

Clean Language

By Michelle Fischer of Creative Leadership

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Developed by therapist David Grove in the 1980s, Clean Language is a method of asking clients questions to help them uncover solutions to problems through their own personal symbols and metaphors.

James Lawley & Penny Tompkins who themselves have developed the “Clean” technique of Symbolic Modelling, describe it, “He (David) realised many clients naturally described their symptoms in metaphor, and found that when he enquired about these using their exact words, their perception of the trauma began to change.”

There are nine core “Clean” questions which by their very nature are able to encourage a client’s thinking process through metaphors, ideas, self-reflections and creative thinking.

Here’s an example of how we use Clean Language in our work:

Client X needed help identifying how to tackle her job search following redundancy after over 20 years of working at one organization. Michelle Fischer helped the client by using some clean questions:

“And, a new job, that’s like what?” Michelle enquired. Client X considered this for a while and said, “Well it’s a bit like finding a new place to live.” To which Michelle replied, “And finding a new place to live, what kind of finding a new place to live is that?” Carefully using her exact words.

It was obvious that she was working with her metaphor by the amount of time she took to answer and in the way she finally said, “Well, it’s about making sure I know what I’m looking for, that I like the environment, making sure the money’s right and that I can move in straight away.” “And what’s that like?” was Michelle’s next question. “Well it’s easy. Then I feel confident that I’ve found the right place to live.”

“And when you’ve found the right place to live, what happens next?” “Well I start to consider what other things are needed – like a solicitor, mortgage etc.” “And when you start to consider what other things are needed, where is that?”

She thought about this for a moment and said “It’s in the yellow pages, or I talk to friends, or I look online.”

Michelle continued asking Clean Language questions of her metaphor so that she could further develop her thinking in about finding a new job. At the end of their time together she said, “If you had told me when we started that finding a new job was like buying a house I’m not entirely sure I’d have believed you! But there really are so many similarities!”

Client X found a new job within 2 weeks.

Clean Language is so affective because of its ability to invite clients to review their inner world and how they view things, without any other influences or distortion.

Clean Language Questions

Here are the nine basic “Clean” questions:

- ★ For x to be exactly as you want it would be like what?
- ★ And x what about that?
- ★ Is there anything else about?
- ★ And what kind of x is that?
- ★ And where could that come from?
- ★ And then what happens?
- ★ And what happens next?
- ★ Where is that?
- ★ Whereabouts is that?
- ★ Does x have a size or shape?
- ★ That's like what?

Clean Language is a tool Creative Leadership use as part of our Talent Management solutions.

For more information about how Clean Language would be useful for you, please get in touch with Michelle today on 07786 622344 or email info@creative-leadership.co.uk