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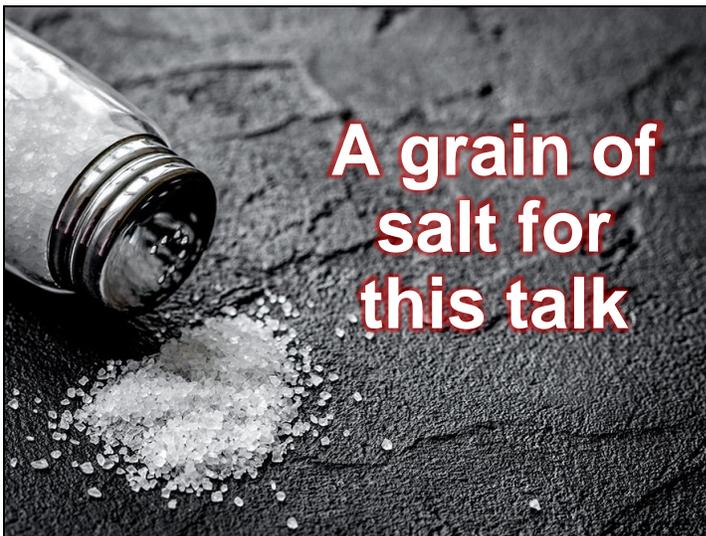
Behavioral Semantics as it Relates to Consultation and Communication
*How to Broaden OBM
and to Avoid the Misstep of Operationism*



Doug Johnson
behavioranalyst@gmail.com
EASTMAN



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- Frequent errors and misunderstanding of the tasks that face us
- Drawn from a couple decades of consulting and educating

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**Our stuff is so great—
why don't they understand
that we have the stuff they're
missing?**



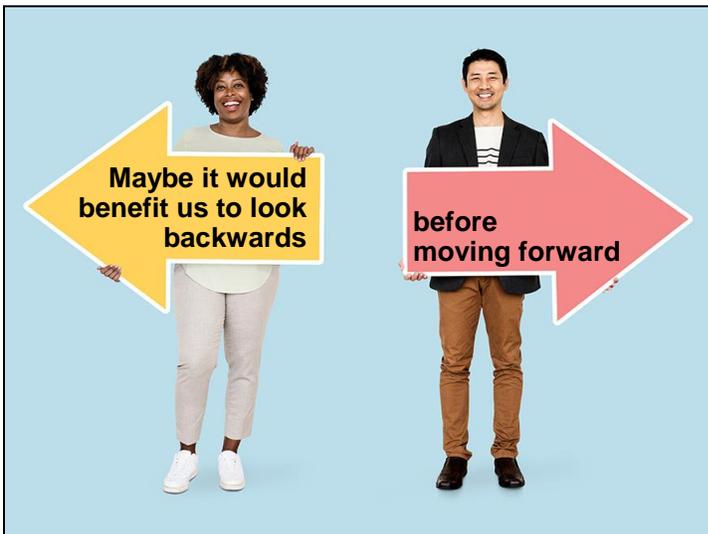
- Start with a simple premise: Our stuff is so great—why don't they understand?
- We built a better mousetrap, but the world did NOT beat a path to our door

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- Expanding to new audiences
- New social landscapes and languages
- New demands within the world of work
- Pressure points to expand our DVs: creativity and shrinking rote work, satisfaction and wellness, DEI
- Some will argue these are not behavioral targets: NOT TRUE

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- In order to advance, it is instructive to carefully examine our foundations

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- The more experienced can doze off for a bit, think about more pleasant stimuli
- How did the misstep of operationism come about (and what is it)?

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- Darwin's theory of evolution
- Important to show that we have more in common than we initially realized with other animals
- Contributions of Darwin's ideas
- Selectionism: Outcomes determine what gets repeated (natural selection and operant conditioning)
- Continuity of species (we can learn things about ourselves by studying rats and pigeons)
- Maybe every human characteristic, including consciousness and reasoning powers, could be discovered in other species

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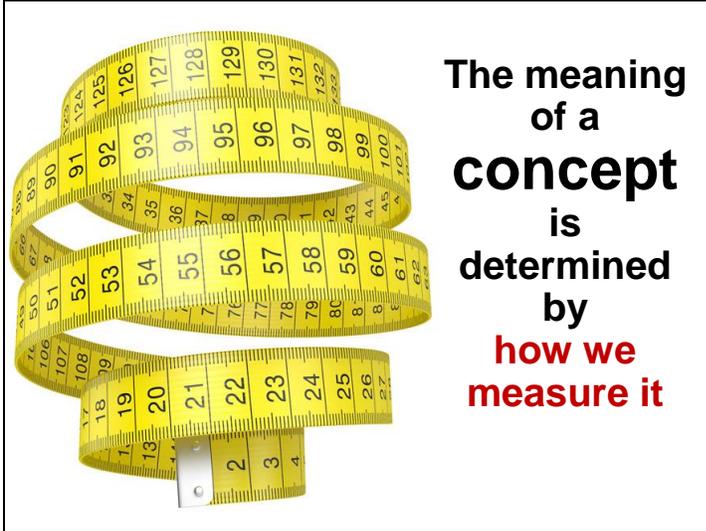
- Most famous dissertation of all time: Thorndike's puzzle boxes
- Parsimony suggested that maybe other simpler mechanisms could account for animal behavior. Trial and error to escape puzzle box, rather than forming mental schematics or working out the solution in your mind.
- If evidence of consciousness and reasoning could be explained in other ways in animals, why not also in humanity?
- Instead of states of mind, intentions, insights, etc.; just strictly observable in animals such as cats, but also humans as well?

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- Logical positivism: Central to the movement is the principle of verifiability
- Only statements that can be empirically verified or logically necessary are meaningful
- Inner world still exists, but meaningless if unmeasured. IF cannot measure OR not logically needed, THEN meaningless
- Huge impact on American psychology in the 1920s

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- Operationism: We do not know the meaning of a concept unless we have a method of measurement for it
- “we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations” (Bridgman, 1927).
- CONCEPT: How excited are you?
- PROBLEM: Individuals have unique definitions
- SOLUTION: Find a measure, such as number of words per minute
- CONCEPT → excited = number of words spoken per minute

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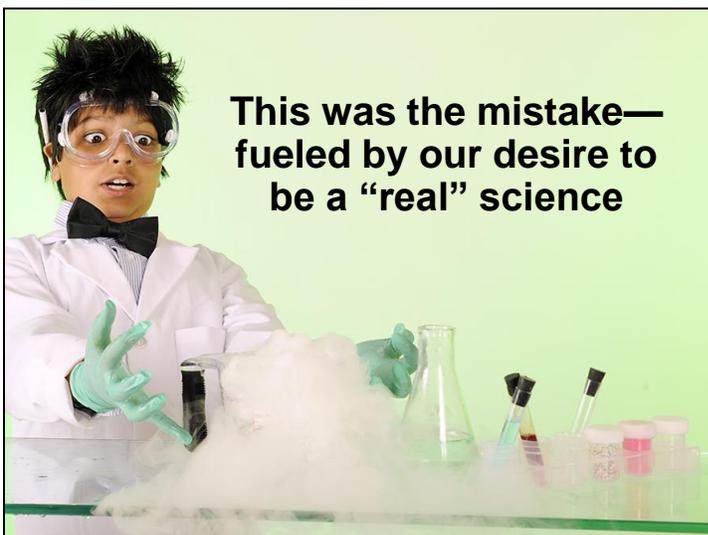
- Grant the distinction between public and private events, and rule the latter out of scientific consideration
- By defining “excited” as number of words per minute, avoid any subjectivity and be a true science

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- Behaviorist psychologists saw this as a weapon in their fight against more traditional psychologists, especially those who prized introspection
- Fear, anger, excitement all can be directly measured!
- ANGER = How loud (dB)
- EXCITEMENT = How fast (count per minute)
- FEAR = # of tears and screams
- Little Albert: Tears and screams were fear itself, anything beyond that could not be measured and therefore meaningless (but not necessarily false)

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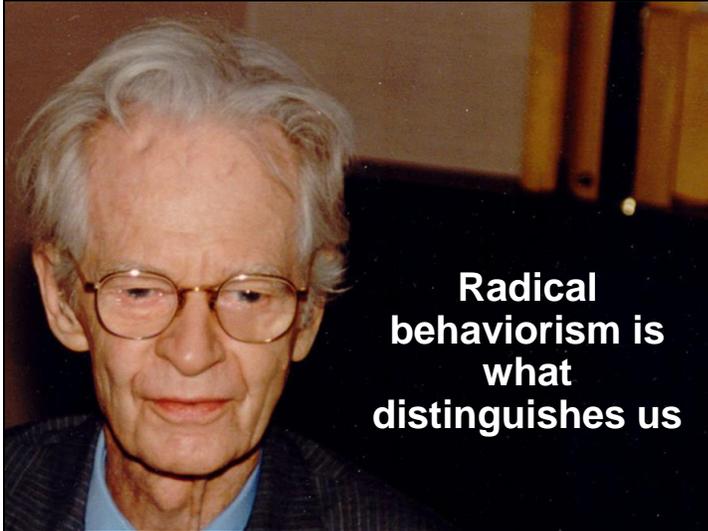
- Methodology dominated the thinking, the approaches to science, and our analysis of meaning
- The cold comfort of never having to infer or extrapolate
- Borrowing prestige from math and logic so no one can call us a fake science anymore
- Our convenient measures and conceptualizations made everything easier
- Methodological behaviorism went to easy route by focusing on the tools alone

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- What distinguishes OBM?
- Solve concerns of people, but so does sociology, economics, and political science.
- Concerns specific to workplace settings will not distinguish OBM from industrial-organizational psychology.
- Credentials (e.g., BCBA) should not be confused for the field itself.
- Specific topics, interventions, and methodologies?
- Whether discipline addresses selection and placement or performance management is likely the product of normative trends rather than inherent distinctions.
- Performance appraisals, employee attitudes, equity issues, and decision making could all be addressed by an OBM practitioner or researcher,
- It is questionable whether a behavioral intervention exists because procedures are atheoretical in nature.
- One cannot tell from a feedback intervention whether a behavior analyst, cognitive scientist, or humanistic psychologist did it
- The difference between fields largely lies within the explanations employed by those working in those paradigms.

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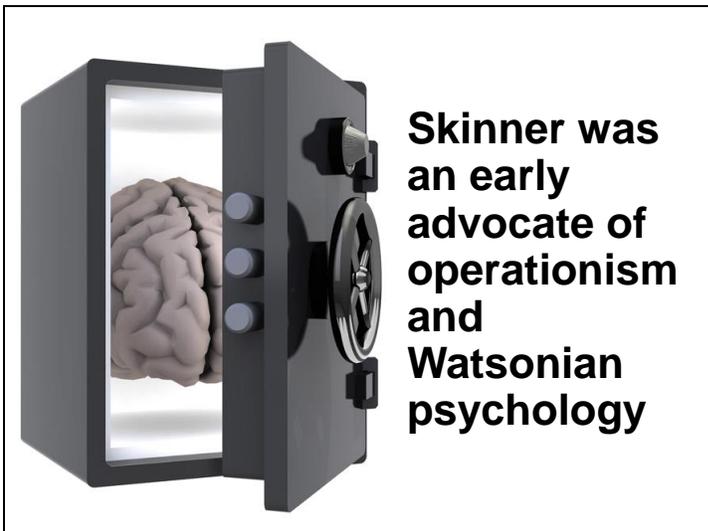
- If we are not grounded in the philosophy or conceptual framework, then we just become tips, tricks, and techniques

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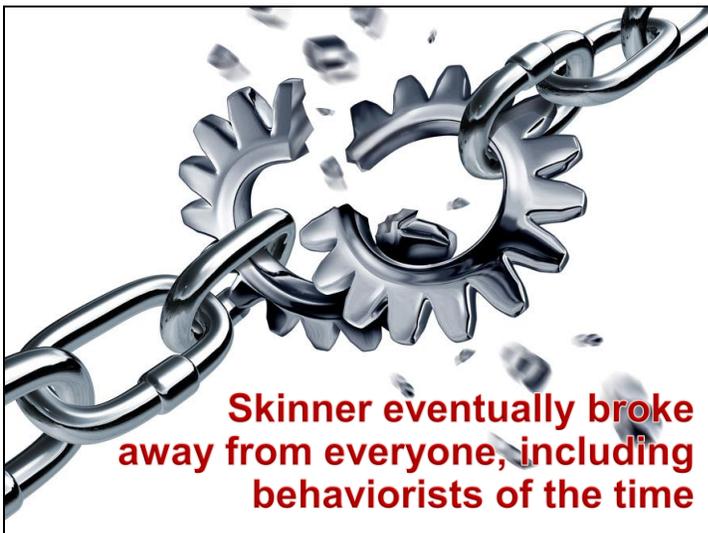
- Many forget about what made radical behaviorism great
- Not about being observable, not the use of consequences
- It was Skinner's understanding of private events and the meaning of words
- Very relevant to consultants who are trying to parse out how to be persuasive

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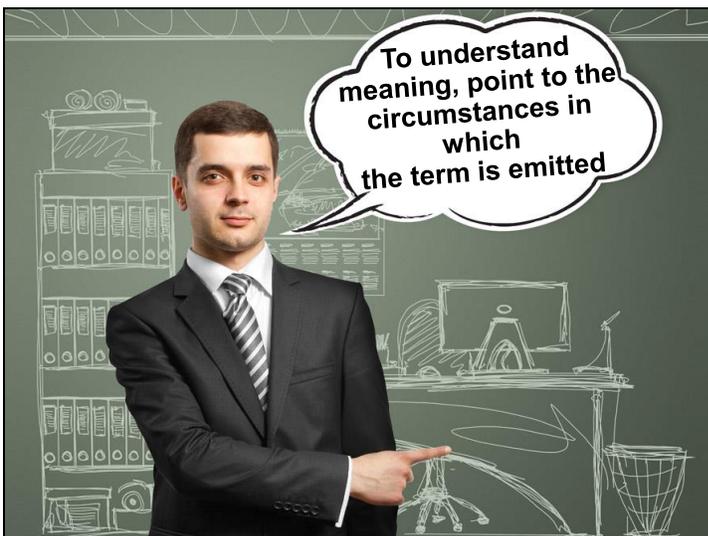
- Skinner originally favored operationism
- But a few critical events caused him to drift away

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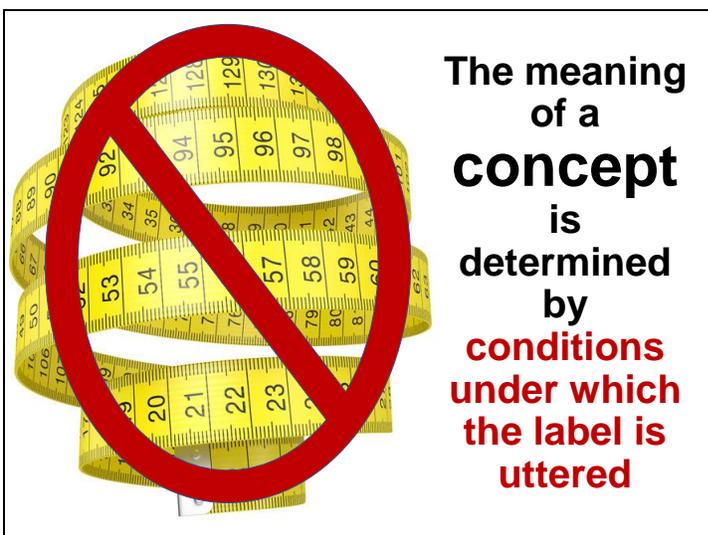
- Skinner's early mentors and intellectual heroes had impressed upon him the importance of understanding the ENTIRE organism, not just the convenient part of the organism
- His approach to verbal behavior gave him the basis for an alternative for defining concepts, one that could embrace private events without mentalism
- He finally and fully rejects Watson and the methodological behaviorists
- He asserts that methodological behaviorism is itself mentalistic.

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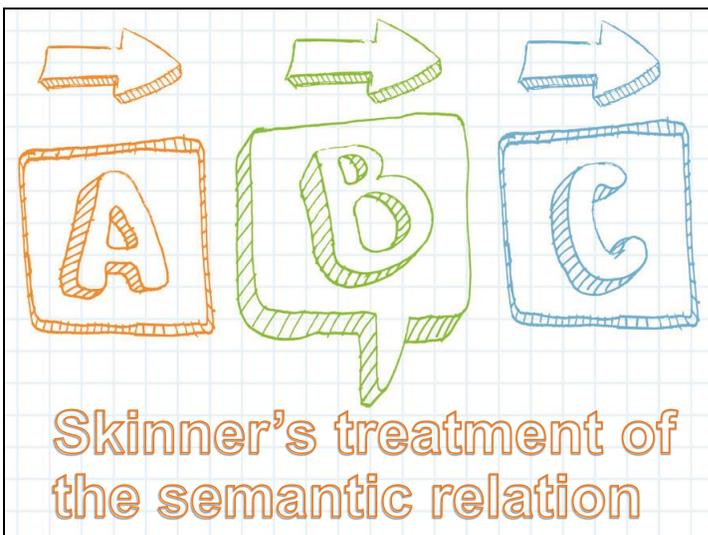


- An operational definition would consist of an empirical description of the conditions under which a term is used (what conditions evoke the tact)
- What do mean by "attending," "creativity," "morality," or any other concept?
- What circumstances evoke those terms? What are the critical attributes? What are the discriminative stimuli and stimulus classes that cause a label to be emitted?

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- Semantics is the study of meaning
- There are three important terms: a stimulus, a response, and a reinforcement supplied by the verbal community
- Concepts = measures
- Versus
- Concepts = verbal behavior controlled by stimulus classes and audience reactions
- This notion fuels much of my professional interest in instructional design and training

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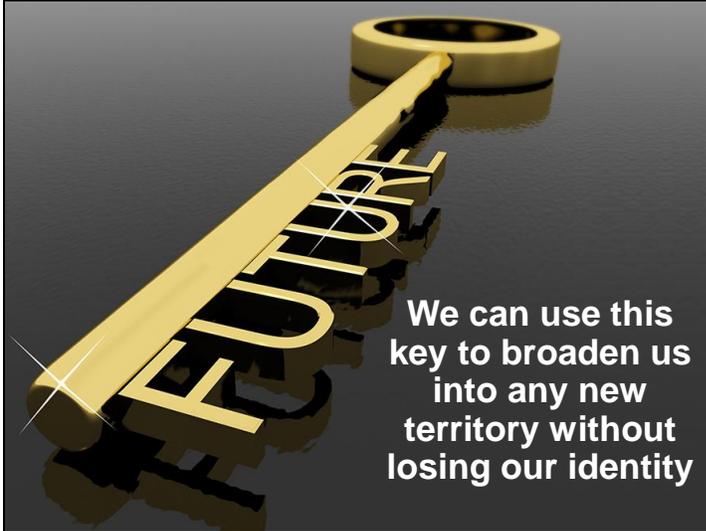
- Translation: the importance of both talking and listening
- For example, if you wanted to know what a good conversation in the field looks like (Laske's dilemma)
- We don't know what to train
- It means different things to different people
- It's very subjective and they are sure themselves what it means
- Listening and guiding the conversation—not waiting to just tell them what it should look like
- You need to discover it with them

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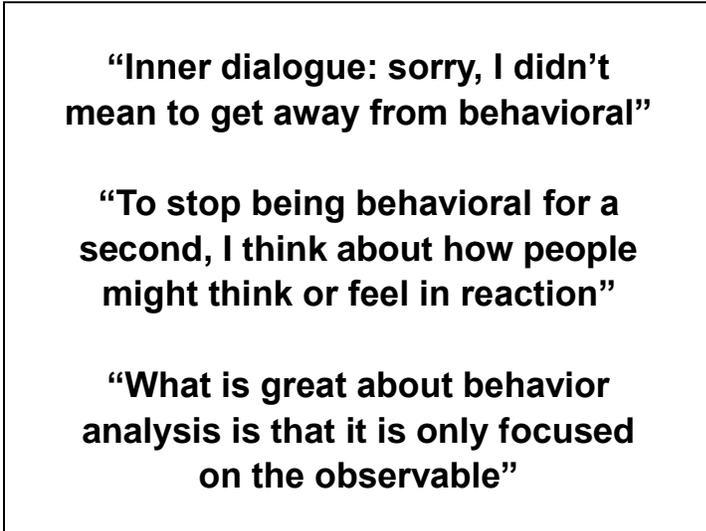
- The value of this cannot be understated and this notion has guided most of how I interact with others.
- Take an understanding and empathetic approach, rather than a dismissive approach when people have a different perspective and don't think or analyze like you

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- Creativity and shrinking rote work, satisfaction and wellness, DEI

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- “Well, every behavior analyst knows that.”
- Then why do I repeatedly hear these sentiments from people working in the field with behavioral degrees or advanced graduate students in behavioral programs?

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- As people live in the applied world where they need to confront unobservable and complex phenomena, they often abandon a behavioral perspective because the day-to-day they think there are dealing with non-behavioral events
- This happens when they leave the bubble where everyone talks the same and struggle with interacting with people who talk and view the world differently

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“An adequate science of behavior **must consider events taking place within the skin of the organism, not as physiological mediators of behavior but **as part of behavior itself.**”**
- Skinner

- For Skinner, the private world was just as physical and lawful as the public world

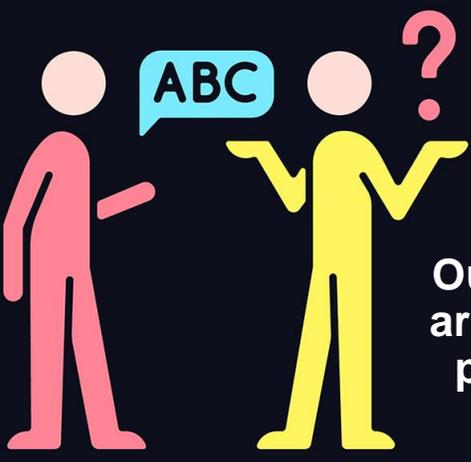
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**Our stuff is so great—
why don't they understand
that we have the stuff they're
missing?**



- Return to our starting premise

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**Our words
are not the
problem**

- Our precise words are not the obstacle.
- Our interpersonal and communication skills are.
- People accept technical explanations all the time from medical doctors, mechanics, astrologers, programming, and like.
- Being plain spoken IS important with certain audiences
- Do NOT use \$20 words when \$1 word will do
- Gradually shape the audience's understanding
- BUT don't think they are simply against new technical word

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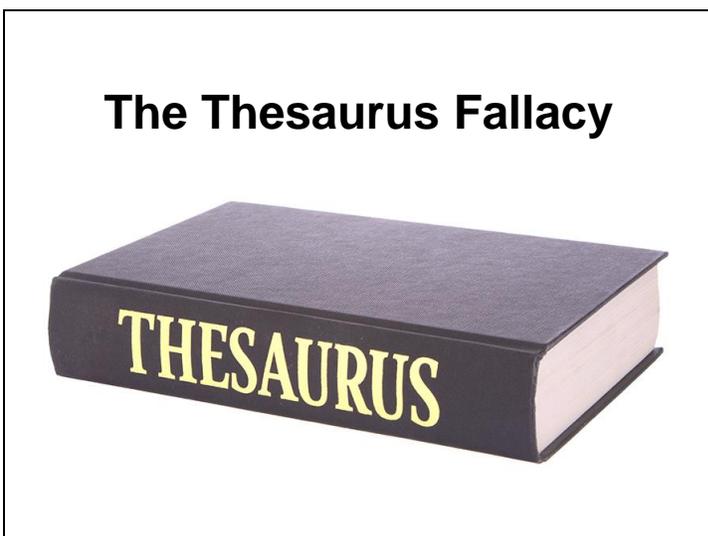
We do things for a reason

Behavior analysis is about making those reasons explicit

Behavior analysis is NOT establishing your superiority

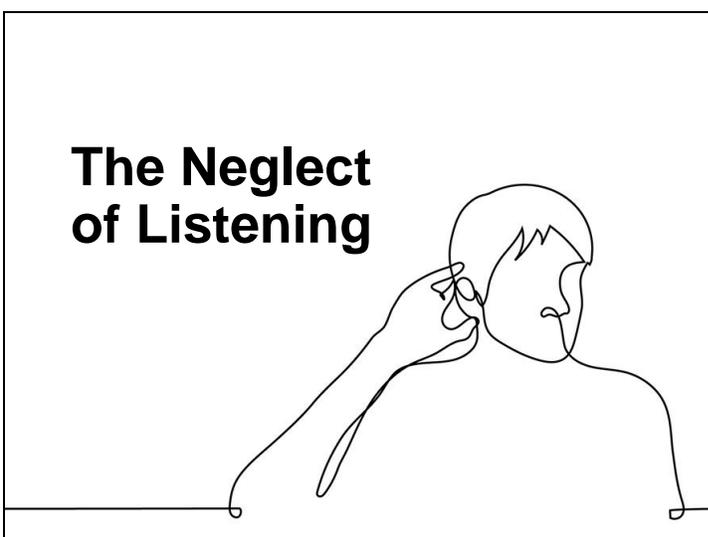
- Your job is not to tell them that they're wrong. Or that they just don't get. Or that you're smarter, better, or more credentialed than them.
- Your BCBA, Ph.D., LBA, or whatever doesn't have much value if you use it as a tool to belittle or just establish that you are better.
- As you try to bamboozle them with clever words unfamiliar to them while you talk down to them.

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- Thesaurus fallacy: magic decoder dictionary and simple synonyms
- Forever talking about talking: How can I phrase things so they get it? What's the magic password?
- An overly eager expressive repertoire

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- Their verbal behavior is controlled by something.
- The words they use are NOT irrelevant to your analysis
- Your job is to figure out it, find commonalities, develop measures that will address their understanding and your objectives, and then redirect towards joint goals with a supportive stance
- Are you listening and trying to figure out their context and controlling variables? Or are you simply waiting for your turn to speak?
- Don't let your impoverished receptive repertoire or your overly eager prevent you from understanding

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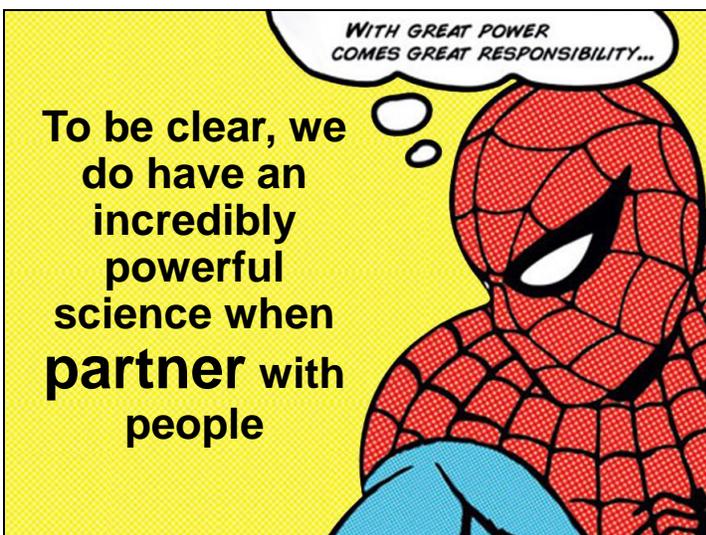
- Listening to unheard voices
- Learning what is needed and figuring out how to supply it

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- How do you get your stuff listened to, adopted, and kept in place?
- You listen, understand, and constantly adapt and adjust.
- You form linkages between what you want and what they want.
- Linkages between where they are and where they need to be.
- Linkages between the short-term and long-term.
- “The linkages are formed, not in the designer’s office, but by partnering with people in the workplace.”

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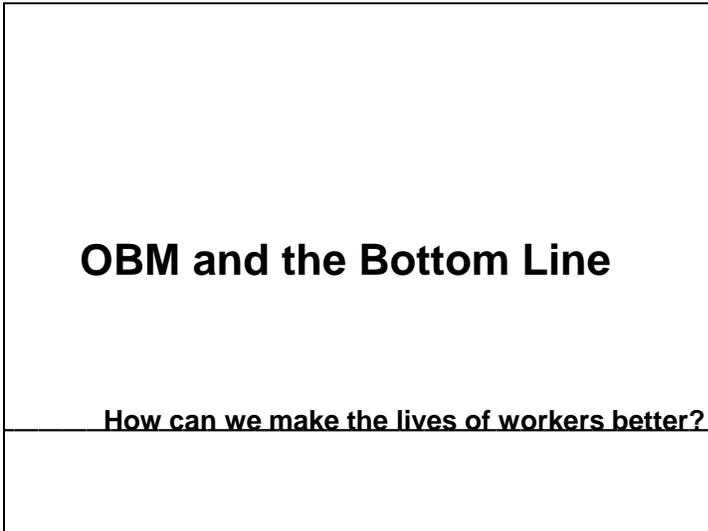
- Our science works and is incredibly powerful when we work WITH others
- This power is not to be underestimated or applied without responsibility

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- You should give freely-not just give a few tiny tidbits and then pitch solutions that can only be found in your overpriced book or workshop
- If you only have a single piece of advice worth paying for, then go and study more

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- Your job is not to just help companies make more money
- Cannot act in ignorance of financials, but not an excuse to exploit workers
- You can improve BOTH the finances and worker well-being at the same time
- First OBM article published, Aldis (1961) concluded: "greater promise is that such experiments may lead to happier workers as well."
- You want to know what is meant by "better?" That is what concept analyses and understanding behavioral semantics is all about, once again.
- If you can't see that, go into finance, accounting, or business administration

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