

In post-camp letters about how their children have changed after their summer at camp, parents often ask how the transformation comes about. Beginning in the Ohana Newsletter, Spring 2000, we have published a series of articles about Success Counseling, with the aim of detailing the philosophical bedrock of our work with children. This approach is based on the work of William Glasser (Choice Theory) and William Powers (Perceptual Control Theory). In this issue, Barnes explains how we create personal pictures of our own “Quality World,” and how The Aloha Camps create environments where children see counselors modeling successful quality world pictures and engaging in this ongoing creative process.

KEEPING THE ALOHA SPIRIT ALIVE

Part III: Preserving the Quality

by Barnes Boffey

In previous discussions of Success Counseling and internal control psychology, we have talked about the internal instructions we all have to be loving, powerful, playful, and free. One difficulty in following these instructions is that they come in a general format; there are no specifics attached. This is like Polonius saying to Laertes, “And this above all, to thine own self be true.” He described no specific behaviors, but simply issued a general instruction that Laertes was responsible for figuring out how to accomplish. For Laertes, our children and ourselves, creating specific blueprints to fulfill our internal instructions is the hardest part of living. An essential process in becoming mature, it demands creativity, discipline, and courage. Part of what we do to preserve the quality of the Aloha experience is to create environments where children can see consistently good and responsible models of successful blueprints and of the creative process in action.

We can compare the role and power of these blueprints to the experience of looking at photographs we’ve gotten back from the drug store. Viewing the pictures we took, sometimes we feel neutral, sometimes we say, “Oh, that’s a terrible picture, I want to tear it up,” and sometimes we say, “Wow, that’s a terrific picture!”

As we live, the same thing goes on in our minds. Each day since birth we have been confronted with millions of “pictures” of the world, other people, and ourselves. Sometimes we really like what we see, sometimes we are neutral, and sometimes we are disappointed. In the lifelong process of developing and refining our personal definition of quality, we select what we believe to be the best of these pictures and store them in a place in our heads that one can metaphorically call our Quality World. These become our personal blueprints as we attempt to actualize our instructions to be loving, powerful, playful, and free. We may not always be able to attain our desires or measure up to our ideals, and over time, we may adjust our blueprints after finding them to be accurate or inaccurate, or effective or ineffective. But, at any given time, our pictures of what we believe will get us what we want provide the day to day foundation for our behavior.

By the time we are grown up, most of us will have eaten perhaps 500 bowls of spaghetti, and from all those, developed a picture of the taste, smell, and look of an “ideal” picture of spaghetti. Each time we order spaghetti in a restaurant, we refer to our blueprint, hoping to get as close to that picture as we can. Sometimes we get close, sometimes we don’t. The same is true of our relationships. We have pictures/blueprints of the way our family members should act, pictures of how we should be able to handle upset, success, and disappointment, and pictures of what it means to be a good wife, son, daughter, husband, or boss. Our pictures of quality are very

personal to us and in some instances may have little to do with reason or rationality. Our picture of a holiday dinner together with our extended family, for example, may include everyone getting along, very specific foods, a specific length, a specific feeling, and specific people. Our ideal picture may have little or nothing to do with what actually occurs at our holiday meal, but our quality world pictures may continue to be the expectations we carry into the world.

The discrepancies between our quality world pictures of what we want and who we want to be with the pictures of what we *actually* have and who we *actually* are creates the stress in our lives. When the pictures don't match, we experience various degrees of frustration and upset. How we deal with the tension between what we want and what we get will for the most part determine the quality of our happiness. If as new parents, for example, we expect to be perfect, to do everything right, and to have children who follow every rule and get A's in school all the time, we are setting ourselves up for failure. We are not always calm, we are not always willing to drop everything for our children, and there are times when being a parent is not much fun. Also, real children make mistakes, real children make choices about how well they will do in school, and real children do not follow a script simply because we have created it. After several years (or several children), we may finally come to reinvent our quality world picture and realize that a good parent is not someone who has a predetermined script, but one who can develop a flexible, quality script, based on the individual characteristics and personalities of their children as they change and grow.

The best educational experiences are those that help people to create new pictures in their quality worlds. For example, many children come to camp with non-camp pictures of how to be loving, powerful, playful, and free. They may believe that power and recognition come from having the right style jeans, or other possessions that bring status. They may have pictures of fun that always include some machine or object, or pictures of freedom built around the idea of doing anything they want, anytime they want. Their pictures of being a boy may focus primarily on being a good athlete; their pictures of being a girl may rely on fashion and body image. When they come to camp, there is a definite transition period when we challenge many of the symbols that represent their quality pictures. We replace stylish trendy clothes with a gray T-shirt or an Aloha tie. We replace a four-wheeled vehicle or CD player with running to the waterfront and a songbook. By the time a camper leaves camp, we hope they will have created new quality pictures, replacing jeans and machines with images of friends sitting around a campfire roasting marshmallows as the sun fades on a warm Vermont evening.

As human beings, we are always in the process of creating personal pictures and blueprints and trying to fulfill them over the long haul. If our expectations are way out of line with the world as it exists, we will be frustrated a significant amount of the time. If our primary energy is consistently focused on trying to change other people, places and things so that they match our expectations, we are sewing the seeds of unhappiness. Happy people spend more time changing themselves so that they can be loving, powerful, playful, and free in the world as it really presents itself. This is not to say we never try to change the external conditions of our lives; certainly that is an option we should explore. But most of the significant and difficult issues that we experience come from situations where the outside world, specifically other people, do not measure up to our expectations of who they should be or how they should act. We may try to change the people, places and things in our lives to more closely match our blueprints, so that we won't have to adjust our expectations. However, when we can't change the conditions within which we find ourselves, our happiness and freedom become contingent on our ability to change

ourselves. If we are unable or unwilling to make the change, we inevitably become victims of our own pictures. A big part of the growth that happens at camp is confronting these choices in an environment where we are safe and surrounded by adults who model thoughtful and responsible behavior.

This growth is part of the reason that we do not try to smooth out every wrinkle in a camper's life. We want children to experience difficult situations and then decide whether they should attempt to change the conditions or their own expectations and blueprints. Having a dispute with a cabin mate can be one of the most important experiences of a summer. A camper is likely to walk into the tent or the cabin with specific pictures/expectations of his or her self-importance, of how other people should act, of how things should work, and of the way the cabin should run. In reality they come face-to-face with the expectations and quality world pictures of five other campers, a counselor, twenty-seven other children in the unit, a unit head, an assistant director, and a director. Finding ways to negotiate the many expectations and pictures that exist is essential to the educational experience at camp.

To create the conditions in which this kind of growth can happen, at The Aloha Camps we continually explain, demonstrate, model, and perpetuate the quality world pictures we believe to be essential for "creating fine people." When campers and counselors come to The Aloha Camps and Hulbert, they bring the personal pictures and blueprints that best represent their experiences and expectations to date. Our programs challenge them to grow further and in many cases to redefine what they believe to be quality. When they do, these new quality pictures become their standard for behavior. We share pictures and blueprints of what it looks like to appreciate and respect nature, to rely on our own creativity for entertainment, and to place a genuine concern for others as a greater priority than appearance or being "cool." With a clear example of the Aloha way of being loving, powerful, playful, and free, a child can have adequate information from which to compare their picture with the Aloha picture.

Upgrading our personal pictures of quality is not an easy process. Once we have changed our expectations, we are driven to behave in ways that meet those new quality pictures. Doing this may involve a degree of energy, diligence, patience, and follow-through which we have not previously been used to. Raising the bar to a new level of quality is an important part of growing, and it necessarily involves challenge and frustration. The joy of aspiring to a higher standard of friendship or personal achievement is attained through significant effort and ongoing support.

A major goal of every program within The Aloha Foundation is to provide experiences in which children and adults glimpse a vision of their best selves. When this happens, they may be temporarily frustrated at not being able to actualize that vision in the short term, but in the long term we have helped them design a truer path to happiness and fulfillment. We hope they will see a clearer picture of the person they really want to be and have enough time to develop that blueprint in ways that will help them carry that vision to their homes, schools, work, and relationships.