

At Your Job: Hypnotist

• January 21, 2008

NAME: Rhoda Kopy

AGE: 59

EDUCATION AND

CERTIFICATION: Bachelor of science degree in biomedical communication from Richard Stockton College of New Jersey; two years of nursing study at Monmouth Medical Center's nursing school; designation of hypnotherapist after completing training at the Academy of Professional Hypnosis; awarded national certification as a consulting hypnotist from the National Guild of Hypnotists.

HOMETOWN: Toms River

JOB DESCRIPTION: Owner, Hypnosis for Women, Toms River. I am a nationally certified consulting hypnotist, also referred to as a hypnotherapist in the state of New Jersey.



Rhoda Kopy (left) works with one of her clients, Doreen Ryant, in Kopy's Toms River practice, called Hypnosis for Women. (STAFF PHOTO: Dave May)

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR JOB? I guess in part, it was serendipity. Years ago, I attended a women's conference at Brookdale (Community College) and the woman next to me mentioned that she had been a heavy smoker and she finally kicked the habit by meeting with a hypnotist. I was dealing with binge eating issues at the time, and I thought well, if hypnosis could help with a smoking habit, then maybe it could help me with an eating habit, and it did.

I was so intrigued by the process and the results, that I began researching it. I enrolled in a training program that combined theory with practical experience, and after that, I sought out additional hands-on experience, working with former classmates.

At that point in my life, I had 20-plus years of experience in community health education, motivational coaching and career services, and I realized that all of the experience, and the talents and skills I had acquired over the years were so incredibly in synch with what it would take to be effective as a professional hypnotist.

CLIENTELE: I'm a generalist. People come to see me because they want help in making a change in their lives. A lot of times, they know intellectually what they need to do and why they need to do it, but they just can't seem to do it, and it occurs to them that their major stumbling block is their own mind.

People see me for weight issues, to quit smoking or to stop some other habit. (They) desire to overcome a fear, such as a fear of flying or driving, or of being in enclosed spaces. Other people want more confidence in making presentations or handling social situations (or) going on job interviews.

Sometimes, people come in to enhance their athletic performance. I see a number of golfers. Or they come in to improve concentration or test-taking abilities. I've worked with physicians, nurses, real-estate agents (and) students who are able to pass their exams as a result of using hypnosis.

Sometimes, women come in just to de-stress and learn relaxation techniques. In some cases, physical issues prompt people to contact me — skin conditions, chronic headaches, other pain that doesn't respond to traditional treatment. In those cases, I need medical authorization. There are times too, when authorization from licensed mental health professionals is necessary.

SALARY AFTER A FEW YEARS: On average, professionals in Monmouth and Ocean counties charge between \$75 and \$150 an hour, and some offer special program rates, and I do that.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE? I'm a solo practitioner, so that means I wear a lot of hats. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, I have office hours from 8 in the morning to 9 at night, but that doesn't mean every slot is filled.

New client sessions last for two hours, and some people are apprehensive at first, so I allay their fears. The client is reminded that this is most effective when she sees herself as a partner in the process.

Then, the next step is to provide an overview of hypnosis, and to dispel the myths. The client may have seen a hypnosis stage show, a movie or TV program that gave a distorted view, and it's important that I explain that those shows are for entertainment, and bear little resemblance to reality.

I know in the back of my mind, some people are wondering, "Will I lose control? Will I do or say ridiculous things?" I had one woman admit to me that her brother scared her by suggesting that I could make her write out a bunch of large checks to me! I had to stifle a laugh and explain (that) I don't have that kind of power or desire to do that.

When clients realize that this is sanctioned by the American Medical Association, and there is a lot of research to support it, they feel a lot better. It's an educational process, and that's a very important aspect of the first meeting.

When a returning client comes in, the meeting is about 45 minutes, and we talk about her progress, then I coach her into a hypnotic state, and I work to neutralize negative programming, so that she continues to move forward.

Between clients, I answer the phone, I return calls and I screen prospective clients. I need to be very selective about who I choose to work with, because if I feel that somebody isn't really motivated to change, or if it seems clear that they're looking for a magic bullet that doesn't involve any personal effort, I prefer not to work with them, because it will only lead to disappointment on both our parts.

Mondays and Fridays are days that I'm available to do guest speaking for community and professional groups and classes, and I also use those days to plan marketing activities and advertising, to work on the Web site (www.hypnoforwomen.com) and to develop new programs and to connect with colleagues.

THE HYPNOSIS PROCESS: For a client to enter a state of hypnosis, she needs to feel comfortable with me and with the process. So, now the client is ready to be coached into a hypnotic state, she's relaxed, her questions have been answered, and I use a variety of induction and deepening techniques, and within minutes, the cares of the day evaporate, muscles loosen and a very pleasant feeling engulfs the client as she focuses on my voice.

I do some testing to make certain she's where I want her to be, and I make some suggestions to her that are appropriate for her situation. Included in this process are techniques like visualization, guided imagery and neural linguistic programming. Sometimes I ask for a response from the client while she is in this state, and I need to make certain she doesn't fall into a sleep state, which for some people can happen very easily.

Then, the client emerges from hypnosis, we discuss the experience, and I teach her to do self-hypnosis, which is a very important component of the process. Amazing things happen when people practice this.

As soon as that new client leaves my office, I take a few minutes to document what was done.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT YOUR JOB? To me, this is a passion, not a job. I get to use my talents and my creativity to help people help themselves, and a lot of times I

get to see and hear about the results. I love it that sometimes clients will take the time to call or to send me notes sharing their progress.

WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE ABOUT YOUR JOB? I still have to encounter the misconceptions related to hypnosis. And that's a shame, because it's such a safe and holistic and researched (treatment). It saddens me that some institutions and professionals hide behind labels like creative visualization and creative imagery . . . because they view those terms as more acceptable.

An emerging field of medicine, called neuroscience, explores how the brain works and how brain changes occur, and it totally supports the work that we do and gives it credibility, and that's such a positive thing. So I wish more professionals were comfortable with the word hypnosis.

SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER PEOPLE CONSIDERING THIS TYPE OF WORK: To be effective in this field, you need to be well educated, you need to be articulate, nonjudgmental. You need to have strong interpersonal and presentation skills, writing abilities (and) you have to be a creative thinker.

Do not enter this field to make a lot of money; you enter this field because you're passionate about it.

I believe that it's important to first have some life experience under your belt. I don't recommend that somebody pursue this right out of college.

In terms of college course work that would be helpful, it would include classes in health sciences, psychology and business and marketing. You need to be a perpetual student, you need to commit to continuing education, which is necessary anyway to maintain certification.

You should join leading industry organizations and network with other professionals. You need to take time every day to read relevant publications and keep up with the latest research. You should find a mentor . . . who has been in the field a long time. You need to be knowledgeable about running a business, and expect to spend a large portion of time and money marketing your practice. It takes years to build a practice, and the flow of income, especially early on, is rarely steady.

And, as the saying goes, you need to walk the walk, meaning you use hypnosis on a regular basis to improve your own life and eliminate your own negative habits. You won't be viewed as credible if you smoke, if you're obese or if you drink heavily.

You have to adhere to ethical standards of practice and state guidelines. You must have the clients' best interest at heart, and sometimes that means referring her to another professional.

Above all, you have to believe that every human being has value and potential, and I think that's the heart of it. I think my clients do well because I fully and completely expect them to succeed, and I transfer that expectation to them.

Edited for space and clarity from an interview with Staff Writer Jennifer Bradshaw. If you are interested in participating in this feature, please e-mail Business Editor Dennis P. Carmody at dcarmody@app.com or write to him at the Asbury Park Press, Business News, 3601 Highway 66, Box 1550, Neptune, NJ 07754-1551.