



The Listener

A journal for coaches

Sharing knowledge and developing practice in the coaching community

New Series #2 October 2012

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Among the developments in the language of organisations in recent years has been the replacement of “staff opinion” with “engagement”. The inquiry into what employees think about their place of work has metamorphosed into an assessment of the extent to which they want to stay and are willing to proclaim the merits of their organisation, and of their readiness to make additional, discretionary effort for it. In many ways this deeper, strategic enquiry into employees’ satisfaction with, and emotional attachment to, their organisation is to be applauded. The task it sets though is a potentially unsettling one, inviting each individual to scrutinise his or her desire for inclusion within the entity that is their employing organisation. It is as if the organisation now *obliges* the employee to find meaning from their role in it; and to seek out a personal congruence between their own values and those the organisation claims, in action and theory, to uphold on their behalf. This invitation carries a risk, in that the deeper the meaning and congruence an employee finds, the greater the emotional consequences for them of how their organisation seeks their engagement or is perceived as disengaging from them.

One of the organisations where I am coaching is emerging from a very substantial re-structuring, with all the down-sizing and re-shaping of roles now so often attached to it. When I first met a couple of my coachees there, they spoke of having lost their place in the organisation, even though they had come out winners in the competition to stay on and had been labelled as talented. Happily, they tell me they are now “back on the bus”. Every so often, however, I catch a glimpse of an engagement gap, the bruised space between their account of their busy contribution to their organisation; and the felt connection they now have with it, a connection at the core of the legacy of their organisation’s attempts at renewal.

It may be that an engagement gap of some kind arises as an inevitable consequence of selling your time and skills to an organisation; and importantly it can offer a positive place from which to manage how healthily to combine work with the other things in your life. In organisations where old certainties are being lost, however, and surviving can be a painful blessing as well as a great relief, I have no doubt that more coaches will be working in that bruised space, as their coachees find a sustainable way to care about their organisation and for themselves.

Ken Smith
October 2012



THE TRANSPERSONAL NOTE IN COACHING

Karyn Prentice

Transpersonal psychology emerged in California in the late 1960s through a group of men and women interested in inner states of consciousness and their empirical, scientific study. Its pioneers included William James, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli and Abraham Maslow. The birth of the transpersonal, as distinct and different from other approaches in psychology was marked by the first issue of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology (1969).

The conceptual developments which preceded this were concerned with honouring the experience of states not being recognised by other approaches to psychological thinking. Naming a psychology 'transpersonal' acknowledged these states of being in their own right, rather than being reduced by interpretations from psychologies with a different philosophical outlook.

Why "trans"?

The word 'transpersonal' has become an umbrella term for naming experiences where consciousness extends beyond the individual or personal ego and the everyday journey of life. These experiences are filtered through the individual person, hence the word '**trans**' personal rather than post personal or non-personal. They don't replace the personal. It is not an 'either-or' position but rather a development on from the merely personal.

For many the transpersonal carries a spiritual dimension characterised by a sense of inner peace, compassion for others, reverence for life, gratitude and appreciation both for unity and diversity. It also implies qualities such as humour wisdom, and a capacity for non-attachment, self-transcendence and unconditional love. (Vaughn, 1986)

Current neuroscience offers much research to suggest that resting in this spacious awareness, these additional states allow one to access a greater inner resource for understanding, insight and wisdom.

And for coaches?

For coaches it is about holding a space at the interface between the outer world with all its demands of the here and now, and the internal world of the individual which is rich with symbols, stories, dreams that hint at the wisdom that lies within us.

Philosophically at the heart of this way of working as a Coach (or indeed as a Therapist) is a belief that there is a spark within each one of us in our core which is whole and eternal. One way to look at this is through the concept of two life journeys a person makes. One 'self', designated by a small 's', is about the persona, the ego, and the unconscious. This is the everyday self with all the attendant issues of work, career, and kids and challenges that

we experience in our lives and which as coaches and supervisors we are accustomed to encountering.

Different from that, but also on the journey through life is the Self with a large 'S'. Within every person is the 'seed' of this Higher Self and all that we may become - all of our potential up to and including the divine spark within each person. It is our wise core: whatever our difficulties in the everyday world we live in, within us there is a connection to this Self. It is always there for us to access if we wish. Its purpose is to seek meaning in life. Our connection to it helps renew us in profound and deep ways. It can offer a reservoir of insight, compassion and wisdom that is as old as us, if not older. This part sometimes manifests within an individual in the crises and experiences, both high and low, of human living. It is the part of us that 'knows' what in our heart of hearts is our truth.

A different shift

Many coaches are familiar with the importance of a 'shift' in thinking within a coaching session. A transpersonal shift, if anything can be so characterised, comes from an awakening of knowledge within us that is sometimes felt as 'more'. We are aware of more of ourselves. Some would say that this aspect called 'more' was always there and that we, in our everyday state, have been cut off from parts of ourselves - often for many historically rooted reasons - that could help us inhabit a greater sense of wholeness. In some senses we are retrieving what was already ours which, for whatever reasons, was not accessible to us. As coaches and supervisors, being open to this perspective we serve the people we work with by helping them tap into even more of their own wisdom and resources. It is not a model but rather a perspective, like a lens that helps increase what may be seen or heard and as such doesn't replace other ways of working.

The title of this paper refers to the transpersonal "note" because in this way of experiencing we aim to fine-tune our ability to pick up the unique frequency of our coachee's or supervisee's world with our virtual tuning fork. This is what we listen out for with our inner ear. These moments may arise at the beginning of a session, at the end, or at any time. The essential thing is that we have created a space and the conditions to attend to them in the service of our coaching work. When we do so we can come to know more than we can do in cognition or emotion alone.

Some questions that promote this kind of exploration might be:

- *Where do you draw your inspiration/wisdom from?*
- *When you have been in a tight corner/were down before what gets you going again?*
- *What makes your heart sing?*
- *How old were you (feeling) in that meeting?*
- *What part of you is speaking now?*
- *Whose voice is that coming through your message?*
- *What is evoked when you hear yourself say that?*
- *Can you allow an image to arise for how that was for you?*
- *What do you know now that you will find out in a year's time?*
- *What is emerging in this moment of ambiguity?*

To bring the transpersonal perspective into your coaching 4 considerations need to feel like 'home'

1. Listening with an inner ear and fine tuning it to the music behind the words
2. Acknowledging the possibility of an inner as well as an outer journey including the frontiers, plateaus, vistas, thresholds and mere glimpses of 'otherness' and of the soul
3. Appreciating the positive thrust of the psyche and It's predisposition to growth and wholeness
4. Recognising the essence of the (higher) Self as the part of us that whole, free, positive

Something more meaningful

As coaches and coaching supervisors we are working more and more with clients whose questions are wider and more searching than the job, the promotion, or the team. Many are exploring issues about meaning in their lives, about who they are and about the journey of life itself. Working from a transpersonal perspective is very helpful when our clients bring us some of the 'big' issues often arising as mid-life challenges and transitions.

There comes a point in many people's working life where the way forward is no longer as clear as it seemed to be. Confusion can arrive and seem to take root. What is the next step? Who or what shall I become now in my working life? Discovering and living aspects of un-lived life may come pushing from somewhere inside us to be heard, seen and counted.

The Chairman who has nowhere "higher" to go in the organisation other than out, the unexpected redundancy at 48, the "prize" role that begins to feel like dust in the mouth of satisfaction, a relationship ending after 30 years; are all examples of mid-life challenges. The big '3 Ds'- death, divorce and disenchantment - all throw a heavy punch at life's buoyancy, whatever the age. This calls upon the Coach to bring a greater depth of presence and create a larger space for the breadth and depth of work.

Mid-life is a time also to re-connect with our dreams, a time for transformation, a chance to ask some vital questions for the next leg of the journey and for our own development. Adding a transpersonal way of seeing can be enormously helpful. The coach can support the journey their coaching client is on even if they personally are not near this mid-life point themselves, even when it is painful and no immediate solution is at hand.

Doing it already?

In summary, you may already recognise aspects of the transpersonal in the work that you do without naming it as ‘transpersonal’. It might fit with your own spiritual beliefs or your own pragmatic approaches. The essential is that we have created a space and the conditions for working in this way even if it is not articulated. When we do so, we can come to know more than we can through cognition or emotion alone. Mindful of this richness we are, to all intents, echoing the belief that we may be more fully ourselves by opening to a greater and deeper part of ourselves. We are invited to listen to the music - capture that unique note - that might arise and inform us from our heart and our soul.



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Further reading for exploring transpersonal ideas

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Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Working with Binding Patterns

James Lawley & Penny Tompkins

Symbolic Modelling is an ‘outcome orientated’ methodology, but this does not mean we ignore problems. This article defines three kinds of problems and describes how to work with client problems involving “binding patterns”.

Three kinds of problem

Paul Watzlawick and his colleagues define a *difficulty* as either "an undesirable state of affairs which either can be resolved through some common-sense action," or a "common life situation for which there exists no known solution and which – at least for the time being – must simply be lived with." These situations are the bread and butter of coaching and little time need be spent on the client's problem. As a rule, supporting a client to get clear about their desired outcome; to develop an embodied sense of themselves and their role in that outcome; and to work out how they are going to achieve their desire; will be sufficient for them to put the coaching into action.

Watzlawick also says there is a different kind of problem: an "impasse, deadlock, knot" – or *bind* as Gregory Bateson called it. A bind is a *pattern* which the client finds inappropriate or unhelpful, and which he or she has been unable to change. It is not just a hard problem but, crucially, a self-sustaining pattern which, experienced, from within, appears to have no escape.

Binds are often created when a ‘solution’ to a previous problem has unwanted side-effects. Take not telling the truth as an example. It might solve the immediate difficulty but the longer the pretense is maintained the worse it would be if the truth came out; therefore the lie has to be preserved, often by further lies, and so the pattern continues. However, this moves from being a difficulty to a bind when the client also wants to be truthful and feels guilty when lying: now they have to deal with feelings of guilt *and* the fear of being found out. They cannot avoid one without triggering the other.

Thirdly, Gregory Bateson and his colleagues specified the structure of a *double-bind*. These patterns are characterised by a primary bind, the resolution of which is prevented by the presence of a *secondary bind*, operating at a higher level. Even if the client discovers a way to extricate themselves from the primary bind, the secondary bind ensures they cannot implement or maintain the solution. A common secondary bind is the belief that something terrible will happen if the problem is spoken about. Thus the elephant in the office grows larger and larger because everyone fears for their job if they mention it. Fortunately, truly double-binding patterns are rare in coaching.

How will I know when to attend to a client's problem?

We use two guidelines to help us decide when to facilitate a *client to self-model* their problem:

- A. When a client indicates that his or her *desired* outcome cannot or will not happen.
- B. When a client identifies ways for their desired outcome to happen and yet evidence shows they are not *actually* achieving it.

Both A and B indicate the presence of a binding pattern – and that will always involve at least *two incompatible intentions*.

A binding pattern will commonly have one or more of the following features:

- Circularity - “I’m going round in circles.”
- Every option is unacceptable - “All roads lead to Hell.”
- Oscillation - “One step forward, one step back.”
- Stuck, trapped or imprisoned - “I’m between a rock and a hard place.”
- Hugely complex narrative - “I’m lost in a maze of my own making.”
- Self-referential - “I want to want to stop, but I don’t.”

There is a meta-pattern to all these configurations: within the binding logic, whatever the client does or imagines doing there is no way out of their predicament. That’s a tough place to be, especially if the client regards themselves as a good problem solver. And like being in quicksand the more they struggle to apply their previously successful problem-solving strategies, the worse it gets.

To get relief from the impact of being bound by their own logic, the client will have devised ways to turn a blind eye to the reality of their situation. The relief can only be temporary because sooner, usually rather than later, something will trigger the bind and they will inevitably run through the pattern again.

Binds can maintain themselves for a very long time, but when a client seeks help it usually means the effect of not resolving the binding logic is *escalating towards a threshold*. As the client's response to a bind intensifies they find it harder to ignore and are motivated to do something about it. In the example of not telling the truth, perhaps guilt increases to an unbearable degree, or maintaining the pretense means life gets more and more convoluted, or a change in circumstances means the consequences of continuing with the untruth are extremely serious. In other words, when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing, people become willing to change.

How will I know when 'A' occurs?

In *Metaphors in Mind* we identified five stages to a Symbolic Modelling session. Each stage has its own indicators of when to attend to a client's problem:

1. When a client cannot identify a desired outcome.
2. When a client cannot develop or maintain a rich description of their desired outcome.
3. When the anticipated effects of the desired outcome happening are unacceptable to the client (or organisation).
4. When a client cannot identify the conditions under which the desired outcome can be achieved. Or, the logic of the conditions necessary for change means they cannot be enacted.
5. When maturing a change is interrupted by a problem which cannot be incorporated into the desired outcome.

How will I know 'B' when occurs?

When, over a number of sessions, a client:

- Continues to demonstrate the problem pattern.
- Despite their best intentions, they can't achieve their desired outcome.
- Achieves their desired outcome but only for a limited time before reverting to the previous problem pattern.
- Says their outcome has happened, but the problem pattern remains, often in a different form or different context.

What do I do when a binding pattern is evident?

We use David Grove's Clean Language to facilitate clients to self-model their internal and external behaviour until they identify what is keeping their desired outcome from happening. In other words, we help the client map the structure and logic of the pattern until they recognise they are caught in a bind. Once they have **A**, we invite them to attend to the *whole pattern*.

Alternatively with type **B** when the client tells us that despite their best efforts they can only maintain their desired outcome temporarily, we facilitate them to self-model what happens *at the moment* they 'fail' to do the new behaviour and 'revert' to the old pattern. The *way* they do this will be part of the binding pattern.

Pattern-level modelling requires a certain kind of thinking. It requires us to direct our questions to the *network* of relationships rather than to the details. Metaphors are tailor-made for capturing the complexity of a pattern. One client described their situation as like two gunslingers facing each other, neither wanting to have a gunfight but both knowing

they will have to outdraw the other to stay alive, and if either makes the slightest move to walk away or negotiate they will get shot.

We invite clients to create a metaphor for their binding pattern by recapping the key relationships of the bind several times and asking: *And that's* [binding pattern] *like what?* or *And* [binding pattern]. *And that's all like what?* Then we can work directly with the metaphor.

How will I know when the bind has been modelled enough?

There are three indicators, when:

- The logic *spontaneously changes* – then we immediately start maturing the change; or
- A perspective emerges that 'transcends and includes' the incompatibilities of the binding logic; or
- The logic encompasses a complete sequence or a coherent set of premises with no gaps. New examples and metaphors may continue to appear but they add no further information about how the binding logic works.

What do I do once the client has identified the binding logic?

Having developed the characteristics of the metaphor, at some point we ask: *And when* [whole pattern/maximum constraint/choice point], *what would you like to have happen?*

Note, this question does not ask for a desired outcome *instead* of the problem (as is common in NLP), nor does it sidestep the problem (as in Solution Focused approaches), rather it asks for a desired outcome *given the current reality* of the binding pattern. If the client can now conceive of a desired outcome we use that as the content for the rest of the session.

What if doing this doesn't resolve the bind?

This indicates a *double-binding pattern* may be operating. We repeat the whole process identifying a metaphor for how the secondary bind is preventing resolution of the primary bind, i.e. we continue modelling at a higher, more inclusive level.

And is there anything else about working with binds?

Patience pays. It is advisable to lay out all the pieces of a jigsaw before starting to put them together. Modelling patterns is similar. It takes time and a number of repetitions before all the key elements and the logic of the relationships become clear.

Persistence pays. Clients in binds regularly get hooked by details and examples, as a way to distract themselves from seeing the reality of their situation, especially the closer they get to 'it'. Each time they do we invite them to return to the nub of the bind.

We hang in there especially when we feel an impulse to bail out or to switch to another process. At these moments chances are the client is on the edge of something significant. Our job is to 'stay put' and to keep the client attending to that edge. We use simple clean questions and do as little as possible. We do *not* attempt to solve the problem for them. Instead we give their creativity a chance to come up with something novel – and usually both of us are amazed. This is the mystery of emergence in a self-organising system.

We keep the client attending to the reality of their situation as they define it, using their exact words. This encourages them to acknowledge both the way things are and that the bind is unresolvable within its own logic – even if they don't like to admit it. We do this by:

- Making the binding logic the context for our questions, e.g. *And when [binding logic] then what happens?*
- Inviting the client to convert conceptual statements into sensory (and almost always metaphoric) descriptions, e.g. *And how do you know [...]?*
- Facilitating the client to embody or enact the bind and then to use their body as a feedback mechanism.

We keep checking the intentions of all symbols/agents/parts involved in the pattern – especially the apparently problematic ones – since we expect them to morph as the client's system adjusts to the implications of our questions. We keep track of all the *current* desired outcomes and intentions. When a change occurs, usually spontaneously, we mature it and check that all intentions get satisfied.

We utilise what the client is doing in the here and now whenever the binding pattern manifests in the room. When that happens we ask: *And what's happening now?* This is what we call 'going live'.

We're on the look-out for potential resources. We take time to develop resources as they appear since these may be a catalyst for change or they may prompt another part of the binding logic to reveal itself. Often significant resources indicate their presence in very subtle ways. They can be anomalous, apparently insignificant, presupposed or hiding in the background. The end of the thread that unravels a binding pattern often occurs outside of the time / space / level / perspective that confines the original pattern.

We especially look out for small changes and mature these as soon as they occur. Sometimes the whole binding pattern transforms in a 'road to Damascus' moment. More often a small shift starts a contagion that eventually has a big effect. Even if nothing appears to change during the session, having self-modelled their binding logic and identified a desired outcome relevant to the bind, they will likely discover that things can never be quite the same again.

We retain a 'Let's see what happens' attitude until we have behavioural evidence that any changes have been sustained over the long term. The effect of some changes can take weeks, months or even years to fully manifest.

Finally, we remember that *working with binding patterns is a developmental process*. The next stage in a client's evolution can only emerge out of their current way of being in the world. In this way binding patterns are a doorway to transformation since they point to the client's next developmental direction.



James Lawley and Penny Tompkins are developers of Symbolic Modelling. They work with individuals, teams and organisations to turn binds into blessings. They have provided consultancy to organisations as diverse as GlaxoSmithKline, Yale University Child Study Center, NASA Goddard Space Center and the Findhorn Spiritual Community. They are honorary members of the Association of Coaching Supervisors and have written over a hundred articles, all available at www.cleanlanguage.co.uk

Further reading

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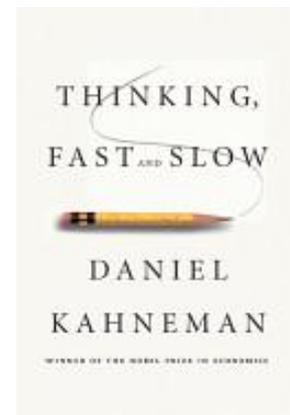
Book review: *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman (2012)

Ken Smith

The achievement of this book is hinted at in the dichotomy of its title: the capturing of elusively fast processes so that we can see them clearly.

Kahneman takes us from his opening metaphor of two systems, one fast, one slow: through an account of their routines and biases; the labyrinth of how we make decisions and choices; and finally to some thought provoking pages entitled “Thinking about Life” in which he sketches out the implications of his theorising for how organisations and governments behave and how they can or could help or control us.

He describes how we experience the world through the interplay of two systems: System 1 the rapid processor, making, keeping and updating patterns and associations and taking the easiest route towards making sense of our environment and ordering our perceptions; the foundation of our intuitions and decisions, operating very largely out of awareness. System 2 offers a more self-conscious challenge, filtering and checking our perceptions, counselling caution and taking a second look. System 2, however, can be lazy and often reluctant to intervene and we go through our lives generally abiding by the “law of least effort”, trusting that System 1 is more or less doing the right thing.



From this general state of affairs arise decision-making routines of various kinds, to which he refers as heuristics. Often they work by substituting, for the problem facing us, a question that System 1 can handle more easily and for which it can find a quick, relevant and good enough answer from its associative memory. This is because we cannot help but seek the easiest, swiftest route to forming a coherent story to explain what is happening to and around us. Consequently, we often make, through these heuristics, definitive, over-confident decisions on a small amount of available evidence, replacing probability with an uncritical plausibility. We are, as the title of Chapter 7 has it, “a machine for jumping to conclusions”.

“The proof that you truly understand a pattern of behaviour is that you know how to reverse it.” p.133

Our inherent need for ease and coherence in our thinking also influences the place of time and duration in our memories. In remembering past events, we rely on peak and end experiences, rather than a more complete summary of vicissitudes over time. And our helpless desire for causes and explanations leaves us easily open to influence, where our decisions and beliefs can be primed by seemingly incidental signals, e.g. finding a coin on the pavement may influence our response to money matters later that day and beyond; and

by more conspicuous cultural and political messages, with the power of their repetition making us blind to alternatives, e.g. reminders of God, the ubiquity of advertising, assertions of the inefficiency of the public sector.

Among the outcomes of our heuristics and of the priming to which we are oblivious, are the illusions that our decisions have validity and that we are in control of our thinking. Kahneman puts this tellingly into the context of expertise, citing examples of where experts' forecasts have proved way off the mark and how the definition of risk is ultimately an excise in power. Not only experts but all of us base our plans on System 1's associative memories, often disregarding System 2's urgings to pause, tame our intuition and allow ourselves to be open to what a wider set of precedents from outside our immediate experience may tell us. The misplaced optimism we have for our decisions and enterprises is at once the central, sometimes tragic delusion of capitalism and its driving energy. Kahneman recommends that we should always be willing to think the opposite of our first call, if we want to improve our plans and outcomes. And in spite of our hunger for control and explanations and the allure of captivating exceptions, we should not under-estimate the place of luck in a world where all things regress to the average.

Kahneman's perspective is not a cold advocacy of System 2's relative rationality as a means of overcoming our folly and prejudices; nor an outcry of dark pessimism and foreboding.

"Our comforting condition that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance". p.201

Rather he strikes a note of awe and fascination in what he observes about the workings of the human mind. Towards the end he makes plain his scepticism about rational man (sic) being the natural and best interpretation of how we are and should be; with its consequences, for example, in libertarian free market ideologies which deem it immoral to offer protection to people about their choices. Rationality and irrationality are not irreconcilable opposites but are subtly, deeply and necessarily interwoven in human functioning. Kahneman offers no sweeping prescription for how we should manage our minds differently. Indeed, in his exposition on happiness he confesses that the great amount science has learned about it has still left us deeply puzzled.

Just at those moments when I felt this book was becoming too long, something else appeared to catch my mind. That it did this is in no small part to do with the quality of the writing, its accessibility and translucent turns of phrase; and the way the material broadens out while remaining connected without dull repetition to the central metaphor of two enmeshed thinking systems and their heuristics. I'm still mulling over how it might inform my coaching practice. There are paragraphs with a more obvious relevance, e.g. the importance of goal-setting in well-being, the relationship between well-being and happiness, the distinction between the experiencing self and the remembering self, the influence of mood over decision-making. However indirect the benefits of reading it may be, I know it has given me some important glimpses into how we find ways of making sense of and being happy in the world; and that what might for me be convincing, may not be all there is.



Looking at Coaching and Supervision through the Lens of Love

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Fiona Adamson

“It is time to recall ourselves from the fear-filled lives we inhabit and begin to explore once again what it would be like if we approached one another through love, with delight and pleasure”. Wheatley (1998)

In our work as coaches and supervisors unless we have established a good rapport with our clients the work we do will lack vitality and ultimately disappoint both parties. Since we first came into the world we have all been learning about others and ourselves through resonant relationships. The importance of rapport and resonance in relationship as the basis for learning and change is the theme I wish to explore here.

A secure base

Much of what we do in this work is about setting up the best climate for learning and changing, and paying attention when anything might be blocking or interrupting the process. In fact unless the base is secure it will be very difficult to repair and restore any breakdown in the process.

One educationist, Fleming (2008) uses the term ‘a secure base’ for learning. This term comes from Bowlby’s work on early attachment (1907-1991). The kind of attachment experience that creates a secure base is one in which the mother is tuned in empathically to the infant. Via accurate attunement the adult is saying to the child: ‘I see you for who you are and how you are feeling in this moment.’ The saying, a mutual exchange between infant and mother, at this preverbal stage of development of the infant, is mainly conveyed through gaze and bodily contact. The child is held by the mother’s love, both psychologically and physically. The mother is present; they are present together, in a shared space of mutual influence and learning.

It is important that we remember that our first experience of being in a relationship in which we learn and begin the dance of reciprocity, or turn taking, is preverbal. In other words we should never underestimate the power of our presence and our capacity to convey non-verbally that we wish to be a partner in the learning journey with our clients.

True presence sets up a resonant relationship in which the limbic centre, containing the amygdala, in the mother’s brain, resonates with the limbic centre of the infant’s brain. Because we are biologically made for resonance, we are enabled to begin to learn about what it means to be human, to learn to regulate our emotions and to develop the capacity for relationship making and sustaining during the attachment phase of our early development.

The templates we all have for relationship building and sustaining are shaped by our early attachments with our mothers and give particular shape to future relationships. Many researchers from interdisciplinary fields have followed Bowlby's work (e.g. Ainsworth & Co. 1978; Schore, 2003; Meins et al., 2001; Siegel, 2007), linking styles of attachment to early brain development, and to the development of internal working models of relationships.

Echoes of early learning

Because this early learning becomes part of our procedural memory and therefore outside our conscious awareness, we are guided by it until we are ready to explore our relationship patterns with someone, a coach or supervisor in this instance. There will inevitably be echoes or patterns of our early learning experiences that appear in our adult relationships. Some of these echoes will hold us back from full participation in all our relationships, some will affect how we work with others, and some will affect our health.

The supervisee or coaching client who comes across to us as hesitant, fearful, seemingly unable to use the learning opportunity available to them, is likely to be held unconsciously by a mental model that brings fear into new encounters. Perhaps there is an expectation that they will be judged and found wanting. Or, the relationship style is one that can be very hard to tolerate. It may be one in which we ourselves are judged as not good enough. We may have doubts such as, what can we possibly have to offer this client? Hence we may be triggered into withdrawing, referring on or deciding that this person cannot use what we have to offer.

Here the concept of a 'good enough' attachment experience is a valuable reminder, Winnicott (1975). There is no such thing as a perfect attachment experience. What we may come to learn about our own attachment experience and the subsequent effect on the ways we relate to others, will serve us well. Some of us are uncomfortable around highly intellectual clients, others amongst us around highly emotionally expressive clients. Whatever our unique take on relationships, as we develop self-awareness, we can open ourselves out towards new ways of relating to ourselves and to others.

Aware and open

Much of the time many of us are not at all aware of the energy that flows within us and between ourselves and others. At times this may mean we act impulsively, react rather than respond thoughtfully. We can find ourselves behaving blindly, perhaps destructively, and with little or no regard for others. We can all learn a way that will support us, and our clients to stay open to ebbs and flows of relationships. We can learn to be present with our clients despite sometimes hearing the echoes of our own attachment experience.

In whatever ways we choose to support our continuing personal and professional development, with a supervisor, an action learning set, peer group and so on, we can learn to explore our own patterns of relating in a safe and supportive situation. Knowing our patterns, we are then much more likely to be able to step back enough from them, to stay present and to create a secure base for learning in all our professional work.

The capacity for such relationships can be developed by a variety of means. Much attention is currently being paid to mindfulness-based practices that offer a route based on a combination of ancient spiritual practices and 21st century knowledge about resonant relationships. Minds can be changed within relationships that attend to the flow of information and energy between people (Seigel 2010).

When we sit with somebody who really listens to us, accepts us without judgment and sees us for who we really are, we become open to whatever this relationship may offer us. Here we could not do better than to learn about adding the 'Time to Think' approach to our contract with clients (Kline, 1999).

Seigel's (2010) concept of Mindsight is also useful here. He has coined this term to highlight the Meta skill we can learn to help us develop relationships that flow and are open to generative learning. At the heart of this idea is that we can learn to monitor and to modify our behaviour, and to attune open-heartedly to the person we are in the relationship with. His research, and that of Schore (2009), shows that while our early attachment experiences are developmentally powerful in shaping our mental models, our brains have the capacity to go on changing. We can grow new neural pathways that support our new learning, and we can do this when we are in relationships that provide a secure base.

An example

Margot is a very senior manager who has been earmarked for promotion, to head up a new department and to manage a much larger team than she does at present. She is showing signs of anxiety and distress at meetings to brief her for this new role. The company has high hopes for her but is recognizing that she may need individual coaching to help her get the best out of this opportunity. She is willing to meet with a coach.

At our first meeting she tells me that she has been shocked by how hard she is finding aspects of this proposed change. As we talk together I notice that she becomes calmer than she was at first, her shoulders drop a bit and her voice loses the tight quality it had to start with. I am conscious of tuning in to her to get a sense of what it is like to be her, and to feel concern for her, to open my heart to her. I am using my Mindsight skills to become aware of myself, choosing to offer her my full attention, and to attune to her. I sense that we are resonating by the small but subtle changes I see and hear, as she is calming down. Her body softens as she is breathing more fully, her voice is richer, and she holds her head up and sits back in her chair.

Margot is able to step back from her fear to connect to her grounded self, so that she can draw from her thinking self and reflect on the relationship that so troubles her. As we track back through her career we see that this is the first time that she has felt she might not cope with what she has always striven for, promotion and more responsibility.

We explore what she feels has triggered her anxiety and discover that the person she will report directly to, is seen by many in the company as a man who does not suffer fools gladly. She imagines that she will fail to live up to his expectations and be shamed by him. It turns out that for her it is a combination of fear of this man, and fear that she is not good

enough. Margot recognises that he has some qualities that are similar to her father. She smiles and remarks, 'oh that old chestnut again, I thought I had got over that one!' I comment that it sounds like an echo from the past, and ask if she feels ready to let the association go to concentrate on the current reality. After a brief inner dialogue Margot agrees she is ready.

She is becoming mindful of herself and her situation, and I comment on how she is now able to think clearly about her situation, something she could not do while being so anxious. We also reflect on the culture of her company. In her experience there is a high value placed on performance, and the emotional life of colleagues is rarely attended to. She was very surprised that they had suggested coaching for her having noticed her distress. We agreed that although love in the sense of caring for each other's wellbeing seemed largely absent at work, yet they were concerned for her.

Margot resolves to build in time for reflection, to notice when she feels anxious, recall how much difference it makes when she breathes more fully and moves her awareness into her body. She will explore a mindfulness course she has seen advertised in her locality.

She accepts that this transition time is bound to evoke some anxiety, and has identified two colleagues at work she knows she can trust to share her feelings with. She is also aware that revealing her vulnerability to me and in future to her colleagues has enabled her to feel better paradoxically. We complete the series of coaching meetings with Margot saying that she now feels able to head out into her new role with greater confidence than before.

In conclusion

A combination of many things can help us all to learn, to change, and to be as effective as we are able. What is key, is to know that the kind of learning that is going to transform us and our clients is generative learning. This kind of learning enables us to see ourselves as we truly are, to see how we work and how we use our potential. Generative learning is best done within a safe and secure relationship. We all carry echoes of the first learning we did in the attachment phase of our development as infants. With Mindsight we can all develop awareness of these echoes, bring them into consciousness and work to release the energy that has been shut away and unavailable to use. To know ourselves, to love ourselves and to be ourselves becomes possible through an attuned relationship with someone who can see us as we truly are through the lens of love (Harrison, 2008).



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And finally:

"Compassion is the heart's gift to the rational mind"

David Malone

If you would like to respond to any of the articles in this edition or if you have a suggestion for an article of your own, do please contact kensmithcoaching@btinternet.com