

idea corner

Working with Minority Groups

No Extension worker should have any big problem in working with minority groups as long as he'll honestly carry out the Extension philosophy of "working with anyone who has the need for Extension services and ability to accept help."

Though at first glance this statement may seem naive, it's true. We can't work with anyone who doesn't need our services and even if they need them, we can't work with anyone who won't accept our help.

There's a certain amount of truth in that old bromide, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." In short, our job in working with minorities is to make them aware that water is available and that it's safe for them to drink.

A tendency exists for some of us to use the term "minority group" and not define what we mean by it. Unfortunately, too many people use the term exclusively as a synonym for *numbers* and *race*. *If you devise programs based on the number of people in a group or their color, race, political, or religious belief, you automatically cease being an educator and become a bigot. When you design programs based on the needs of people and seek honest ways to get the programs accepted by those people, you're an educator.*

The number of people in a group is important only for program planning and budgeting. If the numbers game is played seriously, its results can be ridiculous. For example, if you consider numbers and color as your criteria, you could justify your work by working with only white Anglo-Saxon Protestant millionaires in the Piney

Woods of Texas. They definitely would be a minority, *but if they don't need your help and won't accept your help, your program will be of little value.*

Here is one good approach to working with minority groups:

1. *Define a minority group* on the basis of their need for help in relation to the rest of the population. Have they been bypassed by economic and social progress? Has the lack of such progress been caused by discrimination either overtly or covertly? Only you can answer these questions.
2. *Look inside yourself.* Are you free of a discriminating attitude? You can't fake it. If you're not serious about working with minority people, forget it. One of the most intense hates of people who have felt the pains of discrimination is the phony lip-service attitude of a condescending professional people-helper. Unless you can accept a person as a valuable human being, as he is, and as one who's entitled to his own feelings, you're not likely to contribute much to him nor he to you.

Our Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity legislation will prove to be a boon for the Cooperative Extension Service and for our society. As a result of these legal pressures, three conditions become readily apparent to fair-minded thinking people: a) qualifications for employment are made more specific and measurable; b) consistency in

actually doing what we say we do is encouraged, and lip-service, tokenism, and other forms of hypocrisy should be eliminated; c) society benefits through more effective use of its human resources.

3. *Be willing to work with people on the basis of their own sense of values, not yours.* Too often educators define progress in terms of their own cultural values instead of those of the people they're supposed to help. An educator's job is to understand the problem as the people themselves conceive it, establish alternative ways of solving it, and then provide information and techniques to help the people solve their own problem.

4. *Learn to live as men.* When we learn to effectively work together, we learn to truly live as men.

William Bright said:

Man is a social animal for whom not just things but also their symbols have meaning

He lives only so long as he grows

He grows by interacting with another man and with other men

He interacts by communicating with his fellows

He communicates by discovering what symbols have meaning and appeal for them

His discovery leads to their discovery of the symbols that are meaningful to him

He may insist another is not a "man," or is less a "man," when the other's value symbols differ from his

Growing, or living, then slows down . . . Or stops

But he may also grant other men their own free choice of symbol values

He may grant that each man's truth is what each perceives it to be

As he matures, he may borrow symbols and symbol values from other men

This is often an exchange

Thus he—and they—may continue to grow . . .

And to live as men

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