

Conscientious conversation

Your behaviour as a coach pre-frames and denotes the conversation dynamics – act with wisdom

Part
two



By Lizzi Larbalestier

In the last issue of *Rapport* I focused on location ecology, specifically looking into some environmental considerations for our coaching. We move now into another logical level. As coaches our behaviour articulates who we are as professionals and what we offer, so let's consider some of the dynamics of our coaching experiences. You may choose to think about your full current coach portfolio or simply reflect on a few client experiences.

Starting with ATTENTION and FOCUS

How present are you being for your clients? Now I am sure we would all like to say we are 100% present with our clients 100% of the time... but this is a self-reflection exercise, a health check/ snapshot in time and no-one's judging you.

Do you have certain clients you find it really easy to remain 'on point' with and others less so?

What are the subtle differences and what can you do about this?

Perhaps there are particular triggers that can impact your levels of attentiveness?

If so what might they be?

Think back over the last couple of weeks or so; were there circumstances that impacted your ability to be fully present?



Knowing your attention thieves means that you can stay alert to keeping the coaching process on track

What were they and what can you do in future to remain focused?

How about your clients? Are you noticing when their attention and focus is less than ideal? What actions do you take to address potential 'drift'?

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Moving on to ENERGY and MOOD

How aware are you of your energy? I am referring here to the check-in we do with ourselves when we scan our mind and body to answer the question, 'Am I ok, right now?' or, 'What state am I in?'

Likewise how aware are you of your client's energy – it is after all a reciprocal system. This is for sure something we are tracking moment to moment, but we can sometimes not give it the importance it deserves.

A simple measure for this might be valence and arousal (see Figure 1); having a general sense of underlying mood and mood



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trajectory moment to moment certainly enables us to be more fluid in our approach.

Any mBIT coaches will know that awareness of our nervous system is fundamental to being able to connect at a deeper level with ourselves and to resonate on a similar wavelength to others. Perhaps your energy awareness stems from another modality such as reiki or martial arts.

Physiology matters... gut health, exercise, eating well and sleeping habits impact our immune and endocrine systems and our ability to think, react and respond. Breathing in a balanced way helps us to maintain composure and remain grounded through directly influencing our heart rhythm.

Ok... this is stuff we all know – but are you consciously acknowledging how your current lifestyle choices might be impacting upon your professional practice? Even the most experienced coaches and trainers can fall foul of burnout.

If this is an area that you could really benefit from focusing on, start with attending to your breath, creating a sense of balance and flow and taking time out each day to slow down and connect with nature – it is one of the simplest forms of mindfulness and a free health resource available to us all.

Once you become more aware of your own breath patterns, you will begin to notice your clients' breath changes – an excellent indication of change in energy and mood.

In very simplistic terms...

If your client is a little wired, their breath pattern might be erratic and their reflections are likely to be scattered, whereas, if they are lethargic – sighing a lot, for example – they are likely to have higher levels of CO² within their system (a natural sedative) and make connections that lack true insight.

So be super aware of breath and energy and address this before all else, since being coherent is the foundation for meaningful insight.

How about FLEXIBILITY and CREATIVITY?

Take a moment to think about what flexibility really means to you when it comes to coaching... and creativity for that matter. We all have a tolerance zone – a range of behaviours that sit within our scope of feeling authentic – and, of course, the converse is true: we have behaviours that for whatever reason don't feel quite 'us'.

I once worked with an HR leader/coach who felt her client

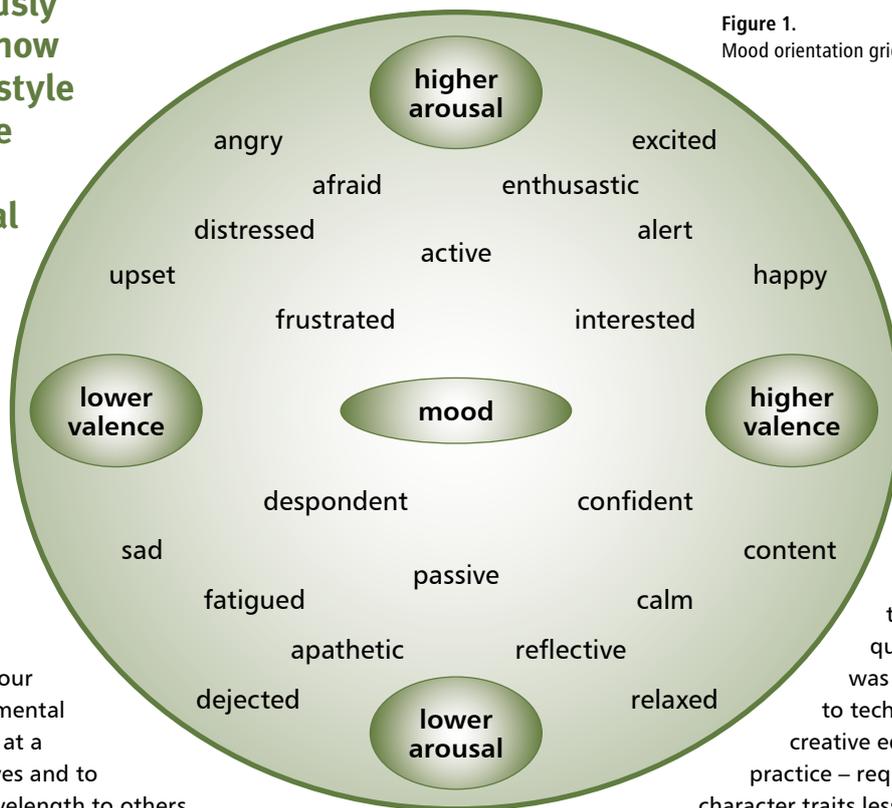


Figure 1. Mood orientation grid

base did not afford her the opportunity to introduce what she termed as the 'more quirky' approaches. She was of course referring to techniques at the more creative edges of her field of practice – requiring her to adopt character traits less familiar to her. She was keen to put these new approaches into practice though, if a little nervous about it. It turned out her stuckness stemmed from a mix of interpreting what she thought her clients might be expecting of her and lacking confidence. Pre-framing that her clients 'weren't ready for the new stuff' enabled her to keep well within her comfort zone. Of course we explored and resolved her nerves... but let's look more closely at this idea of assuming our clients' expectations and attempting to live up to them, an all too common pitfall.

As coaches we can fall foul of assessing risk incorrectly and limit our own practice by second-guessing that our clients fit organisational norms and that the culture of the organisation dictates the individual's coaching path. Ironic since we know that experience is subjective!

Let's imagine you are an exec coach. Depending upon the ►



- way you conduct yourself your client might open up and allow you to work deeply with them through exactly the areas of development really worthy of both your time and attention... or your conversations could remain distinctly pedestrian.

Your behaviour can indicate to a client how comfortable you are to have meaningful discussions, how present you are for them and it can even imply how much you care. If you have decided that you need to play a role of some description then it is pretty much guaranteed that role will get in the way of your ability to truly hold space and ask really important questions when it matters most. Notice if this is something that resonates for you and address it.

Are you BEING YOU?

Consider your current coaching clients. How would they describe the typical characteristics you display? What would be the first words that spring to mind – maybe even go and ask them.

Make a list of 20 words (and even prioritise these adjectives if you like).

Now reflect – are these traits representative of you and do they convey the fullest expression of who you are as a person and as a professional?

Notice which qualities might be missing from the list. Perhaps character traits you aspire to or ones that you know you possess, but somehow don't seem to bring into the working domain.

Maybe some words on the list don't really feel like you. If so ask yourself what are you putting out there that is being reflected back in this way?

What are the words that you are happy to see on the list? Celebrate these qualities and what they bring to your coaching.

Think of other coaches you know – what would their trait lists look like? How much of their list could you reasonably incorporate into the way you show up as a coach and which aspects would you not want to incorporate? Recognise and acknowledge your individuality.

A common coach supervision topic for newer coaches is 'How can I feel more at ease in my coaching style?' Of course some of that comfort will come from practice but a lot of it is remembering you are simply there to facilitate their change and by becoming less guarded you enable more of your natural

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personality to flow, and guess what – as you become more open so does your client.

Finally let's explore POWER and GRACE

In addition to the previous factors we have touched upon, there are a number of ways we promote or inhibit flow. Ease of communication requires boundaries and balance so here are five more coaching considerations:

Preparedness – Be clear about the aims and scope of the coaching session to provide a defined space within which to explore.

Ebb and flow – Notice who is leading the conversation, where there is talk... and how to use silence.

Pace and rhythm – Create progressive momentum through varying pitch tone and physiology.

Power – Stay mindful of the subtleties in terms of empowerment and ownership. I know of coaches who have developed the habit of making copious notes for their clients. Whilst their intention is to help, the impact of this can disempower and foster subordinate behaviour within the client, thus removing accountability.

Challenge and support – Ensure your approach is tailored for the client and situation. I am a huge advocate of provocation. I love the awkward squirliness of a deeply direct and challenging question followed by silence, but of course this must be balanced with compassion.

It can be easy to convince ourselves that we are already perfect. Truth is, coaching is a continual learning process for us all – and I trust this article has provided some headlines to reflect on your practice. We will move into skills next issue, contemplating the foundations of our work and how hybrid, intuitive and non-formulaic our practice really can be. ●

