

THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

(WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO)

BY

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I would some power the giftie gi'e us
To see ourselves as others see us;
It would from many a blunder free us.

- Robert Burns

INTRODUCTION

Everyone in his right mind wants to survive. Everyone wants to feel good. Everyone wants to avoid things that hurt him, mentally or physically, and make him feel bad. So everyone has the same basic objectives. We all want to live and we all want to feel good.

Each person is constantly interacting with the objects in his or her environment, including other people. Whether you are aware of it or not, everything you do or say, consciously or unconsciously, is intended to help you achieve your basic objectives. You always think that what you do or say will benefit you or you'd do something else. Sometimes your behavior works, so you feel good. But sometimes, instead of achieving your objective, you get the equivalent of an electric shock. What's even worse, even when you try something else in that situation, you never know if you will get a prize or an unpleasant surprise. What's going on here?

This book is a rather long answer to this not-so-simple question. It starts with an examination of the mechanism for all behavior. There are two principal forces at work here. Each creature needs to behave in ways that permit it to survive in its environment. The other is the status of the creature's brain, which influences how it behaves to achieve its objectives.

We first trace the evolution of behavior from single-celled creatures to early humans to see why, after millions of years of existence, humans finally began to form small cooperative groups. Neither the basic human needs nor the size of the human brain has changed much since that time. However, the human brain gradually obtained and retained more information about its world. Strange as it might seem, this volume of information changed the way an individual responds to stimuli and so changed the way humans began to behave toward each other.

This relatively minor change in how the brain works has had profound effects, from the human population explosion to almost unbelievable technical developments, all in a single wink of an astronomical eye. Nevertheless, few major developments are perfect. This one also had an unexpected flaw or two.

Each item of human behavior evolved to achieve that person's objective under the conditions that existed at that time. Conditions are constantly changing, sometimes slowly, sometimes abruptly. Unless a person detects the change, his brain has no way to know that the change has occurred. As a result, people continue to respond as they did earlier, but the same behavior that was appropriate in the past might now be fatally inappropriate. A major objective of this book is to help you identify and reduce your inappropriate behavior so that you will feel better.

Our journey will lead us through many astonishing and wondrous developments. It starts with the single-celled creatures that lived more than 3.5 billion years ago. We'll

see how they survived without a brain and what's even more incredible, how their primitive survival system still affects your behavior.

We'll witness the most dramatic development in all of evolution, the beginning of a brain. We'll see why a brain was needed and what it's supposed to do.

Then we encounter a puzzle. Survival would obviously be easier if creatures helped each other, so why do the vast majority, including early humans, live alone and never help even their own kind? We'll be eyewitnesses of another momentous change as we observe the gradual development of small cooperative groups of people and recognize that this was made possible by the growth in the human brain.

Equally important, communication became a form of social behavior which had (and still has) a powerful effect on social acceptance and therefore on survival. Details have changed, but what you say, how you say it, and to whom you say it, is a carry-over of the behavior established in those early groups.

Finally, we'll complete our trip by examining modern behavior to see how little it has changed over the millennia.

IDENTIFYING YOUR PRESENT BEHAVIOR PATTERN

Improving your social acceptance starts with identifying your present behavior. This is not as easy as it might seem. You think you always behave properly or you would do it differently. When your actions don't achieve your objectives or they get you into trouble, you usually don't recognize that it was caused by something you did or should have done. It was bad luck or other people just don't understand you.

And you can't depend on your friends to set you straight. Unless you ask them in the right way, most friends won't tell you what you're doing that offends other people. People who don't like you might tell you in anger when you do something wrong, but you probably won't believe them, anyway.

Two checklists are provided to help you measure your progress in eliminating the behavior that gets you in trouble. Complete the first checklist before you read the text. However, because it is so difficult to analyze your own behavior, you might want to have a special friend help you identify your present pattern.

You can also use this checklist to analyze the way people you admire behave. Do the same thing for a few people whom you think behave badly. Then compare your pattern with both types. This will help you see which aspects of your behavior you should keep and which items need improvement. Save your results to compare your present behavior with the more detailed checklist at the end of this book to see how your behavior has changed.

CHECKLIST OF YOUR PRESENT BEHAVIOR

	YES	NO
You conform to your group's standards of physical behavior.		
You usually conform to your group's standards for communication (e.g., you don't talk too much, too loud, get angry, etc).		
You like to interact with others.		
You behave unpleasantly to prevent others from interacting with you.		
Transmitting Your Messages	YES	NO
When it's important, you carefully decide what you are going to do or say.		
You select the best way and time to get your message across to your listeners.		
You show acceptance of others by warm greetings and small talk.		
You often give sincere compliments or small gifts.		
You talk a lot about yourself.		
You try to impress others.		
You are careful not to bore others.		
You show that most people are not as good as you are.		
You belittle the achievements of others.		
You bad-mouth others.		
You cut up others with your wit.		
You frequently tell people what they "should have done."		
You compare others in ways that make them look bad.		
You help others, but only when asked.		
When you must criticize or contradict someone, you do it carefully and in private.		
You try not to hurt others unintentionally.		
You avoid subjects to which others might be sensitive.		
You express your opinion whether others like it or not.		
You disclose the shortcomings, mistakes, or confidences of others		
You impose your expectations on others.		
You put a spin on facts to make yourself look better.		
You get angry if you ever pay a little too much for something		
You use other people for your benefit.		
You try to hide your mistakes.		
When you make a mistake, you admit it and make amends.		
You usually blame others for your mistakes.		

Receiving Messages	YES	NO
You try to receive everything others transmit, verbally and nonverbally		
You frequently interrupt the speaker.		
You frequently change the subject to something about yourself.		
You frequently distort the message by adding something funny or sexual to it.		
When you don't like the message you're getting, you change the subject or walk out.		
You frequently jump to conclusions before you receive the entire message.		
You reject all information that is different from what you believe.		
Your feelings are frequently hurt.		