








101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Positive Psychology Chapter: Technique 63 (pages 210-212)

Edited by Michelle Lucas and Published by Routledge 2020.

Using Metaphor to Explore 'at my best'

Written by Angela Dunbar

Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					
Individual Supervision	Group Supervision	Peer Supervision	Independent Reflection	All levels	

When is this used?

To focus on strengths and to build supervisee's understanding of what they do well and how that happens. Especially useful for building confidence and helping to form the supervision relationship.

What is the technique?

Metaphors are more than just figures of speech, we construct our thoughts using metaphors and exploring these metaphors taps into a powerful, raw experience. By using Clean Language questions, we both consolidate and deepen the supervisee's understanding of themselves at their best. This anchors the experience making it more readily accessible in the future. The questions used are 'clean' as they are non-directive and stripped of the supervisor's own assumptions, bias and metaphors.

Step 1: Invite reflection on the question *"When you are coaching at your best, that's like what?"*

This could be part of their preparation, encouraging them to bring anything that could represent their answer (eg. Written or drawn, bring an object, photograph, etc).

Step 2: Encourage deeper reflection by repeating back the supervisee's own words and descriptions exactly as they said them. This holds them in their inner experience rather than inviting a more typical two- way dialogue.

Step 3: Continue to explore by asking a series of clean language questions that build on and include the supervisee's own words – insert them at XXX:

- What kind of xxx is that xxx?
- Is there anything else about xxx?
- Whereabouts is that xxx?
- And does that xxx have a shape or a size?
- And that xxx is like what?"
- And what do you know about xxx?



Step 3: Focus attention on the metaphors using the same questions given above, and then, deepen the exploration of any sensory and/or symbolic language. For example:

- Supervisee: “When at my best it’s like I am in flow”:
- Supervisor: “And what kind of flow is that flow?”
- Supervisee: “Like a meandering river.”
- Supervisor: “It’s like a meandering river. Is there anything else about that meandering river?”

Step 4: Continue to use the same set of questions, in a fluid way. Follow the supervisee’s emerging understanding by questioning in an iterative fashion, taking the output of one line of enquiry as the input for the next line of enquiry. As each new element of the metaphor emerges explore with the Clean Language questions above.

Step 5: At this point you could wrap up learnings with further Clean Language questions, such as:

- “And now you know it’s like this when you are coaching at your best, what difference does knowing that make?”

Or, when Step 4 feels done you could move into another supervision approach, such as a real life exploration of when the supervisee last coached at their best.

How to work with the technique...

Questions need to be asked exactly as shown, without changing the word sequence. For instance, “That’s like what?” invites a metaphor whereas “What’s that like?” is a very different question and invites a description. Even when positioned clearly some people respond without using a metaphor. Remember to remain client centred, this may not have been the response you anticipated, but your questions will still encourage deeper reflection. Also, remember metaphors come in many forms, so a response may be overtly metaphorical, e.g. “Light at the end of the tunnel” or it may be more subtle e.g. “Things are looking up”.

A word of caution.

This exercise works best when focusing on resourceful and positive experiences. For those not trained in Clean Language, avoid asking questions of the less positive aspects. For example, with the response “When I am coaching at my best, I feel no fear”, do not ask “What kind of fear?” A more positive follow up would be “What kind of feeling is that, when you feel no fear?”

What other uses are there for this technique?

Asking “That’s like what?” will invite a metaphor of any positive experience or resource. For example, if the supervisee says “I know I need to trust more” you could explore ‘trust’ in metaphor using Clean Language questions: “And when you trust more, that ‘trust more’ is like what?” (etc).

With practice a supervisee could use this approach with their own coaching clients.

Further reading:

Dunbar, A. (2018) *Using metaphors in coaching* [pdf] Available at:
<https://cleancoaching.com/files/2018/04/Using%20Metaphors%20with%20Coaching%20April%20'11.pdf> [Accessed 1 September 2019]



Wilson, C. (2004) *Metaphor and Symbolic Modelling for Coaches* [pdf] Available at:
<https://cleancoaching.com/files/2018/04/Metaphor-Symbolic-Modelling.pdf> [Accessed 1 September 2019]

Smith, K. (2012) *A Clean Corner of Coaching Supervision*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk/articles/articles/318/1/A-Clean-Corner-of-Coaching-Supervision/Page1.html> [Accessed 1 September 2019]