



*Clear Thinking newsletter from Uncommon Knowledge - Issue 82*

In this month's Clear Thinking...

1. Setting goals in therapy
2. Online course: Lift depression fast

## **Setting goals in therapy**

*5 ways to maximize client motivation towards your therapy goals*

Have you ever set a therapeutic goal for a client, had them agree to it, and then... find they've done nothing at all about it at their next session?

To escape from a problem state (whether a burning building or a state of mind) needs a *strategy*. Clear [goal setting](#) is vital when helping people in therapy. The mind needs a clear orientation (especially when it's all emotional) and a compelling 'blueprint' fixed within consciousness of how things can be better in the future. So:

### **1. State the goal in positive terms**

I never take goals for granted. Even when treating, say, a spider [phobia](#), where you'd assume the goal was pretty self-evident, we'll still spend time clarifying their goal in *positive* terms:

*"What do you want from this session?"*

*"I don't want to feel terrified and sick when I see spiders!"*

What kind of a blueprint is that? Imagine getting in a cab and telling the driver all the places you *don't* want to go.

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People who lead fearful lives tend to waste time focusing on what they *don't* want to have happen in the future; successful, fulfilled people focus on positive possibilities and work toward them.

*“Okay, so what do you imagine it will be like to **feel relaxed around spiders?**”*

Ah, now we're getting somewhere, we're beginning to gently steer our client away not just from what they *don't* want, but *towards* their therapeutic destination.

## **2. Therapy sculpture**

Help your clients *shape* their goals.

Someone who has been negatively focused for a long time may find it quite difficult to suddenly start thinking about what they *do* want. For example, if someone's been depressed they may be so mired in misery that any 'solution talk' feels utterly alien. Here you might gently suggest desired outcomes:

*“Wouldn't it be good to start to feel a little more energetic in the mornings?”*

If they concur, then you can start to mould this idea into a more specific goal, but...

## **3. Don't leap the staircase**

I might ask someone to imagine a staircase with ten steps and suggest they wouldn't expect to leap up all ten steps at once, but we can get going by starting to climb *one step at a time*.

Break the goal down into manageable chunks. If someone tells you they want to 'be happy' we need to 'unwrap' this word and discover what this might equate to in practice; for example:

- feel more energetic
- enjoy sex again
- socialize more
- start to play the piano again
- re-join the gym and do regular exercise
- sleep well

And so on. So now we've broken down the vague and indistinct goal of 'being happier' (perhaps itself sculpted from 'not wanting to feel depressed') into specific concrete components that we can actually start to work toward.

## **4. Sell the sizzle**

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The power of *expectation* is immense; use it. Your words, your demeanor, your facial expressions all create expectation.

And you can do this by artfully *implying* positive outcomes, rather than bluntly stating them.

Tell people what to expect, how things will improve. Build future pictures using all their senses of how things will be better and happier:

*“As [depression starts to lift](#) it’s common for dreaming to decrease and therefore day time energy to start increasing... so that it’s possible to do more again...”*

*“When these fearful feelings calm down and recede, people often find themselves experiencing a marvellous sense of lightness and freedom...”*

## **5. Can’t wait to know!**

Curiosity is a huge motivator: Can therapists use curiosity to enhance their therapy...?

Find out next week!

But seriously – of course we can. [Dr Milton Erickson](#) would use curiosity as a motivator all the time; he’d get people fixated on the possible course of their own potential.

*“And I really don’t know... and you can be very curious... just how these new good changes... are going to begin to show up in your life... in rather surprising and delightful ways...”*

## **To sum up**

Your goal setting needs to be:

- positively orientated
- specific (and if necessary broken down into manageable steps)
- compelling (remember the sizzle!)
- made more compelling through maximizing curiosity

In the words of Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

*“One ship sails East,  
And another West,  
By the self-same winds that blow,  
'Tis the set of the sails*

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*And not the gales,  
That tells the way we go”.*

## Goals and depression – incompatible?

One of the commonest symptoms of depression is chronic loss of motivation. For everything. Everything seems pointless, and even things which you *have* to do seem to take much more energy than you have available. So it's a constant downward spiral.

Breaking out of this vicious circle is not easy, and therapists need to know how to motivate their depressed clients into taking those first essential steps to freedom.

Our cutting edge [online course on lifting depression](#) will give you all the tools you need to help your clients recover their enthusiasm for life, no matter how long they have been struggling with depression.

The next course launches on 9 February 2010 and you can save 25% off the course fee if you book your place before 19 January 2010 – so there's a good positive personal goal to go for! There are only 25 places on each course, so book early!

See you in a fortnight.

[Mark Tyrrell](#)

Co-Founder

Uncommon Knowledge

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