

CLEAN LANGUAGE APPROACH CASE STUDY by YUJI YAMAGAMI

Mr. Haneda, Senior Manager of Compliance Group for [Air Water Inc.](#) in Tokyo, a participant in our monthly Clean Language study group asked:

“I have to take a corrective action for a certain factory - what kind of action should I put in place? Although I make suggestions on corrective actions, people in the factory either didn't take the action or they tried to make movements very slowly. Is there anything I can do? And WHY does the person in charge of the corrective action tend to tend to think of errors or recalls as small matters?”

It took me some minutes to think about his question. I thought carefully before answering as I could hear his frustration and realized that what he was expressing was happening in many organizations. Business owners have the same tendency to think in smaller ways regarding audit activities.

I realized that much of it was that people tend to discount troubles or problems when previous corrective actions have not given them the change or corrections they had hoped for. In addition, there is often a distortion or bind lurking in each company and the individuals that are there are often not able to do anything even if they are presented with the 'theory' of what they 'should do' from the outside.

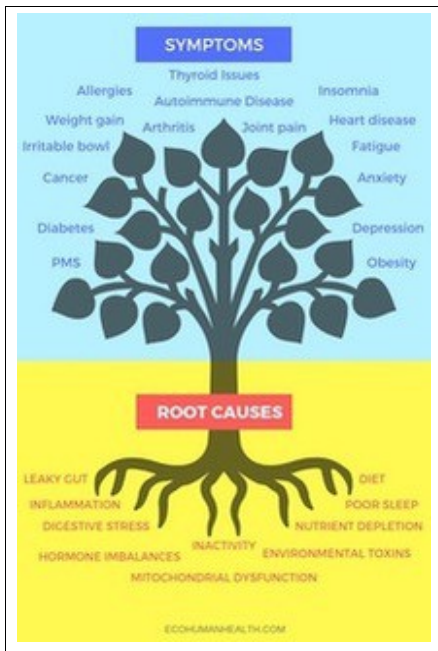
Therefore, at the Clean Language study session I did the work of 'Corrective Action (corrective actions and prevention) by a Clean Language Approach with Mr. Haneda's case. I used the 'root cause tree' as my 'dis-ease' analysis tree.

What was prepared: Large sheets of paper and multi-colored post-it notes

Participant agreement: All participants proceed with clean questions without adding personal thoughts or comments. Describe only the facts of the work.

Process of progression: There is a researcher (this is the client that is delving into the root cause) and an interviewer (this is the person asking the researcher clean questions to support the researcher in gaining a full extension of content and quality information).

First, I put the illustration of the tree to make it easier for the participants to follow the metaphor of 'root cause tree' but any picture or illustration will be fine. Facts of the situation



are encouraged through asking clean questions and post-it notes used around the upper part of the tree represent *how it is now*.

Mr. Haneda had a factory that was newly built. The company had millions of dollars at stake in the production of a particular sweet they produced for market. This sweet had been recalled for the third time due to the report of mold being found in unexpired units by customers.

On first review of this difficulty it was Mr. Haneda's first impression that the manager of the new plant was not experienced enough in the production of an item like this to effectively run the plant. Like many others he looked first at

and held leadership responsible. This was due to reports from the factory floor that management was difficult to access in helping resolve manufacturing issues and the moral and tone of the workforce was very low. There was a huge amount of work lost due to illness. Secondly, we asked about the history of the company - again only using clean questions. This allows us to continue to keep our opinions and/or expertise out of the researcher's content.

As you progress using clean language questions you often begin to see the distortion or bind that is hidden in the business structure. This distortion or bind is extrapolated from the facts. And there are many things happening in organizations that are 'underground', complicit, or simply unsaid. As we pick up these kinds of facts and patterns they are placed under the roots of the tree.

What this showed was that although the factory was new it was not built to the specifications needed to properly produce this particular sweet. The air conditioning was not capable of keeping the plant cool enough to inhibit the growth of mold that happens in sweets of this kind in warmer environments.

This helped bring greater clarity that the management, although not great, was not at fault for the mold in the sweets. When talking with the workers it was found that it was not only the difficulty of reaching out to management that was causing them distress and even illness, but that they were working very hard, doing their best (all experienced in the manufacture of this

particular sweet) and feeling quite helpless in keeping it from getting moldy. They did not know what they were doing or not doing that was 'causing' it.

The bind was:

- This was a new factory and the company had poured millions of yen into its creation and design
- The manager was good friends with the owner of the company
- There was no way the company was going to retire this plant due to the enormous investment

Mr. Haneda had to find a solution to the mold issue within *that* monetary and relationship environment.

There was a small sticky note near the bottom of the root system of the tree that brought a solution to light. It was noted that there was an eight day cycle from manufacture to expiration on the sweet. Most other plants had a three day expiration. This meant they produced, shipped, and sold their sweets from shop counters in three days.



After summarizing I asked Mr. Haneda, "With all of these, it's like what?"

Mr. Haneda's answer was "hidden constitution". He felt a bind was behind the phrase "hidden constitution" (on one of the sticky notes).

As a result of such a series of Clean Language Approach sessions Mr. Haneda found a viable basis for a corrective action that helped him create an analysis and action plan as a first step to the larger issue.

First action

The implementation of a three day turnaround on the production and sale of the sweet worked. The moral of the workers increased as they again felt competent in their work and management's engagement was no longer needed on the production line. When things would happen the workers would do small group huddles to ask the clean questions they had learned from Mr. Haneda as a first line resolution process all while abiding by company policies and processes.