

# 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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# Editorial



Diane Parker  
Editor, **Coaching Today**

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

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

Copy deadlines for the next two issues are **4 February** and **6 May 2025** respectively. Contact the Editor at the email above with your ideas.



## Beyond coaching

**W**hen I returned to my client work after a short break, I was suddenly confronted by the impact of the UK riots

over the summer. In the immediate aftermath, a number of clients reported feeling unsafe in their neighbourhoods and communities, due to their nationality, ethnicity or faith. Those in public-facing jobs, such as in hospitality, described feeling afraid at work.

As I listened and held space for their stories, I was driven to ask myself the question **Erik de Haan** poses in our cover feature (p8): Is it enough that we simply do 'good work' as coaches? Can we continue to 'hide' behind our roles as practitioners, or do we have a responsibility beyond coaching to consider the global and political context of our work? In the face of war, rioting, the rise of far-right ideologies, political uncertainty, new technologies, and a global climate and ecological crisis, what does it mean to be a coach today? What is our responsibility – and where does our power lie?

Whether we work in private practice, in communities or in organisations; whether we work integratively, remotely, with teams, or in a supervision role, the various articles in this issue each explore the responsibilities we have towards our clients and communities.

While **Blaire Palmer** highlights the role we have to play in helping shape the leaders of tomorrow (p14), **Jonathan Passmore** offers us a strategic guide to using emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), in our practice (p28).

**Lucy Myers** celebrates the growth of a 'flourishing community' and warns against the creation of another 'Wild West' as more practitioners embrace dual and integrated practice, arguing a need for more specialist training, registration and accreditation (p24). Finally, **Nash Popovic** demonstrates how integrative supervision represents the next crucial step in the evolution of safe, effective and transformative integrated coach-counselling practice (p20).

An emergent theme among all of our contributors in this issue – particularly when considering the implications of AI and how we harness it – is that it is our essential humanity as practitioners that will continue to separate us from the chatbots. And it is our humanity that continues to respond with empathy and compassion to our clients' pain, sorrow, confusion and anger, as well as their joy, hope, love and gratitude.

What do you think? If you feel called to respond to any of the articles in this issue with one of your own, get in touch with your ideas – I'd love to hear from you.

Until next time... ■

**Diane Parker**  
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It is our essential  
humanity as practitioners  
that will continue  
to separate us from  
the chatbots



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



# BACP Coaching News

# Message from the Chair

Greetings from our new Chair

I thought I'd introduce myself to you all by sharing how I first happened upon the BACP Coaching division and discovered this wonderful group of fellow dual-trained practitioners.

My initial interaction with BACP Coaching was at the BACP Annual Research Conference in 2022. I had joined the division as a dual-trained practitioner, integrating knowledge, experience and qualifications in both coaching and therapy in my practice. I was keen to connect with other practitioners doing the same because I knew they were out there – I just had to find them.

I had volunteered to deliver a 'two-minute platform' at the event, a post-lunchtime spot where members had the opportunity to address the room with any thoughts or ideas. I elected to spend two minutes speaking about my experience as a therapeutic coach to an assembled audience of several hundred therapists. I felt almost unduly nervous, which surprised me as I'm an experienced public speaker, but I felt incredibly vulnerable about sharing my way of working at this event. At this point, I had yet to connect with other dual-trained practitioners, so as I sat down for a lonely lunch hour chewing over my words, I practised my speech in my head.

As I nibbled at my lunch, a therapist took a seat beside me and introduced themselves. We chatted and ate, and I shared that I'd be making a speech about my therapeutic coaching practice. My way of working was new to this therapist and they had several questions, which I tried my best to answer, but the question that really struck me was, 'Can you charge more money?'. Money is an issue about which I'm asked frequently and is something that obviously we, as practitioners, rely upon, but are also encouraged to regularly reflect upon. Money means many different things to different people.

After mentioning something along the lines of it being similar to deciding a fee, as you would in therapeutic practice, while taking into account the added value of further training and experience within a chosen field of expertise, for example (but not limited to) corporate, creative or healthcare industries, I was now feeling really nervous. The therapist's enquiring look and comment that, 'It doesn't make any sense to work that way', took me aback. I faltered. Apprehension crept in.

What would this room of therapists think of my work? Was I doing justice to the field of therapeutic coaching? Did I have any right to be practising this way at all? A mist of doubt descended further.

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With my nerves jangled, I had to invoke my own inner coach. I told myself that the assembled group I was about to address were not aliens. They were a group of therapists, just like me. I reminded myself I only had to speak for two minutes, and I made a quick promise to myself to have my say and get off the stage.

So that's what I did, and the two minutes went by in a flash. It's one thing presenting a workshop



**Gemma Levitas**  
Chair, BACP Coaching

of your own design to a group of willing participants, but to stand in front of a room of respected peers, fellow practitioners, BACP members, associates, colleagues and staff, to talk about a burgeoning way of working, was a tiny bit scary.

As I made my way off the stage on shaky legs, two therapists awaited me by my table. As we chatted, a group formed around us, of other therapists either wanting to know more about integrated practice or wishing to introduce themselves as fellow dual-trained therapeutic coaching practitioners who were also working integratively.

The Coaching division had a presence at the event that day too. I went over to their table and introduced myself to a warm group of integrated practitioners, interested parties and a memorably buoyant coach who had just qualified as a therapist. I joined the table for a stimulating, thought-provoking conversation about dual practice and the future of therapeutic coaching. I felt a mixture of recognition, trepidation and relief – I had found my people!

After that, things happened very quickly. I connected with other BACP members, got in touch with the then Chair, Lucy Myers, and voiced my wish to join the BACP Coaching Executive, which I did shortly afterwards. When Lucy announced the end of her tenure as Chair, I immediately put myself forward.

### **Moving forward**

This is an exciting time for BACP Coaching. As membership numbers increase and clients demonstrate an interest in working integratively, a market-driven desire for our unique offering has emerged. Clients see the benefits of working with a dual-trained practitioner, and as our numbers expand and demand increases, there is plenty of space for all.

**This is an exciting time for BACP Coaching. As membership numbers increase and clients demonstrate an interest in working integratively, a market-driven desire for our unique offering has emerged**

My belief is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to offering therapeutic support. Our way of working reflects this. Each client is unique and I believe integrated practice respects the individuality and uniqueness of our clients' inner experience.

As we move forward in this exciting space, I aim to support and champion the work of dual-trained practitioners wherever I can. Since hosting BACP's Working with Coaching event on 5 September, I will be involved in several more events in the near future, all of which I will keep you informed of right here in my regular column.

Suffice to say, it's a great time to be a dual-trained practitioner or, as I call myself, a therapeutic coach. I intend to support you and the development of our division in any way that I can. ■

## **BACP Coaching Update**



### **A new Deputy Chair for BACP Coaching**



I am delighted to join forces with **Belinda Joseph-Pirame** as our new divisional Deputy Chair. Together, we are excited to take the division forward and we are keen to recruit new

Executive members in the near future. If you have ever felt interested in joining the coaching Executive and working with us to support our division, ensure best practice, and join us in shaping the future of dual-qualified practitioners and therapeutic coaching, watch this space for an announcement and details on how to apply.

### **Supervision SIG Update**

On 17 September, Chair of the BACP Supervision Special Interest Group (SIG), Ioannes Alexiades, joined the trauma-informed perspectives on supervision panel discussion event, which was hosted by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) UK.

The event was organised by EMCC UK Chair, Mia O'Gorman, and included Ioannes, Julia Vaughan-Smith and Julia Robinson on the panel.

Subsequently, both BACP SIG and EMCC UK SIG have agreed to collaborate on future events of mutual interest and we're currently looking to expand our membership of the supervision SIG. For more details, please contact Ioannes at: [info@mindhauscounselling.com](mailto:info@mindhauscounselling.com)

# Meet the member



## Nicola Moore

*is a counsellor, psychotherapist and health coach, based in Belper, Derbyshire. Since qualifying as a psychotherapist in 2017, she has gained extensive experience in helping clients navigate the complexities of addiction, and fostering better mental health outcomes. In 2023, Nicola became a certified health coach with a diploma in health coaching from the College of Naturopathic Medicine in London, enabling her to integrate a holistic perspective into her practice. Nicola's approach to therapy and coaching is deeply rooted in her understanding of the intricate connection between mental and physical wellbeing. [www.nicolamoorecounselling.com](http://www.nicolamoorecounselling.com)*

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

My professional path has been one of continuous learning and evolution. I initially trained as a counsellor and psychotherapist, but my interest in the gut-brain connection – how the foods we eat directly impact our emotional and mental wellbeing – led me to explore health coaching. I became increasingly aware of the profound relationship between our dietary choices and overall health. I realised that food has the power to either harm us or heal us.

I'm particularly fascinated by how imbalances in the gut microbiome are linked to conditions such as anxiety, stress and depression.<sup>1</sup> I've come to believe that our eating and drinking habits, along with environmental factors, significantly influence our mental and emotional states. This understanding motivated me to pursue a diploma in health coaching, further equipping me to address the interconnectedness of physical and mental health.

In my practice, I emphasise the crucial role that dietary choices play in mood regulation and behaviour. Nutrients are essential for neurotransmitter production, which in turn affects our hormones, blood sugar levels and mood. By focusing on nutrition, I encourage my clients to adopt self-care practices that enhance their overall wellbeing, complementing the therapeutic work we do together.

Integrating the healing properties of food and awareness of their physical health into my counselling practice has allowed me to offer a more comprehensive approach to mental health. Educating and supporting clients in making better dietary and life choices not only improves their physical health but also enhances the effectiveness of traditional therapeutic methods, promoting holistic wellbeing and long-term healing.

Understanding the gut-brain connection has been a game-changer for me. It's taught me that physical and mental health are not separate entities, but deeply interconnected. This realisation has led me to adopt a more

holistic approach in my practice, where I address both mental and physical health needs.

Therapy, in my view, fosters self-awareness and understanding, while coaching empowers clients to set achievable goals, receive ongoing support, and implement lifestyle changes that support their overall health. By integrating these two practices, I've been able to provide my clients with the tools they need to achieve lasting improvements in both their mental and physical wellbeing.

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

I'll admit that I initially struggled with the idea of narrowing my focus to a specific niche. I wanted to help everyone and found it difficult to settle on one area of specialisation. Over time, however, my focus has become clearer and I believe the more clients I work with, the more specific my niche will become. For now, I primarily work with clients who feel stuck in their lives and are seeking positive change — whether that means finding peace, reducing overwhelm, or developing confidence in themselves and their relationships. I've developed significant experience working with clients dealing with issues related to shame and addiction, as well as those undergoing hormonal and emotional changes during peri/menopause. This focus has allowed me to understand the unique challenges these clients face, enabling me to offer tailored support that meets their specific needs.

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

Becoming a coach has been as transformative for me personally as it has professionally. This journey has not only enhanced my own health but also improved my relationship with food and my body. This process has fostered deep self-reflection, leading to greater awareness, healing and a healthier lifestyle. Coaching has also expanded my ability to work with a diverse range of clients, each with their own unique challenges and goals.

Supporting others on their journeys toward self-acceptance and wellbeing is a profound

privilege for me. It brings immense satisfaction and continuous learning, making my work deeply fulfilling. The opportunity to aid clients in their quest for self-discovery and health is a source of great pride and motivation for me.

### Where do you practise?

I practise from a lovely office in Belper, Derbyshire, and also offer online appointments for clients who can't attend in person. My office is in a beautiful historical building, constructed in 1840 to attract a doctor to the town. The ground floor houses a yoga studio, and the building also hosts other therapists, creating a vibrant community of wellness professionals.

### Do you have a typical client?

My clientele is diverse, encompassing people of all ages, genders and life stages. What unites my clients is a shared desire for change, and to feel differently about themselves or their circumstances. Some of my clients are in recovery from addiction, and I provide the support they need to navigate this challenging journey.

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

As an integrative and relational therapist, I embrace Rogerian principles at the core of my practice.<sup>2</sup> I explore unconscious processes and attachment styles to better understand how my clients engage with the world, and their relationships with themselves and others. I recognise that each client is unique, and I tailor my coaching and therapy sessions to meet their specific needs, taking into account their life experiences, dietary choices and personal goals.

**Becoming a coach has been as transformative for me personally as it has professionally. This journey has not only enhanced my own health but also improved my relationship with food and my body**

In my coaching practice, I develop tailored plans for each client, following a comprehensive health and life assessment. These plans include specific and realistic goals that are designed to be achievable and sustainable. My approach is always led by the client's needs, ensuring

that the work we do together is relevant and meaningful.

Psychoeducation and continuous learning are integral parts of my sessions. I believe that empowering clients with knowledge about their mental and physical health is key to helping them make informed decisions and take control of their wellbeing. This educational component is woven into my work, providing clients with the tools they need to understand themselves better and make positive changes in their lives.

### What's your biggest challenge currently?

One of the biggest challenges I face in my practice is balancing relational, client-led work with the delivery of psychoeducation and coaching. My passion for my work often drives me to share everything I know with my clients, but I recognise that this can sometimes be overwhelming. It's essential to work at the client's pace, taking small, manageable steps to ensure that they are not overwhelmed by the process. I regularly remind myself and my clients of the importance of taking things one step at a time.

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

I am proud of the progress I've made in my career. I reflect on my earlier career as a stressful time when I lacked self-awareness, compassion and self-love. My journey through therapy taught me the value of self-care, and this has become a central tenet of my practice. I'm proud of my academic achievements, including earning a first-class honours degree, and I continue to pursue my passion and potential with enthusiasm.

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

Maintaining balance in my life is incredibly important to me. I'm a member of a local gym where I practise yoga, strength training and enjoy regular sauna sessions. I also love spending time in nature, whether that means walking in the countryside, gardening, or visiting the park with my children. These activities help me stay grounded and connected to the world around me.

Adventure and travel are also important aspects of my life. I enjoy exploring new places and trying new activities, which helps to nurture my inner child and keep my spirit alive. Recently, I took up paddleboarding, an exciting new challenge that has added a fresh dimension to my life.

To stay grounded and centred, I cherish quiet moments for reading, journaling, meditating, and connecting with friends and family. These practices are essential to my wellbeing and help me maintain the balance I need to continue supporting my clients effectively.



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

If you're a therapist considering a transition into coaching, I encourage you to pursue it with passion and curiosity. Follow your interests, and take the time to find the right course for you. It's important to ensure that any training programme is reputable and aligns with your professional goals. Thorough research and careful consideration are key to finding a course that will support your growth as a coach.

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

Being a member of the Coaching division has provided me with a sense of security that my work is valued. Membership offers a supportive framework for my practice and opportunities to connect with other professionals and colleagues in the field. This community of like-minded individuals is a valuable resource, providing me with ongoing support and inspiration as I continue to grow in my career. ■

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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@baccp.co.uk](mailto:coachingtoday.editorial@baccp.co.uk)







# Where do we stand?

## A wider view of ethics in coaching

As coaches, is it enough that we simply do 'good work' with our clients? Or do we now have a responsibility to consider the broader global ethics of our work and take a stand? **Erik de Haan** asks: what does 'being a coach' mean in the world today?

**I**n our increasingly polarised world, ethical dilemmas and questions are coming to the fore. In the many crises of our time, where do our responsibilities lie? What is sustainably good leadership? Is there such a thing as a 'just' war, and how can we fight such a war or campaign ethically?

As ethical and existential questions emerge around us and especially within us, one dilemma for coach practitioners is provided by the possibility of a retreat into simply 'doing good work'. Following our ethical guidance, delivering to good standards, being professional and accountable – is that not enough? Must we now also think about the state of our industry or the future of our planet? Is this not too much when we are already using all our resources to fulfil a contract and work well within it?

This article unashamedly explores these broader ethics, looking at bigger questions beyond the narrow confines of our profession. What are the ethics of being an executive coach? What is good about coaching, what is good coaching in the deepest sense, and what does 'being a coach' mean for our general contribution to the world in the midst of global crisis?

### Taking an ethical stance

Obviously, from a professional perspective, coaching is doing good. Coaching demonstrably helps clients to reach their goals; moreover, coaching can bring clients closer to a whole range of positive outcomes such as self-efficacy, wellbeing and resilience.<sup>1</sup> But those are narrow outcomes, defined only in terms of the coachee and their organisational context. I think it is time to ask ourselves, What good is coaching doing in the world?

With increasing polarisation in our global society, I think we no longer have the luxury of turning away from such questions and merely striving to be good, professional coaches. We need to pause regularly, reflect and declare what we think about pervasive and urgent issues such as inequality, racism, climate change and disinformation, to name a few. The organisations with which I work also display a growing interest in where I stand on these ethical issues, eg, What do I think of their doing business in China or about

animal experiments to improve their products? How inclusive am I? How safe? How globalist? How capitalist?

As a coach, I increasingly experience profound tensions in my coaching. One example is to do with my 'unconditional positive regard',<sup>2</sup> the warmth and respect I want to have for my client's point of view and decisions. Coaching is, in my experience, always open to a diversity of viewpoints and mindsets, and 'just' holds them up for reflection. Yet there are ways of seeing things and (conspiracy) theories that are alarmingly misinformed, deliberately false, oppressive and/or demeaning of others. How can I respect those?

Albert Camus wrote in his novel, *The Plague*, about an epidemic catastrophe such as the one we have recently experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic: 'The evil that is in the world always comes from ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding. On the whole, men are more good than bad; that, however, isn't the real point. They are more or less ignorant and that is what we call vice or virtue; the most incorrigible vice being that of an ignorance that fancies it knows everything and therefore claims for itself the right to kill. The soul of the murderer is blind; and there can be no true goodness nor true love without the utmost clear-sightedness.'<sup>3</sup>

Another tension exists around the place of coaching in society. Workplace coaching can be helpful, effective, liberating, and many other good things. But coaching is also a Western invention, dominating the wider helping professions (together with services like mentoring, counselling and psychotherapy), occupying the place that older, more embedded, more native, and potentially therefore more helpful, practices used to hold. Some Western theories of coaching have appropriated non-Western ideas without fully recognising those earlier inspirations. Consider the debt that David Bohm – who influenced our thinking on 'good dialogue' – owed to non-Western ideas through American Indians and Krishnamurti.<sup>4</sup> Or think about Bert Hellinger – who brought us the constellation work we do with our clients – and the debt he owed to Zulu rituals that he witnessed and studied.<sup>5</sup> I can think of many other examples, including myself, citing Maori practices that I know very little about, but which seem beautifully generative.

We, as a coaching community, but also more widely in the Western world, are becoming more conscious of our own devastating 'footprint': how we have obliterated and appropriated many original cultures, and how we have eradicated, controlled, degraded and tweaked natural species as well as alternative ways of life. We realise how all of this has never taken place with 'informed consent', ie, never according to our own (more recent) coaching standards. Many coaches are only beginning to realise this, and feel increasingly implicated in the tragic loss of biodiversity and human diversity on our planet.

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**I think it is time to ask ourselves, what good is coaching doing in the world?**

### Case example: A complicated history

For me, there is no more powerful or direct reminder of the centuries of oppression and their impact on us than my current workplace, Ashridge. Ashridge House was paid for by Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, who added greatly to his family's already sizeable fortunes by becoming the first canal-building entrepreneur in Britain in the 18th century (and the richest nobleman in the country). The family home from the early 19th century is of such a scale that it now houses an entire college in the field of business studies. The building is awe-inspiring, and it is always meaningful to observe how guests (students, participants, clients) respond to it on their first visit.

For some, the building evokes a visceral hatred about how much the dominant classes and the English nobility have taken from the people and other nations. Others adopt a gracious pose and feel quickly at home, as if this was their natural habitat. The most painful events, which nevertheless regularly occur, are when Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse participants are asked by white participants where the milk is, or even receive an unsolicited 'word' about the quality of the refreshments. My own former boss, who is of South-Asian heritage, was once standing near his new Mercedes car when a student got in and addressed him with 'Luton Airport, please'. Many aspects of the House, such as the Churchill or the Windsor rooms, can evoke visceral, pre-conscious emotions from a heritage that may be barely processed within us, let alone healed. Faculty members have increasingly become conscious of their own implication in the continuation of these bullying dynamics, and we experience deep conflict: we may feel pride of association mixed with ambivalence about the history. Compared to even a few years ago, we now complete incident forms when bullying happens, and more actively support our students and employees in addressing such aggression.

Within coaching and psychotherapy, the recognition of implication in suffering has led to a healthy movement towards 'decolonising': opening up space for other cultures and traditions (as well as trampled approaches in the helping professions), such as indigenous and transpersonal traditions.

Taking a step back, I notice how over the last 50 years, we have moved from being a 'blank screen' in our profession to being increasingly informed by, and explicit about, our own principles; firstly, about coaching and coaching ethics, and more recently, we find ourselves drawn to be principled outside of our coaching too, regarding the wider conflicts in the world. There are some wholesome and lofty principles underpinning coaching: openness to all information and intention (provided no-one is harmed), promotion of diversity, dialogue and democracy in the workplace, respect for truth, disclosure and redress of any informational advantage, for example. Increasingly, we also want to explicitly incorporate wider principles: doing all we can to reverse carbon emissions, to fight ignorance and disinformation, and to uphold scientific (statistical) truths.

It is very difficult to stand for such wider principles without becoming a politician or an advocate. However, one cannot be a coach and an advocate at the same time, and that leads to a new tension in our profession. I often feel that our rediscovered, noble principles may, if we are not careful, undermine our stance and contribution as coaches, where we want to be open and supportive of our clients' principles even if they differ from our own. With increased polarisation in the world, it is becoming harder to support the widest range of clients, including those clients who do not adhere to these same principles, yet are motivated to change and be challenged, in honest reflection, on themselves and their world views.





### Case example: The elephant in the room

I am very concerned about the Russo-Ukrainian war and I have found it increasingly difficult to work with Russian clients. I believe it is a war of empire and has no just cause, so I blame the Russians and not only their leaders, but also the people for not standing up to them, even if that would be admittedly risky and even heroic. This is such a strong view that I have felt that it is important to tell all my Russian clients, and to withdraw from Russian institutional clients.

Even as I write this, it feels principled, but it also feels like discrimination. I am very proud that I am still working with Russian clients and that I talk about the war with them. I want them to know how I might struggle with empathy and how I might say something provocative that I will regret. Some of my Russian coaching assignments have become very emotional, almost as if on a small scale, we had to work through the conflict first before we could move on to do meaningful work together. This feels like tension, misunderstanding and irritation in the first coaching hour – and then (so far) tears, closeness and intimacy in the second hour: more intimacy than I felt before. I feel different. My Russian clients feel different too. Often, they seem to feel hopeless, unloved, and deeply conflicted and compromised, and fearful of the pain of decades or even generations, before reconciliation might be possible. In every session, we have had to remove the sting of advocacy and disturbance, before being able to return to respect and non-directiveness, and all those other good ingredients of coaching. More generally, I am convinced that some societal events can become such a big elephant in the room that we have to name it, despite our discomfort. There is always a temptation to repress the visceral feelings, rather than recognise them as a potential way into a richer and more honest dialogue.

It seems to me we need to cherish and protect the spirit of inquiry in the deepest sense, by inquiring into our own stance and position in the world, the impact on thinking and feeling of our own age, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, physical and neurodiversity, political persuasions, etc. This process of considering, with others, the position that I have acquired in the world, of reviewing the privileges and the obstacles that manifest in my relating to others, is an awareness I want to expand, if my decolonising is to have any real meaning and impact.

### Working with ambivalence

I am increasingly convinced that issues of difference and oppression should be thought about and explicitly considered in every coaching relationship. We should help bring them to the surface and be in touch with our own implication and potential guilt. Not so much our own implication through experience in organisations, which can be (even unwittingly) demeaning and retraumatising, but our implication in wealth extraction, exploitation, and oppression, through ourselves, forebears, and loved ones. This, our past, can make it nigh impossible to understand the other person fully, from within, however much we might want and be craving to.

As I wrote before, virtually every coaching question has some ambivalence at its core,<sup>6,7</sup> and as coaches, we have to help our clients to overcome this ambivalence, by, for example, deepening their understanding, formulating a way through, or acquiring a 'both-and' rather than an 'either-or' position. It seems to me that increasingly we need to overcome still deeper ambivalences, even when we ourselves are implicated:

- I can feel implicated in whiteness and oppression, *and still* be capable of acting helpfully
- I can be conscious of oppression, wastefulness or greed, *and still* inquire into sources of change and liberation
- I may be critical of corporate inequality, toxicity, and oppression in organisations, *and yet* support individuals with persuasions very different from my own, within organisations with end goals that I do not support or agree with
- I may be receiving privileged information *and yet* abrogate privileges that my clients do not have.

I believe the future of executive coaching is contingent on our success in working with these ambivalences, doubts and dilemmas.

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**I am increasingly convinced that issues of difference and oppression should be thought about and explicitly considered in every coaching relationship**

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### Case example: Ethical boundaries

A colleague worked as one of few executive coaches recommended by the Head of People to managers within a large multinational organisation. This relationship worked to great benefit because the coach learned to understand the corporate culture and its many challenges, and the Head of People found a trusted coach that they could recommend to managers.

A new client relationship would generally begin with two emails from the Head of People: one to coach and coachee encouraging them to begin a contracting conversation, and the other to the coach only, with a few words about the coachee.

When, after many years, another Head took over, the second email suddenly became a lot longer and included more details about the prospective client. The first thing the coach noted was her slight annoyance at having to read longer emails. Only later, upon bringing this to supervision, did it dawn on her that perhaps this 'inner knowledge' about coachees before even meeting them had an impact on the relationship: that the coach now had a lot more information about her clients that she felt she could not share with them. Still later, she realised that she had likely been crossing an important ethical boundary. She went back to the new Head of People and requested either a halt to the briefings, or that the information they contained was also copied to the coachee.

### Practical implications for coaches

- **Take information more seriously** in order to remain truly open and trustworthy. This is about the importance of 'no informational advantage': the 'duty of candour' that is in our modern ethical codes.<sup>9</sup> In other words, if I hear something about my coaching client, then I need to share the information and its source with them, even if that may cause conflict for me. I need to say when I think a comment is sexist or when I hear an assumption that we might agree with a policy or a stance in conflict or war. I need to learn to say all of that in a way that invites shared reflection rather than the closing of doors. This can be a lifelong journey in openness. It means that I have to tell my client what I hear about him/her from the HR director, or that I refuse to bring any information elsewhere including seemingly innocent things like attendance or numbers of sessions. It also means that if I am aware of a mistake that I made which involves my client, such as sending an email to the wrong person, I need to tell my client in order to remain truthful
- **Work with the 'other side'** without othering. Stay in conversation, stay open to other viewpoints, but speak about the horror, pain and crimes committed as I see them

- **Work on self and identity** – name the possible differences in experience or outlook in the room, and own the fact that I may not understand because my sexuality, ethnicity, or level of privilege is not the same. At the same time, take a meta-perspective on these matters; eg, stay in conversation but say if I controversially agree with Israel's politics or with JK Rowling's views on biology and gender, for example
- **Extend the work to other stakeholders** (including the natural realm). This means that I look at the impact of our coaching and the leadership of my client on their team and peers, but also on more distant employees in the organisation, and even on those who may be affected beyond the organisation. It means I address excesses of leadership by looking at primary process and, just as I look with a leader about their impact on others, I need to keep the potential impact on the planet in mind.

These four bullet points sound simple but in practice, dealing with crisis in the world is not easy or straightforward. I have become quite good at recognising the 'look of dismissal' as I call it, the moment a client realises that I am 'not one of us'. Suddenly, the psychological contract and the bridge of rapport in the room collapses and there is the big chasm of judgment, misunderstanding and transference hurt. Rupture is too soft a word; it feels more like existential loneliness. Being able to, in some way, overcome this profound hurt can be a powerful antidote to the othering that has just taken place. If we both make it to the other side, the work can become deeply meaningful and healing for both of us. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Erik de Haan** MSc, MA, PhD, is Director of Ashridge's Centre for Coaching at Hult International Business School and Professor of Organisation Development at the VU University Amsterdam. He joined Ashridge in 2002. His coaching approach is informed by his psychodynamic psychotherapy and counselling training. He specialises in working with the organisational unconscious and in helping to surface hidden aspects of the person, company or team. He has co-written 16 books and more than 200 professional and research articles.

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# Curious, confident and courageous:

coaching in the  
workplace revolution





## Author of new book *Punks in Suits*, **Blaire Palmer**, shows us the unique role that we coaches have to play in developing the bold and brave leaders of tomorrow

**W**e are on the cusp of a revolution in how we harness the talent of people in organisations. Having been a coach for the past 25 years, this interests me greatly. When I started out in the profession, back in 2000, I was still on dial-up internet, my coaching sessions were conducted by telephone, and I posted newsletters to my clients in the mail.

In 25 years, I imagine we will look back at how we coach today with the same sense of disbelief.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is going to play a huge role in our profession. We like to think we bring our unique 'human-ness' to our coaching, but after 25 years, I know that many of the questions I ask my clients could be asked by a bot just as well. There aren't that many variations, and if AI listened to all of my coaching sessions for the next 12 months, I'm pretty sure it could do a good approximation of what I do 90% of the time.

Of course, there is the essential question: Do people want to be coached by a bot? Or are they, in part, looking for the human connection – being heard, empathy, the sense that they are unique in the world, and that the questions being asked and the solutions being generated are specific to them – that only a person can provide?

This same question is currently being asked by professional people in corporations all over the world. How much of what we do, which we have assumed was enhanced by our humanity, could be carried out more effectively by AI? And how much of what we do requires our human attributes?

If, as the World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests,<sup>1</sup> 42% of business tasks will be automated in the next five years compared to 34% currently, including tasks around reasoning, communicating and co-ordinating, we may be shocked by how redundant we really could be.

However, I think this presents an opportunity. If nearly half of what we do currently could be done just as well by AI, that means we can consider all the ways we haven't yet used our human qualities, simply because we've not had the time. If, instead of filling my time with note-taking, sending emails, managing my diary, co-ordinating logistics with my team, doing research, filling in my expenses, and even asking the same questions over and over to different people before we get to the really unique stuff, I could focus exclusively on connecting deeply with my clients, connecting deeply with myself, taking care of my mental and physical wellbeing, wrangling with ethical topics with other humans, innovating and creating, and taking the insights provided to me by the AI coaches who 'work for me' to see trends and opportunities for my clients' growth that get us to a breakthrough faster, this would certainly fill my time. It would just be very different from what I do today.

Apply the same to the people we coach. And then consider what kind of organisational cultures will be needed – and consequently what kind of leadership will be required – to create environments where people can fully embrace their humanity because, frankly, it is the only quality that differentiates them from AI.

In my new book, *Punks in Suits: how to lead the workplace reformation*,<sup>2</sup> I lay down the gauntlet to today's leaders. I ask them to accept the challenge of leaving their organisations in a better state than they found them by rejecting outdated beliefs about people and how to get the best from them, and creating organisational cultures where humans can leverage their humanity and do their best work, leaving the bots to do the rest. This requires creating organisational cultures that are far more 'humane' than they are today. It means believing that people are generally trying to do their best but are fighting a fundamentally broken system that treats them like second-rate machines, and which fears their humanity because it is unpredictable, emotion-driven and probably self-serving. It means shifting from being the supervisor, parent, controller, brains and decision maker in the operation, to being the enabler of the talent of others, a partner, a liberator and a source of information others mine in order to make their own decisions and manage themselves.

Ultimately, it means turning their organisations into a force for good in the world – both limiting or reversing the harm they do to the environment, to the communities in which they operate and to society's levels of trust in business as an institution, and by providing meaningful, life-enhancing working environments where people don't just survive but actually thrive.

This requires bravery. To bring forth this future, today's leaders would have to call into question every piece of conventional wisdom, every sacred cow, and even be willing to give away the power and influence they themselves had accumulated.

### Challenging the status quo

One-to-one coaching offers a confidential and judgment-free thinking space for our clients. They take their breakthroughs gleaned in coaching back into their leadership practice, which has a 'multiplier' effect. Many others benefit from an enlightened leader, often learning how to lead better, think better and listen better, by observing how our clients apply what they are learning about themselves and their own leadership.

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However, I'm talking here about systemic change that goes to the heart of the beliefs that currently determine how businesses operate. Even our own clients, on the journey of self-awareness, can take for granted hardwired beliefs such as:

- 'People don't like change';
- 'Some people don't care about their work as much as others';
- 'Influencing skills are essential to navigate the inevitably political environment of work';
- 'I am in this role because I have more experience/more talent/care more/know more/am a better decision maker and therefore I will need to step in and take control of situations others can't handle';
- 'Some people will try to get away with doing nothing/taking advantage/pursuing self-serving agendas so we need controls, processes and checks and balances to prevent this from happening'.

It is also commonplace for leaders to be cautious about emotion at work – their own and that of other people. Yes, there is a time for people to 'feel' but ultimately there is work to do and sometimes you have to leave your emotions at the door.

However, if the future is one where AI will do all tasks that do benefit from emotion-free analysis of data, repetitive tasks, tasks where efficiency and predictability are paramount and where information is available to all instantly, we need far more radical change – and therefore, far more radical leadership – than the typical workplace culture or engagement programme can provide.

### The importance of trust

Two key beliefs that stem from the industrial age sit at the heart of how we organise people and therefore how we see the role of leaders:

**1. People are second-rate machines.** Machines are efficient and predictable. People are not. Therefore, in order to be productive, people need to be more machine-like and we need to treat them like machines. Therefore, we need processes, working hours, contracts of employment, role descriptions, layers of hierarchy, regular meetings, checklists and detailed plans. If a machine can provide efficiency and predictability, it's best to use the machine

**2. People are trying to get away with something.** Given the freedom to make their own decisions, too many people will take advantage for their own benefit. They will be lazy. They will steal stationery. They will prioritise their own success at the

expense of others. Therefore, we need processes, reporting lines, regular meetings, to sign off expenses, withhold sensitive information, push decision making up the organisation, check people's work and outline acceptable behaviours in our employee manual.

Even organisations who claim trust is important make it conditional: 'Show me you can be trusted, and I will give you more freedom'.

However, if the only differentiator humans bring to their work is their humanity, we have to stop treating them like second-rate machines. And we have to be less afraid of their humanity. Yes, people are emotional. That is their superpower. They care about all sorts of things. They care about the wellbeing of their family, their future security, being appreciated and valued, having agency over their lives, making a difference. They get a sense of meaning from doing a good job, making someone's day, helping a colleague, being part of something greater than themselves.

When challenging emotions come up, when people act out or when they operate with lowest common denominator thinking e.g., by stealing pens or seeking proximity to power, this isn't evidence of a bad apple. It is a signal that all is not well in the organisational culture. If a person feels they have no influence, no voice, no agency other than to steal pens or game the political system, they will. It's the only way to gain some sense of those needs being met.

Leaders of tomorrow need to notice such behaviour and dive deeper. As the coaches of these leaders, we have a significant role to play in highlighting their own responses to these behaviours, and inviting them into dialogue and reflection: *What is going on systemically in your workplace culture? How are you sending the message that your people are not trusted? Which outdated, industrial age beliefs are being played out in how you lead? Rather than focusing on how other people need to change, what do you need to do differently as a leader to create an environment where people can be their best selves?*

We don't create braver, more courageous leaders by reinforcing these beliefs. We do this by exposing their underlying beliefs and calling them to account.

Rejecting these two outdated beliefs also means embracing emotion of all kinds and seeing it as a barometer of the culture of the organisation, and therefore the levels of enlightenment

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**If the only differentiator humans bring to their work is their humanity, we have to stop treating them like second-rate machines. And we have to be less afraid of their humanity. Yes, people are emotional. That is their superpower**



among the leadership team. Leaders need to be able to identify what emotions are coming up for them and what they signal. It is in the places where they become most uncomfortable that their greatest opportunity to learn and grow lies.

### Questions, not answers

This new leadership mindset also requires jettisoning the assumption that decision making should be pushed upwards in an organisation. This is another example of distrust of everyone but the most senior individuals, and a rather self-aggrandising idea that only the chosen few have the capacity to set aside personal agendas, wrangle complexity and make sensible decisions for the good of the business and its customers.

Instead, as coaches, we need to support clients in pushing decision making down to the person or people who will have to implement the decision. Rather than being the answer person, this changes the role of the leader to 1) the question person, and 2) a person who gives away their knowledge, expertise and experience to enhance the ability of others to make better decisions. Senior leaders often make poor decisions which don't work on the ground. They are too far from the detail, they cannot know the full picture (without meddling in everyone else's business, which they frequently do), and people don't tell them the truth. The information they get is sanitised. Let's not take their word for it that they were 'forced' in some way to step in and overrule, or that only they have the full picture. When we believe their 'story' they are always going to present themselves as heroic. We need to ask tougher questions when we sense they are the hero of their tale.

Leaders must let go of their ego's attachment to being right and being better. Like a great coach, they have to hold lightly to their ideas, being willing to share them to enhance the pool of information but then trusting others to make a decision for themselves. If that decision proves to have unintended consequences, they have to assist the person in using these insights to enhance their decision making in future. In reality, there is rarely a right answer anyway. Just a best-for-now answer from which we learn, tweak, try again and continue to iterate as the situation changes and we gather more data from the experience. We have to be willing to hold them accountable for this.

### Waving a beacon on the horizon

Maybe you're wondering if there is even a need for 'leaders' in the future. After all, if we start to trust people to manage themselves and make their own decisions, how will our clients fill their day?

In addition to sharing their wisdom and asking provocative questions, there are two elements that make a leader, a leader.

First, *they hold the vision or destination up for others*. They remind people of the direction of travel so that decisions are made in the light of where we are going, even when that means short-term pain for long-term gain.

And second, *they clear a path*. They 'go first'. If leaders want people to speak their mind, they need to be brave enough to speak their mind. If they want people to use emotion as a signal, they need to see their own emotions as a signal. If they want people to find meaning in their work, they need to find

their own meaning. If they want people to take care of their mental wellbeing, and so on. Leaders go first.

We cannot expect others to do what we are unwilling to do. We need to experience it first. Every time our clients are disappointed in others, we have to shine the light back on them: *How are you in the way of their best work? How do you disempower? What beliefs do you hold on to which limit the potential of others? What do you need to learn in order to be a better leader for them?*

### Our role as coaches

As coaches, we cannot be neutral. We aren't anyway, so why pretend? The changes required in terms of how we harness human beings in organisations are as significant as the changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. We cannot act as if it isn't happening.

We need our clients – the leaders of today – to be braver. We need them to be endlessly curious. We need them to question everything they thought was true about themselves and about people. We need them to go towards tensions in their organisation, not find workarounds. We need them to speak up. We need them to listen so hard, they might change their minds.

And that means holding ourselves to the same standards. Just as a leader cannot expect others to do what they are not willing to do, the same applies to us. What do we blindly accept about the way things are? What do we collude with or tolerate, either in the ways we work or the ways our client organisations work? What beliefs do we share with our coachees and therefore never think to question?

AI is great at distilling what has already been thought about, written about and researched. It finds insights in these data, often shining a light on trends a human being would miss. But it can't go further than that. It can't think a fresh, never-before thought-of thought.

If we are unwilling to question everything that we thought we knew and generate brand new, radical, innovative ideas, then really we are saying that a bot could do our job. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Blaire Palmer** is a former BBC journalist turned keynote speaker on the future of leadership and

work, who has worked on flagship Radio 4 programmes like *Today* and *Woman's Hour*. For the past 24 years, Blaire has worked with organisations helping to drive real change in their businesses and create places where people can come and do their best work. Currently, Blaire speaks internationally at conferences and events, calling on audiences of senior leaders to rethink what leadership means in the modern era. Her new book, *Punks in Suits*

(2024), is a call to arms for leaders to embrace change and a practical guide offering clarity on the most pertinent workplace challenges of the modern era.

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# Research digest



In this issue, **Xenia Kontogianni** investigates the latest research on the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in successful coaching outcomes

## How important is EI in achieving personal and professional success?

Emotional intelligence (EI) broadly encompasses the competences that allow individuals to recognise their own emotional states and those of others (self-awareness and social awareness), and the ability to regulate these emotions to enhance performance and maintain healthy relationships.

EI was first conceptualised over 25 years ago and has since been popularised as a predictor of human performance that goes beyond traditional measures of general intelligence.<sup>1,2</sup> In the business world, EI has gained significant attention. Despite ongoing debates about its validity as a construct, human resource professionals have invested heavily in selecting and training employees with higher EI. This investment has been supported by numerous studies demonstrating that leaders and managers with high EI, positively influence workplace relationships and organisational effectiveness. Given that EI has acquired so much face validity in the realms of personal achievement and organisational effectiveness, it is interesting to see whether EI competences can be trained in a coaching or educational setting. It is also logical to ask whether EI could be considered a coaching competency, since a coaching environment that values the EI virtues of coaches may increase their effectiveness.

The EI literature is divided between two main approaches: one views EI as a skill or ability, while the other sees EI as a trait. The skill-based approach views EI as the ability to process emotional information about yourself and others effectively, using this information to guide thinking and behavioural changes. In contrast, the trait-based approach includes a broad range of personality traits that encompass motivation, temperament, character, and social skills beyond simple emotional recognition and regulation. Consequently, these approaches use different methods to measure EI. For the sake of simplicity,

this article does not distinguish between these approaches any further.

## Can EI be trained in different learning environments?

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of various learning environments, including coaching. One of the most significant was a meta-analysis conducted by Mattingly and Kraiger.<sup>3</sup> This analysis reviewed 58 published and unpublished studies that included programmes for EI training. The findings indicated a moderate positive impact of these training programmes when considered

**Despite some debates, EI has proven valuable in human resource practices, fostering a more capable and emotionally aware workforce**

collectively. These results are valuable for practitioners who are evaluating the potential benefits of implementing EI training programmes in the workplace. Most reviewed studies have been based on pre- and post-EI assessments, following a particular mode of instruction. However, none have considered the effects of EI training on other outcomes of performance, such as job satisfaction, quality of relationships or stress management. In future investigations, researchers should go beyond this question and

examine the broader impact of training. One such study that deserves special mention is the review of a one-year programme regarding person-centred business coaching with management and production team members, that found a positive effect on the development of emotional and social intelligence skills.<sup>4</sup>

## Do EI coach competences affect the outcome of coaching?

EI is also crucial as a core competency for successful coaching. An analysis of the core coaching competences outlined by the Executive Coaching Forum and the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches revealed that over half align with facets of EI models.<sup>5</sup> Despite this overlap, initial evidence indicates that a coach's EI does not correlate with the coachee's perceived quality of the coaching relationship.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that client-reported quality may not be the most accurate measure of coaching effectiveness, and future research should investigate the link between a coach's EI and overall coaching success. A more recent study by Charles discovered a lack of published research on the connection between EI and performance among executive coaches.<sup>7</sup> Follow-up research by Charles failed to find a significant relationship between a coach's EI and his or her performance, possibly due to the performance measures employed. Maybe the measures of performance played an important role and the results cannot be generalised any further. For instance, Charles measured 'performance' as the number of clients attracted by the participating coaches in the course of one year.

More studies have looked into the importance of EI as a coaching competency, particularly in sports. Coaching elite athletes often occurs in emotionally charged and stressful environments, especially after poor performance, team defeats, and high standards set by sports organisations.

In such settings, the ability to comprehend both personal and others' emotions, manage negative thoughts and emotions, and develop future intervention plans are critical competences for coaches. However, this brief review has not found evidence to support the idea that EI competences improve coaching performance. For example, Magrum and Manninen studied 280 head collegiate coaches in basketball and volleyball, exploring the relationship between the coaches' EI and their 'career winning percentage', which was determined using data from institutional websites and NCAA databases.<sup>8</sup> The regression analysis showed that EI did not significantly predict coaching success. Similar results were obtained by Shi and Chang in a sample of basketball coaches evaluated by the players for their EI styles and a set of coach abilities.<sup>9</sup> The results did not find any significant relationship between coach's EI aspects (eg self-awareness, control, social awareness and relationship skills) and coaching abilities such as patience, strategic thinking, leadership, empathy and flexibility.

Nevertheless, research into sports coaching has identified a positive link between a coach's EI and his or her coaching efficacy, which reflects the coach's own perception of their ability to drive change during sessions. For example, Mehrparvar and Moosavi found that coaches' perceived EI capabilities — such as their ability to monitor and regulate changes in excitement during coaching — had a positive impact on their confidence and beliefs in their coaching effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> This relationship was considered to foster a leadership style that aligns with the athlete's condition, enhancing the athlete's attitude and relationship with the coach, thereby improving their learning and performance.

An earlier study involving university coaches discovered a positive connection between the coaches' EI and their coaching efficacy, which reflects confidence in their ability to develop adaptable game strategies and build athletes' character.<sup>11</sup> More recent research also found a positive correlation between coaches' EI competences and their job satisfaction, including aspects like personal commitment, game strategy, flexibility and overall team performance.<sup>12</sup> Since sports coaching occurs in high-pressure environments, managing stress is a crucial skill. In this context, Sirin examined whether higher EI scores could predict the use of effective stress-coping strategies among a sample of 80 volleyball coaches. The findings indicated that elevated EI helped coaches avoid ineffective responses and instead fostered reliance on social support, enhancing their ability to manage stress effectively.<sup>13</sup>

To sum up, while existing studies indicate that EI plays a role in job performance, social skills,

leadership and overall organisational success, additional research is required to validate its significance in coaching effectiveness.

### In conclusion

Despite some debates, EI has proven valuable in human resource practices, fostering a more capable and emotionally aware workforce. Training EI in coaching and educational settings shows promise, although the broader impact on job satisfaction, relationship quality and stress management requires further study. However, the other side of the coin, that is, EI as a core competency in coaching presents a complex picture. While there is overlap between coaching skills and EI facets, linking a coach's EI to client outcomes remains challenging. Measures of coaching effectiveness need to go beyond client-reported quality and basic performance metrics to fully capture the impact of EI. By focusing on a more holistic approach to evaluating coaching success, including factors such as improved communication, conflict resolution and long-term personal growth, the true value of EI in coaching could be better understood.

In sports coaching, EI has played a crucial role in enhancing coaching efficacy and self-perception. Coaches with high EI were better equipped to manage stress, build confidence, and foster positive athlete-coach relationships, which can improve overall team performance and individual athlete development. High EI enables coaches to understand and regulate their emotions, allowing them to remain calm and strategic under pressure. This emotional regulation helps in creating a supportive and motivating environment for athletes, particularly in high-stress situations such as competitions and defeats.

In conclusion, while the relationship between EI and coaching effectiveness is multifaceted, existing evidence suggests that high EI has some potential to enhance coaching outcomes. By developing a deeper understanding of how EI competencies contribute to coaching success, and by implementing targeted training and evaluation methods, the coaching profession can maximise the potential benefits of EI, leading to more effective and impactful coaching practices. ■

### 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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# ‘Superwise’:

the challenge and the magic  
of integrated supervision

With the launch of a new supervision training programme dedicated purely to integrative practice, author of *Personal Consultancy* and founder of the PGDip/MSc in integrated counselling and coaching at the University of East London (UEL), **Dr Nash Popovic**, talks to **Diane Parker**

### **How do you define integrative practice in general?**

Broadly speaking, integrative practice can be grouped into three categories.

The first is *fused integration* – where the ingredients are completely blended, such as when making a gin and tonic. An example of this kind of integration is cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), in which there is no demarcation between the cognitive and behavioural elements.

The second, *eclecticism*, is a kind of integration involving elements taken from various approaches but not in any systematic way – to use another food and drink analogy, this is more like making a fruit salad.

The third kind is a *demarcated integration*, which is more like drinking a tequila. You take salt, tequila and lime, but not at the same time, and in a particular order. Personal consultancy, the model of integration I practise and teach, belongs in this category.<sup>1</sup>

So, we use counselling and coaching skills with the same client but at different stages of the process. This is not about simply adding coaching to our counselling repertoire. The personal consultancy model integrates two basic modes of working with the client: *being* with the client and *doing* with the client. In other words, we are there for the client, to listen to them and to support them, but we are proactive as well in using certain interventions to help them make tangible changes outside sessions, in the real world.

We also integrate the scopes: working with the inner world of the client as well as ‘visible’ behavioural patterns. Furthermore, we integrate timeline: we work with the past, but we pay attention in equal measure to the present and the future. Too often, it is assumed that all clients’ issues stem from the past but it may, in fact, actually relate more to their future outlook (eg, fear of death and dying, or lack of meaning and hope).

We also integrate problem-focused and solution-focused methods. This requires bringing together skills and practices from a variety of approaches into one coherent model. What we don’t integrate are theories of these approaches, as that is impossible because they contradict each other. So, personal consultancy is firmly based on practice. We are primarily interested in what works – what can make a difference for our clients.

### **You led the MSc in integrative counselling and coaching for more than a decade, and you left that to run a training in integrative supervision. Why was that?**

I like the challenge. The MSc in integrative counselling and coaching became an enormously popular and successful programme, and I felt that it was time for me to move on to the next stage for this novel approach. Developing training in integrative supervision appears to be a natural step in that direction. When you think about that – what a strange job supervision is! You supervise people without ever seeing their clients or their work. How do you know that your supervisee is telling the truth about what’s happening behind closed doors? What guarantees do you have that your supervisee will take on board what you discussed, or that an excellent supervision session will translate into equally effective or helpful supervisee’s client sessions? And yet you need to help them learn, grow and navigate all the vagaries of one-to-one work. That’s the challenge and the magic of supervision.

### **Why do we need integrative supervision? What purpose does it fulfil, and how does it serve our clients – and the profession as a whole?**

One of the major challenges my students on the MSc integrative counselling and coaching programme experienced was finding a truly integrative supervisor. There is still a gap in the market in this respect. We simply need more trained integrative supervisors to plug this gap. Integrative supervision serves our clients and the profession as a whole, mainly because it has the potential of making our profession more effective. Some clients come to see a counsellor because they want an opportunity to unload, to talk to somebody, but most come because they are not where they want to be. I have never had a client who is totally happy with where they are; they usually want to make some changes in their life. I believe that we can be far more effective in this way, and integrative practice can play a big part in that. This is because an integrative practitioner can work with the inner world of the client – helping them resolve internal conflicts and overcome inner barriers that prevent them from moving on. But they can also help them build on that – make concrete ‘visible’ behavioural changes and achieve their goals. This is like rebuilding the house: if you just focus on the foundations, you still don’t have good walls and roof. On the other hand, you can build a wonderful house, but if you don’t address its foundations, it will not last long. What an integrative practitioner can do is build the house on good foundations that will help the client to not only make a change but also create sustainable, lasting change. Integrative supervision is an essential part of that journey.

When I did some preliminary research in preparation for creating the training, it struck me that many practitioners find supervision boring. I think this is because they don’t get from supervision what they would really like, which is how to do what they do better, how to be more successful at their job, and how to produce better results with their clients. It seems that too much time in supervision is still spent on talking about and analysing the client, rather than on the process that is going on. Interestingly, existing supervision training courses also spend precious little time on how to produce good results. This is



understandable, as these courses attract people from different modalities, and you don't want to impose your way of working (your approach) onto them. So, the aspect of the training that focuses on helping supervisees be more effective with their clients falls between the cracks. The training in integrative supervision has an advantage in this respect. As it is familiar and uses elements from different modalities, it can focus on helping trainees discern through discussion what can work well in various real-life situations.

### **What about practitioners who do not integrate their practices but offer coaching and therapy as distinct and separate services? Why might they be drawn to working with an integrative supervisor, and how might this benefit them and their clients?**

Well, it is actually quite hard to keep these two apart. More often than not, they complement each other, as in the familiar Taoist black and white Yin-Yang symbol. I see counselling as *Yin* and coaching as *Yang* (with those little pesky dots of the opposite in the middle of each), and as in most aspects of life, we often need both. Think about that: if you have a counselling client, would you not use your coaching skills if you knew that the client could benefit from them? We also know that many coaching clients need some counselling before they can really focus on achieving their goals. So, in my view, every practitioner could benefit from integrative supervision. The obvious benefit is that such supervisors can cover both aspects of their practice. But there is more to that – it opens the door for those practitioners to take a step toward integrating the best of both worlds, by learning to determine when and how these practices can be used and combined in an ethical way. I think we tend to adhere to self-imposed boundaries between these two helping professions too rigidly.

### **What is the current demand for integrative supervision? As a practitioner, supervisor and educator, what changes and developments in the field have you noticed over the past 10 years, for example?**

There has been a steady march of integrative practice in the last 20 or so years. Before that, it was a relatively small niche, and now it is the fastest growing and dominant approach. Most practitioners claim that they practise integratively, although what they integrate and how, may differ widely. Integration between counselling and coaching is particularly popular with clients, which should not come as a surprise – why not get two for the price of one if you can? With the popularity of this kind of integration, the popularity and demand for integrative supervision will naturally grow, too.

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**Integrative supervision serves our clients and the profession as a whole, mainly because it has the potential of making our profession more effective**

### **If I am currently a practising coach, therapist or counsellor thinking of undergoing training in integrated supervision, what do I need to consider? What experience or training do I need to have?**

You need to practise integratively and love it! This does not necessarily have to be integration between counselling and coaching. After all, some counselling/therapeutic approaches, such as solution-focused therapy (SFT) are closer to coaching than counselling in nature. It is important, though, that you integrate elements of at least one 'relational' approach that prioritises exploring the inner world of the client (such as person-centred, existential or psychodynamic) and elements from at least one more proactive approach that emphasises behaviour change and goal attainment (such as SFT, CBT and coaching).

### **What are the benefits of training specifically as an integrative supervisor, as opposed to another training or modality? Who might I serve as a result of my training and experience in this specialist area – and how?**

I cannot generalise, as other trainings in integrative supervision may have different priorities. However, some of the things we would like our trainees to learn are:

- How to use supervision time productively, which requires minimising time spent on analysing the client. It's easy in supervision to slip into discussing clients, analysing what's wrong with them, where their issues stem from, their attachment styles, or their personality types. While this can make the supervisor and supervisee feel engaged and professional, it often does little to help the client get to where they want to be. We find that supervision is more effective if it focuses on the process that is taking place in the session, as well as how to help the client translate the benefits of the session into benefits in real life
- How to recognise blind spots in the supervisee's work. It's common to identify blind spots in hindsight – when it's too late. Our trainees will learn how to help supervisees recognise these in time, when they can do something about them
- How to listen, give feedback, and make suggestions without triggering supervisees' defence mechanisms, and how to create an atmosphere where supervisees feel safe and comfortable to open up and be honest. Integrative supervision is conducive in this respect as it is less ideologically driven. This means that it is less rigid and more open-minded to diverse views and perspectives, which, in turn, encourages supervisees to be more open, as they don't feel that they have to adhere to assumptions of a particular theoretical framework
- How to maintain focus in supervision sessions and help supervisees stay focused in sessions with their clients (this is based on the principles behind the personal consultancy model)
- How to help supervisees manage their own conflicts and barriers to productive work, such as lack of confidence, as well as overconfidence; not liking the client or liking/sympathising with them too much; being triggered or over-identifying with the client; and feeling stuck or rushing to help

- How supervisees can help clients find their way forward without being overly directive
- How to ensure supervisees receive consistent support, even with monthly or fortnightly sessions.

I am aware that each of these points may need further clarification and explanation, but that would take us way beyond the scope of this interview – perhaps we would need a book!

**I am not a supervisor, but over the course of my training and career as both coach and psychotherapist, I have been blessed to work with some remarkably skilled and inspiring supervisors, operating in a range of modalities, each offering something unique. In your experience as both a supervisor and supervisee, what would you say are the essential qualities of a good supervisor? And what additional skills and qualities do you consider to be especially important in order to carry out ethical and effective integrative supervision?**

This came up in a regular discussion group I run called Pub Psychology (so named because it generally takes place in a pub!). We were exploring something along these lines in a recent session on supervision, and it occurred to me that replacing the letter 'v' in the word 'supervise' with the letter 'w' might give us a clue about the most important quality of a supervisor. Supervision is not about *vision* but *wisdom*. A great supervisor has the wisdom to know how much they can do, as well as the wisdom to know their limits. They need to help their supervisees acquire the same wisdom; to help them be aware of their limits as well as constantly reaching beyond those limits. What does this mean in practice? It means

understanding that the limits to what we can do are always defined by the client and what they are willing to do. After all, they have to make any change, and we can't do it for them. This means that the core of our practice is collaboration. Working collaboratively is not just an ethical issue; it is a necessary condition for effective work. Pushing the boundaries means constantly exploring ways to deepen this collaboration so that it bears fruit outside the session and beyond their work with us.

The other essential quality of a supervisor is an ability to establish an 'I-thou' relationship.<sup>2</sup> We are now going through another wave of hype about artificial intelligence (AI) and the inevitable fears that AI will eventually replace counsellors and supervisors. I am old enough to have ridden these waves before and I have no fear that it will happen now or ever. This is because AI will never be able to do 'I-thou', as AI doesn't have 'I', nor is it capable of experiencing. This is why this quality is so important. Those who reduce their coaching, counselling or supervision practice to simply follow some form of protocol do so at their own peril.

More specifically, integrative supervisors need to be able to maintain balance. They need to be comfortable and confident enough to work in depth and help the supervisee deal with deeper issues, such as past traumas and existential issues, but also to be able to deal with the 'surface' (I use the term surface, to indicate the 'visible' aspects of our work, such as changing behavioural habits). They also need to be able to balance *being with* the client with *doing with* the client (eg, introducing some interventions), focusing on the problem with focusing on the solution, and balancing the focus on the past, the present and the future. And finally, they need to balance knowing and discovering, to keep the magic alive!

**Thank you, Nash. Keep us posted on that book! ■**



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr Nash Popovic** is the creator of the personal consultancy model for one-to-one practice that combines relational approaches with goal-orientated approaches such as CBT and coaching.

In 2014, Nash co-authored *Personal Consultancy* (Routledge, 2014), and in 2015, he launched the MSc in integrative counselling and coaching at the University of East London (UEL), the first programme of its kind in the world. He is the founder of the Personal Consultants and Integrated Practitioner Network (PCIPN) and integrative supervision training (<https://tinyurl.com/6hjs3srj>), as well as the creator of a comprehensive personal development guide,

*Personal Synthesis* ([www.personalsynthesis.com](http://www.personalsynthesis.com)). Nash also works as a personal consultant and integrative supervisor in private practice.

To learn more about the integrated supervision training, see the Personal Consultants and Integrated Practitioner Network at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdddxdx>

**Diane Parker** is the Editor of *Coaching Today*.

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# A flourishing community:

counsellors who coach

Psychotherapist, coach, supervisor and former Chair of BACP Coaching, **Lucy Myers**, outlines the history and current practice of therapeutically informed coaching, and offers guidance for dual-trained practitioners



**M**y relational, systemic and solutions-focused way of being with clients is 'about being present as a human being first; as therapist second'.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, my aim here is to share with you what I think it means to be a dual practitioner of coaching and counselling or psychotherapy. My hope is that you'll leave with some clarity about what practising psychotherapeutically informed coaching can look like. I hope too that this will inspire you to feel, like me, excitement and curiosity about working with clients, both at relational depth and with forward momentum, and that you'll know what steps to take next.

### Coaching: the story so far

In 2003, Michael Carroll famously described coaching as 'the new kid on the block'.<sup>2</sup> Twenty years later, the coach-therapy sector is an excitingly evolving space, with a growing evidence base and a flourishing 'dual practitioner' community. This growing presence is perhaps reflecting our changing world. Nobody needs reminding of the unprecedented events we have witnessed in recent times: the global COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, Black Lives Matter, Brexit, #MeToo, the cost-of-living crisis, the war in Ukraine, the Israel/Gaza conflict and more. Much has happened in such a short space of time, causing noticeable shifts in our collective consciousness. With organisations and communities increasingly recognising the need for mental wellbeing support that also builds capacity for progression and positive change, demand for the unique combination of skills that dual-trained coach-counsellor practitioners hold is rising.

At the turn of the century, professional bodies including the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC), and later the Association for Coaching (AC), were established to regulate the 'Wild West of coaching'.<sup>3</sup> Since then, significant research into whether coaching 'works' has been undertaken. The consensus is that coaching is an effective methodology for facilitating positive outcomes for clients<sup>4</sup>, with at least 80% of people who choose coaching faring better than those in the same circumstances who don't.<sup>5</sup>

### What are the differences between coaching and therapy?

As with counselling and psychotherapy, where modalities include person-centred, psychodynamic, existential and CBT, there are many different ways to practise coaching. Alongside the prevalence of sports coaching, there is executive coaching, life coaching, business coaching, NLP coaching, somatic coaching and an array of 'niche' coaching practices, including relationship, parenting, retirement, menopause and divorce coaching.

Debates have raged, with no definitive conclusions drawn, about the perceived differences and boundaries between

coaching and psychotherapy. Comparisons include a 'present' (coaching) versus 'past' (psychotherapy) focus; a highly functional (coaching) versus dysfunctional (psychotherapy) client base, and a focus on business performance improvement versus personal healing and recovery.<sup>6,7</sup> In 2002, Steven Berglas controversially warned of the 'danger' that non-psychologically trained coaches might ignore deep-seated psychological problems they don't understand, leading to negative outcomes for both the client and the organisations they work for. Others are less catastrophist, concluding that, if coaching fails to investigate the 'whole human', the risks are more superficial than dangerous.<sup>7</sup>

Western contends that, while modern-day coaching seeks to work with the 'celebrated self', the 'wounded self' will inevitably surface in the coaching room, and coaches must be able to work with all parts.<sup>8</sup> Kilburg supports Berglas' assertion that, in the wrong, 'untrained' hands, certain coaching interventions can do harm, but also highlights the risk that dual-trained practitioners who trained first as counsellors may focus on psychotherapeutic material that feels familiar and comfortable, rather than the work most necessary for executives operating in a business context.<sup>9</sup> Others support this, suggesting that a lack of organisational awareness in the 'therapist-turned-coach' population is just as likely to lead to ineffective outcomes for clients and their businesses as a lack of psychological awareness in the coach-turned-therapist.<sup>10</sup>

The EMCC states: 'Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential'<sup>11</sup> (p3). Clients use coaching to learn about themselves:

'Coaching is facilitating the client's learning process by using professional methods and techniques to help the client to improve what is obstructive and nurture what is effective, in order to reach the client's goals'.<sup>11</sup> (p3)

So, while the consensus is that coaches can work with clients who are experiencing what we might call 'everyday distress', including feelings of anxiety, worry or despair, the purpose of coaching is not to explore at depth or aim to heal deep emotional wounds or trauma. The BACP Coaching Competence framework states that coaching clients should 'have enough psychological resilience to engage proactively with what can

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**The coach-therapy sector is an excitingly evolving space, with a growing evidence base and a flourishing 'dual practitioner' community**

sometimes be a challenging process<sup>12</sup> and concludes: 'Coaching is therefore not generally suitable for clients who are having difficulties with day-to-day motivation and functioning, or who are experiencing, and seeking relief from, persistent and significant distress'.<sup>12</sup> (p17)

I think it's helpful to bring us back to the reason why we do this work – to help people. Clients come to both coaching and therapy because they want, or need, something in their lives to be different. Ultimately, coaching is rooted in a person-centred belief that people can 'self-actualise'<sup>13</sup>, given the right conditions. The focus in both domains is on the client's agenda; both centre around thoughtful conversations, draw on some of the same psychological theories and techniques, and regard the client-counsellor relationship as paramount. Coaching research supports findings from the psychotherapy domain that a strong 'working alliance'<sup>14</sup> is all-important, and report that a coaching relationship typified by factors such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, trust and transparency is necessary to facilitate positive outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Qualified coaches and therapists alike are also bound by the ethical codes of their respective professional bodies, which require practitioners to work to high standards of ethical and professional practice.

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## I think it's helpful to bring us back to the reason why we do this work – to help people

### **Integrating coaching and therapy ethically and with impact**

How does this integration benefit clients seeking to change? It has been widely acknowledged in the coaching community that a psychological understanding grounded in science underpins the process of human change, and that 'psychological mindedness'<sup>16</sup> is linked to positive outcomes for clients.

In the world of therapy, integration is the name given to a way of working in which a practitioner makes use of more than one modality, with the aim of meeting each client's needs more completely than the practitioner believes a single modality can.<sup>12</sup> (p17)

In the context of the coaching competences, 'integration describes a way of working that involves the intentional use of both therapeutic and coaching theories and techniques'.<sup>12</sup> (p17). The intentional use of psychotherapeutic theories and techniques has been documented as follows:

#### **Person-centred**

Lemisiou reports that a 'person-centred' psychotherapeutic approach to coaching assists in the development of the levels of emotional and social intelligence competence, resulting in better leadership performance and potential shifts in a client's 'internal frame of reference' that may impact outcomes beyond the completion of the coaching relationship.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Psychodynamic**

Critchley contends that a coach who practises relationally, needs an understanding of the nature and implications of

a client's unconscious psychological processes in order to facilitate positive outcomes.<sup>18</sup> Kilburg suggests a coach who can recognise and work with unconscious material, in the form of defensive reactions or dysfunctional patterns of thinking, is able to explain and change unhelpful or harmful patterns of decision making and behaviour that clients have been unable to effectively identify or address.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Working in the 'here and now'**

Cox and colleagues describe the efficacy of using 'Gestalt coaching' with clients to achieve significant, positive developmental change.<sup>19</sup> The co-created 'here-and-now' relationship is the central vehicle for transformation and development in coaching, with coaches who draw on Gestalt therapeutic influences being able to acknowledge the influence of past experience, while remaining focused on how they manifest in the present.

#### **Working with emotion**

The ability of an integrated dual practitioner to effectively contain and explore the emotions of clients within a coaching relationship is seen by both clients and coaches to heavily influence positive results.<sup>20</sup> De Haan suggests that experienced coaches with the appropriate psychotherapeutic training are most able to draw on their intuitive understanding of psychodynamic unconscious processes in 'critical moments' within coaching, and to possess the ability and courage to put these powerful observations forward to the client in a way that will allow them to be received, and insight and change to be created.<sup>21</sup>

### **Why do therapists and coaches want to integrate their practices?**

Sigmund Freud famously stated: 'Much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your neurotic misery into ordinary unhappiness'.<sup>22</sup> Oh the optimism! Of course, things have moved on considerably since then, and while all psychologically trained practitioners believe that alleviating misery is important, the coaches among us wish to help our clients go much further than this – not just to survive but to really thrive. While every dual practitioner journey and approach may differ, it seems many of us find the dynamic tension between an excavation of the past and proactive movement towards the future simultaneously energising, joyful and fulfilling – for us and for our clients.

Within the coach-therapist community, one of the current topics of discussion is what we call ourselves and how we describe our integrated practices. Some of the different ways my peer group with similar training across coaching and therapy describe what they do include psychological coaching, therapeutic coaching, and personal consultancy (we'll call this Group 1). Others who are dual-trained continue to describe their practices as distinctly separate, and may use the terms executive coaching or life coaching, and/or counselling or psychotherapy, depending on their training and their understanding of what a client needs from the work (Group 2). Many highly experienced dual practitioners focus solely on delivering coaching, usually with senior executives, and openly share with clients that their psychotherapeutic experience informs their way of being and approach to working with coaching clients (Group 3).



Another commonly asked question is how we ethically and professionally contract to work with clients. Again, it varies from practitioner to practitioner, but practitioners in Groups 1 and 3 will usually explain their approach as drawing on their coaching and therapy skills and backgrounds throughout the relationship, and usually have a single paper contract for clients to sign. Practitioners in Group 2 may have two separate contracts and, depending on the client's initial presenting issues, will discuss and agree with them the approach they feel is the best fit.

### What do you need to know before you start on this journey?

If any of the following statements ring true for you, then adding coaching to your therapeutic skillset could be something to explore further:

- You feel insight alone doesn't necessarily lead to change
- You believe people have the potential to achieve behavioural change faster than standard therapeutic processes allow for
- You want to support clients' need towards the end of therapy for something more future-focused
- You feel your business background or strategic mindedness may help your clients
- You feel the energy and goal-focused forward momentum of a coaching relationship will suit your personality.

But there are some issues you need to be aware of. While the world is changing and demand for coaching is growing, the therapy-coaching world is still predominantly white and middle-class. Although the counselling profession is largely female, the upper echelons and thought leaders of the coaching world are still mostly male. To fully represent the client base, we need more diversity in coaching, across gender, race, class, religion, sexuality and disability. I am proud of my own working-class roots and my confidence continues to grow to be truly who I am, with everyone I meet. We need to professionalise this evolving area as effectively as possible. We are working to avoid a 'new Wild West' of therapeutically informed coaches, and I'm hopeful that the next few years will see progress in formalising training, registration and accreditation for coach-therapists, in alignment with the structures and frameworks established by the professional bodies for counsellors. Collaboration between professional bodies from both the therapy and coaching worlds will be necessary.

If any of this whets your coaching appetite, my advice would be to reach out, connect and get your questions answered. My experience of the coaching-therapy community is that it's inclusive, supportive, authentic, friendly, warm and passionate. So, get in touch with a group or join a network and start to feel your way into what might be right for you next. After all, to use a classic coaching question, What's the worst that could happen? And what's the best? ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Lucy Myers'** integrated approach draws on experience as a psychotherapist, executive coach, systemic team coach and coach supervisor. A former Chair of BACP Coaching, and as founder of Therapeutic Coaching Consultancy, Lucy combines the solutions-focused energy of coaching with the healing empowerment and psychological insight of psychotherapy, to enhance personal and professional flourishing for individuals and teams.

BACP are currently involved in research to define therapeutic coaching. For more information, please contact Lucy via her website: [www.therapeuticcoachingconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.therapeuticcoachingconsultancy.co.uk)

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# Optimising for digital coaching:

## six practical steps for professional coaches



**Jonathan Passmore** explores how digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionising coaching, and offers guidance for coaches in responding to these forces of change

**T**he coaching industry has undergone a remarkable change over the past decade, largely driven by technological advancements and wider societal attitudes towards hybrid working and personal development. This change has been particularly pronounced since the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the transition from face-to-face to digital coaching.<sup>1</sup>

The trend towards digital coaching is poised to continue, supported by the growth in both the scale and number of digital platforms and the emergence of AI-enabled coaching. However, the move to an online environment necessitates careful consideration of various factors to maintain the professionalism and efficacy of coaching services, alongside a change in attitude and skills for coaches, given the pace of change.

### **The evolving landscape of coaching**

Historically, coaching was predominantly a face-to-face interaction. We estimate that over 90% of sessions were still conducted in person as recently as 2014, with the remaining 10% being largely phone-based. A decade later, this has shifted dramatically, with 90% of coaching conversations occurring online.<sup>2</sup> Despite this shift, face-to-face coaching remains relevant, as is evidenced by the continued growth in outdoor coaching and a preference from some clients for in-person sessions. What is interesting, however, is that the debate about face-to-face coaching being 'better' or more superior has largely ended, with research evidence confirming that outcomes between face-to-face and online coaching are largely comparable.<sup>3</sup>

While many coaches have transitioned from face-to-face to digital practice, administration and management of these online coaching environments remain varied, particularly as most coach training still focuses on face-to-face experience.<sup>4</sup> Coaches must now give as much attention to their digital spaces and brand as they previously did to their physical one.

### Ensuring reliable connections

A starting point for this is ensuring the stability and reliability of internet connectivity and associated power supply. This is especially true in regions of the world prone to scheduled power outages. In such cases, backup generators or battery systems can provide an uninterrupted power source. Similarly, internet connectivity can vary widely, even within developed regions. From my own experience, living in a rural location in the UK, albeit less than 50 miles from London, internet speeds supplied by the local phone provider rarely exceeded 2mbs. As we became increasingly reliant on connectivity in 2020, we switched to a radio mast provider and saw our download speeds increase from 2 to 50mbs, with a significant improvement in the stability of the connection. Coaches should aim to do the same: reviewing providers, as well as using wired connections from box to computer, and employing signal repeaters to improve connectivity throughout their home, using systems such as Devolo.

Security is another critical aspect of connectivity. In 2014, individuals gave little consideration to security. As cybercrime has grown, coaches need to ensure their networks are secure with strong passwords and, where possible, virtual private networks (VPNs) to protect data when using public networks. You might assume by 2024, this was old news, but the UK's most popular passwords still contain the words and numbers used in 2014: 'Password', '123456' and 'Qwerty' being the three most popular, with millions of users sticking to these old favourites, which make hacking an easy task.<sup>5</sup>

### Optimising virtual coaching environments

The physical setup of the coaching space significantly impacts the quality of digital sessions. Most people use laptops, given their portability, but this can lead to ergonomic issues and suboptimal camera angles. Coaches should review their desk setup, and look to reposition their cameras at eye level to avoid the appearance of looking down on clients and provide a more engaging conversational experience.

Lighting also plays a crucial role in how coaches are perceived on screen. Ideally, coaches should face a window to use natural light, supplemented by a ring light if necessary. Too often, I still come across people using backlighting, which creates a silhouette effect, and this reduces our ability to understand body language communications such as facial expressions.

The same is true of sound quality. While modern laptops, particularly Macs and higher end devices, have high quality sound, older and lower cost devices can be problematic; using high-quality microphones or headsets can overcome audio clarity, alongside selecting a quiet environment for calls.

### Curating the background

The background for a digital coaching session can be curated to reflect the coach's personal brand. Again, experience reveals

that some coaches give little or no consideration to what is behind them. While we might argue these have no effect, recent evidence suggests they do impact the relationship between the speakers.<sup>6</sup> Further research is ongoing to better understand which backgrounds create positive effects for the coach. In my experience, a consistent but non-contentious image, such as a world map, can serve as a conversation starter without becoming a distraction, projecting an image of global thinking and inclusion.

### Leveraging coaching tools

Digital platforms offer a variety of tools that can enhance the coaching experience, including screen sharing, whiteboards, and breakout rooms for team coaching. Despite their potential, many coaches underuse these features,<sup>7</sup> possibly due to unfamiliarity or fear of disrupting sessions. Practising with these tools can build confidence and facilitate more dynamic and interactive coaching sessions.

### Managing client relationships and documentation

One of the primary concerns for coaches transitioning to digital environments is the potential impact on the coaching relationship. Research suggests that the strength of the coaching alliance remains robust online, provided that the transition between online and face-to-face sessions is minimised.<sup>3</sup> An alternative route is for the coach to discuss, as part of the contracting, which mode suits the client best and work in the client's preferred mode.

One aspect still worthy of further investigation is how digital environments can facilitate greater openness, due to the 'online disinhibition effect'.<sup>8</sup> We hypothesise that for topics where sadness is the primary emotion, clients may benefit from face-to-face interactions, but topics where disgust or shame are the primary emotion, digital environments (or even AI) may provide a preferred space. For more neutral topics, such as work prioritisation or presentation skills, the mode of interaction probably has limited effect, but more research is needed to better understand these differences and how coaches can select collaboratively with the client which environments are most suitable.

Revised documentation is also essential for digital coaching, including updated client agreements that reflect this mode of delivery. This might involve reference to shorter sessions to mitigate screen fatigue experienced by clients, clauses about recording sessions, changes to cancellation fees and a contingency plan if connectivity is lost during a call.

Regulatory considerations, such as data protection and professional indemnity insurance, also need to be addressed, with coaches registering with relevant government bodies and ensuring their insurance explicitly covers online as well as physical delivery.

### Embracing technology and innovation

As technology continues to evolve, so too does its application in coaching. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are emerging as innovative tools that can enhance the coaching experience. VR, for example, can create immersive environments that facilitate team coaching sessions, allowing participants from different parts of the world to collaborate in a virtual space.



This not only reduces the carbon footprint associated with travel but also eliminates the challenges of time zones and jet lag. However, the pace of change requires coaches to commit to continuous development in the field of technology, or risk becoming out of date if their practice remains unchanged year after year.

### Building trust and maintaining confidentiality

One of the key challenges in digital coaching is building and maintaining trust. In a physical environment, we can commit to the session being confidential. But in a digital space, data are being captured even if the call is not being recorded. Coaches must ensure that such data are secure, and both they and the client understand what data are being captured, when, how long they are being held and who has access to them. This requires coaches to become more proactive, recognising that in digital environments nothing is confidential – your phone, smart speaker and every other digital device in your home are all listening into every conversation. Coaches need to ask their digital providers and digital platform employers these questions, and become more transparent in what they tell clients, recognising digital sessions are not ‘confidential’ in the way previously implied by the term.

### Adapting to changing client needs

The shift to digital coaching has also changed client expectations and needs. Clients now expect flexibility and convenience, with the ability to schedule sessions that fit their busy lives. Digital coaching platforms that offer self-scheduling tools, automated reminders, and easy rescheduling options can enhance the client experience and reduce administrative burdens for coaches. However, coaches need to be skilled in using these, and incorporate these tools in to their new ways of working.

Clients also value the ability to access coaching resources and materials online. Coaches can create digital libraries of resources, including articles, videos and exercises, that clients can access between sessions. This can enhance the coaching process by providing ongoing support and reinforcing key concepts discussed during sessions.

Adapting to these changing needs requires coaches to be agile and open to experimenting with new approaches and technologies. It also requires coach training providers to amend their programmes to support coaches developing the skills demanded by this new digital world.

### Future directions in online coaching

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of the market. The growth of businesses such as EZRA, BetterUp and CoachHub suggests the market is now one which is fundamentally different than it was in 2019. Further advances in generative AI, driven by ChatGPT-based products, are likely to play a significant role in shaping the next series of changes. AI can provide valuable insights and analytics, helping coaches to better understand their clients and tailor their approaches. Machine learning algorithms can identify patterns and trends, providing coaches with data-driven recommendations and enhancing the effectiveness of their interventions. But possibly most fundamentally, AI coach bots, initially of limited capability in 2023, may arguably be providing better quality coaching than many coaches operating in the market by 2025. This pace of change has caught most coaches, and coach training providers, unawares and – as in the cautionary tale provided by Kodak’s famed inability to adapt to new technologies in photography – they risk completely missing the technological revolution happening around them. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jonathan Passmore** is Professor of coaching at Henley Business School and Senior Vice President at EZRA Coaching. He has published widely over the past two decades, including over 40 books and 250 scientific papers and book chapters. Jonathan’s latest book *The Digital & AI Coaches’ Handbook* (2024) was published earlier this year by Routledge.

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