

Coaching Today

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any other type of self-doubt,
is a protection mechanism'

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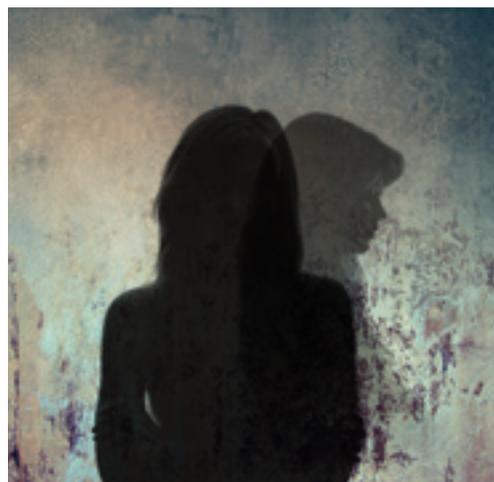
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Coaching Today is the quarterly journal for counsellors and psychotherapists who are retraining and practising as coaches, as well as coaches from a diverse range of backgrounds.

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Diane Parker
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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. 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 November 2022 and 6 February 2023 respectively. Contact the Editor at the email above with your ideas.



The work that connects

Like our Chair, Lucy Myers (see p4), I've been reflecting a lot lately on the notion of connection – and its shadow side, disconnection. Perhaps this is due in part to the fact that, as I sit and write this, we have just emerged from the national knees-up that was the four-day bank holiday to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Whether you're a republican or a royalist, and however you spent the weekend, unless you chose to lie in a darkened room and switch off your phone and telly for four days, it was impossible to miss the fact that the entire nation was seemingly high on cheering, flag-waving and scoffing Mr Kipling iced fancies. The fact that this extraordinary four-day jamboree was taking place as we are still emerging from two years of the coronavirus pandemic only highlighted its magnitude, the images of the cheering crowds lining the Mall in stark contrast to those not-so-recent images of deserted streets and shuttered shopfronts in towns and cities across the country.

Reflecting on the weekend, it was also not lost on me that there were others who chose not to celebrate, or were unable to, for a variety of reasons. This was less a royal celebration, more a cultural event, and if anything is likely to highlight disconnection, isolation and exclusion, it is the idea that everyone else is celebrating and coming together in unity – which is why festivals and holidays such as Christmas can be particularly difficult for so many people.

The wake of COVID-19 has created further ambivalence towards coming together – in-person connection both longed for and feared in equal measure – and recent data show that many people continue to practise social distancing to some extent.^{1,2} I include myself in this group, and I am definitely seeing it among my clients. Echoing our Chair's words, I have been working with a charity supporting young women for almost two years now, and I am facing the prospect of finally meeting my

coaching colleagues in three-dimensional flesh space next week. While I am excited, I admit to also feeling some trepidation, not only about the journey, which will require travelling at rush hour, but also about being with a group of people who, until now, have been only pixels on a screen. In the midst of celebrations and excitement, and desire for connection, it can be challenging to be the lone voice that expresses ambivalence or reticence.

This, to me, is the power of our work – that we hold space for our clients to express their ambivalent feelings, without judgment or censure. As coaches, we have the potential to create connection in the midst of isolation and exclusion, whether we work with marginalised communities or leaders in organisations. The articles in this summer issue reflect the extraordinary power that our work has to create and facilitate connection – with self and other. Each of the practitioners contributing demonstrate how they help their clients navigate the line between 'me' energy and 'we' energy. Sometimes, all we need to know is that we are not alone with our feelings and experiences. This, to me, is the most potent aspect of our work.

However you are spending the summer, I hope it is one of reconnection, restoration and relaxation.

Until next time... ■

Diane Parker
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- 2 Williams S. Long social distancing: how young adults' habits have changed since COVID. [Online.] *The Conversation* 2022; 30 May. <https://theconversation.com/long-social-distancing-how-young-adults-habits-have-changed-since-covid-183837>

OUR ROUND-UP
OF THE LATEST
EVENTS, NEWS
AND RESEARCH



BACP Coaching News

Message from the Chair

Making connections

I recently got on a plane for the first time in three years, which was a surreal experience at times. I found myself nostalgically hankering for the days when my greatest worry was how quickly I could transfer four books and a pair of sandals into hand luggage in front of an impatient check-in queue, having failed the dreaded luggage weigh-in, as opposed to enduring 48 breath-holding hours of 'will-we-won't-we?' child PCR tests and grappling with a bulging folder of signed COVID-19 forms before even reaching the airport. Perhaps most surreal was the Home Alone-esque family sprint through Paris airport to make our long-haul connection following a delayed departure from Heathrow, extra security queues, and an unannounced gate location change for a closing time we'd already missed. Having made the flight, we can laugh about it now. Almost.

But I digress. As I wrote in my previous message in April,¹ our divisional focus on the strategic pillar of 'connecting' with our expert communities is vital to demonstrating the unique role therapeutically informed coaching can play in the 'new normal' – an increasingly global, but arguably more disconnected, post-pandemic world. As I reflected on my holiday experience, I noticed how my perspective on 'connection' – both with others, and within myself – seemed to shift like an internal kaleidoscope throughout the trip. After spending so much time in my own office, bubble, and home country, once up in the air, as I gazed out in wonder at the ethereal clouds, before becoming immersed in an entirely different continent for 10 days, the world seemed to rush back into glorious technicolour. Surrounded once again by multiple languages, diverse cultures, exquisite new tastes, dramatic landscapes and warmer temperatures, my senses seemed to heighten and my viewpoint surged back into widescreen: from micro to macro; an opening up; an ability to inhale and exhale, both physically and emotionally, more deeply than before. An elusive and somewhat intangible sensation of connection to *something* or *somewhere*, that had previously been absent.

Of course, it's possible that I just *really* needed a holiday. But this transformative

and re-energising sense of suddenly being connected differently with the world got me thinking – what was it exactly that had changed in reality, beyond a few days of sunshine? After all, throughout the pandemic I continually connected with coaching clients across the world on Zoom, travelled (metaphorically) to multiple countries, and experienced diverse voices and narratives through vivid onscreen dramas and documentaries. But crucially, these were not in-person connections.

Hardwired for connection

My approach to coaching and therapy is heavily influenced by the concept that we are hardwired from birth to connect with others in order to survive and belong.² In supervision, I explore the powerful, often unconscious, interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics at play for myself and my clients, as we work relationally together.³ If my experience of physically re-engaging with the external world at large created such an impact on my own intrapsychic reconnecting with parts of myself, I wonder what this all means for my experiencing and decision-making in the here-and-now, and for that of others?

What effect might three years of us (mostly) connecting virtually have had on us individually, and therefore on the ever-evolving Jungian concept of the 'collective unconscious'⁴ of us all? Recently, as an Executive, we reflected that 80% of us have never met face to face, and I wonder how true that is for many of you who've forged relationships with, and perhaps even moved on from, new clients and colleagues yourselves over recent years? Has the way we all feel we want, or need, to connect with others irreversibly changed forever? Has a 'remote' culture, that we may have previously found unfathomable and unworkable, become comfortable, to the point that we've readjusted to what we feel is adequate to survive, rather than what we truly need to thrive?

These are all difficult questions and of course I don't have any answers. As time passes, I hope our BACP divisions and wider psychotherapy communities will have the time and resource to research these concepts further, and gain valuable insights. What I do know is the BACP Coaching



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Executive has been doing a lot of thinking about how we can more frequently and deeply engage with our divisional members and across BACP in order to achieve our strategic goals.

How can we learn the lessons this pandemic has taught us about who we are as individuals, and as communities of practice, in order to enhance the way we work in the future?

Connecting as a community

We've been grappling with how the power of social media platforms, ranging from LinkedIn through to Facebook, might most effectively be harnessed in order to have valuable, lively and challenging conversations about our exciting, emerging field of dual-practitioner practice, in a psychologically safe environment. Our debates recognised that social media is, of course, not a new thing; the world has already changed beyond recognition within a generation, and there are undoubtedly a multitude of benefits that come with this. For me, the opportunity is this – how can we learn the lessons this pandemic has taught us about who we are as individuals, and as communities of practice, in order to enhance the way we work in the future?

One thing is clear to me – connecting online is here to stay. It can be a hugely helpful and practical way to bring geographically diverse groups together, and we must therefore continue to both embrace it and celebrate it for the collaboration it brings. Additionally, as I'm sure you've experienced yourselves, I've seen that powerful and impactful work can be done purely online, with client work proving that sustainable psychological and

behavioural change can be achieved, alongside demonstrable results with projects beyond our practices.

But I also believe we are hardwired to chase the intangible *feeling* that connection gives us; the *sensation* of belonging, at both a macro and a micro level. By that, I mean being part of something that is both bigger than all of us, as well as simultaneously firing and inspiring the different parts within each of us. As I returned from my holiday, I also returned to forgotten parts of myself. For me, perhaps the biggest takeaway is that if we start to notice a sense of connection is slipping away, we can try to be brave enough to ask the questions about how we can collectively find our way back. As with so many things in life (and indeed in therapy), maybe this is all about getting the balance right. Avoiding the polarisation of position that can develop when we seek certainty in an unpredictable world, we find that embracing the indefinable and more unknowable middle ground can deliver the intangible magic.

With all this in mind, I genuinely hope to see many of your faces soon – both in person and online – so watch this space as we in the BACP Coaching Executive share new ways to engage as a coaching division and as a wider community beyond BACP, in the evolving coach-therapy space.

And in the meantime, for anyone travelling this summer, *bon voyage*, enjoy the clouds (and don't forget to check your gate number). ■

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BACP Coaching Update



Network events

The theme for our next network meeting on 14 September is transitioning to a dual practitioner. It will be an opportunity to hear and share our journeys of moving from either coach or therapist to working with both approaches, the challenges we faced, and how we overcame these.

See our website for more information:
www.bacp.co.uk/events/nmc140922-bacp-coaching-network-meeting

A call for case studies



As we continue to build on our ambition to create a centre of excellence for our practice, we'd love to hear your experiences of how your therapeutically informed coaching approach has served your clients. In particular, coaching case studies (anonymised) will help demonstrate evidence-based practice and both inform and support BACP's external conversations with relevant policy makers and organisations. Please do get in touch if you can contribute.

Lucy Myers
Coaching.Chair@bacp.co.uk

COVID-19 updates

For all the latest information, see:
www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus



You can find regularly updated FAQs on coronavirus on our website. For more information, visit:
www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/faqs-about-coronavirus



Meet the member



Ioannes Alexiades

is a consultant, peer mentor, coach and psychotherapist. He is a registered member of BACP and the Association for Coaching (AC) and is in the process of being awarded a master's degree in existential psychotherapy from The New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC) and Middlesex University. He is also due to embark on the integrative counselling and coaching postgraduate programme at University of East London (UEL), to enable him to better integrate evidence-based coaching and counselling models and to work more effectively as an integrative practitioner. Prior to coaching, Ioannes worked as a consultant across different sectors and industries, which he continues to do on an interim basis, and he provides coaching to senior executives within organisations alongside his private therapy practice.

Ioannes joined the BACP Coaching Executive last year. His work includes establishing a list of approved supervisors for integrative practitioners and contributing to the social media strategy for the division. He is also working alongside fellow Executive members in the development of a core competence framework for coaching and its respective alignment with BACP, and encouraging collaboration with other professional bodies and coaching associations.

www.mindhauscounselling.com

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

During my consulting career, I found myself working mainly in professional services and on many occasions focusing on human resources, specifically learning and development requirements. I became involved in fulfilling leadership coaching requirements for senior management roles, which brought me closer to the field of leadership development and allowed me to see the benefits of using coaching models in the workplace. I also worked as a peer mentor supporting members of staff in the workplace for many years, and have supported many programmes, including graduate development schemes and diversity, inclusion and equality initiatives. This combined experience of coaching and mentoring paved the way for me to begin retraining as a psychotherapist. I knew from the start that my psychotherapy training would give my coaching work more depth. Having just completed this training, I feel that the time has come for me to combine both disciplines into my practice as an integrative coach-therapist.

Do you have a coaching niche?

I am a firm believer that effective coaching needs to come from the heart. As such, my approach derives from my own experience, both personally and professionally, and focuses on relationships with others. This relational approach allows me to bring my experience of the corporate world into the coaching space, and vice versa. In this sense, I would say that my niche revolves around helping professional people seeking to gain more out of life. From a newly acquired awareness of their inner resources, the coaching process helps them to gain increased confidence and resilience, which then enhances their sense of achievement and satisfaction, both at work and on a personal level.

How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?

I believe that coaching is a way of being, in so far as it has encouraged me to adopt a 'can do' attitude to life. Personally, this mindset has allowed me to overcome many challenges and has enabled me to continuously strive to achieve whatever I set my mind to. Furthermore, there isn't a moment goes by in which an idea doesn't emerge about how I can assist others in achieving their ambitions, goals and aspirations. This has allowed me to see coaching as an organic process that develops when we understand our clients better, and there is nothing more rewarding for me than seeing someone blossom. I find this inspirational and I use this experience and the lessons learnt to help myself and others who may be looking to achieve similar outcomes.

Where do you practise?

At present, I am still using my coaching skills in the workplace during the day, to nurture relationships with my stakeholders as a means of showcasing best practice and what coaching can deliver to the business. I also run a private practice, primarily in the evenings, where I provide face-to-face coaching whenever necessary; but most of my clients are happy to have sessions virtually as this provides them with flexibility – much sought after and appreciated by busy executives and clients.

Do you have a typical client?

At this stage, my clients tend to be young professionals – either employees of organisations or entrepreneurs running their own businesses. My experience of being employed and setting up my own business, both in the past and presently with my private practice, has allowed me to help others who find themselves in similar circumstances. Some of my clients are often running multiple businesses and looking to expand. In this instance, the coaching work revolves around their personal development and how they can enhance the performance of the growing number of their direct reports.

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

I see my work as a coach and therapist as relational, which means that the only way I can make an impact is to be able to establish a connection on a human level. This ability allows me to build on the trust and understanding between myself and my client that develops over

time. I often compare it to a joint venture that allows both parties to learn from one another and that better helps to identify the client's strengths for a more targeted and bespoke way of working.

I have incorporated elements from traditional coaching models, such as GROW/GROWTH and other goal-focused and business partnering approaches in the past, but through my recent training, I have started using more evidence-based therapeutic modalities, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), in my work. In my experience, I have found an integrated approach to coaching to be more effective as it is helpful to set the scene for the work ahead by identifying the goal, while combining other methodologies to enrich the process. More recently, I am using Socratic questioning as a form of guided discovery to fine-tune the work and am looking forward to applying the personal consultancy framework with clients through my forthcoming training at UEL.

I see my work as a coach and therapist as relational, which means that the only way I can make an impact is to be able to establish a connection on a human level

What's your biggest challenge currently?

My biggest challenge is finding the time for my day job, my clients in the evenings, and the work that I'm doing with the BACP Coaching division. However, I don't really see this as a challenge – if anything, it's an opportunity to become more agile and to further develop my offering to other busy executives.

What do you feel most proud of having achieved?

I would say that I am most proud of the therapy training I have undertaken recently. The training was challenging, given the time required for studies and completion of clinical hours, which meant having to sacrifice work to complete my training. I believe that continuing professional

development is something that goes beyond qualifying as a therapist and coach, and feel that this investment in myself is worthwhile and necessary and will ultimately benefit my clients.

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

I tend to recharge my batteries by going on long walks in the countryside, travelling when time permits, going to the cinema, cooking and practising mindfulness. I am a keen art aficionado and like to spend time with friends, many of whom are artists, for inspiration.

What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?

I would say that it's important to learn from your work with your clients. As a therapist, I could see in many cases when therapy might come to an end, when the client felt they could move forward from their issues and challenges, and where coaching might then begin. Equally, it's important to be able to identify what type of coaching attracts you more. Is it executive coaching or life coaching? This decision is very personal, but the soul-searching will allow you to find your own idiosyncratic way of being a coach that combines the therapeutic aspects of your practice.

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

It gives me access to a network of other like-minded individuals. The ability to find your tribe is important, and I view it as a form of homecoming that allows me to feel at ease in the knowledge that I'm surrounded by others who are on the same journey. I very much enjoy being part of the BACP Coaching division and to be around such inspiring colleagues, who are working to create the ideal environment for myself and others who identify as coach-therapists. Equally, I believe in our work and mission to support others in their journey to become integrative practitioners.

Get in touch

If you are a BACP Coaching member and would like to feature in this column, please contact the Editor at coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk

Coaching Supervision special interest group update

New members are welcome to join the BACP Coaching Supervision special interest group (SIG)

We meet every two months for 90 minutes online, sharing our thoughts and ideas about supervision in coaching and how these fit into the wider political, social and cultural landscape, for example, the ongoing pandemic, war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis.

Members are encouraged to contribute their voices through *Coaching Today*, either individually or as a group – contact the Editor with your ideas at coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk

In July, I and fellow member Ioannes Alexiades met with Caroline Jesper, who is leading on BACP's strategy for supervision. A report will follow in a future update.

Next meetings:

12 September 11am 16 November 11am

Karen Ledger BACP Coaching Executive Lead for the Coaching Supervision special interest group (SIG)
karen@kslconsulting.org.uk

Coaching for social impact

Online workshop on 18 October

On 18 October, 12 noon to 1.30pm, the Coaching for Social Impact SIG will hold a workshop discussion on Zoom, focusing on creating more connections and discussing key questions arising from our Coaching for Social Impact event in March. If you would like to join us, please contact Val Watson at the address below. We will email contacts and post further information on our website before the event.

See p21 for our panellists' reflections on our March event.

Val Watson
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Befriending the **imposter**



How can we help our clients when the dreaded imposter surfaces? Executive coach and supervisor **Maria Gray** shows us how developing a healthy relationship with the imposter can be a source of growth and meaningful change

Joanne*, a newly appointed territory manager in a multinational company, made a vulnerable revelation at our first coaching session: 'I feel like there is a little insecure girl who sits inside me and rules my thinking... trying to convince me that I am not as good as my colleagues think I am, and that I am soon going to be found out...'

In my coaching practice I often come across the phenomenon of '...intense thoughts of intellectual and/or professional fraudulence despite verifiable achievements.'¹ It is a common pattern I observe among high-achieving professional individuals, both men and women.

The term 'imposter phenomenon' (IP) has become widely popularised, even if often under the more colloquial banner of a syndrome; many clients I work with are familiar with this professional jargon and readily volunteer that they have it. Clients frequently describe 'overcoming the imposter syndrome' as one of their main coaching objectives.

The notion of 'overcoming a syndrome', however, immediately creates a sense of pressure to take action and fight the 'culprit'. In my view, this can often deepen the client's sense of being somehow inadequate, and create a false sense of the possibility of closing the door on something that has been developing as a part of their 'life script',² often for decades.

In recently published quantitative research, organisational psychologists Zanchetta et al suggest that the main objective of coaching interventions aimed at reducing the consequences of IP should be to focus on facilitating a shift from an 'entity' to a 'growth' mindset.³

This conclusion resonates with my experience of working with the imposter phenomenon in coaching, and that is why I invite you, as coaches, to help our clients develop a healthy relationship with their imposter so it serves as a platform for growth, rather than struggling with making the phenomenon disappear.

I will share some of my thoughts on the subject of developing a healthy relationship with the imposter and will use some of my work with Joanne to share some of the strategies and interventions that have served her well in our coaching relationship. This sharing is based on the direct feedback from Joanne, who generously agreed to share her observations a couple of months after our coaching assignment was completed.

Although I have chosen a specific case study of a female leader with which to illustrate this article, I have written this for anyone who is familiar with the intense ruminations and associated imposter feelings, experiences which often get in the way of enjoying professional success and maximising performance.

Normalising the experience

Joanne shared that our initial exploration of her feelings and behaviours helped her realise that, despite having received a promotion to the role of a territory manager, she was acting as someone who was still seeking approval. She was afraid of being exposed as less competent and as lacking the necessary knowledge to perform the role.

In their book, *How Women Rise*, leadership experts Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith observe that women's habit of undermining their own authority by minimising themselves often reduces their chances of having the desired influence.⁴

Joanne was relieved to learn that many other high-achieving individuals share similar experiences. Many such experiences are largely unconscious – something that coaching can help to uncover as well as facilitating the development of coping strategies. Joanne also told me that she had not previously heard of the imposter phenomenon, and she felt reassured and even liberated to discover that there was a name for what she was experiencing.

One question I often ask my coaching clients is: *'If you knew that more than half of the people who you work with have similar insecurity, how would it change your perspective?'*

Imposter phenomenon, like any other type of self-doubt, is a protection mechanism. That is why it is important that as coaches we invite the client to honour the protective side of it and treat it with kindness and appreciation.

Feeling self-doubt occasionally is part of being human. It is deeply connected with our desire to belong and be accepted – one of the most basic human emotional needs. It's hardly surprising that this need can sometimes force us into 'playing small' in order to please or avoid potential criticism. Although cultural and generational differences might apply, girls in particular are often encouraged to care more about being liked and happy, rather than being successful. Women are taught to please, but it's harming their careers.⁴

“

Imposter phenomenon, like any other type of self-doubt, is a protection mechanism. That is why it is important that as coaches we invite the client to honour the protective side of it and treat it with kindness and appreciation

Self-doubt is also an element of creative reflection – considering options, scanning and exploring possibilities are all part of that process. However, if self-doubt becomes repetitive and circular, it loses its creative potential and contributes to growing anxiety and depression. That is why developing a healthy relationship with IP as a form of self-doubt and learning how to move on are important for proper functioning.

Staying with the experience, rather than looking for quick fixes

In my coaching practice, I often invite my clients to explore where their imposter feeling originated. Psychiatrist Eric Berne famously coined the term ‘life script’, defined as ‘an unconscious life plan’ that is formed in childhood, reinforced by parents, and justified by subsequent events, culminating in a ‘chosen alternative’.² Our script and associated behaviours have often taken many years to develop and, although this may sound counterintuitive, there are frequently some positive aspects in how that script has been serving us.

Joanne, for example, revealed that demonstrating signs of insecurity had often won her praise at school, as well as reassurance from her more senior colleagues later in life. She said that she was also perceived as an excellent team player as her colleagues rarely encountered her competitive side, something her insecurities masked.

When I invited Joanne to reflect on the qualities that made her the best candidate for the new role, she concluded that being perceived as an excellent team player, keen to support others rather than out to beat them, was important. In combination with her strategic mindset, her excellent team management, integrity, work ethic and commitment made her an ideal candidate when the time had come to appoint a new territory manager.

‘What might be the potential downsides if you were to behave in a more self-assured manner?’, I asked her.

At the end of our session, Joanne shared that it was useful and important to talk about and acknowledge what she might lose if she were to change her behaviour. She came to the conclusion that she was not quite prepared to ‘navigate the sea’ reassurance free and that receiving occasional reassurance still remained important to her. She also appreciated our discussion of how that need could be met, without jeopardising her image as the ‘woman in charge’.

Exploring specific situations and making broader conclusions about those that trigger the imposter

I invited Joanne to explore a specific situation where her imposter feelings were triggered. She began:

‘I will need to present the company’s vision to hundreds of our business partners and customers in two weeks’ time. A tall, blonde woman in my mid 40s, a new territory manager, speaking in front of a seasoned sophisticated audience, many of them outstanding speakers... I feel really uncomfortable about appearing in the spotlight. I just don’t feel like I am at the same level...’

I then invited Joanne to examine her assumptions about the status and power of her audience. Status and power are

subjective attributes. As sociologists Berger and Luckmann state, what is ‘real’ to a Tibetan monk may not be ‘real’ to an American businessman.⁵ Consequently, someone with a high status in the eyes of a Western businessman may be perceived as commonplace by a Tibetan monk. We often tend to construct those who are older or who we perceive as more experienced, more connected or better educated, as being of higher status than ourselves. Such assumptions inevitably feed the imposter feelings.

Moreover, such constructions inhibit our confidence and spontaneity, often getting in the way of our being fully present in a dialogue.

Joanne and I explored the assumptions that she was making about her status differential with the people she was going to present to. What, perhaps, could be a more liberating alternative to her limiting assumptions?

‘What if, instead of being critically assessed and looked down at by them, as you expect, you are actually a source of inspiration?’ I suggested.

Fear of rejection triggers bodily responses associated with experiencing shame. Shame, like trauma, puts the body in a freeze state and lowers the ability to think and act clearly.⁶

‘But what if, instead of imagining the words and faces of the people who might criticise or be envious, you visualise and focus your attention on those who will be inspired?’

My intervention immediately encouraged Joanne to come up with a list of people who would be in the audience for her presentation, and who had always looked up to her.

“

Status and power are subjective attributes... what is ‘real’ to a Tibetan monk may not be ‘real’ to an American businessman

‘I still feel like I have to do so much homework before I can present credibly. I just do not feel like I have the in-depth knowledge of the subject that I am supposed to talk about. So much reading and research still to be done,’ Joanne sighed.

Helgesen and Goldsmith observe that a woman’s habit of developing excessive expertise and the fact that society promotes a habit of perfectionism in women often hinder their chances of thriving in the workplace.⁴

Joanne told me that these were indeed traits she could recognise in herself, and admitted that, on reflection, there was less preparation work that she actually needed to do than she initially imagined.

She also shared that my invitation to explore what inspired her about making a speech to her audience and what it was she really wanted them to learn from her presentation, were particularly helpful. ‘I never have problems talking about things that I love to a big audience’, she concluded with a smile.

“

I encourage my clients to think of a healthy relationship with the so-called ‘imposter phenomenon’ by inviting them to strike an optimum balance between the two polarities of being overly modest and overly pompous

Exploring the practical steps and coping mechanisms that can be used when the imposter feelings get triggered

Two months after our coaching assignment was completed, Joanne told me that when the imposter feelings occur, she uses the following routines that help her to manage her feelings and move on:

- *‘If you knew that more than half of the people who you work with have similar insecurity, how would it change your perspective?’*

This question has helped Joanne to remind herself that her feelings are normal and are indeed shared by many. She explains: ‘There is a lot to be said for liking your own imposter. Stress, tiredness, pressure, fear and external aggression almost immediately trigger my imposter, which I have now learned to manage, but in moments of calmness, friendliness and success, I realise that my little imposter helps me and makes me who I am.’

- *‘What if, instead of imagining the words and faces of the people who might criticise or be envious, you focus your attention on and visualise those who will be inspired?’*

When rumination becomes repetitive, Joanne now finds it easier to recognise and remind herself that the role and the title have already been awarded to her. Therefore, her efforts need to be focused on doing her best for her team, those who look to her for inspiration, and the organisation as a whole, rather than ruminating, doubting and trying to prove herself.

- *‘Is what that little girl is trying to tell me really true?’*

When the ‘little insecure girl’ inside her throws her into an unproductive bout of self-doubt, Joanne now coaches herself by asking this question. She adds: ‘What could be a more liberating alternative to the assumption than that the little girl invites me to make here?’

Concluding this article on a more light-hearted note, I offer readers a reminder of the point I made in opening it about the subliminal pressure inherent in the phrase ‘overcoming the imposter syndrome’. I encourage my clients to think of a healthy relationship with the so-called ‘imposter phenomenon’ by inviting them to strike an optimum balance between the two polarities of being overly modest and overly pompous.

The first pole is brilliantly expressed by Marianne Williamson: ‘There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do... And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.’⁷

These words serve as a useful reminder that we can find ourselves downplaying our capabilities and need some encouragement to let our true superhero self shine through; false modesty can inadvertently impair the ability of others to raise their game and be at their best.

The second pole is captured nicely in the observation of Mark Twain: ‘All the great men are dead, and I’m not feeling too well myself’.⁸

This amusing paraphrase of a quote from *Mark Twain’s Speeches* is a great encouragement for retaining a sense of perspective. Leadership undoubtedly requires us to step into our power, but self-humility and vulnerability in our leaders can help others to engage and empathise with them, facilitating a more productive and mutually rewarding relationship. ■

**name and any distinguishing features have been disguised*

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Maria Gray, MSc, MA is an Ashridge accredited executive coach and coach supervisor. She has been an executive coach since 2005 and has supervised coaches since 2015. Following a corporate career, Maria co-founded a change consulting and leadership development practice. She has achieved European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) Global Individual Supervision accreditation (ESIA) and she is now an EMCC senior practitioner (EIA). Maria’s particular interest is helping leaders to navigate the challenge of leading and building confidence in others while managing their inner selves, despite everyday pressures at work and at home.

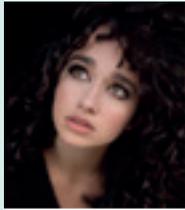
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Research digest



In this issue, **Xenia Kontogianni** looks at how managerial coaching contributes to thriving at work and workplace productivity

Managerial coaching (MC) has become an area of focus for many practitioners and researchers in the last few years.¹ The 2012 CIPD Annual Survey Report found that coaching by management supervisors is seen as an important learning and development practice and was rated nearly three times as effective as coaching by external experts.² Managerial coaching has been considered an effective strategy to overcome inadequate performance in the workplace³ and a means of 'thriving' (ie growing and flourishing) at work.⁴ Thriving at work refers to feelings of being energetic and of having achieved a greater level of knowledge and skills. Supervisors and managers acting as coaches can provide advice, care, empowerment and knowledge-sharing for employees, which may result in positive behaviours and attitudes in the workplace and increase organisational performance.

MC assumes many forms including:

1) supervisor/managers coaching employees one to one (*hierarchical coaching*); 2) learning from each other in reciprocal relationships (*peer coaching*); and 3) leader-employee interactions in a team context (*team coaching*). MC differs from *executive coaching*, in which an invited external coach works with executives to help them achieve their own goals, promote job satisfaction and so improve productivity in the organisation. In MC, a manager or supervisor uses coaching as a tool to help employees increase job performance and achieve organisational goals. The focus of this article is on hierarchical coaching, which is the most common form of MC practice.

MC maintains a rather relaxed structure, and sessions take place in the form of daily interactions between managers and employees. It mainly involves setting goals, active listening, questioning, observing, analysing, giving feedback and building trust relationships so that employees gain fresh perspectives on their work,

learn from what is happening and adjust to challenging situations. On the other hand, some managers/supervisors may rely more on empowering individuals to develop their own potential, facilitating them to explore ways to solve problems, as well as providing constructive feedback to help them reflect upon their own progress.

As a result, many organisations are now offering certification programmes and other forms of training in this domain. Coaching organisations can now seize the opportunity to develop managerial coaching programmes in accordance with the 'coach-the-coach' or 'train-the-trainer' model and continue to provide coaching for managers and supervisors across their client base.⁵ Although many studies have provided strong evidence for the benefits of MC at individual and organisational levels, relatively

and performance benefits. Most academic studies have been carried out with the use of validated instruments measuring skills in coaching, performance outcomes with reference to individual and organisational levels and, finally, instruments for measuring the mediating variables of interest. Respondents completed questionnaires covering these areas, which were subsequently analysed statistically to find the degree of correlation between them. The following Figure 1 identifies four mediating factors that explain the links between MC and individual performance and another four factors for the links with organisational performance.

Mediating the influence of coaching on individual performance

Probably the most frequently explored mediating factor in the literature has been a concept referred to as *psychological empowerment*; that is, a psychological state of motivation, promoting four aspects of cognition: a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and job impact. There are several reasons why coaching could promote psychological empowerment.⁶ First, coaching managers/supervisors provide their employees with useful task feedback, which helps them understand the importance of their contribution to the organisation, thus creating a sense of meaning. Second, managers/supervisors are devoted to developing employees and enhancing their sense of competence in carrying out their work. Third, managers/supervisors appreciate the work of their employees and accept more ambiguity at work, which allows them to grant more control and autonomy to their employees, which increases employees' self-determination. Lastly, more participation takes place in decision making, which makes employees feel that their actions have an *impact* at work. In turn, psychological empowerment leads to greater competence and a sense of control over the work, which may lead to persistent efforts at achieving better results at work.

Supervisors and managers acting as coaches can provide advice, care, empowerment and knowledge-sharing for employees, which may result in positive behaviours and attitudes in the workplace and increase organisational performance

few have looked into the causal paths or mechanisms that explain these benefits. Hence, a literature review in this article looks at a variety of 'mediating factors' between MC

A related mediating factor is *self-efficacy* or people’s beliefs in their ability to motivate and mobilise themselves in order to exercise control over events. Thus, people with high self-efficacy are more likely to take action to cope with challenging situations, persist with efforts when faced with uncertainties and make better choices.⁷ The MC supervisor and employees work together to tackle a problem and to reach specific solutions. Initially, managers/supervisors can review past performance and provide elaborate feedback; following this, they may target the problem together with the employee and discuss actions to be taken in the future. Having role-played these actions with the manager/supervisor, employees acquire an increased perspective on their ability to cope with new challenges. Accordingly, managerial coaching positively influences employees’ self-efficacy.

Many people understand their role in organisations as following certain practices, hence avoiding negative judgments about their competence. However, modern organisations thrive in challenging situations that require employees to demonstrate innovation and flexibility. These capabilities are acquired gradually through *exploratory learning* with difficult tasks and this requires an attitude of acknowledgment that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. Here, comes the

beneficial role of MC supervisors, who care for their people and encourage them to express their thoughts and opinions freely. A leader who embraces complexity at work can encourage people to experiment with new approaches of doing their jobs, which increases creativity in the organisation.

Some of the individual benefits of managerial coaching also seem to have a cascading effect on organisational performance

Recent attention in job design and the human resource development literature has focused on a new concept about employees’ potential to align their work with their own preferences and motives. Hence, job crafting has been introduced as a series of changes that individuals make at their workplace that alter tasks, meanings and job relationships.⁸ *Job crafting* happens quite frequently and informally and it’s not a single, thoughtful act. Given the feedback, social interaction and job resources

that managers/supervisors provide, it has been shown that job crafting mediates the relationship between managerial coaching and job performance.

Mediating the influence of coaching on performance at the organisational level

Some of the individual benefits of MC also seem to have a cascading effect on organisational performance. *Self-efficacy*, for instance, may fuel prosocial behaviours at work, as people who feel able to carry out their work duties may also try to help others, and this has a positive impact on their workplace. When people experience self-efficacy, they are inspired to engage in behaviours and actions beyond the remit of their immediate roles. Prosocial behaviour is very important in creating a climate of forgiveness that improves trust from others and helps people acquire a sense of organisational justice.⁴ In turn, prosocial behaviour has been related to persistence and increased productivity, which explains its mediating role between MC and organisational performance.

These psychological and social mediating factors seem to enter into a complicated network of relationships that makes it difficult to find a clear causal path. For instance, prosocial behaviour is considered an antecedent of *organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB)*;⁹

Figure 1. Mediating factors between managerial coaching and performance



that is, a sense of organisational commitment that enhances job performance and makes employees perform beyond their job scope, just for the sake of their organisation. Studies looking into direct links between coaching and employees' OCB are scarce, but most of the scholars treating this subject emphasise a number of OCB dimensions. For instance, coaching promotes conscientiousness at work as it creates a feeling of responsibility towards the organisation, and makes people willing to put in extra effort beyond their immediate duties. Furthermore, coaching encourages collaboration and fosters positive attitudes, hence improving sportsmanship. In turn, OCB creates a supportive environment by making other people join their efforts, which leads to a better workplace.

Two other related mediating factors concern *work engagement* and *psychological ownership*. A characteristic of MC is the continuity that exists in the interaction between managers/supervisors and employees, which seems to cultivate an engagement with the work environment. Work engagement is conceived as the opposite of 'job burnout'. It can be perceived as a positive state of mind, a feeling of vigour and high levels of energy to persist in the face of difficulties, and a sense of enthusiasm, pride and dedication. When managers/supervisors provide coaching, people become engaged with their work as more guidance is available to manage their goals and acquire a sense of attachment to their jobs. Several studies in management also emphasise that employees should feel ownership at their workplace, that is, feel like the owners of their organisation and make decisions beyond their immediate tasks in the interest of their organisation.¹⁰ In other words, a 'manager as coach' values people, trusts their potential, respects their decisions and encourages them to persist, even in situations of high ambiguity. It may be expected then that employees coached by MC supervisors could gain psychological ownership of their tasks, taking on more responsibilities for the sake of the organisation. In this sense, psychological ownership shares some common elements with organisational citizenship behaviour.

The coaching literature includes a number of studies providing evidence for the positive effect of managerial coaching (MC) on the performance of employees, both at the individual and organisational level. However, MC can be practised using a variety of techniques and theoretical approaches, or even in conjunction

with other types of coaching. It is plausible then that the actual MC practice offers different ways of regulating the interaction between managers/supervisors and employees, and hence, the causal routes leading to enhanced performance at the workplace. This article has provided a succinct summary of the variety of causal links explored in the literature between MC and human performance, some of them concerning the individual alone, while others look into the wider effect on the workplace and the organisation.

Opportunities grow for coaching organisations in this area and there is confidence that good results will be identified by continuing research in academia

From the previous discussion, it may appear that an intricate network of relationships exists between many of the mediating factors mentioned earlier. Especially, *psychological empowerment* seems to be a wide concept that encompasses self-efficacy and learning. In the same way, *organisational citizenship behaviour* (OCB) seems to have as its antecedent prosocial behaviour and psychological ownership. Finally, there is an interaction between the two groups of mediating factors in the sense that self-efficacy promotes prosocial behaviours or learning promotes work engagement. Nevertheless, researchers have been struggling to find new instruments for measuring these mediating factors and documenting the causal links between MC and performance.

On a positive note, the multiple causal links that have been presented show that MC offers a variety of techniques for 'thriving at work' and productivity. MC is an interesting domain of coaching since the focus has been on 'coaching the coach', developing an internal capability in the organisation and achieving continuity in the process. So, opportunities grow for coaching organisations in this area, and there is confidence that good results will be identified by continuing research in academia. ■

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Beyond words:

art-based approaches
in executive coaching

Coach and artist **Anna Sheather** demonstrates how the use of art and image making can have a powerful impact in executive and leadership coaching





I am often asked about the use of art in executive coaching, with coaches and clients alike questioning the appropriateness of this approach. The comments I receive are generally along the lines of it not being 'suitable' for the boardroom, or concerns that the organisation (paying client) would feel that the work we are doing together is not 'serious'. Coaches also share concerns with me that their credibility will be 'diminished' if they were to introduce this in their work with clients. These barriers often stem from the person's own perspectives of art rather than the attitude of the coaching client. I have used art for many years in my executive coaching practice, and my clients are always curious about the approach, with the majority being open to, and enjoying, working in this way.

What is art-based coaching?

Art in a coaching context is '...any image a client creates that has personal meaning to them. This image could be a drawing, a sculpture, a painting, a collage, or a mixture. It is about self-expression – externalising, through line, colour, texture and form, an image of their interior selves.'

Art-based coaching uses the visual expressive language of image making, enabling clients to access their potential in a creative and dynamic space. It is reflective and bypasses the need for verbal analysis. Through coaching with art, we enrich our conversations with our clients, helping them move quickly to a deeper level of awareness and understanding. It gives our clients access to the non-verbal, unconscious parts of their internal world quickly, enabling them to bring to the fore that which may be hidden but in need of recognition.¹

The exploration of the created image allows clients to make sense of, and find meaning in and new perspectives on, their issues. It deepens self-awareness, which in turn leads to fresh insights, furthering personal growth and supporting lasting change.

My practice

I began executive coaching in 2007, coming from a pure business background and coaching in a traditional way. One of the reasons I set up my own practice was to give myself time for my own artmaking, and as my creative practice developed, I found myself holding this separately from my coaching work. However, a growing dissatisfaction with my coaching practice and a conversation with my supervisor gave me the 'aha!' moment I needed, and Art in Coaching was born.

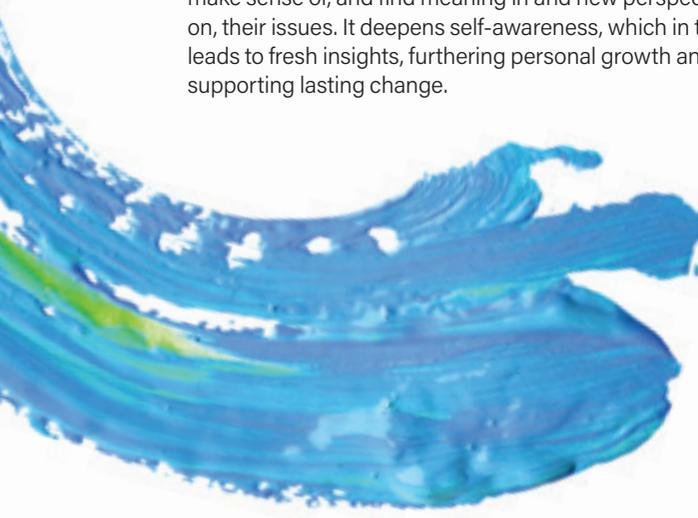
This didn't happen overnight and my art-based practice is based on extensive research, which covers four main areas: art and communication; art therapy and the potential overlap with coaching; art and the brain; and practical research using art in coaching. I consolidated my research into my practice, resulting in the five stages of the Coaching with Art framework¹ that I use today.

Coaching with Art framework – five stages

- 1 Imaging** – holding space to allow an internal image to emerge for our client
- 2 Creating** – the client externalises their image with art materials and expresses themselves through their artmaking
- 3 Connecting** – working alongside our client to connect them to their image, and facilitate their understanding of its meaning
- 4 Coaching** – as the area of focus emerges, moving to coaching
- 5 Continuing discoveries** – making space for ongoing emerging themes, and discovering insights over time

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Art-based coaching uses the visual expressive language of image making, enabling clients to access their potential in a creative and dynamic space



My research

Art is a visual expressive language. As human beings, we have always used art to communicate our place in the world. Image making allows us to externalise and understand that which we might otherwise find difficult and/or impossible to articulate.

Art therapy is one of the newer psychotherapies, and an emerging body of research and experiential evidence mirrors many benefits from coaching, but using image creation rather than a purely verbal process. Expressive art therapist Cathy Malchiodi explains that this process significantly enhances the communication between therapist and client, and that *'...the art facilitates clients' new understandings and insights... helps resolve conflicts, solve problems and create new perceptions that lead to positive changes, personal growth as well as healing'*.² I have found this to be equally true when using art in the coaching space, as demonstrated in the case study below.

As a person-centred coach, one area of practice I am particularly drawn to is person-centred art therapy. In her book, *Art Therapy: the person-centred way*, art therapist Liesl Silverstone writes: *'In my ideal world imaging with the use of art – in fact a wide range of non-verbal creative modes – would be part of learning programmes in the field of human development, resulting in more rounded professionals and thus, in their more balanced, enriched practice'*.³ Silverstone's person-centred approach has many similarities with the way I work: being fully present and empathetic, having unconditional positive regard for the client and being congruent with one's self and the client. Here, the space is held without judgment or censorship, the image belongs to the client and only they know what meanings may be held within it for them. The five stages of my Coaching with Art framework above were inspired by and developed from Silverstone's approach.³

Another important part of my research is art and the brain. I have found psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist's research on the bilateral hemisphericity of the brain particularly enlightening as to why and how art-based coaching may be so effective.⁴ By enabling the silent right hemisphere to communicate through visual language, we ensure we engage the left hemisphere in a way that facilitates whole-brain working.¹ This led me to embrace mindfulness and meditative methods, quietening the mind to allow the more holistic, knowing self to come to the fore, as an important part of the imaging process.

I put all my academic research into practice through case study programmes, running workshops and training events. Exploring how to use art in coaching deepened my understanding of this approach, reinforced its benefits and outcomes, and demonstrated clearly how coaches can hold an art-based coaching space, and that this approach has relevance for all types of coaching, including executive coaching.

Throughout my research and practice, I have been acutely aware of the necessary boundaries around using art in coaching. This approach has the ability to take clients to places they may not have expected and either may not be ready for or want to go. It may also take coaches to areas they are not skilled or qualified to work in. To manage these boundaries, it is important for art-based exercises to be used with a clear purpose in service of the coaching contract, and within appropriate coaching guidelines and ethical frameworks.

Art in executive and leadership coaching

The executive and leadership coaching space can be a complex one to work in.^{5,6} The primary focus is on the individual client's personal growth, at the same time as meeting the needs of the organisation within which they work. It is about the client achieving personal fulfilment in their role, operating in a way that feels aligned with their own values and goals, while maximising their professional impact to achieve organisational goals.

At a personal level, coaching offers the executive a reflective space to explore that which is important to them and to bring about desired changes, to thinking, behaviour and actions. These changes are not always easy nor are they easily achieved through coaching. Even when clients want to change, unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaviour can be very embedded. Clients can find themselves returning to old ways of being and working, and their changes are short lived.

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Exploring how to use art in coaching deepened my understanding of this approach, reinforced its benefits and outcomes, and demonstrated clearly how coaches can hold an art-based coaching space





To achieve personal change, clients need a deeper connection to their inner selves and to gain greater self-awareness and understanding if they are to create a lasting shift. This requires going beyond the thinking mind and connecting with the intuitive, more knowing, mind.

In addition to the personal focus, we must also consider the organisational focus. The organisations within which clients work are complex, with many different systems within them – political, social and emotional. As a result, the issues that executive clients bring into coaching can also be complex. Along with their personal issues, they are working with complex problems within complex systems and relational dynamics.

To be successful, coaching must enable the client to hold both the personal and organisational focus. It must enable the client to achieve a deeper connection with self and their relationship with the wider, complex systems.

Art-based coaching supports the client to hold the complex whole, while also connecting to the knowing self. This approach enables the client to go beyond words and:

- understand and make sense of complex and/or paradoxical situations
- make tangible a sense of inner knowing in a way they can start to understand
- express and connect to what seems difficult or impossible to articulate
- break through thinking loops that can prevent them from making progress
- unlock unhelpful repeating patterns of behaviour that are holding them back
- express and explore emotional responses in a safe space
- make sense of experience and resolve areas of importance.

Case study: Sam

In this case study, I outline my approach and focus in detail on one session – our first session. This session demonstrates the way art-based coaching holds the complex whole, gets to the core issues quickly, deepens personal awareness and understanding and creates insights necessary to grow and develop within a leadership role. I am grateful to my client for giving me permission to share our work together. I have changed their name and organisational details to maintain confidentiality. My client's reflections and comments are also included.

The coaching programme

Sam came to me for four 90-minute art-based coaching sessions over a five-month period. We worked together in my studio, where Sam had access to a range of art materials (though since the pandemic, I have worked with clients online, where they bring their own materials).

As director for a professional body, Sam had been with the organisation for six months and had been recruited to bring in change and best practice to the research function and member-facing areas of the company. Sam contracted to use the coaching to reflect on her role, support her transition into the new organisation and explore how best to achieve her goals.

Contracting for art-based coaching

Contracting for art-based coaching follows the same process as traditional coaching, but Sam and I also talked specifically about the art-based coaching process and how art has the ability to unlock memories and emotions, some of which a client may be unprepared for, or not yet ready to work with. It was important that Sam understood that if at any point she started to feel overly uncomfortable, she could stop at any time.

Our first session

In our first session together, we looked at what Sam wanted to explore in coaching. This session covered an extraordinary amount in just 90 minutes. As Sam said after the session: 'I found it completely fascinating that we should have covered so much territory, [and] that these truths have emerged so quickly and profoundly, enabling me to articulate what have until now been nothing more than gut feelings.'

The imaging process

When coaching with art, the first stage is the imaging process (allowing an image to emerge), which becomes the area of focus for the session. My main approach is to start by creating a space for my client's busy thinking mind to slow down and relinquish control, allowing the unconscious, insightful, intuitive and knowing self to emerge, using mindfulness techniques.

Imaging can also be spontaneous, or emerge from playing with the materials, where intuitive mark-making takes over. My approach depends on what happens in the here-and-now of the coaching space.

My role as observer and facilitator

While Sam was creating her image (stage 2), I observed her process: the decisions she was making around what materials and colours to use, the marks she made, the energy in those marks and the order in which Sam made those marks. When she had finished, I then facilitated her connection to her image (stage 3), an externalised part of herself. Sam's image was held between us, and I invited her to tell me about it. I did not interpret, judge or offer suggestions; I simply held the space for Sam to explore and find her own meaning within her image, knowing that meaning can emerge days or even weeks after the session. There was no pressure for Sam to find meaning, or to find the 'right' words. Words and descriptions come in their own time.

Sam's image

Sam started her image by creating the flower forms in greens and then added the green circle around them, calling this a 'constraining bubble'. She then added the blue roots, which Sam said represented the 'potential for growth', and the different shades of green represented the different guises of the organisation's profession.

Sam described the first phase of creating her image as '...a depiction of the tension between growth and constraint, between innovation and reservation, that seemed to be a unifying theme across the issues I'd been contemplating, although I hadn't recognised it as such at that point.' Sam

talked about the organisation's approach to change; how the organisation wanted to change but there was also resistance to change.

I then asked Sam where she was in the picture. Sam had an unexpected emotional response as she explained that she didn't know where she was and was quite startled by that realisation. This led to a conversation about the hierarchy in the organisation, and Sam used watercolours to depict a hierarchical structure in the top right of the image. Sam put a crown on the chief executive and described the organisation as feeling like the CE's 'empire' and that they controlled everything. The 'C' to the left of the image is the governing body of the organisation.

While talking, Sam suddenly knew exactly how she wanted to depict herself 'in' the organisation and painted the purple circle pushing into the green circle, realising that she saw herself as an outsider in the organisation. Sam went on to talk about being different from others and recognised this as something she had felt nearly all her life: 'It was a revelation to me that I still feel an outsider in this job. I passed my probation with flying colours and get positive feedback about my performance all the time, but there is something about the culture of the organisation that I'm still grappling with. I've always thought that I was offered the job because I'm different, because I'm cut from a different mould. You can see where I have started to "push" into the established "green bubble", but the barrier is only



semi-permeable at best, at the moment. Upsetting the status quo was always going to be uncomfortable at times, and there was always likely to be resistance.'

Sam continued to talk about feeling 'other' and that this was a theme across her life, affecting her confidence. However, through this and the following session (stages 4 and 5), connecting deeply with herself, her felt experiences of the organisation and her role through her image, Sam started to shift from the rational understanding of this being a strength, which she doubted, to a more deeper knowing and acceptance; this was an integral part of who she was, and being able to see and do differently added value to the organisation.

Reflecting on this first session, Sam said that it wasn't just about 'stepping up to the role', it was also about feeling comfortable and building her confidence in being 'other'; shifting from seeing it as an issue to one of strength. In addition, it was also influencing politically to effect change within the organisation and beyond it among the membership and key stakeholders.

Holding the complex whole

This session shows how quickly the art-based coaching approach takes clients to a deeper awareness of their situation, and a greater understanding of who they are. It also shows the benefit of enabling clients to hold within the image the complex nature of operating within organisations. In this case study, the image holds the organisation, the conflicts and paradoxes around change, the relational dynamics, the hierarchy and culture as well as the client's feelings and challenges, both as a person and in her professional role. Many of the areas we spoke about were felt experiences that Sam hadn't consciously addressed before, but had a sense of. Expressing herself in her new role through image making externalised these felt experiences and gave Sam the space to reflect on where she was at this early stage of her new role, and how she wanted to progress.

Sam's reflections

Reflecting on the programme, Sam said she had found the range of media and lack of constraints to the art-based approach both freeing and, at first, somewhat intimidating; but a 'just go with it', intuitive approach helped her quickly move beyond this. Sam said she never knew what was going to emerge, although at times she was strangely conscious of very definite features or aspects that needed to be in the image. Sam never knew why at the time, but noticed this emerged later in our discussions, on further reflection.

Sam found it fascinating that it was possible to cover so much territory in our sessions, and that insights emerged so quickly and profoundly. In particular, that the approach made it possible to articulate that which was just beyond awareness, or 'murky uncertainties' as Sam called them, as well as her intuitive feelings that were important to connect with and understand.

The art-based coaching approach enables clients to get to the heart of issues quickly, maximising the time we have with our clients and enabling them to make lasting change. It offers clients an alternative coaching approach, with the potential to take them to places that cannot be reached by verbal approaches alone, when words are just not enough. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Sheather has been coaching for over 15 years, is a master executive coach accredited with APECS and an accredited supervisor with the Association for Coaching. She is also a self-taught artist. Anna has been researching and developing art-based coaching for many years, and firmly believes this approach has an important role in coaching practice today. She provides both art-based coaching and art-based supervision as part of her wider practice. Anna owns and runs Élan Coaching Ltd, her executive coaching practice, as well as Art in Coaching, her platform for sharing her research and writing, as well as providing development programmes for coaches who want to develop this transformational approach. She is the author of *Coaching Beyond Words: using art to deepen and enrich our conversations* (2019).

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After the event: looking back and moving forward

Three panellists at our coaching for social impact event in March reflect on the issues arising from the day with **Carolyn Mumby**



This title of this article reflects that it is both a retrospective reflection on our recent coaching for social impact event, and that the phrase 'after the event' often denotes an insight realised too late. As a group of practitioners, something we very much want the coaching profession to avoid is realising with hindsight that we have missed a crucial opportunity for coaching to play a significant role in impacting social change. In this sense, the event is part of an ongoing stream of information-sharing, in the hope of stimulating further engagement of multiple stakeholders with the key questions we face as coaches and communities, as we move forward to take action for social change.

The aim of our event was to gather and showcase something of what we already know is working in terms of coaching for social impact, and to connect with others engaged (or desiring to engage) in this work, as well as highlighting the power of coaching to funders and commissioners of services.

Dr Ana Paula Nacif explained the rationale for the report launched at the event, sharing an overview of its content and key ideas.¹ She highlighted why coaching can be an excellent approach for bringing about social change and social impact, shared examples of best practice and reflected on the challenges and opportunities for practitioners, researchers and commissioners.

Dr Suzanne Triggs shared her award-winning experience of applying a social impact model of coaching in the field of social work and showed how activating personal power led to a transformation in social power for both clients and the social workers taking a coaching approach.

Catherine Macadam and Katharine Collins also drew on their experience of running community interest company (CIC) Coaching for Unpaid Carers to make the case for putting time

and energy into proper evaluation of coaching for social change, to demonstrate the impact and social value of this work and to argue for evaluation activity to be properly funded alongside service delivery.

It is powerful to identify not just the information that will provide a foundation for thinking and action, but also the important and yet unanswered questions. With information, good questions, and a strong network consisting of a diverse group of practitioners and people who have benefitted from coaching, we can be more creative and courageous in the continuing development of our profession, expanding its influence for the benefit of both individuals and our social networks and structures, and ultimately our world.

We were delighted, therefore, to be joined by two experienced thought leaders, Hany Shoukry and Judie Gannon, in our closing panel. Here, they reflect on the event and, along with Val Watson, BACP Coaching's lead on coaching for social impact, highlight what they gained from the presentations and questions raised by the participants, and share their freshest thinking on the important questions for us to think about together going forward.

Carolyn Mumby

Former Chair of BACP Coaching and co-facilitator of BACP Coaching's Coaching for Social Impact special interest group



Dr Hany Shoukry

When I first became interested in the practice of coaching for social change, there were few documented stories and only a handful of research studies available on the topic. A decade later, coaching for social impact/change/justice has become a vibrant discourse within the coaching world. What once seemed like a rebellious, countercultural idea has now become central for several communities of practice, discussed in professional and academic conferences, documented in annual reports and practised explicitly or implicitly by many professionals. It has become the subject of awards, developing its delivery and evaluation frameworks, and is acknowledged in funded social care programmes. It feels like the coming of age of an exciting field of practice.

Coaching has always been centred around the individual. Its bias toward the individual is perhaps one of its unique selling points. However, we live in a world where all individuals are connected through a holistic global experience. Thus, the murder of George Floyd, the Russian war in Ukraine, or the financial crisis that is just starting will naturally feature in coaching conversations with those directly affected by them. But remarkably, they also appear in coaching sessions in countries and social groups that could not be further removed from their direct impact. Humans are beings of meaning; we make sense of our existence not only through our personal circumstances, or the challenges of our local context, but also through the global conditions that define our time. This also means that coaching for social impact goes beyond supporting affected individuals to change their conditions, to helping all individuals make sense of their place in a world that still suffers from too much oppression, war and environmental degradation. From this perspective, all coaching has a social impact, be it to reinforce or to challenge the status quo.

Listening to the different speakers in the event, it is energising to see how some core concepts are emerging, such as the centrality of empowerment to the coaching process, or how changing the narrative can enable coaching clients to reshape their story. I have experienced the positive impact of both concepts in my research and practice, alongside helping clients to critically examine their internalised assumptions, and supporting them in planning practical actions in what is often an unforgiving environment. The talks also emphasised a much-needed call for more evidence-based research on coaching for social impact, coupled with another reminder – from the audience – that both research and documented practice need to feature more diverse voices. I add my voice to both calls unreservedly.

How will/should coaching for social change develop in the coming years? I wish to highlight a few possible developments. First, to evolve from the duality of individual versus collective, into a more integral framework that transcends and includes both perspectives. It is important to recognise that while there

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is a growing wave of socially and environmentally aware values within many professions, including coaching, there is also a counter wave of resistance to the former, with voices complaining of normative ideals, positive discrimination and cancel culture. Advocates of coaching for social change may choose to just fight harder, but I believe a better option would be to understand how coaching can help bridge the gap. How to evolve our coaching frameworks so that they can span seamlessly across top-paid executives and financially deprived individuals, alpha males and domestically abused women, individualists and political activists, to name a few?

A second development is one around the business model; many social coaching initiatives are still taking place as pro bono activities, often funded by coaching or other businesses that adhere to the market's rules and values. A better future would be one where coaching for social impact is able to fund itself, thus attracting more practitioners and researchers.

A third development is one I am becoming increasingly interested in, which is the evolution of models that can help coaches and their clients to address the increasingly complex ethical dilemmas they face. Coaching through a social lens is an ethical maze, and the generally accepted models that many coaches use would often fail to support judgment when navigating it.

Finally, we need to connect more in communities of research and practice. But more importantly, we need to ensure that our communities are built with participatory principles and sustainable values, and that our research is done in critical and emancipatory ways that give voices to those who don't usually have a voice.



Dr Hany Shoukry is a researcher and practitioner of coaching. He is an honorary research associate at Oxford Brookes University, and his work focuses on the intersection between individual and society. Born in Egypt, he lives in the UK, and is also the group director of service management at Sky.

Dr Judie Gannon

Like many who attended the BACP Coaching for Social Impact event, I have felt an increasing disquiet about the focus of much coaching practice and research, as if it was misaligned and not quite positioned with the widest impact in mind. In a world where so many communities, groups and individuals are estranged from the support and resources to live well, I welcome this shift in the focus of coaching and view it as addressing some of my unease. My sense, from the event and accompanying report,¹ and ongoing debates in the practitioner and academic literature, is that we now have a crucible for creating something new in the field of coaching. This prospect of refashioning the focus of coaching is an exciting prospect, which I know encourages and enthuses many to continue in this direction.

Particularly heartening was the diversity of the event's main sessions and the cases covered in the report. As a coach, educator and researcher, I was struck by how coaches are engaging with particular causes and social injustices, and leveraging their coaching insights and skill sets to make a difference. For example, at the event, we heard how coaching within existing professions as part of wider service commitments and as social enterprises close to communities and groups of individuals, is delivering social impact. The commitment of those finding ways to deliver coaching with specific groups and communities was uplifting, and demonstrates the creative nature of the coaching community and its practitioners. Recognising that coaching for social impact may involve working with a broader realm of different stakeholders and outfits, and in slightly different ways, will help the wider profession engage with this focus of coaching too.

The various coaching for social impact examples also show that the value of coaching appears to arise from the ways we can work with, rather than do to, individuals and communities who, for multiple reasons, may not have the resources to live well. From this perspective, there were multiple examples of how seemingly small acts of agency can have a profound impact. For me, this reinforces the ethos of coaching as focused on enhancing human functioning and potential, in ways that are truly meaningful and relevant to individuals. These examples contrast with the often heavy expectations, which might come from agencies or organisations with particular agendas, when engaging with those facing social exclusion and injustice.

Over the years, I have noticed the coaching profession can sometimes appear divisive and even partisan, and yet the tone of the BACP event was quite different. Participants and presenters all showed genuine curiosity about experiences, approaches and the questions raised. This did not mean that

differences were not evident but that the focus of value and process resulted in, to me, a different kind of dialogue from some other coaching events I have attended. I have reflected upon whether this was something to do with the way we were encouraged throughout the event to consider what parts of our own coaching work might have (further) social impact, and whether that would be on our proverbial doorsteps, within existing communities we are already aware of, or much further afield. I left the event even more inquisitive about the causes we pursue as coaches, in our pro bono or third-sector work. What does this part of our coaching practice mean to us, personally and professionally?

At another level, the event raised questions for me around how engagement in coaching for social change resonates across different parts of the profession, its commitment to accessibility, social justice issues and enthusiasm for social impact.

I am conscious that my overview of the BACP event and report may appear eulogistic; however, there are points of caution for us all to consider. As someone who has witnessed the abuses of mentoring for social change over the years, I am concerned that coaching could fall prey to the same exactitudes. We need to think carefully about how coaching for social change is evaluated and not fall prey to criteria that dissemble individuals' personal experiences and the value they attribute to coaching.

The BACP event and report mean we now have multiple concrete sources of evidence of coaching for social impact, as well as a growing force of keen and committed advocates. Sustaining focus and progress on coaching for social change will be a challenge, given the post-pandemic priorities facing organisations to adapt to new ways of working, reclaim performance targets and support employee and leader wellbeing. In addition, we will have to continually revisit questions about client readiness, coach training, supervision, and ongoing support for coaching programmes with social impact in mind. I recoil at the thought of some agencies and organisations crafting 'coaching on the cheap' in light of the evidence presented. Do we have the resolve to counter such moves? I hope we do, across all the different stakeholder groups involved in coaching. This will help retain the promise of the crucible created by the BACP Coaching for Social Impact group in March.



Dr Judie Gannon is an academic in the International Centre for Coaching & Mentoring Studies, Oxford Brookes University, where she leads the doctorate in coaching and mentoring. Her research focuses on coaching and mentoring as forms of social movements and communities of practice.

Dr Val Watson

What impressed me most about the content of the day was the variety of ways in which coaching and coaching approaches were being used for the benefit of communities who are normally unrepresented and sometimes 'written off' as lacking in capacity to engage in coaching. There was a real sense in the content of people grasping the principles and signposts to empowerment for themselves and this having a great impact on their confidence as individuals, but also this increased confidence feeding back into their personal relationships and ultimately into their communities and their development. Essentially, though nothing new was said about empowerment, it was being offered through the use of coaching approaches in ways that were honest and respectful, with a basic assumption that people are capable and deserving of respect. Importantly, that they have something to offer and are not frozen/fixed in a deficit model.

The discussions throughout the day and the case studies reflected on sharpened my enthusiasm and encouraged me to consider a further review of some of my practice as a therapist. Clearly, there is a need for careful assessment of when and how to make use of coaching approaches, but maybe there is less of a need to be quite so circumspect if the relationship built in therapy is one that is deemed strong enough to consider some questions that might be helpful, especially when clients often bring socio-economic problems into a therapy space that cannot be properly addressed solely from an empathic counselling relationship. Yes, clients benefit from being listened to carefully and with sensitivity, but this can become very circular if some attention is not given at times to examining with them the structures and environments that are perpetuating, or even causing, their difficulties in their functioning: families, relationships and so on. I was also struck

by the creative ways in which the coaching approach can be used across boundaries: global – for example, Jacqueline Hill's report¹ – and institutional; and invite organisations to rethink their ways of working, employing or leading others. Throughout the event, the 'business case' for coaching and coaching approaches was made through the content of the report and the discussions among participants.

Some questions for us to consider going forward include: How might coaching for social impact justify and properly own its political agenda? Can a coach interested in coaching for social impact consider themselves to be politically neutral, and what implications does this have for the coaching profession? Is there a line between coaching and activism? Where is it? As philosopher Paulo Freire famously said: 'It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.'² This concept of being oppressed sits within coaching for social impact practice. Where might coaches and their coachees/participants sit in relation to this? For example, what can or might an executive coach, who usually works solely with business leaders and CEOs whose aim is the furthering of capitalist economies and profit margins, offer to marginalised groups and communities? What are the implications for training and trainers of coaches if we are to fully embrace the notions of coaching for social impact? What are we assuming about the attitudes, perspective and attributes of coaches in general, and how are these the same as or different from coaches who espouse coaching for social impact perspectives and practices?



Dr Val Watson is an independent counselling and psychotherapy practitioner, coach, supervisor, consultant and trainer. She has worked in education and training settings for over 30 years. Val has contributed a number of book chapters on race and counsellor education, and she is the BACP lead for the Coaching for Social Impact special interest group (SIG).

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Get involved

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Download the full event report at:
www.bacp.co.uk/media/14826/bacp-coaching-for-social-impact.pdf

A nourishing conversation: working with food and eating

How can we as coaches work with our clients' relationships to food and eating? When is it useful – and when might it be problematic? Carolyn Mumby unpacks the issues with counselling psychologist **Julie Friend**



How has your interest in clients' relationships with food emerged in your practice?

It started as a personal interest, and I didn't bring it into my clinical work at first. I began reading books about mental health and nutrition for my own health and wellbeing – mainly for sleep problems, initially – and I found it helpful. I found myself regularly referring to a couple of books: *The Anti-Anxiety Food Solution*, by Trudy Scott,¹ and *The Mood Cure*, by Julia Ross.² These got me thinking about what I eat, how I eat, and how this can affect anxiety levels, sleep and mood levels in general. But I guess things often seep into our work, and, as a therapist with an interest in food, health and nutrition, I became more comfortable bringing it into the work.

I noticed that if a client was feeling anxious, for example, in the back of my mind I would be wondering what they ate, or how often they ate, whether they had regular eating routines or if it was chaotic. The more I informed myself, the more confident I became in asking clients about their eating habits and their current and historical relationship with food.

What further explorations have you been making in this area and what form have they taken?

In 2019, I attended a conference on mental health and nutrition with Marilyn Glenville, a nutritionist who works mainly with women's issues,³ and I happened to mention this to my supervisor. She told me she was writing a book about attachment relationships and food and she invited me to contribute a chapter,⁴ so I had to do a lot more research and explore the subject in further depth. This led to more gathering of knowledge and resources, and writing that chapter led to more writing.

What are some of the ways into conversations about food, for therapists, and how do we make meaning with it?

I recently wrote a paper on disordered eating,⁵ and as part of my research, I sent out a questionnaire to colleagues to get a sense of how therapists feel talking about food and disordered or troubled eating with their clients.

It seems they are quite nervous about it, for various reasons. It might feel at odds with their particular therapeutic orientation or framework or they might feel they are not necessarily an

'expert' in food and nutrition, so there's a nervousness around introducing it. Some therapists reported that they themselves had a difficult relationship with food, and therefore raising it was uncomfortable for them. So, there was a general reticence towards overtly bringing conversations about food into the work. But I find there are lots of ways in. Initial assessment, when you first meet a client, is a

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When you understand a bit more about your relationship to food and eating patterns, there are ways in to thinking more generally about how that reflects on your level of self-care, self-worth and self-image

great opportunity, because we often ask general health questions, such as 'Are you on any medication? What are your sleep patterns like? What's your general health like?', and so on, and that's quite acceptable, so I tend to slip something in at that point, like 'What's your relationship with food? What's your diet like?' to get a general sense. Also, it sets the tone that, as a therapist, this is something I'm interested in, and happy to talk about.

As you get into conversations about people's routines, their working patterns, that's another possible segue into eating habits and relationship with food. Sometimes, clients bring food into the session (particularly since we've all been working online). These are all opportunities to ask, 'What's going on for you? I wonder why it is that you're not having breakfast before our session? Are you rushing about?' This is why food conversations are important – they potentially open up conversations about self-care, whether people are thinking about what it is they need to set themselves up for the day, or how much thought they give to self-care.

There's an interpretative, symbolic function to food as well. For example, is someone bringing a coffee into the session because they are finding therapy boring, and they are telling you something by bringing in the coffee, ie 'I need this to keep me awake'? Or are they bringing in food because they are not feeling 'nourished' enough in the therapy? What might the food be representing? Is it a barrier – a way of keeping you (the therapist) at bay? There are lots of different ways we can look at what food in the consulting room means.

Is exploring relationship to food relevant in coaching? If so, how?

I guess it depends on what the aim of coaching is. I'm not a trained coach myself, but I've had coaching. Returning to that idea of self-care and self-compassion, and where lack of self-care might be an obstacle to growth – is that lack of self-care keeping a client stuck? When you understand a bit more about your relationship to food and eating patterns, there are ways in to thinking more generally about how that reflects on your level of self-care, self-worth and self-image. Or, if the coaching is around professional and career development, or taking place in an executive or organisational context, if people are 'running on empty' and not feeding themselves, for instance, what impact is that having on their ability to perform, to make decisions?



What is the relationship with health coaching or the wellness movement? When is this useful and when is it problematic?

There's a fine line between having a healthy attitude to food and eating healthily, and becoming obsessive about what's good and what's bad and labelling food internally as 'dangerous' or 'enhancing'. There's a real danger of a splitting here, where there's no healthy middle ground or ambivalence around food – it feels very fixed and rigid. Following on from *Fat is a Feminist Issue*,⁶ Susie Orbach wrote a lovely book, *On Eating*,⁷ where she talks about 'seven keys' to eating. One of the keys is about appreciation and mindfulness, really tuning in and asking the question: 'Am I actually hungry now?' which isn't something we necessarily ask ourselves, because it's breakfast time, lunchtime, dinnertime. 'Am I actually hungry, or am I full? And what would I like to eat right now?': really tuning into the body's signals and messages. What we're talking about here doesn't just pertain to food. Essentially, it's about how we come more deeply into relationship with ourselves and notice what's happening for us and how we're feeling, and then thinking about what we might need now, rather than being on some kind of autopilot of reactivity or denial.

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There's a fine line between having a healthy attitude to food and eating healthily, and becoming obsessive about what's good and what's bad and labelling food internally as 'dangerous' or 'enhancing'



Working with eating disorders is a specialist area. How can we know and be explicit about the territory we are working within as counsellors and coaches? How do you work within your competence in terms of this as a specialist area?

It's complex, because whether or not a client has an eating disorder is not necessarily apparent at the outset. I can be working with clients for some time before they say something that rings alarm bells and I think: 'Oh, hang on, I'm dealing with an eating disorder here – does that mean I now have to change the way I've been working with this client? Does our focus have to be different?' And of course, that's up to the client. But if it's obvious it's becoming a problem and it's really impacting on somebody's life in a negative way and they're not functioning, then I have a duty of care as a therapist to speak to the client about their eating habits and to ask them to visit their GP at least.

As practitioners, unless we are trained as eating disorder specialists, we can't be responsible for the management and monitoring side of an eating disorder. We can't ask our clients to weigh in, for example – that's beyond our remit and outside our competence. There's this really tricky line – when is it disordered eating that's problematic but not necessarily dangerous or life-threatening? When does it tip over into something that's a bit more worrying? And I think you can only go case by case with different clients – depending on how well you know your clients, and how much information they are prepared to give you.

How do we think about the difference between disordered eating and an eating disorder?

In the questionnaire I mentioned earlier, it was interesting how my colleagues reacted to similar questions. What I found generally is that practitioners see eating disorders/disordered eating as a spectrum, and that disordered eating is generally viewed as something more common, less extreme or debilitating, whereas an eating disorder is considered more concerning and rigid, and meets certain formal diagnostic criteria. Generally, non-specialist therapists felt less comfortable working with eating issues as opposed to other presentations – there was something about eating that really created an anxiety in some therapists.

When might you need to refer on?

I refer clients on when there's a clear risk to health – monitoring and management doesn't fall into my remit. There's a very useful screening tool on the National Eating Disorders website⁸ and I've found that to be quite helpful when I'm working with somebody and I'm not sure where they fall on that spectrum. It can be useful to ask the client to do that – either alone in between our sessions or in the session with me, when we can discuss the results together and talk about our options and next steps.



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When you start talking about food ... you begin to understand more about family history from an attachment perspective

The best thing we can do as therapists and coaches is to talk to our colleagues, take some courses, read around the subject, and arrange supervision with specialists, if possible. It's important that we see ourselves as part of a larger resource, or support network, and are able to include the client in our thinking around that.

How is having a diagnosis of having an eating disorder potentially useful and not useful?

Some people can feel comforted by a diagnosis because it can validate their experience, help them feel they're not going mad, that it's really an illness; but for others, it can feel that they're being put into a box and that can feel very constricting. It can be frightening to be told 'You've got an eating disorder'. It's very individual how people react to a diagnosis, and whether it's helpful or not.

Do you refer to this as an area for potential exploration in your marketing of your services?

I don't. My worry is that if I mention I even have an interest in disordered eating, people will read that as 'eating disorders'. I do list my publications on my website, and they are all related to eating, so I guess there's a clue in there, but it's not something I advertise. I have an interest in this area but it's important to think about how potential clients might see that. By the same token, having an interest in it is signalling that this could be part of a discussion, because it can be the kind of thing that is not easily talked about. Yet it's something that we're all involved in – a relationship with food – and a lot of things to do with that are connected to our family and whether or not our early experiences were nurturing.

And that's when things can get really fascinating – when you start talking about food and you begin to understand more about family history from an attachment perspective. Who cooked in the family? What did they cook? What were dinner-table conversations like? Maybe there weren't any dinner-table conversations – did people eat in silence?

Did people eat in front of the telly? It can lead to all kinds of interesting conversations – there can be good memories, memories of food associated with a lovely grandma, for example, but terrible associations of food with a cruel, strict father, who wouldn't allow anyone to speak at the dinner table. So, the same client can have a very different relationship with food, depending on these early relationships. It opens up such a rich investigation on food, family history, attachment and memory.

A nourishing conversation, indeed. Thank you, Julie. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Julie Friend is an attachment-informed chartered counselling psychologist and supervisor, working in private practice

in London and online. Over the years, she has become increasingly aware of her clients' profound and complex relationships to food, feeding and the meanings therein. This interest led to her contributing a chapter to *Attachment, Relationships and Food: from cradle to kitchen*, edited by Linda Cundy (Routledge, 2022). Julie has also written a blog for the online counselling and psychotherapy CPD hub PESI UK, *Food for Thought*, which explores ways into conversations around food and eating with clients, a topic she believes is often neglected in therapeutic work.

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Coaching in Practice

In this issue, coach, facilitator and leader **Catherine Michielsens** reflects on the power of the Thinking Environment approach in promoting diversity and inclusion in a corporate environment



Catherine Michielsens

is a certified Thinking Environment coach and facilitator. She graduated as an industrial pharmacist

from the University of Antwerp and has many years of leadership experience within the pharmaceutical industry. Living in Belgium, Catherine currently works for a global pharmaceutical company and leads a team across Europe, Middle East and Africa.

What is the approach you use in coaching (the theoretical model, its premises/underlying beliefs or reasons for being developed etc)?

Alongside providing training and coaching on the Thinking Environment¹ (TE) to various groups, I use Thinking Environment principles to connect with and build connections within my team. The TE approach embraces difference as a component to enable independent thinking. Welcoming diversity of thought and creating the conditions for people to feel included within teams and communities are key drivers for the creation of strong relationships and partnership. If we create conditions in which people have an equal voice, we give them the opportunity to co-create a future together. When people are able to express their ideas, and think for themselves, this has an impact on their actions, on outcomes and on the relationships within their teams.

Why were you drawn to this approach/model and how did you go about becoming skilled/qualified in it?

In 2012, I participated in a women's leadership programme within my company. This programme encouraged me to examine our current volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous (VUCA) world, to consider who I am as a person and as a leader in this world, and to combine these incremental insights to think about my future and who I would

like to be in that future. I had never experienced any kind of training like this before. The connections I made with others on the programme were immediately deep and powerful, from the very first day. At first, I did not understand what made our connections during the programme so tangible. Throughout the programme and through individual coaching, there was something happening that united us as a group, which I experienced as transformational. When I asked the coaches what it was, they confirmed that, not only were they introducing the TE concepts to us, they had been applying those concepts throughout the programme to enable such connection and transformation.

I decided to travel to London and take a Thinking Environment foundation course, and continued with the facilitating and coaching programmes led by Time to Think faculty members. Not only was I convinced this would make me a better leader and person, but I realised I had also found a way to further support the diversity and inclusion vision within my organisation.

Do you work with a particular client group and how do your clients benefit from the fact that you take this particular approach to coaching?

I am facilitating and coaching within the company, and I work with individuals and teams around the globe on TE principles, on the impact of being treated as equal and not being interrupted in meetings and how this positively contributes to team dynamics within the working environment. The managers I worked with realised the benefits when their people were able to express their ideas without interruption, when they were given space to think for themselves, since this was leading to more efficient meetings, more diverse thinking, improved team dynamics and better outcomes. If we agree that human resources are a main competitive advantage to a business, when we realise creating equality and diversity leads to better results, it is worthwhile to create those conditions in our workplaces.

What do you most love about being this kind of coach? Have you experienced this kind of coaching in your life and how does it resource you as a practitioner?

What I love about being a TE coach is that something as 'simple' as listening with superb attention and not interrupting can have such a positive impact on an individual and on a team. The change in energy in the room – even a virtual one – during a session, has a positive effect on me as a coach and I always emerge from the session with new insights. Being a TE coach has also changed me as a leader, raising my awareness of how I can be more inclusive in meetings, for example, and having much more focus and attention.

Could you share a tool or framework or aspect of this approach that other coaches might be able to use or draw on now in their work with clients?

The increase in digital connection in recent years has had a fundamental advantage in that I can now connect people from around the world in a single session, immediately increasing the diversity within the group.

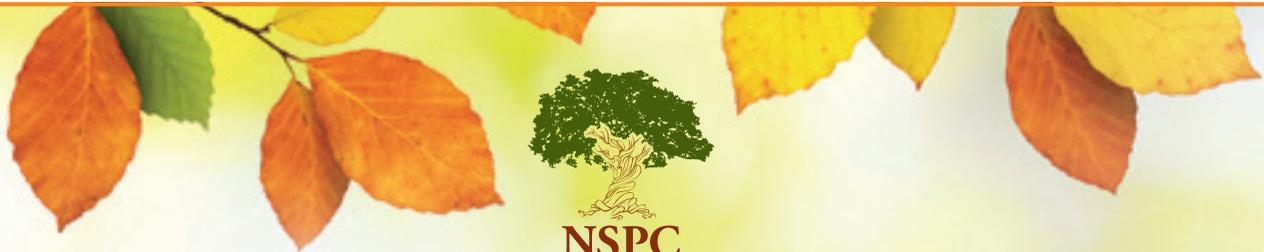
During one such recent session, in the opening round of introductions, I asked the participants to introduce themselves and share a recent positive event, speaking first in their own native language, and thereafter in our shared common language, English. For some participants, unused to expressing themselves in their own language in a business setting, there was some initial awkwardness and reticence. What I noted though was that the use of native languages helped create connection more quickly among the participants afterwards. Not understanding what is being said forces us to listen to the *sound* of language, rather than jump immediately into interpreting the content of it. For a few moments, it reminded us all of how different we are and how powerful it can be for a team when everyone feels able to bring their whole self into the space.

If people are interested in finding out more, what can they read or where could they explore it through CPD or fully train in it?

I highly recommend the latest book from Nancy Kline: *The Promise That Changes Everything: I won't interrupt you* (Penguin, 2020).² If you are interested in training in Thinking Environment coaching, visit: www.timetothink.com/book-a-course For more information, see: www.timetothink.com.

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