DYNAMICS OF SELF HELP GROUPS

Prospective members of a self-help organization struggle with a problem in living or a life circumstance that departs from some normative ideal.

Because the core problem represents a departure from a normative ideal, the individual perceives himself as having failed, as abnormal, or as a hapless victim of controllable forces or of fate.

Most important, because the problem is interpreted as a departure from a normative ideal, the individual feels alone as if his problems, feelings, and experiences are unique.

HOW IT WORKS

1. More experienced members of the self-help group provide models for less experienced members.
2. Self-help groups may also serve as feedback and guidance systems to help members understand their reactions to others and the reactions of others to them.
3. Self-help groups provide a philosophy of life, an outlook on the problem condition. Through repeated discussion of concrete situations with other members, the groups' philosophy comes to serve an organizing function in the lives of self-help group members.
4. By applying the philosophy of self-help groups to everyday problems, it gives the members a foundation by which to work the problem.
5. Older members pass on their experiences and help newer members to anticipate changes in their lives.
6. Self-help group provides a place where members can be themselves and be assured of understanding and acceptance. There is no need to conceal or to explain the problem to anyone. All understand because all have experienced similar needs and emotions.
7. The self-help group also becomes the reference group for its members. Members feel good when they live up to the codes of the self-help group and presumably feel bad when they fail to live up to its standards. The desire to have
the approval and support of fellow group members motivates the individual to live up to the group's standards.

8. Difficulty in conquering the core problem does not lead to banishment. The sinner, so to speak, may always return to the fold and be welcomed, if not honored, for being willing to try again.

9. A foundation for personal identity is established within self-help groups as members share with each other their current problems. In fact, because members are both givers and receivers of help, with the roles changing from moment to moment, sharing of weakness contributes positively to self and to others. An individual member may find himself of value to another simply by sharing a failure. By being of value to another, one’s sense of competence and worthwhileness may be enhanced.

10. Sharing problems and feelings in a self-help group enables members to assist each other with the task of emotional mastery.

11. For some, participation in the self-help group can become critical, not only for the assistance provided in achieving emotional mastery, but also because the individual comes to feel like an integral part of a larger social group.

12. Any implication of "inferior" and "superior" positions is reduced because any member may play either role from time to time.

13. The "helper" therapy principle means that the most effective way of learning is to teach and those who help may be those who are helped the most. The effectiveness of this principle can be derived from role theory in that a person playing a role tends to meet the requirements of that role.

Reference: