

Time Line + curvilinear Graph = Curvilinear Time Line

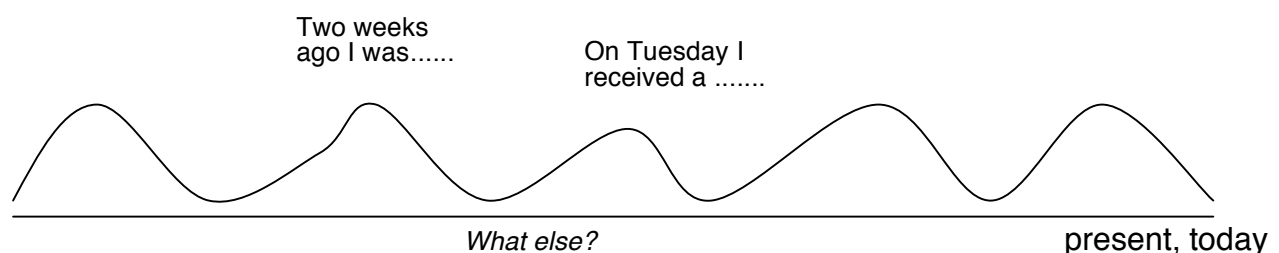
1) Timeline

is a tool which can help us to uncover resources. It makes it easier for clients to remember previous occasions or exceptions, when they've successfully managed situations (which may or may not be similar to the current issue). Such successes are located on a time line (Past - Present - Future) and can then be considered from an outside perspective/meta position. In this way they can be visualised and examined for their usefulness for the desired future.

I find this tool very useful when talking with my clients about exceptions - when the desired change is already happening (at least a little), or about similar situations they've handled successfully. I have also used it successfully to review/ take stock of the current situation ("Where are we/ am I at, now?")

2) Curvilinear Graph/Waveline

In coaching conversations where the situation is felt to be very difficult ("Nothing's going well", „There are no exceptions“) we want to clarify - respectfully - if it has always been so difficult or whether there have been exceptions, when something has gone „a little bit better“. Naturally, the questions should be asked in such a way that results in a „Yes-Set“ ("Yes, there have been moments when it's been a little bit better" or „when it has gone well with colleagues "). So, even in this „awkward“ situation there are moments of variation; in short, it goes up and down! (Nothing new here so far.) However, during some coachings, I have started to draw this „up and down“ on a sheet of paper with a simple wave-line graph:



I've shown this to clients and noticed that it seemed to be effective in enabling them to more easily spot some exceptions.

Now, I have the idea / the intention to combine this simple approach with the timeline:

It becomes the

Curvilinear Time Line

This could be equally well applied to individual coaching or when working with teams or groups. This variation is particularly useful with clients who, as they see it, are going through a very difficult time, are particularly stressed, etc., and who begin by declaring that "nothing's going well". The same goes for groups who initially only see all the things that are not working.

As described above, the first part of the coaching conversation (or the work with the team) aims to get a Yes-Set and to make it clear that there is probably an up and down movement, even for this client (or clients).

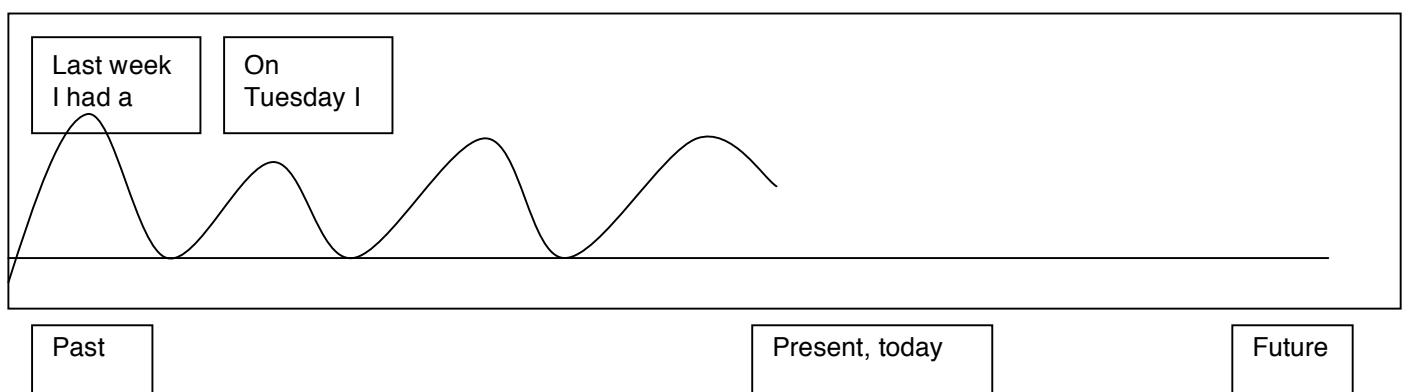
Now the work with the curvilinear timeline begins.

Instead of a more or less straight line on the floor, I work with a line in the form of a curve or wave (on a large roll of paper or several flipchart sheets stuck together and fixed to the wall). Ideally, several meters long, if enough space is available.

One possibility is to have the curve pre-prepared, and then to ask the client to describe one of these situations that he/she remembers. A few

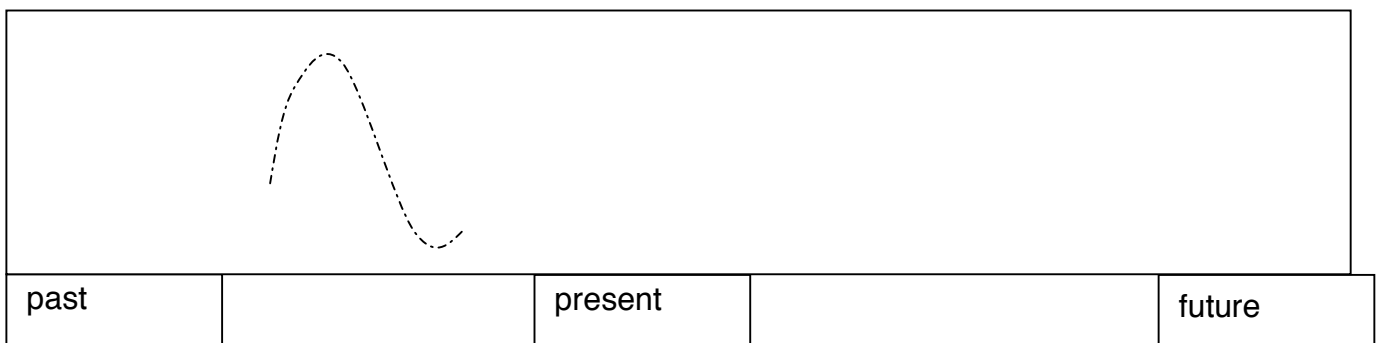


key words are captured on sticky notes and placed above the peaks. Asking the classic question „*What else?*“, we go on collecting exceptions for as long as possible.



Afterwards, we can walk along the sheet, maybe rearranging the chronological order of the notes if the client finds it helpful or necessary. We talk about the exceptions – how they came about, the circumstances at the time („*How did you feel?*“ „*Who was there?*“ „*How did you do that?*“) - even ascertaining external factors like the weather, what they were wearing, or the time of day can be helpful. The aim is to draw out their possible use/usefulness for the desired future.

Another possibility is to start with a long blank sheet on the floor or the wall, with the three points in time placed below it.



This enables you to co-construct the curvilinear graph during the conversation, and even to combine it with a kind of scaling – using different sized waves.

However, this method could have a disadvantage: the clients could feel restricted by the implicit chronology. They may feel they have to start at the far left. i.e. some way in the past. To avoid this, we could draw the first wave further along the sheet between the start of the page and the „present“ to allow them to choose their own starting point