The Meta Mirror

Gill Hicks

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to help the client to be aware of relationship blindspots.

Description

What is actually communicated is what is received, not what is said. Many clients believe that what they communicate is what they say or intend. Frequently clients keep communicating to an individual in their own preferred style and are surprised and disappointed to continually get the same results! The Meta Mirror exercise is a simple, yet very powerful NLP process that can be used for any type of client – personal or business – when there are communication/relationship problems.

Process

The process involves physically changing positions. The coachee (C) sits or stands in the position they would be in if they were talking to the 'problem person' (P) and 'sees' P sitting or standing as they would if the conversation were real. C says what they want to say to P. It is very important that C then changes state – shakes off being themselves, for example by shaking arms or turning around. C then 'becomes P' – sits or stands in P's position and assumes the body language of P. In this position, they now 'hear' what C

said and notice their response as P. Once again, they must change state, shaking off being P, and then move to the third position of 'Wise Advisor' where they can observe the interaction between C and P. (A few clients find it easier to stand on a chair and look down on the interaction.)

From this position as Wise Advisor, and having observed the response of P, the client as Wise Advisor can now give advice to C as to an alternative choice of words, voice, body language, etc. The client then goes back to the first position as themselves, C, and tries out the new communication to P. The process continues as many times as necessary until the response from P is satisfactory. It is very important to remind the client to change state between each position. If the client has gone round a couple of times and seems to be making little headway, you as coach will almost certainly see where the communication is falling down and may ask if you could make some suggestions in what C says or how they say it.

Example

My client Lynn was concerned about raising her professional profile within her own department. She worked very hard but was concerned that she was seen as relatively 'lightweight'. Three or four sessions into our coaching relationship, she said she was getting very frustrated by James, a senior member within her department who kept walking into her office, sitting down for up to half an hour at a time to 'bring her up to date' but mostly with information already known to Lynn. This was happening as often as twice per day, and Lynn was worried about upsetting James and indeed getting no updates if she said anything.

We used the Meta Mirror, first with Lynn's normal response when James came in. As soon as Lynn had shaken off being herself and 'became James' she realized that James had no idea that Lynn was busy and in fact assumed that Lynn welcomed James. After two rounds of the process, Lynn decided that in future she would get up from her desk and, depending on the circumstances, would alternate between being very welcoming, and saying she would love an

update but was very busy at the moment – could she come and see James later? James seemed very surprised the first time Lynn used the latter response but within just a couple of days started to say: 'Is this a good time?'. We went on to use the Meta Mirror again to find a comfortable way for Lynn to interject at the start of the updates to remind James the headlines of what she already knew, saving considerable time previously used covering old ground.

Pitfalls

- Notice if the coachee refers to themselves as 'I' whilst in position P or in Wise Advisor. They should only refer to themselves C as being a third person, for example 'I think C needs to . . .'
- I would not suggest using this intervention early in a coaching relationship with a client who has difficulty getting in touch with their feelings.

Bibliography

Dilts, R. (1990) *Changing Belief Systems with NLP*, Capitola, CA: Meta Publications.