

Helping Helpers: What Does It Take To Be An Effective Human Service Worker

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I believe patience, empathy, and a willingness to learn are the three pillars of the human services field. With these three qualities, a human service professional is set up for success in our modern and ever-changing world. This paper will elaborate on how these three qualities shape a great human service worker. The role of a human services worker is not like most jobs; the human service worker has chosen to dedicate their time to helping others. This field of work can be incredibly difficult at times, but also rewarding.

The Three Pillars

Pillar One: Empathy

In the pursuit of being an effective worker in human services, it is important to remember you are dealing with many different human lives and stories. The people you interact with, whether on a daily or monthly basis, rely on the support you are giving them, so sometimes the lines between your personal life and professional life can be blurred. As explained by Sinai and Cohen (2025), "Research has shown that for social workers, the personal and the professional are intertwined, and here we see a strong manifestation of how social workers speak of the things they must be and the characteristics they need to hone to be good practitioners" (p. 170). Because of these authors' conclusion, I believe when you work with people, you need to have a good understanding of empathy. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), empathy is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another"(Definition 1). As a human services worker, you are expected to help others. To be effective at this, you need to understand who it is you are helping, and empathy is a key tool to understanding others.

We use empathy every day, sometimes without even knowing it. You might see a commercial for children in Africa who do not have water. Now, you might not know what being in Africa is like, but through empathy, we can, in a way, put ourselves in those children's shoes and become sad and create an emotional connection to them. It works the same way with the people you will work with in the

human services field. Being able to empathise with the emotions and problems in your client's lived experience will allow you to help them in a more effective way.

Pillar Two: Patience

Patience is another key aspect of being an effective human services worker. The job of a human services worker is, at its core, helping people with problems in living more fulfilling lives. It can be deduced from this understanding of the profession that a human service worker is trying to help the world, one person at a time. According to the advice to future social workers from the University of Massachusetts Global (UMass Global) (2024), "The road to social change can be long and arduous, requiring patience and perseverance. Don't get disheartened by the pace of change, it's important you embrace the entire journey"(para. 13). Change is not instant as much as we would like it to be. For workers employed in this field, it could be years or even your whole career before you see systems or the people you work with change. The ability to meet people where they are and not rush the change is important for creating good relationships with clients and peers. That is why patience is so important.

Pillar Two: Willingness to Learn

UMass Global (2024) provides additional advice to aspiring social workers: "[They] must adjust to shifting societal dynamics, emerging research, and evolving best practices.

Staying up to date with these changes is essential for providing the highest level of care and support to clients" (para. 27). This constant change inherent to social work is why the third pillar—willingness to learn—is such an important quality for effective human services workers. Humans are constantly changing, and so is the world around them. For human service workers to be effective, they need to have a good understanding of the world and what changes are occurring. Helping problems in living is the expectation for the average human service worker.

With the rise of technology over the last 20 years, the life of the average human has changed dramatically. Understanding the positive and negative effects of things like

social media, AI is extremely relevant to the people you will be trying to help. This means that as a human services worker, your willingness to learn about these changes needs to be present to be effective. Change can only be found through better understanding and education. So if you are trying to help a client change but you are sedentary yourself, that is a disadvantage to you and your client because you will not be nearly as effective as a helper.

Conclusion

In conclusion, being a human service worker is not easy. With information and knowledge constantly changing, it can be hard to keep up. You'll be asked to deal with different people and personalities that you might not understand. Time without significant progress can seem endless. But with the three pillars—patience, empathy, and a willingness to learn—the road to being an effective human services worker becomes much more manageable.

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