

BEHAVIORAL CHANGE: HOW TO ACCOMPLISH IT.

This article describes change, how it occurs and how it affects human behavior. It explains how it can be changed and directed.

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The dictionary defines change as to make something different. Scientists say that change is constantly taking place and that nothing ever remains the same. Change, for our purpose, may be divided into natural change and directed change. Natural change is constantly taking place and may or not be the result of human effort. Directed change is a result of human effort. In the case of natural change there is little man can do to control it even though his activity may have started the change? When man first discovered how to make fire it began a series of changes that affected almost every element of their life. Since there is little one can do to affect natural change it will be accepted as a natural process which is not critical to directed change.

Directed change is the kind of change one wants to take place. Education is a means that society has chosen to perpetuate itself. While society is the main instrument for educating its citizens it isn't the only factor involved in the education system. Families, institutions and individuals play an important role in the process. Every society establishes a set of values and behaviors which identify its culture. Not only does society establish its values and desired behavior it organizes systems to achieve and maintain them. The education systems range from simple to complex and vary greatly from culture to culture. However, the purpose is the same and that is perpetuating the society or culture. Cultures are dynamic and are in a constant state of flux. But every culture has a central core of values and behaviors that the society attempts to maintain. Persons interested in culture and its dynamics may want to read the works of Ralph Linton which can be found on the internet and in most college libraries. The focus of this article is on change and how to accomplish it; therefore it will be limited to the basic elements involved in change. The major elements involved in change may be classified as internal and external forces. Internal force is a set of values the individual has accepted and which, to a great extent, regulates his/her thinking and behavior. External forces are those elements outside of the individual which attempts to direct or modify the individual's behavior. External force is effective in directing an individual or individuals' behavior and certainly has its place in many situations and for maintaining order. It is questionable whether any organization could exist and function without a systems of external forces. Can you imagine a school or classroom operating if there were no rules or regulations and persons to enforce them? External force can achieve the desired behavior from an individual or group for a limited time. External force is only effective as long as there is a system in place to enforce it. Remove the external force and the individuals most likely will revert to behavior that is in harmony with their internal value system. Therefore external force is necessary but it is of limited value for changing behavior. The behavior change achieved from external force is a temporary change which **will enable** the enable the individual to cope with his/her situation.

The primary purpose of any education system must be to provide the individuals with the skills, knowledge and a value system which will enable them to function in and to perpetuate their society. External forces can be effective in developing skills and knowledge but are of little value in developing an individual's internal values. Individuals have a set of internal values that have been developed long before they entered school. An individual's values are dynamic and constantly being modified by forces over which one has little control. However, that doesn't mean that in certain situations these values cannot be changed and directed.

How can a teacher or anyone change a person? Temporary change can be accomplished by the use of external force but it is only effective when the enforcing agent or fear is present. Permanent change will only occur when there is a change in an individual's internal value system. When one wants to modify an individual's behavior the first step is to determine what behavior or change is desired, temporary or permanent. The next step is to design a program which will change an individual's behavior. If permanent change is desired one needs to understand how internal values can be modified. Change can be brought about by convincing the individual that his beliefs are wrong and that substituting new ones. Controlling and changing the individual's environment to a point that his/her behavior will not permit acceptable survival. In biology it is generally accepted that an organism must adapt to its environment or it will not survive. This is basically true of most humans. If a person finds themselves in an environment foreign to them they will generally attempt to modify their behavior or the environment to make it compatible with their values. If unable to do this they will attempt to escape the situation or rebel. So one method to effectuate change is to control and modify the environment. The problem with this method is that it may be difficult to make the necessary changes in the environment which will cause the desired change in behavior. The advantage of this method is that an individual makes the choice to change and if successful he/she may adopt this behavior. This method, even with its difficulties, offers the best way to make a lasting change in behavior. Permanent or lasting change can only be brought about by changing the individual's values. As long as an individual's behavior is satisfying to the individual he/she is not likely to change. Regardless of outcomes caused by their behavior individuals will rationalize their behavior, good or bad, as long as it is consistent with their values. Only when behavior is inconsistent with their values will the individual make permanent changes in their behavior.

The task, of changing behavior in individuals is difficult but the rewards for everyone are great. The individual and society profits when a person is able to become an acceptable and a contributing member.