



Clear Thinking Issue 135

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3 trusty tips for dealing with resistant clients

by **Mark Tyrrell**

If someone pushes you, should you push back?

How about if you *pull* them? Then you'll be *directing* their energy rather than being made a victim of it. But you won't be conflicting with it.

If your antagonist pulls you, do you pull back and get into a battle of wills? How about if you 'encourage' their pulling and help them do it by... *pushing*?

I wouldn't want to equate therapy with martial arts, but sometimes we need to be artful when dealing with client 'resistance'.

But first we have to be sure that the resistance is really there.

Resistance: It's all in the mind

There is a risk that we might see clients as being 'resistant' when they are just disagreeing with us.

By a 'resistant client' I mean a person who is contrary by nature (or at least in your dealings with them). You know, you say "up", they say "down". You summarise what they just said and they shake their head and then repeat exactly what you just said with a couple of words changed. The type of people who just can't seem to help always taking the polar opposite view and who, it seems, would rather die than agree about *anything*.

They may display this contrary behaviour as part of their *overall* behaviour or perhaps only in connection with a particular subject.

The way to spot 'real' resistance and distinguish it from one-off differences of opinion is to ascertain whether it seems that *no matter what* you do or say, your client will disagree with it.

So how can we deal with resistance?

1. Don't take it personally

When your client seems to balk at everything you say, with the body language of a shut-tight forest bear trap, it's perhaps natural to find yourself becoming exasperated or frustrated.

But I want to suggest that you see this kind of behaviour as an *opportunity* and a bonus.

Why? Because resistance, whatever it's focussed on, is *energy* (just like that pushing and pulling) and all energy and motivation can be used in therapy. (I'll talk more about this in tip three.)

The more relaxed, detached, objective and calm you can be when a client demonstrates contrariness, the more effective you'll be in helping them.

2. See what's behind it

I said don't take it personally, and one way to help yourself feel more objective about what seems to be resistant behaviour is to understand what may lie behind it.

People display resistant behaviour for various reasons including:

- **habit** -- they may live with someone who they in constant conflict with, or work in or were brought up in an environment in which they have/had to constantly 'fight' and they haven't yet settled into a non-conflicting role
- **status** -- they may have an unsatisfied (but unconscious) need for status and see every interaction as a tussle for supremacy (if this is the case we may need to ensure that they feel this need is met before we can get down to other therapeutic work)
- **anxiety** -- they may be seeking a sense of security and control through insisting on having everything on 'their' terms and maybe coming over as a control freak.

Appreciating that there is always something *behind* the resistance - whether it's anxiety, out-of-control competitiveness or merely the habit of contrariness - means you have a

chance of dealing with it effectively rather than just emotionally reacting against it by becoming upset or angry yourself.

3. Use the resistance

In fact, don't just use it. Positively *encourage* it!

If you read the case studies of [Dr Milton Erickson](#) you'll see that time and time again he [encouraged the 'resistance'](#) of his patients, seeing it not as a problem but as a vital energy that could, if properly directed, actually help the client.

On our [smoking cessation training course](#) we show video footage of a woman telling me she is "trying not to resist the hypnosis". I then ask her *not* to try to be more compliant but to try to "resist even more!" I then go on to talk about how 'hypnotic' cigarettes can be and how she can really ramp up her resistance to those 'hypnotic' cigarettes.

We *want* our clients to be resistant - but only to what is really undermining them.

So a chronic smoker's or drinker's resistance needs to be encouraged, harnessed and then directed toward what has been destroying them - not the therapist or the therapy, but the cigarettes and the booze.

If I aim to relax someone but detect that they tend to see things in terms of a tussle, I might suggest:

*"Now I don't want you to **relax too quickly**..."*

If they are operating from contrariness and now I seem to be saying "don't relax too fast", if they are to continue to resist me, they now need to relax *quickly*!

Of course none of this would be conscious. (There's more on this [paradoxical approach](#) here.)

I'll leave you with these words on effective trance induction from Milton Erickson:

"Whatever the behaviour offered by the subjects, it should be accepted and utilized to develop further responsive behaviour. Any attempt to 'correct' or alter the subjects' behaviour, or to force them to do things they are not interested in, militates against trance induction and certainly deep trance experience."

New 'Smoking Cessation Training' Home Study Pack

We've been successfully running online training courses for several years now, getting some excellent [feedback](#). However, one common comment from course delegates was that the live lectures times did not always suit busy lives or time-zone differences and that you preferred to listen to the recorded lectures. We've listened to these comments and created a home study training pack that will fit into your schedule and allow you to rush or meander through the course at your own pace.

When you buy a course, you will receive a pack containing a USB stick and workbook, containing audio lectures, hypnosis scripts, psychology insights, videos, check-lists, transcripts of the lectures, overviews and summaries of the course content. In short, everything you need and more to learn effectively. Also, there is your own private forum for ongoing discussion with colleagues and course trainers, where you usually get an answer within 24 hours of posting a question. After completing the self-test quizzes, you will be sent a certificate of completion.

And of course, Kirstin will still be there to help with any administration or other course queries.

The new course has a new price. Previously, the full price course was £395 or £296 if you got the early bird discount. We're offering the new smoking cessation pack for £195, less than half the original price.

Find out more about the [Smoking Cessation Training Home Study Pack](#)

Find out how you can get 10% discount on this training pack and other products and scripts by [joining the HypnosisDownloads.com Growth Zone](#).

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell

Co-Founder

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