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Steps in Changing One's Own Behavior

In *You and Me: The Skills of Communicating and Relating to Other*, Gerard Egan outlines three basic courses of action that are taken to produce behavioral change: exploring, getting new perspectives, and acting.

1. **Exploring.** One must become familiar with one's behavioral patterns before one can attempt to change them. Egan suggests that we explore what we like and dislike about how we act. Perhaps we like the ways in which we perform in crisis situations but dislike the ways in which we react to little annoyances. We should analyze our own behavior in as much detail as possible. Without specific, concrete behavioral examples in mind, it is nearly impossible for us to effect change.

2. **Getting New Perspectives.** It is very difficult to look at oneself objectively. We all have behaviors and mannerisms of which we are practically unaware. In addition, there may be patterns to our responses (we always become tense in certain situations, for example) that we do not recognize but which those close to us can see plainly. Therefore, it can be very helpful to ask a spouse, partner, or friend to provide feedback on our behavior and how it is perceived by others.

3. **Acting.** Self-analysis is of no use unless an action plan is developed and steps are taken to effect change. Once unwanted or undesirable behaviors have been identified, the next step is to identify desired behaviors. In Egan's model, identifying desired behaviors, creating an action plan, and initiating action are subparts of one, continual step. The question is how to replace the undesired behaviors with the desired ones. The answer is to think of a solution (an action plan) and then to make a conscious effort to implement that action plan whenever the situation arises.

These three steps are suitable for an individual who wants to effect change on his or her own. The steps become more specific and detailed within the scope of a training program. In a behavioral-change program, the steps would take the following form:

1. **Learning core interpersonal skills.** In order to change one's behavior, one first must be proficient in using the basic interpersonal skills of self-presentation, responding, and challenging. Egan refers to these skills as the "building blocks of further interpersonal change".

2. **Getting feedback on one's skills.** In a group setting, other members can give feedback on how well a person is using the core interpersonal skills, thus helping that person to learn faster by immediately bringing mistakes or progress to his or her attention.

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3. Learning group-specific skills. Another advantage to learning in a group is that one can practice using interpersonal skills with different people. This provides situational flexibility and adaptability, which serves to enhance people's confidence in using the skills.
4. Practicing interpersonal assertiveness. The process of learning interpersonal skills (having to interact with others) encourages assertiveness. This is because a person who feels prepared to deal with others will be less likely to withdraw, be defensive or hostile, or back down. Interpersonal-skills training helps to teach assertiveness rather than passiveness or aggressiveness.
5. Discovering patterns. The self-analysis involved in a behavioral-change program helps people to become more aware of their unique patterns of behavior with others. Becoming aware of these patterns is essential to changing unwanted ones.
6. Getting feedback on patterns. Feedback from others can help people to recognize the differences between the ways in which they see themselves and the ways in which others see them.
7. Recognizing payoffs. If a person is able to recognize the benefits that will result from changing his or her behavior, these potential payoffs can act as motivating factors that will provide encouragement in times of frustration or extensive effort.
8. Seeing different possibilities. Learning interpersonal skills and examining responses to one's behavior can help to broaden narrow horizons of behavior. One may realize that one's usual response to a situation is not the only option. One may become more open minded and considerate of other patterns of behavior.
9. Experimenting with new behavior. This factor is related to seeing new possibilities. Open mindedness allows people to "try on" new ways of behaving.
10. Evaluating oneself and receiving feedback. As people "try on" new behavioral patterns, they automatically perform self-evaluations of the new behaviors and decide whether or not the new ways are better than the old. Likewise, other members of the group can give objective feedback on the new behaviors.
11. Transferring what one has learned. The final step is transferring the learning, that is, using the new behavior in one's everyday life outside the training group. This is the ultimate goal of behavioral-change training: to effect permanent change in the participants' lives.