

FROM...

...LANGUAGE IN ACTION...

...by...

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### RATS AND MEN

An experiment was once conducted with rats to see "where their habits take them." The rat was first trained to jump off the edge of a platform at one of two doors. If it jumped to the right, the door held fast, and the rat fell to the floor; if it jumped to the left, the door opened, and the rat found a dish of food. When the rat was well trained to these reactions, the situation was reversed; the food was put behind the right door, and the left door was made fast. The rat, however, continued to jump at the left door, each time bumping its nose and falling to the floor. Finally, it refused to jump at all and had to be pushed. When pushed, it again jumped to the left. Then the right door was opened so that the food was visible, and again the rat was forced to jump. The rat persistently jumped at the same door as before, bumped its nose, grew more and more nervous as it found it was up against an insoluble problem. In desperation, it leaped off the platform and raced around the floor, bounced about like a kangaroo. When it stopped exhausted, it went into trembling convulsions, then fell into a coma. It lost all interest in life and ceased to care what happened to it. It had a "nervous breakdown."

Mr. Hayakawa relates this to incidents in the lives of human beings. First, they are habitually trained to make a given choice to a given problem; secondly, they get a terrible shock when they find that the conditions have changed and that the choice doesn't produce the expected results; third, they continue making that choice anyway; fourth, they sullenly refuse to act at all; fifth, when by external compulsion they are forced to make a choice, they again make the one they were originally trained to make-- and again get a bump on the nose; finally even with the goal visible in front of them, to be reached simply by making a different choice, they go crazy out of frustration.

In all situations in life, decisions must be reached and problems solved. In trying to reach these decisions, we go back always towards the "left door"--in other words, continue to drive ourselves crazy and end up with the same disastrous results.