

The 5 Knowledge Centers™

Coaching Leaders & Teams for Wholeness

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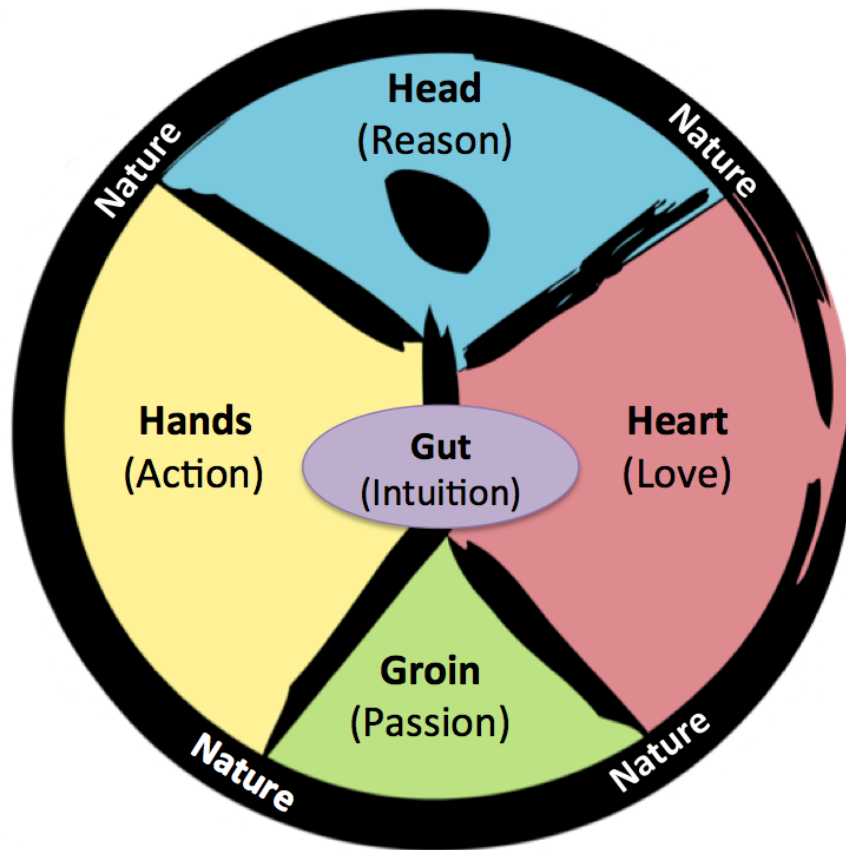
"The most exciting breakthroughs of the twenty-first century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human."

- John Naisbitt

Introduction

What does it mean to be a full human being? What limiting assumptions do we hold about ourselves as a species that are ripe for disruption? What might be possible if we embraced the whole "human being" in our organizations and communities?

Over the past year our team has been exploring the above questions through our leadership development programs, our coaching practices and our own teaming efforts. Over this time we have developed and refined a leadership and coaching model that we refer to as *The 5 Knowledge Centers* (depicted below).



The 5 Knowledge CentersSM

The framework emerged organically through multiple iterations of dialogue, testing, research and reflection. Some of the main influences included: our own experiences as leadership and team coaches; the acting profession (i.e. Chekhov's head, heart and groin actor archetypes); whole brain thinking (e.g. Neethling and Hermann); embodied cognition; Frederic LaLoux's (2014) *Reinventing Organizations*; Jonas Ridderstrale & Kjell Nordstrom's (2008) *Funky Business Forever*; as well as more distant sources such as Da Vinci's 1490 rendition of the Vitruvian Man and The Golden Ratio from mathematics (i.e. Phi--the Golden Ratio or logarithmic spiral). What we are discovering is that the framework, while simple, is strikingly fast, deep and powerful.

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. It takes a lot of hard work to make something simple, to truly understand the underlying challenges and come up with elegant solutions...It's not just minimalism or the absence of clutter. It involves digging through the depth of complexity. To be truly simple, you have to go really deep...You have to deeply understand the essence of a product in order to be able to get rid of the parts that are not essential."
- Steve Jobs

Our experience coaching leaders and teams using The 5 Knowledge Centers Model is that it acts like a "Ouija Board"--it rapidly brings to the surface what is wanting to emerge in an individual, team or company. The distance that might have taken us 1 to 2 days to cover with a team in the past is now often taking less than a 1/2 day. The same is true when coaching individuals and leaders 1-to-1 where what might have taken an hour or multiple sessions in the past now takes 10 to 15 minutes.

There are a number of ways of working with the model as a coach. One of our favorites is to invite individuals and teams to embody the 5 Knowledge Centers during a coaching session. Imagine the above model drawn on the floor. Once a coaching topic is identified (including using the model to identify a coaching topic when one isn't readily available) we invite the client or team to "walk the model." Each knowledge center is physically visited and the coaching topic is embodied and explored from that center. Often, within 5 to 10 or 15 minutes a coaching topic is quickly and holistically explored, a breakthrough is discovered, the motivation for change is released and a clear action step forward reveals itself.

So what are the 5 knowledge centers then?

The 5 Knowledge Centers

Knowledge Center #1 - The Head (Reason): This knowledge center is the one that the majority of us tend to inhabit most frequently. Reason is very important. It's what makes us separate from the rest of the animal kingdom. We couldn't write this blog post right now

without it. The problem in most organizations is that it's the only knowledge center that is accessed and valued hence it creates top heavy thinking in many corporate cultures.



Our job as coaches is to have the other knowledge centers get more equal footing. And your rational mind might be asking “why?” Good question. Our answer is twofold. Firstly, in order to compete and win in today’s business environment, companies need to access much more than rational thought. Technology, outsourcing, flooded markets, rapid innovation and agile teaming cultures have outpaced many of the left brain hard skills that used to be the domain of senior executives and that were often sufficient for success. Second, employment trends are changing rapidly. Gallup reports that worldwide only 15% of people are engaged at work. In Japan it is worse (6%) and in the US, while slightly better (30%), it’s nothing to get excited about. These numbers are quite staggering. The lack of engagement is finding expression in an increasing trend towards people (especially millennials) seeking purpose-centered work rather than just profit-centered work (i.e. a paycheck). And as large corporations hollow out their workforces, new growth in employment is being found in dynamic and innovative non-profits, startups and small and medium sized businesses.

Whether in large, medium or small companies, today's leaders and teams need to tap into under-developed knowledge centers in order to engage workers, succeed and thrive. The good news is that each and every one of us already has those knowledge centers waiting and ready to be explored.

Knowledge Center #2 - The Heart (Love): That's right we wrote "Love." Heart skills are the new hard skills. The great philosophers and poets have known this from the beginning of time. Now science is beginning to finally catch up with ancient wisdom. Back in 1860 the brains that reside in our hearts and in our guts were discovered by a German doctor and later developed by two British colleagues before being lost again to history. In 1990 they were rediscovered by an American neuroscientist (see LaLoux, F. 2014, Reinventing Organizations, p. 2). This finding confirmed that humans have three brains or autonomous nervous systems (i.e. the large one in the head, as well as small ones in the heart and the gut). And who knows perhaps we will discover more brains in the future!



Have you ever said “I can feel it in my heart” or “My heart aches”? Well now it’s actually a true statement, not just a metaphor. The more leaders and teams learn how to access and use their heart the more authentic they are and authenticity is a game changer in the workplace.

So why do we use Love to describe the heart? In short love calls us to bring forth our most noble selves. Without love growth cannot occur. Think of a child becoming his or her full self without love. Impossible. The same is true for us as adults. We all need a holding environment that both supports as well as challenges us to live bigger and bolder lives.

All the families of emotions such as joy, sadness, anger and fear find their root in the presence or absence of love. As leaders, coaches and teams when we create a context of love, all things become possible. Knowledge Center #3 - The Gut (Intuition): Many of us have had the experience of ignoring what our gut tells us (sometimes what it is screaming at us) only to later see the wisdom that was contained therein.

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."
- Albert Einstein

Intuition is slowly but steadily becoming recognized as a valid source of intelligence for humans to tap into. Much like the 20 year rise of Emotional Intelligence popularized by Daniel Goldman in 1995, intuition is becoming mainstream as well. Daniel Kahneman’s (2011) Thinking: Fast and Slow is one great example where intuition finds scientific validation.

In coaching, the first step around intuition is helping clients develop the muscle to feel it or to hear it when it speaks. The second step is helping clients to follow their intuition or sit with it until its wisdom is revealed fully.

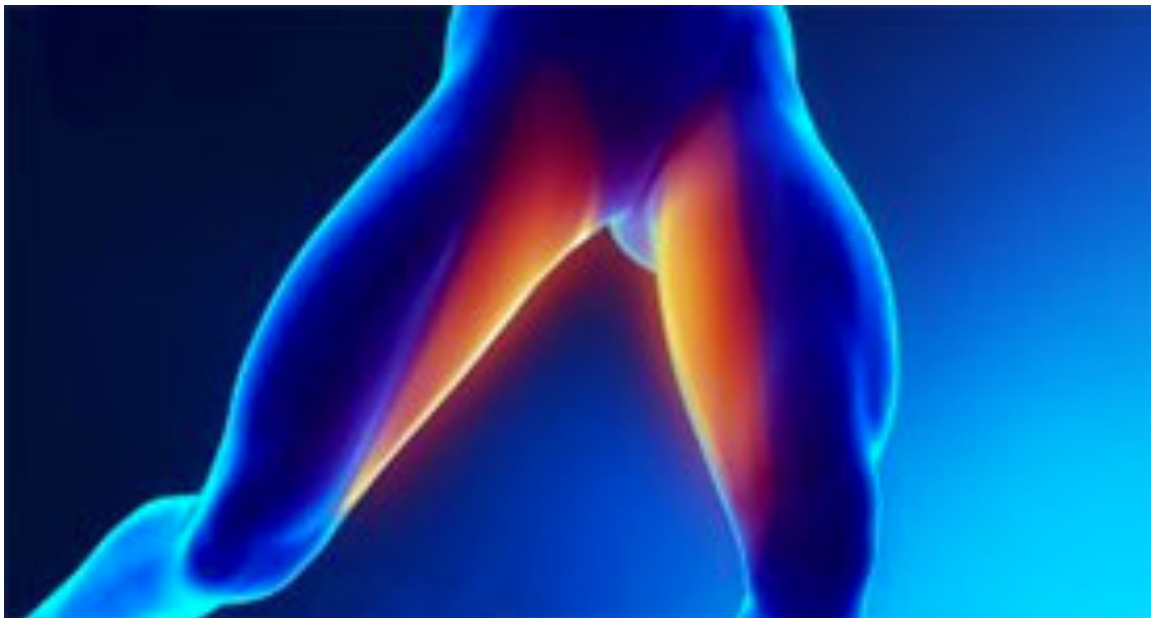


Intuition--defined as the ability to understand something immediately without the need for conscious reasoning--often contains a treasure trove of information that can guide clients through the fog.

Interestingly we see a frequent pattern in coaching. A client is struggling to choose between two important choices. Usually one of those choices is the one the client really should choose however a 2nd choice is also presented--often resulting from a place of fear and a need to play it safe. One choice tends to be bolder and riskier while the second is more realistic and safer. The client racks his/her brain analyzing both options, tends to get stuck and keeps spinning his/her wheels. When we walk clients through the 5 Knowledge Centers and explore both options one at a time, the "bigger choice" often gets revealed and the way forward becomes clear. It often comes by asking clients to tap into their guts and let their intuition speak.

Knowledge Center #4 - The Groin (Passion): Yes indeed we have finally reached the Knowledge Center that you probably have been most curious about or perhaps even cringed at when you first saw it in the model: The Groin! Despite the general taboo about talking about this area openly, it is undeniable that this knowledge center is powerful--powerful enough to create life and to ensure our survival as a species. In coaching, when we help clients get in touch with their groins, we don't necessarily mean in the sexual sense (although that isn't off the table either). We mean tapping into a deep sense of purpose, of understanding our calling and discovering our creative and playful energy.

In the arts and sports, the groin is not as shunned in comparison to most other professional domains but rather is regarded as a powerful creative resource. For example, Muhammad Ali--like many other fighters--was known to abstain from sex for up to 6 weeks before a boxing match and claimed that doing so made him unbeatable. Also Michael Chekhov--the nephew of the great playwright Anton Chekhov--identified 3 acting archetypes: head, heart and groin. In his system, actors could learn to act from any of these centers and expand their range often by physically embodying a given archetype.



When we first began introducing the groin as one of the 5 knowledge centers, both we ourselves as well as a number of our colleagues

suggested we leave it out. "It is too honest" one person said and "it won't fly in the corporate world." And yet leaving the groin out felt like a cop out. If we are serious about exploring the full human being that means we need to explore all areas including areas that may be uncomfortable to some of us. Our experience coaching with the model has shown that leaving any knowledge center out makes the whole interdependent structure incomplete.

When our team started to coach ourselves by walking on the model, we had our initial share of adolescent banter about the groin. But even that adolescent reaction proved fruitful--it injected a playful energy into what otherwise might have been a boring session where we were holding ourselves back. While we still welcome the energy that comes from that adolescent part of us, more often than not the groin now has become a place to tap into when we are seeking more drive, more courage, more creativity, more playfulness, and more purpose. And it never let's us down.

If, as futurist John Naisbitt said in the quote at the beginning of this post that The most exciting breakthroughs of the twenty-first century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human, then surely this part (i.e. the Groin) of who we are is ripe for a refreshing new narrative. Perhaps it will play an important role in helping us restore wholeness to our leaders, teams and organizations.

Knowledge Center #5 - The Hands (Action): Do you remember learning to ride a bicycle as a child? Do you recall how your full being was involved and how much focus it took to keep the bicycle from toppling over? Now as an adult, in all likelihood you can ride a bicycle without even thinking about it. You can probably do this even if you haven't been on a bicycle for years. Your body just knows how to do it.



In 1983 Howard Gardner, the developmental psychologist, proposed his theory of multiple intelligences. One of those intelligences was coined "bodily or kinesthetic intelligence." This is awareness and ability to use one's body to solve problems and to be creative. You have also heard people say "I learn best through doing." Action is a great teacher and the more we do the more knowledge becomes integrated into our hands, feet, limbs...in short our whole body. In the model we use the word "hands" to refer to this kinesthetic or body knowledge.

As our world increases in speed, our line of sight gets shorter. We can only see so far down the road. For most of our clients its about 3 to 4 months at best. This suggests that rather than top-down planning we need to become more comfortable with emergence and "learning our way forward." In other words learning through doing is taking on greater importance. This challenges us to get our "hands dirty" more often, to try more experiments and to fail more frequently so that we can learn and adapt more quickly.

The 5 Knowledge Centers and Our Relationship with Nature

A human...experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

- Albert Einstein

In the Knowledge Center Model image shared earlier, there is an incomplete outer circle that envelopes the man. This circle in our framework represents "nature" or the "environment" within which we as individuals and groups exist. We don't live in a vacuum. Humans evolve in a dynamic relationship with the larger ecosystem of which they are an integral part. Surely we can also derive insight and wisdom beyond the 5 Knowledge Centers. Kurt Lewin, the founding father of Social Psychology, created the famous equation of human behavior:

$$B = f(PE)$$

Behavior is a function of a Person & their Environment

Therefore it is essential that we look at the human being as becoming complete and whole only in the context of his or her relationships with the larger environment.

For many of us, unfortunately, nature exists as a separate entity. One of the author's of this post--Krister Lowe--was terrified the other day when his 6 year-old described some fields that they were passing on the way to school through the lens of the online game Minecraft. "Those fields look like the fields in Minecraft, " she said. Krister would have preferred it had she said it the other way, "The fields in Minecraft look like those fields!" In her world, the fields and forests of Minecraft--where she spends more time--are more real than the real fields and forest that exists outside the window! In all seriousness, we often live, as Einstein said in the quote at the outset of this post, as "separate from others and nature in its fullness and that this delusion is a kind of prison for us." We would venture even further to say that our fate as a species may indeed depend in large part on us reconnecting with and rediscovering our relationship with nature.

In our leadership and team coaching work we've begun to experiment with taking walks with our clients on nice days and to conduct coaching sessions outside. Nature always seems to present great opportunities that support the coaching process. Even inside a building or a training room there are powerful ways to bring awareness to the context and environment and to draw on that in a session.

Recently our team delivered our first training on the model out on the high seas in nature rather than within the safe confines of the typical corporate training room or hotel conference center. (You can listen to a podcast recording where we recount our journey as well as the unexpected insights nature revealed to us at http://www.teamcoachingzone.com/erickohner_pimharder_kristerlowe/ and also can learn more about the program here <http://www.teamcoachingzone.com/nautilus/>). For many of us on the trip who were experienced trainers, leaders, coaches and facilitators, integrating nature into the learning program as a primary

component proved nothing short of incredible. Below is a brief video that helps you experience what this is like:



<https://youtu.be/12RYV7LKn0>

Bottom line: being in nature forced us to be present and facilitated us "getting back into our bodies." It also revealed unexpected insights and rather than being a distraction, rapidly helped us find breakthroughs and confirmations.

Closing

In summary, the 5 Knowledge Centers + Nature provide a simple yet powerful way of helping engage the full human being at work. Whether applied to an individual, leader and/or team, it helps to bring more wholeness into the world of work. We hope that you enjoyed this post and that you will challenge yourself and your organization to bring more wholeness in your work as well. In our view, the 5 Knowledge Centers + Nature provide a simple yet powerful way to begin this compelling journey. You can learn more about the framework at:

<http://www.teamcoachingzone.com/5knowledgecenters/>

We will end this post with a quote from Frederic LaLoux (author of *Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness*) that captures the spirit of this call and challenge to bring more wholeness into our lives and to experience living as full human beings:

"The ultimate goal in life is not to be successful or loved, but to become the truest expression of ourselves, to live into authentic selfhood, to honor our birthright gifts and callings, and be of service to humanity and our world."
- Frederic Laloux

About the Authors:

Krister Lowe, PhD, CPCC is an Organizational Psychologist and the Founder of The Team Coaching Zone (<http://www.teamcoachingzone.com/>). Dr. Lowe currently practices as a leadership and team coach and also organizes periodic master classes in the area of team coaching. He has more than fifteen years of experience providing learning and development solutions to diverse organizations in more than 30 countries throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. He is the host of The Team Coaching Zone Podcast—a weekly interview show that explores the art and science of team coaching—and that has a listenership in more than 125 countries around the world. He is a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach (CPCC) and has completed a number of certification training programs in the area of team coaching and conflict resolution.

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