

Ask the Professional

Monthly eZine

The International Association of Counselors and Therapists

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Acting Like a Hypnotist — Patricia V. Scott

September 2016

Acting Like a Hypnotist

Being a congruent hypnotist who walks the walk and talks the talk.

Interview with Patricia V. Scott

IACT: Hello Patricia. Thank you for participating in this eNewsletter. Since you were a professional actor for 20 years prior to becoming a Hypnotherapist, I am certain there is a lot that you could offer on this subject. Can you expound on some of the ideas you have?

PS: Thank you for this opportunity. When I first became certified in 1992, I presented myself as a "Clinical Hypnotherapist" and wouldn't talk about my previous career in show biz because I thought it would minimize my credibility. Thankfully, I got over that limiting thought. Through the years it has become more and more evident to me how my previous career was actually my preparation for this one. Although I had been studying and using hypnosis, meditation, NLP, and other mind-body methods throughout my singing, acting, and songwriting career, I hadn't yet fully realized that when I was preparing and performing on stage I had learned how to actually put myself into a state that would later come to know as hypnosis.

Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts."

As an actor, I trained myself to instantly release excess stress and tension, to focus my attention on "being" in the moment, and to use my creative imagination to "act as if" I was a particular character with all of the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that went along with that. It was a few years after changing careers that I discovered "Hypnosis is a Performance Art" and I'm working on a book with that title. In our field we have something called, "Deep Trance Identification", which sounds an awful lot like method acting. And Shakespeare's quote above tells me that he knew something about "Parts Therapy". These concepts are very useful with regards to the idea of "Acting like a Hypnotist".

My point is that we all have unique skills, talents, personalities and backgrounds that we bring to this field. I respect that there are some in our field who choose to use different titles and some who even avoid using the word hypnosis. My thought is that it would be very beneficial to our field if we could see ourselves as ambassadors who are responsible for spreading the wonderful benefits of these methods for achieving human excellence and for enhancing the credibility and respect for our industry.

This is what I teach in my Hypnosis Certification training classes....To be proud to call yourself a Hypnotist or Hypnotherapist. I think the way that we overcome some of the lingering negative connotations associated with hypnosis is to wear this badge with honor and pride. This involves self-education and staying congruent with the ideals and principles of the field. We teach that hypnosis can not make someone do something against their nature or values, yet every time there is a ridiculous headline story negatively implying this, I get frantic calls from colleagues and former students. In my opinion, this is when we really need to "walk the walk and talk the talk". Taking a deep breath, stepping back and examining the whole picture (story) dispassionately, and remembering our hypnosis training can be very helpful here. As Hypnotherapists, we can and should train ourselves to react to these situations through our principles and not through fear. How we each react influences those around us and, thus, their impression of hypnosis. Without exception, whenever one of these fantastic stories that implicate hypnosis negatively hits the news, further investigation reveals the fallacy in that assumption.

IACT: You say that your previous career as a performer prepared you for this one. Can you give an example of what you mean?

PS: There are countless examples, but one particularly memorable lesson came when I was performing the lead in a musical comedy show in Tennessee. About an hour before the show was to begin I received a phone call from a man I had been dating for over a year. Let's just say it wasn't good news, as he confessed that he had fallen in love with another woman. My immediate response was what you would expect - I was devastated. But, you know the saying, "The show must go on!" So, I gathered myself as well as I could and I remember having a hard time putting on makeup with my eyes red and swelling up. After three acts of frolicking, singing, dancing, and "acting" silly and funny, I remember being quite curious about the fact that I no longer seemed to feel devastated. I could still "remember" how I had felt before the show, but now it seemed to have lost its power as if it had been diffused somehow.

IACT: What did you learn from this experience that helps you as a hypnotherapist?

PS: Well, there is another old saying, "Fake it till you make it". There is a reason why we have these old sayings, as many of them come from great wisdom. What I found out on a profoundly emotional level that night in Tennessee was that by "acting" happy for a few hours immediately following a traumatic experience, my brain and body released "feel good" chemicals and hormones to override the negative emotions. When we teach the mind-model in hypnosis, one of the rules of the unconscious mind is that it will hold onto an idea, attitude, response, or belief until it is replaced by a stronger one. It is my theory, based on experience with myself and with clients, that the reason the unconscious mind can make instant positive changes in hypnosis is because when a new response or choice is introduced as a possibility at the unconscious level (i.e., in hypnosis), it will always choose the one that is healthiest for the organism. This is because one of the prime directives of the unconscious mind is to maintain the integrity of the body.

Since we also teach that all learning occurs at the unconscious level of mind, here is what happened the night of the phone call that is useful to me now as a hypnotherapist:

I experienced unexpected trauma, which began to produce the "stress response / fight or flight" chemicals in my body. This pattern was immediately interrupted and my mind, focus, and imagination were channeled into another direction because they HAD to be. That's called strong motivation. The new "chosen" thoughts and behaviors produced the healthy "feel good" chemicals into my system and sustained that "state" for several hours. During this time I was in a prolonged "hypnotic state" using the unconscious imagination to "act as if" I was happy. The unconscious preferred that state, recognizing it as healthier for the organism than the previous trauma-induced state and installed and sustained some of that moving forward. So, even when I consciously thought about the source/cause of the previous trauma, the response had been permanently altered to a healthier response. This makes perfect sense to anyone who has studied hypnosis, NLP, and human behavior. Yet, the simplicity of this natural phenomenon sometimes eludes us.

With hypnosis and NLP we are able to help clients who have a past trauma that is still affecting them emotionally. Knowing how the mind and body process and store information, we can help them to create new, more appropriate emotions and responses.

IACT: What are some of the techniques that you have found to be effective for dealing with past trauma?

PS: As a Hypnotherapist, I believe that we offer our clients another way to think about their circumstances and, thereby, change the way they feel about them. One of my first teachers, Dr. Michael Preston, said, "We teach people how to think." I know that he meant, "We teach people how to think... differently."

We know that the central nervous system responds exactly the same to a real event as it does to one that is vividly imagined. Knowing this, we can use many techniques to allow our clients to safely diffuse any negative emotional attachment to a past trauma, gather new lessons and insights, access inner resources, interrupt patterns, and create new, healthier responses to past memories. Some techniques I use regularly are:

- Time Line Techniques
- Dr. Preston's Library Technique
- Parts Therapy
- Regression and Progression
- NLP Techniques (Anchoring, Reframing, etc.)
- Cellular Universe (A technique I created)

IACT: How do you decide which technique to use with a client?

PS: When working with clients, I take a very client-centered approach and never decide what technique(s) I'm going to use ahead of time. One of the more challenging skills to teach my hypnosis students involves learning how to tune in to the client and really listen, and then trust your instincts. It's the dichotomy of being prepared, yet spontaneous and flexible. This does take practice, and being an effective hypnotherapist requires that you learn to take risks and trust your instincts, while maintaining a reasonable sense of control over your own processes. Erickson called this valuable hypnotherapist's tool "controlled spontaneity". This tool requires you to be fully present and aware and to trust your own unconscious processes. This level of confidence requires training and commitment and also instills confidence in the client's potential for growth and change.

Early in my hypnosis career I purchased a video from Gerry Kein and on it he asked a class what they thought the second best training for a hypnotist would be (after hypnosis training). He got various responses and then he said, "Acting lessons". This was another confirmation that my prior career was truly preparing me to do this work. When on stage, you must stay focused and in control, while at the same time being prepared to improvise if something unexpected happens. I don't know about you, but unexpected things happen all the time when I'm working with clients. These moments present wonderful opportunities for change and growth, if handled properly.

I believe one of the most important things is to stay flexible and permissive with a client while at the same time having acute instincts to guide you through the therapeutic process. Genie Z. Laborde, in "Influencing with Integrity", talks about flexibility in communication being essential to eliciting the responses you want. She says communication is a constant circular feedback system and the most important part of communication happens in the middle, where the words and behaviors of one person meet the words and behaviors of another and the meaning changes. Flexibility means being able to use your sensory acuity to notice the response you elicit and use the information you uncover through this feedback system to adjust your communication style accordingly.

IACT: Do you have any final thoughts regarding "Acting like a hypnotist"?

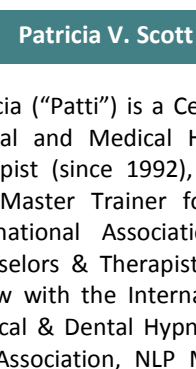
PS: In one of his trainings, John Grinder said, "We are actors, directors and producers of theatre of the absurd. That's what we do in change work." As hypnotherapists, I believe we have an obligation to "walk the walk and talk the talk". I was trained many years ago in hypnotic anesthesiology and for many years have had all of my dental work done without any anesthesia or numbing of any kind. When I casually mentioned this to a fellow hypnotist recently, he was amazed. Why would that be? We have all of these wonderful skills, so the first way to be congruent is to use them on ourselves. How many hypnotherapists do I meet every year at the conferences who don't do self-hypnosis? I've even met a couple who stated, "I can't be hypnotized". REALLY!

In the words of the late, great Uta Hagen, from "Respect for Acting": "Be specific and real in your actions, and they will communicate your artistic statement. Bring your universal understanding of the present to the present....as a real artist."

We know how to go into hypnosis (hopefully!), we know how to model, we know how to future pace, we know how to access our own inner resources, and we know how to create well-formed outcomes and remove any limiting beliefs or blocks. Therefore, we can hypnotize ourselves to "Act as if" we are the most talented hypnotist there is. We create who we are every moment of every day, so if you want to be the best hypnotist you can be, it's as easy as 3...2...1....Hypnosis really is a Performance Art!

IACT: Thank you so very much for granting us this interview. It's been a wonderfully enlightening experience.

PS: The pleasure is all mine.



Patricia V. Scott

Patricia ("Patti") is a Certified Clinical and Medical Hypnotherapist (since 1992), Certified Master Trainer for the International Association of Counselors & Therapists, Life Fellow with the International Medical & Dental Hypnotherapy Association, NLP Master Practitioner & Trainer, Certified Parts Therapy Trainer (Charles Tebbetts Foundation), and Adjunct Faculty with IACT and IMDHA. President of UP Hypnosis Institute, a Division of Unlimited Possibilities Hypnosis Inc., in Tarpon Springs, FL, Patti maintains a private practice and offers internationally recognized Certifications and continuing education in Hypnosis and NLP. She developed a two weekend "Medical Hypnotherapy" Specialty Certification which is approved through IMDHA. She also offers various classes in hypnosis and NLP for the general public. Patti is former President of the Hypnosis Education Association and co-founder of the San Fernando Valley Chapter of the American Board of Hypnotherapy.

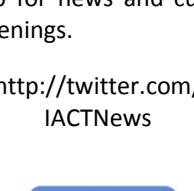
Previously, Patti had a highly successful and diverse 20 year career as a professional singer, actor, dancer and published songwriter. This is where she says she really learned about hypnosis and the power of the mind.



The Hypnocaster

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