



Leadership and Somatic Coaching

You probably have heard or said the following expressions: 'I am the way I am' or 'What you see is what you get'; this notion that after a certain age, we can not change. Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee, two researchers in neural plasticity, challenged this belief in writing the book «Your Body has a Mind of its Own». They illustrated the link between our brain (the neurological maps) and what we are able to do. They discovered, among other things, that these neurological maps have the potential to change as long as an individual incorporates new practices. This realization gives tremendous hope to practitioners in the medical field and their patients but also to coaches in the field of leadership transformation.

Every day, we open or close ourselves to different opportunities in tempering our mood, modulating our voice, being present or not, evoking confidence in others or mistrust - in short, the expression of our leadership.

In the broadest sense of the word, our Body is a reservoir of our past experiences; who we became, the capabilities that we developed and the automatic behaviours we embodied. We know now that our Body continues to evolve to acquire new capabilities and to transform the ones we already have, thereby representing a potential to bring these into action.

Every day, we open or close ourselves to different opportunities. This phenomenon is observable biologically, cognitively and emotionally: our body opens up and closes up through our breathing, the pores of our skin, the process of eating and eliminating, or simply through yawning or stretching. This phenomenon occurs hundreds of times throughout the day and dictates the rhythm of our conversations, the pulsations of our heart and the movement of our lungs and thoracic cage. These are examples that illustrate our capacity to temper our mood, modulate our voice, be present, evoke confidence in others- in short, the expression of our leadership.

Somatic coaching allows us to explore what is meant by "inhabiting our body".

Our leadership capacities live through our presence, our integrity, our gaze, our posture and our tone of voice. Similarly, our purpose is conveyed by the words we say and the actions we take. Our mood also lives in our body. Change your posture and you will quickly see a change in your mood. By developing a deeper awareness of our mood and what we convey, we become more attuned to the mood of others.

Somatic coaching allows us to explore what is meant by "inhabiting our body"; clarifying our ideas, beliefs and interpretations; feeling our emotions and being able to express these to inspire and guide others; being aware of our will and the will of others.

Somatic coaching allows us to become more aware of our capabilities through the depth of our attention, and in so doing, allows for these capabilities to contribute to our personal and professional mission.

How can somatic coaching help you?

Do you want to deepen your purpose?
Do you want to be more effective in your conversations?
Do you want to be more empathetic?
Do you want to be more present and intentional?
Do you want to be more committed to your future?
Do you want to be able to inspire your partners and team?
Do you want to be able to make clear requests?
Do you want to be able to lead your team?
Do you want to be able to ...?

Somatic coaching invites us to become more aware of the automatic ways of being we have embodied over time and to reprogram these to allow us to accomplish what we want to achieve.

A Recent Case Study

The following is an example of a brief somatic coaching intervention I recently did with Nancy, a general director in a public organisation. I was leading, The Art of Coaching, a coaching and leadership program, and Nancy was one of the participants. At the end of the second day, she came to me. She wanted assistance in developing her listening skills. She was recently made aware that she often imposes her point of views on others, interrupting them, preparing her response while the other person was speaking. She described herself as being impatient. As much as Nancy was trying to stay focused on the other person, she was noticing her own mind racing ahead. Being aware of this behaviour, but unable to do anything about it, left her with the feeling of being powerless. She was physically in good shape. She was neither shy nor arrogant. I was able to feel that her concerns were real and that she sincerely wanted to be a better, more patient listener.

Throughout other conversations we had during the two days, I was able to assess her as a direct, energetic, fast paced, ambitious and joyous person.

I asked her what she had tried so far and she replied *'not much other than being aware it is happening ... and ha! I read a book that was recommended to me'*.

How do we build patience in someone that lives in a world of nano seconds? Effective listening requires being in tune with the other person's rhythm. We explored the distinction between speed and rhythm. Nancy is about going fast and in her mind it equates being efficient. On the other hand, rhythm as exemplified in music tends to fluctuate in tempo just like the human rhythm.

Nancy could relate to this distinction and she was able to see that there was a lot of speed in her world right now and very little rhythm. We agreed that this was one of her strengths; think fast, speak fast and react fast. I suggested that in many occasions this strength was very useful but in other occasions, probably not. Some conversations require another level of attention and listening. However, after many years of practices, Nancy drilled in her the capacity to be fast – a little bit like when we manufacture a sports car.

Nancy realised that developing the capacity to be a patient listener might take a bit of practice and time. I then explained to her that developing the capacity of being attentive was a prerequisite to becoming a patient listener. My purpose was to allow her to develop this new muscle of being attentive. I wanted to give her an exercise that she could do easily, every day and many times a day. Knowing that the golden rule is to start small and progress gradually, I suggested to Nancy to stop her activities from time to time during her work day and intentionally direct all her attention to one thing – a pen she has on her desk for example – for 30 seconds and then increase to 1 minute. I asked her to incorporate this small practice in her day to day activities for the next few weeks to start building the muscle of being attentive and patient. In doing this exercise, she is training the power of her attention and her *will* to stay focused on one thing even though her mind wants to jump to the next thing to do. I also mentioned that the next step for her would be to pay attention to other people's rhythm; the pace at which they speak and from time to time practice mirroring their pace for 2 to 3 minutes. She left with the commitment to practice the suggested exercises and we agreed to follow-up in two weeks from now.

In summary

Somatic coaching is a unique method that builds upon your real commitments. It allows you to transform your automatic ways of being into real capacities to support you in achieving what is important to you.