

Reframing

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Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to allow the client to think differently about a situation that is preoccupying them or a situation where they are stuck.

Description

This is a challenging exercise to help people see a seemingly intractable situation from another perspective. It allows them to be creative about the possibility of another interpretation to their story. It also increases their ownership of the situation and allows them to face and discharge their emotions in a logical and systematic way. It gets them right to the heart of the situation and helps to direct them effectively towards actions for handling it differently next time.

Process

- 1 Your client tells you their story about the situation, for example: 'I am so angry with her. She was just sitting there doing nothing while Sandy just trampled all over our work. She didn't back me up at all; that's her all over, selfish and cowardly. She knew I needed backup at that point and it's just typical of her not to stand up for what's right'.
- 2 List in a column, on (preferably) a flip chart or white board, the component parts of the story the client has told.

- 3 Then ask them if each statement is true, false or they don't know.
- 4 Finally, ask them what they **do** know to be true about each situation.

Table 6 provides a worked example.

Table 6 Reframing exercise

Story	True, false or don't know	Reframe
I am so angry with her	True, I <i>am</i> angry, although it is my anger, not literally <i>with</i> her	I am angry
She was just sitting there doing nothing	False – she was breathing, listening, watching, thinking, moving her hands	I couldn't see a reaction from her
While Sandy trampled all over our work	False – she didn't <i>trample</i> it, Sandy presented the work we'd been asked to do in the way she thought it should be done	She didn't acknowledge our contribution or our effort
She didn't back me up at all	Don't know – she may have been backing me up silently; she may have backed me up after the meeting	She didn't intervene publicly at the time
That's her all over, selfish and cowardly	False – she is not selfish and cowardly 'all over'	I don't like the way she behaved at that point
She knew I needed backup at that point	Don't know – she may have, she may not; she may have realized later	I wanted her to back me up. I didn't ask for backup but I could have

And it's just typical of her not to stand up for what's right

False – it may be typical of her not to stand up for what I think is right but she may have been standing up for what she thought was right

I am frustrated that at that moment I wasn't able to stand up in an effective way for what I think is right

Pitfalls

It can take people some time to realize that their stories are rarely 'true'. They may well argue back so this exercise can take some persistence. However, the effort required definitely pays off.