



## Clear Thinking Issue 136

In this issue:

- 3 trusty tips for dealing with resistant clients
- Back by popular demand - Live Rewind Technique Training

### How to neatly avoid resistance in therapy

by **Mark Tyrrell**

*"... and the subject takes credit for it. You're not telling the subject to 'do this, do that'. So many therapists tell their patients how to think and how to feel. That is awfully wrong."*

Milton Erickson

And here's [Erickson](#) again (I really must curb this habit):

*"You ought to have your techniques so worded that there are escape routes for all resistance - intellectual, emotional, situational."*

We generally don't like bossy people.

Sure, we may respect them, know they are 'right', that they get things done, but they tend to rob us of something that we human beings prize, perhaps above anything: a sense of freedom. Bossy people make us feel less free, even when they have the best intentions in the world. And we tend to run from what makes us feel less free.

And if we haven't any other way of escape, we'll go for psychological resistance.

In [3 trusty tips for dealing with resistant clients](#) I described ways we can respond when we encounter resistance in our clients. But right now I want to consider how we can go about *avoiding* this knotty problem altogether. How can we ensure that therapy is much less *likely* to become a 'tussle'?

Here are some ideas that you are entirely free to reject:

## 1. Reframe the idea of 'control'

If you suspect your client is concerned with 'losing control', you can talk about how you use hypnosis only to *increase* the client's control and freedoms. We might talk about how the [phobia](#) or [cigarette addiction](#) or [depression](#) had been seeking to control the person and how [hypnosis](#) can help them become free.

So it's not about

*"me controlling you through hypnosis"*

but rather

*"us working together to stop the psychological difficulty controlling things..."*

## 2. Allow for *any* response with greater choice

When we hypnotize someone, or in fact do any form of psychotherapy with them, we really need to respect their freedom. People's unconscious need for a sense of autonomy may be greater than their need to overcome their problem. Even if that problem has a devastating impact on their life.

I may have the objective of getting my client to relax and go into hypnosis. But rather than phrasing my suggestions categorically to bring about my desired outcome:

*"You will become more relaxed and start to feel as if you are by the sea in your mind..."*

I can free things up by covering all - or at least many - possible responses from my client, so they don't feel so pressured to respond in the particular way *I* think is best.

So I might say:

*"And you can relax with eyes open or closed, and I really don't know whether as you relax pleasant thoughts of the beach might come to mind or maybe just the colours of some place else that you really enjoyed being, maybe outdoors or indoors... and as you drift into **deep comfort**... you might find that sometimes you're consciously very aware and even analytical or that you forget to pay attention consciously and just **enjoy the experience**..."*

Here we are giving them a sense of choice *within* - it has to be said! - the limited frame of relaxing deeply and going into hypnosis.

### 3. Use permissive language

I can be directive in a seemingly non-directive way. By using permissive language such as:

*perhaps... maybe... I wonder if... I really don't know...*

and giving lots of 'choices' like

*"maybe you'll feel that relaxation in the hands first, or maybe the feet, or perhaps you'll start to notice your breathing becoming a bit more like that 'sleep breathing' people do when they are starting to... **sleep deeply...**"*

I am being seemingly permissive (so as to allow for the important need to feel autonomous) while directing everything towards *relaxing deeper*. In this way, even though I am clearly suggesting deeper relaxation and trance levels, I am doing it in such a permissive style that my client is more likely to respond positively.

### 4. Give credit to your clients

However wonderful your therapeutic skills, the real therapy is done by your client. We need to thank them, and give them the credit. For example:

*"Wow, I'm pretty impressed at how skilled you are at relaxing!"*

or:

*"I just want to say thanks for being so committed to making these changes..."*

Acknowledging who is really doing the work like this again gives back freedom, and a sense of capability and competence, to our clients.

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In short, you will learn how to treat phobias or PTSD in as little as one session, and really understand how faulty pattern matching prolongs emotional distress and how to help your clients back to a full and rewarding life.

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell

Co-Founder

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