

Going Where You Want To Be Depends on Where You Are

by Alice Vieira, PhD
Clinical Psychologist
Professional Kinesiologist Practitioner

Loss is loss. Change is loss.

Death, divorce, job loss or other dramatic changes in status are demonstrable losses. Change of any sort is the result of the loss of previous behaviors and cognitive states. Changing parts of ourselves may be more life altering and at least as painful as a more tangible loss.

In numerous articles, lectures and books on the stages of dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has recognized five stages on the continuum of processing loss. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are the milestones. Her description has helped millions of individuals become aware of the process of letting go; not only of life itself, but of anything that must leave or change.

Expanding on Kubler-Ross, Gary Emery, in his book, *Own Your Own Life*, has identified sub-parts of these stages. Within denial there is first non-awareness and disbelief. Part of bargaining is our avoidance of the anxiety caused from feeling out of control.

For a model of the loss involved with the stages of change, we can use Gordon Stokes and Daniel Whiteside's (Three In One Concepts) "Behavioral Barometer". The stages of growth start with the individual in a place of "no choice" and move toward a place of acceptance and choice. Their chart describes the relationship of the three elements of emotions at different levels of awareness: cellular or non-verbal, unconscious and conscious.

The Behavioral Barometer also illustrates the process of change and emotions that an individual suffers to reach awareness. First, there is an automatic, inevitable switch to a defensive posture of negative thoughts, feelings and behavior when a more positive choice is too unfamiliar or unattainable. Once the defensive switch is pulled, the individual can be halted in the process of change.

Hovering between Emery's sub-stages of non-awareness and disbelief is this defensive period. If we take cover under the domination of defensiveness, non-awareness returns as the operative condition.

However, if we can recognize our defensive reaction and deal with the emotions that are covered by the defensive stance then, most often, anger will emerge. Unfortunately, anger is commonly labeled as unacceptable and its manifestations as hurtful, bad or unseemly. Because society mostly loathes anger (especially in women) and certainly does not reward it in most situations, anger is an emotion that is frequently denied or at least avoided.

Unexpressed anger results in depression.

Depression can also result when we refuse to release something or separate from a lost person or object. Closure with a person or event is essential to break through depression.

Depression can also result when we do not set boundaries or allow our boundaries to be easily disregarded.

To avoid the pain of depression or the anxiety of taking action to process a loss effectively, we choose to return to unawareness. In M. Scott Peck's book, *Further Along The Road Less Travelled*, Peck emphasizes the unfortunate fact that most people die in the state of denial, not allowing themselves to express or deal with anger.

Change is one of the losses that require this painful breakthrough past defensiveness into anger.

**WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF
CHANGE AND THE SIGNS OF
READINESS?**

WHAT DOES CHANGE COST?

HOW CAN WE FACILITATE AND EFFECT CHANGE IN OTHERS?

In *On Becoming A Person* (1961), the renowned psychotherapist Carl Rogers recognized a process of change that we, as individuals, go through as we move from "fixity to changingness," from "rigid structure to flow," and from "stasis to process." The remainder of this paper follows Rogers' seven stages.

First Stage: We are rigid and react reflexively to almost all situations. We see no alternative choices or options to consider. We continue to act as we have always acted without benefitting from experience. It's "my way or the highway." Superseding the intentions or needs of everyone else we see everything as "me or mine." We are righteous and highly defensive.

We seem remote, even to our own personal experiences. We assume no responsibility for our problems and see no need to change. If a problem cannot be denied, it is blamed on someone else.

Feelings are neither recognized nor sought; if encountered they are denied and avoided. We have no awareness nor introspection. Close relationships and communication are perceived as dangerous, "ridiculous", or a waste of time; therefore, feelings are avoided.

Television's classic character, Archie Bunker, personifies the first stage.

M. Scott Peck's corresponding first stage on his lowest level of spiritual awareness is called the Chaotic/Antisocial stage. These are his "people of the lie." They are spiritually absent, unprincipled and totally self-serving.

HOW IS THE CHANGE AFFECTED SO THAT WE EMERGE FROM STAGE ONE?

There is at least one widely-accepted psychological test and analysis (the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory or MMPI) that mounts the odds against the possibility of a change in stage one. The MMPI describes these individuals as having rigid personalities and finds that there is little likelihood that they would benefit from any type of intervention. It further states that people with rigidity in their personalities would not be likely to seek help, and should they be forced to attend any sessions that might be geared

toward changing them that they would be unlikely to return.

HOW IS THIS INTRANSIGENCE OVERCOME ?

It seems to happen when we "feel received." This feeling of being "received" is tantamount to feeling valued, safe and understood. In some way, the therapist demonstrates empathy. In *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers states:

"We seem to know very little about how to provide the experience of being received for the person in the first stage, but it is occasionally achieved in play or group therapy where the person can be exposed to a receiving climate, without himself having to take any initiative, for a long enough time to experience himself **as received.**" (p.133)

Second stage: When we can tolerate the idea that there may be a reason for someone else's behavior that does not have to do directly with us and/or we have some slight bit of recognition that we might have some responsibility for what happens to us, then we are in stage two. We no longer have to demand that what we think is absolute. In this stage, feelings are handled in a remote, unowned way so that they are external, not personal. For example, "The symptom was -- it was -- just being very depressed." An individual in stage two would not say, "I feel depressed."

Peck's second stage of spiritual growth is Formal/Institutional. At this stage, we link the genesis and attachment of feelings and behaviors to another institution. This might be family, community, school, church, society, the military, even prison. God is seen as external; as a punitive "rules" enforcer akin to Orwell's Big Brother.

We are locked in the second stage when being "model members of the institutions" with which we identify. We function well because we strictly adhere to rules, roles, guidelines at any level. We are in a place of no choice.

If we feel received by a church, military, prison, or an entity as large as "society," then we diligently learn and follow the rules. For example, model prisoners who have been paroled are often back in their cells within a short time. They are labeled "institutional men" because they cannot effectively function without the comprehensive structure of prison. Charles Manson has been

identified as an institutional man because he functions very well inside prison. Should Manson return to the general society, he would probably be just as dangerous as when he orchestrated and committed the slaughtering of several people in the seventies.

HOW DO WE GET FROM STAGE ONE AND TWO TO STAGE THREE?

The primary motivator is a state of misery or at least extreme discomfort. Otherwise the maxim, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it" prevails. Complicating the transition is that, if we remain in the survival mode of stage one and two, we do not know we have choices. Survival banks on reflexive, fixed and rigid belief systems.

However, no matter how inflexible we may be, there are certain fundamental things in life that are valued as worthwhile and normal. It is very hard to tolerate the substantial absence of feeling good about ourselves, feeling lovable, having friends, keeping a job, being productive, feeling safe, having a place where we feel accepted and enjoy a sense of belonging.

Should the absence of any of these fundamental states cause significant discomfort, we might possibly seek more information about ourselves. Without these conditions, there is little hope for us to emerge from non-awareness.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF AWARENESS OR INTROSPECTION?

Awareness frees us to make new choices in relationships, judgements, actions, statements, values, goals, and beliefs. If we become aware, then our true nature can emerge and be modeled by new choices.

WHAT IS TRUE NATURE?

True nature is frequently misunderstood relative to the ability to change. The story of the frog and the scorpion illustrates the morbid consequences of non-awareness and the inability to change.

The scorpion asks the frog to take him across the river. The frog declines saying he fears that the scorpion will bite him. The scorpion promises not to bite the frog so the frog agrees to the journey. Half way across the river the scorpion bites the frog, causing them both to drown. As

they are going down the frog asks the scorpion why he bit him. The scorpion answered, "It is my nature."

Only separation from our primary attachments, good or bad, can answer the question about true nature. Our ability to remain at least somewhat non-defensive allows us to separate from the first and second stages.

To change, we must move beyond rationalizing, "That's just the way I am," or "I'm only human," or "Let's not talk about it." These defensive stances are not part of anyone's true nature. They are manifestations of a basic survival instinct to keep us safe from what we perceive as danger, attack or loss of love or death.

There is a portion of the population that will always remain in stage one and two. They never read a paper as you are reading now, nor attend conferences to learn new things. They lead limited and unquestioned existences. With their own children and themselves, they repeat the mistakes that their parents made.

However, once a flicker of awareness is seen, the first sign of movement to stage three is disbelief or denial. **WHY?** The state of disbelief depends on the ability to perceive that something is finally within one's awareness. To be defensive requires an acknowledgement that there is something threatening in the environment. The defense mechanism of denial takes emotional energy. So do anger and depression. These are signs of our growth!

The key here is relating one thing to another, just as we did when we were children.

The approach at this stage is for us to have someone help us explore our denial, defense and disbelief. We have to feel safe enough to ask the question, "It wasn't my fault, was it?" Then the process is off and running. If the question is never asked and the statement remains, "It wasn't my fault," then we will not get beyond stage one and two.

WHAT PROVIDES THE RIGHT QUESTION?

From my personal life, I offer a true story about one of my friends. He had always been a very defensive person. He is quick to "protect himself" from the slightest hint of criticism. He sees criticism where the evidence shows none and

anticipates criticism when none is forthcoming. I asked my friend to listen to an audio tape of Deepak Chopra discussing defensiveness from his book, *Magical Mind, Magical Body*. In it, Dr. Chopra says,

"Rationalizations are just excuses for the things that happen to us. It is a change of perception that is necessary.... Most people spend their entire life defending that they are correct. So the moment you stop trying to do that you are approaching defenselessness. Defenselessness is actually the key to invincibility. When you let down all your defenses, there is nothing to attack. It is true that applies to ourselves also – that we don't judge ourselves, we don't try to defend a point of view to ourselves. I'm reminded of a statement Mr. Gorbachev made a few years ago to President Reagan. He said, 'We're going to do something terrible to you, we are going to deprive you of an enemy'. When you let down all your defenses nobody can attack you because there is nothing to attack. That, really, is ultimate power. Ultimate power does not allow the birth of an enemy and the mechanics of that is simple, effective defenselessness."

After we heard this my friend said, "I won't be defensive anymore. I will be dominated and gouged." He was as surprised as I was that this statement came out of his mouth. In listening to Dr. Chopra he somehow was ready to hear something he had not heard before and his belief system "snuck out." He was able to move from stage 1-2 to stage 3 in that moment.

Stage Three: This stage will emerge only if we continue to feel "received." Otherwise, defensiveness will reappear and stop progress. Returning to stage one or two, survival mode will replace the new introspection.

We need to relax at this stage and feel good that "someone understands" or "at least I am doing something about this." Then we can be engaged to begin the process.

In this stage, we can select persons from our family and reflect on how we might have qualities similar to theirs. "I'm just like my mother on this issue." or "That is something my Uncle Jim would say," would be appropriate. We begin to

see relatedness and have it take on some meaning. Contradictions are recognized. "That's just what I hate about my mother and that's what I do with my own children!"

Affecting personal choices is still outside the recognized options – outside awareness.

A man named Quincy had come to me for psychotherapy because he had lost all feelings for his wife. He moved out from their home and, because of limited finances, moved into his parents' home where he had not lived for 20 years. During group therapy Quincy realized that his philosophy was contrary to the philosophies of every other group member. He recognized that he was being antagonistic to a loved one whom he knew loved him.

As Quincy continued to live with his parents on a daily basis, he began to see that he had "become his father" and that he had married a woman much like his mother. Because he had the group experience, he was able to consider rejecting the philosophies or beliefs of his parents. This recognition was the springboard to his growth process. The recognition made it possible for him to move to stage

Peck's third stage is called the Skeptic/Individual. He calls the individuals in this stage "truth-seekers."

Stage Four: This stage is the beginning of change because we are finally ready to change. There is an awareness that we are responsible for our own problems and can actively do something to help ourselves. We seek psychotherapy or take part in educational conferences such as Touch For Health. We read self-help books and materials such as this journal.

A connection is made between who we are today and who we were made to be within our family of origin. In stage four we recognize that we have not separated from our parents' viewpoints or removed ourselves from the legacy of family dysfunction. With the ability to reflect on these issues and see how they caused a lack of trust in relationships, the possibility exists, perhaps for the first time, for a trusting relationship.

We now know that the world of possibilities is larger; we want to seek new options and be "at choice," finally mastering our own reality. There

is desire to explore our purpose for being here and hope that we can maximize our potential.

Peck's final stage of spiritual growth is Mystical/ Community. He profoundly refers to this state "as a beginning."

Stage Five: Rogers (p.140) says, "Feelings are very close to being fully experienced. They 'bubble up,' and 'seep through,' in spite of the fear and distrust which we feel at experiencing them with fullness and immediacy."

We begin to accept the quality of our feelings and believe we matter to ourselves and to others. We feel we belong and feel accepted in our expressions and behavior. In this stage it begins to be important to have the "real me" be known, and some degree of spontaneity becomes normal. Introspection is more frequent. Looking into why behavior is the way it is becomes possible. Choice becomes an option for the first time. Rogers states:

"This phase is several hundred psychological miles from the first stage described. Here many aspects of the client are in flow, as against the rigidity of the first stage. He is very much closer to his organic being, which is always in process. He is much closer to being in the flow of his feelings. His constructions of experience are decidedly loosened and repeatedly being tested against referents and evidence within the without. Experience is much more highly differentiated, and thus internal communication, already flowing, can be much more exact" (p. 143).

This is the stage when self-help books are the most useful, when psychotherapy is most beneficial, and when change, through the new information, is fruitful. This is the stage where not only do we attend conferences but we use the information we learn at the conference.

Stage Six: It is at this stage that the previously-held belief systems no longer hold us captive. The present is allowed to be experienced as the present without the baggage of the past. This stage is a further enhancement of stage five. Once this stage has been reached it is unlikely that we will ever return to any of the previous stages. It is the stage in which we have reached separation from the past and have individuated – have become our own person. We are no longer stuck. Feelings flow because of a certainty that our feelings are

valuable to ourselves and to others. We immediately relate to our experiences and naturally flow in a process of where that experience could lead. "The incongruence between experience and awareness is vividly experienced as it disappears into congruence" (Rogers, p.148). Defense mechanisms are of minimal concern. Our scanner of our childhood, the one we erected in order to survive, has no serviceable purpose. Freed from a constant survival mode, we are ready to experience life at its fullest.

Stage Seven: The highlight of this stage is the ultimate trust in our own process. Trust, autonomy, initiative, sense of individuation and capacity for intimacy is established. Close, healthy personal relationships are a vital part of our lives.

Stephen Covey (in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*) describes an interdependency: a way of being in which we are not dependent on others, not independent of others but connected in such a way that we value others' presence in our lives, realizing what they offer can only enhance our own lives.

Life is rich in each experience and modified by each new experience.

"Internal communication is clear, with feelings and symbols well-matched, and fresh terms for new feelings. There is the experiencing of effective choice of new ways of being" (Rogers, p.154).

WHY ARE THESE STAGES IMPORTANT TO YOU AS A PROFESSIONAL?

Being aware of these stages can help us locate where our clients are and where our efforts will be most beneficial. The client is able to take in different things at different stages. If we match what we offer to where the client is along the continuum, then we build trust that is integral to the change process. We are able to offer "age-appropriate" counsel or intervention; neither moving the client too quickly or letting opportunities go by.

In the excitement of showing Touch For Health to someone new, we can now find out even more critical information. A muscle test after the pretest will enable you to see which stage of growth is evidenced on the particular goal or issue.

Summary

Here is a quick list that will guide you to the most effective intervention strategy.

Stage 1: We are wasting our time!

Stage 2: Our job is to help the other person feel received.

Stage 3: This person is open to suggestions.

Stage 4: This person is ready and open to change.

Stages 5-7: We are there to encourage the sense of "oneness."

References

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