

**CHANGING BEHAVIOR IN
INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES, AND GROUPS**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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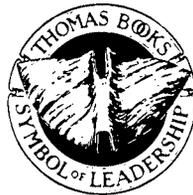
CHANGING BEHAVIOR IN INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES, AND GROUPS

Identifying, Analyzing and Manipulating
the Elements Involved in Change in Order
to Promote or Inhibit Alteration of Behavior

By

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IN MEMORIAM

Much of the development of my thinking about behavior and how to change it was influenced by Bernice Bukar Blank. Her incisiveness and intuition not only contributed to changes in the lives of her husband and children but in the behavior of her many clients and students. She was a living expression of AMCOLER.

Just after World War II, a musical opened in the Booth Theater on Broadway. It introduced the comedian Sid Caesar, who was to become a television great. A paraphrase of the opening number went something like this:

He was a jerk before he went into the service
Through the flak and the fire
The muck and the mire
From a foreign shore
He's back once more
Changed in many respects . . . but still a jerk.
(Harold Rome, *Call Me Mister*, 1946.)

PREFACE

In this book, the author identifies the six elements that he believes are essential for behavior change. He postulates that, if these elements are analyzed and manipulated, behavioral change may be promoted and sustained. He further discusses other factors that may promote or inhibit alteration of behavior and how they may be employed to understand and regulate change in human systems, such as groups, couples, and societies. The book also attempts to throw light on such phenomena as peak experiences, fads, fashion, political and religious movements.

A major thesis of this book is that every person behaves in accordance with constructs that they have formed about themselves, others, and the world they live in. To change behavior, it is necessary for one to become aware of their constructs and to alter them to achieve various objectives.

The goal of this book is to instruct people as to how to change their own behavior and interactions with others. For the student of behavior and change agent, these writings should prove valuable. For the public, the liberal use of case history illustrations should prove most helpful. And the Guide to Change in the Appendix provides a useful means of implementing the ideas presented.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most recalcitrant, unchangeable figures of literature was Ebenezer Scrooge. Then, one night, after visits from Christmas Past, Present, and Future, he made a complete and dramatic change. (23)

Scrooge, of course, is a metaphor for us all. What made this incorrigible character change? More importantly, what will make us change? Scrooge became aware from Christmas Past of who he was, the mistakes he made, and the opportunities missed. He learned from Christmas Present who he is and the consequences of his life style. And he learned from Christmas Yet to Come the implications of his course of life and the options available to him. In that one night, Scrooge reorganized his identity and behavior and committed himself to change. Whether these Christmas ghosts were really master psychotherapists (or a composite of one) or his metamorphosis was a result of something he ate or a series of dreams or revelations of unknown origin, he tapped certain psychological factors that allowed him to change.

Many writers and researchers have written about change. Most of them have been concerned with discrete, specific indices and measurements of personality traits or behavior. This form of microscopic analysis has told us little of the changing person as a person. Others have been interested in broad and dramatic instances of personality transformation. Such macroscopic interpretation has usually been anecdotal or fuzzy in nature.

The emphasis will not be on abstract theoretical discussions or technical considerations. Rather, we shall examine issues relevant to change which will be familiar to you and appeal to your common sense. This book does not purport to convey dogma or scientific laws. Yet, we hope that our considerations and speculations will be sufficiently meticulous and original to be useful to students, teachers and practitioners. This book is geared to the very large and varied group of mental health

specialists and their patient populations (i.e., psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, psychiatric nurses, etc.).

After more than four decades practicing, teaching, supervising, and researching psychotherapy and personality, I have conceptualized what I believe to be the components of change. My purpose in this book is to explain as pragmatically as possible what factors would help a Scrooge, or yourself, to change. Permit me to be your spirit of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. While we will consider other people's lives in case histories, let yourself dip into your own psychic experiences to relate to how others have or have not changed.

To explore the boundaries of change, we seek to include the cutting edge of theory and study but mostly of observations. Some of the assumptions cited by others may seem questionable and even mystical and all should be questioned rigorously. Change, however, often lies at the border of fixed assumptions and unthought of and untried experiences. When we consider change components we ask the reader to always relate to his empirical observations—his own experience—for that is irrefutable data.

There are four sections in this book. The first deals with the structure and theory of change and stress. The second offers this author's conceptualization of the components of behavioral change. The third section examines special factors that influence change. And the final section discusses change in systems such as couples, groups, and societies.

For those interested in changing themselves, we have included in the Appendix a Guide to Self Change. The reader as he completes each chapter on a change component, problem solving, and change for couples can implement it with the Guide and by referring to the relevant exercises in the chapter on Self Change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through all of my own changes as well as my years of working on *Change*, my children, Lyda, Rona and Jordan, have been a source of inspiration, ideas, and feedback. More recently, John Rundel, Toni Herbine, and Doug and Eunah Lee have entered my life and constructs. Most profoundly, Moon Lee, pediatrician, neuropsychiatrist, human being par excellence, has reshuffled my life and perceptions. Finally, Barbara A. Kraskin, who has not only typed but critiqued my writings from beginning to end, is owed a sincere vote of thanks.

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**CHANGING BEHAVIOR IN
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Part I
THE NATURE OF CHANGE

Chapter 1

THE NATURE AND MODES OF CHANGE

The behavior of humans, groups, and entire societies and cultures is extremely resistive to change. Yet life is dynamic—a continuous and inevitable process of change. This paradox—a resistance and need for change—describes the tug and the pull, the stress and the strain, and in and yang of human experience.

Despite the massive resistance to change and its apparent unpredictability, I believe the components of change may be described, manipulated, and, if all are successfully addressed, change effected.

What is human change? It is the alteration of ideas, attitudes, and behavior. It is prodigiously difficult to modify any one of these three processes and extraordinary for all three to be modified simultaneously.

Ideas are essentially the products of a culture or a system, such as the family or a peer group. To change an idea risks disapproval and requires an admixture of courage and rebellion. Too often we are unwilling to pay such a price, although the rewards can be profound. Attitudes are ingrained and fixed early in life—a “self-system” (108). Anything that deviates from this system (is cognitively dissonant), we tend to reject. That which agrees (is cognitively congruent), we tend to retain. So we read those books and newspapers with whose politics we agree, listen to that music we know, and talk only to those people in the same or the next pew.

Our earliest experiences profoundly shape our behavior throughout life. Animals can be conditioned to seek out similarities to their earliest life conditions for the rest of their lives. Thus, ducklings may be conditioned early in life to bond to a human who will forever be their mother. There is ample suggestion of analogous conditioning for humans. That is, our earliest experiences shape our behavior throughout life.

Societies, cultures, governments, religions, organizations, and such do not change people. That is not their business. (Indeed, it is often their business to keep them the same.) It is people who change themselves.

That is why the true educator or leader seeks to jog, jar, and disjoint

the thinking of his adherents. And they are, throughout history, a precious few, and particularly liable to crucifixion, assassination, or ridicule. By far, the preponderance of “leaders” are cheerleaders, exhorting the masses to hold onto what they have or to grab more of the same.

This is because change inherently feels dangerous. We devote the early part of our lives (and the rest of it, too) primarily to gain control over our precarious existence. We want to avoid the threats and shocks of the unknown and to predict what will happen to us. So we form rigid patterns and ritualistic modes of assuring and reassuring our security. We can, at best, tolerate minimal increments of novelty and newness. (We are talking here about societal norms. It will be discussed later how the individual may seek stimulation or the “fix” afforded by the excitement of danger.) That the prototypical human is a miserable predictor and often mistakenly establishes his “security” at the base of a volcano, a port in the path of hurricanes, or in the eye of a holocaust, does not belie the quest for (irrational) security. Denial has always been in the service of sameness and the nemesis of change.

So why change willingly at all? Because otherwise, we stultify, stagnate, and die—the very thing we fear the most. At least coequal to the force of resistance is the human drive for growth, mastery, and exploration.

Whether a perversity of human nature, or the influence of the institutions that we construct, change is tenaciously resisted. Resistance to change may not always have been perverse, for in the primordial history of animals and their predecessors the balance of life was so precarious that a clinging to constancy, to homeostasis, preserved the species. The almost mindless shark, the plodding tortoise, the dauntless roach, the flitting fly, and the driven rat have flourished while changing little over the millennia.

While it may also be equally true that homosapiens may have altered little since his Neanderthal forebears, save in his ability to collectively store, retrieve, and transmit information—that is to learn and teach cognitively—he has managed in a handful of years to skim the surface of the earth, fly over, and even escape the planet, to contact the farthest outreaches of the universe, and to unleash and harness the energy of the atom. Of course, in the process, he may well blow himself up and along with him, the shark, the tortoise, the roach, the fly, the rat, and all other living matter. So much for change.

Nevertheless, change is life and life is change. This is true from the microscopic cellular reproduction to the most macroscopic of human

endeavors. Freud postulated that a basic instinct for organisms, including man, is a return to an inert state; that dying is contributed to, at some level, by an intent to cease all change. Nevertheless, to be alive involves the search for stimulation, novelty, and challenge. In the absence of dynamic (that is, changing) forces operating intrapsychically and externally, there is a deadening status. The senses are jaded and the psychomotor apparatus grinds down to a crawl.

When people are deprived of, or deprive themselves of, stimulation, as in sensory deprivation, they respond pathologically and even psychotically. Either they become apathetic or they search restlessly, even frenetically, for stimuli. There is an emotional withering that often is accompanied by physical atrophy. In babies, this condition in the extreme is called marasmus and can be fatal (63). In the restless search for stimulation, there may be a wild, impulsive, and even manic behavior or manufacture of stimulation, as in hallucinations. Either reaction—apathy or manic behavior—is pathological and is a desperation response of the human organism to rectify or protect against the poverty of stimuli. Impoverishment of stimuli is also responsible for somatic atrophy, disease, and premature aging. It is the type, quality, and composition of stimuli that determine whether and what change takes place.

So, we need to be stimulated, sensorially and intellectually, to be fully alive. The problem is that people tend to turn off stimuli internally, as well as externally, because of real or imagined threat. If the environment appears threatening or overwhelming, we turn off and tune out. It is not, however, an easy matter to reverse the process. Change is the medium. Change is the answer. And change is resisted.

Why do you sometimes change your behavior and sometimes resist it? If you could determine the causes that promote or retard change, then you could manipulate these factors for the desired result. *It is the thesis of this book that you can understand these factors sufficiently to effect change.*

Philosophy, religion, or spiritual development, sociology, anthropology, history, education, politics, and some say, even economics, all contend that knowledge of human behavior and its origins can be utilized to influence or change behavior. The art and science of the psychotherapies are particularly devoted to this contention and, when most comprehensive, incorporate all of the above disciplines—and more. No one school of psychotherapy necessarily includes (or sufficiently emphasizes) all of the change factors. In fact, the enthusiasms of any one school of thought tends to harden into doctrinaire and rigid application of *techniques*. It