

Getting Past the Resistance of Sabotage

By Roberta Swartz

After 26 years as a Clinical Hypnotherapist, I have learned to recognize deeper subconscious beliefs that can hold clients back from being successful. Independent of the presenting problem and regardless of the therapist's good work, these hidden issues can pose a great barrier to your client's progress.

For example, let's say you are helping a client to lose weight. They respond well for the first two sessions but by your third meeting they've gone back to their same old eating patterns. This can be due to many reasons and certainly indicates the need for more work. It is absolutely vital to uncover the secondary benefit to their subconscious relationship with food and to satisfy this subconscious need in a healthier way. But what if your client backtracks after they experience numerous productive sessions of analytical hypnotherapy? Many new therapists take this personally feeling less than competent.

If you know your work is effective but your client responds in this way, it might actually be a positive indication that you are on track. How can this be? I have found that when patterns get worse rather than better, it is the subconscious mind's way of trying to hold on to the problem because its position is being threatened!

For now, I'd like to look at a common challenge, one that is behind many secondary benefits. This is the resistance of subconscious sabotage. Sabotage can rear its ugly head and can undermine your client's success. However, when it is met directly with understanding, it can be transformed. Sabotage is there for a reason. It satisfies a subconscious belief, perception or need just as your client's presenting problem does. Sabotage is a secondary gain that satisfies the original secondary benefit.

Here is an example:

Presenting Problem - being overweight

Original secondary benefit - safety / protection / comfort

Analytical hypnotherapy provides insight and you help your client transform old perceptions and beliefs, yet their eating behaviors are out of control. Sabotage serves to undermine the client's success - Why?

At this stage in therapy, unless the issue of sabotage is addressed you'll probably lose your client. However, I have found that when I discuss the need to take care of sabotage first so they can be successful with their original goal, and I share these ideas with true compassion for my client's well being, they continue to come back. Most of the time they are relieved and they readily share plenty of past experiences to demonstrate just how prevalent a role sabotage has played throughout their life. These clients are hopeful because finally, someone can see through this deeper, hidden problem. As we work on sabotage we thread it in with their original reason for seeking hypnotherapy.

Sabotage tends to stem from a deep lack of self worth and can develop into feelings of self loathing. These people feel as though their very presence is met with disapproval. They are never good enough; not for anyone else and certainly not in their own eyes. They lack trust in themselves and in the world. They live in fear of being criticized or hurt. They find ways to undermine their own success because this supports their belief system that they are unworthy.

Most of these clients tell me they fear failure. In truth, they fear success. Subconsciously, if they succeed, if they break free of the familiar patterns, they cease to exist. This is why sabotage can have such a powerful hold on them.

Following is an example to demonstrate how subconscious associations can be perceived:

"I feel anxious." (food brings me comfort)

"My own parents don't love or accept me, therefore no one can love me or find me pleasing." (food represents love and acceptance)

"I'm not supposed to be here." (food makes my body bigger - I am here)

"Feeling inadequate is familiar and safe. At least I know what to expect." (I feel inadequate / guilty when I make unhealthy choices and eat the wrong foods)

"As long as I fail, I know I'm alive." (Being fat is failure - I know I'm alive when I fail)

"If I succeed, I don't know what to expect. I won't know who I am." (Sabotage keeps me from being successful so I know who I am.)

"When I fail, at least it's familiar."

"Failure makes me feel anxious".....(and around we go).

The subconscious association is: Failure is familiar and safe. Being heavy is familiar and safe. Sabotage serves to support their unhealthy eating behaviors. This is a double-bind that locks your client into a vicious cycle that undermines their success. Their subconscious mind must be convinced that they can create safety in a better way.

Working with Sabotage

The following technique has proven to be successful when helping client's transform sabotage through hypnotherapy:

1. Parts Therapy / Gestalt Work

- a. Have your client create a sub-ego to represent "Sabotage".
- b. Give this part an identity: a name, a gender, an age.
- c. Open a dialog with this part both verbally and through Idiomotor responses.

You can have your client sit in one chair as they speak up for them self, and have them move to a second chair to represent "Sabotage". Give a suggestion for their trance to deepen each time they change seats. Let your client dialog back and forth out loud, as you guide them to understand the secondary benefit to Sabotage.

2. Ask the following questions to Sabotage:

- a. How long have you been in "Karen's" life?
Narrow your responses until you have an approximate age of onset.
- b. Who asked you to participate in her life?
Is Sabotage learned through example? How?
Does her mother or father live in this way?
Is Sabotage self imposed? Why?
- c. Review a few memories regarding these perceptions.

3. Continue questioning Sabotage:

- a. Do you serve a purpose? (Get a yes or no response.)
If "no", then ask, "Then why are you here?" (Find out the reason for the behavior.) If "yes", then ask what it is. Again find out the reason for Sabotage's role in your client's life.
- b. Get feedback from your client regarding these responses. Do they make sense? How?
 - c. How does Sabotage relate to your client's presenting problem?
Use age regression to review memories and perceptions regarding their responses.

Some areas to explore can include:

- Were they a wanted child?
- Who taught them to feel unloved or unsafe? How? Why?
- How did your client change their own behaviors at these times?
- How is this still affecting them now?
- Does this have anything to do with their presenting problem? How?

Further areas to explore can include:

- Is your client concerned about being better than their other family members?
- Is your client fearful of becoming attractive and loveable?
- Is your client concerned of becoming arrogant?

4. Ask this sub-ego, "If Karen can find a better way to keep herself safe, are you willing to let go?"

It is important that you come to a working agreement. Start transforming the old behavior of Sabotage with a new behavior that makes your client feel safe. Let this unfold at a pace that is acceptable to all parts of your client. How can your client feel safe now? What qualities do they have now that they are older, ones that demonstrate they are safe? Help you client recognize and accept that they do know how to keep them self safe in better ways. As you collapse their old perceptions and beliefs you build upon the new ideas that make more sense to them now. This needs to include learning to trust their thoughts and feelings.

Let your client be the one in charge, the one who monitors this transition. Ask Sabotage: "How much do you participate in Karen's life?" (The response is 75%.) "What is acceptable to you, as you being willing to relax and let go? (The response is 50%.) It is your client's responsibility to be aware of when Sabotage participates in their life and to make sure the new contract of 50% is honored. Continue to wean Sabotage's interactions gently down at the same pace that you strengthen your clients new skills. The new ideas and behaviors replace the old ones at an even pace. This allows your client to feel more stable and safe during their transition.

As you return to the main goal of healthy eating and weight loss, your therapy can include the following areas for ego strengthening:

- Acceptance and acknowledgment of them self, free of criticisms
- Monitoring their thoughts and focusing on positive ideas
- Learning to read their body's feelings with understanding
- Feeling free to communicate their own feelings
- Developing self trust

Once sabotage is addressed, understood and transformed, your client can have greater success in obtaining their original goal.

Roberta Swartz, Clinical Hypnotherapist, is the director of the Hypnotism Center of Western Montana, Inc., located in southwestern Montana. She is currently seeking publication for her new book, Me, Myself and Mind: Reclaim Your Self, Your Health and Your Life. <http://www.hypnosis4yourlife.com>