

How to see Possibility using vertical inquiry

Insight is the gateway to transforming your life and everything in it.

‘Vertical inquiry’ is a form of gentle questioning intended to take a client or workshop attendee beyond their conditioning, to experience a mental stillness and an opening of their access to Possibility.

The purpose is for the individual to *see* and gain perspective on an aspect of their life (or many), as if for the first time.

It sets out to reveal how *seeing* into The Realm of Possibility within our mind, via a specific questioning process, is particularly useful in leading us to personal insights and a transformed understanding of how we experience reality and of the reality we experience.

What follows contrasts with the more traditional ways of teaching, counselling and coaching, which is to pass on knowledge, including such popular methods as using metaphors, illustration, storytelling, analogy, example, case study and all forms of input-focused instruction. Each of these methods is, to a lesser or greater degree, an ‘outside-in approach’ to learning. In such approaches, information that is known passes to another where it might also become known – but this information, as valuable as it might be, is often not learnt in a way that makes a difference in that person’s life and relationships.

Our approach to counselling/coaching and how we facilitate The Possibility Workshop directs the participant towards self-discovery, which is an ‘inside-out approach’ taking the client away from the ‘known’ and into the ‘unknown’, and ultimately into The Realm of Possibility - their innate place of true leaning. This experience has the potential to transform forever the life of those questioned. It can be summed up by: ‘Keep asking me relevant questions, and I’ll discover within the relevant answer.’

[B] INSIDE-OUT COACHING

As said, traditional teaching/facilitation often gets in the way of discovery. Our coaching approach is based on what this guide suggests, and that is:

- our reality is an internally generated experience;
- specifically, our moment-to-moment reality, experienced through our senses, is brought to us via Thought and perceived through our present level of awareness;
- the wondrous faculty of Thought is the energy that powers each of us in having this miraculous experience called 'our life'.

Our memory – that is, our lifelong accumulation, however valuable and indispensable much of it is to our daily living – gets in the way of our having a deeper, more direct, richer and more peaceful experience of life in each moment ... and most critically in *seeing* Possibility.

Personal discovery from within our mind is the way to transformation and renewal.

[B] DELVING INTO THE UNKNOWN, NOT ACCUMULATING MORE INFORMATION FROM THE KNOWN IS THE WAY TO OUR TRANSFORMATION

If the answers lie within, personal discovery is an inside-out process. Relying on a counsellor/coach to convey words of wisdom in the hope they will have a lasting impact on the client/participant is less fruitful than being asked questions that evoke personal reflection and insight from a deeper intelligence/reality within, The Realm we call Possibility.

In light of our understanding of fresh Thought, we acknowledge the nature of quiet reflection as leading to inner stillness and insight. This process requires an approach that encourages reflection: being still and being willing to wait patiently in the unknown.

At the heart of The Realm of Possibility Workshop (see the Appendix) is the acknowledgment that the place of our transformation lies within each of us. The

classroom, as it were, is our mind, and the educator is the wellspring of original Thought and our experience of *seeing* Possibility.

[B] QUESTIONING vs TEACHING

History is replete with examples showing that the pivotal element enabling the individual to see the nature of fresh Thought and Possibility lies within them.

Vertical inquiry leads us to *see* beyond our memory, beyond our beliefs, opinions, judgements and current understanding of how our life works and why we experience our life the way we do.

The intention behind each question is to lead us away from our story and to explore the unknown world within.

In life, it is necessary to possess all sorts of knowledge and have that knowledge on tap, but we put to you that when such knowledge is on top, it blocks us from *seeing* Possibility. Seeing life through the veil of yesterday is the cause of the problems we face but fail to *see*.

[B] INSIDE-OUT vs OUTSIDE-IN

Life can insist that we question how clearly we see or *see* ourselves and our relationships. In these moments, we are often sorely tested.

Our decision for our life appears to be whether to rely on what we see from our conditioning, react and thus struggle in life - to fight with a world that seems to threaten or upset what we are sure is 'the truth of the matter'. Or, to face these moments with a mind that is understanding; looking towards the unknown, waiting for the insight, the wisdom and the common sense to touch us gently as we stand in silence, open and willing to *see* our world anew.

Personal insights and accessing our innate potential for transformation are seldom if ever, found in grappling with the content of our thinking – forever a reflection of how we see or *see* life.

It is when; faced with questions that have us quietly examining our unaddressed assumptions about life, that we *see* the fallacies in our beliefs, opinions, judgements and knowledge. At those moments we, if our mind is quiet enough, *see* beyond the known and into The Realm of Possibility and our transformation.

Vertical inquiry facilitates us in examining our long-held perceptions, raising the chances of our *seeing* Possibility, experiencing life anew from that deeper place of understanding – that place before the existence of our memory.

In much of traditional teaching theory, there is the idea that a student learns by listening, looking, reading, experiencing, or by other outside-in ways and then memorising that data. The teacher, to consolidate the lesson, synthesises the material or puts it together in new ways, which hopefully is *seen* via the creative process that lies within the student.

There is an internal creative process, but the evidence suggests that the method of teaching and synthesising and the creative process does not occur as often as they might with the various outside-in teaching or coaching methods.

What happens, more often than not, is an accumulation of more information, called knowledge, which in and of itself does not lead to discovery and thus real understanding, a transformation of the mind and renewal. This is why:

- Many experience a quiet mind, inspiration and peace in the presence of their counsellor/coach/mentor, but struggle when they are not.
- Many, while in a training program, experience the same and *see* life more positively, but soon after leaving that environment, they slip back into their old, less life-affirming habits of thinking, feeling and acting.
- Many, while on a personal development retreat or attending a self-help group, think, feel and act in a constructive, life-affirming way. On returning to their regular life and work, they slip back into thinking, feeling and behaving as they have for most of their life – in a much less constructive and life-affirming way.

- Without an understanding of what is occurring in our mind – that is, experiencing The Realm of Possibility – we imagine that our experience has to do with our teacher – or we make up a story to explain why we have the experience – a story that attributes meaning to an external source.

Gaining an intellectual understanding of Possibility and impossibility is not a transformative experience; generating the rebirth or renewal of the student.

Our need is to *see* beyond the already known.

We need questions that stretch us and require us to *see* beyond our present level of understanding (awareness/consciousness). The process of vertical inquiry paves the way, via this reflection, to insight.

Following an insight, we can subsequently benefit from some limited teaching, but reconfirmation and the fleshing-out of the particular insight is best gained from our own further insights and personal revelations. Moreover, this confirmation includes being reminded that all the answers we seek are found within – not from our teacher.

It is the quality of our insights, and those alone, that leads to transformation, not the brilliance of the counsellor's teaching or the depth of their understanding.

[B] THE VERTICAL QUESTION AS A SIGNPOST

A vertical question is any question that directs attention away from us, the teacher, and towards the individual's inner wisdom, understanding and innate common sense. After all, the value of a signpost lies in directing attention towards the destination. A vertical question evokes reflection in the individual, rather than an automatic or conditioned response from memory.

As said, it has us examining our unexplored assumptions about life. It is a question that assists in the process of helping us to *see* that we are the thinker and therefore the creator of our experience, and it leads us towards the nature

of fresh Thought and Possibility. It plumbs the depths of our inherent understanding by releasing us from our conditioning and exploring our innate nature. From that realm of the unknown, original ideas emerge – novel ways of looking at old problems, new perspectives on long-held beliefs, a more life-enhancing reality.

Is there a risk of putting people into an analytical state with questions, rather than a reflective state? Yes. If a question draws on our memory, we will go into analysing, figuring out, and then back into circular thinking (unless the individual is already awake to what they are doing). If, on the other hand, a question evokes reflection, it will take us towards the unknown and The Realm of Possibility and seeing something new or experiencing a fresh take on something old.

When we are sick of sifting through the content of our memory, of endlessly raking over the coals (for some of us, our hell on Earth), vertical questions can unlock the gates to our psychological freedom and connect us with our natural health. That occurs when we *see* that we are the thinker and, as such, are creating our experience, moment-to-moment, via Thought. Coupled with that, we become acutely aware of the quality of our in-the-moment thinking.

I'll use the phrase 'vertical inquiry' as a simple example of using vertical questions to assist another person to discover what they already know but has yet to see.

JW- "Kevin, you say that you don't understand what I mean by vertical inquiry."

KS – "Yes, I don't get it."

JW – "What is it specifically about that term that you don't get?"

KS – "I don't get what you mean by the words vertical and inquiry put together in that way. It's confusing."

JW – "OK. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

K.S – "No. Go ahead."

J.W. – "What does vertical mean to you?"

KS – "It means going straight up – going vertically."

JW – “That’s what it means to me as well. And, I know you understand what inquiry means, so what might vertical inquiry suggest?”

KS – “It would suggest a line of inquiry that goes up, straight up; but that doesn’t make sense. Up where?”

JW – “Yes. Good question. So, if we make an inquiry that takes a person’s thinking up – where won’t it be taking that person’s thinking?”

KS – “Well, it certainly won’t be down.”

JW – “Yes. And where else won’t it be taking that person’s thinking?”

K.S. – “I guess that it won’t be taking it sideways or off at a tangent.”

J.W. – “So Keven; straight up. Not down, not sideways or off to a tangent.”

J.W. – “What does up mean to you?”

K.S. – “It means higher, rather than lower.”

J.W. – “Yes. Higher than what Keven?”

K.S. – “I’m not sure, but right now it seems like to a higher, clearer understanding of whatever we are inquiring into. Like me understanding what is meant by the words vertical inquiry.”

J.W. – “You’ve got it, Kevin. It means questions that take the person questioned as well as the questioner to a higher or better understanding of what the person already knows, but either, hasn’t recognised yet or has forgotten.”

You can see from this example that the questions keep drilling into Keven’s unknown or unrecognised understanding. As he comes up with each answer that in turn calls for another one and another until Kevin discovers the answer to what he thought he didn’t know.

Of course, with a client, what the client is not understanding is more central to their life, sense of well being and peace of mind. However the process is the same and the results can be life changing for them.

[B] THE ROLE OF REFLECTION

Reflection occurs when we become the conscious witness to what we are thinking in the moving moment – observing our thoughts and feelings with curiosity and maybe with wonder. It is occurring when we notice what is going

on in our mind without judgement, even when we are judging ourselves for judging ourselves.

Reflection is noticing *that* we are the thinker and simultaneously *seeing what* we are thinking. It is being aware of what is passing through our mind — being awake to our creation – our Thought created reality.

Reflection is a state where we, as the thinker, start to transcend the limitations of our present worldview via *insight*.

Reflection leads us to become aware of the restrictions and limitations of our memory, of our conditioning, of our habitual, analytic, hidebound patterns, i.e. the content of our learned, personalised thinking.

Reflection is the inner gaze by the individual on the known while holding gently the intention of *seeing* the yet-to-be-seen, the previously unknown.

Reflection ensues from the process of vertical inquiry, acting as the doorway to *insight*, Possibility and transformation.

[B] INSIGHT: A MOMENT OF POSSIBILITY

Insight is *seeing* in our mind's eye something brand-new, or something in a way we have not recognised before or been aware of until that moment. However, whatever it is we *see*, it comes to us in a context of kindness, understanding, wisdom and common sense.

Insight is waking up from our ignorance.

Insight is the moment of an enriching, possibly exhilarating discovery – one that might transform our life – maybe forever.

Insight is the unforgettable moment experienced by the scientist making a breakthrough; the composer *hearing* the new notes of a beautiful ballad; the sports star, with time, seemingly standing still, scores the winning point in the

dying seconds of the game; the entrepreneur *seeing* a revolutionary idea; or the person who, in a moment of kindness, understanding, wisdom and common sense, forgives another human being after years of blaming and anger.

Insight is the gateway to transforming our relationship with the world.

[B] THE LINKS JOINING VERTICAL INQUIRY, REFLECTION AND INSIGHT

Vertical inquiry, reflection and insight have a lot in common.

Vertical inquiry leads us to the moment where we set aside our world of memory, of seeing life through the illusions of our past.

Vertical inquiry takes us to the point of willingly *not* knowing and having the *intention* to wait in that unknown.

Vertical inquiry, without us realising, moves our gaze from our very personalised thinking towards what we can only describe as impersonal (or arm's-length) thinking.

Vertical inquiry invites us to pause and become reflective on even our most mundane assumptions about how life is for us or how it is for others.

Reflection is, therefore, a natural progression from vertical inquiry.

Reflection enables the individual to *see* that their thinking alone has kept them trapped in a worldview that is restricting their happiness and growth.

Reflection allows freedom from ruminating on our systematic thinking.

Reflection leads to a quiet mind allowing the individual to *see* that they think and that their thinking can shift. This awareness encourages further reflection.

IN SUMMARY

It is from the quiet, unbounded space of reflection that *insights* arise. Those *insights* will inspire in the counsellor/coach fresh vertical inquiry as it does in the client. That in turn, will lead to deeper reflection and further *insights for both*.

The continuing cycle of vertical inquiry/reflection/*insight* serves to deepen our understanding of how we have constructed our life and relationships, and how we might discover renewal via fresh Thought and Possibility.

Vertical inquiry, in my experience, is the best way to spark personal *insights* that will provide a sound and continuing basis for lasting transformation. This view is based on at least two criteria:

- The degree to which the client transforms in a way that their life and relationships are, without exception, happier and more fulfilling.
- The degree to which the movement lasts over time and holds up in the face of life's vagaries.

In our experience, tapping the wisdom, common sense and innate health that already exist in every individual seems to be achieved most effectively and efficiently by directing the individual towards *seeing* the inside-out creation of life, via vertical inquiry.

Warmly ... John