



**TIME TO THINK: listening
to ignite the human mind**

Nancy Kline

Cassell Illustrated 1998

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REVIEW

Attentive listening is what we did before we thought we knew it all and started jumping in with our own views, shouting 'Me! Me! I can tell you!' Now, as adults, we have to concentrate hard to recall the skill. But reading here that the Thinking Environment depends on the quality of our attention and the use of incisive questions, there is an immediate resonance for the coach-therapist: Carl Rogers meets Ms Coaching Tutor (who obviously knows Nancy Kline). And it feels like coming home, because we always knew it worked.

The book is filled with examples and anecdotes, and – most importantly – detailed explanations of the necessary structures, for example the eight aspects of a Thinking Meeting, the 10 components of the Thinking Environment etc. Kline covers many areas of our work: health, schools, politics, love relationships, families, organisations and partnerships.

The need for this way of being stems, according to Kline, from our feelings of perpetual change, fear and being out of control. She equates time to think with gaining time to live and having a tool for life. As coaches and therapists, and knowing what we do about the debilitating effects of over-arousal, it makes sense to offer clients an environment in which to release feelings and regain the ability to think for themselves, both for sorting out past blockages and for being motivated to move on. Add in Kline's incisive questions and you are set up as a coach-therapist, bucking the trend of 'expert' and powerfully enabling the client.

This is an absorbing rather than a dry read. Kline's analogies tend to stick in mind: do you have eyes joined underneath your skull by another pair of eyes, like a kind of periscope, scanning the faces of others to see what the right answer is? I know I do at times. And our schools are filled with pupils desperately following this 'fitting in' ritual. We need to think for ourselves.

Interestingly – to pull out a small section – Kline believes that virtual meetings via Skype etc can help the Thinking Environment on account of time lags and the need to flesh out our flat on-screen image with personal ideas and contributions. So Kline has obviously thought about this! She further maintains that physical tasks may become more automated and that our contribution in future may well have to be the result of what we think, not what we do.

I like the structure that supports the Thinking Environment and in particular the Timed Talk that avoids fierce confrontation. This has the potential to be hugely helpful to us in groupwork, whether coaching, counselling or consulting.

Kline's final tribute to Diana, Princess of Wales does make sense, granted the publication date one year after those events, but seems slightly anachronistic now. Back then, Diana was, says Kline, a chief example of someone creating a Thinking Environment instinctively, which reminds us of the power we hold, as individuals, to change things.

I would recommend this book as part of our CPD even if we originally read it some time ago. Revisiting the powerful basics, in the light of our growing maturity as coach-therapists, can reward us with new thoughts and applications for the concept. ■ **ELEANOR PATRICK** ■