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Behavior Change

A view from the inside out

OVERVIEW

Chapter One: Our Internal Operating System

Chapter Two: Core Beliefs

Chapter Three: Values

Chapter Four: Attitude

Chapter Five: Thoughts and Feelings

Chapter Six: Choices

Chapter Seven: Behaviors

Final Thoughts

Recommended Reading

Tools for your Tool Belt

Next Steps

Our Internal Operating System

We have faced the need to change everyday since childhood. You would expect that with the experience of constant change that each and every one of us would be familiar with how to adapt to it. The fact appears to be, that even with a steady diet of change, many of us still struggle with how to effectively adjust. To some degree many people avoid changing until it becomes too painful to resist. Mr. Fieger proposes that if people understand how they function, they can choose to change without waiting for the pain of not changing to motivate them.

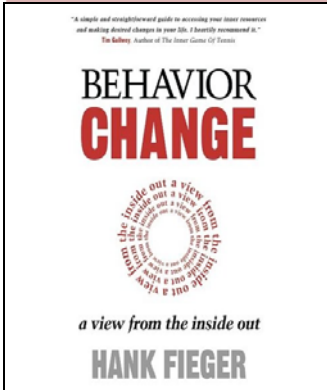
Fieger proposes that all people have an internal operating system from which all behavior originates and that all people have in common. He calls this: Our Internal Operating System. A simple diagram illustrates how the system operates:

Our Internal Operating System

(How we contribute to our own reality)

Core Beliefs → Values → Attitude → Thoughts & Feelings → Choices → Behaviors

Based on this system, all behavior originates from a set of core beliefs. These core beliefs are instrumental in determining how people see the world and themselves. An individual's core beliefs in turn influence their values. Values are qualities that people choose to live by and in turn determine their attitude toward different life events. This combination of core beliefs, values and attitudes are deeply rooted and are the foundation and how people perceive their individual reality. Their view of reality determines their thoughts, feelings and the choices they make. Choices, in turn, lead them to how they act or behave.



Core Beliefs

The world is what we believe it to be. An individual's core beliefs are formed during childhood and reinforced or modified throughout their life. Experience shows that beliefs can be changed and created once they are identified and evaluated.

In order to initiate lasting change one has to become aware of the beliefs they have, understand what keeps them in place, make different choices, and reinforce the new belief. Creating lasting change involves the following four-steps:

1. **Awareness:** Identify the belief that limits you.
2. **Understanding:** Identify what keeps the belief in place.
3. **Improvement:** Replace the belief with one that serves you better.
4. **Reinforcement:** Practice the belief consciously.

Regardless of what core beliefs people want to change, these four principles provide the necessary steps to create the behavior that serves them better.

Values

As stated earlier values are influenced by the core beliefs people hold. Values give meaning to life and individuals choose their values. To understand the relationship between the two it is essential for an individual to clarify what values are most important to them. Most people do not take the time to articulate what their values are until they are put in a position where they are challenged.

Following a simple values clarification process, outlined in this chapter, it is possible for people to identify and clarify their personal values and how they perceive themselves. By understanding what values are most important it becomes possible to identify how attitudes are developed and changed.

Attitude

Up to now, everything discussed has been part of an internal dialogue. Core beliefs and values are not easily seen or detected unless they are shared with others. People can guess at what core beliefs and values might be, however someone's attitude is the first hint as to what they actually are.

By understanding a person's attitude it is possible to see how they feel or think about things around them. Others can use this approach to gain insight into what has been, up to now, only known to the individual.

So what is the role of attitude in helping people understand how to change their behavior? Understanding what contributes to your attitude is actually the first step in knowing how to change. Attitude is directly linked to an individual's core beliefs. If you change the belief it will alter the values and the resulting attitude will shift.

Thoughts and Feelings

If consciously shifting core beliefs is the process people use to alter their values and attitudes, then how is this process monitored internally? What is the mechanism that provides guidance and direction? This is where thoughts and feelings enter the picture. The wonderful thing about this internal operating system is that every action begins with a thought.

How people think directly influences what they are capable of doing. The words people choose are very powerful. That is why some people choose their words carefully, knowing that people will react to them. This is in essence the basis of how people influence one another. This is also how people influence and control themselves.

A common technique shared amongst athletes is *Self-talk*. Self-talk is an internal conversation that people have with themselves. This conversation is internalized and used in self-discovery.

It is commonly understood that the secret to top performance in sports is to manage "self-interference". Athletes know that the formula for superior performance is: *Performance = Potential – Self-interference*. Self-interference comes in the form of worry, doubt, self-criticism, or even praise. Using a simple exercise people can begin to understand how their self-talk patterns and habits influence them. By doing this people can more easily manage the impact self-talk has on their ability to change outcomes.

Choices

Behavior change is all about choices. Choices fall into two categories: conscious and unconscious. People make choices continuously all day long, some are very simple and others more complex and involved. At times unconscious choices don't seem to be choices at all. In some cases people tend to avoid situations that require them to make decisions that they are either not prepared for or not ready for the responsibility associated with them.

With the internal operating system, it is more effective to make conscious choices that are more empowering. Not making a decision is a choice in and of itself. The tendency to avoid

decisions about things people don't want to do or make them look bad can be changed. This avoidance in making conscious decisions is how people become victims. It is within everyone's ability to choose differently.

The purpose of this book is to help people understand that the most influential person in their life is themselves. The next time you become worried or complain about something that is out of your control, stop and redirect your energy by changing what you can control: which is yourself.

Behaviors

Many people reading this book would expect that a chapter on behavior change would have been in the beginning of the book rather than at the end. As you may have surmised from the previous chapters, there is a lot that happens internally before we act. In order to change behavior, which is the observable part of the internal operating system, we have to understand what drives it. To understand how important behavior is, in terms of what other people derive from it, we need to understand the visual, vocal and verbal components of communication. Much of our verbal communication is overshadowed by observable behaviors in the form of body language and vocal qualities. The issue with observable behavior is that most people don't just observe it; they interpret and draw conclusions from it.

To aid people in understanding how to read and interpret observable behavior the author reviews the concept of social styles. He points out that observable behaviors are grouped into two dimensions: assertiveness and responsiveness. It becomes easier to understand individual preferences around communication, decision-making, problem solving, and more once we identify individual social styles. In addition to the two dimensions and four styles there is actually a third dimension entitled versatility. Versatility indicates an individual's tendency to modify or adapt their behavior to either accommodate other's needs or focus on their own. By focusing on the needs of others it is possible to bridge style differences and influence outcomes. By changing our selves we can influence the change we would like to see in others.

Create Lasting Change

In summary the most effective way to create lasting change is to implement the four principles introduced at the beginning of the book:

- 1. Awareness:** Identify the belief that limits you.
- 2. Understanding:** Identify what keeps the belief in place.
- 3. Improvement:** Replace the belief with one that serves you better.
- 4. Reinforcement:** Practice the belief consciously.

Keep in mind that changing behavior is not an easy process. It can be a challenge that requires focused attention and a level of alertness and discipline many people are not use to. The payoff is that by knowing exactly what you want to create and be, the more freedom you will enjoy in a life that is more to your liking.

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About the Author



Hank Fieger is an executive coach and the president of Hank Fieger and Associates. Mr. Fieger has worked in the field of training and development for more than 30 years and has worked with executives and managers of numerous companies and organizations.



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