

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.

### **Attitudes and Approaches**

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:

BEHAVIOR = f (P × 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.

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