

Building Capacity for Change: The Power of the Body

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This article explores the integration of Somatic Coaching, a coaching process working on, with and through the body, with Appreciative Inquiry as a means to engage the body more deeply in the process of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. This blend of AI and Somatics contributes to cognitive and physiological shifts leading clients to recall what they care deeply about, gain clarity of purpose and connect to their values, while engaging mind, body and spirit in a commitment to action. Clients create generative, life-affirming interpretations with depth, velocity and acceleration as they move forward in their world.

What is Somatic Coaching?

Somatics comes from the Greek word “soma” meaning “the living body in its wholeness.” Somatic Coaching as defined by Richard Strozzi-Hecklerⁱ, thought and practice leader, and as learned through the Strozzi Institute’s Somatic Coaching program, has the coach work with the “historical, biological, social, spiritual, linguistic and emotional aspects unique to individuals.” The body is held as an integral informer in initiating, enacting, and sustaining change. The process brings about change by working “through the body” to awaken senses and feeling, bringing us more alive, present and open to possibility.

The body, in the somatic sense, expresses our history, commitments, dignity, authenticity, identity, roles, moral strength, moods and aspirations as a unique quality of aliveness we call the ‘self’. In this interpretation the body and the self are indistinguishable. Richard Strozzi-Heckler

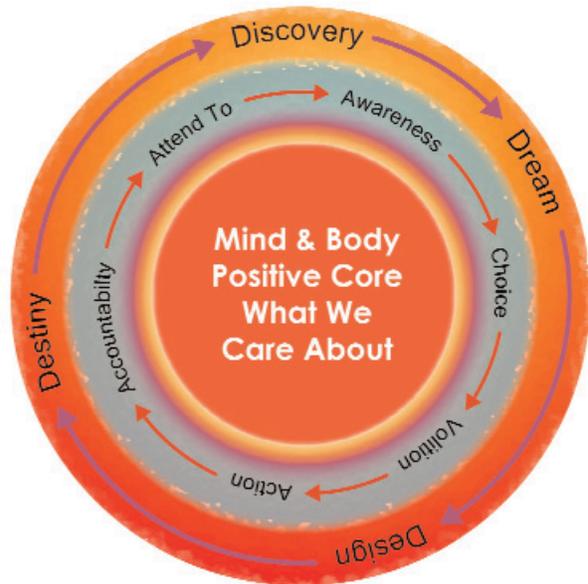
Most of us are trained to function in our daily lives from the neck up. We learn to trust our mind more than our body as we take action in the world. Without the integration of mind and body, we lose valuable information gained through self-awareness that allows us to be an integral player in the experience of life. We may fail to express our full presence or aliveness. Early in life we gain experience of the world through sensations. Before language, our sensations produce energetic reactions – cries calling others to attend to our hunger, diaper, pain or fear. We are conditioned by these early experiences – how we take action and how others respond to us. These and other life experiences shape us and later influence our choices and actions. With the introduction of language we can access words to express what we need or want and no longer rely solely on body sensations to inform others to respond. As we shift to more cognitive explanations of our experience, the body becomes an often ignored or undervalued part of the self.

By attending to our body, we develop a higher level of self-awareness. Our physical sensations and prior conditioning influence our behavior and experience of the world. Through body-centered activities, including deep breathing, meditation and new movements, we awaken our self to discover new choices, to engage with our self and others in a new way and to exercise volition. We move more effectively toward what we care about

– we are clear on our organizing principle and how our actions will serve us. With commitment to recurring practices, we begin to embody a graceful and powerful presence.

Appreciative Inquiry and Somatic Coaching: Pathway to Change

In AI coaching, the client identifies her positive core-strengths and values needed to flourish, to be fully alive. As she experiences the process of *Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny*, she



reconnects with the “best of what is.” She imagines a powerful, compelling future and through coaching she develops capacity to reframe challenges into opportunities, thereby generating a wider variety of positive options for action.

Somatic Coaching introduces an emphasis on the body by inviting the client to *attend to* the body, to bring *awareness* to its sensations, conditioned tendencies and structure. The client is invited to engage the “whole person,” including the typically undervalued somatic aspect of self, in the *discovery* and *dreaming* process. Through in self-observation of the body, she increases her capacity to reshape and

reframe stories allowing her to discover a broader array of *choices*. With somatic practices – body centered activities – she gains discipline in mind and body to exercise her will, or *volition* toward the *dream* and moves with focused attention into sustained *action*. By *attending* to mind and body the client creates a higher level of *awareness* which leads to greater *choice*, *volition*, sustained *action* and a profound sense of *accountability*. She develops the capacity to take a stand for what she cares deeply about.

With both AI and the Somatic Coaching approach, clients feel and experience the connection of mind and body. Blending AI and Somatic Coaching provides the pathway to overcome fear, elevate mood and connect physiology and affect, thus tapping wisdom and energy to effect positive change at the core. The approach opens the client to the relevance of the body, thereby raising self-awareness, awareness of others and widening options for action.

Discovery/Attending to and Awareness:

- **Preparing for the interview by attending to the body:** Before initiating the Appreciative Inquiry, the client learns the fundamental practice of *centering*: to be present, open and connected. This involves aligning the body in three dimensions: along the vertical axis of length representing dignity; the horizontal line of width representing the social domain, relationships; and front-to-back representing depth, where we hold our core principles. She is encouraged to breathe more deeply to broaden her capacity to hold more possibilities. The coach inquires into the client’s mood, a bodily phenomena influencing her behavior and revealing her orientation to the world. The client notices the stance of her body, her thoughts and her energy to reveal the quality of her being in that moment.

When listening to another person, don't just listen with your mind, listen with your whole body. Eckhart Tolle

- **Inquiry:** With a centered presence, a deeper connection opens the listening and strengthens the coach/client relationship. She is able to pay attention to what is unfolding in the moment, observing the self, taking note of the strengths discovered through inquiry and the physiological effect of the experience. With greater awareness of her physical sensations, she elevates her capacity to reshape her being, reframe stories and reproduce energy when needed to sustain momentum. She gains a somatic sense of what she truly desires. In addition, she learns the value of attending to her body as a means of increasing self-awareness.

Dream/Awareness and Choice:

- **Declaring a positive future:** The client reflects on her description of her powerful future and shapes a declaration for the future, similar to a provocative proposition, rooted in what she passionately cares about. She creates an image of the future that is clear and compelling. The somatic declaration is grounded and centered and felt in the body. The commitment underlying the declaration is observable in the body; she speaks powerfully; she is clear and grounded; her voice comes from deep within her body.
- **The collision of the dream and fear:** The declaration or dream, when powerfully reflected in the body, can bring her to where “fear and dream collide.” This is the moment when she recognizes that to enact the future changes in familiar structures of mind and body are required. Structures of mind include habits of thought, stories we tell, and interpretations we make that we slip into believing are true. Structures of body include our presence: how we hold ourselves, mood, patterns of tension, muscular contractions and/or energy blockages. She knows now that success requires an alignment of strengths – mind and body – to engage wholly in creating the future.

Design/Choice and Volition:

- **Choice:** The client makes powerful design choices aligned with the dream and supporting her declaration. Adding standing somatic practices offer her the opportunity to build awareness and strength in the body to hold commitment and to extend her will to achieve the envisioned future. Standing somatic practices are physical moves designed to help the client build the muscle she needs to focus, extend, ask for what she needs and to decline requests that keep her from achieving her goals.
- **Volition:** The client defines her Conditions of Satisfaction as metrics for success in moving forward. Volition, the act of exercising the will, is essential to taking new actions and fulfilling commitments. Building the client’s capacity to express volition in body and mind allows her to make real progress toward the dream/declaration.
- **Standing in the declaration:** The client receives somatic assessments from the coach – feedback on how she is holding the declaration or commitment, which helps the client center herself “for the sake of what” she is making the declaration. Here if a breakdown occurs it is evident in the collapse in the body as she reverts to conditioned tendencies.
- **Designing the body for action:** When the client is challenged to uphold her

commitment she is faced with old embodied habits that no longer serve her. The body doesn't lie; muscle memory delivers an automatic response. Despite her intention to behave differently, she finds herself repeating old patterns and ways of being. She wonders why people fail to hear her requests or acknowledge her declines. She wonders why she is stressed and overwhelmed.

With conscious attention, the client feels the impact of the old patterns and is invited to design novel practices of movement, meditation and expression to literally reshape the body into a more powerful presence. Through practice she builds strength, backbone and courage in the body. The energy released creates new opportunities and new actions. With recurring generative practices, her structure shifts. New behaviors are reinforced and there is increased momentum. She develops emotional resilience, endurance, flexibility and the balance needed for breakthrough results as she holds a leadership presence that engages others in helping her fulfill on her declaration.

Why is it that our body knows the truth? The body has its own wisdom. The body is built for integrity. The body's intelligence is wired for and moves toward wholeness. When we awaken all the systems, we create alignment. The key to high performance is being truly aligned. Ronald Jue

Destiny/Action and Accountability:

- **Action:** Acting on commitments builds muscle for sustainability. The client takes action in generative physical practices, which help her reshape the body, alter her mindset, develop strength and broaden capacity to sustain change. The coach supports her with dynamic questions as she works through and experiences herself in action.
- **Accountability:** During coaching, if there is a breakdown in practices, promises or commitments, the client is accountable for discovering what happens in the body that keeps her from "going for" what she wants. Reviewing internal conversations (the stories she tells herself about herself) and her physical sensations leads her to reframe her narratives and elevate her awareness of physical energy blocks. She readjusts by revising actions and developing new practices to make conscious choices in alignment with her declared future.

Bringing the body into full awareness through the AI process and Somatic Coaching is a journey along a path of discovery that challenges, disorganizes, excites, reorganizes and energizes with every step taken. With a strong declaration of a positive future aligned with what we care about and a body designed to support our success, we are readily able to have choice, volition, action and accountability; in short, to realize our highest potential.

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