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Judy Rees is a former news reporter and media executive. She has been instrumental in highlighting many potential applications of Clean Language beyond coaching and therapy, and enjoys devising and developing new ways of using the approach and linking people and ideas. She uses Clean with individuals and groups in sales and marketing, interviewing, online networking, and in personal, team and business development. www.cleanchange.co.uk
Clean Language

Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds

by Wendy Sullivan and Judy Rees

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## Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v

Foreword .................................................................................................................. vii

Introduction ............................................................................................................... xi

*Chapter 1*  
Getting Started ................................................................................................. 1

*Chapter 2*  
Great Questions! ......................................................................................... 7

*Chapter 3*  
The Magic of Metaphor ........................................................................ 21

*Chapter 4*  
Attending Exquisitely ........................................................................... 37

*Chapter 5*  
The Developing Questions .......................................................... 51

*Chapter 6*  
Sequence, Source and Intention Questions ................................ 63

*Chapter 7*  
Modelling Cleanly ................................................................................. 79

*Chapter 8*  
Transforming Metaphors ............................................................... 89

*Chapter 9*  
Maturing Changes ............................................................................. 99

*Chapter 10*  
Putting it Together for Yourself .................................................. 107

*Chapter 11*  
Directing Attention More Precisely .............................................. 127

*Chapter 12*  
Beyond Words and Into Space .................................................... 141

*Chapter 13*  
Frequently Asked Questions ....................................................... 159

*Chapter 14*  
Where Else Can Clean Be Used? .................................................. 173

*Chapter 15*  
Clean Success Stories ......................................................................... 185

*Chapter 16*  
Next Steps ......................................................................................... 199
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Introduction

We needed to find a snappy story to open the book.

“What kind of snappy?” we wondered.

- Snappy like a smiling cartoon crocodile?
- Snappy like a game of cards?
- Snappy like the snap of fingers, instantly attracting attention?

When you think of a snappy story, what kind of snappy is your snappy story? We’ll tell you about ours at the end of the chapter.

What happens when you think about these snappy stories? Each kind of snappy is a different metaphor – a different comparison of one thing (snappy) to another (crocodile, cards etc).

We do this kind of comparing all the time. That is, we think in metaphor\(^1\). Metaphors are fundamental to how we make sense of the world, and how we organise our thoughts, and yet we’re not usually aware of our metaphors.

This book explores an unusual way of thinking about thinking which will enable you to grasp the importance of metaphor in thinking, in language, and in communication.

You’ll learn how to use Clean Language questions to help other people to explore their thinking and the metaphors which underpin it. And as you get to grips with the material in this book, your own metaphors will emerge, opening up new realisations about yourself and the way you think.

\(^1\) ‘Metaphor’ in this book includes analogies, similes, parables, metonymies, parallels, literary metaphors etc.
Using Clean Language can:

- Help people to make changes they would like in their lives
- Provide both you and them with valuable information about the way they think and how they do things
- Improve communication, understanding and rapport.

Other specific benefits often reported by Clean Language users include:

- It helps people do their best thinking, setting the scene for greater creativity and for new information to emerge
- It encourages people to take responsibility for themselves
- It empowers people to decide the way forward for themselves
- It honours each individual’s uniqueness, making it especially valuable when diversity is an issue
- It can maximise collaboration and innovation
- It avoids ‘leading the witness’ while getting to the truth
- It enables you to talk another person’s language, so that they feel acknowledged and heard
- It is flexible and can be used alongside a number of other approaches to improve their effectiveness.

If your job involves gathering information from other people and/or assisting them to change, in almost any context, using Clean Language questions will help get better results.

Clean Language has its roots in therapy, but is branching into a wide range of other fields. It has been used successfully by coaches, mentors, consultants, managers, health professionals, parents, teachers, journalists, salespeople and people in many other occupations: the list keeps on growing. It seems that it can be used in almost any field of human endeavour.

Clean Language is useful in one-to-one situations and with groups, in formal settings and in casual conversations. By using Clean Language, you and those you spend time with can expect to make better decisions based on more complete information, and so achieve goals more easily.

- “This amazingly powerful tool could transform the way we interact, and run meetings and appraisals, within our
business.”—Caroline Frost, Director of Marketing and Training, Informa Healthcare

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Clean Language is simple, and yet has fascinating implications.

At the most simple level, Clean Language is a set of twelve questions from which assumptions and metaphors have been ‘cleansed’ as far as possible. These questions are good for obtaining information from another person in a structured way that helps you and them to get a really clear understanding of what they mean.

As a complete approach, Clean Language can be combined with the metaphors a person uses, creating a bridge between their conscious and unconscious minds. This can become a profound personal exploration: a route to deeper understanding of themselves, to transcending limiting beliefs and behaviours, and to resolution and healing. The person asking Clean Language questions gets a new understanding of people, and even of the nature of consciousness.

It often surprises beginners to find that the same twelve questions and the same basic principles are used at both the simple level and when using the complete approach. This makes Clean Language very flexible.

Clean Language isn’t useful all the time. Clean is not a persuasion tool, although it can certainly help you to understand what will convince someone. It’s not a good way to force people to change against their will. It is not a method of interpreting metaphors. It may not be the best approach in an emergency or at times when you are delivering specific information. And it can be extremely useful in a wide range of other contexts.

This book is an introduction, to equip you to take your first steps on a journey. We hope it will whet your appetite for more learning, and we’ve included details of further resources later in the book.²

Some people find that Clean Language comes naturally to them, and that they can relax into asking the Clean Language questions in lots of different situations, right from the start. Others find it takes a little longer. The fact you’ve picked up this book means you’re interested, which is really all that’s needed.

² For readers with an appetite for theory, a short essay, ‘Theoretical Underpinnings of Symbolic Modelling’ by Judy Rees, is available online at http://www.cleanchange.co.uk
As we saw earlier, once you have a name and address for something, you can:

- Remember it easily
- Make a quick, precise note of it
- Stay in touch with it
- Reveal connections between it and other things
- Expect the other person to remember it
- Return to it easily if you need to do so in future.

The Name and Address Questions help a person to get specific about what they are thinking and talking about. When these questions are asked about a person’s metaphorical words or phrases, they help make the metaphor more tangible and bring its existence into their conscious awareness.

The Developing Questions, and the Name and Address Questions in particular, are especially useful when exploring emotions. Have you ever noticed that, when you feel an emotion, you tend to feel it somewhere in or around your body? Perhaps you haven’t consciously noticed this before; usually with a little focus on how you know that you’re feeling happy, jealous or calm, etc. you will become aware of the associated physical feelings. Helping someone become aware of the location of an emotion enables them to become aware of any other information that the emotion holds for them.

**Example transcript: Champagne bubbles**

(Clean Language questions highlighted in italics)

**Questioner:** When you are curious in just the way you like to be, *that is like what?*

**Speaker:** It is like I have a buzzy feeling and my eyes and ears open wide.

**Questioner:** A buzzy feeling, and *where is that* buzzy feeling?

**Speaker:** It is in my chest.
Questioner: Whereabouts in your chest is that buzzy feeling?
Speaker: Quite high up.

Questioner: A buzzy feeling, quite high up in your chest. And what kind of buzzy feeling is that buzzy feeling?
Speaker: Mmm … I’ve been trying to work out what that feeling is … it’s a bit like popcorn popping but that isn’t quite right … No, I can’t get it.

Questioner: A bit like popcorn popping but that isn’t quite right. And when popcorn popping isn’t quite right, is there anything else about that buzzy feeling?
Speaker: It’s like it dances about … Oh I know, it’s like champagne bubbles in my chest!

Questioner: Champagne bubbles quite high up in your chest. Whereabouts quite high up are those bubbles?
Speaker: Right in the middle of me.

Questioner: Champagne bubbles quite high up in your chest, right in the middle of you. And is there anything else about champagne bubbles like that?
Speaker: Their popping makes me sit up and take notice.

Questioner: You sit up and take notice, and what kind of take notice is that?
Speaker: It’s to do with opening my eyes and ears.

Questioner: Opening your eyes and ears. And what kind of opening is that opening?
Speaker: Mmm … it is like the champagne bubbles pop them open—wide open—so that I can drink in everything that is available.

This transcript gives you a worked example of using the Name and Address Questions and shows how just using these three questions can enable someone to go beyond what they already know to access...
Chapter 12
Beyond Words and Into Space

“It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious”
—Alfred N. Whitehead

Human beings have bodies and live in space. Everyone knows that we are not disembodied minds, and the way we think is based in our physical, embodied experience. Obvious as this seems, it has major implications.

Whenever we see, hear or feel something, we see, hear or feel it somewhere in space. And the metaphors we use are grounded in the reality of being a person living in a body, influenced by gravity. So, in Clean Language facilitation, space is accorded a special significance. The facilitator keeps their space to themselves and focuses their attention on the client’s space. You would never dream of moving someone’s physical belongings around in their office or home—and in a Clean Language session we extend the same respect to the location of the client’s symbols in their imaginative space.

Beginning a Clean Language session

A Clean Language session is carried out from the client’s perspective. Although the client may not be consciously aware of it, where they are in the room and in relation to the facilitator can make a big difference to how readily they can attend to their metaphor landscape. So at the start of a session, it’s usual to ask the client to choose where they would like to be in the room and where they would like you to be:

- And where would you like to be?
- And where would you like me to be?
The order is important, first the client positions themselves and then they position the facilitator.

Once you are both seated, the usual opening question is:

- *And what would you like to have happen?*

Before a meeting or session, set up the room so the client has a real choice of where to sit or stand. Remove your belongings, stand up and move away from ‘your’ chair before you ask. This sends an important message—this session is about them, not you. Being able to place themselves and you in an optimal position can enhance their ability to think, learn and grow.

As the client selects where to sit, they may be unaware of the reasons behind their choice. But, like their words and the non-verbal elements of their communication, this choice can prove to be metaphoric, or ‘point’ to metaphoric information. David Grove said that in choosing where to sit, and where to place the facilitator, the client is aligning the metaphor landscape with the physical space. So it’s not unusual for furniture and fittings in a room, innocuous at the start of a session, to start to play a part in the client’s metaphor landscape and they will often turn out to be in ‘just the right place’.
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