



Clear Thinking Issue 117

Complete Reframing Course on CD

You know when your client desperately needs to see something in a new light, but how often do you find yourself just contradicting them instead? How can you make reframes 'take' and create that beautiful radical shift in perspective that the whole of therapy can pivot upon?

Learn to reframe like a master...

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How to get your clients to listen

*Using the power of gossip to get their attention – by **Mark Tyrrell***

Years ago while training therapy students we ran a curious exercise.

We gave one set of bemused students some balloons (which they blew up) and another some dried peas. The pea group were then asked to throw their peas at the balloons.

Eventually one of the students got it. "Aha! The peas are just bouncing off!" This smart guy also intuited the *point* of the exercise. "Suggestions can 'bounce off' - just as the dried peas bounce off the balloons!"

And a good way to get *that* idea to penetrate the minds of our students wasn't just to *tell* them about it, but to *get them to demonstrate it to themselves through analogy*, so the idea wouldn't just 'bounce off' *their* minds.

The fact is, no matter how wonderful, apposite or potentially life changing your reframes and suggestions might be, if your clients' minds aren't *open* to them, they will just bounce off.

Which begs the question: How can we get people to really pay attention?

Of course hypnosis is one powerful way of doing this and that is why we use it. During hypnosis people are open to learning both emotionally and even physically – as when we suggest that someone switch off sensation somewhere in the body.

But what about opening the attention gates *outside* of hypnosis? So that people are not just automatically rejecting ideas without really listening to them, or just rehearsing what they are going to say next while nodding at you without really taking home the message?

Well, there are many ways to get people to open themselves wide to new learning and one way is to mimic how this normally happens in everyday ‘non therapy’ life.

You’re not going to believe this!

What makes you *really listen* to what’s coming next? Think how you feel if someone says

(Your name here), look... I really don't know how to tell you this... promise you won't be angry?

Wow! Now they really have got your attention. There's no way you are going to leave without hearing the whole story.

And here are some more everyday attention gate openers:

Err... I'm not supposed to tell you this, but...

Would you mind if I share something with you? No one else knows... you won't tell anyone, will you... ?

Can you keep a secret? You won't believe what I found out about Shirley in Accounts!

Can I ask you a personal question?

Now of course, if someone talks like this all the time it won't have the same impact, but generally this kind of attention-grabbing opening gambit is pretty (for better or worse) compelling. They leave us feeling or saying: “What? What?” They create a readiness to listen very closely indeed.

These kinds of statements can work like mini hypnotic inductions in that they switch us directly into 'receive mode'.

So how do we translate this idea into the therapeutic situation?

Gossip Therapy? Really?

Of course, I'm not suggesting you gossip with your clients or furnish them with salacious titbits about other people just to get their attention (fun though that might be for some... you know who you are!). But if you have an idea or suggestion you feel is really important for your client to hear (and *truly* hear), then you can preface it with statements just as compelling as those above.

Here are three examples.

I have been thinking long and hard about your situation. I don't know how you're going to respond to this, but I've decided to tell you something...
(leading in to your therapeutic idea or suggestion)

Listen, can I ask you a question?
(of course, you just did, but prefacing your real question with a request for permission tends to stop the person in their tracks and get them wondering what can possibly be coming next)

This might seem a little personal... and I really don't want to be intrusive... but...
(and what you come out with doesn't have to be particularly personal, but you have now set them up to really listen to what you have to say next)

Therapeutic communication isn't a separate world far from everyday, natural interaction. And if it is (full of psychobabble) then it will tend to be less appealing to the client and less effective. We can learn to use the patterns of compelling communication strategies from everyday life.

Oh, that reminds me, just wait till you hear this...

Related Article: [Surprise hypnosis](#)

How to lift depression quickly online course

It's hard to talk to really depressed people.

Even when they come to a therapist for help, and you think this must be a sign that they are ready to engage and learn and make whatever changes are necessary, they will often sit in your therapy chair as if that's it, they've done their bit. Now *you* must wave your magic wand.

And whatever you say seems to go in one ear and right out the other.

This is because their attention is locked inside themselves. They hear you, but they don't *listen*. They are lost in a fog. Sounds come through, but they're muffled and meaningless.

So learning how to cut through that fog and get their attention is a vital therapeutic skill. And there's no better way to sharpen up your fog knife than by attending our [How to lift depression quickly online training course](#).

We'll give you the skills and the knowhow that will transform how you deal with depressed clients – knowledge that you can put to use straight away.

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See you in a fortnight.

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Psychology trainers since 1995

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