

What Have We Lost And What Do We Need?¹

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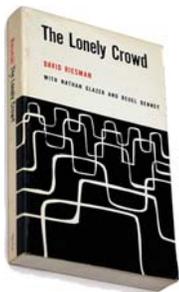


Have you noticed when you walk down the aisles of any retail store such as Target or Costco or a grocery store, that people don't seem to care where they park their shopping carts.

I can't count the number of times I've been frustrated by someone leaving their cart in the middle of the aisle as they look at some product on the shelves, while I am trying to get by them in the aisle. I keep wondering if they are even aware that there are other people around them.

I'm sure all of you have had that experience.

My frustration has led me to thinking about a classic book, *The Lonely Crowd*, written in the middle of the last century, that became one of the country's most widely read books. In that book, the authors introduce the concept of other-directed behavior. They argued that society had moved through three types of behaviors: Tradition-Directed; Inner-Directed; and Other-Directed.



[Tradition-Directed Behavior](#), which existed before the Industrial Revolution, is behavior based on traditions passed down from older generations. Do it this way because grandma says it's the right way to do it.

[Inner-Directed Behavior](#), which emerged after the Industrial Revolution, is behavior that is guided by one's own conscience and set of values, rather than external pressures to conform to tradition.

[Other-Directed Behavior](#), which emerged after World War II, when the middle class began to flourish, is behavior influenced one's peers, by the way others live, by a need to relate and be in tune with others.

People engaging in *Other-Directed Behavior* would be aware of other people in a crowded shopping aisle. They would be considerate to others by parking their shopping carts up against the product shelves so that others could get by, instead of in the middle of the aisle. Unfortunately, many of us have seem to have lost our *Other-Directed Behaviors*.

A fourth style of behavior has emerged in today's technologically connected world:

[Self-Absorbed Behavior](#). This is behavior in which people are living in their own universe with little consideration or even awareness of others around them. This is behavior where "everything is all about me."

It's not a matter of being selfish, although its effects may end up being the same. It is simply a matter of people being so focused on themselves, so self absorbed in their own being, their own priorities, their own needs, their own goals and agendas, that they pay little attention to others around them. It's almost as if each person is its own lonely planet circling around humanity's sun.

¹ Excerpted and modified from Chapter Seven of *Me, You, And The Power Of Choice* by Arnie Dahlke: (<http://www.arniedahlke.com/meyou.htm>)
Meanwhile, take a moment to explore some of my other Timely Tips: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

This may all seem like a silly, unimportant frustration on my part. But, I assure you it has profound implications for all of us individually, for our organizations, and for our society as a whole.

In this increasingly crowded, interconnected, globalized world of today, more than ever, we need people to bond together to solve problems that affect all of us—as individuals, in our organizations, and throughout our entire society.

It's not just a matter of returning to *Other-Directed* behavior. We are desperately in need of a new form of behavior:



Connected Behavior. This is behavior in which people are aware of and totally understand how their beliefs and emotions drive their own behavior, how the beliefs and feelings of others drive *their* behavior, and—most important—how *all of us are interconnected* as one human species who's survival is dependent on each of us contributing our individual uniqueness toward working constructively together.

And, here's where my optimism lights up. From many articles I've read, including workplace surveys, I see the younger generation (known as generation Y or millennials) as the impetus for this new form of behavior.

- ◆ Millennials are connected to the global Internet almost from the day they are born. At home and in their schools, they have instant access to information from around the world. They are more aware and knowledgeable of other cultures and political systems than any other generation preceding them.
- ◆ Millennials are the most ethnically diverse generation in history. According to the Pew Research Center, “18.5% are Hispanic; 14.2% are black; 4.3% are Asian; 3.2% are mixed race or other; and 59.8%, *a record low*, are white.”² They are more tolerant of individual uniqueness and open-mindedly acceptable of people different from themselves.
- ◆ Millennials are becoming the most educated generation we've seen. In their college experiences, they are interacting with people from another country, religion, race or culture more than ever before. They see themselves living in a global community.
- ◆ Millennials are highly collaborative. From their earliest days, they have been encouraged to participate in groups, such as team sports and camp activities. While many people in older generations prefer to work alone, millennials prefer group settings. In fact, they are much more active in community service and corporate social responsibility projects.



I believe Millennials are steering us down a long path that leads to *Connected Behavior*, which, after all, is a higher, more global form of *Other-Directed Behavior*. It is a style of behavior based on collaboration in reaching goals on a grander scale.



Connected Behavior makes possible the achievement of reaching the kind of goals that psychologist Muzafer Sherif way back in the 1950's called *Superordinate Goals*, goals beyond individuals and groups—goals that unite us all.

² Keeter, S. (2010). Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1501/millennials-new-survey-generationalpersonality-upbeat-open-new-ideas-technology-bound>