Ericksonian Hypnotherapy

Igor: Before the lunch break, we went through a nice simple structure for doing some hypnotherapeutic work. Would it be fair to say that you started to experience something significant and that shifts were occurring?

I realize that not all of you necessarily had a resolution but all of you got closer to one. Remember, you were only working for half an hour. I still recommend that you initially start with 90- or 120-minute sessions to really be able to put everything in, including the kitchen sink.

Now I want to take this training wheel model that you played with and give you a more general model of what I would consider to be a model for Ericksonian Hypnotherapy.

Nothing on this list will surprise you except for one or two things that we’ll cover tomorrow, but I want you to be aware of it because then we can start looking at the therapeutic stage in it.

Before we actually go into this model, let me just simplify this into three steps. This is going to put everything else that you do into perspective. There are three key phases, and the reason I call them phases and not steps is because they’re not linear.

All three are constantly happening and they’re all running inside of each other. You’ll start one, which kind of bleeds into the other one, which goes to the other one and then goes back to the first, ends up in the third and comes back to the second. They just jump all around, but there are three key things that are constantly happening.

3 Step Model (3Ts)

1. Trance Induction
2. Trance Training
3. Therapeutic Trances
I call them the three T’s.

1. **Trance induction.**

Trance induction is basically everything that gets the conscious processes out of the way. I hope that you realize by now that you’re constantly doing things to get the conscious processes out of the way, and consciousness will resurface and diminish in waves throughout your whole session, which means that you’re constantly re-inducing trances, technically known as deepening but really it has the same effect.

The point is you’re trying to keep limiting the amount of interference that you get from the rigidity of the Conscious Mind. I think a lot of you already understand this next one.

2. **Trance Training.**

As you well know, Trance Training is accessing as many unconscious potentials as you can, usually in the form of phenomena because when you access a phenomenon it proves that trance is working, which goes right back into trance induction.

It sidelines the consciousness even more because once it gets received as proof it just creates a stronger dissociation from the unconscious, so that Conscious/Unconscious Dissociation is going on. The third thing that’s happening is:

3. **Therapy.**

You’re going to start doing your therapy and using therapeutic trances. You’re using the fact that the Conscious Mind is not so involved from step one, and the fact that you have lots of experiences brought up in phase two to do something practical with it.

Remember these phases are not linear. They’ll happen constantly throughout a session. Each of these three phases has its own unique problems and its own unique solutions.

By far the most difficult of them all is step number three, and ironically this is usually the one that most hypnosis schools and coaching schools just give you a
glib technique for. It has its uses but really I think it misses the point in terms of how important and how significant that particular chunk is.

You could probably spend three lifetimes just exploring that element and getting some real good material out. Ironically in our field of hypnosis, most people are fixated on the first step – trance induction – which is actually the simplest of them all, although as you saw earlier you can get stuck in ways with that too.

I’ve noticed that many hypnotists in general but hypnotherapists in particular are petrified of Trance Training in case it fails. Whilst I don’t necessarily want to laugh at their misfortune, you can see that those concerns are much more laughable now given your experiences.

Those are the three key phases that are constantly running. Think of them like three little machines running inside the whole hypnotherapy practice. So how does this look in actual practice?

**Ericksonian Hypnotherapy Model**

1. Problem/Outcome
2. ‘Gold Digging’
3. Decide
   - What is the inherent skill (TP)
   - What skill is missing that would solve the problem (TP)
4. Trance
5. Trance Training (general)
   - TP
   - Dr UM
6. Trance Training (inherent skill)
   - TP (build up to inherent skill)
   - Dr UM
7. Trance Training (missing skill)
   - TP (build up to missing skill)
   - Dr UM
8. Seed Learnings
   - Point out the skills they have collected
9. Seeding Future Memory
   - Wonder about how they would like to be different
   - Wonder about how they will BE when they have overcome the problem
10. THERAPY
11. Integrate & Test (PHS)
   • PHS: I don’t know when/where/how...
12. Amnesia
13. Self Appreciation
14. End & Distract

You start with some kind of a problem and an outcome dynamic. What is the problem? You can get very elaborate. I’ve seen models where you spend an hour talking about their family, their history, when and where it happens and how they feel. It gets very involved.

Personally I don’t get very much upfront. I just look at whether I understand the nature of the problem. Do I understand what they want and do I have a sense of where their blockages are? That’s usually enough for me. Erickson did even less. He just said what’s the problem? Now shut your eyes.

Step number two is not a part of my marriage counseling practice. It’s actually a term that comes from another hypnotist named Dave Dobson. He was another genius like Milton Erickson, who’s also sadly passed away now. We’ll deal with that more tomorrow. I’m just putting it in here so that you have the complete model.

Somewhere in that whole process you’ll be making your decision around inherent skills that the person already has. What is the hidden ability in the problem and also what might they be missing? What is it that if they had it, it would be easy to resolve the problem? It’s not rocket science at this point.

Steps one through three are relatively invisible because you’re doing them in conversation ahead of time. It seems like you’re just having a chat with the client. This is where the action begins as far as they’re concerned.

You can start that formally and say look and focus on this point and now go inside. You can also do it informally – for example in the form of a Hypnotic Lecture. Erickson loved doing these sorts of things. He’d say okay so your problem is X and Y and Z. You’ve tried this and this to resolve it and it’s failed.

Now you’ve come to me for help and you really need to understand the functioning of the human body in this regard. You can breathe and you can feel comfortable about breathing. Some people have discomfort but soon it turns
into a comfort when they understand the mechanism of breathing. Then off he goes.

The person has no idea that the trance has begun. They’re just wondering what’s going on. I hope you realize that you can be semi-covert or you can be totally overt. It doesn’t matter too much. It depends on where you’re at with that particular client.

I pulled out three phases of Trance Training. They all kind of come together anyway. This is just to keep you posted with the general idea that you want to be doing a fair number of Dr. Unconscious’s within the process. In other words, you want to talk to a semblance of their Conscious Mind from time to time.

As you get more experience, you’ll end up talking to their unconscious more as a somnambulist, although initially you’ll think you’re talking to their Conscious Mind until you realize that you’re not.

Steps five, six and seven really are to put you on alert that there are many ways that you can run those particular processes, that you do want to make several trips into the Fractionation process, that you do have separate tasks to perform in there, that there are several different skills that you wish to elicit from them, and that all of them are important to the therapeutic process.

From time to time, you may skip one of those steps. You may not go with the missing skills. It may be enough for an inherent one, or you may just do some general Trance Training and discover sufficient resources to do the work that you wish to do, in which case you make a professional decision not to continue to find more resources because you can get on with the therapy.

If you’re correct, you did a good job. If you’re incorrect, the client has no idea that when you go back to doing some more Trance Training that it wasn’t your plan all along. Again steps five, six and seven should be pretty straightforward for you because you’ve been doing it quite a bit now.

Now let’s have a look at the second portion. You can see in steps one through four – the trance induction phase – you’ve got to figure out what the heck to do with these people and what kind of people you have. Steps five, six and seven are really the Trance Training phase.
As we talked about before, I’ve given them to you in a linear list but these things are happening in cycles continuously. Then steps eight through the end are the therapeutic stage. You can do a lot of this stuff as things are happening.

For example, when a Trance Phenomenon comes up, you can start seeding their learning straightaway. You don’t have to wait until a later phase, although you can wait until a later phase. There are a lot of choices that you have available to you.

You know about seeding their learnings. You understand seeding the future memory, which basically gives the Unconscious Mind the opportunity to adjust the conscious goal in accordance with the whole personality.

There are many ways that you can do that. These are relatively indirect. You can directly ask the Unconscious Mind to adjust the goal so that it becomes more relevant to the person. There are many things that you can do with that.

Step 10 is purposely ambiguous. That’s where you do the therapy. So far you’ve got a couple of maneuvers that you can do in therapy. You’ve learned to reframe. You’ve learned to use Trance Phenomena as power loops in terms of here’s an experience of trance, here’s a way of separating yourself from memories and learning something from them.

You can use it to review your memories in a new way. You learned how to play with emotions to some degree. You have three simple maneuvers that you can put into that.

Those of you who have more coaching and therapy experience can plug whatever model you happen to know into this point as well, and it’s much more likely to be successful because the problems that you typically run into are less likely to emerge now. We’ll come up with some more processes today and tomorrow.

Integration and testing are pretty straightforward at this point. I’ll add one thing to this just to get an idea of completion. This can include what’s called a Post-Hypnotic Suggestion phase.

A Post-Hypnotic Suggestion is basically an instruction to experience something outside in the real world once they’ve finished the trance. It’s the same sort of
thing as the future memory. This was one of Erickson’s favorite ways of preparing.

You should know that a lot of these ideas, especially the idea of inherent skills and the idea of the Post-Hypnotic Suggestions, come from one of my mentors, John Overdurf, who also did an excellent Ericksonian seminar called Training Trances. There’s a book of the first portion of that seminar available and it’s a great read. It’s really worth reading.

If you do read that book, you’ll recognize where some of my ideas came from. The model that I run is a little different from his. That’s not to say that it’s any better or worse. It’s just the way that I perceive it and hopefully it will help you perceive it in similar ways. It’s definitely worth getting a second opinion.

If you ever watch any of the Erickson videos, especially those commentaries with Jeffrey Zeig talking about what Erickson was doing as he was doing therapy. He has a very different model. If you look at his model, you’ll notice that it fits into this in some ways but it’s very different. If you ever watch those tapes, you’ll enjoy it because it’s much more Conscious Mind oriented.

This is more like I don’t quite understand this but I can do it and it’s easy. That’s my preference. This should be straightforward at this point. A simple way of doing a Post-Hypnotic Suggestion is to say I don’t know how you’ll know you’ve changed. Perhaps you’ll go home tonight and something wonderful happens. Perhaps you’ll wake up in the morning and this happens.

There have been many situations that had they happened in the past you would have had the old problem result, but now when they happen something different happens. Just think about it now.

You’re basically getting them to re-experience that outside. If you know some of the contextual situations they’ll be in, you can basically list those situations and remind them in trance that when they have these experiences it’s a reminder that all this good work that they’ve done is being solidified.

After that we typically want to present amnesia. You can give it more hard lined and say you will forget stuff. My preference is to offer the Unconscious Mind the opportunity and the right to let the Conscious Mind forget those portions that are important for it to not interfere with or think about.
What I typically get is a dual result. The most elegant version was the gentleman who came up who said I heard everything that you said, I have no idea what it was but I heard everything you said. That’s a great example of amnesia.

He didn’t forget the fact that he was in trance. He didn’t forget the fact that he’s had conscious activity whilst in trance. He had no idea what it was, so he can’t interfere with it, but at the same time he acknowledged the fact that it occurred.

That’s a relatively common thing. Sometimes they’ll swear that certain portions never occurred. Of course you don’t remind them about that. Other times they’ll say they know everything. If you want to test them on it, just ask them about it.

If you’re going to ask them about what happened in the trance experience, get them to take a break first. Let them walk around for a bit. You’ll see people in a trance afterglow. Wait until that stops because they’re still hovering. When hypnosis finishes, especially when a lot of stuff has happened, there tends to be this afterglow that lingers.

It’s kind of like when you wake up in the morning and you have this sleep afterglow that lingers. Wait for that to diminish because they’re still in the threshold of trance, so they’ll have more access to what’s going on there. It’s called state-dependent learning.

Once they’ve changed their state more significantly and they’re more in their everyday alertness, when you ask them about it they’ve had a much better chance to forget the important bits, which is great. You understand why now.

If you do ask about it, don’t say what do you think about this bit, because then you’re reminding them about it again. Just ask them if there’s anything they want to say.

Ask them how the experience was. Is there anything that you recall from that? Versus what’s everything you recall about that? You understand that there’s a subtle difference in the way that I present it, which will be received differently.
Self-appreciation is very important. I think it’s a fundamental thing. It really comes across clearly reading Erickson that he really appreciated and respected people of all walks, no matter how messed up their life had become.

Some of the people who came to him did some messed up things and really experienced some strange and unpleasant situations and he still respected them immensely. He still treated them as a valuable and unique human being, whether they were a prince or a pauper.

He made a point to ensure that they did the same for themselves and that they appreciated themselves. That’s an important point. Finally you end the trance indirectly where you say you can come back anytime you feel right. You can do it directly.

Erickson was not shy about saying count from 20 to one and awaken at the count of one. That’s classic authoritarian hypnosis. Many Ericksonian’s miss that, which is funny. You use your instincts, whether you want to make it a more formal ending or an informal ending.

I like the informal ending because then people say what the heck. I also like the last part of the trance is a Dr. Unconscious because they don’t know why they’ve just awoken. You don’t have to do it that way. There are times when you want to just count them out purely because I consider it to be more valuable for them in that sense.

Lastly you want to distract them from what just occurred because of the trance after that we just talked about. Have a general chat about the weather. One thing that Erickson loved to do was before he started talking about the problem, maybe around the gold digging stage, he’d start talking about something random. Sometimes actually before the trance induction, he’d talk about weather, football, a play that he and his wife saw or a meal that he just had.

He’d make no attempt to segue into it smoothly. He’d just start taking about it. Then he’d interrupt that halfway through and start doing the whole trance induction and the whole process. By then they’re off in fairyland. Then when they came back, he’d distract them and just carry on the conversation from where he left off.
That creates a very nice loop. This works on a principle in psychology in memory research called recency and primacy. The things that you remember the best are the beginnings and the endings of things. He gives you the beginning of something and the ending of something that fit perfectly together so that the mind had a tendency – not a guarantee but a tendency to put them together as a whole unit, and everything else that’s happening in between just vanishes.

The other version is distraction. Have you ever noticed that if you have something really important to say to someone, then they say something else and it takes your train of thought away and then they say what is it you want to tell me, and you say oh never mind because they changed your train of thought?

Erickson used to love to do this, especially with the colleagues that would give him a hard time. He’d just distract them just to the point where we’re about to launch in and then afterwards he’d say what is it you wanted to say? They’d say never mind and walk off.

The whole model of Ericksonian therapy should be pretty straightforward to you right now; although I appreciate there are many steps in it. It’s not so much that you have to remember the steps in the sequence. These are all things that are happening pretty much at the same time, layering over each other.

This is one of the reasons why it can feel like or seem like a daunting task trying to make sense of what Erickson’s doing. He’s doing most of these steps. Steps four through 11 are constantly happening on top of each other. He’ll distract them in one way and then go another way, so a lot of things are happening.

To keep track of which one is happening for what reason and what stage he’s at can take a little bit of skill sometimes, especially when you’re going there with them. Do you have any questions about this?