

GRIPEs

LATENESS

Broken Promises

Absences

Hidden Interests

Leadership

COMMON
GROUP
PROBLEMS

Personal Needs

Despair

Competition

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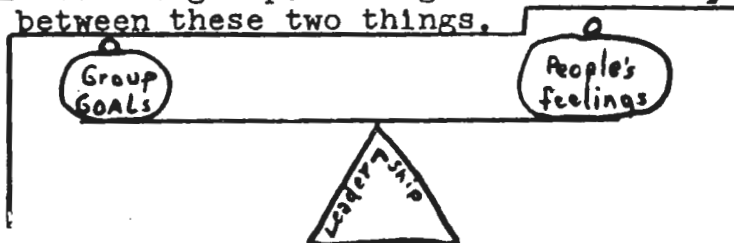
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3. He/She watches silent members to see what their silence is saying.
4. He/She talks openly about signs of a power struggle, and reassures the group about his own strength.
5. He/She lays hidden issues and personal interests on the table.
6. He/She doesn't get sucked into other people's despair.
7. He/She knows how to listen, to reflect to the group, to run a meeting, to make confrontations, and to comment on group problems.

1. Goals Vs. People Balance

If it is to move forward, every group must have people who are concerned about both the other people in the group and the goals of the group. The good leader keeps the proper balance between these two things.



One kind of leader only worries about the goals of the group. The leader knows what these goals are, so he pushes, persuades, begs, drives, reasons, demands, punishes and rewards the rest of the group, trying to move toward these goals. But often, in the process, he hurts the feelings of other people and makes them mad.

Another kind of leader spends all his time taking care of the feelings and needs of the rest of the group. He helps other group members express their feelings when they are hurt or mad. But he rarely gets the group to move toward its goals, the reasons for its existence in the first place.

The best kind of leader balances his time and concern between goals and people. He keeps pushing the group and at the same time takes care of it. And by doing this well, the group stays together and moves forward.

If the leaders of a group do their job of increasing the awareness of each group member to the goals and needs of the group, soon the balance is not so difficult to keep, because everybody is working on it.

COMMON GROUP PROBLEMS

Is attendance at your meetings falling off? Are some of the members not following through on promises? Are your meetings getting longer? Are fewer decisions being made? Are people coming late to meetings and appointments? Are people griping about the leadership? Are members saying that nothing is happening?

These problems happen in every group. Usually they begin in the third or fourth meeting. They are not the real problems, of course. They are only outer signs of dissatisfaction. The good organizer and leaders of a group must understand and deal with these deeper problems, not just change the signs.

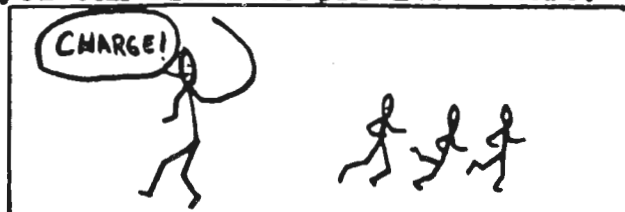
Why do these signs occur about the third or fourth meeting? This is about when each member is beginning to ask himself, "Do I want to go with these other people? Do I want to swing with them? Am I really committed to what they are talking about? Do I trust them?"

Each individual must answer these questions for himself before he begins to act with a group.

But when the "signs of dissatisfaction," such as lateness, absences, longer meetings and fewer decisions keep bubbling out, then the organizer and leader had better look deeper for the causes of these signs.

GOOD LEADERSHIP

The first place to look is at the leadership itself. What is going on between the leaders and the followers? Most of the time you can find the problems there.



What makes a good leader?

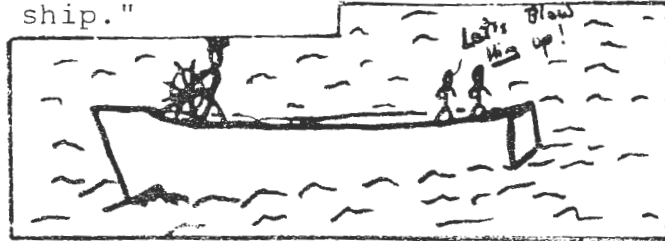
1. The leader is in front of the group--but not too far in front.
2. He/She is sensitive to the needs and problems of members.

The competitor generally operates on two levels. The first level we'll call the "brother" level. He is afraid to take on the old man. But he'll fight like crazy to prove he is better than all his brothers and sisters. The competitor will set up tests of strength between himself and other brothers to prove to the "parents" that he is the best of all the kids. These tests of strength between "brothers" mess up more groups than any other problem.

Sometimes the competitor will have the guts to take on the leader. This called a power struggle. He will challenge the "old man's" way of doing something, or begin to criticize him behind his back. Some power struggles are good. For example, when the group has not decided on a program, it can be healthy, but only if the challenger or somebody else is ready to take over when the leader goes down.

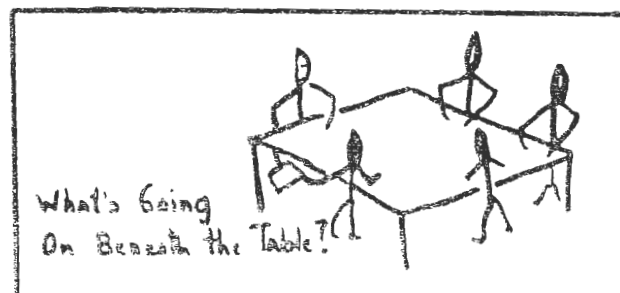
Most of the time power struggles hang up the whole group. Usually the people who are trying to shoot down the leader and the group's program haven't thought about leading the group themselves. They just don't want to be led.

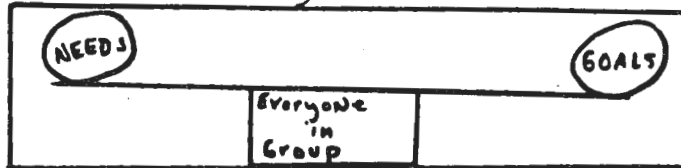
One leader, who was being attacked by a couple of people who didn't give a damn about what was going to happen to the group after he was gone, pointed out gently, "You sink me, baby, and you sink the ship."



4. Hidden Interests

Another big problem in groups are hidden interests. These are the personal interests of different members which go against the group interests. For example, one person in the group may be trying to impress some people in the group. That person is not really concerned with the goals of the group. What is said and done is to impress the group--not to help the group.





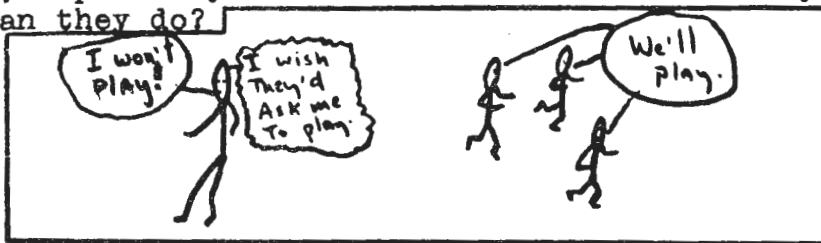
This is called collective leadership.

2. Needs of Members

In order to meet the needs of members, first you must recognize them. In the beginning the group leaders must take care of these needs, but if the group grows honestly, soon everyone will be on the alert for them. What are some of these needs?

We need to achieve, to be praised for it. Everyone likes to do things and get recognition for it. Those people who haven't done anything in your group will be the first ones to leave when the going gets rough. They probably feel the leaders think they are useless anyway.

Parties and other social gatherings not only meet social needs, they also give leaders a chance to get to know members better, especially the silent ones. What do they like? What can they do?



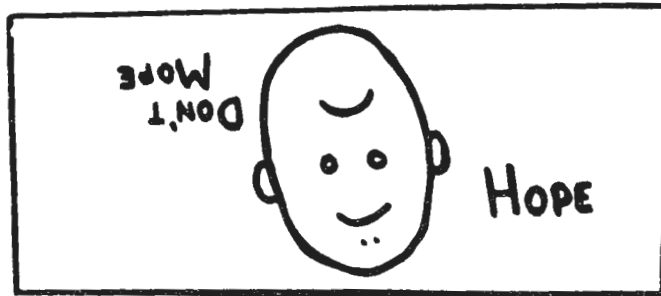
There is another kind of need which many of us have. It is the need to be better than someone else. We call this a competitive need.

3. Competition

Many people grow up with a need to show they're better than someone else. This is because they have been beaten down by parents, teachers, cops and other big people when they were little. Sometimes it's because their parents encouraged them to compete with their brothers and sisters.

Whatever the reasons, this compete and beat need pops up in many groups.





Short-range goals and small successes are the building blocks of hope. Often the leader hears more about the small successes than the rest of the group. He must keep the group informed of all successes, no matter how small.

The hope, confidence and honesty of the leader sets the tone for the whole group. Have you ever been in a group which is down in the dumps? Then the leader walks in and says, "I know we're going to win. And this is why we're going to win."

What happens to the group?

SUMMARY OF COMMON GROUP PROBLEMS

We have analyzed five problem areas about leaders and members of groups:

1. Goals Vs. People Balance
2. Meeting needs of members
3. Compete and beat game
4. Spotlighting hidden interests
5. Honesty and hope

Do you recognize any of these problem areas in your groups?

Some Group Techniques

We have listed the problems, but we haven't said too much about how to prevent them. In every group the problems are different. There are some ways, however, which can help you deal with them before they wreck the group.

LISTEN

Don't talk too much. Listen. Ask questions. Try to hear where other people are. This makes you much more sensitive to their needs--and talents.

These hidden interests (sometimes they are not hidden very well) must be brought out by other group members or leaders, so they do not wreck the group.

5. Dealing with Despair

Civil rights groups sing the song, "Ain't gonna let disappointment turn me 'round." But disappointment and despair (no hope) have turned more groups 'round than any other problem. Especially groups of poor people, who have had the hope kicked out of them all their lives.

If they don't win a quick victory, they say, "What's the use?" And one person's despair can spread through a group faster than chicken pox through a family of 9 kids.

There are two main causes of despair:

- A. Group dishonesty.
- B. Leader being unsure of himself.

A. Group dishonesty: The "what's the use?" behavior is often an outer sign of inner feelings of bottled-up anger. For some reason, the person has forbidden himself from showing this anger. He is afraid if he opens his mouth to express any feelings, the anger is so strong that it will come gushing out. So he clamps on his straight jacket, folds his arms tightly across his chest, and says, "I don't think we should try anything. What's the use?"



The leader must set an atmosphere in which anger and disappointment can be honestly talked about. This will prevent epidemics of despair.

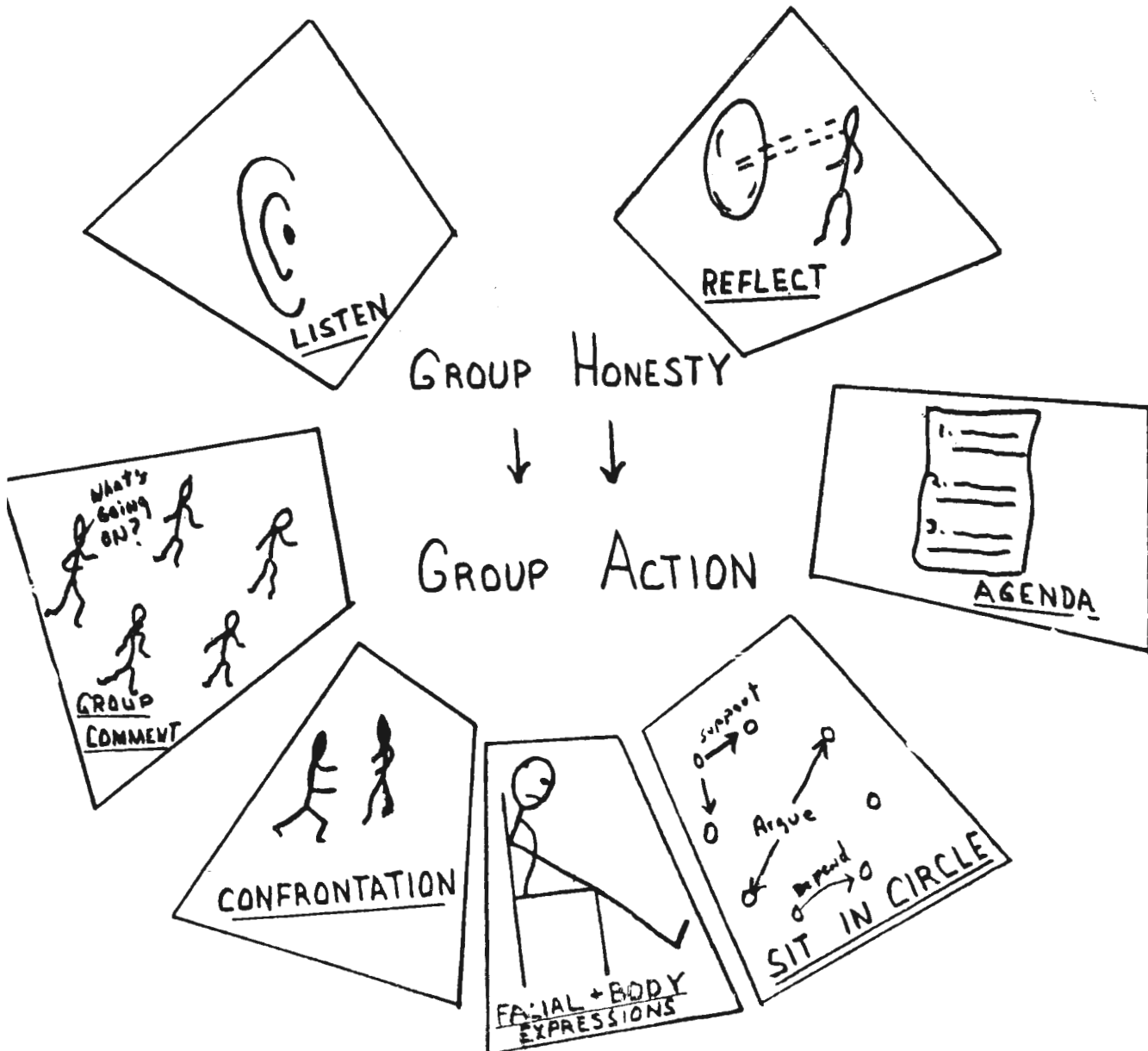
B. An Unsure Leader. The leader must separate his own bad moods from the group's moods. It is easy to get sucked into someone else's dumps. Especially when the leader wants to avoid a painful job. But if the leader starts moping--instead of hoping--it kills the group.

GROUP COMMENTS

You can also make comments about the group itself. When things are hung up you might say, "What the hell is going on in this group?" Some of the members will have good ideas about what the hangup is. For example, one might say, "I feel it's because Harvey has been taking all the credit and we're doing all the work."

Confrontations and honest group comments can help loosen things up—and make the group itself more honest.

AND ONCE THE GROUP GETS HONEST WITH ITSELF, IT WILL ROLL!



REFLECT

Reflect back what other members say, to be sure you are hearing well. If a group member says, "I'm not happy with the way Joe is running this show," you might say, "You feel that Joe is pushing too hard?" This gives him a chance to tell how he really feels, and improves understanding in the group.

AGENDA

Always make up an agenda before a meeting. Let everyone see it and agree on it before you start.

SIT IN A CIRCLE

Sit around in a circle. This helps you become sensitive to some of the relationships within the group. It also promotes better (more honest) discussions.

People who sit next to each other often depend on each other for support. People who sit across from each other will often "take each other on" during the meeting. Soon you can pick up other clues from the seating arrangement.

Don't put a table in the middle unless you have a lot of writing to do. Tables help people avoid dealing with each other.

WATCH FACIAL AND BODY EXPRESSIONS

Look for disagreement in the facial and body expressions of silent members. Ask them what's bugging them. Get it out into the open and deal with it.

DON'T AVOID CONTRONTATIONS

If two people are at each other's throats, but don't ever talk about it in the group, get it out in the open. You might say, "You two are creating problems in the group. What's the matter with you two?"

Or if it's you who is avoiding the confrontation, look at yourself. One good way of confronting another person is to say, "I feel that I'm having a problem with Jane, so I want to get it out in the open. Jane, I disagree with the way you ran yesterday's meeting."