

## Nick Kemp – Provocative Change Works session on the inability to cry

[ProvocativeChangeWorks.com](http://ProvocativeChangeWorks.com)

Transcript and commentary by Joe Kao

The client's stated issue is that she can't cry in situations where she thinks it would be normal to cry. She would like to feel more connected to her emotions.

The metaphorical explorations in this session include discussing other spontaneous emotions (i.e. inappropriate laughter), relationships (would she jump on Sir Lancelot's horse?), and also movement (would she take a giant leap, or freeze and stay on the plane?).

Each of these metaphorical domains – laughter, relationships, movement – overlaps with crying and emotional intimacy in one way or another:

1. **Spontaneous laughter** is a clear parallel for spontaneous crying.
2. **Being intimate with another person** is a parallel for being intimate with yourself and your own feelings.
3. **Being comfortable with movement**, and with taking a leap, is a parallel for going with a feeling, rather than freezing in response to it.

In the Provocative Change Works way of working, this all happens in a rapid, free-form, improvisatory manner. What can seem like off-the-wall humour, or a surreal non-sequitur, is actually an indirect way of working with the client's presenting issue.

Nick also does a lot of work in this session on shifting the client's state by conversationally changing the sensory qualities of her representations (what in NLP are called "submodalities").

One minute he's talking to her through a hand puppet, the next minute he's saying the exact same words from the far corner of the room.

In the process, it becomes increasingly difficult for her to think about her issue in the rigid, closed off way that she used to. By the end of the session, she becomes more and more fluid... quite literally (she becomes visibly emotional and sheds some tears).

### Transcript

**Nick:** So... what's the problem?

You look like some sort of stewardess in an airport. "Exit doors! Gangways!" [*Mimes being a flight attendant.... followed by a pause*] Yeah!

**Laura:** I don't cry in situations where I feel I should be crying.

### Commentary

The classic PCW opening question, which contrasts with most traditional, goal-oriented coaching models.

Nick is working in the here and now, going with his instant reactions to the client, in a friendly, good-humoured manner.

This sets the tone for the rest of the session – implicitly communicating that the session will not be excessively stuffy or formal, and that truth and immediate gut reactions are preferred over polite niceties.

**Nick:** Alright! So you're not a "sobber".

**Laura:** Err, no.

**Nick:** Did you see the film Bambi?

**Laura:** A long time ago maybe.

**Nick:** Did you cry when Bambi died... when Bambi's mother died?

**Laura:** No, I don't think so.

**Nick:** Oh, did you laugh?

**Laura:** I don't recall.

**Nick:** Alright, so it had no effect!

**Laura:** Well, there was. If I had seen it.

**Nick:** Alright, so do you laugh at comedies?

**Laura:** Yes.

**Nick:** Do you cry at tragedies?

**Laura:** No, I don't. But it touches me.

**Nick:** Do you cry at comedies?

**Laura:** No

**Nick:** Do you laugh at tragedies?

**Laura:** Yes... no! [*Laughs*]

**Nick:** You laugh at tragedies?

**Laura:** No.

**Nick:** Do you laugh when you see an accident in the street?

**Laura:** No, I don't laugh.

**Nick:** Are you sure?

**Laura:** Yes.

The use of impactful, idiomatic language (like "sobber") builds vivid representations and increases engagement.

Nick immediately goes for a cultural, universal reference.

The film "Bambi" is tangentially related to her issue (it's a famous film which has made many people cry), but it's something that's a little outside of her mental framework (she probably wasn't thinking of Bambi when she chose this topic to work on).

He's also checking, in a conversational, light-hearted manner, for the scope of the problem – are there exceptions to it? Did she cry at Disney films when she was a girl?

A quick confusion induction, where the categories are swiftly reversed in every question, until the client blurts out the opposite of what she intended to say.

Nick again focuses on an area which is just outside of the topic Laura is wanting to work on, but which is still thematically related.

Here he asks her about "inappropriate laughter" – another response which she can't consciously manufacture or consciously control.

**Nick:** Some things are very funny. If George was walking along.... and he slipped on a banana. See it's funny!

**Laura:** It depends what happens in the end.

**Nick:** Well he slipped over and died. See it's funny! He was looking everywhere. Scanning all around. Paying attention. Got a laser tape to measure what he's looking for. Suddenly [*clap*] he's gone. It's funny! It's funny!

**Laura:** Well the end isn't.

**Nick:** You laughed! Okay, if he slipped over, and he just broke both arms, and they were in plaster. [*Mimes both arms being in plaster casts*] It's funny! Yeah. It's funny! Alright, if his neck was in a big plaster, so he couldn't move. Would it be tragic, or would it be funny?

**Laura:** I don't think it's too funny.

**Nick:** [*Mimes trying to move in a neck brace*] It's funny! It's funny!

**Laura:** [*Laughing*] How you look, it looks like it is funny.

**Nick:** It is funny. It is funny. Yeah. You'll have to get some NLP practitioner to move that picture back.

**Laura:** And up, the picture.

**Nick:** And up, there it goes. There it goes. So...? You want to be one of these women that are... "Ohhhhhhaaahhh!" Tears! "How are you today?" "Ohhhhhhaaahhh!" Wail! Dehydrating. Dehydrating. Yeah.

**Laura:** [*Speaks in Hungarian*]

**Translator:** It's not... there is a Hungarian saying "to be on the other side of the horse" - which means the other extreme. But she wants to be "on the horse".

**Nick:** You want a horse? Horse? [*Mimes cuddling a horse*]. Very open-minded here. What colour would it be?

**Laura:** Brown.

Laughter is a spontaneous emotional reaction, just like crying, so the two are metaphorically linked.

By focusing on one, he is indirectly working with the other.

The use of mime significantly increases the impact of Nick's words, and it evokes strong emotional reactions in the client (i.e. lots of laughter).

Nick vividly paints an exaggerated, absurd version of the client's goal, which nudges her to clarify (to herself and to Nick) what she actually wants and why she wants it.

Nick takes the horse idiom literally.

He then asks a series of questions to get her to associate into the metaphor.

**Nick:** Alright. Okay. How many legs?

**Laura:** Four.

**Nick:** Alright. On your own on the horse, or with someone else?

**Laura:** On my own, it's more comfy on my own.

**Nick:** You don't want to be with anyone else?

**Laura:** No.

**Nick:** What about Sir Lancelot?

**Laura:** What?

**Nick:** Sir Lancelot. King Arthur.

**Laura:** We haven't met yet.

**Nick:** But if you saw him coming towards you. Armour gleaming in the sun. Hair in the wind. Big sword! [*Raises an eyebrow to Laura at the innuendo*]. It's a metaphor! Would you invite him. Or would you just say - "stay away"?

**Laura:** I prefer short-haired guys.

**Nick:** Okay, so get him a haircut. Would you invite him, or would you just tell him to go away?

**Laura:** I would probably have a discussion with him.

**Nick:** [*Mimes one hand talking. Mimes his other hand talking back. Mimes hands kissing*].

Yeah! What's the first thing you'd say?

**Laura:** Hello.

**Nick:** [*Mimes Laura talking to Lancelot with his hands*] "Hello". [*Gestures to her expectantly*] That it?

**Laura:** That would be the first thing.

**Nick:** Okay, what's the next thing? Here he is [*Mimes Lancelot*].

**Laura:** I would introduce myself. "My name is Laura".

Alluding to her willingness to experience emotional intimacy, both with herself and others.

The innuendo increases engagement, and stops things getting too cerebral/dissociated.

Nick turns the abstract, dissociated word "discussion" into a cartoon-like show of intimacy between the two hand-puppet characters.

He is deliberately misunderstanding "discussion" as a euphemism for kissing and intimacy. But the tone is kept playful and light by the silliness of the hand puppets and the references to Sir Lancelot.

**Nick:** Hello? [*Looks expectantly from hand to Laura*]

**Laura:** Probably, within two minutes, you would find...

**Nick:** Well he's waiting for a reply.

**Laura:** He hasn't responded.

**Nick:** "Hello". Keep going. Give me a moment. [*Nick puts a blue plastic bag over his hand, to further bring to life the Lancelot "glove puppet"*]

**Laura:** I really like the colour of your dress.

**Nick:** You look very nice too.

**Laura:** Do you wear this kind of a dress a lot?

**Nick:** Every Tuesday.

**Laura:** Why on Tuesday?

**Nick:** Well... that's because I'm looking for fair maidens.

**Laura:** And what about Thursdays?

**Nick:** Are you interested? Yes or no?

**Laura:** What are you looking for, with the fair maidens?

**Nick:** I'm looking for a good time.

**Laura:** What would you like to do?

**Nick:** You sound like an NLP person.

**Laura:** This is in my blood.

**Nick:** [*Despondently*] God.

**Laura:** I would have asked this question five years ago already. [*Nick appears baffled by the response - translator repeats it verbatim*]

**Nick:** Okay, so what's the problem?

**Laura:** There are situations in which I feel...

The tone of the playful improvised dialogue shifts as Nick cuts to the chase. Does she want intimacy or not? He's getting her to be more definite about what she's willing to experience within this metaphorical domain.

Again – the willingness to leap on the horse with Lancelot is a metaphorical parallel with her willingness to be intimate with her own feelings, and to be emotionally intimate with others.

Nick asks her to reformulate the problem, to check how she is representing it to herself after the work done so far.

**Nick:** Long cerebral analysis...

**Laura:** ...that I close off... I feel stupid because...

**Nick:** You probably are! You're probably correct!

**Laura:** Yeah - this is the point I already reached.

**Nick:** Alright. So what's wrong with that?

**Laura:** There are emotions which I cannot, or I will not, allow myself to connect.

**Nick:** Well it's probably just as well.

**Laura:** Well not for me.

**Nick:** Well it might be that's how it's gonna be.

**Laura:** Well, more like, that so far it's been like this.

**Nick:** And continues to be.

**Laura:** I hope not.

**Nick:** [*Mimes pouting sulkiness*] "Oooooo!" - well maybe that's it.

**Laura:** That sucks!

**Nick:** [*Mimes pouting again*] "That sucks! I'm not happy" [*Mimes raging at the gods*] I'm not happy! Thirty-five years of this! [*Reads notes and rages at the gods more*] "Thirty-five years!". Yeah!

**Laura:** Approximately.

**Nick:** Give or take. [*Pause – Nick reads Laura's notes some more*] God, this is depressing reading. [*Pause*] Blimey. [*Pause*] There is a little smiley face in there somewhere. Yeah.

"I want to jump off the aeroplane" it says here. [*Mimes being a flight attendant again*].

**Laura:** With a parachute preferably.

**Nick:** Alright, is it a single or a double parachute?

Said with a twinkle in the eye.

Minimising the problem.

Alluding to the benefits of the problem.

Going universal.

Laura attempts to frame her situation more optimistically – that it's only true up until now.

Nick, devilishly, teases her that it's going to continue this way too.

Mimic the client.

Exaggerate and mimic the client.

Ignore the client. This takes the pressure off the client, and also builds up a sense of expectancy and impatience for when the session will "begin" again. This gives the whole interaction more dynamic energy.

Nick finds a metaphor in her notes, which sparks the next part of the session.

Digital choice, again alluding to emotional intimacy.

**Laura:** Single. The parachute is single.

**Nick:** Alright, there you go [*Looks expectantly at Laura for several seconds*]. And?

“There you go” – said as if that’s the answer to it all.

This phrase can be used as a simple, straightforward way of inducing confusion.

However, it also invites the client to find a connection between what they’ve just said and the area they want to make a change in. This “keeps the gears turning” in the back of the client’s mind.

**Laura:** Everyone can jump out individually from the aeroplane.

**Nick:** Wonderful theoretical analysis: “Everyone can jump out individually from the aeroplane”. If you had the choice between a single and a double parachute, which one would you take?

Compliment the client.

Nick insists on the digital choice – which gets her to commit more to the scenario, to associate into it, and to indirectly choose between emotional intimacy or going solo.

**Laura:** I've already jumped out of a parachute with a person, and I did it alone.

**Nick:** Alright, if you were to jump out of a plane, with a single or a double parachute, which would you take?

Digital choice.

**Laura:** Maybe after not having jumped for a long time, I would probably try a tandem, a double.

**Nick:** [*Wearily*] So if you were gonna jump out with a single or a double parachute, which would you take?

Digital choice.

**Laura:** If now, I would choose the double, because that would enable me to jump from a higher height.

**Nick:** Alright. By yourself, or with somebody else?

Insisting on making explicit the presence of another person with her, so that it becomes a vivid part of her inner representation.

**Laura:** If it's a double parachute, then of course, with someone else.

**Nick:** Alright, like who?

**Laura:** With a man.

**Nick:** Alright who? Who's on the shortlist?

**Laura:** Preferably someone who had jumped with a parachute.

**Nick:** [*Pause*]. Who's on the shortlist?

So if you close your eyes... if you think about this... if you think about the whole thing now... what's the whole thing like?... as you think about it now?

**Laura:** [*Long pause*] Well, a bit scary and at the same time... but at the same time exciting

**Nick:** Which is more present, the scariness or the excitement?

**Laura:** More the scary character.

**Nick:** Well, what's wrong with that?

**Laura:** I know that if I jump, then it's a lot better than, for example, remaining in the aeroplane.

**Nick:** Well, it might be better to stay in the aeroplane.

**Laura:** Uh-uh [*no*].

**Nick:** [*Mimics "uh uh"*] Well, think about it... you could be the last person in there... there she is!

**Laura:** Uh-uh [*no*].

**Nick:** What do you mean "Uh-uh?" Well, sometimes you don't get what you want.

Fixate on one thing. Fleshing out the metaphor with more detail, to make it more vivid and impactful.

Fixate on one thing. The tension has been ratcheted up, and Laura is becoming at a loss for how to answer.

Nick suddenly shifts gears and begins a PCW metaphor elicitation.

Playing devil's advocate - encouraging the client to go in the opposite direction to what they've just said.

Laura is becoming very definite about what she wants and what she doesn't want. This is a typical response to PCW work – there is less and less wishy-washiness as the client becomes increasingly adamant, definite and insistent about their own experience.

"There she is" – evokes dissociated representation of the client.

Truism.

**Laura:** Sometimes.

**Nick:** The Universe just declares this is how it is... thousands, upon thousands, upon thousands of people are floating through the air... while one remains stationary

**Laura:** [Laughs]

**Nick:** Tens of thousands of people... while one remains stationary... hundreds of thousands of people... while one remains stationary... millions of people... while one remains stationary... [pause] or not... or not...

Some things change very quickly... and some things take a little bit longer... sometimes its useful to move... and sometimes it's useful to stay still... when Lance Armstrong landed on the moon... he said 'One small step for man... one small step for a man... one giant leap... If you were to take a giant leap... what would that be like?

**Laura:** Uplifting

**Nick:** If you were to take a giant leap... what would that really be like?

**Laura:** As if I was flying

**Nick:** If you were to take a really giant leap... what would that be like?

**Laura:** As if I was on the other side of the globe.

**Nick:** [Pause] So take a deep breath in... count back to whatever number feels most comfortable... and then double the feeling of relaxation... and count back again, but this time more slowly... as you think about this whole thing now... what's this like right now?

**Laura:** [Pause] Lighter

**Nick:** And when it's lighter, what's that like?

Going universal – this talk of the universe shifts her internal representations, and tempts her (in the spirit of playing devil's advocate) to accept that her issue is just “how things are”.

Ratcheting up the tension again – exaggerating the difference between movement and being still with vivid, contrasting representations.

And after encouraging her to stay still (by playing devil's advocate), he then suddenly flips it around and gets her to focus on taking a leap.

Catch-all truisms about change and movement.

Universal cultural reference to first man on the moon (with a possibly accidental renaming, which adds to the surreal confusion).

Evoking big, vivid representations of space, astronauts, stars and planets.

Nick's intonation varies with every question, even when the words are the same. This invites Laura to process the meaning of the words differently with each repetition.

Laura is becoming more emotional at this point.

Relaxation induction, followed by a new metaphor elicitation, to test for difference.

**Laura:** [*Pause*] A different colour appears - Red

**Nick:** [*Puts puppet back on*] And open your eyes

[*Speaking through the puppet*] When it's lighter, what's that like?

**Laura:** [*Laughs*] Lighter!

**Nick:** Close your eyes. When it's lighter, what's that really like?

**Laura:** It's like... as if I have broken out of a prison.

**Nick:** And open up your eyes. [*Speaking through puppet*] When it's lighter, what's that really like?

**Laura:** [*Laughs*] I have broken out, as if I had exploded the stones of this tower where I was captive.

**Nick:** Close your eyes [*Nick walks halfway to the back of the room*]. Open your eyes. When it's lighter, what's that really like?

**Laura:** It's liberated.

**Nick:** Close your eyes [*Nick walks farther away*] Open your eyes. When it's lighter, what's that really like?

**Laura:** Better! [*Smiling*]

**Nick:** Close your eyes. (Nick walks to the back corner of the long room). Open your eyes. (asks through the puppet) When it's lighter, what's that really like?

**Laura:** Good!

**Nick:** Close your eyes [*Nick walks back to the front and sits down*].

Take another deep breath in... notice which foot is the most relaxed foot... and notice which hand is the most relaxed hand.... and move your head up about one inch.... and take a deep breath in now... as you're listening to this... notice what makes it better... and what makes it worse... notice what's made it better... and what's made it worse... and begin to notice

Laura is being asked to process the question "When it's lighter, what's that like?" in as many different ways as possible – eyes open, eyes closed, through a puppet, from the distance, with different words being stressed each time.

This increases the sense of fluidity and movement she has around the issue.

It's no longer a fixed, rigid thing that needs a fixed, rigid answer – instead, Nick is helping her to experience much more lightness, movement and choice around the topic.

The repetition also allows her to become more and more definite about the differences she is experiencing.

This definiteness in her answers is something she will be able to hear when she listens back to herself on the recording (all PCW clients are given a recording of their session).

"Notice what's made it better... and what's made it worse" – this presupposes that this issue has changed and can change, that it's never been set in stone.

As the final, closing piece to the session, Nick gets the client to sort for what's useful, for what's different, and for what's right for her.

what will be useful in the future... as you think about it in the way that's right for you... and as you're listening to this... you can remind yourself... you're only one thought away feeling different at any time... and as you keep this difference in mind... you can notice what's right for you... right now... and in your own time... bring yourself back into this here and now...

*[Pauses and waits for Laura to open her eyes]*

Alright, So do you have any reactions to our discussion?

**Laura:** It's like as if, as if I was holding onto something, I was grabbing something and now... I can't find yet the handle to hold on to it, but it's not a problem.

**Nick:** Hmm, okay, we'll talk to them. Any questions, comments or observations?

There are no direct suggestions pushed onto her, Nick doesn't "lead the witness" – she's invited to form her own conclusions from the work that's been done, by mentally sorting for what's useful for her.

Laura responds with a spontaneous metaphor about how different it is now, and she seems surprised.

This, in addition to her emotional reaction earlier on, is a strong sign that she experienced a significant change during the session.

You can find out more information about Nick Kemp's Provocative Change Works at:

[www.ProvocativeChangeWorks.com](http://www.ProvocativeChangeWorks.com)

[www.NickKemp.com](http://www.NickKemp.com)

[www.NickKempTraining.com](http://www.NickKempTraining.com)