

HUMAN INCOMPETENCE



CONFESSIONS OF A
PSYCHOLOGIST



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☞ Tom Gilbert, the Man ☞

Tom Gilbert was articulate, red-haired, and hyperactive the first time I talked to him in 1959 and the last time I talked with him a few months before his death thirty-five years later. We originally met when he was a newly minted Ph.D. and I was a graduate student. We attended meetings, hosted by B. F. Skinner, which were attended by researchers from the greater Boston area. Little did we know, in 1959, that two things would happen over the next few decades: 1) The International Society for Performance Improvement would recognize Tom's contributions by naming one of their highest honors after him; 2) I would be honored to receive The Thomas F. Gilbert Distinguished Professional Achievement Award.

Tom and I got much better acquainted several years later at the University of Michigan when he came to Ann Arbor many times to work with Geary Rummel and others, including me, at the Center for Programmed Learning for Business. Tom was always creative, a good friend, and a harsh critic. He didn't abide fools or pretentious people but he was kind and considerate of his friends. For example, Tom, Geary Rummel, and I were having dinner in the Rubaiyat restaurant in Ann Arbor. A distinguished visiting

colleague began expounding on the importance of *float* in financial management. Tom noticed that I looked blank and saved me from embarrassment by a five-minute harangue at the poor man about people who use jargon without defining their terms.

I tell these stories to illustrate that, as you the reader may surmise in these stories of Tom's life and his impact on us all, Tom Gilbert, while brighter and more creative than most people, Tom was a fallible human being, both vexing and loved.