

Sessions by Dr. Fisch

Reframing in Brief Therapy
Tape #264-6A

Conversation Hour Tape
#G-264-110

The MRI (Mental Research Institute)
Approach Tape
#G-264-1

All by Richard Fisch, M.D.
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These three audiotapes were made in December, 1993, at the Brief Therapy Conference in Orlando, Florida. Richard Fisch, M.D., is one of the founders of the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California.

Of the three, *Reframing in Brief Therapy* is the weakest. A few gems of wisdom are buried in a tedious and somewhat disorganized presentation. One of the more important points made is the therapeutic task of shifting a pessimistic reality perspective to one more optimistic and hopeful. Fisch discusses this issue and gives credit to Milton Erickson for creativeness in engendering optimism which is fundamental and implicit in most positive changes.

Another important issue addressed is the recognition of problems that might or will arise with the resolution of the focal problem. A central point made is the separation of the identified problem from other problem-maintaining behaviors.

The strength of this presentation is Fisch's profound insight into problem perseverance resulting from ineffective attempts at problem resolution. The target of therapy, therefore, is to interdict the attempted solution.

Reframing, while touched upon with deep understanding, is not well covered in this audiotape. The presentation ranges from downright dull to sheer brilliance and leaves the listener longing for what could have been.

The *Conversation Hour* utilizes a question and answer format with audience questions ranging from systemic and change theories to specifics about the physical set up of MRI laboratory. The informal discussion focuses on the Fisch's personal recollections and professional reflections. He provides a great deal of insight into the conceptualization and history of change theory.

The inception of the MRI methodology, almost three decades earlier, began with a pooling of ideas by John Weakland, Paul Watzlawick and Fisch who were later joined by Art Bodin. Over a period of time, the methodol-

ogy that is uniquely identified as the MRI approach evolved and was refined.

Initially an informal exchange to relieve some of the isolation of solo practices, the project expanded when outside funding became available. Influenced by the work of Milton Erickson and the ideas of Jay Haley, the team formulated a research design that mandated outcome evaluation. The need to develop concrete methodology shifted the focus. The question, "How much can be accomplished in one case?" became central. While smaller changes were being evaluated, the expansive "ripple effects" associated with those changes, veered the project into an unexpected and different direction. The question that then emerged was, "How little change is sufficient to generate 'ripple effects' (which then go on to have a broader and immeasurable impact)?"

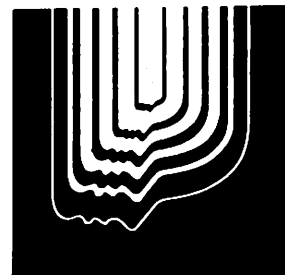
A decision was made to limit cases, within the project, to a ten session period for this evaluation. It was agreed that since people see a therapist because they have a complaint or dissatisfaction, a difference or change within the chief complaint would serve as the indicator of change. The MRI therapeutic approach is problem-focused with adherence to the client's definition of the problem and frame of reference. Outcomes are judged on the basis of the complaint.

Near the end of the first decade, the team had generated sufficient interest within the professional community to have an ongoing audience of visiting therapists. Questions were raised regarding the foundations of their approach; this stimulated the process of documentation of their shared body of assumptions. The book *Change* (Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J. & Fisch, Norton: New York) was published in 1974, the first of three books which have since become known as beacons for change theory. Watzlawick's *The Language of Change* was published in 1978 (Basic Books: New York), and *The Tactics of Change* (Fisch, R., Weakland, J. & Segal, L., Joey Bass: San Francisco) was published in 1982.

For individuals who have studied the MRI approach or change theory, this audiotape is a real treat. However, it is not sufficiently well structured for general use by those unfamiliar with this work.

In the MRI presentation, Fisch proceeds with a rich explanation of the differences between brief therapy and

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insight therapy. This interesting intellectual description is annotated by case examples in which Fisch's dry wit nicely complements his depth of interpretation. He goes on to identify salient features of the MRI approach and gives distinctions of how that framework differs from more traditional therapy of the time.

The streamlined approach characteristic of the MRI takes very seriously that the more factors with which the therapist deals, the longer the duration of therapy and the greater the opportunity for error. Fisch builds a case for a directed approach, limited to the presenting complaint, emphasizing the client's perspective and frame of reference.

Problem definition can be a complex process which Fisch illustrates with several case examples. An insightful discussion demonstrates how an individual's reaction to problems or problem behavior might actively fuel the persistence of the problem. Fisch then covers, through case reports, the integration of emotion in problem resolution. This discussion is then extended to cover the element of timing.

This presentation does not follow a tight outline, but rather it seems to be

an almost spontaneous expression. Fisch is a master of this approach; his wisdom is evident in his expression. There is some variation in the depth of the presentation; some explanations are simplistic, others are complex and some of the more complex explanations are cloaked in simplicity. Overall, the "MRI" tape is of both historical and practical significance to the serious student of this approach.

The tapes are sold individually and represent different approaches to similar material. Each of the tapes was recorded live, and audience participation is integral. Although the quality of the tapes are adequate, audiences are only partially or intermittently audible, making some question and answer segments difficult to follow. Overall, for serious students of change theory, I highly recommend the Conversation hour as well as the MRI audiotapes. For students of brief therapy, the MRI audiotape provides a unique perspective from Richard Fisch who has both the insight, and the ability to express it.

Reviewed by:

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