

Getting it together

People can change, but not very easily

Can people really change? Whenever I hear this question, I usually read it to mean: "How can I get my partner to be more affectionate?" Or, "How can I overcome my passivity?" It's usually an expression of frustration and discouragement. But it's actually a question worth asking.

Can people really change? Modern folklore says yes, but it also says no.

There is the popular personal growth fad, for example, which argues that you can become relaxed if you just read a book or attend an expensive class. But there also is the more conservative belief that adults are the final draft. Our basic character is formed in early childhood, according to this point of view, and we are essentially unchangeable after that.

The lively needle

Unlikely lichens undo noncrofter

By MARY KAY DAVIS

My husband was chuckling in the living room. His favorite golf columnist was telling of one horrible morning when his ball refused to leave its tee, hooked onto other fairways and finally ended up snuggled contentedly behind a drinking fountain. Divots were flying and my husband was blissful because. Somebody understood his problems.

There's something to that. If one columnist can survive seeing his human frailties in print, perhaps I can too. It's time to clean about the lichens.

We were vacationing at a lovely cottage in New York's Adirondack Mountains. I'd taken along some wool and my favorite book about dying with plants. Only the book was written by an Englishwoman who had never seen the Adirondacks, and I couldn't identify one plant from her descriptions. So dying was out—until I saw the lichens.

At least I think they were lichens. They were growing on granite boulders; your average plant doesn't do that. The book told how Scottish croft-

As usual, both sides have some truth and some misconception in them. Adults do change, but not easily.

ANY CHANGE in a person's character or manner causes some disruption in his or her life and to those who come in contact with the individual. The greater the change, the greater the disruption, even if the change is ultimately beneficial to everyone involved.

Doing things differently means going through a clumsy, awkward period for a while. It means surprising people and even surprising yourself. And, no matter how much is gained from the change, something is lost.

The person who makes more assertive losses the comfort of having

someone else make all the decisions. The aggressive person who becomes more tactful loses the sense of security that his or her old intimidating manner used to provide.

There are gains, but there are costs. And as adults don't change unless they really need to, it's simple economics. A person will only pay the cost of changing if he or she expects the results to be worthwhile.

OUR READINESS to change is directly affected by how unhappy we are with our current situation. Individuals who are miserable with their lives are motivated to pay a high price for removing their misery. For them, a wide variety of change techniques will be successful.

But people who are contented with

their lives are not likely to change their ways. And no amount of nagging or demanding can change that. In fact, the danger is that the nagged individual will make his or her life more comfortable by just staying away from the nagger.

In fact, even when dealing with a person who is highly motivated to change, such negative approaches as nagging can do more harm than good. Humans learn best under positive, constructive conditions. The more personal the change, the more this is true.

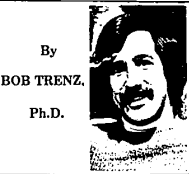
IF YOU WANT to help someone make an important personality change, you have to learn how to be a good coach. That means encouraging efforts and helping the other person to see even little successes. It means di-

minishing the importance of failures and helping the person to keep trying even after falling on his or her face.

The best coaches are those who can see diamonds in the rough, those who can perceive the elements of the new, desired character already existing in the person who is changing.

Those elements are always there. Within every passive person is an assertive person. In every emotionally cold person is a warm, sensitive human being.

So if you really want to help someone change, you have to look for the beginnings of the new person which already exists. And you need to concentrate on bringing them out, not by harassing or attacking, but by encouraging and supporting.



By BOB TREZN, Ph.D.

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ters use lichens to dye wool for Harris tweed. So off I went a-gathering. Which is not easy. Lichens do not stay on granite boulders by accident.

I WAS ON MY stomach, hacking away at a bare rock with my son's Boy Scout knife when a well-dressed man rounded the trail. He took one look, said nothing and kept right on going.

One problem with lichens is that they seem to like high, exposed and totally inaccessible spots. That was how I met the rest of our neighbors.

I'd climbed through the underbrush to a particularly well-stocked rock. It was down a cliff, over a couple of fall-trees and partly out into the lake. There was no flat top and the thing was an angular nightmare. I clutched the sides with one hand while I scraped with the other and hoped that some of the stuff would fall into the Glad Bag jammed between my knees.

I never thought of how my blue jeans looked, dangling over the ripples, until someone said, "Good morning." I lurched sideways and saw a nice young couple about five feet

away in a sailboat. I gargled something; they smiled confusedly and when last seen they were still looking back at that funny lady on the rocks. Fortunately, we never had to meet socially.

HAVING COLLECTED the damned things, I was honorbound to dye something with them. So I followed the book's directions, except for straining the water through peat. I wouldn't know peat if I tripped over it.

And the wool boiled, and the wool boiled and no color that I would see was developing. So I boiled a little longer.

It was when we were half way across the lake on the way to buy milk that I remembered the stuff was still boiling. No telephone and nobody



By MARY KAY DAVIS

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