

# The body knows

## the pathway to implicit knowledge

Embodiment practitioners **Tsafi Lederman** and **Jenny Stacey** demonstrate how arts practices and somatic processes can be used to help clients access 'non-conscious' knowledge.

Embodied coaching is a method that can help clients access their implicit 'non-conscious' knowledge and explore how it influences their explicit conscious knowledge, rational decision-making, behaviour, habits and relationships. Implicit knowledge is knowledge that is not processed consciously; it is something we 'know' but cannot easily express in words.

Embodied coaching can assist the process of acquiring this tacit information and bringing it into consciousness by accessing levels of awareness that are beyond thinking. This is achieved through an exploration of two primary pathways that can lead to implicit knowledge: focusing on body processes, and exploring image and metaphor using the arts. Both of these pathways act as a bridge between implicit and explicit knowledge, supporting communication and transformation. They allow expression that may not otherwise be possible and open the door for exploration of many layers of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

The term embodiment in this context refers to patterns of behaviour we develop throughout life to manage the world around us. These patterns have a physical manifestation expressed in body processes such as posture, movement, tone of voice and breath that are

often not in our awareness. We believe that change can be achieved more readily when the individual becomes more aware of these body processes and is able to recognise and integrate their embodied self.

### The child in the adult

This case study demonstrates how implicit knowledge from the body serves to inform the explicit and is used to promote behavioural relational change. Both the case studies that follow are fictional composites of various clients.

John works for an advertising agency in central London. He gets on with most of his colleagues and enjoys work. The only downside to his job is his relationship with his boss, Kevin. John's sense is that Kevin 'enjoys' belittling him whenever he gets the chance, which makes it difficult when John has to report to him. John decides to work with a coach, with the aim of managing and improving his working relationship with Kevin.

In one session John describes feeling worthless around Kevin: 'I know I am good at my job, but when Kevin's around I just feel useless and can't get the words out. I get so anxious and it's hard to shake that off.'

The coach asks John to imagine that he is about to meet Kevin. She asks John to focus his

attention on his body sensations and his 'felt sense'.<sup>2</sup> John begins to describe the muscles in his chest contracting, forcing his posture downwards and causing him to feel physically as well as mentally smaller. His breath is shallower and he finds it difficult to speak.

The coach asks if this experience is familiar. John says that this sensation reminds him of how he used to feel at boarding school, where he was bullied by some of the older boys. He always felt worthless around them, and wanted to disappear and hide in the hope that they would not notice him. Although this experience was from a different time in his life, John is re-enacting this body experience in Kevin's presence – ie contracting and making himself smaller, as if he were a nine-year-old all over again.

During further exploration of this relational dynamic, the coach observes how John is sitting while he talks. His shoulders are stooped and unconsciously he is stretching out his arm as if he is physically pushing somebody away with his palm, expanding and creating a boundary around his physical space. The coach asks him to be aware of the hand movements and attribute a word or statement that would accompany this gesture. John calls out 'Stop it' and, as he is speaking, a new movement and bodily posture emerges. He is now sitting erect, with his head

