

USING THE DECISION MAKER® PROCESS TO CHANGE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES,
AND FEELINGS IN ORDER TO REDUCE CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR IN
DELINQUENT OFFENDERS: A PILOT STUDY

Final Report -- Revised March 13, 1995

A few comments made by subjects in the Experimental group give a flavor of the results of this study:

"Last weekend I went home and was with my buddies. They all carry guns and I felt like going home to get mine. Normally I would have gone and gotten it. Instead I just left. I had gone with them deliberately just to see what I would do. In the future I don't plan to hang out with these guys anymore."

"I no longer 'rank' on my little brother when I go home. Now I feel like I'm getting healthy. I'm going back to school and getting a high school diploma. I can get somewhere. You gave me a boost to get somewhere. I don't even think about selling drugs anymore."

"I'm not straining like I used to. I'm not self-destructive anymore. It doesn't feel like I have to bite the bullet. My life used to be very strange, scary. I was afraid life would be a bore. I needed drugs to keep life from being boring. Always lived for the moment. None of this is true anymore."

"I had thought about a career in drug and alcohol abuse counseling, but I liked easy money so I stayed selling drugs and never pursued it. I never thought about the possible consequences of selling drugs: getting killed, prison, etc. Before there was no worry, no fear. Now I am aware of what I have to lose if I go back to negative ways of thinking and acting. I used to solve all my problems with 'F--- it!' Now money is not the greatest issue, happiness is."

Results of the Study

The results of the study are extremely promising.

After analyzing the data from the two measures filled out by subjects and the one completed by counselors, Dr. Lee Sechrest, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona, co-principal investigator of the study, pointed out: "The results strongly support the claim that persons in the experimental condition did develop more favorable self-concepts over the weeks of the experiment, while those in the control condition showed no systematic change. For the overall self-concept measure [the Tennessee Self-concept Scale] and for all the subscales except Moral-ethnic Self and Self-criticism, the results were statistically significant and indicated more improvement in the experimental group....

"Similarly, by self-reports, the persons in the experimental group also improved more in several behavioral dispositions likely to be related to risk of further legal violations. Specifically, the

experimental group improved more (statistically significant) than the controls on the Inwald, a test aimed at detecting social deviance. The experimentals also showed statistically significant improvements on risk-taking tendencies and leadership.

"The case workers were not as sensitive to changes in the research subjects, but they may have discerned favorable changes in overall problem levels and in tendencies toward socialized aggression.

Dr. Sechrest concluded that "The simplest, and we think fairly compelling conclusion, is that the intervention resulted in generally favorable changes in self-concept in the Experimental group and that without intervention, self-concepts would likely have deteriorated during confinement....

"All in all, this little experiment has to be regarded as a fairly remarkable success. Certainly it justifies efforts to carry out further testing to determine whether the changes observed can be dependably produced. If they can, the DM Process could have definite promise in helping young male offenders mend their ways."

The Research Design

The initial research protocol described the purpose of the study: "We propose to examine the efficacy of the Decision Maker[®] Process as an intervention to improve self-esteem, enhance an internal locus of control, and to reduce hostility, social alienation and anti-social behavior in eight incarcerated criminals. We hypothesize that using the Decision Maker[®] Process to eliminate beliefs such as *I'm not good enough, I'm not worthwhile or deserving, I'll never get what I want, People can't be trusted, and I don't matter*, will significantly improve self-esteem, enhance an internal locus of control, and reduce hostility, social alienation and anti-social behavior.

We used a revolutionary intervention in the study, the Decision Maker[®] (DM) Process, which M. Lefkoe created ten years ago. It is based on the notion that behavior and emotions are a function of beliefs. The DM Process enables people to identify the specific beliefs responsible for any given pattern of behavior or emotions, and then to totally and permanently eliminate the beliefs, thereby producing significant changes in the patterns. M. Lefkoe has been successful in assisting over 600 clients to get over such problems as bulimia and other eating disorders, depression, phobias, anxiety, workaholism, barriers in their ability to perform at sports, etc. There were significant improvements in self-esteem in virtually every case. Some typical beliefs that clients have eliminated include: "I'm not good enough." "I'm not worthy or deserving." "I'll never get what I want." "Life is dangerous." "People can't be trusted." "Relationships don't work." "What makes me important is carrying a gun or being part of a gang." M. Lefkoe also has worked with over 10,000 employees in over thirty large and small companies, to change both the organization's cultures and how the employees view and perform their jobs.

Dr. Sechrest and M. Lefkoe decided to administer the "Tennessee Self-Concept Scale" to all sixteen subjects both before and after the intervention. In addition, subjects in the experimental group would be interviewed at the end of the study to determine the value of the DM sessions,

both emotionally and behaviorally, and their assessment of the process itself. (See "Excerpts From Exit Interviews With Incarcerated Offenders.") After the study was underway, Dr. Sechrest suggested that we administer another measure, the "Inwald Survey 8 (IS8-A)," which we did.

Moreover, the case workers for each of the sixteen subjects were asked to submit a written report regarding the attitudes and behavior of each subject weekly, in addition to filling out a "Revised Behavior Problem Checklist" both prior to the intervention and again at its completion.

Finally, we agreed to attempt to track all sixteen subjects during the year following the completion of the initial study, although it was unlikely that we would be able to stay in touch with all sixteen after they were released.

We started with eight subjects in the control group, four teens and four adults. One of the teens was eliminated in the middle of the study when the institution requested permission to administer tests and the parent denied it. Two of the teens left the institution a couple of weeks before the end of the study and the institution neglected to administer the tests. The tests were mailed to the homes of the two subjects, but neither of them returned the tests.

One of the adult control group was arrested during the course of the study. Thus, we ended the study with a total of four in the control group.

We started with eight subjects in the experimental group. One of the teens was transferred to another institution after only five sessions. His data was not included. Another one of the teens decided not to have any more sessions after only six sessions. His data also was not included. One of the teens dropped out at the start of the second session. He had thought the program would be like a "Big Brother" program, in which someone came and gave him advice. He did not want to continue the study. He was replaced with a subject who completed all thirteen sessions. Thus, we ended up with two teen subjects in the experimental group.

One of the adult experimental subjects escaped after session two. He was replaced with a subject who completed all thirteen sessions. Thus, we ended up with four adult subjects in the experimental group, for a total of six experimental subjects.

Patterns and Beliefs That Were Eliminated

The following are just a few of the patterns of behavior that subjects presented and subsequently eliminated after the beliefs that caused them were eliminated:

1. Pattern: When I'm disrespected I get angry and feel like using a gun to shoot the person who disrespected me to stop the disrespect.

Beliefs: I'm not worthwhile. I'm not good enough. I'm not important. The way to feel important is to be respected. The way to be respected is to use a gun.

2. Pattern: Deep down I feel I won't get the jobs I apply for.
 Beliefs: I'm not deserving. I'm powerless. I'm helpless.

3. Pattern: Hanging out with people who use guns and get into trouble.
 Beliefs: I'm not important. I'm alone in the world. The way to be popular is to hang out with the popular crowd and do what they're doing.

4. Pattern: I feel that I should do better. But every time I try to move ahead, something pulls me back.
 Beliefs: I'm not deserving. I'm not good enough. The judicial system in Connecticut sucks. Life is unfair. People can't be trusted.

5. Pattern: I have a great relationship with my girl, but I'm just waiting for something to go bad.
 Beliefs: Women can't be trusted. Women lie. Romantic relationships don't work.

6. Pattern: I have a hard time communicating with women. Something is missing when I try to communicate.
 Beliefs: Women are insecure. Women are strongly possessed by emotion, not by reason. The best way to protect myself is to stay to myself, isolate myself emotionally, stay out of the reach of others emotionally.

7. Pattern: A lack of confidence. Procrastination, rather than a doer. I have positive ideas, but take forever to get anything done. Not really having confidence that it will work. I feel "Good idea, but not for me."
 Beliefs: I'm not worthy. I'm not good enough. There's something wrong with me. I'm bad. Life is very hard, very intimidating, tough, scary.

8. Pattern: I tend not to express my thoughts and feelings, both negative and positive. I'm quiet and don't talk in groups. I worry about what others will think of what I'll say. I feel they'll be negative about me and my ideas.
 Beliefs: I'm not worthwhile. I'm not good enough. The way to be worthwhile is to have people interested in you.

9. Pattern: I always feel alone. There's no one there for me. If I don't do for me, no one else will. When I'm in need, there's no one there.
 Beliefs: I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy.

10. Pattern: When someone makes fun of me or my family or my girl, when I'm not respected, when I'm not accepted by my peers, I fight.
 Beliefs: I don't matter. I'm not okay. There's something wrong with me; I'm crazy. I'm not worthy.

11. Pattern: I disrespect others and I want to stop that. I make fun of people, "rank" on them, I pick on people. I bully people. I push them. I feel negative feelings toward people,

critical, and act badly toward them. I don't like that feeling but feel I can't change me.

Beliefs: I'm not good. Whatever I do don't matter. There's something wrong with me. I'm not deserving. The way to be okay is to make others look and feel dumb, stupid and dirty.

12. Pattern: I have been a drug dealer and always will be.

Beliefs: There's something wrong with me. I'm not deserving. The only way to get respect is to be a drug dealer.

13. Pattern: I try to impress others. I need to look good in front of high class people.

Beliefs: I'm not important. The way to be important is to impress others.

14. Pattern: When someone tries to get me to do something I don't want to do, I get angry.

Beliefs: I'm not deserving. What I want doesn't matter.

15. Pattern: I can't express what I think.

Beliefs: Nobody cares what I think. People will laugh at what I think. The way to keep from being hurt is not to express myself.

16. Pattern: I don't trust people. I have to watch my back. I joined a gang for protection.

Beliefs: People will blackmail you if they can. Most people aren't trustworthy. The world's a dangerous place to be. The way to survive is to do what you got to do, get them before they get you.

17. Pattern: Violence with women and others. Threaten people with a gun and shoot people. When I feel that people disrespect me, make me feel like a fool, like I'm nobody, I get mad. Then I get violent.

Beliefs: I don't matter. People who make you feel bad should be punished. The way to punish people is to make them feel pain.

18. Pattern: If someone were to deliberately stand in my face and degrade me (example, call me a punk) I still feel I'd have to shoot him. But all the other situations that would have bothered me in the past wouldn't anymore. I could laugh them off, but not this one situation.

Beliefs: Allowing someone to stand in my face and talk junk to me means I'm not a man.

When we started, subjects stated that they exhibited the above patterns and had the beliefs listed. After the sessions, the subjects said they no longer believed the old beliefs. When the subjects were asked to repeat the beliefs out loud and describe what the words sounded like to them, they answered: Silly, weird, not true, don't make sense, etc. (In the ten years since M. Lefkoe created the Decision Maker® Process, none of the beliefs that were eliminated ever returned.) After the beliefs were eliminated, the subjects reported all of the above patterns had disappeared. They either no longer acted that way, felt that way, or had an interest in that type of behavior.

Conclusion

At this point M. Lefkoe's primary interest is in finding a government agency, state or federal, or

a private foundation to fund a major research study with a much larger number of subjects, male and female, involving a wide range of criminal behavior, age levels, etc. The study described herein is merely a pilot, designed only to indicate the potential effectiveness of the Decision Maker[®] Process in reducing violence and other criminal behavior. Although it clearly is important to determine if the changes as expressed by the subjects and as measured by the tests they took continue to be expressed in their behavior over time, the study did establish the effectiveness of the DM Process with a criminal population. Now it's time to do a full-scale research study involving up to 100 subjects, with a few years of follow up after release. Dr. Sechrest and M. Lefkoe have agreed to collaborate on such a study, which they intend to conduct during 1995.

Ultimately the purpose of the research is to convince the administrators of private drug and alcohol clinics, prisons, and alternative incarceration centers that the DM Process can be helpful, so that they have their staff trained to use it at their institutions.

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