Editorial

The Moving Field of Gestalt: From the Clinician to the Coach

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This issue of Gestalt Review leads off with a clinical article—“Dialogical Exposure in a Gestalt-Based Treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”—

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Mary Anne Walk, MS, MBA, MCC, is a certified Master Coach from the International Coach Federation and a former Executive Director (ED) of the Gestalt International Study Center (GISC). Prior to becoming the ED, she was the president of Walk & Associates, a professional group with expertise in coaching and consulting. She served as executive vice president for a software company after retiring from AT&T as Vice President of Human Resources. In addition to her work as a Master Coach, she is currently Chief Relations Officer at GISC.
cowritten by Will Butollo, Regina Karl, Julia König, and Maria Hagl, in which the process-oriented trauma therapy presented combines a Gestalt therapeutic frame with cognitive based elements. The issue closes with Susan Roos’s review of Margherita Spagnuolo Lobb’s well-received volume, *The Now for Next in Psychotherapy: Gestalt Therapy Recounted in Post-Modern Society*, in which the titular reference “conveys the book’s consistent attention to carrying the client forward and to being attuned to the client’s intentionality.”

The clinical article and the book review frame a unique sequence of six pieces written by graduates of the coaching certification program offered by the Gestalt International Study Center (GISC): a paper and five reflections. The interested reader may also want to refer back to the reflection by Kevin Carley (2014). The editor invites Mary Anne Walk, Master Certified Coach (MCC) and former Executive Director of GISC, to comment on the many thoughts on coaching featured here.

**MAW:** GISC bases its programs and services on the Gestalt 20 Core Concepts and Behaviors (theories) which can be found in the GISC catalogue or on the website (www.gisc.org). *Gestalt Review* is dedicated to the research and application of the theories that have been developed throughout the years for therapists, consultants, leaders and, more recently, coaches. The participants of basic coaching program, “Competency Development Program for Coach Certification: Skills for High Impact Coaching,” are required to research the application of the core concepts and behaviors as they relate to coaching. When effectively used in coaching, the research and the application of theories referred to here not only help to differentiate the coaches in the marketplace but also support the vision of GISC: *Transforming the Way We Live and Work in the World.*

What I found of interest in this diverse set of writings on coaching is that they have one thing in common. They all look at coaching from a Gestalt perspective, which begins with raising awareness: not only the awareness of the client in order to reach his or her intended goals but also that of the coach. Coaches can begin to support clients if they have the training and skill to deal with the client information available, and they can unearth further information clients may have buried. A coach pulls from the client information already there and helps to reframe it into some new meaning—some new awareness. Each special contribution will be treated separately.

In his article, “Gestalt Parent Coaching© (GPC): A New Model for Intervening in Family Systems,” Harvey Melnick uses Gestalt core concepts and behaviors to design a new application for intervening in family systems. He helps his
clients (i.e., parents) focus on what is well-developed in the family. Melnick views all parents not only as “change agents” but as coaches themselves. He uses coaching techniques to “build upon existing competencies. Rather than focusing on what is ‘wrong’ within the family, the GPC coach seeks to discard the parents’ current, and sometimes ineffective, parenting strategies and to build more effective behaviors from the ground up.” In helping his clients he designs experiments they can try at home; they can then bring back the results to discuss in a future session, thereby stretching their competencies to achieve their goals. Melnick enables clients to understand that power does not only sit with the parents; it “exists in the context of the overlapping boundaries and relationships found in all families.” Melnick concludes that this “new model” encourages parents “to take primary responsibility for leading in order to achieve the behavioral changes they desire.” The core concepts and behavior of Gestalt invite an appreciative stance that allows family members to expand their range of behaviors to include success. It is exciting to see Gestalt theories that have been used for years applied to new situations for the betterment of the family through awareness and contact.

In her reflection, “Coaching and Therapy: Finding Common Ground in Gestalt Practice,” Nancy Rutkowski argues soundly that there are more similarities than differences between coaching and therapy: “conversation, a practitioner’s ‘way of being,’ a client's accomplishment of goals, and a manner of work that is ‘fulfilling’ for both, among others.” The profession of therapist, however, has long been regulated and recurring/timely certification is required. The profession of coaching is not regulated, although certification as a coach does now help differentiate one within the field. This in itself would indicate that there is something “different” about the two professions. I am not a therapist. Rutkowski is a therapist and a coach—one I admire and respect, and so I listen to her arguments and am impressed. She continues: “Gestalt practitioners, be they coaches or therapists, are intentionally trained to see the living past in the present.” This is true; however, as coach I only need to know enough about my clients’ past in order to evaluate whether that past is keeping them from moving forward. As a coach, I want to know what they have learned from the past and how they have become more resilient from that learning. Gestalt theory has developed in the therapeutic arena. Practitioners and applied researchers have moved the theories forward to help coaches appropriately apply them to support the advancement of the coaching client’s success. Rutkowski offers many points with which I agree; I invite each of you to read the reflection and enter into the debate.

In “The Coaching of Age in the Age of Coaching: What Matters When You Don’t Have All the Time in the World?” Patricia Perry discusses the phenomenology of aging from the standpoint of polarities. She explores the
awareness that one side of the polarity is considered good (young) and one side of the polarity is considered bad (old), suggesting that one can move within the polarities to offer more opportunities. She proposes: “Join the resistance; explore it, see what energy is released and what emerges on the other side”; and concludes: “Training in Gestalt coaching offers more than a guidebook for this role. It offers a ground from which to work and a way of being and making meaning that allows all of me to show up as I sit with another person; that allows us together to make this time of life unforgettable.” How much more special can our time on earth be than to help the world we perceive be better and unforgettable!

In her reflection, “The Cycle of Creativity: Gestalt Coaching and the Creative Process,” Laurie Fitzpatrick proposes that “Creativity enables us to envision and design the kinds of lives we want to live in entering into careers and business, in serving our communities, in crafting family life—and in achieving the balance of these that works best for us.” The coach uses creativity to help the client design the fitting outcome with a “full and clear understanding of the client and the challenges being brought to work on—in Gestalt terms, the ground.” Fitzpatrick cautions that the creative process is not linear but has starts and twists, often requiring the client to try different constructs (i.e., experiments) in order to find the right outcome. She, like Perry, draws on the notion of polarities to show how clients can expand their range of possibilities. An interesting aspect of Fitzpatrick’s paper is the manner in which she superimposes the “Creative Cycle” over the all too familiar “Cycle of Experience” to show how resistance and energy increase and decrease during the process. Her main point is that clients “can improve outcomes by expanding their ability to stay open longer, or by generating and considering more options before moving to act.”

Lisa Hirsh’s reflective piece, “Sparking Creative Confidence and Action: A Coach’s (Gestalt) Journey,” reveals how the coaching process took the author back to her roots of creativity. It shows that gathering and organizing information (i.e., phenomenology) is critically important. Hirsh articulates the principles of Appreciative Inquiry to her practice because that modality “recognizes that inquiry and change are not separate or distinct activities; the moment we ask a question the seeds of change—what people talk about, discover, and learn, that is, the dialogue and the future images inspired—are prompted by what we ask.” Hirsh is skilled and knows that coaches must know themselves before they can help clients. She reminds us that ideas from Gestalt theory and practice—“developing awareness, being present to what is emerging, staying with the client, figure/ground, the importance of play”—are key to introducing creativity into coaching.

Penny Harris’s contribution, “Linking Gestalt Coaching with Philanthropy:
Where Philanthropy IS More than Money,” is new in that consultants have usually been involved in the field of philanthropy; consulting certainly was/is the author’s expertise. For Harris, Gestalt concepts and behaviors that link coaching to philanthropic endeavors are found in the arena of strategic and intimate interactions, which align strongly with the need to bring awareness into relationships between askers and givers. Resistance is highest when relationships are not properly established and nurtured. Harris explains that understanding askers’ well-developed and less-developed skills can inform the process in order to best influence the givers to connect with the mission of the organization to which they are contributing, and to experience the most joy in giving. “Philanthropy,” Harris concludes, “is when leaders, staff, and donors work together to create a place to serve the larger community, while supporting a passion and experiencing the joy of their generosity.” This reflection can benefit both asker and giver as the coach supports askers in their journey to develop new awareness.

A coach will help raise the client’s consciousness of the issues involved by engaging in inquiry and discussion; and by moving slowly from the abstract toward the concrete, and from complaints about the behavior of others toward awareness of the behavior of the client in question. Coaches can help by maintaining focus both on the clients’ patterns and on their own responsibility to create constructive behavior. The writings on coaching represented here are useful examples of ways in which Gestalt core concepts and behaviors can be applied to further the vision of GISC: Transforming the Way We Live and Work in the World. Use them, talk about them, share them, and Make the World Better.

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Thank you, Mary Anne Walk. This issue closes sadly with an obituary for Todd Burley (9 June 1945 – 31 May 2014), penned by Elizabeth (Liv) Estrup. I was privileged to have met Todd when I was a participant in the Gestalt Associates Training Los Angeles (GATLA) European Summer Residential Program held in Cervera de Pisuerga, Spain in July 2001. We discovered then that we had the Spanish language in common, and we often enjoyed exchanging messages en español. Todd was an incisive and faithful contributor to Gestalt Review, literally until the end, as attested to by his Commentary that appeared in the preceding issue (Burley, 2014)—which uncannily and synchronistically reached many subscribers on the day of his passing. He was also a valuable and indefatigable reviewer of theoretical articles for the journal. This number of Gestalt Review is dedicated deservingly to the living memory of Todd Douglas Burley.
REFERENCES
