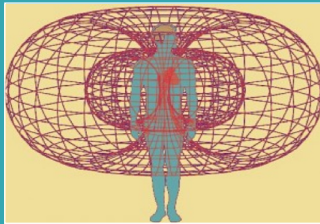




**Understanding what we mean by  
'WHO you are is HOW you COACH, SUPERVISE or WORK'**

**EDNA MURDOCH & ELAINE PATTERSON**

## Abstract



Coaching supervision enables coaches and people professionals to creatively reflect on WHO and HOW they are being in each moment and to become intelligent about the potential impact of 'self' in every coaching, chemistry, contracting, business or leadership conversation which they hold.

As coaches and people professionals, we need to be fully present and engaged AND yet spacious and witnessing - giving attention to what is in front of us (coachee, group or commissioning client), to what is between us (the energy and relationship between) and to what is going on inside our own systems as we work (reflecting in action and attending to our own internal supervisor).

But sometimes the pressures of time, an entangled system or a tightly focused contract, takes even the best executive coach or people professional away from these very influential aspects of our work. We need to listen to the wisdom of Eckhart Tolle who says:

*“words are secondary... far more important is the space of conscious presence that arises as you listen. That space is a unifying field of awareness in which you meet the other person without the separate barriers created by conceptual thinking”.*

## Introduction

*“WHO you are is HOW you coach”* or supervise or work, is the Coaching Supervision Academy’s defining mantra.

This is grounded in over 15 years practice, observation and research which has consistently demonstrated that the skillful use of self-as-instrument is the key determining factor in successful outcomes for the client. O’Brien CEO Of Hanover (cited in Scharmer 2012) reflected:

*“The success of any intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener”.*

But what does this apparently simple but very profound phrase actually mean? This paper seeks to unpack its multiple layers of meaning for its practical application to practice.

## Understanding self-as-instrument and why ‘WHO you are’ is ‘HOW you work’

‘WHO we are’ and ‘HOW’ we use ourselves in our work is a conscious choice. It is created through the dynamic interplay of all that has formed us - the person who is also the coach (i.e. our own narratives about WHO we are and WHO we are becoming) AND how we chose to show up, be present and be in relationship with another moment by moment as we work (i.e. our relational presence in HOW we work). As Gardner (2006) observed:

*“Our state of being is the only real source of our ability to influence the world”*

The essence of ‘WHO we are’ may be understood as the practitioner’s own story and background narrative; the formation of the self who comes to the work who is also constantly developing, evolving, and moving. This is the foundation which has formed us and which continues to form us as we grow, evolve and develop. It is the ground on which we stand and is the unique integration and ongoing conversation which takes place between our

nature, nurture, our internal and external worlds, our values and purpose, our learning, our knowledge, our gifts, our talents, our vulnerabilities, our scripts, our experiences, our trainings, our stories and our potential. This is also true for the client as they come to the session.

When we meet, our business and professional conversations are explicit; WHO we are is often implicit, but it none-the-less has great impact on the outcomes of our conversations. In part, the work of supervision is to makes this impact conscious, thus giving the practitioner access to working intelligently with this key influencer – because ‘WHO you’ are, is ‘HOW you work’.

The essence of ‘HOW we work’ is how we bring both all of who ‘WHO we are’ as well as ‘HOW we are BEING’ to the current conversation, moment by moment. This is how our presence, our energy and our spaciousness is communicated and experienced by clients moment by moment in sessions.

The core intent of supervision is to ensure the skillful use of self-as-instrument in service of the other's learning. For the practitioner, the work is holding a safe space for inquiry and curiosity where insight and learning can flourish. For the client, the work is having the freedom to explore, discover and create new thinking and approaches to their enquiries.

Neuroscience's research on neuroplasticity and on heart and body brain is showing how we can learn, unlearn and relearn the subtle nuanced skills to work skillfully and ethically in the dynamic energy field of relationship.

## Understanding OUR NARRATIVES

### “WHO are YOU?” The Ground on which we stand

Each person is unique. Each person is born with their own unique essence with their own unique gifts (Parker, 2004), a unique place and purpose in the universe and with their own Soul's Code (Hillman, 1996). But our essence can become distant and silent to us as we grow up and become socialized into family, education, community and work – as we learn to co-operate and contribute, it can also mean an unconscious absorption of scripts, mores, behavior, triggers, identities, masks and mind sets.



These can - without intelligent commitment and vigilance - dilute or compromise our essence. Our essence can become muted or drowned out by others' voices so that it becomes hard to hear our own inner guide

about what feels authentic, true and vital to ourselves. Without this, our capacity in professional and business relationships, is much reduced. This is because, as Critchley observed:

*“Change happens in the crucible of relationship”*

Unpacking our ESSENCE from our SCRIPTS is a life's work, and is critical for us and our clients as we seek to live the deeper patterns and purpose of our lives – the 'golden thread'.

This is a work of formation not formulation; through deep reflection we engage in a process of evolution and transformation as we come home to ourselves, and our lives' deeper purpose.

Through formation, we become mature practitioners, master coaches, powerful leaders. The ways in which we can do this are fortunately numerous. They include for example, reflective practices, journal writing, working with a supervisor or thinking partner, therapy - as well as accessing the huge wealth of approaches to human development that are widely available.

This formation takes time, investment and patience – a deeper level thinking, a subtle sensing and an intuitive knowing of what the next stage of development is and what is needed to support that.

Questions to help explore **ESSENCE** are:

- What do I love and love to do?
- What are my deepest hopes, dreams and aspirations?
- What is my authentic self that brings magic to professional relationships?
- What do I most naturally connect to?
- When and where do I feel free and in flow?
- When and where do I feel truly myself?
- What are my greatest gifts?
- How do I access 'original mind' that brings clarity in business conversations?
- What is my greatest contribution(s)?
- Who am I as my best Self?
- How does 'who I am' enable others to be 'who they are'?
- When or how do I feel most alive?
- When do I experience ease, peace and grace?

Questions to explore our **SCRIPTS** are:

- What makes me fearful and afraid?
- What are my triggers in professional dialogues?
- What behaviors, assumptions or mindsets are no longer true or no longer serve me now?
- What is holding me back from achieving my highest potential?
- What decisions/changes do I need to make that will enliven my professional conversations?
- What masks and false identities may I be assuming?
- When do I feel unreal and inauthentic in conversation with others?
- How can I be true?

As David Whyte writes:

*'Work among all of its abstracts, is actually intimacy,  
the place where the self meets the world.'*



## Understanding RELATIONAL PRESENCE

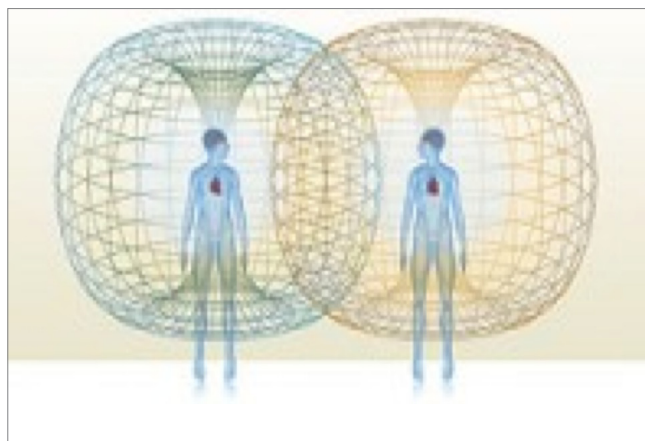
### “HOW you coach, supervise and work”

Whilst we all bring our own signatures to the work we must also free ourselves to be fully present.

Relational presence reflects the quality of our being when we are with another; it requires wholehearted acceptance, intelligence, attention, wisdom, courage, compassion and skill in using self-as-instrument in service of another. As Jung wrote:

*“Learn your theories and techniques as well as you can, and then be prepared to set them aside when you meet the miracle of the living soul in front of you”*

This means that the relational presence - how the practitioner greets and hosts each session - will help determine the quality of learning possible for the client. This requires the self-awareness and skill to adjust and recalibrate in the moment; a skill which is developed by refining a subtle heart / mind / body resonance and connection with the wider systemic field in which we are working.



Relational presence is always work in progress but is made up of five broad practices, which blend, combine and fuse in the alchemy of the session. These create the possibility of deep exploration, reflection, challenge and change.

These 5 core practices are:

**Curiosity**  
**Mindfulness**  
**Somatic Intelligence**  
**Sensing**  
**Appreciative Inquiry**



## Practice 1

***Stance created from the core qualities of curiosity, open mindedness, acceptance and wholeheartedness.***

These are foundational. These qualities create the invitation to the work. They energetically suffuse the learning relationship in order to create safety and trust for the client to work with their gifts. They also encourage clients to engage their learning edges, embarrassments, anxieties and vulnerabilities, in order to see possibility and potential, rather than guilt or shame.

These qualities require the practitioner to develop our own robust reflective and mindfulness practices to bring the best of ourselves to their work. This ensures that our own narratives do not interfere with or compromise the work. It also helps us to recognize our own triggers, overload or compassion fatigue; these can interfere with resourcefulness and availability in professional and business dialogue.

## Practice 2

***Working mindfully and with mindful awareness***

This is how we work with a grounded centredness and mindful awareness; it attunes the practitioner to heightened awareness of the energy, which is in the client's system and in the wider field. It develops a way of being which can be cultivated through a huge variety of mindfulness and meditation practices to provide the groundwork that refines sensitivity to relational functioning in work-based conversations. It is particularly useful when either the practitioner and / or their client are moving out of connection with each other, for whatever reason.

Both parties can energetically sense moving out of presence; a lack of presence breaks connection which can then interfere with or contaminate thinking, perception and decision-making. Maintaining or regaining presence when under pressure is a finely tuned skill. Inspiration and support comes from the contemplative, meditation, yoga, tai chi, martial arts and creative traditions; these foster the potent skill of mindful awareness.

## Practice 3

***Accessing and working with somatic intelligence***

Western culture has tended to celebrate cognitive intelligence over our other multiple intelligences, so that these other human intelligences have been at risk of being de valued or undervalued. However, the human body is made up of many, various and complementary intelligences which have become underemployed.

The intelligences of mind, hearts, bodies and senses all need to be brought into play in professional and business life. These enable us to observe and connect more truly and to make adjustments in how we talk with others. Using all of our intelligences, means that conversations at work are likely to be much more insightful, clear and economical.

## Practice 4

### ***Sensing: working with emergence and not knowing***

The pressure to fix, to know, and to be the expert can override the value of allowing ourselves to just be with another as they explore their question.

Resisting this pressure requires highly-developed, almost counter-intuitive skills to resist jumping in, fixing, strategizing and rescuing. It requires that we become comfortable with not knowing. This is, as per Scharmer's Theory U, the true letting go of beliefs, assumptions and mindsets in order to reach a place of profound reflective inquiry. Here, it is possible for different perspectives, potentials and possibilities to emerge. This invests in and trusts reflective learning technologies in order to facilitate transformational change. Where patience does not occur, we can end up with transactional tinkering.

## Practice 5

### ***Appreciative Inquiry and Generative Dialogue***

Inquiry from a stance of appreciation, generosity and curiosity creates a learning environment; this in turn, fully engages in the love of learning, exploration, adventure and discovery. Appreciation creates an environment which is freed from the censor, the cynic and the judge; so that professionals can more easily get clarity and wisdom and take these back into their worlds of work. Generative Dialogue is a specialized form of dialogue, which allows for playfulness and co-creation in the moment; practices 1-4 create perfect conditions for Generative Dialogue. This is the practitioner as host, skillfully holding open and facilitating the space for curiosity. Here, is the potential for alchemy, delight and surprise. There is a strong body of literature on both Appreciative Inquiry and Generative Dialogue to draw upon.

## SUMMARY

**The Coaching Supervision Academy sees 'WHO' you are is 'HOW' you is coach/ supervise/work' as foundational for excellent working practice.**

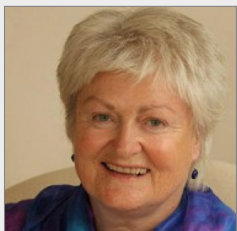
**This statement connects the disciplines of inner transformation with our actual impact and contribution in the world. We have found that this link is often missed where the focus is either the inner work of personal development or the change in the external world but where the two are not married back to source. When these are connected in practice, practitioners can reliably achieve authentic, sustainable transformation and can:**

***"be the change we want to see in the world".***



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