

As any casual Buddhist would tell you, central to the experience of being human is the irresistible desire to be someone else, doing something else, somewhere else. And, paradoxically, part of letting go of this desire is to accept that it and the unique form it takes for you is simply part of how you are in the world just now. Coaches with a background in Gestalt work with the similar notion of change as being routed in experiencing your imperfect and dissatisfied self as fully as possible. I have come to believe that the capacity to accept and be kind to ourselves is a great gift. When my coaching clients experience me as offering them unconditional positive regard, which is my aspiration unless I have seriously compelling evidence inviting me not to, I've noticed that they become a little more inclined to offer such regard to themselves and be accepting of whatever it is about themselves, and about others, that they find troublesome. In our prevailing workplace cultures where too often to err is to become quickly invisible and to forgive is to lose power, a deep breath of self-acceptance is often a major turning point. In accepting and owning our own vulnerability, we can take an important step forward.



*Ken Smith*

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## Coaching Emotionally Intelligent Mindful Leaders

Guest feature from Margaret Chapman

In an earlier edition of the Listener (No.11, October 2010) Michael Chaskalson talked about how mindfulness is transitioning into the world of business. Michael's new book *"The Mindful Workplace"* is set to be a seminal work, heralding a new way of thinking about leadership in organisations, in much the same way as Daniel Goleman's *"Why EQ matters more than IQ"* did in 1996. Following a flurry of media activity and the usual round of seminars and conferences, proclaiming 'EQ' as the new idea for the decade, HR departments re-jigged their competency frameworks to accommodate behaviours that Goleman described, as the new yardstick by which to measure successful leaders. In this article I want to revisit what Michael discussed and seek to extend this by considering the relationship between emotional intelligence ('EQ') mindfulness and to look at the implications of mindfulness in organisations for coaching practitioners.

### Defining Mindfulness

An oft quoted definition is that offered by Jon Kabat-Zinn who defines mindfulness as the ability to pay attention in a particular way to the present moment, on purpose and without judgement. In essence, this 'mindful awareness' relates to the self-awareness element of emotional intelligence, which is the bedrock of all 'EQ' models. However, where mindful awareness differs (and, I would suggest, extends the way self-awareness is conceptualised in EQ in theory and in practice) is to train our attention to our embodied senses, that is Vedana (the initial sensory application of forms). Mindfulness training achieves this through developing practitioners' capacity to pay attention to the breadth and body, through a series of exercises designed to deepen our ability to notice what is happening, in the moment, in order to be able to make choice-ful decisions; since, as Jon

Kabat-Zinn notes, mindfulness is an embodied practice.

However, being mindful isn't just noticing what is happening for us, right here, right now, it is also about developing our capacity to 'de-couple' from our automatic emotional responses. That is, it is about developing our ability to stay in a place of Vedana – a space in the middle ground between our immediate response (interpretation) towards an experience, person, or event, of something we like or move towards; versus moving away from that experience, of what we dislike. Being mindful is about leaning into this response and to 'stay with' that response (whether good and bad). So rather than pulling away from, we stay in a place of compassionate curiosity. What Michael described as developing leaders' ability to stay in an 'approach mode.' That is, to take an interest in all aspects of our experience good or

bad, liking or disliking and accepting it with equanimity. Mindfulness training then is about developing our skill in the process of intention, attention and awareness.

### **The Business Case**

However, for any new idea to be taken up by organisations, it is not enough to publish a seminal book, significant as a landmark that may be. To be convinced of the business case, there has to be empirical evidence, to include credible case examples of successful, high-profile organisations who have gained positive results through implementation, and typically when talking about human performance technologies, in leadership development. In the case of EQ, one of the most cited organisations in the business press at the time was the financial services organisation, American Express. Today, the equivalent 21<sup>st</sup> Century organisations, who are embracing mindfulness are companies such as Google, eBay, Yahoo and Apple. These are pioneers in introducing mindfulness; exemplar organisations that characterise the 21<sup>st</sup> Century business environment. They are no longer in the financial services sector, but provide persuasive arguments, because they are technology firms that employ talented knowledge workers. These employees demand different types of leaders and organisational cultures, ones that are mindful. Couple these exemplars with the voices of leading business schools, such as INSEAD in Copenhagen and Ashridge in the U.K. then the ingredients are right for heralding a shift in mindfulness from the marginal to the mainstream.

*“... within Google, it is working... for people who take the [mindfulness and emotional intelligence] course it makes a difference in how they operate, how they communicate. They learn that they don’t have to leave their emotions at the door when they come to work. That’s big. If Wall Street traders, for example, had more emotional intelligence, they might have realised the crazy derivatives they created were wrong”*

Norman Fischer in *Google Searches*:  
[www.shambhalasun.com](http://www.shambhalasun.com)

### **From Marginal to Mainstream**

To demonstrate some evidence for this shift, in a recent INSEAD study, researchers were interested in looking at the types of executive development interventions that would result in leaders’ capacity to act with greater corporate social responsibility. Their findings revealed that:

- Standard executive education based on engaged discussions and case analyses failed to facilitate managers to shift towards higher probabilities to make socially responsible decisions.
- Coaching programs based on introspection and meditation [mindfulness] techniques, without any discussion about CSR topics, impacted significantly on the probability of managers to act in a socially responsible way
- A “non-orthodox” training intervention, based on “hatha yoga” techniques (postures, relaxation, etc.), produced a positive impact on socially responsible behaviour

Findings as to the benefits of mindfulness practice in shaping leaders' behaviours is similarly discussed in a recent article out of Ashridge; here the authors suggest that the world of business has been "won over by findings at the American Institute of Health, the University of Massachusetts and the mind-body medical institute at Harvard." The findings that are highlighted include:

- Reduced costs of staff absenteeism caused by illness, injury, stress
- Improved cognitive function – including better concentration, memory, learning ability and creativity
- Improved productivity and improved overall staff and business wellbeing
- Reduced staff turnover and associated costs
- Enhanced employer/employee and client relationships
- Reduced health insurance premiums for the business
- A visible and tangible corporate responsibility stance
- Enhanced employee job satisfaction

#### **Implications for Practitioners**

So what does this all mean for coaches, coaching leaders in government? Well, in a recent CIPD/Simply Health survey stress was identified as the biggest cause of sickness absence, with the public sector showing the biggest reported increase (50%) over the last year. The public sector is under siege, with leaders in particular suffering from what Michael describes as "power stress." That is, a state in which even the best leaders are physically and

emotionally drained. As a consequence the natural response is to move away from an approach orientation (Vedana) – emotionally open and engaged and in a place to innovate and apply creativity to the challenge of an organisational 'tsunami'; toward an avoidance orientation. In other words to move away from creative, solution-focused thinking, to an orientation characterised, suggests Michael, "... by aversion, irritability and closed-mindedness.

Coaching is relational and contextual, so it is important that practitioners develop their own capacity to stay with 'what is' and to resource themselves so that they are resilient and can, as Jon Kabat-Zinn observes, develop their and others' ability to, not necessarily stop the waves, but at least learn how to surf! How to do that first begins with developing your own practice.

As Graham Lee wrote in a *Coaching at Work* article in March 2009, some coaches add the odd meditation exercise into the work they do, whilst others are combining mindfulness training with existing approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural coaching and solution-focused coaching. In the U.K. Gladeana McMahon (Chair of the Association for Coaching) and Patrizia Collard are developing mindfulness-based cognitive coaching (MBCC), whilst the founder of the Coaching Psychology movement, Anthony Grant at the University of Sydney, is working with colleagues to demonstrate the value of mindfulness training, cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused coaching and yielding positive results. As Graham observes: "The

*simplicity of mindfulness training is that it can turn average managers into great leaders, focusing their minds on 'being' and bringing clarity to high pressure roles."*

**Conclusion**

Meditative v. business practice would at first seem an oxymoron. However, fundamentally mindfulness is about developing our capacity to operate in two modes of mind, both 'doing' and 'being' (see table 1 below).

The challenge then is not to jettison what we have done exceptionally well for so long (doing) but to re-balance that with our capacity to 'be.' This may seem a tall order in the current climate. However, we are experiencing unprecedented challenges in uncharted territory. At such times, rather than adopt an avoidance mode, leaders need to be in an approach mode; to be resilient. Resilience is based on three key elements: the first is the ability to accept reality ('what is'); the second is to have a sense of meaning and purpose ('to know what for'); and finally, to improvise, to be creative without our usual tools and resources.

To quote Michael Chaskalson again, mindfulness training is important because:

*"... it enhances interpersonal relationships... develops emotional intelligence, increases resilience... innovation, creativity and extends one's attention span. All these have significant benefits"*

Chaskalson, **The Mindful Workplace**, 2011, p.5.

Counter-culture and unorthodox it may be. However, mindfulness is capturing something of the current Zeitgeist, the spirit of our times. As I once commented on the prospect for emotional intelligence, in 2004: *"There is in any new development a subterranean current in popular mind and feeling, which grows stronger and stronger until, with seeming suddenness, it breaks forth in articulated form."* In some form mindfulness has been around for thousands of years. Perhaps it is only now, however, that a confluence of factors means the timing is right for coaches in government to develop leaders who can not only 'surf the waves' but in so doing, create the kind of organisation (and society) that is fit to house the human spirit: a goal I am sure that all of us engaged in coaching can readily support.

**TABLE 1: MINDFULNESS TRAINING: DEVELOPING TWO MODES OF MIND**

<b>DOING</b>	<b>BEING</b>
Judging	Letting Be
Goal-directed and problem solving	Acceptance of 'what is'
Conceptual	Direct experience 'here and now'
Past and future	The present moment
Automatic Pilot	Intentional
Avoidance and escape	Leaning into experience (good/bad)
'Thinking about' our experience	'Being with' our experience

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## Improvisation Skills – the innovating coach

*Guest feature from Paul Z Jackson*

Interactions are at the heart of change. In Solutions Focus we acknowledge this with a saying: “The action is in the interaction”. And when an interaction is fresh and at all unpredictable, it has to have an element of spontaneity to give it value. In this article we explore those very practical paradoxical places where a coach needs both structure and freedom; planning and instant response; and the agility to work with whatever emerges.

### **The Improviser’s Advantage**

To benefit fully from the interactional nature of coaching, it is vital to develop your skills as an improviser. Of course, a coach is improvising all the time. If we understand improvisation as the exercise of freedom within a structure, your coaching model (OSKAR, GROW or whatever) provides a structure, and it is within this that you are constantly making choices. As you develop your improvisation skills, you get better at making more appropriate responses. This takes you deeper into your:

- \* listening skills
- \* ability to be present
- \* responsiveness
- \* creativity and your ability to apply

that creativity in innovative questions and comments.

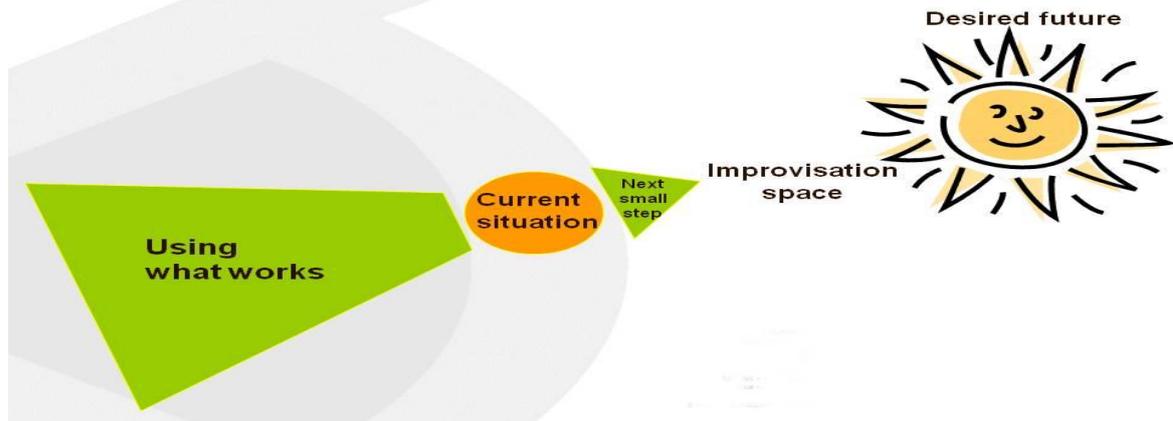
As you build these skills, you and your clients will gain more from each session. This means it is time to think of coaches as improvisers. Improvisers make the best use of the resources available to them; they adapt as circumstances change; and they are expert collaborators.

### **Where improvisation and innovation sit in a model of change**

There’s a useful model for successful change strategies where we can locate an especially productive arena for improvising: this is the territory which offers coaches (and clients) huge opportunities for gain.

# Improvisation Space

finding what works as you go along



The dot at the centre of the diagram represents where we are now; and the yellow sun represents the desired state of affairs. In Solutions Focus vocabulary, this is the 'future perfect', a description of what the client or clients want to have happen.

To the left of the central dot we have 'Using What Works', namely the resources, skills and experiences that the client has had to date and the qualities that are most likely to be drawn upon to enable them to make further progress – into the space between where they are now and where they want to be.

This is labelled 'Improvisation Space' in the diagram, and the proposal here is that the more comfortable and skilled coaches and clients can be in this space, the more they will be able to innovate and succeed.

We recommend that the desired state – the 'Future Perfect' - is conceived as a direction-setting description, not as a goal. We don't succeed or fail in relation to a set direction (unlike a goal, which is achieved or not). We

can welcome anything that takes us closer to a Future Perfect. Success is not measured by arriving. We can sensibly, for example, describe a Future Perfect as 10 on a scale and ask what number on that scale it would be satisfactory to reach. That number – a 7 perhaps - could then function as a client's goal.

With a Future Perfect so constructed, it becomes worthwhile to notice parts of it happening and to work to get more parts of it happening. We do so by operating day-to-day emergently, making use of what's there - whatever shows up, whether planned or surprisingly. As systems thinking pioneer Gregory Bateson put it, "Change is happening all the time: our job is to spot useful change and amplify it."

Nor is Improvisation Space a space of total chaos. Boundaries are created by the context. There is also 'gravitational pull' – a corridor of influence created by participants' awareness of the Future Perfect and the current situation. These contextual elements mean that we as

coaches are rewarded by paying more attention to some aspects of a situation than others.

If a client is granted sufficient time by the coach to build a detailed description of the future that's wanted, they are well placed to identify along the way what's happening that is consistent with or close to the desired state. They can make small adjustments in the moment in the light of that information.

### **Coach Skills and the Skills of Improvisation**

So how can we best operate in Improvisational Space? From the traditions of drama and performance, we already know that important skills of improvisation include:

- Listening skills – the performer's first duty is to listen to what is happening in the scene, so as to join (or continue) precisely that scene.
- Ability to be present – the state of being ready in the here and now; avoiding distractions of past, future and awareness wandering elsewhere.
- Responsiveness – the ability to respond in the moment to the signals around us and to our own relevant processes
- Creativity – the ability to come up with something new and useful at just the moment that it is needed.

The coach needs all the above skills if they are to progress beyond formulaic coaching. It is fine to have a structure – the advanced coach uses freedom within that structure, and it is

improvisational skills that equip the coach to use the structures to best advantage. We can usefully think of this as the coach being a highly-skilled performer in the client-coach conversation.

One of the strongest affinities of improvisation to coaching and also to the Solutions Focus approach is the encouragement to the coach to say 'Yes,' in response to what the client offers. In dramatic improvisation, saying 'Yes' to a partner's offer during a scene is the most important way to keep that scene going. For a coach, it is part of accepting a client's story. It also reinforces the interactional principle of staying on the surface (rather than questioning the client's offer because you think you have a better idea of what is 'really' going on for them). In improvisation and SF coaching, you work with what you get, not looking to impose pre-thought theories or to search for hidden meanings. Meanings for the client (and perhaps the coach) emerge in the course of the conversation. Innovation is much easier if you are not constricted by inappropriate theory.

An improvisational performer becomes expert at leading and at following, and at knowing when each is appropriate. Likewise, the coach is in a 'dance of conversation' with the client, where each playfully takes new perspectives, takes turn with dialogue and silence, expects the unexpected and stays ready to be spontaneous.

### **The Paradox of Spontaneity**

It may seem paradoxical to speak of techniques for spontaneity. Yet through application of techniques we

may reach a point at which pure spontaneity takes over. Why do we need spontaneity?

- For ourselves as coaches or leaders, it enables us to handle whatever comes up, riding over the bumps inevitable in any interactional situation.
- It sharpens our receptivity - so we can learn new skills and be open to new experience, be comfortable with the possibilities of innovation.
- It widens our range, so that we can continue to grow.

Improvisation is a way of opening the door to take in more of our experience and an alternative to blocking out the many signals which are available to us.

In *The Myth of The First Three Years*, John T Bruer points out that it is 'spontaneous neural firing' before birth that makes humans more adaptable organisms than those whose brain activity is hard-wired. Where there is spontaneity, there is adaptability. Inspiration is the essence of intelligent life.

In a Ted talk presenting his findings on wisdom, Barry Schwartz says 'A wise person knows when and how to improvise' – because contexts change; real world problems are often ambiguous and ill-defined. The only adaptive option is to invent what's appropriate for the situation at hand. And he notes that to do this you need permission to fail and to learn from failures. This is an invitation to experiment, to be curious about methods as well as results and to

engage a keen and collaborative intelligence – for people to be at their best without undue stress.

### **Co-creation – the action is in the interaction**

This is a way of thinking for managers and students that encourages us to abandon linear cause-and-effect models in contexts where such models serve us poorly. It continues a shift from mechanistic thinking to systems thinking, and then a step further into useful ways of making progress in a systemic world that moves too fast for making useful diagrams of the systems.

The line from 'where we are now' to 'where we want to get to' is replaced by this improvisational space, where things happen, emerge, effect each other unpredictably (in important ways) and in which some things also happen in linear ways (but are no longer privileged and given undue importance). Yes, there is less certainty – because that's a more realistic model of the world. And the implication is not to regret it or pretend (discuss and act as if) it were not so. Rather it is to embrace it and develop skills (and ways of thinking) to operate more effectively in such environments.

The art of the coach becomes one of awareness, a sense of relationships, an instinct for making useful moves, and a willingness to change direction when needed. The coach takes complexity into account, understands the interplay of variables and sees the task as one of eliciting creative responses to new situations.

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**AC UK conference July 2011**

*Review by Ken Smith*

**Open any recent coaching publication and you will undoubtedly find one or more references to “Resilience”, the topic which formed the focus of the second AC UK conference.**

Tony Grant from the University of Sydney, ever in pursuit of an evidence base for coaching, gave the opening keynote address, presenting in his usual high energy and humorous way two very different studies of how he had answered the question: Does coaching really enhance resilience, well-being and happiness?

The first was a randomised controlled study looking at coaching within organisational change, in which a battery of measures across goal attainment, resilience and depression had been applied to test the difference the coaching had made. Both the psychometric results and the qualitative data drawn from participants clearly showed a positive effect. The second study took Tony from the laboratory to reality TV and his involvement in “Making Australia Happy – Eight Steps to Happiness”. As the title suggests, this comprised a group of people undertaking various exercises connected to eight factors drawn from the findings of positive

psychology, which together were proposed as promoting happiness. Again a wide range of measures were applied, this time including biological data alongside the psychometrics. While there is a question mark over the extent to which this study took place within a coaching frame, as opposed to a more directive counselling one, the data again showed a significant effect, with the biological tests of stress reduction and increased immune function particularly impressive. A key point which Tony made in presenting these studies alongside each other was the importance of using language and a methodology to suit your audience when attempting to persuade them that coaching works.

The theme of resilience was picked up by Peter Hawkins, Professor of Leadership at Henley Management College, in his presentation on “Coaching Supervision: Expanding Ethical and Emotional Capacity.” Beginning with an overview of trends

in coaching and an assertion that a new paradigm is required, where the coach sees the “coachee as our partner - standing shoulder to shoulder with them facing our joint endeavour”, Peter applied his coaching continuum of skill-performance-development-transformation to supervision, inviting delegates to consider if they had ever experienced a transformation of themselves and their coaching practice as a supervisee.



Central to this transformation is what he calls the “resourcing” function of supervision, equivalent to what others have called the supportive or restorative function; within which the supervisory relationship serves to develop the ethical and emotional capacity of the coach. Drawing on the work of Michael Carroll, Peter outlined a pathway of increasing ethical maturity, from creating ethical sensitivity to living with ethical ambiguity. Cleverly overlaid on this were Torbert’s levels of leadership, ranging from opportunist to alchemist, to illustrate the different ways a coach may respond to the ethical content of their client’s narrative.

Proceedings took a more participative turn with Christian van Nieuwerburgh, from the University of East London, who led us in an exploration of “Moments of Choice: Ethics and Reflective Practice in Coaching.” Christian told us that he prefers not to think in terms of ethical dilemmas, which push us towards polarisation in

our thinking; but more of moments of choice. He invited his audience to consider their response to an invitation to coach a senior executive in an organisation that might for some be seen as controversial, for example one involved in arms manufacturing or the tobacco industry; and to imagine explaining their decision to work with such a client or not, to a friend or family member who might disapprove of what the organisation does; and then to consider whether we would change our position on hearing the argument presented by those holding a different one.

Christian reminded us of the existence of codes of ethics published by the various coaching bodies but more than this he posed the powerful question, seemingly very powerful in an unregulated industry: To whom are we accountable? To answer this, an awareness of our own values and principles is essential, to guide us in finding our own way of coaching congruently in organisations and contexts that may not fit with them, or conversely of walking away from the engagement; or indeed of finding the courage to challenge the client organisation’s aims and ethical position.

There is, of course, another question, which arose in discussions elsewhere among coaches around the time when John Blakey’s and Ian Day’s book “Where were all the coaches when the banks went down?” came out, which is: “Who are we, to be the conscience

of our clients?"; a question which also connects with Peter Hawkins' new paradigm and the implication of a shared responsibility for the consequences of the client's actions, where these flow from the coaching conversation. Christian concluded by taking us through his model of a virtuous cycle of ethical maturity, which encompasses our courageous choices and our continuing reflections on them.

My chosen workshop run by Kate Burton on "Coaching with Energy: Resilience for Coaches and their Clients" added a contrasting note by inviting participants to carry out their own personal audit of our physical, mental, emotional and purposeful energy – the latter standing for things relating to meaningfulness and spirituality. At the heart of the workshop was the notion that to be at our best in caring for others we must take care of ourselves. This is a very practical concern and we spent time considering what we do now in this regard and what more we could do, in particular around exercise and diet; and to notice what things trigger us to neglect ourselves. In the course our discussions we touched on how to introduce energy management and well-being to our more machismo clients and stumbled upon our bashful omission of an active sex life from the well-being strategies we had constructed on the flip charts. Implicit in all of this was the place of energy management in developing our resilience as coaches and how we might hold up a mirror for clients in considering their own.

Delegates returned to the main lecture theatre for the concluding keynote address by Chris Johnstone, a pioneer of resilience training and coaching now for twenty years. Chris described a way of "Evoking, Provoking and Promoting Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty". Typical of his uplifting approach was the metaphor of the pearl in the oyster, where the pearl was the result of "post-traumatic growth": the oyster having overcome its irritation at the presence of the intruding grit to produce a pearl.

He described resilience as a matter of "re-storying" our vulnerability; of becoming more aware of the possible, through the creation of the story of what this is or has been. Chris gave us a story structure of six chapters, moving from an exposition of the main characters, through the call to adventure where inspirational dissatisfaction provokes a journey of seeking something different; and the engagement with the adversities that give the story its interest and uniqueness; finally to arrive at a place of active hope where we can strengthen the capacity for responding to setbacks with optimism and autonomy.

It seems that in the creation of the story, we have choices about our resilience; and as some coaches express it, coaching is about the creation of new choices. Chris despatched us back into the world with another question: With whatever situation you face, what would a story of resilience look like and how can you play your part in it?

## Coaching and Intention – a research report

*Guest feature from Barbara Sobolewska*

The need and importance of adopting an appropriate frame of mind when working as a coach, is already well recognized. For instance, the solution-focused approach talks about seeing the client as healthy and capable. However, what is still limited is the availability of a range of tools that would enable coaches to cultivate those appropriate emotional states and attitudes. It is suggested that the coach could be helped with this by using what could be called an Intention Practice. The purpose of this would be to help the coach access an appropriately resourceful state or attitude and encourage the development of this state in the coachee. This paper summarises a research project I carried out earlier this year into Intention Practice.

### **Method**

A phenomenological, semi-structured interview based approach was used to explore participants' experience of using Intention Practice as a pre-session preparation tool.

Intention Practice is a technique that was developed by the researcher and is a combination of mindfulness, elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and conscious intention sending. The first stage of the process involves relaxation through mindfulness meditation, followed by accessing a desired state the coach wants to be in during the coaching session. Having reached the state the coach anchors it by, for instance, pressing two fingers together. This allows accessing the state later in the session by using the anchor (pressing the fingers again in this case). Last stage of the process is to consciously state the purpose of being in the state. In this study it was suggested that the coaches intend for the state to contribute to coachee's progress and success. It was also suggested that the coach cultivates

the state the coachee is lacking and from which would benefit from, having ensured being in this state was in line with coachee's agenda.

### **Results**

Four super-ordinate themes emerged from participants regarding the perceived impact of the technique on the coach, coachee and the coaching process. Some aspects of different themes showed relatedness to each other. The results of this research suggest that there is value in using Intention Practice as a pre-session preparation tool. The practice cannot only assist the coach with preparing for the session but can also add a new, different dimension to coaching. However, it is important to ensure the use of the technique fits with coaching assumptions. Its inconsiderate use may result in bringing the coach's agenda into the session.

### **Theme 1: Technique as a pre-session preparation tool**

The general consensus was that the technique was a useful preparation tool. It not only enabled the coaches

to consciously decide on and create a resourceful state but the NLP anchoring also allowed the participants to maintain the state during the session:

*"...I use the NLP technique to keep that [state] alive in the session."*

The technique also enabled more focus, control and flexibility to be brought into the session:

*"It felt quite a dramatic improvement in holding the focus."*

*"I feel more in control of the session."*

*"I now have the ability to be playful, you know, at the same time as being very still and totally concentrating..."*

Apart from the enabling effect, the technique also supported the coaches in what they would normally do before and during the session:

*"...it's an interesting focus enhancement of analysing ahead of the coaching process."*

Participants also found value in the fact that practicing the technique allowed them space to focus and rehearse before the session, as well as offered them a specific process for preparation:

*"I think the difference is that I had a specific process..."*

Because the technique encouraged non-verbal communication it expanded participant's awareness of transference, the coachee's body language, and as a result led to greater attentiveness of the coach

making coaching a more conscious process:

*"I think I realised that subconsciously I had already been switching mindsets with coachees..."*

*"...it certainly made me much more aware of him [coachee], particularly body language and trying to watch what mental state he was in, which I probably had been doing, but now consciously rather than unconsciously."*

Lastly, because the participants were encouraged to cultivate a state the coachee was lacking and would benefit from, the practice would sometimes open new avenues for the coach and change the course of coaching, leading straight to an important issue:

*"I don't know if I would have gone straight for that [for attending to coachee's attitude] had I not have focused on: 'Ok, what is the opposite of what he actually is?'"*

## **Theme 2: Impact of coach's state**

There was a general consensus that the participant's state did have an impact on coachees. One coach viewed the impact as a naturally occurring phenomenon:

*"...we sit in a room with someone who speaks with a Welsh accent and you end up with a slightly Welsh accent. We all mirror what people do. It's not an unreasonable proposition."*

Some participants felt that their mere presence had a direct impact on the way coachees felt and behaved:

*“...that calmness is a bit infectious on the people that I’m working with because they can relax with me.”*

Other participants talked about their cultivated state having an indirect impact on the coachee, namely their state allowed them to display certain behaviours that would then prompt a change in coachee:

*“I think it [the cultivated state] allows me to do it [ask a challenging question] a little bit sooner, I guess, with the client. Ummm...I’m just trying to think about the impact of it on the client. I think the degree of angst and seriousness that is taken away from this, it sometimes allows the client to open up a little bit more.”*

### **Theme 3: Beyond task-oriented coaching; going on a deeper level**

There was a view that the practice of the technique contributed to taking coaching on a deeper than task-oriented level. Participants defined this deeper coaching being on the level of exploring resources and values:

*“...it’s the all stuff underneath the practical that gives you the resources to deliver the practical... And that for me is where I need to... is that going on a deeper level with people, which I think this [the technique] helps to do.”*

Specifically, promoting this deeper level coaching was attributed to the coach being in a resourceful state, which was the start of a chain reaction. This was illustrated by an

account of a participant who explained how his state of curiosity allowed him to be more flexible with asking questions, which then led to a more open relationship with the client. As a result of the relationship, the coachee was prepared for a deeper level of self- reflection.

### **Theme 4: Using the technique for best results**

This theme highlights the ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘who with’ of using the technique. It emerged that a number of factors should be taken into consideration. Firstly, it was felt that the use of the technique may lead to conflict with coaching assumptions - if the coach uses it to manifest their own expectations. To avoid that, a participant (who cultivated confidence) suggested that the focus of the practice should be on the coach being in a desired state and waiting to see what emerges, as opposed to planning the outcome of the session beforehand.

*“I’ve used it as a reference point to certain issues to explore ...But if I went in and said, ‘What I want to do is to do this and then do that and then do the other’, that wouldn’t be a proper coaching session.”*

Secondly, it emerged that the state cultivated by the coach should not only be of benefit to the coachee but should also allow the coach to be authentic and perceived as congruent.

Thirdly, there was also a view that coachee’s readiness to accept a desired state should be taken into account. There was a need, in certain cases, to work through coachee’s

blocks first before introducing the state:

*"It just wasn't appropriate, in my view, of coach to maintain the mindset that he'd wanted. So I switched it down quite calmly and let him offload and then discuss how he was feeling."*

Lastly, the nature of coachee's agenda was highlighted as a factor worth considering before deciding to practice the technique. Practicing the technique seemed beneficial when coaching on personality related issues:

*"I think, for very untouchable or personality aspects, I think, it's fine..."*

However, the participant did not find any benefit in using the technique with coaching on concrete, task-oriented goals:

*"I think the issue, or the goal, was too concrete or complex."*

### Relationship between super-ordinate themes

Some aspects of the first three themes appeared to be related (see Diagram 1). It emerged that practicing the technique prompted coaches to display certain characteristics which had an impact on coachees. As a result of that impact, coaching reached a deeper level.

**Diagram 1: Relationship between super-ordinate themes**



Flexibility **promoted** Openness **led to** Higher self-awareness

Exploring the moment **promoted** Reflection **led to** resources

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## The Rise and Rise of Internal Coaching

**Ken Smith**

In his review of the coaching world at the AC UK conference in July, Peter Hawkins talked about the increasing use of internal coaches in organisations as a notable and positive trend. A few days earlier at a meeting of the EMCC Public Sector Forum, we too had identified this trend and considered its wider context.

Against the background of extensive restructuring, headcount cuts and the redefinition of our organisations' purposes flowing from the coalition government's policies, we reviewed how coaching could support the people in our organisations through the uncertain times we are experiencing.

Forum member Elizabeth Crosse, Head of Learning and Development at the Legal Services Commission, suggested that people working in the public sector are increasingly falling into one of the following categories:

- People leaving the organisation who wanted to stay
- People staying in the organisation who wanted to leave
- People taking new roles that do not reflect their skill set
- People moving to roles that they did not want
- People who have stayed in broadly the same roles but are now faced with significantly increased workloads

Elizabeth led us in a discussion of the consequences of this, and posed us three questions: questions which cannot yet be fully answered but which seem very relevant to the increased prominence of internal coaching.

### ***Is our coaching fit for purpose?***

While our research colleagues are busy with the important job of constructing an evidence base for coaching, we wondered where the belief that coaching is a good thing has left us. In other words, what is it

actually for? Given the nature of the changes in the public sector and the consequences for strategy and the people, how does coaching actually fit with the transformations being sought?

In some places a connection is being made with staff engagement; elsewhere coaching is acting as a sticking plaster covering the space left by an absence of the training that is no longer affordable. In others coaching is reverting to being targeted tightly on elite groups of senior leaders and talent pools. We saw other places still where coaching seems to be given more value when it is part of a blended programme of interventions; though even here we wondered how this value can be measured in an efficient, economical and credible way when resources for running the more complex evaluation studies, that would feed into the evidence base for coaching, are not available. There is in any case no real agreement on how to take a measure of coaching's impact and while there is a sense that coaches can inappropriately focus more on the benefits the individual client seeks and less on those of the organisational sponsor, much of the debate about evaluating coaching and the charge of over privileging the client assumes coaches should always align themselves with the perspectives of HRM and leave behind the humanistic traditions from which coaching stems.

### ***How are we working with our clients?***

Restructurings and headcount reductions bring extra pressure on people and squeeze out the space for

L&D. The reflective space for coaching can seem ever more like a self-indulgent luxury. So what is the place of the traditional ninety minute face-to-face coaching session in an increasingly time-hungry world?

Do coaches need to work smarter? How can coaches work at a quicker pace with clients – and indeed should they, if this colludes in the perpetuation of a damaging or unproductive organisational culture? As e-learning is poised to emerge, certainly in the central government sector, as the dominant learning medium for the majority of staff, information and single loop learning look certain to take a clearer precedence over reflection and learning with and from others. If this is the case, the challenging of assumptions which coaching so often can bring, to help create the new ways of working which staff are being urged to bring about, may easily be lost.

So would coaches need to bring more content into their sessions and settle for relationships closer to mentoring? And in doing so, how can internal coaches use their understanding of the culture and this need to bring in information, in a way that avoids a collusion with their clients and misses opportunities for development and transformation? Tangled up with this potential for collusion is the opposite pull to manage the performance of the client, given that internal coaches can find themselves wearing the organisation's face and too easily be deployed to substitute for effective performance management by line managers. As clients strive to climb the heightened bar of performance and are being pushed for quicker,

cleaner outputs, and coaches seen as a way to drive for these, coaching relationships can become more straightforwardly functional and paradoxically less supportive of change.

And coaches themselves are becoming more time hungry, very often having other roles to perform in their organisations, which in turn may well be unwilling to invest in their coaching CPD or supervision as budgets are removed or handed to managers with other priorities. How can we sustain our professionalism when resources for doing so are scarce?

***And how are we, the coaches, managing ourselves?***

Internal coaches are of course caught themselves in the change net. It may easily be that our own futures are very uncertain and we must deliver a professional coaching job while at the same time knowing that we too are at risk of redundancy.

So how good are we at recognising our own emotions and managing them productively within the coaching session, drawing on them only in a way that enhances rapport and avoids a parallel process of distress?

We need to learn from the emotions we ourselves experience in uncertainty that can deepen our self-knowledge and so help build our practice. The challenge of this can be compounded when the psychological contract we have as employees within our organisation is broken. When this happens, how then can we as internal coaches congruently represent our organisation to our client, no matter

how directly or indirectly we are being asked to do so? We need to ask ourselves honestly: “Where is my own energy right now and where do I want to put my energy?” and from the answer conclude whether we can take the coaching assignment. And not least in all this, what is our own cognitive understanding of the nature of change – what models do we have that can guide us, for our own benefit and in service of our clients?

**And so....**

The focus of our conversation at the Forum was the public sector and while

I’m sure the questions we asked ourselves can be applied to other sectors too, they seem at the moment to be most starkly posed there. Let’s thank Peter Hawkins and others for recognising the growing place of internal coaching and celebrate the skills and achievements of internal coaches. We need nonetheless to continue to address the position, purpose and professionalism of coaching within our organisations and not assume that the growth of internal coaching is universally applauded, supported and pursued with aims that might fit with those held dear by internal coaches themselves.

*To find out more about the EMCC Public Sector Forum or more about the work that the EMCC is currently doing to promote and support internal coaches, contact Katharine St. John-Brooks at [working.solutions@btinternet.com](mailto:working.solutions@btinternet.com)*

***And finally:***

**“It is always possible for people to become interested in themselves in a new way.” Hanif Kureishi**