

Clean Language Without Words

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"We know more than we can tell." M Polanyi

Clean Language is a method developed by David Grove to dialogue with a client's symbolic representations and metaphoric expressions. One of the most fascinating aspects of David's therapeutic wizardry is his use of Clean Language to communicate directly with client's non-verbal expressions. Our model of what David does, called Symbolic Modelling, attempts to capture the essence of his approach. This article briefly describes how you can use Clean Language to enhance your non-verbal communication with clients.

While we communicate through what we say and how we say it, we also communicate through what we do with our bodies and non-verbal sounds (such as sighs, coughs, clicks). Non-verbal communication is a natural, universal and mostly out-of-awareness process in which we 'cannot not' engage. As Edward Hall realised:

It isn't just that people 'talk' to each other without the use of words, but that there is an entire universe of behaviour that is unexplored, unexamined, and very much taken for granted. It functions outside conscious awareness and in juxtaposition to words. (ref 1)

David Grove goes further:

In every gesture, and particularly in obsessional gestures and tics and those funny idiosyncratic movements, is encoded the entire history of that behaviour. It contains your whole psychological history in exactly the same way that every cell in your body contains your whole biological history. (ref 2)

Just as every word or phrase used by a client has a purpose, contains meaning and has an array of associations, so all non-verbal behaviours are connected to a vast well-spring of knowledge. When Symbolic Modelling we consider repetitive non-verbal communication a pointer to, or a source of, a client's recurring (mostly unconscious) patterns.

What types of information do we encode non-verbally? As well as the more obvious kinesthetic experiences (touch, feelings and emotions) and proprioceptive processes (bodily position, movement and balance), we also use the non-verbal to encode: perceptual space; pre-verbal, pre-conceptual and idiosyncratic knowledge; traumatic incidences and amnesic memories; meta-comments (responses to our words and actions); family lore, genealogical traits and cultural codes; spiritual connections and life purpose — to name but a few examples. Perhaps Isadora Duncan knew more than she could tell when she said *"If I could say it, I wouldn't need to dance it!"*

Non-Verbal Aspects of Clean Language

In *Rapport* (Issue 35) we explored aspects of [Clean Language](#) which relate to verbal communication. This article describes how you can use your voice and body to honour and

utilise the way clients communicate non-verbally through their (1) Perceptual space; (2) Body as metaphor; and (3) Non-verbal sounds.

1. Perceptual Space

In other articles (Rapport, Issues 36, 38,39) we have illustrated how metaphors of space are pervasive in language and are a universal and fundamental component of experience (ref. 3). We have a "mind-space" which acts as a "theatre" where we 'see,' 'hear,' 'feel' and 'act out' our perceptions. The configuration of this mind-space is revealed by our use of spatial metaphors (ref. 4). In addition, how our body has learned to orientate in space is essential to how we make sense of the world and understand our place in it. Said another way, *cognition is an embodied experience* (ref. 5). When our mindbody-space contains symbolic content we call it a **Metaphoric Landscape**. You can think of the client having a perceptual space around and within themselves. Their body will indicate where symbols are, in what direction they are moving, and how these symbols interact. It is the *relationship* between the client and their Metaphoric Landscape that prompts their body to dance within its perceptual theatre.

Given the chance, clients unconsciously orientate themselves to their physical surroundings in such a way that windows, doors, mirrors, shadows, etc. correspond to symbols in their Metaphoric Landscape. By asking clients to choose where they want to sit in a room and where they want you to sit, they will align their perceptual and physical space and place themselves where they feel most comfortable and safe. As David Grove says "*space will become your co-therapist if you pay it due regard.*"

Aligning to Client's Perceptual Space

Since you want to keep the client mindful of their Metaphoric Landscape, it is vital that your marking of space aligns with *their* perceptual space and not yours. Therefore, it is important to notice how clients consistently use their body to indicate the location of a symbol so you can refer to it *as if* it existed in that place. When the client follows your hand gesture, glance or head point they should be led to the precise location of their symbol. This is making your movements congruent with *their* perceptual space. For example:

Client: *It's scary.*

Therapist: And it's scary. And when it's scary, where is it scary?

C: *[points down to his right.]*

T: And when scary *[point down to client's right]*, whereabouts *[point down to client's right]*?

C: *Down there [points with right foot].*

T: And down there *[looks where right foot pointed]*. And when down there, whereabouts down there?

C: *About 6 inches away.*

T: And about 6 inches away. And when scary is about 6 inches away, that's scary like what?

C: *Like standing at the edge of a sheer drop.*

To keep your language 'clean' it is preferable to reference a client's behaviour non-verbally

until they have converted it into words. This encourages symbols to lay claim to their own patch of "perceptual real estate," as David sometimes refers to it, and in this way the client's space becomes "psychoactive".

Lines of Sight

David Grove's clinical research suggests that the direction, angle and focus of our eyes are often correlated with the perceptual viewpoint experienced in a memory or symbolic representation.

By noticing where clients look and the focal point of their gaze you can gather information about the location of symbols inhabiting their Metaphoric Landscape. How does this work? Imagine a child who, having just been beaten, looks up in vain to search a father's face for a sign of love. This incident may remain "imprinted" as part of a "state-dependent memory." (ref. 7) From then on similar feelings of being unloved may invoke the same posture and upward gaze. Alternatively, looking up at the same angle and focal length may access similar feelings or the memory. Over time the 'line of sight' becomes evident as an habitual part of the client's symptomatic behaviour. (ref. 8)

Lines of sight are most easily observed when the client fixes their eyes in one particular direction (such as staring out of a window), or at one particular object (eg. a mirror, book, door handle), or is transfixed by a pattern or shape (eg. a spot on the carpet, wallpaper motif, shadow) or gazes de-focused into space. Even a momentary glance into a corner or over the shoulder is unlikely to be a random or meaningless act, but rather a response to the configuration of their symbolic world.

As well as lines of sight indicating the location of a symbol, a client may orientate their body and view to *avoid* looking at a particular space. For example, a client entered our consulting room and sat at the right-most end of a sofa. He crossed his legs and angled them to his right. His shoulders inclined right as well. For most of the session, he had his left hand beside his left eye, like a horse's blinker. When his hand momentarily dropped away and he glanced to his left he was asked "**And where are you going when you go there?**" [looking along the client's line of sight]" He looked to his left for a few seconds and a massive sob emerged from deep within. When he had recovered his breath he said "Oh God, there's something there (glance to left) and I don't know what it is. I haven't seen there in a very long time. If I look there I will be trapped and it will be compulsive viewing." Later the client realised that wherever possible, in meetings, walking down the street and at home, he would arrange to have people he was with on his right.

Given the choice, where a client sits will likely be determined by their dominant lines of sight. Investigating these can reveal information that would otherwise be unavailable to the conscious mind.

Physicalising Metaphoric Space

Some clients' relationship with their Metaphoric Landscape is such that they prefer to explore it by moving around, rather than by sitting and describing it. They may need to walk around the room, occupy the location of symbols, or enact elements from a scene. By 'physicalising the space' the client can access information, gain further insights and derive a better understanding of the structure of their perceptual space.

In addition to utilising the space of the consulting room, David Grove also encourages clients to find physical surroundings that have symbolic significance for them. As a consequence he has conducted sessions on hill tops, on lakes and at every time of the day or night in order to

synchronise the client's symbolic and physical terrains. Clean Language is used at all times, even in the most obscure of environments.

2. Body as Metaphor

As well as delineating and interacting with their perceptual space, client's bodies communicate all sorts of other symbolic messages. Sometimes information may *only* be available to them when they adopt a particular position, or move part of their body in a specific way. Alternatively, it may be that certain words can only be expressed hand-in-hand with certain actions. Any part of a client's body, or their whole body, can be a living non-verbal metaphor:

- Facial expressions
(grimacing, pouting, grinning, frowning, blushing, mouthing, yawning, etc.)
- Body expressions and idiosyncratic movements
(ticks, twitches, shudders, shrugs, tremors, unusual breathing, etc.)
- Interactions with own body
(holding, rubbing, nail biting, thumb sucking, brow wiping, hair curling, etc.)
- Interactions with physical objects
(rearranging clothing, pillow hugging, pen chewing, twiddling with jewellery, etc.)

We recommend you see clients' behaviour as an expression of symbolic patterning, rather than as 'body language' to be read (ref. 9). By making the body expression the focus of a Clean Language question (usually resulting in a metaphorically equivalent verbal description) this patterning can be explored.

For example, at his first session a client delivered an unbroken hour-long description of his predicament. He ended with "So that's how it is" and looked expectantly at us. Penny replied "**And so that's how it is. And when that's how it is, that's how it is like what?**" He looked away, his head turned to the left, chin pointed up high. While he was considering the question his mouth started to open and close in a rhythmical fashion without sound. He was still deep in thought when James asked, "**And** [matched angle of head and mouth movement]. **And when** [repeated non-verbal] **that's** [repeated non-verbal] **like what?**" The client returned to the mouthing movement a few times and said, "**I feel like a goldfish coming up for air in a de-oxygenated pond.**" He had captured his predicament in a single paradoxical metaphor. And his body had acted it out before he knew what to say. Now he could work with the metaphor rather than swimming round and round, suffocating in the detail of his description.

Sometimes clients cannot describe their experience in words because it was encoded pre-verbally, or related to an unspeakable traumatic event or connected with a mystical experience. In such cases, Clean Language is an effective means for direct communication with non-verbal behaviours without the client ever needing to express themselves in words.

3. Non-verbal Sounds

We make a distinction between the vocal qualities used to convey words and the expression of other sounds. Whenever a word is spoken, both the word and the way it is pronounced carry information. The word is the point of reference, because the vocal qualities used to produce the word cannot easily be addressed separately. In contrast, non-verbal sounds (such as sighs, in-breaths, throat clears, coughs, blows, clicks, groans, grunts, gurgles, laughs and non-verbal expressions or exclamations such as oh-oh, ah, uhm-m-m, etc.) act as both the point of reference and the carrier of information.

David Grove has recognised that these sounds are as much a source of symbolic information as words or pictures. Furthermore, non-verbal sounds usually encode knowledge which is out of the client's awareness. The sound can be regarded either as a symbol itself, or as an 'entry point' to unexplored areas of the client's Metaphoric Landscape.

Matching sounds

In NLP matching a client's words and pronunciation is a way of acknowledging their experience, encouraging them to remain focussed on their perceptions and gathering information about the structure of their experience. The same applies when matching non-verbal sounds. However, if you wish to enquire about a particular sound, make that sound a 'noun-phrase' within a clean question. Thus a client who precedes a statement with a big sigh might be asked:

C: [big sigh] I give up.

T: And [replicate big sigh] you give up. And when [big sigh] what kind of [big sigh] is that [big sigh]?

C: [sigh] I don't know.

T: And [sigh] you don't know. And when you don't know [big sigh], is there anything else about [big sigh]?

C: I can't find the words.

T: And you can't find the words. And when you can't find the words about [big sigh] is there anything else about words you can't find?

C: They're locked away.

You may have noticed that the therapist acknowledged both the non-verbal and the verbal responses and in so doing validated them as equally appropriate and useful. Through developing what she knew about the metaphor "locked away" the client found a way to unlock the words so that she did not have to "give up" anymore.

Making Use of Time

Another way to utilise a non-verbal sound is to regard it as a temporal marker. You can ask questions which 'move time forward' or 'move time back' by using a non-verbal sound as the point of reference. An example of moving time forward is "And [replicate sound]. And when [sound], then what happens?". And an example of moving time back is shown below. The client periodically took in a breath through her teeth. This made a suction-like sound which in and of itself was not particularly noticeable, however, over a period of time the sound directed our attention to ask:

T: And [replicate sound]. And when [sound], where could [sound] come from?

C: [Long pause] My God, that's the sound my grandfather used to make when he was angry and his teeth became loose.

T: And that's the sound your grandfather used to make when he was angry and his teeth became loose. And is there anything else about that sound?

C: It was terrifying. I used to stand behind my mother.

Although this habit of making a sucking sound had been pointed out by others, she had never

made the connection to her grandfather or realised its significance. Clean Language then enabled her to explore and transform her 'hiding from confrontation' pattern that was symbolised in a grandfather's long-forgotten false teeth.

Summary

Symbolically speaking, everything a client says or does is information about the structure of their experience and therefore who they are. Modelling a client's non-verbal behaviour with Clean Language acknowledges their way of being, provides *them* with information about how they make sense of their perceptual world, and enables *them* to establish a Metaphoric Landscape within which appropriate change can take place. Once this has happened, their Metaphoric Landscape will go on working for them long after they walk out of your consulting room.

Clean Language is remarkable in that it can work just as effectively without words as it can with words. It provides a method for using non-verbal expressions directly, or indirectly by eliciting a metaphor for the non-verbal behaviour. Either way, Clean Language is invaluable for entering the "universe of behaviour that is unexplored and unexamined" (ref. 1)

CLEAN LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

for Utilising Non-verbal Expression

Refer to non-verbal symbols by:

- Selectively matching non-verbal sounds and body expressions as long as doing so supports the client to remain in their process and attending to their perceptions.
- Using your physiology to denote location in perceptual space in ways that are congruent with the configuration of the client's Metaphoric Landscape.
- Asking clean questions of particular non-verbal sounds and body expressions by using them as noun-phrases in the standard syntax of Clean Language:
"And [repeat client's expression]. **And when/as** [repeat client's expression], (ask clean question)"

Use the following Clean Language questions to:

Ask for a metaphor

- And ... that's 'X' like what?

Ask for attributes/qualities

- And ... is there anything else about 'X'?
- And ... what kind of 'X' is that 'X'?

Ask for location

- And ... where is 'X'?
- And ... whereabouts?

Move time forward

- And ... then what happens?
- And ... what happens next?

Move time back

- And ... what happens just before 'X'?
- And ... where could 'X' come from?

Use the specialist clean question to 'entrer' via a Line of Sight

- And where are you going when you go there [look or gesture along line of sight]

References

1. Edward Hall, *The Silent Language*, page vii.
2. *And, what kind of a man is David Grove?*, *Rapport*, Issue 33, Autumn 1996, page 21.
3. *Meta, Milton and Metaphor: Models of Subjective Experience*, *Rapport* 36, Summer 1997
Symbolic Modelling, *Rapport* 38, Winter 1997.
The Emergence of Background Knowledge, *Rapport* 39, Spring 1998
 Also see George Lakoff & Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*
 and Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*.
4. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness* and Daniel Dennett *Consciousness Explained*.
5. See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*; and Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson & Eleanor Rosch *The Embodied Mind*.
6. Sometimes this will look like classic NLP 'mirroring' but not always.
7. See Ernest Rossi, *Psychobiology of MindBody Healing* and Robert Dilts, Tim Hallbom & Suzi Smith *Beliefs*.
8. There is a difference between lines of sight as identified by David Grove, and NLP eye-accessing cues first noted by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. Bandler and Grinder suggest that eye movements are systematically indexed with the process of creating internal images, voices, sounds, emotional responses and body sensations (see *frogs into Princes*). In a later development, Richard Bandler's DHE "globe" surrounding a person has similarities with David Grove's mapping of lines of sight. The difference lies in how the information is perceived. For Bandler, "Experience is represented, coded and stored at the Sub-modality level." (DHE manual, London 1993) His globe acts as a 3-D container for defining the *content-free* sub-modality of location of any perception. Grove on the other hand is interested in the *symbolic nature of the content* along lines of sight. These models do not necessarily conflict, rather they are noticing different aspects of subjective experience.
9. This has some similarity with Robert Dilts' and Judith DeLozier's work with Somatic Syntax.

URL: <http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/8/1/Clean-Language-Without-Words/Page1.html>



Penny and James have both been UKCP registered psychotherapists since 1993, supervisors, coaches in business, and certified NLP trainers. They co-authored *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Modelling* and a training DVD, *A Strange and Strong Sensation*. They are the founders of *The Developing Company* and creators of Symbolic Modelling, using the Clean Language of David

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