

# Coaching Today

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## Is the future of coaching relational?

'Where is the room for creativity,  
for spontaneity, for intuition?  
Where is the humanity?'



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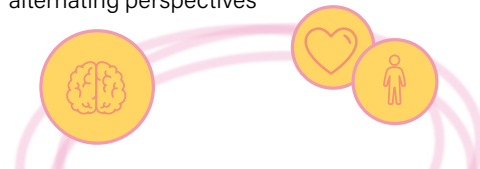
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# Editorial



Diane Parker  
Editor, *Coaching Today*

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We welcome feedback and comments from our readers. If you have a response to any of the articles published in *Coaching Today*, please contact the Editor at [coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk](mailto:coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk). Please note that your letter may be edited for length.

#### Interested in contributing to *Coaching Today*?

Copy deadlines for the next two issues are **7 May** and **6 August 2024** respectively. Contact the Editor at the email above with your ideas.



## The human touch

I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling a small sense of triumph at a minor news story that began circulating in the media towards the end of last year. The northern supermarket chain, Booths, announced that it is removing most of its automated self-service checkouts and bringing back human cashiers, in response to customer demand.

Though perhaps not a seismic swing compared with everything else happening in the world right now, to me, this small but significant shift by the supermarket chain – known as 'the Waitrose of the north' – indicates a potential wider systemic change. Coupled with the news that emerged around the same time – that the proposed closures of railway station ticket booths in favour of automatic machines were abandoned at the 11th hour – I am left with a sense of hope that together, we can push back against the 'technofuturist tide'<sup>1</sup> and reclaim our sense of humanity and community.

With the inexorable rise of artificial intelligence, our profession is by no means immune from automation either, as we have previously explored in the pages of this journal.<sup>2,3</sup> And yet – as the digital juggernaut thunders steadily on, could we perhaps see glimpses of the tide turning here too?

Reading the contributions of our writers in this first issue of the new year, I feel that same sense of quiet hope. Each grapple with the question of what it means to be human – and what it means to bring our humanity into our practice, through our creativity, our empathy and compassion, or our mindful capacity. As George Warren asks in our lead article: in what way is the future of coaching relational? What can we bring to the coaching relationship that an AI chatbot cannot?

Let's be clear – the digital age is here to stay and if we are to evolve as practitioners, coaching providers and as a profession, we must be prepared to adapt.<sup>3</sup> But my hopeful vision for our future is one where the gifts of our presence, our creativity, our compassion and our humanity, are acknowledged, embraced and valued more than ever.

In the meantime, I hope for a future where I never have to hear the dreaded words 'unexpected item in the bagging area' ever again.

Wishing you all the best for 2024.  
Until next time... ■

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**My hopeful vision for our future is one where the gifts of our presence, our creativity, our compassion and our humanity, are acknowledged, embraced and valued more than ever**

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# BACP Coaching News

## Message from the Chair

### In search of *ikigai*



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I'm regularly reminded how lucky we are to have this journal as a resource for inquiry, debate and learning, and our most recent October 2023 issue was no exception. I found myself encouraged to take more positive action to champion the benefits of coaching within my network, to notice and explore the meaning of my energy levels when working with my clients, and to more intentionally discern how leaders' life stories impact their thoughts, behaviours and values. Perhaps most impactful was Charlotte Housden's article 'Reflecting on Reflections', which landed at just the right time for me. With everything that's going on in the world, taking time to reflect at Housden's 'macro' level (alongside my usual regular group and individual supervision sessions) feels less an indulgence and more an act of essential self-care.

**How lucky am I to have found my own unique little *ikigai*, and to be able to, in my therapeutic coaching endeavours, help others search for theirs**

I don't think I'm alone in this. We are often 'holding' clients – therapeutically, in coaching, or in integrated therapy-coaching practice – who come to us because they find themselves in states of turmoil, transition and chaos. Clients will describe feelings of things 'spinning', 'floating', 'whirling', 'out of control', indicating (among other things) an overactivated nervous system reaction to a real or imagined threat. To help clients feel more grounded, metaphors rooted in nature (so to speak) seem to work particularly well. Using the narrative therapy metaphor of the tree of life<sup>2</sup> helps clients identify the strengths and challenges in their past and present, while also providing a sense of agency and empowerment about their hopes and dreams for the future.

#### The tree of life

I've recently taken time to reflect on my own personal tree, to understand what grounds me, and brings me a sense of safety, peace, and identity through the challenging storms of life.

The roots of my past include a sense of timelessness about being in nature: near to water – whether the sea, a river, or a lake; and feeling the elements on my face, regardless of whether it's the sun, the wind, or the rain (preferably, the sun). In the grass that surrounds the base of my tree, which reflects my present circumstances, those around me feature prominently. This includes my dog – a perfect example of a living soul who experiences simple joy in almost every second of every single day – and my children – there is nothing more humbling than your teenagers vocally reminding you of your infinite human fallibility.

The trunk of the tree holds my values, which include curiosity, collaboration, diversity, pragmatism, creativity, and humour. Experiencing for myself the danger that in times of stress we regress, extending the core value of kindness to myself (as well as others) as a source of strength and resilience, has been an invaluable way of soothing and resourcing myself. As I grow into my future, the tree branches represent the continual learning, growth and development that is one of the biggest gifts of our profession. The new leaves that emerge are the inspiring colleagues I have the pleasure of connecting with through my work in the BACP Coaching division and my consultancy practice.

I found myself wondering where my clients fit in to this metaphor, concluding that they are part of the rich foliage, and sometimes, even represent the gifts of fruit. Recognising that I often learn as much from my clients as they might from me, I'm reminded of Yalom's view that 'if the therapist doesn't change, then the patient doesn't, either'.<sup>3</sup> For example, in response to a common theme emerging in my practice, my professional development, reading and research have recently been focused on how I can support my clients in creating optimal work-life balance, and overcome any internal or external barriers to achieving this.

# BACP Coaching News



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## Finding *ikigai*

One book has stood out for me in particular. *Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life*<sup>4</sup> explores the Japanese concept that our meaning and purpose in life can be found when four areas converge: what we love, what we're good at, what the world needs and what we can be paid for. I start this year feeling incredibly grateful that, after years of working in jobs that I loved at times, felt demotivated in others, but all too often had to be a version of me that 'didn't quite fit', I find myself in a profession doing work that fulfils me, surrounded by generous colleagues, that I can keep learning to be good at. I get to provide much-needed services to an increasingly wider spectrum of people, and I have the privilege of being paid for doing this. How lucky am I to have found my own unique little *ikigai*, and to be able to, in my therapeutic coaching endeavours, help others search for theirs.

I'd like to end by picking up on those last two of those four important areas (what the world needs, and what we can be paid for). This year, as a Coaching division, we will continue to work with the BACP Policy team to advocate for the benefits of therapy-coaching dual-practice for individuals, groups and communities beyond those traditionally reached by coaching in the workplace and wider society. We also aim to collaborate with the BACP Research team, to find ways to demonstrate the efficacy of our dual-practice approach with clients, and the value and return on investment (ROI) for organisational investment in our services. ■

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## Changes within BACP Coaching Executive Committee

With much gratitude and a noticeable dose of sadness, in October 2023 we bid a fond farewell to our Executive Committee members Val Watson, Deputy Chair, Karen Ledger, Chair of Supervision special interest group (SIG) and Neresia Osbourne, member of Supervision SIG.

We thank them for their significant and valuable contributions to the committee, and the additional responsibilities they took on throughout their committee tenures, including vital work supporting the development and subsequent successful launch of the BACP coaching competence framework in January 2023. What a legacy to leave behind.

We now extend a warm welcome to three new members – Belinda Joseph-Pirame, Gemma Levitas and Steve Davis. Enjoy learning more about Belinda's extensive background and experience in psychotherapy and executive coaching as our featured Meet the Member columnist in this issue on p6.

We also welcome Anna Kennedy, who is a Senior Research Fellow in BACP's Research team, as our new Coaching division Special Interest Lead, taking over the role previously held by Jeremy Bacon. Anna brings a wealth of experience in social psychology and sociology as part of her PhD research, along with a strong interest in coaching, and we are looking forward to working with her this year. We thank Jeremy for all his hard work and support during his time with the division over recent years – his enthusiasm, commitment, attention to detail and general ability to be a font of knowledge for all things BACP was greatly appreciated.

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## Network events

**Tuesday 6 February, 6pm to 7pm**  
**Location: Online**  
**'Contracting'**

In this session, we will look at contracting. Are you unsure whether to have separate or combined contracts for coaching/counselling/therapeutic coaching? How do you use contracting within your sessions? If you would like to explore these questions and more with like-minded practitioners, please join us.

For more information and booking see:  
[www.bacp.co.uk/events/cnm060224-coaching-network-meeting-online](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events/cnm060224-coaching-network-meeting-online)

The network meetings team would also like to offer a special thank you to Claire Hornsby for her enthusiasm and hard work in supporting and growing the network meetings into the valuable resource they are for our members today. While not a member of the Executive, Claire has made a significant contribution from across the pond (hooray for online working!) and been a great support to Joanne Wright and Yvonne Inglis over the past two years.

## BACP Coaching on Facebook



If you use Facebook, we'd like to invite you all to follow us on our dedicated BACP Coaching division page. Joining us gives you an opportunity to find out about forthcoming events, give your feedback on hot topics and learn about the latest developments within the BACP Coaching division.

Look out for our posts and come and be part of the discussion.

<https://tinyurl.com/bacpcoachingdivision>

# Meet the member



## **Belinda Joseph-Pirame**

*is an existential psychotherapist, executive coach, facilitator and workplace wellbeing consultant. Belinda has a background working in various mental health organisations across statutory, charitable, and private sector organisations, in both frontline and leadership roles, and she currently works in private practice. She is both a BACP and UKCP-registered psychotherapist and an EMCC-accredited practitioner for executive coaching and mentoring. Belinda joined the BACP Coaching Executive Committee in summer 2023.*

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### **How would you describe your journey from therapist to coach (or coach to therapist)?**

I have always been curious about people and how they live their lives. I also have an innate desire to help. I was always rather fascinated by psychiatric conditions and their treatment, and so, my initial aspiration was to become a clinical psychologist.

To fulfil this ambition, I undertook an undergraduate degree in psychology with social studies, and a postgraduate qualification in health psychology, while I began work in acute and post-acute psychiatric settings. I loved this work; I found it fascinating and there was rarely a dull moment.

However, I accidentally discovered that I found a much deeper sense of joy, purpose and usefulness in talking with and listening to patients about their concerns, as opposed to supporting their medication plans. I swiftly followed my gut feeling to train as a psychotherapist instead of a clinical psychologist, enrolling at Regent's College (now Regent's University) to train as an existential psychotherapist. I later went on to undertake additional postgraduate training in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as I moved into trauma work, noticing highly traumatised clients required more in the way of active strategies to tackle issues such as eating disorders, panic attacks, problematic thought patterns and other mind-body symptoms.

I've been fortunate to have worked in a broad variety of settings, in both frontline and leadership roles. This includes varied NHS psychiatric settings and outpatient therapy; community and residential mental health services; social enterprise psychoeducation, rape crisis/domestic and sexual abuse; crisis and suicide prevention; employee assistance programmes (EAPs); reoffending prevention; and private sector psychotherapy settings. I have worked in private practice for the past decade.

As I look back, I know that I absolutely made the right decision to change training. I still love psychotherapy as much today as I did then, finding fascination and magic in it, even after 23 years of practice. I consider it a gift that I get to help people help themselves to make considered choices that shape their lives, and to witness their personal growth.

My coaching journey has been different by comparison. In all honesty, I initially felt a deep resentment and scepticism towards coaching, believing it lacked credibility. While my primary drive is a vocational one – a desire to help people – at first, I resented what I perceived as a disparity in pay between executive/leadership coaching and psychotherapy. I experienced an expectation of therapy as being offered for little or no money, despite offering much deeper work and requiring longer intensive training. Alternately, coaching

seemed to me to be more superficial, requiring far less intensive training, yet commanding much higher fees. I felt this was unfair.

More and more corporate company leaders, senior managers, and employees arrived in my therapy room with concerns and stresses about toxicity in their workplaces, challenging workplace relationships, and less-than-ideal equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices, and how these impacted them, both personally and professionally. All the while, I noticed a seed growing within me, a desire to effect change on a larger scale, helping both individuals and the organisations they worked for to create more satisfying, human-centric, and productive workplaces.

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**I noticed a seed growing within me, a desire to effect change on a larger scale, helping both individuals and the organisations they worked for to create more satisfying, human-centric, and productive workplaces**

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I became curious about pursuing coaching training and was challenged to re-examine my initial beliefs about executive coaching. In both offering and receiving coaching, I discovered that it has so much more to offer clients than I'd previously given it credit for, dissolving my formerly held negative ideas. I went on to complete my Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) level 7 coaching and mentoring qualification, and have now been coaching for over three years. Today, I am excited and intrigued to be on this journey of refining what integrated therapy and coaching

practice means for me, and what I have to offer individual and organisational clients.

### **Do you have a coaching niche?**

The coaching I offer is transformational, concerned with the internal world and who the leader is 'being' in their leadership role. Therefore, I work with leaders who experience personal and professional blocks that are interrupting their ability to function as the best version of themselves as leaders. Many leaders I work with are experiencing stress, anxiety, perfectionism, imposter syndrome, burnout, overwhelm, relational issues and unhelpful thinking.

### **How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?**

Coaching has allowed me to shift away from lone work as a therapist. It's helped me make wonderful connections, working on various joint projects with fellow coaches and similar professionals, both within the UK and worldwide, that I would not have otherwise made.

In becoming a coach, being coached has helped me to shift my perspective on the concerns I brought along, and in doing so, shifted my entire perspective on coaching itself. Today, I am more readily able to return to my belief that there are many ways up the mountain; that is, there are many things people can choose to help them and ways in which people can be helped. There is space for everything. This includes therapy and coaching, whether separately or in integrated practice.

### **Where do you practise?**

I practise a hybrid model, splitting time between online work with clients both in the UK and worldwide, and face-to-face work in London.

### **Do you have a typical client?**

I work with leaders and senior managers within private, public, and charitable sector organisations. They either work for medium to large organisations or own their own business(es).

They often bring personal and professional aspirations at the outset, struggling to create harmony between the two. They will often be looking at how to become more effective in their professional role through overcoming personal blocks.

Some of my clients are also professionals of colour or from multicultural backgrounds who are experiencing EDI challenges in a professional context.

### **How would you describe your particular approach to coaching/therapy?**

My approach blends aspects of the existential and CBT therapy models with coaching techniques.

For example, I have experimented with various coaching frameworks but over time found increasingly that some aspects of psychotherapeutic practice, such as Socratic questioning, to be far more useful. I am still on a journey of refining this.

### **What's your biggest challenge currently?**

I would say that becoming more visible to corporate leadership teams as a therapist-coach and a professional woman of colour is not without its challenges.

**I feel there is much more work to be done... in terms of creating greater inclusion, not only within coaching provider organisations but also within the leadership teams who consume those services**

My personal experience has been that some leadership teams within the corporate/private sector settings continue to retain homogenous leadership teams. This sometimes includes coaching employers using an associate model. Given that research shows diverse teams out-perform homogenous ones<sup>1,2</sup>, this for me seems in need of amendment and has, at times, fostered a feeling of exclusion rather than belonging.

I feel there is much more work to be done and many more vital conversations to be had in terms of creating greater inclusion, not only within coaching provider organisations but also within the leadership teams who consume those services. I have found some real challenges in calling out racist, racially neutral or micro-dismissive practices, often feeling alone or like the burden is on me to raise issues around diversity.

Despite this, I do feel hopeful that change is possible and I want to be a part of that change.

### **What do you feel most proud of having achieved?**

One of the things I am most proud of is my professional career. I always wanted to be someone who spent time doing something in which they felt interested and found great joy, especially considering the amount of time spent

at work. I feel I have learned so much and continue to learn, through experience, from fellow professionals, and most of all, from clients.

I feel deeply grateful that I still get to be someone who can say that I love my work.

### **How do you resource yourself? What do you enjoy in your spare time?**

I love rowing (sculling), fishing and open-water swimming. I have an aspiration to learn to sail. I get a lot of spiritual connection as well as mental and physical wellness through water. I recently moved away from London to a coastal town, which allows me easy access to these pursuits.

### **What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?**

I invite you to pull the thread of that interest!

I would also say, please do your homework if considering coaching training. Take your time to consider what feels right for you, find a credible training provider, and ask lots of questions. Make sure you have a like-minded community around you.

Most of all, be authentically you. There are lots of highly successful coaching practitioners, and it can feel like there's not enough room for new coaches. However, I believe there is more than enough space for everyone.

### **What does being a member of the Coaching division give you?**

I cannot tell you how excited I am to be part of the Coaching division. After recently attending my first in-person meeting with fellow members of the BACP Coaching Executive, I felt inspired and found my colleagues to be forward-thinking, like-minded and very supportive.

For me, being a member of BACP Coaching means being part of a pioneering group that collectively aims to support its fellow practitioners, boost excellence in the profession, tackle hitherto-unexplored ground, and raise the volume on the value of dual practitionership. ■

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### **Get in touch**

If you are a BACP Coaching member and would like to feature in this column, please contact the Editor at:

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# Where is the humanity?

The gift of presence  
in coaching





In a coaching climate increasingly driven by new technologies and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), coach and trainer **George Warren** asks: in what way is the future of coaching relational?



**I**t can be said that the world of coaching mirrors and matches wider trends of modern life. In the 1990s, executive coaching focused heavily on performance and growth. Coaches were hired into organisations to help leaders 'do' more, achieve more. Fittingly, the model of choice at this time was the process-led GROW model.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years on, this model remains one of the most popular, often taught on day one of coach training. Its use today mirrors the often paradoxical and divergent nature of the coaching journey. It can be both at once a simple, logical 'coaching by numbers' process easily taught and quickly applied, and the manifestation of some profound psychological principles of flow, consciousness, awareness and responsibility.

### **The rise of bot coaching**

Today, in 2024, we coaches are operating at a time when an AI bot can already coach pretty effectively. A 2022 Oxford Brookes study showed that the 'Vici' coach bot could offer increased goal-attainment versus the control group.<sup>2</sup>

Vici's website describes it as the 'future of coaching', and in the emerging market right now are AI coaching bot offerings from other organisations such as Rocky.AI. Coming soon, from the folks at CoachHub, we'll be invited to meet AIMY™, 'the world's first conversational AI coach'. And in August 2023, *The Guardian* announced that Google is trialling its own AI bot that acts as a 'personal life coach'.<sup>3</sup>

In an already saturated market for coaches, with commoditised bot-coaching snapping at our heels, what is a human coach to do?

## Coaching to process

In the years I've been providing coach training and assessment for executive coaches in training, one of the most concerning trends I've experienced is a slavish adherence to process; an over-indexing on structure and control within the session, clinging, white-knuckled to the side of the pool, fearful of the deep water.

The efforts to professionalise the coaching industry are, without doubt, well intended. One clear downside in how they have been articulated, taught and assessed is that many new coaches believe that 'good coaching' entails sticking as closely to the competences as possible. That 'effective coaching' is a box-ticking exercise; that 'transformational coaching' is born from an increasingly closer adherence to the structured coaching process that they 'should' follow.

Good coaches, after all, always follow the client's agenda.

Good coaches, after all, always ask open questions – and never ask *why*.

Good coaches, after all, will not bring any of their 'stuff' into the conversation.

We coaches operate in an era where the largest accrediting body, the International Coach Federation (ICF), mandates a form of professional development that is focused on performance. Mentor coaching involved reviewing a recording of a coaching session, but one of the criticisms faced by this is an over-emphasis on the 'doing' of a coach.

In my experience as both mentor coach and mentor coachee, a typical 60 or 90-minute mentor coaching session can turn away from the 'being' of a coach, in favour of a performance analysis against a competency framework, ie the 'doing' of a coach.

For many coaches I know, a refreshing tonic to an overly structured, logical and process-led approach to coaching can be found in the work of Carl Jung. It feels apt to offer his advice here:

'Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul. Not theories, but your own creative individuality alone must decide.'<sup>4</sup>

## Structure and control

My professional experience as a coach trainer, assessor and supervisor has informed a deep and growing concern that an increasing number of coaches, qualified and unqualified, accredited and unaccredited, are operating with a need for control and structure. Having unpacked this topic in many supervision and mentor coaching sessions, I see an echo of a common, wider need in business of the deep, human need for certainty.

The underlying belief is that as long as there is a process to follow, everything will be 'alright'. Whether working with a paying client, a practice client or a fellow coach-in-training, there is an understandable keenness to avoid mistakes, to avoid being judged, rejected; to avoid social shame.

Many coaches have shared with me that one of the strongest barriers to the effective coaching they want to do is the prospect of doing something wrong and that the client will lose respect for them.

As a result, what happens? Silences tend to be filled. Challenges are left unoffered. The illogical remains unexplored. Intuition remains in the gut. The coach homogenises, relying on some of their stock questions. They continue playing it safe.

## Challenge and discomfort

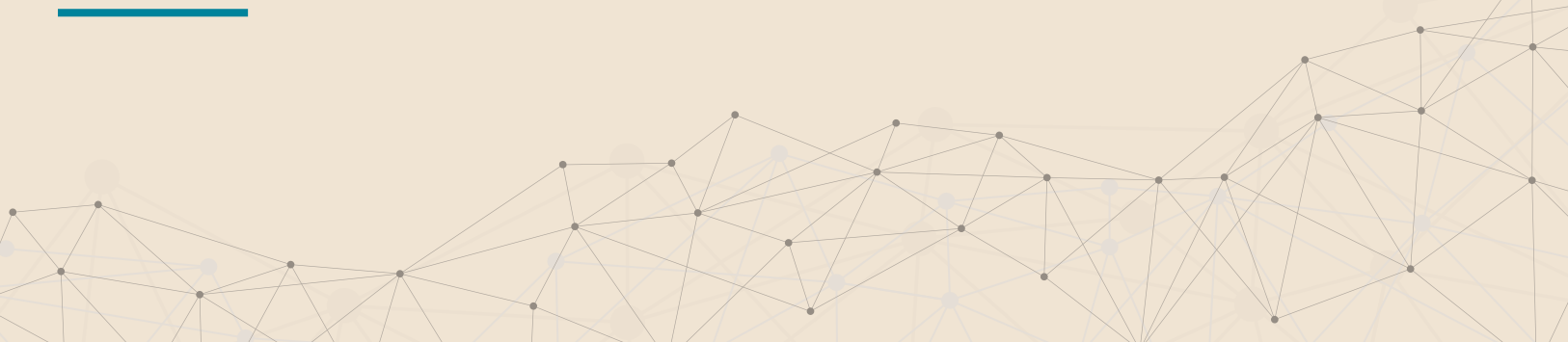
In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, executive coaches John Blakey and Ian Day encouraged fellow practitioners to leave the 'cosy club' and to lean into a greater sense of risk, tension and provocation with their clients.<sup>5</sup> They invited coaches to spend more time in the 'zone of uncomfortable debate', a space where coach and client are not necessarily agreeing, with some friction, some positive tension in the air. A coach might become more direct – *'What is the heart of the matter here?'* – or more provocative – *'What aren't we talking about here?'*

In my own journey as a coach, leaning into more tension, becoming more aware of when I might be 'agreeing' with my client in an unhelpful way, or 'colluding' with their thinking, has been transformational. It is a sentiment echoed by what I hear from coaching clients.

If you were to ask someone who has received executive coaching what quality they found most helpful, you will probably hear that their coach challenged them – 'really made me think'.

“

**Many coaches have shared with me that one of the strongest barriers to the effective coaching they want to do is the prospect of doing something wrong and that the client will lose respect for them**



### The gift of presence

As coach-training schools and institutions continue to facilitate thousands of new coaches into the wider world each year, this can be seen as broadly a good thing. This also presents several downsides.

First, ChatGPT-style bots will, if not already, out-perform and undercut those human coaches who continue to operate from a place of strict logic and process.

Second, what is getting missed, stifled and repressed when a coach is fixated on strictly following a crib sheet? Where is the room for creativity, for spontaneity, for intuition? Simply put – *where is the humanity?*

While many coaches play their own 'inner game'<sup>6</sup>, trying to remember the rules, what they should and shouldn't be doing, what that perfect question is... while all this chatter is happening – *what gets lost?*

Presence. Becoming present to the person opposite you; the beautiful gift of being fully *with* that person. Hearing them at a deeper level... listening to you own body, emotions and intuitions. Connecting with the person opposite you in a more profoundly spiritual, beautiful, human way.

One encouragement I regularly offer coaches is to turn down the volume of the mind, and turn up the volume from their heart, their gut, their soul. It is a sentiment beautifully encapsulated in the Co-Active Approach, where the coach is encouraged to 'dance in this moment' with their client.<sup>7</sup>

### Dance, dance, dance

To stretch the metaphor further, I advocate that, rather than aim to rigidly and robotically regurgitate line dancing, or endlessly repeat the macarena, the coach aims to flow with their client, be fully *with* their partner and effortlessly attuned to the music, the silence and the present moment. To dance as if nobody else is watching.

In my experience, what sets apart great coaches is the quality of *presence*. Their curiosity to pick up on a breath, a pause, a tiny gesture. Their courage and confidence to experiment, to get things wrong, to improvise. Their intuition to challenge, to disagree, to provoke, to stretch, to hear at deeper levels the meanings, emotions or repressions sitting underneath the words. Their ability to work with humour, intuition, silliness and the illogical.

“

**What is getting missed, stifled and repressed when a coach is fixated on strictly following a crib sheet? Where is the room for creativity, for spontaneity, for intuition? Simply put – *where is the humanity?***

### Our humanity is our best coaching quality

Our body is our best coaching tool. This will need to be harnessed more and more if we are to compete with AI coach bots. We – and our clients – are relational, tribal mammals who seek connection and community. To fixate on process and structure is to overly intellectualise, overly mechanise and commoditise coaching.

Casting a beautiful, humanist shadow over the coaching industry, Carl Rogers said 'the individual has within themselves vast resources for self-understanding, for altering their self-concept, their attitudes, and their self-directed behaviour'.<sup>8</sup> (p49)

Rogers spoke of a careful environment to be created, characterised by non-judgment, openness and authenticity, and that 'when persons are approached in this way, when they are accepted as they are, we discover them to be highly creative and resourceful people in examining and changing their own lives'.<sup>8</sup> (p187)

De Haan offers supportive evidence for this approach through results of his meta-analysis, which suggests that the key factor in an effective coaching engagement is not the modality or method of coaching – but the relationship between coach and client.<sup>9</sup>

### A wider context of connection

In my own experience as coach trainer, I have witnessed sessions in which the coach is asking excellent coaching questions but something deeper is missing. On paper, according to logic, they were brilliant questions – and yet my intuitive experience was that these weren't really helping the client.

On reflection, things remain at a seemingly superficial level. The questions feel clunky, as if reeled off from a mental list, from a cognitive filing cabinet marked 'Good Coaching Questions'. Instead of responding to the person – or even responding to what the person was sharing – the coach moves onto the next *excellent* coaching question. It feels transactional. It feels like there is no wider or deeper context.

This experience mirrors my own journey as a coach. I used to believe that the key quality of a coach was the ability to ask clever questions. In the years since, my thinking has evolved.

I wonder if I believed that effective coaching was purely about moving the client towards a goal? I wonder if I was hiding behind the safety and objectivity of questions that gradually moved the client towards that goal? I wonder if I enjoyed the neutrality and distance – a cold objectivity that I can trace all the way back to Freudian psychoanalysis? I wonder if I believed that the greatest value I could provide would be in sticking as closely as possible to the structured coaching model?

I do know that I was scared of silence. Scared of not knowing. Scared that the mask might slip – my carefully constructed persona of the executive coach – and I would be revealed as a fraud.

I now know that the best way I can help my coaching client is to really *be* with them. To hold the space for them to share, to understand, to unfold. To engage my human-ness and to think less and feel more. To model not-knowing and the illogical, to leave the map and the compass in the backpack and trust that my client will figure out the right path for them.

### Doing the work on ourselves

I believe that some of the most valuable work a coach can do is on themselves, in the privacy of their own mind and heart. I advocate that coaches work with a qualified professional to do the inner work, to safely go to their own depths that they might safely and effectively help their clients go to the places they need to go, while honouring the boundaries with other helping professions.

In her book, *Mentor Coaching*, Clare Norman advocates a dual approach to coaching support and development: 'supervision keeps the coach safe and sane; mentor coaching keeps you sharp'.<sup>10</sup> (p. xiii). My own coaching experience encourages a third element as well: working with a therapist.

In my own journey, one of the most helpful and important experiences for my coaching effectiveness was to work with a therapist. At a practical level, this helped me clarify and articulate my professional boundaries as a coach. After all – how can a coach fully understand the boundaries between coaching and therapy if they haven't experienced both?

But at a more profound level, working with a therapist has helped me to better understand my inner workings, my biases, my trigger points. It has helped me get a better handle on 'my stuff', so that I can show up more helpfully for my coaching clients.

As someone who came into coaching from a non-therapeutic background, I am honoured to work alongside therapist-trained coaches, with the wealth and the depth of experience that they bring. If coaching was keen to break away and lean more heavily into performance and business in its infancy, looking



**As someone who came into coaching from a non-therapeutic background, I am honoured to work alongside therapist-trained coaches, with the wealth and the depth of experience that they bring**



ahead, one of my deepest wishes for coaching is that it continues to honour and espouse its therapeutic heritage; to 'come home' to itself.

This process shows up nicely in the BACP Coaching Competence Framework<sup>11</sup>, and to me signposts where the future of coaching will go. To paraphrase David Britten, one of the consultants to the creation of BACP's coaching competences, a set of competences is simply a map. We still need our intuition, our wisdom, our humanity and presence to navigate the rough terrain of real-world practice.<sup>12</sup>

Like the roots of a tree, today's coaching landscape seems to be expanding into so many beautiful directions. Recent years have seen the growth and prominence in coaching of, for example, neurodiversity, climate change, social justice and AI.

These are, I believe, important and fascinating opportunities for learning, growth, evolution and maturation for the industry. There is a danger, I believe, in coaches and the coaching industry also falling into a habit of chasing the 'new thing'; of coaching conferences and publications seeking the latest developments, the next shiny new topic to get excited about.

The danger is that this possible magpie effect of always seeking the newest, shiniest thing will first perpetuate a sense of continual deficiency in coaches. Constantly on the treadmill with an incline, always trying to keep up. A sense of deficiency and 'not good enough' which might, indeed, make its way into the coaching space.

The added danger is that a constant sense of newness risks distracting us from our monsters under the bed. That we look 'over there', instead of 'in here'. That coaching continues to

break away from its therapeutic ancestry, instead of coming back home to it.

Perhaps the work of coach training schools, accrediting bodies and supervisors is to teach the rules so that our coaches know when to break them; to codify competences for broad guidance rather than for formulaic process. To help us coaches understand our 'stuff', our 'baggage' and our deeply held emotional needs so that we can be more aware of how those might infiltrate and taint the thinking and the feeling of the person sitting opposite us.

I feel drawn back to the words of Carl Jung, to close with a fitting encouragement to us coaches and, perhaps, the coaching industry:

'Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes'.<sup>13</sup> ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**George Warren** is a coach, supervisor and mentor coach. He is a member of faculty at the Academy of Executive Coaching (AoEC), and he hosts the Edge of Coaching podcast and community.

To read more of George's writing about coaching visit:

<https://edgeofcoaching.substack.com>

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A white daisy flower is shown in the lower right corner, its petals glistening with raindrops. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a grassy field. Numerous vertical streaks of white represent falling rain, creating a sense of movement and freshness. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.

# Feedback culture:

from feeding self-doubt to  
encouraging self-trust

When a client feels crushed by workplace feedback, how do we help them rebuild confidence? Executive coach and supervisor **Maria Gray** demonstrates how we can support leaders in getting value from the feedback they receive at work

Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots.'

**Frank A. Clark**<sup>1</sup>

**I**t's only now, three years after I left the corporate world, I am beginning to discover who I really am'. Such reflection – or words along these lines – is typical of what I hear from my leadership clients.

Regular performance appraisals and provision of feedback have become an important part of any corporate culture and fundamental for encouraging employee performance, as well as promoting corporate values. As a result, employees often find it harder to trust their inner voice, or indeed to even recognise it, and become overly dependent on feedback from others and seeking external validation.

This article is not an attempt to question the value of the feedback culture, but an exploration of how such culture influences one's effectiveness in the organisational context. How can we support leaders in getting the most out of the feedback that they receive, and ensure that the feedback does not undermine their self-trust or trigger unproductive self-doubt?

I will use a couple of case studies to illustrate the impact that feedback may have on leaders. These are not based on stories of any individual leaders who I have worked with, but are collective images which represent some common themes that I have worked with in my coaching practice over the past 18 years.

## Sophia

When Sophia, a senior leader in a professional services firm, first appeared in my coaching room, I felt as if somebody had placed a heavy weight onto my shoulders. Her body looked stiff and tense as she lowered herself into the chair, and she visibly struggled to relax before she could start telling me her story.

Trying to keep the conversation as authentic and informal as possible, I lightly inquired into Sophia's present work and home life. I couldn't help noticing the intense look she kept giving me; I sensed that she was anxious about my judgment and was trying to second guess my reaction to her story as she was speaking.

She revealed that she had just received the results of her 360 feedback at work and that, despite all her best efforts, she felt misunderstood and unappreciated. Sophia was perceived by her stakeholders as skilled and hard-working, someone who was focused on the quality of the work that her team produced, and who could achieve outstanding results on behalf of the organisation. On the other hand, many of her colleagues had pointed out that her interpersonal skills required attention. She was perceived as 'hard around the edges' in her communication style, defensive to criticism, and as rigidly pushing for other team members, both senior and junior, to meet her expectations.

Sophia shared that she had been hearing similar feedback for years and, despite doing her best to soften her communication style and make it 'more acceptable' to others, people's perceptions of her did not seem to change. She felt out of her depth. Moreover, she felt that her team's outstanding results, and her efforts to deliver them, at the cost of working very long hours, were vastly under-appreciated.

Sophia then told me that, in coaching, she was hoping for some strategies to 'lower her own standards' so she could become more relaxed about the quality of work that her team delivered and some 'tips' regarding her communication style. In a nutshell, it seemed to me as though Sophia was looking for tools to help her become someone she was not.

The sense of unease and stiffness that I saw in Sophia's body language was hinting that, despite her request to explore some remedial strategies and find new 'tools' to enhance her influencing style, first work had to be done to help her get in touch with herself and find the language to express what she was experiencing in her body.

Renowned Gestalt therapist, Arnold Beisser, noted that: 'Change occurs when a person becomes what s/he is, not when s/he tries to become what s/he is not'.<sup>2</sup>

Through our joint exploration, Sophia discovered how challenging it was for her to get in touch with her own beliefs, and to recognise what was truly important for her. Sophia mainly described herself through the prism of the feedback she had received from her colleagues over the years and her internal response to that feedback. It was clear how much she was hurt by that feedback, how unloved and depleted she felt. Unsurprisingly, her capacity to deliver the work was undermined until she was able to find ways of integrating her experience, and to discover her internal resources to move forward.

## Sebastian

During a three-way alignment call between myself, my client Sebastian and his manager to discuss Sebastian's coaching needs, his manager described Sebastian as 'great at everything he does', but that he needed to find a leadership style that was authentic to him, in order to progress his career.

In his first coaching session following this call, Sebastian told me that he felt confused by his manager's words. He explained that he had been attentive to the feedback he received from his team and had tried hard to implement the changes suggested to him. He told me that it was disheartening to hear that, as a result of this, he was now perceived as 'less authentic'. Moreover, as he had been told that he often came across as 'too serious' and 'disengaged', thanks to the feedback, he now found himself overthinking his facial expressions and body language. Small wonder that he was finding it difficult to be 'authentic'.

As we discovered through our coaching conversations, Sebastian was very focused on his career progression. Always immaculate in his physical presentation, he attached a lot of self-worth to being reliable, productive and achieving. It was clear that his team and those senior to him had great respect for him, but they often felt that he tried so hard it could be difficult to engage with him in an authentic, light-hearted fashion.



**How can we support leaders in getting the most out of the feedback that they receive, and ensure that the feedback does not undermine their self-trust or trigger unproductive self-doubt?**





Through coaching, we discovered that, as a high-achiever, Sebastian harboured a sophisticated form of self-doubt; pushing for achievement was necessary for him to feel worthy. His corporate environment continually reinforced his internal pattern with an ongoing push to think about what his next role might be and what he needed to improve to get there.

Sebastian told me that he often found himself dwelling on the conversations he had with his work colleagues. He was not particularly bothered by being disliked by them as a result of some of his 'imperfect interactions', but a perceived failure to meet his own high standards did not sit comfortably with him.

Through further exploratory work, we discovered that one of his biggest fears was that deep down he might be lazy or complacent. Sebastian did his very best to keep his laziness in exile where it was guarded by his internal high achiever.

One of his core beliefs was that life is a fight. Sebastian believed that unless he worked hard and aimed for perfection, he was going to be at best, ordinary and at worst, fail.

From the stories that Sebastian told me, it was clear that self-discipline, along with his ability to pull himself together and persevere, despite any difficulties that life threw at him, had served him well many times in both his personal and professional life.

Sebastian revealed that he often found himself buried in a heap of operational tasks and avoided addressing more strategic issues that would require him to engage his creative side. Sebastian was repeatedly praised by colleagues for his productivity and ability to resolve issues, a perception he was deservedly proud of. As a result, he spread himself too thin and left himself no room for the creative reflection that he needed to address strategic issues.

Despite always looking 'together', on several occasions Sebastian mentioned often feeling depleted, admitting that even on holidays, he struggled to relax and the best he could manage was 'doing rest', rather than actually resting. Even when he was on holiday, his harsh internal critic bullied him into being productive; it called him lazy and complacent when all he wanted was to get some rest and enjoy life.

Our coaching work was purposefully designed to help Sebastian get in touch with his own inner voice and self-doubt, explore the positive purpose of his internal perfectionist and high-achiever, and think about what self-trust might look like for him.

## Feedback as a double-edged sword

In my executive coaching practice, my relationship with a leader often starts with joint exploration of their recent 360 or 180 feedback results. It is often a helpful place to start a coaching relationship as such conversations amplify patterns that are worth paying attention to in coaching, and highlight any coaching needs as perceived by other stakeholders.

However, if taken at face value, there is a danger that the focus of coaching work can be shifted to how others want a leader to be, rather than exploring what might be strategic and most meaningful for the leaders themselves. The coaching work can then become rather superficial, addressing behaviours and looking for quick fixes, rather than exploring the underlying challenges and internal barriers that get in the way of changing behaviours.

I find that a challenging probing question often helps in getting immediate insight into a leader's inner world:

*How does it sit with you that you are perceived as:*

- *rough around the edges?*
  - *too soft?*
  - *being unclear about your expectations?*
  - *not addressing poor performance?*
  - *lacking focus on strategic matters?*
  - *too tough with your expectations of others?*
- [or whatever else it might be]*

*What could be the consequences of not doing anything about that?*

Moreover, in my initial contracting with leaders, I explicitly emphasise that whatever behavioural strategies and changes of influencing style we might be exploring, these must be meaningful for them and in line with their personal values.

All that said, I have come across cases where a leader was so hurt by the feedback that they received from their colleagues, they felt so unloved, unworthy and misunderstood, a lot of work had to be done before we could engage in exploring any potential behavioural changes. In such cases, coaching work primarily needs to focus on integrating their rather traumatic experiences, helping a leader to find the language to describe what they experienced emotionally and physically, witnessing and validating their experience and helping them to recover and restore confidence.

As a coach, I find that the regular feedback that people receive in the modern corporate world can often be a double-edged sword.

In my former role in learning and development with one of the largest professional services firms, when my function was to impress on managers and partners the importance of providing feedback to their teams, I would often refer to coach Myles Downey's metaphor of a float tank, a sensory deprivation chamber – a giant bath filled with a high-density saline solution that is the same temperature as our bodies – to demonstrate the critical importance of feedback.<sup>3</sup>

After the initial positives of restoration and rejuvenation, which we can experience in such a voided space, there remains the possibility that if we spend too long in there, we start second-guessing what is happening outside and even begin to hallucinate. This is what happens in the absence of feedback.

Feedback can be a very helpful tool for raising self-awareness, promoting corporate values and encouraging certain behaviours, *if* leaders are equipped to have development conversations with their employees so that developmental feedback promotes learning and growth, rather than cultivating shame or resentment.

Much has been written on the art of giving feedback. For example, in his 2012 Forbes article, Eric Jackson, a technology and media investor, highlights some common mistakes that leaders need to avoid when giving feedback – ‘too vague’, ‘no preparation’, ‘no follow up’, etc.<sup>4</sup>

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**While nobody can make us feel bad about ourselves without our internal consent, such an attitude does not necessarily come naturally to many leaders**

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However, comparatively little has been written, and most importantly, very little is usually done, about helping people develop a healthy attitude to receiving feedback.

While nobody can make us feel bad about ourselves without our internal consent, such an attitude does not necessarily come naturally to many leaders. I observe that regular exposure to feedback often:

- *interferes with self-trust and exacerbates self-doubt*
- *feeds dependence on external validation*
- *depletes personal emotional energy*
- *dampens authenticity in an attempt to fit in*
- *results in over-thinking*
- *contributes to circular imposter feelings*
- *dampens creativity for the fear of judgment*
- *feeds perfectionism and excessive focus on achievement.*

Work needs to be done across the board to ensure that feedback helps people to grow and develop, encourages meaningful positive action, in line with a person’s values and aspirations, rather than simply promoting ‘fitting in’.

While it is important to be open to feedback from others, what we do with that feedback is the key to how much value we get from it. Taking on board what’s useful and, just as importantly, not dwelling on the rest, is essential if we are to avoid losing touch with our authentic selves and stay resourceful.



I have come across leaders for whom such a positive approach comes rather naturally, but I have also worked with many for whom coaching is a remedial action for rebuilding self-trust that has been undermined by so-called 'constructive' feedback.

This is particularly relevant for leaders whose internal anchor might be less solid, who might have historically not developed the 'secure attachment style', that Bowlby described as the capacity to connect well and securely in relationships with others, while also having the capacity for autonomous action.<sup>5</sup> Such leaders, especially if they are particularly invested in 'doing well', often seek external validation more often than others and find themselves easily hurt by any criticism.

Feedback can serve as a useful tool for helping people grow and develop, as well as promoting certain values and behaviours. However, organisations need to do better at supporting people in developing their self-trust as a crucial internal anchor, rather than feeding their self-doubt and dependency on external validation.

To the extent possible, coaching interventions need to support organisations in:

- Encouraging *belonging*, rather than fitting in. Taking feedback on board and taking developmental action is important, but staying true to yourself is essential for your own wellbeing and for building trust-based relationships where everyone feels valued and empowered. The main intent of feedback is to raise awareness.
- Promoting self-trust, rather than feeding unproductive self-doubt; emphasising and building on one's gifts, rather than focusing future development efforts on managing their perceived shortcomings. Would a young David Beckham have been well advised to spend more time on practising tackling... or just to devote all his efforts to being the best striker of a dead ball and crosser of a ball in the world?
- Appreciating that 'feedback is a relational encounter'.<sup>6</sup> Authentic, honest feedback can promote learning and growth, but it is well received only if a learner does not doubt the positive intentions of those giving feedback, if the relationship has a quality of mutual trust. Giving and receiving feedback is a delicate matter and needs to be approached accordingly.
- Rewarding courageous action. We have become so fearful of judgment and the dangers of being 'cancelled', a wider societal trend, leaders are often reluctant to take measured risks or even speak up when something does not feel right. As a result, despite all the best intentions, feedback systems often inhibit organisational creative potential for change and innovation.

To paraphrase Frank A. Clark's quote with which I opened this article – feedback, like rain, should serve to nourish our growth without destroying our roots.<sup>1</sup> ■

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**Work needs to be done across the board to ensure that feedback helps people to grow and develop, encourages meaningful positive action, in line with a person's values and aspirations, rather than simply promoting 'fitting in'**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Maria Gray** has been an executive coach since 2005 and has supervised coaches since 2015. Prior to coaching, Maria worked in a range of senior leadership roles. She has supported many leaders in developing self-trust, in navigating the challenge of leading and building confidence in others while managing their inner doubt. Maria's focus is on helping leaders to become the most authentic, energised and resilient versions of themselves.

Maria holds an MSc in organisational change, an MA in economics, and a postgraduate certificate in advanced coaching and organisation development supervision. She is an Ashridge accredited executive coach, EMCC senior practitioner and she holds an EMCC Global individual supervision accreditation (ESIA).

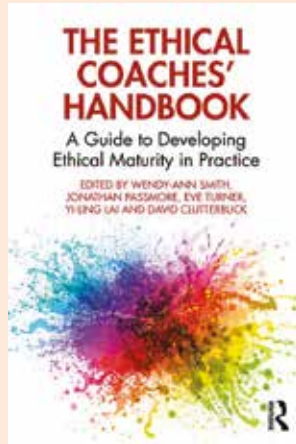
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## What you're reading

# On the bookshelf



### **The Ethical Coaches' Handbook: A guide to developing ethical maturity in practice**

**Edited by Wendy-Ann Smith,  
Jonathan Passmore, Eve Turner,  
Yi-Ling Lai and David Clutterbuck  
Routledge 2023  
ISBN 978-1-032-23463-2**

Weighty in size, subject and significance, this extensive handbook first considers the foundational philosophy of ethical thinking. Citing De Vries' assertion that 'ethics is not a problem to be solved but a relationship to be lived' (p69), the editors and contributors then invite us to go further in our reflection, thinking and ethical practice.

Tatiana Bachkirova's introduction is thought provoking, elucidating four areas for our development as ethical coaches; namely, dealing with otherness, developing self as instrument, ethical maturity, and trustworthiness.

**Part 1: Foundations of Ethics in Coaching** challenges us to connect more deeply with the philosophical thought that preceded current codes of ethics, and to broaden our gaze beyond such codes, which might otherwise tend towards a more limiting association with policies and rules, and avoidance of risk. Other chapters explore what ethical coaching is, its evidence base, and its relationship to professional coaching bodies, raising thought-provoking questions such as: *'Are professional bodies behaving ethically or have they created neofeudalistic organisations with surveillance built into their policies and rules?'* (p37). This section includes chapters that consider ethical codes and the legal considerations of ethical decision making in coaching. I found the

focus on ethical decision making frameworks by Jonathan Passmore and Jule Deges the most immediately accessible and applicable chapter in part 1.

Closely reading **Part 2: Ethics in Coaching Practice**, felt like undertaking in-depth continuing professional development (CPD). The information and questions raised in these chapters could stimulate fruitful discussion in supervision or practice groups. Pam McLean's 'The Psychological Contract in Coaching' was a welcome reminder to ensure that this is acknowledged alongside the more concrete aspects of contracting. I found the chapter on supervision ethics by Julie Allan and Lise Lewis particularly stimulating – I was taken with the invitation to look in a mirror and ask myself as the supervisor: *'What am I pretending not to know?'* and *'What feelings am I not expressing?'* 'Ethics in Team Coaching' by Peter Hawkins and Catherine Carr brought excellent exposition and thought-provoking questions – a must read for coaches working with teams. This chapter also challenges us take a broader and proactive view to consider what the world is asking of us now and in the future (p160).

Chapter 13, by Rosie Evans-Krimme and Jonathan Passmore, focuses on ethics in mental health and suicide management. The authors highlight the increasing need for support in these areas and the importance of understanding warning signs and referring on supportively, arguing that coaching is most appropriate not in diagnosis of 'disorder', or the 'damage' of languishing but in the arena of 'desire', good mental health, and wellbeing (p199). There is acknowledgement that the competency of the coach, especially one who

is therapeutically trained, will allow for different interventions, and I think we need to engage in further ongoing debate regarding how dual-trained practitioners with an integrative approach can work with and respond to both vulnerability and potency.

'The Ethics of Multi-Party Contracting' by Yi-Ling Lai and Eve Turner shares vital questions to consider and raise with stakeholders. The closing chapter of this section, 'Ethics in Transnational Assignments' by Philippe Rosinski and Liz Pavese, challenges the reader to think more deeply and broadly about the role of coaching, asserting that '...it would be unethical for coaches to help corporations in their pursuit of profit, if their quest is unbridled, done at the expense of the environment and under undignified social conditions' (p235). They suggest that we need to consider how coaching relationships and their boundaries may be seen differently, depending on culture and context. I particularly enjoyed their challenge to explore an 'and' way of thinking, more paradoxical than binary 'or' thinking. We certainly need this if we are to live and practise ethically in this complex world.

### **Part 3: Pushing the Boundaries of Conventional Ethical Thinking in Coaching,**

delivers what it promises. I was particularly inspired by the chapter on positive ethical practice, and the questions offered by authors Annalise Roache, Aaron Jarden, Tayyab Rashid and Tim Lomas, encouraging us to reflect on and think about embedding these principles, eg: *'What presenting cases would you or would you not take on and why?'* (p262). Bob Garvey and Andrea Giraldez-Hayes' chapter on ethics in education encourages us to consider how 'training' tends towards a teacher driven outcome focus, while 'education' suggests stimulation of our critical thinking, ability to challenge, take initiative and be creative. Providers of coach training where ethics might be 'espoused as foundational but taught as a cursory tick box' (p253) are exhorted to go further, and indeed this book could be invaluable to the designers and facilitators of coach education, containing as it does a wealth of theory, models, frameworks, and stimulating questions.

Sarah Smith and Roger Bretherton's chapter on ethics, wisdom, and adult development in coaching digs deep into 'the adaptive capacity that enables us to live and act well in complexity' (p282) and provides a detailed comparison of what constitutes ethical maturity, systemic ethical maturity, and wisdom perspectives (p285). This chapter is followed by chapters exploring ethics, race and culture in coaching. 'Race: Ethical Perspectives on Equity-Based

Coaching' by Terrance Maltbia and David Prior illuminates the difference between equality and equity, and emphasises the importance of considering when race and racism are present and embedded in coaching topics, and of proactively engaging with their exploration. The authors offer a learning agenda for equity-based coaching (p324) and extend invitations to coaches, educators and leaders to complete 'association mapping' activities and seek examples of tools assessments, practices and protocols that can be applied to equity-based coaching with a focus on race.

## **The authors highlight the implications of the 'do more, be more, have more' imperative and encourage a radical shift in our perspective as coaches towards community and connection with our complex adaptive systems**

'Ethics and the Ecological Environment in Coaching: Searching for a New Paradigm' by Michael Cavanagh and Eve Turner, explores how our social, economic and environmental systems are 'intimately connected'. While coaching emerged from 'hyper-individualism', there are social implications of this and of the 'growth imperative' as it appears in our business contexts. The authors highlight the implications of the 'do more, be more, have more' imperative and encourage a radical shift in our perspective as coaches towards community and connection with our complex adaptive systems; to work more holistically, with emergence, and interdependence, acknowledging what is irreversible and unpredictable. Drawing wider system boundaries, with a longer future focus, on process, purpose, interconnection, and paradox is encouraged.

The next chapter considers the need for a digital code of ethics, followed by 'Ethical Considerations for the Use of Multisource Feedback in Coaching'. Here, author, Angela M. Passarelli explores the downside of 360 feedback, and offers practical suggestions to better assess recipient readiness, ensure the integrity of data and their use, and avoid flawed assumptions in interpretation. The final chapter in this section – Francine Camponé's 'Choose Me! Ethics in the Promotion of Coaching' – considers how implicit

and explicit promises of unrealistic outcomes can creep into coaching and encourages us to frame marketing as a relational issue rather than a commercial device.

Finally, **Part 4** offers 12 diverse case studies focusing on areas such as intimacy; challenges for postgraduate teachers; coaching as a developmental tool or organisational status quo; loyalties in executive coaching; the influence of the boss; working across cultures in team coaching; the internal coach; emotional entanglements; recording for assessments; coach qualification representation; and diversity, looking at token inclusion and unspoken biases.

As the myriad authors explore the origins and meanings of ethics relating to their specific topics, there is some inevitable repetition throughout this anthology. However, the varied perspectives are enlightening, and most chapters stand alone in terms of the depth and breadth with which their subject is explored.

I expect that the most likely readers of this volume will be coach supervisors, educators and students. However, I do hope that as many practising coaches as possible borrow or invest in the book for CPD and essential reference, because, as this book demonstrates, ethics are everywhere – not only 'consciously or unconsciously embedded' (p13) in the coaching relationship but also in our personal and professional systems. ■

### **About the reviewer**

**Carolyn Mumby** is a coach, supervisor and facilitator in private practice, and a founding member of the Coaching for Social Impact group.

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# Coming back to 'now' through body, mind and heart



How can we help our clients become more connected to the present moment? Mindfulness practitioner and researcher **Howard Baron** offers a practical approach that guides our clients through three alternating perspectives

**A**s coaches, we can expend a considerable amount of effort motivating our clients to commit to future goals, and if we are also therapists, we may spend a lot of time and energy helping them explore their past histories. But when clients seem too distracted by thoughts of either past or future, what guidance can we offer to help them also embrace the present? How might we help them make the best of each moment before it's lost forever?

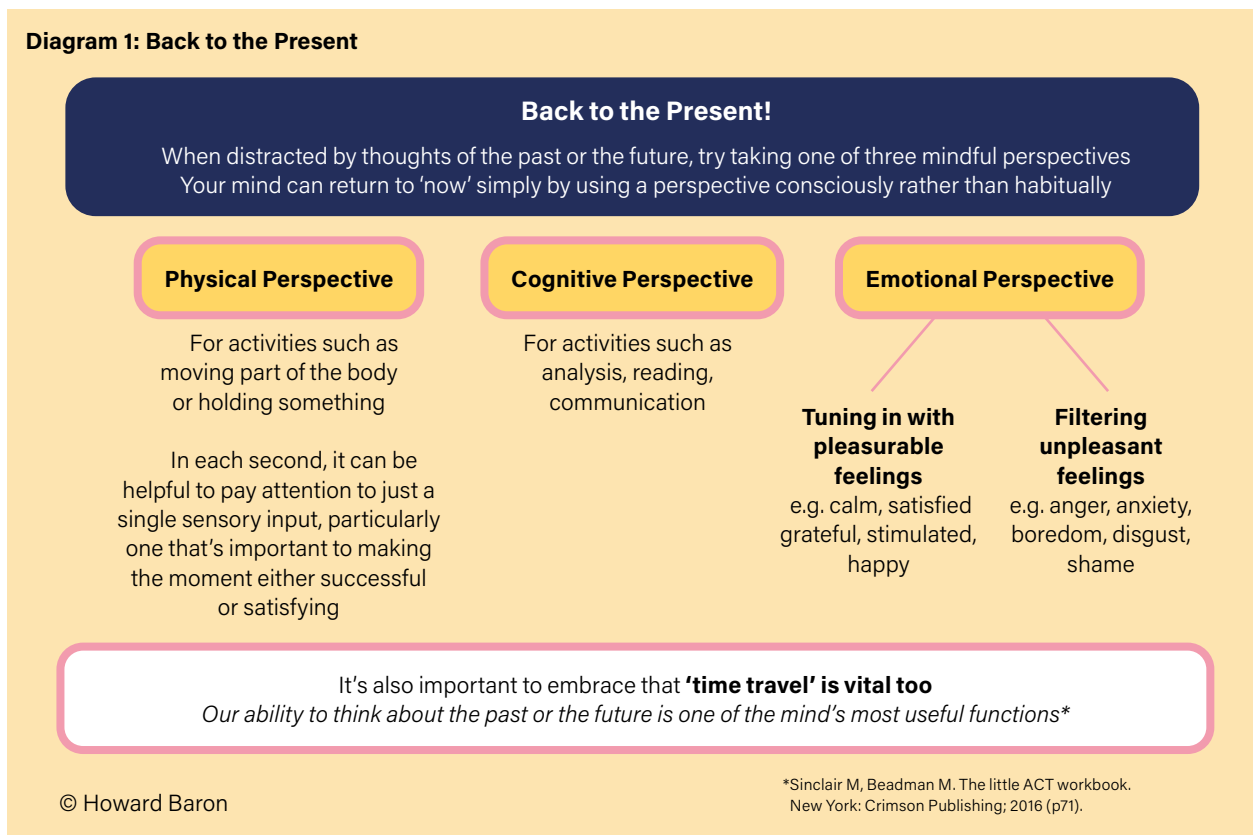
Mindfulness is a simple concept that can help us to return to the moment, and many people benefit from mindfulness-based meditation. However, achieving mindfulness in everyday moments is far from easy in daily life, particularly when we are constantly bombarded with stimuli from a rapidly changing world.

There's a plethora of guidance available on mindfulness meditation but relatively little written on becoming more present in everyday moments. Some writers suggest aiming to become more mindful during specific activities (such as eating or walking), then gradually expanding such activities.<sup>1</sup> This might work well when we have time to fully explore the moment. However, for fast-moving activities with competing priorities, we need a more immediate, concise approach to snap back to the present.

Each of our moments comprises physical things (our body, its environment and other people) and thoughts, both rational and emotional. In most moments, there are too many elements to absorb, so it's pragmatic to connect with just some aspect of the moment rather than none at all.

To become more connected with the present, I suggest helping clients to alternate between three mindful perspectives: *physical*, *cognitive* and *emotional*. Each might have a timescale ranging from less than a second to many minutes. **Diagram 1** provides a brief overview of these perspectives. We use all three habitually and can return to the present moment simply by using one more consciously. Just becoming aware of which perspective we're using is sufficient to return us to 'now'.

**Diagram 1: Back to the Present**



**To become more connected with the present, I suggest helping clients to alternate between three mindful perspectives: physical, cognitive and emotional.**

**Physical perspective**

Our daily activities tend to be primarily physical (such as walking or moving an object) or cognitive (such as reading or writing). Today, many of us engage in work that relies more on psychological than physical skills. As we use electronic devices for work, online shopping and leisure, several hours can pass without engaging with other people or our surroundings, relying on autopilot for many physical activities. During this time, we can examine the past and construct future work and personal scenarios without any pressing need to absorb the present. Such a pattern of thinking, almost detached from reality, can be broken by focusing on something physical such as our body or our surroundings. Taking a physical perspective is our quickest route back to the moment. Such a perspective means letting your body have precedence over your mind, acting robotically, with the mind's only function to receive sensory inputs.

Making a physical connection can be just being aware of the body's movement. To strengthen the connection, it's helpful to pay attention to a single sense, or specifically, a *single sensory input*. This may be for just a second before switching attention to another sensory input or another sense. For many activities, the input will be either a view (static or moving) or a tactile sensation (on the surface of your skin, within the body or awareness of the body's position). It could also be a sound, smell or taste. We're likely to feel a more intense connection with the present by getting a firm hold of a single sensory input rather than trying to wrangle several indistinct stimuli simultaneously.

Of course, in many situations, there can be numerous alternative potential sensory inputs to choose from, so it's best to concentrate on one that's important to making the moment either *successful* or *satisfying*. 'Successful' might mean focusing on the intended 'destination' or aim for the current second, having a picture of where you would like to be at the end of the second. 'Satisfying' refers to any input that prompts a pleasurable feeling. When walking in the countryside, for instance, your focus may change several times within a single minute, perhaps focusing on 'success' (such as looking out for landmarks for navigation purposes) then switching to satisfaction (such as feeling the sunlight on your face). We should aim to give 100% of our attention to the chosen input, which can be facilitated by aiming to remember it, just for a second (whether it can actually be recalled later is irrelevant to being mindful).



While the conscious mind focuses on a particular input, the subconscious will continue to monitor and react to other inputs. It's unnecessary to concentrate on a single sensory input for all or even most moments, just when the mind needs a nudge to return to the present.

It's natural and inevitable for emotions (either pleasurable or unpleasant) to also arise. For example, we may begin to feel a sense of calm when doing something simple; or self-respect if handling a complex activity well. Such feelings can prompt thoughts of the past or the future, so when they arise, it's normally useful to try to put them on hold, even for a few seconds. For instance, when playing a rally in tennis, making a particularly good or bad shot may prompt momentary feelings but it can be distracting to dwell on these immediately – better to have our full attention on the ball coming back at us, now! Once the point, game or match has ended, these are more appropriate times to switch to an emotional perspective.

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**Being mindful means not only tuning-in to pleasurable feelings but also acknowledging unpleasant emotions such as anger, anxiety, boredom, disgust, shame, fear or sadness. These emotions can also have a vital role, perhaps warning of danger or the need to make changes**

### **Cognitive perspective**

Of course, many activities are primarily cognitive rather than physical; such activities include analysis, reading, creative thinking and communication. When a cognitive activity is absorbing, staying present comes naturally. While the mind can flit between physical and emotional perspectives many times within a minute, a cognitive connection can endure when engaged in an enjoyable or interesting activity. Though we can observe physical and emotional aspects of the present, it's impractical to observe our own cognitive process as it occurs – trying to do so would be distracting.

Some cognitive tasks might involve not only consideration of the past and the future, but the feelings of ourselves and others, which might lead us to dwell on other times. When this occurs, it's useful to take a short break (perhaps just a minute or two) and switch our attention to something physical. Moreover, it's advisable to take regular breaks when sitting for long periods in order to minimise eyestrain and postural problems. If it's really not possible to take a break, one option is to focus on a physical aspect of the cognitive activity (such as handwriting, or the text that we're inputting to a digital device).

When taking a break, any physical activity should be undertaken consciously rather than having thoughts about the cognitive activity permeate through. That's easier said than done though – in any case, understanding the past and considering the future are vital too.

### **Emotional perspective**

Each of our waking moments generates feelings or emotions, which might be pleasurable or unpleasant, intense or mild.<sup>2</sup> Many moments have just a tiny effect on milder feelings such as satisfaction or calm, rather than intense emotions like happiness or love. Unpleasant feelings (like anger or disgust), which can highlight danger and risks, tend to demand the mind's immediate attention, often nudging aside pleasant sensations. So, there are two sides to emotional connection: tuning-in with pleasurable feelings and filtering unpleasant ones.

### **Tuning-in with pleasurable feelings**

Experiencing pleasurable feelings gives the mind a reason to stay focused on the moment. Even routine activities provide opportunities for feelings of calm, stimulation or appreciation.

Calmness can be prompted by appreciating periods of inactivity or waiting (not grasping for our phone yet again!); while doing something that's relatively simple or very familiar; and when there's no time pressure. A feeling of calm can also be induced by noticing a slow pace, stillness, silence or a sound we find relaxing, or by breathing slowly.

After a brief period of calm, our mind may start to seek stimulation, to skip ahead to future activities that might be more interesting, important or enjoyable. When this happens, we can try finding something we cherish or that feels uplifting in the present moment such as:

- Having everything required for the immediate moment. This includes possessing adequate or strong skills needed, cherishing these as a gift that we're using for the first time – as might be regarded by someone with an impairment or disability. Using these with awe, acknowledging that we may not always have such capabilities
- Appreciating people and things in the moment (both natural and man-made), perhaps searching for something not really noticed previously or something that stimulates curiosity. If finding it difficult to find anything, we can try to notice things we might at least respect eg, the human ingenuity and energy required to develop something; the talent and effort expended by a competitor
- Gratitude for anything that could be lost by changes in health, relationships or circumstances.
- Being stimulated (physically, intellectually or emotionally) by something specific or the general ambience of a place or situation
- Experiencing things that generate uplifting thoughts and feelings such as satisfaction, happiness, amusement, love, enthusiasm, excitement, curiosity, self-respect, encouragement, inspiration, pleasant surprises and sensory experiences
- Having something that motivates us, drives us forward; something to fight for
- Simply having the time to contemplate the moment, or pride in using our abilities well.

When a pleasurable feeling arises, it can be unhelpful to make a conscious effort to hold on to it, as this may distract our attention from the next moment. Although it's possible to have a euphoric feeling lasting many minutes, this can't be engineered.

Except for thoroughly unpleasant moments, it should be possible to appreciate something about most moments. However, when feeling a moment really isn't important, urgent or interesting, we may need to just use the moment as a step towards a more rewarding one.

### **Filtering unpleasant emotions**

Being mindful means not only tuning-in to pleasurable feelings but also acknowledging unpleasant emotions such as anger, anxiety, boredom, disgust, shame, fear or sadness. These emotions can also have a vital role, perhaps warning of danger or the need to make changes. Many experts advocate accepting such thoughts as transitory which may or may not be true and/or useful, then deciding whether it's an opportune time to explore such thought or concentrate on another aspect of the moment. Acceptance is not the passive acceptance of the intolerable. It is not 'giving up', nor is it resignation or spinelessness. Neither is mindfulness anything to do with detachment – it is not about 'not feeling anything'. Acceptance takes our minds off the hair trigger, so we're less likely to have a knee-jerk reaction.<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness does have its critics: for example, that mindfulness can lead to insularity, even selfishness.<sup>4</sup> I suggest being mindful can just as well reinforce altruism if that is an important personal value.

Having a tough challenge tends not to feel too pleasant at the time but dealing with a problem, either successfully or unsuccessfully, can help us to 'grow'. As the popular saying goes, 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger', yet boundless positive thinking does have limitations, such as difficulty empathising with someone who might not be feeling optimistic.<sup>5</sup>

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**The approach outlined is strictly secular; religious or spiritual beliefs are unnecessary. However, as we increase our engagement with the present, an increasing proportion of routine moments may start to feel magical and wondrous**



### **'Time travel' is vital too**

Mindfulness shouldn't be an obsession but regarded as an essential tool. Our ability to think about the past or the future appears to be one of the mind's useful functions; almost every aspect of our achievements owes much to this 'time travel'.<sup>6</sup> While it's important to be mindful sometimes (certainly when in a dangerous situation but also during work and important social contact), time travel also has various purposes such as assimilating recent experiences; increasing motivation (celebrating the past or being excited about the future); and when doing something creative (forming connections between diverse experiences and generating ideas for the future). Practising mindfulness simply helps to get a good balance between thinking of the present versus other times. For instance, when learning some new physical exercises, it's important to be mindful but, if having to do highly repetitive exercises over many months (possibly as part of a rehabilitation programme), it can be comforting to let the mind wander to happy or more interesting times.

After noticing the mind wandering, there's no value in feeling the slightest irritation or frustration. Such feelings only provide further distraction. Just compliment yourself on noticing this, then regard this observation as a helpful starting point for the next moment, as if passing through a door into a brightly lit room.

### **Choosing and using perspectives**

So, for many activities, we can return to the present simply by paying attention to a single sensation, either a sensory input or a pleasurable feeling.

Obviously, there are overlaps and linkages between the three perspectives. Frequent switching between perspectives can occur either subconsciously or consciously. The choice of perspective is merely an entry point to the moment and this perspective might last for only seconds before switching to another. A vital role for the mind is to referee the healthy competition between the three perspectives and thoughts of other times. Switching to the physical perspective can be instantaneous, whereas the other two might require more attention. When absorbed in a mental activity, a cognitive perspective can be maintained for many minutes without interruption. However, during a physical activity, the perspective might alternate frequently between physical and emotional, perhaps several times in a single minute. Such a switch may be for less than a second but if the feeling is important, we might choose to dwell upon it because it's pleasurable (and we'd like to hold on to it) or unpleasant (maybe it highlights immediate risks). It's natural for an emotional perspective to be dominant when involved in something that we do (or might) appreciate – this might well include everyday activities like eating, showering and walking.

The physical and cognitive perspectives are more appropriate when engaged in an activity that's new, might be done better/differently, or is challenging in terms of speed, risk or complexity. When fully immersed in either perspective, we

may notice thoughts of mild physical or emotional discomfort move to the periphery of our attention.

To break a cycle of unproductive thinking (such as repetitive thoughts about a problem or an emotional issue), it's helpful to put such thoughts into context by perceiving even the most routine moment as an infinitely sophisticated event. Each second, a scientific and societal marvel that's only made possible by the human body (the most advanced organism in the known universe), billions of atoms (each with immense power and mystery) and by thousands of people from present and past generations. Surely, each astonishing production deserves attention? Within each second, mindfulness can be facilitated by regarding unproductive thoughts as a miniscule component. We might perceive such thoughts as a mist obscuring the 'view' but which can be evaporated instantly just by noticing something physical.

The approach outlined is strictly secular; religious or spiritual beliefs are unnecessary. However, as we increase our engagement with the present, an increasing proportion of routine moments may start to feel magical and wondrous.

When we feel things aren't going too well, we might seek to boost emotional energy through meditation, attending retreats, embracing religious or spiritual beliefs, holidays, meeting with friends and family, exercise, excessive alcohol or other unhealthy choices, or keeping busy with leisure activities or work. Just using the three mindful perspectives more consciously helps to conserve emotional energy and doesn't require either time or money.

### How coaches can help

If you have a client who finds it difficult to focus on the present moment, your first step might be to encourage them to work through a reputable book on mindfulness<sup>1,3</sup> (which tend to be accompanied by meditation audios) or attend mindfulness training.

Once they've had time to try out suggested meditations and activities from such sources, you might then have a discussion about becoming more mindful during everyday activities, not just during meditations and mindfulness exercises. **Diagram 1** could be used as a structure for the discussion. Clients may also find it helpful to use the mnemonic 'ERA', as a prompt to 'evaporate the mist' of unproductive thinking by aiming to *remember* a single sensory input in each second or, in some moments, noticing an aspect to *appreciate*.

Prior to the next session, suggest they spend a few hours, tracing their mindfulness during a variety of activities: say, an hour at work, one attending to domestic tasks and another during a leisure activity. It would be impractical and tedious to keep a formal log, it's sufficient for them to simply make some brief notes about when they were most and least mindful, and how they returned to the moment, perhaps noting which mindful perspective they used.

At the next session, talk through their notes and discuss whether they found the exercise interesting and/or helpful, and what steps they might take next. If the exercise reveals or confirms a low mood lasting for many weeks which is starting to dominate daily life, it's important to address this and make a clear decision on whether you are the best person to support them with this or to make a referral.

I welcome feedback on this article and would be very interested to hear of alternative approaches to everyday mindfulness that you find effective in your own life, and when working with clients. ■

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

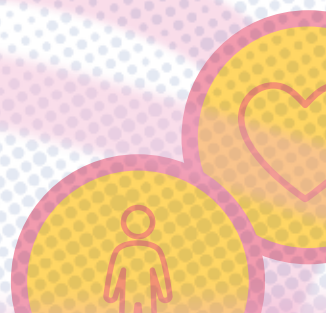


**Howard Baron** is a retired business consultant and coach who has worked in both the private and public sector. During the latter part of his career, Howard began to appreciate the value of mindfulness and meditation in managing emotional energy. Since retiring, he has spent time researching and developing new approaches to this topic, beginning with an article on energising meditation in 2019 for *The Hypnotherapy Journal*, published by the National Council for Hypnotherapy.<sup>7</sup>

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# 'Who looks inside awakens'

working creatively with coaching clients



## Founders of Awakening Creativity, coach **Lindsey Wheeler** and humanistic counsellor **Christina Bachini**, demonstrate a simple and powerful new approach to incorporating creativity in coaching practice

**U**nless it forms part of their wider experience, training or background, the use of creativity in practice can feel daunting to some coaches. This is likely because many only encounter it as part of their elected continuing professional development (CPD), or on an art therapy course, or one of the more progressive humanistic courses. To our mind, this is a great shame and deprives coaches of a beneficial tool that can make an enormous difference to our clients' journeys.

Creativity as a therapeutic approach has a long history, particularly the work of Adrian Hill<sup>1</sup>, (often considered the founder of art therapy in the UK), and the work of Margaret Naumburg<sup>2</sup> and Edith Kramer<sup>2,3</sup> in the USA in the 1940s. Even earlier, Freud had made connections between imagery and the unconscious mind,<sup>2</sup> and Carl Jung's views on the importance and value of understanding one's 'inner city'<sup>4</sup> is still foundational to understanding the human condition. More recently, the benefits and outcomes of creativity as a therapeutic approach have been researched and documented in the US and UK by the American Art Therapy Association (<https://arttherapy.org>), and British Association of Art Therapists (<https://baat.org>) respectively.

'But your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart...

Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes.<sup>5</sup>  
*Carl Jung*

### How does creativity help?

Helping clients explore their stories is what we all hope to do as professionals. We aim to support our clients as they journey to the heart of what is troubling them and uncover more helpful ways of 'being' today, in the present. It is here that working creatively really comes into its own. It assists the client to bypass the conscious mind, where all the current thinking and belief are enacted, and allows them to look at the *underlying* beliefs and values that are really driving their behaviour.

However, when clients enter the room, they, and we as coaches, are often most concerned with what their conscious mind is telling them. Much of our work is connected to helping clients gain clarity and some relief from the relentless churn

of their thoughts. It is here, we believe, that working creatively with a client is particularly helpful because it provides a safe and fertile route to venture into their unconscious, to uncover their thinking patterns and the principles behind them.

Creativity provides a key that unlocks thinking and enables a new kind of conversation between coach and client to take place; a conversation that does not rely solely on the client's ability to 'find the right words' and articulate in a literal or logical way what's going on for them. When a client is invited to create a physical representation of their issue, they are able to detach from it, and leave behind their conscious knowledge of the situation that they already know so well. They are then able to process the image in a way that offers new perspectives, and with their coach as guide, move the ideas forward so that a change in the thinking system can occur.

For example, if a client says: 'I'm feeling completely blocked, I really don't know what to do', asking them to create the metaphor 'block' as an image results in the mental freedom for a shift to occur. By simply creating an image of the 'block', the block itself is already transformed. Further investigation through skilled questioning will lead to an even greater understanding that will help reshape or dispel the block.  
*When we work creatively with people, movement takes place.*

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**Helping clients explore their stories is what we all hope to do as professionals... It is here that working creatively really comes into its own**

### Working with complexity and confusion

We have all adopted beliefs, values, moral parameters and rituals from our formative years and life experiences. We learnt to adapt so we can fit in, stay safe and be accepted and loved. These early mechanisms become automatic responses that we make without much conscious thought, which is where the problem may lie. What worked when we were young or in a particular situation may not be what a person would now choose if this unconscious baggage were not the backseat driver.

That's not to say the unconscious cannot be trusted. It does many valuable things for us and has a positive purpose. Often, at the root of it, it aims to keep us safe and protected and provide the best opportunity for us to achieve a sense of belonging and love. But how it goes about this may no longer work or be helpful.

When we meet clients, it's likely they will say they feel sad or anxious, think they are not performing well at work, have 'lost their mojo' or don't know where they are going in life. Most clients know something is not 'right' but may have no idea what is causing this lack of 'rightness'. Conversely, some may be wedded to their story and seem committed to a fixed reason for why they feel like they do but still struggle to make sense of it all and express it verbally. It's not surprising they struggle because they are often experiencing a mix of emotions and feelings generated by their current and past

life experiences, and fuelled by their own responses and behaviours concerning their situation. A lot is going on – at both the conscious and subconscious levels.

However, when clients are invited to work creatively, they are able to represent complex emotions and confused thinking outside of themselves. The very act of creating an image – whether that be a drawing, a clay model, or a formation of buttons – they become an observer of their emotions. Their creation provides a window into their unconscious beliefs and values that are driving their current thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This window helps them uncover where their beliefs and values have come from and, by virtue of this, start to really understand why they do what they do. With this new understanding of themselves, they can see, sometimes for the first time, options and choices open up before them and figure out how to move forward more positively.

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## **Creativity requires no artistic ability or any particular creative skill by the coach or the client. It only requires an acceptance to go with the flow and a willingness to listen to the inner self**

The unconscious mind also affects how we physically feel. It is easy to see the relationship between our mind and our body when we think of situations when we just ‘know’ something’s not right, or if a situation is not safe, or we get a sense that someone is lying. We notice that bodily feeling, but it’s hard to define and often lurks on the edge of our conscious minds and we often try to ignore it. Nonetheless, we know there is hidden knowledge there that is as yet untapped.

Working creatively raises this kind of unconscious hidden knowledge to the conscious mind, helping clients notice it, understand it and feel it. In doing so, clients realise they have the opportunity to evaluate how the unconscious drivers influence their life and how helpful, or otherwise, they are. From this perspective, they can see they have choices to develop a more helpful approach that will serve them better.

### **Do I have to be artistic?**

Creativity requires no artistic ability or any particular creative skill by the coach or the client. It only requires an acceptance to go with the flow and a willingness to listen to the inner self. Our book *The ChrisLin Method, 5 Steps for Working Creatively with Imagery and Metaphor*<sup>6</sup> was written specifically to share our research and practice with fellow practitioners and explain how to help clients let go of their logical thoughts and listen to their intuition as a door to the unconscious. The method we developed is itself founded on empirical evidence from our years of research, experimentation and practice, from our own experiences and the results reported by other practitioners, but it is also highly influenced by our own personal approach to our work, founded in the humanistic, pluralistic and person-centred schools of thought.

Our experience with creativity spans many decades, and we have engaged with a broad spectrum of corporate and private clients over the years, including CEOs, leaders and teams in organisations, and young people. Our collective professional knowledge comes, in part, from our own diverse backgrounds: Lindsey’s experience in the technology sector in sales and human resources before qualifying as a coach complements Christina’s profound understanding and application of humanistic psychology as a counsellor. We work together because of our common belief in the value of creativity as an intervention and a desire to spread the word to fellow coaches. We enjoy the fact that we are so different, as we bring very different perspectives and test ideas through very different lenses, which we feel brings a valuable robustness to our work.

Through our own use of creativity, we realised how much we could all benefit from some deeper study on the actual process that takes place and identify a structure that can be shared with others.

Most practitioners we come across believe that creativity is a ‘messy’ intervention. But it doesn’t have to be. Yes, it can involve felt tip pens, pencils, paints and glue. But it can also involve whatever materials are to hand – white boards, flip charts, desk paraphernalia, household objects or items selected during a nature walk. One client we worked with was having a problem with his team and he used items from the canteen table to represent each person. Using sachets of salt, pepper, sauce and sugar, he laid these out as a visual representation of the relationships between them. In doing so, he was able to recognise there was a distance between him and certain members of the team, and explore the reasons why he experienced difficulty in his interactions with these people. This key insight enabled him to look at his part in the issue and develop some new strategies for how to work more effectively to bring his team together.

### **How to work creatively with clients**

The ChrisLin Method consists of five steps and nine core questions and is supplemented with numerous frameworks for working with specific emotions, behaviours and models, such as boundaries, anxiety and the Drama Triangle.<sup>7</sup> The five steps provide the coach with a simple structure that leads the client from first engagement through the exploration of their creation, to the embodiment of the change and finally, the decision of what to do with their creation when the work is finished. This structure is the backbone of the process and guides practitioners through the ebb and flow of the therapeutic journey. The nine core questions are specifically designed to guide the client through the exploration of their creation (Step 3) and reach some new level of understanding about themselves.

In developing the core questions, our assumption is that the image knows something that the client doesn’t – the image is the holder of the unconscious beliefs and values. So the questions are designed specifically to help the client, and coach, stay focused on the image and uncover what it knows. Once mastered, the coach is free to use these questions along with the framework-specific questions, and their own questions, for a rich and developmental experience.

### Examples of core questions

1. Tell me the story of your image
2. What does this colour represent to you?
3. What does this shape mean for you?
4. What is important about the size of this?

In our experience, the biggest challenge for coaches who are new to working in this way is staying focused on the client's image or creation. As coaches, we are used to asking questions about what our client thinks, feels and believes, so it can feel strange to be asking questions about their image, as if it were a living thing. But the assumption behind our method is that the client *already knows* what they are thinking, so we need a different approach. Working creatively in this way presupposes there is something helpful and, as yet, unheard or unnoticed by the client that the image of their inner world can offer.

### The five steps

Following the steps sequentially ensures a well-run session and will boost your confidence in working creatively as a regular part of your practice. The key elements for each step are:

#### Step 1. Introducing creativity to a client

Often it is about recognising when the client is stuck, unable to verbalise their emotions or their thinking, and would benefit from being taken away from their logical, rational brain. Sometimes the client's use of language, and regular use of metaphors, can give a clue that working creatively would be a good approach for them. Help clients understand that this is not about being an artist or having any artistic abilities.

#### Step 2. The process of creation

Remind the client that the work they will do is about slowing down, tuning into their intuition and being able to doodle or create an abstract, representation, symbol or metaphor. Encourage the use of any creative materials, colours or shapes that they feel drawn to. Set a time limit, such as 5 or 10 minutes, and stay silent while the client is creating.

#### Step 3. Exploring the client's creation

The coach listens to the client's story of their creation and also notices the image as a whole and its component parts. Use the nine core questions to encourage and guide the client to dig deeper into the image and uncover what it has to offer.

#### Step 4. Integrating the changes

Up to this point, all the work has happened outside of the client, and it is likely you will see physical as well as mental shifts in the person. Integration happens by supporting the client to embody the change. For example, suggesting they pick up their image, hold it to their heart and breathe it in.

#### Step 5. Closing the session

When the client is out of the creative process, check they have achieved what they set out to achieve. It may be a complete shift and therefore the process is complete, or a smaller shift that lets the client know there has been a change, but there may be more work to do. Find out what the client wants to do with their creative piece. Do they want to have it on view at home? Do they need to perform a ritual to let go of it?

Over the course of our careers, we have used, experimented and tested many theories, models, approaches and techniques. However, in our opinion, none have been as impactful or effective in facilitating lasting change for our clients as the power of creativity. The method is fully described in the book and on our training courses, and while it is primarily aimed at supporting counsellors, coaches and art therapists to work in this way, it can be applied by practitioners across many disciplines – psychologists, teachers and classroom assistants, HR managers and line managers, or, for personal development.

All you need is to:

- Know the method, but not be a slave to it
- Remain intensely curious about your client's creative work
- Trust your own intuition to ask the right question at the right time.

We believe that creativity has a significant role to play in helping clients look at their underlying, unconscious drivers. For this reason, we believe creativity deserves a prominent place in any coach's toolkit. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Christina Bachini** and **Lindsey Wheeler** are co-founders of Awakening Creativity and authors of *The ChrisLin Method: 5 Steps for Working Creatively with Imagery and Metaphor* (2023). Their more than 50 years of collective experience spans working with young people to corporate clients, with individuals, groups and teams and training in the ChrisLin method.

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