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### Sense of Actuality

To have a "sense of actuality" is to realize that every occurrence takes place in the "present". It is to appreciate that the "actual" is ever-changing, unsubstantial, and is the only first-order, existing reality. A great many individuals have difficulty grasping actuality. There are the hanger-oners who wish to preserve what they have, freeze the present fluidity into something static. They want to make the present permanent. Sometimes they even want to make the past overwhelming and try to obliterate the only existing reality man has by strangling the present with obsessions of the past. "Hanging-on" persons approach life as though it were a photograph album. They cling to habits and have difficulty in switching or moving from one situation to another. In addition to the "hanging-on" types there are those who anticipate--they miss actuality by trying to live in the not-yet-now. They are able to frighten themselves a great deal by imagining what is "going to happen". This also leads to stiffness and inflexibility. They float ahead of the present in a delusional world. Since most of what they dream about, think about and anticipate is unreal, fear is able to get a real toe-hold in their lives. When dwelling on the future, it is impossible at the same time to adequately cope with existing reality--that is, with the present.

It is fundamentally important for a counsellor to realize what tense he is living in. The past, the present, the future? If he has not a clearly developed sense of actuality for himself he can hardly help anyone else achieve a firmer grasp on existing reality. The two processes of remembering (pastizing) and anticipating (futurizing) are always rooted in the present. By developing a constancy of awareness as we slide off either into the future or the past, we are able to develop a recognition of living in the present.

The person who slides into the past often has a strong need to find scapegoats--he also is usually good in coming up with reasons. Don't forget that reasons are as "cheap as raspberries". A reason is a substitute for present awareness. Reasons are especially handy for the individual who needs to find fault or to "explain". Reasons are like "poor relatives"--take one in and a dozen more follow. The individual who can come up with convincing reasons successfully avoids taking responsibility in the present and remains unaware and in ignorance.

If we really want to experience the actual, then we can use a number of helpful tools. One I have already mentioned--develop an awareness of sliding off either into the future or the past.

A second step is to still the ceaseless "babbling" which goes on in our heads--we call it by the respectable name, "thinking". The word "thinking" is usually a screen expression. That is, it hides more than it conceals. "Thinking" covers up a host of mental processes such as remembering, imagining, anticipating, comparing, subvocal talking and so on.

misuse	translated
"I think you are cross with me"	I'm afraid....(or) I imagine....
"I am thinking about my childhood"	I'm remembering....(or) I'm reviewing...
"I think I will win the game"	I'm anticipating....(or) I imagine....

To clarify our minds we need to identify and avoid using screen expressions which conceal rather than reveal. A person who says that he "is nervous" may be speaking of annoyance, embarrassment, sexual tension, physical sensations, confusion, etc. Make up your own list of screen words and try to give more accurate translations. Check with another person to see if they understand what you have done. This exercise would help you to see that what we call "thinking" is usually not genuine thinking and will give us a peek at how we confuse our actual mental processes.

A third step is to practice listening to your own voice. You can do this through a recording to start with. To become really tuned in to your voice, however, you should try to hear it directly as you speak or read something aloud. Be aware of any impulse to change, or criticize your voice and try to "dissolve" the impulse by simply being aware of it. The point is not to change your voice but to become aware of it, as it actually is, in a living situation.

Try starting your spoken thoughts with the words, "As I say to myself....", or "I tell myself...." and then listen to your own voice as you complete the statements. Write down short descriptive statements (or just adjectives) about the sound of your voice. Have another person give you his impressions of your voice. Try to hear your actual voice.

By awareness of tendencies to "slide" from the present into the future, by classifying just which mental processes we use, by identifying "screen" expressions, and by establishing contact with our "living" voice, we can build a sense of the actual.