



Gestalt Coaching

by Debra Brosan

Presence

Gestalt Coaching focuses on the present. Living now is more central than dwelling in the past – or imagining a future divorced from the present. The process starts from the surface and follows the experience of each individual - not seeking out the unconscious, but staying with what is present and aware. Awareness is seen as curative and growth producing. Gestalt Coaching focuses on the present. The goal is to help individuals stay present with their experience. Staying present is remaining in the here and now. Grounding ourselves in the present is more healthful (effective) than going back to the past and getting lost in an uncertain future. Because of our groundedness, we accept emerging events as natural.

Presence is also what we bring to the relationship. Presence is being grounded in who we are, what we know, and where we came from to bring us to the here and now. Coaches have the opportunity to model ways of dealing with challenges and problematic concerns. Also, we invite our clients to try out potential solutions through creative experiments. Presence can create a trust that makes one feel safe and supported. This support can provide a safe ground for experimenting, with options for change, within the context of the coaching relationship. Consequently, such experiments can lead to taking effective action in the world.

Experience

Experience is more than just ideas and memories, though they are certainly important. It also includes emotions, perceptions, behavior, images, thoughts, and body sensation. Gestalt Coaching aims to support experiencing in all of these ways, vividly in the present. The way to clear experience is by focusing on both techniques to heighten our awareness of experience, as well as to the awareness of the things that block us.

We describe experience as to what is occurring rather than intellectualize and analyze. “Expressing” it rather than talking “about” it.

Good contact is when we are most in our experience.

Creative Experimenting

Gestalt Coaching’s experimental methodology requires that coaches constantly explore their curiosity against the client’s experience and modify these ideas accordingly. The coach needs to be highly creative and flexible, while concentrating on the client’s process. The collaborative efforts of the client and coach often produce a fascinating process of discovery.

Creative experimenting provides an opportunity to try on new ways of being in the world. By playing out possibilities for problem solving, we may begin to experience ourselves in new ways. Giving full expression, these new ways will create excitement and aliveness to our moment to moment experience (living phenomenologically).



Techniques for exploring creatively may be suppressive or expressive. In other words, asking someone to feel more of their stuckness may give way to awareness of their stuckness and energize toward change (suppressive). Or having someone act out the specific symptom, behavior, inhibition, feeling, thought, etc... outwardly may help someone realize the power in such expressions (expressive).

Relationship

Relating is central to human experience and survival, and relationality is the central healing mechanism in Gestalt Therapy. One becomes fully alive when one is in congruent relation to oneself and achieves good relationships with others. Presence, dialogue, authenticity, and visibility of the coach characterize the coaching relationship in Gestalt Coaching.

The coaching relationship helps individuals become more aware of what they are doing, how they are doing it, the choices they have available to them to mobilize change so they can value and accept themselves. In turn, this helps them to recognize the value of such processes when engaging with co-workers or their clients.

Based upon the existential philosophy of Martin Buber, Gestalt Coaching embraces the concept of "I and Thou". We can say that authentic relating occurs when we are open to be known by others, and open to know others. In other words, "I want you to know my truths, and I want to know your truths." We meet by differentiating ourselves as a distinct "I" and a distinct "You." The courage to be "a part of" is an essential element of the courage to be as "oneself", and the courage to be as "oneself" is an essential element of the courage to be "a part of." Through this way of being, we can encourage and invite opportunities for true meeting and healthy merging to occur in our coaching practice.

Profound Respect

Gestalt coaching approaches – an individual, a team, a partnership, or an organization – in a deeply respectful manner. This greatly influences the coach's attitude toward resistance and change. Gestalt coaching acknowledges that there is always some element of helath in how a client seeks to stay the same - or even continue

to engage in destructive behaviors - and that the process of growth can actually be speeded by acknowledging the resistance. Coaching becomes a balance between support and challenge to be the most effective that we can be.

With profound respect also comes trust. Trust is a vital element in the coaching relationship, a safe container to work within. This safe container can create an atmosphere for creative experimenting and giving way to new behaviors, attitudes, feeling, etc.

Social Responsibility

Gestalt coaching acknowledges responsibility for self and for others and its principles extend into the broader social realm. In demanding respect for all people and a high regard for the differences among them, it supports a humanistic, egalitarian approach to social life and encourages people to live these principles in the community at large. Social responsibility is grounded in "real" hearing and "real" responding – real being with – the real basis of responsibility. It is grounded in the awareness that it is the whole existence of a person who is addressed and claimed, and that one's social relationships are an essential part of this whole personal experience.

Debra Brosan is an associate of The Learning Key who provides training on Gestalt Coaching. To learn more about the work she and her husband, Mark Magerman, do in Gestalt Coaching, contact them at Magerman and Associates Organizational Consulting and Coaching, 1703 Langhorne-Newton Road, Suite 6, Langhorne, PA 19047, call them at 215-860-9876, or e-mail them at mmagerman@comcast.net.