

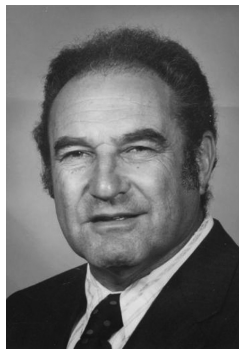
Insight Without Change

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In a letter to Carl Rogers in 1950, my father wrote: *“The aspect of the therapeutic puzzle that currently most occupies my attention centers around those clients who seem to achieve intellectual insight but little significant modification of behavior.”* The behavior my father was referring to can be as simple as an addiction or as complex as your personal relationships or world view. Sometimes the therapeutic target is a pattern of thinking or a problematic emotional response rather than any overt behavior at all. My father and I prefer to begin the counseling process with an exploration that leads our clients, by way of conversation, to a clear intellectual understanding of their situation and what they should do about it. At that point it is tempting to declare victory, and some people actually do carry their insights directly forward into appropriate action. Sometimes the insight itself is the objective. Usually, however, there is some independent process required to embody insights in appropriate action.

Action can consist of concrete objective steps undertaken in the world, or it can consist of subjective efforts to interpret and respond to problematic circumstances in a systematically different way. Surprisingly, it is often possible to manage a problematic emotional state directly, without changing the circumstances that appear to be responsible for that state in the slightest degree. This is a particularly appropriate strategy when the relevant circumstances cannot be changed. Some people are better at this than others, just as some people are better at executive action than others. Whether it is subjective or executive action that is required to harvest the fruit of an insight, there are a wide variety of ways to reinforce, support and embody it. If you can't be disciplined, be clever. Trust me. Call me.



Charles K. Ferguson

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