

Clean Language

“To be “Clean” is to be naïve, present, open, not knowing, alert, aware, fascinated, eager to learn and selfless.” David Grove – Clean Language

Using Clean Language or Clean Questions allows us to take our communication to a whole other level. It enables us to ask a question in a way that doesn't contaminate the answer; to keep our own map of the world back. It is questioning and listening without interpretation or suggestion, leaving the other person free to explore their own material as the questioner stays out of the way.

Clean questions allow us to gather information directly from a person without adding our own interpretation to it. Remember, the “map isn't the territory” and paraphrasing can introduce your own personal map into the conversation and influence the direction or outcome – which you may wish to avoid! When you are coaching or eliciting information you want to be working with the other person's map, not yours.

Clean Language was developed by David Grove in the 1980s as a result of his work on clinical methods for resolving clients' traumatic memories. As Lawley & Tompkins describe it, *“He 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.”*

The questioner neutrally collects information by using questions such as:

- and? (repeat the person's own words as a question)
- in what way?
- and is like what?
- anything else about?
- and what would you like to have happen?

The cleanest question of all is silence.....

Using 'and' instead of 'but' links 2 statements in mind of the other person and increases buy-in. Remember the saying *“everything before the but is bullshit!”*

Consider the following:

- I really appreciated the way you did that, **but** next time could you pay attention to
- I really appreciated the way you did that, **and** next time could you pay attention to

Known as the agreement frame, using “I agree...and...”, “I appreciate... and...”, “I respect...and...” enables us to stay in rapport with a person during conflict, creates a space for them to hear our viewpoint whilst still being able to express theirs and facilitates reaching an agreement with mutual respect.

Although clean language may sound complex, it is remarkably easy to use. Clean questions are structural and not content driven.

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own.” Benjamin Disraeli

David Grove’s 12 Clean Language Questions

Developing Questions:

- ... (And) what kind of X is that X?
- ... (And) is there anything else about X?
- ... (And) where is X? Or (And) whereabouts is X?
- ... (And) that X is like what?
- ... (And) is there a relationship between X and Y?
- ... (And) when X, what happens to Y?

Sequence and Source Questions

- ... (And) then what happens? Or (And) what happens next?
- ... (And) what happens just before X?
- ... (And) where could X come from?

Intention Questions

- ... (And) what would X like to have happen?
- ... (And) what needs to happen for X?
- ... (And) can X (happen)?

The PRO Model

This model can be really useful to encourage us to focus our attention on what we do want rather than on what we don’t want! In NLP, we call the former an ‘outcome’ or ‘desired state’ and the latter a ‘problem state’.

If you were to imagine you are moving house and the removal man asks you where you want him to put a particular box, it would be a very lengthy conversation if you said “Don’t put it in the kitchen, and don’t put it in the bathroom and don’t put it in the lounge”; it would be far quicker and more likely that you would just ask him to put it in the master bedroom.

- Problem – I don’t want
- Remedy – I want less of
- Outcome – I want

The following questions can be useful to use when we are presented with each of the PRO statements:

Problem – I don’t want to feel stressed – *“And what would you like to have happen?”*

Remedy – I want to feel less stressed – *“And when less stressed, then what happens?”*

Outcome – I want to feel energised – *use any clean question to explore the outcome or desired state.*