

The Art of Listening

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In our profession, there are many things that are important to learn and to utilize. Some examples are: a pleasant voice, professional manners, and good business skills. There is another quality that is seldom discussed; yet, it might be the most valuable attribute of hypnotists and regression therapists. That quality is the ability to listen.

We understand that our work consists, primarily, of speaking, especially when we are helping a client by means of visualization; however, the act of listening is even more important. Listening, especially during the intake period, creates rapport and trust between the therapist and the client. Listening demonstrates a genuine interest and it suggests that both individuals are working together for the benefit of the client. Listening provides the regression therapist with key words and phrases from the client's own vocabulary. Such terms, built into the therapeutic session, can allow the client to feel at ease.

An out-dated approach implied that the hypnoterapist was the expert and that the client was the problem. Today, we have grown a little wiser in our approach by recognizing that the client might be wiser than we had realized. Clients have conscious goals and hopes that must be acknowledged. They also have unconscious goals and wisdom. It is important to interview and to listen to the inner mind (in past-life work) as well as to the conscious mind (intake). Sometimes there is harmony between those two states of consciousness; however, often, there is strong opposition.

There is another worn-out approach that implies that the therapist has an automatic answer to a client's dilemma. In past times, a therapist's words to a client, "Oh, I know what the problem is and I can fix it for you" seemed to assure the client that all would be well. It still is that way in the medical/physical sciences. In our profession, the hypnotist no longer is a sage on the stage but a guide by the side. True listening is not an act of declaring that we have solutions to clients' problems; rather, it is an act of focusing attention on the words and signals of the client. Often, unconscious gestures signal more information than does the spoken word. It is imperative that, when we listen, we are tuning into more than the actual words. Active listening includes all levels—visual, auditory, and emotional.

Listening must be natural and realistic. If it has the appearance of being contrived, then the client will detect such behavior and will stop talking. Learning new skills is important. Practicing those skills to make them natural takes time and effort.

One of the best techniques for practicing the skill of listening is the forming of pairs for assuming both roles. The first person listens while the second person shares a real and personal event. Absolutely no advice or comments may be given during the sharing period. Then the roles are reversed. That type of session can make us realize how we, as therapists (and in our everyday lives), are accustomed to interfering in a person's story and offering advice. Too many times, we assume that we have the answers. Too often, we assume that our solutions are applicable to another person's situation.

Listening and offering advice are two distinctively different activities. In the previous century, Dr. Milton Erickson helped hypnotists to realize the important role of the client in the listening/advice relationship. Over two centuries earlier, in the 1700s, the Marquis de Puységur experimented with an entirely new level of hypnotism. At that time, the common term for hypnosis was *magnetism*. The Marquis was one of the few people who correctly used the term *subjects*—the peasants who participated in those sessions were workers on his estate and, therefore, were his subjects. Many outdated terms such as *magnetized* and *subjects* no longer are used because they are imprecise and misleading.

The Marquis de Puységur was a friend of, and successor to, Dr. Mesmer, an advocate of *animal magnetism*. His contributions to the field of hypnotism are numerous and profound. One of Puységur's novel and far-reaching discoveries was that humans have an innate wisdom far greater than formerly acknowledged. One experiment involved asking magnetized (hypnotized) volunteers to diagnose their ailments and to prescribe the proper treatments. The story of his pioneering work is published in the March 2006 edition of *The Journal of Hypnotism* (pages 24-26). The same article, written by Dr. John C. Hughes, Research Editor, includes the amazing true story of the twenty-three-year-old peasant, Victor Race. Victor is immortalized in hypnosis books as a forerunner of Edgar Cayce and various other individuals who channeled information for self, at first, and then for others. Although Cayce's work has more documentation, Victor Race's

work with the Marquis was the most inspired of that time.

One of the best therapies involving the importance of listening is found in non-directive (client-centered) counseling. Originated and developed by Dr. Carl Rogers, it encompasses the belief that each person possesses, within self, the ability to find solutions to personal problems. In the sessions, the counselor is a person who, through training in clearing his/her own attitude to develop self-understanding and humility, has learned the technique of listening with understanding. The technique allows the client to talk without interference. Then the counselor reflects (summarizes) the client's information. As a mirror reflects an image, so does the therapist reflect the ideas back to the client. As a result, the client knows that he/she was understood accurately---thus maintaining rapport and trust. The idea is to draw out the client's own resources---to allow the client to access his/her inner wisdom---thereby enabling that individual to go within the self to explore the Kingdom of God which is within each person.

The therapist who is thinking about the next question to ask the client is not listening to the client. Sometimes, however, particularly with the less-talkative clients, some therapists find that it is productive during a client's pause sometimes to insert "Please explain further" or "How do you feel about what's happening?" (Or "How do you feel about what happened?") The use of *Why* can be counter-productive because it throws a switch to the left-brain and ends the flow of creativity. As a result, it leads the client to rationalize situations instead of following a sequence with feeling. The use of "Tell me..." also should be avoided because the client is more interested in describing the story than in reporting to the therapist; moreover, in a past-life session, it is very unlikely that the therapist was present at that time. Therapists who have cleared their own attitudes have learned to keep the egotistical *me* and *I* out of therapeutic work with clients.

The purpose of non-directive therapy is to help people who are not in need of psychiatric treatment but need some assistance. It has been called *first aid for the soul*. The art and the skill of being a good listener can be a preventive measure.

When the client begins to talk about problems, the therapist listens. As that person goes deeper into hate and blame, the therapist listens and makes innocuous comments reflecting exactly the ideas presented by the client. Eventually, the client becomes aware of the bitterness and then possible solutions begin to come. From the non-interference

of the therapist, through the emoting of invective, condemnation, and malcontent feelings, the client becomes aware that possible answers are emerging. The session continues until the client realizes that the severity is diminishing into tolerance and tranquility and that insight is expanding into enlightenment and wholeness.

Listening is difficult and it requires a strong focus of attention and concentration. There can be no mind wandering. The therapist must absorb everything that the client is saying and doing. There is an oneness---a rapport in which the therapist receives impressions not generated by the self but directly from the client, almost like a religious experience.

Today, how many hypnotists ask their hypnotized clients to self-diagnose and to prescribe the proper treatment? Very few. How many classes or workshops focus on the art of listening? Very few. How can we build a profession in which the general public will perceive hypnotists as friendly, helpful instead of controlling, and manipulative? How can we be more successful in helping people to help themselves?

The solution to the above queries is found in the familiar story of the fish. If you give someone a fish, then you will feed that person for one day. If you teach someone to fish, then you feed that person for a lifetime. That concept is not new but, sadly, it would seem that some people only want fish-for-a-day. They have not developed the self-respect to do things for themselves. Most people, however, want to learn how to help themselves by using hypnosis or self-hypnosis to create miracles in their lives and they encourage the people around them to live more productively.

Listening, like fishing, takes practicing a few skills, which can be learned. Teaching clients to access and to listen to their own inner wisdom is the most valuable gift any hypnotist can give to a client.

A good listener has

- a background of personal sessions for the purpose of clearing his/her own attitudes for self-understanding and for the development of humility
- good conceptualization of the technique of listening with understanding
- good memory for the information and body language given by the client and should take careful notes to reinforce the memory
- skill in following the direct flow of the client's information
- thorough understanding of the material presented by the client