

Description of the Behavioral Structure of the Training

Excerpted from: "The Politics of Transformation: Recruitment - Indoctrination Processes In a Mass Marathon Psychology Organization"

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Introduction

[Note: "Vitality" was substituted for the name of a well-known large group awareness or mass marathon training.]

This section of the results chapter presents a linear, behavioral description of the structure of the Initial Training. This task is undertaken because, in a restrictive milieu, the milieu is the single most influential element in the field. Therefore, it is imperative that the structure of the training be described in detail.

In the case of mass marathon psychology organizations, the milieu is primarily composed of the behavioral structure the controlling organization imposes on the participants. The participants' experience depends in large part upon what the organization encourages, instructs, or coerces them to do. These structured manipulations are embodied in the events of the training (i.e., lectures, discussions, interpersonal exercises, or hypnotic inductions). The events are introduced, monitored, and managed from beginning to end by the trainer and his staff. He, in turn, appears to follow an extensive script, which guides the staff and the trainer in both the large agenda (e.g., the order and content of the events) and the small details (e.g., the correct song to play over the sound system or the proper deployment of the staff during a specific event). The carefully controlled structure evokes certain responses in participants, which then, in turn, are treated by the trainer as indicators of the participants' states of mind. He will therefore alter his behavior and the structure of the exercise accordingly. These changes will then make a further impact on the participants, and they will indicate the significance of the impact by their responses and so on.

Therefore, the entire recruitment-indoctrination process cannot be understood without a detailed description of the behavioral structure of the training. Research Question One has been developed in order to aid in the collection of the data. It states:

What does the Vitality Initial Training consist of, step by step? -What does the trainer say and do? What do the staff members say and do? --What environmental controls are used and what is their effect upon the participants (e.g. behavioral rules such as talking, eating and bathroom "privileges," the strategic use of music and lighting, social rewards and punishments. etc.) These data were collected through interviews with three Vitality graduates (see Appendix A. "Interview Guide A: Behavioral Structure of the Training"). Occasionally, when available and applicable, data collected from the 15 "experience" subjects were used as an adjunct to data from the "behavior" subjects. When used in this way the data from "experience" subjects were always clearly distinguished from that of the "behavior" subjects.

The data were then organized linearly and presented as a narrative. Section B is composed of (a) a brief description of each large event of the training reported in serial form, (b) a few brief

anecdotes from subjects that illustrate and add descriptive detail, and (c) some brief theoretical comments from the researcher. Data are organized linearly: all events, exercises, and statements are organized in the sequence in which subjects thought they occurred. Therefore data will be organized by starting with day one, event one, moving on to day one, event two, etc.

Research Proposition #1, which was developed from the working model, is then used as a way of systematically organizing and evaluating the data. The results of that evaluation will be found in Section C.

Because the researcher was restricted to interviewing techniques in order to recreate the structure of the training, this section is less accurate, detailed, and complete than it could have been if participant observation techniques had been possible. This is particularly true due to the emotional and behavioral pressures to which participants are exposed. It is important to remember that the training is composed of a high-intensity, rapidly moving series of intense emotional experiences. Often participants are exhausted, hungry, tired of thinking, giddy, and euphoric. All of this makes accurate retrieval of their memory of the order and content of events extremely difficult. This is particularly true since subjects are subjected to formal and informal hypnotic induction techniques at various points in the training. This accounts for the erratic nature of the reports. Sometimes subjects were extremely detailed in their memories of a trainer's statements or the order of an exercise. At other times they may simply have forgotten the content of an entire exercise. Although the subjects interviewed for the behavioral structure were chosen for their professional knowledge and objectivity, they too were affected by the milieu and were therefore unable to remember all details of the training. This unfortunately resulted in incomplete or vague descriptions of some of the events.

The training is composed of successive sessions on Wednesday night, Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday day and night, Sunday day and night, a Tuesday night post-training session ten days after graduation, and a post-training interview. Evening sessions begin at 6:30 PM and last until 11:30 or 12. Saturday starts at 10 am and lasts until approximately 12. Sunday starts at 9 am and lasts until approximately 12. Participants are instructed to wear comfortable clothing. Initial Trainings are usually held in the convention facilities of large, expensive hotels. A training is usually composed of 250-300 participants, many Vitality volunteers, several official Vitality staff, an assistant trainer, and a head trainer.

Day One

At the check-in table participants are given a nametag and told to wait by the closed doors and enter only when the doors are opened. Vitality volunteers mill around the waiting area, smiling and enthusiastic. Their job is to instruct the participants and to intensify their anticipatory excitement. Instead of a nametag one subject remembered that they wear a badge that is a picture of a hand holding up four of its five fingers. This appeared to some subjects to be some kind of sign or symbol. At the time they didn't understand what it signified and they were too preoccupied or socially anxious to ask. Fourteen of 15 "experience" subjects (93%) and 2 of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported feeling quite nervous or excited at the beginning of day one.

Approximately 10 minutes before the training is scheduled to begin, the doors are opened and participants stream in to the sound of "Theme From 2001". One subject recalled that she was very nervous at that point, and the music frightened her. Participants are instructed and guided to move directly to the seat nearest to the front of the room. They are not allowed to save seats, move the chairs around, or take a seat at the back or on the side.

After everyone is seated the unused seats are quietly "whisked away-" One subject noticed this and thought this was done in order to hide the number of no-shows. Participants are instructed to be seated before the music stops, or they will be considered late and will not be allowed to continue the training.

Then there is silence until the trainer strides quickly and purposefully onto the center of the stage and takes the microphone. The staff applauds loudly. One subject reported that "I was pretty tense when it started, but I also felt some relief; at least now it was beginning."

Day One—event one

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) uniformly described the trainers as young, well dressed, attractive, forceful, athletic, and charismatic. Although Vitality claims to have one female trainer, all the subjects had male trainers. Therefore in this study trainers will all be referred to as males. The trainer begins with a short introduction about life. Introducing Vitality's basic ideas in a chatty format. These include the ideas that personal growth is an Ongoing Process, that an individual's frame of reference and belief system limit personal growth, that experience transcends thinking, that Most Of an individual's problems come from resisting an experience, and that what one resists one is "stuck with."

He encourages them to "let go" of their belief system, and suspend judgement of the training until after it is completed. He tells them that "the diamond within" is what the training is all about. He explains that the training is "unreasonable" and that it's an emotional roller coaster. He cautions participants not to look for the one right way. He then proceeds to explain the right way: "what you deny and avoid is what you are stuck with. Therefore, when you totally experience something, it disappears." Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that this is a constant theme in the training, a central ideological tenet.

He then begins the laborious chore of explaining and getting participants to comply with Vitality's ground rules. This is a crucial process, since his unwavering goal is to achieve a total, unquestioning compliance with the rules from each of the participants. If participants are not willing to comply completely with the rules they are not allowed to continue in the training. This process usually takes the rest of the night.

The trainer explains each of the rules, and participants can ask questions or make statements about the rules and ask to be granted exemptions from a specific rule. In order to speak they must strictly comply with the rules, which means they must not speak until recognized by the trainer, and then they must stand and speak through the microphone. Then, when the participant is finished with the exchange, the other participants must applaud. This is the general procedure for the large group share exercises, which go on throughout the training. The trainer rarely grants any exceptions.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that some participants were abused and humiliated during this procedure. The trainer would curse, call them derisive names, attack their personality, and make fun of them. Primarily, the trainer would maintain that their specific question, disagreement, or concern was irrelevant to him and was an indication of their poor psychological functioning. In fact, he interpreted their attendance itself as an admission of guilt:

You're here because your life isn't working. Your life isn't working because you're scared shitless of committing, just like you're scared shitless right now of committing to the rules."

Although mandatory attendance for the post-training session and the post-training interview (i.e., recruitment session for the II Training) are now made explicit before participants attend the first session, subjects reported that in years past that was not the case. Therefore, accepting the rules was particularly difficult for some participants, especially out of town residents. Rules strictly regulating eating, exiting, and bathroom activities were also reported to be difficult or irritating for participants to agree to.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants are harangued, embarrassed, humiliated, and bored by the "ground rules" exercise. They are instructed to "surrender" and

"totally participate." If they do take the risk to "totally experience their vulnerability, (they are told that] the results are incredible." During this adversarial process, 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer acts "like a real Jerk," a "schmuck," an "asshole." One subject remarked that he thought that the trainer wasn't really like that, but he had to act that way because it was "in the script."

In the course of this first event, 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer begins using many English words in a manner that is different than their usual meaning. "Commitment," for instance, is defined as "the willingness to do whatever it takes." "Conclusion" is defined as a belief. Also, words like "responsibility," "space," "surrender," "experience," "trust," "consideration," "unreasonable," "righteous" "totally participate," "from your head." "Openness," "letting go" are redefined or used so as to assign them a new meaning. Every question of every participant must be dealt with in this public manner. Then all participants must stand up to indicate their acceptance of the rules. If individual participants do not finally accept each rule, they are not allowed to continue in the training. This is described by the trainer as kicking the participant out of the training, not as the participant rejecting the training. "Then get out" is a common phrase used by the trainer.

Fifteen of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) expressed annoyance and impatience with those who wouldn't yield to the rules. They all reported thinking it was a boring waste of time, and that almost all participants in the training were sympathetic with the trainee and wished the participants with questions would shut up and comply with the rules. However, all subjects reported also being angry and upset with the trainer for acting so arrogant, sadistic, and humiliating. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) realized how dangerous it was to stand up and publicly complain about the trainer's behavior towards others. Therefore, although they were disgusted and upset, they did not try to intervene, and as a result felt guilty that they were abandoning their fellow participants. One of those three reported feeling "disoriented" by her inaction in the face of the verbal abuse of a particularly vulnerable participant.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants are exhausted, bored, and angry with those who oppose the trainer. Fifteen of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) confirmed that observation. Participants are resentful that 20% of their money has been "wasted" by "picky people," and are impatient to "get something" from the training in order to justify their financial outlay.

Day One—event two

The last two exercises of the first day (or the first two of the second day if time does not permit) illustrate the ideological and hierarchical points established in the "ground rules" process. In the "trust walk" exercise 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) recalled that the trainer says, "I am going to tell you what to do. Then I want you do it, then I want you to share about it." Again this emphasizes the trainer's predominant autocratic position.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that no one complained. Participants are instructed to walk in the group and mingle and go up to individuals and state "completely honestly" whether or not they trust that person. Participants are further instructed not to "feel," Just to be "ok" with the other's response to them.

Fourteen of 15 "experience" subjects (93%) reported being nervous about this exercise, worrying about whether or not they were going to "do it right." They knew they weren't "supposed to" worry, they were just supposed to "be ok" with whatever they said or whatever was said to them.

Day One—event three

The last exercise of day one is the first of what Vitality refers to as "closed eye processes." Three

of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that this is a long relaxation exercise, starting with a detailed body awareness exercise that uses many hypnotic induction techniques. The use of generalized, global phrases such as "there is nothing to do," and "you will know just where that spot is" are typical induction techniques. The global phrases also emphasize Vitality's ideology of "natural knowing." The induction uses color, progressive relaxation, and embedded suggestions ("If there is stiffness or pain, simply acknowledge it and let it go") to "prove" the doctrine that experiencing pain will "disappear" it. Participants are instructed to listen to their "who you are" questions as they come up and to notice that "natural" answers also come up.

Day One—event four

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) recalled that homework is given for the first night. Participants are instructed to write down what they learned about themselves. Two "experience" subjects who have staffed trainings volunteered the information that they were instructed to call up and talk to the people who signed up but did not attend and do "whatever it takes" to get them to attend (the other four subjects who have staffed did not volunteer that information and were not asked).

Day Two

Day Two—event one

At the beginning of this session 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants were very intent about getting to their chairs on time. Everyone was more obedient and serious about all the ground rules. Those few that are late get "processed" in front of the entire group and/or are ejected from the training.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) recall the trainer lecturing on "personal growth" during the early moments of session two. A large chart outlines what participants come to recognize as the Vitality doctrine. At the top of the chart is "You are at cause"; at the bottom of the chart is "You are at effect." When individuals are at the "top" of the chart they make things "happen" or problems "vanish." When individuals are at the "bottom," things happen to you, problems remain "stuck" to you. Participants are told that the top is where results lie in life. However, change only comes when individuals do not resist events, because "what you resist, you become." One's belief system keeps one trapped in the past, unable to truly experience in the "now."

Day Two—event two

The trainer then leads the group into a guided imagery exercise, a walk in a meadow. Participants are encouraged to notice how they "resist" the naturalness of the meadow. At the end of the exercise, they are instructed to learn how they resist by noticing how they behave in the training.

Day Two—event three

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) described a dyadic exercise referred to as the "parent posture" exercise. Participant A acts like his or her father and mother; then they switch, and Participant B acts. Participants are instructed to get in touch with their feelings, even exaggerate. They are encouraged to notice what they held back from their parents, how they stopped being "real" with them and with the world. The resulting subject matter is quite sensitive and emotional. This is the first of a series of exercises dealing with the participants' parents. These exercises are successively regressive. They encourage the participant to confuse the past with the present, to relive intense emotions and conflicts. As the exercises progress the regression becomes increasingly more infantilizing and falsely gratifying, since the exercises become increasingly intense and graphic. As a result, subjects reported a great many emotional sounds in the training room. Participants begin crying out loud, moaning, and screaming. At times the din becomes

overwhelming. One "experience" subject reported becoming so upset she vomited. Bags are provided for this purpose by the staff).

In this first parent exercise. Participants are encouraged to let their feelings "bubble up"; they must look at how they resist, because what they resist they are "stuck" with. They are told repeatedly that the training is a "safe place." If participants have a difficult time remembering or feeling, they are told they are resisting. They will be asked, "What is in the way of 'surrendering' to the process?" or "How does this particular resistance get in the way of your everyday life?"

One of 3 "behavior" subjects (33%) reported that the trainer chose someone to be "processed." This meant he worked intensively with a participant in front of the entire group. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that at some point in the training this happened at least once. Fifteen of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) concurred. This processing did not usually focus on the content the participant was attempting to confront (e.g., the participant's relationship with his or her father, a decision they have to make, etc.). Instead, the trainer usually will reframe the problem as an inability to "let go," to trust the group, to "surrender" to the training.

Therefore, the trainer works to get the participant to emote, to have a seeming cathartic experience by getting the participant to take a risk, often a physical risk like falling into the arms of several other participants. The lights go down low, special "trust" music is played on the sound system, the participants cradle and rock the participant and the trainer touches and massages the participant, murmuring softly to him or her. As the participant sobs, everyone gathers around, encouraging the participant. Fifteen of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that some participants cry and they themselves were deeply touched by these emotional displays.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported incidents that indicate that the behavioral modeling accomplished at these dramatic moments is quite significant.

Ten of 15 "experience" subjects (67%) reported feeling very jealous of the participant who is getting all the attention. One "experience" subject reported thinking "What's wrong with me that I can't loosen up like that? I'm not doing it right."

Day Two—event four

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported another dyad exercise in which participants are instructed to tell each other a story in which they were made to do something they didn't want to do. Participants must close their eyes and find the pain in their bodies that expresses this experience, intensify it, purposely make it worse. Then they are instructed to let it go. Afterwards they can share in front of the whole group.

Day Two—event five

The lecture continues with dyad work in which participants remember a childhood scene in which they were made to do something they didn't want to do. They are instructed to make it into the formulaic expression "I have to do (X), if I don't I'll feel (Y)." Subjects reported that the trainer really begins to push them at this point. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) subjects noticed at this point the room became very emotional as participants confronted painful and angry feelings they felt because they realized they had done hateful things in order to be loved or accepted. The trainer argues that the feeling that is experienced when people "play this game" is a "grungy." It is a "pay off." However, he lectures, people aren't really coerced into this. The truth is "everything is choice!"

Day Two—event six

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that a long exercise follows this lecture that turns the "grungy" concept into a way of discussing medical or emotional symptoms. In small group "sharings," participants explore the idea that "grungies are masks, not reality." Participants are encouraged to get in touch with an important "grungy" of theirs, exaggerate it, and act it out.

A closed eye process helps participants translate this idea into the realm of medicine. They are told (again) that the way to eliminate pain is to fully experience it. They are instructed to become aware of a physical or emotional symptom (i.e., a "grungy"), identify where they hold it in their body, and really feel it, intensify it, and exaggerate the feeling. Then they should bring it out in front of them. Participants are told to visualize it and call out what size and shape it is, what it weighs, what it feels, smells, tastes, and sounds like. It has color and a liquid-like consistency. Participants are encouraged to ask it questions and have a dialogue with it. They are to ask it questions (e.g., What are you a payoff for?).

The trainer then explains when participants figure out what the payoff is they can more directly get what they want. Then they can "disappear" the symptom because they don't need it anymore. The participants are instructed to call out their pain level. With a show of hands they are to indicate that they were able to disappear or reduce their symptom. The trainer emphasizes that the more willingly the participants look at the symptom's payoff the more they'll be able to let go of it.

One "experience" subject reported being very impressed at all the headaches and stomachaches that were disappearing. Unfortunately, she had a weight problem and she couldn't disappear her fat! She felt exposed, ashamed, frustrated, and jealous.

The trainer usually asks for a show of hands for those who now believe they can create their own headaches, colds, and so forth. He asks increasingly more extreme questions, until finally, he asks if they believe they can cure their own cancer? All this is done publicly. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects reported that self-presentation concerns are very strong at this time: if participants don't conform to the group norm by this point in the training they chose to hide it and feel embarrassed or at fault. Although 12 of 15 subjects (80%) reported they didn't go along with the doctrine all the way, they also didn't really think the trainer was actually being literal about it, even though he said he was.

Day Two—event seven

The last series of exercises is one 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" (100%) subjects remembered and talked about: "victim accountable." Participants are instructed to tell a story in which "they" did it to "you" (i.e., stories in which the storytellers perceive themselves to be the victim of the story). First partners try to top one another by telling victim stories in the big group. Then they break up into dyads and tell their story. Each partner must convince his or her partner that they were indeed victimized. Then they must tell the story again, as if they caused the result. It is especially important to tell the partner "what you were pretending not to know." Partners must continue telling the story and explaining until their partners are convinced that they really do believe they are "at cause."

Afterwards, they share in the large group. One "behavior" subject remembered a woman who learned from the exercise that she was not a rape "victim." She got in touch with the fact that she had set up the whole thing, that she wanted it to turn out the way it did. She was eight years old at the time of the rape.

The trainer sometimes writes on the board some of the good things that come from the concept that individuals set up every occurrence in their lives. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) remembered the trainer being very powerful and forceful about this viewpoint. He argued that when individuals come from being the "victim" they feel one down, but "why feel one down about something that's your own choice?" The trainer proclaims. "I

set up everything" including his "choice" of parents, his death, and so forth. "There are no accidents, and there are no miracles."

Day Three

Day Three—event one

This is Friday after work, and one subject reported that the atmosphere was emotionally charged, "like it was a date evening. People were going to get something done!" Another subject remarked about how tired everyone was. This will be the third night in a row that they will go straight from work to the training, from 6:30 p.m. to midnight.

The trainer starts off with an experiential exercise that none of the "behavior" subjects can remember in detail. One of 3 "behavior" subjects (33%) recalled that after the exercise the trainer lectures a bit about the difference in world view between most everybody (who believe people are victims) and his view (that everything is determined by an individual's intentions): "It is everyone's intention to have everything happen just the way it is." He says explicitly what much of the training has been pointing to: "These things that happen to people don't just happen, they are manifestations of your belief system." He likens an individual's life to an iceberg: "almost everything is below the surface."

Day Three—event two

The trainer follows this rather general, didactic exercise with a very confrontational, publicly embarrassing lecture. Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that he makes all the people with obvious physical problems like weight problems stand up or indicate their problem. He then embarrasses them by asking participants who do not claim to have a weight problem leading questions (e.g., "How many of you eat as much as you want and don't get fat?" or "Who controls your metabolism?"). The obvious conclusion is that participants with weight problems are causing the problem because of their "beliefs" about food and the secondary gain (i.e., grungies) that they get from it.

He asks, "What happened that you started gaining weight?" One "experience" subject remembered that he said that people who have poor eyesight didn't want to see something that happened in their family and people who were fat were trying to hide their sexuality, And he was right I remembered my sister started wearing glasses not long after our mother died. This goes on for quite a while. Then there is a large group "share," and many disclose their private struggles and link them to the "reasons" for their physical symptoms. The trainer repeats many times the main message of this exercise: "Your body is a living sculpture of your beliefs."

Day Three—event three

Next is the "broken agreements" lecture. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer explains that our lives do not work because of the agreements we have made and broken: "The universe will indicate to you that you have broken an agreement." And the ultimate agreements, of course, are the agreements individuals make with themselves.

Day Three—event four

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the "junkyard", one of the most famous of a "closed-eye" processes, follows the lecture. A very relaxing induction is followed by the instructions to find a junkyard and sort through it, finding pieces of junk from your broken agreements. The trainer instructs participants to find and bring back "the part of you that you withhold from others." The trainer identifies that part with the "free child. " But all the "Junk" gets

in the way of relationships with friends. The trainer equates the "free child" with the participant: "That is the way you could be, if you would only stop holding back." Then a group "mingle" or sharing begins; participants are instructed to share their free, hidden part with as many participants as possible.

Day Three—event five

Directly after this comes the "parent process," which 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported as one of the most emotional of all the processes. Participants are instructed to choose a partner who looks like one of their parents. A short induction begins; participants are instructed to relive feeling like a carefree child. With each breath they are to expel the worry of the adult and breathe in the happiness of childhood. A deep age regression is accomplished through the technique of the "family photo album." The trainer instructs participants to remember in detail a "perfect day" in the life of their childhood. From morning to night. But then there is trouble: the child is instructed to remember feeling tension. Participants are to feel how much energy is frustrated, closed off. The trainer encourages participants to feel and intensify their deep hurt and frustration.

Then participants are to picture their father, and imagine the feelings they had for him in that instant. Music fills the room: one "behavior" subject identified it as "Father's Song" by Barbara Streisand. When dyad partners open their eyes, one is instructed to role-play the child and the other the parent. The child will see their parent in the other: "Make it real! Jump in and surrender!" Participants are to see their fathers as an "ideal" Dad, "the father you always wanted him to be." Participants are instructed to ask their fathers for anything they want, what they "secretly" yearned for and never received.

And the partners must give whatever is asked for. Participants are again encouraged to let the feelings "bubble up." There are "no limits" in this exercise participants can use the whole room to express themselves: "The feelings you feel now are the feelings you usually push down. Feel the enormous waste of energy. Look at the enormous price you pay." Then the roles change. The exercise is repeated. This time remembering the mother. Finally, holding hands, participants share with their partner.

"Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that during this exercise the participants' emotions flooded the room. Participants were sobbing, laughing hysterically, moaning, jumping, screaming with rage or happiness; acting like, children or their loving, doting parents.

Day Three—event six

The last exercise of the evening is the "Red and Black" game. This is a type of "prisoner's dilemma" game popular in social psychology experiments. Participants are encouraged by the trainer and by staff to "win" the game, really pour it on. Staffers become like cheerleaders, and, after the trainer has explained the game ("The purpose is to win"), participants are divided into two teams and are left on their own to elect captains and figure out how to win the game.

By the time the game has to be stopped, 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that many people had become very excited, driven, and frustrated about winning. It is at this point the trainer steps in and harangues and humiliates the participants. He swears at them, he calls them names, he blames the arms race and world hunger on people like them, who "can't imagine winning without killing the other side."

The recrimination is very strong, and very effective. All subjects reported being affected by it and remembering it. The pattern was the same for 14 of 15 "experience" subjects (93%). Either subjects felt distraught because they tried to win by making the other side lose, or they figured out the key to winning, but they were too frightened to speak up or too self-critical to believe they

knew the answer. Either way, one "experience" subject noted, everyone seemed to feel embarrassed and crushed. As one "behavior" subject noted, it was, paradoxically, a no-win situation.

Day three—event seven

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the homework assignment was to look at their behavior in the game and determine what was underneath the display of competitive activity. They are instructed to stay in the training room for sixty minutes of silence. During this time and at home they are to face themselves and determine what is their "ground of being," their "core." one "experience" subject recalled that the song "Games People Play" is played on the sound system.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects reported that everyone seemed just crushed by the heavy disapproval they faced. The trainer's disgust and anger appeared devastating to many participants.

Day Four

Day Four—event one

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that after the high of "victim accountable" and then the crash that comes with the "Red and Black" game, participants are usually exhausted and emotionally spent. They are sent home "in disgrace" and humiliation, and instructed to contemplate their "disgusting life." The reports of 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) concurred with this account.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the first exercise of Saturday morning is a rather free form large group sharing and lecture. One of 3 "behavior" subjects (33%) reported that the trainer began by continuing to berate participants about the "Pettiness" of the night before. If he does this he will continue to pound away, saying that the Red and Black Game is a mirror of their everyday lives. He may accuse them of alienating themselves from others and in fact from themselves. He may ask them over and over what they want so desperately that they will destroy themselves or others in the process. "What's in it for you? How long will you continue this game?" The attack is often accompanied by the playing of sad songs on the sound system.

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that the trainer started off by asking if anyone has something to share. Participants were invited up onto the stage. Subjects reported that the whole early morning became a kind of joyful testimony to Vitality or the trainer. Even if the trainer started out by continuing the humiliation and criticism of the night before, soon participants start clamoring to get onstage and enthusiastically "spilling their guts about how competitive and inhumane they've been, trying for a win-lose result all their lives."

Others confess that they figured out the way to win the previous night, but they were too cowardly or self-critical to speak up, and they've been like this all their lives. Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67.) reported that this morning was like a church confessional, complete with tears, regret, and a new found strength and vision. Their homework was not only to think about their behavior in the game. But also "to get to the core" of their being, to "find the grain under the paint." One "behavior" subject commented that the homework assignment seemed to be an invitation to "regress" and uncover "deep, primitive needs."

The opportunity to "repent and see the light," as one "behavior" subject put it, is for some the highlight of the training. They get to be on stage, in the trainer's position, "in his seat, so to speak." Often the trainer goes to the back and sits down at this point. One subject told of a participant who suffered a psychotic episode at this time in the training.

Day Four—event two

The next exercise was the "What do you want?" dyad; 2 of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) recalled that it we-- a long and frustrating experience for most participants. One subject reported that it seemed to go on "forever, I just couldn't quite do it, get down deep enough, for a long time."

In this exercise Partner A asks Partner B "What do you want?" over and over again. With every question Partner B is supposed to answer, digging deeper and deeper into his being. Participants are to choose a partner they can be totally honest with. They are instructed to do whatever it takes to assist their partner in reaching deeper and deeper levels. Partner B should respond by saying the first thing that comes into his mind with each question. After a few minutes the trainer sometimes asks, "Who's stuffing their feelings? A, if B is stuffing, stand up now." One "behavior" subject remarked that this is undoubtedly embarrassing to Bs, since they are being exposed as someone not fully experiencing, as someone holding back. The trainer then says "B, look how much A cares, he's even willing to risk your friendship and anger." Two of 3 (67%) "behavior" subjects reported that the trainer left the stage and "processed" a particular participant. Several times they remembered him exhorting participants to "acknowledge yourself, and surrender!"

One "experience" subject reported that during this exercise he stopped "standing at the edge of the pool and jumped in." This exercise was probably the most confrontational moment in the training. Your partner must be as lovingly tough with you as they can be to help you get deeper. There are times when you want your partner to STOP DIGGING! I'm sure those people who stopped digging with something nebulous got less out of it (than I did]. It was a stomach wrenching experience; the most significant in the training for me...No one had ever asked me that question before. It was shocking, exciting, and very frustrating...It changed my whole career around. This exercise was the turning point for another subject, who finally broke down, sobbing to her male partner, "I just want to be loved, just to be loved." This was very important for her, since she had been molested and beaten many times and had closed herself off from her feelings, especially toward men (see chapter III, section F, case #2).

Day Four—event three

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) recalled a relatively short dyad which followed, in the same questioning format but not as harsh and unrelenting. The content pertains to relationships. The trainer speaks a bit about relationships and about trying to "win" at any cost. Then partners are separated into dyads and Partner A picks a relationship he or she is involved in, Partner B asks, "How do you get to be right around your spouse/lover/friend?" and "How do you make your spouse/lover/friend wrong?" The trainer sometimes asks questions from the stage. The song "How Can I be so Right and be So Wrong?" is played. Then there is large group sharing.

Day Four—event four

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that a lecture on belief systems continues this line of thinking. The major idea of this lecture is that beliefs get in the way of experiencing the world and inevitably lead to feeling "right/wrong". Participants are exhorted to "experience," not "believe"; "surrender," and not "hold back." When participants can do that, they are told they will experience themselves as "the source of everything, the creator of your world": "No one can harm you, no one can victimize you."

Day Four—event five

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that this guided imagery exercise starts with a short relaxation and trance induction. Then participants are instructed to imagine they are in a room, and in the room is the movie of their lives. It is being made at that exact moment. All the reels of film are in this room. Participants are encouraged to take a reel off the shelf and watch it. There is

a director's chair, and the participant is instructed to sit in it, and take the camera. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the participant is transported, suddenly, to a ship or yacht. The yacht, participants are told, is your life. The ship's captain is steering the ship, but then he jumps off yelling, "She's all yours." Participants are told they can control the ship just by thinking about it: "Just send out your thoughts and the ship does whatever it is told."

Day four—event six

After a break, there is a large circle sharing. Participants take off their shoes and the style is more informal. None of the "behavior" subjects (0%) could remember the content of this session.

Day four—event seven

Then a very long exercise occurs. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants are arranged in three lines or circles opposite one another. They are told this is an experience in "honesty." Participants must choose the one person they are most attracted to and go stand opposite him or her. Participants are instructed to summarize the qualities of that person they are most attracted to, and then those qualities they are least attracted to. Participants are instructed to look directly into their eyes and deliver the message clearly. Then participants are told to close their eyes and determine if they were honest. If not, examine what stopped them. All this, participants are told, will help them identify their belief system. Then the large circle is reformed and participants share, asking, "what beliefs are challenged?"

Then participants must repeat this, but this time with the person they are least attracted to. Then the large group reforms again. Often this takes a long time: 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that a few people have long lines of participants waiting to tell them what is or isn't attractive to others.

The trainer then lectured about the idea of the "mirror." One "experience" subject explained it like this: "There is nothing out there, but you, it's all your stuff. Your experience of this person is just your experience, because your stuff is coming out." Then participants go again to the participant they are least attracted to. They are instructed to first tell what qualities are unattractive, and then explain why these qualities remind them of qualities in themselves. The trainer argues that what one doesn't like in the other is really what one doesn't like in oneself. This is the mirror concept at work. Then participants are instructed to share about the experience, and then go on to the participant they are most attracted to, and do the same, using the mirror concept again. During the meal break participants are to pick out several people and talk about how their ideas about the other demonstrate the mirror concept.

Day Four—event nine

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) referred to this exercise as the "hug line". It is a very long exercise. One subject said, "It seemed to go on forever-and we wanted it to go on forever!" The group forms two concentric circles. Each participant must look his or her partner in the eye, and signal with one, two, three, or four fingers. One stands for no greeting; two, eye contact only; three, a handshake; and four, a hug. Participants are instructed to observe their internal reactions to the vote itself and to feelings of rejections and fears of rejecting others. Above all, participants are told to be "honest." They are encouraged to risk by going to people they've been hiding from. "Sometimes When We Touch" is the song played over the sound system.

Most participants are pretty tired by this point, emotionally and physically. They have been lectured to repeatedly about the importance of an open, loving, non-judgmental life style. Also, they have been told that the other is actually a mirror of them. Now, in this exercise, they are in the position of loving or rejecting the other (i.e., the self?). They have to face person after person

they barely know, and they have to demonstrate in public whether or not they understand the ideology that has been forced on them for 4 consecutive days.

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that the training became a massive hug line. One "experience" subject described the scene at his training: After a couple of times, everybody chose just to hug. No more ones, or twos, or threes, Just fours. It was a fantastic experience. As it goes on we increasingly let go...I wanted it to go on forever...It was wonderful feeling to not be judgmental or inhibited. It was simply unconditional, unqualified affection. I was filled with love...I was in an altered state. The feeling of community was overwhelming."

Another "experience" subject had a very different experience that illustrates an underlying aspect of the exercise. This subject didn't enjoy the hug line ("It was a crock of shit"). When at the post training session she vent up to the trainer to thank him, he remembered her as the person who wouldn't hug everyone and he told her "you've got some problems, lady." The subject reported that he was real sarcastic, furious with me...I was upset because they told us to be honest, and I was. I said "I was telling the truth, like you told us to" and he said "it wasn't about telling the truth!" and he stalked off.

Day four—event ten

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the "workshop" process is a guided imagery exercise that lasts about an hour. After the usual trance induction and relaxation participants are instructed to use their hands and openly verbalize during the exercise. They are to build a workshop, and they are instructed to gather the tools they will need, including the ever-present director's chair, a "screen for the mind," and a "people mover." They are instructed to find a perfect place to build this workshop, and proceed to build it, just the way they want it.

When they have finished "building" the workshop they are instructed to imagine themselves (with their "limiting beliefs") on the "screen for the mind." Then they are to picture themselves without these beliefs. Later on in the process they are instructed to get to know someone better by bringing him or her into the workshop through the "people mover." Then they can learn about and "share energies" with them. At the end of this guided imagery, participants are instructed to give their friends a hug and flowers.

After the trance is ended, participants are given a card and told to write down the qualities of their workshop and their feelings about it. Then they are instructed to cross out the word "workshop" and substitute the word "myself" or "me." This is a particularly moving aspect of the exercise for some. One subject framed the card and hung it on her living room wall for years: It made me feel good I was that positive about myself. I was in touch with the good, strong, pretty side of me. I had a sense of wholeness. The message was I was going inside and inside is good. Another subject revealed her feelings about the workshop exercise when she thought the title of the exercise was "building a home."

Day four—event eleven

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer explains that this exercise requires complete "100% participation." He tells them they're going to get a chance to look "completely foolish." One "experience" subject remembered feeling: "oh, no, here I was just getting comfortable and now they're putting me through something else." I was scared! It was very hard for me. I just wanted to get it over with.

The trainer calls this a "once in a lifetime moment." All that is asked of the participants is "to be spontaneous." He builds this up more than he has most of the other exercises. He tells participants that this is a chance at a "miraculous moment," a "transformation." During this exhortation he

delivers one of the great paradoxes of the training: "If you choose to be open to acting foolish, you won't ever have to." All participants must get on stage and act "weird or crazy" for a few moments. They change their clothes a bit, mess up their hair, and sing a "funny" song or do a "silly skit." This seems to release participants to act out an aspect of their negative identity. One "experience" subject reported that it was liberating, a kind of going crazy exercise...I thought there is more to be and things I wouldn't normally do that I could actually do...but then it went on too long. It wasn't fun anymore; it was degrading after awhile.

Day four—event twelve

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that homework for Sunday was "to look at what you want for your life." Participants were to list ten things they want, and the problems they encountered in attaining them. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that since the training began at 9 a.m. the next morning, participants, already exhausted, had one more task to fulfill before they could rest.

Day Five

Day Five—event one

Only 1 of 3 "behavior" subjects (33%) could remember the first exercise, which he reported as a dyad that deals with their homework list of the night before. Partner A asks "What do you want, how can you get it, and what will it mean?" Partner B answers. Then they switch. At some point participants are instructed to close their eyes and feel. "Let it Be" is played. Then they share.

Day Five—event two

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that although the first exercise encouraged participants to talk about what they wanted and how to get it, the trainer now attacks that viewpoint. He argues that although most people think that what they have determines what they do and who they are ("have, do, be"), real security comes only from the "inside." The trick is to start with what you are, develop skills, and you will naturally -acquire the symbols you want ("be, do, have").

In the lecture the trainer explains that "intention" is the important concept. When you know who you are, you do what is necessary. All of life, participants are told, begins with "who you are" and is then distorted by a belief system: "Living is perfection just the way it is...Life is a game." It is composed of setting goals ("going for it") and then enjoying the process of it ("letting go of it").

This kind of philosophical discourse was rather difficult for 2 of 3 "behavioral" subjects (67%) to recall and satisfactorily understand. Eleven of 15 "experience" subjects (73%) couldn't actually explain these ideas or follow them to a conclusion; they just appeared to mouth the phrases. One "experience" subject reported being very impressed by this idea: "This is what life is all about, isn't it? Working for things, and then kicking back and enjoying the process." But then a friend said, "No, I don't think those are my goals, to get things and then to enjoy the ride." She thought about this and she realized she really didn't agree with the trainer after all. She reported feeling confused and troubled by this realization that somehow she had been "influenced" more than I realized."

Another "experience" subject had gotten very confused about the difference between who she is and what she has. She reported Somehow I got it reversed. What's outside determines what's inside. In other words if I look good, I am good...I wanted to fit the image...I drew this picture around me--a life of total image!

Day Five—event three

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the next exercise, a role-play, is an opportunity for participants to put into practice the above idea presented by the training. First the trainer defines what a consideration is: "a barrier that stops us from what we are going for in life." Then he forms participants into groups of six. One participant at a time presents an issue (e.g., a "what do you want"). Four other group members act out a specific "consideration." The last group member plays the role of coach for the first. The participant with the "I want" speaks up and all the considerations talk at once; they are to be as noisy and obnoxious as possible. They are instructed to stop only when the first participant acts in a "clear," "rounded" manner, handling the considerations one by one. Each member gets a turn.

Afterwards, everyone shares. The trainer asks for a show of hands. He explains that "considerations are only as important as you think they are. You can handle them, or they can handle you." The trainer says he hates people who equivocate: "Either do whatever it takes, or give it up!"

Day Five—event four

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that the lecture that follows the role-playing is more informal than the other lectures. The trainer sits at the edge of the stage or wanders among the participants, who sit on the floor. The trainer shares more of himself in this setting, tells more personal anecdotes. The topic is relationships.

Consistent with Vitality's doctrine of "natural knowing," the trainer argues that the universe is "abundant" in relationships. There is no need to become frightened and "sucky." Relationships are always available, but beliefs obscure them. The trainer advises participants to "surrender to what is already there." "Let go of a problem solving mentality. Don't demand change, just be there."

One "behavior" subject was struck in particular with one phrase: "See where the ladder leads, don't keep looking at the bad steps or the rotten wood."

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that a short dyad follows, which puts the ideas into practice. Both partners are instructed to simply acknowledge the other's point of view, neither arguing nor explaining.

Day Five—event five

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that the trainer then neatly segues into a new topic by remarking that individuals can transcend their frame of reference by committing to something "bigger than yourself." "Service," he lectures, "is the most advanced form of relationship...To truly serve persons must forget themselves. Giving is natural."

Then the trainer brings the staff forward. These are people who attend III Training and volunteer their time. Everyone claps and the song "Nobody Does It Better" is played on the sound system.

As day 5 progresses 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 15 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that the pressure to enroll in the II Training as soon as possible intensifies and becomes increasingly hard sell.

Day Five—event six

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that at the meal break participants are instructed to form small groups and share intimately about a relationship.

Day Five—event seven

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) reported that when participants arrive back they go into a closed eye process that relates to an earlier guided imagery scene in the "workshop." After a body relaxation exercise participants are instructed to go to their workshop and work with their two imaginary "assistants" (one male, one female). The assistants lead the participant to "The Truth Door." Subjects report the trainer really plays this up, making it very dramatic. The participants ask questions of the Truth Room and the room answers. Questions are big questions about the future (e.g., "Who am I?" and "What will I do next in life?"). Then participants go back to the workshop, talk with and get help from their assistants regarding the future. The participants are instructed to say goodbye to the assistants, and leave the workshop. Then there is a large group sharing exercise.

Day Five—event eight

Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) described an exercise that demonstrated extra sensory perception. The trainer announces that he will demonstrate how to use "natural knowing" to its fullest by appearing to "read" someone's mind. Participants are then encouraged to join with the trainer by demonstrating this skill themselves. They work in dyads, and are instructed to "set aside their mind" and go by intuition, "no matter how it sounds." The trainer "guarantees" that everyone can do it, the trick is to listen to your first thoughts only.

One "experience" subject in particular was overwhelmed with this exercise. He was certain he could read minds, "I wasn't guessing, I knew! This was mind blowing! I had a greater sense of my own power. It made me focus on my potential...I am a very powerful person."

Day Five—event nine

After the excitement from the "mind reading" exercise quiets. The trainer returns to the topic of Vitality and the Initial Training experience. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer encourages participants to relate to people who are Vitality graduates and to continue to be involved in the organization. One "behavior" subject remembered the trainer saying, "You can take Vitality as far as you want to go." Another "behavior" subject remembered the trainer saying "continued growth is all there is." It was at this point that 3 of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 10 of 15 "experience" subjects (67%) began to get resentful: "I felt like all we were getting at this point is one big sales pitch...Sure I liked the training and I thought I'd like to do another sometime, but I hated the increasing hard sell." Five of 15 "experience" subjects (33%) remembered this as a time of increasing happiness: "He just kept talking and talking about growth and what we got out of the training, and I just wanted to tell all my friends about it. I thought if everyone took the training the world would be a much better place."

By this time the trainer is recruiting quite explicitly: "Start with the II Training...I want you to do III" Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants are by this time familiar with his use of harsh slogans, and he uses this same style as he recruits them for II: "Are you afraid of II?" That's tough! The only way to it is through it!"

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the trainer also instructs participants in the art of recruiting: "Share what you have found with your friends. I want each person here to bring friends to a guest event and to the post-training. Don't keep this to yourselves. Allow them to do the training by sharing with them."

Day Five—event ten

Then, after the pressure to enroll and recruit, the trainer leads the group in the last ceremony before graduation. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that participants are led in a guided imagery exercise to the "workshop" and are told to "open" themselves up from the top of their head to their crotch: "Let the energy flow through you to the middle of the room." They are

instructed to feel "connected" to everyone in the room. They are instructed to open their eyes, and silently, without touching, walk to one person, make eye contact, and "share your energy." They are told to do this with several different people. "Love Song" plays over the sound system.

Day Five—event eleven

Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 14 of 15 "experience" subjects (93%) reported that much of the graduation exercise is a blur. They remember the trainer talking, telling them they created this training, and in fact they are the source of Vitality. "Vitality is as powerful as you will make it, it depends on you." Then the relatives or recruiters of the participants are led in while the participants stand with their eyes closed. They open their eyes and their loved ones are standing opposite them, usually holding flowers or a balloon purchased from Vitality. Fifteen of 15 "behavior" subjects (100%) reported that the emotional impact is tremendous. The trainer says "Goodnight, and welcome home!" Then the music starts blaring loud rock and roll, and everybody dances. Three of 3 "behavior" subjects (100%) and 15 of 13 "experience" subjects (100%) reported that everyone is very high, people are hugging and kissing and dancing. The party lasts for a long time. One "experience" subject remarked "people kind of lose themselves in the release of it all. It's pretty overwhelming."

Post Training

Interview—Neither "behavior" nor "experience" subjects gave much information about the post-training interview except to say it was very unpleasant and a very hard sell. Two of 3 "behavior" subjects (67%) refused to attend. One "experience" subject reported that "Oh, God they were hard-assed about it (we call it 'laser' in Vitality). She Sure had my number! She knew just where to push; I signed up right there at the interview, and I didn't think I wanted to before it started.

Another subject didn't like the hard sell, so her interviewers were flexible.

They Just wouldn't take no for an answer, and I just wouldn't say yes. So then they brought in a very nice guy who was kind of quiet and softer. He didn't push and I said "sure. I'll enroll." I Just didn't like to be pushed.

Session—One of 3 "behavior" subjects (33%) and 10 of 15 "experience" subjects (67%) reported that participants first bring their guests (i.e., potential recruits) to the guest event that is scheduled for the same night. They share with them how important Vitality was to them. Then they go to a separate room for the remainder of the night. The trainer starts with two paradoxical interventions: he tells them (a) they won't get "high" from this session like they did the training, and (b) the negative consequences they have suffered since the training are the fault of the participant, not the fault of Vitality.

One "behavior" subject remembered the trainer saying: "Remember that people create their own problems. You can disappear your problems as easily as you can create them."

The participants are then led in a dyad exercise about love. Then the trainer leads an important, climactic trance induction. Participants are to imagine they are standing in a small beam of light. The light cleanses their whole body. Then they visit their workshops. Participants go to the director's chair, which is covered, in white light. One "experience" subject reports that the trainer says, "you can accomplish anything."

They are instructed to get "reacquainted" with the male and female assistants from the last workshop exercise. Then they are instructed to "merge energies" with the two assistants, looking into their eyes and "acknowledging first the male and then the female inside of them." The child. Also from the last "workshop" exercise is sitting in the director's chair. Everyone is engulfed in white light and energy. The participant is instructed to merge with the child. Somehow a wall

disappears and the participants stand on the "brink of the universe!" The trainer says, "You are the creator of your life."

The trainer once again vigorously encourages future participation in Vitality trainings. Participants are instructed to hold hands in a circle, and then they are instructed to go back to the guest event to "support your friends" (i.e., encourage their recruits to enroll in the training).

Note: For Philip Cushman's analysis of the inherent systemic problems with many mass marathon or large group awareness trainings see his paper on "[Mass Marathon Trainings](#)"

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