HOLLIS CASWELL used to remind his students that, of the many things curriculum workers are expected to know, they should probably know best the process of curriculum change. Some of us, seeing the realities of a curriculum coordinator’s role looming just ahead, were compelled to formulate quickly if tentatively the process by which people change their behavior and attitudes. When we tested our formulations in field situations, we began to sense some of the forces that assist and impede change. Furthermore, we felt the slowdown that comes from giving helpful forces our ill-timed or ill-advised assistance.

In my earlier days as a school administrator, I defined curriculum improvement simply as curriculum change in the “right” direction. I was quite certain that I knew what was “right,” and that persons who did not accord with my views were either stubborn or unintelligent.

Sometimes I have wondered about my tendency in subsequent days to condemn other people’s resistance to change—and then to spend so little time in their presence. Mostly I was preoccupied then with inanimate objects, especially with textbooks and courses of study. With satisfaction I manipulated things and, when I got around to them, people.

Much graduate study and hard experience were needed to convince me that I myself must change. I think I have only partly learned the lesson. Nevertheless I have developed a formulation of the change process which, for me at least, looks like this:

For myself, I interpret this diagram as follows:

Some of the stimuli in my environment contribute to my readiness for change.
by creating in me a felt need. This need is met, at least in part, by a planned or fortuitous experience. Largely as the result of this experience or a series of experiences, I see myself and my environment in a new light. Consequently I develop new values, and subsequently new goals. Sometimes the new goals arouse in me additional needs, and I find myself in another orbit of change. Because I'm an easily discouraged, easily distracted individual, I need encouragement, help and stimulation during the process of change. Also, the nearer my newly developed values are to the values I hold dear, the more permanent the change in me is likely to be.

Of course, I see dangers and difficulties in this learning cycle. For instance, I often confuse adverse change with genuine improvement. I know too little about the kinds of experiences that create with facility desired changes in me.

Helping Others Change

If I have trouble with constructive change in me, how much more pervasively may I be expected to have trouble in helping others improve themselves! Poorly as I know myself, I know the values, temperaments and previous experiences of others much less well. Often I feel and behave like a surgeon who must perform an operation, with the occasional cooperation of his patient, while the lights are out.

Despite the dimness of the curriculum worker's perception, he does sometimes help other persons change themselves. There was, for instance, Miss Buntz, a high school English teacher who, it seemed to some of us in her school system, remained for a long time unresponsive to certain needs of her pupils. The majority of the graduates of her high school went to work in the offices of local business firms. They had needs which were related directly to their future employment. But Miss Buntz did not appear to recognize these needs, though she had been "softened" by talking with guidance personnel, by reading books about general and professional education, and by inspecting curriculum materials from neighboring schools.

One day Miss Buntz's principal suggested that she use her allotted "intervisitation days" in calling on personnel directors of local business firms. Two days' experience in business offices brought Miss Buntz back to school with a desire to teach eleventh and twelfth graders about questionnaire forms, letters of application, and employment interviews. During the following months, she became a leading campaigner for a curriculum oriented to social use as well as to classical scholarship.

Miss Buntz seems to have changed rather dramatically. Surely none of us in the workaday world is changed as dramatically as was St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Most of us are changed gradually, like the eunuch who was already reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah when Philip encountered him. Professionally, we have our fifty-third chapters of Isaiah. Frequently we need only a little personal attention, a little added explanation to send us beyond these chapters into a change orbit.

Beliefs About Change

Several years of work with people who have changed their behavior and attitudes have led me to certain beliefs about the conditions under which im-
provement in people, and therefore in the curriculum, most readily occurs:

1. People improve with greatest enthusiasm when they detect the desire of the change agent to improve himself. The argument, “You need changing, and I am here to change you,” has slight effect. On the contrary, “We have a common problem; to solve it, we should all improve our competencies” has a pleasanter, more convincing ring.

2. The direction of change should be determined cooperatively. My direction and your direction may differ. Let us, therefore, set our goals carefully and cooperatively, that we may proceed toward them with all appropriate speed. Certainly we should try to make sure that the proposed change will yield improvement.

3. To promote change, we must identify and examine each other’s centrally held values. This action is difficult and time consuming. It requires the best in communication—the careful listening that Carl Rogers talks about, the careful observing that Daniel Prescott recommends to teachers. It demands lengthy talking together and prolonged watching of each other’s behavior, so that we may truly say, “We know each other.”

4. Change often occurs in informal settings. The seeds of change are planted, and often come to maturity, during coffee breaks and at picnics. Formal in-service media are needed, but we know little more about their effectiveness than we know about the effectiveness of sharing ideas during informal conversation.

5. We should seek to change ourselves, and to help others change themselves, through a variety of experiences. We merely guess which in-service media function consistently best. Because we do not know, we should experiment with all of them—workshops, personal conferences, directed reading, intervisitation, and the others—in varied settings. Also, we should alter the nature of the experiences provided within the media.

6. We should divide our time, as circumstances seem to require, between individual and group contacts. Work with individuals and work with groups have their respective merits. During individual conferences, most of us like to be stimulated and encouraged, but we dislike being told. In group settings, we prize both productivity and good human relationships. Curriculum workers apparently need more preparation in both individual conferencing and group work. As for myself, I still stumble in both areas of the curriculum worker’s needed competency.

7. We should act as though we realized that persons’ resistance to change constitutes a major individual difference. Not only are some people more generally resistant than others, but all of us seem to vary in our specific resistances. For example, I have readily learned to hold my fishing rod in an unorthodox position, but I am unwilling to accede to the hot weather fashion of wearing Bermuda shorts and knee-high socks. Knowing that all of us are more or less resistant to change in some areas of our living, we should relinquish our role as zealous change agents when our zeal promises to become offensive.

8. Whenever possible, change should occur in a setting that involves problem solving. I believe other people have best helped me change when they have worked with me to solve one of my problems. Occasionally, a problem has proved so threatening that I have been unable to face it, except in the guise of another person’s problem. Certain prob-
lems, like the nonconforming and disturbing behavior of one’s pupils, are simply not “respectable,” and can therefore not be easily discussed. As curriculum workers, we need to do all we can to make large numbers of legitimate problems respectable, and to help others deal with their problems directly or indirectly. Often, too, I have been deluded into accepting certain problems at their face value. We should remember that the problem which manifests itself initially may be only a cover-up for the real problem that lies beneath it.

9. We should try to create and maintain a climate of freedom for those with whom we work. This statement rests on the thesis that people improve only when they feel free to improve. What “my superiors expect of me” often has its foundation in rumor, allegation, and suspicion. Nevertheless, poorly grounded feelings influence behavior. The curriculum worker simply cannot be too careful in guarding his words and actions against flagrant misinterpretation. The little things in life do so often count.

10. We should seek to keep channels of communication open. Here is another well-substantiated belief that’s hard to put into action. We know so little about the psychological static that gets between the sender and the receiver of a message! Presumably much of the static can be cleared by profitably utilized face-to-face communication. Good utilization depends greatly on trying to hear what others have to say: by listening carefully, by repeating or rephrasing people’s comments in their presence, by seeming to try to understand.

11. We should remember that persons in status leadership positions have great power to satisfy need. Administrators and coordinators who have power to dis-

pense position, salary, approval, knowledge, prestige, disciplinary control, and even affection should distribute their bounty very judiciously. It’s easy to seduce or bludgeon people into temporary, unfulfilling change.

12. Once we have been launched into our orbits of change, we often need additional impulses. Beyond simple help and encouragement, we may need more of the same experiences we had originally, or different but related ones. Above all, we should not be permitted to flounder. Not only the immediate process but our potentiality for future change may be damaged by frustration.

13. The curriculum worker, as change agent, should operate on a limited number of fronts at a given time. “Fighting the whole war” is simply too big a project for a mere, puny individual. It’s possible for the change agent to find himself working with so many people that he doesn’t work with any of them really well.

14. A change agent’s success depends substantially on his ability to maintain his prestige and acceptance. What the change agent is and what he does to help others lie at the root of his reputation. While he cannot hope to remain completely beyond suspicion, he can guard his reputation by every animadversion. I wish, for example, I could “take back” many a word and several deeds that have damaged my effectiveness as a curriculum coordinator.

The preceding statements are, as I have said, only a series of beliefs. They have been tested little by research but much, I think, by experience. They suggest numerous hypotheses that should be tested by curriculum personnel as they continue to study the process of change.