Workshop Manual

Effective Techniques for Dealing with Highly Resistant Clients

Clifton Mitchell, Ph.D.
Mind Management Seminars
3328 Berkshire Circle
Johnson City, TN 37604
cliftmitch@comcast.net
website: www.cliftonmitchell.com

6 hours
Conventional Definitions of Resistance

- "Any client behavior that exhibits a reluctance, on the part of the client, to participate in the tasks of therapy as set forward by the therapist,"
- "...any behavior that indicates covert or overt opposition to the therapist, the counseling process, or the therapist's agenda," (Bischoff & Tracey, 1995, p. 488).

Alternative Perspectives: The Social Interaction Theorists

Resistance occurs as a result of a "...negative interpersonal dynamic between the therapist and the client" (Otani, 1989, p. 459).

"Resistance is defined as psychological forces aroused in the client that restrain acceptance of influence (acceptance of the counselor's suggestion) and are generated by the way the suggestion is stated and by the characteristics of the counselor stating it" (Strong and Matross, 1973, p. 26).

Resistance and Influence: Breaking the Negative Cycle

A general hierarchical list of the least forceful to most forceful methods to influence:

- least forceful
  - completely non-directive
  - indirectly suggest
  - directly suggest
  - provide advice/educate
  - confront
- most forceful
  - punitive force

Resistance is created when the method of delivering influence is __________________ with the clients' current propensity to accept the manner in which the influence is delivered.
General Principles for Managing Resistance

Do the Unexpected

Slow the Pace

Focus on Details

Seek Emotionally Compelling Reasons for Change
Maintain an Attitude of Naïve Puzzlement

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Treat Clients’ Resistance with Respect

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Establish Mutually Agree Upon Goals

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Conclusion

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

All a client has to do to thwart your efforts is _________________.

Adapted from King, 1992

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Email: cliftmitch@comcast.net       website: www.cliftonmitchell.com
# How to Convert Questions Into Curious Commands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Openers</th>
<th>Directives</th>
<th>Add-ons/Softeners</th>
<th>Object of the Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you</td>
<td>tell me</td>
<td>a bit more about</td>
<td>your husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unnecessary, eliminate)</td>
<td>describe</td>
<td>a little about</td>
<td>your childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>explain</td>
<td>a little more about</td>
<td>your medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>summarize</td>
<td>something about</td>
<td>what the move was like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>outline</td>
<td>the problems with</td>
<td>the move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clarify</td>
<td>something more about</td>
<td>the larger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>share</td>
<td>a little more about</td>
<td>regarding the move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>talk</td>
<td>something more about</td>
<td>what your dad said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>give me</td>
<td></td>
<td>your illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>give me an idea of</td>
<td></td>
<td>your job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>help me to understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>your relationship with…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Managing "I Don't Know" Responses

Responding to "I Don't Know"

The key to responding to "I don't know" is to respond to the ______________ behind the response. Examples of responses that interpret “I don’t know” at face value include:

"At this moment, you are really stumped as you search for an answer."

"You really cannot think of a possible approach that you can take that appears better than what you are doing."

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

If client has stated "I don't know" in order to avoid revealing some threatening reality about him/herself, simply empathize about your suspicion:

"It is difficult and scary to actually say aloud the truth about…"

"You are really uncomfortable facing this aspect of your life."

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

If you suspect the "I don’t know" is a peacekeeping deflection, then respond similarly with an understanding of this perspective.

"You are concerned that if you provide the answer it will cause a lot of controversy and conflict among your family."

"You are reluctant to tell me the answer because you worry about how I might take it."

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
How to Avoid "I Don’t Know" Responses

1. Simply omit the question altogether. Instead, respond with the empathic statement.

Example:  "I sense that you are stuck as to what to do, you have no idea how to begin doing something about your problems, and you are really searching for some new approach that might work."

Inquire of a Wise Friend

The Classic Pretend Technique

"Pretend you weren't confused, what would you be saying if you knew what you wanted."

"Make up an answer."

"Guess what you think you might say if you did know."
References


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Effective Techniques for Dealing with Highly Resistant Clients 2nd Ed.
Clifton W. Mitchell, Ph.D.

Hundreds of Innovative Approaches & Ideas
To Prevent, Avoid, & Resolve Resistance

A to-the-point, practically written guide that brings together tangible, stress-reducing approaches and techniques for dealing with your most frustrating clients. An invaluable resource that both the working practitioner and student will turn to when seeking realistic, pragmatic ideas & strategies for overcoming stagnation & creating therapeutic movement.

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Priming: Programming the Mind for Habit Change and Success

The Ultimate Guide to Programming the Most Important Computer in Your Life—Your Mind

Are your self-defeating habits holding you back and interfering with your life satisfaction and success goals?

Don’t Fight Your Bad Habits, Reprogram Them!

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Therapists, did you know you are triggering unconscious action with virtually every therapeutic response you make? Priming stimulates the unconscious guidance system that controls behavior. Significantly, subconsciously activated goals can be more powerful than conscious goals. This book will teach you everything you need to know about the fascinating phenomenon of priming and how to proficiently incorporate it into your therapeutic dialogue. Written from a self-improvement perspective, the approach can also be used as a technique in and of itself to help you and your clients dissolve ineffective habits and create new ones.

Available at www.cliftonmitchell.com or Amazon
Priming: Using the Hidden Power of Language for Superior Client Outcomes and Self-Improvement

Dr. Clifton Mitchell

ABRIDGED HANDOUT

"You do not have to want to stop your current behavior in order to change, you simply have to want something else more."

Aldo Pucci

1. You do not like the status quo.
   -- pushes client
   -- less pleasant motivator
   -- but familiar state

2. You want something else more.
   -- pulls client
   -- more pleasant
   -- but unfamiliar, threatening
Most clients have not clearly formulated the desire side of the change equation.

The first rule of language is that all language is hypnotic. All words and paralanguage influence.

The second rudimentary point is that, if you are talking to another, you cannot, not manipulate.

Brain most complex organ in the universe
86,000,000,000 nerve cells (86 billion)
86 (billion) to 860,000,000,000 (billion) glial cells
Each cell has 1000 to 20,000 connections
100 (trillion) to 1,000,000,000,000,000 (quadrillion) neural connections in brain
Processes 1 (trillion) to 100,000,000,000,000 (100 trillion) bits of information per second
You are only aware of about 2000 bits of info being processed per second
Typical neuron fires 5-50 times per second
Ave. 20 yr. old has about 100,000 miles of nerve
fibers in brain
In a recent simulation experiment it took the 4th
fastest computer in the world with 82,944
processors 40 minutes to do what the human
brain can do in 1 second.
The brain uses 20-30% of the calories we take in

The mind move you and your
listener in the direction of the
dominant thought, regardless
of whether it is stated in the
positive or the negative.

Instead of Saying… More Effective to Say...
“Don’t fall.” ............... “Walk Carefully, hold the
hand rail.”
“Don’t lie to me.”........ “Tell me the truth, now.”
“Don’t hit your little ......”Keep your hands to
sister.”                           yourself”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of Saying…</th>
<th>More Effective to Say…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You're not dumb.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;You're smart and capable.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You're gonna fall and break your neck.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Hold on tightly, maintain your balance.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't forget to.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Remember to...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You can't miss it.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;You will see it on your right...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't hesitate to call.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Call when you need me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;You will not fail.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;You'll succeed!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't be nervous.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Remain calm and relaxed.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm really poor at.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Inch by inch everything's a cinch!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instead of Saying… More Effective to Say…

"I hope I don’t eat .......... ”I am healthy, I am thin.”
that chocolate cake.”

"I gain weight just looking at food.” “Everything I eat turns to health and beauty.”

I shed pounds daily for no apparent reason.

1. Define what you are currently doing.
2. Define the positive opposite of what you are currently doing with much attention to a properly worded dominant thought.
3. Make a present-tense statement of you doing the desired behavior with the precisely worded dominant thought.
4. Repeat the present-tense statement to yourself 500-1000 times a day consistently across time. Give it 2-3 months, once formulated, consistency is the crucial!
Priming refers to an increased sensitivity to certain stimuli due to prior experience.

Priming occurs when an earlier stimulus influences response to a later stimulus.

Priming can occur at the unconscious level or at a conscious level.

Subjects primed with words like “polite” “considerate” “respect” were less likely to interrupt than subjects primed with words like “rude” “obnoxious” “impolite”

Subjects primed with words like “old” “Florida” “wrinkles” “bingo” etc., all associated with elderly

1) walked slower after the priming, and, in similar study, if S had much contact w elderly
2) performed worse on a memory test than S primed with neutral words w little contact w elderly
We are controlled by an unconscious behavioral guidance system more than we think. And we are unaware of it.

Once covertly activated, unconscious goals are more powerful or just as powerful as conscious goals.

Goals do not require an act of will to be acquired.

What Does This Mean for the Therapeutic Dialogue?
1. Remember you are constantly priming your clients.
2. Consistently state the positive opposite of client’s negative framing of problems.
3. Use high level empathic responses that include deficit statements.
4. Use embedded suggestions/commands in your dialogue.
5. Carefully observe client reactions when prime clients.
6. Remember that your job is to plant seeds. Talk to the subconscious.
Language shapes perception. Language shapes memory. Words create “reality.” You cannot, not manipulate. You cannot, not prime. The only question is: In what direction am I priming my clients with my dominant thoughts?

“When you had the urge to drink...”
vs.
“When you decided to drink...”

“When you decided to give into the urge to drink.”
vs.
“When you decided not to fight the desire to drink.”
Things Not Shown to Have Significant Impact

- Time in previous treatment
- Tx approach – theory you use
- Evidenced based approach or not
- Degree type or field (Coun., Soc. W., Psych, MFT, D&A)
- Degree level (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.)
- Diagnosis
- Years of experience (most therapist plateau early)
- Whether you did an intake interview formal or informal
- Program CACREP, NASW, APA approved
- 48 vs 60 hour program
- Going to trainings like this one
- Use of Treatment Plan UNLESS!....

Things Shown to Have Significant Impact

- Therapeutic Relationship
  - Mutually agreed upon goal
  - Task agreement
  - Rogerian core conditions.
- Client willingness to try new things. (David Burns new scale)
- Hurting & paying/invested.
  - (Personally invested literally—collect those co-pays)
- Therapists’ belief in efficacy of approach

Well-stated empathic statements recognize and include:
1. The content or facts of the situation.
2. The underlying emotion present or thought to be present
   AND/OR
   The deeper personal meaning behind the client’s statement.
“You have tried to have a child for quite some time and are experiencing much grief over the possibility that it may not occur.”

“You are at your wits end with your children and are experiencing much anger at your husband for reinforcing their misbehavior.”

“You are very distraught over the divorce from your wife. The marriage in which you have invested nine years of your life appears to be coming to an end.”

Empathic statement + deficit

…and what you're looking for…
…and what you need…
…and what you're searching for…
…and what you want is…
…and what you require is…
…and what you desire is…
…and what you wish is…
…and what you crave is…

“You have tried to have a child for quite some time and are experiencing much grief over the possibility that it may not occur. As you talk about it now, it appears you are looking for…

…and other ways to fulfill your desire for a child.”

…and a way to move through your grief and begin readjusting to this reality.”
"You are at your wits end with your children and are experiencing much anger at your husband for reinforcing their misbehavior. You strongly desire...

...a way to obtain support from your husband and to develop more effective methods of discipline for your children."

...to learn new approaches for managing your children."

...to release the emotional buildup that you carry." (Gives permission to let loose.)

Benefits of the added deficit statements:
1) Displays deeper understanding of the client's situation—improved empathy.
2) Provides direction to the dialogue. Breaks up empathic loops.
3) If not correct, does not matter. Client will correct & clarify.
4) Begins goal creation. Depending on how stated & situation, the prime is the goal.
5) Begins priming the client toward new things. Seeds future action.

**Pacing** is the art of making a statement that tracks and joins the client's actions, thoughts, and/or emotions in the current moment.

**Leading** adds to the pacing statement an idea, suggestion, inquiry, etc. that encourages the client to consider new perspectives and actions.
General Formula For Creating *Pacing & Leading* Types of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Pace</th>
<th>Current State Pace</th>
<th>Emotional Pace</th>
<th>Lead&gt; Suggestion Prime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As you're sitting here</td>
<td>aware of your disgust</td>
<td>thinking about... perhaps you might&gt;Prime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As you are sitting here</td>
<td>getting in touch with your frustration &amp; pondering the options... wonder what would happen if...&gt;Prime</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to Talk Positive to Negative Person without Them Knowing

Make an empathic statement and then follow it with a statement of how difficult it is to do..., or imagine..., or comprehend..., or consider... the very behavior the client is having difficulty doing or facing.

"I can tell you're deeply hurt by the loss of your boyfriend, and it's at times like these that it's so hard to...*imagine all of the other men available to date.*"

"You've wanted to divorce for a long time, but it's hard to...*comprehend reestablishing yourself with another partner.*"
"You're so angry with your ____ that you could really give him/her a piece of your mind. It's at times like these that you just can't...imagine sitting down and having a mature conversation about this situation."

"At this time it appears that you get very nervous before a test, it's hard for you to...see yourself sitting there calmly taking a test."

Examples of Embedded Suggestions

"As you sit there and assess your situation, it is hard to...imagine yourself doing something different."

"Right now, you are struggling to...consider if a conversation could possibly impact the situation."

"As you...consider possibilities of how to handle this situation, it is difficult to...hear yourself saying an assertive statement."

All priming statements should always be stated in the positive:

"Your situation is quite irritating to you and you are lacking the guts to speak out."

A much better statement would be:

"Your situation is quite irritating and you're searching for the best words to say in order to have a significant impact."
Negative: “You are hanging on to your grief.”
Positive: “You are trying to...discover the best way for you to...move through your grief toward an acceptance.”

Negative: “It hard for you to not let your anger take control of you.”
Positive: “You are seeking to find a means by which you can...remain composed in these situations.”

Ideally Goals Should:

1) Be in the positive. No stop-doing or not-do goals.
2) Include dominant thought words that trigger desired behaviors.
3) Be in present tense. No will, going to, should, try, etc. (Explain why to client.)

As a direct approach/technique works well for:

-- Motivated clients who enjoy the counseling process and the world of psychology.
-- Clients seeking practical, down-to-earth approaches. (Not enamored by intuitive, psychodynamic discussions in which therapists prone to engage.)
1. Explain the approach & theory
2. Inquire as to client’s current language
3. Explain problems with current language
4. Jointly develop a dominant thought statement
5. Explain they must repeat
6. Explain the backlash demons they will have to face & positive reactions to expect

Demons to Face and Conquer
1. The negative voice
2. Monkey mind
3. No Instant Gratification

Positive Reactions That Will Emerge
1. Delivering of better dominant thoughts.
2. Subtle urges & intuitive nudges
Implementation Intentions

It is one thing to say you want to accomplish a certain task—the goal.

It is another thing to specify the exact moment where a shift in behaviors should be done in order to begin accomplishing that task.

“Consciously deciding to pursue a goal in advance of doing so enables goal pursuit to occur outside awareness. Relevant cues in the environment will then activate the goal, triggering preexisting behavioral intentions that predict goal pursuit” Anderson, et al.

With implementation intentions “…mental representations of the anticipated situation…become highly activated and thus easily accessible.” Gollwitzer

One group S prepared by writing the number “3” repeatedly on paper.

Other group prepared by repeating the mental programming statement, “When the number 3 appears, I will respond particularly fast.”

Results:
- Both groups responded faster to number “3.”
- S who repeated the mental programming statement did best.

Why?
What’s in a Word—

Unhappiness, despair, sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, sad, misery, dejection, stagnation, stuckness, miserable, sorrow, discontentment, melancholy, anguish, despondency, gloom, blue, impossibility, desperateness, inactivity, inertia, sluggishness, immobility, unproductivity, regret, disgruntlement, downheartedness, torment, idleness, etc.

Contentment, meaningful, hopeful, pleased, activity, engagement, productivity, satisfaction, pleasure, gratification, movement, moved, substantial, important, expectant, encouraged, commitment, fulfillment, enjoyment, creative, heartened, invigorated, stimulated, exhilarated, success, amusement, inspired, gladdened, energized, restored, delight, attainment, motivated, etc.

No word stands alone in the brain. Every word is literally neurologically linked to other words in the brain. When you say a word, associated words are momentarily triggered and stimulated. Is this chain reaction of associated words neural connections fire. This, in turn, creates a momentary domino effect of words each stimulating another. More importantly, these words also trigger preparatory thoughts that trigger action. The priming and ironic process research has confirmed this repeatedly.
You should always think of every word you say as a cluster of related words priming that are triggering preparatory thoughts.

Salience and Accessibility

We filter through, sort out, and make sense of our world directly in proportion to the salience and accessibility of the ideas and words we hold in our head. We do actions directly in proportion to salience & accessibility of relevant dominant thoughts that prime.
When you say “WE” you
1. turn the session into a group project.
2. take personal responsibility away from the client.
3. misrepresent the therapeutic process and relationship.
   (A treacherous word with highly resistant clients!)

Goal setters typically like to create new things; problem solvers like to improve on status quo.
Goal setters prefer to write a book, problem solvers would prefer to edit a book.
Goal setters prefer to score points (offense); problem solvers prefer to keep the opposing team from scoring (defense).
Goal setters are concerned with the direction things are going; problem solvers are concerned with what’s currently broken and how to fix it.

Boss declares next year’s goals, the goals setters are excited while the problem solvers ask when last year’s goals are going to be met.
Goal setters tend to not see the problems at hand, get bored easily, and fail to tend to details.
Problem solvers fail to see the big picture, are leery of the untried, and distrust their instincts in new situations.
Goal setters are energized by goals and drained by problems; problem solvers are energized by problems and drained by goals.
"How does that make you feel?"

Duncker’s Candle Problem: Use the materials on the table to mount the candle to the wall and illuminate the room.

Two groups of subjects were first told they were participating in an experiment about long-term memory. During this "study" they were primed in two different ways. (Higgins & Chaires, 1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;...a carton of eggs...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;...a carton and eggs...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;...a tray of tomatoes...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;...a tray and tomatoes...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects</td>
<td>objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undifferentiated</td>
<td>differentiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linguistically</td>
<td>linguistically</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 20% of the subjects in the “of” (undifferentiated) group solved the problem within 10 minutes.

However, 80% of the subjects in the “and” (differentiated) group solved the problem within 10 minutes.
Conscious mind thoughts are more than mere mental ramblings; they are also programming, literally, the subconscious as to how to approach and solve problems. The conscious mind is the control panel we are given to control subconscious mental programming that controls most of our behavior. Words solve problems in more ways than you might think.

The subconscious is constantly seeking guidance from conscious mind thoughts. You should think of it as an eager puppy sitting there awaiting guidance and direction. Once cued, it immediately begins necessary processes to accomplish what the conscious mind wants.

However, you must cue it!

Thus, one of the therapist’s jobs is to cue the subconscious through the meticulous, precise use of words.

Therapy is, to a large degree, priming with dominant thoughts.

-- Priming the Prime