

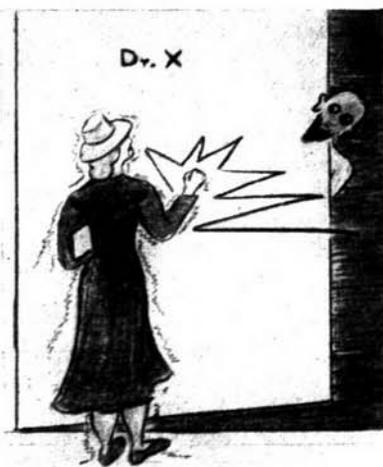
The Importance of People

Dorothy J Hayes

Illustrations by Alla B. Cooper

"INNER-STANDING" OF THE TEACHER

DEAR MARY:—I loved your answer to that letter of mine that hinted (perhaps not too subtly) that both you and the children in your classroom might benefit if you had the courage to seek some professional counseling help.



I know, Mary, it took a tremendous amount of determination for you to make yourself seek out Dr. X and tell him you wanted his help—you who have steadily through the years built a concept of yourself as a person who could take it—regardless of what you had to take. Remember when we were in high school (way back then) some of us used to say that you seemed to thrive on obstacles. So it's not surprising that it made you feel weak and inadequate to find that now you needed help from someone else. It made you feel that perhaps you weren't even capable of being a teacher if you didn't have the strength of character to work through your own feelings of frustration. But despite those feelings, you did go for help.

I'm glad you described the various kinds of feelings you have had. Because I had had quite similar feelings myself at one time, I felt that for a little while at least I had some "inner-standing" of you (my own word meaning that a person can so completely identify with another person that for that time he sees the world as that individual sees it—he has the same perspective and hence the same feeling reactions).

Certainly I know what you mean by that unbelievable sense of freedom and ease and "at peaceness with the world" that you say seemed to become a part of you after the first few weeks of therapy; and also that steadily growing ability to look back over your life objectively and understand and accept the cause of your behavior. And then came that renewed feeling of confidence that you really were capable of solving your own problems. And you liked that feeling.



But now—all of a sudden—you seem farther back than you did when you

wrote me before! And you're wondering whether that little taste of adjustment wasn't just a tantalizer. You're still worried about being cross with the children; you feel that you may even be getting crosser. Each night you vow that tomorrow will be different, and then tomorrow is worse. You say that you even feel it isn't fair to take more of the counselor's time since perhaps you are not really capable of profiting by this experience—that yours is one case where this kind of therapy breaks down.

I wish I could say to you, "Do this particular thing, Mary, and then from this point on all will be well with your feelings." Wouldn't it be an easy way to help friends? At this moment, however, I honestly don't know specifically what to tell you to do to counteract those feelings of inner-tension. I know it doesn't help very much for me to tell you it's your problem to work through to an understanding of the other teachers in your school, to realize that many of them have their own special problems and they are so absorbed in them that they lose sight of your need for warm friendliness at this time.

Also I can understand how you feel when you think your principal is demanding unreasonable things of you and the children. I wish I could tell you how to regain that sense of humor that, in the past, carried you over some rough spots. But although I can't tell you *what* to do, I know you will continue to work on it.

You may come to the realization that your present set-back and discouragement are a part of the procedure of working through to a more lasting and consistent inner-satisfaction. You are so much on your mind these days that perhaps you fail to see the progress you have really made in being able to accept yourself and your feelings. I think you'll probably go back to your counselor and begin to have some realization that you're regaining your earlier peace of mind.

Quite by coincidence, the day your letter arrived I was having lunch with a superintendent of schools. He was in the city to try to find some suggestions of clinical help that he could get for a teacher in his school system. His board had voted to give the teacher a years' leave of absence on full salary on the one condition that she would get help in an attempt to build back her mental health. He related an interesting story of how the board had discussed four years previously what could be done about this teacher. It was decided that mental health was a personal matter and that the teacher would have to find a solution for herself. In fact, she was warned that if she did not learn to control her terrific outbursts of temper and her "subversive attempts to undermine the morale of the other teachers" she would have to find a position elsewhere.

But now they say: "We see that not only did we fail to assure her that the seemingly best-adjusted people may occasionally need counseling help, but we actually put her into a threatening situation that increased her feelings of insecurity. We shudder to think of how we failed her and the children. We didn't take into account the fact that during the four years we have been trying to make up our minds what to do about her, she has been in daily contact with young children. We forgot that many of the most important social learnings for children come from the example set them by adults with whom they live in school and out. We forgot that our social science curriculum, which has as its objective the building of well-adjusted, contributing citizens, includes the teacher. We forgot that the teacher is not only important, but she is the most important part of that curriculum. And we forgot our obligation to teachers as persons. I hope we haven't waited too long."

Does his attitude help you a little?

Dorothy



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