

Emergent Knowledge - An Introduction to the Process

Getting from A to B – a simple outline of the coaching process

In a nutshell, clients will come to you because they need to get somewhere different from where they currently see themselves. That 'somewhere different' is their goal. It exists somewhere in their minds, and they may have a very clear idea of what it looks like or they may be somewhat hazy. What they will know is that they *don't have it now*.

So, if we take 'B' to represent that goal, the client has to be at some point other than "B" which we will call 'A'. The process of life coaching is to help a client get from where they are now: 'A' - to where they want to be: 'B'. There are many different models of coaching processes, but all will be somehow related to this overall strategy, getting from A to B.

So, how do you help someone get from A to B? The first two steps are likely to be about helping the client understand the difference between A and B. So, clearly defining their goal as an outcome, and also getting a very clear sense of the current reality (where they are now).

What happens next depends on the client and the nature of their goal. It could simply be a case of helping them to explore options, coming up with the incremental steps needed

for them to get from A to B. This would involve looking at possible solutions, strategies and actions.

This is a pretty straightforward process, following a broad model of planning which anyone could use to achieve anything in business or life in general. The GROW model is one commonly used in the coaching process.

However, many people will come to a coach after they have already tried the straightforward and simple logical direct approach themselves and it hasn't worked. Something is stopping them moving forward, however hard they try.

For example, the client wants to 'Settle down and get married'. They are currently in a relationship but can't commit. The first logical step is to move towards a greater commitment, but every time they try and do this, something backfires. They get 'cold feet', their partner seems to become more argumentative, etc etc. It's like the world is against them achieving the goal they are sure they want.

The 'something' that is stopping them is very likely to be an unconscious belief or value that is creating an internal conflict that they are unaware of. Whatever that something is, you can be sure that it exists somewhere between the points of A and B, ie something within the framework of how they view the whole reality of the situation.

Sometimes, the way to get from A to B is not taking the direct route (let's call it 'C'). Like if this were a real journey, there may be road blocks, one way systems and all manner of obstacles if one tries to take the direct 'as the crow flies' route between destination and current location.

So, coaching sometimes requires us to take some detours if we are to ultimately help a client reach their goals.

David Grove (A renowned New Zealand psychotherapist who sadly died in January '08) originally created clean language as a therapeutic communication process that enabled a client to stay within their own experience without being distracted or influenced by the facilitator's own ideas or assumptions. He discovered that by asking simple questions that contained as few assumptions as possible, he enabled the client to more closely engage with their own experience. He also discovered that by asking these questions of any metaphoric content within a client's language, the client was able to start 'thinking about their thinking' and reach new levels of understanding. The metaphors were in fact, more than just figures of speech. They contained information that the client 'knew' about their situation that so far had not found it's way to their conscious, logical mind.

Since David Grove first created Clean Language in the 70s and 80s, he went on to develop further therapeutic and/or coaching processes that have emerged from his earlier work.

The first main area of development was 'Clean Space'. This takes the universal metaphor of conceptual space and makes it physical by asking the client (using Clean Language questions) to find various spaces around themselves that hold knowledge. The client physically moves to each new space discovered and gains insight from the new perspective. By effectively creating a real life metaphor in space of the places and spaces around their goal (B) and their current position (A) the client would instinctively be able to safely access and resolve any negative beliefs or barriers that might be preventing their progress.

By asking a client to map out in the space around them the spaces where A and B currently are, they create a third space of 'C' which is everything in between A and B, which by definition, must include whatever's stopping you from being at B.

Emergent knowledge uses a variety of processes designed to help a person discover new information, currently outside of their 'small world' knowledge of A, B and C.

The language used is still clean, but even simpler in structure and form.

David discovered that for most people, there are six different steps or stages that need to be explored before a client reaches a new understanding of their situation. For this reason, the emergent knowledge processes involve the repetition of questions six times.

David took on board the new science of emergence and the theory of networks in formulating the process and question set, and I personally have seen it work scores of times to great effect. A very different way to coach and one that I recommend you explore more fully.

Based on the scientific principles of emergence and small world networks, EK works by having the client 'connect the dots' of all known information in such a way that a clearer and simpler higher level understanding can emerge. The process works by asking the same kind of question around six times. Each time the question is asked it is recursive ie. asked of the next piece of information that client has just given you. The effect is like peeling back layers of an onion skin, each answer getting deeper and deeper into the coachee. And more than that, as each answer is spoken, it connects to all the others. David's theory was that after asking around six questions of the same thing, the coachee has six different 'points' of information all interconnected to now form a network – which is then capable of forming a different kind of answer – the 'whole' becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

The success of this technique is in creating the right starting conditions for the different areas of knowledge to start emerging from the coachee's unconsciousness:

Questions to create a 'clean' start:

- Write down or draw your goal (or even pick an object that could represent it) on a piece of paper, and place that paper (or object) where it needs to be somewhere in the space around you
- And place yourself where you need to be in relation to that goal

These might sound like very odd questions, however I have not yet met a client who doesn't understand what's required here. The client will create a special representation of however they are perceiving the distance between themselves and the goal they wish to achieve. Some will place the goal far away, some nearby. Some up high, some will hide it. All will have some special significance for the client and help them to understand how they currently see the goal and the journey they need to make to get there.

This basic 'set up' is then more finely tuned by asking a series of check questions along these lines:

- And is the goal in the right space?
- And it is at the right height?
- And is it at the right angle?
- And are you in the right space? Height?
- And are you facing the right direction?
- And is the distance right between you and your goal?

Again, in my experience most clients have little trouble understanding the questions and start to fine-tune the position of the goal and themselves in relation to it.

All the while, the client is paying exquisite attention to something they have probably not thought of before. Rather than focusing on the specific content of goal or where they are in relation to that goal, they are focusing on the unique relationship between these two points in their imagination, made real and tangible by laying them out in space before them.

Many clients get new insights just by going through a clean start as described here.

Getting outside the small work network of A, B and C

As already mentioned, a client is usually seeking to get from A to B when they come to a coach. If C represents everything that exists in the coachee's mind between A and B, then it is likely to contain whatever is stopping the coachee achieving B. So, any kind of thinking that is focused on A, B or C is likely to re-inforce the 'small world network' which is stuck within a problem scenario.

By asking questions to get information that is adjacent to the known information, the coach's goal is to have the client ultimately break free from this small world, and get insights that come from outside of this network.

Networking what, not who you know

After the Clean Start, the coach would ask a series of questions, most which begin with “And what do you know?” then “And what else do you know”. Sometimes the client is asked to move location or position after each knowledge collection, sometimes the client could be asked to focus on a particular word or letter within the goal they have written.

All the techniques are simply ways to have the client think around the same thing six times.

At the end of six questions, the coach would ask:

“And what do you know now?”

The piling on of layers of information serves to create a complex neural network that eventually gets overloaded. Along the way, the client may well feel confused, overwhelmed or even irritated by the questions. But they normally get to an ‘ah ha’ moment when something simple and elegant begins to emerge from the complexity of thoughts words and ideas.

The final question serves to ‘download’ a summary statement that may be taking a higher level perspective.

This process can continue with numerous rounds of six questions or a coach could move into a more traditional coaching approach.