

Mainstreaming Hypnotherapy

By

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MAINSTREAMING OUR PROFESSION

Many of the graduates from our training program have practices in my immediate area. A while back a fellow hypnotherapist said to me, "Don't you ever feel like you are creating your own competition by training all of these people"? My reply was, "No... In fact the more quality professionals we have out there doing good work, the more mainstream we become, and the larger the client base grows for all of us. I'm happy to see them out there doing good work. The more the merrier".

If you drive through any commercial area in my town you will see numerous chiropractic offices on the same street. They are all over the place and they are all busy. Why... because they have created a public trust through the development of skilled professionals, and by their sheer numbers within the community. They have become a recognizable and accepted profession. The old saying "Familiarity breeds contempt" is a crock of crap. The opposite is actually true. Familiarity breeds comfort. That's why someone is more likely to buy Tide Detergent over brand "X". They are familiar with the name and that name recognition generates comfort. The more familiar people are with "quality" hypnotherapy services, the more comfortable they will be in seeking us out to help them accomplish their goals.

WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING and WHY SHOULD WE CARE

We are all best served when we do our part to make hypnosis and hypnotherapy an accepted and viable option in the eyes of the general public. To my amazement there are still those who would rather keep hypnosis/hypnotherapy underground and mystical as has often been the case in the past. I have a theory about that... My theory is that while most of us (like myself) see the immense value in bringing hypnotherapy into greater public acceptance, there are some who prefer to stay below the radar and in essence, exist as a big fish in a little pond. It is almost as if competing in a larger arena would be intimidating to them in some way. I hope that if anyone reading this article has that mindset, I can help to dispel any concerns and get you on board in helping our profession expand its horizons. For those already on board, it is my hope that I can inspire you to be as active as possible in doing whatever it takes to create the highest possible levels of public respect and acceptance for us all. Thankfully the majority in our profession do recognize the value of becoming more mainstream in the eyes of the public, the wellness community, and the medical community.

What do I mean by mainstreaming and why is it important to our profession. Perhaps this analogous story from my personal experience will paint a picture for you.

I remember the first time I ever went to a chiropractor. It was in 1972. When I told friends and relatives that I was going to see a chiropractor, I received comments like, "I wouldn't do that" or "they're not real doctors", or "Chiropractors are quacks". In any event, I don't recall anyone giving me encouragement to go to a chiropractor. I went to the chiropractor for a lower back problem (sacral spinal area) that had plagued me for years. Every few months I would end up in bed for a day or two because the pain generated by an impingement would literally take my breath away. I walked into the chiropractor's office that morning bent over and in pain. Less than an hour later I walked out standing straight up and with no pain. To this day I have never again had the back problem. As I said... that was 1972. It is now 2007. You can do the math. Needless to say I was a completely satisfied patient.

My point is this... In 1972 chiropractic was an emerging growth profession. There were well trained chiropractors and there were also not so well trained chiropractors. I was lucky enough to get a well trained competent professional. His success made me into a walking advertisement for the benefits of chiropractic. There are many parallels between chiropractic in the 60's and 70's and hypnotherapy today. Like chiropractic in the 60's and 70's, hypnotherapy is now an emerging profession (no pun intended) in the eyes of the public. The hypnotherapy profession has within its ranks some terrific, high-quality training programs. There are also the "Quickie Weekend Certification Programs" that produce mediocre practitioners at best. I know this from people who have retrained in our program after discovering that the certificate from their weekend course did not mean much without the knowledge and skill needed for professional practice. In the same way that I became a walking advertisement for chiropractic, a well trained, skilled and caring hypnotherapist becomes the source of many walking advertisements for our profession.

PROFESSIONALS VS AMATURES

Most people in our profession truly want to enhance this honorable profession. Unfortunately (in my opinion), there are also those "few" who are looking for what they think will be easy bucks, a title/credential, to be respected or admired like a "Guru" and who want to experience the ego trip of all that while contributing the least amount in time and effort possible in learning their profession (e.g. weekend quickie courses) etc. **I have also noticed something that is both interesting and wonderful in the hypnotherapy community...** The "**Best of the Best**", my colleagues that I admire and respect the most, are not only knowledgeable professionals but are also the ones most ready to help others to grow, learn, and become better. The "Best of the Best" don't hold back knowledge and are not afraid of competition. They share their knowledge and experience willingly. They encourage, help and support their current colleagues as well as newcomers to the profession.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

We know from "Hypnotherapy 101" that what a person perceives as reality is reality to that person. That is also true (in a broader sense) of the general public. It is critically important that each of us represent the profession in a way that is conducive to

creating a comfort level within the general public. Most people in complementary fields like hypnotherapy travel in professional and social circles with other people who have similar interests. When most of the people we associate with have our same interests, it is easy to fall into the mindset that the rest of the world views Hypnotherapy, Reiki, Massage, and the like in the same way that we do. This is far from true. The general public, more often than not, has gross misconceptions and distorted views about hypnotherapy. They frequently see hypnosis as mystical, scary, or as a means of "mind control". Their perception comes from the movies, TV, mystery novels, and to some extent even stage hypnosis (e.g. perceived control by the hypnotist). [Note: I am not commenting negatively about stage hypnosis. I think stage hypnosis can be a positive venue through which we can educate the public about hypnosis, however, it can (if not done with thoughtfulness) give the general public the wrong idea about hypnosis.]

Perpetuating the stereotypical perceptions of hypnosis sabotages our progress in becoming a mainstream option. Hypnotists and hypnotherapists who attempt to depict themselves as Guru types, or as mystical people, or who dress or act in a way that creates that persona, perpetuate false (and less marketable) images of hypnosis. That characterization of hypnosis will keep hypnosis in the shadows as some mystical novelty phenomenon. It is our job to educate the public about the true nature of hypnosis and to represent ourselves as professionals in the eyes of the public. It is not in our best interest to create an image of hypnosis that is primarily palatable to those with an interest in parapsychology, mysticism, spiritualism, and other less mainstream ideologies. Those who are already open to things like Reiki, NLP etc. will most likely be open to hypnosis as well. Preaching to them is preaching to the choir. It is the layperson that we need educate.

There is a saying that "you can't judge a book by its cover". Whether or not one should do so is debatable but the reality is that people do judge a book by its cover. Personally, I think the premise that you can never judge a book by its cover is hogwash. In many cases you can (to whatever extent) judge a book by its cover and often be fairly accurate in doing so. A person's clothes, the car they drive, the way they decorate their home, their level of personal hygiene, the way they take care of their health, all say something about a person's personality. Your dress, your demeanor, your personal hygiene, the organization and cleanliness of your office, and the personal presentation that you make, will all say something to your client about you, and about your profession. Like the effect my first visit to a chiropractor had on me, a client's contact with you may well determine whether he or she becomes a walking advertisement "for" or "against" hypnotherapy. It will determine whether that person leaves your office saying what a great experience they had and how professional you were, or if he or she leaves and tells others that the office looked like a throwback to the Hippy era and that the service was a hokey rip-off. The choice in how the public at large perceives us is totally up to us.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE

Hypnotherapy will become "mainstream" only if we continue to police ourselves and raise the educational and ethical bar higher each and every day. It will take growth on both a quantitative and qualitative level. The more "WELL TRAINED and COMPETENT" practitioners we have entering the profession, the more beneficial for all in the

profession. In short... we need more hypnotherapists with good initial training and ongoing continuing education. These are the people that will have a successful full time practice where their clients will sing the praises of the importance of hypnotherapy in the accomplishment their goals.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Another way to gain public trust and acceptance is through the public's faith that someone advertising as a hypnotist or hypnotherapist actually has credible training and experience. We can help in developing this perception by continually upgrading our educational programs and educational resources. As well, training programs should keep copious records on each student (transcripts) and have a method (e.g. exams) to show that graduates actually have a grasp of the materials.

For example: Our certification course at Master's Center (which incidentally is done through an accredited college), is continually upgrading materials and increasing hours and learning opportunities. Our Basic course is now 500 hours (and growing). As well, we recently added a counseling module to our program. The counseling module is not intended to teach students to do conventional counseling and talk therapy. It was included to improve the student's intake and interview skills and to better equip graduates to communicate with other professionals in the counseling community (again to enhance mainstreaming through communication).

Our advanced course is 80 additional hours plus homework assignments and practice. Each phase of training includes an exam, and a transcript is kept on each student. The final phase of the basic training program is a "Practicum". We included this as a type of "internship" so that students have a means of transition between the academic portion of the class where they are working with fellow students in therapeutic scenarios, and that of actually going into private practice. At the practicum students work with volunteer subjects doing actual hypnotherapy sessions under the supervision of both myself and other experienced associates from our Center. When graduates leave the training and go into practice they have already worked in session providing real hypnotherapy services to the public. As well, for their first year after graduation, our graduates receive an hour per month of free consultations should they need advice to help with clients with whom they are working. This provides a safety net and resource for help and information after graduation, in the crucial first year of practice. We want our graduates to be successful and we do all that we can to help them in their quest for success. My point... Training programs need to be well structured and student's progress recorded in a professional manner. There also needs to be a venue through which new hypnotherapist have support after graduation.