

Letting them draw their own conclusions

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Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to unleash creativity and/or illuminate something that is out of awareness. In the world of business today, successful people are often intellectually competent and highly skilled in rational, analytical thinking. These cerebral types are well practised at expressing themselves logically. However, using logic does not always provide the best solution. In addition, our society's over-emphasis on the written word as the primary vehicle of information in education compounds this left-brain tendency. This exercise serves to stimulate the right brain.

Description

In this exercise the client is invited to use drawing as a technique to explore an issue. The reason why, to quote the old adage, pictures are worth a thousand words, is that they make use of a massive range of cortical skills, particularly right brain: colour, form, line, dimensions, texture, visual rhythm and especially imagination. The exercise allows the individual to mentally step out of their usual way of thinking and can provide them with surprising insights. I have used this successfully with many people, not just those who predominantly favour their 'visual' and/or 'kinaesthetic' senses.

Process

Notice when it may be a pertinent time to use drawing as an intervention. Examples of indicators include:

- tracing (on the table or in the air) with their finger(s);
- using expressions that indicate preference for a visual representation system but which indicate a lack of clarity such as: ‘I just can’t see what he’s doing’ or ‘I’d like to shed some light on the matter’;
- appearing well-rehearsed and knowledgeable in their ‘story’, but keep talking round in circles.

The process is as follows:

- 1 Provide a large piece of paper, coloured pens, chalks, pencils and colourful stickers.
- 2 Invite the client to use whatever appeals to them from the available materials to create a visual representation of the situation they have been describing.
- 3 Encourage them to use different colours and textures to draw images, symbols or even words if necessary.
- 4 Many people believe, mistakenly, that they are incapable of drawing. Therefore, reassure them that it is not the quality of the drawing, but the impact on their thinking that matters.
- 5 Don’t judge or make observations about their drawing at first; encourage them to provide a commentary as they go.
- 6 Pay particular attention to the words they use in their commentary, not just the drawing itself. They may well provide you with different insights as they are distracted by the activity, often revealing new patterns.
- 7 Continue the coaching session using the commentary and the drawing.
- 8 Once they have finished the picture, ask them: ‘Having drawn this picture, what is your sense now of [the issue]?’
- 9 Finally, ask them to review how helpful the activity was to them.

Pitfalls

The client may be embarrassed to draw with someone watching them. Most people can be encouraged to participate so it is worth spending time reassuring them (see point 4 above). However, if it is clear that they are too inhibited at this time, it may be more helpful to suggest doing the exercise privately, outside the coaching session. This has a different emphasis as you cannot bring contemporaneous observation to the exercise but is still a worthwhile activity.