Interpersonal Needs and Coaching Questions

William Bergquist, Ph.D.

I have presented a set of coaching questions that focus on the needs manifest by the men and women who come to us as clients, seeking to better understand and hopefully improve the interpersonal challenges they face in their organizations. The questions I offer are based on the insight-rich concepts of Will Schutz (and his FIRO theory of interpersonal relationships. Following presentation of the questions, I offer a summary of Schutz' theory and something about several other interpersonally-related models that expand on Schutz' theory. A much more substantial description and analysis of Schutz' interpersonal need theory is to be found in his book, *The Human Element*, published by Jossey-Bass in 1994. Many other summaries of his theory are to be found on various websites. Will Schutz also wrote an earlier book about FIRO theory, *The Interpersonal Underworld.* Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Book, 1966) which is a "collector's item" and hard to find.

The Coaching Questions

I have found the following questions to be of value when coaching an individual client in setting the stage for their exploration of interpersonal challenges. These questions are also of great value when coaching an entire team. These questions are posed with each member of the team. While no member of the team should be required to answer any one of these questions, the dialogue that is generated by team member's answers to these questions can greatly accelerate and enhance team-building (especially if the team has been newly constituted, is a short-term task force that needs to work effectively in short order, or if the team can been newly reconstituted).

The questions are divided into three sections, each section related to one of the three interpersonal needs identified by Schutz (see description of each need in the section following

this list of coaching questions). You might also wish to use Schutz' FIRO-B instrument in conjunction with your coaching session. This instrument is available from CPP, a major test publishing firm (www.cpp.com/products/firo-b/inc).

Inclusion (In/Out)

- When you (client/team member) enter a new group, what do you look for in deciding if you want to be a member of the group or at least an active, highly motivated member of the group?

- When you want to be a member of a group, what do you tend to do in order to gain acceptance from other members of this group.

- When you don't "really" want to be a member of a specific group, but have to "hang around" in this group, what is your pattern of behavior?

Control (Up/Down)

- When do you look forward to being influential in a group? What are the characteristics of the group that make you want to influence its processes and/or outcomes?

- When are you most likely (most able) to be influential in a group? What are the characteristics of the group that enable you to be influential?

- When are you most likely to be influenced by other members of the group? What are the characteristic(s) of the group member(s) that makes them influential? What are the conditions operating in the group that make you amenable to the influence of other group members?

Openness (Near/Far)

- When are you most likely to express your own feelings, share your personal history and/or offer your reactions to group processes and achievements? What are the conditions operating in the group that make you willing to be open with other group members?

- When are you most likely to enjoy and encourage the sharing of feelings, personal

histories and reactions to group processes and achievements by other members of a group? What are the conditions operating in the group that make you willing to be open to the sharing by other group members?

- When are you least likely to express your own feelings, share your personal history and/or offer your reactions to group processes and achievements? What are the conditions operating in the group that make you reticent or even unwilling to be open with other group members?

Schutz' Theory

Probably the most widely used tool for increasing interpersonal awareness during the 1960s-1990s was Will Schutz' FIRO Theory. This theory of interpersonal behavior was developed by Will Schutz in 1960. He was attempting to explain interpersonal behavior consistent with psychodynamic theories. It was the culmination of his work at the Naval Research Laboratories in Washington, D.C., and subsequent work at Harvard University's Social Relations Department. Schutz tends to focus on what you can see—behavior—rather than on what one might infer from what is being done or said. Schutz believed that people behave differently in interpersonal situations than they behave when they are alone. He proposed a theory that describes behavior in these "interpersonal" situations and postulates that there are three fundamental interpersonal needs that strongly influences this interpersonal behavior: Inclusion, Control, and Affection (later called Openness).

Schutz suggests that these three needs are sufficient to explain and predict interpersonal behavior. In addition, each type has two components: Expressed and Wanted. Expressed needs are those that the person expresses (behaves) towards others. Wanted needs are those that the person wants others to fulfill, or that direct the way in which the person wants others to behave towards him. "Expressed" and "wanted" are confusing terms. I will instead use the terms *proactive* and *reactive*. These terms are not only a little less confusing, they also correlate directly with the important concepts of internal and external locus of control. Proactive relates to internal locus and reactive relates to external locus.

Inclusion

This is the In/Out dimension of interpersonal relationships. With regard to stages of interpersonal and group development that were first introduced by Bruce Tuckman in "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups" (*Psychological Bulletin*, 1965, 63, pp. 384-399), this concern about inclusion is primary during the initial stage in building a relationship (called "Forming" by Tuckman). The primary focus for people with high needs for inclusion center on being very careful with and concerned about participation in a relationship or membership in a group. They want to determine or at least have a major "say" in determining whether or not they are engaged in a particular relationship or with a particular group. This person (and a group at this stage of development) needs to be clear about membership issues. The primary strengths associated with this need are interpersonal sensitivity, selectivity, and thoughtfulness.

Ironically, people with high inclusion needs often have very high standards with regard to the relationships and group they enter. They are looking for something quite specific. On the negative side, those with a high need of inclusion are often highly selective because fundamentally they don't believe that most people can be trusted (in terms of either competence or intentions). "I see the dark side; hence, I must be cautious about involvement." This means that high inclusion people can overuse or misuse their strengths by being highly vulnerable, by being loners, or by being timid. They feel quite vulnerable because they have remained "outsiders" for many years; hence, they often don't know all of the subtle signs of acceptance, nor the strategies to be employed in gaining acceptance.

Control

This need represents the Up/Down dimension of interpersonal relationships. With regard to stages of interpersonal and group development, control is aligned with the conflict-filled second stage of group life (Tuckman's "Storming" stage). The primary focus associated with this need is very clear: be very careful with and concerned about the distribution of power in

the relationship or group. A person with high needs for control wants to be clear about authority issues. They wish to control when and where they express their need for control (their own control or someone else's control). Control for these people is a nested and recursive process: they want to control their need for and their expression of their need for control.

The primary strengths associated with this need include: forcefulness, clarity of task, and a sense of responsibility. People with a high need for control are often willing to stand out front and accept the consequences of whatever comes from actions that they take or the group takes (internal locus of control). When the need for control is overwhelming, these strengths can be overused or misused. The high control person can become domineering, rigid, and insensitive. She will override other people in order to engage in whatever she believes is absolutely the right thing to do.

Openness

This need is aligned with the Near/Far dimension of interpersonal relationships. It is most apparent in the third interpersonal or group developmental stage (Tuckman's "Norming" stage). The primary focus associated with this need is: be very careful about and concerned with the pattern of interpersonal or group relationships. Trust is critical here—all three forms of trust are being assessed. Is this person or group really interested in establishing fair and interpersonally-sensitive norms (trust in *intentions*)? Is this person or group skillful and knowledgeable (trust in *competence*) in establishing and enforcing appropriate norms? Do we mean the same thing when we talk about establishing norms (trust in *perspective*)? Once again, a person with a high need for openness wants to determine (or at least strongly influence) when and where he will be open and who will be open with him regarding specific interpersonal issues.

The primary strengths associated with people who tend to have a strong need for openness are: accommodating, interactive, and empathetic. They are able and willing to adjust their own

5

style and needs to accommodate the styles and needs of other people. When there is an inappropriate or overwhelming need for openness then these strengths get overused or misuse. The person with high openness needs becomes self-sacrificing, insipid, and intrusive. He gives away too much in order to feel wanted and influential. This leads, in turn, to resentment about this sacrifice.