

Somatic coaching

Eunice Aquilina and Richard Strozzi-Heckler

Introduction

Somatic coaching is a change process that works by transforming a person's embodied shape, deepening their awareness of their habitual patterns and narratives and supporting them to move towards who they wish to become in their life and in their work. It posits that a person's way of being, that is, who they are, is the ground of the coaching and that sustainable change occurs when the "being" (rather than the "doing") of the person is addressed.

Somatic coaching privileges the body as a fundamental source of change, learning and transformation. The somatic coach sees the body, the human form, as the unified space in which we act, perceive, think, feel, sense and express emotions and mood. It holds that the body and who you are as a person, the self, are inextricably linked, and by working through the body we can directly work with the self. In this interpretation the body is the energetic space where we build trust and intimacy, produce meaningful work, create family and community, bring forth a world in language and live our spiritual aspirations.

The fundamental work of the somatic coach is to guide the person to feel and be with this animating force that makes them alive. Tuning into the innate intelligence of the body as a source of wisdom and depth.

Somatic coaching is a process of working with, on and through the body so an individual or team can be self-generating, self-educating and self-healing. This creates a leadership presence that is grounded in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

Development of somatic coaching

In the late sixties, when George Leonard, an educator who wrote extensively about education, coined the term the "Human Potential Movement" (1972), self-development took a new turn. Psychology was revived by a new humanism, placing the person at the centre of the therapeutic process instead of their symptoms. Many of these early thinkers and practitioners (Maslow 1954; Perls 1951\1994; Rogers 1961) were influenced by bio-cybernetics (the study of an entire living organism) and bodywork as well as Eastern meditation practices. Terms such as "holistic health" came into being.

In 1970, co-author Richard Strozzi-Heckler pioneered the integration of meditation, bodywork and movement practices and a body-oriented psychotherapy based in gestalt therapy. Having become disillusioned with standard psychological practices, he saw his clients' symptoms eclipsed by a vision