**TRANSPERSONAL COACHING**

Transpersonal Coaching developed from Transpersonal Psychology and draws from the earlier explorations of psychologists like Psychosynthesis founder Roberto Assagioli and Abram Maslow. The main exponent of Transpersonal Coaching is Performance Coaching pioneer Sir John Whitmore, who was filmed delivering an insightful transpersonal session with me, which is reproduced below. John sometimes uses the analogy of an orchestra to describe his approach:

![Orchestra analogy](image)

He calls the players in our orchestra ‘sub-personalities’ which are the things we are identified with, such as our roles, relationships or possessions. For instance, in answer to the question ‘Who are you?’ most people might reply with answers like ‘I’m a doctor,’ ‘I’m a father’ or ‘I’m a good listener’. Transpersonal Coaching challenges that these labels describe us but do not define who we are.

As we evolve we dis-identify from them a little, and then we become the ‘orchestra conductor’, who ensures that the instruments are played in harmony, and this represents the centred state we can reach when all of our sub-personalities are working together. Yet there is something else behind that conductor and orchestra— the composer who writes the score. This could be called the ‘self’ or ‘higher self’, and represents universality and individuality; it is where our ultimate potential lies, our innovation and creativity, the things we would like to tap into.
The word ‘transpersonal’ means ‘beyond the personal’, and Transpersonal Coaching seeks to synthesise the sub-personalities so that they work together in harmony instead stifling each other, and to uncover not only the orchestra leader but occasionally the Self who writes the score.

Below is an abridged version of John Whitmore coaching me in a Transpersonal session, filmed for the OCM in 2007. What cannot be conveyed in the transcript is the lightness and humour of the session. The film is available for viewing on http://www.theocm-store.com/72-transpersonal-coaching.html.

John: So, Carol, I’d like to know what you’d like to work on in this session.
Carol: The key thing for me at the moment is about my business model and life model and aligning the way I’m spending my time.
John: So how are the business model and the life model related to each other?
Carol: Completely related. All of my work involves things I’m passionate about, but I tend to be doing so much that I can’t keep moving forward.
John: So what you’d like to have a look at is how you can unblock that and move forward to wherever that might take you. Is that what you’re looking for?
Carol: Yes. It has got to the point where there are things going on in half a dozen areas, none of which I want to give up, all of which I’m passionate about.
John: You mentioned ‘passion’ just then. Can you give me an idea of the sort of things, even before you started your current career, that you got passionate about?
Carol: My whole life has been about taking risks and challenges. I ended up running record companies which was a great challenge. I realised early on that what I loved about doing it was the opportunity for developing people – both artistes and staff.
John: The pattern here is about stretching and supporting people. Are there any other words you would say that you like to do with people?
Carol: I like to see them enjoying themselves.
John: So, going back to you personally, what are your personal values, the sorts of things that you really value in life, to get a sense of what’s going on behind that passion?
Carol: The key thing is freedom – people being in a situation where they have the freedom to express themselves and develop.
John: You are talking about people there in an objective sense – what about you?
Carol: For me it is essential to have the freedom to develop myself.
John: Are you suggesting that in your present situation, and why we’re doing this coaching, that there is some restriction on that freedom? And would you like to elaborate or build on that?
Carol: I have managed to get myself into the position where it can all be developing and stretching. The only constriction now is time.
John: In terms of your skills, Carol, what would you be able to put your hand on your heart and say ‘I’m good at this’?
Carol: I’m good at writing, listening, working in a facilitator or public speaking role, engaging people, maintaining my health and being disciplined about work life balance.
John: So if we put those three together, your passion, your values and your skills, what stops you being able to exercise the full range in what you’re doing at the moment? I’m talking about internally now, not external circumstances.
Carol: Can I start with external and move in? I run a business in training, leadership and coaching and my big passion is writing. But when interesting work comes in, I’m drawn by the challenge of doing something new, and I don’t put enough into the other areas. Does that answer your question?
John: It does, but I’m looking a little deeper here. What inside you stops you doing things in exactly the way you want to? There are always external circumstances and they will always be there. But it really all begins internally, so what is it inside you that has not changed things to exactly the way you’d like them to be?
Carol: That’s a very good question. I think there is a battle between the Introvert and the challenge of going out and developing people. And in our work we get a lot positive feedback, so there’s a bit of ‘feeding the ego’ there too.

John: You’ve mentioned three parts of yourself: the Introvert; then there’s the person who’s ‘out there’; then there’s that other part that needs and likes to get good feedback. If we just look at those three parts of yourself, to what extent do you notice some degree of conflict between them?

Carol: That’s interesting, because there’s quite a lot of conflict. If I have a few days writing, it is quite hard to go into training. Yet after three days of training I look forward to the writing.

John: So that way is the easy one, the other way is not so easy?

Carol: Yes.

John: What does your writing give you?

Carol: Good question. If I start the day by writing, I feel buoyant, free, happy and flowing. I don’t function so well without it.

John: So that part of you is very important to you? That part of you that has that need, so to speak - and you’re clear that it serves you to have that. What’s the downside of the fact that you like that part so much?

Carol: The down side of the introverted self - and this is probably a key thing that you have uncovered here, John – is that if I did give up the delivery I am afraid that the Introvert would take over and I would never be able to go out again!

John: This extroverted bit – in what other ways does that enrich you?

Carol: Intellectually, it is the very fabric of the stuff I write. Out of that comes the new development.

John: So these two parts of yourself, the introverted part and the extroverted part, they serve each other?

Carol: Yes. They do, don’t they?

John: If you were not out there ...

Carol: I wouldn’t have anything to write about.

John: It sounded as if these bits were in conflict with each other, but perhaps we’re seeing now that they need each other in some way.

Carol: Yes you’re quite right – one couldn’t exist without the other.

John: Can they be friends?

Carol: I think they are friends ...

John: You don’t sound very convincing when you said that.

Carol: I’m just wondering. I’ve never thought about whether they were friends or not.

John: Just imagine they were totally collaborative these two parts, and worked together, what do you think that would that feel like?

Carol: I don’t know what the reason is, but there is a reason why that can’t be. I can sense there is a barrier between them but I don’t know what it is.

John: Let’s go away from that for a moment. The bit that you described - the ego, the liking good feedback – tell me more about that. What does that give you?

Carol: It raises my energy and the validation gives me confidence to stick my neck out.

John: And what’s the downside of that bit of you?

Carol: It takes up more energy than it gives. It raises short term energy, but I pay for it with long term energy. Writing is the opposite and raises long term energy.

John: So are there any other areas where that ego part affects you? Relationships?

Carol: I’m sure it does!

John: Tell me in what way.

Carol: I think of myself as a good listener, but sometimes I don’t listen because I’m waiting for someone to stop speaking so I can tell them my big idea.

John: So there are these three obvious parts of yourself that you’ve talked about. Have you got another what we sometimes call ‘sub personality’ in there which is different to those? I don’t want any other parts of you to be ignored. What else comes to mind? When you go away on holiday or when you do things completely differently, is there
another part of you that comes in there?

Carol: Yes, there’s a person who slobs out. That’s the space where you recharge because you are not making any demands on yourself. I do yoga, walk and swim. Without those the rest couldn’t happen.

John: So you’re comfortable with that part of yourself?

Carol: Yes.

John: Any other parts that are lying around there somewhere that we haven’t uncovered yet?

Carol: There’s the Shopper! And the Friend.

John: So it sounds like you feel a lot of pressure from all the different things you are doing out there. That pressure comes from inside because of not being able to fulfil all the things that you would like to fulfil in yourself.

Carol: It is pressure but very exhilarated and energetic pressure - pressure in the sense that there isn’t enough time to follow all the avenues.

John: Certainly what you’ve indicated is a degree of collaboration between these different parts of you, and you recognise that one is meeting the needs of another. What I’m also hearing is that there is a competition for time between these parts of yourself. Can you imagine these parts negotiating with each other and coming to a kind of an agreement about a way forward that you don’t have to stick to, but could say ‘let’s make this sort of agreement between ourselves and try that out for a month or six weeks’, or something like that, so that each could get their needs met without pulling on each other? Could you envisage these parts negotiating with each other?

Carol: I think it would be a really good idea. Whether I can get them to the table I’m not sure.

John: If we were having another session in future, the sort of thing I would suggest we work on would be that negotiation process, and we have methods for doing that and getting you to negotiate between those. I suspect that because they are, in principle, supporting each other, and you are recognising that, that they are not really in conflict. There would be a lot of benefit for smoothing that out.

Carol: I can sense as you are saying it there would be a huge benefit. I think now you have identified it ...

John: Who identified it?

Carol: You identified what you heard me saying and hearing it back from you has made me identify that that process has already started happening.

John: Can you just say ‘I, Carol, identified’?

Carol: I identified it - with your help John!

John: Let’s look at stepping back from that. Those are all parts of you but they’re not you. Who are you underneath this?

Carol: I hate this question.

John: It’s a great question for you then!

Carol: I’ve never been able to answer it.

John: You might want to run through those and say – ‘there is this part, but that’s not me’. Can you actually say that – “There’s an introverted part of me but that’s not who I am”? Try to say that out loud.

Carol: Ok. There’s an introverted part of me but that’s not who I am.

John: So that’s true for each of these parts is it?

Carol: It may be that the introverted part of me is who I am.

John: OK, so just take a look at it now. Just take thirty seconds on your own to say that slowly to yourself for each of those parts and see which is the strong one.

Carol: OK [pause]. What came out about the extroverted one was ‘Leader’. Leader hasn’t been mentioned, but it’s part of the extroverted one. What came to me – it was a really good exercise – was that the introverted person was introverted because it was comfortable, and actually the real person wanted and needed to lead. Becoming an Extrovert enabled the Leader to operate where the Leader couldn’t operate from the Introverted position.
John: So the good news is that you sound rather clear about that – what emerged here is leadership and it looks ...

Carol: It’s astonishing I’ve never seen that before. It’s almost something I have to give myself permission to do.

John: So you’ve got to give yourself permission to be who you are, and leadership is definitely a part of that. Of course the Leader in you is another sub personality. So who are you? Again can you step back from that and say ‘this is a part of me, there’s a Leader here but that’s not who I am’?

Carol: [Silence]. Then the Explorer comes up.

John: So at a level beneath the Leader ...

Carol: Actually a metaphor came into my mind of the Explorer – it’s about exploring who I am and exploring life, but I saw a picture of someone setting off in a ship.

John: Sometimes those images that come up like that are very valuable. Because the kind of questions I’m asking are taking you a little bit outside your rational mind. And that’s where there is great wealth in this non rational part, because what comes up are images that have great meaning for you. I should caution you not to get frustrated because you can’t answer fully that question ‘who are you?’, because very often we discover who we are by discovering who we are not, so you never actually find out who you are. That in itself is an exploration and what it sounds like to me is that you are on that journey of exploration of yourself and you are using these other activities that you have as a way of that exploration. Does that make any sense?

Carol: Yes, that’s what was coming up for me, definitely.

John: So now that has happened and you have talked out your issues, how might that understanding help you to balance the different activities that you get involved in, that cause you so much time pressure and so on? Can you imagine how you can use that deeper part of yourself to maybe ‘conduct the orchestra’ so to speak?

Carol: I’m sorry to say that what’s coming up is how to contain the other things so I can put more things in. The Explorer wants to explore! I have a feeling that now we have identified all this, the component parts may start reorganising themselves and I will follow what the outcome is. Does that make sense?

John: Absolutely. What we are moving towards here is that you are the conductor of the orchestra. The conductor doesn’t play an instrument, but manages the orchestra. As you go further down this you may begin to find that you can manage these components more and balance them, including the possibility of what you have suggested, which is another one coming to disrupt the process. If you can step back from that a little bit, and become more the observer, and manage the whole process from that place, the deeper you go into that question ‘who am I?’ the stronger that conductor capability emerges. Does that make sense?

Carol: I have a feeling that’s what will emerge. Just by identifying all these things it’s enabled me to step back and now, having stepped back and seen all these parts, I can’t step back into the middle of them and not see them.

John: Just before we conclude here I would like to jump you forward in time: if you could fully express the things that have emerged here, and you could lead that process, what would be your positive fantasy of say five years or ten years from now?

Carol: The fantasy would look like doing more creative writing, being somewhere on a beach so I get my swim every day, and be invited to speak at conferences and run workshops all over the world. I think the leadership would express through the workshops and conferences; it is leading people into develop themselves rather than day to day management.

John: So the leadership retains its importance. You played it down for a bit in the scenario, and then it seemed to rise up again. In this life, five or however many years ahead, if it was perfect, when someone asked you what your life is like, what would you say?

Carol: You know that expression ‘quality time’? I would say ‘quality freedom’.

John: Maybe that’s a good place to stop on ‘quality freedom’.

Carol: Thank you John, that was fantastic. Extraordinary!
John: Thank you for being open.

After the session, John explained the structure and thinking behind his approach:

“So what I was doing in that session was, first of all, exploring with Carol the deeper parts of herself that had always been there. I referred back to earlier things, to find out what qualities she had, what passions she had, and the values she had, because we were trying to establish the underlying drivers that manifest themselves in her different activities. If we imagined we all had some kind of role or purpose, it shows up in those things so, in order to help Carol move forward, it was important that we identified what these core things were in her that had been there for some time.

What began to happen was that she herself came up with the conflicting different parts of herself – the Introvert, the one who wanted to be out there and so on – and so I moved at that moment on to what we would call the sub-personality model.

I did notice that she was reluctant to go inside when she described her sub personalities, all these conflicting parts of herself. So I was using the opportunity to follow certain words that she used to go inside, because I felt quite strongly she needed to go to a level beneath all the external circumstances that she was readily talking about. Then I wanted her to establish the degree to which these parts of her were in conflict with each other and the degree to which they supported each other, so that’s why we explored their relationship and the different components.

Now, one of the places you can go off track is to just focus on the things that first come up. So it was important that I went back there at some point and said ‘are there any other parts of you here that are not being expressed?’ We wanted to broaden the picture to include that, and then looked at the degree to which there could be some improvement in the relationship between these components.

All the time I was taking the lead from the different words she was saying. I’m looking at her face and her body expressions, so to speak, but listening to the timing of her responses – when there’s a slight hesitation, what does that hesitation mean? I was trying to pick up all those messages, and she was passing quite a lot of messages in that way. And then I was going in on particular terminology that she used, because I want to go where she has expressed an interest; there were certain words she kept repeating and I would follow down those words. I then began this process of trying to see to what extent these could be further integrated with each other and I think she had some insights that they could be integrated, they support each other and so on.

At that point we started a process of becoming the observer, standing back from these different components of herself and her recognising that they are not her – not to get caught up with any of these pieces and have that part of the person completely dominate, because that’s what can happen, and then the others feel frustrated. And I wanted to avoid that and then move into a more stepped back position. And that’s why I went into more of a subconscious process of getting her to say to herself ‘I have this part of me but it’s not me’. I wanted her to do that silently to herself so she could hear what she was saying and digest that, and that’s working at a deeper level.

What happened then was that some insights came up from that – the other part of herself, the Explorer, came up. I felt we had moved towards helping her discover more of who she was – this ‘Leader’ that emerged, and the Explorer beyond the Leader was now becoming a stronger part of her - but it’s still not who she is.
I wanted to point out that this is just another sub personality; it is a deeper sub personality and closer to who you are but it’s not who you are – because that is a long way down the road, if you ever get there. I felt she was in quite a good place with this. I think she had some realisations and recognitions. I felt there was some clarity emerging and that was showing on her face and some of her expressions.

I wanted to take her forward from these qualities we had started with, and that had blended themselves into Leadership, to then say where are you going with this? I wanted her to see that there’s a future, something to point towards, something to move toward. I wanted to end up on this high note with this aspiration towards a couple of qualities she had expressed right at the end.”

On a final note, from my own perspective two years later, the session was prophetic: I went on to ‘contain’ things so that the Explorer could ‘fit more things in’ and am now undertaking a doctorate and writing two more books as well!

With thanks to:
Eric & Ed Parsloe at the OCM www.theocm.co.uk.

References:

About the author:
International speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Managing Director of Performance Coach Training, on the Global Advisory Panel at the Association for Coaching, and former AC Head of Professional Standards & Excellence. A cross-cultural expert, she designs and delivers programmes to create coaching cultures for corporate and public sector organisations all over the world and was nominated for the AC Awards ‘Influence in Coaching’ and ‘Impact in Coaching’.

www.performancecoachtraining.com
www.associationforcoaching.com
www.cleancoaching.com
+44(0)207 022 4923
carolwilson@performancecoachtraining.com