Resource 1. Coaching in Practice: Setting the Coaching Space

“Everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking we do first. Our thinking depends on the quality of our attention for each other”.

Nancy Kline, Time To Think.

After years of research and observation, Nancy Kline, founder of the Thinking Environment and President of Time to Think Inc., recognised that people generate their best thinking when treated in particular ways by those around them.

The Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

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In terms of listening, our focus for practice is on four of the key components:

Attention, Equality, Appreciation and Ease.

Applying The Thinking Environment principles: Active Listening

- Set the intention to step into an active listening space
- Keep your eyes on the person, ideally on their eyes, even when they look away
- Create a sense of ease; remove any urgency or rush
- Listen with active interest
- Convey a sense of appreciation for the person as a thinker
- Try to hear the meaning beyond the words
- Allow silence while the other person pauses to think
- Let the coachee know that this is their time and that you won’t interrupt. Then don’t.
- Much of what the coachee says will be the result of your effect on them.
- Your job is to help your colleague think for themselves, not to think for them.
- Remember that the expression of feelings is often part of the thinking process.
Exercise

This is a simple, elegant exercise which Nancy Kline encourages for practising the Thinking Environment principles.

- **Coachee**: choose something that you would like to think through with your partner for the next ten minutes or so. You may want to choose for example, a current work challenge or exploring ‘something you’ve been putting off’.

- **Coach/manager**: step into a listening space. Ask:

  "What would you like to think about, and what are your thoughts?"

  The listener then listens to what the speaker wants to say, without interrupting, until the speaker has fully said what they wanted to say. At this point you can ask:

  **And what else do you think, or feel, or want to say?** and wait again.

  You can follow with variations such as:
  “Is there any more you want to say about this?”
  “Let me ask you again just in case you think of more.
  “What else do you think or feel about any of this – does anything come to mind?”
  “Well just in case, is there anything more that comes to mind about this that you want to say?”

After 10 minutes, swap and the coach becomes the thinker.

“Perhaps the most important thing we could do with our life and with our leadership was to listen to people so expertly, to give them attention so respectfully they would begin to think for themselves, clearly and afresh”.

Nancy Kline

Resources

1. Nancy Kline’s book ‘Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind’. A very interesting read which elaborates how to integrate the concept of the Thinking Environment in different settings. Also expands on the ten principles and how to construct ‘Incisive Questions’. Or go to https://www.timetothink.com/thinking-environment/.

2. Tedx Talk - The Power of Listening by William Ury. Ury has worked as a negotiation adviser and mediator in conflicts in the Middle East, the Balkans, Venezuela among other countries. He co-founded the Harvard Programme on Negotiation and is commonly known for his book ‘Getting to Yes’. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saXfavo1Qo