

The World's Most Honest Con Artist

I mentioned in my lecture on dentistry at the IMDHA conference that I consider myself the world's most honest con man, and that I often tell people that when they ask what I do for a living. And there is a part of me that is very serious, especially when referring to the use on NLP. I think Richard Bandler was probably one of the greatest con-artists in the history of the world, so good that he would simply con people into getting better (by their own standards). And that is, sometimes at my best, all I am doing as well. By some perspectives that may be all we ever do as practitioners of hypnosis.

And let me take a second to say that there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, it's a really great thing. Have we found a ritual so cross-cultural, a process so elegant, that it works in many of the same ways as placebo without actually being one? A placebo is something that works because it is pretending it is something it isn't, hypnosis doesn't do that. But both have almost everything to do with the expected outcome of the subject and the steps taken by the facilitator to get the subject to 'buy in'.

A few fun examples:

I once heard a story of a practitioner who was working with a client for anger issues. He asked the gentleman, "Have you ever been angry while you were upside down?" to which the man replied that he hadn't. The practitioner then stated that the man had never practiced being angry upside down and therefore didn't know how to do it. So with that in mind he told the man to do a handstand with his feet against a wall any time he started to lose his temper and it would immediately calm him...and that worked.

I had a client come in for caffeine addiction, specifically coffee. She told me that she loved sitting in her living room, putting her mug on the coffee table and would read a book or a magazine. She went into great detail about the coffee table and how much she liked it, which I recognized as the problem. Half-joking, I told her to go out and buy a "decaffeinated coffee table." The next week she came back and told me she had done exactly that, and how much it had helped her.

I'm working with a woman for alcoholism right now, she used to get depressed and drink bottles of vodka in bed. I had her buy new sheets after the first session. She had one very small relapse during our progress together, but it wasn't in bed like she used to. "I couldn't drink in the bed if I tried," she said, "I can't drink in front of the new sheets." She is making amazing progress still.

Tell me this isn't simply conning people into doing what they want to do but didn't know they were able to already.

You see, smart people often come up with complicated solutions to simple problems. About 50 years ago we discovered you couldn't use a normal ballpoint pen in space. Put simply, zero gravity equals zero ink coming out of the end of the pen. So NASA spent eight years and many Billions of dollars creating the space pen, which could write upside down, underwater, at 50 degrees below zero, etc. The Soviets, on the other hand, used a pencil. So when people ask what I do for a living, I sometimes tell them that I am a Russian rocket scientist.

Because I think this is what we do, for better or worse. We see things differently, recognize problems in a new way, and find more efficient solutions for our clients. It isn't that we are smarter, we just have different training, and that gives us the perspective to see things that our clients didn't see.

So our job is to get them to see this new option or perspective, and this is often what a con artist does. He skews, manipulates, or utilizes the given information in a way that helps him achieve his desired outcome. The only difference is we often don't decide the given outcome, the client does.

And I think this a really good thing. Not just recognizing what we are doing, but actually doing it. So I don't think I actually "do" anything other than find the appropriate ritual for the client to undergo in order to trick himself into changing. And because I don't really 'do' anything other than that, it means they had all the resources necessary to make this happen all the time, I just helped find them, or reallocate them. Is this why we say, "all hypnosis is self hypnosis?"

In closing, I'd like to say I place a great value on what we do for our clients, and in no way wish to take from the remarkable progress we help people around us make. I'm only writing to question how or why what we do works, and to inspire thought and feedback from a few hundred of my colleagues.

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts,
Scott Sandland