

Sharpen the Saw if you want to stay at the cutting edge.

(A brief exploration of the benefits of working with Self-Generated Metaphor by Maurice Corrigan MLBCAI, Clean Language Facilitator and Symbolic Modeller).

At this time of economic gloom it's tempting for businesses to implement spending cuts right across the board. Training and human resource development budgets are often first to come under the axe. However this is somewhat like the woodsman who is sawing the tree with a blunt saw; exhausted and stressed he believes he cannot find time to sharpen the saw. Obviously this is not an effective strategy but how often it happens. Effective performance requires provision for 'sharpening the saw'; the seventh habit recommended by Stephen Covey in his "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People".¹

Maurice Corrigan is skilled at facilitated reflection and can support you and team members in "sharpening your saw". Having worked as an executive Business Coach for almost eight years and also as a coach trainer he brings a wealth of skills knowledge and understanding to the 'sharpening' process. Maurice has studied Symbolic Modelling in the UK with James Lawley and Penny Tompkins, recognised world leaders in this exciting new field. They are authors of "Metaphors in Mind, Transformation through Symbolic Modelling". Maurice believes that this cutting-edge process generates results; results that blossom and endure. Under current conditions both business and individuals crave services which are competitively priced, faster and better.² Maurice says that symbolic modelling which Lawley and Tompkins developed by modelling the work of New Zealand therapist David Grove can satisfy these drivers.

"Compare *'I'm so confused I don't know what to do'* with its metaphorical equivalent *'it's like I'm on a roller-coaster'*. A roller-coaster can stop and the passengers can get off, or the track can level out and become a railway going somewhere. There are a multitude of options available in the metaphor that are unavailable in the conceptual word *'confused'*."³

Symbolic Modelling facilitates clients to enter their internal world; to explore and attend to that landscape. How is this achieved? It is accessed with ease through the use of clean language questions. These questions are called clean because they to a large extent reflect back the exact language of the client and allow less chance for the facilitator to assume, to distort or misunderstand the client's experience; and not lead the witness so to speak. The questions are addressed to the client's information rather than to the client. Clean interventions allow clients to see things they couldn't see

previously, see them with more clarity and talk about things they didn't know they could talk about.

'And you are on a roller coaster..... and is there anything else about on a roller coaster?'

Yeah, it's not very nice, it's scary really, I feel sick actually most of the time.

Simple reflection plus a short clear question helps the client to develop the information. The client has a more felt sense of 'confused' and is more likely to engage in bringing about a solution.

Developing the client's information even further;

And you're on a roller coaster and it's not very nice, it's scary really, and you feel sick actually most of the time... and when sick actually most of the time, what kind of..... 'most of the time' is that 'most of the time'.

It's as I say most of the timeIt starts on a Monday morning and goes on most of the day...yeah, even most of the week except for a few hours in the evening when I wind down before bedtime. The only thing I seem to be able to look forward to is the week-end and then I fret that it will pass too quickly.

It is time to direct the client's attention off the problem onto the possibility of change; bearing in mind the client's original statement 'I'm so confused I don't know what to do'.

*And when all of that..... what would you like to have happen?
Well I'd like the roller coaster ride to stop and I'd like to get off.*

Using another question to move time forward;

'And I'd like the roller coaster to stop and I'd like to get off, and when the roller coaster stops... and you've got off.....then what happens?'

Well I can relax... calm down... and I can sort myself out.

Can you notice the shift the client has made through this short sequence? From 'I'm so confused I don't know what to do' to 'I can relax, calm down and sort myself out', from high stress perhaps verging on burn-out to a place of possibility and agency; *I can relax.....I can sort myself out.*

Using further Clean Language⁴ questions the facilitator continues to develop the outcome. As this happens, clients report it's as if they can now see things they couldn't see before or things which were hazy and fuzzy are now clear. The mist lifts; with this new clarity the path ahead becomes more apparent and less daunting, the shot isn't such a long one now the target is easily within range.

As Henry Ford said “If you think you can...you can, if you think you can't... you can't. Either way you're right!” The client's sense of self-efficacy has transformed and is greatly enhanced by the process.

In this article I hope I have managed to give you a flavour of how a ‘clean language’ session might go and even a sense of the benefits that can be gained from working with metaphor. My experiences to date in facilitating clients in developing their own metaphorical landscapes indicate that this is a much swifter and more effective process than any other modality I have encountered.

Ell Marie Kelleher, Cork said of the process;

“While working with Maurice even when I didn't understand the style of clean language I got brilliant results... .. I believe now that even though we might not understand things we should be always open to try new things and be amazed by the experience!”

John Flynn, Limerick said;

“WOW! That process is so simple, powerful and insightful..... I will be forever grateful.”

If now is the time to ‘sharpen your saw’ contact Maurice to book a session and don't be surprised at the benefits and results that occur. Or if you simply feel you'd like to discuss further any of the points raised contact Maximise in Galway on 093-36400 or info@aximisecoach.com

¹ ‘The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Restoring the Character Ethic’. Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster Inc. ISBN 0-671-66398-4

² “In the current economic environment, the pressure is on to deliver, quicker better and cheaper. Clean is a quick win that will deliver speed, quality and lower cost/increased revenues. The emphasis between each of these 3 drivers will vary.

In addition, organisations need to work more effectively together taking account of all stakeholder's needs and wants. Clean communication skills combined with the insightful use of metaphor, can transform the process.” **Maurice O'Shea** management consultant and Certified Clean facilitator in ‘*Some Ways to Use Clean Language to Make a Difference in Business*’ Compiled by **Judy Rees** May 2009. www.cleanchange.co.uk

³ Chapter 3, Metaphors in Mind, **James Lawley** and **Penny Tompkins**. Published by the Developing Company. ISBN 978095387510-8

⁴ ‘**Clean Language, Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds.**’ *Wendy Sullivan* and *Judy Rees*, Crown House Publishing 2008. ISBN 978-184590125-7