

Helping a coachee to become 'unstuck'

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Purpose

This is a strategy used when coachees notice themselves going round and round in circles with a particular issue or typical behavioural pattern, which undermines their effectiveness.

Description

Expressing feelings as they happen with a client underpins the coaching model. This technique is inspired by the Gestalt approach where the whole of a person's experience is considered important: thoughts, feelings and body sensations. The Gestalt approach focuses on the 'here and now' – what is happening moment by moment. Staying with present experience allows the coachee to become more aware. 'Unfinished business' from the past that causes fixed ways of being can emerge and be completed. Different aspects of one's own self come into awareness, allowing more fulfilling relationships and a freer way of functioning in the world.

In its simplest terms, the cycle of awareness (highlighted by Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy; see Houston, 1995) has three stages:

- 1 sensation (noticing emotions, energy, fear, for example);
- 2 contact (the point at which an individual is mobilized to do something);

3 withdrawal (the point at which the individual is satisfied and moves on to the next cycle of awareness).

When the cycle is interrupted, a charge of residual energy remains, perhaps tensions or anxiety. By continuing to raise awareness of the sensation, the coachee can become more self aware, so work towards contact and eventually withdrawal.

Gestalt is a philosophy of being in the world. For this reason, there are no prescribed methodologies. Instead, the coach embraces the philosophy and creates their methods within that. The step-by-step process shown below illustrates my typical way of using Gestalt.

- **Step 1**
Ask the coachee what they would like to work on.
- **Step 2**
As the coachee describes the issue, notice your own reactions and listen deeply to what is said, unsaid, body language, mannerisms, choice of language, tone, etc.
- **Step 3**
Notice your own sensations in response to the coachee. Share your sensations as a vehicle for the coachee to share their own sensations. Encourage the coachee to raise their level of awareness of their sensations. Remember that the goal of the coach is to raise awareness moment by moment, rather than problem solving or putting structure into the conversation.
- **Step 4**
If the coachee gets stuck, ask them to draw the situation on paper or use other imagery such as metaphors or similes. Stay with the unknown or the dilemma.
- **Step 5**
As the level of awareness grows, the coachee makes contact or has a moment of realization about their behaviour. With the insight, the coachee has choices and is mobilized into action.
- **Step 6**
At this stage, be creative about different choices. Think the unthinkable before deciding on a course of action.

Pitfalls

Working with Gestalt can be incredibly powerful and transformational intervention. However, you can easily slip into problem solving. Gestalt is a way of 'being' with clients, thereby the coach needs to focus and express emotional responses and feelings with the client as they work together.

Bibliography

Houston, G. (1995) *Red Book of Gestalt*, London: Rochester Foundation.