Paradoxical Interventions

From: "Andrew Cain"
Date: Fri Aug 31, 2001 11:47 am
Subject: Paradoxical Interventions

I wonder if y'all could give me some advice on delivering paradoxical interventions. I just had a client on the phone who is still 'feeling sick' at the thought of a major speech she has to give in a few months time, although she feels much better about smaller, informal talks she gives. Not wanting to pass up the opportunity, I told her to draw up a schedule of five or ten minute slots in which she could worry about the speech. I insisted that she be very strict about the time etc.. "That won't be hard!" she said. I persisted but can't help wondering if I set it up right -- the last thing I want is for her to succeed! She'll ring back next week with the results and -- who knows? -- they might be fine but I wonder if anyone has any advice to increase the chances of success (or failure)?

Regards, Andy

From: Roger Elliott
Date: Sat Sep 1, 2001 7:00 am
Subject: Re: Paradoxical Interventions

Hi Andy

Sounds like a good idea to me! :-)

As far as the outcome goes, as with any good paradoxical task, you can't lose.

If she succeeds in doing what she has been asked, this is great as you have introduced a new element and broken the original pattern. She has also had the experience first-hand of having 'done' her problem deliberately.

Of course this leaves the door open for her not doing her problem at other times.

In addition, the way you asked her to do the tasks implies that she doesn't need to worry at other times.

I hope this helps,

Good luck with it and do let us know how it goes.

Roger Elliott

From: Anthony Asquith
Date: Mon Sep 3, 2001 10:40 am
Subject: RE: [Uncommon Knowledge] Paradoxical Interventions
Andy you old war horse!!! I was interested to get your notes about this, you could suggest that your client rather than trying her best to conceal evidence of her nervousness, she could do the exact opposite by advertising the fact that she is nervous. One simple way would be for her to use words like 'I have really been looking forward to giving this presentation and I am really excited about being asked to talk like this however, I am also very nervous so I would be grateful if you could maybe give me a smile in the audience from time to time. It will help me a lot to get through this.'

The effect that this is likely to have will be that the audience will side with her during her talk...

Call me soon

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