

Gestalt Coaching or Gestalt Therapy? Ethical and Professional Considerations on Entering the Emotional World of the Coaching Client

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Synopsis

Gestalt offers a way of being and engaging with the world which both supports and promotes self awareness on the part of the coach and coachee with a consideration of the co-created relationship – the heart of any effective and impactful coaching. Psychological competency, underpinned by Gestalt, enhances the coach's capability to work at a deeper, more psychological level which helps bring about powerful shifts in clients' perceptions of themselves and others. This in turn generates a number of questions for the Gestalt oriented coach regarding the boundaries of professional practice. This paper sets out the dilemmas faced by the authors and received wisdom of what are 'professionally acceptable' arenas of work for Gestalt coaches particularly when it comes to dealing with the emotional life of the coachee. We explore the following questions:

- What are the differences between Gestalt Coaching and Gestalt Therapy and the resulting implications for the coaching contract?
- What does the coach need to attend to when dealing with the emotional world of their coachee?
- Is a Gestalt oriented coach more likely to evoke emotional responses than other 'flavours' of coaching?

We offer both discussion and case study material which is intended to guide thinking and professional practice as each one of us attempts to make whatever decision is right in the moment for the particular coachee we are working with.

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Marjorie Shackleton has a Masters degree in Social Work from the University of Kansas. She spent the first part of her career as a clinical social worker and systemic family therapist in the U.S. before returning to the UK where she trained and practised as a Gestalt Psychotherapist before taking advanced coach training. She now works as an executive coach and coach supervisor. She is a senior Faculty member of The Academy of Executive Coaching and core faculty for Certificate Programmes in Gestalt Coaching Skills and the Psychology of Coaching. She also teaches on the MSc in Executive Coaching at the University of Portsmouth Business School.