

Question of the week

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Purpose

This strategy uses the power of the unconscious mind to assist the client in making shifts in their thinking to enable them to move forward.

Description

The unconscious mind is incredibly powerful. Having set it a question, even while the conscious mind is thinking about what to make for dinner, the unconscious mind may be considering the question; turning it over, looking at it from different angles and ultimately finding a fresh perspective of great use to the client. In some circumstances, the question does not even need to be explicitly answered. Merely setting it may cause changes in the client's behaviour and outlook. It can be very enlightening for a client when they realize the depth of awareness and new perspectives that can be gained by doing something so easy. It is simply a question of trusting in the process . . . as well as setting a good question!

A good way to use this strategy would be to set a question during the coaching session for consideration by the client in the period before the next session. A question of the week (QOTW)!

Process

- Towards the end of a session and taking the lead from the most significant issue raised therein, a QOTW may be set. This may be done by either the coach or the client. A useful approach is for the coach to set the question for a few weeks until the client becomes familiar with the process, at which point they may be keen to set their own question. On occasion it might be helpful to do some questioning around a client-set QOTW to make sure it is relevant and sufficiently challenging.
- You can then elicit some ideas from the client for keeping the QOTW in mind throughout the week. This might be by visual prominence (e.g. a note on the fridge/a post-it note on the bathroom mirror/a screensaver) or more subtle methods for those who prefer to keep their QOTW private (e.g. to repeat the QOTW each time they brush their teeth/ to consider the QOTW whenever they eat).
- Do highlight to the client that they do not need to consciously answer the QOTW. So, for example, while they are brushing their teeth they may just want to ask themselves the question. They do not need to try to answer it.
- In the following session you may ask the client about things related to the QOTW. It will be interesting to notice any progress made by the client in areas where they previously felt stuck or confused. Or indeed any changes of attitude that have allowed them to take a course of action they previously felt was unavailable to them.
- Some clients enjoy having a notebook reserved exclusively for their QOTWs and any responses to them that they may have noted.

Pitfalls

It is difficult to prove the power of the unconscious mind. Clients who are not familiar or comfortable with this may doubt the efficacy of this exercise and be reluctant to take part. For many years they will have been trained that if you want to find a solution you need to really focus on the issue and think HARD. They might think that this process is too easy to be worthwhile.

Bibliography

Fonagy, P. and Target, M. (2002) *Psychoanalytic Theories: Perspectives from Developmental Psychopathology*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.