

Coaching Today

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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 9 May and 8 August 2022 respectively. Contact the Editor at the email above with your ideas.



Happy new year to you – and happy anniversary to us

A very happy new year to you all. I hope that you are returning to your work refreshed, restored and ready for what 2022 might bring.

It is 10 years since our first ever issue of *Coaching Today* was published and distributed, back in January 2012, and in that time, I have been honoured and privileged to meet and work with some amazing practitioners, some of whom have since become regular contributors to this journal.

I am proud to be able to give a platform to those pioneering practitioners who are very often themselves part of the communities they seek to help

As I reflect on the articles that have been published within these pages over the past 10 years, I can't help but reflect on the changing landscape of therapeutic coaching practice within BACP and beyond. When I started in my role as Editor of this journal for a new BACP division, therapeutic coaching was in its infancy. The majority of members of this new coaching division were therapists or counsellors – existing BACP members – who were retraining as coaches or seeking ways to incorporate coaching into their therapy or counselling practice, and to do so ethically, safely and effectively with the support of BACP. Our readership and contributions reflected this demographic. Since then, not only am I seeing more stories from experienced coaches who have been inspired to undergo training in counselling and psychotherapy (reflecting my own direction of travel), but I am reading contributions – and learning lessons – from practitioners of diverse

professional backgrounds, including teaching and social work, who are developing unique models of integrated or dual practice, and who are working in increasingly diverse sectors and adapting these models to support a range of clients and client groups. Crucially, these include communities who would not traditionally have accessed coaching. I am proud to be able to give a platform to those pioneering practitioners, who are very often themselves part of the communities they seek to help, and who provide inspiration and education in equal measure.

Over the past 10 years, as our political landscape has shifted dramatically – along with the small matter of an ongoing global pandemic to contend with – BACP Coaching has continued to respond, adapt and innovate through the development of campaigns, initiatives and special interest groups, and *Coaching Today* continues to reflect this ongoing work. This would not be possible without the tireless dedication of the various BACP Coaching Executive teams I have worked with over the past decade, led by their Chairs in office at the time. It feels sad, as we celebrate our 10th anniversary, to be saying farewell to our current Chair, Carolyn Mumby, following her five years of diligent service to BACP Coaching, both as Chair and as Chair-Elect before that. I am immensely grateful for Carolyn's grace and grit – especially during the past two years of the pandemic – for her creativity and determination, and for introducing me to some inspiring writers and practitioners over the years through her own contributions to this journal.

As ever, this 10th anniversary issue reflects the diversity of transformational therapeutic coaching, with contributions from established writers alongside emerging voices, mirroring the current social and political landscape and embracing the issues that are of increasing relevance in coaching today. ■

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



BACP Coaching News

Message from the Chair

Happy new year and farewell

It's the beginning of a new year, and, in the space between one working year and the next, I hope you have found some time to be still and recover in the tranquillity and dormancy of winter.

This is my last message as Chair of BACP Coaching, and I am delighted to hand the baton on to my successor, Lucy Myers, who you met in some detail in the Meet the Member column of our October issue.¹ Lucy will set out her vision for the role in her first Chair's message in our April issue.

BACP Coaching update

After a year where we have continued to work hard to ensure that coaching is further embedded within BACP, the BACP Coaching division is going from strength to strength, and 2022 is set to be momentous as BACP is now fully embarked on the programme to develop an evidence-based coaching competence framework. This project aims to identify the additional competences required by counsellors and psychotherapists who wish to move into coaching. It will also identify the competences needed to combine both coaching and therapy in a single form of practice. We hope this will bring a shared understanding, greater ethical safety, and the courage to move forward more coherently and creatively into coaching for our members.

Thank you to those of you who have contributed your thinking to our member survey, as by describing your coaching and coaching-therapy practice, you are providing us with rich data to inform the competence framework. As you will know if you are a long-term member, the beginning of this development has been imminent and then temporarily postponed for quite some time, but it really does feel like this is the year! We have also, more than ever before, worked closely with BACP's Policy team to enable them to advocate to funders and commissioners the specific benefits that coaching can offer individuals in communities and within the workplace.

We are making more connections across the divisions in recognition that coaching is an area of practice rather than a specialism and so has a place in private practice and the workplace, in the contexts of education, healthcare and with young people, as well as connecting with a transpersonal

position in terms of spirituality. We continue to look outwards in the form of our membership of the Future of Coaching Collaboration (FCC) and now within our special interest group focused on Coaching for Social Impact, which includes coaches who are members of other coaching bodies and professions, as well as academics and leaders of community interest companies. This diversity of identity, experience and thought is incredibly dynamic and enriching and will enable BACP to move further in its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

We have awakened BACP to the benefits of coaching... contributed to knowledge and understanding, and created enduring connections between practitioners

Our forthcoming 'Coaching for Social Impact' event on 23 March is an opportunity to hear from those engaged in ground-breaking work, which aims to empower individuals and communities who are disadvantaged in current social structures. We will be presenting the first iteration of a new model for coaching in this context and thinking together about evaluation and funding. We want to create space for conversations, foster ideas and increase the growing network of people committed to equity and social change, so please book your tickets and join us to share your insights and questions and contribute to the learning in this vital area (see our news item, right, for more information and to book your place).

The rhythm of energy

The first cohort of a new leadership training course that I jointly design and facilitate is also coming to an end, and we have been thinking together as a group about endings and their



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place in a cycle leading back to beginnings. A view that I find particularly illuminating is Richard Strozzi's 'rhythm of energy',² which describes how our energy and contribution move through four distinct stages: awakening, increasing, containing and completing.

This rhythm can be seen in our seasons, as I recognise from working on my allotment. From the beginning awakening stage, where we see possibilities and plant seeds; followed by a period of growing and building, where we may have to make tough decisions about what to thin out and what to nurture towards the flowering and fruiting of summer's increase; a period of maturation or containment in autumn; and a sense of completion as we move through winter, in which there is rest, to allow the process to start again. Although we tend to think of summer as the peak of everything, the other seasons play an equal part in that flourishing, and there is something satisfying now about seeing the pumpkin stalks disintegrating in strands, lying across the soil waiting to be reabsorbed. The pears are all gathered in, and stalwart broccoli stands patiently in the gloomier light and cooler weather, waiting for its time to come to fruition in spring. Garlic and onions are planted and hidden in the dark soil. Time to clear out and re-order the shed. For me, there is relief in the cessation of growth: I need that break from it, and it is a necessary completion that creates the conditions for a new season.

As I complete my time with BACP Coaching, my role as Chair comes to an end. This will free up much-needed space in my diary and my life, as a great deal of work goes on behind the scenes cultivating and making connections with the staff of a large organisation. I have picked up the threads of the awakening that was initiated in 2010 by our inaugural Chair, Linda Aspey, and carried forward by all the Chairs who followed – Jo Birch, Gill Fennings-Monkman and Eve Menezes Cunningham. We have each increased the space for coaching within BACP, within what was possible at each point in time. We have awakened BACP to the benefits of coaching, and we have, along with our members,

contributed to knowledge and understanding, and created enduring connections between practitioners through our network groups and events, which help coaching come to fruition and be contained within many different spaces with individuals and organisations. As an Executive, we have at times also had to contain some frustration as we broke new ground and needed to wait patiently for attention to turn to programmes of work to support coaching, but we persevered and we have all in our turn completed our terms of office.

With each of those Chairs, there have also been many contributors in the form of divisional Executive members, all of whom have cultivated specific areas of work, including supervision, communications, network group meetings, research and special interest groups, writing and presenting; and who, in turn, have encouraged other members to contribute, connect, gain appreciation and recognition for their coaching practice and to continue to develop their networks and their client base. You all know who you are. Thank you for all you have done to sow the seeds, to nurture the small plants, and stake the larger ones, to gather in the learning, share the fruits and to make way gracefully for others to do the same.

As my role as Chair comes to an end, my hope is that, with the ongoing support of the BACP Coaching Executive and the BACP Coaching division members, BACP as an organisation can more fully move into the 'containing' phase in regard to the profession of coaching, supporting our practitioners and practice in a way that also demonstrates coherence and commitment to the integration of counselling and coaching, for the great benefit of our clients and their communities of life and work. ■

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COVID-19 updates

Online resources to support you

Our range of resources remains live on our website to continue to support you during the ongoing pandemic. This includes the latest updates and information for practitioners working within the different coronavirus restrictions across the four nations.

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

You can find regularly updated FAQs on coronavirus on BACP's website:
www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/faqs-about-coronavirus

Book your place on our 'Coaching for Social Impact' event

Tickets are now available for our next Working with Coaching Day on 23 March, which will have a special focus on 'Coaching for Social Impact'.

This event is an opportunity to learn about cutting-edge coaching for social change and impact from experienced and enthusiastic coaching practitioners. You will hear from those who are engaged in ground-breaking work that aims to empower individuals and communities who are disadvantaged in current social structures, and have an opportunity to discover how these projects were established, funded and evaluated. We want to create space for conversations, foster ideas, and increase the growing network of people committed to equity and social change.

If you are keen to hear about a new model for coaching for social impact and contribute to its development, please join us on 23 March.

To book your place, see:
www.bacp.co.uk/events/oww2303-coaching-for-social-change-and-impact



Meet the member

Introducing a new member of the BACP Coaching Executive

Joanne Wright is a coach, counsellor, facilitator and mediator. She has a background in leading organisational development and training departments for banks, insurance and retail organisations, the NHS and hospices. She is a registered member of BACP and the Association for Coaching (AC) and a fellow of the Learning and Performance Institute. Joanne joined the BACP Coaching Executive last summer.

www.wrightinsight.co.uk



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

I have loved every part of my journey, even the tough parts, as that is where I find I really learn the most. The learning never ends as there is always another client who needs us to meet them in their space, a space which may be unfamiliar to us.¹ This huge appetite for learning is what led me to move from coaching into counselling.

While supporting an aspiring director's programme for the NHS, I was lucky enough to gain a place on a postgraduate coaching course, which would enable me to coach the delegates as part of their leadership journey. However, although I received positive feedback from my coachees, I felt something was missing and I wanted to explore this more. So, at the age of 47, I took the brave step of leaving my job and embarking on a degree course in counselling. At this point, I probably need to thank my husband for his support while training (plus he will be chuffed he found a place in this article). I was determined to throw everything I had at this new part of my journey, but I found the academic study challenging, for reasons that gradually became clear (more on that later). I had four counselling placements

throughout my training, which encompassed adult community mental health, bereavement care and the prison service. After qualifying, to build up my hours (and my confidence), I volunteered at my local Open Adult Counselling Service (OACS) in Essex, which is entirely run by volunteers and supports hundreds of counselling sessions each year for our local

The whole learning journey changes me all the time. I am much more confident with my flaws and happier to sit with what I am feeling and 'trust my gut'

community. I still help when I can, as the experience of being part of this amazing team has taught me a lot. I especially appreciate the opportunity to work with a group of people with whom I feel I can be myself and who support my growth as a practitioner.

Do you have a coaching niche?

My niche probably mirrors my career. I find clients are drawn to me because they are interested in my organisational development career or leadership development experience. My background as a trainer or manager, rather than a therapist, can make me seem more relatable to clients, and less scary.

How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?

The whole learning journey changes me all the time. I am much more confident with my flaws and happier to sit with what I am feeling and 'trust my gut'.² During my training, I also discovered I was dyslexic; officially diagnosed with 'very poor visual recall issues'. It was a surprise to me that there are so many different aspects to being dyslexic. It means I am an incredibly slow reader, and you don't want to be on my team for any game that requires visual memory. But my diagnosis came with a huge positive: apparently, I am in the top 3% of the country for problem-solving skills, which makes me fantastic at solving puzzles. Whether this makes me a good therapist/coach is for another article, perhaps, but I do find my best work happens when I reflect back to a client all their 'puzzle pieces' that my gut tells me do not fit.³

Where do you practise?

Mostly still online, although over the past few months I have had some visitors to my lovely new office in Essex and have been able to venture out to a number of organisations for some team building and leadership coaching.

Do you have a typical client?

In my private practice, I work with small business owners and individuals who have relationship difficulties at work or home or are feeling overwhelmed and struggling to find a way through. The work I do for organisations often involves working with huge amounts of conflict or the aftermath of organisational change, investigations, disciplinaries and periods of sickness. I also have the privilege of supporting many NHS staff through my work as an associate for the coaching and leadership development company, Insightful Exchange. Last winter, we supported many frontline staff on the COVID wards, which was very humbling. The NHS staff I worked with certainly deserved more than a clap on a Thursday evening – they really were our heroes.

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

I would describe myself as an 'eclectic practitioner', merging all the skills in my toolbox and pulling out the ones that best fit my clients' needs. I always find it interesting that most clients do not really know what they need until they start. If you are using the right competences with the right client at the right time and do not work outside your area of expertise, does it matter if you call it coaching or counselling? I am not just a therapist or just a coach – I can bring my whole self to the party, if it will benefit my client.⁴

What's your biggest challenge currently?

I have recently become a granny, so fitting in time for family is important to me. Although, getting that perfect work-life balance, I know, will always be something I need to work on. It is a challenge each day to turn off my laptop. I love my job and I love learning and networking, so there is always more to learn, share and build on.

What do you feel most proud of having achieved?

Definitely my son. He got married a few weeks ago and made the most wonderful speech; I was bursting with pride, the kind that seeps from your eyes and runs down your face. I am also proud of where my journey has led me. I never thought I would be writing for publication about a career that has brought me so much joy.

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

I love feeding my family. I have a sign in my kitchen that says, 'Happiness is a kitchen full of family,' which is so true for me. I have also developed a passion for yoga. When you are upside down, standing on your head, it is quite hard to think about anything else, so it enables my mind to rest.

I have always felt that learning something is never a waste of time. Even if, once you have learnt it, you decide it is not for you, it is still something you did not know before you started

What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?

I have always felt that learning something is never a waste of time. Even if, once you have learnt it, you decide it is not for you, it is still something you did not know before you started. Give it a go and see where it leads you. I am always happy to share stories, and support an individual in a learning/exploratory journey. However, if I had to share some insights, I would say, think about your transferrable skills and where your previous experience could add value. My early career has really helped me. When coaching senior managers, the language and organisational cultures are often quite complex. I feel I would struggle if I did not have any previous understanding of this context. I also find coaching quite exhausting, as the pace clients work at seems to be so much faster than in counselling. I find the higher up the organisation, the faster the pace and the more challenge I receive from my coachee.

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

A space to share my passions with like-minded people. I loved my first meeting with the Executive team – it had been such a long time since I had been in a room (well, a virtual one) with so many people with the same passion as I had.

What do you hope to bring to BACP Coaching?

Having led award-winning training teams, I hope to be able to use some of this expertise to promote and develop learning opportunities for our members and anyone who is interested in therapeutic coaching. I have also been meeting with former Executive member Tom Andrews, and I hope to be able to build on his good work developing the networking activities, to bring together more like-minded people and share the message around the benefits of therapeutic coaching. Finally, being dyslexic, I hope to be a significant voice on this topic and add value to the diversity and inclusion agenda. ■

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Get in touch

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



Love for the planet:

our contract with the world and the crisis of leadership

What relevance does coaching have to the current crises on our planet? **Erik de Haan** argues that, as coaches, we have a unique role to play in providing space for reflection on these crises and what we can do about them

Coaches' concern for the planet

Over the past two years, we have all experienced what a truly global crisis looks and feels like and how such a crisis poses severe challenges. The 'corona crisis' reminded us of how connected we are, both in our biology and, increasingly, through global connectivity. It focused our minds on providing what is necessary in a short amount of time, even if humanity's collective response still left much to be desired.

During this corona crisis, the use of video platforms exploded, enabling us to keep in touch with one another during lockdown, continue holding meetings, and even engage in our consulting and coaching conversations, virtually. However, our rather discursive and fragmented screens, which often looked like a randomly arrayed series of rather bland postcards, also underlined the kind of crisis that we had to deal with: a crisis that drove us apart, stoked fear and blocked many a meaningful, intimate connection.

It is now dawning on most of us that we are tumbling from a grave health crisis into a graver financial crisis and into the gravest crisis of all, our self-made climate crisis – crises becoming ever more jarring, haunting and disruptive. It is understandable and ethical for us to want to do something about this and become an activist. Crisis invites us all to take a stance.

This pull is particularly strong on us coaches; we are, after all, professional helpers. We feel the urge to 'stand up and be counted', to try to use the considerable personal and professional power that we have, for what is clearly a good cause.

But is this actually helpful? As coaches, at some point in our lives we have chosen to put ourselves in the service of the fortunes and objectives of others. But this urge can overstep a boundary, where we run the risk of trying to do our clients' work for them or otherwise get overinvolved. Naturally there is a big pull in most of us to help others, and in some cases a real preference to attend to the needs of others over and above our own, sometimes called our 'helper's syndrome'.¹ The best coaches have learned how to step back from becoming too helpful and to address our visceral needs to help in other ways, eg by allowing ourselves to be helped as well as helping others, or by spending reflective time by ourselves, for ourselves.

Helper syndrome

Claudia is the eldest daughter of four. Her parents were still establishing their own careers when their children were born and, from an early age, Claudia learned to help take care of her younger siblings. After studying psychology, Claudia qualified as a clinical psychologist. Three years into her first job, she suffered a burnout, after which she took some time out to reorient herself. She recognised that she had taken on a lot of administration and managerial work, plus a considerable caseload. Following therapy, Claudia decided to become self-employed, and within a few years she became a successful coach, greatly in demand by her clients. Now, she had more control over her working hours, but again, she managed to overbook herself, and it was only through regular supervision that she managed not to succumb to the pressures once more. Gradually, Claudia became aware of her tendency to be generous with her time, while neglecting her own needs. Working with clients made her feel useful, whereas not being busy left her feeling helpless. By attending to this feeling and exploring it regularly, she was able to find a better balance and become more 'choiceful' in her practice.

There are clear boundaries to our effectiveness: if we become too much of an 'expert' – including advocacy – or too 'hands on', we risk becoming less effective as coaches.

It is also important to remember that these current crises are (mostly) man-made, that they are crises of our consciousness, including the hold of our own leadership shadows on us: our greed, our corruption, our narcissism. So, I would argue that if we coaches take a stance by turning to leadership and advocacy, we risk growing our leadership shadows at the same time, potentially aggravating the crises, however well-meaning our initial intentions.

We need to be doing what we do so well with our individual clients: taking a step back and not getting involved with their decisions or actions, simply coaching them through their choices. Can we lovingly observe and be available to those leading us



through the crises that we are ourselves part of? Can we nurture reflection where reflecting has become so difficult?

I think that to do so, we need to reflect on the roots of the crisis and think deeply, alongside the organisations we work with, about the mentality underpinning the problems, and see if we can hold this mentality in mind, lovingly, safely, so that healthier values may emerge from within. This is not so much activism and advocacy, but has more to do with observation and sense-making.

I know we need to 'fight' the crises, and some might argue we are already far too late to begin our fight. My question is, nevertheless, even at this late stage: how do we fight? And what happens to us when we fight in advocacy mode? Might we risk putting off a lot of good people by lecturing to them? Might we risk switching parts of ourselves off, by suppressing them? If we fight against other nations, institutions or individuals, we won't achieve our ends, as this is a global crisis that encompasses all of mankind.

In Greek mythology, there were two gods of warfare – masculine, violent Ares and the protectress Athena, who held a secondary interest as the goddess of wisdom. I would argue that in this fight, wisdom is to take Athena's stance and to strive for protection and reflection in the interest of defence, not attack. And I firmly believe our feminine, protective coaching profession can play a role under the banner of Athena, rather than Ares.

Coaches are familiar with crises of leadership

Let us think about the kind of crises that we are having to deal with. First and foremost, they are crises of leadership, in manifold forms. We know that, on the whole, mankind has the resources to feed – and vaccinate – the world, to increase diversity and to reverse climate change for as far as this change is reversible over the short term – but this requires joint strategies, joint implementation and joint action, and they are conspicuously hard to achieve, in particular with the many forces that can drive us apart and make us compete with each other for ever more scarce resources.

“

This is where coaches can play a unique and important role: witnessing the mindset that underpins the crisis, being sensitive to the greed and hubris that are at stake – and calling them out

We have never been able to establish full global leadership, even though clearly global leadership was called for in the corona crisis and was to an extent provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO), global pharma companies and careful communication between governments and institutions.

Leadership is a very basic process, to do with the effectiveness of a team or organisation, that we all partake in, all of the time and even from a very early age, which makes it so often hard to define. In recent years, technological advances have grown the span and influence of leaders – with impact on many people's daily lives, with a need to respond to frequent change, and increasingly so, as the world is becoming increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous ('VUCA').²

Psychopathology and leadership are highly correlated: leadership corrupts and therefore creates pathology over time, and conversely, psychopathology also produces leadership.³ In other words, free-flowing leadership processes do not automatically converge on the best possible solution for all or for resolving crises – and conversely, many individuals who are not the best leaders, end up in leadership roles.

I think the crises in our leadership, most of which predate the current health, financial and ecological crises, lie at the root of the issues in those other domains. This means addressing the manifestations of selfishness, greed, fear and stubbornness or prejudice in our leaders, so that they can begin to make better decisions for all.

In *The Mask of Sanity*, US psychiatrist Hervey M Cleckley was the first to describe the specific configuration of traits that capture the essence of the psychopathic personality.⁴ Psychopaths were described as superficially charming, self-centred, fearless, impulsive, articulate, callous and guiltless. Out of this thinking triarchic models of psychopathy evolved, where the most common psychopathic traits are clustered around boldness (eg grandiosity, interpersonal dominance), meanness (eg lack of empathy, callousness) and disinhibition (eg impulsivity, irresponsibility).⁵

Although boldness may contribute to positive task performance and charismatic leadership, and disinhibition may contribute to positive adaptive leadership, an overall negative contribution of meanness and a partially negative contribution of disinhibition to leadership have been found.⁶ In Vergauwe et al's research, the leadership effectiveness was rated by subordinates, which we argue in *The Leadership Shadow* is a helpful perspective for measuring leadership effectiveness.³ However, if we would measure the impact of psychopathy from the perspective of quality of life on our planet or for future generations, these negative, demonstrated links between psychopathy and leadership effectiveness are expected to be even stronger and to also include boldness.

Unfortunately, leadership appears to be a key example of 'successful psychopathy': it attracts individuals who are interested in power and self-promotion, and/or the pressures and projections on top leadership have a pathology-enhancing effect, especially over time.⁷ This means that either through self-selection or through experiences on the job, the number of triarchic traits according to the Patrick et al model is expected to be larger than in the general population.⁵

I argue that these crises of leadership, and the dark leadership shadows that they have occasioned, lie at the root of the current major challenges, those to do with exploitation, inequality, threats to biodiversity and to the climate globally.³ Greed, narcissism and fear lie at the root of these issues. So, we need to find better ways to counter greed, selfishness and fear.

A vision for a loving way to confront this unprecedented global crisis

Science and technology can help with the complex crises that we are facing, as we have seen with the corona crisis. However, without a different form of leadership, and an understanding that we have to change our priorities and make them more sustainable collectively, rapid, technological change will not be enough and will itself not be sustainable. We will have to engage in many more conversations about ecotaxes, rewarding lower climate footprints,

Filling the 'leadership void'

Kevin is a leadership coach, who works mainly with start-up organisations, helping redesign their organisational structures and working through what the new structures mean for their work together and their relationships.

Kevin has found his participation in rapidly growing businesses to be meaningful and rewarding. However, he has also noticed that, despite his experience as an executive coach, his clients have a particular way of making him feel responsible for their leadership struggles. He notices that he often finds himself filling a void of leadership. This usually has adverse results: as soon as Kevin starts explaining or organising the way forward, the leaders in the team lean back and give him space, without successively implementing any of the great ideas that Kevin pressed for during the meeting. He is noticing that his high levels of engagement and involvement with these clients do not always yield the objectives his clients are aiming for. This leads to assignments being abandoned, Kevin being retained much longer term and him questioning his own value to the team and the company.

accepting changes to our diet etc. These will be very tough conversations that need to have real consequences, both in politics and in large organisations. Difficult choices will not be made without strong, collective leadership.

The new United Nations report on climate change by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), has shown that this is an exponentially growing crisis and can only be answered by similarly exponential changes in our approach to the planet.⁹ This means, we are dealing with a second-order challenge, both in terms of the need to change the mindset that has created the problem and in terms of the observer and change agent also being part of the problem.⁹ Fortunately, this is something that organisational development professionals and coaches know about and can facilitate, however difficult it is in practice. This is another reason for us to be involved in addressing the leadership challenges as well as the mindset that has created the crisis.

Bad leadership is not something that can be 'fixed' in the way that processes and machines can be fixed. It cannot be 'located' in a single person or group of people; moreover, it is co-created or enabled by determining factors such as power, discretion, time of service, industry norms etc. Nevertheless, as coaches, we can work with leaders in transformative ways. I believe we can provide a relationship where bad leadership can be observed and given space to shift to healthier, more sustainable contributions.

If a leader is challenged head-on and without offering support, the only response will be defence and counter-attack, as we have seen with those - for example, whistleblowers - who try to address issues in global leadership.

In my experience, there are two prongs of attack (or rather, protection) that have made a difference in coaching conversations, with regard to leadership and the leadership shadow:

- Understanding more about leadership and links between power, hubris and psychopathology. From the study of leadership, we may formulate better checks and balances

on leadership, such as are in place with political power (two independent chambers, voting rules, democratic control).

- Challenge and support provided in a safe setting, so that leaders can truly reflect on what they are doing and reappraise their priorities and values. With appropriate challenge, leaders can step back from their shadow, put their contribution on a more positive and balanced footing, and integrate their more primitive urges as expressed by their shadow sides.^{3,10}

But we can only do this by remaining independent, by observing and reflecting on the leader mindset, not by taking a stance and advocating for particular ways forward.

This is where coaches can play a unique and, in my view, important role: witnessing the mindset that underpins the crisis, being sensitive to the greed and hubris that are at stake - and calling them out. Naming the unwholesome (greedy, lazy, selfish etc) processes that are compounding the issues, but not taking a side against them - just lovingly opening them up to reflection. I hope we will all take up the challenge.

For this, it is important that we learn to reflect on our own minds first. Our minds can be seen as pollutants emitting toxic substances, when they are fuelled by irrational fears, usually in response to feeling unsafe or unloved.¹¹ When in such a state, we feel we need to consume more or lead more, in order to feel safer, and our irrational greed remains unrecognised. This irrational fear can just as easily be expressed by coaching, by advocacy or by altruism, ie by aligning ourselves to a 'worthy' cause and a 'worthy' profession. We therefore need a lot of self-reflection to determine whether a piece of work (eg helping others) is truly worthy or only an expression of fear. The value of our coaching - or advocacy - is not an empty question with an obvious answer, but rather something that we will have to study regularly and at length to become gradually more sure of ourselves. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Enough is enough:

managing overwhelm and living sustainably



Becky Hall outlines her practice model designed to support clients to live and work from a state of abundance

I feel like I'm being pulled in all directions and I'm doing everything badly!
'I feel guilty the whole time that I should be doing something else, and I'm exhausted.'

Such comments are typical of clients when describing the sheer volume, complexity and relentlessness of their working lives. In my practice, I find that it is often the most passionate and talented of people, those who have chosen to follow their vocation, who suffer most from the sense that they can't switch off – that they need to be constantly available and attentive to the demands they face. In our current digital age, this can be the case for many of us, whatever our role or level of responsibility. It seems that we have collectively bought into the myth that we have to be immediately responsive, regardless of the time of day or night. Unchecked, this way of living and working is at best unhealthy, and at worst, can lead to exhaustion and burnout.

As a systemic practitioner, I see a parallel with this pattern of behaviour and the environmental crisis we currently face. In both cases, we have got ourselves caught up in a way of living and working that demands more resources than are available, potentially leading to serious harm for us as individuals, and for our planet. Here, I share a coaching approach that can support our clients to manage overwhelm and to live and work sustainably. It starts with identifying what is 'enough' and using this as our starting point for designing our lives.



What is 'enough'?

Enough is a state of being and a way of living that is resourced by love and abundance. When we believe that we are enough, we find freedom and flow in our lives. From a state of *being* enough, we are able to set and maintain healthy boundaries that enable us to recognise that we do enough. We allow ourselves to live and work sustainably. With 'enough', we can live within the natural limits of our individual and collective lives so that we *have* enough, and this in turn sets us free to flourish.

One concern that clients have expressed to me about the concept of 'enough' is that it indicates a sense of mediocrity – of settling for average, not striving. I maintain that the reverse is true. Enough allows us each to stand in fertile ground, well rooted and well resourced, so that we can flourish with creativity and brilliance. From our place of enough, we can grow to be the right size for our needs – contributing and connecting with others and our environment so we can do amazing things. We move from the ever hungry, never satisfied state of striving, to a state of fullness, from which we can thrive. Far from being mediocre, enough is a springboard to self-belief, health and sustainability.

The art of enough

I use the art of enough model (see Figure 1), to take my clients through a series of what I call 'arts' – each art focused on finding inner or outer balance. The model depicts a set of scales where 'enough' is the balance point poised between the two polar states of scarcity and excess. Balancing is never static – it requires constant attention and adjustment. When we find it, it facilitates creativity and growth – as demonstrated by the vase of flowers in the illustration. Whether we seek to find the state of enough in our personal lives, our organisations or our relationships, we need to find balance between the states of scarcity and excess – both of which are driven by fear and anxiety.

The art of enough is an 'inside out' model, starting from the bottom and moving upwards. We'll focus on each 'art' in turn, especially on those that support our clients to manage overwhelm and live and work sustainably. Alongside each art, I offer sample practices to use with clients.

Art 1: Enough mindset

While a feeling of overwhelm is usually prompted by the reality of having to meet multiple demands, it is often our own mindset that tips us into feeling that we can't cope.

As a senior manager with a lot of responsibility, Donal found it extremely hard to switch off from work in the evenings and weekends. The first thing he did when he woke every morning at 5am was to check his phone. Donal reported feeling constantly under pressure, unable to stop. Then, at one of our sessions, he told me that his beloved father-in-law had died, a man he had loved and respected for over 30 years – after which everything changed for him. Following the funeral, the mourners gathered for the wake, which Donal described as being a lovely occasion for a great man – until he couldn't find his work phone and realised that he must have dropped it at the crematorium. The thought that he would be out of contact with work sent Donal into such a panic that he left

the wake to return to the crematorium car park to look for it. As he approached, he saw the red light from his phone blinking at him in the darkness. The momentary relief that he felt at finding his phone was quickly replaced by overwhelming guilt and sorrow. He had left his wife at her father's wake alone, missing the tributes to a man he loved and respected, because he was worried that he would not be contactable for work. This moment of truth changed Donal – and gave energy and focus to his intention to rebalance his mindset.

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As a systemic practitioner, I see a parallel with this pattern of behaviour and the environmental crisis we currently face. In both cases, we have got ourselves caught up in a way of living and working that demands more resources than are available

Practice mindset

It can be useful for clients to work through what I believe is a key process for changing our patterns and habits. Helpful questions include:

- **Notice:** 'What mindset are you coming from?'
In Donal's case, this was fear based and driven by an assumption that he had to be available at all times.
- **Pause to reflect:** 'How is this mindset serving you?'
For Donal, his mindset was robbing him of the ability to be in the present moment at a significant point in his life.
- **Choose:** 'What mindset would serve you better?'
An 'enough' mindset is based on love rather than fear, a sense of abundance and acknowledging the reality of the present moment.
- **Reset:** 'What becomes possible if you change your mindset?'

For Donal, an 'enough' mindset helped him challenge his assumption that he had to be always available, and helped him to reprioritise.

Art 2: Enough permission

This is where I work with clients to explore their beliefs about what is and isn't enough. So often, it is an inner sense of not being enough that drives people to overwork, to achieve a goal that never feels within reach, with no permission to rest. When this is the case, resetting a sense of overwhelm involves deep, inner work.

Examining past systems with clients can involve going right back to the first relational system we are part of – our family of origin. This is the biggest pattern maker in our lives, and it is here that we learn what we need to do in order to belong

within a relational system.¹ Sometimes, we can hold on to this belief unchecked, and it can continue to drive us to do things in ways that may no longer serve us. For example, if hard work was our way of getting attention and love as a child growing up, this may continue to drive us to work hard as adults, even though the context is different. This inner drive can lead to very damaging working patterns, until it is brought to light. The process of identifying where our deepest beliefs and assumptions come from can lead to some profound shifts in attitude to work, and in some cases, gives people permission to stop striving for something that is no longer relevant in their lives.

Practice permission

This exercise can help clients untangle long-held assumptions and beliefs and offer an alternative view: Write down the beliefs that you currently hold about what you can and can't do. Now reflect on these questions:

- Who would smile on you as you act on these beliefs?
- Who are you being loyal to in maintaining these beliefs?
- Do these beliefs really belong to you or to someone else?
- Are these beliefs still serving you now, or holding you back?
- What beliefs do you want to let go of so that you can grow?

Art 3: Enough presence

Managing overwhelm can be greatly helped by focusing on our physiological state in the present moment. I work somatically with my clients to help them get in touch with and listen to their bodies and build practices that allow them to calm their nervous systems. When clients adopt regular routines, such as coherent breathing, mindfulness and positive thinking, they create a pattern of sustainable working practices that serve them when work pressure increases.²

Art 4: Enough boundaries

In this art, we look at how to create good boundaries, and more crucially, how to maintain them. Most of the clients I work with have a heavy workload and are 'time poor'. That is not to say that we don't all have choices to make about how we set boundaries. Many of us saw over the last 18 months

of the pandemic, how quick and easy it was to fall into a pattern of back-to-back online meetings, before we remembered that we had a choice about this scheduling. In my experience of exploring 'enough boundaries' with clients, it is not setting the boundaries themselves that is a challenge – there are plenty of ways of doing this creatively. Rather, it's sticking to boundaries that poses the challenge – which usually requires that we stop doing some things and learn to say 'no'. When this is the case, the following exercise is one that coaches can offer clients as a way of recognising and reaffirming how life-giving it can be to say no and hold a boundary.

Practice boundaries: keep a 'no' journal

If you find saying 'no' particularly difficult, or you are in the habit of over-committing, keeping a journal can really help. Each time you say no to something, try recording:

- What you have said no to.
- How you did it.
- How it made you feel in the moment and then again 10 minutes later. It can take great courage to turn something down in the moment, but this momentary discomfort can lead to greater clarity for you. Say no for the bigger yes!
- The impact of having said no on your time, to focus on what's most important to you.
- What you have done with that time.

Art 5: Enough resource

Enough resource is about remembering and reconnecting with what resources us and with the cyclical pattern of life. Often, as a coach listening to what my clients tell me, I would find myself thinking that resources are finite commodities: 'I just don't have the time,' or 'I'm running on empty' or 'I simply don't have the strength anymore'. When we believe resources such as time, energy and strength can run out, we automatically tip ourselves into a place of scarcity, which triggers our fear-based responses. Neither time, strength nor energy exist in a linear spectrum on a finite line. It's much more accurate and useful to describe them as circular, mirroring the patterns of life and nature that we are familiar with in our daily lives. Ideally, we get up in the morning, refreshed after a (hopefully) good night's sleep, go through our day meeting the demands, challenges and activities that it brings, have some time to replenish our resources and then return to sleep. Our bodies help us through these cycles of the day – our diurnal pattern is supported by a nervous system and hormones that prime us for action or slow us down to 'rest and digest'.³

Thinking in this circular way with clients can be powerful. Rather than thinking about resource as something that will run out, and when it's gone it's gone, it can be helpful to ask, 'Who or what depletes your energy?' and equally important, 'Who or what replenishes your energy?' It can be useful to use the analogy of a phone battery that needs regular recharging. Two questions I ask most frequently in my coaching are: 'What are you doing at the moment to resource



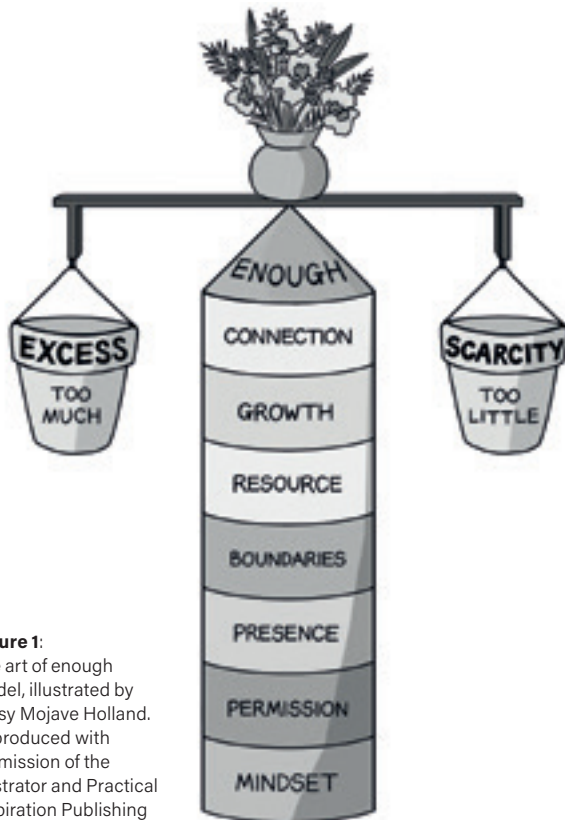


Figure 1:
The art of enough model, illustrated by Daisy Mojave Holland. Reproduced with permission of the illustrator and Practical Inspiration Publishing

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My experience is that when clients turn their attention to being, doing and having ‘enough,’ they can find ways to naturally manage their overwhelm and build sustainable patterns of living

yourself?’ and ‘What are you doing to recharge your batteries?’ Because it’s when we fail to do so, that our resilience gets low, and we begin to pay a high cost.

Art 6: Enough growth

In this art, I move with clients between their internal landscape and the systems they inhabit, eg family, workplace, community. At the heart of enough growth, is setting an upper target for what we need. We know that ‘more’ isn’t always ‘better’. Coaching has a long tradition of focusing on depth and transformation, rather than size and quantity.⁴ Working with clients to unpack the value of limits as a way of facilitating depth and sustainability can, in my experience, offer profound transformation. At a practical level, this can be setting a limit on the growth of a business to focus on quality and long-term investment. Alternatively, it can be about working with clients to set their own upper financial or work/life boundary, so that they can focus on flourishing

sustainably. As business writer Charles Handy writes in *The Second Curve*, ‘If we cannot ever say to ourselves, “enough is enough” we will never be free to explore other possibilities.’⁵

Art 7: Enough connection

Enough connection describes the thread that runs directly between our inner life and the planet we all share. I work with clients to connect with nature as a way of finding perspective and remembering the rhythms and patterns of the natural world, which we can so easily disconnect from when we are overstretched. Getting back into relationship with nature also reminds us that we are custodians of the planet and that finding a way to live sustainably serves us all. I invite clients to come up with their own practices for this – here are some that have been particularly valuable:

- Planting a seed and nurturing it to life
- Lying on the earth on a sunny day
- Standing barefoot outside, feeling the earth beneath your feet and the sky above you
- Seeking out a place where your relationship with nature comes alive, and making regular time to be there.

Working through these seven arts with clients offers them a lens through which to manage overwhelm and build sustainable working patterns – all framed within the context of finding the state of ‘enough’. Each client can start at a different point of the framework, depending on their particular needs. My experience is that when clients turn their attention to being, doing and having ‘enough’, they can find ways to naturally manage their overwhelm and build sustainable patterns of living. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becky Hall is a coach, writer and speaker and has worked for over 25 years with teams, organisations and leaders, helping busy people all over the world create their own Art of Enough for themselves, their businesses and the world. She is a registered senior practitioner with the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), a HeartMath accredited coach and a member of the Coaching Constellations systemic coaching teaching team.

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Further reading
The Art of Enough,
by Becky Hall, is
published by Practical
Inspiration Publishing.

COACHING IN PRACTICE: creative coaching supervision



Jo Birch is a psychotherapist, supervisor, executive coach and coaching supervisor. She has been training coaches across the world to become supervisors for nearly a decade. A former Chair of BACP Coaching, Jo is a regular contributor to professional forums and journals. She is the co-editor with Peter Welch of *Coaching Supervision: advancing practice, changing landscapes* (2019) and editor of *Coaching Supervision Groups: resourcing practitioners* (2022).

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

In my executive coaching practice, I draw upon the wisdom of psychotherapeutic understanding and that of leadership development, systems and complexity. This range of knowledge is intrinsically embodied and less cognitively driven, and has developed during my 30-year practice as a psychotherapist, coach and supervisor.

I would still say, though, that my heart is essentially person centred. In the early days of my training, the person-centred approach and the 'way of being' described by Carl Rogers' and others,^{2,3} opened a wonderful and unexpected portal through which to explore and understand my own life. This still underpins everything I do.

I weave creative approaches throughout my practice and draw on the work of Liesl Silverstone,⁴ a pioneer in person-centred art therapy. Her keen eye during my training with her, and subsequent continued practice as a course leader, really helped me hone my practice. We focused on the power of 'noticing' and being curious about the subtle ways in which we interpret and lead clients, arising from our own frames of reference. Although creative approaches are, at times, fun and playful, the inquiry is also deeply personal and requires sensitivity – and, I would say, daring, from all involved, as it invokes connections that have been previously inaccessible and brings them into our awareness. At the outset, we have no

idea what may 'arrive'. Imagery holds our dreams and desires and also our fears and shadows.

I began to embrace concepts and conversations arising from leadership, systems and complexity over 10 years ago when I started working as an executive coach. I attended the Shambhala Summer School ALIA in Nova Scotia, where a gathering of thought leaders ran inspiring sessions while living and playing alongside and within the learning community. I went on to work with Aikido-based wisdom through Wendy Palmer's Leadership Embodiment⁵ and Toke Moeller's Art of Hosting and Practising for Peace in Denmark.⁶ This Aikido-based learning helped me to stay in my body and notice how I moved, or didn't move, and how I kept, or changed, my shape under different conditions and situations.

I also embraced Otto Scharmer's Theory U⁷ and the related work of Arawana Hayashi's Social Presencing Theatre⁸ – the embodiment of Theory U. I am currently working one to one with an acting coach, which amplifies this learning. More recently, I have been excited to enhance my understanding of individuals and systems through natural inclusionality and other complexity-attuned praxis, through the work of Louie Gardiner.⁹

I access a diverse body of knowledge; however, there is a coherence in the prizing of people, approaches centred around the growth and development of inner wisdom, and attending to more than surface, presenting issues.

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

I've made links to some of the sources of my learning above; however, knowing myself and my work intimately, and stretching into the edges of my growth and development, relies on the quality of my supervision relationships.

This reflective space, one-to-one, group and peer, is essential for me to ensure coherence within my practice across the entire portfolio of my work.

My biggest learning ground, at the moment, is through the design and provision of a range of supervision programmes. Together with the core and wider delivery team, we find ourselves using our own experiences to extend our awareness and our capacities for mutual learning, as we hold that kind of learning space for others.

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 feel excited and energised by the curiosity and conversations within the wider coaching

community. I have been involved in developing the professional field for over a decade – influencing the integration of counselling/ psychotherapy and coaching and bringing new dimensions to coaching supervision training. I've been training coaches to become supervisors for much of this time. I often feel in awe of the cohort members, watching them as they step into new areas of personal and professional growth; and I feel a range of other emotions as I am called to hold multiple individual and group processes through these complex learning scenarios. This work is always relational and therefore brings continual learning and development for everyone involved, myself and the team included.

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?

I am enormously grateful for the work I do. My coaching clients hold incredible roles in major corporate institutions, entrepreneurial organisations, communities and families across the world. This means I am constantly working within and across multiple cultures and diverse experiences.

The professionals I work with in supervision are just as varied and are also geographically spread throughout the world.

I am excited by developing people in their work; and by developing the field of coaching through supervision, training and collaboration.

I have had a range of supervision experiences over the years: one-to-one as well as in peer and facilitated groups. Each experience has provided me with catalysts for my own inquiry, and I see no reason to believe this will end. Although I enjoy long-term supervision relationships, I also build in shorter experiences and therefore often have more than one source of support. At present, alongside my one-to-one supervision, I am also involved with a peer group of experienced supervisors exploring the 'supervision of supervision'.¹⁰ We are having an unexpected and 'interesting' journey.

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?

Over the last few years, many supervisors have asked if I would take a moment to share my knowledge and experiences of running group supervision sessions. I wanted to enthusiastically agree, and yet very quickly I recognised the impossibility of this request. Running group supervision is complex. Last year, I had the opportunity to bring together a kaleidoscope of approaches relating to group supervision in an edited anthology.¹¹ Chapters cover practical approaches to group supervision; the inquiry before the group begins; and psychodynamic, complexity-attuned and social constructionist theories.

The interesting thing about CPD for mature practitioners is that opportunities are unlikely to be obvious. Follow what catches your

interest. Trust that your work can be enhanced by unexpected sources. For example, sea kayaking has really brought my attention to my relationship with 'centring' and trust; Five Rhythms dancing helped me to see how I moved alone and in relationship, and how my patterns could hold or adapt; Theory U helps me to sit in the tension of not knowing; and the receptive-responsive space and natural inclusion reminds me we are in and of nature and in relationship with each other – what arises in you, may be evident in me too, sometimes showing up similarly and sometimes differently. ■

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See overleaf for a conversation between Jo and colleague Shirley Smith on using creative approaches in supervision, which also appeared in the December 2021 issue of *Private Practice*.

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?

This exercise is suitable for supervision or coaching, and can be conducted one-to-one or in a group context. You will need at least 30 minutes and your 'creative kit' which, for this exercise, is a quiet space and a range of paper, crayons, pencils and pens.

- Pause. Take a breath, allowing the exhale to be slightly longer than the inhale. Notice any tension in your shoulders, your face... anywhere else. Extend your spine, just a little, towards the sky.
- Tune into yourself as a practitioner (leader, supervisor, coach etc). Who are you? Allow an image of yourself to surface. Notice your image.
- Notice your process, any thoughts or judgments about your image, whether

you are compelled to change it, or whether more than one image arrives.

- Focus on what is present – this image of yourself as a practitioner.
- Now, take two minutes to draw, conveying to paper your image, or whatever part of your image is present.
- After two minutes stop drawing. Look at your image. What do you notice?
- Focus only on what you notice about the image before you: what colours you have used, where you have placed your image, how you have drawn your image. What is present? What is *not* present?
- Write about your image for three minutes, using a continuous flow, embracing spelling mistakes and poor grammar. No-one else will be reading your words.
- After three minutes, stop writing. Read through what you have written and also look at your image again.
- Allow any insights to appear.

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When a raspberry jelly is a truth teller

Jo Birch and **Shirley Smith** in conversation
about using creative approaches in supervision

Jo: I began my training as a counsellor and psychotherapist in the early 1990s and, shortly after completing my first Diploma in Counselling, began my private practice alongside my day job in designing and managing community health, mental health and regeneration initiatives in the inner city. Over 20 years ago, I had the chance to train with Liesl Silverstone, a pioneer in using person-centred art therapy skills. I became a member of her small training team and we continued to learn alongside her for many years. This work forms the basis of my creative approaches to supervision today.

Shirley, what's your story about using creative approaches in your work?

Shirley: During my coaching training, I had been introduced to a few creative approaches, such as the playing cards I used when working with my engineering colleagues. As I developed my practice into supervision, I came to understand how playful creative approaches can be. I found we were quickly working at a deeper level, yet very often clients and supervisees felt safe in the process of externalising their narrative into the image.

Any interpretation of a creative representation belongs squarely with the client. For coaches, and supervisors, it can be easier to leave our cultural and personal assumptions and biases to one side when working with creative approaches. We don't even need to see what the client is working with, or observing, as it is in their sharing of what they are noticing that meaning making and insights arise for them.

Jo, why are creative approaches in supervision particularly relevant to working in private practice?

Jo: As counsellors and psychotherapists, when we set up our private practice, it is an opportunity to think into every aspect of our work. Often, background systems and policies have previously been attended to through an agency, yet here in private practice, we begin to define our own parameters for the safety and quality of our work. Examining ourselves as ever-changing professionals, and how supervision is playing a part in our growth and development, can also be explored. We may find ourselves asking, what kind of supervision is the best fit at this point in time? We can do this through creativity, as this helps us to access previously inaccessible 'wisdom' from within.

Shirley, what is special about 'contracting' for creative supervision?

Shirley: Many people know that working creatively in supervision is a big interest of mine. Sometimes, supervisees choose to work with me so they too might gain confidence in their own capacity to work creatively. My contract is clear about working creatively being experimental, a kind of shared learning laboratory, where things may or may not work out. Just like when working in a real lab, there are certain rules regarding safety and the equipment we need to hand. My contract attends to these in some detail so that we can both (or all of us, if we are a group) arrive and play in this space equally prepared and with our resources. Many find it a lot of fun curating their 'creative toolkit'.

Jo, what else is important to consider at the beginning?

Jo: We may wish to explore some of our assumptions and beliefs, to bring them more consciously into view. For example, I invite the reader to pause as they read each question and see what arises. For example:

- What do you believe about your own creativity?
- What messages have you received about yourself as a creative person?
- What do you believe about supervision?
- What do you imagine 'creative supervision' to be?

I also invite readers to write down their thoughts and then to reflect on what shows up on the page. For example:

- What do you notice?
- How might this support you in being creative around the development of your own private practice?

Shirley, we've covered contracting and assumptions; are we ready to start supervision yet?

Shirley: Hmm... Is there a straightforward answer to that question? How does our own process of 'tuning into' ourselves and our clients impact the quality of the outcome? I often find myself starting to check in with my clients some days before our time together. I reflect on my notes, if we are already working together, and what I notice about myself. Before the session starts, I have a personal routine to become grounded and present. When the session starts, I invite my client to join me in a grounding exercise as a formal way of stepping out of whatever has gone before and to become more present to whatever is happening now. This process supports us in noticing our state, and whatever we are still carrying with us from earlier in the day. It helps us choose to put this to one side, or to stay with it more consciously. We might also notice what's around for us right now, or how we are being affected by the bigger context – relationships, the environment, world events etc.

“

For coaches, and supervisors, it can be easier to leave our cultural and personal assumptions and biases to one side when working with creative approaches

I believe this process is important to being open to working more creatively – to expand from our heads, and our cognitive 'thinking', into the wisdom of our body, noticing when we are centred and off-centre, enhancing our capacity to be open to what arises. And from here, we can address our check-in question – a question I will have considered in advance, depending on our shared intent for our working together.

As an aside, we offer many examples of different, creative ways to check in on our LinkedIn profiles. Earlier this year, we

ran a series of 21 different ways to check in for 2021, with suggestions to follow, or to adapt, for both one-to-one and group working.

Shirley, through what other ways can we introduce more creative approaches into supervision?

Shirley: The list is endless. What might we explore through creative approaches?

- Case work, ethical dilemmas, relationship difficulties
- Management issues, business development
- Personal and professional development.

We can use imagery, metaphor and our imaginations. However, we can also use:

- Objects, cards, drawing or mark making on paper
- Movement, sound, improvisation
- Plasticine, clay, Lego bricks.



This work is playful, and yet is also sensitive, deeply personal and requires daring from both the supervisor and the supervisee. All creative work has the potential to reveal both light and shade

What's really important is to become fluent and competent – and to develop in this way, we need to practise and experience the work ourselves.

Over to Jo for the final words...

Jo: Using imagery and other creative approaches yourself is essential in gaining familiarity, confidence and a sense of the power of this work. Find a colleague and experiment together or, as Shirley suggested earlier, ask your supervisor to use more

creative approaches in your work together. This work is playful, and yet is also sensitive, deeply personal and requires daring from both the supervisor and the supervisee. All creative work has the potential to reveal both light and shade. Perhaps your wishes, desires and dreams; or your fears or other areas which reside in the shadows. Always bear this in mind as you take care of your own process and that of your supervisees.

And, in case you are wondering, that's what created the title of this article, a moment in which I really wanted to invoke a super-confident image. However, in its place, a raspberry jelly appeared, which held more information about my fears than I wanted to acknowledge. Illustrating that we never know what will appear, and also, we can't 'think' an image into being. Whatever arrives will arrive – our opportunity is to accept 'what is' and invite the message within to reveal itself. ■

A version of this article first appeared in the December 2021 issue of Private Practice, www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/private-practice, published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jo Birch has been training coaches across the world to become supervisors for the last eight years, enabling

them to engage with each other in generative learning partnerships, enhancing individual work and the professional field. Jo, previously Chair of BACP Coaching, is a regular contributor to professional discourse, journals and research, and is co-editor of *Coaching Supervision: advancing practice, changing landscapes*, and editor of *Coaching Supervision Groups: resourcing practitioners*.

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Shirley Smith has had a long career in global human resources and organisational development.

Over recent years, she has focused on supervision, with a special interest in creative approaches in supervision. She has worked internationally throughout her career, travelled extensively, and has lived in four different countries, each with very different cultural heritages. Her creative pursuits include painting, vegan cooking and textile embroidery.

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To find out more about the raspberry jelly, or about Jo and Shirley's work, read Jo's chapter in *Coaching Supervision Groups: resourcing practitioners*, available from Routledge, with a special 20% discount by using the Code FLR40 at checkout. You can also contact both authors on LinkedIn.

The creative supervisor

Coach and supervisor **Claire Elmes** demonstrates how working creatively can help supervisors support their supervisees' coaching practices, and move them and their clients from stuck to thriving

I have been a supervisor for six years and have myself been supervised in my work for over 15 years. In that time, I have had the pleasure of working with some amazing and inspirational supervisors, who have supported, motivated, encouraged and challenged me – the kind of supervisor who has taken me on a journey and who I have been excited to meet with before every session because I know they are going to help me make a shift with a client I have been feeling 'stuck' with. On the flip side, I have also had some unfortunate experiences, with supervisors who have lacked empathy or micromanaged me. In my experience, the support you receive from a supervisor can make or break you as a professional.

My experiences of supervision have not only shaped me as a practitioner, but have ensured that I aim to empower my supervisees and clients to value their own self-worth and to recognise toxic workplace environments.

This article focuses on how to integrate creative supervision into traditional supervision sessions, and the benefits of doing so. Creative supervision, as a means of focusing on coaches' skills and supporting them in their work, uses original, inventive and inspiring ways of understanding and expressing experiences. Supervision has the potential to become so much more than the relationship between supervisor, supervisee and client, and here I hope to offer creative inspiration for you in your practice, whether you are a coaching supervisor or a coach.

The seven-eyed supervisor

Supervision often focuses on the 'client-centred' model of supervision and involves the supervisee 'offloading' the events of their client sessions, with supervisors giving guidance and support where necessary. One of my favourite supervision models is the seven-eyed supervisor model,¹



which was a core model on my supervision training. In this model, supervisors are taught to focus on the interconnecting systems of the client, coach and supervisor, and extend this focus to consider all the connecting systems, enabling the coach to consider environment and potential transference, and to recognise potential triggers within their own coaching journey. As a supervisor, I enjoy working with this model, as not only does it allow me to consider the systems we are all working within, but by checking in with my supervisee first and foremost, this consideration allows them to become grounded, and prevents the inevitable 'regurgitation' of sessions that can follow. During the pandemic, in particular, it is vital we are 'checking in' with the supervisee first, and sometimes this can change the whole direction of a session.

Supervision for coaches does not need to be limited to the one-size-fits-all approach of psychological language, reasoning and logic (a heavy focus on the right side of the brain). All supervision aims to foster collaborative and transformative learning. However, creative supervision incorporates a multitude of creative methods, such as drawing, working with metaphors and visualisations, and the use of colours, shapes and lines, to help unlock the unconscious creative mind (left hemisphere) and explore different ways of thinking and conceptualising.²

Creative thinking can be an incredibly useful tool for problem-solving, gaining new insights and exploring emotions and challenges. Therefore, creative supervision helps to stimulate creative thinking through various methods to enhance the experiential learning process for coaches and supervisees.

The benefits of creative supervision

Creative supervision helps to generate insight into problematic relationships with clients or provide direction with clients who are stuck.² Creative methods, such as sand tray therapy, drawing or painting, allow supervisees to model their sessions with clients and to express how their client is doing, to gain new insights and find solutions through more abstract and imaginative thinking and storytelling, rather than relying on rational, linear thinking and problem-solving. Supervision is, in a sense, an educational process, and therefore different supervisees will respond to different methods. Creative supervision emphasises multiple choice and multiple ways of seeing.

Secondly, creative supervision allows for exploration of physical barriers in the system. During the pandemic, many of my supervisees were navigating various obstacles in their work with clients; from masks to Perspex screens, to working online. Creating metaphors and visualisations in my work helped my supervisees overcome these physical barriers. One of my favourite exercises was inviting my supervisees to imagine that each 'obstacle' held some magical value. This helped address the frustration they felt and allowed them to be empowered and explore a different way of working.

Thirdly, creative supervision enables coaches to tap into their own self-expression and creativity, using the creative part of the brain and unlocking the unconscious mind. This can help foster the growth, development, reflection and self-discovery of the supervisee, giving them more tools for conceptualising experiences, exploring dynamics within

Case study: Mary and James

Mary is a coach in training, who sees me every two weeks for supervision. In every session, she sits before me and 'updates' me on the sessions she has had with her clients each week. In one session, she stated that she was feeling 'stuck with a client', who was not 'shifting' as she had expected. I asked Mary to represent this client, James, using a part of my available toolkit, including sand tray, clay, drawing materials or any medium that she felt drawn to (I have a number of creative tools in my practice room). I asked Mary to take a moment to think about James, to consider the reason he had come to her in this moment, and to represent who he was at the beginning of their work together. She chose the drawing materials and drew a squiggly mess across the entire page, using predominantly darker colours. Then I asked her where he was now. She drew a smaller squiggly mess in the middle of the page, then drew a 'container' around it with 'calm and considered' swirls emerging from it. I asked her where she would like to help James get to and she drew more

swirls and colourful shapes, all connected seamlessly with swirly lines. I finally asked her to draw how he could get from where he was now to where she would like to help him get to. She drew an image of the squiggle unfolding, and explained that this represented herself and James' mother, who she knew he had a fractious relationship with. She explained that she was represented by the more ordered 'swirl' side and his mother on the 'squiggle' side to the left of the paper. When we reflected on the images together, we dissected the symbols that were pertinent for change. Mary realised that James's mum had been causing some of the mess (the left side often represents the past). Most importantly, it gave her ideas for the next steps she could take with him. In their next session, she focused on his relationship with his mother, and his limiting belief of not being 'good enough' immediately shifted. James was amazed, as he had not previously connected this issue with his childhood,

and Mary was amazed that this had come to her by using this creative medium.

This approach enables us to reflect on potential interventions that supervisees can use in their coaching. It also often unlocks any potential blocks for the client, as there may be valuable insights that give them tangible next steps or action points. It can be a powerful intervention in supervision, especially when a coach is feeling stuck with a client or unsure about next steps.



cases, finding solutions, strengthening the imagination, and connecting to innate wisdom. In this way, creative supervision can be freeing and empowering in comparison with traditional supervision and traditional ways of exploring, monitoring, and evaluating coaching skills and experiences.

The supervisor-supervisee relationship is key here. The supervisor must be aware and respect the readiness of the supervisee for the experiential process, and both must understand the therapeutic use of images, metaphors, and fantasy as part of the creative supervision process and agree to the 'rules of the game'.² Mutuality and agreement are a core component of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide an atmosphere that is individualised, nurturing and optimal for growth and development. The role of the supervisor here involves teaching, skill building, consulting, guiding, monitoring and evaluating the coach as a practitioner, not just focusing on their client work.

An example of the efficacy of this approach is inviting a coach to 'check in' with a metaphor at the beginning of a session. This prepares them for working creatively and gives the supervisor space to reflect with the coach on their own self and assess work-life balance, stress levels etc. It helps to have access to different types of metaphors in a physical sense, but it is also possible to imagine if this is not possible. This can be anything from pictures and images to actual items, eg faces depicting different emotions, animals, figures, stones, shells, weather, landscapes, famous people, words, values, postcards, quotes and affirmations.

Finally, creative supervision helps coaches to develop skills that will benefit their clients. This helps the supervisee to grow and develop, gaining a multitude of creative ways and insights into how to work with certain clients. Coaches can bring these creative tools into sessions to allow clients to explore problems and dynamics in their life differently, rather than relying on traditional talking and linear thinking. As with the supervisor-supervisee relationship, this should be done with the full consent and mutual agreement of the client to maintain an egalitarian relationship.

Unlocking the unconscious

I couldn't write about creative supervision without a brief mention of sand trays, which are incredibly powerful tools to use with supervisees and clients alike. Sand trays utilise different figures and metaphors and can help unlock supervisees' and clients' processes. Allowing a supervisee space to focus on one aspect of their client work during the supervision session, and 'deep dive' using small figures, can be emotive. If you are working remotely, there is an online sand tray available for use when supervising coaches.³ Do be aware that this approach requires specific training, so if it is an area of interest, look to undertaking training as part of your continuing professional development (CPD).

In conclusion, there are manifold ways to utilise creative methods and approaches within supervision. These creative methods provide alternative ways of conceptualising difficult cases and client dynamics by unlocking the unconscious mind for deeper exploration and problem solving.

Supervision is associated with more traditional ways of working through particular problems or feelings attached to clients, tracking the coaches' development and facilitating their personal and professional growth; but, as we have seen, creative supervision takes a different approach that can be incredibly beneficial for supervisors, supervisees and their current or future clients. The elements of creative supervision are additional tools in the coaches' toolkit, to help foster and facilitate self-expression, reflection and imagination, alongside reasoning and logic-based approaches that, while always useful, can place limitations on the unconscious mind. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Elmes has a background in children's social work and has worked in the NHS in adult and children's mental health and as a self-employed children's therapist. Claire trained as a supervisor in both therapy and social work and she has supported numerous students, therapists and social workers in their work. Upon returning from maternity leave in October 2019, Claire moved into coaching and she is now a therapeutic wellbeing coach with

her award-winning company, Inspire You. Claire is passionate about supporting individuals and companies with work-life balance, focusing on clarity, routine, lifestyle and emotional regulation in her work supporting clients to thrive and become the best version of themselves.

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Research digest:

psychologically informed approaches to workplace coaching

Xeni Kontogianni
looks at an evidence-
based practice of
integrated psychological
approaches in coaching

Workplace coaching is a learning and development (L&D) intervention that uses a goal-oriented, reflective, collaborative approach to achieve results that are appreciated by the clients.¹ Coaching has traditionally been viewed as an intervention addressed at 'executive' levels (executive coaching), but there is no need for coaching to be limited to high organisational levels. Other forms of workplace coaching may include managerial coaching (where supervisors acquire coaching skills that promote better communication within individuals in the workplace), peer coaching (with emphasis on reciprocal relationships between colleagues) and team coaching (with emphasis on increasing collective performance of a group).

The main goal of workplace coaching is to improve individual performance and facilitate behavioural change in the workplace.² However, many working in this domain place equal emphasis on the values of self-esteem and wellbeing and consider these as legitimate objectives in themselves. Therefore, personal values and perceptions of workplace relationships are also important in coaching. This widening of the range of application of workplace coaching

has been seen as a response to rapid changes and increasing uncertainty in business life.

A 2011 large-scale survey, *The Future Work Skills 2020*,³ found new areas for continuous human development in organisations. These include the skill of sense-making, a critical attitude to earlier decisions, the ability to develop trusting relationships, and communication skills. This means it is necessary to develop people's ability to challenge and collaborate, and this may help them to deal with new challenges in their efforts towards sustainability in their organisations. Indeed, workplace coaching requires a comprehensive framework that would account for the complex relationship between the coach, client and organisational context. In a sense, coaching is seen as a social process where organisation culture and social relationships become significant factors in coaching outcomes;⁴ hence, a more flexible and integrated coaching framework is needed.

The proposal to integrate several psychological approaches in coaching is not new. In 2003, Palmer, Cooper and Thomas focused on the application of multimodal coaching approaches in dealing with issues relating to stress, health and wellbeing.⁵ In *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*, the authors showed that coaching can be practised from a variety of psychological frameworks including rational-emotive therapy, cognitive-behaviour therapy, solution-focused therapy, social psychology, positive psychology, psychodynamic therapy, person-centred therapy and hypnosis.⁶ A comparison matrix showed that cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT) and solution-focused coaching (SFC) appeared to have the widest application to workplace coaching. This may explain the accumulating evidence that a mix



of psychological approaches, developing around CBT and SFC, could create an evidence-based approach to coaching.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to compare various psychological modalities that have been adapted to workplace coaching, it is worth mentioning a few of these. Perhaps the first integrative approach to coaching came from Grant, who found that a combination of cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused (CB-SF) approaches had been very effective in enhancing mental health, quality of life and goal attainment.⁷ The CB-SFC approach could also lead to better workplace wellbeing and lower stress among executives.⁸

Another integrative approach (IC) has been advanced by Passmore, who developed a model in which coaches can address relationships with their clients at multiple levels.⁹ The IC approach focuses on the coaching relationship as well as the client behaviours and thoughts (both conscious and unconscious). Dias, Palmer and Nardi proposed integrative cognitive-behavioural coaching (ICBC), a framework mainly based on the principles of CBT but which also uses techniques derived from solution-focused therapy and positive psychology.¹⁰ Finally, Minzlaff brought together CBT with motivational interviewing and mindfulness to create an integrative model for workplace coaching that could help clients enhance performance, change behaviours and promote their wellbeing.¹¹ Indeed, there is recent evidence that psychologically informed coaching can increase job satisfaction and

commitment to organisational life as it provides a more holistic intervention that helps understand clients' motivations, feelings and assumptions.¹²

So, a legitimate question is: are some psychological approaches to workplace or organisational coaching more effective than others? While many psychological frameworks appear reasonable, it is not certain that some are more likely to lead to better results than others. Therefore, more research is necessary to examine the relative efficacy of different approaches to executive coaching.

Are some psychological approaches to workplace or organisational coaching more effective than others?

In this regard, the most systematic comparison of different mixes of psychological approaches to workplace coaching has been undertaken by Wang et al.¹² These authors conducted a meta-analysis of several coaching approaches, namely cognitive-behavioural coaching, positive psychology and integrative approaches. Their analysis suggested that there was no particular approach to coaching that was more effective than others. This is in line with the 'outcome

equivalence' hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the efficacy of many psychological approaches and techniques.¹³ In a sense, this meta-analysis ascertained that none of the popular psychological approaches are outstanding over others.¹

Therefore, would an integration of approaches be more effective than a single approach to coaching? The previous study showed that the effectiveness of an integrative approach was marginally higher than a singular approach on evaluative outcomes. This finding may be due to the fact that only six studies used an integrative model, while 14 studies used singular approaches in the test sample.

In terms of practical implications, it is suggested that an integrative framework of coaching could present some advantages to the extent that equal emphasis is placed on individual goals, personal values and social context of the work of the client. The present review highlights the equivalence of results of common frameworks of psychologically informed coaching. This is in line with recent trends in current practice that suggest workplace coaching is associated with complex social processes. In other words, an integrative approach may facilitate the coaching relationship. This does not mean that the application of psychological approaches in coaching is an exclusive influential factor in successful outcomes, but rather implies that this is a plausible way that promotes evidence-based practice by integrating scientific findings from psychology. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Xeni Kontogianni is an Executive member of BACP Coaching. Currently studying at the University of Amsterdam and participating in leadership research projects, she is committed to bridging the gap between academia and practice and applying modern scientific methodologies.

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Growing together:

supporting each other to grow
and flourish



The use of coaching approaches with the socially disadvantaged is not a new concept, but is not often described or discussed.

It is a pleasure to introduce you to June Webb, a member of our Coaching for Social Impact special interest group (SIG). June's commitment and activism, walking the talk as a coach and therapist, make her 'part of the solution' in addressing some of the challenges that exist in her local community

for those recovering from or coping with chronic mental distress.

June asks some powerful questions, born of her life experiences, training and her professional work, such as: How are coaching and the coaching approach relevant to the socially and economically disadvantaged? What does my community need? How might that need be met with the total involvement of the community at all stages? What part can I play in helping that to happen? Are some of

our terminologies outdated and disrespectful? June's questioning attitude has led her towards adopting the international clubhouse model as a way forward; a holistic approach focused on meeting the needs of communities, with their full involvement at the heart of the work and its organisation.

Val Watson

BACP Coaching Lead for the Coaching for Social Impact special interest group

Coach, former social worker and founder of the Norfolk Clubhouse **June Webb** explains how and why she was inspired to set up a community-run mental health support group

'There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives'
Audre Lorde

In 2017, I read a *Guardian* article titled 'Could life coaches ease pressure on overloaded social workers?'.¹ The question intrigued me. After graduating from Sussex University in 2008, I had worked at various settings on the south coast as a social worker with adults with various mental and physical needs. I wondered why, despite sometimes receiving intensive 'input' from various agencies, people did not seem to 'get better'. We saw them return time after time, following some intensive support, and then the service would reduce or close, only to see the person back again several days, weeks or months later.

In my first paid role as a social worker, a member of my team, who was originally from the US, explained that, back home, they had worked as a generic practitioner, long term, with the whole family. This approach to social work made me think, and we discussed the differences in approach between the US and UK. In comparison, our approach is fragmented and short term, so as not to 'create dependency', based on specialist areas, eg adults, mental health, learning difficulties etc. I wondered how we could work more holistically. Fragmentation inevitably means cracks. If people don't meet the criteria, are too ill, not ill enough, too old, too young, then no service exists or it is short term and temporary.

In her book *Radical Help*, designer and leading social thinker Hilary Cottam, outlines some successful relational welfare approaches. She comments on the process of commissioning and provision of services, noting that '...human connections that form around this exchange are invisible and have no place in the contract'.² The state's provision of 'care', thus monetised, becomes a mere transaction, and to me the term 'service user' sounds degrading. Seeking a more meaningful career, I left social work in 2014, moving to Norwich to train in counselling and psychotherapy at the University of East Anglia, including a postgraduate certificate in Focusing, followed by a master's degree in counselling. However, despite more open dialogue, I still experienced discussions around mental health as stigmatising. In 2019, I completed a certificate in coaching at the University of Cambridge. I wondered: could coaching offer a means for social change?

Breaking the mould

The traditional view of coaching is of a service that is provided for and accessed by business executives or, alternatively, life coaching for those seeking to improve their lives in some way. I have no problem with this; we all need to develop and grow personally. However, there seemed to be few opportunities for people who lack economic and social opportunities to access coaching. I started to research what others had done to 'break the mould' in offering provision outside the traditional 'life and executive coaching' models, such as Clare McGregor's *Coaching Behind Bars*, which documented the development of a special coaching programme for women in prison.³

As someone from a working-class, one-parent family, growing up in Sheffield in the 1960s, who left formal schooling at 12, following a series of personal traumas, I had few opportunities to access further education or meaningful work. I grasped what free resources I could, valuing my local library, a resource that built my confidence and provided hope that I could perhaps sit and pass exams one day. I read as much as I could and I took available correspondence courses.

A long-time local political and social activist, I have explored my privilege to some extent. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 spurred me on personally to become even more active in challenging social injustice and my own white privilege. The past couple of years have seen a drawing together of many strands in my life and work. In 2018, I began training from a systems perspective around relationships, then undertook further training in 2019 to 2021 with a placement at a local CAMHS team, completing an intermediate course in family systems therapy with the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust.

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Second-order change involves those being partnered... seeing themselves as active participants in their own lives, rather than passive receivers

A systems approach

Systems approaches to change in coaching and psychotherapy are important on several levels. A systems approach promotes second-order change, which involves those being partnered developing self-agency, seeing themselves as active participants in their own lives, rather than passive receivers.⁴ This supports leadership creation beyond the traditional image of 'leader', and supports the growth of community leaders who are experts in their lived experience. The infamous 'revolving door', which many people experience in the care sector or mental health system, is challenged. For many, change is only possible if the 'experts' are involved: so-called first-order change.⁴ This approach actually creates dependency, because if we don't embody self-agency, we can't

face future difficulties with more resilience. The issue is not in relieving pressure on overloaded social workers or services, but in meeting people's unmet needs in such a way that it provides a route to lasting agency for everyone. This impacts beyond the individual and creates sustained change as it is embedded and embodied in people in community, not services or institutions.

This shift in responsibility is crucial. If people see themselves as having agency within a supportive, collective environment, they can then take responsibility to make change happen at every level. As a personal example of this, in 2017, I was offered the opportunity to complete some free business training in Norwich. I then won a place on a year's funded training with the School for Social Entrepreneurs.

The 'clubhouse' model

International Clubhouse originated in New York in 1944 as a small self-help group by some patients leaving hospital seeking to maintain connection, and is now a global network of over 320 clubhouses. The International Clubhouse model provides a systems approach, allowing all family members to be part of the community, thus impacting positively on the children, parents and older members of the family, and creates an eco-system within communities.⁵

Inspired by the International Clubhouse model, I set up Norfolk Clubhouse in June 2019, because it provides a model of positive mental health, run by a community of members, for the members. Membership is free to anyone over 18 and is a lifelong membership. The model is holistic, a counter-cultural force against the fragmented nature of much of the way health and social care are delivered. Change is embedded and embodied within members, who see themselves as active participants in running the clubhouse.

A 'garden mind'

Norfolk Clubhouse promotes a strengths-based approach to improving health that is non-stigmatising. In spring 2020, I devised an eight-week, online programme for members, called 'Growing Together', which drew upon my work with survivors of abuse, and my lifelong interests in nature and gardening, embodiedness and in using the non-stigmatising metaphor of growth. The model aligns with that of the garden mind by Dr Sue Goss,⁶ a systemic coach countering the 'machine mind' of monetised transactions underpinning much of what we experience in human dealings with work, relationships and our planet. The garden mind 'tends' rather than controls: these principles underpin our work.

“

If people see themselves as having agency within a supportive, collective environment, they can then take responsibility to make change happen at every level

Members work through the course at their own pace, exploring the modules that pose questions to stimulate thinking around identifying strengths and growing resilience. Our facilitated weekly meet-ups, dedicated women's group and 'Saturday socials' on Zoom encourage members to share their interests, strengths, hopes and dreams and ideas for how we can support these to grow and flourish. It is based on an abundance model of identifying existing resources rather than a deficit model of disease and lack. This mindset focuses on what we can do, rather than what we think we can't do. We



don't ignore our mental, physical or environmental situation. We seek to work with it and to creatively transform it, together.

What makes Norfolk Clubhouse different? Our 'why' is in the 'unmet mental health needs', which existing services don't provide for. For so many people – despite the involvement of services and organisations – because services are providing the 'what' without exploring the 'why' of people's pain, it does not meet their real needs, or if so, only briefly. Relational welfare works with the root of the difficulties, not just the symptoms, because people's difficulties are embodied and embedded within the person, and they are also embodied and embedded within their relationships with themselves, their family, work, neighbourhood, school, town or city. They are often about being human in a very complex, post-industrialised world.

Many existing systems do not meet people's enduring needs for a sense of belonging or for sustained relationships beyond the merely functional or transactional. The difference is that our members are the 'skilled craftspeople', not the 'experts'.⁷ Members actively stitch, upcycle, restore, cherish and celebrate. Our 'how' is the principle of self-help, strengths-based and active community participation. Many of our members have reported that the clubhouse has been

there for them when other support has broken down, and we supported each other through the initial months of the pandemic online and by phone. Some of our members have gone so far as to say that, in some way, the COVID-19 outbreak has been a blessing, because it forced them to seek help; otherwise, they would not have discovered the clubhouse.

The pandemic has slowed our progress in embodied connecting, publicising our presence face to face and finding a base camp. However, we remain in contact via social media, phone and video link and are building creative partnerships with other charities, social enterprises and organisations in Norfolk, who are working for sustainable change. As the founder of a small organisation, I am a 'Jill of all trades' in setting up the necessary systems, doing the groundwork, fundraising, publicity, marketing and administrative tasks. Our team of volunteers – three trustees, two professional coaches, a chef and those tireless souls who create and maintain our website – are invaluable members of the team. It can be lonely and at times demoralising when funding bids are rejected and people don't 'get' us. We are finding creative ways to challenge this as we don't often tick the 'right' box, because we, like our members, are not box shaped! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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