



Module Ten: Putting it All Together

This week is your last lesson on Choice Theory. Next week we will begin looking at the questioning or Reality Therapy process. This week's lesson is about tying all the component parts of Choice Theory together with some examples.

Choice Theory tells us that all we do is behave. Our behaviors are almost always chosen, whether or not we are aware of the choice. All behavior is purposeful. This means that everything we do and everything anyone else does is a best attempt to get something that's wanted. We don't do things for no reason. We are always trying the best behavior we have available to us to get something we want.

Counselors:

Whenever you are working with a client, you may not know exactly what they want because they may not tell you but when you look at the behavior(s) they are using, you already know they are attempting to get something they want.

Let's look at a 45 year-old woman whose husband brought her to you for depression. When you speak to the woman, you learn that four months ago, her husband came home and said he was leaving her. He didn't love her anymore and had, in fact, fallen in love with a 20 year-old he met at the local Starbucks.

You also learned that was when the wife's depressive symptoms began. What woman wouldn't be depressed to learn her husband had fallen in love with a much younger woman? It almost seems the inevitable reaction to an outside event.

However, when you begin to apply a Choice Theory lens to the problem, you start to see a slightly, more encouraging story. The client, Joanne, had a long-term Quality World picture of growing old with her husband. She expected and wanted to spend the rest of her life with this man. Together, in their younger years, they had sacrificed a lot to take care of their children, for him to move up in his company, and for her to go back to school. Joanne thought they were getting closer to being able to live the life of their dreams together, with more time to spend with each other.

When her husband provided her with the information that he no longer loved her and had fallen in love with a younger woman, she recognized the information in her Total Knowledge Filter and

as soon as it got to her Valuing Filter, she colored it red or painful. This was not positive, happy information. That information went through the Perceived World and was placed on the left side of the Comparing Place or scale. Joanne's Quality World picture of her happy marriage to her husband, Steve, went on the other side of the scale.

As a result, her scales went totally out of balance. There would have been a very strong frustration signal to do something, anything, to correct the situation. Joanne would have begun accessing her Behavioral or Creative System. Sometimes people are aware of accessing this process and other times it happens out of their conscious awareness. Joanne would have begun seeking behaviors that could be helpful in the situation.

She may have come across older behaviors from the past, remembering when her 16 year-old boyfriend cheated on her and she got angry. In fact, Joanne reported that her first response was shock but that then she quickly moved into anger and rage. She accused her husband of terrible things and even broke a vase they had received as a wedding gift. She ordered him out of the house and he gladly left.

After that, Joanne had taken to her bed. She stopped going to work. She wouldn't take phone calls from her friends, co-workers or children. Even though she was in bed most of the time, she had difficulty sleeping. She wasn't eating. All she did was cry and hope to shut the world out.

This was a totally new behavior for her, or was it? Certainly, Joanne had never responded with such severe depressive behavior, but if you think about what happens with many little girls when they are unhappy, they cry and subsequently, they are comforted. This creates the lesson that depressing is a very need-satisfying behavior. It works.

Joanne was in a situation where she was trying to get the Quality World picture of her happy marriage back and the best thing she knew to do was first to rage and when that didn't work, she began to depress.

When Steve saw how sick Joanne had become, he moved back into the house to take care of her. He felt guilty about what his behavior had "caused." But he wanted to return to his new life with his lover and needed Joanne to get better so he could do that.

Dr. Glasser says, "It is difficult for even the most unhappy among us to choose misery once they know it is a choice." So, as a therapist counseling with Choice Theory, you would teach Joanne Choice Theory, helping her understand about the choice she is making in depressing. She would have to admit it's a fairly effective behavior for guiltling her husband into staying with her but she may come to accept that it is not the conscious behavior she would want to choose in the situation.

We will discuss more about counseling in the section on Reality Therapy.

Educators:

In using Choice Theory in schools, there are several things to consider, the main one being that if students have successful, responsible ways of getting their needs met in school, then there will be no reason for them to "act out" in class.

What does that mean for educators? If you want students to choose responsible behavior in school, then teachers need to provide positive, responsible ways for kids to get their needs met in class.

What does that look like? Let's start with survival. It is up to teachers to create a classroom where students can feel safe and secure. Students need to know they will be safe from violence, bullying, and gossip. A strong teacher can show students that unsafe behaviors will not be tolerated in the classroom by co-developing standards of behavior with all students to achieve student buy-in.

Next is love & belonging. Students need time to relate to and connect with their peers and friends. I did consulting work in a school where there was only a 3-minute pass time between classes and twenty minute lunch periods. Kids did not have opportunities to talk to each other. This created a lot of misbehavior in class as students ignored teachers while catching up with their classmates. When students have opportunities to meet this social need responsibly, they won't insist on doing it irresponsibly. Giving students five minutes to talk at the beginning of classes or allowing them to work together on class assignments during school can be helpful in this area, among other plans for student interaction.

Students also need to feel a connection with their teachers. Teachers generally get into teaching to help kids. One close relationship with a teacher can mean the difference for a student between making great decisions in school and being disruptive or violent in school. A close relationship with a grownup who cares has been shown to be extremely beneficial in a child's life.

Another need is fun. When learning is fun and not boring, students get lost in their enjoyment of the learning. If learning is about boring, repetitive tasks or memorization, then count on students to create ways of having fun in class that will likely be disruptive. There are many ways to make learning fun. One is to connect the learning to something relevant. Another is to involve kinetic movement while learning and yet another is to infuse humor into the lessons. Fun is essential to the learning process.

The next need is for freedom. Whenever a person is feeling boxed in and restricted, the freedom need kicks in and they start looking for avenues of escape, whether physical or mental. There is not a lot of freedom built into the school day for students. Some ways to create freedom is to negotiate rules, give lots of options and choices, and allow students to demonstrate their competence in a variety of ways that work best for them.

The final need is for power. This is typically the need that causes the most disturbances in schools, particularly secondary schools. Students are attempting to get their power and freedom needs met. These are important needs in a child's development, particularly during adolescence.

Adults want kids to grow up to be powerful and independent. Unfortunately, it often takes the form of breaking rules and challenging authority which is certainly problematic in schools.

In order to prevent those behaviors, it is necessary to infuse ways for students to legitimately feel powerful, in control and competent throughout their school day. One way is to limit the amount of rules, and instead co-develop standard guidelines the class agrees to for co-existing together. Another way is to switch to a competency-based learning system. Stop using the school year as the timeframe to demonstrate competence and instead do away with time altogether. Let students know they will only get credit for a class when they demonstrate competence in the subject matter. And then, let them know you, the teacher, will ensure they have the tools, instruction and resources to be successful. You will not let them fail. You will work with them until they "get it." When students begin to believe that they can achieve competence, then they will begin to gain joy again from working toward competence.

Another way to infuse power into the school day is to never engage in power struggles with a student. Whenever a student steps forward to challenge a teacher, the teacher needs to use that opportunity to determine what that student really wants and work toward a negotiated solution so the student and the teacher can both get their needs met, creating a win/win solution.

Business Leaders:

One of the biggest applications of Choice Theory in business is to understand what motivates people. When you believe Choice Theory principles, then you know people are motivated internally, not externally. Therefore the old carrot and stick methods of, "If you do something I want, then I will reward you with something" are largely ineffective. In fact, they can be downright insulting because people do not like to be controlled at home or at work.

Another thing that is largely ineffective in business is the punishment route. Punishing may cause workers to fear you or to fear detection but it doesn't stop them from being motivated from the inside out. When you create a climate of fear in your employees, then the best you can hope for is compliance. You won't get quality or creativity. A fearful worker will only do enough to get by. They are too scared to be engaged in the thinking you need them to be doing to help move your business forward.

So, where does internal motivation come from? You need to understand what best motivates each of your employees because no two people are exactly the same. You likely have some employees who would love public recognition of being employee of the month and others who would hate the hoopla of being paraded in front of others.

Do you know what need motivates each of your employees the most? If it's survival, then you will likely need to provide a lot of guidance and structure for that person in order for him or her to feel safe. If it's power, then that employee will feel rewarded with recognition and increased responsibility. If it's freedom, that employee will want opportunities for increased independence. Do not be looking over that employee's shoulder. They need lots of space and room, when they have the responsible behavior to manage that freedom.

If you have employees motivated by love & belonging, then they will be motivated by appreciation and social time. Give them some time to talk about their personal lives and to connect with co-workers during work. And finally, people motivated by fun like to pull pranks, tell jokes, laugh at work and also appreciate meaningful training to enhance their job performance (learning).

In order to tap into your employee's internal motivation, you need to know them and what things they each find motivating. It's more work for you in the short-term, but much more effective in the long run.

Conclusion:

This week's worksheet is designed to help you begin to think in more of a Choice Theory way when problem-solving. Instead of going to the usual external control way of thinking, I want you to begin to start thinking of behavior as a proactive, not reactive, way for a person to get what he or she wants. You will never make the situation better by frustrating a person's attempt to get more of what they need. However, you do not have to endorse them getting exactly what they want. Your job is to try to help a person find responsible ways to get their needs met that don't interfere with others meeting their needs, including your own.

This is a challenge to do. Unless you have been working on living a Choice Theory way of life for some time now, it probably feels like you are taking one step forward and two steps back as you try to apply the ideas. This is not unusual. You are attempting to break a strong pattern of behavior you have been using for many years. Add to that, Choice Theory, while commonsense, can also feel quite counterintuitive.

In the next module, we will begin looking at the Reality Therapy or questioning process. It is what you use with yourself or others who are attempting to make important changes in their lives.