

Foundations Enable Flow



By Lizzi Larbalestier

In the last article of the series we dived pretty deeply into the nature of change and how the landscape can reflect this. In the vein of ebb and flow I thought this issue I'd touch upon some lighter practicalities, dipping our toes into some of the how-tos of nature-based coaching, since without the basics in place our ability to provide a truly immersive coaching experience is limited.

As a Blue Health Coach™, being in tune with the coast is fundamental to the conversations conjured and whilst a large part of this is learned as a result of time served, there are of course some modelled elements that *all* coaches can bring into their practice to set some foundations for a positive and productive outdoor coaching session.

My article *Location Ecology* in issue 68 of *Rapport* shared some considerations

we make when choosing spaces to work within, but the way we orientate ourselves in these spaces creates an integrated and professional approach. To maintain professional standards, rules of engagement are as important, if not more important, when working at the coast as they are when working in an office environment.

Safety is an essential factor for your coaching agreement. You might imagine high cliffs and tides are the main concern when beach coaching, but this is not always the case... It might sound crazy, but you wouldn't believe the number of clients I have worked with who forget sunscreen when planning to be out at the coast for a couple of hours or longer!

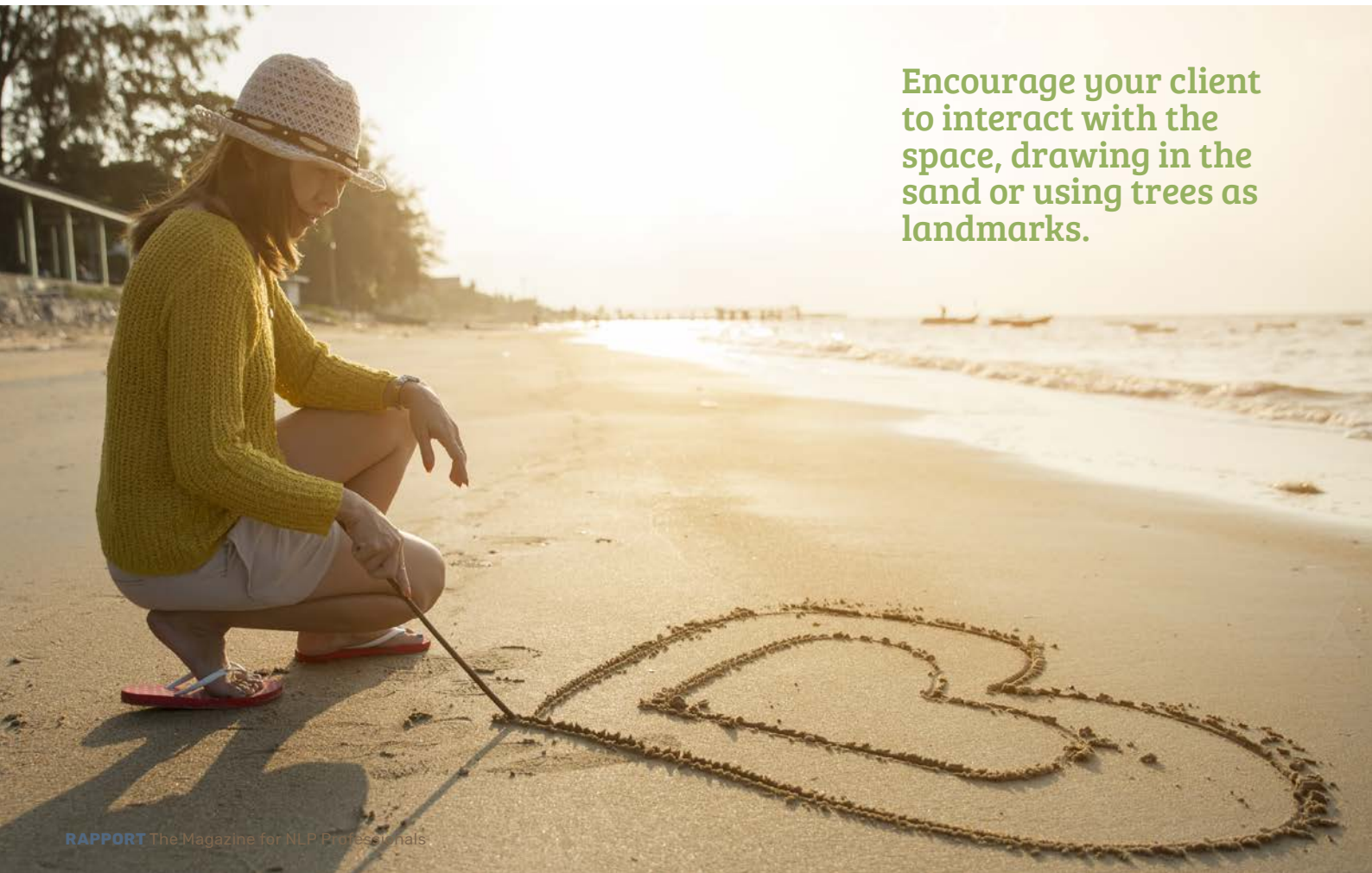
Unsurprisingly, checking in regarding physical limitations comes into play too, especially when tackling tricky

terrain. Remember that what one person finds easy can be a real challenge for others, so clarify any potential differing perspectives.

Being more prescriptive with basic comfort factors upfront creates space for you to explore within the coaching itself... It can pay to not assume anything when it comes to coaching in blue-space and green-space. Have a checklist to include:

- encouraging them to dress less formally and consider their footwear choices
- reminding them to bring water and snacks if it is a longer session
- checking the weather forecast and recommending they bring waterproofs if there is a risk of rain – the micro climate where I work can fluctuate a lot, and being prepared is key
- asking what their normal activity level is. It is no good planning a ten-mile walk

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if they are normally pretty sedentary; we are aiming to stretch and challenge our clients, not traumatize them!

They won't thank you if they feel uncomfortable, exhausted or dehydrated. Meeting them in their model of the world and pacing is something we are all familiar with as NLP professionals.

Foundations

It helps to imagine what might be the *expectations* and *fears* that your client brings with them. For many, the first time they are invited for coaching outdoors they can feel a little *exposed*. A shift in *formality* and perceived reduction in *structure* can create questions relating to the *professionalism* or *robustness* of the coaching. Perhaps a throwback to school lessons outdoors as kids, stepping beyond the confines of normal indoor constraints can evoke *scattered thinking* and whilst we wish to enhance creativity, *coherent reflection* is our aim.

For us as coaches, we want to harness all that is great about expanding physical boundaries without losing focus in order to provoke progressive insight / action.

Pre-framing and contracting is vital. Your prior credibility will play a role in this, but it can be useful to emphasize the process and clarify boundaries through sharing:

- **why** you have suggested working outdoors
- the **role** the environment might play
- **how** you will be working together in this space

Let's expand on a few of those in case you don't have answers to those questions...

There is a generic **why** for coaching outdoors and a specific **why** *this* is the approach you have selected for *this* client and *these* circumstances.

Why outdoors? More generally, outdoor environments provoke:

- decreased stress and increased energy, raised clarity and focus
- improved sensory acuity, presence and connection, leading to better decision making
- plus the added benefits associated with



movement and breathing well

Why for *this* client?

- it could be that a step away from technology is needed for a shift in perspective
- maybe you have elected to work outdoors to introduce a different pace, enabling more considered reflection and a less reactive approach to life
- perhaps they wish to map out a future plan or walk through some ideas and the physical expanse provided by your outdoor location is required in order to do this
- it's possible they are seeking some privacy away from work colleagues

There can be many reasons to opt for outdoor coaching – and sharing your rationale can help establish trust. The point about technology is important too. Advocating that phones are switched off, better still left in their office, will free your client to be fully present and avoid interruptions. If your client really struggles to separate themselves from their technology, this could be the topic of another coaching conversation.

The role of the environment

Nature is more than a backdrop to a conversation; it encourages a wider depth of field. Our considerations have a fuller spectrum of orientation and we can discover how and where complexity brings beauty and choice, rather than immediately seeking black and white

limited options for fear of overwhelm.

The multisensory richness of terrain, weather and wildlife etc. offers an invitation to reflect upon how the analogue qualities in nature resonate with the lifestyle tendencies of our clients. So the environment can offer:

- a container within which we can explore
- a blank canvas to be free and creative
- a mirror for emotion
- scale and scope to provide contrast and perspective
- and even wisdom related to the interconnections of all things
- not to mention the inspiration and motivation that awe and wonder effortlessly provoke

The environment is co-facilitator of learning and insight and as such, consciously inviting it into the conversation respects the value it can bring. As you coach outdoors, check in periodically to ensure you are providing space for nature to really play its part.

How will you work together?

Give plenty of thought to how you sense your clients will feel in terms of trust and intimacy when working outdoors in order to co-create your relationship. Of course, the location you choose will impact this, but reassurance is essential if you are going to invite more fluidity into your process. For instance, are they ready for a walk of grace and power in a wide-open environment – or might that be a little

How will working in nature extend your scope of practice and how, therefore, will you ensure your clients are prepared to really make the most of their experience?



▶ too far out of their comfort zone? Is a timeline exercise going to feel immersive in the space you have chosen – or is the location, busyness, weather etc. not conducive?

Working with the space and in-the-moment shows a respect for them and their process within a dynamic context. With *all* coaching, but particularly when coaching outdoors, it is often what you DON'T say or DON'T do that matters. There is a subtlety within the silence and a real skill to allowing a moment to evolve... Reflect on your coaching process and develop a lighter touch.

Interruptions can be managed and even integrated into the learning process, but ensuring you remain present for your client is essential. Perhaps somebody they or you know walks over – if you are newer to coaching outdoors, agree with your client how you might manage interruptions. A simple smile, nod and keeping walking usually does the trick to communicate that you are busy; having a pleasant but non-invitational phrase ready can avoid awkwardness and distraction.

Be aware of your presence: you are not there to compete with the location... Encourage your client to interact with

the space, drawing in the sand or using trees as landmarks, for example. Point out wildlife as and when relevant to shift state or invite metaphor.

If walking on a coastline side by side, be mindful of how you decide which side of them to walk. Let them lead this process; hold back on imposing yourself within their space. Sensory acuity is essential here – wherever you place yourself will impact their experience.

The same goes for walking along narrow paths. Allow them to walk ahead and set the general pace. That said, if you notice them racing along and looking only at the floor, encourage them to slow down, breathe and take in the location.

Notice how their pace changes with different questions – perhaps they slow down to contemplate or speed up to gloss over something. Offer some meta-awareness if it suits – “I notice you slowed down there...” – simply inviting inquiry without over-determining their behaviour.

Encourage resonance

Prior to contracting beach coaching, my clients have a phone chat and/or smart survey with some reflective (and deliberately ambiguous) questions to shift their levels of curiosity. These

conversations and questions prime their energy and attention for the type of personal inquiry we are likely to invite when working outdoors. This helps them to gain a sense of how emergent and eco-centric coaching (with me) in blue space works, and whilst they do not need to find answers to questions, it provides some orientation for them to identify how ready they are for the depth and scope of discussion that could arise at the coast.

For me as the coach, their responses are a temperature check to ensure my clients are kept psychologically safe, but also to ensure that we are a good match.

Think about how you can ascertain this for yourself and your clients, particularly with regards to taking your coaching outdoors. How will working in nature extend your scope of practice and how, therefore, will you ensure your clients are prepared to really make the most of their experience? Connect with other coaches – perhaps through the ANLP social media channels – and share your insights.

In the next issue we will dive back under the surface again – but for now, model and share how much difference getting the foundations right makes to your outdoor coaching. I would be curious to hear. ■

Lizzi Larbalestier is an ICF professional blue health coach and coach trainer specialising in marine-based change work in Cornwall and California. Disarming humour supports a highly provocative coaching style and she uses the coast as a landscape for trajectory-led philosophical debate grounded in neuroscience. Lizzi is the founder of Going Coastal Blue and Director of Coaching for Blue Mind Works. For more information go to www.goingcoastal.blue