

Coaching of the Body-Mind: Somatic Coaching

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"Most psychologists treat the mind as disembodied, a phenomenon with the little or no connection to the physical body. Conversely physicians treat the body with no regard to the mind or the emotions. But the body and the mind are not separate, and we cannot treat one without the other."

--Dr. Candace Pert

Although the word "body-mind" is traditionally being used across eastern cultures to define mind-body connection, it is recently gaining understanding in the Western Scientific circles as well as Western Culture. Dr. Candace Pert made a breakthrough discovery even before she was chief of brain biochemistry at the National Institutes of Health, which changed the way scientists understand the mind-body connection. She found the opiate receptor, the mechanism by which a class of chemicals (peptides) alters the mind and body. Her research led her to an understanding on how emotions function as a regulatory system in the body. Dr. Pert's work revealed that the emotions are not simply chemicals in the brain. They are electrochemical signals that affect the chemistry and electricity of every cell in the body. Pert also explained in her theory that neuropeptides and their receptors are the biochemicals of emotions, carrying information in a vast network linking the material world of molecules with the nonmaterial world of the psyche.

Scientific research is now uncovering what mind-body modalities thought over the years that the body as a whole keeps the stories of the individual's life experiences as electronic information inside the cells. Therefore, engaging just the mind of the client during the coaching conversation may result significant missed opportunity for change to take place. In this article I will be sharing Somatic coaching as a way to engage client's system as a whole during the coaching conversation so that the

change process has an opportunity take place holistically.

Somatic coaching is a significant tool that brings the body-mind connection into the coaching conversations. Somatic approach to coaching enables coaches to observe clients holistically during the coaching conversations and encourages clients to do the same. Soma comes from the Greek word for body. The role and power of the body is often ignored in conventional coaching conversations. The somatic coaching combines body's intelligence with the client's sensate experience to devise a strategy for change. It is a process in which one embodies new practices to be able to create a body of action.

In a study reported in the February 26, 1998 issue of Nature (Vol. 391, pp. 871-874), researchers at the Weizmann Institute of Science have conducted a highly controlled experiment demonstrating how a beam of electrons is affected by the act of being observed. The experiment revealed that the greater the amount of "watching," the greater the observer's influence on what actually takes place. Quantum Physicists Dr. Fred Allan Wolf states that according to quantum mechanics there is no reality until that reality is perceived and we change reality simply by observing it. This means that the observing body-mind response to the "client's agenda" for the coaching conversation will support the change enablement for human system as a whole.

When the client is open to experience the somatic coaching and the client's agenda is suitable for the method, I first use breathing techniques to bring the client into a state of "mindfulness". In order for objective observation to take place both for the client and the coach requires stillness of the mind so that the impact of the "subject for the client's agenda" can be observed in the body as a whole. For this part of the practice deepening the breath as well as the breathing cycles required in order to shift the brain waves to Alpha or Theta states. This way the body can be relaxed, emotions that are held in the deep tissue can rise up to the surface and what is being communicated by each cell that is resulting the experience become clearer.

This process supports the coachee in his or her experience from the being who is the one inside the experience towards more who is the one observing it. Once the state of calmness obtained with deep relaxation techniques, the coach can engage the whole body-mind awareness in the conversation such as “What are the impacts of this experience inside of your body? Where do you feel the emotion/belief? What is the quality of it? How is it impacting your whole body chemistry? What are the results of that? Where is the tension? If you were to relax the tension how would that change your overall experience in this particular subject, etc.?” The powerful questioning that is inclusive to whole body-mind will enable deepened awareness for the client on their systematic responses to the situation at hand.

Once some awareness is gained in the subject regarding to systemic experience, then if client is open, and coach is willing and trained, some mind-body poses can be used to enable the change through the somatic release. In this part of the practice, I often use the yoga postures that are targeting the particular area that the client has sensed the patterns that are not in harmony with the rest of the system. I would recommend converting the yoga posture into a restorative nature. This way client is not spending effort to stay in the pose, rather deeply relaxed into it so that the observation is effortless and deep; and can come to the surface through the stillness in the body-mind system. While client is in a deeper connection with the area in the body where the belief/emotions are being stored, body-mind responses have the ability to express themselves resulting the change in the molecular response that is required to experience rather than directed through the client’s mind.

Let me share an example from a recent somatic coaching session to deepen readers understanding on how Somatic Coaching works. Client was expressing an impingement of a nerve during our regular sessions, which was running from her shoulder all the way to her fingers that were aching throbbing and generally uncomfortable both day and night for her for about three months. After explaining what Somatic Coaching is to her, I asked if she would be interested in experiencing one of our sessions that way to explore the underlying

issues of this pain. She expressed an interest since she has been under a Physical Therapy for three months and it was not resolving the issue although it was helping her to be functional despite the pain. I started to session in meditative nature where we quieted our minds and set an intention to explore deeper her experience with the impinging nerve. I then engaged inquiries about the pain, the quality of it, where she feels it, etc. This enabled her to shift from being the “experiencer” into being the “observer”. During the session I placed her into the relevant postures as she learned more about the “nerve pain” through our inquiry to explore the body while I had her hold poses and engaging in coaching style inquiry. This allowed “her mind to go deep into the body and be aided by spirit” as she described it. In her words the result for her was”... a lasting understanding of what I was feeling physically while understanding how my thought patterns and emotional patterns were aiding and abetting the chronic discomfort.”

What our session revealed to her was her need to “shoulder” other people’s pain and problems. Once she came to this understanding right there then, the nerve pressure she was experiencing started to cease. With deeper emotional understanding she was able to hear thought patterns easier. She reported that the chronic condition greatly improved in a short period of time ultimately ending in total resolution for her as she became aware of the initiating thought patterns.

“To change your mind, is to change your body to function differently” says Stanley Keleman, the director of the Center for Energetic Studies in Berkeley, California. As a seasoned coach as well as mind-body teacher, my understanding is that to create a change in your experience you need to change your body-mind’s response to the experience itself. And that requires mind-body awareness. Accordingly, as a coach, if mind-body modalities are not part of your own life, somatic coaching might not be a suitable tool for you since you might not be able to guide the coachee through their experience inside their body. If you are engaged in some modalities of mind-body practices then you may consider to utilize somatic coaching as part of your practice considering that it is a powerful tool, which initiates the change from the

core and often supports clients for life-long, lingering patterns that are hard to change through the mind.

As mentioned above, somatic coaching may not be a tool for every coach and may not be a fit for every client. Like any other methods, it requires to approach with integrity, openness and respect of the client needs...

Somatic coaching can also be utilized during virtual sessions, however utilizing somatic engagement virtually requires much more experienced coach in mind-body modalities as well as deeper connection at the client's end to their body.

References:

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Tijen Genco, PCC, MBB, is an Executive and Wellness Coach. She specializes Cultural Transformation along with Process Excellence. Tijen has Master's in Organizational Behavior and Coaching and is a certified mind body modalities teacher. She provides individual as well as team coaching/ workshops to corporate and private audiences worldwide, as well as supervisory coaching at the academic environment.