



WALK OF LIFE

In a maze you can get lost, in a labyrinth, you can only find yourself. Coach **Anneliese Monden** reveals how her coaching clients are walking the walk, literally, and coming to their own conclusions

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Labyrinths have been drawn and built for thousands for years. Today, they are being discovered again, as a powerful tool for stress reduction, connection with essential themes and true transformation. But why the revival? And why have we built one for coaching?

The modern labyrinth

The reasons are linked to the ever-increasing complexity of today's world.

- **Information overload**

There is an excess of information and an expectation to tweet, blog, and digest emails daily. Someone living in the Middle Ages would have had their whole life to process the same information you and I process in a single day.

- **Natural disasters and security issues are on the rise**
- **Authority is often questioned**

As a leader, parent, lawyer or doctor, you need a facilitating leadership style because your employees, children, clients and patients may, at

“ Labyrinth walking is a metaphor for finding ‘what you stand for’ in the centre, and for aligning these findings with your life ”

times, be more knowledgeable than you are.

● *Too much choice*

We are faced with an ever-increasing number of possibilities and decisions. This can lead to confusion, even burn-out and depression.

More than ever, our world requires us to take full responsibility for our own lives. This can be overwhelming. Since French philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650), espoused rationalism, we have been primarily using the left side of our brain to try to comprehend situations at hand and to find rational solutions for our questions.

Today, this is no longer enough. We cannot analytically ‘comprehend’ everything that is happening, at the speed at which it now happens.

Walking transcends thinking

Labyrinths can help us transcend rational thinking, because of their connection with so-called sacred geometry (in which numbers and shapes have symbolic as well as numeric meaning).

Historically, sacred geometry has been used in the planning and construction of religious or sacred buildings (possibly as far back as Stonehenge and the Pyramids of Egypt) to allow people to make connections in a non-rational way.

Sacred geometry uses ‘irrational’ numbers (which cannot be written as a simple fraction and in which the decimal point is never-ending and non-repeating). At least two of these irrational numbers are applicable to the labyrinth: the golden ratio (Φ) and Pi (Π).

Walking the labyrinth connects the left and right sides of our brain. It also, literally, leads us to the centre. In a labyrinth, there is only one way to the centre and one way to leave. The road is winding but you cannot get lost.

A labyrinth is different from a maze. Mazes were in high demand during the Renaissance, at a time when there was a strong focus on the analytical mind.

They are like puzzles in which you need to use your intellect to find out which road to follow, and you may end up at a dead end.

A convoluted story

Labyrinths have been in existence for at least 4,500 years and have been drawn and built all over the world. The remains of these old labyrinths can still be found as rock carvings, constructions in nature, in palaces and churches, and on old coins and vases. The best-known is the classical or seven-circuit labyrinth, though the older, more complex, eleven-circuit labyrinth can be seen at the medieval Chartres Cathedral in France.

Historically, there have been four key themes in the symbolism and use of the labyrinth: 1 Death and (re)birth, 2 Initiation or transition to a new phase in life, 3 Fertility and 4 Spiritual journey.



What do you stand for?

Coaching guides people from being led in life towards leading their own life. It accelerates the process of discovering what is essential to you and how to integrate those findings with the different roles you play in life.

Labyrinth walking is a powerful tool that can be used during the coaching process. It is a metaphor for finding “what you stand for” in the centre, and for aligning these findings with your life as you walk into the outer world again.

Qlickcoaching decided to construct a classical or seven-circuit labyrinth on its premises in Antwerp, Belgium, after being introduced to the concept by our Italian colleagues at BlessYou!

The construction itself was an experience. Uwe Wascher, the builder of the labyrinth, initially

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What our clients say...

● *The labyrinth has proven to be a wonderful and effective instrument to connect to my intuitive wisdom inside... Lots of pieces of the puzzle were suddenly in the right place*

Alain Van Echelpoel, 1newworld

● *The labyrinth was a very enlightening and powerful instrument to find some peace of mind, and it acted as a catalyst for change in my life*

Ilse Deklippel, CDK Consult

● *When I was asked to enter the labyrinth, I assumed that I would not experience much. As a matter of fact, it is only a row of stones which form a path... But I was surprised by the range of emotions that came up as I walked towards the centre... It was an intense feeling, different from what I was used to. In the centre, many things became very clear. For example, I felt that I could obtain a better balance between my private and my business life. The symbolism of the labyrinth is very powerful*

Patrick Muezers, Polyscope

started the construction from outside in. It didn't work.

"If you build from outside in and you take the wrong measurement, you will not reach the middle and you may lose the space necessary for success. Only if you build from the inside out can you utilise the space optimally. It's like reading an interesting book that you cannot put down; if you build it, you have to try to build it from start to finish," he concluded.

A personal trajectory

Qlickcoaching uses the labyrinth as part of an individual coaching trajectory. The coach may ask the client to enter the labyrinth with a specific question in mind or may observe the process and share his/her reflections.

This can lead to powerful questions such as: "I noticed how

quickly you walked the labyrinth... how is this related to your pace in life?"; "What made you stumble?"; "What do you generally do when you are faced with obstacles in your life?"; "What did you find on your path?"; "What did you hear, feel, see?"

We also use the labyrinth for group sessions, such as aligning the company vision and strategy with the objectives of its individuals. Unlike 'space' in a room, the labyrinth grants direction – literally.

Walking through the labyrinth activates different senses, in particular visual, auditory and kinesthetic ones. Each person experiences the labyrinth in a different way, but the common outcome is the changed attitude towards self-evaluation and a willingness to act.

Convergent thinking, innovation and decision-making power are among the many tangible outcomes that we have witnessed when our coaching clients walk the labyrinth. Insights have been powerful and simple; obvious and totally unexpected.

My analytical brain can write this article, but it cannot describe the experience of walking the labyrinth. Those that do should be prepared to surrender to its mystery. ■

● **Anneliese Monden** is an ICF professional certified coach specialising in transformational leadership. She works with individuals and corporations in a global context

● With **Chantal Smedts**, she co-authored a coaching book in Dutch translated into Chinese. Together they established Qlickcoaching www.qlick-coaching.com