



101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.

Gestalt Chapter: Technique 52 (pages 165-168)

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Working with Blocks

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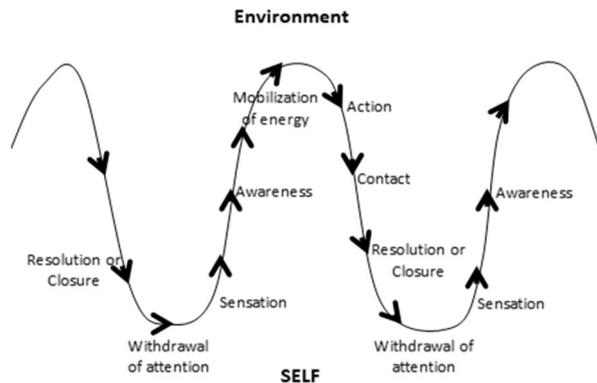
Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
 Individual Supervision	 Group Supervision	 Peer Supervision			 Experienced Supervisees Only

When is this used?

The purpose of this type of exercise is to explore the nature of what might be going on when somebody is experiencing a ‘block’ or ‘resistance’ in relation to something important for them. They may be stuck at some point in the gestalt cycle, for example. Each part of the cycle comes with an accompanying way in which resistance can show up - these are known as ‘interruptions to contact’, and the intention is to address such interruptions in a way that allows progress.

From a gestalt frame, being in full contact with the ‘block’ would of itself be the completion of a cycle within the greater cycle(s). See Figure 3.1. This approach allows an embodied type of exploration that can be informative and contactful, including the benefits of working somatically (with body), whether there are words for this block or not. It can produce a shift that enables movement.

Figure 3.1: The gestalt cycle of awareness adapted from Zinker (1977).





What is the experiment?

The experiment involves using a wall or other immovable part of the room, to serve as an embodiment of this block. It can be done standing or seated, as appropriate. Brief the supervisee along the following lines:

Step 1: Set up.

- Place your back against the wall. Bring to mind the situation about which you feel stuck.
- You can have your eyes open or closed, whatever suits you. The wall represents the 'stuck'.

Step 2: Explore.

- Feel the wall behind you, experiment with leaning against it more or less heavily, shifting weight from side to side, being straighter or less straight, back of hands or palms to the wall, all the different ways you can find.
- Notice any sensations. Notice how things change when you adjust your position. Do any colours, places, images come to mind?

Step 3: Explore more.

- If you like, you can experiment in other ways. What if the wall felt soft? What if it was a tree? What if?

Step 4 (optional): Expanding safely beyond the block.

- Imagine a safe bubble for yourself as you lean there. What would it be like to extend that bubble behind you to include the wall and everything behind it? If you try it, stay a while and then bring the bubble back to this side of the wall.

Step 5: Consolidate awareness.

- When you are ready, disconnect from the wall. What do you notice now?

How to work with this experiment...

As with many gestalt experiments, light facilitation is used to enable somebody to explore. Consider that this way of working may not suit everyone and could be experienced by some as confusing or annoying. Such a response is also part of the field and potentially informative, but whatever a supervisee chooses to work with is their choice; an experiment is just that – an experiment, not a mandate in which choice is over ridden by a supervisor's inappropriately strong attachment to a specific process or outcome. So, if a supervisee wishes to explore the nature of the 'nothing' or 'annoyance' they feel, that is fine, and it is equally fine for them to say they don't think they are getting anything from it and do not want to continue.



A word of caution.

Resistance is normal and can be functional. The task is not to eradicate but to explore, and in so doing expand awareness of what the resistance is like, what it is serving and whether it is still needed. It may need to stay but change form.

What other uses are there for this experiment?

With skilled clients and supervisors in a group setting, it can be interesting to sit back to back and become a living 'block' for the partner. This gives the possibility of some careful exploration of a moveable, living block and indeed of experiencing self in the role of block. What is that like? It is important to de-role after this.

Exploration of blocks in this way can also be used in coaching, with previous supervised learning or training.

Reference:

Zinker, J. (1977) *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*. Vintage Books. p. 77.

Further reading:

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Spoth, J., Toman, S., Leichtman, R. and Allan, J. (2016). *Gestalt Approach*. In: J. Passmore, D.B. Peterson, and T. Freire, (Eds). (2016) *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of The Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. Ch.20.