



## **Imagery and metaphor**

### *Storytelling Warm-Up*

#### **V/O Commentary :**

People often believe that they can't use metaphor, or feel uncomfortable about trying. Part of the difficulty is that metaphor often works best when it emerges spontaneously, and it's difficult to be spontaneous when you feel under pressure.

Ian uses a couple of very simple warm-up techniques that help to overcome adult inhibitions.

#### **Ian McDermott::**

The more you are able to engage the imagination that a child has, the more creative you're gonna be.

#### **Child:**

Once there was a little cloud, and a rainbow, and a crab... and the crab said 'Oh what a beautiful day!'

#### **Ian McDermott:**

That ability to access a certain state of wonder, a certain state of openness rather than us imposing adult limitations on our own creativity. How to do that. There are things we can do to make it easier... Life is like ...

Life is like...

#### **V/O Commentary :**

The volunteers are asked to get into groups of three. Person A says the words: "life is like... " and turns to Person B. Person B says the first object that comes into their mind, and adds the word "because", as they turn to Person C. Person C has to complete the sentence as spontaneously as possible.

#### **Richard Morley:**

Life is like ...

#### **Shirley Crichton:**

Erm, a table, because ...

#### **Diana Brown:**

You can put a lot of weight on it but it can collapse suddenly.

#### **Paulette McDermott:**

Life is like a bowl of cherries because...

#### **William Freeman:**

If you have too much the juice runs down your face.

#### **Ian McDermott:**

Okay let's up the ante, and move from life is like to marriage is like.

#### **Michèle Bosc:**

Marriage is like ...

#### **Ken Harper:**

Marriage is like a large spoon full of curry powder, because...

**Maria Marfleet:**

At times it gets pretty hot. Marriage is like...

**Michèle Bosc:**

A child playing, because...

**Ken Harper:**

Because, when a child plays you never know what mischief that child's gonna get up to.

**Teacher:**

Abacadabra...

**V/O Commentary :**

Fun and laughter are obviously an important part of the process of getting people to relax and become able to respond in a more unselfconscious way. Ian's next exercise involves getting his participants to attempt a more sustained use of imagination by inventing stories. He sets up the conditions so that the stories cannot be pre-planned. He puts them into new groups of three, Persons A and B think of a random object, Person C thinks of an issue or problem and states it briefly. Person A now has to immediately tell a story. The story should use Person B's object and should in some way address Person C's issue.

**Ian McDermott:**

You will find this story has a natural way of unfolding, and furthermore that you will know when it's finished. It will come to some sort of resolution, of its own accord, and the person who's been listening to these two stories, that's it, you just make of them whatever you do. And you don't have to do anything with it, this is equally important. Part of why story telling is a very powerful technique, is that it does not require anybody else to then say "oh yes I see thank you for that illuminating story I now realise what I must do". It's actually very permissive. It allows people to make connections in their own way - and indeed in their own time.

**V/O Commentary :**

Here we'll see William inventing a story around Maria's object, and Joey's issue.

**William Freeman:**

My object is a blue sports car.

**Maria Marfleet:**

Mine is a wheelbarrow.

**Joey Walters:**

Okay. The issue, my issue at the moment is about taking my leadership back into the workplace, and what I'm really wanting to do is to balance my life properly so that I can take on a really important challenge to actually lead a project which is quite major, quite important to me and to the others involved in it.

**William Freeman:**

Okay, this story involves Joey the gardening dog, who was employed in an old folks' home as a pet, sit there have his head patted etc. etc. But then it was found that Joey was more useful than that in that he could go round and he used to pay a lot of attention to the flowers that were in the wrong place, and the gardener noticed this, that this dog would be looking at it and sniffing this flower, and he always picked out the ones that weren't thriving. And he noticed that if Joey the dog noticed that he was watching he wouldn't do this. So he had to do it in such a way that was surreptitious. So, he'd pile things in his wheelbarrow and take them around the garden. He found that when he was just pushing his wheelbarrow around, the dog twigged to this. So that in the end, the only way that he could get to find out which of the flowers was in the right place and which needed to be moved, and to observe the dog's behaviour, was to get what was in the wheelbarrow right, he had to have the things that he was using, at any one time, to be in the wheelbarrow, to be doing a real job in order to be able to observe what the dog was doing. That's the end of the story.

**William Freeman:**

I loved it. I like telling stories anyway, and what's really fascinating I wasn't really consciously aware that Jo was your name and I just came up with that as a as a name. Really, and I wasn't trying to sort the issue out, in fact by about the second or third sentence I'd forgotten what the issue was. And was just sort of trying to, you know, this stuff just came, I don't know, there's no rhyme or reason to it.

**Joey Walters:**

When William was talking about the wheelbarrow story and Joey the dog, what that said to me was about the wheelbarrow of resources, and it was actually something which I realised that I didn't really put forward in my issue, which was actually about bringing all the resources of my past and my experience together, to actually take it into my leadership now. So, it was it was fascinating that it actually took me there and that was really the the depth of what was coming across was that he reminded me of what I really needed to do.

**V/O Commentary :**

But would this sort of thing be acceptable in practice? We asked two participants if they thought exercises like these could really be of any use in the world of business.

**Richard Morley:**

I think if you just went into a business and started doing this, in some businesses that would not work at all well. I think that people would love it, and maybe they'd need to go away for a day or two off-site to do that.

**Diana Brown:**

I wouldn't necessarily use all the 'something is like...' that we used this morning but I think it can help to free people up. I think it brings in so much more of what people are about, and sometimes if you use visual imagery, or you get people in touch with how they feel, then they can suddenly get an insight which isn't available to them.

**Caitlin Walker:**

Get your lemmings in there!

**Simon Coles:**

Got no lemmings on there.

**Robert Davis:**

Can we have some lemmings Tom?

**Tom Kranz:**

How do you want to visualise that?

**Robert Davis:**

There's a cliff and people falling off but it's not...

**Tom Kranz:**

But where?

**Robert Davis:**

Well for me to the bottom right, cos what's happening is that the people who are approaching the city only see the see the big city, it's not until they get there they see what it's like to live in, and the consequences of the road that they're taking will lead them to the other side and off the cliff.

**Simon Coles:**

So, the bottom right of the dark city there's a cliff with a pile of bodies or whatever.

**Tom Kranz:**

So, you're looking at something sort of there. Let's get that sort of sense of it being a cliff really. A bottomless cliff. And ...

**(Laughter)****V/O Commentary :**

At the end of the session Caitlin asked the group how they would use their metaphor.

**Tom Kranz:**

If I walk into a customer site or something and I'm talking to someone at board level, I am a technical person, I will use technical language, and it will bounce off them it will go over their head they'll just sit there and go well, what do I care you know give me the bottom business line. But using a metaphor I can say you know, what would it feel like, what what would happen if you were in that sort of space and they can use their emotions and really get to the real, underlying reasons why something is the way it is.

**Rupert Edgar:**

You can look at it far more objectively.

**Simon Coles:**

It's very emotional to them. So taking away the rain clouds could be a really\_\_\_\_, sort of, you know, completely reorganise your department and fire half of them or something. If you said that to them they'd immediately go well I can't do that, but if you say well take away the rain clouds they go, well yeah take them no rain clouds nice and dry that's good, you know, and then go back into the real world...

**Caitlin Walker:**

They take it out to customers and they use it as a vehicle for explaining to customers vast amounts of technical detail in a way that they can understand. And further from that they've started then actually using the questions to encourage their customers to create metaphors themselves to help them get information back.

**Robert Davis:**

Whatever they say is always very informative, because it's something that points out whether they're empathising with this or whether there's some sort of gap, and if there is a gap they will say it in terms which are are profoundly revealing

**Caitlin Walker:**

Now I think that's extraordinary, I didn't expect that. I didn't expect this group to... to take on the language in such a way that they could then teach other people to do it I mean that's, I think that's wonderful that they've taken it on like that.

**V/O Commentary :**

During the feedback session, Caitlin also asked them how it felt to build a shared metaphor.

**Simon Coles:**

If someone added modifications to something I wrote that would be them sort of correcting me as it were. Whereas this, we all pile in together and build the city together as it were, and that's a more constructive, and and quicker.

**Robert Davis:**

For me it engages at a level where you where you you start to understand the important attributes that aren't described if you just choose words finally, and so the whole thing takes on some sort of shared space about what you're talking about.

**Simon Coles:**

Mm, and it's a shared area where we can we can all contribute, and nobody feels defensive about it and we all feel we can a