

FOREWORD TO THE 1ST EDITION BY JEFFREY K. ZEIG

Milton Erickson was known for his flexible and effective therapeutic communication which was predicated to a great extent on his ability to read nonverbal behavior. Early in my training with Erickson, I asked for instruction to be able to better understand nonverbal behavior. In an amused fashion, he asked if I knew the definition of “zyzzyx.” I replied that I did not and asked what it meant. He instructed me to look it up in the dictionary, stating that you first learn the alphabet, then the words, then the grammar. There is no substitute for direct experience and, before one goes on to complex tasks, it is important to really know the basics.

In this volume, Michael Yapko presents the alphabet of hypnotic influence communication based in part on Erickson’s strategic and symptom-based therapy, a methodology that uses hypnosis both formally and naturalistically to promote change. Whereas traditional therapy made understanding and insight primary, Ericksonian methods center on promoting effective living independent of the therapeutic situation. To accomplish goals and to maximize patient-based change, Erickson pioneered indirect techniques, noting that communication occurs on multiple levels, including the verbal content, the implications, and such extraverbal factors as tone, duration, intensity, and body language. In fact, some experts maintain that only a small fraction of our response to communication is due to the verbal content.

Traditional therapists interpret the patient’s multiple level communication, that is, describe back to the patient what he “really means.” Modern Ericksonian methods, however, are predicated on the idea that if the patient is intelligent enough to communicate on more than one level, the therapist should be equally intelligent. Therapeutic communication does not need to be interpretive, concrete, direct, or linear to be effective. In fact, therapeutic communication is best when the therapist is flexible, uses indirect techniques, and focuses as many output channels of communication as possible (Zeig, 1980).

Yapko gently eases us into the world of hypnotic communication. He provides a balance between direct and indirect techniques, integrating clear examples of each approach into the text. Examples also are given of content and process techniques (roughly, those that are specific and those that are more general). Direct and indirect techniques along with process and content suggestions have their place in therapy. Yapko does not tell us which to use or when to use them; rather, he examines

possibilities, presenting the advantages and disadvantages of each, reminding us that the amount of indirection to be used is directly proportional to the perceived resistance.

Yapko's approach to hypnosis is a radical departure from other authorities. He defines hypnosis as influence communication—a position sure to be considered controversial because some might think that definition too general, thereby unnecessarily diluting the territory. However, Yapko presents his arguments cogently and has a position that deserves recognition in the literature and can be supported by citations and references.

Trancework was written to promote clinical hypnosis and make it more available to psychotherapists. It will motivate many to enter the field and broaden their interests so that there will be active use of and research into hypnotic communication.

I find this book particularly interesting when it describes the induction process, the utilization of trance phenomena, and the wording of different types of suggestions. Professionals will appreciate the attention given to the ethical use of hypnosis. In good Ericksonian fashion, we are admonished to attend to individual differences and meet the patient at his frame of reference; the emphasis is on communication skills, not on rigid formulas.

Trancework provides the building blocks necessary to learn the vocabulary and grammar of hypnotherapy and effective forms of influence communication. We look forward to other expositions from this talented writer.

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REFERENCE

Zeig, J. (1980). Symptom prescription techniques: Clinical applications using elements of communication. *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 23, 23–32.