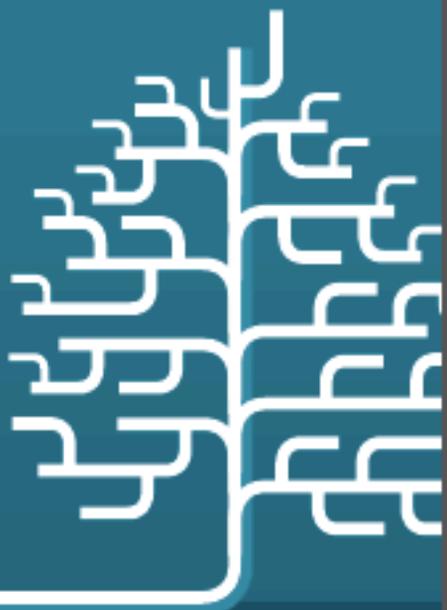# CLEAN APPROACHES FOR COACHES

**HOW TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE
USING CLEAN LANGUAGE & SYMBOLIC MODELLING**

Marian Way

Clean Approaches For Coaches

How to create the conditions for change using Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling

Marian Way

Clean Approaches For Coaches

How to create the conditions for change using
Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling

by Marian Way

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

www.cleanapproachesforcoaches.com

You can purchase a copy of this book at www.cleanapproachesforcoaches.com

Foreword

From the outside, clean approaches to coaching can look a lot like other coaching methods. But this is an illusion of perspective. From the inside, from the client and coach viewpoint, the process is probably like nothing either has experienced before.

The most obvious difference between clean and other kinds of coaching is David Grove's Clean Language, which he began developing in the early 1980s. At that time the centrality of metaphor to thought, word and deed was a revolutionary idea. Today Clean Language still forms the most sophisticated and elegant means of working with clients' metaphors. Yet Clean Language needs to be used within a methodology or framework, and this is where Symbolic Modelling comes in. When clients are facilitated to attend to their metaphorical language and non-verbal behaviour they get to know themselves in a new way and they start to think differently.

David Grove said Clean Language has to be simple because clients are complex. By not introducing any content, Clean Language limits distractions. This means the client has little choice but to work with who they are – whether they like that or not. They can fool themselves and they can fight themselves, but sooner or later they realise they are only doing this to stay the same. And then what do they do? We don't know. They don't know. But we're willing to facilitate them to find out.

When and how change happens can rarely be predicted (and the effects of change are even less predictable). We've seen a client experience a significant change in the first few minutes of a session – much to his surprise and our shock. Another felt something shift as she struggled to open our front door to leave after a session. Often a client will find their life changing months later. Occasionally nothing much seems to change, and maybe this is for the best. We don't assume change is always beneficial.

We believe minds evolve and behaviour changes through nonlinear processes. This means there is no direct relationship between what coaches do and clients changing – so we don't try to make change happen. Instead we look for patterns in the client's behaviour that indicate the conditions under which his or her system will change itself – spontaneously and naturally.

To do this clean coaches have to set aside their own inner world and make the client's inner landscape the focus of their joint attention. Many coaches think they already do this, and they may, but not to the extent that clean coaches do.

Furthermore, the clean coach doesn't have a toolbox full of change techniques and they don't offer advice – no matter how good it is. If they aren't allowed to introduce any content of their own, what can they do? The clean coach has only one 'tool': Everything they do – every word, every gaze and every gesture – has the purpose of inviting the client to attend to aspects of his or her experience and to notice, consider and reconsider how they do who they are; and to wonder what they would like to have happen. We call this facilitating self-modelling.

Becoming an excellent clean coach takes some doing. Mostly it takes disengaging from the myriad of explanations and beliefs acquired about how the mind works and how it changes. These generalisations can prevent us from seeing the uniqueness of the individual in front of us, blind us to what is happening in the moment and block us from responding to the client's idiosyncratic ways of staying the same and changing. When you disengage you are released from needing to understand, from making things happen, and from being the expert. Less really is more when you realise the client is always unconsciously providing clues and indicators about which way to go next. Then the blindingly obvious becomes visible and every step is an adventure with the unexpected waiting to surprise both of you at any moment.

Marian has produced a beautiful and well-thought-out book that concentrates on the practicalities of becoming a clean coach without compromising the soul of the process. *Clean Approaches for Coaches* manages to combine simplicity with depth, accessibility with thoroughness, and clarity with the messiness of real life. The book is full of images, metaphors and transcripts from Marian's considerable first-hand experience. These provide an insider's perspective; which is what makes this book so rich, congruent and creative.

We expect *Clean Approaches for Coaches* will intrigue you enough that you will want to experience Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling both as a coach and as a client. We also expect you to be inspired to read this book again and again so you acquire a deep appreciation of the wisdom distilled in its pages. You couldn't have a better grounding than the book in your hands.

James Lawley and Penny Tompkins
Sydney, Australia,
1 February, 2013

Prelude

Have you ever learned something as though for the first time, only to realise that you already knew it all along? This happened to me in a garden in France when I realised that my purpose in life is to make communication possible. This felt somewhat surprising at the time, although it's hard to figure out why. My outcome for being in the garden had been to discover my direction in life; I was already coaching people using Clean Language; and all my previous roles – teacher, leader, trainer, writer – had communication at their heart.

I suppose the surprising thing was how this learning came about. I was attending a workshop in order to improve my Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling skills. This meant taking the role of client as well as coach, and in that role I'd said I wanted to know what direction I was going in. During the workshop I discovered I had a tendency to veer off my chosen path, so it was an important moment when, standing in the garden, I finally got myself aligned and able to go in a forward direction.

Attempting to draw a picture of my 'metaphor landscape' later that evening, I realised I'd spent so long getting the direction right, there was not a single thing in front of me to move towards! So I thought about the scene in the garden. There'd been a tree in front of me, and I've always loved trees so, in the absence of anything else, I planted a symbolic tree right there in my picture.

I was eager to get to the workshop the following day. I wanted to look up 'tree' in a book about symbolism. I read that the roots represent the 'underworld', the trunk stands for the earth, and the upper branches reach out towards the light of heaven. And the function of the tree is to join all three worlds, to make communication possible between them.

When I read the words, 'make communication possible,' I had a moment of pure recognition. Yes, I thought, that is exactly what I am here for. And yet it seemed so coincidental. I just happened to be working in a garden, and I just happened to be facing towards a tree, and of all the symbol books I could have chosen I just happened to pick one that 'spoke' to me about my purpose in life. Spooky!

And yet not so spooky. Within a Clean Language session events like this are quite commonplace. For the process of asking someone clean questions, ones that are stripped of all unnecessary presuppositions, creates a space that is 'psychoactive' and where a client is 'likely to discover deep significance in the coincidence of events and the location of objects.' (Lawley and Tompkins, 2003)

Using a clean approach also helps to create the conditions whereby clients are motivated to act on these kinds of discoveries. I recently worked with a client who was soon to be starting as a non-executive director with a new organisation. He was anxious that with this new group of people, he wouldn't know when to speak up and share his knowledge and when to keep quiet. In the first part of the session he discovered that, if he could be calm and centred, he would know when to speak. Then, the clean questions I asked helped him to experience being calm

and centred right there in the room. And finally, clean questioning helped him to realise that he would need to practise this state every day and to create a plan for doing that practice. Clean Language is a multi-purpose tool.

He did all this without receiving a single suggestion from me. Within this methodology there's no room for advice giving, interpretation, or even paraphrasing. When clients find their own truth evolving and emerging out of their own words and symbols, they are motivated to act from *within.*

I was 'hooked' on Clean Language the very first time I saw James Lawley in action at an NLP Conference. I volunteered to be his 'demonstration subject' and my life was never the same again. Not only did I resolve a lifelong problem I'd had with resentment, but it was also the start of the journey that has led to me writing this book. I later discovered that Penny Tompkins was 'pulled' to learn more the first time she saw the originator of Clean Language, David Grove. And every so often someone contacts me and says, 'I *have* to learn about Clean Language. When can I start?' And I know they've been hooked, too. There's a growing community of people who are 'pulled' or 'hooked' on the beauty and the integrity of this process – and the results it brings for them and their clients.

A friend of mine, a senior teacher in a primary school, has been mentoring student teachers for years. A couple of years ago, she went on a coaching course, but until she read a draft of this book, had not been able to make the switch from mentoring to coaching. She understood the theory, but not the practice. How do you help someone to come to their own conclusion about something? Isn't

it faster to tell them what to do, to give them a 'nudge' in the right direction? Of course it is, if what you are doing is teaching them new skills. In our training courses, which we run as 'cleanly' as possible, we still have to give information, instructions, and feedback. But if you want to encourage someone to find out what kind of teacher they want to be, to explore their own thinking and make their own mind up, then coaching rather than teaching or mentoring is the better option.

Maybe you're like my friend and you know that good coaching means keeping your opinions to yourself, but you haven't yet found a way to keep yourself out of the picture? Or maybe you're exhausted from having to think so hard about what technique will suit this client or what advice will benefit that one? Maybe you're sometimes at a loss as to what to say? Take heart, for within the pages of this book you'll find a way to do less and for your clients to achieve more than you, or they, ever thought possible.

Clean Language is simple. By combining someone's words with clean questions, a novice can help someone to gain new and powerful revelations within minutes. But it is not always easy. If you already work as a coach or use a questioning approach in your work, you may find it a stretch at first to ask *just* clean questions and to use *just* the client's words. Tuning into people's metaphors may take a little while too.

My aim in writing this book is to present the ideas behind Clean Language, and the methodology itself, in a way that is easy to follow, to understand, and to put into practice – without denying the complexity of human thought that will start to reveal itself when you ask someone more than two or three clean questions in a row.

There's no denying that working with another person's logic is like walking in a strange land, where nothing is as it seems. A client talks about creating a bridge between herself and her partner. You conjure up an image of a romantic stone bridge across a babbling brook. Then it turns out to be a tall and highly engineered structure to get across a very wide gulf. A person's inner world is a land where anything can happen, and neither you nor they have any way of knowing what that will be. It's a land that may defy what you consider logical, but one that most definitely has a logic: a beautiful internal logic that makes complete sense in itself.

As you embark on learning this clean approach to coaching, there may well be times when you feel stuck and don't know what to do. You'll imagine that there's no solution to this particular problem, or you'll worry that the questions seem intrusive (they do from the outside, but from the inside they feel wonderfully affirming). And there may be times when you'll be tempted to say to a client, 'This isn't clean, but I am wondering if you'd be interested to know …' as you offer them your bright idea.

When I was new to this work, I certainly bailed out on more than one occasion and gave my client the 'benefit' of *my* wisdom rather than trusting in theirs. And I noticed that whenever I did this, I regretted it. I learned that if I'd only hung in there and asked a couple more clean questions things would have sorted themselves out. Over time I've learned to live with my discomfort and now I have a mass of experience that lets me know that keeping going is definitely the best policy. I have become 'comfortable with not knowing.'

Clean Language is simple. Human minds are not. Using the methodology I've explained in this book, your clients will be able to get great results relatively quickly. With practice, your ability to detect subtle nuances of language and to direct your clients' attention to the most salient aspects of their experience will improve. Your work will become more efficient and more effective. You may even become an expert in Clean Language.

But you will never be an expert in another person's metaphor landscape. They, and they alone, will remain the expert and you will always be a step behind, creating a hazy mental model of what is going on for them and doing the best you can to ask a question that will make sense to them. You will never know what is 'really' going on and you will never be in control. But you will experience the freedom of not having to think up clever questions or answers, the joy of helping people to discover their own truths and the rigour of a methodology that can both affirm and challenge people as they get to the heart of the matter.

Welcome to the world of Clean Language.

Marian Way

January 2013

Before You Begin ...

Before you begin, think about yourself and how you like to learn. I want you to get what you want from this book, and in an ideal world I would be able to present the information in the format and order that would work best for you. And I would be beside you, so you could ask me questions of anything that's not a hundred percent clear. Since that's not possible, I'm going to start by asking you to consider your answer to this question:
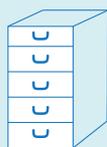
What would you like to have happen as a result of reading this book?

What's your purpose for reading this book? Perhaps you already have a good knowledge of Clean Language and are curious to know if there are some additional insights that can deepen your understanding. Or maybe you know nothing as yet and want to learn Clean Language 'from scratch'. Or perhaps this is the textbook for a course you're attending and you'll want to read specific sections to reinforce your learning. Thinking about what you would like to have happen as a result of reading this book will help you to get the most from it.

When you're learning at your best, that's like what?

It's also a good idea to think about your learning style and how you can make this learning experience the best it can be. This question is designed to get you thinking about a *metaphor* for when you're learning at your best, but of course it's up to you how you respond.

When **Jane** is learning at her best, it's like she has a pyramid in her head with slots in it. Little cubes appear in the air when she's reading, or in a class, or watching a video, and they slot into the pyramid. This works best when Jane is calm, quiet and focused. Jane needs to find a quiet spot and to read the book in small chunks.

John learns best when he can ask questions. He then stores information in his head, as though in a filing cabinet, so he can search for it later. John will join the Clean Approaches for Coaches group on Facebook and will write the answers to his questions on Post-it™ notes, which he'll place in the relevant pages in the book.

For **Angela**, learning at her best is like being immersed in the sea, open to whatever comes in. Learning fills her pores and she becomes buoyant and 'full of it'. Back on dry land she wants to share what she's learned with others. Angela will read the book from cover to cover and plans to teach other people some of what she learns.

Sam learns at her best when she practises or writes about what she's learning and this needs to happen several times before she really knows it. She'll find herself a practice buddy and blog about what she learns.

Think about what **you** would like to have happen and how **you** learn at your best. What difference will this make to the way you read this book?

Introduction
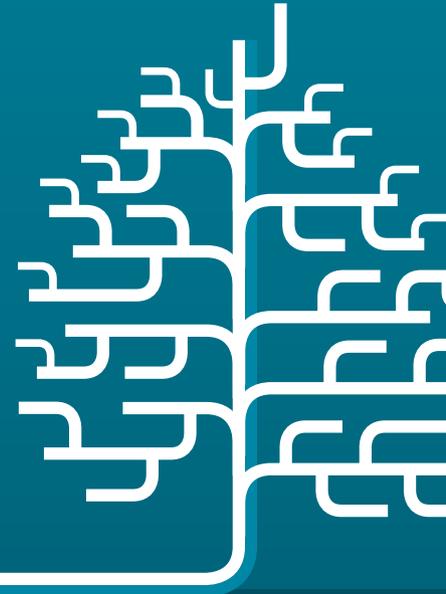
We create an environment in which the client can discover where it is that he needs to go ... information evolves internally out of the client's experience. It is not introduced into the client's experience by the therapist.

Grove and Panzer, 1989

What is Clean Language?

David Grove wanted to keep his assumptions out of his interactions with clients as far as it was possible so that he could work directly with their inner world. He wanted clients to do more than give a description; he wanted them to have an experience. To do this, he devised Clean Language.

At one level, Clean Language is simply a set of neutral questions used with clients' own words to direct their attention to some aspect of their own experience. There are just two simple rules when asking Clean Language questions:

- *Use only the other person's words.*

- *Only ask questions that are clean.*

But this description belies the fact that asking even one of these questions in the right context can result in an interesting new insight or the recognition of some new possibility. And when that new possibility itself is questioned using Clean Language, something quite profound can happen. Within a few questions, many people find themselves thinking new and extraordinary thoughts they have never considered before. Clean questions invite them to consider their experience in a different way and people are often surprised by their own capacity to generate new, powerful and useful ideas that can make a big difference to their lives.

David observed that therapists would often distort their clients' language and felt that this 'robbed' them of their true experience. He experimented with questions that would minimise that risk, and by paying exquisite attention to their words and gestures he was able to honour their very personal experience.

This is not to say that Clean Language does not influence the client – there'd be little point in using it if it didn't have an effect. While a clean coach may not be voicing their own opinions, they will be deciding which words or gestures to focus on. And they will be collaborating with the client to determine the direction of the questioning, explicitly at the start and more implicitly as a session progresses.

Clean Language is Like What?

Here are some descriptions of Clean Language from experienced clean coaches during a workshop:

Clean Language is like a special drill – because it gets to the core.
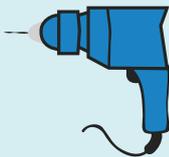
Clean Language is like navigating with precious and adventurous passengers with all your human resources with no electronic devices to predict what's going to happen.

Clean Language is like the British TV show, Mr Benn – an adventure in a magical landscape then a shopkeeper appears and Mr Benn returns to normal life with something to remember it by.

Clean Language is like exploring for gold with only one clue about where to begin.

Clean Language is like a corkscrew – because you can enjoy the wine afterwards.

Clean Language is like holistic health practices such as homoeopathy, reflexology and herbalism.

Clean Language is like advocacy – because the coach is working on behalf of parts of the information that haven't been getting attention.

Clean Language is like giving someone their own personal rail card for them to take whatever journey they choose.

Rail Card

What Makes Clean Language Special?

One of the best ways to find out about Clean Language is to experience it for yourself, as a client, or as a participant at a Clean Language event. On one such occasion when working with a fellow participant, I decided to consider a problem I'd had for a while: lack of sleep.

Most nights, I was having trouble getting to sleep, or if I woke up in the middle of the night I'd be unable to get back to sleep. It was as though I had a track in my head – in the shape of a figure of eight. Thoughts would race around the track in a continuous loop, round and round.

My coach began:

And when thoughts go round and round on a track, what would you like to have happen?

I'd like some peace.

What kind of peace?

I envisioned peace as a completely blank, white open space and after a few more questions to my surprise it turned into a piece of blank white paper.

And what would that piece of paper like to have happen?

I discovered it would like to slice the figure of eight in half so that my thoughts would no longer be able to go round and round.

My coach asked me whether this could happen (it could) and a few minutes later the session was over and I had a new resource to try out that night.

When I climbed into bed my thoughts started to race around the track as usual. So I simply imagined a piece of crisp white paper slicing down through the track. And it worked. The thoughts had to stop since they now had nowhere to go. The two halves of the track were separate – and I went to sleep.

From a workshop activity that lasted 20 or 30 minutes, I gained a life-long resource. Even now, if my thoughts start racing round when I am trying to get to sleep, I take out my metaphorical piece of crisp white paper, cut the track in half and am asleep in seconds.

The experience I had in that workshop, and the ongoing effects of this and similar experiences, hint at the reasons why I was attracted to this methodology and what makes Clean Language so special:

• I created my own unique solution to my own unique problem.

• I was able to access this solution because my coach used Clean Language to put my attention on the metaphors I was using to describe my experience and helped me to create a mental model of what was happening.

• The solution was surprising – it emerged from the information elicited during the session and neither I nor my coach could have known in advance what would happen.

• The solution and the way it emerged seemed quite ingenious, yet incredibly simple and easy to put into action. It was surely quicker to access this neat solution from my unconscious mind than anything my conscious mind could have come up with.

• It worked.

It's impossible to tell whether something like this will happen in any particular session, yet it is the kind of thing that I and hundreds of other coaches who use this methodology are able to help our clients to achieve quite routinely. And you will be able to do so too, once you are able to put aside your own ideas, advice and suggestions and trust that your client really does have all the resources they need to solve their own problems and achieve their own desired outcomes.

Where Did Clean Language Come From?

Obviously, the quickest and clearest answer to this question is that it came from David Grove. But where did he get his ideas?

David was part-Maori, a culture with a strong oral tradition that valued, and remembered, stories and the words that were used to tell them. He was also exposed to homeopathy and the idea of keeping interventions to a minimum:

> *The nature of Clean Language is homeopathic: we are looking to language the minimal that excites the curious.*
> *David Grove, 1998*

David studied science and business administration. Then in 1978 he became interested in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP).

> *At first I wasn't interested in the therapy side, I really wanted it for business. One time I went along for an NLP business workshop and they said 'Oh I'm sorry, not enough people have showed up, you'll have to join the other (therapy) group.' So that's how I first became interested in phobias and trauma.*
> *David Grove, interviewed by Lawley and Tompkins, 1996*

David was also attracted to the idea within NLP that:

> *... you could take an experience, find its structure and if you changed its structure it changed the experience.*
> *David Grove, interviewed by Lawley and Tompkins, 1996*

During this time, David was influenced by well-known therapists Carl Rogers, Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson and the anthropologist Gregory Bateson.

By the early 1980s he had distanced himself from NLP and had trained as a clinical psychologist. Using Eriksonian hypnosis and Strategic Family Therapy, he was working with trauma victims. He found that when people retold their story, they would often become re-traumatised and he began to experiment with questioning the metaphors his clients were using, quite naturally, to describe their experiences. Metaphors generally operate at an unconscious level and David found that by paying attention to them, people were able to gain access to a deeper and embodied level of experience: the structure of their thinking; the patterns that run their lives; their truth. By the mid 1980s, David had accumulated enough knowledge and experience to write his book, *Resolving Traumatic Memories* (1989), with Basil Panzer, in which he talks extensively about Clean Language.

In a keynote speech during the 2012 Clean Conference, Cei Davies Linn mentioned that David was also influenced by: family therapists Carl Whittaker and Salvador Minuchin; biologists and philosophers Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela; the linguist Noam Chomsky; the psychiatrist R. D. Laing; the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein; and the playwright Willy Russell.

Dafanie Goldsmith (2008), in an obituary to David, wrote:

> *His avant-garde approach took in learning from all aspects of life: systems theory, physics, literature, ancient Greece, aviation and the web. He was able to synthesise these ideas into his work and emerge with spectacular new processes.*

David loved the story of Peter Pan as a child. And when I read the first chapter, I was struck by the similarity between the 'Neverland' and the idea of a 'metaphor landscape':

I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a person's mind. Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and these are probably roads in the island, for the Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a hut fast going to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked nose. It would be an easy map if that were all, but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needle-work, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, three-pence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on, and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still.

Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal. John's, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. John had no friends, Michael had friends at night, Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents, but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other's nose, and so forth.

James M. Barrie, 1911

Clean Language as a Coaching Tool

Like many other psychotherapeutic tools, Clean Language found its way into coaching.

Penny Tompkins and James Lawley paved the way for coaches to use this powerful technique when they modelled what David was doing and made Clean Language applicable to fields other than therapy. Later, they devised the Problem, Remedy, Outcome (P.R.O.) model (2006) to help coaches encourage their clients to focus on their desired outcomes. This is an important aspect of coaching and one that commonly distinguishes it from therapy.

Another person who has encouraged the use of Clean Language in coaching is Caitlin Walker. She's spent many years developing clean coaching activities for individuals and groups. She has introduced Clean Language to Liverpool John Moores University, where it forms the backbone of their PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring, and together with Nancy Doyle, has devised an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Coaching and Mentoring programme based on clean approaches.

The Association for Coaching has also embraced clean coaching methods. Two members of their UK Council – Angela Dunbar and Carol Wilson – are respected members of the clean community who worked closely with David before he died to develop further clean approaches for coaches.

Whatever your coaching niche, the use of Clean Language will enhance your practice and bring massive benefits to your clients. Because it is neutral, you can use Clean Language in all sorts of contexts, and with all kinds of client outcomes.

Ned Skelton used Clean Language to coach the Great Britain Premier Open Dragon Boat Team. He helped the team to develop metaphors for: the start of the race; the whole of the race; finding the motivation to go training; and how to get into a flow state.

> *This gave us the language to talk to individuals about different aspects of training and competing that was not available to us before.*
> Ned Skelton, 2005

Clean Language is particularly useful for accessing difficult-to-describe internal states such as fear and anxiety, decision-making and creativity.

Business coach Mike Duckett (2006) used Clean Language to work with chef and restaurateur Heston Blumenthal O.B.E. to develop his metaphor of being like 'a kid in a sweet shop'. His sweet shop included an old-fashioned doorbell that rings as you enter, an infinite stock of sweets in jars, the aroma of the sweets, and the feelings of curiosity, excitement and anticipation that arise when he moves around the shop lifting lids off jars and feeling the weight of coins in his pocket.

As a result of this creative process, Blumenthal decided to make his kitchen at the famous Fat Duck restaurant and the overall dining experience more like the sweet shop, in order to promote feelings of excitement and curiosity in each diner.

I found our work to explore my metaphoric sweet shop really helpful on a number of levels. At first it helped me regain my creativity and now that creativity has itself fed back into using metaphor to enhance our customers' dining experience.

Heston Blumenthal, 2006

I use Clean Language to facilitate my clients' self-modelling in a generative way because they gain so much from the process to lift their performance. Also it offers me a means of staying true to the coaching principle that my clients are the experts and I should add as little as possible to their inner world.

Mike Duckett, 2006

This coaching principle is often cited by coaches when I've asked what they see as the main benefit of clean coaching:

I love the discipline that ensures I keep myself out of the session and that it is really about the client's agenda, not mine.

Sheryl Andrews, Coach

I had been taught that people have all the resources they need, and I believed that, but it wasn't until I learned Clean Language that I found a way to help people get their hands on them.

Bev Martin, Coach and NLP Trainer

Of course the benefit is not actually in the discipline or the belief, but in what results when you put these into practice. Although the benefits vary from client to client, what can be said in general is that the ideas that arise in a clean coaching session are always an excellent 'fit' for the client and so they are more likely to be motivated to take action after the session or to be happy to see the world in a different way.

More often than not a significant change will take place during a session as unconscious patterns are brought to conscious attention. Clean questions are framed in the present tense and after a while the client's metaphors become 'live'. Clients start to 'do' the patterns they're talking about right there in the room and when a change occurs, it also happens right there in the room. This is the kind of change that Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith (2006) describe as 'transformational'.

A few years ago I met a coach who was very curious about Clean Language and how clients might benefit. He taught his clients models they could use on an ongoing basis and was concerned that although a client might experience a change during a clean coaching session, they would not have any tools or models to take away for future use. I described the symbolic piece of paper that helps me sleep (page 20) and how looking at a tree reminds me of my purpose in life (page 12). These are my own mental models, and although they weren't the kinds of models he had in mind, he could recognise their value, both at the time of the coaching, and as ongoing resources.

Long Lasting Change

While change may happen in the room, it's not really possible to know its effects until the client returns to their everyday life. So I asked a few people about the longer term effects of their clean coaching:

Allison's metaphor for building her business began as a trickle, evolved into a stream and then a flowing river. This metaphor has helped Allison keep in mind that building a business is a process that gradually grows and gathers momentum. She says:

I loved the trickle/stream/river metaphor. It gave me a nice warm feeling because the water was warm, the sun shone on it and it gently dealt with little stones and boulders (i.e. obstacles that got in the way) by gently rolling over them. That session was a year ago and recalling that metaphor helps me keep going to this day, knowing that I am gradually gathering momentum and having a lovely time whilst doing that.

Penny developed a resource metaphor for 'inner strength' – a rectangular tube inside her body, with blue liquid in the bottom third of it. She says:

Over the years I was aware of the rectangular tube, but the real impact was several years later when I was in a highly charged, and potentially dangerous situation. I was starting to become unresourceful when, out of nowhere, I felt the rectangle solid inside of me, and experienced the blue liquid filling the lower third of the tube as 'ballast'. This steadied me, my breathing slowed, and I felt my posture change as I drew myself up to my full height, with feet planted firmly on the ground. I was wary, but calm and as this happened, the situation around me began to change, and I walked away.

All I have to do is think of my rectangular tube, and that self-assurance is available to me – to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the context.

Aylin was feeling stuck at work and in general. During a clean coaching session she developed a metaphor of the ocean, waves and anchoring to the moment:

I didn't know what the metaphor really meant until I was sitting by the ocean after a particularly difficult day at work, appreciating the waves, the dolphins and the lady who walked by with an anchor tattoo on the back of each calf. I noticed that one is never really stuck when one pays attention to the outside world, and thinking about being in the moment led me take a mindfulness class. Even when things are not the way I'd like them to be and the future is unclear, I don't recall feeling stuck ever since that session; instead I meditate, walk, run or go sit by the ocean and get excited about life.

As well as the wealth of anecdotal evidence to show that Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling get good results, Caitlin Walker and Fe Robinson have been demonstrating quantifiable results:

Caitlin Walker (2010) worked with Liverpool John Moores University to develop a coaching programme based on Clean Language and clean principles. The staff wanted to create a 'learning to learn' culture, with students using one another as peer coaches in order to get the most out of their university experience.

The process involved working with staff and students to discover different themes (e.g. learning at your best, time, making good decisions, motivation and inspiration) that would make a difference to student motivation. These were then incorporated into workbooks with clean questions and other simple models and the programme was implemented.

In the 5 years prior to this programme, 49% students had achieved one of the top degrees (a 2:1 or above). In the first cohort who completed this programme, 73% achieved this mark. This improved figure has now remained stable for 3 years, indicating a sustainable culture change.

Fe Robinson (2012) investigated whether Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling could have an effect on employee well-being amongst people facing ambiguity and rapid change at work. She conducted well-being measurements using the Ryff scales, with sub-scales for self acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.

Participants were then divided into three groups:

• Control group – no intervention

• One-hour one-to-one Symbolic Modelling session on 'organisational change at its best'

• 90-minute workshop where participants learned and practised Clean Language questions, with a similar focus on organisational change at its best.

A week later, when the tests were run again, there was a significant increase in the 'autonomy' scores for those who had received individual coaching sessions.

Final tests were run 12 weeks later. At this point the average scores for 'environmental mastery', 'personal growth' and overall well-being were significantly higher for the groups who'd received one of the interventions, while overall well-being fell for the control group. This suggests that Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling interventions may have counteracted the negative effect of imposed change.

What is Symbolic Modelling?

When NLP trainers Penny Tompkins and James Lawley came across David Grove's work, they wanted to know how he got such amazing results. They spent several years watching David at work, talking with him, being his clients and analysing his transcripts.

Their aim was to produce a model that could be taught to others so they could achieve the same kind of results as David and which could be applied outside of therapy. They combined his thinking with their own ideas from the fields of cognitive linguistics, systems thinking and NLP. They called it Symbolic Modelling, which they define as:

> *A process, which uses Clean Language to facilitate people's discovery of how their metaphors express their way of being in the world.*
>
> *Lawley and Tompkins, 2000*

It has four main elements:

- **Clean Language:** the means
  (what you are doing)

- **Modelling:** the methodology
  (the process you are using)

- **Metaphor:** the medium
  (what you are doing the modelling with)

- **Outcome Orientation:** the motivation
  (the purpose for the modelling)

Penny and James used their NLP modelling skills to figure out how David was achieving such good results. In this context, modelling means finding out how someone does something and then producing something – a book, a diagram, a 3D model – which explains to others how it works, and which omits anything non-essential.
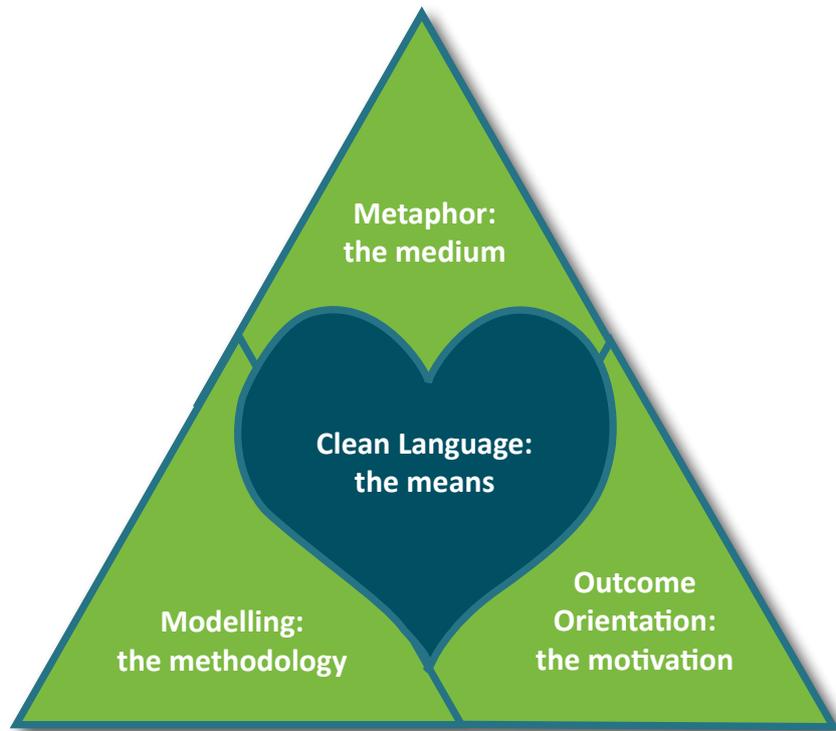
They were aiming to answer questions about David's work, such as:

1. What is he doing?

2. What response is the client having to what he is doing?

3. What patterns do we notice between 1 and 2?

4. How accurately could we predict his next question?

Penny and James produced a model called Symbolic Modelling, which incorporates Clean Language. When you learn this process you are learning the art of modelling itself:

> *Modelling has come full circle. Starting from modelling therapists, it is now used by therapists to model clients' patterns of behaviour, thinking strategies and metaphors.*
>
> *Lawley and Tompkins, 1997*

The Elements of Symbolic Modelling

Metaphor:
the medium

Clean Language:
the means

Modelling:
the methodology

Outcome
Orientation:
the motivation

How Does Symbolic Modelling Work?

Symbolic Modelling is 'bottom-up' modelling. Rather than starting with a top down model of human patterns (e.g. the 16 different MBTI types, or the Parent, Adult, Child model from Transactional Analysis) and seeing how the client fits into it, we start with a 'blank canvas' and help the client to build up a picture of their own unique and idiosyncratic patterns. Patterns emerge from the information, rather than the information having to fit into a pre-ordained pattern. It works something like this:

People have all the wisdom they need. → **That wisdom can be accessed via metaphor.** → **Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling help to create conditions for change.** →

This is the basic premise on which this methodology is based: people are naturally creative, resourceful and have their own inner wisdom. But they do not always know how to access that wisdom ...	A client's wisdom is held in their mind-body system, often at an unconscious level, and the metaphors (verbal and nonverbal) they use quite naturally, provide a 'way in' to that information. David Grove (1989) spoke of metaphor as being our 'primary processing language'.	Using Clean Language and Symbolic Modelling to help someone model their experience – without any desire (on the part of the coach) to change that experience – is, paradoxically, an effective way of encouraging the very conditions for change to occur.

New insights and ideas emerge naturally.

Change is a natural by-product of the process.

The impact cannot be known until afterwards.

As the client gains more information about their own ways of thinking and feeling, new insights, ideas and creativity will emerge quite naturally. This can be thought of as emergent knowledge.

Emergence is what happens when parts of a system interact in such a way that 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'. Sand dunes, rainbows, ant colonies and babies are good examples of emergence.

Change is a natural by-product of the Symbolic Modelling process, although it's impossible to know in advance when, or whether, a change will happen. Trying to 'force' a change to happen will distract the client and make it less, rather than more, likely.

Although the process is designed to encourage change to happen there and then, in the session, it's not possible to know the effects of the coaching until the client is back in the real world. And if a change doesn't happen or doesn't 'stick' that just means there is more of the client's system that needs to be modelled.

You can purchase a copy of this book at www.cleanapproachesforcoaches.com