

Resisting our Demamaps

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**Dr. Gateley died shortly after he submitted this paper and after he accepted our invitation to present it at the Conference.*

Last summer, two connivers swindled an elderly friend out of \$400. On his way home from the store, he gave a ride to a well-dressed hitchhiker who told him he had just arrived from Africa and needed some help. He said that he had inherited fifty thousand dollars that he was to give to the poor, but since he was from out of the country, he could not receive it, and needed to find someone who could take the money and distribute it for him. My friend volunteered. His rider agreed that he would be happy to turn the matter over to him, and even suggested that he could keep 20% of it for himself, a suggestion that horrified my friend. As they were riding along they saw another man, also well dressed, standing by the side of the road and the hitchhiker suggested that they pick him up so as to get a third opinion. My friend did so, and they revealed their plan to the third party that agreed that their plan seemed to be a good one, but asked his fellow traveler, how he could trust this stranger who had merely given him a ride. He suggested that my friend should be willing to put up some money to show his trustworthiness, at least a thousand dollars. My friend, clearly in a state of deep hypnosis at this point, agreed and, leaving his new friends on the street corner, went to the bank and tried to withdraw a thousand dollars, but much to his dismay, discovered that he had only \$400.00 in the bank. He withdrew the money, returned to his friends, and asked them if this would be enough. The stranger from Africa opened up his coat and said "Certainly, Mr. Jones. Put it right in this pocket." My friend did so, and the two strangers walked around the corner and disappeared. My friend told me that at this point, he realized that he had been swindled. He came out of his trance too late. He listened and understood, agreed, and acted.

Three Dangerous Demamaps

In his book on assertiveness for managers and executives, Smith (2000) states that we manipulate others and are often manipulated by a three-staged argument. People who (1) understand us (2) should agree with us and (3) should do what we want them to do. When this technique works, three *Responsive Demamaps* (MacNeal, 1997) appear to be involved: (1) When somebody talks to you, you should listen to what he says and try to understand what he means. (2) When you understand someone, you should agree with him. MacNeal discovered during his early experiments with grokdueling that when you precisely stated your opponent's position, he spontaneously expected you to agree with him (1999, p. 128). (3) If you agree with someone, you should do what he wants.

The demamap that understanding another means that you should agree with him might appear irrational to most of us, but the demamap, "When you understand and agree with another person you should do what he wants," seems harder to resist, because we may appear stupid or uncaring, etc., if we refuse to go along with the speaker.

Not long ago, I received a call from a newspaper salesman. He asked me whether or not I would be interested in having a paper delivered to my door for one month for no charge. I said "No". He replied, "You understand that this is free and that you are under no obligation to continue the subscription after a month. Don't you agree that this is a good deal?" I said, "Yes." He replied, "So, can we start this next week?" I said, "I do not want the paper." His reply was "That does not sound like an intelligent decision." I said, "I wish that I was smarter, but I am not interested." After a brief silence, he said "Thanks," and hung up.

Our demamaps often work against us on the basis of false self-concepts, i.e., that we "are" smart, intelligent, caring, etc., people in all circumstances, or that we should at least appear that way to others. Self-acceptance requires self-validation, (Ellis, 1977,) or as William James put it years ago when he discussed acceptance of unpleasant realities, being "...willing that it be so." Smith (2000) argues that we all have certain rights: The right to be ignorant, stupid, non-caring, non-helpful, etc., and honesty, self-acknowledgment, requires us to admit, at least to ourselves, that we all have these "traits" or as Robert Wilson (1990) framed it, acknowledging that we often become different selves in different situations. At the same time, we are knowledgeable, caring, helpful, etc.

The Dangers of Listening

There are times when it is dangerous to listen to others. When my father died, I told my mother, age 74 years, who would be living alone, to use the following demamap: "If a stranger appears at your door, do not let him in the house, and that goes for a nice looking young man wearing a suit and tie." She did not listen and consequently bought an expensive and worthless health insurance policy because, she said, "He was a nice, well-dressed young man." When we get old and alone style over substance can be powerfully persuasive.

Getting out of a Trance

Korzybski taught that the Aristotelian language system creates hypnotic states in those that use it and that general semantics provides a way to escape from these trances. You ordinarily cannot experience hypnosis if you do not listen to the words of the hypnotist, and getting people to understand us, and agree so as to act as we wish had better be considered a hypnotic technique. A trance state causes you to believe (project) that the words of the hypnotist make your arm tingle. Some might argue that believing that another person could talk your arm into feeling a certain way might be evidence of a permanent trance. Some situations can spontaneously produce trances. Millions of German citizens listened to Hitler's "Isness" statements about the Jews and went into a deep trance with disastrous results for them and the world.

One Root of the Problem

Resistance to self-acknowledgment that would decrease our vulnerability to the hypnotic effects of our demamaps seems to result from either-or thinking that creates a false dilemma. We think that we "are" either good or bad, caring or not caring, honest or dishonest, good or evil and that leads us to develop a self-hypnotic state that denies that the so-called dark side exists, understandable, if we consider it true that if we "are" not good, we "are" evil, and if we "are" evil, absolutely evil, etc. Johnson (1947) elaborated the unfortunate effects of this kind of thinking when he discussed the IFD (Idealism, Frustration, and Demoralization) syndrome. If we

believe that we are either bad or good, smart or dumb and define these "traits" in absolute terms, it is certainly no wonder that we desperately need to hide the bad traits from ourselves and others. The stronger our commitment to either-or thinking, the more defective demamaps we can create, the deeper our trances can get, and our vulnerability to manipulation increases. It takes a bit of understanding to answer No to a telephone solicitor that presents a glowing account of the noble cause he is representing when he asks, "Can we count on you to help us out?" As I was typing this paragraph, I was interrupted twice by calls from telephone solicitors that appealed to me as a caring person to give them some money.

You, no doubt, can list many defective demamaps that got my friend in trouble, Be kind to strangers that appear to be in need: listen to their tales of woe and try to help, etc. but his major problem that day seems to have been created by his self-concept. He thought of himself as a good person who ought to help others in all circumstances and became a victim of his responsive demamaps.

Assertive Demamaps

Smith (2000) presents a technique that MacNeal might call a *Responsive Demamap* for dealing with manipulators who want to induce feelings of guilt, shame, feelings of foolishness, or feelings of ignorance in us by the use of accusations or labeling. Smith's technique enables our assertiveness and forces manipulators into becoming assertive. Smith suggests that we can resist such manipulative efforts by making what he calls a "Fogging" statement, a statement that allows us to ignore the intent of the manipulator and respond to the truth, principles, or probability of the truth of the statement and respond assertively instead of defensively. A common defensive demamap, for example, that creates vulnerability consists of the belief, If you are accused of making a mistake, deny it, or blame somebody else. Instead, Smith teaches us to respond assertively by agreeing to the truth, with the principles stated, or with the probability of the truth of the statement.

Here is an example:

Accuser: I do not understand how anybody could be as inconsiderate as you have turned out to be!

Old Response: How dare you call me inconsiderate? Don't you remember when I did x, y, or z?

New Response: I do not doubt that you feel that way, and I know that you have your reasons for it.

Smith suggests that we should increase the assertiveness of our accuser by adding the negative assertion, "I know that I need to be more considerate of people," and made a negative inquiry, "What is it that I have done that makes me so inconsiderate? The new responses have for their purpose provoking assertiveness from the accuser. A general semanticist might frame this as moving the accuser from an inference level to description, and it often brings an accuser out of the trance caused by his evaluation of his victim as always being a certain kind of person in all circumstances. At least you have something concrete to fight about.

Wilson (1990) makes the point that a state-created person loses access to the information that he has available to him in other states. When you are furious with an individual, it is hard to remember how you regard that person in other circumstances. General semantics can provide us an escape from the dominance-submission conflict into rational discussions of differences. We don't have to either fight or flee: We can become Non-Aristotelian and discuss. I have never seen a Non-Aristotelian on the Jerry Springer Show.

Resisting our demamaps and becoming relatively trance free requires self-acceptance or, more accurately, selves-acceptance. To believe that self-acknowledgment, self-acceptance, can easily be obtained, seems naïve, especially in a society that believes that our mistakes reveal our essences and that we should be punished for being in essence bad, but it seems to be a necessary prerequisite to mental toughness.

Self-acceptance might be the foundation from which assertive behavior can develop, but we have not given it much thought. I cannot find "self-acceptance" in any of the dictionaries I have checked, and if I found "selves-acceptance" in a dictionary I would probably consider it a misprint.

Many people seem to believe that if you accepted yourself, you would lose the motivation to improve. Maslow (1981), for example, suggests that one of our major challenges consists of the task of accepting ourselves and at the same time, seeing a need for self-improvement. I don't see a problem here. General semantics provides one solution: If you believe that self-improvement is possible, you could accept yourself as a person who needs to improve.

I don't think, however, that we can improve ourselves. We have to become different people, as the Christians often frame it, be "born again." That seems to require a miracle, but Wilson quotes Dr. Timothy Leary as saying with reference to this matter, "It is as easy as changing the dial on your television set," (Wilson, p.199), and I agree. You just have to become a person doing something else. If you have a bad reputation and have come to be regarded as a person that is filled with a bad essence, if you change your behavior, people ordinarily will decide that they were wrong about you or that you are certainly a different person now (Wilson, 1990). Don't get your hopes up too high. Bankers and district attorneys are all Aristotelians.

Before I read Wilson, I was puzzled about why I tend to forget all about general semantics when I lose my temper "because" of the behavior of somebody. I inferred from his discussion of state-created selves that when I enter into an Aristotelian state of mind, I do not have access to Korzybsky. Occasionally, I can switch the dial, come out of my trance and cool off, but for me, it is hard work. The dial often sticks in Aristotelian.

In Conclusion

The argument that when people talk we should listen and understand, and when we understand should agree, and when we agree do what the speaker wants, gets its power from our irrational responsive demamaps. We need to throw them in the trash bin.

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