



## **PITFALLS IN THE HELPING PROCESS**

My parents, probably like most of our parents, taught me that it was a virtue and an essential part of our family's value system to help others. Their message must have been more powerful than I realized since I chose to enter into a helping profession as my "life's work". Remembering my early professional days, I was imbued with great enthusiasm to help people. I remember one of my supervisors, though, a very wise woman, cautioning me about the helping process. At first, her words seemed inappropriate because of all of the work that needed to be done. Actually, it wasn't until my fifth or sixth year of training that the full impact of her cautioning really had meaning.

Many, if not most people, welcome and appreciate help...especially in times of deep crises. However, that acceptance can be fraught with problems as well. Should the people receiving the help be very dependent in their personality makeup, the "helping process" tends to become the "enabling process". I use the term "enabling" to indicate that a basic problem that an individual might have can become exacerbated and, instead of the help working to their advantage, it does the opposite.

Some guidelines that can be used to guard against this danger are the following:

### **HELPING MAKES US "GOOD PEOPLE":**

A common perception of helping is that our doing so makes us "good people". What makes us a "good person" is the person or **who we are** and not necessarily in the role of helping others. There are some people who believe this to a fault, however. They might even "force" their helping on others who may not really want the help but might accept it in order not to seem ungrateful. What ultimately occurs is a pattern of control being established with the helper in the controlling position. Of course, that isn't helping at all but can mistakenly be identified as a good and noble thing.

### **THE ISSUE OF "DIGNITY"**

One of the most important things to look for in helping others is their sense of dignity. Other words for this concept might be "pride" or "survivor". Many people are too proud to accept help...even when they may need it...because they feel it detracts from their sense

of dignity or their feeling of independence. This can be a very important determination to gauge since our "best intentions" might not only fall on "deaf ears" but become an insult to someone who feels strongly about their being helped by others.

### **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:**

In order for people to be helped effectively, they must assume full responsibility for the problem-at-hand. Should the "pendulum" swing toward the responsibility being assumed by the helping person, something could be drastically wrong and both the "helper and helpee" need to reassess the process ASAP.

### **THE HELPER'S SENSE OF GRATIFICATION:**

One of the main incentives that most people want to experience in helping others is the sense of gratification they receive from doing so. However, in order to truly help someone in a manner that their personal dignity is maintained, a sense of **objectivity** needs to be maintained by the helping person. Objectivity allows the helping person to gauge how effective they are the helping process and whether the people being helped are "truly benefiting" from the help being given. If the helping person tends to place more emphasis on their sense of gratification than on maintaining their objectivity, problems are sure to arise in the process.

### **DISCOMFORT ON THE PART OF THOSE NEEDING HELP:**

There is a difference between someone "needing" help and "wanting" help. There are many people whom we might determine "need help" who really don't "want" it. In those cases, our perception of that "need" isn't theirs. They might manifest their discomfort by appearing anxious, uncommunicative, hesitant or tending to procrastinate in coming to some conclusion regarding their accepting the help being offered. Helpers need to be aware of where the person needing help "is coming from" before we jump into our helping role.

I guess the general rule might best be depicted in the song that was made popular by a popular country/western singer who cautioned the gambler to know "when to stay and when to walk away". The helping process can be "tricky" and the more aware we are, the more effective we can be in helping others.

## **A Brief Biographical Sketch**

*After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity*

*Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.*

*Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980's he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a "mind game", he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.*

*He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.*

*Charles invites you to view his website at [www.charlesmbonasera.com](http://www.charlesmbonasera.com) as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address ([charles@charlesmbonasera.com](mailto:charles@charlesmbonasera.com)). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is "seeking alternative methods to happiness" and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: "enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.*