

*Cognitive
Behavior
Technique #35*

The Mirror Model

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The following material is adapted from 'THE 'MIRROR MODEL: A Guide to Reflective Questioning' by Philip Harland, first published in Rapport magazine, Issue 42, Winter 1998.

Technique CBT#35 The 'Mirror Model'

A Guide to Reflective Questioning

"Only reason can convince us of those three fundamental truths without a recognition of which there can be no effective liberty: that which we believe is not necessarily true; that which we like is not necessarily good; and that all questions are open." Clive Bell, '*Civilization*'

INTRODUCTION

'Reflective questioning' is a use of language that respects one of our fundamental freedoms - the right to make our own mistakes. It neither interprets nor seeks to replace a person's meaning or belief, but rather aims to highlight it.

What is presented here is a colloquial variant that organizes the principles behind several counselling models into a simple framework that can be used by anyone anywhere. The 'Mirror-model' deconstructs experience and reflects it in such a way that it returns ready-reconstructed.

This is considered to be a counseling technique, particularly useful as a formal dialogue to be carried on with the child by the Cognitive Behavior Mentor. Since it uses conversational language, it can be used anywhere at anytime.

While the Cognitive Behavior Mentor is not usually involved in assessment, it would be helpful for general understanding of the linguistic underpinnings to read either the book *The Structure of Magic* [1975] by John Grinder and Richard Bandler, or the *CBAT#03- The Meta Model* for background.

First words

A woman introduces herself at a party. *"Hello, I'm Winona."* You talk about

the weather, you comment on the host ... and you're just about to take the exchange onto a deeper, more meaningful level when you realize you've forgotten her name. It was only one word. It was only a few seconds ago. *Winifred? Ramona?* OK, you weren't listening, you were watching her instead, something about the way she tucked her hair behind her ears ... but *one word?* And while you're worrying about that you realize you've missed more information. What did she say about getting in touch? What *exactly?* Dammit, *it was only a sentence.*

Opening statements

Pay close attention to the very first thing a client says. Even before they think they've started. After all the client is demonstrating their pattern to you as they walk through the door - they can't help it. And pay particularly close attention to their answer to the first question - typically

What would you like to have happen?

Write the answer down, verbatim:

I need to change my life.

This first reply will have immense structural significance. Whether it's short, apparently simple and about the way they process, or whether it's long, rambling and all about what happened at the supermarket. The statement will itself be a metaphor for the client's underlying pattern. And if it's recorded precisely it will be available as a reference at any time. Half-way through the session you might want to check the progress of your work against what the client actually said at the start, rather than trying to remember what they said, or guessing what you believe they may have said; and particularly when you're totally convinced you know what they said.

Choices

Whatever the context and whatever the other person's first words (*'I can't go on like this'*, *'My family's giving me a hard time'*, *'What lousy weather'*), if they seem to have a problem and you want to be helpful, the chances are that the first interventions will be at a conversational level.

Where do you start? You have infinite choice.

Frames

Hall and Bodenhamer's figurative notion of 'framing' [not reframing, which is the opposite allowing the client to develop] is used to organize thinking into six [06] visual frames, within which there are various sub-categories. Each of the frames contains a series of Open Questions. If you want to condense the model further you can forget the sub-categories. But hold on to the colloquial tone of the questioning.

Seeking Socrates

Real change happens at an emotional and deep-structural, not a rational and intellectual, level - it's a uniquely personal, internal experience. If you agree with an 'experiential philosophy' (ref. 3), then your role is to keep pace with your clients as they ***track their own experience of already knowing what is good.*** ['good' in the sense of useful and valuable *uniquely for them*].

The aim of open questioning is to reflect, expand and shift a person's internal process without interpretation or suggestion from the questioner.

PROCESS STEPS

What follows is a sequential exercise for learning the SIX OPEN QUESTION FRAMES - a way of familiarizing yourself with the idea of reflective questioning so that you can adapt the methodology to your own needs.

- A. Listen carefully to the clients statement of their problem or limiting belief.**
- B. Repeat it back to them.**

Don't paraphrase it. "*And you kind of feel the need to change some things about your life.*" Use their exact words. If it's too long, repeat a part (usually the last part, because that's usually the most significant). This is not to give you time to think, though it does. It is to acknowledge the

client without elaboration. Quite a rare event, for any of us. We're more used to responses like "*I know just what you mean*", when the speaker has no idea what we mean, and might equally have said "*You just reminded me of something about myself*".

The chances are that both you and the client will find simple repetition a positive experience. Often a client won't realize what they have said until they hear you say it. You might not realize what they have said until you repeat it. It's not only an affirming thing to do, it's an essential precursor to working effectively together.

C. Help the client clarify the statement. Write it down:

I need to change my life.

Recording the statement helps in three ways. 1) It's captured for all seasons - no guesses, disputes or post-suppositions later. 2) The words exist not only in time but in space - a visual aid for your study of their structure. 3) The speaker is more likely to regard the statement dispassionately, as something 'outside' them - even more so if you allow them to see the statement - therefore challenge to what s/he actually said/meant is more likely to be experienced as a co-operative venture.

Before we go any further let's put aside this idea of challenge. You are to work 'cleanly' with your client, shunning bias, opinion and suggestion, however nobly intended; your higher purpose being to help unfold what the client already knows as you both connect to the greater good. Reminding yourself that the client is the expert in their own perceptions. The only expert.

D. Add quotation marks

"I need to change my life."

Use quotation marks to help a client's words stand out more. This simple act makes a surprising difference. The words take on a life of their own. The client has not made a random selection of words from an infinite set of trivial possibilities, but conscious and unconscious choices that had deep structural, symbolic and systemic significance. Quotation marks

discreetly remind you and the client of something that might be neglected. Take opening statements more seriously.

You'll find that concentrating on the *exact* words, separating these from their tone of voice and treating the words as a quotation (i.e. this is just what one person *said*), will help unhook you from unhelpful emotional responses - feeling blamed, for example, or fearful. Not an ideal place from which to ask, or hear the answers to, open questions.

E. Deconstruct

One of the fundamental tenets of Neuro-Linguistic Programming is that our utterances represent the partial, socially derived, heavily filtered, generalized, deleted, distorted, symbolic, verbal expression ('surface structure') of a complete sensory representation of our experience ('deep structure'¹) [See **CBAT#03 - the Meta Model** for more information].

When deconstructing a client's often quite complex surface-structure statements (they're not all as succinct as 'I need to change my life'), consider using *three* sets of quotation marks - one for the deconstruction of the **Perceiver**, another for the perception of the **Perceived** and another for the bit **In-Between**.

'I'	'need to change'	'my life'.
Perceiver	In-Between	Perceived

Crudely put, the perceiver is normally **The One Who Wants or Doesn't Want**, the perceived is **What They Want or Don't Want**, and in-between is the **Way To Get It** or **What's Stopping Them**.

¹ According to NeuroLinguistic Programming, we have three structures of the human mind. The first is the experience itself, which includes many stimuli that never become conscious and is called the **Reference Structure**. The experience is represented [coded] in a second structure in the mind by language, symbols and submodalities [See **CBT#31 - Cross Mapping Submodalities** for more information] that are called a **Deep Structure**. When we attempt to convey the Deep Structure of an experience to other people we make certain cognitive errors that distort the experience. This third, **Surface Structure**, results is an exchange that can help the clinician or assessor infer more about the Deep Structure and ultimately the experience itself.

Write out your deconstructions. With practice you can do it mentally, but it's a good discipline for complex statements and a useful check on over-confidence. Even apparently straightforward statements such as "*I need to change my life*" are ripe with distinctions.

Deconstructing the 'Perceiver' (*'I'*) is an indicator that 'I' can be questioned and developed quite separately from the 'Perceived' (*'my life'*) and the In-Between (*'need to change'*). The three elements of this statement are distinct surface-structure codings for different, complex, deep-structure representations of your client's experience.

You can further deconstruct the In-Between. *'Need to change'* is a common phrase and in the flow of ordinary conversation or reading you could be forgiven for assuming it's one idea. But stop the flow for a moment.

Check 'need' within yourself.

What's your experience of your 'need for a cup of tea', right now. Compare that to your need to 'phone John or Melissa. You probably had two quite different experiences of 'need'. (If you know John *and* Melissa you may well have had three.)

Thus your client's *'need'* in:

'I' 'need' 'to change' 'my life'.

may look and sound familiar, but you can bet it has a meaning unique to your client and at this stage you would be foolish to make *any assumptions* whatsoever about it.

The same goes for *'to change'*. A couple of almost inseparable syllables. Pull them apart:

'I' 'need' 'to' 'change' 'my life'.

The word *'to'* can now be seen as evidence of a certain need in your client in their relationship to *'change'* that is almost certainly different from the need that would be expressed in a statement such as "I need change *in*

my life".

Why deconstruct the 'Perceiver', by the way? Isn't the Perceiver always 'I'? Well, yes and no. There's no 'I' in the statement "*Things have to change*", for example. And yet there is - it's just that it's been deleted by the speaker and you may have to rummage around a bit to retrieve it. Your client might actually be saying "*I can't change things*".

When you find the 'I' don't assume it's the only one.

For example, **I** (surface-structure symbol for a deep-structure representation of my complete experience of *a present me* writing this) remember about a year ago (*a past me* has been deleted here) working with a client of **mine** (*a relational me*, situation-specific), when **I** (*a part of me*) discovered that my client could identify at least four 'I's in her metaphor - one behind watching her have the experience, one seeing through her eyes, one in a cloud hovering overhead and another stuck in a tunnel below. Which of those 'I's (eyes) did she mean when she said "I see myself..."?

Etcetera. You can go on. Whether you're in conversation or process you'll have to make choices about where to concentrate your attention. To help you make them, next:

F. Draw a frame around the statement.

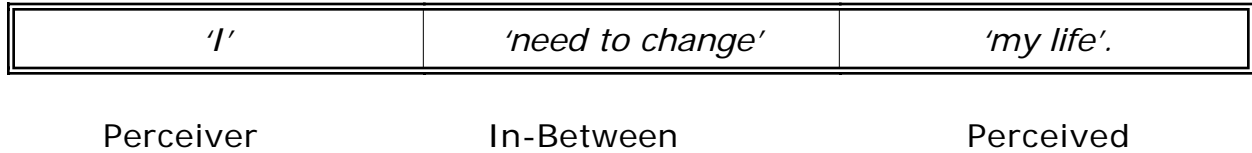
"I need to change my life."

The frame gives another perspective. There was additional information there, symbolized by the space surrounding the statement.

Think of a client's statement as the label on a container. The label is a summary of the contents. The container contains 'inside information'.

And as you and the client are about to embark on conversational 'reframing', you will have the first frame as a literal and figurative frame-of-reference against which to check subsequent reframes.

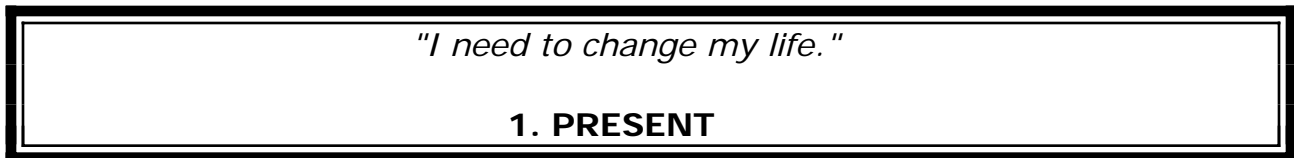
Serious deconstructors, of course, will wish to draw three (or more) frames:



for the sake of simplicity here, we will stick with one. Next:

G. Label the frame 'Present'.

You do this to represent the client's present frame of mind. And only now that you have come this far in your understanding of the client's process may you intervene.



Interventions

With a sense of the neuro-linguistic structure of human communication, you will appreciate that any verbal intervention at the level of surface-structure may have powerful echoes throughout the system. It may result in a change to the clients deep-structure representation of a problem, that in turn may prompt the client to feel better or worse about their situation. At the very least it will enable more information to rise to the surface.

Shifts

As new information feeds back into the system, the system moves on. It cannot stay the same. In considering how we determine who we are, Stewart observes that *"Constant updating and effective tracking are prerequisites for the highest levels of our functioning as creative human beings"*.

In relation to metaphor process Tompkins and Lawley say, "*Through a heightened awareness of our own patterns new levels of complexity emerge. In other words, the system starts to self-correct.*"

Of purposeful dialogue, Faulkner has said, "If you can reflect a client's problem undistorted, the client is relieved of the responsibility of holding it alone. The problem shifts and the system will spontaneously re-organize".

There's a common thread of quality here: *effective* tracking ... *heightened* awareness ... *undistorted* reflection. The value to your client of having their process reflected without distortion, enabling them to track their patterns with heightened awareness, will depend on your skill and sensitivity, your *leger-de-main*, or lightness of touch. If you're clumsy the client's experience may be less valuable.

Questions

There are an infinite number of ways of questioning what someone says. As you explore a particular statement with open questions within limited frames not every question or frame will seem equally appropriate. The point of the exercise is to familiarize yourself with a discipline that usefully limits your choices and *stays respectful of the client's unique process*. Rapport is important; your voice tone in particular; curiosity without disquiet.

First examine the statement from within the **Present frame** using the categories below. The sample questions apply to "*I need to change my life*" and are meant to be illustrative, not definitive.

SPECIFICALLYs

William Blake said 'To generalize is to be an idiot', but don't quote this to your client unless you've trained in Provocative Therapy. We all over-generalize.

- *How specifically do you need to change your life?*
- *What specifically do you need to change?*
- *And more specifically?*

WHAT KIND OFs

- *What kind of change?*
- *What kind of need?*

'What kind of..?' is a beautiful question, classically 'clean'. It helps the client return to their deep-structure representations with minimal interference. You can use the question time and again for any part of the statement, but as this is a conversational model you risk straining your credibility if you ask too many.

- *What sort of change?*
- *What do you mean by change?*

are alternatives. 'What sort of..?' and 'What do you mean by..?' can be used for any part of the statement. Or

- *How change?*
- *In what way change?*

'How..?' and 'In what way...?' are not generally suited to nouns (nominalizations are a special case), but can help mobilize most other parts of speech, particularly verbs.

PARTs

Usually only a part of the situation is a problem, though applying 'part' to the Perceiver may be taken as an invitation to construct a metaphorical part of themselves, which may not be appropriate. Faulkner uses 'aspect' - general enough for many, if not for the highly visual. 'Element', 'component', 'particular' (used as a noun) may be OK depending on the context.

- *What part of your life needs to change?*
- *What aspect of you needs to change in order for your life to change the way you want?*
- *What is the smallest change you could make that would improve your life?*

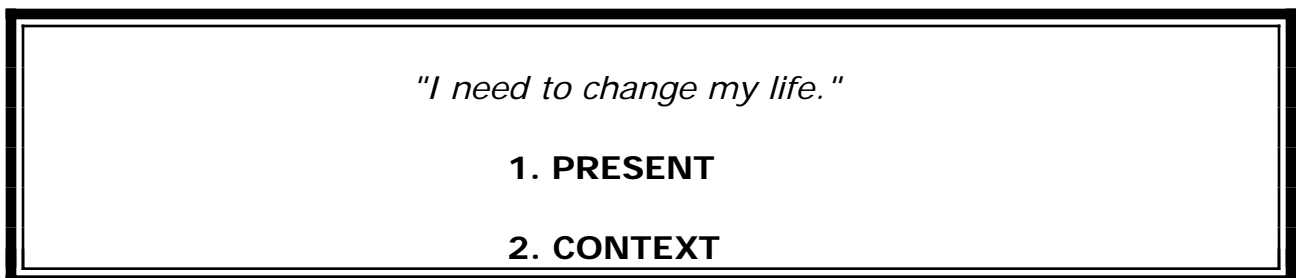
SYNONYMS

Prudent use of synonyms may help the client open up present content into immediate Context (frame no. 2). The least reflective category of the lot, but it's not the same as paraphrasing the client, or loosely substituting a word of your own for one of theirs. Your tone of voice is crucial - hint only at your ignorance and desire for clarification as you prompt a search around a selected word in the statement.

- *You want to change your life...?*
- *You seek to change your life...?*
- *You need to vary your life...?*
- *To alter your life?*

Offering a couple of variations with an open-ended inflection or gesture will help the client continue to scan their own database for the pertinent word and prompt a concomitant deep-structure search for the experience the word symbolizes. Thus, the quest might extend into frame no. 2.

H. Draw a Context Frame around the Present Frame.



Representing immediate context. Question the statement using these categories:

HOW DO YOU KNOWs

Could be a Present frame question too. The frames are not meant to be mutually exclusive.

- *How do you know you need to change your life?*
- *How would you know if you didn't?*

The client may see the answer, a voice may tell them, they may have a feeling ... As you track their *visual / auditory / kinesthetic experience* of knowing you'll find more avenues opening.

WHAT ELSEs

The system *always* knows more than it first lets on.

- *What else is there about changing your life?*
- *Is there anything else?*
- *What's another aspect of this?*

CONNECTIONs

There are always connections to other things in the client's life and to the greater scheme of things.

- *What's related to your need to change your life?*
- *How would you experience changing your life in relation to your family / work / community etc.?*
- *What connections are there between (any / all) elements?*

And a gentle prompt that allows the possibility of a connection between elements without presupposing one:

- *What kind of change (i.e. new or present element) when you've already won the Lottery and had the operation (i.e. other known elements)?*

I. Add a 'Past' Frame.

"I need to change my life"

from conversation into process. Core Transformation Process developed by Connirae Andreas, NLP Comprehensive (1995), that has similarities to 'laddering'. Repetition of the key question "What is more important for you than that?" eventually brings the client to a sense of a core state of their being, that they then learn to access at will.

MEANINGS

- *What is the meaning of your need to change your life?*
- *What else could it mean?*

Note this is the 'significance' sense of 'mean' rather than the definition sense of 'What do you mean by...?' in the Present frame.

PURPOSES

- *What would be your purpose in changing your life?*
- *What other purpose could there be?*

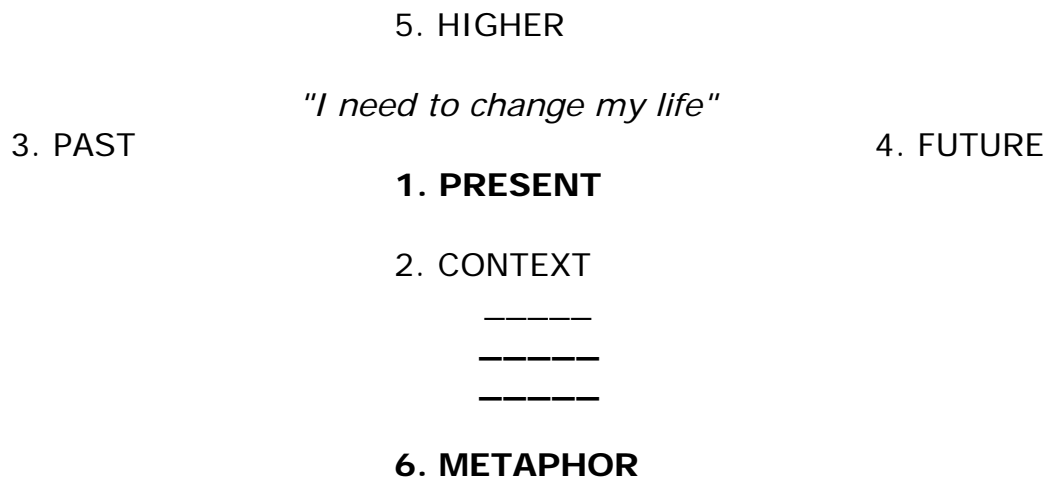
LEADING QUESTIONS

- *What needs to happen for you to change your life?*
- *What makes it possible for / enables you to change your life?*
- *What determines when you change your life?*

Majestic questions, not strictly reflective, but you may ask them in all innocence. They might be asked in any frame, but because of their potential power I locate them here.

I. Finally add a 'Metaphor' Frame.

Be creative. Relate a story or an analogy that opens up the frame. Constructing a genuinely therapeutic metaphor, however, requires great skill and practice. It must relate to your client in every particular (ref. 11). If you need to construct an outcome for your client (to which the metaphor leads), the outcome cannot be truly reflective. Even if the client has articulated an outcome for themselves you cannot be certain that your metaphor will lead them there if the elements in the metaphor are not client-generated.



For example, in response to 'I need to change my life' you might come up with *"A Mesopotamian philosopher said 'You cannot step twice into the same river '- our lives by their nature are in constant flux"* and think that sounded general enough for anyone to relate to. But if your client happened to have an unfortunate personal association with rivers, water and stepping, the intervention might not be helpful. Or you can be really creative and help the client find their own metaphor. You can do this in three ways:

- (i) Wait for the client to come up with one spontaneously - 'It's like needing to change a car tire', 'It's an all-consuming need'.
- (ii) Ask directly: *"What is a metaphor that symbolizes the change you need?"*
- (iii) Elicit a metaphor indirectly: *"That's a need to change your life like what?"* Then ask: *"What kind of (part or whole of metaphor) is that?"* or *"Is there anything else about (part or whole of metaphor)?"* And if you find that metaphor work turns you on, get some training in Symbolic Modelling (ref. 12) and have an option of moving into full metaphor process.

The aim of open questioning is to reflect, expand and shift a person's internal process without interpretation or suggestion from the questioner.

IN SUMMARY: SIX [06] CONVERSATIONAL REFRAMES.

X = the clients exact words.

1. PRESENT FRAME

- SPECIFICALLYs
 - What X (part of statement) specifically?
 - What specifically about X? And more specifically?
- WHAT KIND OFs
 - What kind of X (part or whole of statement)?
 - What do you mean by X?
 - How / In what way X (verb in statement)?
- PARTs
 - What part/aspect/element of X (is relevant)?
 - What's the smallest change you could make that would improve the whole situation?
- SYNONYMs
 - Prompt a search around a selected word

2. CONTEXT FRAME

- HOW DO YOU KNOWs
 - How do you know that X (whole or part of statement) is true?
 - What is your visual, auditory, kinesthetic [V-A-K] experience of knowing?
 - How would you know if X were not true?
- WHAT ELSEs
 - What else is there about X? Is there anything else?
 - What's another aspect of X?
- CONNECTIONs
 - What is related to X?
 - How do you experience X in relation to family / work / community / etc.?
 - What connections are there between (some or all answers)?
 - What kind of X (new element), when Y and Z (existing elements)?

3. PAST FRAME

- PROMPTS
 - What could have prompted X?
- JUST BEFOREs
 - What happened just before X?
 - And just before that?

4. FUTURE FRAME

- EFFECTS
 - What would be the effect of X?
 - When X, then what happens?
 - And what happens next?

5. HIGHER FRAME

- IMPORTANCES
 - What is important for you about X?
 - What is more important for you than that?
- PURPOSES
 - What would be your purpose in X?
 - What else?
- MEANINGS
 - What is the meaning of X for you?
 - What else could 'X' mean?
- LEADING QUESTIONS
 - What needs to happen for X?
 - What enables / makes possible X?
 - What determines when you X?

6. METAPHOR FRAME

- Relate a story or analogy that opens up the frame.
- Alternatively use the clients own metaphor or help them find one:
 - What metaphor for you symbolizes X?
 - That's an X like what?
- Then ask the metaphor:
 - What kind of (part or whole) is that?
 - Is there anything else about (part or whole)?

Conclusions

The grouping of these six frames represents a framework for conversational change to honor the individual's natural inclination toward individuation. The frames contain a set of open questions that aim to reflect, expand and shift a person's internal process without interpretation or suggestion from the questioner.

In James Lawley's words, reflective questioning could

"effectively assist someone to completely reorganise their cognitive / conceptual structure, with the ripple effect of influencing 'deeper 'organising metaphors, embodied experience and neuro-chemical processes".

Help someone be more themselves, in fact. If the journey of the soul has an archetypal route each individual has their own itinerary. You might reflect on that.