Evolutionary approaches to Self-care in Coaching today

UNIVERSITY OF CONTINUING EDUCATION CAMBRIDGE
UNDERGRADUATE IN COACHING.

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Evolutionary Behavioural Consulting
Improving Mental Health, Well-Being and Performance
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WHO AM I AND HOW DID I GET HERE?

• I am a Neuro Diagnostic Coach, Therapist, Yoga & Meditation Teacher.
• My journey evolved from my own personal journey of burnout in my corporate job at BA.
• I used Yoga as a healing modality and what to share the benefits with others that maybe going through something similar.
• Taking early retirement after a period of sick leave. I decided to make a radical change retrain, set up my own business and embarked upon another path.
• Based in London I’ve been teaching and training teachers for the 15 years in New York, LA and Europe and evolving what I do to align with the times.
• My work has been featured in various blogs, podcasts and publications including Psychologies Magazine and Women’s Health and Fitness. I’ve taught events The Secret Yoga Club, Lululemon and presented at The Yoga Show, Mind Body Spirit Festival and has been featured on BBC Radio as well as co-hosting a well-being show on a local London Radio station. Produced a DVD, have my offerings on various online platforms including itunes & Grokker.
How did I get here?

- My introduction to Coaching started when I embarked on a 11 month Coaching program with The Handel Group in New York with my teacher/coach Elena Brower. This made me see the potential for combining eastern practices and western psychology as an extremely powerful tool for transformation.
- More importantly it helped me address my own behavior that yoga could not. This came at a critical time as I was caring for and supporting my mother through her dementia journey.
- These two experiences lead me wanting to be more psychologically and scientifically informed about the underpinnings of the brain and, mind in certain behaviours.
- I returned back to Cambridge to study Experimental Cognitive Psychology taking additional modules in the clinical applications of Mindfulness and Understanding Stress from a Neurobiological perspective.
- In addition I’ve continued my studies at the Universities of London/BirkBeck, Birmingham and UCL in Neuroscience, Psychopathology, Cognition, Genetics, Biopsychology, Evolutionary and Social Psychology, Research, AI + Robotics.
- My areas of interest are in Language, Sound + Auditory Perception, Visual spatial processing and orientation, Movement Performance, Intelligence, Cognitive control, Free will and Consciousness.
WHAT WE’LL COVER:

• An introduction to Evolutionary strategies combining Eastern practices with Western science to promote better mental health, well-being and performance.
• How to use these approaches on yourself and others.
• An experimental understanding of the ACT and RFT models.
• A splattering of the Neuroscience/Neurobiology of health and why it maybe helpful for Coaches and Clients.
SO WHY DO WE NEED TO PLACE MORE IMPORTANCE ON SELF CARE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS AND WHY NOW?

• We are all vulnerable!
• Generation stress: 4 in 5 Brits could be suffering burnout as a result of stress, AXA research reveals (November 13th 2017, Health).
• There’s more demand for Coaches, Psychologists and Therapists due to the status and diversity of society today.
• The growth and in USING COACHING, YOGA, MINDFULNESS, MEDITATION as alternative tools for self medication and healing.
WHY DO WE NEED TO PLACE MORE IMPORTANCE ON SELF-CARE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS AND WHY NOW?

Generation stress: 4 in 5 Brits could be suffering burnout as a result of stress, AXA research REVEALS November 13th 2017. Posted in Health

**Who is stressed?**

82% of people feel stressed at least some of the time

- 76% Male
- 89% Female

While 8% feel stressed all the time

55+ are the least stressed

- 45% Personal health
- 43% Health of family and friends
- 25% Personal finance
- 29% Are not stressed at all

Men are stressed about...

- 41% Work pressures
- 36% Personal health
- 32% Personal finance
- 30% Pensions and future saving

Women are stressed about...

- 43% Personal finance
- 41% Health of family and friends
- 40% Personal health
- 36% Pensions and future saving
Are you as adaptable as you want your clients to be around stress and change?

• ‘All the experiences in your life – from single conversations to your broader culture – shape the microscope details of your brain. Neurally speaking, who you are depends on where you’ve been. Your brain is a relentless shape-shifter, constantly rewriting its own circuitry – and because your experiences are unique, so are the vast, detailed patterns in your neural networks. Because they continue to change your whole life, your identity is a moving target; it never reaches an end point.’

• – David Eagleman (Neuroscientist, Writer Stanford University).
SO WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY & EMOTIONAL AGILITY? AND HOW CAN WE CULTIVATE IT?

• Well Steven Hayes and Russ Harris describe it as “The ability to contact the present moment fully as a conscious human being, and based on what the situation affords, changing or persisting in behavior in the service of chosen values.”

• So what are some of the best tools to help us cultivate this ability?

• ENTER research from Eastern practices and Western Psychology, Therapy and Science....
• This form of self enquiry is often approached in yoga philosophy via “Self Study” ‘Svadhyaya’.
• It is the fourth Niyama (observances) branch of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras.
• An important quality to embrace if one is seeking contentment.
• When we combine the essence of this philosophy with the findings from western science we can begin to see how this might be helpful in understanding and monitor behaviors and feelings within ourselves and others.
ONE SHOULD TRUST IN NOTHING BUT FACT. FACT MUST BE PRESENTED TO INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL NATURE ON PHYSIOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, LOGICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDS.

The importance of Self Study is reflected from this thread/sutra is taken from the 4th Chapter of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras focusing on self-analysis and enlightenment.

It shows us how SCIENCE (east & west) can help us to acknowledge the outer world to be able to focus on the inner world.’

From a western perspective it could be seen to be reflective of Carl Rogers ‘Person Centred Approach’.
Dr. Daniel Siegel holds the view that the evolving part we play as therapists, coaches and friends depends on how we ARE ABLE TO FOCUS ON THE ’Inner Experience’ and offers the following formula that means paying more attention to how we nurture and replenish ourselves.

- **P** - presence
- **A** - attunement
- **R** - resonance and receptivity
- **T** - trust
SOME POINTERS to remind ourselves how to be present

• 1. Pause for a moment.
• 2. Lightly focus attention on an ”anchor” (on the body, breath or point of focus).
• 3. Observe – with openness, interest and receptiveness whatever thoughts, feelings, or other private experiences are present.

• In other words how are you attending to your attention?
PRACTICE: SIX CORE SKILLS MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

• To settle and position yourself comfortably to help you arrive in this moment open and receptive and follow the following cues (eyes closed).

• After:
• Q1. What did you notice about your own mind and body at the beginning of the practice?
• Q2. What did you notice at the end of the practice?
THE EVIDENCE Mindfulness meditation has been shown to promote emotional stability.

Impact of meditation training on the default mode network during a restful state

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Mindfulness meditation has been shown to promote emotional stability. Moreover, during the processing of aversive and self-referential stimuli, mindful awareness is associated with reduced medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) activity, a central default mode network (DMN) component. However, it remains unclear whether mindfulness practice influences functional connectivity between DMN regions and, if so, whether such impact persists beyond a state of meditation. Consequently, this study examined the effect of extensive mindfulness training on functional connectivity within the DMN during a restful state. Resting-state data were collected from 13 experienced meditators (with over 1000 h of training) and 11 beginner meditators (with no prior experience, trained for 1 week before the study) using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Pairwise correlations and partial correlations were computed between DMN seed regions' time courses and were compared between groups utilizing a Bayesian sampling scheme. Relative to beginners, experienced meditators had weaker functional connectivity between DMN regions involved in self-referential processing and emotional appraisal. In addition, experienced meditators had increased connectivity between certain DMN regions (e.g., dorso-medial PFC and right inferior parietal lobule), compared to beginner meditators. These findings suggest that meditation training leads to functional connectivity changes between core DMN regions possibly reflecting strengthened present-moment awareness.

Keywords: mindfulness meditation; functional connectivity; default mode network; prefrontal cortex; resting state

WE ARE CULPRITS OF OUR OWN SUFFERING – (DUKKHA)

• The essence of Dukkha (means suffering) whilst Sukha is (Joy).
• So what gets us into trouble and causes Dukkha?
• Normal mental representation & processing:
  • Our behavior is often shaped by things we are not experiencing, and have never experienced examples include:
  • Don’t put your hand in the fire.

• ROLE OF LANGUAGE (Related Frame Theory)
  • Shows how we can make anything mean anything
  • and how we react to things we have never directly experienced
SO HOW CAN WE LEARN HOW TO WORK WITH OWN
BRAIN, MIND & EMOTIONS RATHER THAN AGAINST
THEM!

• Accept that:
• Some difficult thoughts are natural and it’s our
  mind’s job to:
  • Look ahead for possible dangers
  • Try to solve problems that might come up
  • Remind us of important things in our past
  • Notice important things that are missing
  • Keep track of how other people are treating us
BY LOOKING AT HOW WE CHOOSE TO REACT TO THESE THOUGHTS

• For example how often if ever do you;

• Give up on things.
• Get caught up in thoughts.
• Dwell on the past and future.
• Try to problem-solve things that can’t be solved.
• Avoid things that make you feel bad.
In the ACT model we refer to this as Fusion and Defusion.

**FUSION being:**
- Seeing the world *through* your thoughts, rather than seeing the thoughts as part of your world.
- Losing the distinction between thought and reality.
- When you the thoughts as realities, which can create frustration, stuckness.
DEFUSION

• Treating thoughts as thoughts and not realities which creates more mobility in emotions and cognition (thinking).
• May or may not be true.
• Definitely not something you have to obey or follow;
• Not a threat to you;
• Is merely words or pictures in your head;
• May or may not be important;
• The IMPORTANT ONE; Can be be allowed to come and go of it’s own accord.
SOME EXAMPLES OF FUSION VS DEFUSION

• Defusion (Having vs Buying into thoughts)  Fusion

• I’m noticing that....

• I’m having the thought that......It’s all going to go wrong I’m having the thought that.......I’m not good enough

• This is referred to as the beginnings in cultivating psychological flexibility and emotional agility (sitting with the positive and negative).
PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY: THE BASIC POINTS

• As we move through life, Thoughts & Feelings will show up, simply because of how our minds work.
• Some are unpleasant, but they’re not themselves harmful.
• We have a natural urge to struggle (fix, get rid, avoid).
• The WAY we go about this can cause far greater problems for us than the thoughts & feelings themselves.
• Goal is not to reduce the thoughts and feelings, but enable person to do things that matter in their life in the presence of those experiences.
PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY – the definition

• The ability to move in a direction that matters to you, even if the presence of unwanted experiences (thoughts, feelings, physical sensations), and in changing circumstances.

• Psychological flexibility is the ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being and to either change behavior or persist, if doing so serves valued end’ (Wilson & Murrell, 2005).

• Knowing what is important and taking steps to connect with this.

• Making changes to our reaction/s allows us to achieve the outcome that we want to see.
The Psychological Flexibility Model Matrix
Kevin L. Polk, Ph.D.

5-Senses Experiencing

What do you do to move away from the unwanted stuff?

What could you do to move toward who is important to you?

Away

Noticing the Difference

Toward

What unwanted stuff shows up inside of you and gets in the way? (like Fear)

Who and what are important to you?

Mental Experiencing
ACT is about building a fulfilling life, not about eliminating distress.
Rejection of concept of ‘healthy, happy, normality.’
Suffering is universal consequence of normal psychological function.
Interested in psychological processes.
These processes are universal, not simply present in those with ‘a problem’.
• Has roots in Behavioral Therapies.
• Key names: Steve Hayes, Kelly Wilson, Robyn Walser and, Russ Harris.
• Development during the 90s, most work since Hayes et al original book published 1999.
SUITABLE APPLICATIONS OF ACT FOR YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS

• ACT is not a symptom-based approach.
• Process-based, not protocol-based.
• Diagnosis not central to the application of ACT – can help to group characteristic forms of avoidance and inflexible responding.
• Since applied across huge range of problems and settings, including: depression, anxiety, anger, substance abuse, psychosis, pain, chronic health conditions, workplace stress, epilepsy, stigma, cultural awareness, learning new skills.
WHAT IT CULTIVATES… BE BOLD

• B – Breathe
• O - Observe your thoughts but don’t let them become your reality (defusion vs fusion in the ACT model).
• L – Listen to your values.
• D – Decide on actions.
WHAT ACT ATTEMPTS TO DO:

• Establishes flexible attentional processes that enable you/and the client to come back to the present moment. By using any breath, mindfulness or meditation practice.

• Provides insights into learning how to respond to the painful and unpleasant thoughts and feelings that are part of the human experience more effectively.
ACT CONTINUED

• **Has 3 principles:**
  • HEART - what have I/you just experienced? experiencing, what showed up
  • for me/you? what did I/you notice
  • HEAD - observe the difference between thinking and experiencing = feeling
  • HANDS - how could I/you take what you experienced here into your daily life?
  • So how do you think you could use the 3 principles of ACT on yourself as well as your clients?
Psychological Flexibility Model
(e.g. ACT - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy)

**AWARE**
- of the here & now
- notice what’s going on inside you and around you

**OPEN**
- Step back & make room for thoughts & feelings
- Not getting tangled up, pushed around or running from them

**ENGAGED**
- Know what matters to you
- Do what it takes to live that way under current circumstances

More fulfilled, more effective, more resilient
WHAT IS RFT RELATED FRAME THEORY

• An explicit psychological account of how human language and cognition interferes with behavior.
• It provides a functional account of the structure of verbal knowledge and cognition, creating an important link between the perspectives of cognitive and behavioral psychology.
• Is regarded as the ‘Science of Behavior’ within the ACT community.
• ACT is regarded as the ‘The Art of Behavior’.
WHY AND HOW I USE THESE APPROACHES AND NEUROSCIENCE ON MYSELF AND WITH MY CLIENTS:

• To explore foundational brain concepts in brain functionality relative to patterns of certain behaviors to be able to see your own patterns as well as clients.

• Additional and educational information regarding basic foundational brain networks and biological concepts such as brain chemicals and the effect of certain neurotransmitters and the impact on emotions and behaviors (including diet and lifestyle).

• Combine with the noticing skills can help in manage and change the default state/Inner Critic of coach and client.

• Reminds yourself and helps clients understand how language interferes with behavior (RFT).
Neurotransmitters are chemicals that transmit a signal from a neuron (a brain cell - neurons) to another across a synapse (gap) packaged into little balls (synaptic vesicles). When instructed they bind to receptors on the other side of the gap.

Neurotransmitters include glutamate, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, adrenaline and non-adrenaline.
EXAMPLE:

When we look at an ‘Overarching goal’ either for ourselves or our clients sometimes we can run into some of the following feelings:

- Impatience and overwhelm as we try to make all the changes at the same time to focus on and achieve one particular outcome.
- We might not stop along the way to acknowledge all the small successes which is hugely important for the brain and our biology. If we or our clients did this it would contribute to regulation of our DOPAMINE so why might this be important?
DOPAMINE

• Dopamine is important in the front lobes for controlling information flow to other areas of the brain. However it does not travel all over the brain like Serotonin.

• **How to increase levels and why?**
  • The increase in Dopamine levels can be triggered just by thinking about the small tasks that are in alignment with your goals or your clients goals which will help you follow through with decisions.
  • Motivation is a psychological construct but from a neuroscience perspective it involves the Dopamine REWARD CIRCUITRY in the brain.
  • To monitor these levels in ourselves/our clients we could analyse our consumption of coffee and look at our diet.
WHY ARE NEUROTRANSMITTERS GOT TO DO WITH WELL BEING AND COACHING

• Some chemicals in the brain are not Neurotransmitters but hormones. Cortisol is one example.

• **How could you use this information on yourself or your clients?**

• Have a discussion/monitor the frequency of exercise and practice Stress reduction techniques like the ones we’ve been speaking about that can keep cortisol levels from getting chronically high.
SEROTONIN (5-HT) PART 1

• Is important for mood regulation, appetite, sleep, memory and learning and HAPPINESS (Sukha)
• Tryptophan (Trip-toe-fan) is the essential amino acid needed to make serotonin this can be found for example in Bananas, yogurts, milk, poultry, chocolate, sunflower and pumpkin seeds.
• BE aware that drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can decrease levels.
How might this information be helpful:

- You might want to discuss/explore/monitor:
- The intake of sleep against productivity and fatigue.
- Monitor exercise activity.
- Use positive thinking/Psychology which has a huge impact on our biochemistry to help MOTIVATE YOURSELF AND YOUR CLIENTS.

**Example:**
- Start a regular morning practice of an ‘attitude for gratitude journal’ this could help you and your client get into the right mindset for the day ahead.
WHY COMBINE EASTERN PRACTICES WITH WESTERN SCIENCE IN COACHING TODAY?

- Simple noticing skills can help and alert you and your client to old behaviors and thinking by cultivating awareness and receptivity in the present moment.
- Cultivates a better relationship with yourself and a stronger connection, trust and receptivity with clients (Carl Rogers – Person Centered) Approach.
- 25 years of Behavioral Neuroscience has and is changing the way we understand interpersonal connection, conflict and productivity in the Leadership and Business and in creating a life of meaning and value in our personal life.
SO WHAT NOW AS YOU WAVE GOODBYE TO CAMBRIDGE AND EMBARK ON A NEW PATH...

• Things you might want to consider:
• How could you distinguish yourself in the crowded market place?
• What are your strengths?
• What are you passions?
• Could you use any part of your background to create a niche?
Recommended Reading & Resources

- EAST MEETS WEST my biggest influences
- Dr. Richard Davidson [https://centerhealthyminds.org/](https://centerhealthyminds.org/)
- Dr. Daniel Siegel [www.drdansiegel.com/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/)
- Dr. Steven Hayes [https://contextualscience.org/acbs](https://contextualscience.org/acbs)

- BOOKS:
- David Eagleman, ‘The Brain’.
- Dr. Susan David, ‘Emotional Agility’.
- Candace B. Pert, PhD ‘Molecules of Emotion’.
- Amy Brann ’Neuroscience for Coaches’.
- Paul & Virginia Brown ‘Neuropsychology for Coaches’.
- Yogi Bhajan, PhD ‘The Mind, Its Projections And Multiple Facets’.
• Q & A
Open brain wave meditation

• If there’s time!