

THE LAYMAN AND THE PROFESSIONAL *

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THE roles of the layman and the professional within the social agency have varied over the years. In their beginnings, social agencies were completely dependent upon the volunteer. It was the layman who determined the purposes of the agency, raised its finances, performed all of its services, and interpreted its work to the community. The emergence of the professional came only as a result of the intensification of social welfare work.

With the development of a formal structure, and with an increase in program, it became impossible for the layman to devote the time required to perform the agency's services. Professionals were hired to help do the job. In this period, the professional was not seen as someone who did a particular job because of training or skill, but primarily as an extension of the layman doing those things for which the layman had not the time.

As agencies became larger more professionals were employed. Soon they grew more and more dependent upon the professional. Concurrently, training programs were developed and universities opened graduate schools of social work. Greater emphasis began to be

placed upon social work practice. As specialization grew, and a body of professional knowledge was created, it became easier for the professional to consider the layman as a "necessary evil" and to place less and less reliance upon lay groups.

This latter stage came, of course, at a time in society when increasing specialization put heavier emphasis upon the role of the specialist and the "manager." This was the period when James Burnham wrote about "the managerial revolution" and when "technocracy" was a bright new phrase. The emergence of a managerial group was clearly seen by Charles Merriam who, in his book *Systematic Politics*, wrote

"If we ask why cities must have managers, or the dairymen's association have a manager, or steel or motors have a skilled staff of managers, not so-called perhaps, or labor groups, or the political party (or the social agency), we find the answer in the increasing number and specialization of functions, and the correspondingly increasing need for ways and means of integrating these specializations. The increasing of modern societies and the proliferation of their complex activities, make new forms of binding the machinery together indispensable to successful functioning.

"It is not necessary to conclude that the managerial groups have assumed complete domination over the concerns in which they are found, although this may be the fact in various instances, but only to reckon with the

undoubted truth that the managerial factor in public and private enterprise has taken on a far more significant role than before. This new role which has puzzled and alarmed the 'owners' in industry and the policy-makers in government (and Board of Directors in social agencies) is not, however, primarily a power role, but a specialization of the evolving and complex character which we now confront in our civilization."¹

The professional in the social agency, as well as in industry, for a while did indeed seem to usurp "power." With increasing security on our part, however, we became concerned with the vanishing role of the layman. We began to make efforts to re-evaluate what was happening within the agency in order, once again, to "make room" for the layman. In so doing, many agencies developed a concept of a lay-professional partnership without recognizing the "specialization within the evolving complex character which we now confront in our civilization." Instead of looking at the "partnership" from the point of view of the unique contribution of each partner, an undifferentiated kind of partnership was developed.

In this kind of relationship, everything was conceived as being done together. The concept of "togetherness," which is receiving recent attention, became the watchword of the day. Every communication that went out from the agency was jointly signed by the executive and the president. Every decision was made together. Board and staff walked hand in hand in sweetness and in light.

This undifferentiated partnership carried with it important implications. Where at first the professional role was ignored, to be followed by a denial of the important role of the layman, the un-

differentiated, "we-are-equal-partners" phase completely negated the difference between lay and professional function.

The evolution of professional-lay relationship did not follow an exact chronological pattern nor did every agency go through each of these phases. In the development of the field, however, we can distinguish each of these phases at one time or another. All of these experiences have led to our present conception which sees the lay-professional relationship as one in which each plays a different role complementing each other.

Louis J. Blumenthal has put it this way:

"The cooperative or partnership relation is built upon several socially sound concepts: inter-dependence rather than domination by one part being subservient to the other; mutual consultation; mutual assistance; the give and take of free discussion; the recognition of the complementary roles of Board and staff."²

Where the first items developed by Mr. Blumenthal are descriptive of the relationship, the last concept, the recognition of complementary roles, is one which adds a new dimension to Board-Staff relationship and stresses the fact that there is a uniqueness about that which each contributes. The question that needs to be resolved is what constitutes that uniqueness. An answer to this question can best be ascertained by examining the differences in function, role, skill, and use of self. Each of these can best be considered separately.

Function

It is generally accepted that the function of a Board of Directors is to determine policy whereas the function of the staff is to execute this policy. On its broadest

¹ Charles Merriam, *Systematic Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1945, p. 163. The parts of the quotation in parentheses were added by the author of this paper.

² Louis J. Blumenthal, "The Job of The Center Board Member," unpublished address made at the Western States Regional Conference, Jewish Welfare Board, November 3, 1957.

* Presented at a staff in-service training session, March 4, 1958.

level, this is easily discernible. The Board determines the budget of the agency. The staff spends it. The Board determines how many club groups the agency may serve. The group workers supervise the group leaders that work with the groups. The Board determines minimum and maximum salary ranges. The executive hires within those ranges.

Even where this difference of role is clear and distinguishable, there may be confusion. The professional helps the Board to determine a policy. He does so by assembling facts, pointing out alternatives, or making recommendations. Similarly, there are occasions when the Board member assists the staff person in executing a policy. He may register enrollees in a class, or volunteer to lead a group. It is important in such instances to recognize that when such assistance is given, basic responsibility is not abrogated. When the executive makes recommendations, or assembles facts, or points to alternatives, he is assisting the lay group to perform what is basically its responsibility. Similarly, the lay person, in assisting the professional, does not assume the professional's responsibility in so doing.

What about those many tasks within an agency which are difficult to define as being properly policy-making on the one hand or the execution of policy on the other? There are many such gray areas particularly within the Center. For example, the Day Camp Committee meets to discuss and act upon certain basic policies. These will have to do with fees charged, size of camp, personnel practices and standards to be used in camp. There is never any question that these are basically the prerogatives of the lay group and that the professional acts here in an assisting fashion. The supervision of the day camp counselors in the performance of their duties is clearly seen as a professional task. How-

ever, there are many other policies and jobs related to running the day camp which cannot easily be pigeonholed. For example, the committee determines that an intensive program of interpretation should be undertaken to publicize the camp to various groups in the community. It is agreed that an attractive brochure should be prepared, that all the PTA groups within the area should be approached to permit a speaker to talk about the camp, that all the membership groups within the Center should have someone visit them and tell them about the camp, and that some feature stories be written for the newspapers. Who should do these things? What are tasks for the layman and which for the professional?

Actually, these particular jobs may be done by either, provided that the principle of complementary roles is clearly recognized. The policy decisions about public relations plans are essentially those of the Camp Committee. The basic responsibility for seeing to it that the plans eventuate becomes the professional workers'. Whatever lay assistance is given—and it may be very considerable—it is given in the performance of this professional function. Within this content, the determination of who takes on a particular job will depend upon such factors as the talent and skills available within the lay group; the job load of the professional worker; the writing skills of the professional worker; the priorities being given to the public relations program; and the availability of volunteers.

A question that occurs may be stated as follows: "Are there no areas in the execution of policy in which the lay person cannot assist?" There are, but oddly enough, these limits do not get set because of skill. We often have a trained worker sitting on Board committees who, from the point of view of skill,

could do as effective a job as the professional. Hence the actual skill is not that which is involved. The limits instead come out of the use of professional relationships and confidentiality.

Relationships are the stuff and substance with which the professional works. Within the group itself it is the dynamics of the inter-personal relationships which forms the basis for the practice of the group work method. With his supervisee, the supervisor develops a supervisory relationship which helps the worker being supervised to do a more effective job within the agency. Within the scalar chain of command still another form of relationship develops, based upon the authority concept. In working with lay people, the professional develops a professional-lay relationship which gives direction to the way in which he performs. *Anything which may affect the particular set of relationships formed by the professional in the performance of his job is an area in which the lay person should not be directly involved.*

The Chairman of a House Committee might see a janitor performing a particular job inadequately. He would not be functioning properly if he corrected the janitor and gave him a set of orders, for in so doing he interferes with the relationship formed within the agency's chain of command. Similarly, the committee member might observe a program activity and have a number of recommendations for change as a result of the observation. These recommendations should not be given to the group leader but to the professional who staffs the committee.

As a social agency we respect the confidentiality of material received from people who use our services. Anything which would violate that confidence is a breach of faith. Hence, this too offers an area in which limits are set for lay functioning.

Role

In our discussion of function, we have discussed the role of the layman as a policy maker and the professional as a policy executor. We have also discussed the way in which each assists the other in the performance of his respective role. But there is still another dimension to the concept of role which needs examination and which provides another facet to the difference between the professional and the layman. Manheim S. Shapiro writes,

"The layman is the one who fosters, expresses and supports the process of social change; but the principal distinguishing factor is that he concentrates upon the effects of change. He is anxious to know how much the clientele has been changed or is going to be changed. He evaluates his and the agency's success upon the basis of whether a given goal is reached. He selects the policy on the basis of his judgment of whether it will achieve a given goal or not.

"The professional, on the other hand, brings to a field the specialization of affecting change as such. He is the stimulator, the trainer, and the trainer of trainers. He is the broker who brings together the changes and the resources they can use for changing. He lends continuity and continuation to the process of change. . . ."

While Shapiro tends to develop some questionable conclusions because of this difference in focus, he nonetheless is correct in pointing out the concentration the professional places upon process as distinct from the content of the process. The professional displays this concentration upon process by serving as an enabler to the layman as he performs his essential function of policy making.

In a previous article on the role of the professional in the Jewish community I wrote

"... we are also enablers. As professionals we play an important part in helping our

³ Manheim S. Shapiro, "The Respective Roles of the Layman and the Professional," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Dec. 1957, pp. 154-158.

community, our Boards and Committees, to make decisions, to define goals, and to set policies. We do so by presenting facts, outlining alternatives, and recommending courses of action based upon our knowledge and insight. When we do this within a broad, democratic framework in which many lay people are truly involved, and in which a permissive atmosphere for decision making is created, we properly fulfill our role as enablers. When we push for decisions which we think 'right' outside this framework, we become manipulators and not enablers.

"... We do not function properly as professionals unless we recognize that our basic role in policy making is an enabling one. In the final analysis the true test of the professional, as distinguished from the technician, is the way in which he is able to help people to become aware of problems, understand their nature and develop the capacity to solve them."⁴

This concern with helping people to solve a problem involves a faith in the ability of people to make decisions; a basic security in our own relationship to our lay people so that we can "permit" a decision to be made with which we disagree; and a concentration upon the process which will permit for creative decision making.

The Use of Self

The characteristic of the professional is the way in which he consciously uses himself in order to meet the needs of the client or group member. This is in marked contrast to the way in which one uses his personal self to meet one's own needs rather than that of the agency member. The goal in a two year graduate professional school is not just attainment of certain basic skills. These, in many instances, can be acquired from books. Instead, the goal is the development of a professional self which permits the formation of a professional relationship, which comes only with in-

sight, sensitivity and many, many years of cultivation. Let us examine the difference between the personal and professional relationship more closely.

The personal relationship is free, violent, easy, haphazard, and operates on many different levels, whereas a professional relationship is purposeful, planned and controlled. A personal relationship knows no limits in what it expects and what it gives, whereas a professional relationship is limited by the function of the agency and the objectives of the worker. The personal relationship is uncontrolled and self-demanding, whereas the professional relationship is controlled by a consciousness of purpose. A personal relationship is naive and unsophisticated, whereas a professional relationship carries with it an understanding of the person with whom the relationship is formed, of one's self, and of the processes involved within the relationship. A personal relationship is focused primarily upon one's own feelings and needs, goals and aspirations, whereas a professional relationship is focused on client and agency needs.

Within our agencies, lay people give much devoted service based upon a number of different motivations. Similarly, professionals come into the field with differing motivations. The lay person, even though he gains some understanding of his motivations, may quite properly seek to satisfy these motivations as a result of his work within the agency. The professional may not. The professional must continuously seek to gain an understanding of himself so that he can use himself to help the client rather than to meet his own needs. It is on this professional use of self that the enabling role of the professional is based.

Skill

As a result of training and experience, the professional develops a body of

knowledge and skills which are not available to most laymen. This body of knowledge and skills gives further direction to the difference between lay and professional operation within the agency.

The content of social work practice is currently being re-evaluated within the field itself. The National Association of Social Workers has engaged a staff and organized a series of commissions intent upon putting down on paper those concepts which can be termed basic to social work. In whatever fashion this content becomes finally conceptualized, there is no question but that two years of graduate training plus acquired experience does equip the professional with a body of knowledge and a set of skills which is not readily available to the layman.

Examine the many tasks in which the average group worker is engaged. He works with groups directly. He helps develop recreational programs of all kinds. He supervises others, group leaders and specialists of all sorts. He works with committees of the Board. He writes publicity, prepares budgets, worries about room "set-ups." He is a confidant of some and a resource for many.

As he works with groups, the group worker uses his understanding of individual behavior and group dynamics to modify group processes in order to effect changes in group members consistent with his agency's objectives. As he supervises others, he draws upon his knowledge of supervisory relationship so as to be most helpful to his staff. He must know a wide variety of program media and the techniques of their use. He must have some knowledge of administration.

Of course, many laymen working as volunteers within the agency acquire some of the skills described above. But the group worker develops these skills

in an organized, systematized fashion and has so incorporated them that they are an organic part of him. They are in his muscles.

A test, then, of whether it should be the professional or the layman who functions in a particular area becomes the nature and extent of the professional skill involved.

Some General Implications

The distinguishing features between the layman and the professional thus far discussed tend to give some direction to the manner in which we perform our tasks within our agency setting. Over and beyond these directions, they have implications for us in other areas.

One of our major concerns as professionals is the regard in which we are held, the status which we possess. A good deal of the feeling we have about our status stems from confusions about our professional role and some of our unconscious rivalry strivings with lay people. The clearer we are in the differences between the professional and the layman, the easier it is to perceive that status is gained by the competence we display in performing our unique function within the agency. Status is achieved by the way in which we use ourselves in all of our helping relationships. It is achieved by the permissiveness with which we enable lay groups to make policies while, at the same time, assisting them through proper use of the skill and the resources we bring to the problem.

Our discussion of professional relationships has implication for the kind of relationships other than professional that we form with lay people. There are some professionals who boast of the fact that they do not form any social relationships with laymen. Just recently, in a discussion of administration, I heard one executive director of an

⁴ "The Role of the Professional in the Jewish Community," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall, 1953, pp. 100-106.

agency say "In the twenty odd years that I have been executive of my agency, I have not visited the home of any one of my Board members, nor have they visited mine except on a matter of professional concern." In our kind of work where a Board member may at one time be a policy maker and employer and another time a volunteer assistant and at still a third time a recipient of service, these kinds of lines are difficult to form nor indeed are they necessary. Nonetheless, once a professional relationship is established, it is impossible to set up a completely personal relationship at the same time. In all such "non professional" relationships, the professional must always withhold some part of himself which controls and directs the quality of the relationship, for what happens in a personal relationship does affect the professional relationship. For example, how often in a social grouping does a conversation turn to the program of the agency? How often in that discussion is there a reference to a fellow professional staff member? In such a discussion, the professional cannot speak freely. He has a relationship to a professional colleague and a relationship to laymen which does not permit a free use of himself. The same sort of example may be given in many other areas. For this reason, although social relationships with lay people may be formed, they cannot take on the qualities of a purely personal relationship.

We also form professional relationships with our colleagues. While the subject of this paper bears primarily on lay-professional relationships, there is a basic connection between how one uses oneself in both these contexts. The person who is able to use himself professionally with lay people is the person who usually is able to use himself professionally vis-a-vis his colleagues. The

one who is unable to do so in one area is unable to do so in another.

A good deal of the difficulty in lay-professional relationships stems out of the lack of understanding of self. Too often one's unconscious feelings against authority become transferred or projected on to the authority concept of Board. Too often, one's unconscious feelings of hostility towards wealth become projected against people of wealth who serve on Boards. Too often one's own concentration upon "getting the job done" makes the contribution of the lay person seem relatively insignificant. These are unconscious blockings and projections which insight into one's self and the use of that insight in a professional manner can overcome.

Conclusion

The job within the agency can only be accomplished by cooperative work of lay and professional. The history of professional-lay relationships has taken different emphases. Today we recognize that it is a relationship which asks for different contributions from each—although each may assist the other in the performance of his job. Arlien Johnson has written:

"In this country we are developing a professional service, social work, which has an identity apart from the agency in which it is practiced and which has a distinctive body of knowledge and skills. The fact that a person is employed in a child welfare agency or in a settlement does not in itself make him a social worker. It is the way he works with people—individuals, groups, and communities—that is the criterion as to whether or not the service he renders is professional."⁵

To this might be added that it is only in the way he understands how this makes a professional contribution that the professional will most effectively work with laymen.

⁵ Arlien Johnson, "The Respective Roles of Governmental and Voluntarily Supported Social Work," *The Social Service Review*, Sept. 1948.