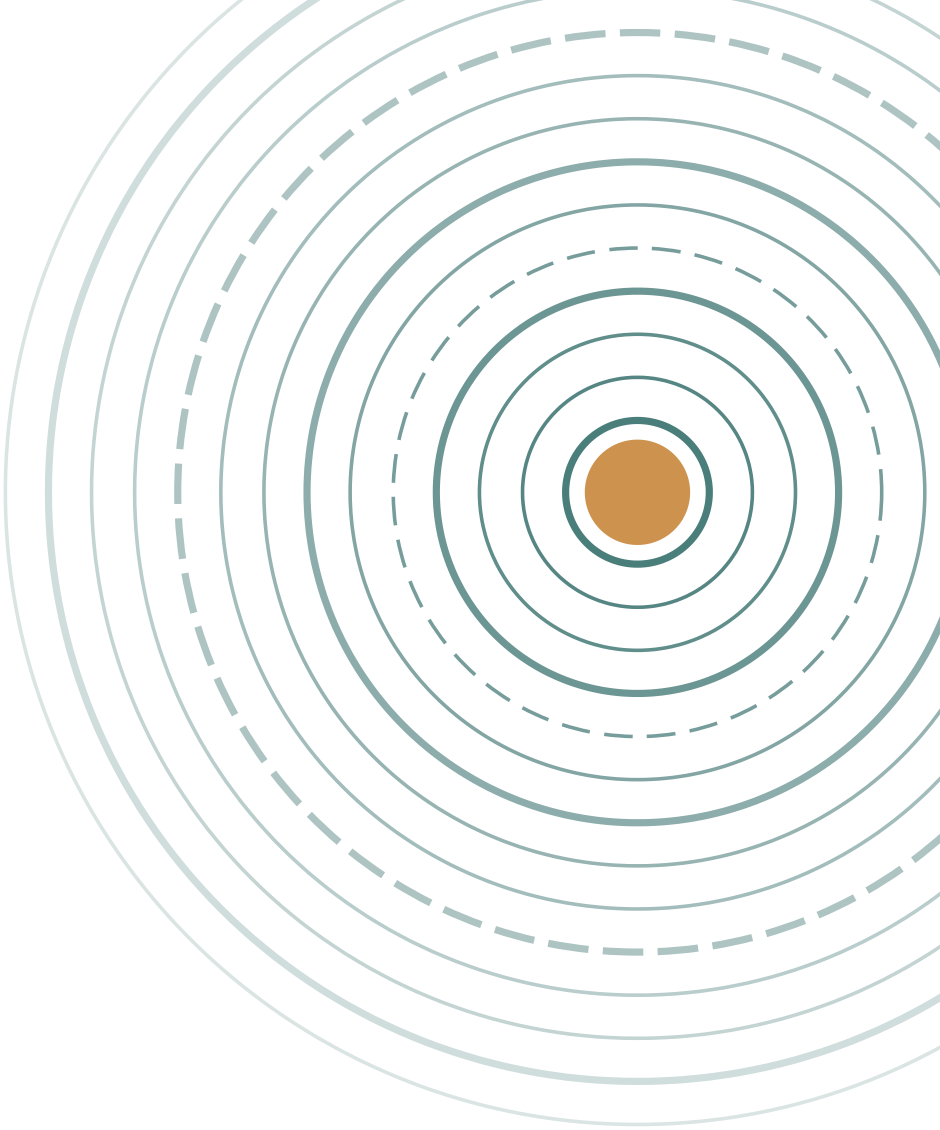


A VISUAL SUMMARY

The Gestalt Approach to Coaching

Awareness, contact and change in the here and now

Concepts · Models · Methods · Applications

OVERVIEW

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01 · INTRODUCTION

What is Gestalt coaching?

Gestalt coaching is a way of working that helps people notice how they are thinking, feeling and acting right now, so they can make fresh choices. It does not install answers. It raises awareness and trusts that change follows.

The approach comes from Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology. Coaches have taken its core ideas into leadership, team and organisational work: awareness, the here and now, the whole person in context, and an honest relationship between coach and client. "Gestalt" is a German word with no exact English match. It means a whole form or pattern, a configuration that is more than the sum of its parts.



Focus

How the client is doing things, not only what they want to achieve.

Stance

A curious, present coach who works with what emerges instead of a fixed script.

Outcome

Better self-awareness, more choice, and behaviour change that lasts.

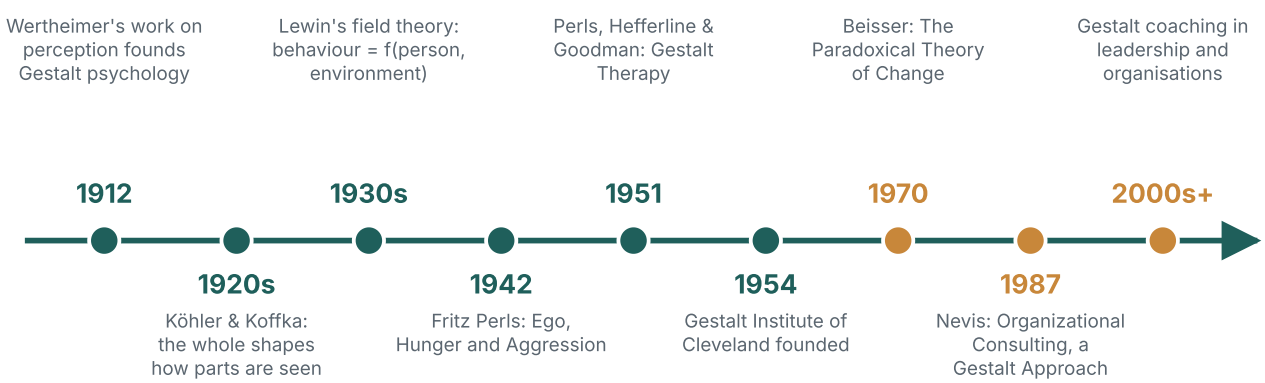
Common misconceptions

Myth	Reality
"It's therapy in disguise."	It borrows ideas from therapy but works within a coaching contract focused on work and growth.
"It's all empty chairs and role-play."	Techniques are optional. The core is awareness, presence and dialogue.
"There's no structure."	It follows clear models (the cycle of experience, contracting) while staying responsive.

02 · ORIGINS

Roots and history

Gestalt coaching draws on three traditions: early 20th-century research on perception, the Gestalt therapy of Fritz and Laura Perls, and later work applying Gestalt to organisations.



Gestalt psychology

Showed that people perceive organised wholes and patterns, not separate pieces. Meaning comes from the whole configuration.

Gestalt therapy

Fritz and Laura Perls, with Paul Goodman, added existential, phenomenological and holistic ideas. The focus moved to awareness and contact in the present.

Organisational Gestalt

The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland and Edwin Nevis brought the work to consultants, leaders and teams, which led on to coaching.

Key figures

Person	Contribution to Gestalt coaching
Fritz Perls	Co-founder of Gestalt therapy; focus on awareness, the here and now and responsibility
Laura Perls	Co-founder; emphasised support, contact and the relationship
Paul Goodman	Main theorist of the 1951 text; the contact boundary and self as process
Kurt Lewin	Field theory: behaviour as a function of person and environment
Edwin Nevis	Applied Gestalt to organisations; the consultant's presence as intervention

02 · ORIGINS

The psychology of wholes

Early Gestalt psychologists found that the mind actively organises experience. We do not take in raw data. We create meaningful wholes.



Figure / ground

Is it a vase or two faces? Attention picks one



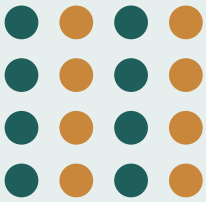
Closure

We complete the circle that is not there



Proximity

Nearby items are seen as groups



Similarity

Alike items are seen as belonging together

Why this matters for coaching

We make meaning

Clients build "wholes" out of incomplete information. A single comment from a boss can become the whole story "they don't rate me". Coaching makes those constructions visible.

We seek completion

Just as the eye closes the circle, people feel pulled to finish situations that are unresolved. Unfinished situations take up energy and attention.

Context shapes perception

The same behaviour means different things in different settings. You cannot understand a person apart from their field.

Attention is selective

Whatever becomes "figure" pushes everything else into the background. What a client keeps missing can matter as much as what they notice.

REFLECT

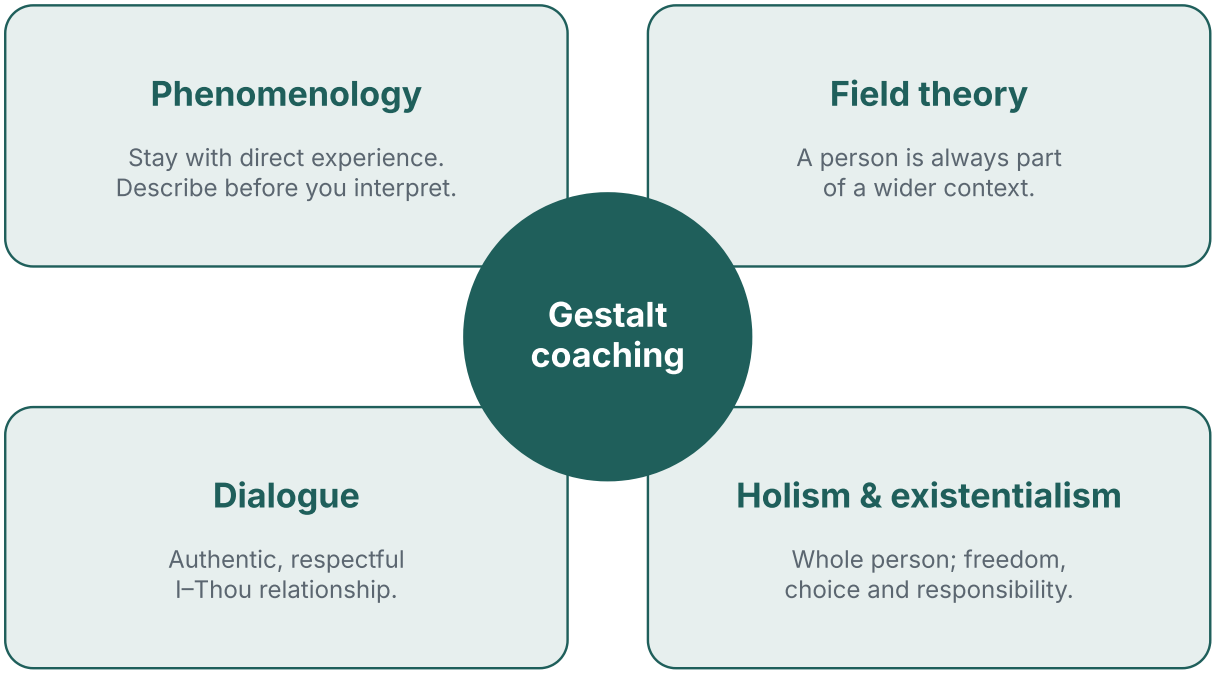
Coach's reflection

- What 'whole story' has my client built from a few pieces of evidence?
- Which details might they be filling in, as the eye closes a circle?
- What is sitting in the background that neither of us has looked at yet?

03 · FOUNDATIONS

Four philosophical pillars

Gestalt practice rests on a small set of linked ideas. Together they explain why Gestalt coaches pay attention, ask questions and intervene the way they do.

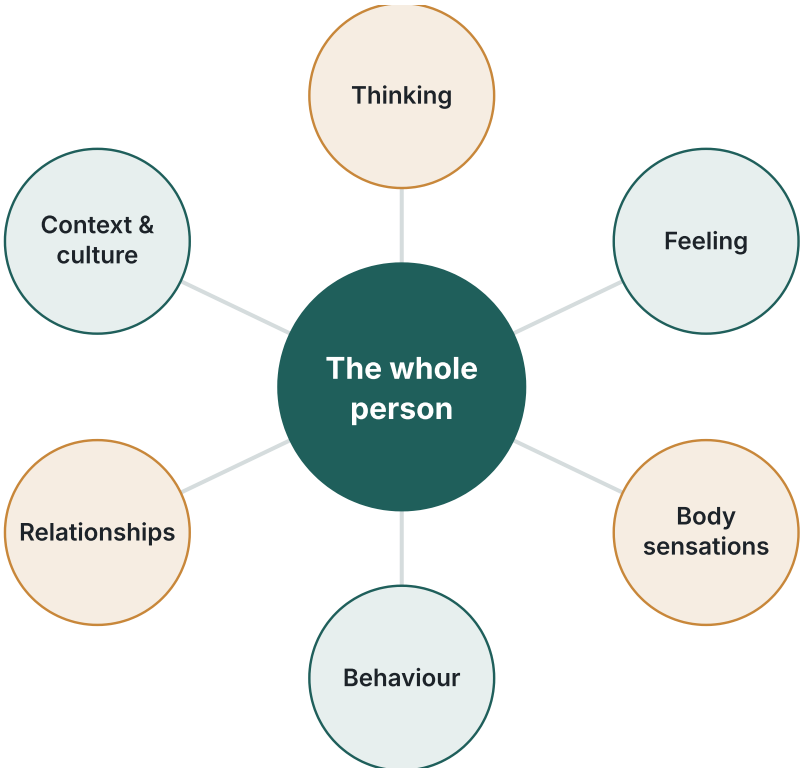


Pillar	Core question for the coach	In practice
Phenomenology	What is actually happening for this person right now?	Track words, tone, posture and energy. Avoid jumping to diagnosis.
Field theory	What in the wider situation is shaping this?	Explore team, organisation, culture and history as active forces.
Dialogue	How am I relating to this person in this moment?	Be present and genuine. Meet the client as a person, not a problem.
Holism / existentialism	What is the client choosing, and what do they take responsibility for?	Bring in body and emotion. Highlight choice and ownership.

03 · FOUNDATIONS

Holism: the whole is different from the sum of its parts

Gestalt coaching sees the client as one integrated system. Thinking, feeling, sensing and acting are linked, and all of them sit inside a wider set of relationships and context.



Beyond the cognitive

Many coaching models work mostly with goals and thoughts. Gestalt also pays attention to emotion and the body: a tight jaw, a held breath, a sudden flatness in the voice.

Coaching implication

A change in one area affects the rest. A leader who learns to notice tension in their body may find they also listen better and react less defensively.

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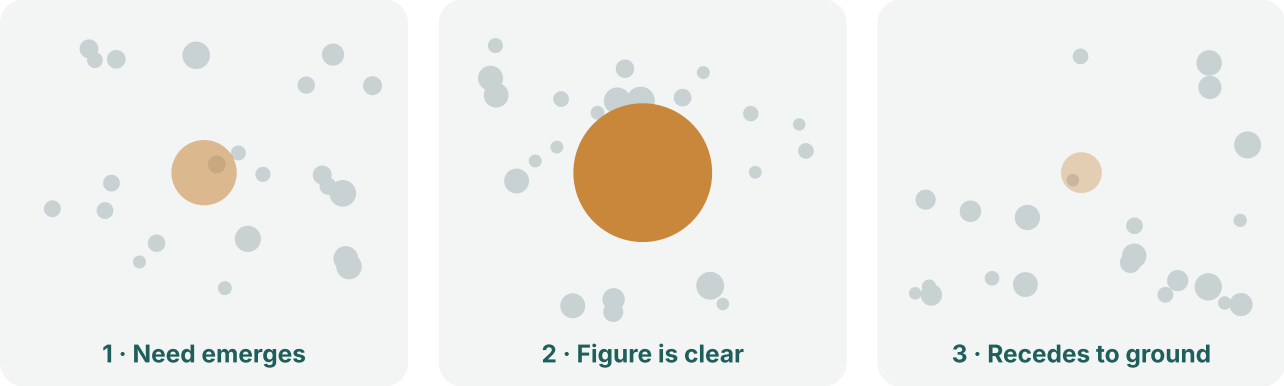
A whole-person check-in

- **Head:** "What are you thinking about this right now?"
- **Heart:** "What are you feeling as you say that?"
- **Body:** "Where do you notice it physically?"
- **Context:** "Who else is part of this picture?"

04 · CORE CONCEPTS

Figure and ground

At any moment one thing stands out for us (the **figure**) against everything else (the **ground**). Healthy functioning means clear figures form, get dealt with, and then fade so new ones can emerge.



1 · Need emerges

2 · Figure is clear

3 · Recedes to ground

Figure

What is most alive, pressing or interesting for the client now. For example, a difficult conversation they keep putting off.

Ground

The background: history, values, organisational climate, past experience. It gives the figure its meaning.

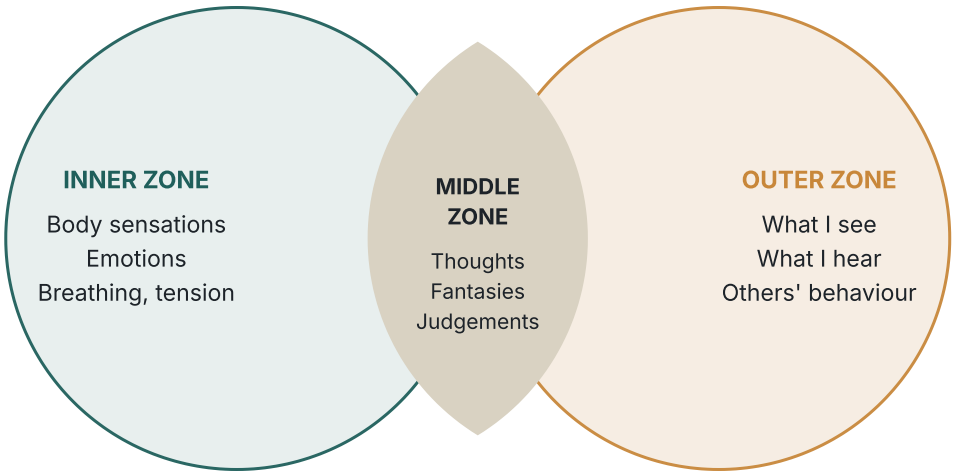
Working with figure and ground

Pattern	What it looks like	Coaching move
Unclear figure	Client jumps between topics; low energy	"Of everything you've said, what stands out most right now?"
Fixed figure	The same issue keeps coming back	Explore what stops it being completed or let go
Ignored ground	Issue treated as purely individual	Widen the lens: "What else is going on around this?"
Competing figures	Two concerns fighting for attention	Name both and let the client choose which to follow

04 · CORE CONCEPTS

Awareness: the heart of the approach

In Gestalt work, awareness is both the method and the main outcome. Awareness on its own is often enough to change things: when people see clearly what they are doing, they can choose to do it differently.



Perls' three zones of awareness. Clients often live mostly in the middle zone, among thoughts and stories, and lose touch with their bodies and with what is in front of them.

Inner zone

"What are you noticing in your body as you say that?"

Middle zone

"What story are you telling yourself about this?"

Outer zone

"What did you actually see and hear in that meeting?"

> **Awareness is not insight.** Insight is knowing *why*. Awareness is noticing *what* and *how* as it happens. Gestalt coaches prefer "how" and "what" questions to "why" questions.

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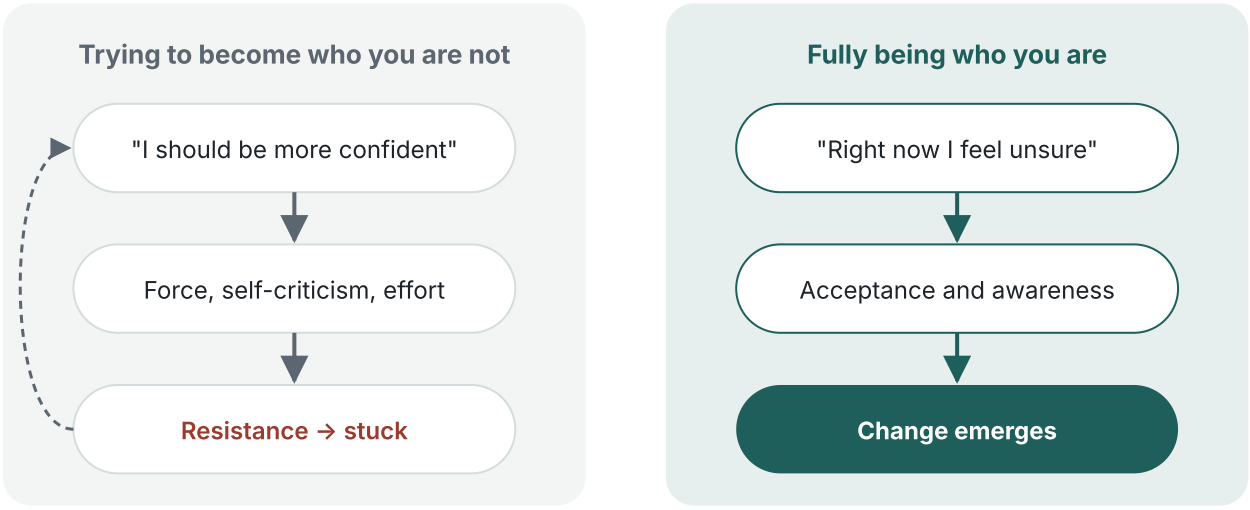
The awareness continuum

1. Invite the client to start each sentence with "Now I am aware of..."
2. Let them move freely between inner, middle and outer zones.
3. Notice which zone they return to most, and which they avoid.
4. Debrief: "What did you discover about where your attention goes?"

04 · CORE CONCEPTS

The paradoxical theory of change

Arnold Beisser (1970) put it this way: change happens when a person becomes what they are, not when they try to become what they are not. This idea is at the centre of how a Gestalt coach works.



What it means for the coach

- Don't push the client towards a preferred outcome.
- Help them fully explore and own where they are now.
- Treat "resistance" as useful information, not an obstacle.

What it means for the client

- Less effort spent fighting themselves.
- More energy for real choice.
- Change that feels owned, not imposed.

> *"Change does not take place by trying coercively to change. It happens when the person takes the time to be what they are."*
>
> Paraphrasing Beisser, 1970

TRY THIS

Working paradoxically

- Instead of "How can you become more confident?" ask "What is it like to be unsure right now?"
- Explore what the current behaviour does for the client before trying to change it.
- Notice your own urge to fix things, and set it aside.

04 · CORE CONCEPTS

Here and now

Past and future matter, but they only exist in the present: as memories, expectations and feelings the client has now. Gestalt coaching brings them into the room, where they can be experienced and worked with.



Talking *about* (there & then)	Experiencing *now* (here & now)
"My manager always undermines me."	"As you talk about her, what's happening for you right now?"
"I'm not good at presenting."	"Stand up and give me the first minute of your talk. What do you notice?"
"I think I might be avoiding the decision."	"You've changed topic twice as we got close to it. Did you notice?"
"Last year's restructure was hard."	"What is still unfinished about it for you today?"

Present tense

Invite the client to describe a situation as if it is happening now.

Process in the room

How the client relates to the coach often mirrors patterns elsewhere.

Live data

Shifts in voice, breathing or energy are evidence you can work with immediately.

TRY THIS

Bringing it into the room

- Ask the client to describe a past event in the present tense.
- Pause when energy shifts: "Something just changed. What happened?"
- Use future fears as present data: "What are you feeling as you imagine that?"

04 · CORE CONCEPTS

Field theory: the person in context

Kurt Lewin's field theory holds that behaviour comes from the person and their environment together. A Gestalt coach never looks at an individual in isolation. Problems are seen as features of the whole field.



History
Past experiences, career, family patterns

Power
Who has influence, formal and informal

Culture
Norms, unwritten rules, values

Change
Restructures, markets, new leaders

The coach
The coach is part of the field too

Key implication: "Difficult" behaviour may be a sensible response to a difficult field. Before trying to fix the person, a Gestalt coach asks what in the situation is making this behaviour likely, and what the client can still influence.

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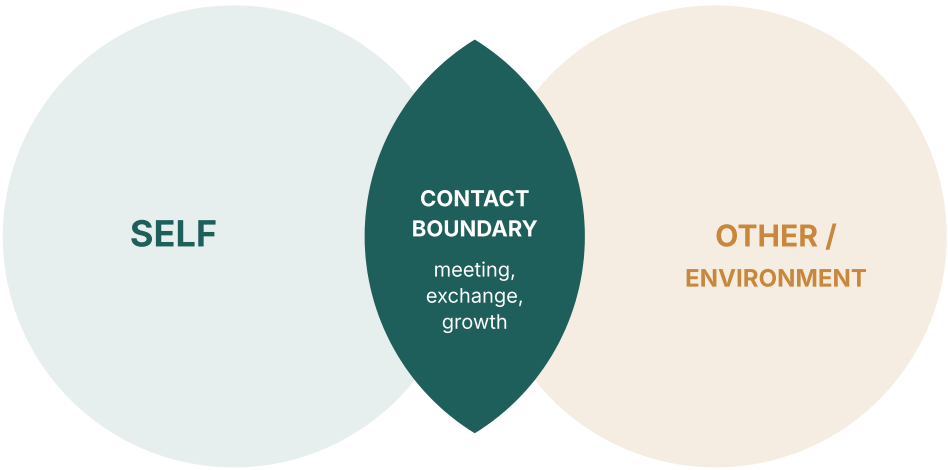
Mapping the field

1. Put the client's name in the centre of a large sheet of paper.
2. Add the people, groups and forces that influence the issue, placed near or far.
3. Draw lines for relationships: thick, thin, tense or broken.
4. Ask: "What do you notice now that you can see it all?"

05 · THE CONTACT MODEL

Contact and the contact boundary

"Contact" is the Gestalt word for meeting what is different from ourselves: people, ideas, tasks, feelings. Growth happens at the **contact boundary**, where self and environment meet and exchange.



Good contact

- Clear sense of self and other
- Willing to engage with difference
- Able to take in what is useful and reject what is not
- Able to connect and then withdraw

Poor contact

- Boundaries too rigid (cut off, defensive)
- Boundaries too porous (merged, can't say no)
- Engaging in habitual, automatic ways
- Avoiding conflict, feedback or feeling

> In coaching, the quality of contact between coach and client is itself something to work with. "How are we meeting right now?" is a legitimate and often powerful question.

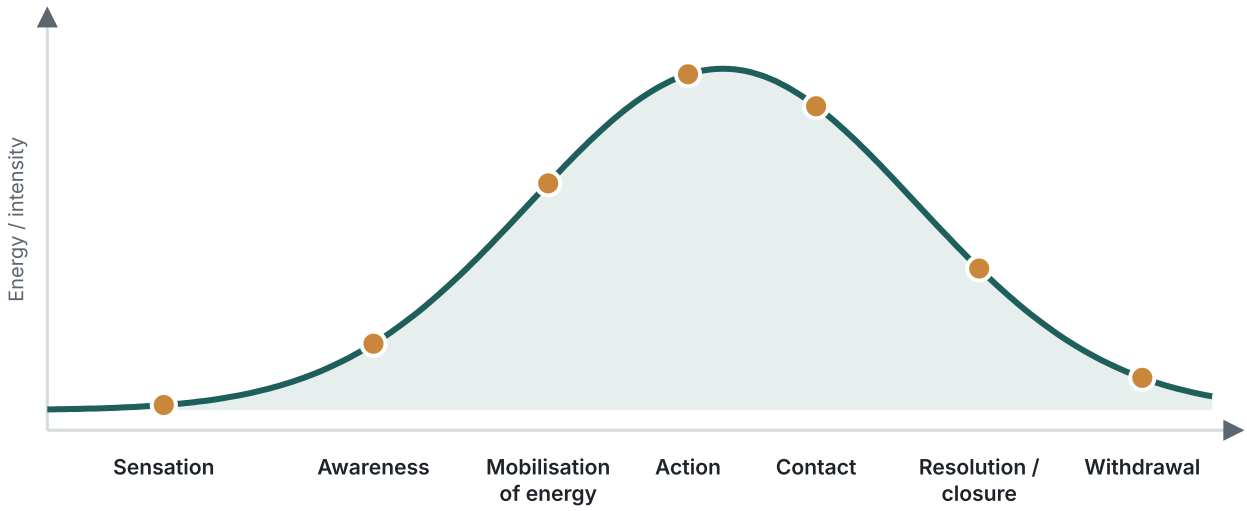
The senses of contact

Contact function	Coaching note
Looking	Does the client make eye contact, or avoid it when the subject is difficult?
Listening	Do they hear what is said, or what they expected to hear?
Speaking	Voice, pace, volume: does how they speak match what they say?

05 · THE CONTACT MODEL

The cycle of experience

Developed at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, the cycle of experience shows how a need moves from first sensation to completion. It gives the coach a map for seeing where a client's energy flows freely and where it gets stuck.



Stage	What happens	Coaching question
Sensation	Something stirs: unease, excitement, a hunch	"What are you noticing?"
Awareness	The sensation is named and becomes figure	"What is that about for you?"
Mobilisation	Energy gathers; options are considered	"What do you want to do about it?"
Action	Choosing and moving	"What's your first step?"
Contact	Full engagement with the person or task	"What's it like to be fully in this?"
Resolution	Completion; sense of satisfaction	"What feels complete now?"
Withdrawal	Letting go; rest; making space for the next figure	"What do you need to let go of?"

Interruptions to contact

People develop habitual ways of interrupting the cycle. These "contact styles" once served a purpose, and in the right amount they are still healthy. They become a problem when they are automatic and outside awareness.

Style	What happens	Sounds like	Coaching response
Desensitisation	Numbing or ignoring sensations	"I'm fine. I don't really feel anything about it."	Slow down; invite body awareness
Introjection	Swallowing rules and beliefs whole, without checking them	"Leaders should never show doubt."	"Whose voice is that? Do you agree?"
Projection	Seeing in others what belongs to oneself	"My team doesn't trust me."	"How much do you trust them?"
Retroflection	Turning energy back on oneself instead of outward	"I'm so angry with myself."	Explore who the energy is really aimed at
Deflection	Avoiding direct contact through humour, vagueness or changing topic	"Anyway, it's no big deal, ha."	Name the pattern gently; return to the point
Confluence	Merging with others; no clear boundary	"We all agree, as always."	Draw out differences; "What do *you* think?"
Egotism	Over-controlling, standing outside the experience	"I've analysed it from every angle."	Invite spontaneity and letting go

> **Not pathology.** Each style has a healthy form. Introjection lets us learn quickly, confluence helps intimacy and teamwork, and retroflection is useful self-restraint. The coaching question is whether the client is *choosing* it.

05 · THE CONTACT MODEL

Mapping interruptions onto the cycle

Each contact style tends to interrupt the cycle at a particular point. Mapping a client's pattern shows where their energy stops, and so where coaching attention is most useful.



Diamonds mark typical points of interruption (after Clarkson's adaptation of the Cleveland cycle). Real clients rarely fit a single point exactly; use the map as a guide, not a diagnosis.

Early-cycle stuckness

The client struggles to know what they want or feel. Work on sensing, noticing and naming.

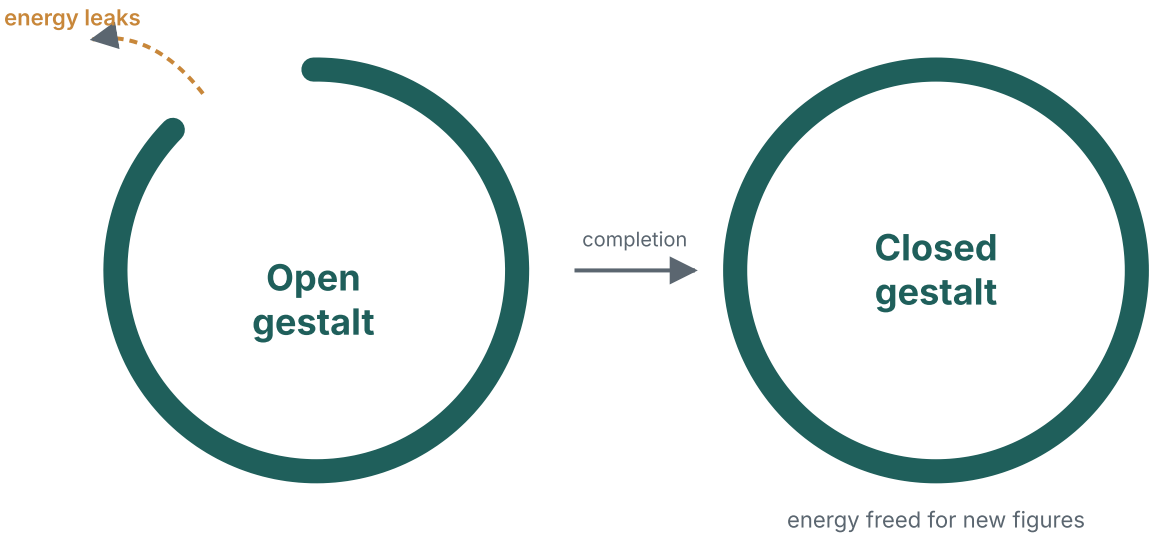
Late-cycle stuckness

The client acts but never feels finished, or can't let go. Work on completion, appreciation and withdrawal.

06 · PATTERNS

Unfinished business

Situations that were never completed, such as words not said, losses not grieved or conflicts not resolved, stay in the background and pull at attention. They show up as repeated patterns, strong reactions or a feeling of being stuck.



Signs to notice

- Reactions that seem out of proportion
- The same theme coming up across sessions
- Resentment, regret or "if only..."
- Energy that drops whenever a topic comes close

Ways to work with it

- Name the unfinished situation
- Express what was held back (e.g. an unsent letter or a chair exercise)
- Identify what is still possible now
- Acknowledge, appreciate and let go

Coaching boundary: Unfinished business in coaching usually concerns work: a past restructure, a failed project, a broken working relationship. Deep personal trauma belongs with a therapist, and the coach should refer.

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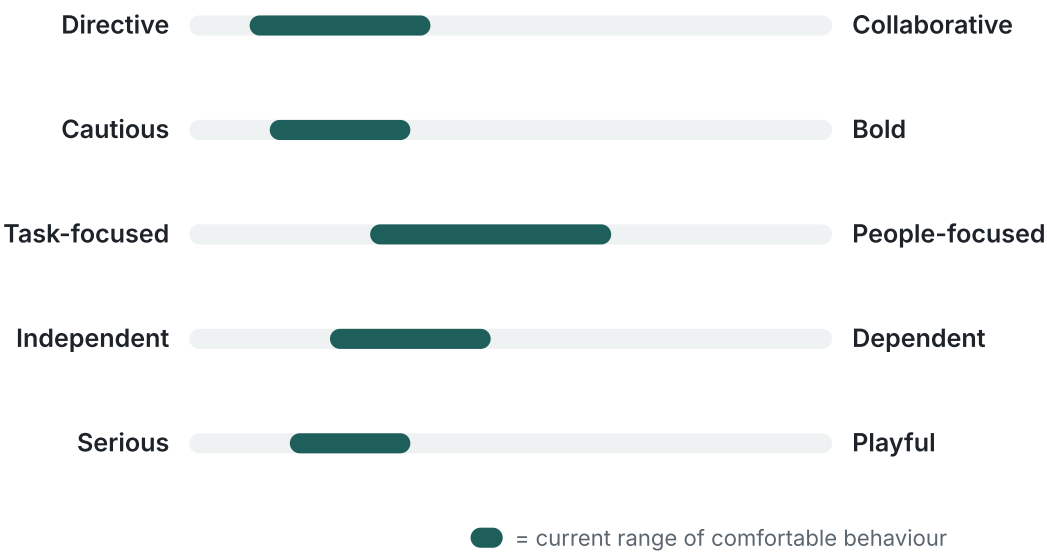
The unsent letter

1. The client writes a letter to someone connected with the unfinished situation. It will not be sent.
2. They write everything they would like to have said.
3. In session they read it aloud and notice what they feel.
4. Ask: "What, if anything, is still possible or needed now?"

06 · PATTERNS

Polarities

Every quality we show has an opposite that we tend to disown. Gestalt sees these as polarities on a continuum. Rigidity comes from living at one end. Flexibility comes from being able to move along the whole range.



Why polarities matter

A leader who over-uses one end (always decisive, never uncertain) loses access to the other. Strengths over-used become limitations. The disowned pole often shows up in how the person judges others.

Coaching with polarities

- Identify the preferred pole and its opposite
- Explore what is feared about the other end
- Experiment with small moves along the line
- Aim for range and choice, not swapping one end for the other

> *The goal is not balance in the middle. It is the freedom to stand anywhere on the line when the situation calls for it.*

07 · THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP

The dialogic relationship

Drawing on Martin Buber's philosophy, Gestalt sees the relationship itself as a main way change happens. The coach aims for genuine meeting, which Buber called "I–Thou", rather than treating the client as an object to be fixed ("I–It").

Presence

Being fully here, bringing your real self

Inclusion

Sensing the client's experience without losing yourself

Confirmation

Accepting the whole person, including what they could become

Openness

Willingness to be affected and surprised

	I–It stance	I–Thou stance
Coach sees client as	A problem to solve; a role	A whole, unique person
Coach's attention	On technique and outcome	On the meeting and what emerges
Communication	Strategic, one-directional	Honest, two-way, open to influence
Client experiences	Being assessed or managed	Being seen and met
Typical result	Compliance; surface change	Ownership; deeper change

> Both modes have a place. Contracting and goal-setting need some "I–It" clarity. Gestalt coaches move into "I–Thou" moments when depth is needed.

REFLECT

Questions for the coach

- Am I meeting this person, or managing them?
- What am I holding back that might be useful to share?
- How am I being affected by this client, and what might that tell me?

Use of self and the support–challenge balance

In Gestalt coaching, the coach's own experience is a source of information. What the coach notices, feels and imagines in the session can show something about the client's patterns and their wider field.



Using yourself as an instrument

1. **Notice** your own reactions: boredom, tension, warmth, confusion.
2. **Hold it lightly.** Is this mine, or is it about the client or the field?
3. **Choose** whether sharing it would serve the client.
4. **Offer** it as your own experience: "I notice I'm feeling a bit lost as you describe this."
5. **Stay curious** about how the client responds.

> **Support and challenge go together.** Gestalt coaching aims for a "safe emergency": enough challenge to stretch habitual patterns, enough support that the client can risk something new. More challenge needs more support.

Coach presence across a session

Before	During	After
Arrive early; ground yourself; notice your own state	Track your sensations and reactions alongside the client's	Reflect: what was mine, what was theirs?
Let go of the previous meeting	Share observations as yours, tentatively	Take strong reactions to supervision
Hold the contract lightly; be open to what emerges	Balance support and challenge moment to moment	Note patterns across sessions

The phenomenological method

The Gestalt coach starts from what can be directly observed and experienced. Interpretation comes later, if at all, and usually from the client rather than the coach.



Observation versus interpretation

Interpretation (avoid leading with this)	Phenomenological observation
"You're clearly anxious about this."	"I notice you're speaking faster and your hands are moving a lot."
"You don't really want the promotion."	"Your voice drops when you mention the promotion."
"You're being defensive."	"You leaned back and crossed your arms just then."
"That's a classic people-pleasing pattern."	"You said yes to all three requests. What was that like?"

Why it works

Describing rather than labelling lets the client find their own meaning. It lowers defensiveness and keeps responsibility with the client.

Helpful stems

"I notice..." · "I see..." · "I'm aware that..." · "What happens if you stay with that?" · "How are you doing that?"

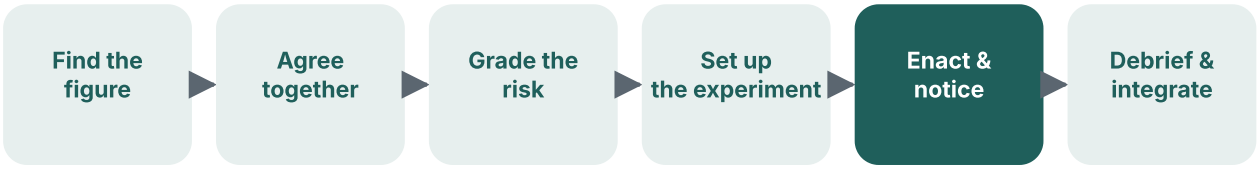
TRY THIS

Practise describing

- In your next meeting, silently note three things you observe without interpreting them.
- Turn one interpretation into an observation: "She's annoyed" becomes "Her answers got shorter."
- Ask the client what they make of your observation before offering any meaning.

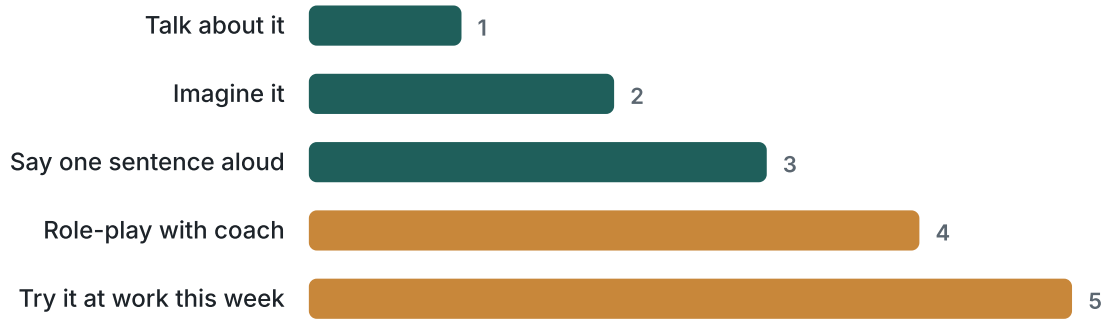
Designing experiments

An experiment is a structured way of trying something new in a safe setting. It is not a test with a right answer. It is a way to learn through direct experience. Joseph Zinker described experiments as the creative heart of Gestalt work.



Grading the experiment

A good experiment is "just enough": it stretches the client without overwhelming them. The coach adjusts the difficulty up or down depending on how the client responds.



Level of risk and stretch for the client (1 = low, 5 = high)

Principles

- Grow it from what is alive in the session
- Get the client's agreement
- Stay curious; there is no failure, only data
- Always debrief what was learned

Example

A manager who "can't say no" first notices how she says yes, then says "no" to the coach once, then reports what she noticed in her body and thoughts, then plans one real "no" for the week.

REFLECT

Grading questions to ask yourself

- Is the client curious, or just going along with me?
- Do they have enough support to take this risk?
- If this feels too big, what is a smaller version? If too easy, what is the next step up?

08 · METHODS

The Gestalt coaching toolkit

Gestalt techniques are less important than the stance behind them. The tools below grow out of awareness, dialogue and experimentation, and are used when they fit what is emerging.

Technique	How it works	Best used for
Staying with	Invite the client to stay with a feeling or sensation instead of moving away from it	Deepening awareness; reducing avoidance
Empty chair	Client speaks to an absent person (a boss, colleague, past self) as if they are present	Unfinished business; difficult conversations
Two-chair dialogue	Client moves between chairs giving voice to two sides of an internal conflict	Polarities; dilemmas; inner critic
Exaggeration	Amplify a gesture, phrase or posture to see what it expresses	Bringing hidden meaning into awareness
Language shifts	"I" instead of "you" or "one"; "won't" instead of "can't"; "and" instead of "but"	Ownership and responsibility
Body awareness	Track breathing, posture, tension and movement	Inner-zone awareness; stress; presence
Enactment / rehearsal	Act out a forthcoming situation in the session	Building confidence; testing new behaviour
Creative media	Drawing, objects, metaphors, sculpting a team with objects	Making the field visible; bypassing over-thinking
Immediacy	Name what is happening between coach and client now	Patterns that show up in the relationship

> **Technique follows the moment.** A tool imposed out of habit becomes a gimmick. A tool that grows from a shared figure becomes an experiment.

09 · IN PRACTICE

The shape of a Gestalt coaching engagement

Gestalt coaching follows what emerges, but it is not unstructured. Both the engagement as a whole and each session follow a loose cycle of experience.

Across the engagement



Contracting

Clarify goals, roles, confidentiality and stakeholders. Agree how the coach will work, including experiments.

Awareness & experiments

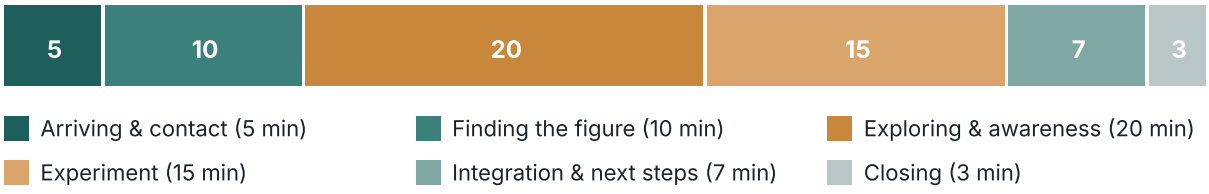
Most of the work: noticing patterns, testing new behaviour in sessions and then at work.

Closing

Review, appreciate what changed, name what is unfinished, and end the relationship well.

Inside a typical 60-minute session

illustrative



> The figures are a rough guide only. A session may spend most of its time on one experiment, or on simply staying with one important moment of awareness.

TRY THIS

Contracting questions that set up Gestalt work

- "How will we know this coaching has been useful?"
- "I sometimes suggest trying things out here in the session. How does that sound?"
- "What would you like me to do if I notice a pattern between us?"

09 · IN PRACTICE

How Gestalt compares with other approaches

Gestalt coaching can sit alongside other models. What sets it apart is its focus on present experience, the body, the relationship and the wider field.

Dimension	Gestalt	GROW / goal-focused	Cognitive-behavioural	Solution-focused	Psychodynamic
Main focus	Awareness of present process	Goals and actions	Thoughts and beliefs	Solutions and strengths	Unconscious patterns
Time orientation	Here and now	Future	Present / future	Future	Past → present
Role of the coach	Present, dialogic partner	Facilitator of a structure	Collaborative educator	Curious questioner	Interpreter of patterns
Theory of change	Paradoxical: through acceptance	Planned, step by step	Change thinking → change behaviour	Do more of what works	Insight into origins
Body & emotion	●	○	◐	○	◐
Context / system	●	◐	○	◐	◐
In-session experiments	●	○	◐	◐	○
Use of the relationship	●	◐	◐	◐	●

● *strong emphasis* ◐ *some emphasis* ○ *little emphasis. A general characterisation; individual practitioners vary.*

Combining approaches

Many coaches use GROW for structure and Gestalt for depth. Once a goal is set, Gestalt asks: "How are you stopping yourself?"

When Gestalt adds most

When the client "knows what to do" but doesn't do it. When patterns repeat. When presence, impact or relationships are the issue.

10 · APPLICATIONS

Where Gestalt coaching is used

Because it works with presence, relationships and systems, Gestalt is especially suited to leadership and organisational settings.

Executive & leadership coaching

- Executive presence and impact
- Handling conflict and difficult conversations
- Leading through uncertainty
- Over-used strengths (polarities)

Team coaching

- Making team dynamics visible
- Working with confluence (groupthink) and avoided conflict
- The team's own cycle of experience
- Unfinished business after change

Organisational development

- Nevis's idea of the consultant's *presence* as the intervention
- Raising system-level awareness
- Supporting change by working with resistance

Career & life transitions

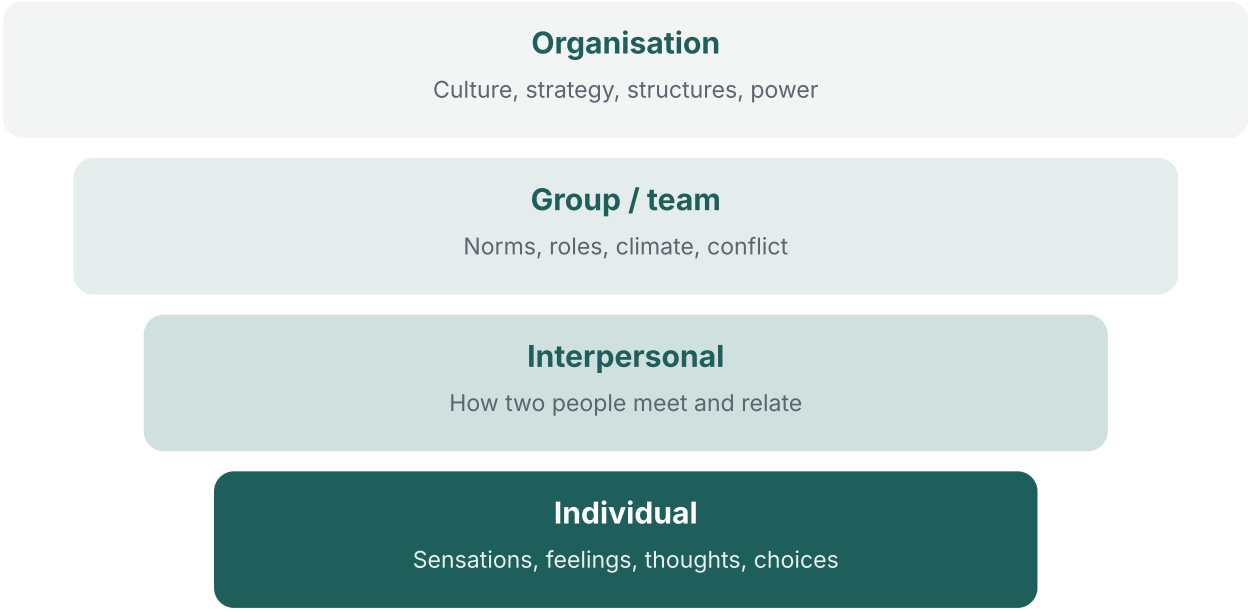
- Endings, neutral zones and new beginnings
- Withdrawal and the "fertile void"
- Values and authentic choice

Typical presenting issue	Gestalt lens	Possible intervention
"I lack gravitas in the boardroom"	Contact and presence; inner zone	Body awareness while rehearsing a board update
"My team won't take ownership"	Field; confluence; projection	Explore the leader's part in the pattern
"I can't decide whether to leave"	Polarities; unfinished business	Two-chair dialogue between "stay" and "go"

10 · APPLICATIONS

Working at multiple levels of system

Gestalt coaches pay attention to several levels at once and notice how a pattern at one level shows up at another. The same avoidance can live in a person, a pair, a team and a whole culture.



Level	Coaching question	What to watch for
Organisation	What does the system reward and punish?	Parallel process: client re-enacting organisational patterns
Group / team	What does this team avoid talking about?	Shared introjects ("we don't do conflict here")
Interpersonal	What happens between you and them?	Projection and confluence between colleagues
Individual	What are you aware of in yourself?	Interruptions to the client's own cycle

> **Parallel process:** Sometimes the dynamic between coach and client mirrors one in the client's organisation. Noticing it can give powerful system-level insight.

11 · ILLUSTRATION

Case illustration: "Finding my voice"

A short, fictional composite showing how one coaching thread moves through the cycle of experience. Names and details are invented.

> **Context:** Maya, a newly promoted head of operations, is told by her CEO that she "needs more presence" in leadership meetings. She wants to "be more assertive" but feels stuck.

Sensation	Client mentions feeling "flat" before leadership meetings.
Awareness	Coach notices she sits back and speaks quietly when describing the meetings. She realises she holds back her views.
Mobilisation	Introject surfaces: "Don't disagree with senior people." She questions whether she still believes it.
Action	Experiment: she states one disagreement to the coach, standing up, in a full voice.
Contact	She reports feeling energised and nervous. Two-chair work between her "polite" and "candid" selves.
Resolution	She commits to voicing one view at the next meeting, with a plan for how.
Withdrawal	Next session: reflects on what happened, appreciates the risk, lets go of the old rule.

Gestalt ideas in play

- Paradoxical change: exploring the holding back instead of forcing assertiveness
- Introjection and retroflection
- Polarities (polite ↔ candid)
- Graded experiment in the session

Field considerations

- Does the leadership team actually welcome dissent?
- What does "presence" mean in this culture?
- Is this pattern shared by others in the team?

12 · EVALUATION

Strengths, limitations and ethics

Like any approach, Gestalt coaching has real strengths, real limits, and ethical points that need care.

Strengths

- Works with the whole person, including body and emotion
- Produces change the client owns
- Strong fit for presence, relationships and leadership
- Sees the individual in their system
- Flexible; can sit alongside other models

Limitations

- Can feel unfamiliar or "too personal" to some clients
- Less structure than goal-focused models
- Depends heavily on the coach's skill and self-awareness
- Outcomes are harder to measure
- Experiments can be misused as gimmicks

Coaching or therapy?

	Gestalt coaching	Gestalt therapy
Purpose	Development, performance, effectiveness	Healing, psychological wellbeing
Typical focus	Work, leadership, roles, choices	Personal history, distress, clinical issues
Depth of emotional work	Moderate, tied to the coaching contract	Can go deep and long term
Sponsor	Often the organisation	Usually the individual
Referral trigger	Signs of mental health difficulty or trauma	-

Ethical essentials: clear contracting (including consent to experiments), confidentiality agreed with sponsors, regular supervision, working within competence, and referring on when an issue goes beyond coaching.

13 · SUMMARY

Key takeaways and further reading

1. Awareness is both the method and the outcome.
2. Change comes from fully being what you are (Beisser).
3. Stay in the here and now; bring past and future into the room.
4. See the whole person in their whole field.
5. Use the cycle of experience to see where energy gets stuck.
6. Treat interruptions as choices to make conscious, not faults.
7. The relationship and the coach's presence are interventions.
8. Experiment; learn by doing, safely graded.

Further reading

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> *Gestalt coaching does not ask "How do I fix this person?" It asks "What is happening here, and what becomes possible when we both see it?"*