

# Researching feelings

For much of the time Roy Langmaid spent in thousands of focus groups what happened was: not a lot! Yet he recognised the importance of emotions.



I knew that how people really felt about choosing, buying and using products was important to them – and the key to delivering results. So, I asked: “*how can we get people to experience and account for feelings in a place where they are observed by others and then to comment on these feelings?*” By questioning people about what they were feeling in my sessions I noticed that many had difficulty in answering. There were several aspects to this:

- Often people didn't have much feeling about the brand, product or service we were exploring. They were simply too insignificant in people's lives. A mum might have a lot of feelings about feeding her family, but very few about yoghurt or jam. *Nonetheless, her feelings about feeding her family would colour her responses to yoghurt, jam and everything else in her fridge and larder.* From this early realisation came the first maxim that I use in my work today: **people before products**.
- Even more interesting, a lot of people didn't know how they felt. Or rather, they didn't know that they were feeling and how to be conscious of that in a way they could articulate. This was especially true of small, everyday, fleeting experiences like choosing, buying, and consuming everyday items.
- We are not a culture known for emoting! Especially in public among a group of strangers on a topic of little significance in real life.

How could we help people to recognise, experience and produce an account of their feelings in a way that would enrich their – and our – understanding? We invented a way of doing this called:

## Coached Self Observation

Much everyday consumption is automatic, low in significance, transitory. So how could we elevate these consumer events into people's consciousness and also access their feelings about them?

We invited people to an evening event, opening like this: In many years of doing projects **we've often noticed that what we do every day and how we feel about it is 'invisible' to us**. Think about these things: Which shoe do you put on first? Where do you start shaving/putting on make-up? We would take examples from the room.

This session is to coach you in self-observation on everyday events: all the kinds of events that relate to you and your daily life. This includes 'external events' (*things that happened, including your actions*) and 'internal events' (*thoughts and feelings*). We are particularly interested in ..... (insert topic)

Invite the group to think of some external events, like their journey to the session and then some internal events, like the feeling they had as they entered the room.

## Self observation coaching (45 mins)

We then took people through a series of steps (each activity 60 secs), to increase their self-awareness:

1. Let's start with: **sounds**. Close your eyes and pay close attention to all those going on around you, inside the room and out. Note what you hear. Talk in pairs then feed back to the big room.

2. Now pay close attention to things you **see** close by. Sights, colours, shapes, textures, movements, faces, anything at all. After a minute's silence talk in pairs about what you noticed that you hadn't before, then feed back to the big room.
3. Now close your eyes again and focus on **thoughts**. Follow the flow of thoughts in your mind like: 'This is strange,' 'I wonder what's going to happen next?' As before, observe, discuss and report back.
4. Now close your eyes and notice **feelings**. Experience things like warmth, curiosity, boredom, and accompanied bodily sensations such as tightness, raised heart rate. Observe, discuss, feed back.

**Writing coaching (45 minutes)** This approach works well for journal or diary projects. We helped respondents record their daily consumer events and their feelings about them through journaling.

## Writing exercises

**First:** just write the first things that come into your mind about your daily life. Let anything come into your mind and write without censoring: memories, thoughts, feelings, things that happened. Just put pen to paper.

**Second:** in pairs discuss early memories to do with (insert subject). Take the first one that springs to mind, discuss for two minutes, including any reflections on how it might have influenced your attitudes nowadays. Write up this conversation for a couple of minutes.

## Instructions for journaling using self observation:

The next part is about *recording* what you observe. We're asking you to do that in the journal given you. This will be confidential. It's not school and it's not 'artistic writing'. What's really important is you and what you do, think and feel in your encounters with (subject). There are columns for 'what happened', 'what you did', 'what you thought' and 'what you felt', plus spaces for photos or pictures that might help to get your experience across. We hope you enjoy this and look forward to hearing about your experiences in a few weeks time!

## Conclusion

The coaching session proved very fruitful in helping customers know their own minds and complete their journals. Rather than taking feelings for granted they detailed them so that we were able to follow them up in extended focus groups – and see those feelings that attached to particular types of events, thus starting to build an 'emotional map' of the climate surrounding different activities and events in their lives.

More, because of their self-awareness, these journals gave us insights into the sub-personalities they used to manage their everyday lives. They became aware that they were using different heuristics to manage different issues, just as we are all aware that we adopt different persona when we are parent/student/lover/liar. So, more than a diary of external events, this facilitated a record of a journey in two worlds: the outer world of events and actions and that all-important driver of our behaviour, the inner world.

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