

SOMATICS IN BUSINESS

For the past four decades the field of somatics has gradually gained acceptance as an alternative, if not a complement, to standard medical and psychological practices. The American Medical Association reports that over 70% of people seeking medical help have sought some form of alternative approach for their treatment. The large percentage of these will have been cared for under the somatics category of massage therapy, deep tissue manipulation, chiropractics, acupuncture, yoga, biofeedback, or any number of the bodywork methods that have emerged in the last thirty years.

There have been three major forces that have been instrumental in this rapid advancement of somatics into the public consciousness in the last half of this century. Arguably the most significant factor is the validation by the scientific community that stress is a major contributor to disease. With this discovery, the general public began to experiment with somatic disciplines as viable alternatives to the prescriptive practices of modern medicine. When somatics offered the promise of handling the cause of stress, and therefore illness, it began to shift from being primarily an underground phenomenon towards being a mainstream offer. Many people saw the good sense of taking personal responsibility for their health through practices that produced physical fitness, emotional balance, and spiritual fulfillment.

A second force was the recognition that somatics can be a major contribution to those in treatment for trauma or abuse. Research began showing that a trained and competent touch can assist someone in integrating a past trauma, eliminating the symptoms, and significantly reducing the dysfunctional behavior. A growing number of health providers began referring patients with histories of sexual and emotional abuse, as well as traumatic stress syndrome, to bodywork practitioners. Often the bodyworker and the therapist began working closely together to jointly bring their areas of expertise to the healing of the patient. This brought psychotherapy and bodywork into a closer relationship which became the third force in advancing somatics.

As psychotherapy failed to produce certain results, people began to explore bodywork disciplines that experientially opened them to emotions, feelings, and new ways of behaving that traditional talk therapies were unable to access. Moreover, a growing number of psychotherapists began to receive bodywork themselves. This led them to being trained in somatic disciplines that both broadened and deepened their therapy practices. Now it is no longer uncommon for someone seeking psychological assistance, either for personal growth or confronting a neurotic behavior, to include the body in their treatment.

While there is still ground to be covered, many somatic disciplines have transcended the “fad” category and are officially recognized by a number of HMOs and insurance companies,

The American Medical Association, The American Dental Association, and corporations that offer their employees health plans that include alternatives to allopathic medicine. Blue Shield advertises shiatsu on large advertising boards in subways and bus stops. In airports, grocery stores, hair salons, amusement parks, and malls one can receive a chair massage from a licensed massage therapist. An increasing number of employers contract somatic practitioners to work on their employees during work hours. People in all levels of the company have the choice of receiving bodywork, guided visualization, instruction in yoga, or a conversation about how to deal with stress at work. The employees report increased well-being and the employers declare that the health, mood, and productivity of the employees have increased.

While these somatic disciplines are making a major contribution in shifting our approach to health maintenance and disease prevention, they have at the same time produced an identity of somatics as a discourse whose offer is solely hands-on bodywork. As much as these bodywork disciplines are transforming our ways of dealing with physical and emotional well-being, they will limit somatics to a hands-on approach to healing if they are not seen in a broader context. If the promise of a somatic approach to living is a unified, holistic experience in which human beings can be self-generating, self-healing, and self-educating, then the laying on of hands is only a part of that offer. But, if the body is viewed as something to be simply aligned, relaxed, adjusted, or strengthened, it's possible to practice bodywork while reinforcing the Cartesian notion that the body and the self live as two separate non-interacting entities. What must be remembered is that somatics is a pragmatic philosophy concerned with the total human being, not a set of bodywork techniques. Somatics is a way of living in which the self is the embodiment of generative interpretations of the world.

While it is undoubtedly valuable to take time out for stress reduction, it is organized such that it is seen as something apart from our everyday practices. When we take time out for bodywork it's similar to a pit stop to get our oil changed. While somatic practitioners and theorists have designed practices oriented towards a unified, holistic approach to health, performance, and learning, it is inside a culture that continues the fragmentation between mind and body, process and content, journey and goal, principles and techniques, the world and the sacred. As they are practiced now, somatic disciplines live outside where and how we spend our time. Most people spend the majority of their time in the workplace, where much of our meaning, value, and relationships are created. Yet the workplace is not organized to include our concerns for physical, emotional, and spiritual well being. At work we are asked to leave our personal self at the door, and at home we leave our professional self at the office. In order to create congruence among our work environment, the contribution we make to the world, and the values we embody, I believe it is necessary to

challenge the very underpinnings of our rationalistic inheritance that divides the world into non-interactive compartments.

The accelerated advances in technology in the last fifteen years require people to be life-long learners, adaptable to change, and centered in an uncertain and ambiguous world. In an ironic twist, the breakdowns created by this increased velocity of change have opened the possibility for offering somatic practices as an integral part of the workplace. As we enter into the 21st century we have the opportunity to create a somatic sensibility, which allows people to integrate their personal self, professional self, and spiritual self in the workplace.

To meet this challenge, I propose that dojos be created inside the workplace, whether this is in non-profit organizations, multi-national corporations, small entrepreneurial companies, military, or government institutions. Dojo is a Japanese word that means, “place of training” and it is derived from the Sanskrit word bodhimandha, which means “place of awakening.” The purpose of the Leadership Dojo™ is to train the human skills of pragmatic wisdom, skillful action, and grounded compassion. In the dojo it is acknowledged that these skills take care of the dual concerns of learning and adapting professionally in a world of constant change, as well as maintaining physical health, emotional balance, and spiritual fulfillment.

The fundamental claim of the Leadership Dojo™ is that the body is indistinguishable from the self. To work through the physical body re-orientates the self, and to attend to the concerns of the self re-organizes the body. Thus, the cultivation of the self occurs through embodied practices. This is similar to the dojos of 19th century Japan where the Japanese Samurai honed the art of warfare (budo) in order to protect their community and land while at the same time building a moral and ethical foundation (bushido) for living a meaningful life. As well as the arts of combat, the Samurai also practiced the aesthetic arts of flower arranging, rhetorical eloquence, poetry, and music. I offer this historical precedent as a way of illustrating that a place of learning, a dojo, can include a multiplicity of concerns, from the specific skills required to fulfill professional commitments to the more ontological skills for building community, meaning, purpose and satisfaction. Furthermore these competencies and virtues come to maturity through embodied practices, not academic learning.

The learning in the Leadership Dojo™ falls into three distinct categories: Pragmatic Wisdom, Grounded Compassion, and Skillful Action.

Pragmatic Wisdom is a fundamental principle at the foundation of human life. Foremost it is the capacity to act beyond the concerns of the individual self. It is the skill of putting one's personal desires, wishes, and preferences aside for a larger good. Pragmatic wisdom is recognizing our limitations as well as honoring our transcendence; it is the capacity to listen deeply to the concerns of others; to acknowledge that which exists before reason and

language; to know when to act and when to exercise restraint; and to live in a state of being which is inwardly peaceful and externally prepared for action.

Skillful Action consists of the skills required to take care of the concerns of one's work and professional environment. This includes the specific skill set needed for one's professional role, such as the computer competency necessary for an internet provider, as well as the social skills for coordinating with others, creating cooperative teams, making and managing commitments, resolving conflict, building trust, and having conversations for innovation and action.

Grounded compassion is acknowledging the legitimate existence of others. It is the embodied commitment and respect for the life others have inherited, as well as the life they are designing. Grounded compassion produces an openness to diversity, an acceptance of differences, an acknowledgement of sameness, and a gratefulness for life. To interact with others in this mood of openness and acceptance creates an environment from which innovation and entrepreneurship can emerge.

The Leadership Dojo™ produces these competencies through movement practices that teach one how to coordinate effectively with others, to build trust, cooperation, and reciprocity, and through concentration and reflective practices that train the attention for action in the world, as well as an inner quiet. There are conversational practices that deal both fundamentally and specifically with the work at hand. These include the speech acts of declarations, grounded assessments, requests, offers, and promises. There are touch and breathwork practices that work with the armoring of the individual and teams. This produces a greater capacity for intimacy and building trust, a wider range of mood and emotional expression that is fundamental in leading others, greater health, and a "self" that is capable of listening deeply to others.

Though I have articulated these practices as separate modalities, they are taught from the perspective of the human being as a unity of action, mood, self-reflective awareness, and a drive for dignity. Bringing forth this unity is the work of the Leadership Dojo.™ If this sounds far fetched, recall the time in the early eighties when there was no such thing as health facilities in hotels. Now it is not uncommon for people to book their lodging around its gym rather than its bar. Or, imagine a holistic health center offering bodywork in rural America twenty years ago; now these centers exist in every geographical location, from rural Idaho to the back country of Arkansas to downtown Manhattan. The Hilton in New Delhi has a meditation room for its guests; a growing number of airports have installed quiet rooms for reflection and contemplation for travelers. In the last fifteen years I have worked with leaders in executive positions to establish dojos, of which I have just spoken, in Fortune 500 companies, non-profit organizations, state and federal institutions, and small entrepreneurial

companies in the U.S., Canada, and Latin America, and for the U.S. Army and Marines. The dojo that I speak of is not an ideal, it is a reality.

I believe that to remain relevant and coherent to a changing world the somatic community must stay alert not to drift into being self-serving and complacent. The programs and events listed in somatic conferences are a valuable refining and deepening of the themes that have been alive for the past twenty-five years, but what is missing is outreach into new areas. While the field of somatics has built a strong foundation for bringing personal responsibility to our physical and emotional health, we must take caution not to reify the body into a “thing”. The body is a domain in which humans can learn to be self-educating, self-healing, and self-generating. Inspired and responsible leaders in business, government, and the military recognize that human beings, not technology, are our greatest resource. By instituting learning environments that are part of, and not separate from, the workplace we can make a valuable contribution to the individuals and organizations of the future. This is a revolution in human affairs. It is teaching people to act with dignity, flexibility and power.

By Richard Strozzi-Heckler