

# **The Pacific Institute**

## **A Curriculum Based on the Foundations of Modern Cognitive Science**

Extensive interdisciplinary research at major universities across the country provides the theoretical and experimental foundation for cognitive science, including the disciplines of psychology, biology, neurology, computer science and others. The recent extensive involvement of scientists from these fields has led many to refer to this as a major movement in science, the “cognitive revolution.”

Much of The Pacific Institute's curriculum is based on cognitive science, including modern cognitive theory of human behavior, a conceptual framework that emphasizes the importance of the mind on human behavior. Essentially, The Pacific Institute uses the principles of cognitive psychology to teach individuals and members of organizations to use the skills of thought and analysis in setting and reaching goals.

Prior to the emergence of cognitive psychology, some thirty years ago, behaviorism, along with psychoanalytical theory, was the prevailing theoretical framework in psychology. Many behavioral theorists believe that a science of behavior can be built without studying the mind, in that the need for experimental control makes the mind too difficult to study.

The following brief explanation, which includes two formulas, demonstrates the main difference between behavior and cognitive theory. While necessarily simplistic, it does highlight the essential difference between these two theories in their approach to understanding human behavior. It also helps explain what The Pacific Institute does.

It can be said that the behaviorists' overall formula for human behavior is:

$$\mathbf{Behavior = (f) Heredity + Environment}$$

From this formula it is shown that behaviorists acknowledge the influence of both heredity and experience or environment on behavior, without regard to how the mind may affect the equation. The cognitive theorists' model recognizes the role of heredity



and environment in human behavior, but adds a third, critical concept, “human agency.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>b</sup> Thus:

**Behavior = (f) Heredity + Environment + Human Agency**

"The capacity to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation and action is a distinctively human characteristic," says Dr. Albert Bandura, a leading cognitive theory psychologist and researcher at Stanford University. "Because judgments and actions are partly self-determined, people can affect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts." (1)

Dr. Bandura and other prominent cognitive theorists have conducted extensive research showing that humans can dramatically impact their sense of well being and optimism, career options and confidence levels.

Some of the most noted controlled studies supporting the validity of cognitive psychology involve the treatment of episodic or situational (versus chemical) depression. According to a series of studies spanning nine years, Dr. Martin Seligman demonstrated that the average depressed patient treated with cognitive therapy methods progressed significantly better than patients receiving other forms of psychotherapy, behavior therapy, or drug treatment. (2)

Dr. Aaron Beck and numerous other leaders in psychiatry and clinical psychology have treated certain behavior disorders (e.g. depression, phobias, anxiety) by cognitive therapy with considerable success (3, 4, 5). Cognitive therapy begins with the assumption that

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<sup>a</sup> The exact nature of how environment, heredity and human agency interact is a topic of continuing debate and research.

<sup>b</sup> We are indebted to Dr. Albert Bandura for the use of the term “human agency,” a term that denotes a class of variables related to belief systems, thoughts, and perceptions, that lie only in the capability realm of human beings. The Pacific Institute assumes full responsibility for the application of this term in this formula.

many behavior disorders are largely caused by unduly pessimistic, distorted thoughts. The goal of treatment, then, is to change thought patterns, thereby changing the behavior and removing the disorder.

Seligman, author of Learned Optimism and What You Can Change and What You Can't, is a prominent University of Pennsylvania researcher in the field of cognitive psychology and has written extensively on the origin and treatment of depression. According to Seligman, cognitive therapy utilizes treatment tactics that first help individuals to recognize automatic, negative thoughts that pass through the mind during life's most stressful moments. Individuals are then taught how to challenge negative thoughts using data from their past experience that disputes these thoughts.

In Learned Optimism, Seligman describes counseling a woman who was depressed because she believed she was a bad mother. Through cognitive therapy, she learned to challenge and change her internal belief that she was a bad mother by creating a more accurate internal dialogue that stressed the positive aspects of her parenting. (6)

Researchers such as Bandura, Seligman, and Beck continue to develop a theoretical framework for cognitive psychology, accumulating a critical mass of empirical data. Since 1971, The Pacific Institute has worked closely with distinguished researchers worldwide to develop a curriculum based on the effects of thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and expectations on behavior.

## **Self-Efficacy and How It Works**

The concept of self-efficacy is central to The Pacific Institute's curriculum. The Pacific Institute teaches that — to a greater extent than is widely realized — individuals can acquire the causative power, or self-efficacy, to make desirable things happen in their lives. Self-efficacy does not refer to the actual skills a human being possesses, but rather, to what a person *believes* about what can be accomplished with those skills. (7)

According to Lou Tice, chairman and founder of The Pacific Institute, self-efficacy is the belief that we have the power to produce desirable results. "It is the ability to focus social, cognitive and behavioral skills together to accomplish bigger, bolder goals than one has previously thought possible," says Tice.



Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy generally perform at higher levels, in part because they consider setbacks and difficult obstacles as challenges. Individuals who question their self-efficacy view challenges and setbacks as threats, resulting in "low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to perform," says Bandura. (5)

Those with high self-efficacy tend to set high goals and remain motivated despite the threat of failure. For this reason, the principle of self-efficacy is integral to The Pacific Institute's curriculum.

## **Practical Tools that Change Thoughts and Lives**

Although it is accurate to say that the entire curriculum of The Pacific Institute is directed toward teaching high self-efficacy, major emphasis in building efficacy is given to three key skills:

### ***Goal Setting***

"Simply put, goal setting is deciding what it is that you will get used to in the future — the new job, the new income, the new way of doing things," says Tice. "The result is that you no longer accept the way things are."

The principles of setting goals apply to both individuals and organizations. Visualizing, or imagining, a new reality — one that has strong emotional appeal — has an energizing effect. According to Tice, effective goal setting focuses first on the desired end result. For example, a goal may center on increased profitability or greater personal confidence. If the goal has enough emotional appeal, if it strikes an inner desire, the mind's inner resources will go to work on achieving the target.

Bandura states that personal goal setting is influenced by the self-appraisal of an individual's capabilities. With stronger perceived self-efficacy, people set higher goals and have a firmer commitment to those goals. (1) Additionally, Locke and Latham demonstrate the effectiveness of goal setting in organizations. (9)

According to Tice, goal setting is essential for human and organizational development, and through programs such as those offered by The Pacific Institute, individuals and



companies can learn to be more successful in setting and accomplishing goals. Goals must be quite specific. Instead of, "We'll have a strong fiscal year in our company," a better goal would be, "We'll cut our spoilage rate by 50 percent."

Using facilitated seminars, workbook exercises, audiotapes, videotapes and one-on-one consultation, The Pacific Institute guides its clients through the principles of effective goal setting on both an individual and organizational level.

### **Self-Talk**

Self-talk refers to the conversations all human beings have with themselves. The nature of these internal dialogues can be encouraging and positive, or negative and disparaging. According to Tice, we generate thoughts in words, pictures and emotions which accumulate to build beliefs.

Our thoughts and conclusions about ourselves can be self-regulating, particularly if there is no conscious awareness of their existence. In other words, we live up to (or down to) these beliefs. Our achievements are often limited unnecessarily when these internal dialogues are inaccurate or distorted. Accordingly, The Pacific Institute encourages participants to first identify their self-talk by keeping an ongoing journal of thoughts and feelings. The second, crucial step is to evaluate these thoughts.

"People behave in accordance with how they perceive themselves to be. The crucial question is whether that self-knowledge is based on reality," says Tice. "Many conclusions about ourselves are taught to us by others and often are accepted without question, but they may, or may not, be accurate."

For example, journal writing, or any form of self-talk evaluation, may suggest to a manager that he or she feels threatened by employee suggestions or criticisms because they cause feelings of inadequacy or failure: "I'm a poor leader. If I were a good manager, my people would always agree with me." Once this issue surfaces and is accepted by the manager, the next step is to confront this inaccurate self-talk with self-talk that disputes the distortion. For example, thoughts about recognition for successful management may be repeated to oneself as "I am a skillful manager and a good leader and have been recognized as such by a Manager of the Year Award."



## ***Affirmations***

An affirmation is a written or oral expression that represents a belief about ourselves. Affirmations are built on the theory that people's beliefs in their own self-efficacy mobilize them to accomplish goals. "To be successful, one must not only possess the required skills, but also a resilient self-belief in one's capabilities. People with the same skills may perform poorly, depending on their self-beliefs," says Bandura. (8)

Affirmations play a critical role in accomplishing goals and correcting erroneous beliefs about ourselves. They are most effective as written exercises specially designed to help keep goals in mind.

Affirmations are constructed in the first person, present tense, as if the goal to which we aspire has already been achieved. For example, "Because I am creative and efficacious, I help my team solve problems that used to be paralyzing." According to Tice, these written or oral exercises help new goals to become more prominent in an individual's mind, to the point of becoming more dominant than current reality.

Specific tools like goal setting, self-talk and affirmations prove most useful to individuals and organizations once the key concepts of cognitive psychology are understood and internalized.

## ***Thirty Years of Success***

For thirty years throughout the world, individuals, Fortune 500 corporations, service-directed companies, small businesses, athletes, government agencies and world leaders have experienced, firsthand, the benefits of The Pacific Institute's application of the concepts of cognitive psychology.

Literally millions of people who have used the services and attended programs developed and presented by The Pacific Institute have learned that they have the power to make fundamental changes in how they think. These changes result in increased individual and collective efficacy which, in turn, produces higher performance levels, greater productivity, more satisfying interpersonal relationships and, in general, greater fulfillment in individual and organizational goal attainment.



## **Key Terms**

### ***Affirmations***

A cognitive act that establishes a specific course, direction, outcome or state of being for the future; a confirmation or ratification of a truth. Affirmations are written and spoken in the first person, present verb tense to emphasize their attainability.

### ***Cognitive Science***

A scientific discipline consisting of scientists from various fields such as anthropology, psychology, computer science, neurology and others who study the brain and the mind.

### ***Human Agency***

A distinctively human characteristic which enables us to govern or cause behavior through our own thought processes.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Appraisal of our own ability to cause, bring about, or make happen a desired effect or event; a combination of our self-esteem, skills and resources; task specific.

### ***Self-talk***

An act whereby we evaluate or assess our own behavior; how we talk to or affirm ourselves when we react to our own evaluation, or others' evaluations, of our performance. Self-talk has been shown to influence self-image.

## Bibliography

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