

2003 ALFRED KORZYBSKI MEMORIAL LECTURE

ON THE TEACHING OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

BY SANFORD I. BERMAN

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INTRODUCTION

BY BRUCE I. KODISH

What a great honor to be here to introduce our speaker for this evening, Sanford I. Berman.

Doctor Berman, known to his friends as Sandy, joins a line of distinguished presenters, in one of the most important, though perhaps least known, annual speakers' series on the planet: The Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, also known as the AKML.

Since 1952, when the first Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture happened, we've had such individuals as Ashley Montague, Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, Jacob Bronowski, L. L. White, George Steiner, Gregory Bateson, Kenneth G. Johnson, Neil Postman, Albert Ellis, Steve Allen, Robert P. Pula, and many others.

I feel particularly delighted tonight that we will hear as AKML speaker, Sandy Berman, who has directly devoted a significant part of his life energies to the growth of general semantics. Sandy very accurately fits my criteria of a Renaissance man, which includes a fierce appetite for experience, broad ranging interests, and multiple talents in many different forms of creative expression.

Now, I thought that I came up with this on my own, but I later found out that, a number of years ago, some newspaper writer wrote a column about Sandy entitled, "Renaissance Man." So, I consider that as independent corroboration of my evaluation.

I'll just give you a short list of some of Sandy's many accomplishments, which might fill the CV's [curricula vitae's] of quite a few less talented individuals.

Sandy started out in his native Minnesota—I'll just go over his academic background. He has a Bachelor's degree in Radio and Communications from the University of Minnesota; a Master's in Speech from Teacher's College, Columbia University; and he received his doctorate in Speech Communications from Northwestern University, where he then assisted Dr. Irving J. Lee in his famous general-semantics classes.

And Sandy had also studied with S. I. Hayakawa, and at the Institute of General Semantics. And his doctorate work was directly related to general semantics, in the speech discipline.

Since the 1950s, Sandy has had multiple, and sometime concurrent careers, as a university lecturer, nightclub entertainer, stage hypnotist . . .

I'm constantly learning things about Sandy and his many lives. He's done work as a seminar presenter, a motivational speaker, and a success coach, a popular author, a newspaper columnist, a businessman, and a serious scholar in the history and philosophy of science, and scientific epistemology.

And I want to just briefly mention his book, *Logic and General Semantics*, which has his editing with additional articles and his own commentary on the work of the long forgotten philosopher, Oliver L. Reiser—a very important philosopher in relation to general semantics. And I, and many of the top people in terms of general-semantics scholarship, consider this one of the most important works on philosophy and the relationship between philosophy and general semantics, that's been written in a very long time.

Sandy has served as president of the International Society for General Semantics, and on the Board of Trustees of both the Society and the Institute of General Semantics. In recent years Sandy has also become prominent as a GS philanthropist, sharing some of the rewards of his successes to support a variety of GS-related projects. These include establishing three university Chairs in general semantics in the communications departments at San Diego State University, the University of California at San Diego, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, our host for this conference.

The scope of Sandy's span of activities could leave a person breathless, but I feel glad to report that Sandy seems to breathe rather easily. Some of this may result from his internalizing of general semantics. But I also consider that it may have something to do with an important aspect of Sandy that I have abstracted from observing him in action over a number of years. His deep love of people, and his heartfelt desire to help in whatever way he can.

Now tonight, Sandy's talk will not go as advertised. He will not speak primarily —although I don't know what he is going to say—but he told me that he had changed the topic from "GS and the Philosophy of Science" to focus on teaching and training in general semantics.

So I will now present to you Dr. Sanford I. Berman.

SANFORD I. BERMAN: Thank you very much, Bruce. When I count to three, you'll wake up! [audience laughter]. That introduction was like a glass of perfume, smells pretty but it shouldn't be swallowed.

I changed my speech because I don't believe in reading speeches—I learned that from Irving Lee—but I did write a 50-page paper, [See following article] and I hope the speech tonight will be more enjoyable, because I brought all my best jokes and illustrations to demonstrate how Irving J. Lee lectured at Northwestern University—and how I did also—but not nearly, nearly as well, believe me.

First I want to mention, because we are video-taping this speech and making it available, people will ask, "What are some good books in general semantics?" And [addressing Bruce Kodish] I'm returning your kind words by mentioning that this is the best new book-length introduction on general semantics [*Drive Yourself Sane*, by Susan Presby Kodish and Bruce I. Kodish].

I teach on a sophomoric level, as you'll see tonight. And others of you teach on a more scientific, scholarly level. You'll see a more scholarly level perhaps in the paper that I wrote already, on the history of man's thinking, from pre-scientific thinking—the projections and animisms, and other kinds of misevaluations, pre-scientific thinking of pre-scientific man—to the aristotelian era, and Galileo, Newton—to Einstein—to post-einsteinian thinking, of quarks and string theory. In fact, I've added on to the structural differential, the electrons, protons, neutrons, sub-microscopic level—further up are the string theory and quarks.

I've underlined 150 books—I don't just read books, I underline them, mark in the margin everything related to general semantics—and as far as I know not too many people have written books on the relationship between general semantics and the philosophy of science. And I do this, as I point out in the paper, because there are many people who have been critical of general semantics.

In fact, I didn't bring it with me, but some of you might like to know, I did send to Jeff Mordkowitz and to Paul Johnston, a book I edited, of some really fine articles on general semantics written by Hayakawa, Rapoport (on what is the aristotelian structure of language), Stuart Chase, and many others. I edited that book. I hope it will come out next year.

I also edited another book on critics of general semantics. Irving Lee once said, “You know, we’ve got to deal with the critics of general semantics”—like Bruce did [*General Semantics Bulletin* #64] with Max Black on his [Black’s] book on logic—and I’ve got another book on quite a few critics of general semantics, because many of these criticisms are based upon total misunderstanding.

One critic said that if you want to learn general semantics, you don’t go to *Science and Sanity*. And yet Korzybski ‘invented’ general semantics in *Science and Sanity*. So that paper will be coming out.

This is a fine introductory book [*Drive Yourself Sane*]. And there is another book—as you well know, we publish this, still a classic—*People in Quandaries*.

When Jeff Mordkowitz taught at the seminar [2001, in Arcadia, CA], he asked me something about how can we train in general semantics, and if I had any ideas. I replied that I had added onto Wendell Johnson’s *People in Quandaries*—if you look in the back of the book, you’ll see “semantic exercises”—and I did add at least five more things that teachers can do to help extensionalize your understanding of general semantics.

Also, I brought an outline of a book that I wrote 40 years ago. I’ve got one chapter left to finish. I got involved in my nightclub career in San Diego, literally working day and night for 40 years.

I apologize if I talk about myself, but as Sam Bois said—in the introduction to one of his books, either the *Art of Awareness* or the other one, *Explorations in Awareness*—“Who else’s nervous system can I talk about?”

I’m going to talk tonight about drawing people to general semantics. Why don’t we have more people in general semantics?

One of the reasons I became a nightclub hypnotist is because everybody in the world wants to be entertained, they don’t want to be educated.

When I had my success motivation seminars I changed the title from “general semantics and effective communication” to “success motivation” because I found out that more people would rather learn how to become millionaires than learn how to lessen misunderstandings.

And so while I started off with 300 students, the number went down to 200, and 100, through the years, and when we had the difficulties with gas availability in 1974, we’d have 50 students; and then it went up. But I taught it for 15 years, with two or three hundred people in the class sleeping [in trances] all over the place.

You see my seminars were under hypnosis and self-hypnosis, and I became a nightclub hypnotist because I dislike ignorance and stupidity of all kinds. The best way to educate people that hypnosis is true is to *show* them on the *factual* level.

Many years ago I took a course in parapsychology at the University of Minnesota, from Dr. William Heron, and he put on a demonstration of hypnosis, and I said to myself, “Why is this academic professor doing this carnival stuff?”

People still have that kind of evaluation toward that taboo word, *hypnosis*. And so for my minor in anthropology and PhD, I wrote several papers on primitive mentality, as well as taboos. And I just happen to have made a lot more money as a nightclub hypnotist than I would as a teacher, I believe, in one-fifth the time.

But the big money of course is buying real estate. The lady from Wisconsin said, “I hear you’re in real estate.” And I said “No, I only buy it.” There’s a big difference.

And this is why I can give money for this conference.

I'm also going to give money to train people to lecture, or have you train them to lecture rather, like Bob Eddy did the other day. As soon as Bob got out of the gate, I knew he was a professional lecturer. He did everything that a professional one does.

So today I want to talk very quickly about a course that I developed.

I've lectured on effective communication and general semantics to companies all over the country, especially when I was in Chicago.

Tonight I'm going to talk about stupidity and ignorance and lack of knowledge, because people have still not been taught the important principles of general semantics.

Those of us who have written books on general semantics still have not abstracted one-tenth of what Korzybski wrote about. Irving Lee said, "There's a gold mine of information here." And I try to present it on the easy-to-understand level of abstraction.

Well, what do we mean by that?

Many of you are familiar with Bill Haney's test on inferences. This was his PhD dissertation. Around that same time, I made a test for x-number of different principles: *projection and misunderstanding*, for example.

When I open my class, I don't give the students a lecture on general semantics at all. I simply ask questions.

"Which girl do you think is more beautiful, Diane Darling or Elsie Zadrovski? Betsy Hacraft or Louise Love? Lisa Hoy or Joy LaMar?"

Which fellow do you think is more handsome: Tim Condon or Abe Schwartz? Allen Dale or Nick Nipopolous?"

Well, I go up and down the rows, and would you believe it, they answer the questions before I start to lecture on anything in general semantics. In other words, they know what the person looks like *by the name alone!*

Now we did videotape my lectures at San Diego State once and the next day I came in and I lectured in class and I read the same questions, and did they answer them? No, they were laughing like heck, because they had *changed*, they had realized that it was *stupid* to answer those kinds of questions.

We don't know from the words alone.

So I have many different quizzes that I give my students that I want to share with Steve Stockdale and others.

One quiz is on *projection and misunderstanding*, another on the *two-valued orientation*, and many, many others.

Bill Haney called his quiz an "EQ test", an *Evaluation Quotient*. And I said no, you've got to index it. Your test is only for the *fact-inference principle*—EQ₁. I developed tests for many different principles—EQ_n.

I hope that some of you will take me up on this to construct your own kind of a quiz *before* you give your students a lecture on general semantics—because many philosophy professors used to dismiss general semantics as "old stuff"—*yet they were the ones who violated the principles the most*, some of the ones who had that kind of an *allness* orientation.

So you've got to construct a quiz to invite the students to misunderstand, invite them to jump to conclusions, invite them to behave stupidly.

And I only say this because I was teaching 50 top executives for about 13 years at the University of Chicago's Management-Development Seminar. And they loved this kind of training. These were all presidents and vice-presidents of large corporations.

I'd give them a quiz before the lectures, and I'd give them a quiz at the end. At the beginning, one guy got about 56 wrong out of about 70 or so. And at the end of the course, he came up with his test—he had only about four or five wrong—and he came up, and he was almost mad at me. He said, “You mean to say I was this god-damned dumb?”

I almost said, “Yes.” [audience laughter]

They also say, “Why didn't I get this stuff 30 years ago?” And all of you may be asking, “Why aren't my kids getting this today?”

I'm talking about a *certain way of teaching*. I'm talking about *getting it into their nervous systems*. I'm talking about it becoming enjoyable.

I don't stand in one place when lecturing. Unfortunately Irving Lee's lectures were filmed with him standing in one place.

Dr. Lee and I were driving in downtown Chicago, and he said, “You know, they want me to make some films for Indiana University, and I don't know if I should [because he was very busy].” And I said, “Yes, you know this is very *time-binding* to make those films.” And we're all very fortunate that he did.

But while we have the films of Irving Lee lecturing to a camera, we don't have Irving Lee filmed with his students. This was when he was at his best. He'd have little games and quizzes and would invite them to participate, and this is how you teach general semantics, not one-way communication.

And so Lee would go to the blackboard, and he'd say, “Give me a directive that I cannot possibly misunderstand.” One person would say, “Well, write your name on the blackboard.” And then Lee would write on the board with his finger; or he would write “your name on the blackboard.”

It's the easiest thing in the world to misunderstand.

My students only got me one time.

I was teaching at the University of Chicago's Management-Development Seminar, and I'd lecture from 4:30 to 6:00, and we'd take a dinner break from 6:00 to 7:00, and come back at 7:00 and lecture until 8:30. And I said, “You've got one hour during dinner to see if you can think of a directive that I cannot misunderstand.”

After dinner we returned. One guy was sitting in the corner and he stood up, and I said, “OK, what is the directive?”

He had an eraser in his hand; he threw it at my head and said “Duck.”

I did not misunderstand! [laughter]

So to those of you who teach—we all have different personalities, but you've got to be more dynamic, and meaningful, and practical and pragmatic if you want to get to the introductory student.

I'm not that bright. I like to teach on the introductory level, even for top executives in industry.

We had many professors at the University of Chicago who couldn't teach these executives—the professors were too theoretical. They were way up here [raises arm]. The students wanted to know how you lessen misunderstandings. How do you stop jumping to conclusions? How do you stop individuals from thinking that they know it all?

I had one executive from the Omaha Gas Company, used to come in from Omaha to Chicago, took the seminar, and said “You know, we have trouble with some of our individuals. The psychological tests say they have ‘poor judgment’. We don't know what that means.”

So I said, “Well, during the course I’ll give you much more of an example in terms of poor judgment.”

So I explained a little bit, poor judgment is defined by, number one, having *signal reactions*. Number two, *jumping to conclusions*; number three, having an *allness orientation*; not looking for enough facts, etc.

And the whole course, my entire course, Dr. Lee’s entire introductory course, called “Language and Thought”—contrasted the *intensional orientation* on one side, the *extensional orientation* on the other. The extensional orientation being the scientific method; the intensional method, of course, is the verbal orientation.

I defined it a little differently in the speech that I wrote for the AKML. Irving Lee said, “How do you solve problems?” There are two different ways.

The intensional way, through logic, through reasoning, through debate, through argumentation, goes back to Aristotle and Plato. This is the verbal method.

The extensional way of solving problems is the scientific method of experimentation. This is the factual method.

So two principles are the two main ones that I looked for in all the history of science, the extensional and the intensional orientation, and elementalism and non-elementalism.

And where you have scientific progress, you have non-elementalism come into play. They used to assume that electricity and magnetism were separate. Now we have electro-magnetism. And there are many, many other examples that I abstracted.

I also have here—some of you who took the seminar—the “speech for all occasions.” You can give it anywhere. These are high-order abstractions that are not specific and concrete. What do we mean, “specific and concrete”? It is very simple to explain.

Here we have Milton’s [Dawes] chair. The word “chair” stands for this nonverbal object. But it also stands not only for this chair, but for all chairs. And then we have the word “furniture,” which includes this chair and other kinds of furniture. See—higher order abstractions. Then we have “business,” “industry,” “commerce”; you see, the different orders of abstraction.

And the important thing is to teach people how to be specific and concrete, because, as I will point out very quickly, this is where you have misunderstandings—in the levels of higher-order abstractions.

And it is ignorance—we’re all ignorant in many areas—but stupidity is something else again.

If you don’t understand someone else, ask them, “What do you mean?”

As we will see, the burden for effective communication is upon whom, the speaker or the listener?

Both! Oh, the speakers assume, “I gave you, I handed you a handful of meaning”—as you handed me water in the glass (I’m assuming it’s water)—not in Bob Pula’s glass [audience laughter].

So I can hand you meaning, say something to you. You’re afflicted with ‘allness’ if you don’t ask me “What do you mean” and you misunderstand me.

The most important thing about the *allness orientation*, is that it is extremely *subtle*. This principle was especially meaningful to top executives in business and industry. General semantics is especially important in effective communication, human relations and management generally.

Those of you teaching general semantics, *emphasize* that word “subtle.” The allness orientation does not necessarily manifest itself in the extreme form of dogmatic behavior, the know-it-all, the closed mind; it manifests itself in *extremely subtle* ways, the refusal to listen, the refusal to learn, the refusal to change or keep up to date, etc.

Oh boy, I used to teach at Northwestern's Traffic Institute. I loved teaching those army officers—police chiefs, Navy officers. When they came to class with their uniform on, they'd shove a shoulder at you as if to say, "OK boy, I dare you to teach me. Show me something I don't already know!"

They'd come to class in a T-shirt, and their behavior would be different.

I had one colonel—this was interesting—he sent me a letter. He said, "I want you to know that during the class I didn't believe one damn word you said." He said, "I now find myself practicing these principles. Would you please send me your quiz? I want to teach this way."

So what I do, the first principle that I want to talk about, very quickly, is the *signal reaction*. Most misevaluations start from the signal reaction, automatic, impulsive behavior.

Here we have something—an event or happening which has a *nervous impact*— followed by an *evaluation*, a way of thinking, then *talk*. After the word "talk," add the word *act*, because we are concerned with behavior, *especially* stupid behavior not based on facts.

In fact, Irving Lee called his introductory class, "Language and Thought." And I said, "Why don't you call it Language, Thought and Behavior?" And he said, "The psychology boys think that behavior is within their province."

The book that I'm going to finish [writing] is called, *How to Think, Communicate and Behave Intelligently*. Note *behave intelligently*—we are concerned with behavior.

George Santayana said, "The aim of education is the condition of suspended judgment on everything." I don't know, let's see. How can we train people in saying, "I don't know?"

Where do you think that's from—general semantics! It's the *non-allness orientation*.

When I gave these chairs to the different universities, one of the universities didn't want to call it "general semantics." They wanted to call it "language," and I said "OK" just to get it into the university. But I made sure that general semantics was an important part.

You see, Irving Lee used to say, "You've got to realize that general semantics did not come from within the university"—Korzybski was not a PhD, Korzybski was not a professor." Although Hayakawa, and Lee, and Wendell Johnson and others did work from within universities.

So the most important thing, the reason I gave this money, was to get it within the university.

Now I'm looking for dynamic young teachers—and Steve, I will finance public speaking contests, because when I was in ninth grade, I began entering oratorical contests—the greatest training I've ever had.

And in my show-business career—who do you think I modeled myself after—it was a great showman, Irving J. Lee!

Now we have neuro-linguistic programming. You see, I was the first teacher as far as I know, to use hypnosis and self-hypnosis in education. I won't talk about that—but very important, hypnosis is a powerful tool to *internalize* the principles of general semantics.

It's the easiest thing in the world to jump to conclusions. It takes no gray-matter at all. We must teach the difference between our inferences and statements of fact. For example:

A well-filled bus was proceeding down a Boston thoroughfare, when a truck cut sharply into its path, and only the bus driver's quick wits and action prevented disaster. Pale and shaken, he voiced his estimate of the vanishing truck driver's character, origin, and mode of life, in words appallingly stark. Then remembering the audience at his back, he turned to face them.

A little white-haired woman forestalled his apology. "My congratulations," she said, "upon an admirable presentation of what we may reasonably *assume* to be the facts."

This one is kind of subtle, very subtle, and it afflicts all of us:

A man, accompanied by a small boy, entered a barber shop, and he asked for a haircut. When the barber had finished with him, the man said, "I'm going next door for a beer while you cut the kid's hair." The barber gave the boy a haircut and waited for the man to return. Finally, he turned to the kid and asked, "Where in Pete's sake did your father go?"

"Oh," said the boy, "That ain't my father, he's a man who stopped me in the street and asked me if I'd like to get a free haircut."

The third barrier to effective communication is the *allness orientation*. And the Kodishes, plus many people, give an excellent description of the process of abstracting, how our nervous system abstracts.

And in my classes I ask the question, "Can we know all about anything?" And finally the students come to the conclusion, after awhile, that you cannot know all about anything.

Then I ask them, "Have you ever met individuals who act *as if* they know all about everything or something?" Oh yeah. It's always the other person.

So that's the allness orientation. The other half of abstracting is that if you are *not conscious of abstracting*, you fall victim to the *allness orientation*. And the important thing is that it is so extremely *subtle*. It manifests itself in the refusal to listen; and usually I fall victim to some of the illustrations myself.

All of you are listening to a different lecture right now. All of you are sitting on your *assumptions*! And I'm standing on mine.

How do we know that the roof won't cave in? Life is a series of *assumptions*. But wisdom *begins* when we *check our assumptions*, when we don't pass off our inferences and assumptions *as if* they were factual.

So the allness orientation manifests itself in the refusal to listen, the refusal to learn, the refusal to look or look again, the refusal to change or keep up-to-date, assuming knowledge that one does not have, the refusal to ask questions. Both the speaker and the listener must ask the other person, "Do you know what I mean," or "Is this what you mean?"

So we have many examples here. Here's one that I like, of abstracting:

We were seated in the lobby of the hotel as she walked swiftly by us. She turned a corner sharply and was gone. "That's an uncommonly good-looking girl," I said to my wife, who was deep in a cross-word puzzle.

"Do you mean the one in that imitation blue-taffeta dress with the green and red flower design?"

"The girl that just walked by," I said. "Yes," said my wife, "with that dowdy rayon dress on. It's a copy of the one that I saw at Hattie Carnegie's, and a poor copy at that. You'd think though that she'd have better taste than to wear a chartreuse hat with it, especially with her bleached hair."

"Bleached? I didn't notice her hair was bleached."

"Good heavens, you could almost smell the peroxide. I don't mind a bit of make-up, provided it looks fairly natural, but you could scrape that rouge off with a knife. They ought to add a course in make-up to the curriculum at Smith."

"Smith? Why Smith?"

"From her class pin, of course. You must have noticed it from her charm bracelet."

"I wasn't looking at her wrist."

"I bet you weren't, nor at those fat legs of hers either. A woman with legs like that shouldn't wear high-heels, patent leather shoes."

“I thought she was a very pretty girl,” I said, apologetically.

“Well you may be right,” said my wife. “I was busy with my crossword puzzle, and I didn’t notice her, particularly.” [audience laughter]

And you know what an atheist is, don’t you? An atheist is a person who goes to a Notre Dame, Southern Methodist football game, and doesn’t care who wins.

I watch a lot of sports—I happen to have four television sets that I watch every night at the same time, including my favorite, a 61-inch one, where I watch sports. Right now, I’m video-taping the fight.

I hypnotized Ken Norton for two and a half years—Bob Eddy was at the fight where Norton was knocked out by José Garcia, 1970.

I was having my success seminars at Ken Norton’s manager’s hotel at La Jolla, at the Holiday Inn. I saw this gray-haired guy back there being hypnotized. He came up to me and said, “You know, my boxer Ken Norton just got knocked out by José Garcia. I believe in what you are teaching—success motivation—and would you hypnotize him?”

I hypnotized Ken for two and a half years, right through the time when he broke Mohammed Ali’s jaw.

Then I was supposed to be on Johnny Carson’s show with Ken, but the manager went on Johnny Carson’s show with Ken Norton himself. They froze me out completely, and I wouldn’t hypnotize him after that.

Now basically what I am saying is that what I teach in success motivation is that nobody cares about you except you yourself. You’ve got to learn to be *inner directed*, to quote David Reisman in his book, *The Lonely Crowd*. There are known ‘laws’ of success.

Steve, tomorrow, if I could have five minutes, I’ve got many other cassettes that I’ve written and recorded. Charles Peirce’s *Philosophy of Science*, A. J. Ayer’s book, I’ve got my whole success seminar, 13 cassettes, where I brought together general semantics, communication, and the ‘laws’ of success.

Now heretofore we didn’t want to bring success motivation into general semantics. That’s why we don’t have so many people here at the conference. You’ve got to get to the average person. They’re the ones who need it. And I can talk to you more about that. OK?

Here’s the one I like on abstracting. Some of you may recall this. [See “The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes, in *Alfred Korzybski Collected Writings*, pp. 170-171.]

“In a railroad compartment an American grandmother with her young and attractive granddaughter, a Romanian officer, and a Nazi officer, were the only occupants. The train was passing through a dark tunnel, and all that was heard was a loud kiss and a vigorous slap. After the train emerged from the tunnel, nobody spoke, but the grandmother was saying to herself, ‘What a fine girl I have raised; she will take care of herself. I’m proud of her.’ The granddaughter was saying to herself, ‘Well, grandmother is old enough not to mind a little kiss; besides, the fellows are nice. I’m surprised what a hard wallop grandmother has.’ The Nazi officer was meditating, ‘How clever those Romanians are—they steal a kiss and have the other fellow slapped.’ The Romanian officer was chuckling to himself, ‘How smart I am! I kissed my own hand and slapped the Nazi!’ [audience laughter]

I like this next example because it’s so subtle, the allness orientation. Notice this.

A friend of mine, who is a father of 12, volunteered to baby-sit one evening so that his wife could have an evening’s relaxation at the movies. “Don’t let a single one of them come downstairs,” his wife instructed him as she went out.

He promised to carry out her instructions to the letter, and had just settled down with a book when he heard steps up the stairway. "Get back upstairs and stay there," he commanded sternly.

He read in peace for a few minutes and again heard soft footsteps. This time he added the threat of a spanking.

Soon he again detected stealthy sounds, and dashed out in time to see a small lad disappear up the top steps.

He had hardly returned to his book when a neighbor came in distractedly. "Oh Fred," she wailed, "I can't find my Willy anywhere. Have you seen him?"

"Here I am, Ma," said a tearful voice from the top of the stairs. "He won't let me go home!" [audience laughter]

So this allness orientation is so extremely subtle! And if we are trained in general semantics, we shouldn't behave like the "average" person. We will *check our assumptions*. We will *look and see*.

Thomas Edison said, "Show me a thoroughly satisfied man, and I will show you a failure." Charles Kettering said, "Some minds are like concrete, all mixed up and permanently set."

And again to show you the *subtlety*, here is another example:

The young man said in a faint voice, "You don't want to buy any life-insurance do you?"

"I certainly do not," the sales manager replied.

"I thought you didn't," the embarrassed solicitor said, and he headed for the door.

Then the sales manager called him back and addressed the confused and frightened young man. "My job is to hire and train salesmen, and you're about the worst salesman I've ever seen. You'll never sell by asking people if they don't want to buy. But because you're just starting out, I'm going to take out \$10,000 worth of insurance with you right now. Get out an application blank."

Fumblingly the salesman did so, and the deal was closed. Then the sales manager said, "Another word of advice young man. Learn a few standard organized sales talks!"

"Oh, I've already done that," the salesman replied. "I've got a standard talk for every type of prospect. This is my organized approach to sales managers." [audience laughter]

One final example deals with projection and misunderstanding. I ask my students, "Where do you find meaning?" And invariably they say, "Meanings are in words."

When I was at Teacher's College, Columbia, I had a discussion with one of the English teachers, and she said, "What's the difference if you say, "Meanings are in words," or "Meanings are in people"? I didn't have the answer then.

Well, I learned later on from Irving Lee: Here we have the speaker; here we have the listener. The speaker speaks with his meaning and the listener listens with her meaning. This is mode A [speaker], and this is mode B [listener]. And the question is, how can we get the speaker and the listener on the same channel of communication, mode C?

So I asked them, "The burden for effective communication is upon whom, the speaker or the listener?" Some people say the speaker, some people say the listener. Obviously, it's upon both.

If your concentration is on the speaker's words, if you start with the assumption that *words contain meaning*, then you fall victim to the problem of misunderstanding. Irving Lee called it, "the *container myth*," the *mythical assumption that words contain meaning* as that glass there contains water.

As Charles Sanders Peirce said—and I pronounce it "Purse" in my recordings because this was the pronunciation when he was in England. Charles Sanders Peirce said, "You do not *get* meaning, you respond *with* meaning." And so there are two ways of evaluating.

One is, let's say, mode A. If you assume that meanings are in words, you'll stop or short-circuit the process of communication too quickly. The logic runs, "I know what the word means, therefore I know what you mean." You stop right here, and you misunderstand.

But in mode B, if you are trained in general semantics to realize that *meanings are not in words, they're in people*, your attention will be *on the speaker*.

I don't want to know what the word means. I can look up 50 definitions in a dictionary, and it might very well be the wrong one—compared to how you are using it. I want to know what *you* mean.

And so the burden for effective communication is *both* upon the speaker (to be specific and concrete, and as extensional as possible) and the listener (to get on the speaker's channel of communication).

In business and industry, before an executive or a worker goes off and misunderstands the directive and costs the company hundreds or thousands of dollars, ask some simple questions: "What do you mean? How are you using the word? What do you want me to do?"

And this stuff is so *simple*, but so important in business and industry. In other words, words are ambiguous. We must be trained in the *ambiguity of language*.

Other points, and I will cover these very quickly, we learn the 'meanings' of words from our past experience. Therefore, meanings are personal; all of you are listening to a different lecture. Also, meanings are arbitrary. There is no inherent relationship between the word and what it represents. And finally, words don't mean anything, people mean. Meanings are in people, they are not in words.

Well, we talked about the tests that we can give. Here is one I used to give to my students at the Illinois Institute of Technology. We have an ambiguous picture, hard to see (of a worker coming into his boss's office), about a couple of guys. There's a girl looking disheveled. And the question, "What will they talk about, who are these people, how will it come out?" And on the bottom, "Write down the name, age, and sex."

And so you send five or six people outside, but keep one person there, and you pick a picture and let him or her look at a picture for a couple of minutes; then you bring the next person in, and the first person describes the picture to that person, and you bring in another person, and he/she describes it to that person, and so on.

And at the Illinois Institute of Technology, it turned out that the last person described the picture as showing a guy and a girl having sex in an alley. It was the funniest thing in the world as you saw the progression.

So in communication, you see two things happening, you have lost information, and you also will have *adding-in*, what was not there in the first place.

Here is another test that you can give your students, that I give to my students a lot.

There's a card on which four sentences are written, headed by "Bet you a drink that you can't read this card aloud correctly." The students see, "*Paris in the spring, Slow men at work, Once in a lifetime, Bird in the hand*"—I've gone all the way around the class, every one of them reading out loud the same thing. In reality, it says, "*Paris in the the Spring, Bird in the the hand, Slow men at at work, Once in a a lifetime, Bird in the the hand*." All the way around the room; people normally, naturally project their own meanings, or what they expect to see.

And so in human communication, number one, as we have said, "You learn the 'meanings of words' not from a dictionary, but from your past experience." Here's a good example:

The Lord's Prayer has had to withstand considerable abuse, especially from children trying to learn it from poor enunciators or from mumbling congregations. One little boy was heard to pray, "Harold be Thy name." Another begged, "Give us this day our jelly bread." A New York child petitioned, "Lead us not into Penn Station." [audience laughter] You can never be certain what the response will be.

The wife was talking with the maid. "You know, I suspect my husband is having an affair with his secretary." To which the maid replied, "I don't believe it—you're only saying it to make me jealous."

I like this one here. Notice the *subtlety* of the allness orientation. It was lunchtime. The elderly clerk opened his sandwiches, looked at them, exclaimed bitterly, "Cheese sandwiches, always cheese sandwiches!"

"Why don't you ask your wife to fix you another kind of sandwich," a colleague asked. "Who is married," said the man, indignantly. "I make these sandwiches myself."

I get a lot of these emails, and I love this one. I break up laughing; I hope I won't be crying in front of all of you. But let me share this with you. A lawyer is questioning a doctor on the stand. "Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check the pulse?" Answer: "No."

Question: "Did you check for blood pressure?" Answer: "No."

Question: "Did you check for breathing?" Answer: "No."

Question: "So then, is it possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy." Answer: "No."

Question: "How can you be so sure doctor?" Answer: "Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar."

Question: "But could the patient have still been alive, nevertheless?" Answer: "Yes, it is possible that he could have been alive and practicing law somewhere." [audience laughter]

Here's another one.

Question: "All your responses must be oral, OK?" Answer: "OK."

Question: "What school did you go to?" Answer: "Oral."

You do not *get* meaning. Your respond *with* meaning.

[Other stories]

Question: "Did you blow your horn or anything?" Answer: "After the accident?"

Question: "Before the accident?" Answer: "Sure, I played for ten years, I even went to school for it."

Judge: "Well, sir, I've reviewed this case, and I've decided to give your wife \$775 a week. Husband: "That's fair your honor. I'll try to send her a few bucks myself."

Question: "What is your date of birth?" Answer: "July 15th." Question: "What year." Answer: "Every year."

"It was announced today that Canada is now prepared to help the United States in its war against terrorism. They have promised to commit two of their largest battleships, six thousand armed troops, and 50 fighter jets. However, after the exchange rate, that comes down to a canoe, two Mounties, and a flying squirrel."

Well, we have a lot of these kinds of examples and illustrations to illustrate the humorous aspects of why we have misunderstandings, the ambiguity of language; and if you use jokes and illustrations, and entertainment in your lectures you are likely to have a better result. As Irving Lee said, "Humor is the most disarming means of persuasion."

I once lectured at the Waldorf Astoria in New York for a management group. And I followed Elliot Janeway—I don't know if any of you ever heard of him—he was a famous economist. The boringest, driest guy you ever met in your life.

And he was standing, reading his speech—guys were going to sleep—talked a long time...

You see, I'm a speech teacher. I've heard some speech teachers at speech conventions speak in a monotone [Here Dr. Berman speaks very softly in a monotone with no audience contact to illustrate poor speech]: "Today I want to lecture on public speaking students who are very bad speakers. They have no audience contact, they have no vocal projection, they have no vocal variety..." These are *speech* teachers!

So what I am saying here—use examples and illustrations and jokes, and above all, bodily movement. You'll make a tough target.

Well, one of the important things we general semanticists learn—that as we go through life, we know some of these principles, but it's still difficult to get them into our nervous systems.

I've handed out some things in answer to Jeff's question, "How do you train people in general semantics?"

I've written a couple of pages on that. Number one, Wendell Johnson talked about the semantic diary. I've had my students use that at the universities. I've written some other things of what you might do. Cut out a picture of some fruit from a page, cut out any kind of food, and give it to your students—and tell them to eat it. That's pretty extensional (factual). The word is not the thing! You've got to get off of the verbal level in training your students.

And so although we realize that we should change our ways of thinking, communicating, and behaving, it's still very difficult for many of us to do so, as indicated by this final example:

There was once a man who went around saying, "You know I think I'm dead." His friends finally persuaded him to consult a psychiatrist. When the patient told the psychiatrist that he thought he was dead, the psychiatrist told him to clench his fists, stand before a mirror and say, "Dead men don't bleed." He told the man to repeat this motion six times a day for a month, each time saying, "Dead men don't bleed."

He told the man to go home and carry out his instructions, and return at the end of the month.

The patient carried out the psychiatrist's instructions and at the end of the month he returned. The psychiatrist told him once again to go through the motions. The reason he had him tighten his fists was so the veins would come to the surface of the man's wrists. The man tightened his fists—and just as he said, "Dead men don't bleed," the psychiatrist jabbed a scalpel into the man's wrist. The blood gushed out, and the man hollered, "By God, dead men *do* bleed!" [audience laughter]

Let me leave you with one bit of advice, and I mean this very, very sincerely:

Don't believe one word I've said. Go out and try it.

Thank you all very much.