

Roberto: Issue of Control

ROBERTO and HIS DESIRES

Roberto is a very nice boy. All employees claim they love Roberto. No more than people usually love a cute kitty. Our boss described Roberto as a "little manipulator". Employees claim Roberto is always happy when someone is in trouble, but not him. Roberto fights, bites and whines. Roberto is a blind non-verbal twelve-year-old boy. He looks like a seven-year-old. It is likely that he never started to learn how to speak, because he is considered autistic. I wonder how a blind, non-speaking boy was diagnosed with autism? And what did it matter? His parents didn't need Roberto. The boy was under the supervision of the Child Protection Social Service and the only person who visited him was a social services worker.

Roberto, like most of such children, knew perfectly well what he wanted and what he loved, and what he didn't. More often than not, he sat in the corner of the couch rocking his leg as if it was a baby, smiling peacefully. When Mary sat next to him, he could lean on her. Mary did not like to be touched, so the staff of the residence forbade Roberto to do this. He was forbidden to touch Mary or anyone else. He only had to sit quietly in the corner of the couch. Roberto obediently followed these rules. He tried to protect himself from troubles.

Sometimes Roberto wanted something and began to whimper quietly, but according to the "behavior program" whimpering was forbidden. On my first day at work, we went for a walk in the park and Roberto was with me. Roberto did not want to go to the playground with the rest of children and began to whimper. I remembered that I had been told that Roberto liked to walk and decided to walk with the boy in the park. It was evident that he liked to walk on flat paths, but he did not want to walk on the grass. We walked for a long time with Roberto, and it seemed that he was happy. It was easy to

work with him, because he knew well what he liked and what he didn't, and he knew how to explain it clearly.

When I told Jill, an employee who had worked with Roberto for a long time, about how wonderful we had been in the park, she retorted that the boy hated walking. Another time, when I wanted to treat Roberto to an orange, she said that he hated oranges. In fact it turned out that it was the orange that was Roberto's favorite fruit. Maybe Jill herself didn't like oranges.

One day we went with Jerek and Roberto to the museum. Or rather, we were sent. Not the best entertainment for a blind child. And of course, he didn't feel very good when he found himself in a room with a lot of people. Trying to somehow entertain Roberto, I tried to show him something new, offering to touch cold metal and warm pebbles, but he did not like it. He just wanted to walk. It is understandable, he wanted to take a break from the boring couch.

It is very interesting to work with these children, as they often communicate with very weak, subtle signs. Thus, this keeps you always in the loop.. For example, you are walking with a child in the park, you want to turn right, but with the movement of his palm he shows that he wants to continue to go forward. Usually, I react to these little signs and go wherever possible according to their desires, so good mutual contact is established very quickly.

DESIRE FOR CONTROL

One of the main goals for Roberto was learning how to use the toilet. Or rather, it was a goal for the employees. According to the "behavior program" the boy had to sit on the toilet for 5 minutes every hour. One day we were working together with Fred, the boss, who was trying to follow the instructions of the letter-for-letter. He told me to take the boy to the toilet. Roberto jumped up from the seat in a second. Then Fred took him to the toilet himself, and I witnessed that Roberto stayed in the toilet for the five minutes he was supposed to have, while Fred remained by his side. Fred is a tall and strong man. When they returned, I inquired about the result of his supervision. No result. According to the schedule, exactly one hour later, Fred again sent me and Roberto to the toilet and told me to keep him there by force for five minutes. The boy bit me. It was a slight bite, and the boy was not angry at all.

He was just trying to convey to me his opinion about what was happening. I said, "Okay, Roberto, I see what you want to tell me."

Fred was angry and was going to punish him, but In fact, for Roberto it was his only way to protect himself from the pressure of the outside world with his "behavior program".

It was the only time in all 20 working years when I was "injured". Perhaps the reason was that I never used force against Roberto, as well as against anyone else. I always manage to persuade, convince, and agree on some kind of compromise. And here it was the use of force. Of course, he did not like it.

VIGILANT CONTROL

In fact, almost all of the low functioning children were under continuous supervision. Any actions in their lives were determined from the outside. They could be forced to eat and even forced to sleep. For example, in relation to one boy who did not want to sleep, employees used the cold. When the boy was cold, he became lethargic and fell asleep faster. But the excretory system is not so easy to control, so children used it as the only way to somehow control the world around them. And Roberto was one of them. But I didn't know about it yet.

When I asked Fred why Roberto refused to use the toilet, Fred replied that the boy was mentally handicapped. This reason is used to explain any problems. And it makes no sense to look for any other explanations for his behavior. Any behavior is explained by diagnosis.

- "These children are almost like animals, so how can we understand the reasons for their behavior", Fred explained.

I wanted to argue that there is always a reason for any behavior, even when it comes to special children, but I did not continue this meaningless discussion. In times of behavioral approach, ranting about causes is not at all adequate. For me, this is interesting and entertaining, so just in case, I always "try the

water" to find an ally, and at the first usually negative reaction, I immediately stop and then have fun alone

Another interesting thing I noticed this evening. According to the "behavior program", we had to teach Roberto, as a child with autism, to perform one-step commands. For example, "get up", "come here" or "sit down" and the like. Just like in the army. In this way, Fred ordered I should give Roberto some instructions. I said, "Roberto, get up!" . He stood up and walked over -straight , turned left and hugged me without any further instructions, even though I was sitting quite far away and had to make a turn. Thus, he did 3 actions in a row. Later I saw that in fact Roberto can do much more than was expected of him. I don't know how he could guess my approach, but as soon as I approached him, the boy stretched out his hand to me. Sometimes I would take his hand and say, "I have nothing, Roberto, just myself." And he laughed back. These children respond very well to humor

FORBIDDEN ACTIVITIES

Sometimes I would bring Roberto some fruit, and ask him to give me first one hand, then the other, and he did this task without any difficulty. I wanted to start asking him to extend his right hand first and then his left, but unfortunately I had to stop working with the boy. There were complaints of excessive activity. We played only outside of prying eyes

I had to go back to what my colleagues constantly complained about and everywhere. I began to think. And analyzed Roberto's problem regarding the toilet. The next morning, when Roberto woke up, I took him to the bathroom. The boy jumped up from the toilet in a second and flatly refused to stay there longer. Then I took him to take a shower. He loved to shower. While the boy was bathing in the shower, I asked him to pee. He did it. The next morning, I decided to test my assumption. I took the boy to the shower and, while he was washing, again invited him to pee. And he obeyed again. I could see from his face that he understood what I was telling him. Since then, I have not had any difficulties in working with Roberto. Often the situations were not easy, but Roberto never behaved badly. He patiently tolerated if I was wrong about him, and was very happy when I understood him correctly. A complete understanding has been established.

There were more experiments with Roberto on controlling their own system and I think it gives kids some sense of freedom. And it's necessary. But if to suggest substitution which would satisfy that need I believe kids would be glad

ANY PORT IN A STORM

There seemed to be nothing that could be done for Roberto except sleep and eat. Toys were not allowed for safety reasons. Well, you can use that there is and had to use food for games. The next time first I asked him to reach out with another hand, and only then gave him a treat. I noticed that he was enjoying the game and laughing merrily. Then I made the game more difficult - to stretch out one hand to me twice, the other twice. Then, instead of eating, I started shaking his hand and saying, "Hello, Roberto!" I saw that even without treats, he likes this game. Then I asked to reach out with my right hand when I gave a treat, and my left hand when I just wanted to shake hands. Soon Roberto firmly learned where the right hand was and where the left hand was. Then we moved on to another game – give your right hand to me and your left hand to Tony. At this stage, food was no longer used as a motivating factor, Roberto continued to enjoy the game. At the end I always gave him the rest of the treat, saying, "Roberto is tired, he's done a good job, he's learned where the right is and where the left is, so he needs to rest."

The exercise began and ended with a treat, but that was not the main thing. The most important thing is that Roberto himself wanted to play and enjoyed the activity and at the same time learned something new. He didn't play for treats, he played for the sake of playing. It was very interesting with Roberto

WHAT ROBERTO THINKS ABOUT?

Unlike specialists, who often barely tolerate their work due to the fact that they have to do the same thing over and over as it is prescribed, signed and sealed, until they get permission from the top for new activities. I had complete freedom to follow only Roberto and change what was needed, when there was a natural need for it. As a result, both Roberto and I enjoyed the process

And it is not surprising that even sitting in the corner of the sofa, Roberto usually looked satisfied, and a blissful smile walked across his face;

Probably none of those who worked there ever thought about what was happening in the minds of these children. Perhaps Roberto, who was so happy in his own little world, swinging his leg for hours, was actually somewhere else. and was completely free

Perhaps his leg was something else to him and not a leg at all, and he rejoiced in something else than the troubles of his friends. By something that we could never have imagined. Maybe he understands everything and laughs at us, thinking, "Well, how strange are these people around? Well, what can be funny when my friends are punished? How could they just come up with that strange idea?"

But no one will ever know what Roberto thinks about, because no one is interested in it and does not need it