With

The ‘Here and Now’ relationship

> *“We learn best about ourselves and our behaviour through personal participation in interaction combined with observation and analysis of that interaction.”*
>
> — Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy* (2002)

The here-and-now

The here-and-now refers to the immediate events of the coaching session: to what is happening **here** (in this room, in this relationship, in the space between me and you) and **now**, in this immediate hour.

Why use the here-and-now?

The rationale for using the here-and-now rests on the idea that what goes on within the coaching relationship is a microcosm of what goes on ‘out there’ in the rest of the client’s life.

“Eventually (provided we do not structure it too heavily) the interpersonal patterns of the client will manifest themselves in the here-and-now of the coaching relationship. The client’s patterns of behaving will enter into the client’s relationship with the coach…”

So instead of needing to gather lots of context, we can trust that what is most relevant is likely to surface in the here-and-now of the coaching session.

The here-and-now energises coaching

Work in the here-and-now is always more **exciting** than work with a more abstract or historical focus.

- Naming what we’re noticing or experiencing in the moment is working in *the here and now*.
- Offering how something ‘lands with us’ is working in *the here and now*.
- Exploring the impact of words or ways of relating on an individual or group is working in *the here and now*.

Adapted from Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients* (HarperCollins, 2002). Yalom writes about therapy; ‘therapy’ and ‘patient’ have been changed to ‘coaching’ and ‘client’.

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Origins of the ‘Here and Now’ approach, as told by Irvin Yalom

> *“People want to interact with others, are excited by **giving and receiving feedback**, yearn to learn how they are perceived by others, want to let go of their masks and connect.”*
>
> — Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy* (2002)

In **1946**, the state of Connecticut sponsored a workshop to deal with racial tensions in the workplace. Small groups led by the eminent psychologist **Kurt Lewin** and a team of social psychologists discussed the ‘back home’ problems brought by the participants. The leaders and observers held nightly post-group meetings in which they discussed not only the **content** of the sessions, but also their **process**.

- The **content** refers to the words and concepts expressed.
- The **process** refers to the nature of the relationship between the people interacting.

News spread about these evening staff meetings, and the group members asked to attend… and so they observed themselves being discussed by the leaders and researchers.

There are several published accounts of this momentous session, at which the importance of the here-and-now was discovered. All agree that the meeting was electrifying; ***members were fascinated by hearing themselves and their behaviour discussed***. Soon they could stay silent no longer and interjected with comments such as “No, that wasn’t what I said,” or “how I said it,” or “what I meant.”

The social scientists realised they had stumbled onto an important axiom for education (and for coaching as well): **we learn best about ourselves and our behaviour through personal participation in interaction combined with observation and analysis of that interaction.** People engaged in discussing the here-and-now are energised and engaged, and say that they come alive when focusing on it.

Story adapted from Irvin D. Yalom’s account of the 1946 workshop led by Kurt Lewin, which gave rise to the T-group (training group) movement.

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Your own evening meeting

Lewin's team learned the most when they met each evening to look back at *how* the day's sessions had unfolded, not only *what* was said. This activity invites you to hold your own evening meeting after a coaching session, workshop or team conversation.

1. After a session: content and process (10 minutes)

Split a page into two columns and jot down what comes to mind under each.

Content: what we talked about

- What topics, problems or stories came up?
- What did they want from the session?
- What was agreed or decided?

Process: what was happening between us

- When did the energy rise or drop?
- What did I feel, and not say?
- When did I start rescuing, fixing or collecting context?
- How did they relate to me, and I to them?

Then ask yourself: ***"If what happened between us is a microcosm of their world, what might it be telling me?"***

2. Next session: try one here-and-now offer

- "I'm noticing something in the room right now. Can I share it?"
- "As you say that, I find myself…"
- "How is this conversation landing for you, right now?"
- "What's happening between us at the moment?"

3. Questions to sit with

For coaches and facilitators: What do I tend to notice in the moment but not name, and what might that be costing my clients?

For clients: How might the way you're showing up here, with me, reflect how you show up with your team?

A note on contracting

Here-and-now work lands best when it has been invited. Agree early on that you will sometimes share what you notice between you, so the client experiences it as an offer, not a surprise.

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