

# Principles and Conditions of Learning & Behavior

by Gaines Steer

Many moons ago (circa 1967) I was exposed in graduate school to the “Principles of and Conditions for Learning,” an unpublished treatise by two university professors: Horne and Pine. Today, these principles are ubiquitous, having underwritten legions of theories and practices in education and human service arenas as well as the family kitchen table and assorted athletic fields. These principles have withstood the test of our time. We could be thankful....

When I first was exposed to these behavioral science ideas and ideals, I sensed this was the platform for an emerging career: Community Organizer. (I always capitalize the title; Bare with me, please.). You may recall the daring and dangerous definition of a Community Organizer: “To take the audacious oath to uphold the democratic principle.” I stand guilty, as charged. I’d claim a C+, @ audacity!

What are these referenced principles, the serious reader asks? Ah So! They are 12 in number and 23 in substrata. Hardly the volume tolerated, even in a famous newspaper such as this.... Do not despair! Brevity is a virtue that I have long admired, yet seldom attained. Since six is one-half of 12, I shall suffice it to summarize the following 6 principles:

- Learning is an experience which is activated by the learner, not {only} by the teacher or group. Changes in perception and behavior are products of the learner exploring and discovering personal meaning.

- No one teaches anyone anything of significance {parents excepted}.  
People learn what they want to learn, see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. (Hear; Hear!)
- Behavioral change is a consequence of experience. ....change is influenced by responsibility and independence. Experiential.
- Learning is an evolutionary process. Behavioral change requires time and Patience. {trust this one!}
- One of the richest resources of learning is the learner her/his self. Each individual owns an accumulation of experience, ideas, feelings and attitudes, a rich vein for problem-solving.
- Learning is facilitated in an atmosphere which consistently recognizes our right to make mistakes. {FYI: I made an A+ @ this one.}

I personalize this subject with my comments and imbue it with my idiosyncratic writer's voice because I wish to connect intimately to the reader. Who among us can be exposed to these earnest voices without discovering personal and collective implications for our lives and times.

*Gaines Steer is a writer and story-teller who lives in Pittsboro. Gaines is the author of "A Story Worth Tellin': a documented memoir"*

