

Part 1 What is Hypnotic Argument? How Does it Differ from Using Scripts?

When I first started as a Hypnotherapist, when a new client would come to see me, I would research their issue, photocopy scripts from script books, print material related to their issue that I found on the internet, and create what I now call "Franken-scripts"; cut and paste scripts compiled from several different sources with my own scribbled notes in the margins. These scripts would be at least 7 or 8 two-sided pages of material and would take me hours to research and write.

A session would then consist of me reading my script to the client while they passively received it in the chair.

One day I was treating a client who had come to see me for weight loss. I was doing the standard, "you eat only when hungry, you eat foods that are nutritious and healthy" patter and, much to my dismay as well as hers, after 3 sessions she was actually gaining weight! While she was in hypnosis, in a moment of frustration I exclaimed aloud, "there must be some reason why you are not following my suggestions!" And, to my surprise, as I had never been taught that clients could talk in hypnosis, that a session could be interactive, my client began to speak. She told me about being 7 years old and being taken to the hospital repeatedly to visit her grandmother who was in hospice. My client didn't really understand at that time that grandma was very ill. She just saw that over the course of her visits grandma got thinner and thinner and thinner and then one day she was dead. As a result, my client had a belief still stored in her SC mind that weight loss led to death. So, all this time that I have been giving her suggestions to take weight off, in a sense, her SC was hearing me say, "I am going to kill you" and it was responding by putting weight on--it was trying to keep her alive!

In this case, my client did not need to hear, "you eat only when hungry. You reduce your food intake". In fact, hearing that was causing the client to go backwards. It was causing the exact opposite of the results we were aiming for!

My client actually needed reassurance that weight loss was not going to kill her the way she thought it killed grandma. What she actually needed to hear was that grandma died because she had an illness and that weight loss was not what killed her. She needed to hear that it was safe for her to take off weight, that it would add to her longevity and wellbeing, that if she ever felt unhealthy as a result of taking weight off, she had the power to stop taking weight off. And

when I took this approach with my client, reassuring her as to the safety of taking weight off and the difference between her situation and grandmas, she started taking weight off without me having to give her suggestions around healthy food or healthy behaviors.

This moment was eye opening for me for several reasons and forever changed the way I do hypnosis. Besides realizing a client can communicate in hypnosis without it interfering with the trance state I realized several other things:

- The SC is a storehouse of experience and it "knows" what events in a person's life are connected to their symptoms and can communicate this during a session
- That suggesting away symptoms does not always work if the client has a SC reason for hanging onto them

Over the years I learned several other key things as well

- That the SC is typically protective-- it is concerned about self preservation. No matter how dysfunctional a client's behavior may appear to be, more often than not it is the SC trying to keep the person safe
- The SC can be convinced to do things differently if the right argument is made.

This approach to hypnosis that I was taught of passively reading suggestions to my client never really sat well with me. It felt shallow and unconvincing and disconnected and was not effective enough in getting results for me to feel good. And over time I realized why. We are led to believe that all it takes for a client to follow suggestions is for them to be in hypnosis. But that is not actually true! What matters is that they are RECEPTIVE to what is being said. And it matters as well that the right thing is being said.

Contrary to what many people believe, most clients can hear what is being said to them while in hypnosis. AND during a hypnotic state, the client's own thoughts get accepted into their mind, just like a hypnotic suggestion. The SC does not differentiate between the two types of stimuli; my suggestions and the client's own thoughts. So, if we are simply telling a client with low self esteem that they feel good about themselves, like themselves, walk with confidence and talk with confidence, and the client is thinking, "No. I don't feel good about myself. My self esteem is in the toilet", then their thoughts will cancel out my suggestions and there will be no results. In fact, the problem could be made even worse!

If the client is arguing with my suggestions, they are cancelling out everything I say. When I tell the overweight woman she is "slim and healthy" and she is thinking to herself, "No. I'm not. That's not true", then no changes occur. When I tell the man with fear of public speaking that he will "speak with confidence and be calm and natural when speaking", if he's telling himself,

“No way! Speaking terrifies me. I sweat. I shake. I am not confident at all”, then everything I am saying will be ignored.

So it is important that we are saying the correct thing to the client--not simply offering generic suggestions in an attempt to remove symptoms.

The majority of the clients we see for therapy are analytical types who will still be thinking and paying attention while we are talking to them during a session. So, we need to take into consideration how receptive they will be to what we are saying.

An analogy that I use with my clients is that the subconscious (SC) mind is like a castle and the conscious mind is the guard at the gate. We want to get into the castle. It's nice if the guard is wandering off, making daisy chains in the meadow because when the guard is “away” we are able to get into the castle. However, for many people the guard remains at the gate. This is the case with clients who stay a bit lighter in hypnosis, who are nervous, who are analytical and therefore likely to hang out to try and understand the hypnotic process, who are afraid to “lose control” and who are simply curious about the process. And it doesn't matter if the guard is at the gate! We don't need the guard to go away. We just need the guard to let us in. If the person is thinking, “These suggestions are not true” the guard is blocking our entry. But if the guard is saying, “I cannot dispute that. Yes, I like how that sounds. Yes, I agree.” then the guard is allowing access.

So, the receptivity of the guard is the most important thing.

So, as a result of this realization, I began to create what I call a “hypnotic argument” —this is a compelling argument that the client cannot dispute. This argument is personalized; it takes into consideration the client's history, pivotal moments, and the "big players" in the client's life. It considers the client's beliefs and provides a counter argument, to talk the client's SC mind into thinking differently.

This approach is VERY different from using a generic script that one finds online and simply inserting the client's name into the appropriate blanks. I have been shocked, as a teacher of Hypnotherapy, how often I run into people who have been trained to use generic scripts and to read to their client in hypnosis. A script written BY someone else with someone else in mind is not designed to meet your client's needs. Your client is an individual and must be treated as such.

To give you an example of how hypnotic argument works let's look at a client suffering from poor self esteem.

In order for the client to receive my suggestions in hypnosis, I need to know WHY the client has poor self esteem? Where does it stem back to? Does it come from a neglectful or critical parent? Did she get poor feedback from a peer or teacher? Was it due to feeling like she didn't fit in? Was there some failure that occurred in her past that she is still beating herself up over?

Any one of these situations leads us to create a different argument in order to improve the client's self esteem. I am going to say something different to a client who wasn't accepted by her peers than I am going to say to a client who had a critical parent.

We need to know the "WHY" in order to create a compelling argument. We can't just throw positive words at the client and hope they will stick. This will sound hollow and empty to the client and leaves room for them to dispute. When we know the "why" we can create an argument that they cannot poke holes in.

For example, if the client had a critical parent, I would then want to find out what they know about their parent and how the parent was raised in order to build my argument. Maybe the parent was never praised so it doesn't come naturally. Maybe the parent has unresolved issues due to their own life experiences and is acting negatively to my client as a result. Maybe the parent has poor self esteem and is projecting their hatred of self onto my client. By understanding the parent and why they came to be who they were, I can then create an argument to help my client free herself from the impact of those negative messages. If my client understands the messages were not about HER but about what was going on in the parent, if I can depersonalize the messages, the client can begin to heal. This is not about blaming anyone. But it is important to understand the client's specific situation so an argument can be created that the client will buy into.

In the above example part of my argument might be:

"You mentioned that you mom was raised by a critical parent herself. So, perhaps her criticizing you was due to some lack in her, not a lack in YOU. People can only teach what they know. Your mom was taught to be critical but that does not mean that there is nothing about you that is not worthy of being noticed. Everyone has many positive and desirable traits whether someone else points them out or celebrates them or not"--- and I would elaborate on this, of course.

In this example, the client CANNOT argue with anything that I have said. So, an argument like this goes way further in helping build self esteem than simply telling the client "You have great self esteem".

In order to create this argument you must be able to uncover or identify where the client's issue stemmed from. We will be looking at how to do this later in this book.