

# Using the four gateways to tell new stories and make new choices

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*Coaches and clients can make more conscious and generative choices when they have greater somatic self-awareness.*

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## Introduction

**A**TACHMENT THEORY provides an evidence-based source of guidance that both coaches and clients can use to make new choices in their sessions. While the theory was developed in relation to infants and caregivers, it reflects the same basic needs that adults have in coaching: creating healthy connections, being met appropriately and generatively, increasing the capacity for self-soothing and self-regulation, and exploring in new directions to facilitate growth. As such, coaching can be seen as a process in which people develop new regulatory and narrative strategies (Drake, 2017). In so doing, they become more mature, resilient and agile in service of what they are seeking. This article connects self-regulation from an attachment perspective, self-awareness from a somatic perspective (four gateways), and the choices coaches make (formulations) and clients make (decisions).

Attachment theory is relevant here because any effort to assist clients in making decisions or new choices must address their underlying narrative patterns. Stories are perfect for this as they make visible people's largely invisible attachment and identity processes. Working somatically – as is done often in narrative coaching – enables clients to access aspects of their story that are hidden by their conscious mind but present in their body. As Paris (2007) observes, 'What the psyche refuses to acknowledge, the body

always manifests' (p.xii). Questions such as, 'What do you notice in your body as you are telling this story? Where do you notice it?' 'What words or emotions come up for you there?' are commonly used for this reason. Inviting clients to slow down and access their somatic knowledge often yields powerful experiences in which they can access more of the truth in their story and make better decisions (Drake, 2015). The early phases in coaching are therefore less about moving toward the objective and more about shifting the person's presence and perspective to create a new starting point.

## Attachment theory

As coaches, we routinely encounter vestiges of long-held patterns that continue to echo across our client's stories and lives. In tracking these patterns, we are looking for the ways in which clients are living the same story over and over again. Attachment theory offers a useful resource here because of its emphasis on the preverbal nature of our narrative patterns (Drake, 2009). In the context of coaching it is generally not a matter of exploring our client's past, but more about recognising, observing and working with the manifestations of these patterns in the present. For example, when speaking about a challenge at work, does the client adopt a posture which signals she may fault herself (slumping in her chair as if she is guilty) or a posture which

may signal she faults the other person (sitting defiantly in her chair as if she is innocent). As a coach, you could use her body language as a way in to explore both the particulars of this story in the moment as well as the broader implications of the patterns in play (from the past and for the future). How might the awareness of her posture enable this client to gain access and then shift to what is going on in the moment – and by extension in her broader life? Through coaching, clients can develop an increased sense of attachment security through enriching their regulation, repertoire and resources in terms of how they meet their needs and relate to others. Many of the challenges our clients bring to coaching are remnants of the compromises we made as children, particularly when we had less than desirable attachment experiences.

This is based in the premise that attachment theory reflects an evolutionary imperative to keep vulnerable infants alive by instilling in them an instinctual drive to preserve safety and love. When children perceive a sign of threat, their attachment system is activated and they seek proximity to and care from attachment figure(s). If the result is satisfying, they develop greater security, engage in further exploration and build working models to suit. If it is not satisfying, they deploy insecure secondary strategies, engage in less (effective) exploration and build working models to suit. There are three primary outcomes from the attachment process for infants (Bowlby, 1969, 1988), each of which has a counterpart in adults. A sense of a *safe haven* results from the proximity of and access to a trusted caregiver when the child feels anxious or senses danger. This is analogous to the rapport and trust building that is required for clients to feel safe with their coach and the coaching process. The presence of a sufficient safe haven provides a child with a sense of a *secure base* from which to increasingly and confidently explore the world – and to which he or she can return as needed as part of ever-widening circles. This is analogous to our invitations to clients to try out new mindsets and behaviours during and

after the sessions. As children grow, they begin to rely less on external figures for safety and more on the repeated experiences they have encoded in their implicit memory as *working models* they will increasingly carry within themselves. This is analogous to setting up scaffolding and other structures for success with clients, which they can use to be more proactive and less reactive in their responses and choices (Drake 2009).

Clients' working models can be seen as meta-narratives that inform how they see the world, relate with the world and act in the world. Since much of this is unconscious or tacit for them, they are best explored through working with their stories (particularly elements such as metaphors) and their bodies (postures, gestures, states, etc.). Metaphors work in this way because they often provide a shared linguistic shorthand and bridge the symbolic and literal, the emotive and logical, and the conscious and unconscious in a conversation. Working somatically enables clients to more easily access their emotional states, triggers and reactive responses. For example, when a client stands in a new way she notices a greater sense of confidence in herself. When a client lets go of his usual stance, it seems to make it easier for people to approach him. The aim in coaching is to help clients develop a greater sense of attachment security through our work with them.

#### Four gateways

The body is often overlooked by coaches, both in terms of their development and their practice. However, it is an important source of knowledge about what is happening within ourselves, with our clients and in the relational field between us. For example, a coach becomes aware of a knot in his stomach that leads him to pause and, in so doing, he realises that he has colluded with the client to keep the conversation at an abstract level rather than speak directly to what is actually going on in the client's stories. I developed the simple process below to help both coaches and clients to drop into

**Tool: Creating greater attachment security through coaching.**

Attachment need	Client need	Opening for change	Invitation by coach
Secure base	Gain support for his depressive state	Awareness of his triggers for stress	Shift his point of comparison to reduce judgment
Safe haven	Opportunity to be a results-oriented leader	Invitation from boss to step into a new role	Use his experience to offer a set of options rather than just accept what he was given
Working model	Develop a more strategic mindset	Need to talk with a key player impacted by decision	Increase his advocacy for his needs and awareness of impact on her if the strategy is to work

their bodies as they work together. It is based in the system of chakras found in a number of philosophical traditions and modalities. These four gateways represent access points to the flow of energy (or lack thereof) in the body and each one can be associated with a different type of knowledge. The use of energy as a construct finds support in the neuroscience of attachment patterns and regulation, and it provides a way to ground intuition and increase self- and other-awareness. Coaches can use their gateways to better ‘read’ situations and to support their clients in making more informed and authentic choices. I primarily focus on these four gateways, but there are a number of others that can be used as needed (Drake, 2015).

The premise is that people will be freer to make new choices and will make better decisions if they have access to knowledge in the fullest sense of that word. If not, they are often missing vital clues and ener-

gies, which will impede their processing and constrain their choices and actions. Working with the gateways and other somatic tools in coaching counters the bias toward rationality and cognition and enables the coach to address the whole person. The framework is most commonly used by placing a hand on each of the four spots on the body – one at a time – while focusing on a decision or issue at hand. With each of these gateways, the question is the same, ‘What does this part of me, this way of knowing, have to say about my question? My current and desired state?’ Coaches can do this for themselves and/or guide the client through the process. Either way, it is about moving up and down these four gateways as needed to gain new knowledge about the question or issue. This helps either of them to stand in the truth of his stories and open up to what can be learned there. For example, a client relaxes her habituated narrative when experiencing

**Tool: The Four Gateways.**

Gateway	Focus	Association	Level of knowledge
Head	Thinking	Thoughts, mental models	Cognitive
Heart	Feeling	Values, emotions, relations	Emotive
Hara	Being	Gut instinct, primacy, power	Instinctive
Hips	Doing	Action, commitment	Active

stress (head gateway) in order to pay closer attention to her values (heart gateway) and to explore the fear that blocks what is most true to her (hara gateway) such that her actions are avoidant (hips gateway).

Clients are asked to notice what comes up at each location, and the result often yields information that is useful for them in terms of the associated knowledge and energy. Many people find that how they hold their question or issue changes as new information emerges in moving through the four gateways. The person is encouraged to not pre-judge the sensations as good or bad because these labels tend to be over-simplified and non-generative. We are more interested in the acuity of their observations and articulations. For example, does the energy feel strong? Blocked? Unsettled? Peaceful? You can then work with the person to explore what is happening for him at that gateway, 'What do you notice? What words come up for you? What would it take to restore the flow here?' You can also use just one or two of the gateways: e.g., inviting the client to put her hand on her heart to name a feeling, put one hand on her heart and the other on her hara to ground her grief, or put one hand on her hara and the other on her hips to gather more strength to make a tough decision (and act on it). When clients feel complete and there is a restored sense of flow – or at least a sense of what is needed to restore flow – they are more informed and ready to do the work at hand.

One of the primary reasons clients struggle to make decisions or act in new ways is because they get stuck in their heads. Using the gateways helps people access more sources of knowledge they can then use to get unstuck and make better decisions. I find that clients can access more of their truth and make better decisions by using their head last rather than first. Otherwise, the executive function of their mind is often overwhelmed and not nearly as effective. However, I tend to start the gateways process with the head because that is where most people begin as they tell their stories in

coaching, especially in organisations. Ultimately, it is about helping people to develop a greater sense of intimacy and agency through coming to trust that they have more resources within them than they may have once believed. As a result, they can access more energy and knowledge in support of their new choices and new actions (Drake, 2015). For coaches, it is a call to fine-tune our body as an instrument so that we can become a more masterful artisan of our craft (Drake, 2014).

### **Example of using the gateways in a client session:**

1. Using the *head* gateway, the client notices that his story is jumbled as he tries to think about whether or not to stay in his current role.
2. Using the *heart* gateway, he feels a sense of sadness and loss he had not been aware of before, and he associates it with a realisation it may be time to move on.
3. Using the *hara* gateway, he first senses fear but then, as he breathes deeper into it, he discovers a sense of adventure he had been stifling.
4. Using the *hips* gateway, he becomes aware of a new energy as he imagines himself exploring other options.
5. Moving back through the gateways he feels the clarity and alignment he needs to start looking for a new role.

### **Closing**

Our presence as coaches is critical and – as with the attachment process when we were young – much of that happens relationally and physiologically more than cognitively or linguistically. So, the more you can develop your somatic acuity the better you will coach. The more fully you can access your body as you coach, the more it opens up possibilities for clients to do the same through mutual regulation. The more that both parties can do this, the richer the material is to work with and the more deeply human the conversation can become. The better the working relationship and conversations in coaching,

the greater the attachment security each person will gain. When our clients feel more secure, they are more able to:

- Distinguish between their experience and that of others.
- Sense and articulate their feelings and empathise with others.
- Self-soothe and mutually regulate so they can learn now.
- Break up their stories and reconfigure them in order to grow.

Working with the gateways in coaching enables both people to be more present as a whole person and to contribute to more of the whole story. It opens up more generative conversations and supports the somatic anchoring of new narratives, choices and actions. This is particularly important when the coach is confronted with a difficult task for which he is not necessarily prepared. If it is mutually recognised and fully engaged it can become a 'moment of meeting' (Stern, 1998). This requires that each person contributes something unique and authentic in response, and this is where growth happens. This means that formulating as we coach is less about figuring things out and more about paying attention to what is there (Drake, 2016). It is about staying present to the four questions in formulation as a dynamic and responsive process:

1. What story am I telling myself about what is going on?
2. What story am I telling myself about what caused it?
3. What story am I telling myself about what should be done?
4. What story am I telling myself about success?

This matters because 'most clients will not be able to travel farther in sessions than their coach is willing to go' (Drake, 2015, p.141). Where do your clients and their stories want to go? You can use these attachment tools to help them find the resolution that was there all along.

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