

Refraining

Neuro-Linguistic Programming™
and
the Transformation of Meaning

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I

Content Reframing: Changing Meaning or Context

You have all learned the six-step reframing model. In that model you establish communication with a part, determine its positive intention, and then create three alternative behaviors to satisfy that intention. It's an excellent all-purpose model that will work for a great many things. It's got future-pacing and an ecological check built into it, so you can hardly go wrong if you follow the procedure congruently and with sensory experience.

However, that's only *one* model of reframing. There are several other models that we don't usually get around to teaching in workshops, mostly due to lack of time. One of them, called "content reframing," is the most common way that reframing is done in therapy. We call it content reframing because, unlike six-step reframing, you need to know specific content in order to make the reframe. There are two kinds of content reframing, and I'm going to give you an example of each. One of my favorite examples is this: one day in a workshop, Leslie Cameron-Bandler was working with a woman who had a compulsive behavior—she was a clean-freak. She was a person who even dusted light bulbs! The rest of her family could function pretty well with everything the mother did except for her attempts to care for the carpet. She spent a lot of her time trying to get people not to walk on it, because they left footprints—not mud and dirt, just dents in the pile of the rug.

When I grew up, I had relatives who bought carpet and then put plastic walkways across it, and people weren't allowed to step off the plastic walkways. They were the ones who bought a piano and then locked it so that no one could play it, because they didn't want to have to clean the keys. They should have just lived in a photograph. They could have stood in the house, taken the photograph, died, and hung

the picture where the house should have been. It would have been a lot easier.

When this particular woman looked down at the carpet and saw a footprint in it, her response was an intense negative kinesthetic gut reaction. She would rush off to get the vacuum cleaner and vacuum the carpet immediately. She was a professional housewife. She actually vacuumed the carpet three to seven times a day. She spent a tremendous amount of time trying to get people to come in the back door, and nagging at them if they didn't, or getting them to take their shoes off and walk lightly. Have you ever tried to walk without any weight on your feet? The only person I've ever seen do it is the guy at the beginning of that old TV program, *Kung Fu*, where they roll out the rice paper, and he walks down it without leaving footprints. When you can do that, you can marry this woman and live in her house.

This family, by the way, didn't have any juvenile delinquents or overt drug addicts. There were three children, all of whom were there rooting for Leslie. The family seemed to get along fine if they were not at home. If they went out to dinner, they had no problems. If they went on vacation, there were no problems. But at home everybody referred to the mother as being a nag, because she nagged them about this, and nagged them about that. Her nagging centered mainly around the carpet.

What Leslie did with this woman is this: she said "I want you to close your eyes and see your carpet, and see that there is not a single footprint on it anywhere. It's clean and fluffy—not a mark anywhere." This woman closed her eyes, and she was in seventh heaven, just smiling away. Then Leslie said "*And realize fully that that means you are totally alone, and that the people you care for and love are nowhere around.*" The woman's expression shifted radically, and she felt terrible! Then Leslie said "Now, put a few footprints there and look at those footprints and know that the people you care most about in the world are nearby." And then, of course, she felt good again.

You can call that intervention "trade feelings" if you like. You can call it a change of strategy. You can call it anchoring. You can call it lots of things, but one useful way to think about it is as reframing. In this particular kind of reframing the stimulus in the world doesn't actually change, but its *meaning* changes. You can use this kind of reframing any time you decide that the stimulus for a problem behavior doesn't really need to change—that there's nothing inherently bad about it.

The other choice, of course, would have been to attack the rest of the family and get them all to shape up and not leave footprints. This woman's mother tried that; it didn't work very well.

If people have a sensory experience that they don't like, what they don't like is their *response* to it. One way of changing the response is to understand that the response itself is not based on what's going on in sensory experience. If you change what the experience *means* to them, their response will change.

What we know about the woman who kept everything clean is that she engages some strategy that allows her to decide when it's time to feel bad. She doesn't feel bad on vacations, or in a restaurant. My guess is that when she walks into somebody *else's* house and it's messy, she doesn't feel bad, because her response has to do with ownership. Her home is *her* territory; she only feels bad within certain limits. She may not consider the garage or the backyard to be in her territory. Some people keep their houses spotless, but they don't consider their children's rooms to be part of the house, so they don't feel bad about them when they're dirty.

These are all people, of course, who use negative motivation strategies. As they walk into the kitchen and see dirty dishes everywhere, they go "Ugh!" In order to make the bad feeling go away, they have to wash all the dishes. Then they can stand back and go "Ahhhh!" When they walk into a clean hotel room, they don't go "Ahhh!" because it's not *theirs*. So there's some kind of a decision strategy at work.

One way to help this family would be to alter this woman's strategy. Her strategy has some other characteristics which are unpleasant for her. But to solve the immediate problem and achieve a very limited therapeutic gain, all you need to do is to get her to have a positive feeling about one thing: the carpet. That is not a pervasive change, but it's something you should be able to do. This is *especially* true for those of you engaged in the business world, because content reframing is the essence of sales.

Some people call this "redefining" or "relabeling." Whatever you call it, what you are doing is attaching a new response to some sensory experience. You leave the content the same and put another piece of meaning around it—the same *kind* of meaning that the person has already made. The clean-freak mother makes a judgement that when she sees this sensory experience, it means something important enough to feel bad about. If you can define the footprints as being something important enough to feel good about, then her response will change.

To get a change, it's very essential that you have congruent supporting nonverbal analogues as you deliver the reframe. You have to do it with a serious facial expression and tone of voice.

Virginia Satir is one of the people to study if you want to learn about content reframing. She is a master at it. One of Virginia's main maneuvers to anchor new responses in the family is to do content reframing. Let me give you an example of one I saw her do. I almost blew it for her, because I cracked up when she did it. That's not appropriate in a family therapy situation, so I began coughing. That's always a good cover: when you laugh, you can go into coughing right away, and no one will notice.

Virginia was working with a family. The father was a banker who was professionally stuffy. He must have had a degree in it. He wasn't a bad guy; he was very well-intentioned. He took good care of his family, and he was concerned enough to go to therapy. But basically he was a stuffy guy. The wife was an extreme placater in Virginia's terminology. For those of you who are not familiar with that, a placater is a person who will agree with anything and apologize for everything. When you say "It's a *beautiful* day!" the placater says "Yes, I'm sorry!"

The daughter was an interesting combination of the parents. She thought her father was the bad person and her mother was the groovy person, so she always sided with her mother. However, she *acted* like her father.

The father's repeated complaint in the session was that the mother hadn't done a very good job of raising the daughter, because the daughter was so stubborn. At one time when he made this complaint, Virginia interrupted what was going on. She turned around and looked at the father and said "You're a man who has gotten ahead in your life. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"Was all that you have, just given to you? Did your father own the bank and just say 'Here, you're president of the bank'?"

"No, no. I worked my way up."

"So you have some tenacity, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is a part of you that has allowed you to be able to get where you are, and to be a good banker. And sometimes you have to refuse people things that you would like to be able to give them, because you know if you did, something bad would happen later on."

"Yes."

"Well, there's a part of you that's been stubborn enough to really protect yourself in very important ways."

"Well, yes. But, you know, you can't let this kind of thing get out of control."

"Now I want you to turn and look at your daughter, and to realize beyond a doubt that you've taught her how to be stubborn and how to stand up for herself, and that that is something priceless. This gift that you've given to her is something that can't be bought, and it's something that may save her life. Imagine how valuable that will be when your daughter goes out on a date with a man who has bad intentions."

I don't know if you begin to hear a pattern in this. *Every experience in the world, and every behavior is appropriate, given some context, some frame.*

There are two kinds of content reframing. I've given you an example of each. Can you tell the difference between them? Can you hear an essential difference between the two examples I just gave you?

Man: One changed the context, and one changed the meaning.

Yes, exactly. In the last example, Virginia changed the context. Being stubborn is judged to be bad in the context of the family. It becomes good in the context of banking and in the context of a man trying to take advantage of the daughter on a date.

Bill: So you're really changing the context that the father uses to evaluate the daughter's behavior.

Right. Her behavior of being stubborn with him will no longer be seen as her fighting with him. It will be seen as a personal achievement: he has taught her to protect herself from men with bad intentions.

Bill: So you switch contexts in imagination and get a different response "there," and then bring that response back to the present context. You get him to respond to what is not going on.

Well, he's already responding to "what is not going on." You get him to respond to something *different* which is not going on. Most of the behavior that puzzles you about your clients is a demonstration that the majority of their context is internal, and you don't have access to it yet. When a husband says to his wife "I love you," and she says "You son of a bitch," that's a pretty good sign that she's operating out of a unique internal context. If you explore, you may find out that the last time a man said that to her, he then turned around, walked out the door, and never came back. A lot of your ability to establish and maintain rapport with your clients is your ability to appreciate that what looks and sounds and feels really weird and inappropriate to you,

is simply a statement about your failure to appreciate the context from which that behavior is being generated.

Rather than imposing a new context, you can use the client's own resources to find a new context. Your client says "I want to stop X-ing." You ask "Is there some place in your life where behavior X is useful and appropriate?" If the client answers "Yes, there are *some* places, but in other places X is just a disaster," then you know where that behavior belongs. You just contextualize that behavior, and substitute a new pattern of behavior in the contexts where X was a disaster.

If the client says "No, it's not appropriate anywhere," you can assist him in finding appropriate contexts by giving him specific representational system instructions. "See yourself performing that behavior and listen to it. . . . Now, where did that happen?"

"Oh, it happened in church. I stood up and yelled 'God dammit' and then they came and dragged me out."

"All right. You know that standing up in the middle of a group of people in church and yelling 'God dammit' didn't work out very well for you, and you don't want that to happen again. Let's find a place where it would be useful for that behavior to happen. You can see and hear yourself doing it in church. Now I want you to change that background—the pews and the altar and the interior of the church—to something else. I want you to keep substituting other backgrounds for that same behavior, until you find one in which if you stood up and said 'God dammit!' every part of you would agree that that is an appropriate response, and you can see, by looking at the faces of the people around you, that others also consider it appropriate. As soon as you find a context like that, then go inside and ask the part of you that makes you stand up and yell 'God dammit' if it would be willing to be your primary resource in *just* that context."

That's using a visual lead, of course. You have to tailor the search for a new context to the person's actual internal processes in terms of representational systems. For some people it would be more appropriate to search auditorily or kinesthetically.

Another way of approaching this more formally and more generally would be to do the following: identify a behavior that you want to change. I want all of you to pick a behavior in yourself that you don't like. You don't have to say anything out loud; just pick one. . . .

Now, rather than contacting the part that generates that behavior directly, just go inside and ask if *any* part of you whatsoever can figure

out *any* situation in which you *want* to be capable of generating that exact same behavior. . . .

Now, go inside and ask the part of you that has you do that behavior if it would be willing to be the most important part of you in that situation, and to generate that behavior exquisitely and congruently *only* in that context. . . .

Those are variations on the theme of context reframing. All the reframing models that we use are based on some kind of content reframing. In the stubbornness example we left the meaning of the behavior the same and put it in a new *context*.

Now, what did we alter in the first example I gave of the woman and the footprints? . . . We left the context the same and changed the *meaning* of the behavior in that same context. Everything remained constant except what the behavior *implied*.

For another example, let's say that someone had a part of themselves that was greedy, and they believed it was bad to have a greedy part. One way to alter that would be to have him conceive of a context or situation in which being greedy would be very important—perhaps after an atomic war, or being greedy about learning new things. You can always come up with some change of context that will change the significance of the behavior.

Another choice is to find out what behavior they generate that they name "being greedy" and give the behavior itself a new name with a new meaning. "Greed" has negative connotations, but if you give the behavior another label with positive connotations, such as "being able to meet your needs," you can change the meaning of the behavior.

A Virginia Satir "parts party" is nothing more than doing this over and over and over again, in lots of different ways. If you have a part of you that is devious and malicious, it later becomes renamed "your ability to be creatively constructive" or something else. It doesn't matter what name you come up with, as long as it has positive connotations. You're saying "Look, every part of you is a valuable part and does positive things for you. If you organize your parts in some way so that they operate cooperatively, and so that what they are trying to do for you becomes more apparent, then they'll function better."

In the case of the stubborn daughter, "stubbornness" in the father's experience changes from being something that works against him to being something that he feels good about when he sees it occur, because he knows that this behavior is something that she will need to survive in the world. That changes his internal response.

In the other example, when the mother looked at the footprints on the carpet, she took them as a comment about her being a bad housewife—that she hadn't finished doing the things she was supposed to do. If you change the meaning of the footprints to "You're around the people you love" then her experience changes. *That change in experience is really the only essential piece of any reframing model.* That is what reframing is all about.

Man: When you change the meaning, aren't you installing a complex equivalence?

Yes. Actually, you're not installing a complex equivalence, you are just altering the one that's already there. You're really trading. She already has one complex equivalence. She is saying "Footprints on the carpet mean bad housewife, therefore feel bad." You are saying "Well, since you are so good at complex equivalence, try this one. This one is a lot groovier: footprints on the carpet mean that the people you love are around, therefore feel good."

In order to make reframing work, sometimes it's better to begin with the reverse case. Leslie could have just looked at this woman and said "Well, no, no, no. You see, you're all wrong. When you see footprints, it just means that the people you care about are there." That would not have had an impact; it would not have changed her internal experience or her response. So of course the sequencing of your delivery and your expressiveness are *very* important.

"You see the carpet there and it's *spotless!* You've cleaned it *perfectly*. It's fluffy. You can see the white fibers." This is pacing: she is responding to the complex equivalence. Then you lead: "And then suddenly you realize that that means you are *all alone*." That is something she had never considered before. If you think about it, that is not necessarily true. The whole family might be in the next room. However, it *sounds* so meaningful in that context that you can use it to influence behavior. Then you switch back: "Now put a few footprints there, and realize that those you love are near."

Which kind of reframing is more appropriate if somebody says to you "I can't take notes. I'm so stupid!" They'll both work, but which one is more immediate? When you hear a complex equivalence as in this example, it tells you something about meaning. If I say that I don't like something, especially about others, typically it has to do with meaning. If I say "Well, Byron has never been really interested in my groups; he sits in the back corner," that's a statement about the *meaning* of a behavior.

If you make the statement "It annoys me when X happens," which kind of reframing is going to be most appropriate? . . . Meaning reframing will be. What kinds of statements will tell you that context reframing is more appropriate?

Woman: "I'm not happy when I'm sitting in this room."

Which kind of reframing is going to be most immediate for that: context or meaning? She's essentially saying "I don't like what this means," so it's meaning again.

What happens if I say something like "I'm too tyrannical"? . . . That tells you something about context. Too tyrannical for *what*? . . . or for *whom*?

Now, what's the difference between the two forms? Each of them is a kind of generalization. Can you tell the difference between those kinds of generalizations? If you can identify form, that will tell you which kind of reframing is more *immediate* to use.

No behavior in and of itself is useful or not useful. Every behavior will be useful somewhere; identifying *where* is context reframing. And no behavior means anything in and of itself, so you *can* make it mean anything: that's meaning reframing. Doing it is simply a matter of your ability to describe *how* that's the case, which is purely a function of your creativity and expressiveness.

Now let's play with this a little. Give me some complaints, and I'll reframe them.

Woman: There's no more coffee in the evening, and I don't like that. Have you been sleeping well?

Man: There are too many sessions scheduled at once. I decide to be in one workshop, and then I want to be in another. I can't switch and go over to another session in the afternoon, because it's already progressed too far.

Yeah, I understand. I really do sympathize. And one of the nice things about arranging the workshop that way is that it gives you extra practice in decision-making processes.

Woman: I don't see the reframing there.

Well, I placed his remark in a frame in which it has a function other than the one he consciously recognized: it gives him practice in decision-making.

Man: My wife takes forever to decide on things. She has to look at every dress in the store and compare them all before she selects one.

So she's very careful about decisions. Isn't it a tremendous compliment that out of all the men in the world, she chose you!

Man: I don't want to tell my wife what I want sexually, because that would force her to limit herself.

But you *are* willing to limit her ability to please you when she wants to, by not telling her what you like?

Woman: My children yell and run around too much.

When they are playing outdoors or at sporting events, it must give you great satisfaction to see how uninhibited your children are, and how well you and your husband have preserved their natural exuberance.

Now I'll give you some complaints, and you reframe them. "I feel terrible because my boss always criticizes me."

Man: He must really notice the work that you do, and like you enough to want to help you improve it.

OK. Fine. "I'm too easy-going."

Woman: Well, I'm thinking of many of my friends who are getting heart attacks because they react so strongly when someone asks them to do something they don't want to do.

Exercise

I want you all to practice meaning and context reframing for twenty minutes. Get together with two other people. One of you will be a client, one of you will be a programmer, and one of you will be an observer. Switch roles periodically.

The client's job is to come up with a complaint. You could role-play a client of yours and state some really powerful complaint that you typically get from clients in your practice. Or you could pretend to role-play a client but come up with a complaint that might be relevant for some part of your own personal evolution. I want you to state your complaints in a particular form to make it easier for your partner. The form of the complaint will tell the other person which kind of reframing is most appropriate.

1) Present your complaint as a complex equivalence that links a response to a class of events: "I feel X when Y happens" or,

2) Present the complaint as a comparative generalization about yourself or someone else, with the context deleted: "I'm too Z" or "He's too Q."

The programmer's job is to find a way of reframing the problem, and then to deliver the reframe in such a way that it has an impact. This is a training seminar, so don't force yourself to respond immediately. Let me give you a strategy to generate reframes. First you identify the form

of the complaint that your client has presented so that you know which kind of reframe to go for. With a complex equivalence you do a *meaning* reframe, and with a comparative generalization you do a *context* reframe. The next step is to create an internal representation of the complaint that you have received from the other person: either make a picture of it visually, feel what it would be like kinesthetically, or describe it auditorily.

For a context reframe, ask yourself "In what context would this particular behavior that the person is complaining about have value?" Think of different contexts until you find one that changes the evaluation of the behavior.

For a meaning reframe, ask yourself "Is there a larger or different frame in which this behavior would have a positive value?" "What other aspect of this same situation that isn't apparent to this person could provide a different meaning frame?" or simply "What else could this behavior mean?" or "How else could I describe this same situation?"

When you have found a new frame for the behavior, take a moment or two to think of alternative ways of delivering the reframe, and then select the one that you think will get the maximum response. Pacing and leading will be extremely important in doing this. If you have difficulty, take the observer aside for a moment and use her as a resource.

When you have thought of a reframe, ask the client to repeat the complaint, and then deliver your reframe. Carefully observe the nonverbal changes in the client as he considers what you have said.

The observer and the programmer both have the job of getting a sensory-based description of the nonverbal changes that occur in the client as he makes the transition from complaining about a behavior to at least a partial appreciation of how the behavior has value for him within a different frame.

Do you have any questions?

Woman: What is the purpose of pausing before you reframe?

I want you to take the time to employ one of the specific strategies I offered you to come up with a verbal content reframe. If you are practiced in content reframing, and you have an immediate response, fine. Go ahead and make it. But if you have any hesitation, I want you to drop out. Go into internal experience and check all representational systems to figure out visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically how you could verbally reframe the content of the complaint.

If you are practiced in reframing, it will be to your advantage to take a little time to figure out what your own typical strategy for verbal content reframing is, and use any *other* one, so that you increase your flexibility. If you usually lead visually and search for alternate contexts visually, try doing it kinesthetically or auditorily.

Come back to me with a successful example of each kind of content reframe, and with a specific sensory-based description of the changes that you saw in the client. We'll compare the descriptions to find out how we can generalize about the things that you observed. Any other questions about this exercise? . . . OK. Go ahead.

Discussion

Woman: I had a lot of difficulty reframing the problem that my partner presented. It was an interaction with his wife, and when she does something that she—

Did he give you one sentence?

Woman: Yes. He wants to stop making so many visual side trips when he's talking to his wife.

That doesn't fit one of the two forms that I asked him to express the statement in, so it has nothing to do with what we are doing here today, *unless* he rephrases it for you, or *unless* you question him until you get a statement which fits those forms. I want you to use the two forms that we demonstrated earlier, so that you have some control over your language and your sense of expression. I said "Describe a problem in one of these two forms." He did it in some other form, so it has nothing to do with what's going on here. If you were to Meta-Model him, eventually it would come out in one of these two forms. You weren't the only one who did that, by the way. A lot of people came up and asked "What do you do with this sentence?" And I said "Nothing. It has nothing to do with what we are doing here."

An important part of being successful in NLP is knowing what kind of problem your procedure works on. If you know that, you can do successful demonstrations any time you want to. You just ask for volunteers who have exactly what your procedure works on. You say "Who has a problem like this: you go into a context and you want to have a certain feeling, but instead you have a completely different feeling, and it happens every time?" If you have a therapeutic model like reanchoring which is designed to deal with that, you can't lose.

People often come up to us after seminars and say "You guys do therapy *so fast!*" It's fast because we ask for problems that fit the form of what we want to demonstrate. As soon as somebody raises his hand, we're done.

Being able to identify these forms and ask for them is very important. If you have a client who comes in and says "Well, you know, I have all kinds of problems" then you can say "Do you have anything like this?" And he'll say "Yeah, I have a couple of those. I've got these two." You can fix those, and then you can describe another form and ask "Well, have you got any of these?" It's a very different mental set for doing therapy. If you've got certain things you do that work, being able to describe the kind of problem that they work on is very important.

If you take one of these two refraining models and use it where it's inappropriate, it won't work. That would be like taking the phobia cure and using it for something else. It just won't have an impact, because it's not designed to do something else. One man who was in a workshop we did in Chicago phoned me about a month later and said "You worked with a woman who had a phobia of birds, and it worked really well, but I've been doing that with all my clients and it doesn't work." I asked "Well, do they have phobias?" He answered "No, I don't have any clients with phobias." He came right out and said that! I said "Well, why are you using that technique then?" And he said "Well, it *worked!*" He really understood the seminar!

In essence that's the biggest mistake that has been made in therapy all along. Somebody did something and it worked. Then he thought "It worked! Good! We'll use it for *everything!* And we'll call it a new school of therapy." And then he went out and tried that one thing with everybody. It worked with some people and not with others, and he couldn't figure out why.

It's really quite simple. The structure of what he did was appropriate for accomplishing certain goals and not others. Since those specific goals were not described, people didn't know how to look for them and find them. I am hoping that you will come to realize that there are appropriate and inappropriate times to use these tools. It's important that you know what your tools do, and what they don't do. Otherwise you have to find out by trial and error.

Jim: I'm interested in getting others' reactions to a reframe that I did. My partner role-played a patient who had attempted suicide several times. She said to me "You people profess to know a lot about human

behavior. I don't like it when all you do is continue to lock me up instead of letting me kill myself."

Marie: Well, there was something else that I said: "I really know I want to kill myself." His response to that was "Good! I'm really glad you know what you want." Then I responded "Well, if you appreciate that, why do you lock me up here? I don't like it that you send the police for me when I swallow pills."

OK. That's the complaint. All of you take a moment to figure out a content reframe you might make to that input, and then Jim can tell us what he did. . . . OK, now go ahead, Jim.

Jim: I said to her "You know, I have never really understood suicide before. We really don't know what goes on with people like you, and you are offering me an unprecedented opportunity to learn. What I would like to do is cooperate with you, but what you have proposed is too simple, and I won't learn enough. What I would like to do is make your death more complex, so that I can really learn about it."

She was obviously very surprised by what I said. She just went "Tchew!" and inhaled suddenly, and her stomach sucked in.

Marie: When he said that, I got the feeling that he is as crazy as I am!

Cathy: When Marie was talking about suicide I thought about how fantastic it is to have something in life that's worth dying for. So it would be important to search for *the* thing that would really be worth giving your life for, and to take the time to do that.

Marie: I would go along with that; I would feel good about it. The question is "What can I do with that next?" I'm really hoping that you can tell me what to do after that.

The important thing about the responses that Cathy and Jim made is that they both accept the idea of suicide. It's a good pace, and establishes rapport. And now since they've accepted that she is going to kill herself, they move on to *when* and *how*. Cathy's response is really a natural extension of the *how* part. "If you are going to do this, you may as well do it *well*. It's far too precious a thing to do just on the spur of the moment." With this kind of patient, the outcome of exploring what she's going to die for is that you will get to the intent behind the suicidal behavior. Typically the suicidal patient will never give you a positive statement. They can't. They are committing suicide out of desperation: they would rather be dead than continue living with the kinds of experiences they are presently having.

What Cathy and Jim have suggested is a kind of shock treatment to gain rapport. You follow that with a statement presupposing that the

only justifiable way to die *isfor* something which is positive. What you will end up getting is some positive intent behind the suicide, and then you can approach that intent in a variety of ways. That sequence is particularly nice.

Bunny: I did that with a client who was talking about a part of her that wanted to die. I said "How wonderful that you are looking for heaven on earth." Then we went into what heaven on earth would be for her, and she was much less depressed after that.

"Heaven on earth" of course, is a way of defining a very general secondary outcome: the positive intention that suicide will achieve. You are essentially relabeling "suicide" as "trying to achieve heaven on earth." Any time your relabeling can include an idiom like "heaven on earth," it will have an extra force to it, because it appeals to both brain hemispheres simultaneously. It is one of the few language forms computed in both hemispheres, so it has an extra power to it. Her complex equivalence for "heaven on earth" will be essentially the goals which you can now work toward in other ways than having her commit suicide. That's a really nice way to lead into a situation which is appropriate for the six-step model of reframing.

Man: When your client talks about committing suicide, how about saying "*Wonderful!*"?

Again, that's fine as a first step, particularly if all your nonverbal analogues support what you say. One way to interrupt a client's pattern is to do something totally unexpected. One of the least expected responses to suicide in this culture is to compliment him and agree and approve of such a statement. Agreeing will interrupt him, and it will also get immediate rapport with the part of him that made the statement. This is not a complete maneuver, but it's a good way to change the focus of what's going on. You don't want to stop there, especially when you are dealing with life and death matters. You need to go on immediately to utilize this opening to explore outcomes. "Who would you like to find your body?" "Have you composed your suicide note? Would you like to have me edit it for you?" These are ways of specifying the outcome that this part of him is trying to gain for him by suicide.

So these are only first steps in a complete therapeutic intervention. They are simply ways of interrupting and changing the frame in which the person understands his behavior, giving you a lot more freedom to maneuver. That's the whole point of reframing, anyway: creating freedom to maneuver. If a person has behavior X, it's a very specific behavior. It has actual sensory components: seeing, feeling, and hear-

ing. If you try to change that piece of behavior directly, it will be very difficult. However, if that piece of behavior, with all its specificity, is suddenly seen or felt or heard to be in a larger context, a larger frame, you can discover that what you are really committed to is not the specific piece of behavior, but to the *outcome* that behavior is supposed to lead to in your world-model. Then suddenly you have a lot of room to maneuver. You hold the outcome—the goal that you are trying to achieve—constant, and recognize that this particular pattern of behavior is only *one* way to achieve it. There are many other ways to achieve "heaven on earth."

Let me remind you that we almost never take a response away, except temporarily. There may be a context in which even murder, suicide, etc. is a good choice. I'm not willing to play God to the extent of removing any choices from a person; I simply want to add additional alternatives which are somehow more congruent with the person's conscious understanding of what he wants to achieve. I don't want to take away the ability to engage in the "inappropriate behavior" because it may become appropriate at some other time in some other context.

However, with a suicidal client it's quite appropriate to *temporarily* take away the choice of suicide. I recommend that you be very explicit at the beginning of your work with her. "I agree that it is better for you to die than continue living the way you are. I believe that I can assist you in changing your life in ways that make life worth living. I will accept you as a client *only* if you give up the possibility of suicide for three months. At the end of that time, if you still believe that suicide is appropriate, I'll even help you do it. Do you agree to that?"

That's what I do verbally. As I do that, I read the client's nonverbal responses, to be sure that I have full unconscious agreement. Anybody who tries to commit suicide is dissociated enough that she wouldn't consciously know whether she was going to commit suicide anyway or not.

After using NLP for three months the situation will be so different that the issue of suicide probably won't even come up again. I will bring it up myself, just to make sure, and because I've made an agreement.

Milton Erickson often used a contract like that. He would then point out that since she has been planning suicide anyway, she may as well go out in style. "How much money do you have in the bank?" "Oh, \$5,000." "Good. By Wednesday you will have consulted a hair specialist, and someone who is competent to teach you to dress appropriately.

You look gross! You will also consult someone who can teach you how to walk and talk and meet people, both in social settings and in interviews." She can't object to spending money, because soon she will be dead, so it won't matter. He uses her planning to be dead as *leverage* to move her into new behaviors that he knows will make suicide unnecessary.

Man: What if you decided that suicide was an appropriate choice, because the person was very old, incapacitated, and in great pain, or something like that?

Then I would do essentially the same thing that I do when both members of a couple have decided to end a relationship. I help them really complete the ending of the relationship so that they can go on cleanly and congruently. When a person ends a relationship, typically he carries lots of "unfinished business" with him and leaves a lot of messes behind him. This is also true of suicide.

Let me give you a specific ritual that I have used to accomplish this. I ask the person to select a place in the outdoors that is very special to him, preferably a high place where he can look out over the world. "In your imagination, go to that place, and gather around you all the people who have been important in your life. Take one of them by the hand, look her in the eye, and tell her of your decision to suicide. There may be other things you want to tell this person so that you can be fully satisfied with the way you are ending this relationship. If there are, tell her now. Think about any messages left unsaid or activities left undone, and as you do this, watch and listen to her response, to know if you are completing this relationship in a manner that is satisfactory to you. Take as much time as you need to do this thoroughly until you feel complete with this person. . . .

"Then I want you and this person to look into the future together to see how present events will develop without you. As you do this, I want you to consider if there is anything you want to do now before you go, to influence those future events. . . .

"Now take the time to do the same with each and every one of those people you have gathered around you."

If the person is truly ready to die, it can alert him to the things he needs to do first so that his death has the most constructive impact on his friends and relatives. If the person is not congruently ready to die, this ritual will give you lots of information about the outcomes behind his decision to suicide, and you can use this information to develop other ways of satisfying them. You will also learn a lot about the

people and events that still have meaning for him, and you can use this as leverage to help accomplish the changes you want to make.

Now let's get back to the exercise and talk about the other part of it. Somebody give me a sensory-grounded description of what you could see, hear, or feel—if you were making tactile contact—that seemed to be an indication that you just did a successful reframe. What did you observe when there was a reorganization of the person's understanding unconsciously—and usually also partially at the conscious level—that indicated that you succeeded in the reframe?

Ben: There was a loosening of the body, especially in the chest. The muscle tension in the face and shoulders softened.

Does anyone have any counter-examples to that? Did anybody tighten up in that area when the reframe worked?

Man: The initial surprise seemed to make them tighten up . . . and then they relaxed.

Becky: I experienced what I perceived to be a slight epileptic seizure internally, and then I relaxed.

OK. Did it show up externally?

Becky's Partner: Yes. I also noticed another thing. When Becky was considering something, she would "chew it over" metaphorically. She was also literally chewing. It was very visible in her jaw movements.

OK, and what happened when she made a decision on whether or not she was going to swallow it?

Becky's Partner: Her jaws relaxed, and there were major skin color changes. Each time I made the reframing statement, there was a visible pink flush in her cheeks and forehead.

OK, so there was an increase in blood flow to the skin. Are there any counter-examples to that?

Woman: Along with the tightening there was some whitening, and then the flush came with the relaxation.

What we are describing now are some of the visible signs of the functioning of the autonomic nervous system. There are two parts to the autonomic nervous system: the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The two tend to balance each other through opposite effects.

Sympathetic activation results in increased muscle tension and a readiness to respond physically to some threat. There is more adrenalin, and the skin whitens as the blood vessels and pupils constrict. Parasympathetic activation results in muscle relaxation, flushing of the skin, dilation of blood vessels, dilation of the pupils, etc.

These are some very general visible characteristics of those two systems. What we have been describing is that people tend to have sympathetic activation when presenting a complaint and considering the reframe. Then they shift to parasympathetic activation when the reframe works, which is what you would expect to occur. If the reframing works, what was perceived as a problem to cope with becomes not a problem at all. What other changes did you observe?

Ken: I saw accessing changes. Typically when the client was presenting her complaint, she would be in one mode of accessing. Usually the ones we saw were high-intensity kinesthetic. As we presented the reframe, her accessing switched into a visual or auditory pattern. Then when we went back and talked about the problem situation, she accessed in the second pattern.

Excellent. That's a really elegant nonverbal test to find out if the reframe continues to work after you first introduce it. Your client may accept your reframe at the time that you make it. Later, she may reject it because of objections that arise. However, if later you mention some other dimension of the same presenting problem, and you see that she goes through the accessing sequence which was characteristic of the reframe and not the accessing sequence that was there before the reframe, then you know that the reframe is integrated into her experience of the problem area.

Woman: That's what happened with Bob. His eyes went to visual construct when he made the complaint. When the reframing took place, his eyes became defocused and he stared straight ahead. Then when I mentioned the complaint again, he went through that same defocusing process.

Great. As far as I'm concerned, the generalization is this: one indicator that the reframe works *at the moment* is that you get a different accessing sequence when the person considers the same problem area. You observe some new strategy. Perhaps rather than being locked into kinesthetic feelings, the person is able to take a new perspective. Or you may observe the same accessing sequence, but with a different response. You recognize that by observing the autonomic cues that we mentioned earlier: skin color changes, breathing changes, muscle tension changes, etc.

Then you go on to other material, or have the client practice some new behavior to be wired in, so that she has lots of choices in the context that you reframed. Then later, at the end of the session, you can use what you observed earlier to test whether the reframe has

endured. You might ask "By the way, does so-and-so—who is part of the original presenting problem—have a moustache?" If you see the same changes that were characteristic of the reframe moment, then you know you've got integration for that material. If not—if she goes back directly to the original pattern—then you might suspect that you need to do some more work. Any other examples or comments?

Woman: My client was playing a blind person, and she said "You people just don't understand what it is like to be blind." I said "Gee, we must be missing a lot." Her whole body jerked, and her eyes opened up.

Great! What you said *reversed the* presupposition of her statement. She's complaining "You don't understand what it's like to be blind and miss so much." Your response is " *We're* the ones who are missing out."

This is a typical pattern that Carl Whitaker uses. Let me give you an example. Carl is working with a family and the father says "Nobody in this family has ever supported me by taking care of me. I always have to do it all myself. No one is ever solicitous or takes care of me, and it's been like this my whole life." His supporting nonverbal behavior is "Isn't it terrible that I should have to live through this!" Whitaker watches and listens very attentively. When the man finishes, Whitaker pauses meaningfully while the man is waiting for some supporting remark like "Oh, that's really too bad. Maybe we can make changes in the family." Then Carl looks over at him and says "Thank God!"

The outcome of that maneuver is 1) pattern interruption, because Carl's response is so unexpected, 2) the father will go inside and search for some way of figuring out how he could possibly be glad about that behavior, and 3) it honors the part of the father that has organized his behavior in such a way that nobody ever supports him in an overt way by taking care of him.

If you think about the message that is being offered, it's actually a conscious-mind complaint about his own behavior. He has behaved in such a way that no one has ever formed a relationship in which they take care of him. The response that Carl offers is a validation of the part that put him in that position of not having people take care of him. He is essentially saying "I'm sure glad that this part of you established those kinds of relationships with your family members and caused those behaviors to occur."

That is a meaning reframe. It's fast and it can be very effective. Carl is presupposing that there really is something good about that behavior, and that the father will be able to come to a recognition, at least unconsciously, of the point of Carl's comment "Thank God!"

However, that is making an assumption which, strictly speaking, isn't warranted. It's possible—though not very likely—that there isn't anything good about that behavior. I trust Carl as a communicator, having had the opportunity to watch and listen to him. If he were to make that intervention, and the father's response was incongruent with the outcome Carl was working towards, I trust him to have enough sensory experience and flexibility to go on to try something more appropriate. Carl has finesse, so he wouldn't go back and talk about it, he would simply go on to another reframe or some other intervention that would help the person make the change.

The thing I don't trust is formulas. For instance, there is a formula in gestalt therapy that guilt is really resentment, and beneath that is anger, and below that is a demand. That could be a useful formula for some people. If you want to use a formula, of course it's another choice that you ought to have available to you. If you engage in content reframing, then you need to take the responsibility of being very sensitive perceptually to any incongruencies in response to your intervention, to know whether your reframes work. If they don't, you are imposing content on that person and probably doing him a disservice. If you know via feedback that a reframe has worked, that indicates that you made a guess which resonates and is congruent with an unconscious set of patterns in that person.

One way of thinking about content reframing is that it can be used as a temporary measure to loosen a person's perceptual frame. The client is fixed on the fact that some particular thing is the issue. She has riveted her conscious attention on the fact that X is the case, and you point out that it is "really" Y, or also Z. When you have succeeded in shaking up her perceptual frame, it will be much easier to go on to do other things.

For instance, there's a man in California who does a single content reframe that works with anorexics. He has an 80% cure rate with anorexia, which is a tough problem for most therapists. He brings the whole family into a room with a one-way mirror. There's a table in the room with a big pot of hot dogs on it. He walks in and says "I'm Dr. So-and-So; you have fifteen minutes to get this young woman to eat. I'll be back." Then he walks out.

The family does all kinds of things to try to get the anorexic to eat. Some of them physically pin the girl down and start stuffing food in her mouth. They do their usual inadequate best to try to get her to eat. At the end of fifteen minutes he walks back in and says to the family "You

failed miserably. Get out!" He throws everyone out but the anorexic. Then he turns to the anorexic and says "Now, how long have you been using this as a way of getting your family's attention?"

That's a gross imposition of content on the anorexic, but it works. Four out of five times the anorexia cycle is now broken and the anorexic can move into more healthy states. I don't argue with success like that.

Woman: I do something similar when I want to change the way the family members view the "problem" child. In a family session I'll say to the child "Don't stop getting into trouble. You're doing something really important with this behavior. Until you get the attention of these fools, or until you find a better way to get their attention, you keep on doing what you're doing."

Excellent. There are actually two reframes in that intervention: 1) describing the problem behavior as a useful way to get attention, and 2) characterizing the symptomatic problem behavior as being under conscious control. That can be very useful. Any time you relabel another person's behavior like that, you are imposing your own beliefs and your own values. You are hallucinating freely and projecting your hallucination. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as you know what you are doing and realize the consequences of doing it.

Let me give you another example from Virginia Satir's work. She's working with a couple and the husband is yelling at the wife "You stupid bitch, blah, blah, blah." When he pauses, Virginia says to him "I want to tell you, Jim, that I know that you are angry. You look angry and you sound angry, and I just want to tell you that one of the most important things for *any* individual in a family is that he feels the feelings he has, and that he can express them. I hope everyone in this family has the ability to express anger as congruently as Jim has."

That's pacing: she builds a frame that says "That's good! That's really wonderful." The husband isn't yelling anymore; he's listening to this appreciative message about his yelling and screaming—which is the last thing he expected!

Then Virginia moves in and gets really close to the husband. She places her hand gently on his stomach, and says in a soft, low tone of voice "And I'm wondering if you would be willing to tell me about those feelings of aloneness, hurt, and isolation underneath that anger?"

Whether or not there were any feelings of isolation, aloneness and hurt *before* she said that, there are now/The father isn't yelling, and he

isn't even angry. Now Virginia can go on to build more useful patterns of interaction in the family.

Some people who have been exposed to Satir's powerful work simply copy the content of something she said that worked. You will never succeed in being an effective communicator if you base your responses solely on the content, because content will vary infinitely. Every one of us represents another unique human possibility in terms of content. However, we all seem to use the same kinds of processes or strategies to create our experience. So you do yourself a favor as a professional communicator if you focus on, get in touch with, and listen carefully to the kinds of messages that are offered which identify process as opposed to content. This is one of the advantages of using the six-step reframing model. It's more complex, but it safeguards the integrity of the client because it is a pure process model that stays out of content. . . .

Do you all understand the statement that is written up here?

THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN DINNER IS NOT SERVED.

Man: Is it true?

It's true right now, isn't it?

Woman: It made me wonder.

Man: It's true even when we're eating dinner.

Depending upon how persnickety you are, of course. Do you all understand, now, that this is a true statement at this moment in time? Does it make sense to you?

It seems like a cheap trick, and it is. The point of writing it up here is that when you make statements, and they *sound* meaningful, people will assign all the necessary connotations to make them meaningful. Let's say I walked out and left this sentence here. Some people would walk into the room and say "What do you mean there's not going to be any dinner?!" People pay very little attention to the preciseness of meaning. When I wrote it up here, several people looked up and gasped "Ohhhh! I *paid* for meals!" The statement is a perfectly true statement. The only thing that gives it meaning is the context in which it's presented.

When Leslie made the reframe that I described earlier in the context of therapy, the outcome was very powerful, even though what she said was actually irrelevant. "The fact that your carpet is clean means that no one is around" *does not have anything to do with being lonely.*

Delivery is *very* important. Saying "The fact that your carpet is clean means that nobody's home right now" will have much less impact than saying "And you see that your carpet is clean, and you *realize* that this means that you are *all alone!*" Those two statements have very different connotations, although the meaning could be identical.

Man: You are firing off anchors with your tone of voice and emphasis.

That's right. The connotation of what you are saying is as important as the words you use to describe it. All the patterns for building connotation are the patterns of hypnosis, what we call the "Milton-model": ambiguity, nominalization, all of that good stuff. For the most part people don't consciously notice all those linguistic forms because language goes by too quickly to process all the exact words. People read "There will be times when dinner is not served." "*No dinner!*" It doesn't say that there's not going to be dinner. It doesn't say anything about that. If I say "You realize you are all alone," that doesn't mean that nobody is coming later. However, the fact that the statement is uttered *implies* that.

If I look at you and say "Are you here *again* in the front row?" it's just a question, but the tonal emphasis gives a few additional implications. "You *again?*" "Do you have *another* question?" I cannot emphasize enough the importance of what we call "congruence" and "expressiveness." That is always going to be a very important part of the context in which the reframe occurs.

The actual physical context is also very important. It is very, very different to be in a doctor's office and see the doctor glance at you and look uncomfortable, than to see the same thing at a hotel registration desk. Those are two *entirely* different experiences, although the sensory experience has some similarities. I want you to keep the context in mind when you do reframing. That will help you to have the impact you want to have.

The frame that you put around a proposed new behavior will also have a strong impact on whether, or how, a person will consider it. Once for a demonstration someone brought in a client who was "frigid." She was a school teacher with three children. Her husband wanted more sexually than she was able to offer, and she also congruently wanted more than she had been able to offer.

I established rapport quickly, and then said "Now, think of one thing that you can do sexually with comfort and ease. Don't tell me about it."

Her slight body movements as she thought about it were ample evidence for me of what the content was, but she was unaware of that.

Then I said "And now think of one thing that lies just on the boundary of what is acceptable for you consciously as far as sexual behavior is concerned." I asked her to consider actually engaging in some sexual behavior with her husband that wasn't quite acceptable: something that was a bit tantalizing and interesting, that she wasn't quite sure she could pull off, but that she thought some day she probably could. This was asking her to imagine doing something that was on the edge of the limits of her model of the world.

When I asked for that, I got a very strong polarity response. She wouldn't do it. No way. My understanding is that the part of her that had an objection to that kind of behavior was afraid that she might actually try it, so it stopped her from even *considering* it.

When I observed her polarity response, I shifted my own analogues and asked her to think of one of the most outrageous sexual behaviors that she could engage in with her husband—something that she knew for sure that she would *never ever* have the audacity to actually do. She was able to do that comfortably. She accessed, and went through a sequence of implicit muscle movements.

Later her therapist told me that the following day she sent her children off to school and her husband off to work, and told him to be sure to come home for lunch. When he came home for lunch, she was wrapped in cellophane with a big red ribbon—exactly the behavior that was so outrageous she would never consider actually doing it.

If the proposed new behavior is perceived as being somewhere within a person's model of what she might do, she may resist even considering it. But if you go far enough outside her model, you'll get a dissociation that allows her to consider it. Since the new behavior is framed as being totally beyond what this woman would consider doing, the part that objects has nothing to object to, and it's safe to allow her to think about it. Thinking about it allowed her to contemplate fully what it would be like to do the new behavior, thereby setting up the internal programs to do it at some future time. Considering the behavior fully, in context, is actually a future-pace—the same as step five of the six-step reframing.

Man: Why wouldn't the part object to the behavior as it is future-paced?

Well, what this particular part objected to was her *considering* doing the behavior, not the behavior itself. Once she actually considered the

behavior, the part didn't object. If a part had objected to the behavior, she wouldn't have done it.

Many people limit themselves by never even considering certain behaviors. If they actually considered the behaviors, they would often find them acceptable. But some part objects to their even *considering* the behavior. The part assumes, with very little evidence, that doing the behavior would be bad, and it also may assume that if you consider a behavior you have to go ahead and do it.

One of the greatest favors you can do for many of your clients is to get them to make a distinction between considering a behavior and doing it. If they can do that, they can fully consider what it would be like to do *anything*. As they consider it, they can find out in internal experience what it would be like to do it, and they can discover whether or not they think it would be worthwhile—in terms of their values and goals—to actually do it in external experience.

Man: So reframing—whether it's a small belief or a larger presupposition—is simply taking the concern about something and making it into something positive.

No. Be careful with the "positive" stuff. You reframe in a way that is *useful*, in some *context*. You have to be careful about this "positive-negative" stuff. It's *positive* to be *useful*. That's a reframe, by the way.

So far we have talked exclusively about reframing something "bad" into something good, and in therapy that's usually the way it's most useful. But reframing isn't just for taking things that have negative connotations and changing them to have positive connotations. Sometimes it's useful to reframe the other way. For instance, think of somebody who really believes in himself, but is incompetent. He needs to have his confidence reframed to *overconfidence*.

I saw Frank Farrelly do an interesting "negative" reframe once. Frank was working with a man at a conference where I was supposed to model his behavior. The man was telling Frank about how he couldn't seem to get a zing out of his wife, basically. And Frank, in his inevitable form, was badgering the guy so fast he couldn't keep track of what he was saying.

Frank: "Well, do you ever kind of give other women the eye, you know?"

Man: "Well, yeah, sometimes."

Frank: "But you get with your wife and nothing happens?"

Man: "Well, yeah, I just kind of stiffen up."

Frank: "Well, *where* do you stiffen up? *This is very important!*"

Man: "Well, you know, all over."

Frank: "And when you're with other women, do you stiffen up all over?"

Man: "Well, no, no. You know, I've had lots of interactions with other women and ah--"

Frank: "*Interactions?* Is that like fucking?" Frank is very subtle.

Man: "Well, ah . . . yes."

Frank: "Does your wife know about this?"

Man: "No."

Frank: "Well, does your wife have 'interactions,' too?"

Man: "Well, ah, no."

Frank: "How do you know?"

Man: "Well, you know, I just feel that-"

Frank: "Ah! The intensity of your feelings is *not* the test of reality!"

Now that's a reframe of sorts. If you think of reframing as only being useful for taking something unpleasant and making it nice, then you should probably find a new profession. Many people need to have a more accurate view of themselves and the world, and that's not always nice.

The man Frank Farrelly worked with *assumed* that his wife didn't have "interactions" with other men, and that she didn't know that he was seeing other women. He also assumed something even more dramatic: that she was not important to him. He is the one who will come to therapy when his wife drops him like a hot potato. Suddenly no other woman in the world will do. I call people like him "pinies." They come in pining away for their lost loves. And if they had had more sensory experience to begin with, they might never have lost them.

Let's say I'm a therapist from the Midwest, and I became a therapist without knowing exactly how I got to be one. I was going through school, and chemistry was too hard; I didn't really like mathematics, and I found history boring. All my friends were going to be teachers, but I didn't want to do that, because I wanted a new crowd. I felt inadequate, and when I got into therapy, I saw that people always compliment each other in groups, and I thought that was really groovy. So I became a therapist and got a license, but I still have strong feelings of inadequacy, and this causes me trouble. If I generalize my own problems to the rest of the world, there are going to be a lot of people I can't help, because some people do not have problems with feeling inadequate. In fact, if some of them felt inadequate, they'd be a lot better off.

There are many people in the world who do not know how to use sensory experience to test and find out what they do and don't do well. What they really need is a good strong dose of self-doubt. When they get too sure of themselves, they often do something that results in their getting hurt. However, they don't use that as the basis for becoming less sure of themselves in a way that's useful. They go through cycles almost like a manic-depressive: competence, *competence*, COMPETENCE, failure! I often meet people like that. One of the things that you can do to help them is to stick your foot out and trip them just as they are feeling really competent—before they fall too hard. Then you can begin to assist them in building the kinds of sensory feedback that will give them valid information about themselves.

So don't think of reframing as being appropriate only in a context where you take something negative and make it positive. Sometimes a good stiff dose of fear or incompetence or uncertainty or suspicion can be very useful.

Woman: You sound like the devil.

You're not the first one who has said that, I'll tell you! There was a cute little social worker who came up to me in a workshop I did in the Midwest—

Woman: A man or a woman?

Does it matter? Are you a sexist? How's that for reversing a presupposition! The comment this person made to me as it came up and coyly looked at me was "Are you telling me that it's OK to be tricky?" I said "Yes, that's what I'm telling you." And it said "Oh, I was *so good* at that when I was young, and I haven't been able to do it for years. Will it be manipulative?" And I said "Yes." Now, I think that's an example of where reframing is really needed.

Virginia Satir does "parts parties," which are reframes done through psychodrama. Everyone gets to be one of somebody else's parts. If you don't like the person, it's a great time to get revenge. For some reason I was always a bad part. I never got to be Little Bo Peep or any part like that. I always had to be Machiavelli. And I was always the *last* one to get reframed! In one of these parts parties, I got to be somebody's ability to be manipulative. I don't know why; type-casting, I guess. Suddenly in the course of the parts party, this person stopped and said "I *like* that part! I never really thought about it, but my ability to be manipulative has gotten me *a lot* of good things." And if you think about it, it's really true.

However, a content reframe has been done in the field of humanistic psychology: "manipulating is bad." If you look in the dictionary, the first definition of manipulation is "To work or operate with the hand or hands; to handle or use, especially with skill; to manage or control artfully." That doesn't have anything to do with good or bad. It has to do with being able to do something *effectively*.

If your frame is that "Anyone who manipulates is bad" it limits you from doing many things. If you believe, as Sidney Jourard said, that "Anyone who is good is transparent" that means you have to go out of your way to say unpleasant things to people. If you go to Humanistic Psychology conferences, people come up to you and say "Hi, you look awful today." "I don't really feel good, but I'm going to tell you that I do anyway." When you are caught inside of any frame like that, it limits your choice. Whether the frame is a "good" one or a "bad" one doesn't really matter.

As a communicator you want to have the ability to shift the frames that people put around anything. If a person believes that something is bad, the question is "When, where, how, and for whom?" Reframing is a different way of doing the same things you do with all the Meta-Model questions. Rather than asking the question "for whom?" you just change it. If somebody says "Stupidity is inherently bad; it is bad to be stupid" you say "Some people use stupidity as a way to learn a tremendous amount. Some people use stupidity as a way to get people to do things for them. That's pretty smart."

Typically people think that success is good and confusion is bad. In our workshops we're always telling you that success is the most dangerous human experience, because it keeps you from noticing other things and learning other ways of doing things. That also means that any time you fail, there's an unprecedented opportunity for you to learn something that you wouldn't otherwise notice. Confusion is the doorway to reorganizing your perceptions and learning something new. If you were never confused, that would mean that everything that happened to you fit your expectations, your model of the world, perfectly. Life would simply be one boring, repetitive experience after another. Confusion is a signal that something doesn't fit, and that you have a chance to learn something new.

The phrase "unprecedented opportunity" is a reframe in itself, because it directs you to search for the opportunities that always exist, even in the worst disaster.

Another reframe we're always making is "*The meaning of your communication is the response that you get.*" Most people don't think that way at all. They believe that they know what the meaning of their communication is, and that if somebody else doesn't realize it, it's the other person's fault. If you really believe that the meaning of your communication is the response that you get, there is no way that you can blame others. You simply keep communicating until you get the response that you want. A world without blame is a very altered state for most people!

Ben: People's beliefs, or presuppositions, often give them a lot of trouble. My question is how do you pull out a pin on someone's belief system, and will you give me an illustration of it?

Why would you want to? Let me ask you that, first. . . . How do you know someone will be better off without a particular belief? You're asking for a model without having an outcome. . . .

I only pull the pins out of someone's reality when I believe that it will take somebody somewhere useful. I don't agree that doing that with everyone in this seminar is going to be useful. There are people here whose pins I am not going to touch. That's a decision which I make, based on my sensory experience. The only basis on which I can make that decision is knowing what the ramifications of pulling that pin are going to be. Let's say we have somebody in here who bases eighty percent of her experience on certain religious beliefs. What happens if I pull the pin about good and evil? I have no way of knowing what I will end up with! And if I don't *know* what I am going to end up with, I don't pull pins!

Ben: Well, I'd still like to know what it's like.

Woman: I think you would certainly be safe doing it with Ben, because he is asking for it.

I still won't do it. I don't care what his conscious mind wants. Conscious minds are dumb.

Woman: What if his unconscious mind wanted you to?

Unconscious minds can *be just* as stupid. I don't want to pick out anybody's in particular, either!

Ben: Well, let's say a man comes to you and you listen to him and it becomes obvious to you that he believes that women are *intrinsically* out to control his behavior. His mother always controlled him, and now he's thirty-six years old and has never been married because of this limiting belief. It would certainly be useful for him to generalize his

belief and realize that *all* people attempt to control the behavior of others.

Yes, of course. But that's going to be a *final* step. What I would do *first* is to metaphorically describe how much it delights me to have a woman try to control my behavior—what a compliment that is. Because if she didn't try to control me, it meant that she wasn't interested in me in any way whatsoever. That's a meaning reframe.

Woman: I assume that this man has been around men who have been trying to control him for a long time and it hasn't bothered him. That's why it doesn't seem as if that is the essential thing to reframe. I don't think he minds being controlled by a man.

Of course not.

Woman: So even if you reframe that it is good to be controlled he still might say "Well, OK, it's good to be controlled and I think I'll choose to be controlled by a man."

Well, you give people much more credit than I do. I don't think people can usually make those kinds of distinctions. First, I doubt seriously that he would admit that men are out to control women and each other nearly as much—and it would always be *as much*—as women are.

Woman: But he's been experiencing that and tolerating it and not *seeing* it.

Yes, but that's just a lack of sensory experience. His lack of sensory experience is going to be based upon all the presuppositions in his behavior. It's like eye accessing cues: if you know about them, you are much more apt to see them. He *knows* that women are controlling, so he's more apt to notice it when a woman is manipulating. However, a man will be able to control his behavior like crazy, because he won't notice it.

All I want to change is his internal response. Now his response to being controlled by a woman is negative. If I can change that to a positive response, *then* it will be possible for me to do what I want, which is to get him to control people and to do so gracefully and expressively.

Man: Last night I was really glad I watched a show about the feminist movement. If I hadn't watched that show, I wouldn't have realized how well women can control men.

Well, I find that the more women get into the feminist movement, the *less* they can control men. That has been my experience. It's one of the disservices that the feminist movement has done to women. I think

we're now going through a phase where women are going to keep some of the benefits that they got out of the feminist movement, like more money when they work and not having to go through certain rituals that they don't want to go through. But women are going to get back into some of the groovy stuff, like fancy clothes. They had a fashion show on television the other morning, showing all the new fashions. Women's clothes are really becoming women's clothes again—great things with capes hanging down, and feathers, and all kinds of long trailing things. Feminists *can't* wear those.

Now, who's limited? Whenever you say "We will not do this," then you lose. If you say "I'm going to do it when I feel like it, and when I don't feel like it, I'm not going to do it," *then* you've got choice and you've got some basis on which to be in control.

Man: With the man who believes that women want to control him, would it be an appropriate strategy to get him to notice the ways in which *he* was controlling people, even though he is a man?

No. Absolutely not. Your question is "Would it be appropriate to get this man to consciously see or feel that he is in fact controlling people, *without knowing about it*. So perhaps women don't know about it either." And my answer is "Absolutely not, that's the wrong approach." This is a choice about the syntax, the *order* in which you do things. If you do things in the wrong order, you make it really difficult for yourself. *If you* succeeded in doing it, what would be the result of convincing him that for years he had been controlling people without knowing about it?

Man: Probably guilt. He's just like his mother.

Right! Guilt. He'd go straight to a psychiatrist.

Man: Then you could reframe his belief about guilt.

You could do that. *But if you change the meaning of control ahead of time, it's much easier*. If you *first* make controlling into something *good*, then he'll never have to feel guilty. And it will be a lot easier to reframe controlling if it's not him doing it. If you reframe so that he begins to notice that the women who are trying to control him are after his body, then controlling becomes something that's worth having. Then later you say "By the way, this counts for you, too." The syntax, the *order* of what you do makes it easy for him, and it makes it easy for you.

Frank: You said earlier that content reframing was the essence of sales. Can you give us some examples?

Sure. Let's say someone comes in to buy an expensive car. He is looking at one model, and he says "I can't see myself driving a car like this; it's kind of racy and frivolous." First you can say something like "Well, I certainly couldn't see myself in one that had racing stripes on it, or something gaudy like that" to pace his objection. Then you go on to say "But having the quick acceleration and power that this car has is more than just a frivolous thing: it's really the safety of being able to get out of somebody's way quickly. This car handles better and performs better on wet and winding roads, and I certainly don't consider my safety to be frivolous."

You first give him something to object to that isn't on the car anyway, like racing stripes. Then you go on to reframe the implication of the content. The fact that it's a fast sports car doesn't mean that it's frivolous; it means that it's *safe*.

Of course you first have to gather enough information to know that safety will appeal to this particular person. Safety doesn't mean a thing to some people. To do an effective content reframe you have to know at least a little bit about what criteria are important to the person that you're talking to. Then you take whatever elements he objects to, and find a way that those elements can satisfy other criteria that he has. You go for saving money, saving time, prestige, or whatever is important to this particular person.

If somebody says "It's too racy; I want something more conservative," then you go for redefining the car as being truly conservative: the safety, the speed, the good repair record all conserve your investment as well as your life.

If he agrees but says that other people won't realize it, you can reframe that. "Doing what *you* know is best is the earmark of a true conservative. It's really conservative to be willing to drive a car like this even though other people don't know that you're being conservative." With your emphasis and tonal shifts you imply that it is a question of appearance in contrast to the car's real function.

You can also utilize his concern about appearances and what other people think. You can use this concern to propel him into going ahead and buying a car. "You know, a lot of people come in here and really don't care what other people think of them. They just decide what is appropriate for *them* and go ahead! Of course those are the people who are pleased with their decisions later." Now he is in a dilemma, because he is faced with "what people think" on both sides of the argument. On one side some people may think it's too racy; on the

other side you are saying "You're too concerned with what other people think of you." So you utilize his concern about others' opinions to move him in the direction of deciding for himself.

One thing that all salespeople need is to be able to reframe objections about price. "Well, this car definitely costs a lot more than a Chevy Chevette or something similar. In fact, it's twice the price, but if you think about buying a car just in terms of the short run, then you are better off buying a more expensive car, because you can finance it over a longer period of time and keep your monthly payments down lower. You would actually be spending less money per month to drive a better car. It takes a lot longer to own it, but in the long run when you finally do own it, you end up owning something that you can still drive, instead of a pile of junk that has no equity."

I typically look at the customer and say "Do you think all those doctors and lawyers drive cars like this just because they are ostentatious? They do it because they know about money. If you think it's cheaper to pay \$220 a month for three years to buy a Datsun as opposed to \$220 a month for five years to buy a BMW, look at a five-year-old Datsun and compare it with a five-year-old BMW. Check their value and the kind of shape they are in, and notice which one is still running. You will discover that it's really much too frivolous and expensive to go out and buy a cheap car. You can't *afford* to do it. While you may be saving a few dollars in down payment and perhaps a few dollars a month right now, three years later you're just going to have to buy another new car all over again."

Five years from now the person who bought the expensive car will actually look at it and say "I've still got a car that's holding together. It runs well and it's still worth money." Your job as a salesperson is to create that experience for the customer *now*, so that he can take that into consideration as he decides which car to buy.

The really critical element in doing successful reframing is to find out enough about a person's world-model so that you know what kind of reframe will fit for him. You can gather information directly, and you also need to listen very carefully to objections. Every objection will tell you about his important criteria. The more you know about his world-model, the more appropriately you can reframe. Simple information-gathering is where most salespeople fail miserably. Most salespeople are terrible at pacing, too. They tend to jump in with a standard sales pitch that may be completely inappropriate, instead of pacing and gathering information about *this* particular customer's criteria.

A lot of salespeople think they should try to sell everything to everybody. That is a situation in which *they* need to be reframed, because they need to understand that sometimes they make more money *not* selling something. When you find out that the product you have is really inappropriate for a particular customer, you're much better off *not* making a sale. If your product is as good as what somebody else has, or if there is no way of making the distinction, it doesn't matter. But if you really are convinced that something else would be better, then you're much better off if you convince the customer of that, so she can go somewhere else and be happy with her purchase.

If you sell someone something that doesn't fit her criteria, sooner or later she will have what salespeople call "buyer's remorse." People tell their friends about unsatisfying purchases, and typically they blame it on the salesperson. That's the kind of advertising you don't need.

Satisfied customers also tell their friends, and satisfied customers aren't necessarily people to whom you actually sold something. If they were satisfied with the experience they had with you, they will send you their friends even if they themselves didn't buy anything.

I know a realtor who is very good at information-gathering. She is able to select the few houses that actually might appeal to a particular customer. If those aren't appropriate, she doesn't try to show them anything else. She just says "I know what you want. That's all there is right now that might interest you. I'll let you know when something else comes onto the market." Almost all her sales are referrals from people to whom she *didn't* sell, but who liked the way she treated them.

There's a great little book about this, called *Miracle on 34th Street*. A guy is hired to play Santa Claus for a large New York department store. He starts sending parents to other stores whenever he knows they can get better deals on toys elsewhere. The store manager finds out about this, and is about to fire him. Just then a flood of people come into the store, because they've heard that this store has a Santa who won't just try to con them into buying junk. And of course they sell out the store completely. Most salespeople are shortsighted, and never consider the long-term benefits of recognizing when there isn't a valid way to make a match between product and buyer.

The problem that reframing addresses is the way that people generalize. Some people don't ever consider that they will be in the same Position three years from now if they buy a car that won't last. Or they buy a used car because it's cheaper, and they don't think about things

like not being able to depend on it, having to rent a car while it's being fixed, and so on. When they are buying a car and they look at prices, they see the difference in total price, but they don't ask the question "*When?*" Something that's cheaper now may be *much* more expensive in the long run.

This is exactly the same situation as the father who says to his daughter "Don't ever be stubborn," rather than realizing "She's hard to control, and it's a bother; I want to find a way around it, but this same behavior is going to pay off for me in other situations later on." There's no utilization in the process by which most people generalize. Reframing is saying "You can look at it that way, or you can look at it this way, or you can look at it this other way. The meaning that you attach is not the 'real' meaning. *All* of these meanings are well-formed within your way of understanding the world."

Think of the clean-freak mother that Leslie worked with. When Leslie had the woman visualize the clean carpet and said to her "And realize this means you are alone!" the old meaning was "You are a good mother and housecleaner" and the new one was "The people you love aren't around you!"

Leslie just changed *one* response in that mother, but that radically changed the entire family. Before, the mother would see footprints, feel bad, and then nag the family for being so careless and inconsiderate. Afterwards, she would see the footprints, feel good that the people she loved were nearby, and then do something nice for them. *She became just as good at appreciating her family as she had been at nagging them!* After a few weeks of that, the family was *completely* different.

Broadening people's views through refraining doesn't force them to do something. It will only get them to do it *if* the new view makes more sense to them than what they have been thinking, and is an undeniably valid way of looking at the world.

When people think of buying something, they usually make up their minds ahead of time, and don't even consider alternatives. They don't realize that they can buy a car over three years or five years, or they can lease it or pay cash. There are always variables like that which *they have never considered*. Those variables are the bases for making the product fit into the way they think about themselves. If someone comes into a Mercedes showroom, they already want the car. It's just a matter of making it possible for that desire to fit in with all their other criteria.

Of course, no one's understanding will ever completely match the world out there. You can't ever know whether a car is going to last. You

can always get a "lemon." Or you might buy a crummy car that later turns out to be one of those priceless used cars that lasts forever. People who bought Edsels thought they got burned, but look how much they're worth now!

If you call up a woman and say "I sell pots and pans door-to-door. I want to come over to your house" and she says "Come on over," at that moment you know that there is at least a part of her that's interested in pots and pans. There's a part of her that wants to buy them, and there are probably other parts that can't yet fit buying them into her well-formedness conditions for her to actually buy something. If you don't take those other parts into consideration when you make a sale, you get what's called "buyer's remorse."

I think buyer's remorse isn't regret. Buyer's remorse simply means that the product was not adequately sold, and that the decision to buy it was not fully made. In other words, the product wasn't shaped into something that met all the person's standards. Then later when one of these standards is violated, the buyer says "I should have known better," and that wrecks everything. From then on, the product is an anchor for unpleasant feelings.

We once worked with some people who sold china door-to-door. Their problems stemmed from the fact that door-to-door salesmen are the lowest on the prestige ladder. People assume that door-to-door salesmen will try to fast-talk them into buying overpriced goods. Their china was good and reasonably priced; their customers really wanted the china and bought it. Then when the customers went to work the next day, their friends said "*Oh! You fell for a door-to-door routine?*" and then they felt cheated.

My proposal was for the salespeople to future-pace that problem away. Immediately after writing up a contract, I would have them say this to their clients: "Look. I've got this contract here and I'll rip it up right now if you want me to. I know that people are going to say 'You bought something from a door-to-door salesman? You got *burned.*' You either want something or you don't. If you don't want the china, I'll tear up the contract." At that point you can tear the top of the contract a little bit to give them a thrill. You just look at them and say "A lot of door-to-door people sell overpriced goods. If you want to go out and look around and compare, that's fine. I need to know that you want to buy, and that you are *sure* you want to. I don't want you to come back to me dissatisfied later on. I want customers to send me other people because they're satisfied with what they bought. I know

that some people are going to say that you were cheated, and if that creates doubt in you, it's bad for me. I need for you to be sure enough that you won't spoil my reputation."

That effectively reframes something that is going to happen in the future. When it does happen, it will now elicit a different response. Rather than "Oh, I'm just another sucker" the person responds "Oh, he told me this was going to happen." That makes the person even *more* confident, because the salesperson knew what was going to happen in advance.

When I proposed that idea to the china salesman, they were scared to death. They thought that they would lose a lot of sales. But that proposal is not only protecting the salesperson, it is protecting the client. If you don't do that for your client, you deserve all the customer dissatisfaction you get.

A lot of salespeople think of themselves as taking advantage of people, but their real job is to protect people. I think that should be an industry-wide reframe. The salespeople who operate that way make much more money with a lot less work, because they get so many referrals. They don't have to try to force people into anything. Many salespeople act like bulldozers, and there are a certain number of people who can be bulldozed. But you get a lot of buyer's remorse from that, and you end up having to work a lot harder.

Reframes are not con-jobs. What makes a reframe work is that it adheres to the well-formedness conditions of a particular person's needs. It's not a deceptive device. It's actually accurate. The best reframes are the ones which are *as* valid a way of looking at the world as the way the person sees things now. Reframes don't necessarily need to be more valid, but they really can't be less valid.

When the father says "Oh, my daughter's just too stubborn" and you say "Aren't you proud that she can say 'no' to men with bad intentions?" that's a really valid way of looking at that situation. At another time and place, that father would actually look at it that way and be proud of her, but he didn't think about it until you brought it up.

You can't reframe anything to anything else. It has to be something which fits that person's experience. Saying to that father "You should like your daughter's being stubborn because that means she's a liberated woman" probably isn't going to work with him. You have to find a valid set of perceptions in terms of that particular person's model of the world.

What reframing does is to say "Look, this external thing occurs and it elicits this response in you, so you assume that you know what the meaning is. But if you thought about it this other way, then you would have a different response. Being able to think about things in a variety of ways builds a spectrum of understanding. None of these ways are "really" true, though. They are simply statements about a person's understanding.