

CONCEPTS OF INDIVIDUALITY

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Dr. Norman R. F. Maier, Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan, was born in Sebawaing, Michigan, in 1900. He was a student at Wayne University from 1919-21 and received his A.B. degree from the University of Michigan in 1923, his A.M. in 1925, and Ph.D. in 1928. In 1926-27 he did graduate work at the University of Berlin. He began a teaching career as an assistant professor at Long Island University in 1928; was a fellow of the National Research Council, University of Chicago from 1929-31; an instructor of psychology, University of Michigan, until 1935; an assistant professor until 1939, at which time he became an associate professor, attaining full professorship in 1945. He has done extensive research on reasoning, animal behavior, brain physiology, frustration, industrial psychology, and human relations. He has worked intensively as a consultant for the Michigan Bell Telephone Company, the Ohio Bell Telephone Company, the Detroit Edison Company, the Dow Chemical Company, and the Hammermill Paper Company. At present he is working with three small companies, on problems, in which all levels of management can be brought in one group. He was awarded the American Association for the Advancement of Science \$1,000 prize in 1938, and the Henry Russell award by the University of Michigan in 1939. He is the author of "Psychological Approach to Literary Criticism" (with Reninger), 1933; "Principles of Animal Psychology" (with Schneirla), 1935; "Studies of Abnormal Behavior in the Rat" 1939; "Psychology in Industry," 1946; "Frustration: the Study of Behavior without a Goal," 1949; and "Principles of Human Relations," 1952. In addition, he has contributed many articles to science journals.

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COLONEL PRICE: Admiral Hague, General Greeley, and gentlemen: In our study of human relationships in management, the common denominator is the individual. Each of us, while we are members of a group and do much of our work with and through others, is still an individual. This morning Dr. Norman R. F. Maier, Professor of Psychology, University of Michigan, will discuss with us the concepts of individuality.

As you have all noticed in his biography, he has done extensive research instruction, and writing in this field. We are very pleased to welcome him again to the college.

DR. MAIER: Thank you, Colonel Price.

Admiral Hague, General Greeley, and gentlemen: It is very satisfying to me to return to this college. I enjoyed my visit here last year. I found the group very much interested and very stimulating to me. For this reason I always enjoy coming back.

I suppose the problem of understanding people is extremely important. I might say it involves three areas. The first is the problem of attitude toward the person with whom you are dealing. With one attitude you do a different kind of job toward a person from that with another attitude. For example, you may feel superior to a person, or if you may feel equal to a person; the way you deal with that person is going to depend upon which of these two attitudes is present.

Leaving the attitude factor constant, your ability to deal with others also depends upon your skill. We must distinguish between skill and knowledge, the third area, because knowledge is simply an intellectual aspect. It deals with principles. We have certain principles that are important, such as the follow-through principle in golf. A principle is quite distinct from the ability to do it. You can read a book on golf and know all about it so far as principles are concerned and still you may be a very poor golfer. You may know a lot about how you should deal with individuals, but doing it may be quite another thing.

I might be able to teach human relations and still have no skill myself, the same as someone might be able to teach tennis and not be able to play it himself. You probably wouldn't respect a person like that, but that is another matter.

Today I want to touch upon each of these three to some extent. Naturally, I can't go into any one of them in great detail; but I will probably spend more time on the latter (knowledge) than the other two.

What kind of attitude is most conducive to effective relations with other individuals? Probably the attitude of respect for the dignity of the other individual, because, if you respect a person, you are going to be more patient, you are going to be more understanding, you are going to be more likely to assume that what he did, he did for good and sufficient reasons.

That ties in with an important assumption. I always make the assumption when dealing with people that there are no bad people. If someone does something that I think is bad, unjustified, or wrong, I assume that I don't understand him.

The reason I make that assumption is because if I assume that a person is bad, then the only thing I can do is to sit back and wait until he changes. Of course, if we can get rid of him, that is fine. The trouble is, that is often hard to do. I understand that you have the same trouble in the armed forces. If you have somebody who isn't functioning properly, for example, it is awfully hard to get rid of him.

So you are stuck with ineffective people, or you are stuck with bad people, or you are stuck with bad countries; and you feel awfully helpless when you make the judgment that they are bad and there is nothing you can do about it. And we know that punishment doesn't make people good. We have learned that over a good many years. Paddling a child doesn't make that child more cooperative; very often it does the opposite.

If now, we assume that our problems are due to misunderstanding, then that makes one feel less helpless. You see if I understand someone, there is something I can do about it. I can ask such constructive questions as, "What can I do to clear up the misunderstanding?" and what can I do to prevent misunderstandings?"

That takes us into the question of looking at some of the sources of misunderstandings. When I want to improve my understanding of people, I have to look at some of the sources of misunderstanding.

First of all, we very often assume that the behavior of a person has to do with that person alone. When I say, "Jim doesn't have any initiative; he is lazy," I am talking only about a particular person and assume he is the only factor involved. Actually behavior (B) results only when an organism (O) has been stimulated by the situation (S) in which it finds itself. We write the formulation as follows:

S → O → B. Psychologically it is unsound to mention only the person when explaining behavior because behavior is always a response to something. The behavior of a person, or of any other organism, is always the response to a stimulus. When an organism responds to the stimulus, the behavior results.

Now, behavior accomplishes certain things. The accomplishment (A) might be an accident or the accomplishment might be that of getting away from an upsetting stimulus such as a pin. To be complete the formulation should read S → O → B → A, where "S" might be a pin prick, "O" might be you, "B" would be the behavior of jumping and "A" would be getting away from the pin. The casual sequence would be in the order indicated with A always being caused by B. But if I ask, "Why did you jump?" and you say, "In order to get away from the pin," I must not believe that. If I accept your answer, I am not understanding you, because I have overlooked the fact that you jumped because you were pricked with a pin. A pin prick being what it is, and you being what you are, you had to jump. True you got away from the pin. That is an accomplishment not a cause.

The accomplishment is the result of the behavior. Often we make the mistake of explaining behavior in terms of the accomplishment. Causes always precede effects. So when I want to understand behavior, I have to look at the nature of the organism and the nature of the stimulating situation.

But the accomplishment attracts our attention, as when something has gone wrong; when our attention is attracted to something and that something is undesirable, we get angry. When we get angry, we do certain things. One of them is to blame or attack. So very often we blame or attack the nearest thing, and that is the fellow who was involved in the behavior.

Children are playing in the yard--a baseball game--nice boys. Everything is going fine. Our little boy takes a swing at the ball. The ball sails through the window. The behavior is the same sort of thing as before, but the accomplishment changes. Now, of course, you drive them away. They should have known better.

So we make another mistake in dealing with people. We blame people for the accomplishment. Going through a red light and not having an accident is treated differently from going through a red light and having an accident. And if the accident costs 50 dollars, it is treated differently from one that costs 500 dollars.

We react to the accomplishment, but the behavior is the thing we should be looking at. It is the behavior that I have control over. If I want to alter accomplishments, my point of control is at the

Behavior level. I have got to change the behavior of people if I want to influence accomplishments.

How do you change the behavior of people? By changing or doing something to the organism. But we mustn't overlook the fact that the situation has something to do with it too. The situation is always present. You can never explain behavior by talking just about people. You always have to include and describe something in the situation.

I ask a man, "Why are you running?" He says, "I am running to catch a train." You point out to him, "You can't be running because you want to catch a train, since you will catch the train because you run. Catching the train is the accomplishment of your behavior. So you haven't explained the thing to me." Of course, he knocks me down and goes on his way; but I maintain I am still right; that what he has overlooked is the fact that a clock had something to do with his running.

I could make that fellow run and make him look foolish by setting his clock ahead. Now he looks at his clock. He doesn't have to run to catch the train, but his watch being half an hour ahead, he dashes out of the room. On the other hand I could cause him to miss his train, stimulating his walking behavior when he ought to be running, by setting the clock back. In other words by recognizing the "S" in the behavior sequence I have a point of control over behavior, which ordinarily is overlooked.

Just a very simple example of how behavior and accomplishments have been controlled by dealing with the "S." We used to have more head-on collisions than we do now. That was due to the fact that human nature is so designed that people go down the middle of something. They differ from rats. Rats go along a wall. Human beings like to go down the middle. That created a problem in traffic. When you have a simple road, they can't successfully go down the middle in opposite directions.

A very simple method of correcting that was to draw a white line down the middle. Now two people going in opposite directions still can go down the middle, but each one has his own middle and everyone is happy. In the prevention of accidents we try to make it impossible for a person to have an accident. Safety devices remove hazards and make it very difficult to have accidents. That is one of the best methods of reducing accidents. A way of reducing errors in inspection is to step up the lighting.

In brief I just want to point out that our tendency is to react to accomplishments, and subsequently response is one of blaming. Blaming solves no problems, because when the milk is spilled, it is over and you can't reverse time. The only thing you can do is to wipe it up and then see what you can do to prevent it from being spilled in the future. Prevention is always a matter of altering things with an eye to the future. Blaming requires one to face backward.

How can you alter the organism? How can you alter the situation so that it doesn't happen again? A failure to appreciate this part of the behavior represents a source of misunderstanding.

Furthermore, as long as you blame people for things, they are going to hide things from you, and so it becomes awfully hard to get essential information for correcting something. However, if your whole objective is to prevent things from happening again, the people who are involved in undesirable behavior are more likely to cooperate with you and help to prevent something from happening again. If you blame them, you motivate people to lie, cheat, double-cross, and withhold information from you. Whether or not you get cooperation or the opposite of cooperation depends upon the situation you create for others.

The second factor, or source of misunderstanding, is our failure to recognize what an attitude can do to behavior. Suppose that to see an "X" makes you happy. Suppose that to see a "V" makes you unhappy. Now I present you with this kind of a stimulus, "XX." Are you happy or are you unhappy? And whose fault is it? What controls what you experience and what you do. Your reaction or behavior depends on what you see here.

Your interpretation of this object depends upon how you organize what is out there. Many things can be organized in very different ways. As a matter of fact, if you have been naive enough to suppose that that is either a matter of X's or a matter of V's, you have misunderstood. There are no X's there. There are no V's. It is a W on top of an M.

Furthermore, the W on top of the M is very plain. I can see it without exerting myself. If you don't see it the way I do, obviously there is something wrong with you, isn't there? Might we say you are not very bright if you don't see things my way? If you have to exert yourself to see it, you are in bad shape.

We can get into a debate over the question of who is right on a thing of that sort. But is it a question of right or wrong? If I want to understand what you do, will I not understand your behavior better if I know you are happy because you see X's? When I see you, you see something. I understand you. Further, if I try to understand the way you see things, I may also cause you to see things the way I do.

This leads to better understanding and has to do with the whole problem of attitude.

The amazing thing about this whole area of attitude change is, don't try to change the other fellow's attitude. Try to find out what his attitude is. You can do more by understanding his attitude than by trying to change it. We will see how that works a little later.

I like to think of attitude as being this sort of thing. Imagine I have a garage window 12 inches high and 12 inches wide. It is a small window--too small. So I get out my saw and make it twice as big. I measure it and find it is 12 inches high and 12 inches wide. You think I am screwy. Here is my garage window, 12 inches high and 12 inches wide before and after the change. It is twice as big now but still 12 inches high and 12 inches wide. You see, we hadn't communicated with each other before because the statements which seemed contradictory at first are perfectly sensible.

The whole problem of communication boils down to being sure you are talking about the same thing. Here is an object-- $\diamond$ . I am going to put another one just like it over here-- . I am not going to change those objects which I will call facts. Now I frame this one this way-- $\square$ . I frame the other this way-- $\triangle$ . Now the two objects don't look alike as they did before.

I like to think of an attitude as being the frame of reference in which we see things. One person looks at something with one frame of reference, another looks at it with another frame of reference. However, in attitudes you have the frame of reference in your own head. But when you look at something, you put your frame of reference around it, and someone else puts his frame around it. Management puts one frame around a set of facts, and labor puts another frame around the same facts. This causes them to come up with different interpretations. We judge them by saying that one is right and the other is wrong; that is bad and the other is good. It isn't a question of any of those things. It is just two different ways of looking at the same thing.

Suppose I let this object ( $\diamond$ ) represent 70 dollars a week as a man's pay. Let us call that a fact. I ask him, "What do you think of your pay?" He says, "It's lousy." That is an opinion. I ask another man, "What do you think of your pay?" He is getting 70 dollars a week, too. He says, "Good." That is another opinion.

Let us think of an attitude as a general frame of reference. Let us say that one of these men likes the company and the other one doesn't like the company. Suppose the men over here like the company and the men over there don't like the company. They all get 70 dollars a week.

Which group is going to say most frequently that his pay is lousy? I am sure you will agree that the people who don't like the company are more likely to say their pay is lousy.

Your opinion then depends upon your frame of reference, which we speak of as your attitude. Suppose employees have an unfavorable attitude toward a company. If you ask them a series of questions, you get a series of unfavorable opinions. "What do you think about the food in the company restaurant?" "Poor." "What do you think of the training program in the company?" "Poor." "What do you think about the leadership in the company?" "Lousy." Another group of people may have favorable opinions about the same things and this would indicate a favorable attitude. Sometimes we take these opinions too seriously. If, instead of trying to change the opinion, we try to change the attitude, we may change a whole batch of opinions all at the same time. I will show you later how that works.

I am just going to write some words up here. I have no evil meaning or intent behind them. I am a good man. So if you put any wickedness in them, don't blame me.

For example, I write "bottle." There are all kinds of bottles. There is no reason why we shouldn't have a "glass" around. We sometimes work with "alcohol" and "noise" Why not "Women." Do those words hang together in any way? You feel they do. Let me add another word "cat." Why not? I mean, a cat would belong. What happens if I add these words "microscope," "test tube," "Bunsen burner."

First, you probably saw these things in a frame that made them fit together. The bottle had a particular shape. The women were blondes. Then I added some more words to the list and the scene changed into a laboratory or a hospital room.

Now I have to frame the list differently. In this new frame of reference, what happens to the bottle? Has it changed? It is a different kind of bottle now. Notice that every item in the list has undergone a change in meaning. We might say that every opinion of the facts listed changed without my doing anything to the facts themselves.

If I had discussed any of these items with you, we probably would have gotten into an argument. I didn't discuss any of them. I just added some more experiences. As a result this bottle changes shape. These glasses change shape. This is not alcohol that you drink. It is alcohol that you preserve things in. These women become nurses. Every item here undergoes a change. This gives you some idea of what might be accomplished by changing the attitude. The usual thing is to argue over these points of difference. If we added some new experiences, we actually can do more to change the attitude.

One method of changing attitude in industry is to improve the supervision. If you make the supervision better employees are more likely to say the food in the restaurant is better, that the lighting is better and so on. When you add pleasant experiences to someone, you tend to build a favorable attitude. When you add unpleasant experiences to someone, you tend to build an unfavorable attitude. At least that is part of the story. So the second area of misunderstanding is that of attitude.

Thirdly, we misunderstand people when they are frustrated. The characteristic thing that people do when they are frustrated is to cease solving problems. When people are not frustrated they can do a good job of solving problems. You can always solve another person's problem better than your own because you are not as likely to be emotionally involved.

When you are frustrated, instead of behaving in a problem-solving manner you do three kinds of things. The most common reaction is to show aggression, such as attacking someone. When you have a hard day at the office, you go home and push your wife and the kids around. I think one of the most important and desirable features of marriage is that it gives you someone to push around.

When you are frustrated, you are not particular who you push around. If someone is handy, you push him around. One of the most important contributions that Hitler made to the frustrated Germans, brought on by years of unemployment, was to give them somebody to push around. They could slap certain people and get away with it. So he played a very important part in a period when there was an economic problem in the unemployment in Germany. He gave German youth something to push around; they could even talk back to their parents. The parents were afraid of the children, because the children could report the parents.

I probably could illustrate this aggression with a little story: Emma was a very big girl. She was very strong. Whenever she played in the band, she could play the horn so hard you couldn't hear the rest of the band. When that happened you didn't have a band any more. So they said, "Emma, don't blow so hard." But Emma would forget. When she got in the spirit of the thing, she would just forget everything and blow.

So they gave Emma a little horn, thinking it wouldn't make so much noise. But she could blow the little horn so you couldn't hear the rest of the band. Someone said, "Let us put her on something intermittent. Then we can hear the band in between." So they decided on the drum.

Emma now played the drum. And she really worked the drum over. One day they were having a conference and talking about different things. They asked Emma why she beat the drum so hard. She said: "I used to smoke, but since I have been saved I don't smoke anymore. I used to drink, but since I have been saved I haven't had a drink. I used to sin in other ways lots of times. But since I have been saved all I do is beat the drum." This story illustrates how aggression may be directed toward innocent bystanders.

Another characteristic of frustrated behavior is regression. Frustrated people behave more like children. Regression is the opposite of growing up. People grown backward; their behavior is childlike. They display lack of initiative, dependence on others, and so on. These are characteristics of children. Gullibility and suggestibility are also characteristics of frustrated people. They are the dominant things that happen in panic. The same traits combine with aggression in a riot.

And thirdly, people who are frustrated are stubborn or rigid. That trait also appears in panics. People do the same things over and over, regardless of how it affects them. When people panic in a fire, they push at doors that don't open. You remember, in the Boston night club fire the people got bunched up at the entrance--the front door. It never occurred to anyone that there might be a window. It never occurred to anyone to use the back door. Everyone, I think, knows that a building that has a front entrance has a back one, too. And yet that kind of knowledge couldn't function in a fire, because in a state of frustration people are rigid; they don't show variability. They get in a rut and they can't get out of it.

When you try to reason with people who are in this state, you are misunderstanding them. They are too busy being rigid to be reasonable. You may think that a person is incapable of reasoning because you've seen him behave while he was frustrated. But he isn't incapable of reasoning. He is just incapable of reasoning in this condition. The first thing you have to do to a frustrated person is to get him out of this state of frustration. Then you will find that he is very reasonable.

If a person is not reasonable, if he doesn't respond to reality, we have reason to say he is in a frustrated condition. All of us are that way at times. Some people are in that state a good share of the time.

The important method of dealing with frustration is to help people blow off steam. One of the ways of reducing frustration is to get the symptoms expressed. But what can you do to help people express their frustration without getting them into trouble? Emma was an example.

She beat the drum. Had she gone around beating at people, they would have struck back and she would have become more frustrated. When frustrated, people are not very wise. They usually push other people around, and then these people push others back. Frustrated behavior leads to behavior that causes trouble, which makes more frustration, and so things go from bad to worse.

The fourth source of misunderstanding occurs because people have different needs. That is one thing that makes people different. Suppose a new job opens up. One fellow wants it because he has a need for a better standard of living, he can't make both ends meet and wants more money. Another person wants this job because he wants to escape from his present job. Still another person wants it because he doesn't like his present supervisor. Still another person wants it because his wife says he isn't getting anywhere. Finally another person wants it because he wants recognition. The need for recognition, the need for money, the need for getting away from a job you don't like, the need to escape from your supervisor--those are different needs.

All of the above men want the same thing but for different reasons. But life is so designed that everybody can't have all the things he wants. So he has to find and work with substitutes. What would be a substitute for the different people who want this job is going to depend upon the need each has.

The one woman who can't have a child but wants to rear a family, a substitute might be to adopt a child. But if the woman needs to prove to herself that she could produce a baby, that kind of need would not be satisfied by adopting a child. So, before we can satisfy people or find substitutes to satisfy people, we have to discover the need.

With all of these problems and all of these differences, is there anything we can do about it? I am just going to mention one method which is extremely important for dealing with attitudes, frustrations, and discovering needs. It is one of those fortunate procedures that seems to do a variety of things all at once. This is the method of active listening. In your conferences in which you will discuss a case you can try out another method--the method of discussion. Here is an illustration of a change in behavior that resulted from just using the method of listening.

A supervisor was given the instructions that the next time he had a problem with a person he was to do nothing but get the person to talk and to be understanding. Understanding doesn't mean that you agree with or that you disagree with a person. You can understand without taking sides. The supervisor was just asked to understand a person who made a complaint and to see what would happen.

Not long after this a woman burst into his office. She was a middle-aged woman--an average employee so far as her work was concerned. She had spent 20 years with the company. She had a reputation of being called "indifferent" by the younger women in the office. On this day she barges in and she says: "The only pay increases I have had in the last 10 years have been those where the ceiling has been raised. Everybody gets those increases. I think that I should get an increase once in a while that isn't due to the top being raised."

How is he going to give a woman an increase who is already getting the ceiling wage? She is asking for the impossible. He could point that out to her. But that would result in an argument: When people get into an argument, they keep talking about the same things, so they never get anywhere. Fortunately he doesn't say anything. He is busy jotting these points down on a slip of paper held in his lap under the desk. He asks her to tell him more.

The next thing she says is: "A girl with a good attendance record should be given an increase for that reason alone." You could argue and refute that point also. The sillier the argument, the easier it is to refute it and the worse off you will be if you try to do it. Whenever the other person can refute something, that is the time to keep your mouth shut. The supervisor doesn't say anything but only listens and nods. So she has to talk about something else.

She says: "New girls come into the office and they get increases whether they are any good or not." He could have said: "So what? You aren't so hot." Fortunately he doesn't and continues to listen.

So she makes her next point: "Lots of girls working for the company get more money than I do and I'm just as good as they are." Notice the hostility, the aggression. Notice the kind of arguments she is making. They show childishness. That is regression. He doesn't say anything.

So she says: "There is a lady who works for another company who is getting 70 dollars a week. This company is making lots of money now. If others can pay those salaries, so can this company." He doesn't defend the company, fortunately for the company.

Then she makes the next point: I have had to fight for every raise I ever got and that's what I'm doing now. "I understand," he said.

She now moves on the next point:

"You brought a new girl into our unit the other day. If you had given us girls in the unit a raise, then we would work harder and you wouldn't have had to hire the new girl." Soldiering on the job and she wants a raise. But he doesn't say anything about it. He just nods.

"If there's no more money for me here, why don't you transfer me? They have lots of good jobs in other departments and they don't work as hard as I do." He lets that one pass, too.

"If I were a pretty girl, you'd give me an increase." I don't think he would have. Anyway, he lets it pass. "You don't want me here. You just want young girls. I am getting old, so I guess that I should get out."

At this point she started to cry. He passed the Kleenex.

"No one pays any attention to me any more."

Next point: "All my troubles seem to have started since my father died last year. Since then things haven't gone good for me." It developed that her father had lived in Canada and every week-end she used to visit him in Canada. She used to spend her vacations in Canada. Now she has no place to go. "If I could find another girl to live with me, maybe things would be better, but I can't find anyone I like."

Next point: "I won't be working very long anyway. I'm buying a 25 dollar war bond every week and that has mounted up and with my pension I can get along all right."

She is putting away more than he is, and here she is talking about more pay. But he doesn't mention this. They began talking about other things, about traveling experiences. All of a sudden she got up and said, "Thank you very much, Mr. Brown, for giving me all that time. I am sorry I have taken so much of your time. Thank you very much."

Now if you have changed your attitude toward the girl, she has changed from a troublemaker to a lonesome person. This change would cause you to alter your behavior toward her. You now can treat her with more consideration. This supervisor now spoke to her more often on the job.

But notice how meanings changed when you change your attitude. If you think of her as a troublemaker, then when she says: "I think I should get an increase once in a while that is not due to the ceiling being raised," you see that--as a request for more money--an unreasonable request. But when you see her as a lonesome person, the statement means she just wants attention. In other words, it is not an unreasonable request. All the things we have been seeing in her as contradictions are really not contradictions at all. When you see her as a lonesome person, all the things she said make sense from that point of view. One can understand why she is jealous of the girls that had things to do--jealous of their popularity, In other words she was not as illogical as we first thought; we just misunderstood her.

By listening the supervisor discovered her frame of reference and he changed his conduct toward her. By listening he also caused her to discover what her own problem was; that was that things had happened to her on the outside. She also discovered that she was lonesome and, interesting enough, raised the question of getting another girl to live with her. Follow-up showed that within a few months she changed her residence and lived in a house where there were 13 other girls. She not only discovered her own problem but also discovered her own solution; and she did something about it. That is one of the things we don't do about advice. We often get perfectly good advice; the trouble is, we don't take it.

Maybe the reason we don't get into more trouble and cause more harm is because people usually don't take our advice. When we give advice, we seem to take on a terrible responsibility. It had better be good advice. But it is not so bad after all; people don't take it, so don't worry. That is one of the big problems in dealing with people--how to let them live their lives. One of the important things to do in dealing with attitudes is to help people to discover their problems and to help them develop their own solutions. We cannot successfully impose solutions on them.

I am sorry to have run over my time. Thank you very much.

(10 Nov 1953--750)S/mmg