

Capital Coaches Conference, ICF Metro D.C.

BEYOND STRESS MANAGEMENT:
Stress Reduction, Spaciousness and Stillness

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“When you are present ... you are still, alert, open to what is. You bring a new dimension into the situation: space ... All creativity comes out of inner spaciousness.”

Eckhart Tolle, A NEW EARTH

OVERVIEW

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Effective coaching or reduced stress?

Many of us (and our clients) tend to think about the coaching process as generating results/solutions that lead to better stress management. It's true that any effective coaching will at least temporarily ease the stress that led the client to seek help.

Ultimately, though, coaching can be much more powerful when it integrates stress reduction.

One of the central tenets in coaching is that we help our clients find the answers within themselves. It's much easier to reach that kind of internal clarity when we and our clients can step back from the usual torrent of mental, emotional and physical distractions.

Consciously incorporating stress reduction into our coaching can make us even more successful coaches and give our clients precious tools that will serve them well on all fronts for the rest of their lives.

Stress reduction techniques offer an invaluable way to step back into *stillness* ...and out of *stillness* arises *spaciousness*. Spaciousness provides fertile ground for the blossoming of radical new ideas and ways of being. It reduces our reactivity and offers much more breathing space in any situation.

From the coach's perspective, there are special challenges and benefits to incorporating stress reduction.

The special challenge is that you've really got to “walk your talk.” As a coach, you must be comfortable with these practices yourself, in order to introduce and share them effectively -- especially with clients who have reservations about moving outside the cognitive realm.

The special benefit is that by practicing stress reduction for yourself and with your clients, you will reap the long-term rewards that come with reduced stress: enhanced mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.

BREAKOUT SESSION

In this experiential breakout session, we will weave together simple stress reduction techniques with partnered and group coaching.

We will adapt our exercises to the experience and goals of attendees.

All sharing will be done in the spirit of "Insight Dialogue." This is a structured format for sharing that is timed, with guidance for bringing special presence and awareness to the roles of both speaker and listener.

For participants who are new to these approaches, this session will provide a clear and thought-provoking introduction.

For participants who are familiar with these approaches, it will be an opportunity to share knowledge and generate new ideas, and new questions.

Here is an approximate schedule for our session:

15 minutes: Participants do a brief internal check. Guided centering/grounding exercise. Sharing with partners and then the group about participants' familiarity with the topic and what they would like to gain from participating in this session.

45 minutes: Additional centering exercises that build on each other, interspersed with posing questions for exploration with partners and the group. Specific questions will depend on the previous segment about participants' familiarity with the topic and what they would like to gain from participating in this session.

20 minutes: Using the same basic format, participants will begin identifying what they have gained from the session so far (as well as other relevant learning from the conference), and how they would like to take that forward into their lives and work, both short- and long-term.

10 minutes: Final clarifying, sharing and wrap-up.

Just for fun, here are some examples of the types of stress reduction exercises that might be included:

Pretend you're a tree
Exhale stress and inhale calm
Through roots of your feet

Thumb to forefinger
A famous hand position
It deepens your breath

Brief notes about these haiku and additional examples are available at:

<http://www.insightfultransitions.com/Haiku>.

"Physiology of the Stress Response," by Stephen Palmer, provides a concise summary of the acute and chronic physiological effects of stress: <http://www.managingstress.com/articles/physiology.htm>.