A hand holding a lit sparkler against a dark blue background with other sparklers in the distance.

# *Creativity in Coaching*

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# Introduction:

## How to use this book



To help spark your imagination about how to use this book, I'd like to share some of my experience of writing this book, and others I have previously written and published.

Like many books, it started with a seed of an idea. In my mind's eye I had a sense of the finished product, but I had no idea how the words would actually end up presented on the pages. For me, the creative process of writing starts with engaging with the topic I want to explore by reading and researching all I can, in a relaxed, curious and open manner. Gradually I build my understanding and begin to form my own original perspective, which then triggers ideas about what I want to say and how I might express that. Next I start putting things down. Initially, the sentences don't flow and I end up with odd notes and bullet points that seem disconnected and random. But as I persevere, eventually things begin to join up, like connecting pieces of a jigsaw puzzle with an overall picture emerging. It can be frustrating though as it always seems to take so

much longer than expected for things to gather momentum and I begin to see the completed piece on the horizon.

After many months of me struggling to know what to include and how much to say, the book eventually took on a life of its own. Inevitably, there was so much more to cover than there was space available. Having worked so hard to find the words, then begins the process of pruning them down!

Although I have completed this iteration of the book, I still consider it a work-in-progress rather than a finished product. I decided to put it out there to invite you, my dear reader, to contribute so as we can create a collaborative and comprehensive manual for coaches, written by coaches. For future editions, I would value your input. As you read this book: if anything inspires you, reminds you of something, irritates you or prompts a question, please get in touch.

If there is anything you would like to see included in future versions, including your personal experience of using creativity in coaching, please email me at [coach@angeladunbar.co.uk](mailto:coach@angeladunbar.co.uk) with your suggestions. I will of course reference you if we use your contribution.

And keep in touch if you would like future, improved version of this book as and when released.

Thank you for reading this book,

*Angela*

# Chapter One: Why creativity?



## The value of creativity

*“From creating works of art, producing abundant inexpensive water, developing non-invasive health devices or net zero energy homes, finding medical cures, restoring and improving urban infrastructure, generating new energy sources, and preventing nuclear terror, to developing sustainable ways to solve complex geopolitical problems, the ability to produce and implement new, useful ideas is rapidly becoming a critical attribute for leveraging knowledge success and increasing quality of life.”*  
(Plucker et al, 2015)

Creativity is becoming an increasingly valued commodity in a fast-changing, unpredictable environment such as the world we all live in today. In fact, it is considered one of the four core 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that people need to succeed in work, life and citizenship – along with collaboration, communication and critical thinking. This has been well-documented and acknowledged by the international coalition “Partnership for 21st Century Learning” (known as

‘P21’<sup>1</sup> , whose mission is to unite business, government and education leaders worldwide to make innovative learning a reality.

It is the single most important leadership quality, according to a large scale commercial study by IBM, at the beginning of this decade <sup>2</sup>. More recently, the DDI Global Leadership Forecast <sup>3</sup>(2014/2015) highlighted ‘innovation’ as one of the core topics keeping CEOs up at night, with only 26% of those surveyed feeling up to the challenge that today’s business world demands of them in this regard.

More widely, other research has indicated that only 25% of people believe they live up to their creative potential (Adobe 2012)<sup>4</sup> .

In summary, we need more of it than we have!

So what exactly is it? As this book will highlight, much of that seems to depend on your perspective. Creativity can be many different things to many different people, and how you view it affects how you use it.



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<sup>1</sup> P21 website: <http://www.p21.org/>

You can download P21’s research briefing document on creativity through this link:

[http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/Research/P21\\_4Cs\\_Research\\_Brief\\_Series\\_-\\_Creativity.pdf](http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/Research/P21_4Cs_Research_Brief_Series_-_Creativity.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> IBM report “Capitalising on Complexity” produced 2010, can be accessed here:

[http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE\\_GB\\_TI\\_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF](http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE_GB_TI_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF)

<sup>3</sup> DDI report can be accessed through this link: [http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-](http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE_GB_TI_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF)

[bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE\\_GB\\_TI\\_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF](http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE_GB_TI_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF)

<sup>3</sup> The Adobe study can be found here:

[http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pdfs/Adobe\\_State\\_of\\_Create\\_Global\\_Benchmark\\_Study.pdf](http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pdfs/Adobe_State_of_Create_Global_Benchmark_Study.pdf)

**Personal Exercise:**

***For you, creativity is like what?***

Please spend some time reflecting on the question above. Then, take some paper and *write down* and/or *draw* your reflections in any way that you want, using words, symbols, doodles or drawings, before you read on. There is no right or wrong answer to this question!

## **What is creativity?**

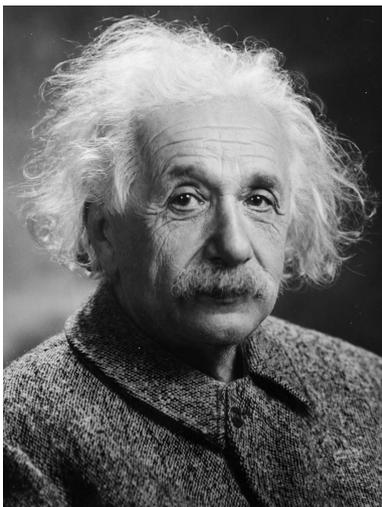
Creativity is an elusive spark that appears to separate humans from animals. It describes what happens when something new, original and valuable is created. Once thought to belong only to the divine, 'everyday' creativity gets problems solved and enables people to go beyond habitual thinking and behaviour. Einstein had it when he discovered the theory of relativity. Steve Jobs had it when he came up with the iPhone. Every child demonstrates they have it when they step beyond what they have been told to imagine something different. You have it whenever you discover a new way to do something, however trivial it may seem.

But, like many well-documented and discussed concepts, when we try and nail down a clear and specific definition we soon find ourselves on shaky ground. Creativity as a topic for scientific study has been poorly neglected, only really identified as a valuable subject of enquiry since the 1950s. Despite the huge benefit that creativity could potentially bring to the world, if harnessed and developed, research has been haphazard and sparse.

Creativity still remains largely an enigma, especially the moments leading up to that sudden flash of inspiration, commonly known as an 'insight' moment. Uncontrollable and unpredictable, creativity remains a rare and mysterious happening.

What if people were at their creative best all of the time? Can you imagine a world where we could enhance those moments of insight and recreate them at will?

Imagination is creativity's poor cousin. Creativity is seen as an admirable quality and much sought after, but if you hear someone being referred to as 'highly imaginative' a less favourable image is conjured up. Possibly of someone with their 'head in the clouds' or even a little bit 'flaky'. But imagination is a key part of creativity and refers to the ability of being able to conjure up images, sounds, objects and ideas within our internal mind's eye. As children we are all great at this kind of activity, but as adults many of us lose touch with our inner world and choose to prioritise the external world as real-life and therefore much more important. However, our inner world of the imagination is absolutely vital to us, personally and as a society.



Einstein once said  
*"Imagination ... is more  
important than knowledge.  
Knowledge is limited.  
Imagination encircles the  
world."*

(Calaprice, 2000)

Despite popular belief, the truth is that your inner world and external reality are not entirely separate domains anyway. Our perception of the world 'out there' is achieved through much the same network of neurons that we use when we are remembering or imagining things in our heads. In fact, there are always gaps in our perception that we fill in with our imagination anyway!

There is a wealth of evidence in hundreds of studies about perception that supports the finding that people tend to see what they expect to, not what is really there. So, we all project our inner world onto the external, making it difficult to completely separate our imaginative 'perceptual' space from the physical domain. Our mind's eye is not contained within the physical boundaries of our brains, but projected 360 degrees all around us, superimposed onto the physical space that we inhabit and move around within.

Innovation is yet another relative to creativity, but this one is more like its rich aunt. It is a term often used interchangeably with creativity, but more so in the world of business. Innovation has a wider scope than creativity's mere ideas, and includes the process that transforms those ideas into reality, such as developing new products or services that bring greater value and ultimately greater profits. But innovation cannot happen without the creative ideas in the first place.

As a coach, you may seldom meet coachees who directly mention creativity as their main focus of attention. Nor will many set outcomes for improving creativity as their key aim from the coaching experience. However, you would be hard pressed to think of any coaching topic or outcome that could not be more easily achieved should the coachee's creativity 'quotient' be given a boost.

Creativity in coaching is particularly useful when you or your coachee is 'stuck', perhaps trapped within your own circles of thought. This often happens when the issue has been too narrowly defined and an impasse is quickly reached with a sense of frustration: all options appear to have already been exhausted. Or it can be simply because the problem has been around for so long it has become an ingrained habit.

Personally, I think creativity is at the heart of all successful coaching activity. Coaching helps people find ways to achieve their outcomes by discovering new paths of thinking, taking different actions and trying alternative behaviours. It's all about encouraging original and unusual answers to stuck patterns of doing and thinking. The successful coach needs to light that spark of creativity in their coachees. And, if the coach is in touch with their own creative energy, this will be much easier to achieve.



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# Chapter Two:

## How creativity gets stifled

### Education and organisational barriers

Despite the overwhelming support for the importance of creativity in today's world, our current Westernised education system operates policies and processes that instead of supporting creativity may in fact actively quash it. For instance, the tendency is to teach that there is only one right answer to a problem, discouraging the kind of 'divergent' thinking required to open up possibilities and generate creative paths of thinking. There is an increasing emphasis on getting good exam results, which pressurises children to perform within a fixed time scale. It enables quantifiable measures of knowledge and certain abilities to be captured, but looming deadlines are the antithesis of the kind of unstructured, creative 'mind wandering' that's generally considered a crucial aspect of generating new ideas.

Most organisations say they value creativity, although within most companies today, the reality is quite different. Teresa Amabile, a leading expert on the study of creativity, says that organisations unintentionally undermine creativity all the time with widespread and systemic business practices, in the need to maximise business imperatives such as coordination, productivity and control - *which systematically crush creativity* (1998:18).

Creative people tend to be rebels who resist the status quo, and let's face it, most organisations don't want people who upset the apple cart. Creative rebels tend to be discouraged for thinking outside the corporate box. Some of Amabile's research has shone a light on a variety of ways that managers could foster more creativity in people around them (1998), but it has yet to be widely adopted. According to Amabile, managers could influence co-ordination, productivity and control more greatly by focusing on six general categories of managerial practice that affect creativity. These are:

- **Challenge:** being given just enough so people rise to it.

- **Freedom:** for instance - although goals need to be clear and consistent, people need to be given the freedom on HOW to achieve them.
- **Resources:** again, just enough to foster confidence.
- **Work-group features:** such as being part of a well-balanced team.
- **Supervisory encouragement:** this covers such things as actively recognising and rewarding creative efforts, avoiding inadvertently quashing the raw potential that might exist, and finally being a good role model to encourage creativity.
- **Organisational support:** through information sharing and collaboration.

### **We are our own worst enemy**

As well as the institutions around us, like schools, universities and organisations, people are also pretty good at stifling their creativity all by themselves. We are all largely creatures of habit and our minds tend to follow the same patterns of thought over and over. Like jelly in a mould, once we have learnt something our minds 'set' it into place, it sticks together and we no longer mentally search for different routes. We all make use of 'mental sets' as short cuts to problem solving, quickly searching for what worked before. However they are also the chains that shackle our creativity and prevent it from breaking free. 'Functional fixidity' is just one kind of mental set which has been well documented and researched, describing how people generally respond to objects. This can be demonstrated by one particular creativity exercise repeated time after time in various studies over the years, which usually highlights the same poor results (see Duncker, 1945).

#### **Personal Exercise**

Karl's Duncker's experiment involved giving participants a candle, a book of matches and a box of drawing pins (of standard size). The participants are then given a fixed time period to try and find a way to attach the candle to the wall and light it, only using the materials given.

Do you think it can be done and if so, how?

Give yourself just a few seconds to ponder, then read the answer at the end of the chapter.

Creativity seems to be an abnormal ‘blip’ in how cognitive scientists understand our minds work, which involves ‘processing’ information: noticing, learning and storing what we know about the world in a systematic and iterative way. And even more confounding is how unpredictable creativity is. One cognitive scientist who specialises in insight and creativity, Stellan Ohlsson (2011), argues that this is the crucial paradox: why is it that people are *sometimes* able to rise above their habits of thought and see things anew? And, having done so are often then unable to repeat this magical moment again at will? No-one really understands why creativity strikes randomly and so rarely. But there are many ways to provide the right kind of conditions for creativity to spontaneously and naturally happen, as we will investigate within this book.

### **How coaches can dampen the spark**

One would think that any and all kind of coaching activity would encourage creativity in those embarking on it. But I am not so sure about that. I suspect most coaches intend to encourage creative thinking in their coachees, but there are a number of reasons why this may be harder to achieve than is commonly believed. In fact, many coaches could indeed be dampening any creative sparks because of these common factors that tend to be part and parcel of many coaching assignments:

#### ***Focus on results***

Coaching is all about defining outcomes then helping people to make progress towards them. This kind of steering is very useful to nail down specific and tangible aims and then actions to achieve them, but creativity requires *divergent* thinking that widens possibilities rather than just *convergent* thinking which narrows them down.

J.P. Guilford (1967), a leading American Psychologist coined the phrase 'divergent thinking' as the kind of thought activity which is generative, mushrooming outwards and sparking in many directions, leading to multiple and diverse ideas. 'Convergent' thinking is more focused, drilling down on specifics and making decisions on which path to follow. Although the more chaotic divergent thinking is commonly thought of as the key activity for creativity, we actually need both kinds of thinking. At different stages of the creative process we need our minds to be expanding out, and then at other times, focusing in.

Coaches may sometimes be too quick to get focused on specifics and prevent the coachee from exploring possibilities.

### **'False starts' are rarely reviewed**

A key barrier to creative problem solving happens before we even consciously start working on finding a solution.

The stages of human problem solving (Newell and Simon, 1972) can be summed up in three steps:

1) We perceive the problem. As perception does not produce an exact replication of reality and always involves interpretation, the mind uses prior experience to *filter* what kind of problem it sees. Perception is the end result of a series of layered processing units which take sensory input and step by step, distil it into a coherent whole.

2) We then retrieve information (unconsciously) from our long term memory, filtering for whatever seems most useful to the problem at hand. Because of the limited capacity of our working memory, it is only the strongest connections that get made, based on the already biased perception of the problem. We fill our mind's eye with all the possible pieces of information that we think could be useful, and then lock the door to keep out everything else.

Psychologists call this the 'problem space', to describe the mental construction of a network of possibilities, necessarily constrained to provide an area of focus and direction to aim for. We put what we know into a kind of mental box, with a lid firmly holding it all together and stopping anything else getting in.

3) Finally, we search for a solution (consciously), mentally rehearsing in our minds eye possible strategies using the information already selected within the problem space.

Within the framework of this model, it is relatively commonplace for people to make a 'false start' and begin with certain assumptions about a problem which may not be useful or even true.

Ohlsson (2011, p104) points out that *'in a turbulent and unknown world, there is no guarantee that the biases laid down in the course of experience are predictive of which knowledge elements are most useful for solving a problem'*.

Because the information retrieval process takes place unconsciously, we are not aware of the degree of filtering we have already applied to what might be important. To say that this limits our creative capacity is a vast understatement. As David Rock neatly summed up: *"Relatively speaking, if you think of your conscious processing capacity as the coins in your pocket, then your nonconscious processing capacity is the entire U.S. economy by comparison"* (Rock, 2011).

Once they are off down the outcome-defining rabbit hole, people seldom re-examine what they know about the problem, situation or context within which they are setting outcomes. Coaches also tend to keep going forwards rather than taking a number of steps back to start the thinking process over again.

But sometimes, to get to our desired destination, we need to begin our journey from a different place. Each time we revisit where we are now, our understanding of where we need to be and the steps required to get there is likely to change. Anthony Grant (2011) suggests that rather than following the GROW model, coaches would do better to take an iterative approach that looks more like:

GRGROGROOGROWOGORW!

### **Time restrictions**

As already mentioned, having a fixed end time can thwart the creative process, and coaching generally takes place within very structured and relatively short time pockets of an hour or so. Once the coach and coachee have contracted, shared updates and set intentions for the current session, there may be a very

small window for exploration before the required action planning phase at the end of the session. Just knowing the clock is ticking towards a finish time can put pressure on both the coachee and the coach to 'get somewhere' rather than meander around emerging ideas and themes – nurturing the seeds of a creative insight.

### **Seeking a single 'correct' answer**

Our education and experience teaches us to come up with the right answer and we are embarrassed if we get it wrong. Fear of making a mistake means that many people will say only what they feel will be an acceptable answer rather than allowing their unspoken 'off the wall' and 'half-baked' replies to be exposed.

### **Avoiding risk**

Similar to the point above, many people will seek to conform to what they believe is the expected response. This is another well-documented, much researched psychological phenomenon about people and their behaviour. For example, people will disregard what they can see with their own eyes if the majority of people round them agree they see something different (eg Asch, 1951).

To step outside 'the way we do things here' can appear risky and moreover, many organisations instil the fear that taking risks leads to dangerous consequences. It is also fair to say that this same conformity urge will affect what the coach feels is appropriate to do or say within a coaching session.

### **Biased questions**

As I cover in depth within my book 'Clean Coaching: The Insider Guide to Making Change Happen' (Dunbar, 2017) it is all too easy for coaches to push the coachee in a certain direction of thought due to subtle 'hints' within their questions. Bias is often unconscious and like it or not, the coach's personal beliefs, preferences and opinions tend to leak out within the language they use. Even a so called 'open' question can be embedded with assumptions that dictate a particular context and introduce a narrow field of options. For example:

*“So given what we have spoken about today, how might you move forward on this and remove the barriers?”*

Forwards may not be the direction to move in! Sometimes sideways works best or even taking a step back. Barriers may not be able to be removed but could be climbed, avoided, transformed or dismantled. The language within the question is subtle but all the more persuasive as a result. No-one notices the influence they have on the coachee’s scope of thought. If you doubt the power of biased questions, see the research into eye witness interviewing carried out by Elizabeth Loftus and colleagues in the 1970s, and repeated many times over the years (Loftus et al, 1972). In short, this research demonstrated how changing just one *single word* within a question altered the interviewee’s opinion of what they had witnessed.

### **Being too structured OR too unstructured**

Coaching is more than just a meandering conversation. It needs structure, such as a beginning, middle and end, with a sense of completeness in the form of action points and/or learnings to take away. However, the coach’s control over the shape and direction can constrain creative possibility as the coachee tends to only run down the paths available within the session. On the other hand, keeping things too loose means that the coachee is put off from creativity due to fear and lack of support. What is needed is a certain structure that creates a safe space for exploration and a context within which to explore. But, still encourages mental freedom within those parameters.

### **How can coaches access and inspire more creativity**

The rest of this book will outline a number of different ways and means to access your own creativity, and that of your clients.

They all use the ‘Clean’ techniques, created and developed by the late, great David Grove, a New Zealand counselling psychologist. His blindingly brilliant approach to helping people think for themselves was to only ask them questions that were stripped of any words or expression that could distract them away from their own train of thought. Generally this involves sticking closely to the client’s own words and expressions within the simplest of question structures.

During the 80s, 90s and 00s Grove worked with an abundance of patients, psychotherapists and other people-helpers/healers to firstly hone and then teach his unique approach to helping people find their own solutions by keeping completely out of their way.

He once said that coaching was really all about helping people get from where they are now to where they want to be, in other words getting 'from 'A' to 'B''. This metaphor of coaching being like a kind of journey to take is more than simply a figure of speech. People do tend to picture their goals and dreams as though they were some kind of destination, in a place outside of themselves and at a certain distance. And these mental images matter. Typically, people try to reach their goals by trying to take the well-trodden and well-known path directly between 'A' (where they currently see themselves as being) and 'B' (their outcome). The most obvious, habitual 'straight-line thinking' route may be the most apparent and appear the easiest way to go, but from a mental representational perspective, this mental path will be strewn with memories of any previous failures, negative beliefs about our capabilities, and fears for what may happen. In short, the real or perceived obstacles or barriers that exist between our current position and where we would like to be sit along that direct line between 'A' and 'B', often making it the least helpful path to take. Grove's approaches involve taking a more circuitous route that may at times seem to wander off track, but ultimately encourage creative thought and the discovery of new pathways and potentially even entirely different destinations.

The term 'Clean' refers to the avoidance of 'contaminating' another's thoughts and ideas by putting yours there instead. That doesn't mean that your ideas, suggestions, recommendations, etc. are wrong, dirty or damaging. It's just once they are presented, like a worm on a hook most people will bite and become stuck within your frame of reference. There are many times when this might be very helpful, for instance when providing essential information or giving instructions. But when any kind of creative thought is required, taking a cleaner approach will allow your coachee the opportunity to develop their own ideas and find their own unique solution.

Please note that this book is no substitute for training. Some people find they can naturally and easily adopt the clean techniques and processes covered in this book. For many people, they need the opportunity to learn with an expert, who can demonstrate and describe how it works in far more detail, stimulating their understanding. The Clean Coaching Centre at [www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com)

offers affordable online training which includes live classes in small groups along with structured, supervised practice session to help build your knowledge skills and confidence in Clean Language and other Clean techniques, such as Emergent Knowledge.

We periodically run free 'taster' classes as well as provide recordings, papers and podcasts to help you learn more. If you haven't done so already, please contact us to register for our e-newsletter and we will keep in touch with you about free tasters and future classes.

Email [angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com](mailto:angeladunbar@cleancoaching.com) or visit our website [www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com)

### **Personal Exercise - Answer**

Karl's Duncker's experiment involved giving participants a candle, a book of matches and a box of drawing pins (of standard size). The participants are then given a fixed time period to try and find a way to attach the candle to the wall and light it, only using the materials given.

Do you think it can be done and if so, how?

It's quite simple. You use the box that the drawing pins were in, attach that to the wall with the drawing pins then put the candle in the box before lighting it with the matches. Many people disregard the box as being an available resource within the scope of the exercise, and their mental set prevents them from re-evaluating.

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# Chapter Three: Nine lenses through which to view creativity

**Creativity is not one thing!**  
(Pope 2005)

Different experts have put different labels on creativity over the years. In summary, creativity is more than one thing.

By limiting your understanding of creativity to one kind of definition, you may be missing alternative ways to access it in yourself and nurture it in others.

As you read through each definition, try them on for size. If creativity for you were like this, it would be like what? What would happen next? As you read through this chapter, allow each idea presented to spark your own thoughts about creativity.

**Creativity is a gift**



Historically, creativity was once seen as something mere mortals had no right to seek or expect to have happen in their lives. There was just one kind of 'Creation', and only God was capable of bringing something into being that wasn't there before. As time moved on, eventually this view was stretched to include the possibility that humans could sometimes be touched with 'divine inspiration'. But ultimately, for most of human history, creativity was (believed at least) to be left in the province of God.

This view has cultivated some prevailing myths about creativity and who can – and can't - be blessed with it. Many still believe that only a certain few 'gifted' people are able to be naturally creative.

I was fortunate in that when I was in my first year at school, a teacher told my mother I was highly creative. She believed it and so, in turn, did I. I never questioned that I would be able to come up with fresh insights or generate novel ideas, I just got on and did it. If the ideas turned out to be not so hot or novel, it didn't matter, I'd already thought of some more by then.

When, later in life I undertook psychometric tests that defined me as more detailed-oriented and analytical, I did wonder whether rather than any natural aptitude I had simply been blessed with another's belief in me. This man-made miracle is one we can also bestow on others, to give someone your belief in their creative ability is a valuable gift indeed.

One of the most innovative person ever to be born, Thomas Edison, received a different kind of message when he was a child, being told that he was mentally deficit. There is a story that he was expelled from school and the letter his mother received explained he was too 'addled' to benefit from education. His mother is said to have lied to Edison, explaining instead that the letter said he was too talented and special for the school to be able to teach him. Although this story is unproven and likely exaggerated, Edison was indeed home-schooled after expulsion, and said of his mother that she was "...the making of me. She was so true, so sure of me: and I felt I had something to live for, someone I must not disappoint."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Read more at <http://www.business2community.com/us-news/thomas-edisons-mother-lying-contents-expulsion-letter-largely-false-01719324#Bhk3G7ulcVHjmg9E.99>

So often, instead of receiving positive messages, people are told they are 'not very creative' and therefore, never reach their potential, for fear of making a mistake or risk of embarrassment or derision.

### **Personal Exercise**

Have you ever been given the gift of creativity? Who from?

What kind of gift was it?

How can you give this gift to your coachees?

### **Creativity is an ability**



It wasn't until the mid twentieth century, that American Psychologist J.P. Guilford (1950) raised the profile of creativity as a topic for psychological research, pointing out that its neglect to date was downright 'appalling' given its social importance. He highlighted that aside from those rarely encountered 'gifted' individuals with genius intelligence, the ordinary person is also capable of everyday creative acts. Although some rare individuals may have greater

propensity for creativity, it is a capacity within all of us. These are those little moments of ingenuity and insight that we ALL experience from time to time.

Guilford highlighted that there are two kinds of creativity – ‘Big C’ Creativity: leading to discoveries which helps shape society, enabling humankind to take huge leaps forward as a race. But he suggested there was also plenty of everyday, ‘Small c’ creativity, happening constantly to everyone.

So anyone and everyone can be creative. This universal ability needs to be flexed and like a muscle, it will get stronger.

Once creativity became established as a useful topic for scientific enquiry, two core areas of interest became apparent. Firstly, how do we measure creativity within people? Secondly, how can we develop our creative ability so we have more of it?

From Guilford’s initial conceptualisation of there being TWO kinds of creative thought – both divergent and convergent, it became clear that the ability to be creative was actually a combination of a number of skills and techniques. Nowadays, creativity is seen as a highly complex range of abilities, drawing on many different cognitive functions and using many different regions distributed throughout the brain (Howard-Jones, 2008).

Back in the seventies, Dr E. Paul Torrance (1974) developed tests to measure creativity through four key indicators of creative ability, each a skill which could be nurtured and taught:

- 1) **Fluency:** the sheer volume of ideas produced in a short time.
- 2) **Flexibility:** being able to generate diverse ideas from different categories and looking from different perspectives.
- 3) **Originality:** coming up with ideas that are unusual and unique.
- 4) **Elaboration:** Expanding on an idea by embellishing it with details and making a plan of action.

Certainly for the first two skills, it is widely accepted that you can learn to be more fluent and flexible by simply practicing. Simple ‘brainstorming’ exercises that encourage people to keep suggesting ideas without judgement helps get this aspect of creative technique going, as does stepping outside the problem space in whatever way you can. In later chapters we’ll explore how physically

moving into different spaces and literally looking from a different perspective can open up this aspect of creativity.

For originality and elaboration, any of us could improve in these areas, however lack of time and level of interest often curtails us. But think how useful having a coach can be for developing these abilities, especially a coach who asks lots of open-ended questions to encourage you to explore alternatives, possibilities and consequences.

How can **you** flex your creative muscles? Anything that helps break you out of your normal tracks of thought can help. As we will explore later, physical movement can encourage creative thought, this includes for instance, going for a walk and - if you are willing, studies have shown that *tree climbing* is incredibly useful for stretching your creativity muscle (see Chapter Nine).

### **Personal Exercise**

When you think of your creative muscle, whereabouts could that muscle be?

Does that creative muscle have a shape or a size?

Could you make a representation of that on paper?

## Creativity is an accident



Another enduring view of creativity is that it is something that happens to us, rather than something we do for ourselves. Spontaneous and random, it comes 'out of the blue' and there is no way to control it.

William J. J. Gordon (1961) coined the term 'Synectic' to mean the 'coming together of apparently irrelevant elements' and suggested embracing the seemingly irrelevant. Many famous creations have happened seemingly by serendipitous 'accident', such as penicillin, microwaves and Viagra (Meyers, 2007).

But those random occurrences that trigger a new way of seeing things tend to happen to people who have previously devoted a lot of time pondering on the nature of the topic involved. Some ground work is necessary it seems before we are likely to stumble upon a golden insight.

However, we can take the principles of spontaneity and randomness and bring them into our coaching. Gordon (1961) felt *metaphors* were at the heart of creativity and required in order to shake up usual thought patterns by making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Later in this book we will explore metaphors in depth.

David Grove is best known for his work with metaphors, but he was interested also in other ways we use 'substitutes' to represent something different,

deeper and more meaningful, for instance through objects and drawings. He felt people often selected objects around them unconsciously that would aid their creativity and referred to these as 'co-inspiring items'. By referencing and asking questions of the so-called random objects that just happen to be in the coachee's immediate vicinity can trigger amazing co-incidental relationships with the topic being explored. More later on this!

### **Creativity is a process**



As a process, most see the creative act as more than just a single blinding flash of inspiration, however momentous it may feel to the initiator. There seem to be core steps preceding that moment which help us to identify key conditions for bringing about steps to creativity. Graham Wallas (1926) proposed an enduring model of the process of creativity:

1. *Preparation* – This initial stage is when the individual focuses on the problem and its dimensions, scope and boundaries. Information is gathered in order to solve the problem. Conscious, convergent thinking is required for focused attention and methodological research to build an understanding. This stage continues either until the problem is solved, or in the case of complex, non-linear problems, an 'impasse' is often reached.

2. *Incubation* – on the surface, the problem seems to have been set aside or forgotten. Conscious attention wanders, often the individual will be relaxed and playful. But the problem has been internalized into the unconscious mind and something is still happening at a deeper level.
3. *Illumination or insight* - where the creative idea bursts forth from its preconscious processing into conscious awareness. This is sometimes preceded by an '*intimation*' when the individual gets a kind of inkling that a solution is emerging.
4. *Verification* – where the idea is consciously verified, elaborated, and then applied. Here is where convergent thinking is once again useful, and other skills such as assessment and judgement.

Wallas saw creativity as a legacy of the evolutionary process: quickly adapting to a changing environment - a kind of learning from experience. For our best ideas, it's survival of the fittest.

Knowing that there is a process for creativity means allowing time for each stage to happen, and encouraging different kinds of thinking at different stages.

David Grove's Clean Coaching with Emergent Knowledge ('EK') process (Dunbar, 2017) is structured according to his 'Six Degrees of Freedom' theory. Rather like Wallas' stages of creativity, Grove's model for coaching drives the coachee through the stages of thought by iterating the same or similar question a number of times in a recursive fashion: each question is asked of the last answer given. As we'll find out later, this is an excellent way to structure a coaching session with creative insight in mind as the end result.

## Creativity is a decision



Creativity is not just available for the select few, born with a certain kind of brain. We ALL have the capacity for creative thinking. We just need to decide to be creative to open up that possibility.

Sadly, for many people often the complete opposite has happened, at some point in their past they have made the limiting decision that they are NOT creative, and this can be a powerful obstacle to any creative work. So how can you coach someone to unlearn how *not* to be creative?

As covered earlier in this chapter, giving people the gift of creativity can be very useful if they are not stuck too deep in the negative mindset of an 'uncreative person'. And you can also encourage coachees to let go of any limiting decisions and decide to be more creative. This often involves taking some risk.

Another way to encourage your coachee to decide to be creative is to frame your contracting around the importance of allowing the coachee to be creative and giving them permission to do so. You can also allay any fears by explaining the ground rules: tell them what to expect, even if that's unpredictable you can give them examples. Finally, you can directly ask them to make the decision to be creative, and check their commitment to making it happen.

## Creativity is a space



Another increasingly popular strand of research into creativity explores the impact that the environment has on creativity. Taking a social psychological perspective, ideas do not necessarily reside within an individual, but are more of a collaborative venture, amongst people and places. Ideas are always situated in a place, time, culture and context and perhaps cannot ever be viewed as having a single 'owner'. Lev Vygotsky (1978) was a strong advocate of the power of social interaction for all kind of learning including the creative kind, coining the term 'scaffolding' as the support and structure a teacher can provide for a learner. A coach can also provide scaffolding for a coachee's creativity, by asking questions that explore the coachee's current understanding to allow it to develop and new insight to emerge.

The aspect of physical environment is even more fascinating. Godden and Baddeley (1975) demonstrated that *where you are affects what you know* by teaching divers a new set of words underwater, discovering they were able to access this new knowledge only once they were in the water again.

Beyond that, remember our imagination fills our perceptual space which spills over into the real space around us. No wonder our environment is the perfect backdrop to creative thinking and there are no end of imaginative, creative approaches a coach can take to have their coachee use the space around them to 'find' ideas in different places, angles and directions. Some of these ideas are explained further in this book, and we recommend exploring

[www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com) and the online training courses on offer that provide in-depth training on using space and movement as a coach.

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# Chapter Four:

## Giving the gift of creativity



As we have already covered in the previous chapter, just having the belief in your coachee's ability to be creative and giving them permission to do so will cultivate their creativity. You may also like to try the following:

### **At your creative best**

Most individuals are able to remember at least one time when they were in the 'flow' of creativity and at their creative best. The concept of 'flow' was coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and refers to the unselfconscious state of mind people reach when they are totally absorbed in what they are doing, to the extent that they lose track of time and other priorities. You can help coachees to re-connect with this state and help them access it again by encouraging them to explore what being at their best is all about, for them.

The concept of 'best self' has a long tradition within psychology and counselling and is useful framework for helping coachees discover and connect

to their personal strengths. Equally for the novice Clean Coach it provides a topic for self-exploration.

This phrase “At your / my best” was originally coined by humanistic psychologist and counsellor Carl Rogers (1980:129), who wrote about being “At his best” late in his career, saying “When I am at my best... I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other”. Rogers felt that everyone has a unique and authentic core, which can be reached if one stops striving to be someone other than yourself. Beneath any delusions, deletions or denials, there is a true self.

The positive psychology movement developed the exploration of ‘being your best possible self’, beginning with Maslow (1971) who described the process of re-experiencing an intensely positive moment by suggesting people think of the most wonderful, happiest experience in their lives, citing examples such as being in love, listening to music, or being ‘hit’ by a book or painting/ to concentrate on the experience and imagine yourself in the moment again, feeling and seeing all you did then. Then write about it in as much detail as you can.

One way to re-capture the benefit of being at your best is to reflect on and write about a past experience and / or an imagined future in which you are being at your best. Positive psychology founder Martin Seligman (2005) highlights many positive effects gained from researched interventions where people focused on their best self. For instance Laura King (2001) researched the effects of people writing about their ‘best possible self’. They wrote down their strengths, which they then were required to reflect on every day for one week. This resulted in positive (but temporary) effects of increased happiness. Later research focused on people with health issues (Burton and King, 2004) and highlighted significant health benefits.



### Coaching exercise

Ask your coachee:

**“When you are at your creative best, that’s like what?”**

Encourage them to explore whatever words, symbols, images and metaphors come up for them.

You could ask them to write or draw their reflections on a piece of paper and further explore anything and everything they put down.

Tips:

- Ask the question very slowly, leaving pauses between the words to allow the coachee to begin reflecting before you even finish the question
- It doesn’t matter if they don’t come up with a metaphor, just by exploring whatever they do come up with, something metaphoric is likely to emerge given time

### The magic of metaphor

The second part of the question above ‘that’s like what?’ encourages people not only to explore and explain what being at their creative best is like, but also to compare it to something else. You are inviting them to find an analogue or metaphor that best represents an abstract concept such as creativity.

People use metaphors all the time to explain complex or difficult feelings and ideas. We say we are ‘tired as a dog’ or that ‘you could cut the atmosphere with a knife’. Metaphors (and similes) are the stand-ins we use when we describe one thing with a name belonging to another thing. People do it all the time, so much so that often we don’t even directly refer to the stand-in word at all. Such as “The wind was biting” (comparing the sharpness of the cold wind with the sharpness of teeth, perhaps?) But it seems to matter not, people understand our substitute words because (almost) everyone is capable of making the connections between the real meaning and the substitute comparison, even if their personal understanding is slightly different from the original intention.

When metaphors are 'invented' ad hoc within a coaching session they can quickly shape the track along which a person is thinking. Metaphors are more than figures of speech to aid communication. Many cognitive psychologists now understand that us human being's ability to have something 'stand for' something else, whether linguistically like metaphors, or more visually like symbols, is the core basis upon which all our abstract and conceptual reasoning is based. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) we don't just understand the world in metaphor, we experience it like that too.

Lakoff and Johnson explored a number of core metaphors that define how whole societies of people make sense of the world and their experience within it. Metaphors, over time, become so ubiquitous that we forget their metaphoric roots and consider them figurative, for instance to 'focus' or an electrical 'wave'. Lakoff and Johnson refer to these as *literal* metaphors. But even real things and places have complex meanings that are more about social convention rather than any truly impartially fixed notions, for example, think of so called real things like 'hospital' and 'teacher'. We share constructed meanings about such terms and these meanings change over time. Underneath the shared meaning will be further layers of personal meaning as well.

Many metaphors involve the body, or parts of it. Lakoff and Johnson suggested the body was the basic blueprint for all conceptual understanding and as infants we build our understanding of the world and our place within it by creating comparisons between abstract concepts and concrete bodily experiences. There is growing evidence to support that people create their understanding of abstract aspects of reality by drawing their concrete and tangible experience of living within a body, and all the physical sensations that accompany that experience. We literally make sense of our world through our senses. (Leung et al, 2011:2)

When we engage with metaphors we tap into those deeper sensations as though they were the 'real thing'. We feel the wall we are banging our head against. We see the light at the end of the tunnel. By exploring our metaphor for being creative, for instance, we are likely to activate what actually happens for us when we are being creative, and recreate the sensations, feelings and thoughts. Many people will be able to enter a state of being creative by

exploring with a coach what it's like for them. A useful place to start a coaching session!

We can explore our metaphoric stories, characters and symbols and as we do so, develop a 'felt sense' of what it's like for us and discover how it happens. Moreover the metaphor can become an anchor so as to help trigger the person to reactivate the same state in the future.

### **Finding the inner creative**

When exploring people's inner sense of self using metaphors, it is quite normal for people to imagine there is more than one version of themselves. You may notice in people's language they often describe different and conflicting 'parts' by saying such things as: "Part of me wants to take a chance, but part of me doesn't want to risk it" or "There's a part of me that can be creative and imaginative"

Capitalise on such statements by asking:

### **"And that part of you that can be creative and imaginative is like what?"**

David Grove's work with trauma victims was often focused on finding the 'Child Within' as that hidden part of a person, frozen in time often held the key to discovering a solution for healing.

According to Berne's 'TA' (Transactional Analysis) framework of people and their interactions, we all have 'Child' parts of ourselves available but rarely visible, aspects of who we are that may have been set aside as we grew to adulthood. It is when we were natural, unconditioned children that we were at our most creative. Children use their imaginations and easily dream up all manner of wild and wacky stories and ideas, until they learn more sensible ways.

As a coach, by engaging with the child part of the coachee's self you can encourage these qualities to emerge and a more playful and creative person to 'wake up'. In TA terms, by talking directly with the child from your own child part – will enable that to happen.

How do you do that?

- Contracting – tell your coachee it’s okay to be playful, to go with the flow
- Allow yourself to be relaxed and playful
- Awaken your childlike curiosity and assume a state of questioning curiosity rather than expert explainer

Engaging with metaphors tends to bring out a more childlike state in people as it often taps into fables and fairy tales, possibly linking to more foundational symbols and stories upon which a person has shaped their view of reality and how things happen in it. It is really fascinating to be witness to a person’s emerging landscape of an entire metaphoric world open up in front of their eyes and become a playground for exploration.

To help someone explore their metaphor, keep quiet as much as you can! Really listen to their descriptions and prompt them to explore and explain any and all aspects that emerge. Reflect back the coachees own words from time and time and avoid paraphrasing. Stick to their language, don’t change it to yours!

Keep your questions really simple and just build on what the coachee has already said. See the next chapter for suggestions on Clean Language questions you can use which will help the person to stay within their inner world of imagination.

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# Chapter Five:

## Strengthening Creative Ability



You can't teach creativity, but you can avoid stifling it, and you can provide the right environment and conditions to allow creativity a chance to emerge. What's more, as a coach YOU can be creative in your approach. In this way you act as a role model, giving permission that it's okay for creativity to come out to play here. When you are creative as a coach, your creative 'output' is the coachee themselves. Your job is not to come up yourself with the innovative and original answer to all their prayers, your role is to work (and play) with the coachee as though they were your raw material and allow the masterpiece they can become to emerge!

### **How to keep out of your coachee's way**

The crux of igniting the spark of creativity in your coachee is very simple, but not at all easy. It is simply avoiding doing or saying anything that inadvertently

leads the coachee down a certain track of thought that you have initiated. By making suggestions or offering models, you deprive your coachee of the opportunity to explore more deeply their own trains of thinking that may ultimately lead them to a creative insight. This can be uncomfortable and challenging for both you and your coachee. It is too easy to rescue a floundering coachee by stepping in and offering a tentative solution. But you are not doing them any favours.

In my book “Clean Coaching: The Insider Guide to Making Change Happen” (Dunbar, 2017) I highlight the many traps that we can be seduced by and end up taking a directive approach. But in the end, providing the space and the stimulus for coachees to delve further into their own emerging insights will teach them how to find solutions for themselves, a far more sustainable outcome.

Howard-Jones (2008) refers to this purposeful and deliberate attempt to avoid influencing your coachee as: “Indirect direction”. Often referred to as ‘non-directive’, this approach is far from directionless as you are encouraging a certain style of thinking rather than a particular answer or kind of answer. He suggests the kinds of questions that work best are those that imply no single correct answer. He also advises that the questioner should lead by example and enter the appropriate state yourself (but don’t jump in with suggestions!).

### **Clean Language questions**

Clean Language is a way of communicating that limits the usual two-way exchange of dialogue and ideas, and instead keeps all the focus on the question ‘recipient’. The questions are ‘clean’ because they contain no assumptions, metaphors, ideas or opinions from the questioner. Clean Language was created in the 1980s by New Zealand counselling psychologist David Grove, originally for working with victims of trauma. Over the years their usage has expanded as the immense value of being clean in many kinds of situations has been discovered and explored.

Within coaching, Clean Language provides a question format that supports a non-directive approach. There are just 13 core Clean Language question formats, constructed from very basic vocabulary, phrased in a specific, particular way and delivered in a slow, steady cadence.

Each question format provides a basic scaffold within which to wrap the coachee's own words. In this way, every question is in fact completely unique and personal to the coachee that it is asked of.

**Example Clean Language questions:**

- “What kind of (coachee's word) is that (coachee's word)?”
- “And is there anything else about that (coachee's word)?”
- “And where could that (coachee's word) have come from?”
- “And what do you know about that (coachee's word)?”
- “And is there anything else that you know about that (coachee's word)?”
- “And anything else?”

Including Grove's later work on 'Emergent Knowledge' (EK), there are altogether around 30 or so core Clean Coaching question 'templates' to use, each one most effective when asked using exact phraseology along with the coachee's own terms. There are also many 'specialist' Clean questions for advanced users. Plus experienced Clean Coaches are able to create their own unique Clean questions as appropriate for the coachee and their situation. See [www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com) for more about Clean Coaching and the question formats.

U.S. based Creativity expert, author and university professor Tina Seelig (2015) suggests one sure-fire way to kick-start creativity in another person is to keep asking the same question until you get a different answer. And in this way, Clean Language questions are especially useful when used multiple times.

Don't worry that your coachee will think you sound repetitive. Each time you ask the question you are asking it related to the coachee's most recent answer and taking into account all that has emerged so far. In this way the questions become not only recursive but iterative, two patterns that can create self-sustaining feedback loops. Feedback loops in our thinking processes are not just taking us around in circles. With each cycle our understanding is broadened, our thoughts spiral outwards until we breakthrough to a new understanding.

Chances are, as the session continues your coachee will begin to reflect back on their previous answer even before you ask the next. A simple 'Anything else?' might be all that's required to nudge further thinking. Here's an example of a brief recursive and iterative questioning sequence:

Coachee: I want to be more confident

Coach: What kind of 'more confident?'

Coachee: More... consistently confident. Especially in new situations. I find I'm okay when doing things I am used to.

Coach: Is there anything else about 'more confident', when it's consistent like that?

Coachee: Yes, I could trust myself to create a good first impression.

Coach: And what kind of trust is that trust when you're consistently more confident?

Coachee: It's a certainty I'd feel in my heart

Coach: And when trust is a certainty you'd feel in your heart, where could that trust come from?

## **Use your imagination**

As we covered in chapter one, imagination is a hugely important ability to aid creativity, involving the use of one 'mind's eye' to bring forth images, sounds and sensations. Imagination is the forming of mental images or concepts of what is not actually currently present to the senses. Conception within our 'inner world' is closely linked to and impacts on our perception of the 'outer world' of reality.

'Constructivism' is a growing field of psychology which claims that people create meaning from the external world by building up their own mental representation (constructs) from the stimulus received. We say 'seeing is believing' and that is often true, but equally our beliefs become filters to the world we experience and believing something to be true means we are more likely to notice and respond to those environmental cues that confirm or support that belief. As Korsybski (1958) famously said "The Map is not the Territory" and this term is now a core presupposition of within the field of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), a practice dedicated to the achievement of human excellence.

Through advancements in brain imaging, there is much evidence that people use the same sensory neurological pathways to **imagine** seeing / hearing / moving as they would if they were actually undertaking the sensory task.

## **Cultivating visualisation**

At least two-thirds of visual brain areas can be activated when we visualise something as when we perceive the real thing (Kozhevnikov et al, 2005), suggesting visualisation may serve as a reasonable substitute for actual experience.

Imagine please, if you will, 3 elephants dancing. And hold that thought.

What kind of elephants were they? Large or small? All the same as each other? Were they a realist or a cartoon-like representation?

What kind of dance were they dancing?

Were all three doing the same dance or each one doing something different?

Were they dancing on all four feet or were they stood up on two legs?

Notice that to imagine the elephants, you conjured up some kind of mental representation, usually a picture or image you can 'see' in your mind's eye, that enable you to notice the answers to the questions above. But it's not just about vision. Other senses are engaged with our imaginary world and we also tend to hear, smell and taste. We also have physical sensations. For instance, many people will also imagine music accompanying their imaginary elephants. My ones always seem to be quite nearby and as a consequence I feel the vibrations in my body as the elephants do a kind of synchronised 'Riverdance'!

**Personal Exercise:**

- What kind of dancing elephants did you imagine?
- Can you describe or represent your image in some way.
- And can you share that with me?
- In a future edition of this book I would like to show the myriad of possible elephants that different people conjure up!
- Please share your image by emailing me at [coach@angeladunbar.co.uk](mailto:coach@angeladunbar.co.uk)

(See the end of this chapter for some examples of images shared with me so far)

In our imagination, anything is possible, we do not have to have actually ever seen REAL dancing elephants or flying pigs in order to create an image in our minds eye. But we do need certain kinds of knowledge relevant, such as what elephants look like, and what kind of motion constitutes a dance. But strangely, our minds can be confused by the imaginary and respond as though it were real. Imagine biting into a lemon. Most people, if they really focus on this imaginary action, will find themselves salivating. This trick of the mind is very useful, especially in coaching. Consider the value of having someone mentally

rehearse for a presentation, a meeting or difficult conversation. It's more than just good preparation, they are priming their bodies and minds to know how to do it and building up mental short cuts to be able to quickly get into the right state again in the future, when required.

But imagination has a wider scope for us and can be more mundane than that. We constantly use our imaginations: to plan ahead; try on creative ideas; read a story; listen to music etc. More generally, imagination is used to think of anything not currently available for direct experience through our senses. If I see a train go into a tunnel, I know that the train still exists in the tunnel as I can continue to imagine it. This ability is something we develop as very young infants. It is a key aspect to what makes us human. It means we are capable of putting ourselves into another person's shoes, experience empathy, make complex plans for the future, anticipate future events and make contingencies as a result, and so on.

Sometimes our imagination may appear totally abstract, and not seem to have any visual imagery or identifiable components. But, there is something we are using as a representation of the real world in our mind's eye. We manipulate symbols that represent real life objects, and also those that represent more intangible concepts, as we reason and process information. Through exploring the metaphors people naturally and automatically use in their language, a coach is able to bring those symbols into clear and conscious focus. The more awareness people have of these symbols, the sharper that clarity can become, with conceptual symbols developing a shape, location and various qualities.

You can improve your ability for imagination, very quickly and easily by simply practicing. Try visualising any kind of verbal description or written story. Try observing a scene and then close your eyes and see how closely you can imagine the scene.

Clean Language questions help people to focus on their internal imagery as they do not distract them from their own experience, by introducing the questioner's own ideas and views.

As a coach you can help a person develop their imagination by noticing when they refer to something in their inner world, often revealed through the use of a **sensory word**:

- I *feel* apprehensive
- I *see* a way forward
- *Sounds* like a success

Another very useful Clean Language you can ask to help people begin to become aware of their inner world of imagination is:

“Whereabouts do you ...(coachee’s ‘sensory word’)?”

For example: “And when you feel apprehensive, whereabouts do you feel apprehensive?” or “When you see a way forward, whereabouts do you see a way forward?”

### **Learning more about Clean Language**

This book is the tip of the metaphoric iceberg. It is written with many quick tips and simple questions and exercises to try to bring more creativity into your coaching. But there is much more to Clean Language and Grove’s later approaches in Emergent Knowledge than what is covered in this book. To become proficient takes time, structured learning, lots of practice, and also observing a skilful questioner in action so you can hear how the questions sound and see the reactions they produce. You can read more about our low-cost online training courses with live classes at [www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com)

### **Dancing Elephants – examples from readers:**

“I imagined them as three large grey elephants, all stood on two legs, doing the “Can-Can” and looking very happy and fun-loving. But all synchronised in movement and very cartoon-life.” S. A.

“ I imagined 3 elephants dancing standing on their 2 feet and having a great time. One had blond hair, a swimming suit and sunglasses (female), one had punk hair, leather clothes and was playing guitar (male) and singing the other one had white hair and a suit (female too). They were all smiling, deeply enjoying themselves. They were tall elephants, and cartoon-like (I thought straight-away about The Jungle Book in fact). They all had different style of dancing and were dancing on the music played by the elephant playing guitar and singing.” P.P.

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# Chapter Six:

## Creating the Conditions for Accidental Insight



### **Accidents will happen**

However much we plan ahead, consider what needs to happen and imagine alternative future scenarios, it's good for any control freak to realise that most really good ideas seem to come completely out of the blue and by accident. A touch of the random and unexpected is part and parcel of the creative experience.

## **Bringing synchronicity into your coaching**

As a coach you cannot make unexpected accidents happen – or else they wouldn't be accidental! But what you can do is relinquish your control over what happens enough to allow for the spontaneous to occur. This means sometimes going with the flow of the coachee's meandering train of thought rather than keeping them focused on goals, strategies and actions. You can help break down the walls around the coachee's thought structures by shaking things up a bit. Meet in a different space, for instance outside in nature somewhere or possibly in an art gallery or museum. Ask non-obvious questions about the accidental words, phrases or gestures that the coachee uses, seemingly unconnected to the topic of enquiry. David Grove used this approach with Clean Language, and I noticed he frequently asked questions of the following:

- Unusual words that seem out of place within the coachee's narrative
- 'Asides' people make when they comment about their own train of thought
- 'Spoonerisms' – the wrong word, mispronunciations, muddling one word with another

As mentioned in my Clean Coaching book (Dunbar, 2017): Grove (1998) suggested the 'accidental asides' that the coachee introduces are often the key to underpinning assumptions that hold thoughts in place. Although it can feel like going off track in the coaching session, sometimes we need to get lost before a new path appears.

### **Serendipity: Pick an object**

Think of an issue that's troubling you. Or a goal that you would like to achieve.

Now, look around you. Is there an object that you could choose to represent that issue or goal? Don't think too deeply about this. If nothing immediately springs to mind, almost anything will do.

Amazingly, more often than not people will select objects that, on closer examination, have much in common with their issue or goal.

David Grove referred to any object or item placed around the coachee as a 'co-inspiring item' that has the power to aid in the creative process of discovery. These are the things that just happen to be there, accidentally and randomly in the space around the coachee at the time of their session. If you are meeting the coachee in their own space there is much scope for this but also you can notice objects lying around everywhere, in meeting rooms, offices and outside. If you have coachees come to your premises, you can further enhance the possibility of co-inspiring items by having a wealth of odds and ends, ornaments and stuff lying around available for inclusion. In this instance, having a messy, cluttered practice room could be an advantage!

When a coachee picks an object and explores it in relation to their issue or goal, something happens between their conceptual inner world and their perception of the item that often brings about a gradual awareness of a deeper significance. The object becomes 'psychoactive': a term Grove used to describe an 'other worldly' quality that can attach itself to items and through the power of an unleashed imagination seem imbued with an energy or even a consciousness all of its own.

Don't confuse this with magic or mysticism, although it might seem almost spiritual in nature. It is the combination of structure and flexibility around the exploration of goals through examining real-life objects that bring about this altered state of awareness. The coachee's inner world is mapped onto their external space so it's not surprising that sometimes extraordinary coincidences and synchronous happenings seem to occur. It is as if objects within the space were becoming part of the coaching process. Through exploration of the real-world 'object', new connections are made in relation to the coachee's issue or goal. I have seen this phenomenon in action many, many times, for instance:

- A beautiful blue bowl was selected as the coachee's desired way of being themselves. The bowl reflected light and made others shine in its company. It could hold only a few selected things at one time.
- The goal was an object positioned at some distance, and as the wind blew, various items flew in front of it and obscured it, representing how the coachee got distracted by other priorities

And from my book (Dunbar, 2017:p166) a detailed example of synchronicity in action:

“I worked with a coachee once who chose to represent their goal during our session as a pine cone she had found in the garden. The structured shape and pattern on the pine cone made it an appropriate metaphor for the orderly result she was after. She placed the pine cone on the floor to explore it more thoroughly. Very randomly, a cat suddenly jumped in through an open window, ran up to the pine cone and picked it up in its mouth before charging off just as suddenly, taking the pine cone with it!

As the facilitator, I was taken aback and unsure how best to respond to such an odd happening. I took a deep breath and carried on with the Clean Coaching process, asking the coachee what it was she knew now, about her goal. She also seemed surprised by what had happened, but said: *“Actually it’s very typical of what happens to me, at work and in my life in general. I take ages planning a very structured goal, so I know exactly what to do to achieve it. And then someone – or something - comes along out of nowhere and changes the goal posts! It’s like they ‘steal’ my outcome, just like that cat. My goal no longer belongs to me, in fact it feels so distant it just disappears off my radar...”* What followed was an ‘ah ha’ moment, the coachee began to see a pattern in how things had been happening and how she needed to address the wider environment and tackle things differently if she wanted to achieve a personal outcome.

Thanks to the cat, my coachee gained insight that they may otherwise had not. This cat was a great example of a ‘co-inspiring item’ – although usually they are not quite so animated! But things do have a tendency to come alive during Clean Space, often with the coachee imagining certain objects as capable of intention and emotion. This projected personification can be very helpful in a session by providing another source of knowledge.”

Even more interestingly, research has demonstrated how people can make sense of any object in relation to their current circumstances and problem at hand, even if they haven’t chosen the object themselves. Research by Howard-Jones (2008) compared the results for having objects selected by the participant, someone else or just randomly. Almost always, the individual is

able to make sense from the object and apply to their situation. This is because human beings are great at making connections between things and will do so with just about any two things. And for creative insight, the more tenuous the link may be between the object and the situation, the more likely it is to jump-start an entirely new train of thought!

There is a Clean Language question you can ask to help a person explore any connection, similarity or difference:

**“Is there a relationship between (your goal) and (this chosen object)?”**

**Top tip:** Do not name the object according to what you think it is, however obvious that might appear. Refer to the object with the same language the coachee uses.

### **Using props to springboard into creative thinking**

Bearing in mind this ability we have to make sense of what’s around us and make it relate to what’s going on within us, you can see how the use of various props such as objects or picture cards, can be very useful to help people reframe their experience and see it through more creative eyes.

Many coaches have recognised that using props in the coaching session, such as objects or pictures can be especially useful for adding an element of randomness to the equation. Objects, cards and pictures can be manipulated, moved and seen from multiple perspectives, as well as noticing where they may sit / fit within the surrounding landscape. A selection of multiple objects, cards and pictures can be drawn upon and the coachee can then also explore the relationship between each item. As children we learned to ‘play’ with toys: and through these objects we learned about ourselves and the world and developed our ability to be creative. For most of us that ability to project our thoughts onto objects around us is natural although as adults we may have gotten out of the habit.

Having an external representation of the coachee’s goal has many additional benefits, aside from aiding creativity. For instance, it enables the coachee to

detach from any emotional content and view the object from a more dispassionate and logical perspective. In a way, the object acts as a container and holds any and all thoughts and feelings the coachee may become aware of. It's also easier to hold onto any new insights or understanding, with a single object acting as the repository, to keep in mind and remember later.

Although the use of picture cards could be seen as a limit to a person's boundless imagination, the advantage is that it provides a safe and easy way for the coachee to begin playing with imagery within a coaching session. The availability of a selection of 'ready made' images and/or objects takes away any fear or embarrassment a coachee may feel if they are asked to think of something original or draw something for themselves. That old negative belief that they are not creative enough for that could get in the way of their imagination.

I have found that by using objects and pictures early on in the coaching relationship, the coachee's confidence in developing their own symbols, metaphors and drawings in later sessions increases.

I have occasionally experimented with encouraging the coachee to bring with them to a session an object they have found or even a photograph they have taken that represents a quality they are working on, an aspect of their goal or a key insight they would like to remember. Although this may take away the spontaneity of picking something 'in the moment', it seems helpful to get coachees more acquainted with noticing the obscure things around them and making connections through them.

Recent research (Diehl et al, 2016) has shown that taking photographs of an event or place actually greatly enhances one's experience of that event or place. It seems putting a 'frame' around a certain view helps us hold it in context and value what we are really seeing. Within the field of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), there is an established conversational technique known as 'reframing' which is a process designed to help people re-examine the context by which they are viewing a certain issue. Change the 'frame' and you change your perception of the 'picture'.

## Looking around for the unexpected

There are a number of Clean Coaching processes that invite the coachee to notice more what is happening around them, to encourage that synchronous, accidental moment of insight.

One such process is called 'Clean Spinning'.

David Grove was fascinated with having people move into different positions within the same physical space, rotating on an axis and seeing what's around them in full 360 degree view, before settling on one single position or point - randomly or by choice.

A simple coaching exercise that you could try that emulates this approach would be to ask your coachee:

- "What do you notice around you? Take your time and scan all around you. You can stand up and spin slowly around, if you would like?"
- "Keep spinning until you notice something interesting...and then stop"

When the coachee stops, ask:

- "And what do you know from this direction?"
- "And is there anything else you know?"
- "(of any item noticed and described) "What kind of (coachee's description) is that (coachee's description)?"
- "And is there anything else about that (coachee's description)?"

You can continue in this vein for as long as it seems useful. David Grove would use these simple question formats in a repetitive sequence, often involving six 'rounds' of the same or similar iterations. Having studied the human mind and how networking processes appeared to be at the heart of how it works, he capitalised on the known 'small world' phenomena that demonstrates that all points of a network can be reached through connecting just 6 information hubs. In the next chapter, we cover more about Grove's 'Powers of Six' concepts and 'Emergent Knowledge'.

Meanwhile, to conclude this chapter on accidental creativity, it's worth recognising that although creative insights happen in an instant, there is often much groundwork that takes place before that magic moment, and as coaches we can help the coachee to stick with it, having the patience for them to explore within and around their themes, goals and issues without putting pressure on them to get anywhere, but just to notice where they are now and what is around. Ironically, this letting go of pushing the coachee 'forwards' frees them to go in any possible direction and often means more movement takes place, by way of transformative change in both their beliefs and ideas as well as real world actions and behaviours.

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# Chapter Seven:

## Following the process to creativity



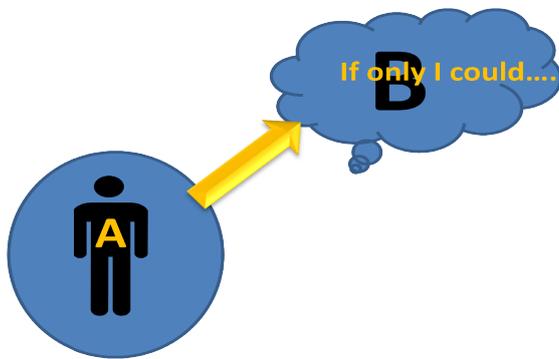
### The 'A' to 'B' model

In an earlier chapter I mentioned how David Grove likened the coaching process to a journey of 'getting from 'A' to 'B''. He gave a very simple but powerful description of the different sources of information that coachees can utilise to discover creative solutions. Each source of information resides in a different perceptual space in our mind's eye.

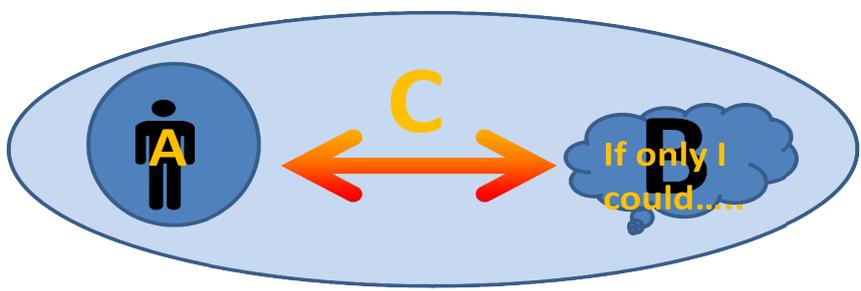
The coachee comes to the session with all their own experiences, beliefs, history, identity etc. Everything they know about themselves exists in one space which Grove labelled as 'A'.

And then there is the goal that the client wants, which is where they want to

get to. By its very definition, the goal can't be in the same place that they are, or it would already be achieved. So, that goal must be somewhere different, usually outside of themselves, in a space we can call 'B'.



Coaching is about helping people get from their current reality at 'A' over to their desired outcome – the destination of 'B'. As mentioned previously, although the most obvious route to success seems like it would be a direct line between the two spaces in as few a steps as possible, this is seldom the case. Grove suggested that between 'A' and 'B' would be everything else we know about where we are now and where we want to be, including what's stopping us. So all the barriers, all the excuses, reasons, explanations – real or otherwise that prevent us from achieving our goal, also sit between the two spaces, in a space Grove coined 'C'. These three spaces, similar to Newell and Simon's (1972) 'problem space' form an overall problem space or frame (see Chapter Two). This is like a belief network or repetitive thought bubble that goes "I am over here at 'A', and I can't get to 'B' because of 'C' ". These are the 'mental sets' or habits of thinking that hold us stuck within the limits of what we think we know.



This is why with Clean Coaching, we take a very different and more creative strategy to help a coachee get from 'A' to 'B'. Clearly a direct route cannot work else the coachee would have already achieved their goal. Instead, we take a more circuitous route, that may take us 'all around the houses'. The client will discover more about achieving this goal from other mental spaces and we can

help them explore the less obvious path that could open up an entirely different perspective on the whole thing. Outside of this whole 'A' to 'B' structure lies the space of D: unrealised insights, as-of-yet unknowns, long-forgotten learnings and to-be-discovered wisdom.

This 'A' to 'B' strategy can be viewed as an actual process or journey for the coachee to explore, and many Clean Coaching techniques invite the coachee to explore these imaginary spaces as though they were real. The coachee is encouraged to map the spaces out in real locations within the physical space around them, taking their internal perspective and making it something tangible that they can actually move around in.

### **Networking Answers**

David Grove felt the space between 'A' and 'B' could be bridged by taking a networking approach. He used aspects from networking theory and built on the scientific principles of emergence to formulate a new understanding of how people change. He viewed the mind as a series of interconnected networks of information, with our available understanding (or working memory) sitting within a wider network containing all we know consciously and unconsciously. Like a computer with a limited data bank that has access to a wider source outside (the work wide web), creative solutions can be reached by connecting various information hubs across the network. Like joining the dots, the picture emerges with each extra connection. Many current psychologists and social scientists are beginning to think of the mind as operating like a giant network, and particular human phenomena such as consciousness as being an 'emergent' quality rather than belonging to one particular structure or region within the brain.

'Emergence' describes a natural and spontaneous process of change that can be observed happening in many different ways across different contexts. In complex networks, rather than change coming from a single place or one 'leader', instead many individual units are interacting over and over again in set patterns that ultimately 'bubble up' and something new emerges overall - at a different scale and on a higher level. This could be seen to describe what happens when people have a creative insight, modelling what is known about neuronal networks of activity, as well as cognitive thought patterns.

With better ways of seeing the physical brain in action, fMRI scans are showing how the brain facilitates thought, and neurons do indeed work in similar ways to other units in a dynamic network: whether we are talking about a computer attached to the web; ants in a colony or birds in a flock. Intelligence emerges from the sheer numbers involved.

David Rock has been influential in bringing cognitive neuroscience into the practical domain of coaching, and describes the 'Ah ha moment' (2012), explaining how people solve different kinds of problems in different ways. For linear problem solving, such as mathematical questions, we bring a small selection of relevant data into our conscious 'working memory' rather like a mental whiteboard to manipulate the pieces of the puzzle until we calculate the answer. However for non-linear problems with no standard answer, we need to enlist the help of our non-conscious mind, which is vast in comparison to our conscious limit. He highlights the dilemma of encouraging insight, as something that seems to be central to learning, yet can't be forced.

However Rock claims that following a few simple rules can vastly increase the likelihood of having an insightful moment. Insights happen when being in a state of 'internal mind wandering', rather than directly focused on the external problem at hand. So, for people developers such as coaches, it's about creating the right space for insight, encouraging the other person to have some quiet time and a quiet mind. And, simply allowing people to reflect. In a sense, giving them permission to pay attention to their own thoughts, rather than to the coach.

Confirming the value of mental quietness, neuroscientists (Jung-Beeman et al. 2008) found an *alpha effect* (indicating the brain at rest) in the visual and auditory cortex *just before* someone has an insight. This seems to be because we temporarily tune out of watching the external world, and switch attention to fragile internal processing activity. At the very moment an insight reaches conscious awareness, there is a high frequency "gamma spike" within the brain, thought to be produced as a new neural network pathway crystallizes into shape and an idea is born.

As the process of insight happens mostly at an unconscious level, it is not easy to pinpoint exactly what is happening. For many years cognitive psychologists have been interested in researching the exact thinking processes that lead to a moment of insight. Although some aspects of the process remain mysterious

and/or disputed, some key stages seem quite certain, such as Newell and Simon's (1972) stages of human problem solving, highlighted in Chapter One:

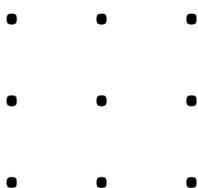
Here is a summary:

- 1) We perceive the problem (distilled through filters of interpretation and prior experience)
- 2) We then retrieve information from all we know, unconsciously limiting this to what seems most pertinent based on our biases. This produces the 'problem space' which provides the scope but blinkers us to anything beyond it.
- 3) Finally, we search for a solution (consciously), mentally rehearsing in our minds eye possible strategies using the information already selected within the problem space.

As covered in Chapter One, within the framework of this model, it is relatively commonplace for people to make a 'false start' and begin with certain assumptions about a problem which may not be useful or even true.

The 'nine dot problem' is a good example of this. People constrain their own thinking by the initial structure and shape we place around the problem at hand. Our exploration is then restricted by those unhelpful assumptions and we cannot escape them, hence the impasse. The problem solver is trapped within a circle of their own thinking, constrained by the very mechanisms that perceived and explored the problem in the first place.

#### The Nine Dot Problem



Connect all the dots by drawing four straight, continuous lines that pass through each of the nine dots, without lifting the pencil from the paper.

For one way of doing this, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOvilAbB2i8>

## The paradox of insight

Stellan Ohlsson (2011) argues that the puzzle is why we often get to a moment of *impasse* before an insight comes to mind. It is like the mind has to give up before finding a new way of seeing the problem, and therefore the solution. He sees that the paradox of insight is its unpredictability. If we are trapped within the box of our own preconceptions, how is it that some people manage to break out? And if some people can, why doesn't it happen to them all the time?

Ohlsson reframes our perception of cognitive mental systems. He explains that until quite recently, Newtonian science had led us to believe that we live in a 'Clockwork' universe, such as the classical cognitive psychology comparison of 'information processing' in the mind mirroring that of a computer. But the brain is messier than this and represents a natural system that has evolved over time. Ohlsson reflects on the question: What if the mind is more like a different kind of system, namely the weather?

## The Redistribution Theory

Ohlsson argues that, at least some of the time, and under the right conditions, the impasse itself can become the trigger to discovering insight. Ohlsson calls this the "Redistribution Theory", and says that repeated, failed attempts to solve a problem can eventually cause the problem space to disintegrate. The building blocks on which the perception of the problem is based start to fall down. Each building block represents a layer of processing activated during the initial perception. With progressive failure, each layer receives negative feedback from the layer above, decreasing its level of activation until it switches itself off. As Ohlsson (2011, p109) summarises: *"Turning off a choice point relaxes whatever constraints it imposed on the alternatives to the options it represents"*.

The reason the impact is often sudden is due to the nature of thresholds: as one doorway of thinking is closed, it enables another to be opened.

For the problem solver, their entire representation of the problem and potential solutions has been transformed as a single change at one layer changes the coherent whole that the mind created from the sum of all the processing layer's outputs. The new problem representation starts a new

retrieval process, suddenly a whole new set of information pieces become available, from our vast store of long-term memory, previously inhibited by the constraints of the original problem space.

Ohlsson also says that a person *“trapped in an impasse is not in the same mental state as someone who has disengaged from problem solving”* (2011, p113). The thinker is deeply absorbed in the problem, and the unconscious mind is busy sending inhibitory feedback down the processing layers.

So what are the conditions for insight? According to Ohlsson, one factor seems to be perseverance: consistently failing enough times for the building blocks of the problem space to start falling down. Another is spending sufficient time re-evaluating the initial problem, so that different layers of processing begin to be activated, ready to enter our conscious thought space when an existing layer gets deactivated. This confirms the importance of focusing on ‘A’ not just ‘B’.

Grove’s Emergent Knowledge (EK) process describes a layered approach to problem solving that has similarities to Ohlsson’s redistribution theory. Having studied the science of emergence and networking principles, Grove suggested that there are **six** steps or levels to insight. The significance of the number six is based around observable principles of networking, which follow the same rules regardless to whether the network is man-made, a social network or a natural network. It only takes a series of six interconnections between hubs on a network for any one part of the network to connect to any other part, however complex.

Research (Milgram, 1967) has shown that we really do live in a ‘small world’ despite its seeming enormity. You can connect any person on the planet (of 6 billion people) to any other person with an average of only six socially associated people. This is referred to as the ‘Six degrees of separation’. So, the first degree of separation includes everyone you know directly, the second, everyone that each of them knows, and so on. We often increase our reach across a social network through connections with the less obvious, more distant acquaintance who has a completely different social circle to ourselves. The value of distant, ‘weaker’ associations in expanding the available network is important to brain/mind networks and well as social ones. In fact Beeman et al (2008) suggest *“...variables that improve the ability to detect weak associations may improve insight solving”*

Grove likened the Clean questioning process to how Internet search engines apply an iterative approach to finding the most relevant information within a complex and chaotic network such as the World Wide Web. The search engine operates the same command over and over again with each answer becoming the cumulative stimulus for the next command, generating a series of feedback loops which gradually improve the initial 'approximate' solutions until the target answer is reached.

Clean questions are also asked in an iterative sequence. Simply put, the same question is repeatedly asked of the answer given to the previous question. On average, it takes six iterations of the same question/answer cycle to reach a new understanding or insight. Each repetition of the question takes the coachee to another layer of thinking.

Grove suggested that the most crucial of steps is the fourth iteration / question cycle, which he termed 'the wobble'. Rather like Ohlsson's description of an impasse, this is where Grove says everything that the problem solver thinks they know about the problem starts to unravel. The current 'small world' system of networked information hubs has reached a level of complexity that it has become overloaded and begins to deactivate.

The initial 'set up' of the Clean Coaching session enables the client to re-evaluate the problem and use the real-life space around them as a metaphor for the conceptual 'problem space' that they have constructed. The repetition of the same or very similar questions helps the client keep their current thinking channels open to encourage greater and greater connectivity to available information. As feedback loops of thinking are created, the unproductive elements eventually reach a limit, where they begin passing back negative, inhibitory feedback and eventually switch off.

The Clean Coach's role is to hold the space for the person long enough for the building blocks to fall down, so a brand new representation of the problem and solution can emerge. Although this cannot be guaranteed to happen 100% of the time, Clean Coaching with the principles of EK is a very useful way of encouraging the right conditions for insightful solutions to emerge.

Given that insight can only emerge after an impasse, it is extremely important to effectively contract with the coachee in the first instance, so that expectations are set and the process holds no surprise (although the outcome may well do). A life-long motto of mine has been 'Confusion is the pre-requisite

to inspiration' and I put this to my coachees as one way to interpret any feelings of uncertainty that may come up in the coaching session.

There is another ingredient to the creativity process that is well worth appreciating, and that is the importance of both coach and client having trust, in each other and in the process. With trust comes the perseverance to hold your nerve and keep the mind quietly attentive on the impasse or 'wobble' until an insight begins to emerge.

### **Coaching Exercise:**

#### **Starting a creative Clean Coaching session**

##### **1) Establish the Goal:**

(The exact terminology of the first question can be varied according to what the coach intuitively feels suits the coach and the client) For instance:

*"What is your goal/ /desired outcome?"*

or

*"What would you like to have happen?"*

*Listen to what the coachee says. Do not paraphrase back to them.*

##### **2) Client represents the goal in some way:**

*Ask:*

*"Can you write or draw [goal] on a piece of paper or....find an object that represents [goal]?"*

*Explore:*

*"What have you written / chosen?"*

##### **3) Client places paper or object:**

*"And place that goal somewhere in the space around you, in a space that*

*feels / seems right"*

**4) Have the client place themselves in the right space in relation to their goal:**

*"And where would you be in relation to [goal]? In front, beside, behind, or in another room?"*

*"Now, place yourself in the right space in relation to [goal]."*

**5) Ask a series of questions to explore and check the distance, height, direction, angle, position and space of both the person at "A" and the goal at "B". Choose from the following, in any order and until client is sure that the space is right:**

*"And is the distance right between you and [goal]?"*

*"And are you in the right space?"*

*"And is [goal] in the right space?"*

*"And are you at the right height?"*

*"Is [goal] at the right height?"*

*"And are you facing the right direction?"*

*"And is [goal] facing the right direction?"*

*"And are you at the right angle?"*

*"And is [goal] at the right angle?"*

*"And are you in the right position?"*

*"And is [goal] in the right position?"*

*"Are you the right amount of distance from [goal]?"*

**6) When the client seems sure they and the goal are in the right spaces, ask:**

*"And what do you know now?"*

Followed up with

*"And is there anything else that you know now?"*

At this point you can invite the coachee to write or draw any insights or

observations on their paper.

At this stage you have set up an external representation of the coachee's inner 'A' to 'B' model, and could continue to explore this creatively in many different ways, using more typical, traditional coaching questions or continue in a Clean Coaching manner, exploring any metaphors that have mentioned.

You can also continue to explore the space around the coachee and their goal, as covered in Chapter Nine.

# Chapter Eight: Deciding to be Creative



## Creating conditions for creativity

You can help your coachee to decide to be creative before the first session even begins. So much of the coachee's expectations of what will happen in the coaching session will be formed by the way you present your services and contract in advance. If you wait until the start of the first session to tell them to use their imagination, it may be too late!

Let people know right from the start that the coaching process will invite them to think along different tracks and they can expect to be asked unusual questions to encourage this. I also ask coachee to come ready to go with the flow and be open to different experiences. I make it clear that there are no right answers to any question I ask, and that it's okay to not know an answer. In fact, I will usually explain to coachees that being in a state of *not knowing* is really important, and ask them if they are prepared to do that.

You can also invite them to bring with them to the coaching session suitable items to encourage creativity, such as coloured pens and paper. Plus you can

get their creative juices flowing by asking them to find a picture or object or take a photograph to represent their outcome, or themselves (for instance 'at their creative best')

I am also a fan of setting written reflection questions that the coachee can consider prior to a session so they come prepared. This is a double-edged sword as on the one hand, the prepared mind has had time to 'incubate' and getting to a creative insight is more likely to happen. On the other hand, the danger is both the coach and the coachee end up constrained by the questions and just follow a predetermined track.

I see these written reflection questions as a process for the coachee to undertake prior to the session. We do not necessarily have to go over the material, I trust that whatever has resulted from the reflection time will surface in the session. I also know that depending when the coachee considered the questions, things may have already shifted since and taking time going over the questions could now be old ground.

Finally, the core condition for creativity is to feel safe. You can begin to sow the seeds for that safety in everything you communicate to the coachee prior to the first session, and this will need to continue throughout the whole coaching assignment. Here are some reflections on how to make the coachee feel safe in advance and during your coaching sessions:

- Your confidence, professionalism and demeanour will inspire trust in you and the process.
- Consider where the coaching will take place and invite them (if possible) to choose a place where they will feel relaxed and free from distractions.
- Convey a playfulness along with professionalism. Let them know that it's okay to explore whatever they want in whatever way they would like. Be friendly and authentically human.
- When using a Clean Coaching approach, deliver your questions slowly and deliberately, with the expectation that the coachee will find it easy to reply. Any uncertainty in your voice will likely project over to the coachee

### **Getting into a state of creativity**

As well as inviting coachees to reflect in writing prior to a coaching session, writing things down aids the creative process during a coaching session too.

With each word penned, the impetus to be creative increases and the coachee can transcend their usual thought patterns and find a new voice.

Within the Clean Coaching suite of techniques, David Grove developed a comprehensive process known as 'Clean Hieroglyphics' which uses the coachee's own words, drawings and doodles as the focus for creative insight.

Following on from the starting process highlighted in the previous chapter, the coach could continue to work with the coachee's paper on which they have written or drawn their goal.

The idea is to encourage them to add more and more detail to their paper until a complex web of ideas, thoughts and potentially random connections have been somehow represented on the paper.

There are many Clean Language questions within the complete and complex process, which goes beyond the scope of this book. However, as a starting point that you could try in your coaching immediately, you can ask the coachee:

"Is there anything else that needs to be on your paper now?"

As the coachee replies to your questions, you can periodically invite them to put their thoughts down on the paper, in whatever way seems right.

When the paper appears full and 'ripe' with a myriad of words, doodles, drawings and other markings, you can shift their awareness on to what may be emerging on that paper.

Clean Language questions to encourage this shift include:

"What are you noticing about the words, the letters within the words, or drawings, or even the spaces around the words, letters or drawings?"

Or:

"Where are you drawn to on your paper?"

The idea is to take them away from their conceptual thought processes and to examine what's on the paper in a more perceptual way. It could mean noticing the shape of a letter that stands out as different, or an empty space on an otherwise busy background. Like reading in between the lines, this process helps people to notice the embedded assumptions or gaps in their thinking, and to see any connections that may be emerging. Keep the focus of attention on what's on the paper and encourage them to see it afresh over and over again. Eventually, rather like one of those 'magic eye' pictures, a new meaning can emerge from the messiness of the complexity.

Sometimes it helps to invite coachees to add more paper around the original piece of paper – in changing the overall frame, often very different thoughts and ideas come out to be added to those extra pieces of paper.

To help make this process as creative as possible, it's helpful to have a selection of different kinds of pens / pencils in a variety of colours, and to have a wide selection of paper in different shapes and sizes.

The process can be conducted in sets of six repetitive question sets (iterative) or just until something new emerges. When the coachee has an insight, you can ask them if there is anything they like to change, add or remove from their paper now. Finally, you can ask them if they would like to rewrite their goal in light of any new understanding.

**Coaching exercise: One simple question:**

A key Clean question for gathering up any emerging insights during the Clean Coaching process is:

**“And what do you know, now?”**

**Getting in touch with creativity**

As we covered in Chapter Four, although most people tend to think of themselves as a single, coherent identity with one core personality, most psychological models of 'self' conclude that people are made up of multiple parts, different sides of themselves play different roles depending on the circumstances, our personal habits and the people around us.

As mentioned previously, inviting people to explore their 'creative best' is an excellent way of connecting to their most creative 'part'.

You might also help the coachee to explore where their creativity comes from. For most, this will not be their head!

Western society has for a long time neglected the body as a source of knowing and insight. Through coaching you can ask Clean Language questions to connect to the parts of the coachee's self that may offer different, creative perspectives.

Knowledge from within ourselves and from our bodies is known as 'tacit knowledge'. What is considered to be 'knowledge' is a far ranging topic, covering a whole branch of philosophy (that of epistemology), so this is a far from straightforward question. We lump a whole lot of different kinds of stuff into the "Things we know about" pile, including both explicit (knowing what) and tacit knowledge (knowing how). Explicit knowledge can exist outside of ourselves. It can be written down and communicated to others, such as material facts and objective 'truths'. Whereas the tacit lies within each of us, and is 'more than we can tell', which includes personal beliefs, values and experience. As we live in a world now that's exploding with explicit knowledge (often contradictory), available instantly everywhere through electronic devices - could this kind of knowing actually **stifle** our ability to decide and act?

Hodgkin (1991) describes 'tacit' knowledge as 'a range of conceptual and sensory information and images that can be brought to bear in an attempt to make sense of something'. The book "Personal Knowledge" by Michael Polanyi (1958) argues against so called objective knowledge and for the value of passionate, personal participation in all comprehension.

Clean Coaching focuses repeatedly on what the coachee knows, (without any external input, advice or suggestions from the coach) which inevitably creates the catalyst for action. One key value to Clean Coaching is the time and space given to explore what the coachee tacitly knows now, here. At this moment and in this space. Rather than rush headlong towards agreeing actions that may or may not actually happen or indeed help the coachee make progress. Clean techniques hold the coachee in their own

introspective experience long enough for their understanding to deepen, widen, increase and possibly change. Until actions become so motivational and obviously 'right' that the coachee can carry them out with ease.

### **Coaching exercise:**

#### **Exploring multiple selves**

One way of helping coachees to discover their different parts and the role each plays is to invite them to explore the different ways they refer to themselves using a range of pronouns, including "I", "me", "myself" and in third person as "you" or even "one". The complete 'Clean Pronouns' process is covered on our comprehensive training programme. A simple way to begin exploring this with your client is to have them draw an outline of their body. No artistic talent needed, just a single line drawing to represent a 'map' of their physical shape.

As with the Clean Heiroglyphics process described in the previous chapter, you can invite the coachee to populate this drawing with words, doodles and drawings. In this instance the purpose is to explore aspects of themselves and each question set can be asked of each pronoun. For instance:

"When you say "I", whereabouts is your "I"?"

"Place your "I" in whatever way seems right, on your body map"

You can help each part become personified and reveal its purpose through a series of Clean questions:

"And does your "I" have a shape or a size?"

"Is there anything else about that "I"?"

"What does that "I" know?"

"And what would that "I" like to have happen?"

Encourage the coachee to add more to their body map as the process

continues and explore each of their pronouns in turn.

David Grove developed many question sets to explore aspects of the body, within the questionnaire 'The Senses Census'.

### **The Senses Census**

David Grove along with Carol Wilson (expert performance coach, author and speaker) developed a comprehensive 8 page questionnaire known as the 'Senses Census' to be used as a written reflective tool pre and post coaching sessions. The questionnaire poses many Grovian-style Clean questions arranged in the following areas:

**The coachee's sense of A:** Including their sense of time, their own body and 'parts' of body. For instance in the 'body' section the question posed is:

*Draw a body map. Define and place on the map the descriptions of each of your body parts and what contribution each has made to who you are today:*

It also asks questions of the coachee's body positions and body movements, as well as exploring their body of 'speech', words and mannerisms.

**The coachee's sense of B:** Including a map to all goals – helping to define an overall life mission or purpose.

**The coachees's sense of C:** Helping the coachee create a map of the space between A and B, and explore their own metaphor for the kind of journey they might need to take.

**The coachee's sense of D:** In this section, the coachee is encouraged to think about what would change the map of their journey, for example:

*Can you list or draw a representation of events that would change the map of your journey from A to B. What people, places or things could influence you, your journey and your [goal]?*

In its entirety, my impression has always been that the questionnaire could overload a coachee, however selectively choosing relevant sections to give to

the coachee to reflect on between coaching session, can be an excellent way to reinforce self-discovery and growth outside the actual coaching session itself.

This questionnaire is provided on our Clean Coaching training programme and explored in depth.

### **Turning ideas into action**

The decision to be creative needs to be matched with a further decision to actually do something with any creative idea or insight that emerges.

For this to happen, the coachee must be motivated to make change.

You can encourage that level of motivation through helping the coachee engage fully with all their senses with their desired outcome. Not what they need to do, but more widely around how the world will be to them once their goal has been achieved. This is another area where Clean Language can help by allowing the coachee to enter their inner world of imagination and bring their goal to life, through metaphor.

No coaching session would be complete without some kind of exploration of 'next steps' or actions, and this is a crucial part of the creative process. No idea is ever truly a 'good one' until it manifests into reality and can be assessed according.

Within Clean Coaching, there are a number of questions to help take ideas and help them become concrete actions.

The simplest of which involves just four questions, which can be repeated over and over again as the coachee whittles down his or her actions into clearer and more manageable specific steps.

To draw out an action, ask:

**“What needs to happen next?”**

To define clearer actions steps, ask:

**“And how will you do that?”**

Follow up with further iterations of “And how will you do *that?*” until you have a very specific step. Then track back to the next action and drill down further.

For each action you can also pinpoint even further:

“And can you do that?”

(to check the coachee’s belief in their own capability)

“And when will you do that?”

(again you can ask this repeated until you have a very specific date and time, along with commitment)

**References:**

Hodgkin, R. (1991), Michael Polanyi - Prophet of life, the universe and everything, Times Higher Educational Supplement, September 27, pp.15-21.

Polanyi, M. (2002) [1958]. Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. London: Routledge

# Chapter Nine:

## Creating a Space for Creativity



### **Space matters.**

As covered in an earlier chapter, where you are effects what you know.

The space in which you conduct your coaching session will influence much of what happens within it. If the coachee is sitting in their usual place of work they are likely to be constrained by their usual ways of thinking. Think outside the office box and be imaginative about your potential venues to coach in. If possible, you can choose interesting outside spaces full of co-inspiring items and which encourages physical movement. You could go for a coaching walk in nature, or meet in a nature reserve, or in an art gallery or museum. If you need to stay in the coachee's work premises, find a different office space. Or at the very least, have the coachee choose a space within their office to be, not in their standard position in front of the computer.

If you are very enthusiastic, try tree climbing, which recent research has shown can improve working memory (the problem space 'size') by up to 50% (Alloway & Alloway, 2015)

In fact, the same is true of other dynamic activities like balancing on a beam, carrying awkward weights and navigating around obstacles. With more space these kinds of physical opportunities more easily present themselves.

If you still doubt the power of space, another interesting piece of research took the metaphor of 'thinking outside the box' and applied it literally to see what happened. Leuing and colleagues (2012) took this commonly used metaphor for creative stimulus and conducted a study where they got participants to literally sit inside or outside a 5' x 5' box, so as to study how people perform in different working environments. A higher percentage of participants sitting outside the box gained insight of the problems they were instructed to solve.

### **Clean Space**

As covered my book Clean Coaching (Dunbar, 2017):

Space is the perfect medium for Clean Coaching as people use it in many imaginative ways. It is the universal metaphor that crops up in nearly all conversations about goals and outcomes. We place things in imaginary spaces in our minds eye, but that space is easily superimposed onto the physical space around us. Our non-physical thoughts are not contained within the physical boundaries of our brains, or even our bodies. All our experience - both internal imaginings and external reality - takes place in our own personal theatre of the world. We use the objects and spaces around us as containers for our thoughts: anchors that trigger certain ideas, memories and emotions. Space is so ubiquitous in language that some psychologists (Pinker, 2007) suggest it's the very medium through which conscious reflective thought can happen.

If you consider space as an extension of the coachee's inner world and capable of holding different thoughts, ideas and insights, then it's easy to see how you can coach someone to move into new spaces and find out what they know from each.

You can use two simple questions from the Clean Coaching repertoire to help a coachee explore the space around them:

“Is there another space that you could go to from that space there?”

Or

“Is there a space around you that knows about [coachee’s words]?”

Followed up with

“And what do you know from that space there?”

Remember, these questions are designed to prompt physical movement and to get the coachee to move into another space somewhere around them. It isn’t enough for them to imagine a different space.

#### **References:**

Alloway, R. G., & Alloway, T. P. (2015). The working memory benefits of proprioceptively demanding training: a pilot study. *Perceptual and motor skills*, 120(3), 766-775.

Leung, A. K. Y., Kim, S., Polman, E., Ong, L. S., Qiu, L., Goncalo, J. A., & Sanchez-Burks, J. (2012). Embodied metaphors and creative “acts”. *Psychological science*, 23(5), 502-509.

# Chapter Ten: Bringing Creativity into your Coaching – a summary



There are many ideas scattered throughout this book, some explicit and some are still only half-baked! I hope many of you will email me your own thoughts and insights and over time this book will evolve into a collaborative repository of various coaching approaches, skills and methods to use and encourage creativity.

Meanwhile, here is a brief summary of some of the key messages within this book:

### **Giving the gift of creativity:**

- Give your coachee permission to be creative
- Explore with them “When you are at your creative best, that’s like what?”
- Invite them to explore their own metaphors

### **Strengthening creative muscles:**

- Let the coachee explore their own ideas without interference from you
- Use Clean Language questions to limit your biases
- Encourage the coachee to use their imagination and engage with their inner senses

### **Creating the conditions for ‘accidental’ insight:**

- Use random objects and invite the coachee to choose something to represent their goal
- Come with creative props to make it easy for the coachee to springboard into creative imagination
- Ask the coachee to look around: what do they know from that direction?

### **Following the process to creativity:**

- The mind is like a network – join the dots to get the picture
- Insight comes just after an impasse. Give the coachee the space to get stuck, give up and then emerge the other side into insight
- Starting a creative coaching session cleanly

### **Deciding to be creative:**

- Encourage the coachee to decide to be creative even before the first session
- Most importantly create a safe space where the coachee trusts you and the coaching
- Use written reflection questions before a session
- During the session use paper and pens to explore the coachee's outcome with written words and drawings
- Engage with the different parts of the coachee and invite each to voice their goals
- Use Clean questions to help turn ideas into tangible actions

### **Creating a space for creativity:**

- Space matters – choose it wisely and imaginatively
- Use Clean Space questions to help coachee uncover creative insights from the space around them

# Recommended Reading

Aside from all the references at the end of each chapter, I would recommend the following brilliant books on creativity related to coaching:

## **‘Coaching Creativity’ by Jen Gash**

Jen is an occupational therapist and artist and brings an eclectic wisdom from these fields into her work as a coach.

## **‘Insight Out: How to get your ideas out of your head and into reality’ by Tina Seelig**

Practical ideas grounded in science with plenty of real-life business examples.

## **‘Jumpstart your creativity’ by Shawn Doyle and Steven Rowell**

Light, fun and chock full of ideas.

## **‘On Creativity’ by David Bohm**

A classic!

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# About Angela Dunbar



Angela Dunbar is a qualified coach, accredited with the Association for Coaching, and a former council member, holding the position of “Head of Professional Forums”. On behalf of the AC, Angela has helped to develop coaches through the facilitation of a local co-coaching forum, as well as managing all forums across the country. As a highly experienced coach and a lifetime fellow with the AC, Angela also supervises and trains coaches who wish to develop their skills, flexibility and discernment.

Established with her own training and development business since 1994, Angela coaches people on all aspects of their professional and personal lives, with a special interest in confidence, creativity and communication skills.

Angela is trained to Master NLP Practitioner level, and her passion is Clean Language, a powerful non-directive facilitation process that engages the coachee’s non-conscious resources through the metaphors they use to describe their experience.

Angela teaches ‘Clean’ techniques for coaches through The Clean Coaching Centre: [www.cleancoaching.com](http://www.cleancoaching.com). Angela’s is the author of “Essential Life Coaching Skills” (2009) and “Clean Coaching: The Insider Guide to Making Change Happen” (2017), both published by Routledge and available worldwide. Angela has twice been nominated for the AC’s coaching Honorary Award for “Impacting the Coaching Profession” and obtained her Psychology degree (First class) in 2015. Angela can be contacted at [coach@angeladunbar.co.uk](mailto:coach@angeladunbar.co.uk).

Angela is an active coach and coach supervisor, working one-to-one with a long list of clients. Ever fascinated by the power of metaphor, Angela works with people to help them discover their own creative solutions and find the message within, to convey in the manner they feel most confident in expressing. As a trainer, Angela has facilitated an extensive range of coaching and leadership training programmes within major organisations, including Oxford Brookes University, BBC, Coventry Building Society, American Express, Hitachi, Autotrader, HSA, Roland UK and many more.