

A Brief Introduction to “Clean”

Introduction

Clean Language is a simple, but powerful questioning technique that can help individuals to explore their thinking. It uses metaphor as a way of exploring things which they may find difficult to put into words.

Most people use metaphors constantly as a way to describe their thinking patterns in fact it has been suggested that the average person uses about four metaphors in every minute of conversation.

When a client begins to pay attention to the metaphors that they are using, the symbols, shapes and elements of that metaphor often ‘come to life’. Exploring the metaphors that an individual naturally uses, often subconsciously, enables understanding at a core level often resulting in transformational change.

This approach is said to be “clean” because the coach only uses the coachee’s words and metaphors and will not muddy the water by adding any words or assumptions of their own.

Clients have found it a useful way to work when they feel stuck or are unsure about what they want or feel. It works at a slightly deeper level than some other tools and techniques and is therefore very helpful for making connections, drawing out how you really see things and clarifying what you want to have happen.

History

Clean Language was originally created by New Zealand Psychotherapist David Grove as a therapeutic communication process that enabled a client to stay within their own experience without being distracted or influenced by the therapist’s own ideas or assumptions.

Penny Tompkins and James Lawley then undertook a five-year research project to model David Grove’s approach and developed their own process, Symbolic Modelling, which combines Clean Language with a more process-driven methodology.

Originally developed for use as a therapeutic process, Clean Language is now used in a variety of situations including one-to-one coaching and group facilitation.

Principles

Clean Language is a process which honours the client by using words which will least influence or ‘dirty’ the client’s experience. This is achieved mainly through exploratory, open questions and reflecting back the client’s own words.

Because the coach does not contaminate the coachee’s experience with their own interpretation or solution through leading questions, coachees have total control to explore whatever they feel safe and comfortable to do so. As they are not ‘led’ by the coach, they go only as far as they are ready to go, consciously or unconsciously. This makes Clean Language a very safe process to explore deeper issues without needing a psychotherapy background.

Being “Clean” involves:

- Recognizing and understanding your own metaphors and how they influence you and your thinking
- Holding your own opinions ‘lightly’ and letting them go in favour of new information
- Being in rapport with the client’s internal ‘landscape’ not the client themselves
- Keeping yourself out of the client’s picture
- Mirroring back the client’s words and metaphors to the client
- Being non-judgmental and flexible

The Basic Clean Language Questions

There are 12 basic Clean Language questions:

1. (And / So) what kind of (X) is that (X)?
2. (And / So) is there anything else about (X)?
3. (And / So) where is (X) or (And) whereabouts is (X)?
4. (And / So) that’s (X) like what?
5. (And / So) is there a relationship between (X) and (Y)?
6. (And / So) when (X) happens, what happens to (Y)?
7. (And / So) then what happens or (And) what happens next?
8. (And / So) what happens just before (X)?
9. (And / So) where could (X) come from?
10. (And / So) what would (X) like to have happen?
11. (And / So) what needs to happen for (X) to happen?
12. (And / So) can (X) happen?

Clean Language questions often start with ‘And’ or ‘So’. Tacking one of these prefixes on to the front, particularly ‘and’, makes the question kinder and less invasive. The client is less likely to become defensive.

The (X) in the questions refers to a word or phrase that the coachee has used. For example:

Coachee: *“I’d like to choose the right path for my future career”*

Coach could ask:

- *“And what kind of path is that path?”*
- *“And is there anything else about that path?”*
- *“And whereabouts is that path?”*
- *“And what kind of future career is that future career?”*
- *“And is there anything else about choose?”*

Clean Language questions are delivered with a slower and more rhythmic cadence than normal conversation. This is to ensure that the questions land in a deep place in the client so that they let their intuition provide the answer rather than answering from their conscious mind.

Clean Resources

Books

Sullivan W & Rees J (2008) *Clean Language: Revealing metaphors and opening minds*

Tompkins P & Lawley J (2000) *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through symbolic modelling*

Articles

See AC bulletin Spring 2009 – available on AC website
(<http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pub/pub02.htm>)

Training Providers

Clean Coaching – www.cleancoaching.com

Clean Change - www.cleanchange.co.uk

Apricot Island - www.apricotisland.com

Training Attention - www.trainingattentioninbusiness.co.uk

Websites

- www.cleanlanguage.co.uk
- www.powersofsix.com
- Plus the ones above