

A new theme has been emerging in the coaching profession: Should coaches be the guardians of their client's morality? Many coaches will readily declare their sense of privilege in being invited to witness the discomfort and aspirations of their clients; and to have some role in the resolution of the former and the realisation of the latter. The client is of course just one part of a larger system



and their actions will have consequences of some kind for others. The ethical question for coaches responding to this new exhortation toward assuming moral guardianship is: How can we still honour the privilege our clients give us, while introducing our own moral judgements on their propositions and their actions? A theoretical answer may lie somewhere in the notion of coaching as an alliance where assumptions can be challenged. The answer in practice, which respects the client's autonomy while having the courage to stay close to our own values, both as a coach and as a human being, may be less easily found. *Ken Smith*

### Ethical Dilemmas in Coaching – an EMCC research project Guest feature from Katharine St.John-Brooks

Some of you will have been at the Coaches in Government Network's Conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 where I talked about the findings of some research I led for the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC) into the nature of the ethical dilemmas that arise, in particular, for internal coaches - although many of the dilemmas arise for external coaches too, particularly if they have come to know very well the organisation in which they are coaching. The following is a summary of the findings and some further reflections on them since I completed the project.

123 coaches participated in the research and contributed over 150 dilemmas from which I extracted the "Top 10" categories of dilemma. These were:

1. Third parties in the organisation (often the line manager) wanting the coach to give information / feedback about the client
2. Role conflict i.e. where the coach is coaching a client on whom, or on whose work area, the coach's 'day job' impinges (particularly happens when the coach works in HR e.g. chairing a promotion panel where one of the candidates is your client)
3. Client wanting to discuss an issue involving someone whom the

coach knows well/works with (i.e. issues of maintaining one's independence)

4. Being told by client about inappropriate comments or behaviour (e.g. bullying) by a third party but the coach not being able to act on them
5. Client's personal issues having impact on performance (but the client not wanting anyone to know)
6. Where coaching more than one client sets up difficulties (e.g. where the clients want to discuss each other or one works for the other)
7. Knowing something about the client/client's future that they don't know (and you can't tell them)
8. Being unable to use information that could benefit the team/organisation (e.g. because of confidentiality or where there is no mechanism for feeding back organisational learning)
9. Client attempting to use sessions to further own agenda (through influencing coach)
10. Client wanting to discuss leaving the organisation (which was not the original contract)

Many of these dilemmas were much easier to deal with if the coaches had contracted tightly and thoughtfully at the outset of the coaching relationship and if they had been alerted to the fact – via their initial training or subsequent CPD - that such issues can arise so that they weren't taken by surprise.

I was asked the question: ***What kind of support does your organisation provide?***

The following percentage of the 123 respondents said "Yes" to these different types of support:

Facilitated shared learning opportunities	56%
Coaching network	56%
CPD opportunities e.g. visiting speakers	49%
1:1 supervision	45%
Group supervision led by a trained supervisor	37%
Coaching library	22%
Action Learning Set	20%
Shared web space / internet chat room	15%
Email groups	14%
Coaching 'buddy'	13%
None of these	8%

It was particularly heartening to see that many employers offered 1:1 or group supervision (indeed, one or two made it a condition of coaches being allowed to continue to coach) but one might still argue that provision of supervision should be universal. Speaking as an external coach, I don't know what I'd do without it.

However, this article is more about what has happened since I finished the research. It left me feeling very strongly that: a) training was sometimes inadequate in this area (though others have made the point that it's only once you have been coaching for a while that the significance of all this becomes real; b) that organisations need to give their coaches more guidance about contracting; and c) that many coaches have less support than they deserve. Another consequence for me is that I am contracting much more tightly myself.

On the training front I am now on a mission to talk to all the major training providers about the time they devote to the discussion of how to deal with ethical dilemmas. So far I have dates in the diary to talk to the alumni or Masters programme organisers at the Academy of Executive Coaching, the Oxford School, Myles Downey's School of Coaching and Sheffield Hallam. If any of you think that the training establishment where you trained could usefully have devoted more attention to this issue, do get in touch with me.

### **Confidentiality**

Having spoken at nearly a dozen conferences or workshops over the past eight months about the research, I have been struck that the issue which always raises most controversy is what to do if a client tells you that they or a colleague is being bullied but the client does not want to take it any further. The issue hinges on what we mean by 'confidentiality'. Most coaches take the view that their role would be to support the client to take it further – or even to encourage them to. However, if the client resists, these coaches would, if reluctantly, leave the matter there on the grounds that doing anything else would breach the client's confidentiality. Some coaches – particularly those working in certain professions such as the police - contract up front, that their commitment to confidentiality is conditional on the fact that the client does not tell them about anything that breaches the organisation's disciplinary code. These coaches

argue that it would be their duty to the organisation to act on the information.

Every single audience I have had has included coaches on both sides of the debate. Similar variances have arisen in relation to a client arriving at sessions smelling of alcohol. Some coaches would consider it a personal matter to be addressed in a coaching session, with the coach encouraging the client to seek specialist help. However, other coaches are appalled by this. One, coaching in the NHS, said that she would insist that the client went straight home after the session and would tell him / her that she would have to report it (because of the potential dangers to patients); another, working in a manufacturing company, took a similar view because of the dangers to the client inherent in working with machinery.

One of the lessons I have taken from these debates is the importance of organisations discussing with their coaches what variety of confidentiality they are expecting from them and what that would mean in practice. My last workshop, last week, was with half a dozen coaches all working for the same retailer. There were three different schools of thought amongst the six coaches and no organisational policy.

If you want to know more about the research findings, a fuller account of them appears in the June 2010 issue of the International Mentoring and Coaching Journal.

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## Association for Coaching Conference 2010 – Going Global Ken Smith

**We are, so Julio Olalla, President of the Newfield Network, told us, all observers: once we have observed, we act; and if we are discontent with the results, we act again. Our problem is that our later actions are based on the first observation: “We are trapped in the obviousness of how to see.”**

As coaches we help others to observe the observers they are, helping them to find a new way of knowing. The importance of different ways of knowing and the consequences of giving legitimacy to the exterior world which we try to measure and predict, and denying it to an interior knowing which the Newtonian paradigm has devalued; lay at the centre of Julia’s exposition. He described coaching clients as people looking to have a conversation they can’t have with anyone else; people wanting to know what their real question is, the question at the heart of the dissatisfaction in which they have been trained, by systems of education and commerce firmly rooted in that exterior way of knowing. It is impossible here to convey the richness, humour and humanity of Julio’s words, coming as they do from the profound and sometimes dramatically difficult experiences of his and his family’s life. For once, we had an inspirational speaker who did not press the tender places of our inadequacy and envy but left us all truly inspired.

The scene had already been set by a warm welcome from Katherine Tulpa, who described the coaching profession’s coming of age,

combining: credibility of practice; collaboration across our professional bodies; and a greater purposefulness going beyond individuals to society. During the eight years of its life, the Association for Coaching has moved from attempts to define coaching, to exploring how it can be used for teams, at all organisation levels and for transformation.



After these two sparkling exhortations, delegates dispersed to their chosen workshops and more practical concerns. My attempt to remain in a rarefied atmosphere took

me to the workshop on Thought Field Therapy (TFT) from Tim Polkinghorne of Reach Nirvana, who promised us 2-minute solutions. I was hoping to find out the difference between TFT and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), and how these meridian therapies can be positioned in a coaching setting. Overall I was left still guessing but very relaxed.

Where next but on to the irresistibly entitled “Transitions and the Meaning of Life”. Jennifer Liston-Smith, Siobhan O’Riordan and Sheila Panchal invited us to consider our own life experiences, in particular turning 30, becoming a parent or preparing for retirement; and how these

experiences might be different now to how they were for people 30 years ago; not least given the ever more rapid speed of change in information technology and the different kinds of expectations and relationships that flowed from this. Living through transition was described as a process of meaning-making, where values shift as different things take on new importance and life becomes more complicated. The presenters offered three approaches, which their researches had suggested were particularly helpful in working with transitions: positive psychology, cognitive-behavioural coaching and solutions-focus.

We came down to earth at the session on selection of external coaches given by Liz Dimmock of Clutterbuck Associates. Liz described a process used to select a new pool of external coaches for a client organisation which viewed qualifications, membership of coaching bodies and client testimonials as not sufficiently good predictors of coaching performance.

The assessment comprised a panel interview covering the candidate's coaching journey, what drives their CPD and what issues they have taken to supervision; together with a real coaching session with volunteer clients; and the candidate's self reflection on the session. Interestingly in making the judgement to appoint a coach, little weight was given to the volunteer client's account of their experience of being coached by the candidate. The rationale for investing in what was a resource-intensive process was an entirely reasonable one; but I wonder with the professional bodies and the better

coach training organisations introducing ever more rigour into their accreditation processes whether there are less costly ways to be an intelligent customer.

Sir John Whitmore took us into Day 2, with more encouragement to coach for a higher purpose, with his short and powerful address on "Sustainability and the Role of the Global Coaching Community". Echoing some of Julio Olalla's words, Sir John saw the industrial revolution's drive to engineer our way to utopia as a delusion and suggested coaches be more open to the moral and spiritual potential of their practice, where responsibility to humanity may at times need to override our responsibility to our client.

This slipped smoothly into "Values-Based Coaching", in which Lisa Wake of Awaken Consulting related a case study about a culture change programme in a large multi-site organisation. The main interest here was in the description of the diagnostic approach, which drew on among other things Spiral Dynamics, which was explained with the commendable clarity missing from Beck and Cowan's 1996 source book on this topic.

Reuven Bar-On gave the much awaited afternoon keynote address, though in a curiously apologetic manner, deciding to spare us the detailed account and evidence-base for which I suspect many in the audience were waiting; telling us instead about how the notion of holistic listening – with ears, eyes and heart – has been with us for at least a millennium; and reminding us of the

close connection between understanding ourselves and being able to understand and relate to others.

In “Pivotal Moments in Coaching” Jacqueline Binkert and Ann Clancy of Appreciative Coaching reported on their research into what are often called “aha! moments”: times of sudden, new awareness. With more echoes of Julio Olalla, Jacqui and Ann contrasted the perspective which saw change as manageable and controllable through planning, to one which looks at change as a continuous product of self-organising systems. Pivotal moments were held to be phenomena of the latter and the session looked at what characterised them and how they can be triggered in coaching. Though these moments manifest suddenly, it was acknowledged that, while triggered in the coaching conversation, they need

not occur while the conversation is still in progress.

And finally on to team coaching, a topic still attracting a degree of debate about what it actually is. John Leary-Joyce was pretty clear that it encompassed activities that currently fall under the description of team facilitation and team development but that also included individual coaching support. As ever the critical piece seems to be contracting and establishing the purpose of the work. John offered us a six-level process model, across which he laid Torbert’s model of leadership levels, to design powerful questions which could be asked of the team and the individuals within it. Importantly he proposed that a team coach would need to draw on an expanded range of capabilities, with particular importance placed on working with the team to understand its place within the wider organisational system.

## **Review: Tim Casserley & David Megginson - “Learning from Burnout”**

*Paul Ellis*

**As even The Economist talks about overstretched workers (Schumpeter: “Overstretched” May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010) the issue of burnout in the workforce would appear to be ever more relevant. Yet this book by Tim Casserley and the long-standing doyen of the coaching world, David Megginson, is a much more thoughtful and reflective tome than others that have jumped on the burnout bandwagon in recent years. Indeed early in the book they set out what for them burnout means and how it relates to a much deeper existential issue than those who are simply overworked.**

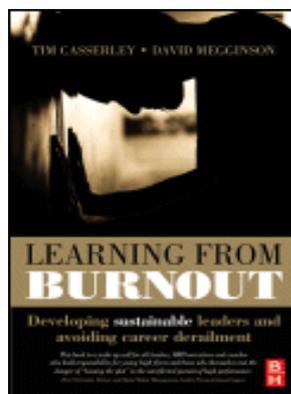
The clue to their focus is in the works subtitle, “Developing sustainable leaders and avoiding career derailment”. The authors argue that burnout is a particular phenomenon of

high potential high-flyers those who the organisation invests in as leaders of the future. Their research suggests that around 20% of this high potential pool suffer from burnout, and they

demonstrate clearly why on a cost basis alone this is a vital issue for organisations.

This book would be a fascinating read just for its carefully researched explanation of how both the individual and the organisational environment produce burnout, the behaviours that manifest in this condition and how to deal with it. Yet it challenges many of the prevailing ongoing beliefs and values that we see in organisations today, often peddled by the HR community.

On burnout itself they argue for it being a transformational learning experience and one that when managed well can produce leaders who are grounded in reality with a clear sense of purpose of who they are. To enable this transformation requires support for those in burnout from coaches, and here they argue for coaches who are at a developmental stage beyond those they are coaching. To my view this is a far deeper level of coaching than many of us can offer, it goes beyond the tools based approaches that are common, and requires coaches who have done considerable work on themselves as well as continuing to do so.



Just as they challenge the orthodoxy that a coach can coach anyone, entwined in the central theme of burnout is a challenge to the orthodoxy of developing leaders against a set of competences. They argue that this approach produces a set of clones: that you either fit the competences or you don't. They challenge the prevailing view of management training with its fixation on sanitised information transfer

rather than promoting learning at a deeper more meaningful level. And they challenge the growing popularity of positive psychology, arguing that learning to lead does involve some pain and inward examination.

The authors hold passionate views, born from their own personal experience and augmented now by research. This is in many ways a risky book: reading it will challenge the reader's perceptions in a variety of areas, many of which are unexpected based on the title alone, but this risk is entirely congruent with the authors' perspective; that we are failing to produce leaders who can lead in this time, precisely because we will not take the risks required.

**Empowering minority group members: coaching for an NGO**  
*Jane Cordell*

**The train has pulled out of Birmingham on a sunny spring evening. I have just finished the fourth and final day of coaching work on a Leadership Empowerment scheme run by RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation). All**

**those I coached were disabled or had long term illnesses, like me; all faced challenges in their careers and home lives. The experience stretched me as a coach, demanded new skills and gave a good perspective on my in-house coaching work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Here I reflect on this.**

### **Diverse styles**

Something which struck me immediately was what a diverse bunch this was, coming from around the country and working in a wide range of jobs from the civil service to education and the voluntary sector. Some arrived already brimming with ideas for the future, their goals waiting to be captured and organised. For them, and me, the prescribed 30 minutes did not seem enough and I used a faster pace and more obviously vigorous style with them. Having written down their goals, we ranked them and created draft timetables for achieving them.

Other individuals came from a very different starting point. Some of them had to juggle a complex range of responsibilities at work and home which, understandably, seemed rather overwhelming. For these people, the pace needed to be gentler and the style more probing, encouraging them to put aside their burdens for a short time, and reflect on the longer horizon. Setting a physically relaxed but purposeful atmosphere was, I found, important during these sessions. I led with managing my own body language, noticing how the atmosphere changed as the person with whom I was working followed suit. This was particularly important, I thought, in the pauses - those silent moments where it can be tempting to 'help' the person you are coaching. If you stay calm and do not fill them with any indication of dismay or impatience, the ideas or answers will

come.

The timetable for coaching sometimes meant there was often no gap between clients. This meant that I had to be ready to 'change gear' and adapt the pace immediately. This was easier after the first and second events, as by then I could anticipate the style of the person about to come through the door. But initially it pushed me to adapt faster and be more flexible. This has changed me - default 'moderate' will no longer do, and I realise that by helping a client set the pace, you let them determine how much happens the session, which is empowering. Most of this happens non-verbally. Being deaf and a good reader of the whole person probably helped.

### **Motivation and determination**

The people I coached had this in spades; it was part of what made the experience so rewarding. Often it was as though a spring had been released and the clients were giving themselves permission to do the things they had been pondering for some time. I wonder whether the fact participants had to pro-actively apply for the course, and go through selection, gave them a more positive attitude to the course and coaching sessions than, say, someone who may be offered coaching 'on a plate' in the workplace. I also think that the fact they all experienced significant barriers, due to their disabilities, made them more determined to succeed and ready to be creative in doing so.

The inclusive, positive environment on the course helped too. Because we were working with people who were getting what they needed to develop, it made it easier to draw them out on goal-planning and next steps.

### **Work/life boundaries**

It was interesting that the people I coached seemed more alert than colleagues I have coached at work to the impact which their work had on their home lives and vice versa and were ready to discuss this. I wonder if this may again relate to their disabilities. When you have to handle more, practically or psychologically, you are automatically more aware of what the outcome could be, e.g. exhaustion, discouragement. Coaching in my workplace focuses on career development but this can sometimes prevent the type of broader discussion which might hold the key to unlocking someone's full potential.

### **Restraint**

Perhaps the most interesting point that emerged from doing this work was the most surprising: trust someone to know their own limits and when someone can explain why they want to remain where they are, let them be.

This seems initially to go against the grain of coaching, which of its nature promotes forward thinking, goals and progress. But the question is: progress on whose terms? Achievement is a highly subjective thing and not only defined by career and material improvement. One person I coached reached the conclusion on the final day that despite encouragement from their line

manager, they did not want to make a move into a higher-level, management role. The temptation as a coach to take this as a cue for probing the reasons why not and trying to remove possible barriers to 'progress' was too great to resist. Luckily I only did the first (the probing) - and gently. This showed that the individual concerned had taken out the issues, looked at them and seen the range of disadvantages for them at that point in their life. This may sound negative, but it's not.

As a coach, what I took from this was an important lesson about knowing when to push, and how far, and when not. Like much of what we do as coaches, it is a risky business. You need to take a decision quickly, based on what you know, what the person is saying, how they are saying it, what their body language and other signals are adding. It is worth probing *how* the client has reached their decision, in case they are simply justifying staying in their comfort zone, but you have to trust your instinct on when enough is enough and maybe recap any good ideas from the session which they could use in the future when they might want to revisit the question again.

### **Out of the coach's comfort zone!**

Doing this pro-bono work for Radar provided valuable experience. It offered a much broader range of clients who came motivated to succeed and overcome obstacles. I was pleased that they took me out of my own comfort zone, offering me new challenges. I had not previously coached people with learning or communication disabilities, and I coached for the very first time directly

in British Sign Language, stretching my skills. The work encouraged me to challenge some of the assumptions I may have been making about what coaching should do and achieve, and expanded my range of styles, making me more flexible and better at adapting quickly to different styles. It

also gave me a healthy perspective on my workplace, a reality check which helped me see what I do and the people I work with through fresh eyes. For all these reasons I would recommend to any coach that they seize any similar opportunity.

## **Review: John Blakey & Ian Day - "Where Were All the Coaches When the Banks Went Down?"**

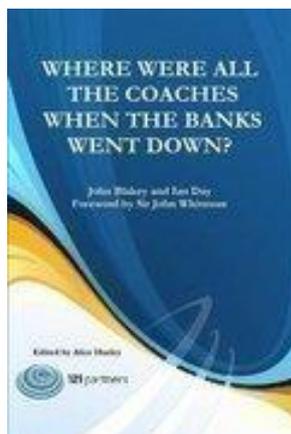
*Ken Smith*

**I came to this book with some reluctance; partly as the fires of my outrage were already well enough stoked; partly as my own coaching practice is unlikely to take me into the banking sector, at least not yet. I'm pleased that I overcame my reluctance, however, as this short, straightforward and very readable book contains some useful and thought provoking things for all coaches working in organisational settings.**

The authors bravely challenge some of the orthodoxies of coaching, which they see arising in large part from the prosperous economic conditions surrounding the birth and early development of coaching. This comfort has fostered a tendency in coaches to serve the individual client significantly more than they serve the sponsoring organisation and to neglect the wider social and economic systems in which coaching takes place. The emphasis has been to privilege the coach-client relationship sometimes to the point of collusion and at the expense of delivering improved outcomes and client accountability.

The central orthodoxy which is challenged is that coaching must be non-directive. While remaining a core

principle, the authors see that applying it too strictly can be unhelpful and let clients off the hook, with potentially hideous consequences of the kind we have seen in the last couple of years. They propose that we should use a FACTS approach, which emphasises: (i) **F**eedback in the moment - being much more willing to offer feedback on the effect the client is having on you; (ii) **A**ccountability – being more ready, courageous and forthright in holding the client to account for action plans and in particular for any incongruence between their words and their actions; (iii) **C**hallenge – having and expressing higher expectations of clients so they stretch themselves; (iv) **T**ension – being prepared to sustain or even create tension in the coach-client relationship as a means of



transformation; and (iv) **S**ystems thinking – inviting clients to view their proposals and actions from the perspectives of others within the wider system.

There is a flavour here of the coach acting as the client's conscience, though the authors express this as offering "tough love". In taking the FACTS approach, they contend that coaching will have a far stronger impact for the client far sooner in the coaching relationship than other more customary approaches. I'm not sure that this is true, as the timing and nature of change is I'm sure conditioned by other, additional variables outside their model. Nonetheless their call to redress the balance between focusing on relationship and on delivery, though not an especially radical proposal, is a compelling one for coaches to consider, given the context in which they place it.

The authors have high aspirations which they deliver in a modest but

effective vehicle. There are points over which one could quibble: the section on systems thinking is somewhat simplistic, though given the book's aims at accessibility, sensibly resists the temptation to stray into more theoretical complexities. I found the case studies artificial and a touch irritating at times but again they support the preceding material well enough. The extensive prescription of the FACTS contract seemed to me overplayed but serves as a reminder of the critical place of contracting and holds up a mirror for how we might currently be going about it.

Though the provocative title might suggest a more polemical critique of the coaching industry, the authors' intention is less to leave coaches blushing with shame at a failure to foster more scrupulous behaviour; but much more to get us to reflect on what coaches could and should be doing; not only for those clients in particularly influential places, but also for the world we live in.

***This review was first published in the Association for Coaching Bulletin April 2010***

There are now **205** members of the Coaches in Government Network, from **52** organisations. **64** members have submitted coaching profiles. Since the Network's inception members have provided in excess of **500** hours of coaching in other members' organisations.

The Network's reputation has now reached across the Atlantic, with officials in the Canadian Government joining Ken Smith in a conference call recently. They have plans to build coaching communities in Canada and wanted to know more about how our Network operates.

***And finally:***

***"Such is the irresistible nature of truth, that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing." Thomas Paine***