

PERSONNEL COUNSELING - Selection & Training

Miscellaneous
Counselor Characteristics and Effectiveness
(HCT)

4/22

OUTLINE AND DISCUSSION OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELORS

I.

Personal Characteristics

1. What is the nature of his interest in people?

It is recognized that in general an "interest in people" is a desirable attribute of a counselor. However, an interest in people is professed by nearly all persons who indicate a desire to get into personnel work. In many cases, this interest, even if real, may not be of a type which is particularly related to their possible effectiveness in counseling or any other type of personnel work.

For example, some people "just like to be around people". They prefer participation in group activity to any sort of solitary activity. They are apt to be popular, and the nature of their interest in people is understood simply in terms of the fact that by habit they are gregariously inclined. This type of interest in people, although not undesirable, is not sufficient for the counseling job. A counselor of this type might be widely known and very well liked in his territory without ever doing the counseling job.

A second type of interest in people may be thought of as an intellectual interest. Those who are scientifically interested in the motives of human behavior, in theoretical considerations involving the causes of maladjustment, etc., may be thought of as having this type of interest in people. It seems important to emphasize that this type of interest in people is not particularly related to the counseling job. To persons whose interest is of this type, a "case" is apt to be just what that term implies. It simply offers another opportunity for study of the principles and theories of human adjustment, and will be looked at from the standpoint of the light it throws on an understanding of these principles and theories.

By contrast with the above, the counselor's interest in people is a sincere and spontaneous interest in what other people are saying and in an understanding of how they feel about the things they are discussing. The counselor who really "gets a lift" out of seeing a person shift from a confused state of mind toward a more clarified view of his situation as the interview progresses is showing this type of interest in people.

2. What is the nature of his personal adjustment toward life?

It may be noted that, to a greater extent than many types of office work, the counselor's job requires a person whose methods of adaptation to life situations are realistic. In this respect, it is somewhat comparable to the salesman's job. It is recognized that adjustments to people, other than very close acquaintances, are much more difficult than adjustments to things, because people are so much more variable from time to time than things. Thus, any tendency to adjust in some inadequate manner may markedly reduce the effectiveness of the counselor. He may, for example, adjust to difficult situations by throwing up defenses. Or he may make persistent non-adaptive reactions to his own conflicts and frustrations. Such reactions lead to inactivity or to un-directed activity, and also to a highly personalized view toward his situation.

3. In his point of view toward life, to what extent does he give evidence of maturity, experience, or "seasoning"?

It is essential that the counselor be capable of taking a non-evaluative point of view toward all sorts of unusual behavior which may be brought out in his interviews with employees. In order that he may be able to avoid giving evidence of undue approval or disapproval of such behavior, he should be mature in his outlook. Two extremes of immaturity may be noted by way of illustration. One is the immaturity of the young intellectual who places positive value on the new, the unconventional, or the shocking. Ideas about reforming the world or changing the institutions and beliefs of society fall under this heading. At the other extreme is the highly conventional immature person who has been so sheltered and tutored in the conventions of his social group as to be disturbed by any mention of unconventional forms of behavior and thought.

4. What is the nature of his social adjustment?

Social adjustment, of course, is actually bound up with other aspects of personal adjustment. However, because of its special significance in the counseling job, some aspects of social adjustment may be given special consideration. Some people relate themselves well to certain classes of other people, but not to other classes. Whatever may be the reason for this variation in ability to relate well to certain classes of people, it may be of value to consider how adequate those adjustments are. For example:

Does he have difficulty relating himself properly to those of lower rank or status?

Does he have difficulty relating himself to older people?
To younger people?

Is he ill at ease with persons of markedly different background or point of view, even though no problem of level or status may be involved?

How well does he relate himself to his colleagues in the working group?

How well does he relate himself to his own supervisor?

Does he appear to better advantage in large groups (parties, meetings, etc.) or in small groups?

5. Does he apply himself to his job?

It is in the nature of the counselor's job that a great deal of his motivation to keep working must come from himself. Close supervision is not possible. It is also in the nature of the job that if he is so inclined, he can "busy himself" with activities that appear to be entirely proper but which are really taking a disproportionate amount of his time. In these respects, his job is quite similar to that of a salesman.

6. Does he give evidence of mental alertness?

Does he "catch on" quickly when instruction and training are given?

Does he give evidence of being able to think through his counseling problems clearly? Can he see his mistakes, and learn from his experiences?

II.

The Counselor's Job

1. Does he see clearly the objective of personnel counseling?

That objective is to facilitate the adjustment of individuals through the application of a specific technique.

From the counselor's standpoint, it seems unwise that he be concerned about any of the possible other objectives that one might have in talking with people. For example, it is not his objective to "determine the attitudes of employees". Nor is it his objective to discover and report conditions which the Management ought to change.

Thus, his job is to facilitate the adjustment of individuals, not to do anything else. But in addition, it is his job to facilitate that adjustment through the application of a special technique.

2. Does he see clearly the function of the counseling type of interview as a therapeutic device?

Does he recognize that it is his function as interviewer to

4.

facilitate the continuance of the employee's thinking along lines that are important to the employee himself rather than along lines which seem important to the interviewer?

Does he recognize that it is irrelevant to his function to be concerned about the nature of the employee's disturbance, the cause of the disturbance, or the solution which the employee "ought" to arrive at?

Is he aware that the interview itself is the therapeutic device which he is using - rather than considering the interview as an information-gathering procedure on the basis of which he may be able to offer suggestions, admonitions, or advice.

In facilitating the continuance of the employee's thinking, does the interviewer focus his attention on the employee's feelings rather than upon the things the employee is talking about?

3. When in the interview situation, is the counselor skillful in the actual conduct of the interview?

It is recognized that no matter how clearly the objective of counseling may be recognized, and no matter how well the function of the interview may be understood, counselors may vary widely in their skill in the interview situation. The face-to-face situation is one in which there is not time to think over what needs to be said. It is thus common to find that we frequently do not do as well as we know how to do. To what extent has the counselor mastered the skills required in conducting effective interviews?

HCT:DRL