

Experiencing The Unknowable- Nancy Kline - 05.Jan 09

Today on the Thinking Partnership Programme I suddenly said this:

The power of the Thinking Partnership Session lies in our desire to experience the unknowable. We do this in order that the unknowable can become known.

I have never thought about the Thinking Partner's expertise in quite that way. Or certainly not in quite those words. I followed with this:

As the Thinking Partner I cannot know what the Thinker is thinking or will say. And neither can they. When we recognise this fact, both of us can begin truly to discover, and thus to know, precisely what the Thinker thinks. We then, for a few moments, know the unknowable.

As 'helpers', professional and otherwise, we are instilled with the opposite message. We are told that real expertise lies in listening only long enough to be able to predict what the client is thinking and will say next and in pre-empting that (saving time, making progress) with our questions or comments. Some coaches-in-training have even been 'graded down' for 'listening too much, waiting too long to come in and really "coach."'

And as 'Thinkers' we often think we already know what we think about something before we think out loud about it. And so we decide not to have a Thinking Session. But in fact, until we think with Attention, we don't know what we think. That is because we use the generative nature of the Partner's Attention (and of the sequence of questions) to discover and develop what we think. And so the decision not to have a Thinking Session because we 'already know what we think and will say,' is self-defeating.

And the decision to 'help' by interrupting or entering with a question because we are assuming we already know what the Thinker is going to think and is to say is also self-defeating.

So, perhaps listening to the Thinker, we want to relish the experience of the unknowable. In doing so, we become the force that dissolves the unknowable-ness for a moment, allowing us both to know.

It is this decision to want to know because we don't know, to be, deep in our bones, interested in, what the Thinker thinks that distinguishes 'listening to ignite' from 'listening to reply.'

I feel there are not adequate words to say how different from usual listening this kind of presence is, this profound interest in what the Thinker will think and say next, this savouring the unknowable.

And when we interrupt or tap our mental toes, we have lost it.

When we sustain it, we catalyse transformation, almost always.