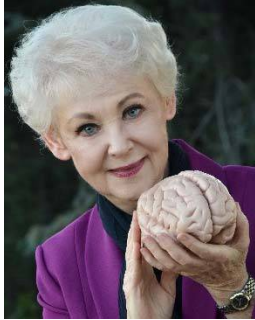


Busting Bad Behaviors

©Arlene R. Taylor PhD www.ArleneTaylor.org



Entering the lobby, I walked straight into high drama. The principle actor was a slim young woman who was fairly vibrating with emotion.

“That’s insulting, demeaning, sexist, racist, and you WILL pay for it!” she screamed, her long ponytail racing in circles. “Who are you to tell *me* what to do? Who asked you to critique my behaviors anyway?”

Individuals in the group began to drift silently away until only the drama queen was left in the lobby, hands on hips, ponytail still swinging.

Turning to go, she noticed me. Glaring in my direction, she fairly spat out the words: “Did you hear what that b_____ said to me? Did you?”

Shook my head.

“Well! She told me I needed to get my s_____ together! That’s what! Said I was disgusting, something straight out of the book of *bad behaviors for a two-year-old*. That’s what!”

I refrained from smiling with difficulty, however, based on the performance I’d just witnessed. It really was Broadway stage quality.

“I expect you’re going to put me down, too! Tell me my behavior was *bad*, whatever *bad* means!”

“It’s your behavior; your call. For me, I decide if a behavior is good or *bad* based on whether the outcome is negative or positive. What I *can* say is this: that *was* an Oscar-winning performance.”

“I suppose, if you were me, you’d have done something entirely different,” she said, sarcastically.

“If I were you, I probably would have done exactly what you did. I imagine you were doing the best you could at the time with what you know. Most people do. But if it were *myself*, I’d probably try to figure out what triggered the comment. And, if I could learn anything from it. Those two things—before I reacted.”

“You are pathetic!” was her response, although her posture relaxed ever so slightly, and her hands fell from her hips. “What could I possible *learn* from it?”

“What would have been your response if the comment had been “Grow up,” or “Get your life together”? I countered.

“Easy,” she replied. “I’d just have flipped her the bird and told her that I am grown up!”

“And?” I persisted.

“Oh, that I *am* getting my life together. Well, as soon as I figure out how to do that, I suppose.” She was mumbling.

“She didn’t say either of those things,” I said. “Rather, she gave you a metaphor, which certainly got your attention.” *No matter that the language was rather primitive*, I thought.

Walking over to a comfortable chair, I removed my coat, sat down, and pointed to a nearby chair. The young woman strolled over nonchalantly and flopped down, legs hanging over one upholstered arm.

“She got my attention, that’s for sure,” she said. “What’s a metaphor?”

“A metaphor is a type of story that can help people better understand a specific situation in their lives by comparing it with something else. Here’s an example.”

“Scruffy is a large loveable hound that lives down the block. Unkempt and ungroomed, he is completely untrained. Wait. I take that back. He has learning that anything and everything goes. His owners, to all appearances, have devoted zero time and energy to teaching this rather loveable pooch how to be a valued member of society. Consequently, he runs wild in his corner of the world: flattening freshly planted flowers, scratching paint off fences and doors, peeing on gate posts, digging holes in gardens, and leaving messes anywhere and everywhere without regard to where people walk or sit. Naturally, he saunters off expecting others to clean up after him. He jumps on people he likes, planting big paws on shoulders and leaving imprints on suits and blouses the size of a saucer. He can do in a pair of glasses with one swipe of his big tongue. Most regard him as an unmitigated neighborhood nuisance. But because they like his owners, they tolerate his egregious behaviors—so far, anyway.”



“I can picture that,” she said, actually smiling. “Why doesn’t someone just *bust* the hound? I’d do it if I lived in that neighborhood.”

It was my turn to laugh. “How might this metaphor apply to your life?” I asked.

She shrugged, rolling her large dark eyes expressively. “I’m sure and certain you’re about to tell me!”

“Only if you want to hear my brain’s perspective.

She shrugged and assumed a regular sitting position. I took that as a go-ahead.

“Compare yourself to Scruffy, although you are much better looking.” She chuckled. “Although I have no idea what triggered that other person’s comments, is there any possibility that you’ve been making messes in your corner of the world and expecting others to either pick up after you or live with it? Any chance you have been exhibiting JOT behaviors—that is, J-jumping to conclusions, O-overreacting, and T-taking things personally? If so, have these resulted in positive outcomes for you?”

“Boy, you don’t pull any punches!” the young woman snapped. After staring at the floor for a few minutes, she got up, walked back and forth a few times, and then settled back down in the chair, legs over the arm again.

Finally looking up with tears glistening in her dark eyes, she said, “Okay, I get it. But only because of your meta-*something*.”

“Metaphor,” I repeated.

“But I still don’t like being told to get my . . .” I held up my hand, signaling that I remembered.

“Whenever another brain shares its opinion, you always have a choice,” I said. “You can *choose* to jump to conclusions, overreact, and take it personally. Or you can realize it’s just that brain’s opinion. You can pick it up and run with it—or not. Learn from it—or not.”

“Oh. Oh,” she said slowly. “I assumed she was intending to put me down. I took it personally and decided she hates me.”

I said nothing.

She sighed. “I might have over-reacted—just a bit, you understand.” Her face unfolded into a beautiful smile. “Instead of biting her head off, I could have busted my own bad behavior.”

We both burst out laughing.

I gave her a thumbs up. “Good on you, as they say down under. That’s how you start raising your Emotional Intelligence, your EQ. Next time, in a similar situation, you can choose to respond more effectively.”

“*Scruffy* is in training!” she said, wryly. After a moment of silence, she added, “Were you serious about my performance being Oscar-winning?”

So, she *had* heard my comment.

“If Oscars were awarded for *bad* behaviors that result in negative consequences, you bet,” I said, thinking to myself that *sometimes they may be*.

“I’ve always dreamed of acting on stage or even being a drama coach,” she said wistfully.

“Then go for it,” I replied. “Harness some of that innate ability and put it to good use. If your brain can perceive it, you can achieve it!”

“You think I could *do* that?”

“It doesn’t matter what I think. It’s what you and your brain think. If you think you can or you think you can’t, either way you’re right. If today was any indication . . .” I let my voice trail off.

She looked at me for a long moment.

“Yes,” she said, a new note in her voice. “Yes! Definitely. I can do that! Matter of fact, I *am* doing it. I’ll invite you to the first play I act in or coach!”

“Deal,” I said.

Jumping up, she pulled me out of my chair, threw her arms around me, and lifted me off the floor by at least twelve inches. *Goodness! The woman is tall and strong!*

Setting me down after kissing me soundly on both cheeks, she jogged across the lobby and headed down the long corridor, her ponytail making those interesting circles.

Her words drifted back to me. “No more making messes. *Bust* those bad behaviors instead!”

Retrieving a shoe and putting myself back together, it took me a full minute to stop laughing.

Even more fun than winning an Oscar is helping people bust bad behaviors and make better choices . . . in their “corner of the world.”