

BE YOUR OWN CHAIRMAN:
Participating in Small Groups

by

Ruth C. Cohn

and

Daniel I. Malamud

Preface

You can be lonely in a high-rise building or in a community with thousands of people around you. Your neighbors are probably figures you know by sight and a hello, but hardly intimately. Moving in and out of houses and neighborhoods in quick vehicles across and above countrysides and countries may turn even your family members and close friends into Christmas cards.

You may experience other just spatial distances. There may be a gap between you and your parents, or you and your children, between you and your teachers, or you and your students, between you and your boss, or you and your employees, between your being black or white, and your other-shaded fellow beings, between your rat-infested tenement, or swimming-pooled house, and life on the other side of the tracks. And even your living room may be divided between your own chair and that of your spouse.

The "I don't know you" gap may be within your awareness, or you may just feel an occasional surge of wanting something in life and not quite knowing what this something may be. The need to know others and to be known by them, to recognize others and to be recognized by them, is universally human. Prolonged frustration of this need is deadening; it may and does kill people and peoples.

In this, our century's anguish, attempts to counteract loneliness and alienation spring up in various forms. Encounter and other small groups and communes attempt to bridge the gaps between me and you and us and them. All over the world, in various forms and shadings, a new humanistic faith is evolving: that intimacy and care can be promoted in families, among friends, and even in small groups of strangers, and that emotional starvation can be overcome in a world of moving-about vehicles, populations, and changing values.

In previous ages people found their way through direct communication. A child did not need directives to find grandmother's house in his village; a young person hardly went beyond his circle of social and local friends or acquaintances to find a husband or wife; and to find an occupation or job, it was enough to be fit and to choose between opportunities.

On the other hand, for us today, maps, instructions, and skills are imperative to find our way, be it geographically, vocationally, or personally. To find intimacy in a world of colossal cities and open spaces is often a matter of skill. Only for a very few people does the immediate family and community provide personal and practical opportunities without preparation and search.

This manual is written by us, the authors, as a map for

communication among people in small groups. We are writing to you people who meet in small groups to find more meaning in your personal life and more effectiveness with others. We spell out a Theme-Centered Interactional approach which we have worked out, thought about, tested, and taught in a variety of workshops, classrooms, and families. This approach includes techniques which help to forestall endless merry-go-round discussions, superficial quibbling, hampering politeness, hidden destructive agendas, gray-droopy resignation, and rose-colored demands. We believe we have written into this manual suggestions that will help you to find new excitement and peace in your family and small-group life. It may even help you in all your relationships, including the most important one, that with yourself.

This manual contains guidelines for behavior as a group member and as a group leader. An amateur group leader can be a good one to the extent that he is aware of his responsibility, has talent, and acquires skill. He is a parent or child in a modernized family, a modernized teacher or student, or a member or leader in some organization. He needs special training for this skill in our complicated times, while in earlier centuries people learned from their ancestors directly. We need maps to find our way.

This manual does not provide the training we believe essential for a professional group leader. The best mother cannot replace a physician; neither can a singing, humming, whistling person replace an opera singer. In our opinion, acquiring professional group leading skills requires years of thorough training. Skilled consultant group leaders are required for organizational systems, conflict groups, school projects, business groups and disturbed small families, or other groups in real trouble.

We speak from long years of professional experience. We have worked in many different settings, with different populations, and for a variety of purposes. We are training professional group leaders in the Workshop Institute for Living-Learning (W.I.L.L.). A comprehensive book about our Theme-Centered Interactional approach for professional and other group leaders is in process. This small manual, however, is written for you, the many people who meet in groups and want to learn more about how your meetings can be improved. We wrote this manual for you in the hope that life shall be rich and beautiful for all of us, and out of our anxiety that if all of us don't work faster there won't be people left to find out that growing in groups can be rewarding and beautiful.

Introduction

You and your group members will do a lot of talking together in your efforts at helping each other grow. What you

discuss and how you go about it will be extremely important. Real talk that is clear, direct, and tuned-in can make your group bloom, but talk that is phony, obscure, or punitive can be withering.

In this manual we make specific suggestions which we hope will help you to tune in to yourself and others, to express yourself sincerely and effectively, and to avoid the frustrating snarls and dead ends that most people in groups experience as they go about exploring themselves, each other, and the world they live and act in.

We worked hard on establishing new guidelines for useful attitudes and effective behavior in groups, substituting relevant principles and rules for traditional etiquette and chance behavior. Therefore, most of our suggestions call for a real shift in ways most people behave in a group. They may require a lot of deliberate thought and practice on your part to develop the new skills involved, but we think you will find the effort worthwhile. These new skills make the difference between a dead meeting and one that is rich with living-learning.

Learning tuned-in communication is not only useful in working together on some group task but is likely to be an exciting adventure of your growing in groups.

We strongly suggest that you refer to this manual frequently until you are thoroughly familiar with its content. It may take a long time and much effort until new patterns of communication come naturally to you. As you read keep in mind that our recommendations are just that: guidelines based on many years of experience with groups that can facilitate group meetings of all sorts, but please guard against turning our suggestions into rigid dogma. We believe in the spirit of respecting individual differences in people's styles of growing, and that only rules which express this spirit are suitable aids in our walk through life.

Meeting Arrangements

We suggest that you meet with your group at least once a week, at a place where you can relax and be informal, sit in a circle, and keep interruptions and distractions to a minimum. If the group is not your own family or a commune, decide whether some other plan should be followed, such as finding a place in the country or away from your usual surroundings.

Set times for meetings that all members can make. If this is impossible, rotate the schedule so that no one gets left out all the time. If a member fails to come to a meeting, keep in mind that he would probably appreciate a call inquiring about his absence and bringing him up to date on what transpired at

the session. Naturally, commitment to coming on time is desirable. It is hard to say exactly how long a meeting should last, but for weekly meetings we would suggest an hour and a half or two. At times you may prefer longer meetings ranging from half a day to even a weekend. It is generally a good idea to begin and end meetings on time. In groups meeting without definite time limits people often don't use themselves effectively.

Socializing interferes during the work part of meetings, but may round out the gathering afterwards. If a meeting extends considerably beyond two hours, then a break at the midway point is a good idea for stretching, simple refreshments, and a few minutes of one-to-one intimate talk.

We have found that group discussions invariably go better with a leader than without. Therefore, we suggest that at each meeting someone act as a chairman of the group, keeping in continual touch with how the meeting is going, giving some attention to members who seem out of it, seeing to it that the discussion is not too scattered, summarizing briefly if necessary, and doing whatever else seems appropriate to make the discussion fruitful and alive.

When someone functions as group leader, this frees the other members to become more deeply involved in the discussion without neglecting individual or group concerns. However, as we will emphasize more fully later on, every member is his own chairman, and as such shares the group leader's functions with him.

We regard it as essential to rotate leadership, that is, for the participants to take turns in leading. Leadership is a function rather than a status position. Rotating leadership gives every member an appreciation of this job and serves to instill appreciation for the function of leadership and for the value of cooperative membership.

The Discussion Theme

We believe that you will usually get more out of your meetings if your group centers on an agreed upon theme instead of simply having a free-wheeling bull session, or a meeting revolving around only one member and his particular concerns, or a kind of social get-together where the talking is unfocused and goes off in different directions. The theme should be a topic that each and every member is actively interested in and finds meaningful and can relate to in his own uniquely personal way. The more personally involved every member is in the theme the more it gives everybody something to work on together. Below are examples of themes other groups have found useful:

Getting to know you and letting you know me ✓

Overcoming my fears of aloneness and closeness
Being myself in this group
Managing conflicts in our group
Developing my potentiality
Learning to appreciate myself realistically
Appreciating differences
Giving and getting nourishment
Growing with personal crisis ✓
① Being my own chairman--
Rediscovering neglected parts of myself
I want to do this, you want to do that, and
now what do we do?
② Growing in groups
Discovering the here-and-now
Giving and accepting feelings
Challenge of change
Money and I
The Me that nobody knows
Dealing with hurt feelings: mine and yours
The many ways to love
My body is mine
Hearing and being heard
Being free and responsible
Reaching out and letting go
Being aware of my inner child
Help: asking for it, giving it, taking it
Using myself creatively in a group

As you become more experienced in theme-centered discussions as described in this manual, you are likely to find it both easier and more challenging to create your custom-tailored themes, fitting them to your group's immediate needs. Sometimes the theme of your meeting may be a task that has to be done, such as writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, deciding the family budget, or planning a community action.

A good theme should be neither too large nor too small in its content. If it is too broad and all inclusive, for example, "Life today," your group may get lost in it and find no common focus. If it is too narrow in scope, for example, "Brushing my teeth," then it is likely to stifle imagination and fail to stir up much of substance.

The wording of the theme is important. It should be clear and specific enough to arouse lots of ideas and feelings in people's reactions. Using verbs with "ing" endings (as in the theme "Growing in Groups") and personal pronouns such as "I," (as in "Money and I") are helpful in injecting an active, personal spirit into the discussion.

Positively worded themes and those including both sides of a conflict are preferable to those that are negatively worded or onesided. The theme "Conflict in our Family" can have a

negative, hypnotic effect and is more likely to stimulate fights among members than the theme "Managing conflicts in our family," which suggests work toward constructive resolutions. Similarly, "Problems with my child," is a less usefully worded theme than "Helping my child with what bothers him." Some themes which exclude negative feelings like, "Enjoying my whole body," may be cruel for members who are in pain. Or a theme, "Becoming more intimate," may be disturbing to people who need permission to keep their distance. A theme such as "Finding the right closeness and distance between us" would be preferable.

Themes provide the unifying center and purpose for the meeting. Exploring the personal meanings of the theme in its various aspects is the task that you and your fellow members share, and as you work on it cooperatively, it is the connective link that pulls the group together. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the theme and to keep it in focus, and if you get away from it because other things take precedence, to find your way back to it.

Beginning the Meeting

Prepare for the meeting in advance by mulling over the theme, its meanings to you, and what you hope to achieve in exploring it. It's usually a good idea to begin a meeting with a silent period during which everybody can continue this meditation on the theme.

The group leader may invite such introspection with the following series of instructions: "Let us all be silent for a while. Let's sink back into ourselves and think about the theme, what it means personally to us, and let's see what experiences related to it come to mind."

After two minutes the leader may continue: "Let us become aware of our feelings, perceptions, and sensations right here and now. Now look around, how do we feel being in this room with all of us, knowing that we will communicate about something in the near future? What does each one of us feel: uneasy or excited, or what other feelings? How do we perceive each other? What bodily sensations do we notice at this moment?"

After a few minutes the leader may then suggest a brief exercise related to the theme. For example, one leader introduced the theme, "Giving and getting help," by asking each member to think of one other member in the group to whom he would feel most free to turn for help, and to visualize an imaginary scene in which he receives specific help from this person, and then switch to another scene where he is the helper, either with the same person or another one. After the group had followed this last instruction for a few minutes, the leader said, "Now,

let's share with each other whatever we wish of the imaginary experiences we have just had. And let us be aware here today in this group how each one of us experiences giving something to someone else and receiving help."

The three instructions above are usually very effective in expanding the members' awareness of the many facets of a theme. The first instruction induces personally involved past experiences and thoughts about the theme; the second promotes awareness of sensations, perceptions and feelings in the here-and-now, and the third connects thought and feelings to a concrete, here-and-now, theme-related task. This "silent time" procedure will stimulate you to clarify your own goals in relation to the theme. Thereafter, you will share, as your own chairman, whatever you wish to share with your group. This will create as much intimacy as each person is willing to accept.

The introduction of silence at the outset of a meeting often helps to promote an atmosphere in which you can communicate with yourself more deeply. Such brief silences may be suggested by any member and may be entered into at any time providing the whole group is willing. People usually come to appreciate that not every minute has to be filled with talk, and that silences can be cherished as part of living, beautiful in themselves and harboring creative stirrings; they are part of the ebb and flow of being within ourselves and being with others.

Beware of making a dogma out of initial silences. Right in the beginning a group may be at full steam and cohesive around the theme that needs to be discussed. To interrupt artificially at that point may be detrimental to the group spirit. Many introductory procedures other than silence can be invented. They all should lead to the awareness of each person and where he is at, the needs and will of the group, the physical and emotional experiences at the moment, and the task that has to be done. Sometimes the leader may give a short "lecturette" to bring the theme or his immediate needs or those of the group as he sees them into the foreground. Sometimes there may be a dialogue between two people about the theme. There is no limit on introductory procedures. The initial silence, however, is an important and frequently best introduction.

Members of a new group are naturally curious about each other. The acquaintanceship process can sometimes be facilitated by playing some simple "games" which encourage each person to share of himself or to interact with every other person in a variety of ways. Some examples of such activities, intriguing yet relatively nonthreatening, will be found in exercises in the Appendix.

Be Your Own Chairman

Discussions are satisfying and exciting to the extent that each of us is our own chairman. To be the chairman of myself means always being as aware as I can be of where I am at this moment and what I want to get and what I want to give in any situation, and being as active as I wish to be in behalf of what I want.

The principle, "Be Your Own Chairman," is so basic and important that we would like to restate it in a variety of ways for the sake of emphasis: in each meeting it is up to you to give and to get whatever you want. If you are your own chairman you are alert to your own needs and respect those of other group members. You are also aware of the task on hand; the theme you discuss, the decision to be made, and you are with it in awareness. So you don't just do "what you feel like doing" but what you want to do, and that includes your awareness of your needs, your perceptions of others, and a respect for the judgment of your senses and your thinking.

Even if another member serves as a group leader, he cannot carry the sole responsibility for the group's well being and productivity. "Be your own chairman" means to be aware of your own agenda and to speak or be silent as you want to in relation to it. A good chairman is aware of the others in the room and their wishes and how these relate to the task that is to be done. He is aware of his own needs, wishes, and capacity as well as of those he chairs. This is everybody's meeting and everybody's time. Therefore, speak up as you want to, being aware of the circumstances. Be silent when this seems right. Sometimes it feels nice to be invited, but take such invitation as a gift and not as something that is owed to you.

You also have an "inside" committee, that is your own desires, tensions, pains, pleasures, conflicts and goals. Listen to each one of them and don't push any away. You can then choose what you want to convey to others. You may want to share your past experiences, your personal feeling-thought connections to the theme, or your here-and-now awareness of yourself and others.

Sometimes you may choose to remain silent. This may be okay too. But if you feel that you may lose out by remaining silent, or if you feel that you are being left out and don't really want to be, then try to get in, and if you don't know how to get in, say just that. If this too is more than you can share, then keep in mind that it would probably be a good thing to do such sharing as soon as you can.

Almost always people gain more if they state wherever they are at, at least some of the time. Sharing feels fulfilling and enriches the group. You may feel you have nothing important to contribute. This is hardly ever true. Even your mere

presence, your listening and attentiveness, may be felt as valuable. Any ripple you make in the water changes the landscape. You really are important. You are the center of your own universe, and you are a partner within the group.

Sometimes you may choose to listen for a long time and let everything that is being said by others get into you rather than to speak. This may be especially fruitful if you are usually a talker rather than a listener. It is good to experiment with things we usually don't do. On the other hand, if you are usually a listener and have difficulties in talking, then you may want to experiment with being the unused side of yourself. It is neither good nor bad to be a listener or talker. It's good to feel at one with oneself and to grow every day, every year, all our lives.

If you have confided something that is meaningful to you, and you feel the need to hear other people's reactions, try to elicit it from the whole group or from specific members whose responses would especially interest you. Life becomes richer when we overcome superfluous inhibitions, to ask for what we want. Not to say what we want often stirs resentments and leads to more trouble than if we are direct in the expression of our wishes.

If others pile questions, advice or comments on you, or give you interpretations that you don't go along with, or if you feel so uncomfortable that you can't follow the whole discussion, say so. Again, no long speech is needed. You might say, "Stop, don't tell me what I feel," or, "Don't tell me who I am," or, "Don't ask me questions. Tell me about yourself." Or simply say, "Cut it out," or, "I need time out." (Sometimes we can get carried away with our zeal to help and do not know when to stop.) You and your group might find it helpful to play "Spitback," described in the Appendix and designed to emphasize that it is up to each member to decide for himself what he wishes to value or change in himself, and that he must learn to accept this responsibility to himself in the face of pressure from a group.

If you feel that the discussion has strayed away from the theme as you have understood it, or from some particular aspect of the theme that interests you, then you may do yourself and others a favor if you let them know about your concern. Of course you may notice that someone is really deeply disturbed about something else that needs airing, and then you might keep your own desire in abeyance for a while, keeping it in the back of your mind instead.

When several members speak at once, you can do your bit to see to it that they find a way to state briefly what they want to say, one at a time, and then go on. If two members are having

a side conversation, you can express your wish as a general rule that they let the group in on their exchange.

If you feel that a member is speaking too much or rambling incessantly, or speaking inaudibly, you can let him know that you are frustrated by this. Others in the group may express similar or different reactions to this person. This might be helpful to you and the members whose ways of talk you dislike. You might find it interesting to check out your own reactions against theirs. Of course, sometimes people become so pre-occupied with their own needs that they become pedantic rule-keepers and interrupters. As our own chairman we must weigh our priorities. There are many factors within each person and many, many more in a group, so that conflicts in priorities are unavoidable and need patience and understanding to be dealt with.

Here is an example of how one member spoke up for herself as her own chairman: "The theme was 'Overcoming our fears of aloneness.' My group was talking about an author I had never heard of. I felt ashamed of my ignorance and grew silent. I felt like a kid at the dinner table surrounded by my parents and big brothers who talked about things I never understood. I knew that if I just sat silently I would feel more and more alone and find it harder and harder to listen. I reminded myself of the rule, 'Be your own chairman.' So I opened my mouth (it was not easy) and said: 'This is embarrassing to tell you, but I never heard of this author you're all talking about.' The others filled me in very matter-of-factly, and I was in again, feeling very good about the small risk I had taken and how it had worked out."

If we air our wishes we increase our chances of having them satisfied. This is obvious, yet so many of us tend to wait out our frustrations in the hope that somehow or other they will be magically recognized by others and will be taken care of without requiring specific efforts on our part. The expectation that the other one should read our minds and know what we want is very deeply rooted in most people. Such automatic feeding, however, takes place nowhere but possibly in the womb; even in the first year of life a baby has to do something to get milk, at least open its mouth; and probably cry, or show other active signs of hunger. Yes, sometimes sensitive people can sense things in us, but it is a precarious expectation to believe that they will, and why should they use their sensitivity to second-guess us, when we can simply and directly tell them what we want.!

The awareness that we are responsible for what we do with our life, our minutes, days, and years, can be a challenging, even shocking, insight. We do not mean to say that we are all-powerful and independent. But as long as we own consciousness we are always choosing among alternatives. We are our own

chairman, choosing agendas and actions from many alternatives. The rule, "Be your own chairman," is in essence not a rule but a statement of fact. This is the reason we believe why this "rule" has had a profound effect on almost every participant of theme-centered interactional workshops, not only for their experience in groups, but in their day-to-day lives as well. "Be your own chairman," is a reminder for each of us of the fact that we are always the chairman of ourselves, even if we forget it. And it is the awareness of this fact which helps us to live more wisely and effectively.

One member said, "I used to be inclined to be silent in groups and only to listen to others. I always waited to be drawn out. When you said I should be my own chairman I was very angry with you and felt you just wanted to shirk your own responsibility. Then I suddenly realized that nobody can ever really be a substitute for myself, and I have been a little more independent ever since."

Another member reported, "I didn't want to go to my sister-in-law's party. I don't care for parties, but my wife likes them. Also, she didn't want to offend her sister by not going. I thought to myself, 'How can I be my own chairman in this situation? She wants to go to the party, and I want to paint my bookcases. I think I will try to convince her to go without me.' I tried this, and it really worked after she understood. We are happier than we ever were. I feel like a person who has stopped being a Siamese twin."

And a third member said: "I regard all my needs clamoring for attention as my committee members who have important things to tell me, but I've come to realize that I have the right and obligation as the chairman of myself to weigh their voices with regard to my own wishes and agenda: What do I, as my total self, want to do after listening to my own group inside of me? Do I want to stay in bed? Or wash my hair? Or read a book? Or be with friends? As my own chairman it is up to me to decide. I never used to think of myself in this way before, but it is exciting to really know that I am in charge."

Creating a Supportive Atmosphere

A supportive, accepting atmosphere is necessary for a group to work well together with respect and happiness. If the group climate is predominantly cold and negative, especially in the beginning, most people will have a hard time working on any theme because they are afraid, hurt, or angry. Any theme-centered discussion that takes place then is likely to be on a personally uninvolved, guarded, or blindly competitive level.

A group will function well when it develops an overall sense

that each person's feelings and opinions will be respected as his way of being and that his way of being may or may not include a desire to change. As you and your group learn to accept all feelings and thoughts (and we do mean all) as a basic part of our humanity, then anger, fear, and other painful feelings can be much more easily taken in stride and responded to constructively.

Most of us are not used to expressing our feelings freely, and it is a hard challenge to reveal ourselves in ways that make us vulnerable to others. The more we can see that others are interested in us, that they care about what we are expressing, that they feel rewarded by our having risked exposure to them, the more we may be encouraged to reveal ourselves on this level.

Really listening to others is a major way of giving support. We mean not just hearing and understanding the content of what the other is saying, but listening to the person deep inside, reaching out for what this inner person has to say, for example, by picking up messages from his facial expressions and tone of voice, and to imagine how it would be to live in his circumstances. We urge you to practice such listening everywhere, at home, in classrooms, offices, gatherings, and especially in your own group.

We always have some kind of reaction to what anybody says, and sharing it with the person is another important way of giving support; it lets the person know where I am in relation to him or to what he said. You could, for instance, tell him that what he said moved you in some way or stirred some affectionate or annoyed feelings in you, or left you feeling indifferent or bored. You could give him your appreciation of how difficult it must have been for him to say what he did. You could share related feelings or incidents from your own life. You could give him some advice or an interpretation for him to consider (but with all due regard for you being you and him being him and that something plausible for you might not be for him). And if you don't know what to say, you might just share that. For example: "I wish I could say something to you now that could be helpful, but I really don't know what to say." Your simply saying that will tell him that you are with him.

There are many other ways of giving. Just smiling at another member and letting him know that you are aware of him. Or not smiling when this could be an easy way out of helping him to sustain his bad feelings long enough to really work them through. Using somebody's name and looking at him when you speak are often appreciated ways of giving contact. You can share your observations of a member with him: "Bill, I see you have been unusually silent for the last hour, and I'm feeling concerned about you. Are you disturbed about something or just interested in listening?"

When you take your turn as group leader you can do a lot

to further a supportive atmosphere. For example, you can put yourself in the other person's shoes and react to his statement, even expressions of anger, in receptive ways, either simply restating what has been said, or recognizing something of value, some grain of truth in his statement (there is rarely any statement that does not contain something worthwhile thinking about). Acceptance means that I respond with my own real thoughts and feelings, even my negative ones, but make it clear that I do not consider my own anger or negative judgment as God's last truth. And if I learn to accept that I have as much right to my own negative and positive feelings as everybody else, self-acceptance and other-acceptance establish an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect.

In one group meeting a person sadly said, "I feel that I don't want to be in with this group now, and yet I don't want to leave. I just feel on the fringe and I don't know what to do." The group leader responded: "Look, it is all right to be what you are. Do not torture yourself. If you are on the fringe now, this is what you are, on the fringe. So be on the fringe." Later on this group member said to the group leader: "I feel so good that you didn't put me down or make me do things. I felt I was okay wherever I was, even on the fringe. Oh, I wished a teacher in school had ever said this to me. I might have felt all right in my classroom as I did here, and after a while I even wanted to get back into the group again."

Though we emphasize a supportive climate we do not mean to say that negative feelings toward other members should be buried in the early sessions. Definitely not. This would stifle interaction and might accumulate such a heavy load of unexpressed feelings that could deaden the meeting or erupt in a hurtful explosion. Any person who frustrates you in your group may be accepted as a challenge to you to contact your inner strength, to change your own reactions productively so that you neither suffer unnecessarily or get stuck in fruitless demanding that he must change. It pays to experiment with your ability to experience that there is usually more than one side on every issue, and that an annoying group member also has a right to be in the same room with you. So, can you try to experiment with yourself and see how you could live with her, him, here, without going to pieces, getting a headache, or exploding? In one group Mary told Janet: "I suddenly realize you remind me of my bossy mother and just seeing that and recognizing you don't have the power over me that she did makes me feel easier toward you."

There are ways of expressing your negative feelings so that they need not be lethal in their effect. You may be frank to others and still create an accepting atmosphere if you are equally frank toward yourself and really believe that not only you have the right to hate somebody else, but the other one can hate you too, and that neither one of you gets killed this way. One group member declared: "Mary, I feel

very knocked down by the way you talk to me. I really hate you now. I guess you may hate me too, and we both still live." Another member said: "Your manner upsets me, your superior, contemptuous look. My brother looked this way at me, and I hated him for it. But you are not really my brother."

The "Crisis" game (described in Appendix) might be a good one for your group to try out as a means of exploring various ways of responding to common dilemmas that occur in a group.

In a good meeting, a lively living-learning group, minds and feelings click and clash and become fruitful networks of give and take. There is room in a good family for all kinds of differences and all kinds of feelings as long as we strive to understand that we are chairmen of ourselves in a world that is filled with other chairmen, and that the universe has lots of space for galaxies of moving-about stars and of individually different people!

Self-Disclosure

Any kind of sharing in ways that enable others to see the real person is usually a valuable way of contributing to our own growth and to the growth of others. Such self-disclosure can be useful on many levels. It is not always necessary to tell our deepest secrets. If we share our here-and-now, such as anxious feelings, this can be very helpful. For what makes us anxious may reveal most clearly to another person something of who we really are. Reporting what bodily sensations you experience helps to prevent sterile intellectualization and can be a potent tool for getting in touch with others, e.g., "As I listen to you I feel my stomach getting tied up in knots." You might be interested in trying the "Here-and-Now Go-Around" as a practice in self-disclosure. (See Appendix #10)

When your theme is not specifically a task that has to be done outside of the group, but a personalized theme about how people function with each other, it is a good thing to use the here-and-now of interaction to learn about yourself as you may affect people outside your group and draw parallels from the here-and-now to the there-and-then, and vice-versa.

When you let your group know where you are at, see if you can be as clear and direct as possible. Speak for yourself and not for anybody else. Speak in terms of "I" rather than hiding your feeling or opinion behind some reference to "we" or "you".

For example, say, "I'm getting tired of hearing the same thing over and over," instead of "We're all getting tired, etc." To state yourself as "I" means to take responsibility and to risk personal commitment.

People often use the word "we" without checking out whether everybody in the room really agrees. Even if everybody does share your tiredness, such consensus does not make your view any more valid than if you are the only one who is tired. Your feeling is your feeling and not anyone else's. Your feeling is real and is entitled to be heard whether others share it or not. Also, a "we" that is not checked out, particularly if expressed strongly, may sway members to go along uncritically and to give up their own good judgments and ways of experiencing.

Many questions are hiding places, that is, they are indirect or disguised expressions of feelings or thoughts. For example, the question, "Why are you late?" may hide, "I was annoyed at your coming late," or "I missed you." Translating your questions into declarative sentences will be more stimulating both to yourself and to others. In one meeting one member asked another, "What do you think about giving kids so much freedom?" The other member answered, "I don't know how to answer your question. I feel like in a quiz. What do you mean to say?" The first member smiled and said, "You're right. I didn't realize it when I was asking the question, but I'm thinking about my kids. I think I spoiled them by letting them have their own way too much."

It is not easy to speak in terms of "I" rather than "we," and it is also difficult to translate our disguising questions into forthright declarative sentences. But we have experienced how important it is to learn this shift in our manner of speech. Even experienced group members like ourselves slip quite frequently into language habits that conceal more than they reveal. We can help each other by drawing these habitual ways of talking to each other's attention, but even these rules should not open the doors to our becoming nags about them. You might also find it useful to try exercises in the Appendix as practice in the direct expression of one's feelings.

We imagine that it must be hard for many of you who have rarely or never before been in a theme-centered group to come out forthrightly with your thoughts and feelings. You may feel inhibited by the idea that you may be unique in your reactions, and you may fear that the other members in the group will react disapprovingly. It may seem a great risk for you to take, yet we hope at some time you will feel that you want to take this risk of self-disclosure. People whose temperaments differ, of course, take risks in different ways. Some dive into the water head first; others go in a little at a time, toes first. Remember to be your own chairman. Risk when you are ready to, push yourself a little if you want to, but risk in your own way.

Another important issue is that of confidentiality. Most people do not want to share confidences that they have risked within the group with outside people such as wives, husbands,

friends, and acquaintances of group members. So, when you are tempted to tell someone who is outside the group what has transpired within a meeting, think first about what it might mean if this information is shared with others, and to whom might this other person tell the same information. It is a common experience that a secret not kept by the person who experienced the confidential event will not be kept by the person to whom it has been told. When confidences have been broken, and they get back to the group, the people involved often feel hurt and have a hard time to remain open with each other. Yet even such wounds can heal. Nothing needs to lead to permanent damage, given the good will of both the chatterer and the victim of gossip.

Disturbances Take Precedence

As your own chairman, pay special attention to anything that seriously interferes with your relating yourself to the theme or to the other members. You may feel bored or very preoccupied with some happy event of the night before, or suffer from a bad headache. Perhaps you are disturbed by a member behaving in a way that you can't stand or that seems to violate the commitment to the group as you understand the group commitment.

Whatever the interference is, if you are not with it, if you feel apart from the group and the theme, try to get back in on your own steam; however, if you find that you are unable or unwilling to get back in, feel free to let the airing of this disturbance take precedence over anything else that is happening in the group. Bring out into the open that you are not relating to what's happening, and tell your fellow members why. You may not be the only one who is out of it, but even if you are, you will be doing yourself and your group a favor if you let them in on your feelings as soon as you yourself become aware of them. By the way, it is also helpful to the group if the leader shares whatever disturbances may be interfering with his function of leadership.

Following are examples of such shared disturbances: "My father is in the hospital, and I'm afraid for him and can't think of anything else." "I am so bored with your joking all the time that I've turned you off." "The smoke in this room is suffocating me." "What you said hurt me so much all I could think of for the last few minutes was that I want to get out of here." "I am so happy thinking about my date with my girlfriend tonight that our theme today doesn't interest me at all."

The rule "disturbances take precedence" is necessary to keep the group together. If one member for any length of time

is not with it, a link of the group member chain is missing, and both the individual and the group lose out. So let your group in on whatever is blocking your involvement, even if this means interrupting someone. If the interrupted person needs to take the ball back he is likely to do so, or the group will help him to regain the floor. And if the two of you have to tangle with each other about the priority of speaking, this is okay too. Some way will probably be found for taking the needs of each person into account, and in the meantime your adrenal glands and those of your opponent's will be going full force, and you will both be involved and alive.

Nothing is more deadening than the development of an unspoken gentleman's agreement among members that they must politely refrain from interrupting when someone happens to have the spotlight. It is unrealistic to expect a group to revolve around one member with rapt attention for any length of time. What usually happens then is that members put on phony masks of being interested and suppress all kinds of spontaneous reactions to the person in the center, and these reactions when finally expressed come out flat and stale or overly explosive. So it is better to get into the habit of interrupting briefly instead of being inattentive and upset when you experience some interfering preoccupation, and give the person who has the floor the chance to wait for you, or to withdraw, or to fight for his turn.

Obviously, the whole point of getting your disturbance out into the open is to give yourself and your group a chance to deal with it in some way which will free you to get involved again with where the group is at. Both you and the group lose out if you are "missing." However, keep your disturbance in the center of discussion only as long as necessary to help you to return to the group and the theme. Not every disturbance can be or needs to be worked through or pursued at length to the point of resolution. So let your group know as soon as you are ready to go on. Sometimes just briefly sharing the fact of your disturbance and having it recognized and accepted by the group is enough to give you some relief and a feeling that you count, enabling you to once again relate to the others and to the theme. Of course, it may not always be easy to decide how far to pursue a disturbance. But that's life, full of difficult-to-make decisions!

People often have hang-ups and negative feelings, or sometimes even positive ones, that they really would like to express and don't quite dare. Or sometimes they just don't think about saying something which is really important for them to say. We suggest, therefore, that the leader of the group, twenty or thirty minutes before the end of the session, if nothing urgent is going on, remind the members to express things they have on their mind, thoughts, feelings, disturbances, unfinished business, or whatever: "Imagine you are on your way home now on

the bus or train or in your car. What would you resent or regret not having said or not having asked if we broke up now?" Exercise in the Appendix can provide useful practice in recognizing and expressing your disturbances.

Selective Authenticity

We want to express over and over again emphatically: "Being your own chairman" does not mean "do my own thing." Letting disturbances take precedence does not mean behaving in wild, indiscriminate ways and saying impulsively whatever I feel like in utter disregard of time, place, and the consequences to myself and others. It is hardly useful, for example, if I were to disrupt discussions by announcing aloud that "a mosquito bit me" or other tiny annoyances which I experience. As my own chairman I am someone with respect for my agenda, my fellow members, the commonly agreed upon theme, and for the group that I am part of. We try not to leave ourselves out. We make ourselves and our needs known, but we also recognize other people and their verbally and nonverbally expressed needs.

Being my own good chairman means weighing and taking into account to a variety of considerations. "Doing my own thing," and "doing what I feel like doing," yes, but only as one aspect of a total situation which includes other people's feelings and interests, the group theme, and the overall goal of forming a group in which it is good to grow. This conscious, careful choosing process we call selective authenticity. Whatever I say I want to be authentic, but not everything that is authentic needs to be said. To be real does not mean to be indiscriminate, either in withholding important personal feelings, or in exposing each and every one of them.

Following are examples of times when members restrained themselves in responsible fashion: "Something came up in the group that reminded me of what Ross had confided in me privately, and I felt it would be good for him to share it, but I took into consideration that he had a right to his privacy, so I didn't say anything, and after the session I asked him if he wanted me to bring it up the next time." "Jill spoke about her father's dying, and I wanted very much to talk about my loss of a job, but I held back until she had gotten a lot of her painful feelings out."

Selective authenticity includes tactfulness, and tact means timing and sensitivity to other people. I might decide not to hug somebody that I feel like hugging because I've sized him up as a person who would be extremely uncomfortable with such contact. However, I might tell him that I have this impulse but that I want to respect his feelings about it, or I might even have the intuition that not saying anything about

this may be best. Tactful restraint can be a gift. Plants need water, but they can also be flooded.

Groups sometimes go overboard in forcing members to speak against their real wishes, and this can easily happen, given the power a group can exert on a single member. If you would like to hear from a silent member, and it is really your personal wish, there is no reason why you should not tell him so, but that does not mean that he needs to comply with your wish. As his own chairman he has to decide for himself just how much he wishes to share with the group, and it is up to you as your own chairman to decide how you will cope with the frustrations of your wishes.

Of course, the member may say that he does not want to talk, and you may feel that this is not true. You may want to express your skepticism, but you must also know that you may be wrong, and that it is wise to accept his decision as his because he does not have to comply with whatever you think is right. We believe that each person is born with the inalienable right to privacy. The idea of robot mindreaders or of torturing Big Brothers breaking into the private spheres of our thoughts is a nightmare.

We believe in a philosophy which emphasizes that people not only have civil rights but personal rights as well. We accept that people are what they are and that the only person we can really change is ourselves. (And that is difficult enough without getting preoccupied with changing others.) We can tell another person how we would like him to be, but we keep in mind that he has the freedom, just as we have, to want to change or not. If he wants to change, we can give him all the help we can, but if he doesn't, then we remind ourselves to let him be, for he was not put on this earth to fulfill our wishes, any more than the snow that falls from the sky. The "You Are You, Not Me" exercise #17 in the Appendix can be a useful experience to try out in this connection.

We realize how hard it is sometimes to draw the line between real consideration of other people and using considerateness as an excuse to cop out from airing something difficult. Okay, we may assume that in a group discussion it is almost always better to speak up than not to, but we keep in mind that every once in a while it may be better not to. Unfortunately there are no foolproof rules to help us decide which these situations are. For most of us a useful maxim might be, "When in doubt, speak up," because most of us habitually do the opposite. (Still some of you may have different experiences with people and may do better to remain alert to tendencies on your part to disrupt other people's thoughts or to invade their privacy.)

Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts

There are personality differences among members of any human group. This is inevitable since different individuals bring to each group varying backgrounds and personalities. These differences make clashes and conflicts between members of a group something to be expected, but such clashes need not be serious obstacles to the group's development, provided they are approached as opportunities for growth.

When a participant behaves in a way which stirs negative feelings in you or disturbs you in some way, it is good to ask yourself such questions as the following: Why does his behavior bother me? Am I expecting too much of him? Does his behavior touch off some oversensitivity of mine? Do I absolutely need him to behave differently in order to feel comfortable? Can I use this opportunity to change my allergic patterns?

Values and judgments reflect our personalities. This is good to remember when we confront someone else. They reflect how we are but not necessarily how the other person is. (For example, if we are bored with someone that doesn't mean necessarily that the person is a bore.) We can tell the person as specifically as we want to what it is about his behavior that rubs us the wrong way, but do so without accusing him of being a louse, giving him unmasked advice on how he should be, or otherwise attacking him as a person. It is human and wise to express some interest in hearing what he feels like inside when he behaves in a way to which we object.

We all know how hard it is to follow such suggestions when we are good and mad. It is human to want to lash out and hurt the person whom we feel has hurt us. (And sometimes we do this subtly by playing "helpful analyst.") But our attacks will often stimulate defensive counterattack or flight, and such outbursts can only be productive if after such verbal violence listening and talking can be resumed and the flow of feelings and thoughts can be used to understand what has just happened and to heal wounds.

When someone gives you negative feedback, you may react immediately by denying, explaining away, or justifying your behavior. This is a natural reaction, but it is usually not helpful to you, and keeps you from seeing what there may be about your behavior that has brought on someone else's negative feelings. What he is telling you may be to your advantage to consider, and if you can focus on that possibility rather than on automatically becoming hurt and defensive, you may learn something to your benefit. This shift from defensiveness to listening is one of the hardest things for anyone to do, but usually people find practicing it in groups makes it easier all around, although never "easy as pie."

Even if we realize a member is right in his criticism of us, we can still protect ourselves against becoming unduly hurt by saying to ourselves, "Okay, I'm not perfect. I can see that I'm wrong. I am human, and so I make mistakes. Now let's see what I want to do next." Or, "Maybe he doesn't like me the way I am, and maybe the way I am isn't the best way imaginable, but it is me. I am not worthless just because he wants me to change, or because I know that I might do better some day." Or, "Maybe he doesn't like the way I am, but other people do. Not everybody can like me, and that's okay. I don't like everybody else either."

A continuous, angry conflict between two members is a special form of disturbance with which groups often have difficulty coping. Members may stop listening to each other. In the Appendix are a number of exercises which we have found useful when such difficult-to-resolve disputes develop.

Balancing the I, We, and It

There are three main ingredients to a meeting, and when these are in the ever moving process of balancing, the overall meeting is likely to be a good one. These three elements are the I, the We, and the It. The I is the individual member as he experiences himself or as he is seen by the group. The We consists of all the I's who share something together at the same time, be it a feeling, thought, activity, or purpose. The It is the theme around which people gather. Each of these three factors is equally important. We think of them as points of a triangle. Any gathering of people which neglects one of these points for any length of time is a crowd but not a group. When all goes well in a meeting, I's interact and make a We around an It.

Remaining alert to the balance of these three elements is a complex task. Here especially is where a group leader can be of use, someone who gives his primary attention to the "triangle" yet without leaving himself out as a person altogether. When it is your turn to be a group leader, it may be helpful to you to visualize riding a bicycle with three pedals labeled I, We, and It. Then, for example, if the group stays for too long a time with one member (one I), you might step on the We or the It pedal. This shifting of pedals promotes dynamic interaction and is the propellant force in a group's living-learning encounters. To have the triangle in mind and to look for the one pedal that is being least used at any particular moment is one of the most helpful ways of being a good chairman of a group.

There are many techniques which a group leader can use to shift the weight from one pedal to another. For example, if the group seems to you to be overly intellectual, then you can state your feelings. If the group seems to be expressing feelings all over

the place without concern for the theme, or for intellectual connections, then you can express some unifying generalization or make a brief summary. If some members are unusually silent you may say, "I miss some people's participation, and I wonder if anything is wrong," or "I feel insecure about where everybody is at," or "I think that everybody is not with it right now. Maybe the people who are not with it would want to say so." (An indirect question is usually less embarrassing than a direct question such as, "Judy, are you out of it?")

If you are not sure whether all I's are involved in what is going on, or you feel insecure about the depth of the involvement of people, you may like to try the technique of the "snapshot," a procedure which is especially useful in bringing imbalances to the surface. You suggest: "Let's stop and take a snapshot. I'd like to know where everyone is. Could you please hold onto whatever you are experiencing right at this moment. Let's go around and have each one of us say a very brief sentence and tell each other where we were at the very moment when I interrupted." It is important to keep each person's report of his snapshot brief (not more than one or two sentences), or else the meaning of just finding out where everybody is gets lost, and some people don't get a chance to have their say quickly enough. This procedure leads to knowing where everybody else is, and group cohesion, the We, is furthered. The group can then decide on what or whom it wishes to focus its attention.

It is useful to maintain some alertness to group imbalances, even when someone else is the group leader, so that all group members can do their bit toward restoring the necessary emphasis to whichever element is being neglected for too long a time. For example, one group is very involved in discussing the theme, but in a very abstract, thin, academic way. No one is really digging into the theme with real involvement or depth. The It and the We are present, but the I lacks depth or color. Everybody is on a head trip in discussing the theme, but individual members are not relating to the theme in their own personal, intense way. One of the members, becoming increasingly aware of this imbalance, finally bursts out: "I feel very alone here with all this chatter. We seem to be avoiding something deeper and more personal. Our theme is "Dealing with Loneliness," and each of us says that we have been lonely at one time or another in a general sort of way, and then we quote literature and all the time I am feeling more and more lonely and not getting anywhere."

Another example of imbalance: "Jane had been talking and talking for half an hour. Bill and Phyllis kept asking her questions and she kept answering them. At first I was very interested (and I think everyone else was too) in her self-exploration, but after a while I became bored with the question-answer game. Most of the other members had been silent for a long time. I couldn't tell from their facial expressions what they were

thinking about. Jane was the I, Bill and Phyllis were firing questions at her in relation to the theme, but my I, myself, was out of it except as an observer, noticing that there was not much We in the group. So I decided to be my own chairman, and I asked for a "group snapshot." After this go-around it was clear that most members had been "out" for a long time. Even Jane had been just going through the motions in answering questions. The vital We-ness was restored as attention shifted from Jane to a new aspect of the theme which again involved every group member's interest.

Another type of imbalance is one in which there is a We but the It is neglected: members go off together on a tangent, for example, a flight or a glow of togetherness, and forget all about the agreed-upon theme. Often some member will bring the attention of the group back to the task they came for. The group leader may try to find a connection between the present mood of the group and the forgotten task, or he might explore why there is reluctance to go on with the theme. Sometimes a group may agree unanimously to revise a theme in line with a newly developed here-and-now interest.

Concluding Statement

We want this manual to be a guideline, not a dogmatic handbook. We want to stimulate, challenge, and suggest, but we do not wish to block your own creativity. In studying this manual we hope you will feel free to add, subtract, change whatever does not work for you in a particular situation. But we also hope that you will gain confidence in the exercise of your own active, personal responsibility, in your respectful and perceptive listening to both your inner messages and to communications from others, and in your capacity for authentic but selective statements. In brief, that you will learn to understand that you are the chairman of yourself, and that accepting personal chairmanship, you become one of the chairmen of your group.

We believe in a philosophy which requests that each person take responsibility for himself; each me for each myself, and that each I respect each You. We believe that some such orientation is necessary if mankind is to survive. We hope that this small manual will do its share to translate these humanistic ideals into practical group skills.

APPENDIX: EXERCISES

Most of the exercises listed below were developed by Malamud, in a Workshop in Self-Understanding which he offers at New York University's School of Continuing Education. The Workshop is a non-credit course open to the public at large, and accommodates groups of about thirty adults who vary widely in age and educational background. Self-confrontation exercises are the chief vehicles of learning in this course. These are structured activities in which members are encouraged to involve themselves with a blend of playfulness, curiosity, and risk-taking. Some of these planned happenings are so novel that students' conventional responses are circumvented, and they have an opportunity to see themselves from unfamiliar or even surprising perspectives. Other exercises provide training and practice in new ways of experiencing, self-expression, or relating to others. The bibliography lists a variety of sources for other individual and group techniques and exercises which can contribute to a group's self-development.

1. Read the section, "Be Your Own Chairman." As you read underline any significant work, phrase, or sentence that stirs you emotionally in some way. Review what you have underlined and then pick out the three items that you regard as most important to you in one way or another. Share and discuss with your group your three most important underlinings. After this discussion close your eyes and review your three items from this point of view. Assume that one of these items is related to some important experience that you have had as a child, either at home in relation to one of your parents or to a sibling, or in school, or elsewhere. See what experiences come to mind in relation to one of your three items. After a few minutes of such introspection, open your eyes and share your memory with the group. At the completion of this sharing, go around and have each member evaluate to what extent he was his own chairman in the above discussion.

2. Follow the same procedure as described in Exercise 1 with reference to section, "Disturbances Take Precedence." In the final phase of this exercise, have a go-around in which each of you shares with the group the extent to which you followed the rule about disturbances.

3. Family Sayings. Every family has its own favorite expressions, proverbs, slogans, advices, admonitions, or warnings. These repeated sayings express core values and attitudes which permeate the whole atmosphere and enter significantly into the development of one's personality. Members list all the repetitive sayings they can recall from their own families and then read them aloud in a go-around. In the discussion which follows, members may wish to explore how their family sayings may effect their participation in the group.

4. Eyeolog. Carry on a wordless dialogue with each other using only your eyes. Look about the room, find somebody's eyes, and then conduct as meaningful a communication with this person as you can. When either of you feels finished, break the eye contact and see if you can catch someone else's eye, and carry on as meaningful a communication as you can with this new person. Keep doing this with as many or as few people as you wish for about five minutes. This experience is usually a very rich one in providing a group with a variety of meaningful encounters for later exploration.

5. Form subgroups according to varying childhood patterns. For example, members can group themselves according to their birth order, those who were the oldest children in their original families get together in one group, the youngest in another, the middle in a third, and onlies in a fourth. These subgroups locate themselves in different parts of the room, and then explore the various experiences they had by virtue of their birth order position. After fifteen or twenty minutes all groups can be recombined into new subgroups, for example, a group whose fathers were the dominant parent, a mother -- dominant group -- and a group in which neither parent was seen as dominant. As members find themselves in different groups, they have opportunities to become acquainted and to see each other from shifting and often novel angles.

6. Who Stands Out? All the members mingle as relaxedly as possible and look each other over, really inspect each other, and see what you feel when you look at different people, and see how different members make you feel as they look at you. Feel free to touch members in any way that is comfortable for you, but do not talk to them. See if there is one member to whom you react in some unusually striking or intense way. After about five minutes of this, return to your seats and discuss who in the group stood out for you and how.

7. Ask me a Question. One member of the group volunteers to be "it." Every other member writes out a personal question that they would like to put to the volunteer. After they have done this, they close their eyes and imagine that they are walking up to the volunteer and looking him squarely in the eye, ask him the question they thought of. They then listen, and in their imagination, hear his response. Once they have "heard" his answer, they open their eyes and write the sentence down. When the group has completed this task, one member at a time asks the volunteer his question, hears the volunteer's real answer (as self-disclosing and truthful as he can comfortably make it), and then reads aloud the answer he imagined the volunteer would give.

8. Say This to Me. Each member does the following in turn. He closes his eyes and thinks of one sentence he would like to

hear the group say to him. This sentence will be addressed to him personally with his first name preceding the sentence itself. It can be any kind of sentence, one that the person has actually heard, or one that he has never heard said to him. It can be a painful sentence or a pleasurable one. The person tells the group how many times he would like the members to repeat the sentence and how he wishes them to say it -- loudly, softly, scoldingly, caressingly, or however.

9. Reverse Name Definitions. Spell out your first name in reverse. Look at your reverse name. Pretend that it spells a strange, new word that comes from a language of an alien species on the planet Mars. Roll this alien word over your tongue, and decide how it is pronounced on Mars. Now write out a definition of the word as it would appear in a Martian dictionary. The group then hears each person's definition of his reverse name, and then later explores how these definitions might reflect some central theme for each member.

10. Here-and-Now Go-around. Sit in a circle. Each person in turn says in a sentence or two what at the very moment he is noticing about or feeling towards another group member. Continue doing this for about fifteen minutes. This procedure is valuable not only in focusing members' attention on the here-and-now but in providing silent members in a relatively safe way with opportunities to practice sharing with others what is going on in them.

11. Sharing Disturbances. It is important for members to become proficient in recognizing when they are disturbed in some way and to share these disturbances with the group as soon as possible, when these disturbances are significantly blocking. As practice in this kind of sharing the group closes its eyes, and each member imagines himself in a group meeting. Visualize a discussion going on, hear what it is about, and notice who is talking. In a few moments, something will occur which will disturb you very much. See what it is. Now fantasy yourself expressing your upset feelings as forthrightly as you can. Hear what reactions you get and what develops next. Members share their fantasies with special emphasis on practicing aloud the forthright expression of their disturbed feelings.

12. Getting it Off Your Chest. Divide the group into trios. One member in each trio is designated "A", the second, "B", and the third, "C". The "A's" share with their "B's" something disturbing that they are experiencing in the group, for example, some worry about what may happen in the meeting, or a negative reaction to some other member. All "B's" are instructed to respond to the "A's" in ways which make "A" feel that he is really being listened to and that an effort is being made to understand how he feels. All "C's" observe the interaction between "A's" and "B's", with particular attention to evaluating the ways in

which "B's" appear to fulfill their assignment. After five minutes of interaction between "A" and "B," each trio takes five minutes to share its observations and reactions. Then all "A's" move in a clockwise direction, and all "C's" in a counterclockwise direction, to the next trio. In this fashion every member becomes part of a new trio. "B's" now share their disturbances with "C's", and "A's" observe. Then in a third shifting of trios, the "A's" express their disturbances. This exercise is useful in giving members practice in expressing disturbed feelings and in providing training in some of the listening skills required in group meetings.

13. Expressing Feelings Directly. In a go-around each of you in turn will get in touch with some feeling which you are experiencing toward one of the other members. Express this feeling towards the person in the form of a question which gives the appearance of simply asking for information, but which really expresses this feeling in disguised form. The member to whom you address your question will attempt to sense the hidden feeling and will ask, "Are you trying to tell me such and such? And if your answer to this is, "Yes," then he will say, "Why not say so?" You will then recast your sentence into a declarative sentence which openly states your feeling. If the person to whom the question is addressed fails to sense the hidden feeling, he can ask for help from the class at large.

14. Tell Him, Not Me. This exercise is designed to get members into the habit of talking to each other instead of about each other. Member "A" says a sentence to his neighbor "B" about "F." "B" says, "Don't tell me. Tell 'F' directly." "A" does so. Then "F" says, "Thank you for telling me." Then "F" repeats the process saying something to his neighbor "G" about another member in the room, and so forth.

15. Close your eyes and imagine that some person in the group has just said something angry and hurtful to another member. You see this other member wincing. Look and see who specifically it is in this group who is saying something hurtful, and see specifically who it is that winces. Notice what thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. Now let this imaginary scene develop by itself in any direction. After a couple of minutes open your eyes and discuss your fantasies. Other crises which you and your group can imagine and develop include "a participant suddenly bursts into tears," "one member arrives extremely late for a third time in a row," and "a member monopolizes the discussion." Each fantasy can be explored from different angles, but especially in terms of a constructive or destructive action taken in coping with the crisis.

16. Spit-back. Spit-back refers to a member's right to take as much or as little of another's feedback as he wishes, to taste what is presented, and to spit it out if it does not taste good. Members practice spit-back as follows: One member

says to a second the first ritual sentence, "(First name,) I wish you a good, long life, but I don't like the way you (here a criticism is expressed)." The criticized member replies with a second ritual sentence, "Thank you, (member's first name), for telling me. I'll think over what you say, but I wasn't put on earth to be the way you want me to be." He then selects a member in the group to criticize, and in this fashion the format of these two ritual sentences is repeated a number of times until each member has had at least one practice turn.

17. You are You, Not Me. The group sits in a circle. One member starts the game by singling out another member and saying to him, for example, "Bill, you are Bill, not Dick." Bill looks back at Dick and says, "Yes, Dick, I am Bill, not Dick." It is now Bill's turn to repeat the ritual. He looks the group over and picks out another member and says, for example, "Peter, you are Peter, not Bill, and Peter replies, "Yes, Bill, I am Peter, not Bill." Then Peter repeats these ritual sentences with another member, and so forth. Each member may choose whomever he wishes as often as he wishes, but you always use the same two ritual sentences. You can introduce variations in your exchanges through changing your tones of voice, the emphasis you place on this or that word, how quickly or slowly you say the sentences, or the gestures you make as you say them.

18. Family Diagram. This exercise modified from one developed by Bodin is very useful in drawing each group's attention to its network of relations as perceived by each member. Draw a diagram of the relationship in your group as you actually see or experience them. Draw each member as a rectangle. Label each figure with a person's name. Include one with your name. The figures can be square, long, thin, or anything in between. They can be standing up on end the tall way, or lying down on edge the flat way, or tilted at any slanted angle. You can make them any size and on any place on the paper. They can be separate, touching, or partly or completely overlapping. Members compare and discuss their drawings.

19. Who Reminds You? Each member looks about his group and selects the one member, male or female, who reminds him most of his mother in some respects. This procedure is then repeated for one's father, and for one's siblings. These selections may be discussed as they are spontaneously shared or in a series of go-arounds.

20. Stop the argument and institute this rule: "Each person can speak up for himself only after he asks, 'Do you mean to say...'" and then restates the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately and to that speaker's satisfaction." This means that before one disputant presents his point of view, it is necessary for him to really understand the other person's thoughts and feelings so well that he can summarize them for

him. Only if and when one disputant has reflected the meanings that the other wanted to express can he make his statement. It is amazing how often people think that they have expressed themselves clearly and are being understood, but either the speaker or the listener, or both, have difficulty sharing in the simple communication. This rule of checking out whether one has heard what the other person wanted to say sounds deceptively simple, but if the members involved try to stick to the rule, they will probably find that angry feelings tend to lessen, differences tend to be reduced, and these differences which remain are more of an understandable sort.

21. Disputants carry on the argument but with roles reversed. Each plays the other's part, putting himself in the other's shoes and trying to feel the other's feelings and think the other's thoughts. Sometimes just trying to imitate the other person's physical position and feel how it may feel to sit or stand in this or that way is helpful in seeing the other person in a more constructive perspective.

22. Each disputant in turn develops an argumentative dialogue between himself and his opponent, playing both parts, and aiming for a "script" which ends in some kind of reconciliation. While one disputant develops a dialogue, the other listens silently.

23. Ask the two disputants to go through the following interactions, each one lasting for three minutes: they sit back and talk to each other without arguing. They sit face to face and look at each other without touching or talking. They look at and touch each other without talking. They touch each other with their eyes closed and without talking. They talk (but no arguing) without touching. Finally, they touch, look at each other, and renew their argument with each other (but only for three minutes). (from V. Satir.)

24. You may use this for post-sessions or homework: Ask each combatant to write out at home his responses to the following questions and then bring them into the next meeting for sharing and exploration: What specifically do you (the opponent) do or say which makes me feel good or which I appreciate? What specifically do you do or say which makes me feel bad or which I resent? What do I do towards you which I feel good about? What do I do towards you which I regret and feel badly about? What could you and I try to do to resolve our differences?

25. Every member, including the combatants, symbolizes the conflict between them in a drawing. These drawings are then shared and discussed.

26. The two disputants are asked to act out their feelings instead of using words to describe them. For example, they

may be instructed to remain silent, look into each other's eyes, and walk very slowly toward each other, and when they come together to do whatever they feel like doing without planning their actions in advance. (From Schuz) Physical attacks, of course, which might inflict damage are out of bounds. Competitive games of strength, however, are sometimes quite useful. For instance, in Indian arm-wrestling, the two combatants lie down on the floor on their stomachs and put their right arms up to the elbow on the floor, the two arms touching from the elbow up, hands folded into each other, and thumbs locked. Each person tries to push his opponent's right side.

27. Conduct the argument within a round by round format with each round followed by a group huddle or briefing. The first round should be verbal, the second nonverbal, the third nonverbal, etc. Thus, the two disputants discuss their feelings towards each other for two minutes in the center of the family, following which they retire to their respective places in the circle and listen silently to the group's analysis and reactions for three minutes. At the end of the group's analysis of this first round, they then resume a second round of interaction, this time entirely nonverbal, again lasting for two minutes. This again is followed by a three minute period of group discussion to which the disputants silently listen in, etc., until some significant place of progress is achieved.

28. Consider having group meetings taperecorded. Then when any difficult-to-resolve conflicts break out, the group and the combatants might find it profitable to listen to the playback of the event, and go on from there. (We would suggest that you erase the recordings after having used them, for it is almost impossible to keep tapes confidential.