

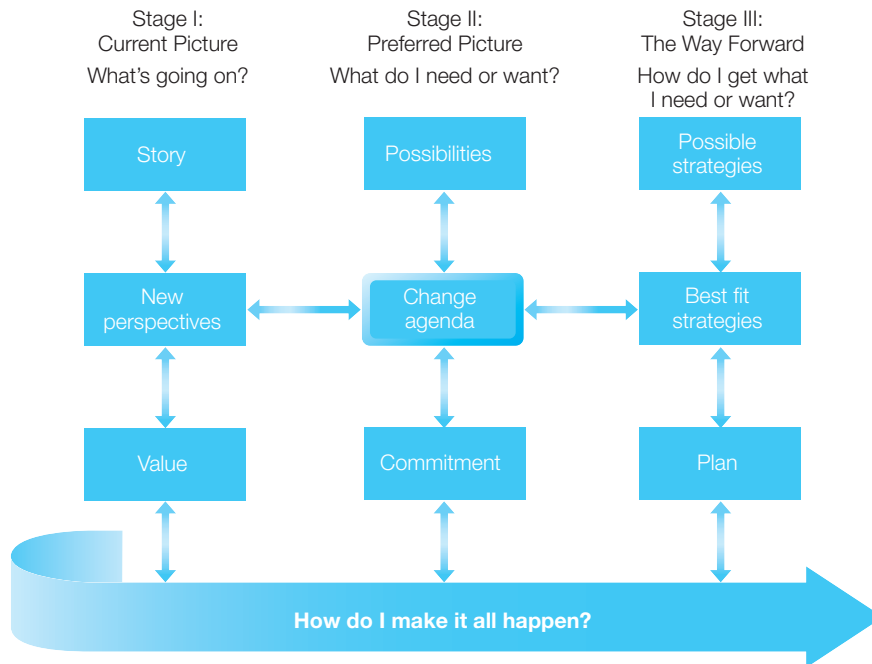
# THE SKILLED HELPER

*A Problem-Management and Opportunity-  
Development Approach to Helping*

10<sup>TH</sup>  
EDITION

GERARD EGAN

## The Skilled-Helper Model



### The Helping Dialogue:

#### Essential Communication Skills

- Tuning in
- Active listening
- Responding with empathy
- Checking understanding
- Probing
- Summarizing
- Challenging
- Negotiating

---

# THE SKILLED HELPER

A Problem-Management and Opportunity-  
Development Approach to Helping

TENTH EDITION

**Gerard Egan**

*Professor Emeritus*

*Loyola University of Chicago*

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Opportunity-Development  
Approach to Helping,  
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# PREFACE TO THE TENTH EDITION



In the tenth edition I knew I “had” to do a version that would be “totally the same and totally different” in response to the best client-focused research over the last ten years. “Totally the same” means all the useful themes that I have developed over the past 35 years—the primacy of client focus, the importance of life-enhancing client outcomes, the collaborative client-helper alliance, a problem-management and opportunity-development approach, the essential communication skills needed for effective client-helper dialogue, an emphasis on the values that drive the helping process, the importance of diversity—stay intact although they have been reorganized and simplified. “Totally different” refers to the use of my version of the “common factors” approach to give new meaning and vitality to these themes and to the use of the problem-management model to organize and give coherence to all these themes. So what is new and what is updated?

The new approach revolves around my version of the “common factors” approach to understanding success in therapy. The common factors research is a search for “what works” in therapy (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010), that is, those factors or elements or ingredients that are common to successful therapy no matter which approach to therapy the helper uses. For instance, research shows, not surprisingly, that a strong working alliance or relationship between client and helper contributes to successful outcomes in therapy. In these pages I call these factors “the ingredients of successful therapy.” The ingredients that I have pulled together include and move a bit beyond the ones described by Duncan et al. (2010). These ingredients together with the reasons for including them are explained in the totally rewritten first chapter and then become themes that permeate the rest of the book. Naming them and describing what they have to offer clients provides greater crispness and focus to the problem-management and opportunity-development approach to therapy outlined in this book.

My approach in the tenth edition underscores the importance of the CDOI (client-directed, outcome-informed) movement in the helping professions (Bohart & Tallman, 2010). Life-enhancing outcomes for clients constitute the backbone of therapy. In this edition here is a heightened emphasis on clients and all that they bring with them to the therapeutic encounter and on the importance of “keeping the client in the driver’s seat” throughout the helping process.

Feedback—client to self, client to helper, helper to client, and helper to self together with the give-and-take discussions these forms of feedback evoke—is presented as one of the key ingredients of successful therapy. This kind of feedback has always been a theme in previous editions, but recent research has demonstrated how essential it is to successful therapy. Feedback on progress toward desired outcomes and on how each session contributes (or does not contribute) to progress belongs in every session.

My version of what I call the Standard Problem Management Model, which is found directly or indirectly, in practically every form of therapy organizes all the skills, methods, and themes of successful helping. The problem-management process is not about schools of psychology, interesting theories, or the latest fads. It is about people with problem situations and unused opportunities. This process—broadly speaking, a contextual cognitive-behavioral-emotive approach to therapy—is presented as a valid treatment approach in itself. It is also a tool of psychotherapy integration. Effective therapists appreciate the power of both goal setting and planning even when the troubled person, or the world at large, does not. Talking about goal setting and planning may evoke a yawn in some quarters, but the challenge of the helper is to make them living, vibrant, useful realities in the eyes of those seeking or needing help.

This edition makes it clear that effective decision making (and its shadow side) lies at the heart of problem management and opportunity development and, therefore, at the heart of therapy. It is now included as one of the key ingredients of successful therapy. Therapists help clients make decisions throughout the helping process. Effective helpers understand both the bright and dark side of decision making and become guides as troubled people muse about, make, glide toward, flirt with, or fall into decisions—or attempt to avoid them. They also help clients explore the possible unintended consequences of the decisions they are making. Because decision making has a deep shadow side, the more therapists understand its inner workings the better.

The essential uncertainties associated with human behavior, named in Chapter 1 of the tenth edition play an important role in therapy and require helping approaches that are both rigorous *and* flexible. Both client-focused rigor and client-focused flexibility in the use of models, methods, and skills permeate the chapters of this book. The “non-scientific character” of the belief-values-norms-ethics-morality package, and its relationship to decision making, is one of the principal causes of uncertainty in therapeutic endeavors. This is not just an add-on.

This edition further promotes the concept of “personal culture,” the way that each individual lives out the beliefs, values, and norms of the larger social culture. Diversity at the individual client level takes precedence over any particular form of diversity such as multicultural diversity. The personal culture of each individual client includes his or her incorporation and expression of ethnic and cultural themes

together with all the other forms of diversity in his or her makeup. If social culture is “the ways *we* do things,” then personal culture refers to “the way I do things” as a member of any given culture. An  $N = 1$  research approach to the evaluation of progress in therapy provides the kind of rigor that fits clinical situations while respecting the personal culture of each client.

The clinical use of research findings demonstrates that therapists do not have to choose between evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. Therefore, this edition avoids the “either-or mentality” that is found in much of the debate about therapy. If we are client-focused, then we have a big tent. There is room for both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. Either-or gives way to both-and. The problem-management process is used as a “browser” to search for a wide range of therapeutic methods and adapt them to the needs of this client. Client need drives the process.

The tendency of the helping industry to avoid the term “challenge” is noted. There is increased focus on *invitations* to clients to engage in self-challenge and the concept of helper self-challenge is introduced. Therapy is presented as a form of positive challenge in itself. If therapy is to make a difference, it must be different from what happens in everyday life. Some form of challenge is part of this difference.

In many ways clients (like the rest of us) create their own reality, but the reality they create often has a way of biting back. Reality itself is challenging and incorporates the wisdom of the French saying, “*Nos actes nous suivent*,” that is, our actions have a way of pursuing us. Competent helpers espouse individual freedom, but they do not confuse liberty with license. While they appreciate individuality, they also recognize everyone’s need for some form of community. The model as spelled out in these pages recognizes and delights in human diversity, but it remains rooted in the commonalities of our humanity. There are many made-up rules, but life has its own rules and we as therapists can help clients explore them.

Effective helpers know that grappling with problems in living is hard work and don’t hesitate to caringly invite those seeking solutions to buckle down and engage in that work. But not work for the sake of work. In the end helping is about work that produces outcomes that favorably impact the lives of help seekers.

All of the above has led to extensive reorganization and restructuring of this book and the rewriting of most chapters at the service of simplicity and coherence. The book has three parts. Part I deals with the “key ingredients” approach, the role of the therapist, the importance of the helping relationship, and the values that drive the entire helping process. Part II focuses exclusively on the communication skills therapists need to engage in a collaborative outcome-focused dialogue with clients. Part III deals in detail with the problem-management and opportunity-development approach. The contents of each part are spelled out in the Guide which follows.

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## A GUIDE TO THE TENTH EDITION

This chapter-by-chapter guide is designed to help both instructors and students familiarize themselves with the changes introduced in the 10th edition of *The Skilled Helper*. Let's start with some overall changes and then move from chapter to chapter.

- Every word in the book has been scrutinized and many sections have been rewritten for the sake of clarity or to introduce new ideas.
- Some 300 citations indicating new ideas regarding theory, research, and practice and updates of older ones are scattered throughout the book.
- I have tried to incorporate what seemed to me new or updated contributions to the helping professions such as the importance of common factors related to successful outcomes for clients, the key role feedback plays in therapy, and the fact that there is no one right school or approach to treatment.
- I have included ideas from outside the helping professions, including ideas from business and organizational behavior. The source of an idea is not important; its therapeutic usefulness is.
- Chapters and sections within chapters have been rearranged for the sake of logical order and clarity.
- Many of the changes are designed to soften the linearity or “hard edge” of what some see as a highly logical problem-management process without, of course, sapping it of any of its rigor.
- I have continued to develop the notion of the “shadow side” of the helping profession, its processes, helpers themselves, and clients.

*The Skilled Helper* has always emphasized the *basics* of effective therapy and has ignored the fads and the “the next big thing” in the helping industry.

This edition names, simplifies, clarifies, and organizes these basics more effectively. This book has three major parts:

- *Part I* is an introduction to the “key ingredients of successful therapy” approach.
- *Part II* is a detailed review of the communication skills needed by helpers to engage in a therapeutic dialogue with clients.
- *Part III* is a detailed overview of the problem-management and opportunity-development process at the heart of helping.

**Part One: Introduction** has two chapters. *Chapter 1* has been completely rewritten. It reinforces the fundamental client focus of therapy and the three goals that contribute to this focus. Then, under the title of “the key ingredients of successful therapy” it names and describes my version of the clinical application of the “common factors” research carried out over the past ten years. *Client focus* is the key ingredient of the helping process. Throughout the book the importance of keeping the client “in the driver’s seat” is emphasized.

*Chapter 2*, also extensively rewritten, addresses three of the key ingredients of successful therapy: (1) the role and competence of the therapist together with the therapist’s skill at orchestrating the key ingredients and tailoring them to each client’s needs; (2) the *collaborative therapeutic relationship* between client and helper; and (3) the *values* that should permeate and drive the helping process together with the importance of *the beliefs-values-norms-ethics-morality* dimensions of life as manifested in the social and personal culture of the client.

**Part Two: Therapeutic Communication Skills** has five chapters all of which focus on the communication skills needed by therapists to engage and interact successfully with clients. This group of skills constitutes one of the key ingredients of successful therapy. Therapists can use these skills to help clients with poor communication skills engage meaningfully in the therapeutic dialogue.

*Chapter 3* highlights and illustrates the nature of the *therapeutic dialogue* between client and helper together with three basic skills of *therapeutic presence*: tuning in to clients, remaining engaged, and active listening.

While Chapter 2 discusses empathy as an essential human value, *Chapter 4* shows how empathy is also a key communication skill. In this chapter empathy becomes a clinical skill.

*Chapter 5* outlines how therapists can use *probing and summarizing* to help clients engage more fully in the helping process.

*Chapter 6* considers the role and rationale of *challenge* and *client self-challenge* in therapy. It details ways helpers can invite clients to engage in self-challenge with regards to thinking, behaving, and expressing emotions without telling them how they must think or behave.

*Chapter 7* explores how helpful it is for therapists themselves to engage in self-challenge throughout the helping process.

**Part Three: The Problem-Management and Opportunity-Development Process** has seven chapters devoted to a detailed presentation of the problem-management and opportunity-development process of helping. The problem-management process is a key ingredient of successful therapy in two ways. First, all forms of therapy



incorporate, directly or indirectly, many, if not all, of the dimensions of the Standard Problem Management Process; that is, they discuss directly or infer problem exploration, goal setting, finding ways of achieving problem-managing goals, and the ups and downs of implementing goal-accomplishing plans. Second, this process seems to be a psychological universal. People around the world readily recognize its broad strokes, even though, like most of us, they don't use it readily or effectively.

*Chapter 8* is an introduction and overview of the problem-management and opportunity-development approach. For the sake of simplicity, the "opportunity-development" part of the title is often omitted, but this is not meant to diminish the importance of opportunity development in the therapeutic process. This chapter reinforces the importance of *feedback*, one of the key ingredients of successful therapy, at the beginning and end of each session.

A simplified graphic is introduced in this edition. It serves two purposes. First, it stresses the interactive and nonlinear nature of the problem-management process. Stages (I, II, and III) and tasks within the stages (A, B, and C), though presented in logical order, are seldom sequential in practice. Effective helpers use the problem-management process flexibly. They start with client needs and, in collaboration with clients, tailor the process to those needs. Second, the graphic also highlights the importance of *outcome-focused action* on the part of clients throughout the helping process.

*Chapters 9 and 10* deal with the three tasks (A, B, and C) of *Stage I* (Help Clients Tell Their Stories Fully and Work on Issues That Will Make a Difference). Remember that a task is nothing more than something a therapist can do to help a client move forward in some part or phase of the problem-management process.

Task I-A in Chapter 9 outlines how therapists, using the communication skills discussed in Part II, can help clients explore their concerns, and presents guidelines for helping them do so. This chapter also shows how the very telling of stories by clients can suggest to them things that they can do to begin moving in the right direction without, of course, engaging in premature or inadvisable action.

Chapter 10 describes and illustrates the other two tasks of Stage I. Task I-B discusses ways therapists can help clients develop new, more accurate, and more useful perspectives on their problem situations. This task also describes ways that counselors can invite clients to challenge the ways they think, behave, and express emotions.

Task I-C outlines ways therapists can help clients focus on real issues, that is, issues that will make a difference in their lives. This task underscores the continual search for client-benefitting value throughout the helping process.

Chapters 9 and 10 make two things clear. First, these three tasks related to helping clients tell their stories are not linear. Rather they intermingle and interact. Second, these three tasks are useful *throughout* the entire helping process, that is, in all three stages. First of all, clients do not necessarily tell the whole story all at once. They often add things to the basic story throughout the helping process. Second, new perspectives and self-challenge are welcomed in every stage. Third, it is important not only to work on the right *issue* but also to set the *right goals*, and to come up with the *right set of strategies and the right plan* for achieving these goals.

*Chapters 11 and 12* describe the three tasks (A, B, C) of Stage II (Help Clients Set Problem-Managing Goals and the Plans to Accomplish These Goals). A goal is

defined as a desired problem-managing outcome. Chapter 11 focuses on Task II-A, which poses and suggests ways of answering this key question, “What would things look like if this problem situation were managed or this opportunity developed?” This task is about discovering possibilities for a better future. Creative thinking is important.

Chapter 12 covers Tasks B and C of goal setting. Task II-B deals with helping clients choose problem-managing goals. Problem management is filled with decision making. Therapists help client make life-enhancing decisions. Task II-C is about helping clients explore the quality of their commitment to both the goals they choose and to the entire problem-management process.

*Chapter 13* describes Stage III (The Way Forward: Help Clients Make Plans to Accomplish Goals) and its three tasks. Task III-A outlines ways of helping clients discover strategies for achieving goals. Task III-B focuses on helping clients choose a strategy or a set of strategies that best fit the client’s style and resources. Task III-C shows ways of helping clients organize these strategies into a workable plan. This chapter points out how important it is for therapists to turn the “mechanics” of problem management as outlined in these chapters into a fully human experience.

*Chapter 14* (Implementation: Help Clients Make It All Happen) addresses ways of helping clients turn plans into action and action into outcomes that have the desired impact on the lives of clients. It reaffirms the notion that problem-managing action on the part of clients should, with prudence, start as early as feasible in the helping process. Obstacles to implementation and ways of overcoming them are reviewed. Finally, the power of both resilience and posttraumatic growth are celebrated.

## **BECOMING A SKILLED HELPER**

If you come to a good understanding of all the models, methods, and skills described and illustrated in this book, would you be “a skilled helper”? Not yet, because knowledge and competence are not the same thing. You need to be *trained* in these models, methods, and skills. The Introduction to *Exercises in Helping Skills: A Manual to Accompany THE SKILLED HELPER* (Egan, Owen, & Reese, 2014) outlines a rigorous training methodology that I have used over the years to train aspiring helpers in a number of different cultures. The manual, which is part of the training program, gives you an opportunity to get a feeling for and, eventually, basic competence in the models, methods, and skills outlined in this book. The full training methodology, which includes practice and supervision, would speed you on your way, but then would you be a skilled helper? Maybe. A skilled helper is more than a technician, even a very competent technician. Helping others is more than a job, more than a career. The helping professions call for more than just knowledge and competence. There is a *vocational* dimension to it. I’ve been going to the same doctor for over 30 years. Medicine is his vocation. We have great conversations. He doesn’t do medical research, but he shares the latest findings in medical research when he believes they will benefit *me*. Spending time with him is not just a visit; it’s an event. We need people like him in the helping professions. You’re lucky. You can start down that path right away.

---

TO:

*Adrian, Aideen, Al, Andrew, Angie, Ann, Anna, Arthur, Austin, Barbara, Barry, Ben, Bernie, Bill, Bob, Brendan, Brian, Byron, Carl, Casey, Cher, Chido, Charlie, Chuck, Colin, Dan, Danny, David, Declan, Dennis, Dick, Don, Donal, Donna, Doug, Ed, Edwin, Eleanor, Erin, Ernestine, Evelyn, Frank, Gene, George, Gerry, Gitta, Hany, Harris, Helen, Hisham, Elizabeth, Holly, Homer, Ian, Jack, Jackie, Jan, Janet, Janette, Jasper, Jay, Jayson, Jeff, Jennifer, Jerry, Jesse, Jim, Joe, John, Jon, Jonathan, Justin, Kathe, Kathleen, Kathy, Katie, Keith, Ken, Ketti, Kevin, Kieran, Laura, Lew, Linda, Lisa, Malcolm, Marge, Mark, Mary, Mary Kay, Lynn, Martha, Maureen, Max, Melissa, Mike, Nassry, Nick, Pat, Patrick, Paul, Peter, Phil, Queenie, Rami, Ramzi, Ray, Rich, Rick, Rina, Roberta, Rod, Roel, Ross, Roxanne, Rudaina, Rudy, Sakae, Sal, Sammer, Sandy, Sawako, Sayoko, Scott, Seth, Simon, Stefanie, Stephen, Steve, Steven, Sue, Suhair, Taz, Terry, Thad, Tim, Tom, Tony, Toots, Trish, Vincent, Walter, Weijun, Weilian, William, Yoshi, Yugi*

*You've all played a part. Thank you.*

---

# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

PART



Although the centerpiece of this book is a problem-management and opportunity-development framework that encompasses all the ingredients of successful helping (Part III) and the communication and relationship-building skills needed to engage in the client-helper dialogue (Part II), some groundwork (Part I) is required.

In Part I, Chapter 1 outlines the nature and goals of helping and the ingredients of successful helping together with a snapshot of the problem-management and opportunity-development framework that organizes these ingredients. Chapter 2 focuses on the helping relationship and the values that drive it. Both chapters highlight the client-centered and outcome-focused nature of helping espoused in this book.



---

# THE INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESSFUL HELPING

CHAPTER

1



## CHAPTER CONTENTS

### Formal and Informal Helpers: A Very Brief History

#### What Helping Is About

- Clients with Problem Situations and Unused Opportunities
- The Three Principal Outcome-Focused Goals of Helping

#### The Ingredients of Successful Helping

- The Client and the Contextual Factors of the Client's Life
- The Person of the Therapist
- The Helping Relationship
- Communication Skills at the Service of Dialogue
- Two-Way Feedback Between Client and Helper
- The Treatment Approach and Its Methods and Techniques
- Problem Management: A Human Universal and a Common Factor
- Decision Making: A Psychological Universal and a Common Factor
- The Beliefs-Values-Norms-Ethics-Morality Factors That Drive Human Behavior

#### Embracing and Befriending the Uncertainties Inherent in Helping

- The Client and the Contextual Factors of the Client's Life
- The Therapist
- The Helping Relationship
- The Therapeutic Dialogue
- Two-Way Feedback Between Client and Helper

- The Model or Method of Treatment and the Assumptions Behind It
- The Standard Problem Management Process as a Human Universal
- Decision Making as a Human Universal
- The Beliefs-Values-Norms-Ethics-Morality Factors

**Moving from Smart to Wise: Managing the Shadow Side of Helping**

**FORMAL AND INFORMAL HELPERS:  
A VERY BRIEF HISTORY**

Throughout history people the world over have held a deeply embedded conviction that, under the proper conditions, some of us are capable of helping others come to grips with problems in living. This conviction, of course, plays itself out differently in different cultures, but it is still a cross-cultural phenomenon. Today this conviction is often institutionalized in a variety of formal helping professions. In Western cultures, counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and ministers of religion among others are counted among those whose formal role is to help people manage the distressing problems of life.

A second set of professionals, although they are not helpers in the formal sense, also help people in times of crisis and distress. Included here are organizational consultants, dentists, doctors, lawyers, nurses, probation officers, teachers, managers, supervisors, police officers, and practitioners in other service industries. Although these people are specialists in their own professions, there is still some expectation that they will help those they serve manage a wide variety of problem situations. For instance, teachers teach English, history, and science to students who are growing physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally and struggling with developmental tasks and crises. Teachers are, therefore, in a position to help their students, in direct and indirect ways, explore, understand, and deal with the problems of growing up. Managers and supervisors in work environments help workers cope with problems related to job performance, career development, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and a variety of personal problems that affect their ability to do their jobs. This book is addressed directly to the first set of professionals and indirectly to the second.

To these professional helpers can be added any and all who try to help others come to grips with problems in living: relatives, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers (on buses and planes). In fact, only a small fraction of the help provided on any given day comes from helping professionals. Informal helpers—bartenders and hairdressers are often mentioned—abound in the social settings of life. Friends help one another through troubled times. Parents need to manage their own marital problems while helping their children grow and develop. Indeed, most people grappling with problems in living seek help, if they seek it at all, from informal sources (Swindle, Heller, Pescosolido, & Kikuzawa, 2000). In the end, of course, all of us must learn how to help ourselves cope with the problems and crises of life. Sometimes we do this on our own, but at other times we seek help from

mostly informal sources. This book is about the basic ingredients of successful helping. It is designed to assist you in becoming a better helper no matter which category you fall into.

## WHAT HELPING IS ABOUT

Helping is first and foremost about the person seeking help. Let's call the person seeking or needing help a client rather than patient to avoid, at least for the time, the dispute relating to the use of the medical model in helping (Wampold, 2010a, 2010b). To determine what helping is about, it is useful to consider (1) why people seek—or are sent to get—help in the first place and (2) what the principal goals of the helping process are.

## CLIENTS WITH PROBLEM SITUATIONS AND UNUSED OPPORTUNITIES

Many people become clients because, either in their own eyes or in the eyes of others, they are involved in problem situations that they are not handling well. Others seek help because they feel they are not living as fully as they might. Many come because of a mixture of both. Therefore, clients with problem situations and unused opportunities constitute the starting point and the primary focus of the helping process.

**Problem situations** Clients come for help because they have crises, troubles, doubts, difficulties, frustrations, or concerns. Often called “problems,” generically, they are not problems in a mathematical sense because these problems usually cause emotional turmoil and often have no clear-cut solutions. It is probably better to say that clients come not with problems but with problem situations—that is, with complex and messy problems in living that they are not handling well. These problem situations are often poorly defined. Or, if they are well defined, clients still don't know how to handle them. Or clients feel that they do not have the resources needed to cope with them adequately. If they have tried solutions, they have not worked.

All of us face problems in living. Problem situations arise in our interactions with ourselves, with others, and with the social settings, organizations, and institutions of life. Clients—whether they are hounded by self-doubt, tortured by unreasonable fears, grappling with the stress that accompanies serious illness, addicted to alcohol or drugs, involved in failing marriages, fired from jobs because of personal behavior, office politics, or disruptions in the economy, confused or abused in their efforts to adapt to a new culture, returning from some battlefield with the psychological ravages associated with war, suffering from a catastrophic loss, jailed because of child abuse, struggling with a midlife crisis, lonely and out of community with no family or friends, battered by their spouses, or victimized by racism—all face problem situations that move them to seek help. In some cases, these problem situations move others—such as teachers, supervisors, the courts—to refer people who are not managing their problems very well to helpers or even mandate that they seek help.



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