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Dealing with Anger Using “Because. . .”

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Fred was a competent, successful businessman in his 50’s. He had no trouble relating to and managing relationships with his business associates but could barely tolerate talking to his mother, especially on the phone. Her voice tone and cloying manner were repulsive to him. This contrasted with his desire for her (and other women’s) approval and he “couldn’t let go of it.”

We had discussed the positive intent behind his mother’s behavior and used a few NLP techniques to change his responses to her. This was helpful in the set-up to this exercise but had not changed his emotional response to her.

I combined a sentence completion process with the “because” pattern; using it first for his causal perspective, then for his mother’s. The results were swift and amazing.

“Fred, repeat out loud the sentence stem I give you and complete it with the first thought that comes to your mind.”

“I am angry at my mother *because—*”

“I am angry at my mother because, . . . of her neediness and then withdrawals.”

“She was needy and withdrew *because—*”

“She was needy and withdrew because, . . . she was wounded.”

“She was wounded *because—*”

“She was wounded because, . . . of her genetics and upbringing.”

“So, you are angry with your mother because of her genetics and upbringing.”

He suddenly smiled, and I asked what was happening.

“It seems silly and amusing.”

The anger had vanished! Helping him realize that his current emotional response was tied to a cause out of his control and long past deflated the response.”

Follow-up Nine months later I had the opportunity to remind him of his initial response to his mother and asked what his experience was like now.

“I feel compassion toward her. I don’t love our phone conversations because they are mainly about the minutiae of her health problems (she is 90 after all) but it is now easy to be patient. It is an obligation I willingly do.”

Using the question, “because?” brings to light the unconscious way in which we explain why we don’t do or accomplish something, something I learned from Charles Faulkner’s presentation at the 2009 Advanced Mastery Training. In this example I first

used “because” with the client’s experience, and then he bridged to his mother’s experience. Finally I connected his first “because” to his last one, “connecting the dots.”

Pause to consider the following questions: How did this process work to change Fred’s response? Think of some cause-effect linkage in a problem you have, and use the same kind of sentence stem and summary that Jan used above, filling in your content, to experience how you respond. Given your understanding of how it worked, how could you generalize this example to a wider range of interventions?

“Because” Commentary

by Steve Andreas

Using the sentence stem, with a gentle nonverbal beckoning gesture from the client to herself, makes the question an unambiguous simple request for information (in contrast to an “attack,” or some other nonverbal frame that could elicit defensiveness, or some other less-than-useful response). “And that is because. . . ?” asks for the “prior cause,” which expands the scope of a problem experience into the past, one of many distinctly different reframing patterns. It utilizes the cause-effect presupposition that is implicit in most problems, “I have a problem *because* _____” “He *makes* me angry,” etc. By repeating the question, the scope of experience extends ever further into the past, creating a larger and larger scope in time, a larger “perspective.”

One key to creating this kind of larger perspective is that the client sees each of the larger scopes *added* to the previous one, in contrast to just skipping backward in time. The “And” in “And that is because” tends to join the response with what came before, and Jan’s last sentence links the earliest event to the last (problem) one, implicitly including all the events in between, “connecting the dots.”

If the client were to simply jump from the problem event to successively earlier events, that would change the scope attended to (This is the reframing pattern called “change frame.”) but not necessarily *join* it with the problem event. That would result in distraction from the problem, which might be very useful as a first step to change state, and then elicit a new response, or do some other process, but that would be an intervention with different structure, and different result.

Asking the client to complete the sentence is another key piece in this process. It would be very different if Jan had offered different causal explanations with content, which the client might or might not agree with. Since each cause emerges from the client’s experience, it *has* to fit their own world view. (This will even be true if the client is asked to think of “bizarre” or “unlikely” causes.)

When Jan shifts to the mother’s cause-effect, she also shifts from present tense to past tense, using “was” rather than “is,” putting the earlier cause-effects in the past, creating more distance. Jan points out that this larger perspective is likely to involve a shift from “self” position to “observer” position, a kind of dissociation. (However, this doesn’t *have* to happen; it is possible to remain associated into the present problem, while seeing images that go further and further into the past.)

Generalization

This example of using a *single* reframing pattern recursively, suggests the possibility of doing the same with each of the many other reframing patterns.

In fact, the central process in Connirae Andreas’ very powerful Core

Transformation process is to repeatedly ask for the outcome of the outcome—often called the meta-outcome—of a problem behavior. This recategorizes the problem symptom recursively at a higher and higher logical level of inclusion and generalization until a universal one is reached. (Then the highest one is brought back through to the original problem, linking all the outcomes together.)

Another reframing pattern goes the other direction in time, the future *consequence* of an event. Starting with a problem event, we could ask, “And the consequence of that is. . . ?” and then “And the consequence of that is. . . ?” repeatedly increasing scope into the future, and then link the problem event to the last consequence, by saying something like, “So what you are experiencing now will result in (last consequence).” We could also explore the difference between using the plural (“consequences”) instead of the singular, or the difference between using “a” consequence instead of “the” consequence. The saying, “In a hundred years, who’ll know the difference?” implicitly uses this pattern.

Another reframing pattern is called “expand frame” enlarging *scope* in space, keeping the time constant. So we could ask, “And the larger context around that is. . . ?” repeatedly increasing the scope, and then link the problem to the largest scope elicited, again implicitly including all the intermediate scopes. In the larger context, the problem literally looks much smaller, making it look less overwhelming, and easier to solve, and the larger context may offer abundant clues about how to solve it.

Another reframing pattern “redescription” or “redefinition” uses a change of categorization instead of a change of scope in space or time. “And how could you describe that in another way. . . ?” asks the client to place it in a different category. When this question is asked repeatedly, each time the client responds will put the problem into a different possible category, offering *many* different ways for the client to respond to the same event besides their original categorization of it as a “problem.”

Recursive Reframing Exercise

(pairs)

In this exercise, A is to pay careful attention to any changes in his/her own experience, while B is to provide instructions following the steps below, while observing A’s external responses to each intervention.

1. B asks A to “Think of a problem behavior or response.” . . .
2. B picks a reframing pattern from the list of reframing patterns (on the following two pages). . .
3. B asks A an appropriate sentence-stem question using this pattern and a nonverbal “beckoning” gesture, and A responds. . .
4. B asks the same question in regard to A’s response. . .
5. B continues this as long as seems useful, or until a limit is reached. . .
6. Then B links the problem behavior to A’s last response—and all the ones in between. (Using hand gestures will make this unambiguous). . .
7. A and B share their experience of doing the exercise. . .
8. A and B switch roles and repeat the exercise, using a reframing pattern that has not already been used in your group.

Of course other alternative sequences (other than recursion) may be

interesting to explore, and there are many, many possibilities:

Take two (or three) different reframing patterns and ask them in sequence repeatedly, for instance, 1, 2, 1, 2, etc

Take three different patterns, and ask them in the sequence 1, 2, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, etc.

Reframing Patterns

A Reorganization

by Steve Andreas

Every reframing pattern changes one or more of the following: a *scope* of experience in *time* or *space*, the *categorization* of a scope, or the *logical level* of categorization. This organization helps you understand how all the different reframing patterns are related, what kind of change of experience will result from each, and points out ambiguities in earlier presentations of reframing patterns. Whenever a pattern has previously been named (for instance in Dilts' "sleight of mouth" descriptions) that name is used. Dilts lists 14 different patterns; the list below contains 24 patterns, but some are different names for the same kind of scope/category distinction, and a few differ only in content. Keep in mind that although each sentence-stem question asks for a particular distinction, the responder may answer with a different one—good information about how they are organized.

1. Change of Scope:

Space

Expand frame (larger scope) "And the larger context around that is. . . ?"

Shrink frame (smaller scope) "And part of that is. . . ."

Change frame (different scope) "And something entirely different than that is. . . ."

Perceptual Position (self, other, observer) "And how s/he would see this is. . . ?"

Time

Prior cause (earlier scope) "And that's because. . . ?"

Consequence (later scope) "And the result of that is. . . ?"

Expand frame (larger scope) "And if that still picture were expanded into a movie. . . ."

Shrink frame (smaller scope) "And the most significant moment of that is. . . ."

Change frame (different scope) "And a very different time is. . . ."

2. Change of Categorization (at the same logical level):

Redefinition or *Redescription* "And how else could you describe that. . . ?"

3. Change of Logical Level of Categorization:

Going to a more general category (higher logical level) "And that is an example of. . . ?"

Meta-frame (The prefix "meta" alone has been used ambiguously in the past to indicate *either* scope or category, but "meta-frame" has usually indicated a shift to a more general category, rather than a larger scope.) "And that is an example of. . . ?"

There are *many* possible meta-frames. Some of the more useful and well-known ones that have been described previously are listed below:

Positive Intent "And his/her positive intent is. . . ?"

Model of the world "And so the way *you* see it is. . . ?"

Learning "And what you learned from that is. . . ?"

Curiosity "And what was most interesting to you about that is. . . ?"

Hierarchy of criteria “And what is more important to you than that is. . . ?”

Analogy/Metaphor “And that is like what. . . ?” (Metaphor creates a category, and often also creates a *prototype* example for the category.)

Going to a more specific category “And that is what specific kind of. . . ?”

Category to example And an example of that is. . . ?”

Counterexample (Category to example with negation) “And a time when that wasn’t true is. . . ?”

Looping between category and example, or between category and subcategory. These patterns that are seldom applicable, but *very* useful when they are, because they are logically “airtight.” Both of these loop between logical levels; the category *includes itself* as an example.

Apply to self (applying a category to itself.) “And is that true of what you just said?” “You said that you hate complaining; is what you said a complaint. . . ?” (See Six Blind Elephants, volume 2, chapter 5)

Paradox (apply to self with negation) “And is “You said, ‘I won’t communicate with you,’ but what you said is also a communication. . . .” (See Six Blind Elephants, volume 2, chapter 7)

Ambiguous Reframing Patterns (in addition to *Meta*, or *Meta-frame*, above)

Each of the categories below is an example of one of the previous categories.

Outcome An outcome can be either a *scope* of experience (a specific new car) or a *category* (status), asking about an outcome could shift from one scope or category to another, or from scope to category, or vice versa (four possibilities). And the outcome of that is. . . ?

Another Outcome Just as an outcome is ambiguous, another outcome could also yield the four possibilities listed above.

Meta-outcome (outcome of the outcome) Again, a meta-outcome can also be either a *scope* of experience or a *category*, so asking about a meta-outcome could be shifting from one scope or category to another, or from scope to category, or vice versa (again there are four possibilities). (When the prefix “meta” is used in other ways, it is also ambiguous in regard to scope and category.)

“Chunk down” can mean either going to a smaller scope or to a more specific category.

“Chunk up” can mean either going to a larger scope or to a more general category.

Reality Strategy “How do you know that. . . ?” asks for the evidence (the epistemological basis) for their experience. The responder may tell you a category (“That is one of the things my parents told me.”) or a scope of experience (“I saw it happen,” or “It’s in the Bible.”).

This handout from the 2010 Advanced Mastery Training accompanies the DVD, “Using Reframing Patterns Recursively and The Implications of Outcome Description, available from RealPeoplePress.com.

For a much more extensive discussion of the use of scope, category, and logical level in understanding our experience and how to change it, read Steve Andreas’ two-

volume book, *Six Blind Elephants; understanding ourselves and others*, also available from RealPeoplePress.com

Implication

“Every sentence has implications, and it is in the implications that the important message is given.” —Milton H. Erickson, M.D.

People often speak of *losing* weight, and there are thousands of weight *loss* programs and clinics, etc. In fact, the phrase is so much a part of our everyday language that most people (myself included) have great difficulty describing this goal in different words. However, the use of the verb “lose” creates a number of significant problems because of the implications created by its meanings and connotations. Here are the first four dictionary definitions of the word *lose* that I found online; notice the implications embedded in each one:

“To fail to keep or to maintain; cease to have, either physically or in an abstract sense; ‘She lost her purse when she left it unattended on her seat.’ ”

“To be unsuccessful in retaining possession of; mislay: ‘He’s always losing his car keys.’ ”

“To bring to ruin or destruction: a ship lost in the storm; theol. to incur the damnation of: to lose one’s soul.”

“To [stop having something because it has been taken from you or destroyed](#).
“Mike lost his job last year.”

1. Aversion Read those definitions again, and particularly notice the words used (“fail,” “unsuccessful,” “ruin or destruction,” “damnation,” “destroyed.”) Would you want to apply *any* of those words or definitions to a personal change that you want to make? . . .

Since each of those definitions categorize “*losing weight*” in a way that no one would want to do it, using that word immediately sets up an *emotional opposition* to the task that is usually unconscious and unrecognized.

2. Negation Many have pointed out that the word “lose” includes *negation*: the *cessation* or *absence* of something (“cease,” “unattended,” “stop,” “destroyed.”) So “losing” weight is not a positive outcome, a key aspect of any successful change. Attempting a negative outcome (“Don’t think of puce elephants.”) is self-contradictory and sure to fail because it is a *logical contradiction*.

3. Value Something that is lost is almost always something *valuable*. (Review the definitions above.) Theoretically one could lose dirt, garbage, trash, etc., but since that is not how that word is usually used, it doesn’t contribute significantly to its meaning. If someone says, “I want to lose weight,” that implicitly categorizes it as something of value. Since no one wants to lose something of value, that immediately sets up a conflicting motive to *not* lose weight, another *emotional opposition*.

4. Accidental If you *lose* something, that implies that it happened *accidentally*, not as a result of conscious effort. *Losing* something is not something that one can do intentionally or deliberately. Think of something that you could lose, like a key or watch, and imagine how you could *lose* it intentionally, and you will find it impossible, because

it is another *logical contradiction*.” (“Lurking brazenly” is my favorite example of this kind of contradiction; “lurking” means to be hidden, while “brazenly” means to be in the plain sight.) Whenever *lose* is used as an active verb it is applied to something or someone other than the speaker. “I lost *him* in the crowd.”

Since someone engaged in a “weight loss” program is usually consciously and intentionally doing a variety of things (weighing themselves, exercising, calorie counting, adjusting meals, etc.) that contradicts the accidental nature of the word “loss.” Again, this sets up an implicit *logical contradiction*. “How can I intentionally do something to achieve what has to happen accidentally or spontaneously?”

Summary Using the word “loss” immediately sets up four conflicting motives, two emotional (1. aversion, and 3. not wanting to lose something of value) and two logical (the contradictions in trying to 2. achieve a negative outcome, and 3. intentionally do what can only happen accidentally).

Using the word “loss” in the description of the outcome *creates four obstacles* that are in *addition* to any that the client already has—such as beliefs about it being possible for them, secondary gain in being overweight, poor eating habits, lack of motivation, etc. Using the word “loss” or “lose” isn’t like shooting yourself in the foot, it is shooting yourself in *both* feet—*twice*.

Exercise:

1. How could you redescribe or reframe the task of “weighing less” or “weight loss” to a client so that the four problems described above no longer exist? How can you create a more useful way to describe and present the outcome of weighing less to a client?*

2. Choose some other outcome, which you have difficulty achieving with clients, and notice the words you use to describe it, such as “stopping smoking.” First examine that description for problems that might arise because of the implications that are embedded in it, and then redescribe it in a way so that those problems no longer arise.

Additional Resources

Two detailed articles about implication, “Verbal Implication” and “Nonverbal (Contextual) Implication,” along with other free articles can be found online at **SteveAndreas.com**

Books, CDs, DVDs and other NLP teaching products can be found at **RealPeoplePress.com** For recent articles and updates you can sign up to receive Steve Andreas’ blog on the lower left of the home page.

The three-volume *Conversations with Milton H. Erickson, MD*, edited by Jay Haley is a gold mine of information about how Erickson actually thought and worked, to which I have turned repeatedly for more nuggets of insight. One of my favorite cases is “The Case of Inhibited Ann” in Volume I, chapter 6, pp. 123-149.

*(Erickson once instructed a woman who “always overate” and who weighed 280 pounds to “*overeate in order to maintain a weight of 260 pounds*” and then gave her the same instruction repeatedly, reducing the target weight each time.)

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