

The following is an edited transcript of a conversation between David Gordon and Doug O'Brien that took place in December 2005. This was a telephone conference call with several listeners and was recorded for the purposes of this transcription. No significant content was edited from the dialog. It was edited simply to facilitate cohesion.

Doug: We are honored to have David Gordon with us again. David is the author of several books, *Phoenix* on Ericksonian Hypnosis, *Therapeutic Metaphors* on Ericksonian Hypnosis, and his latest book on modeling. What's that called again, David?

David: *Expanding Your World, Exploring the Structure of Experience.*

Doug: Right and we talked about that a bit last time and because of some technical difficulties, we have you with us again. And just as much as last time, we're honored to have you here.

David: Well, I'm very glad to be here.

Doug: So, last time, before we were so rudely interrupted by technical difficulties, we were just about to begin talking less about NLP and more about Erickson and his work which has, I think since his death, come to be known as Ericksonian hypnosis. By the way, was it known as Ericksonian hypnosis prior to that?

David: I never heard anybody referring to his work like that before he died. Well, let me think about this for a second. Ericksonian hypnosis, no, actually I never remember hearing that phrase before he died. The first time I remember hearing that was at the very first Erickson conference, which of course was after he died.

Doug: So how did you come to work with Erickson?

David: Okay, so here's where I'm getting on my soapbox. Because often, when people talk about working with Erickson, there is at least a suggestion in that of somehow collaborating with or having some kind of apprentice relationship with Erickson and so on which, boy, I wish I could say was true for me. But I want to be clear that I didn't work with him in the sense that somebody collaborates or is even in an apprenticeship relationship.

I did get to spend two weeks with Erickson a couple of times, but in the same manner of relationship that most people did which was this: I was there with a small group of people sitting with him in a room as he told us stories. The first time with a mixed group, the second time was just a group of us from the NLP gang of Santa Cruz. But in each case it was the same, we talked with him about his work in therapy, and he would work with us individually and do hypnosis and so on. It was absolutely

wonderful and an experience of a lifetime, but I think it's a mischaracterization to say 'worked with him.' I just want to be clear about that.

Doug: I appreciate that. And when did you come to first sit in that room and listen to him.

David: Yeah, we'll have to come up with a different euphemism. Well, that must have been...the first time was in '76, I would say, '75 or '76. The next time would be about a year later, maybe early '78. I'm trying to think about when Therapeutic Metaphors was published. That was published before he died and that was '78, as I recall.

Doug: Okay. The first time, however, was not with the NLP gang?

David: No.

Doug: So how did you come to be there?

David: Well, my entrée there was through Richard and John.

Doug: Okay.

David: Richard and John sent me there saying, "Okay, you need to go see this guy." Of course, I already knew a lot about him. In fact, as a funny coincidence, I actually knew about Milton Erickson before Richard and John did. When I was in college - as a freshman in college so this was in 1969 - I was doing a paper on delinquency and I went to a Berkeley bookstore looking for books. There was this white clad book on the shelf and it jumped out because it was white and the title was Uncommon Therapy. I pulled it out and started looking through it and it was fantastic, so fascinating that I ended up on the floor reading through it and bought it, of course, and read it cover to cover a couple of times.

I was absolutely bowled over by the work that this man had done. And then I kind of forgot about him and he ended up on my bookshelf for five or six years. Then all of a sudden, Richard and John are talking about this guy, Milton Erickson. So that was kind of a secret joy for me.

Doug: And you were a psychology student?

David: I was, yes. Actually, originally I was a psychobiology student and I ended up killing a whole bunch of animals. Early in my senior year, I got so overwhelmed by all the animals I'd slaughtered that I had an epiphany and changed my major to psychology. Fortunately, within a matter of weeks from doing that, I met Richard Bandler and that gave me some kind of

focus for my work because, at that point, all I was doing was graduating and I had no idea what I was going to do. But meeting Richard Bandler in my senior year was a godsend.

So anyway, Richard and John, of course, had already been studying the work that Erickson was doing and they'd introduced me in particular to his metaphoric work and said, "Here, run with this," which was easy for me to do. I was very interested in it anyway and they said, "Well, you need to explore this." So, I did and then they arranged for me to go meet with Erickson, which would have only happened through their intercession because, at that time and all times, Erickson wasn't letting anyone come see him unless they had advanced degrees and I did not at that point. All I had was a BA.

Doug: Great. So he made an exception for you because you were sent by them?

David: That's right.

Doug: Well, thank goodness for exceptions.

David: No kidding!

Doug: Because that led ultimately to the book Therapeutic Metaphors, correct?

David: Yes, it did. I was actually already working on the book at the time I went to see Erickson. Actually, what that trip and the subsequent trip led to was Phoenix. That's when we gathered the audiotapes that Mary Beth Myers Anderson and I studied and used to model what he was doing therapeutically. See, that was my introduction to Erickson. My introduction to Erickson was not hypnosis. My introduction to Erickson was his therapeutic work.

If you have read Uncommon Therapy, which, of course, everybody in the world should read...

Doug: By Jay Haley.

David: Yes, that's right, by Jay Haley. There's almost nothing about hypnosis in there. There is a great deal about his therapeutic work and how he engineered or created change experiences for his clients.

Doug: Right, that is actually one of points of focus for tonight. Now that we've got a little bit of background out of the way and people have a better idea of where you were in all of that, I'd like to begin by asking about the distinction between Ericksonian hypnotherapy and Ericksonian psychotherapy. You know, how he actually intervened with people wasn't

always through trance. In fact, I would gather from the literature that I've read that it was only sometimes through trance.

David: That's completely my experience and understanding of his work, too.

Doug: Okay.

David: Now, I think we should also make a distinction between formal trance work and informal trance work. He was using informal hypnotic patterns a lot.

Doug: Would you describe how he would do that?

David: Well, for instance, if he wanted to get somebody to change their idea about something or take a certain stance, he would start seeding in ideas throughout his conversation in order to put that person's attention on that particular aspect of their experience. I think that probably a lot of people will know the lovely example of when he was working with Joe and doing formal trance work with him using the metaphor of planting tomatoes and tomato seeds. He embedded in his description of all this planting all kinds of suggestions about relaxing and pain going away and things going through stages and so on.

Doug: I see.

David: He would do the same in conversations working with a client (or us as students who were sitting at his feet as well, as a matter of fact) as a way to seed ideas into this other person.

Doug: So could that be thought of then as what we might call Ericksonian language patterns? Many of the people listening and others who will be reading this on the website will be interested in the language patterns and how Dr. Erickson would specifically seed those ideas.

David: Yes, he would always be using those language patterns. And so one could, I think, justifiably say that he was hypnotic in his approach to interacting with people both conversationally, therapeutically, and then also - where it became obvious, of course - in the formal trance work that he was doing.

Doug: I noticed a lot of times with traditional hypnosis, if you will, that there seems to be a kind of format for a session. In other words, a client will come in and the hypnotist will run through a particular format: First they'll establish rapport. Then it's on to information gathering. They will talk about the problem for a little bit and establish what they want. Then they'll say, "Okay, let's do some hypnosis. Close your eyes and we'll

count you down, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6,” you know, “deeper, deeper, deeper” sort of thing. And then they’ll give direct suggestions, typically like, “Your eyes are getting sleepy. You are now a non-smoker. You hate the taste of cigarettes; etc., etc., etc.” That kind of thing. And when they bring them out of the trance, they say, “Now go home and listen to this tape six times a day.” Erickson didn’t seem to have that sort of way of working.

David: Right.

Doug: In fact, from what I can tell from the videos that I’ve seen, books I’ve read, and discussions I’ve had with you and others, it seemed like he was sort of always on and that the moment you walked into the room, you know, trance and therapy and things were happening.

David: Yes, that was absolutely my experience, and everybody I know who went there, that was their experience, as well. I got to be around him outside of that room as well. I was very privileged to be invited into his home on a number of occasions and just be there with his wife, Mrs. Erickson, and him in the home and had some very nice social times with them. And, you know, it was my experience he was always on. He had a twinkle in his eye and I think he really just loved seeing what he could get people to do. I think it just gave him a lot of pleasure and he always wanted to do it in whatever subtle, long-way-around-the-barn he could.

So yes, I think he was always on. But I think the important distinction to make is that his hypnotic way of interacting with people, the language patterns he used, for instance, were not in service of putting people into trances, in my estimation. They were primarily in service of orienting people towards the kinds of learning experiences and perceptual experiences that they needed, in order to re-orient themselves... in order to change, to put it in a very simple form.

Doug: Okay, let’s talk about that. How did he do that and how did he know to do that? How did he make the distinctions of, you know, what to do with whom? That’s a simple question, I know.

David: Yeah, how did he know what to do? Whoa!

Doug: As an example, I know by from reading a book by O’Hanlon called Tap Roots that there’s a classic example of, for instance, the differences between traditional hypnosis and Ericksonian hypnosis, if you will use that term. In traditional hypnosis, if a person came in for any given problem, it would, essentially, be the same format. They would be put into trance, deeper, deeper, deeper, and then given direct suggestions. So as an example, if a person came in to solve a bedwetting issue, they would

sit them down, close their eyes, deeper, deeper, deeper, and say, “Okay, you will have dry beds from now on.” Or words to that effect.

In Tap Roots, O’Hanlon describes three different scenarios in which Erickson worked with three different people and had three totally different approaches. One that used like a task assignment, you know, he told the girl that she should practice stopping and starting her urination. You know, build up the muscle that way, and that worked for her. I won’t go into all the details of the stories for interest of time.

David: Right. There was a boy who had the drawing of a bow in his imagination. I don’t know if you remember that.

Doug: That wasn’t in Tap Roots, but I know that story, as well. The other two in Tap Roots was a boy who had also problems in school, so Erickson gave the mother the task of waking him up if the bed’s wet...she checked the beds at 5 in the morning...

David: Oh, yeah.

Doug: And if the beds were dry, she would let him sleep, and if it was wet, she’d wake him up and make him practice his handwriting.

David: Right, right. That’s right, I’d forgotten.

Doug: And then there was a third one where he just told an elaborate sort of story, the kind of thing that drew on the child’s own experiences of being a baseball player, comparing it with his brother’s gross skills in playing football.

David: Right.

Doug: But he described all the fine muscle control it took to play baseball.

David: There are other examples. There was a couple, in Uncommon Therapy, they both wet the bed. And he would have them intentionally pee on the sheets, I don’t remember the details - it’s been a long time - but he’d have them both, you know, together, pee on the sheets before they went to bed. Yeah, yeah, pretty wild, huh?

Doug: Indeed.

David: And, in none of these examples do I recall him putting a person into a trance and, you know, doing hypnosis, per se. Okay, so let’s talk about this a little bit and see if we can sort this out.

Doug: All right.

David: So, it seems to me that what Erickson did - I want to say does, I'll say does - is that he takes to heart, first of all, the observation or injunction that Gregory Bateson used to make which was you can't really solve a problem at the same level at which it exists. That it needs to be addressed at a different level. And so I think that what Erickson would do, rather than meeting this person head on, rather than meeting the client head on with their problems, he would consider, "Okay, what matters to this person? What's the world that this person lives in? What do they really care about? What do they respond to?"

So for instance, if we're talking about a little boy, you know, if you're a little boy growing up at a certain age, what do you care about? What's really important to you? Well, your body and being strong and being able to show that you can do things. That's what boys are about. I think what Erickson would do is ask, "What's the reality of this person? What's the world that they live in?" Some of that is given by their age, because people go through different stages in their lives. Some of that is given by their social background. There are wonderful stories of how he would use people's social backgrounds.

Their education, what they're doing professionally, all of these things contribute to kind of the world they live in. And then there's their psychological makeup. And, you know, I think what Erickson would do is take each individual who walked through the door and ask, "Well, who is this person? What's the world that just walked in the door here? And what do they really care about? What motivates them? What's important to them?" I think that's what he would look for and use for his leverage to then motivate people to do things and to provide the foundation for changing their experience.

And the way he would then go about doing that is by concocting some sort of (what I call) a reference experience, some kind of actual experience that would then meet their psychological needs and allow them to do something different, something that is in alignment with what they would really want. So, this boy who is peeing in his bed, he doesn't want to do that. He really wants to not do that. But he needs a way to, well, it can be different for different people, but he needs a way to understand it, accept it, and a way to interact with his own body that allows him to have what he wants or do what he wants to do. I'm sorry; I just said a whole lot of stuff.

Doug: That's all right.

David: You just feel free to stop me because I'll just run off at the mouth.

Doug: That's what we're paying you for.

David: Oh, okay... Hey, wait a minute!

Doug: That's a euphemism. The check's in the mail, really, trust me.

David: I'm sorry to be thumping the Uncommon Therapy book so often, but one of the wonderful things about reading that book is that, in case after case, it gives you an example of Erickson responding to the psychological and cultural and social background of each person as an individual, and coming up with a life experience that is in accordance with who the person is. It doesn't come from the outside, it comes from the inside. And the same thing is true - this is what really struck me in the early days - the same thing is true about his hypnosis work.

Doug: When he does metaphors especially.

David: Exactly, and that's what I think is the thing that I don't want to be missed about his work, that he did not, as you said, he did not simply, I mean, there was a time when he did that, but he did not simply put people in trance and say, "Okay, now you're going to stop bedwetting." He would put people in trance and use the trance as an opportunity to create experiences with and for the clients, as in the famous Monde tape, for example. You know, he gave her a vicarious experience, an experience that in trance had the same psychological gravity, the same reality, as having an experience out in the real world.

That's one of the wonderful things that you can do in a trance. Erickson would spend hours teaching his clients to go into a trance deep enough that they could have imagined experiences that were real to them. And once he could do that, he could orchestrate experiences for them that they would not otherwise have in the world. And those experiences then became the basis or the opportunity for them to change, to acquire a different perspective on their problem.

Doug: And he would, in a sense, by telling these stories and by using the language patterns, make sure that they create the correct meaning out of the experience.

David: That's right. It was very controlled. I think he really controlled what happened. Or tried to control what happened, exactly as you say. He had very clearly in mind, I think, the experience that this person needed, how he was going to help create that experience for them. And then he used those language patterns to make it real for them, to put them in the experience, and to, in a sense, fortify it with all kinds of embedded... not

commands, but embedded suggestions and ideas and so on. So, yeah, he brought all of that to bear. My sense is that he really knew where he wanted this person to go, where they needed to go. He had a very strong idea of that. And everything he did was always in support of where this person needed to go.

Doug: Now, when you do therapy with people, how do you approach it? How do you get to know where they need to go, what kind of experience that you need to provide for them? How do you decide if it's going to be a trance experience or a task assignment or how do you come up with a therapeutic plan?

David: Okay, I want to make a distinction. To me, you asked me kind of two different questions. One is about the approach I'm going to take in terms of "Well, am I going to put this person in a trance? Am I going to just talk with them? Or am I going to give them a task? Am I going to use a technique?" That's one thing. The other is what do they need in terms of an experience? What kind of change?

Doug: Okay.

David: You know, how do I know what kind of change they need?

Doug: Right.

David: Because to me, the technique or the trance or the task, all of that is going to be in service of the change that they need.

Doug: Sure.

David: I don't even think about what the approach is until I have an idea about what it is that they need in terms of a change. So, do you want me to answer that?

Doug: Yes, please.

David: Well, the way I get my answer to that question is I do my darnedest to try and recreate their problem in my own experience.

Doug: Do you try to step into their shoes?

David: I try to step into their shoes, into their world. As I'm asking them questions about who they are, where they live, what's the world they live in, what's important to them in their problem situation, what are they thinking, what's going on in their feelings...as I'm gathering all that information, I am actually trying it on in my own experience. I'm

building it in my own experience. I try and become that little kid, you know, that eight-year-old kid who's still wetting his bed.

Doug: In a sense, just to interrupt you for a moment, like we said in the previous conversation, in a sense, it's the same idea as modeling.

David: Yes, it is the same for me.

Doug: It's the same as if you want to model an ability of someone. You would be trying it on as you go along to see if you can get, you know, this golf swing correct. And the same way, you apply the same process to a person with a problem, per se, to see how you can recreate that in you: What's the structure of that?

David: They have got a structure of experience that works perfectly well to produce this problem.

Doug: Exactly.

David: So in that sense, putting it that way, it's no different than any ability that a human being has. It's just one that doesn't serve them.

Doug: Right.

David: So I want to understand the structure but I want to understand how it works for them, how it works to be them. And so, what I'm doing is gathering information until I can reproduce in my own experience, to the extent that I believe I can do that, until I can reproduce in my own experience their problem so that I can be jealous in the way that they're jealous, or scared in the way that they're scared, or grieving in the way that they're grieving. Once I can do that, then I step into what they want, you know, what's the desired outcome here?

And I ask myself, "Okay, how did I get from there?" there being in the present problem: "How did I get from there to being here in this desired outcome?" That is, what needed to change in my thinking, in my perception and the kinds of experiences I had. Or perhaps even in my environment, you know, it could be something situational or environmental. What needed to be changed so that I could be here, here being that desired future?

Doug: Right.

David: And whatever the answer is to that is for me what I will then go for in working with that person.

Doug: So you want to then create an experience or something that will help them to go from point A to point B.

David: I have no idea what Erickson did in that regard. You know, one of the things that happens is that, like everybody, I have intuitions about what's going on with people, based on my life experiences. And, you know, from going through the process I just described, I learned a lot about what goes into people's experiences. And so, it often is the case that I can sit down and be talking and somebody tells me what their problem is, and after very little information, I already have a very good idea about what they need in terms of a change. I haven't really gone through that whole process completely and diligently because I've already been there many times with this kind of situation, this kind of person.

So I suspect Erickson had a phenomenal grasp and source of those patterns of understanding regarding how human beings work.

Doug: Yeah. Yeah, he did his homework.

David: He did.

Doug: And had a lot of life experience obviously.

David: He did and he started young.

Doug: Yes. If you were to, at that point in this intervention, this interaction with this person that we're imaging, decide that what you would want to do is tell him a story, tell him a therapeutic metaphor, where would that come from? Would you say, "Hold on a minute, I've got to go write something?" and, you know...

David: Well, in fact, in the early days, that's exactly what I did. In fact, it was more than that. When I first started doing it, I would gather information like crazy and take all kinds of notes and then send them away for the week, you know.

Doug: See you next week.

David: They'd come back for their appointment next week and then...

Doug: Same time, same place. Same time next week.

David: Exactly, and then in the intervening week, I would very carefully work out this metaphorical story to tell them. I'd bring them back, you know, put them in a trance and tell the story. I was pretty diligent about that. And then, of course, it got easier and I actually did go through a period where I

would gather lots of information, put my client in a trance, and then go out of the room and sit down outside the room and furiously figure out the metaphor I was going to tell them and come back and tell it.

Doug: Did you just leave them sitting there in trance?

David: Yep.

Doug: A little time distortion. I really wasn't gone for 15 minutes.

David: No, no, no, I would give them something to do in the trance and tell them, you know, when they next heard my voice, they would go even deeper in trance or something like that. I used to also sit there in front of them while they were in trance and figure out the story on a piece of paper. And then it would get easier and easier. Like most muscles you exercise, the more I did it, the stronger I got at it and the easier it got. You know, I was going through the world looking at everything in terms of metaphors and so I found them and got used to thinking of things in that way. So it got easier. Now, usually as I first start talking to somebody, I start to formulate a story.

Doug: You start to formulate a story. Is it always a fresh story or do you recycle some of the old stories?

David: Both, both. You know, I think there is no problem with using a story I've used before, as long as it's tailored to this person. I personally am very much *not* in favor of canned stories, but that's just me. There are some that work very well for people and I think that's terrific. But, as you've, I'm sure, gathered from things I've said, I've just got a thing about responding to people individually. So that's one of my hang-ups.

Doug: You know, I think it's interesting that when I was a musician back in the day, I learned jazz in a couple of different ways, jazz and various other forms of improvisation. One was to copy other people's improvisations, which, of course, isn't improvisation. But I would sit and listen and write out the actual notes that, you know, B. B. King was playing or whatever. I tried to emulate, even though I was playing piano, I'd try to follow that lead line on the keyboard that he was playing on the guitar. And then I'd try to play it exactly the way I heard it from him.

David: Yep.

Doug: And then, there were other times when I would just, you know, try to forget all of that and have it come from within me and whatever I was sort of singing in my head, trying to play that and it was sort of a different

approach towards the same end that were ultimately, I'd like to think, I integrated the learnings from these other masters that I was studying.

David: I think you described it beautifully, I mean, that is certainly my experience. Not only learning to tell metaphors but to do NLP and work with people, I emulated, mimicked, copied, tried to reproduce as closely as I could people who I wanted to learn from and I wanted to be able to do what they did and I think that's...

Doug: But you never told Erickson's stories, you never stole his stories, did you?

David: No, oh, no! Oh, no. I wouldn't.

Doug: I did.

David: Oh, great!

Doug: Not exactly, not word for word or anything but, you know.

David: Let me think. No, no, I didn't. No, I didn't.

Doug: OK.

David: In fact, actually that's an interesting question. I'm just kind of thinking back on those days. So maybe I'll confess something here. I'm remembering, I think what happened is that there was this period where I was almost in secret kind of becoming the expert on therapeutic metaphor. You know, I was really working on it. And somehow, I kind of got introduced into the seminar and therapeutic world of NLP by Richard and John and others as Mr. Metaphor. So suddenly I was thrust into having some notoriety about this that was completely unearned.

So I think, you know, as I kind of remember back, my feeling is that I felt that I had to justify this position that I was suddenly thrust into and so, I think I felt I had to come up with my own stories, in order to prove that I deserved the position that I was being put in.

Doug: Right, you couldn't very well just be...

David: Right, I couldn't kind of just be a student along with other people at that point. That's interesting; I'll have to think about that.

Doug: That is interesting.

David: No, I think its fine to use other people's stories. People ask me if they can use my stories. I say, "That's fine. Sure, Just make sure that you tell it in

a way that takes into consideration the person you're telling it to, rather than it being about the story." Because I don't think there's magic in the stories, I don't think there's magic in techniques. I think there is magic in the interaction between you and this other person as you're telling them the story.

Doug: Yeah, yeah. And certainly, you know, I've noticed one of the things that sets apart Erickson and Ericksonian people, whomever they may be, a good therapist from a bad therapist, that I think is crucial in working with a person is, in a sense, observing that person all the time. I remember Steven Gilligan saying the three secrets to effective therapy, number one is to observe, number two is to observe, and number three is to observe. And yet, I have sometimes seen, when people are working from a script or that sort of thing, that they've essentially got their nose buried in the book or in the script or whatever and they're basically ignoring the human being that's sitting three feet away from them.

David: Yeah, I've seen that an awful lot. And I do understand, as a stage in learning, having a script and following it. I completely understand that. I know what it is to do that. I've done that and I completely understand that and I think that's okay as long as the goal is to throw away the script.

Doug: After you wrote your stories, went out in the waiting room and kept the person in trance and came back in 15 minutes later with a story... how would you deliver it? Would you read it?

David: Well, initially, you bet your life I did, because, of course, I wanted it to be good and just right.

Doug: Just right.

David: Yeah, you bet. But it was okay because they had their eyes closed and they didn't know I was reading to them. Or at least I flattered myself that they didn't know that. But yeah, initially, I sure did. And that was fine, you know, as a stage of learning, I think that's just fine. You know, ultimately, I think what I'd like to do in telling a metaphor is to have it be a conversation that I'm having with this person. That as I'm telling the story, you know, and they're looking at me - I'm talking now about telling them a metaphor when they're not in a formal trance - they're looking at me and, even though they're not speaking, they are still interacting with me. That's my experience; that I'm watching and paying attention to what's happening with them as I'm telling the story. And as they respond, they are, as in a conversation, letting me know what they're getting from what I'm saying, where I need to go in my story, what's working, what's not working, and so on. And that's what I really like, that's what I really like to do now.

Doug: And just to be clear, when you say they're telling you, they're not telling you.

David: They're not verbally telling me.

Doug: Right.

David: But, you know, I'm watching what's going on with their facial expressions, the tearing in their eyes, their breathing, their color, all of those subtle responses.

Doug: So they're telling you other than consciously.

David: Yeah, yeah. Right, right, right.

Doug: So for a person who really wants to emulate Erickson at this point in time, when he's not around to have us sit in a room with him and tell us stories and have him be working on us kind of incessantly and subtly and covertly and that sort of thing, how would you suggest, besides reading J. Hailey's Uncommon Therapy, how would you suggest we go about that? For instance, you said when you were working with a client, you'd put them in trance and then tell them a story. How do you do that? How do you put them in trance?

David: You get a watch fob... How do you put them in trance?

Doug: Yeah, I mean, I know how I'd do it but how do you do it? Do you just say, "Close your eyes"?

David: That's pretty good.

Doug: Is tonality important to you?

David: Well, in general, you grab their attention and then limit their foci of attention dramatically and in a way that is congruent with their own psychological needs. I think that is how you do it. I think, in a nutshell, that is what Erickson did. He would first grab their attention and then limit their attention in a way that was congruent with their psychological needs. So, for example, you know, the person who says, "You can't put me in a trance." Erickson would say, "You're right, I can't put you in a trance. I want you to stay as alert as you can possibly stay because anything I might say might start to put you into a trance. So you need to be extremely alert and pay attention to everything I say so that you don't go into a trance unless you want to."

So what has he just done? What's he doing there? He's not trying to go against this guy's psychological make-up. He's going, "Oh, this is somebody who needs to be in control. He needs to believe he's in control." And so, instead of trying to convince him, "Oh, its okay. You can give up your control," he goes ahead and uses that need for control as a basis for completely focusing his attention on something. Narrowing it down and narrowing it down until the rest of the world can go away. And, of course, he grabs his attention right from the get go by saying, "You're right. I can't put you into a trance."

Nobody asked me what you just asked me before (thank god). You know, my off the top of my head answer is just that, it's kind of those three, I would say it kind of parses out into those three things: Grabbing this person's attention, then focusing it and limiting it as much as possible (or continuing to focus it more and more or limiting it more and more) that's number two, and doing it through, you know, who this person is, psychologically.

Doug: Okay.

David: Wow!

Doug: Give me another example. Hypnotize me. Now.

David: Boy, oh, boy! Now if I was going to do that, you know, now just think about what you've just done; just think about what you've just done. You have put me on the spot on the phone. Here you are talking to me on the phone. There are other people who might be listening but they're muted. But, I'm not muted. You're not muted. But there is something going on right now. You know about putting people into trances. And then you put me on the spot wanting me to put you in a trance. And you already know all about that.

Doug: Yes?

David: Well, that's how I would start anyway.

Doug: That's a good start. Keep going.

David: Oh, come on. I have to say, I'm very red in the face right now. Nobody has ever asked me to put them in trance on the phone and I've never thought of doing that before.

Doug: You've never put anybody in trance on the phone?

David: Not intentionally.

Harlan: He got me just now.

Doug: Who's that? How are you doing? Glad you could join us. Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Harlan Kilstein.

Harlan: I've actually been listening for a long time and been absolutely fascinated. I didn't want to rush in. But ever since David just put me into trance--

David: Oh, you silver tongued devil you.

Harlan: Actually, I wasn't planning on getting on the call but this is the only chance I get to speak to David.

David: Oh, I see, I'm that hard to get a hold of, huh?

Harlan: You're that hard to get a hold of now. This has been absolutely fascinating. There are so many processes going on in your mind, simultaneously, how do you choose which approach? Trance, not trance, task, no task, story, no story?

David: Well, I make an assessment about this person who's in front of me. So, for instance, I'm working with a client and they'll remind me of something and I'll start telling them some little story out of my own experience that they reminded me of and watch what happens. Do they go away into the story? Are they staring at me, eyes unblinking, going into the story? Or are they just waiting for me to finish so they can get back to what they want to talk about?

That's an example, if I see them getting lost in my story, I know this is somebody that - or I suspect anyway - this is somebody who would be very responsive to, at the very least, telling a metaphor and probably trance work as well. My preference, and this is a David preference, my preference is to give people tasks in the world. I was completely imprinted by my first experiences of an Ericksonian approach to therapy, imprinted to the whole notion of tasks, giving people things to do in the world. What I like about that is that it is in the real world where people live. Whatever changes they make are going to need to be operating in that real world that they come from. And so, if at all possible, I like to create reference experiences, experiences for people in their daily world that make a difference, that reorganizes their thinking or retune their experience.

Doug: Would you give us an example of one that you did with someone?

David: Let's see now, what would be a good example? All right. Well, this is one that actually got me in a whole lot of...oh, no, that one got me in a lot of trouble at the Ericksonian Conference. This other one didn't get me in trouble--

Harlan: I'd rather hear the one that got you in trouble.

David: It really did get me in hot water, I've got to tell you. Well, I'll tell you about it. But the easier one first. I had this guy come to me who had what's called a shy bladder. That's what he called it, anyway.

Doug: He couldn't pee in public?

David: He couldn't pee in public, right, so he'd go into public bathrooms and he couldn't pee in them. And, if anybody was in the room, that was it, there was no way he could do it. And so I had him drink a big glass of water and tell me about it and we talked about it. And then I had him drink another glass of water and we talked some more about it and I talked about some of my experiences. I had him drink about 4 big glasses of water and I said, "We need to go for a walk." And I took him nearby to a mall and we went into a public restroom.

By that time, of course, he really needed to take a leak. And he really needed to go into the public restroom and so I said, "Well, let's go." So we went into the public restroom and I hung over the urinal while he took a leak, you know. I mean, I was just staring down at him.

Doug: Now, would that get you in trouble at the Ericksonian..?

David: Oh, that one didn't. That one was okay. No, the one that got me in trouble was a woman who came - this is quite a while ago, a long time ago - who, in brief, she got cooties from her parents and her parents could spread cooties. She couldn't have these cooties on her so she had over a 100 pairs of gloves. She was very careful to wash and clean everything, her house was immaculate. Her parents were not allowed to come into the same city that she lived in... there were a lot of elements to this story. I'll cut through the middle part. But this is a client that both I and Robert Dilts worked with for almost two years and couldn't get anywhere with her.

And finally, what I did was, I knew where she lived and I actually broke into her house. Now here comes the disclaimer (I did this at the Erickson conference, too) *nobody* should do what I did. This was in the early days of NLP. I was in my twenties. I thought I could do anything and did. So I broke into her house. I knew she was out and I knew when she would be back. And so when she got home... oh, I also had sent her a phone

message saying I had met with her parents, which I had, which meant that I was now cootieized. And so when she came home, I was sitting there in her house. She had no way to know where I had been in her house, what I had touched, or anything. It was so overwhelming to her, the thought of trying to clean her house, that she decided she just simply had to give it up. So she did. Now, you know, I don't recommend doing this.

Doug: Well, it's also interesting that you worked with her for two years prior to that.

David: Yeah.

Doug: If that was the first thing you had done, I don't think it would have worked. I'm just guessing.

David: No, we had tried, separately and together, everything we could think of to do.

Doug: Right.

David: And this was the only other thing that I could think of to do. Anyway, the Erickson folks absolutely went up in arms. I talked about this case at a panel I did on tasking with several other people. And people in the audience afterwards got so upset because it was unprofessional.

Doug: Well, *yeah*.

David: Oh, yeah, of course it was, of course it was. And I was explicit about that before I told the story and it didn't make any difference. There were letters written.

Doug: Really?

David: Oh, yeah. It was the only tape from the whole Erickson conference that they wouldn't sell.

Doug: Speaking of taping, we're about at the end of our scheduled time. We can go longer if you're willing.

David: Well, I don't know if you want more examples from the past or what you would like from me. You know, I'm a talker so if you want to ask me some more questions, I'll stay a little while longer.

Doug: Yeah, let's do another 5 minutes or so. Okay. Related to tasking, there's a section in your book, Phoenix, that I was fascinated by and I wondered if you could comment on. It's a story about a student of Erickson's who had

lost a leg as a sophomore in college. And had, up to that point, been a very outgoing, gregarious, fun loving, loved by everybody kind of guy. Then when he lost his leg in this accident and had to wear a prosthesis, he became very opposite, very withdrawn, very, kind of, depressed and antisocial and lost a lot of his friends, etc.

David: Yeah, “Now I’m just a cripple.”

Doug: Right and Erickson devised this scheme wherein he had told some of his other students and staff to spread the word that Erickson is going to do one of his practical jokes. And he had - I’m remembering this as best I can - he had one of the students on the given day go up and hold the elevator on the fourth floor, if I recall correctly, and another person was a kind of the lookout. And another person waiting on the ground floor, sort of pushing the button saying, “I don’t know, I think the janitor is holding the elevator for his paint cans or something.”

And finally, a crowd gathered, people wanting to use the elevator, but they were, of course, all in on it that something was going on that Erickson was doing. And this student showed up with the peg leg and they were all waiting and waiting and waiting and finally, Erickson turned to this boy and said, “Hey, how about you and me, us ‘cripples,’ walk up the stairs and leave these ‘able-bodies’ to wait for the elevator?”

David: Right.

Doug: And then, they hobbled up the stairs together and basically, from that day forward, the kid was his old self again.

David: Yeah, and if I remember correctly, then they released the elevator and everybody in the class got in the elevator and they were waiting for them at the top of the stairs.

Doug: Oh, really?

David: If I remember correctly, yeah. Well, I think it’s fascinating. I mean, there’s so much that went on there because, you know, in a sense, Erickson is aligning himself, who is a respect figure, with the guy and now we’re the cripples and all the able bodies and I’m sure he used interesting tonality when he called them, ‘the able bodies,’ sarcastically saying that they were just too lazy. Disdainful. So the guy was now sort of one with Erickson, if you will, and it gave him a whole other perspective. And what was amazing about it, to me, is that there was no therapy. You know, he didn’t ever sit down with him and say, “Okay, let’s talk about your depression” or “Where’d this happen?” or “How do you feel about this?” There was no...

Doug: "You're just as much a man as you ever were."

David: Right. "Yeah, what's a leg? That doesn't matter. You're just as much a man as you ever were. Now come on, buck up."

Doug: I mean, the guy never even realized that there was therapy happening, it just did.

David: Yeah, he doesn't need to. How about that? I don't know what to say about it beyond what you've said, you know. It's a fabulous example of Erickson thinking, "Okay, what change in perception of himself and the world does this guy need so that he can move on?"

Doug: And how do I create it for him?

David: Yes, and have a different sense of who he is and his own self-worth and his capabilities. And then instead of telling him that he ought to think *this* way and he ought to feel *this* way, he engineered, created an experience for him to actually feel and to perceive those things. And, of course, it doesn't necessarily - I think it should be said - that doesn't guarantee it will work.

Doug: Right.

David: But it does, I think, create the opportunity to have a real experience. You know, one of the things that can happen in therapy is that the problem and the person's experience gets put out on a table. And now we're talking about *that* experience, and a frame gets put around it so it makes it much easier for the client to, in a sense, argue with you about their experience. And to keep it at a distance. And they can agree with you, you know, "Oh, that's right" and "I see that." They can even have some kind of epiphany but, you know, we're talking about "*it*."

And one of the things that giving somebody either a real world task or experience in the real world, or giving them a vicarious experience through a metaphor or through trance, one of the things that really does is it strips away that dissociation. It puts the person inside the experience of change rather than on the outside talking about the change. Does that make any sense?

Doug: Yeah, absolutely.

David: So I think that's a really important thing to keep in mind if we're going to talk about what Erickson did - and one of the reasons why he was so effective - was that, whether it was in the real world or in the vicarious

real world of a trance, he was always putting people inside of what subjectively, was a real experience for them rather than talking about them.

Doug: Right. I think that's fascinating. That's really, really interesting.

David: Well, should we, on that note..?

Doug: No, I want to ask you one other question, if you don't mind. Oh, okay. All right. I know I'm pressing my luck here but I have one other thing. I have also noticed that in your work, Erickson's work, and many people's work whom I admire - Bandler, clearly - that humor plays a big part in therapy as well, and in the interventions and the way that people actually make change. Can you talk about that just for a moment? Is that a conscious, if you will, decision to utilize humor? What's the therapeutic benefit of humor?

David: Well, it's intentional. I'm certainly not trying to be funny or make jokes. Well, let me, I don't know how to put this. Of course I do. Let's see. I certainly won't joke about everything, but I think that there's a tremendous amount of freeing that can happen when people can laugh at themselves and their own situations. I mean, what it does is it puts them, instead of inside, you know, we were just talking about being inside the experience...there are a lot of times when you want people to be disassociated.

You know, you've got people who are taking themselves so seriously that they can't see anything outside of that. Or they are so inside their sadness or their being upset that they can find no way outside of that. What makes something funny is that you are seeing yourself from a completely different perspective, which means you're seeing yourself from a dissociated position and one that's unexpected. That's what makes it funny, is that it's unexpected. And there are times when that really is important.

Sometimes it's important simply so that you can get access to this person and so that they can get access to themselves, so you can actually get them talking. There are times when you want them to be able to talk about their situation and about their problem. And humor is very good for freeing them by putting them on the outside of it. Also, humor can be used as a way to, in a sense, anchor in, program in - I don't like using those words...but *teaching* this person, let's put it that way, teaching a person to have a different response to some of their usual, typical patterns. So that when they get into a certain situation that they often find themselves in, because you brought them out of it through humor and joking again and again, they've learned to do that, too.

So, yeah, I think it's fine. You know, a wonderful example of a person who does that is...

Doug: Old "what's-his-name..." Frank Farrelly.

David: Frank Farrelly, yeah. Frank Farrelly. Fantastic. He's a master at that. Author of Provocative Therapy, a book that I think everybody, if you work with people, I think that's a book everybody ought to read. There's a lot to learn from Frank.

Doug: Frank has actually sort of re-emerged. He's been doing some programs in England and some of his programs are available now on CD and DVD.

David: Yes, and I think there's going to be some more coming out as I understand it.

Doug: That's a great resource.

David: Yes, he is. He's wonderful and his ability to help people get outside of their patterns through humor is absolutely wonderful, absolutely wonderful.

Doug: I had a mentor in Jungian psychology once who described it a little bit as the distinction between having a problem or the problem having you or you having it.

David: Oh, right, yeah, which would you rather have? Which situation would you rather be in?

Doug: I have *it* by the tail.

David: Yeah! Well, that's true, that's true. Get that perspective on it. It doesn't necessarily make the problem go away, but you can laugh about it.

Doug: Right.

David: And my goodness, what a difference that is.

Doug: Harlan, are you still there?

Harlan: No.

Doug: Do you have any final questions or thoughts?

Harlan: No, just this was a wonderful time to get inside David. He hasn't been available or out there as he used to be a long time ago and anytime you get to pick David's brain, it's like mining gold.

David: Aha!

Harlan: And, because you've got the marketer on the phone, David's latest book, which is all about modeling, is available only on the web at www.expandyourworld.net and it's an incredible book and DVD.

Doug: Expand or expanding?

David: No, expand.

Doug: Just expand, www.expandyourworld.net.

Harlan: And the book and DVD is just something that belongs in everybody's library. So if you don't have it yet, I would definitely go there and get it. I have mine right here. Yeah, I heartily endorse it.

David: You hardly endorse it?

Harlan: I *heartily, heartily*. A little bit, I endorse it.

David: Are you done with this lecture?

Doug: Yeah, pretty much.

David: All right.

Doug: Well, thank you so much, David. This has been great.

David: Oh, it's been a pleasure, been a pleasure. Good night all and I'll talk with you again some time.

Harlan: Good night.

Doug: Good night, everyone.

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