

Pathological hoarder or just stubborn?

I know lots of ways use TFT to quickly treat anxiety conditions such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). I don't know of any tapping to get a stubborn person to change their position until they are ready to change. Of course TFT will give relief to under lying traumatic stress or fears of the future that support the world view in which the decisions are made and maintained but this kind of change is not quick. Understanding the power and limits of TFT and what is really the problem being presented by my client saves me from being frustrated and impatient with my clients – and makes me a much better psychotherapist.

A woman age 62 is referred to me by another therapist. She and her husband had come to therapy to save their marriage. The husband was about to retire and had laid down an ultimatum. He would no longer live in a home full of useless, unorganized, and messy stuff. If the marriage were to survive she would have to get rid of all the clutter. This woman insisted she wanted to comply with her husbands demands but she just could not. Their therapist recognized her problem as inability to tolerate the anxiety she felt when ever she would make decisions about what she should do and what material should be removed from their home – an anxiety that can be eliminated by TFT. In the first with me she was able to eliminate the uncomfortable feeling she had as she planned to separate the useful art material she had stored for years in and around her home. She was for the first time making a plan – not shutting down – not avoiding – not blaming others

for not making decisions. She picked a small area to clean out. In her mind she was making decisions about what would be stored in an empty cabinet, what would be sold or given away, and what would be thrown out. Each time she started to feel some discomfort in her body or found her mind going off track to an irrelevant issue she would tap and come back on task. As with all TFT the true test is in her day to day reality. A week later she reported she had accomplished the task she had set out for herself without further distress. With the knowledge that TFT can help her with the distress established, we began the bigger challenge of finding the motivation to continue to sort through the years of stuff and organize her life to her and her husband's satisfaction. She would in her husband's words "get up off her butt and focus on the job to be done". After getting to know this woman a bit better it was clear to me she did not have trouble focusing on what she wanted and on a daily basis was off her butt most of the time.

The problem for her was not one of a single phobic response to a specific item or situation; it was about her life style and her relationship with herself and to those who hold an intimate place in her life. Why would she want to continue to do the difficult task of sorting through her home? All of us who have had to move or help our friends and family sort through years of accumulated material know this is serious work involving lots of time and energy. TFT can help eliminate the anxiety associated with decision making and help us live with uncertainty that comes from living in a world where the only thing we know for sure is that change will occur. We can only make the best choice among the options in front of us at any given moment. Once the anxiety is gone the decision still must be made and the work done. People with a hoarding pattern often say

they are afraid to let go of something because they feel or think that they will make a wrong decision about what will prove useful next week or next year. After using the OCD algorithm or causal diagnosis to eliminate the bad feelings the work must still be done and the changes made.

We can think of the motivation behind peoples actions in a few large categories: people do things because they are following through on the continuation of long term goals or habits; people do things because they are forced to by external events; or because they have recognized a deeper understanding of their own needs and desires. The first category is one of gradual, often small alterations in the actions of our lives. I stopped changing the oil in my car engine and doing basic maintenance because I can now afford to have it done at a shop. My goal has always been to spend as much time with my wife as I can.

The next broad category of motivation for change is a result of external demands forcing us to respond in different way because the old way is no longer possible. I started taking a cab and riding the bus because I failed the test to renew my driver's license. I stopped drinking the forth cup of coffee when my body could no longer keeping from shaking. These changes are beyond our control and are not easy to accept but survival necessitates the change in our behavior.

Then there is change that happens as a result of a deeper understanding of what it means to be in line with who and what we are. I do something different because it is a better

expression of my ethics and aesthetics. From my belief system about the nature of myself and my world and the people in it, along with my education and experiences, I form a set of values. Values are the preferred ways of being and acting that we all create as grow into mature beings. These values are expressed through our esthetics and ethics. Ethics are standards of right and wrong or good and bad that inform our decisions and actions. Aesthetics are standards of beauty and pleasure that also inform our choices. TFT will not change values.

So how can TFT help in making large permanent change in this client's lifestyle? First we must understand motivation to change will not come from long standing goals and habits alone. In her opinion she has been living quite happily in this clutter for years –it seems to work for her. She sees herself as very much in line with her thrifty and environmental values in not throwing anything out. Her long term life goals and habits will provide little motivation to continue the difficult task of reorganizing her home and life.

To force this woman to change in response to the external demands of her husbands has little chance of working in the long term to motivate a change. She was raised by a demanding, never satisfied mother and an absent alcoholic father. She knows how to just barely do what is required to get by. And she will do the same with her husband, giving just enough to keep the marriage but not enough to satisfy ether one of them. This as a motivation to change will not work.

What did seem to motivate her to continue to do the work was when she realized that she did not like the way her home looked. As an artist she had developed a strong sense of what pleased her and what had meaning to her. When asked to look at the space she live in the way she would look at a gallery or display area the work to get rid of clutter became important to her. She was willing to make decision and carry them out with this motivation. In some decision making anxiety would sometime come up, but this easily eliminated with TFT. Her confidence improved as triggers related to past traumas from decisions were tapped away. Living to our highest standards of our ethics and aesthetics is often the best motivation for change. TFT eliminates the blocks to making these changes.

How much of her clutter was out of pathology or out stubbornness doesn't matter in the end. She has made a change in her life to her husband's satisfaction, to her own satisfaction and to me (her therapist) satisfaction. The more we use TFT the more we learn about how to apply it with patience, precision, and power.