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My thanks to Dean Almasy, and the Eberly College of Arts & Science, for bestowing on me the alumni recognition award and to Mike Perone, chair of the department of psychology for nominating me.

Receiving my Ph.D. from WVU opened doors that changed my life forever, in ways I could not anticipate. I was an American Studies/English major as an undergraduate—and in graduate school at Johns Hopkins, I pursued my love of culture and history. Soon thereafter, however, I ran smack dab into the applications of behavior analysis making a difference in people's lives. I have never looked back.

When people like me speak to a group of future leaders like you, it is to convey our wishes for the future shaped by your ideas and ideals, by your curiosity to know, by your rejecting simplistic analysis and promoting of half-truths or of your own self-interest at the expense of others. We want *you* to help us *all* be better than we are today. So I speak to you from my vested self-interest in how you choose to live your life at work, as a citizen of our country, and a fellow traveler in the larger world.

In preparing this talk, I wanted to tie events that had affected me and appeared to form, in hindsight, what have become my primary interests along life's way. Against the backdrop of three events I have selected, I want to share a few principles derived from behavior analysis, my field of study, and my life's work, as to what I think can make a significant difference in your success at work and in life.

In the mid-1950s, my father coordinated a team of former German generals and English and American historians to write a history of the German Luftwaffe in WWII. Allied leaders wished to ensure that the German generals, before they actually were given command, had freedom to reflect openly about their values and regrets with one another. They then captured their remembrances and reflections in writing as to how their recent history and culture *should* influence the future behavior of the military in Germany. Although the actual events were removed from me, my parents talked in detail about why we were there and what the mission was, giving me lots of books to read. And, the personal relationships were not removed at all. I still remember vividly those days and the friendships with people I know now more fully from historical writings. This experience made me aware at a young age about differences, culture and context, for determining what was right or wrong according to our histories. These events did prepare me for experiences in later high school and at my university and triggered my awareness of how seemingly quite foreign problems could appear in my back yard. It taught me that we must as-

sess the reinforcing properties of behavior and unintended consequences that are a part of any culture—be it in my company, inside the corporations I enter in my work today or in our larger community. The lessons of my life in Germany were all about behavior and its consequences—although I could not have articulate that then.

The second event occurred in the 1960s when I was an undergraduate at the University of Alabama—falling into an unanticipated hotbed of civil rights and the larger turmoil in our country. The lessons of human interactions failed and taken to new levels, and human potential diverted and achieved were all around me there.

The third event, from my vantage point today, was when, in the summer of 1965, I worked at Anna State Hospital in Anna, Illinois. During that special summer, a groundbreaking research project was occurring at *that* psychiatric hospital, demonstrating remarkable capacity by institutionalized persons to learn and adapt. This project rewrote the textbooks on psychiatric disorders, demolishing our assumptions about what was possible in terms of behavior change. And all by using contingencies of reinforcement as the only therapy of choice—no psychotropic drugs. The primary researchers, Nate Azrin and Ted Ayllon, two brilliant behavioral psychologists, shaped a generation of clinicians and behavior analysts to see the untapped potential of almost anyone, if we only take the time to arrange conditions for success.

So these things, German General Officers, and their families, coming to terms with their culture, their personal values and actions, and the larger world and its interests; the Deep South, civil rights and violent solutions as the method of choice by many; and seeing hospitalized chronic schizophrenic patients talk, walk, plan, organize, and socialize after decades of silence, neglect and discounting. All these things came together to shape my future interest in behavior, culture, and ethics; violence reduction in America; and, most generally, optimizing human potential. I will focus primarily on the last interest today—optimizing human potential.

I am the CEO and President at Aubrey Daniels International, where the values I have formed over my life have found a home—we are behavior analysts who work in corporations around the world, committed to the belief that human potential is essentially untapped, that tools of learning can unlock that potential, and that strategies of positive reinforcement based in a strong grounding of values and ethics, can do much good in our world, and as a significant by-product, reduce the use of coercion and threat and create delight from the executive board room to the frontline in the activities of work.

The connecting link between my early history and my current activity is behavior: the actions and words we use, observable and measurable, either affecting others for good or not, and advancing or inhibiting conditions in our daily work or home life, the larger community, and our culture at large. There are seven guiding principles about behavior that have influenced me and that I hope will benefit you, our honorees, as you use your considerable talents and the things that you have learned at WVU to make your own marks on the world.

The first principle is the role of *behavioral reciprocity* in creating who we are today. What we do is a part of a river of behavior and impact, like white water in WV—a mighty roar of histories of learning,

setting events, contingencies, consequences and future patterns of action being ever modified and shaped by our actions with each other.

MLK in several speeches in the mid-1960s refined a central message that runs through many of his speeches. He captured the reciprocity of the human experience, with a powerful voice, in a manner richer than the typical research psychologist might state but with clarity that we are just now coming to understand.

He said:

“Our destinies are tied together. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

He also said ...

“We’re all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. And whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

I cannot tell you how much I believe these statements, from the science of behavior and from living life. They offer us a world-changing view of our inextricable relationship to one another.

The 2nd guiding principle is to master the skill of *pinpoint valued behavior* as specifically and descriptively as possible. Such specificity makes it more likely that valued behavior will be repeated. It also provides to the receiver emotional support and recognition for effort. In our American workplaces, including University settings, the number one issue, after base pay, in creating the greatest job *dissatisfaction* is the failure to be recognized in meaningful, specific ways for individual contribution. A great gift, specific recognition, in terms of our emotional well-being. Seems easy—but a rare gift indeed.

So, honorees, an *assignment*. Sometime in the next 24 hours, tell individuals-- people of significant influence in your lives--in *specific terms* just what their individual actions have meant to you. No gift, no matter how material, is as great to those who love you than hearing the ways they, personally, have demonstrated specific behaviors that you value.

The 3rd life lesson is a product of the first two: Good attribution is a necessary act of the mature person. No behavior, practiced consistently, is as helpful to how you are viewed as a colleague than attributing ideas or actions to their rightful owners. If others claimed work that you did without acknowledging your efforts, you get an idea of the relationship-robbing power of incomplete or wrong attribution. You will build trusting relationships if you learn early and practice frequently giving away credit — not with false modesty but with a true understanding about this core principle.

Many psychology studies indicate that far-reaching success in life is tied to those who have what is perceived as a high dose of realistic optimism. This is my 4th guiding principle for success at work and in life. If you don’t have a whole lot of optimism, Dr. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania, has

written just the text for you, *Learned Optimism*. He knew from the laboratory and case studies, that there is no better inoculation for the journey of life than a healthy dose of optimism. That is, a working belief that *today will be OK and that tomorrow holds promise*, not necessarily much more than that, but certainly that—what that perspective can bring to the table of your life’s choices, how you look at events, and how others look at you—defeating or interesting; the glass half empty or half full.

The fifth principle is foundational to the science of behavior analysis-- be *objective* about what you see people saying and doing if you want to help them change. Learn to see what is, not what ‘should be’ or ‘ought to be’ in other people’s actions. Drop stereotyping labels like lazy, deceptive, or rude—learn to describe what you actually see. There is more to learn here, but understand that underlying the skills of objectivity is the fact that individuals are not the labels we give them, that they can in fact and do in fact change.

The 6th principle is to harness the power of positive reinforcement to accelerate and sustain behavior, but base its use on an ethical foundation. Great harm has occurred by the use of positive reinforcement untethered to an ethical anchor—it can produce unintended consequences. Think of high rates of cheating in sports for the ‘good of the team’ or the last decade of the extraordinary level of greed by some of our best educated corporate leaders to get to their personal end goals. Remember, when you read about the collapse of our institutions, what really collapsed was individual behavior into a quagmire of self-interest and neglect of the needs of others. Companies are no more than people who behave, and without a clear understanding of the laws of behavior, such events will happen again. Enron executives did not intend to have on their resume, *years in prison*, but without doubt, high and steady rates of unchecked reinforcement for their own myopic actions got them right there. Using R+ for *the good of the team* or *we/me against them* without evaluating the potential or actual unintended consequences is never enough.

In American workplaces, including universities, too much threat and fear is used to ‘motivate’—*do this or else; you are replaceable; if you can’t do it, I’ll find someone who can*. We use such methods as well in raising children, in teaching, and in marriages and other relationships. We do it because it is highly reinforcing—we get what we want. My company knows that such techniques do harm to those who live and learn under those conditions. We sub-optimize the American and international workforce, the children we teach, the people we love.

So—understand there is a better way. You *can* get high rates of behavior using negative consequences with children, with workers, and with your spouse—but the cost factor is dear. There is a better way.

The better way is the 7th, final, and *most important, lesson*: Learn as much as you can about *shaping*, the most powerful tool you will ever have in making a difference in the lives of others. Shaping is the process of identifying and positively reinforcing small steps, approximations to the goal, as people master more complex operations or activities. Along life’s way, you will be in positions where you will influence others directly. Benjamin Franklin said, “Carve mistakes in sand and success in stone.” A great phrase—*carve mistakes*—yours and others, *in sand*. Sand can be moved and the carving reshaped or erased—do not dwell on mistakes in others or yourself; learn from them, and redesign—

then make a mix to create lasting *success* through accomplishments. Delight in successes, celebrate them, brag about them, and learn from them for what you can do next time. Make statues of stone out of them.

At work or in your personal life, see the mistakes of others objectively and help them move on to approximations of success—we call this most compassionate and educational approach, shaping. When mastered, you will actually see successive small steps to success as fine accomplishments in their own right—a child almost tying a shoe, a first wobbly ride on a bicycle, and so on through life at whatever levels of accomplishment. Those who bully others *to succeed* may think they are doing the right thing, but we know that such strategies only reduce potential, even when near term success is achieved, and are sadly non-productive for the rapid learning environment we need in today's world.

In summary, learn to see the interconnectivity of behavior, how to specify what works and does not, to see behavior objectively and avoid labels, using an ethical framework to bring out the best in yourself and others, remembering to carve mistakes in sand. Be skillful in shaping: Arrange the context and the motivational support to create opportunity to experiment, learn, change, and grow; and adopt toward others optimism about their potential in ways that are helpful, not hurtful.

Ask others to help you evaluate your path in life so you don't slip down a slippery slope of seeing all things as right when some things need to change. Demand accountability of your actions through invited review and openness to new learning. And, whatever your profession or niche in life, remember there is a positive science of behavior change. Learn about it. Master how to bring out the best in yourself and in others—it is a life long journey, but a trip full of passion and excitement, never ending. Best wishes to all of you. Thank you.