

Existential Coaching

Why the BIG philosophical questions matter

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Overview

- What's it like not to know?
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Overview

- CoViD-19: a boundary situation
- The big questions and how they find their way into the coaching room
- The “human condition”
- Existential philosophy in a nutshell
- A framework for existential coaching
- Existential leadership
- Q&A and conversations



CoViD-19: A BOUNDARY SITUATION



BOUNDARY SITUATIONS → BIG QUESTIONS



THE BIG QUESTIONS



“Do you believe in God?”



“Do you believe in God?”

Do I have a destiny? Does God exist?

What am I here to do? What’s my purpose?

Are there answers out there that I’m not listening to?

What’s my next best career move?



A BIG question

THE BIG QUESTIONS



The presenting issue

THE BIG QUESTIONS



“What’s my next career move?”

Are there answers out there that I’m not listening to?

What am I here to do?

What’s my purpose?

Is there such thing as destiny?

Does God exist?

Do I believe in God?



“What is my purpose?”

“Why am I here?”



“How can I be happy?”



Money
Promotion / Accomplishment
Resolving conflict / Self-acceptance
Safety and security
Life skills Love Meaning & purpose
Personal development Feeling better / less stress
Eat, sleep, exercise, meditate

“How can I be happy?”





“Where do I belong?”



Moving jobs
Career decisions Moving country
Fitting in Being understood
Finding love
Relationships Conflict
Family

“Where do I belong?”



“How long do I have left?”

“What shall I do with my time?”



“What does it all mean?”



“Am I in charge?”

“Who’s living my life?”



“Do I have free will?”



“How can I make confident choices
in a VUCA world?”



“Is this real?”

“Do I matter?”



“Who am I?”

“How can I ‘be myself?’”



The BIG questions (Wong, 2010)

- **Who am I?** What defines me? Is there anything unique and special about me?
What's left when I peel back the layers?
- **How can I be happy?** Why am I bored? Why am I so dissatisfied with life? What is the good life? Why is happiness so illusive? Is this all there is to life?
- **What should I do with my life?** How should I live? How do I make my life count for something? What is my calling? To what should I devote the rest of my life?



The BIG questions (Wong, 2010)

- **How do I make the right choices?** How do I know that I am making the right decision regarding career and relationships? How can I tell right from wrong? How can I choose in complex situations with conflicting moral demands?
- **Where do I belong?** Why do I feel so alone? Why don't I feel at home here? Where is home? How can I develop meaningful relationships? Where can I find acceptance?
- **What is the point of striving when life is so short?** Why should I struggle to survive when life is transient and fragile? What is the point of building anything only to see it swallowed up by death?

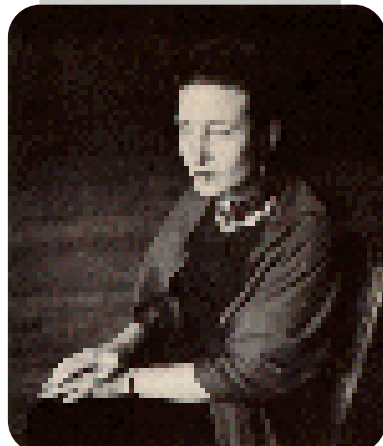


PHILOSOPHY → COACHING



Existential Philosophers

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre,
de Beauvoir, Buber, Camus, Merleau-Ponty



Existentialism in a nutshell

- A philosophy of human lived-existence
 - Exploring “The Human Condition”
- Existential givens:
 - Death, Freedom, Isolation, Meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980)
- “Dasein” (being there/in the world with others)
 - paradox, dilemma & anxiety
- Holistic, universal & inevitable



Existential Therapists

Irvin Yalom, Rollo May, Victor Frankl, R.D. Laing,
Emmy van Deurzen, Ernesto Spinelli, Alfried Längle, Monica Hanaway



Existential Coaches

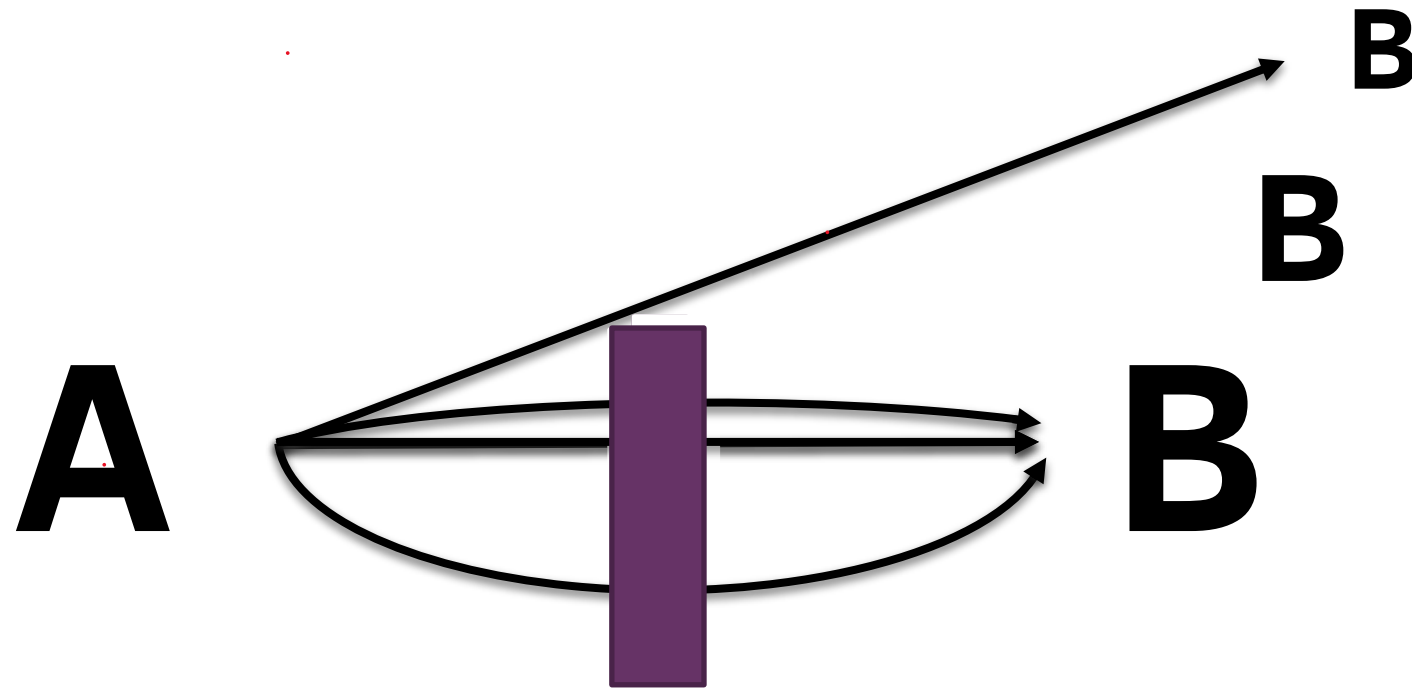
Ernesto Spinelli, Alfried Längle, Monica Hanaway, Yaqui Martinez
Jamie Reed, Yannick Jacob, Ann Lagerström, Sasha van Deurzen-Smith



COACHING & EXISTENTIAL COACHING



Coaching: A journey from A to B

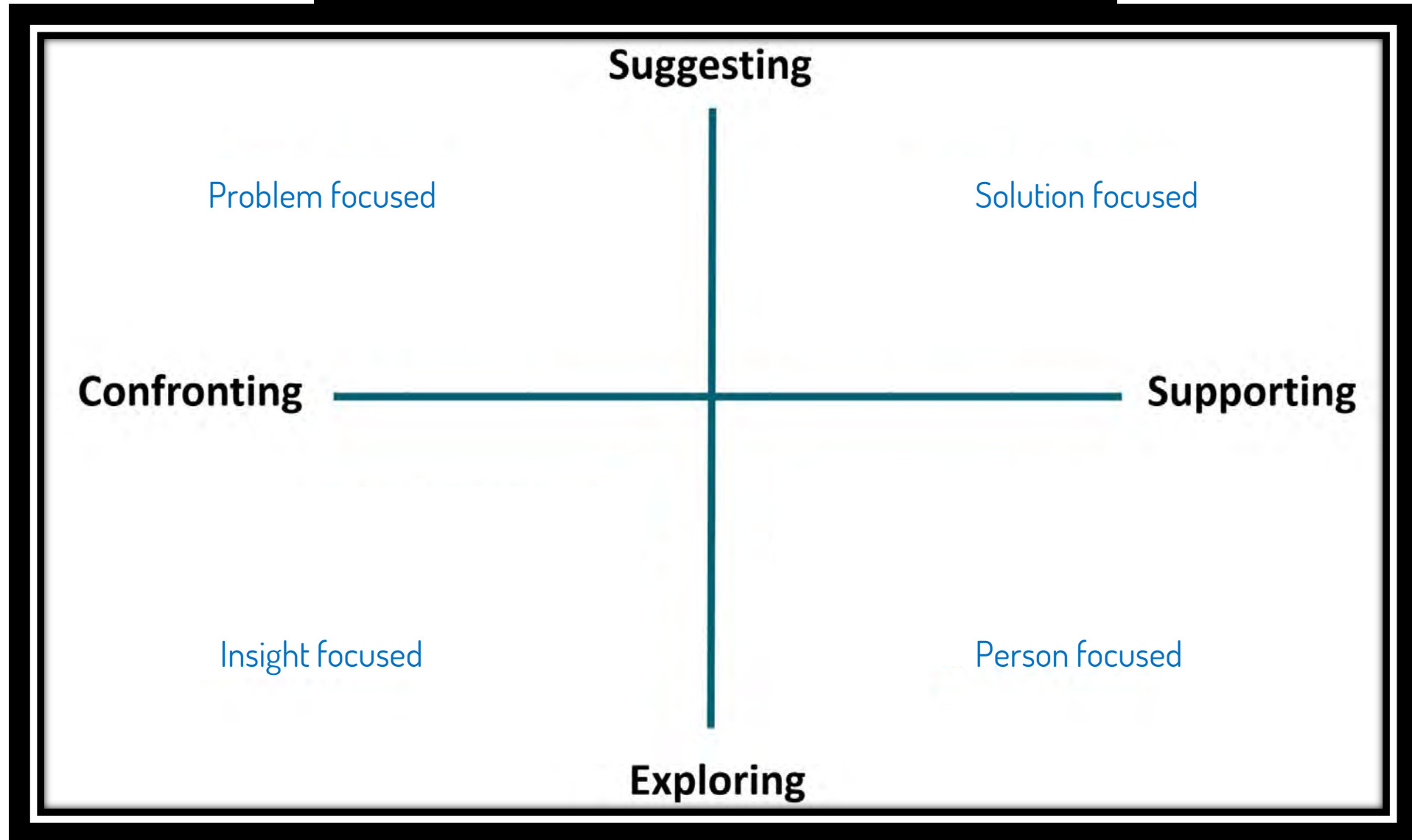


“A collaborative solution-focused, results-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.”

(The Association for Coaching)



De Haan's Playing Field



(De Haan, 2008)



Existential Coaching

“focuses particularly on existential issues such as freedom, responsibility, authenticity, meaning, purpose, paradox and dilemma.

*It helps a person to get **more of a perspective** on the way they live and to ask some new and **more profound questions** about life. [...]*

*Ultimately it is an approach with an entirely pragmatic objective: to **help people to live their lives with greater deliberation, liberty, understanding and passion.**”*



Emmy van Deurzen & Monica Hanaway

**Existential Perspectives
on Coaching (2012)**



Existential Coaching

*“is **not solution-driven**[...]. It suggests answers will be more profound and more beneficial to the client when the coach stays still and **pays attention to what is in front of them** rather than working to ‘fix’ it.*

[...]

*A client may seek **companionship in their journey of meaning-making**, and benefit from a coaching relationship which **facilitates the exploration of our being**, and the dilemmas and challenges that will inevitably be encountered as we forge our unique path.*

[...]

*People may present with a number of **concrete and practical dilemmas**, but these may have **roots in more existential concerns.**”*



Monica Hanaway

**An Existential & Phenomenological
Approach to Coaching Supervision (2022)**

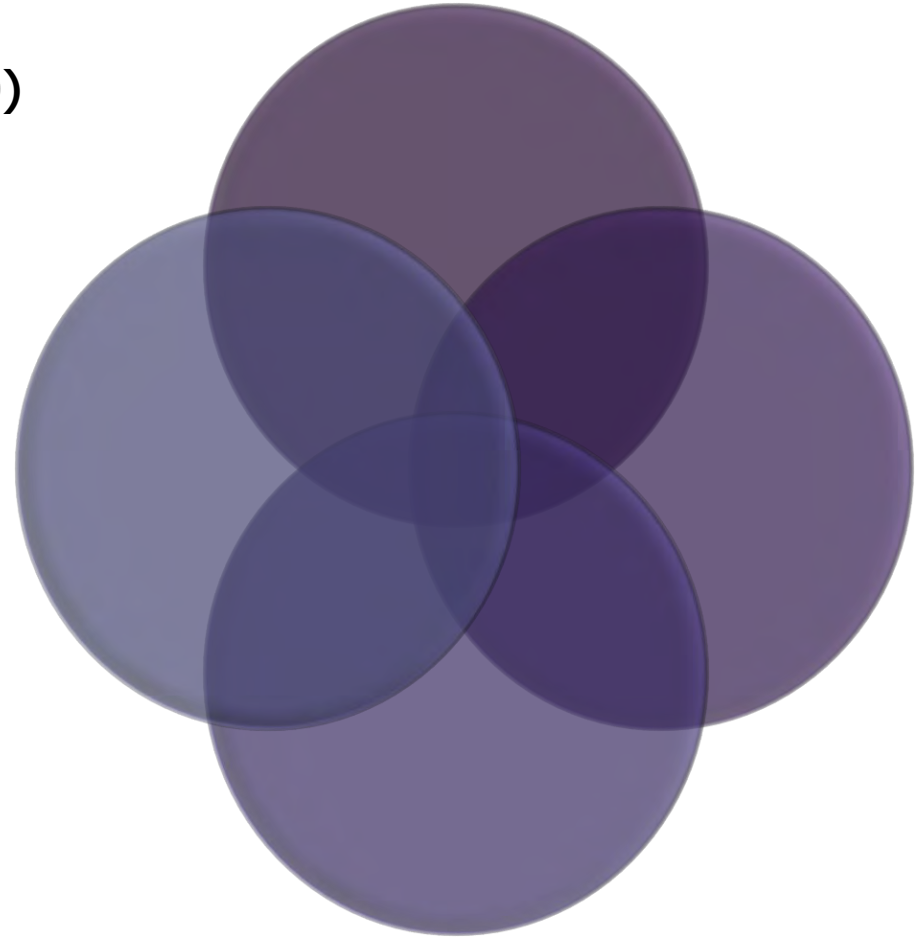


KEY THEMES IN EXISTENTIALISM



The Existential Givens (Yalom, 1980)

- Freedom
- Death
- Meaninglessness
- Isolation



**FREEDOM
CHOICE
RESPONSIBILITY**



**TEMPORALITY
ENDINGS
DEATH
CHANGE**



MEANINGLESSNESS ABSURDITY



**ISOLATION
RELATEDNESS
OTHERS**



Existential tools and models

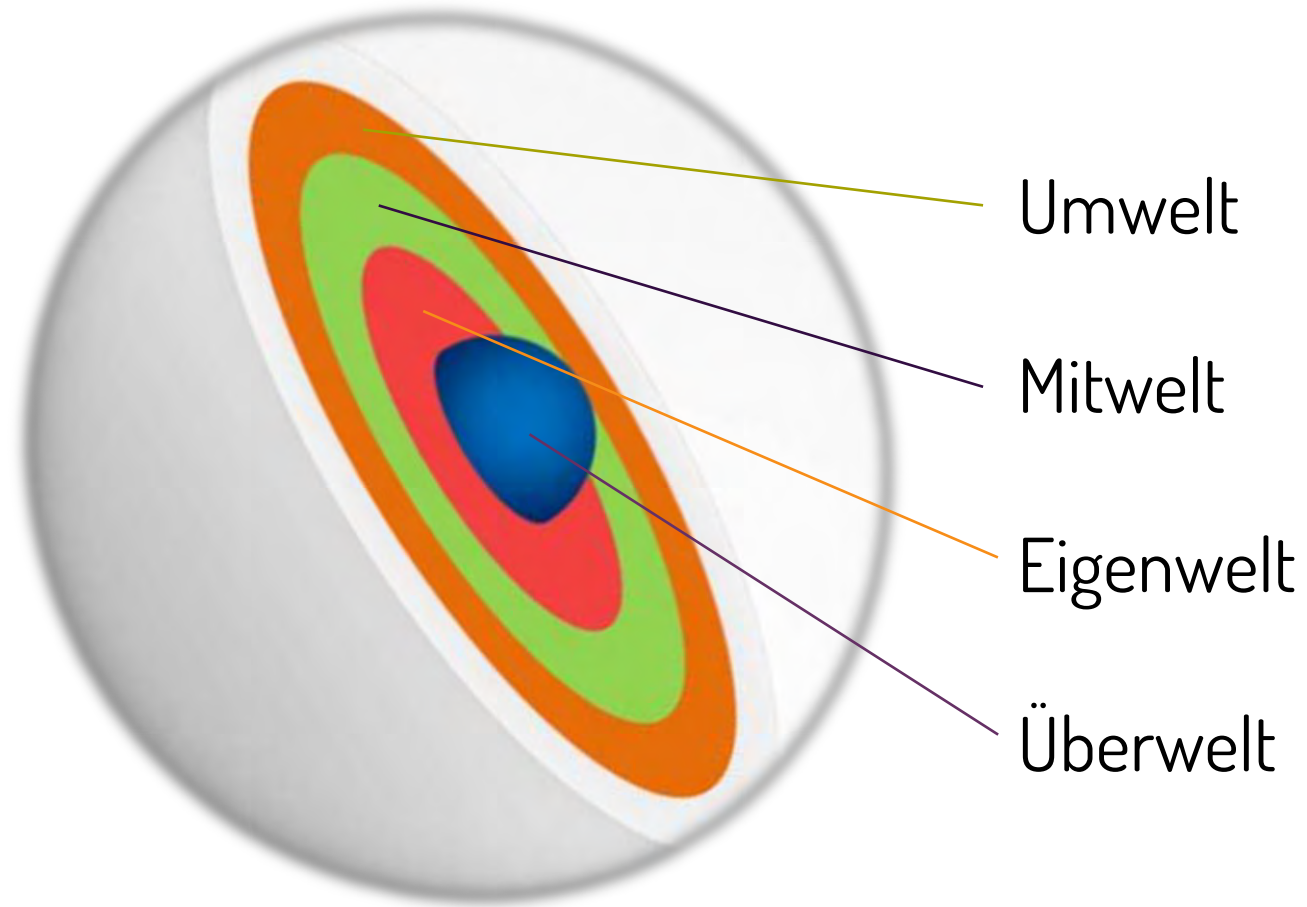
- Meeting the client holistically:
 - The 4 worlds
- Phenomenological inquiry
- MOVER & CREATE
- Tuning in & out:
 - Being-with & Doing-with



The 4 Worlds



The 4 Worlds



Umwelt

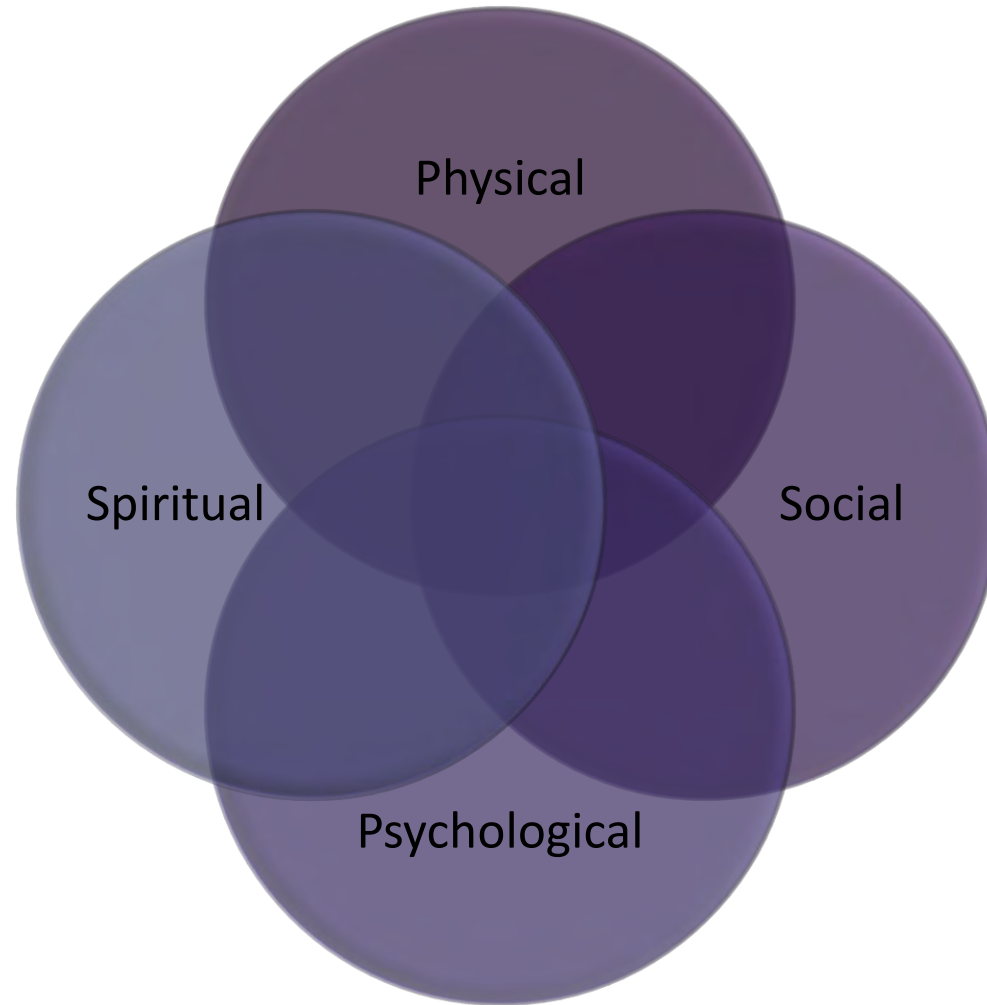
Mitwelt

Eigenwelt

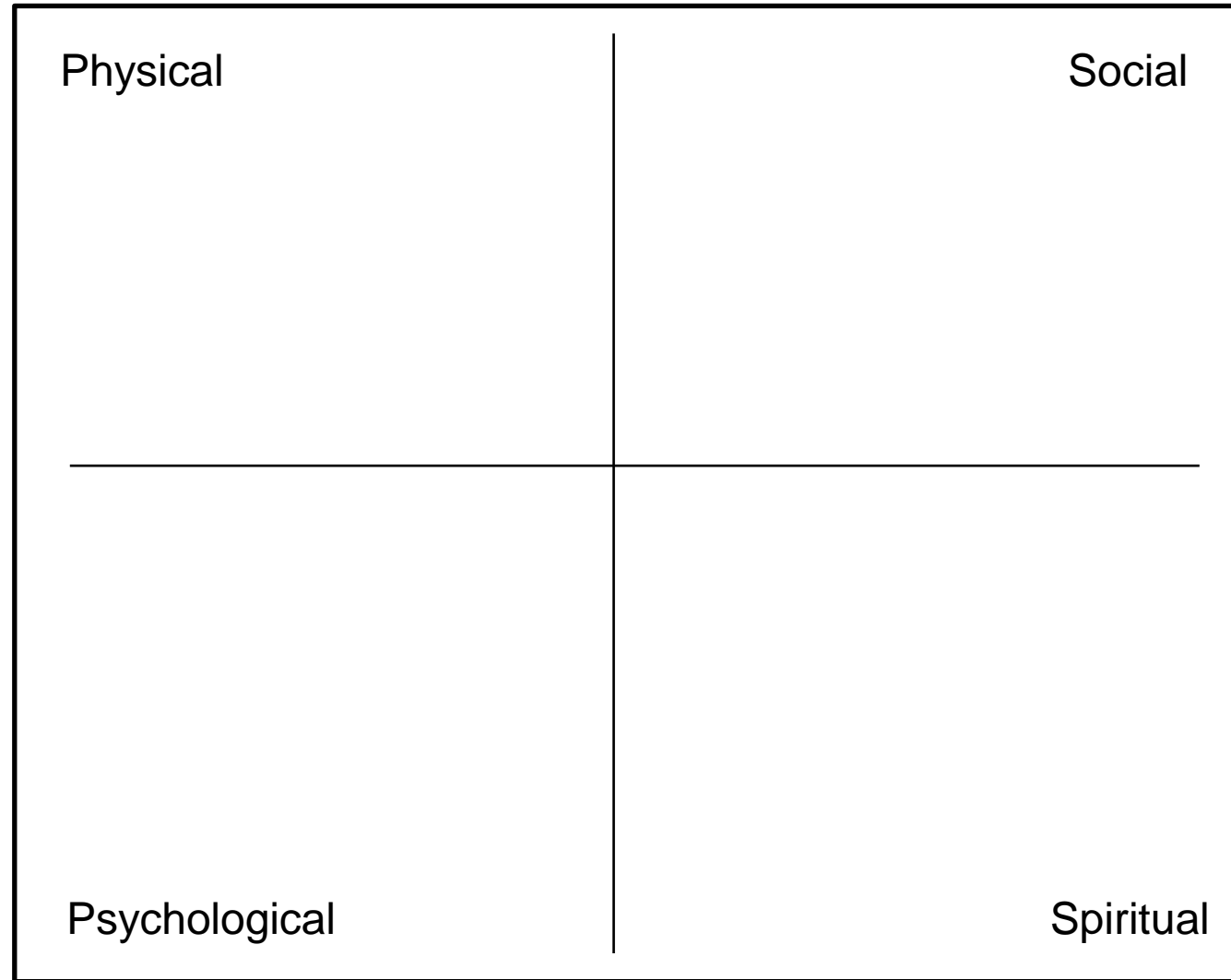
Überwelt



The 4 Worlds



The 4 worlds



4 world questions – Physical

- How important is your current environment to you (your house, office, bedroom, flat share, etc.)?
- What does it provide you with?
- What would you lose or miss if you were elsewhere (e.g. moving house, changing jobs or office, etc.)?
- What is lacking in your current environment?
- What would your ideal environment look, feel, taste, smell and sound like?
- In what environment do you feel most ill at ease?
- To what extent does your environment reflect those preferences?
- What changes in your current environment would have the most benefit for you?
- How do you see yourself physically? How do you relate to your physical body? Are you happy with that? If not, what, if anything, are you doing in to change that?
- Where in the world do you feel most at home? What does being at home look like to you?



4 world questions – Social

- How do you relate to other people? How comfortable are you with those around you?
- Do you keep your people close or are they spread across long distances?
- Are you in touch with people you grew up with? Do you make many new connections?
- How do you behave at parties or other social events?
 - Do you engage in conversation? Who with? Do you seek like-minded people or engage in debates and arguments?
 - Do you tend to hang out with people you already know or are you find pleasure in getting to know new people?
 - Do you try to meet and greet as many people as possible or stick to a few longer conversations?
 - Are you there for the good food, the free drinks, the dancing and care less about the people?
- How important is the concept of 'family' and your own family to you?
 - Are you close? How often do you speak to them?
 - What are the dynamics and relationships like between you and your family members?
 - Do you need them to approve of your actions?



4 world questions – Social (cont.)

- Are you more comfortable leading or following?
- How do you describe your attitude towards conflict, disputes or arguments with other people?
- What are the most important aspects of your relationships with others?
- Which one/s is/are the most significant relationship/s in your life? Tell me about it!
- How do connections with others serve you in your life?
- What costs do you experience as a result of your relationships? How do they affect you?
- If you could choose to be friends with anybody in the world (assuming that they would reciprocate), who would you like to be friends with?
- Roughly how many people would you call besties/friends/colleagues/acquaintances/loose connection?
- Who are your enemies (if any)?



4 world questions – Personal

- Who are you?
- How would you describe your personality or self-concept?
- What are your character strengths?
- What is your most vivid memory (in relation to the topic of the coaching)? What is it about this event, object, person or experience that it remains so clearly in your thought?
- What's the most recurring thought that you hold in your mind?
- How do you relate to yourself?
- Are you meditating?
- What are the sort of thoughts and feelings that pass through your mind/body frequently? Have you noticed any patterns?



4 world questions – Spiritual

- What do you feel you couldn't live without?
- If you drew a spider diagram of what is important to you, what would you place at the centre?
- How would you want someone to finish this sentence if they were talking about you?
“He was so passionate about...?”
- What are the beliefs which guide or govern your decision making and actions?
- What meaning do you find in your current position? How can that sense of meaning be increased?
- If you were to write your own epitaph, what would it say?
- What would you like your greatest gift to the world to be? What was your most meaningful achievement and why?
- If your heart had a voice, what would it stand for?



Phenomenological reduction

- **Bracketing:**
putting aside “taken-for-granted” beliefs
- **Reductions:**
seeing things through different lenses

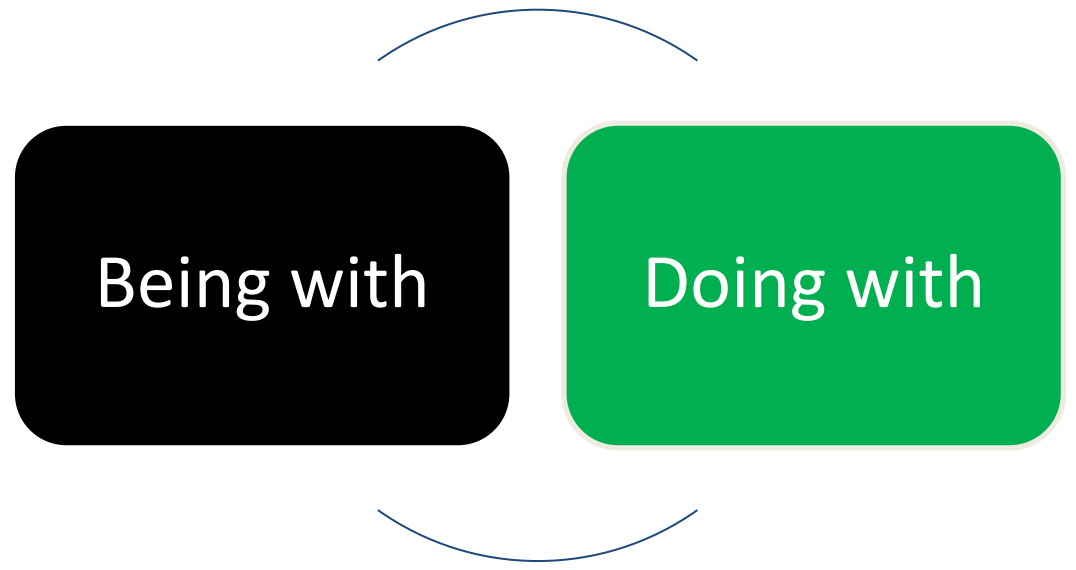
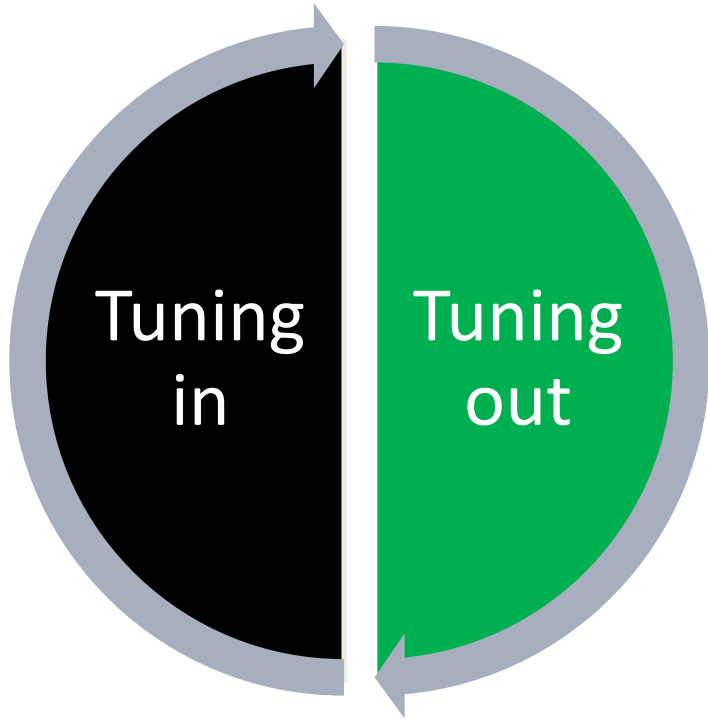


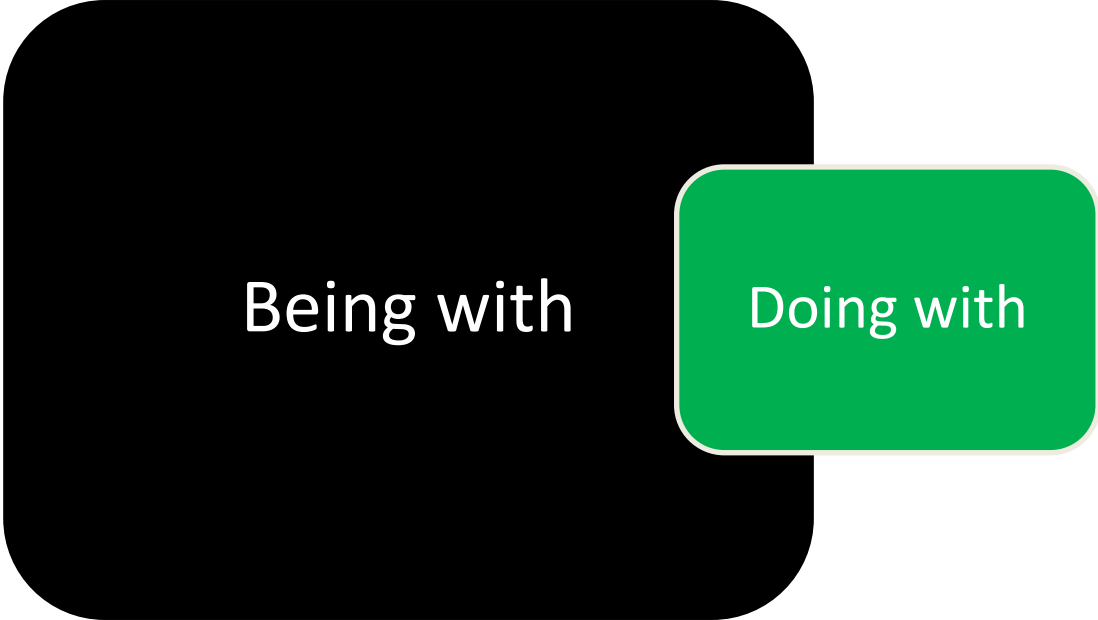
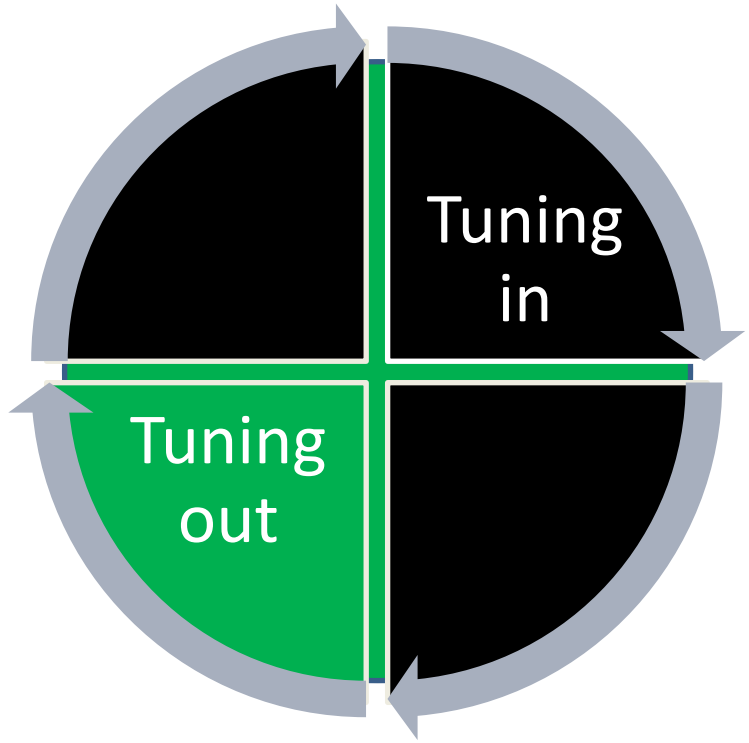
→ *moving away from distractions, assumptions and preconceptions allowing us to get closer to the essence of an experience of a phenomenon.*



TUNING IN & TUNING OUT







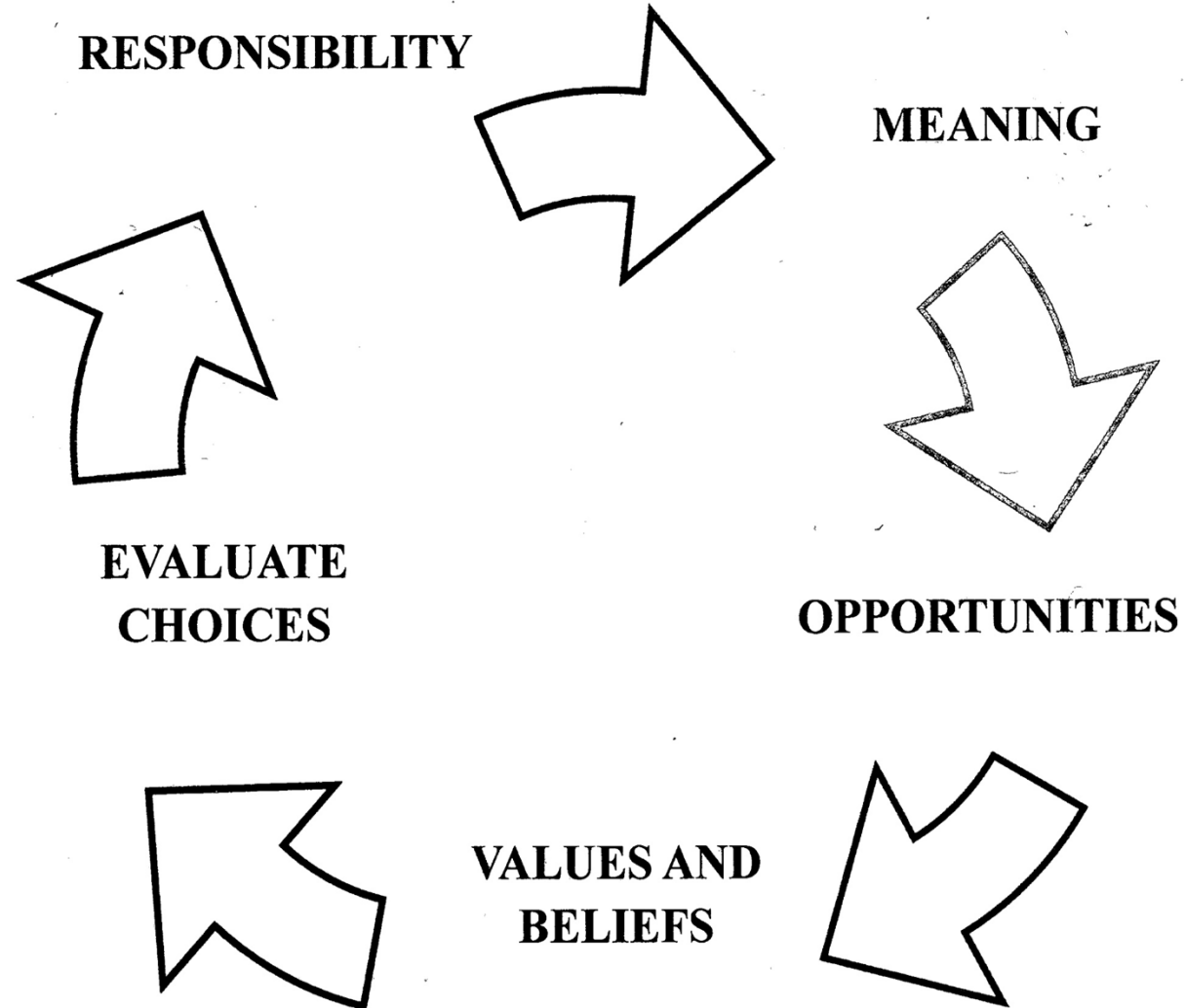
WORKING WITH THE HERE-AND-NOW IN COACHING



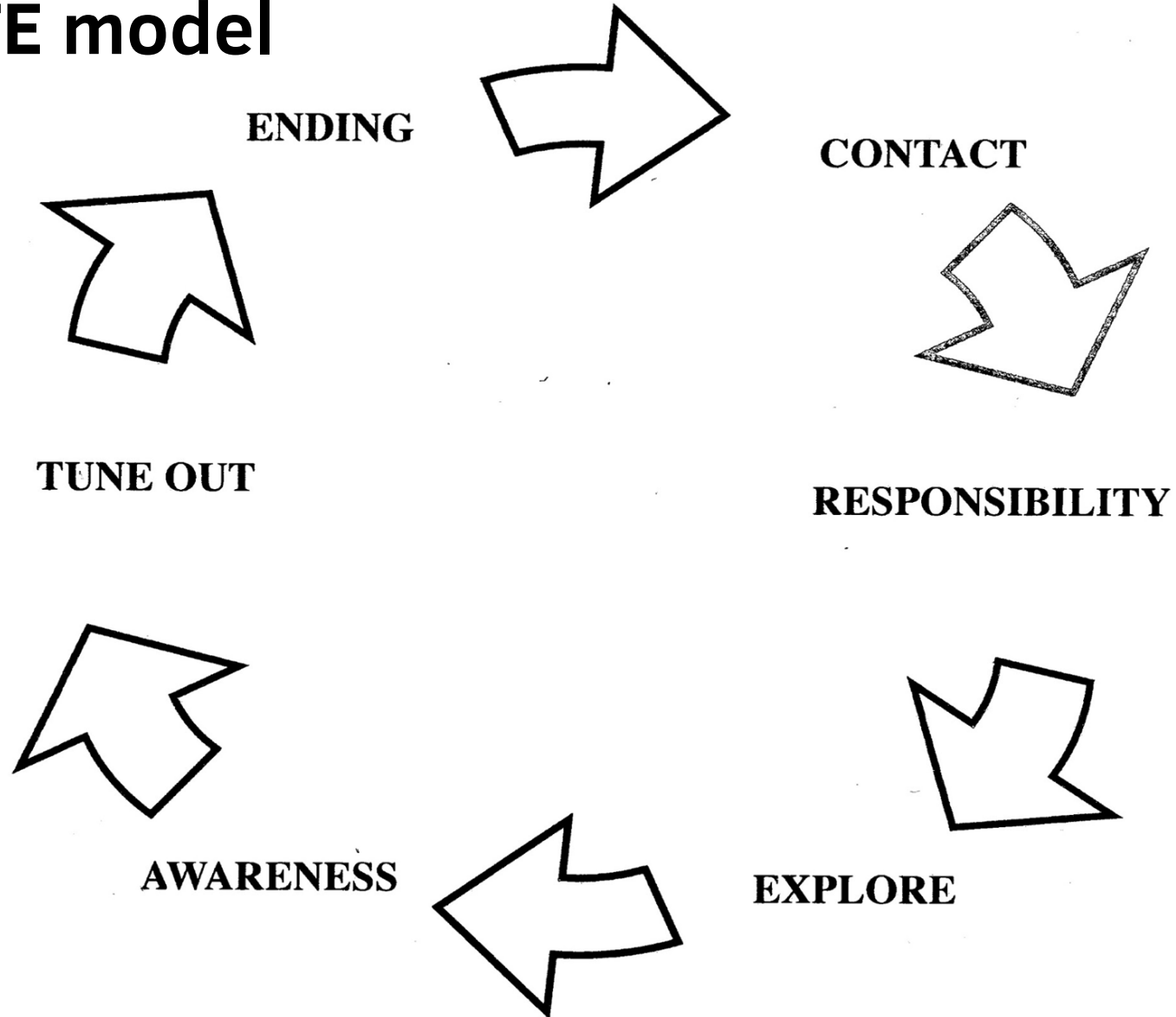
IMPARTING EXISTENTIAL WISDOM?



The MOVER model



The CREATE model



GUIDELINES & EXPECTATIONS



Guidelines for Existential Practice (Peltier, 2010)

1. **Honor individuality** – First, approach each new coaching client with a freshness and willingness to see him or her as unique. Reinforce your client's points of view
2. **Encourage choice** – Remind your clients that they choose their identity each moment of each day. Existence precedes essence. Their reputation need not constrain them.
3. **Get going** – The time for waiting is over. Exhort your clients to take risks, to get involved, to act, even to “live dangerously” sometimes.



Guidelines for Existential Practice (Peltier, 2010)

4. **Anticipate anxiety and defensiveness** – Anyone who is a coaching client will experience anxiety. This is expected and “normal”. Beware of a client who reports no anxiety for he or she is not willing or able to notice or discuss feelings or their subjective inner state.

5. **Commit to something** – Existentialism urges us to get involved with the regular activities or everyday life, and to do it with a passion. Do not accept it when your clients hang back. Urge them to get involved with those things that are important to them, even if others do not agree with their priorities.

6. **Value responsibility taking** – Existentialism urges us to take responsibility of the choices we have made. We did it, we chose it, and we now live with the choices and implication.



Guidelines for Existential Practice (Peltier, 2010)

7. **Conflict and confrontation** – In the existential view, interpersonal conflict is unavoidable, yet many people characteristically avoid conflict. This is a mistake and coaches must assess their clients along this dimension.

8. **Create and sustain authentic relationships** – Both [coaches and clients] will benefit from authenticity in work relationship. An authentic relationship occurs when both parties treat each other as autonomous entities to be respected. The truth is told and neither manipulates for personal benefit.



Guidelines for Existential Practice (Peltier, 2010)

9. **Welcome and appreciate the absurd** – Organisations [just as life itself] are full of examples of absurdity, and anyone who has ever worked in a large (or small) organisation know how ridiculous things can get. This is simply normal. Assess your client to see how well they understand this fact and what they do with it.

10. **Clients must figure things out their own way** – No one can tell you the answers to the most important questions. You have to figure them out yourself, in your own way.



— Clients' expectations (Hanaway, 2018)

- They will be encouraged to speak up for themselves and the values they hold and will not be treated as if they fit into a pre-established model.
- They will be invited into a creative dialogue where they take charge of their own exploration and are helped to think in new ways about making choices and decisions in their lives.
- They will be helped to formulate with clarity who they think they are, where they are, where they want to go in their life.
- They will be shown how to probe a little further and deeper and to challenge their assumptions about their lives, themselves, other people and the world they live in.



— Clients' expectations (Hanaway, 2018)

- They will have an opportunity to tackle the conflicts in their lives and understand not only how they contribute to creating some of these but also how to face up to conflicts and surpass them, by learning about reciprocity, generosity and empathy.
- They will be taught about dialectical principles and the way in which they make more of the paradoxes of human existence, using the ebb and flow of their lives to create movement for themselves.
- They will be enabled to recognize their own ideology, in the form of their unspoken assumptions, their prejudice, their values, their most deep-seated beliefs and their predictive framework of human existence.



— Clients' expectations (Hanaway, 2018)

- They will be taught new methods for tackling some of the distortions that have obscured their vision and they will increase their capacity for widening their perspective on their life.
- They will be helped to take a broader and wider view of human existence in general and gain greater understanding of how life and the world actually work.
- They will engage in debating their personal philosophy and will feel tested and challenged, but also helped to arrive at a more wholesome and complete view of the world.



— Clients' expectations (Hanaway, 2018)

- They will abandon old destructive habits and replace them with new and more creative ways of proceeding in life, by reengaging with a meaningful purpose and project, which will make them feel passionate and enthusiastic about what they can contribute to the world.
- They will examine their physical embodiment, and be helped to observe and note the habits that break them, so that they can break these habits instead.
- They will become aware of the emotional and interactional patterns that create constant friction with other people around them and get better at resolving such conflicts or using the energy of those frictions to move on.



— Clients' expectations (Hanaway, 2018)

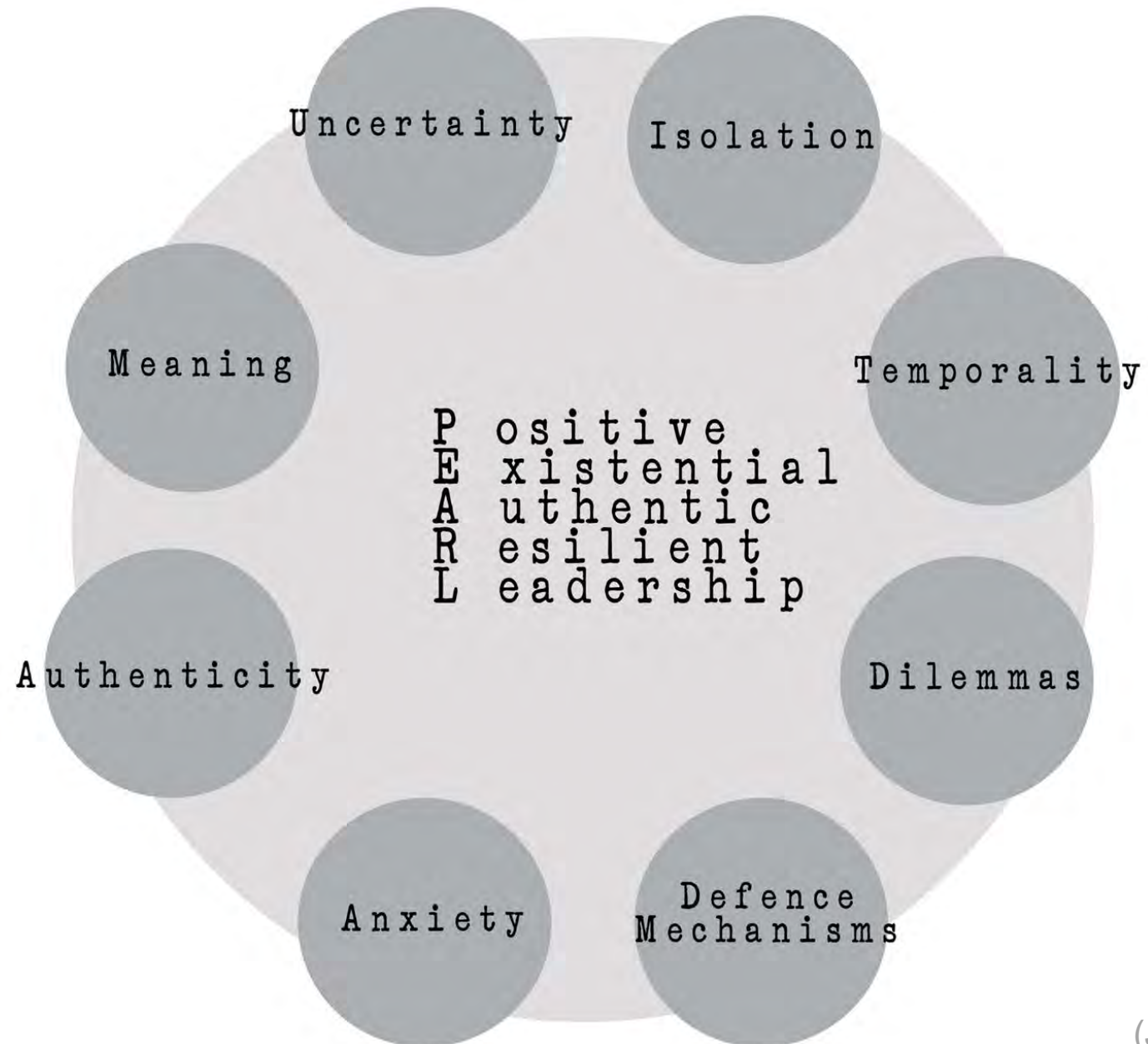
- They will consider their self-image and their personal sense of who they are. They will become more able to become who they are capable of being and want to be.
- They will improve their vision about the life they live, and the life they would like to live. They will do so by understanding first of all their own beliefs and values, but also by finding out more about human existence, its challenges, purpose and internal lawfulness.



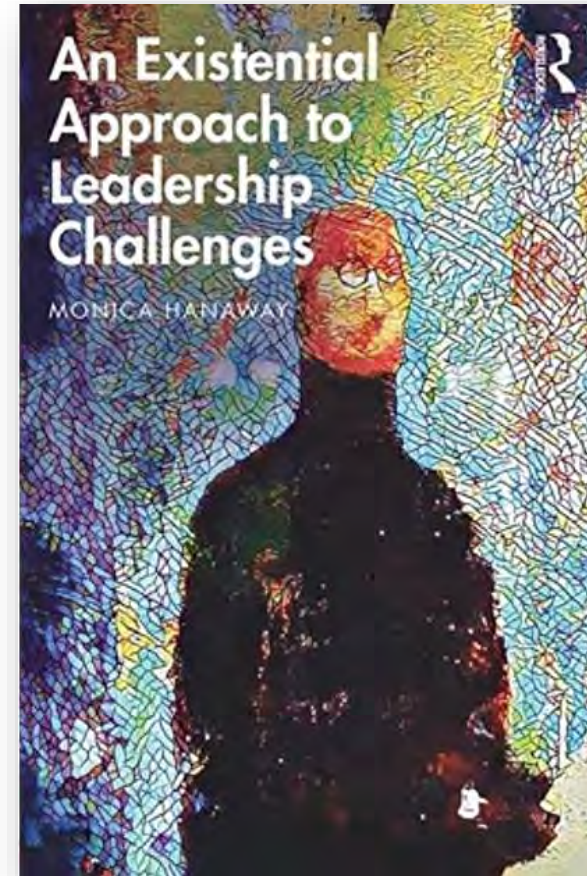
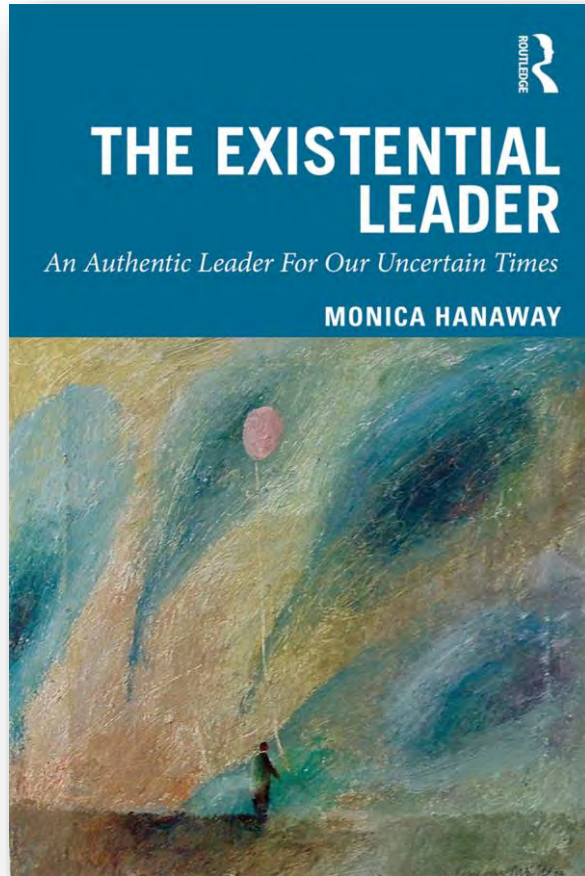
EXISTENTIAL LEADERSHIP



The “hidden” challenges of leadership

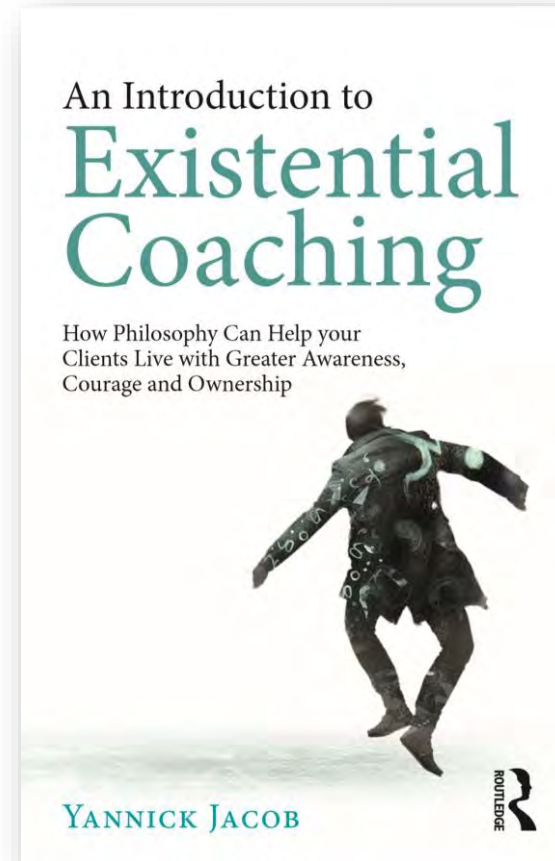


Existential leadership

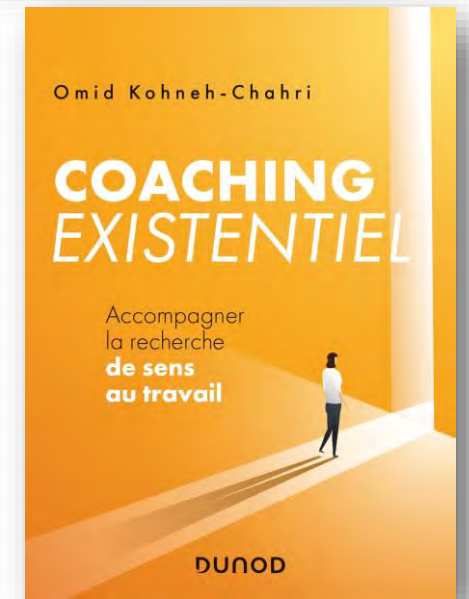
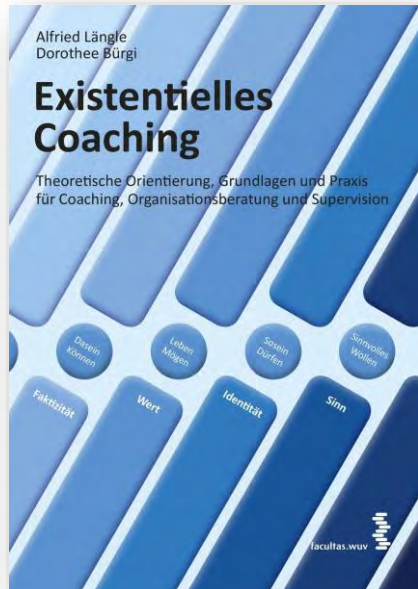
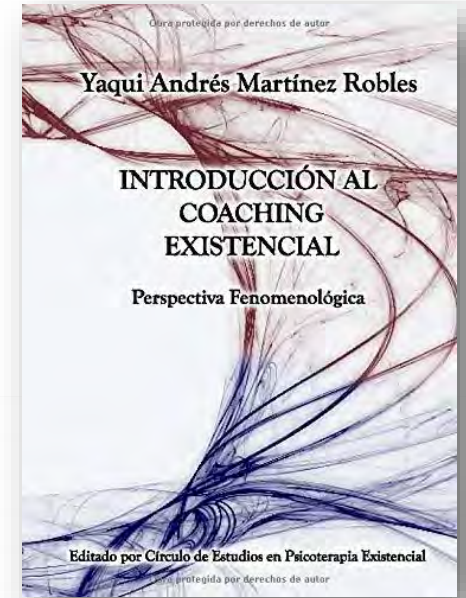
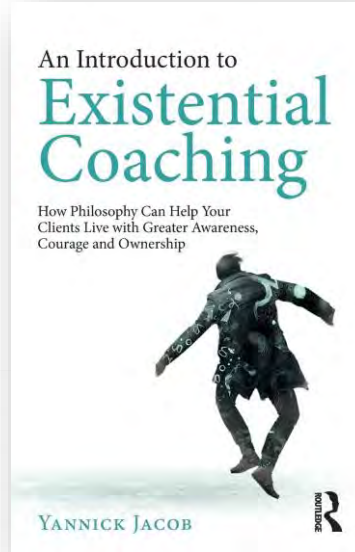
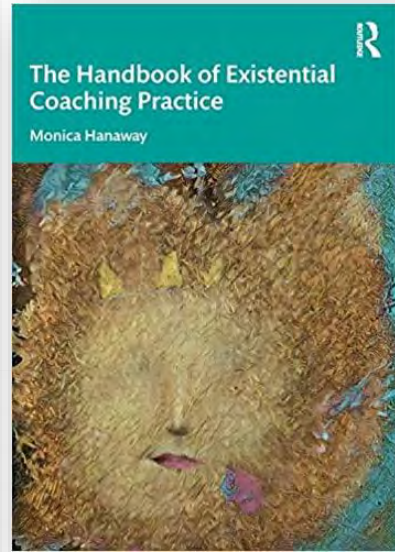
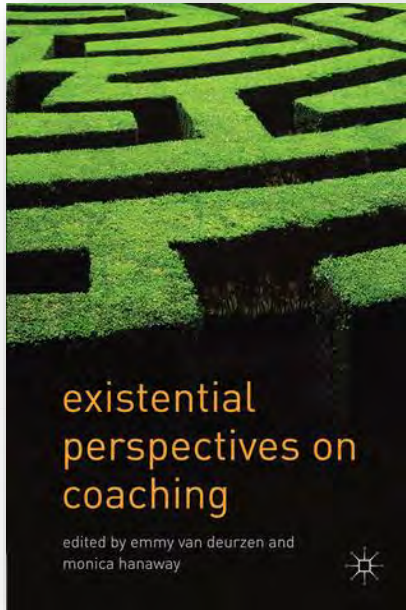


Establishing a coaching practice

Free download of chapter 7,
“How to establish an existential coaching practice”,
via www.RocketSupervision.com/FreeStuff



Global Perspectives



Recommended reading

- Jacob, Y.U. (2019). **An Introduction to Existential Coaching**. London: Routledge.
- Van Deurzen, E. & Hanaway, M. (2012). **Existential Perspectives on Coaching**. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hanaway, M. (2020). *The Handbook of Existential Coaching Practice*. London: Routledge
- Spinelli, E. (2010). Existential Coaching. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.) ***The Complete Handbook of Coaching*** (pp. 94-106). London: Sage.



#13

YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

Featuring a full-length Live Coaching Demo plus debrief, conversations & experimental breakouts with

Natalie Lancer

Coaching through BIG projects, Co-author of "Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring (2nd edition)", Honorary Secretary of the BPS Special Group in Coaching Psychology



Eventbrite Meetup



YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

#6

YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

Featuring a full-length Live Coaching Demo plus debrief, conversations & experimental breakouts with

Eric Larson

PCC with over 10,000 coaching conversations under his belt



Eventbrite Meetup

Existentially-informed coaching in action

<https://bit.ly/CoachingLabMembership>

<https://bit.ly/FutureCoachingLabs>

<https://bit.ly/LabRecordings>

#20

YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

Featuring a full-length Live Demonstration plus debrief, conversations & experimental breakouts with

Dr. Joël Vos

Evidence-based meaning-interventions from "The Punk Professor" & author of "Meaning in Life"



Eventbrite Meetup

#24

YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

Featuring a full-length Live Coaching Demo plus debrief, conversations & experimental breakouts with

Sasha van Deurzen-Smith

Existential Coach, Programme Leader of the MA Existential Coaching @NSPC



Eventbrite Meetup

2022

YANNICK'S COACHING LAB

Featuring a full-length Live Coaching Demo plus debrief, conversations & experimental breakouts with

Aboodi Shabi

Ontological Coach, ICF PCC, Lecturer in Coaching and Behavioural Change at Henley Business School



Eventbrite Meetup

#18

TALKING ABOUT COACHING
WITH YANNICK, SIAWASH & NICKI



How do you set your coaching fees?



TALKING ABOUT COACHING

#21

TALKING ABOUT COACHING
with YANNICK, SIAWASH & NICKI



Can I coach clients without setting a goal?



The Podcast from Coaches for Coaches

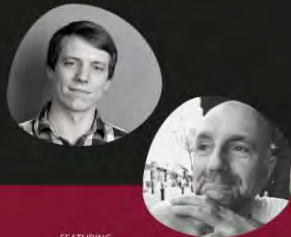
youtube.com/c/talkingaboutcoaching

fb.me/TalkingAboutCoaching

bit.ly/TalkingAboutCoaching-MailingList

#1

TALKING ABOUT COACHING
with YANNICK JACOB



FEATURING
Aboodi Shabi

Ontological Coaching

#5

TALKING ABOUT COACHING
with YANNICK JACOB



FEATURING
Sasha van Deurzen Smith

Existential Coaching



Other resources

- Broad range of resources, references and further reading including novels, movies, videos, cartoons and other sources at:
www.existential.coach/thisisexistential/





Thank you!

Slides: bit.ly/nexus-slides

Newsletter: bit.ly/YannicksNuggets

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www.existential.coach

www.RocketSupervision.com