

# SKILLS of COUNSELLING

MICROSKILL MODEL

Includes Kinesics & Focusing

*D. John Antony, OFM. Cap.*

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## Other Books by the Author :

1. Dynamics of Counselling  
Microskill Model  
TA & NLP are included
2. Types of Counselling  
Lifespan Developmental & Situational Approach  
Developmental Psychology is included
3. Psychotherapies in Counselling  
Includes Theories of Personality
4. ஆஹ்வயபந்து கலை  
நபுஹ மா
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Skills of Counselling

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TO  
ALL  
MY  
FORMATORS  
AND  
MENTORS

With my heart welling up with gratitude I thank

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# SKILLS OF COUNSELLING

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STAGE	COUNSELLOR'S SKILL	COUNSELLEE'S TASK
1.	Acquainting	Associating
2.	Observing	Manifesting
3.	Founding	Involving
4.	Diagnosing	Investigating
5.	Pacing	Exploring
6.	Personalizing	Understanding
7.	Reframing	Reorienting
8.	Initiating	Acting
9.	Evaluating	Reviewing

## HJ - 2 ! \* -

Counselling is an art and as such like any art it requires certain specific skills if it is to be effective. Skills are like techniques related to particular fields. One may have a lot of goodwill but may not have the necessary skills or tools to deal with the job concerned. Hence the need of acquiring the skills that go with the efficiency of a given job. For instance, take a person who is a born artist. He has only the potency to develop his talents of an artist; but in fact he may clumsily do the painting without proper initiation and acquisition of the skills. He may do a little better than we do just because he is naturally more gifted than we are. But his performance can be enhanced if only he has the training required and acquires the skills necessary.

In my previous book entitled 'Dynamics of Counselling' I have rather elaborately dealt with all that accompany counselling along with the skills. Of course, skills were spoken of but always in a wider context. That was to serve a particular need of placing the skills in a context. Now in the present attempt, I would like to highlight the skills, giving special attention to their various nuances. It would serve me, my colleagues in the counselling profession, those counsellor trainees who are learning the basics of counselling and those lay persons eager to practise counselling. For all of them a systematic presentation of the skills alone will be a handy reference to meet the immediate needs. Practically in training sessions we finally settle down for the skills, asking the trainees to remember the skills they have learned and how they are applied or not applied in their counselling skills practice.

Counselling psychology is a vast ocean though only of late it has become an independent science with its own rights. Every time you deal with people in crisis or give

training to the trainees, you are rewarded with new insights that go to enhance the whole thrust of counselling. Hitherto I have observed that most of the researches were done in knowing what in the counsellor facilitated or did not facilitate an effective counselling. Because, any counselling interaction, it is presumed cannot be neutral, for it either exerts a positive influence or a negative one on the client. When counselling met with a major hurdle of not being really useful, since clients spontaneously improved even without counselling, as much as the people who underwent counselling, the attention turned to the person of the counsellor. The researches came up with the astonishing conclusion that it is the quality of the counsellor that made a difference with regard to its effectiveness. I am just wondering whether it is the whole story. Can there not be anything that is vitally required of a counsellee too, taking for granted that a counsellor should be functioning at a higher level, towards worthwhile counselling? In this endeavour I am modestly attempting to spell out those little attitudes of the counsellee that are as essential as those of the counsellor, if not more, towards an efficient counselling. I myself am wondering what they might be trying to identify in every situation those elusive attitudes in my search. I know counsellors who are experts in their profession and yet a sizeable number of clients did not profit from such persons. Definitely there could be a number of things wanting in the same counsellors. But is it the whole picture of the complex reality of counselling? With certain hunches, I attempt to trace some qualities needed in the counsellee herself. It seems rather a shared responsibility of the counsellor and the counsellee. If a counselling is not successful, apart from various other reasons, it could be either the deficiency of the counsellor or of the counsellee. In this book, I am making a maiden attempt to underscore the attitudes of the counsellee herself. In this way, this book is different

from the previous one in which I had just made mention of those attitudes of the counsellee without dealing with them in detail.

For the above reasons 'Skills of Counselling' comes as a sequel to 'Dynamics of Counselling,' mainly complementing and projecting the aspects of skills, exploring into the working of the client and adding new insights gained through experience and reading. I would also like to keep in mind the need of academic aspects being presented in a practical way. Therefore, I am concerned about giving a number of examples wherever possible to illustrate the point at issue. When all is said and done, I prefer to consider this search as a study-process, being open to new insights and interpretations. Hence my concern is to keep myself open to feedbacks and comments so that I can profit by them.

The model I present in this book is called 'Microskill Model.' It is definitely an attempt to break the skills into smaller units for the sake of the learning process. Anything in smaller dose is assimilated more easily than a bigger chunk. That is the principle that I keep in mind while presenting the model. I would also like to caution you against the danger of being bogged at every stage, forgetting the total vision. There may be two dangers in approaching counselling. The one is to break down into smaller units and get entangled in the steps without looking at the whole process taken together. Here one may lose the total vision and unnecessarily concentrate on a small unit more than needed. The other danger of seeing the whole process of counselling together as integrative, though advantageous in itself, has the tendency to overlook each step needed. One could make the mistake of being very superficial without any substance since the steps are not dealt with sufficiently either for want of skills or want of time. Microskill model helps you to master each

step meticulously and keeps you reminded that the counselling has to be taken as a whole in an integrative way. A balance of being on a step and looking at the end will be the best attitude one could take in approaching counselling.

You are invited to approach counselling as a whole organism while concentrating on each step. While climbing up the stairs, your intention is to reach upstairs but your feet are in contact with every step of the stairs while you try to reach upstairs. That is what I precisely mean when I introduce the 'microskill model.'

Certainly I am not reflecting in the air. I base my findings on the praiseworthy works of the giants in the field of counselling. Carl R. Rogers forms the basic foundation of the edifice of counselling, with Robert R. Carkhuff giving a direction and Gerard Egan elaborating on the skills. Again Richard Nelson-Jones' practical approach finds a place in my attempt, and Adrian Van Kaam influences my overall approach to counselling. Besides these, I heavily rely on my own experience; for experience is the best teacher, they say. Again it is said that if you want to learn a subject you should teach that subject. My acquisition of the skills is more by teaching than by being taught. Since I intend this book for wider circulation among the persons of counselling profession, by necessity I am constrained to speak in a technical language, of course, that which can be understood by the layman as well.

A word about the vocabulary I have employed in the book will be in place. The words 'counselee' and 'client' are interchangeably used. In the narration, whenever the counsellor is spoken of in general, the person is identified as male; and whenever the counselee is spoken of in general, the person is identified as female for the sake of complementarity.

As I write each word and every sentence, I imagine that I am speaking to persons who hear about counselling for the first time. Since I do my work with this attitude, I hope that you will be able to understand what I write. With this background information being supplied right at the beginning, I invite you to scan the pages that follow, wishing you a pleasant and rewarding reading.

**D. JOHN ANTONY**, OFM. Cap.  
Anugraha  
Nochiodaipatti Post  
Dindigul – 624 003  
Tamilnadu, India  
Tel : 0451 – 2550099, 2550100  
1<sup>st</sup> May 2003  
Email: anugrahacap@eth.net

### 5>LJ@, M\*L5@>

Counselling is truly a human encounter. It is not merely a chance meeting or a planned meeting with another human individual where we hold our own masks and recognize only the mask in the other. Encounter is differentiated from meeting since the former goes beyond the latter and the 'we experience' which emerges in encounter has a deeper meaning, and is pervaded by a much more genuine humanity and affection than is usually the case in routine meetings, which fill our daily lives often marked by indifference. Human encounters are the core of counselling and the basis of change and growth.<sup>1</sup> Adrian Van Kaam speaks of human encounter thus:

*An authentic human encounter always implies that I am, at least for some moments, totally present to a person, that I am fully with him. In a true encounter, I participate in the personal existence of another for whom I really care. To participate means literally to take part in. Thus encounter entails that I share the life of the other, the existence of the other, his way of being in the world.<sup>2</sup>*

In this context of encounter in which counselling takes place, we find that it is a two-way collaborative process. Counsellors provide stimulation to the clients and the clients take advantage of the stimulation provided and help themselves for more effective ways of living. If only counsellors were to strive hard without the clients cooperating and taking their share of responsibility, counselling will be a one-way traffic that will sabotage the effectiveness of the very process of counselling. Since it is a collaborative concern, both the counsellors and the clients contribute greatly their share in the human encounter that facilitates growth and change.<sup>3</sup> It becomes clear when we analyse the direction that emerges in counselling. When a counsellor counsels a client no one

will be able to predict beforehand what direction the counselling will take, since it is not entirely with the counsellor or with the counsellee that the direction rests.<sup>4</sup> The human encounter which is deeply caring brings about a direction that has been fathered by the counsellor and the counsellee, and hence it is rightly a human encounter which is collaborative.

We see this collaborative human encounter as a process of interstimulation. Since no encounter is a neutral type of meeting nor is it a one-way traffic, the interaction between the counsellor and the counsellee is bound to be interstimulating. What could be the implication of counselling being a process of interstimulation? It simply indicates that a counsellor by attending involves the client, and this is the first stimulation. Because the client is involved she begins to explore and express her concerns which impels the counsellor to understand the client and to respond to her internal frame of reference, and this is the second stimulation in the counselling interview; thus mutually reinforcing each other's effort the counselling glides on. But for the mutual stimulation, the counselling would get stuck midway. We come across certain counsellors who are not able to provide stimulation by appropriate probing and hence lack the knack to reframe the mind of the client. At times the clients are so dull and unresponding that the counsellors do not get the minimal level of stimulation to maintain their effort, which is shown in one way or other as reluctance to counsel particular types of counsellees.<sup>5</sup>

In a truly human, caring, collaborative and interstimulating encounter, the counsellor gets involved in the personal life of another human being who needs the counsellor in a very special way in some phase of her life and development.<sup>6</sup> Often we do not fully realize the

therapeutic effect of presence. For a child the presence of the mother is comforting, for a lover the presence of the beloved is pleasurable, for a friend the presence of her friend is reassuring, for a person in bereavement the presence of her colleagues is consoling and thus we can go on enumerating the effect of mere presence to human life enhancement. That is why Rabindranath Tagore sings of the beauty of mere presence in an ecstatic vein in Gitanjali. He begs the Lord to grant him the indulgence of sitting for a moment by His side.<sup>7</sup> This presence in order to be totally present to the client involves by its very nature breaking through one's unconscious self-preoccupation and leaving behind one's self-centred world of daily involvement.<sup>8</sup> Even if you are only a few minutes with the client, let the client enjoy your total presence.

The reasons that compel us to accept counselling as a human encounter, simultaneously impress upon us that counselling is a living, organic process.<sup>9</sup> The living organism adapts itself to the constantly changing environmental forces and in the same way both the counsellor and the counsellee keep themselves adjusting not only to each other but to every new emergence of insights in their exploring, understanding and acting, the three main phases of counselling.

Having said a little of the general idea of counselling, let me propose a tentative definition which I had already formulated in my previous book 'Dynamics of Counselling.' *Counselling is an interpersonal and collaborative process by which one facilitates growth or change in another by adopting certain attitudes and employing certain skills appropriate to the context.*<sup>10</sup>

The word 'interpersonal' denotes a relationship between two human individuals. According to existential philosophy, I create a world of my own and you create yours. We are indeed worlds apart unless we decide to

enter into the realm of the other and let the other enter into ours. Here we need to give more emphasis to the quality of the relationship. Not every type of relationship is conducive for counselling. By the quality of relationship I mean a whole lot of nuances that uphold human relationship and more specifically a non-possessive warmth born of genuineness and nourished by sensitiveness to the thoughts and feelings of the client.<sup>11</sup>

The word 'collaborative' means that both the counsellor and the counsellee have to work together for the success of the counselling. The responsibility rests with both of them and more with the counsellee. If any one of them is not minimally cooperating, the outcome will not be encouraging.

The word 'process' indicates movement, a forward thrust, a flowing. It is opposed to anything fixed, definite, immutable and non-negotiable. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that the world is in a flux and as an example he said that we can never set foot in the same river twice, for when we step into it for the second time, the river that flowed when we stepped into it for the first time has already gone away. For him the symbol of change is fire, which keeps changing constantly. Counselling is like a fire that keeps constantly transforming. The changes and turns that are being taken with every step in the counselling interview are incredibly in a flux and therefore it is more apt to speak of the interaction as a process than anything else.<sup>12</sup>

The word 'facilitates' puts the whole picture of counselling in the context of equality, of collaborative partnership suffused with a tremendous respect for the awesome person of the other. In some centres of counselling, counsellors scrupulously avoid using the word 'helping' so that the trainees do not get the

impression even unconsciously of giving something to the client. Harvey Jackins has termed his method of counselling as 'Re-evaluation Co-Counselling.' By the word 'co-counselling' he means to respect the dignity of the other, and also negates the idea of one-up-and-one-down status between the counsellor and the counsellee. Facilitation can be understood more in terms of stimulation, an invitation, which a client can accept, or decline. Though we think of collaboration and equality among the counsellor and the counsellee, we should not forget that counselling is unilateral in the sense that the focus of attention is on the problem of the counsellee and not on that of the counsellor.<sup>13</sup> Even though it is unilateral it is not helping a helpless person but it is seriously stimulating the client to be awake and asserting, to be brave and possessing, to be active and actualising, to be courageous and non-abusing, and to be tender and forgiving. The idea of facilitation leaves the responsibility<sup>14</sup> to change with the client herself. Self-help and personal responsibility of the client can be triggered off by facilitation and not by helping.

The words 'growth' and 'change' refer to the goal of counselling. It is with this goal in view that one enters into a counselling interview. Whichever school of thought one may follow, one aims at the clients' managing their lives more effectively and solving their problems and developing opportunities.<sup>15</sup> The word 'growth' underscores the idea of clients' becoming more effective self-helpers. The word 'change' refers to the ability to solve problems and the ability to develop opportunities. The clients either have unsolved problems or do not live as effectively as they would like to live, or both together. Counselling is not for nothing, neither is it for the sake of structuring time. It is with the idea of change that counselling is undertaken. In short, the two words refer to the problems of living which are developmental tasks that people face

at different stages of their life span like getting married, forming a family, having children and getting old, and the problems connected with the transitions that accompany every stage, and the individual tasks like becoming what they want to become.<sup>16</sup>

The word 'attitudes' refers to one's mental orientation. It is a learned and more or less generalized affective tendency. It is out of our attitudes that our feelings and behaviours proceed. If my attitude towards you is positive, my feelings towards you will be one of sympathy and love; and conversely if my attitude towards you is negative, I feel angry and behave aggressively. A caring relationship of warmth should be buttressed by a network of attitudes which are interrelated. For example, respect is an attitude. Because I am deeply convinced of your worth, individuality and potentiality and value you as a person with rights, I avoid giving advice or manipulating you. A counsellor is bound to have certain attitudes, which are either positive or negative. But for a warm human encounter, we need positive attitudes to permeate the whole relationship. More than the skills what is more appreciated by the clients is the positive attitude the counsellor adopts.<sup>17</sup>

The word 'skills' means expertness, practised ability or facility in an action or while doing something. Counselling is not an aimless wandering for which one does not need skills. Skills are means or tools to achieve the goals. Since we have a definite set of goals in counselling, it presupposes that some skills specific to the field in question are a must. The skills are to be selective and related to the task in hand. By employing the appropriate skills we avoid wasting time and we move in a focused way.<sup>18</sup>

Finally we land on the word 'context.' Skills are to be exercised in certain settings. Take for example self-

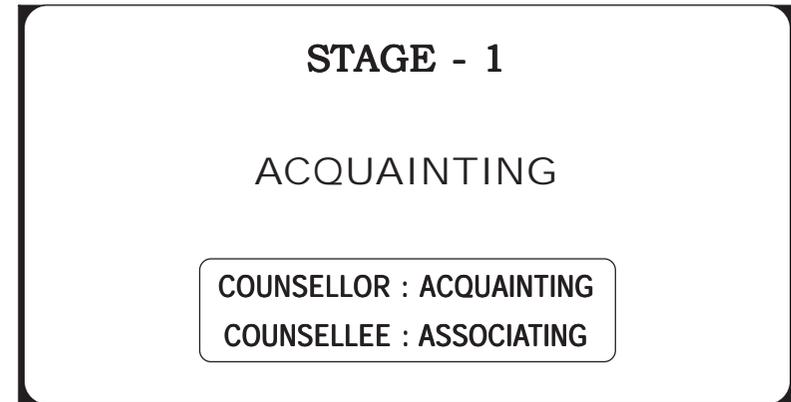
disclosure, which in itself is a skill. This skill can be exercised at a later stage of the counselling process when the counsellor judges that his self-disclosure will definitely enhance the decision making process of the client. If not used prudently, this very exercise of the skill of self-disclosure will be counter productive.<sup>19</sup>

The overview of the facilitating model I present here comprises of two main sections namely Facilitative Dimension (Pacing) and Action-Oriented Dimension (Leading). Under the facilitative dimension I have placed the Pre-Helping Phase with its four stages. Action-Oriented Dimension has two phases namely Helping Phase and the Post-Helping Phase. Helping Phase has four stages whereas the Post-Helping Phase has just one stage.

I know a group of students who attended a German language course in a reputed institute. The course ended with an examination. A brilliant student got the first mark. In practice the one who got the highest mark could not communicate in that very language effectively, whereas the students who scored low marks were able to communicate rather well. Therefore it is not so much the amount of knowledge and skills you may have, though of course we do not underestimate the value of such things, but what is practically needed is your ability to make use of whatever you may possess to facilitate the client. Being able to help others even with a little of knowledge should in a way motivate you to learn more and become proficient.

With this introduction, I suppose, you are ready to enter into the different stages of the process of counselling, treading one step at a time, learning it thoroughly and marching forward with a relentless spirit.

## PRE-HELPING PHASE



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### ACQUAINTING

Now we are entering into the first stage of the counselling process. Here the task of the counsellor is to get acquainted with the client. Mostly it is a stranger who comes to meet the counsellor and therefore the thing that needs immediate attention is to get to know the client well. Here the counsellor makes himself familiar to the person who has come with a lot of expectation. The first impression is the best impression, they say. And the first impression usually lasts longer compared to the impressions we form later. In a very few instances only, we change the first impressions we got of people. When a person meets you for the first time, he forms a judgement about you in 90 seconds. It is estimated that 90 percent of the opinion he makes about you is made within 90 seconds.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the time he spends with you is only to confirm the impression he has formed about you. Because of the impact of the first impression on a stranger who is going to enter into a deep therapeutic relationship,

the counsellor will do well to take the necessary steps to present himself in a becoming way without being over-enthusiastic or too dull.

Every time we conduct the counselling course, I notice something curious happening on the eve of the starting of the course, when the participants arrive. Some of the staff members make it a point to receive the participants and see that they are accommodated and well attended to. When finally the course is getting over and the participants are about to leave or during the time of evaluation of the course, the participants recall with a grateful heart how they had been first received. What is surprising for me is the fact that a particular individual who received the participants may not have contributed to their learning much during the course compared to the others who spend themselves for the participants. But the participants remember vividly only the person who received them first and not the ones who helped them most. This only goes to tell that the clients form an opinion of the counsellor from the way they have been received. Here the first impression the counsellor makes is of great importance for the ensuing task. Since the clients could form both positive as well as negative opinion about the counsellor looking at the person instantaneously, there is the necessity of having the appropriate skills to present oneself becomingly. When I speak of presenting becomingly, I do not mean to say that one should fake and pretend to be sweet. What is required is far from such manipulation; genuineness should permeate every movement of the counsellor.

You might have noticed this when you yourself had been a guest to someone's house or when you received guests into your own house. The guest anticipates and expects a warm reception and every word and gesture of the host is keenly read by the guest in terms of his acceptance or non-acceptance. The reason is rather obvious. The one who comes to you is vulnerable because

he is not sure if he will be welcome. Something similar happens to the clients who approach the counsellor and therefore it is recommended that the counsellor receives the clients warmly.

In the first stage, the counsellor sets the tone and the quality of the relationship that will last through the counselling sessions. Therefore we call this stage rapport-building stage. That which takes place between the counsellor and the counsellee is also termed as 'therapeutic alliance' or 'workable alliance.'<sup>2</sup> An informal contract of what is expected of the counsellor and the counsellee is already drawn as soon as the two enter into a counselling interview. In most instances this alliance or contract is not formal. The alliance we speak of implies interpersonal relationship. This helping relationship is not an end in itself. It is not for the sake of relationship that counselling is entertained, but this relationship serves as a means to reach the goals of counselling. If a warm friendship were to flower from the counselling, it is altogether another story but counselling is not undertaken primarily with a view to establish relationship, though therapeutic relationship is essential for counselling.

## 1. WELCOMING

Your active presence is a kind of social-emotional presence<sup>3</sup> which speaks in unequivocal terms your willingness to work with the client. Since you commit yourself to her welfare, you should both verbally and non-verbally communicate the warmth and willingness of being with the client and working with her. Take the case of Noordeen, an eighteen-year-old student who met a counsellor. Noordeen went to the office of the counsellor and saw the counsellor, who pointed to a chair and asked him to sit down while he was busy with his work. When the interaction started, Noordeen kept silent for the most part because he felt that he was not welcome. Since much depends upon the reception one receives at the hand of