

LEARNING

A lecture given on
29 October 1951

Cleaning Up Facsimiles and the Environment

I would like to go over with you what learning is, because you really have to know this to work well with a preclear.

Learning is the process of cleaning up the environment of the facsimiles you are trying to record; that is all.

You try to teach somebody something; this is very simple. Let's say you want to teach a signalman to signal. You are a chief signalman and you want to teach this boot to signal. So you are standing there with the signal flags in your hands and you say, "Now, A-B-C. You understand this?"

"Huh?"

You get the idea that people think it takes time to learn. It doesn't take time to learn, but a person has to accumulate a lot of theta facsimiles in which the dangerous things in them are cleaned up.

As he looks at the chief signalman going "A-B-C," the new signalman is seeing a superior petty officer who may do things to him, the deck of the ship, the sea, lines, speaking tubes, magazines and so forth. That is all in the facsimile. He has a whole, big facsimile here, and you are trying to call his attention to a pair of signal flags. He can't see those signal flags yet. His attention is dispersed. So the facsimile he gets is a facsimile wherein the signal flags are not clear.

Day by day, he finds out things. The first day he finds out the sea isn't dangerous about learning to signal; it doesn't apply to it. The next day he gets theta facsimiles that say the deck has nothing to do with it. Then he finds out finally the CpOl is not going to knock his block off or criticize him, so he doesn't have to be afraid of the CPO. He sorts out all these details; finally he gets it down to a clean facsimile which merely says "A-B-C." Now he has a clean facsimile to work from. He has confidence in it. It is clean—no fear, no danger in it and so on—and he can handle this facsimile, so you can get him out there and he will do A-B-C—no problem.

Obviously it has taken him a certain number of days to learn this, so you say, "It takes individuals a long time to learn something."

But he could have been taught this in the same afternoon. You could have said, "The signal flags are the goal. Now, would you take a look at the sea? Is there anything going to happen to you from the sea right now?"

And he would say, "No, no. Nothing's going to happen."

You would say, "Look at the magazines; what do they contain?"

"Ammunition."

“Well, what kind of ammunition?”

“Well, gun ammunition.”

“What happens to ammunition?”

“It blows up.”

“Is that ammunition liable to blow up?”

“No.”

“All right, what are these speaking tubes here? What’s liable to happen about speaking tubes?”

“Well, you’re liable to run into them in the dark.”

“Well, is it dark?”

“No.”

“Now, under what circumstances am I liable to hit you over the head with these signal flags?”

“If I was too dumb to learn? No, you wouldn’t do that; the naval regulations say . . . No, you wouldn’t do that, would you! Ha-ha.”

“Now, see these sticks? You ever see a stick like this before?”

“No, no. No, I never saw anything like that before.”

“What did your father used to use to beat you up?”

“Oh, he used to use a cane! No, I never saw anything like that before.” “All right. Now how about these flags, made out of cotton—cloth. They remind you of anything?”

“No.”

“They’re just flags.”

“That’s right.”

“What’s that sound remind you of?”

“Ma’s sheets flapping in the wind.”

“Well, that’s fine. What are they?”

“They’re signal flags!”

“What are these sticks?”

“Well, they’re sticks on signal flags.”

“What’s the alphabet?”

“Hmm . . . letters.”

“Well, did you ever have any difficulty learning your alphabet?” “Oh, n You know, I was in the first grade twice.”

Clean it up, in other words.

All of a sudden you say, “This is A, this is B. this is C! Here, take them. A-B-C.” Now get him communicating across the deck to another sailor—just across the deck. Get him letter-perfect to a point where he will go “A-B-C” and receive and send across the deck perfectly.

“Now,” you say, “we’ve got a signalman.” Oh, no, you haven’t! You put him on a signal platform and say, “You signal that other ship over there.”

“Sure!”—lots of confidence. He steps up—but this is a brand-new facsimile: there is the sea and a ship. He doesn’t actually think actively or consciously that any of these things are really dangerous to him at any time, but it is blurred. Here is a ship; here is a new thing injected into the operation. How can he handle this?

Now, you could spend two weeks of your time and that of a signalman on the other ship in teaching him how to do this, or you can say to him, “What’s that over there?”

“Oh, yeah, there’s another signalman over there.”

“Well, is that a ship or a garbage scow or what?”

“Well, it’s a ship.”

“What’s that ship do? What are those guns all about?”

“Uh . . . hey, well, I know all this!”

“Oh, yeah, but does it go through the water and do the guns shoot, and when do the guns shoot?”

“What are you trying to do? It’s just a ship!”

“Well, now, you take that water down there: Anything wrong with it?”

“Well, there’s sharks in it sometimes.”

“You see any sharks? You ever hear of a shark biting a signal line in half at this distance?”

“Ha-ha! No. Never did.”

“You going to have to swim across to the other ship to get the message, or anything like that?”

“No. Well, it never occurred to me that I’d swim. Naturally I won’t swim! It’s just another ship, and it’s just the ocean, and all I’ve got to do is send him a signal. It’s a little hard to see the guy, that’s all.”

And he will be able to do it; just clean up his facsimiles.

That is learning. You give a fellow enough clean facsimiles and you will have narrowed his attention on to what you have narrowed it down on. But if you keep a fellow nervous while he is learning so that he can't clean up his environment, he will not learn.

Furthermore, you can take an individual and give him a lesson today and a lesson tomorrow and a lesson the next day, day after day, each time in a different environment with a different person, going over the same text that so me b o d y e l s e w o u l d go over in conse cutive l e s s o n s with t h e s a m e person in the same place, and you will find out that this first individual won't learn. Taken place after place, with different people talking to him, this fellow won't learn the subject.

Did you ever have a student complain about having his classroom or his professor changed? Indeed you have. If it is changed on him two or three times he will go into apathy on the subject, because his clean theta facsimiles that he has managed to clean up are all muddied up again with new factors which are surrounding the subject. And you are asking him to absorb the whole theta facsimile.

Now take a preclear on the couch: It is very important to you to clean up this preclear's theta facsimiles of the couch and the room he is in and you.

“Who am I?”

“Well, you think I'm crazy or something? You're my auditor, of course!”

“That's good. You sure I'm not your uncle Oswald?”

“No. You do look something like my uncle Gerald, though. Mean fellow.”

“Well, do you see your uncle Gerald? Take a look at me—you know I'm not Gerald. All right, that's fine, that's fine. What's that?”

“That's a light.”

“You ever see it before?”

“No, not that one.”

“Here's the bed. You ever have a bed like this before? You ever lie down on a bed like this? You ever lie down on that bed before?”

“Well, I was in the hosp but I'm not in the hospital now. This bed is pretty—no, I've never lain down here before; I'm perfectly comfortable.”

“All right, see that door? Ever see a door handle like that before?”

“No, except for San Antonio Jail. (What am I saying?)”

“All right. Do you hear these noises around—footsteps, a typewriter going down the hall? Any of these things familiar to you? What are they?”

“Well, it's a typewriter going down-the hall!”

“You sure it’s not a cement mixer?”

“No, it’s not a cement mixer. It’s a typewriter!”

“Okay, it’s a typewriter. That’s fine. Okay. What odors do you smell here?”

“Wax, floor wax, bedsheet, leather.”

“Well, where are they coming from?”

“Oh, well, the floor wax comes from the floor, and the bedsheet comes from the bedsheet, and so on. Anybody ever tell you that you had halitosis?”

“All right, you got all these things identified. That’s fine. Well, good. All right, let’s start in auditing.”

What you are doing there—and what you should do and continue to do—is keep the present-time environment of your preclear cleaned up so that he doesn’t have to devote attention units to shaping it out. And actually, the first three or four sessions that you ordinarily spend with a preclear, he is not giving you data. He is not running engrams, he is really not getting anyplace at all. All he is doing is spotting you, looking you over, comparing you—with a lot of his attention units—being nervous, not knowing what you are going to do, being restimulated this way and that by his old postulates, one way or the other. He is undifferentiative. You are not getting all that you could get of his attention. You clean up his environment and he will start running right off the bat.

Now, this is useful to those of you who employ people occasionally or who want to habituate somebody to an environment rapidly.

Do you know that the first week or two of a new employee are spent in just wandering around sort of dazedly? He doesn’t do his work very efficiently. He is not sure how he is going to get on, he thinks; he has a lot of explanations for this, but actually, he hasn’t got clean facsimiles of the place yet. He hasn’t sorted out the dangerous from the undangerous, he hasn’t sorted this from that, and so on.

As a consequence, if you merely escorted him around the place and showed him everything there was in the shop, called it to his attention, and even called to his attention these knives over here that cut paper— “Keep your hands away from them, they’re quite dangerous”— he would be much better off. It is necessary to call his attention to those knives. He is liable to be quite nervous in that room for four or five days every time he goes into it before he finally pins it on where it belongs—the knives. He won’t have noticed what is dangerous in that room. Point out what is dangerous, and all of a sudden he sees that the table is all right; he doesn’t have to fall across the threshold flat on his face and break all the plates every time he comes in.

In short, you can take anyone and by cleaning up his learning environment, or cleaning up his working environment, you can habituate him to the whole thing merely by giving him a clean theta facsimile.