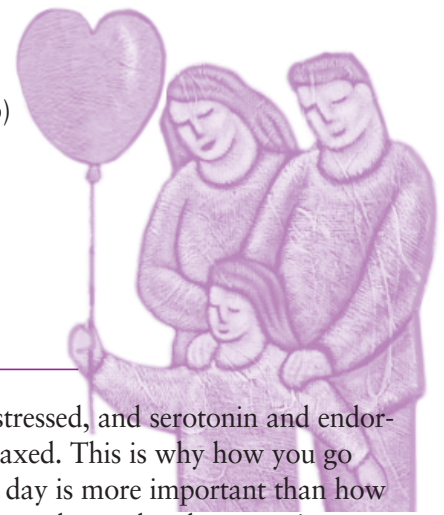


# Thinking With Your Body

## Reflections from a Coaching Perspective

by Karen Staib Duffy



In our culture, we value thinking, logic, and analysis. We tend to think of thinking as something we do with our brains, and only with our brains, and we are quite cerebral in our approach to business and life. We often forget the very existence of our body and sometimes even deliberately ignore it. There are, however, many fascinating aspects to our bodies, which we fail to appreciate. In this world, we exist in our bodies and through our bodies. We even think with our bodies. The body's knowing, however, is nonverbal. For those of us who are highly trained in verbal intelligence, this makes it hard to understand. Hence, ignoring it is so common.

**“Wordless ties...determine our mood, stabilize and maintain our health, and change the structure of our brains so that in a very real sense, who we are and who we become depend on whom we love.”**

### Body Memory and Learning

In 1983, Howard Gardner, a Harvard professor of psychology, identified seven types of intelligence, one of which he called kinesthetic intelligence. This is the intelligence that we have within our bodies. It is an ability or knowledge of our bodies and how we move our bodies in space. This is an awareness that an athlete or dancer excels at. As with all of the intelligences, some of us are better at it than others, but we all have it and can make good use of it, with some attention and practice.

Your body physically remembers ways of being and doing. We can access this memory. Remember the phrase, *it's just like riding a bike*. Even if you have not done it in many years, when you hop on, your body remembers how to balance, pedal and move the front wheel to stay centered and turn.

Our body also stores our emotions. The stress, joy, anger, or contentment that we feel every day is accumulated in our bodies. We build up levels of adrenaline and

cortisol when we are stressed, and serotonin and endorphins when we are relaxed. This is why how you go about your life day to day is more important than how you relax occasionally on the weekend or vacation. You create a habitual way of being, which your body remembers, and you can find yourself stressed, even when nothing stressful is happening.

In “The HeartMath Solution” by Doc Childre and Howard Martin, there are proven biofeedback techniques that enable us to willfully change the rhythm of the beating of our hearts. This rebalances our nervous system and hormones, and enhances our immune system. Take a moment and notice where stress shows up for you. Is there tightness in your chest? Is your jaw clenched? Do you bounce your legs? Is your breathing shallow? Are your shoulders tense or your neck stiff? Wherever you feel the stress, right now, breathe in, tighten it more and then breathe out and relax. Feel the difference?

In addition to storing our emotions, the body offers us a way to tap into intuition. Intuition is a rapid-fire way of arriving at an answer or an awareness, that defies and surpasses logical analysis. It takes all of the logical data and analysis we have been doing and recombines it in a new way. We just suddenly “know” it. We have all had that gut feeling telling us there might be danger up ahead or had an answer suddenly pop into our head. Usually, we are not consciously, mentally aware of this process, but we know it, feel it at some other level.

### Our Impact on Each Other

Physically, we are not designed to live alone. Our bodies require the physical presence of other human beings. In “A General Theory of Love”, by Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, human physiology is described as an “open-loop arrangement.” Physically, each of us has open loops that only someone else can complete. We stabilize each other with “wordless ties [that] determine our mood, stabilize and maintain our health, and change the structure of our brains so that in a very real sense, who we are and who we become depend on whom we love.”

We human beings, as mammals, also have a capacity called limbic resonance, that is a “symphony of mutual

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exchange and internal adaptation whereby two [beings] become attuned to each other's inner states." Scientists at the Institute of HeartMath in California have research showing that our hearts have strong magnetic fields, which influence the people around us. Specifically, my heart influences your brain, and your heart influences my brain. Perhaps this is how we "know" that the interview is not going well or our co-worker does not like us, even when they pretend otherwise. We read, need, and know each other at this level with little awareness.

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### Body Dispositions

The way that we hold energy in our bodies determines our disposition toward approaching life's challenges. In the Ontological Coaching model by Newfield Network, our bodies reflect our thoughts and emotions. Each of these three — body, thoughts and emotions — must be in dynamic coherence with the other two. We can, however, control each separately. When we want to make a change in how we are responding, we can start with any one of the three and the remaining two will follow.

There are five Body Dispositions in the Newfield model. They are Determination, Openness, Stability, Flexibility, and Centeredness. Imagine two lines intersecting in space. On the horizontal axis, Determination is forward looking, while Openness leans back. Determination is aggressive and hard charging. Openness is calm and receptive. On the vertical axis, Stability sinks into the ground, like roots, whereas Flexibility rises up in the air. Stability is repetitive and steady, even monotonous. Flexibility is never the same way twice and often off balance.



*An alumna, Karen Staib Duffy, MBA '78, is an executive coach and founder of Quantum Development Coaching. She honed her skills as a manager and strategic coach in the corporate arena. An innovative leader and people developer, her experience includes over 25 years in management, capital markets, sales and marketing, risk management, and business and product development. Karen has been designated as a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) by the International Coach Federation and is certified as an Ontological Coach through Newfield Network –*

At the intersection of the two lines is Centeredness. Centeredness is where you come to regroup, but not to stay. After reviewing your situation in Centeredness, you deliberately move into one of the other Body Dispositions that is better suited for responding to your immediate situation.

Most of us have one of these Body Dispositions as the dominant mode of action. In the corporate world, I have found Determination to be very common, often with a secondary mode of Stability, doing things by

routine and process. Generally, Openness and Flexibility are rarely invoked and often shunned. Hence, when a problem requires a creative solution or input from many sources to arrive at the best answer, trouble looms and frustration sets in. For an artist or someone in a creative line of work, however, it may be the exact opposite. In either case, the problem cannot be solved with the existing, favored Body Disposition and resolution is hard to reach.

When you find yourself struggling with a problem that seems intractable, it may be that you need one of the other Body Dispositions that does not come easily for you. There are specific body movements, postures and sounds that go with each disposition and we can all increase our capacity to use these other Body Dispositions. As with much of this kind of learning, it requires some time, attention, and practice.

*Your body has much to say, but it comes without words.* Pay attention to your inner wisdom. The body does not lie. Listen to its subtle cues and your body will guide you. *Think with your body!* ■

*Coaching for Professional and Personal Mastery. In addition, she has held a variety of roles with Korn/Ferry International's Coaching and Executive Development, including three years as Regional Managing Director for Illinois. Karen has been a featured speaker on emotional intelligence, language and leadership, and the competitive advantages of corporate coaching. She coaches both individual and corporate clients. Karen has a B.A. from Northwestern University. Further information is available at [www.qdcoaching.com](http://www.qdcoaching.com). Karen may be contacted directly at 312-664-6979 or [kesduffy@hotmail.com](mailto:kesduffy@hotmail.com).*