

The Art of Somatic Coaching

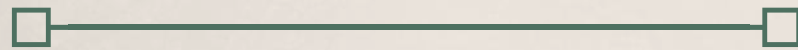
Embodying Skillful Action, Wisdom, and Compassion

Richard Strozzi-Heckler

Review by Coralee Pringle-Nelson

Introduction

Richard Strozzi-Heckler, Ph.D. has taken a revolutionary approach to leadership in his book *The Art of Somatic Coaching*. Prior to incorporating somatic work into leadership he was a body-oriented psychologist. He realized however, that the conventional practice of psychology was not addressing the whole person that he encountered in his practice.



Diagnoses no longer fit the shift that was happening in Dr. Strozzi-Heckler's personal and professional life.

He started to ask different questions:

"What yearns to come to life?"

"What wants expression?"

"How do I enliven, or numb myself?"

p. 3

Life Issues,
not Diagnoses

MEANING, PURPOSE, VISION

Authenticity, Life Transitions

A full, rich life and emotional wellness

"I sought a context in which my purpose was grounded in spirituality that was inseparable from skillful action in the world" (p. 2).



Directly using the body to work with individuals, Dr. Strozzi-Heckler noted, "Accountants could make room for the poet; the mother became the entrepreneur; the manager now a potter...the wounded healed by entering into the wound" (p. 3).



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Basic Human Dignity

People were no longer a sum of their psychological parts. These clients were experienced by Dr. Strozzi-Heckler as powerful agents who could do good in the world. Not only was the therapist seeing the vast potential of the client, but the client also was not remaining stuck in their condition or “diagnosis”.

Self-Healing

Healing was no longer the job of the therapist, but a dual action that created an opening for individuals to find their own healing practices. Empowerment for transitional change occurred as somatic coaching developed.

Self-Educating

Becoming in-tune with the somatic songs of the body resonated with clients. They became open to new possibilities and created a changed world through exploration and discovery.



Innate Intelligence at a cellular level

Humans are not defined by their genetic makeup entirely; they define their genetic makeup. Dr. Richard-Strozzie's somatic coaching model affirmed Dr. Bruce Lipton's work in epigenetics in *The Biology of Belief* (2016).

live
laugh
love



And so began the road to Somatic Coaching



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Chapter One: A Short Distance But a Big Cost

“From a somatic point of view, living any distance from our bodies is dodgy and the consequences harmful, even grave” (p. 9).

Being present
is part of being truly
alive.



When humans are not present, they are unable to fully experience their world, nature, their emotional interior and interpersonal experiences.

Our current culture unknowingly lives a disembodied existence with emphasis on rationality that has shredded our emotional lives (p. 10). The work of Dan Siegel and others support this notion (2012).

It is estimated that 80% of doctor visits are associated with stress.



The leadership components of somatic coaching assist with developing true satisfaction and meaning-making in the life of the client or the employee.

When people's lives are full of meaning, they are more likely to flourish.



From a rationality standpoint, “...insight has its place but it is a mistake to think that if we change our minds, different behaviors will follow” (p.11).

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Where did our modern dependence on rationality come from?

In the 17th century, a power shift occurred moving from religious leaders to leaders in science who valued rationalism. Rene Descartes was key in introducing rationalism which influenced the disconnection between body and heart in our modern, Western, materialistic culture.



“...if we live at a distance from the life of our body we’re unable to feel ourselves, and if we are unable to feel it’s difficult to learn, change, and transform ourselves. It also makes it impossible to feel others...”
(p. 11).

From a rationalistic point of view, science claimed it could reduce the world into parts using objective processes. These processes could be manipulated and understood by the disembodied mind, but emotions were not given a voice.

COST:

“The legacy of rationalism has made theory more important than action, domination more compelling than cooperation, ideas more regarded than life, abstract logic prevailing over moral intuition, and pure reason trumping emotion” (p. 17).



Heckler- Strozzi affirmed that relying on our rational minds as Descartes promoted is not sufficient to respond to our complex world and our emotional needs (p. 21).

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Chapter Two: Coaching



In Strozzi-Heckler's unique first-person style, he recounts his own experiences with a variety of coaches including sports and martial arts coaches.



"They were often gruff, straightforward men who were veterans of World War II or Korea, and they ran their teams like a military unit" (p. 23).

Strozzi-Heckler recalled a shaming humiliation at the hand of a coach that deeply penetrated his life and had a negative influence as he aged.

"...having a good coach was immeasurable, and a bad coach could make life miserable" (p. 24).

Typically coaches have a couple of functions. First, they work to keep the team motivated and inspired. Second, they have specific skills that sharpen the capacity of the team.



"Somatic coaching posits that a person's way of being in the world, that is, who they are is the ground of the coaching. Transformation occurs when the being of the person is addressed. By working through the body Somatic Coaching represents the next evolution in the relatively new discourse of coaching" (p. 30).

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Skill-based coaches tend to be niche specific, see something the coachee cannot see and apply a specific strategy to help overcome a problem or enhance a practice.

Coaches may be known by other names too:
Mentor, guide, instructor, teacher, sensei, facilitator.



Coaching didn't stay solely in the sports arena.

In the last twenty years, the practice of coaching has shown up in business, education, leadership, education, health, fitness, and personal development.

Psychiatry and psychology have moved away from their original foundations toward a medical, reductionistic perspective that rarely takes into consideration the whole person.

Interest in psychology and personal development has soared.



Freud, Rollo May, Fritz Pearls, Carl Rogers

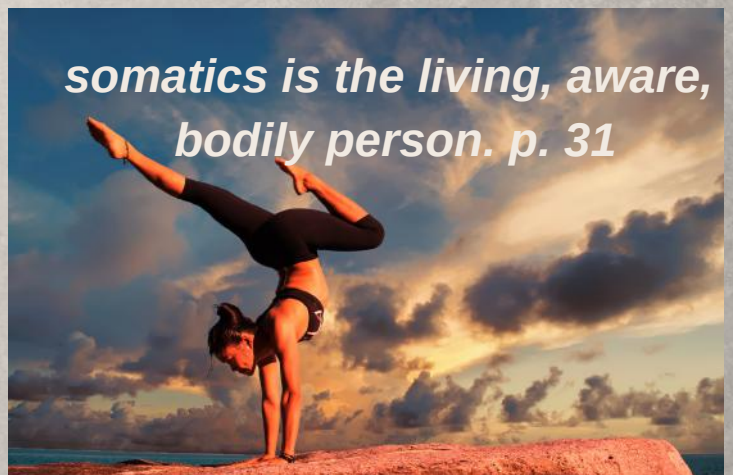
Somatic coaching goes beyond traditional coaching that only looks at what a person is doing, essentially separating them from their being. The somatic coach is an embodied leader.

Greek: Somatikos



Somatic coaching supports self-healing, self-generation, and self-education practices that integrate the mind, body, and emotions.

somatics is the living, aware, bodily person. p. 31



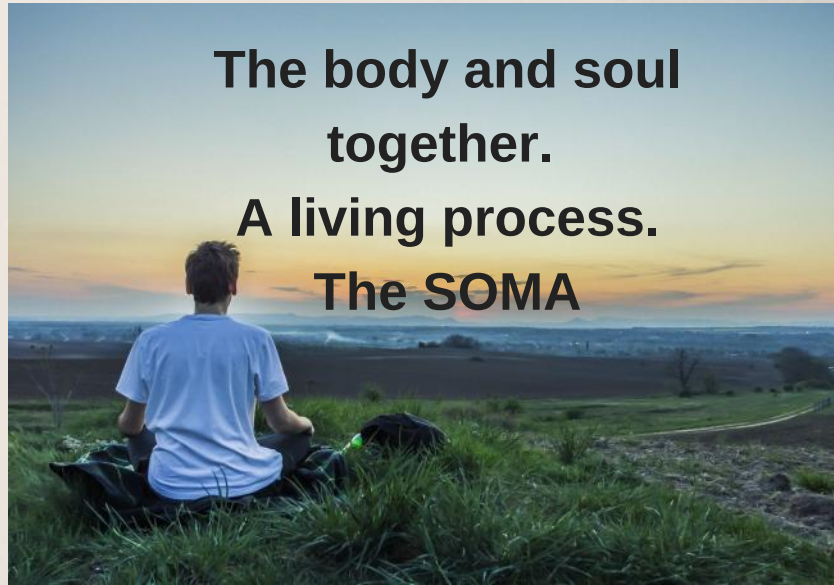
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Chapter Three: Somatics and Somatic Coaching

A move for radical change, from the scientific reductionist approach to a phenomenological approach, was introduced by philosophers such as Georg Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Edmund Husserl.

The focus was placed on meaning rather than objective understanding about self and the world. The meaning was to be experienced not just through the mind but through the body as well.



Somatic Coaching

- Different from conventional coaching
- Different from mind-body-spirit coaching
- Uses physical sensations, temperature, weight, movement, streamings, pulsation, vibrations, images, thoughts, attitudes, yearnings, dreams, and language
- The leader and the follower engage in a dynamic relationship

Takes into account the work of Thomas Hanna, Wilhelm Reich, Elsa Gindler, Moshe Feldenkrais.



"...the body is the energetic space where we build trust and intimacy, produce meaningful work, create family and community, bring forth a world in language, and live our spiritual aspirations" (p. 33).

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Three Entry Points for Somatic Coaching

The ideal entry point for somatic coaching is working through the body. At times, another entry point is required.



Working on the body:

When physical symptoms are the focus of coaching.

Working with the body:

When the emotional or social life is the focus of coaching.

Working through the body:

When the somatic coach engages with the life energy to assist with dramatic, meaningful change.

"Our body is precisely the medium of exchange with this field of awareness we call life...The body is inextricably linked to the self and we can cultivate the self by working through the body"
(pp. 37 & 38).



Chapter Four: Methodology

"To have a fulfilling and satisfying life, to be an exemplary leader of others...to strive for mastery, one needs to develop certain skills and to be connected with a supportive network, but the foundation is who one is as a person" (p. 41).

Somatic coaches employ leadership skills:

- self-presence
- embodied values
- care
- authenticity
- ability to take effective action
- trustworthiness
- action based on wisdom and compassion



Somatic Coaching Promises

- Pragmatic wisdom
- Grounded compassion
- Skillful action



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Somatic Coaches become

- Self-healing
- Self-educating
- Self-generating



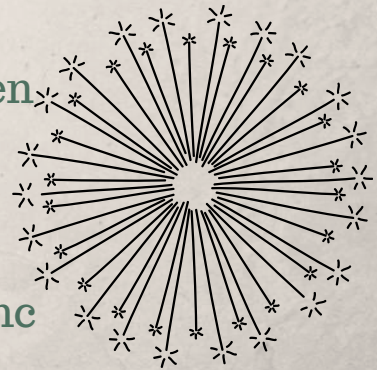
Core Principles

- Primacy of relationship
- Transformation
- Embodiment
- Practice
- Self-Cultivation
- Conflict as generative
- Social and environmental equity

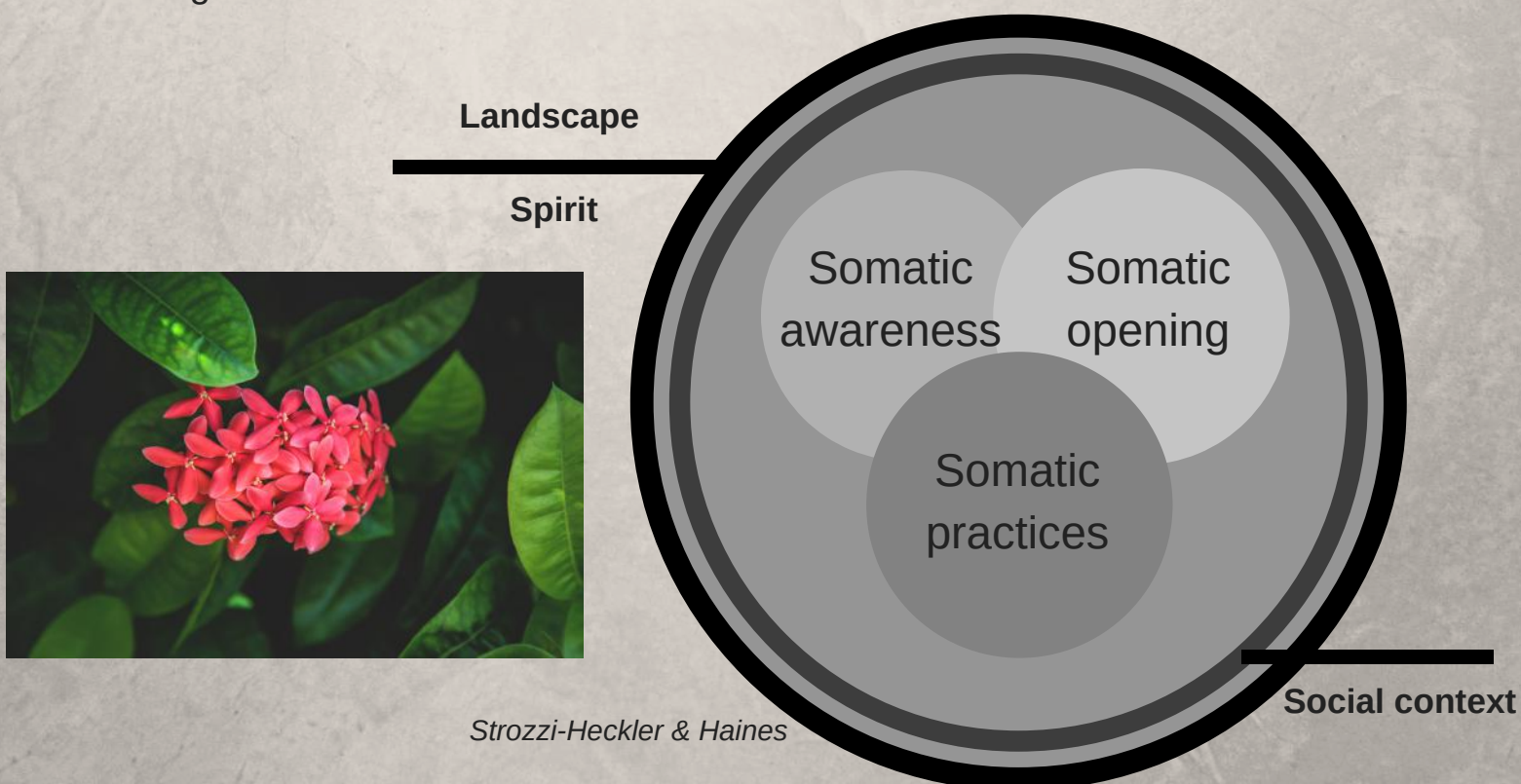
Key Somatic Distinctions

- Animating principle--life energy
- Body/soma--actions, emotions, relationships, learning, dignity
- Primary concerns--basic human needs
- Practice--doing what we care about
- Story--our own narratives
- Mood/being--who we are in the world
- Community--relationships with others
- Dojo--a space for awakening and learning

There is a vital intersection between the elements in somatic coaching. The leader and follower work in sync together.



Somatic Transformation



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Somatic Awareness Breeds:

Choice, presence, attuned energy, attention, a re-shaping of world-views, assumptions challenged, moving beyond the mind...

Somatic Opening Creates:

Safety, security, connection, worth, dignity, belonging, freedom from historical conditioning, assertion...



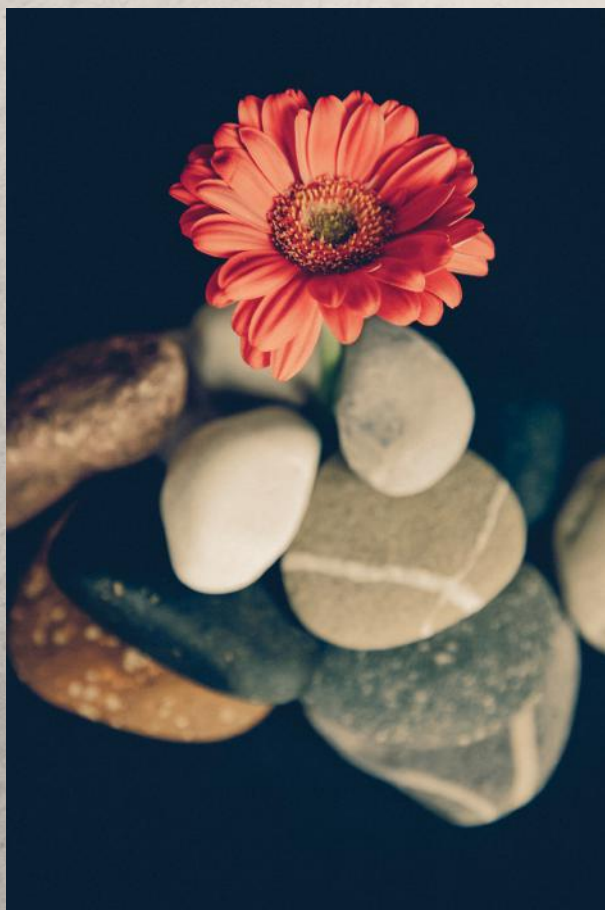
Somatic Practices Result in:

Calm breath, relaxation, embodying new skills, insight...

Whether we like it or not, we are always practicing something.

Social Context

"When personal-development work is not grounded in an analysis of social conditions, there's a risk of reinforcing beliefs, norms, practices and systems that are opposite to our commitments and concerns." p. 86



Landscape/Nature

How nature affects us, our interdependence on nature, nature associated reflection, nature associated resilience.

Spirit/The Mystery

Awe, beauty, wonder, love, sacredness of life, a sense of longing.



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Chapter Five: The Rhythm of Energy

When followers become aware of their own rhythmic patterns they develop choice in a completely new and skillful way.

Awakening

Involves training our attention resulting in curiosity, openness and focus (p. 113). Awakening involves becoming aware of how our body intersects with our attention and how we can somatically engage our bodies to release our defenses.

Containing

Maturation, self-fulfillment, self-knowing, accepting limitations, satisfaction, wisdom and compassion...boundaries are both physically-muscular and emotional-spiritual.

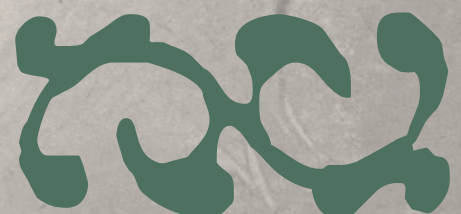
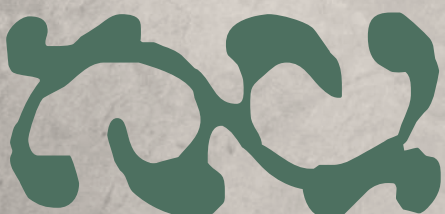
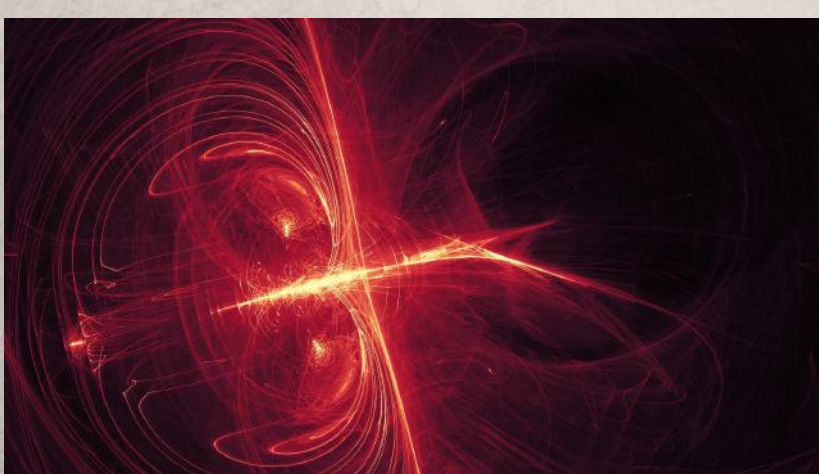
Increasing

Incrementally allowing energy and desire to increase. Being with our own energy keeps us in the moment, allowing us to embrace skillful action in a manner that deepens our life experiences.

Completing

The embodied skills to manage completions when there is an ending--personal, institutional, technical or structural.

Without maturity in the emotional field, people may never enter into completion, thus endangering the potential for healthy, embodied completion.



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Chapter Six:

The Somatic Arc of Transformation



"Most of us don't know how to navigate change and we're left confused, out of balance, and even sick. Ill prepared to deal with the countless transitions we reflexively fall into the role of the bewildered, the victim, the martyr, or hero. We either find ourselves frozen and anesthetized; or we become bitter, resigned victims; or we bravely rush headlong as if speed and velocity will help us..." (p. 143).

In the Art of Somatic Coaching the leader supports the follower to enter into change and benefit without losing one's self in the process. Change is a key process in transformation.

Four distinct stages in somatic change

Stage One: The current historical shape

- Starts with a beginning or ending
- Helps the follower get in touch with the inextricable link between the physical body and the self
- A move from thinking to feeling resulting in somatic intelligence that benefits the follower's ability to effectively navigate change

Frequent, rapid changes occur in our world. Change typically involves a beginning or end. Without embodied practices, it can feel disorienting, causing disconnection with self and others.



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Stage Two: Unbounded Shape

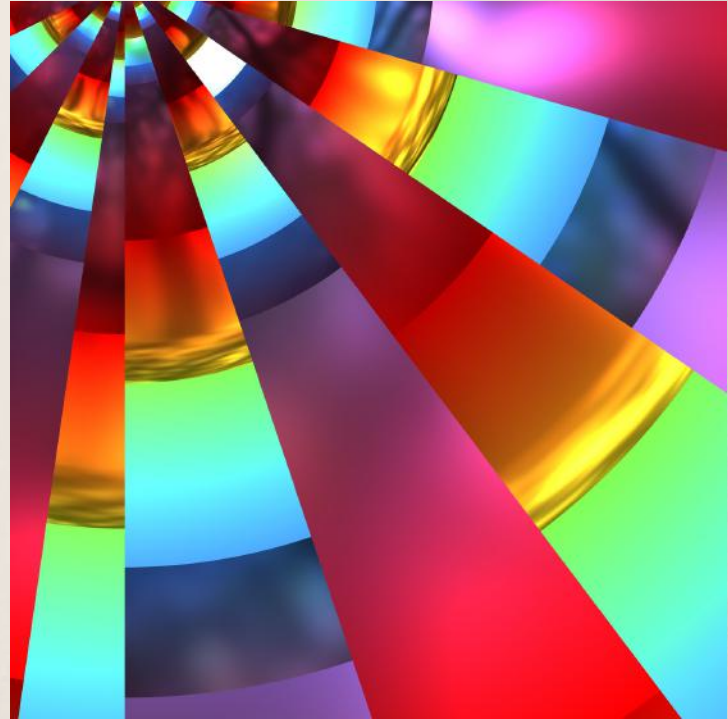
-Freedom from constraining historical patterns is both hopeful and distressing
-*"I worked with a man...who wanted to shift from his historical cold, analytical posture to one of explicit care and concern for those loved and led"* (p. 164).

Stage Three: New Shape

-Exploring a new way of being
-This is not a cognitive process
-Coaches led the follower to self-collect and mobilize

Stage Four: Embodiment

-Coaches assist followers somatize vision into new practices which lead to skillful action
-Embodiment takes considerable time
-Experimentation, curiosity, and practice are involved



Conclusion

"When we are out of touch with our bodies we can no longer feel. When we can't feel we're unable to feel others, and all other life...The path of somatics--feeling our livingness-- is a part of the solution to reinvigorate our capacity for skillful action, grounded compassion, and pragmatic wisdom" (p. 180).



The Art of Somatic Coaching for the Education Leader

The Art of Somatic Coaching skillfully explains the consequences of being out of sync with one's own body. Strozzi-Heckler outlines the emotional, spiritual and physical impact of living unintegrated lives.

The Art of Somatic Coaching is an advance in leadership and followership



Epigenetic focused science indicates that the DNA one was born with does not have to be one's destiny (Church, 2014; Lipton, 2016).

People carry their beliefs, stories and life histories right within their DNA (Van der Kolk, 2014). Indigenous people's have understood this concept for centuries.

It will benefit the education leader to understand that truncation between the mind, heart, and body is detrimental to how one functions in their personal and professional lives. A significant move in therapies is to work with the body to release anxiety, stress, and trauma (Odgen & Fisher, 2015).

Somatic Coaching as described in this book may not be practical for every leader. The full practice requires a high level of skill and it's best to have some training in somatic work. The case examples are illustrative and compelling. Some of the tenets may be helpful for all leaders:

- To consider the whole person--the Soma
- That compassion and skillful action are born out or being in tune with the body, emotions, and mind
- That integrative somatic practices can bring life, healing and, discovery
- That healthy leader-follower relationships have much transformative power and do not have to rely solely on the mind and emotions



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