



Episode 11 - Emotion at Work in Clean Language Chatting with @judyrees

Phil: Hello and welcome to the emotion at work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition and today's episode is looking at emotion at work in language and meaning which is a bit of a theme for the podcast recently. We've had, I think this is the 4th podcast where we are looking at language and we are taking again a slightly different perspective and look at it. I have had a bit of a bee in my bonnet for a while now about the notion of clean language, I first heard about it when I did my NLP Practitioner course and as a coach, it is something I hear other coaches or I hear at coaching conferences where people talk about clean language and it bothers me because I don't think language can ever really be clean because, from my point of view any type of communication has meaning, even silence will have meaning. So, yeah I was really interested in that topic. Before we get into that though let's welcome our guest to the podcast - so our guest this week is Judy Rees. Hello Judy.

Judy: Hello.

Phil: How are you?

Judy: I'm excellent thank you.

Phil: Good, good. So, Judy and I met online and we haven't actually met in real life yet, we have had a couple of conversations both online and then over Skype and I picked up a connection with Judy because she was talking about clean language and I have already said in my earlier introduction that I don't buy it really so I decided rather than be judgemental and just go huh, clean language is just a load of rubbish, that I'd see if I could have a chat with somebody who talks about clean language to find out more about it because it might be that whilst I think it is a load of tosh I might be misunderstanding it or misrepresenting it or others maybe misrepresenting it and I'm kind of not giving it a fair crack of the whip. So I made contact with Judy and then we had a chat and during that conversation that we had, I thought you know what this will make a really really interesting podcast so we then put a date in the diary to record. So does that give a fair summary of how we've met each other and interacted so far, Judy?

Judy: It does and yes the sense of it's all a load of tosh I think is actually something that we connected on that basically we both think clean language is a load of tosh or the idea of clean language some people represent it is a bit of a load of tosh.

Phil: Yes, that I agree and I think it's that spectrum of I can't believe I'm about to introduce a toshiness spectrum but what is there behind it is the bit I find really interesting about our conversation last time and again I'd like to explore today. So the format of this podcast changes from one episode to the next, so our listeners will know that I like to play with the format a little bit so at least to start with on the podcast I am going to hand the hosting duties over to you Judy because what I thought would be useful is rather than talk about clean language in an abstract way we could see if we could create part of a conversation that we could then use to unpick this notion of clean language around. So in advance of the podcast, I asked Judy to prepare a couple of questions for me that she could ask me at the start of the podcast and then we can use my responses and my thinking as the basis to unpick clean language around. So I have no idea of what's coming next, I don't know what Judy is going to ask me so I am both a mix of excitement and slightly anxious so I will hand the reigns over to you then Judy for you to pick it up from here.



Judy: Thank you. Before I dive into asking you those questions I think there might be one tiny little piece we need to do for some listeners because some listeners can't bear to go on without knowing what clean language is at one level and when we say clean language do you just mean not swearing? This is a little tiny piece of disambiguation that I usually put in at the beginning. The clean language that I'm talking about is not not swearing, it's not the software language clean and it's not quite the NLP idea of clean it's related to it but what I'm talking about when I talk about clean language is an inquiry technique, it's a precision inquiry technique which was originally designed for exploring the metaphors that underpin peoples thinking and that drive their behaviour and that inquiry technique is used increasingly extensively in coaching in 1-2-1 conversations but it's also really good for helping teams and groups to work better together and that's mostly where I use it. I just wanted to say that to give it a little tiny piece of a frame or else people will get a little bit lost with this whole thing, is that okay?

Phil: Yeah absolutely it is and already I have just written down on my notes to say precision inquiry I want to come back to that, that's a really interesting way of positioning it, so no that's good thank you. I think that's some useful disambiguation and I didn't have any idea that clean was a language programming approach either.

Judy: I have only ever met one person who knows it as a programming language but it does exist as a programming language.

Phil: Wow, there you go, there's my new thing for today.

Judy: So as an inquiry technique it makes sense for me to ask you a few questions. Let me start by asking you something that I would often ask in a team building session, I do lots of team building with this stuff. I would ask all of the members of the team this one question, "When you are working at your best you are like what?" So people might be playing along with this at home but for you Phil when you are working at your best you are like what?

Phil: So if I take the filter away then, so what I mean by that is a metaphor popped into my mind and I didn't like it but then I couldn't find a better one so will just go with that. So the metaphor that came in to mind was a river, and that's partly to do with flow and I know there's a notion or concept around flow in terms of being immersed in something where time seems to have not any kind of, not meaning, but there's no notion of sense or time because you're, let me put that to one side and it will come back to me. So it's partly to do with flow being immersed in something that it can both have speed and have calm, it can be tumultuous and still, that it can be twisty and turny but it can be fairly straight to but it's about being in it and working with it, so not being at its whim and passively moving. It's about being in it and part of it and working really collaboratively with it to create movement I guess. That movement isn't necessarily for me it can be movement for other people but when I'm best is when I am immersed in whatever that activity is that I'm doing.

Judy: So immersed in that activity and when you're immersed like that and the metaphor that came into your mind was a river and you didn't like that, when immersed when you're working at your best what kind of immersed is that immersed?

Phil: What kind of immersed is that immersed? So it's immersed to the extent that I can feel what's happening around me and I use that information to navigate my way along with whatever is that's happening. So sometimes that might be about swimming with the current or against the current, sometimes it might be just about lying on top and being still and just letting it take me, other times it might be where it's kind of head above the water but other times it might be diving down to the bottom so the immersion is to do with every sense is attuned to what's happening both around and



within me. So in terms of how I'm feeling, how it feels for me, how it feels for other people but there is also elements of looking back and looking forward, most of the time it's in where I am right now in that river but there are also occasions where there is a look-up ahead to see what's coming, what's there because that helps me be able to navigate that but also where have I been, what's been before because that informs what's happening now, so if I can be attuned to where we are with a reference point of where we've been and where we're going then that equips me most effectively to deal with whatever follows.

Judy: And attuned to where you are like that and when you are attuned like that what kind of attuned is that attuned when you are attuned to where you are?

Phil: I find it hard to articulate sometimes because it's about being wholly in it but also slightly detached so it's being. I guess I come back to something that I said earlier on - there's one thing which is about being aware of what's happening around and then just letting that take me somewhere. So I could think right I'm drawn to go this way or that way or to do this or to do that, so what's happening around me draws me to do that but that's almost constantly held with a curiosity of why do you want to do that. Is that the right thing for now, to what extent is that going to help you get where it is you or the situation wants you to get. For me, it's the distinction between being passive and being active in it, so it's not passively just allowing it to take you wherever it takes you it's yes, being wholly in it and feeling it and understanding what's happening but then making very deliberate choices around how to work with that. There might be a choice to let it go and to just go with it but there might be another choice to say actually no I don't want to go there yet we are going to hold where we are for now, we are going to stand our ground for a moment because we need to stand our ground and then we are going to hold it here and see what happens. If we continue to hold it here see how long we can hold it for and again knowing why we're holding it and what the intent and the purpose is and those sorts of things but it's that balance between being wholly aware of what's happening but countered with the deliberate and purposefulness of the choices that we make around it.

Judy: So it's that balance between wholly aware and that deliberate choice like that. Where about is that balance?

Phil: I don't know. I don't know because I have never been asked that question before. It's in me I think but I am not willing or able, and I don't know which one of those it is, to give it a more specific low cal than that.

Judy: So it's in you but you're not willing or able to give it a more specific low cal than that?

Phil: Yeah, because I can't say it's in my head and I can't say it's in my gut and I can't say it's in my heart or chest because it's in all of those places and none of those places which doesn't make any sense because it's not about intuition either. Sometimes my intuition will say go here, my intuition is telling me to go or to stop but then again I look to validate what my intuition tells me with what data, and this is I guess getting into something slightly different. So if my intuition is saying right let it go and move then another part of me will say right so what's the data to support that moving is the right thing now so you chose to hold here for a reason, you chose to hold here for these reasons, to what extent have those reasons either been negated or addressed and therefore we're going to move. So if I put that into a coaching scenario if I'm working with a client and there's a question that I've asked, I'm going meta now, so I guess in a way similar to the question that you have just asked me about where is it that they're really struggling with, my intuition might say I feel uncomfortable with their discomfort, so they're uncomfortable at the moment and I feel uncomfortable about that, so my intuition says move it on but then another part of me might say well actually there's a reason



why you asked that question, there's a reason why this bits important, so no we are going to hold for longer and let it be even though they're uncomfortable and your uncomfortable you're still going to hold it anyway.

Judy: And the balance is not in your head or your heart or your gut or your chest it's sort of all of those places and none of them and your intuition, whereabouts is your intuition?

Phil: Again it's similar in that it's in all of those places but none, again it's within me and it's really interesting because the thought that went through my head just then was I had a feeling of being under pressure to say my gut. So I interpreted your question to be you putting pressure on me to situate it somewhere and to situate it in my gut and my long pause was because I was checking myself then to go okay well A) it's interesting that you got that meaning B) is it there and C) are you saying it's not there because you are trying to be awkward and I answered all of those questions to say actually no I'm not trying to be awkward and it is the same answer that I've given before in terms of it is in all those places but none of those places. I can't put a pin in it to say that's where it is.

Judy: And that process that just happened, is that the same or different to the process you described a moment ago about the relationship between intuition and balance?

Phil: So it's fairly similar, so yes, is it the same? I don't know I wasn't willing to say it was the same again because I think I hadn't thought about it in that way but yes it's very similar to that process because something somewhere inside me chose to hear it as what I just said I heard it as and then another part of me was like hang on a minute though, so yes it's similar.

Judy: So there's that balance, there's the intuition, there's that process and when you are immersed in your work every sense is attuned and there's that balance between the wholly aware of what's happening and that deliberate seeking the data and all of that and all of that is there is anything else about you when you're working at your best and all of that.

Phil: So yes and there is a lot of love in there because I love what I do and I choose that word deliberately because it is not about joy, there is a lot of joy in what I do but it's not just about joy. Yes I enjoy a lot of what I do but I also love what I do because what I do can get me scared and get me cross and get me annoyed and get me offended and get me contemptuous at times actually but I love what I do because love incorporates all of those things, it's not just about joy, love isn't just about being happy in my humble view. I love what I do because of the ways that it affects me, how it makes me feel, what it makes me think and all of those things that go with it.

Judy: And when all of that, what difference does having explored all of that make?

Phil: Makes me think about how I articulate it because I haven't articulated it like that before so that's interesting, it's helpful in that it's got me considering where are things situated, do I want to situate things so I'm saying I can't put a pin in something, it's here but it's not here so it's got me thinking is that something I want to do, right now I'm not sure if it is but it's an interesting thought process to have and I have enjoyed the self-reflection on the meaning that I'm getting from the questions that you ask and I guess part of that is with the knowledge of where the conversation is going to go in the future within this podcast as well, there's a momentary and meta-analysis thing that is going on at the same time.

Judy: Thank you, so is that a good place to hand the chair back to you.

Phil: Yes, thank you, yeah that sounds good. Okay, there was lots of my language that I use within the questions that you asked me, is that a deliberate thing?

Judy: Yes so, the clean language which was devised by this bloke David Grove is basically a set of about a dozen questions which have spaces in them for the other person's words. The question patterns are relatively rigid so people might have heard that I only asked three maybe four questions in the whole of that conversation, but each time they were different because they had different of your words dropped into them. That was one of the amazing things that David discovered that actually just a very small number of questions was enough to support somebody making an inquiry into their own internal workings, the two most common questions which are the ones I use most of the time are what kind of X where X represents some of your words or is there anything else about X and that's pretty much all you do with clean language, it is at one level incredibly simple just a small number of questions, the other persons words, the jobs a goodun.

Phil: And as a practitioner when you studied David Groves work or when you started doing that how did you feel about that? There is an agenda behind my question which I'll share in a minute.

Judy: For me, it seemed absolutely natural as my professional background was as a news reporter and I was a news reporter who had been trained that everybody else has a story, it's your job to find it and help them to tell it. I'm not the kind of news reporter you see on TV whose main role is to be a personality. In the tradition that I was taught the reporter should be as invisible as possible, so for me it seemed very natural and very comfortable as a concept, but it took what I already did and magnified it hugely. I thought I was already being clean in the technical meaning of the word, cleaning saying that I was doing minimal influence but actually what I realised was that I was influencing all over the place and that actually I could go a lot further and the further I went into using their words and minimising their words the more I discovered, the more I learned and that's when it got interesting.

Phil: I said there was an agenda behind my question and the agenda behind it is that I have worked with a number of people who pride themselves on the ability to craft a question and having a massive question bank, so having a huge arsenal of questions at their disposal and so the idea of only needing 10, I don't know where I got the number from - I don't know if you said it earlier, but the idea of only 10 they could interpret that as quite threatening, quite challenging rather than having this huge arsenal or armoury of questions to ask.

Judy: And I think that touches on the heart of the purpose of clean language, it is an inquiry technique and if you are working a change context, so if you're wanting to help somebody to make changes in their lives for example in a coaching context, traditionally NLP coaches and other kinds of coaching the coach comes in with the powerful question which completely reframes the situation and changes the way the other person thinks about the thing that only works very very occasionally, it's actually much more powerful to help the other person to understand it for themselves differently which is subtle distinction but it's a really important distinction. So in an NLP, you will get slate or mouth model questions and meta-model questions, the purpose of which is to undermine the clients' sense of how the world is by introducing new content from the coach but actually the underpinning assumption of clean language is that 99 times out of 100 that's not the bit that's needed particularly in these days of us having the internet at our fingertips. If more information or more perspectives on the same situation was going to change things it would have changed it by now, what really is going to make the difference is something from inside the client shifting, now that is potentially disempowering if your entire professional career is built on amazing questions that completely transform the clients world but actually if you're in that kind of mind-set you may like to

pay attention to how often those powerful questions actually work, what effect they actually have rather than the effect you wish they had.

Phil: Sorry in my head I am now searching my experiences of my coaching practice and wondering what has been the impact when I have tried to ask those context shattering questions.

Judy: And I'm not denying sometimes they work, sometimes questions can be awesome and sometimes clean language questions can be used in an unclean way where they actually do challenge the way someone is thinking about it. In one of my learning groups online we are having a discussion at the moment about, so if the client says I feel that people are judging me, is it or is it not a clean question to say how many people could there be? Now how many is technically a clean question, it's a specialised one it's not one of the core 12 but it's one of the extended set of about 20 and the client has said there are multiple people in their internal world, I feel that people are judging me, so at one level it is perfectly reasonable and curious question oh, how many people could there be but at another level that is effectively a meta-model question in which you are asking do you really mean that all people are judging you, challenging that universal quantifier, so it's possible to use clean language questions to be completely unclean and to try and fix the client, but David's big insight was that clients don't need fixing. If you can open space if you can allow with your listening and your attention to open them to have a space to do their best thinking their systems have the power to heal themselves they don't need your magic wand.

Phil: And I love that as a starting point, I think I mentioned last time when we spoke before we set the date for the podcast I mentioned Nancy Klein's work and I am a huge fan of Nancy Klein's work and the more we are discussing it the more overlap I'm making, whether that's a fair thing to do or not is another question but the more overlap I am making between her work and the work we are talking about here, so it's prompting me to want to go and read more and to immerse myself in it more.

Judy: I think that's a great place to pay attention because Nancy's work is absolutely awesome, so there is a lot in Nancy's work about providing a space for people to talk, she says things like the quality of your attention determines the quality of another person thinking, absolutely in the same kind of territory as clean, where we diverge is in Nancy's concept of the incisive question which is absolutely the kind of question which you're talking about where the listener suddenly switches role and instead of just being curious says right I can frame, I can craft a question which is going to transform everything. David's idea was don't do that, you don't need to do that.

Phil: So can I go back to the example for a second. So the client was saying that people are judging me - did I get that right?

Judy: Yeah.

Phil: We talked about the question of how many people, so what would be an alternative clean question that you could ask.

Judy: The classic clean question in response to that statement would be and when you feel people are judging you what would you like to have happened?

Phil: Okay.

Judy: Now on one level it has got a less clean intention than just curiosity.



Phil: Yes true.

Judy: For most people most of the time it's more useful to be paying attention to what they like than what they don't like to resources and to outcomes rather than to problems and the general messiness of the past. Most clean language coaches will use that attention switching question to help someone to look at what they would like instead. David Grove, on the other hand, didn't do that, he used to talk about being an equal information employer and he thought that constant focus on outcomes was inappropriate, that people should actually keep this sense of curiosity and instead just ask another question that would take the person to the edge of what they already knew and to find out something else that they didn't already know. You could ask, the original statement was I feel people are judging me. David might ask, when you feel people are judging you whereabouts do you feel it?

Phil: Okay.

Judy: Because David was really really interested in psycho-geography about the notion that peoples thoughts and feelings and experience was entirely physically grounded, we're not disembodied brains in jars we are human beings in bodies in relation to environments and our thoughts are held in physical space one way or another and because David was working with trauma one of the things he wanted to do was get his clients more into their bodies and out of their heads because in resolving trauma typically it's a very visceral body reaction that needs to happen to resolve traumatic conditions.

Phil: And are we talking physical trauma, psychological trauma or both?

Judy: Both in the cases that he was dealing with.

Phil: Okay.

Judy: There are a bunch of alternative questions and of course you could just ask and when you feel people are judging you what kind of judging? What you can notice by having this very very small question set, you can go to some amazingly different places.

Phil: Yeah absolutely.

Judy: Even though you've just got this small question set, the other persons' words and an intention to be curious rather than to try and fix it.

Phil: One of the other things I'm really interested in is the word of framing and metaphor which I've put together as one and actually they are two distinctly different things and I was curious about how, and there's me framing it as curiosity, so I was curious about the way or ways that clean language would use those two things. So I guess in a way, if I'm understanding it correctly, there can be some framing within it but the metaphor is about recycling or reflecting back depending on which word you want to use, the metaphor that the individual, the client, whether that be in a coaching or a team setting, it's using their metaphor to encourage further respiration and the frame can be where is that. So the example, if I'm understanding it correctly, in the example you said just now around where is that judging then the frame that you are putting around it is that it has a physical place and it pre-supposes it has a physical place but the thing that you're reflecting back is the metaphor that has been used. Is that a fair or accurate description?



Judy: It's a slightly complicated one because framing is itself a metaphor and means lots of different things to different people.

Phil: Yeah okay.

Judy: And every metaphor is unique to an individual and we share common frames within cultures, so there is a whole bunch of different energies combined in that question. When one is asking a clean language question typically you are looking to find out information as the facilitator but much more importantly to help the client find out what is happening for themselves, you are trying to impose as few frames, as few rigid structures as you can in order for them to have the maximum freedom of movement but one of the things is that constraint inspires creativity so when you ask a clean language question you are directing attention with precision, you are not just vaguely going, oh is there anything else in all of that. Which really just allows the client to carry on thinking the way they have always been thinking, so if we start off with I feel that people are judging me and you go oh is there anything else about that, well no new thinking is going to emerge from that.

Phil: Yeah okay, yeah.

Judy: But by directing the client's attention with pinpoint precision to, is there anything else about those people, then you basically take the attention to a bit they haven't already paid attention to. David wants the attention taken to just the edge of what they know now and not wildly beyond but just at the edge so in his way of seeing it getting the answer I don't know to a question was not a disaster, it doesn't matter when the client says oh I don't know, I have never been asked that before, you are encouraging them to do new thinking and even a small bit of new thinking is potentially making a change in the system. A lot of your listeners will be very much systems thinking but they will have the idea that everything within the system influences everything else but if you can change one piece lots of the other things might change. So a small change in thinking, expanding the thinking in one direction or another might change a lot of things, so when we take the attention to what the person wants to the intended outcome or as an appreciative inquiry take, the attention to what's working, what's going really well that expands the frame of our thinking, we are discovering something new. The whole space in which we think becomes larger, more things are then able to change and more connections can be made and all the rest of it. I have gone off on a bit of a riff around framing, is that some kind of answer to your question?

Phil: Yes it is thank you. So it wasn't some kind of answer to my question it was a thorough answer to my question so thank you. So the experience that I had then where the meaning I took from one of your questions was that you were forcing me to a particular place and I suppose I am linking a few things together which may be inappropriate for me to do, but we talk about precision inquiry and then if I think about that in the context of the discussion that we had that precision made me uncomfortable and it caused a reaction in me of I feel like I'm being told I have to situate this somewhere. In your experience is that common?

Judy: I think this absolutely gets into the nub of the conversation that brought us together in the first place. The idea that people cannot influence each other is utter nonsense and the idea that when one person is asking another person very specific questions that they are not influencing is utter tosh, its right up there on the toshiness scale. What I was doing, the way that I understand what I was doing is I was directing your attention with precision, it's like, you see those big spotlights that are manually operated, you see them in pantomimes and they chase the character round on the stage and there is typically a bloke, it can be done by a woman, typically a bloke up in the lighting gallery with that spotlight-chasing the character around the stage and all of a sudden there will be a little noise and the spotlight moves to a different part of the stage and the character has to run to

follow the spotlight. That's what questions do, they take the persons attention, like the character on the stage, the attention is pulled hither and yon by questions which means, oh and there is another little loop - what happens when you are asked a question? Your attention goes inside to seek the answer to the question, so whenever I ask a question even if you have got no intention of answering it, your attention follows the question.

Phil: Yeah absolutely and part of that is to do with societal rules and norms that mean it is impolite, so the amount of time it took me to give you the answer I don't know because I felt like I should give you an answer and I think goes back to where I felt that pressure to situate it somewhere because it was a similar question that you had asked in a slightly different way. There was a bit of social pressure that I was putting on myself to say you need to situate this somewhere because you have been asked about it twice now, you've been asked about this twice and you gave an, I don't know last time and you can't give I don't know again because that would be rude or impolite or those sorts of things. So I agree with you when the question is asked you will go there is a norm very much so to go and look for the answer and if the answer is then I don't know then so be it.

Judy: It's really really hard to hear the question where is that feeling and answer breakfast cereal and where attention goes energy flows so by directing someone's attention to one thing in preference to another thing you are directing their energy, so a coach who always directs the persons attention to what they want in preference to what they don't want is directing the person's energy to what they want as well as their attention. I have lost track of what the original question was but the notion of what you are doing is not not influencing, you are influencing. You're influencing the person's attention and the person's energy and directing them in specific ways. What you are not doing is trying to fix them and what you are not doing as far as possible is introducing your own content as the facilitator. So I'm not sitting around and going oh and when you are working at your best it is like a river, is that like the River Thames near me or is it more like the Humber near you.

Phil: Yes, yeah.

Judy: I am not introducing rivers and I am also being more led by you and your answers than by a formula, so I don't think I actually asked you any questions about the river apart from the very first one because you'd said you didn't like that metaphor and there was something else that you were talking about which was immersion, so although there was some moments where I thought you were still talking about a river I thought let's leave those, let's pay attention to some of the other pieces and you did at one point talk about sometimes I'm swimming with the flow and sometimes I'm swimming against it and sometimes I dive and sometimes I'm resting on the surface so probably there was a river in the metaphor but actually river was not the central focus of our inquiry at that point.

Phil: No.

Judy: We might have gone on to talk more about river but we might not so I am much more being led by you and what you are wanting and wanting to explore than by a book thing that says oh he said the word river let's keep going back to that. So its different levels of content in position, you are trying not to impose content you are imposing the direction of energy through the direction of attention.

Phil: And I guess that's back to one of the phrases that you opened up with which is about precision inquiry. Okay.



Judy: I'm really curious, this toshiness spectrum is there anything else about the toshiness spectrum? I want to know what this toshiness spectrum is like.

Phil: That's a tough question to answer. As a general thing I like spectrums as ways of exploring things and so on a toshiness spectrum there's one end which is complete and utter tosh and is a mix of things, it could be no practical application, it could be no evidence base behind it, no foundation for it and then at the other end of the spectrum there is I guess the opposite of those things. Yeah, I think I like spectrums because they give freedom to say that, it removes the binaries of it, it's not right or wrong or correct or incorrect or black or white it's the range that can be in it because nothing is as simple as clean or dirty or if I go with clean language there is no clean. So if we look at language as clean or dirty I think that gives us an unhelpful binary perspective on it.

Judy: I hate the name clean language by the way. I think it's really really unhelpful name for a thing that is really much more interesting than that and more use because it's not really about language either it's about metaphor and metaphor goes much deeper than language. The reason there is metaphor in our language is because there is metaphor in our thoughts, the suggestion that its clean language not only suggests that there is a perfect cleanness but also suggests that there is a language focus to the thing but actually you can use clean language questions about all sorts of things it doesn't have to be about words. You can use them about body movements and all sorts of things like that.

Phil: And I was imagining as well as in the coaching and team development world there could also be applications within the consulting perspective as well. One of the things that I get really interested in when I am asked to do some consulting work is exploring the reality or realities of what is happening wherever I am being asked to work. I can imagine using those questions to explore those realities that are present for the different people that are involved would be a really interesting one to do.

Judy: Indeed, you have got various applications in that kind of point. This is one of the places where clean language has got academic support by the way just to pay attention to your toshiness criteria. Clean language is increasingly being used as a methodology for academic interviewing and James Lawley who is one of the key people in the clean language world has established effectively a cleanness analysis tool and if you are doing a research survey you can run your questions through his analysis tool and it will tell you how clean you are being.

Phil: That's really interesting.

Judy: Which actually can be really handy in a whole bunch of situations but in the situation you described, in a consulting situation first you can use clean language to find out what it is the person potentially hiring you actually would like to have happen as a result of hiring you. Now typically that's a place where consulting projects go horribly wrong because you don't have a clear sense of what they want, you are too anxious to say what you have is a nail and what I have got is a hammer and they're anxious also for you to have a hammer for their nail, but really you never get to find out what the actual situation is that is causing them to call you in. So there is this whole piece of clean scoping of what is the project that is required and that in itself because being asked clean language questions typically deepens the relationship between the client and the facilitator really really quickly.

Phil: Yeah I can imagine.

Judy: So it's very handy to ask your potential client clean language questions because although it is a little bit of a trick it will make them feel that you understand them really well and hence they are

potentially more likely to hire you. Once you have got the gig, then as you say, establishing current reality you are already in there using the questions to find out what's actually going on for people and in the same moment of doing that you are building their relationship with you and potentially you are teaching them tools which can build the relationships within the organisation you are going into so you are already doing it, you are already making the intervention in the bit where they think that you are just fact-finding. Then as it goes on maybe you do your official report back and you say oh what I think we should do is this, this, this and you say right we should do some training or some coaching and then you are again teaching people to use these questions as a way of teaching them to be more curious about each other and my colleague Caitlin Walker would say in the process the system becomes aware of itself. What I understand her to mean by that...

Phil: I was going to say what you mean by that...

Judy: Is that as people become more aware of each other and more aware of the interactions between people and more aware of the results of the interactions between people they can start to direct attention in ways that potentially change that. When an individual is being coached using clean language stuff that just changes, so the example I often use is a client I had recently the metaphorical landscape he had, it was like there were blocks scattered all over a field and I asked him questions about these different blocks. I suppose that they must have been to do with different aspects of his career, I was asking him about different blocks and we had been going for about 15 minutes and he suddenly went oh, I said what just happened and he said the blocks have picked themselves up and formed themselves into a staircase.

Phil: Okay.

Judy: And I asked him some questions about the staircase and the next thing that happened was that a flaming portal opened up at the top of the staircase and he was able to go up the staircase, walk through the flaming portal and his stuff was sorted. One of the downsides of being a clean language coach is you never really understand what they mean by the metaphor. But the bit I want to share is the surprise, the sense of surprise when the metaphor changes, everything changes. Something similar seems to happen when groups and teams really get using these questions and using the metaphors together. At the very simplest level, they discover that one person, when they are working at their best they are like an express train and another person when they are working at their best they are like a butterfly and now they understand why they are not quite seeing eye to eye. As it goes deeper they can understand well what is it that the butterfly needs to be in place to be working at their best, they need the freedom to move from flower to flower. What is it the express train needs to be working at their best well they need to be properly fuelled and have a nice clear track to follow and once you know that people need this stuff the butterfly can make sure that the track is in place and then they can float off. It becomes much easier to work together when you know what people need and until you start to get curious about your colleagues you just don't know.

Phil: What I really like about that is the way it empowers the individual to create those things and articulate those things for themselves as opposed to it being done as a result of completing a personality questionnaire or as a result of a doing a Belbin team role thing, so rather than asking questions to then put yourself in a predisposed pre-described box it's about you being empowered and enabled to create those explanations and distinctions for yourself.

Judy: And it takes a lot less explanation than Belbin or any of those things. How many pages of assessment is it for a Belbin thing? It goes on forever and in order to understand your colleagues, one you have got to read their so many pages as well as your own and so on and so forth whereas

with a metaphor just one line when I'm working at my best I'm like a butterfly gives you so many clues because metaphor captures so much information in a very very small package even though their butterfly will not be the same as my butterfly, we can have a sense of how butterflies are, we know what the metaphoric entailments of butterflies are and the metaphoric entailments of an express trains. Before we even start to talk about more detail on those things we already have a general sense.

Phil: It's been fascinating Judy, I have really enjoyed it today.

Judy: It's always good to talk about this stuff, I am now clicking back through your toshiness criteria and thinking is there anything else we haven't covered in terms of toshiness criteria. We covered research, we've covered, I hope we covered practical application.

Phil: Yes we have.

Judy: Was there another criteria and I think there was a third.

Phil: There may have been but I can't remember.

Judy: What I'm really curious is what difference has this conversation made for you. For someone who came, and we had a previous conversation, but when you first came to clean language which was only about a month ago we started talking on LinkedIn I think it was, what difference has having explored all of this stuff about clean language, what difference does it make?

Phil: So it's sparked a curiosity that wasn't there before, so I would wrinkle my nose up in disgust and turn away if I saw the words clean language in everything I would just go whatever and turn around and walk away, whereas now you have got me really curious about the 12 core questions and the additional 20, the work that both David Grove and James Lawley are doing because part of what I do is help organisations with some cultural diagnostic stuff and I think I have got some really "good" questions which I have again, and when you talk about the examples that you have got and shared with me today around what some of those 12 might be I can see that some of those have got elements of those within them already in terms of the precision but broad so asking something that is precise but gives space and room to allow people to explore. The use of the interviewees or the groups language as a way of kind of presenting that back to explore that in more detail and explore that in more depth so both in my work as a coach and as a consultant, as a facilitator you have really got my curiosity peaked and to go and find out more, read more and just to go and interrogate more, whereas that's a complete 180 from where I was before. If you would have said where does clean language fit on your things that you want to go and investigate I had have said it's not even on the list, whereas now it is very much on that list and something I want to investigate quickly.

Judy: Excellent I rate that a job done then. When you have got a moment to investigate it some directions I suggest on my website judyrees.co.uk there is a free e-book - your clean language questions answered which does indeed answer a lot of your clean language questions. There will be, so that e-book is made up of blog posts from judyrees.co.uk there are lots of others on that website, it's a search function you can find all sorts of stuff about clean language there.

Phil: I will put a link to that in the show notes as well so if people want to go and find it they can just open the show notes and click on it and off it will go.

Judy: I think that e-book includes a list of recommended books but the very short list of recommended books you might enjoy the book I co-authored which is Clean Language Revealing



Metaphors and Opening Minds. If you are working primarily with groups there are two others to pay attention to - Caitlin Walkers book From Contempt to Curiosity and it might sound a bit bizarre but Julie McCracken's book Clean Language in the Classroom, the substance of the book is about working with small children most of what she does is also applicable to adults and if people are coaches listening to this then there is a book by Marion Way called Clean Approaches for Coaches which is again very excellent. I have got various recorded courses online, I have got a weekly newsletter which brings out all sorts of stuff around this stuff. David Groves own materials, David, unfortunately, died about 10 years ago so he was around before people were mass producing YouTubes and those kinds of things, so there isn't a huge amount of David's own material out there, most of what's usable is recent work by other people.

Phil: Fab. Wonderful, thank you I will make sure I find all of those books and put the links to them in the show notes as well.

Judy: Thank you, this has been fun.

Phil: It has been fun, so can I take your question and kind of play it back to you as well. So the question you asked me was, what difference having explored all of this has made?

Judy: It's been interesting, it's always interesting to share it with somebody new and compare and contrast your experience of it with my experience of it. Yeah it's good fun to talk about it and 10 years ago I was as guilty as anybody of standing in the conference coffee area going oh clean language yeah clean language is about not influencing your clients and it's just tosh, so over the last 10 years I have got better and better and better. I hope explaining why that's not true and now I no longer feel guilty about saying it, it's not possible to be completely clean and what's interesting is what happens when you give it your best shot and what you then learn.

Phil: And I think that's a brilliant note to end on. So thank you so much for your time today Judy I really really appreciate it. If people want to get hold of you they can go to judyrees.co.uk. Thank you so much for your time Judy both today but also in the conversation that we have had in the past and for our interactions online and I look forward to chatting with you more as I go and explore clean language even more.

Judy: Enjoy it.

Phil: Wonderful, thanks Judy take care.