For counsellor-coaches and other coaching professionals

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Coaching Today

Working with trauma: beyond survival

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Editorial

Diane Parker
Editor, *Coaching Today*

I took the unusual step of giving myself an extended holiday over the summer – indeed, as I write (mid September), I am only now just beginning to dip my toes tentatively back into the world of work. I realised, towards the end of spring, that I was beginning to feel a little frazzled and frayed around the edges, and that I was in danger of operating from what I have learned to recognise as 'survival mode' (when I go into shutdown, cease to feel and operate more from a 'heady' thinking space, rather than my customary embodied, heart-centred, feeling and intuiting place).

Looking back at that period now, I recognise that this was a healthy, perhaps necessary, response – an acutely primal, animalistic response designed to protect myself from potential overwhelm in the face of numerous challenges on a personal, professional, social (and dare I add, political) level. (I swore I wasn't going to write about our current political situation in this issue's column, but it's there, always, in the ether and unavoidable, like the smell of bad drains).

I take a small comfort in the fact that I am not the only one who has been feeling this way, it seems. Among my colleagues and peers – coaches, therapists, writers, artists and activists – there's a collective sense of disquiet, frustration, sadness, grief, anger, exhaustion, fatigue and fear. We want to do something, to change the world – but we're all too bl**dy kn**kered. For me, my response was to sit and do nothing, which is so much harder than it sounds (can you relate?) I took great solace in the opening lines of the poem, *Wild Geese*, by

Mary Oliver, which I shared with a client just before we ended our work together before the summer:

> *You do not have to be good.*
> *You do not have to walk on your knees*
> *For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.*
> *You only have to let the soft animal of your body*
> *love what it loves.*[1]

Sometimes, it takes a pause and a breath, and the courage to do nothing, to allow ourselves to reconnect with our wildness, our intuition, with the soft animals of our bodies. To give ourselves the silence and space so we can hear the whispers of our own soul longing. In that stillness, I realised that, in order to continue my work effectively, safely, creatively and lovingly as a practitioner, I need to reconnect with my dance artist self again, which was something of a surprise, to say the least. At this stage, I'm still exploring the possibilities and potential (not to mention practicalities) of this revelation, but it turns out that what the soft animal of my body loves is simply to dance: so, however inconvenient that may be at this stage of my life and career, I need to find some way of inviting that back into my practice, alongside my work with my clients.

So... what does the soft animal of *your* body love? ■

Diane Parker
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1. Oliver M. Wild geese: selected poems. Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books; 2004.

FEATURES

REGULARS

Message from the Chair

The night after receiving the unexpected phone call, I dreamt in distinctive detail of an overgrown green space.

After nine years on a waiting list
I had forgotten I was even on,
I had finally reached the top.
I had been granted an allotment.
Did I still want it? (I think so, how could I not?)

I woke with a sense of being caught between possibilities and uncertainties. I imagined creating order from chaos; perhaps some raised beds, boundaried areas full of neat growth, coming home with an abundance of produce because I had cleared and tilled and planted and tended and harvested. Simultaneously, I felt excitement about the alternative prospect of allowing wildness within our very urban location. There was anxiety; could I really take on more work? Yet could this also represent the possibility of some of the respite and space I have been craving in my inner city London life? I was already busy with work and family; both flourishing, for which I am grateful, but both bringing challenges and demands, an intensity of time and attention that can begin to feel depleting.

The yearning to cultivate, to create order out of chaos, to produce, to make fruitful, is strong in those who come for coaching, and often in coaches themselves, and aligns with a human need for impact and improvement. The idea of wilderness can evoke an association with something inhospitable, neglected and abandoned, pathless and usually uninhabited by people. We want to render it more workable and this can be a laudable aim and satisfying achievement. However, this desire to create order and produce results can have some unintended consequences, while the perceived 'chaos' can have unexpected benefits.

A recent visit to Knepp Wildland in Sussex[1] – previously a traditional farm estate that has been deliberately allowed to rewild itself – was illuminating and restorative. In her book about the project, *Wilding*[2], Isabella Tree describes how intensively farmed land had impacted biodiversity, creating a monoculture, exhausting and contaminating our soil and isolating species, some of which have been dying out at an alarming rate. As we know from our work as coaches with teams and organisations, it is easy to become acclimatised to a restrictive culture that lacks the diversity needed to really shift into a dynamic and creative state. It can also be to our cost if we move too quickly to action with 'tried-and-tested' methods before really understanding what is already at work in the system.

Tree describes how: 'managed with minimal human intervention, and with herds of free-roaming animals driving the creation of new habitats, their rewilded land is now heaving with life. Rare species like turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons and purple emperor butterflies are now breeding at Knepp, and biodiversity has rocketed'.[2]

The Knepp Estate has observed that there is a need for 'buffers, bridges and stepping-stones' of wilder areas that allow for creatures to move and plants to colonise. This increases the opportunity for species to 'adapt and survive in the face of climate change, habitat degradation and pollution'.

We now know that trees communicate with each other through their root systems and when oak trees are left to stand alone in cultivated fields, they become more vulnerable to disease, their isolation increased when the soil is regularly ploughed up around them as it breaks up the delicate fungal networks. Isabella Tree describes how the trees' 'life support system extends into a dark and invisible universe of the mycorrhizae – fine hair like filaments of fungus that attach themselves to the roots and create a deep, intricate and vast underground network'.[2] This 'community

“The yearning to cultivate, to create order out of chaos, to produce, to make fruitful, is strong in those who come for coaching, and often in coaches themselves, and aligns with a human need for impact and improvement”

structure' brings food and acts as an early warning system when one plant is under attack, stimulating others to raise levels of their own protective enzymes.

I believe that BACP Coaching can create such connection for support and cross-pollination between the professions of counselling and coaching, strengthening what we can offer our clients in these arguably crazy-making and challenging political and environmental times.

A few days after receiving the phone call about the allotment, I met the council representative to view my prospective plot. While my initial impression was of a space overgrown with long grass and some fairly derelict aspects, including a little shed, it already had pear and plum trees, raspberries, rhubarb, glimpses of an asparagus bed and rows of potatoes peeping from underneath wild grasses and bindweed. When I mentioned wildlife, the man from the council was sympathetic but stern about the need for full production of fruit and vegetables within a year. Later, wandering the space on my own, pulling some grass aside, I disturbed a frog and stumbled on a small pond previously unseen. The plot is flanked by a high tree on one side and council flats on the other. The morning I was there, it was sunny and open and the air full of birdsong. I plan to both cultivate *and* leave spaces and edges for something wilder where I can watch what might emerge.

How do we create spaces to notice the unexpected emerging in BACP Coaching? How do we attune to what might already be happening under the surface before we move to cultivate? What are the best ways to strengthen and grow our division in the support of you, our members, and to the ultimate benefit of your clients? What would you like to see growing? Please email me and let me know. ■

Carolyn Mumby is Chair of BACP Coaching. Coaching.Chair@bacp.co.uk

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1. See https://knepp.co.uk/home for more information.
2. Tree I. Wilding: the return of nature to a British farm. London: Picador; 2019.

FOCUS ON SUPERVISION

In a recent conversation with BACP Coaching's Executive Specialist for Supervision, Steve Page, we explored how we might create a resource to support supervisors of coach-therapists. Steve commented on the often-unseen nature of supervisors, and their contribution to connection, learning and support, and we likened it to the 'delicate fungal filaments' I mention elsewhere in this message. Part of our strategic plan is to create an information resource for supervisors working as they do, sometimes in isolation, across the two professions. As we discussed how to do this, we realised that before we plough on (so to speak), there is a need to find out more about what is already there, happening beneath the surface, to discover what coach-therapist supervisors need and see how their existing contribution can be acknowledged and supported. To this end, we are seeking to connect with those of you who already supervise dual-trained practitioners, so do let us know if you would like to be a part of this exchange.

In the meantime, we are responding to an invitation to explore areas of common interest with another organisation, The Association of Coaching Supervisors, who were drawn to connect with us because they recognise the richness of the *Ethical Framework* and extensive counselling supervision resources already offered by BACP. I am excited about how we can learn from and influence each other.

Coaching Executive **update**

We are delighted to have new influences on our established team in the appointments of Tom Andrews and Karen Ledger to the Executive. It was our first experience of conducting a more detailed and extensive interview process, helpfully guided by Tracy Shrimpton in the BACP Volunteers department, and we are delighted to have found two thoughtful, dynamic, differently experienced and well-resourced practitioners to join us. Sally Brown introduces them to you on page 25. We all work together across our strategic plan, but each person on the team keeps their eye on specific areas of focus, with a view to supporting different developments. Steve Page will remain with us until next summer and, due to her expertise and interest, Karen will work alongside him in the exploration of supervision in integrated practice to take this work forward. Tom will be taking a particular interest in the re-establishment of coaching network groups, and his creative way of working, through curiosity and connection, is in alignment with the idea of growing our network groups organically.

Eve Menezes Cunningham has completed her relocation to Ireland and finishes her work with us this month. We thank her for her dynamism, good humour and her determined advocacy for this division in her role as Chair, and wish her well in the wild green spaces that she is working from now.

We have waited a long time for work to begin on differentiated coaching competences and we are so pleased that from this autumn, Nicola Forshaw will convene an expert reference group. Gill Fennings-Monkman also continues her focus in this area, and we thank her for continuing dedication to see this work progress. It has not been easy, but we anticipate that coaching competences will provide necessary clarity and credibility for therapists who coach and will be a taproot from which other areas of work can grow. They will also be an important development in the wider coaching system.

What does **trauma** have to do with coaching?

How does trauma show up in our work with clients? **Julia Vaughan Smith** and **Jenny Rogers** explain that trauma is not the exclusive domain of therapists and demonstrate how coaching can help clients successfully integrate a fractured, traumatised self.

Harry had been told throughout his childhood that he was a 'disappointment' to a mother whose own childhood had been beset by extreme poverty and neglect. Rachel was the daughter of a wealthy stockbroker who had severe problems with alcohol, and she spent her teenage years trying and failing to stop him drinking as well as intervening when he physically attacked her mother. Angela's parents both had depression and she had become their carer at a young age, suppressing her own needs for attention and affection.

Traumatising childhood experience was behind all the behaviour that these clients described overleaf on page 8 (see 'Case studies'). Most coaches will recognise the scenario where the client presents with a familiar enough set of goals: they want to be able to take the next step in their careers, have a more balanced life, fulfil their work roles more effectively without destroying their leisure and family life; yet all the obvious coaching tactics do not seem to work. The coach establishes excellent rapport, agrees the goals, asks good questions, action steps are agreed – and yet nothing changes.

Contrary to popular belief, trauma regularly appears in coaching. It isn't the exclusive province of therapists or mental health practitioners.

Understanding how trauma presents in our work is particularly valuable when coaching isn't going well, as in the examples above. When coaching has no energy, or is blocked by the client's deeply held self-limiting beliefs, no change can happen, and both coach and client are likely to become entangled by responses that are affected by their own internal trauma.

Why coaches feel uneasy about trauma

We find, as practitioners working with coaches, that trauma is poorly understood and that coaches tend to ignore its reality and presence.

Often, the main reason is a misunderstanding of what trauma is. The use of the word itself can raise anxiety levels and invoke associations with abuse or terror. As a result, some coaches are fearful of what might be asked of them and of inappropriately entering 'therapeutic territory'.

Understanding the lasting impact of trauma

The three clients we described at the beginning of this article were all presenting their Survival Selves to their coaches. The reason the coaching was not working – and could not work – is that the role of the Survival Self is to prevent change through providing the illusion of safety.

As coaches, we carry our own splits in the psyche and our own Survival Selves. These can get activated when clients' Survival Selves trigger our own trauma feelings, outside of conscious awareness. This results in an entangled survival relationship within which coaching cannot be effective. Our task as coaches is to become self-aware of these dynamics, so that we can regain contact with our Healthy Self. From that place, we can support clients in accessing the resources within their Healthy Selves, including contact with their body and deep feelings, to recognise their Survival Selves and explore how the 'there and then' is operating in the 'here and now'. →

Case studies

Harry

Harry is in his early 60s and comes to his coach with a quest to 'find out what's next', as he prepares to retire from the law firm he founded 40 years ago. On the surface, this looks like just one variant of a standard career coaching programme, but it quickly becomes clear that something more is at stake. His voice reduced almost to a whisper, Harry returns again and again to his feeling that he is 'useless', despite clear evidence that he has an outstanding record as a solicitor and leader.

Rachel

Rachel has two young children and works full time as a paediatrician. She is the breadwinner in the family. Rachel's boss sees the distinct possibility of burnout. 'She works far harder than she needs to', he says in his briefing to Rachel's coach. In their first session, the coach realises that Rachel is fully aware of all the obvious solutions to her readily-confessed exhaustion, yet seems stuck in her belief that very long hours and obsessive commitment to overwork are all she can do.

Angela

Angela's well-deserved recent promotion to a managerial role has exposed her difficulty with telling people straightforwardly what she wants them to do. Her boss suggested an assertiveness course, which Angela attended, but she tells her coach that although the course was 'interesting' it did not really seem relevant to her own situation.

Trauma defined

As the word trauma is used in many different ways, it is helpful to be clear about terminology. Trauma is not an event or events. It is the *lasting* impact of a relationship or environment that is experienced, at a physiological level, as life-threatening. This trauma response affects all our body, mind and emotional systems, and occurs when the stress hormone activation of *fight* or *flight* is so intense, there is a conversion to *freeze*, bringing dissociation from the body and the present, terror, numbness and fragmentation of memory associated with the experience.[1] This is a state of extreme overload.

Many writers and thinkers are adding valuably to our understanding of trauma. These include Gabor Mate,[2,3] Bessel van der Kolk,[4] Pat Ogden,[5] Peter Levine[6] and Stephen Porges.[7] In this article, and in the book, *Coaching and Trauma: Beyond the Survival Self*,[8] by the co-author of this article, Julia Vaughan Smith, we draw on the work of Professor Franz Ruppert[9] who, from his extensive clinical practice, has developed a theoretical model which allows for the complexity of trauma. This model is simple enough to be understood immediately and we have also found it helpful to share with clients.

Ruppert describes the trauma response of freeze, dissociation and fragmentation as creating a 'split in the psyche' (see figure 1).[10] Here, 'psyche' is used to mean the network of neuro-physiological-emotional systems that provide us with a sense of ourselves.

This model indicates that despite these trauma responses, we retain a Healthy Self through which we can self-regulate and make healthy decisions for ourselves. The Trauma Self contains the trauma emotions of terror, pain, rage and shame, which we have suppressed to keep us safe. The Survival Self contains the parts which act as the defensive shield to protect us from feeling these trauma feelings so we can continue 'as if' the trauma doesn't exist. The proportions of these three 'selves' vary from person to person, depending on the extent of their trauma history.

Figure 1: The Split in the Psyche

Image: Franz Ruppert, *Trauma, Angst und Liebe. Unterwegs zu gesunder Eigenständigkeit. Wie Aufstellungen dabei helfen.* ©2012, Kösel-Verlag, München, in der Verlagsgruppe Random House Gmbh. Reproduced with permission.

The biological basis

Trauma is a lasting imprint on all our body systems. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk[4] makes the case that the body bears the full force of the trauma. Infants, from conception onwards, may be traumatised through the freeze-and-fragment process and this has a lasting impact on cognitive, emotional and physiological development.

Our systems continue to develop, but in an altered state, which may include permanently heightened stress responses and a limited capacity for emotional self-regulation. Our unhappiness, confusion, relationship difficulties, career problems, chronic illness or stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue or inability to create a healthy life for ourselves all have roots in our early developmental experience. Some people find this hard to accept, as the trauma survival strategies of denial, illusion and distraction stop us from engaging with reality.

We can create new pathways through personal development work and gradually step out of our trauma responses. This takes personal commitment and doesn't happen immediately. Coaching can contribute to integration, using reflective enquiry about how the 'here and now' may link with the 'there and then', through identifying survival strategies for what they are, and through body and emotional awareness.

Links with attachment theory

Trauma theory adds to our understanding of the attachment theory of Bowlby[11-13] and Ainsworth.[14] Secure attachment needs sufficient parenting from the Healthy Selves of the parents and others close to the child, who are able to recognise the child as being separate and a subject, not an object of their needs and projections, and who are able to be attuned to the needs of the infant.

Healthy, secure attachment bonding needs parents who can respond to the infant's needs consistently and reliably. Where the parents are themselves traumatised, they will parent more often from their Survival Selves and be unable to be attuned or in contact with their child.

The parents themselves have insecure attachment patterns and are insecurely attached to the child. Adverse parenting styles, including those harsh styles of disciplining that are allegedly done 'for the child's own good', can result in children not feeling wanted, loved or protected. This is traumatising. →

Case study: Dan

Dan worked for a utilities company. Previously, he was in charge of a retail team where individual quirkiness was expected and encouraged. Now, he was in a classic leadership role where he ran a division of several hundred people and more conformity was expected.

As part of the coaching, he agreed that getting detailed feedback would be invaluable, and his coach conducted 12 interviews with peers, boss and direct reports. This revealed that people admired his technical competence and his deep understanding of the market. They respected his intelligence and enjoyed his company. Yet they also described his absolute refusal to delegate and his tendency to waste other people's time with jokes and stories. Dan received this information gracefully and with little surprise. He told his coach that he was sleeping badly, and he hardly ever spent much time genuinely relaxing with his wife and children. He was exhausted by the energy needed to do his own job along with so many of the tasks that should have been given to others. Dan knew this all too well, yet he still failed to address it.

The first session explored his back-story. Dan was an only child whose parents had an unhappy marriage and his mother left the marital home when he was six. By the time Dan was 12, both his parents had died. He was fostered with enormous reluctance by a succession of wealthy aunts and uncles, who quickly shipped him off to a famous boys' boarding school. He constructed a Survival Self, which was clever, clownish and self-sufficient. This Survival Self told him that in order to be safe, he could not trust other people; it was essential to do everything himself. He hid his fear of yet more abandonment through charm and by working hard; and he had risen with apparently minimal effort to a succession of senior roles.

Dan had never connected his traumatising childhood experience to his self-sabotaging behaviour at work because he had never considered it to be traumatising, even though, by most people's standards, it would have seemed at the very least to have been 'difficult'. His eyes widened as the coach explained the theory to him and asked him for his response. 'Enlightening' was his answer. The coach asked him what his Healthy Self, the resourceful and thoughtful part of him, would say to his Survival Self. Dan had no difficulty in answering: 'He'd say, look fella, you're safe now, you can trust other people; you don't need to do it all yourself and you don't need to be funny all the time.'

Slowly, very slowly, over a year-long coaching engagement, Dan and his coach constructed a series of what he called 'pilot projects' to test out new ways of living, being and doing. The aim was not radical transformation but to become good enough at his managerial responsibilities, an outcome which, as coach and client agreed, was largely met.

“Dan had never connected his traumatising childhood experience to his self-sabotaging behaviour at work because he had never considered it to be traumatising”

> Contrary to popular belief, trauma regularly appears in coaching. It isn't the exclusive province of therapists and mental health workers

The insecure, survival attachment patterns, and a constructed survival identity are laid down early as part of the trauma response, affecting our relationships with ourselves, others and our work.

Implications for coaching

Sometimes there is an understandable belief among coaches that if people carry trauma, as a result of early childhood experience and insecure attachment, then their careers cannot be successful. This is not our experience as executive coaches. In fact, it can sometimes be the reverse; that the Survival Self of the client is, in practice, closely linked to their advancement at work. These clients would rarely see themselves as candidates for therapy and, if suggested, would be most unlikely to take up the recommendation. They do not see themselves as 'dysfunctional', and in so many ways, they are not. ■

Special offer for Coaching Today readers

To receive a copy of *Coaching and Trauma*, with 20 per cent off the recommended retail price, order directly from the publishers at **www.mheducation.co.uk** and use voucher code **SMITH20** in the online checkout.

Suggestions for using this approach with executive coaching clients

- Always ask for some autobiography. At the very least, ask the client, 'What three events or periods in your life have had a major impact on the person you are today?'
- Listen for evidence of insecure attachment.
- Share the Ruppert model© with clients, if you feel it appropriate. Ensure you understand it fully before doing so and have practised with a colleague. (Note that to use the model in any published material will require permission from the copyright holder.)
- Explore how the organisation and its culture may be perpetuating unhealthy work patterns.
- Accept that the bigger the change needs to be, the slower the change will be in practice; suggest small steps first, then review.
- For highly anxious clients, ask what medical or therapeutic help they have already had to date and coach them around getting more, if this feels appropriate.
- Ask, 'What would your Healthy Self do or say about this?'
- Explore your own 'trauma biography' and survival strategies as part of your own development plan.

Jenny Rogers has 29 years of executive coaching experience. She has a parallel career as a writer, supervisor and as a teacher of coaching skills. Her book, *Coaching Skills: The Definitive Guide to Being a Coach* (2016), is widely used all over the world as a foundation text in learning how to be a coach.

Julia Vaughan Smith is a psyche-trauma practitioner, writer and teacher. She is a qualified integrative and humanistic psychotherapist and has practised for 25 years as an executive coach and supervisor. Her book, *Coaching and Trauma: Beyond the Survival Self*, was published in August 2019.
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Ask the Executive

Two members of the BACP Coaching Executive discuss their journeys into executive coaching, to address the question:

How do I become an executive coach?

Michèle and Carolyn, you both started as counsellors and now work as coaches within organisations. Looking back, what motivated you to make that move?

Carolyn: In a sense, it was a move to include a new sphere of working rather than a move away from something else, and it happened quite organically. I was coaching individuals and knew that I would earn more money in the corporate world, which would also balance the pro bono and less lucrative coaching I was offering elsewhere. I was motivated by challenge, learning, the opportunity to use my knowledge and skills in a new context, and capacity to earn more money.

Michèle: I had no motivation to become an executive coach as at the time I was starting out, 22 years ago, I didn't know they existed! I stumbled into it while doing corporate training (after a career in teaching, then setting up a successful small business, then training as a therapist). I was training two directors one day when I realised they were already competent in what the course covered, so I asked them what they really needed, split the day into two, and worked with them one to one. Over lunch, one of them said to me: 'I didn't know you were also an executive coach', and I responded, 'Yes, I am', even though at the time, I had no idea what an executive coach was! That client then asked to carry on working one to one with me, and so began a very happy career.

What is most rewarding about the executive coaching you are currently involved with?

Carolyn: The variety is great. In one day, I can be seeing people at a consulting room in Bank, meeting a young entrepreneur informally in a bar, and then seeing someone in the financial sector in a large glass office. I have enjoyed learning more about current challenges and trends in leadership and the cross-fertilisation that brings to clients. It sounds a bit clichéd but people are people everywhere, and I find that a huge percentage of the time, what is holding them back are their own limiting assumptions and sometimes the need for some pertinent information and generative support. I have found that being able to bring a systemic perspective is invaluable. In this aspect of my work, I am also coaching people who have the power to influence and support others, so seeing the impact of their own growth as leaders on their teams and organisations is very satisfying.

Michèle: I'm working with some wonderful individuals and teams and seeing real change and growth. As always, I am inspired to see the positive effects of therapeutic coaching on stressed executives who are often buckling under the weight of pressure, responsibilities and long hours.

What is most challenging?

Michèle: There is an element of not knowing where your next project or client is coming from and I used to spend a lot of time worrying about the future. I took my worries to my supervisor once and she pointed out that the evidence suggested that the work always comes. Which it did! That realisation helped me become more comfortable with uncertainty. I have worked very hard to get to a place where I now only take on work that makes my heart sing. For the first few years, I had to take on everything that came my way. Other than that, there is a lot of admin when you work for yourself, such as emails, paperwork and VAT returns, and finding time to do it all, as well as writing bespoke workshops and programmes, can be challenging. I am currently considering getting a part-time personal assistant. The travel can also be a challenge – I live in Wales and work in London and Oxfordshire so I always travel to see my clients. Although I break my journeys by staying away from home for a few days at a time, if my car could talk, it would be saying, 'What, again?!' on a Monday morning as I set off early on my two- to three-hour trip.

Carolyn: I grew up in a working-class family, who were basically in service, in what is now quite an unusual way, to an upper-class family, who you might call 'landed gentry'. While we were appreciated and supported by my father's employers, I grew up with a particular sense of 'knowing your place' that has at times proved hard to shake. It helps to be married to someone from New Zealand, himself successful in the corporate world, as he doesn't really see class. I think my early background, coupled with the sense of vocation and service that comes →

I have found that clients value the opportunity to go into depth when it is needed, with the understanding that we are not engaging in therapy per se, though as has often been noted, the work can itself be therapeutic

from working for a long time as a counsellor and in some inner-city locations with people who were often struggling economically, made it a challenge for me to see myself as entitled to 'pass' and to earn at a much higher level in the corporate world. I have had to work on my own untrue, limiting assumptions and take on the challenge of genuinely valuing the extent of my experience, knowledge and skills. It has been good for me to grow in this way.

How much does your therapeutic background inform your work as an executive coach?

Carolyn: Hugely! It was why I was hired in many cases, because there was a need to be able to work at some psychological depth in each of the situations or with particular people that associates brought me in to work with. I have found that clients value the opportunity to go into depth when it is needed, with the understanding that we are not engaging in therapy per se, though, as has often been noted, the work can itself be therapeutic. The stigma still felt in some quarters about counselling is often absent in coaching, but the need for work at depth may still be required. It can be hard to disentangle what I have learned as a counsellor and what I have learned as a coach, particularly because the theory is powerful across contexts, so Gestalt and transactional analysis (TA) perspectives underpin a great deal of my work, as does understanding about attachment and self-compassion. Psychological safety, trust, boundaries and presence are all essential in coaching and I gained a great deal of experience working as a therapist that I could build on when learning to be a coach.

Michèle: I wouldn't be the coach I am today without it. To be able to sit with a client in that deep, emotional place can only happen with a deep therapeutic underpinning. Equally, the ability to meet my clients wherever they are requires the same rigorous training. However clients show up is fine with me, because as a therapist, I was used to working with whatever and whoever came through my door. Nothing really phases me and I'm sure clients feel the security of that, knowing that they can absolutely be themselves with me.

Executive coaching has become a highly competitive field. Are there any identifiable factors that make a coach new to this field more likely to succeed?

Michèle: If you're pitching for work, speaking the language makes a big difference. As therapists, we would call it 'working within the client's frame of reference'. So if you're sitting in front of a CEO or HR director and can neither understand their references nor respond in kind, you'll struggle to create a rapport and be seen as the coach for them and their organisation. You need to know at which organisational level you're most comfortable working. I specialise in working with senior executives and will offer that early in a conversation so that they know where to place me in their thinking, be it for one-to-one, group or team coaching. You need to feel comfortable in your working environment. If you aren't familiar with the corporate world (my business background really helps), then you may be better working within the public or not-for-profit sectors. Choose the most natural fit for you. You will also need to understand the multiplicity of contracting – BACP's *Ethical Framework* is a good place to start. Be sure you have a supervisor experienced in both counselling and coaching or they'll only be able to help with the therapeutic part of your work and not the organisational, which is just as important.

Carolyn: I know from my experience of supervising others who are starting out as coaches that their existing networks and previous experience are crucial. If you have a background in business and contacts who value and trust you, you are more likely to get initial leads and opportunities; and in my experience, good work in one context usually leads to work in another – either in the same organisation or through recommendation from one executive to another. I think you need to make sure that you have some kind of systemic understanding to bring, and I have found training in constellations work really useful. I think people still prefer to employ people that they know and trust, and that's how I get work. If you don't have a background in business, talk to people in your networks who do. You may also want to go in with a particular specialism, if this is something that you have experience and knowledge of, such as maternity coaching. Ensure that your offer is meeting an identified need and is research based. Make sure you know a lot about complex contracting and that you include more than experiential evaluation – eg, clear return on investment. Mary-Beth O'Neill's *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*[1] is a useful read in terms of linking individual development with the needs of the business.

What is the best way to break into associate work?

Michèle: I had no idea that associate work existed when I started out. My feeling is that if you have the right skills and background, and confidence in your offering, it makes sense to go into coaching directly. If you do so, the profits of the work are all yours. Having said that, I do miss the camaraderie that comes with working with peers (which is partly why I joined the BACP Coaching Executive). I can see that being an associate would also provide that.

Carolyn: Build really good, genuine, authentic relationships with other coaches. At the moment, I work with three associates and was asked in each case to come on board because I

> If you're pitching for work, speaking the language makes a big difference. As therapists, we would call it 'working within the client's frame of reference'

knew them from other contexts, either through attending training they were running, training alongside them as a co-delegate, or training them! They all valued the fact that I was also therapeutically trained and could offer an integrated approach. I have been lucky enough not to have to pitch to anyone as I was asked if I would like the work. I have also come together with other coaches to develop offers. If you are going to tender for work, you need to make sure that you have limited company accounts and can demonstrate that you have the capacity to deliver. All of this takes time and I don't know any shortcuts. I know from others' experience that there are organisations specifically set up to interview and employ coaches to deliver coaching contracts in the corporate world. They will have specific criteria and will also have quite rigorous interview days within which you will need to demonstrate your skills.

Where do you stand on pro bono work and how useful is it in establishing yourself as an executive coach?

Michèle: All my work comes to me through word of mouth. As an executive coach, this usually means that my initial meeting is with the procurer of coaching rather than the individual client. During that meeting, if there is a rapport and they believe I can provide what they are looking for, they will hire me as a coach. In my experience, if they aren't sure I'm the right fit after meeting me, no amount of pro bono work will make a difference. Also, I prefer to keep my voluntary work separate from my paid work. That way, the one doesn't taint or impact the other.

Carolyn: When I was starting out, I offered low-cost coaching through my networks and gained experience of coaching individuals in the corporate world. Some of those coaching relationships lasted quite a while and through them I was recommended to clients who could pay full rates. Some have also intermittently returned for sessions as they meet new challenges. I have found that coaching pro bono for the New Entrepreneur Foundation, working with young people, has increased my network with other experienced executive coaches, as well as keeping me up to date with developments and challenges in this field. I have also kept in touch with those young people who reconnect again once they are more established.

Is there a piece of advice you give to prospective executive coaches? Or that you were given that you found particularly helpful?

Michèle: Research the organisation before you go to your initial meeting so that you know something about them and have a feel for their culture. Also, something which is hard to put into words, but you need to sound less 'counselling-y' in a corporate environment. As therapists, we're used to sounding soft and empathic, often tentative in our interventions so that the client feels supported, encouraged and not prescribed to. While this is just right for a vulnerable client, it can come across as lacking in confidence or passive to a corporate client. Of course, be yourself; but we all show up as different aspects of ourselves as the environment necessitates, so just bear this in mind, and use your therapeutic skills to quickly create rapport.

Carolyn: I guess it's the opposite of selling yourself short. By that I mean, do recognise where you have extensive experience, knowledge and skills and charge accordingly – people often expect to get what they pay for, and an investment in quality coaching can provide an excellent return. If you are genuine and open in your interactions, people read that. Emphasise and build on what you have and who you know, without being disingenuous or mercenary about your contacts. There is no shortcut to trust and trust is what is needed for people to give you work and to work with you. It can take time to build the networks you need to succeed and at the same time, every contact and every good piece of work can lead to another, sometimes in surprising ways. I'm not big on giving advice because, generally, with the right support, people can find their own way forward; but I do know from my own experience that it helps to be generous and have both confidence and humility – they are not mutually exclusive! ■

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Living her unlived life

Joanna Ball is the founder of community interest company Mums4aChange. Here, she demonstrates the importance for mothers of children with additional needs of identifying and living 'the unlived life'.

Clare passes the group facilitator a piece of paper. On it, in neat blue letters, she has written 'I was cut open and it hurt, then he was born and it was OK until it wasn't OK: diagnosis and more diagnosis. I'm his nurse now; I would introduce myself but I don't really know who I am'.

As Clare's words are read aloud she looks surprised by what she's written. The other women in the group nod vigorously. They get it. She has named the confusion and loss of identity that many experience as mothers and particularly mothers of children with additional needs. She has also implicitly brought into the room the powerful question: 'Who am I?'

Mums4aChange is a community interest company that offers individual coaching and groupwork to mothers/female carers in challenging circumstances so they can make changes that support their own wellbeing. Our Time for YOU group workshops are designed specifically for women who have a child with additional needs. In these groups, we use coaching and creative tools to combat emotional isolation and burnout.

When we are flat-out 'doing for others', thinking about 'who we are' can feel like decadent navel-gazing, but a powerful question like Clare's is valuable in two ways. Firstly, it invites us to bring to life aspects of ourselves that we discount or that remain in the shadow of our awareness. Secondly, it begs the question 'What else in me wants to come alive?'

Jung famously declared that nothing has a stronger psychological influence on our children and their environment than the unlived life of the parent[1]; a notion that has made different impressions on me throughout my working life. In my late 20s, just beginning my career as an arts therapist, Jung's theory seemed to 'out' those illusive spectres that haunted my clients.

When I had my own children in my late 30s, this idea landed very differently with me, and my response was more: 'Oh really, as if I'm not already trying my best to juggle everything in my lived life – now I need to factor in my unlived life as well?'

In the context of the Time for YOU groups, I've wondered if Jung's premise thrums with privilege, ie, is it a concept more relevant to those who are parenting under less challenging circumstances? As parents of children with additional needs, we see so many excruciating things impacting our children psychologically; is our unlived life as a parent really a number one priority and, even if it is, who has the headspace and resources to address it?

However, by no doubt taking some liberties with Jung's original line of thinking and through considering the impact of our groupwork at Mums4aChange, I'm beginning to think that, by attending to their 'unlived lives', mothers of children with additional needs can potentially help themselves avoid burnout and increase their internal resources. Consequently, it is a considerable priority when focusing on wellbeing for mothers and, by extension, their families.

This is especially the case when we think about what is 'unlived', not as a singular 'unlived life' but in two ways, ie bringing to life:

a) what is currently not fully lived in us because it is not in our awareness or is discounted
b) what consciously wants more of an outing.

These two pillars provide the scaffolding to our approach.

So, looking at the first pillar, how do we foster ways to breathe more life into the qualities and aspects of ourselves that we are discounting or are not in our awareness? We have honed a variety of creative tools in our groups, and common to all of them is self-compassion. Without self-compassion, deepening our connection with ourselves and our unlived lives is unlikely to be a positive resource, whichever pillar we are focusing on. Being a parent of a child who has additional needs can lead to guilt, blame, or reduced self-esteem.[2] More awareness of when we are judging ourselves can just feel like more ways for us to be wrong.

Along with that, when we are focused on the complexities of our children's needs, it can seem counterintuitive, self-indulgent or impossible to think about ourselves. Group participants also describe how firefighting can feel constant when dealing with the fallout of reduced services. For example, the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman has seen special educational needs and disability (SEND) complaints increase by 150 per cent between 2014 and 2018; 87 per cent of these were upheld.[3] As a result, we can find ourselves feeling stuck, that it's 'them or us', and 'us' gets sidelined. Any reminders to 'think of yourself' can seem trite.

> It is not that we give too much, love too much or do too much, but it is when we abandon ourselves that we burn out

What we have seen at Mums4aChange though is that tools that foster self-compassionate connection offer an alternative to self-judgment[4] and these stark either/or choices. The bonus is that self-compassionate connection is free and doesn't demand lots of extra time.

For example, Hailey told us she'd hit breaking point one evening, overwhelmed by her children's needs and anxiety about her eldest child's mental health. Instead of bingeing, as she habitually did under stress, she remembered two things we do in the group. The first is a mindfulness technique where we use our senses to come back to being in the present and then choose a quality to breathe in on the in-breath; literally, breathing more life into these qualities within her.

The second thing Hailey remembered is the group feedback. In line with Nancy Kline's[5] work about the benefits of genuine appreciation, in each session participants give specific, evidenced, appreciations of qualities they see in each other. Group participants can pass if they don't want to do this, but rarely do because this validation seems to breathe life into half-lived and unlived aspects of themselves. →

Hailey remembered the other group members saying how much they admired her 'powerful big heart'. She imagined all that 'big heartedness' filling her up and comforting her as she breathed in. Doing this helped her move beyond either/or thinking, their needs versus mine, and she called someone to be with her. Taking ownership of herself as a 'big-hearted nurturer' enabled her to be fully alive to herself in this way.

What is evident is that Hailey used her imagination as a resource, creating a richer relationship with the unlived aspects of herself. To paraphrase Winnicott,[6] it is only through play and the imagination that we can access the whole self. This takes us beyond either/or thinking. Jungian psychologist Robert Johnson describes this beautifully in his book, *Living your Unlived Life*,[7] explaining that symbols are inherently both real and not real. By working them in our mind, they allow us to bring our inner unlived world alive, enabling us to do something while at the same time not doing it. This sounds like it would be frustrating, but as Johnson shows, our unlived lives can be surprisingly satisfied in this way without dropping a bomb in the midst of our world.

The 'Your Life is Your Lab' is a group check-in method we've developed that has similarities to the ways of working with symbols that Johnson describes. In each session, participants choose images from a collection of postcards. We start by asking participants to think about their week as if they were seeing themselves through the caring eyes of a good friend. With this in mind, they look at the postcards and let the postcards 'choose them', whether they like what they see or not.

Each participant then makes a gallery of her postcards and chooses a caption for her collection as if she were 'speaking' for the images. For example, group participant Paige captioned her assorted postcards: 'I'm a boat with no oars and all these passengers'.

After ascribing a caption, the next task is to write what the cards suggest you need more or less of in your life. Paige wrote, 'I need oars or an engine, some way to move so it's not just up to the wind. I need to be the captain. But I just want to drift too, but I'm scared where I'll end up and everyone's relying on me.'

The next challenge is to identify the smallest meaningful step in real life towards having more of what the card shows is needed and less of what isn't. Paige was thinking about 'more oars and more drifting and less being at the mercy of the elements' and what that would look like in real life. It sounds like it would be fraught with 'I can't get oars, I can't even swim' but, more often than not, once participants know they can't get it wrong, they willingly allow their imaginations to surprise them and come up with an experiment; for example, getting 'oars' for Paige became playing with saying 'no' more, so she could change the direction of things.

When she thought she was done, Paige told the group that the feeling she gets after the mindfulness relaxation exercise 'is a bit like drifting, but solid, like someone's got my back'. She'd thought 'drifting' was too risky, but opening the windows, feeling the breeze and allowing her mind to sail for a few breaths each morning was an idea that she could play with. By using the symbols to acknowledge life as it currently was, and compassionately 'dialoguing' with what wanted to emerge, Paige allowed her unlived Captain and her Drifter to come more fully alive.

The benefits Paige reported from her experiment, ie that she felt clearer, more alive and had more energy, fit beautifully with Dr Dina Glouberman's research on burnout.[8] Psychotherapist and coach Glouberman found that it is not that we give too much, love too much or do too much, but it is when we abandon ourselves that we burn out. And when we abandon ourself and our unlived life, this can reduce us to a husk of duty, fuel envy of others (even our own children) and stoke addictions, where we give ourselves the shadow of what we need. Ultimately this burns us out.

I wonder if the effectiveness of using images and the imagination within the groups is that both the images and the group members provide a compassionate mirror and container for the complexity of who we are and our situations? When the group affirms you as you are in this way, it seems, paradoxically, to allow more space for who you can become. Beisser captures this succinctly when he says: 'Change occurs when one becomes what (s)he is, not when (s)he tries to become what (s)he is not'. [9]

For most of the mothers we work with, to become more of who they are and fully bring this to life involves acknowledging how profoundly changed they are by parenting. Moreover, as parents of children with additional needs, they are changed in unique ways, including the fact that often the child and parent they had prepared to be in their pre-child fantasy is very different from the reality;[10] a mismatch that is apparent at every milestone. The shadow of this unlived life can, for some, feel like trying to cram feet into coveted shoes that are a size too small – the pain is palpable.

When we take this on board, we bring into awareness a whole gamut of feelings, including grief for the unlived life of our fantasy. Along with this, we also have the opportunity to update our self-concept to include all the many ways having our actual children has made us grow. Taking time to creatively capture these in the groups can be a very empowering way to breathe more life into new aspects of the self. In this way, we hold the paradoxes and expand our vision of who we are. So, instead of holding a torch to one aspect so other aspects fall into shadow and remain unlived, we can safely explore how to expand the pool of light from 'either/or' to embrace 'both/and'; both the one with the oars, and the one that can drift, or the one that resents, and the one that loves, akin to Winnicott's notion of the 'good enough mother'.[11]

I'd like to end this article with another anecdote that speaks specifically to the second pillar, ie what consciously wants more of an outing in us. While this pillar has been addressed indirectly as the result of becoming more of who we are, I'd like to share one of our specific exercises, which focuses directly on what is waiting in the wings.

If you are old enough to remember Mr Benn from the 1970s, you'll know that he was a cartoon character who took a weekly visit to a fancy dress shop. As if by magic, the shopkeeper would appear and choose just the right costume

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for him. Mr Benn would then enter a world befitting the costume, eg the circus tent for the lion tamer. When he returned, he always brought something back with him.

We take our participants on an imaginary trip to this same costume shop and the shopkeeper chooses a costume for them, which represents one of their unlived lives. The participants then create the costume, including the 'thing' that they have 'brought back'.

Jessy, one of the group participants, was bewildered by what her imaginary shopkeeper gave her. Despite never having been the 'showy' type, nor interested in singing, the shopkeeper nevertheless gave Jessy a diva costume, complete with feather boa, stunning silver eyelashes and a voice that carried across the O2 arena without a microphone. She decided it was this voice, along with the feather boa, that she'd bring back and make a representation of in the group.

Later that week, faced with a meeting she was dreading about her son, who she felt was being failed, she summoned up her 'inner diva' in her imagination and found herself channelling all that gutsy energy. As a young, single parent, she had been left home-schooling him for months, carrying the entire weight of his care and education. This was huge – but so was her newfound voice. Her son has now started at his new school and she keeps the feather boa she made, draped over her mirror.

Obviously, mothers exploring their unlived lives in these ways will not single-handedly deal with the crisis in SEND provision or take away their child's debilitating anxiety or heart condition. What we are seeing at Mums4aChange though, is that a compassionate focus on coming home to all of who you are is powerfully effective. Anecdotal evidence from Mums4aChange participants suggests genuine benefits, which include increased self-care, self-compassion, energy, hope and a capacity to think more clearly. And, by not abandoning themselves and their unlived lives, they are potentially putting in a protective factor against burnout, as well as hopefully mitigating the possibility that their children could carry the burden of their unlived lives. ■

Joanna Ball is the founder and director of Mums4aChange CiC and she also coaches with Co-Creation Coaching as a life and career coach. Joanna has previously worked in a variety of settings as an integrative arts psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor. She has two lively, utterly unique children, and in her spare time, she is an aspiring poet.

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Developing a coaching business

Part 2: How to price your products and services

In part two of our four-part series on business development, executive coach, mentor, supervisor and coach educator **Julie J Allan** explains how to price your product or service in order to sell more easily and effectively.

Business development describes the tasks required to grow a business (and its monetary value) via strong products/services, relationships and markets. Through mentoring for the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and further research, I realised many coaches are unclear about and uncomfortable with the practice of business development, often fearing the idea of defining, pricing, marketing and selling their services, and there are few opportunities to learn how to do this well.

I am writing this article and running related training events to address this gap and help coaches learn how to sell well so that their businesses thrive profitably.

To sell is described in the *Oxford Living Dictionaries* as 'to give or hand over (something) in exchange for money'.[1] Using this definition, professional coaches sell the service of coaching to their clients. This is a fact of what we do – regardless of how we feel about it.

This article is the second of a series in *Coaching Today*, based loosely on the 'marketing mix' or 4Ps (product, place, price and promotion).[2] This series covers the following:

1. products and services (published in July 2019 issue)[3]
2. pricing
3. promotion and selling
4. place: where to sell/target market(s)

But what does 'pricing products and services' mean for practising professional coaches? Coaches who want to develop their skills in this area need to know:

- How to conduct market research to find out what competitors charge
- How/whether/when to carry out pro bono work
- How to value their work and know the right price to charge – without over or under pricing
- How to quote, contract and invoice/bill

Market research is vital to our ability to sell to potential clients. In my experience, few coaches know exactly what or who their target market is, nor do they know what the 'going rate' is for coaching within that particular market. My own target market is senior leaders in business – usually in large corporate organisations.

I was previously a human resources director for 10 years, so I regularly bought coaching for the organisations that I worked for; therefore, I knew the range charged for executive coaching in business (my target market).

Ask yourself: who or what is your target market? Then do some research to find out the range that other coaches working within this particular market charge – from lowest to highest price per hour. This is your evidence-based, numeric data – the starting point from which you can objectively and fairly set your fees. Do web-based research first. Ask organisations in your target market what they pay for coaching: lowest and highest rates. Ask other coaches who work in your target market – some may share their pricing structure, and some may not. The only way to find out is to ask. Do this research for each product or service that you offer (for example, I did this market research for both team coaching and 1:1 executive coaching): see my previous article regarding how to define your products/services.[3]

Pro bono work is work that is donated or undertaken free of charge. Many coaches start out by offering pro bono work, especially while undertaking qualifications and/or working towards accreditation, which requires many hours of coaching to be undertaken within a short time period, often when they are new to coaching. Carried out for a specific reason like this, the benefits of pro bono work to your business are clear. I would still challenge you to consider whether some charge could be made, even in this scenario. After all, isn't the coachee receiving a valuable service from your coaching?

I see many coaches start out this way, which then colours their view of how much they can/should charge in the future. Be aware of this danger! Any amount sounds a lot in comparison with zero. If you choose to do pro bono work, be clear why you are doing it and what the risks and benefits to your brand and your business are. The only pro bono work I do now is part of my charitable/social responsibility offering, chosen specifically so that I and my business contribute to society and the coaching profession by giving something back. This feels entirely appropriate to me at this stage of my career and business, and is fully aligned with my professional and personal goals. What is right for you and your business now? (This may well need to change over time – I suggest you review this periodically.)

How to value your work and set your price appropriately is based on your market research (ie the price per hour range that your target market pays other coaches), and your objective assessment of where within this range your level of skill, experience and the value your work adds places you. Reticence and embarrassment about money will prevent you from making an objective assessment and this could reduce the income that you earn and/or the profitability of your coaching business.

Challenge yourself to remain objective if this makes you uncomfortable. Look at, raise your awareness of, understand and move past your discomfort, if you have any. Early in my self-employment, alongside my market research phase, I received some invaluable advice – to think very carefully about what my hourly rate said about me and the quality of my work. I was warned by a trusted friend (who was successfully

> Always stay curious about whether you have set [your rate] too low… just because a client agrees to pay the rate you asked for does not mean they wouldn't have been prepared to pay more

self employed) that if I charged too low a rate, I would be effectively telling potential clients that I am rubbish at what I do! This was hard to hear and harder still to accept and act on – I offer you the same challenge now, in support of you and your business and its potential growth and profitability.

Once you have set your rate objectively and fairly, having done your research and challenged yourself, test it in the marketplace (in your chosen target market). If clients and potential clients are prepared to pay your rate, it works! If not, you may have set it too high. And always stay curious about whether you have set it too low – this is a more likely risk for most coaches I have worked with. Just because a client agrees to pay the rate you asked for, does not mean they wouldn't have been prepared to pay more.

Differential pricing for different products and services makes commercial sense. I have a different rate for one-to-one executive coaching, team coaching, supervision, etc, based on market research and the different skill level required for me to provide that specific service. I have noticed that some coaches flex their price (for the same service/product) with little thought or rationale. 'Because someone asked me to' or 'I thought I'd lose the business if I didn't offer it cheaper' are common reasons for such price reduction decisions. Is this fair – to you and to your other clients who pay full price? Is it reasonable? Could you explain why you charge what you do, including every variance to your standard rate, with good objective reasons that would stand scrutiny? If you want to have a differential pricing policy for a particular product or service, only do this based on market research and objective criteria that clearly (quantifiably) enable consistency for you and your clients. For example, for a specified (numerically defined) large-enough volume of work booked with one client, you might offer a discount on your normal rate – think clearly before you start about the practicalities of this, such as when the discount begins and how/when you would end it if the volume of work subsequently reduced below the defined volume threshold; or you might choose differential pricing if you have a particular sector within your target market where the rates are different (for example, the public sector may have different price expectations from the corporate sector). You may (or may not) wish to consider whether you charge organisations the same as self-funding individuals.

Offering quotes, contracting and invoicing/billing are a basic and important part of business development. Key points here are to quote (verbally and/or in writing) concisely and clearly, so that all doubt and ambiguity are removed. Include key points such as your hourly rate, VAT (if applicable), cancellation terms, travel costs, invoicing and payment terms, etc. Key contractual points such as these should be covered explicitly (usually in writing) for the benefit of all: this protects you and your clients from any awkwardness later on that can arise from misunderstandings. Invoices must be clear, concise and professional as well as meeting all legal and tax requirements relevant to your jurisdiction. Absolute clarity is usually appreciated by clients and makes their lives and yours easier in the long run. This is another area where embarrassment or reticence can lead one to avoid complete clarity – trust me that the consequences of a lack of clarity and any misunderstandings can be far more embarrassing than being clear upfront.

In summary, learning to price appropriately and sell well is possible for all of us – but only if we do the hard work of defining our target market(s), undertaking market research and setting and adhering to objective, fair price structures that reflect our level of skills and experience and the value we add, as well as market rates. We may need to go beyond our current comfort zone to enable ourselves to do this well. Once all of these challenges have been met and overcome, generating profitable business and creating satisfied customers is easy and a delight – for us and for them. ■

Coming up in our January 2020 issue…
Julie explains how to promote and sell your unique coaching products and services

Julie J Allan is a self-employed coach, team coach, mentor, supervisor and coach educator, with board-level experience in the legal, transport and water sectors and senior management experience in financial services. Julie passionately believes in the inherent capability of all, and in the power of Gestalt and Three Principles-based coaching to unlock that potential.
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Nature as dynamic co-partner: beyond the 'walk and talk' experience...

What are the benefits of working with the natural world – for both ourselves and our clients – and what do we need to consider? Coach and supervisor **Catherine Gorham** shows how we can invite the outdoors in to our coaching relationships.

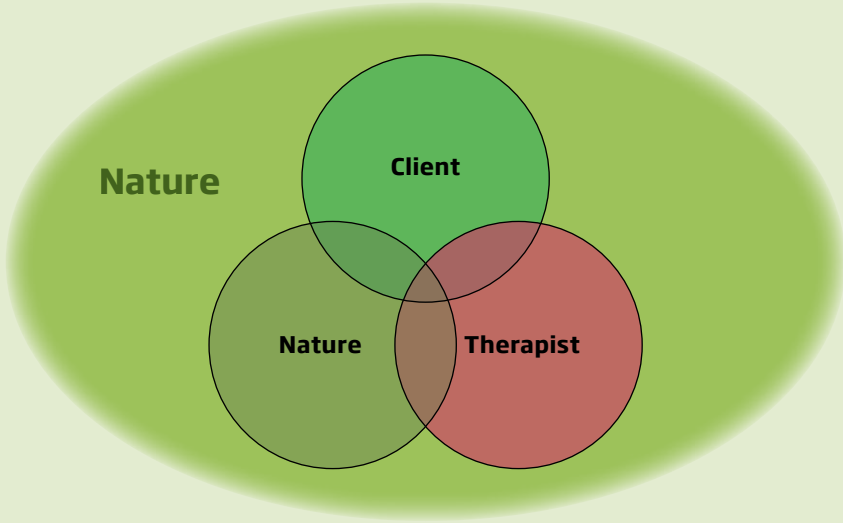
In a world where time and space seem to be continually contracting, it is small wonder that many coaching clients welcome the spaciousness that 'walking and talking' sessions outside the office can offer.

Nature as witness: a holding environment

It is now widely acknowledged that a connection to the natural world enhances our physical and psychological wellbeing; eg Ulrich's 1984 hospital window experiment[1] and Kaplan's attention restoration theory.[2] The latter identified the restorative effect on higher cognitive functioning gained through access to complex ecosystems, leading to Scandinavian government rehabilitation programmes in horticultural settings to address burnout. Earlier this year, latest findings from a Natural England survey[3] suggested that a weekly two-hour 'dose of nature' significantly boosts health and wellbeing.

In the field of ecotherapy, Level 1 is described as 'human-centred nature therapy',[4] with nature seen as a witness, a holding environment for the client and practitioner to use as necessary, regardless of the cost to the environment. Level 2 is about a 'circle of reciprocal healing',[4] working at a level of 'interbeing' between humans and the non-human world.[5] For my coaching and supervision practice, I have chosen to position my relationship with nature as 'nature inviting us in', reminding myself and clients of the need to respect the natural world and soften our tread on the earth while physically opening up our hearts and minds to the messages that nature may offer.

Figure 1[8]: Outdoor therapeutic relating



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Lewis[6] explored the impact of a natural setting on the psychotherapist as opposed to the client and concluded that an expanded sense of spaciousness became available to the practitioner too. →

Nature as dynamic co-partner

However, beyond nature as a witness, Berger[7] developed the model of incorporating nature as co-therapist in the therapeutic alliance, playing a more active role by holding up a mirror to the internal emotional landscape.

Marshall[8] describes the 'eco-intimacy' of this vibrant alliance with the immediacy of shared experiences in a dynamic environment, deepening the relationship with self and other. The unpredictability of taking a client or supervision group outdoors offers a wealth of moments that can be perceived as potential triggers for discomfort or opportunities for exploring an edge. Outdoors, those edges can easily feel magnified – for example, the client who expressed fear of large birds ahead of us venturing out to the Thames river path: we contracted for walking past the inevitable Canada geese and swans but with permission to back away or change direction if she felt uncomfortable. It was important that she felt she had agency to step towards or away from her fear in the moment, but by expressing it, she also referred to the associated shame she felt around the fear, which opened up a new aspect of inquiry around the shame. It is the process of navigation as the outer and inner landscapes meet that offers the coach, or supervisor, a richer view into the client's world, which can be transformative for the relationship.

There is something magically synchronistic about how often the unpredictable dynamics that evolve serve as the perfect tool for the work, enabling the coach to step back to being witness, and nature to take on the role of coach (eg I had a pair of ducks come and sit in the middle of a supervision group in Regent's Park which immediately presented the perfect embodiment of the supervisee's relationship inquiry!).

Why does working with nature deepen our connection with the inner landscape?

The natural world offers a way in to our unconscious, a somatic level of knowing through hard-wired resonance (Wilson's biophilia hypothesis)[9] which accelerates internal processing, particularly for coaching clients showing up very much 'in their heads'. While this catalytic effect can be beneficial, requiring fewer sessions for a deep sustained shift, there is also a health warning; ie emotions may surface quicker than either the client or coach are expecting, and this needs to be contracted for in advance.

Buber's I-thou[10] theory of identity mirrored in relationship offers an explanation as to why a natural setting provides such a rich backdrop for psychological inquiry: the diversity of metaphors immediately available enables clients to develop a unique relationship with objects in the moment. As those relationships unfold, they reflect aspects of the unconscious (such as the client who selected a burnt tree to represent the effect of a conflict with a fellow board member, revealing a degree of emotional scarring which suddenly became visceral for both of us – far beyond words alone). It is noteworthy how quickly many clients develop an attachment to an object that speaks to them, then revisit it between sessions as an anchor for their ongoing internal work.

There is a palpable potency about the sense of separation that the natural environment offers as co-partner. A blackbird had stood to witness a supervisee's whole issue unfold, and I asked her, if the blackbird represented her internal supervisor, what messages might be in the blackbird's song? Immediately she was able to separate from the story and to use the distance between to invite in new perspectives. Part of the challenge for the practitioner working outdoors is to observe and catch these moments as gifts to integrate into the work – while simultaneously being totally present for the client and attentive to their own processing. Sometimes, pointing out such opportunities as they arrive in the space can feel like a potential distraction to the client or interruption if they are mid-flow, so attunement involves choosing how and when the offer should be made. A softening of the voice, mirroring the gentleness with which the blackbird treads on the earth, enabled the observation to be heard without being experienced as an intrusion.

In a natural setting, the sense of spaciousness offers both client and practitioner the perfect backdrop for slowing down, inviting deeper noticing of the internal landscape and of respective relationships to the outer landscape in that moment. The use of movement, whether pausing or pacing, suddenly becomes an added tool; for example, modelling as practitioner a slow walking pace with the client alongside frequently generates an initial resistance in the client which, by inviting attention, paradoxically accelerates their shift to a more internal focus.

When is it inappropriate to take a client outdoors?

Taking a client outdoors may not always be appropriate; in my professional experience, psychological safety sometimes seems to be a less predominant consideration for coaches and supervisors than for therapists, and yet this is paramount, whichever modality we are operating within. Clients presenting with symptoms of stress and overwhelm may find an outdoor open space without any physical surrounding structure and accompanying sensory stimulation even more overwhelming, so this needs to form part of the initial assessment. Likewise, a client who is not yet fully engaged in the coaching process, or coaching relationship, ie not yet totally 'in the room', is often not ready to leave the room's safety. For those of us who desire to work in this way, we need to consider what's different about a natural setting that we need to attend to for psychological safety and optimal benefit. Can some of those benefits still be gained if nature comes into an indoor space? Given the current agenda around promoting positive mental health, it is also imperative that coaches who use the outdoors within a wellbeing context are equipped to do so safely.

> For my coaching and supervision practice, I have chosen to position my relationship with nature as 'nature inviting us in', reminding myself and clients of the need to respect the natural world and soften our tread on the earth while physically opening up our hearts and minds to the messages that nature may offer

Bringing nature in

For those situations when an outdoor space isn't appropriate or practical, the benefits of integrating nature into the coaching process can apply equally in an indoor space. →

Case study

I first met 'John' in his small, sterile office that offered no daylight. He came across as a thoughtful, introverted, self-effacing guy, concerned about his recent promotion to a senior leadership role after many years in the same organisation, and its corresponding challenges, including suddenly being a visible figurehead to a diverse team and having to make decisions far more complex and nuanced than his scientific background had prepared him for. He didn't find new relationships easy, seeking to know the right way to respond, and associating with the identity of scientist rather than leader. Hence his initial request to me as his coach was to provide him with a 'leadership manual' to address the gaps he was only too acutely aware of.

Early in our first session, I was struck by John's embodied sense of contraction – cognitively and somatically – like a rabbit in headlights, too dazed and frightened to move, and his cramped physical environment was an added factor, impeding any softening towards expansion and inquiry.

Having assessed John's capacity to contain his own emotional process while being outdoors, ie in an unstructured space, I offered him the opportunity of working together in a local park for session two, explaining the theoretical rationale for this in more depth than I normally would, respecting knowledge as his comfort base.

As part of our extensive contracting process, I checked out his historical relationship with nature, which was limited, given his upbringing in Singapore. This enabled me to work from his starting point; ie his leap of faith in venturing into an open, natural space for 'intangible' work represented a move towards expansion in itself and indicated the need for me to hold the psychological container even more tightly early on until he developed his own stability. We established permission to express any concerns in the moment around privacy and emotional upset or overwhelm, especially given the intensity of new sensory stimulants he was about to encounter in a park bursting with spring colours, textures and other people. One aspect of the tight containment was to check in with him more regularly in our early stages of working outdoors together, partly for me to know how he was doing in the moment and partly to facilitate his own noticing and regulation.

Within the tripartite alliance with nature, John and I walked side by side, enabling a felt sense of connection as we attuned together to the rich sensory tapestry around us. The vibrancy of the plants, dynamic movements of the squirrels and expanse of the sky offered a support for mindfulness in the moment, and I encouraged him to drop five per cent further into his body as we slowly walked together. I consciously held a multidimensional awareness, leaning in to my deep, personal relationship with nature to aid my own somatic processing and stay with the not knowing (I could easily have been triggered by his need to know).

Over the remaining sessions, the powerful combination of metaphor, projection and the immediacy of the experience meant that John was able to bring into awareness previously unconscious core limiting beliefs. For example, he chose a tree that represented his embodied leadership identity, which turned out to be the smallest tree in the park, supported by a wooden frame. This was a moment of surprise, deep noticing and self-compassion for John, enabling him to take his first physical steps towards his aspirational tree and voicing what kind of shift they represented.

One of the coaching objectives was to build his capacity for empathy; I suggested we work with the drifts of crocuses, each colour symbolising one of his key stakeholders: by moving to stand alongside each character, he was able to experience the view of the field (in a Gestalt sense) from their individual perspectives, which triggered a somatic cognisance in him. It also provided him with a simple tool that he could practise beyond the coaching.

John's hard-wired need for control made him reluctant to risk stepping back as a leader and empowering others. We used the boundaries of the park to represent his system and the network of paths within the park to find positions from where he could remain figural to an issue or move to the edge, visible yet softening the degree of control. Physically, he could feel the difference and experienced that moment of self-inquiry, when he made an appropriate choice for the situation.

In summary, the rich sensory palette offered by nature extended his more black-and-white binary thinking, drawing on other levels of knowing beyond the intellectual and, given his starting point, his willingness to embrace this entirely different way of learning was humbling to witness.

> In a natural setting, the sense of spaciousness offers both client and practitioner the perfect backdrop for slowing down, inviting deeper noticing of the internal landscape and of respective relationships to the outer landscape in that moment

Natural objects, such as pebbles, shells or even images, can still be used as visual and kinaesthetic channels for catalysing a somatic connection and thereby shifting the energetic state of the client. Visual natural images have been proven to reduce stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system.[11]

Determining the holding environment

The qualities of the natural setting can determine its holding impact on the client; for example, a small shady woodland area enclosed by trees can feel private, intimate and containing, whereas open downs, with their vast expanse of open space, few trees and long views, can feel much more exposing and uncontaining, even potentially overwhelming for a client who is new to coaching and/or is already experiencing a sense of feeling overfull. However, for a client wanting internal spaciousness to shift perspective and unstick some unhelpful narratives, an expansive space inviting movement and physical freedom can be a powerful vehicle for inquiry. Even then, a grassy dip in the hillside where we can sit together can offer a surprising degree of physical and emotional containment. Working at the point where the urban and rural worlds meet can also be powerful: where is the clash of systems in the client's world?

What's different in practice that coaches need to attend to?

My advice to coaches and supervisors working outdoors is to pay particular attention to what I call the '3Cs: Contracting, Containing and Connecting' – which all require some adjustment from indoor practice. 'Contracting' needs to include permissions concerning unpredictable events, and the client's particular fears or vulnerabilities. 'Containing' means ensuring that the client feels energetically held in the space through regular checking-in and managing proximity between coach and client, while securing privacy. 'Connecting' requires the coach to soften the boundaries between self and the natural world so that the dynamic and spontaneous gifts available are noticed and integrated, if appropriate, and to invite the client to do the same.

What's the added value for supervisees from being outdoors?

Group supervisees have the additional benefit of observing nature interact with their fellow group members:

'By positioning the work as Nature inviting us in, this gave a somatically different aspect for us to step into – our senses were awakened so we could notice the metaphors Nature was presenting to each of us. When I was too wrapped up in my thoughts, I missed what Nature was offering!'.

Integrating nature in an organisational context

I have experienced some resistance to this way of working from coaching leads in large corporate organisations, which act as a barrier to internal coaches drawing on its potential or clients reaping the benefits. Examples I have heard range from: 'There's not enough time for it' to: 'It wouldn't address serious issues, it's just tree hugging' to: 'You need to be in the country' (when a couple of trees and a view of the sky will suffice!). Hopefully, over time, the bottom line benefit of fewer sessions will make employers stop and listen to its unique value – as an enabler for positive mental health; a catalyst for deep, sustained change and a vehicle for softening our collective tread on the earth. ■

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News, views and research round-up

Compiled by **Sally Brown**

BACP Coaching News

We are delighted to introduce two new members of the BACP Coaching Executive, who joined in July.

Karen Ledger

Karen is a leadership coach, therapist, expert witness and supervisor. She is passionate about her working relationships, which are underpinned by the person-centred approach and influenced by Gestalt and the work of Irvin Yalom. Her coaching and organisational clients span the independent and public sectors within the UK, including the NHS and political sector.

Karen has worked with a range of teams, including executive boards and senior management teams. Her work focuses on building effective relationships and communication to achieve high performance. She has recently developed her practice to offer the option of working outdoors, using nature as an additional resource for her clients, coachees and supervisees.

As well as delivering leadership workshops for a wide range of organisations, Karen has designed and facilitated workshops on diversity for staff working with dementia clients.

Karen will take a special focus on the Executive on supervision for coach-therapists, working alongside Steve Page.

> “I am fascinated by people and relationships. I have always had a strong interest in making connections and developing networks, and I am now seeking new ways to make a contribution. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the BACP Coaching Executive”

Tom Andrews

Tom has been working to support others throughout his career, particularly using creativity as a catalyst for change. He is the founder of two influential charities: People United (pioneering artistic projects and research across the UK, focusing on kindness) and Music for Change (promoting cultural understanding through participation in music).

Tom's eclectic career has involved helping to establish a successful record label, working with the senior management team at the Royal Opera House, and teaching Tibetan refugees in Northern India. He now works as a coach, supporting leaders working in the cultural and third sectors, specialising in career transition, wellbeing and values, and is an integrative counsellor for a community counselling service and hospice. In addition, Tom is a facilitator and coach for the Clore Leadership Programme.

> “I am keen to contribute at what feels like an exciting time of exploration and growth for coach-therapists. I am particularly interested in listening to and supporting members and contributing to initiatives and research across BACP and further afield”

Meet the member

Lynne Walder is a psychotherapist, coach, clinical hypnotherapist, university lecturer, mentor and speaker. Teaching mindfulness and emotional intelligence is core to her work, to help clients achieve mental fitness, emotional health and personal growth. She works with both children and adults to eliminate anxiety, depression and stress. Lynne's private practice is international.
www.lynnewaldercoaching.com

How would you describe your journey from therapist to coach?
It was a natural integration. I realised that, as a therapist, I was only able to support my clients on part of their journey, and that there was huge potential and opportunity to be able to work with an individual to explore how they might move forward once they had reached a point at which they could feel free of the blocks that they had come to therapy to resolve in the first place. I see both competences as symbiotic, and more powerful for the client when used together. I often blend therapy and coaching, depending on what presents in a session. I also trained in clinical hypnotherapy to enable me to pull out the real stubborn 'weeds' by the roots.

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Do you have a coaching niche?
I wouldn't call it a niche, more a way of working. Mindfulness and emotional intelligence are core to my approach. I focus on reconnecting people to themselves and their 'inner GPS', teaching them to feel, rather than rely solely on thinking. Emotions are often misunderstood, feared and avoided. Learning how to understand emotions and feelings, and respond rather than react to them, is central to psychological wellbeing. I always begin from my belief that there are three elements to most of our mental distress: a dysregulated nervous system, as a result of emotional baggage, trauma, and unprocessed emotional reactions; an existential 'gap' or incongruence between who we believe we are and who we really are; and social factors such as poverty, job and environment, etc. My passion is in understanding both mental health and human behaviour, and how one impacts the other. To expedite my learning, I chose to work as a coach-therapist in the toughest of environments, including a dual-diagnosis drug rehabilitation centre, a maximum-security male prison and a forensic psychiatric hospital, with clients who were extremely challenging, demanding and resistant to change. They taught me much about human behaviour.

How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?
I have always had a solution-focused, resilient and positive disposition, and coaching has reinforced and strengthened that in me. I am not afraid of challenges or sitting with discomfort in order to grow. In fact, I seek them out! I left the UK to live in New Zealand nine years ago with my husband and two children. We had never been there before, it was as far from the UK as you could get, we didn't have jobs to go to, didn't know anyone there, and sold our house in the UK, so that there was no going back. I grew so much from the experience.

Where do you practise?
I use Skype for overseas clients and see face-to-face clients in my private practice at home. I also work as a lecturer and mentor at Nottingham Trent University, delivering seminars on personal development and emotional intelligence. I am also the wellbeing coach for staff members.

Do you have a typical client?
Depressed, anxious, angry or fearful Homo sapiens! My clients often express feeling stuck, blocked or lost. They often fear change, uncertainty and the unknown, which creates anxiety. Yet change is happening all the time, and the only certainty any of us has is death. I enjoy the challenge, and the satisfaction I get when I work successfully with clients who have been labelled, judged, diagnosed and 'written off'.

What's your biggest challenge currently?
Patience. I feel a huge sense of urgency at the moment, with regards to having a positive impact on people's mental health in the quickest possible time. I am always asking myself: 'How can I have maximum impact? How can I reach the biggest audience?' as I see the world in crisis regarding psychological health. My goal is for psychological wellbeing to be given the same attention and importance as physical fitness.

What do you feel the most proud of having achieved?
I am most proud of having had a significant positive impact on the quality of my clients' lives. As a result of my ability to build trust and rapport with the most challenging individuals, I learned how to reach the most unreachable clients, and to connect with the most disconnected. I seek to meet the person behind the behaviour, diagnosis or presenting problem (symptom), as very often the problem they bring is not the real problem.

Coaching in Practice

Supporting international students

The internationalisation of higher education has dramatically increased over the past decade, and now generates £25.8 billion for the UK economy.[1] Many foreign students arrive with high expectations of what they will gain from their investment in a British degree or post graduate qualification, says Dr Kate Daniels, who has set up a coaching programme to support international students at Cambridge University: 'In coaching conversations, these often stressed, sometimes depressed, homesick, anxious and even angry clients can emerge more self-aware, purpose-driven, and intellectually and socially agile.'

Dr Daniels joined the University of Cambridge as a lecturer in Modern Arabic studies, before becoming a Director of Studies, a role which involved academic welfare support. She then moved into her current role in Academic Training and Development for International Students (ATDIS), as part of a team that supports the learning and development of international students. 'I realised that I was using coaching techniques in much of my one-to-one work, so when I discovered that the university offered a coaching diploma, I applied for funding. I was fortunate that my director understood its relevance to my role,' she says.

Dr Daniels had already qualified as a counsellor, inspired by her personal experience of psychotherapy through the university counselling service. She then set up a formal coaching programme as an adjunct to the academic support offered by ATDIS. 'It works on a self-referral, ad-hoc basis. I post session availability on the ATDIS intranet system each week, and students book themselves in. I usually offer about five sessions a week,' she says.

The coaching element differentiates the programme from the university counselling service, says Dr Daniels. 'Many are coming with issues such as time management and reducing procrastination, which respond well to coaching.' But she describes her coaching approach as being 'counselling informed', as there is often a need to work at depth: 'Many come thinking their challenges are down to the language barrier, but it invariably turns out to be more complex. There is often a struggle with identity. There is a lot of impostor syndrome at Cambridge as students question whether they are clever enough to be here. We help students understand themselves emotionally and intellectually and to develop their relationships.'

The programme is now in its second year, and Dr Daniels is in the process of setting up a formal evaluation process. 'Self-reported results so far show that every coaching encounter has had a positive effect, which may be reported as getting a first in a particular piece of work or more generally as an improvement in personal wellbeing,' she says. 'In the long term, I believe the coaching programme has a role to play in student retention and resource management, helping to take pressure off both counselling and the academic support services.'

> I enjoy the challenge, and the satisfaction I get when I work successfully with clients who have been labelled, judged, diagnosed and 'written off'

What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?

One size does not fit all. Don't rely too much on tools and theories as it can feel prescriptive and inauthentic to the client. Be yourself in every client interaction. Always explore the 'why' behind a desired goal – coaches who have a therapy background are more adequately equipped to work with deeper issues that might surface in coaching. ■

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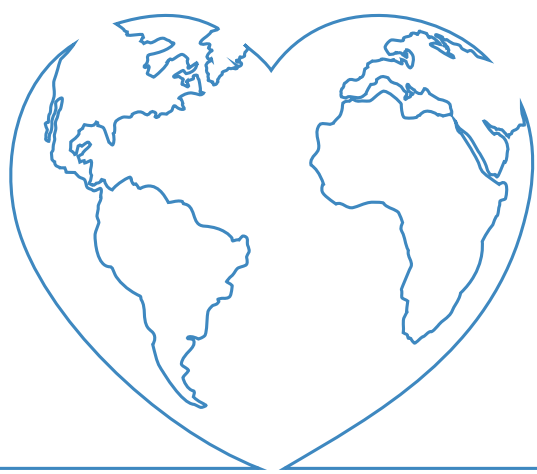

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OR Coaching Psychology	11-15 Nov; 16-20 Mar;15-19 Jun
Stress Management, Health and Wellbeing Coaching (4 days)	Modular

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