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surrounded by idiots

The Four Types of Human Behaviour
(or, How to Understand Those Who
Cannot Be Understood)

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by Idiots**

Communication Happens on the Listener's Terms

Does that sound strange? Let me explain. Everything you say to a person is filtered through his frames of reference, biases, and preconceived ideas. What remains is ultimately the message that he understands. For many different reasons, he can interpret what you want to convey in a totally different way than you intended. What is actually understood will, naturally, vary depending on who you are speaking to, but it is very rare that the entire message gets through exactly as you conceived it in your mind.

It may feel depressing knowing that you have so little control over what your listener understands. No matter how much sense you would like to knock into the other person's head, there's not that much you can do about it. This is one of the many challenges of communication. You simply can't change how the listener functions. However, most people are aware of and sensitive to how they want to be treated. By adjusting yourself to how other people want to be treated, you become more effective in your communication.

You help other people understand you by creating a secure arena for communication—on their terms. Then the listener can use his energy to understand rather than to consciously or unconsciously react to your manner of communicating.

All of us need to develop our flexibility and so be able to vary our style of communication, adapting it when we speak to people who are different from us. Here we find another truth: No matter what method you choose to communicate with, as an individual, you will always be in the minority. No matter what kind of behavior you have, the majority of people around you will function differently from you. You can't just base your method of communication on your own preferences. Flexibility and the ability to interpret other people's needs is what characterizes a good communicator.

Knowing and understanding another person's style of behavior and method of communication will result in more educated guesses about how a person may possibly react in various situations. This understanding will also dramatically increase your ability to get through to the person in question.

No System Is Perfect

Let me be clear about one important point: This book doesn't claim to be totally comprehensive with respect to how we, as people, communicate with each other. No book can do that, because the number of signals we constantly transmit to those around us wouldn't fit into any book. Even if we could include body language, the differences between male and female dialogue, cultural differences, and all the other ways to define variations in communication, we wouldn't be able to write everything down. We could add psychological aspects, graphology, age, and astrology and still not get a 100 percent complete picture.

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According to the *American Journal of Business Education* (July/August 2013), more than 50 million assessments have been made using the DISA tool. And yet even with all this information communication remains a fascinating and puzzling topic. People are not Excel spreadsheets. We can't calculate everything. We're way too intricate to be described in full. Even the youngest child is far more intricate than anything that could be conveyed in a book. However, we can avoid the most blatant blunders by understanding the basics of human communication.

It's Been Going On for a While

"We see what we do, but we do not see why we do what we do. Thus, we assess and appraise each other through what we see that we do."

These words come from the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Different behavior patterns are what creates dynamism in our lives. When I refer to behavior patterns, I don't just mean how a person acts in a single instance (his actions) but rather the whole set of attitudes, beliefs, and approaches that govern how a person acts. We can recognize ourselves in certain behavior patterns, but other forms of behavior we neither recognize nor understand. Besides, each of us acts differently in different situations, which can be a source of either joy or irritation for those around us.

Though individual actions can, of course, be right or wrong, there is really no pattern of behavior that is right or wrong. There is no such thing as proper behavior or incorrect behavior. You are who you are, and there's no point in wondering why. You're fine no matter how you're wired. No matter how you choose to behave, no matter how you are perceived, you are fine. Within reasonable limits, of course.

In a perfect world, it would be easy just to say, "I'm a particular kind of person and it's okay because I read it in a book. That's just

how I am and this is how I act." Sure, wouldn't it be great not to have to mishandle your own behavior? To always be able to act and behave precisely as you feel at the time? You can do that. You can behave exactly as you wish. All you have to do is find the right situation in which to do so.

There are two situations in which you can just be you:

The first situation is when you're alone in a room. Then it doesn't matter how you speak or what you do. It doesn't hurt anyone if you scream and swear or if you just want to sit silently and ponder the great mysteries of life or wonder why fashion models always look so mad. In your solitude, you can behave exactly the way you feel. Simple, isn't it?

The second situation where you can completely be yourself is when all the other people in the room are exactly like you. What did our mothers teach us? Treat others as you want to be treated. Excellent advice and very well intentioned. And it works, too—as long as everyone is just like you. All you need to do is make a list of all the people you know who believe, think, and act exactly like you in all situations. Now just give them a call and start hanging out.

In any other situation, it might be a good idea to understand how you are perceived and to learn how other people function. I don't think I will make headlines by saying that most people you meet aren't like you.

Words can have incredible power, but the words we choose and how we use them vary. As you have seen from the title of this book, there are different interpretations of—yes, you got it—words. And when you use the wrong word, well, maybe then you're an idiot.

Surrounded by Idiots—or Not?

What does this actually mean? As I was writing, the following analogy hit me: Behavior patterns are like a toolbox. All types are needed. Depending on the occasion, a tool can sometimes be right and some-

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times be wrong. A thirty-pound sledgehammer is great for tearing down walls, but it's hardly the thing if you want to hang a picture in the foyer.

Some people are opposed to the idea of sorting people into different behavior types. Maybe you believe that you shouldn't categorize people in that way, that it's wrong to pigeonhole people. However, everyone does it, perhaps in another way than I do in this book, but we all register our differences nonetheless. The fact remains that we are different, and in my opinion, pointing that out can be something positive if you do it in the right way. Improperly used, every tool can be harmful. It's more about the person using it than the tool itself. This book is your introduction to human behavior and dialogue. The rest is up to you.

Parts of what you are going to read I have gathered from TTI Success Insights. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sune Gellberg and Edouard Levit for so generously sharing both their experience and their training materials.

No Matter How Strange It Might Seem, in Theory, Every Kind of Behavior Is Normal

Normal Behavior . . .

. . . is relatively predictable.

Every person reacts in a habitual manner in similar situations. But it's impossible to predict every possible reaction before it happens.

. . . is part of a pattern.

We often react in consistent patterns. Therefore, we should respect one another's patterns. And understand our own.

. . . is changeable.

We should learn to listen, act, speak openly, and reflect in order to do what is relevant right now. Everyone can adapt.

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... can be observed.

We should be able to observe and consider most forms of behavior without being amateur psychologists. Everyone can take note of the people around them.

... is understandable.

We should be able to understand why people feel and do what they do—right now. Everyone can think about why.

... is unique.

Despite the conditions that we have in common, each person's behavior is unique to him. Succeed in your own conditions.

... is excusable.

Dismiss personal jealousy and complaints. Learn to have tolerance and patience, both with yourself and with others.



Why Are We the Way We Are?

Where does our behavior come from? Why are people so different? Search me! Very briefly, it's a combination of heredity and environment. Even before we're born, the foundations for the behavior patterns we will exhibit in adulthood have been laid. The temperament and character traits we have inherited affect our behavior, a process already begun at the genetic stage. Exactly how this works is still a bone of contention among scientists, but all are in agreement that it does come into play. Not only do we inherit traits from our own parents but also from their parents—also in varying degrees from other relatives. At some point or other, we have all heard that we speak like or look like an uncle or an aunt. As a child, I resembled my uncle Bertil—something to do with my red hair. To explain how this is genetically possible would take a tremendous amount of time. For the moment, let us just establish that this inheritance lays the foundation for our behavioral development.

What happens once we are born? In most cases, children are born impulsive, adventurous, without any barriers whatsoever. A child does exactly what he wants. The child says, "No, I don't want to!" or,

"Sure I can!" He is immersed in the thought that he can manage just about anything at all. This kind of spontaneous and sometimes uncontrolled behavior is, of course, not always what his parents wished for. Then, hey presto, what was once an original pattern of behavior begins to transform, in the best/worst-case scenario, into a copy of someone else.

How Are Children Influenced?

Children learn and develop in multiple ways, but the most common is by imitation. A child mimics what he sees around him, the parent of the same sex often becoming the model for imitation. (This is clearly not an exhaustive study on how the process works, as this book is not about how we influence our children.)

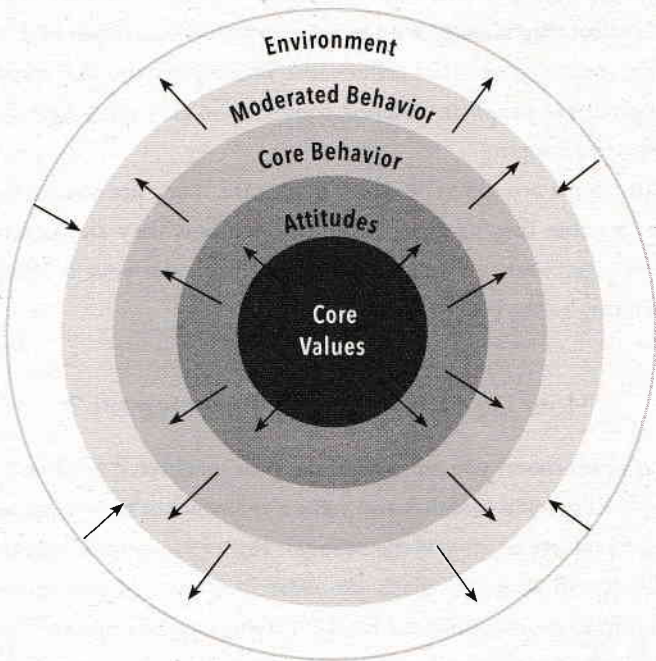
Core Values

My core values are found deep within me, values so deeply embedded in my character that it's almost impossible to change them. These are the things I learned from my parents as a child or that I learned in school when I was very young. In my case it was different variations of "study and do well in school" or "fighting is wrong." The latter, for example, means that I've never laid hands on another person. I haven't fought since third grade, and I seem to recall that I lost then. (She was really strong.)

Another important core value is that all people are of equal worth. Because my parents demonstrated this to me during my childhood, I know it is deeply wrong to judge a person based on his or her origin, sex, or color. All of us carry many such core values. We know instinctively what is right and what is not. No one can take these core values away from me.

The next layer is my attitudes, which are not exactly the same thing as core values. Attitudes are things I have formed opinions about based on my own experiences or on conclusions I have drawn from encounters in the latter part of my schooling, high school, college, or my first job. Even experiences later on in life can form attitudes.

A relative once told me that she didn't trust salespeople. She's definitely not alone in having strong feelings about salespeople, but in her case it resulted in comical practices. She couldn't buy anything without returning it. A sweater, a sofa, a car—the buying process was endless. Every fact had to be examined and explored. No matter how much research she did beforehand, she always wanted to return her purchases afterwards.



Once I had observed the pattern, I asked her why she did this, and she explained the reasoning behind her attitude: Eighty-five percent of all salespeople were swindlers. Explaining that I too was a salesperson had little effect. To this day, I don't know if I belong to the 85 percent or if I can count myself among the fortunate 15 percent. The important thing is that an attitude can change. My relative had probably been badly fooled a number of times and therefore learned to distrust salespeople. However, if she had a number of positive experiences her opinion could change.

The Results

Both my core values and my attitudes affect how I choose my behavior. Together they form my core behavior, the real person I want to be. My core behavior is how I act in complete freedom, without the influence of any external factors at all.

You probably already see the issue here: When are we ever completely free from external influences? When I discuss this question with groups of people in different contexts, we all usually agree: only when we're sleeping.

But people are different. Some don't care. They are always themselves because they've never reflected upon how they are perceived. The stronger your self-understanding is, the greater your probability of adapting to the people around you.

How Do Others Really Perceive Me?

The people around you most often see your moderated behavior. You interpret a specific situation and make a choice about how to act based on that evaluation—this is the behavior that others around you experience. It's all about the mask you wear to fit into a given situation. We all have several different masks. Having one at work and one at home isn't that unusual. And another one for visiting the in-laws,

perhaps. This book is not an advanced course in psychology—but I am content to establish that we interpret situations differently and act accordingly.

Consciously or subconsciously, surrounding factors cause me to choose a particular course of action.

And this is how we act. Look at this formula:

$$\text{BEHAVIOR} = f(P \times Sf)$$

Behavior is a function of *Personality* and *Surrounding factors*.

Behavior is that which we can observe.

Personality is what we try to figure out.

Surrounding factors are things that we have an influence on.

Conclusion: We continually affect one another in some form or other. The trick is to try to figure out what's there, under the surface. And this book is all about behavior.