

*Cognitive
Behavior
Technique #34*

Reframing

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The major source of this material is the book by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, Reframing, published in 1982. Additional sources are Bernard J. Baar's A Cognitive Theory Of Consciousness, published in 1988, Evolutionary Psychology and the Emotions, Leda Cosmides & John Tooby, 2000 and Mind-Lines by Michael Hall and Bobby G. Bodenhamer, 2000. All material has been adapted.

Technique #34

Reframing

"You people just don't understand what it is like to be blind."

"Gee, we must be missing a lot."

INTRODUCTION

"An evolutionary perspective leads one to view the mind as a crowded zoo of evolved, domain-specific programs. Each is functionally specialized for solving a different adaptive problem that arose during hominid evolutionary history, such as face recognition, foraging, mate choice, heart rate regulation, sleep management, or predator vigilance, and each is activated by a different set of cues from the environment. But the existence of all these microprograms itself creates an adaptive problem: programs that are individually designed to solve specific adaptive problems could, if simultaneously activated, deliver outputs that conflict with one another, interfering with or nullifying each other's functional products. For example, sleep and flight from a predator require mutually inconsistent actions, computations, and physiological states. It is difficult to sleep when your heart and mind are racing with fear, and this is no accident: disastrous consequences would ensue if proprioceptive cues were activating sleep programs at the same time that the sight of a stalking lion was activating ones designed for predator evasion. To avoid such consequences, the mind must be equipped with superordinate programs that override some programs when others are activated (e.g., a program that deactivates sleep programs when predator evasion subroutines are activated). Furthermore, many adaptive problems are best solved by the simultaneous activation of many different components of the cognitive architecture, such that each component assumes one of several alternative states (e.g., predator avoidance may require simultaneous shifts in both heart rate and auditory acuity). Again, a superordinate program is needed that coordinates these components, snapping each into the right configuration at the right time." [Cosmides & Tooby, 2000]

Bernard J. Baar in his book, ***A Theory of Consciousness***, defines the Global Workspace model of consciousness. The model is a distributed society of specialists that is equipped with a working memory, called a 'global workspace', whose contents can be broadcast to the system as a whole.

Baar notes that the fact that people become unconscious of a repetitive or predictable stimulus does not mean that the stimulus has disappeared. On the contrary, it continues to be processed in the appropriate input system. One may say that the loss of consciousness of a predictable event 'is' the signal that the event has been learned completely.

The processes are coded in memory in schema that he labels as contexts. Contexts he defines as relatively enduring structures that are unconscious, but can evoke and be evoked by conscious events. Conscious contents and unconscious contents interweave to create a 'stream of consciousness'.

The release from habituation is not dependent upon the energy of the stimulus: it is dependent upon a change in 'information', and 'information' as Bateson tells us is the 'difference that makes a difference'. Thus, the nonconscious context can be stimulated to come to consciousness only when something novel attracts conscious attention. One might suggest that the response given to the blind person at the beginning was sufficiently novel to garner his/her attention. It was not the usual response for it reframed completely a complaint into a response that complains back that we are the one's who are missing out. That the response was 'novel' and therefore aroused consciousness could be seen in the sensory reactions as well.

The novel reframing provides outcome of 1) pattern interruption, because the response was so unexpected, 2) the likelihood that the person will try to figure out how someone could possibly miss something by being sighted, and 3) it honors the person's blindness in a way that is rarely done. *This change in experience is really the only essential piece of any reframing model.*

Baar suggests that one plausible meaning of 'self' is as the *dominant enduring context of many conscious experiences*. We may also say that

conscious experience provides information to the self-as-context. These dominant enduring contexts are not necessarily *true*. There is much evidence that people manufacture memories, images, perceptual experiences, and intentions that are demonstrably false, that suggests that they were coded falsely [or incompletely] in the first place. They do, however, provide the basic body of information that is used by the 'self' to determine reality in the world. In other words, these contexts are, for better or worse, self created models of the world and give meaning to every event and experience that the person may have.

In Baar's model of consciousness, he uses the well-established fact that many small collections of neurons in the brain have very specific functions, to suggest that unconscious events are treated as the functioning of specialized systems. A 'process' involves changes in a representation. A 'processor' can be defined as 'a relatively unitary, organized collection of processes that work together in the service of a particular function'.

Specialized processors are 'structured recursively'. So that a processor may consist of a coalition of contexts, that in turn may also be a member of a larger set of processors that can act as a single chunk. We should not expect to define a processor independently of task and context, though some tasks may be so common that they need generalized, relatively stable processors.

Thus, processors and contexts can be thought of as *parts* of the self. You have a schema [processor and series of contexts] which because of the way it has been coded [represented] carries out certain functions for the 'self' This conceptual construct has been used in such techniques as **CBT#22 - Six Step Reframing**. The fact that the context [or series of contexts] can be carrying out a function that is inherently painful and causing problems in living suggests that it is an area for change.

Nonconscious automaticity seems to be reversible. Baar's model suggests that automatized skills can become conscious again when they encounter some unpredictable obstacle. The existence of de-automatization is one reason to believe that consciousness may be involved in *debugging* automatic processes that run into difficulties.

Conscious events are indeed able to be broken into fundamental parts

and one major function of the system underlying consciousness is to unify these components into a single, coherent, integrated experience [Mandler, 1975; Treisman & Gelade, 1982].

Barr's theory suggests that within narrow limits, specialized processors can adapt to novel input for all processors must be able to change their parameters, and to disassociate from the status quo and reform into new processing coalition.

Processors may function well until a 'novel' situation causes a 'mis-match' requiring a 'debugging' of the program. They must be able to adapt whenever the predictions they make about the world are violated and remain essentially passive unless such violations occur.

We can sum all of Baar's points by saying that specialists processors are 'functionally unified' or 'modular'. The detailed processing in the overall system is widely decentralized or 'distributed' into parts. Each module may be variably stable and unstable, depending on the guiding goals and contexts. Specialized processors may be able to 'adapt' to novel input, but only within narrow limits. Adaptation implies that specialized processors are sensitive to mismatches between their predictions and reality, that they are, in a sense, 'mismatch-addressable'. We are not conscious of the details of specialized processors, suggesting that executive control processes are relatively 'ignorant' of specialized systems.

Baar does not spend much time addressing 'meaning', although it is clear that the information contained in the processors and context have meaning. Meaning does not exist 'out there in the world, but is 'in here' - inside the individual person.

Nothing in and of itself means anything.

It takes a Meaning-Maker to construct an association, set a frame, link events, and marry concepts.

(Hall & Bodenhamer - Mind-lines)

Meaning only exists in the magic meaning that we create when we attach and link a thought [set of representations contained in a context] to an external event - from this Hall & Bodenhamer propose a formula:

External Behavior --> = Internal State

Actually, we would turn it around and suggest that the Internal State [Internal Logic] predisposes external events - what we perceive, what we do and how others are likely to respond. But these two aspects context and meaning are both available for reframing.

Thoughts and Beliefs

“Every belief is a limit to be examined”
(John C. Lily)

Hall & Bodenhamer do have a great deal to say about meaning [thoughts and beliefs]. In beliefs, they suggest, we formulate a mental map about things. We map out the linkages between things and ideas, we associate various things, events, experiences and what we think about such. So, through our representational thinking, we construct beliefs as understandings about what things *'are'*, how they work, what they mean, their importance, relationships, etc. Once formulated, our beliefs then shape our everyday realities. Beliefs shape our internal experiences, our self-definitions, resources, hopes, expectations, experiences, accessing of resources, skills, abilities, emotions, etc. This make beliefs incredibly important. As our *meaning structure*, beliefs provide a most salient influence. They command nervous system functions. They govern perception. And once installed, beliefs *take on a life of their own*.

When a belief becomes that strong, it begins to operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As we believe - so we are. If we believe that people will hurt us, it seems that we suddenly have eyes for seeing hurt everywhere. If we believe that we can't do something, our very body and neurology seems to take this as *'an order'* to not have the ability to do it.

With a belief, we not only have a ***set of representations*** about something [a primary state level], we also have a ***confirmation and validation*** of those representations [a meta or transcendent level structure].

Test these thoughts:

The President of the United states lives in the White House in Washington, D.C.

Congress should reduce spending.

People should not eat meat.

Santa Clause flies around the world in a sled pulled by reindeer every Christmas and enters homes to bring presents to good boys and girls.

You can *think* about all of these statements. You can represent them and entertain them as ideas. But do you *believe* every one of them?

Actually, according to modern psychology, *all propositions are true* - *proposition* in this case meaning a *sentence that asserts that something is the case*. Saying it does make it so. It seems that Baruch de Espinoza [later Benedict Spinoza] challenged De Cartes [somewhere around 1633] and stated that when people hear statements they accept them as true *until they do the analytic work* to decide whether it is coherent with everything else they have absorbed. Recent research evidences has supported this notion.

This idea seems to be inherently understandable. Animals do not dispute their sensations [cognitive integration of multiple perceptions]; the danger is just too great. Thus, when the rabbit senses an owl; it does whatever rabbits do to protect themselves against owls without analyzing whether an owl could really be there. Accepting as truth what we hear [as well as see, taste, smell, and feel] would be an evolutionarily successful trait and those who did not respond to the proposition as true are no longer with us.

The further impact of this is that when the individual is in a deenergized state, meaning that their attention is busy elsewhere, they do not bother to do the analytic work, therefore accepting as true what has been said, even if incoherent. This is something to remember when you are attempting to change a child's thoughts. On the other hand, most of what

we think does not need to be analyzed unless the information is 'novel' - the difference that makes a difference - and arouses our consciousness. Then, when we exert the energy we are able to make judgements about the truth and/or utility of a proposition.

Hall & Bodenhamer remind us that you can have thoughts without beliefs. So what separates an idea that we believe from one that we do not? How does a belief differ from a mere 'thought'? There also seems to be a qualitative difference between a thought that is accepted to be 'true' and one that is analyzed as truth. For a proposition to be false it must be analyzed. Truth, however, may be accepted in any proposition that is not examined. But if a proposition is examined and found to be true, this seem to be of a different order. It is not just affirmation, it is confirmation. Further, there is a hierarchy of beliefs in which some beliefs are more strongly held than other beliefs. Those endowed with strong emotional content are the most strongly held beliefs of all.

How did emotions arise and assume their distinctive structures? According to Cosmides & Tooby, fighting, falling in love, escaping predators, confronting sexual infidelity, experiencing a failure-driven loss in status, responding to the death of a family member (and so on) each involved conditions, contingencies, situations, or event-types that recurred innumerable times in evolutionary history. Repeated encounters with each kind of situation selected for adaptations that guided information-processing, behavior and the body adaptively through the clusters of conditions, demands, and contingencies that characterized that particular class of situation. This could be accomplished by engineering superordinate [belief] programs, each of which jointly mobilizes a subset of the psychological architecture's other programs in a particular configuration. Each configuration would be selected to deploy computational and physiological mechanisms in a way that, when averaged over individuals and generations, would have led to the most fitness-promoting subsequent lifetime outcome given that ancestral situation-type.

Emotion laden beliefs exist on a higher logical level than thoughts. Hall & Bodenhamer suggest that a belief functions in a '**Yes!**' frame, or validation that we utter to an idea. The '**Yes!**' that we speak to *the thoughts* that we represent *confirms* the ideas, *validates* the thoughts and

establishes the primary level representations. Thus, a belief involves a *thought* that already has a *frame* around it, a belief has a *confirmation* frame around a thought. It embeds the thought inside of a frame of reference of validity and thus exists as a meta-thought, or a thought about a thought.

Richard Bandler has described beliefs as 'commands to the nervous system'. When we merely 'think' something, we send signals to our brain and body. If we think about something obnoxious and disgusting in a vivid and graphic way, our nervous system will respond with a state of aversion¹. Shad Helmstetter supports this saying that "neuroscientists have learned that thoughts are electrical impulses that trigger electrical and chemical switches in the brain. Thoughts are not just psychological in nature, they are *physiological* - electrochemical triggers that direct and affect the chemical activity".

"When given an electrical command - a thought - the brain immediately does several things: it responds to the thought by releasing appropriate control chemicals into the body, and it alerts the central nervous system to any required response or action."

Thus the power of thought, particularly a thought that is held as true, and most importantly a thought that carries emotional value [good or bad] is a very powerful message to the nervous system about how to behave in the world. And since the belief carries emotional content, the physical appearance of that emotion is apparent to an observer with '*sensory acuity*'. If you are aware, you will be able to observe both the emotion of the belief and the emotional changes of the reframe.

If a belief exists as a set of representations or thoughts to which we confirm as we say '**Yes!**', then as soon as we begin to say '**Well maybe...**' [questioning doubt] or '**No, no way**' [disbelief] the reframing process begins.

¹ Even such visceral experiences can be reframed. We have all smelled and responded negatively to the odor of a skunk. It seems as though you can't stand it. Reframe this in your mind next time it happens. Think of 'burnt coffee'! You may have a surprising result.

Reframing

Reframing is the transcendent metastructure of cognitive change for it is a system of providing 'mismatch' either through outside suggestion or through individual metaperspective taking. It is a method of reorganizing the emotional content of a thought and allowing rational as opposed to emotional response to predominate.

We can understand frames as being our conceptual or cognitive views of particular situations. For instance, do we perceive a story we hear from a client to be a tale of ***problems*** or of ***solutions***? Our choices of frames help us to hear certain aspects of the client's talk, while not helping us to hear other parts of the conversation.

Contexts in conversation are built by the joining or weaving together of words: Knowing the meaning of a word or phrase is the result of joining them together with other words and phrases. From this perspective we become weavers of words as we attempt to fabricate meaning and create coherence for ourselves. It is important to remember that context is created from the weaving together of words because it is on this very matter which many become confused: Context does not cause that which is contextualized to have meaning; meaning is produced when the two - the context and the text, are brought together.

The notion of recursion becomes a bit more complex in that the cognitive frames we think are in recursive relationship with the linguistic frames we speak and hear. ***Our understanding of a situation helps us to grasp "what is going on", and at the same time, as we experience "what is going on" in a situation, our understandings can be re-shaped or reframed.*** [Chenail, 1995]

The reframing technique is not new. It is often used by well intentioned parents, teachers and probation officers to lead people into behaviors that can help or actually cripple them for the rest of their lives and are powerful and effective mechanisms of change. One of the most powerful reframing occurs when the mental health profession reframes unacceptable behavior as an 'illness'.

Change means a change in the ways clients talk, and most likely

think, about their problems. If a clinician can hear changes in how clients talked about their problems in sessions, then s/he can assume that there would be corresponding changes happening in the clients' lives.

“Don't believe everything you think!”
Farkas

You must remember, however, as Bandler has so irreverently puts it - “its all lies - although very useful lies”. These descriptions are just useful ways of organizing experience. If you look meaningfully at someone saying “Now, look, there's a part of you that finds this a little scary and I can understand that”, this is just a way of talking about things and those words are not grounded in reality. It is not that one way of talking approximates reality more closely than the other one. Whenever you start to decide that, you're in trouble. It is most dangerous to actually believe that your thoughts are reality. They are all simply ways of organizing your experiences; and reframing is a way to organize your experiences to go somewhere new.

It is not the experience, but the *interpretation* of the experience that counts. The more ways you can interpret an experience the more flexible your personality will be and the fewer problems in living you are likely to incur. Or to reframe that:

Things turn out best for those who make the best
of the way things turn out. Art Linkletter

Some people cannot make the best of even the best of circumstances. The world is fraught with people who are extraordinarily successful in their commercial lives and distraught internally. ‘Movie stars’ or athletes who commit suicide or slowly kill themselves through use of drugs are an obvious example. If they could have only learned the pleasures of being blind.

There is a Taoist story of an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. ‘Such bad luck’, they said sympathetically. ‘May be’, the farmer replied. The

next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. 'How wonderful', the neighbors exclaimed. 'May be', replied the old man. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. 'May be', answered the farmer. The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. 'May be', said the farmer.

The meaning of any event depends upon the way in which we perceive it. When we change the frame, we change the 'frame' of reference and change the meaning. Having the horse run away was a 'bad' thing, until the horse brought the wild horses to the farmer. Having the wild horses was a 'good' thing, until the son broke his leg. Having a broken leg was a 'bad' thing until he was passed over for conscription into the army. While the story is likely told in order to show the value of nonattachment as displayed by the farmer, the neighbors' responses clearly demonstrate the power of reframing.

The farmer's nonattachment, his ability to think of and utilize many frames of reference without commitment to one, provides him with a much more satisfying existence. He is neither elated nor distraught as his neighbors are.

In general communication theory there is a basic axiom that a signal only has meaning in terms of the frame or context in which it appears. The sound of a squeaky shoe on a busy sidewalk has little meaning; the same sound outside your window when you are alone in bed means something different altogether. While the emotional predominance has an evolutionary history, the mediation of emotions by thought also has evolved. Robin R. Vallacher [1993] suggests that mental control developed because a person cannot do everything at once. This means that there must be some mechanism for holding the yet-to-be-discharged action components in queue, inhibiting their enactment until the appropriate time. The backlog of undischarged action components - the action queue - sets the stage for mental control by creating a need for

representation in the mental system. Because the elements making up a complex action queue must become coordinated to ensure that they are executed in the appropriate combination and in the right temporal order, the resultant representation must function as more than a simple holding tank. This would seem to give a clear advantage to the meaning-based, verbal [language] representations relative to image-based or enactive representations. Indeed, constrained only by linguistic capacities, people, in principle, can come to represent the essence of virtually any action, no matter how complex or lengthy.

Vallacher also points out that the action queues develop in accordance with dynamics that have little to do with consciousness. He suggests that in much the same way that water coursing down a mountain becomes organized into a river by following the path of least resistance, the multiple components of an action become organized into action queues under ecological constraints. Thus the nonconscious processors of Barr come into play. This linguistic mediation process is consistent with the components of reframing.

Reframing appears widely in the counseling process. When a clinician tries to get a client to 'think differently about things' or 'see a new point of view' or to 'take other factors into consideration', these are attempts to reframe events in order to get the client to respond to them differently.

Explicit conceptualizations of reframing have been used by a number of clinicians who understand that problem behavior only makes sense when it is viewed in the context in which it occurs. These include many with a family or systems orientation, notably Paul Watzlawick, Jay Haley and Salvador Minuchin. These clinicians generally use what is described as 'content reframing'. They have designed specific reframing interventions such as 'prescribing the symptom', and 'paradoxical injunction', that effectively reframe behavior in order to change it.

Virginia Satir uses a great deal of reframing in her work, from simple redefinitions to more elaborate reframing via psychodrama in her 'parts parties' and 'family reconstructions'.

Carl Whitaker reframes with nearly everything he says to the families that he works with. Symptoms become reframed as accomplishments or skills,

'sanity' becomes craziness, and 'craziness' becomes sanity.

A more elaborate and 'all purpose' method of reframing, called 'six step' reframing was developed by Bandler and Grinder and already appears as **CBT#22**. The six steps include a process of reframing by using the 'parts' of the self.

We call reframing the metastructure of cognitive behavior management because it is used in almost every cognitive structure.

Psychoeducation attempts to reframe through the provision of new language and concepts or ways to think and talk about the issue.

Metaperception [visualization or imagining] reframes by allowing the client to take both associated and dissociated perspectives of the same issue.

Goal Development reframes by asking the client to project him/herself into the future.

Relaxation Training reframes by asking the client to project him/herself into a peaceful place.

Verbalization or self talk reframes by asking the client to habituate him/herself with a new way of thinking about the problem.

Problem solving reframes by dissecting the problem in different ways [WANTS & NEEDS] or before and after.

Attribution training 'seeds' the environment with internal attributions of personal responsibility of *memes* for change.

Finally, **Anchoring** reframes by asking the client to adjust the way s/he is feeling in the present to a perspective developed in the past.

Lewicki suggests that social perception can be changed by a single

conscious experience [1986]. If this statement is correct, reframing can instantaneously change a client's perception of the world and his/her place in it - meaning that s/he can resolve some serious problems in living in a very short period of time.

Khalsa [1999] suggests that pain, one of the most intense of all human experiences, can be reframed for relief. Pain, he says, *demand*s meaning. All human beings have an innate, immutable need to understand the meaning of life's experiences. This human need for understanding is also the force that allows us to finally *rise above our pain*. When we can *understand* our pain - when we can find *meaning* in it - we can transform this remaining pain into an entity that is *not* painful. This new entity - which once was pain - might be merely a physical sensation. An interpretation of pain that is negative will only heighten the stress response and decrease the cognitive control over pain.

Reframing is a very powerful communications tool. The question is whether we can take it from the realm of a hit-or-miss art to a set of predictable and systematic interventions for achieving behavioral change.

Content Reframing: Changing Meaning or Context

Content reframing is the most common way that reframing is done. Grinder and Bandler called it content reframing because, unlike six step reframing, you need to know the specific content in order to make the reframe.

There are two [02] kinds of content reframing. As an example of the first:

Leslie Cameron-Bandler was working with a woman who had a compulsive behavior - she was a clean freak. She was a person who even dusted light bulbs! The rest of her family could function pretty well with everything the mother did except for her attempts to care for the carpet. She spent a lot of her time trying to get people not to walk on it, because they left footprints - not mud and dirt, just dents in the pile of the rug.

When this woman looked down at the carpet and saw a

footprint in it, her response was an intense negative kinesthetic gut reaction. She would rush off to get the vacuum cleaner and vacuum the carpet immediately. She actually vacuumed the carpet three to seven times a day. She spent a great amount of time trying to get people to come in the back door, and nagging at them if they didn't, or getting them to take their shoes off and walk lightly.

The family seemed to get along fine if they were not at home. If they went on vacation or out to dinner, they had no problems. But at home, everybody referred to the mother as being a nag. Her nagging centered mainly around the carpet.

What Leslie did with this woman is this: she said "I want you to close your eyes and see your carpet, and see that there is not a single footprint on it anywhere. It's clean and fluffy - not a mark anywhere." the woman closed her eyes, and she was in seventh heaven, just smiling away. Then Leslie said "**And realize fully that that means you are totally alone, and that the people you care for and love are nowhere around**". The woman's expression shifted radically and she felt terrible! Then Leslie said "Now, put a few footprints there and look at those footprints and know that the people you care most about in the world are nearby." And then, of course, she felt good again.

In this particular kind of reframing the stimulus in the world doesn't actually change, but its *meaning* changes. You can use this kind of reframing any time you decide that the stimulus for a problem behavior doesn't really need to change - that there is nothing inherently wrong with it.

If people have a sensory experience that they don't like, what they don't like is their *response* to it. One way of changing the response is to understand that the response itself is not based on what's going on in the sensory experience. If you change what the experience *means* to them, their response will change.

Such reframing is the essence of sales. When the customer asks how

much this is going to *cost*, the salesperson indicates that the *investment* will be \$X. There is a vast difference between the meaning of cost and investment, even though both are expenditures. What is the cost of convincing someone that they are mentally ill and not in control of their own behavior? One cost is what has been called diplomatic immunity - meaning that they are immune from consequences of their own behavior. What is the investment in teaching that same person that they and they alone are responsible for their behavior and its consequences, BUT that they can learn skills that will enable them to reach the outcomes they want AND that these skills will not only resolve immediate difficulties, but have impact in the future as well?

Virginia Satir was working with a family. The father was a banker who was quite stuffy. He took good care of his family and was concerned enough to go into counseling. The wife was an extreme placater in Satir's terminology. She will agree with anything and apologize for everything. When you say 'It is a beautiful day!' the placater says "Yes, I'm sorry!". The daughter was an interesting combination of the parents. She thought her father was the bad person and her mother was the groovy person, so she always sided with her mother. However, she *acted* like her father. The father's repeated complaining in the session was that the mother hadn't done a very good job of raising the daughter, because the daughter was stubborn. Once when he made the complaint Satir interrupted and said "You're a man who has gotten ahead in your life. Is this true?"

"Yes."

Was all that you have, just given to you? Did your father own the bank and just say 'Here, you're president of the bank'?"

"No, no. I worked my way up."

"So you have some tenacity, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is a part of you that has allowed you to be able to get where you are, and to be a good banker. And sometimes you have to refuse people things that you would like to be able to give them, because you know if you did, something bad would happen later on."

"Yes."

"Well, there is a part of you that's been stubborn enough to really protect yourself in very important ways."

"Well, yes. But you know, you can't let this kind of thing get out of control."

"Now I want you to turn and look at your daughter, and to realize beyond a doubt that you've taught her how to be stubborn and how to stand up for herself, and that is something priceless. This gift that you've given to her is something that cannot be bought, and it's something that may save her life. Imagine how valuable that will be when your daughter goes out on a date with a man who has bad intentions."

There is a pattern in this - *Every experience in the world and every behavior is appropriate, given some context, some frame.* This is the second kind of reframing. The meaning of stubbornness did not change, but the context did. The daughter's behavior of being stubborn with the father will no longer be seen as her fighting with him. It will be seen as a personal achievement: he has taught her to protect herself from men with bad intentions. What has appeared to be dysfunctional behavior becomes functional [given the context].

Most of the behavior that puzzles us about clients is a demonstration that the majority of their context is internal, and you don't have access to it yet. A lot of your ability to establish and maintain rapport with your clients is your ability to appreciate that what looks and sounds and feels really weird and inappropriate to you, is simply a statement about your failure to appreciate the context from which that behavior is generated.

Rather than imposing a new context, you can use the client's own resources to find a new context. Ask the client where the behavior is appropriate. If the client says 'nowhere', you can assist him/her in finding appropriate contexts by giving specific representational system instructions [though metaperception]. Have him/her picture in his/her mind the experience and then keep changing the background until s/he finds a context that feels appropriate and s/he can see others approving. As soon as she finds a context like that, have him/her make the behavior the primary resource in *just* that context."

All the reframing models that we used are based on some kind of content reframing. First, you must identify the form of the complaint that your client has presented. For a **complex equivalence** you do a *meaning* reframe.

Complex Equivalence - The complex set of experiences that equal a certain meaning in a person's map of reality; e.g. the specific set of behaviors that indicate that someone loves you. Two statements that are considered by a person to mean the same thing. For example - thinking someone is not paying attention if they are not looking at you.

For a meaning reframe, you will need to ask yourself - "Is there a larger or different frame in which this behavior would have a positive value?". "What other aspect of this same situation that isn't apparent to this person could provide a different meaning frame?". Or simply, "What else could this behavior mean?" or "How else could I describe this same situation?".

With a **comparative generalization** you do a *context* reframe.

Comparative Generalization - A generalization is the process by which elements or pieces of a person's model become detached from their original experience and come to represent the entire category of which the experience is an example. Our ability to generalize is essential to coping with the world.

For a context reframe, ask yourself - "In what context would this particular behavior that the person is complaining about have value?".

Think of different contexts until you find one that changes the evaluation of the behavior.

Hall & Bodenhamer suggest another set of *linguistic markers* or key words that can help to identify the client's beliefs. Simply listen for:

- **Causation statements:** how the client models the way the world works, functions, relates to itself, etc.
- **Equation statements:** how we decide and model regarding meaning, what abstractions equate with what behaviors.
- **Value words and ideas:** the ideas, events, experiences, etc., that we deem important and significant.
- **Identifications:** what things equal other things, what we identify as the same.
- **Presuppositions:** unquestioned assumptions that we simply take as true.

As we begin to hear the client make these comments we know that this is an area of belief that can be reframed. We can also identify the common frames of reference used by the client.

Comparison frame: "S/he does this so much better and quicker than I do."

Self-esteem frame: "I would feel like a nobody if I flunk."

Self-identify frame: "I'm not that kind of person."

Historical frame: "That's the way I have always been."

Relational frame: "I'm first and foremost a good friend."

Success/Failure frame: "Could I even succeed if I tried?"

Masculinity/femininity frame: "That wouldn't seem manly."

Right/wrong frame: "You shouldn't talk like that."

Pleasure/pain frame: "Will it hurt?"

Relevance frame: "How will this help me?"

In meaning reframing we operate inside the formula box and simply shift the frame from one frame-of-reference to another. "It doesn't mean that, it means this!" In context reframing, we move outside of the formula box and explore what surrounds the box.

Another choice is to find out what behavior the client generates when

s/he says she is, for example, 'being greedy' and give the behavior itself a new name with a new meaning. 'Greed' has negative connotations, but if you give the behavior another label with positive connotations, such as 'being able to meet your needs', you can change the meaning of the behavior.

A Virginia Satir 'parts party' is nothing more than doing this over and over and over again, in lots of different ways. If your client has a part of him/her that is devious and malicious, it later becomes renamed 'you're ability to be creatively constructive' or something else. It doesn't matter what name you come up with, as long as it has positive connotation. What you are saying is "Look, every part of you is a valuable part and does positive things for you. If you organize your parts in some way so they operate cooperatively, and so that what they are trying to do for you becomes more apparent, then they will function better.

Reframing also involves making a distinction between behavior and intention, behavior and person. We distinguish what a person **does** [the external behavior] from what a person **seeks to achieve** by those actions [internal logic].

Visible Signs

One of the things you will need to hone is your observation of the visible signs of the functioning of the autonomic nervous system. There are two parts to the autonomic nervous system: the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. The two tend to balance each other through opposite effects.

Sympathetic activation results in increased muscle tension and a readiness to respond physically to some threat. There is more adrenalin and the skin whitens as the blood vessels and pupils constrict. Parasympathetic activation results in muscle relaxation, flushing of the skin, dilation of blood vessels, dilation of the pupils, etc.

There are some very general visible characteristics of those two systems. The importance of observing these differences is that people tend to have sympathetic activation when presenting a complaint and considering a reframe. Then they shift to a parasympathetic activation when the

reframe works. You would expect this to occur, since if the reframe works, what was perceived as a problem to cope with becomes no problem at all.

Accessing Changes

Accessing Cues are behaviors that are correlated with the use of a particularly representational system; e.g. eye movements, voice tones, postures, breathing, etc.; the ways we tune our bodies by breathing, posture, gesture and eye movements to think in certain ways.

We use different channels to represent information on the inside [internal representations of experience], using our five senses: Visual, (sight), Auditory, (hearing), Kinesthetic, (body sensation), Olfactory (smell) and Gustatory (taste).

There is a really elegant nonverbal test to find out if the reframe continues to work after you first introduce it. Your client may accept the reframe at the time that you make it. Later, s/he may reject it because of some objection that arises. However, if later you mention some other dimension of the same presenting problems and you see that s/he goes through the accessing sequence that was characteristic of the reframe and not the accessing sequence that was there before the reframe, then you know that the reframe is integrated into the experience of the problem area.

The generalization is this: one indication that the reframe works *at the moment* is that you get a different accessing sequence when the person considers the same problem area. You observe some new strategy. Perhaps rather than being locked into kinesthetic feelings, the person is able to take some new perspective. Or you may observe the same accessing sequence, but with a different response. You recognize that by observing the autonomic cues mentioned earlier.

At the end of the session, you might test whether the reframe has endured. You might ask "By the way, does so-and-so - who is a part of the original presenting problem - have a moustache?". If you see some changes that were characteristic of the reframe moment, then you know you've got integration for that material. If not - if s/he goes back directly

to the original pattern - then you might suspect that you need to do some more work.

One way of thinking about content reframing is that it can be used as a temporary measure to loosen a client's perceptual frames so that it will be much easier to go on to other things.

For instance, Bandler and Grinder report that there is a man in California who does a single reframe that works with anoretics. He has a 80% recovery rate with anorexia, which is a tough problem. He brings the whole family into a room with a one-way mirror. There's a table in the room with a big pot of hot dogs on it. He walks in and introduces himself. He then says "You have fifteen minutes to get this young woman to eat. So I will be back." then he walks out.

The family does all kinds of things to get the girl to eat. Some of them physically pin the girl down and start stuffing food in her mouth. They do their usual inadequate best to try to get her to eat. At the end of fifteen minutes he walks back in and says to the family - "You failed miserably. Get out!". He throws everyone out but the anorectic girl. Then he turns to her and says - "Now, how long have you been using this as a way of getting your family's attention?".

That is a gross imposition of content on the girl, but it works. Four out of five times the anorexia cycle is now broken and the girl can move into a more healthy state. Don't argue with success like that.

There is an emotional shock aspect to this kind of reframing, that should not be overlooked. A similar thing occurs when you accept the idea of suicide - saying something like - "You know, I have never really understood suicide before. We really don't know what goes on with people like you and you are offering me an unprecedented opportunity to learn. What I would like to do is to cooperate with you, but what you have proposed is too simple, and I won't learn enough. What I would really like to do is make your death more complex, so that I can really learn about it.".

You follow that kind of shock statement presupposing “the only justifiable way to die is *for* something that is positive” - which sets up a nice pattern of finding something positive.

Another shocker might be “How wonderful that you are looking for heaven on earth!” - which is essentially a relabeling of suicide.

The point is that one way to interrupt a client’s pattern is to do something totally unexpected. And the acceptance of the possibility is reinforcing to the relationship since it does not set up an immediate defensive response.

Or how about “Don’t stop getting into trouble. You’re doing something really important with this behavior. Until you get the attention of these fools, or until you find a better way to get their attention, keep doing what you are doing.” This is actually two reframes 1) describing the problem behavior as a useful way to get attention, and 2) characterizing the symptomatic problem behavior as being under conscious control. That can be very useful. Any time you relabel another person’s behavior like that, you are imposing your own beliefs and your own values. There is nothing wrong with that as long as you know what you are doing and realize the consequences of doing it.

Delivery is *very* important. This is the **art** of reframing, just as timing is the art of stand up comedy. You cannot be taught it, but you can be improve through practice. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of ‘congruence’ and ‘expressiveness’. The actual physical context is also very important. It is very different to be at a doctor’s office and see the doctor glance at you and look uncomfortable, than to see the same thing at a hotel registration desk. Those are two *entirely* different experiences although the sensory experience has similarities. Keep the context in mind when doing reframing.

As a communicator you want to have the ability to shift the frames that people put around anything. If a person believes that something is bad, the question is “when, where, how and for whom?”. Reframing is a different way of doing the same things you do with the Meta Model questions. Rather than asking the question ‘for whom?’ you just change

it. If somebody says "stupidity is inherently bad; it is bad to be stupid" you say "some people use stupidity as a way to learn a tremendous amount. Some people use stupidity as a way to get people to do things for them. That's pretty smart".

There is a choice about the *syntax*, the *order* in which you do things. If you do things in the wrong order, you make it really difficult for yourself.

The problem that reframing addresses is the way that people generalize. Broadening people's view through reframing doesn't force them to do something. It will only get them to do it *if* the new view is congruent and makes more sense to them than what they have been thinking and is an undeniably valid way of looking at the world. What makes a reframe work is that it adheres to the well-formedness conditions of a particular person's needs. It is not a deceptive device. It is actually accurate. The best reframes are the ones that are *as* valid a way of looking at the world as the way a person sees things now. Reframes don't necessarily need to be more valid, but they can't be less valid.

You can't reframe anything to anything else. It has to be something that fits that person's experience. Every objection will tell you about important criteria. You have to find a valid set of perceptions in terms of that particular person's model of the world. What reframing does is to say - "Look, this external thing occurs and it elicits this response in you, so you assume that you know what the meaning is. But if you thought about it this other way, then you would have a different response." Being able to think about things in a variety of ways builds a spectrum of understanding. None of these ways are 'really' true. They are simply statements about a person's understanding.