

# **The Seven Deadly Sins of Hypnotists**

How to destroy trust and to lose clients

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## I. Introduction

Who really controls the hypnosis state? Is hypnosis imposed from without or is it an internal experience? As a hypnotist/hypnotherapist, what do your words reveal about you? Do your words and actions build trust or do they create fear and failure? Words are the tools of our profession and it is vital to use them wisely and correctly. Words can bring laughter or tears. Words can lead to actions of healing or harming, of building or destroying. Words can create rapport or resistance.

Our profession, hypnosis, is one of the most exciting and productive professions on earth. That is the reason we have devoted so much of our lives to it. It is the only profession that helps people to heal all aspects of their lives --- spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally, and even financially. Hypnosis is the leading profession for holistic healing --- healing the whole person. Amazingly, after the client masters the art and the science of the work, the healing quality of self-hypnosis is free from the cost of office visits. It is a skill that is learned similar to that of learning to ride a bicycle.

Best of all, there is no down side to hypnosis and self-hypnosis. There are no side-effects as can happen with many medications. There are no dangerous drug interactions. Hypnosis has a long-term, consistent record of great help and betterment for people of all ages and from all nations.

We, as hypnotists, are involved in a unique profession with vast opportunities; however, some of the terms used in the work might be misinterpreted by the public. How do we maximize our therapeutic strengths while minimizing memories of the vaudeville era?

Our professional vocabulary is in the process of renovation. Many words and phrases employed by hypnotists in past decades are outdated because they have been known to be misleading. Perhaps, some of our newer terms are just as ambiguous.

In any profession, practitioners have to simplify complicated ideas. In order to communicate with the general public, they have to translate their university-learned shorthand jargon into familiar words and phrases. Sometimes, we would like to say, "If you can't talk about it in simple language, then, perhaps, **YOU** really don't understand it." Is it possible that you are using terminology and concepts which you really are unable to define --- that you really don't understand completely?

Through observation and research, we have learned much about the childlike qualities of the inner mind. We have learned that, as the trance state deepens, the verbal responses become shorter and shorter. Paradoxically, however, such sentence fragments can be very profound. The simple, innocent child-like mind can cut through the strata of non-essentials. The hypnotist would do well to cooperate with the client (to mirror the client) by working at the same level --- by using simple, focused language. The use of basic, simple subject and predicate will be far more effective than complex language could be. Complex language is fine for writing professional papers but simple language is best for trance work.

As simplicity is considered the cornerstone of honesty, we should arrive at straightforward terms that have precise meanings and we should use vocabulary that can be understood by all --- vocabulary that is inclusive. By such process, we can eliminate the terms that seem exclusive, power-oriented, or elitist. The neurological system seems to accept the literal meanings of words.

Just as the vocabulary of an individual reveals information about that person, so does the vocabulary of a profession reveal its status. In the activities of life, both at home and abroad, we meet many hypnotists and hypnotherapists. To the public, who might meet only one or two, each professional represents, in a way, the entire field. With that background in mind, we encourage serious discussion on the topic of how we can improve our professional vocabulary, thereby improving our collective performance.

The primary tool of the hypnotist is words. A psychologist travels with a briefcase containing a battery of tests; a medical doctor carries a bag of instruments; other professionals use various types of equipment for their work. In the course of attending to the needs of the client, a hypnotist carries an unseen package of words, phrases, and sentences.

In the light of insight into their sciences, professionals update their tests, instruments, and equipment. The profession of hypnosis also shows advancement over time and should overhaul its linguistic toolbox. Constantly, we are learning new ways to improve our tools --- to sharpen and to polish them, to update them.

We live in a dynamic world. There is continuous change everywhere. When we refuse to flow with scientific advancements, we behave as if the world were static. The frustration which we meet tends to make our work less effective. Since the hypnotist's tool is words, clients are served better when words are used in the most efficient and effective manner, as indicated by observations and research over the years.

Other professionals may struggle with neologism but, for us, the inventing of new words and phrases can be set aside for a while. Perhaps our profession could update by simplifying our sentence structure and by eliminating outdated words and phraseology. The following words and phrases are a few of the main culprits.

## **II. Outdated Words and Phrases**

### **1. "Now, I want you to..."**

"Now, I want you to..." is a phrase of malignant self-importance. As research in science learns more and more about the mind and the levels of brainwave activity, there comes better understanding of the work of hypnosis. Hypnosis is seen, nowadays, as self-hypnosis. Nobody really hypnotizes anyone --- although it usually appears to be that way.

The hypnotist's job is that of creating a trustful and relaxed atmosphere to enable the client to enter a level of mind which is comfortable. Entering hypnosis, or relaxation, is something which the client does; nobody can do it for another person. Experienced hypnotists teach clients to enter their own levels of hypnosis; novices, if they have not learned well, think that they,

themselves, are doing it all. The phrase, "Now, I want you to..." implies that the hypnotist is the person in charge of the session.

Ironically, when a client expresses a desire to be told (commanded) what to do, that person tends to be resistant to control in any area of life! The work of an effective hypnotist is that of helping clients to heal their own lives. No matter how many years of experience, how many certificates, how many degrees you have, or how hard you try, you merely set the stage for the client. The client does the work. You cannot do it for your clients but you surely can prepare safe, positive environments in which they can work to make effective, acceptable changes in their lives.

"Now, I want you to..." is, by far, the most limiting, egocentric, and authoritarian phrase used in our profession. It should be discarded immediately. Effective hypnotists stopped using it many years ago. The phrase almost always elicits a negative response by creating immediate wariness on the part of the client and, thus, is counter-productive.

By using such a phrase, the hypnotist tends to limit the client's capacity for self reliance because it implies that the client must obey, must do something to satisfy the needs and goals of the hypnotist. The mission of our profession is to empower clients --- it is not a power trip for hypnotists. The hypnotist is not a miracle worker but a person trained to create an atmosphere conducive to the client's successful resolution of concerns and problems.

"Now, I want you to..." is a phrase which is outdated because it is arrogant, controlling, degradig, and exploitive. It can be replaced by "Please..." The effective hypnotists are teachers who respect their clients as learners. They enable and empower clients to take responsibility in learning new and effective ways of living.

## **2. Referring to clients as subjects**

The word **subjects** must be stricken from our spoken vocabulary and from all printed texts within our profession. The term is used only rarely today in healing professions. It tends to carry many unwanted, negative connotations. The police sometimes use that term in reference to possible criminals. Suspects are labeled as subjects.

In earlier times, the term **subjects** was used when scientific research was being conducted. The word still applies in laboratory settings. When used in reference to human beings, in either research or therapy, it implies that the person has no personal control and is being manipulated and measured like a lab rat running a maze. It also has a broader meaning of inferior status and subservience, for example, the subject of a monarch.

Decades ago, The American Psychological Association banned the term subjects. It recommended the term **participant** for people who volunteer for research studies and the term **client** for a person seeking therapy. In research, other acceptable terms are **volunteer** and **co-researcher**. The emphasis is

placed upon the concept of volunteering; research on human beings is not conducted without the willing and informed consent of the participants.

### **3. The Use of the Phrase under Hypnosis**

People experiencing hypnosis are in an altered state, usually recognized as a higher level of functioning. To an untrained observer, they might appear to be asleep or to be responding involuntarily. In reality, however, they are more aware and more perceptive than when they are 'in the normal beta state. Realistically, they are at a higher level of consciousness; surely, not at a lower level. People experiencing a hypnosis state certainly are not under anything.

The word **under** has frightening connotations for many people. No intelligent person wants to be under the control of another person. The concept generates fear. In fact, people experiencing hypnosis retain more functional capacity than they use in the normal conscious state. In common parlance, we say that it is unfortunate to be under the weather meaning that the person is ill. We use under the influence to indicate that a person is under the control of alcohol or drugs. Surely, our profession neither needs nor wants to be associated with such negative concepts.

A suggested change: **The client experienced hypnosis.** The positive statement empowers the person involved and has the primary virtue of being true.

Another phrase which needs to be changed is: "I put him under." What a bold and, essentially, untrue statement! Only someone who did not receive good instruction or, perhaps, an old-time vaudeville showman would make such a statement. Nobody hypnotizes anyone else. Hypnosis is an inner experience requiring consent. Nobody can do it for anyone else. Effective hypnotists realize that the job description is to create a comfortable environment in which hypnosis, or relaxation, can occur. To believe or to imply otherwise exposes what would appear to be a power complex and a flagrant disregard for the integrity of the client.

A suggested change: The hypnotist facilitated hypnosis. Humbling as it might seem, in truth, it is all that we do.

### **4. Using Negative Sentences and Negative Words**

For many years, we have known that the neurological system tends to ignore such words as: don't, won't, not, etc.--negative words. It tends to respond to nouns and verbs with their accompanying adjectives and adverbs. In the waking, beta, state of consciousness, adults, normally, can respond to such words or, at least, recognize their presence. Often, though, rules and regulations which begin with negative words are disobeyed. Even the Ten Commandments are regarded as a grand ideal and tend to be broken.

Negative sentences, which often begin with the word **don't**, can make a complicated form out of a simple sentence. For example, the hypnotist says, "Don't imagine the problem as getting worse; imagine it as getting better." With such a command, the client's mind first has to imagine the problem as getting

worse before imagining it as getting better. The client might focus too long on the first part and give only limited attention to the second part. Actually, the first part of the command is not needed and serves only the purpose of complication. (Effective hypnotists would eliminate the word **problem**, too.)

By analogy, a small child first has to hear, "Eat the cookies" before hearing, "Don't eat the cookies." The system ignores the word **don't**. The little child often doesn't move to the second stage of incorporating **don't** and is regarded as being disobedient. The direct, simple sentence is effective. Such negative forms of giving commands---or of making statements---should be eliminated from the vocabulary which hypnotists use in trance sessions. The inner mind can produce profound wisdom in a simple child-like manner. Essentially, the unconscious mind of an adult, just as does the mind of a small child, responds to simple subject and predicate.

Quite often, people tend to give commands in a negative manner because they believe that they are being specific. "Don't run into the street" sounds like a specific warning to give a child; however, in the working of the child's mind, an image of running into the street is created and is reinforced with each admonition. "Be sure to play only in the yard" is less dramatic but is far more effective. "Remember to breathe deeply" is more effective than "Don't forget to breathe deeply." This subtle and profound change in specific wording will improve how we communicate as people and, especially, as hypnotists.

In addition to avoiding the use of negative statements, it is wise to avoid the use of negative words both in isolation and in sentences. When the hypnotist uses negative words, such as danger, depression, despair, etc., the client, in a trance state, tends to focus on such words and could develop unwanted behavioral characteristics. Have you noticed that many of the negative words begin with the letter d? (de-, di-, dis-) Avoid the d- words when you are doing trance work. They are depressing! There are other negative words such as: problem, sick, ill, trouble, etc. which should be avoided, too. While the conscious Mind, often (most often, not) has learned to work through negativity, the child-like simplicity of the unconscious mind responds best to positive words and statements.

The unconscious mind tends to respond to the literal meaning of words. Just as a small child will take statements at face value, so does a client in an altered state of consciousness.

Edgar Cayce stated, "Always constructive, never negative suggestions." (1163-2)

## 5. "The client is susceptible to hypnosis."

The word **susceptible** has outlived its usefulness. Nowadays, people are said to be susceptible to things which they don't want, such as colds and influenza. By contrast, people are receptive to things which they want. Individuals choose hypnosis, willingly, to get help in many areas of life and, therefore, are receptive to it. **Susceptible** implies the weakness of vulnerability; receptive indicates the strength of acceptance and acquisition. The statement can be rephrased, "The person is receptive to hypnosis."

## **6. The Client Is Resistant and Uncooperative**

**Resistant and uncooperative** are words that ineffective hypnotists use. When a client is not responding, it is because there is fear or a lack of trust and rapport. Sometimes, the lack of trust is rooted in the choice of words used by the hypnotist. Blaming the client for being resistant is similar to blaming the victim for a random drive-by shooting. The term resistance implies that the client is doing something wrong. Could it be that the skilled, professional, highly-trained hypnotist is doing something wrong?

The reality is that we need to examine our choice of words and techniques and to review our whole stance toward the work. Perhaps we create the resistance. Rapport and trust are essential to our work. If, in an atmosphere of caring and understanding, we have created sincere rapport with our clients, there will be cooperation. We need to realize that trust works both ways: we need to trust the client's inner wisdom. In our attempt to trust the client to learn what to do to find healing, we need to use empowering vocabulary and we need to eliminate authoritarian phraseology. When we respect the client, there is full cooperation.

## **7. Fear-based Words, Phrases, and Sentences**

All too often, it seems, hypnotists unintentionally create fear 'in their clients just by the choice of words and phrases which they use. Some of the fear-based words can be felt very acutely by clients and the response can be much different from the desired outcome. When clients become fearful, perhaps as a result of being told, "You have nothing to fear," "You won't have any difficulty," "Don't be scared if.." "Don't be worried if.." "You won't be ill," they become reluctant to express their concerns.

The issue of trust is a major consideration for clients. Without trust, the entire session can be lost. A client presented with fear-based words might never consult a hypnotist again. It is a simple matter to rephrase negative statements to make them positive and empowering.

When fear is used to attempt to control the client, the client's apprehension becomes strong. Fear and manipulation are the antitheses of productive hypnosis work. As hypnotists, our words and actions must demonstrate respect for our clients.

Our words can either help or harm our entire professional standards. If you hear other hypnotists use fear-based words, please politely explain to them the necessity for changing the vocabulary which they are using. Our choice of words --- as well as our attitudes and our actions --- shows our degree of respect for our clients. Fear-based words can lead to the undermining of our profession.

## **III. Conclusion**

The Old Guard is changing --- but slowly. We still have some experienced hypnotists/hypnotherapists who continue to commit those Seven Deadly Sins. We hear them frequently. Many of those people are regarded as highly successful. Imagine how much better they would be if they

changed their manner of communication to a more positive approach! There are many, at all age levels. We say that practice makes perfect; however, many people have perfected the negative language to the extent that it is ingrained in their vocabularies. Changing it becomes difficult. Most teachers will agree that unlearning a bad habit is a difficult task and that a reward for good behavior is more effective than is punishment for error. If we would practice the positive, then, that form would become second nature to us.

It is vital for experienced hypnotists to update their linguistic communication to a positive language structure. They are icons in our profession and should be remembered for their distinguished contributions without having a "but---" attached. They have a lot of expertise to share with newer professionals.

We have to create a comfortable, positive, trusting atmosphere for the client's self-hypnosis in the processing of the successful resolution of concerns. The work we do is exciting and productive. We are innovators but we must remember to keep in touch with general common sense. We must learn to use clear, simple language in a strong, meaningful manner. A few concise words, spoken with sincerity and depth, have far more significance than a deluge of meaningless verbiage and patter.

More than anything else, our words reveal who and what we are. Before we can change the world, we must change ourselves --- a small part of the world. Before we can build a better world, we must improve our own small part of it. We can start by renovating our professional vocabulary, the way we communicate with our clients.

The future for hypnosis is greater than we can imagine. To be part of our profession's growth, we must remain open to new knowledge, we must be eager in the pursuit of truth and clarity, and we must be courageous "in discovery. Let us be responsible in our profession.

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