

Dancing in the moment with clients

I have been thinking a lot about how to **dance in the moment** in conversations with clients. **Dancing in the moment** is a cool, 'feel good' expression but what does it look like and how you can do it?

When I am dancing well!

I am feeling fresh and relaxed. I can tune in to what the other person is saying and giving in terms of their body language. I can respond nimbly to what they want and am 'getting where they are coming from'. I can see the little signs in their tone of voice, or their physical expressions and can do something with that. I am not overthinking and my 'gut'/instincts are giving me lots of useful pointers.

When my dancing gets clumsy!

Dancing in the moment in a client conversation also has a lot to do with what is happening in my head. When I am anxious, performance driven, feeling inauthentic, in people pleasing mode, all of this contributes to a background chatter that stops me actively listening. When I have an agenda and am already planning my next question to someone while they talk - I know I am not dancing in the moment.

Two experiences to share

I had two great experiences yesterday. Great - because I did not deliver what I wanted but learnt something from that.

A coaching perspective

I set out to develop my goal setting skills with a practice client. I was determined to help the client set some SMART targets - to move them forward. This positive agenda and my best intentions suffocated the session and starved it of oxygen. Early on I got some signals both verbally and non-verbally that the conversation needed to go in a very different direction. If I had been dancing in the moment - I would have gently stepped in that direction and followed their flow and my instincts. Instead with well-intentioned leaden boots I ploughed on with my own intellectual approach.

A tennis perspective

Later yesterday evening I had exactly the same experience on the tennis court. I played with somebody new. I was determined to give that person a good game but I became fixated by keeping the ball in play. My tennis game became cautious and I stopped enjoying myself. I play tennis because I love hitting fluffy, yellow balls over a net. When I am relaxed and just focused on that - I can hit it pretty hard and I love that feeling of a clean winner. This is dancing in the moment for me in tennis.

Some working principles

Dancing in the moment is a skill I want to constantly develop and refine when engaging with clients. These are the principles I will follow:

1) Anchoring: To anchor myself before something important. Before an important client meeting, where I need to dance in the moment, I do a little visualization. I imagine myself drinking a cappuccino, in my favourite coffee shop, near the River Thames/Borough market in

London (my favourite place on this planet!). I used to go there to write courses and articles. This has a peaceful impact on me.

2) Getting the breathing right: I do some deep breathing in support of the visualisation above. A mini-meditation before an important client discussion really helps me. When I get too anxious I have a tendency to say too much.

3) Process targets: I try and commit to the process and not to a 'win' target. If I am presenting to an HR manager in offering a new course - I focus on communicating my company with openness and passion. A target that prevents me becoming fixated with an outcome - 'winning the client'. This helps me dance in the moment and stay loose.

4) Types of questions: I try and prepare questions that are open and curious - 'what' questions. These questions give the client oxygen to express what they want and need before I look to offer solutions. I also focus on the little conversational sustainers that help my client explore what they need - the linking phrases that help get more information and go deeper.

5) Body language: I try and read the non-verbal signs. What is my client triggered by? What is making them tense...how can I respond to this?

6) Keeping calm: I try not to rush my responses. Taking that little bit of extra time to reflect on a question can avoid a knee-jerked, ill-considered or nervy response. You can over-commit to a client in that nervy space.

7) Practice: Based on what I know about a new client, for example, research into their sector/industry and information outlined in the first contact email, I work through in my mind what information

might be useful and what types of questions they may ask. I practice a lot. However, crucially, I try not to let what I think they want to talk about hijack what they are going to talk about. For me it is about being ready.

8) Having some fun: There is a difference between making a joke at the wrong time or treating something superficially and being warm, open and, at times, humorous. When I am relaxed and at my most powerful - I don't take myself too seriously.

9) Hitting the yellow, fluffy tennis ball: When I think back to playing tennis with my Dad as a child in the sunshine, I got a very pure form of pleasure from hitting a tennis ball. When I feel connected to my own emotion, my warmth and passion in what I do- I always dance in the conversation in a much more authentic and fluid way with clients.

10) Taking the pressure off: Whether you hit a tennis ball into the net or sky high - you need to instantly let it go. The same applies to dancing in the moment with a client. If you ask a clumsy question and you see instantly that it has dropped like a lead balloon, practice developing that muscle in you that can inwardly chuckle and just let it float away.

None of these principles are easy but I am going to keep practicing!
