

Creating a Clean business strategy with Clean Space

by Judy Rees

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You've probably heard about Clean Space, one of the newer innovations from David Grove, originator of Clean Language. Perhaps you read James Lawley's article about it in the last edition of The Model? It's exciting stuff. And it has applications far from its origins in psychotherapy, as Judy Rees discovered.

I wasn't planning a new application of Clean Space when Wendy Sullivan and I sat down to spend a day developing her new business strategy. That's what happened, though, and it worked brilliantly.

Whatever the methodology, my role as coach/consultant/facilitator is straightforward. I'm there to help my client to:

- get a clear idea of what she wants (from her business, in this case),
- fill out the details of the objective, making it as attractive as possible,
- deal with anything that's stopping it from happening,
- develop an outline plan to make it happen.

Wendy's the UK's top Clean Language trainer: she runs Clean Change Company, which offers public, modular Clean trainings. As Discovery Works, she provides NLP-based trainings within companies and other organisations. She also does coaching and psychotherapy using Clean and NLP, and her coaching clients include a handful of people who first saw her in a former role as a speech therapist. It's an interesting mix.

The snag was there was just too much to do - Wendy often seemed to be running as fast as she could just to stand still, often working late into the night.

So, we sat down for a rethink. Where was it all going?

I'm an NLP Master Practitioner and I have formal business qualifications as well as plenty of executive experience. And I love working Clean, particularly when coaching people in the NLP and personal development field. I've found that unless I can match their skill at their chosen speciality - hypnotic storytelling, for example, or New Code NLP - they'll be disappointed and go into "trainer" mode.

With Clean, though, the process is unobtrusive. The client's words, metaphors, gestures and other thoughts take centre stage, and I keep my "stuff" to myself as far as possible. The client can enjoy exploring their own fascinating internal world without pressure to change anything. In reality, change often happens spontaneously at the client's own instigation.

Finding space

So on this particular day, Wendy and I set to work in her office at home, initially just chatting generally,

mainly exploring "problems". We touched on speech therapy, where things were very clear - Wendy no longer regarded herself as a speech therapist. "How about writing 'speech therapy' on a Post-it note and putting that where it should be?" I asked.

Wendy placed it carefully on the wall behind her and to her right.

At that point we could both see a similarity to the "Clean Space start" Wendy taught me a few months ago. But still we continued chatting. There were problems and more problems in the immediate future.

"Get her out of that chair!" shouted a voice in my head. So (unCleanly) I suggested Wendy move to a space which represented a time in the future *after* she had achieved what she wanted with her business. Retired, for example.

She found such a space down the hall near the front door - and the Clean Space exploration was on.

From that point on, I stuck to some of the official Clean Space questions:

- "What do you know from that space there?"
- "What does that space know?"
- "Is there another space you could move to from that space there?"

If you're used to working with complicated language patterns to influence your clients, restricting yourself in this way to just a handful of questions initially sounds bizarre. But amazingly, it works. It generates a kind of trance as the client explores their inner world, and feels restful and respectful.

It's based on the work of therapist David Grove, and was modelled and developed as Symbolic Modelling by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins. If it's all new to you, you can find out more on www.cleanlanguage.co.uk

Back to the work with Wendy. Over a couple of hours, we discovered eleven specific spaces which had relevance for her. Each was labelled with a Post-it note - you can probably guess some of the content from their names:

- Now (office chair)
- Speech therapy
- Retirement
- "?" (which involved Wendy's friends and colleagues Marian Way and Phil Swallow)
- Community
- Write book
- Corner
- Overview (at the top of the stairs)
- Mulling it over
- Neutral
- Fully alive

Most important of all was the space called "fully alive". Wendy loved this space and spent plenty of time exploring it.

"It's like a split-jump in skating, or in a deserted hotel corridor - a physical way of expressing sheer joy," she said. "It's a space drenched in sunshine, in a garden with flowers and with the sea in the distance - like a spot at the NLP University in Santa Cruz where I did my NLP trainer training."

I asked Wendy to draw a picture of this space, which she did using lots of colours and filling in as many details as she could.

She also drew a map of all the spaces, then gathered them up as we ended the exercise.

From metaphor back to reality

So, how was that useful?

What seemed to happen was that over the course of the exercise Wendy developed a much clearer sense of her goal, its desirability, the steps that could take her there and the issues that might arise. Working metaphorically made it easier for her to play with possibilities and explore ideas because, to some extent, we bypassed her "internal critic".

By the end of the exercise we were no longer struggling with problems: the goal was very clear to Wendy, even if I couldn't follow the details just yet.

The next step was to take what she had learned and turn it into something that I, and others, could understand and help her to achieve. We took a page of flip-chart paper and she drew a monster mind-map, rushing to capture all her ideas and insights, jotting down all the possibilities.

From there, I could switch to my project planning hat and figure out what had to happen for it all to become reality. There's still more work to do on the final business plan - I haven't yet found a way to make financial projections into a two-minute job. But you'll certainly be hearing more of Wendy.

In her perfect business future she'll be doing less:

- Corporate training, as Discovery Works trainings will often be delivered by other people,
- Speech therapy,
- Working as associate on other people's trainings.

Meanwhile Clean training, coaching and consulting will take centre stage as her central business focus and principal source of income.

- She will be training Clean Language, Clean Space and Symbolic Modelling, helping people to take their first steps in this fascinating approach, get themselves up to a competency they're happy with and start finding new ways to apply it.
- She'll be working with others to create a thriving Clean community, keeping people involved and learning.
- She'll be available as a consultant to companies who'd like to use Clean approaches to develop their people.
- She'll be "growing people who grow people", supervising and training coaches, therapists and trainers.
- She'll be the author of a guide to Clean, reaching thousands more people around the world.

Watch this space for more developments!

- Judy Rees is an NLP Master Practitioner, journalist, coach, facilitator and consultant. Find out more about her at www.purpleflash.co.uk