
Book Review

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Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help
by Edgar H. Schein
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Edgar H. Schein has forged a legacy that has long been respected by nearly everyone associated with the fields of psychology, social psychology and management. His stream of research, stretching for decades, has made a substantial impact on the efforts and understandings of numerous scholars, thousands of practitioners, and millions of others. Significantly, his work has had a profound effect on many global academic communities, including the myriad stakeholders of this journal. A review of the Index of this issue (and the articles contained herein) demonstrates that the intellectual domain of Edgar H. Schein is universal. European management pays great attention to research and writing that largely takes place outside of Europe, including (if not especially) articles related to individual and social behaviours. Notably, Schein is recognised as a pioneer in the realm of ‘corporate culture’, but he is also credited with numerous additional contributions to understanding the behaviours of individuals, groups, and organisations. One of Schein’s most recent books, *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help*, has now been released in paperback, and it is well worth reading.

Though crafted in an easily understood style of writing, *Helping* offers a powerful combination of theory-turned-to-practice, examining the concept of ‘help’ along multiple dimensions. Drawing upon principles rooted in social psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines, Schein establishes the need for more thoroughly understanding and better implementing help by providing evidence of the pervasiveness of ‘helping’ in numerous individual, group, and organisational contexts. To do so, Schein begins by furnishing multitudinous descriptions of helping and provides an overview of the vernacular frequently employed within various helping situations. Throughout the book, Schein proceeds to examine many components and dimensions of helping, including why helping is often requested or offered but is not always successful. Similarly, Schein also explains why an offer of help may sometimes be declined. According to Schein, “Maintaining a readiness to be helped or to give help means you must inquire internally to recognize when and under what circumstances you are prepared to offer, give, or receive help”. Certainly, in addition to prescriptions for an effective administration of help, being aware of the reasons for potential failure or rejection of help can also be useful for those seeking to provide it. In this way, *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help* brings further value.

In this book, Schein's fundamental underpinnings relate to examining the helping phenomena primarily from the perspective of the 'human experience'. Recognising the human dimensions of helping acknowledges the individual, social, cultural, and anthropological constraints that are placed on the one who is helping as well as the human dimensions that relate to the one for whom the help is intended. According to Schein, 'help' and 'helping' might best be observed and described through an understanding of human roles, scripts, and relationships.

Throughout the book, Schein reiterates the importance of trust and understanding in the relationship between the helper and the one being helped. He contends that trust fosters openness, and understanding encourages honesty, all of which can lead to a better recognition of when to ask for or offer help. Schein points out that, given its prepotency to the help process, developing trust and encouraging honesty are standard and well-practiced components of professional therapy. However, he contends that developing trust and encouraging honesty are commonly insufficiently addressed during less clinical, day-to-day encounters – the ones in which most of us are actually presented with the opportunity to seek or provide help. To build trust, Schein explores many facets of the helping process, including various levels of the basic inquiry necessary to fundamentally understand the nature of the problem for which help is required.

The act of helping, according to Schein, contains elements of an imbalance of both power and status between the helper and the one being helped. He writes, "At the beginning of any helping situation, the relationship is unbalanced, which creates the potential for both client and helper to fall into traps derived from that imbalance". Generally speaking, those with more power and status are more frequently called upon to provide help for those with less power or status. Therefore, a risk exists for some of the initial imbalance in power and status to be amplified by the helping process. Schein indicates that by asking for and accepting help, the one being helped may, in the transaction, be acknowledging weakness and is, therefore, susceptible to a further loss of power. To need and accept help can be humbling, and Schein posits that it is the responsibility of the helper to provide the help in a manner that is efficacious, yet thoughtful and circumspect, all the while paying close attention to the balance of power and preserving it. Examples and mini-cases throughout the book illustrate this and many other points addressed in *Helping*.

The final chapters in the book relate to specific situations where helping can be practised in group and organisational contexts. In large part, he builds upon the principles and concepts he introduces earlier, but provides examples and explanations within the context of leadership or within team environments. Schein explores teamwork as 'perpetual reciprocal helping', and his examination of the fundamentals of helping in organisational and leadership environments draws upon the understandings of helping in an individual context. The book's final chapter provides an explication of the principles of helping, as well practical advice and guidelines that are directly linked to each principle, ensuring that the book delivers upon the promise implied in its title.

One criticism of the book is that it seems to convey a significant North American bias, even if doing so silently. That is, from its beginning to its conclusion (from providing examples of helping situations to suggesting principles for helping), a presumption may be that both the helper and the recipient of the help are North American, which is a continued source of frustration for those who practice or conduct research in management on other continents and in other countries. Nearly all

components of Schein's helping process are tacitly influenced, if not somewhat governed by cultural folkways. However, Schein does not mention this, nor does he concede that inquiry (level and content), offering suggestions, and other activities associated with helping may vary across national cultures. Given that help is often sought to understand and reduce cultural differences (and that organisation–client relationships take into consideration an increasingly global environment), not commenting on this is a curious omission. Still, the book is of value to the practitioners and scholars of the European continent, as well.

Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help is a useful book for academics and practitioners alike. Grounded in extant theory, it is a practical and informative guide to providing as well as receiving help. It is not often that an author successfully bridges the gap between theory and practice, but with *Helping*, Edgar H. Schein has done so with aplomb, and this book is recommended reading.