



Embodiment

By Jane Allen and Ute Bock

The Source

Ute: Throughout my own development as a leader I have often felt a limitation in interactions with other people and a sense that I was missing out on important information. A colleague recommended this practice and it has helped me connect with my body in a way that I hadn't before. I first realised that something was missing; second, I started to actually notice my body; third, I started to acknowledge it and explore it further. At this point I began to trust my body—an ability that is now second nature and an asset in all situations in my professional and personal life.

Jane: When I was a child I felt a lot in my body, but believed that I needed to control and suppress my physical reactions—I was told to “stop fidgeting and sit still”, as if being still was good and movement was bad! As I grew older I frequently felt a sickness in my stomach; I developed many strategies to try to overcome it, as it was unhelpful and disabling. Only after living with my body for a long time, through illnesses and childbirth, did I develop the confidence to trust in it and the messages it was giving me. Equally, I find I can now give my body messages in return.

I acknowledge the teaching of Wendy Palmer Embodied Leadership and an earlier introduction to Aikido for opening up a trust in the power of my body, and teaching me that it holds much wisdom and insight. I now know that embodiment practices can bring both power and grace. (<http://www.leadershipembodiment.com/tag/wendy-palmer/>)

What do we understand by embodiment?

It's like having an internal sounding board. We have bodily reactions to things that are going on internally or in the outside world. This is not unlike the singing bowl used in bodywork, which is placed on the body and reacts both to internal and external “sounds”.

(See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_bowl)

The Practice

This practice involves developing the art of noticing our bodily reactions in any situation, but especially when our body reacts in an unexpected way. If we learn to tune in to it we will find a rich source of information which can help guide our actions. Here are the guidelines for one version of the practice.

Step 1

Take about 10-15 minutes to check in with your body as follows:

You can do this by simply sitting but, if you prefer, you can lie down.

Start by becoming conscious of your breathing. Take a few seconds to feel your breath being taken in and let out in a gentle rhythm.

Become aware of your body, starting with your head.

What's happening in your head, your neck, throat and your shoulders?

Go down your right arm following it on the outside. On your way down stop for a moment at the elbow.

Reach the hand and follow the fingers to the end of your fingertips.

Travel back up the arm on the inner side up to the shoulder and to your chest.

Move your attention across your chest and down your other arm, following the outside on the way down, stopping at the elbow, and then moving down to the fingers and all the way to the ends of your fingertips.

Move back up your arm following the inner side back up to the shoulder.

Go back to your breathing and focus on your chest. Become aware of how it envelops your breathing and your heartbeat.

Go down the upper body to the lower body, in a straight line and staying in the centre. Notice your solar plexus, your belly, your pelvic floor and your hips. Take time to listen in to whatever sensations you find there.

Move down your legs from your hips to your thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet and toes.

Pause and go back to your breath, appreciating that you have taken the time to check in with yourself.

Step 2

Now shift your position and notice what happens.

What did you notice? Where was there tension that might contain some information—even if you're not yet sure what that information might mean?

Go over what you found, using the following prompts.





On the surface:

Think about your skin as your connection to the outside world.

Was there any tingling anywhere? Did you notice any particular temperature—hot, warm or cold? Was there any sensation in the hairs on your skin as you moved down your body?

On the inside:

Consider the rhythm of your heartbeat, the contractions of your lungs, the churning of your intestines, how your muscles tense and loosen, any deep or mild pain, thirst, hunger, or digestive activity.

Could you feel your bones, especially your spine? Was it straight or bent? Does it hurt anywhere? Did you notice any suppleness or soreness in your joints?

How did you experience the energy of your movements?

What is your body doing, or wanting to do? Do you want to sit, stand, shuffle, cross and uncross your legs, play with your fingers, etc.?

Step 3.

Take a few minutes to absorb the sensations you've just noticed. Try to do the full practice again after a short while to see if you notice anything different or new. It may be that the first time you brought some anxiety to the exercise, and it may have showed up in your body. By doing it again you will get used to the exercise. Afterwards, take a few minutes to reflect on what happened.

Then do it a third time and afterwards either write down or say out loud "I felt...", "I noticed...", "My head...", "My lungs..." and so on. This step is important because it helps you to stand to your body and appreciate it further.

You could write down what struck you or share it with someone else.

Street Smart Application

You can do this any time to check in with your body: sitting, standing, attending a meeting, before chairing or speaking in a meeting, etc. It's just a matter of participating in and noticing what's going on around you, and listening to the information that your body might give you about it.

You can do it during business conversations—with your boss, a colleague, a subordinate, an important customer or client, or a valued partner.

Try it during a one-on-one conversation to check in on what's happening within you as you talk. Try it during a difficult conversation or after an exhilarating one. It will help you to capture another dimension of the interaction and deepen your understanding of it. Perhaps you will use it in preparing to meet another person—someone who will be having their own embodied reactions, but might not be aware of them. We might call this tapping into the "energy field" between you.