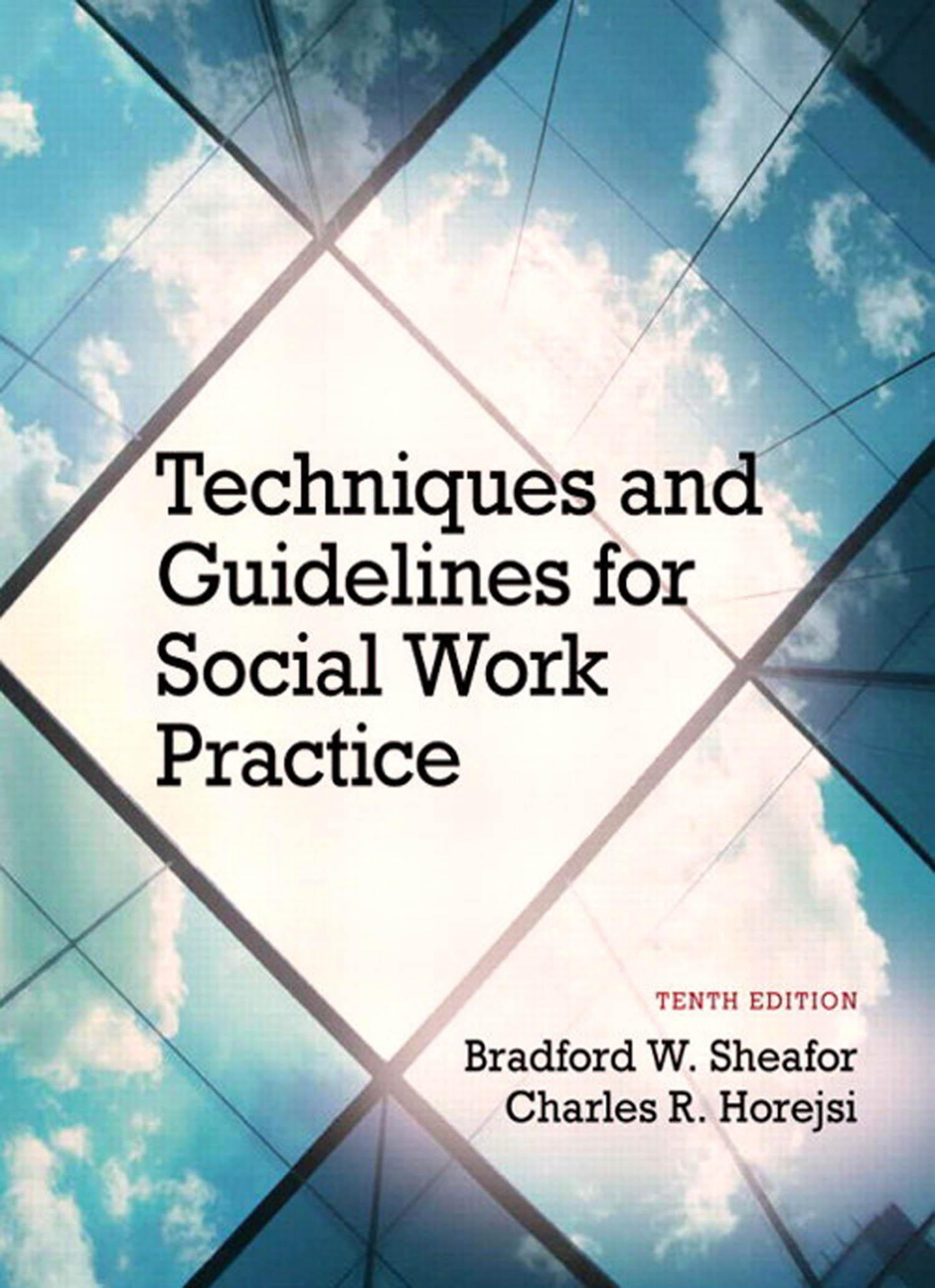
Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice
TENTH EDITION
Bradford W. Sheafor
Charles R. Horejsi

TENTH EDITION

Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice

Bradford W. Sheafor
Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University

Charles R. Horejsi
Professor Emeritus, University of Montana

PEARSON

Boston Columbus Hoboken Indianapolis New York San Francisco Amsterdam
Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montréal Toronto Delhi
Mexico City São Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

VP and Editorial Director: Jeffery W. Johnston
Acquisitions Editor: Julie Peters
Program Manager: Alicia Ritchey
Editorial Assistant: Andrea Hall
Executive Marketing Manager: Krista Clark
Marketing Coordinator: Elizabeth Mackenzie Lamb
Operations Specialist: Maura Zaldivar-Garcia
Art Director: Diane Ernsberger
Cover Art: ©robsonphoto/Fotolia
Media Producer: Allison Longley
Full-Service Project Management: Integra/Anandakrishnan Natarajan
Composition: Integra Software Services
Printer/Binder: Edwards Brothers Malloy
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color/Hagerstown
Text Font: 10.5/13, Dante MT Std

Credits and acknowledgments borrowed from other sources and reproduced, with permission, in this textbook appear on appropriate page within text.

If you purchased this book within the United States or Canada you should be aware that it has been imported without the approval of the Publisher or the Author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sheafor, Bradford W.
Techniques and guidelines for social work practice/Bradford W. Sheafor, Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University; Charles R. Horejsi, Professor Emeritus, University of Montana.—Tenth edition.
pages cm
ISBN 978-0-205-96510-6 (alk. paper)—ISBN 0-205-96510-5 (alk. paper)
1. Social service—United States. I. Horejsi, Charles R. II. Title.
HV91.S48 2014
361.3'2—dc23

2014019725

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PEARSON

ISBN 10: 0-205-96510-5
ISBN 13: 978-0-205-96510-6

To the next generation of social workers,
who have chosen to devote their time and talents to the service of others
and the struggle for social justice,

and

To our families,
Nadine, Laura, Brandon, Perry, Christopher,
Gloria, Angela, Martin, and Katherine,
for their love and support

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

Many people are influenced, directly and indirectly, by the decisions and actions of social workers. Working in courts, clinics, hospitals, schools, businesses, private practice, and a myriad of private and public social agencies, social workers deliver a wide variety of services directly to clients while also striving to promote positive community and social changes. Improving the quality of life for an individual, a family, or the people of a community ultimately impacts society as a whole and elevates the health, happiness, safety, and productivity of all its members.

This book is about what social workers actually do when helping their clients solve problems and/or enhance their functioning. Although many books describe social work's basic principles and theory, *Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice* focuses on a more specific and concrete level. It describes 154 techniques and guidelines that social workers use in everyday practice.

Most social workers have been exposed to a variety of practice theories and conceptual frameworks described in the literature and taught in programs of social work education. Although that knowledge base is essential, practice is much more than a set of beliefs and ideas about how people can be helped. In reality, social work practice is a set of actions and behaviors by the social worker. Clients are not directly affected by the worker's theory; rather, they are influenced by what the worker actually does—by the social worker's specific actions and behaviors. We do not intend to suggest that attention to the techniques can or should replace attention to theoretical frameworks. Rather, techniques and specific guidelines complete the package of knowledge and skills needed by the social worker.

Plan and Structure

Understanding the design of a book helps the reader make use of its contents. This book has five major parts.

Part I, "Social Work and the Social Worker," reviews the background knowledge and characteristics we believe a social worker must possess, including:

- A clear conception of the domain of social work and the competencies the social worker is expected to bring to the change process (Chapter 1)
- An understanding of the challenges a social worker faces in merging his or her personal life with professional roles and responsibilities (Chapter 2)
- The native talents necessary for perceptively creating and entering into the interpersonal relations that are at the heart of practice (i.e., the art of social work), as well as a commitment to draw on and apply the science of social work—that is, the profession's knowledge base and its ethical principles (Chapter 3)

Part II, "The Building Blocks of Social Work Practice," stresses the need for the social worker to become familiar with the central features of effective helping. To serve clients ranging from individuals to communities, a social worker must have these qualities:

- An understanding of the varied roles performed by social workers in delivering human services and the specific functions associated with these roles (Chapter 4)
- A deep appreciation for the profession's fundamental practice principles and a commitment to be guided by those principles (Chapter 5)
- A basic knowledge of the various perspectives, theories, and models that have proven useful in practice (Chapter 6)
- The ability to use critical thinking to select the best possible knowledge, values, and skills to help clients make sound decisions about how they might improve their lives (Chapter 7)

In Chapters 8 to 16 we present numerous techniques and guidelines, each of which has a number and a title (e.g., 10.4: Making a Referral). In this example, *10.4* signifies the fourth item in Chapter 10. This system of numbering is used to refer the reader to related information in other parts of the book.

Several paragraphs describe each technique or guideline and its application. In addition, we present a Selected Bibliography, which usually lists two to four books or articles that we consider particularly useful for obtaining more in-depth information related to the topic discussed.

In Part III of the book, "Techniques Common to All Social Work Practice," we have included techniques that strengthen the social worker's performance regardless of agency setting and irrespective of whether the client is an individual, family, group, organization, or community. Underlying our selection was the belief that the social worker must have these basic skills:

- The interpersonal competence to communicate effectively and engage the client in a set of basic helping activities (Chapter 8)
- The ability to address ethical issues, handle organization-related details of service delivery, and effectively manage her or his time and workload (Chapter 9)

Part IV, "Techniques and Guidelines for Phases of the Planned Change Process," lists techniques and guidelines for both direct and indirect practice in chapters organized around the five phases of the planned change process. Although social work authors use differing names for these phases, we have elected to use the following:

- Intake and engagement (Chapter 10)
- Data collection and assessment (Chapter 11)
- Planning and contracting (Chapter 12)
- Intervention and monitoring (Chapter 13)
- Evaluation and termination (Chapter 14)

When introducing these five chapters, we describe what should be accomplished during that particular phase of the planned change process. These general concepts are then elaborated to more clearly describe the direct-practice applications (Section A) and the indirect-practice applications (Section B) in those chapters. A worker can readily examine

several suggested techniques or guidelines by identifying the phase of the change process, determining if the activity is a direct or indirect intervention, and then locating the most applicable technique or guideline.

Part V, "Specialized Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice," includes some items that cut across the five phases of the planned change process and thus did not fit into the classification system used in Part IV. To address these issues, we created two chapters containing items related to serving vulnerable client populations (Chapter 15) and the items related to maintaining a social work position and enhancing one's professional performance (Chapter 16).

Definition of Terms

Writing about social work practice inherently presents some language problems. One has to read only a few social work texts or articles to become at least a little confused when various authors use terms somewhat differently. Unfortunately, some commonly used terms lack a precise or an agreed-upon definition. Perhaps that is to be expected in a profession that focuses on complex and dynamic human and social interactions. This book cannot overcome these long-standing problems of terminology, yet the ideas presented here will be more readily understood if we make the meanings of several terms, particularly those in the title of the book, more explicit.

A **technique** is viewed as a circumscribed, goal-oriented behavior performed in a practice situation by the social worker. It is a planned action deliberately taken by the practitioner. The application of a simple technique (e.g., making the first telephone contact) may take only a few minutes, whereas more complex techniques (e.g., assessing a client's social functioning) may require several hours or more.

Guidelines, by comparison, are a set of directions intended to influence the social worker's behavior and decisions. Guidelines are essentially lists of do's and don'ts. They might be used when working with a specific type of client (e.g., a child or a client with mental illness) or when carrying out workload management tasks (e.g., recording or writing reports).

Social work is a term applied to a specific profession that is committed to improving the quality of life for vulnerable people by helping them deal more effectively with the challenges they face and/or helping to change the social and economic conditions that create or exacerbate individual and social problems. In our introduction to Part I, we more fully spell out our perception of social work.

Practice is a term used when speaking about what social workers actually do, as in the phrase *social work practice.* The word *practice* infers action and performance by the social worker. The word *practice* also implies that social workers always are learning from what they do, always open to new insights, and never content to do what they have always done. Thus, social workers take the viewpoint that they are continually practicing, evaluating, and improving their craft.

In addition to terms in the book's title, the reader should be alert to the varied meanings of the term *client.* Common usage implies an individual who is the consumer of services. However, as used in this book, the term has a broader connotation. The **client** of the social worker may be an individual, a family or another form of household, or even a small group, committee, organization, neighborhood, community, or larger social system. Throughout the book, the term *client* is occasionally expanded to mention clientele, clients, client groups, or client systems, reminding the reader that the traditional narrow definition of *client* is not intended.

Finally, the term **intervention** is sometimes confusing to someone new to social work. The practice of social work is all about change—for example, change in the client's thoughts, perceptions, and actions, as well as change in the environment that affects or impinges on the client. The word *intervention* suggests that the social worker enters into and guides the client's search and struggle to deal more effectively with some particular challenge or problem.

New to This Edition

Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice has been carefully updated to provide students with easy access to current information on fundamental techniques required for social work practice from the generalist perspective. Virtually every chapter and every item has been revised to add new understanding, to delete outdated material, and so far as we are able, to offer clear descriptions and explanations. In addition, new features of this tenth edition of *Techniques and Guidelines* include:

- The brief descriptions of intervention approaches commonly used by social workers (see Chapter 6) have been expanded to include dialectical behavioral therapy and various trauma-related approaches.
- Several new items related to direct-practice interventions are included in this edition: clarifying roles and responsibilities, the meaning of work in social functioning, assessing a client's needed level of care, mandated reporting of abuse and neglect, understanding the family life cycle, accessing evidence-based information, and providing support for caregivers.
- We have also added two new indirect-practice items: conducting community assets assessments and participatory action planning.
- An item on measuring client change with frequency counts was added to Chapter 14 to complement the items on measuring with individualized and standardized assessment scales.
- In Chapter 15 new items related to the client with a personality disorder and the client or family experiencing an adoption have been added.
- With each new edition of this text it has been necessary to delete some items in order to make room for new content we believed was important to include. Many of these deleted items are quite relevant today and we are making them available by indicating through marginal notes how to access them. The notes appear near related content in this current edition.

Supplements for Instructors

For instructors using this book in their classes, we have created an Instructor's Manual and Test Bank to assist them in using this text. This manual can be obtained from your campus Pearson representative or by writing to Pearson Education (One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 07458).

Acknowledgments

Social work practice involves many different activities with a wide variety of clients having many different problems and concerns. Moreover, social work practice takes place within a wide spectrum of organizational settings and social environments. Consequently, social work practice entails a vast array of knowledge and skills. This book

is ambitious in the sense that it describes techniques and guidelines used by social workers practicing in different settings and with many differing types of clients and situations. That goal and broad scope calls for more expertise than that possessed by its two authors. Consequently, in preparing this book we asked more than 65 colleagues and former students in social work practice and social work education to critique our drafts of the items included in the book. We thank them for enhancing the quality of this publication, but take full responsibility for the final product.

We would also like to acknowledge the following individuals, who reviewed this tenth edition and offered suggestions for improving this publication: Kathleen Belanger, Stephen F. Austin State University; Rosalyn Deckerhoff, Florida State University; Kimberly Delles, Aurora University; Lettie Lockhart, University of Georgia; and Patricia Magee, Pittsburg State University.

Bradford W. Sheafor
Charles R. Horejsi

This page intentionally left blank

PART 1

SOCIAL WORK AND THE SOCIAL WORKER

Social work is an indispensable profession in our complex and ever-changing society. But it is an often misunderstood profession, in part because it is a profession characterized by considerable diversity. Indeed, social workers engage in a broad range of activities within many types of settings and with many different people. Some social workers deal intensely with individuals and families, whereas others work with groups, organizations, or whole communities. Some deal primarily with children, others work with older persons. Some are counselors and psychotherapists, others are supervisors, administrators, program planners, or fund-raisers. Some focus on family violence and others specialize in how to provide housing or medical care to the poor. This variety is what makes social work so challenging and stimulating. But it is because of this diversity of both clients and activities that it is so difficult to answer the simple question: What is social work?

The task of concisely defining social work in a manner that encompasses all of what social workers do has challenged the profession throughout its history. At a very fundamental level, **social work** is a profession devoted to helping people function as well as they can within their social environments and, when necessary, to changing their environments to make positive social functioning possible. This theme of improving person-in-environment functioning is clarified and illustrated throughout this text.

The authors' perspective of social work is captured in the following three-part definition of a social worker. A social worker

1. has the recognized professional preparation (i.e., knowledge, ethics, and competencies) and the requisite skills needed to provide human services sanctioned by society, and
2. especially to engage vulnerable populations (e.g., children, older people, the poor, women, persons with disabilities, ethnic groups) in efforts to bring about needed change in the clients themselves, the people around them, or related social institutions,
3. so that these individuals and groups are able to meet their social needs, prevent or eliminate difficulties, make maximum use of their abilities and strengths, lead full and satisfying lives, and contribute fully to strengthening society.

In order to be a responsible professional, the social worker must understand and function within the profession's accepted areas of expertise. Throughout its history, social work has been portrayed as both an art (one's personal characteristics) and a science (a base of knowledge and skill required to be an effective professional). Part I of this book addresses the most fundamental elements of social work practice—the blending of the person and the profession. These elements must be clearly understood before a social worker can most effectively use the techniques and guidelines described in the subsequent parts of the book to assist vulnerable and disenfranchised people as they seek to prevent or resolve the complex social problems that arise in their daily lives.

1

The Domain of the Social Work Profession

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader should be prepared to:

- Describe the unique place of social work among the several helping professions.
- Identify that the improvement of people's social functioning and changing detrimental social conditions are the dual responsibilities of social workers.
- Recognize that social work's person-in-environment focus requires the social worker to address issues and problems ranging from those of the individual to those impacting the community or society as a whole.
- Identify the merging of client, social worker, agency, and social policies and programs during the process of planned change.

When a person sets out to help others, he or she assumes a serious responsibility. The responsible helper from every profession must practice within his or her **professional domain** (i.e., the profession's area of expertise) if clients or patients are to receive the most effective services that the professional is prepared to provide. Indeed, professional helpers can harm those they intend to help if the helpers' activities extend beyond their professional boundaries because these boundaries identify and encompass the services its members are best prepared to deliver. These boundaries also determine the content of professional social work education and training.

This text is concerned with the profession of social work and how social workers assist people in addressing a variety of different problems and issues that confront them. Thus, understanding the professional domain of social work is prerequisite to helping clients address their issues.

Social work is, indeed, a curious name for a profession. In times that emphasize image over substance, it is clearly a title that lacks pizzazz. In fact, the use of the word *work* makes it seem burdensome and boring. Social work is a title that many social workers have wished they could change, possibly without understanding where it came from in the first place.

The title is attributed to Jeffrey Brackett (1860–1949), who served for nearly 30 years on the Massachusetts Board of Charities and later became the first director of what is now the Simmons College School of Social Work. In the early 1900s, Brackett argued that the word *social* should be part of this developing profession's title because it depicts the focus on people's interactions with important forces that shape their lives, such as family members, friends, or a myriad of other factors, including their relevant cultural or ethnic group, school, job, neighborhood, community, and so on. He added the word *work* to differentiate professional practice from what he considered the often misguided and self-serving philanthropic activity of wealthy volunteers. Brackett believed including *work* in the profession's title emphasized that its activities were to be orderly, responsible, and disciplined—not something to be engaged in by volunteers or those simply curious about other people's problems.

Social work, then, is an accurate title for a profession that applies helping techniques in a disciplined manner to address social problems. During the years since Brackett convinced early helping services providers to accept this title, the domain of social work has expanded and its methods have been reshaped by knowledge drawn from the social and behavioral sciences. Yet the title continues to describe this profession's central focus today.

THE SOCIAL WORK DOMAIN

It is important for the social worker to carefully examine the domain of social work (i.e., to understand its purpose, focus, scope, and sanction). This is critical for students because educational programs divide the study of social work into units, or courses, and this can lead to familiarity with the parts without necessarily understanding the whole. Yet the practice of social work requires attention to the whole of the profession's mission.

Another reason for understanding the social work domain is to help guard against **professional drift**, which is the neglect of a profession's traditional purpose and functions in favor of activities associated with another discipline. This happens most often in clinical settings when social workers align themselves too closely with models and theories used in medicine, psychology, and other disciplines that tend to minimize attention to social policy and social justice issues. These individuals may come to define themselves as their job title first (e.g., therapist, probation officer) and social worker second—or perhaps not as a social worker at all. Professional drift is also seen among administrators and managers, too, who were trained as social workers but identify primarily with the existing procedures of specific organizations rather than also introducing the perspectives of the social work profession. When professional drift occurs, it is a disservice to one's clients, social agency, and community, for it diminishes the unique commitment, perspective, and competencies that social work brings to the helping process.

A precise and generally agreed-upon understanding of the boundaries that mark the several helping professions does not exist. Different disciplines (e.g., social work, clinical psychology, school counseling, and marriage and family therapy) have claimed their domains without collaboration or mutual agreement about where one profession

ends and another begins or where they appropriately overlap. This problem is further complicated by the fact that each state that licenses the practice of these professions is free to establish its own definitions of professional boundaries. It is important, therefore, to approach learning about social work's domain with recognition that the boundaries between professions are sometimes blurred.

Social Work's Purpose

An understanding of the social work profession begins with a deep appreciation of humans as social beings. People are, indeed, social creatures. They need other people. Each individual's growth and development requires the guidance, nurturing, and protection provided by others. And that person's concept of self—and even his or her very survival, both physically and psychologically—is tied to the decisions and actions of other people. It is this interconnectedness and interdependence of people and the power of social relationships that underpins social workers' commitment to improve the quality and effectiveness of those interactions and relationships—in other words, to enhance clients' social functioning and, at the same time, to improve the social conditions that affect social functioning.

Improved Social Functioning

The concept of social functioning is a key to understanding the unique focus of social work and distinguishing it from the other helping professions. *Social functioning* relates to a person's ability to accomplish those tasks and activities necessary to meet his or her basic needs and perform his or her major social roles in the society. As Maslow (1970) suggests in his *hierarchy of human needs*, the most basic human needs concern having adequate food, shelter, and medical care, as well as being safe and protected from harm. At an important, but not quite so critical, level, people need to feel that they belong within their social networks, experience some level of acceptance and respect from others, and have the opportunity to fulfill their own potential (i.e., self-actualization). Indeed, one aspect of the diversity in the profession of social work is that social workers are prepared to help clients improve social functioning related to all levels of these basic human needs.

Another illustration of the diversity of human situations social workers address relates to the fact that their clients typically are expected to simultaneously perform several social roles, including, for example, those of being a family member, parent, spouse, student, patient, employee, neighbor, and citizen. Depending on the person's gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, abilities, occupation, and so on, these roles may be vague or quite prescribed. Furthermore, they may change over time, leading to confusion, tension, and conflict in families, at school, or at work. Thus, the concept of improving social functioning includes the wide range of actions that social workers might take to help clients strengthen the match or fit between an individual's capacities to perform these multiple social roles, and resolving the sometimes conflicting demands, expectations, resources, and opportunities within his or her social and economic environment.

Although the social work profession is concerned with the social functioning of all people, it has traditionally prioritized the needs of the most vulnerable members of society and those who experience social injustice, discrimination, and oppression. The most vulnerable people in a society are often young children, the frail elderly, persons living in poverty, persons with severe physical or mental disabilities, persons who are gay or lesbian, and persons of minority ethnic/racial backgrounds.

To carry out their commitment to improving people's social functioning, social workers are involved primarily in the activities classified as social care, social treatment, and social enhancement. **Social care** refers to those actions and efforts designed to provide people in need with access to the basics of life (e.g., food, shelter, and protection from harm) and opportunities to meet their psychosocial needs (e.g., belonging, acceptance, and self-actualization). In social care, the focus is on providing needed resources and/or helping the client be as comfortable as possible in a difficult situation that either cannot be changed or modified in the immediate future. Examples of social care would be efforts to help older people adjust to the somewhat restricted lifestyle of living in nursing homes, adults who experience a serious and persistent mental illness, and persons who face a terminal or life-threatening situation.

Social treatment involves actions designed to modify or correct an individual's or a family's dysfunctional, problematic, or distressing patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior. In social treatment, the focus is primarily on facilitating individual or family change through education, counseling, or various forms of therapy. In some cases (e.g., children in foster care, hospice work), the social worker may provide both social care and social treatment to the same family.

A third form of intervention seeks to enhance, expand, or further develop the abilities and performance of persons who are already functioning well. **Social enhancement** services emphasize growth and development of clients in a particular area of functioning without a "problem" having necessarily been identified. Some examples of enhancement-oriented services are youth recreation programs, well-baby clinics, marriage-enrichment sessions, and job-training programs.

Improved Social Conditions

Social work's second broad area of emphasis is on shaping and creating environments that will be supportive and empowering. Underpinning this goal is one of the most fundamental social work values: a strong belief in the importance of social justice. **Social justice** refers to fairness and moral rightness in how institutions such as governments, corporations, and powerful groups recognize and support the basic human rights, dignity, and worth of all people. A closely related principle is *economic justice* (sometimes called *distributive justice*), which refers to basic fairness in the apportioning and distribution of economic resources, opportunities, and burdens (e.g., taxes, bank loans, business contracts). Social workers often favor the use of various laws, public policies, and other social and economic mechanisms to ensure that all people are valued and treated with fairness and that all have reasonable opportunities for social and economic security and advancement.

Very often, political controversy has its origin in differing conceptions of what is truly fair and just and in differing beliefs about whether and how society should assume responsibility for addressing human needs and problems. Most social workers would argue that social and economic policies must recognize that all people have the right to have their basic needs met—not because of individual achievement, but simply by virtue of one's inherent worth as a human being. Among those *basic human rights* are the following:

- The right to have the food, shelter, basic medical care, and essential social services necessary for one's survival
- The right to be protected from abuse, exploitation, and oppression
- The right to work and earn a sufficient wage to secure basic resources and live with dignity

- The right to marry who one chooses, to have a family, and to be with one's family
- The right to a basic education
- The right to own property
- The right to be protected from avoidable harm and injury in the workplace
- The right to worship as one chooses—or not at all, if one chooses
- The right to privacy
- The right to associate with those one chooses
- The right to accurate information about one's community and government
- The right to participate in and influence the decisions of one's government

Social workers would also argue that rights and responsibilities necessarily coexist. With every right comes a responsibility. For example:

- If a human has the right to the basic requirements for survival, then others have the responsibility to make sure that each person has food, shelter, and essential medical care.
- If people have the right to be protected from abuse, exploitation, and oppression, then others have the responsibility to create social programs and take actions that will provide this protection when required.
- If a person has the right to work and earn a living, then others have the responsibility to make sure that employment opportunities exist and that those who work are paid a living wage.

Situations of injustice develop when people are concerned only about their own rights and have lost a sense of responsibility for others and for society as a whole. Not infrequently, social workers become advocates for those who whose rights have been ignored or abused. And in many situations, social workers provide a voice for the vulnerable and oppressed.

More often than other helping professionals, social workers seek to bring about changes in the environments in which people must live and function. When working with individuals and families, these changes are often termed *environmental modifications*. An example would be efforts by a school social worker to prepare students for the return of a former classmate who was badly scarred in an automobile accident. Another example would be special training and guidance given to a foster mother so she can provide a calming and protective atmosphere for a young vulnerable foster child who is fearful of new people.

Even when working with an organization or a community, a social worker may seek to modify its wider environment. That may entail efforts to influence local decision-makers, businesses, political leaders, and governmental agencies so they will be more supportive and more responsive to a community's needs and problems. Such interventions may involve the worker in social research, social planning, and political action intended to develop and improve laws, social policies, institutions, and social systems so they will promote social and economic justice, expand opportunities for people, and improve the everyday circumstances in which people live. Specific examples would be expanding the availability of safe and affordable housing, creating incentives for businesses to hire people with disabilities, amending laws so they better prevent discrimination, and helping neighborhood and community organizations become politically active in addressing the issues they face.

In some situations it is possible to prevent a problem from developing or from getting worse. **Prevention** consists of those actions taken to eliminate social, economic,

psychological, and other conditions known to cause or contribute to the formation of human problems. To be effective in prevention, social workers must be able to identify the specific factors and situations that contribute to the development of social problems and then select actions and activities that will reduce or eliminate their impact (see Item 12.13). Borrowing from the public health model, three levels of prevention can be identified:

Level 1: Primary prevention. Actions intended to deter the problem from ever developing
Level 2: Secondary prevention. Actions intended to detect a problem at its early stages and address it while it is still relatively easy to change
Level 3: Tertiary prevention. Actions intended to address an already serious problem in ways that keep it from growing even worse, causing additional damage, or spreading to others

Social Work's Focus

Social work is certainly not the only profession concerned with how individuals and families function, nor is it the only profession interested in social conditions and social problems. However, it is social work's *simultaneous focus* on both the person and the person's environment that makes social work unique among the various helping professions. This pivotal construct is termed **person-in-environment**.

Social workers strive to view each individual as a **whole person**, having many dimensions: biological, intellectual, emotional, social, familial, spiritual, economic, communal, and so on. It is this concern for the whole or the complete person that contributes to the breadth of issues addressed by the social work profession—for example, the individual's capacity to meet basic physical needs (food, housing, health care, etc.), the person's levels of knowledge and skills needed to cope with life's demands, the person's values about what is important in his or her own life and how others are viewed, the individual's goals and aspirations, and the like. It is important to note the person-in-environment construct uses the word *person*, not *personality*. Personality is but one component of the whole person. A focus only on personality without attending to other influences on that person would be incongruous with the domain of social work and slant it toward the domain of psychology.

A person always lives within a particular environment. As used here, the term **environment** refers to one's surroundings—that multitude of physical and social structures, forces, and processes that affect humans and all other life forms. Of particular interest to social workers are those systems, structures, and conditions that most frequently and most directly affect a person's day-to-day social functioning (i.e., the person's *immediate environment*). One's immediate environment includes the individual's family, close friends, neighborhood, workplace, and the services and programs he or she uses.

Social workers devote major attention to helping clients improve aspects of their immediate environment. In addition, they are also concerned about what can be termed the client's *distant environment*. These more remote influences have to do with what people need for healthy growth and development, such as clean air, drinkable water, shelter, and good soil to produce food. And because biological well-being is a prerequisite to positive social functioning, social workers must also be concerned with problems such as prevention of disease and pollution.

Because social relationships are of central concern to their profession, social workers must understand the power of a social environment—both its potentially helpful and

harmful influences. Humans are social creatures with a strong need to be accepted by others. Achieving what others in our environment do is a powerful force for change—either positive or negative. Social workers also understand that if a person's environment changes to become more supportive and nurturing, that individual will be more likely to make positive changes in attitude and behavior.

Social Work's Scope

A profession's **scope** can be thought of as the range of activities and involvements appropriate to its mission. One way of describing social work's scope involves classifying the intervention by the size of the client system. Practice at the **micro level** focuses on the individual and his or her most intimate interactions, such as exchanges between husband and wife, parent and child, close friends, and family members. The terms *interpersonal helping, direct practice,* and *clinical practice* are often used interchangeably with *micro-level practice.*

At the other extreme, **macro-level** practice may involve work with and efforts to change an organization, community, state, or even society as a whole. Macro-level practice also deals with interpersonal relations, but these are the interactions between and among the people who represent organizations or are members of a work group such as an agency committee or interagency task force. When engaged in macro-level practice, the social worker is frequently involved in activities such as administration, fund-raising, proposed legislation testimony, policy analysis, class advocacy, and social resource development.

Between the micro and macro levels is **mezzo-level** (midlevel) practice. Practice at this level is concerned with relationships and interactions that are somewhat less intimate than those associated with family life but more personally meaningful than those occurring among organizational and institutional representatives. Examples of midlevel practice would be the change efforts with and within a self-help or therapy group, among peers at school or work, and among neighbors.

Some practice approaches address more than one intervention level. For example, the generalist perspective requires the social worker to be capable of practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels (see Chapter 6).

Social Work's Sanction

The concept of **sanction** refers to the authorization, approval, or permission needed to perform certain tasks or activities—ones that can have a significant impact on someone's life and possibly cause harm. Three sources provide sanction for social work practice. One of these is legislation at the state and federal levels that explicitly or implicitly recognizes and approves social work activities. This is most apparent in the state licensing and regulation of individual social work practitioners. Sanction is implicit in various forms of legislation that creates social programs and allocation of funds for social work activity.

A second source of sanction is the many private human services organizations (both nonprofit and profit-making agencies) that endorse social work by recruiting and hiring social workers to provide services or by purchasing services from social workers who are in private practice or employed by other agencies. Indirectly, then, the community sanctions and pays social workers to provide specific services.

Finally, the true test of public sanction for practice is the willingness of clients to seek out and use services offered by social workers. In order to win the trust of clients, social

workers must demonstrate on a daily basis that they are capable of providing effective services and conduct themselves in a responsible and ethical manner.

In return for this sanction, both individual social work practitioners and the profession, through its professional organizations and through state licensing boards and accrediting bodies, are obliged to make sure that social work practitioners are competent and adhere to the *NASW Code of Ethics* (see Item 9.5).

AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Indeed, many factors shape the work of the social worker. Figure 1.1 presents a model of the key factors that influence social work practice and shows how the content in the 16 chapters of this book fits together to reflect the whole of social work. The overlapping circles in the center of the figure depict the client (or client system) and the social worker as joined in an effort to bring about a desired change in the client's functioning or situation. This **planned change process** involves several phases during which the client and social worker move from their decision to initiate action to improve some aspect of the client's social functioning, through assessment and action phases and on to an evaluation of its success and a decision to terminate the helping activity. Although the social worker is expected to guide this process, the client must ultimately decide that change is needed and commit to utilizing the helping resources identified by or provided by the worker.

"The Client" side of Figure 1.1 indicates that the client's problem or concern is, most likely, the product of a combination of personal and environmental factors. Each client has a unique set of *personal characteristics* (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, life experiences, beliefs, strengths, limitations, needs) that may have contributed in some way to the situation being addressed. Some of these personal characteristics will be important resources during the helping process.

Clients do not exist in isolation. Their *immediate environment* might include friends, family, school personnel, employers, natural helpers, neighborhood or community groups, or even other professional helpers, to mention just a few. In some cases these environmental influences have contributed to the client's problem and may need to become targets for change and others may be potential social supports and resources.

"The Social Worker" side of Figure 1.1 suggests that the worker brings unique personal characteristics and a professional background to the change process. These are experienced by the client through what the social worker actually does (i.e., the worker's activities and application of skills and techniques). What the worker does is a function of the specific professional role he or she has assumed and the conceptual framework(s) he or she has selected to guide practice. The social worker's *personal characteristics* encompass many factors. For example, the social worker's unique perspectives on the causes of human suffering, as well as her or his particular values, are inevitably introduced into the change process. Those perspectives will have been shaped by the social workers' unique life experiences of family, community, socioeconomic background, gender, age, sexual orientation, and the like. All of these characteristics to some degree affect the social worker–client relationship.

At the same time, the practitioner brings the special contribution of a *professional background* to social work, which differentiates the social worker from the client's friends, family, and the professionals representing other disciplines who may also be working with the client or have attempted to help in the past. What is this professional background?

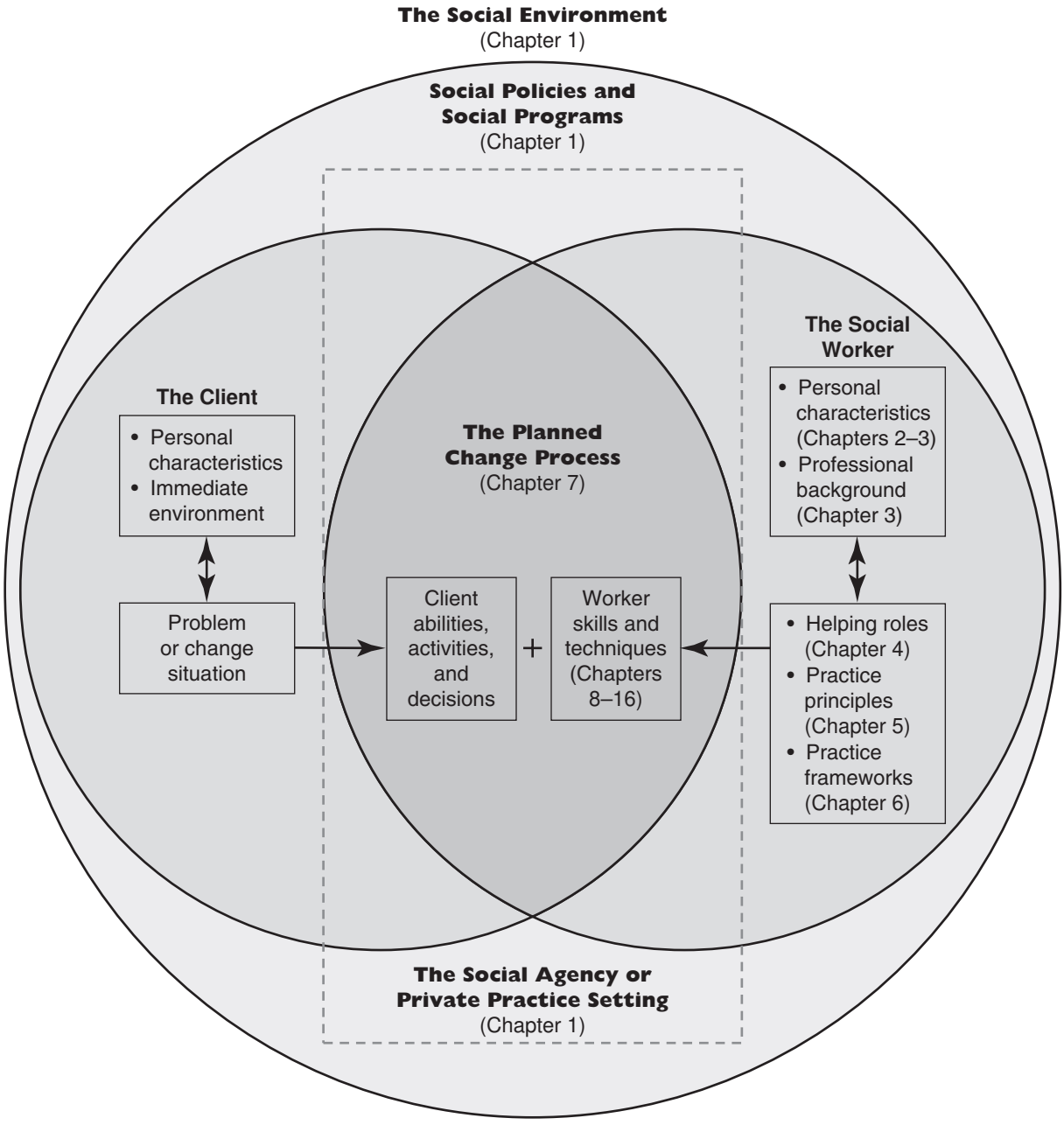

Figure 1.1
An Integrative View of Social Work Practice

First and foremost, the social worker brings the belief system, values, ethical principles, and focus on social functioning that are common to social work. Through education and experience, the social worker develops the "artistic" part of his or her helping skill (i.e., the practice wisdom and the natural ability to use his or her personal characteristics, special talents, and unique style to help clients). In addition, the social worker brings the "science" of social work (i.e., the knowledge about people and their social interactions, as well as knowledge about how to help them make changes in their circumstances and functioning).

As social workers carry out their responsibilities, they perform various *helping roles*. Indeed, social workers must be prepared to perform a wide variety of roles and functions, ranging from linking clients to appropriate resources, to assessing case situations and providing direct services, to planning and conducting social action.

The social work profession has a long history of adopting and using many different approaches in its efforts to provide needed and effective services. Although there is no established social work practice approach or strategy that fits all practice situations, some tried-and-true guidelines have evolved. These have been reduced to a set of *practice principles* that are, perhaps, the most universal directives for how a social worker should conduct her or his practice.

Another important element of the social worker's professional background is knowledge of the various *practice frameworks* that guide one's practice decisions and the change process (e.g., practice perspectives, theories, and models). The social worker must master several of these frameworks in order to select the most appropriate and effective approach for each client situation.

Finally, the social worker's *skills* and mastery of *techniques* are his or her most observable contribution to the change process. The skills or techniques selected by the social worker will depend, of course, on the nature of the client's problem or concern, the expectations of the practice setting, and the worker's own competence in using them.

Returning to Figure 1.1, it is important to recognize that social work practice usually takes place within a particular **social environment**—namely, the context of a social agency. For the client, this agency is a type of *distant environment*. Typically, the agency has been shaped by local, state, and/or national social policies and its programs are a reflection of society's values and beliefs. Commitment to the social welfare of its members varies among societies; within the United States, it even varies among regions, states, and communities. Having sound **social policies** aimed at improving the well-being of all people is essential for a just, healthy, and productive society. Yet, every social worker knows that the country's social policies leave much to be desired.

Through its legislative and other decision-making bodies, society creates **social programs** intended to help certain people. These programs take three basic forms:

- *Social provisions* involve providing tangible goods (e.g., money, food, clothing, and housing) for persons in need.
- *Personal services* include intangible services (e.g., counseling, therapy, and learning experiences) intended to help people resolve and/or prevent their problems.
- *Social action* programs are concerned with changing aspects of the social environment to make it more responsive to people's needs and wants.

The particular philosophy on which social programs are built has a significant bearing on how smoothly they operate, how effective they are, and how they affect both the client and the social worker. The two dominant competing philosophies of social welfare, a safety net or a social utility, are at the heart of considerable debate about how to provide human services.

Historically, the prevailing philosophy in the United States contended that, ideally, private charities (e.g., nonprofit agencies and churches), with the aid of voluntary donations, should address such problems as poverty, lack of health care, homelessness, hunger, dependent children, and the like. If public tax-supported social programs were to exist, they would serve only as a *safety net*, providing a minimal level of assistance to those who are in desperate economic straits and who can demonstrate "real need" by meeting strict eligibility criteria. In other words, these public programs would be a last

resort for those who are in a dire situation. It was gradually recognized that private funding could not come close to meeting the income, health, mental health, and other needs of the most vulnerable members of the society, and so government-supported agencies are increasingly providing the bulk of the human services for people experiencing serious social issues.

A second philosophy of social welfare, the *social utilities* conception, considers public tax-supported social programs to be first-line functions of society (similar to a public education, libraries, highways, and law enforcement). In other words, this view is that social welfare is a fundamental government responsibility and it should make these programs available to all of its citizens, usually without a means test and without having to prove the existence of a genuine emergency. If a fee is charged for a particular service, the amount it is minimal or easily waived. Such programs are able to place an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Social welfare benefits, services, and programs are typically provided through a **social agency** or an organization created for this purpose. For the most part, social work is an agency-based profession and most social workers are agency employees. A social agency might be a public human services department, mental health center, school, hospital, neighborhood center, or any of a number of differing organizational structures. It may be a *public agency* supported by tax funds and governed by elected officials, a *private nonprofit agency* operating under the auspices of a volunteer board and supported primarily by fees and voluntary donations, or a *private for-profit agency* providing services under the auspices of a corporation. Regardless of the structure, the basic functions of the agency are to administer social programs and to monitor the quality of the helping process.

To perform these functions, the agency must secure money, staff, and other resources; determine which people are eligible for its services; and maintain an administrative structure that will meet targeted social needs in an efficient and effective manner. The most important ingredient of a social agency is its people. Receptionists, custodians, administrators, and service providers all must work together to deliver successful programs. Often, several helping professions are employed in the same agency. In such interdisciplinary programs, each profession brings its own perspective on helping—as well as the special competencies appropriate to the domain of that profession.

Social workers are also increasingly providing services through **private practice**. These private practitioners maintain an independent practice, as is typical in medicine and law, and contract directly with their clients to provide services. Unless the practice is large and involves several social workers and/or professionals for other disciplines, it functions more as a small business than a social agency.

CONCLUSION

Social work is one of several human services professions that have been sanctioned by society to help improve the quality of life for its people. Other such helping professions include clinical psychology, drug and alcohol counseling, marriage and family counseling, school psychology, medicine, rehabilitation counseling, nursing, and so on. The uniqueness of social work among these professions is its focus on the social functioning of people and helping them interact more effectively with their environments—both their immediate and distant environments. Social workers perform this role by assisting people in addressing issues in their social functioning and working to prevent social problems from emerging or, if they already exist, from getting worse.

Increasingly, conflict and competition arise among the various human services professions over issues of the domain (or turf) of each. These squabbles and power struggles tend to center on competition for jobs, salary, status, and control, as well as disagreements over which profession is most qualified to perform certain tasks. To minimize the effect of this head butting on service delivery, it is important for the members of these professions to engage in **interprofessional collaboration** as they provide their services. However, each discipline must avoid letting its practice activities drift into the areas of expertise of the other professions.

Social workers have historically claimed they represent the profession best prepared to help people resolve problems in social functioning and to guide social change efforts that can prevent problems from occurring or growing worse. It is important that social workers maintain their focus on these central features of their domain.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Maslow, Abraham H. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
National Association of Social Workers. *Code of Ethics*. Washington, DC: NASW, 1999.
Sheafor, Bradford W., Armando T. Morales, and Malcolm E. Scott. *Social Work: A Profession of Many Faces,* 12th ed. rev. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012.

2

Merging Person with Profession

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader should be prepared to:

- Recognize that being a social worker can be both personally rewarding and, at times, discouraging and frustrating.
- Recognize that social work is a career that can affect the social worker's personal life.
- Identify tasks a new social worker should be prepared to complete in order to develop a positive professional reputation.
- Identify the importance of a social worker being prepared to address issues in agency functioning and/or community conditions that compromise or threaten the quality of life for residents of the community.
- Demonstrate commitment to being fit for social work practice and seeking help in periods of stress or when addressing personal problems.
- Describe the importance of not taking oneself too seriously and enjoying the practice of social work by maintaining a sense of humor about the trials and tribulations of social work practice.

Social workers' professional roles and responsibilities are always, to some degree, intertwined with their personal lives. They will try to keep professional concerns separate from their personal and family lives but the very nature of social work makes this difficult.

The social work profession views the individual client as a whole person, with many dimensions to consider such as the physical, emotional, psychological, social, spiritual, and the intellectual. This, of course, also describes the social worker, for he or she responds as a whole person to the demands of the job and profession. Thus, a social worker's beliefs, values, physical and emotional well-being, and all other dimensions of living will both influence and be influenced by what the social worker encounters each day in his or her professional practice.

The social worker views the client as always functioning within a particular situational and environmental context. Social workers, too, function within various professional and organizational

contexts. Also, they have numerous roles and responsibilities in addition to those associated with their jobs. For example, a social worker is part of a family or household, often a spouse or partner, often a parent, part of friendship and social networks, and a resident in a particular neighborhood and community. Moreover, he or she may be a member of an ethnic group, affiliated with a religious denomination or faith community, a member of a special-interest group or political party, and a member of one or more service organizations. Given this multitude of connections and contexts, the social worker is challenged to cope with the tensions and conflicts that can easily arise between personal matters and professional obligations.

Although this book focuses primarily on the activities that occur during the hours that the social worker devotes to her or his profession, this chapter examines how the realities of practice may impinge on the worker's private life. The observations presented here are intended to assist social workers in striking a healthy balance between their personal needs and responsibilities and the demands and responsibilities of social work practice.

SELECTING SOCIAL WORK AS A CAREER

People's lives are shaped by the choices they make. Because choosing social work as a career has some unique implications for self and family, those attracted to this profession must consider (and periodically reconsider) if social work should be their life's work. There must be a good fit between the person and his or her occupation. A mismatch can cause stress and threaten one's health and well-being. A person who feels trapped in the profession cannot bring the desired energy and commitment to the helping process, and consequently, clients will be poorly served.

Social Work as a Life Companion

An individual considering a social work career must be satisfied and comfortable with his or her answers to the following questions:

- Is being a social worker a meaningful and worthwhile way for me to live my life?
- Will the practice of social work be an appropriate use of my special gifts, abilities, and skills?
- Do my personal beliefs, values, ethical standards, and goals in life fit well with those of the social work profession?
- What impact will my career in social work have on my family?
- What impact will this career have on my physical and mental health and the overall quality of my life?

Each person needs to identify what is truly important. The work and rewards that accrue from being a social worker should be consistent with those priorities.

Earning a Living as a Social Worker

People do not choose the social work profession because of the money they will earn, but they cannot devote their time to the practice of social work unless they can earn a decent living. Social work has never been a high-paying profession and in contrast to some occupations, the earning power of social workers does not rise rapidly or continually as they gain skill and experience. Social workers earn a modest income and have limited opportunity to climb the economic ladder. However, the satisfaction of doing something truly

worthwhile and making a difference in the lives of people is often viewed by social workers as an offsetting form of compensation.

Most entry-level social work jobs involve the provision of services directly to clients. After several years in the direct services, many social workers seek positions in supervision and administration as a way of increasing their incomes. This may be a wise move for those attracted to management tasks such as budgeting, policy development, public relations, personnel selection, and staff training. It may be an unwise decision for those whose job satisfaction comes primarily from direct contact with clients.

Those entering social work should expect to change jobs from 5 to 10 times during their working years. Sometimes a job change is prompted by an agency's staff reductions, but most often it is a matter of personal choice. Among the reasons why social workers change jobs are the following:

- Desire for higher salary, better benefits, or job security
- Desire to learn a new field of practice and work with clients having a different set of problems or concerns
- Desire for more discretion and control over practice decisions and methods
- Desire to work in a setting that embraces new ideas and innovations
- Desire for a less stressful or a safer work environment
- Opportunity to receive better supervision or additional training
- Desire to remove oneself from conflicts with a supervisor or agency administrator
- Need to adjust work schedule due to changes in personal or family life (e.g., a marriage, divorce, birth of child, illness)

Those preparing to enter social work are advised to identify their personal and career goals and formulate a plan for reaching those goals. Examples of goals include becoming skilled in work with certain client populations, having the opportunity to design an innovative program, becoming an administrator of a certain type of agency, conducting research on a particular topic, and so on. In these times of rapid change, it can be difficult to develop such a plan and even more difficult to follow it. However, career planning provides a framework for making decisions about what experiences and training to pursue.

The School-to-Job Transition

Social work is a rewarding career but it is full of challenges. For many social workers these challenges will become apparent as they transition from the role of student into that of being a paid professional within an agency setting. Many new social workers will experience a reality shock. For example, in describing her new job, a very capable recent graduate told one of the authors: "I had no idea that my clients would be so troubled, my job so difficult, and that my agency setting would be so complex."

Those beginning their first social work job soon realize that there is seldom enough time to do all that needs to be done. Many discover that in far too many social agencies, core social work values and ethical principles have taken a backseat to the forces of political pressure, administrative expediency, budget limitations, the fear of lawsuits, and the day-by-day struggle to cope with the workload. Many find that some colleagues have lost their enthusiasm and are too fatigued and demoralized to be effective. If the workplace environment is rushed and stressful, it can be a challenge to maintain one's professional ideals and standards.

Every new social worker is somewhat frustrated by the slowness of change, whether that change is by individual clients, organizations, or communities. They discover that identifying or knowing what needs to change is relatively easy compared to actually achieving that change. Programs of social work education teach about the process of change and the techniques for facilitating change, but they cannot teach the personal qualities of patience, perseverance, tenacity, and tolerance so necessary for turning good ideas into reality.

New social work graduates who were high academic achievers may face a special challenge as they move into agency-based practice. Simply put, they are accustomed to doing grade-A academic work and they expect to do high-quality work on the job. They often discover, however, that there is not enough time for perfection and probably only enough time for C-level, or average, work.

Some of the agencies and organizations that employ social workers provide a superb work environment for their employees, but far too many work settings are noisy, crowded, and even dangerous. Dissatisfaction with such conditions has led many experienced social workers to enter private practice in search of a more agreeable work environment and more control over what they do and how they do it. Although this is an understandable response to frustration, it has the effect of drawing talented social workers away from the profession's traditional commitment to serving the poor and oppressed. Throughout their careers, social workers must struggle to reconcile their desire for adequate income and a decent work environment with their concern for the poor and a commitment to social and economic justice.

Many new social workers are surprised to discover that office or organizational politics plays a significant role in the decisions and functioning of their agency settings. Within every organization—whether a business, a social agency, a religious body, or a professional association—people use their power and authority to move the organization in directions they perceive as desirable. Thus, all organizations are inherently political to some degree. Social workers, however, must guard against becoming so absorbed in the politics of the workplace that they lose sight of their agency's real purpose and the people it is to serve.

ESTABLISHING ONESELF AS A SOCIAL WORKER

It is not enough for the new social worker to carry his or her credentials and skills into a job and simply assume that everything will fall in place for a satisfying and effective career. The social worker must first demonstrate to clients, colleagues, and other agencies in the community that he or she is competent and trustworthy.

Acquiring a Reputation

Every social worker will acquire a reputation within his or her agency, within the local human services network, and among the clients he or she serves. That reputation will have a significant impact on his or her work with clients, professional communications, interagency cooperation, and whether the worker is considered for promotion or offered other social work jobs. Social workers should regularly review how their statements, decisions, behavior, and associations are shaping their reputations.

One need only sit in on a few support group meetings or spend an hour in an agency waiting room to realize that many clients talk freely about the social workers, doctors,

teachers, and other professionals they know. They tell friends, neighbors, and other clients about how they have been treated and who does a good job and who to avoid. Clients are especially sensitive to whether social workers really listen to what they are saying, are available when needed, and fair in the decisions they make.

Within an agency, each social worker acquires a reputation as an employee. Over time, the other agency employees form an opinion about the worker's competence, whether she or he is honest and dependable, and a good team member. That reputation will affect the willingness of the other employees to offer their support, assistance, and cooperation.

Reputation is a determining factor in whether a private practice or a fee-for-service program will succeed. If they have a choice, people will select a professional with a good reputation and avoid using agencies and professionals who have poor or questionable reputations. In addition, those who are in a position to refer clients to a social worker will select a practitioner who has a reputation for being competent, ethical, and effective.

A good reputation can take years to develop but can be quickly destroyed by others. For this reason, many cultures consider slander and the spreading of gossip that can ruin a person's reputation to be among the most reprehensible of moral transgressions.

Conflict over Agency Policy

Every social worker comes to her or his practice setting with a set of beliefs, values, standards, and expectations. It is inevitable that she or he will, from time to time, disagree with agency policy and administrative decisions. How is a worker to respond in such situations? The decision on what to do must be based on a thoughtful examination of the issue or conflict. One might begin this examination by seeking answers to the following questions:

- Which of my beliefs, values, or standards is threatened or violated by this agency policy or decision? Is my concern or conflict a matter of principle or possibly arising from my own bias or perhaps from a difference in professional or administrative style?
- Why has my agency administration taken this position? What are the arguments for and against this position? What political and economic forces and circumstances gave rise to this position?
- What impact does this position or policy have on those served by my agency? How will it affect those most at risk and most in need of agency services?
- What impact does this position or policy have on the community? Does it enhance and strengthen the functioning of individuals, families, and the community? Does it recognize the obligation of communities and society to promote the common good, expand social and economic opportunities, and provide assistance to those unable to meet their basic needs?
- Does the position or policy recognize the dignity and worth of every person as well as the basic right to self-determination? Does the position recognize that every competent person is responsible for his or her own actions and must accept the consequences for violating legitimate laws?

If the worker concludes that this is, indeed, a serious matter and is clearly unfair and harmful to clients, he or she should seek guidance from trusted, knowledgeable, and experienced peers on how it might be changed. If the problematic situation cannot be changed, the worker must ponder his or her future with the agency. In extreme cases and when there is no acceptable alternative, the worker may need to seek employment elsewhere.

One of the most painful situations social workers can experience is to discover that they are employed by an organization that does not really respect its clients, value professional competence, or expect ethical conduct. Such situations can arise when an organization's administration is more concerned about politics, cost cutting, or profit than providing needed services.

If the worker is expected or asked by his or her agency to perform a task or take an action that would violate his or her professional or personal moral standards, the worker should voice these concerns, document them in a letter to the administrator, and formally request to be excused from having to participate in the questionable activity.

All organizations develop a culture consisting of its values, expectations, and group norms. Once formed, an organizational culture tends to perpetuate itself while exerting a pervasive effect on its employees who are rewarded when they accept this culture and ostracized when they do not. A social worker employed by an organization with a destructive culture will need to work to change that culture or else look for another job.

When issues are complex, knowing what is right is never easy and doing what is right is always difficult.

Promoting Social Justice

Most of the individuals attracted to social work are somewhat idealistic. They want to make the world a better place. As discussed in Chapter 1, the social work profession and social workers strive to create a more just and humane society. Social workers seek to establish **social justice**, a condition where everyone in the society shares in the same rights, opportunities, and protections.

All considerations of social justice rest on the core beliefs that every human being has inherent dignity and is intrinsically valuable. Moreover, every individual possesses certain inalienable rights. This worth of the individual person is not something that must be earned or proved, nor is it a privilege obtained because of one's skin color, nationality, gender, income, social status, health, education, political affiliation, occupation, or other life circumstances. Simply by virtue of being human, every person has a right to be treated with fairness and respect, protected from abuse and exploitation, and granted opportunities to have a family, secure an education and meaningful work, and have access to basic health care and social services.

A multitude of economic, political, historical, and social forces can give rise to unjust and dehumanizing conditions. Because an injustice can be woven into a society's dominant belief systems and into social and economic structures, situations of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination may go unnoticed by all but those who are directly harmed. Social workers must be always open to the possibility that they or their agencies may unintentionally and unknowingly contribute to or perpetuate a social injustice.

Usually we do not feel personally responsible for the existence of social and economic injustice. When an injustice is brought to our attention, we are likely to conclude that it is the fault of society and beyond our control. We may feel helpless and conclude that we are too small a force to make any real change in the situation. Social injustice is indeed a societal problem, but the responsibility to oppose injustice rests with the individual.

Achieving social justice is a complex undertaking, and even among people of goodwill and compassion, there will be different perspectives on what is truly fair and what actions move us toward a more just and humane society. Social workers must pursue

social and economic justice in ways that recognize legitimate differences of opinion while maintaining respect for those with whom they disagree.

In order to correct an injustice, people must become politically involved, speak out, and propose practical solutions. However, those who seek social reform must also understand that they will likely pay a price for challenging powerful individuals and groups that stand to lose money, power, or position if the status quo is altered. Those who work for justice may be ridiculed, lose their jobs, or, in extreme cases, subjected to physical threats and injury.

Political Involvement

Efforts to advance social and economic justice require participation in the political process. **Politics** is the art of gaining, exercising, and retaining power. Some social workers are attracted to politics; others find it distasteful. The degree to which one becomes involved in political activity will reflect such factors as level of interest, available time, and temperament. Being an informed and conscientious voter is, of course, essential, but more is required of social workers if they are to remain true to the "soul" of their chosen profession. A social worker's participation in the political process will usually involve one or more of the following activities:

- Assessing the impact of an existing or proposed law, social policy, or program on people, especially the most vulnerable members of society
- Participating in the development and formulation of just and effective social policies
- Educating the public about the social dimensions and ramifications of existing and proposed laws and policies
- Entering into the public debate and advocating for needed changes
- Working for the election of those who will advance social and economic justice

As social workers become involved in the political process, they must decide where they stand on complex issues. This can be difficult because there are usually some valid arguments on all sides of the debate. Most social workers tend to be on the liberal or progressive side of the conservative-to-liberal continuum. However, it is a mistake for social workers to assume that they must choose between being either a liberal or a conservative. Rather, they may need to be a little of both. Everyone who is intellectually and spiritually alive is liberal in the sense of being open to the truth, regardless of its source; desirous of needed change; and accepting of governmental action if it will expand opportunities and improve the lives of people. Similarly, every thoughtful and responsible person will be conservative in the sense of wanting to preserve those values, social arrangements, and approaches that have been fair and beneficial to people. The newest idea is not necessarily the best one and, not infrequently, there is a negative side to government intervention. Thus, depending on the issue, a social worker might line up on either the liberal or conservative side of a debate. The merits and wisdom of a proposal, and not political ideology or political party, should determine one's stance on an issue.

The political health of a nation, state, or community depends on informed citizens debating the issues and finding feasible ways of achieving social and economic justice and advancing the common good. Such a debate requires not only mutual trust and goodwill among all involved but also a respect for diversity, a common language and terminology, and an agreement on core beliefs about people, society, and government. Those presenting or arguing their viewpoints should presume that those on the other side of the issue are acting in good faith and merit respect and a genuine effort to understand their

opinions and reasoning. People destroy the possibility of finding common ground and a workable compromise if they replace dialogue with monologue, reason with slogans, and civility with coercion.

Political involvement can be tiring and frustrating. Some lose heart when confronted with setbacks. In order to continue working for justice and needed changes, year after year, social workers must develop the personal qualities of patience, perseverance, and tolerance. They need to present their positions without being shrill and offensive. They must hold to their core beliefs and principles without becoming narrow and partisan. They need to guard against being manipulated and refrain from manipulating others. And they need to focus on what brings people together rather than on what divides them.

Social workers are often in a position to directly observe the impact of a social policy or program on the lives of people. Such observations are seldom available to the politicians who write the laws and the administrators who design programs and formulate operating procedures. Thus, the social worker has both an opportunity and the obligation to document the real impact of legislation, policies, and administrative decisions, as well as to offer ideas on how policies and programs can be made more humane, effective, and efficient. Social workers who are skilled speakers and writers can make valuable contributions to the education of legislators and the citizenry.

THE INTERPLAY OF ONE'S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES

Social workers frequently meet people who have overcome great obstacles and who care deeply about their families and communities. Getting to know these individuals is an inspiring and uplifting experience. At the same time, social work practice can be stressful and requires a heavy commitment of time and energy. Those demands affect the social worker and his or her family.

Being Changed by Your Clients

In every type of practice, social workers will meet clients and other people who are truly remarkable because of their courage, wisdom, compassion, and generosity. Many will have faced great challenges and hardship. Social workers have the awesome opportunity of learning from these individuals. At a deeper level, many professional relationships are an exchange of intangible gifts and both the social worker and the client stand to be changed by what they give to and receive from each other.

One cannot begin to really know a client without coming to understand how the client thinks and feels about life. In many cases, the client's perspectives, beliefs, and values will be significantly different from those of the social worker. This may challenge the worker to rethink his or her own life experiences and reevaluate priorities.

A social worker may be nudged toward further self-examination by a client's criticism. A client might, for example, accuse a social worker of being rushed, insensitive, or unfair. The worker must remain open to the possibility that a client's uncomplimentary evaluation is accurate and, if that is the case, strive to modify the attitudes and behaviors that have offended the client.

The clients who cause a social worker to feel anguish and inadequacy are a particularly painful source of a worker's self-examination. Not infrequently, the worker's skills and the available resources are insufficient or ineffective in helping a troubled client

modify destructive behavior. In such situations, the worker will feel powerless and helpless as these clients make bad choices that disrupt family relationships, damage their health, or get them into trouble with the law. These humbling experiences teach the social worker that she or he is but one small influence in a client's life.

Personal Responses to Clients in Need

Many of the clients served by social workers live in poverty and experience misery because they cannot pay for even the basics such as food, shelter, and health care. By comparison, the social worker, with only a modest income, seems quite well off. This situation confronts the worker with a troubling question about his or her individual responsibility. Once a social worker has done all he or she can do as a professional and as an agency's representative, what, if anything, remains as a purely personal responsibility? Should a social worker ever spend his or her own money to address a client's emergency?

Some would quickly answer no and argue that meeting people's basic needs is a community and governmental responsibility. For a social worker to do so, even occasionally, would be unreasonable. Moreover, it might make it too easy for the community or government to ignore and avoid its responsibilities. On the other hand, some professionals might argue that even when social welfare systems fail to meet basic human needs, the social worker still has a personal moral and ethical responsibility to respond in certain cases. It can be argued that a social worker, because of his or her knowledge, has a unique obligation beyond that of the ordinary citizen.

Ultimately, one's answer to this complex question is a matter of conscience and a judgment call as to what action would be helpful to the client and reasonable for the social worker. The social worker might consider the following questions in formulating his or her response:

- What situations, if any, require some extraordinary and essentially personal response by the professional that is above and beyond what the agency provides? What if the situation involves a person who is especially vulnerable and at risk of imminent harm?
- Given that social workers may encounter desperate and emergency situations on a daily basis, is it realistic to even consider using one's personal financial resources to address these situations? If a personal response is not reasonable, is some type of political or community action required of the worker?
- If a social worker decides to make a personal contribution to deal with some client emergency (e.g., to buy food, pay for a night's lodging, pay cab fare), how is this to be done? Can it be done in a way that keeps the donor's identity confidential so the client does not feel awkward or beholden to the social worker? What personal, ethical, and legal pitfalls might result from making a cash contribution directly to a client?
- Should agencies have a policy on whether, when, and how a personal contribution can occur? Would it be appropriate for the workers of an agency to create and donate to a special emergency fund that is separate from the agency's budget?

The Social Worker's Family

It is difficult to keep work-related concerns from affecting one's personal life and family relationships. It is also difficult to keep one's personal and family responsibilities from affecting professional performance. Nevertheless, social workers must strive to maintain

a healthy separation and protect his or her family from being adversely impacted by work-related concerns.

Those who provide direct services to seriously troubled and dysfunctional clients will observe behaviors and situations that may be extreme, depraved, and cruel. Long-term exposure to such behavior and circumstances can distort a worker's sense of normality and moral compass. In an adult correctional setting, for example, the daily exposure to intimidation, violence, and manipulation can dull one's sensitivity and stretch one's tolerance for and acceptance of abuse and inhumane treatment. Skewed views on what is acceptable behavior, if brought home to one's family or into one's friendships, can strain those relationships.

Like everyone else, social workers experience personal and family problems. When the worry associated with personal concerns is added to the stress of social work practice, the worker may feel overwhelmed. During these times, she or he needs the support of colleagues and must be open to guidance provided by those able to see more objectively what is happening.

A SELF-CARE PROGRAM FOR THE SOCIAL WORKER

To be of maximum assistance to clients, a social worker must maintain a proper boundary in professional relationships. The worker's own need for meaningful relationships and friendships must be met outside of relationships with clients. In addition, effective practice requires that the worker be intellectually alert and physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy.

Friendships and Community

Good friends provide us with support and encouragement, and help us to examine our assumptions, test reality, and maintain perspective. Good friends also provide constructive criticism when we behave inappropriately.

Because people tend to choose friends who are similar to themselves, many friendships develop within the workplace. Although this is a natural occurrence, it has a downside. It can, for example, limit one's exposure to differing points of view. If a social worker's friends are mostly other social workers, he or she may come to believe that only another social worker can understand his or her concerns and frustrations. In some cases, a narrow circle of friends gives rise to an "us against them" mentality. The social worker should cultivate friendships with people from outside the profession in order to attain varied perspectives on life, the community, and society.

Unfortunately, the feeling of belonging and the sense of community are often missing in our fast-moving society. A genuine sense of belonging to a community is something that grows slowly as individuals share what they have—time, energy, creativity, or money—with others in order to reach a common goal. Long-term associations, personal sacrifices, trust, mutual respect, and loyalty are the building blocks of community and a sense of belonging; there are no shortcuts.

Social workers often find a spirit of community and camaraderie through participation in professional associations such as the National Association of Social Workers. Professional organizations are important because they advance the profession. However, social workers should not limit their involvements to professional groups and organizations. They should also participate in neighborhood and local community events, projects, and activities.

Self-Worth and Self-Image

Social work is not an esteemed profession. To a large extent, this is because its purpose and activities are not readily apparent to the public. Also, social workers often call attention to problems and social conditions that many in society would prefer to ignore and deny. Because so many of the people served by social workers and social agencies are devalued and avoided (e.g., the poor, parents who abuse their children, the mentally ill, individuals addicted to drugs, the homeless), social workers are, by association, also devalued.

Given the types of concerns they address, it is not surprising that social agencies and social workers become targets for criticism by politicians and others who do not want to be reminded of unmet human needs, injustice, and the inadequacy of existing programs. Not infrequently, social workers are blamed for systemic and societal problems that are beyond the control of any one person, profession, or agency. Social workers understand that such criticism is unreasonable or misdirected, but it is still painful and frustrating. Social workers, like all people, want to be understood, valued, and respected.

In order to counteract feelings of being devalued and misunderstood, social workers must possess a strong sense of personal worth, self-confidence, and mission. This derives from a belief in the importance of their work and the value of the services they provide. If the social worker doubts his or her own worth or the importance of the profession, he or she is easily demoralized. No one should feel apologetic for being a social worker; the profession's mission and values are truly noble and reflect the very best of the human spirit.

Physical and Emotional Well-Being

There must be a suitable match between a person's physical and emotional stamina and the demands of her or his job. Thus, when selecting a particular type or field of practice, a social worker needs to consider his or her temperament, physical limitations, and any health problems. In addition, the worker must consider the normal developmental changes that will occur during the years of work. As people grow older, their level of stamina decreases and they often experience some degree of loss in vision and hearing. These ordinary changes can affect the performance of specific social work tasks. Family and group therapy, for example, require excellent hearing. Also, one's age can make it either easier or more difficult to build relationships with clients who are in certain age categories.

For the most part, social work is a sedentary occupation. Physical inactivity can place the worker at a greater risk of heart disease and other health problems. In order to counter this risk, it is important for workers to adhere to a program of regular exercise.

The expression of empathy and compassion by the social worker for the client is necessary to support and encourage the client during the change process. However, those efforts to "be with" and to "feel with" the client are sometimes exhausting and even painful. The social worker must strive to strike a healthy and realistic balance between empathy for the client and maintaining the emotional distance, objectivity, and personal boundaries appropriate to a professional relationship.

Social workers must be able to cope with and respond appropriately to the intense feelings and emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, fear) they encounter when working with clients who are in gut-wrenching situations such as, for example, the father who has abused his child or the family that has lost a member to suicide. The frequent and

long-term exposure to the distress of others can contribute to *compassion fatigue* and a numbing or hardening of the worker's own feelings (see Item 16.4).

Many clients are so overwhelmed by their problems that they develop *learned helplessness,* a pervasive feeling of hopelessness and a belief that no matter what they do, their pain will continue. Social workers who meet these clients on a daily basis are vulnerable to developing this same sense of helplessness. Social workers who have not satisfactorily resolved issues in their own family relationships or who carry emotional baggage related to traumatic life experiences may sometimes distort and mishandle a professional relationship when clients are struggling with issues similar to their own. In extreme cases, vulnerable workers have been so knocked off balance emotionally that they could no longer function as professionals. It is critically important that social workers become aware of their emotional weak spots and, if needed, obtain professional help (see Item 16.3). If that is not possible or successful, they should arrange for work assignments that will avoid handling those cases and situations that might threaten their emotional well-being.

Life-Long Learning

The risk of intellectual stagnation exists in every profession. Learning must continue throughout one's life and career. People put themselves in touch with new ideas in a number of ways, such as reading, listening to presentations by experts, and participating in thoughtful discussions with family, friends, and colleagues. It is helpful to place oneself in situations that will generate pressure to study and think through the matter in more depth, such as making a presentation to a professional organization, teaching a class, or writing an article (see Item 16.10). Ideally, every new social worker will find a mentor who provides encouragement and direction as the worker seeks to learn a new job or develop his or her knowledge and skills (see Item 16.9).

"Learning From a Book or Article" from 1st edition

"Learning From an Oral Presentation" from 1st edition

Learning, especially learning during adulthood, requires a special effort to let go of comfortable and familiar ideas. In order to learn, people must first feel unsure about what they "know" and be willing to examine new and sometimes disturbing ideas. Learning begins with a question and an inner dissatisfaction with one's level of understanding or skill. It continues as the individual searches for answers, either alone or with others.

It is hard to imagine a type of work that can evoke as many truly significant and challenging questions as does the practice of social work. The situations that social workers encounter each day raise questions about justice; human rights and responsibilities; moral and ethical behavior; the causes of individual, family, and organizational problems; and the nature of personal and social change. However, social work is not an academic discipline, nor is it a pure science wherein the search for knowledge is driven primarily by the excitement of ideas and the joy of discovery. Those who want most of all to grapple with theoretical matters and knowledge building are usually not content in the role of a social work practitioner. Social workers spend much of their time trying to patch together practical solutions to very serious but fairly common human problems, dilemmas, and crises.

Religion and Spirituality

What motivates an individual to pursue a career in social work? Undoubtedly, there are a variety of answers, but many social workers would say that it has something to do with their spiritually and religious beliefs and values.

Both religion and spirituality involve a sense of the sacred—a sense that we are part of some indescribable and incomprehensible mystery or ultimate reality that transcends the familiar and usual. Both wrestle with the really big questions of life such as: Does my life have some ultimate purpose and meaning? How should I live my life? How do I decide what is right and wrong? Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? Why is there so much good and love in the world? Is there an afterlife? Is there a God? What is God?

These are not questions that the scientific method can answer. Rather, they are matters of spirituality, faith, and choice. The major religions of the world offer some answers and perspectives that have been meaningful to countless people over thousands of years, but, ultimately, each individual must choose her or his own spiritual path.

Although religion and spirituality are intertwined, it is helpful to make a somewhat arbitrary distinction. A **religion** is a way of life organized around a set of beliefs, traditions, stories, and practices that nurture particular forms of spirituality and provide a conceptual framework for spiritual life. Religions are passed from one generation to another through various forms of leadership and institutional structures. The usual elements of a religion are public prayer and worship, various rituals that mark transitions in the life cycle or the spiritual journey, a moral code, and reverence for certain sacred writings and sacred places.

As compared to a religion, which is public and institutional in nature, **spirituality** is more a quality of the inner self or soul—that deepest recess of our being, where we encounter our "true self" and judge ourselves in light of what we believe to be ultimately worthwhile, right, and wrong. An individual's spirituality is his or her unique way of interpreting and assigning meaning to life. Our spirituality is revealed in our everyday decisions and actions such as how we treat people, what we do with our money, and how we react to success and setbacks. Deeply spiritual persons are often described as compassionate, real and genuine, self-aware, kind, nondefensive, unpretentious, joyful, generous, grateful, forgiving, accepting of others, and cognizant of the interconnectedness of all that exists.

Spiritual growth is a process, a lifelong journey. Spiritual leaders and guides underscore the importance of occasional solitude for reflection and meditation, being of service to others, striving for self-knowledge and self-discipline, and having patience with themselves and compassion for others. They also identify common barriers to spiritual growth such as a desire for control, power, prestige, and possessions, and the fear of change.

One's spirituality needs to be durable in the sense that it provides meaning, direction, and a sense of hope during both good times and bad, throughout the life cycle, and especially as the person faces suffering and death. It is difficult to develop a healthy and durable spirituality without the ongoing support of a group or community that provides guidance, encouragement, and challenge. Also necessary is what some have termed a "sacred technology" (i.e., prayer, meditation, solitude, ritual, study, fasting, etc.) that helps the individual remain conscious of his or her spiritual ideals and values. As people grow spiritually, they realize that they are capable of great love and generosity. They also become more aware of their "shadow side" and their tendencies toward selfishness, small-mindedness, and self-deception.

Every day, social workers meet people who have been hurt by injustice, dishonesty, prejudice, and violence. Every day, social workers encounter people who have unmet needs for food, shelter, and health care. How do social workers make sense of such a harsh reality? In order to avoid being consumed by frustration and in order to maintain a

positive attitude, the social worker must strive to develop a hopeful spirituality—one that views all people, including those who cause harm to others—as having inherent worth and dignity as well as being capable of positive change. The social worker needs a spirituality that celebrates the basic goodness of people. (For more information on spirituality see Item 15.18.)

Artistic Expression

Another piece of the social worker's self-care is artistic expression. There is evidence that effective social workers are often creative people. It is not uncommon to meet social workers who are talented in various forms of artistic expression such as music, painting, acting, creative writing, sewing, photography, dance, woodworking, and so on. Social workers need to cultivate and share their artistic talents. The exercise of creativity can be a diversion from the stress of social work practice and a gift that enhances the quality of life.

HAVING FUN IN SOCIAL WORK

Human beings need to play and have fun. Adults often satisfy this need by introducing various forms of humor (e.g., jokes, playful pranks, and silly antics) into their work environment. How is a social worker to reconcile this need for fun with the serious business of social work? In many ways, the practice of social work is a rather grim and heavy endeavor. Many clients are often in truly desperate and tragic situations. Although human distress is not a laughing matter, humor can be a counterbalance to the frustrations experienced in practice.

Without an active sense of humor, social workers can be boring and social work practice can be unbearable. Social workers must take their work seriously yet acknowledge and appreciate those things that are genuinely funny about themselves, their jobs, and the situations they encounter. They must allow themselves to laugh at the absurdities of life and to temporarily slip out from under societal demands for conformity and the many restrictions they place on themselves.

"Using Humor in Social Work" from 6th edition

The use of humor with clients is always somewhat risky, but given proper precautions, it has a place in helping relationships. It is always wrong to laugh at clients, but it may be appropriate and even helpful to laugh with them as they describe the humorous aspects of their experiences. Often, it is the clients who teach the workers to find humor in the clients' situations. Many who live with harsh realities come to appreciate humor as a way of achieving a degree of detachment from their painful situations. Humor is an essential coping mechanism that should be affirmed and supported.

CONCLUSION

When an individual chooses social work as a career, he or she is faced with all the challenges involved in blending or merging a unique human being with a set of professional responsibilities. The social worker, as a whole person, has many dimensions, including the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual. These dimensions both affect and are affected by social work practice and the workplace environment. The social

worker's family is affected by the modest earning capacity associated with the profession and by how the social worker handles the everyday demands and stresses common to social work practice.

A social worker may attempt to keep his or her personal and family life separate from professional responsibilities but this is inherently difficult. Each social worker must strive to achieve a healthy balance between his or her personal and professional lives.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austin, Michael. *Social Justice and Social Work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013.

Cox, Kathleen and Sue Steiner. *Self-Care in Social Work: A Guide for Practitioners, Supervisors, and Administrators.* Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2014.

LeCroy, Craig. *The Call of Social Work: Life Stories*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011.

Meisinger, Sarah. *Stories of Pain: A Social Worker's Experiences and Insights from the Field*. Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2009.

Payne, Malcolm. *What Is Professional Social Work*? Chicago: Lyceum, 2007.

Reichert, Elisabeth. *Social Work and Human Rights,* 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Rosenberg, Jessica. *Working in Social Work: Real World Guide to Practice Settings*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Whitaker, Tracy. *The Results Are In: What Social Workers Say about Social Work*. Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2009. (For updated materials from NASW Workforce Center see http://workforce.socialworkers.org.)

3

Merging the Person's Art with the Profession's Science

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this chapter, the reader should be prepared to:

- Recognize that a social worker's personality and values (i.e., his or her art) must include a strong sense of caring about others and concern for achieving social justice.
- Demonstrate appreciation that successful helping must be underpinned by the application of the best available knowledge (i.e., the science of social work) related to human and societal behavior, social work intervention techniques, and social policy development.

The previous chapter described the merging of an individual with the roles and responsibilities of being a professional social worker. This chapter focuses on another type of merging—namely, the blending of the artistic with the scientific, or the merging of a social worker's unique creative gifts with the knowledge component of the social work profession.

Professional education cannot teach these artistic features, although it can help the learner identify such strengths and develop the ability to apply them in work with clients. Professional education can also assist the person entering social work in developing a beginning understanding of the knowledge (or science) that is necessary for effective practice. This merging and blending of one's art and the profession's science is initiated in social work education programs, but it is a lifelong activity, as social work knowledge is constantly expanding and the worker is being continually changed by life experiences.

THE SOCIAL WORKER AS ARTIST

A social worker's **art** is the application of his or her intuition, creativity, and natural aptitudes and skills for helping people. One need not look far to observe that some people have an unusual capacity to build trusting relationships and engage others in an effort to bring about a needed change. People who enter social work typically possess a healthy amount of this natural ability and find personal satisfaction in being able to assist others.

There are numerous ingredients of this artistic ability that each social worker must possess, although each worker may hold the components to varying degrees. It is helpful for each social worker—or potential social worker—to consider the following elements of the art that is prerequisite to effective social work practice.

Compassion and Courage

One essential component of the artistic ability found in social work is the social worker's compassion. The word **compassion** means to suffer with others; it refers to a willingness to join with and enter into the pain of those who are distressed or troubled in order to address that difficulty. Although most people see themselves as compassionate, it is important to recognize that a high level of compassion is not typical of most people. In fact, it is quite natural to want to avoid involvement in the pain of others. A social worker who lacks compassion is likely to distance himself or herself from client concerns.

Social work also demands **courage**, not in the sense of being bold or daring but rather in being able to confront on a daily basis human suffering and turmoil and, not infrequently, negative and destructive human behaviors. Day after day, case by case, the social worker must be able to respond constructively to people who are directly affected by illness, disability, violence, neglect, sexual abuse, addiction, criminal exploitation, poverty, chaotic family life, separation from a loved one, loneliness, abandonment, and other types of human suffering. Moreover, the social worker must be able to respond constructively and with respect to people who have directly or indirectly inflicted injury and suffering on others. They must be able to deal with sometimes appalling human problems without becoming distracted or immobilized by their own emotional reactions. Over time, an individual can develop this fortitude or courage, but it is not something that can be learned from books or in a classroom.

Professional Relationship

A bond of trust must exist before people are willing to risk that difficult human experience—change. The most fundamental tool of the trade is the use of a **professional relationship** to help people become open to the possibility of change and engage in the always uncomfortable change process. A positive relationship is a precondition for effective work with individuals, families, or groups of clients, and also in working with the people who make up organizations and communities.

Following Lambert's (1992) literature review and research, he concluded that there are four factors that contribute to successful helping:

1. *Client factors* (e.g., the quality of the client's participation in treatment, satisfaction with what the worker is doing, the client's personal strengths and resources)
2. *Relationship factors* (e.g., the trust and connection between client and helper)

3. *Expectancy factors* (e.g., the client's positive expectations from the helping process)
4. *Model/technique factors* (e.g., the specific practice approach used by the worker)

Lambert's research indicates that client factors account for about 40 percent of successful outcomes, relationship factors for 30 percent, expectancy factors for 15 percent, and helping approach the remaining 15 percent. This research suggests that of the two variables the worker can most directly affect (i.e., relationship and intervention approach), relationship is the most significant. It is important, however, to recognize that the intervention approach (see Chapter 6) can be the added contribution to the helping process that makes the difference in a successful outcome.

There are several essential qualities of a successful helping relationship that are discussed more fully in Item 8.1. First, one must understand the client's thoughts, beliefs, and life experiences from that person's standpoint. To accomplish this *empathy*, a social worker must temporarily set aside her or his own values, attitudes, and judgments, so far as possible, in order to take on the other person's perspective. Empathy is needed, for example, to understand the fear and anger of a battered wife and yet her continuing concern for the man who hurt her; to be sensitive to the anger and guilt of an abusive parent; to appreciate the difficulty of a teenager risking criticism by peers for speaking up in a group; or even to hear out the frustrations of an overworked staff member.

Warmth is another quality of relationship that communicates respect, acceptance, and interest in the well-being of others. However, warmth is much more than just saying "I care," although at times that is important. Warmth is transmitted in many forms of communication, from a reassuring smile to an offer of tangible assistance. Warmth is an artistic quality that is expressed differently by each person, but inherent in all expressions of warmth is acceptance of the other person and a nonjudgmental attitude.

Linked to warmth and empathy is the quality of *genuineness.* Trite as it may sound, the social worker must behave like a "real" person and must truly like people and care about their well-being. The social worker may know the correct words to say or the proper action to recommend, but the client will assign them little value if the worker appears phony.

Creativity

In addition to a trusting helping relationship, **creative thinking**, the integration of diverse facts and information leading to the formation of original ideas, is central to effective helping. Creativity is important in social work because each client's situation is unique and constantly changing. So-called textbook answers to human problems cannot accommodate this uniqueness.

One aspect of creative thinking is having the *imagination* to identify a variety of ways to approach and solve a problem, whereas the unimaginative social worker identifies only one or two options—or perhaps none at all. For example, one area in which the social worker must be imaginative is in interpreting and implementing agency policies. Policies are created to serve the typical client, yet people are characterized by infinite variety. Although the social worker cannot ethically (or sometimes legally) ignore or subvert agency policy, he or she can often find creative ways to adapt a policy to meet unique client needs. The social worker who is bound by a literal interpretation of "The Agency Manual" is simply not able to make the system work for some clients.

Flexibility is also a dimension of creativity. Helping others to cope and change requires an ability to continually modify and adapt prior plans and decisions. The social worker making a foster home placement, for example, must have the flexibility to adapt his or her thinking to the often differing perspectives of biological parents, foster parents, the child, the court, the agency, and even the neighborhood. To align oneself rigidly with any of the affected parties limits the social worker's ability to help resolve problems and conflicts. At times, one needs to be supportive; at other times, it is necessary to challenge the client; and at still other times, the social worker must be hard-nosed, be directive, or exercise legitimate legal or professional authority. The effective social worker must have the flexibility to shift from one tactic to another and correctly decide when a shift is needed and appropriate.

One additional characteristic the creative social worker must possess is *persistence*—the capacity to continue on a course of action, despite difficulties and setbacks. Working with clients to translate creative ideas into action does not always work on the first try, but continuing to attempt new approaches can often lead to successful outcomes.

Hopefulness and Energy

The motivation of a client to work for change, especially when the prospect of change is anxiety producing or painful, is often a reflection of the social worker's ability to communicate the possibility that by working together the worker and client can improve the client's situation. Two characteristics the social worker must communicate to increase client motivation are hopefulness and energy.

Hopefulness refers to communicating a firm belief in people's capacity to change in positive ways, and in encouraging them to work cooperatively with others for the common good. Clients have typically been unsuccessful when attempting other avenues to address their issues or they would not be seeking professional help. Consequently, they often approach professional services with a carryover of skepticism. Given the serious and intractable nature of many of the situations encountered in practice, the social worker, too, is vulnerable to feelings of discouragement. The worker's hopefulness makes it possible to approach each practice situation with a genuine sense that this time the helping effort can make a difference.

Hopefulness, alone, is not enough. There must also be the infusion of energy to support movement toward change. **Energy** is the capacity to move things along, get results, and bounce back from mistakes and failures. The social worker's energy is needed to activate the client and counteract the client's hesitation. The worker's willingness to commit time and effort to the change process can encourage clients to also invest themselves in that activity. The worker should be careful, however, to avoid communicating a false or counterfeit optimism.

Judgment

The complex nature of the helping process and the uniqueness of every client's situation require social workers to make difficult judgments. **Judgment** is the ability to make distinctions among varied and sometimes conflicting information, identify how factors interrelate, choose between alternatives, and arrive at decisions on how to proceed. Judgment is at the very core of such professional activities as assessing client situations, formulating intervention plans, choosing techniques or procedures to utilize, and deciding when to terminate services. Ultimately, professional judgment depends on clear and critical thinking by the social worker.

Needless to say, some people are better than others when it comes to forming judgments and making decisions. Some make poor judgments because they act more on emotion than on careful and logical thinking. Discipline is sometimes required by the social worker to slow down the process and make sure that the client's situation has been thoroughly analyzed and sound judgments have been reached before moving forward with an intervention. One's life experiences and wisdom acquired from working with clients facing similar issues helps inform the social worker's judgment, but nothing substitutes for well-informed and thoughtful decision making.

Every responsible social worker strives to be free of prejudice that could adversely affect clients. However, every thoughtful social worker is aware that he or she may retain some degree of bias and prejudice, yet must make difficult and sometimes gut- wrenching decisions that may be affected by personal bias. It is the responsibility and the burden of professionals to make these difficult decisions, even when painfully aware that they can make mistakes because of their humanness and fallibility.

Personal Values

The reasons one might enter social work are varied, but the motive is almost always a concern for others and a desire to make the world a better place. However, it is important to remember that when a person becomes an instrument for change, there is in that person's mind some notion about what constitutes a desirable and good life for people. In other words, social workers, like all people, possess personal values. A **value** is a consistent preference that affects one's decisions and actions and is based on that person's deepest beliefs and commitments. Values are a person's fundamental beliefs about how things should be and what is a right and worthwhile way of acting.

A *value dilemma* arises when there is a difference of opinion over what is "right." The social worker's view of the "right" outcome or the best course of action may be different from the client's, and both may differ from that of the agency that employs the social worker or of other persons in the related community. Is it "right," for example, to encourage a single mother to find employment if having a job necessitates placing her young children in day care? Is it "right" to refer a woman to an abortion clinic? Is it "right" to withhold further financial assistance from a client who has violated an agency rule by not reporting income from a temporary job? Is it "right" to force homeless people to reside in shelters against their will? Whose "right" is right? Whose values are to be followed?

Given that one person's values cannot serve as absolute guides for all others to follow, is it appropriate to expect the client to conform to what the social worker or his or her agency considers desirable or the right thing to do? Logic would answer no, but many clients feel pressure to go along with what they think the agency or social worker expects. If a social worker accepts the principle of maximizing clients' self-determination, she or he must allow clients to make the decisions and to move toward outcomes the clients believe are most desirable. And apart from those values codified in law and universally recognized moral principles, the social worker should hold his or her personal beliefs and values in abeyance in favor of client self-determination.

This is not to suggest that the social worker is always to remain neutral with regard to client behaviors or decisions that are socially irresponsible, self-destructive, or harmful to others. A social worker is of little help to a client if he or she sidesteps or avoids discussing moral and ethical issues directly related to a client's concerns. Laws,

basic moral principles, and even the rules of civility do matter. They are an essential and important aspect of the client's social functioning. However, when such issues are discussed, it must be done in ways that are respectful of the client's perspective.

As value conflicts arise, it is important for the social worker to consider what she or he believes about the situation and why, lest her or his personal values are inappropriately forced on the client. It is useful in a social worker's personal life to regularly discuss value-related issues and various moral dilemmas with family, friends, and colleagues to obtain alternate views that might contribute to refinements in his or her thinking.

It is desirable for the social worker's personal values to be compatible with the values of the social work profession. If these two value systems are in conflict, one of two things is likely to happen: (1) the worker will go through the motions of representing professional values, but because her or his heart is not in it, the lack of genuineness will be apparent to both clients and colleagues or (2) the worker will reject the profession's values and principles as a guiding force and respond to clients entirely on the basis of personal beliefs and values. In both instances, the client and the employing agency will lose the benefit of the social work perspective.

What values characterize professional social work? The *NASW Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1999) is predicated on six core values that drive this profession:

1. *Service.* The primary purpose of social work is to help clients deal with issues of social functioning. The obligation to serve clients takes precedence over the workers' self-interests.
2. *Social justice.* As social workers engage in efforts to change unjust societal conditions, they are particularly sensitive to the most vulnerable members of the population (i.e., those individuals and groups who have experienced poverty, illness, discrimination, and various forms of social injustice). Social workers, then, are committed to promoting public understanding of the effects of the oppression of vulnerable populations and encouraging an appreciation of the richness to be gained from human diversity.
3. *Dignity and worth of the person (and the society).* Social workers are committed to considering each client a person of value, and therefore treating the client with respect—even when his or her behavior may have been harmful to self or others. At the same time, social workers are committed to improving societal conditions and treating others with respect while attempting to resolve issues in the broader society that negatively affect clients.
4. *Importance of human relationships*. Social workers understand that relationships are central to human development as well as to a successful helping process, whether serving individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities. Further, clients are hesitant to risk change unless they are true partners in the helping process, feel supported by a meaningful relationship with the social worker, and maintain as much control as possible over the decisions about how to achieve change.
5. *Integrity.* A helping relationship cannot be sustained unless clients can trust social workers to be honest and to respect the clients' rights to privacy. Moreover, workers are obligated to assure that any human services agency with which they are affiliated treats clients and information the clients reveal in an appropriate and professional manner.