

‘Being Present’ as a Trader – Application of Relational Gestalt Practice in a Financial Market Context.

By Steven Goldstein

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As a Gestalt Practitioner in Organisations (GPO) specialising in Financial Market Businesses, a large part of my work involves working with individuals and teams in trading, investment management and sales roles. My focus is largely on helping people and teams to develop and grow their performance and become more effective in the challenging and uncertain worlds they inhabit.

It is within the context of working in these highly specialised environments, characterised by extreme complexity and rapid change, where I have been applying practices developed through my training in Relational Organisational Gestalt (ROG). The ROG approach, developed by Marie Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham-Vaughan of Relational Change, supports me as a consultant and coach to navigate these challenging worlds. In addition, use of the ROG models and philosophies enables me to help people, leaders and teams to navigate their own challenges more effectively. Finally, by introducing clients to these ROG concepts, within the context of their own world, I can facilitate them to adopt and develop ‘Sensemaking’ practices, which can help them develop and sustain greater effectiveness going forward.

Understanding Presence through the SOS Framework.

A cornerstone of the ROG approach is the ‘SOS Framework’. This is a relational model which views a person’s world and the organisational system they are part of, through the interconnected framework of **S**elf, **O**ther and **S**ituation. This systemic context can be a small group, such as a family, or a much larger group, such as an organisation.

As an external practitioner, the SOS framework supports me to cut through the morass of complexity I encounter in each client engagement. This enables me to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnections of each person’s own world and the system they exist within. A crucial aspect of this is how people relate to each of three lenses of **S**elf, **O**ther and **S**ituation. Individuals who can create and exist within a strong and harmonic relationship with these three lenses, are more able to be fully ‘Present’. The more one is ‘Present’, the more they can readily bring the best of themselves to their work and the challenges they face.

People in financial markets have two layers of extreme complexity to navigate, the organisational complexity, and the complexity they face in the highly volatile and uncertain environments of financial markets. The more ‘present’ they are, the better they can manage these challenges separately and together.

When an individual, or a team, is ‘Fully Present’, they seem to have more power, more energy, and a broader and wider perspective. They tend to make better choices, are more resilient to threat or setbacks, and are far more switched on and ready to act. – In the ROG perspective, ‘Being Present’ is termed **‘Energetically Available and Fluidly Responsive’**. (See Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan 2007, British Gestalt Journal, for more details).

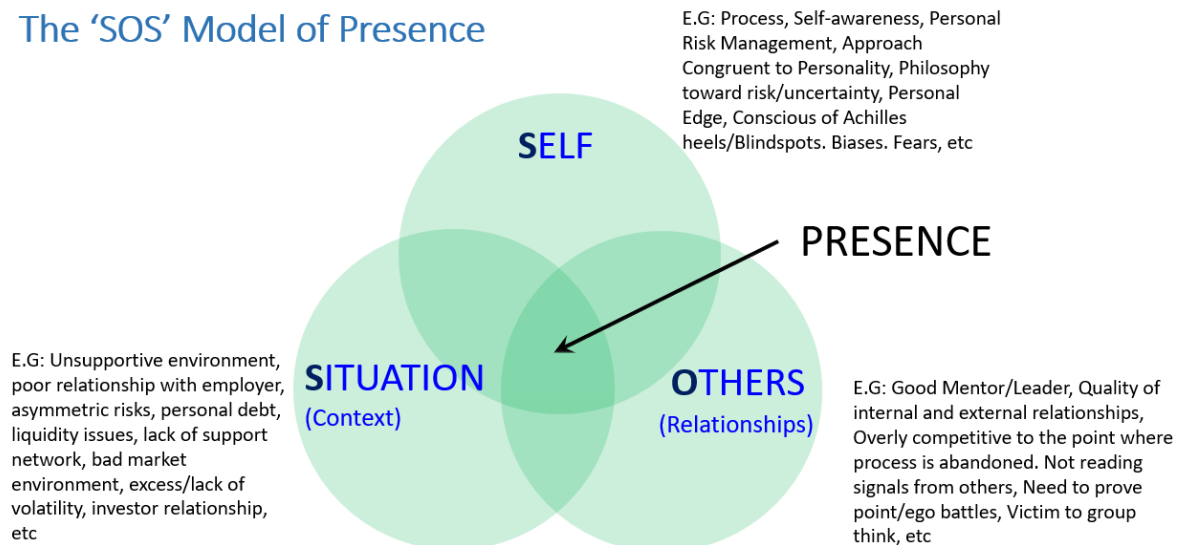
When one is ‘fully present’ **‘Energetically Available and Fluidly Responsive’**, as a trader or investment professional, one is better at filtering, assimilating and making-meaning of the varied information and conflicting signals in the world around them (Sensemaking). – The ‘Present’ trader is more able to optimise situations when right, and will suffer less in situations when wrong. It enables them to tip the scales in a positive direction.

The complete opposite is the 'absent' trader or investment professional. They may be physically present. but mentally they are absent. 'Absent' individuals may surrender more easily to their personal biases and bad habits, or may be sloppy and easily disengaged. In addition, they are less cooperative with colleagues, collaborate less with other people and teams, and become harder to manage.

The SOS Framework

When we view 'Presence' through the model of the SOS framework, we understand it through three lenses. The 'Self' lens. The 'Others' lens, and the 'Situation (or context)' lens. When the three lenses are in balance and harmony, a strong overlap exists between all three lenses. Where this overlap occurs, we term this as the area of 'Presence'; the conditions exist for the client(s) to be more readily 'Fully Present'.

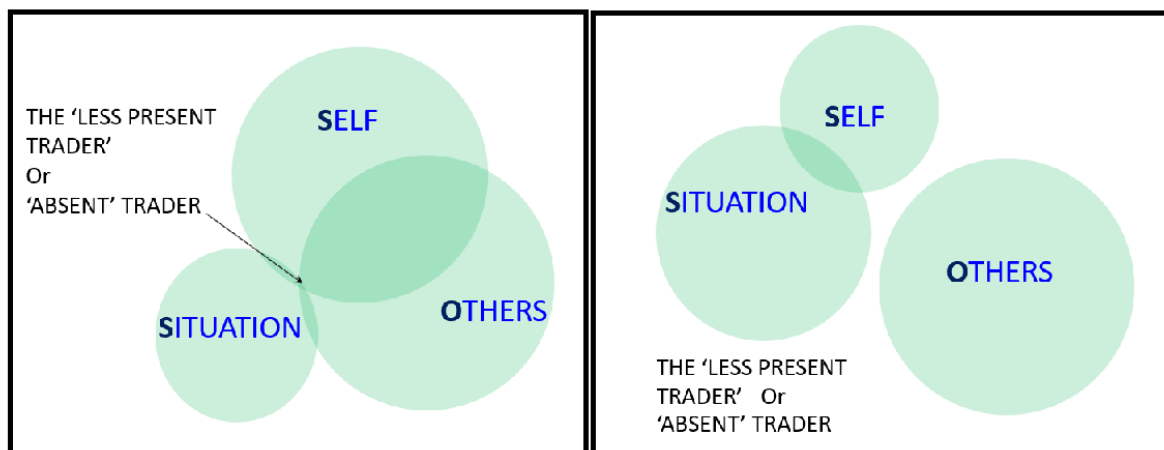
The 'SOS' Model of Presence



— Alpha R Cubed —

We can contrast the above image to the images below where the lenses are unbalanced. In the images below, the area of presence is far smaller, or not there at all (Absent).

Developing Presence



— Alpha R Cubed —

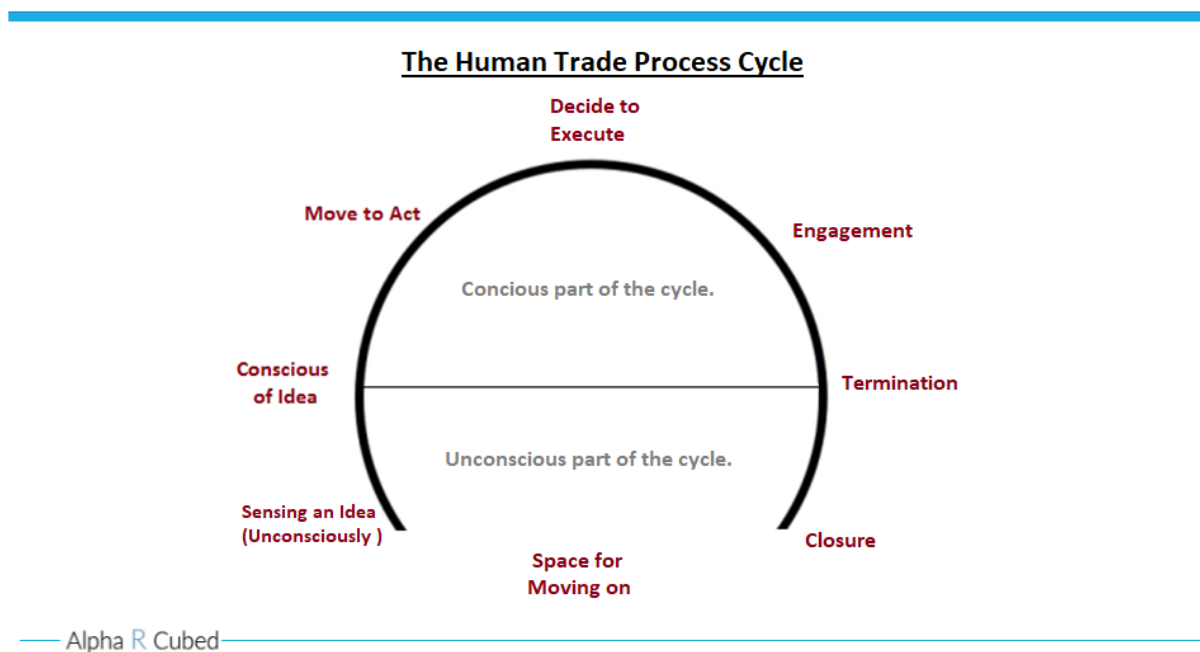
Looking at the example on the left above, there are many possible reasons that may be causing the 'Situation' lens to be smaller and less attached. These could include a poor organisational culture, misalignment between strategy and reality, inferior and poor IT systems, or perhaps an unaccommodating environment. When the 'Situation' is not supportive, I consider that the ground is uncertain beneath a person's feet. In an environment such as this, successful outcomes are far harder to come by, and much energy is expended for relatively little return.

Looking at the example on the right, the relationship between the individual and 'Others' is highly challenged and stretched. A failure to engage with others successfully is impacting the individual and their situation. In this example one may become less sure of one's self, confidence suffers, and doubts can creep in. In a trading or investment environment, these individuals may fall back on biases and lazy thinking, they will be prone to poor decision-making and sub-optimal behaviours: They will be beaten before they even commence.

The Human 'Trading and Investment' Process Cycle. (An adaption of the Gestalt Cycle of Experience)

Being 'Present' is about so much more than just being in the right state of mind. The trader must stay 'Present' through each stage of the trading process cycle.

In my work, I introduce the 'Human Trading and Investment Process Cycle', this is my own adaption of the 'Gestalt Cycle of Experience' contextualised for the trading and investment process. The 'Present Trader' needs to remain focused and engaged at all stages of a trade, whether it is a few seconds long, or several months long.



The early part of the cycle requires attention to the unconscious signals from which one can infer meaning. Many great traders and investment professionals are highly skilled at listening to their intuition and work extremely hard to find hidden meaning which enables them to reveal insights beyond 'prima facie data' and 'beneath the headlines'.

The challenge moves on to the more conscious part of the cycle. Here the individual must structure the ideas into a trade, then execute, manage and see it through to completion and termination. Such is the nature of 'Risk and Uncertainty' that the termination phase may not always coincide with a

favourable outcome. When the result of the action is a losing trade, then the 'Present Trader' is more readily available and capable of minimising losses.

The final part of the cycle often occurs beyond consciousness, and is about getting closure on a trade and moving on. 'Being Present' matters as much at the end of the cycle, as it does at the commencement of the cycle. The 'Present Trader' can find it easier to get closure on a trade or idea. Failure to get closure can lead to more value being surrendered, than was potentially realised on a successful trade or lost on a failed trade.

An example of failure to get closure on a successful outcome may be where they individual felt they 'left money on the table'. Examples of failure to get closure on bad outcomes may include; where the individual fails to understand what contributed to a bad outcome, or where they sought to blame others.

Traders unable to get closure are unable to complete the cycle. Consequently, they may struggle to 'move on' and could enter a negative feedback loop. This negative feedback loop undermines performance, and often dooms them to repeat mistakes. Compare this to individuals who get closure and can move on and enter the final part of the cycle. I term this the 'Space for Moving on', the more general term is the 'Fertile Void'. This is where 'Time to Think' happens. In this space people can gain clarity, new perspectives, and can be creative. Freed from regret and fear, new thoughts and ideas emerge and spring up, and energy is restored for the next cycle.

Summary

The ROG concept is proving extremely powerful in informing my 'organisational' work, both in teams/groups, and when working with individuals in complex and challenging situations. The SOS model of presence, is a powerful framework that enables the practitioner to navigate the complexity they encounter, and provides a lens for helping clients to gain greater clarity and insight into their own challenges.

The world is becoming increasingly complex, change occurs at a far more rapid pace than ever, and we are becoming less connected and engaged than ever, in a physical sense, from other people. It is within this context that a 'Relational' perspective is increasingly valuable when working with people and organisational systems. The 'Relational Organisational Gestalt' (ROG) approach provides a powerful, holistic, and practical approach to working in a more relational way whilst building upon the core principles of Gestalt Psychotherapy. More details and insights into the ROG programme, as well as further resources, can be found on the Relational Change website at

<http://www.relationalchange.org/rog-training.html>

About the Author.

Steven Goldstein is a qualified Gestalt Practitioner in Organisations (GPO) awarded by the European Association of Gestalt Therapists (EAGT). He is a qualified Executive Coach having achieved a Practitioner's Diploma in Executive Coaching from the Academy of Executive Coaching (AOEC), and holds an Executive MBA from Cass Business School. Steven's own background includes more than 20 years working as a Financial Market Trader in various senior roles at a number of major banks in London.