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Foreword

I worked in the Thornton School District 205 schools with Ambrose Panico many years ago, developing plans to improve student behavior and training teachers under his supervision using the principles and strategies of *Discipline With Dignity®*. His new book, *Behave Yourself!,* personifies the competent, caring, and professional nature that Ambrose brought to those trainings. A program can't work if it is too simplistic, leaves out the needs and concerns of the student, or relies predominantly on rewards and punishments. The strategies, questionnaires, and tools described in this book are not only relevant to the concerns of special education teachers, but to teachers of any disruptive student in any class or grade.

Student behavior does not exist in a vacuum. The context of the behavior is crucial in understanding its underlying cause, and in finding the keys to changing those behaviors that hurt the student's chances for success. More often than not, discovering the contextual clues makes sense of seemingly nonsensical behavior. We often wonder why a student does something that appears irrational and self-destructive, only to find later that it makes perfect sense to the student (who perceives the variables of context differently than we initially did).

Often students do the *right* thing in the *wrong* way. Fighting is a good example. It is natural and acceptable to defend oneself from verbal attack. Every student has the right to protect his or her own dignity. Fighting, however, is not the preferable way to do it. It is good to listen to a friend who might be upset or elated over something that just happened; however, doing so during class time is not the right time or place to do so. For an intervention to be successful, it must take into account the difference between *what* and *how*.

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Another major concern that is addressed in this book is the issue of control. Many students have difficulties with control and seek to find it by proving that no one can make them do what they don't want to do. The truth is we cannot make students do anything unless they want to do it. All interventions that give students choices and acknowledge their power have a better chance of success than interventions that use power against them to force them to change in ways that they don't want to. The great power of this book is that it recognizes the need to give students control over the changes we believe are in their best interest. Using force simply will not work with our most difficult students. If it did, we would not have difficult students to begin with!

Another important distinction between typical books on behavior change and this book—especially for special education students—is the understanding of the limited use of rewards and punishments in the change process. Punishments and rewards satiate, meaning that more is needed to get the same effect. The first time a student is given a detention or a call is made to his parents, he will plead for mercy. After the third or fourth time he will say, "Who cares?!" As punishments satiate, we need stronger and more painful ones until there is no more pain we can inflict. It is far superior to teach students the skills and strategies they need to make better decisions than to punish the previous poor decisions made in the past.

Rewards also satiate. We start by giving something small, and soon find that students want more. "Is that all?" is a whine we have all heard many times. In addition, rewards used as bribes rather than appreciation can become addictive, and students will not learn without them. This book offers a far more holistic approach than simply rewarding good behavior and punishing the bad.

The best thing about this book is that it is comprehensive in its fundamental approach. It does not rely on any one philosophy or set of tools, but rather incorporates several sound methodologies, all of which are child-centered. The needs and goals of the student are paramount. Helping out a teacher might or might not help a child, but helping a child improve his or her behavior *always* helps a teacher. I agree with Ambrose's wonderful new book; we are always better off starting with the student.

—Dr. Richard L. Curwin
Coauthor of the *Discipline With Dignity* series

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Chapter 1

Why We Are Stuck on Rewards and Punishments

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The farther backward you can look the farther forward you are likely to see.

—*Winston Churchill*

Teachers tend to limit themselves to using rewards and punishments to help students change their behavior. There are a few reasons for these self-imposed limitations, each with its own rationale.

Roles and Responsibilities

Some teachers believe it is not their job to teach their students to behave. They believe that they teach academic content and that *parents* teach appropriate behavior. They see their role in relationship to student behavior as limited to rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior so that academic instruction may occur uninterrupted. My response to these teachers is that they are dead wrong. If they do not examine their beliefs about student behavior, they will never accept the responsibility they have to their students (and to society) to actively participate with their students' parents to mold competent individuals and responsible citizens. You know your job is much more than teaching the ABCs and the 123s, or you would never have purchased this book.

Talk with your colleagues, lend them this book, and ask them to help you change a student's behavior—not because they must but because it is the right thing to do—and because the child needs them to do it; to appeal to them on a moral level. If they fail to be motivated by moral obligation, inspire them by suggesting there could be a link between academic instruction

and problem behavior. Researchers have confirmed that students will misbehave to avoid the embarrassment associated with repeated failure (Dunlap, 1993; Nelson, Scott, & Polsgrove, 1999; Shores & Wehby, 1999).

Time Constraints

Some teachers simply resort to rewards and punishments because they are overwhelmed by competing demands on their time. Their principal refers to their multitude of pressing duties as *multitasking*, but that doesn't make the job any easier. These teachers believe they must spend all their time on academic instruction to survive in the era of No Child Left Behind, so discipline must be quick and easy (such as reward and punishment). They thoughtfully teach academic content, and they reactively levy discipline. But when discipline is reduced to a reactive endeavor based solely on rewards and punishments, it is ineffective for the 5 to 15% of students who desperately need a teacher's help to change their behavior. The word *discipline* is derived from the Latin *disciplina*, which refers to learning. For students requiring behavior change, discipline must be associated with more than rewards and punishments. They must come to view discipline as a collaborative process with their teachers that allows them to gain control of individual situations and their lives in general.

In fact, if you do not proactively engage your most challenging students in controlling their own behavior, you choose to attempt to control their behavior for them—over and over, after things have already gone wrong. Teachers who fail to understand this concept waste an excessive amount of time attempting to limit the disruptive behavior of a handful of students. Conversely, teachers who invest a relatively small amount of time in proactively helping these students change their behavior recoup a significant amount of instructional time that is not diverted to reactive discipline. At its core, this book is a practical "how to" resource for individuals who make the decision to proactively teach discipline.

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Compliance Mindset

Special education's focus on compliance issues and students with developmental disabilities is impeding its ability to help higher functioning students change their behavior. Both general education and special education educators alike are confused by and often intimidated by special education's emphasis on rules and regulations as they pertain to helping students with disabilities change their behavior.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004) has in some ways only added to the confusion and heightened anxiety levels among educators by:

- Mandating functional behavioral assessment (FBA) as part of a student's behavior intervention plan (BIP)
- Failing to adequately define FBA or provide enough detail regarding its implementation

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- Linking the FBA/BIP procedure to the discipline process: "According to the IDEA 1997, schools must introduce functional behavioral assessment to address serious and persistent problem behavior" (Gable, Hendrickson, & Smith, 1999, p. 167). IDEIA 2004 continues to enforce this requirement for FBA and BIP.

When a child with a disability exhibits behavior that impedes the child's education or the education of the child's classmates, the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports must be considered. IDEA 1997 goes on to ensure that for disciplinary action that would result in a change of placement exceeding 10 consecutive school days, the child receives both appropriate functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention services intended to alleviate the recurrence of the objectionable behavior. Mitchell Yell (1997) is among many researchers and scholars who take the position that this requirement is applicable to all students with disabilities, regardless of their disability category.

While the law does not provide a specific definition of functional behavioral assessment, its clear intention is to ensure that the function or purpose of the behavior is not only identified, but also used to create a behavior intervention plan that teaches and encourages alternative behaviors that serve the same function as the undesirable behavior (Gable & Hendrickson, 2000). It should be of no surprise, in light of the emphasis of No Child Left Behind, that IDEIA 2004 [300–324 (3) (i)] mandates the "participation of a regular (general) education teacher in the determination of appropriate positive behavioral interventions and supports and other strategies for the child."

This is probably a good time to provide a definition of functional assessment for a general education teacher who wonders, "What else am I supposed to know and do?"

What Is a Functional Behavioral Assessment?

Sugai, Horner, and Sprague (1999, p. 253) define *functional assessment* as "the process of identifying establishing operations, antecedent variables, and consequent events that control target behaviors. Said differently, a functional assessment identifies when, where, and why problem behaviors occur and when, where, and why they do not occur." Individual states, districts, and schools are presently engaged in a struggle to figure out which students require functional behavioral assessment, which students would benefit from FBA, what constitutes FBA, who can and should conduct FBA, what to do with an assessment once you have it, and how to find the human and financial resources required to actually administer an FBA, and then to use the FBA findings to develop and implement the BIP. Yell notes that among other concerns, in passing the IDEA 1997 amendments, Congress found that "too much emphasis placed on procedural paperwork tied to legal requirements and not focused on teaching and learning, and better student outcomes, had limited the effectiveness of the IDEA" (IDEA 1997, p. 1). Unfortunately, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA does not address this concern.

In other words, the emphasis placed on FBA might unintentionally perpetuate paperwork designed to ensure compliance with regulation at the expense of actually helping students

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change their behavior. Too often the focus becomes avoiding due process hearings and litigation instead of improving student outcomes. The result is often what I refer to as a *complete* BIP; that is, a plan with all the blanks filled in—a plan that is ready to be filed away because no one expects it to actually do anything to help a student change his or her behavior. Instead, the plan was meant only to keep everyone out of "special education jail." Compare that to a Plan to Do Better, which I refer to as a *viable* plan—a plan that each team member wants a copy of because everyone believes that if it is implemented with fidelity, there is a good chance the student will change his or her behavior.

Complete plans are written as if behavior occurs in a vacuum and pay little attention to the social, academic, and environmental variables that make up the context in which the behavior occurs. These plans often identify one nonproductive behavior and one intervention designed to address that behavior. These plans almost always overemphasize the use of punishments and rewards. In reality, many students present a myriad of problems that respond better to a bundling of interventions. This bundling "may need to include: behavioral-reduction, cognitive, and skill building programs, along with environmental manipulations" (Gable, Henrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002, p. 469).

Finally, complete plans often totally disregard the importance of personal (internal) variables and instead focus entirely on environmental (external) variables. Viable plans, in contrast, recognize the need to balance a behavioral change equation that thoughtfully includes both personal and environmental variables. We are cautioned that "in all, a mix of variables affect student behavior encompassing internal and external events" (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002, p. 463).

While federal regulations mandate the administration of FBA for all special education students who require BIPs, IDEIA 2004 does not require that direct observation be part of the assessment. Direct observation is the practice of one or more individuals observing the student to collect data regarding the antecedent events, the nonproductive problematic behavior, and the consequent events that control the behavior.

A review of the FBA literature reveals that most of the research that informs the use of FBA in the schools was conducted on individuals with low-incidence disabilities and extremely limited communication skills. These individuals were of limited cognitive ability (for example, individuals with severe and profound mental retardation). Gable, Hendrickson, and Smith (1999) not only support my assertion that most research has focused on low-incidence disabilities, they add a concern that few studies have focused on the effectiveness of FBAs with older children or students with average IQ scores.

Educators across the county are suffering from paralysis by analysis when it comes to developing BIPs for students of average or better cognitive ability—students who communicate verbally and whose troublesome behavior certainly does not qualify as aberrant. Traditional functional behavioral assessment that includes direct observation should not be standard operating procedure for all special education students experiencing challenging behaviors. Sugai, Horner, and Sprague (1999, p. 253) state:

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