



Changing the Way the World Works

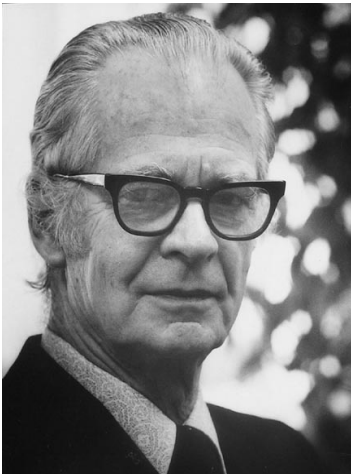
By Gail Snyder

How the work of Aubrey Daniels, his consultancy, and the pioneers before him have paved the way to effectively manage behavior in the workplace.

Often, when innovation pushes us to examine comfortable concepts, our first reaction is to discount the innovation. Such was the case when B. F. Skinner, a brilliant Harvard psychologist, presented his highly controversial research findings that behavior is determined by scientific principles of cause and effect. Many thought that the idea of human behavior being controlled by consequences was demeaning and condescending. Yet, as research and success in

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— Aubrey Daniels



clinical and educational settings prove otherwise, Skinner’s findings are endorsed by a growing number of academics, mental health clinicians, and educators. The business community, however, has been slower to recognize that behavioral laws are at work in their companies.

More than thirty-five years ago, Dr. Aubrey C. Daniels set out to share

the practical application of Skinner’s work with businesses and industries around the world. In fact, he is today considered a pioneer in changing the way the world works. His company, **Aubrey Daniels International (ADI)**, has shown that the knowledge and systematic application of scientifically derived behavioral principles is the only path to optimal and sustainable performance. Consequently, the understanding that employee behavior is the root cause of an organization’s success is increasingly understood by forward looking leaders in business and industry. These leaders realize that management methods of the past that look elsewhere other than behavior do not guarantee sustained business success. They have learned that what has been applied to address human performance problems from unique theories based on personal experience or from popular motivational books rarely are grounded in the science of behavior. Alexander Pope wrote over 300 years ago, “*a little learning is a dangerous thing.*” Using unscientific, commonsense techniques to inspire, engage and involve employees often results in changes that do not last and employees that do not reach their full potential.

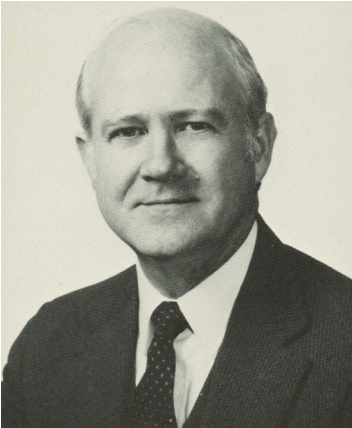
Since 1978, ADI implementations have improved performance (both behaviors of

employees at all levels and the business results of their efforts) in a variety of industries: nuclear energy, education, forestry, manufacturing, sales, materials and construction, utilities, distribution, transportation, healthcare, mining, engineering, finance, and more. Behavior-based improvement initiatives have included product innovation, quality, productivity, employee retention, teamwork, customer satisfaction, leadership skills, change management, compensation systems, cultural alignment, and safety. “*The advantage of using methods based on scientifically proven principles is that they work every time,*” Daniels explains.

DRIVING BEHAVIOR

Most of us don’t look under the hood of our vehicles before we drive—nor do we need to. Instead, we get in and turn the key in the ignition or, with the latest technology, just push a button. That usually proves to be the simplest, most expedient method for reaching our planned destination. However, popular writers on motivation at work, biologists, neuroscientists, chemists and





other scientific disciplines do look under the human “hood” to fix behavior that we see. As it turns out, understanding childhood traumas, bad parenting, poor education and a million other events that could have impact on current conditions may be both too speculative and too many steps removed to repair what is broken behaviorally. It is rarely necessary to look under the hood to determine the skills and actions needed to create outstanding performance.

Look first to what you can see people saying and doing and then carefully design a workplace where valuable behaviors receive the specific consequences necessary to develop and sustain desired actions. The key to shaping the success of the vast majority of performers is found in what we can see people saying and doing in a specific environment—their behavior and the conditions that surround them. **Change the consequences in those conditions and you change behavior.**

When people seek help in terms of *“why I do the things I do”* or *“why someone else does,”* they may believe that the solution is internal, mysterious and often not influenced by the environments in which they find themselves. They want positive results and sustainable behavior change—real change that influences in positive ways their thoughts, feelings, and actions. And that is exactly what **Dr. Aubrey C. Daniels** produced in the 1960s when he first began applying behavioral methods at the Georgia Mental Health Institute. He describes his early experiences in a blog “**B. F. Skinner: Why Today’s Businesses Need to Take a New Look:**”

When I introduced behavioral techniques into mental health settings, I was roundly criticized by most others in the business—mostly psychiatrists and other clinical psychologists. I persisted because it worked. It succeeded where other treatment methods failed. As a matter of fact, the psychiatrists let me work with either long-term patients (those hospitalized 20 years or more) or those with diagnoses that had not been responsive to traditional psychotherapy—initially patients with incapacitating phobias. My early successes were discounted by colleagues. They thought that the ‘cure’ wouldn’t last or that it would cause even more severe problems later since, according to their method of treatment, I had not dealt with the underlying problem that caused the phobic or other symptom.

I must admit that the behavioral approach I used was not sexy. A psychiatrist explained to me that agoraphobia (fear of open spaces) was a desire to return to the womb—I guess as the result of some unresolved sexual trauma of early childhood. I was so simple-minded that I thought the problem with agoraphobics was that they were afraid to go outside alone, so that is what I taught them to do. Problem solved. No withdrawals to the corner of the room in a fetal position; no unresolved problems but many more satisfying and productive relationships at home and at work.

TAKING IT TO WORK

Daniels’ success with these patients was rewarded with the request to develop a hospital-wide program for a 500-bed mental health facility. **There he dramatically reduced recidivism (76% to 11%) and length of hospital stay (months to weeks.)** This led to working with delinquent teenagers and to a remedial tutoring center, where for the first time he worked with supervisors, teaching them how to help the chronically unemployed become

successful at work. *“I must say, in as much modesty as I can muster, that all were spectacularly successful—not due to any brilliance or high intelligence on my part but due simply to the fact all of these approaches were based on the science of behavior,”* says Daniels.

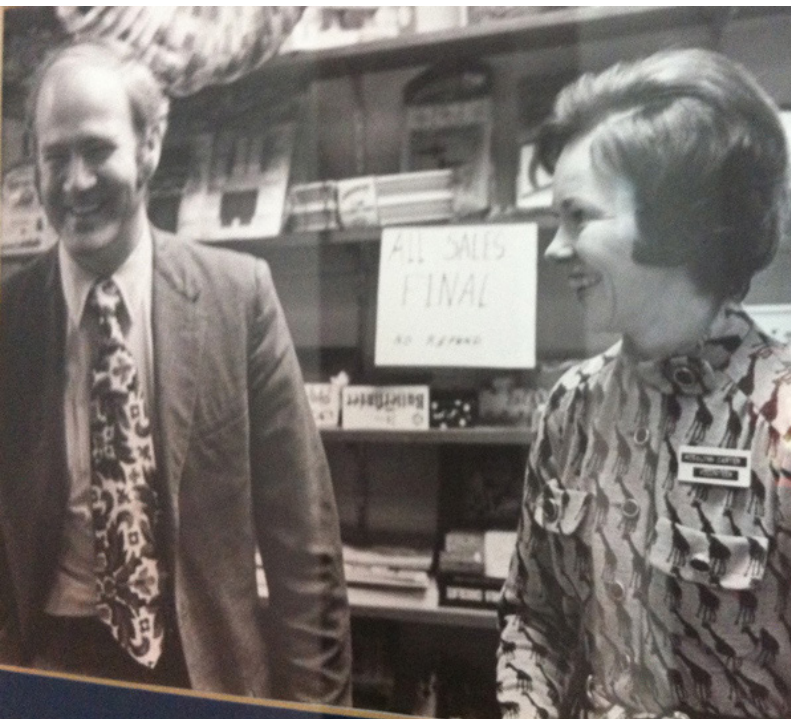
Over the years, the most skeptical of critics have come to realize that most people want to do a good job. But after years of management via punishment and working to avoid some unpleasant interaction with a supervisor or manager, they often give up and quit, or even worse, they give up and stay. Some studies state that the best way to live a longer and healthier life is to love your job. In any case, going to a job you enjoy is much less stressful than going to a job you would rather avoid. By measuring the right actions and inserting positive reinforcement into even repetitive tasks and providing ongoing feedback to every individual and team, organizations will without fail build a workplace of



engagement. People—not rules or oversight by managers—make the difference for success through their own discretionary effort. The power is in the people: any leader who does not understand that will struggle. The future workplace is one where all of us ensure the success of every individual. It’s akin to keeping score on yourself and your team. Even though it’s not sports, it’s still an endeavor where people want to know what they need to do to be successful.

PREDICTING THE FUTURE

In a 1995 interview, Daniels predicted the profile of a successful company in the 2000s. He stated, *“The Company of the 2000s will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of all organizational activities in terms of their ultimate impact on the organization’s mission. In my view, over 90 percent of the current initiatives will be eliminated because they can’t demonstrate consistent results, or indeed, any results.”* Unfortunately, many organizations today continue to slog along using outdated management methods and bureaucratized systems and strategies. On the plus side, those organizations that began implementing behavior-based approaches decades ago and those who implement those same methods today, can thrive even in sluggish economies. They have the capability to quickly respond to change by focusing on the behaviors of their employees and engaging employees to



contribute their input and experience in determining what those behaviors should be.

In an *Atlantic Monthly* article, “The Perfected Self,” author David H. Freedman discusses how a surge in technology in the form of Smart Phone apps and online self-improvement programs has ironically brought the science of B. F. Skinner to the forefront, but in a new, and much more positive, light. He writes, “B. F. Skinner’s notorious theory of behavior modification was denounced by critics 50 years ago...

But Skinner’s ideas are making an unlikely comeback today...The rise of social media [meant] more and more people are incorporating his theories into their daily lives. Skinner’s theory was at its core so simple that it sounds purely commonsensical today: **all organisms tend to do what the world around them rewards them for doing.**” (For ADI professionals and our clients, we have known this to be true for many years, and such signs indicate that people are finally “getting it”!)

Possibly the surface simplicity of behavioral interventions to improve performance (of any kind) has been its biggest downside. In fact, over the many years of successful results, managers, leaders, supervisors, and frontline employees continue to state with incredulity that something that seems so simple can really be quite difficult. Successful behavioral processes require knowledge, training, observational expertise, and a systemized approach to measurement, feedback, and reinforcement. Yet, once in place, they allow for flexibility and often result in organizations that run like well-oiled machines.

It might appear even after tens of thousands of proven applications in business and educational settings that behavioral science is still a best-kept secret. However, those organizations that continue to apply behavior-based strategies advantageously, some for decades, attest to its proficiency. Many people take the methods home to improve communications, safety, and the overall well-being of family life. The positive strategies have been used by parents to improve study habits, grades, and class participation of their children at school.



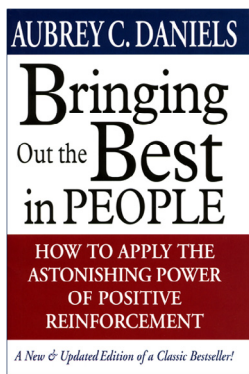
Once people understand that quality, productivity, customer satisfaction, safety . . . every element of life at work involves human behavior, they can then recognize the power they have over their environment and the contingencies that influence their own behavior and that of others.

THE UNIVERSAL ELEMENT: BEHAVIOR

Improving employee training and retention, completing a merger, fine-tuning a product or service, or completing a day safely: *all require* behavior. A large textile factory of 1,200 em-

ployees used a behavior-based feedback and reward system with its resistant all-male workforce to encourage use of safety equipment. Within months the percentage of workers consistently wearing earplugs rose from 35 to 90 percent. A large paper mill dramatically reduced lost-time accidents from an average of 31 per year to 14. Behavioral strategies are not only for frontline positions. Engineers, medical personnel, and executives are equally creatures of behavior, after all. “Managing performance through the use of measurable criteria has been long-supported by 3M and is one of the keys to our success,” stated Allen F. Jacobsen, CEO. Todd Reed, a director at Honeywell’s Space and Strategic Systems Operations discussed the importance of letting people know what you expect of them, allowing them to contribute, and recognizing them for doing so. “If American business would focus on those things, many problems our corporations are having would go away, and yet, they bypass the opportunity,” he stated.

Daniels, founder of Aubrey Daniels International, a spokesperson, promoter, and author of many books on the subject of positive behaviorbased management, continues the important mission of convincing organizations that when done correctly, this science works. Many fads come and go because they are not based on science, but because the laws of behavior always work, they determine the difference

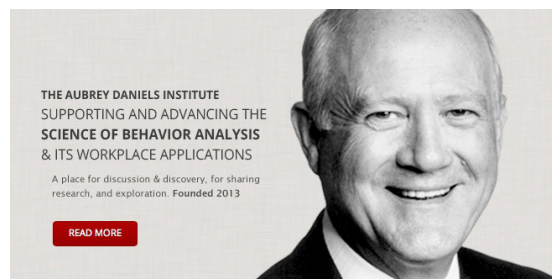


between surviving and thriving! Behavior-based processes have worked in companies and cultures around the world because every country has one thing in common—all are inhabited by people. In his book, *Bringing Out the Best in People—How to Apply the Astonishing Power of Positive Reinforcement*, Daniels capsulizes the real reason for adopting behavioral strategies:

Since everyone operates under the same laws of behavior, applying these universal laws in a positive, effective way will bring about the behavior changes you are seeking in employees—whether you manage two or two thousand.

To continue on with his mission to *change the way the world works*, Dr. Aubrey C. Daniels has launched The Aubrey Daniels Institute designed to bring a long tradition of research in the science of behavior to the workplace.

www.AubreyDanielsInstitute.org



[About the Author]

GAIL SNYDER

Gail Snyder is a staff writer for Aubrey Daniels International. For the past 27 years, she has worked with clients to share their stories of the impact the science of behavior has had on their people and their business. In addition, Gail was the editor of Performance Management Magazine from 1987 to 2004.

[About ADI]

Regardless of your industry or expertise, one thing remains constant: People power your business. Since 1978 Aubrey Daniels International (ADI) has been dedicated to accelerating the business and safety performance of companies worldwide by using positive, practical approaches grounded in the science of behavior and engineered to ensure long-term sustainability. ADI provides clients with the tools and methodologies to help move people toward positive, results-driven accomplishments. Our clients accelerate strategy execution while fostering employee engagement and positive accountability at all levels of their organization.

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