

Ericksonian Hypnotic Language Patterns

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Patterns of Indirect Suggestion (not "Covert Hypnosis")

In a therapeutic setting we strive to achieve the client's goals with elegance. Sometimes, however, change is difficult and resistance, conscious or otherwise, is a natural response. By using the following language patterns we are able to bypass the conscious resistance and to communicate with the subconscious mind.

Milton Erickson was famous for his therapeutic metaphors. He would elicit hypnotic responses in his clients or direct their thinking by telling them a story. He wasn't alone. Like Aesop's fables, the parables of Jesus, and Greek myths, stories can teach us and direct us with their implicit, indirect suggestions.

Milton's stories, however, were told in a manner that utilized a sophisticated understanding of how the listener's subconscious would hear them. His use of these language patterns and vocal tonality to slip suggestions past the listener's conscious critical mind is sometimes referred to as "covert hypnosis." We take issue with this representation. This artful use of language cannot rightly be called covert when used in a clinical setting. The client has come to you for treatment and is paying for all of your expertise. Using Hypnosis covertly, like in a bar to seduce someone, is something Dr. Erickson would neither do nor advocate.

Adirect suggestion is really a command. It tends to be evaluated by the conscious mind and may be rejected at the outset. Indirect suggestions are like a Trojan horse that slips past the gates and guard towers of the conscious mind and carries good suggestions embedded within. Hence the term, "embedded command." [As an example, "You will feel confident," is a direct suggestion. As opposed to the Indirect Suggestion: "I'm wondering how it is when **you feel confident** ."]

Note: Words in bold are to be said utilizing a shift in your tonality

and/or physiology. This is referred to as "Analogue Marking" because the shift in tonality and body gestures are analogous to that of a command. An Embedded Command can be marked out in a variety of ways. A louder voice, a softer voice, a change of vocal timbre, pausing just before the particular phrase, a hand gesture, a shift of eye focus onto the subject, etc. But, whatever way the phrase is marked out must be analogous to a command. You are telling them to do something and it must be clear to their other-than-conscious what they are to do.

I should like to point out that without these shifts in tonality, etc., there is no command at all. You must **shift your tonality** in a way that is noticeable. Regardless of whether or not the listener pays attention to it consciously, it has to exist. Sometimes people think they are shifting their tonality and are not really doing so. Generally speaking, you can err on the side of exaggeration quite safely. Richard Bandler is sometimes almost comical in his broad way of delivering the commands, yet they unfailingly work.

Speaking of tonality that is analogous to a command, in natural English language a change of inflection can change the meaning of a sentence entirely. As in the sentence, "You are going to the proms." If you were to use a lifting of your tonality at the end of the sentence it becomes a question. "You are going to the proms?" (Say it aloud and listen to it.)

With flat tonality it is a simple statement. "You are going to the proms." (Say it and listen...)

When you shift your tonality downwards at the end of the sentence it becomes a command. "You are going to the proms."
(Go ahead, say it. Say it with the downward inflected tonality and listen to how it sounds.)

Thus: In communication in general and in Hypnosis in particular, tonality is primary.