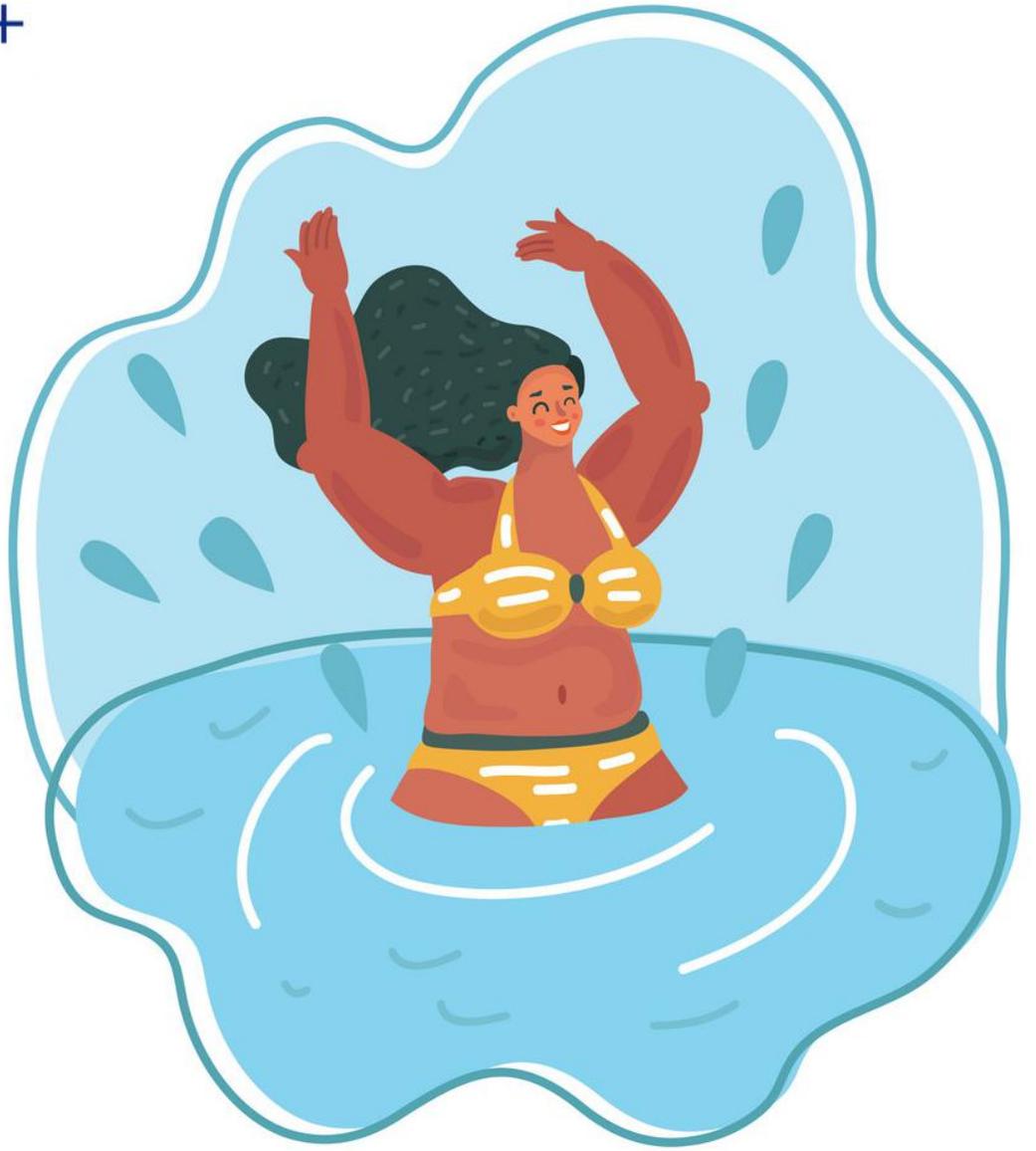




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COACH

A DIVE
INTO
WHAT IS

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| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Way Of Being | 4 |
| Observation And Distinctions | 7 |
| Interpretations | 11 |
| THE ROAD OF NO RETURN | 13 |
| First Order Learning | 13 |
| Transformation | 16 |
| Breakdowns | 18 |
| Self-Coaching Questions | 23 |
| Second Order Learning | 26 |
| Awareness | 31 |
| LANGUAGE | 35 |
| Basic Presumptions About Language | 37 |
| LISTENING | 51 |
| Basic Presuppositions About Listening | 52 |
| Five Levels Of Listening | 60 |
| The Four Ears Model | 66 |
| REFERENCES | 70 |

ENITS

COACHING: A DIVE INTO WHAT IS

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WAY OF BEING

Ontological coaching provides a unique approach to learning and coaching. Ontology is the study of being and can be regarded as an inquiry into the nature of human existence. The expression “Way of Being“ refers to how we are at any point in time, and in particular refers to how we are observing or perceiving the world. Ontological coaching is based on an interpretation that Way of Being is an interrelationship between language, mood and physiology. In this interpretation, how we are at any point in time is a dynamic interplay between these three domains of human existence. The world shows up for us according to the current state of our Way of Being.

What is ontological coaching

Five key interrelated elements are the core of Ontological coaching

1. Holding the coachee as the legitimate other
2. Identifying the breakdown
3. Language
4. Moods and emotions
5. Physiology/body

Have-Do-Be Paradigm

Before we go further, I need to tell you an important and general misconception that often generates frustration instead of happiness, even though we are doing everything we can to create for ourselves a life filled with joy, success, beauty, love, etc. This misconception comes from a simple chronological mix up of three little verbs. What do you think the correct order of these verbs are?

Do

Be

Have

Well, most of us are living our lives thinking we have to have something, in order to do something, in order to be something. For example, we think we need to have that particular diploma/job, in order to do that particular job/project, in order to be successful. Or, do-have-be is also common. We think we need to do something, like win the lottery/climb Mt Everest, in order to have something, like money/reputation, to finally be free, happy/powerful, self-confident. And most of the times our toilsome path brings us nothing more than emptiness or new desires. When we expect the be after the have and do, it somehow never comes and there we find ourselves in the Faustian vicious circle.

The only way to get out of the circle is to rearrange the order. First, we decide to be something and from then as a reaction unravels what we do or have. We decide we are successful and from then all are actions and results of those actions cannot be otherwise than successful. I have seen many beautiful, model like young girls who just do not seem to think they are good enough and they are getting more and more disappointed of the wasted opportunities or somebody else's victory in the same area. Their body posture is also quite following the mood they chose to be in. Slouched shoulders, head downward, avoiding eye contact. The language is following also. This means that the words that are coming out of their mouths are reflecting their mood and body posture: "I'm not good enough", "I'm never going to get that job.", "If I lose more weight,

then I will have a chance winning that competition”. On the other hand, I know some below average looking women, and I know you do too, who get all the men and grab all the opportunities. Why is that?

Because they have decided that they are sexy/unfuckwhitable/fabulous, and both their body posture and language radiate exactly that. They people around them say that they own a certain charisma. Do not get me wrong, I am not saying there are no charismatic people, what I am saying is that first you decide to Be happy/successful/glorious/strong/beautiful and then everything that happens is a mere consequence of a quality cause.

What we do and how we do it influences the outcomes of the myriad of situations we find ourselves in every day. Much of our personal and professional dissatisfaction in life stems from not being able to behave in the way that produce the results we say we want. This is especially so in our relationships. While the outcome of ontological approach is behavioural change, this is not primarily what the coach is coaching towards. He is to a deeper level, to the driver of behaviour. **This deeper level is the Way of Being of the coachee.** Thomas Moore said that the intersection of the three domains contains the human Soul “a dimension where we experience ourselves and others”. Using the ontological coaching approach, in this way, we can really coach to the human soul.

In order to know what exactly to coach in the realm of WOB, we need much more distinctions than just language, mood, physiology. And the prerequisite for creating those distinctions lie in our observation skills.

OBSERVATION AND DISTINCTIONS

“The range of what we think and do is limited to what we fail to notice, and because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there’s little that we can do to change, until we notice how failing to notice changes our thoughts and deeds.”

R.D. Laing

How the world is for us depends on how we observe things: events, circumstances, people and objects. An important thing to remember is that we cannot change what we cannot name. If we cannot name something, it is as if it does not exist. Seeing different things with the same eyes is what we get as a result when we acquire specific distinctions. Ontological coaching is about developing a relationship that creates a learning environment in which the coachee becomes a different and more powerful observer. Because we do not see how things are, we see them according to how we are.

Let say that a girl goes on a date with a boy who really wants to impress her. He takes her out Saturday night to a romantic viewpoint overlooking the city. The night has freshly fallen, he puts her arm around her and while gazing

upwards he sighs: “Look dear, how the stars shine beautifully.”. Now

imagine this same girl going out with an astronomer, he would perhaps say:

“Look at all those constellations, Milky Way, Orion’s Belt, Andromeda, Sirius, Venus, Pegasus, Big Dipper, etc.”. He would have quite an arsenal of distinctions in his pocket. Same sky, different eyes. And now imagine that she went out with an astrologer: “Look at Aquarius over there and

**When we
become a
different
observer,
life takes on
a different
meaning.**

Pisces leaning right next to it. Leo, Scorpio, Sagittarius, etc.". Same sky, different eyes. This happens to us all when we engage in conversations with people who share with us distinctions we did not have before. Why do those things appear to be obviously there now but were not there a few seconds ago? How much am I unable to observe because I lack distinctions? What I might be missing? How does all of this affect my possibilities for action if I cannot intervene in a world I do not see?

What is important to note at this point is that looking is a biological and seeing a linguistic phenomenon. That means we look with our eyes but see with our brain. And if we do not possess the distinction, concept, word about a specific thing, it simply does not exist to us. Have you heard of the invisible ships phenomenon, cited in several new-age books and movies? It goes like this: When Captain Cook/Columbus/ Magellan arrived at the coast of Australia/Cuba/South America, the native people completely ignored them, presumably because huge ships were so alien to their experience that their highly filtered

perceptions could not register what was happening, and they literally failed to 'see' the ships. Or take into account the fact that Inuits have seven different words for "snow", depending on how the snow can be used.

These language habits can be conceptualized as distinctions. In the words of an Inuit elder, "Words do not label things already there. Words are like the knife of the carver, they free the idea, the thing, from the general formlessness of the outside. As a man speaks, not only his language is in a state of birth but also the very thing about which he is talking."

Distinctions bring forth a world that did not exist before and that is a great starting point for a coach who wants to present another perspective to his coachee. What we observe will influence our behaviour



and how we can participate in the world which in turn will shape the outcomes we get. What is available to our senses is heavily influenced by the distinctions we have available to us. We can distinguish varieties on the level of all three WOB domains. To do that we must be able to observe and to know what we are observing. Later on in the chapter dealing with rapport, we will deal with specific distinctions. And how to notice them? By practice. A lot of time during beginner's presentation skills workshop, people do not know what to feedback about the presenter. As the workshop progresses and the participants acquire the language and practice observation skills, the feedback round lasts more than the presentation round. We hear all kinds of details about facial expression, posture, tonality, language, legs, knees, eye wrinkles, etc. And then we can give the presenter a little more to correct instead of "yeah,

could you be a little more interesting?".

When we become a different observer, life takes on a different meaning. The notion of the Observer is central to Humberto Maturana's work in the biology of cognition. At any point in time, how we observe determines how the world "shows up" to us. It determines what we see as problems, what we see as possibilities and what we see as solutions. When we experience shifts in our Way of Being (ontological shifts) and are able to observe circumstances differently, problems can be transformed into possibilities and solutions can become self-evident. This is a vital source of creativity and innovation. Ontological coaching is about developing a relationship that creates a learning environment in which the coachee becomes a different and more powerful observer.

Becoming aware of this opens the door to a new way of learning, a new set of choices, an entirely different set of possibilities. Bottomline, **we cannot intervene in the world we do not observe.**

“Theory without practice is foolish, practice without theory is dangerous”

Chinese proverb

INTERPRETATIONS

To observe is to interpret. To interpret is to make sense of things and reach an understanding for ourselves. Our interpretations are meanings of events and people, we connect with them. Humans are “meaning-making machines”, which means we cannot not interpret, we cannot not create a meaning because that is what we do. At least the rational, mental part of us. The brain cannot handle the nothing, that is the problem. It has to fill in the blanks, empty spaces, silence with thoughts, tasks, rationalizations, explanations and excuses. They say the feeling of guilt will tear you apart not if you do something you interpret as wrong but if you do not do nothing at all. To the “wrong” you can give a meaning that will soothe your conscious. To the nothing you cannot do anything.

This is how the brain is able to survive, and also to create a loop, dearest to all coaches. The “yes, but” loop. You see, whenever the coach steps into the trap of “leaning forward”, working more and giving advice, the coachee naturally “leans

back”, works less and starts to rebut the proposal with this famous sentence. Do you know how come this is happening? Because first of all the problem is never the problem, the solution is. And second of all, the coachee’s ratio is the master of this problem, he has been tackling it for maybe a few years and he knows every nook and cranny. So, if you think you can beat him at his game on his territory, you are in for a surprise.

**We see
things
according to
who we are.**

Life is an interpretative experience and we live in the world of interpretations. We appoint meaning to every single thing we encounter. We need to ask ourselves how well our interpretations serve us? Do they open up new possibilities for leading

a meaningful and fulfilling life? Do our explanations have anything to do with our moods? Most of us are terrible observers of our moods, we do even see them as moods, we see them as the way things are. Sometimes it seems we do not have them but they have us. And what about our body posture, what perspective that we later pin with a meaning does it offer? The trick is not to miraculously stop doing that, because the attempt is quite futile. The difference that makes the difference is to become aware that there are some facts and then there are our interpretations upon those facts. And to tell them apart. These distinctions support us as well as our coachees.

A coach is a poet (Greek poesis: to create, produce). Poetry is the art of providing new meaning. By exploring the coachee's Way of Being, the coach triggers the formation of different perspectives and interpretations by the coachee. They in turn reveal new possibilities for participating in the world differently. The coachee is able to view himself/life differently and novelties

are opening up. An ontological coach is a particular observer of how ways of being of a coachee produce interpretations and behaviours that are not working for him and supports him to author a more powerful interpretation. To observe is to interpret mmm. Our interpretations share the meaning we make of events, people, objects, etc. Life is largely and interpretative action and we live in a world of interpretations. A fundamental issue we all face is: **How well do our interpretation serve us?**

Put in another way, do the interpretations we live in enable us to continually open up new possibilities for leading a meaningful and fulfilling life, individually and collectively?



The Road of No Return

*You were born with the creative power of the universe at the
tip of your tongue.*

Neale Donald Walsch

**FIRST ORDER LEARNING
TRANSFORMATION
BREAKDOWNS
SECOND ORDER LEARNING**

FIRST ORDER LEARNING

Our behaviour creates certain results. We deem these results good or bad, more precisely, we decided if they are working for us or not. If they are working for us, then we go about our lives as nothing has happened. If they are not working for us then, most probably, we want to make them better. The way we usually do it is we as observers, observing our actions, behaviour and making a change in it, doing something different. And if we are experienced, we will ask other pairs of eyes for feedback, some of which we could include in our adjustments. This is how a perfectly smooth loop of first order learning looks like. I offer you two examples, second of which I thank Alan Sieler for.

Let us say you want to learn to play tennis. You know your way around sports, you have some stamina and good motoric skills. Hiring a tennis trainer is a starting idea. He then mentors you through all the backhands, forehands, grips and tricks of tennis. By practicing and him correcting your behaviour, you get better. In fact, every month you are much better than the previous one. After a certain time, you decide to register to a tournament and compete. This gives you more experience and new feedbacks to implement into your strategy. You go on practicing and improving for years, quite successfully, until one moment when you think you do not have anything more to learn but still somehow there are players who can beat you. As if you have reached to a glass ceiling and cannot seem to break it.



Someone may want to improve the way they chair monthly meetings in the workplace. They may speak to people and/or find some written material to support their learning. In the process, they find out about particular procedures through the adoption of strategies, techniques and procedures.

2

When we reflect on how our behaviour influenced the outcome of a situation, we are engaging in first-order learning. Here, we are observers of our behaviours and how they impact outcomes is directly oriented to the development of strategies and skills. Behavioural change is approached through the adoption of strategies, techniques and procedures. However, in times of accelerating change, this may no longer be sufficient to meet the continual need for rapid learning and readjustment. This model (and the one called Second Order Learning) was initially developed by Chris Argyris and Robert Putnam. Just because I may have exhausted all the possibilities I see, does not mean there are no possibilities or options left. It just means that from the way I see things, the way I have constructed the situation, the story I have built, from my perspective, through my beliefs, there are no possibilities.

TRANSFORMATION

How do you see the difference between change and transformation? They are both strong words, often took as synonyms. Some dictionaries state transformation is “to change in composition and structure”.

Let us say it is spring time and you would like to do some refreshing in your home. You would like to change something and start with the chairs. You polish them with sand paper, add coats of a different colour, upholster it, maybe add a pillow of two and there you go. You changed you chairs, yes you did. Although, they look different, but they are still the same chairs. There lies the catch, change is temporary, transformation is irreversible. That is why the most famous example of transformation is the metaphor of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. There is no way you can push that butterfly back into the cocoon! If you want to transform you chairs, the only thing you can basically do is replace them with a rocking chair or an armchair. That way you have updated your seating habits.



**Change is temporary,
transformation
is irreversible.**

I am certainly not saying that change is bad and transformation is good. What I am saying is that the distinction of the two will give us more awareness into what we are doing. An ontological coach seeks to facilitate learning for coachees in all three WOB domains. Transformation (an ontological shift) only occurs when there is a shift in all three domains. When this occurs, a different world is observed and new possibilities for action become available.

BREAKDOWNS



Relax, there will be no nervous breakdowns in this book, although a nervous breakdown is a type of an ontological breakdown. A breakdown is a crucial ontological concept that comes from Martin Heidegger's philosophy. His particular interpretation of it differs from what might be called "normal". As he says, "breakdowns have the potential to be a powerful springboard for coping more effectively with the vicissitudes of daily life." They are basically an interruption in the anticipated flow of life, based on our concerns. By interrupting our automatic flow, they enable something new to enter. Of

course, if we observe it and let it. Somehow, when faced with a breakdown, as if we only then "show up". This is a vital thing when coaching comes into question, because if the coachee does not "show up", his real concerns, values, thoughts, fears, worries, we as coaches might as well be wasting time working on consequences instead of the cause. An ontological coach may generate a breakdown in the coachee's transparencies about his WOB. Either acceptance or resistance will occur. Both is a great sign. How to effectively work with resistance we will process later on in the book.

Living in this time of profound change and uncertainty, we are faced with an ever-increasing number of breakdowns of varying complexity and intensity. It is more important than ever to understand what breakdowns are, how to notice

them and finally deal with them so that you really turn it into learning and create stepping stones for success. We can assess them as positive or negative. Here are some examples.

- .: You learn there is going to be another restructure in your company
- .: You receive an aggressive phone call from an unsatisfied customer
- .: Your children are exceptionally tardy and uncooperative in getting ready to school
- .: It takes five minutes to start the car or the bus to work is already 15 minutes late
- .: Breakup, divorce, argument...
- .: You win a cruise on a competition
- .: You are approached about moving into a senior position
- .: The cost of servicing your car is half the price you estimated
- .: Your partner offers to cook the evening meal, so you can prepare for an important meeting
- .: Pleasant surprises, winnings, promotions, marriages, births, reunions...

TRANSPARENCY

Let us take it from the beginning. Heidegger used the term “transparency” to refer to “what is so familiar that we are not aware of its presence”. Transparency here is related to habits and practices we engage as a part of our normal living. For example: use of technology, relating to other people, walking, talking, brushing teeth, showering, driving a car, shopping, etc. These habits of ours are almost on automatic pilot and we are not conscious of doing them, we often delete. Of course, that is one of very powerful mechanisms called deletion, which prevents overloading our brains and enables focus, among other things. But the point is that we see right past these things as though they were not there. “Transparency is the unconscious manner of our engagement with the world and is a form of blindness.”

BREAKINGDOWN

The event per se is not a breakdown, rather it is how this event is regarded by the observer, that constitutes a breakdown. It is always an assessment of the observer based on what is important to him, based on his concerns. We live our daily lives, but the driver behind the wheel is in fact our concerns: core values, underlying beliefs, priorities, commitments. Every action that we take is directed to addressing those concerns. The funny thing is that most of our concerns are also transparent to us.

A better insight into this concept can be gained if we play linguistically with it and transform it into “break downs”. A breakdown is a breaking down of the transparency of living. If we break down the event that has just happened to us, then we will be able to “see” what has been hidden from us, whether our concern, the opportunity or the learning it offers. Shifts in WOB open up different ways of observing, which can provide an ongoing basis from which to develop effective strategies and greater flexibility in dealing with life’s complexities.

BREAKTHROUGHS

From an ontological perspective we do not have problems, we just experience breakdowns. Also, we do not seek solutions to our problems, rather resolutions to our breakdowns. A breakdown always presents us with an opportunity how to observe how we are observing, to reflect on our WOB and to engage in Second Order Learning. We can begin to question how we are observing, which can be the catalyst for generating different and more insightful perspectives. This is the foundation for creative thinking, in which new ideas lead to novel responses to challenging circumstances and accordingly produce breakthroughs.

SELF-COACHING QUESTIONS

by Alan Sieler

From what perspective are you observing the breakdown you have been working with?

What conception do you have of yourself taking different action and moving beyond your habitual way of dealing with a situation like this?

Exactly what is the interpretation/story you are holding about this situation?

What questions are you not asking?

What are you blind to in developing different ways of dealing with it?

What are you holding on to and will not let go?

What are the standards you are viewing from?

What conception do you have of yourself taking different action and moving beyond your habitual way of dealing with a situation like this?

What is at stake that keeps you trapped and prevents you from taking different action?

DEALING WITH BREAKDOWNS

1. Declare
2. Take (conversational) action
3. Additionally, seek another observer

Just as our competencies have become transparent, so can our incompetence. Our Way of Being may become transparent to us as we recurrently generate the same ineffective behaviour. We become blind how our WOB traps us and renders us less effective. One specific feature we can be more attentive to is acknowledge when we are experiencing a breakdown. One of our most insidious forms of suffering is living breakdowns we are not aware of. The easiest example to point out here concerns our health and physical condition. The lightbulb goes off only when it is too late. Start with declarations. A declaration of a breakdown can open up the possibility for exploring how the way I am observing the situation makes it a breakdown for me.

A breakdown is a shift in the assessment of what we regard as possible. Negative as well as positive breakdowns close and open up possibilities for us. They can also be regarded as calls to action. Something important to us is not being addressed and a breakdown urges us to take action and address those concerns. They are linguistic and emotional phenomena, experienced in the body of observers. The action it urges us to take is more of a conversational nature, one that will shift our WOB.

This is a point when coachees usually seek help, when something is not going the way they would like. Rafael Echeverria has developed the following linguistic reconstruction of what is happening (mostly private, meaning inside the head, conversations) with someone who decides he would like to experience coaching:

Rafael Echeverria

I have a breakdown.

I'm stuck and I don't know how to improve things for myself.

I'm suffering because of it, the quality of my existence is not what I want it to be.

SECOND ORDER LEARNING

“It’s never a lack of resources, it’s your lack of resourcefulness that stops you.”
Tony Robbins

This comes with the introduction of a new element and a new focus point. The new element is an Observer and the new focus point is the observer. Now, an ontological shift, a transformation happens when you are able to see the same situation from a different perspective. That fresh perspective is the Observer who watches the observer, more precisely he watches the Way of Being of the observer. It analyses how he is in this world, body, mood and language. Let me give you an example, imagine an owl sitting on the highest branch of the tallest tree, looking at the happenings below. Is that owl the first or second observer, what do you think? Yes, the first. And the second would be a fly sitting on the owl’s head! The fly is seeing both the owl and the happening below but is more focused at the owl and how it

observes those happenings. The fly is least concerned, and utmost detached from what is happening below.

From the awareness of those observations and distinctions, we have the opportunity to become more resourcefulness. Because the resources were already and always there. We have the opportunity to author fresh assessments about ourselves that will trigger our behaviour, that will in turn impact our results. And that is how the glass ceiling gets broken. If you as a tennis player dare to hire a coach who will ask you second learning order questions that will focus you more on you than on your behaviour, you will be able to challenge and beat the rest of your competition.

We are all unique observers. And when I say that, I mean we can be viewed as an intricate bundle of congruency among three separate yet strongly intertwined aspects, that create the authentic version of us. And as you can probably conclude by now, most of the times, we are poor observers of ourselves. It is quite difficult to change something in order to produce a different result if we do not even see what is it that we are doing right now. It is only after we observe something, notice something, that we can be conscious about either changing it or leaving it the same. This is where distinctions come in handy. If you can notice something and name it, then you can do something about it. If not, it stays this vague thorn in your heel that you feel and it is very real, but you cannot seem to either locate nor move.

We can thus become observers of how we are observing and ask questions like:

∴ What is the story that I am telling myself now, what internal conversations am I having right now?

∴ What is happening to my WOB that I observe in this particular way?

∴ What is happening with my language, emotions and body that has me observe this way?

Working with second order learning is about how to shift our WOB to open up doors for more competent behaviour, so that different strategies or behaviour become apparent to us. I will cover second order learning questions in more detail in the section of questioning. Also, an important note for the coaching context, the second Observer can be somebody else as well as the aware you. The only difference is that the latter produces long term self-generative results.

Back to the two examples.



With the help of another pair of eyes even, the focus on your behaviour brought you a long way indeed. Now it is time for a shift, a transformation. It is time to improve your strategy to the point that you beat those couple of players that you know you can, but do not seem to in real life. You can enhance the technical proficiency of you backhand by shifting your Way of being. It could be that you are running negative conversations inside your head ("I'm hopeless at this. I'll never get it. I look stupid."). Your breathing may also be shallow and your muscles tight, inhibiting free-flowing movement. A coach can make intervention in any of the three WOB domains, and they will trigger movement in the other two. If he does it on the level of language, it is the easiest intervention, because we use it every day and for the same reason it is the trickiest one, because it has become transparent to us. We are saturated with language. If he tries to do something with the body, it is the most subtle, non-invasive, short cut way to the brain. Here it takes building up awareness before that, so that you know what distinctions to observe within your physiology. And lastly, working with moods is 100% effective and 100% evasive and long term. The quickest way is through the body in your case.

It takes more courage to take a look at how we look at things than it does to simply try new actions. The conclusion drawn by the neurobiologist Humberto Maturana have shown, the taking of new action in the world literally creates a new structure within us, which then allows us to take action and respond

in new ways to future events. We are literally, not figuratively, a different person/observer after that. He said it is because he believed human beings were biological beings and were structurally determined. Meaning, we can do what our structure allows us, unless we transform it.

2

People chair meetings from their WOB. Knowing specific procedures and strategies may not be sufficient, especially if some people have intense feelings about issues being discussed and the meeting becomes heated. How the chairperson listens and speaks will be crucial. Listening is not only listening to others, it is also listening to themselves: observing the conversational flow of the meeting. What is happening emotionally with a chairperson can be critical in how they use their speaking and listening to conduct the meeting. Their body posture and breathing will influence their moods and their speaking and listening. A coach can support them to be in the appropriate “emotional space” and ensure that their posture and breathing facilitates this occurring. From this emotional space they are more likely to be open and alert in their listening of others, and timely in their speaking. They will then be able to observe and shift their WOB in meetings to enhance their effectiveness.

Maturana was busy among other things with ontogeny, a history of structural change in a unity, without loss of organisation in that unity. He explains evolution as a set of changes triggered by interactions coming from the environment or as a result of internal dynamics: “As long as a unity does not enter into a destructive interaction with its environment, we as observers will see between the structure of the environment and that of the unity a compatibility or congruence. As long

as this compatibility exists, environment and unity act as mutual sources of perturbation, triggering changes of state. The best example of this would be lineages of automobiles and cities: dramatic changes on both sides, which have taken place in each one as an expression of its own structural dynamics under selective interactions with the other.” Are you the same observer that you were when you were in high school? Learning happened.

Oh, and by the way, you cannot change another human being.

Who of you has ever tried? Who has teenagers, partners, co-workers, relatives, friends? How much success have you had? I am not saying that we have no way in influencing others. I believe we certainly can. What I am saying is that at a fundamental level, you cannot change me. Only I can change me. But again, I cannot change what I do not notice. And there you go. We have gotten really good at observing others, we have a lot of practice there. Along with the tips and tricks what they should or should not do. Yet we are often not very good at observing the one person we can truly change. And this severely limits our choices and possibilities. You have read correctly, we always have a choice, so you can now start looking at the statement: "I simply had no choice, I had to go through with it!" in a different light. We are constantly making choices as we deal with the issues of our lives, and the thing that we do not know at the time, we do

not know, is that our chosen choice is one of many offered. It is just that we are blind to see the rest. That does not mean that they do not exist, or that they are easy. Most of my coachees mean "It is difficult" when they are uttering "It is impossible." That is a completely other story.

It is imperative we get a new presumption about choices, we have them, they are all around us. Have you noticed that every time in your life something went wrong, or good for that matter... you were there! We are each the common denominator in our own stories, we are the ones who keep showing up again and again. We claim that we are what we are, because of the choices we make. And if we are always choosing, every moment, would it not be life altering to offer to your coachee and to yourself a greater palette of choice so that each of you can intentionally create your own master-piece.

AWARENESS

“Awareness is like the sun. When it shines on things, they are transformed.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

The dictionary defines awareness as “knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information or experience”. Imagine it as your own personal flying drone representing the all-seeing eye of the second Observer. Depending on what the drone camera catches, that is the video quality or input you are going to have. If the drone is sitting on your shoulder, it will see the same thing you see. In a coaching context, that would be like blind leading the blind, a coach who gets sucked in the content of what the coachee is saying, unable to detach himself and offer a different perspective. You want your drone to fly high and all around. That is the reason you got yourself a drone not a camera, isn't it? What the Observer's detachment can offer could be illustrated with the following example. Have you ever been on a hot air balloon ride? First you come

near the basket, it is positioned on the ground while the balloon lies neatly next to it, like a huge shopping bag. The flying instructor tells you to step in the basket, so you may begin the journey. The moment you are in and the huge shopping bag is starting to inflate itself and look more and more like a balloon, your adventure has begun. The balloon is now completely pumped and you can see the sponsor's brand clearly on it and



your basket slightly lifts in the air, then bumps the ground again and a couple of more times does the same thing. At the beginning, nothing has changed for you. You can still lead normal voiced conversation with people standing around you, the ones who arrived there to wave you off. You still see the same things as five minutes ago, and this hot air is taking forever to lift off, actually. The second phase you encounter is the moment when your balloon has reached an altitude that provides a view. Wow, now you can see the whole valley and from this perspective it looks greener than you thought. Maybe you can see the next town or village. Here you really become a different observer. Even though you are high up, you can still talk to the people on the ground. Maybe you need to yell a bit, but the connection is there. The third stage happens when you least expect it, a sudden shift when you reach the point of distinctions in hearing. View wise it just broadens and gets wider

and wider, the streets, cars and people get smaller and smaller, but it is what you hear that strikes you. It is nothing, silence. You hear just your instructor pumping the hot air from time to time into the balloon, to retain altitude. It is amazing how you automatically gain a completely new picture about the surrounding below you. Without being able to communicate to the people below, you see them and the places they live in differently. Like watching a movie that has nothing to do with you. Completely detached. Good thing that hot air balloons have rules about altitude, seed and wind or you would find yourself somewhere where your Observer would give you even more information to chew on. The higher you let your Eye up, not only do you get more visual, sensory as well as auditory information, not to mention experience. This is pretty understandable so far: awareness is like big Eye, I need to keep it up, check!

And as soon as we get ourselves into a “subjective” experience, like in a temperamental argument where emotion clouds our judgement and language, we say: “It’s easier said than done.”. True, easier, not impossible!

BOOSTING YOUR AWARENESS

How to do it, you wonder? Well, wrong question. The right question here is when? And the answer is now. And I do not mean it in a self-help motivational way: if not now then when, I mean it as opposed to the past and the future. You know those people who always say it was better when they were young, better jobs, better salaries, better friends. Notice they live in constant melancholy, you could almost say a mood of depression. They are living in the past. All their focus and all their energy is invested in their memories, a time that does not exist anymore. Sad, really. And then there are those people with an agenda.

Sitting on a meeting and trying to casually look at their watch to check the time not to be late to the next one. People who walk or drive, thinking what they need to buy, arrange, send, call, remind. People who face states like stress or frustration, those are the ones who



forget to stop and invest all their focus and energy into the future, into a time that will never come.

“Silence is our true nature” as Tolle says, the only thing is that we are rarely calm enough, rarely in the present enough to hear it. In the present moment there cannot be anything, there is no space for it. The soon we put something it becomes the past. Tomorrow really never does come. Present moment is fast fleeting. It is also the only place we can be creative, authentic, an author. In order to do this, we need to declutter the now and leave it empty. Filled with nothing. The additional paradox is that in this nothing, we can create anything. Now, when you know that awareness is something to be practiced only in the now, again comes the famous

remark: “It’s easier said than done.”. Nobody said it was going to be easy. The next step for you is to find out how to be in the now? The simplest thing to do here is to be guided by the physical universe. In Event Wise, a personal development training, they have a saying “Physical universe is your guru”. The body is ultimately one third of your Way of Being, learn how else you can use it. Focus on your breath, pinching yourself, verbalize your mantra, make five squats, whatever works for you and projects you back in the state where you can be an author.

When we are observers of our behaviors and how they impact our outcomes (2 examples page 35)

Language

“Language, a tool we cannot put down”

Chalmers Brothers

As a coach, in whichever WOB domain we make an intervention, the other two will rearrange themselves accordingly. Facilitate learning in all three domains. When this occurs, a different world is observed, and new possibilities and action become available. The domain we are usually most preoccupied with is the domain of language, so in this basic background overview of coaching approach, we will focus mostly here and leave the mood and physiology interventions for more advanced times. By now you are aware of the

fact that the majority of coaches focus basically only on 1/3 of what makes us a human being, what constitutes our Way of Being and in that way, they are missing out valuable possibilities and perspectives they can offer a client.

Because coaching is largely about offering a client a new perspective, something that he is unable to see differently for himself, not adding some knowledge, the presupposition here is that the client already knows enough and possesses all the

necessary resources. In offering him that, at that moment he has at least two options, which means he can choose. And if he can choose, he is free. Everybody wants to be free in their lives or of their obstacles. So, the trick is almost not to devise ingenious ways with your coachee on how to overcome the obstacle, but to make him see that there are no obstacles or that there are other ways. Like in the animated Kung Fu Panda picture, where they finally looked on the long-desired scroll where all the wisdom and purpose of life was supposed to be written only to discover “the scroll is empty!”

Language is fundamental human technology. It is really a tool we cannot put down, a tool that can hurt and heal. And if we are going to be really honest with ourselves, we mostly use it without thinking, unaware of its hidden potential. What would happen if we only knew?

In a new understanding of language, language is regarded as a process,

a form of doing, by which we make the world happen for us. The language we “live in”, how we speak to each other in our communities, and how we speak to ourselves “inside our heads”, determines what is actual and possible in our worlds.

**Do you know why
people seek
coaching?
Because their
reality,
or the meaning
they give to it,
is not working for
them anymore.
They find
themselves**

BASIC PRESUMPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE

- ∴ Language = listening + speaking
- ∴ Language creates and generates
- ∴ We live in language
- ∴ Language is action. To speak is to act.

LANGUAGE =
LISTENING
+ SPEAKING

We have generally overlooked the role of listening as a linguistic phenomenon. So far, we have tended to regard listening as a somewhat passive process, assuming the role of the listener is the one of taking in whatever the other side is communicating. Listening is a much deeper process than being attentive to what others are saying.

Where do we speak from? A response to this question is that we always speak from our own listening. What is the meaning of this expression? Part of living in language is to be continually conversing with ourselves. These are the almost continuous thoughts we have running inside our heads: our internal conversations. When we speak aloud, we always do so from the silent conversation: from what and how we are speaking to ourselves. This is our listening. What makes listening a linguistic phenomenon is that it is the process by which we language (speak) to ourselves.”

We are already engaged in internal speaking before we observe, it is not that we hear something, take it in

and try to make sense out of it. We are already listening.

Every listener is an observer and as such will be continually making interpretations about what is spoken. When we stop and track what is happening in our private conversations with ourselves, we begin to map the specifics of how we are observing the world and how our WOB looks like.

Language=speaking+ listening. The moment I think my explanation of the event is what happened, I stop listening. This is not a question of being subjective or objective, this is a question of being terminally certain of my side of the story, that the flow creation and option die out. And along with it, our ability to learn, to reinvent ourselves. Eric Hoffer said “In times of change, those who are prepared to learn will inherit the land, while those who think they already know will find themselves wonderfully equipped to face a world that no longer exists.”



LANGUAGE

CREATES AND

GENERATES

What is language?

What is language for?

And what would the giant majority answer with? A tool for communication, or some variation of this. This is such a widely held idea, or a way of understanding language, that most people do not see it as an idea at all. Today we realize that language is not only a descriptive phenomenon, but it is also a

generative and active one. It does not serve just to describe objects or retell anecdotes, it also **serves to create relationships, moods, possibilities, context, public identity,** etc. Our language is an essential element in being the unique observer we are, in creating the “me” who sees what I see and the “you” who sees what you see. Through the power it grants us to make distinctions and by enabling us to



make things happen we are able to design ourselves as well to alter the world in which we participate. We are not just human beings, we are “human becomings” because we speak ourselves in this world. Each of us is authentic, and by that I do not mean simply unique, but and Author. And as an author by verbalizing and idea, we make it an action. Words are actions.

What follows are a couple of very vivid and witty examples from Chalmers Brothers where he undoubtedly argues the proposed basic presumption about language.

Think about every single time in your life you have ever said the word “yes”. Every time. Now consider: if all

those times you had said no, would your life be different? You wouldn't be here. The simple act of saying yes, you move in the world this way, these doors open, these doors close, and vice versa. We are not describing. One of my favourite stories about how language creates is a baseball story. “Two umpires sitting around talking, and the first one is saying, -You know, Joe is a fabulous umpire: there's balls in his strikes, he calls them like they are. The second umpire said - No no no, Joe is a great umpire. There's balls in his strikes, but he calls them like he sees them. Joe said, -Ya'll both wrong. He says, -There's balls in my strikes, but they are nothing till I call them. When he says -Strike three, it is Strike three”.

“Now a question for everybody who is married, or who has ever been married. It's a simple question: Is it different being married than not being married? Yes. It's different legally, socially, sexually, emotionally, financially. It's different. So, the question: how do we go from being not married to being married? How'd that happen? Somebody said something. And in that moment it's different, and it's not a little bit different, it's really different. We

speak ourselves into the world. Is there not a moment in most weddings when the person doing the ceremony will say some version of this: "Anybody here thinks that so and so and so and so should not be married? Speak now, or forever hold your peace. "Here's my promise to you: you stand up in that moment and you scream: "I object!", you are not describing, you are creating. Think about it. You're creating chaos, a crisis, you're also creating a brand-new relationship with the groom. Think about it. And a brand, spanking new public identity for yourself. (Laughter) I am not saying we don't describe with language. What I am saying is that is not all that we do. And it is this whole other "not all that we do" that we need to consider".

How was the United States of America created? What is there, in the Archives, right next to the Constitution in Washington D.C.? The Declaration. This country was declared into being. Now, there was work to do after that, yes, but without the Declaration does not happen. How was Jim's Auto Body Shop down the street created? And all organizations for that matter? They were also declared into being, and Jim and the rest of us can find

the evidence in the file cabinet, "We hereby shareholders declare part 100, a, b, c; August, 1, the company doesn't exist, August, 2, it does."

Leaders get paid to have effective conversations. Leaders create and continually sustain and cultivate this non-physical but very real and very powerful thing called corporate culture, not with shovels and fertilizer, of course, but with the conversations they have, the conversations they require, and the conversations they prohibit in their organizations. These conversations shape and impact that culture every bit as much as the culture influences the workplace conversations. Causality is two-way.

Now, let's get personal. Think about somebody in your life with whom you have a close, deep, excellent relationship. Your conversations with that person create the experience of intimacy, generate the space of authenticity and vulnerability, not describe it. You change those conversations, and you change that relationship. If you end those conversations, and you end the relationship (extracts from Chalmers Brothers).

In times of ongoing change, exactly like those we live in today, our ability to continually learn is critically important. And one of the most spectacularly powerful prerequisites for learning, regardless of whether we're learning to ride a bike, learning to rebuild a relationship, learning to lead a company, that prerequisite is a language step, and it's when the learner says, either internally or out loud, "I don't know." Declaring "I don't know" does not describe a state of affairs, it produces something. What it produces is called a context for learning; not physical, very real. We declare beginner hood into being. We

speak it so. Just like the umpire. Everybody here knows this: who here in this room has ever tried to teach somebody something when the learner thought they already knew it? How much learning takes place? Not much. There you go.

**Language
generates meaning,
it has the power to
bring about what is
real for us.**

Language is a form of action, and how we listen and speak is an active process that generates action in the world. It is

WE LIVE IN LANGUAGE

Now, that expression, what does it mean? I like to frame it this way. Who here reading this has the little voice inside? The one that is saying, "What's she talking about?" that is the one I am talking about. Who has a debate team? Mark Twain said, "I'm always in a conversation. And sometimes, other people are involved." And if you think about it, it is not just Mark Twain, it is us. It is all of us. And because we live in language, this is what we do. Another creative example from Chalmers Brothers depicts this without a doubt. Let us pretend I am a lion, he starts. A lion on a savannah, getting ready to hunt for a zebra. Behind me on my left are other young males, wishing it was their turn to be in the spot light, their turn to hunt. Behind me, on my right

are the females, checking me out. I see the zebra I want, it is a slow one in the back, I've got it picked out. I take a running start, get ready for the final pounce, and kaboom, I hit a hidden log and down I tumble, in a cloud of dust. Getting up I am thinking I knew I shouldn't have had that antelope last night...it was so filling, and I knew I was scheduled to hunt today look at them all laughing at me I'll never be king, not with this on my record and look at her, I can forget our date Saturday night this is



the worst day of my life I'm humiliated. In fact, I may have to join another pride!". Does a lion do that? No, of course not, he will get up and chase after another zebra. But human beings do that. When we are confronted with an event we quickly:

Event is not equal to explanation. You, and I, and all of us, we are confronted with events. Events at home, events at work, events with our kids, events in college, events at

1. Make up a story about it
2. Hold our story to be The Truth
3. And forget that we made it up

the beach; events. And what we do as human beings? We make up stories about these events, we hold these stories to be the truth, and we forget that we made them up. Now, when I say "story", I don't mean fib, or fabrication, it is not a purposeful manipulation, it is not a self-deception. It is an interpretation. An explanation. A crucial distinction for us to possess is event is not equal explanation. Event is not equal explanation!

For example: your child comes home from school, looks up at you straight in the eye, and says, "I'm stupid." "What are you talking about?" "I'm stupid." "What are you talking about?" "I got an F on my English test." In this little example, what is the event? The F on the test. What is the explanation? "I'm stupid." Question: if that kid lives in that conversation long enough, is that a descriptive thing or a creative thing? That is definitely a creative thing. And let us back up from the F on the test and think more broadly. Is it the events of your life or your explanations about those events that are more influential as to the actual actions you end up taking in the world? It is the explanations. Out of any given event, how many possible explanations are there? Infinite. What if we can break a habit? What if we can break the habit of labeling explanations right or wrong and instead call them powerful or unpowerful. It would look like this: Is your explanation powerful or unpowerful, given the results you say you want? Does my explanation serve me or not serve me, given what I say I want to be, do, or have in this situation, in this relationship? Always with the tagline "given the results we say we want" never in a vacuum.

We live in language like a fish lives in water. A fish is born in water, lives in water; water, water, water. Question: when would a fish first know, he's born in water and lives in water? When would it first know that? When you take it out. We are born in language, live in language, language all around, language everywhere. We live in language just like the fish lives in water, it is transparent to us. It is not that we do not know that we speak and listen, rather we are unaware that language is shaping the world as we see it. I want to create a space where we can begin to look at language instead of living through it, so we can be more aware of what we are up to in language and more conscious and more purposeful about how we wield this creative, generative energy we call language. We are swimming, each of us, in an ocean of stories, interpretations, explanations and beliefs, all of which live in language and a great majority

of which we have long since forgotten that we authored. Some of these stories, interpretations, explanations, and beliefs absolutely do not take us today and will not take us tomorrow where we say we want to go. But because we have forgotten that we are the author, we have also forgotten that we have the authority and the ability to change them, update them, transcend them or let them go.

I invite you to be a more powerful observer of yourself and what you are up to in language and live with ongoing awareness and acceptance of your role as the author of your life. Robinson Crusoe knew this very well. This is why he kept his calendar, read the Bible every evening and dressed for dinner. He behaved as he were in England, living in the linguistic domain of existence and constitute a part of environment in which we identity and adaptation.

Language is
action.

TO SPEAK
IS TO ACT.

I am willing to bet that by now, the above statement as new presupposition about language is getting clearer and clearer. Although happy that you are following, allow me to elaborate further.



Consider leadership management, coaching, parenting, selling, administering. What are most of the actions that you actually do there? Think very specifically. What would a camera see you doing as you are motivating, leading, directing, facilitating, coordinating, supporting, enabling, nurturing, teaching, building...all the things that we say we do. As Rafael Echeverria said, may of us get paid to have effective conversations. And as a coach, your goal is to help you coachee meet his goals and the way you do that is to help him lead powerful, quality conversations with himself and the people around him.

If I make a request, and you say yes, we have ourselves a promise. If I make an offer, and you say yes, same thing. We have just out in motion events and actions that would not have been put in place had we not spoken, had we not make that agreement. Language conveys not only information, but commitment. And commitments, promises, agreements: these are fundamental ways we achieve coordination with others, that we accomplish anything collectively. Because, we human beings, are social beings. That does not mean we socialize easily, that means we exist in relation to each other. That

is one of the reason you feel awkward brainstorming out loud by yourself, but perfectly comfortable to do it to/with somebody else, even though that somebody else is silent.

To speak is to act. Language is far more than a way of communication, far more than a way of describing how things are. The Speech Acts developed by John Austin and elaborated further by his student John Searle is a proof of that. We will be dealing with them in more detail in a separate chapter.

A powerful way of looking at language, introduced by Fernando Flores is that for human beings, language has to do with **Coordination of Action**. And the way we coordinate action is language. Some animals for example, obviously coordinate action with themselves. Ducks agree to fly in a certain formation and they have a duck fly along the ones who get too tired and are falling behind. Wolves travel and hunt in a specific formation. As far science can tell us, ants are not gathering the night behind and discussing who gets the head of the beetle and who gets the tail, or when the exploration party should meet to

begin searching for other dead insects, or how many ants need to go and so on. Ants coordinate action through their biology. In other words, ants do not plan to carry the beetle, they just carry the beetle. Human beings can plan to carry the beetle. In fact, we can coordinate the coordination of action. And this is the action of language. This is language!

What we call action is tightly connected to language and to making/managing commitments. What we call action is directly related to specific Speech Acts which enable us to do things with others. Language is how we coordinate the coordination of action. We can not only meet in the library to do a joint project, we can schedule it, commit to it, and plan to meet in the library tomorrow afternoon for this purpose. This commitment, in turn, frees us up to enter into other commitments with other people. Without this capacity for purposeful coordination of action, we would only be able to accomplish whatever we could singly accomplish. We would obviously be much more limited in our possibilities and capabilities.



To complicate things a bit more, the recursive nature of language allows us to engage in reflective action. We can turn language on itself and get another layer of interpretation, we can put it in a metaposition. By this I mean, that with our language, we can talk about talking. We can think about thinking. And the results of this reflective action often lead to new public conversations, new private conversations, new commitments, new coordination of action, new results.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was interested in what he called “everyday language”, the practical use of it. He noticed that “words are deeds” and that language was the

instrument for getting things done. If I ask you to open a window, you will probably do so. Language is not just a way of saying something, it is also a means of doing something, things happen because of language. Building on Wittgenstein’s ideas, the British philosopher John Austin, went further on and invented the term “performative utterance” to describe language as an activity. By this he meant within the act of speaking, a speaker is performing specific acts: promises, offers, requests, etc. John Searle, his student, developed Austin’s work by adding the importance of context around it and outlined a set of speech acts. We will be covering all the Speech Acts in detail in the appropriate chapter.

Now that we have all the facts laid out, we can start contemplating for ourselves. An NLP (neurolinguistic programming) presupposition comes to mind “The meaning of communication is the answer you get” and Searle explains what that means, long before it was coined: “The performance of the speech act does not yet constitute a

communicative event; rather, it is constituted by the performance of the act plus interpretation by the hearer...What counts in the realm of human communication is not the acts as they were intended by the speakers, but the consequences they have; that is how they are interpreted and subsequently responded to by other participants.”



Listening

We speak from our listening. Part of living in language is to be continually in conversation with ourselves. When we speak aloud, we do so from the silent conversation, from what and how we are speaking to ourselves. This is our listening. What makes listening a linguistic phenomenon is that it is the process by which we language/speak with ourselves. Our private conversations are powerful shapers of how we observe, what we listen to and how available we are to what others are saying.

Listening consists of the continual silent conversations we have with ourselves, which contain interpretations we make about ourselves, others and life's circumstances.

BASIC PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT LISTENING

- ∴ Listening = hearing + interpretation/mmm
- ∴ We listen from the past/ listening is prejudiced
- ∴ Discovering the legitimacy of the Other



Listening = hearing + interpretation

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger commented that we collapse hearing and listening together in our experience. He claimed that we think what we first hear is the fire crackling, the car passing by, the washing machine doing its job. Hearing is an auditory phenomenon in which sound waves impact on our auditory system. It is the noises and sounds that first register with our nervous system, and we impose meaning on these, that we habitually call hearing. However, listening is a linguistic phenomenon in which we generate meaning through language.

Our listening is contained in the silent ways we speak to ourselves, as well as the feelings and physiological responses that go with our silent speaking. Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, concludes that listening is interpretation. Heidegger also equated listening to translation.

The meaning of the world does not exist independently from how it is observed. Meaning exists within the Observer. Our meaning shapes how we observe event and circumstances. We can think of

ourselves as walking sets of interpretations and what happens in the world triggers one or more of our interpretations, defining reality of that situation for us. We project our meaning onto the world.

Our listening is more than indicative of our WOB and the nature and quality of our existence. Developing the capability to listen to our own listening and to intervene and shift our listening is a central aspect of ontological learning.



If we live in interpretations and these repeatedly inform us how to observe and respond to circumstances does it mean we are stuck in these interpretations? Listening forms stories. Stories form concerns. Belief system lecture???

Here we can turn to one of the main ideas in Heidegger's philosophy. In

his investigation in the nature of human existence, he coined the expression "being-in-the-world" and considered that the essence of our being "reveals itself as care". There are phenomena in the world which we care about (values, objects, routines) and the things we care about constitute the world for us. What we care about is at the heart of our linguistic and emotional structure. To be human is to live in concerns and to be continually taking action to address what is most important for us.

How do we form our interpretations? When we listen we are immersed in stories (of ourselves, of others and of the world in general). Our stories contain information of who we are, how we should be, what we are capable of and what is possible for us. Our stories also inform us about how others are as well as how they and the world should and could be. "We can think of stories as our linguistic tapestry, in which are woven our preferences, our prejudices, our standards, our assumptions, our concerns, and our hopes and desires.

We listen from the past, listening is prejudiced

For Wittgenstein a meaning of the word was not the dictionary definition, it was the use to which it was put in the everyday life. Meaning is context specific. Words have meaning only in contexts in which they occur and a context can range from family to nation. We may share the same meaning of some words because of our contextual background, but we also may have learned the meaning of a word in completely different contexts. The speaking of the word triggers off our meaning and we consider that to be

the meaning of the word. In fact, all it does is just bring our interpretations of it into the foreground. This means we always listen from a historical background or to put it bluntly: we listen from our past. The historical nature of our listening means that the possible interactions we will have in our interactions with the world are determined by our history of “meaning making”. Our listening is⁵⁵ biased.

Discovering the legitimacy of the Other

When we are living in an interpretation about the motivation of others, what is at the core of their care, we may well close down possibilities for how the relationship could be expanded. A different perspective we can bring to our relationships to listen for what may be the concerns of others. In other words, to listen not only for what we think they might be trying to accomplish but to listen at a deeper level for what it is that really matters to them. If we are in the mode of “What concerns do I think this person is wanting to take care of?” and create the possibility to free

ourselves from the prison of our prejudices and untested assumptions. This is how we hold others as “Legitimate others”.



“How am I open in my listening?”. Openness is not about not having a position or deciding what our position is and how much we will budge. It is about considering the possibilities from other positions and learning from these. Openness requires us to temporarily “leave ourself” and go to the position of the other and gain an understanding of their perspective. Rafael Echeverria entitled openness as “the fundamental posture of listening”. He claims that his openness “is based on our capacity to accept that others are different from ourselves”. When someone says they are not being listened to, they are also saying “I don’t feel accepted as a

person who can make a valid and worthwhile contribution”. Listening is at the heart of the issue of mutual respect and mutual legitimacy. When we hold the person as a “legitimate other” that means we are listening to what that person has to show us. One of the traps we can readily fall into, that closes down our listening, is to readily label people and then listen for what we assume are their intentions.

Second order learning is a means to generate openness and listening to people as legitimate others. By observing how we are observing we can tune into our listening and how we may de-legitimise others.

This process can be facilitated by three questions:

1. How am I listening: what interpretations am I running?
2. How come I’m listening in this way? What’s at stake for me here?
3. What’s at stake for them? What are their concerns?

Heidegger wrote: “It might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of only hearing what we understand”. When we are so attached to our own assumptions and assessments, we do an excellent job in limiting what we can learn from others. We close off the possibility that someone else could have something to say and contribute to our learning. Our statement behind is then “I have the monopoly on wisdom in this situation and you cannot offer me anything that is more wise than my ideas”. Stating I don’t know is a prerequisite

for learning. We can only grow and develop once we have learned to live in relation to other.



As a coach we access levels of ontological listening:

1. The coach as a listener to the coachee’s stories and concerns, as well as how he is using language, what their predominant moods are and how these are embodied.
2. The coach is a listener to his own listening about the coachee’s listening. The coach monitors his own interpretations about what the coachee is saying. This is vital for the coach’s listening will inform the questions asked and the direction of the conversation.

Some important background questions

- ∴ What's going on with me?
- ∴ How am I listening right now?
- ∴ What am I listening to?
- ∴ Where am I listening to?
- ∴ How might my prejudices be interfering with my listening?
- ∴ How do these interpretations impact on my emotions?
- ∴ How could I shift my body to listen differently?
- ∴ Am I holding the coachee as legitimate other?

for the coach.

FIVE LEVELS OF LISTENING

When a coach is truly attentive to a client, they listen intently. They do so not just with their ears, but with their eyes and their intuition. Of course, being in that state of high attentiveness continuously isn't easy – internal and external distractions constantly interrupt our total attention and cause us to drift away from truly listening. To some extent, however, these distractions are what enable us to concentrate on the client – if we are aware of them, they are a recurring reminder of where our attention should be. A useful analogy is the way our eyes work. It used to be assumed that when we concentrated on an object, our eyes were still – but the opposite is actually the case. While focusing on an object involves stopping large eye movements, the eye is constantly making microscopic movements, called microsaccades, which refresh the

messages to the brain. Without this constant minor shifting and renewal, we would see nothing, as the images in our minds would fade before we had time to acknowledge them consciously. In much the same way, we the flow of sensory distractions can help us to retain our focus on the client. They provide a constant reminder to attend.



One way of improving our attentiveness is to assist this natural process of **drift and refocus** by making it more conscious. This in turn is helped if we recognise and acknowledge different types of listening as they occur.

There are at least five types of listening:

- .: To disagree
- .: To respond (which includes framing a question) or record
- .: To understand
- .: To help the client understand
- .: Without intent

Listening to disagree is the stuff of debate. This is highly selective listening – it involves identifying words, phrases and ideas that can be seized upon and used against the other person. It is often an ego-centric process, based upon the needs of the listener to be heard and valued. When a coach recognises that they are being drawn into this level of listening, the following questions to themselves can re-establish their focus:

- .: On whose behalf am I listening?
- .: What parallel process is happening for me, which I need to “park”?

Listening to respond or record seems on the surface to be very helpful. However, it diverts attention to our own thoughts, experiences and stored memories. Finding a helpful question or suggestion may seem appropriate. But what often happens is that the client's thinking progresses as they talk, making our intended intervention obsolete before it is voiced. Then the process of discarding our thoughts again diverts our attention. (Even worse, sometimes we make the error of voicing our thoughts anyway, with the result that we disrupt the client's concentration as well!)

Taking notes as the client speaks is also highly distracting. The neural circuits for attending have considerable overlap with those we use to think about writing. Moreover, breaking visual connection blinds us to physical clues about what is happening for the client. I normally recommend writing nothing more than trigger words and leaving more comprehensive note taking to natural pauses, when coach and client can agree together what they would like to record from the previous segment of their discussion.

Listening to understand takes us into the territory of the more experienced, more confident coach. The coach focuses on intent (what is the client trying to say and why?) and meaning (what overt and hidden implications are there?) Useful questions here are:

- .: What is the client trying to say?
- .: What are they trying not to say?
- .: Are my own experiences and associations helping or hindering me in interpreting what they are saying?
- .: What is the logic of what is being said?
- .: What emotions are engaged here?
- .: What meaning is emerging for me and for the client?

Listening to help the client understand goes a step further in shifting the coach's attention from themselves to the client. The coach helps the client become more aware of their own thinking processes; the meaning that they attach to words, phrases, concepts and symbols; the emotional currents colouring their perceptions and behaviours; and the interplay between all of these. Many of the questions and techniques of CLEAN Language are appropriate here, because they redirect the client's attention to their own internal processes of sense-making.

Useful questions include:

- ∴ How aware is the client of what is happening within them and around them?
- ∴ What would help them improve the quality of their thinking and feeling?
- ∴ What do I need to avoid in order not to interrupt their growing awareness?

Finally, **listening without intent** aims simply to support clients in the conversation they need or want to have with themselves, with the minimum of intervention by the coach. Even when listening to help the client understand, the coach may be mindful of processes or specific questions than can call down from a prepared toolkit. By contrast, at this level of listening the coach aims to attend totally and holistically, with the minimum of intrusion from their own experience, processes or thoughts. It isn't easy, especially when you let go even of the need to think about the next question. (Thinking about what to ask next can be a huge distraction.) Instead, the coach has confidence that, at the moment an appropriate question is needed, it will emerge of its own accord. And if, perchance, it doesn't emerge straight away, then a period of silence, while the client reflects, usually does the trick.

This level of listening has more to do with unconscious, instinctive thinking processes than conscious reasoning. In some ways, it can be compared with sleeping on a problem and finding a solution when you wake up. The neural pathways that discipline and restrict our thinking under normal conditions become less active, allowing us to think more creatively.



Once within this level of listening, there are no useful questions to ask of oneself – doing so immediately breaks the spell! But there are useful questions that help to take us into listening without intent and these include:

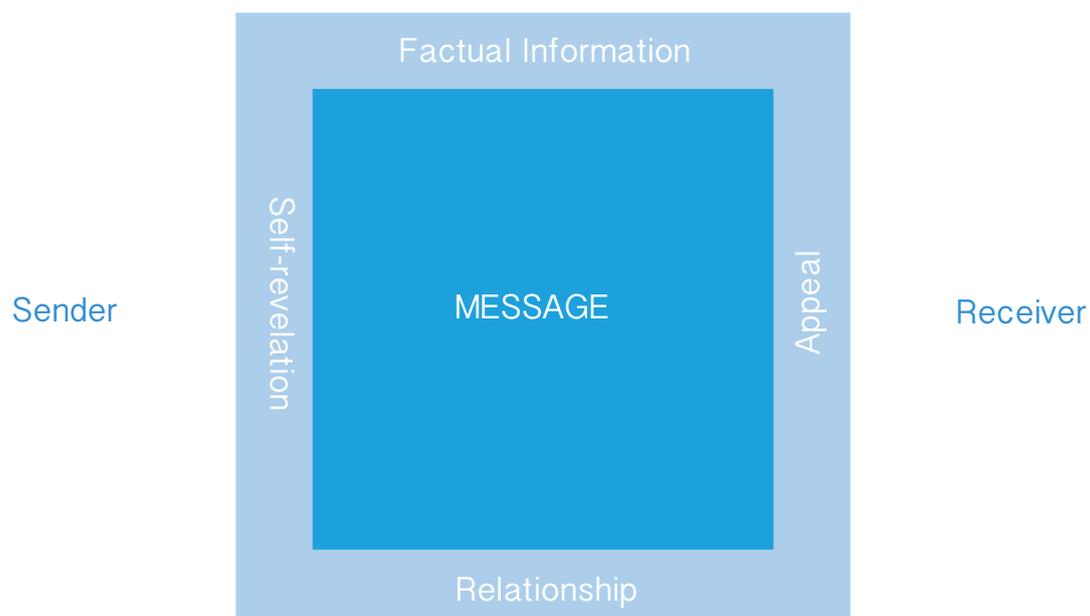
- .: What will help me achieve mental stillness without turning to my own thoughts?
- .: Am I attending with all my senses?
- .: Can I help just by being here?

When I have explored the levels of listening with highly experienced coaches and mentors, they typically admit to finding themselves in each of the five levels of listening at times. Their “centre of gravity” tends to be in listening to help the client understand, but they spend time in each session both above and below this level. There is some suggestion, too, that having shifts between these three levels is important in the client’s sense of being listened to, though it’s unclear precisely how this works. It may be that, in order to listen fully to their clients, coaches also need periodically to listen to themselves.



THE FOUR EARS MODEL

The four-sides-model (also known as communication square or four-ears model) is a communication model by Friedman Schulz von Thun. According to this model, every message has four facets though not the same emphasis might be put on each. The four sides of the message are fact, self-revealing, relationship, and appeal. The communication square describes the multi-layered structure of human utterance. It combines the postulate of Paul Watzlawick, that every communication has a content and a relationship aspect, with the three sides of the Organon model by Karl Bühler, that every information contains something about the matter, the sender and the receiver. Such models are familiar in linguistics as models of the speech act.



THE MATTER LAYER

On the matter layer the sender of the news gives data fact and statements. It is the task of the sender to send this information clearly and understandably. The receiver proves with the Matter ear whether the matter message fulfils the criteria of truth (true/untrue) or relevance (relevant/irrelevant) and the completeness (satisfying/ something has to be added). In a long-term team the matter layer is clear and needs only a few words.

THE SELF-REVEALING

In every news there is information about the sender. On the layer of the self-revealing or self-disclosure the sender reveals himself. This message consists of conscious intended self-expression as well as unintended self-revealing which is not conscious to the sender (see also Johari window). Thus every news becomes information about the personality of the sender. The self-revealing ear of the receiver perceives which information about the sender are hidden in the message.

THE RELATIONSHIP LAYER

What I think about you (You-Statement) and how we get along (We-Statement):

The relationship layer expresses how the sender gets along with the receiver and what he thinks about him. Depending on how he talks to him (way of formulation, body language, intonation ...) he expresses esteem respect, friendliness, disinterest contempt or something else.

Depending which message the receiver hears with relationship ear he feels either depressed accepted or patronized. A good communication is distinguished by communication from mutual appreciation."

THE APPEAL

Who states something will also affect something. This appeal-message should make the receiver do something or leave something undone. The attempt to influence someone can be less or more open (advice) or hidden (manipulation).

On the Appeal ear the receiver asks himself: 'What should I do think or feel now?'

Citation: 'Mothers are very appeal-influenced by children.'

Mum! The shoes

.... Yes! I'll be right there to put them on for you.

EXAMPLE

Two people are eating a home cooked meal together.

The one who didn't cook says: 'There is something green in the soup.'

Sender

Matter layer: There is something green.

Self-revealing layer: I don't know what it is.

Relationship layer: You should know what it is

Appeal layer: Tell me what it is.



Receiver

Matter layer: There is something green.

Self-revealing layer: You do not know what the green item is and that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Relationship layer: You think my cooking is questionable

Appeal layer: I should only cook what you know in the future

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