

BOOK REVIEW

HELPING AND HUMAN RELATIONS: A PRIMER FOR LAY AND PROFESSIONAL HELPERS. Volume 1. SELECTION AND TRAINING.

By Robert R. Carkhuff. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, pp. xix + 298. \$9.10.

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Counselors and counselor trainers: have you been feeling uneasy about the counseling methods you use or teach? If so, you may welcome the publication of Robert R. Carkhuff's volumes on *Helping and Human Relations*. If you are not uneasy, these unsettling books may not be welcome, but in fairness to your counselees and students, and above all to yourselves, you may wish to listen to this strong plea to rethink old positions.

Carkhuff's importance, it seems to me, is not so much that he is yet another new star in our sky advocating certain new procedures and producing yet another model of counseling. His importance is more global, for he insists that we suspend for a while all our accumulated beliefs and preferences and accompany him on a tour of the vocational domain in which we operate, and especially that we return for a while to Square One, a square called Helping. Volume I of *Helping and Human Relations* does this. Though the bulk of the volume deals with the selection and training of helpers, all that is said is in the context of a restructuring of our vocational universe—a reconsideration of who can help and what helps—*really* helps.

The landscape in Square One is fairly clear-cut: the world is inhabited by a vast variety of people who function with vastly varying effectiveness. The more effective people can and do help the less effective, but not vice versa. Very or moderately effective people can be trained to help more competently. There are no status or role requirements for helpers in Square One—helpers may or may not be counselors, therapists, or people with letters after their names. And if less than minimally effective people are put in officially helping roles, they will not be able to help anyone as effective as, or more effective than themselves, and they may and do harm them. Carkhuff thinks there are many such people.

The process of effective helping requires some constant dimensions. But once these requirements are met, helping can take an infinite variety of modes. The constant dimensions include several facilitative ones (like empathic understanding) and several action-oriented ones (like decision-making about functional goals which, when attained, will make a positive difference in the life of the person helped). The variety of modes comes about because every helper-helpee pair or group is different, operates in different environments, and concerns different problems.

The foregoing is a paraphrase of Carkhuff's position. In the book he elaborates much more specifically, describing levels of effectiveness, specify-

ing the dimensions of effective helping, suggesting selection procedures for the people who are to be trained to help, and outlining ways these people can be trained. He emphasizes the importance of considering non-professionals as potential helpers, and the importance of highly effective persons to do training. Whenever there has been research (usually by himself and his colleagues) to substantiate his statements, he quotes it.

There is no substitute for reading the book, and none is offered here.

What is offered, however, is a series of small warnings—a sort of reader's guide to the experience of reading Carkhuff, *not in any way* suggestions not to read him.

Carkhuff is a very strong person—strong in that he is courageous and forthright, and even stronger because it is obvious that he cares very much about people. In such strength there is always a danger that readers become lulled by a sense of great security, carried along by his prose with the blissful feeling that here, at last, is the man with the answers. Such a tendency is perhaps furthered by his practice, in parts of the book, of presenting statements as numbered assumptions, propositions, corollaries, and conclusions. It is hard to escape the feeling that this is Truth At Last Revealed. Yet a closer look may show that some statements follow more logically than others, some are backed by better research evidence than others. In sum, the reader can and should be critical—and Carkhuff himself says that he will change.

Another warning concerns a basic assumption on which much of what follows is based. It is stated clearly by the author, but may be lost sight of through no fault of his. It is that people in need of help *seek* help. This may be so, although the mode of seeking may not be to knock on a counselor's door. But for school counselors and some others it needs to be kept clearly in mind that Carkhuff is not speaking of the reluctant counselee, or of students being "helped" by a school official as the result of school routine or because some other school official thinks counseling is indicated.

A third warning concerns the title: "Primer" is a word that usually connotes an easy first reader about the rudiments of a subject. Although certainly rudimentary, the book is not easy reading—some of the more common jargon is omitted, but some remains and the terminology requires some background knowledge of behavioral science.

Finally it is as well to remark that although Volume I can be read as a separate book, it lacks lengthy illustrations of ongoing helping. Some brief examples of helper-helpee exchanges are presented, but the bulk of illustrative material is presented in Volume II, on *Practice and Research*. (Volume II will be reviewed in the near future.)

It is difficult to think of anyone who is reading this journal who would not find *Helping and Human Relations* at least interesting, and for many it may well be a great deal more than that. But if there are readers who do not find it so, there is still hope: Dr. Carkhuff is at present hard at work on another book!