

Overviews of General Semantics: Francis P. Chisholm

Francis P. Chisholm taught at State Teachers College in River Falls, Wisconsin. Perhaps best known for his *Introductory Lectures on General Semantics* (1945), he shares a distinction with S.I. Hayakawa as the only two men to present seminars sponsored by the Institute while Korzybski was alive. This article from 1949, "Positive Training for Maturity", was perhaps included as a special mailing to Institute members.

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Certain formulations of general semantics are extremely important in training maturity and sound mental health. It should be remembered that the aim is to get people to use these principles habitually in making their own evaluations. In other words, the aim of exercises suggested by these principles is to train ourselves and others in the integrating delayed-reaction order of response (scientific method in everyday situations).

Children especially should be taught to talk, behave, etc., as if they understood the following propositions. They should have practice in talking about situations in terms which reflect these scientific insights and what they say should be systematically re-stated to make this kind of description habitual.

1. The world is in process. Our descriptions, etc., (i.e., "maps") should be dated, and changed as the territory changes. People, things, etc., change, and cannot be treated exactly alike from day to day. no evaluation of myself is permanent. "I dislike what Carl does today," is better than "I hate Carl."
2. The differences between similar things are as important to us as the similarities. We should evaluate specific men or women, for example, more in terms of their individual characteristics than in terms of generalizations about "men" and "women".
3. Scientific method in action means training ourselves to think in a definite order. Proper order involves these habits:

Observation before talking;
Description before evaluation;
Facts before opinions;
Understanding before judgment;
Etc.

4. Language (map) is about events (non-linguistic territory). We should check from "what I think the situation is" to the situation itself before action.
5. No description can tell all about the situation described. Every description is an abstraction from the situation. What else is there to say?
6. We give ourselves positive training in maturity by distinguishing carefully between:

Hopes and predictions;
Reports and inferences;
Descriptions and feelings;
Fantasy and report;
Legend and history;
Etc.

7. Predictions are never certain; they are more or less probable.
8. Explanations and hypotheses are not established by argument or intensity of belief; the scientific test is predictability in the territory.
9. The qualities and values (i.e., "sweet", "sour", "bravery") that we see in things in things are values that we see there by our own nervous system's activity. We should be conscious of this projection. "The seal looks blue to me this afternoon." "What he did seems heroic to me."
10. Maturity is not any one set of opinions, but a way of evaluating situations. Immaturity is shown by:

Egocentricity;
Two-valued (black and white) extreme evaluations;
Compulsive speech;
Internal insecurity;
Violent mood changes in response to slight changes in the situation;
Dogmatism and sureness of opinion;
Undue regard for tokens of approval, titles, etc.;
Etc.

Maturity is shown by:

Zest and interest;
Flexibility and relative efficiency;
Internal balance;
Social responsibility;
Etc.

11. Maximum transfer of learning occurs when the student understands the structure of a successful or unsuccessful reaction. When a student uses delayed reaction in a given context, he should understand the way in which he has used his nervous system for a successful result.
12. Generally, shock and frustration result from following maps which are unlike in structure to the situations they represent.
13. You cannot impose "values". To change "values" you must change people. If you try to impose "values", you make only fear.
14. Parents and teachers should distinguish between:

Protection and protectiveness;
Area of child responsibility (within which he must stand on his decisions) and area of parent responsibility;
Etc.

Under present world conditions, you cannot, in detail, tell your children what to think; but you can train them how to think and trust them to make better solutions than you have made. Etc.

A fool, it is said, can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer. The fact is that a wise man can answer many questions that a fool cannot ask.

Cassius J. Keyser

Overviews of General Semantics: **Dr. Russell Meyers**



Dr. Meyers, chairman of the Division of Neurosurgery at the University of Iowa, regularly participated in Institute seminar-workshops throughout the 1940s and 50s. This excerpt comes from the copious notes taken by **Kenneth Johnson** (later to become principal lecturer at Institute seminars, author and editor) during his first Institute seminar-workshop in August 1957.

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There are two premises we must operate on whenever we try to communicate. First, we must expect to be misunderstood. Second, we must expect to misunderstand. This may seem "obvious" but too few human beings act as if it were true. We are striving to minimize misunderstanding, not to eliminate it. This is true not only of inter-personal but intra-personal communication.

Communication can be competent or incompetent; it can lead to improvement or to destruction.

General Semantics is less interested in "answers" to examination questions than in personal behavior in day-to-day situations. It grew out of a comparison of the kinds of behavior that have led to adaptation and the kinds that have led to mis-adaptation.

Most of GS is unspeakable. It must be experienced and practiced over a period of time.

Concepts basic to General Semantics:

- Scientific method - generalized
- Communication
- Evaluation
- Creativity

The scientific method is not a very old formulation. As it is now taught, it dates back to about 1892 and the book Grammar of Science. The notion that this method can be generalized is peculiar to GS.

Alfred Korzybski compared the efficient communication behavior of scientists to the inefficient behavior of "mental" cases. He then took those kinds of adaptive behavior that could be identified and taught and generalized them for everyday use.

The aim of GS is robust psychological health, not merely correcting or preventing maladjustment.

You don't get meaning, you respond with meaning.

Charles Sanders Peirce