

Cognitive Behavior Technique #22

Six Step Reframing

A Manual For Cognitive Behavior Mentors

Although created by John Grinder and Richard Bandler after ‘modeling’ [*The process of observing and mapping the successful behaviours of other people. In NLP this involves profiling behaviours/physiology, beliefs and values, internal states and strategies*] the Family Therapy of Virginia Satir, the material used in describing this technique is generally garnered from *The Heart of the Mind*, 1989, by Connirae and Steve Andreas.

Technique #22

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Prompt

Step 1. *Have the client pick a behavior or feeling that s/he doesn't like.*

Step 2. *Have the client set up communication with the part that supports the bad habit.*

“Will the part of me that makes me do this behavior, communicate with me in consciousness now?”

“So that I will know exactly what you mean, if you mean ‘Yes’, you are willing to communicate with me in consciousness, please increase the ‘signal’ [in brightness, volume, or intensity]. ‘If you mean ‘No’, you are not willing to communicate, please decrease the ‘signal’ [in brightness, volume or intensity].”

Step 3. *Separate the behavior from the positive intention.*

Ask the part “Are you willing to let me know what you want for me that is positive by doing this behavior?”

Step 4. *Find new behaviors or responses*

Ask the part “If there were ways that you thought would work as well or better than the bad habit to accomplish your positive intention for me, would you be willing to use them?”

Tell the part “Go to the creative part and communicate what your positive intention is for me, so that my creative part understands.”

Tell the creative part “As soon as you understand the positive intention, please begin to make up other possibilities for accomplishing that positive intention, and communicate these to the part that wants an alliance toward a positive purpose.

“The part of me that wants to reach the positive intention can then select only those new ways that it thinks will work as well or better than the ‘bad habit’ in

achieving its positive intention. Each time it selects a new choice, it can give me a 'Yes' signal so that I'll know."

Step 5. Gaining commitment and testing the process.

Ask the part that wants to reach the positive intention, *"Are you willing to actually use these new alternatives in the appropriate situations, to find out how well they work?"*

Step 6. Checking for personal ecology

Ask ALL parts "If you have an objection, please increase that signal for 'Yes' and decrease it for 'No'.

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Six Step Reframing

Introduction

Six Step Reframing is a process used in Neuro Linguistic Programming through which a problematic behavior is separated from the positive intention of the internal program or 'part' that is responsible for the behavior. New choices of behavior are established by having the 'part' responsible for the old behavior take responsibility for implementing other behaviors that satisfy the same positive intention but don't have the problematic by-products.

Reframing can be used with literally any behavior or feeling response that the subject would like to change, including:

Behaviors & Habits: Most of us do things that we don't like. Some people have habits like smoking, drinking or overeating that cause problems, but despite the recognition of these problems, they continue doing what they do.

Feelings or Emotions: Occasionally we have feeling responses we don't like and would like to control: feeling angry, depressed, intimidated, impatient, resentful, etc.

Physical Symptoms: Anytime there is a physical symptom which is concerning, the subject should first make use of appropriate medical advice. However, sometimes such physical symptoms contain psychological messages as well. A backache, for example can be a message to slow down. A shoulder ache may be telling us that we are taking on too many burdens. A migraine headache may be telling us we need to relax and get more rest. Getting physical symptoms can be a response to nonconscious requirements that are being ignored. Learning to interpret the message in these physical symptoms allows for the conscious structuring of day to day responsibilities to avoid the pain of debilitation.

Reframing is concerned with positive intentions. We all have feelings or behaviors that were developed to serve a useful purpose at one time, and we continue even when they are no longer useful to us. Some people find themselves still fighting battles with their parents long after they have died. We may find ourselves

responding in the workplace with behaviors developed to deal with an older brother, or school bully. People who have been abused sometimes learn to mistrust others so well that they have great difficulty trusting others who love them.

All of us at sometimes do things we consider stupid or limiting - that get in our way. Sometimes we feel angry, inadequate or something else, we may think that's a dumb thing to feel. We also occasionally see our friends and relatives doing stupid or bizarre things. "If only they knew better", we think.

We usually try to 'get rid' of these behaviors or feelings, criticizing ourselves: "You should be able to stop smoking [eating, etc.]." Usually we don't know the useful purpose behind these behaviors or feelings. We just know that these responses get in our way.

The most important concept of six step reframing is that *every behavior or feeling, no matter how bizarre or stupid it seems, has some useful and important positive intention or purpose.*

This often seems ridiculous at first, but it is a powerful assumption that makes much inner healing possible. It helps turn problems and limitations into assets and lays the foundation for behavioral change. This assumption also helps us gain a greater rapport with all parts of ourselves - with our entire being.

When we speak in terms of 'parts' of a person, it is important to understand that we are not talking about a particular body part or in ascribing human attributes to a part of the body. 'Parts' is just a convenient way of talking about the experience we all have when we are ambivalent, divided or in conflict; we kind of want to do one thing and also want to do another at the same time. Such behaviors range from excessive television to compulsive spending, from nail biting to driving too fast, from eating too much to procrastination. A bad habit is any recurring behavior that you can't seem to stop doing, even though you have come to realize that it has a negative impact on your life.

Symptom effectiveness

Six Step Reframing is a very rapid and elegant way to gain useful changes in behaviors and feelings. Even more important than getting a solution for a specific personal problem, reframing creates a new positive *attitude* toward ourselves and others.

For centuries, saints and sages have advised us that learning to love ourselves is important, making us more able to lead fulfilling lives and to love others. Yet few have been able to offer specific and efficient ways to learn how to do this. This method provides a *way* to love ourselves. After all, if we are focused on the behaviors and feeling we don't like, it is easy to dislike ourselves and others. Reframing teaches a client how to welcome each of these feelings and behaviors for their positive purposes. If we feel unhappy, guilty, angry or embarrassed, rather than criticizing ourselves for those feelings, we welcome them and *assume* a positive purpose can be found in them. As we find other ways to achieve these positive purposes, we no longer need to experience the unpleasant feelings or troublesome thoughts.

Time for Mastery

Varies, but generally from one to two hours.

Instructions

The Mentor should understand that s/he is both facilitating the use of the technique and training the subject to use the technique for future reference. While it is usually easier to get results with guided facilitation, the six steps can be done alone. Even without full completion, there is often an experience of beneficial results from the parts they do complete. As with many of the cognitive behavior techniques, training the subject to use the procedures enhances future inoculation to problems in living. Some of the steps in this process may seem strange to the child, as they probably did to you. You might tell the child, "The only reason to do something as strange as this is that it gets results - usually quickly and easily." Since the technique is benign, the worst that can happen is nothing, but frequently people gain new choices for problems that have bothered them for years.

Step 1. ***Have the client pick a behavior or feeling that s/he doesn't like.***

This can be smoking, procrastination, overeating, feeling inadequate or angry or some physical problem. The child should pick something specific and then think about 'the part of him/her that makes me do the behavior or have the feelings.'

Step 2. ***Have the client set up communication with the part that supports the bad habit.***

First, have him/her turn inward and apologize to this part for not appreciating it in the past. This is the part that you now realize wants to do something important and positive *for* you in continuing the behavior, even though you don't yet know what this positive intention is. The more kind and gentle s/he is with this part of him/herself, the more willing this part will be to communicate with him/her.

Once having achieved a positive focus the client should close his/her eyes and ask a question inside: "*Will the part of me that makes me do this behavior, communicate with me in consciousness now?*"

After the question has been asked, the client should notice what s/he sees, hears or feels. This will often seem a little strange, but that's okay - just concentrate on what happens.

People get a wide variety of signals from their unconsciousness parts. S/he may get an image of a person, or an animal nodding its head; s/he may see a color or shape. S/he may hear sounds or words. Many people feel a body sensation - a tingling in the spine, warmth in the hands or face, an increase in heart rate or something else.

S/he may experience some aspect of the response in the actual problem situation. For example, if s/he is working with a part that makes him/her angry, s/he may feel tension in the stomach or feel the heart speed up slightly as the signal. Some signals are so unique and surprising that you *know* immediately that the part is communicating. At other times, the signal may seem like your own ordinary thoughts and images. As soon as the client gets a signal, have him/her pause to *thank the part for communicating*.

Since reframing works by communicating with 'unconscious parts', it is very important that the signal is one that you *can't* duplicate by conscious effort. So to be sure the client isn't just fooling him/herself, simply have him/her try to create the signal s/he received. If it is a good signal [unduplicated], go on to the next step. If the client *can* duplicate it, s/he can simply tell his/her inner part, "in order to be sure I'm communicating with you, I need to have a signal that is clearly outside my control. Since I can duplicate the signal you just gave, will you please choose another signal that I can't duplicate exactly", and wait for a new response. Each time thanking the part for its responses - even if s/he doesn't understand it yet.

Whatever the client sees, hears or feels in response to the question, s/he needs a way of knowing what the signal means - when this part wants to say 'Yes', and when this part wants to say 'No'. Have the client go inside and tell the part, "*So*

that I will know exactly what you mean, if you mean 'Yes', you are willing to communicate with me in consciousness, please increase the 'signal' [in brightness, volume, or intensity]. "If you mean 'No', you are not willing to communicate, please decrease the 'signal' [in brightness, volume or intensity]."

Typically, the signal will increase or decrease, and it doesn't matter which it does. If the part signals "No, I don't want to communicate" *that is still a communication*. Almost always this simply means that there is certain *information* that part doesn't want to communicate, and that's fine - it doesn't need to.

Step 3. *Separate the behavior from the positive intention.*

Now is the time for the client to make a distinction between the 'part's' behavior or response and its *positive intention* or *positive purpose*. Make sure that the client remembers the assumption that even though this part is doing something s/he doesn't like, it is doing this for *some significant positive purpose*.

Suggest that the client go inside and ask the part, "*Are you willing to let me know what you want for me that is positive by doing this behavior?*" The part can use the same yes/no signal established in Step 2 to give the answer.

If the part signals, 'Yes', thank it and tell it to go ahead and tell you. If the part signals 'No', also thank it, and tell it that you are assuming that it has a positive intention that you are better off not knowing right now. You can go on to Step 4 even when the client doesn't consciously know the positive intention.

Advise the client that it is very important *not* to 'second guess' the parts and decide what they are telling you. Reframing provides a way to find out *from the part*. If you are not sure, use the yes/no signal to find out. For instance, you can say internally, "I think your positive purpose is to help me succeed. Please give me a 'Yes' signal if this is true, and a "No" signal if this isn't correct. Each of us has unique messages which may be entirely different from anyone else's.

NOTE: It is even worse to 'second guess' someone else's parts and tell the other person what message their unconscious is offering them. The Mentor is in a role of helping the child explore his/her own unconscious thoughts and should not offer 'rational explanations' in this process.
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If the client gets a 'positive purpose' which s/he doesn't like, or that seems negative, s/he should thank the part for giving him/her the information. Then ask

“What do you do for me that’s positive in that?” have the client keep asking the question until s/he gets a positive purpose s/he can agree with.

Up until this point, we have been referring to the part and “the part that makes you want to follow the ‘bad habit’.” Now we will begin to call this same part “the part that *wants* you to acknowledge and ally with its positive purpose”.

Step 4. *Find new behaviors or responses*

Now you want to ask your client to turn inward and ask the part to use its yes/no signal to answer this question: “*If there were ways that you [the part that wants alliance around a positive purpose]thought would work as well or better than the bad habit to accomplish your positive intention for me, would you be willing to use them?*” If the part understands what you mean by this, the child will always get a ‘Yes’ answer. S/he is offering *better* choices for the part to get exactly what it wants, *without taking the old choice away*.

If s/he gets a ‘No’ answer, this only means that the part doesn’t understand what is being offered. S/he can back up and explain more clearly, so the part can understand and agree.

Now the Mentor should have the client take a moment to become aware of a creative part of him/herself. It should be made clear that you are not talking about any exceptional artistic creativity. It may just be the part of him/her that thinks about what to do for fun, or what to wear to school. If you prefer to use a different word than creative, that’s fine. Whatever you call it, the client will need to utilize this part to generate alternative ways to satisfy the positive intention.

Have the client again turn inward, and ask the part of you that wants the alliance toward a positive intention to “*Go to the creative part and communicate what your positive intention is for me, so that my creative part understands.*” Then invite your creative part to participate in the way creative parts love doing: “*As soon as you understand the positive intention, please begin to make up other possibilities for accomplishing that positive intention, and communicate these to the part that wants an alliance toward a positive purpose.*”

Some of these possibilities won’t work at all, some will work a little, and some will be great. The creative part’s job is only to ‘brainstorm’ possibilities for the other part to choose from. “*The part of me that wants to reach the positive intention can then select only those new ways that it thinks will work as well or better than the*

'bad habit' in achieving its positive intention. Each time it selects a new choice, it can give me a 'Yes' signal so that I'll know.'

When the client has gotten three [03] 'Yes' signals, s/he is ready to go on to the next step. Have the client thank both the creative part and the part that wants to reach the positive intention for helping in this way. The client may or may not know consciously what the three new choices are, and it doesn't really matter.

Step 5. *Gaining commitment and testing the process.*

Ask the part that wants to reach the positive intention, *"Are you willing to actually use these new alternatives in the appropriate situations, to find out how well they work?"* Again have the part use its yes/no signal.

If you get a 'Yes' responses, go ahead to Step 6. If you get a 'No', find out what the objection is. You may need to back up to Step 4 and get additional choices that will satisfy the objection.

Step 6. *Checking for personal ecology*

The part of the client that wants to reach the positive intention is now satisfied. It has three new choices it likes. Now the client must turn inward again and ask of all his/her *other* parts. *"Does any other part of me have any objection to any of my new choices?"* If s/he receives no internal signals, s/he has completed the process.

If the client does get a signal - by seeing, hearing, or feeling something inside him/herself - s/he will need first to find out if s/he really has an objection, or if some part of him/her is just excited about having new choices. Have the client say *"If you have an objection, please increase that signal for 'Yes' and decrease it for 'No'.* If s/he does have a part that objects, s/he can recycle through the same six step process with both the new part and the part that wants the positive intention met to find three choices that will meet *both* their positive intentions.

If the client gets several signals that are objections, you simply go back to Step 2, and ask *all* objecting parts to form a 'committee' to identify each part's positive purpose and select new choices from the ideas the creative part generates. The client should make sure that each new choice satisfies *every* part involved. A consensus, rather than a majority vote, will result in a lasting change. Once all the internal parts agree, you will find yourself automatically acting in new and better ways.

Special Considerations

The same process can be useful in family relationships. The basis for the process was originally developed by Virginia Satir, one of the pioneers of Family Therapy. She used it for many years, both before and after John Bandler and John Grinder delineated the Six Step process.

Realizing positive intentions can also help us deal with other people who act in ways that disturb us. The person who yells at you in traffic is using the only way s/he knows to vent frustration and try to feel better. The person who deceives you probably feels that s/he has to do that in order to survive in a world s/he perceives as confusing and untrustworthy. This notion of positive intention provides the basis for an *attitude* of positive relationships, despite difficulties that appear to be attacking us, but can now be framed as protecting the self.