

# Presence Exercises

## Hacking the Thoughtstream

In this exercise we work in pairs, sitting facing each other close enough for comfort and to be heard but being mindful of appropriate physical boundaries.

Start by choosing who speaks first. A good simple way of deciding is for the one with the shortest hair to do so.

Facing each other, begin by taking a few deep easy long breaths, all the time maintaining an easy, relaxed eye contact with each other, aiming to keep this throughout the exercise. Both may well notice some inner discomfort with this and the suggestion is to try to simply breathe and allow the discomfort to be. It will pass. As best you are able, keep the gaze alive, authentic and interested yet relaxed and easy.

The speaker begins talking and simply downloads in 'real time' whatever arises, without editing, judgement or trying to think of cool or interesting stuff to say. This is an exercise in immediacy and allowing; of letting words simply move on out without the habitual processes of cognition or us trying to be smart, connect or impress. It is a monologue in and from presence. Primarily what you'll notice is it will simply be the ongoing thoughtstream made manifest, tumbling forth as it happens moment by moment.

The listener remains fully engaged with the process, demonstrating their connection by their own awake, alive and active presence. Not trying to create a conversation or respond but simply receiving the download and allowing it too to pass through.

Allow 3-5 minutes for the speaker. A bell will sound or set your own timer.

At the end the listener simply thanks the speaker. No feedback. And both allow some space for a few deep breaths while the energy settles following which both swap roles and repeat it all again.

Finally when both have finished speaking, then feel free to discuss what went on for each of you.

How did you feel? How was the extended eye contact? How present did you feel both as speaker and listener? How engaged did you both feel?

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## Presence Ping Pong

In this exercise we again work in pairs, sitting facing each other close enough for comfort and to be heard but being mindful of appropriate physical boundaries.

Once more start by deciding who speaks first and both of you taking a few moments to breathe, 'drop in' and prepare yourselves.

The speaker is asked to choose a recent notable event for them and to describe fairly briefly to the listener what it is and what happened. Allow around a minute or two to do so. For this exercise the listener remains fully engaged in the story, again demonstrating this by their active body language and gaze but not responding until the speaker finishes.

When they've done so (you'll know this by the natural, logical slow down and end point in the monologue), now ask your question but ensuring if possible that it is directly related to the *last* thing the speaker has mentioned. The invitation is to allow the first thing that comes up to form the question. Again try not to edit or think it through too much. No need to be smart, clever or create change. The object is to allow the questions and responses to flow.

Aim to ask open-ended questions meaning not questions that simply require a yes or no answer such as 'Did you like it?' Instead using language such as 'How enjoyable was this compared to other times in your life?' or 'When have you experienced similar?' This may sound as though it is interrupting the flow and causing cognition to fire. Of course it may to a degree but try it. Also if you do have to then

If you do end up in a closed-ended question response, then the listener once again simply asks the first question that arises to restart the flow. Say for example, the response was a simple 'yes' or 'no' (which is typical with a closed-ended question), then asking something such as 'Tell me a little more about that/this .....' will easily enough revive and restart the dynamic.

What we're doing here is beginning to allow the dialogue process to unfold, following each response with whatever question arises spontaneously and trusting that process implicitly. Simply that you can open your mouth and a question will arise.

Some suggestions are:

- Let it flow. Don't worry too much about how it sounds or 'being a coach' or 'solving problems'. This is simply an exercise in letting the questions bubble up with spontaneity and immediacy and in trusting enough that they will do so. To do this we simply must be relaxed and trusting enough in the process ourselves.

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- To facilitate this see if you can remain as active, engaged and curious as possible with all that is happening. This requires the listener to be fully present and engaged and not away somewhere else with their own inner dialogue and story.
- See if you can keep the energy alive and flowing with as little space as possible between responses but equally not rushing the process.

Allow about 3-5 minutes for this part of the exercise and finish when either the bell or timer sounds.

Swap over roles after taking a minute or two to collect yourselves.

## Embodied Centering

Begin standing, feet hip width or perhaps slightly further apart. Legs straight.

Allow your awareness to shift inwards and pay closer attention to how the body is balanced bone on bone from the feet up to the head. If you can, perhaps have a sense of dropping out of your head into your body. Allow your gaze to remain soft yet your peripheral vision alive. Let the shoulders and arms hang freely and without tension (though not slumped) while you find your place in gravity. Have a sense of your height and length from the soles of your feet right up to the top of the head as though easily extended between sky and earth. How tall and long do you feel? Do this without straining but still allow the posture to be an expression of energy. Pay close attention throughout this exercise to how the body feels in each position and state: alive, dull, calm, anxious, unstable and so on. Sometimes these states are quite subtle and often 'under the radar' of our consciousness but they are always there.

Maintain your position with the legs straight for now and begin to gently rock side to side at first paying attention to how the sense of physical balance is disturbed ... or not. Noticing your width and breadth. How wide do you feel. How wide can you perceive including using your peripheral vision and sense. What are edges of comfort? Where do you lose it? How does it feel when you move back to balance. How stable is this?

Now do the same with forward and back movements and this time giving attention to the space behind you as well as that more obvious field in front contained within your visual awareness. Once more testing your boundaries and also feeling what it's like to return to a sense of balance.

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Now come back to a still central position and once calm and centred, relax your knees a little but still keep them active and with a sense of aliveness about your posture. At this point it can also help to take your awareness down to the region we call the Hara. If it helps place your hands over there to draw your attention more keenly. See if you can drop in a little more to your own body. Feel what it's like to be fully in your own body. The weight of it and feel of it in gravity, yet alive, engaged and supported from within.

Once again gently move around in and out of balance – first sideways, then forward and backwards and finally in all directions yet also taking time to return to neutral - to center yourself. Notice if there's any difference from the first straight leg test. Can you move in any direction more or less than before? Which position felt more stable? How does your body respond when moving out of balance? What about when it's in balance? Which position allows for more ease? Always discerning directly through the bodily felt sense rather than what you think is happening.

Which position holds more ease, stability and balance – taut and rigid or loose and relaxed?

Paying close attention to our posture and our sense of equilibrium in this way allows us firstly to return to or begin from a calm yet energised physical state from which we can respond appropriately with less stress and strain – we have a stable 'start point'. I can help to consider of the neutral point adopted for many of the ancient martial arts as a position of our greatest power, potential and ease. It also helps down regulate the sympathetic nervous system and so taxing our cognitive and emotional capacities less, potentially leaving even more bandwidth available for all our higher functions.

Adapted from the work of Richard Strozzi-Heckler (**The Leadership Dojo**; Berkeley, CA: Frog, Ltd, 2007.)

## Instant Sense Presence

This is an identical form for Instant Presence but this time we're simply going to focus on what can be called all of the sense doors. This can be executed standing or sitting.

Begin by simply connecting with your breathing meaning where it is felt in the body. It can help to have a few long deep breaths to initiate this process. Once you feel a little centred, calm and embodied then turn your attention to each of the senses by saying silently to yourself:

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- **I am aware of sound & hearing** (as you say this bring all of this sense center stage in your awareness)
- **I am aware of all in my field of vision and seeing** (as you say this now bring all of the visual experience center stage)
- **I am aware of sensations of smell** (as you say this now put the spotlight of your attention fully onto the sense of smell. Even if you smell nothing then simply know that)
- **I am aware of sensations of taste** (once again in saying this now turn your attention fully to the taste experience. Even if you haven't eaten there will still be an experience no matter how subtle. Can you sense it?)
- **I am aware of sensations of touch** (this time as we bring our full awareness to the sense of contact with hands, skin on clothes, of sitting or standing, contact with the air)
- **I am aware of all sensations** (as you say this it can help to have an image of flinging open all the doors and maintaining a fully open awareness of all the experiences. A kind of meta-awareness.)
- Finally in this meta state see if you can maintain it for a short while but do so without straining. Easily.

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## ICF Core Competencies

**4. Coaching Presence**—Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

1. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment.
2. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing—"goes with the gut."
3. Is open to not knowing and takes risks.
4. Sees many ways to work with the client and chooses in the moment what is most effective.
5. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy.
6. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action.
7. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions.