

Utilising Hypnosis with The Miracle Question

The Miracle Question is generally first credited to Insoo Kim Burg's who then developed the idea alongside Steve de Shazer at The Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and this wonderfully useful approach has become a well-loved tool in many a therapist's kitbag.

Solution Focused Brief Therapy is all about moving a client forward with their thoughts and The Miracle Question really does pinpoint this approach. We all know that feeling of focus we get when our client replies with a wonderful stream of uninterrupted positivity - it really does feel as if a true miracle is unfolding before our very eyes ... but, let's face it, it doesn't always run like that!

So why is that? Well, the Miracle Question is a simple enough paragraph to memorise and ask of our client but its power lies within *how* it is phrased, timed and delivered and understanding this subtle aspect of its secret can greatly enhance its results.

We need to have, at some level at least, already encouraged our client to think from an intellectually positive perspective but our clean language, good rapport and focused encouragement should have taken care of this for us at the point of asking the question.

As a Solution Focused Hypnotherapist we have an extra skill at our disposal and one that I feel has perhaps not been utilised fully during the creation of our particular brand of therapy: Namely, Hypnosis.

Therefore I have been 'experimenting' with my approach to the miracle question and have been placing my clients into a trance state *before* posing the question. As a result of this I have observed several key changes in their responses to the question and a greater 'hit rate' of positive imagination.

Setting up the question

It might be important to state first off that I approach all of my session time from the viewpoint of a hypnotist – from the moment my client arrives at the clinic I want them to be moving into a waking trance state so we can lower the critical faculty and allow all their positive ideas to be offered up for subconscious consideration.

Please Note: I refer to this scenario as a *waking trance* in order to differentiate between it and the more ‘formal’ couch time trance that follows later during the session.

It should be possible to see that a client whose critical faculty is lowered will be able to bypass the negative blocks of their current thinking far easier than that of a client who is still operating from a position of past concepts of possible/impossible in their life. This means that when timed correctly, the miracle question can be seen as a subconscious reframe that is cued from an intellectual, problem solving perspective.

Creating a trigger for the question

I decided to involve an anchor during the process as I felt this larger ‘ritual’ helps promote a focusing moment and a greater sense of *doing* – this is always important when maximising hypnotic suggestion. So I utilise a breathing anchor before asking the question, like so:

“Please just relax back and be aware of the points of contact between you and the chair you are sitting in ... you can close your eyes now ... if you like. Notice your breathing, that gentle rise and fall and allow yourself to just relax back into the chair. In a moment I would like you to consider this idea for me ... I wonder if you can remember that comfortable feeling of relaxation that flowed through you during your trance state on the coach last week and notice how you can expect that feeling to simply wash over you again in just a moment. That’s right ... just imagine that as you count three comfortable breaths you can breathe in that wonderful relaxed feeling and let in flow through you now. (Count down) That’s wonderful, dropping back into that wonderful relaxed state ... that’s it ... and when you are ready and have claimed this feeling all for yourself you can bring it back with you to full wakefulness, (count up) that’s it, you can feel yourself returning back to a full, refreshed, wide awake state of being once again with your eyes open and ... great.

Let’s try again ... (etc)

This process is rehearsed until we can see the client is dropping into a trance state and then when they are good and focused we can proceed.

... Now I’m going to ask you a question ...

(Cue the miracle question)

Results

I have found several notable changes with the answers received from clients when using this hypnosis approach:

- The client appears more able to visualise themselves in a future setting
- The client appears to have a higher confidence in the plausibility of the scenario envisioned
- They have a greater emotional response to the imagined success
- Overall they appear more involved with the process and affected by its imagery

Other benefits

- The Client can be taught the process as a self hypnosis technique and use it as a 'homework' exercise.

In effect we are utilising hypnosis to promote a sense of inner reality and feelings of belief and acceptance in our clients ability to make those changes just as we would at any point during the hypnotherapeutic process, but by placing them into this state BEFORE asking the miracle question we can lower the critical faculty, reduce resistance and begin to open those channels of internal communication and positive imagination so important for a greater sense of confidence, well being and future development.

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