9.1: Challenging Stasis

A California state educational survey revealed that 75 percent of high school students in California admit that they cheat on tests, and 66% of students say cheating to obtain a desired grade is okay. Years ago, students would have considered cheating a very big deal, but now it appears to be wrong only if they are caught. This change in attitude about cheating has led to a change in "cheating" behavior.

To explain this change of behavior we need to examine some of the current beliefs of the typical student. The campus newspaper at Moorpark Memorial High School conducted a survey to discover why student cheating is so rampant. The results of the poll revealed that the main reasons for cheating are to get good grades and the lack of test preparedness. The pressure to get good grades occurs for several reasons, including parental pressure, lower car insurance rates, and college acceptance. These pressures are cited in an attempt to justify the cheating behavior. When we take a test, we make the decision to cheat or not to cheat. If we feel pressured to do well, or if it is important that we do well, and if we are unprepared due to lack of studying, we might tend to have a positive attitude toward cheating. Therefore, the decision is made to cheat.

In analyzing this increase in student cheating, we start with three very important terms: beliefs, attitudes and behavior. Briefly explained, one's beliefs (knowledge) and values (goods or bads) lead to the development of an attitude (likes or dislikes), which in turn guides or directs one's behavior. And when all these parts become comfortable, we are in our personal stasis or comfort zone.

To best understand the overall process, we need to first look at beliefs, and at subsets of beliefs, known as values, followed by a description how this leads to an attitude. Once we understand this foundation for how we act, we can look at various persuasion strategies that are used to alter beliefs and attitudes. We can learn not only how to use these approaches to change others, but we can examine how others use these methods to persuade us.