CONGRUENCE

Michael Argumaniz Hardin, PhD

The Virginia Satir Global Network

Director of Education

History and Development of the Concept

Through facilitating training programs around the world, Satir and her team first conceptualized congruence as a three-level developmental process.

CONGRUENCE

Level 1: Feelings *1950's*	Awareness Acknowledgement Ownership Management Enjoyment	High self-esteem
Level 2: The Self ("I AM") *1960's*	Centeredness Wholeness Harmony	High self-esteem
Level 3: Life-Force *1980's*	Universality Spirituality	High self-esteem

Satir, V., Banmen, J., Gerber, J., & Gomori, M. (1991). The Satir Model. Palo Alto, CA.

Tasks and not Levels

If we do not accomplish these tasks, we experience being stuck in our growth process and must return to unfinished business.

CONGRUENCE

|		
Relational Consciousness Task:	*Awareness, Acknowledgement, Ownership, Management, and Enjoyment of:* • *What we see,* • *What we hear,* • *What we say,* • *What we feel,* • *What we desire, and* • *How we act*	*Self-Esteem aligned with Self-Worth*
The Self ("I AM") Consciousness Task:	*Authentic self surfaces (often after shedding limiting roles and rules learned in childhood), leading to:* • *Centeredness,* • *Wholeness, and* • *Harmony*	*Self-Esteem aligned with Self-Worth*
Life-Force Consciousness Task:	*Emergence of a spiritual non-dual consciousness and existential integration—where one lives in congruence with:* • *Their authentic self ("I AM"),* • *Others,* • *The Universe*	*Self-Esteem aligned with Self-Worth*

Congruence is Characterized By:
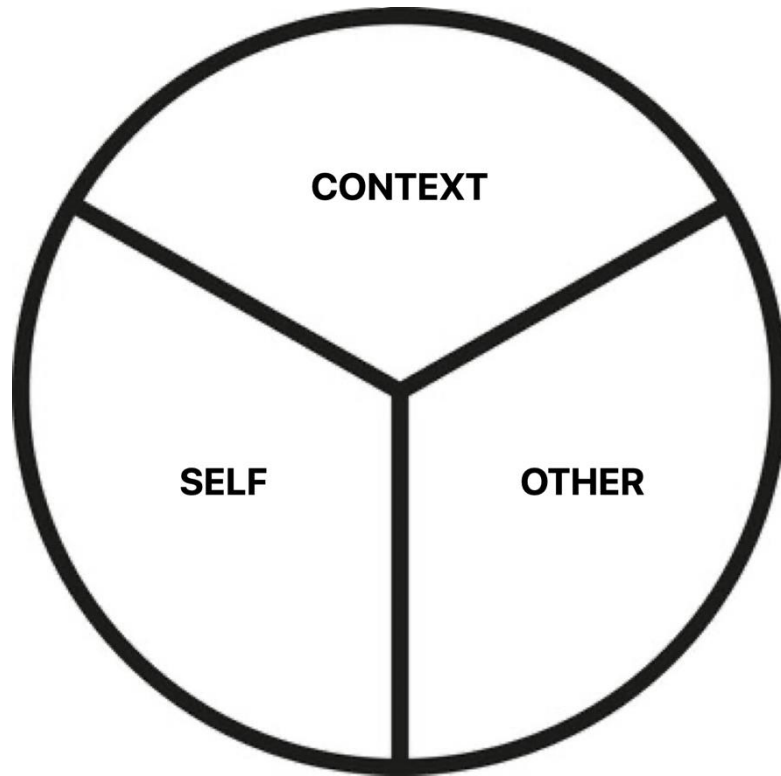
- the appreciation of the uniqueness of the self
- the free flow of personal and interpersonal energy
- the insistence on being human
- the willingness to trust yourself and others
- the willingness to take risks and become vulnerable
- the use of your own internal and external resources
- openness to intimacy
- the freedom to be yourself and to accept others
- loving yourself and others
- flexibility and openness to change.

Congruent Communication

In addition to a developmental state of being, Satir also described congruence as a way of conveying information. In communicating, we have at least three choices:

- Using incongruent words and congruent affect

- Using congruent words and incongruent affect

- Using congruent words and congruent affect

Affect includes voice characteristics, facial expressions, body gestures, body posture, tonus, skin color, and breathing. Satir found and frequently stated that nonverbal communication provides more than half the information in most interactions. Over the years, Satir stressed the importance of nonverbal aspects of therapy and encouraged therapists to pay special attention to their own affects as well as that of their clients. It was important to her that therapists who used the Satir model be congruent and be aware of their own incongruencies.
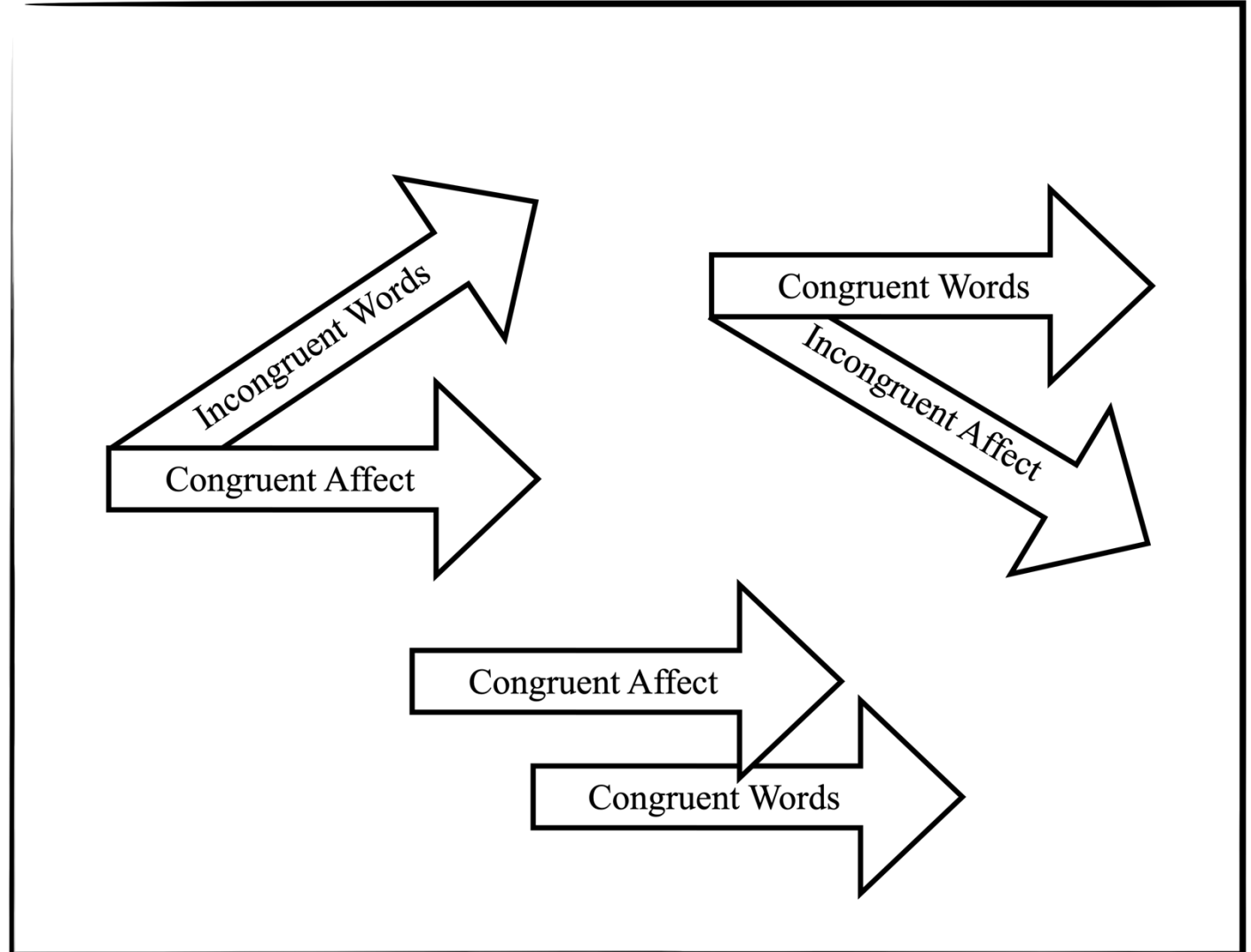
Communicating Congruently

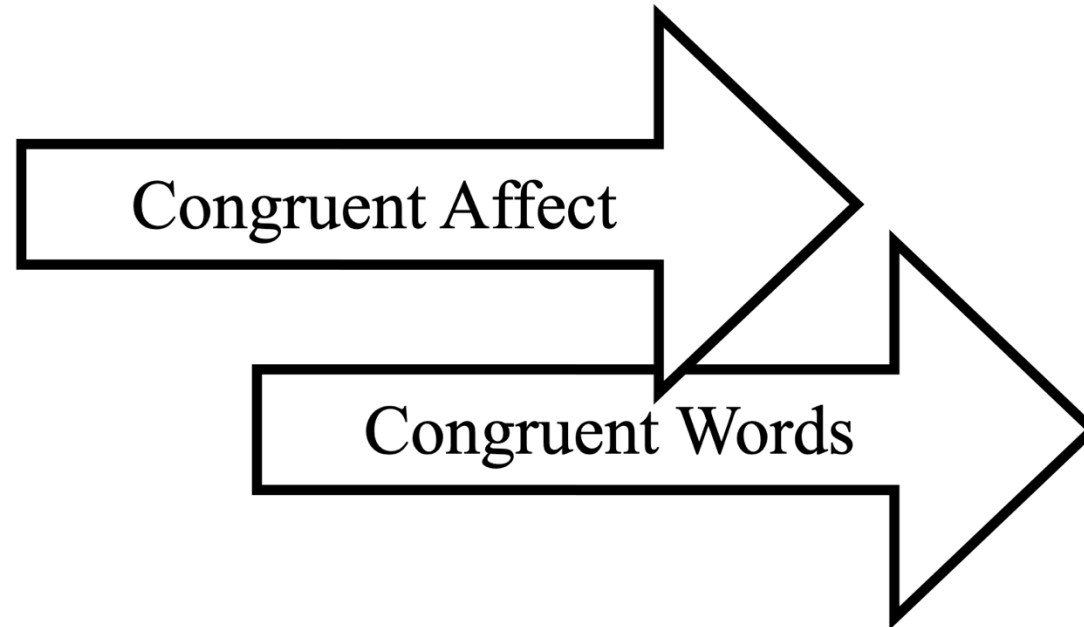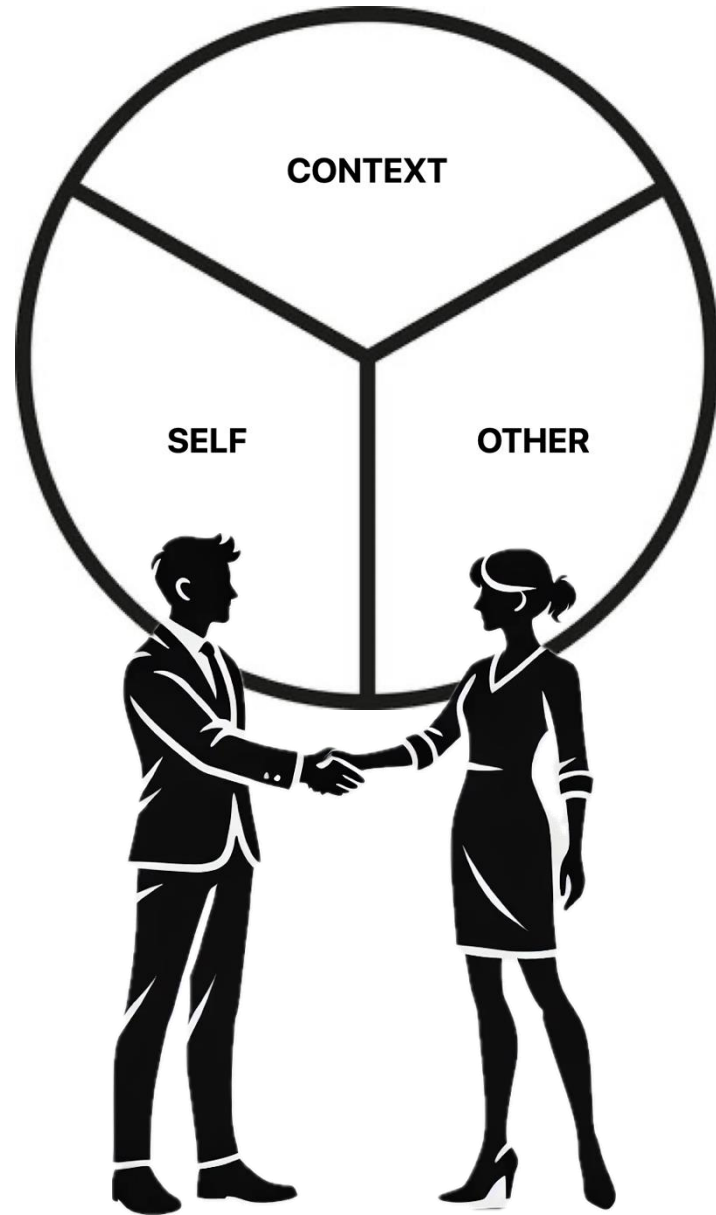If a woman says,

"I am happy" and her voice sounds content, and her body movements, skin color, eyes, and other nonverbal expressions support her words, she is communicating in a congruent way.

Congruent Affect

Congruent Words

Responding Congruently

Choice at a conscious level is based on awareness, acknowledgment, and acceptance of self, other, and context, and of being in charge of self.

A State of Being vs. a Congruent Response

WORDS

Aligned with values & goals:
- Words match the body position, the voice, tone, and the feelings.
- Words show an awareness of feelings.
- Words are direct & respectful

AFFECT

Consistent with words:
- Greater emotional awareness, expression and acceptance
- A natural tendency toward contentment, optimism, & gratitude
- Reduced emotional reactivity
- Increased compassion

BEHAVIOR

Great energy flow:
- Creative and Alive
- Healthy boundaries
- Unique and Competent
- Proactive and not reactive
- Live into 5 Freedoms

INNER EXPERIENCE
Inner Peace and Wholeness:
- Harmony
- Balance
- Authentic living with reduced need for approval or comparison
- High Self-Esteem aligned with High Self-Worth

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS
Healthy:
- Emotionally resilient
- Decreased anxiety and depression
- Greater life satisfaction and purpose
- Healthier relationships

PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS
In tune:
- Lower stress hormones (Cortisol)
- Improved immune function
- Better sleep quality
- Heart health and lower blood pressure
- Increased energy and vitality

SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

Authentic and in harmony with greater purpose:
- In tune with one's deeper essence, beyond ego-driven needs. Associated with wisdom, compassion, and a sense of universal connection.
- In alignment with one's values, beliefs, & purpose
- Beyond fear-based or survival-driven behaviors
- Acting from a place of love, peace, & understanding.
- A sense of oneness with others, nature, and the universe.

HONOR SELF, OTHER, AND CONTEXT

Resource:
- Relatedness, understanding own worth and the worth of others
- Emotionally intelligent
- Growth mindset
- Maintains a sense of equilibrium
- A sense of purpose, connection and faith beyond self
- Peace within, between, and among

CONTEXT

SELF   OTHER

A State of Being

WORDS

Aligned with values & goals:
- *Words match the body position, the voice, tone, and the feelings.*
- *Words show an awareness of feelings.*
- *Words are direct & respectful*

CONTEXT

SELF   OTHER

A State of Being

AFFECT

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CONTEXT

SELF   OTHER
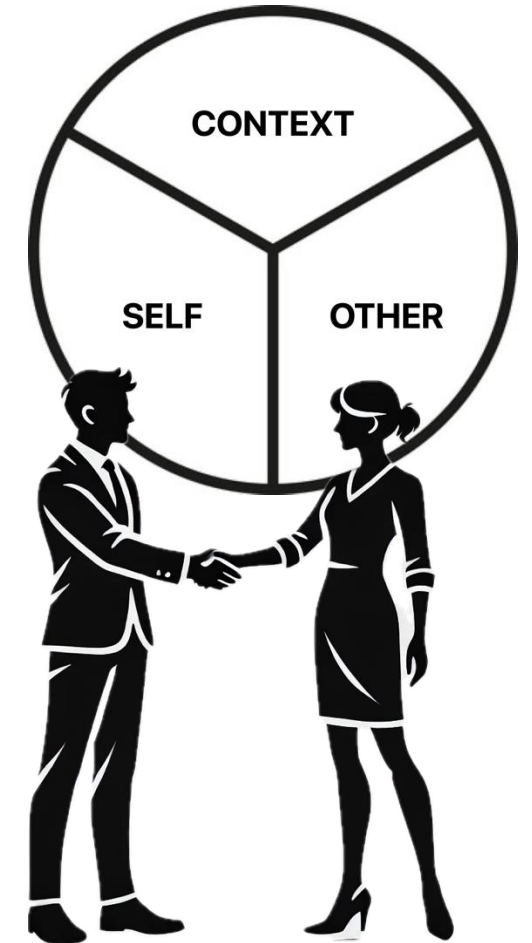
A State of Being

BEHAVIOR

Great energy flow:

- *Creative and Alive*
- *Healthy boundaries*
- *Unique and Competent*
- *Proactive and not reactive*
- *Live into 5 Freedoms*

A State of Being

INNER EXPERIENCE

Inner Peace and Wholeness:

- *Harmony*
- *Balance*
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CONTEXT

SELF   OTHER
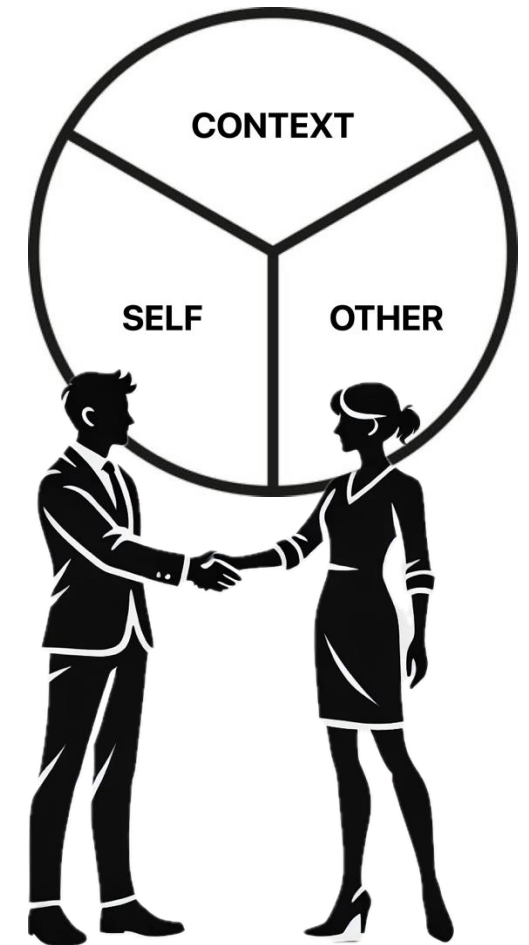
A State of Being

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Healthy:
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A State of Being

PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

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A State of Being

CONTEXT

SELF **OTHER**

SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

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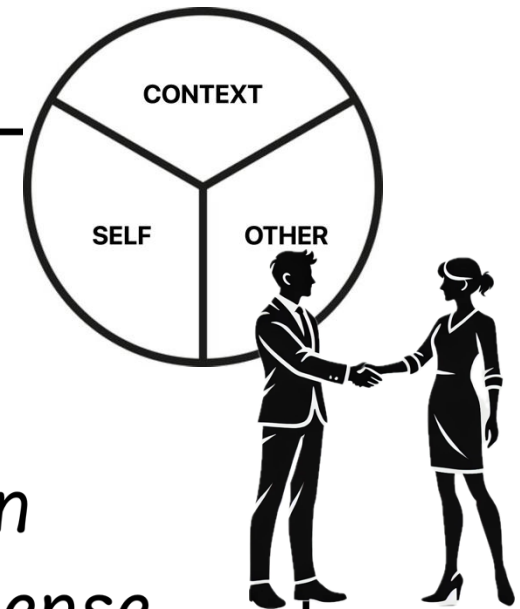
A State of Being

HONOR SELF, OTHER, AND CONTEXT
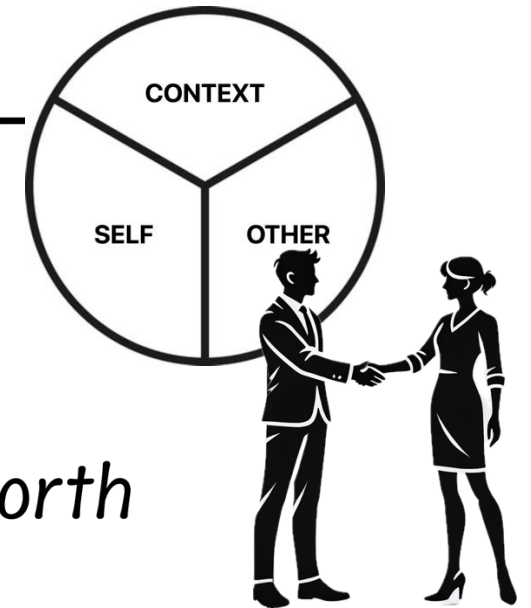
Resource:

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- Peace within, between, and among

Congruence and the 7 Survival Stances

describes what happens inside us as we communicate — the process we go through as we take in information, interpret it, and decide how to respond.

SATIR'S INGREDIENTS OF AN INTERACTION

The Iceberg Metaphor in Action

1 How a Person Experiences "self"
Iceberg and Self-Mandala

2 Initiator's Message
Impacted by level of self-esteem and context

3 Sensory Input
Sensory clues processed during relational interactions
Conscious and sub-conscious triggers (i.e., voice, body language, facial expression, proximity, scent, breathing, words, pace
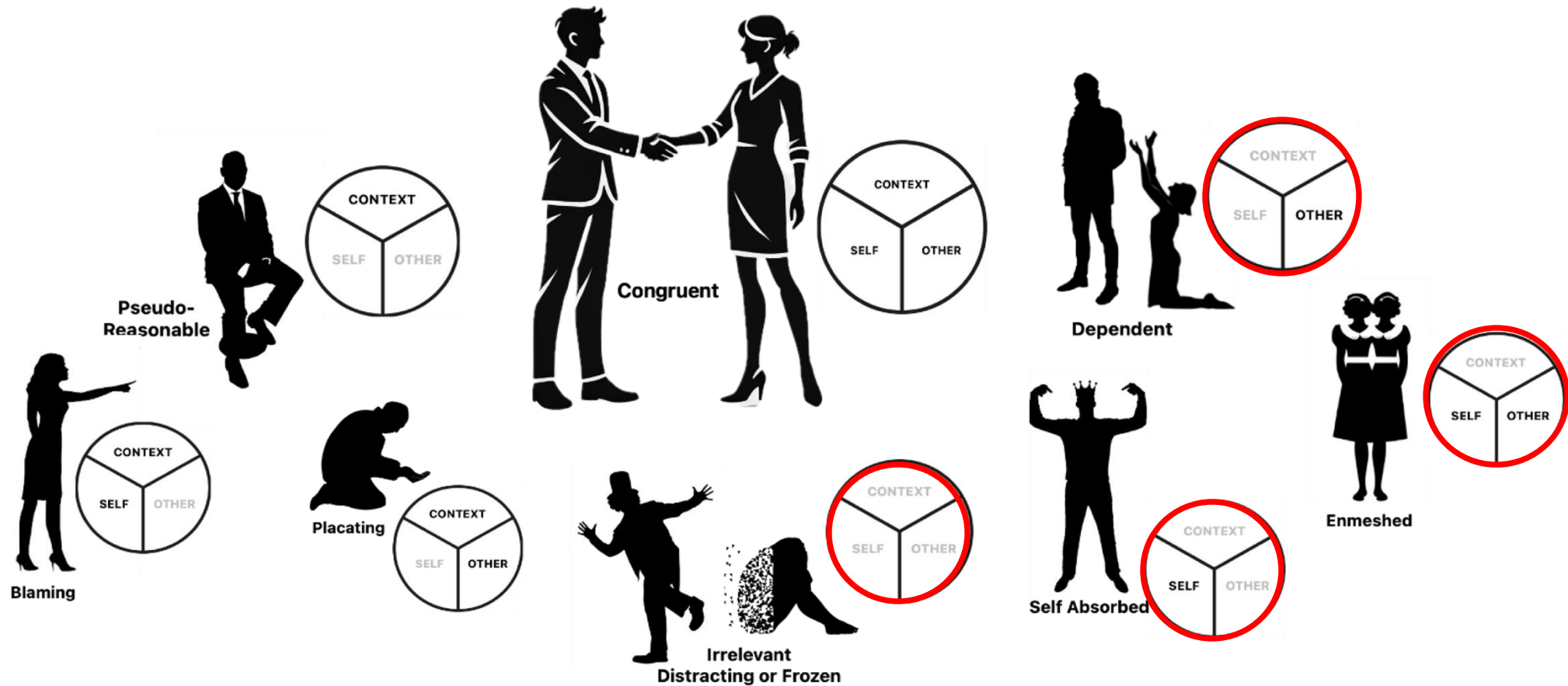
4 Body Sensations
Physiological reaction to sensory data
Tingling, tightness, warmth, pain, heaviness, lightheaded, nausea

5 Meaning Making
Multi-sensory interpretation of complex situations
Perceptions, cognitions, expectations, beliefs

6 Feelings
Feelings based on the interpretation

7 Feelings about Feelings
How a person feels about their feelings based on internal dialog rooted in family/societal rules
(should, ought, must, never, always, etc.) and tied to self-esteem

8 Coping Patterns
Conscious or sub-conscious attempts to survive
Blaming, placating, irrelevant, pseudo-reasonable, dependent, enmeshed, self-absorbed

9 Rules for Commenting
Family/societal rules that limit a person's self-worth, restrict their choices, are no longer relevant or no longer fit
See what you should, say what is expected, feel what you ought, wait for permission, choose to be secure

10 Observable Outcome
Behavioral response

Assessing the Gap Between Coping & Congruence

To assess the gap between a person's current coping patterns and congruence, we can consider the following eight points. Satir said an individual manifests congruence when he or she:

- Replies to questions directly rather than first asking, "Why do you want to know?"

- Shows some sexual vitality

- Names specific desires without giving a long rationale

- Says yes or no honestly (makes honest choices)

- "Puts on a detective hat" to look at comments, ideas, acts, and situations instead of passing judgment first

- Takes risks on his or her own behalf, even before settling all fears

- Still asks questions about life, is open to new possibilities, and doesn't pretend to have all the answers in advance for every new situation

- Listens to his or her intuition or "wisdom box" for new possibilities, choices, and resolutions, and includes these in any decision-making situation

Working Toward Congruence

Problem-Solving vs. Process-Oriented

- Helping a client build congruence is not a problem-solving approach in which the focus is on content, and the implication and expectation are that the therapist will help solve the client's problem.
- Rather, it is a process-oriented approach that focuses on what the client wants to learn and change.
- This reflects Satir's growth model of the world and its acceptance of people as they are. It helps them gain access to their inner resources and their choices."

"Congruence is not a matter of choosing one message over the other. Rather, incongruent communicators' perceptions are out of harmony with the self. To build congruence, we need to change our interpretations and then reconfirm our self-esteem at the level of self ("I am"). We need to teach ourselves and our clients to breathe regularly, to center ourselves by going inside for some self-validation, and to stay in the present by accepting our context, the other person, and ourselves."

-Virginia Satir

The Experience of Self

Behavior
(action, storyline)

External

Coping
(Survival Stances)

Waterline

Waterline

Internal

ego survival
"Doing"

Expectations
(Of self, of others, from others)

Body Sensations
(tingling, tightness, warmth, pain, heaviness)

Beliefs
(of self, of others, of context/world)

Feelings
(joy, anger, hurt, fear sadness)

Perceptions
(assumptions, mindset, subjective reality, cognition)

Feelings about Feelings
(self-worth)

"Being"

Yearnings
(Loved, accepted, validated, purposeful, creative, lovable, meaningful, freedom)

I AM

Essence
(life force, spirit, soul, atman, transcendental apperception, intellectus)

Working Towards Congruence
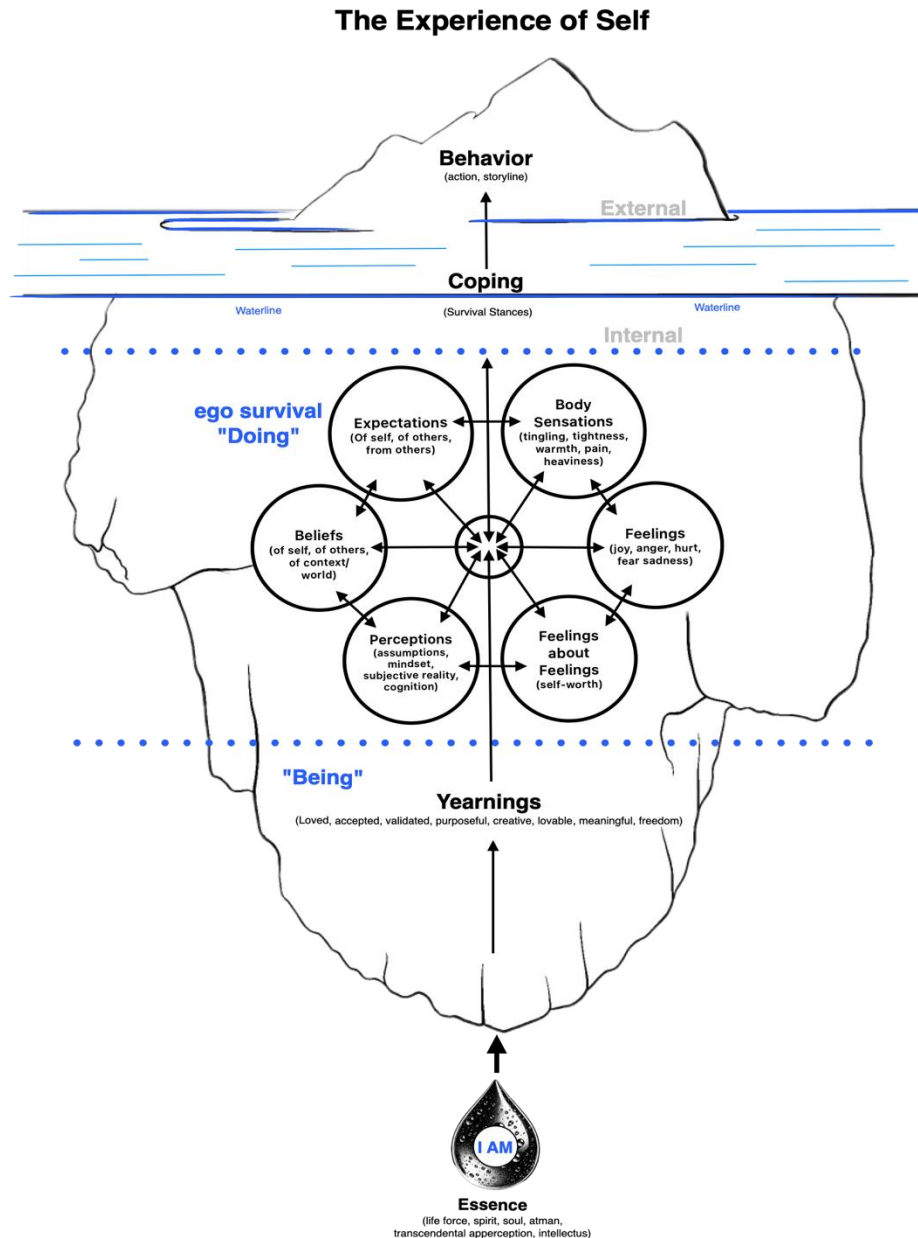
- Congruence is based on an awareness of what is going on within: our thoughts, feelings, body messages, and the meanings we ascribe to our experiences.

- We learned to be incongruent to survive

- To learn congruence requires reevaluating and hearing ourselves anew, being able to gauge our self-worth at any moment, and moving from the submissive/dominant model to Satir's growth model.

Working Toward Congruence
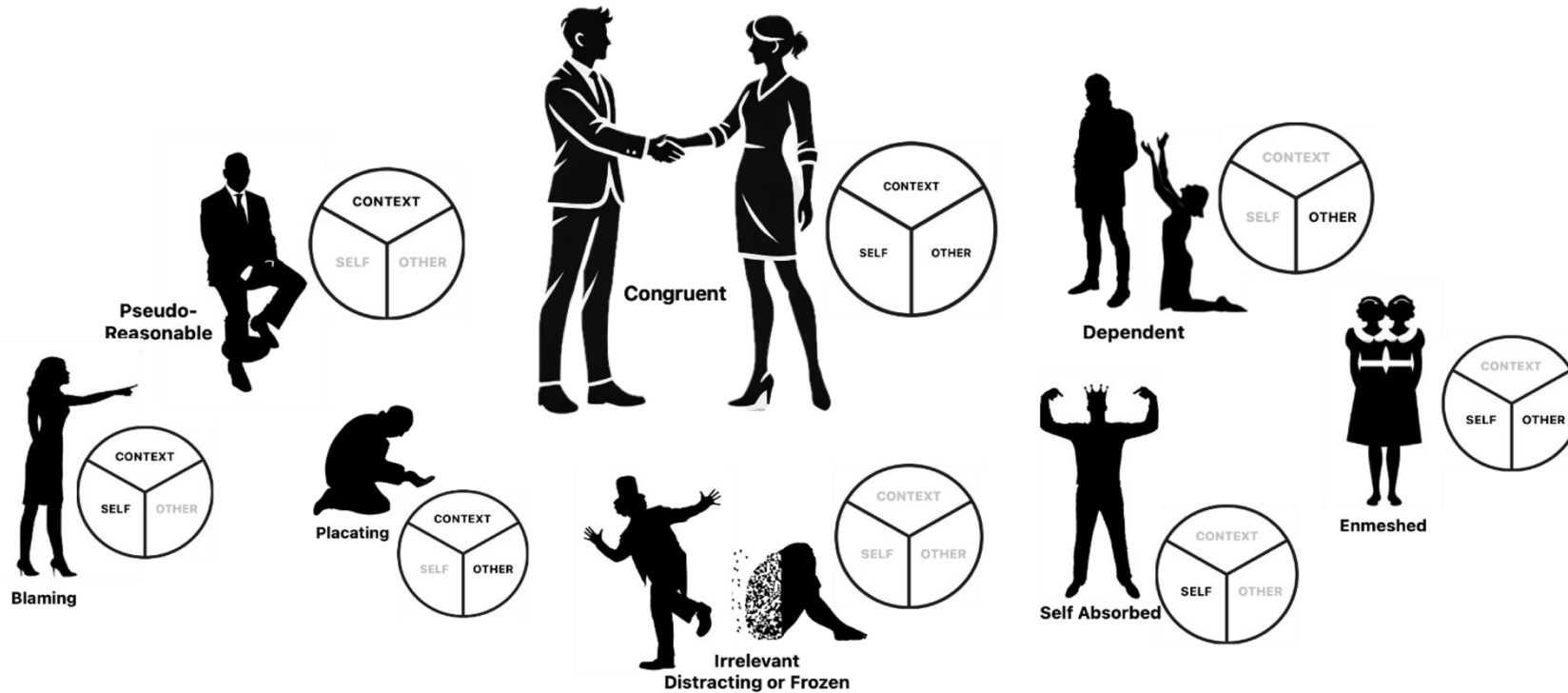
For someone in the placating stance adding the resource of self-care moves the person to congruent caring about self and others. Similarly, if someone in the blaming stance adds an acknowledgment of the other person, congruence and assertiveness can be achieved.

To help people live congruently, Satir developed these pointers:

1. Be aware and honor self, other, and context.
2. Give full attention when relating to others.
3. Be aware of personal body messages.
   (Satir conceptualized and enacted the survival stances, for instance, so that people could recognize and become aware of their bodies and their body messages)
4. Be aware of personal defenses and family rules.

Congruence refers to a state of being as well as a quality of communicating.

Congruence entails acknowledging and accepting our inner experiences (sensations, interpretations, and consequent feelings about those feelings) and being able to express them. Congruence involves listening to our perceptions and expectations and translating those into a responsible pattern of meeting our needs by tapping our yearnings. Ultimately, congruence moves us into harmony with our spiritual essence, or what Satir called the universal life force.

Satir, V., Banmen, J., Gerber, J., & Gomori, M. (1991). The Satir Model. Palo Alto, CA.

# Key Aspects of Banmen's Concept of Congruence:

Importance of Congruence in therapy:

In Satir-based therapy, achieving congruence helps clients develop a stronger sense of self, improve communication, and create more fulfilling relationships. Banmen considered it a key goal for personal transformation, as congruent individuals experience greater harmony within themselves and in their interactions with others.

1. Internal-External Alignment – A person is congruent when their feelings, thoughts, and actions are in harmony, leading to authenticity and integrity.

2. Balance in Communication – Congruent individuals communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully, rather than using defensive or incongruent communication styles (such as blaming, placating, or being overly rational).

3. Self-Connection and Self-Awareness – Congruence requires self-acceptance and awareness of one's inner experiences, allowing a person to express themselves truthfully while considering the impact on others.

4. Emotional and Relational Maturity – Banmen sees congruence as essential for healthy relationships, as it fosters genuine connections, mutual understanding, and emotional well-being.

Consciousness
RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SPIRITUAL ESSENCE AND THE UNIVERSAL LIFE-FORCE

2nd Birth

Context
Self
Other
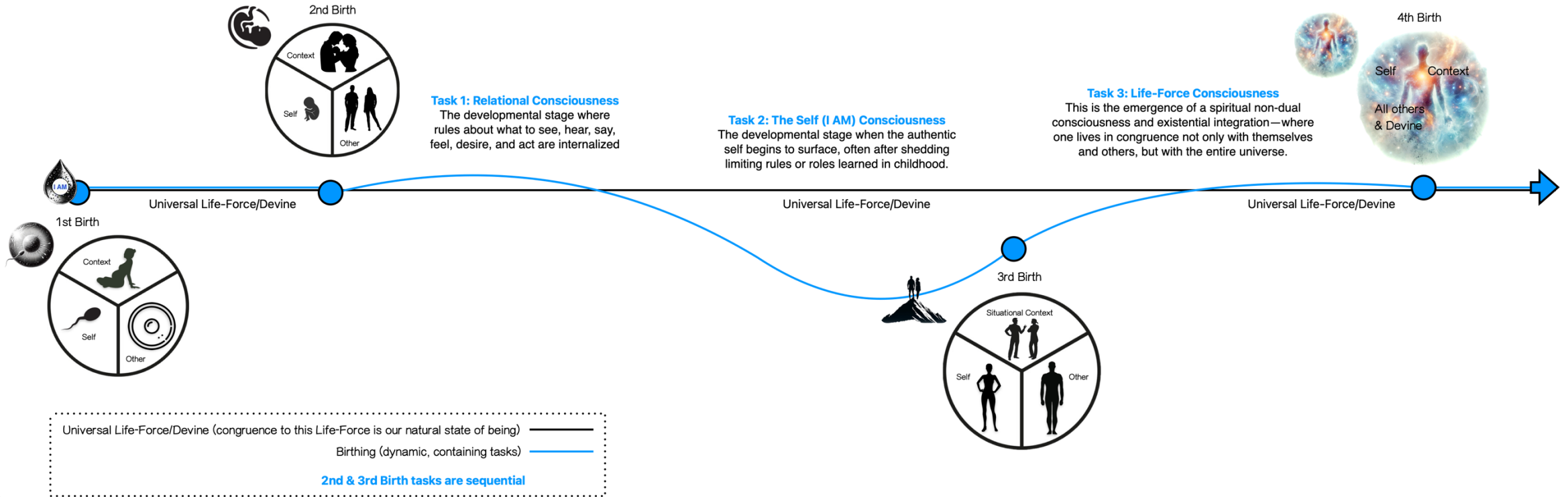
Task 1: Relational Consciousness
The developmental stage where rules about what to see, hear, say, feel, desire, and act are internalized

Task 2: The Self (I AM) Consciousness
The developmental stage when the authentic self begins to surface, often after shedding limiting rules or roles learned in childhood.

Task 3: Life-Force Consciousness
This is the emergence of a spiritual non-dual consciousness and existential integration—where one lives in congruence not only with themselves and others, but with the entire universe.

4th Birth
Self Context
All others & Devine

Universal Life-Force/Devine

Universal Life-Force/Devine

Universal Life-Force/Devine

I AM

1st Birth
Context
Self
Other

3rd Birth
Situational Context
Self Other

Universal Life-Force/Devine (congruence to this Life-Force is our natural state of being) ————
Birthing (dynamic, containing tasks) ————

2nd & 3rd Birth tasks are sequential

Argumaniz-Hardin, 2024