

MARK WALSH

THE TOP 12 EMBODIMENT COACHING TECHNIQUES



Introduction

Why embodiment?

I have specialised in embodied approaches to training and coaching for twenty years, with the last fifteen of those training facilitators in over forty different countries. This includes personally coaching everyone from soldiers in Ukraine to radical activists, movie stars to politicians, and street kids to billionaire business leaders.

I am dedicated to the embodied approach for one simple reason: it works. It goes deep quickly and sticks. It is hugely practical, and frankly also fun for me as a coach.

Sadly, although there's a lot of resources available on embodiment, much of it is esoteric, new-age, "woke", or, if actually useful, hidden behind a paywall. That's why I wanted to make this short book freely available for those seeking something pragmatic and concise.

A world of caution

I hope that it is obvious that such a short book as this does not equip someone to be an embodiment coach alone. On our flagship course, the [Certification of Embodiment Coaching](#) (CEC), we take six

months to give people the basics, which includes things such as trauma education and supervision. That being said, I hope this little work gives coaches already trained in other methods some ideas, and may inspire people to train with us more thoroughly.

It is also worth stating that any embodiment technique one uses rests on the foundation of one's own embodiment. Unlike purely cognitive methods, embodiment is about modelling and resonance as much as tools. I hope this also inspires some humility in those new to the field, as checking whether you're in integrity teaching many techniques may be helpful.

If readers like this booklet, they may also like the far more in-depth "text book", [The Body in Coaching and Training](#), along with the many demonstrations of these techniques online, as showing is often much clearer than telling!

You can find 1-minute embodiment coaching demonstrations along with much more extensive videos on:

- [@warkmalsh on Instagram](#)
- [The Embodiment Channel on YouTube](#)
- [The Embodiment Unlimited group on Facebook](#)

On algorithms

While this is a book of techniques, our main approach is actually to provide "algorithms" that allow for generative, creative application of principles. Let's get started...

SIMPLE AWARENESS TECHNIQUES

Awareness raising

Algorithm:

Try – notice – clarify – reflect

- *Have clients try a range of motions or postures (e.g. the Four Elements or Embodied Toolkit).*
- *Have them notice which are familiar, which are uncomfortable and which are longed for.*
- *Clarify what patterns might be present.*
- *Reflect on how this shows up in life.*

We use this principle with all kinds of models and it can be done with both individuals and groups. Be careful to distinguish between what is familiar and what is longed for.

Self-touch & touch

Having clients touch themselves can lead to great embodied and emotional awareness (e.g. on the chest while asking them what they actually feel about a topic), as can (consensual) touch from the coach. Often this leads to much greater insight than just talking about a topic.

Mirroring back

Algorithm:

Ask permission – mirror the posture/movement – check how it fits – reflect

- *Ask permission to mirror the client.*
- *Observe posture or movement.*
- *Mirror posture or movement.*
- *Ask if it's familiar, makes sense, fit to life.*

We generally suggest “show” before “tell” (direct feedback), though caution should be taken that client’s understand the purpose of mirroring them (awareness building) and that it is respectful.

Direct feedback

Algorithm:

Ask permission – share observation – check how it fits – reflect

- *Observe patterns and/or reactions.*
- *Ask permission to share.*



- *Share what you've noticed without interpretation.*
- *Ask if it's familiar, makes sense, fit to life.*

We tend to give feedback less than having client's discover things for themselves but it does have a place.

Belief archaeology

Algorithm:

Speak – observe - exaggerate - enquire

- *Have the client say a word relating to a topic of interest, e.g. "money" or "marriage"*
- *Observe what they do in their body*
- *Have them exaggerate and repeat the response*
- *Ask them what they think their underlying belief is about the topic*

This is a great little technique for revealing what people think unconsciously and deeply about a topic.

CHOICE TECHNIQUES

Awareness & choice technique

Good for:

- Almost any issue!
- Where a client is stuck and their old way of being is not working for them

Integrity check:

Are you in your body?

Algorithm:

Identify – notice – reflect – change – reflect – repeat

- *Identify the situation the client would like to explore*
- *Ask, “what are you doing in your body when you talk about this topic?” or similar.*
- *Ask, “How do you want to be around this topic?”*
- *Help the client find another embodiment that may be more helpful.*
- *Reflect upon this*
- *Invite to repeat or practice.*

This is a very simple but effective way of coaching embodiment: help people find what they're doing now, and then to find a way to do things that serves them better!

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- Sharing your description, explanation or interpretation on what a client is doing rather than giving them a chance to bring body awareness.
- Teaching what to do to change, rather than exploring together with the client or suggesting options to try.
- Not calibrating (what's too much/ too little?).

Centring coaching

Good for:

- All requests regarding stress response (fear, anger, showing up, expression, etc.)
- Most requests start with "I can't..."
- Requests about wellbeing, empowerment, commitment, etc.

Integrity check:

Are you centered?

Algorithm:

Challenge – notice – learn – repeat – centre – increase – repeat



- *Introduce a manageable challenging stimulus with permission. Start with a very gentle stimulus and calibrate upwards, making it more intense and realistic until a noticeable but not overwhelming distress response is reached.*
- *Notice the distress response. Make/ask for specific body-based descriptions rather than evaluations. Repeat stimuli if not able to identify response.*
- *Apply an appropriate centring technique using culturally sensitive language, and add metaphors, role-models and images, if that's helpful.*
- *Repeat stimuli and employ the centring technique, targeting specifics of the individual distress response.*
- *Notice objective reduction in distress response, subjective feelings of distress, and effect on the relationship (e.g. less hostile). NB, a coach should let a client discover this for themselves, rather than tell them.*

- *Increase the stimulus strength with permission. As long as someone is not overwhelmed, you can keep increasing the strength of stimuli and centring.*
- *Repeat centring.*

This principle is from Paul Linden. Like all the other principles, there are many ways of applying it, for example using many stimuli such as tissues, grabs and insults; and many centring techniques such as ABC, EROS or smiling heart. It contains sub-principles, such as capable consent, calibration and individual adaptation. A well-designed yoga or martial arts class can be an expression of this principle.

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- Not being centered yourself.
- Doing meditation, not centring.
- Doing somatic awareness sessions, not centring.
- Mixing centring with freeze response.
- Choosing something that is too triggering so it's impossible to change the state (lack of calibration).

Leader-follow (basic partner form)

Good for:

- Any request about a relationship (to people, topic, project, etc.)

Integrity check:

Are you okay with both roles? Are you aware of your patterns? Do you know your personal range and bias around partnership?



Algorithm:

Try (simulate) – observe and notice – reflect – ask for changing – try – review

- *Ask for a situation/request.*
- *Try leading-following movement (steps forward and back together, with or without touching).*
- *What role is more familiar? What role fits the situation?*
- *Ask what can be noticed in the body (stress response, tension, pushing, resistance, pleasing, caring, etc).*
- *Ask questions about attention during movement, images, purpose, etc.*
- *Find a way to change and try the new way.*

- *Review the results.*

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- Not being aware about your personal preferences or bias (i.e. “this is right/wrong”)

Four Elements brainstorming coaching

Good for:

- Any request about a way to generate ideas

Integrity check:

Can you embody all four elements comfortably? Do you have any bias around some element? Is the client stable enough to go out into life (might need some earth/centring in the end).

Algorithm:

Identify - Move and ask - clarify - commit



- *Identify the coaching question*
- *Have clients move through each element, one at a time, while asking questions that match that element*
- *Clarify the ideas that came up with each element.*
- *Choose 1-2 ideas for future investigation.*

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- You are not able to embody the different qualities of the elements (so you can't lead, support and inspire your client to try the element)
- Calibration

Toolkit coaching

This technique uses a range of poses which can be found online and in other books from the [Embodied Toolkit](#) (previously Embodied Yoga Principles) system. On [CEC](#) we use Yes, No, Self-Care, Giving, Taking up space. It can be used just to raise awareness and insight, or to practise a new way of being.

Good for:

- Any request about personal qualities, such as: “How to develop ____” or “How to do (more or less) ____”.
- Request on “How to find the way to ____”.

Integrity check:

Did you practise the poses yourself recently? Can you embody it both bodily and emotionally?

Algorithm:

Simulate – notice – insights – practice

- *Ask for a situation/request.*
- *Try a toolkit pose that fits the request.*
- *Ask how it fits (is it familiar).*
- *Notice any new insights*
- *Invite to repeat or practice.*

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- You didn't practise the poses so you can't do them comfortably.
- You're not attentive to the deviations.
- Not calibrating the intensity of the pose.



Light intuitive / body listening coaching

Good for:

- Fresh insight and accessing body wisdom

Integrity check:

Are you ready to see and listen to others? Are you ready to share attention between yourself and others?

There are actually two subtly different techniques here (both below). The first is “light body listening”, and the second “light process work”.

1) Light body listening

What happens in the body? What does the body want to tell?

Algorithm:

Identify – welcome – expand – ask – design – review

A. Identify a theme / question ...

B. ... Or start with a sensation already calling for attention within the body (e.g. pain with no obvious external cause).

- *For (A), ask the body for a sensation which relates to this question/theme and identify one.*
- *For (A) and (B), notice, accept and welcome the sensation.*
- *Ask the sensation if any other parts of the body are involved and follow these until it settles.*

- *Ask the sensation to grow (note that you may have to set bearable limits).*
- *Ask the sensations what message they have. What is their job? What would they like? What would they like to say?*
- *Design actions and practices based upon this, if needed.*
- *Review and adjust.*

This principle is from Paul Linden (and is similar to other practices including Focusing). It is a way of accessing intuition and dialoguing with the unconscious. Note that self-care and rest after this practice are particularly important.

2) Light process work

What wants to happen in the body? How do you want to move?

Algorithm:

Frame – follow – allow – set aside – follow – meaning

- *Pose yourself a question you'd like insight into as a frame. This part is optional, e.g. just "letting the body do its thing" is also usually helpful.*
- *Follow sensation in the body.*
- *Allow movement to occur. This could be very brief or over days. Music can facilitate this (for example, as in 5 Rhythms) but be aware this adds an element.*
- *Watch out for forms and set aside judgement and censorship, e.g. you can just say "later" to yourself when this happens or*

focus on sensation again instead. In this way it is a type of moving meditation.

- *Keep following sensation and movement, preferably until it comes to a natural rest point as per the cycles.*
- *Afterwards, you can make sense of the experience through discussion and creativity (e.g. drawing).*
- *Self-care and rest after are recommended.*

The idea here is that by “getting out of our own way” we allow the body to follow its natural healthy process. There are other slightly more led varieties, for example, where we are looking to complete a stuck movement from the past (e.g. Somatic Experiencing). The seasons model is key to this principle.

The most common mistakes for this technique:

- Lack of calibration
- Lack of listening
- Not finishing the natural cycle of process



Coaching resources

In real-world coaching, I tend to mix techniques together somewhat.

You'll find plenty of embodiment coaching demonstrations for free on [The Embodiment Channel](#) on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@Theembodimentchannel>

We've collected many examples here in one place here, too:

<https://embodimentunlimited.com/coaching-top12/>

On Instagram, my 1-minute embodiment coaching demonstrations are very popular. This 1-minute video on [how to stop people-pleasing](#) has had over 3-million views, for example (if you are interested in people-pleasing as a topic, you may like to download the free eBook, [People Un-Pleasing](#)).

Books you may like include [Embodiment: Moving Beyond Mindfulness](#), [The Body in Coaching and Training](#), and [Embodied Meditation](#).

Finally, this work is very powerful in-person. You'll find upcoming workshops in the UK, Europe and the US on [this events calendar>>>](#)

Who is Mark Walsh?

Mark Walsh leads embodiment, coaching and trauma education trainings.

He is the author of *Embodiment, Working with the Body in Training and Coaching*, *People Un-Pleasing*, *Embodied Toolkit* and *Embodied Meditation*.

Mark hosts *The Embodiment Podcast* (over 3-million downloads), and led *The Embodiment Conference* (1000 teachers, 500,000 delegates). Seeing a theme yet?

He founded the *Embodied Facilitator Course* and the *Certification of Embodiment Coaching*. Mark has certified over 2000 embodiment coaches, and taught workshops in over 40 other countries.

He gained an honours degree in psychology (despite been an alcoholic at the time), and has taught widely in the corporate world – where he pretended to be a grown up for years – including with blue-chip companies (e.g. Google, Unilever, Shell, Axa, L’Oreal).

Mark has worked in war zones (including founding a trauma education charity in Ukraine), and entertained over 50,000 children.

He has headlined International Coach Federation events, lived with the circus and in slums, taught celebrities, and kissed a princess.

Mark is an aikido black belt, and also has 28 years of experience in other martial arts, yoga, bodywork, improv comedy, conscious dance and meditation.

Embodiment is his obsession, life's work, and frankly, at this point he couldn't get a job doing anything else. He dances like your dad at a wedding, impresses cats with his stroking, and offends pirates with his swearing.

Mark's now tired of writing in the third person. It's getting weird.