



Presence as Meta-Competency: Preparing Leader Clients for the Unknowable

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Coaching Toolkit: “Seeing” as Object

SEEING with presence brings the liberating recognition that we create our worlds through maps. The meta-competency of Seeing:

- supports the recognition of the inherently subjective process of constructing our worlds,
- increases fluidity at accessing a wide range of perspectives and mental models in any given situation, and
- helps us hold our maps lightly as subjective, tentative, and partial.

Even with this recognition, they organize our seeing and provide a structure for interpretation and action.

When We Are Subject to Seeing	When Our Seeing is Object
We accept our interpretations/maps as a trustworthy description of reality	We understand that a map is an approximate representation of one particular aspect of reality; the “map is not the territory”
We see the world through rose-colored glasses and we think the world is pink.	We see the rose-colored glasses themselves, recognizing that our glasses determine how we see the world
We take comfort in the structure of a map, believing it offers solidity and ground	We are cognizant that we choose our maps for often unconscious reasons, and therefore use maps tentatively and situationally
We unconsciously filter out information that contradicts our maps, and tune in to information that reinforces them	We consciously ask what we are missing or how we could be wrong, and look outside our maps for what is missing
We see the world through the distinctions of a map, making it comfortingly knowable	We see the map itself as a distinction, and the world as mysterious and complex

Coaching Moves for Seeing

Distinguish roles: Invite the client to differentiate 4-6 roles he or she plays in the position. Identify the one(s) that are prone to overuse (excessive identification or reliance on a role, even when it's a strength, leads to problems and narrowed range of leadership options.) Identify the one(s) that are underutilized (perhaps due to aversions or lack of competency.)

Mapping systems: Use polarity maps, process diagrams, Competing Commitments mapping, stakeholder diagrams, and other visual means to access new perspectives on the system in which the client is operating. Then, ask "how could this be wrong?" Or, "what is this map not showing?"

Request self-observation: Ask the client to observe and report on her inner experience, in this moment. This invites mindfulness and presence. This can be a request for her thoughts, what she is feeling, or what body sensations she is experiencing. Reporting on present-moment experience increases mindfulness.

Modeling/disclosure: Model present-moment awareness through sharing your own internal experience, emotions, etc. While it is obviously important to not make your own experience the focus, disclosing your own experience appropriately builds intimacy and safety, and models awareness for the client.

Direct attention into sensation: Ask the client to report what he is sensing in his body. Since sensations only exist in the present moment, asking the client to witness or self-observe what he is noticing internally brings him into mindful presence. In addition, tracking changes in these sensations over time refines the process of self-observation, and invites awareness of the shifts in state that often accompany self-observation.

Offer assessments, followed by a question: Reflect, through in-the-moment feedback, what you observe in language, in emotion, and/or in physical posture or other somatic observations. It is most often helpful to follow the assessment with a question that invites the client to share what they are noticing, or to respond to how the assessment rings true (or not) for her. This resulting self-observation is a move towards presence.



Fieldwork for Seeing

Field test system maps in practice. Develop and validate system maps with others in the organization or team. Use the maps to surface assumptions, see what the group believes to be true, and zero in on missing information or misguided assumptions.

Include mindfulness practices in fieldwork: Incorporate a short, regular sitting practice into client fieldwork. Call it an “experiment,” if that helps invite openness with your client. Even 10 minutes a day can have tremendous benefits. Providing a little research background on the health, psychological, and leadership payoffs will be helpful for those clients for whom this is new and different. Provide a narrative of relevance so that clients connect mindfulness to an outcome that they care about.

Self-observe and reflect: Invite the client to pay attention to his internal experience during the course of his activities. Use structured self-observation practices to reflect on his habitual behaviors and focus attention on the direct experience of the underlying drivers and the urges that precede these behaviors. Observe how these urges show up in sensation and narrative. Observation builds mastery over time.

Coaching Toolkit: “Being” as Object

BEING with presence leads to mastery of our inner selves, and to resilience and embodied commitments.

The meta-competency of Being:

- invites the fullness of our experience in the moment
- includes perceptions, thoughts, emotions, internal sensations, and relational awareness,
- is the basis for regulating our mood and our inner state through directing our attention, and
- is the embodiment of our commitments.

Cultivating the capacity to witness and stay present to our own action urges means that we can replace reactive habits with more intentional and consciously chosen behaviors.

When We Are Subject to Being	When Our Being is Object
We are inside our experience, and don't identify, label, or have any perspective on it.	We track our experience on multiple channels, and can label and describe our experience
We believe that our experience is who we are; it has a sense of permanence and inevitability.	We see that our experience is a transient phenomenon separate from ourselves. Experience continually arises and dissipates, and we can watch the show.
Our state is dependent on our context. We take on the stress and character of our environment.	We de-link our state from our context, observing and self-regulating our state independently of context.
Our attention reacts to phenomena as they trigger us; we lack awareness of the capacity to choose.	We recognize our control of attention, and the inherent capacity to choose in every moment what we attend to.
When we experience ourselves as energized and resilient, it is by accident, or as a product of an activity (e.g., yoga or running.)	We access a centered, resourceful, resilient state at will; our default is a state we have cultivated and chosen.
Our commitments are unconscious and unquestioned.	Our commitments are chosen purposefully and arise from what we care about.
We juggle, and feel torn between, multiple competing commitments. The ecology of our lives results from external vectors.	We experience ourselves as above the system of competing commitments. Yesses and Noes arise easily, aligned with what we care about.

Coaching Moves for Being

Teach an attention practice: Provide live, real time instruction with mindfulness, on centering, or on directing attention. Doing so builds skills during the coaching session, and provides direct experience that can be built upon in subsequent sessions or in fieldwork.



Hold space: Allow silence, maintaining your own mindful attention during the silence. This deepens the sense of presence, and supports the client's capacity for attention to what might be emerging. The deeper your own internal silence, the more powerful the space that the silence introduces into the flow of the coaching conversation.

Work with self-regulation in the session: Practice self-regulation in real time, during the coaching conversation, by directing attention into the various channels. This lays the groundwork for state-shifting practices in fieldwork.

Ground with client's strong state: Drop your attention and ground your own state as your client is having a strong experience (difficult emotions, energy release, feeling overwhelmed, etc.) Through the process of biological co-regulation, your stable dropped state serves as a resource to your client's nervous system during this strong experience. (Think of a crisis situation in which someone says "I don't know how you stayed so calm when that happened, but your calmness helped me do what I needed to do.")

Use the Awareness Map: Differentiate between the different channels of awareness, and build somatic literacy by explicitly inviting data from all channels into the conversation, making internal experiences explicit. This also lays the groundwork for fieldwork around the Awareness Map as well.

Explore how states support roles. Explore this experientially (e.g., ask the client during the session to practice saying the words ("I really want to know what you think") from both a leaning forward hard-charging stance, and a leaning back, open stance.) This will reveal a lot about congruence and leadership presence, and inform practices and fieldwork for the client.

Fieldwork for Being

Build somatic literacy with the Awareness Map: Invite the client to build awareness of all channels of experience. A quick inventory of the Awareness Map can be a powerful practice to become familiar with the internal urges that precede a problematic habit, to become more present in any situation, and to center and settle oneself before a triggering situation.



Include self-observation practices in fieldwork: Design regular practices with your clients in which they pay rigorous attention to their inner experience during their daily activities. Structured daily reflections build clients' skills at witnessing the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that precede behavior. Over time, this builds client awareness and choice. Self-observations can be designed for clients for developing awareness around:

- Habitual and unconscious default behaviors that create problems
- Choice points that the client seems to override, falling into unhelpful patterns of thought or behavior.
- New behaviors the client seeks to cultivate, but that don't come naturally.

Include somatic practices in fieldwork: Engage the entire nervous system through awareness practices as foundational elements of fieldwork. Include bodymind state-cultivation practices like centering. Repurpose physical practices the client is already doing, or custom design somatic practices that are particularly metaphorical for the client's coaching issue. Somatic practices that are a) coupled to a purpose, and b) done regularly, over time, and with awareness greatly accelerate development.

Include state-shifting practices in fieldwork: Choose mildly triggering situations and create on-going practices with the client on how she can resource herself in those situations. Practice, and track, accessing resourced states in triggering situations. Over time, raise the bar by moving to higher stakes situations.

Coaching Toolkit: "Doing" as Object

DOING with presence means taking precise action illuminated by an expansive view of our context. We connect with others and with the context in every action, being cognizant of the impact and intentions of what we are doing.

The meta-competency of Doing:

- arises from the perspective that we, others, and the current situation are perfect as they are,

- reminds us that every action we take has impacts we can't possibly foresee, and
- aligns actions with the intended future.

When We Are Subject to Doing	When Our Doing is Object
Our actions are driven by attachments and aversions, justified after the fact by our stories, and far more automatic than we can possibly recognize.	We stay present to the sensations and automaticity of the underlying attachments, aversions, and impulses that precede action. By contacting stillness, we recognize choice.
We interact with others with the intention to build relationships and create movement towards what we care about.	We are conscious of our leadership presence and the relational field in our interactions with others, recognizing that our state is constantly evoking the future.
Actions have an urgency and a future focus; we are already “down the road” to the results, and solving problems that don't exist.	We act in the spacious present moment, recognizing that anything can happen next. We know this the only moment we get.
Our actions arise spontaneously from an unregulated state triggered by our context.	We self-regulate our state, and cultivate states that naturally give rise to actions that support our commitments.
We believe the consequences of our actions will be primarily what we intend; we take comfort in this.	We recognize that every action changes the world, and that the ripple effects of every action are unforeseeable and extend forever.
We take actions in the belief that they are causal, and are surprised and frustrated when things don't go according to plan.	We recognize the process of emergence, acting within our understanding, and trusting that the next set of conditions will then reveal what actions are possible.
We see leadership as an individual process, and that we are responsible for results.	We see leadership as a collective, culture-shaping process to which we are a contributor.



Coaching Moves for Doing

Discern where client has influence. Differentiating where the client has control over and where she doesn't. Recognizing and accepting what is a given in a situation can eliminate a lot of frustration and wasted energy. The timeless Serenity Prayer is essential in leadership contexts.

Connect action to purpose. Reflecting on what we care about, and clarifying the future that we intend (e.g., what commitments are we a stand for?) animates our actions and connects them to our emotional center.

Bring stakeholder perspectives into action design. Invite an inclusive awareness of ourselves, others, and the context during the coaching session. Represent all stakeholders in the process of designing actions, so that their perspectives, values, and legitimate needs are included.

See action as culture change. Take actions in ways that are consistent with the desired culture. Acting as if this future culture were already present can feel bold and even risky, yet it both models the future and invites it into the present now.

Sense potential actions in the body. When considering a potential action, invite the client to attend to how it feels in the body. Ask questions like "Does this possibility feel congruent? Incongruent? What urges are present? What do the urges reveal? What alternative action might feel more congruent? What feels right?"

Fieldwork for Doing

Conduct "safe-to-fail" experiments. These learning experiments can be test drives of new behaviors, probes to see how the system responds, or prototypes of new processes that will help the client understand the complexity of the system.

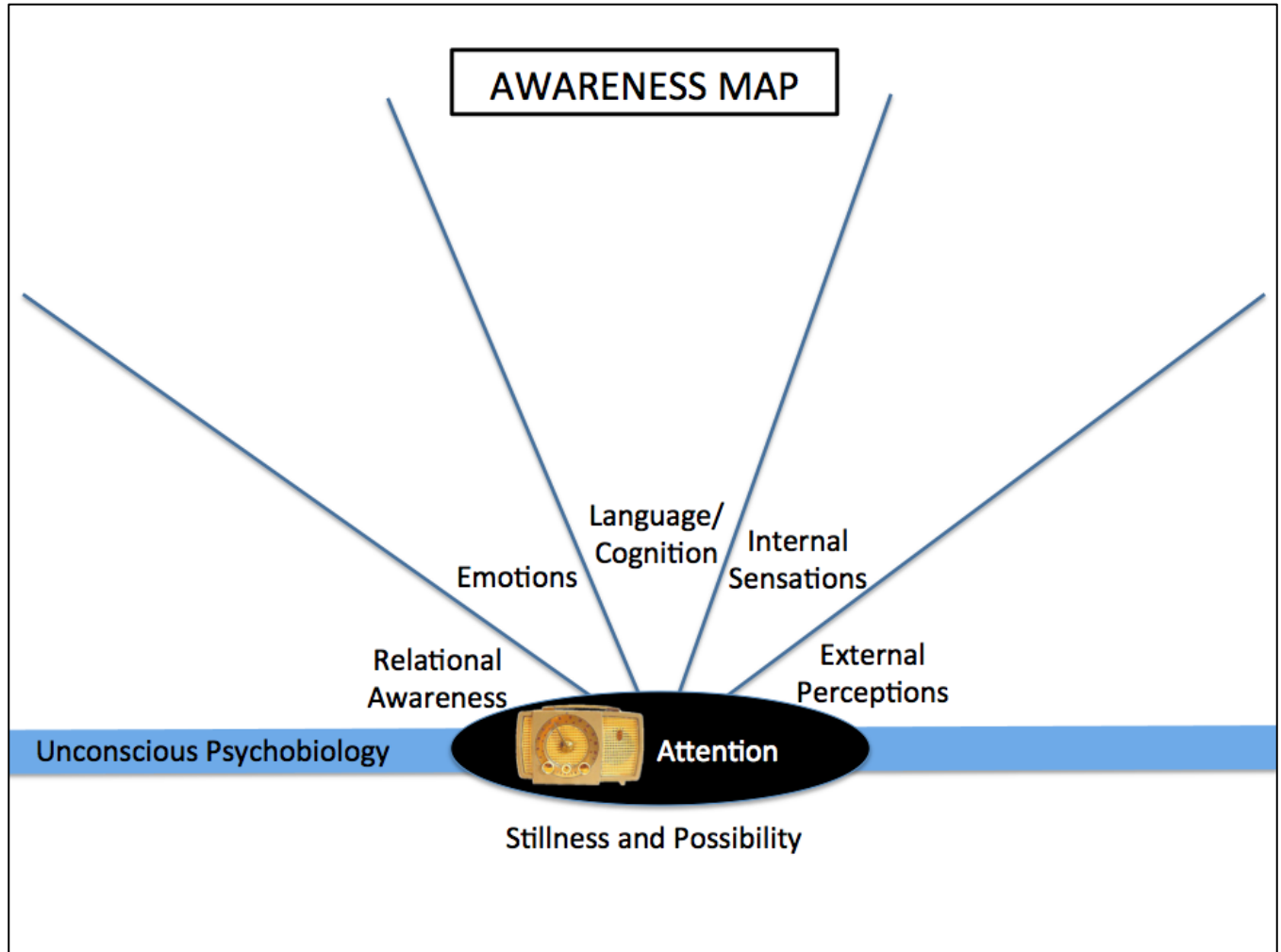
Extend leadership presence. Design practices and experiences in which the client takes the time and space to self-regulate and center herself before taking action, acting from the full embodied self in her leadership context, and paying attention to the effects on others and the context.



Cultivate a healthy body. Neuroplastic change requires a healthy system! Exercise, diet, sleep... all of these create the physiological conditions for change. Without these conditions, we might intend change, but it's far less likely to take physiological root.

Perturb things: Take simple actions that upset the status quo. These might be things that feel a bit risky for the client, that upset routines in a meeting, that differ from what is expected. Perturbing the status quo, done skillfully, with curiosity and compassion, always reveals something.

Awareness Map



A Primer on Working with Habits

The Anatomy of a Habit

Habits are conditioned patterns of behavior. We can think of them as our default responses to life's complexities. We learned them well, presumably, because they worked for us earlier in life. And, given who we are now and our current life circumstances, we may begin to discover that these habits limit our creativity, render us ineffective, or cause us to suffer.

This work is not about trying to figure out the origin of a habit. Rather, we are learning to observe the habit as it arises, in all its nuances and subtleties. With this self-awareness (really, an expanded sense of our own truth in a given moment) we find ourselves with a choice about whether to act out the conditioned habit, or, choose a new response that may be more useful.

Habits have five elements. These include a trigger, a constellation of conditioned responses that arise rapidly and sequentially through three levels of experience, and a resulting behavior.

- Trigger: something happens around us that we sense, and that evokes a response.
- Somatic response: how our body automatically responds to this sensory input. This is the biological organism responding, and is observable as sensation (energy, tension, tightness, warmth, numbness, etc.) Generally, this is the first element of a constellation of linked responses.
- Emotional response: the feelings that arise, based on our deep history. Observable as emotions (anger, anxiety, joy, excitement, etc.) This follows the somatic response.
- Mental response: the “mental formations” that provide meaning for our experience, and rationale for our response. Observable as language (stories, interpretation, justification, etc.) Because this is the highest order of response, it generally follows the first two, although the entire constellation can arise in less than a second.
- Resulting behavior: the behavior that flows out of the constellation of phenomena that arises. Observable as acts (movement, speech acts, etc.)

A helpful view is to be curious about your habits, and to “make friends” with them. Habits are there because the organism that is you has learned well how to get along in the world. Your habits have served their purpose. Now, you are becoming curious about their subtleties, and bringing awareness to the entire constellation of what arises with this habit. This is different from working at changing the behavior. Rather, you're expanding and deepening your awareness of something that is in fact quite complex and miraculous.

The secondary effect of this awareness is that, down the road, you'll become able to sense the first arising of the pattern, and choose whether to go the rest of the way with it or replace it with something new. The journey starts with your self-observation.



About Self-Observations

Traditional approaches to changing behavior often rely on good intentions. However, real change requires first being able to observe ourselves doing what isn't working, and knowing what an alternative might be. Then, we must interrupt our well-rehearsed automatic tendencies and, in the heat of the moment, replace a habitual behavior with an unfamiliar one.

Self-observations are key to this intricate process. Self-observations help us:

- Develop the capacity to observe our behavior objectively, almost as an outsider might see us,
- Replace the inner critic that makes it more difficult to change with a neutral acceptance, and
- Eventually, to be able to stay present during an event, and choose a more effective response.

Self-observations are simply a structure designed to observe a specific behavior consistently. A self-observation usually defines:

- the behavior to be observed (e.g., interrupting others in meetings,)
- the timing of the observation (e.g., at the end of the workday, or after a staff meeting,)
- the length of time to do the self-observation (e.g., for the next two weeks,) and
- specific questions to be considered about what happened, what your inner experience was, and what the results were.

The questions are designed to shed light on the nuances of the behavior as it arises. Often questions address the somatic, emotional, and mental levels of the experience, as well as observing what impact the behavior had on yourself or others.

Using self-observations over time leads to change generally as follows:

- We use 20/20 hindsight to reflect at the end of our day. We remember that we actually did engage in some heinous behavior (for example interrupting others) earlier in the day. We jot down notes about our experience, and become curious ("Hey! Maybe I really do interrupt!")
- After several days, because we are collecting data, we become more attuned to the behavior, and notice it sooner. ("Oops! I just interrupted Joe!") Still hindsight, but closer in time.
- Soon, the internal observer, which we've been cultivating, begins to notice what we're doing as we do it. ("I'm interrupting Beth right now!") Because the bulk of our awareness is still identified with the seemingly important thing we're interrupting Beth to say, we likely finish saying it anyway, but awareness is dawning.
- We begin to notice our impulse before the behavior. ("I feel my energy increasing and my back straightening. I feel impatient. I know what we should do. I'm about to interrupt Joe. No, this time, I'm going to hear him out instead. Slow down, relax, breathe, listen.") Now, we are changing our behavior. But it happened simply, easily, almost by itself.

Self-observations are of tremendous value, and can be designed for nearly any behavior, including both behaviors that you would like to use, or that you use excessively or inappropriately.



Creating Sustainable Change

Self-observation, of course, is simply a learning device. It's a means to build structure and accountability around the very intangible quality of presence, or awareness in the present moment. And, it's only in the present moment that we can choose something different.

Sometimes, of course, our default instincts are the right thing to do. Our habits are there because those behaviors have historically worked for us in getting what we wanted and needed. However, to increase our range of responses to a given situation, and especially to replace an ineffective but frequently practiced behavior with a more effective and novel one, we must be aware in the present moment of what we are doing.

Through self-observation, we (and, by extension, our clients) build the capacity to pay full attention to what we are doing at any given moment in time. If we are present, we will notice our habitual behaviors arising before we act them out. The early, often subtle, somatic aspects of the habits are the warning bell that we're about to do what we usually do. Significantly, paying attention to what's happening in our bodies is the most direct means into presence anyway. This present moment awareness is what provides us with the moment of choice that Viktor Frankl, Stephen Covey, and countless others have spotlighted for us.

Recent neurological research (see the work of Richie Davidson, David Rock, etc. for example) is increasingly demonstrating that the brain and nervous system is literally capable of re-wiring itself as we learn new habits. It takes energy, commitment, and attention to do so. And, most importantly, it takes repetition of a new behavior, with full awareness.

Therein lies the key to sustainability. With this level of attention to the granular nature of our habits, we become increasingly able to recognize an old habit arising, and to make a choice to do something different and more effective. As we make this choice, with full attention, our brain is literally building new neural pathways. With sufficient practice, the new pathways will become strong enough that they are the new default.

What we experience as "normal" will have shifted, and we will have replaced an old, impulsive habit, with a new and consciously chosen way of responding to similar situations.



Personal Application Worksheet

Choose a developmental challenge that you are facing; one that requires you to work more skillfully with some habit that perhaps served you well in the past, but that is now problematic.

Seeing:

- 1. What is your developmental challenge?**
- 2. What are some of the roles that you play in relation to this challenge? (Give them names.)**
- 3. What role do you tend to overuse?**
- 4. What is the behavioral habit, identified with this role, that causes problems? What is this habit serving/ how is it keeping you safe?**

Being

- 5. What is the story that you tell yourself right before this behavior, that justifies it? What emotions are present? Where does the action urge show up in your body? What is the sensation of the action urge? Really feel this.**
- 6. For a week, at the end of every day, please write down daily notes in response to these questions, describing a real situation from that day when the behavior arose.**

Doing

- 7. What would it look like to use this role wisely, without the drive and excess of the habit? How would that feel? What narrative would be true at that moment? What emotions would you feel towards the others involved?**
- 8. For a second week, at the end of every day, please write down daily notes in response to these questions, describing a real situation from that day when you felt the urge for the behavior, recognized the urge, settled yourself, and made a conscious choice. How did you enable taking this new action?**



Additional References and Resources

Presence-Based® Coaching Resources

Competency Model: presencebasedcoaching.com/pdf/model.pdf

ICF-Accredited Coach Training and Certification: presencebasedcoaching.com/training

Resource Library: presencebasedcoaching.com/subscribe

Books

Silsbee, Doug: The Mindful Coach: Seven Roles for Facilitating Leader Development. Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Silsbee, Doug: Presence-Based Coaching: Coaching Self-Generative Leaders Through Mind, Body, and Heart. Jossey-Bass, 2008.

What did you do?

*It's 3:23 in the morning and I'm awake
because my great, great, grandchildren won't let me sleep.
My great, great, grandchildren ask me in dreams
what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?
surely you did something when the seasons started failing
as the mammals, reptiles and birds were all dying?
did you fill the streets with protest when democracy was stolen?
what did you do
once
you
knew?*

- Drew Dellinger