

Kittens and Technology Marketing

A Somatic Approach to Career Coaching

Reprinted with permission from *Somatics*, Volume 15, Number 2, pages 29-38

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Introduction

Although most people who have been interested in the work of Moshe Feldenkrais have focused primarily on the physical transformations that he was able to catalyze, I have long been intrigued by his larger interest in teaching people how to live a healthy life. He wrote about this in a brief article (1979), where he asked what it was that defined a truly healthy person.

“If a human being needs no medical services for years and has no complaints of pains or aches, is he or she healthy? If, on the other hand, this same person leads a dull, uninteresting life with marital difficulties that end up with suicide—is that a healthy person? And is a person who never brings his or her work to an end one way or another, and who keeps changing employment only to avoid his duties time and time again—is he in good health?

... A healthy person is one who can live his unavowed dreams fully. There are healthy people among us, but not very many” (pp. 26-27).

My overall goal in my work has been to enable people to live such healthy, meaningful lives.

The work I did with Jeanne over a period of four years stands out as an

example of the way movement and awareness can be used in conjunction with coaching to evoke change in large areas of a person’s life. (Both Jeanne and her partner, Bill, are real people, but their names have been changed to protect their privacy.) My work in this area is based on 20 years of professional practice as a Feldenkrais® practitioner, certification as a career counselor and clinical sociologist, and 15 years of experience as a management consultant and coach.

Like many Feldenkrais clients, Jeanne was initially interested in the physical contributions that this work could bring her. She liked the way it made her feel, and she grew to appreciate me as both a practitioner and a friend. Because of the trust that developed, she was willing to experiment with a broader application, as described in the case below.

In my role as a somatic practitioner and career coach, I am far more interested in the use of movement awareness to transform one’s life than in its use simply to reduce pain—as important as this may be as an initial step. One way of describing the process is that it resembles archaeology of ourselves: exploring and digging out all of

the layers that have come to form us as adult beings, incorporating mental and cognitive functioning, emotions, and also all of the deeper structures of the self that are literally “embodied” in the way we hold ourselves and move physically through life. By accessing and integrating our awareness of all of these facets, we become free to create the life we want, one that expresses our “unavowed dreams,” as Feldenkrais himself described the deeper nature of health.

I first did Feldenkrais sessions with Jeanne when she came to a workshop I offered on “Leading and Facilitating Organizational Change: Foundations in the Body.” I had met her through a business women’s network and was surprised by her desire to participate in this session, as she had not previously shown interest in this type of learning. Since then we have worked and learned together, each from the other, in a fascinating process that moved back and forth between supporting comfort and fluidity in her body and enabling the same qualities in her mind and life. The work has helped her to develop a commitment to life-long awareness through movement and a quality of ease that is noticeable when one speaks with her about her life.

Over a period of four years, she has shifted from being a delightful young woman with wide-ranging interests who was clearly uncomfortable with the choices she was making in her life to someone who is deeply self-confident, at ease with herself, and happy.

As she once described what she has learned, “What I do now with my body makes me more comfortable in the rest of my life. I feel much more connected both physically and to my sense of self. Lately I’ve had a lot to do. It would have been a great opportunity to feel bad about myself. Instead, I don’t feel compelled to do things perfectly. I don’t feel guilty. I feel more peaceful and my friends comment about this. Several have said ‘You seem so calm!’ One friend worked all night to help me with my recent move. I think it’s because I’m nice to be with!”

The Beginning: Shifting from Noticing Physical Pain to Examining One’s Life

October

When I began working with Jeanne, we did not have a clear goal with regard to life or career coaching. We were simply doing sessions to alleviate her back pain. She liked massages, saw a chiropractor often, and the work I did felt good to her. After one of the earliest sessions, she commented that she felt like she was “swimming in a tub of warm, melted milk chocolate,” as she was able to move her arms and shoulders with unanticipated ease.

One day, she asked if I knew a good career coach. I hesitated and then said that I was a certified career counselor—but that I’d be happy to recommend someone else. We discussed it and decided that it would be fascinating to work together on the relationship between movement, self-awareness, and career choices. I had been interested for years in using the Feldenkrais Method® for changing significant aspects of our lives, but never had been offered such an explicit opportunity to work with it in this way.

I aimed to help Jeanne formulate a picture of what she wanted her life to feel like, so she could notice any possible differences between this desired life and her current life. I wanted her to picture vividly what she’d like her life to be about and what kinds of skills she would need.

As she described her life, she liked the way she could set her own schedule day to day, leaving time so she could

be free to say, “Yes! I can meet you for lunch!” She liked brainstorming with people and creating and maintaining small systems. She was not happy about her skills in managing her time and energy effectively. She commented that she often had a feeling of stress and disorganization, and felt uncertain about marketing herself and her work as a project manager.

Looking concretely at the details of her work, I sought to find out what excited her. As she talked about specific projects (helping high-tech journalists, promoting a novel set in Silicon valley, supporting a start-up), she began to notice that she missed writing and editing—and really enjoyed throwing great parties! At first glimpse, this may seem like a unique place to begin career coaching, but in fact it provided a solid foundation. It let both me and Jeanne see how she perceived her life and interests, using her own language. Whether or not it matched anyone else’s idea of what she should be thinking about, it was what she herself felt and valued.

Commentary

The core of my work is using touch, movement, and talking to enable clients like Jeanne to discover how they really feel. Not “feel,” in the general meaning of emotions, but in terms of what their “texture” is as a person. What kind of actions and life fit them naturally, like a soft kid glove. So many of us shape ourselves to fit opportunities and structure that come to us from outside. I have always been interested in whether we can instead shape our lives around ourselves, by fortifying our awareness and comfort at being ourselves.

Near the beginning of our work, I asked Jeanne to look back at her life from the vantage point of imagining herself to be 90 years old and to describe what she valued most. She said:

- I moved to foreign countries on quick decisions.
- I developed the physical side of myself by trekking in Bhutan and in other mountainous places, overcoming vertigo and seeing cool things.
- I wrote three children’s books and a study on an important topic.
- I cooked a lot.
- I taught Bill how to be a good Dad (they have no children yet).
- I created a “family” (both blood-

based and with friends).

- I gave back to communities that helped us that weren’t as well off, creating links across the globe, and sponsoring a group of actors and playwrights.
- I took care of my Mom as she grew older.

I noticed immediately that she said nothing about what we commonly call “career” or “work,” although her desire ostensibly was for career coaching. This absence of career focus seemed quite significant to me, but I felt it was not useful to point it out at this time unless she noticed it herself. My aim was not to make her feel inadequate, which that might have done, but instead to help her appreciate and love the person she really is.

This became our starting point. She had considerable clarity regarding what she was unhappy about and what she thought she wanted to accomplish, but no fixed intent to achieve specific goals. At the time she was working in her third high-technology start-up. She enjoyed her work, but seemed to feel that something was missing. She was in a committed living-together relationship with Bill, the head of another start-up. As a young woman in her late twenties, she had “the basics” covered, but she wanted more clarity and direction.

The Process of Our Work

Each session, we spent roughly two hours together. Half the time we talked, and half the time I guided her through Feldenkrais movements, mostly using my hands, but also inviting her to move and make discoveries on her own. Since she had been receiving individual lessons for some time, increasingly I placed the responsibility on her, rather than structuring the lesson entirely by myself. I would ask her to experiment with a movement that I suggested, selecting different movements that I felt would give her insight into herself. For example, if she was uncomfortable sitting, we’d go back and forth between me helping her feel different places to bear weight and ways to move a shoulder or her pelvis and her “taking off” from the suggested movement and building on it.

In December, as Jeanne arrived, she exclaimed, “I’m beginning to see what I want to do in life as a process in itself, rather than as an ‘I should fit in here’ kind of thing.” This was an important change in her perspective on work and

life. Like most people in our society, Jeanne had assumed that a career was something she had to select from an array of pre-existing options. A career was a “thing,” like all the many “things” in our lives. What she found herself discovering through our work together was already a huge shift: just as the Feldenkrais learning involved a process with a clear starting point but no fixed end, she now saw her career development as a comparable process.

This had been my original intention in using the Feldenkrais Method simultaneously with conversation about key areas of her life and work. In seeking career coaching, Jeanne had sought assistance in focusing her energy in the arena of work. As a certified clinical sociologist and Feldenkrais practitioner®, I aimed to combine somatic learning and career coaching in ways that would help her ground her choices about work in deeper levels of functioning than mere talking and thinking allow. She sought learning, rather than a mode of therapy.

Commentary

According to the principles underlying the Feldenkrais Method, people develop their self-image based on the neuro-motor feedback they receive as they take action in the world, starting from infancy and continuing on throughout their lives. A person's sense of him- or herself is not just a general concept, an abstraction that has no physical locus. Rather, there is an actual image that is grounded in the motor and sensory cortex. Our movement and actions affect our sense of the ease or difficulty of impacting the world around us and are in turn colored by the actions we take—clearly a central aspect of the way a person approaches his or her career.

Because of my experience with adults and children using the Feldenkrais Method, I knew that more improvement is possible in the physical aspects of action in the world than many people believe. Children that physicians have diagnosed as having lasting neurological problems that should have precluded learning have been known to improve sufficiently to graduate from college and go on to grad school¹. Unfortunately, little research has been done to experiment with how such movement exploration might impact the movement, thinking, choices, and action of adults². This was what Jeanne and I were doing.

Jeanne continued to mention her interest in writing, which was not the direction she expected to go when we began. However, since it continued to emerge as something of interest to her, we let ourselves play with themes in thought in relation to it, as we do with movement on the Feldenkrais table. When she expressed interest in something, we followed it and created variations, rather than talking as though career coaching ought to be linear and organized in some standard way. We devoted time to playing with the notion that she might be like Erma Bombeck, Danielle Steele, Isaac Asimov, or Martha Stewart. How would this feel? What might it be like? At first glance, aside from writing, these people seemed to have little in common. What we saw was that all of them provided models for being a person who sought out and delved into interesting experiences, and then wrote to share them in ways that combined entertainment and education.

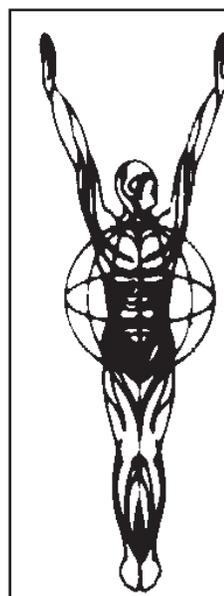
Another theme that emerged was that work involves both focus and accomplishment: that Jeanne needed help to carve a life path that incorporated both energy and focus. As a body needs structure and energy, a life needs focus and energy. Jeanne's life lacked energy, we both noticed. In Jeanne's words, her life lacked “that ‘oooh!’ feeling.” We wondered whether this might

be because of an insufficient quality or quantity of focus. At this point in the work together, we were both intrigued by the way we were learning how to bring the Feldenkrais Method to the way that we talked and perceived her life, in addition to using it to elicit new forms of movement in a body. We felt as though we were developing a new language together.

At the end of every session, I asked Jeanne to commit to accomplishing something specific before the next session—not from a belief that she “had to do something,” but to create a structure to see what emerged when such a commitment was present. Once, the task was completing an article on cats she'd been thinking about, another time it was sorting her key documents, and yet another was deciding how to structure her business.

We allowed the pattern of sessions to fluctuate with the changing demands of her life. She took several long trips with her boyfriend, but always returned to sensing herself through the Feldenkrais movement experiences and to reflecting on what she was discovering. Among other things, she became aware that she was consistently drawn to work involving solitary tasks, yet she loved community. This led us to explore how she might create a community in which she would be encouraged to do the individual-type work she loved. A holiday

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visit to Bill's parents led to discoveries about the relationship between her experience of family, her feelings about focusing, and her feelings about flow.

Commentary

My role is to initiate a direction, whether in movement or discussion, and also to be very open to going where Jeanne leads us. This can be challenging for a coach, because it is easier to lead when one knows where one is going. In this "dance" with Jeanne, although it is my role to coach, I am committed to doing it in a way that builds on and follows her lead, even though at times I may not know where this will take us. I have to trust that following the flow of excitement and going where it is easier to move will lead us into new learning.

This is analogous to what I generally do in somatic learning sessions: If someone is fascinated by the feeling of a movement, we'll explore it, although it may not be where I thought we were going to head when I began the given session. The importance of catching a person's delight and fascination with a moment in life seems self-evident to me. There is a special quality that emerges when a person is totally one with movement, sensing, or talking—so I go with it, in order to see where it will lead.

January

It was intriguing to be with Jeanne during this first session after her visit to Bill's parents' home, because she clearly wanted to pursue and talk about a wide range of parent-focused perceptions that did not appear to be closely related to one another at all, or to the development of a career. Several times I wanted to shift the direction of her talking, because hearing about all of this did not seem relevant to our work. However, I felt that to intervene would be too directive and jarring, so I listened. I heard that Bill's family made them sleep in separate bedrooms; that her father had been an entrepreneur who was laid off in a way that made Jeanne ache inside, and that he hated organized religion. I heard that what she loved in her "chosen family" of friends was that she felt free to be really silly or really serious without being judged. The connections among these disparate "facts" of her experience were not evident, and I did not press for them. We were not seeking logic,

but the flow of her attention and energy. I wanted to help her feel herself, not as a physical being in movement, as we do in our somatic work, but as a being whose attention and energy shifted and moved in ways that had their own inherent structure—a structure that she could learn to perceive.

An example of the flowing way that we worked together is what happened on her return from a holiday visit to Bill's parents. She sat down and began to talk about her trip. At first, I could not see a purpose in the way she was talking about her experience. I let her talk, because she clearly was invested in doing so. Because I was willing to follow her lead, rather than feeling a need to direct her, she made critical discoveries about the relationship between her experience of family, her feelings about focusing, and her feelings about flow.

What we discovered, after she described her experiences with her friends and Bill's family, was that in her mental structuring of her own life, purposeful activity (work) was experienced as being in contrast with flow, while flow was what she loved in life. So when she set out to "plan" a "career," she was doing something that was intrinsically inimical to what she loved most deeply. Therefore, the more she tried to structure her career, the less she got anywhere. This presented an intriguing paradox. Jeanne wanted a career, but the "normal" methods of creating it moved her farther from her goals, instead of closer to them. I suspected that this discovery would prove to be of fundamental importance, so I made sure to bring Jeanne's attention to it, so she could formulate her own interpretation.

It continued to appear that the very process of attempting to focus made Jeanne uncomfortable. She had come to me to help her focus on developing her career, yet the nature of the task as it is usually conceptualized seemed not to fit her. I helped her to make connections between the reactions she had when she attempted to focus her thinking or movement. In our work on the Feldenkrais table and in watching her walk, we distinguished between what we decided to call robot-type walking (choppy, abrupt, entirely purposeful) and human walking (flowing, with moving being translated through the entire system). Traditional approaches to career development felt to her to be equivalent to "robot walking"—they

didn't incorporate a natural flow. In today's world, the way we normally conceptualize "a career" in itself involves separating work from ordinary life events and requires a way of being that did not seem to be Jeanne's. She liked what she had been discovering in Feldenkrais movement, the feeling that she described early in her experience of it as "floating in a warm tub of melting milk chocolate." A life with that quality is far more "Jeanne" than one that has goals, targets, and clear structures.

Commentary

I did not intend to use the combination of Feldenkrais work and career coaching to convince Jeanne that her life should come to have the quality of Feldenkrais work. My original intention was simply to use the somatic learning 1) to assist people to get in touch with themselves as beings in movement or action, and 2) to improve their ability to sense themselves, so as to be aware of whatever was there. Instead, this exploration with Jeanne seemed to be going towards the discovery that when she was most happy, her life had qualities similar to Feldenkrais movement itself. This perception fascinated both of us, but we wished to remain open to whatever might emerge in our work. Our intent was to continue doing the somatic lessons and talking about her life and work, and to see where this would take us. My intention as a coach was to help her arrive at a point where she felt comfortable with whatever choices she might make regarding the place work would take in her life.

Some portions of her personal biography became important, so we discussed them, but this was not the "plan" of our work. My intention and approach to working with Jeanne did not change from the beginning to the end. It was to do some somatic Feldenkrais work at each session, grounded in whatever most needed to be addressed, whether it was relieving pain, when that was dominant, or furthering her ability to use awareness through movement as a living part of her life. This meant that sometimes I would suggest that she lie down on the table and sometimes we would begin with a movement she wanted to make easier, such as sitting and writing, walking, or standing to cook. After the specifically "Feldenkrais" portion, involving movement and somatic awareness, we would talk about her life.

We began to see that perhaps the question was not, as we'd thought, "How and in what ways should Jeanne provide more focus and structure in her life?" but rather, "Had Jeanne unintentionally 'decided' that focus and structure were not 'good'?" Jeanne described aspects of her parents and her life to me. She talked about the way that both of her parents (who had divorced when she was young but were still friendly with one another) spoke in favor of the importance of focus in life. She said that her mother felt that she had not had enough focus in her own life, and that this had limited her. As Jeanne reflected on her life, she commented that in high school she had a "low boredom tolerance" and was good enough in school to be able to "skate over" the parts she did not like of most areas of learning. She had not attended university, although both her parents were professionals. She commented that as a teenager she was often depressed, and feared she would grow old and depressed and become an old lady living by herself in a small apartment with nothing to do but go to the library.

She described how all of this had changed when she went to Paris as an au-pair. At that time, she became responsible for two small children, a responsibility that had transformed her. She loved the work, loved Paris, and began to love herself and her life. She

also talked about her love of kittens: in recent years, she had begun fostering low-weight kittens so that they would grow strong enough to be adopted. No matter how busy she was, at times she would bring two to four untrained kittens into her home and foster them. Sometimes this meant taking them to the vet multiple times, because these were not healthy kittens, but she didn't mind. She also spoke of all-night writing-fests, when she was absorbed in a project, working intensely until it was done.

As we talked, we both saw patterns emerging. Jeanne saw that she loved work and could focus intensely . . . at times. She became aware that when a task drew her in, little could distract her. On the other hand, when she had to provide a structure for action in an arena where she lacked passion, she became unable to complete it. We talk about our culture's beliefs and attitudes around work. In modern society, we believe in careers, planning, structure, getting up in the morning to go to work, and spending a set amount of time every week working. This is not intrinsic to nature or life, but it is clearly a fact of industrial society.

Jeanne became increasingly aware that she didn't like the way she is when she focuses on doing things. "I don't do anything else," she commented. She preferred what she is like as a person when she is not career-directed. This

free mode of being was something that she felt to be almost sinful—and we both agreed it was subversive and counter-cultural. And she loved it! This was a strange spot to be in within a process of career-coaching, but it was fitting Jeanne perfectly.

I told her about Jean Houston's³ description of people as needing to "wake from a cultural trance"—and we felt that perhaps we were experiencing precisely such awakening.

Commentary

Was this "career coaching," as Jeanne had originally requested? Not in the normal sense—but what we felt we were discovering together was that the Feldenkrais movement was serving as catalyst and metaphor for a different way of approaching the place of work in one's life. People are "supposed to" not waste time. Those who are most admired are often described as "driven": the affluent, leaders, and influencers tend to be driven, whether they are high-tech entrepreneurs or musicians. People who follow their own internal rhythms are marginalized from a career standpoint; women who become part-time consultants are not considered to be as successful as those who start and lead companies.

This growing perception startled us both. Again, it built on the similarity that we both began to notice between what Feldenkrais movement evokes

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in people when they do it, and how Jeanne seemed to feel about herself and “careers.” This had intriguing implications for the role of women in Western society, as many women’s lives do not have the structured, planned nature of a “successful career”; motherhood is hard to plan. Many professional women have had their plans altered by pregnancies that were desired, but not at the precise time when they happened. This willingness to “go with” what occurs rather than sticking to a plan is one difference between the successful careers of men and women—and may also relate to the relative marginalization of women historically in the world of work.

Jeanne and I talked about the difference between “having a career” and gardening or tending a fire. The former has an artificial structure, coming from the mind of man, whereas the latter are rooted in natural rhythms and energy. Jeanne commented that in the Dutch world in which she grew up, people who didn’t have a “real career” were regarded as self-indulgent, lazy, unfocused, not success-oriented, inconsistent and ultimately . . . sinful.

Since she was again going to be away for an extended time, rather than suggest a specific task to accomplish as we had previously, I suggested that she notice when any seeds were ripe and ready to sprout, in terms of actions that she might wish to take. I encouraged her simply to watch for these and advised that she’d “feel it” if action was timely.

At this point, what was clearest to Jeanne was what she was calling the “cat thing.” She wanted to finish the article she was writing on fostering kittens. She also felt that she wanted to write a book or something else meaningful. I wondered whether she actually wanted a career at all—or simply felt she was supposed to have one.

We went to the Feldenkrais table and worked with movement through the torso, feeling the difference between what she did with her right leg and shoulder as compared with her left leg and shoulder. The right leg was very heavy, the hip did not allow movement through it easily—as if it were a dam, rather than a ball joint. We worked with these differences in various positions: one week on her back, sometimes on the side, sometimes feeling the differences in walking.

Always, we looked to increase the

transmission of movement through the whole skeleton, the ease and lightness of the movement, and the ability to let go of old holding patterns. Often the jaw and lower abdomen were keys for letting go; when we noticed these and she attended to them, things far away would change. The clear transmission of movement through the skeleton seemed analogous to the same thing in action in life, and to be what Jeanne was fundamentally hungry for.

February

Jeanne had a bad cold, her brother was losing his business, marriage, and home, and life was full of “issues” to deal with. Jeanne was still reflecting on what we both considered to be our “subversive” comments about careers. “I don’t associate a career with balance,” she said, “or with having time to figure out what’s important.” We realized that she felt best doing things in small bursts, like packets or pulses, rather than in a steady, controlled stream.

“I want balance. I feel good about spending time on different things. This includes having the emotional energy to breathe and look at what’s going on—not just to do things under constant time pressure,” she said. “Look at what’s happening with my brother. He built a successful company and now it’s all falling apart. It’s making him crazy. I don’t feel as balanced as I’d like, but at least I am clearer about what’s important day to day.”

In Jeanne’s perception, her mom had become burned out from doing too much of what she loved. Jeanne had seen her mother trying to say no at work and being given a difficult time for doing so. When her mother had asked for additional resources, her employers asked her to make do with what she already had and then to accomplish more, as well. As we look at today’s world, we see such pressures everywhere.

“It’s hard for me to realize what negative associations I have with this,” Jeanne went on to say. “I was VP of a start-up. They’re still using things that I put in place. At the time, I really liked what I was doing—but not the overwork and burnout that seem to go along with it.” She also didn’t like the pressure from what she experienced as a bunch of young white males who tended to assume that tech skills were hard and people skills easy. In addition, she could see that Bill was happier now

that he was consulting, rather than living with the day-to-day pressures of being CEO of a technology start-up. “Having Bill happier leaves me more free to notice and feel what makes me happy in myself.”

Commentary

I am a coach whose work is derived from organizational development, clinical sociology, and the Feldenkrais Method, and am also a professional ski instructor. With these diverse influences on my thinking and actions, I began to see “focus” differently than I had at the start of my work with Jeanne. It began to seem that “focus” might perhaps demand a kind of energy similar to that required by fast skiing, where one needs to pick a line and function with heightened attention and awareness. Perhaps it could indeed come in bursts, as Jeanne found was natural for her. I saw that it did not necessarily fit with the notion of career, as developed by our Western industrial and post-industrial society.

March

Jeanne arrived in my office distraught on her return from a vacation. I worried that there might be difficulties between her and Bill, but that was not the problem. Her dad had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and his condition was serious. It was impossible for her to talk about careers or her own life, as these now seemed small compared to what was happening with her dad.

We began with table-work, rather than talking about her. I did very gentle work, less focused on physical functions or outer movements than on sensing breathing and on sensing the spine, the middle of herself. My intention was to bring her back into herself in a non-conscious yet comfortable way.

After we completed work on the table, we talked. Jeanne had decided that it was important to recognize the patterns in her life, rather than to decide on a career and fit herself to its patterns. Initially, as we talked, she felt that she had a choice among three options.

1. She could influence her nature; if her patterns were “bad,” she could shift them.

2. She could adapt to them.

3. She could ignore them and act as if they weren’t there.

As she perceived her choices, she didn’t like any of them.

This led her to notice a deeper, un-

derlying pattern, and it was something we could joke about, agreeing that it probably represented the responses of an eight- or nine-year-old girl:

1. "I see what I'm doing and it's bad. Bad pattern."
2. "Bad Jeanne."
3. "Eat chocolate."

In other words, she would tend to observe herself, see her actions as indicating the presence of a pattern, judge the pattern as being bad, judge herself in her entirety as being bad—and then, feeling that all was hopeless, console herself by giving herself a favorite reward: chocolate. However, by noticing the pattern and accepting it, she suddenly had unexpected power over it.

Although the initial wording of this sounds funny, it became even more important for her than the earlier perception of choices. As time passed, it became a way of lightening up that was easy for her to access. As with Feldenkrais movement lessons, this "Feldenkraisian" approach to generating options provided new ways to respond to familiar situations. So although she arrived at the session with a sense of heaviness related to events in someone else's life (her father's), she left able to look at her own actions and laugh, rather than over-generalizing in a way that depressed her and left her unable to act. As with the awareness she had been developing about focusing and her feelings regarding careers, the "bad Jeanne—eat chocolate" joke probably allowed more change than many other insights.

I gave her homework to continue to do Awareness Through Movement® lessons (ATMs) either from tapes or in classes, and to notice other patterns in her life, any and all patterns, whether liked or disliked, and ask, "How have the patterns in my life shifted over time?" My not-so-secret intention was to allow her to gently observe that her patterns were not fixed and immutable, but that they shifted and evolved over time. If this were to become an underlying awareness in Jeanne about herself, she would be less prone to reacting to things she noticed in herself as being fixed and immutable.

Jeanne commented to me, "This work with you, even more than yoga or massage, has let me deal with the news of my father's serious cancer, as well as life-path discussions with Bill, feeling more 'with it,' despite feeling numb from the news. It helps me feel grounded. Usually, the first thing I feel is that

I'm losing all connection with my body. Now, I don't feel that I am."

The next movement lesson I gave was a "lesson on feeling." I wanted to help her explore how feeling could be light and easy. Feldenkrais lessons are customized; we do not have a set series of lessons that we give to everyone, but there are certain established patterns that practitioners learn and make their own. There are lessons that one learns in order to improve a wide range of functions, but "feeling" isn't one of them. I had no template for a "lesson on feeling," but felt that I could create one and that this was what she needed. It seemed to me that this would involve breathing, letting go of the jaw and the area above the pubic bone, and the back of her shoulders. If all of these areas could feel light, with no effort taking place, then Jeanne would be able to move more fluidly and might experience emotions differently. At least that was what I was betting on.

I asked Jeanne to lie on her back. When I lifted her arms, they were very heavy. Neither her chest nor back participated in the movement of the arms. It felt to me as though she was holding on in her chest and upper arms. I placed my hands under her shoulders to compare how one shoulder and the other would move with a gentle lift. I rolled her head. It moved effortlessly to the right, but little or not at all to the left. I wanted to help her discover where she might let go and thereby move more effortlessly.

I began a sequence of moves, lifting first one arm and then the other, always attending to the quality of movement and not doing anything that wasn't easy for her. Nonetheless, when I lifted her arm or shoulder slightly, both felt heavy and moved in a somewhat sticky way, rather than smoothly. I then touched her ribs and back to help her to connect these and to feel the relationships between the ribs, chest, and arms. I suggested that she notice how she was breathing, since I noticed that she seemed to be breathing very shallowly. As we progressed, my touch and her attention to breathing changed the way she was breathing. As my touch helped her pay attention to herself, her increasing awareness of her ribs and chest changed the way that her arms moved. They became lighter and moved more easily.

I suggested that she place her hands on her belly to feel the breathing and because it is a comforting feeling. I



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touched her neck, the base of her head, and her upper spine, so she'd feel what was happening in all of these places. She rediscovered movement in her upper spine.

I then asked her to move either arm in a way that would feel easy and light. She picked the left arm and saw that she could, in fact, move it with ease. Then I asked her to imagine the right arm moving. "It's jerky," she said, with some surprise, since it was all in imagination. "Let it be like a clown, parodying its own movement, but fun, not serious. Let it teach the left arm, in your imagination, to be a clown."

Then I touched her sternum, feeling for movement and connecting it with the shoulders and ribs. I had one hand in front, at first underneath and then around her ribs, helping her feel the twisting, lifting, light—to feel her own looseness—first to the right side, then to the left. The left was better, but it changed. The holding-on had moved here. We joked that it was not as though one side *is* a certain way, but that holding-on seemed to move around, like the ghost of Christmas past looking for a place to hide. Gradually, this side too let go and both were fluid.

Then I removed the rollers that I had placed under her knees and ankles to generate comfort and ease, had her place her feet soles-down on the table near her buttocks with the knees in the air, and began rocking her pelvis gently, to help the feeling of freedom and fluidity move into her pelvis. (We had recently worked with this movement, so I knew it should be familiar and doable.) "Feel how the legs and feet participate" and the movement grew even

lighter and easier.

“Now get up, please, at your own pace, to feel how you are right now.” She did so, but felt she had lost the sense of lightness and ease in moving and the freedom in the chest. I suggested that she do a movement with her arms that combined flinging them from below in a circle, then becoming a stretch of ribs and back by lengthening the leg on one side with most of the weight on the other leg.

This helped her to bring her earlier sensations and ease of movement into her ribs and to connect the upper-body lightness with the support provided by her legs in a standing position, so she could then take this kind of movement into walking and out into her life.

Moving toward Closure

April

We knew that we were moving towards a pause in our work together, so I intended this session to “rehearse closure,” so that we could achieve it in the next session. Closure is not easy for most people in our society, so I felt that rehearsing it might make it more comfortable, for both of us. Jeanne had decided to move to Europe, both because she and Bill wanted to live there and so she could be near her father.

I asked directly, “What have you found through our months of working in Feldenkrais and talking about your life and career goals?”

She thought for a moment. “One, to make sure that my body is ‘with it’ is not a luxury. Two, I like working with people, but I need to look at the culture of the group as being *as important* as the individual—I need to learn to be picky. Three, I’m more subversive than I thought—and that is just fine! Four, it’s important to be doing the things that give me ‘sparkle’ and make me energetic (like organizing a retreat, fostering kittens)—but not to the detriment of everything else. Five, ‘bursts’ vs. steady mode was an important insight. I want to learn how to accommodate other things *and* work in bursts.

“Also—I can go into a very unsure state. I suddenly recalled the time when I was seven years old and my parents divorced. I changed from a cheerful little girl into an unhappy one. I retreated into fairy tales and felt abandoned, angry, and confused. My sense of stability was suddenly gone. Perhaps that connects with how important it is for me to sense my body and to feel my own stability.”

We went on to joke about “the Tao of kitten-ness” and the importance of tuning her instrument, herself.

We knew she would be back in several months to pack for the move, but this was an initial parting.

July

Jeanne arrived pleased with having gone to Europe, but having found that family interactions were not easy. Her sisters and brother seemed not to appreciate their father’s increased need for care and support, but wanted him to be their as-always source of support. Jeanne seemed to be in a new place: able to be a source of support to him comfortably.

We talked about what she has been experiencing, about the move, about taking a job that wasn’t what she “really wants to be doing” but will be just a job. She seems fine with her choice.

We did a final Feldenkrais lesson, a simple *feel how you feel-before-parting* lesson, and hugged several times. “We’ll see one other again,” we said to each another, but it felt more like an assertion of will than a description of fact. We both seemed to feel the sadness of an ending, despite the pleasure we felt in the whole process. And the process seemed complete, for now.

Conclusions

“There are healthy people among us, but not very many,” said Moshe Feldenkrais (1979, p. 26). His interest in helping people to live healthier lives lay at the core of his approach to learning and personal development. This training can be used not only to improve movement (as important as this may be to someone who is in pain and to children with disabilities) but also to invigorate people’s lives by changing the way that they think about the process of learning and its function in their lives. When a student discovers how to develop a “habit” of introducing variety in small ways into life and begins looking for new discoveries and greater ease, much changes besides movement. This approach to learning introduces a process of constantly reinventing oneself.

In this case study, Jeanne initially requested “career coaching.” As we explored her movements and her life, it became clear that she sought life coaching, rather than simply assistance in improving her career. Both she and I were delighted with the process and the outcomes.

Jeanne wished to develop more focus and clarity about her career path. As we worked, she had major insights about what made her happy. We used somatic awareness and movement to help her

- get “unstuck” from old patterns that did not produce the results she desired,
- develop new ways of moving that felt more fluid and that became symbolic of moving more fluidly through life, and
- make decisions that fitted what she truly loved in life.

What was perhaps most striking about my work with Jeanne was that our conversations about her work led her to realize how much what she sought in life mirrored the fluid yet structured processes of the Feldenkrais Method. Neither she nor I anticipated such a result. This significant discovery gave Jeanne a dramatically different outlook on her choices in life. As a result, she made major changes that allowed her to live in accord with her values and to be more comfortable with herself and her actions than she had ever been in the past. She became one of those lucky few who begin to live their unavowed dreams fully. ☺

Notes

1. See February 10, 2003 episode of *The Healing Quest* [Television series] Public Broadcasting Service, reproduced with permission from Lightbridge Production and Distribution, copyright 2001, available for free from www.anatbanielmethod.com.
2. See Feldenkrais, M. (1977, 1993). *Body awareness as healing therapy: The case of Nora*. Berkeley: Somatic Resources.
3. I studied extensively with Jean Houston in the 1970s and 1980s. Her work has evolved since then; a current description can be found at www.jean-houston.org.

References

- Feldenkrais, M. (1979). On health. *Dromenon*, 2(2), 25-26.