

ON TAKING BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY INTO CORPORATE CULTURE [PART 1]

A "Trends" Interview With Albert Pesso By Jan Dragin
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Due at least in part to managed care, many psychotherapists in recent years have attempted to transfer their skills into the world of business consulting. What is the potential for body psychotherapy in the corporate world?

We decided to talk to someone who has been bringing "BP to B" for a long time. In this edition of "Trends" we talk with Al Pesso, co-founder with Diane Boyden Pesso, of Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor (PBSP). Part Two of our dialogue will appear in the winter Newsletter.

NL: Business consulting isn't a new phenomenon for you, is it?

AP: No, we've been working with corporate people for about ten years now.

NL: How do you transfer PBSP, how do you introduce body psychotherapy principles, into a workplace, into the corporate environment? Especially if you're dealing at a management level?

AP: Honestly, I do pretty much what I do with everybody else. I tend to stick to what I know best. I don't adapt to the corporate 1 thing- except in a few important ways.

There are basically four points about all this. First, we start from what they're dealing with in the present. What we refer to as Microtracking™. Then we trace that information back to developmental or maturational issues that show their effect on the individuals. We begin to see how those maturational deficits impact on how they deal with stresses and problems they're confronting in the corporate world and the extra added difficulties those developmental issues have added.

Corporate environments are stressful anyway. Their old baggage puts an extra load on it. We work with an end to solving or enhancing their ability to solve corporate issues. So there's their own personal stuff in it. Which isn't very different from working with other people, in a regular therapy setting.

NL: There are so many organizational development and management consulting gurus and methodologies. Do you incorporate any of those approaches that, say, a company may be expecting to hear?

AP: The main point is: stay with what I know best. Don't step into a field that I'm a novice in. Don't change my stripes.

NL: What's the second point?

AP: The second factor is that when they get to know the work, get to understand it theoretically, they begin to see how their own basic developmental needs -- nurturing, support, limits, and so on -- are having impacts on their own corporation's behavior.

One particular corporate president thought those topics he looked at for himself were not only valid in his own personal and historical development, but in his corporate culture, too. He began communicating some of those notions to his managers. He saw his manufacturing plant as a family. He wanted a cooperatively -- rather than a competitively based place.

A lot of people did their major living in the company. He began to question, 'Did it provide a sense of place, or was it just an existence place? Was it a nurturing place? Are the people expanding, getting strokes, being recognized, valued? Are they being supported?

This executive translated what he learned in our work to his present day company and its culture and values. He taught to his managers the notion of basic needs that he learned in his own work and held seminars in just that. He found that part of the theory directly applicable.

There was focus on the need to feel protected. He asked the managers to see what they were signaling to those that reported to them, their subordinates, to see what they were doing in the categories of protection, of limits, and to assure their people that those needs were what would be attended to in the workplace.

He's been doing that for years and has been translating what he " learned in our work for at least six or seven years. He's more interested now in doing that than in managing the day to day operations.

NL: What part of your corporate work is very specifically Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor?

AP: Well, the third point is this. We found something unexpected: the value our clients realize through the PBSPTM process of MicrotrackingTM: Microtracking Present Consciousness; Witnessing Process; and Tracking Values and Attitudes by the Voice FiguresTM.

They get to know how it feels on the inside. They get to experience the witness figure saying, "I see how you feel such and such while such and such is happening." This is depending on how an individual's facial expression appears -- sadness, or whatever -- the managers know how it feels to be accurately seen in the witnessing process.

We listen for the values that come up as thoughts. For example, If a person says, "If I really showed my true feelings, I'd be in trouble," the Voice FigureTM says it back to them, "If you show your real feelings you'll be in trouble." The individual then can recognize that that statement controls their behavior.

When we Microtrack, we track the affect, their thoughts and values, to see where they arose from in history. But now these guys, back in this business setting, they begin to self track now: They register their own emotions and thoughts and it gives them a per- spective on their own processes.

The real value is, once managers get that procedure, they become incredibly better observers and listeners of their subordinates. They really see and hear, rather than simply project. They become better listeners, productive listeners. They're able to process in the immediate moment what they're working with. They become more conscious, more agile.

Last point: Having seen how their historical stuff is affecting their present -- and all kinds of theoretical maturational formulations about those dynamics -- they can now understand the foibles of their workers and know how to maneuver around them or be more clear when they see something's off. They're better able to recommend to their employees that They need to attend to certain kinds of things.

We're not training managers to become therapists. They simply become more sensitive to certain kinds of issues. We teach them what it's all about, so they have the language to communicate it. They become dispensers of that information. They pass it on.

NL: But aren't you talking about an ideal setting? Some corporate environments aren't quite that "enlightened."

AP: There is that one negative part. Being able to do this kind of work depends on the culture of the corporation. In a culture of cooperation, it's fine. In a corporate culture of competitiveness, if several people from the same corporation who are in competition with one another are in a group, that can be hairy. They won't really open and surface, because the other person will take advantage.

So the nature of the work limits the audiences you can work with. If you do choose to work with more competitively-oriented companies, you can comprise a group out of different members of different corporations, or of different divisions within the same corporation, so they don't have much contact with each other in their working lives.

Typically, these executives work hard. Their intelligence and ambition is in their favor.

NL: So go back to your first time working with business.

AP: The first time was with a man in Belgium who was a consultant, a psychologist for big corporations. I had known him 25 years ago when he was in some of my training programs. He'd pestered me for years. He said he'd organize a group.

I have to confess: it was a [I was struck by how much greater management consultant fees were than therapist's fees] I said, well, ok. He knew well enough to say, "Just do what you know."

He took care of the scouting. He did the selection process for the group. He picked several people from the same corporation, but different departments. I worked for years with him. Twice a year, we did those workshops and worked with individuals.

NL: Are you doing any PBSP trainings now just for the corporate environment?

AP: Here's what's happening: A Dutch psychiatrist, our European Director of PBSP Training, is working with a colleague in London who does a lot of corporate training. They're asking for that specifically. That effort is just starting. I'll be teaching there next year, although the first group started this year.

We're thinking of having a (PBSP) division just for the corporate world. It would have a different selection process and range of topics. Those in that training program would only be licensed to work in the corporate world.

NL: But at this point, aren't you already hitting a wave of therapists and modalities out to do the same thing? How do you differentiate yourself?

AP: There are so many people out there now in psychotherapy finding the HMOs chewing away at their lives, fed up, moving towards the business field. Most are taking courses and doing what somebody else has already started. They move off their center trying to adapt. Take what you know best and adapt and apply that rather than trying to adapt to some other shape.

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