

The Meta Mirror

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Purpose

The purpose of the Meta Mirror model is to assist an individual to see how their difficulty in a relationship is actually a result of their relationship with themselves, rather than the relationship with the other person. It is based upon the psychodynamic concept of projection where we find other people difficult because they remind us of aspects of ourselves that we have not fully dealt with. By bringing this blind spot into conscious awareness, the Meta Mirror provides individuals with the opportunity to be more fully in control during relationships with people who have hitherto been very difficult.

Description

The Meta Mirror model was designed by Robert Dilts in 1988. Its name alludes to the psychodynamic concept of projection in that typically the people coachees have most difficulty communicating with are a mirror image of how the coachee relates to themselves in that same situation. To assist in understanding, a diagram is provided below in Figure 9 with the hypothetical labels in the text (**bold**), visually presented.

- Ask the coachee to relate to the other person in the first position. Ask them what characteristic makes the person so difficult. Coach them to getting just the right trait, the

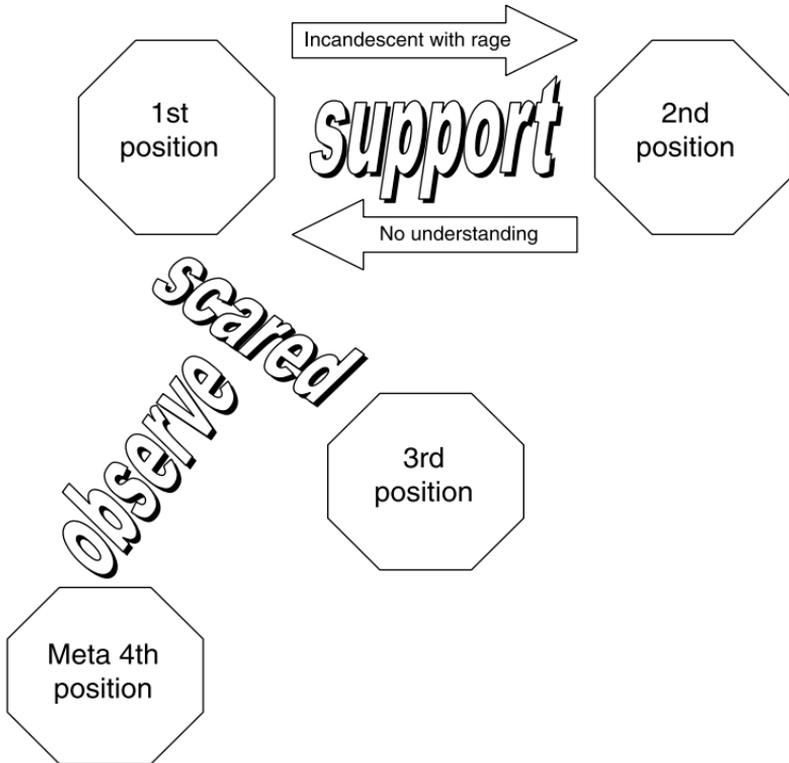


Figure 9 The Meta Mirror in action

one that really sums up the problem for them. **(other person has no understanding of the challenge)**

- Ask the coachee to step into the 3rd perceptual position and observe themselves in the first position. Ask them to describe themselves and then name their own behaviour in relationship to the other person. **(incandescent with rage)**
- In the 3rd perceptual position ask the coachee to raise their awareness as to how their reaction to the other person actually reinforces the relationship system, or acts as a trigger.
- Ask the coachee to think of other ways in which they could change their behaviour in this relationship.

- Ask the coachee to go into the Meta 4th position and notice how in that position they can ‘see’ the relationship of them in the 3rd position (fly on the wall) to them in the 1st position. Ask them to name that relationship. (**scared**) To what extent is their relationship to themselves a mirror of the other person’s relationship to them in that situation?
- From the Meta 4th position ask the coachee to switch the 1st and 3rd position reactions and notice how it changes the dynamic of the relational system. Ask the coachee to now relate to the other person from this revised 1st position.
- Ask the coachee from the 2nd position, the perspective of the ‘difficult person, to now observe this revised person and ask: “What does this person need from me in this situation?”. Allow that person to receive this in whatever fashion they want. (**support**) Notice the change in that person from the 2nd position perspective.
- Finally, ask the coachee to re-associate into the revised 1st position. Ask the coachee to notice how this model has changed their internal experience in this relationship.

In Figure 9 we have a situation where an employee feels her line manager has no understanding of the situation they are managing; her reaction is she is incandescent with rage. When seeing herself from her 3rd perceptual position she is quite scared. She goes into the Meta 4th position and swaps the 1st and 3rd position and relates to her line manager as a scared person. On now seeing herself through her line manager’s eyes she sees herself as scared and recognizes she needs to give herself support. On re-associating into her 1st position after this exercise she found her-self much more supportive of herself in this situation and her line manager no longer was a problem for her. To what extent in this situation her relationship to herself (scared) mirrored her manager’s relationship to her (not having any understanding), one can only speculate.

Pitfalls

- One can get mixed up with all of the positions, so it is a good idea to mark them out on the floor and ask the other

person to step into each of the spaces as one asks the questions relevant to that position.

- The material that this coaching technique uncovers often is quite unconscious. It is therefore best to just go with the answers that come to the mind of the person doing the exercise and to be pleasantly surprised, rather than analyze the answers too much.
- Allow the other person to play around with the four positions. There is no rule that says after the first run one has to come up with wonderful insight. One may need to revisit some of the positions to obtain greater clarity concerning how one really feels in that position.

Bibliography

Dilts, R. and DeLozier, J. (2000) *Encyclopedia of Systemic Neuro-Linguistic Programming and NLP New Coding*, Scotts Valley, CA: NLP University Press.