



Embodied Coaching: Leverage the Power of Whole-Person Transformation

by Maud Raber (France)

‘ We move through space like we move through life. ’

- Stuart Heller

Have you ever completed a coaching programme feeling that some deeper dimension of the client’s resources remained untapped and wished you could go deeper?

Have you ever worked with “heady” clients who felt stuck, but for whom verbal coaching interactions did little?

Developing a whole-person, embodied approach in your coaching can prove tremendously impactful. It has significantly increased the transformational power of my interventions. I share here some key learnings from my professional practice.

Embodiment: what are we talking about, and what difference does it make in coaching?

“Embodiment” is the way we are, how we feel, relate and do, in our whole body-mind. Our physiology is far from being just a vehicle for transporting our brain. It is the physical bedrock of our perceptions, cognitions, emotions, relationships and behaviour.

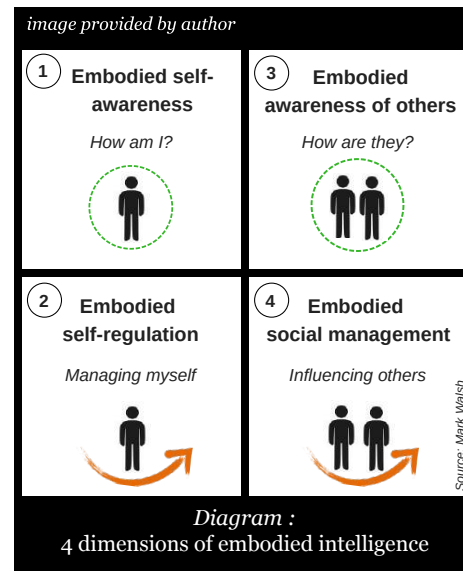
In that sense, embodiment goes beyond just “inhabitation” - beyond regarding the body as a thing I live in (implying a separate identity that is aware of the body as ‘it’). It is being aware AS a body; the body as ‘I’ : it is the subjective experience of the body as an aspect of self.

Becoming conscious of our usually unconscious personal shaping, developing a range of options, and having the freedom of choice as a result, is what ‘embodiment’ means to us. How we move is an expression of how we are, and the potential of how we can be.

Embodiment matters to all human beings because this embodied sense is present in the whole of our experience. And it matters specifically to us coaches as it offers a deep, efficient and sustainable approach to working with others when other methods (e.g. more cognitive or verbal-only) often fall short. In an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, it is decisive that we develop for ourselves, and can help our clients develop, flexibility and adaptability, especially under intensity and challenge.

Accessing multi-dimensional awareness and agency

Embodied intelligence is multi-dimensional. We can think of embodiment skills as involving awareness and choice, for ourselves and others (choice becomes influence), thus forming a 4-quadrant matrix of embodiment capabilities:



These 4 quadrants provide a map of practical embodied skills that can be developed (building up from 1 to 4).

8 key gateways for working with the body in coaching:

These eight aspects of embodied intelligence (M. Walsh) define what makes a happy, healthy, flourishing human being. They are both the components of practical techniques, and ‘gateways’ into the depths of embodiment. Developing a range of skills in all eight is helpful.

1 core capability: **reflexive resilience**

The core “algorithm” (P. Linden) or meta-process of embodiment is: Awareness - Acceptance and Choice (M. Walsh).

In an embodiment, we train ourselves to notice more often and earlier on when we are sliding in a pattern that’s not useful (not appropriate to context and objective), then practice acknowledging it as best as possible. From then on, we clarify our intention, and deliberately move and/or shape ourselves in the body towards this chosen way of being, acting, relating.

In particular, we learn to bounce back under duress from our habitual, often unskilful reactive pattern caused by the distress response (see “Personality and Center” diagram below). We learn to adjust our posture, breath, muscle tone, orientation of awareness and connection to purpose and to others so as to embody what we call a “centred state”, which retrieves access to our larger potential, including: big picture thinking, creativity, intuition and flow in anything we do.

image provided by author

8 GATEWAYS TO EMBODIMENT

- 1 AWARENESS (the most fundamental)**

This tool, doorway to embodied agency, enables all other tools: agency stems from awareness, acceptance & intention
- 2 ACCEPTANCE (harmony with what is)**

Being receptive and actively and freely giving consent to what is, instead of fighting it, as the first step to change
- 3 INTENTION (harmony with what could be)**

A present moment bodily action, this set of micro-movements shapes a blueprint for a future course of action, and enables choice and personal leadership
- 4 POSTURE (structural alignment)**

Using appropriate postures to align ourselves with the forces acting upon us, and cultivate integrity, efficient energy use and balance
- 5 RELAXATION (and tension patterns)**

Efficiently mobilising our energy and movement patterns, to enable optimal, responsive movement and feeling
- 6 MOVEMENT (including breathing)**

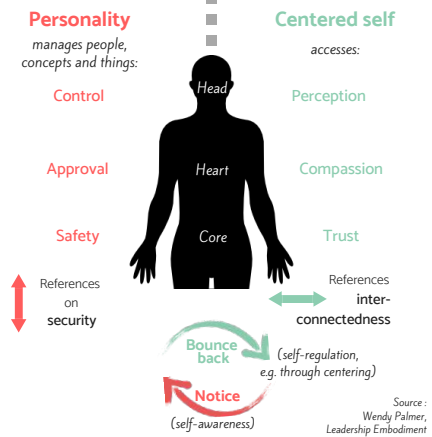
Using movement to be aware of how we are and adjusting amount, quality, shape & rhythm to access our potential
- 7 RESPONSIVENESS**

Responding appropriately (rather than react) to the environment to be proficient at relationships (e.g. listening, cooperating, competing healthily)
- 8 IMAGERY**

Using appropriate visual metaphors (e.g. archetypes, animals, goofs, as a shortcut to activate complex movement patterns

Source: Mark Walsh

image provided by author



3 of my simplest, go-to embodied coaching techniques:

I regularly use these in my coaching, and you can implement them immediately, with robust results.

- Walking embodied check-in (awareness) and intention setting (M. Walsh):

This is a practice of the “awareness and choice” master algorithm of embodiment (see above). Invite your client to walk naturally in the room, scanning their body slowly from feet to head, following their breath, and discovering: “How am I right here and now?” (physical sensations, emotions and thoughts – comfortable and uncomfortable). Ask them to share their most concrete observations (what, where in the body and how), as a training in embodied awareness. Pause (see f.i. shaker below).

Ask your client to resume their walk, this time asking themselves “How do I want to be?” and literally shaping their desired quality as a movement form, with its distinctive direction, rhythm, form, tone. Invite them to raise the intensity of their shape / movement by 50%, try out different patterns and find out which one resonates. Again, ask them to state where, what and how in their body this intention resides, and how they would call it now.

This is an example of supporting the body to “learn (...) through exaggeration and contrast” (Wendy Palmer).

- **Shaker – an efficient state changer:** Invite the client to shake their whole body for at least 3 seconds, standing, with deep, long outbreaths. This will support them shifting their embodied state.
- **Centering for embodied self-regulation:** Centering is a category of embodied self-regulation techniques, building on posture, breath, relaxation, orientation of awareness and social connection. There are many centering techniques. Here is one from Paul Linden:
- **Soft core (relaxation):** let your tongue hang loose, your shoulders drop, relax your belly and lower abdominal muscles
- **Stability (posture):** adjusts your posture, uplifting while relaxing your spine, tilting your tailbone backwards if seated, and unlocking your knees if standing
- **Expansiveness (attention):** Open your awareness to left and right, back and front, above and below, and expand it in all directions as a radiating light bulb
- **Smiling heart (social connection):** think of someone who makes you smile.

A 2-seconds version of this is: Uplift – Relax – Expand (W. Palmer).

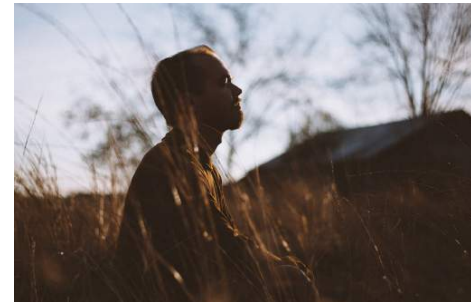
More advanced techniques

Embodied coaching also builds on more elaborate techniques. On the basis of a principle-based approach such as the one developed by M. Walsh and F. Briers, you can reach infinite creativity in this respect.

To gain insight into new situations and practice new ways of doing things, we create simulators, i.e. safe, calibrated, experimental body-mind protocols by which we test the impact of different variables and support the client finds out a more adapted way of operating in the face of a specific challenge. With distinction coaching, we help clients get out of stuckness and gain greater choice by distinguishing and separating out embodied patterns that they have initially unconsciously confused e.g. visibility and arrogance.

Because the body is also home to meaning as a felt sense, we tap into embodied inquiry to elicit and test insights, by taking on archetypical postures, as through the Embodied Yoga Principles approach (M. Walsh).

In the spirit of Focusing (E. Gendlin’s psychotherapeutic inner awareness process) or Hakomi body psychotherapy, we leverage deep body listening to follow a felt sense and its unfolding meaning throughout the body. In order to map and fuel opportunities to build an embodied range (more variety in our embodied patterns), we explore the Four Elements (Earth, Water, Fire and Air – G. Whitelaw and M. Walsh) and their resonance with our own embodied type. As an embodiment coach, our distinctive contribution lies also in supporting our clients to craft tailor-made practices that stretch them to the learning edge of their embodied potential.



Embodied coaching excellence: how to get there? If you feel called to bring the body more into your coaching, here are reliable steps that will lead you there.

1. Develop your own embodiment through dedicated practice, and stay on this ever-deepening path. Most of your coaching efficiency will spring out of who and how you are.
2. Work on your own trauma history and build professional trauma-awareness. The body is a powerful vessel, and coaching through the body borders therapy and trauma work more often than not.
3. Follow a high-quality professional embodiment coaching curriculum. A few excellent ones exist internationally; all integrate a mid-term personal embodied transformation journey.

However you are already integrating the body in your coaching, consider prolonging and deepening this fruitful development. And don’t hesitate to reach out for any question! maud@embodied-potential.com

Resources to go further:

- All books by: S. Heller, P. Linden, W. Palmer, R. Strozzi-Heckler, or G. Whitelaw
- Free e-Book “Working With the Body in Training and Coaching” and more resources on embodied coaching excellence: <https://embodiedfacilitator.com/ebook/>
- The Embodiment Podcast (free, also on iTunes)
- YouTube: Integration Training Channel

ABOUT MAUD RABER

Maud is a leading international embodiment developmental coach, facilitator and trainer. She works with C-Suite and executives in corporate organisations to support the development of authentic leadership, resilience and interpersonal excellence for the future of work. A trainer and mentor of embodiment coaches, she is a faculty of the Embodied Facilitator Course (UK- Russia) and of the Formapart certifying Facilitator Training Curriculum (France). Accredited Leadership Embodiment Coach and Instructor, and seasoned practitioner of Being in Movement, Embodied Yoga Principles, systemic representations, Focusing and Mindfulness. Co-founder and lead trainer of the Moscow-based « Додзё Лидера » blended learning executive embodiment programme.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/maudraber>
www.embodied-potential.com
www.embodiedfacilitator.com