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# BREAKTHROUGH

Stories of Transformation in Coaching

Edited by Nick Bolton



Studies in Coaching

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# About the authors

## Editor

### NICK BOLTON

Nick Bolton is Founder and Director of Animas Centre for Coaching and runs a coaching, supervision and mentoring practice.

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Association for Coaching, a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coach Federation and a member of the Association of Coaching Supervisors and the Special Group for Coaching Psychology, Nick is dedicated to progressing the field of coaching through exploring the growing edges of its theory and practice and is currently researching and writing on self and identity in coaching.

For more information go to: [www.animascoaching.com](http://www.animascoaching.com)

## Authors

### ALYSON BAXTER

Aly Baxter is a qualified HR professional with a passion for Transformational Coaching. Aly founded Rockpool Consulting, providing HR consultancy alongside her coaching practice in 2014. Aly works with a number of different clients, mostly people who have decided to allow themselves some time and space to explore the important things for them; be that stuck in a job that is no longer where you want to be, exploring some questions you have never felt safe enough to discuss, or turn a long-lost dream into reality. Aly's coaching practice is based in the South Coast, where she spends time with her clients in the outdoors. Aly enjoys the outdoors herself, and has seen a real shift in clients' perspectives while walking and

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talking along the shoreline and enjoying the woodland walks of the New Forest. Her priority is to give time to her clients to listen and explore what is important to them. As well as the face-to-face sessions for those based in and around the South Coast, Aly also works with clients globally through telephone and Skype sessions.

Find out more about Aly at: [rockpoolcoaching.com](http://rockpoolcoaching.com)

## **ALICIA BENITO-MARTINEZ**

Alicia Benito Martinez is a person-centred Coach, NLP practitioner and Hypnotherapist specialising in helping clients who are undergoing personal or career changes to find their own inner strength and resources. She is particularly interested in how thought shapes language, and vice versa. She has a varied background, having held a variety of roles in different industries including academia, IT, media and banking.

She holds a degree in English Studies from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, a Postgraduate Diploma in Translation by the Institute of Linguistics (IoL), and a Professional Diploma in Marketing by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), and works both in English and in Spanish. She is a member of ICF (International Coaches Federation).

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## **SARAH BRANDIS**

Sarah is a personal coach and author with an interest in negative self-talk, relationships and personal development.

After studying Cognitive Neuroscience at University of Westminster, she began training as a coach with Animas to pursue her interest in the mind and her passion for supporting people to change their lives.

Sarah's self-published memoir-meets-psychology eBook, "The Breaking and Making of Me" reached number 1 on the Amazon UK mental health list and offers a frank account of her journey through her life to personal fulfillment.

When Sarah is not coaching or working on a book, she can be found blogging at <http://anelectiveorphan.com>.

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## **ALISON COATES**

Alison's life has not always followed the route she would have imagined. Suddenly becoming a single parent to two very young children back in 1999 rocked her world and set her on a path of self-discovery and exploration. Raising her children has been her number one focus for the past 20 years, managed alongside a career in Local Government, a period as a freelance IT systems developer, a role as a community transport co-ordinator, a variety of voluntary work, undertaking a somewhat daunting renovation project, and most recently qualifying as a personal transformation coach.

Alison has the ability to hold a vision for what is possible. She's demonstrated this very practically in the transformation of a neglected and uninhabitable Victorian semi, (which had been empty for over 12 years), into a wonderful family home. She now puts this ability to good use with the people she works with, people who know they want more from their life. Her clients may, or may not, know what it is they want but they are always ready to grow and discover what really inspires them. This may be around work, family, relationships, or any aspect of their life. Alison gives each client the time and safe space to explore what is important to them, and create the momentum needed to move forward in their lives.

Find out more about Alison at: [www.livingwithlove.co.uk](http://www.livingwithlove.co.uk)

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## **KAREN CONWAY**

I call myself a Personal Clarity Coach & Creative Facilitator. Over the last 4 years I have worked with a huge variety of clients that have included classical conductors, lawyers, teachers, doctors, creative entrepreneurs, young people and job seekers... anyone who wants to get ‘unstuck’ and become the best they can be. I also run my own meetup group called Professional Procrastinators. Here I host workshops – leading small groups through a 6-month structured coaching-style programme that enables participants to break through their personal blocks and get more exciting stuff done!

Find out more about Karen at: [www.kouroucoaching.com](http://www.kouroucoaching.com)

## **SUDHIR DAYA**

Sudhir is the founder and director of Integrated Health ([www.integratedh.com](http://www.integratedh.com)). Sudhir graduated as a chartered physiotherapist from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. With more than 13 years’ experience, Sudhir specialises in sports injuries, performing arts injuries, musculoskeletal conditions, ergonomics, occupational health and stress management.

Sudhir appreciated the mind-body interaction in “dis-ease”, and therefore coaching was an organic diversification for Integrated Health in order to “bring it all together” and address the person holistically. Sudhir has a bias towards health and wellbeing coaching, but is particularly interested in personal transformational coaching, which empowers people to make better fundamental choices so that they can live the life they truly want to live and feel more energised, focused and happy.

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## **TRICIA FERNANDES**

Tricia is a personal coach with 12 years experience working in Public Sector finance. She works with young professionals and high achievers in corporate settings, helping clients overcome both personal and professional challenges in order to develop their skills and map clear career paths. In addition to this she also has a diverse client base with wide ranging goals. Her interests include: limiting beliefs, co-dependency and NLP, particularly how the mind influences behavior.

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## **SONIA GILL**

Sonia Gill is the Director of Heads Up Limited. She studied psychology, is a qualified teacher and joined the business world by being selected to join the John Lewis graduate leadership program.

Her experience and success in business coupled with her desire to return to education lead to the creation of Heads Up. She realised school leaders were not always well supported or trained in core leadership skills, especially those required to create high performing teams and cultures of excellence. Yet what so many of them did, as class teachers, was exactly that and her ability to translate the skills of a classroom teacher to those of leadership and culture creation make her work very accessible to school leaders; all who have experienced it recommend working with Heads Up.

Through cultural development programmes, conferences, training and coaching, she and her team support school leaders create outstanding school cultures.

Her belief is that every school can be outstanding and her mission is to make that a reality.

Find out more about Sonia at: [www.ukheadsup.com](http://www.ukheadsup.com)

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## **HEERAL GUDKA**

After 15 years of working in the City of London, my move into life coaching and career development was driven by the sincere conviction that I can contribute more to improving the lives of people, in their home and work environments, as a coach than as a finance professional.

I work with individuals and businesses internationally, facilitating improvements in engagement and mindset. Coaching clients come to me for an integrated approach which brings about lasting change. My coaching style is straightforward and free of jargon; I build trust with my clients and they rely on me to give honest and compassionate feedback. I help my clients deal with the stresses of life and work, help them to identify opportunities and to overcome challenges. I observe and identify patterns of behaviour and thought process, so that the client can decide which are helpful and which are hindering progress.

Find out more about Heeral at: [www.gudkacoaching.com](http://www.gudkacoaching.com)

## **ROBERT STEPHENSON**

Robert Stephenson is a Performance and Person Centred Coach, who explores how NLP, Hypnotherapy and Creative Thinking can enhance the coaching environment, creating awareness and change, to enable people to overcome their fears, achieve their aspirations and reach their true potential.

Robert is the lead trainer of the 'Diploma in Transformational Coaching Programme' at The Animas Centre for Coaching.

Robert is an ILM approved Coach and iTOL Trainer, specialising in Youth Empowerment, Motivation and Life Balance. He works with Catalyst Business Dynamics and with Wac Arts Training as an Associate Trainer. He is also a Creative Agent for A New Direction and a tutor for Essex University and Anglia Ruskin University.

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## **SUE SUNDSTROM**

Sue Sundstrom is a transformational life coach, and is passionate about seeing people overcome limiting beliefs, to achieve their full potential, both in their personal and professional lives. She particularly enjoys working with people looking for greater clarity in terms of life direction, helping them understand and attain their career and/or business goals. She loves inspiring others to take action and get 'unstuck'! She has a Marketing and Project Management background, having worked for years in the corporate world, as well as on a self-employed basis, and understands the challenges of both worlds, as well as the juggles of balancing work and family (she's a wife of 15 years, and mom to two lively boys, aged 11 and 8).

Find out more about Sue at: [www.suesundstrom.com](http://www.suesundstrom.com)

## Foreword

NICK BOLTON

Like our first book, *Light Bulbs!*, this new collection of essays gently pulls back the curtain on what happens in transformational coaching.

Unlike the many books which focus on coaching techniques and theory, *Breakthroughs* allows the reader to get a sense of what goes on in coaching: What does the coach do? What kinds of issues are brought to coaching? How does change take place?

Coaching is maturing both in practice and in the theory that underpins it and, unlike the early days when it almost exclusively concerned itself with performance and achieving goals, it is now increasingly a space in which people can take time to explore how to live more fulfilled, authentic, and happy lives. It is becoming a place for transformational thinking and reflection that enables people to unfold what's going for them in whatever context feels significant to them.

This book aims to demystify the process of coaching, while also revealing its true depth, compassion, and potential. All the essays are written by coaches who have trained through Animas and who approach coaching from the more emergent, life-centred perspective described above. As such, there is an implicit appreciation that coaching is a journey of personal discovery built on a powerful exploratory relationship, and that achieving personal change goes beyond merely a focus on behaviour and goals. As coaches working at a more transformational level, we are exploring the core paradigms at work in a client's experience of their world.

There is often an assumption about change in coaching: that it happens with a breakthrough, a special moment, rather like the light bulb moment described in our first book. The word itself implies as much: 'breakthrough' – sudden, dramatic, and permanent!

In the heat of the moment we might think, “Wow! My client made an amazing breakthrough today!”

Or in a more reflective space, we might ask ourselves: “I wonder where the moment of breakthrough was that led to the client’s change?”

And, indeed, sometimes change does happen with a breakthrough.

Our experience of coaching here at Animas, however, suggests that this is not typical and that there needs to be a shift in how we discuss change in coaching – one that acknowledges the power and importance of emergent possibility, the shifting nature of self-knowing and the power of slow transformation.

Given this Animas philosophy, what does it mean, then, to talk of a ‘breakthrough’?

As an interesting side note, when putting this book together, we faced this very question when we considered the cover illustration, and this offers an interesting micro-study of the assumptions we make about change and breakthrough. Our initial idea was of a dramatic breach – a wall being broken down by a strong force such as a wrecking ball – the light pouring forth. This felt like it would be an eye-catching cover and a bold statement of coaching intention. And yet, as we thought about it, we realised that breakthroughs in transformational coaching are more subtle and shifting; far more like sunlight breaking through the clouds, only to be covered up and revealed again in another place at another angle – lighting up another piece of the landscape.

And so it’s no surprise to see this reflected in these essays. Rarely are the moments of breakthrough single moments of stark differentiation from the rest of the coaching. Rather, the change is gradual, emergent and glimpsed in reflections before it becomes clear that something has shifted for good.

This kind of breakthrough is one of revelations, surfacing the unsaid, lighting up the unknown.

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At the root of coaching transformation is the *conversation* that, like the sunlight breaking through the clouds, shines rays across the mental landscape and interpreted world of the client. At one moment, the conversation lights up the implicit beliefs at play in the client's challenge and in another, it brightens the picture of the values that underpin the change. It momentarily dazzles as it spotlights our very identity or it gently highlights an unseen feature. It meanders slowly across the landscape or it scoots across with a strong gale of discovery shaking and rattling old assumptions.

This idea that coaching breakthroughs are more like the sun and the clouds, for me, resonates far more than the instantaneous, undeniable breakthrough symbolised by the wall crumbling down as it encounters an immense force.

In coaching, we journey together, holding true to the client's greatest good, and enabling breakthroughs to occur wherever and whenever they arise. We shine the light no matter what the cloud cover and we know that there's always a break in the clouds where our conversation is lighting up a patch of land.

That's breakthrough. The changes our clients experience can wholly be life-changing but rarely is this the result of one 'killer question'; rather it's the rolling of time and the lighting of the richness that lies within.

Now let's hear from the coaches themselves.

# Two sides of the coin: solving inner conflict

ALICIA BENITO-MARTINEZ

It is a universally acknowledged truth that starting a business is not for the faint-hearted.

The challenges are many, even for individuals of great determination and a strong passion for what they do. There is new information to take in at every step; decisions are needed at all levels; and different hats to be worn and changed very quickly.

A willingness to take risks, to adjust to changes, and learn as you go – all these are very important characteristics. There are an infinite number of daily situations that take small business owners out of their comfort zone. An ability to stay flexible is key, as well as an undeterred confidence in yourself and the skills that support you in delivering your product or service.

So what happens when you *know* all this, but you actually don't *believe* it?

This was the issue a client brought with her when she came to see me. From our initial conversation, I could tell this was a very strong-willed lady in her mid-forties. She had been unhappy in her administrative job for around six years, and had decided that this was not the way to live life. After discussions with her husband, and taking into account the financial needs of the family, they both agreed that it was the right time for her to leave her day job and set up her own business: a website selling homemade beauty products.

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From our first session, I found her spirit remarkable – she had decided she wasn't going to waste one more day in a dead-end job, even if it meant downsizing and selling their beloved house. The time was now, and she was going to make it happen.

The initial stages were quite exciting: meeting friends to brainstorm possible names for the business, deciding on the website design and which mixture of ingredients to use... yet as time went by, many other, more complicated decisions had to be taken. As she decided to do a video about her service, she realised that she didn't feel comfortable in front of the camera at all. In fact, she came to realise how uncomfortable she felt on the technical side of things – and this was an issue for her social media presence, which she soon acknowledged was absolutely key for business development.

Everything she set herself to do became a huge challenge in terms of the time and energy to invest: one small issue led her to another that needed still more information to be absorbed or someone else to be consulted, more networking to be done or more money to be spent. So she saw herself at the bottom of a huge mountain, with very little experience of climbing and lots of stones on the way!

As the sessions went by and we explored these new situations and what could be the best way for her to approach them, it became increasingly obvious that despite being able to discuss and come up with feasible options, specific plans of action, and counting on her family's full support, it was still difficult to see real progress being made, and clients were not knocking on her door.

In one of the sessions, she stated that it seemed to her that everyone around her was getting there, but somehow she wasn't matching up and this thought was paralysing, making her hesitant about the smallest, day-to-day decisions.

She found herself procrastinating on basic jobs that needed to be done, taking one or two “days off” just to clear her mind, which sometimes turned into a whole week. The work we were doing, while it helped in keeping her focused, was not quite reaching the transformation needed for her to take control of the business so that it could flourish. Consciously, she was very clear about her goals and determined to see them through, but there seemed to be something else playing up in the background.

We explored her self-esteem, self-confidence and limiting beliefs, yet at the bottom of her struggles I could sense she felt there was a sort of barrier she couldn’t cross, and sometimes she got tired of trying.

As a coach, it is also a frustrating experience when obstacles seem to hinder the client’s progress. It’s important to remember that there is always a reason for the client’s behaviour and we are not ultimately responsible for it – we are catalysts and sounding boards, providing the space for reflection, but must avoid taking decisions or actions on their behalf.

Transformation has to start *within* the client and sometimes it is a matter of holding tight *with* the person during the exploration, which can take a while due to deep-seated issues surfacing. And it often comes when we least expect it.

In one of our sessions, as we were discussing a behavioural issue – acting impulsively in social situations – she suddenly went quiet and I waited in expectation, sensing that she was searching for the right words to share an experience.

It is always tempting to jump in with another question or with a series of options, but experience has taught me that when the client looks pensive, it is a key moment to stay quiet, as some people need extra time to verbalise their inner experience. This also applies when the client is trying to decide whether she can trust the coach with relevant information that she hasn’t revealed so far.

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She took a deep breath. “The thing is,” she started, “ever since I decided to become an entrepreneur, I have been living with this sort of low-level anxiety, which is getting worse and worse. My husband has been nothing but supportive, and we have discussed at length, but I still feel judged by him. I feel an unspoken pressure to ‘get this right’. At a logical level, I know I have the experience and am very adaptive and I can make it work. I have always been a great achiever; I was the first one in my family to decide to take evening classes and get a degree. Yet I start wondering, what if no one wants to buy my products? And it is absolutely terrifying. I feel blocked.”

She spoke quickly, as someone who had barely been keeping her emotions at bay for a long time, and I could see she was struggling with this matter. I could see and hear that we were reaching the core of the issue. So I said:

“Would it be fair to say that there is a part of you that is *confident*, and knows what you can do, and another part of you that is *vulnerable* and fears?”

She went quiet for a few moments. “Yes.” I could hear a gentle hesitation in her voice. It came across as if she had difficulty with this specific issue. Her face had acquired a very serious expression and she seemed to be unable to say anything else. I gave her a bit more time, then I offered: “Inner conflicts are very common. Contradictions between what one consciously wants and the unwanted behaviours one subconsciously adopts are quite normal.”

One thing that still surprises me in coaching is that a one-off remark, which may state the obvious, can really hit the mark.

She looked at me, truly surprised. “Really?”

“Well, think of wanting to lose weight but reaching for the chocolate cake, even though you know it’s going to sabotage your efforts. Loving your husband yet having an affair. Knowing that speaking in public is essential for your business, yet getting cold sweats on stage.”

She seemed to lighten up. “Well I was very aware of these two parts of me. But I thought it was only me.”

“Not at all. In fact, I don’t think anyone is free from inner conflicts! I certainly am not,” and I grabbed one of the chocolate biscuits sitting on the table, looked at it intently, sighed, and put it back on the plate with a smile. Point made.

“Well, I have always thought I was a weirdo. I very much know these two parts of myself, you see. They are so obvious and they strike at different times... I have even given them different names. One of them is me. My first name, G. This is the woman that is confident and knows what she wants, the high achiever that doesn’t care about what others think.” She swallowed.

“But then there’s this other me, my second name, S. It’s as if she talks to me and she’s really harsh. Every time I am about to take a decision, she questions it. S often tells me ‘who do you think you are?’, “you’re getting a big head”. Sometimes it’s so bad, I actually speak to her as if she was a real person and ask her to please stop. It is maddening. I have only told this to my husband, because I fear people would think I am crazy.”

As I looked at her across the table, her body language spoke for itself. She tilted her head to the left while talking about the side of her that was her ‘social’ self, moving her left hand, whereas when discussing her hidden self, she inclined her body towards her right, and closed her shoulders together, as if wanting to become smaller.

As it happens, S, this insecure self is what prompted unwanted behaviours, impulsive and apparently uncontrollable decisions to eat or drink in excess. It is important to listen to everything that a client brings to the session, as often an apparently unrelated issue or random statement could in fact be the key to understanding what is going on underneath the surface. I offered this connection between a negative inner dialogue prompted by S and acting as a trigger of an excessive behaviour.

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“I think that is true, actually,” and her face reflected a shift in understanding. “Thinking about it, I often eat or drink mindlessly when I feel judged or I am surrounded by people that I think are judging me and my business decisions. I guess it’s S in action!”

It is always a pleasure help the client reach a new understanding of the issues that have them stuck, sometimes for years. It pays off to work longer on the issue to facilitate the client reaching the conclusion him/herself, bringing lasting change as two pieces of the jigsaw that suddenly fit.

I highlighted how remarkable her level of awareness was: she actually realised these two parts were distinct and operating independently, well ahead of those that did not even know their conflicts exist. This reframe changed how she positioned herself in the world – and so the healing began.

For some time, we left business issues aside and explored these two parts, when and where they possibly came from. We decided to work on the premise that our subconscious always has a positive intention, and therefore this part of herself that was apparently hindering her progress actually had an important role in protecting her and keeping her safe. Why did S come into existence?

As it happens, G loved school, got very good grades and was always happy as she was very passionate about learning. She remembered one instance when she was getting dressed for school and one of her sisters made a nasty, derogatory remark. So young G made the connection that she shouldn’t really be happy or at least not show it, or else it will be perceived as boasting and she would be criticised. Shortly afterwards, she saw her mum cry and heard her say her husband may leave. As a young girl, G’s young mind decided it was her responsibility to keep the family together and so she tried to keep as low a profile as possible so as not to “rock the boat”.

Having an awareness of when S was created took away some of its power, and the inner dialogue became less pressing. We reframed this experience by highlighting its positive intention in helping confident G avoid external threats and keep things running smoothly, which was a positive thing, especially for a small business owner.

We practised having an open dialogue and being kind and gentle towards S. The client acknowledged that, while being a very smart and thoughtful little girl, maybe she had gotten a little stuck in the past. In fact, she was called her second name only within the family up until she was about 16, while the rest of the world called her G, the name for a promising, smart young woman.

While it is good to remember the past, it was more effective to inform S that things have changed in G's life. That she was now an adult and customers and fellow business owners were definitely not going to raise an eyebrow if she was successful in her business! As S grew in understanding, G also gained understanding about herself and her motivations, and the tension was somehow relieved, allowing her to make progress in the business without judging herself so harshly.

In fact, we took it further and explored how could S's experience of the world could actually contribute to her business success; her "protective instincts" would come in handy to keep an eye on competitors and to be sensitive to how her customers reacted to products.

Her new acceptance of the "darker" part of herself had a direct effect on her marketing. She now saw her customers with compassion, perhaps with conflicts between how they felt and how they looked. She decided to promote her products not as means of masking perceived imperfections, but as a way to enhance beauty and positively celebrate a life fully lived.

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Like any other conflict, internal tensions that haven't been fully acknowledged create a lot of *dis-ease* in the person that suffers them, topped by feelings of shame and inadequacy. Sometime later, the client confessed to have felt much better just by knowing that this happens to everyone and that "she was not crazy". Her inner voice had only become stronger because *what we resist, persists*. Quieting down S's voice with food or drink only made her voice stronger, but turning avoidance into collaboration paid dividends.

She also came to a wider understanding, acknowledging tension as a part of life. This improved her relationship with her husband, as she now saw him as a full person with many sides, wanting to support her and at the same time being able to express financial concerns. As a consequence, it became easier to stop when these tensions were mounting, and they were able to discuss them. It also diminished unwanted impulsive behaviours, as there was less tension to be relieved.

Many fruitful learnings and significant change came from this joint exploration. As a coach, it doesn't get better than opening a crack in what appeared to be a solid block that has kept the client stuck for a while. It often takes perseverance on both parts, but sometimes the coaching journey offers these breakthroughs as invaluable gems in the path of genuine transformation.

# The Power of Self Awareness

TRICIA FERNANDES

Simon was a man who was locked in a vicious battle against himself. That much was clear as he slumped over his coffee, dejected and exhausted from psychological torment. From the outside looking in, no one would've guessed Simon's personal struggles. He had been happily married for many years and had a young family. He was active in his local community and had enjoyed a hugely successful career and a thriving social life. By all accounts, he was a high achiever who had set high standards for himself and accomplished his goals with ease. But throughout the years, cracks had appeared under the surface of his life and had deepened over time, and Simon had now reached the point where he could no longer ignore these issues.

In our previous sessions, he had run the full gauntlet of emotions – from willingly and collaboratively working with me to uncover his issues, to stubbornly declaring that there was in fact nothing wrong with him and the whole world was to blame for his unhappiness. Not only was the whole world to blame for his unhappiness, he resolutely informed me, but there was, in fact, no hope for him, as each and every person in his life disliked him intensely: his wife, kids, parents, friends and work colleagues. Each one of them had a valid and decidedly complex reason to dislike him. Each one had been failed by him at some point in their relationship. Simon had decided that not only did they dislike him, but he deserved to be disliked by all of them as there was something inherently unlikeable about him. In addition to this,

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he lived each day with the certain knowledge that not only did all the people in his life dislike him, but everyone he met in the future would curse the day he entered their lives. On the face of it, Simon did not have much to look forward to in life, as he was so deeply maligned and a burden to all who crossed his path.

Interestingly, Simon's intrinsic 'unlikeability' was not the reason he had first sought my counsel as a coach. As with many coaching relationships, he had originally wanted to discuss another issue which was not as 'deep' in comparison. This is often the way coaching relationships begin. Clients seek coaching for 'surface' issues and once resolved, either move on to talk about the real issue they want to resolve, or the real issue is revealed in trying to resolve the 'surface' issue. Sometimes the process is deliberate and sometimes the client has no idea that there is a deeper issue lurking beneath the surface issue that needs to be worked out. In Simon's case, the latter had been the case and the revelation of the deeper issue had been both surprising and unsettling for him. This process of 'uncovering' deeper issues is a valuable and necessary part of the coaching process. Sometimes the surface issue serves to build trust and rapport between client and coach, and creates an atmosphere where they feel comfortable discussing the deeper issue(s), and sometimes the surface issue acts like a spotlight that illuminates the deeper issue they didn't realise was there. Often it's a combination of both.

Simon's view of the world was that everyone disliked him and this was causing him to resent key people in his life. He resented his wife because he thought she was angry and unhappy that he couldn't give her the things she wanted in life. This had created an unspoken rift between them that he assessed was growing each day as they psychologically and emotionally drifted further and further apart. She was preoccupied with the house and kids, and never asked him a single question about himself despite the fact that he was working all the hours of the day and night to support their family. He resented his children because he thought they didn't want to spend time with

him. He reasoned this was because he was a bad father and not as patient, understanding or interesting as the other fathers he knew. He resented his parents because his relationship with them had always been strained. They had envisaged a different life for him than the path he had taken, and consequently Simon didn't feel they were ever proud of anything he had done with his life. Their relationship with his brother was a lot better in comparison, and this cemented his view that he was a huge disappointment to them and created tension between the siblings, culminating in a mutual dislike, with each blaming the other for the state and fate of their family. He resented his friends and colleagues, as they all thought he was incredibly boring and uninteresting. He knew this was true as, given the choice, even he wouldn't want to spend time with himself. He also resented his boss for not recognising all the hard work he put in at the office, and refusing to acknowledge that he was breaking his back each day for very little reward. Simon was angry that he had given these people, these ungrateful demanding selfish people, all of his time and energy and received nothing positive in return.

After our first coaching session, Simon did not expect that I would want to coach him a second time. He was so unwaveringly convinced that I would dislike him, just as he thought everyone else did, that he was completely surprised to learn that there would be subsequent coaching sessions. *Didn't I have other people to coach? he enquired. People who had real problems that needed sorting out? Wasn't he just wasting my time with issues that were all certain facts that could never be changed?* In truth, one hour with Simon had drained me of my desire to help others, but with my coach's hat still firmly on, I knew this said more about me than him. More importantly, we had opened up a dialogue and started the process of change. Despite his unhappiness, I had seen a resilience and determination in Simon and was curious about where his coaching journey would lead him. The fact that he was willing to undertake a coaching session, when he was so positively determined that nothing could be done about his

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situation, was a huge signal that on some level he wanted things to change. This need hadn't made its way into his conscious thoughts yet but was there, bubbling under the surface in his subconscious.

Over the next few sessions, we explored Simon's self-image. The way he felt about himself and the person he thought he was had hugely shaped his perceptions of how he thought others viewed him. It was clear to me that Simon didn't like himself and had projected this dislike onto the people in his life, convincing himself it was they who disliked him. This allowed him to feel sorry for himself, and over time his self-pity had transformed into an anger that had locked him in a psychological prison and prevented from making progress in life. One by one, we went through each person that disliked Simon, exploring the reasons why and what he might have done to elicit this response from them. At the end of this process, Simon reached the conclusion that there was no real concrete evidence that people disliked him, and none of them had verbally expressed this view to him. Where, then, had this incorrect assumption come from?

Further investigation during our coaching sessions led Simon to the realisation that he didn't like himself. He had previously been unaware of this and was subconsciously expressing his dislike by externalising it onto other people. This discovery was uncomfortable for Simon to admit, and he struggled with it and the exploration of the underlying causes, but nevertheless realised that it was necessary to work through this in order to move forward. The reasons that Simon disliked himself were centred on the ways in which he had let himself down throughout his life, by not meeting his own needs and prioritising the needs of others instead. By constantly making others a priority at his own expense, Simon had sent a clear subconscious message to himself that he didn't think he was important and worthy of the things he desired. He didn't deserve to live the life he wanted to live, and if he didn't think he was worthy then according to his logic, no one else would either. Furthermore, if Simon prioritised the needs of others before his own, then he was holding himself accountable to meeting their needs, and

if he was responsible for meeting their needs, then by his logic they were responsible for meeting his. When these needs were not met, he rationalised his disappointment by concluding that they must dislike him. Simon had effectively taken on a responsibility that wasn't his (meeting the needs of others) and silently and subconsciously traded this with what should have been his responsibility (meeting his own needs). The result was resentment, silent rage and a feeling that he had simultaneously failed others and been failed by them.

My role as a coach had been to allow Simon the space and time to reach these conclusions himself. The fact that I had also reached similar conclusions from what he had said during our coaching sessions had no real value unless Simon also agreed that this was true. Telling him these things would also be of no value to him, and would actually serve to damage him more in the long run, as it could be disempowering to have these things suggested to or imposed on him, rather than the more empowering and transformational process of discovering it himself. There was also the possibility that my observations were not true for him in his reality, only for me in mine, which was another reason why telling him my conclusions could have been damaging.<sup>1</sup> The process of changing thought processes and cognitive patterns, that have in most cases been determined in childhood and are deeply rooted, is long and ongoing. The subconscious shifts that take place during this process cement the new processes that replace them, in a way that just telling someone and expecting them to believe what you're telling them is true cannot do. There is inherently more power and value in a client reaching conclusions themselves through

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1. The coaching relationship is client-focused and impartial. Within this relationship, my observations and conclusions as a coach are not important and do not need to be communicated to the client. As a coach, it is essential to have an awareness of conclusions drawn from information the client provides, and stay focused on this information and where it leads the client, as opposed to trying to lead the client to the same conclusions.

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a process of exploring their beliefs and challenging or questioning those beliefs, than in merely telling them what they think and feel isn't necessarily the case. This is the power and value of the coaching relationship and the reason why good coaching relationships work.

Modern life is fast-paced and hectic. There is always something to do, time is scarce and the list of people making demands on our time is long and growing. Coaching is primarily about holding space and allowing the client time to talk about themselves. This is something that a growing number of people don't get the opportunity to do in their everyday lives. Taking time out to talk about problems or issues with people you know often feels indulgent and imposing, as if you're taking up time that could be better spent doing some pointless but necessary task. Coaching gives the client that time and space. The sessions are **their** time to discuss things that are important to **them**. Initially, this can feel uncomfortable because as a society, we are taught that giving your time to others is acceptable but taking time for yourself is selfish. As a coach, I believe that you cannot give what you do not have. In this respect, taking time for yourself to honour your needs and do the things you need and want to do is essential if you are going to be able to give back to society on any level. In Simon's case, he had nothing left to give as he had spent his life putting the needs of others before his own. The resulting anger and resentment were a distress signal from his subconscious that he needed to prioritise himself in order to secure his own happiness and make a valuable, positive contribution to the lives of those around him.

At the end of our coaching sessions, I would sometimes suggest a task for Simon to carry out before our next session. These tasks were always discussed with and agreed by Simon. As his main issues centred primarily around his relationships, one of the tasks I suggested he undertake was to observe his relationships with the key people in his life for a week, focusing on how and when he interacted with them, how they interacted with him and what might be going on for him and

them during these interactions. I suggested this task because during our sessions, it was becoming clear that Simon 'lived in his head' the majority of the time, and his mind chatter was having a hugely negative impact on his perceptions of himself and his relationships. By getting him to consider the perspectives of other people, this would hopefully be a step towards getting him to focus on something other than his own mind chatter and gain a different perspective. This task was to prove more valuable to Simon than even I realised at the time.

At our next session, I barely had to ask Simon any questions, as he was full of information about the relationships with the people in his life and newfound realisations that had never occurred to him before. The most important breakthrough to come from this exercise was the realisation that he was not actually disliked by people, rather it was the way he viewed himself that had caused him to think people disliked him. Furthermore, he said that he'd previously believed his influence on people's lives was greater than it actually was. Realising that he was not actually the centre of people's lives had helped him gain a completely new perspective. People were not walking around thinking about how they disliked him 24 hours a day, as they actually had lives of their own to think about. This caused a huge shift in the way that Simon related to others and himself. Whereas before, he actually thought his boss hated him because of his abrupt and insensitive tone during their conversations, he now replaced that thought with a new one: his boss was merely under pressure and stressed by the demands placed on him. By realising that he was not the most important factor in his relationships with others, Simon realised that very little of what they said or did to him was actually caused by him. When he let go of this thought, he realised that he might not always be a priority to these people but he could be a priority to himself. Finally he was able to begin the process of letting go of things he wasn't responsible for and start meeting his own needs instead. He accepted that in doing this, he was not letting anyone down and there was nothing wrong with putting himself first.

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Once Simon reached these conclusions, things did not automatically improve for him overnight. He now had the awareness and perspective to make positive changes in his life, but to permanently change negative thought processes that have been held for a lifetime takes determination, strength and commitment to change, and is an ongoing process. Having an awareness of your thought processes and the impact it has on your behaviour does not automatically mean you won't slip back into old patterns; however, it does enable an increased awareness of when and how this happens. This awareness is hugely valuable, but to effect real change, negative thought patterns must be replaced with those that have a positive impact. To do this, Simon embarked on a new relationship with himself, one where he didn't spend his days disliking himself and listening to his negative mind chatter telling him he wasn't successful enough, wasn't good enough for other people, wasn't thin enough, wasn't smart enough, wasn't tall enough, wasn't interesting enough, and all the other negative reinforcements he'd previously believed. Instead, he started slowly replacing these thoughts with more positive ones. During our coaching sessions, he began to focus more on his achievements and the positive things he'd accomplished during his life, and at the end of this process he came to the conclusion that not only did he like himself (something he had always been unable to do before), but he was actually a decent, hardworking, and trustworthy person. There was nothing inherently bad or unlikeable about him; this had merely been the way he had chosen to view himself through the eyes of others. Furthermore, not only did Simon like himself, he didn't give a damn if no one else did! This was a huge breakthrough for Simon, a defining moment that positively impacted every area of his life.

Very little of Simon's life actually changed during the time we worked together. However, he was able to make huge improvements to his life and was much happier at the end of our time together, because he had changed the way he viewed the world and ultimately himself. As a

result of this, the quality of his relationships improved dramatically. In some cases they didn't change much at all, but now that Simon wasn't holding onto the limiting belief that others disliked him, he no longer felt the anger and resentment that had previously crippled him. Part of Simon's coaching journey had been to strengthen and build his self-confidence, and this changed the nature of his relationships. Whereas before, his role in his interactions with others had been passive, he was now increasingly assertive and willing to articulate his thoughts and feelings, which meant he no longer felt frustrated and misunderstood by those around him. The reaction to the change in Simon's behaviour varied: some people welcomed it, which led to more harmonious relationships; but, somewhat inevitably, he reported that others were uncomfortable with the changes and what they represented, and were unable to accept the new Simon. However, while this would have previously upset him, he was now able to take it in his stride.

At our last session, I asked Simon if his coaching journey had been worth it. I wasn't sure how he would respond to this question as our coaching sessions had, at various points, been uncomfortable, emotional and extremely challenging for him, bringing up issues he had tried to avoid for decades and, in some cases, had never discussed with anyone before. Out of all the clients that I'd worked with up to that point, Simon was the one that I had challenged the most and pushed the furthest out of his comfort zone. He was also the one I admired the most, as he always stayed in the room and met the challenge, no matter how uncomfortable the questions got. To my surprise, he answered without hesitation that coaching had undoubtedly changed things for him in a positive way. What he had found particularly helpful was the process of taking thoughts out of his mind and discussing them with an impartial person, because this had made problems that had seemed impossible much less severe and easier to cope with. He also mentioned that he'd started to look forward to his coaching sessions; although they could be challenging,

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this was the one hour in his week that was truly *his* time. Lastly, although he had found the thought of facing up to his fears quite daunting, there was something hugely rewarding in knowing that he had not only done it, but had also come out the other side with a much healthier frame of mind. Simon's journey had also represented a breakthrough in terms of my coaching style. After our sessions, I sometimes wondered: *Had I pushed too much? Were the questions too intense? Was I being too challenging?* Simon had often described me as 'tough', but as we reflected on where he had started and how far he had come during his coaching journey, both of us agreed that he was in a much happier, healthier place.

## “A Safe, Open Space”

KAREN CONWAY

I took a call from an unknown number one Wednesday afternoon in early April this year. After some introductions, we began to explore what had brought her to me and to coaching. It seemed there had been a series of events in her life that had taken her to the brink of depression. She was desperate for change. Run-down, sad and lacking the energy and strength to get started on her own. Eight months later, we are still working together on what has been quite a remarkable and powerful journey.

My client recognised herself as a deep thinker and philosopher, extremely analytical and emotionally sensitive – knowing there were barriers keeping her from fulfilling her potential. Through our initial gentle explorations, it came to light that a key barrier was a lack of trust. Trust in others but also trust in herself.

Specifically, she wanted to learn to trust men again and also to trust herself that it is safe to love and be loved. She felt that she had no boundaries when it came to dating and relationships. She said sometimes she felt she was ‘passive-aggressive’, and that made her feel isolated. She felt finding her boundaries would enable her to create a sense of safety – something she felt was always missing in her life. She believed feeling safe would enable her to relax and to ‘let her shell down’; to feel ‘normal’ and not see the world or people as ‘enemies’.

Boundaries became a key theme for our explorations. Looking at how she could learn to recognise, define and establish clear boundaries – both at work and in her personal life – with the aim of being able to make meaningful connections and ‘open up’, while at the same time follow her own agenda and not feel as though she is ‘losing herself’.

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As part of this, she was keen to explore how to spot patterns that were not helpful for her, as well as learning to say 'no' to situations that were causing pain. She wanted to learn how to look after herself emotionally so as not to fall into states of mind that drained her energy. To find a way to accept situations that can't be changed and to work with people, not against them.

She recognised that she had built up a 'negative mind-set' that was born out of some difficult past experiences. Through the coaching experience, she wanted to learn to 'redraw her mental map' and to find her 'inner compass' as a way to "navigate through the sea of emotions rather than being consumed by them".

She asked me to "listen to her story with compassion" so she could have the confidence to show her 'shadow side' and 'uncover how her mind works'.

Ultimately, she desired an understanding of how to re-establish a new sense of self where she recognised old patterns and found new paths to take. She was craving clarity, courage and inner peace and the ability to "access her inner strength" - to "redefine herself and her place in the world".

## **Starting the Journey**

During our first session, my client shared some of her stories. Through the rapport and trust we created, a space was held for her to tell these stories. I listened with deep curiosity and compassion, while being sure not to be drawn into the stories so as to collude with the meaning that had been created out of the events.

We also began to explore her values. This had the effect of allowing her to see that she had far more choices in life than she had realised.

After this first session, she shared with me the following thoughts and reflections:

“I felt safe to open up and talk about myself without thinking that I am being judged. It seemed that it was just a story that happened to someone and I was just remembering it. It felt like I was saying it but not living it anymore. It brought closure on many issues. Finally I was able to let it go mentally and did not have to fight for it to go away. On Tuesday morning I felt much more liberated and alive. I was able to be the true version of myself who is open and funny and thoughtful at the same time. I was able to speak my mind to people on the course I attended for two days.

I learnt that it is safe to ask for help and advice and it will be safer to create a positive attitude. This is what I am working on. Step by step I recall what went well during the day and repeat the mental picture so much that this is what gets remembered (engraved) in my brain. I am consciously creating a new map – a new reality for myself – without having to force myself. The beauty of it is that I am doing it on my own and at my own pace that allows for gradual growth.”

Five days after this session, she emailed me with some updates:

“I’d just like to share a few things that happened since we met on Monday:

I’ve been headhunted by a start-up company and having an informal lunch next Friday.

Bought a guitar and will start learning how to play.

Found a yoga teacher who will be able to help me to recover from post-surgery (hip replacement) trauma and teach me how to work those operated muscles.

I’m having less panicky feelings about how my life should turn out.

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Felt less intimidated by bossy colleague who caused so much grief.

I feel like a door is opening up for me and 'something' keeps re-aligning in me.

It is like all the foundations are being re-worked and old habits let go.

Spring cleaning of my life has started :)

Thank you for walking next to me on this journey!"

A little further into our journey, my client wanted to explore how to "break a cycle of projecting her unmet needs". She articulated that "it is a small child inside me that wants to feel loved and cared for".

I invited her to write a letter to her inner child. She embraced this exercise and said that it made a great positive difference to her sense of self – to feel more secure in herself and able to look after herself. A key moment in the coaching journey.

Having started to gain a deeper understanding of her values and what needs to be present in her life in order for her to feel happy and fulfilled, I introduced the concept of making 'value-driven decisions'. On this she reflected:

"Looking back at the list of values that I wrote up in preparation for the initial session helped me to understand how much I wanted to protect these values throughout my life. I have witnessed the outside world many times as being scary and created a wall around me while seeking continuous appraisal from the outside world (parents, boyfriends, work positions etc.).

I realised that I was living in the world of constant conflict where I was unable to filter through the external world. All impressions were just falling onto me, destabilizing my inner world. When facing decisions I tended to opt for the safest option and did not have any energy to consider other possibilities.

The story that I constantly told myself was that the world is an unsafe place for me and I have to fight for everything. By placing a meaning onto the story it became so powerful that it took over my life. Running for security I forgot about myself and was not more secure 15+ years' down the line.

Making value-driven decisions allows me to reflect on my work and map out where I want to move to and who I want to be with. I need to choose work which serves me best and to find a partner with whom we serve each other best.”

Some further reflections and realisations:

“I often said that I don't feel safe in relationships, yet I want to create a safe life where I have emotional and financial security. While waiting for the train on my way home I thought what I have yearned for (this security) is nothing else but reassurance. Reassurance in that I am good enough to do a good job, meet the partner I want to be with... Most importantly, through reassuring myself a few times a day could make a good difference. So I created a few sentences that resonate with my values. Teaching myself to value myself through affirmations fertilises the ground of my emotion-ridden mind. And it creates flowers instead of weeds.

Whenever I start to feel helpless and out of control I repeat these affirmations. I say: it is safe to feel pain – it is safe to be loved. Or: it is safe to ask my boss for a pay rise and ask him to pay my extra hours and change my title (as promised) to manager... And I got all that I asked for – and realised I could (without the 'should') do this more often. I can ask and be clearly guided by my values.”

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## The Next Chapter

My client is now in a much stronger place than eight months ago. She has a very different energy about her. At work she is able to open up and act from a more authentic but objective place – instead of feeling ‘run by’ her sensitivity and emotions. She has reported being able to find her ‘professional voice’ at work and has stopped attaching her identity to her work. She is seeing work now as a vehicle for her skills and development and to create her role in line with values, providing her with much growth and freedom.

Another breakthrough has been the ‘releasing of pressure’ of thinking life should be a certain, fixed way. She is now more open and accepting of how things can be.

She is letting go of the need to have the approval of others through developing an inner trust – building this muscle that enables her to create that sense of safety. She no longer questions or doubts herself so much and is nurturing the ‘inner compass’ that puts her in the driving seat of her own life to guide the way.

The self-awareness she has gained through the coaching has allowed her to see that she now has an abundance of choices, empowering her to respond rather than react to certain situations, thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Through creating her own mind maps and vision-boards, she has been able to connect with her deepest desires – putting herself in the centre of her life and her future. She shared that the vision board initially made her feel quite emotional. She found it difficult to place herself in the centre instead of ‘them’ (‘them’ being her job, family and other commitments). She said it has been ‘cathartic’ for her to allow herself to be the centre of her life.

In the last couple of months, she has been in a relationship where she has been able to create a space she didn't feel had been possible prior to the coaching. The coaching has reminded her that she can keep herself grounded by making time for certain activities that help her to reconnect with herself (physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and creatively), to focus and be calm and centred. She chooses breathing exercises, walking, journaling/self-reflection time, playing the guitar and swimming.

By honouring her values and keeping herself a priority in her life, it feeds her energy to be in a stronger place to support and give to others. She shared that she feels she is growing roots and foundations with deepened knowledge of her values and beliefs that allow her to grow.

Transformation and breakthrough in coaching is an ongoing process – a journey of unfolding and opening – and to conclude this chapter, I'd like to finish with my client's words about how coaching has supported her:

“Each session is a ‘safe’, ‘open’ space for me, where I can honestly talk about my plans and get ‘unstuck’ from old ways of thinking. Coaching allows me to think freely and to express myself without feeling judged. In turn, those ‘nagging’ internal voices (that tell me that I cannot succeed or I should or should not do something) fade away, allowing the ‘real me’ to develop and flourish.

The most significant breakthrough (so far) has been being able to let go of the past. I no longer give my past stories any energy and I create a safe space for myself through reconnecting with my visions. It is this daily ‘anchoring process’ that works well for me.

I now have closure with the past and am able to stay open and aware in the moment. I can now create plans and ‘see myself’ as part of the plan and have the courage to execute them. I have gained mental stability and trust in my knowledge and wisdom. I am reclaiming who I am, my power and life.”

## Connecting to Deeper Values

ALISON COATES

### Who was the client?

Rachel, a woman in her mid-50s, had been self-employed as a reflexologist for over 10 years, but had recently moved home with her family, and as a consequence was in the process of re-establishing her practice in the new area. She approached me for coaching, in the hope that it could be a way to get the support she needed to move her business forward.

### What was the presenting issue?

Our first coaching session, conducted through the telephone, found Rachel feeling really low and despondent; she'd lost motivation with her reflexology business and was finding it difficult to attract new clients. Recently, she'd been experimenting with setting up a facilitated healthy living support group, in addition to trying to attract one-to-one therapy clients, but it all felt like a struggle and Rachel wasn't feeling energised by or enthusiastic about her work. She was coping with personal challenges at home too, which were adding to the burden that she felt. The opportunity of having the time and space in our coaching sessions – to purely focus on her business – was something Rachel really appreciated.

From the outset, she was clear that the coaching was to be around her work, and the issues at home were something that she had other support with (through her own personal counselling sessions).

During this first call, using curious questioning, and allowing lots of space for Rachel to really explore what she wanted from our time together, we established that she loved both the work she was doing with her small number of one-to-one clients, and the work with the support group she had set up; however, she was finding it really difficult to motivate herself around promoting her work and attracting new clients. She was feeling that it was all too difficult and wasn't sure which direction to head in. She also felt the two areas of work were very different, which caused a conflict around how to promote her services congruently. From the way she spoke, it was clear that her work was really important to her but she didn't feel she was getting the support she would have hoped for from her family. In fact, her business had become an additional source of tension at home.

## **What made it a challenge for them?**

Although Rachel had lots of ideas of what she could do to promote her services, she was unable to move forward. It became evident that the conflict between the individual and group work had caused her to become stuck around promoting her reflexology, with the groups taking precedence. Another issue we identified was her reluctance to talk to people about the work she was doing, because she felt that in doing so, she was trying to 'sell' her services, which made her feel uncomfortable. Her challenge was to find some clarity around what she was offering, which would give her the motivation to promote it to potential clients. We agreed that the objective for our package of six coaching calls would be for her to be building her business and for it to be going well. We would later define how she would know when she finally got there.

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Rachel told me that she was relieved that I wasn't encouraging her to take a very structured goal-oriented approach. I shared with her that in my coaching practice, I like to work with the client to articulate a desired outcome for the series of sessions, as well as establish – each time we meet – what they'd like to achieve by the end of that call. My way of working is to really be with the client (where they are at on that particular day, at that particular time). I always hold the overall outcome in mind, but it may not be the focus in any one coaching session and, it may well be adapted as our coaching journey unfolds.

## **How did you feel about the challenge?**

My intention with each of my clients is to be open and curious, hopefully with no expectation of where the coaching may lead, and no attachment to the outcome either. I have learnt to never make assumptions, especially if a client is presenting with a challenge that I can relate to myself. It is wonderful to help uncover what is really important for a client, and this won't happen if I have pre-judged or assumed I know what they mean. I focus on being really interested in what they, as a unique individual, are coming to coaching with, and work with them to identify what their particular challenge is. This may appear to be one thing in the beginning, but often the clarity around it only emerges during the course of the coaching process.

Rachel was no exception. Firstly, I could hear that she was passionate about the work she did, but frustrated by feeling awkward talking to people about it; and secondly, she was confused about how to handle the group work versus the individual work. I could really relate to the first aspect, but it was important that I stayed present with her challenge and not link it with my own.

Interestingly, in relation to Rachel's challenge, I have a lot of knowledge of and experience in working with small businesses and sole traders in my previous roles, but in the current situation I was coaching rather than mentoring. As such, our work together would not be about sharing technical or practical skills, but about helping Rachel to really uncover her own motivations and desires for her business, and her work in general. It would not be helpful for me to have a preconceived idea of how she could, or should, be marketing her business, even if this appeared to be the issue she was struggling with. I considered that my role as her coach was to help her to uncover her own motivation; her understanding of why she does what she does; to discover what it is that she really enjoys; and to trust that she has all the answers within herself, and just needs the space and support of a coach to feel empowered and move forward.

## **What were some key moments in the coaching journey or session?**

A key moment in the coaching came during our very first session, which was dedicated purely to establishing the purpose of the series of coaching calls. Having established that to be "building my business and for it to be going well" was Rachel's outcome, we dug a little deeper to identify how she would know if she had achieved that. Allowing more space to think and talk this through, Rachel realised she would know this had been achieved because she would be feeling more energy, excitement, pleasure and satisfaction in her work.

Depending on your viewpoint, this may not seem particularly specific or even exciting as a coaching 'goal', but I was very happy that I had helped Rachel explore her presenting issue and allowed her to formulate an outcome that really felt good to her. Hearing the change in her voice when she talked about having more energy, excitement, pleasure and satisfaction in her work really showed me that we were on track.

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In the second session, we spent time looking at the two different areas of her work. Rachel was finding it hard to talk to people about the two different services she was offering, because she felt they were so different and unrelated. Starting out with the question “What are the differences between your groups and your individual clients?”, it soon became apparent that this wasn’t the right question, as Rachel was really struggling to articulate an answer. I turned the question around and asked “What are the similarities?” This was the right question. Rachel was off; she immediately began seeing ways in which what she offered to both groups and individuals had an underlying theme of nurturing, support and connection.

## **What was the breakthrough?**

It was wonderful to witness her realisation that both areas of work are based on the same underlying values, delivered in a different way. This in itself could well be considered a breakthrough, as it really seemed to change the way Rachel had been thinking about her business and her difficulties in moving forward.

However, a more significant breakthrough was to happen in the next session.

Following on from the discoveries in session two, the third session began with an intention of being clear about Rachel’s business and what she was offering. Beginning by exploring what aspects of her work she was currently enjoying, and asking “What would nourish you in your work life?”, it seemed appropriate at this point to delve more deeply into what really motivated her.

Having already uncovered the commonality between the two areas of work, it was important to investigate what really mattered to her. The simple question “What’s important to you?” elicited a response of

“challenge, satisfaction, growth”. I asked again: “What else is important to you?” “Art, being creative, inspiring others” was the response. Again I asked, “How is that important to you?” More responses came, each with real depth of thought; this was a ‘good question’; Rachel was really going deep with her thinking. This wasn’t a question she’d ever been asked before. At that point, it would have been easy to stop. Rachel had found some new answers, but it didn’t feel like we were finished yet. It felt uncomfortable to ask again (almost as if I were stupid – had I not heard her?) She’d given me answers. But I went with it and asked again. “How else?” Silence. More silence. I held the space, and my nerve, and didn’t jump in to make it okay. And then came deep thinking, tears of recognition of something really important. Rachel articulated what, deep within her, was her motivation for the work she loves.

It was a really special moment; a “wow” moment. We were both rather stunned at the power of what came through those simple questions, and the space to really be with them. It felt like a real shift in the energy of the sessions, that we had uncovered and discovered something that was fundamental to her whole purpose.

## **What enabled it to happen?**

This breakthrough came by creating a space of trust where Rachel felt safe and able to open up. I was present with her, listening carefully to what she was saying and using simple questions, and the repetition of simple questions, to allow her to go deeper and deeper into her own knowing. She was given time to think, without interruption, which allowed her to articulate what was really important to her in a way that she hadn’t before.

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## How did it change things?

Achieving this breakthrough somehow allowed Rachel to be more flexible in the following sessions. Knowing what she now knew about herself, it was easier to look at more practical issues around her work, such as being really busy and not knowing where to begin, or what steps she could take to create a new group. Somehow it gave a freedom to the following sessions, because we knew what her underlying motivation was, so now it was more possible to relax into the detail of how to move forward with a deep understanding of her reason for doing so.

The final three sessions were very varied in content and flavour, and were very much dictated by what was most pressing for her at the time. For example, in one session she was preparing to go away on holiday and was feeling very stressed, and interestingly, the thought of a coaching session and the potential of more work to do as a result were adding to her anxiety levels. Through really paying attention to what she said in response to my initial question about what she wanted to use the time for, it was clear that as much as she felt she 'should' be focusing on making progress in her business, the priority at that time was being ready (practically and emotionally) to go away on holiday.

This developed into a really interesting session about prioritising what needed to be achieved, and some really useful questioning around boundaries, and what aspect of business she was willing or unwilling to allow into her holiday time. It was wonderful to feel the change in her energy and motivation; to end the call with Rachel having much more clarity about what she was going to do, and knowing that it was now very achievable.

This in itself was another breakthrough for us both, in realising just how flexible it is possible to be with a series of coaching sessions when we are really present to what is most pressing for a client in that

moment. Rachel was pleasantly surprised that this was ‘allowed’ and extremely grateful. At the same time, I was reassured that going with my intuition about what she needed in that moment had paid off.

## **What did you learn from the process?**

Through working with Rachel, I learnt that although it felt really scary to hold the silence and to keep repeating the same question, it was so powerful for her and the breakthrough that was achieved was most certainly worth the risk of a little discomfort on my part – and on Rachel’s part too. She did comment that she wondered what I was up to, but was pleased that she played along and really got to the juice of what was important to her, and it allowed her to feel so much more empowered about talking to people about the work that she does.

## **What’s happened since?**

The breakthrough enabled Rachel to really connect with her motivation. By having a clearer understanding of what was important to her at a deep level, she has been able to move forward with her business, and her life, with more commitment and passion than before. She has a much clearer understanding of where she is coming from, and why she does what she does. This helps in every conversation she has; she is able to come from a place of authenticity and is sharing her enthusiasm for reflexology and healthy living with people, without her previous fear that she was ‘selling’ to them. Her enthusiasm is infectious and she is finding that more and more people are genuinely interested in how she can support them in improving their own health.

For me, the breakthrough really reminded me why I love to coach. To see how powerful is the simple process of being present with a client, listening to them, taking a risk of feeling uncomfortable, and enabling someone to discover something deep within themselves. It’s magic and I love it.

## A Whole New Perspective

SONIA GILL

I was coaching a head teacher, Sue. She had been a head for a while and was on the journey of taking her school from 'requires improvement' to 'good', and ultimately to 'outstanding' in terms of the school inspector's (Ofsted) judgement. Over the years, she had been on quite a journey with her school and at the time of our coaching session, her school was judged as 'requires improvement' which means many eyes are watching them: the local authority, Ofsted, not to mention parents and the local community.

I'd known Sue for about a year and I learnt about a lot of the tough decisions she had made to move the school forward; I don't want you to get the wrong impression of her, she is not a 'tough' person, she is incredibly caring and supportive but also wants the best for the children she serves, and so she made these tough decisions for that reason, understanding that they would be hard on the team but were necessary if they were to provide *at least* a good standard of education.

When we sat down to coach, she had had a hard, tiring day; it was near the end of term and anyone who works in education will know how the cumulative tiredness builds up. As she began to tell me what was on her mind, her eyes became glassy with emotion and then she said it: she was thinking of leaving education. She felt like she wasn't doing a good job, that the school should be doing better than it was, that she had put everything she had into the role, into moving her school forward, and yet it didn't seem to be, so maybe it was now time she hung up her hat. From the way her voice trembled and she fought back the tears, this was clearly hard for her to say and it was also clear it had been bubbling away inside her. The emotion with which she

spoke was that of someone who was finally saying out loud thoughts that had been running in her head for some time, and it was hard for her to hear herself saying them.

I let her talk: “But what else could I do? I’ve always been in education so I don’t know what else I could do? And I do need to work because I need to support myself. Maybe I could be consultant for the local authority?”

I listened and watched. I liked Sue a lot and I really felt for her. You see, in the year that I’d known Sue, I could see what a great leader she was and I rated her highly; she was a great combination of a leader with their head and heart in the right place. She cared deeply about all the people in her school, but also made good decisions in the best interest of the school. And I’ll admit that I thought her leaving headship would be a loss to education. However this wasn’t about what I thought and felt, and as much as I wanted to tell her this in the hope that it would comfort her, I knew that wouldn’t help – if anything it would probably cloud her thinking further.

I wanted to help Sue move forward in her emotions and thoughts so that she didn’t need to wrestle with this, but so that she could gain greater clarity, maybe even make a decision – who knows where a coaching session would take us! For where we were, I could see two ways forward. The first was, I think, the more obvious of the two: to explore what she could do if she left education. However, I wanted to know that the evidence for her thinking was right, so if she did leave it would be for the right reasons; we set about exploring what led her to feel she should leave.

**Sue:** The school hasn’t improved enough.

**Sonia:** *What would be enough?*

**Sue:** (pause) I’d love to be outstanding now, but I know that’s not realistic.

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**Sonia:** *Ok, so what would enough be?*

**Sue:** Oh, I don't know! I just don't feel my labours are bearing any fruit!

**Sonia:** *If you knew three years ago where your school would be now - in fact if you met you three years ago, and told you what you were achieving now, what would you be telling you?*

Sue's eyes moved as she thought.

**Sue:** I'd be telling them about our SATs results, but also about how the teaching has improved so much; back then most teaching was 'requires improvement', but we've worked steadily and hard and very nearly all teaching is at least good. Also, we have great school trips which the children love, much better than before, the funding we've secured for various projects, how our special needs provision has improved, even how assemblies get a good parent turnout these days! I feel like we're adding value to our children and our community. Oh! And my amazing leadership team who work so hard to move this school forward.

Sue lit up! Her eyes were bright; she sat upright in her chair. This was her breakthrough moment!

**Sonia:** *Wonderful. And how would Sue of three years ago feel about what she is going to achieve?*

**Sue:** If I'd known that three years ago, I would have been very happy. Very happy (she said with a cheeky smile of realisation). So maybe I'm not so bad at my job, we have done a lot, I just feel we're not where we want to be.

So then we went on to look at what the next part of her journey would be, to get really clear on what she wanted, what would make her feel like she was doing her job well, which of course included at least a good Ofsted judgement, but all the other less tangible things like the children's desire to come to school, how they would be talking to their parents all the way home about what they had learnt, and the excitement and buzz for learning that would what across the school, for children and adults.

Sue had her breakthrough when we looked at her thoughts in the true context of how far she had taken her school. I think sometimes we get sabotaged by our emotions, especially when we're tired or stressed, and this can skew our perspective. It didn't take Sue long to see how far she had taken her school, and while there was still more to do, she could see that they had made leaps in the right direction, despite having to make tough decisions, her team having low morale after the last Ofsted, and members of her team questioning if she really knew what she was doing. The use of evidence, where she was three years ago compared to now, allowed her to get perspective and see things more accurately. With this, her frustration disappeared and she looked instantly brighter, like a weight had been lifted.

When I was younger, I would have leapt in to solve the immediate problem: what else could Sue do for a living? However, I've learnt that getting under the skin of the issue - so that we can be sure we are solving the right problem - is really important and for me, in this coaching experience, turning to the evidence a little like a detective might, ensured that we were going to work on the real problem, which turned out to be different.

## Am I Doing It Right

SUDIR DAYA

*There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.*

- NELSON MANDELA

The theme of this quote is reflected in the case study I have chosen. I have decided not to share a case study in which I have had a smooth ride to a 'breakthrough' with the client. Instead, I have chosen to share a case study where the journey was bumpy, with diversions, wrong turns and some traffic jams. In sharing this case study, I hope to demonstrate a more realistic coaching experience - the concerns, the doubts, the frustrations, the challenges, the head-scratching moments, the long silences, the risks, the adventures, the surprises and the joys. The case study also highlights the type of work that Integrated Health does in "bringing it all together" to support a client in living the life they truly want to live.

John was in his mid-twenties and he presented to coaching with a history of anxiety and depression, for which he had previously received treatment (pharmacological and psychological). John was aware that coaching was not a substitute for these, and said that he came to the free introductory session, as he wanted to "get his life sorted".

John reported that he had been sick off work for the last six months with panic attacks, and had also broken up with his partner. As part of the "opening up" process as per the Animas TOOLKIT, John completed the "Wheel of Life" exercise.

This revealed that John had a supportive family, but that he was having issues with his finances, social interactions, relaxation, relationships, his health and his career. Further questioning revealed that smoking was eating into John's finances and this was especially problematic as he was off work for the last six months.

John wanted to be financially stable, healthier, not smoke, cope better with his mental health and be more relaxed in social situations. John felt that his anxiety in social situations was linked to a lack of confidence.

After allowing John adequate time to 'open up', I 'tidied up' and clarified my understanding, and summarised how I saw the relationship between his various issues via the "iceberg analogy".

John's issues with his career, relationship, social interactions and finances were on the 'surface level'. On a 'snorkelling level' were his health issues – smoking, anxiety and sleep/relaxation. On a 'scuba diving' level was his low self-esteem. John found it helpful to see the relationship between his issues and what was possibly driving them, and agreed with my summary.

As I was a new coach, I was eager to help John and suggested a short 10-minute relaxation exercise so that John could leave the session with something practical and useful that he could immediately apply in his life, and whet his appetite for what future coaching sessions could offer him. John agreed and lay down comfortably on the plinth for a guided relaxation incorporating deep breathing. On completion of the exercise, John reported that he did not find the exercise useful, as he has an analytical mind and tended to doubt any type of autosuggestion. As a new coach, this was disappointing but highlighted to me the importance of taking a client's preferred learning style into account and the risk of offering solutions too quickly,

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rather than allowing the client time to 'loosen up' and to generate the solutions from themselves. This was related to my background as a physiotherapist, where there is a practical physical component to each session and the client is routinely given 'homework' in the form of a physical exercise. On deeper reflection, this also revealed my belief as a new coach that the client had to experience some sort of shift in order to regard the coaching session and future coaching as helpful. This, together with my inexperience as a coach, disempowered the client and put unnecessary pressure and responsibility on myself, as it inferred that the power in the coaching relationship lies with the coach - in the form of an 'expert'. This taught me the importance of seeing the client as resourceful, and allowing him to generate his own solutions that are meaningful to him, which may most likely lead to a longer term change in behaviour.

The free introductory session was wrapped up with explaining to John how coaching could assist him in achieving his goals. John was advised to book a follow-up session with the view to focus on him quitting smoking, as he reported this to be significantly contributing to his financial difficulties. As a new coach, I doubted the coaching, the client and myself, and I was uncertain if John would come back for another session.

A few weeks later, John came for the second session and confirmed that he would like assistance with quitting smoking. Some background medical information was gathered, and a few basic measurements were taken to establish a crude baseline of John's lung function. John completed the Heavy Smoking Index, which suggested a low level of nicotine dependence and that it would be unlikely that he would have acute nicotine withdrawal symptoms.

John seemed ambivalent about quitting. An exploration of John's current smoking pattern was undertaken. John reported that he began smoking as a way of leaving his desk in a previous job that he hated, and that he currently smoked more when out socially and

when stressed. As a new coach, I could sense that I could help John if I could just remember which model to use! So, just using the power of open questions, I fumbled my way through the STAR model to unpack what was happening every time John went to light up a cigarette. Despite not having the model clearly in my mind and executing it smoothly, I was pleasantly surprised at what interesting insights were gained into John’s smoking patterns (see table below).

Situation	Thoughts and feelings	Action	Result
Sitting outside at a bar drinking with friends	“Don’t say anything stupid” Feeling anxious	Stuttering Fidgeting with fingers	Smoke

I was curious as to why John was concerned about saying anything stupid in this situation. Deeper questioning revealed that John was bullied at school and this led to him being hyper-vigilant of saying anything stupid for fear of being bullied, and this cycle was perpetuating in his current life. It became clear to me that his fear of being bullied was driving his smoking habit. John also found this to be interesting, but was not an animated character and so this was not reflected in either his verbal or non-verbal communication. To me, John gave the impression that he already had this insight. As I continued to fumble through the STAR model, I asked John about what evidence there was to support the notion in his current life that “saying anything stupid” would lead to some sort of negative consequence/rebuke. I was eager to break this cycle, and began to explore with John the ways that he could gather evidence to test his belief that saying anything stupid would lead to a rebuke. John decided that he could ask a technical question to a friend whom he regarded as having superior IT knowledge to him, in order to challenge his belief. We both agreed that this would be a useful thing to do as homework.

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I was now interested in the reasons why John wanted to quit smoking. John mentioned the financial and health benefits as his main reasons for quitting smoking. This led to a discussion about the negative health impacts of smoking. John was unaware of the particular negative impact that smoking had on his anxiety and depression via the hormone dopamine, and found this information useful. John was also educated on some research showing how, over time, nicotine had trained a part of his brain to generate the powerful urge to smoke every time he found himself in a situation where he would normally smoke, irrespective of whether he liked smoking and whether he wanted to smoke or not.

John established a quit date and a 'SMARTER' goal was set as the research suggested going 'cold turkey' was advisable. Despite setting a SMARTER goal, I was interested if John really believed that he could achieve this and I asked him to complete the generalised self-efficacy scale. This revealed that John had a moderate belief in his capability to achieve his goal. Due to time constraints, John was directed to additional resources related to quitting smoking and was advised to read them.

I was uncertain if John would achieve the goal he had set for himself, and this was probably more a reflection of my ability as a new coach, my self-chatter and my belief in the client.

John arrived at his next session and reported that he had given up smoking, completed his assigned homework, gone back to work (part-time) and had a date set up for that weekend. I was genuinely surprised by the numerous significant changes that had occurred since our last meeting, and was interested to understand what had happened. John was not an animated character and so his non-verbal communication was difficult to read, but I appreciated that this could be related to his previously identified issues of anxiety in social situations, despite having attempted to create a safe coaching environment. John was given feedback as I noticed that his breathing pattern had changed

for the better since the last session. John revealed that he asked his friend a technical question and there was no adverse response. John appreciated that seeking evidence to either support or negate his unhelpful thought patterns would be useful in breaking the cycle of anxiety.

As relapse rates for quitting smoking are high, I had a lengthy discussion with John regarding the barriers and facilitators to maintaining his abstinence from smoking, as well as what strategies he was going to employ with regards to dealing with smoking triggers and withdrawal symptoms. John was reminded of the plethora of resources available to support his abstinence from smoking, and some deep breathing exercises were taught to John in the session.

John previously reported that his anxiety in social situations, and subsequent smoking, was linked to a lack of confidence. In the previous session, John rated his self-efficacy as moderate, and self-efficacy is closely connected to self-esteem/self confidence. John completed a self-esteem scale that confirmed that his self-esteem was very low. Deeper exploration revealed two limiting beliefs: “I am not good enough” and “I am scared I will make an idiot of myself”.

Time constraints meant that this could not be explored further in the session but, as a new coach, I felt I needed to give John something to do until our next session and so an informal goal (not SMART) was loosely agreed: that John would write down one thing that he did well every day, to help him begin to change the way he sees himself. On reflection, this was more related to my lack of experience and the belief that I had to give the client something at the end of the session that he could take away with him.

At the next session, John reported that he had continued to abstain from smoking, he had managed his cravings and that he continued to be at work (part-time). John reported this his date went well and that he did not do the homework of writing one thing every day that

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he did well. The fact that John did not complete the homework was of little surprise to me, given the way that I presented it as a 'bolt-on' at the end of our last session, and that it was not self-generated.

John reported that he would like to continue to explore his low self-esteem/confidence. I 'chunked up' and asked John what self-esteem looked like to him. John was an artist and I suggested that he draw what self-esteem looked like to him. John reflected on the drawing and identified the various things that made up self-esteem for him, and these included happiness, open body language, confident body postures and a positive attitude. I continued to chunk up and John reported that self-confidence would make life easier, in that he would have better relationships with people and be able to achieve his ambitions for the future, such as running his own business.

I was interested in what John thought was the difference between the picture he drew and himself at present, i.e. what was missing. John revealed that three things were missing, including positive attitude, an open body language and happy thoughts. John talked more about the happy thoughts and the 'critic' that was inside, and how he wanted to "balance the critic" rather than let it be dominant. I continued the theme of drawing and asked John to draw what his inner critic looked like. John drew a serpent and called it "Hiss" and described it as "snide, backstabbing, cowardly and untrustworthy".

I was also curious as to what John thought of himself, and we explored the things that he was good at, all his achievements to date and what they meant to him, and what he liked about himself. These were all written down with relevant examples, and John found it helpful despite having to think for a while about what to write in some instances. Having done this exercise, John felt that having a record (soft copy) of something he had done well every day would be helpful to "balance the critic" and promote a positive attitude.

At the next session, John reported that he had started smoking again as numerous stressful things had happened. We explored at length the numerous triggers that lead to John resuming smoking and the various strategies that he had tried to manage his stress. This discussion unearthed that John had a fear of abandonment and being alone. This insight was powerful for John, as he had previously not linked it to his current everyday behaviours.

John's next session was roughly about two months later for numerous reasons. At this sixth coaching session, John reported that he was still smoking. John, however, reported that three other changes had happened. These included returning to work three full days a week, learning how to drive and having gone back to college to study IT. I was interested in all these changes, and we chatted about what prompted these. It was also of interest to me how despite still smoking, John's life was moving forward in so many other aspects that were meaningful to him.

John reported that he wanted to explore his fear of abandonment that came up in the last session. We explored at length his fear of abandonment and how it manifested in his everyday life. John discussed his relationship or lack thereof with his father, and the anger he still holds towards his dad revolving around his parent's divorce and his dad's disinterest in him. John talked about how this, together with being bullied at school, led to his fear of abandonment. John talked about how this fear of abandonment manifested in his everyday life as a fear of rejection, and contributed to his anxiety in social situations. John appreciated that he coped with his anxiety in social situations by either smoking, withdrawing or removing himself from the situation. For me, this was a powerful unpacking of how, in John's case, his everyday behaviours were deeply rooted to pertinent experiences in his past. This experience has made me reflect on the

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question: “Why does someone still do something that they know is bad/unhelpful to them?” This leads me think about how a ‘shift’ needs to happen, on a deep fundamental level, for it to manifest as long-term sustained behaviour change in everyday life.

The coaching experience with John made me think of a quote from TS Eliot:

*“We shall not cease from exploration,  
and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive  
where we started and know the place for the first time.”*

This, together with Mandela’s quote mentioned earlier, were applicable to John’s case in that despite John still smoking, his life was moving forward in so many other aspects that were meaningful for him. This has made me think about what I regard as a successful coaching outcome. John also reported gaining insights into his behaviour and what was really driving them. For John, I think the question now is: “What does he want to do about it?” I look forward to continuing to work with John.

*If you choose to “C” first,  
you can change your reactivity!™*

# What We Already Know

ROBERT STEPHENSON

The moment Leon walked into the café, I knew something had changed. She was full of energy, yet relaxed – almost glowing. Her face was full of her smile, a smile that had been there in moments before, but was now full and held with ease and grace.

Before she had a chance to sit down, I was already asking what had happened, and was commenting on her relaxed self. We took our seats, and her smile grew as she began to speak openly and easily; she began sharing her breakthrough.

Let me take you back to the beginning. When Leon had started out, she wanted to explore how she was working, how to develop her projects, get focused, and move things forward. As a freelance creative consultant, she was also developing her own work, and wanted to get unstuck with it, as she felt that she had spent time without moving it forward... without moving it forward enough for her.

So we started as you do, exploring what an outcome might look like, how we would measure it. We explored the bigger picture: wife, mother, creative consultant, school governor, friend, and project leader. As we continued to explore this, I began to ask about the self, herself, and her place within her life!

You see, sometimes when someone is so busy doing what they do for others, for work or for their family and friends, they can forget about the self, they can forget about filling the vessel. And I think we can all do that; we can all get busy looking after the world and forget about the self until it's too late. Sometimes that too late is an illness, and in this case it was a feeling.

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Leon had a feeling of being not quite settled. She was happy with her life, but felt that something wasn't quite sitting right for her. So to start with, we focused on her outcome, the work.

As we sat in the café and continued talking with this new, fresh and relaxed self, that feeling of unsettledness had gone – vanished. Leon was looking grounded, sitting back in her chair, moving freely and easily. She paused in her thinking and spoke of her work, of how it had suddenly found its way.

You see in our early sessions, Leon's work had seemed a little stuck; she had been doing all the right things, but the working world of a freelancer can be a challenging one. Leon had wanted to create some space to develop her own project, but creating that space meant not taking on new work, and as a freelancer that's a hard road to walk.

A lot of freelancers don't know when the next job is going to come in, so they get caught up in famine and feast – not enough or too much work – and it takes a steady hand to hold your nerve, say no to work, and create the space to develop one's own projects. In this holding of the nerve, Leon was finding the times challenging. She knew that she had to create space to do the work, but life was a busy place: her family, her husband, friends, school commitments, as well as work. And as you might already know, if you are not working as a freelancer, you are not earning...

So together, we began exploring how to hold your nerve and how to keep the space open for your own work. The coach and the client in the dance of questions and answers, of exploration and discovery, of sharing and searching. Uncovering the client's own resources.

In person-centred coaching, a belief is held that the client has the resources within them or the access to the resources, which will enable them to solve their own challenges or reach their own outcome. I, too, hold this to be true when coaching – that the client has the ability to solve their own challenge, reach their own outcome with self-found

resources; however, it is the role of the coach to enable this finding of resources. To help the client discover these resources, questioning and listening is needed, but not just any old question. And to be honest, it's more about the listening: listening to what is being said and what is being left out, noticing what changes and what stays the same. Seeking out the client's values and limiting language.

During this process, Leon is sharing what's important to her, and I begin to notice that although her rituals are an important need, they are not being met. You see, Leon talks about her rituals of coffee, meditation, walks, yoga and 'me time', but her life seems to come crashing in and taking over that space.

Looking at Leon now, I see someone who is totally relaxed, as if they have just walked out of a yoga meditation session. She talks of spending 'me time', and as she talks there is a confidence and 'groundedness' to her.

And as I continue to listen, Leon talks of how she was able to create the boundaries in her life, the boundaries that enabled her to meet her own needs, and still feel okay about it. You see, even though she knew that meeting her needs was important to her well-being, to her mindset and ability to hold her nerve, and keeping that space open for her own work without panic, she hadn't been able to put the boundaries in place. They had simply been pushed down by the needs of others, leaving Leon to put herself last. But over time, by coming back to the idea of doing what you know works, she was able to bring those needs to the surface and begin to meet them.

Leon talks of having a bath without disturbances, of not answering the phone to friends who pull her into their dramas, of reminding the family of her own needs, so that they are aware she is off to yoga or meditation. And in doing this, she is able to create strong boundaries that hold the world back while she gets ready for it, and the more she does it, the stronger they become and the stronger she becomes.

# animas

Leon smiles as she talks about knowing this, knowing it all along, but somehow not being able to put it into action. And by having the mirror of coaching held up to her, she is able to see what she is not doing. Also, taking time in between the coaching sessions has enabled self-reflection, as well as time to embed the learning from the sessions too.

It's funny how as the coach, I sometimes question my role or my effectiveness, even though I know that the work we do in the session continues after the session, but seeing this transformation is just amazing – seeing how she left a few weeks ago, unsure but ready to work, and returning so focused and confident, while calm and relaxed. And I think to myself: *Did I help that happen or did it happen all by itself?* As if reading my thoughts, or perhaps reading my expression, Leon begins to talk about the coaching space.

She talks of how the coaching space is the space that enables the changes to begin, to be found. How during the coaching, she is able to simply be, share what is going on for her, without judgement or concern. And how the simple act of saying her thoughts aloud begins the change or recognition process. Leon talks of how during the talking and reflecting, new thoughts or ideas come to mind, new perspectives and viewpoints are created. And this thinking goes on well after the session, but without the session, this thinking wouldn't happen.

One of the things that Leon also notices is the challenge: we can talk to ourselves, but we don't really challenge ourselves and during the coaching, real challenge can exist. The coach can get tough on the client, and enable them to truly see what they are saying or thinking, and in seeing that and/or being challenged, change begins to emerge.

As the session draws to an end, Leon talks of sustaining the change, realising that she is in a good place now, and knows that staying there is the key, holding onto those boundaries, so that this feeling – this mindset – can exist. Leon realises that sticking to her rituals is the key, that meeting her needs is the key to being able to meet the needs of others and ultimately making herself happy.

She notices how her working relationships have also changed. The change in her has also created a change in the rest of her world, or perhaps she is simply facing the world differently. Projects are coming together more clearly. Challenging conversations, that were not happening, have happened without the challenge coming into play. Projects that were not moving forward have moved, or she is able to see the movement in them. It's almost like her mindset had blocked how she was seeing her projects, her world, but by getting the mind in the right place, by getting her rituals in place, she was able to see her world more clearly, and be more present within it.

As the session ends and we plan our next, I am left reflecting on how easy it is for us to forget to do what we know works, like getting enough sleep or drinking enough water, taking time for ourselves, and exploring our own rituals.

# The Hidden Emotions of Business Success

SUE SUNDSTROM

When Stacey sat opposite me for our first coaching session, she was all smiles. A sociable, outgoing girl, in a loving relationship, owner of a business in a field she loves, and with a wide circle of friends – it would be reasonable to think that all was good in her world. But it soon became glaringly obvious to me that she was not happy at all. My first question to her was, “So, what are you wanting to get out of coaching today?” I was taken aback when her eyes immediately filled with tears as she tried to tell me what her issues were.

She told me that work – her business - was a real issue, and in particular she was concerned about the number of clients she had (or rather the lack of them). What really bothered her was that for years she felt she had not moved her business forward at all, and that even though she knew she should be doing something about it, she lacked motivation and drive to make it happen. And then of course, she felt guilty about the fact that she wasn’t working on expanding her business, because her partner was bringing in the greatest proportion of their combined income. She thus felt undeserving of the material things she enjoyed in her life, because her partner was working hard to provide for them, and she was enjoying the benefits of it without making “enough of a contribution”. She was not actively looking for new clients for her business, but instead she just did the work that came to her. She felt stuck in an endless cycle that she lacked either the skill or knowhow to break herself out of.

Interestingly though, it took coaching for her to realise that she was unhappy! In spite of her visible distress at the mention of her work issues, she kept maintaining that she was actually content with life!

So we had some work to do to uncover what was really going on inside her...

I was curious that in the same breath that she relayed her frustration with the status quo, her guilt and annoyance with herself at being so 'lazy', she also maintained that, in fact, she didn't need any more money or clients, and was (and should be) completely content with her financial position. She compared herself to those who were significantly less fortunate than her, and felt she should be grateful for what she had rather than wanting more. When she told me that she was lucky to have a life that was enviable - she was able to travel, eat out, and do many things that others couldn't do - I said to her, "But I'm noticing that you're clearly unhappy - maybe we can explore what is making you unhappy - and how we can change it." She realised that if she was getting emotional every time she spoke about her work, then what I was saying had weight. She had not wanted to admit to herself that finances were causing her a great deal of unhappiness.

I found her ambivalence intriguing; this thinking of "I'm not happy, but I should be happy," which actually kept her stuck. It took a couple of sessions before we could break through to identifying limiting beliefs that were behind her confusion about what she really wanted. I spent time with her just listening, inviting her to open up about her feelings, and keeping alert to hearing anything that would reveal any thinking she had that was holding her back. I asked her if there was anything in her past that may have caused this ambivalence over money, work and achieving her goals. For a while she asserted that no one and nothing had caused her to feel guilty in the area of wealth, material possessions and achievements. After much opening up though, we found that some beliefs about money had been formed early on in her life, and these beliefs were definitely impacting her in the present. In fact, she realised after a number of coaching sessions, that her money beliefs were a big part of the problem and were impacting a number of areas in her life - more than she would have liked to admit initially.

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She also had a lot of guilt. It became clear that her guilt cropped up both when she recognised a desire within her to earn more, specifically to be able to own a home, and guilt also arose when she felt she wasn't working as hard as she should be, and didn't deserve even the level of financial position she currently enjoyed. I decided to look deeper at her guilt over wanting greater financial gain, and we found that at the root of this was a limiting belief that being poor was somehow virtuous, and that to want more than enough financially was wrong and unethical. It was no wonder that she was having difficulty, if she felt that attaining more financially conflicted with a value system she held related to money.

Together, we identified that a significant part of the problem was thus a money mindset that wasn't serving her. Repetitive thought patterns she had were: "Having a lot of money is wrong," "Be content with whatever you have – don't desire more," "I don't deserve to earn much money," "I'm not worthy of being wealthy," and "I'm lazy."

These were not helping her when it came to trying to achieve her goals – two of which were to move her business forward, and to have enough income to be able to save a large portion of it every month. Her subconscious, based on beliefs she'd formed in her childhood, was telling her that it was wrong to have 'more than enough' money. So she told herself, and me, that she should be content because she still had more than enough money, and had a lot more than others that she knew. Yet because of a genuine and valid desire to own her own home, naturally she felt unhappy and unfulfilled. She felt that, for a person her age, she would have wanted to attain the goal of owning a home by now. But as long as her subconscious fought that desire, she would continue to find it difficult to do anything that helped her attain the goal of earning more and doing more in her business to move it forward, thus keeping the goal of owning a home in the faraway future. So a key part of her breaking free from what was holding her

back was to change her money mindset. Once she recognised that she had a wrong money mindset, this awareness alone made it easier for her to start challenging incorrect thoughts. Just this awareness also immediately made it easier for her to start conceiving of herself earning more money, and feeling comfortable making plans on how to achieve more income.

Over the next few weeks, she also gained a greater knowledge of 'average earnings' for her field, and for other types of work, which was something she had not questioned before. This knowledge turned out to be a big contributing factor in her breakthrough in the area of her finances. Having gained an understanding of what others in her field were earning, she started to better appreciate the value of her skills, and how she'd be short-changing herself by earning less than her knowledge, skills and time was really worth. She also began to realise that those who earned less did so because of a lack of skill, not because they were being more 'ethical'.

She also spent some time reading a resource on money, which challenged her money mindset, and which also helped her gain a more balanced view of money and wealth. She started to see that having wealth was not wrong, but was a tool to achieve some of the goals she had.

In our sessions together, we also challenged the idea of how anyone could measure how much money was 'enough' and when it would be 'too much'. I asked her, "How would you quantify something so subjective, and who would be the judge? And if it was wrong to have so much money, why not earn more, and simply use the excess to give to the poor?" These were some of the questions I confronted her with to challenge her thinking. When she saw that she could control how wisely the money was used, and she could decide who benefitted from it, then how much she earned stopped being a moral issue!

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Along with beliefs about money, the accountability I provided as a coach was also for her a huge part of gaining breakthrough. We agreed some actions steps together after each session – ‘homework’ that she could do before we met again for the next session. These were actions related to financial goal setting for a deposit on a house, how much she wanted to earn on a monthly basis, and some steps she could take that would move her business forward. She told me that the accountability alone caused her to take action that she had procrastinated on for years – having the pressure of someone to report back to in the following week galvanised her into action. Being a solo entrepreneur (working from home) was sometimes both isolating and demotivating. As she is a person who loves the company of others, she finds people both a distraction and a help in getting things done. So while some friends in her life were a distraction, as her coach, I was able to be someone who helped push her forward.

After four sessions, and a couple of months since our first session, Stacey has had more work come in during the past week than ever before! She is also now saving more actively towards a deposit for her first home, and has a goal with a firm deadline in place when she and her partner will be buying that home. They are actively working towards that goal. She went from telling me, in our first session, that “it feels like I’ll never get there, I’ll never own my own home,” to having a clear idea of when it’ll become a reality (and a dream come true!). She also tells me that she doesn’t think about work as much – “It doesn’t bug me anymore, it doesn’t consume my thoughts,” she says. Because she’s busier than ever with client work, she no longer feels guilty about not working hard enough, she’s making more money, and she no longer feels undeserving of the increased finances coming her way.

I am delighted with the progress she has made and loved playing a small part in seeing breakthrough in her life. I have also learnt the incredible power of our beliefs and thinking patterns, and how much they impact our lives, for good or bad. This whole process of both

being coached and coaching someone else has also made me realise how powerful it is to have another pair of eyes on our lives, and in particular our thoughts. Stacey and I laughed about how all of us have irrational thoughts in one or more areas of our lives, and we are so often blind to the errors in our own thinking, while it can be blindingly obvious to someone else.

I've learnt that that is why coaching can be so life-transforming. As a coach, I find that you don't always feel as though you are doing much. But when, as a coach, you know the right questions to ask, and you allow a client to feel safe enough to open up and be vulnerable, answering your questions helps them to process things better, and gain insight that they wouldn't have obtained on their own. That's when incredible change can occur, as the coach helps the client discover what was there all along, but it needed to be encouraged to come into the light, to be noticed, examined and then challenged. She said that I offered a different perspective to her irrational thoughts. When they were just swimming around alone in her head, they stayed there, and to her they seemed completely normal. It was only when they were voiced aloud, to be examined by someone who looked at them completely objectively, that she could see how irrational they were. Without this kind of help, like Stacey, most of us will just continue on the path we're going, never changing our thinking, and never understanding why circumstances in our lives don't change. The old adage, "nothing changes until you change" is so true. When we change our thoughts, we'll change our actions, and before we know it, our whole life has changed.

## Cloud Busting

SARAH BRANDIS

My story is one of a breakthrough for both my client and myself. I would like to start by introducing myself as a 'newbie' coach at the time of writing this. I had just completed my Foundations weekend of training, when my first practice client and I found each other – kind of by accident.

Peter was more than ready to talk. He was almost at the point of bursting. I was similarly at 'bursting point' with excitement to start coaching, so our chance meeting was a serendipitous one. We didn't book an appointment; Peter literally could not wait, so we made time for the session right then and there. Another reason for grabbing that opportunity straight away was that Peter's girlfriend probably wouldn't have 'let him' go to a coaching session if she knew about it. And particularly not with a female coach. Yes, that is the sound of alarm bells ringing. But Peter was very grateful to let off some steam, and I was very grateful for such a willing client. The best thing for myself about our 'surprise session' was that I wouldn't have to endure a nervous wait for my first session to begin. So we jumped straight in.

The initial problem that Peter described was his girlfriend, Shelly. Yes, I did say 'his girlfriend' as a noun, not his relationship with his girlfriend. At least, that was how he was feeling at the time. *She* was his problem.

Shelly:

- didn't respect him.
- was selfish.
- didn't understand or appreciate him.

- was incredibly jealous if he even looked at another woman on the street.
- didn't work, contributed nothing to their finances, and slept late every day, while he worked double shifts.
- spent 'their' (his) money on herself.

So I felt that I should unpack this issue with a lot of opening up. I wanted a lot of background on this. Not only about his girlfriend and their relationship, but about Peter's background, where he was coming from. Peter told me that he had a difficult family situation. His mother had not been around. Although at first he spoke very proudly about his father, it quickly transpired that the two of them could not be in the same room for long before the bickering started. He had a brother, who seemed to be favoured by their father. Peter told me that his childhood had been an unhappy one, with a great deal of physical punishment, and not much praise or support. Peter had served in the army from age 18, and had done a tour of Afghanistan. Being shot at had "toughened him up" (his words), and also put some distance between himself and his family. Having come back to civilian life, Peter had found himself lost for a direction. He had tried working in the event management world, following in his father's footsteps. Peter told me it was very stressful and he had doubted his reasons for doing it. Currently, he was labouring on building sites, working long hours in a role he was overqualified for. This rang another alarm bell for me – it seemed as though he may have been undervaluing himself, and I wanted to hear why. This, coupled with his uncomfortable family situation, made me wonder about his possible negative self-beliefs. I needed to find out more.

As a newbie, I didn't have a lot of models in my toolbox to work with. I had just learned the TOOLKIT model, and so was conscious of working to this as a rough guide. During the Foundations weekend, we learned the basics of coaching conversations. The topic of question types

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had really resonated with me. I knew about open-ended questions from my previous days in customer service roles. But I hadn't really considered hypothetical questions before now. I found a good use for them here.

Back to Peter's present relationship. For every example Peter gave of his girlfriend's irrational behaviour, I was struck by Peter's telling me of his lack of reaction to it. It sounded like she was a difficult person to get along with, but it also sounded as though he was allowing her bad behaviour. From what Peter told me, he never stood up for himself. Every irrational or annoying thing Shelly asked of him, he obliged, cursing under his breath, but nonetheless doing as he was asked.

Peter told me a story about a recent event that demonstrated this behaviour brilliantly. Shelly had been to Ikea with her mother, and spent money (earned by Peter) on a set of three canvas pictures. They were part of the same image, and therefore designed to be hung side by side. Shelly proudly showed them to Peter, assuming he would like them as much as she did. Peter did note at this point that she wasn't unreasonable in her assumption, because he had never let on that he didn't like her taste in soft furnishings. Every tacky (his opinion) item Shelly brought home, Peter swallowed his distaste for, and nodded along with her thoughts on where to display it. So these pictures were sitting on the sofa, waiting for Peter to hang them under Shelly's instruction. At this stage, Peter is already upset with the situation on two counts. Firstly, his hard-earned cash has been spent by Shelly, on herself. And secondly, he was now expected to hang the pictures for her, with her back-seat driving the process. But the most annoying part for Peter was yet to come.

Shelly had marked on the wall with a pencil the three points where the pictures were to be hung from. The far left of the three points was directly above the lounge light switch. Now, Peter is a labourer. He understands practical things like basic electrics. Electrical cables run vertically up from light switches. To Peter's disbelief, Shelly firstly wasn't

aware of this, and secondly didn't believe him. She was completely adamant that the nail was going in line with the switch. As Peter told it to me, he did his best to explain that you can't just bang a metal nail into an electrical wire. Shelly reportedly either didn't believe him, or just wasn't even registering what he was saying. Peter told me that this was the point where he got really mad. He could handle a lot of disrespect, but not having his common sense questioned by someone who didn't know what she was talking about. That was too much. It was hard not to squirm as Peter told me the rest of the story. He isolated the circuit for the light switches, banged the nail into the exact point Shelly had marked, directly above the centre of the switch, turned the circuit back on, and flicked the light-switch with a wooden broom handle, for obvious safety reasons.

Bang. Black smoke up the wall, and his point proved. This perhaps should have been Peter's moment to enjoy. He was proven right, in an undisputable way, leaving a black trail up the paintwork. Yet here came the biggest disappointment for Peter. Shelly was furious, yes, but not with herself. She was furious with Peter for doing something he knew would make a mess. At this point, Peter hurled a string of obscenities that I won't recreate for you here. But I'm sure you can imagine his frustration. He still did not get the credit he deserved, nor did he get an apology. Peter told me that at this point, he took himself off for 'one of his long walks' to calm down. Peter reported to me that he has to go for these walks frequently. I was not surprised to hear this.

We talked some more around the background of his relationship with Shelly; how they got together, and what was still good about their relationship. Peter told me that before Shelly, he had been single for a long time, and was really very lonely. He described to me a time where he had felt particularly alone. Peter had taken himself to Paris for the weekend, by himself. In the famously 'romantic city', he stood at the top of the Eiffel Tower, surrounded by couples. Peter told me that he

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had gone up there with the intention of taking in the view, but was so distracted by being the only single person, that he couldn't enjoy the moment. He told me it was right there and then that he decided he needed to find a new girlfriend. Ok - this was my opportunity to use a hypothetical question! I asked Peter what would be different if Shelly was standing with him at the top of the Eiffel Tower. He didn't seem to think too much, but replied automatically. "She would be whining about it being cold up here." I asked him how he would likely respond to that. He thought for a few seconds, then replied, "I wouldn't bother saying anything, she wouldn't get it." I then asked him to imagine that scene, but tell me what he would really like to say to Shelly. He told me that he would prefer to speak his mind, and make her understand that it's worth being in the cold for a few minutes. In that moment, he seemed to shift from uncomfortable to something else. He seemed a little more assertive. I must admit, at this point I was pretty happy with myself. He appeared to be realizing his power in these situations.

To reflect on those bullet points I made earlier, about Peter's girlfriend not respecting him: Peter was now realizing that he wasn't respecting himself. This felt like the first little bit of breaking through. He had stepped back and gotten some perspective on the matter. He was realizing that everything his girlfriend did, he was allowing her to do, to some degree at least.

Right after our session, Peter called his girlfriend and had quite a long chat. He told me afterwards what they had spoken about. It sounded as if he had claimed a bit of control for himself, and told her how he would like to be listened to from now on. This was a breakthrough for him, but also for myself. This was the first time I would help a client to see their behaviour patterns in a new light, and to make a decisive move to change things.

This was the reason I had been drawn to coaching to begin with. I had always felt strongly about helping people to do the best by themselves, perhaps mostly because this has been a big struggle of mine too. My coaching journey has helped me to look after myself just as much as it has helped my clients, and I have had many little personal breakthroughs along the way. I have learned to be realistic about the challenges I face in my relationships with others. There are always going to be clouds in my sky, and I have come to accept that. But learning that I have at least fifty-percent control over the weather ahead is what keeps me on track. While I can't control the actions of others, I can choose how I respond to them. I deal with my clouds much better now; instead of wrestling against the wind with my umbrella, I am just less scared to get rained on. And I enjoy the sunny moments all the more.

## Light and Shade

ALYSON BAXTER

I will call my client Gemma to retain her anonymity.

She is in her late 20s and lives on the south coast with her boyfriend. Gemma has a real passion for the outdoors and loves to create things. I would describe her as thoughtful and creative; someone who really enjoys making things and has an artistic flair. She also has some very strong ideas and values that she is yet to feel comfortable with in her external world.

I was curious about: how much of society's expectations Gemma feels she has adhered to so far in her life; how that impacts the choices she has made to date; the importance she has placed on these within her life; and how these may be influencing her decision-making today.

Gemma loves the outdoors. She feels a real connection with her environment and describes this as very important. Her surroundings have a big impact on her, and it very quickly became obvious (from the early discussions we had and Gemma's description of herself) that everything has to be settled and in order for her to be on top of her game. Gemma described that her ability to be creative is fuelled by her working environment; in order for her to feel at her best, her surroundings and environment need to be right.

Gemma had no difficulty in coming up with different options of exciting things that she could spend her time doing. My purpose as a coach was to establish what was stopping Gemma from turning these ideas into reality, and for her to follow what she felt was right for her.

Gemma came to me describing that she was at the end her tether; she felt she was in a job that gave her no satisfaction, that she didn't

see a future in her role, and she felt that what she was being asked to do wasn't going in a direction that felt 'right' or 'correct', or that it was something she agreed with. Gemma also explained that she sensed the company values and her personal values were poles apart. She described that this conflict had been taking its toll and was now having an adverse reaction. Gemma regularly felt sad about going to work; every day was a day that she didn't look forward to. Days would begin and end in tears. Gemma was starting to be concerned with her unhappiness about the situation, while in the prime of her life, and also raised her concern with spending too much of her life doing something that she really didn't enjoy. Because of all these things, Gemma wanted to make a change. Something had to give - she felt that she could not go on with this anymore. Yes it was a well-paid job, fairly close to home, and she was carrying out a well-respected role in the company. However, the possibility of doing this and waiting a good number of years doing something that she didn't enjoy would be a disaster. Gemma knew she had to make a change. I sensed that her decision had already been made; what Gemma wanted to work on was how to carry out that decision and start her next venture. At this point, we started to work together.

Gemma's challenge was that she had been 'swept' along for a number of years, doing the job she had been doing, ever since she had left university. Gemma had joined the company and worked her way up in various roles. During all those years, Gemma had known in her heart that this wasn't a job she really wanted to do, but she needed to have a job and earn some money.

Something happened in Gemma's world of work that made her stop and think about what she really wanted to do. There were some redundancies taking place and some of the people that Gemma had worked very closely with were losing their jobs. From the sessions we had, this seemed to have an impact on Gemma's view of the company, which threw a number of questions into Gemma's thoughts.

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The more we explored and reflected on Gemma's situation, the more frequent the strength of feeling became apparent. Gemma seemed to be experiencing strong reactions to the way she felt her colleagues had been treated. While questioning and listening to Gemma's view of the world, there seemed to be a regular pattern, and it became clear that Gemma felt comfortable to detach herself from the company. Gemma saw that if she stayed, it would be a way of showing support and condoning the behaviour of her bosses. This was not an option for Gemma, and it was something she felt strongly about.

Values, expectations, should's and could's seem to play a big part in Gemma's story. One of Gemma's regular comments was that she couldn't let anyone down. She had an overwhelming feeling that she didn't want to "leave people in the lurch". This gave us an interesting dynamic, as she knew that she was in a job that didn't play to her strengths or excited her and at the same time, she felt she couldn't leave because she would be letting others down.

I felt excited and suddenly aware of the situation Gemma presented; I knew as a coach myself, talk may become more active in this situation. What Gemma presented had some similarities to my own career, and two immediate situations came to mind. I remembered that on one occasion, I had agreed to carry out a role because I didn't want others to do it (as it was going to be pretty horrible), and I knew I would be valued for doing it. On a separate occasion, I continued in a role when I knew I was past my best. I didn't because I wanted the team to be self-sufficient before I took leave of the position. The challenge also appealed to me as I sensed that Gemma meant business - the time had come to take action.

A key moment for me in the coaching journey was our initial session. It took place during a woodland walk. The sun was out, the trees were full, the forest was alive with wildlife, and the paths were quiet - ready for us to take our walk.

Interestingly, I had walked the same route a number of times with different clients. The walk is in a circular enclosure. There are different routes you can take, but I tend to stick to the main path, as it isn't busy and the walk typically takes approximately one hour. However, on this occasion, for some reason we twice went wrong and took the wrong turns. This didn't seem to faze Gemma or me, and in a way it added something different to my previous coaching sessions, where we needed to retrace our steps. I used this in my session, thinking about where steps had been retraced before, and if that had any significance for Gemma. It was amazing what that question created in the opening conversation.

The breakthrough for Gemma was that she outwardly voiced that she was going to leave her job. She was going to 'cut free' and do what actually felt good for herself. This Gemma saw as a breakthrough, as she had thought long and hard about it; every day she had thought about leaving, but she had never actually explored what her days could be like if she left her job. Saying the words out loud and to another person seemed to be a big step for Gemma. It was about having the confidence to stand up and say: "Enough is enough, my life needs to be lived. I want to have things in my life that I enjoy and feel good about doing." Gemma voiced that she had spent too long letting others determine what she 'should' be doing, and that this was now the right time to make a change and see what happens.

The other breakthrough was that Gemma had always seen work as a job and a single job that you have to do in order to pay the bills and have a roof over your head. On the walk, it became very clear that a shift in mindset took place, and Gemma realised that she could have a number of pots of activities that could all bring in some money. This came across as being a total revelation, and suddenly she became 'light' and open to all sorts of possibilities, excited about what she could do, and options came flooding into Gemma's mind. At that point, I also noticed that our walking pace had quickened and that we were definitely walking with purpose now, rather than a meander.

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Seeing the transformation in the individual was something special to behold. Having worked with a number of clients previous to Gemma, I felt comfortable walking and talking and giving Gemma the time and space to explore and question that what she held true in her mind. To be part of that 'breakthrough' was quite something for me. The added intensity was that this was only the first session I had had with Gemma, where the sudden realisation took place to see the world from a different perspective. I was amazed at the openness, the rapport and the connection we had together, and this I think helped Gemma to be in a relaxed and comfortable place. This helped with the ease of exploration and the talking and expressing of her thoughts openly, which lead to the breakthrough that Gemma experienced during our walk.

This change seemed to have a huge positive impact on the way Gemma viewed a situation. Gemma went from feeling that she had no options and not being able to see a way of changing her life into something she wanted, to looking forward to and being excited by what she chooses to do. For Gemma to suddenly realise the power of regaining that control, making her own decision and building her future the way she wants it to be, was such a refreshing and massive shift for me to be a part of. To see the changes in the person, the language they use, the way they walk and the excitement in their voice, is something that I will never forget.

So since our initial session, Gemma has left her job, made some lifestyle changes, moved to a beautiful listed building, and is looking to secure a part-time job at an upholsters across the road. Gemma also has a number of other projects kicking off including photography and refurbishing second-hand furniture. Having made those lifestyle changes, Gemma now has the opportunity of choosing what she wants to do and the elements that are important to her.

As a coach, I realised that you have a huge impact on unlocking different views of the world and by doing this, people can take a very different route to the one they were expecting. From a simple walk in the forest, being present, connected and listening to all that is going on with your client, you can have a big impact on someone's life.

I found this to be a poignant moment, as I enjoy coaching to help others get to where they want to. I wasn't expecting that in one session, I would have created an environment that allowed a significant shift, which may have led to the decisions Gemma made. As a coach, I need to be prepared for the decisions my clients come to, having explored a number of different viewpoints. In a way, I felt responsible for the decision that Gemma took.

After the session, I spent some time reflecting on why I felt responsible and concluded that as a transformational coach, it is about working with the whole person as an 'adult', and for them to decide what their best option is. I did feel responsible that there may be some consequences that Gemma may not have thought about, but the question to me was: "Why did I feel a sense of responsibility?" This I believe is more about me and my need to feel protective about my clients, and the impact this could have in terms of a client and coach relationship. Since then, I have worked with my own coach to work this through. I feel very confident that this doesn't affect my coaching sessions. It has made me more aware of my natural tendency to want to protect in order to get a sense of satisfaction and my natural drive to nurture. This I am now much more aware of, both as a coach and as an individual. I also learnt that there is no harm in doing something that you get satisfaction from, as long as you know why you need that sense of satisfaction.

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Since our early sessions, we have had further telephone sessions where Gemma is putting together her plan for the future. A recent session I had with Gemma uncovered that she was waiting for an outcome of her part-time role in an interior design shop, so that it would give her the work experience to get into the textiles field. Gemma also recently attended a wedding, where she took some photos. The bride has asked for Gemma's photos, as she liked them better than those of the official photographers. Gemma has also given herself some time for things to settle after moving house. She is now aware that her creative energy is impacted by her surroundings.

In our continued sessions, Gemma has already recognised that if she continues her portfolio career, she wants us to work together on her levels of confidence and how she measures her own success and credibility. I have great pleasure in continuing to work with Gemma on her journey.

# Leaving the Past Behind

HEERAL GUDKA

*“To move on from where you are, you must decide where you would rather be”*

- UNKNOWN

## Session 1

Alex came to me early on in my journey as a coach, and of all the clients I had worked with up to that point, he seemed the most hopeless and lost.

His eyes told of a deep sense of betrayal. In the beginning, his story focused on his family. Parents who didn't support him emotionally, an older brother who took advantage of Alex's financial situation, and an older sister who had cut herself off from everyone.

With a trip home approaching, the rising tension was apparent; Alex said he could feel knots in his stomach. He feared the bullying from his brother, and felt overwhelmed by the emotional demands his mother made. Fears around being forced to move back home to support his parents were making him ill. Alex said his mother was a weak creature, and that being around her would make him unhappy.

His memories of his father were of a frightful, towering figure who used to beat his children. Even now this fear remained, despite him being elderly with only his words available as weapons.

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In the midst of the sadness, I asked him where there was joy in his life. From an earlier consultation call, I already knew he was an avid runner and was Pilates-mad too! So I thought perhaps these activities might feature in his answer. Instead, there was more sadness: running was a perennial struggle with injury, and Pilates was something he should do to help with that (that word “should”!).

“What about work, how do you feel there?”

And this is when the tears came!

At work there was his ex. In his eyes, she was taunting him every day by talking to other men in front of him. Flirting with them, and going off for coffees with the man she cheated on Alex with.

Alex had no safe haven in his life. He lived on a small island where everyone knows everyone. Even his home was a place of tension and anxiety, caused by noisy neighbours playing loud music late into the night.

With all of this spilling out in just the first session, I was at a loss as to where to start. But fixing Alex’s life was not my job. My job was to simply help in whatever way he needed me to. So I let him direct me:

The trip home was happening, and he chose his family as the focus for our next session. In the meantime, I asked him to look at all parts of his life, and consider what would be a good outcome for him.

## Session 2

Alex began by apologising for not doing 'the homework'. I got the sense that he worried a lot about disappointing people, of somehow not measuring up.

His week had been totally defined by an argument with his ex. His plans to think about his family were thrown off track. Everything sounded like a struggle. He wasn't sleeping well and was not looking forward to going to see his family the next day.

I was struck by his low energy and sense of defeat. Reflecting this back to him opened up into his fear of conflict with his brother and father. The constant occurrence of conflicts with them made him believe that he was bad, that there was something fundamentally wrong inside him.

Alex decided it would be a good idea to keep a note of situations which triggered anxiety or conflict during the trip. It gave him a small sense of hope: even if the trip was awful, he'd be able to use the process to explore his reactions. He was looking forward to the next session!

## Session 3

Alex returned to his life exhausted but relieved to be back. His father featured heavily in his notes of triggers. His shouting and his anger drove Alex to retreat into isolation. The week was defined by a deep fear in his stomach, reaching back to his childhood.

So much so that the emptiness and loneliness had led him to seek comfort from his ex – they texted a lot while he was away. Alex felt disappointed in himself.

He recognised a pattern of looking to his exes for security, and was unable to feel it in himself. He expressed a deep pain of being unable to survive on his own without reassurance.

# animas

We did a strengths exercise I've used many times with clients. By the end of it, Alex had a list of 13 strengths to his name. He had never thought of himself in such a positive way before – not since early childhood. He began to feel he was letting himself down every time he compared himself to other people. Alex worried he would never find a partner.

I asked him to ponder on this question for the next session:

What do I need to feel complete in myself?

## Session 4

In between sessions, I received an email from Alex detailing all his frustrations, his lack of self-confidence, and how he compares himself to others.

By the time our session came round, he was sounding more positive, as though writing the email had helped.

He had begun running again, he had remembered all the things he used to do a year ago that had made him happy (his photography blog, sketching). How he never used to compare himself to other men until his ex cheated on him.

There was a desire in his voice to get back to being the person he had once been. But at the same time, he seemed to see life only as a struggle, and couldn't see anyway to exert his will or autonomy over himself.

Alex said that running is a metaphor for his life. That he pushes himself a lot, past the point that he should, even in the face of injury. That his family taught him to be this way – to not show himself any kind regard – even though he doesn't think it should be that way.

Everything about him was so morose. So lacking in agency and will. He could see that he'd like life to be different, but showed no energy to make the smallest of changes. He said he feared looking inside himself and at his life. He kept searching to others to make it right for him.

I asked him to consider two questions:

1. What word describes your life?
2. What would you do if there was nothing you were "supposed to do"?

## Session 5

"I didn't do the homework, I couldn't think of anything clever. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't 'have to do' anything."

"The week was horrible, I didn't do anything thing for myself - I'm disappointed in myself on so many levels. I interacted with my ex, I didn't reflect on anything, I can't. Everything is in the way."

"I feel suffocated every time I see my ex. She was around all week. I feel excitement when I see her, I can't stop it. And I know everyone can see it. I feel pathetic."

"The joy and affection feels lovely, but then it goes away, it's like I am sinking, and it lasts a long time. I'm really not good at recovering. It interferes with my work. I have lots of bad feelings at the end of the day; I feel like withdrawing. I do withdraw. I have no friends, they are fed up of hearing about my problems. I'm angry at myself."

"If you escaped this trap you seem to be in, how would it feel?"

"Free, not obsessed."

"What would you be free from?"

# animas

“The obsession over my ex. It’s all because I’m not happy with myself. I want to be content with my life choices. I want to disconnect from my ex, then focus on my career and other parts of my personal life.”

“I want to plan. On Monday mornings, everything falls apart. So let’s plan how I can stay on track. I seek perfection; if there isn’t perfection there is no point in trying. I just can’t sit with sadness.”

“What around you is perfect?”

“My ex – she’s so beautiful, popular, successful, fit. She can run, she doesn’t get injured.”

“Your ex cheated on you.”

There is a pause.

“I keep hurting myself. I can’t handle the emptiness, the loneliness. I can see my mum in me. I’m doing the same as her.”

“If you carry on as you are, what will your life look like in 10 years?”

Another long pause.

“My life needs to change. I don’t want to end up helpless like her.”

“Change is a process. It requires energy and commitment. How much commitment do you have to yourself?”

He looked down and was silent.

“I have zero commitment to myself. I have no self-discipline. I have no self-respect.”

“What word describes your life?”

“Frustrated! At myself, at being sad, at how all this affects me.”

“How would it feel to change this freedom?”

And this is where the change happened. Session 5 was where the pain had really come out. Where Alex saw how he wasn't caring for himself at all, and that he kept hurting himself through these acts of omission.

At the start of my coaching journey, I remember learning about "stacking the pain". This concept had frightened me in some ways. I thought it was risky, that shining a light on the painful things in a client's life might destabilise them. Would coaching be the right place for this to happen, or would it be therapy?

During my sessions with Alex, though, I realised that this would probably be the only way, as he seemed so stuck. I didn't intend to start any session using this method, but it seemed to fit with session 5 and the turn that it was taking.

So how did it change things?

In the fortnight that passed between sessions 5 and 6, Alex started looking after himself!

## **Session 6**

Alex came online for our video call, and he was beaming. He showed me the gratitude journal he had started writing. It had shown him that he was actually grateful for so many things in his life. He said that his emotions had turned out to be his best teacher.

Alex felt his frustration had shifted in the last two weeks. There had been movement at work and it had helped him to start de-attaching from his ex.

He recognised his desire to have a partner came from his unconscious, and that it was not linked to his ex. His desire to talk to his ex, to have any kind of interaction with her, started to fade. He wanted to be with someone, but definitely not her.

# animas

To take advantage of this positive mood, Alex decided he wanted to work with me to build a picture of his ideal partner. It was something he really enjoyed putting together. And this moment came to signify real hope for the future.

Alex realised that only he could make changes to his life, that there were not many things he was obliged to do, and so there was a lot of time available to him to start. He said he wanted to enjoy life and be happy with himself, that the previous session had made him very sad, because he was letting himself down by not being committed to making his life more his own.

Seeing this breakthrough in Alex was wonderful. He was starting to see his potential to be happy and content with his life. The seeds of resilience had been sown and he was nurturing the soil they were in.

I learnt to trust more in the process of coaching clients through difficult struggles, and saw that it wasn't just about working out detailed action plans. It was the first time I had helped a client look at how they were being, how they were interacting with the world around them, how that felt and then letting them decide if they wanted to change.

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