

# THE ANATOMY OF CHANGE



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## **Main principles of influence**

### ***Social following/social influence***

Social cues influence our actions and perceptions

Message and cues about what most people are doing/social norms/social proof

Mirror neurons

Social mimicry

Modeling

Reciprocity

Liking

Similarity

Compliments

### ***Contextual influences***

Perceptual priming

Contextual priming

Conceptual priming

Linguistic priming

Response priming

### ***Loss avoidance/aversion***

# CHANGING PATTERNS

## Identifying Problem/Unwanted Patterns

Identify problem patterns by noticing actions that are repetitive, what people in several settings (home, work) complain about, and/or a similar label that people give you in various settings.

Remember to focus on the doing of the problem, not being the problem or the feeling associated with the problem. (You can feel shy but you do not have to do shy.) Use videotalk to describe how you do the problem. How do you do anger, jealousy, shyness, or borderline? Recognize triggers (invitations) to the patterns. What are the typical steps leading up to the problem?

With interpersonal patterns, either person can change the problem pattern—it's hard to do a tango when the other person starts doing the fox trot. The ability to change a problem pattern does not mean that you or they are to blame for the creation of that pattern or problem.

## Changing Problem Patterns

When you would usually do the pattern, do anything different that is legal, ethical, and not harmful.

*Change actions (sequence, antecedents, consequences, repetitive/invariant actions and interactions, body behavior).*

*Change location/setting.*

*Change timing (frequency, time of occurrence, duration).*

*Use humor.*

*Change the non-verbals (voice tones, gestures, body movements, eye contact, etc.) around the pattern.*

Search for exceptions. What do you or people around you do when the problem doesn't happen? Identify the solution or exception patterns and do more of those patterns in place of those that don't work.

Search in another setting for patterns that work better (at work, with friends, in other family relationships, with hobbies). Borrow the skills and creativity you/they use in those other settings and apply them to changing the pattern.

**Remember what Rita Mae Brown and some twelve steppers say: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."**

## SOLUTION TALK

This is “personal benchmarking.” You are going to start seeding the virus of solutions in the conversation when there is a problem. The idea is not to convince people that they have solutions and competence, but to ask questions and gather information in a way that convinces and highlights for them that they do.

### **Method #1 Exceptions to the Problem Rule**

Ask people to detail times when they haven’t experienced the problem when they expected they would or solved the problem when they thought they wouldn’t. This includes exceptions to the rule of the problem, interruptions to the pattern of the problem, and asking about contexts in which the problem would not occur (e.g. home, in a restaurant, etc.) or in which they naturally solve problems well.

*Example: “Tell me about the last time you started to get anxious or scared but somehow calmed yourself. What things did you do differently then?”*

### **Method #2 The End Game**

Find out what happens as the problem ends or starts to end. What is the first sign the person can tell the problem is going away or subsiding? What will the person be doing when their problem has ended or subsided different from what he or she is doing when the problem is happening or present?

*Example: “You’ve had down times before and come out of them. So when you start coming out of the depression, what things do you start to do differently?”*

### **Method #3 Highlighting Choice**

Find evidence of choice in regard to the problem. Determine variations in the person’s reactions or handling of the problem when it arises. Are there times when he or she is less dominated by it or have a different/better reaction to it or way of handling it than at other times? Have the person teach you about moments of choice within the problem pattern.

*Example: “I know things are really bad for you right now and most things that could change the situation seem impossible or beyond you. Is there anything that you can think of that you could do right now that could help?”*

### **Method #4 Find Contexts of Competence**

Search for other contexts of competence. Find out about areas in the person’s life that he or she feels good about, including hobbies, areas of specialized knowledge or well-developed skills, and what other people would say are the person’s best points. Find out about times when the person or someone he or she knows has faced a similar problem and resolved it in a way that he or she liked.

*Example: “If you were on the golf course and you faced this kind of situation, how would you handle it?”*

### **Method #5 Worst Case Comparison**

This is a backwards way of identifying competence and solutions. Compared to the worst possible situation people or this person could get in, how do they explain that it isn’t that severe? Compare this situation to the worst incident and find out if it is less severe. Then track why or how.

*Example: "I know you are unhappy with how much you weigh, but I am curious, how come you don't weigh more?"*

**Method #6 Tapping into Altruistic Expertise**

Ask people to help you help other people who might be experiencing the same issues what they have learned about what is helpful to solve or better the situation.

*Example: "You say you've already dealt with your sexual abuse and don't need to talk about it any more. Can you tell me what you have learned from your dealing successfully with this issue that others might find helpful?"*

# DISSOLVING IMPOSSIBILITY TALK

It is important to both acknowledge and validate clients without closing down the possibilities for change for them. Too much emphasis on change and possibility can give clients the message that the therapist does not understand or care about their suffering or dilemmas. Too much emphasis on the acknowledgment side can give the message that the client cannot change or might encourage wallowing in the pain and hopelessness. The following methods are designed to combine both acknowledgment and invitations to change and possibility. Remember that these are methods and if they start to become formulaic, they can be used disrespectfully or superficially. They are designed, however, to be respectful and to deeply empathize with clients' suffering and possibilities.

## Method #1 Spinning Problems into the Past

Use the past tense when people speak about current problems or limitations.

*Statement: "I'm constantly suicidal."*

*Your response: So you've really been suicidal.*

*Statement: "I can't do anything right."*

*Your response: You haven't done anything right.*

## Method #2 Going Unglobal

Respond to generalized statements by restating them with slight changes in the quantifiers and qualifiers.

*Statement: "Nobody listens."*

*Your response: It's been close to impossible to get people to listen.*

*Statement: "I always leave everything 'til the last minute."*

*Your response: Most of the time you leave things 'til the last minute.*

## Method #3 Spinning Reality/Truth Claims into Perceptions

Limitations are often less in reality than in peoples' perceptions. Reflect limitation statements by inserting perception phrases into them.

*Statement: "I won't be able to keep a relationship going."*

*Your response: You don't think you'll be able to keep a relationship going.*

*Statement "He'll never change."*

*Your response: Your sense is that he really can't change.*

## **PROBLEMS INTO PREFERENCES: A FUTURE-ORIENTED ACKNOWLEDGMENT METHOD**

*When people first seek therapy, they are often focused on the past and what isn't working. How does the therapist gently and respectfully invite them into the future without minimizing their suffering or invalidating them? I use a method that owes a lot to both Carl Rogers (for the acknowledgment and reflection of people's experience and feelings) and Milton Erickson (for the indirect shifting of attention and frame of reference). This method helps people re-orient their attention from what they cannot change (the past) and what hasn't been working (the complaint) to what they can change (the future) and what they would prefer to have happen (their goal or direction or desire). If done respectfully and skillfully, most people do not even notice the shift consciously, but many report feeling more hopeful after it is used through the interview.*

- **Rephrase from what is unwanted to what is desired or preferred**

*Client: I think I'm just too shy to find a relationship. I'm afraid of women and being rejected.*

*Therapist: So you'd like be more comfortable around women and to be able to get into a relationship.*

- **Redirect from the past or present to the future**

*Client: We argue all the time.*

*Therapist: So you'd like to be able to work out conflicts without having so many arguments and even to have fewer conflicts if possible.*

- **Mention the presence of something rather than the absence of something**

*Client: He never does anything we ask him to.*

*Therapist: You'd like to see some cooperation from him.*

- **Suggest small increments rather than big leaps**

*Client: I can't stand this depression.*

*Therapist: You'd really like to find some way to feel a bit better and be a bit less depressed.*

## **Change 101: The Seven Ways People Change in Therapy and Life**

*"If you want truly to understand something, try to change it." –Kurt Lewin*

- Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing: Finding the Motivation and Energy to Change
- Method 1 The Journey of 1,000 Miles: The Small-Steps Method of Change
- Method 2 The Same Damn Thing: The Breaking Patterns Method of Change
- Method 3 52-Card Pickup: The Crisis Method of Change
- Method 4 Bless My Soul: The Mentor/Model Method of Change
- Method 5 Custom Reframing: The New Perspective Method of Change
- Method 6 Residential Psychoanalysis: The Relationship Path to Change
- Method 7 Becoming Yourself: How to Change by Becoming More of Your True Self

Reference: Bill O'Hanlon. *Change 101*, W.W. Norton, 2006.

## IDENTIFYING AND ELICITING MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

### *THE SIX TYPES OF MOTIVATIONS FOR CHANGE*

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Negative past motivation    | Positive past motivation    |
| Negative present motivation | Positive present motivation |
| Negative future motivation  | Positive future motivation  |

**Here are some questions to ask clients to identify and elicit motivation:**

- What did you dislike in your past that you want to make sure does not happen again?
- What happened to you that you are adamant should never happen to others?
- What wound did you suffer that sensitizes you to others' similar pain or suffering? What might that sensitivity lead you to do to use it in a productive way?
- What aspect of your life in the past are you longing to recreate or stay connected to?
- About what are you so uncomfortable at the moment that you are motivated to change it?
- What would you most like to change in your life or situation right now?
- If what's bothering you right now were resolved, how would your life change?
- If your fondest dreams came true, where would you be and what would be doing in a year? Five years? Ten years? [Or choose an appropriate time frame]
- If things continued as they are going, what would be happening in a year and how would that be for you? Five years? Ten years? [Or choose an appropriate time frame]

### **Motivation 101: A summary**

- You need to have energy, motivation, to change
- There are two types of motivation, things you want to get away from and thing you want to go toward
- Identify which of these motivations is relevant for your clients
- If the person you are seeing is not motivated (a rarity—they are often at least motivated to stop seeing you or avoid legal consequences), find out who is motivated in the situation and tap into them for change
- Link the identified motivation to the desired change

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