

Marilyn Taylor's Adult learning Cycle 1987

Coaching sessions usually start in equilibrium. What happens when a coachee suddenly realises about their potentially limiting value, was they moved quickly into Disorientation. It's not a comfortable place to be for the person experiencing it. The coachee isn't expecting it and so they can become confused, anxious – or angry at the source. And in a coaching situation, the source is often initially seen as the coach as they asked the question that prompted it. In other words they get angry 'at' me rather than 'with' me.

Most people experiencing this want to get back to Equilibrium as quickly as possible – because it's more comfortable there. Furthermore, they didn't expect it, they've been caught by surprise and can feel vulnerable. If they do that, they 'short circuit' the model (by missing out the Exploration stage), and gain no learning.

This is the point at which the coach needs to support the individual, help them with their self-esteem and work with them regarding their motivation to explore the issue. The more that can be elicited from the Exploration of the matter, the more learning there will be. What was driving the Disorientation? What were the reasons for it being so impactful?

Once the Exploration has been completed, the Reorientation is where the coachee reflects on their findings and starts to make sense of it all. In the specific example of a couple of weeks ago, my coachee decided to change some of their work practices and prioritise aspects of work differently due to the learning. And then they are back in Equilibrium – but a slightly different person from the one they were when they were last in Equilibrium.

Due to the emotions involved, individuals working through the whole of the Adult Learning Cycle are often emotionally drained. It is worth helping them understand what they have been through – and the model really helps – so that they can see it is not an unusual process, and that it is how we can develop deep learning. It's probably best to only spend a short time on it at that point, and spend a longer time on it at the next session – when they are less tired. If the person understands the process, there is more potential for them to be able to work themselves through such issues in the future – or assist other people.