

A Case of Mistaken Identity

By: Robert F. Otto, C.Ht.

I don't believe there's a practicing hypnotist among us who doesn't enjoy the benefits of a healthy dose of 'smile' from time to time. With that being said I'd like to share with you one of the many humorous stories I've encountered during my professional career that provides an undertone of how effective our work can be to those who choose to believe in their own abilities. People who are ready to receive without reservation and accept the notion that change occurs when the door to change is open and welcoming. Whether the stories are our own to tell or are stories relating to circumstances that have happened in the lives of our professional colleagues, many of them have a medicinal effect when used as part of an overall anecdote of a presenting client challenge. I believe stories that touch a chord within us, and are profoundly convincing, can often be used to bring home a point in an entertaining style with little threat of client confrontation. For this reason I am happy to share with you yet another 'chuckle' of the phenomenal power of suggestion.

Recently my wife and I had the pleasure of dining with relatives (on my wife's side). Over the course of dinner the topic of our conversation was changed to the subject of growing old, and the forgetfulness that accompanies this malady. We often joke about the absentmindedness of our elderly and make light of a situation that in reality, sooner or later seems to take hold of us all. This evening in particular our guest spoke about it candidly. The following is an abstract of the story as our dinner guest told it to us.

"A funny thing happened to us while we were in Florida this past winter, he said poignantly. You know, I take a number of medications in order to keep this old body aligned. In addition to my vitamin supplements and medication for high blood pressure and cholesterol, about six months ago Doc Smith (not his real name) prescribed a 'calm-me-down' pill (sedative) for me to take whenever I feel nervous or agitated. For the most part the pills have kept me on an even keel and I am not nearly as short-tempered or aggravated as I used to be. I also think the 'calm-me-down' pills allow me to sleep better and more soundly. You know just this past year I noticed how good they worked when we were around the grandchildren. Normally a visit from the little ones would have me climbing the walls after a few hours of watching their antics and shenanigans. But not this year, by golly this year I stayed as cool as a cucumber! I *must* be getting old because I don't enjoy being around all that hoopla anymore. Heck, those 'calm-me-down' pills easily helped me get through this year's Christmas festivities with the grandkids. After a Christmas reunion with those youngins, anybody would be ready for a three-month vacation!

Anyway, while we were in Florida this past winter, I realized that the prescription for my 'calm-me-down' pills had expired and unfortunately I didn't have another refill left on the bottle. Because of the high cost of healthcare, and not wanting to see a doctor I was unfamiliar with, I decided that it was high time I took matters into my own hands. I opted to decrease my intake of the 'calm-me-down' pills in order to make them last until I got back home in the spring. So what I did was cut my pills in half. I thought this was a pretty smart solution to my problem if I say so myself. And it worked like a charm! At the time, I thought half of a pill worked so well because I didn't have all the young grandchildren running in and out of the house, the telephone ringing off the hook, or

anything else that I believe causes me to become nervous. I also had the beautiful Florida weather of bright sunshine and warm temperatures to keep me calm and relaxed.

So each morning I carefully cut the pill in half and quickly swallowed it with a chaser of fresh-squeezed orange juice, being careful not to allow it to melt in my mouth because they had such a bitter aftertaste. I learned from previous experience to be quick about taking the pill. One time I was a little slow about taking it and when it melted in my mouth, the taste was just awful!

I really thought I was getting away with something by cutting my pill in half and had already determined that when I got back from Florida I would be sure to set an appointment with Doc Smith and insist on speaking with him about what I had done and how well it worked. I didn't see the need to take a whole pill when half of a pill was equally effective. Not to mention the money I'd be saving! Especially on a fixed income!

When we got home this spring one of the first things I did was make that appointment so I could get a fresh prescription for my medication. Even though I intended to tell the doc about what I had done, I didn't want to be chastised for self-medicating so I remained silent through the exam and obediently answered all the routine questions in order to shorten the visit and be on my way with a new prescription in hand.

After I left the doctor's office my first stop was to the pharmacy. While there, the pharmacist methodically and with great care filled the prescriptions authorized by the doctor's office. I never gave a second thought that perhaps my prescription had been altered until the following morning when I popped open the bottle and found that the pill form of my 'calm me down' pills had been changed back to a capsule form. I thought this was unusual because just before we left for Florida I remembered them changing the medication from capsule to pill. Now, here it was a few months later and the pharmacy was back to issuing pills instead of capsules. Hmmmm. This had me wondering about the change.

As a follow-up and at my wife's insistence, I put a call in to both the doctor's office and the pharmacy. Neither office had any idea as to what I was referring to. I was instructed to immediately bring the medication back to the pharmacy so that they could investigate the mysterious change in medication. This had me somewhat concerned and bewildered. Was I becoming so absentminded that I didn't realize what medication I was taking? Fearful of the embarrassment this could cause, I searched to find an answer.

I sought to both mentally and physically retrace my steps back from the initial change in medication to the present. It was during the physical search that I discovered the original prescription bottle (still intact with a full bottle of medication) inside the glove compartment of my car. What had happened was that in my haste (and somewhat absentmindedness) I grabbed the wrong bottle of pills to take to Florida! You see, at Christmas-time, Darlene (my daughter) bought me a super-sized can of Altoid breath mints. It was huge and far too cumbersome to carry around, so for the sake of convenience I filled an old prescription bottle with the Altoids and threw it in the glove compartment of the car. When we left for Florida I grabbed the wrong bottle and during the three months we were away had been taking breath mints, cutting them in half and using them in place of the 'calm-me-down' pills. And, do you know the oddest part of this story? They really worked!"

To all my friends and colleagues: I leave you to ponder the question of whether or not this person ever really needed the prescribed sedative in the first place. We hear

stories like this all the time and rarely give credit to the individual who, in their own style, their own time and on their own terms, utilized their mental capacity to alter a train of thought whether accidentally or intentionally. This is a clear indication that the placebo effect works and can be influenced either negatively or positively. The manifestation is determined by the client's frame of mind, motivation and projection of the desired outcome.