
A manager's guide to

Listening and problem solving

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*When people work together to solve a problem, something magical happens.
This is called synergy.*

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Preface

I am not a therapist or trained psychologist. This book is not meant for therapists or professional counselors. My training is in communication and management. This book is designed primarily for managers or would be managers, who are (or will be) involved in dealing with people in the workplace. Its focus is more on personal problem solving and goal setting than technical decision making. I hope it will be valuable to other readers as well as those in management. Anyone who works with other people should find this book useful. But I also hope its value will extend beyond your professional life to your personal life. As a father of five daughters, I have used the principles here in personal problem solving with them as well.

Professional counselors use the terms helper and client. I like the term helper because I believe we all can be helpers, as we deal with friends, relations, clients, customers, subordinates, co-workers, students, or children. The term client seems a little too clinical or therapeutic, but I use it anyway throughout the book.

So this book is for business managers on one hand and for professionals involved in helping as part of their jobs – nurses, guidance and career counselors, and others – but also it is for each of us who have a friend in need.

Some people hold the view that learning problem solving and listening skills is not important. They think that if we have the right attitude – an attitude of caring and concern for others – what we say will come out right.

I agree that attitude is important, but I also believe we can learn useful skills that will help us to be better prepared when we face situations where we are asked to help. I wrote this book to help build the problem solving and listening skills you need to help others. The task is not easy. It involves learning, but also practice. Reading this book is not enough. You need to do the exercises as well. As part of doing the exercises, you will be asked to reflect upon your experiences. Reviewing what you have done and determining what you can do differently will help you continually to improve your skills.

Chapter 1

When to use problem solving – ownership of problems – dealing with problems – management applications of problem solving – skills needed in problems solving

Problem solving is an every day occurrence in the workplace. Sometimes it is formal problem solving, but most often it is done during small snatches of conversation between managers and workers while standing in the hall or leaning on a desk or wall support and during coffee breaks and lunch hours. Problem solving is not just something that occurs on the job, but it is something we do at home, at the gym, or at the PTA.

Problems happen everywhere and all the time. Some are work related; some are personal, but all affect how we do our jobs. Just like it is difficult to not take work problems home; similarly it is hard to leave our personal problems outside the workplace. We take our problems with us wherever we go.

Ownership of problems

Coaching, mentoring, and training are popular approaches to solving problems. This book is about counseling, which I prefer to describe as listening and problem solving. Counseling in the workplace is of two kinds, depending upon who owns the problem.

Ownership of problems can be looked at as if it were on a continuum. At one end of the continuum are company problems, like buying or repairing a piece of equipment. At the other end of the continuum are personal problems, like alcoholism, personal finance or marital relations. Most problems fall somewhere in between and the division between ownership is blurred.

If a problem is of joint ownership, where the manager and worker both own the problem, then both play an active part in defining the problem, generating alternatives, and decision making. If the problem is personal, then the manager should take less of an advising role and more of a listening role. However, listening is important in both situations. It is the key to success in problem solving.

Solving company-owned problems is often straightforward, particularly when they are routine problems. Then, typically a policy is in place to deal with the problem or the manager has seen the problem so many times he or she knows how to deal with it. Solving personal problems is more

complex and, because these problems are complex and personal they are often ignored or avoided.

Problem solving ability distinguishes good managers from poor ones. Most often this ability comes from experience. However, this skill can be learned. Good managers have learned to deal with both ends of the continuum. They know when to give direction, when to advise, and when to listen. They also recognize when a problem is too big for them and when it should be turned over to someone else. Big company problems may need the help of a management group or consultant. Big personal problems may need the help of a counselor or therapist.

Dealing with problems

Managers often deal with problems like they deal with conflict, in one of five ways. They ignore or avoid the problem, they dictate or mandate a solution, they seek compromise or negotiation, they give in, or they problem solve. Blake and Mouton (1985) describe the ideal management style as one which focuses equally on concern for production and concern for people. They call this style "team management," which they define as the "integration of task and human requirements into a unified system of interplay towards organizational goals." A person who manages according to the team approach stresses understanding and agreement through "involvement-participation-commitment."

Maier (1976) in describing three basic approaches to the appraisal interview extols the problem solving approach as better than the other two: tell and tell and tell and listen, although the other two have their places. In tell and sell the manager tries to communicate the employee's evaluation as accurately as possible (p.4). The supervisor lets the subordinate know how well he or she is doing, gains the employees acceptance of the evaluation, and has the employee agree to a plan of action. In tell and listen, the interviewer communicates the evaluation to the employee and then explores the subordinate's feelings about the appraisal (p. 9). The problem solving approach "takes the interviewer out of the role of a judge and makes him a helper" (p. 13). In problem solving, the manager helps the employee identify strengths and weaknesses and assists in establishing goals and strategies for achieving the goals. In problem solving, an appraisal may not be communicated at all.

Problem solving helps in developing the employee's performance. Because development of the employee's performance is the primary objective, both the interviewer and the subordinate would like to the employee to improve on the job. Job performance often requires changes

in the job, and problem solving can lead to this. Subordinates are not defensive "when discussing how their jobs can be made more satisfying and efficient." Problem solving, says Maier, can improve performance by (1) changing the subordinate's behavior; (2) changing the job duties or job procedure, (3) changing the jobs, and (4) changing the pattern of supervision (p. 14).

When managers work with employees, problem solving is useful in assuring a change in direction will occur (Maier, p. 18). It affords both participants an opportunity to learn and communicate. Usually, training and developing, is a one-way process, management directed. Problem solving allows the employee to participate in planning and development. The key communication skill in problem solving is listening. Too frequently managers dictate and fail to listen. Listening improves planning, and also increases employee morale.

Management application of problem solving

Management by Objectives (MBO) and Theory Y (McGregor, 1960) both are based on use of a problem solving approach. In MBO specific performance objectives are mutually developed by subordinates and their superiors. Theory Y managers assume employees are creative, seek responsibility, and can exercise self-direction. Theory Y managers problem solve with employees assist them in goal-setting and encourage commitment to organizational objectives.

Hersey and Blanchard (1981) suggest a contingency approach to leadership, which alters depending upon an employee's maturity defined as skill and willingness. An unskilled employee lacking initiative requires close supervision while an unskilled worker with initiative may only need training and direction. A highly skilled employee with initiative can be delegated assignments and expected to complete work with no contact other than reporting and problem solving. Skilled employees with little initiative may suffer from burnout and will benefit from a participative approach that uses problem solving.

The contingency approach is based on previous studies that suggest a balance between relationship and task orientation (Stogdill and Coons, 1957; Blake and Mouton, 1975). Studies affirm that supportive "people-oriented" styles of communication promote satisfaction (Daniels p. 159).

Skills needed in problem solving

Problem solving requires strong problem solving and communication skills. A first step is to develop a problem solving approach and practice

the approach. Business offers a number of problem solving approaches to assist in decision-making. Counseling and therapy provide insights into the human side of problem solving. I recommend you draw from both of these fields to develop an approach that fits your style. When you have decided on the steps you will follow, practice your method, then reflect upon it, change it, and develop it further.

Among the required communication skills, according to Maier (p.15), are listening, accepting and responding to subordinate feelings. Probing and questioning skills are also important. As soon as the employee is ready to discuss the job situation, the interviewer can start asking questions about the job. "Such questions are directive in order to channel the subject of the conversation, but nondirective about feelings that an employee can express." Another important skill is the ability to summarize or restate in different words so the interviewer can test his understanding and show that he or she is considering the employee's suggestions (p. 16).

The subsequent chapters in this book deal with the development of the skills needed in problem solving. Basic to good problem solving is the creation of a climate that is open and trusting. Chapter 2 makes some suggestions about how to develop a good communication climate and how to use communication journals as a means of improving the climate and your communication skills. Chapter 3 provides information about problem solving approaches and suggests a way to develop your own problem solving method. In Chapter 4 various listening responses are listed and you are encouraged to explore the value of using some responses over others. Exercises are appended to each chapter to assist you in skill building. Finally, in the Appendices are several additional exercises, which will help you, build your problem solving skills. It is only in doing that you become better.

Chapter 2

Establishing a good communication climate – supportive versus defensive climate – willingness to disclose and accept counsel – communication journals – exercises

Two elements are important for successful problem solving: a willingness to disclose and a willingness to accept counsel. For this willingness to exist the communication climate must be open and trusting. To achieve openness and trust, managers need to become more sensitive to subordinate communication needs and develop a supportive rather than a defensive atmosphere.

W. Charles Redding at Purdue University (1972) classified supervisors as effective or ineffective on the basis of ratings by higher level managers, and then examined the supervisors' communicative dispositions (Daniels p. 158). Effective managers showed a sensitiveness to employee communication needs by:

1. being communication minded,
2. being willing empathetic listeners,
3. asking or persuading rather than telling or demanding,
4. being in tune to the feelings of others, and
5. being more open in passing along of information.

Supportive versus defensive climate

A supportive climate leads to subordinate satisfaction and accuracy in communication. Jack Gibb (1961) suggested people in a supportive climate have the following characteristics as opposed to a defensive climate.

- People use description rather than being evaluative.
- People have a problem orientation rather than being controlling.
- People are spontaneous rather than strategic.
- People show empathy rather than neutrality.
- People demonstrate equality rather than superiority.
- People adopt an attitude of provisionalism rather than certainty.

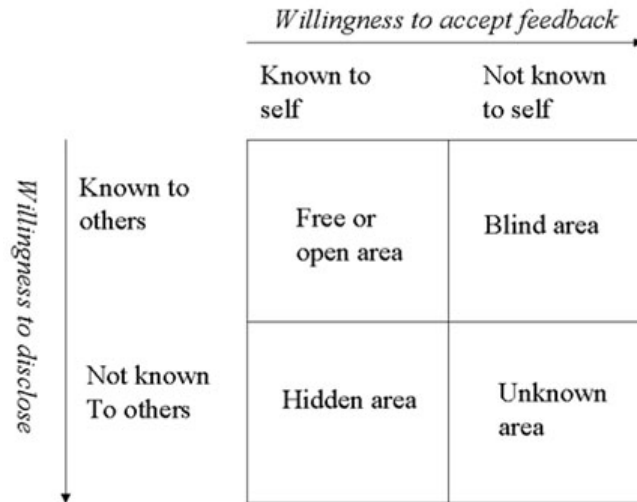
Criticism destroys trust and openness. Maier (p. 155) indicates that a superior should not criticize an employee during an appraisal interview. So what do you do when criticism is necessary as it relates to personal faults, rather than work related problems? Do not use the problem-solving approach.

The tendency may be for the superior to supply the answers and specify the ways the employee must change (Maier, p. 150). Suggesting a plan negates the need for problem solving. The superior has decided on the plan before hand and all he or she needs to do is get the employee's acceptance. For problem solving to work the superior must avoid suggesting solutions. "Problem solving can occur only when the subordinate ceases to be defensive and the superior is ready to accept the possibility that the job may be improved in a variety of ways, some quite different from those he has in mind."

Disagreement is also destructive to an open climate, although healthy discussion is important. "An interviewer need not agree or disagree with the ideas to accept them. Understanding or accepting ideas is an important neutral position between agreeing and disagreeing." (Maier p. 16) Covey (1990) suggests, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Willingness to disclose and to accept counsel

The Johari Window , named after originators Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Luft, 1961), is a useful way to look at the process of disclosure and feedback. A more open and trusting climate increases a person's willingness to disclose and accept counsel (or feedback). A change in the free (or open) pane of the four quadrants in the Johari Window will mean a change in the others. Less information will be purposely hidden, the client (or employee will see more blind spots), and the information that is unknown will become smaller.



Communication journals

Journal writing allows you to think about your behavior. As you write and ponder, your actions you realize how you can improve. Writing also reinforces your commitment to change. Over the next two weeks try writing at least five journal entries for situations where miscommunication seems to have occurred. If you continue to write journals, you will see a marked improvement in your communication.

As you progress through the book you will learn the language of communication and be presented with several possible problem-solving approaches and be asked to develop your own approach. This will help you in using the appropriate jargon to describe and evaluate your behavior in communication situations. For now use the language you know from past experience and readings.

I suggest you use the following format.

- Describe the communication situation.
- Evaluate how well you did. Reflect on the skills you used (or didn't use). Describe the problem solving approach and your use of communication skills. Describe the over effect (the results) of your communication.
- Make recommendations for change. What would you do differently if you were in a similar situation again?

Exercises related to journal writing

Examine the following five descriptions of communication situations. The first one includes evaluation and suggestions for change. For the next four provide your own evaluation and suggestions for change.

Journal entry #1

Two young workers were sitting at a table. I was trying to put together a piece of equipment. They joked around, pushing each other. Finally in exasperation I told them to stop kidding around and come help me. They ignored me. I walked over to the one, leaned toward her and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"Heather, I need your help to get this equipment working."

She didn't say anything. She just sat there and stared at me.

"I have been trying to put this together for an hour and I can't get it to work." I was exasperated and I could feel anger coming.

She just stared at me.

I raised my voice: "Are you listening to me?"

"You don't have to shout. All you have to say is please," she responded.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I need you to come and hold this part for me while a screw it on."

Evaluation:

I used non-verbal communication. I walked over to her when I couldn't get her attention. I leaned forward and looked into her eyes.

I used an "I-message" but didn't really express how I was feeling. "I have been trying to put this together for an hour and I can't get it to work."

I raised my voice, when I couldn't get her attention. "Are you listening to me?"

I was not very specific in my request to have her help me.

Overall, the communication was fairly poor. Although I was starting to get upset, I tried to use an "I-message" instead of being judgmental or accusatory. I raised my voice, which was not a good idea, although I'm not sure how I could have got her attention otherwise. At first I was fairly general in my request for her to help me, but then finally I was more specific. She understood my feelings and eventually helped as she was asked. I used good non-verbal communication by walking over to her and

looking directly in her eyes, although that might have actually been considered threatening.

Recommendations:

I should have been more specific in the first place. When I first spoke to her, I should have made a specific request and said please. I could have gone over to her at that time and used non-verbal cues to get her attention -- leaning forward, looking in her eyes, and touching her arm and then made the specific request.

If I had been more direct earlier, I may not have gotten angry. I should not have raised my voice. This should have been avoided. Even if I needed to talk to her further, to persuade her to help.

Do you have other comments to add to the evaluation? What other things could the supervisor have done to make this a better situation? What do you think the work atmosphere will be like from now on? What things can the supervisor do to improve the working conditions?

Journal entry #2

One day at work, I was involved in a conversation with a patient. The patient lived a high-risk lifestyle and had increased the risk of problems in her pregnancy due to drug and alcohol abuse, and heavy smoking. This patient was well known to us as she had been in to hospital several times with a variety of minor complaints asking to be admitted and asking that her baby be delivered early. She was tired of being pregnant.

This patient was now in premature labor. I told her she would be admitted. She cried. She stated she did not want to stay in the hospital, did not want me to do any of the procedures the doctor had ordered to try and stop her labor. "What do you want?" I asked. I was annoyed! All the times she wanted to be admitted with superficial complaints and we sent her home angry. Now that things were serious she was refusing care. She continued to cry. I started to prepare the supplies to start an I.V. She cried harder. I took a deep breath, and I repeated my question to her. "What do you want me to do?" She didn't answer. I stayed with her in the room, stopped preparing supplies, maintained eye contact, I had my hand on her leg, let silence take over for awhile. Then asked again, "What do you want?" I was calmer now. She told me she wanted to know what was wrong and that she wanted her baby to be OK. I told her that's what we wanted too. There was no guarantee the baby would be OK, but it had a better chance if we could stop the labor. I reassured her that at present, based on the fetal heart rate tracing, the baby was fine, and the best thing she could do for

her baby was to stay pregnant and work with us. She allowed me to complete the admission and carry out the ordered procedures.

I think sometimes we don't allow patients to express their feelings. They come to the hospital to be treated and hand over complete responsibility to us, and we do our procedures quickly and efficiently. I wanted to let her know that together, her and us, we would work to ensure both her and her babies well being.

Evaluation:

Recommendations:

Journal entry #3

I came into to work early and was sitting at my desk when a co-worker came in. Her face showed worry.

I said, "You seem worried about something. Am I close?"

She replied with a half smile

"You look like you were bothered by something when you first came in."

Here I noticed by the way she was holding herself that she was hurting a great deal emotionally as well as physically. I instantly felt her news was bad, so I put everything aside and sat up.

She said, "I just came from the doctors."

“And?”

Hesitating for a moment she told me, "I have a large mass on my ovary".

I said, "Oh no!" I got up and went around the desk and gave her a hug. I could feel her trembling.

Again the communication came naturally when I noticed how troubled she was. She told me what the doctor had told her while I listened with an open posture and continued support. Once she finished and she admitted being afraid of having cancer, I said to her, "Is it possible that some of your fear of cancer is dying and leaving your husband by himself?"

She started to cry, saying: "Maria, I don't know what he'll do. I am so afraid for him." I told her she was a tough lady and so was her husband tough. I then suggested maybe she should go home and I offered to take her.

Evaluation:

Recommendations:

Journal Entry #4

Rod, an old co-worker of mine whom I have not seen in almost three years, called me tonight. I was very happy to hear from him and we talked about everything from school, to work, to friends and family.

There was a pause in the conversation, I smiled and said "Yeah, but Rod, how are you doing?" Simply trying to make the point that we talked about everything but ourselves. He sighed and simply said, "OK, I guess." I was surprised; it never really occurred to me that something might be wrong with him. Yet, from the tone of his voice I knew that something was indeed wrong. That, and the fact that Rod usually laughed and said he was great anytime anyone ever asked him how he was. I asked him what was wrong, and told him that I was there for him if he needed to talk about anything at all. He then told me that he had a fight with his fiancé, Stephanie. "Oh, no. That's terrible" I replied. "What happened?" Rod then proceeded to tell me how Stephanie was mad at him because she felt he was not very supportive of her new career offer, which involves monthly trips. All while he was talking, I kept saying "yes" and "mmm-hmm" to let him know that I was listening. I asked him how Stephanie thought he was not being supportive. He told me it was because he asked her not to take

the job. Without thinking, I blurted out "Oh, Rod! How could you?" I quickly apologized and asked him why he would ask her that. Rod replied that he just didn't want her traveling all over the place. I then asked him if it was because he felt scared of her being in an accident, or being unfaithful. He said it was so, to which I replied that he should talk with her about his fears and not just demand that she give up her career opportunity.

Evaluation:

Recommendations:

Journal entry # 5

A conversation with a woman I supervise with named Beverly. She and her common-law husband, Glen, had been fighting the night before and a neighbor had called the police. The neighbor had feared for their 3-year-old son's safety.

"Beverly, that was sure a stupid thing to do. All you need to do is get child welfare involved and you could lose your boy."

Beverly started to cry. "He has been abusing me, but I don't want to talk to the police. I have kicked Glen out but he keeps coming back and I take him back."

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My reply: "Maybe you need to move out. Go to a crisis center or something."

I led Beverly to a couch and sat beside her. She started to talk. I just listened, using attending skills and encouraging her to talk. In a minute or two she said she would move out. I offered to get her some help and she said she would contact me to make arrangements.

Evaluation:

Recommendations:

Chapter 3

Problem solving approaches — decision making in business – Egan's 9 step model – 4-step problem solving approach – developing problem solving skills and your own model

The objective of this chapter is to help you develop your own problem-solving model that works for you and practice using it. Some problem solving strategies are highly structured, following a step-by-step process that allows less flexibility, but ultimately arrives at a solution. These are more often used by professional counselors and therapists. I recommend something less structured for managers. However, it is helpful to understand the other processes, because in developing your own model you may want to borrow from the more structured approaches.

Problem solving models

Most everyone has problems and most of the time. Management can be described as problem solving. Life also is a process of solving problems. Our success in business and our success in life may be measured by ability to solve problems. Problem solving is an important management skill. It is also an important life skill. Most of us will be asked at sometime or another to help a friend or colleague deal with a problem. In management we are required to work with others almost daily in solving their problems or company problems. Some of us use problem solving almost daily, in our own lives and in assisting our friends and family. The purpose here is to assist you in developing a problem solving approach that will work for you in the kinds of situations you face and for the kinds of people you help.

This is not meant to be a guide or help for professional counselors or therapists, but rather for the rest of us who are involved in problem solving with others on an infrequent or casual basis. It should also have value for managers who work daily with others in solving business and helping with personal problems. The reality is that business and personal problems cannot be divorced. We all bring our baggage from home to work, just as we take our work problems home.

Problem solving is a topic in many management texts. Often the process that management theorists propose is complex. The process may be suitable for the difficulty of business problems but not for counseling or helping someone with a personal problem. Still, you may find it helpful to understand the business model because you may want to borrow some

steps for your own personal model of problem solving. Here is a seven step model proposed by Rasmussen (1979).

Rasmussen's 7-step business model

- Clarify the problem – Provide a brief description of the problem situation. List objectives that are not being met, stated in positive terms. Indicate the reasons the objectives are not being met.
- Suggest alternatives – Develop a comprehensive list of alternative courses of action that might solve the problem.
- List objectives - List objectives which exist over time and specify what you are trying to achieve. These might be similar to the list you used in clarifying the problem. Another way of looking at this is to consider conditions that must be met for the problem to be solved.
- Prioritize objectives – This establishes what objectives are most important.
- Establish consequences for objectives – Determine how the alternatives affect each objective. For example, if cost is important, how much does a particular alternative cost?
- Choose an alternative – Select the alternative (or alternatives) which best meet the objectives or conditions.
- Implement the chosen alternative – Finally, develop a plan for implementing the alternative. Include things to do, who will do them and completion dates.

Rasmussen suggests using a matrix (or table), where objectives are listed across the top and alternatives along the left side. Symbols or numerical notations establish consequences in the matrix.

Egan's model

Therapists use problem solving to assist clients in dealing with their personal problems. Egan (1998, p.32) has developed a model that has three stages and three steps in each stage.

Stage 1: Current Scenario

- Story – Help clients tell their stories. Some clients tell their stories easily while others need help. This requires the use of communication skills that will help the client tell what is good and

what is bad in their lives. Clients need to be encouraged to describe their problems in terms of their experiences, behaviors and feelings.

- Blind spots – Clients need to see themselves more objectively and discover those areas that are only suggested in the things they say. By challenging blind spots clients can develop new perspectives about themselves.
- Leverage- Clients need to focus on only those things that make a difference. They come in with a multitude of problems, too many to focus on at one time. Find the key problems which when solved will lead to the resolution of other problems.

Stage 2: Preferred scenario

- Possibilities – Clients see their current state of affairs as unacceptable so need to be encouraged to visualize a better future. Here they are asked to list the range of possibilities, which will provide them the future they desire.
- Change agenda – From all the possibilities the client has listed, an agenda needs to be developed which is realistic in terms of values, time frame, and the person's situation. The agenda must result in action.
- Commitment - Clients need to commit themselves to their agenda by determining what they are willing to give up for what they want. Reasons for doing something need to be explored, because without incentives the goals will not be achieved.

Stage 3: Action strategies

- Possible actions – Rather than implementing the first strategy that comes along, clients should be encouraged to brainstorm for the best possible strategy that will lead to action.
- Best fit – Strategies should be chosen that best fit the person's needs and resources.
- Plan – Clients should be encouraged to draw up a plan that will set out a step-by-step process for achieving their goals.

Four-step problem solving model

I prefer a four-step problem-solving model (see figure 1), partly because as a non-professional it is something I can easily remember and apply in a helping situation. The four steps are: a) identifying the problem, b) generating alternatives, c) evaluating alternatives, and d) deciding on a solution and an implementation plan. I borrow the terms helper and client to describe the counselor and the person being helped.

The model can be used in numerous relationships: supervisor-subordinate, teacher-student, counselor-client, parent-child, friend-friend, nurse-patient, and therapist-patient, etc.

It can be used in many situations, including performance appraisals, employee counseling, work-related problems, school and career counseling, health advisement, parent-child relationships, or between friends. It can be used with many kinds of problems, both work and non-work related. Some that come to mind are tardiness at work, alcoholism, meeting deadlines, relationships, finances and debt, and poor hygiene.

As you look at this method and others, consider the steps, which would fit your style and approach best. Then practice your approach as people talked to you about their problems.



The 4-step problem-solving model

Ownership

One consideration in deciding what problem solving approach to use is determining who owns the problem. If joint ownership exists as is the case in some business problems, then both the helper (who might be a manager) and client (the subordinate) are involved equally in all stages of the problem solving process. However, if the problem belongs totally to the client, then the helper and the client play different roles throughout the problem solving process. The helper facilitates the problem solving process, using listening and summarizing skills at each of the steps. Only

during the second stage, with the client's permission, does the helper get actively involved in the process by assisting in generating alternatives.

Transition

Part of the helper's role is to clarify the problem solving process for the client. The helper does this by summarizing the discussion in the previous stage and by suggesting how to proceed in the next stage. For example, at the end of stage 1, using a paraphrase, the helper summarizes the problem that the client has identified and then suggests they go on to list alternatives for solving the problem. The helper might also suggest that alternatives be listed on a board or sheet of paper. Similarly, at the end of stage 2, the helper summarizes the list of alternatives and suggests the client consider the pros and cons of each as a form of evaluation. The helper might say, "Now that we have listed a number of alternatives, let's look at each of them and you determine how they fit best your situation and needs." At the end of stage 3, the helper again summarizes the discussion evaluating each alternative and then asks the client which of the alternatives he or she favors. The helper summarizes the decision and then assists the client in developing a plan for implementation of the solution.

Step 1: Identifying the problem

In the problem identification step the helper assists the client in describing his or her problem. To do this the helper may have to develop trust and an open communication climate, one in which the client is willing to open up and express feelings and thoughts about the problem. In addition to telling the story (as set out by Egan (1998, p. 27) in his stage 1), the helper should assist the client in separating the key problem from the others and in identifying blind spots that prevent seeing the whole problem.

Typically we all have more than one problem we are dealing with in our lives. Problems are extremely complex. They are also inter-related. One problem may be caused by another and be the cause for a third. They all affect each other. The key to solving the multitude of problems we face is to find the principal problem that if solved will help in solving the other problems. This what Egan (1998, p. 27) calls leverage: choosing the right problems or opportunities to work on.

During the problem identification stage the helper should assist the client in finding the one problem or set of problems that are key to all the other problems. The person may not truly recognize what the key problem is and so throughout the problem solving process the helper may be trying to

get the friend see blind spots that make it difficult to see the real problem (Egan, 1998, p. 27). A person could have financial problems, marital and family problems, work problems, but the key problem might be an addiction to gambling. If a friend has a serious problem, like an addiction or serious depression that may lead to depression, he or she needs to work with a professional counselor. That doesn't mean you stop talking to them, but you should encourage them to see a professional, even if it means setting up an appointment and taking them to it.

In addition to identifying the problem or problems, the helper encourages the client to express feelings and thoughts about the problem. In this step it is important that the client identify the problem. The helper's role is to assist in clarifying and identifying areas for further exploration and discussion.

Listening and summarizing skills are key to the helper's success in doing this. The helper needs to be aware of listening responses that work and throw out the ones that don't. Important skills are attending, following and reflecting or paraphrasing. Besides learning to listen, the helper needs to use summarizing skills to help clarify and identify the problem as it is finally stated. If the problem is not clearly identified, it is likely that a solution won't be found and worked upon.

When the helper is satisfied that the problem has been clearly identified, he or she should restate the problem by summarizing or paraphrasing. Then, the helper would suggest they move from problem identification to step 2: generating alternatives.

Step 2: Generating Alternatives

During step 2, the helper can actively be involved in brainstorming by suggesting alternatives, if this is all right with the client. Alternatives are suggested as tentative or possible solutions. They should not be evaluated nor should a preference be given for the best alternative. Evaluation and judgment tends to decrease the number of alternatives. The goal here is to come up with as many viable solutions as possible.

At most times advice tends to inhibit rather than encourage communication. However, here because the advice is given within the context of brainstorming and is only tentative, it is all right for the helper to provide suggestions. At other times it is not a good idea.

The helper may want to assist in generating alternatives by listing and organizing the alternatives on a sheet of paper or on a board. In brainstorming you build upon the ideas that have already been generated and so it helps to have the ideas in front of you. At the point that no more

ideas are forth coming, the helper summarizes the alternatives. This might actually help in bringing forth other ideas.

After summarizing the ideas, the helper suggests they go on to evaluating the ideas before deciding on the best solution.

Step 3: Evaluating alternatives

Because the client needs to take ownership for the solution and be committed to whatever alternative is decided, it is important that the client evaluate or make judgments among the various alternatives. The helper again plays a clarifying role, by probing, summarizing or paraphrasing. The helper also assists in the evaluation process by suggesting a process for judging from among the alternatives.

A number of approaches could be used in evaluating alternatives. The most commonly used approach is listing pros and cons (advantages or disadvantages). This could be done on the same sheet as the alternatives were listed. Another approach is to consider consequences for following a particular alternative. Rasmussen (1979, pp. 35-39) suggests using an information matrix where alternatives are weighed against objectives. This could also be done by considering the results of following a particular action. Would it achieve the particular goal one is working toward? Would it affect negatively relationships with others? A third approach is what Egan (1998, p. 30) describes as choosing the best fit. "Help clients choose the action strategies that best fit their talents, resources, style, temperament, and timetable." All or a combination of these approaches could be used in evaluating alternatives.

Finally, when all the alternatives have been considered, the helper should summarize the discussion and suggest that the client might be ready to choose the best solution.

Step 4: Choosing a solution and developing a plan for implementation

This is the decision making step of the problem solving process. It's important that the client choose the solution. This assures commitment. The helper assists, possibly by further clarifying the alternatives and reminding the client about the discussion during evaluating the alternatives. Solutions are often less than perfect. The helper may have to remind the client of this fact and assure the client that she has made the best decision given the situation and the alternatives that are available.

After choosing a solution, the helper should assist the client in developing a plan for implementation. Developing a plan for implementation may

require brainstorming of strategies for achieving the client's goals. The plan does not need to be complex. Instead it should be simple, and, where possible, broken down into steps. It might be appropriate to identify times when the client should come back to discuss progress, possibly following the various steps.

As Egan (1998, p. 29) indicates, pursuing a particular direction "demands a great deal of work and often takes courage." The helper's support both through encouragement and follow-up will help the client in keeping his or her commitment to solving the problem.

Backtracking

The helper and client may decide during the stages of generating and evaluating alternatives that new aspects of the problem need to be identified and discussed or that some alternatives were not suggested. In these situations it is appropriate to backtrack to previous stages to explore the problem further or to identify other alternatives. Also, at the point of deciding on a solution, the client may realize that no suitable solutions have been discussed and they need to go back to identifying the problem and generating other alternatives.

Taking a break

At any time during the problem solving process the client may want to take a break or even end the process all together. Unless the counseling is a requirement of a court order or a part of discipline action at work, this is all right. After all it is the client's problem. Sometimes discussing the problem is enough and provides the client a feeling that he or she can deal with the problem without the helper's assistance. Other times opening up provides a sense of relief and that is what the person needs.

When a suitable solution is not found, the problem solving process may be halted. After a period of rest the problem may become clearer or a new solution may become evident. The helper and client can get back together later to finish the problem solving process.

Exercises

Develop a problem solving model and practice using it. Report back on your success. Evaluate how well you did and suggest changes for another time.

Analyze the transcript of a problem-solving situation. (Several are located at this web site or you may choose to record and type your own helping

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interview with someone.) Use this guide to determine the steps the person used, the use of transition, and other skills. Evaluate how effective the problem-solving model was and make suggestions for improvement or change.

Chapter 4

Listening Effectively - Attending - Following - Ways of giving information - Ways of asking for information - Reflecting - Exercises

To be an effective listener in a helping situation, one must learn to listen actively. Active listening is much more than appearing to listen or even hearing. It implies listening with understanding and requires responding appropriately.

We demonstrate understanding by the responses we give. There are three kinds of responses that demonstrate our understanding and show we are listening actively. They are attending, following and reflecting.

Attending

Attending skills are mainly non-verbal. They demonstrate to the speaker that we are "there." A posture of involvement shows that we are interested. Egan (1998, pp.63-64) describes five microskills of attending, summarized in the acronym SOLER.

S means face the speaker squarely. In North-American culture, facing another person squarely is considered a basic posture of involvement. Even if it is not possible to face a person squarely, we turn toward them to show our interest.

O stands for adopting an open posture. Crossed arms and crossed legs are sometimes interpreted to mean that the listener has made up his mind, has closed himself to further ideas, or is no longer interested. Both feet on the floor and hands in the lap suggest a more open posture. Whatever your posture, ask yourself, "Does my present posture suggest openness and availability for the speaker?"

L suggests that in conversation we lean forward toward the other person. Leaning forward is a natural sign of involvement and indicates that we are intently listening to the other person. Leaning backward or even slouching backward suggests boredom or distance. However, leaning too far forward can be frightening or intimidating.

E means maintain eye contact. In North-American culture, fairly steady eye contact is natural for people deep in conversation. However, staring is inappropriate. Also, frequently looking away may show reluctance and a lack of interest.

R suggests the need to be relaxed or natural in our non-verbal behavior. It shows we are comfortable and interested in the other person. Fidgeting or nervousness shows a lack of interest or desire to be somewhere else.

Aboriginal culture has adopted many of the attitudes of North American whites. In most situations facing a person squarely, adopting an open posture, and maintaining eye contact are used. However, in listening to Elders, to demonstrate respect the younger person would typically maintain a submissive posture, with eyes averted. Some whites have interpreted this as a lack of respect, whereas in Native culture the opposite is true.

Distance is also an important aspect of attending. In North-American culture, distances closer than 18 inches are considered appropriate only for people who have an intimate relationship. But, standing too far away suggests the listener is stand-offish. Somewhere in between is a comfortable area for conversation.

Another aspect of attending is to assure that all distractions are removed. The computer, television, the radio, a view from the window, and other people are examples of distractions that can cause interference and lessen the effectiveness of a conversation. Sometimes not all distractions can be removed, like little children, but every effort should be made to make the environment as non-distracting as possible.

Following

Whereas attending skills were non-verbal, following skills are verbal. Our verbal responses and questions show we are interested and following what the speaker is saying. Listening responses can be either in the form of giving or asking for information.

Following is a list of some responses we typically give in a helping situation. Some are more effective than others. Some actually inhibit problem solving. One way of judging communication effectiveness (suggested by Rasmussen) is to determine how well the responses encourage discussion, self-direction or clarification. Another judge might be how well they demonstrate our understanding of what the person is saying or feeling.

- Discussion refers to carrying on of the discussion or dialogue.
- Self-direction refers to the need for the speaker to be self-directing, in identifying and solving his or her own problems. Does the response encourage the speaker to pursue his or her own line of

thought or is he or she being steered in certain directions by the response.

- Clarification refers to the speaking achieving insight or clarifying the issue for himself or herself.
- Understanding is a sense that the speaker has that you know what he or she is saying or feeling.

Ways of giving information

Acknowledging (Ac) indicates we are paying attention. Acknowledging could be non-verbal vocalizations, like "Uh-huh," "Mmm," "Ah," or "Ooo." They could also be short words or phrases, like "Yes," "I see," or "I hear you." They might encourage discussion, but do little to help self-direction or clarify the problem.

Sharing (Sh) presents personal experiences similar to the speaker's. "I also have problems with upset stomach." Sharing is autobiographical and, although it may not inhibit communication, it probably doesn't strongly facilitate discussion, self direction or clarification. It does suggest to the speaker that you understand his or her problems.

Sympathizing (Sy) is when the helper offers sympathy. "That's terrible. I feel so sorry at your loss." Sympathy shows a level of understanding, but does not help with discussion, self-direction or clarification, although it does not inhibit them either. It is a neutral response. Egan (1998, pp. 77-78) has a stronger view of the effect of sympathizing. He claims "...when I sympathize with someone, I become his or her accomplice. If I sympathize with my client as she tells me how awful her husband is, I take sides without knowing what the complete story is. Helpers should not become accomplices in letting a client's self-pity drive out problem-managing action."

Advising (Ad) suggests the speaker should do something. "You should try taking this herbal remedy for your stomach upset." Without an indication from the speaker that he or she would like advice, it may be very ineffective, actually inhibiting the communication. As a part of problem solving, it may be very appropriate to use advice. "You might try an herbal tea to relax you and help you go to sleep."

Placating (Pl) suggests a change in attitude or a suppression of feelings. "Don't worry about it. Given time, every thing will be all right." Although your comments may be true, they still do little to show understanding or help encourage the person to problem solve.

Taking sides (Tk) is where the helper takes sides with the speaker against a third party that might have wronged the speaker. The helper criticizes the other party, not the speaker. "You can't trust those people. They have hurt you and they will hurt you again." Taking sides, like sympathy, makes you the speaker's accomplice. By criticizing the third party, you lose your objectiveness and, in fact, you may also lose the speaker's trust. "If he says those things about other people, does he say the same kinds of things about me when I am not here."

Criticizing (Cr) is when the speaker criticizes or finds fault with the speaker. "You should have been more up front with them. If you had been, you wouldn't be in this situation now." Criticizing has no place in the helping situation. It halts all communication, deeply offends and hurts the speaker. This does not mean you should ignore the speaker's distortion of reality. Egan (p.99) believes the helper should "note the gaps and distortions and challenge them when it is appropriate to do so" by using paraphrase and empathetic listening. A superior should not criticize an employee during an appraisal interview (Maier, p. 155). So what do you do when criticism is necessary as it relates to personal faults, rather than work related problems. Do not use problem solving approach.

Ways of asking for information

According to Maier (p. 16) skillful questioning is an effective way for an interviewer to stimulate a subordinate to evaluate his own ideas. Questions should not put the employee on the spot but allow the employee to make a judgment about his own plans or ideas. Example of questions are: what kinds of problems do you anticipate, what weaknesses do you see in your plan, what are the strengths?

Non-threatening exploratory questions are effective for drawing an employee out and making him think more clearly; they also should direct attention to areas that have been overlooked.

Elaboration (El) encourages the speaker to continue. The following examples are forms of encouragement that indicate to the speaker you are listening and would like them to continue. "Tell me more." "I see. Please go on." "What happened then?" "Is there anything else you would like to say?" This is a strong form of communication that encourages discussion. It does not necessarily show understanding, but still may help the speaker to find self-direction and clarification.

Background information (Bg) requests for more details or feelings about the situation. It could be an open question, which encourages discussion, self-direction and clarification. "How did this make you feel?" Or it

could be a closed question, which is neutral in that it does not prevent discussion, self-direction or clarification, but does not necessarily encourage it either. "How long have you been married?" Requests for background information do little to show understanding.

Definition (De) asks for the speaker to clarify meaning. "What do you mean by 'placating'?" These are mostly closed questions, with a short response expected. They help to clarify, but are neutral as far as discussion and self-direction are concerned.

Problem solving (PS) are questions that provide transition in the problem solving process. "What alternatives do you see?" "Now that we have looked at alternatives, let's evaluate them. What alternative seems to best fit your needs and situation?" "Let's review our evaluation of the alternatives and decide which best fits your needs." Problem solving encourages further discussion, helps in self-direction, and allows for clarification. It does not show the helper understands the speaker's problems.

Reflecting skills

Reflecting skills include certain kinds of questions, which help to summarize and show the listener understands the speaker. They go beyond following skills, the main purpose of which is to encourage further response. Perhaps the most effective reflecting device is the paraphrase.

Summaries usually occur several times within a problem solving session. Effective summaries may be used to accomplish the following (Maier, p. 16): (1) to restate the points already covered; (2) to show the interviewer understands the ideas expressed up to the point when the summary occurs; (3) to check and refine ideas; and (4) to separate what has been covered from problems that have not been uncovered.

Ways of giving and asking for information

Rhetorical question (RQ) indirectly gives information in question form and sometimes also asks for information. It is frequently combined with some other listening response, such as advice or criticism.

"Don't you think it is time you did something about your weight?" This is a negative form of listening response that is frequently mistaken for paraphrasing. It inhibits discussion, self-direction and clarification and does not show understanding.

Paraphrasing (Pa) gives an interpretation that asks for verification or correction. It frequently ends with a question like "is that right?" "So you

are upset about all the criticism you are getting because of your weight. Is that right?" The paraphrase shows the listener understands both the feelings and content of the speaker's message and also encourages self-direction, discussion and clarification.

Advanced Empathy

Sometimes the feelings speakers have are so intense that they may not be entirely aware of what they are feeling or what the causes are for the feelings. Egan describes the process of discovering these feelings and their causes as "advanced empathy" (p.180). It involves finding the "story behind the story" or as Rogers (1980, p. 142) states it is "sensing meanings of which the client is scarcely aware.". A look back at the Johari window puts the unknown information in the sections of the window that are hidden to the listener, blind to the speaker, or unknown to both.

Before the speaker discovers his or her underlying feelings or their causes, the listener may have to ask questions or paraphrase for content. The listener may sense how the person feels and reflect back these feelings. Then based on a hunch or a guess, the listener may suggest as a paraphrase the underlying causes for these feelings.

The speaker says: "My sister stood there yelling at me, accusing me of being liar - and even worse of telling lies about her. She kept going on and on, so finally I shoved her and when she shoved me back I ran away crying."

As a listener, you could respond in a number of ways. If there was something you didn't understand, you could ask a question or paraphrase the content of the statement. "Can you tell me more of the background behind what happened.? What did she accuse you of saying?" Or "After so much yelling at you, you couldn't stand it any longer, so you pushed her. Is that right?"

However, maybe because of the intensity of the things she is saying, as a listener, you might want first paraphrase the speaker's feelings. This lets the speaker know you understand her feelings and helps build trust. "You were really upset, because she kept going on about you being a liar." Or "It hurts you when she doesn't trust you."

At some point in the helping situation, you will want to probe deeper into the causes for her feelings. This is done by following hunches you have about the underlying circumstances. These may be something the speaker doesn't even realize. For example, you may sense that this feeling of animosity between the sisters has been going on for a long time and that this situation came as a result of not regularly expressing feelings and

concerns. An example of advanced empathy might be: "Is it possible that your sister has been carrying these feelings inside of her for a long time and that the two of you have not been sharing your concerns with each other?"

Exercises

1. Measuring the effectiveness of response kinds

Part of listening is responding appropriately to the speaker's messages. Some listening responses are more effective than others. Others actually inhibit problem solving and create barriers for good communication. One way of judging communication effectiveness (suggested by Rasmussen) is to determine how well the responses encourage discussion, self-direction or clarification. Another judge might be how well they demonstrate our understanding of what the person is saying or feeling.

- Discussion refers to encouraging the discussion or dialogue to carry on or proceed further.
- Self-direction refers to the need for the speaker to be self-directing, in identifying and solving his or her own problems. Does the response encourage the speaker to pursue his or her own line of thought or is he or she being steered in certain directions by the response.
- Clarification refers to the speaker achieving insight or clarifying the issue for himself or herself.
- Understanding is a sense that the speaker has that you know what he or she is saying or feeling.

Label the response kind for each of the following responses to the statement below. Then indicate if the response inhibits (I), is neutral (N), or encourages (E) under the headings discussion, self-direction, clarification and understanding and overall rating

Statement:

The boss claims that my lateness is causing problems for other people at work. If he only knew how hard it is to get anywhere on time when I've got three children to get ready for daycare and school and I'm trying to work full-time.

Response	Label	Discussion	Self-direction	Clarification	Understanding	Overall rating
1. You're not the only person in that situation.						
2. Tell me more about what he said.						
3. Have you told him about your situation? Maybe he could arrange for you to come in later.						
4. Try my schedule for a while and you'll see how hard it can be.						
5. Don't worry. It will all blow over and the boss'll forget he ever said anything.						
6. Don't you think getting to work on time is important?						
7. How late are you?						
8. Would it help if I were to come over once in a while and help you get the kids ready?						
9. Those are just the realities of being a working single parent.						
10. It must really put pressure on you to have his complaints on top of all your other concerns.						
11. How does he say your lateness causes problems for others?						
12. You could maybe get someone to come in to help you in the morning, couldn't you?						
13. It makes me sad to think someone in this day-and-age has so little tolerance for the						

problems of single parents.						
14. I'm sorry to hear about your situation. This must really trouble you.						
15. Go on. He didn't really say that, did he?						
16. That guy has always been a jerk.						
17. Would you like to talk more about this and see if there are ways that you can solve the problem?						
18. I have a similar situation with my own kids. What I did was ...						
19. Can you tell me what he means by being late?						
20. That's tough, but maybe we should talk about the assignment he has given us.						

Which responses do you consider most effective?

Which responses inhibit communication?

2. Examine a transcript of a problem-solving interview (such as the one in Appendix 3) to determine the effectiveness of the helper's listening skills. Identify the listening response for each helper statement, evaluate the response by determining if the best response was used at that particular point and suggest another response if the best response was not used.

3. Provide responses to statements for each of the response kinds listed.

Statement: A teenage girl is upset about the restrictions her parents put on her about dating. She says: "They treat me like I was 13 years old. I'm sixteen and I think I should be able to decide who to go out with and when to get home."

Advising response:

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Judging or criticizing response

Supporting response (taking sides)

Probing or questioning response

Paraphrasing response

Statement: My office mate always leaves his work on the floor, on chairs, and on common filing cabinets. It drives me crazy. I've talked to him, but it doesn't seem to help.

Advising response:

Judging or criticizing response

Supporting response (taking sides)

Probing or questioning response

Paraphrasing response

4. Suggest listening responses for each of the following situations. using the skills of probing, paraphrasing for content, paraphrasing for feelings (basic empathy), and paraphrasing for hidden meaning (advanced empathy).

1. My 15-year-old came to dinner late last night. As soon as she sat down, she started annoying her younger sister. I told her to stop several times and finally told her to leave the table. I think that is really what she wanted. She didn't really want to eat with us.

2. I really have a hard time communicating with my wife. She tells me something. Then she asks me what she said. If I missed what she said or can't tell her exactly what she said, she yells at me and says I never listen to her. I really try to listen, but sometimes I just don't hear her.

3. My husband never seems to listen. I tell him things - important things - and five minutes later he doesn't remember what I said. It's really discouraging. I hate repeating myself. I really don't think he cares about me.

4. My husband and I have separated. After ten years of arguing, we really felt it was the right thing to do. But for my seven-year-old son it's different. He is angry. He thinks we don't love him. He cries a lot and is moody. I'm at a loss about what to do.

I find studying really hard. I've got so many other things going, but really want to finish my degree. It's hard to be a parent, to be running kids around, to find sitters and get my kids to daycare. But on top of that at

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night when I have to study, my kids want to play. I feel divided. I should pay more attention to them, but I know, when I'm finished school, things will be better for all of us.

Appendix 1

Analysis of a Helping Session

With the help of a couple of friends or co-workers practice using your helping model. One friend should play the role of the client while you are the helper. The second friend should observe your roleplay and keep notes for later discussion. Use the following guide to prepare an analysis of the session.

A. Strategy

1. Was a systematic approach used for helping the client? Describe the helping model.
2. Describe your understanding of the problem. Comment about your use of summary and paraphrasing to clarify the problem.
3. State the alternatives and describe how the alternatives were evaluated and the decision was made.
4. Describe the solution and your action plan. Comment about how you clarified the solution and developed a plan for implementation.

B. Communication skills

5. Describe your use of communication skills by giving examples of some of the communication skills you used.
6. Describe your use of transition from step-to-step in your helping model.

C. Evaluation

7. Describe how successful you were in using the helping model.
8. Describe how well you did in using listening skills.

D. Recommendations for change

9. What recommendations would you make for changing the helping strategy?
10. What recommendations would you make for improving your listening skills?

Appendix 2

Helping through personal problem solving – transcript analysis – problem solving strategy – communication skills

Use the following analysis of as a guide in preparing an analysis of your own problem-solving session. As in this interview between a human relations consultant (the helper) and an office administrator (the client), tape-record the session and transcribe a 10-minute segment for more in-depth analysis. Following each helper statement in the transcript, write an annotation, which considers the type of listening skill used, its purpose and its effectiveness. Make suggestions when it is obvious something else could have been said.

Firstly, analyze the whole taped interview for problem solving strategy. Describe each stage of your helping model and then evaluate it in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Make recommendations for improvement.

Next, from the transcript prepare a table showing the frequency your use of various listening responses. Describe in more depth your use of listening responses, evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, and make recommendations for change.

Finally, summarize your findings, including recommendations, in a conclusion.

The Story

On November 15, I had a problem-solving interview with a friend, Anne, who is an office administrator. Anne divulged that she had been under a lot of personal and work stress, much of it related to several "tragedies" which had occurred in the past six months. She has been experiencing anxiety attacks with symptoms of blackouts, sleeplessness, and memory problems.

As a result of this stress, she has found that her attitude and behavior at work has been changing. She is no longer as easy-going. She is finding that the little things that she used to deal with daily are now overwhelming and is frustrated by her staff's inability to take responsibility for their own work. Her position entails supervising quite a few people, and a particular group of three employees have been struggling with personality clashes and work-related issues. Anne has normally stepped in to "fix" the work problems and smooth out personality clashes, but now finds that she doesn't have the patience. She would like them to "act like adults" and deal with their problems themselves.

In the past, Anne has been called back from vacations to deal with "forest fires," and finds she cannot even take a day off without being called at home to solve everyday-type problems. Anne has expressed that she has very high work ethics and personal expectations, and is concerned that others in the office do not share these. In addition, with workers belonging to a strong union, she finds her hands are tied for motivating her employees, yet she feels that the work is not equitable.

Basically, Anne is trying to deal with a number of work issues, particularly related to the office culture, which has been accepted as the norm but which she would now like to change. This problem seems magnified by her personal issues and anxiety. She is dealing with a doctor for the anxiety issue, and I did not feel qualified to delve into this area, so I chose to keep the discussion centered on the work issues.

The following analysis includes a 10-minute transcript of our conversation, followed by an examination of the problem solving strategy and the communication skills. The problem solving and communication sections are sub-divided into description, evaluation, and recommendations. In the transcript, Anne's comments as the client are odd-numbered, mine, as the helper, are even-numbered. Following each of the helper statements is an annotation that gives the purpose, an evaluation, and recommendations.

Interview excerpts

13. The difficult part is for my staff. This is just a new thing for them because before I always have been so understanding and easy going and in most cases take the problem and fix it myself. And so it's a big change for them. So I guess for me it's how to deal with them so that they know that I'm serious – that I want some changes made here. I want my decisions to be respected and not that next week they'll do it again because – uh – well – Anne will be OK with it. So I think it's how I need to deal with the people I'm working with to make them see that I want to make these changes and that they have to buy into it and that they have to make an effort to do something about it.

14. So you have always just accepted things and fixed things as they come up.

I was attempting to paraphrase and summarize what I thought was the main information that had come up in our discussion to this point. I was, in this paraphrase, trying to clarify my understanding and give a focus to the discussion that I felt comfortable dealing with. I was happy that I did

this, as I managed to center on the work aspect, and Anne seemed more comfortable discussing this part and not her medical problems.

15. Right.

16. But you are sort of feeling right now that you have enough to take care of in your life and you would like them to help to take control and deal with the things they can.

This was an attempt at basic empathy, actually leading into an advanced empathy statement. I was trying to confirm her feeling of being overwhelmed (though I did not name it) and was looking at the content of what had been said to this point. I did not use the "formula", but found that this format came quite naturally and was satisfied with its use. Anne then confirmed that I was on track, but my comment was not yet finished.

17. Yeah.

18. Have you looked at how you have been dealing with the people and getting them to take responsibility for it?

This is the advanced part of the empathy statement. I had looked at the content of what she had said and interpreted her feelings, but I felt there was a greater reason for her needing to be in charge. My hunch was that, with her work ethic and expectations as discussed earlier and again later in the interview, that she felt she was the only one who could really deal with these issues properly. Anne had high expectations of herself and others, and the others had not been living up to them. In order to do something right, she felt she was better to do it herself, or at least guide the process. I feel that I was on track, and, by her next comment, that Anne was in the process of recognizing this herself.

19. Well they, you know, the other things is that I have so many different personalities ... personalities and they don't always mesh these personalities so I'm always sort of the mediator between them to keep the peace between them...their personalities are so different. And so I know that this solution works with one person, and with somebody else you have to do something differently. And so I've been doing that over the years, but I'm just getting to a point where I think.... I don't want to spend that much effort. I don't want to be spending my effort trying to resolve problems that I think are not significant problems.

They are problems that I think ...they are adults...they should be able to be dealing with these things and handle them themselves...and taking care of them themselves.

20. And so you think will they never learn... that you keep going over the same things over and over again.

This was an attempt to paraphrase to clarify my understanding of what Anne was saying and to let her know that I understood her.

21. Yep... right.

22. Are these things that are specific to one position, or are they sort of team efforts?

This was a probe to get some background information. Unfortunately it was asked in the form of a closed- ended question, not usually conducive to bringing about more discussion. However, in Anne's case she was willing to expand, so this did not really pose a problem or inhibit the discussion.

23. Um .. the problem is that we really have to work as a team here because we are a small .. we manage everything that is done in the main office we do in this small office with the staff that we have so we need to work as a team. And I think that's one of the big problems because the personalities are so different that ... and the other problem is that people have been here for so long that they just think the university owes them ...that everybody owes them something so that behavior should be acceptable because well they've been here for so long so they don't ... when they don't work together it affects all of us. And everybody is angry but they won't talk to each other. They come to me and I have to be the mediator. I want to say well you guys have to deal with it and if you can't come to a solution then I will get involved. But they are just so used to coming to me to settle everything.

24. So do you find that they are not even trying to deal with it with each other?

Again, this was a closed- ended probe looking for background information and trying to clarify my understanding. In this case, a closed question was appropriate, and my understanding was confirmed.

25. No, they are not.

26. (Pause) That must be really frustrating to have to deal with everyone's problems all the time.

This was basic empathy, dealing with her feeling and the content of what she had said. It was bordering on sympathy in the way I was feeling, but I tried to keep that out of it. I believe that my tone and facial expressions also let Anne see that I could relate to how she was feeling. This also let her know that I was attending carefully to her.

27. Yeah it is especially when I'm finding at this time in my life I have enough of my own problems.

28. Uh huh.

Here I was attending while trying not to interrupt her train of thought.

29. I don't need to ... I mean an example is I can't even go away for one day. I mean the other problem is I haven't had a decent holiday. I had a week off this summer, and I'm taking a day here and there to use my vacation days. I mean I go to the main office a couple of weeks ago meeting with my boss and I wasn't there for 10 minutes and they were calling me from my office and my boss said to me "can't you ever go away from the office". It's not just that they can't deal with the problems and they won't ... I come back and I'm putting out forest fires for the first day or two that I'm back. I'm fixing all the things that went wrong ... and you know I'm always defending my staff – always when people call with problems that happened always when I'm gone – their behavior – I mean I can hear a lot from my office, and so when I hear what I think is not appropriate behavior with a customer, I will walk out and the way they're being with this person....

30. Changes....

Oops!! Interrupting and finishing her sentence for her while she was still thinking. A bad thing to do in any conversation. Luckily I did not make her lose her train of thought and the conversation continued.

31. ...Changes immediately when I walk out, so when I hear that behavior is happening and I'm getting complaints from students and other staff. So I'm spending the first day I'm back dealing with this - you know trying to clean this stuff all up instead of getting caught up on the work that has built with my own being away.

32. So you end up feeling responsible for everyone's work on top of your own.

This was an attempt to paraphrase and demonstrate basic empathy. I was trying to show empathy and summarize what she had said to that point.

33. Exactly!

34. So your load gets heavier.

A continuation of my paraphrasing and summarizing. Anne had confirmed that I understood her point and I feel she felt comfortable to go on and let out some of her more disturbing feelings...ones that she is not comfortable with. I feel she has a tendency to want to defend her staff, but has doubts about a lot of what they do herself.

35. Exactly and my first instinct whenever I get a call is to defend my staff, and then talk to them and find out what happened, because in some

cases they aren't in the wrong. In some cases it is that they were misunderstood or whatever, but in a lot of cases it was something that they could have dealt with or taken care of. But they won't. They want the autonomy, but they don't want to take the responsibility

36. Hmm.

Attending, without interrupting.

37. To get that autonomy.

38. So what kind of socialization or training do they have? They've been here for a long time and are used to it being one way. Do they have any sort of training in between to keep them learning, to learn new ways?

Here I was using an open-ended probe in order to obtain some background information. Instead of leaving it to the question, I attempted to explain why I was asking it. I finished off my statement with a closed-ended question. She may have been confused as to what to answer, the way it was worded. I should have just stuck to my initial question and if she did not understand that, I could have clarified it later.

39. Um...yeah, they do. They have ... that's the other thing too. They always complain about not having enough training, and then when I bring somebody in and I make all the arrangements to cover the office, they end up with reasons why they can't make it or they can't do it. You know something always goes wrong so we've got to a point where people don't even want to come here and do the training because our group is never big enough so I mean I think ...

40. So the training is not mandatory.

This was a paraphrase to confirm my understanding about the training, and in letting Anne hear for herself what she had said, it also served to let her realize there was another problem. If she did not make the training mandatory, I did not see how she could convince these people to attend. She had to see this for herself before she could address it.

41. No and I think that's another one of the problems. The training should be made mandatory to them. And I've been trying to do that. In some cases I would say I'm expecting this of you, this is when you will go and I expect you to be there. And you see, that tends to work ... it's almost like you know if I get really strict and I put down the rules, then they listen and they do what is asked of them, but that's not my personality to be like that.

42. No, but you have a lot of responsibility in your position, obviously. You take a lot on yourself, but your position has a lot of responsibility too.

Here I was trying to clarify my understanding of her role. I understood that she felt responsible for all these activities, but I was not sure what kind of responsibility her position actually held. In this case I was not clear in what I was trying to find out, and later found myself digging again as to what her position was actually responsible for. In fact, all I got was confirmation that she felt she had all this responsibility, and that her position had some too, with no specifics. I should have asked what kind of authority she actually had over these positions, and what she was accountable for.

43. Right

44. Which means people then have to listen to you that way

Because I was not yet clear on the authority of her position, I was still indirectly trying to clarify her role and determine whether or not she had the authority to get these people to follow her direction in areas other than those already specified.

45. Right

46. Um. Have you given them some sort of guidance as to what you expect from them ... when you're solving problems with them do you just sort of take it and do it?

In assuming that she was indeed the authority figure, and had the ability to enforce training and interpret procedure, I then asked a probing background question to find out what she had indeed done in this area. Unfortunately, again I asked a closed-ended question which could have led to a lesser answer than I wanted. I should have instead phrased it as an open-ended question, asking what kind of guidance she had given them, or asking her what information was available to them which would make it clear what the expectations were.

47. In most cases I try to go through the steps of how to solve the problem and they have so much responsibility, and they have a time to get back to me to see how it's going. And as long as I'm on that all the time it runs smoothly, but you know sometimes if I've got a couple of people who are constantly late for work, so we'll deal with it and you know for a week attendance will be perfect, they'll be here every day on time, and then one day they'll be late, and then you know, maybe two days, and then pretty soon they are late every day and pretty soon we've got to come back in and do it all over again. My feeling is that we've gone through this a hundred times ... we shouldn't have to do this ... you know what your responsibilities are.

48. And what are the repercussions for something like that?

This was a better example of a probing open-ended question. I was looking for background information.

49. Well, the problem is that they have a really strong union, so the repercussions ... I mean that's the other problem ... they know that there is not very many ... I mean personality-wise, their personalities I cannot evaluate people on their personalities.

And the same thing with the being late - I mean when they are good ... and they'll always a month or two before assessment time their behavior will be perfect. And I mean ... I told them this year I am not using the last couple of months in my memory of how I will do your assessment. From now on when I call you into my office to talk to you about an issue I will send you something in writing and it will go in my file and at the end of the year when it is assessment time I will bring out that file and I will deal with it all along because of the problem that they are good for a while

50. Uh huh.

Here I was attending so that she knew I was following her; however I was careful not to interrupt.

51. And they are so inconsistent.

52. So you have already taken steps then to make them aware that things are going to be different.

This was a paraphrase in an attempt to summarize the main portion of what she had said. It proved to be accurate. At this stage, I felt we had defined the problem, which had a number of related elements, and I wanted to move to transition. I wanted her to know that I understood what she was concerned with and wanted to move into identifying some options, so I considered this a good area to move on from.

53. Yeah.

54. The way I see the problem is that you have a lot on your plate as it is.

I was in the problem-solving mode attempting to summarize the problem so that we could settle on a definition.

55. Right

56. And you don't want to be responsible for everything, but you are finding that they won't take responsibility for themselves...

Still problem-solving and summarizing the problem definition. In addition I wanted to make sure I was clear on her future expectations.

57. Right.

58. So what I see that I think you see that you need to do is to try and get them to take responsibility and behave in the matter that is expected of anyone in a job.

I was working on the transition stage of getting her to consider and evaluate some of her alternatives. I was attempting still to paraphrase, but in fact this could have been interpreted as advising. It was not worded well, though I tried to change the flow of it partway through. It would have been better if I continued summarizing without putting in my opinion of what I saw. In inserting my opinion I would appear to be taking sides.

59. Right. But how do I ... I guess my problem is how to make sure that that is happening all the time. I expect here that people that work here have been here for a long time, they are adults, they are mature, that I shouldn't have to be doing this all the time.

60. No.

Here I was attending with her and agreeing with her. In fact, this could also be interpreted as me taking sides.

61. The reason why I have them here is that they are trained, they know their jobs and they ... all I should be here is someone to help them when they've reached a point where they can't go further - I shouldn't be here as .. um... I don't want to be a day to day supervisor. (pause)

62. Always having to look over they shoulder all the time.

Here Anne took a pause, and I was attending by responding and paraphrasing to let her know that I understood.

63. That's right.

64. I think when you look at ... we look at people the way we are and we think that everyone should have the common sense and things. But common sense isn't really common to everybody depending on their background and things.

Anne seemed a bit distressed here. It was obvious that she took this problem very seriously and it was overwhelming to her. She did appear to tear up a couple of times during the interview, though she was able to control it. Here I felt the need to share and let her know that I understood how she felt. I often feel the same way as she was expressing - why does it have to be so difficult - you expect work ethic to be common sense and human nature, and it is so disappointing when it doesn't turn out that way. I almost found myself sympathizing and was ready to advise, but managed to catch myself.

65. Uh huh.

66. Um have you looked at all the different personalities, and thought about all the different areas that do need to be addressed with each of them?

In trying to get away from the sympathizing, I asked a probing question to help us move on with generating the alternatives and carry on with the transition in the problem-solving model. Once again I appear to have asked a closed question which could have been answered by yes or no. I should have asked Anne how she had looked at the personalities and what options she had come up with to address each different one.

67. Yeah, I have and I think that is probably the other thing that I have to deal with too is my work ethics.. I mean I just expect everybody should have the same work ethics as I do and not everybody does and ... but then again I find that there is such an inconsistency because they are all on the same job classification, they all get paid the same amount of money but I have one person who pulls a really big workload, and then another person who does just what they need to get by. And I don't think that's fair because I have no way to reward the other person because you know they are in a union so you can't give them bonuses. They've got to be paid by whatever the scale um.. so really the only benefit I can give them is more work by giving them special projects.

68. Uh huh. And how do you distribute the workload then so that one person gets that much more and one person gets less?

When it became clear that the it was not only her expectations that were not being met, but that it also concerned the equitable distribution of work, I asked a probe to get background information and attempt to generate new ideas. I had an idea by this point, but was holding back on giving my advice. I knew that she would buy into any idea more if she generated it herself, and Anne was the one who knew what the major issues were. In this case my probe was open-ended and was satisfactory to generate some thought and discussion.

69. Well what happens is it depends on how many students walk through the door and who takes the initiative

70. Uh hmm.

Here I was attending.

71. To attend to the customer when they come in so if there's three people working in front you might have one that is always the first one up and taking care of the customer so the other two will just sit and wait because someone else is doing it or else you've got to go in and say you know it's busy in the front end - move out into the front end.

72. So what kind of options do you have then? If you look at the issue, you've got people who ... one person who's carrying more load than the others, but they are all there at the same time.

We had jumped back to the problem definition to add another related sector, so again I was summarizing and trying to keep Anne generating options that we would later sort through and prioritize. I wanted to make sure she had some options that addressed the various areas of her problem so that she could then determine what was the most important and be able to see a bigger picture.

73. Uh huh

74. You've got people who are late. You've already decided that you will start monitoring in writing.

Again, paraphrasing to summarize the problem and some of the options we had already considered.

75. Uh huh

76. And keeping track of that for their assessments. That should give them some idea. But what other options do you have so that you can make the work more equitable, because you don't have the option of the reward.

Still summarizing to see where we were at. But I still did not feel she had addressed options which took into account all the factors of the problem she had discussed. In fact, looking at it the common denominator which was present in all had to do with personality, workload distribution and acceptance of responsibility. I asked an open-ended, leading probe so that I could get Anne to address that area.

77. I mean I guess what I could do... I mean it would start with me having to do really one-on-one supervising again, but I guess I could make a schedule and make sure you know they rotate for who is the first person out to take care of the students, and for that week that is their responsibility. So I don't care, whether your ... I mean if your phone rings, it shouldn't ring - it should be on call forward and you should be your main duty for that week would be taking care of the students and then we might be able to get it consistent that way.

Analysis

This analysis of the transcript will center on the use and effectiveness of my problem-solving model and communication skills, with specific focus on the use of basic and advanced empathy.

My model follows the four-segment system of Problem Identification, Generating Alternatives to Reach the Desired State, Evaluating Alternatives, and Choosing and Implementation.

I see my personal problem-solving model as being similar to an hourglass shape. I liked the idea of widening out when considering all the information, and narrowing down as the scope became clear and focal point was set. I initially had a problem with this model. The format did not allow for decision interruptions and reversing the process, but I have recreated it in my mind so that I can just turn the hourglass upside-down for a few moments to reverse the process and reconsider options, which were missed earlier. With this vision in mind, I was able to follow this problem-solving model quite effectively.

Problem-solving Model

Problem Identification

As appears to be common, the problem identification stage consisted of a lot of talking from the client (Anne) and a lot of listening and interpretation by the helper (me). During the entire conversation our postures were relaxed. I feel we followed Egan's SOLER very naturally. We were facing each other squarely, our postures were open and we leaned towards each other. Eye contact was maintained almost all the time - a couple of times when Anne felt emotional she turned her head away.

I did not avert my eyes, but tried to remain relaxed and bring her back to ease. I felt we had a bond of respect and trust which was built in the last conversation we had. Anne was familiar with my HR background and I felt she was confident in discussing this problem with me.

As Anne explained her problem I was careful in attending without interrupting. I responded with acknowledgement sounds (Uh huh ...) and also inserted some basic empathy. I did not find that I used the formula, but did put across an understanding of her feelings as interpreted from the content of her statements (things that didn't used to frustrate you as much are causing you more frustration, things you used to be able to deal with?).

Anne, in discussing her problem, got into some medical issues which I did not feel comfortable broaching. She had already discussed some of them with her doctor, but was not yet satisfied with what she came out with. While I was not prepared to tackle this issue, I did not feel I could challenge the problem without acknowledging it. I did ask a few vague background questions but then we steered the conversation to an area,

which was more in our depth --the way the problems were carrying over to her work.

I was then able to use some empathy, while following my gut feelings. I had a hunch, from what I had learned about Anne previously, and from what I had heard so far, that she was a perfectionist. She has a high work ethic, and it appeared to me that she felt it was easier to do something herself than to explain it to someone else and risk having it done wrong. While she wanted to delegate, the trust was not there. I felt that this was key to the issue, and while we did identify her problem in segments, I did not identify this for her. I did attempt to have her come to that conclusion herself by asking if she had looked at how she had been dealing with people and getting them to assume responsibility.

We did spend a long time in the problem identification stage, with me asking a lot of background questions, and using basic empathy. (That must be really frustrating to have to deal with everyone's problems all the time). I felt this time spent helped Anne vent some of her feelings of frustration, and helped us find a focal point from her multi-dimensional problem. By line 53 I felt we had spent enough time on defining the problem, so I took steps to summarize and focus and worked towards transition.

Generating Alternatives to Reach Desired State

As I worked at the transition into alternative generation we reverted a bit back into the problem. I felt the need to share my feelings with Anne and let her know that I understood what she was feeling. I was borderline sympathizing, but she appeared distressed and I wanted to keep her thinking ahead at how things could be better. Once again I moved to generating alternatives by asking open-ended probing questions which led to thought and discussion about areas she needed to address. I had a lot of ideas in mind, but wanted her to generate her own so that she would have ownership for them. I didn't want to have to get her to buy into my ideas, though I may have used some leading open-ended questions to focus on certain areas.

Because the work issue had a number of relating segments, generating alternatives took quite a bit of time. I spent a good deal of time summarizing segments of the problem so that Anne could find alternatives that addressed them. At this point, we were considering all alternatives, without worrying about feasibility or priorities. When I felt that an alternative brought up another potential problem, I would probe further so that Anne could consider other things that may arise from her actions, but I was again very careful not to advise.

By line 99 we had a number of options available, so many I really needed a paper. I attempted to summarize them, again pegging them to their relevant segment of the problem. This was very effective as Anne was able to grasp one that I had missed. This was confirmation that she was indeed giving careful thought to them, and had ownership for them ("...and procedures, don't forget procedures"). As this section of the discussion moved to transition, the mood had lightened considerably and I made an observation, which was probably a rhetorical question and sounded a bit like a joke. In fact, it caused Anne to laugh and I knew that we had moved on past the emotional part of the discussion. I then attempted to move us to the evaluation of the alternatives.

Evaluation of Alternatives

I was commenting on how busy and stressed Anne was already, and now here she had this huge list of possibilities, all of which seemed viable. In transition to the evaluation of alternatives, I asked her to prioritize them. Anne needed to see what the results of each alternative would be so that she could consider which would reduce her load the most initially before she had to tackle others. She started taking the time to see the bigger picture and see what would give the best results with the least effort on her part to start with until she felt she could deal with some of her personal issues. I did use some advanced empathy when she again started talking about people bringing things from their life into work - she still felt distressed by what was happening outside, and I had a hunch that the others were not aware of all these factors, which were affecting her mood. She started tearing up again and I realized I had hit a chord.

Anne was again encountering feelings, which I was not equipped to deal with. At this point I used basic empathy (you're feeling pretty overwhelmed) and I began sharing something personal so she did not feel so alone in it. I did advise that she make sure she find some time to see the doctor for some additional coping tools or strategies and deal with her personal issues. Anne then continued the discussion by setting her priorities so that the first things that would result would be her ability to take time off to deal with her issues without having to be called in all the time.

Choosing and Implementing

At this point Anne had set some priorities and was already in the action planning mode. She had already determined what she wanted to do first and was setting the stage for the when and how. I was pleased to see her ready to take the initiative and seeming excited with the prospect. I was

very supportive of her ideas and let her know. (I really like the idea of and I think you have a really good plan for that.) I'm not sure where that fits in a helping interview, but I suppose it could be considered sharing or taking sides. However, I was being honest and felt that her ideas were right in line with what she wanted to achieve.

Evaluation of the problem-solving model

During this interview I tried to remain very aware of my four steps of the problem solving model. In following it, however, I gave myself permission to backtrack if I felt it necessary. When I did this, I was always aware of what the next step was supposed to be and didn't allow myself to get bogged down in the process. I felt that even when we did revert, that I was familiar with and constantly aware of the next step. Because of this I was able to follow it through with confidence. (Much more could probably have been written to evaluate the problem solving model.)

Recommendations

I am now satisfied with my use of the problem solving model. It has four sequential steps, each needing to be completed before going on to the next. I have found that if new information comes up which leaves one step incomplete, I am now comfortable in going back, dealing with the issue, and getting back on track.

Knowledge of these steps and what we are trying to achieve in each makes the problem solving interview a much easier process to follow. I no longer jump straight to problem solving and action steps with my advising, but let the clients come up with their own decisions and alternatives, giving them ownership and making it more likely that they will follow through. I am satisfied that my personal problem solving model will continue to work for me.

Communication Skills

The following table summarizes the communication skills used in the transcript excerpt.

Communication skill	Number of times used	Statement # in transcript
Paraphrasing to summarize	7	14,32,34,58,72,74,76
Probing for background info.	6	22,24,38,46,66,68

Acknowledging/Attending	5	28,36,60,62,70
Paraphrasing to clarify info.	4	20,40,42,44
Basic Empathy	3	16,26,32
Advanced Empathy	1	18
Interrupting	1	30
Sharing	1	64

Paraphrasing

I tend to use paraphrasing in a couple of major ways. The first is as reflecting, in summarizing the content of what has been said, making sure I have understood correctly and either carrying the conversation forward or leading to transition.

"So what kind of options do you have then. If you look at the issue, you've got people who ... one person who is carrying more load than the others, but they are all there at the same time ..."

"You've got people who are late. You've already decided that you will start monitoring in writing."

The other way in which I use paraphrasing is to ask for verification and clarify meaning of what has been said.

"...and so you think they will never learn...that you keep going over the same things over and over again"

"...so the training is not mandatory"

While I note that I have used paraphrasing extensively, I have broken it down in the table to show these two different areas. I have found that my use of paraphrasing is more often in the area of summarizing, usually in the problem-solving mode.

In evaluating my use of paraphrasing in general, I am satisfied with my ability to use this form of summarization and clarification.

I think in doing so, it not only confirms what I am hearing, but also lets the speaker know that I am indeed listening carefully, and ensures that any misunderstandings are cleared up. I find that it also keeps me in line so that I can keep track of what has been covered and where we are headed. I have no further recommendations on my use of paraphrasing. I will continue to use it as comes naturally.

Probing

I used probing quite frequently in looking for background information. This allowed me to get specific details about the situation, helped to elaborate what had been said and made sure I was interpreting the conversation correctly. I did, however, seem to lean more towards the closed questions which can inhibit information gathering.

"Are these things that are specific to one position, or are they sort of team efforts?"

"So do you find that they are not even trying to deal with it with each other?"

"Do they have any sort of training in between to keep them learning ...?"

These questions either looked for a yes/no or a choice for an answer and did not require Anne to expand and give me further information.

I did on occasion use open-ended questions and was happier with the results achieved with these.

"What kind of socialization or training do they have?"

"...how do you distribute the workload then so that one person gets that much more ...?"

While these were not as frequent as my closed questions, I often made the mistake of trying to explain myself and adding a closed question at the closing of my statement.

"What kind of socialization or training do they have? They've been here for a long time and are used to it being one way. Do they have any sort of training in between to keep them learning..."

In reading my transcript, I was not very pleased with my probing skills this time. I have always thought that I was good at asking this kind of question to get information. This is something I'm trained in for behavior interviewing so I felt it was one of my strengths. However, I am now aware that while the speaker is giving me the information I am looking for, it is not a result of my questioning. Most of my probes appear to be closed, leaving room for an uncooperative person to give simple or one-word answers without really giving me any more information than I already have.

In future, in using my probes I will be more conscious of how I word a question and make attempts to have more open-ended questions.

Acknowledging/Attending

I always feel it is important, especially during a long monologue, that the person you are speaking to knows that you are following what they are saying. They need to know that you are indeed listening to them, and not lost somewhere in your shopping list. Acknowledging and attending is very important to this. This includes comments such as "uh huh", the tone of voice and non-verbal communication such as facial expression and hand gestures.

I did follow Egan's SOLER. Having read that chapter, I am now acutely aware of my posture, eye-contact and relaxation. I did a few acknowledging sounds so that Anne knew I was following her, and I know that my tone and facial expressions, especially when she was making her medical revelations, let her know that I was indeed following her and feeling for her. On a couple of occasions, I did agree with her in my attending. That could be interpreted by some as taking sides, but I knew that Anne took it to mean that I was understanding her point of view.

I am satisfied with my attending skills. My only recommendation for change would be to try to avoid the sympathizing gestures. In discussing her medical problems, I felt I could relate to some of them and am certain that my expression indicated sympathy more than empathy - as I said earlier, I was feeling for her. While this is good for being able to put myself in her shoes and seeing the problem from her side, it can cause the listener to take sides and potentially poison the conversation.

Basic and Advanced Empathy

I do use what I consider empathic responses quite often. While I do not follow the formula of "you are feeling _____ because _____" I believe that my comments lead to the same understanding of feelings and content.

"But you are sort of feeling right now that you have enough to take care of in your life and you would like them to help to take control of and deal with the things they can ..."

"...That must be really frustrating to have to deal with everyone's problems all the time ..."

"...so you end up feeling responsible for everyone else's work on top of your own..."

I am not as integrated in the use of advanced empathy, and to put it in practice felt awkward. In fact I can only identify one area where I used it, and this was an intentional attempt, which came across sounding awkward

on the tape. I was making my basic empathy statement, while at the same time trying to word my hunch in such a way that Anne would understand what I was getting at. In the end, I paused after the basic statement, so that she interjected with her attending. I felt that she knew what I was trying to do and that made the attempt feel even more awkward.

In the end the exchange went like this:

"But you are sort of feeling right now that you have enough to take care of in your life and you would like them to help to take control and deal with the things they can"

Anne: "Yeah"

"Have you looked at how you have been dealing with the people and getting them to take responsibility for it?"

My hunch was that Anne assumes responsibility because she feels that it is easier to do it herself and knows it will be done properly. I felt that she thought it would take more effort to try to explain and let someone else handle "emergencies" and that she did not trust them to achieve the results she wanted. In fact Anne has high expectations, and this result was very possible.

I wanted Anne to see that she could delegate and that she would have to empower them to help them own the responsibility. I am not sure that my use of advanced empathy was useful here.

As a recommendation, I will try to continue with my genuine empathy statements which seem to occur more naturally. I will have to practice on the advanced empathy. Just becoming aware of the hunches is a start. Many thoughts occur during a conversation, so it is imperative to determine which hunch is more accurate and should be followed up. I know I need a lot of practice in this before I reach the integrated stage. I feel that even though I may appear awkward, it does not hurt to try to use this technique more often.

Other Skills

Another skill I made use of during this interview was sharing. I felt that on a couple of occasions, when Anne was appearing to become distressed, that I should let her know I understood how she felt. Anne seems to be a very strong person, and when she started to become emotional she was very good at coming to grips with it. I wanted to let her know that it didn't worry me if she got teary. In fact, this is one of my major personal faults - I am over-emotional and I have several issues that I have not had time to deal with which still cause me to lose control. I experienced one of those

feelings the day before in class, and reminded Anne that it is something that happens to all of us. I wanted her to feel completely at ease with me.

On this occasion I also broke into my advice-giving mode. I watched myself very carefully during the conversation to avoid this, however I did fall into it on a couple of occasions. I am pleased with my ability to hold back through most of the discussion. I feel that my awareness from our first transcript experience helped me to limit this.

On one occasion I also caught myself actually interrupting Anne and trying to finish her sentence. How rude of me! I realize this is a major fault and one that I really do try to watch. It still seems to come naturally to me and I will make every effort to hold back in the future.

Evaluation of Communication Skills

Overall, I am satisfied with my communication skills. I have found different uses for paraphrasing and find them most effective in for summarization in the problem-solving and transition mode, and for clarifying my understanding of what has been said.

My probing skills need to be refined. I am aware of the need for open-ended questions to keep conversations moving and to gain more insight. I do see the need for closed questions sometimes, however I tend to use them too often. Luckily, with Anne, this did not inhibit the conversation. I can see how with someone else, a teenager for example, may simply answer the questions without offering any further information.

I believe I am very effective in my attending skills and am satisfied with my use of these.

I am happy with my use of basic empathy. I feel that even though I do not use the formula, my natural comments tend to be empathic and demonstrate an understanding of what I believe the person is feeling. My use of advanced empathy was rare (only once) and very stilted, however it is a new concept to me and will take time to refine.

I was pleased that I did not do much advising. I was rude in interrupting and finishing Anne thought - I should have been patient and let her think her way through what she was trying to say. As for the sharing, I felt it was appropriate where used, but not something I could see myself doing often.

Recommendations

In considering the above evaluation, I have no recommendations for changing my paraphrasing. I will continue to use this to clarify my understanding and help summarize situations. My probing skills definitely need work. I can see that I do not make enough use of open-ended questions. I will try to be more aware in my probing and catch myself before I ask the closed questions. I will try to keep my wording in such a way that draws out more information. I can see practicing this on my children to become more natural at it.

I have no recommendations for change in my attending skills. I felt that I was very there during these discussions. I will, however, try to be more aware of listening and not trying to do too much at once in my personal life when I am not in a controlled situation such as this one. I will continue to control my desire to advise and interrupt.

I am happy with my empathy skills, however I will attempt to put into practice the advanced empathy so that I am more aware of my hunches and the impact they may have on opening conversations and blind spots.

Conclusion

I found this course to be very enlightening. I see the value in having a problem-solving model for helping conversations, and have now defined one that I feel can really work for me. Just being aware of it helps with the flow and prevents me from leaping to advising and action taking. I understand the need for the client to take ownership of the problem, the alternatives and the action steps. The model allows me to follow through with this and simply help them along.

I was satisfied with my use of communications skills, and my eyes have been opened to the areas that need improvement. I think a refresher course on this would be valuable to everyone I know.

I realize some practice is required in certain areas, particularly with my probing skills and advanced empathy. I understand that advice giving and interrupting can inhibit conversations, and realize that closed questions can be just as detrimental. I will be taking this awareness with me wherever I go and try to apply what I have learned.

Appendix 3

Analysis of interview transcript

1. Analyze the following interview. After each helper statement label the listening skill used, indicate what the helper was trying to do, and evaluate her effectiveness. If the helper could have said something different or better, make a recommendation for change.
2. Develop a table of response kinds and describe and evaluate the overall use of communications skills. Make recommendations for change, if appropriate.
3. Describe and evaluate the strategy that was used. Comment on the use of transition from one step to the next. Make recommendations for change if appropriate. Use statement numbers to identify transition and steps in your analysis.

Background Information

In this interview one friend is talking to another friend. The helper friend's name is Joyce. The client friend is Rita. After getting comfortable in their physical environment, the conversation flowed rather easily. Rita decided to discuss a problem she is having at work with a male co-worker, Bob. She has worked with this person for over ten years. This man is married and has children. Their relationship is professional but borderlines dalliance. Rita was handling this until recently. Rita now works in Human Resources and the policy regarding sexual harassment was recently redone. The policy regarding sexual harassment is very clear and very strict. Rita knowing now what she knows and working in Human Resources feels this man has crossed the line.

The following is approximately a ten-minute excerpt from their conversation. Odd numbers refer to Rita. Even numbers are the comments of the helper, Joyce.

Interview

1. "In an ordinary working day... everybody jokes around with each other in a very, maybe a little bit in a sexually orientated fashion. Not anything that's of any... there's no touching there's no whatever. I consider it to be very mellow. I certainly wouldn't consider it to be sexual harassment."

2. "Okay so you tell dirty jokes or... that kind of stuff."

3. "No. They do funny things. How do I say... Let's say a... oh I don't know... somebody might say nice dress... you know and you go 'thanks' you know? It's not sexually whatever but it's just kind of joking a bit. How do I explain it? it's a... there's no overt sexual harassment meant in anything that's ever said in a normal working day. Okay and I never feel it and I would never pick it out. Every once in a while this person will do something that I would consider extremely sexually harassing. I just let it roll off my shoulders. If anybody sees it or hears it in my work it would be considered sexual harassment."

4. "Okay. Give me an example of something this man will do or say."

5. "I'm on the phone. He comes up to me. I have a shirt on. He'll take my hand, unbuttons the cuff, rolls up my sleeve and kisses my arm."

6. Rita has my attention. She knows it because I am looking at her with my jaw dropped. I am thinking 'the nerve of this man' and at the same time 'is she for real?' There is a five-second silence.

7. "What?" At this point Rita is grinning and lets out a laugh.

8. "I'd agree that is definitely sexual harassment."

9. "It's going past the point. Right? I believe it is."

10. "Your two examples that you gave me. First 'nice dress.' That's a compliment. I could tell you that."

11. "Right. That's appropriate."

12. "Second example, rolls up your sleeve and kisses your arm. That is sexual harassment. Are both these examples using the same man? Are you aware of him doing this with anyone else?"

13. "Yes, the same man. I don't follow him around. So no I don't know. I only know what he does to me."

14. "This is private and not in front of anyone else."

15. "Well I'm in an open area. I'm in a cubicle. Anyone walking by would see that. Right."

16. "But nobody has."

17. "Well I don't think anybody has. Well maybe someone has seen some of the things that he has done. I mean this is only one example. Right."

18. "This man has done things like that to you several times."

19. "Oh for sure!"

20. "In the last ten years. Five years."

21. "No. Probably the last year. Before that I don't think I could tell you of any example of anything that has ever been said or been done. I'm saying I can't think of anything up to that time that I would consider sexually harassing. In the past year he has become physically... it's physical now. Right. It's touching."

22. "You feel uncomfortable now because it has become physical. It's touching and you feel sexually harassed."

23. "Well... yeah, it's a work environment. He's married. He shouldn't be doing these things to me. I'm Human Resources. Like 'HELLO.' Why don't you do it to the President? Like how far up do you want to go before you get your butt kicked here. Right.

24. "Okay Rita, you've given me some details about your concerns at work. You feel this is definitely sexual harassment. You are no longer comfortable with the situation and can no longer let it roll off your shoulders. Tell me, what are you going to do about this?"

25. "How do I deal with this in the correct fashion? Do I address him with this and say 'Bob back off'. I mean up till now I've blown him off, but this arm thing happened last week! I know at the time I should have said 'excuse me' and popped him in the face, but I didn't" Rita is laughing. "I'm HR now. I cannot in any shape or form, even if it's not a big deal to me. I cannot put up with this anymore. I have to deal with this. I have to deal with this. I have to address him so he will not do these things anymore and recognize this is not acceptable to me. Right. I'm not exactly sure how I'm going to do this."

26. "You feel torn between what is acceptable to you personally and what is acceptable according to Human Resources Policy because up to now you've blown things off. But the rules have changed with your title and in your very job description this behavior is not acceptable. Is that it?"

27. "Yes, yes, yes! I cannot blow it off anymore. I have to deal with this now. We are launching the new Human Resources Manual soon and I know the Policy on sexual harassment will jump right out at him.

28. "So Rita your problem is well defined. What can you do? What are your options? What does your Human Resources Manual say you should do?"

29. "That I am to go to my manager and express my concerns and they would deal with it. I would be taken right out of the picture. If management can't solve the issue then it goes to HR."

30. "You are HR. Can I assume your manager is HR also?"

31. "That's right 'So duh, Bob come to me with your problems and I'll help you work them out.'" Rita gives a big laugh.

32. "So what are your options?"

33. "My thought was I could address him first or I could take it to management. I don't want him to get in trouble."

34. "What would you say to him?"

35. "Tell him about the manual and that he's going to have to stop this behavior at work. I'd tell him he has to be real careful about what he says and does, especially to me. Right."

36. "Yes. Go on."

37. "I don't care if you've known me for ten years... and we're... you know... it's just us. This kind of behavior is inappropriate at work. He's married. He probably thinks it's funny."

38. "You feel he won't take you serious because you've been putting up with his harassment and blowing it off."

39. "Maybe. I could just go to management."

40. "You have limited options. Two options actually. You can talk to him yourself."

41. "Right."

42. "Or you can go to your manager and complain to them and let them deal with him."

43. "Right I'm just not sure which is the best way. Either them or me."

44. "You feel worried about him being reprimanded or losing his job because of you. Is that it?"

45. "That's not what would happen. They'd just tell him not to behave that way."

46. "He wouldn't be let go."

47. "Oh no. That would never happen but I guess the real problem is I don't want someone to give him shit and he ends up thinking bad of me."

48. "Okay. Go on."

49. "That's the whole piece. Right I think he's the kind of person that would say to me 'Why didn't you just come to me? Why didn't you tell me sooner? Why did you let things go so far?'"

50. "Why didn't you tell me to stop?"
51. "Yeah right I think my best bet is to pull him aside and say 'look I'm not going to tell anybody anything unless you keep doing this'. A verbal warning."
52. "A verbal warning. I like that."
53. "We've worked together ten years and I've let things slide but I'm not going to any more."
54. "Right. Sounds good. You're making a plan."
55. "I'll pull him aside and talk to him. If I don't get what I want out of that... if he doesn't watch his P's and Q's, then I'll go to management."
56. "You'll tell him that."
57. "Oh yeah. He will know that if things don't change immediately I will go to management."
58. "Sounds good."

- 59. "Thanks, I'll get right on that"
- 60. "You go girl!"

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