



Gestalt International Study Center Newsletter

Transforming the way we live and work in the world

Focus on: Coaching

Number 5, November 2007

Given the popularity of coaching, we asked some members of our community to share their thoughts on the practice. **Mel Rabin**, who is both a coach and a clinical psychologist, speaks about maintaining a boundary between the two disciplines. We also hear from **Dave Breslin**, a long-term client of Mel's. **Rob Farrands** writes about extending his approach of "mutual inquiry" to exploring the client's "place" in the world. In **Nancy Hardaway's** Leader's Log she shares how using a coach has helped her define organizational issues facing GISC. **Harvy Simkovits**, a coach and consultant who attended *Mastering the Art of Optimism*, expresses his thoughts in a poem. Read, enjoy and pass along! We'd also love to hear your comments.

We have a number of new offerings for coaches in 2008 -- click here for more information!

Monitoring the Boundary: Interview with Mel Rabin by Cynthia Cook

Mel Rabin is a coach and a clinical psychologist, with an extensive 30-year background in Gestalt, having trained with both Sonia and Edwin Nevis. I asked Mel about the kind of coaching that he does, and the benefits and challenges of being trained for both roles.

GISC: Give a brief description of coaching from the Cape Cod Model perspective.

MR: The key point is being able to see clients through a positive lens – even the positive within the negative ("It took courage to take the President's parking space!") The major focus is on heightening awareness of the individual's core personal and tactical strengths and competencies while firmly holding the cognition that at this time in the organization, under these circumstances, the client is doing the very best he or she is able to do.

Increased self-awareness is critical, for both the coach or consultant and the client. This includes awareness of themselves, their character traits, patterns of behavior and their own process. By developing this awareness, clients are able to learn to use themselves as instruments of change and influence who can positively impact their organization. They can learn how others experience them or how they experience others when entering a room; for example, the power of a sigh, a facial gesture, strong words, aggressiveness, or a calm tone.

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The Power of Not Trying to Persuade: Interview with Dave Breslin by Cynthia Cook

Dave Breslin is President and CEO of Direct Federal Credit Union, a \$700 million cooperative enterprise. Since Mel Rabin has coached him over the course of 10 years, we thought it would be interesting to hear his perspective on the benefits of Gestalt coaching.

GISC: What stands out to you about the coaching that you have received from Mel?

DB: What stands out the most is not what's so obvious in terms of tactical things, but that I see my role a lot differently in the organization. I'm the President, and I had always seen my role as being to define the organization's goals and then do everything I possibly could to see that we achieved those goals. Seeing my job this way came with a price, and in working with Mel I began to see my role differently. I still have that responsibility, but now I am more of a consensus-builder.

I report to a nine-member volunteer Board of Directors. I always saw myself as responsible to say to them, "Here's what we need to do and how we need to accomplish it" – in effect doing their job. Mel suggested that it might be better to approach them with, "here are my thoughts, what do you guys think?"

It seems like a simple statement and a simple change, but it is a much more powerful statement to say, "What do you think?" rather than trying to persuade them to agree with what I think. This also gets them to identify more with the goals that I present to them.

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Leader's Log: From "Me" to "We" Leadership by Nancy Hardaway

Day 230 — I've hired help - a coach/consultant, which I probably should have done months ago, but with all the expert resources available here, it seemed a bit redundant. When I look at my development edge in this role, where I need to grow is in the area of nonprofit leadership. So I chose a coach with that content expertise!

Day 242 — I asked my coach to put on a consultant hat and talk about strategic planning. As our fall strategy meeting approaches I need to explore how to shepherd the processes of this organization. Together we talked about the polarities of our organizational openness versus structure, our mission's looseness versus the need for specificity. As we talked about my own style and the organization's culture I see that we may be heavily weighted on the collaborative, organic growth end of the spectrum. Moving from the founder/family stage of the organization, we may need to be more specific about processes. How comfortable will this be for the organization? How do we maintain the intimacy? I think that is more about intention than about process.

The question I struggle with is how to create a shared awareness of where we are as an organization (not as a collection of programs), and what choices we have to make as we go through this transition.

Day 247 — What a surprise to find our leadership practices in the book about Lincoln's leadership, *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin. What makes great leadership is demonstrated in great leaders, I guess. The importance of following his own vision of leadership rather than adhering to other's expectations, gathering and accepting multiple points of view, balancing warm and personal with strategic interactions, recognizing that people come to awareness and understanding at different speeds -- all part of his leadership success. What also struck me was how much his generosity, humor, and optimism played a part in his success, contrary to his dour photos.

Day 266 — What does it mean to be international? This year we've offered programs in Italy, South Africa, Mexico, and now in Sweden. In our environmental context of the US we are very international having faculty and students come to our meeting house from around the world. Does that meet our goals? As the world becomes smaller how do we play a part in that?

Day 267 — We're full every day with students who leave here so full of what they've learned, ready to do their work with others a bit differently. It's exciting and rewarding to be part of. And it's hard to get out of the million urgent details to support these programs and look at the bigger picture of our upcoming strategy meeting. To look at where we want to be next year and in five years. It's so hard to slow down enough to think.

Day 275 — What do people want from our website? The whole

issue of marketing our vision and mission is a challenging combination of brand development as you'd do with a product and building a relationship as you'd do with a person – it's the combination of strategy and intimacy, isn't it?

Day 287 — Our Optimism conference this weekend is absolutely full – over 50 people representing our rich mix of executives, consultants, therapists, educators, and others. In rereading the program evaluation forms I'm struck with how many people commented that they were leaving "feeling so full." There is a recurring theme around optimism as a choice and the power of the first question you ask in setting the tone and expectations. A physical therapist told me she's going to ask "tell me when you feel good," as part of her first evaluation with her patients. I constantly need this reminder myself.

Day 299 — Leadership training finishes and our strategy meeting begins. It's hard to keep switching gears so quickly. I've now discussed the process steps of strategic planning with my coach and how it relates to the culture of this organization three different times. I've done strategic planning in the formal setting of financial services and in the wild and woolly culture of a start-up. The question I struggle with is how to create a shared awareness of where we are as an organization (not as a collection of programs), and what choices we have to make as we go through this transition. Strategic decisions involve not just what we're going to say yes to but also what we are going to say no to. There's no shortage of ideas. The shortage is our capacity, our resources to support all the ideas.

Day 306 — As I feel more settled in my role, I know I've taken on too much – the success of the Center can't rest on my shoulders alone – it requires a group effort. The coach/consultant met with Edwin and me to help us start to think about how to create the "we" form of leadership for our organization, rather than the "me" form. It's a harder form to create when we're all spread out, but I know we can do it if we all have the intention.

Nancy Hardaway is President and CEO of GISC. She invites your comments and feedback. Contact her at nhardaway@gisc.org

Coming Up at GISC:

- **Introduction to the Cape Cod Model (Boston)**
December 1 - 2, 2007
- **Introduction to the Cape Cod Model (Atlanta)**
February 21 - 23, 2008
- **NEW! Applying the Cape Cod Model to Coaching**
February 28 - March 4, 2008 With a special pre-workshop Overview of the Cape Cod Model, *February 27 - 28, 2008.*
- **Introduction to the Cape Cod Model in Action (Philadelphia)** *February 2 - 3, 2008*
- **Women in the Working World**
March 14 - 16, 2008

The Client's Place in the World: Reflections on Gestalt Coaching by Rob Farrands

I have been interested in how I (and others also) develop our approach towards coaching others out of our own situation. For example, our attitude towards corporate power and the way it is wielded by the executive we might be coaching can affect our basic attitude towards the task. For me, also, recent forays into education through the University of Bath in the UK have helped steer me towards a conception of consulting and coaching as processes of mutual inquiry.

Also, my contact with therapists and educators working inside institutions has alerted me to the peripatetic aspects of my work life: I travel to do my work in the client's workplace.

Since typically I am referred to the client, I tend to not have much of a pre-contact stage, and I arrive into a pre-established culture, which has often already defined a problem or issue for me. I have written elsewhere about how bewildering it can be to be picked up and carried into the client's place: the geography of the building, their traditions and, above all, their habitual way of handling the stranger.

These situational features help to direct my inquiry on coaching towards the way it "takes place." I mean by "place" not just the spatial aspects of occupying a particular space, but also the whole intellectual/sensual experience of being with this person in this situation. In these circumstances I find the struggle to accommodate myself to the strangeness of location becomes mixed in with my struggle to understand my client and their issue.

The intertwining of these aspects of my experience can have interesting consequences; for example, in the case example I want to offer, I was kept waiting and I used the time to look about (recorded in a separate note I made of this event).

I took particular pains, while waiting for the client to meet me, to walk around the open spaces on the ground floor of the building, taking in the absence of people, the expanses of modernist architecture, noticing an involuntary shiver of coldness and a heavy sense of insignificance; also noticing my admiration for the sweep of the interior roof line, and the rich mixture of materials – glass, stone metal, brick and wood.

Here in the heart of this multi-national I fancied some confirmation for the precise yet distant organisation of the engineer, a priority for rules and procedures over responsiveness and flexibility (allied also to some understanding of how this kind of culture might serve the purpose of the system).

When she produces the results of an Emotional Intelligence questionnaire, and begins a conversation about her own emotional life, I take the opportunity to share with her some of my feelings as I entered the building. I ask, "What kind of emotional life might be encouraged by these kind of places?" We wonder together at the contrast between this kind of place and our homes – how do we respond differently in each place? This moves the inquiry of emotionality into a more existential space, and helps to broaden it away from issues of personality to include cultural aspects.

Adopting this kind of stance, as a place from which to inquire, encourages me to experiment with forms that stress the client's place in the world, and the resources and investments that are available from this place. For example, finding myself working with this client in a large conference room, I contrived with her to hold a meeting. Building on explorations she had already begun with friends, family, and work colleagues, I suggested that she invite to a mock meeting guests (some alive and some dead) who might help her with her issue.

"what kind of emotional life might be encouraged by these kind of places?"

We made named places around the table, so she could move round, sitting in each place in turn. As she did I asked the same two questions. What

does it feel like to occupy this place? What advice do you have from this place? I then provided her with the notes of what she had said to herself about herself. Particularly significant was the sensual embodied content of what occurred:

I was surprised by how much information became available when I just concentrated on the physical, such as changes in voice tone, body posture and emotional loading of the voice. She was, for example, mischievous and playful as her husband; in tears as her past; slow, contemplative, and softly spoken as her friend; very brief yet sympathetic as the [company] manager. In the conversation that followed we both registered our surprise at the richness of this part of the process.

After this session she went back into the world to continue her inquiries of key people in her life with a new set of questions, supported by a refreshed sense of purpose, and renewed confidence in her own resources.

How might this be a Gestalt approach? Four aspects seem worth emphasizing here. First the intervention tended to amplify what was already working for the client – both her existing process of consulting others, and the wisdom locked within her worldly network. Second, it sought to engage the client with her world sensually as well as intellectually. Third, the process retained a sense of dignity and separateness in respect of the guests. They were not subsumed to the interior world of the client (as in multiple personalities for example). Fourth, the client was led towards nourishing and cultivating the relationships that helped constitute her place in the world.

I believe these aspects honor Gestalt's existential and phenomenological roots. What do you think?

Rob Farrands consults internationally on change and development to individuals, teams and organizations. He was first co-chair and helped to develop GISC's leadership development program, Leadership in the 21st Century, and will be teaching our Graduate Leadership Forum in 2008. Rob recently completed his doctorate. You can reach him at rob@farrands.co.uk



Embracing Optimism by Harvy Simkovits, CMC

Optimism: Expectations of positive results; hopefulness and confidence about the future

With optimism

There is no blame or shame; life is experienced without hard judgment

With optimism

There is no right/wrong, bad/good or win/lose; there is just what is

With optimism

There is caring, compassion and curiosity for understanding and learning

With optimism

There are no enemies; resistance is approached as just information

With optimism

There is a calm, centered presence that opens spaces for all realities to surface

With optimism

There is an appreciation for what's working, and a respect for what's not

With optimism

Trust and connection is generated; many more futures become feasible

With optimism

Life expands, not contracts; there is room to approach, explore and grow

With optimism

There is a potential and power for purposeful action and personal fulfillment

With optimism

There is hope, creativity & collaboration for a better today and brighter tomorrow

With optimism

One looks through the eyes of what can happen, not just what has happened

With optimism

One explores and inquires with appreciation for what is healthy, good and strong

With optimism

One focuses on commonalities rather than differences, yet respecting the latter

With optimism

There is no failure of imagination, but a triumph of positivism

With optimism

Positive images leads to positive action; the good gets known, shown and grown

With optimism

Life is entered and the moment is stepped into with an appetite for what's possible

With optimism

There is a respect for realism and pessimism, yet no further need to lead with it

Harvy Simkovits, CMC, recently attended our conference on "Mastering the Art of Optimism." He writes of his coaching, "Focusing on the positive helps me see and create possibilities in, with and through both myself and others. It takes continual work yet is rewarding." Harvy operates Business Wisdom (www.Business-Wisdom.com) in Lexington, MA. and is on the Board of ICF-NE.

GISC's Annual Fund

GISC is a nonprofit organization that operates in the public trust. That means we are not owned by any individuals and that any money we receive from tuition and donations supports our mission of "transforming the way we live and work in the world." However, tuition doesn't cover all of our costs.

As 2007 closes, we turn to you for financial support. With your donation we can bring our optimistic approach to more people and organizations, develop new programming and maintain the excellence of our offerings. With your donation we can bring programs to Africa and Mexico, and offer them in new locations closer to you. With your donation we can offer scholarships, particularly to people doing good work in areas of low pay and those who have to travel from distant locations to study at GISC.

GISC has always been a generous community, built on the generosity of our founders, our faculty, our members and students, our friends. You can donate by check, phoning or faxing your credit card information, or bank wire. Join us in investing in GISC's future. If you can, please be generous. If you are in the US, GISC is a 501(c)(3), so your gift is tax deductible. If you want to honor or remember anyone in particular, your gift may be made in their name.

Thank you to all of you who have already given so generously! Our donors will be officially acknowledged in our first newsletter of 2008.

Not Trying to Persuade *cont. from Page 1*

GISC: What has been the primary benefit you have experienced?

DB: It has made my job easier and more enjoyable. At times it would be exhausting and to a degree stressful to see myself as responsible for persuading people to my ideas rather than getting everyone else's viewpoint in building consensus. Another dimension of this is that I never saw myself as a consensus-builder, never viewed myself as "President" with a capital P. In working with Mel I became much more acutely aware that the senior VPs who report directly to me saw me that way, such that if I would say to them "I think we should...what do you guys think?" they never had any ideas – and I have really smart people working for me.

Now that I see myself as not being solely responsible for defining the problems and coming up with ideas, but being more of a coach than a task manager in that effort, I will say, "What do you see as our problems, and what are your ideas for strategies to solve them?" and I will build on their ideas. It could be that I see the problem very differently, but I will come in at the back of the discussion so they don't freeze. I never was aware of the authority

– the "juice," if you will – that I had. I had no idea of that. And likewise with the Board of Directors. I had edged them out from putting their oar in the water and building a consensus.

GISC: Has it changed how you approach situations in general?

DB: I tend to articulate my views more obliquely, rather than start out sentences with "I think," or being very directive, or if I know you are stuck on a particular problem, I will view it more as a coaching role rather than my solving the problem. It's been an evolution to seeing myself more as a servant of the people who work for me, rather than a master.

Same thing in my personal life – I have four grown children and inevitably they come to me with things they say are problems, and I do a much better job of being more of a coach and reassuring them the stuff you are doing is great, what else might you do. I remember Mel saying, people are trying to do the best they can. That's a challenging thing to me at times, I ascribe motives to what people are doing. Now I take it at face value and work with their viewpoint, whether with my peers or the Board or my kids.

Monitoring the Boundary *cont. from Page 1*

While working with the client, the focus is on the present – the here and now. The approach is phenomenological. There are behaviors, verbal and nonverbal expressions, processes, interactions that are observable and verifiable and undeniable because they are happening right in the room in front of all parties. This allows the coach/consultant and client to grab the present moment and learn about what's happening in the moment in a profoundly powerful way.

GISC: How is this different from doing therapy?

MR: Although there are significant overlaps between the two, one major difference is the context in which the work takes place. When I am hired by a company to work with an executive, the "client" is the organization, and the coaching assignment is tied to organizational goals and measurable outcomes.

In my office, as the psychologist, I well know the rules of the game and can take control of the evaluation and treatment process. When going into an organization, I must be very aware to find out what the "game" is, the rules of the game in this particular tribe, and how the client system works – all while I am the one being evaluated and judged by numerous people.

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In one on one therapy, highly personal issues are discussed in order to benefit the patient personally in alleviating or reducing symptoms, and the types of questions asked and answered are very different. This could very well carry over into the workplace but it is not the focus of the work. For example, the person who resolves past issues of being bullied by a parent may notice differences in relating to the boss at work.

The contact in therapy is interpersonal between the therapist and the client. In an organization the work is to enhance contact among parts of the organization while partnering with the executive on coaching.

GISC: Since you are trained in diagnosing pathology, was it hard to embrace the Cape Cod Model approach?

MR: Yes and no, depending on what becomes figural for me. The coaching issues and problem behaviors usually fall on a continuum. What I watch for is a matter of degree and where on the continuum of healthy leadership on one end and pathology on the other end the issues lie. That is to say, the client can be systematic, strong in interpersonal relationship skills – that's on one end. And on the other end, there can be compulsive talking, masked depression, undiagnosed learning disabilities, and overwhelming doubt. I experience a strong "pull" from both sides

and I have the tools necessary to go to both sides.

This can be very challenging. One day, after 9/11, I was called into a company to meet with the executive team. I walked in, and the televisions were on all over the place, all running news of the tragedy nonstop. The executives, as well as the rest of the company, were shocked, confused and traumatized. I made a decision to conduct a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) meeting and make specific recommendations based on my clinical knowledge and expertise in trauma and the impact of traumatic events. This was done with the agreement of everyone in the meeting. I was clearly wearing my clinical hat.

I'm frequently called on by corporate executives to use my psychological background of 37 years to explain personalities and behaviors of others in the company, so that the executive can have a better understanding of their colleagues. This can facilitate useful partnering in a contactful way.

GISC: What are some of the challenges you have experienced?

MR: The main challenge is keeping the boundaries between therapy and coaching clear. When coaching, it is difficult to be working more on an educational and strategic level when I'm quite aware of glaring psychological issues, that I clearly believe I could treat, and

making a choice not to "accept" this clinical "invitation" when I have a strong pull to go there. At many of those choice points, I hear the voice of my mentor and consultant of 25 years, Edwin, saying "refocus, Mel, refocus." Not always easy.

GISC: What are some of the benefits – for your clients? For you?

MR: There is a clear advantage to having the knowledge of a clinical psychologist (especially with 35 years of consulting with Sonia). I have a deep understanding of personality types, coping and adaptation styles. I have empathy and very deep understanding of what my clients feel and believe so that my interventions can be made with great awareness while respecting, appreciating and being able to work with their resistance. I'm keenly aware of the possibly historical ways that character traits can develop and this adds to my understanding and appreciation of the client and determines in part how I choose to make contact and use myself. I'm also keenly aware of trust issues.

As a result, the client feels understood, trusting and willing to partner with me while overcoming obstacles to peak performance for the benefit of the organization. In doing so, the client receives feedback consistent with their improved performance. The client also appreciates my using an optimistic approach in leveraging their strengths.

Mel teaches Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches at GISC.



Gestalt International Study Center is a diverse worldwide learning community based on trust, optimism and generosity. We study and teach skills that energize human interaction and lead to action, change and growth, and we create powerful learning experiences for individuals and organizations. We offer leadership development, advanced professional training and programs for personal development for executives, coaches, consultants and clinicians. Join us!