

The Meta Model

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Purpose

The purpose of the Meta Model is to help an individual more fully understand the meaning of the language they use. It does this by asking the well-known what, when, who, where and how questions. The purpose of these questions is to help an individual use their language so it accurately represents exactly what they are thinking about at a deeper level. This has the effect of connecting the individual's language with their sensory experience; this in turn creates greater clarity and therefore satisfaction in communicating, both for the speaker and for the listener.

Description

The Meta Model is a collection of 13 syntactic patterns in human speech along with the appropriate challenges. It is a model about another model, and that model is language. In the short space here it is not possible to go through each pattern so I have outlined a coaching strategy that uses the principles of the Meta Model and works very well.

Process

- 1 Establish rapport.
- 2 Listen very carefully to *every* word the other person says.
- 3 As you listen to each word, run an internal video in your

head so you can translate each word into an aspect of that video.

- 4 When you find you cannot run the video because there is a word that does not translate into 'video format', find a what, when, who, where or how question to uncover the information. Often, these will be abstract words like 'angry'. An appropriate question would be 'how do you *know* they are angry?'
- 5 Ensure you retain rapport and pace the other person's current map of the world as you ask each question.

You are likely to find that the individual will start to use language with greater accuracy.

Pitfalls

- If you do not establish rapport when using Meta Model questions you will appear inquisitorial and the coaching will be counterproductive.
- After asking some Meta Model questions there may be a temptation to begin to guess at what the other person means, or where the dialogue is taking them. At these times, stick to the Meta Model questions and allow the emergent meanings to become apparent to the other person at their pace.
- Do not start using Meta Model questions *too soon* in a conversation. Make sure that a good rapport, using matching and pacing skills, is built up first.
- Meta Model questions are powerful and the other person may need time to answer them. Do not rush them as they search for an appropriate answer. Allow them all the time they need. Practise being silent as they do this and learn to be comfortable with these silences.
- Do not ask multiple Meta Model questions; this will only confuse the other person.

Bibliography

Bandler, R. and Grinder, J. (1975) *The Structure of Magic*, Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behaviour Books.