

ClickerExpo 2020

Inside Pages: A ClickerExpo Book Conversation about
Maybe You Should Talk to Someone: A Therapist, Her Therapist, and Our Lives Revealed

Discussion Guide for ClickerExpo

Introductory Questions

1. **“This is a book that asks “How do we change?” (see Author’s Note). As teachers, coaches, and people in our own right, this is a question that is important to our effectiveness and improvement.**
 - a. After reading the book, what are the similarities and differences between the author’s tools for change and the tools within the animal training community? Write down 3 of each.
 - b. How does the author use these tools to help her clients?
 - c. What tools does the author’s therapist (Wendell) use to help the author?

2. **The author also answers the question above (in brief), writing that we change “in relation to others.” (see Author’s Note)**
 - a. After reading the book, what do you think she means?
 - b. Is her statement a sufficient summary of the answers contained in the book?
 - c. What would your similarly brief professional summary be to the same question: “How do we change?”

3. **Is the author a “good” therapist?**
 - a. What qualities and observations of her recounted experience inform your opinion.
 - b. Write down 3-5 of these qualities and note something you read where that quality was expressed

4. **Have any of your clients seemed similar to a “Rita,” “John,” “Julie,” or “Charlotte”?**
 - a. If so, did reading about the author’s clients have a meaningful impact on your ability to be of help to your clients?
 - b. How? Is there anything in our toolbox that we might use to be more effective?

5. **The author writes: “Just as I always try and see the whole person and not just the snapshot, I also try and see the underlying struggle and not just the five digit diagnosis code.” (page 93) She also writes about her experience being diagnosed: “Once anxiety is added to the electronic medical chart... I felt there was no way to escape that label as the cause of my symptoms... no way to be believed.” (page 222)**
 - a. How do these statements apply to our clients and their animals?
 - b. What are the implications for our own work with people and animals?

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6. **Wendell says to the author, “There’s a difference between pain and suffering—you're going... to feel pain—everyone feels pain—but you don’t have to suffer so much... If [you are] clinging to the suffering so tightly [you] must be getting something out of it.” (page 62).**
 - a. How would we restate this observation in the language of behavior work?
 - b. Do our clients or (or do we) ever experience this? If so, what have you done about it?
 - c. Does anything offered in the book give you an alternative way to help that same client?

7. **In Chapter 39 (page 281), the author describes the stages of change that she keeps in mind when she is working with clients. She writes, “We can’t convince people not to be self-destructive because for now self destruction serves them... We show them how to how to ask themselves the right questions until something happens either internally or externally that leads them to do their own persuading.”**
 - a. What do you think the author means by “internally” or “externally?” Are those definitions or distinctions useful for us?
 - b. Do any of her patients change their behavior without the external environment changing first?

8. **The author writes, “Most big transformations come about from the hundreds of tiny, almost imperceptible steps we take along the way. Doing something prompts you to do something else, replacing a vicious cycle with a virtuous one.” (page 21)**
 - a. How do these statements relate to our work as trainers? Is the relationship central or peripheral?
 - b. Does it seem surprising to you that the therapist thinks about her work in similar terms?

9. **Both trainers and therapists have a typical structure to sessions with their clients.**
 - a. How are the structures different/similar between therapists and their patients and trainers and their clients?
 - b. How do these structures affect the process/format of change?

10. **The author writes about Rita, “For Rita, joy isn’t pleasure, it’s anticipatory pain”**
 - a. We can see the impact of a long learning history on Rita and how that learning history has caused great pain for her and others. How would you describe what enables Rita to make change?
 - b. Do you often see your client’s learning history as being critical to their success?
 - c. Do you try and learn about your client’s learning history early on in your teaching or do you adjust strategies as you observe their success and struggles?

- 11. The author writes, “My patient Julie said that she always wished she could freeze the next few days between having a scan and getting the results. Before that call came in, she explained, she could tell herself everything was fine, but knowing the truth might change everything.” (page 224)**
- What function would be served by freezing time?
 - Is the consequence negative reinforcement or positive reinforcement?
 - As behavior-change specialists, would we describe this phenomenon very differently or very much the same way, and does it matter?
- 12. The author sets up the environment for Rita to take clean tissue for use during her tear-filled sessions, but Rita keeps using older, dirty ones from her pocket. Yet, Lori won’t hand her a tissue.**
- Why do you think Lori does that?
 - What behavior is she looking for? What type of behavior is that?
 - Is it effective for Lori to do that? Are there ethical implications?
- 13. The author writes, “People want to be understood and to understand but for most of us, our biggest problem is that we don’t know what our problem is. We keep stepping in the same puddle.” (Chapter 17, page 116)**
- What’s our behavioral diagnostic tool for this type of situation?
 - Is it fair to rephrase this as “Many times, we don’t understand the function our behaviors serve; so we just use take on new behaviors that we think are different and are surprised when they achieve the same undesirable outcome.”
 - Do you see instances in the book where Wendell or Gottlieb essentially use the behavioral approach?
- 14. The author’s journey with John creatively informs John’s episodes of his television sitcom. John’s change is profound and highly generalized to many aspects of his life.**
- Describe an episode in your life where you employed the tool of behavior change to help achieve sustained generalized change with yourself or someone else.

Multi Part Bonus Question!

- 15. The author quotes the psychiatrist Frankl, “Everything can be taken from a [person¹] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose ones’ attitude in any given set of circumstances.” By way of further explanation, Frankl is quoted as explaining where that choice takes place... “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response.” (Chapter 40, starting on page 289)**
- Is it fair to say that desired training outcomes involve eliminating “that space,” what we might describe if it were observed as latency—the lag between cue and response, for example?
 - Is the “space” the equivalent of a pause before action and consideration of behavioral responses itself, a learned behavior? If so, would we teach it? Where else (what other disciplines) do we see it?
 - Is this view of “space between stimulus and response” useful for us or not useful? Does it contribute to cultural fog or clarify the mechanism of change? Is it ever useful for helping clients or ourselves?

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- d. In behavioral terms, what would we understand Frankl to mean by “attitude?”
- e. To change the behavioral response to a stimulus that is already solidly on cue, would we attempt to create “space” for a new behavioral repertoire? What would that look like operationally?
- f. In this context, is it incomplete for Frankl to leave out the impact of C (consequences)?
- g. We certainly would like to feel we have “choice” over our behavioral response to stimulus. And delaying our normal behavior in response to a cue does seem to open up space for a different behavior to take its place. But is something missing (in this summary) from the behavioral equation? How would we build alternative responses to stimuli in our own language? What role does slowing responses down play in our training and teaching or ability to take up new habits?

¹The original text says “man.”