

Like a kid in a sweet shop: the use of generative metaphor

Extracts from a paper originally published at <http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk/MikeDuckett-Sweetshop.html>



"I have found our work to explore my metaphoric sweet shop really helpful on a number of levels. At first it helped me regain my creativity and now that creativity has itself fed back into using metaphor to enhancing our customers' dining experience." Heston Blumenthal O.B.E.

A guiding principle for me, as a coach, is to act as a facilitator and stay well away from consultant, advisor or trainer roles, and this is what attracted me to explore the possibilities offered through Symbolic Modelling using Clean Language.

Since then, Symbolic Modelling has proved to be a wonderful 'way in' to clients' generative potential; a way in for them that stays clear of any contamination from me, and my judgments about such things as the appropriateness of their goal.

One of the first times I worked in metaphor with a client to clarify a goal was in a sports setting when a professional rally driver needed to access their personal 'state of flow'. This performance state proved very difficult to re-access and articulate. However, their metaphoric landscape of the Zone of Flow proved rich with symbols. They reported a sense of knowing more, without necessarily understanding, about something that had been out of consciousness before. Further work followed, but I think it's no coincidence that they went on to win the championship – by frequently being able to get 'into the zone'.

Over the past few years I've had the privilege of working with Heston Blumenthal, whose restaurant, The Fat Duck, has been named the best restaurant in the world by *The Restaurant* magazine. Heston is a highly creative and original chef, renowned for re-thinking the way that we experience food, and developing dishes such as egg and bacon ice cream, and snail porridge. In addition to its normal kitchen, where customers' meals are prepared, The Fat Duck has an experimental kitchen, where Heston tries out his latest ideas, and puts his belief in molecular gastronomy – the application of scientific knowledge to the cooking process – into practice. He has given me his permission to touch on that part of our work that has used Symbolic Modelling in a generative frame.

We have often modelled a 'metaphoric landscape' that represents his desire to achieve a number of

clear goals. I think it is no coincidence that in becoming really clear about his goals Heston has achieved international success, including three highly coveted Michelin stars, and an OBE in the most recent New Year's Honours list.

However lately Heston has found that success can be a distraction, taking time away from the process of developing a complete dining experience for his customers. As demands on his time grow, he has found that he needs to set aside specific time to be in his experimental kitchen. And while in that kitchen, rather like the rally driver's personal Zone of Flow, Heston has found he can use metaphor to re-access a uniquely personal performance state which allows him to design dishes that are setting the direction for the future of *haute cuisine*.

In our most recent work together, we have used Symbolic Modelling to help open a doorway into his creative place which he calls 'The Sweet Shop'. This metaphor did not emerge out of a coaching session, but was one I heard him use when he was being interviewed by a group of NLP students. They asked how he developed his passion for cooking and I heard him answer "Once I get going I'm like a kid in a sweet shop." Since then, we have used Symbolic Modelling to explore this sweet shop. He discovered that there's an old-fashioned doorbell that rings as you enter the shop, and an infinite stock of sweets of all colours in jars that crowd the shelves. The store even has its own distinctive smell; the aroma of those sweets you may also remember from the 60s and 70s - Sherbet Dabs, Parma violets and Love Hearts. There's a cash till that rings behind open racks of sweets such as Banana chews individually wrapped in that familiar shiny paper. As he moves around lifting lids off jars, feeling the weight of coins in his pocket, key emotions arise: curiosity, excitement and anticipation.

Heston believes that eating is a multi-modal process, involving all the senses and emotions, so he has begun to actually 'physicalise' his metaphor to bring some aspects into reality. The first step was to create a physical representation of the metaphoric sweet shop as his own creative space in the experimental kitchen. He has installed a bell that rings as you enter, and the intention is to decorate the shelves with those distinctive sweet jars. In addition, a top perfume house has been briefed to identify the particular sweet shop smell so that it can be used in his kitchen.

This is only one way that the original metaphor of 'a kid in a sweet shop' has helped Heston gain more knowledge about his personal state of creativity. Now, because he also believes passionately that being a restaurateur is about

Inside this issue:

Sleep on it! 2

Men & Women at work 2

Stressed librarians 2

Motivated workforces 2

Would you like coffee? 2

Does happiness lead to success? 3

"A Wayne in a Manger" 3

sharing experiences with guests, his team of chefs are working on ways to build some of the sweet shop elements into the overall dining experience (aromas, colours, visual symbols) in order to elicit each diner's emotions of excitement and curiosity – so important to enjoying a visit to the Fat Duck.

I continue to use clean language to facilitate my clients' self modeling in a generative way because they gain so much from the process to lift their performance. Also it offers me a means of staying true to the coaching principle that my clients are the expert and I should add as little as possible to their inner world.



Sleep on it! (More use of metaphor)

With thanks to Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck for openly sharing his sweet shop experience. www.fatduck.co.uk

Josephine Ross, writing in December 2006 issue of The Psychologist delivers a comprehensive review of a subject close to our hearts - solving problems in one's sleep.

This idea, that we can continue to process information whilst we sleep and present solutions as elaborate dream metaphors, has been around for thousands of years. (The first book of dreams was written by Antiphon living in 4th century BC).

Ross cites numerous examples of famous solutions and creative works being attributed to dream metaphor. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is cited as claiming he dreamt his poem Kubla Khan word for word. Some other classic examples quoted are:

Literary & artistic inspiration

Robert Louise Stevenson is said to have trained himself to dream plots for his novels e.g. *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Stephen King attributes the central plot of his famous novel & film *Misery* to a dream he had on a plane journey. As soon as he arrived at his hotel: *"I wrote the first forty or fifty pages right on the landing here, between the ground floor and the first floor of the hotel"*.

The surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali often used almost direct reproductions of dreams, Dali describing many of his as 'hand-painted dream-photographs'.



Engineering

Elias Howe (1819 - 1867) was working on the invention of the sewing machine and was struggling with the issue of how to thread the needle. Apparently he had a dream in which wild cannibals were attacking him with sharp spears, the strange thing being that each spear had a hole in the tip. When he awoke he realised this was the answer - thread the needle from the point!

Science

Many examples abound. Mendeleev is said to have been able to write out the entire periodic table (fundamental to chemistry) following a metaphorical dream. Also the ring structure of the Benzene molecule was solved in a dream by Kekule (1829 - 1896) after everyone had been struggling to draw up models using long chains of atoms. He fell asleep and dreamt about the chains

writhing and twisting like snakes, until one snake got hold of its own tail. As he said: *"As if struck by lightning I awoke" "Let us learn to dream, gentlemen then we may perhaps find the truth"*.

Ed: A coaching session will often conclude with the suggestion that having done a lot of thinking around a problem the client 'sleep on it'. So if you thought we were joking just remember we're actually asking you tap into a very powerful problem solving tool!

Reports from 2006 Occupational Psychology Conference

Men & Women At Work

From a survey of 1399 new employees in 19 organisations by **Anthony Miles of Talent Drain Ltd.** the conclusion is that men are more likely to go to work for:

- job satisfaction,
- the compensation package
- career enhancement

whereas women are more interested in:

- the working environment
- relationships with others
- work-life balance.

Stressed Librarians

Saqib Saddiq of SHL has found that librarians suffer greater work place stress than fire-fighters! The factors leading to their stress were the physical working environment, perceptions of the under-use of their skills and limited control over their work role. Saddiq comments *" Although these findings seem strange at first, they actually show how insidious stress can be and how it can have an unhealthy impact in any organisation"*. He also reflects on the fact that police and fire-fighters are trained to deal with stress whereas many other workers are not.

Motivated workforces

David Sharpley, a research psychologist, has discovered that money is of less importance to people's motivation at work than feeling the work they do is meaningful, the role they play is clear and that they feel supported by management. *"This study reinforces how important it is that people know what they are doing; why they are doing it and feel that their personal development is supported by management"* he says.

Would you like a coffee?

If you want to persuade someone to accept your point of view give them a caffeine-laden drink first - at least that's what a report in the **European Journal of Social Psychology** suggests to us!

Australian researchers gave volunteers a glass of orange juice containing either a placebo or caffeine (3.5mg/kg body weight) then had them read persuasive arguments in favour of euthanasia. Those who had caffeine were in greater agreement with the arguments, had better recall of the arguments and were more resistant to counter arguments, even when they hadn't originally been in favour of euthanasia.



Positive Psychology

Does Happiness Lead to Success

(or which comes 1st, Chicken or Egg?)

Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky, of University of California has spent her career studying the phenomenon of happiness and one of her conclusions is that, in the main, successful people are happy people. Their emotional state is characterised by traits of:

- Confidence
- Self-efficacy
- Likeability / sociability
- Activity and energy
- Originality and flexibility
- Coping effectively with challenge & stress

To answer the chicken & egg question they conclude that happy people are successful for two reasons. Firstly, because happy people have positive moods more often they are likely to engage in goal seeking behaviour more often. Secondly, happy people have skills & resources which they have acquired over time during previous happy mood states.

Having reviewed many other studies they reveal that, compared to less happy people, happy people are more likely to:

- Win job interviews
- Be more highly valued when they get the job
- Perform better
- Avoid burnout
- Handle management positions better
- Consistently score more highly on creativity scales

An interesting final note seems to 'ground' the whole study in that they comment that being happy all the time is not ideal either. At the same time that happiness leads to success (which we all know breeds further success), "happy people are also able to react with negative emotions when it is appropriate to do so...."

So, it seems happiness brings about successful outcomes rather than the other way round - (so the chicken wins?)

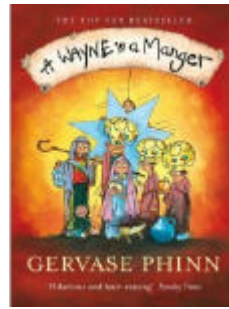
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"A Wayne in a Manger"



As it is the season for heart-warming family gatherings and kid's stuff, here's a little book we've enjoyed reading and passing round.

Gervase Phinn was once Inspector of English for schools in the Yorkshire Dales and draws on his experiences at this time of year.

As the Amazon synopsis says:

"A Wayne in a Manger" includes some wonderfully funny and touching nativity play anecdotes, including children forgetting their lines, ad-libbing, falling of the stage, picking their noses and showing their knickers. One hilarious anecdote tells of an innkeeper who generously says there's plenty of room for Mary and Joseph, while another child, jealous of Joseph's starring role, allows Mary to come in but not Joseph, who can 'push off'... There's the baby Jesus who suddenly pipes up with 'My name is Tammy, are you my Mommy?' and funniest of all, Mary who tells Joseph, 'I'm having a baby - oh and it's not yours'.

Ed: No this isn't one you can get from our website - but still a nice little gift to lighten the mood!



About us

Coaching for Success provides executive and personal coaching that helps individuals perform to their maximum potential.

Our corporate client list covers a range of industry sectors, including pharmaceutical, retail, finance and construction, and high profile names such as John Laing, Novartis, KPMG, Abbott and Johnson Controls.

Our coaches work with company personnel, on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to recognise the choices and opportunities available to them, to make decisions about career and personnel development and then to create and implement a plan of action designed to achieve success.

We provide professional coaching in the areas of:

- Executive Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Performance Coaching