



Clear Thinking Issue 110

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How to talk to the unconscious mind

– by *Mark Tyrrell*

A sense of identity is a curious thing. When I talk about 'me' or 'I', which part of me do I mean? Am I talking about the conscious part of me that makes decisions and consciously intends to do something? Or do I also mean that part of me that can dilate my pupils, breathe while I sleep, generate [dreams](#) and activate my immune system? All these unconscious processes are 'done' by me, but they feel as if they just 'happen by themselves'. So there is a duality of identity in me. And you.

We commonly say things like: "I'm in two minds about that..." and "part of me agrees with you and part of me doesn't..."

Your identity isn't just singular. If you blush, you might feel consciously 'responsible' for that blush; people even say things like: "I'm so stupid for blushing!" But really this is the conscious mind taking responsibility for the *unconscious* mind. People don't *consciously* decide to blush – it's another part of them that is doing it. And it's this *other part* that we need to influence when we use hypnosis. This is not to say that we don't have or take responsibility for what we need to change in ourselves, but it does mean we can be clear about *which* part of us is actually maintaining a problem behaviour.

The conscious part and the unconscious part of us, although clearly forming a total 'whole', appear to work as separate autonomous systems. The more we can relax with this idea, the more we can encourage the specific part of ourselves that is best suited to deal with specific circumstances to take the reins and manage that process. What does this mean?

Well, for example, someone who likes to feel in control of things all the time may find themselves trying to 'consciously control' what is, in reality, an *unconscious* sphere. If you try too hard to relax, or to fall asleep, or even to be creative, then you are trying to influence these things with the wrong part of yourself. 'Control freak' types may have difficulty sleeping, or spontaneously letting their hair down in company. They may have sexual difficulties too, as they find it tricky to let that part of themselves that knows how to respond to intimacy do its stuff. There is a part of you that is *not* the conscious part that is better than you are at digesting food, regulating blood pressure, improving your mood and healing your body. This is not to say that what you decide to do consciously can't *influence* these processes, but ultimately it's your unconscious mind that runs the mechanisms by which these changes occur.

When we [communicate hypnotically](#) with ourselves or others we need to know which part – conscious or unconscious – we are communicating with and seeking to influence. A good hypnotist will be absolutely clear in their own mind which part of the mind they are directing their communication towards and will modify *how* they communicate with this in mind.

For example, if I say to a client, "Okay, now make your blood pressure lower, please!" I am speaking to them quite directly in a way that is really more appropriate to the conscious mind, which is *not* the part that deals with autonomic processes like blood pressure.

But suppose I were to say something like:

*"Now you know there are two parts to you. There is your **conscious part** that is processing these words and is aware and may be analysing what is going on but there is a far **larger part** of you which is **very able** and can do things for you without you even needing to be aware that **it's happening**..."*

*And it's that part of you that I want to begin to appeal to right now – the part of you that is apart from the conscious part is so powerful and knows how to **ease blood flow** through your body*

*And as it does that... your conscious self may start to **become very curious** as to just **how it's going to feel** once your blood pressure **begins to lower** a little...*

maybe you'll notice your hands feeling a little warmer or just start to feel more relaxed generally..."

This is very different from the first approach of just *asking* someone to lower their blood pressure. The second way of communicating does two things. First off, I use what we call '[splitting](#)'. This means I *purposefully* and *explicitly* divide up the parts of the person by saying: "Now you know there are **two** parts to you... a conscious part and an unconscious part..." This is a way of implicitly saying, "Okay, your conscious mind can butt out of this because it's your *unconscious* mind that is the expert here."

The second thing I do through this approach is to start to build up conscious curiosity. If the unconscious mind is going to do what it's good at (lowering blood pressure, switching off the pain response, curing warts or whatever), then we can ask the conscious mind just to sit back and be curious and almost just *watch* what the unconscious mind does. Sometimes when people are hypnotized they experience a hand or arm getting lighter. If we want to encourage this specific [hypnotic phenomenon](#), rather than just asking them to lift their arm (which would be a *conscious* instruction), we might ask their conscious mind to

"be very curious as to just which finger feels lighter than all the other fingers... and I really don't know and you don't know yet which hand can... just begin to feel a little lighter..."

Again, I'm using a specific type of language here – what you might call the language of duality – to distinguish between the unconscious part that actually starts to produce hypnotic phenomena and the conscious part that needs to stand back and just watch it happening and be curious about it.

When we seek to [hypnotize someone](#) we *want* them to respond with their unconscious mind; it's this part we want to connect to. So, we might say something like:

"Now you really don't need to listen to me because your unconscious mind will hear me. You can let your conscious mind wander in any direction it wants to..."

Emphasizing the duality in your subject's consciousness isn't about trying to use hypnosis to 'switch off' the conscious mind, but rather to give the conscious mind *permission* not to pay attention, or to occupy itself with something else. Skilled hypnotists often use confusion as a way of giving the conscious mind a preoccupying task and thereby keeping it distracted while suggestions really meant for the unconscious mind are delivered.

All good hypnotic inductions use the language of duality and you can even use it when asking *yourself* to produce hypnotic changes. For example, if I want to sleep deeply

tonight (which of course I always do ☺) I might encourage my unconscious mind to ‘do its thing’ by saying something to myself like:

“Now there is a part of me that just knows how to sleep deeply and nod off in just the right way... and right here and now I just want to make a little request to that part of myself for later... the part of me that knows all about those moments when I just gently start to slip into a beautiful deep and restful sleep...”

I also find that if I’ve forgotten something, it’s not much use trying too hard to consciously force the forgotten material back into my mind – in fact that seems to make it even harder to remember! Instead I might purposefully avoid trying to remember and just suggest to myself:

“Okay I need to recall this name and I’m going to stop thinking about it now but I want my unconscious mind to search for me and when it has found that name (or whatever it is I’m trying to recall) I want it to present it to me...”

This is a surprisingly effective way of getting your unconscious mind to do the work for you.

Before doing a longer [self hypnosis](#) session I might just review the kind of things I’d like my unconscious mind to do for me in very general terms. Then I will get my conscious mind to step down and just enjoy the ride. For example, if I’m feeling bad about a situation that I can’t practically change but want to feel differently about, I might ask my unconscious mind to generate some kind of [metaphor](#) or image that will help me start to move on from this concern. So, in this way my conscious mind has the task of merely *setting the intention* and leaving it up to the unconscious mind to *produce the means* of me feeling different. I might further suggest to myself that, whatever my unconscious mind does in the up coming self-hypnosis session, I want to re-awaken in about [twenty minutes](#) feeling refreshed but so much more positive and relaxed about the situation.

[Dr Milton Erickson](#) would often ask his patients to “trust your unconscious”. By saying this he was encouraging them to let the part of them that was expert at many things be allowed to work for them without the conscious mind getting too much in the way.

Sometimes if I am working with someone who I feel is a little too consciously uptight, I might use an analogy. I might say:

*“You know when you travel in a plane you need to leave the flying to the experts on the flight deck – you need to **allow** yourself to be flown. And likewise, there is a part of you that is more expert than your conscious self at overcoming this problem... and it’s **that** part I’m going to be talking to today as your conscious self can just **enjoy the relaxation.**”*

Your unconscious mind appreciates metaphor and patterns and even just starting to talk in analogies gears communication more toward unconscious responses. I've only just touched the surface of how to use duality when hypnotizing yourself and others. I hope you will take in these ideas and use this kind of approach to help yourself and others effectively.

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People talk to the unconscious mind all the time. Their own, and other people's. But, generally speaking, they are not aware that they are doing so.

This is not usually a problem (we are all so used to it we don't normally notice), but now and then it can lead to some spectacular misunderstandings when the listener responds to what their unconscious mind picked up rather than to the conscious, surface communication.

But when you learn to use hypnosis to help yourself and others on our [Hypnosis Unwrapped online course](#), you will begin to appreciate how important (and useful!) it is to know exactly 'who' you are talking to. And what to say to them.

As well as setting you on the path to being able to use hypnosis effectively to address and overcome many psychological and emotional difficulties, it will make all your communications much clearer and more effective. That's got to be good.

New dates for the [Hypnosis Unwrapped online course](#) will be announced soon, and meanwhile you can [read all about how to learn hypnosis online here](#).

See you in a fortnight.

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