

1st Sept 2012

The Therapeutic Coach: A New Paradigm

Counsellor or Coach

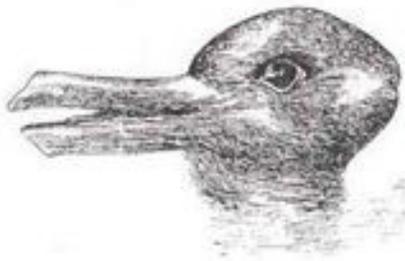
Frances Masters MBACP GHGI FRTC

I had been coaching for two years before I realised I had made the transition from counsellor to therapeutic coach.

Psychopathological issues were now often resolved in one or two sessions, and with a gap left that had previously been occupied by emotional distress, clients were drawn to reconstructing their vision of the future in more positive terms.

Their perception had shifted and life looked different. The transition had been seamless and organic. I had not noticed that I had become, out of necessity, and through seeing around twenty clients per week, very prescriptive in the way I worked.....

Sometimes something is said, or something happens, or you read something that causes a paradigm shift, a reshuffling of the paperwork in your head, a movement in perception. A story was told by Steven Covey author of the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.



A Paradigm Shift

A man got on a subway train one day with his children. The carriage had been quiet, people reading, working or simply resting with their eyes closed.

The children were noisy and boisterous, running up and down the carriage, yelling back and forth, throwing things and grabbing people's papers. There was an air of irritation in the carriage, eyebrows were raised, but the man did nothing to control his children. As he was sitting next to me, I felt obliged to make the obvious comment and, leaning over to him, said in a low voice 'You need to do something about your children?'

The man looked startled, as though waking from a dream and replied 'yes, I do need to do something about my children. We've just come from the hospital where their mother died this morning and I don't know what to do about my children.'

Having attended a Human Givens workshop on brief therapy strategies, I experienced a professional paradigm shift which was to have an impact not only on the way I worked as a therapist, but on my own

The Therapeutic Coach: A new paradigm.

Frances Masters MBACP accredited GHGI FRTC

1st Sept 2012

worldview. And as the papers in my head reshuffled, I realised that traditional counselling skills were simply not enough.....

From the time of Copernicus, the modern world was perceived as being made of solid objects with empty space between them governed by the laws of physics and likened to the workings of a clock.

But as science progressed, it emerged that the world is in fact made up of minute, energetic particles and or waves characterised by vibrations. This post-modern view of the world refers to wholeness and connectedness and is best illustrated by the analogy of a hologram in which each part of the picture relates to all the others and cannot be separated from the whole.

Therapeutic Jingoism

Competing models have tried to take ownership of therapeutic territory, placing their metaphorical flag on the Mountain of Knowledge and claiming it as their own.

Yet research psychotherapist and author John Macleod speaks of the need to view therapy within a pluralistic framework which is inclusive rather than with the either/or mindset of individual approaches. These barriers to communication between schools of therapy have existed for too long and have caused obstruction, hindering progress, as the argument continues 'What constitutes good therapy?'



Many years ago, in training as a client centred therapist, I thought 'congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard were enough and sufficient.' 'Have faith in the model' I was instructed by well-meaning tutors.

I avoided directing my client or making interventions of any kind, simply following their process and reflecting that process back to them in the hope they would gain insight and find their own way forward.

However, reflective skills and good intentions often could not help those people burdened by panic attacks, OCD, post-traumatic stress and the many other complicated emotional states I was now encountering in my therapeutic work. It struck me that, from the client's perspective, it was like going in for an operation in a modern theatre where the surgeon is highly skilled and uses the latest fine precision instruments or choosing another surgeon who might be just as well-meaning, but is prepared to go in with a hammer and saw!

In reality, the various models of therapy are an illusion, creating barriers where they should be none. In deconstructing competing approaches, a *lingua franca* may emerge and we can finally begin to communicate and make progress together. In retaining the separatist titles of counsellor, psychotherapist or coach, we merely extend the problem. It seems we have all been climbing the same hill for many years, but from different directions. We all mean well, but have delayed progress by protecting our own space.

It was General Patten, during the Second World War, who made the observation as he withdrew from enemy territory, '*I am not retreating; I am simply advancing in another direction.*' Therapeutic jingoism, the

1st Sept 2012

claiming of territory, must be a thing of the past as we now shift our worldview and realise that, like the holographic image, each part of the picture relates to all the others and cannot be separated from the whole.

In approaching a counsellor, the informed client might ask 'What is in the toolbox? What are the skills attached to this person?' Conversely, they might also wonder about the therapist's empathic abilities, perhaps asking...'Is there a person attached to these skills?'

The concept of the psychotherapeutic coach is inclusive, a celebration of modern outcome informed practice and practice-based evidence, embracing current understanding of all that is therapeutically effective as mental health finally begins to emerge now from the dark ages.



The Big Experiment

Following the shift in my perception of what constitutes good psychotherapy, and as I worked and saw consistent good results, I began to ask myself a series of questions: As this way of working was obviously so beneficial for clients, why was it not been taught as a part of traditional counselling and psychotherapeutic training?

As I monitored my own results and therefore had clear evidence through feedback that this was helpful and appreciated by my clients, why was this kind of therapy not available to everyone via the NHS? If it was not available through the NHS, how could this be rolled out to the general public and free at the point of delivery?

These questions encouraged me to look very closely at what was beneficial within this way of working and I began to construct a session by session format, of what became a prescriptive yet integrative **fusion** model.

Having constructed the model, and specifically broken it down into five therapeutic sessions, the next big question was, would it be possible to condense years of training and thousands of hours of practice into a brief and intensive training programme with a view to recruiting volunteers who could work within an agency setting and reproduce the good results I had achieved?

The naming of Reclaim Life was easy. Many clients, beset by years of depression, anxiety or panic attacks had been very grateful to be on the receiving end of something which clearly worked, and the common message on completion of therapy was 'thank you for giving me my life back.' The reality was, of course, that they had simply been given the tools to take back control of their own lives.

The current mental health system within the NHS is complicated, with layers and strands of intervention ranging from talking therapy to medication or hospitalisation.

Many GPs who encounter a patient with emotional or mental health issues have little in their toolbox of helping strategies other than that provided by the medical model, in the form of antidepressants. A while after the Reclaim Life agency opened and volunteers had been working with clients, I began to look with interest at completed files, wondering if the clinical outcomes would be as positive as I had hoped. What I discovered was impressive and consistent as I realised...

The Therapeutic Coach: A new paradigm.

Frances Masters MBACP accredited GHGI FRTC

1st Sept 2012

The big experiment was working.

What is coaching: Is it different from counselling?

Shortly before beginning the first Reclaim Life training programme it occurred to me that I ought to check out what was available in current coach training and I took myself off for a weekend of study with a large coaching organisation.

The trainer opened her programme with the question 'What is counselling?' Somebody in the audience thought she knew the answer and suggested 'Somebody who listens, empathises, doesn't judge or give advice but who, through reflecting and reframing, will allow the client to find their own way forward. Someone who will offer psychological support whilst helping the client identify repeating patterns and making them aware of choices.'

'Well, if you want any of that,' said the trainer 'don't come to a coach!'

And in that moment I realised that a counsellor who has coaching skills is very different from a coach. This was confirmed to me when I later approached

I approached executive coach Philip Parry, looking for the overlap in his work and my own and realised that he had no interest at all in psycho pathology and would not feel skilled to deal with mental health issues.. 'I am concerned with the outside' he said 'someone like you deals with the inside'.



On The Road

At some point of course, we have to stop theorising and 'do the experiment', and, with a certain sense of bravado combined with a leap of faith, that is how the Reclaim Life project was born and is now 'walking the talk', offering psychotherapeutic coaching in a prescriptive five session format.

To a large extent, all psychotherapy is still in its pre scientific stage. There is no discussion, for instance, between different paradigms of health professionals when there is a broken leg to be mended. There is an agreed procedure and it is clear to all that the procedure is effective because it can be seen to be so, employing standardised clinical outcome measures to record improvement.

John Macleod speaks of counselling within a pluralistic framework, where we look for areas of commonality.

'**Fusion**' is defined as 'the blending of different things into one' or 'the merging of different elements into a union'.

The Therapeutic Coach: A new paradigm.

Frances Masters MBACP accredited GHGI FRTC

1st Sept 2012

In the context of physics, *'A nuclear reaction in which nuclei combine to form more massive nuclei with the simultaneous release of energy'*

With the Reclaim Life project established, the fusion of traditional counselling, psycho education and goal oriented coaching skills has now moved past the theoretical stage.

Our knowledge and understanding of the human brain and the mind/body connection has grown through neuroscience and is taking us forward into the 21st century, where psychotherapy, in all its forms will hopefully achieve the scientific status it deserves.

Driving through France recently, I observed to my husband that our satellite navigation system needed updating. In getting from A to B, we were meandering down country lanes taking hours to get to our destination, when there were new motorways that could have made the journey so much faster.

There is perhaps another debate about enjoying the journey, but for the person gripped by extreme depression, anxiety or despair, there is a sense of urgency in recovery. For people who want to reclaim their lives, it feels inappropriate to consider they should relax and enjoy the process.

At one point in France, the journey to our proposed destination took so long and took us down so many winding country roads, that we gave up, did a U-turn and went back. And so it may be for some clients, the therapeutic process is too long or too difficult or may seem to be taking them down roads they do not wish to travel and they give up and drop out of therapy.

Sharing knowledge

It was George Bernard Shaw who said;

'If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple.

But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas.'

Let's keep sharing.

Frances Masters

Therapeutic coach !