

Values systems and world views in coaching



By Lizzi Larbalestier

The fourth article in this series was set to focus on values and beliefs as we work our way through the logical levels relating these to coaching modalities. But in light of the current contextual turbulence I thought it might be relevant to expand this frame to explore **world views**, since changes in cultural climate can drastically draw into question how easy it is for ourselves and our clients to expand our beliefs and align our actions to our values.

As our political and social landscapes change, with environmental policies in question and significant economic implications, strong bias can emerge within ourselves and our coaching clients and we can find that the schema we once used to navigate our world and make decisions is no longer fit for purpose.

As NLP practitioners we acknowledge change ecology whilst working closely with our clients to ascertain their values and beliefs in service of motivation for progressive growth.

We navigate the perspectives of others and acknowledge the local norms and global trends that influence ourselves, our businesses and our communities.

As coaches, awareness of developmental psychology models such as spiral dynamics (built on the insights of Dr Clare Graves) can help us to ascertain *how expansive* our client's view of life has become and therefore ensure that the work we undertake is meaningful *to them*.

For a client without 'values system' awareness, conflicting ideas and their associated memes can seem irrelevant, dangerous, lacking in pragmatism or maybe just so unfathomable that they create excessive inertia... not a helpful state of affairs when it comes to coaching.

Our life circumstances will also have an impact on our world



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view; for instance if our client is a junior stockbroker working in the city to whom time, money and status are deeply intertwined, investment decisions will probably be considered from a different perspective than a senior financial advisor working for a philanthropist. This is an illustration only and highly stereotyping – it isn't a judgement of the individuals, it simply acknowledges the systemic impact of the life context we find ourselves within.

So before we 'dip our toes in the water' of Graves' levels (and it is just that here – please do go and dive a lot deeper if inspired to), let's explore a real-life tangible example.

World view example – sustainability coaching

This is a topic close to my heart and here we look specifically at motivation relating to reducing single-use plastics.

Have a look at the following examples and when you have read through the levels below review these to hypothesise their world views and how this awareness might affect your coaching approach (they will each be likely to

span a few levels).

- Business A – Sees short-term free PR potential for making a few easy quick-win changes (only if cost savings are evident)
- Business B – Compares its swaps to those of others wanting to be 'the best'
- Business C – Identifies itself as part of the 'affluent green' community
- Business D – Feels swapping would be inconvenient and unnecessarily inefficient, saying 'We sell to our market – if they want it we will sell it'
- Business E – Is an early adopter of bio-plastics now back-

pedalling frantically due to lack of research into county disposal infrastructure

- Business F – Is keen to learn more and be a part of designing new solutions, researching and sharing ideas
- Business G – Offers to work with local government to effect policy change in this area.

Ok, so environmental advocates and activists recognise that the topic of 'single-use plastics' is a widely accessible *gateway conversation* for practically addressing marine conservation and carbon reduction... and yet coaching questions relating to tangibly integrating a 'circular economy' would be unlikely to resonate for many of the businesses above.

Even in simplistic terms we can see 'towards' and 'away from' motivations above, but meeting them in their model of the world is a lot easier if we become curious about which of the values systems they might be navigating from... and as their coach it is, after all, *their motivation* that matters.

So let's have a look at the levels (Figure 1; noting that this is just a model) and some of the transitional quandaries that emerge when identifying the limitations of each stage.

1 - Beige / Survival Think of this space as primitive, with focus on self and survival and very limited awareness of cause and effect. Here we seek to address basic needs, being instinctive and biologically driven with only loose bonds and little sensitivity to others.

That said – *Survival chances increase when we form groups; there is safety in numbers.*

2 - Purple/Animistic As we bond with others, tribal awareness emerges with a lack of individuality; we avoid conflict and value our place within the tribe. Showing some very early spiritual development, rituals and rites of passage feature and we honour tradition and ancestry.

Even so – *Self-satisfaction and better resources can be acquired through rising to the top.*

3 - Red/Impulsive Personal desire for power emerges and we step into a space of domination, instant gratification and indulgence; a scarcity mindset develops with short-term 'I win/you lose' patterns. We assert ourselves to control others, seeking respect and viewing the world as adversarial – there are battles to be won.

However – *Combative and divisive actions damage the system and more order and cooperation are required for greater gains.*

Their behaviour at best and worst will provide clues to their current world view

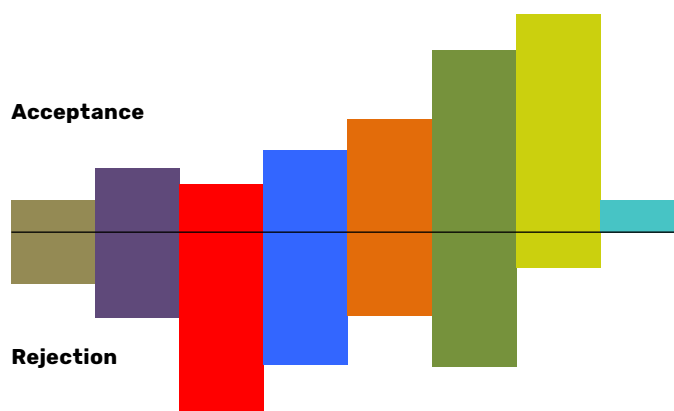


Figure 1. Graves' levels

4 - Blue/Role Here absolutist and binary reality exists for us – an 'I am right, you are wrong' lack of open-mindedness. We value the truth (one truth – ours). Discipline, law and order, certainty, structure and stability are prized in this literalist world view where control and authority are underpinned by hierarchy, service and rules.

Although – *An excess of black and white rigidity doesn't lend itself to the fluid and analogue world and doing everything by the book limits creativity.*

5 - Orange/Achievement In this domain a hunger for success and wealth arises in the form of reward and capitalism; we strive for material gains with astute use of science and technology to increase personal comfort. Liberty, innovation and individualism are valued and status is acquired largely through managing the economy in order to buy influence. In this space, clever branding and quick wit can give you the rewards that you believe you deserve, manoeuvring into goal-directed abundance.

Nevertheless – *Resource depletion in service of acquisition can have longer-term toxicity and does not equate to happiness. Material wealth without shared success can feel empty.*





▶ **6 – Green/Communal** This is a phase of peace, love and union with a sense of what spirituality might offer. We desire global equality and there is an inclination to empathise with other communities and cultures. We value trust, sensitivity and collaboration and seek to give back collectively to make the world a better place, helping the disadvantaged – an ‘Everybody counts’ world view.

And yet – *Tangible real-world solutions require sophisticated discernment beyond caring and sharing.*

7 – Yellow/Integral Here we awaken to our psychological development, recognising complexity. We are individualistic yet responsible and systems aware; cooperative and interdependent; seeking to learn and problem-solve real-world issues. And yet we are also comfortable with uncertainty and paradox. In this space we become consciously aware of and respectful of all the previous levels.

Even now – *This blend of rational and intuitive begins to create questions of emergence, beyond the scope of understanding, welcoming in true spirituality, which can only be accessed through transition.*

8 – Turquoise/Holistic In this space it is likely that we value spirituality and the deepest expressions of wisdom – true compassion, real creativity, deep courage... Mindful of collective consciousness awakening to pure energy and a non-duality that lacks definition – it just is.

Beyond this – *Concepts of Coral and Teal have been speculated upon... but for the most part (a little relevancy challenge here) we are likely to be existing and indeed coaching within 3/4 to 6/7 range.*

So what...

Imagine we and our clients are moving through these levels like a wave; as we begin to accept new values and belief systems and ways of being we let go of and reject more of the previous levels – so we are never wholly in one level.

As we begin to use this framework to attend to the words people use and the ideas and concepts they convey we can

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recognise them simply as symbols of their values systems. Getting truly ‘meta’ we acknowledge that their behaviour at best and worst will provide clues to their current world view beyond the content of their story.

For instance, two diametrically opposed perspectives could still be operating from the same values system – one of absolutes, for example.

With this awareness we can question and challenge our clients at their level and avoid the disconnection that can emerge from vastly differing values systems. We can truly acknowledge their progress measured in relation to their current world view.

Now what...

Theory is all well and good, but value is added in the application – so ask yourself:

- How do your life circumstances enable you to be the best coach you can be?
- Which areas of your life circumstances can you address to transcend your current perceived limitations?
- What are the memes that are currently catching your attention?
- Which spiral dynamics levels resonate for you personally?
- Where are each of your clients in their psychological development?
- How can this awareness influence your practice?

And finally (until the next chapter in this series) this quote from Graves carries wisdom as relevant and vital to acknowledge today as it was decades ago:

‘The psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating, spiralling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behaviour systems to newer, higher-order systems as man’s existential problems change.’ (Clare Graves, Spiral Dynamics) ■

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