

WHEN BEHAVIOR MODELING IS PROPERLY PERCEIVED AS A VALID INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS, WHEN IT'S APPLIED WITH CARE, IT'S AN EFFICIENT, COST-EFFECTIVE MEANS OF ACHIEVING POSITIVE RESULTS.

BEHAVIOR MODELING: A PROCESS

BY DONALD T.
TOSTI

Since its first controlled application in the early 1970s, behavior modeling has become a major factor in modern training methods. With its acceptance and use, though, has come an accompanying rise in confusion about what it entails.

Behavior modeling has been around longer than verbal communication — and presumably even longer than mankind, as evidenced by animals using it in the wild today. It's nothing more than demonstrating a behavior which the observer then learns to duplicate. The apprentice who learns a trade by imitating the master represents an unsophisticated form of behavior modeling. Unfortunately, many apprentices imitate the master's bad habits as well as the good. A second problem with apprenticeship programs is that there is little structure, so that it takes many years for the novice to gain sufficient competence to be on his or her own. However, when instructional technology is brought

to bear on a problem, the modeling process can yield far more precise and accurate results in less time.

There is a widespread confusion between the method of behavior modeling and the uses to which it can be put. In fact, criticisms of the method are often actually complaints about inappropriate *uses* of the method, or about inflated claims regarding what it has accomplished. These claims are sometimes unrealistic promises which serve to promote haphazard use rather than properly designed applications.

Behavior modeling has been widely and effectively applied in management skill training, and it's in that area that the confusion between method and use has been most evident. We frequently forget that behavior modeling is nothing more than a training *method* — a way of demonstrating or delivering skills — and is not to be confused with the instructional content for which the method is used.

For instance, a common misconception is the idea that behavior modeling is a system for enhancing

self-esteem. Modern supervisory skills require the ability to increase individual productivity by building an employee's self-esteem, and behavior modeling has proven itself very effective in teaching how to do this. That, however, is as far as the connection goes. Behavior modeling is a method, or tool, that has proven effective in teaching techniques for building self-esteem. It could also be used for other purposes, including being used to teach the destruction of self-esteem — perhaps by military intelligence interrogators for use on prisoners of war.

The objection that behavior modeling is manipulative is really only a comment on training in general and a misunderstanding of the word's meaning. Any training process is an attempt to develop new or different behaviors, so that training in itself is a form of "manipulation" — behavior modeling is only one of many training methods. And despite the image the word conveys to most people, manipulation in itself is not inherently evil. Like nearly anything else, it can be used to achieve either negative or

positive ends. We can "manipulate" people honestly and openly to achieve ends that we and they value, just as well as we can manipulate them for less desirable reasons.

Misconceptions such as these seem to have grown out of the behavior modeling mania which has swept the training profession in the last decade — which, in turn, was facilitated at least partly by the hardware craze of the '60s. Much expensive, hastily bought video and film equipment is available, and the use of behavior models is often seen as a good way to employ it. As the phenomenon spread, many firms and consultants began leaping on the bandwagon — more often than not without having taken the time to understand the process with which they were dealing. This resulted in unintended abuse and misunderstanding. There's a lot of mediocre work being done in the name of behavior modeling, and more than a few instances of the name being used without actual use of the method. When used correctly, however, it is one of the most effective methods available. A growing body of research points to its ability to teach skills that significantly improve productivity.

Confusion in Design

Regardless of the complexity of the modeling program, there are three major steps in any effective use of the behavioral modeling process. These are:

1. Demonstration of master performance.
2. Guided student practice.
3. Feedback on the quality of student effort.

These three steps are equally important and care must be given to the design of each. A master performance of poor quality will result in the student learning poor skills; but even the best model in the world will not guarantee success unless equal care is taken to provide relevant practice and effective feedback. Unfortunately, many of the people associated with behavioral modeling have been trainers and not designers. As a result, many behavioral modeling systems, even those commercially

available, are inadequate in one or all three of the steps of behavioral modeling. The major errors committed in these programs generally are:

1. Poor Models
 - The situation depicted is confusing or distracting.
 - Actors perform amateurishly and are not convincing.
 - Inappropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior is demonstrated along with appropriate actions.
2. Practice Situations Not Effective
 - Practice is not relevant to the student's situation.
 - Practice is uncontrolled, resulting in the possibility of practicing "wrong" behavior.
 - Students do not receive sufficient practice for mastery.
 - Level of individual participation is too low (viewers not doers).
 - Practice sessions are too complex (not focused on a progressive development of skills).
3. Feedback Not Effective

- More criticism than encouragement is provided.
- Feedback fails to focus on relevant critical behaviors.
- Level of detail is not appropriate to the ability of the student.
- Timing or sequence of feedback is poor.

The model must show the desired behavior; it must do so in a clear, understandable fashion; and the situations, people and reactions must be compatible with, although not necessarily identical to, the students' real world. It must also be presented in careful steps, so that the student can follow its development and learn accordingly. Failure to follow these guidelines invariably results in "diluted" or "fuzzy" behavioral models which fail to effectively communicate their intended messages.

The act of merely recording people's interactions on videotape does not in itself create an effective behavior model no matter how "real" the drama may seem.

The training curriculum from cover to cover.



There's likely a film or you teach just about any supervisory training sub-

and most comprehensive resource of films and videotapes is found between the covers of Roundtable's 1980 catalog. It's an impressive selection of 70 top-notch programs in over 46 key training categories!

Don't plan another training session without this valuable resource at your fingertips. Write or call today for your **FREE** 1980 Roundtable catalog.

video program to help management, sales or

ject. But the very best



113 North San Vicente Boulevard / Beverly Hills, California 90211 / 213/657-1402
In Canada contact International Tele-Film Enterprises / 47 Densley Avenue / Toronto M6M5A8

"The act of merely recording people's interactions on videotape does not in itself create an effective behavior model."

In some instances, for example, role-playing scripts have been developed from actual situations and dubbed "behavior models" without reworking to assure a clear focus on all critical skills, or that "bad habits" aren't also being demonstrated.

In cases such as these, users of so-called "behavior modeling" usually find it necessary to depend heavily on live instructors to correct errors caused by the "model" presented — then they complain about the method's expense because it needs so much instructor intervention. Actually, a refined, properly designed and presented behavior model can enable even a weak instructor to handle 10 to 20 students. There's less instructor dependence simply because the instructor serves more as a "master of ceremonies" for the learning process than as its star.

Realistic Demonstration vs. Relevant Practice

The idea that you must "customize" your models in order to produce effective skill learning has not been supported. In fact, there is some evidence that model demonstrations that match the work environment too closely, or use familiar settings and co-workers as actors, may be distracting. Behavior modeling is far more than drama watching — another common misconception. One must take seriously the fact that display of the desired behavior is only one of three parts of a properly thought out behavior modeling program. Relevant response practice and feedback are also part of the package, and it is these components that really translate the displayed behavior into a learned one.

Response practice is a chance for the student to imitate the model in a simulated real world situation. The practice should directly relate to the application in which the student will use the behavior and should not be complicated by extraneous input. In fact, learning research indicated that the relevance of the practice is far more

important in assuring application back on the job than is the "realism" of the model. Even showing behavioral models from dissimilar occupational areas is effective as long as the practice exercises are constructed around the students' own work experiences.

Finally the feedback — from the instructor, if needed, but most effectively from fellow students — should be well-timed and appropriate to the student's use of the new skill. Properly handled, it encourages students and promotes their further development.

One of behavior modeling's real advantages is its use in minimizing the teaching of "theory" which, while sometimes valid as a memory aid, often has little to do with real world application of a skill and thus adds nothing to the value students get from training. By practicing the desired behavior and getting constructive feedback on their performance, students complete the modeling phase of the method and take a usable skill — not merely a vague conceptual understanding — out of the classroom.

For example, the following script is from a behavior modeling exercise designed to teach how to conduct a fact-finding discussion.

It is well designed for three reasons. First, it provides a progressive build-up of skills. Second, it presents these skills in a clear fashion and third, it minimizes trivial or distracting information.

The first skill to demonstrate is how to establish a positive climate for the discussion.

Mark: Hi Susan, come in.

Susan: Hi Mark, you wanted to see me.

Mark: Yes, please have a seat. Say, I like your suit. Very professional.

Susan: Thank you, I'm just, um, trying to follow the leader here.

(They laugh.)

Mark: Well, that's O.K. Don't follow too close, though. I'd hate to see you stumble over all the things I do.

The use of first names, small talk and humor tends to reduce any anxiety and promote a freer exchange. The next step is to start a discussion in the right direction. Preparing a good opening is an important skill.

Mark: Susan, the other day, you brought up the possibility of getting a word processor in here. And I've been thinking about it ever since you mentioned it. How would you see us using a word processor to help get our work done here?

The speaker gets right to the point and decreases the likelihood of getting "off track." Now we want to model effective listening and probing skills, to make sure we get all the facts.

Susan: Well, I'm glad you took me seriously. You know, Janet in Personnel has a word processor. And the other day I had 35 individually typed letters to do. It took me all afternoon and after I finished Janet said it could have been done by the word processor in about 30 minutes.

Mark: Hmm, I see, so you've been talking to Janet and she has a word processor.

Susan: Yes, and I've been watching her operate it and I'm impressed!

Mark: Well, how would you see us using it here?

Susan: Well, just in the last month I've had three different projects that totaled about 120 individually typed letters. That makes 30 to 40 letters for each project just for this month alone. And there seems to be a lot more such work.

Mark: Yes, there certainly is. The professional staff is trying to upgrade its image with clients so they've begun sending out more and more originally typed letters.

Susan: Oh, so it is in the program. So that's what's going on. Frankly, it's getting a little bit boring!

Mark: You mean to say that typing the same letter over and over again is not your idea of fun?

Susan: You got it! (Laughing)

But I'm not sure we really have that big a volume.

Mark: Hmm. I think you're right. Actually it would be very hard to justify a word processor for just 120 letters a month.

Susan: Oh, there'd be more than 120 letters a month. There's more that we could do with it.

Mark: Well, like what?

Susan: Well, umm, you know those pamphlets that we revise every six months; it would make an easy job of that.

Mark: I see. So, we could use a word processor to revise those pamphlets.

Mark: You know, it'd probably be a good idea to do a complete analysis of the whole secretarial production staff. And, I'll just bet you that a processor sales representative would include that in the sales pitch.

Susan: I hope so. 'Cause I don't think we'd have the time.

Mark: Well, Susan, you've given me a lot of reasons in favor of getting a word processor. Can you think of any problems we might

have if we had one?

Susan: Well, assuming that we could justify the cost of the machine itself, there's an extensive amount of training necessary for an operator. And after we trained an operator, if she got sick or decided to leave the organization, we'd have the problem of replacement.

Mark: That's a good point. Actually there are two points. There's the expense of training an employee and the possibility of replacement difficulty.

Much information has been given. The final step in the process is to obtain a summary of the main facts.

Mark: O.K. Susan, now let's summarize the strongest points.

Susan: Ah, by strongest, do you mean the arguments for?

Mark: O.K., let's start there.

Susan: Right. There are the letters and the pamphlet revision.

Mark: Uh, huh . . . (he's writing down a list in summary.)

Susan: That's the main point,

and I think that when their sales reps come in, that they will probably think of some things we never even dreamed of.

Mark: Right. O.K. and now the points against.

Susan: Well, there's the expense of the machine . . . and the expense of an operator.

Mark: Uh, huh . . .

Susan: And the risk of losing an operator.

Mark: All right. O.K., Susan. I think I've got the list now. What I'll do is contact one of the processor sales people and have them come out and give us a savings estimate.

Susan: Great.

Mark: I think it's a very good idea, Susan. Thank you very much for your help.

Susan: You're welcome. (She gets up to leave.)

Of course work discussions seldom run this smoothly, but to show a complex interaction at this point would only distract the student from attempting to learn the critical skills. Complexity is introduced slowly — for example, we may later ask the students what kinds of "hard times" do their employees give them when they make an assignment or try to point out ways employees can improve. This always results in a lengthy list, which includes everything from "they cry" to "they get angry." One can then gradually introduce each of these situations into a "hard times" model so that the student can learn specific skills in dealing with that type of problem.

Behavior modeling, although old, is in many ways still in its infancy. A soundly designed behavior modeling program demands knowledge, forethought and preparation. When the method is properly perceived as a valid instructional process, and when it's applied with the same care that any training design requires, it's an efficient, cost-effective means of achieving positive results.

Donald T. Tosti is president of Operants Inc., San Rafael, CA. He has been active in the field of performance development and instructional design for more than 15 years.

STOKES SLIDE SERVICES, INC.



Duplicating slides is our business. We have become the largest slide duplicating lab in the Southwest because we do not compromise on quality and still deliver at a competitive price. So if you need slides or filmstrips, from one to a million, we can handle your job in a professional manner. Write or call for more information.

If we make your duplicates

you will know the difference

512 458-2201

7000 Cameron Road

Austin, Texas 78752

Circle No. 133 on Reader Service Card