

# Try an experiment: what happens when you try

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## **Purpose**

This technique is particularly useful when someone is concerned or worried about not being able to get the 'right' outcome first time or when trying out an activity that is new or outside their comfort zone.

## **Description**

This strategy encourages the client to experiment and so to reduce the risk of failure. You work with the client to focus on an issue by taking one step at a time.

## **Process**

Set up the activity as an exploration, looking at what happens when they do the activity. First, ask the person to talk to you about what outcome they want and how they want to achieve it. Agree the outcome and actions with the person. Identify the first action to take and ask them to focus only on this one. Tell them to treat the activity as an experiment: their objective is to notice what happens when they carry out the action: 'When you do x, what happens?'. Ask them to record the information and also any reactions or thoughts they have about it. Ask them to bring the information to the next conversation with you so that you can review it.

People often think they have to go from A to Z in one step. By focusing on the first action only it helps them realise

that they can take a step-by-step approach and move to the next stage when they are comfortable to do so.

By setting the task as an experiment, there is no right or wrong answer, and the activity is framed as a learning activity. It is simply information to explore, review and learn from.

### ***Example***

Jane found it difficult to initiate conversations with colleagues unless it was work related. She wanted to be able to engage with people on a more personal level, but the idea filled her with dread. We identified someone she felt comfortable to approach and also had a work reason to talk about. Jane's task was to ask this person about how their weekend had been before moving into the work topic. Her objective was to notice how the person responded and pay attention to her own reactions as well.

At our next meeting, Jane reported that the conversation had gone well: her colleague had responded with lots of information and they discovered areas of common interest. By the end of the conversation they had agreed to have lunch to discuss the work topic in more detail. Jane said that being able to see the task as an experiment enabled her to relax more, which allowed the conversation to flow more easily. She had noticed she felt less apprehensive and less awkward in approaching her colleague.

### **Pitfalls**

A coachee may continue to be reluctant to take the first step of action. The coach may need to spend more time exploring what is stopping them and help them break this down into small, positive steps.

### **Bibliography**

MacKewn, J. (1997) *Developing Gestalt Counselling*, London: Sage Publications.