

L. Brown

TECHNIQUES OF COUNSELLING

AND

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

I. MINISTER'S ATTITUDE AND APPROACH

A. Have genuine love and concern for the people. (Rom. 12:9)

1. You don't have this naturally -- you must pray for it. (Rom. 5:5)
2. Learn to care about human problems as a shepherd cares for injured sheep. (Matt. 18:12-14)
3. Mentally place yourself in the person's circumstance with feeling and compassion.

B. Be a servant and gentle shepherd -- not an overlord whom they fear. (1 Pet. 5:1-3; 1 Thes. 2:7,8; 2 Tim. 2:24)

1. Your responsibility is awesome. (Heb. 13:17)
2. Try to reflect God in your attitude and actions.

C. Be all things to all men. (1 Cor. 9:19-22)

1. Humble yourself -- condescend to men of low estate. (Rom. 12:16)
2. Yet maintain a bearing of confidence, competence, and maturity.
3. Adapt your language to the different levels of the people.

D. Put the person at ease.

1. Avoid being cold, impersonal, and businesslike.
2. Be warm, friendly, and pleasant.
3. Show respect and honor, and he will reciprocate.

E. Set the stage and condition the mind.

1. Chat a bit before launching into the counselling.
2. Don't begin with a forceful and blunt approach.
3. If you suddenly put the person on his guard by being too authoritative or suspicious, or by asking direct and pointed questions prematurely, he will sometimes lie (unintentionally) or put himself in a favorable light so as not to incriminate himself.
4. Create a relaxed atmosphere so that the people will not feel hurried or rushed to explain their problem.

F. Be a good listener.

1. You can miss important facts and attitudes by not paying close attention, or by thinking of your next comment instead of listening.
2. The people will open up if they know you are listening with interest and respect.
3. Never interrupt his train of thought unless absolutely necessary.
4. Avoid fidgety and nervous gestures (yawning, thumping fingers on the desk, glancing out the window or at your watch, etc.). These movements indicate that you are bored and are anxious to complete the counselling.

G. Be prepared to remain neutral and unprejudiced.

1. Don't take sides if it's a conflict involving two or more people.
2. Never be swayed by emotions or tears.
3. Hold fast to the principle of integrity and justice.

H. Get the whole picture clearly in mind before giving advice or trying to solve the problem.

I. Never betray a person's confidence in you.

1. Be careful how you use other people as an illustration to make a point during the counselling, and also in sermons, club evaluations, etc.
2. Treat all information given to you as confidential and privileged information.

J. Recognize your limitations.

1. If you need to counsel with another minister, your district superintendent, or someone who is expert in his field, then do so.

II. CLASSIFY THE PROBLEM

A. All human problems a minister is asked to solve come under two broad categories.

1. Personal and private -- involving only one person.
 - a. Personal sins.
 - b. Discouragement.
 - c. Financial reverses.
 - d. Etc.
2. Group or social -- involving two or more persons.
 - a. Marital.
 - b. Conflict between two members.
 - c. Scandal.

III. HAVE THE PERSON TO INTRODUCE THE PROBLEM

- A. Encourage the person to tell all he knows about the problem while you remain alert for clues and hidden information that will help you to formulate a true picture.
- B. When you know what the overall problem is, then you can classify it.
- C. Often a person will solve the problem just by having to think it through sufficiently to present it to you and then talking about it. Sometimes the problem is only his attitude toward the matter, which can be corrected by facing the truth.

IV. ONCE CLASSIFIED, DETERMINE WHAT THE SPECIFIC PROBLEM IS.

- A. You can waste valuable time and accomplish little in working toward the solution unless you pinpoint the precise problem.
- B. Boil down vague generalities to specifics.
 1. Personal and private.
 - a. Sex problem.
 - (1) Adultery.
 - (2) Fornication.
 - (3) Homosexuality.
 - (4) Masturbation.
 - b. Discouragement.
 - (1) Failure to overcome a particular sin even though the person has tried repeatedly to conquer it.
 - (2) Overlooked and unrecognized when an opening on the job was filled by another employee less qualified.
 2. Group and social.
 - a. Marriage problem.
 - (1) Conflict about how and when to discipline the children.
 - (2) How to spend the family income.
 - (3) Sexual incompatibility.
 - b. Conflict in human relations.
 - (1) Snubbed by a deacon.
 - (2) A partner broke his agreement on a contract.

- (3) Criticized severely by a member for wearing a dress $\frac{1}{4}$ " above the recommended minimum length.

V. GET THE FACTS

- A. If the problem involves two or more people (group or social), keep these points in mind.
1. The attitude of the people toward the problem will signal what approach you must take in reaching an answer.
 - a. Are they humble, forgiving, peacemaking? (converted)
 - b. Are they stubborn, self-willed, resentful? (carnal)
 2. He that is first in his own cause seems just.
(Prov. 18:17)
 - a. The offended member sees only his side -- and believes he is right.
 - b. The offending member sees only his side -- and believes he is right.
 - c. Neither can see the other's side -- usually because he doesn't want to.
 3. The human heart is deceitful above all things.
(Jer. 17:9)
 - a. People have brilliant minds when it comes to making excuses or covering up for themselves.
 - b. They will say under fire, "But that's not what I meant", when in truth they are lying.
 - c. They may not mean it now (under interrogation), but did they mean it when they said it?
 4. Realize that most members are sorely lacking in judgment or in knowledge of right and wrong.
 - a. They may possess only five bits of information concerning a problem when in reality there are 30 considerations.
 - b. It is your duty as a counsellor to get all the facts, then carefully weigh and evaluate them.
 5. There could be a simple misunderstanding.
 - a. An open, heart-to-heart talk may be all that is necessary to settle the conflict.

B. Differentiate between fact and opinion or hearsay.

1. There is a vast difference between the statements "I think I saw Joe Blow smoking" and "I saw Joe Blow smoking", or, "In my opinion I believe he is wrong" and "Based on these facts I believe he is wrong."
2. As a counsellor, you must be certain that all so-called facts are facts indeed -- facts based on truth and evidence -- not on opinions, feelings, suppositions, or hearsay and gossip.

C. Here's how to get the facts.

1. Enquire diligently. (Deut. 13:14)
 - a. Exhaust the problem -- get the background.
 - b. Leave no stone unturned until you can see the whole picture with crystal clarity.
2. Procedure of inquiry.
 - a. You must ask these six questions: HOW, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, WHO.
 - b. Each of these questions may have to be broken down separately and covered in detail.
3. Examples of use.
 - a. WHO -- Determine who is involved in the altercation.
 - (1) You may want to conduct a preliminary private counselling of each party.
 - (2) Or, if the problem is not major, you may want to counsel all parties together.
 - b. WHAT -- What were the exact terms of the contract or agreement?
 - (1) Too often it's the verbal agreement that causes the most trouble.
 - (2) Each in his own mind understood it a different way. (Both may be right but didn't understand what the other was thinking at the moment of transaction)
 - c. WHEN -- When did the offending party promise to fulfill the agreement or to "deliver the goods"?
 - (1) Did both agree on the same date?
 - (2) If there is a discrepancy, probe -- find out why -- what happened?

- d. WHERE -- Exactly where was the door to be cut
in the wall -- in the center or five feet
from the adjacent wall?
- (1) Was this written down or recorded?
 - (2) At the time of negotiation, did both parties decide on this question clearly?
- e. WHY -- Why did you make the statement, "He's a liar and a two-faced hypocrite"?
- (1) Did the offending party actually say it, or did he imply it?
 - (2) Or did the offended member hear this statement from another person who said that he heard it?
- f. HOW -- How did the child break his leg? (Two boys were playing)
- (1) Was it an accident?
 - (2) Or did the one youth deliberately push the injured child down the staircase in a fit of temper?
4. Strive to determine attitudes and motives.
- a. Ask why he feels the way he does.
 - b. Don't be satisfied with superficial or surface answers -- get to the heart of the matter.
 - c. Ask what he believes to be the answer to the problem.
5. Allow only one person at a time to present his views.
- a. Give each the prerogative of presenting his case without interruption -- if possible.
 - b. Do not permit arguing or disputing back and forth.
 - c. Keep order -- you are in control.
6. Stress the seriousness of "bearing false witness" or withholding information in order to protect oneself or to get his way.
7. Take notes if the problem is knotty and complicated.
- a. List the facts chronologically the way the problem developed.
 - b. Condense the problem to hard core facts.
 - (1) Cull out and discard that which is irrelevant.
 - (a) Opinions.
 - (b) Unfounded accusations.

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- (2) Don't allow yourself to be sidetracked.
 - (3) When people are guilty or under pressure, they tend to ramble and sidestep the issue or justify their actions.

8. Be on guard for contradictions and irregularities.
 - a. Be alert in regard to his own case and also to other testimony.
 - b. Jot them down for later reference.
 9. Challenge these contradictions and irregularities until they are resolved.
 - a. At the moment the contradiction or irregularity is made.
 - b. When the counsellee has completed his side of the problem.
 - c. After all parties have spoken.
 10. Summarize the facts and reconstruct the story.
 11. Determine whether all parties agree.
 - a. Does any stubbornly hold to his own opinion?
 - b. If the matter appears hopelessly deadlocked, have all get on their knees and pray for a right attitude.
 - c. If this action fails to produce the desired results, you will have to exercise authority and render a decision.
- D. The above procedure applies in principle to solving private and personal problems as well as to group and social problems.

VI. DON'T GIVE A RASH AND SUDDEN ANSWER (Prov. 18:13)

- A. Avoid spur-of-the-moment decisions and snap judgments.
(Be especially careful before and after the club, Bible Study, or Sabbath services, or when you might not have enough time to hear the problems and get all the facts)
- B. To re-emphasize the point, give yourself sufficient time to hear the matter fully and to weigh every aspect carefully.
- C. Ask yourself what principles or laws are involved.
 1. You must know God's law well. (Judgments of Deut. and Ex. 20-23, Matt. 5-7)
 2. You must know human nature.
 3. You need to have a backlog of knowledge and experience.

D. Look on the intent of the heart.

1. What was the motive and attitude at the time the act was committed?
 - a. Was it malicious and deliberate?
 - b. Was it done in a moment of weakness?
 - c. Was it purely accidental and unintentional?
2. What is his present attitude?
 - a. Self-justifying?
 - b. Repentant and contrite?
 - c. Does he fully admit his mistake and want to correct it?
3. Does he have a record of frequent involvements?
 - a. Is he an accuser?
 - b. Faultfinder?
 - c. Sower of discord?

E. Regardless of the motive, you must judge the act.

1. Harm or injury may have been inflicted on innocent victims.
2. The claims of justice must be met.
3. You as the counsellor must clearly point out who is right and who is wrong.

F. In summing up the case, pray for God to guide your mind and give you the right answer.

1. Strive to give the answer in a way the person will understand and will want to accept it.
2. Realize that God will lead you as His minister into truth and sound judgment if you ask Him in faith. (John 16:13)

VII. RENDER A JUDGMENT AND GIVE THE SOLUTION

A. First point out who is right and who is wrong.

1. Show why you have come to your decision by citing the scripture or principle.
2. Explain the spirit of the thing.

B. Next point out what the proper attitude of each should be.

1. The offended member should be merciful and forgiving.
 - a. Be willing to suffer loss if necessary.
(1 Cor. 6:1-7)
 - b. Especially if the matter involves a poor and needy member.

2. The offending member should exert every effort to compensate, repair, replace, or do whatever is necessary to make restitution.
 - a. Apologize.
 - b. He should hold no grudges.
- C. Get each person on your side by imputing a virtue or by using God's form of psychology. (Philemon)
 1. "Mr. Smith, you do want to know God's answer in the matter, don't you?"
 2. "Mr. Jones, if you're in error, you will certainly want to repent, won't you?"
 3. Make it difficult and self-incriminating to say "no".
- D. You must have the guts to give God's answer or viewpoint regardless of how the individuals may feel about it or toward you.
 1. You cannot compromise justice or be a respecter of persons.
 2. You must see that the decision is enforced and followed.

VIII. SHOW HOW TO PUT THE SOLUTION INTO EFFECT

- A. Sometimes people take advice as negative because they have to do something about it.
 1. Change a habit or pattern in their life.
 2. Forego money in meeting the demands of justice. (Repair a borrowed lawnmower that had been damaged)
- B. Therefore make the answer as clear, colorful, and practical as possible so that they will want to do it.
 1. Show them the blessings they will receive in obeying God's law. (even though it may be difficult for them as in D&R, paying first and second tithe, remaking a cabinet that did not meet inspection codes, etc.)
 2. Also point out the curse for disobedience.

IX. ASK FOR A SUMMARY

- A. After giving the answer, ask the person to summarize and repeat it.
- B. Be sure he understands so that he can't say later, "I thought you said...."

- C. Ask if he is going to act on the decision.
- X. FOLLOW UP WITH ANOTHER VISIT TO CHECK ON THEIR PROGRESS
AND TO SHOW THAT YOU HAVE THEIR INTEREST AT HEART

End.