

SELF-DIRECTED BEHAVIOR

4TH EDITION

Self-Modification for Personal Adjustment

David L. Watson

Roland G. Tharp



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SELF-MODIFICATION FOR PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

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Self-Directed Behavior

SELF-MODIFICATION FOR PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

4th Edition

***For our parents,
Faye and Manly Watson
Berma and Oswald Tharp***

PREFACE

This book is designed to acquaint you with a general theory of behavior, to guide you through exercises for developing skills in self-analysis, and to provide you with concrete information on how to achieve the goals you hold for yourself. The most important goal of this volume is to help you, the reader, achieve more self-determination, more “willpower,” more control over your own life.

The book can serve as a textbook in psychology courses but does not depend on a formal course structure. Any reader can use it for self-instruction; no “prerequisites” are necessary. Clients of therapists or counselors can use it as an adjunct in planning their own self-change.

You should be warned about one possible side effect: you may become interested in the science of behavior. A number of people do find themselves delving deeper into the subject as a result of studying this material and in response to the experiential learning that can result from the self-change process.

The vehicle for learning will be your own self-analysis, your own program for implementing your values. Throughout, you are urged to accompany your reading with your own self-improvement project. In a sense, your daily life will become the laboratory in which you will study and develop your own behavior.

Foreword to the Professional

This book’s fourth edition maintains the authors’ same intentions: to provide scientifically based instruction in the principles and practices of self-applied psychology. In the proliferation of self-help manuals, we have defined our niche as the one that offers an opportunity for students to learn principles of scientific psychology in the laboratory that is most important to them—the laboratory of their own life problems. Simultaneously, they will learn verified coping skills for personal problem solving.

To achieve these goals, we have set certain standards: to maintain an up-to-date review of all important literature, including both empirical and theoretical publications relevant to self-managed behavior; to maintain accu-

racy of summary and interpretation, so that instructors can be confident in assigning this text; to be conservative in making recommendations that arise only from a secure data base; and, finally, to advance integrative interpretations that offer some coherence to a vigorous and expanding field. We have also striven to maintain the readability that has characterized our previous editions.

The field of self-directed behavior began as self-behavior modification, but it has expanded in a vortex that has swept in vicarious and observational learning, cognitive behaviorism and verbal self-control, imagery and information science. This fourth edition has incorporated a wealth of new theoretical and empirical concepts that are currently influencing the field: skills analysis, delay of gratification, learned resourcefulness, control theory, relapse prevention, neo-Vygotskian developmental theory, self-efficacy, commitment theory, decision making, and attribution theory. In our reading of the field, this enrichment has provided key conceptual links that have made self-direction more coherent, more understandable, and more integrated. More depth and variety of work than has ever before been available has been included in this edition.

Since the previous editions, there has been considerable discussion of the ethical principles involved in the promulgation of self-help information. We are gratified that empirical field testing of this text has been uniformly positive: students using this text have achieved their goals for self-change in percentages varying from 66% to 84% (Hamilton, 1980; Clements & Beideman, 1981; deBortali-Tregerthan, 1984; Rakos & Grodek, 1984).

Some changes in the organization of the book are designed to make it even more useful for the student. For example, this edition contains a set of learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter. Key terms are highlighted in boldface, and a special rule identifies the successive steps of the self-direction project throughout the book. The "Tips for Typical Topics" (at the end of most chapters) have been expanded to allow for a more rapid formulation of a self-modification plan, and a topic index allows the student to retrieve all information relevant to a particular behavior.

Acknowledgments

For this edition, we are particularly indebted for the excellent critical analyses provided by Patricia Baasel of Ohio University, Harriet Kathryn Brown of the University of Hawaii, Elaine Heiby of the University of Hawaii, Donald K. Pumroy of the University of Maryland, Richard F. Rakos of Cleveland State University, and John Ward of Carroll College. Special thanks go to Richard Suinn, Jerry Deffenbacher, and Steven Richards for their useful advice and correspondence. Joyce Frank provided expert bibliographic work, editing, and manuscript preparation. Peggy Tropp was a sensitive and accurate manuscript editor for Brooks/Cole.

Our greatest debt of gratitude is to all our students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Their self-change projects have taught us much and made

this edition, like the previous ones, possible. We would like to cite especially Harriet Kathryn Brown and Gail deBortali-Tregerthan, who—former students themselves—have now provided us with reports from their own students. The list of all these student names has grown too long to cite. We have always disguised their identities in the case reports that illustrate the book; we hope that in this anonymity each of them will accept a tribute to the Unknown Student.

David L. Watson
Roland G. Tharp

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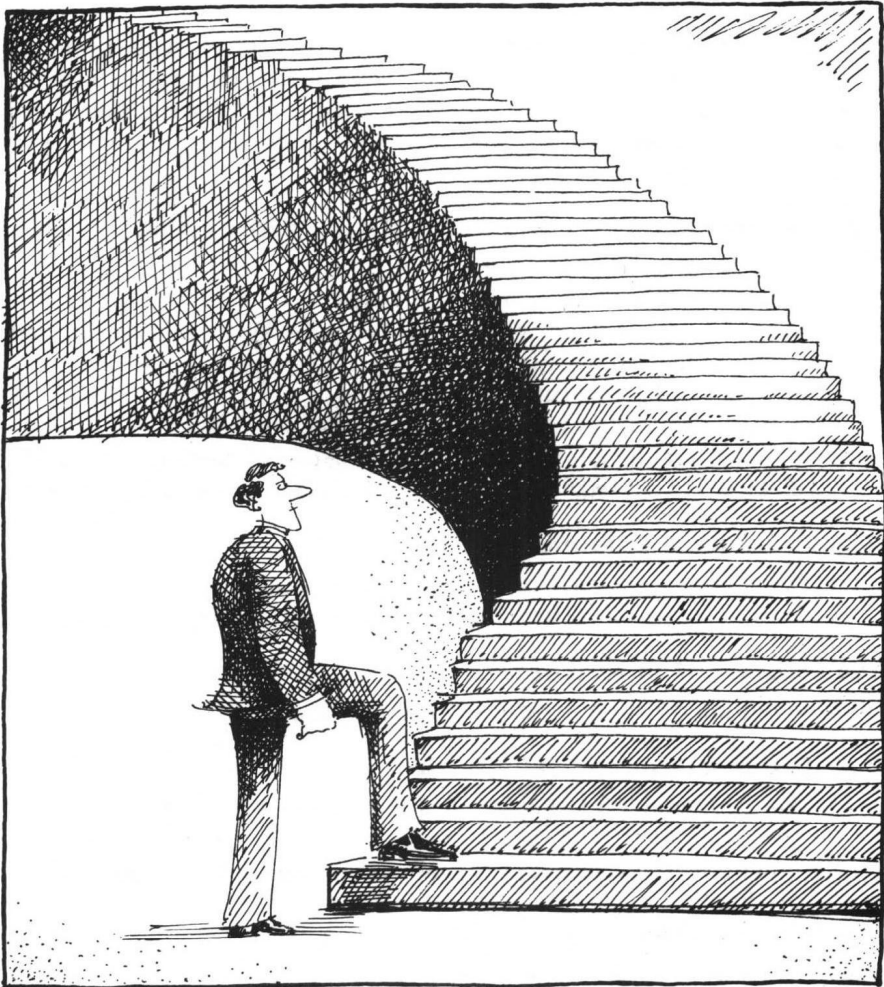
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Adjustment and the Skills of Self-Direction



OUTLINE

- Self-Direction and Willpower
- The Skills of Self-Direction
- Self-Direction as a Skill
- Behavior and the Environment
- The Process of Self-Modification
- Does Self-Modification Really Work?
- Chapter Summary
- Your Own Self-Direction Project: Step One

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Each chapter begins with a set of learning objectives, in which all the major points in the chapter are listed. The learning objectives are phrased as questions. When you can answer all these questions, you will have mastered the chapter. The learning objectives are divided into sections corresponding to the sections in the chapter.

Self-Direction and Willpower/The Skills of Self-Direction

1. How is adjustment defined?
2. What is the best way to study this book?
3. What are the various approaches one can take to adjustment, and what are their implications for self-direction?
 - a. What is the medical model?
 - b. What are the problems with the idea of willpower?
 - c. What are the implications of thinking of self-direction as a skill?
 - d. How are self-regulation, self-control, and self-modification defined?

Behavior and the Environment

4. What are antecedents, behaviors, and consequences?
5. How does learning affect them and their relationship to each other?

The Process of Self-Modification

6. What are the steps in most self-change programs?

Does Self-Modification Really Work?

7. Are people able to change themselves when they have a relatively serious problem with their behavior?
 8. What does the research show about the success of students who use this book?
 9. When a self-modification plan doesn't work, what are the likely causes?
-

To arrange, to harmonize, to come to terms; to arrange the parts suitably among themselves and in relationship to something else—that is the definition of adjustment. Adjustment can mean harmony among parts of the self—harmony of thoughts, actions, and feelings. The person who is torn by internal contradictions, the person who wants love but hates people, is not balanced or happy. We might say that such a person is badly adjusted, or disturbed. Significantly, we say that a person who is mentally ill is “unbalanced.”

Adjustment can also mean harmony between the self and the environment. When people are out of phase with the world around them, we say that they are out of touch, gone, way out—words implying that they are not in harmony with the environment.

When we say that someone is “badly adjusted,” we are making a value judgment. To the total conformist, any individualist seems badly adjusted, out of line with the group. To the individualist, total conformity seems bad adjustment, out of harmony. It is sometimes difficult to know if one should conform or rebel. When we say that someone is badly adjusted, we make a value judgment that the person should not be doing something, or should be doing something else.

We make value judgments about our own behavior, too. You may feel that you eat too much and weigh too much, and you’d like to be slimmer. You feel that your life would be improved if you weighed less. You’d be more attractive, feel more energetic. You might make new friends, or be more captivating to old ones. If that is your own value judgment about your weight, you would probably like to change your eating habits.

But can you? Do you have the skills to change? If you don’t, people who can make a decision to change themselves and then do so probably seem a marvel to you. A slim friend says, “Yes, I decided I was about five pounds overweight, so I just took it off.” You listen with mouth agape—you who have been trying unsuccessfully for years to do the same thing.

All of us have certain goals we cannot reach “just like that.” Most of us have skills for certain situations but not for others. You might easily increase studying, while your slim friend needs to do the same thing but lacks the skill. When we have the ability to change ourselves, we have the skills that make up good adjustment.

Adjustment is better understood as a *skill* than a *condition*. Self-direction means that your own behavior is under your control—that when it is necessary to change, you can. Events change our environment, and as we devise new goals, we need to change our responses. We want to be able to control our behavior so that we change in the desired way—to increase study time, to develop better social skills, to stop overindulging in food or drugs.

Self-direction means recognizing the changes you want and being able to actualize your own values. The skills of self-direction include choosing goals and designing strategies to meet them, evaluating outcomes, changing tactics when needed, and solidifying new gains. Self-direction is the combination of skills by which goals are achieved.

The purpose of this book is to present these skills of personal adjustment. As you will see, there is a strategy for achieving change. The same principles can be employed for becoming less shy, for giving up smoking, for losing weight, or for increasing your studying. The same principles are involved in gaining skills at tennis, in taking examinations, or in reducing anxiety. We will deal with specific topic areas, but our goal is to teach you the basic skills for maintaining good adjustment.

As in all teaching, our success depends on you, the learner. All skills begin at simple levels and rise to more complex ones. Understanding requires effort and study; perfection requires practice. Specific exercises are suggested at the end of each chapter. It is important that you carry out these practice assignments. Like someone who is learning to ride a bicycle, you must actually ride, be willing to wobble a bit, even take a fall. The only way you can learn to ride “just like that” is through practice.

SELF-DIRECTION AND WILLPOWER

Is it really possible to learn self-direction? The answer is *yes*. You can increase the control you exercise over your own behavior and your own life. Obviously you can't control all the events in your life. We are all limited by lack of talent, energy, or plain bad luck. But within broad limits you can direct yourself toward your chosen goals, and change when you want to.

Some people are excellent managers of their lives. They aren't shy, they can study when they need to, they are in charge. By analyzing the ways these good managers achieve their goals, we discover principles and techniques we can all use. Research on methods of teaching these techniques has led to the discovery of principles that can be applied to self-direction, resulting in a body of knowledge that describes how self-direction occurs and how it can be increased.

Some people say, “I can't give up my old habits. I have no willpower.” They speak as though “willpower” involved standing in the face of temptation, fists clenched, jaws tight, refusing to do what one shouldn't do, even though one wants to do it. After several decades of practicing chastity, Mahatma Gandhi sometimes slept with attractive young followers in his camp to demonstrate his ability to abstain from sex. Most people with effective willpower avoid that kind of situation in the first place. It is far easier to remain chaste while sleeping alone. People use foresight, self-analysis, and planning to avoid temptations. This point can be found in many ethical and religious systems. St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, taught that to avoid sin one should avoid the occasion for sin.

For each of us there are powerful temptations. That is, there are situations in which we make the choice for immediate pleasure even though it goes against our long-range goals. If you, like Gandhi, can resist temptation, then you don't need the techniques in this book. But for most of us there are

situations in which we choose for the short run over the long run, even though we regret it later.

How can we make ourselves do things we find so difficult? This has been a topic of concern from time immemorial. Our own mythology shows, for example, how one wily man scored a victory over temptation. In Homer's *Odyssey*, written about 800 B.C., Odysseus and his crew sailed through straits where the Sirens sang a song so alluring that it drew sailors to their death on the rocks. Odysseus wanted to hear their wonderful music, but he wanted to avoid sailing too close. A shrewd man, he used a clever strategy to achieve both goals. He ordered his men to lash him to the mast and, no matter how much he begged to be set free, to keep him there until they had passed through the straits. Then he plugged their ears with wax so they could carry out his orders and row safely through without hearing the music (Ainslee, 1975).

BOX 1-1

HOW TO STUDY THIS BOOK

At the beginning of each chapter is an outline of the chapter and a set of learning objectives that are phrased as questions. The learning objectives cover all the major points in the chapter. If you can answer them, you will have mastered the text material. Your task while studying is to find the answers to those questions and then learn them well.

1. Break up your reading so that you do just one or two sections of the chapter at a time. The learning objectives and chapter summary are divided into sections that correspond to the sections of the chapter.
2. First read the outline for the whole chapter. Then read the learning objectives and the part of the chapter summary that corresponds to the section you are working on.
3. Now read the material itself.
4. Then reread the summary material.
5. Finally, close the book to see if you can answer the learning objective questions for that section.
6. Repeat this process for each section.

When you are studying for a course examination, give yourself a pretest by answering the learning objectives. Check your answers against the text. Reread the whole chapter summary, and reread those parts of the chapter necessary to answer the learning objective questions.

This method may sound cumbersome compared to your present way of studying. However, research has shown that it is the best way to learn the material in a text (Robinson, 1970; McKeachie, 1978). As you practice this method, it will become easier and easier for you. Our advice is this: *Try it and then evaluate it.* You can always go back to your old way of studying if this doesn't work better for you.