

BERNARD G. BERENSON,
*American International College,
 Springfield, Massachusetts.*

CONFRONTATION: THOSE WHO QUALIFY AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

ABSTRACT: Confrontation is an abused technique sometimes used irresponsibly and never sufficient in itself. The only people who are qualified to confront are those who demonstrate high levels of understanding which go beyond what is being said, who demonstrate deep and appropriately changing levels of regard and affect, who possess a high level of physical energy, and who possess a large and growing repertoire of helping skills.

In recent years, helpers have been encouraged to confront their helpees, children their parents, students their teachers, trainers their trainees, and constituents of all kinds their representatives. Confrontation is a much talked about and, most often, abused technique. Although there is no evidence that confrontation is a major vehicle for helping, it continues to be an over-used technique by some trainers and therapists. We have listened to and observed hundreds of hours of therapy and training in our efforts to research confrontation as a therapeutic tool. It may now be appropriate to pull together selected experiential learnings as well as learnings from our research (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Berenson & Mitchell, 1973).

For some, confrontation is a means to act on the assumption that any significant relationship must be based upon increasing levels of honesty. If it is not based on honesty, the individuals and the relationship will not grow: the likely path is one of mutual self-destruction. In addition confrontation is a means to expose the helpee's effort to get away with his neuroses, to fool his helper. The effective helper knows that if the helpee successfully neutralizes him, the helpee will realize that all helping is a game played by two helpees.

For the most effective, there is a realization that the helping relationship must be highly conditional if it is to make a constructive delivery. Confrontation in this instance becomes one way to communicate conditionally. For the least healthy, confrontation is employed to elicit the helpee's pathological behavior, humiliate, and vent irresponsible and infantile helper impulses.

When employed by those who have mastered a large repertoire of

helping skills, confrontation, although never sufficient, facilitates efforts to:

1. Deal with discrepant helpee behaviors.
2. Expand the experience of the helper and the helpee by creating crises in the relationship and the need to act upon what they understand about each other and themselves.
3. Make the interaction more immediate by dealing with the here and now.
4. Demonstrate that the helper not only responds to his world but also acts on his understanding.
5. Uncover new areas to explore, and to re-explore previously discussed but unresolved problem areas.
6. Demonstrate that after the helper has come to understand the helpee better than the helpee understands himself, his acceptance of the helpee's behavior is highly conditional.
7. Determine whether the helpee is ready to act on his own behalf by being ready to be acted upon by his helper.
8. Demonstrate that the highest level of understanding is acting upon the helpee.
9. Demonstrate that although the helping process was initially based upon the helpee's frame of reference, the initiative aspects of helping are often initially based upon the helper's frame of reference.
10. Demonstrate that the helper lives more effectively than the helpee. The effective helper knows that understanding is critical only because it sets the stage for efficient and systematic programs of action.

How then do we discriminate between those who confront because they cannot help and those who confront to share our experience by nurturing what is strong and attacking what is ugly and weak?

THOSE WHO QUALIFY

1. Only those who demonstrate high levels of understanding which go beyond what is being said are qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Confrontation based upon high levels of understanding results in a more full and immediate interaction between the helpee and the helper. Confrontation without such a base of accurate and communicated understanding is likely to be inappropriate in content and affect as well as destructive (Carkhuff, 1969; Berenson, Friel, & Mitchell, 1971). The base of accurate and communicated understanding makes it possible for the helper to appropriately employ his repertoire of helping skills. Only such understanding will enable the helper to discriminate between what is potentially constructive or destructive. Most important, high levels of understanding followed by helper initiative behaviors establish the helper as a potent reinforcer, thus increasing the probability that the helpee will implement constructive programs developed with the helper.

2. Only those who demonstrate deep and appropriately changing levels of regard and affect are qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Those who offer a steady unchanging level of regard and/or affect communicate that the helpee cannot have an impact on the helper (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967). Those who fake intense affect, as is popular in some training encounters, are simply psychopathic. Unchanged high or low levels of expressed regard by the helper merely serve as a model for not acting upon the world — a condition that leads to the helpee experiencing himself as increasingly impotent, cruel, and destructive (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation). In time the helpee comes to know that the helper is really a helpee. The subsequent interactions are a series of denying exchanges between two victims.

Increasingly and gradually the effective helper is intolerant of anything that does not demand that both he, the helper, and the helpee be the best they can be. There are no games, no neurotic contracts, no compromises. The effective helper regards himself conditionally and offers no less to his helpee.

3. Only those who possess a high level of physical energy are qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Constructive confrontation demands immense energy, durability, and broadly based experience. Fatigue and loss of direction by the helper results in another abandonment all too common in the life of the helpee. The initiation of a confrontation offers promise; its premature conclusion, without constructive programs, is another in a long series of broken promises. The critical point is that the helper failed to make a delivery the helpee could use. The helpee learns that the world only requires the apparence of delivery (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Helpees ask two fundamental questions when they meet their helpers: (a) "does this person have anything I want?" and (b) "given my circumstances, can this helper make it better than I (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967)?" If the helper is fatigued and physically weak, the helpee knows the whole process will be a lie. The helpee then enters the relationship not to grow but to learn just how much stronger is he than his helper.

4. Only those who possess a large and growing repertoire of helping skills are qualified to confront.

Helpers who have a large and growing repertoire of effective responses and skills never become a party to a "mutual non-exposure" contract with their helpees. He knows that it takes skills to be effective and he pays the price to learn them. The effective helper is committed to his own constructive and creative emergence and demonstrates that commitment by sharing his growing skills and by training with his helpee. Only those who are growing can act to facilitate another person's growth.

THOSE WHO DO NOT QUALIFY

1. Those committed only to survival are not qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Those committed only to survival understand living a highly conditional existence but do not understand personal emergence. For the underprivileged the struggle for survival is familiar; growth is unfamiliar because the conditions for growth have been withheld. Promises in the past have not been fulfilled. Confrontation and what follows is given little consideration because there is nothing to lose and nothing to gain.

For those who have enjoyed opportunities to grow, embracing a survival state constitutes a strategy to avoid the exposure of their dulled affect, distorted motives, and lack of competencies, resulting in such a lack of self esteem that they are convinced they are entitled to no more than survival (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation). Any person who abuses his potential must choose to undermine the growth of others. He will confront only to prove that the helpee is as badly off as he, the helper.

2. Those who have lost contact with their own experience are not qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Confrontation emerges from the helper's experience. If this experience is distorted or unavailable to him, his confrontations are likely to be stupid questions posed aggressively. The resulting interaction is irrelevant to the helpee. Most often, the confrontation is a question designed to focus on real or fabricated pathology. In reality, it is a reflection of the pathology of the helper because the content is often irrelevant (Berenson, Friel, & Mitchell, 1971).

If the helper cannot draw upon his experience without distorting it he can only distort the helpee's experience. It is at this moment that the helper is exposed as the helpee he really is. All he really knows is that he is a victim and that whenever he acts it is destructive.

At a deeper level appearing not to be in contact with their experience (helper and/or helpee) is a sham. The fact is that the ineffective are aware that if they translate their impulses into action they must destroy (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

3. Those who hold allegiances which are stronger than their commitment to constructive personal emergence are not qualified to confront (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

Incompetence is often justified on the basis of a commitment to a cause or institution. Any denial of personal growth is to be viewed with suspicion. In helping, those helpers who profess to sacrifice their own welfare in order to help others are ineffectual. Self-denial is a ploy of those who are not growing to act out their distortions with impunity. This type of "helper" all too often puts the focus on what is right or wrong for society or an institution in order to divert attention from who he is. The ineffective helper actually attempts to train his helpees to employ the same diversionary tactics he employs, just as the effec-

tive helper trains his helpees in the skills they need to live as effectively as he does. Some of these diversionary tactics are: (1) avoid what you need most, a relationship with a healthy person, (2) destroy what you need most by distorting the experience with a healthy person, (3) demand responsiveness from others and abuse those who respond, and (4) pose as a victim of a high functioning person as a last-ditch effort (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation).

4. Those who possess a limited repertoire of helping skills are not qualified to confront.

Those who have not mastered all the essential helping skills (Carkhuff, 1969, 1972) move blindly from one fad to the next. They have one song to sing regardless of its degree of effectiveness. The criterion is fashion, not effectiveness. Any technique not employed within the context of high levels of attending, observing, listening, and responding is silly at best and psychopathic at worst (Carkhuff, 1972).

Helping is a *set of skills* not a skill.

"Only those few who have the right to help have the right to confront.

Confrontation is never *necessary*.

Confrontation is never *sufficient*.

In the hands of those few who have the right to help, confrontation may be efficient (Berenson & Mitchell, in preparation)."

RESUME: La confrontation est une technique dont on abuse et qu'on utilise parfois d'une manière irresponsable. Elle n'est jamais suffisante en elle-même. Les seules personnes qualifiées pour l'utiliser sont celles qui manifestent un degré élevé de compréhension dépassant le contenu des mots, qui peuvent vivre à un niveau profond et approprié leur acceptation et leur affectivité, et qui disposent d'une grande énergie physique ainsi que d'un bon répertoire d'habiletés à procurer de l'aide.

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