

Dear Networkers:

Since May 30th and my last communication [general type], much water has flowed over the dam and in the course of events I have finally gotten to where I want to bring you-all up to date. The net seems to be in the summer doldrums, or something, and if nothing else, maybe this will stimulate a little activity. I hope so. I do like to hear from people.

Probably the biggest event in my life right now is my new job. 3 weeks ago I was thrust out into the cruel world with the opportunity of finding a new job. At the time I was not prepared to do this, but managed to accomplish something which has turned out to be a real turning-point for me.

I had faced this problem before but had never handled it successfully. It is a two-part problem: [a] what do I want to do; and [b] how can I get into contact with people so that I can do (a). I partially solved (a) by deciding that I wanted to work in advertising, especially creative work, and (b) by deciding to contact every advertising agency in this area and ask for a job. Both of these decisions were radical changes for me.

For over two weeks I went about carrying out these decisions. In the course of calling on people I learned a great deal about myself and about them. Finally I arrived at the office of a man who needed somebody to do just the sort of work I wanted to do. I had changed my goals somewhat in the course of these calls and when I went in to see him I knew specifically what I wanted, what he had, and why he needed me to do this. And I was completely successful in selling him on my doing it for him--and he sold me on himself, too.

So--for the first time in my life I have a job which I chose and which I obtained in a way which I could do again. Maybe job security ought to include the feeling that you can get another one if necessary.

I have improved my relations with people immeasurably in these past 3 weeks. There has been a change in kind rather than degree. And at the same time I have improved my attitude about myself. I can feel the difference in how I accept myself, etc.

One of the ways in which I worked on this and other problems was what I call the concept of "possible abstractions." This is not a new idea at all, though the way I think of it does seem to me to have the appearance of a synthesis of the ideas of several others. For instance, Korzybski, in Science and Sanity, went into much of it but I wasn't able to figure out how to use his data directly. In Gestalt Therapy the authors give a much more helpful method. Kant's Critique of Pure Reason seems to me to be all about this idea I am advancing, though it is very difficult to understand the way Kant presents it. Howes said something helpful in his discussion of Richard's Modern Clinical Psychology and the 'motivation-capacity-control' triad. The 'BAM' technique or concept which Wichita seems to be the same sort of thing.

I was somewhat aware of the ideas from all these sources and others, but was not able to assimilate them in such a way as to be able to use them. Then I got the idea I am going to present and immediately it became a very unifying or integrating type of idea and I was off.

Every abstraction is from something that is not an abstraction [a non-verbal event or reality]. There are literally abstractions without limit about any such event. Each abstraction is relevant within a certain context. Each context is more or less a class of abstractions and there are classes of contexts. Another word for context, as I use it here, is 'frame of reference.'

If you will go along with me on these assertions [or assumptions], then we can see what happens. A person becomes aware of an event. If they do not symbolize about the event, the results are interesting but not too significant for our present purposes. If they do verbalize or symbolize about the event, then we have our problem. Because out of the multitude of possible abstractions available, the person uses only a few, in some cases only one.

Not only does he use only one, but sometimes he will assert that there is only one, his. And sometimes he will try to suppress the others. We can then ask about the effect of this process on the individual, himself, or about its effect on the relationships between this person and others, or about its effect on the other people. Each of these inquiries will have a relevant place in some context.

At this time I will discuss the effect of this process on the individual and leave it to you to go into the other questions. The first thing I notice about such a process is that it is a very limiting sort of thing. The individual sees the world in only one way and just about eliminates the other possibilities. It leads to the all or nothing, either-or type of thinking that Korzybski got so excited about. Not only that, it inhibits creative thinking very nicely. Such a person may be so busy determining what is not that he doesn't spend an adequate amount of time on what is.

Much depends on circumstance and the chain of circumstance leading up to the present moment. It seems to me that a person who thus limits himself must have swallowed whole [introjected] the abstractions of others.

Let us turn now to what I consider to be a more adequate approach to the problem. I see this method as one of abstraction, context, and purpose. As you know, purposes are, as far as other people are concerned, constructs, or inferences from behavior. What I am talking about here becomes, then, an interesting way of inferring purposes, usable by the individual or by others. If you know how a person abstracts from an event, and if you can identify the context, you will probably have a good line on his purpose. And the more abstractions you know of, the better the odds that you will infer correctly.

To examine a situation in light of this idea, state the abstraction, name the context, and infer the purpose. Then using the named purpose as the abstraction, work on down to a more basic level. The method seems to be like that of BAM except that for me I can do these things with abstraction-context-purpose and I can't with belief-attitude-motivation.

I am working on a paper outlining this 'theory' more completely with examples, etc., and expect to work it out more fully. Any ideas you have would be helpful to me.

There doesn't seem to be much doing around these parts in dianetics, or at least if there is I haven't heard of it. My wife and I are continuing to work as we can, reading, etc., and the two books that seem most helpful right now are: Gestalt Therapy and Horney's Neurosis and Human Growth.

I'll be looking forward to hearing from you. We have been communicating in this network for just a year now and I continue to think it is valuable.

ARC,

Harry Fortune

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