

The Neuroscience of Enduring Transformation

Integrating Memory Reconsolidation in Developmental Coaching as Illustrated in Aletheia Coaching

By Steve March, originator of *Aletheia Coaching*

Before 2004, the prevailing belief among neuroscientists was that the brain could not erase or edit existing emotional learnings. Based on this belief, many approaches to psychotherapy, coaching, and self-development attempt to create new responses that counteract and compete with existing learnings to develop new ways of being and establish new patterns of behavior. Such counteractive approaches rely on repeated practice to strengthen these new responses to make them more available than past responses.

In 2004, brain neuroplasticity researchers (Pedreira, Maldonado, Pérez-Cuesta, 2004) discovered a way to erase and/or edit emotional learning through a process called *memory reconsolidation*. And as early as 2006, this new understanding was being consciously applied in clinical psychotherapy with great results. Further research has demonstrated how the most effective styles of psychotherapy leverage memory reconsolidation as a core mechanism of transformation. No single psychotherapy approach owns the method of memory reconsolidation. Instead, memory reconsolidation is a universal process that leverages the brain's built-in capacity for neuroplasticity (Ecker et al., 2012).

By contrast, counteractive approaches do not meet the brain's requirements for erasing or editing existing emotional learning. They are marginally effective and are highly dependent on the client's regularity and discipline with practice. In addition, because existing emotional learnings are not erased or edited, clients will experience relapses.

When the conditions for memory reconsolidation are met, existing emotional learnings can be either erased or edited. Memories of what happened don't change, but the emotional meaning of what happened does change. When existing emotional responses are erased or edited, they can no longer be triggered leading to effortless and sustained transformation.

Despite the power of memory reconsolidation, many approaches to psychotherapy, coaching, and self-development have not yet integrated it into their methodologies. Given its effectiveness, I predict memory reconsolidation will play a significant role in the future of coaching. In this article, I will explore how memory reconsolidation can be integrated into developmental coaching. I will detail the three-step process for opening the memory reconsolidation window, a time when emotional memories shift into a malleable state where they can be erased or edited. I will illustrate how this process is integrated into *Aletheia Coaching*, a next-generation developmental coaching methodology that I originated. Lastly, I

will offer an edited and annotated transcript of an actual coaching conversation to demonstrate memory reconsolidation in action within a developmental coaching context.

We Learn Behaviors and Develop Our Sense of Self from Our Emotional Experiences

Learning and development are deeply emotional processes. Once a particular response has been learned and embodied, it can be hard to stop or replace even when it is limiting or sabotaging. The most obvious examples of this are our psychological defenses. Through the emotional turmoil of our childhood and teenage years, we learned and developed ways to protect and defend ourselves from getting hurt in specific ways.

For example, I can remember sitting in the back row of the classroom in 3rd grade. The teacher asked the class a question (although I can't remember it). Enthusiastically I raised my hand to answer the question. When I gave my answer, the teacher harshly criticized it and I felt overwhelming shame for being wrong. For the next decade of school, I never volunteered to answer a question in class again. Sitting in class, I frequently felt anxious and fearful that I would be called upon to answer a question. I never wanted to feel such overwhelming shame ever again. This pattern of not speaking up in groups persisted into my late twenties. This protective strategy aimed to prevent me from feeling ashamed, yet it also sabotaged my participation in school, in college, and in the early years of my professional career. I struggled with a lack of self-worth throughout this time of my life.

My experience is not uncommon. Everyone has felt hurt many times in life and adapted to this by learning and developing defenses. We have felt abandoned, annihilated, betrayed, deficient, destroyed, embarrassed, humiliated, isolated, rejected, shamed, unloved, worthless, etc. These powerful emotions are the basis for enduring emotional learning. Defenses, like my avoidance of speaking up in groups, are well-intended. However, 1) they inevitably fail to protect us from feeling hurt, and 2) they are costly. In my example, not speaking up in groups didn't result in never feeling ashamed. From time to time, I still felt ashamed despite this strategy. In fact, in some instances, I felt ashamed for not speaking up. Furthermore, not speaking up was a costly strategy, especially as I started my professional career as a software engineer where I was expected to contribute to problem-solving conversations in meetings. All protective strategies and defenses are well-intended. However, they also have negative unintended side-effects that are limiting and sabotaging.

Clients that come to coaching are usually suffering from such negative side effects. And they find their enduring defenses hard to change even when they rationally understand how behaving in such ways is sabotaging them and limiting their possibilities for effectiveness in life and work. Their current ways are rooted in emotional learnings, usually from their younger years, and not expressions of their rational understanding. As a result, their current ways display tenacity, resist change, and often undermine efforts to develop new ways of being.

Coaching clients are also usually suffering from a deficient sense of self. In my example, the events of my childhood, one of which was the feeling of being wrong and the overwhelming shame that accompanied that in 3rd grade, left me feeling a lack of self-worth. There are two kinds of autobiographical memories: episodic memories and personal semantics (Grilli & Ryan, 2020). Episodic memories are memories of particular events, like my example from 3rd grade. However, given time and more life experience, our memories often fade. What persists from our life experiences are personal semantics or self-images that represent identities abstracted, extracted, and accumulated from our past experiences like my lack of self-worth.

Developmental coaching is aimed at developing a fresh sense of self that is not deficient but instead capable of navigating the complex challenges of life. To do this, coaches must help clients release limiting emotional learnings such as well-intended but sabotaging defenses and create new emotional learnings through uncovering and embodying innate resourcefulness, creativity, and adaptive brilliance.

The Breakthrough of Memory Reconsolidation

Memory reconsolidation is the brain's neuroplastic process for erasing and updating emotional learnings, like the often-unconscious conditioned behaviors that thwart self-development. According to Bruce Ecker, Robin Ticic, and Laurel Hulley, the authors of *Unlocking the Emotional Brain: Eliminating Symptoms at Their Roots Using Memory Reconsolidation*, who were the first to knowingly leverage memory reconsolidation in psychotherapy,

The true disappearance from memory of a learning that previously generated behavioral responses has the following signature features:

- A specific emotional reaction abruptly can no longer be reactivated by cues and triggers that formerly did so or by other stressful situations.
- Symptoms of behavior, emotion, somatics, or thought that were expressions of that emotional reaction also disappear permanently.
- Non-recurrence of the emotional reactions and symptoms continues effortlessly and without counteractive or preventative measures of any kind (Ecker et al., 2012, p. 19).

Given these outcomes, it is not surprising that some psychotherapists are promoting the idea that memory reconsolidation is a universal integrating framework for psychotherapy (Ecker et al., 2012; Goldman & Fredrick-Keniston, 2020). Given my experience integrating memory reconsolidation into developmental coaching, I believe that memory reconsolidation can also be a common thread across various methods of developmental coaching where it is utilized.

How Does Memory Reconsolidation Work?

The brain's requirements for activating memory reconsolidation involve a three-step process (Ecker et al., 2012).



Figure 1: The three-step process of memory reconsolidation

1. *Reactivation* – The target memory is *reactivated* and becomes accessible in the present moment.
2. *Mismatch* – Concurrently with reactivation, a new experience is generated that differs significantly from the target memory. This creates an *experiential mismatch* that unlocks the target memory and opens the *memory reconsolidation window* during which the memory is labile for approximately five hours.
3. *Erase or edit through new learning*: During the reconsolidation window, before synapses are relocked, create new learning through new experiences and practices. If the new experience is a complete mismatch, then the target memory is erased. If the new experience is a partial mismatch, then the target memory is edited. Reconsolidation occurs as this window closes.

Referring to memory reconsolidation, Ecker, Ticic, and Hulley claim, “As of this writing, this is the only process known to neuroscience that achieves true eradication of an emotional learning, and it does so through the only known form of neuroplasticity capable of unlocking the synapses maintaining an existing learning: memory reconsolidation” (Ecker et al., 2012). Therefore, the conditions of this three-step process must be met to generate effortlessly sustained transformation.

To utilize memory reconsolidation, the structure of coaching conversations must complete all three steps. The third step can also extend to the five hours after the coaching conversation where practices can create new learning. In addition, any practices offered to the client can be designed in such a way that they complete all three steps. This helps clients leverage memory reconsolidation in between coaching conversations.

A Brief History of *Aletheia Coaching*

In the remainder of this article, I will offer an example of how memory reconsolidation can be integrated into developmental coaching as illustrated in *Aletheia Coaching*, a methodology that I originated. To understand the methodology at a high level and the coaching transcript that follows, a brief history of how the method unfolded and an introduction to its core concepts will be helpful.

I completed my initial coach training and certification in 2002. Like many coaches, I spent most of the next decade studying various developmental methodologies spanning both psychological and spiritual ranges of development. To me, a few things were striking that left me puzzled. First, all of the methods I learned were very different from each other. I naively expected that most self-development approaches would be variations on a theme. This is not what I found. Second, I noticed that despite these differences, every method I learned was powerful and effective. However, third, I also noticed that each method also failed to work with certain clients. This puzzled me. All methods both work and also fail to work. From this experience, I developed an eclectic coaching practice. I tried my best to assess the needs of each client and determine which method would fit them best. Sometimes I would mix and blend different methods in a single coaching engagement. This created mixed results, working sometimes and failing others. From my conversations with many other coaches, I learned that the journey from certification to eclectic practice was, by far, more the norm than the exception.

In 2012 I had an integrating insight that solved the puzzle I had about which method to use. I suddenly realized that the methods I knew each operated at different depths. Immediately I could see how these methods easily grouped into four depths. Each of the methods that I knew were specialists at one depth but generally ignored the others. When clients were functioning from the depth a method specialized in, it was powerful and effective. However, if the client was functioning from another depth, the same method was cumbersome or plain didn't work. This insight helped to explain why all methods work and all methods fail to work. The crucial factor is depth.

What is depth? The experience of depth arises from the relationship between what is foreground and what remains in the background of awareness. In *Aletheia Coaching*, there are four depths at which the present moment can be experienced. Generally, this is not recognized because the deeper depths exist in the background of awareness where they remain hidden until they are unconcealed.

The Four Depths of Cosmos, Psyche, and Soma

The primary view in *Aletheia Coaching* is called The Four Depths of Cosmos, Psyche, and Soma. This view articulates four depths of contact with the present moment. We can experience the four depths of the external world or cosmos, the internal world or psyche, and the body or soma which reciprocally embeds the experience of the internal and external worlds within each other. Working within these depths and deepening the clients' access to them is the chief method in *Aletheia Coaching* for effortlessly leveraging memory reconsolidation as will be illustrated in the transcript below.

Briefly, the Four Depths are defined as follows and listed in order from shallowest to deepest:

1. *The Depth of Parts* – Experience at this depth is dominated by the sense of separation. We experience ourselves as separate from other people and things. Inwardly, we experience many separate ego parts of ourselves (e.g., an ambitious part, a cautious

part, a rejected part, a playful part, etc.) that have separate intentions, strategies, behaviors, and emotions (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2019). Each person has a unique configuration or constellation of ego parts that function as structurally consolidated emotional learnings. Ego parts can be understood as object relations (Kernberg, 1993), ego states (Watkins & Watkins, 1997), schemas (Young et al., 2003), or as winning strategies (Goss, 2015). These ego parts are the target for memory reconsolidation with experiential mismatches created by consciously accessing deeper depths of self-experience.

2. *The Depth of Process* – Experience at this depth is a flow of felt meaning that is accessed through bodily felt senses (Gendlin, 2007) and/or imaginal felt images (Corbin, 1976; Hillman, 1997; Bosnak, 2007). Felt senses and felt images reflect the subtleties of currently lived relatedness. Therefore, all process phenomena are unique to the moment. Accessing this depth creates many partial experiential mismatches with existing emotional learnings because what is arising freshly in the unfolding process of the present moment never exactly matches existing structurally consolidated emotional learnings, which exist at the Depth of Parts. Process phenomena are only accessible in real-time in the present moment.
3. *The Depth of Presence* – The hallmark of experience at this depth is the sense of innate wholeness and completeness. Presence is a field of awareness that can manifest as various virtuous qualities, for example, acceptance, contact, courage, equanimity, generosity, intelligence, intimacy, joy, kindness, love, passion, peace, perseverance, strength, trust, and value (Almaas, 2008). Accessing this depth usually creates complete experiential mismatches as the prevailing sense of ego deficiency is contrasted to the sense of innate capacity and sufficiency experienced at this depth. Like the Depth of Process, qualities of presence at this depth can only be accessed in the present moment within the sense of oneself as a field of conscious awareness.
4. *The Depth of Nonduality* – Experience at this depth is of non-separate and entirely unconditioned awareness (Fenner, 2007). In every way, experience at this depth contradicts and therefore mismatches with emotional learnings consolidated at the Depth of Parts where separation is experienced. This is the depth of profound spiritual realizations of unity consciousness and the domain of the deepest unfoldment of human development.

Largely speaking, mainstream culture only recognizes the Depth of Parts and remains unaware of deeper depths and therefore of the phenomenon of depth itself. However, these depths are empirically observable in various brain wave patterns using an electroencephalogram (EEG) (Wise, 2002). According to tests conducted using an EEG machine called the Mind Mirror 6.0:

1. *The Depth of Parts* corresponds to high amplitude beta waves.

2. *The Depth of Process* corresponds to high amplitude theta waves.
3. *The Depth of Presence* corresponds to high amplitude and hemispherically synchronized gamma waves.
4. *The Depth of Nonduality* corresponds to high amplitude delta waves.

Alpha waves act to relax ego parts and form a bridge from the Depth of Parts into the Depth of Process.

Psychological and spiritual development is not a journey from the shallows to the depths. Rather, it is a journey of consciously inhabiting more and more of one's depth. Initial EEG studies have indicated that *Aletheia Coaching* supports clients in cultivating what Anna Wise (2002) calls the "awakened mind" brain wave pattern which offers synergistic access to all four depths simultaneously.

Four Methods Integrated into One Method

With the Four Depths as an integrative framework, I began to experiment with ways of integrating the methods I had learned. To start with, I named exemplars for the development work at each depth from the methods that I knew, as follows:

1. *Parts Work* – Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2019).
2. *Process Work* – Focusing (Gendlin, 2007).
3. *Presence Work* – The Diamond Approach¹ (Almaas, 2008).
4. *Nondual Work* – Vajrayana Buddhism, especially Mahamudra (Brown, 2006) and contemporary non-affiliated nondual teachings (Fenner, 2007; Blackstone, 2007).

In their original forms, these methods were framed using different ontological commitments, different languages, and divergent practices. To create *Aletheia Coaching*, I had to integrate these exemplars into a unified view and a unified method or practice.

The essential structure of each method, no matter which depth it operates at, is a three-part gesture: 1) inquiring, 2) unfolding, and 3) enacting. I discovered that these three gestures had a unique way of functioning at each depth. From this, I articulated the twelve unfolding moments which incorporate the essential methods of the exemplars for each depth.

¹ I list the Diamond Approach as my exemplar for Presence Work. Unlike the other exemplars which generally specialize in one depth and either ignore the others or reframe the others in terms of the depth they specialize at, the Diamond Approach addresses all four depths, although not explicitly.

<u>The Four Depths</u>	<u>Aletheia Coaching</u>	<u>Inquiring</u>	<u>Unfolding</u>	<u>Enacting</u>
Depth of Parts	Parts Work	<i>Identifying</i>	<i>Disidentifying</i>	<i>Loving/Valuing</i>
Depth of Process	Process Work	<i>Contacting</i>	<i>Being-with</i>	<i>Feeling-Saying</i>
Depth of Presence	Presence Work	<i>Beholding</i>	<i>Being-Wholeness</i>	<i>Unfolding-Completeness</i>
Depth of Nonduality	Nondual Work	<i>Awakening</i>	<i>Realizing</i>	<i>Illuminating</i>

Figure 2: The Twelve Unfolding Moments of Aletheia Coaching

The method of *Aletheia Coaching* is inspired by these exemplars yet doesn't exactly implement any of them in their original forms. The result is an original method that integrates know-how and wisdom from each exemplar in a form that creates a seamless integration of four methods, Parts Work, Process work, Presence Work, and Nondual Work, into one method, *Aletheia Coaching*.

It is common for the coach and client to access two or three depths in a single coaching conversation. Using *Aletheia Coaching*, the transition between depths and ways of working is rarely noticed by clients. With this method, the coach has a skillful way to artfully lead and follow the client's exploration of their direct experience in a way that reactivates existing emotional learnings, easily creates experiential mismatches, and generates new learnings that erase and/or edit them, powerfully supporting the client's deepening development in an effortlessly enduring way.

Each of the twelve unfolding moments is an expression of a particular quality of presence. In the mature form of practice, as more and more qualities of presence are unconcealed and embodied, the method becomes an unfolding of presence by presence itself, rather than a series of methodological steps the coach and client take. When this occurs, the client's development undergoes a kind of quickening that accelerates ego transformation.

Deepening into the Depth of Nonduality occurs more rarely than experiences of the three shallower depths. Nevertheless, it is important to include this depth within the range of the method and coach training because clients can spontaneously drop into Nondual states in this style of coaching. This has been repeatedly demonstrated by coaches in the *Aletheia Advanced Coaching Program*, even including coaches at Level 1.

Development Unfolds through Working with Vertical Threads

What is the relationship between depth and development? Development is never a linear process. Typically, there are several concurrent and overlapping *threads of unfoldment* that are active at a given point in life. There are two kinds of threads:

- 1) ***Horizontal or historical threads*** – A pattern of reoccurring challenges that are woven throughout the life history of the client starting in childhood and are revisited from time to time in adulthood. Often these are threads of self-care, money, career, intimacy, family, friendship, community and belonging, values, ethics, purpose and meaning, and threads of identity and reality, which ultimately touch on spirituality. Naturally, we tend

to recognize horizontal threads in the presenting issues that clients bring to coaching.

- 2) **Vertical threads** – A pattern formed as a cross-section of the Four Depths where a constellation of Parts, at the Depth of Parts, is attempting to over-compensate for the assumed absence of a particular quality of presence, at the Depth of Presence or a particular Nondual quality, at the Depth of Nonduality. These qualities are assumed absent because these depths only exist in the background for the client where they remain unaware of the resources they contain.

Horizontal and vertical threads are woven together. Clients continue to suffer from a history of reoccurring struggles – a horizontal thread – because the vertical depth work required to resolve it remains incomplete or entirely unaddressed. Until the client can drop into the Depth of Presence and recover the lost sense of their innate wholeness as a particular quality of presence, a constellation of parts will continue to try to over-compensate for that loss. Ironically, the history of struggles the client suffers is often a negative unintended side-effect of this compensatory strategy. Therefore, until the client recovers the sense and embodiment of their actual resourcefulness as presence, parts of them will continue to try to over-compensate for that loss and continue to re-create and repeat their history of struggling.

In my view, the primary job of the developmental coach is to help the client locate and complete the vertical depth work implied by the pattern of reoccurring struggles they experience throughout their life. This occurs naturally in *Aletheia Coaching* as the coach and client practice Parts Work, Process Work, Presence Work, and Nondual Work. Enduring transformations unfold through the reactivation of past emotional learnings, in the form of constellations of parts, the generation of experiential mismatches, and the creation of new learnings through accessing deeper depths where innate resourcefulness, creativity, and adaptive brilliance can be integrated and embodied. As the client deepens their self-contact, unconcealing and embodying various qualities of presence, they develop both psychologically and spiritually. As a general pattern, as clients develop, they consciously inhabit and embody more and more of their depth.

Let's look at an example of this. The client doesn't feel seen and appreciated for the value that they bring. They struggle in romantic relationships and at work because they don't feel seen and valued. They have a constellation of protector parts with various strategies for sensing what others want and value. In turn, these parts act like shapeshifters to constantly reposition the client so that they are more valued and seen by others. Sometimes this works yet not often enough. The client still frequently feels hurt because they don't feel valued. And, constantly triangulating to be more seen and valued by others is exhausting. With some exploration, it is easy to discover that the client has felt this very struggle throughout their childhood, with one or both parents, throughout their school years, with some teachers and friends, and now into their adult years with romantic partners, friends, and their managers at work. Here we can see the contour of recurring struggles that compose a horizontal or historical thread.

In a horizontal thread, the client senses an inner self-deficiency, in this case, a lack of self-worth and innate value, and tries to compensate by taking action in the outer world to get what is missing from others. This pattern, which can be either conscious or unconscious to the client, is visible in every horizontal thread, no matter what quality of presence it is anchored in. As you can see, in this case, the client various protector parts that focus on creating value for others so that they will be valued in return.

What remains unexplored is the client's inner experience of this pattern and the feelings that underlie it. Working with the vertical thread proceeds through practicing Parts Work, Process Work, Presence Work, and Nondual Work. The coach and client work inwardly to investigate and explore the client's experience of not feeling valued. As the client drops into deeper contact, they become more aware of the pattern of parts underlying their recurring struggles with value at the Depth of Parts. Then, as these parts release, they drop into the Depth of Process where they feel what it is like to be in their current relationships in a fresh, precise, and very alive way. Finally, as they follow the flow of process and drop into the Depth of Presence, they recover a sense of their innate wholeness and experience a sense of their innate value. Here they realize that they are valuable simply by being who they are rather than only be valued by what they do for others. The journey of working through a vertical thread creates many experiential mismatches, opening the memory reconsolidation window, where new ways of being are embodied and consolidated, effortlessly generating enduring transformation.

Memory Reconsolidation and *Aletheia Coaching*

Aletheia Coaching is based on the premise that essentially, we all have what it takes, at depth, to effectively navigate the complexity of our lives. However, our past emotional learnings have often convinced us that we lack what is needed, either partially or completely. Our emotional learnings frequently obscure knowledge of our innate capacities and block their embodiment and utilization. This explains how we come to believe that we lack what is needed.

The method of *Aletheia Coaching* utilizes memory reconsolidation to erase and edit these emotional learnings and help clients experience and embody their innate resourcefulness, creativity, and adaptive brilliance. Through this, clients unfold and develop. They become able to navigate the complex situations they face in work, relationships, health, and in life overall with greater skill, effectiveness, and fulfillment.

Since it originated in 2013, *Aletheia Coaching* has evolved to maximize the potential for the client's unfoldment and development during a coaching conversation. This is accomplished through observing blockages to the natural process of deepening unfoldment, skillfully releasing them, and guiding the client into deeper levels of self-contact and presence where they can experience and embody their innate resourcefulness, creativity, and brilliance.

Throughout this practice, memory reconsolidation is utilized in several synergistic ways. This method creates the context for memory reconsolidation through:

- Establishing self-unfolding as the aim for coaching engagements and conversations.
- Attuning to real-time experience through a love of truth, beauty, and goodness for its own sake.
- Working in real-time in the present moment with what is arising in direct experience somatically, emotionally, cognitively, relationally, and spiritually.
- Leveraging the paradox of change through the core principle of letting be, letting unfold.

Each of these is detailed below. Furthermore, the method of *Aletheia Coaching* fulfills the brain's conditions for memory reconsolidation through:

- Leveraging the emergent properties of complex systems, including the natural process of unfolding expressed by all living organisms, including human beings.
- Utilizing a seamless integration of Parts Work, Process Work, Presence Work, and Nondual Work which reactivates existing emotional learning and generates new experiences that produce partial or complete mismatches and creates new emotional learnings.
- Designing integrative micro-practices for clients to perform during the memory reconsolidation window to create new emotional learnings based on a direct experience and embodiment of resource states.

A complete description of the *Aletheia Coaching* methodology is beyond the scope of this article. However, I will introduce the core concepts and offer an edited and annotated transcript of an actual coaching conversation in which the method and its application of memory reconsolidation are illustrated.

Self-improvement vs. Self-unfoldment Coaching

Broadly speaking, coaching methodologies fall into two categories: self-improvement methods and self-unfoldment methods. The characteristic question at the heart of self-improvement methods is "What is missing?" In self-improvement coaching, the coach's job is to pinpoint what skills and/or ways of being are missing. This lack of capacity explains why and how the client is struggling. The coach makes an assessment of what's missing and then designs a development plan that includes various topics of study and practice to help the client develop the missing capacities.

Self-improvement coaching frequently relies on counteractive practices that work to overcome existing emotional learning and create new emotional learning. As named above, counteractive approaches don't meet the brain's conditions for memory reconsolidation. Results from self-improvement coaching are heavily dependent on the client's adherence to the development plan and practice schedule, which is often undermined by existing emotional learnings and habits of behavior. In addition, by only countering but not editing or erasing existing emotional learning, clients will often experience relapses driven by existing emotional learning that persists.

If I sought coaching in my mid-20s as I entered my professional career, a self-improvement-styled coach might have said I was missing self-confidence and self-worth. Indeed, this was so. A likely development plan might have included finding groups where I felt safe enough to speak up and share my ideas so that I could build more confidence in my value. Of course, such a practice would counteract my tendency to not speak up in groups. It is highly likely I would be scared to practice this and struggle to follow the development plan created by my coach. I might have tried speaking up in a limited way and perhaps experienced some success mixed with relapses into well-worn patterns of behavior. Experiencing such mixed results would probably reinforce my sense that something in me was missing. Although self-improvement initiatives are well intended, they can backfire in exactly this way.

The provocative question posed in self-unfoldment coaching is “What if nothing is missing?” Naturally, this is not a question about the client’s skillfulness. Anyone can lack certain skills. I’m not very good, for example, at slam dunks in basketball. Instead, this is a question about the client’s wholeness as a human being. Very frequently, clients come to coaching with a sense of self-deficiency. Indeed, this often inclines them toward self-improvement which 1) doesn’t erase or edit existing emotional learning, 2) evokes the resistance of existing emotional learnings, 3) often creates relapses, and 4) which then reinforce the sense of self-deficiency. Self-unfoldment methods offer a powerful alternative.

From the outset, self-unfoldment coaching predisposes the client to make fresh discoveries about their innate resourcefulness, creativity, and brilliance during the coaching conversation. This approach meets the brain’s conditions for memory reconsolidation and thereby generates sustained transformations in the client’s way of being in a way that doesn’t depend on the client’s adherence to a development plan or practice schedule.

Aletheia Coaching establishes self-unfoldment as the aim for coaching engagements and conversations, as illustrated in the transcript below.

Leveraging the Emergence of Complex Systems

In *Aletheia Coaching*, we view the client as a complex being who lives embedded within layers of additional complex systems (e.g., family, team, organization, culture, etc.). As complexity scientist Dave Snowden (2021) has shown, navigating complex systems is challenging because cause and effect relationships are only knowable retrospectively. That is, when faced with a complex situation, we don’t know exactly what action to take to shift from where we are to where we want to be. Instead, we can only answer the question “How did I get here?” This fact puts yet another nail in the coffin of self-improvement approaches.

The general strategy, when faced with complexity, is to experiment or probe the system, observe your success or failure, amplify what seems to be working, and dampen what is not working in your next experiment. We experiment by re-purposing existing capabilities, which unfold and emerge through successive experiments. This is a process that Snowden calls “exaptation” (Snowden et al., 2021).

Aletheia Coaching adopts an agile framework (Sutherland, 2019) which focuses coaching conversations on addressing the inner impediments the client experiences as they work toward fulfilling their goals and addressing their concerns. As clients work with and through the impediments they encounter, they build new skills and develop new ways of being that enable them to be more effective and more fulfilled in work and life. As more impediments are addressed through the coaching engagement, clients are more able to fulfill their goals and/or to update their goals as an expression of the unfoldment and self-development they are experiencing.

The Fundamental Attunement of *Aletheia Coaching*: Loving Truth, Beauty, and Goodness for its own sake

According to philosopher Martin Heidegger, we are always attuned to our experience in one way or another (Heidegger, 1962). How we are attuned determines how things matter as we address our everyday concerns. What we experience of the world is not raw sense data but things and entities that are useful, harmful, fascinating, messy, appealing, attractive, repulsive, etc. Shaped by our way of attuning, we encounter people, places, things, and paths that are already value-laden.

Historically speaking, there have been many different ways of attuning to our world. The prevailing attunement in our present-day world is a technological attunement (Heidegger, 1977). According to Heidegger, the phenomenon of technology displays itself as a capacity standing in reserve, waiting to be used. Consider your parked car right now, assuming you are not driving it while you are reading this. It is a capacity standing in reserve waiting for you to use it.

We live in a technology-centric world. Heidegger's concern, which every coach would be wise to adopt, is that attuning to the world in this way has people show up as technology. We stop viewing an employee as a human being and instead see them as a Level 2 Software Engineer. An even more everyday example is how we see grocery store clerks, waiters, and waitresses, or other drivers on the road as capacities rather than as human beings. In this view, we see people as possessing or lacking capabilities and capacities, as being efficient or inefficient, as operating optimally or in need of optimization, and as working correctly or being broken. Perhaps the most emotionally painful instance of this is how, in this technological way of attuning, we experience ourselves more as technology and less as a human being. Often, we see ourselves as deficient and in need of improvements and performance enhancements. Indeed, the style of self-improvement coaching discussed above follows from this attunement. Some methodologies for self-improvement even claim to be "transformational technology."

Heidegger feared that this technological attunement was concealing what it truly is to be human. In this way of attuning, we no longer view ourselves or others as being loving, kind, compassionate, courageous, steadfast, or virtuous in any way. And yet, these and other human virtues help us to face and navigate through complex situations. Indeed, the very complexity we face in today's fast-paced world is a clarion call for such virtues.

Heidegger's suggested remedy to the technological attunement is to cultivate a poetic attunement alongside it (Heidegger, 1975). Attuning poetically to our world discloses the essential truth, beauty, and goodness of our humanity and of life itself. It transports us into a mood of wonder and awe at our potential for being. This is precisely the attunement that creates the conditions for creating experiential mismatches and leveraging memory reconsolidation in the process of supporting the development of our clients.

In *Aletheia Coaching*, the coach and client are attuned by a love of truth, beauty, and goodness for its own sake². This way of attuning creates the conditions for deepening unfolding and automatically directs the focus of the coaching conversation towards generating fresh experiences for the client, easily creating mismatches with past emotional learnings thus opening the memory reconsolidation window where those learnings can be either erased or edited.

The Core Principle of *Aletheia Coaching*: Letting Be, Letting Unfold

Mostly we don't let things be. Instead, we try to grasp, manipulate, control, improve, fix, enhance, correct, change, transform, or develop what arises in our experience. In some cases, we even try to keep change from happening. And we do this for good and well-intentioned reasons. Yet, as a result, we don't fully receive what is given in our experiences. Unfolding proceeds somewhat paradoxically from letting things be and letting them unfold.

At first glance, it may seem that nothing changes if you let things be. However, the opposite is true when it comes to inner experiences. If during a coaching conversation, the client starts to feel sad, their experience will unfold by simply letting the sadness be, by simply being with it, and feeling it. Usually, within a minute or two, the sadness will have passed, and the client will be in touch with something else.

This principle is an application of the paradox of change, a principle in use within Gestalt therapy (Beisser, 2006). According to this paradox, if we approach a part of ourselves with an agenda to change it, we evoke that part's resistance to this change. You can see this at work in counteractive approaches which the parts being counteracted often resist. Not surprisingly, this resistance expresses existing emotional learnings despite the client's rational understanding of the need to change behavior. However, according to this paradox, if we approach a part of ourselves with no agenda to change it but a genuine interest in understanding and appreciating it exactly as it is, then what reliably follows is some form of life-affirming change, usually in the form of that part relaxing and releasing.

² Why do we adopt this attunement for its own sake? Because if we adopted it for the sake of producing any particular outcome, then we have reverted back into the technological attunement. For example, if we love truth, beauty, and goodness for the sake of uncovering innate virtues and resources to improve our ability to navigate the complexity we face then we have created a technology for doing so. It is important to remember that the technological attunement obscures the wonder of being human. If our aim in the coaching conversation is to help our clients discover their own truth, beauty, and goodness, then we need a poetic attunement.

Putting this core principle into action, by itself, repeatedly creates experiential mismatches with existing emotional learnings as you can see illustrated below in the transcript.

Overview of an *Aletheia Coaching* Conversation

In *Aletheia Coaching*, a typical coaching conversation starts with the client naming an impediment they are struggling with. The coach and client uncover and explore the emotional truths surfaced by the impediment. The conversation proceeds by working with these emotional truths in a way that naturally unfolds one or more resource states. The coach helps the client to embody and integrate these resource states during the conversation and by offering integrating micro-practices for the client to perform following the coaching conversation.

At the start of the conversation, naming and exploring the emotional truths surfaced by the impediment reactivates the target for reconsolidation. As the conversation proceeds, the client unfolds and experiences themselves in fresh ways in the present moment that create powerful experiential mismatches, thus opening the memory reconsolidation window. Throughout the coaching conversation, the client deepens their self-contact which usually evokes a resource state. In *Aletheia Coaching*, these resource states are called qualities of presence. Qualities of presence are virtues that support the client in navigating the complexity of their life and work in more effective ways. Some qualities of presence include acceptance, contact, courage, equanimity, generosity, intelligence, intimacy, joy, kindness, love, passion, peace, perseverance, strength, trust, value. My understanding of qualities of presence is inspired by the Diamond Approach (Almaas, 2008).

At the end of the coaching conversation, the coach designs one or more integrating micro-practices for the client to perform during the five-hour memory reconsolidation window. The conversation often concludes by exploring how these newly discovered inner resources can be applied in situations where the client previously experienced inner impediments.

This process is repeated, conversation after conversation, throughout a coaching engagement that commonly lasts six-to-twelve months. In a typical coaching engagement, clients will directly experience and embody three to six qualities of presence. Because the emotional learnings that blocked access to these innate resource states have been erased or significantly edited, clients can integrate these resource states as new emotional learnings which form the basis of new ways of being and responses to life. Emotional learnings that have been erased or edited are no longer available to be triggered.

An Example Coaching Conversation

The following is an actual coaching conversation between George (not his real name) and me, conducted in April 2021 via video conference. George is an HR business partner who supports several leaders within his organization. I have known and been working with George for the previous six months.

I have slightly edited the conversation for brevity and also made annotations to illustrate how *Aletheia Coaching* integrates memory reconsolidation. It is impossible to capture everything that unfolds in a coaching conversation in a transcript. There are pauses, especially as we work in real-time and let what arises unfold. I have indicated the most significant pauses, where significant inner shifts are occurring.

The transcript picks up the conversation after George and I checked in with each other and he briefly named the topic he wanted to focus on.

George: There is a high level of stress from a lot of the leaders that I'm working with. They are feeling a lot of pressure. We've shifted to all working remotely in the past year. And this was an organization that had a lot of fun in the workplace and a lot of great strong connection time. There's a lot less of that. There's a lot more powering through now. And what triggered me earlier this week was a leader that I support who is burning out. I found myself going into rescuer mode, like I need to save him. I need to save all of these leaders that are burning out. And then I'm watching myself in the drama triangle being the rescuer.

Comment: He names the impediment he's experiencing right now as a rescuer part that has been triggered at work. Responding as a rescuer in certain situations expresses his existing emotional learning. We are starting this conversation at the Depth of Parts and therefore practicing Parts Work.

Steve: What do you know about this rescuer part?

George: This rescuer part is just out of breath, almost having a panic attack. Which is something I've had in the past. This part is saying, "I can't, I just can't, I can't." It's trying to save everybody, but it also knows that it can't, it also knows that it's unable to.

Steve: What if you took a few deep breathes here? Can you be with this part for now?

Comment: He has contact with this part, it seems, and I am inviting him to be with it in real-time.

George: [long pause with some deep breathing] It is starting to catch its breath. It is breathing with me. And I am starting to understand that it feels the need to rescue. That's how this rescuer part feels valuable by saving other people by supporting other people.

Steve: This part tries to rescue others because it is really trying to help you feel valuable? Is that what you understand?

George: Yeah, totally.

Steve: You seem to have good contact with this rescuer part. Is that right?

Comment: He is sharing what he is starting to understand about the part. I invite him back into relational contact with the part where an experiential mismatch becomes possible. Only knowing about emotional learnings does not create an experiential mismatch.

George: Yeah.

Steve: How do you notice the contact? Do you feel the part in your body, feel it emotionally, seen an image of the part in your mind's eye, hear its voice, or maybe something else?

George: My heartbeat picked up.

Steve: That's good noticing. So you notice the presence of this part because your heartbeat picked up. What else do you notice that has you feel in contact with this part?

George: Heat.

Steve: Heat? Yeah, I can see you taking your jacket off there. Is there anything else?

George: And a tightness in the top of my chest and at the bottom of my throat.

Comment: While saying this, he placed his hand at his throat. I'm asking these questions to support him in establishing strong contact with this part.

Steve: So right there where your hand is, yeah, there's a tightness that's right there. And is it okay to be with this tightness right now?

Comment: I asked this question because I could feel some emotion arising when George put his hand on his throat. When working in real-time with what is arising in direct experience, it is often important to check if the client can be with what is arising. In some cases, when they check, to their surprise they might realize that they can be with their emotions, even with intense emotions. In and of itself, this can create an experiential mismatch in which the client directly experiences their capacity as Presence to be with what is unfolding. In this case, he wasn't surprised.

George: Yeah, it is. There may be some emotion there, but it feels a bit more like that sense of panic. But it's okay to be with it.

Steve: Okay. So how do you feel toward this part right now?

Comment: I'm checking to see if George is relating to this part from Presence or from another part. If he is relating from Presence, then we can more easily create an experiential mismatch and open the memory reconsolidation window. If, on the other hand, he is relating from another part, then he is expressing another pre-existing behavior and no mismatch is created.

George: I feel like I want to rescue it.

Steve: You want to rescue the rescuer?

George: I see this part as an image of a person in my mind that is panicking, and I feel myself wanting to embrace him.

Comment: Here he is accessing an imaginal felt image at the Depth of Process. This is a common way that people experience their parts and feel their relatedness to the part in the present moment.

Steve: That's a beautiful sentiment, to really want to embrace this part, to really help this part, to hold this part.

George: But there's a change agenda there to calm him down, to rescue him, right?

Comment: George is familiar with this methodology since we have been working together for some time and immediately understands that he is relating to the rescuer part from another part that has a change agenda.

Steve: That's exactly right. It is good to acknowledge that. What if you turn to the part that wants to embrace him in order to save him and say, "I really get how you want to save him. It's a beautiful intention. And what if you just take a step back and let me be with this part for now?"

Comment: In the practice of Parts Work, the coach helps to facilitate the conversation between the client and their parts. Here I'm doing this by offering a suggestion for what he can say to this part. If the concerned part that wants to save the rescuer is willing to step back, then he can more easily be Presence with the rescuer, making an experiential mismatch more likely. Often, concerned parts are willing to step back when they feel their concerns are understood and acknowledged.

George: [long pause] Yeah. It's willing to do that.

Comment: During this long pause, I assume that George acknowledged this concerned part and asked it to step back. This is a good example of how many important shifts take place within the inner world of the client.

Steve: It's willing?

George: Yeah.

Steve: Maybe you can thank the part for being willing to give you some space.

George: [pause] Yeah, I did.

Steve: Now return your focus back to the rescuer part. Really feeling your contact with this one again, and noticing how do you feel towards this part now?

Comment: Asking, "how do you feel toward this part?" is a way of checking for Presence.

George: [pause] Still.

Steve: You feel still?

George: Yeah. Like I'm picturing myself, I'm sitting at a bit of a distance from him and kind of just watching him with some curiosity.

Steve: And do you feel like you can be with this part, from this stillness without any need to change him?

Comment: This is yet another way to check for Presence. Presence is always a capacity to be with parts, exactly as they are, with no agenda to change them.

George: Yeah.

Comment: I have now established that George is relating to his rescuer part from Presence, which has no change agenda. In this case, Presence is arising as stillness, which is very palpable in the relational field between us. The rescuer part is activated, and George is relating to him from Presence. The conditions are now set to create an experiential mismatch.

Steve: Let's check in with the part to see how he feels today. Maybe you could just ask him, "How are you feeling, right now?"

George: Yeah. [long pause] Just as I sit with it, it is starting to be able to catch its breath. That sense of panic seems to be slowly subsiding.

Steve: It's beautiful what can happen when your parts feel in relationship with you as Presence.

George: I'm not asking it to do anything either.

Comment: George likely notes this because relating to this part in this way is different from how he usually relates to his rescuer part.

Steve: That's right.

George: I think that's the thing. This part believes that people have so many expectations of him. Being here with no expectations of him is helping him settle.

Steve: And, you don't even have an expectation that the part needs to settle.

George: Nope.

Steve: It's as if you are saying, "I'm with you exactly as you are." Did you ask the part, "How do you feel?" And did the part say anything to you, or did it just respond by settling? I just want to be clear.

Comment: Because much of what unfolds occurs in the client's inner world, it is necessary to ask what's happening in order to be able to track the client and facilitate the unfolding process.

George: I didn't ask him any questions. I just sat there with him.

Steve: Okay. What if you ask him and let's see if the part is willing to talk? Does he respond when you ask him, "How are you feeling right now?"

George: [long pause] He's tired.

Steve: Yeah, he's tired.

George: And he's saying, "I can't, I just can't do this."

Steve: What if you mirror this back to the part, maybe you could say something like, "I'm really feeling how tired you are and that you feel like you just can't do this."

Comment: One of the simplest ways to create an experiential mismatch is mirroring back your understanding of what the part is saying and feeling. This helps the part feel seen and empathically understood. Notice we are letting the part be as it is. However, when the part feels seen and understood, predictably it will release and unfold. This helps the client drop into deeper self-contact within the four depths where mismatches are easily created.

George: [pause] It's just kind of nodding back at me.

Steve: Yeah. It's acknowledging that.

Steve: If I was tracking, it sounds like, you know what the deeper job of this part is already. This is the part that's working really hard to help you feel valuable. Is that right?

George: Yeah. This is the part that says, "This is what I need to do to add value. This is what I need to do to be valuable. This is what I'm here to do. Right? Like I'm here to support them."

Steve: Do you feel any appreciation for how this part is trying to help you feel valued?

George: Yeah. Absolutely!

Steve: It's an important job. [pause] What if you express your appreciation to him? You might say, "I notice just how hard you're working to help me feel valuable, to be valuable, and I really appreciate you for that."

George: [long pause] He really appreciates that recognition. He's feeling more relaxed now.

Steve: Yeah, that's beautiful.

Comment: Here we see the paradox of change in action. By relating to this part in an accepting, loving, and appreciative way, the part spontaneously changed by relaxing. If we had told the part, for instance, to stop trying to rescue people, it probably would have felt misunderstood and resisted.

Steve: This part has let us know that there's another part of you, a hurt part, that remembers what it feels like to not feel valuable, to feel worthless. Does that feel true? That there is such a part?

George: Yeah. [pause] There's a very clear hurt part that's coming to mind that I have seen before. That I've been with before.

Steve: Yeah?

George: And I feel like I've done work with him before, but that hurt is still there. [pause] He's, he's right there. That's very evident right now. It's a very younger version of me, this elementary school version of me. A seven- or eight-year-old version of me. I have a specific image in mind sitting on the bench in gym class and always being last to be picked. I wasn't good at sports. Wasn't good at any of that stuff. And I wasn't sure if I was good at being one of the boys. I wasn't sure if I was good at being one of the girls, but I was supposed to play with the boys. I would try and play sports, but that didn't work. Where am I valuable? Am I valuable? What am I talented at? For a long time that was so unclear to me for most of the vast majority of my life. Like, I don't have a talent. I'm not good at something.

Comment: Every protector part is trying to protect us from accessing a hurt part. We worked with the rescuer part, which is a protector part. Now we are starting to work with the hurt part who remembers how much it hurt emotionally to have these questions about his value.

Steve: That must have really been confusing ... and disorienting and hurtful.

George: Yeah. [pause] And that is masked with trying to constantly add value.

Steve: Right. Trying to add value is a really positive intention. And in fact, it's even something you've been hired to do. So you can see that even taking up this job, it's sort of a setup for this part to come along and say, "Okay, I'm the one that's been hired. I'm one, that's going to do this job."

George: Yeah. And it's gotten a lot of recognition along the way externally. So continuing to say, "We'll keep doing that. You're doing it well, so just keep doing it." I've had career progression because of it. So I guess that's what I should just keep doing. And I also see that it doesn't serve me in, in other ways.

Comment: George is developing a deeper understanding of his rescuer part and why his job is such a trigger for it. This is important to recognized and I want to get back into contact with the hurt part where we can again move toward creating an experiential mismatch.

Steve: And this part is exhausted and tired and feels like it's got a job that is really hard. [pause] So it feels to me like you already have some contact now with this hurt part. Is that true?

George: The hurt part is very, very present for me right now.

Steve: How do you feel this contact? Do you sense it in your body, feel its emotion, see an image?

George: Again, it is right there in my throat. And I just see this younger version of myself sitting alone on the bench and not really knowing what to do.

Comment: When practicing Aletheia Coaching, I often find clients report activation of emotional armoring in the cervical segment when contacting the pain of not feeling valued. There seems to be a deep connection between value and voice. Given this, I am curious to explore what he feels in his throat.

Steve: What is it that you feel in your throat right there?

George: [pause] There's sadness.

Steve: Yeah. Is it okay to feel that sadness?

George: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steve: What if you just take a few breaths and just feel this? How is that for you?

George: [long pause] It's okay. I can be with it.

Steve: Yeah. I really feel that.

Steve: [long pause] How do you feel towards this part? This hurt part?

Comment: Now I'm checking for Presence with the hurt part.

George: [pause] I feel sad for him.

Steve: Yeah?

George: I feel sad for him. And at the same time when I've seen this hurt part before I also have another really beautiful memory or a thought that is very soothing for this hurt part, and not necessarily that I'm trying to rescue him. [pause] There's something my mother used

to say and still says about me, that she always saw me as a very sweet caring boy, and that was just in my nature. [pause] When I offered that to this hurt part, when I've worked with him in the past, it felt like such a relief to him that like, "Oh, I don't need to be good at the sports? I don't need to do this. I don't need to be good at this. You're saying I can just be a sweet caring boy? That's okay? That in itself is enough?" And just offering him that again, he gets off the bench and he goes to chat with some of the other kids.

Comment: Here you can see an experiential mismatch beginning to arise. The hurt part felt he was not valuable, yet he is also a sweet caring boy, which expresses his value, his preciousness. I want to bring this from an idea into a felt experience in order to create the mismatch experientially.

Steve: That's beautiful. But I want to back you up a step and actually invite you to be that care towards him.

George: If I can offer him that sweet caringness?

Steve: Yeah, for you as Presence, to be an embodiment of this sweet care. [pause] Can you feel that this sadness that you feel as you come into contact with his pain, his hurt, comes because you really care. [pause] Can you feel that?

George: Yeah. I have this image of this care being like a pink blanket. It kind of just envelops him.

Steve: Yeah. Right. [long pause] So let's try to get into a conversation with him. To start with, what if you ask, "How are you feeling right now?" And just listen.

George: [long pause] So he feels alone.

Steve: He feels alone.

George: And as I say that there's another heartbeat that picks up ... that aloneness is definitely a fear.

Steve: Yeah. So what if you ask him, "How does it feel to be here with me right now?" Because in this moment he's actually not alone. You're here. What's that like for him?

Comment: The part feels alone. This is very common for hurt parts who are mostly kept out of conscious awareness by the actions of protector parts. However, this part is not actually alone right now. George is here with him and I'm also here. I am attempting to evoke a mismatch and have the part actually notice that he is not really alone. This offers a good example of how vitally important it is to create the mismatch experientially instead of just rationally.

George: [long pause] He says it feels okay.

Steve: It feels okay. [pause] So maybe you could ask this part, “What do you want me to understand about how it is for you?”

Comment: This hurt part has been reactivated. Now we have an opportunity to create another mismatch by allowing this part to feel seen, understood, and loved for exactly as it is.

George: [long pause] He's confused. He's telling me he's confused. He's telling me he doesn't know what to do.

Steve: Okay.

George: Should he get up and try playing sports, even though he doesn't really want to, and he didn't really like it? But it'll help him fit in? Or should he go play with the girls, but then maybe he'll be made fun of, and he doesn't really fit in there either. So he's confused. He doesn't know what to do.

Steve: Confused, yeah. What if you mirror that back? Maybe you could say something like, “I really understand how confused you feel.”

George: [pause] Yeah.

Steve: How does he respond to you when you say that?

George: He's just kind of nodding his head.

Comment: I'm taking this to mean that the part feels that its confusion is seen and understood.

Steve: Okay. Yeah. Maybe you could ask once more? “What else do you want me to understand about how it is for you?”

George: [long pause] That it's sad, that it's lonely that it's confusing.

Steve: So again, mirroring that back “I really get how sad and lonely and confusing it is for you.” [pause] How does he respond when you mirror that?

George: He's still sitting there on the bench kind of squirming not really knowing what to do.

Steve: Okay. What if you asked him, “If you didn't need to be the one that was sad and confused and lonely, who would you rather be? What would you rather do? It's totally up to you.”

George: [long pause] What I hear him say is like, “I just want to go play.”

Steve: Right, he just wants to go play. How does that sound to you? That he wants to go play?

George: Go ahead. Do it, of course. Right?

Steve: Maybe you can say, "You have my full support. Go play."

George: [pause] Emotion came up there.

Steve: Something's touching about that.

George: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Comment: This part feels lonely, confused, and sad. He doesn't know what to do or who to be. George says, "You have my full support. Go play." This feeling of support creates an experiential mismatch for this part. Feeling this support is emotionally touching.

Steve: What's happening with him?

George: [pause] He doesn't feel alone right now.

Steve: Beautiful. Yeah.

George: He's smiling. He's less scared. He's comforted by that.

Steve: [long pause] What if you let him know that you'll come back? Let him know that you will come back in another hour or two and check in with him.

Comment: The work with the rescuer part and the hurt part is complete enough for now. I want to shift attention back to George's sense of himself. But first, by suggesting to George that he let the part know he will come back to check in in a few hours, I am setting the context for an integrating micro-practice for him to practice during the five-hour memory reconsolidation window. I'll name this at the end of the coaching conversation.

George: [pause] Yeah. He'd like that.

Steve: Beautiful. And now just take a few deep breaths in sense, your whole body. Just drop into your felt sense. What do you notice is here right now?

Comment: Up to this point we have largely worked at the Depth of Parts using Parts Work. The two parts that we worked with have unfolded somewhat. This usually frees the client to make deeper contact with himself, which can create additional experiential mismatches. By inviting George to take a few deep breathes and sense his whole body to notice what felt senses are here now. This invites him to drop into the Depth of Process. Where we go from here will depend on what he has contact with.

George: There continues to be a feeling in my throat and feeling my heart, but this time with some softness.

Comment: My sense has been growing stronger since the beginning of the conversation that George is working through a vertical thread rooted in Unconditional Love, a particular quality of presence that I know well. The conversation has also touched into a vertical thread rooted in Innate Value. Phenomenologically, Unconditional Love arises as a felt sense of a kind of sweet soft fluffy delicacy that feels like a deeply appreciative kind of love, unconditionally appreciative in fact. George spoke about being a sweet caring boy. He embodied this sweetness and care in how he was with his parts, especially the hurt part. When I ask him to check his felt sense, this softness is an aspect of what he feels. I want to mirror back the softness and invite him to follow this thread deeper.

Steve: What is it like if you really just feel into this softness?

George: [long pause] The lump in my throat and my heartbeat picking up doesn't seem as threatening as it was before. Yeah, there's no threat there. There's a comfort. I'm picturing myself falling into like a bunch of pillows and duvets. [pause] Like I can be held by it.

Steve: Yeah. Can you feel in this moment, in this softness, in this holding, it's like, there's this sort of fluffiness? This fluffy holding is soft and delicate.

George: And there's also some strength.

Comment: George is right. The feeling of Unconditional Love as a quality of presence has strength in it.

Steve: Yeah. Right.

George: [pause] Like a bed, it feels solid.

Steve: Yeah. [long pause] How are you feeling that right now?

George: Still in my throat still. It's soft. It's solid. And it's still.

Steve: Yeah. And what if you feel, this is the feeling of yourself and actually shift to first person language saying something like "I am soft and solid and still?"

Comment: We have been exploring his felt sense for only a few minutes. I already recognize Unconditional Love as a quality of presence arising in his felt experience. However, at the Depth of Process, he experiences it as a feeling that is separate from who he is and not a way that he feels himself. By inviting him to feel this felt sense as the feeling of himself, I am inviting him to collapse the subject-object duality and to feel what it is like to be this sweet fluffy softness. As he does this, he drops deeper still into the Depth of Presence where he can embody and own this quality of presence as an aspect of who he is. This creates yet another experiential mismatch. At the start of the conversation, George was feeling overwhelmed by needing to support his leaders at work. A part of him was saying, "I can't do it." There was a sense of self-deficiency.

As we drop into the Depth of Presence, he will feel whole, complete, and sufficient. This time the mismatch is deeper and more complete. He is not just reconsolidating his memories from not being picked for sports teams when he was 7 or 8. Now he is reconsolidating his sense of self. This is the most important outcome of Aletheia Coaching.

George: [long pause] There's a felt sense of just wanting to lay back in it.

Steve: So that might actually be something that you could do as an integrating experiment. Right after we're done here, if you can organize it in your life to just go lay down on your bed or something. Something where there's a way that you can really just sink into support. Release and let go into it.

Comment: We are nearing the end of the conversation and George just named a great micro-practice that he can do within the reconsolidation window. I take the opportunity to name that here.

George: And I'm finding myself even doing that now just on the couch and just like sinking back into it and sinking back into these pillows. And there's a comfort there.

Steve: It's such a beautiful antidote to these parts that are working so hard and exhausted and burnt out. These parts have tremendous care. And it's a care that you can still show up in the world with. It's a really different expression of care than the rescuer kind of expression. Can you feel that?

Comment: Here is the core mismatch. The rescuer part was expressing care in a way that was tiring. To this part, caring requires taking action, expending energy to do things for other people. It is a lovely and well-intentioned gesture, however, when the needs for care become overwhelming, as they have this past year during COVID, the habitual behavior of this part wears him down. Using Parts Work, we let this pattern be and let it unfold. This allowed him to deepen his self-contact through the Depth of Process and into the Depth of Presence where he landed into an inherent and unconditional kind of care that is an expression of who he is as a human being, without the need to do anything. At this point in the conversation, I am inviting him to feel both and feel the difference.

George: [long pause] Oh, it's totally different.

Steve: Right!

George: [pause] Totally different! This is ... I'm just being with it. I'm just here. I'm hanging with it. [pause] This has an element of effortlessness. The rescuer does not feel effortless.

Steve: That's exactly right! So you're in a caring role at work. And you're a caring person. How can you be this without getting burnt out? What if the answer is coming from this place of effortlessly being care as opposed to coming from the rescuer? The rescuer has a great positive intention, but that part gets burned out.

Comment: I take the opportunity here to circle back to his work situation where he can experiment with this new way of being, with this effortless care, and without the need to prove his value through doing things for other people.

Steve: So we need to begin to wrap up this conversation. Can we shift into meta conversation here?

Comment: In an Aletheia Coaching conversation we are practicing unfolding with the client. At this point, we are shifting from focusing on what is arising in his direct experience to talk about what just unfolded. I usually reserve the last five minutes of the coaching conversation for this, which I call the meta-conversation. This is an opportunity for me to understand how this practice was for the client and to clarify micro-practices that they can do in the next five hours while the reconsolidation window is open.

George: Yeah.

Steve: So how was this for you?

George: [pause] It was very doable. I went into this conversation asking myself if I have the energy for this conversation today. But the conversation itself was natural and energizing.

Steve: Yeah. We're really not pushing against anything here. Really the practice can be effortless.

George: Yeah. It wasn't demanding for me to go through that.

Steve: It's a great lesson to learn. [pause] There are two micro-practices for you to do in the next five hours. The first is lying down, allowing yourself to relax and feeling the sweet soft care that you are. You might do this for a few minutes every hour or so. Is that doable?

George: Yes, it is.

Steve: The other integrating experiment is checking in with the hurt part in a few hours, like you said you would. You are fostering a relationship with this part. Continuing to explore what it's like for this part to play and to not feel so lonely. Ask the part how it feels and simply mirror that back in a way that the part feels seen by you.

George: Thank you, Steve.

Steve: You're welcome. The next time we meet, I want to hear what it is like for you to simply be this sweet soft care at work. What is the difference you notice, especially in your sense of value?

George: I'm excited to try it out.

Conclusion

Given the power and effectiveness of memory reconsolidation for generating sustained transformation, I predict that it will play a significant role in the future of coaching. To leverage memory reconsolidation, coaches must work in real-time with their client's direct experience. The brain's conditions for unlocking consolidated emotional learnings are not met by approaches centered on assessing clients and designing development plans that focus on counteractive practices to redirect existing responses. Such self-improvement methods are well-intentioned efforts to address apparent self-deficiencies but 1) don't erase or edit existing emotional learnings, 2) evoke resistance from existing emotional learnings, 3) frequently generate relapses into well-established patterns of behavior, and therefore 4) often unintentionally reinforce the client's sense of self-deficiency.

When the approach taken by the coach fulfills the brain's conditions for memory reconsolidation, 1) existing emotional learnings are erased or edited in an effortlessly sustained manner, 2) the activation of resistance is eliminated or substantially reduced, 3) new emotional learnings, like new ways of being, are more easily established and embodied, and 4) the client deepens their sense of innate resourcefulness, creativity, and adaptive brilliance.

Aletheia Coaching has evolved to leverage memory reconsolidation in multiple synergistic ways.

- Establishing self-unfolding as the aim for coaching engagements and conversations.
- Attuning to real-time experience through a love of truth, beauty, and goodness for its own sake.
- Working in real-time in the present moment with what is arising in direct experience somatically, emotionally, cognitively, relationally, and spiritually.
- Leveraging the paradox of change through the core principle of letting be, letting unfold.
- Leveraging the emergent properties of complex systems, including the natural process of unfolding expressed by all living organisms, including human beings.
- Utilizing a seamless integration of Parts Work, Process Work, Presence Work, and Nondual Work which reactivates existing emotional learning and generates new experiences that produce partial or complete mismatches and creates new emotional learnings.

Coaches who want to integrate memory reconsolidation into their methodology must focus coaching conversations on 1) reactivating existing emotional learnings, 2) creating experiential mismatches through fresh experiences, and 3) erasing or editing these learnings. Doing this removes the obstacles to unfolding deeper self-contact and helps the client access and embody their innate resources for navigating the complexity they face in work and life.

Author Bio

Steve March is the founder of *Aletheia* (www.integralunfolding.com) and the originator of *Aletheia Coaching*, a next-generation approach to developmental coaching. He has been

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