

Choice Theory

William Glasser

Introduction

- **Choice Theory**, developed by **Dr. William Glasser**, is the explanation of human behavior based on internal motivation. As Dr. Glasser explains in the most recent of his widely read books, Choice Theory, all of our behavior is chosen as we continually attempt to meet one or more of the five basic needs that are part of our genetic structure.



Components of Choice

- An understanding of these needs as well as the other major components of Choice Theory (*the Basic Needs, the Quality World, the Perceived World, the Comparing Place, and the Total Behavior System*) can help us build and maintain better relationships with the important people in our lives and lead happier, more satisfying lives.

The Ten Axioms of Choice Theory

- 1. The only person whose behavior we can control is our own.
- 2. All we can give another person is information.
- 3. All long-lasting psychological problems are relationship problems.
- 4. The problem relationship is always part of our present life.
- 5. What happened in the past has everything to do with what we are today, but we can only satisfy our basic needs right now and plan to continue satisfying them in the future.
- 6. We can only satisfy our needs by satisfying the pictures in our Quality World.
- 7. All we do is behave.
- 8. All behavior is Total Behavior and is made up of four components: acting, thinking, feeling and physiology
- 9. All Total Behavior is chosen, but we only have direct control over the acting and thinking components. We can only control our feeling and physiology indirectly through how we choose to act and think.
- 10. All Total Behavior is designated by verbs and named by the part that is the most recognizable.

Motivation of Choice

- 1. **Survival** - This need is a physiological need, which includes the need for food, shelter, and safety. Because we have genetic instructions to survive, not only as individuals but as a species, this includes the need to reproduce.
- 2. **Love & Belonging** - This need and the following three needs are psychological needs. The need to love and belong includes the need for relationships, social connections, to give and receive affection and to feel part of a group.
- 3. **Power** -To be powerful is to achieve, to be competent, to be skilled, to be recognized for our achievements and skill, to be listened to and have a sense of self worth.
- 4. **Freedom** - The need to be free is the need for independence, autonomy, to have choices and to be able to take control of the direction of one's life
- 5. **Fun** - The need for fun is the need to find pleasure, to play and to laugh. Should you doubt that this is as important as any of the others, imagine a life without hope of any enjoyment. Glasser links the need for fun to learning. All of the higher animals (dogs, dolphins, primates, etc.) play. As they play, they learn important life skills. Human beings are no different. It is true that "play is a child's work."

- **Characteristics of the Five Basic Needs:**

- 1. Universal
- 2. Innate
- 3. Overlapping
- 4. Satisfied from moment to moment
- 5. Conflict w/ Others' Needs

The pictures in our Quality World:

1. Meet one or more of our Basic Human Needs
2. Are changing and changeable
3. Are unique
4. Often conflict with each other
5. Vary in levels of intensity
6. Vary in levels of attainability

Our Perceived Worlds are, for each of us, our reality. Because they are made up of perceptions, our Perceived Worlds are:

- Highly subjective: based on one's culture, education, experience, gender, age, etc.
- Unique
- Subject to constant change (new information, new experiences = new perceptions)
- Frequently inaccurate

Comparing Place As we experience life, we are constantly comparing what we want (our Quality World pictures) with what we've got (our Perceived World). When the two match fairly well, we feel good. When there is a mismatch, as there probably was when you read the sentence above, you feel a degree of frustration, depending on how important the Quality World picture is to you. That frustration signal, as Glasser terms it, is felt as an urge to behave in a way that will help us get more of what we want.

According to Dr. Glasser all behavior is Total Behavior, made up of four components:

- 1. Acting
- 2. Thinking
- 3. Feeling
- 4. Physiology