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*Experience is necessary...in order that the soul take notice of ideas that are in us.*

(Robinson on Leibniz, 1976)

The act of negotiating oneself through the process of resolving conflict is synonymous with the act of modifying behavior. The process of negotiation incorporates many varied strategies specifically intended to manipulate - or modify - the behavior of the other party involved in the transaction.

*Websters.com* offers the accepted form of *behavior modification* as follows:

*n. The use of basic learning techniques, such as conditioning, biofeedback, reinforcement, or aversion therapy, to alter human behavior.*

The definition of negotiation as cited in *Websters.com* can be interpreted as a process similar to that of behavior modification.

*n 1: a discussion intended to produce an agreement; ... "they disagreed but kept an open dialogue"; ... [syn: dialogue, talks] 2: the activity or business of negotiating an agreement; coming to terms*

Thompson (2005) identifies basic learning techniques in terms of human interaction (99, 106, 107, 119, 194, etc.); the actual words used by Thompson are different, although the phenomena are the same. My original example and process is an inner process of modifying my own personal behavior, which will be evidenced in the behavior of those others impacted by my perceptions and expectations, as well as by my own overt behavior. It is not necessary that the other parties consciously participate in this particular negotiation beyond their collective and individual spontaneous input to the process. For example, if I modify my behavior to include not alerting the students to changes that I make, one or many of them may feel compelled to comment on that behavior change with the intent (on their part(s)) to essentially re-

modify my behavior. (*note*: My normal style is to proactively inform others who may be impacted by my actions whenever I act; it would be noticed if I were to change that behavior.) If I modify my behavior in a way that is gracefully compatible with the others, it may be that I am the only one aware of the specific change.

In order to create a plan of action that can be ethically imposed on the students covertly, I have strayed back to the Social Psychology literature, revisiting many of Thompson's, and Borisoff and Victor's primary sources, bulking up the concepts presented in both texts. Many of the principal investigators (PIs) are familiar enough to readers that there will be little need to expand upon their advice much further than simply mentioning their names. For example, Milgram's study on obedience (1962) is nearly universally known; it seems it may be enough to simply state that I have revisited his work as I have prepared this assignment. Others, while having been around for, at times, 60 – 70 years, are not so well-known; I will talk more about those PIs as my hypothesis requires. I have tried to stay within the categories of *persuasion*, *negotiation*, *stereotyping*, *obedience to authority*, *conflict resolution*, and *motivation*; additionally, I have attempted to use only those PIs and authors that surface in both the *Business-* and *Psychology-specific* databases.

Let's review my conflict. I have recently redefined my career by taking a position at Thomas College as the Information Resource Specialist (IRS) for the campus community, based in the Thomas Library. I also am currently employed at Colby College as a Professional Teaching Associate (TA) in their Department of Psychology. Both positions require that I work with student employees; have a solid, working knowledge of research and researching procedures (e.g., appropriately searching relevant professional databases); am able to run a classroom occasionally; can manage, troubleshoot, and instruct on the use of media and computer devices, as well as computer applications such as SPSS and Blackboard. The stated expectations for both positions is that I am able to prioritize and accept any request(s) made of me; that is to say, I am to at least attempt to assist anyone in any academic situation that may arise. (Both position descriptions could read simply: An Aunt Colleen who can do anything that

might occur at college.) On the surface, this move seems to be an intuitive and predictable shift: sliding from a specific discipline over to an entire campus, which, by definition, includes all disciplines.

A notable difference between the two jobs is the number of students, and their perceived degree of responsibility, who will report through me at Thomas College. There are twelve students sharing what has traditionally been a regular staff position, and there has been no-one in my position for about six months previous to my arrival; the students have essentially been doing my job.

The jobs are very similar, although the *communities* seem to be dramatically different. I have been very loyal to Colby College, as well as to its policies, procedures, and perceptions, for the duration of my professional career (13 years). Inherent to being loyal, generally, and specific to this paper, is the public acceptance of certain shared or professed beliefs by the one who is loyal (Aronson, 262). We see this phenomenon everyday as we notice groups of people whom we wouldn't necessarily predict would be friends; there are always one or two members who have allowed their personal ethos to skew in order to be accepted into the group. Specific to this paper, I have slowly, less than consciously, adopted the perception that Colby Students must be smarter than Thomas Students. Additionally, as I have become older, I've come to suspect that student workers (at both institutions) are inept, unprofessional, and egocentric. I had even gone so far as to start calling students "kids". I can tell you that my own children are older than college students, and offer that as my excuse, but the reality is that I have come to think of traditional college students as children; I am the adult who can fix the problems that they create.

I am very good at what I do; I am able to be a professional and expect the same behavior in others; I am able to instruct people of varied ilk and ability; I believe that I am already an asset to Thomas College, and, in fact, may already be perceived as such by those to whom I am responsible. Unfortunately, I am also human, and, as a human, am vulnerable to my own inner belief system. Combined with the human tendency to "take the easy way" when confronted with a new situation or environment, that vulnerability is a potential "deal killer" with regard to pleasantly and productively working with the Thomas College students and community as I re-align my loyalties and my expectations of the student employees.

Initially, I suspected that the primary factor in this one piece of the process of transitioning would be my own contribution to my new environment; it seemed I was the one who had a problem with Thomas College students, and I expected to be readjusting, by and large, my own perceptions and expectations. Additionally, however, there seems to be the *verbalized expectation* on the part of Thomas College students and employees that I view them as less professional and intellectual than I do those members of the Colby College community, simply by virtue of my having been employed by Colby College. It is relevant to add that I wasn't aware that I felt so strongly about any apparent differences until I actually arrived on the Thomas College campus to report for work. I am the parent of a Thomas MBA alumnus; I am a matriculated graduate student at Thomas College – it simply never occurred to me *on a conscious level* that there were real or practical differences between the two academic institutions, or their respective students. *And*, I do not believe there *are* dramatic differences across the two institutions, only that there is a *feel*, or *perception* of a difference that does seem to want to surface as I attempt to transition my loyalties. It is ironic that the perception seems to travel in both directions; that is, the Thomas College community (almost as one) *perceives itself to be different*, and, most are probably experiencing the same “realigning of attitude” as I.

For the purposes of this paper, I have identified my conflict as one derived of the stereotypes which I have allowed to seep into the way I view my new “pseudo-colleagues”, the students. It is a well accepted premise that the most effective tool for debunking stereotypes is education (Aronson, 267). Education can be interpreted as simply the process of being exposed to novel ideas and situations, while cognizant of past experience (Dewey, 1938). It seems reasonable to predict that increased exposure to the Thomas College student workers will offer me experiential evidence that my perceptions (stereotypes) are not fact-based.

*Simply by recognizing the power of exposure, I have begun the process of “negotiating” with myself* (Snyder, et al., 1977); I can begin the act of re-aligning my perceptions and expectations by allowing my self to “listen to me” as I witness behaviors different than those that I initially presumed existed. I will be essentially persuading myself to weight the *actual* behaviors with more importance than

the *expected* behaviors. According to some theorists, I will most likely find myself in greater conflict at the beginning of this process (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Milgram, 1962); however, the result will increase the pie exponentially (Fisher & Ury, 1991) – if I am successful.

The inner, or *Socratic*, dialog will be relatively constant, and must be as objective as is possible in order to fit the new experiences into those I have had in the past. For example, even as I believe the students will potentially create a problem, I have to be consciously alert to any and all evidence when they are responsible for *correcting* a problem (Snyder, et al., 1977). A student worker correcting a problem must seem to be more important or valuable than *my* ability to fix the mistakes. This weighting of the actual behavior may require a little “embellishment” as I collect information. I may have to speak of an occurrence aloud, to another who has authority, in order to *convince myself* that it is of value (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). There are several hypotheses addressing this process of strengthening the power of an experience, and indeed there is very little definitive information about the phenomenon in the formal literature. It may be that I am essentially “re-inputting” the event as if it were a separate – additional – event; it may be that through the process of resolving cognitive dissonance, I must convince myself (by telling another) that the event actually occurred. Regardless of the mechanisms involved, the *behavior* of speaking of the event aloud will help me to apply greater importance to the positive, corrective event.

It is also necessary that I consciously attempt to *not* see any behavior that seems to feed the stereotypes that I carry; the negative behaviors (students creating problems) must be essentially “rationalized” out of existence. This technique is potentially disruptive in that it could work so effectively that I begin to see *only* the debunking behaviors (Snyder, et al., 1977); it is critical that I remain consciously objective as I watch and store information. It will serve no purpose ultimately for me to become a defender of poor performance; I must carefully rationalize only those negative behaviors that could be considered stereotypical. An example of a stereotypical behavior can be made with the image of a student worker flirting with another student while at work. A behavior which may be considered a problem, but is not stereotypic, is to use the wrong page in a calendar book when reserving equipment;

one doesn't have to be a student to turn two pages as one by mistake. While the first example may seem more problematic in the short term, it really is simply a stereotypic behavior that a little nudging to the individual student will fix. It is important in my process that I ignore the flirting behavior, and focus on the calendar error. I can "rationalize away" flirting by attributing it to being young, while focusing on the calendar error as a procedural issue that impacts others.

The "glitch" with my methodology is that I do not exist in a vacuum; I must work with all levels of authority (student workers along with directors). As mentioned above, presumably those others with whom I am working will be forcing themselves through similar processes, occasionally confounding my own strategy. For example, it is possible that my behavior of ignoring stereotypic behavior will be perceived by those watching me (from "above") as presumptive behavior, as if I think the students are not worthy of my attention – a stereotype attributed to Colby Instructors. It is critical that I remain acutely aware of my own behavior as I interact with others who hold different levels of responsibility and authority. Additionally, there are several different and salient degrees of authority that can (and most likely will) elicit a certain amount of blind obedience in both the students and me. I am an adult in a student environment, old enough to be "the mother" who can tell the students what to do. At the same time, I, too, am vulnerable to performing simply because one in a higher position has told me to do so.

I have been somewhat successful thus far in that the students do seem to trust me and my "methods". I have to admit, however, that the confounding has begun; there have already been instances of misattribution and stereotyping that seem only to strengthen negative impressions on both sides of the "negotiation", in practice and ideology. As a human, I find myself surprisingly susceptible to giving in to *not* thinking consciously about the potential impact of my covert behavior. Because I am trained to be a student of human behavior and, not coincidentally, am a natural observer of behavior in general, I have forced myself to practice the exercise of "debriefing" daily. I think of the practice as removing my rose-colored glasses as I drive into the driveway after work. (Luckily, my significant other appreciates the value of this part of the process!) I spend just about an hour listing aloud "all the things wrong" about my day of interacting with my new colleagues and students; the rest of the evening is peppered with

deliberate “re-phrasing” of each event. This is a key aspect of *Socratic Dialog*; it is important to “digest” events and experiences *consciously*, allowing interpretations a sort of “clean-up” process. For example, it may have *seemed* at the time that a student was being impertinent toward me, but after ranting about it *to someone else* who has no reason to interpret the behavior as anything at all, and *away from the event*, it often will seem suddenly obvious that the student was not directing the behavior at me at all. The debriefing via the process of Socratic Dialog is a deliberate attempt to “re-rationalize” (or reprocess) events that might have originally seemed stereotypic.

My process of negotiating a change in the way I perceive Thomas College students includes various theories developed in the fields of behavioral, industrial, and applied psychology, and identified by Thompson, and Borisoff and Victor, as effective. The theories include, but are certainly not limited to: Socratic (internal) dialog specific to attempting to reinterpret my own behavior, as well as the behavior of the students; frequency, latency, and magnitude of positive reinforcement as it relates to the “re-input” of events to my thought processes and perceptions; an awareness of the human tendency to work within ones current repertoire; and the ability to cleanly rationalize instances of insignificant stereotypic behavior.

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