

Clean Facilitation – coaching with space

Clean language and perceptual space

Coaching aims to direct the client's attention to new possibilities. Clean Language does this in an explicitly non-interpretative way. It uses a set of questions and a particular syntax designed to facilitate the client in building their own model of their desired outcome and its associated constraints and resources. This model takes the form of a landscape or network of metaphors, where new meanings, connections and possibilities emerge as the client self-models. Clean Language questions are sometimes used within a particular protocol called Clean Space, which directs and holds the client's attention using both mind and body as they create their metaphor landscape.

The purposeful use of metaphor is central to Clean Facilitation. One metaphor which coaches often use is "holding the space" for a client, where the latter can safely reflect and learn. The process of Clean Space embodies this metaphor through using the actual, physical space of the practice room to explore the changes the client wants to make. Using Clean Space invites the client, literally and metaphorically, to find a new perspective on their outcome.

It can do this because space is a crucial part of how we make sense of our experience. Whenever we see, hear or feel something, we do so somewhere in space. For example, if I ask you to remember last Christmas or think of a blue elephant or to tell me about an experience which makes you feel excited or anxious, you would notice that as your answers arise you can locate them in the space around or within you. It is as if we represent our experience or imaginings in a virtual space of our own construction, in order to describe, understand and use it.

The process:

I start Clean Space sessions by asking the client to draw a picture in answer to the Clean Language question: "And what is it that you want to have happen?"; next, to place their drawing *where it needs to be* in the room where we are working; and then to place themselves *where they need to be* in relation to it.

After asking a few Clean questions to develop the ideas and symbols contained in the picture, I then ask the client to give a name to the space where they are standing. Next I direct the client to “find a space that knows something else about all of that”, indicating their drawing and all they have said about it. During the session, the client finds six spaces where new knowledge can arise and gives each space a name and places a label for it on the floor. At each space the client’s emerging knowledge can be developed using Clean Language questions. The client’s experience at or around space 4 is often marked by a sense of breakthrough or crisis, where significant new insights appear.

The collection of spaces constitutes the system through which the client’s perception of their desired outcome and its relation to their present state operates. It also contains previously un-noticed resources. One of the telling parts of the process is to introduce these resources to each other by revisiting chosen spaces, i.e. “now return to (name of space x); what does this space know about (name of space y)?”

At the end, the client returns to their first space and answers the question “And after all that, what do you know from here *now*?” They make a second drawing to capture their new knowledge about their outcome and to conclude I invite them to identify and commit to an action towards it.

One client’s experience of a Clean Space session:

I had hit a crossroads with my career path and decided to seek advice on what direction to choose. I found my current administration role frustrating and was unsure whether to seek another similar role or promotion, or completely change gear and seek creative employment elsewhere. As someone with a design background, I had lost confidence in my creative work and found this was severely holding me back.

Ken explained that the session, our second, would use drawing and moving around the room and started by asking me to draw what I wanted to achieve and anything else about it that occurred

to me at that particular time. I felt more pro-active and able to engage more, less restricted and confined than I would if sitting being coached at a desk. In some way, it felt and looked as though I was mapping and planning a large event; confidently plotting what I wanted.

Through each stage, I wanted and was able to steer myself away from the original thoughts that influenced my drawing. I kept stepping to a new point (a new perspective) in the room after each had been discussed (ensuring that I was making good use of the design of the newly laid carpet!) and most importantly ensuring that I was stepping away from the negativity that was in the drawing at the start. By the end, I had gone through the cycle gaining from each previous place that I had stepped on, and now had a new confident perspective on what I wanted, from where I was able to clarify what I should do to achieve it and how to resolve things along the way.

As a very visual person, I found that this exercise was an easier way for me to communicate. As well as visualising, I was also 'physicalising' – able to relate and reason with what I had drawn more clearly than by just staying stationary. It felt good that I had confidently come to this point. As a result of the session, I have now updated my design portfolio and have been approaching companies without the nagging self-doubt that I previously had. I am now fully aware that a creative career path is the right direction for me.

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Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling have been developed in the UK by James Lawley and Penny Tomkins and is based on the work of David Grove. To find out more go to: www.cleanlanguage.co.uk. To find out about training in Clean Facilitation go to: www.cleanchange.co.uk