

The Apex Effect – A Fascinating Mental and Psychological Conundrum

There is an interesting thing that happens sometimes while working with EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques, an energy based therapy which taps on meridian points to ease discomfort emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually). In the couple of years I have been working with folks using EFT, I've run across it a few times myself. In this article, I'll be presenting some examples of this issue, talking about some possible reasons it occurs, and noting some ways that we, as practitioners, can work with the client who may be experiencing it.

Some examples:

— In one case, I was tapping with a medical nurse of over 30 years on her knee pain. She was skeptical at first though when her pain eased, the first words out of her mouth were, “somehow you distracted me”.

— Another example was when I was tapping on a college student's test anxiety. The student called me one evening in a complete panic over an upcoming exam. We tapped a few rounds and the intensity rating (when we tap, we typically take an initial SUDS or intensity reading on how much the issue bothers the client. The scale is from 0 to 10 with 0 being little bother and 10 being intense) went from a 9 to a 4. The student was content with that and we hung up the phone. I got a call a couple days later with the student saying how she got a 90 on her test, almost 30 points higher than on the first test. When I asked about the anxiety level, the student said very casually that she wasn't too concerned about this test at all.

I said lightly, “Oh, the tapping helped, huh?”

And she said, “I didn't really need to tap much because I wasn't that stressed out.”

In a recent example, I was tapping with a woman who was struggling with the concept of loss. After a couple of rounds, her intensity level had come way down from a 9 to about a 3. Almost as suddenly, she appeared to have shut down to the idea of tapping and instead, in a heated panic, began rapidly and intensely discussing her adamant belief in her religion. It was as if she felt like she was betraying her God by using energy work and felt guilty because she was feeling relief from it. (Which the option that perhaps her God brought the energy technique to her as a tool to help with her issue was not in play at this point.)

So what's possibly going on here?

In none of these examples was EFT tapping given credit for the relief. Instead, the client veered off in some other direction or tangent. Gary Craig, founder of EFT, touches on this topic in the EFT manual and on his website. He calls it the *Apex Effect*. Dr. Roger Callahan, developer of Thought Field Therapy, the precursor of EFT, called it the *Apex Problem*. It has also been considered a type of psychological reversal. Fred P Gallo, author of “Energy Psychology”, related the apex problem to *cognitive dissonance*, a term coined by social psychologist Leon Festinger.

In basic terms, *cognitive dissonance* is the emotional effect of experiencing a behavior that opposes an internal attitude or belief. And usually, this is a negative emotion or uncomfortable feeling.

A simple example of this may be when we take a multiple choice test and change our answer then find out our original answer was the correct one. We commonly react to getting the answer wrong, justify changing it, feel something about it (usually upset or anger), and the like. The issue isn't so much that we changed the answer but rather how we felt or reacted to the outcome (in this case, getting the answer wrong after we initially had it right). In this example, the test is the logical part of the situation and our reaction to the error is the subconscious part. This constriction of logic and subconscious (not logical) creates feelings of anxiety, sadness, guilt, second guessing ourselves, feeling threatened (identity), denial, feeling we need to explain our actions/reactions, and more.

People don't like to feel uncomfortable. Part of this is built in – psychologically and biologically.

Psychologically, we create foundations and beliefs that help us maneuver through our lives day to day. When something challenges a foundation or belief, commonly the foundation feels it must somehow defend itself, even if the new-found idea is just as effective or even better. The challenge causes discomfort and we want to do whatever we can to ease that discomfort.

Biologically, the mind functions quickly so that it can react fast to the stimulus. When it reacts, it is typically subconsciously. With EFT, sometimes something that has been a part of our identity or a feeling we have had for years or a pain we just got used to, may dissipate quickly. It is suggested that our minds take periodic scans of what is going on in our bodies at all levels (emotional, physical, etc).

So if the mind sees that at one moment there is a pain and in the next it's gone, one of two things happen. One, the mind decides the pain was never there in the first place or two, it says it is still there. In the former case, people don't recall the intensity the issue brought since the mind didn't remember or acknowledge it. In the latter case, the pain may return, showing that the client has a resistance to letting go of the issue. (If this is the case, one method used to help get past it, if the client does want to move beyond the pain, is to tap on aspects, or other parts, of the core issue. There may be other pieces to the puzzle which may be contributing to the client's grip on to the issue. Making a list, such as in the Personal Peace Procedure that Gary Craig presents, might be of assistance in finding these additional aspects. Another noted cause of an issue not clearing involves toxins such as perfumes, foods, etc, which interfere with the body's energy system.)

So how do we, as the person experiencing the dissonance, typically relieve the discomfort associated with a behavior opposing our beliefs? There have been several methods noted. One is to change an aspect or part of the idea. For instance, if we see rich people as being snobs and yet we want to be rich but we don't want to be a snob, we might look for other examples of rich people who aren't snobs.

Another way is what is called confirmation bias, or finding reasons to support an existing belief. This is seen a lot when we are beating ourselves up where we can always seem to find something to reinforce to ourselves that we are bad.

Reducing the importance of the whole issue is another technique. This is also called trivializing. Our example of the test anxiety case represented this concept.

Another method is to replace the emotional reaction with logical reasoning. Often it is our emotional response which paralyzes us. By looking at the situation with a bit more logic, we may be able to see options and choices we otherwise couldn't see because we are standing in an emotional tunnel.

Releasing our attachment to the issue and the factors involved is another way people cope with the discomfort. In this method, the client pulls attachment away from both the experience and the belief. Interestingly, the concept of cognitive dissonance appears to be more prevalent in societies that value individuality than ones that value the group dynamic.

The apex problem has also been considered to relate to the medical concept of *confabulation*. In the most basic terms, this is when the mind creates an answer (often a lie) and believes it. It is common in amnesiac and stroke clients for instance, though anyone can confabulate. If something happens where the person doesn't understand or know the answer, he or she might make something up and instantly believe it as truth, just to have an answer. Another explanation of the apex problem is that for the people who are experiencing it, they are somehow saying that they don't deserve to feel better for some reason. It brings the point that many issues are held in our subconscious which simply don't work on a logical scale. We may be thinking without our consciousness that we want to be rid of this issue or problem, yet subconsciously...we want to be safe, we may be living in our inner child, our memories, our identities, our familiar, and the like.

What we as practitioners can do.

Many practitioners are concerned that clients who experience the Apex Effect may not see that EFT helped them and might stop using it or not speak well of it. There are several things the practitioner can do to assist the client who is experiencing the effect while also maintaining the integrity of the EFT technique. One important point to make here is that for the EFT practitioner, regardless of what happens with the client, the practitioner's belief in EFT is critical. If a client is experiencing doubt or disbelief, the faith in the EFT process by the practitioner can be an imperative piece to the overall puzzle. The practitioner doesn't need to vindicate it per say, just believe it and with all energy vibrations, it will sustain itself.

Several sources suggest that an effective method to decrease the intensity of the cognitive dissonance or apex effect may be to explain the process to the client; that the apex effect may happen and basically what it is. It doesn't have to be an elaborate explanation though just enough to put the concept into their consciousness that it could happen. The explanation could be as simple as: "Some people have experienced a rapid lessening of intensity and felt that EFT tapping distracted them or that the issue was never that big of a deal in the first place. Because EFT can work so quickly and works with our natural body energies, the intensity could drop just that fast."

Research in the field of psychology has suggested that the more one thinks about the issue that they are denying exists, the more intense they are about it whereas if they are in the place of feeling about it, they are less stressed and less intense about it. The point for the EFT practitioner here is to somehow link the results of having no intensity or care about the initial issue to some emotional state of the client rather than force them into thinking about how EFT helped them. If the client did a Personal Peace Procedure list, perhaps another aspect related to the issue may draw the person back to an emotional view of the general issue. The good thing about this process, too, is it distracts the mind from trying to figure out what to do (bring back the issue or assume it never happened). It also takes the client back to the EFT process and they will likely already show an intensity decrease about the overall problem and other aspects.

What is important to remember is that the client is not intentionally deceiving the process or themselves. We all want to feel good but it also may come at the cost of contradicting what we have known or considered part of our identity for a long time. While processes like EFT can provide amazing and fairly rapid results, the mind isn't always in line or doesn't always catch up as quickly.

As an EFT practitioner, we need to be aware that this type of behavior can happen and that it is not commonly intentional. Just being aware can help us to work with and through it for the first thing we need to do is maintain an air of calm. The client may react in any number of ways – for instance as noted in the examples, denial, completely ignoring it, panic, etc. If things begin to get heated, use some de-escalating techniques such as staying relaxed, not approaching them (entering their boundaries. It is suggested to remain at least four feet away, especially in the case of panic), and speak in a relaxed, calm, and non-condescending tone.

The use of active listening skills is a great ally in this situation. Let the client talk. Listen to them and make no judgments. Use open ended questions to draw answers from them. If they are panicking and feeling cramped in the office, offer to move outside or to a larger room. Respond to their feelings not their words. Rephrase statements as you understand them. And of course, as most EFT practitioners do, trust and use your intuition to work with and through the effect with your client. Happy tapping all!

By E.J. Frank