

## Using Possibility Language

This is my favorite tactic. It's easy to learn and makes a significant difference in how you and your clients think about problems. It is simply this: to speak of problems in the past, solutions in the present and/or future. If a client says "I can't seem to sustain a relationship," you could reframe the statement slightly: "Ah, you've had difficulty sustaining relationships." (Note the past tense.)

By doing this, you subtly confirm points of view as only points of view – not facts. Further, you want to move clients beyond generalities about issues, so they're no longer presenting a problem that can't be solved. I recently overheard a woman say "personality doesn't change." She was conceptualizing personality as static, which is a dead-end street. Think of Enneagram points as "styles." Personality **styles are dynamic**, a set of patterns that can be changed.

If a client says "I can't sustain relationships," there's no real entry for the coach. When you put the problem in the past and begin to dig out the specifics, you unearth a problem that can be solved. "You've had difficulty sustaining relationships. How has that shown up for you? Give me an example."

Usually, when you start to probe, a client will begin to clarify "Well, I'm close to my sister, and I have several good friends. But I've walked away from two relationships that were very intense in the beginning. Now I'm starting to lose interest in the guy I've been dating for six months."

Keep looking for a problem you can work with. "What's the longest relationship you've had? While it was working, what went well?" Questions like these will bring a positive example of some kind. Perhaps the client says, "I was with one man for three years. He was brilliant and I loved our conversations." Now you have one small wedge into a solution. "So you can sustain a relationship for a while with someone who's intelligent." (Note the present tense and note the client is no longer someone completely incapable of sustaining a relationship.)

1. Rapport
2. Vision
3. Presuppositions
4. Self-observation
5. **Possibility language**
6. Solution focus
7. Both/and thinking
8. Honor resistance
9. Right-brain tactics
10. Fieldwork
11. Process observations

*Speak of problems in the past, solutions in the present and/or future.*

*Move clients from the general to the specific, so they have a problem that can be solved.*

Finally, you'll search for examples you can use in a future statement (presupposition). Let's say you discover some romantic idealizing in this client's language that leads you to suspect she's a Four. You want her to remember the ways she does know how to sustain a relationship.

*Search for examples to use in a presupposition.*

In the bigger picture, you've given a nudge to the Four's worldview that she's flawed and can't have what other people have.

By careful listening, you'll eventually get enough specifics that you can reframe the client's situation in possibility terms, and in her own words. It might look something like this: "You've ended several relationships after the excitement of something new wore off. The romances that last the longest are with intelligent men. In sustained relationships with family and friends you also value their intelligence. At the same time, you're pretty realistic about their shortcomings and you love them anyway. As you become more realistic about romance, you'll commit to someone you love through thick or thin."

*Listen carefully and use the client's own words.*

### ***Practice***

1. Review the previous paragraph and pick out the past, present, and future-oriented statements.
2. For the next week, listen to your own language. When you catch yourself saying "I am..." or "I am not..." shift into a specific past tense. (For example, "I'm an introvert" might become "I've typically preferred to be alone more than some of my friends.")
3. Practice possibility language with your clients, and teach it to them, as well. These skills are not meant to give you an edge over them; then you would be playing expert. You'll find after teaching this to clients they'll sometimes catch you speaking of a problem in the present. When this happens, you'll both be learning, and it will strengthen your partnership.

*Teach these skills to your clients. Both of you will learn, and strengthen your partnership.*