

The Process as Six Skill Sets

The Six Skill Sets

I asked him, *Do you know what gyroscopic precession is?* He replied, *No!*

So I said, *But you can ride a bicycle, right?* He said, *Yes, of course!*

Well, I told him, *That's my point.*

Riding a bicycle is a skill. One theory that explains certain behaviors of a bicycle in motion is the theory of gyroscopic precession. It tells you about the behavior of gyroscopes and why the wheels of moving bicycles are similar. It explains why a moving bicycle turns when you lean. But, you don't need to know the theory at all in order to ride well. You only have to know how bikes act, which is very easy to learn from experience. With experience, you build a model that predicts how the world acts. Habits are expressions of these models and they are functions of procedural memory and the adaptive unconscious. To ride you need skills, not theory.

I've summarized the skills needed for the Hakomi Method and organized them into six basic skill sets. If you learn and practice these, you have a very good chance of becoming competent in the method. Although each skill is unique and can be learned and practiced separately, put together, they function within a session as an integrated whole. Here are the six sets in outline:

The Six Skill Sets

I have begun to see learning skills as much more important than learning theory. I see the process as requiring six sets of skills: state of mind, relational, observational, modeling, experimental and support for healing.

1. State of Mind Skills

The main skill in this first set is a combination of two very important habits that create one's state of mind. The preferred state of mind is called *loving presence* and it is an integrated combination of attitude, emotional state and focus of attention. These skills help a practitioner develop a state of mind and being that is expressed effortlessly through one's demeanor and actions. This state of mind has a profound effect on the development of relationships. Of all six sets, this is the most important. Reaching and maintaining a present-centered, loving state is the first task of the therapist. Learning to do this is an essential part of the trainings. Some people are already good at this and are naturally drawn to the work. Learning how to look and listen to someone with the intention to find something that inspires and maintains compassion, as well as the habit of staying completely focused on what's happening in the present, are the basic skills.

Being present means keeping your mind focused on what is going on for you and the client *right*

now, moment to moment. To train your mind to be present like that, you have to train it away from one of our strongest, most common habits, the habit of gathering information through asking questions and conducting ordinary conversations. Those are bad habits if you're trying to be present. So, you have to train your mind not to get drawn away from present experience by getting overly focused on ideas, stories and conversation. Other skills in this set are *being patient, being and staying calm*. ^{SEP}Without these habits of state of being, not much in the way of a connection to a client and his or her adaptive unconscious will be possible. Without that connection, the process goes very slowly, if it moves at all.

2. Relational Skills

These are skills that build and maintain a strong connection with people. The principle ones are all about demonstrating these relational qualities and attributes. Through your behavior and a few short, accurate, non-disruptive *contact statements*, you show that you are aware of what the other person is presently experiencing. Getting and staying in contact is the primary skill for connecting and staying connected. It creates the sense in others that you are *with them*, aware of their feelings and present experiences. It makes you able to anticipate their needs and work to provide help.

Through your tone of voice, pace, posture and gestures, you show that you are patient, sympathetic and non-judgmental. Your body movements, facial expressions, head movements and gestures show that you understand what the person is saying, thinking and feeling. You work to gain a general understanding of the person's present situation and history. You build a model in your mind that makes sense of the way they feel, think and organize their life.

You make a habit of keeping silent when the client needs time to think and remember. You develop ways to intervene to move the process forward when needed.

3. Observational Skills

What's needed most is *a good set of attentional and recognition skills*: keeping your attention focused on present behaviors, regularly scanning the face and body for signs of present experience, regularly scanning the other's behavior for possible indicators of unconscious material, recognizing emotions quickly by subtle changes in tone of voice and/or facial expression, recognizing statements implied through tone of voice and gestures, being able to guess at the meaning of postures, gestures, "feeling" the emotions in others, through limbic resonance and mirroring, recognizing the client's need for silence, and finally, recognizing the signs of integration and memory processes.

4. Modeling Skills

The bridge between observation and experiment is the ability to create models of the laws governing the behavior you're observing. I call these skills modeling skills.

This is a method of science. Richard Feynman, the Nobel physicist, tells us the three steps of science are: make a guess, calculate the implications of your guess, and test your guess on the basis of your calculations. "If my guess is true, then if I do this, this will happen." That's the gist of it. We use our ability to observe behavior, especially indicators and our knowledge of indicators, to make guesses about the person's beliefs and models of self and their world. Then we test our guesses by doing experiments. The outcomes of our experiments allow us to evaluate and refine our guesses.

There is a mathematical theorem that describes how perceptions and sensory models of the world are continuously updated in the nervous system. It's called Bayes Theorem, after the mathematician who discovered it (Frith, 2007). It describes mathematically how models and beliefs are changed in the face of new evidence. It helps us understand how some models can be believed so strongly and it suggests to me how models (beliefs) can become so strong in the face of contradictory evidence or no evidence at all.

The way we use the scientific method in Hakomi and the idea that all behavior is organized is to be able to sense some general qualities of the client, to get a feel for who the person is and how he or she learned to be in the world. And we need to constantly refine our models by continuing to make new observations and to do new experiments.

5. Experimental Skills

You need certain skills to create and execute good experiments. You must create hypotheses about core material from your observations of the client, you help the client become mindful when doing experiments, you create and execute experiments. You describe how you'd like the client to participate, you get permission, ask for mindfulness and wait for signs or a signal that mindfulness is occurring. You do the experiment, observe its outcome or ask what happened if the results are not forthcoming. You learn to follow the spontaneous reactions to an experiment and use them to support the unfolding healing process. With the results of an experiment, you design another experiment and you use the outcomes of experiments to think about missing experiences.

6. Support for Healing Skills.

You must learn to support spontaneous management behaviors. You learn to give the client time for her internal processing. You must be comfortable with silence. You must follow the spontaneous behaviors that arise in the person. You and your assistants provide comfort and holding when needed and with permission. You understand how to create and offer missing experiences and you understand that all missing experiences are missing in the present moment, they are missing because of the ways in which a client is organized to meet the world.