



Module Seven: Total Behavior

Last week, we talked about perception. The week before that we talked about the Quality World. What we do all day long is compare the way we want things to be from our Quality World with the way we perceive them in our Perceived World. We make this comparison in the Comparing Place.

Imagine the Comparing Place as a set of scales, similar to the Zodiac sign for Libra. When we perceive we are getting what we want, then our scales are close to balanced. When we perceive we aren't getting what we want, then our scales are tipped. In either case, there is a resultant frustration signal which acts as a signal telling us to "do something."



This signal is much stronger when we aren't getting what we want. When our scales are tipped, we feel compelled to "fix" the situation. It is quite an uncomfortable feeling to be out of balance in our comparing place--the greater the imbalance, the greater the frustration, and the stronger the urge to behave.

When our scales are more in balance, then the frustration signal will result in a maintenance behavior so we can keep getting something we want or more likely, the mild frustration signal will shift our attention to something in our lives where our scales are less balanced. We are programmed to pay more attention to things that are out of alignment with what we want so we can "fix" them.

This explains why when we are in a room with a perfect temperature, we don't even notice. I've been a public speaker for over 30 years, and never once has someone raised their hand to tell me, "Thank you for having the temperature at the perfect setting in here!" But there have been many times when I've heard complaints and requests to either raise or lower the temperature. This is because we notice more the things we don't like.

Parents pay more attention to children who are misbehaving than to children who are following the rules. Bosses pay more attention to employees who are not performing up to standards than those who are handling the expected workload well. Teachers pay more attention to the children who have behavior problems than to those who sit quietly doing their work.

So, whenever we experience a frustration signal, certain things happen. We begin to search for the behavior with the greatest likelihood of getting us what we want in that situation, whether that's more of the same or something completely different.

In order to form this behavior, we enter our Behavioral (sometimes called Creative) System. It is here in our brains where our options are stored. Every time we engage in a behavior, it becomes an option for future use. If we've done it once, we have created neural connections in our brain that will allow us to do it again. In Glasser's terms, it becomes an organized behavior because it has already been created and acted out.

We will sometimes encounter situations where our organized behavior does not seem sufficient to get us what we want, so we will set about creating a new behavior. This requires creativity. One way is to take bits and pieces from previously organized behaviors. Another way is to create a completely unique behavior, never before tried by us. Our Behavioral System keeps working until it locates or creates what it believes is the best possible behavior available at that point in time to get what it is that we want. That doesn't mean there isn't a more effective behavior; it simply means it isn't known to us at that point in time.

Hence Glasser's premise, that everyone is doing the very best they can at any particular point in time to get something they want. It doesn't mean they will be successful. It doesn't mean there aren't better ways. It doesn't even mean someone hasn't "told" them about a better way. But just because someone tells a person a better way to do something doesn't mean that person believes it's a better way or that they are even capable of using that behavior.

If it's true that a person is always doing the best he or she knows to do in a given situation, then that creates an entirely different paradigm for punishment. Why would we punish someone for doing the best they know how? Instead the paradigm needs to be to teach new and expanded behavioral options. We will discuss this in greater depth in Lesson 21.

This leads to another premise of Choice Theory that all behavior is purposeful. Everything people do is their best attempt to get something they want to more effectively meet their needs. People do not act randomly. Sometimes we consciously choose our behavior, and sometimes our Creative System offers us a behavior we accept and act out that is out of our conscious awareness but our behavior is always purposeful, never reactive.

Once we have sorted through our options in the Behavioral System and decided on the best behavior available to us in that situation, then we act out or engage in a total behavior. You may have been wondering what I mean by "total behavior"? Dr. Glasser says all behavior is total, meaning it consists of four inseparable components--your actions, your thinking, your feelings and your body's physiology. All of these components occur simultaneously even when you are more aware of one of them.

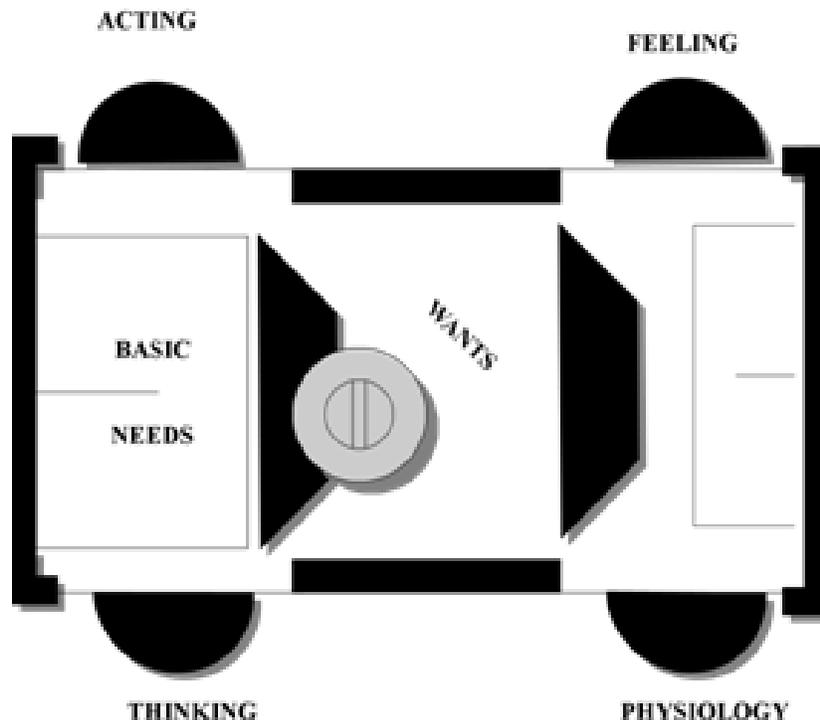
Therefore, when you are engaging in running as a behavior, your action of running is most pronounced and noticeable, however you are also thinking something, experiencing some emotions while running and your body is adapting to the increased activity by increasing your heartbeat, taking deeper breaths, sweating, and possible secreting endorphins.

When you are reading or studying, thinking seems to be the salient component. However, you are also sitting, holding a book perhaps as the action. You are thinking about the material and you are having feelings or emotions. Your body is also engaging in physiological activity to maintain your life. Your heart is beating, your body temperature is steady, and your breaths are being regulated by internal automatic mechanisms.

When you are raging or depressing about something, your feelings seem to be the most recognized component. However, when angry, you are engaging in behavior. You may be pacing, hitting your fist against your other open hand, or yelling. Your thinking is probably, "This makes me so angry!" And your physiology is changing by activating your adrenal system, your muscles become tight and you are ready for a fight.

When you are depressed, your behaviors may be quite slowed. You stay in bed longer, maybe you cry, you mope around. Your thinking is, "This is hopeless. I'm helpless. I'm worthless." Your feeling is depression and your body, over time, may produce less serotonin, you may experience unexplained aches and pains, and your appetite and sleep patterns will change.

Having a headache or stomach ache would be examples of physiology being the salient behavioral component. Your behavior might be rubbing your temples or holding your stomach. Your thinking will be, "I wish my head would stop pounding" or "I'm going to vomit." Your feeling is dread, fear or unhappiness. Your physiology is your body's aches and pains.



All behavior has these four components, and Glasser visually represents behavior as a car with

four wheels. The four wheels are acting, thinking, feeling and physiology, with acting and thinking being the front wheels and feeling and physiology being the back wheels.

The reason acting and thinking are the front wheels of the car is because we can directly control our actions and almost always directly control our thinking. Sometimes we have occasional stray thoughts we don't necessarily want, however once we recognize we are thinking something we don't want to be thinking, we can shift to a more appropriate thought of our choosing.

To illustrate this, I often ask people to demonstrate they can clap their hands by doing so. After taking a dramatic bow, I point out how they controlled their actions. Then I ask them to think of what they want to do over the upcoming weekend. Everyone is able to do that. Then I'll ask them to FEEL ANGRY!!!! Usually a few people raise their hand, indicating they are, in fact, angry. When asked how they got there, people will say they were either angry to begin with or they simply thought of a time when they were angry and could bring that anger up again. I then point out the key word is "thought." In order to get to a desired emotion, people must either change what they are doing or what they are thinking.

Finally, I'll ask them to raise their heart rate by five beats a minute, one physiology component. Some people will admit being able to do this through exercise or physical activity. I know others can do this through bio feedback or meditation. But all methods involve steering the front wheels of the car--by directing acting, thinking or both in a different direction.

This has implications for our own application, as well as for counseling. For ourselves, we know if we want to change a feeling or some unwelcome physiology, we must concentrate on what we are doing and what we are thinking. The counseling implications will be discussed in the upcoming lessons on Reality Therapy.

The other important thing to remember about behavior is that it is always proactive, never reactive. It is always our best attempt to get something we want in our Quality World so we can more effectively meet our needs. No one can "make" us angry, "make" us sad, or even "make" us happy. We choose your emotions to help us get what we want.

That is not to say we use our emotions in a manipulative fashion. Sometimes that is true for some people. They are aware of the effect their emotions can have on certain individuals and use that information to their advantage. But most people experience emotions as something that just happens to them, as if they have no control over them.

Because feelings are a part of total behavior, and behavior is always purposeful, our emotions are used to help us get things we want. We use depression to get attention, to get assistance, to excuse us from responsibility, and to keep us safe. We use anger to control other people, to get attention, to pump ourselves up and to excuse us from responsibility. My son didn't "make" me mad because he didn't clean his room. I used my anger to try to get him to do what I wanted.

This may sound like I am splitting hairs but this is a very important distinction if we are to successfully implement Choice Theory in our lives. Choice Theory is called the new psychology of personal freedom. We cannot be free unless we accept personal responsibility for all we

create. When we recognize that our behavior is always designed by us to get us something we want, then we can closely examine the behavior that we don't like, figure out what we are attempting to accomplish with that behavior, and then ask ourselves if there is a more adaptive, responsible behavior that will have an even better chance of getting what we want.

Conclusion:

Complete the Total Behavior worksheet. Think of a behavior you engage in that you wish you would stop and answer the questions on the worksheet. The exercise is designed to have you thinking about the behavior in a total behavior way. So spend some time paying attention not only to what you do, but also what you think, how you feel, and how your body responds while you are engaging in the behavior. Then you are to evaluate the behavior and come up with some alternatives if the behavior is, in fact, hurting someone, is against the rules or breaks the law.