

There's something about Bob - A Bob Story for Bob

Dear Bob –

(Personal Stuff - Redacted)

My third contact with you was the seminal one, a game changer, a life changer. During this academic epoch, I had spent considerable time trying to think about and write about the peculiar effect of placebos in insomnia RCTs: The three stick phenomena (as I like to call it). That is, placebos reliably cause an initial change (stick 1), the clinical gains of placebos are, oddly, stable for an inordinate period of time, a time frame where one would think that the initial effect would wear off (stick 2), and then another clinical gain that moves the measure of symptom severity to a level closer to normal (stick 3). Stick 1 everyone knows about - its expectancy. Stick 2 was where I was focused... focused on the idea that waxing and waning symptom severity in insomnia may interact with pill use so that pill use corresponds to clinical improvement on an interval basis. I thought this was important and wrote this up. But the third stick was a total mystery to me. That's when the epiphany happened: you presented a departmental or center lecture on placebo effects and the notion that the vehicle for medication delivery can become a conditioned stimulus for the medication effects. Wham! That was the third stick. With time (and interval reinforcement [enough pairings of the physiology of good sleep with pill use]) the vehicle / pill can be come a conditioned stimulus and elicit good sleep. Wow. I was thunder struck.

But wait there's more: you were proposing that given a certain paradigm, one could optimize the potential of placebos as conditioned stimuli and test how much reinforcement was needed to maintain the response for prolonged periods of time (Partial Reinforcement Paradigm). Wow. Imagine that ! I made an appointment to meet with you to talk about this idea and its possible application to the problem of maintenance therapy for insomnia. The meeting was a watershed event. You wanted us to field a grant. I needed grant funding. It was a match.com moment. But here's the thing. You thought I should be PI. I couldn't "grok" this... it was your idea... You went on to explain.... With typical Bob style straight talk: 'Michael you need multiple PI grants' (a point also made clear to me through the fog of academic adolescence by Jan Moynihan) – 'I don't need such stuff or want the responsibility... what I want is to test the idea in as many applications as I can with people within various fields taking point'. Well you don't walk from an offer like that: I said "OK. Let's get to work". So we started meeting regularly, we worked through the oddities of co-writing, and we produced a grant that on its second submission (then a 3 cycle review process) got a perfect score (1st percentile). Wow! This was the first of four consecutive R01s to hit within 1 year. Life changed. Life Changed because of you.

As time passed I got used to meeting with you regularly and started to consider you part of my academic family (a very important thing to me). During this period I got married and Ari and I made it our habit to go to Dim Sum on Sundays and to always invite you and Gayle to "come with"... You two often did... So... I got used to Sunday's with you and Gayle and started to consider you guys family.

Then we had a Baby. And what a Baby – she has an inborn ability to win hearts and minds. Her first campaign: You and Gayle. She seemed to win you over and before we knew it, we felt like we had a local set (a Rochester set) of grandparents. After many discussions with you, we left Rochester in 2008 and our regular contact came to an end. "More's the pity". Today we maintain contact over our collaborative work but my /our life is poorer for not having regular contact the way we used to... So it goes.

Bob – this is our story and I am sticking to it. Thank you for so enriching my life / our lives. Not just Ari, Mia and I, but on behalf of all the people whose lives you changed (many of which are enshrined in this book): Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.



Dim Sum Sunday



Mia in the "Ader's Blue Dress".