

Gerard Egan's Stage 2 Counselling skills Teleseminar Lecture 2

Basic principles of counselling

Stage 2 Understand

As a progression from Stage 1 Counselling skills which helps you explore your client's position, Stage 2 helps your client understand in more depth how they have come to find themselves at this point in their lives. I once heard a quote on a radio show: 'to understand all is to forgive all'. I thought closely about that. Forgiveness is a loaded concept in our society with religious overtones. Stripping away those overtones, what do we really do when we forgive someone or something? Forgiveness I believe starts with the self. It starts when we realise that the old hurts we hang on to and nurse so zealously are only doing us harm. They do us harm because we erroneously believe that someone else has forced us to feel like this, and we hold on to this belief because then it gives us a reason (excuse) for why we don't, or can't or are too scared to.... do whatever.

While our powerlessness might have once upon a time been true when we were a vulnerable child, it may no longer be the same when we are adult. If we can understand what brought us to where we are, and then run with the reality that we can now choose what we do, then we build in independence, self reliance and a growing peace of mind in our clients.

If your client is prepared enough to look at their own inner world, understand the nature of their consciousness, realise that everything is transient and impermanent, and that the only thing you can rely on is constant change, eventually they will come to a place of calm and peace. But that may take a lifetime of self actualising behaviours and endeavours. Many people in today's world want that instant gratification; that short cut to health and wellbeing. I'm not sure there is a true short cut, but at least building in some understanding and then using a hypnotherapy intervention may help your clients to a place where they feel more comfortable.

In stage 3, we look at how to encourage our clients to take ACTION. But importantly they need to know and understand that whatever ails them, is ultimately in their control. And that is the purpose of stage 2 counselling skills: to give clients more control over what they once believed was someone else's responsibility.

In each of the gaps below, jot down what you understand each of the skills to be. It will help you learn if you can write.

When you move on to the 'understanding' stage of counselling, it is tempting to want to explain it all to them as you see it and to forget that they have to some degree work it out for themselves. Please remember all your skills from Stage 1 – explore. Silence is golden, as they say. Allow your clients time to make connections. Challenge and use immediacy but remember to shut up afterwards and let your client respond!

Just as an aside, I sat on an interview panel a few months ago for a local college. We were interviewing prospective students as candidates for the college's elite Careers academy. As business people it was deemed we would have some insight into who would be best suited to this area of study. One of the panel members, though a senior male, was very inexperienced at interview technique. No sooner had he challenged the young and eager interviewees, than he'd continue to explain and then practically answer his own questions for them! As someone who has been trained to listen very carefully, it was almost painful to be part of something so decidedly contrary to what good business practice is about.

So please do not forget to let your clients speak. Your job is to provoke thought. To get them to question themselves.

Be aware also, that you may well be applying your understanding to them when in their world, they may be feeling completely different. This is where we as therapists, need to do some serious personal work to be able to strip out what is our understanding and what is theirs and be mindful that theirs may be very different to ours. We achieve tolerance and that elusive holding environment for our clients when we do not NEED to fix them to make us feel good. Yes we have powerful techniques: but if they're not better and we've thrown everything at them, figuratively speaking of course, then the issue probably lies with us or the approach we are taking. It takes some soul searching humility to then seek out the appropriate training or insights that we still need to learn to help more of our clients.

This month, try using some of these skills. If you want to really gain some personal insight into what you are doing, try writing a reflective journal. Make your clients your fuel for your own self development. Ie: ask yourself why this client in particular winds you up, or annoys you, or makes you feel helpless? When else in your life have you felt like this? Is it a pattern? Etc. You can apply all the above skills to yourself in this way. If you do that, it will help you gain insight into what is driving your clients to behave the way they do when you can personally understand why you behave the way you do.

If you want to learn more about how to use counselling skills alongside your hypnotherapy practice, you may consider the heart level membership on www.theopenmindtherapist.com/membership which gives you access to the members forum and live online chat to talk through your questions with me twice a week.

I shall talk about transference and countertransference and what I call, unfocussed listening, in future sessions after I've finished stage 3 counselling skills next month.