

- MASTERFUL SYSTEMIC COACHING POSTURE AND TOOLS

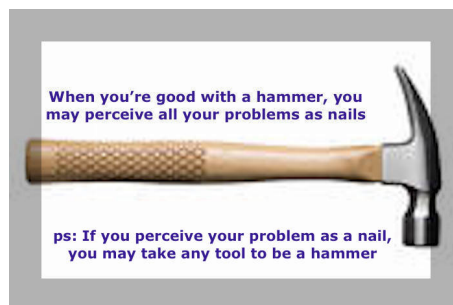
Systemic Life Coaching and Systemic Executive Coaching with Attentive Presence and Resonance

Caution: This text is an abridged English version of a book that was published in France in 2011, with an expanded Romanian version published in Bucharest April 2012. The complete and updated English text is available on [KINDLE](#).

What? Another text on systemic coaching? What can be the real added value of one more article on the subject (and what's more a long one) ? There are already numerous easily available volumes and articles about the profession on the net and in print. The subject can well be considered extensively covered, if not suffering from a blatant case of media over exposure.

Of course, this is quite true about general definition of coaching, the inventory of its specific tools, and the extensive descriptions of habitual coaching strategies used in different personal and professional contexts such as executive or life coaching. A number of important dimensions of the field, however, still remain relatively mysterious, even for confirmed executive and life coaches. This is particularly true if one considers what really defines true systemic coaching mastery.

To be sure, beyond the texts on the art and science of executive and life coaching, beyond the numerous writings on techniques and exposés on the specific dialogue process that defines coaching, there are still very few articles and books on the art of how to be a true systemic master executive and life coach. Indeed, not much precision is readily available on the specific posture or way of being of systemic master coaches and very little is said about their powerfully minimalist attitude when they seem to do almost nothing but just be there, to successfully accompany clients towards their different forms of success.



Yes, the history of the development of executive and life coaching is well researched. Yes, the different schools of thought and traditions are somewhat being inventoried, in order to keep track of the complexity gradually influencing the field. Yes, cultural differences between national traditions and style differences between individual preferences can be reasonably well pinpointed. But how many of us really understand systemic coaching's more mysterious folds and the magical dimension of its deep transformational processes? How many know how executive and life systemic coaching can naturally meander into the profound and essential nature of a successful personal or professional quest, to the outer limits of our existential or spiritual nature?

This text proposes to explore beyond the basic definitions of executive and life coaching as they are usually presented, beyond a practical presentation of its originality and effectiveness, and beyond the range of its widely known tools. In the art of accompanying individuals and teams truly focused on achieving ambitious goals, this text offers an in-depth reflection on some essential questions concerning the fundamental posture of systemic masterful coaching:

- How can we precisely define executive, individual, team and organizational coaching mastery, the one that rests on simple presence with deep attention without any precise intention on the nature of client results?
- How can we define with precision the paradoxical and fundamentally minimalist systemic master coach skill set that permits huge measurable breakthroughs in client transformation and results?
- How does masterful executive coaching and life coaching attentive presence clearly participate in creating coach-client systemic resonance, and how does that resonance facilitate the surfacing of new emerging forms and solutions?
- How can we define, expect and routinely provoke the surprises, accelerations, breakthroughs, and other perspective landslides that emerge in the course of a systemic masterful coaching process?

For both clients and executive or life master coaches, alchemical sequences routinely precipitate personal mutations and provoke deep and seemingly unpredictable transformations. These commonly surface as if by accident. During large group sessions that include over fifty people and during more personal and intimate one-on-one executive and life coaching meetings, masterful magical instants are legion to the point of being an integral part of a very precise emerging process. Paradoxically, however, these results rest on something other than the coaching skill set routinely mentioned in texts describing the profession.

Note indeed that executive and life coaching is commonly defined as an accompanying process that provides ample room for emerging solutions. This definition can be taken lightly, simply signifying that the profession offers spaces and volumes for unexpected surprises, that an executive or life coach should be ready to welcome the unexpected. That would be excessively underestimating the systemic importance of a key element in the art of masterful coaching. New patterns and profoundly original solutions emerge or surface in masterful coaching much in the same way as when new life forms routinely emerge in nature. The process is identical to the most recent artificial intelligence discoveries in modern software design and much deeper worldwide social changes provoked by the web. In fact it is conceivable that systemic masterful coaching exactly reproduces the inherent creativity that naturally emerges in all complex forms of decentralized network systems.

Indeed, to simply say that executive and life coaching makes room for emerging solutions is to state in a banal way that the very philosophical and practical foundations of systemic coaching are in total opposition to our normal western perspective. The statement very simply says that executive and life systemic coaching is in complete contradiction with a Cartesian foundation, our materialistic perspective, our linear time and centralized structures, our usual expert approaches.

- **Synthesis:** Much as within other environments, the emerging nature of systemic masterful coaching underlines that new perspectives and solutions surface from the bottom up, from the local to the global.

Emerging processes in executive and life coaching are complete opposites to those that occur in centralized structures where shapes, forms and solutions are proposed if not imposed from the top down. So very practically, what should this mean when we consider systemic masterful coaching relationships?

In keeping with many other statements concerning the profession, this seemingly simple definition of executive and life coaching merits careful reflection and an appropriate skill set to be put in to practice by all systemic professionals. Throughout this text, we will review some fundamental systemic coaching principles, those very principles that are often formulated through apparently simple definitions and then unfortunately immediately put aside.

Consequently, in order to approach the more intangible aspects of systemic masterful coaching, this text suggest that we review this original professional relationship by precisely considering it's hidden dimensions, by carefully studying the processes that escape the wills, intentions and control of the interrelating actors, by totally accepting to dive into the hollows, meanders and fathomless silences of systemic masterful coaching. This text proposes to delve into what happens when the relating executive and life coach and client wander beyond appearances, go through and beyond more superficial interactive rituals into the deepest reality of all that is being left unsaid and unexplained in systemic masterful coaching.

The first section of this text suggests we start from scratch. It suggests we question all we think we know about executive and life coaching. It invites all who want to access true systemic mastery in the field to forget everything about the doing tools and techniques commonly put forth in texts and training programs on executive and life coaching. This section shows that to truly become a systemic masterful coach, one must first very simply get liberated from the generalized obsession focused on learning behavioral tools and skills and acquiring effective techniques and strategies. Consequently, if the executive and life coaching process is often described by listing its precise and useful tools to actively accompany clients while these focus on achieving their goals, the first section of this text will suggest that all these apparently useful methods be firmly put away.

Indeed, when beginning and established executive and life coaches focus on well-publicized superficially effective tools, they may very well never become masterful systemic professionals. They may very well forget that truly original solutions and surprisingly new perspectives emerge primarily out of the quality of the relationship with their clients, if not more essentially out of the relationship clients create with themselves, the executive and life coach simply acting as a transparent and humble witness.

- **Synthesis:** Paradoxically and step by step, the first section of this text proposes to drop the habitual focus on tools and techniques in order to access the power of empty space, the transparency of vacuums, the essence of void.

Consequently, if we are considering systemic mastery in executive, individual, team or organizational coaching, this text suggests that all proven coaching methods and all effective coaching strategies must first voluntarily be put aside.

One must let go of all reassuring ramps and crutches. We need to totally loose control and develop a truly minimalist approach. Only then will masterful systemic coaches and their accompanied clients be able to welcome the mysterious, to let underlying forms emerge and reveal new perspectives within a new form of all-encompassing reality. Only in this way can systemic coaches begin to serve another dimension of reality that naturally eliminates or bypasses over-structured logic, prefabricated mental forms, tried and tested habits. Only then can the true depth and power of the art of masterful systemic coaching begin to become manifest.

Consequently, the first section of this text is centered on the many facets of the one essential executive and life coaching technique, the one main skill for master coaches: listening. But beware, that is not the habitual type of listening common to all professional humanist approaches. This is the art of listening that is specific to a masterful systemic coaching posture, which can take years and years to truly understand and develop.

The second section of this text will make explicit the essential quality of systemic master coaching presence and being that is indispensable when creating a systemic coaching context. A systemic approach is indeed the conceptual frame of reference that most leaves ample space for the

apparition of truly spontaneous emerging solutions. This section presents how masterful executive and life coaching is almost naturally a resolutely systemic approach.

The objective here is to demonstrate how systemic master coaches willingly enter into an intimate form of interpersonal resonance with their clients and create the necessary conditions that will allow original emerging solutions to naturally and magically surface.

Indeed, the exceptional quality of a masterful systemic coach's presence first creates alignment with the client in order to allow the partnering pair to tune in together and harmoniously vibrate as one. In effect, systemic coaching presence thus becomes shared resonance. This resonance creates a collective context that serves as a receptacle for new forms, solutions and perspectives to literally surface and almost propel the executive and life coaching partners into new realms of conscience.

Most often, humble, simple, whole and attentive executive and life coaching presence is totally sufficient to embark willing systemic coaches and clients into this totally unexpected new dimension. True deep presence and attention allows the relationship between the coach and individual or collective client to literally become an aspiring, inspiring and inspiriting vacuum waiting to be filled with novel forms. It is often both humbling and surprising how a simple empty, free and transparent receptacle facilitates the emergence of truly new, unexpected, liberating perspectives.

In order to implement and accompany this fundamentally pure and intuitively creative executive and life coaching process, this section of the text below will precisely delve into the particularly difficult yet central coaching skill of true listening. In systemic coaching, this skill is taken farther than what is habitually experienced by other professionals. Indeed, true listening fully participates in creating the deep attentive presence without intention specific to masterful systemic coaching.

The competency of systemic presence is essential in all executive and life coaching contexts, whether it be face to face, when coaching partners, when coaching teams, or teams of interacting teams such as organizations. In fact all the different contexts within which systemic master coaches practice their art have but little influence on the necessary quality of personal presence: the systemic masterful coaching posture.

- **Synthesis:** Masterful systemic coaching is based on the single competency of attentive presence. It considers that this type of listening is an art of being. True presence can consequently be considered the single foundational skill in systemic coaching.

An undeniable evidence will be explored in the course of this text: whenever an executive or life coaching session or sequence does not rest on an open, deep, respectful, systemic and attentive presence and focused listening on the part of the coach and with the client, a number of consequences can be measured: Powerful questions lose their edge, contracts and agreements veer off track, seemingly effective action plans get bogged down, individual and team client progression becomes more laborious, solutions remain more superficial. In the absence of a fine, deep, focused attentive presence, a respecting minimalist approach, a subtle and extraordinary art of shared relationship, all other practical executive and life coaching skills invariably lose most of their potential magical power.

When, however, systemic coaches profoundly rest their presence on deep listening and true attention without particularly directing their intention in any way, reasonably competent professionals can rapidly and almost automatically achieve masterful if not magical results with their clients. Masterful ease influences the relationship and the client development process. These quickly start to flow forward with the same minimalist elegance. In short, systemic coaching is often amazingly effortless for the client and for the executive and life coach.

The third section of this text details the practical consequences of the former two: How can systemic coaches and clients practically understand, define, recognize, welcome and accompany the new perspectives that naturally emerge or surface, almost magically? What can they do when new perspectives impose themselves in their obvious and just pertinence, in their overwhelming coherency? How can systemic executive and life coaches and clients welcome the flow of essentially sustainable and ecological emerging solutions?

For systemic coaches and their individual and team clients, new organizations of reality often present themselves in the form of coincidences and synchronicities. New perspectives always carry new and enlarged meaning. When original, sustainable and fundamentally right solutions present themselves, the motivation to see them through is immediate, action plans fold out as if they participated in the natural flow of the universe and generally just enthrall all the concerned actors. This systemic executive and life coaching process often seems to unroll with fluid and esthetic ease. There appears to be an inherent beauty in client implementation, an esthetic quality in all the ensuing personal and collective actions.

The third part of this text therefore describes with as much precision as possible the key steps that follow systemic emerging or surfacing forms and solutions. This section details how action plans and other practical implementations seem to just happen, without effort, apparently surfing on partnering environmental energy, in synchrony with a conniving universe. During this follow-up, the whole transformational and self-organizing process comes to a natural conclusion. This last part of the process is the one most often referred to as the magical dimension of systemic masterful coaching.

Finally, without the fourth and final section, this text would be incomplete. It is focused on the art of coaching more complex systems, large groups, teams, networks and organizations

- **Caution:** The first mistake concerning the profession would be to believe that systemic coaching only concerns accompanying collective ensembles and not individual clients.

The first three sections of the text below will clearly demonstrate that is not the case. Individual executive and life coaching clients are integrally part of their surrounding universe and cannot be truly accompanied without taking into account the complexity and connectivity of the larger systemic context that nourishes, supports and includes them. Consequently, true individual coaching is necessarily systemic.

- **Caution:** The second illusion concerning team and organization coaching would be to believe that accompanying such collective systems is much more difficult and would need a particular type of specialized coach training, special expertise and specific tools that do not concern executive and life coaches who accompany individuals.

Granted, coaching collective ensembles is different in as much as one needs to co-manage the complexity of client group, family, network, team or organizational interfaces. But this type of executive and life coaching calls for exactly the same type of simple, transparent, intention-free, systemic attentive presence as when coaching individuals. Furthermore, anyone who has been raised in a family, that was educated in schools, that has participated in collective sports, that has belonged to associations and has a collective life experience already has a long practice of social and professional system complexity. For each systemic executive and life coach, a deep awareness of the collective dimensions of their personal past is the best way for them to open up to the complexity of the world, to the connectivity of their rapport to the universe.

Our past, present and future, our education and training, everything is systemic in our existence. Systemic reality is as common as it is discounted by linear logic and simplistic causal perspective. Consequently, developing an intimate awareness of systemic reality is an equally foundational skill to accompany individuals, teams and organizations in executive and life coaching. To coach on all these levels, nothing is needed other than an open consciousness of all that has made us become who we are.

Much as in individual coaching, there no need to amass tools, skill, techniques, theories, strategies and other accessories to accompany teams and organizations. It is just useful to be totally present and attentive to the present moment and the beautiful complexity of the interfacing ensemble within its environment, and accompany the executive and life coaching client to question known processes and explore original perspectives.

- **Synthesis:** In as much as man is a social being, a collective animal, accompanying the development of teams and organizations can be considered completely identical to coaching individuals.

A word of caution is useful concerning the text below: The concepts of attentive presence and listening are neither easy to define nor to describe in writing. Everyday words do not readily convey the subtleties of the quality of listening that is central to executive and life coaching mastery. Common language does not easily lend itself to describe the subtler and fundamentally innovating dimensions of masterful systemic coaching. As in any new field, executive and life coaching desperately needs new terminology.

In order to express the spirit of a systemic master coach's being skills, and to describe how to be essentially present and usefully transparent, the text below will sometimes offer uncommon principles, propose surprising analogies and original metaphors. To wander into new territories, it becomes indeed necessary to invent a new poetry of space. A new imagery of language is needed to describe a different form of time and an uncommon flow of energy, in order to convey what masterful executive and life coaching is all about. This search for the right words may hopefully also serve to illustrate how the indirect paths and conceptual leaps offered by language and modern science can help think, feel and act very differently.

- **Caution:** Notice, in fact, that words and concepts are most often used as noise to disturb real listening, to fill the void offered by silence, to disrupt the intimacy of true presence to oneself and with others.

Indeed, in social and professional contexts, words are too easily offered to fill in the more important blanks, hide a necessary solitude or escape from real attention to oneself, to others and to the surrounding universe. This is particularly true in groups and other collective environments such as teams and organizations where it has become extremely rare to witness a profound appreciation of the beauty and truth that can be found in the depth and warmth of shared silence.

Where language and words generally pretend to communicate and inform, they more often serve as protective noise or as shields. Too often they are used to avoid, divert, convince and impose, to protect one or others, to reassure and put to sleep. Silence however, can often be the best way to accept, to receive and to welcome. Silence makes true space for diversity. Real attentive listening and the respect of diversity come together and nest in hollows, they blossom in meandering paths. Real respectful attention without attention grows in the empty spaces and volumes created by shared silence.

Consequently, writing an article on attentive presence through deep listening as one of the particular qualities of a systemic master coach's posture is a truly paradoxical adventure. One would better be silent, provide a blank page, and let the reader expand in an open and fertile space for personal exploration within the volumes of their own reflection. That would be the one most congruent way to help the reader consider that only silence can permit the understanding of attentive presence and listening, and consequently of masterful systemic coaching. Unfortunately for many readers, blank pages generally face the writer, not their public.

- **Synthesis:** So in order to progress in the direction of learning to tame emptiness and fully partner with silence, we suggest useful homework: once this text is put aside and on a regular basis, the reader is invited to indulge in long spells of attentive silence, solitary contemplation and collective meditation.

Note that some very practical introductory texts on executive and life coaching are presented in books and on the web. Most of these articles and writings present complete, very practical sets of professional executive and life coaching tools, techniques, skills, and know-how. Again, these will not be repeated here. But note that this text can both serve as a general introduction to executive and life coaching, and as a way to delve deeper into the art of masterful systemic coaching. Indeed, it can serve as an introduction to the profession, or it can be studied to go deeper, when one has learned all the tricks of the trade.

To summarize, rather than focusing on how to do executive and life coaching, the text below presents how to truly be a systemic masterful coach. It will attempt to demonstrate that only this quality of being, resting on simple, profound attentive presence can be the main if not the sole competency conducive to the type of executive or life client and coach change of perspective systemic coaching claims to accompany. In short, rather than focused

on how to do coaching, the question approached throughout the text below is how to be a truly systemic master coach.

[To consult a training program on the fundamentals of coaching mastery](#)

I THE FOUNDATIONS OF SYSTEMIC COACHING

Systems Theory or systems analysis is a theoretical approach that has numerous obvious applications in all modern sciences. More than just a conceptual ensemble, systems analysis has become a coherent new frame of reference that can be applied to all facets both of scientific reality and of everyday life. It is even possible to affirm that if linear, logical Cartesian thinking has immensely influenced the development of sciences until the middle of the last century, it is systems thinking that is taking the lead today as a foundational perspective in the complexity of modern research in biology, physics, meteorology, medicine, psychology, economy, etc.

Of course, this pervasive influence of systems thinking is not altogether conscious. This new perspective on reality has been slowly developing over time and has been insidiously permeating modern thinking, at least in the western world. We don't learn about systems thinking in school but the twenty first century is undeniably global, sustainable, ecological, both materialist and spiritual. It has therefore become systemic, whether we like it or not. And in as much as executive and life coaching is one of the most recent professions in human sciences, it should also be considered as fundamentally, intrinsically rooted in a resolutely systemic way of thinking.

Indeed, considering that systems approach is omnipresent today, it should be obvious that it serves as a foundation to executive and life coaching, the most rapidly developing profession of the twenty-first century. As a matter of fact, simply mentioning that executive or life coaching is systemic should be a redundancy, considering that as a perspective on life and human development, coaching is naturally, intrinsically and structurally systemic.

Formally, systemic thinking is a relatively elaborated theoretical approach. It is possible to consult numerous well-documented books and articles that present its take, for example on complexity and fractal resonance, macro-economy, etc. It has numerous applications in a very wide range of very complex fields.

Paradoxically, however, the reality of systemic perspectives is much more difficult to experience in the humdrum of our everyday lives. Indeed, if systemic thinking is often applied to understand and attempt to explain very complex fields and world-wide phenomena, it is much less applied in the comprehension of minute micro-details of everyday executive and life coaching behavioral patterns, our interpersonal relationships and collective processes that regularly emerge within our teams and organizations.

- **Example:** Fractal theory stipulates that identical patterns infinitely repeat themselves, like Russian dolls, at different levels of hierarchy of a same system. This is quite observable in nature and there are numerous well publicized scientific examples of the notion.

But it is extremely difficult to constantly live with a truly systemic perspective of our everyday lives, observing coherent, repetitious patterns between personal and collective behavioral sequences over seconds, minutes, hours, months and years. A systemic perspective can be continuously used to better seize coherent patterns between almost all aspects of our personal and professional lives. In fact, accrued systemic consciousness could help us perceive and modify individual and collective patterns that are key to our growth and development.

Examples: It is regularly possible to observe:

- That couples and teams do not form by chance. Their members meet and develop within a shared systemic resonance that often escapes simple Cartesian understanding.
- That individuals unknowingly and very precisely repeat simple and complex behavioral patterns in very different contexts such as in the way they drive their cars, play their sports, manage their teams, move within a given environment, behave within their families, formulate their phrases, etc.
- That processes and results of all team meetings within a same organization can be perceived as strikingly identical, no matter who is present as participants, no matter what the subjects are in each of these meetings and no matter how the desired outcomes may be stated.
- That patterns observed over a few hours during the initial planning of any given executive or life project can provide very detailed information on the probable one-year processes and results of that same project.
- That the quality of interfaces between executive or life partners in a given relationship can give very precise indications on the interface patterns each of the partners create in other unrelated personal and professional partnerships.
- Etc.

To be sure, the undeniable fractal reality of our daily existence is proven and measurable. This type of systemic phenomena is studied and has been integrated in all modern fields that are concerned with individual, team and organization development. So for now, let us just assume that the executive and life coaching profession rests on systemic foundations. Again, the coaching profession is the most recent among all those that provide services specializing in accompanying people and collective social and professional entities. As such, in its resolutely modern existence, it could be obvious that in a fundamental way, executive and life coaching inherits most naturally of a systemic perspective.

Example:

- More than in any other individual or collective accompanying approach, systemic coaching aims to implement strategies that are totally respectful of an executive or life coaching client autonomy in order to allow the surfacing of their own dynamic and emerging forms and

solutions.

- More than in any other approach focused on people and system development, executive and life coaching rests on a philosophy and a skill set of non-intervention and non-control. Coaching lets underlying systemic self-organizing, natural capacities surface and do the job, through both individual and collective dialogues.

In order to really understand and implement the specific systemic difference executive and life coaching offers, the first step is to fully comprehend the minimalist art and science of creating a particular type of coaching space within which client self-organization becomes naturally possible. Indeed, in executive and life coaching, one must simply stop intervening, thinking, proposing, and driving solutions to let creative client patterns emerge, in their systemic coherency.

1) Listening: An underestimated coaching competency

First measure that in the professional executive and life coaching community, listening is one of the least developed coaching skills. Listening is indeed rarely the key subject in advanced theory and practice-related articles. Listening is almost never the central focus of deliveries by keynote speakers or the subject of round tables in major conferences. It could consequently seem that listening is an obvious and acquired competency in almost all professional executive and life coaching circles.

Observe indeed that articles and conferences on more complex, intellectual and apparently dynamic tools and techniques are much more commonly exposed and that these attract much more attention from the public at large. Asking smart and powerful questions, restating or reformulating client statements with precision, clarifying client agreements and expected outcomes, co-designing effective and very structured action plans, etc. all seem to be much richer, more noble and more usefully active executive and life coaching concepts. These concepts do indeed attract much more attention and are much more developed in numerous and extensive professional writings and texts.

As a matter of fact, note that in the business world in general, all complex theoretical models that are accompanied by proposals for affirmative action are much more appreciated than simple, humble, light and effective approaches. Let us not forget that in occidental cultures, simplicity is too often synonymous with stupidity. Between simple and simplistic, the boundary is surprisingly thin for many people. In executive and life coaching too, the general accent is often stressed on more obviously masculine skills such as powerful questions and very performing action plans. This may be to underline that the field is seriously professional, focused on achieving very probing and highly ambitious results.

Surely a marketing and sales imperative underlies this willfully active focus in executive and life coaching. It is difficult to sell to organizational top dogs a minimalist method that rests on respect, warm silence and deep listening. To impress a potential client, it may indeed be difficult to brag that a coach is a professional that practices the art of respectful attention without displaying undue intentions. It may not appear very serious to sustain that coaches are fundamental witnesses and listeners, kin to horse whisperers, and that they very consciously choose to leave all the available space wide open to allow for the creative unfolding of executive and life coaching client inner potential. Although profoundly true and quite precise, the argument is not convincing, to say the least.

Also, a minimalist approach based on listening does not lend itself to exclusive and complex theoretical constructs that will attract top theoreticians in the field of relationships. Silence and listening will not give presenters matter to elaborate numerous slides and impressive power-pointing shows in international conferences and conventions. So it is definitely not easy to turn attentive listening and coaching presence into a sexy selling concept. Putting forward other apparently more consistent competencies such as elaborating client agreements and triangular contracts and action plans and really-really powerful questions, and follow-up gimmicks, etc undeniably serves to better differentiate executive and life coach professional identities.

- **Synthesis:** Unfortunately, even in sales situations, this attention given to sometimes over-active executive and life coaching competencies is detrimental to simple, patient, humble and respectful systemic listening, permitted by an attentive presence that alone will allow the natural emerging of real client needs and issues.

It seems most individuals consider that listening and attentive presence is relatively easy. It simply means keeping quiet long enough to catch the essence of the subject and understand what it is all about. Listening is being silent with another person just enough time to establish the foundations of a trustful relationship. After that, the executive or life coach can move quickly on to more affirmative tools focused on action and results. In reality, listening is perceived as such an inactive competency that it is perceived as passive. To feel better about listening, we even develop the concept of active listening, soon to become hyperactive.

In fact, the larger public too often gives listening skills a rather negative connotation. To be perceived as a competent winner, one should rather know how to debate, to convince, to argue, to push and to sell. One should demonstrate that they know where they stand, that they have opinions, and that they know where they want to go. Listening is indeed too often assimilated with the fact that one doesn't know. It demonstrates lack of reassurance or excessive doubt.

Technically, listening is often defined as just not doing anything else. Consequently, when one is quiet or just remains silent, when one does not intervene nor answer, if one is not impatient and agitated, then, one is just listening. Simply assimilated to not doing something else, real listening is one of the life competencies that may be the least valued, the least studied, the least taught. Paradoxically, it may also be the skill that is most appreciated by those who like to talk, and don't know how to listen.

The result is obvious in numerous training sessions dedicated to learning how to become an executive or life coach. One can often observe that young apprentices to the profession firmly believe they naturally know how to listen. What indeed could be simpler and more inbred a skill for them, than knowing how to listen to another in order to respond intelligently? All through our different phases of life, we have all apparently been taught how to listen to our parents, to our teachers, to our bosses, to our clients, to our partners, and then to our children.

Some participants in executive and life coach training programs are so certain of their competency in the field of listening that they attempt to negotiate the possibility of skipping the few short training sequences allocated to developing that foundational skill. Generally, these beginners are very impatient to fill their pouch with numerous rich and complex techniques. They are behaving in the same way as beginning salespeople who want sales techniques, tools, methods, procedures and other skills that will give them some elements of predictability and control when they just need to learn how to listen to clients and respect them. Tools are in fact sometimes useful and can be reassuring. However this need for tools may motivate the beginning executive and life coach to integrate into their coaching toolbox numerous theoretical and technical techniques that have strictly nothing to do with the profession and that very rapidly leave all too little space for listening to the client.

- **Synthesis:** If executive and life coaching is reputed to be an open and non-directive approach that offers clients all the available space in order to allow them to develop their own autonomous searching process, it would be paradoxical to do this while asking them to respect methods, follow procedures, participate in exercises and adapt themselves to theories and other preconceptions, all brought by the coach.

For the executive and life coaching beginner in the field, nonetheless, active competencies and well argued and uselessly complex theoretical constructs are all too often seriously considered at the expense of learning how to listen. Consequently, in their impatience to learn what they believe to be the more important skills of the trade, neophytes do not take the time to develop the one most central competency of coaching: that of attentive, respecting, silent listening to clients without any intention whatsoever on the object of their quest.

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2) *Avoid established client avenues*

3) *Listening in lightness*

4) *Listening for nothing*

5) *Let go of the need to understand*

6) *Letting go*

When listening with a client, systemic coaches do not necessarily try to understand their words. Consider the following question: Why should a coach need to fully understand client descriptions and explanations?

- **Caution:** To understand means to comprehend, to seize or to apprehend, much as when the police apprehend a criminal. These words underline that wanting to understand really means to want to seize, to hold or to control.

These expressions indicate that if one were focused on having a very clear understanding of anything, this would be kin to wanting to control it. Comprehending also means to include such as when comprehensive agreements are all-inclusive. To want to understand is often the equivalent of wanting to include and to predict all possible details. It is a control issue.

Even for experimented executive and life coaches, this hurdle can become overwhelming when the subject presented by a client is intimately related to a similar experience in the coach's life. The coach can then inadvertently become empathetic if not sympathetic or emotionally involved, immediately losing necessary personal distance.

- **Caution:** Let us keep in mind that by definition in executive and life coaching, all control is to be entirely considered as the client's sole responsibility.

Indeed, clients understand their own contexts, their own issues, their own ambitions, their own history, their own objectives, their own motivations, their own fears, etc. as never any coach will ever understand. What's more the executive and life coaching relationship is much larger than the story of the client's issue. It also includes the coach, both their common environments and their separate personal and professional contexts. It is impossible for the coach to understand it all, to entirely control this all-encompassing ensemble.

- **Synthesis:** Consider that it is impossible to understand that which understands us. We cannot include nor control that of which we are a part.

Even if one of the declared objectives of modern science is to understand life, for example, this ambition is out of human reach, by definition. We are part of life. It includes or comprehends us. We are understood by life. At best, we can attempt to respectfully welcome and cherish life with the humble attentive presence it surely deserves. Consequently, rather than try to understand the mystery of life, it would be much more natural to simply abandon ourselves to its wisdom in order to better participate in its grand scheme. That attitude would be conducive to implementing true sustainable development and much deeper respect, both of humanity and of our natural environment.

The same attitude is present in our approach to time management. In this dimension too, we could consider that it is fundamentally impossible to manage time, in as much as it is time that manages us, as it well pleases.

The same holds with clients in systemic coaching relationships. Executive and life coaches are an integral part of the coaching relationship and process. Coaches and clients participate in being part of a larger context that includes them both. Consequently systemic coaches cannot attempt to control the process that includes them, the client and the client issue. At best, systemic coaches can humbly accept the common or shared accompanying process, welcome it the much larger interactive context, flow with it and trust it. But never is a coach in position to seize it nor control that larger ensemble. This posture is fundamental to systemic executive and life coaching.

Consequently in systemic coaching, it is rarely useful to want to fully comprehend the issues that belong to their clients, nor whatever gradually surfaces in the context of the executive or life coaching relationship. It is for clients to keep their bearings, decide on their direction, choose their battles, work through their issues and select their solutions. Coaches are only there to accompany clients with attentive presence unhindered by any intention. That posture presupposes letting go of their imperative to understand and nurture the feeling they're in control.

- **Caution:** Within the executive and life coaching community, the importance of this trustful attitude and posture consisting in trusting client capacities to move forward at their pace and in their direction is very often repeated in the way of a religious litany. But it is and just as often misunderstood or forgotten to the profit of the illusion of understanding and control.

The consequence to this specific humble trustful and respectful posture is difficult to achieve for most apprentice executive and life coaches. They first need to learn how to let go of their imperative need to comprehend, understand and actively manage both the client issue and the coaching situation. They must accept to forget years of training to develop listening skills focused on understanding content, to demonstrate knowledge in dimensions that are actually considered as almost peripheral for systemic masterful coaching.

Naturally, if it will be useful for the systemic coach to pay much less attention to the content of client issues, it will be just as useful to be present to all the rest. But then to what does a coach pay attention? The search for answers to this question will help master systemic executive and life coaches develop a deeper listening capacity, a fundamental type of attentive presence that includes no intention on client process or results. A fundamental form of letting go is the first necessary step.

“Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.” Rumi

7) *Learning to listen*

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The real capacity to listen as a master systemic coach represents the essential foundation on which rests the correct use of all the profession's other tools and techniques. Only profoundly respectful listening and attentive presence allows other executive and life coach competencies to unfold with their true power. Without profound attention, other tools are no more than superficial behavioral and linguistic techniques. With respectful listening, systemic coaches suddenly participate in the creation of a formidable transformational space.

When training executive and life coaches, one can almost systematically observe that this particular form of profound listening with attentive presence and without directed intention is very difficult for most to understand, almost painful for all to learn and implement.

- The first surprise for beginners is that listening without becoming simply engrossed or intellectually taken by the content of another's dialogue is an almost impossible challenge.
- Then, learning to be totally quiet, profoundly present both to the executive or life coaching process itself and to one's own senses and intuitions seems to take a few more light-years of focused training.
- Ultimately accepting to let oneself be surprised by a much larger resonant systemic consciousness that includes the coach, the client, and the whole context that brings them together will need a still deeper and more intimate level of attentive presence.

Indeed, for many, the steps to truly develop the particular deep attentive presence and listening stance characteristic of masterful executive and life coaching is almost as esoteric and inaccessible as learning how to meditate, maybe even to levitate.

In reality, learning attentive presence rests on daily, sustained, rigorous and disciplined behavioral training. Indeed, for most, this particular listening skill can only be developed with the same voluntary approach as when one decides to regularly pump iron to develop muscle or daily practice chords to learn to play piano. In the etymological sense of the word, learning to listen is a real discipline such as when learning a martial art, a musical instrument, a high-precision profession, or meditation.

Consequently, developing true listening through attentive presence is far from just learning how to pull out an occasional superficial technique. It concerns changing the way one is built or modifying the equilibrium of the way one is. Truly, acquiring attentive presence cannot be improvised. One needs practice, practice again, and then more practice.

- **Caution:** To acquire mastery in any field, one needs personal discipline. To acquire any discipline, one needs personal mastery. And obviously, when successful, this process ends by transforming the apprentice. The process of learning attentive presence is at the heart of what can take executive and life coaching to an art that is kin to an alchemical quest.

Learning how to be totally and profoundly attentive to clients and their context has very important and lasting consequences in terms of personal transformation, primarily for the systemic coach. Given that listening is the least active executive and life coaching skill, the one that least calls for thinking, talking and doing, it is naturally the one that is most revealing of a coach's most intimate way of being.

- When executive and life coaches are silent and inactive, they cannot hide behind their verb, their knowledge, their hyperactivity and their tools.
- Listening without interfering or manifesting oneself, remaining open and in silence, peacefully present to the client relationship is almost synonymous to relinquishing all control and totally baring one's soul.
- Unconditionally offering executive and life coaching clients all the space they may need to grow, receiving their expression as it is, accepting their presence as it comes forth calls for a fundamental capacity to accept if not to totally welcome diversity.
- Really listening is simply being present to another and to oneself without artifice, without restraints, without fear of the intimacy that regularly emerges from relationships that unfold in unhindered shared volumes.
- Listening is learning to trust the pertinence and coherency of what others offer, and trusting the beauty of all that is bound to emerge from client dialogue and from the much larger, mysterious, almost universal shared context.

Knowing how to listen like a master systemic coach can open numerous new doors and windows to shared environments, perceptions, and fields of experience. It can lead to very unconventional perspectives. Often, profound attentive presence and listening can give coaches and clients sudden access to spaces and dimensions that are usually reached through regular meditative practice or other types of contemplative spiritual quests.

To be sure, this is not particular to or limited either to personal or executive coaching, or life coaching, professional coaching, team or organizational coaching. For a systemic master coach, all these illusionary boundaries and categories disappear one after the other. True mastery in coaching does not presuppose segmenting client lives in neat mutually exclusive manageable parts. Master systemic coaches do not harbor a world-view by which human experience is sliced and diced in so many exclusive fields of expertise. True systemic executive and life coaching is simply focused on clients in all their personal, social, professional, collective and divine dimensions. Then can emerge a truly comprehensive conscience of the shared process.

- **Example:** A CEO of a service company asked for coaching during a difficult transition period to ensure her effectiveness in business while she also accompanied her husband who was painfully dying of terminal cancer. The coaching sessions quickly included helping the client face real challenges at home and with her children, each of them working through their personal mourning processes at very different speeds.

When any issue is approached in the course of an executive or life coaching sessions and sequences, a master coach is totally available to all the facets their clients may want and need to cover. Even apparently superficial issues can be indirect invitations to plunge in very personal and deep valleys of personal consciousness. All seemingly different client themes and issues, no matter how trite, are intricately meshed to form one large undivided area of existential concern.

Regularly, the truly listening systemic coach reaches a form of transparency to boundaries, limits and territories. In the practice of attentive presence regularly emerges a feeling of loss of self. This temporary form of personal identity dissolution occurs to the benefit of a deeper presence to the whole client context, to the executive or life coaching relationship and to a larger shared common field within which the partners seem to exist in true reciprocity or resonance. Through attentive presence truly free of all intentions, coaches can thus progressively be part of an active development process that almost totally escapes their personal control.

- **Synthesis:** Through attentive presence without intention, systemic master coaches actively participate in creating a totally inclusive and shared development environment.

By intensely listening to clients, systemic coaches can also feel they are gradually becoming transparent to themselves, that they forget or erase their personal concerns to the benefit of whatever the client needs to achieve. Both the executive or life coach and client participate in a shared context that is much larger than the partners at work. This free attention can sometimes resemble a transparency of identity, in which all the interactive space is totally left open and available to the client's undivided quest, and sometimes to more.

Evidently, in systemic coaching, profound listening and its underlying attentive presence become key competencies that supplant, facilitate and support all the other executive and life coaching skills. They are the skills that most embody the fundamental coaching philosophy. They permit:

- Clients to gradually take over all the provided space and volume, in order to expand, deploy, and soar,
- Coaches to adopt the unique letting-go attitude or posture that allows for an intimate, comprehensive perception of clients as they proceed within their total potential.

Below are presented and detailed numerous facets of attentive presence and of true listening without directive coach intentions, and of how these systemic executive and life coaching competencies permit the subsequent surfacing of new perspectives that can fundamentally transform both systemic coaches and their clients.

8) *Listening beyond the veil of words*

The art of listening is different for a systemic master coach than it is for other professionals. It subtly but very firmly rests on the fundamental frame of reference of executive and life coaching. To really understand how to listen as a master coach, one must always keep in mind that all the skills of profession stand on a number of fundamental principles that have almost existential consequences.

- First, in executive and life coaching, the client is a priori considered as a unique, intelligent, capable, powerful, honest and truly motivated being.

The sole fact that clients initiate a collaborative process with coaches to improve their personal or professional capacities, context and results is in itself an obvious proof of their motivation and commitment to take responsibility. Consequently, executive and life coaching clients are not perceived as people who need to be cured or as professionals in difficulty, as ineffective teams that need to be helped. Executive and life coaching clients are to be perceived as inspired people or systems that aspire to achieve a project and fully develop their inherent potential.

- Secondly and a priori, executive and life coaches consider their clients to be very well informed, as far as the detailed content of their issues are concerned.

They intimately know all the characteristics of their issues as no other person ever can. Each client indeed has a complete and intimate knowledge of personal projects, goals, problems, vision and ambitions in a way that no coach can ever fathom. They are undeniable experts in the knowledge of their fields. These two essential principles are foundational to any active systemic coaching process, and preempt the use of any other executive or life coaching tool or technique.

- **Synthesis:** Taking these principles into account, systemic coaches can consider that careful listening and analysis of any individual or collective client's words, focused on the detailed description of the content of their issues and concerns is of very little benefit for either the coach or the client.

In fact, executive and life coaching clients can spontaneously only relate what they already know. Consequently, the detailed and often reiterative client description of any situation of their concern can only serve to reinforce their acquired frame of reference and inventoried perspectives.

When an individual or team client calls on a coach, it is precisely because all they already know and understand has not frankly helped them achieve their goals or realize their ambitions. To be sure, their restrictive acquired frame of reference and their inventoried perspectives have generally not led clients to the positive outcome they would like to achieve. As a matter of fact, that is precisely why they have come to seek the competencies of an executive or life coach.

- **Synthesis:** For a systemic coach, what indeed could be the use of accompanying clients up the same avenues these have explored time and again to the point of calling on another party, specifically to get out of their all too familiar perspective?

Consequently, one can assume that accompanying clients on their already beaten track, listening to what they have already studied and revisited numerous times will not likely help them discover extraordinarily new solutions. Unless of course, if the experts who are accompanying these clients consider that these are not very informed on their own issue, or not intelligent enough to understand the context of their own ambitions.

To be sure, some clients may sometimes lack knowledge, competencies, strategy or information. Some clients may not have all the needed means to alone fully analyze and understand the intricate details of their issues. They may not have the technical and intellectual capacities to achieve their ambitious goals. Those clients could surely benefit from acquiring the services of a trainer, a consultant, an expert or a specialist. But surely, they would not need (only) the competencies of a executive or life coach.

- **Example:** Consider coaching situations concerning Olympic sports champions. These world-class winners often feel they need to be accompanied by coaches. If these coaches knew more about each of the specific sports, however, they should then be winning the medals in the place of the champions.

In all fields, top-level performers are generally not limited by a lack of technical knowledge in their chosen area of specialization. When they need executive and life coaches, it is to be accompanied to achieve even better results in their field, within their own capacity to perform, in their own way, by fully exploiting the very high level of expertise they have already achieved.

- **Example:** A project-leader engineer works with a coach to find ways to put a limit to constant interruptive interventions from her larger work environment. This environment is endlessly asking for complementary information, studies and analyses on all the risks that may be inherent to the project she is leading. Of course, these excessive demands are having a very negative effect on her team's capacity to meet the project's deadlines, and will significantly increase the final cost.

In the course of her work with the coach, this engineer cannot refrain from detailing and over-detailing all the information she has about the nature of her project. She continues searching where time and again she has already searched, and is turning around in circles in her endless analysis. A systemic observation of the coaching relationship reveals that in a fractal way, the client is repeating with her coach exactly what her environment has been imposing on her and on her team. The informative and analytical approach that is keeping the project from moving forward is the same as the one that is keeping the coaching process from progressing. The coach can therefore quickly feel the same disempowerment as the client.

The coaching process proceeds to first focus on how to set limits on analysis within the coaching relationship in order to model how the client could do the same within her work environment.

- **Synthesis:** Much like in the case above, in almost all systemic coaching situations, the answers to the client issue do not emerge from the content of the problem that the client is reiterating in lavish details. The process by which the client is approaching the issue in the relationship with the executive and life coach reveals much more pertinent information about the client's process limits on the one hand, and about solutions that could be conducive to solving the issues, on the other.

To look for solutions where the client is focused can often be of very little use. Clients technically know more than enough about their issues to achieve their goals to full satisfaction within the reality of their contexts. Coaches can surely accompany their clients if they stay out of the technical and relational context that the executive and life coaching clients know all too well, to the point of completely adapting to its ineffectiveness, and to the point of repeating the process in the relationship with the coach.

The same type of paradox will occur when accompanying teams and organizations. In the course of collective or system-coaching processes, organization leaders and their representatives tend to very carefully explain to coaches their issues, detailed objectives and the means to achieve them. These same leaders and representatives often also want to analyze and over-define the possible coaching process to determine a procedure that will be sure to achieve their goal.

These leaders and representatives often repeat with their coaches the exact same processes they tend to implement within their organizations. They are little accustomed to letting go to facilitate an emerging process when they would rather roll out, or roll down very controlled, efficient and well-planned action plans determinately focused on achieving their stated goals. Much as in individual systemic coaching, team and organizational coaches need to be attentive to the type of relationship that is established with them, and make ample space for unexpected or emerging solutions before the process even begins.

- **Synthesis:** Whether in individual, team or organizational coaching, much as in high level sports performance, if the head imperatively needs to direct and control everything, the results will rarely be innovative, nor will they provoke a radical change of perspective.

Consequently, it is important for both individual and team coaches not to hurry down a path that has been predetermined by client reasoning. The systemic coach needs to listen beyond the well thought-out words that serve to confirm what the system already knows all too well. In coaching, the obvious and logical initial diagnosis and objectives stated by individual and collective clients are there to reveal the limits of a restraining frame of reference. What clients are really trying to achieve generally lies outside of the way they define the shape of their problems or the form of their ambitions. Most often, to achieve their goals, clients first need to liberate themselves from the underlying constraints of how they state their issues.

- **Synthesis:** If rather than immediately proceeding down their defined tracks, organizations choose to call on a coach, it is precisely to be heard beyond their words and installed convictions, to be understood beyond their definitions and to be accompanied beyond their usual ways of perceiving, understanding and implementing.

It often seems that when a master systemic coach listens transparently with deep attentive presence, apparent differences between individual executive and life coaching, team coaching and organizational coaching in the way they state their issues and ambitions very quickly disappear.

9) *Silence in coaching*

"Silence is the language of God, all else is poor translation." Rumi

Along with the above developments on the essence of listening, it is also useful to be aware of the fundamental function of silence in the life coaching and executive coaching process. For a systemic master coach, being silent is not only choosing to keep quiet at strategic moments. The function of silence rests on a fundamental attitude that should impregnate coaching sequences if not all the sessions throughout any life coaching or executive coaching relationship.

- **Synthesis:** In order to understand the essential function of silence in a masterful coaching relationship, it could well be compared to the vacuum that is created in a common pump in order to have it fill with an appropriate liquid or gas.

Unconditional listening, coach presence and the silent attentive environment offered to clients provide a space similar to the one that exists inside a running household vacuum cleaner. In as much as empty space aspires to be filled, the relational vacuum created by a silent coach will gradually aspire the deepest client thoughts, emotions, motivations, intuitions, inspirations and ambitions.

In this welcoming vacuum, clients can search, develop and blossom by themselves and for themselves. Consequently, when clients come to life coaching and executive coaching, they unknowingly come to find a space created by a specific coaching skill: the capacity to create and maintain a truly empty space or volume, a universe free of all possible influences.

Within this truly infinite environment, clients will be able to question, search, find, define, deploy, and conjugate themselves totally and freely. To offer this free environment, this relational vacuum, coaches obviously first need to clean up the clutter from their own internal space. They need to refrain from filling it with their own frameworks and limits, their own thoughts, emotions, knowledge, projects or solutions. Much like in outer space, this void is free of taste, smell, noise, without distinctions, with no ups or downs, no inside or outside, no inclusion or exclusion. Simply welcoming, this space is totally virgin of any influential information.

For a beginning coach, the notion of silence or void is usually very simply used as an occasional technique. At different times during a life coaching

and executive coaching process the neophyte will leave a little more space or volume for the client to search, wonder and question.

- **Synthesis:** For systemic master coaches, the whole relationship with clients if not with themselves rests on a form of permanent underlying silence, a constant aspiration. This function is almost a key definition of a masterful coaching relationship. Silence and the emptiness it provokes is not a technique but an integral part of attentive life coaching and executive coaching presence. Its powerful effect is only occasionally, minimally, respectfully interrupted.

Let us stress here that almost all other essential life coaching and executive coaching competencies – asking powerful questions, appropriately reformulating, knowing how to simply repeat a key word – all are measured by their capacity to create silence within the client. A truly powerful systemic coach question therefore invariably provokes clients to suddenly become quiet and engage in internal exploration, questioning, thinking, feeling and soul-searching. This client silence is needed. Once created, it should never be interrupted.

A truly powerful question therefore provokes client silence. The more powerful a question, the longer and deeper will be the ensuing client silence. This is so true that it is possible to assert that when clients immediately respond to a question without hesitation, the question is of no real importance to them. They just serve the purpose to inform the coach on content: in as much as the client already knows the answer to any question, its fundamental added value is dangerously close to zero.

- **Synthesis:** When clients immediately know the answer to a coach question, the question is merely informative or incremental. If rather than respond to a coach question, a client suddenly plunges into a deep inner silence and reflects, then the systemic coach really needs to focus and intimately listen to the client's quality of silence.

Consequently, systemic coaches should be even quieter and more present when their clients are quiet. That is precisely when life coaching and executive coaching clients are working. In silence, clients are inwardly searching much more deeply than when they are filling the coaching relationship with analysis and descriptions. The more silent the client, the more the true systemic coaching relationship is happening, and the more silent the coach. And vice versa.

In the same line of thought, when systemic coaches occasionally restate a client phrase, when they repeat a key client word with interrogation, when they underline an expression, that is not so much to elicit more information but more to help clients interrupt themselves to listen a little more deeply to who they really are in what they just said.

- **Synthesis:** Fundamentally, systemic coaching interventions in client dialogues serve more to create silences than to provoke it to be filled, more to interrupt than to direct, more to stop clients in their reassuring flow than to support them in making too quick decisions or build premature and reassuring action plans.

We could conclude that all life coaching and executive coaching techniques can be perceived to essentially serve one purpose: to interrupt clients and bring them back to exploring their inner silence. When clients are talking, they are often only expressing what they already know. They are explaining themselves to the coach. When clients are searching inwardly, they are looking for new images and uncommon words, they are off their automatic pilot, adventuring out of their known universes and creating new forms and patterns. Only during intense silences are life coaching and executive coaching clients really struggling to create new synapses.

- **Synthesis:** Coaching can often be defined as an essentially interruptive process that functions by aspiration. That may be what is meant when it is said that coaches never push clients to help them move forward. Fundamentally life coaching and executive coaching works by traction rather than by propulsion.

Likewise in team and organizational coaching contexts. Systemic coaches often accompany these collective entities by strategic silences in order to provoke collective inspiration or conspiracy. As a matter of fact, the etymology of the word conspiracy clearly indicates that when a group defines a collective ambition or motivating collective inspiration, it invariably conspires towards an ideal objective rather than work against an established order.

In this way, the observable result of masterful systemic coaching process may resemble the effect of a Zen koan much more than that of an apparently more effective short-term problem solving or project-management undertaking.

To resume, professional systemic masterful coaches are attentively present in order to offer clients totally open or limitless, warm and intimate empty spaces or voids. This space is free from all coach thoughts, emotions, intentions, ambitions, knowledge and impatience. This empty space permits client personal internal exploration and discovery, deployment and transformation. In these client growth conditions, everything gradually and sometimes suddenly becomes new possibility.

When systemic coaches deliver their undivided silent and attentive presence to clients, when they abandon all their own identity supports and joint the whole client context to warmly and impartially welcome it, they develop a much more comprehensive access to the totality of each client's context. This access permits a much larger, systemic, ecological acceptance of each life coaching and executive coaching client's undivided human nature.

10) Listening without filters

Much like in any other situation, coach listening with real attentive presence first rests on the capacity to remain silent. To begin to listen, one indeed needs to be quiet. In life coaching and executive coaching, true listening not only rests on external silence but also on profound internal quietness.

This capacity to be inwardly still is a fundamental prerequisite to develop master coach attentive presence. Internal silence allows a posture or attitude that will remain detached from all possible intention on individual or collective client issues or results. Consequently, master coaches listen in total confidence, holding no personal intention on client issues and goals, trusting them to proceed and succeed at their own pace, in their own direction.

- **Synthesis:** Caution is essential here, as this description of masterful silent listening without intention is often very superficially understood.

Not only professional coaches are reputed to be present and silent, but they also need to be internally empty, almost transparent to themselves. Coach listening needs to be free from all internal noise and references to any context other than the one inhabited and revealed by each client's presence. This capacity to listen beyond individual or team client words with limitless acceptance, without conditions or conditioning, with complete openness to client presence is neither natural nor easy.

In this realm, the first major hurdle is to learn to listen without filtering client dialogue through any intellectual, conceptual, emotional, personal, technical, spiritual, etc. framework. In life coaching and executive coaching, individual and collective client presence and expression are very simply welcomed in a form of vacuum materialized by the coach's complete and attentive presence. Nothing more and nothing less is fundamentally pertinent.

- **Synthesis:** Master coaches do not attempt to understand, nor classify, nor lighten, nor structure, nor remodel client dialogues.

Ideally, coaches welcome client words by leaving the life coaching and executive coaching relational space and context wide open for client expression, without any other form of receptacle than a welcoming coach presence. In this way, coach listening and presence is completely free of intention, such as would be a simple attentive witness.

- **Caution:** For all those of us who already have preferences, habits, opinions, certitudes, theories on personalities and life, time management or other problem solving methodologies, listening to others without filters and without attempting to structure their dialogue seems close to impossible.

Habitually indeed, most listen to others to understand through their own personality, through their years of expensive training, through their long experience of life and through their sometimes exclusive and very performing theoretical grids. These filters are actually forms of philters. They succeed in charming coaches to cherish a particular personal approach, a preferred frame of reference, a pet theory or favored methodology rather than just focusing on clients as they are, totally free of classifications and categories. Paradoxically, master coach listening only calls for intense focus on the client, without artifices.

Unfortunately, when coaches want to differentiate themselves on their professional market, they maneuver to build themselves a strong identity or brand. To do this, they often design and market a personalized and attractively packaged coaching approach related to a specific set of exclusive skills and tools. These tools are often excessively complicated when not too complex. The result is that a number of coaches present theoretical niches or expertise, put forward seductive tools, and become systematic in their way to approach clients. Often, they simply elaborate a slightly innovative personal twist on an existing theoretical model or they add numerous behavioral details to a presence that would gain in remaining simple, humble and transparent.

These tools invade the coaching market, pretending to add to the relationship-based process when they actually just succeed in diverting attention that should be exclusively focused on the clients. These accessories become central. The result is that a host of coaches insist on displaying seductive tools that they systematically unroll, no matter the situation, no matter the client. In this process, they invariably lose in humility and simplicity. They lose in transparent presence.

- **Caution:** The word theory has the same etymology as theatre. It means that theory is just a representation of reality, proposed by whoever has designed the plot, contrived the play and built the décor. Master coaching is an intimate relationship between two real people, the coach and the client. This intimacy is as far from theory as it is from theatrics.

Superficially, this gimmicky marketing strategy helps seduce individual and organizational clients with personalized products that help differentiate one coach from the mass of others. Very paradoxically, this marketing strategy to attract clients to a personal product is instrumental to divert coaches from creating a frank, simple and direct relationship with their clients. Subtly indeed, the seductive tool insidiously steps in between the client and the coach. It becomes a shield that protects from the possibility of a simple transparent relationship between one and another, one and a group. Let us never forget that the tool does not make the master coach, much the contrary.

- **Synthesis:** There is a fundamental paradox between all the elaborate strategies displayed to make one's place on the market and the undeniable fact that a master coach continuously remembers to occupy no space, in order to leave it entirely at the disposal of the client.

Furthermore, identity or niche building by adding fancy intellectual twists to coaching is generally conducive to coach ego development rather than to the attention given to clients. This is also done at client expense in as much as they are very subtly asked to admire a tool or concept at the expense of focusing on their own objectives and ambitions. The partners are invited to focus on the accompanying professionals and their knowledge rather than on the accompanied clients and their paramount quest.

- **Synthesis:** The more coaches identify themselves with a particular theoretical approach or personally relate to a specific professional strategy, the more their clients will be kindly requested to adapt those models and to fit the frame of reference of the coach. That will be at the expense of their personal freedom and identity as clients, at the expense of learning to develop in their personal way.

When coaches are transparent to themselves and their theories, however, when they listen beyond the content of the client's words, when they are fully present to the common coach and client context, then they can be fully present to all that can emerge from this coherent ensemble.

II CO-CREATING SYSTEM RESONANCE

11) *Presence to coach-client interfacing*

12) *Coach - client resonance*

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13) *Resonance within client expression*

14) *Presence to patterns in client dialogue*

15) *Presence to clients in their desired outcomes*

While being attentive and present to the life coaching and executive coaching relationship and client context it is also useful for a coach to listen to the client's expressed objective, issue or expected outcome. Indeed, during a coaching session and process, clients are present with more than just their internal and external context. Their description of an issue, a problem or a project also positions them in dynamic relationships with desired outcomes situated sometime in the future and at the end of the coaching sequence. The client presence is stretched both by a personal or professional vision in time and by their expectations for coaching process results.

One way or another, life coaching and executive coaching presence exists within an aspiration created by client objectives in time and by their vision of possible results. In fact, the quality of client presence and the intensity of their work are highly correlated with their commitment to expected results. This client tension directed towards an expected end definitely gives coaching a directive dimension. Consequently, it is clear that life coaching and executive coaching is not a relationship focused on a relationship. It is a partnership focused on achieving an outcome that needs to be owned and defined by the client.

To achieve this goal-oriented client tension, coaches generally propose that clients quickly focus on and formulate the desired outcome they wish to achieve during their work process. In the first minutes of all life coaching and executive coaching dialogues, coaches reputedly ask several questions and then rephrase and reformulate client answers to clarify client sequence or session objectives.

But some caution is useful concerning this outcome-focused clarification process. Coach questions and rephrasing should not be offered with the simple objective of eliciting very precise answers in order to implement a highly structured process focused on neatly achieving expressed client goals. Indeed, masterful life coaching and executive coaching is not to be confused with professional project management. Coach question and restatements focused on helping clients specify their desired outcome are only there to have them set a relatively precise direction for their quest, so as to efficiently help them start their exploration process.

The purpose of clarifying all client objectives is to set a cardinal point, a general direction or an approximate outcome. Even when clients are very determined on their goals, coaches need to stay open to possible future adjustments, sometimes to radical changes in client objectives.

- **Synthesis:** If the life coaching and executive coaching process is to allow for emerging solutions, one must always leave space for deeper emerging client meaning. Consequently, a master coach should always allow for, or hope for, unexpected changes in client direction and other creative process modifications.

Systemic life coaching and executive coaching always leaves ample space for client meandering and sharp turns for new perspectives to emerge. New horizons and solutions can only come forth out of the folds of client dialogue and evolution, in relatively adaptable exploratory spaces. Rather than absolutely want to achieve clearly set goals, it is imperatively necessary to allow for all that can emerge within a loosely defined client quest.

Creativity only happens within a desired outcome that can regularly be adjusted if not completely redefined by the client.

It could even be possible to consider that if a client *doesn't* change goals within a given life coaching and executive coaching process, that client hasn't really learned anything new during that dialogue. Indeed, if given clients and their goals are considered as intimately related, how can we consider they have evolved in a coaching process if they keep yearning for the same outcome? If we don't change our perspectives as we grow, how much have we really grown?

- **Synthesis:** Consequently, what is often called a life coaching or executive coaching session or coaching sequence contract could well be redefined as a relatively loose agreement to jointly begin to proceed together.

The object of a life coaching and executive coaching agreement is just to have the coach and client tune in to each other, looking in the same direction, in order to advance in concert. The more coaches privilege movement to acquire momentum in a loosely defined direction, the more fundamental client motivations will be likely to surface.

Indeed, we can imagine that if life coaching and executive coaching clients know exactly what they want to achieve at the onset of coaching sequences, they are capable of reaching these goals without much support. When we have a very clear perception of our objectives, these generally elicit the necessary motivation to find the means to achieve our results. It is consequently quite illusionary to insist that clients be truly clear about their deeper objectives at the onset of their quests, at the beginning of a coaching session or at the start of a coaching sequence.

In this light, objectives and expected outcomes are useful to just give clients an opportunity to give a general direction to their dialogue. They serve to provide coaches with a rudimentary compass in order to witness and accompany client progress. Much like when making music together, tuning in to the same chord in the beginning of a life coaching and executive coaching session or sequence merely serves to co-create a common foundation and sense of direction. Much like in jazz improvisation, the rest of the coaching relationship needs to be open to all the positive surprises that emerging processes generally have to offer.

- **Example:** At the onset of a coaching sequence, a client rapidly states that she does not really have a precise measurable goal. She clearly states that she does not want to make any decisions nor have any action plan. She just wants to express her frustrations about a negative relationship. She just wants the coach to listen while she unloads.

Formally, the coach could answer that this expectation does not appropriately fit into a coaching context and relationship. The coach could insist that the client formulate what could be a more precise operational and measurable outcome. Indeed, the stated function of coaching is to accompany clients while they achieve tangible goals. Just venting frustration in the presence of a willing ear can surely be satisfying for anyone under the influence of negative emotions, but is this really coaching?

In this situation, a more tolerant attitude could also lead a coach to reformulate the client's expectation and accept the situation. This could indeed permit an interactive context from which could emerge unexpected results both for the coach and the client. After accepting to just listen to the client expose the situation and voice frustrations, a coach could also ask the client if coach interruptions, questions or perceptions were acceptable. In other words, the coach can first welcome the client's offer to have a place to express emotions and frustrations and also propose that this could lead to another type of dialogue.

In the real situation presented above, it so happens that the client dissatisfaction concerned her relationship with a friend with whom she perceived she had given a lot and received very little in return. The client had helped her friend get started in a professional endeavor with a relatively open contract and numerous informal meetings. A year later, she realized that she had really invested quite a lot of time and energy. She also realized that whenever she needed something, her friend was too busy to respond. The relationship that was initially positioned on an equal give and take basis turned out to be almost completely one way, to the client's disadvantage. This, she said was the cause for her frustration.

Now there exists an interesting systemic parallel: the coach can become aware that in the coaching agreement, the same client affirms that she is not expecting much more from the coach other than to just listen, or receive, and give nothing in return. Indeed, the client is willing to pay for a session where she will give her perceptions, vent her feelings, share her perceptions, but she is not expecting anything concrete nor useful from the coach. Attentive presence to the nature of the relationship proposed by the client in the coaching situation can offer interesting resonance indicators as to how she initially designs her relationships to be one way affairs, to her dissatisfaction on the longer term.

- **Synthesis:** On a regular basis, careful attention to parallels or resonating patterns between the initial coaching agreements or contracts and the issues clients wish to approach will offer extraordinary opportunities for masterful life coaching and executive coaching insights.

This case study illustrates that initial coaching agreements can present many different forms, shapes and patterns. For one, it can be very detailed and precise or relatively open and unclear. Whatever this initial agreement, it will be useful for the coach to use it as a contextual base from which the coaching relationship can begin to unfold. That will allow the coach and client to first gain momentum and then discover resonating patterns, growth opportunities, more precise goals and unexpected perspectives.

Even when initially sketchy, this beginning coach-client agreement will help both the client and the coach remain attentively present to the general direction of the coaching process and client progress in time. Whatever the agreement, it will allow the coach to listen to the client within a stated client direction and context. This context includes, by common agreement, a tension or an aspiration towards an oftentimes relatively imprecise outcome. Typically, that outcome will go through a number of unexpected creative modifications.

- **Synthesis:** In this way, clients define their intention and then begin their personal dialogue. Whatever the stated goal, coaches can be totally present and attentive to their clients as they submit themselves to their aspirations and ambitions, and as they gradually give more detail and precision to what they yearn to become.

As soon as the process towards the loosely defined client direction seems to wither, to become unclear or to lose its productive tension, the coach can comment on the subtle changes and ask where the client stands. The client can then choose to confirm, reconsider or totally change directions towards whatever appears to be an emerging preferred course. This allows for the surfacing of more fundamental directions, more essential aspirations and sometimes totally new forms of client existence.

Consequently, throughout the life coaching and executive coaching process, intention-free attentive presence is focused both on the general client context and on client aspirations, in a direction that is often gradually refined if not totally redefined. In this way, clients can be progressively pulled or aspired by initially undefined horizons. Only as they progress forward, client desired outcomes begin to unfold, gain in precision and materialize to gradually become their emerging reality.

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16) Presence to client context

Systemic coaches need to perceive client environments as if these contexts were the reflection or the extension of who they are. Client objects, tools, offices, cars, homes, clothes, sports, lifestyle, etc, everything from the way they dress to their behavior and language patterns can be indicators of who they are or want to be. In a way, the immediate universe around clients can be perceived as extensions of their being in a much larger space and volume. This way to perceive clients can even include the spaces occupied by other people, the roles other people play. "Show me your environment, and I will tell you who you are" is a saying that could illustrate this enlarged or systemic perception of client dynamic identity and being.

The client's universe is indeed an extension of their persona in a much larger space, within a more consequential volume. It is very useful for a systemic coach to know habitual life coaching and executive coaching client environments and be attentively present to the way they inhabit them and unfold within them. This can be an excellent argument for the pertinence of shadow-coaching, when life coaching and executive coaching professionals follow or shadow their clients while these continue their day-to-day activities in their real work and life contexts, in their sports, within their families, inside their organizations.

- **Synthesis:** Systemic coaches can rest on the principle that clients occupy their environments in the same way as they inhabit themselves. Consequently, the list of client manifestations to which a systemic coach could be attentive and present is practically infinite.

But note that if systemic coaches activate all their senses to be aware of their clients within their context, they do not focus on any one parameter at a particular time. Systemic presence is very loosely focused. It is freely floating and all encompassing. Coach awareness and attention is fleetingly present to all direct and environmental client manifestations, never really concentrating on any single client dimension or extension. This floating attentive presence may seem extremely complex if not outright complicated. However, if there are no limits to all the client environmental facets, if the realm of life coaching and executive coaching attention is indeed extremely complex and apparently dispersed, the systemic coach's focus holds in one word: the *client*, as perceived through the enlarged environment the client occupies.

- **Example:** Arriving at a client meeting, a coach suddenly learns that due to an emergency, the client must imperatively cancel the meeting and immediately drive to attend a meeting on the other side of town. The adaptable coach spontaneously proposes to accompany the client during the car trip and have the session during that travel time. Reactive clients indeed deserve reactive coaches.

While driving, the client approaches current issues initially planned for the session, punctuating the dialogue with flash comments on the upcoming urgent meeting and on the obviously limited skills of most neighboring drivers. The coach sits back and listens with an enlarged floating attention, and starts to perceive numerous parallels between the client's handling of traffic jams and crisis management, between the client's general driving energy and professional emotional involvement, between the clutter thrown in the back seat of the client's car and the client's back office organization, etc.

- **Synthesis:** Simply put, life coaching and executive coaching listening and attentive presence concerns only one question: Who is this client, in his or her context, in her or his total, global and human complexity?

It is impossible for a coach to consciously or intellectually analyze the mass of pertinent information emitted by clients second by second, minute by minute. There are millions of related information bits involved at each instant. In a systemic way and quieting all useless internal noise, however, coaches can globally and intuitively grasp the general client context and global patterns as they unfold during the accompanying process. From the complexity of the whole client environment will emerge surprisingly pertinent patterns and forms, echoes and shadows, rhythms and structures.

Sometimes life and executive coaches can also visualize client absent environments. Attentive presence to client context sometimes permits sudden coach intuitions concerning unmentioned pertinent actors, unperceived potentials, unused support systems, on the outer fringes of client awareness. Sometimes, the presence of a very pertinent partner or foe can physically be felt in the course of a client dialogue, within which the person was never mentioned. In this way, presence to client context also includes an intuitive openness to the much larger client personal, social and professional

environment.

- **Synthesis:** Consider that all subjects presented by life coaching and executive coaching clients at a given time, that all their defined issues or envisioned projects are merely offered as temporary vehicles to introduce much deeper issues and aspirations and patterns. Client existence and all that is really significant to their being surpasses by a wide margin the limited and conscious subject they initially offer as a point of focus for a life coaching or executive coaching session.

If coaches limit their listening and attention to the conscious perimeter offered by initial client goals or to the simple content of their dialogue, they will limit their work to a relatively restrained field of client consciousness, a superficial range of passing client interests.

During each life coaching and executive coaching session and sequence, all expressed client preoccupations need to be considered as simple introductions that can give access to a much vaster and more significant client universe of being. A systemic master coach's attentive presence immediately needs to be listening all the indicators that are present in that much wider client reality.

17) Presence to client time patterns

In life coaching and executive coaching, like in all other professions, time is of the essence. It is a key performance indicator. As a matter of fact, such common expressions as "here and now" and the relativity "time-space" concept reveal that if coaches fundamentally need to respect client space, they equally need to respect client time.

In order to be truly present in a creative listening mode, it is useful for coaches to imagine that time can be perceived otherwise than by visualizing a long straight and uninterrupted line that begins in a distant past and ends in a likewise infinite future. Client time can alternately be perceived as an unoccupied space, a lived-in volume, a paralyzing vacuum, a rhythmic pace or wave, a depressing downward spiral, uplifting energy on which to surf, a repetitious cycle, a wildly accelerating vehicle, a cluttered or suffocating receptacle, etc.

Consequently, professional systemic coaches need to be attentively present to, and very respectful of, all individual and collective client time patterns and rhythms in the course of each life coaching and executive coaching client session and sequence.

- **Caution:** It is not a coach's function to efficiently pace sessions and manage life coaching and executive coaching time in order to make sure that clients achieve satisfactory results within set deadlines.

Coaches, again, are not to be identified as project managers to solve client issues and achieve their ambitions. They are not responsible to realize client results within imperative time frames, in order to undeniably demonstrate their coaching effectiveness. Much the contrary. A master coach respectfully accompanies clients as they progress in their own way and manage their own quest, *in their own time*. And if the life coaching and executive coaching time-space truly and completely belongs to the client, coaches need to be particularly attentive to the time patterns that surface in the relationship. Consequently, client time also requires full and deep attentive presence and respect, completely freed from coach time-management intentions.

- **Caution:** Rather than feeling they must be the keepers of shared time and become efficient pacers of the life coaching and executive coaching process, it would be more coherent with the philosophy of coaching and a truly professional coaching posture to let the client express the patterns of who they are within their own time architecture.

Do coaching clients make time to finish early and run off? Do they take their time and finish late? Do they run after their time while their time escapes them? Do they loose or waste their time or again savor and cherish each instant? Do they effectively use their time or try to buy time? Do they write off their time, or are they stressed by their potential lack of time? How can a coach accompany clients by letting them express themselves fully, in the open space of their own time? How can coaches be present to clients until they develop their own original presence to themselves, to their lives and to their personal time-space as it slowly unfolds?

- **Caution:** Masterful systemic coaches need to develop sensitivity to client time patterns, an attentive presence to the way clients install themselves in their time. This sensitivity concerns the way clients exist in the time of their life coaching and executive coaching sessions, sequences, homework, action plans, and personal dialogues.

Client time can manifest precise and repetitious forms and structures, characteristics and patterns. Some clients are slow to start. Whatever they begin, they first need to warm up, and gradually pick up speed. Others are over-compressed and seem to start everything they do in a revved-up sprinting mode. Still others manifest difficulties to finish or conclude whatever they begin, while others still resemble long distance runners who display a resilient capacity to keep a steady pace over very long distances and periods of time. Some need very little time, achieving extraordinarily brilliant, almost immediate results. Some clients seem to prefer to get lost in original and creative meanderings, introverted bubbles, and concentric circles or unpredictable sidetracks. Still others regularly choose to take surprisingly creative tangential shortcuts or adapt to totally new directions with surprising ease. Whatever the type of time or pace clients choose to adopt, a masterful systemic coach simply accompanies them, as a witness to their particular way of being within their time-space.

- **Synthesis:** Attentive presence to how each client begins, follows and concludes an hour-long session, a sequence over minutes or a sentence over seconds provides masterful coaches with an intimate understanding of the patterns within which those same clients may manage their life segments over days, months, years and decades.

Clients inscribe themselves in their life coaching and executive coaching sequences in the same way they install themselves in their lives and professional times spans. A presence to client time patterns allows master coaches to intuitively feel how each client's rhythm and energy is deployed in the time-space of all they decide to avoid or achieve. In order to perceive each client's particular way of inhabiting their time, it is imperative for a life coach or executive coach to totally respect client pace and rhythms, just as much as they need to be respected in their space.

Attentive presence to client time structure will allow coaches to fully become one with each one's specific type of rhythm and energy, and understand how each is in time, in everything they choose to accomplish. Consequently, resting on the principle that the universe can be perceived in a grain on sand, all client time patterns within all segments of a life coaching and executive coaching process can illustrate client ways of being in their projects, missions, ambitions and all other personal and professional endeavors.

- The way clients start a life coaching and executive coaching sequence can illustrate the way they generally begin all their other projects and action plans.
- The rhythm or pace in the way clients follow these beginnings and all the hesitations and accelerations during each sequence of a life coaching and executive coaching relationship can illustrate their patterns in all other realms of their existence.
- The way clients end or close a sequence, conclude a session: early, on time or late, softly, abruptly or with precipitation etc. also illustrates their capacity to properly wrap up and finish. Life coaching and executive coaching session conclusions illustrate the quality of client conclusions in all they do elsewhere in their personal and professional processes.

Obviously, coaches can exert quite some influence in the management of client time processes:

- On the one hand, coaches could choose to play a structuring role. They could actively and effectively manage life coaching and executive coaching time processes in order to ensure timely client results. In this case, coaches would leave little room for clients to be really responsible for their achievements and would regrettably end up carrying too much of the client time process. This would then principally serve to reveal coach time management patterns and control issues.
- On the other hand, coaches could choose to simply accompany their clients in their own delegated time management. These coaches would then occasionally give respectful indicators about the way clients choose to be in or out of their own time. This would be more in keeping with a truly masterful posture, corresponding to just being attentively present to client time-space, without any intention to modify it into a predetermined form.

This second option is obviously less conducive to creating client dependency. It respectfully helps clients become conscious that they own their time, that this time is a precious commodity, and that they can gain in managing it as effectively as they see fit. Gradually with this strategy, both coaches and clients will really gain the consciousness that when each really inhabits their own time, then they can easily find their proper or just place within their environment.

- **Caution:** Numerous beginning coaches, and some more confirmed, actively manage their client time, privileging short-term effectiveness to help clients achieve results. These life coaching and executive coaching professionals believe they are responsible to ensure client results in order to provide them with immediate and tangible satisfaction.

For these coaches, any individual or team coaching session must start with a precise and concrete contract. This phase is followed by an exploration phase, then a search for practical solutions, and finally the process is topped off with a solid action plan. In this perspective, one must indeed manage clients in order to conclude on time. Of course, these coaches maintain that they respect clients and accompany them without trying to influence them in any way. This may be true as far as the content of the work is concerned, but clearly in such situations, the coach manages client time in a relatively directive fashion.

Granted, it can be argued that such a voluntary coaching stance may be useful to achieve material results on the short term in order to acquire client satisfaction. This type of approach does not provide clients with the opportunity to first express, then become aware, and finally modify their own way of being within their own time processes. This may have huge consequences when we know that one of the main indicators of individual and collective client success is client capacity to manage their own time to achieve their own results.

- **Synthesis:** What if it was not a coach's responsibility to keep an eye on the clock and manage life coaching and executive coaching time? What if coaching clients were invited to work on their own way of managing their own life coaching and executive coaching space, in order to practice their own time management autonomy?

Interestingly, as the saying goes, time is money. It is also significant to realize that the word finance comes from the same root as finish. This indicates that client time management can provide systemic coaches with metaphorical insights as to how clients manage their finances by observing how they spontaneously manage their time. How are life coaching and executive coaching clients who are regularly late finishing also living over their financial budget? How do clients reveal their capacity for financial success by finishing early, with a measurable time credit? How are clients who waste time illustrating their strategies by which they waste money? An open attentive presence to client time management can give excellent insights to their credit rating, and give the systemic coach numerous opportunities for powerful questioning. To do this, however, it is imperative to let clients

express their time management patterns.

Consequently, masterful life coaching and executive coaching consists in accompanying clients while they unfold and expand in their time-space provided in the here-and-now coaching environment. Attentive presence to the whole client and the way they inhabit their time and space provides the systemic coach with very clear client patterns, strategies, shapes and rhythms that are totally in resonance with who the client is in many other dimensions of their lives. This intention-free attentive presence to client being in the coaching time and space first allows client to assume total responsibility for who they are in their time. This fundamental respect then allows clients to freely choose who they want to become, in their own time.

Everything can change when both coach and client together develop the awareness that each can take their time, and much as they do with their space, and then decide to occupy it and share it as they see fit, in the accompanying process. For clients and for coaches, presence to their shared time reflects the way each find their fundamental space in other realms of their much larger personal and professional environments.

18) Presence to client interfacing

Beyond the simple coach-client relationship, it is useful for the coach to be attentive and present to the quality of relationships and interfaces clients establish within the immediate environment defining the life coaching and executive coaching context.

How does the client enter the room? How is the client conscious of the immediate environment? What is his or her interest for the furniture and objects in the room? How does the client presence adjust to that environment? How does the client say hello, and what follows? What attention does the client give to personal movements and gestures? How and where does the client stand and sit and what is the client attention to personal comfort? How does the client acknowledge the presence of others in the immediate environment?

The first few minutes at the onset of every life coaching and executive coaching session often supply the coach with very important indications of the larger context that surrounds conscious client interfacing preoccupations and issues. During those few preliminary minutes, clients offer vital information on their relationships and exchanges with the larger envelope of their existence and on vaster ensembles than what they consciously know.

The way clients exist and move in any environment, and the environment's spontaneous reaction to clients offer numerous indicators that coaches can seize with a loose attentive presence, in order to feel the specificities of each of their existences.

- **Synthesis:** A master coach needs to be conscious that what is most systemic about any client is totally local and constantly present in each client interaction within their immediate environment and in the life coaching and executive coaching relationship.

Everything the client says and does in a life coaching and executive coaching context, from the first to the last second, follows patterns that will mirror client issues, client interfaces with other absent environments and the client as an inseparable part of a larger whole.

This underlines that all systemic experiences of the universe rest neither on lofty principles that provide new intellectual perceptual structures nor detailed knowledge of intricate, global and hidden architectures. Systemic experiences of our universal environment manifest themselves in short, immediate, local and very simple interactive patterns. Indeed, systemic experiences constantly emerge out of very close and almost insignificant if not banal events, through their structure and processes. They often express themselves with limpid transparency and with a form of simplicity that often provokes knowledgeable scholars to shrug them away as insignificant.

Paradoxically, coaches need to learn to be very present and attentive to heed these minute coincidental details, to catch their particular form, and their pertinent message. One needs to give these details all the attention they merit, to hear the deep meaning they convey. With the careful development of their attention to these minute details, coaches will gradually grasp how much the global exists within the local, how much the important is constantly present in the apparently insignificant.

- **Synthesis:** We exist within a systemic coherent universe built of numerous flowing patterns of connection and echoing occurrences, of coincidences, and other unexpected connections. Recognizing and cherishing these experiences can first jolt us and awaken us with surprise, then attract our attention to pertinent messages. These are conveyed only to those among us who can be truly present and attentive to the instant.

Apparently, systemic experiences and the immediate meaning they convey cannot be easily explained, at least not if they are considered with a classical, linear and materialistic approach. But in a systemic perspective, the life coaching and executive coaching context can often magically reveal infinite details of client interactive and existential patterns. Of course, the coach is also powerfully and intimately concerned with and involved in all these patterns.

Consequently, within their local common environment and interactive context, clients and coaches reproduce together and unconsciously the larger structures and patterns intimately woven into the fabric of client issues and ambitions. Masterful attentive presence to this local interactive structure and these immediate patterns offers numerous opportunities to access the real-life client context and the larger client personal and professional reality.

- **Example:** At the first meeting with a client recently promoted CEO to a country branch of an international company, the coach was briskly accompanied to the executive floor of the head office building. Interestingly, the meeting was organized on a Saturday morning and the office

building was practically empty of weekday staff.

Before starting the meeting, the executive client spontaneously showed the coach around the deserted executive floor. The tour started with the visit of a spacious and obviously unoccupied corner office with a large terrace and a superb view of the city. The office had belonged to the previous CEO that the client had replaced with very little advance warning, a few months before. The coaching partners then visited another angle office, occupied by the country financial manager, and still another smaller office occupied by the local executive Human Resource Director. The visit was finally concluded in the executive client's much smaller personal office, which incidentally had no terrace.

This executive coaching contract concerned accompanying the newly appointed CEO during a transition period. The client was to rapidly take full responsibility of the new executive position. Prior to that appointment, the client had occupied a Chief Operating Officer job, reporting to the prior CEO. Interestingly, the visit of the executive floor revealed that the client had not yet moved into the glamorous CEO office in spite of having the job for several months. The predecessor's ghost seemed to still occupy the room, and be floating in the darker shadows of the office building.

Following this obvious client lead during the first meeting, the coach quickly directed the work on the subject of space allocation on the executive floor. When does the client intend to move into the vacant CEO office? What type of rite-of-passage will the client organize to accompany this act and whom will be invited to the event? Who should take the present client office that will then become vacant? What could be the perceived meaning of this second move? What is the quality of relationship with the financial manager who also disposes of a glamorous angle office with a terrace? What other symbolic decisions concerning moves and could be planned to accompany the transition, and how should these be informed to the personnel?

The client dialogue on the allocation of office space indirectly helped both coaching partners to tune into intuitions. This helped the coach formulate some interrogations concerning the transition period into the new position. This work inadvertently focused on the office space offered a very light and highly effective way to approach the subject of managing the transition, and permitted the client to make rapid and practical decisions to fully inhabit the CEO role.

19) Presence to coach development issues

The life coaching and executive coaching context is such that almost all clients bring personal themes, issues and ambitions that are also important if not central to their coaches' personal and professional lives. In short, specific client issues generally fit their coach's issues to a tee. For each client and coach, this correlation does not only concern vague concepts, nor general values and principles; this correlation concerns very specific occurrences, real personal characteristics and significant incidents in both the client and the coach's lives.

This type of coincidence in life coaching and executive coaching is not due to chance but to natural underlying processes that structure interpersonal attraction and seem to underscore all human relationships. As the saying goes, likes attract likes. Affective clients find affective coaches, technocrats trust technocrats, angered individuals attract and relate with other angered people, etc. We cannot please everybody, so a natural choice process works by elimination to very effectively limit the range of clients a coach can attract, and vice-versa.

When we pay more attention to these unconscious echoes, shared attractions, and coincidences, they turn out to be very precise. A person in search of meaning may attract a coach in a developing quest for faith. A young client who has just lost his father may meet with an older coach who has just lost his son. A manager who lacks time structure may be assigned a coach equally incompetent in managing his or her personal agenda. A coach with financial issues may attract clients who repeatedly forget to pay. A client considering major changes in personal relationships may unknowingly partner with a divorcing coach. Consequently, transference situations are also the rule life coaching and executive in coaching.

These apparent coincidences may render a coach's task much more difficult whenever facing client contexts. Personal and sometimes painful personal and professional events in a coach's life may suddenly surge out of client issues or problems and make inwardly peaceful and open attentive presence all but impossible to achieve. Suddenly, a client's hot problem and a coach's current issue seem to be one and the same. The two partners' emotions mix and resonate. The client coaching space and time becomes totally filled with the coach's personal affect and emotional implications.

In these situations, coaches may even temporarily completely lose sight of client contexts, and become overwhelmed by their own very open wounds and personal urgencies. Tuning into their personal vulnerability, coaches may then experience a very real loss of client distance and coaching competency. The open, empty unconditional receptacle for client development is suddenly overflowing with coach experience, thoughts, emotions, limits, and personal intensity.

A systemic coach knows that overlapping patterns between coach and client realities are the rule rather than the exception. Systemic coaches intimately know that coach neutrality is an illusion. Client-coach resonances are to be considered the common lot of most systemic life coaching and executive coaching relationships. When these take place, professional and authentic coaches can rapidly recover their appropriate posture and attentive presence through the use of simple and transparent communication accompanied by a clean ethical stance. An attitude of humility and the capacity to accept one's own vulnerability and humanity are the first obvious conditions to bring these occurrences into the coaching relationship for the benefit of life coaching and executive coaching clients.

Coach and client transference can be perceived to be in complete agreement with quantum physics theory, where the observer is systematically involved in the processes and results of the observed. In the same way, coaches are irremediably included in their clients' quests, issues, meaning, difficulties and growth processes. To be performing, master coach experience and client issues are obligatorily linked in unitary resonance.

- **Synthesis:** The shared experience between a coach and a client, including their apparently separate lives and issues, need to be considered as

one unitary phenomena that is part of a unique inseparable reality that belongs to single universally shared realm of information.

Life coaching and executive coaching can be inscribed in the quantum reality of the universe where the principle of the external or distant scientific observer disappears to make room for the collaborative principle of the scientific participant. In this perspective, the external universe is also internal and irremediably becomes a field of shared participative awareness and processes. As in all attempts to understand quantum reality, coaches who accompany client dialogues actively participate in reshaping both client universes and their own realities. The boomerang effect of life coaching and executive coaching is that clients constantly participate to reshape coach existence. At no time can a coach pretend to be a neutral, external observer. Never can a master coach truly partake in a client relationship without also enduring lasting consequences.

Obviously, regular supervision is the preferred setting to attempt to make the difference between what may really belong to each coach and what may belong to their clients. Therapy may also help life coaching professionals and executive coaches gain a deeper awareness of their own baggage, and of whom they attract as partners in personal life and work. In those setting, however, the goal is not to achieve a theoretically ideal level of awareness where overlaps between client and coach contexts will cease to surface. That would be an illusion, and an immense loss of added value would be the price for it.

The object of coach supervision is to achieve a positive just-in-time awareness of these echoing phenomena between the coach and the client. The master coach will gradually learn to immediately perceive and transparently use coach-client issue overlap to propose avenues for shared growth. The obvious growing edge for master coaches is to learn how to use all these resonating occurrences for them to grow in their own personal quests. Obviously, all those who consider that it is more than useful for coaches to commit to a personal therapeutic process probably come from the same frame of reference.

In systemic life coaching and executive coaching, it is consequently very important to constantly expect these overlapping occurrences between all client issues and significant personal experiences in the coach's life. Professional coaches can systematically prepare themselves to meet their own issues and challenges in every theme that every client comes forward to offer. It is an integral part of the coach growth process to achieve really masterful attentive presence to oneself and one's own issues.

- **Option:** The personal question one can ask oneself when facing any client is: "What is this human being bringing here today that is going to teach me something about my own shadow and light?" This is how we discover that a very important part of attentive presence to clients is also a deep attentive presence to the personal if not intimate context of coaches.

When meeting each client, or at each and every meeting with each and every client, and so as not to be suddenly surprised by a overwhelming overlapping process, coaches can ask themselves a few personal preparatory questions. Who is this life coaching or executive client for me? To who does that client correspond in my past or present close environment? How is this person part of my family or part of my closest intimate circle? What is this person coming to teach me about my issues, my challenges, my ambitions or my life quest?

In this way, each client can be perceived as a messenger or as a mirror for coach development, indirectly coming to ask vital questions that will invariably have a boomerang effect.

20) Synchronicity and alignment

III EMERGENCE IN SYSTEMIC COACHING

21) General characteristics of emerging processes

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22) Creative circularity

23) Trusting confusion

24) The breakthrough

Beware for what you wish, for you will get it

A breakthrough is a quantum leap, where in the way of Alice in Wonderland, we perceive that we have broken through the proverbial mirror or another form of heaven's gate and reached another time-space, another facet of reality. In life coaching and executive coaching, a breakthrough takes place when the veil of perception seems to suddenly drop and both coach and client experience a sudden passage into a new dimension. Suddenly a spotlight seems to have been turned on to shed light on the shared coach-client context in a way that had been unknown until then.

Almost simultaneously, the life coaching or executive coaching partners establish new perceptual connections and pierce into a completely different

awareness of their common quest. New meanings emerge, unexpected perspectives shape and creative solutions come forth. Out of the enlarged context emerge new forms of awareness, feelings, understandings, and different standards and scales seem to apply. Deeper and wider meanings of reality impose themselves and new, original references and restructuring perspectives emerge. Although these were expected, they always astonish the partners in coaching. Both unannounced and apparently involuntarily provoked, they seem to emerge and impose themselves as if of their own free will.

- **Example:** In the course of a relatively intimate discussion with his coach, a client indulges in the expression of some of his more personal sensations and emotions. These concern his perception of the infinitely insignificant place he occupies in the universe. The client illustrates his thoughts by sharing his experience watching stars out in the open sea, on moonless nights, with nothing but the horizon offering a frame for infinity. With his words and images, he shyly attempts to share his spiritual dimension, an almost universal experience of being part of an infinite whole and simultaneously feeling almost insignificant in that immensity.

The coach then asked: “When you describe this infinite universe that marvels you, are you sure that you are looking outside, or is it inside yourself that you are peering?” Silence first followed, then a shared burst of laughter expressed the two partner’s discomfort, and then silence again.

A few indicators are always present to accompany this and other similarly powerfully moving or magical occurrences in human relationships. First, the coach question or comment just seems to appear out of the blue, without preparation, and it formulates itself without any precise intention. Typically, coaches seem to hear and experience the power of their question or comment at the same time as their clients. Coaches are consequently just as surprised and affected as their clients by the reach of their own comment or question. Immediately after that, the two partners are simultaneously rocked off their foundations by the shared experience of a new emerging perspective as it re-organizes their shared perception.

The immediate apparent reaction is usually a profound shared silence. Sometimes a bout of laughter filled with excitement or tears of joy will burst out and serve to hide their awkwardness as they soak in the surprising new landscape. Less visible are the spinal chill, the physical choc, and the mental disequilibrium that accompany the radical change in context architecture. Often, a feeling of deep, almost embarrassing intimacy signals that together coach and client are transformed and need to each take time to personally rediscover who they have become.

- **Example:** In the course of an apparently social conversation on formal marriages with a coach who happened to be both legally and religiously married, a confirmed bachelor innocently declared that considering that he had been living with his partner for years, his personal engagement was practically “the same thing”.

“Sure, it’s the same thing,” answered the coach, “but it’s the same thing as *what?*” The ensuing silence quite eloquently put a stop to the chitchat. In the course of the following year, the bachelor and his companion got both legally and religiously married.

Once more, the conception and formulation of that type of question can never be prepared prior to the instant it is expressed. It does not aim for one or another specific objective nor suggest any particular action. The masterful question or comment just seems to emerge out of the shared context, to channel through the coach and to impose its meaningful spontaneously to enlarge the client’s perspective, if not reveal to the coach who he or she profoundly is.

This type of powerful life coaching or executive coaching intervention obviously serves to equally surprise and provoke the all partners in progress. Its function is simply to create the quality of space for both the client and the coach to properly inhabit their common context, then confront themselves to a very different perspective and finally take whatever action may seem most appropriate.

In this last example, one could consider that the coach’s question is quite influential and directing the client towards a specific goal. Being officially and religiously married, there is a good chance that the coach considers that his own union with his wife has great value and deep meaning. Through a simple question, the coach undoubtedly communicates numerous confronting perspectives and provokes reflection where the client previously had another range of very different answers.

- **Caution:** Often in life coaching and executive coaching, one can imagine that clients are searching for to be confronted to themselves, to their fundamental values, to belief systems and behaviors. One can even consider that this search for confrontation is one of the unconscious criteria by which they choose to work with one coach or another.

We can consider that chance occurrences do not exist, that we may all choose our relationships for a reason, and that everything that comes out of them may convey an important lesson that we can choose to interpret one way or another. In this perspective, it is important for coaches to remain humble on the relative influence they may have on clients. They just need to proceed and serve their open and confronting questioning without doubt or censorship. Indeed, clients are powerful enough to make their own choices.

Back to breakthroughs, it may be useful to underline that the paradox of masterful life coaching and executive coaching is often difficult to solve:

- The more coaches intently listen to consciously find the one best intervention or question, the more these seem to escape their awareness.
- The more coaches are just attentive and present to the general coach-client context with no specific intention or expectation from themselves or from their clients, the higher the chances that a surprisingly different perspective will just emerge out of the shared context.
- The more coaches try to protect themselves and their clients by avoiding uncomfortable passages through doubt and internal uncertainty, the more breaking through the proverbial mirror remains out of reach, becomes impossible.

- The more coaches let loose, follow the flow of the relational contexts that bind them to their clients by trusting the creative and emerging accompanying process, the more that process will serve the partners in their common quest.

All seems to indicate that a totally intention-free interactive environment is the necessary framework that permits a spontaneous creation of new mental synapses. Any known common context is a constraining structure. It must be reshuffled before any unexpected and innovative solution can be expected to naturally emerge.

Only when we really let go of our voluntary and programmed intentions can the accepted vacuum welcome innovating forms of perception and new mental passages announcing original solutions. Our only responsibility as coaches and clients is to be attentive and seize these breakthrough moments and the meaning they convey, when they spontaneously appear.

Consequently, without conscious and directed intention, without searching for anything, a coach's attention is on the lookout for unexpected emerging new perspectives. Remember Archimedes who very tired of searching chose instead to relax in his hot tub: suddenly a solution emerged out the foaming chaotic context of the bubble bath. Apparently resting without any conscious intention, but very attentively present to his issue, Archimedes was ready to seize the breakthrough solution that had always been there, just out of reach: Eureka!

25) *Self-organizing emerging patterns*

The nature of systemic life coaching and executive coaching as it is described up to this point permits a performing, original breakthrough process from which new perspectives naturally emerge. To grasp and embody this process, coaches need to fully understand the importance of the intention-free listening strategies described throughout the chapters of this text.

- On the one hand, masterful listening is deep, silent and attentive. It requires extreme personal presence and concentration.
- On the other hand this listening skill it is free, floating and agile, without intentions on client results. It accepts apparent client uncertainty and confusion, meandering and questioning. It never stops to analyze the details of any specific client content or direction.

Consequently, masterful attentive presence is not specifically focused on understanding any one or other of the multiple conscious dimensions of client expression or client manifestations. Logically speaking, this listening without intention blossoms in apparent client diversity if not in client confusion. With a systemic frame of reference, coach listening and attentive presence freely melts into the folds, echoes and meanders of client mind and awareness, integrating the coaching relationship context as a participating factor of the client quest. If emerging solutions surface from the bottom up, as the expression clearly illustrates the process, this specifically means they are never top-down conscious or controlled mental or intellectual constructs.

This listening skill is not focused on any particular objective but attempts to be present to the whole coach-client context as if to an undivided ensemble with multiple connections, including those that intimately engage the coach as a person. Through this attentive systemic presence, coaches invite, welcome and follow all possible connections between manifestations of their client contexts as if they all were parts of one unique and coherent subject. From this whole coherent ensemble, new perspectives, forms and solutions naturally emerge.

Gradually, without directing their attention, coach general attentive presence naturally taps onto the connections that exist between the numerous elements of a given client's context. This includes all the issues and interfaces that very personally, intimately concern the listening coach. Progressively, a masterful coach can invite and welcome the general direction of client meaning, issues, attitudes, motivations, thoughts and emotions, beginnings and ends, assurances and hesitations. Facilitated by this interactive architecture, a new unpredictable and specific, coherent form can self-organize and emerge from each individual client's global context.

- **Caution:** Masterful coaches gradually learn to feel existentially secure, knowing that sooner or later, new configurations will emerge from the totality of diverse client manifestations and comments concerning multiple subjects, especially when these are presented with floating approximations or apparent disorder.

In all chaotic situations, in all turbulences and changing states and transformational processes, nature often proceeds in a fashion that escapes the eye of an unknowing observer. Hidden by the apparent confusion, much finer, subtler, indirect mechanisms gradually prepare new foundations. Original meaning is forming and future structures are growing. Only when these become sufficiently important will they begin to become apparent.

The observation and description of these underlying structuring mechanisms cannot be achieved locally. They are minute, but simultaneously present in the whole system, in every one of its apparently segmented parts.

In physics also, it has been demonstrated without a doubt that from the chaos of nature, there naturally emerges new forms of D.N.A., and new subatomic organizations, unexpected chemical structures, original crystalline forms and unknown mathematical solutions.

- **Synthesis:** All the apparently disconnected elements that compose each client's context and reality are in fact intimately connected and necessarily interacting in reciprocal influence. They all rest on a common foundation. They all inseparably create and can reveal an emerging whole.

In masterful life coaching and executive coaching, new perspectives regularly emerge from this whole in totally unexpected ways. This process takes place in the same fashion as when loose and informal network systems give birth to original and performing forms of organizations. The process is also identical to chaotic creativity sessions that help elaborate totally unexpected and innovative technological solutions. In nature, the same process underlies the sudden creation of new forms of life within apparently inhospitable environments. This same emerging process allows the apparition of new, coherent and client-pertinent patterns in masterful systemic coaching. This commonly takes place when client contexts are left entirely free of all linear, structuring and preconceived constraints and when coaches abandon themselves (and their self or ego) to unconditionally accompany shared coach-client energy and context.

When coaches let go on all urges to control and guide client processes, when on the contrary, they facilitate the expression of lateral and complex connections, of multi-polar and contradictory or confusing client motion and emotion, then new forms of global, synthetic and systemic connections can emerge. During these essential moments of creativity, the coach and the client, the implicit and the explicit, information and relationship, content and form, mind, spirit and time are all intimately merging to become un-dissociated, suddenly and fundamentally unified.

Professionals in the fields of cybernetics and systems thinking know this process well. It is often observable in many different fields: It is the capacity of creation or self-organization of natural systems, when they are left free to interact, simply or elementarily accompanied by simple interactive rules. To be sure, this life process permeates everything in the universe.

26) *Consolidation*

27) *Emerging decisions*

Client action plans

Designing an action plan is generally the ultimate phase of a coaching sequence. It is generally perceived as the ultimate sequence after a meandering process that may have been the occasion for a number of sidetracks, mistakes, difficulties and dead ends. When all these pitfalls in the coach-client accompanying process are finally been avoided or solved, when the time finally arrives to bring the relationship to a positive conclusion, many coaches start coasting on a relatively linear road that is perceived to lead straight to success. That final sequence of the coaching process is action planning.

Numerous performing methods exist on the market to accompany the elaboration and implementation of effective and performing action plans. Although most of these have proven their methodic pertinence in terms of results, these procedures are often very logical, linear, and let us admit, hopelessly Cartesian in their nature. Truly, action planning is the part of coaching that rarely offers much surprise.

Most of these methods are related to project management principles that directly inherit from the efficient frame of reference of the Industrial Revolution. For the most part, they have been tried and tested and ensure the predictable, timely realization of very complex human and industrial projects. In general, these project management processes or procedures rest on the precise definition of clearly delineated, consecutive steps that are each coherently articulated into a coherently structured whole, in the fashion of an efficient assembly line. This ensures that any well-defined project can be successfully accomplished within reasonable deadlines, respecting both defined costs and quality expectations.

In the same spirit, well trained, performing, professional coaches know how to accompany clients all the way to their finish line by using a set of very practical questions that belong to the recommended classical skill-set, such as; What? With whom? When and for when? Where? How? Etc...

Beyond the above obvious foundational coaching skills, it will often be useful for the systemic master coach to regularly abandon the above mainstream techniques and strategies and choose to experiment with a less linear frame of reference. Indeed, a number other less burdensome and non-linear action-oriented frames of references may sometimes allow coaching clients to consider their action plans in a much lighter, more ecological and energy-efficient fashion in order to achieve maximum sustainable results with a minimum display of means. Action planning can also serve to undermine established perspectives and shift client frames of references.

- **Example:** In the course of a team coaching process focused on conceiving and realizing a major change in structure and processes, a project team finalized a very ambitious project that was designed to turn their organization around in a little less than a year. After this exemplary teamwork was painstakingly finished, the team coach asked its members how the ten-month transformational project could be totally redesigned if it was absolutely vital for the organization to undertake its turnaround in less than four weeks.

After a first expression of disbelief displayed by some of the more creative team members, and the expected resistance strategies vehemently expressed by the rest, the group settled down and proceeded to accept the challenge. They finally imagined and adopted innovating strategies to conceive of a much more performing action plan that could achieve more challenging results in record time. The organization achieved the totally revised plan within six weeks, with a consequential economy of means and a much more immediate return on investments.

- **Synthesis:** In all our projects, what takes the most time is our extraordinary capacity to postpone. The most time consuming element in most projects is very simply the comfortable deadlines established between each one of their constitutive steps. This is a fundamental characteristic of all systems that operate within a linear frame of reference resting on the principle of centralized control.

Paradoxically, the above example may give the wrong impression that a coach's function is to push clients to accept to put themselves under enormous

pressure in order to achieve extraordinary results within record time frames. On the contrary, systemic coaches accompany individual and collective clients in creative processes help them perceive time and other available environmental means as their most solid allies.

- **Synthesis:** Very rarely will a systemic coach ask questions centered on setting very short deadlines in order to help clients visualize how to achieve goals in a highly demanding and voluntary behavioral context. Systemic coaches are more focused on accompanying clients in a fundamental change of their perception of time and energy, in order to help them develop projects that are tailored to succeed in the lightest possible and manner most time and energy-efficient organization.

Rather than quickly center clients on performing deadlines, it is often much more strategic to first ask clients where they could initiate their actions most effectively, or who are the allies that could most probably offer support, or again how they could initiate all the pertinent actions simultaneously and immediately, in several complementary directions. These and other creative questioning strategies will serve to re-center clients, or de-center them, in order to adopt an attitude that will open them to capitalize on all their misperceived environmental aids and on all preexisting means already present within their established context. This type of systemic strategy based on effective interfacing with existing resources will very often allow for an important gain in time and energy.

- **Synthesis:** When preparing for action, it is certainly important to consider to do it with quality. It is also vitally useful to eliminate all possible delays and postponing between all the action-plan sequences in order to achieve synergy in simultaneity.

For many people, teams and organizations, initiating new actions is synonymous with lengthy preliminary information campaigns, to expect sustainable effort, to allow for prolonged preparatory negotiations, to consider heavy investments in time and energy, to plan for the need to extensively communicate throughout the process, to prepare persistence in follow-up, to accumulate economic resilience to survive through the process, and of course, to evaluate the imperative uncertainty in results.

For these people and systems, the subliminal moral to the story is that change is necessarily risky and difficult to achieve. To succeed an exceptional project, this frame of reference stipulates that one must be prepared to churn out much more energy than usual dispensed, for a predictably long period of time. In this fundamentally masochistic and pessimistic perspective, the motto is: if change were easy, its results would already be achieved. In this context it is a given truth that success is extremely difficult to achieve. Of course, that is an excellent excuse for these people and systems to indefinitely remain in the relative comfort of their established equilibrium.

For an individual or a team, this frame of reference often implies a defensive or competitive attitude that can only exist in opposition to the environment. A more systemic perspective rests on totally different premises by which appropriate actions aiming for sustainable transformations are naturally adopted by a positive, fluid environment in the midst of pre-existing dynamic synergies. In fact, useful, sustainable projects are generally rapidly linked with, and intimately supported by participating environments. They are fed by a positively inclusive and ecological context. Durable qualitative achievements often cluster to co-align and resonate in effortless reciprocity.

Examples:

- Observe that people and systems that exist in opposition to their environments, who conceive their actions as intense battles within difficult contexts, can never allow themselves to lower their guard, to take time off for leisure and reflection.
- Consider also that all successful people and systems that succeed with their environments, those who collaborate in concert with their networks, know how to achieve four times more results with relative ease and comfort. The latter do not display more efforts than the former. They simply exist in a very different frame of reference or worldview that is completely in keeping with systemic coaching.

Before changing perspectives, it is useful to acknowledge the fact that failure almost systematically requires and consumes much more time and energy than success. Whenever facing any heavy project that seems to require excessive means and considerable effort, a number of measurable criteria can be observed.

- First, the concerned people and systems experience the same type of difficulties on a recurring basis, in most everything they undertake.
- They harbor the principle that their projects and ambitions must be solitary undertakings, carried out without others.
- They want to achieve their goals with controlling, individualistic strategies, with independent means and actions.
- They spend large amounts of energy to protect themselves from their environment, perceived as dangerous, in order to ensure that they will be the sole beneficiaries of whatever results they achieved.
- They therefore act against rather than with, spending time and energy to control their environment.
- Often, they just don't want to owe anyone anything.
- In short, their frame of reference and strategy unwittingly cuts them from all possible surrounding forces in the universe that could support and accompany a light and easy successful endeavor.

On the contrary, successful people and systems seem to achieve much higher goals in much less time, with much less effort. These individuals and organizations act within a principle of reciprocity with all and everything in their environment in what is called today a fundamentally sustainable

perspective. They seem to continuously interface with this environment, maintaining constant transparent interaction to achieve a form of communion of spirit and soul. These people and systems seem to be much more generously inserted within their natural social and professional contexts. They maintain a simple and dynamic policy of mutually beneficial reciprocity. Their vital energy seems aligned with all the positive forces in their environment. And not too surprisingly, it seems that in return, this environment openly supports them and their projects.

It seems very clear that all exchanges or interfaces within a positive systemic frame of reference rest on mutual trust and generosity. These interactive foundations allow for the achievement of much more economical, ecological and performing results than when each tries to achieve results alone, in spite of their environment or despite their network. When they are imposing, solitary ambitions require way too much personal effort. On the other hand, one plus one plus one... permits fluid miracles when all operate in concert.

- **Synthesis:** Systemic coaching action plan conception and implementation rests on the creation and consolidation of a multiplicity of performing interfaces with the whole environment of individual and collective clients. These interfaces are considered to be one of the most important contributive factors to achieve truly sustainable project results.

In this way, visualizing an appropriate location that would be most suitable for an action can automatically evoke a whole set of supporting factors such as environmental allies and naturally available useful means. The search for a strategy that would permit multiple simultaneous actions, opening numerous operational fronts at the same time, almost obliges one to loose control and attract active and responsible partnerships. Only when one juggles with numerous different actions and useful support systems will naturally appropriate dates and times emerge to client consciousness. Action plans that are conceived in the complexity of a systemic frame of reference are relatively light, naturally collective and surprisingly simple to manage within a dynamic and motivating distributed structure. They need less effort and take much less time.

- **Synthesis:** Numerous coaches identify themselves and measure their success with their client results. They are consequently much too eager to see them succeed. These coaches generally consider that short deadlines give action plans added value. All too often, coaches promote voluntary and utilitarian strategies at the expense of lighter, more indirect and more fluid strategies that could greatly benefit client results.

In a subtle way, coaches who are too centered on tight client deadlines, those who drive clients to achieve in a timely fashion, are often attempting to indirectly take control of the client situation. In a way, they are also subtly suggesting that their clients too, should be in control, at the detriment of a lighter delegating and collaborative and interactive relationship with their environments.

Consequently, rather than identify themselves with a solid and performing action plan that would include well structured, logical steps and engaging dates, systemic coaches gain can in performance when they accompany their clients with a minimalist attentive presence, in a trustful state of mind that rests on a respectful, interactive emerging process.

Conclusions for infinite horizons

Evidently, this article underlines that attentive presence is the main systemic coaching skill. It is so intimately linked to the mastery of all the other coach competencies that one could say it precedes and includes each one of them. Without attentive presence without intention, other skills such as listening, questioning, silence, the capacity to create new perspectives, to accompany client decisions and action plans, etc. may loose their power and be relegated to mere superficial project-management techniques. With true and profound attentive presence, all the other coach competencies mesh to make the art of coaching a truly essential and innovative development process.

To conclude, this text proposes that the one fundamental coach posture is an intimate and attentive presence, not only to the client, but also to the coach and to the whole coaching and environmental context. This text suggests that attentive coach presence needs to be perceived as the envelope that gives a very specific edge to all other tools, techniques and strategies in that profession. This central competency rests on a very intimate, transparent, personal and profound way of being. When a coach develops it, all the other acquired behaviors and doing skills very naturally and effortlessly fit into place.

Consequently, attentive listening and an intention-free presence to the client, to the coach and their shared context should be the one central focus of all coach training and development methods. All the other coaching tools should be presented as secondary incremental skills that can be acquired only if and when they naturally fit into the accompanying process.

Imagine for a minute this type of profound, unconditional and welcoming presence, without intention, in the course of coaching relationships:

- On the one hand, clients explore their intentions, their aspirations, their motivations and goals. Within a totally open and free relational architecture, they pursue their personal dialogue, stretching themselves towards their expected achievements and development.
- On the other hand, without any personal intention, coaches are present, in a state of receptive and alert suspension. They simply respect client time and space and melt their presence into their client contexts. They shortly, lightly and freely, accept to manifest themselves, remaining on the outer fringes of their client's quest. They attentively listen, but for nothing. They yearn for nothing. They simply let their presence welcome their clients in the open and welcoming space created by their attentive silence.

This context creates the chalice that allows masterful systemic coaching to take place. This very structured and protected developmental architecture is the one that permits coaching clients to truly expand and deploy in exactly the way they see fit. Accompanied by the wide and profound silent presence of their coaches, clients start to listen to themselves and begin to express and give form to their deepest potentials. In this infinite coaching space, time or volume, the magic of coaching can begin to unfold.

IV SYSTEMIC COACHING TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

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[For a \(much shorter\) article on attentive presence in a team coaching context](#)

[To consult a technical article on listening skills.](#)

[To consult a training program on the fundamentals of coaching mastery](#)

"May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling and ebbing currents, these deepening tides moving out, returning, I will sing you as no one ever has, streaming through widening channels into the open sea."

RILKE's Book of Hours

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