

Becoming a  
Transformational Coach:  
A guide to 10 Essential  
Learning Edges



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# Introduction

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**"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."**  
Mahatma Gandhi

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**If you are reading this guide because you are interested in training as a coach, I would assume that you enjoy supporting others and helping them grow.**

In your past, as a manager or leader, you may have found yourself enjoying nurturing your team members or colleagues and solving their problems; and this has now sparked an interest in coaching and the potential of a new career. These past experiences and helping behaviours are likely to have become hard-wired

in your brain. Yet this natural desire to 'help' can be a dual edged sword when you are training as a coach.

Helping anyone is a purposeful and rewarding endeavour from which they can gain useful guidance and information which supports their thinking.



**"If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody."**

**Chinese Proverb**

## Introduction

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However, when we start to practise the art of coaching, we soon learn that even when offered with good intent, helping can also make another person 'helpless' and can potentially reinforce self-doubt, limiting beliefs or a level of dependency on the coach.

As per the famous quote from Maimonides, *"give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."*

Moving into a more formal role as a coach, there are several development tensions we may experience during our training. These tensions are *'learning edges'*, where we can feel uncomfortable and uncertain.

With guidance and support we can develop and expand beyond these, often because of a comprehensive training programme, supervision and hours of practice, we will move into a place where we are more confident and have a deeper presence and way of being with our coaching clients.

This guide has been written because of our experiences as coaches, coach trainers and supervisors. It aims to shine a light on some of these potential challenges to help you normalise your development experience and integrate supportive beliefs, paradigms and a coaching mindset to gain confidence

and underpin your practice as you develop. Most coach training guides focus on what we do as a coach, whereas the intention of this guide is to help you reflect upon how you are being. We have also included quotes from practising coaches (many are our alumni, who have trained with us) as a way of bringing these edges to life, which we hope you will find helpful and normalising for your own development journey.

Below you will find ten key learning edges, that you will meet as you are training as a coach. Each learning edge (we might call these principles for practice) is not independent — as you read through this guide, you will notice the interdependency of each one and how by developing one you will also be creating growth in another.

We hope these guide you on your development journey and that you realise the impact these will have if they are fully lived by you within the coaching relationship.

**Damion Wonfor,**  
**Founder,**  
**Catalyst 14**





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# Learning Edge 1

## Learning how to be Useful rather than Helpful

## Learning Edge 1

Learning how to be Useful rather than Helpful

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**“Trust the process. We always end up right where we are meant to be right when we are meant to be there.”**

**Anonymous**

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**A common challenge in coaching can be the need to solve the coachee’s problem, your ‘default’ position, because it is often what we believe (and sometimes experience) is expected or required of us in our role as a coach. The expectation from both the coachee and external stakeholders (such as line managers or organisational sponsors) that the coachee will “fix” the coachee or solve their problems directly. (ie a line manager asking you to help with the development of a ‘difficult leader’).**

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Often a dynamic of ‘learned helplessness’ is present in organisational life where people are consistently told what to do, they stop taking responsibility for their own decisions. This sense of helplessness can manifest in coaching sessions where coachees expect the coach to provide the answer or tell them what to do.

It is easy therefore to ‘interpret’ a coachee talking about an ‘issue’ or a current

‘challenge’ as a request for you to ‘fix it’. We might even experience this as a coach energetically as we are drawn into focusing on the coachee’s context and problem, and we may feel impacted by their sense of stuckness. This will also be present for us if we have come straight into coaching from our other organisational role where we are fixing and advising and have not taken the time to prepare ourselves to consciously move into the coaching space.





“Like many coaches that I know, I came to coaching with a background of leadership and management and had a strong ‘carer/rescuer’ strand to my character. Providing solutions was my job and part of my DNA. It was expected of me and, if honest, it also felt good. No wonder then the alluring temptation to ‘own’ the content and the outcome during a coaching session. The reality is not only did that undermine the potential of the coachee, but it actually also interfered with my coaching.

The more focus I had on the content, the more I was distracted from the information that could enhance my coaching. Information such as the subtleties of body

language, facial expressions and key words spoken, all of which I could use to really empower the coachee. And there’s the word — empowerment. Empowering coachees not only in the coaching session to access their own resources to find solutions that they owned, but beyond the coaching session, being able to continue to apply what they had learnt about their goal and indeed themselves. When I learnt to leave my solution finder ego at the door, I truly served my coachees well.”

**Chrissie Elam,**  
**Senior Leader, Local Government**

## Learning Edge 1

Learning how to be Useful rather than Helpful

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“With a natural bent toward being a rescuer, exacerbated by deep corporate experience of being expected to be solution-oriented, I needed to re-program those innate and learned behaviours to become a more effective coach. Shifting out of that modus operandi and into a place of coaching the person and not their problem, I began to palpably experience the responsibility weight of outcome or solution shift from me to them.

The focus of the coaching sessions became about the coachee discovering the solutions themselves, with them often experiencing several epiphanies

in one session through my growing repertoire of open and incisive questioning.

This has freed me up as a coach to be more embodied in the space with real clarity brought to the observation of coachee tone and body language, with focused active listening now more finely attuned. It has allowed me to really get comfortable about letting go of the outcome and focus my energy and thoughts on excellent best practice around the process instead.”

**Martin Turner,**  
**Executive Coach**

While the coachee may be coming to coaching to help them resolve an ‘issue,’ coaches soon start to learn that solving it for them by providing ‘our answers’ to ‘their questions’ seldom creates change, awareness, or builds confidence or creates ownership and responsibility for action outside of the session.

A colleague of mine who works in elite sport says that if the coach continues to do this “the coachee will only ever be as good as the coach!” Meaning the coachee’s growth is limited to the coach’s own experience and knowledge. In essence they are not being given the opportunity to access their own potential and to become more than they imagined was possible.

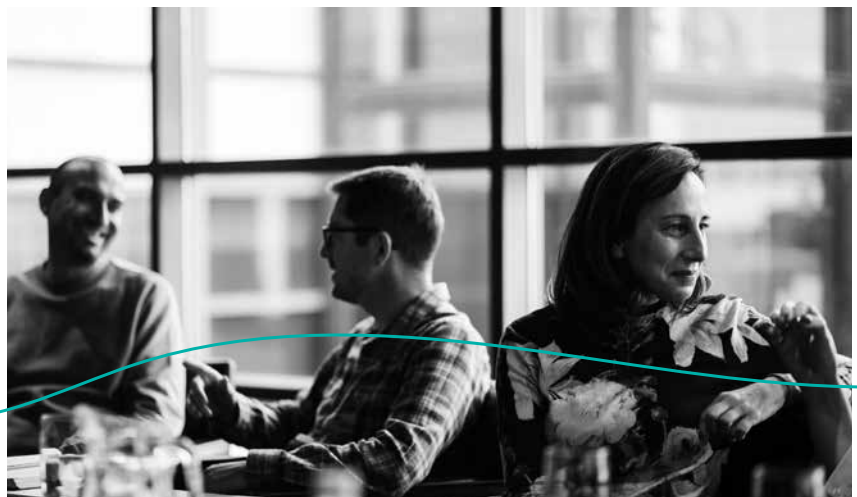


Through practising more non-directive and inquiry-based approaches, we learn that the coachee's answers will always be more powerful than those provided by us. As the coachee works through their challenges and questions they often experience a shift in perception, engagement and awareness. Every time they connect to this inner resource they are also realising their potential, developing self-regard and most importantly self-trust.

In contrast, being told what to do often leads to less engagement, reduced motivation and potentially less chance of action. How often do you do what you are told to do?

Providing solutions, however, can be seductive for the coach as this creates a means of personal validation and way of feeling good about ourselves within the coaching process. The solutions or ideas we may be tempted to offer can also feel more tangible, real and measurable than the often intangible and immeasurable shifts in perception and objectivity, engagement and responsibility that the coaching process is working to generate.

Providing solutions or asking questions from our own view of 'what is right' or 'what will work' can be equally limiting, because the coachee's situation and 'map of the world' is very different from our own. What has worked for us may not work for the coachee.



## Learning Edge 1

### Learning how to be Useful rather than Helpful

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Learning a robust and effective framework and developing core listening and questioning skills to hold the coaching conversation is one antidote to support our development whilst we are experiencing this tension of wanting to add value and help the coachee's thinking. A lens that is helpful for coaches to hold is, we are there to *"coaching the person (potential) not the problem."*

Learning that we bring more value by facilitating their thinking about their topic through the coaching conversation, rather than doing the thinking for them is a key insight we start to experience through practice. It is important to understand that as coaches we own the process (and can be as directive as we want to be around this) and the coachee owns the content, solution and outcomes.

This mindset allows space and permission for the coachee to own the topic and find the best solution for them. Our professional

helping can move to transforming, helping the coachee create the required internal change and relate differently to the situation they are exploring.

Owning the coaching process provides both the coachee and the coach with a sense of direction and clarity, even during moments of uncertainty. We have an anchor point and focus to come back to, to create a shift and movement in the coachee's thinking. Through practice we learn to trust this, see the value we bring and let go of the need to have the answer.

The distinction between being useful versus being helpful is a profound shift in mindset for the coach. When we focus on being helpful, there is often an implicit need to provide solutions, fix problems or offer guidance in the moment. However, by focusing on being useful, we create the conditions for long-term, sustainable growth, enabling the coachee to make the change they desire.

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## Learning Edge 2

# 'The Coachee has Innate Potential'

## Learning Edge 2

'The Coachee has Innate Potential'

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**"The 'acorn theory' holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived."**  
**James Hillman**

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**The next learning edge is our ability to believe in the innate potential of the coachee rather than seeing them as someone who we need to fix. The person in front of you, your coachee, is hugely resourceful and has immense potential even if they are not able to currently express this or even see it themselves.**

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Do you believe in the potential of your coachee? What would happen if you did – both for you and your coaching client? As the *Hawthorne*, *Pygmalion* and *Placebo effects* show, the impact of predetermined expectations can be very powerful.

Let's consider the impact this way of seeing our coachee as being resourceful and full of potential may have on the coaching relationship and outcomes.

Often the coachee is in a difficult space and may be experiencing a state of unresourcefulness.

By holding the belief about the innate potential of the person sitting in front of you, it enables you, as a coach, to move into a facilitating role rather than a fixing role.

An experienced executive coach once observed to me that during supervision, when they notice they are getting hooked into 'rescuing' the coachee, they sit back in their chair, take a breath and say to themselves (in their own mind) "you have all the resources you need."





"I have noticed that where clients appear to be particularly unresourceful — e.g. they don't know what they want, don't believe they can change their situation or share deep-seated limiting beliefs about themselves — I have doubted my ability to support their development.

This has led to me wondering if other interventions are more appropriate; and me

seeing them as someone who needs to be 'fixed'. When I remember their innate potential, I not only trust their ability to change but also that my presence and belief in them will support them in this. Supervision helped me to reflect on this and see where my belief in their potential had slipped."

**Debbie Fisher,**  
**Executive Coach**

## Learning Edge 2

'The Coachee has Innate Potential'

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This small inner movement enables them to shift their thinking away from the coachee's problem and towards the coachee's experiencing and the way they are relating to their problem, they are shifting to coaching the person not the problem.

Please pause here and reflect upon your personal experience of being with someone that believed in your potential even when you were not seeing this yourself. What was the impact? Next time you are in a coaching conversation, see if you can try looking at your coachee through this lens; what happens?

When we see our coachee as having innate potential, it creates an inner movement for us to trust and let go into the magic of the coaching relationship.

Coaches training with us describe this movement in the relational space from

'you and me' to 'we and us'; something that creates a deep way of mutual relating. We have seen from extensive research projects into coaching that the critical ingredient to make an effective intervention is the coach's ability to create a human-to-human relationship and we would argue that this 'lens' supports this and that when this is present the coachee experiences being fully received within the coaching relationship.

In time, they will let go more fully into their development process, experience of being coached and will be comfortable stepping outside of their comfort zone into a space of vulnerability. Most importantly they will connect to their potential (self-trust) and start to believe more in themselves and their inner wisdom.

Their coach will experience the conversation moving from a transactional interaction into a more transformational one with deepened openness, disclosure and honesty.



**"If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and what he could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be."**

**Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe**



"Allowing myself to really believe in the coachee's innate potential created a significant shift in my coaching. When I realised that it was easier for me to see the coachee as someone with a problem and occasionally as the problem itself, I also realised that I was restricting my coachee's ability to generate solutions that were meaningful and impactful for them.

At first, I didn't find this easy and it took discipline and a little courage for me to let go of being the expert and the bringer of solutions. As a lawyer,

I delivered value by finding gaps, identifying weaknesses and advising people how best to arrive at the solution they wanted.

As a coach my value proposition is different and the magic happens when I truly believe that the coachee has innate potential. Sometimes I have to remind myself and when I do something shifts even when I don't articulate that belief."

**Claire Lea, Executive Leadership Coach**



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## Learning Edge 3

# 'The ABC of Coaching is Always Be Contracting'



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“Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul.”

Carl Jung

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**T**his learning edge is an evolving understanding of how important the relationship is between a coach and their coachee. We have found that it is common that coaches focus, at first, on learning models, techniques, tools and concentrate on what they are doing and saying.

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As coaches develop in their practice, we notice a growing intent and ability in coaches to foster and nurture the relationship they have with their coachee. A key aspect of this is that they recognise that forming the relationship starts to happen even before they first meet their coachee, then throughout the coaching work together.

When we use the term ‘contracting’ we are referring to a process of consciously agreeing what the coaching is aiming for, who is involved, where and when it will take place and how the parties will work together. It is more than a written contract, although many coaches will also have a legal contract between parties.



## Learning Edge 3

'The ABC of Coaching is Always Be Contracting'

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"When I began my formal coach training, like many others, my focus was on the accumulation of tools and approaches to support my practice. Undoubtedly these have a place and I continue to develop my toolbox. However, what I have come to understand is that without a solid relationship there is little prospect of good work, no matter how skilled the coach is in deploying their tools.

For me, the relationship is about trust. Coachees need to trust in our belief in them; trust that we will be fully present for them and trust that we are acting in their best interests. They also need to trust that we will challenge them and hold them to account, not simply be a cheerleader.

They need to trust that we will be alongside whilst they explore their vulnerabilities. For our part, coaches need to trust our coachees to commit to the process and to their best 'future self'. This is more than just a transactional commitment around the logistics of when we'll meet and the topics on which we'll focus our conversations. So much more than a quick establishing of rapport. It's a commitment to genuine human connection, which evolves and shifts each time we meet. It's the foundation and the container for the work."

**Sara Corcoran,**  
**Executive Coach**

## Contracting in the beginning



Contracting is a verb, and so an action; the coach and the coachee are “doing” the contracting. The action is to agree the “container” that will hold and support the coaching work. Three categories to consider when creating that “container” are:

### 1 Objectives and Purpose

What is the coachee aiming for in this coaching?

### 2 Logistics and Process

When, Where and who is involved?

### 3 Psychological agreement

How will the coach and the coachee work together? Both parties expectations.

One turnkey that coaches training with us report is the moment they realise that contracting can be so much more than a mechanistic, tick the box at the start of a coaching programme and/or start of a session conversation to being a way to start to build trust and rapport immediately.

There have been numerous studies in coaching (and in a therapeutic setting) that a primary ingredient for the success of any coaching (or therapy) is the nature of the relationship between the coach and the coachee (De Haan and Gannon 2017). The psychological agreement is one way to bring this to the conscious attention of both parties. We refer to it as an agreement as it involved both parties co-creating how they will work together. The intention is to consciously define and agree the nature of the relationship.

Contracting begins from the initial moments together. For a coach new in their journey who is wondering what does that look like in conversation, we can ask questions like:

- ***“What would you want this relationship to feel like?”***
- ***“How do you need to be to get the most from our work together?”***
- ***“How do you need me to be as your Coach that is in best service of you and your objective?”***

In our experience, coaches develop more effective relationships by being truly themselves, sharing this openly whilst accepting the coachee where they are.

## Learning Edge 3

'The ABC of Coaching is Always Be Contracting'



**"The relationship was the basis upon which the coaching was built and without a relationship the coaching would not be as effective as it could be."**

**Gyllensten and Palmer (2007).**

### Contracting as the coaching progresses

As with any relationship, the dynamics can change over time. Boundaries can move, the system can change and / or the mindset of individuals can shift. All of these can impact the container that the coach and the coachee initially set out to define and create.

As a coach we own the process and part of that is to check that the "container" remains fit for purpose. To do this we bring the nature of the relationship to the conscious attention of our coachee and check in on how they feel it is.

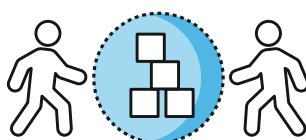
As coaches we can also get 'data', allowing us to evaluate or gauge what is effective throughout the coaching, rather than just at the end. Some coaches refer to "check in questions" using phrases like:

- ***"How are you finding our relationship?"***
- ***"What have I done in this conversation that you have found most helpful?"***
- ***"How could you be to get the most from our work?"***

In this way contracting becomes a continual part of the coaching and the reason for the acronym ABC; **Always Be Contracting:**



Chemistry



Building the blocks together



Co-creating and maintaining the container





“Two sayings that stick with me are “No contract without contact” and “Don’t coach without a contract”. The former saying reminds me that we are fundamentally two human beings, brought together in a moment from our independent lives, to create a space for change in the coachee. In taking time to know one another and build trust and rapport, we acknowledge our journeys to this point and we open together the most expansive opportunity to the many possible paths into the future. The latter saying enables us to define and agree, together,

the perimeters to that space and to identify what ingredients or conditions will best serve the coachee. This reference point allows us to check-in through our work together, to adapt and refine as we learn more, and also to contract ‘in the moment’ for specific needs or experiences that can arise in any human coaching context.”

**Tom Halton,**  
**Leadership Coach,**  
**The Leader’s Coach Ltd**

## Learning Edge 3

‘The ABC of Coaching is Always Be Contracting’

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“When I first started my coaching work I was initially focused on the client goals and making sure those were fully articulated so we both knew how we could measure progress. And while the client goals and outcomes still have an important part to play in the coaching process, I’ve come to realise that the key to any successful coaching is my ability to build a relationship with my clients that allows them to feel both psychologically and physically safe. An environment where the client feels safe enough to let go of any defensive behaviours and self criticism; to express their ideas, to question, and to admit mistakes — and all without the fear of being judged or facing any negative consequences.

My focus has evolved to become more about co-creating a space that allows the client to grow, to really think for themselves and as themselves; and if I can do that my role then becomes more about staying curious about how far they can go in their thinking before they need mine or anyone else’s. I know when I am able to build this deep connection with a client, they’ll not only achieve the outcomes they are looking for but also make sustainable and even transformational changes.”

**Jacquie Hampton,**  
**Executive Coach,**  
**M&JS Consulting Ltd**



In some ways we can liken coaching to a dance; as Coach, we own the process and lead the conversation and, at the same time, we invite our coachee to help create the space they benefit most from.

By co-creating the space with the coachee we open the possibility to create “Magic in the Middle”. In 2005 Finn Voldtofte described this as shifting attention from individuals, and from a group or team, to what happens between the people that meet. He described deliberately focusing on this middle magic to create collective intelligence and wisdom which can have transformative power.

### **Contracting towards an ending**

We know that to avoid an abrupt or inelegant ending we can signpost and agree how that ending takes place. It reinforces that, as coaches, we own the process and the coachee has choice on how the ending takes place and what they take from the coaching.

The importance of this learning edge is that an effective coach is continually attending to the nature of the relationship between themselves, as coach, and their coachee. Effective coaches bring in their own interpersonal skills authentically and encourage the same from their coachee to build and develop a relationship based on trust.



## Learning Edge 4

# 'Unlearning and Relearning Being Directive'

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“The measure of intelligence  
is the ability to change.”

Albert Einstein

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**To develop more insight in the coachee, we need to learn to let go of the content and outcome (as per learning edge #1) and hold a belief in the coachee’s potential (as per learning edge #2); this move is to a more non-directive, facilitative and inquiry-based coaching style where we are coaching the person rather than the problem.**

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We often use the analogy of a light switch when training coaches about the use of directive and non-directive styles of coaching. If the coachee is lost in the dark and feeling around for a solution, is your intervention switching the light (their thinking) on or off? Remember coaching is about activating the coachee as much as possible to achieve their desired outcomes. The coachee is not frozen in ice between sessions and whether we like it or not, 90% of them moving towards their goals will happen outside of their time with their coach; it is therefore important that they are the person taking responsibility.

Most people come to coach training with a great deal of experience in helping others and giving guidance and advice and this is hardwired in their brain. So, the first real shift is learning to be comfortable with utilising a more non-directive style. When this is used well, we experience the coachee’s thinking ‘lighting up’ and becoming more active.

Often if we are owning the content too tightly, we will see the coachee become more passive in terms of the levels of awareness they are experiencing regarding their topic and therefore the responsibility that is being generated for the solution.



## Learning Edge 4

### 'Unlearning and Relearning Being Directive'

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Unless you have experienced coaching, and received another's full attention when reflecting and thinking, it is likely you will not understand the power of this space and the use of an inquiry based coaching style. We often hear trainee coaches saying "all I did was listen," (please see learning edge #5) as to truly listen is a gift.

After a lengthy period practising, coaches often report that they are noticing that they are frequently holding back personal resources and experiences in a coaching session that

may support the coachee's thinking. They begin to question the fact that they are not bringing themselves and their experience fully to bear upon the coaching session.

We always train coaches that there are in fact two sets of experience, knowledge, competence, skills and wisdom in the coaching relationship: our own and the coachee's. The key learning edge we need to cross here is how to intentionally access both in a way that best serves our coachee's thinking and insight.



"I can totally relate to this learning edge in my own coaching journey. As a senior litigation lawyer, I was used to being the 'expert' giving advice and direction. For me, therefore, adopting a non-directive style in my early coaching practice was challenging and a little uncomfortable. However, I soon appreciated how this approach expanded my coachee's awareness and allowed them to find their own solutions. Having

changed my own way of thinking, my approach has continued to evolve so that, although I prefer to be non-directive in my coaching, I feel comfortable offering a resource or sharing a personal experience, when it is in service of my coachee's thinking."

**Toni Smerdon,**  
**Executive Coach, Toni Smerdon Associates**



"Coming from a consulting background I found it hard not to share my ideas and experiences with my coachees. Simply listening felt passive and ineffectual and I was certain that giving advice or sharing data was bound to help my client get to a solution as quickly as possible.

I learned the hard way that in order to have permission to be directive and for this to genuinely help the client, we first need to truly listen. Being non-directive is a hard lesson to learn when it goes against all of your career experience to date, but the power of coaching is in being present and allowing the client the space to think for themselves. This is what

makes our work "coaching" instead of an everyday business conversation.

When being non-directive is mastered, it is wonderfully freeing to play along the scale of directive v non-directive. These days I am increasingly daring to be directive, but before I do I am very consciously checking in with myself to understand where my desire to be directive comes from and to what extent it will help the client, and not simply make me feel like I have added value."

**Helen Cowan,**  
**Founder, The Tall Wall**

## Learning Edge 4

### 'Unlearning and Relearning Being Directive'

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Once we have developed the capacity to use a more inquiry-based style (through training and hours of practice), we can then become more aware of our intention of offering more of our own resources, experiences and knowledge within the coaching relationship.

It is through this process of 'unlearning' to give solutions and then re-learning a more intentional way of offering our experiences that we can ensure our own resources, when offered, are more impactful.

The key here is that as a coach we help our coachee think how they might apply this input to their situation, as by doing this we are helping to raise their awareness and generate their responsibility for action.

Lots of people believe that coaching is purely non-directive, but whilst more transformation and change happens when the coachee is taking the responsibility for the content and thinking, it is a relationship created between the coachee AND coach; it would be unauthentic if the coach did not bring all of themselves to the coaching process.

Many coaches struggle with giving themselves permission to offer within the coaching dialogue, due to their training being purely non-directive.

The key check-in questions for the coach are:

- ***What is my intention in offering?***
- ***What is likely to be the impact of doing this?***
- ***Who is this for? What is this for?***

If it is to raise more awareness and insight in the coachee, then this intervention has positive intent.

When offering our own resources as a coach, our role is to help the coachee make sense of how they will use this knowledge, model or experience in their context.

To do this effectively, we need to first be non-attached to what we have shared, and it is then necessary to ask the coachee questions to help them translate this information into their own situation and build solutions that will work in the coachee's way.

It is this period of synthesis and integration into the coachee's experience that is often missed in other forms of conversations. Simple questions such as "Now I have shared that, what are you thinking?" need to be integrated within our coaching practice.

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## Learning Edge 5

# The art of Compassionate Listening

## Learning Edge 5

### The Art of Compassionate Listening

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**“The quality of your attention determines the quality of my thinking.”**

**Nancy Kline**

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**A**s supervisors and coach trainers, we often hear phrases such as “I just listened, it didn’t feel like I added much value.” Even though the coachee said it was a valuable session, here is still an ‘itch’ for the coach that they did not do enough so they start to question whether they are doing it right.

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Listening is often something that is taken for granted and yet it is very rare because most people listen for what they want to hear rather than what is really happening for the other person, or they listen with a minimal presence due to their day-to-day preoccupations.

When we train as coaches, we learn that listening is not a passive process. In fact, we are fully engaged with deep presence attuning to the coachee. We listen to what they are expressing, to what they are saying and not

saying. We are listening to their story and to what lies beneath it; the meaning they are making, their feelings, beliefs and values. As coaches we learn to listen with all our senses, beyond just the words keeping the coachee’s goals in mind. We are listening for signs of energy and motivation, the choices they are making and how these choices move them towards or away from their desired state. We are also listening for their reactions, hesitations and resistance too.





“When I started my coaching journey many years ago, active listening was what I believed I was good at. However, I realised this was more about communication techniques that held profound influences over the coaching journey and put emphasis on the action rather than the mind-set. Through my own development as a coach, I realised the art of listening is different to active listening. The art of listening is not just about hearing the words, it’s about understanding emotions, intentions and the unspoken messages behind them. As a coach having

the ability to use the art of listening has given me deeper understanding that goes beyond active listening and involves me tapping into my intuition and emotions through tone, body language and context. It has also given me the ability to truly be present which in turn creates the deeper connection and empathy to allow individuals to open themselves up.”

**Debbie Fountain,**  
**HR Director,**  
**Thales**

We are fully present and listen to follow the interest of the coachee because as we are listening, we will be making choices that can change the direction of the conversation. We are trying to create the conditions for transformation and so the coachee discovers their own solution rather than the coach’s.

Over time, every coach learns that the coachee’s insights and answers will always be more powerful than those provided by the coach. This is because it requires the coachee

to arrive at that realisation on their own, a shift in perception, a greater awareness and a connection with their own potential; leading to a deepening in their self-trust.

In our model of coaching, transformation occurs when the coachee experiences an energetic or embodied shift in the coaching conversation. If the coach is too focused on the coachee’s story and solving it for them there will be no space for this insight and change to occur. If the coach moves into

## Learning Edge 5

### The Art of Compassionate Listening

instructing or problem solving for the coachee, it can be like they have left the room as they are no longer present for the client; they have stopped listening and are now following their own agenda.

If we rearrange the letters in 'Listen' we find the words 'Silent' and 'Let's In'. Once a coach truly understands and embodies this, their presence and listening becomes the core capacities at the heart of their practice. This shift of understanding creates a deliberate practice of listening, and through training and experience this state becomes a trait; a characteristic; a way of being that is felt by the coachee.



Please now pause and reflect upon the following quote from Thich Nhat Hanh. Consider the impact of this way of listening upon the coaching space, the relationship and the coachee's belief in their own potential that this form of listening creates.

*"Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with the only one purpose: to help him or her to empty his heart. Even if he says things that are full of wrong perceptions, full of bitterness, you are still capable of continuing to listening with compassion. Because you know that by listening like that, you give that person a chance to suffer less. If you want to help him to correct his perception, you wait for another time. For now, you don't interrupt. You don't argue. If you do, he loses his chance. You just listen with compassion and help him to suffer less. One hour like that can bring transformation and healing."*

**Thich Nhat Hanh**



“To listen fully means to pay close attention to what is being said beneath the words. You listen not only to the ‘music,’ but to the essence of the person speaking. You listen not only for what someone knows, but for what he or she is. Ears operate at the speed of sound, which is far slower than the speed of light the eyes take in. Generative listening is the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind’s hearing to your ears’ natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning.”

**Peter Senge**

At Catalyst 14, we describe this way of listening and being as a coach as the art of listening.

It involves tuning our being to the coachee’s being with compassion and a motivation to help (to help them help themselves), and in an adult-to-adult/horizontal way of relating (I-thou).

In our experience, listening in this way creates a transformational space: it provides the coachee with permission to be seen, to be authentic in that moment and say what truly needs to be said from a deeper place. This is where the embodied and energetic shift is created.

Listening like this creates deep levels of connection and an experience of being fully understood. The coachee will feel ‘felt’ as the coach becomes attuned through this process of compassionate relating:

*“Emotional attunement – the ability to hear, see, sense, interpret and respond to the client’s verbal and non-verbal cues in a way that communicates to the client that he / she was genuinely seen, felt and understood.”*

**Mary Sykes Wylie  
and Lynne Turner**

## Learning Edge 5

### The Art of Compassionate Listening

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“Most of us listen to reply, not to serve. It’s a wonderful and distinctive hallmark of true coaching conversations to have fully clarified what the speaker wants to focus on and then be listening for clues for that and that only to gift them. Not to have to come up with a clever thing to say, nor a solution, nor as coach a smart question. Unlearning all of these reflexes was one of the first, and most profound learning edges for me and cathartic when it clicked. What gets in the way of listening is internal mind chatter, beliefs, habits, fears. Listening is a property of our inner self, as opposed to outer noise.

My edges now are to develop my other ways of listening — body language, tone, emotion, silence, breath. Listening feels like the art and act of being a mirror. My keenest edge to the art of listening is that of self-as-instrument, and hearing through my whole felt sense, not only with my ears, and how to offer that back to the client in a way that empowers them to hear themselves a new.”

**Cat Totty,**  
**Founder,**  
**Cat Totty Visionary Coaching**

When we fully understand the impact of listening at this depth, we understand that this is an incredible experience for the coachee, when you are listening with an open heart, curiosity and with an intention to understand, the coachee will feel seen and heard. They will feel safe and secure and will begin to let go, trusting the coaching process and you. It certainly is so much more than ‘just listening’.

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## Learning Edge 6

### There is no 'Magic' Question





## Learning Edge 6

There is no 'Magic' Question

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**"A question works because, unlike a statement which requires you to obey, a question requires you to think. The mind seems to prefer to think, not to obey."**

**Nancy Kline**

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**When we begin coaching, we start to realise that coaching is an art and not a science. We understand that there are many factors and variables involved in creating breakthroughs in the coachee's thinking, rather than a formula that we learn to follow.**

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A key learning edge for every coach is realising that there are no killer questions and that the magic does not rest in the questions we ask. Instead, it lies in our capacity to be present, listen generatively and create the conditions for transformation to occur.

Coaches training with us often share that finding the 'right' question becomes a barrier to being truly present with the coachee. It is

like learning to drive as there are so many moving parts. As depicted by Maslow's learning curve, they are consciously incompetent, it feels clunky and they are in the zone of mirror, signal and manoeuvre.

Why is learning to question as a coach such a challenge when most of us are used to asking questions within our roles such as leaders and in our wider lives, e.g. as parents?

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When coaching, the key difference for us is the different intent behind asking the question, our questions aim to facilitate the coachee's thinking and intend to raise their awareness, responsibility and choice rather than solving the situation for them.

*"Coaching is an art, and it's far easier said than done. It takes courage to ask question rather than offer up advice, provide an answer or unleash a solution."*

**Brene Brown**

When new coaches first start practising, they are often in fix it mode (they are coaching the problem rather than the coachee about the problem) and their questions are aimed at helping the coachee find the solution so much so that they stop listening and start to direct and lead the conversation with closed questions such as "have you thought about," or "do you think that ...". This is learned behaviour of problem solving typical in managerial and leadership roles can be resolved by pausing and considering the helpful question, who are we asking this question for?



## Learning Edge 6

### There is no 'Magic' Question



Without truly understanding our role as a coach and recognising that the questions are for the coachee's knowing not ours, we risk asking questions so we can understand the coachee's situation better so that we can solve it for them. Whilst this may feel more tangible for us as we start to gain the necessary information about the coachee's context, it rarely raises the coachee's awareness since they are sharing information that is already known to them.

An additional challenge of coaching in a 'fix it mode', is the coachee can often experience the coaching session as more of an interview or a game of ping pong with the coach firing the next question before they have finished speaking or had chance to reflect on what they have just heard themselves say. It is helpful for coaches to remember for insight and creativity, our brains require a breathing space, as per Judy Brown's 'Fire' poem – "it is the space between the logs that makes the fire burn". By learning to pause and truly listen to the coachee, as per learning edge #5, we start to realise our questions come from the listening space.

By fully integrating listening skills such as reflection and summary, our questions come from exploring the coachee's frame of reference. They link to what they have just shared and deepen the coachee's thinking further.

Without this awareness, a new coach is often trying to formulate questions as they listen, which can become a bit like stacking planes on a runway. When the coachee is talking they form the first potential question, then as the coachee continues they note a second question

and before they know it, they have a plethora of questions circling in their mind and they have stopped listening to the coachee. In fact, it is likely that the conversation has moved on.

As experienced coaches we learn to be present and let questions flow in and out of our mind, we learn to let go and pay attention to the coachee, knowing that if it is important, it will arise again in the session. In this way our questions follow the coachee's interest as we ask questions based on what the coachee has just shared rather than on something they said earlier in the session. This is an important tip for new coaches - listen and then pause, formulate and ask the question based on what the coachee has just shared.

It is also helpful to remember that coachees need to fully explore what is really happening for them in any situation before they come to an insight or solution. New coaches are often solution focused and so quite quickly start to ask questions about what the coachee can do differently. Without widening the coachee's perspective, it is likely it will be too soon for them to identify potential solutions. When this is experienced, the new coach often feels dismayed that they are not being a competent coach as their questions are not being impactful.

The coachee will always share first what they have already thought about and if we move too quickly into the potential solutions, we are often trying to solve the challenge with what the coachee already knows. Through practice, coaches learn when formulating questions is more helpful to expand the coachee's awareness first before focusing on a solution, this is often referred to as the **T Model** of questioning – see below:

## EXPAND



## Learning Edge 6

### There is no 'Magic' Question



"When I embarked on my coaching career, I relied heavily on prescribed tools and models which I was often applying a script or relying on a predefined question set. Models like GROW seemed to offer an abundance of questions, which fostered the illusion of adaptability and usefulness. In fact, I was holding tightly to the models I'd been taught and hoping that one of the questions in my repertoire would be the 'magic' one.

As I developed my coaching practice, I recognised the inherent limitations of such frameworks. Yet despite my confidence and experience, I still sometimes found myself searching for the perfect question that would unlock a client's deep insight and drive transformational change.

With Transformational Coach Training I soon realised that the magic question doesn't stem from a single question. Instead, it emerges from the art of deep listening, genuine presence and a curiosity that leads me to follow the coachee's unique interests and needs. Working with the emergent allows each question to arise organically from the context and energy of the conversation. The 'magic' isn't in the question itself but from the connection established with the coachee — where open ears, an open heart, and an open mind create a space for meaningful exploration."

**Lisa Boyd,**  
**Executive Coach,**  
**Citrus Coaching Ltd**



**We describe an insightful coaching question as one that effectively facilitates self-reflection, insight, and action in the coachee; it generates their awareness, responsibility and choice. Whilst there is no magic formula apart from your presence and your compassionate and generative listening to generate insightful questions, there are ten key principles that help us construct an insightful question and these are:**

## **1. Open questions**

Insightful coaching questions will be typically open-ended, allowing the coachee to explore their thoughts and feelings without being restricted to a simple yes or no answer. For example, "What are your beliefs about this situation?" instead of "Do you think this is a good idea?" Open questions begin with What, Where, Who, How and When or Tell me more, describe or explain. A Why question is open and we have to be mindful of our tone when asking why questions as these may cause a defensive reaction in the coachee.

## **2. Simple, Succinct and Singular**

Insightful questions are simple, succinct and singular. The power is not in complexity, it is in fact in simplicity and a good example of this is "And What Else?"

When new to coaching we may often be unsure of the question and start to explain it, when this happens the coachee is likely switching off. Remember we are testing questions, so just ask the question and wait and see the response from the coachee.

Also watch out for asking multiple questions, if we ask multiple questions such as "What is the first thing you will do? When will you do that? And what support do you need? The coachee is likely to answer the last question or the easiest one. Ask one question at a time.

## Learning Edge 6

### There is no 'Magic' Question

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#### 3. Follows the coachee's interest

Insightful questions follow the coachee's interest rather than leading them to what interests the coach. This means that the question will link and explore what the coachee has shared allowing the conversation to flow and supporting the coachee's thinking rather than being a distraction when the coach asks a question to something that is unrelated to what the coachee has just shared. Remember, if you are unsure of what question to ask, simply ask a question on what the coachee has shared with you.

#### 4. Thought provoking

Insightful questions challenge the coachee to think deeply and critically about their circumstance, feelings, beliefs, and behaviours. They encourage new perspectives and insights. For instance, "What assumptions are you making about your colleague?" During your training you will learn a number of frameworks that will support you to ask thought provoking questions.





**“Questions hold the power to cause us to think, create answers we believe in, and to motivate us to act on our ideas. Asking moves us beyond passive acceptance of what others say, or staying stuck in present circumstances, to aggressively applying our creative ability to the problem.”**

**Tony Stoltzfus**

## **5. Encourage Responsibility and Action**

Insightful questions promote accountability and motivate the coachee to take actionable steps. Questions like “What is within your control?” are helpful and generate this responsibility.

## **6. Positive and Constructive**

Insightful questions are often framed in a way that builds the coachee’s confidence and encourages a positive outlook. For example, “What strengths can you leverage to overcome this challenge?” rather than “Why do you think you are not being successful?”

## **7. Exploring Multiple Perspectives**

Insightful questions help the coachee to consider different viewpoints and alternatives. This can lead to more comprehensive understanding, develops more objectivity, empathy about the others involved in the situation and better decision-making.

## **8. Resourcing**

Insightful questions encourage the coachee to be more resourceful by reflecting on their past experiences and learning from them. “What did you learn from that experience?” helps the coachee gain insights and “How can you apply the learning to this situation?” Enables them to put this learning into action.

## **9. Non-Judgmental**

The tone of the insightful question is one of curiosity and non-judgement. This fosters a psychologically safe and trusting container for the coachee to explore their thoughts and feelings honestly.

## **10. Emergent**

Insightful questions are emergent rather than scripted, this means that we are listening deeply to the coachee and our questions come from our listening.



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## Learning Edge 7

# Working with Emotion



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“The funny thing about emotions is everyone knows what they are until you ask them to define them.”

Joseph LeDoux

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**E**motions; aren't they interesting? We all have emotions, we understand the notion of emotions, yet we often find it hard to explain what they are. As a coach, being able to work with emotions adds depth and potency to enable transformational work.

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So what are emotions? We like the definition offered by Paul Brown and Virginia Brown that emotions are a source of motivational energy or *'energy creating movement'* (think e-motion).

It can be helpful to think of emotions as data or information, inviting us to pay attention to something. Remember that our emotional, or limbic system evolved with us to enable our survival. So our emotions are trying to serve us. At times they do serve us well helping us recognise that we need to take action. At other times, and often with a lack of awareness, we may react or get caught in a pattern of behaviour that doesn't serve us well.

As with much of our development as coaches, the exploration around our learning edge in working with emotions starts internally. Our own relationship with emotions will show up in the way we meet and hold these in our coaching conversations.

Take a few moments to reflect on the following:

- ***What are your beliefs about emotions?***
- ***What is your relationship with emotion?***
- ***What emotions are you comfortable exploring and what are you less comfortable in holding?***
- ***How do your beliefs about emotions help or hinder you as a coach as you meet the coachee's emotional knowing in a session?***



## Learning Edge 7

### Working with Emotion

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“The more people I work with, the more I realise how few of them have a safe space to share. They carry so much with them that when they finally find a place to put it down and explore it, a whole host of feelings and emotions can come up. And that can be really scary for them. Especially if they don’t usually share things like that, or they’ve never had a particular realisation before.

Key for me is the trusted relationship you build and the space you create together for the work, which helps them feel safe being vulnerable. I always let my clients know that whatever comes up is ok and we can hold the space for it together. It’s also crucial that I keep our relationship adult to adult and allow them space and time to explore what is emerging, allowing them to explore at their own pace and process what’s

going on. As always, the choice and responsibility stays with them. I’ve also learnt that if I am not sure what’s the best next step then the best thing I can do is ask what they need and be guided by that. While it’s essential that I retain control of the process, if I find myself feeling on the edge I can remember to breathe, slow down and allow myself (and them) to pause and be present with what’s there, before we decide where to go next. So often emotions are present because it is something that really matters, and if we can support our clients to identify and work with and through them, it can unblock and release so much.”

**Lauren Hogg,**  
**Coach,**  
**The Coaching Arc**

We may have learnt to label emotions. For example, we may label 'joy' as 'good'; frustration as 'bad'. There may have been some emotions that were welcomed by others in our earlier lives and other emotions that weren't.

As humans, we have often been conditioned to cut off certain emotional experiences. A recent coachee apologised when a tear formed in her eye. She wiped it away believing she needed to 'strengthen' herself.

Yet if we let our clients experience their emotion, they will often peak and then subside, like a wave. If we create a space that invites the coachees to experience that cycle it can be both cathartic and help generate greater awareness. In the case with the coachee mentioned, the tear linked to an emotion of overwhelm. Exploring this more, she realised the overwhelm she had been carrying for a while and the sadness that came with the realisation of that and the impact of the relentless pressure over her past year.

This awareness was a catalyst for thinking about what was important for her and an energiser towards action.

Whilst there may be some emotions that are more pleasant to experience, all emotions are there to serve us. As coaches, we want to invite our coachees to become curious about

their emotions, without judgment and with a sense of 'being OK' with the emotions they are experiencing.

## **Facilitating the space for emotions**

As coaches, the way we are present, model mindful attention and compassion is key. Being grounded before and during the session helps us to notice and regulate our own subtle internal reactions to emotions around us.

This holding of a space of openness and non-judgement is not by chance — it comes from the daily discipline of a self-care practice such as mindfulness, tai chi or time in nature.

The more we practice, the greater our capacity to hold the emotions emerging within the coaching session. Consider the analogy of putting a teaspoon of salt in a glass of water and how salty the water would taste versus putting a teaspoon of salt in a lake and how unaffected this spacious and expansive volume of water would be.

This is the reason we train coaches in mindfulness and embodiment practices: so that, in these critical moments, they can stay centred, resourced, expansive and hold the space for the coachee to work through their emotions if they choose to.

## Learning Edge 7

### Working with Emotion



“When I first started coaching the emotional responses of my clients could feel overwhelming for me as we worked. I would feel a wave of sympathy and a desire to rescue — along with a certain amount of embarrassment or guilt — had ‘I’ upset them? What was my role here, and was it OK to sit and watch someone else in this fragile emotional state?

Of course, this wasn’t about me as the coach making them feel anything, more, it was the work we were doing together creating space for them to pay attention to themselves often exposing hidden emotions. We understand that our human brains have developed in such a way that the limbic system will produce an emotional response to situations which can stop us from ‘thinking straight’ and that until this response has been allowed to surface and settle rational thought may not be possible.

Imagine this as a river. The dam controlling the flow of water released. Eventually, if the pressure

rises the dam may burst. The flood of water will be uncontrollable, the flow unstoppable and there will be nothing we can do but ride this wave until the energy is dispersed. Even here the currents may be strong, and we may need to allow ourselves to be carried downstream, accepting the force and going with it.

Eventually we will come to a place where the water is gentle, where we can take notice of the spaces around us and breathe. Here there may be tributaries to explore, new directions to take, decisions to be made. As a coach, my role is to go with this flow, to allow space for the dam to burst, and to stay present for my client as they ride the rapids. I realise there is no need to rescue as they will have all the resources they need to navigate their way to the riverbank at the moment of their choosing.”

**Ros Wells,**  
**Executive Coach**

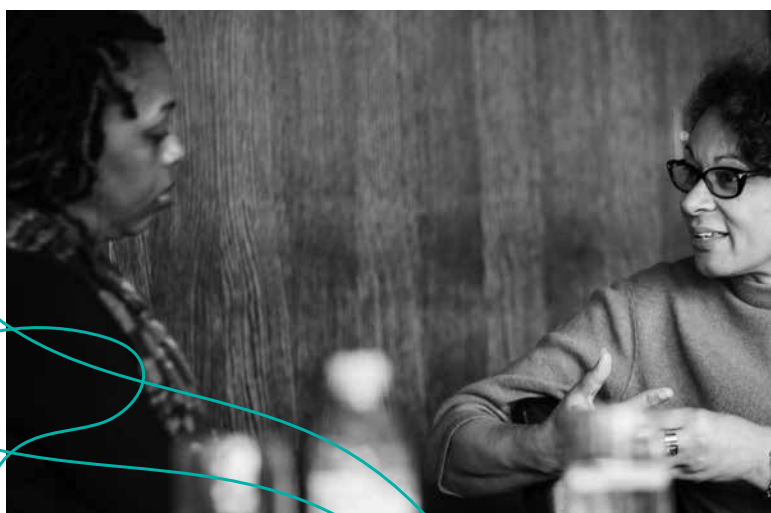
## The power of emotional contagion

As humans, there is evidence to show that the emotions we have impact the emotional state of those around us – our emotions operate in an open loop system. This is important for us as coaches to be aware of on a number of levels.

Firstly, when our coachees arrive at a session charged with a particular emotion – this may be anxiety, frustration, a sense of stuck-ness or excitement, this may well trigger that emotion in us. Of course, without our awareness, this can cause interference for us as coaches as we may be left taking on emotions that are not ours. If we can become aware of our emotional state, and regulate ourselves whilst still noticing the impact from the coachee, we can use ourself as an instrument to offer feedback or data to our coachee that will support their awareness.

Secondly, if we can regulate our emotions such that we bring a centred and grounded presence, in a similar way with emotional contagion we can support our clients to become more grounded, slow down and get into a space where they can engage their cognitive function and do their best thinking.

Without awareness we can commonly jump to rescuing the other to shield them (and possibly ourselves) from the experience of an emotion that we believe unpleasant. Alternatively, we may act to shut down their emotion, believing that all emotional exploration requires a more therapeutic approach and therefore sits outside the coaching space.



## Learning Edge 7

### Working with Emotion

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#### The learning edge

**Being able to work effectively with emotions is a frequent learning edge coaches want to focus on. This learning edge typically involves three pillars:**

- 1. Being able to recognise and regulate our own emotions so that we are present and grounded for the coachee.**  
This includes becoming more aware of the first signs that an emotion is present in us, an embodied knowing of our emotions. Recognising and tuning into things such as our heart beating fast, tightness in our chest, or the quality of our breath might signal something relevant to the coachee.
- 2. Linked to the point above, being able to sit with the discomfort of others with a sense of curiosity, without judgment and without the pull to 'rescue'.**
- 3. Recognising our boundary between exploration that may be suitable for coaching and when the work may benefit from a more therapeutic approach.**  
In addition to this, having the clarity and confidence around which to have that conversation.

Coaching supervision is a place for us to explore our learning edge in this space and anything that has may have arisen for you, from reflecting on this content.

### So where is the boundary between coaching and counselling?

This is a common area that coaches find themselves questioning. A key working assumption in coaching is that our coachees are well and therefore able to adequately regulate their emotions. They will of course experience emotions, some of which may be strong and yet they can manage themselves to engage their cognitive function to explore their emotions.



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For any of us, it may not be uncommon to feel a sense of apprehension or nervousness ahead of starting a new role or giving an important presentation. As coaches it is important that we are attune to factors such as:

- ***The intensity of the emotions and the ability of the coachee to regulate these***
- ***The significance and pervasiveness of the impact the emotions have on the coachee's ability to go about their daily activities***
- ***the duration the coachee has been experiencing the emotional state and its pattern of recurrence.***

There is a difference between a coachee feeling somewhat anxious ahead of an important presentation, which may lead them to have some worry about 'failing'. Perhaps even distracting them temporarily from other tasks. Yet they are able to notice their emotion and rationally talk about this.

As compared with someone who is finding it hard to sleep due to worry, it has impacted them for many months and they are regularly finding themselves tearful and feeling overwhelmed.

Whilst coaches and counsellors/therapists have some skills core skills in common – empathic listening, presence, non-judgment and curiosity to name a few, counselling or therapy offers a different focus and

incorporates a different and additional skillset. The work in therapy can often focus on healing emotional pain and the nature and often frequency of sessions, offers a much more intense form of support than coaching.

It is because coaching offers a space for coachees to be heard and to explore topics that are important to them, that coaching may be experienced as therapeutic (notice the small 't'). Whilst this is the case, it is important that we as coaches, are clear that it is not Therapy.

The boundary between coaching and counselling is not a precise science. Supervision is an important part of our practice to help recognise the boundary and support a conversation with your client. There are some factors or red flags linked to the bullets above, that would typically indicate the appropriateness and benefit of a Therapeutic intervention.

As with much of our work as coaches, kindness and compassion are fundamental qualities for us to bring both to ourselves and our coachees. Remaining curious and non-judgemental helps us do this, be present and also model a healthy relationship with emotion for our coachees.

## Learning Edge 7

### Working with Emotion

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#### Tips for working with emotions in the coaching session itself

##### 1. Consider time

Where you are in the session? Do you have enough time to explore what is arising (if the coachee chooses to)? Remember we are responsible for the process and ensuring the coachee leaves the session in an Adult Ego State.

##### 2. Intentionality

What is your intention in offering to work with the emotion? For coaches that have trained with us, remember the 5 tests!

##### 3. Acknowledge

Acknowledge the emotion that the coachee has touched into so the coachee experiences being seen and heard.

##### 4. Spot contract

Keep choice with the coachee in terms of moving into exploring what is emerging or not.

##### 5. Normalise emotions within coaching

Help your coachee understand that connecting to emotions is important within coaching, e.g. "It is ok for this emotion to be here; this is important

information and it is ok for us to explore it."

##### 6. Ground and anchor the coachee

Guide the coachee through short grounding practices to resource them before you begin exploring the emotion, e.g. Inviting the client to connect to the felt experience/physical sensations of their feet on the ground. Reinforcing that, at any stage, they can move back to these anchor points as a way of supporting themselves through the exploration you are about to do. Invite them to take a conscious breath or two.

##### 7. Emotional Inquiry

Practice and develop a way of supporting the coachee to stay with and explore the emotional energy, e.g. where are you experiencing the emotion in the body? Where is it mostly? What are the thoughts that go with it? What kind of emotion is it? What is the shape? How does it develop or change? Is there movement? What happens if you breathe with it?

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## Learning Edge 8

# 'Being Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable'

## Learning Edge 8

'Being Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable'

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**"Discomfort brings engagement and change. Discomfort means you're doing something that others were unlikely to do, because they're hiding out in the comfortable zone."**  
**Seth Godin**

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When you start coaching, it is not unusual to spend a great deal of time planning the coaching session, going over the models and techniques you have learnt and therefore what interventions you are likely to use in the session...and then the coachee turns up and takes the conversation in a completely different direction!

When this happens, we can start to experience a roller coaster ride in terms of movement between the expected and the unexpected; the known and the unknown within the coaching programme.

Coaching is a process of making the unconscious conscious so that we intentionally support the coachee to step into a place of not knowing and take them beyond their current thinking, often not knowing what will emerge next in the conversation, their awareness and where the session is taking them.

To be able to work with this emergent wisdom, can you as a coach be comfortable with not knowing? If not, it is likely you may try and control the direction, offer solutions to add value or try to help the coachee be more comfortable. And yet, this edge of 'not knowing' is often where a coachee's most creative insights will emerge.

As relationships are symbiotic, the coachee is too likely to experience our lack of ease with where the session has gone — causing interference in their thinking and trust within the coaching process.

Just pause for a moment and consider some impactful learning you have experienced within your life. When you were experiencing this change or situation, how did you feel? Was it comfortable or uncomfortable?



“In my early days of coaching with my need to ‘get it right’ I remember a very distinct moment when I paraphrased the coachee’s conversation. I felt quite confident sharing what I felt I had heard, only to be told ‘no, that is not what I meant’. Those words fell heavy on my ears, a sudden sense of failure ‘I got it wrong’. This impacted my concentration, I felt anxious, and my ability to listen in that moment was compromised.

Within moments the coachee then responded with their thoughts, clarifying what they meant and in hindsight I believe enabled the coachee to be clearer with their thinking. My learning and reflection from

this initial interaction and sense of failure was that it is ok to paraphrase — and not be right.

My intention is to feed back what I’m hearing; if this lands a little heavy or incorrectly for the coachee then I believe my role is to be brave and be comfortable with not knowing. My key learning is to be present, manage my internal reactions and give the coachee the chance to clarify more clearly their thoughts and even open up an opportunity for the coachee to think differently.”

**Brodie,**  
**Executive and Team Coach,**  
**Almach Leadership**

Often, to truly learn, we need to step outside of our comfort zone; to move from our current knowledge and competence into a place of not knowing.

In coaching this often results from the coach introducing a different perspective or way of seeing for the coachee. When this happens,

the coachee has to work harder mentally because of this novel experience. For the coachee to feel safe and comfortable, it is vital the coach has developed the capacity to hold this space for the coachee. In the moment they are experiencing an ‘okay-ness’, this is just where the coachee needs need to be.



## Learning Edge 8

### 'Being Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable'

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As coaches, we sometimes forget how coaching can be anxiety-provoking for the coachee, so the level of discomfort we are experiencing is likely to also come from emotional contagion too. To enable us to recognise this in the moment and then manage our emotional response so it does not contaminate our ability to be 'present', we need to build our capacity to hold emotions such as anxiety and discomfort.

Experiencing a coachee's emotional energy can cause a retraction in our field of awareness, so coaches need to start to develop presence and grounding techniques to utilise in the moment. It is through applying these techniques that we can attune to our

coaching clients, so that they experience feeling 'felt' without being impacted by our own anxiety.

If trust is flowing between the coach and coachee, the coachee's threat response in their brain quietens down and their thinking will start to open up to new options and possibilities.

*"Do you have the patience to wait  
Till your mud settles and the water  
is clear?"*

*Can you remain unmoving  
Till the right action arises by itself?"*

**Lao Tzu**



"At the start of my coaching journey I wanted to learn more and more models that I could use in any given situation, in a scientific way, to support the client move towards their goals.

What I learnt from experience is that coaching is as much of an art as a science. I'm inviting my clients

to embrace the unknowns and bring curiosity to any discomfort that emerges. It seems appropriate that I allow myself to do the same and trust the coaching process."

**Boaz Safier,**  
**Executive Coach and Partner at Catalyst 14**

“At first I was relieved to learn about models and tools because this gave me the feeling that I knew what I was doing and had a sort of ‘expertise’ that the coachee didn’t have, so I must be able to add value in a session. I would go into sessions, confident in my knowledge of tools that I could use ‘on’ coachees and, nine times out of ten, I would find a way to use my current favourite at some point in a coaching session. As I learnt more and more tools and techniques, I put them in a sack that I carried on my back into coaching sessions. Most of the time, the coachees seemed to enjoy the sessions and find them helpful.

However, the sack got bigger and heavier. Eventually, there was so much in it that during coaching sessions, my attention was often on its contents rather than on my coachee. I was listening for clues in what my coachee was saying, waiting for the moment to open the sack and pull out a shiny tool. I started to notice that, whilst my coachees might, indeed, enjoy our sessions, they weren’t really having many break-throughs and there was a sense that there was something missing.

One of my coachees at the time was a man with a senior role and a lot of presence, whom I knew was regarded as the CEO in waiting. I found it daunting and uncomfortable working with him, I was worried that he would feel I wasn’t adding enough value and that he was wasting his time — though

he had never said this. With him, my dependence on my sack of tools was particularly high; I would introduce something whenever he seemed a bit stuck or appeared at all uncomfortable.

One day, he became quite emotional when talking about how he felt about public speaking — this was unusual for him, he was not a man who wore his heart on his sleeve. I could feel my heart beating very hard and I became quite hot. I was desperately trying to think of something we could ‘do’ but my mind was blank, I couldn’t think of anything. I remember quite clearly saying to myself ‘get a grip’, feeling my feet on the floor, looking very directly at him and asking, ‘so what do you need now?’. He said something like, ‘I just need to sit with this a bit. I hadn’t realised quite what a big deal this is for me.’

The rest of the session was one of the first coaching conversations I had where I felt that I really had added value simply by listening, not filling the silence and allowing stuckness and difficult emotions to be in the room. It was a turning point for me, letting the tool sack sit in the corner and relying much more on being present and being ok with both the coachee’s discomfort and my own.”

**Sally Bogle,**  
**Executive Coach,**  
**Transcape Leading & Learning**



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## Learning Edge 9

# Being Enough



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“Perfection is the mountain that has no peak.”

Anon

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**W**hen we are practising regularly, we are likely to meet a critical learning edge as a professional coach, which is our own imposter syndrome and sense of being enough.

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As we have explored throughout this guide, coaching is often ambiguous and we must let go of what we know, to truly listen and be present for the coaching client to enable us to access the emergent knowledge happening within the coaching space.

The challenge for us often is that unless we take the time to look after ourselves and prepare for a coaching session, we are at the mercy of the less helpful parts of our personality such as our inner critic. What we start to realise as a coach is that if we leave it to chance to be at our best, it is not the most helpful parts of our personality that will make an appearance; we are likely to be in the grip of not feeling good enough.

During our coach training courses, we explore Tim Gallwey's work of the inner game and his concept of the 2 voices of Self 1 and Self 2. Self 2 is often the quieter voice that believes and trusts in our innate potential as a coach. 'Self 1,' the louder voice of the inner critic or judge, which drowns out 'Self 2,' the voice of our flow state. When we are unconsciously reacting to Self 1, we are often trying too hard, trying to be perfect and feeling as though we are not enough.

Taming our voice of Self 1, our inner critic is one of the key learning edges we will need to work through when we are training and practicing as a coach — especially as one of the key coaching themes we will meet is our client's 'imposter syndrome.'

## Learning Edge 9

### Being Enough



“For a long time, I felt my garden wasn’t quite right. I’d like it for a while and then I’d find it lacking. Not enough. I’d go from being happy with it to feeling disappointed and even resentful. Even if others saw it completely differently.

Often times too with myself as a coach. I’d be about to start with a new client and there it would be. That tight small feeling thought of ‘not enough’ and all its attendant beliefs. As if everything I know to be true, all the learning and experience thorough feedback and practice stands for nothing. My ‘not enough’ and probably just like yours – self-critical, painful spire down a rabbit hole.

I’ve found over time that I’m not alone and that we all have this.

There was a moment with my garden when I realised I could attend to it differently, being curious about what thrives in this soil, taking care of the tender plants, cultivating those that are strong and flourishing. Composting what falls away and what is no longer needed.

In my coaching practice, as with my garden, my approach over time has become one of curiosity, kindness and acceptance. I’ve found that it’s all about cultivating what’s good in me, attending kindly to what is struggling and opening to what is now possible. My mindfulness and reflective practices, group supervision and feedback nourish, support and resource me.

The one practice that has transformed my experience of my ‘not enough’ (or critic or imposter) is to meet this as a part of me and that one that has a positive intent, even if it doesn’t feel that way. When I am present and grounded, I can say hello, what would you like me to know? I often find it wants the best for me, and has a practical wisdom that we can explore together.

I love my garden now, its idiosyncrasies and imperfections and all that it offers me and those who join me there.”

**Isobel McConnan,**  
**Executive Coach**



*"The player of the inner game comes to value the art of relaxed concentration above all other skills; he discovers a true basis for self-confidence; and he learns that the secret to winning any game lies in not trying too hard."*

**W. Timothy Gallwey**

With the accompanying emotions in the session, unless we have worked through this edge ourselves, we may become contaminated with this energy, take on these feelings and leave the session not being good enough. (rather than being able to centre ourselves, regulate our emotions and become curious about this feeling and how it may reflect the coachee's experience).



"In my early experiences as a coach, I recall feeling the weight of anxieties on delivering enough for my clients, that weight was wrapped up within my internal worries of, "will I ask the right questions, will I use the right model, do I know enough models, what if the other coaches know more models than I do?"

The transformational programme with Catalyst 14 helped me release the fixed mindset of a single right outcome that my client expected, or maybe a more experienced or skilled coach could deliver. It enabled me to develop a new relationship with understanding my role and the value and magic that I can, and do, uniquely offer to my clients by freeing and trusting myself to be an instrument within the shared space

I develop with each client. This was uncomfortable learning edge but one that propelled my coaching practice and confidence to accept myself as enough and release the weight of burden of achieving a, 'right' outcome. I now have an innate sense of trust that I am not only enough, but I have been brought together with a client for the purpose of sharing my gifts to help each client reach unique insights as a result of our coaching dynamic and the container I create to enable my clients to find their own answers."

**Laura Nielsen,**  
**Occupational Psychologist & Leadership**  
**Coach specialising in coaching for**  
**Neurodivergence**

## Learning Edge 9

### Being Enough

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#### Tips for taming your inner critic

Here are 10 key strategies to support you in taming your inner critic, many of these we will cover and deepen on our Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses:

##### 1. Reflect on your “If onlys”

If only ..... then I will be enough – what is the story that you are telling yourself?

##### 2. Develop a mindfulness practice

Practising mindfulness regularly will enable you to disidentify from the inner critic and choose to connect with a more grounded awareness.

##### 3. Practise self-compassion

Meet your inner critic with love – for more information about this, please see - [www.catalyst14.co.uk/blog/self-compassion](http://www.catalyst14.co.uk/blog/self-compassion).

##### 4. When you notice your inner critic...

Pause, take a conscious breath, and thank your inner critic for worrying about you and let it know that you will be ok. What happens when you do this?

## Creating a different relationship with our inner critic

How do we come into a different relationship with our own feelings of not being enough, driven by our inner critic?

One way we can recognise when we are in the grip of our inner critic is through journaling after a coaching session and noticing our self-talk. If we are noticing absolutes within our language such as you never, always or the tyranny of shoulds, pause, take a breath, and then observe and consciously evaluate these repetitive cycles

of harsh judgment. We can notice how we are reinforcing the sense of not being enough that may be preventing us from seeing the good, the value we created in the session and how much we are developing as a coach.

Once we are consciously aware of our inner critic, we have more choice of what we are paying attention to (remember Self 2 is there too); how this is shaping our experience and how we are responding.

**5. Before a coaching session, after centring, set an intention for the session**

What qualities do you want to consciously embody as a coach? Now connect with the felt sense of these qualities in the body. If you notice your inner critic, take a breath, and reconnect with these embodied qualities before, during and after the session.

**6. Connect with the voice of Self 2**

Remember both voices are trying to help you and it is up to you, which voice you decide to listen to.

**7. Say to yourself...**

"I am enough," or "this is enough" when you notice the inner critic being energised before, during or after the coaching session.

**8. Keep a gratitude journal for your coaching practice**

Then once a month spend time reflecting upon what you have achieved, how you have grown and what you are most proud of.

**9. Stop comparing yourself**

Forget about other coaches and decide to focus solely on you and your coaching practice. What happens when you let go of comparisons?

**10. Evaluate**

At the end of each coaching session – ask the coachee – "what has been most helpful today?" or "What has been most valuable from today's session?"



**"As soon as we ask whether or not a story is true in the present moment, we empower ourselves to reframe it."**

**Sharon Salzberg**

## Learning Edge 9

### Being Enough

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"Much of my early life was spent striving to be the best, get the top grades, get into a top university, push myself hard, having high, often unrealistic expectations. This seeped into my experience as a new mother; a good friend advised, "You just need to be good enough". What did this mean? What did I do with "striving"? Slowly, I learned to relax a little, pause and sit back in different areas of my life. But the perfectionist still reared her head. She came with me on my early journey as a coach. "Get this right", "Shine", "Do you best with this coachee". It's exhausting just to write these phrases down, let alone try and live by them.

The striving as a coach was driven by a sense of Imposter Syndrome. I loved the coaching space, but

did I deserve to be there? Other coaches seemed more skilled, more present, more like "real" coaches. I allowed myself to feel intimidated. A turning point came when I coached a coachee, and on requesting feedback, they were unable to give me any. Surely confirmation that I was not a good coach? However, on discussing my doubts with my supervisor he shared a word, "Trust". This word seeped into me, my core, and percolated for a long while. It taught me to trust who I am. It taught me to trust myself as instrument with coachees. It taught me to let go of striving to be and just to be. It taught me that there is no space for the imposter, but to trust that I am enough as I am when I coach."

**Katie Cowley,**  
**Executive Coach**

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## Learning Edge 10

# 'From Doing Coaching to Being a Coach'



## Learning Edge 10

'From Doing Coaching to Being a Coach'

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**"You have to put your own oxygen mask on before helping others with theirs."**  
**Daniel Siegel**

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**T**o be receptive, wide open and in presence with coaching clients takes focus, energy and for us to be fully available cognitively, emotionally and spiritually.

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If our training results in us focusing too much in a conversation on the techniques we are using, then we will be too busy to notice what is really happening for the coachee and how they are relating to their topic.

This shift from doing to being as a coach occurs when we learn the importance of taking care of ourselves so that we can be fully resourced, present and in a place of relaxed concentration.





“This ‘edge’ was the most profound learning point for me in training as a coach — something that I feel is a development journey in itself.

In the initial stages of training, it felt appropriate to be trying hard to memorise models and focus on what I could ‘do’ to support the coachee, perhaps to impress them (and myself) by delivering the best technique! As the programme continued, I realised that this was flawed — the wrong intention and a recipe for a lack of attention to what was really going on during a session.

Instead, I have learnt through this training to intentionally (and repeatedly) drop the scanning of appropriate models in one’s mind to attending much more fully and being present. By this I mean being present for what is really arising in the moment — to the wider view of the coachee, including their

energy, body language and tone of voice. To tune in. My intention shifts from one of impressing, solving or fixing to ‘being with’ their experience. For me, this is characterised by feeling still internally and a slower pace of conversation.

From this place, invariably something arises that is quite skilful to work with. It doesn’t feel like I have thought about it; it just happens. I can only describe moments like this as profoundly deep.

The potential appears so far beyond what I could ‘do’ or think to implement. It’s more about how present I am and the space I can hold for the coachee”.

**Ruth Farenga,**  
**Mindfulness Teacher & Coach,**  
**Mindful Pathway**

In this state of being as a coach, we have a deep understanding of what is happening in any moment and the ability to action that understanding with courage and creativity.

The time to resource ourselves will never miraculously appear in our professional and personal lives; we need to make the time.

## Learning Edge 10

'From Doing Coaching to Being a Coach'

***"You know you are in Second Circle (presence) if you;***

*Feel Centered and Alert*

*Feel your body belongs to you*

*Feel the earth through your feet*

*Feel your breath is easy and complete*

*Know you reach people and they hear you when you speak*

*Notice details in others - their eyes, their moods, their anxieties*

*Are curious about a new idea, not judgmental*

*Hear clearly*

*Acknowledge the feelings of others*

*See, hear, smell, touch something new which focuses this energy inside the whole of you."*

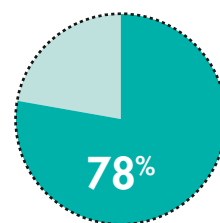
**Patsy Rodenburg**

This means not underestimating the importance of taking time to prepare for a coaching session and then taking the time for reflection and to transition out of coaching into the next part of day. It also means developing a daily ritual of self-care that works for us (as well as having regular supervision) so that, just like a musician, we are fine-tuning our instrument.

As our practice continues, we will also start to learn through supervision the emotional impact that our work has on us, as to relate deeply to clients will result in us being affected. Research by Carsten Schermuly (2014) highlighted negative effects experienced by coaches over the course of their career:



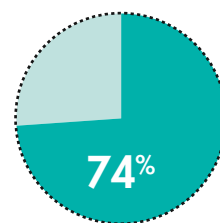
"I felt insecure"



"Personally affected by topics discussed"



"Frustrated that the problems of coachees could not be resolved"



"I felt emotionally exhausted"



“As we develop our practice as coaches naturally we learn new about tools, frameworks and theories to underpin our coaching and like learning to drive a car for the first time, it can feel overwhelming. As you try to remember to press the clutch down, move the gear stick and check your mirror whilst releasing the handbrake seamlessly, only to lurch forwards it’s at this point you realise you’re driving, but are not yet a driver!

Whether you are learning to drive or focusing on a new coaching tool, the chances are that the self-talk or “interference” as referred to by Timothy Gallwey in his book ‘The Inner Game’ will be getting in your way of being the coach you want to be. Now you may well say, this is just part of the learning process and as your confidence grows, the interference reduces. However, the new tools or models that you have come to favour can easily seduce you. You may lose

sight of who you are there to serve, and that the tools and models are merely there to assist a conversation, to assist in creating awareness for the coachee. A similar trap is overly focussing on creating the ‘shift’ or ‘aha’ moment for the coachee. This may also become a distraction or further interference for the coach. These are just a couple of examples where you may be ‘doing coaching’ rather than ‘being a coach.’

In a frantic and complex world, it has never been more important to take care of yourself to best serve your coachees as a coach. Treat yourself with the kindness, compassion and respect that you have for your clients. “

**Paul Vissian,**  
**Global Head of Learning & Development,**  
**Executive & Team Coach**

## Learning Edge 10

### 'From Doing Coaching to Being a Coach'



"In order to bring my best self to coaching, have true connectedness with the client and create an impactful container, I recognise the importance of being fully resourced.

In the past I neglected areas of my life which nourish me. This left me feeling over-whelmed, over-burdened and over-loaded. I now appreciate from my own coaching journey the value and the positive impact of truly slowing down, looking at the big picture and devoting time to the things which energise, motivate and inspire me.

I also realise the importance of being still – I had normalised the busyness of life! This means I enter

all my coaching engagements in the right head space, I am fully present and I connect to the client in a way I didn't even know was possible. Being in a resourced state also means I enter my sessions from a place of ease; and through practice I have learnt to just 'be', not to get too fixated on models or techniques — if I truly trust myself then I already have all the tools I need. The transformations I have seen in clients have been so tangible and rewarding, and it is so incredible to feel I have played a part in their journey."

**Georgie Dickens,**  
**Director,**  
**Cajetan**



Too many coaches are on the edge of burnout themselves; so it's important to be the change we want to see in our coaching clients.

We need to be role models, take time to fully resource ourselves in our wider lives so we have the physical, emotional and spiritual energy to facilitate deep change in others. If we are in a constant state of busyness and doing, we will not be able to create a reflective learning space for our coachees to slow down or learn about their experience so they can take action.

Unless as coaches we learn the internal moves to enable us to commence a coaching session in a neutral state, and manage ourselves over the session, how can we notice the subtle emotional shifts we experience when attuning to our clients?

*"Your self-care means that your coaching clients get the best of you rather than what is left of you."*

**Damion Wonfor**

This question lies behind the reason that our coach training programmes have a high degree of focus on developing a coach's capacity to be embodied and present when coaching; with this heightened 'beingness' they are more able to access a 'flow' state (a state of relaxed concentration, full engagement in the act of coaching, working with an expanded awareness of what is emerging internally and externally within a session).

**To conclude, if we are supported as we train as a coach to develop and expand through each of these 10 Learning Edges, we become a catalyst for transformational change; we will develop the capacity to evoke deep and lasting change in another.**

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**To learn more about the coach training courses that Catalyst 14 delivers and to find the depth of training right for you, please [click here](#).**

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