JANUARY 2026 | ISSUE 48

Coaching Perspectives

THE ASSOCIATION FOR COACHING
GLOBAL MAGAZINE

Association for Coaching

Coaching and Hope

Active hope - your guide to making a difference

How to embody hope as a leader

Hope and nature - an unbreakable bond

The pathway to healing is lined with hope

Hope and despair - two sides of the same coin

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ADVANCING COACHING IN BUSINESS AND SOCIETY, WORLDWIDE

ISSN 2632-9735 (PRINT)

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associationforcoaching.com/event/ethical-AI-marketing-lab_ws

It feels timely to start the new year reflecting on hope - ushering in possibilities for these next twelve months and beyond. Spring generally carries radiant messages of hope - snowdrops burst through, lambs are born, the daylight hours start to stretch out before us. Even when the world is in turmoil or our own lives are in crisis - these simple signs signal that the planet is still turning and that the days keep unfolding - for now at least…

'Hope springs eternal' so they say - but is it easy to access? From my own experience I would say not always. It becomes easier when we approach hope as a practice and for me this starts with noticing and connecting with the beautiful moments that nature offers us on a daily basis. I was on a dance retreat in Greece a few years ago and used to walk down to the deserted beach at dawn to swim towards the rising sun - noticing how I felt at one with myself and the world - full of hope, peace and contentment. I can still tap into these feelings now when I need them, when life feels difficult, when the scale of what we are facing feels overwhelming. And perhaps it is in these small but perfectly-formed moments that we can connect with the true essence of hope - deep, resonant and pure. From this place we can take small steps to turn hope into something tangible…

The late Dr Jane Goodall said: 'the opposite of apathy is hope - not naive optimism - a disciplined choice to keep showing up as a force for good in the world'. This is where hope becomes active, where we can channel it into action; where it starts to act as the glue that unites citizens and prevents society from collapsing.

I see coaches as custodians of hope. We can hold space for our client's despair while sensing hope is round the corner. Our starting point of unconditional, positive regard means we hold an inherently hopeful stance for our clients and this buoys them up as they make difficult decisions, tackle their challenges and embrace developmental changes.

This edition is packed with thoughts on how to embody hope as a leader, the interplay between hope and nature, how hope can underpin healing, how to practice active hope and have an impact, how hope acts as a bridge from hard times to new beginnings, and much more.

My two key take aways from this edition are that hope is not like gold dust that we sprinkle across our days, rather it is the fuel to our fire and just as we must tend to a fire to keep it alight - so too must we tend to hope on a regular basis. And secondly, just as joy and sadness go hand in hand, we can harness hope more effectively if we can also get comfortable with despair. If despair shows us what is wrong in our lives and the world,hope lights the way for us to take action.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this edition. Thank you as ever to our writers who have shared their thinking and their personal experiences so generously. We are fully commissioned for the April edition on the 'Age of Uncertainty'. Next up will be the July edition on 'Energy and Balance' so please get in touch at editor@associationforcoaching.com if this is an area of expertise for you or you have some thoughts you wish to share from your research or practice.

Happy new year to you all.

Best wishes,

Clare Manning

Clare Manning
Co-editor

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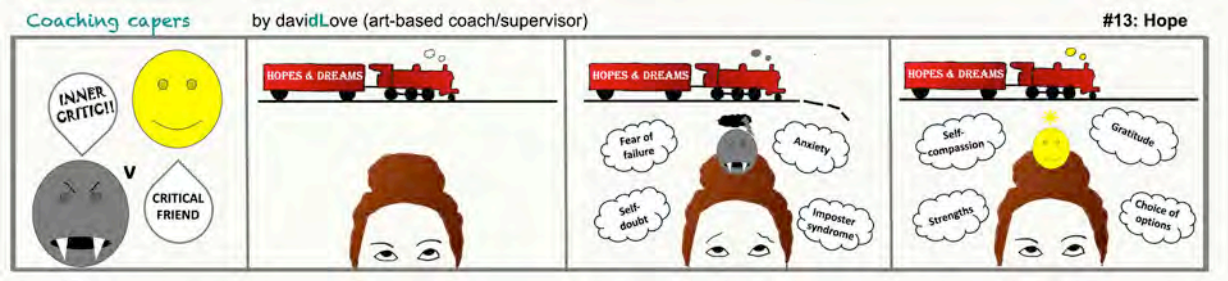
Calling all prospective writers…
We invite you to consider the themes for the upcoming editions of Coaching Perspectives and see if something captures your interest. If so, please contact us at **editor@associationforcoaching.com** to share your ideas for an article. We will then set up a commissioning call to explore further.

Upcoming themes…

As ever - please interpret the themes as you wish - we love to see what they inspire in you …

July 2026 – Energy and Balance
– Submission deadline 15th May 2026
How can coaching sustain our energy in the world, and sustain the world's energy for us? In an age of tilting horizons and shifting sands, what will help clients and organisations achieve greater balance – and what are the benefits of a life of balance? Where do our clients source their energy – whether for greater resilience, high performance, or a search for a higher calling? How is the discourse around energy and balance changing in coaching and supervision conversations?



ABOUT DAVID LOVE

David is a leadership coach and coach supervisor who deploys art-based approaches (including cartoons) in his work, believing strongly in the power of creative methods for generating the deep insights and learning which underpin personal and systemic change. He is one of the first coaches to undertake the AC-accredited Diploma in Art-based Coaching designed and led by the artist and coach, Anna Sheather.

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THE ALCHEMY OF HOPE: FROM DESPAIR TO RENEWAL IN COACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Hope isn't a concept we think into existence, says Simon Goland. It is a physiological state we return to when safety, connection, and aliveness are restored.

WHEN HOPE FEELS FAR AWAY

I once sat across from a senior executive whose résumé could have doubled as a corporate legend. But that day, something had broken open in her. She stared at the table, eyes clouded, and said quietly, 'I don't know if what I do matters any more.'

It wasn't burnout or depression. It was despair- that heavy, silent cousin of exhaustion that creeps in when purpose feels like a myth we once believed.

> ***Without hope, our work as coaches, leaders, and supervisors loses its vital spark - the animating current that keeps us oriented toward life rather than away from it***

In moments like these, the word hope can sound almost naïve. What use is hope when glaciers are melting, geopolitical chaos seems to be on steroids, organisations are restructuring for the fifth time this year, and the most common phrase in boardrooms is 'doing more with less?'

And yet, without hope, our work as coaches, leaders, and supervisors loses its vital spark- the animating current that keeps us oriented toward life rather than away from it.

HOPE BEYOND POSITIVITY

Hope, as I have come to understand, is not an emotion or an outcome. It is a practice. It is a posture of the body and spirit that allows us to keep engaging with what is difficult without collapsing into cynicism or false optimism.

In my early years as a coach, I unconsciously treated hope as a kind of performance enhancer. It was the energetic fuel for reaching goals, achieving targets, crafting shiny visions of success. We had formulas for everything- SMART goals, accountability structures, 360 feedback. Hope was the background music to a culture obsessed with forward motion.

But as coaching evolved, so did my understanding. Hope is not the same as positivity. The former requires courage; the latter often avoids discomfort. Hope, when embodied, is not an escape from despair but a willingness to sit beside it- to breathe, listen, and wait for the next right movement to reveal itself.

The opposite of despair isn't blind hope. It is embodied presence.

THE SOMATIC GROUND OF HOPE

I once worked with a CEO who was brilliant, strategic, and perpetually exhausted. She described feeling as though she was 'carrying the company on her back.' Her body told the story long before her mind caught up, with hunched shoulders, a jaw perpetually clenched, breath that rarely travelled below the collarbones.

We explored this state through somatic presence, inquiry, and awareness. As she softened, her breath deepened, colour returned to her face, and she whispered, 'I feel… hopeful. For no reason.'

> ***The opposite of despair isn't blind hope. It is embodied presence.***

That moment reminded me that hope is not an idea we think into existence. It is a physiological state we return to when safety, connection, and aliveness are restored.

Neuroscience confirms what our wise bodies have always known: hope begins below the neck. The vagus nerve- that wandering bridge between gut, heart, and brain- carries most of its messages upward, from body to mind, not the other way around. Which means that the stories we tell ourselves about the future are profoundly shaped by the state of our nervous system in the present.

When we are in a sympathetic state - mobilised for action, braced for survival- our world view naturally contracts. Hope feels far away because our biology is doing its job, protecting us from threat. When we collapse into dorsal parasympathetic shutdown, the body's energy drops, our breath flattens, and even imagining possibility feels impossible. It is not a mindset problem; it is a physiological state of our being. True hope emerges when we come home to the ventral vagal state, which is that place of grounded safety where body and heart remember connection. In this state, curiosity returns. Our gaze lifts. We can feel others again. The future begins to shimmer with faint possibility.

This is why we cannot think or will our way from despair to hope. No amount of re-framing, affirmations, or positive thinking can override a nervous system that doesn't feel safe. We must work through and with the body- through breath, through presence and grounding, through gentle co-regulation with another human being who can hold presence when ours falters.

True hope emerges when we come home to the ventral vagal state, which is that place of grounded safety where body and heart remember connection

Hope, then, is not a motivational speech. It is the nervous system remembering safety after fear, the heart remembering connection after isolation, the lungs remembering to exhale after holding too much for too long. It is not fragile or abstract. It is biological, a natural rhythm that returns whenever we stop trying to control, fix, or transcend our humanity and instead inhabit it fully. When we begin to see hope as a somatic process rather than an emotional luxury, we start to understand why some of the most hopeful people are not the ones shouting optimism from the rooftops, but those who know how to pause, breathe, and stay present in the middle of uncertainty.

HOPE IN RELATIONSHIP: THE ENNEAGRAM AND THE HUMAN PATTERN

One of the most illuminating frameworks I have found for exploring hope and despair (as well as pretty much anything else relevant to human development and awakening) is the Enneagram, as a living mirror for how we habitually lose and rediscover our core essence. At its heart, the Enneagram is a map of remembrance. It describes nine ways we human beings forget who we truly are, and the nine pathways to come home to our essence. Each type represents a particular flavour of disconnection, a specific strategy for surviving a world that once felt too much. For us coaches, it is important to realise that the Enneagram is not about self-improvement in its deepest purpose. It really is about self-liberation. The Enneagram doesn't ask, 'How can I become a better version of my personality?' It asks, 'What would remain if I stopped organising my life around my personality's fears?'

Hope is biological, a natural rhythm that returns whenever we stop trying to control, fix, or transcend our humanity and instead inhabit it fully

When viewed through this lens, the Enneagram becomes a luminous compass for navigating despair. It reveals the precise moment where hope disappears, be it the subtle contraction, the loss of contact with presence, the movement away from the heart. Yet, it also shows how hope is restored, by relaxing the structures that obscure what is already here, present within the client, the leader, and the coach.

In the Enneagram, each type, in its own way, forgets hope:

- Type 1 loses hope when the world refuses to be perfect.
- Type 2, when love feels conditional.
- Type 3, when success stops delivering worth.
- Type 4, when beauty turns melancholic.
- Type 5, when knowledge fails to provide safety.
- Type 6, when trust feels foolish.
- Type 7, when pleasure loses its shine.
- Type 8, when control doesn't protect (decades of experience for me personally with this one).
- Type 9, when peace demands conflict.

But within each Enneagram type lies the seed of hope's restoration. As a Type 8 myself, I lose hope when I mistake tenderness for weakness. Hope returns when I soften, which is when power and vulnerability are invited to coexist. For a Type 6, hope may emerge through embodied trust, when the person opens to a somatically sensed and felt evidence that the world is not only dangerous. For a Type 4, hope is rediscovered in ordinariness- the quiet beauty of washing dishes and being enough without needing to be special. A Type 4 client once told me, through tears, 'I am scared there is nothing underneath.' Minutes later, she added, almost surprised, 'But this nothing… feels alive.'

That is the return of hope- quiet, cellular, real.

Hope that excludes despair becomes brittle. Hope that includes it becomes unbreakable.

THE SHADOW OF FALSE HOPE

Coaches and leaders, by nature, are merchants of hope. We help people believe change is possible. But there is danger when hope becomes performance, when we use it to bypass pain rather than be transformed by it. False hope sounds like this:

'It will all work out.'
'Everything happens for a reason.'
'Just stay positive.'

These phrases, though well-intentioned, often silence the deeper truth trying to surface. Authentic hope doesn't deny despair; it metabolises it. As coaches, we must ask ourselves: are we offering hope as medicine or as distraction? Are we holding the tension long enough for something real to emerge, or rushing to fix discomfort because we can't bear it?

Hope that excludes despair becomes brittle. Hope that includes it becomes unbreakable

I have learned that sometimes the most hopeful thing we can say is, 'Yes, this is hard. And you are not alone.'

HOPE AS PRACTICE, NOT CONCEPT

So how do we cultivate hope that is embodied, grounded, and actionable?

1. Begin with the body.
Notice where hope or hopelessness lives somatically. Is it heaviness in the chest? Numbness behind the eyes? Simply naming it begins to restore movement.

2. Breathe, then listen.
Despair contracts attention. Hope expands it. Breath restores physiology before meaning can return.

3. Ask questions that honour mystery.
Try: 'What is life asking of you right now?' instead of 'What do you want to achieve?'

4. Normalise despair.
You only despair over what you love. Despair is care in layers of disguise.

5. Cultivate communal hope.
Hope grows in relationship, with nervous systems regulating each other, stories weaving into shared meaning.

6. Turn hope into micro-action.
Small acts- a courageous conversation, a walk instead of another meeting - signal to the psyche that movement is still possible.

7. Use humour wisely.
A well-timed laugh reminds the body that aliveness persists. Laughter is hope's most playful expression.

THE ALCHEMY OF HOPE IN LEADERSHIP

Leaders, perhaps more than anyone, live at the crossroads of hope and despair. They are asked to hold vision amid volatility, to inspire without pretending certainty. The most powerful leaders I have coached aren't those radiating relentless optimism. They are those who can stand in ambiguity and still stay open.

A leader once asked me, 'How do I give hope to my team when I don't feel any myself?'

'Don't give them hope,' I said. 'Show them humanity.'

He began speaking more honestly, acknowledging his own uncertainty, inviting co-creation. The result was not instant morale, but mutual respect. Hope grew out of honesty, rather than invented illusion. Hope thrives where truth is spoken. It withers under pretence.

SUPERVISION: WHERE HOPE LEARNS TO BREATHE

In supervision, we meet both our clients' despair and our own. It is here that our relationship with hope becomes most personal. I often invite practitioners to 'give their despair a chair.' Naming it, sitting it beside us, acknowledging its right to exist is a simple act that lets hope re-enter the room. Hope, like a shy animal, rarely appears when chased. It comes when we are still enough to notice it approaching.

Supervision restores the somatic ground of hope. It reminds us that even the most experienced coaches need to re-source- to reconnect with the breath, the body, and the wider field of meaning that holds our work.

THE FUTURE OF HOPE

If coaching began in the fluorescent-lit boardrooms of performance and productivity, perhaps its next evolution is into the softer light of presence and humanity. Hope, I suspect, will be our compass in that evolution, as a focused and intentional practice of embodied resilience and relational truth.

Hope, like a shy animal, rarely appears when chased. It comes when we are still enough to notice it approaching

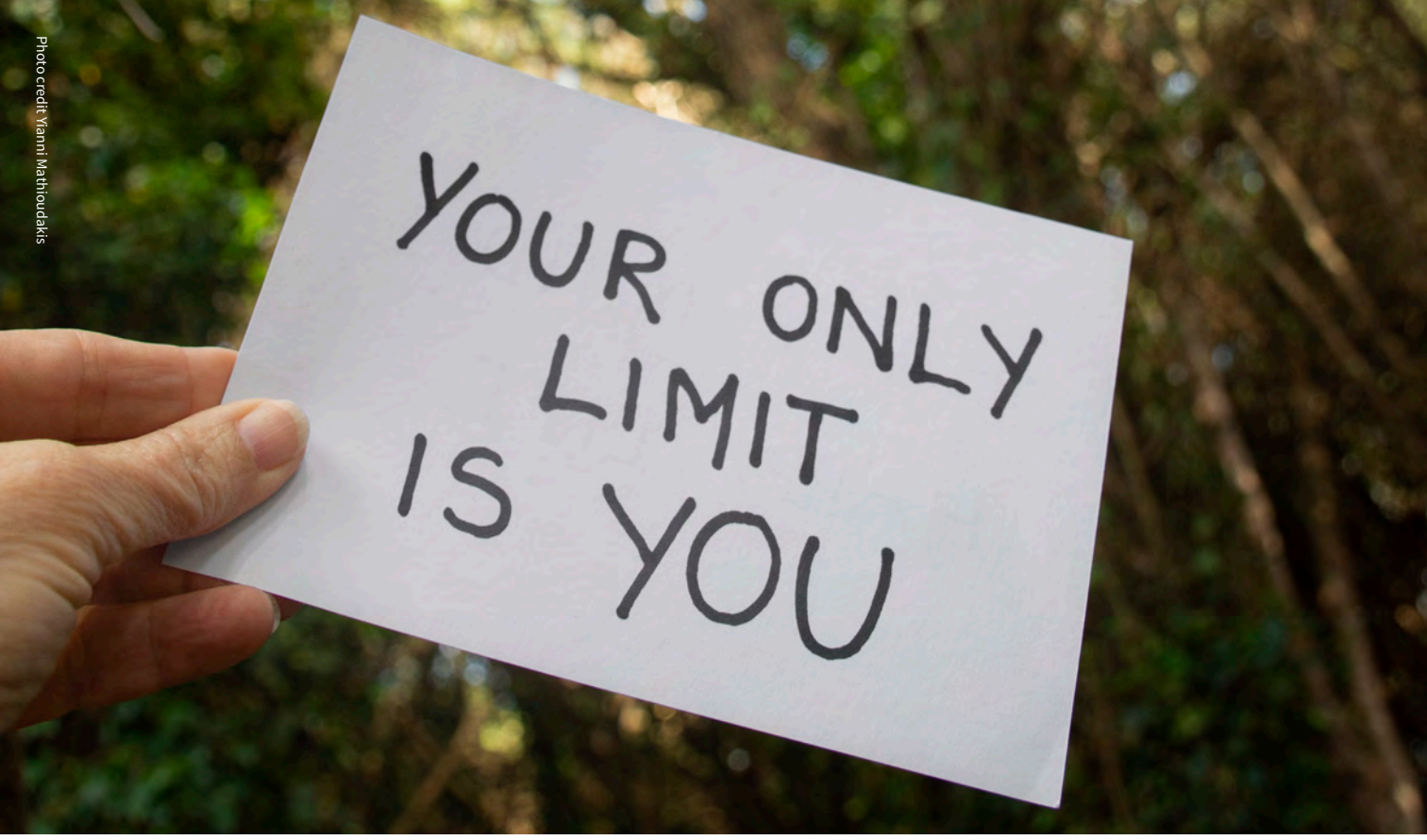
As I write this, I sit outside feeling cool air on my skin. The world is both burning and blooming. Hope doesn't wait for perfection before it visits. It simply asks us to stay present and available- to breathe, to act when we can, and to rest when we can't.

Our planet, our societies, our organisations- we all need a little hope right now. But not the brittle kind that demands constant progress. We need the tender yet unwavering hope that can hold paradox, that knows how to grieve and still get up in the morning. As coaches and leaders, we are not distributors of hope. We are its gardeners, preparing the soil through attention, compassion, embodiment, and truth. And when we forget, as we all do, may we laugh, breathe, and begin again. Because hope, mercifully, never runs out of patience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Goland, Ph.D., PCC, is a contemporary alchemist and facilitator of transformational awakening in coaching, organizational, educational, and individual contexts. His work bridges the Enneagram, somatic intelligence, Eco-Psychology, and purpose-driven leadership. Simon is based in Victoria, British Columbia, where he continues to explore the intersections of aliveness, tenderness, and awakening - and the mysterious ways hope keeps finding him, often in unexpected moments. You can find more about his personal and professional life at

https://www.SimonGoland.com



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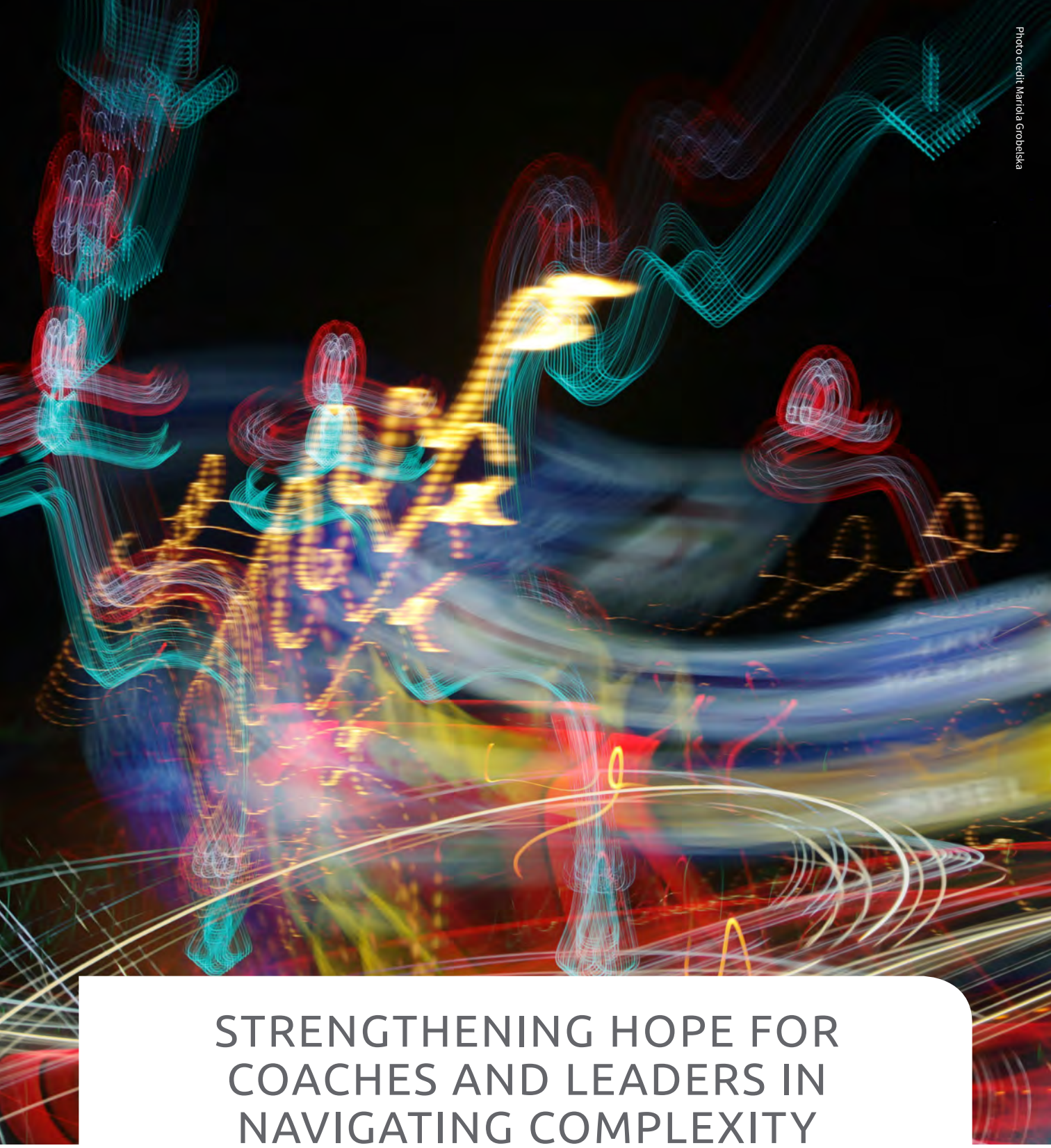

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STRENGTHENING HOPE FOR COACHES AND LEADERS IN NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY

Offering a wealth of related models and techniques, Johnny Hammond and Catherine Farlam Ashton delve into the crucial role coaches can play in cultivating a sense of hope and agency in leaders facing an increasingly BANI world.

In turbulent times, leadership requires more than strategy and expertise- it requires hope. Hope gives direction when the path is unclear and sustains momentum when logic alone cannot. Across sectors, leaders and coaches are recognising that cultivating hope is not a 'soft skill': it is a core leadership capability that enables learning, resilience and renewal in navigating complexity and uncertainty.

A recent Gallup global study found that the primary need of followers worldwide is hope.[1] People look to leaders who inspire belief in a better future and in their own ability to shape it. As Napoleon is attributed to have said: 'Leaders are dealers in hope.' Writing about hope is poignant for me (Johnny) thinking about my grandmother- named Hope- who lived through both World Wars and lit up every room with her positivity- a testament to the power of nominative determinism!

Cultivating hope is not a 'soft skill': it is a core leadership capability that enables learning, resilience and renewal in navigating complexity and uncertainty

The Institute for the Future describes our world today as BANI- Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear and Incomprehensible.[2] Unlike the earlier VUCA world of volatility and uncertainty, BANI points to systems that are fragile, unpredictable and overwhelming. In this environment, leaders must hold space for the paradox articulated by Admiral Stockdale and described by Jim Collins: to face brutal realities without losing faith in what is possible.[3]

This was brought into sharp relief by a fourteen-month group coaching experience with a group of Nurse Managers in a private hospital group in southern Africa during the initial waves of the global Covid pandemic. Representing eleven hospitals, each of whom experienced intense waves of the pandemic at different times, what unfolded was a powerful case study in how collective coaching can rekindle hope as a strategic, relational force for resilience and leadership.

SIGNS OF DESPAIR

When hope erodes, even the most competent leaders can feel stuck and helpless. Across organisations, we are seeing increased anxiety, crises of purpose and emotional depletion. Front line managers, in particular, report feeling stuck and hopeless, caught between relentless, often unrealistic expectations and systemic fatigue.[4]

Despair has many guises and can show up as:

- A sense of profound stuckness or paralysis in decision-making
- Low energy, disengagement and avoidance of accountability
- Overwhelm and pessimistic framing- continually expecting the worst
- Subtle self-sabotage, such as overwork or emotional withdrawal
- An entrenched but quiet belief that change is impossible

In coaching conversations, these behaviours can show up as repetitive narratives, heavy silence or resisting what is possible. Despair often reflects a breakdown of coherence, when leaders can no longer make sense of their experience or see a path forward.

When the Nurse Managers began their coaching journey in mid-2020, the atmosphere was one of exhaustion and fear. They were living through what Professor Salim Abdool Karim described as 'sailing the ship while building it'[5], a metaphor that encapsulated the adaptive and often improvisational strategies employed to navigate the evolving crisis. Covid-19 was new, medical guidance was changing daily, and the death toll was rising. At one of the earlier sessions, one of the Nurse Managers commented:

'I didn't go into nursing to see death on this scale- or to have to watch so many people die alone without their families.'

That moment was a stark glimpse of collective despair and moral pain beyond fatigue. These leaders were holding their patients and teams together through fear, grief and uncertainty, while carrying their own sense of fear and helplessness.

WORKING WITH POLARITIES AND BIASES

As coaches, we can support leaders to notice and balance the polarities of hope and despair, action and acceptance, optimism and realism. Cognitive biases, particularly negativity bias, can narrow perception and block possibility. Coaching invites a wider lens: What else might be true? What might still be possible?

In the coaching space, small shifts can begin. The Nurse Managers began to make sense of their perceived failures by gaining new meaning through re-framing their roles in the pandemic as beacons in the storm, both for their teams and their patients. For their patients, the heartbreak of witnessing people die alone was reframed as a call to provide presence, love and dignity, supporting each person to experience the best possible passage under the circumstances.

SUPPORTING ACTIVE HOPE

Hope itself is not always good. Passive hope assumes that things will improve on their own and can manifest as denial, magical thinking, avoidance or the inaction of waiting to be rescued. This form of hope can breed complacency and learned helplessness.

When clients lose sight of hope, coaches can hold hope on their behalf, not as rescuers, but as custodians of possibility

By contrast, active hope, as described by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone[6], is about choosing to hope and taking steps toward it, regardless of the certainty of the outcome. Active hope is not something we have; rather it is something we do. Coaches play a critical role in helping clients distinguish between wishful thinking and activating forward movement.

As coaches it is important to remember Carl Rogers'' core principle

that people are 'inherently creative, resourceful and whole' meaning they have the inner capacity, insight and potential to understand themselves, solve problems and propel their own growth.[7] When clients lose sight of hope, coaches can hold hope on their behalf, not as rescuers, but as custodians of possibility.

In the nursing coaching group, active hope emerged as the nurse leaders began to ask: Where do we have agency? How can we support one another? Their courage to act- to improvise, to debrief emotionally and share learnings across hospitals- became a powerful embodiment of active hope both for themselves and the wider systems of which they were part.

HOPE, COURAGE AND RESILIENCE

Hope, courage and resilience are neurologically intertwined. Emerging neuroscientific evidence shows that hope activates the prefrontal cortex, enabling planning, goal-setting and problem-solving.[8] Under chronic stress, leaders risk emotional depletion or amygdala hijack: reactive states of fight, flight, freeze or flop where judgement and planning are compromised.

Coaching supports self-regulation by anchoring clients in their purpose, vision and values. When coaches can help clients reframe challenges and imagine alternative futures, they stimulate neural pathways associated with what Carol Dweck calls a 'growth mindset' in which challenges are seen as opportunities to learn rather than threats to identity.[9] This intersection of hope and learning builds psychological flexibility as the foundation of resilience.

Periods of overwhelm or low hope can also be normalised, especially in transitions. The first two stages of group development as described by Bruce Tuckman[10] - the 'forming' and 'storming' phases- test alignment and resilience. Beginnings and disruptions, even positive ones, require rebalancing and the rewiring of old habits. Hope fuels trust and opens neural and emotional spaces to tolerate frustration and ambiguity long enough for the seeds of renewal to take root.

In the Nurse Managers' group, resilience did not mean bouncing back unchanged. It meant integrating pain into purpose and finding meaning in service, connection, learning and small wins. The forum created space for the Group Nursing Manager to inspire and support the Nurse Managers across the hospitals, both emotionally and technically. 'Hope,' one of them reflected, 'isn't about waiting for the light at the end of the tunnel. Knowing we're going through this together, and that we're supported and trusted, gives us hope that we'll overcome the daily challenges we face.'

The new world calls for adaptive learning rather than primarily relying on our current strengths. Hope today demands that leaders and coaches lean into discomfort and build capabilities to face the unknown. This requires coaches to balance compassion with challenge in supporting leaders to stretch beyond their comfort zones and learn and integrate new skills.

THE POWER OF LISTENING, WITNESSING AND HOLDING SPACE FOR DESPAIR

Hope is catalysed by listening, especially the two higher levels described by Otto Scharmer's Theory U: empathic and generative listening.[11] When coaches listen empathically and generatively, they help clients hear themselves to be able to unlock possibilities.

Holding space for despair requires courage, patience and care. The coach's role is not to rescue or try to fix but to acknowledge, hold and support exploration, reframing and rebuilding. Sometimes silence rather than strategy can be most healing in a session. At the same time, coaches must recognise when hopelessness signals psychological distress or a deeper potential problem and refer clients for specialised support. True hope coexists with realism and is not naïve.

Coaches must be especially alert to transference and countertransference when working with clients struggling with hope. Noticing these dynamics allows the coach to create, or seek, the appropriate level of support to stay in their role to be able to show up fully for the client.

Hope coaching also involves challenging patterns of victimhood. Stephen Karpman's Drama Triangle (Victim, Persecutor, Rescuer)[12] contrasts with David Emerald's Empowerment Triangle (Creator, Challenger, Coach).[13] Hope-based coaching supports clients to move from the position of victim to that of creative problem-solver. This signals a shift from 'Why is this happening to me? / Who will rescue me' to 'What can I make of this?'

The Nurse Managers made this shift collectively. Being able to witness and hold space for each other was also pivotal. Initially fragmented, the group evolved into a compassionate community of learning and practice. This created space for them to normalise their struggles, learn from each other and begin to co-create solutions rather than waiting for top-down answers.

HOPE THEORY IN PRACTICE

Rick Snyder's Hope Theory defines hope as a cognitive and emotional framework comprising three components: goals, pathways and agency.[14]

Research shows that people with higher hope scores are more likely to overcome setbacks and achieve meaningful outcomes.[15] Developing pathways thinking (finding multiple options) and agency thinking (believing one can act) directly enhances resilience and persistence.

As the pandemic progressed through the different waves (each bringing new presentations and challenges), the Nurse Managers increasingly took the lead in translating despair into direction. Many leaders also had to work hard at nurturing and restoring morale in their teams. As agency grew, so did their capacity to celebrate the positive. Patients who had been on ventilators for a long time and who survived were 'clapped out' of the hospital, with hospital staff forming a guard of honour to celebrate their recovery and return to life.

This is our shared calling: to create circles of hope as regenerative spaces that amplify collective strength and buffer against despair

Frameworks like Richard Boyatzis's Intentional Change Theory[16] and NLP's current/future state frameworks also provide structured ways to help clients clarify purpose, expand pathways, strengthen agency

and affirm small wins. Over time, agency and consistency build self-efficacy, the belief that one's actions matter and make a difference.

STRENGTHENING CIRCLES OF HOPE

Hope is relational. It flourishes in spaces of trust, empathy and shared vision. Leaders, coaches, supervisors and coaching clients ideally all work together to cultivate self-reinforcing circles of hope.

In the group of Nurse Managers, hope was restored not through external change but through connection embodied in acts of listening, reframing and courageous action. It enabled them to reframe what was possible, rediscover courage and translate the learning from listening to themselves, their leader and each other into disciplined and flexible action.

For leaders, coaches and supervisors alike, this is our shared calling: to create circles of hope as regenerative spaces that amplify collective strength and buffer against despair. Every coaching conversation, in its practice of re-storying hope, affirms an underlying belief that a better future is possible.

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Photo credit Susan Wilkinson

THE CAPE OF 'GOOD' HOPE

Hany Shoukry takes us on a voyage of adventure, through coaching for hope in storms, and for storms within hope.

In March 1488, the Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias reached a turning point in his long voyage around Africa, where he finally began sailing east rather than south. Near the meeting point of two oceans, the seas were ferocious, and Dias aptly named the headland the 'Cape of Storms.' Yet, as news of the voyage spread, the headland was renamed the 'Cape of Good Hope,' a symbol of new possibilities for Europe. But for all the opportunities it promised, the discovery of Good Hope also marked the beginning of centuries of exploitation across Africa and Asia.

Hope is an elusive charmer, a game changer, and the invisible energy that shapes both individual narratives and history's turning points. In coaching, hope might be the reason a client asks to be coached, and perhaps the most prized outcome they get out of being coached. But hope, in coaching, is rarely plain sailing; it is full of twists and dialectical relationships that some coaches will navigate better than others.

Hope is an elusive charmer, a game changer, and the invisible energy that shapes both individual narratives and history's turning points

The way I experience hope in coaching feels like standing where two oceans meet. From the North and West come currents of modern thought: belief in the human capacity to imagine a better future and in the power of individual agency. From the East and South flow older and deeper waters, where hope is communal, arising not from what is yet to come but from the meaning discovered in our shared struggle.

At their confluence, the waters turn and mix, revealing questions that lie at the heart of our profession: How can coaches help clients turn storms into hope? How do we rediscover hope within ourselves when we have lost it in the world? And is all hope, truly, 'good' hope?

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Nora was facing a career-defining decision. Recently appointed to lead her organisation's HR function, she had begun to suspect unethical practices on the commercial side. Should she stay, blow the whistle, or accept a timely offer from an NGO she once admired?

In coaching, she appeared paralysed: unable to choose, unwilling even to explore her options. Some thirty minutes down the spiral, she finally named what was really bringing her down. It had little to do with her career. She was angry about the world. She had joined her organisation, a nonprofit, believing in its values, only to uncover

corruption in its methods. And when she considered the NGO, she had just watched its helplessness in the face of a politicised humanitarian crisis- the very cause that had once inspired her. Looking across her whole industry, she felt she no longer belonged. For her, at that moment, the world simply made no sense.

Most of the stories that clients bring to coaching sound personal, yet their hope and despair are often rooted in the collective. We live with an implicit trust in a minimum level of fairness, kindness and reason. Each of us carries a small hope in humanity that anchors hope in our own lives. Take that away -through blunt injustice, unpunished cruelty, or the growing normalisation of public, power-protected contempt, anywhere in the world- and people begin to lose hope in the most immediate parts of their existence.

But the cycle works the other way too. When hope is rekindled in the collective soil, individuals often become more able- and more willing- to find it in their own lives. This is why art, cultural memes, and global moments can have a disproportionately large impact on people, even when nothing has changed in their immediate circumstances.

Ask: What are the sources- and the detractors- of hope in how you see the world right now?

Yet this is precisely where the collective lens can become problematic. The forces that shape our collective hope or despair often arise from structures: political, social, and organisational systems far beyond our reach. And regardless of whether these structures are good or bad, when life feels shaped by forces that we cannot influence, hope fades not because of how the world is, but because of the sense that it is all simply happening to us. This is where reclaiming agency becomes vital.

For Nora, hope needed to start with a realisation that she still had the capacity to act. In fact, all she truly had was her right to choose how to respond to the situation she found herself in. This hope- the hope of choice- is grounded in Viktor Frankl's notion of 'the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.'[1]

In Western philosophy, agency is primarily individual; it is exercised through self-determination, personal goals, and autonomous action. Coaching can leverage this world view as a fitting starting point. In the conversation between coach and client, the scope of hope is defined by how the client reclaims the right to interpret the world and to act upon their life.

Ask: What choices do you feel entitled to make?

But agency need not stop at the individual level. If the collective acts as the root of our experience, then individual action has a role in reshaping the collective and the structures that affect it. Many non-Western traditions, from the Ubuntu of Africa to the critical pedagogy of Latin America, point towards a relational and collective agency. There is compounded hope in such agency, and a closure of this dialectical cycle: structures shape collective hope, which in turn shapes individual hope, yet individual agency can act upon personal life and, collectively, upon the structures themselves. Coaching is at the heart of this cycle.

Ask: How do your choices give you more hope in the world?

OPTIMISM AND DEPTH

When Jason was made redundant, his supportive network of family and friends tried to lift him up. They connected him with job opportunities, invited him to sports dates and social gatherings, and consistently reassured him that the future would be good. While grateful, Jason felt unsettled, sensing a deep resistance to imagining - or working towards- a brighter future.

During coaching, Jason gradually identified what he really needed. Instead of hope that is conditional on pleasant activities and future opportunities, he needed to find a way to accept, and find beauty and light, in his current moment of darkness. In his words: 'I've spent a lifetime trying to be my best, and do my best, and I probably always will. But first, I need to feel that I am OK- even if I don't.' He was seeking freedom from the prison of striving disguised as hope.

It is hard to make a case against the positive effects of optimism. Research has consistently shown that an optimistic outlook can improve wellbeing, reduce anxiety, strengthen resilience, and increase the capacity to identify and pursue personal goals. Coaches often draw on concepts from positive psychology- particularly the works of Martin Seligman and Charles Snyder - helping clients frame setbacks as temporary, visualise positive futures, and generate pathways toward desired outcomes. There is little doubt that these interventions help countless people recover from adverse situations. And, from a collective standpoint, optimism is infectious. It lifts energy and opens possibilities.

Ask: If life felt more hopeful a year from now, what would you notice?

Yet for many people, the pursuit of happiness has become exhausting. Echoing Hartmut Rosa's notion of social acceleration[2], modern life places individuals under relentless pressure to keep moving, improving, and performing simply to maintain their status quo. In such a world, optimism, positive thinking and even hope become additional expectations that individuals must meet to feel worthy. The demand to speak and act consistently with optimism can, ironically, deepen despair by denying the legitimacy of pain, struggle, and uncertainty.

Optimism expands, depth grounds. Hope needs both

Instead, coaches can sometimes tap into deeper forms of hope that live outside the performance of positivity: a hope grounded in the beauty we find in struggle, in deeply feeling our suffering and that of others, in unconditional love, in holding to our values in the face of adversity, and in listening to our own silence. This deeper hope recognises that despair is not a failure to be fixed but a significant part of our experience- an opening through which life may speak and meaning may emerge.

Ask: As you sit with what is happening right now, what do you sense or notice?

Optimism and depth are not opposites. They would be only if reality were fixed. For Jason, finding beauty and unconditional self-acceptance at a moment when he feels defeated loosens the

resistance he feels to exploring new pathways for his life. At the same time, words and acts of optimism- even when naïve- can generate deep hope, not because of their practical consequences, but because they become part of his lived experience. Optimism expands, depth grounds. Hope needs both.

GOOD HOPE: SYNTHESIS

Hope becomes truly alive only when opposing currents meet, challenge one another, and give each other shape. It moves between the individual and the collective, and between optimism and depth. This movement is not a linear performance of improvement, but a form of praxis- a cyclical rhythm of reflection and action. In the praxis of hope, we recognise how the world shapes us, even as we shape it in return. We acknowledge the structures that hold us yet reclaim our agency to act within and against them. We receive optimism's light without being blinded by it. We recognise doubt not as a weakness to resolve, but as part of the human condition. And when the waters grow dark, we find a deeper hope- one that rises from being willing to stay with our struggle. In praxis, hope becomes a dynamic exchange rather than a relentless race.

In the praxis of hope, we recognise how the world shapes us, even as we shape it in return. We acknowledge the structures that hold us yet reclaim our agency to act within and against them

For coaches, praxis shapes how we listen, how we frame questions, and how we hold the complexity of a client's world. We attend to both the individual story and the collective forces around it. We help clients see where they are shaped by contexts they did not choose and then help them notice where they have agency. We let our optimism be available without making them feel obliged to mirror it. We create space for pain, confusion, and contradiction, and we support them in entering the storms rather than avoiding them when the waters feel stagnant. When they are ready, we help them imagine possibilities- and we invite action not as a measure of future success but as a way of cultivating a deep, grounded sense of hope in their capacity to act. Finally, we encourage clients to explore how their choices might contribute, however modestly, to shaping the world around them.

In this sense, Good Hope- like its namesake- is not just hope that the storm will pass, but the recognition that it is often the experience of the storm that reveals who we are and guides us toward a shared destination.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Hany Shoukry is a coach, author and researcher whose work explores how individuals reclaim hope, agency and meaning in the face of adversity. He is an Honorary Research Associate at Oxford Brookes University and creator of the Coaching for Emancipation (CFE) framework, examining personal transformation within social and organisational structures. He co-founded the Institute for Critical Coaching. Originally from Egypt, he now lives in the United Kingdom and is also a senior technology and transformation executive. Connect at **linkedin.com/in/hshoukry**

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July 2026 – Energy and Balance – Submission deadline 15th May 2026

How can coaching sustain our energy in the world, and sustain the world's energy for us? In an age of tilting horizons and shifting sands, what will help clients and organisations achieve greater balance – and what are the benefits of a life of balance? Where do our clients source their energy – whether for greater resilience, high performance, or a search for a higher calling? How is the discourse around energy and balance changing in coaching and supervision conversations?

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HOPE FLOURISHES IN LIFE'S CRACKS: TRANSPERSONAL COACHING, CRAXIAL MOMENTS AND HOPE

Sometimes we reach a turning-point, whether imposed or sought out, where we can choose to listen closely to what our soul is trying to tell us. In these moments, Hetty Einzig argues that hope plays a crucial role in strengthening our resolve.

There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.
-Leonard Cohen, Anthem, 1992

It is in moments that seem completely hopeless that hope shows its mettle. It is easy to be hopeful when the sun shines, the birds sing, flowers bloom and the world around us seems to be flourishing – we soak it up and our wellbeing expands. We feel that, on balance, there are reasons for hope.

But right now- not so much. And yet of course it is when things are especially gloomy or perilous or seem to be downright headed for catastrophe that we need hope most.

In 2022 I wrote a chapter for a book on holding hope in our fracturing world. I called it *Radical Hope: a dimension of the Soul Rooted*[1]. My point of departure was the book by American philosopher Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the face of Cultural Devastation*[2] in which he uses 'radical' in its sense of fundamental, disruptive change. My title also referenced a well-known quote by Czech dissident, activist and playwright, Vaclav Havel, who presided over a period of great turbulence, serving as the last President of communist Czechoslovakia and the first President of the newly formed democratic Czech Republic:

'The kind of hope that I often think about…I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us, or we don't. It is a dimension of the soul; it's not essentially dependent upon some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation… it is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.'[3]

In that chapter I sought to extend our use of the word 'radical' by reminding us of its etymological base in the Latin radice for root- and how hope is nurtured by our roots in the soil and our kinship with all that is alive. Here I want to return to the disruptive role of 'radical' and the potential for quiet revolutions, contained in the concept of Craxial Moments©. The fresh beginnings that emerge are full of energised hope.

CRAXIAL MOMENTS

Living in an age of constant change and uncertainty we increasingly find ourselves in situations in which our work and life are up for review. Simply doing nothing is no longer an option – choices are being called for. These are Craxial Moments and seminal situations: they sow the seeds of our future.

> ***All our lives contain moments or periods that are craxial – turning points that shape our future in subtle or dramatic ways***

We coined the neologism, Craxial Moments to describe both crucible moments- which confront us with a current crisis or the consequences of previous choices, forcing change- and axial moments, which are times when we make space to look ahead and make a conscious choice. Both are Craxial since both offer the opportunity to connect with what is deeper and more purposeful in our lives and work.

Crucible moments happen to us. We find ourselves in untenable, even painful circumstances when the present is not working or even breaking down.

- Do we change jobs or batten down the hatches and weather the storm?
- Does a personal crisis mean we can't continue working as we've been doing?

The metaphor of the alchemist's crucible, speaks to how these times can feel like everything is going wrong at once, as if a whole load of disparate elements are thrown together into the cauldron. The past suddenly catches up with us, or the present flips us a hard card- illness, redundancy, a breakup, failure or forced move. It can be confusing and overwhelming. A transformation needs to take place, but we need to look back before we begin looking forward: to step back, mourn the loss, reflect, deepen, reframe, and open ourselves to watch for what is emergent- for what emerges may be gold.

Axial moments are chosen. We might suddenly realise that our work pays the bills, but it doesn't give us scope to grow or even satisfy us any more.

- Do we aspire for more autonomy?
- Are there opportunities out there we don't know about?

In axial moments we are not reacting, we grasp an opportunity. A chance encounter or sometimes a confluence of events stimulate the desire for change. We are gifted- or actively seek- the psychological space to look ahead, make a course correction, evoke the new, make conscious choices to step into a new direction, re-identify with purpose, and take action.

All our lives contain moments or periods that are craxial- turning points that shape our future in subtle or dramatic ways. In transpersonal coaching we pay special attention to these times of breaking down and breaking open, because, as the incomparable Leonard Cohen said, the cracks are how the light gets in.

THE SOUL COMES CALLING

One way to consider craxial moments is to see them as signs of spiritual emergency. In the face of the medicalisation of modern distress and our tendency to pathologise any deviation from the norm, transpersonal psychology invites us instead to consider the deeper 'why'. Without in any way romanticising or skating over the reality of pain or grief, when the time is right, we invite our clients to view their boredom, discomfort, depression or even despair as possible portals. Can we wonder together what might be seeking to awaken within us, what is being asked of us, what might be emerging – pushing up through the cracks that are widening in the veneer of our everyday lives?

Psychosynthesis, the transpersonal psychology, founded by Roberto Assagioli, which is the foundation of my practice, proposes a model of the psyche [see Fig 1, top of next page] where our 'I', the core of our being, is conceived as a centre of pure Awareness and Will (quite different to Freud's 'ego'). Around this core is a constellation of Sub-personalities (or mini-selves, or parts) which take on roles to act in the world. A key feature of this model is that our 'I' has a hotline to our Higher Self, which sits on the porous border between the individual and the universal, looking inwards and outwards: beyond the personal. The dotted line represents this direct channel of communication with our I.

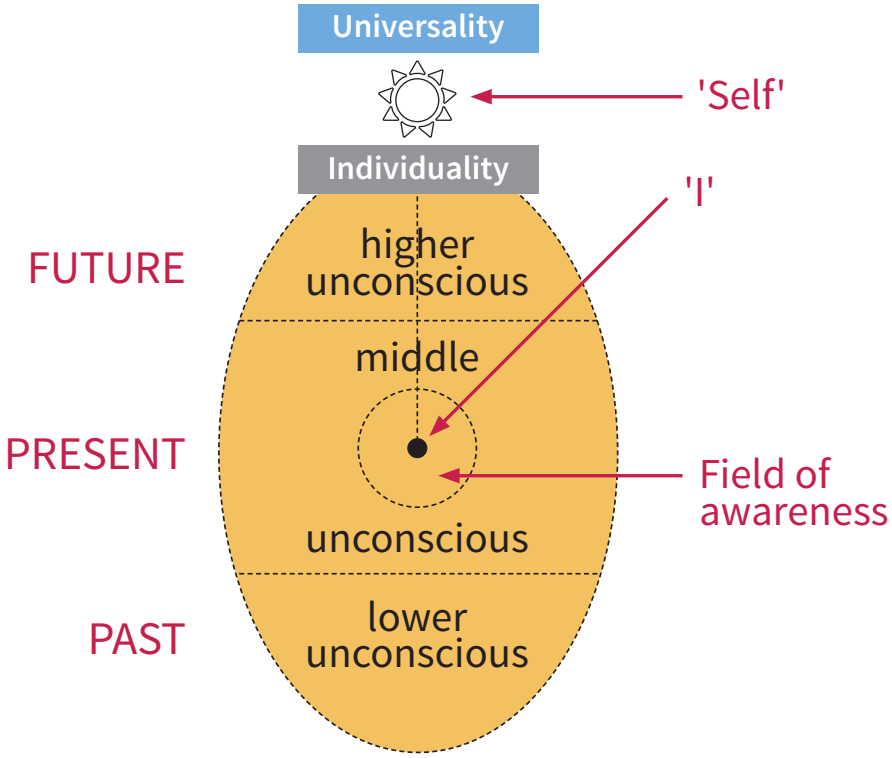

Figure 1 - the psychosynthesis model of the psyche

Like Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli thought Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was missing something critical by dismissing the spiritual, and in wishing to reclaim this essential spirituality from its incarceration within the rigid structures of the Abrahamic religions, he devised a secular vocabulary for key concepts. The Higher Self is his term for soul – or nafs, atman, nefesh, neshamah, anatta (the Buddhist no-soul) in other spiritual traditions.

The Self is always there, whispering to us, reminding us of the wiser action to take, the kinder gesture, the more enriching path to creativity and contribution – if we are willing to listen and hear

Soul comes from the old English sawol: the spiritual and emotional part of a person, that which animates existence. Seen as the core of life, in ancient German it is connected with the sea (saiwaz), as the resting place of the soul before birth and after death. Soul links with spirit as breath and energy and allies with hope, which breathes life and energy into the future with trust, confidence and desire. In ancient biblical texts hope is seen as a virtue and allied to leadership[4]. All cultures have a place and word for that which is beyond the material and beyond the personal (trans-personal); a word that speaks to the numinous, our capacity for awe, the spark that lifts our nose from the grindstone, that reminds us of beauty and mystery, and of our interdependence with life around us, which thus infuses the life within us.

Enrique Salmon, an academic from the Raràmuri people in the Sierra Madre, Mexico introduces us to the word, iwìgara[5], a concept that expands our Western idea of soul. Iwìgara includes origins, history and spiritual guidance, and an embodied richness where language, identity, spirit and actions are enmeshed in a continuous co-creative flow. He coined the term Kincentric Ecology as a reminder that soul is embedded in all of life:

'Indigenous people view both themselves and nature as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins… an awareness that life … is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin.'[6]

In my many decades of coaching and before that as a psychotherapist what I have observed is that the Self is always there, whispering to us, reminding us of the wiser action to take, the kinder gesture, the more enriching path to creativity and contribution – if we are willing to listen and hear. Most of the time we don't listen of course – that quiet voice gets drowned out by the cacophony of everyday life. If ignored, however, the Self doesn't just slip away quietly. It usually speaks louder, or knocks harder on the door.

This insistent Self prompts axial moments: we just know we have to choose something different. I've had several of these in my life: turning away from the art world frontline to study and train as a psychotherapist and later, leaving the high-profile world of policy as director of a think-do-tank to go into coaching; or the time when, despite uncertainties and lack of funds, I decided to go to California to train with The Pachamama Alliance, deepening my understanding of ecosystemic and indigenous practice. I threw my hat over the wall, as a colleague put it, and then I had to figure out how to get over the wall! It was a choiceless choice.

These are axial moments: choices to follow deeper, richer, different pathways, characterised by excitement and the 'certainty that something makes sense'. Fuelled by the kind of hope that gathers strength from committing to action, 'regardless of how it turns out' as Havel said.

THE CRUCIBLE OF LIFE

What about crucible moments? These by contrast, we often experience as crisis.

The Self or soul is not a passive thing. It, she, is noisy, awkward and rebellious! If we persist in ignoring her knocks on the door, refusing to listen to her wisdom, she may bang down the door altogether and manifest as a full-blown Existential Crisis, or, similar but different, what we call the Crisis of Duality.

The Existential Crisis (TEC) may be triggered by external circumstances, or by illness, severe or chronic. I had a repeated chronic illness through my twenties that forced a complete reassessment of my life as I was living it. As often as not we could be struck by a sudden or creeping sense of meaninglessness. TEC is characterised by such questions as: 'Is this it? Why am I doing this? What is all this about? What is the meaning of my work and life?'

Idealists and visionaries in all walks of life are especially prone to the *Crisis of Duality (CoD)*: when it becomes too hard to hold the chasm between our vision of what the world could be – a flourishing, caring, beautiful plenum- and our realisation of the grubby realities of ignorance, greed and cruelty. Something cracks. Depression or despair grabs our heart and soul. The questions asked are along the lines of: 'What's the point? Are all my efforts useless? Will anything ever change?'

In my experience this is the stuff of burnout. After ten years of immersing myself in the passionate intensity of environmental awareness-raising alongside my mainstream work in corporates, I hit a wall: a deep exhaustion laced with despair and cynicism, imparting a bitter taste in sinews and soul. While people continued to be inspired by the programmes we delivered I felt that nothing had changed – the world continued to spiral from bad to worse.

It took me many years – of distancing and mourning – to see the opportunity contained within my withdrawal from my work with The Pachamama Alliance, and thus to find the energy to reinvest my active hope in the roots of my practice: in my transpersonal coaching work. To do this I needed to reclaim the transpersonal from the worlds of psychotherapy and individual-centred coaching. This involved a re-cognition that while classified within the personal psychotherapeutic canon, the transpersonal ontology is at its heart an ecosystemic, relational, interdependent model for self-in-the-world.

Looking back, I can see what a radical re-framing of my work this was. The transforming of a crucible moment to axial opportunity is all about tapping into the deeper well of purpose and meaning. My craxial moment followed a classic transpersonal course: I moved over time from giving up to letting go, from disengaging to re-engagement; it was a journey from identifying as a mainstream coach, to dis-identification- to allow space for emergence- and eventually re-identifying with thebroader, deeper wisdom of the Self and my sense of purpose. I was able to re-conceive and repurpose my coaching, teaching and programmes as a contribution to the growing swell of practice-based regenerative initiatives now flowering around the world.

WORKING CREATIVELY WITH CRISIS – INVESTING IN HOPE

The idea that crises are both moments of danger and opportunity is not new.

However, in the thick of our saturated and noisy lives – a world of polycrises and permacrisis- it can feel impossible to step back enough to consider the opportunities.

At the start of a series of group supervisions for hospital staff I asked what their hopes were for the sessions. One doctor took a deep breath and said quietly but firmly, 'I want a space to talk about failure. As a doctor you are expected to have an answer to everything- in a society that doesn't brook failure. I want for us to be able to show fear rather than hiding it.'

Failure and crisis are a normal part of life, rather than due to personal lack or limitation. We know this. Yet we react as if we didn't. Pain is inevitable, but shame, depression and anxiety need not be. Learning how to face the failures and crises of everyday life with courage and compassion, rather than shame and suppression, is a key skill we could usefully develop- it would serve us well in facing the greater pain and the greater shame of our failure to care for our Earth.

One of the tenets of transpersonal psychology is the idea that we can work creatively with crises, challenges and loss- not only support people through them with empathy and compassion. We work very deliberately with failure and crisis as opportunities for creative breakthrough. Far from being signs of our inadequacy, these are a natural part of life and contribute crucially to our development. There is no breakthrough without breakdown.

If we give in to our aversion to pain or our urge to bury our humiliation by turning to any of the countless numbing distractions our culture presses upon us, or if we follow the typical advice to brush ourselves down and move swiftly on, we will miss the precious opportunity not just to learn something but to discover our deep reserves of courage, wisdom and hope.

'Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is… an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.' [7]

And if we invest hope in action, allowing the light in through the cracks, then success might just surprise us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hetty brings 25 years of psychology and executive coaching experience to global leadership development. The best selling author, Hetty's career has spanned the arts, journalism, media, health and policy development in the private, public and voluntary sectors. She designed and delivers leader-coach and global culture change programmes. Key focuses are women's leadership, Transpersonal Coaching and regenerative approaches for contribution. She works ecosystemically and holistically founded on transpersonal psychology and informed by psychoanalysis and embodiment approaches.

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CULTIVATING HOPE IN HUMAN NATURE

Living in these uncertain times, with so much conflict in the world, hope feels like an essential, yet often fragile element. Margaret Walsh argues that, as coaches, this is the context for the work we do, and our clients come to us often sensing this fragility.

Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.
-William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

CREATING HOPE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Climate change, political polarisation, risks in the AI revolution, and social fragmentation are a few examples of the backdrop which shapes a sense of collective despair. Martin Seligman[1] acknowledges that anyone can become stuck in a bad situation. As a result, they may become tired of maintaining hope and believe that only something miraculous can help them transform their lives and create a flourishing future. When one despairs about the future, one risks apathy and inaction. As coaching professionals, our work is grounded in nurturing possibility. Thinking through the complexity of problems in a psychologically safe environment creates the ability to understand the impact of external events and how these affect the client's inner world and everyday existence.

Within coaching, hope serves as both a mindset and a process, a bridge between the present and a desired future

Hope enables human beings to act with purpose, despite uncertainty. It offers what existential philosopher Gabriel Marcel[2] called a 'mystery of participation': a stance of trust that meaning and renewal remain possible, even when outcomes are unclear. Within coaching, hope serves as both a mindset and a process, a bridge between the present and a desired future.

COACHING AS AN ACT OF HOPE

Psychological research offers a clear framework for understanding hope as an active, goal-oriented process. Charles Snyder's Hope Theory[3] conceptualises hope as the interaction between two core elements:

1. **Goals**- helping a client to determine what they want to achieve and to be specific and measurable, with a clear deadline. Writing goals down creates a sense of commitment and focus. Exploring how the client feels about the goals is a key step in aligning to the client's values and is meaningful.
2. **Pathways**- identifies the routes and strategies to achieve the goal(s). Having a variety of pathways and options creates more possibilities for successful outcomes. This might involve determining the sequence of steps or pathways that need to be explored. Asking questions like: 'Is there a different way of looking at this?' opens possibilities which promote flexibility and resilience when also developing contingency plans.

For coaches, this model provides practical insight. When a client feels stuck or demotivated, coaching requires attentive listening to increase the client's self-awareness to re-establish a sense of agency to build energy to move forward. Through sensitive rapport-building and skilful questioning, issues can be carefully examined and alternative pathways identified. Paying attention to the client and engendering trust that they can continue to flourish, facilitates a more resourceful way of moving forward. Facilitating the principles of solution-focused and positive psychology coaching, emphasis is placed on strengths, resources, and self-efficacy[4]. The presence of the coach and the act of listening with care by sensitively tuning into the intricate details of what is said, and holding space for reflection, amplifies hope. The coaching process sifts through thoughts and feelings to arrive at what really matters, the values and essence of the client.

The presence of the coach and the act of listening with care by sensitively tuning into the intricate details of what is said, and holding space for reflection, amplifies hope

However, hope is not purely cognitive. Kaye Herth[5] describes it as 'multidimensional, encompassing emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions'. Hope connects individuals not only to their own goals, but also to others and to a larger sense of meaning. In supervision, this interrelated nature of hope becomes especially important. Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet[6] describe supervision as a 'living system' that supports reflection, learning and renewal.

LESSONS FROM THE NATURAL WORLD

When we look at the natural world, we find that hope is embedded in life's very design. Ecosystems continually demonstrate the principles of resilience, adaptation, and regeneration. In nature, decay and growth are intertwined. Forest fires, while destructive, also release seeds that can only germinate through heat. Dead leaves decompose into nutrients that feed new growth. The forest's apparent endings are, in fact, beginnings. This cyclical process reflects the essence of hope: a capacity to hold loss and possibility together.

For coaches, this ecological metaphor is informative. Transformation often requires a process of breaking down of old narratives, habits, or identities to create fertile ground for new meaning.

COACHES AS GARDENERS OF HOPE

Only when translated into action does hope become meaningful. Just as ecosystems thrive through feedback and adaptation, human systems require practices that sustain renewal. For coaches, this might mean embedding reflective cycles into their own coaching practice that allows mirroring of the rhythms of nature.

Cultivating hope requires attention, acceptance, action, and alignment. Through these activities, coaches act as gardeners of hope, advocates for psychological environments in which others can renew and thrive. Looking after a garden is an ongoing process of getting to know what works and what does not. Coaching encourages clients to slow down and ponder the unhelpful patterns in their thinking that function as obstacles to their goals and aspirations. If clients do not reflect on the thoughts and feelings that limit them, then there is an increased risk of them being repeated. Nature shows us the importance of continually adapting to the world we are in rather than demanding the world to be a certain way.

> ***Coaches act as gardeners of hope, advocates for psychological environments in which others can renew and thrive***

Encouraging our clients to spend time in nature, or coaching in nature, offers opportunities to slow down and notice more. Staying connected to cyclical changing seasons reminds us that change happens beyond our control and that growth takes time. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan[7] suggest that natural environments provide 'soft fascination', a gentle form of attention that helps the mind recover from fatigue. It is hard to feel hopeful when we are exhausted. 'Attention restoration' eases feelings of overwhelm, provides perspective and builds hope for the future.

As coaches, it is important that we also connect to the natural world to sustain our own practice. Approaching the natural world with curiosity and reverence can help to restore a sense of connection, meaning and perspective. These are some of the key elements of hope and resilience that were identified by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams[8] as 'foundations to human flourishing'.

HOPE AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Hope, viewed through psychological and ecological lenses, is not static but a living process. It ebbs and flows, adapting to context and season. To nurture hope in coaching is to participate consciously in this cycle of renewal. As practitioners, we can draw inspiration from nature's resilience: from seeds that lie dormant before germinating, from rivers that find new paths when blocked, from ecosystems that regenerate after disturbance. Change happens all the time and, even when faced with difficulties, nature can renew and flourish.

In the end, hope is not something we give to others, it is something we nurture together. Like nature, it reminds us that renewal and regeneration is always possible, even after the bleakest winter. Despair, like the season of winter, has its place: it invites rest, reflection, and the composting of old beliefs to prepare us for new beginnings. Winter reminds us that we cannot always see our future growth and that there is often work beneath the surface that nourishes roots in nature and, in our client's work, builds strong self-esteem and confidence.

> ***Hope is not something we give to others, it is something we nurture together***

Holding hope helps coaching clients to reframe perspectives from their own personal history to invest in growth, purpose and meaning for the future. It is interesting to reflect on the acronym used by John Whitmore[9] who developed the most popular of all coaching models, the GROW model. It signals the relevance of words from nature in our coaching work, and this memorable acronym also acts as an instruction from nature!

When we help clients to sow the seed of an idea, we plant a narrative of future possibilities. It is an act of hope. Sue Stuart-Smith[10] captures hope by acknowledging not all the seeds we sow will germinate, but there is a sense of security that knows you have seeds in the ground.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Walsh is a psychotherapist, coach and supervisor. With a background and human resource resources, Margaret balances pragmatism with humanity in her work with clients. She was particularly interested in creating space within her work for clients to deepen their self-awareness and make ethical choices to maximise their potential.

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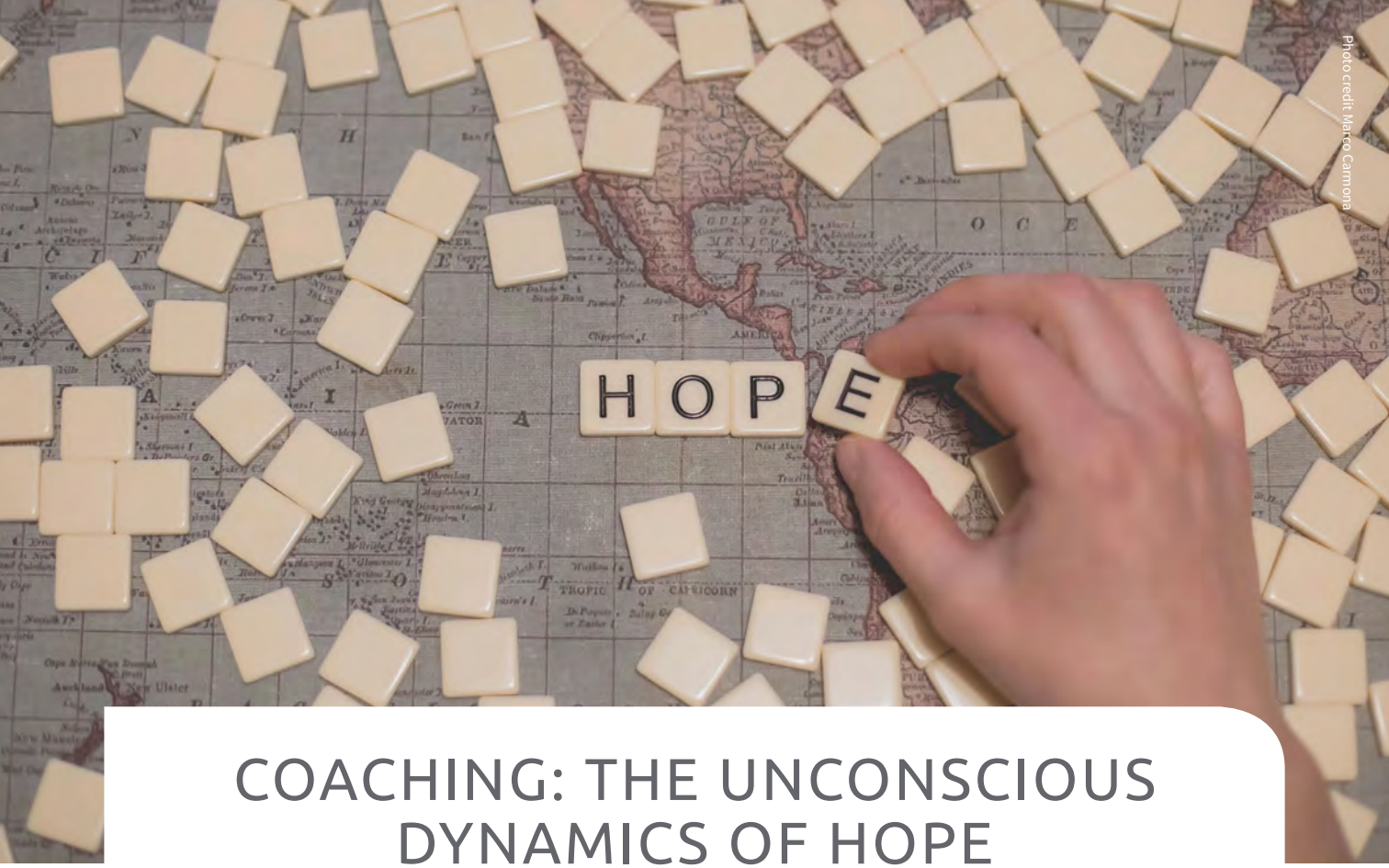


Photo credit Marco Carmona

COACHING: THE UNCONSCIOUS DYNAMICS OF HOPE

Simon Western explores the relationship between hope and coaching. Drawing on personal experience, critical coaching theory and psychoanalytic insights, he argues these enable us to 'look awry'[1] at the underlying patterns shaping coaching practice.

1. HOPE IS FOUNDATIONAL

Coaching is founded and underpinned by the idea of hope. Why would any client engage in coaching without hoping it might help them in some way?

Across coaching websites, training programmes and institutional literature, hope sits at the core of the coaching offer. Coaching promotes individual agency, positive change and, often, the promise of transformation. Professional coaching emphasises growth mindsets, future-focused goals, and improved performance. It sells itself through the foundational belief in a better future.

This ideology is strongly aligned with neo-liberal narratives of personal responsibility and self-improvement, an assumption that the individual can change themselves regardless of wider social or contextual constraints. This is the first danger flag. Hope in coaching can overlook, diminish and even ignore Sigmund Freud's reality principle[2], marginalising the limitations and challenges that social and contextual issues impact on individuals.

Without hope, the coaching industry as we know it would not exist. Yet hope manifests in different ways: sometimes helpfully, sometimes dysfunctionally.

The coaching pair and unconscious hope

The coaching methodology begins with the coaching pair: the client and the coach. This coaching method is an arrangement that inherits much from earlier helping traditions, including therapy, counselling, friendship and spiritual directioni. Wilfred Bion's psychoanalytic theories on group dynamics shed light on the unconscious forces at play here, particularly *Basic Assumption Pairing (BaP)*[3].

Bion identified three unconscious states that groups may adopt:

- *Basic Assumption Dependency (BaD)* - reliance on a leader who will take care of them.
- *Basic Assumption Fight/Flight (BaF)* - assumption of threat, mobilising to attack or escape.
- *Basic Assumption Pairing (BaP)* - unconscious hope that a pair will produce a saviour who will solve the group's problems.

In group situations the unconscious pairing of two people signifies hope: a hope that a new idea will be born, or a solution will be found. Bion also noted that pairing evokes a symbolic unconscious sexual fantasy, a symbolic belief that the union of two people must produce something generative. As a couple gives birth to a new baby, so a couple can

give birth to a new idea, or new beginning. This unconscious dynamic appears also in the coaching pair. Crucially, 'The Messianic hope must never be fulfilled. Only by remaining a hope does hope persist.'[4]

In the Basic assumption state, hope acts as a placeholder, known in Lacanian psychoanalysis as an Objet petit a. This is a way of avoiding the anxiety of doing the real work required; it is a displacement. The coaching pair may spend hours talking hopefully about a bright future, without addressing, underlying challenges or unspoken limitations. Yet these unconscious states can also be transformed into productive stances. The hope that underpins BaP, when used in a mature way, provides an energising foundation for developmental relationships, supporting clients to endure difficulty, to be resilient and for the coach and client to work together as a hopeful pair through the challenges faced.

Applying BaP hope in coaching

When coach and client meet, BaP may activate an unconscious expectation that 'something new will emerge from this partnership that will transform me.' This hope can be constructive, energising the client and generating curiosity, motivation and perseverance. In its sophisticated, mature form, BaP helps the pair hold aspiration, maintain forward movement and helps the client develop resilience when things get tough.

The risk: displacing responsibility

At a more primitive unconscious level, the client may idealise the coach as the one who holds the answers, believing that this hopeful pairing will be the answer to all their troubles. Both coach and client may collude in imagining that the breakthrough lies somewhere in an imaginary future, thereby postponing real work that needs to be done today. This is precisely the defensive function Bion warns against. Hope in this case stands in the way of doing the work necessary that can deliver positive change for the client.

Transforming BaP hope

The aim is not to eliminate BaP, but to transcend the fantasy of hope for hope's sake. The coach's task is to mobilise the energy from BaP to enable co-creation, whereby hope is harnessed to drive change. A skilful coach:

- harnesses hope as motivation
- counters idealisation by clarifying roles
- grounds the work in present-day reality
- uses the relational bond as a container for growth
- names the difficult dynamics when useful

In this way, the hope placed in the coaching pair becomes fuel for work, not a substitute for it.

2. TWO DISCOURSES OF HOPE

In my book Coaching and Mentoring: A Critical Text, I identify how therapeutic culture became pervasive in the West. Therapy went beyond clinical practice and entered into wider society. Therapy culture was found in talk shows, self-help books, the proliferation of counselling and it entered everyday vocabulary. It took two forms, the Wounded-Self and the Celebrated-Self, both of which became the core unconscious discourses that underpinned coach training and coaching practice [see illustration 1].

Each discourse frames the coaching work differently and mobilises a different form of hope.

Illustration 1[5] - (Western 2026 forthcoming)
Entanglements, Weaving our Futures Karnac publications

The Wounded-Self

This discourse assumes we are all wounded through our life experiences, and in need of emotional or psychological repair. The professional helper becomes the healer; the client becomes the injured person/victim seeking reparation. Hope in the wounded-self frame, is the hope of salvation from suffering, and healing to overcome damage and deficit in order to become whole again. This aligns with the Christian cultural narrative of Adam and Eve leaving their utopian garden of Eden, and being sinners, suffering in the world until salvation takes place.

The Celebrated-Self

Emerging from the human potential movement, this discourse assumes unlimited personal potential. The professional helper's role is to unleash the client's hidden potential. The celebrated-self offers a hopeful optimisation of the self, the potential to grow and to improve our happiness and wellbeing. Eva Moscowitz claimed that therapy was a new religion and cited that in the 1990s Americans spent $69 billion a year managing their feelings and attending to their emotional health. To celebrate the self was the new imperative. As Moskowitz notes, 'therapy took on quasi-religious dimensions, with emotional optimisation becoming a moral expectation.'[6]

The table below sets out the roles and ethos of each when applied to coaching.

Wounded-Self Coaching	**Hope: Salvation from suffering** Hope for reparation, healing, overcoming pain, challenges and deficit. **Ethos** Caring, empathetic, pathologising **Coach:** 'Salvationist Healer' **Client:** 'Suffering victim'
Celebrated-Self Coaching	**Hope: Abundance for growth** Hope to achieve any dream, to overcome all difficulties, to discover our pure untainted self. **Ethos:** Individualistic grandiosity **Coach:** Hopeful guru, positivity influencer **Client:** Unfulfilled potential

Coaching and the two selves

Workplace coaching differentiated itself from therapy by re-framing the helping relationship. In competitive organisations, the explicit therapy narrative of the 'wounded' client in need of help was unacceptable. Successful leaders couldn't admit weakness, but at the same time the workplace was becoming much harder to navigate. Therapeutic culture had arrived, employees required more emotional and psychological care, the workplace itself became more complex. Leaders urgently needed a Psy professional to help them[7]. Coaching found a way to reframe its identity from being a Wounded-Self profession working with poor performing employees to adopting the Celebrated-Self discourse, framing the client as high-performing and the coach as a personal and performance growth expert.

Coaching was the new Psy expert of the workplace[8], it transformed from a remedial intervention to an executive development tool for successful leaders, and it flourished as a new profession much in demand. Life coaching likewise embraced the Celebrated-Self narrative, offering unlimited hope to all.

Coaching found a way to reframe its identity from being a Wounded-Self profession working with poor performing employees to adopting the Celebrated-Self discourse, framing the client as high-performing and the coach as a personal and performance growth expert

While coaching overtly embraced the Celebrated-Self, the long reach of therapy culture also meant that the Wounded-Self emerged as part of coaching practice. Many coaching theories mirrored therapy theories, such as Rogerian counselling, psychodynamic approaches, NLP, cognitive behavioural and solution-focused, and psychologists zoomed in on this new lucrative domain. These imports that highly influenced coaching development brought with them more of the Wounded-Self discourse.

Coaching today is a hybrid of both discourses, and each carries pit falls:

- **Celebrated-Self Coaching**
  - o may refuse 'problem-talk'
  - o may collude with narcissistic tendencies
  - o may detach hope from reality
  - o can promote grandiosity over grounded change
  - o separates individuals from social context
- **Wounded-Self Coaching**
  - o may become trapped in deficit thinking
  - o risks pathologising the client
  - o may unconsciously require the client to remain 'wounded' to justify the coach's healing-salvationist role

Both also have their strengths: having the skills and ability to coach people in working through emotional and psychological challenges and life transitions is fundamental to coaching. Identifying strengths in clients as well as hurt, seeing resilience alongside suffering, and supporting clients to find their way to a better future and even to acknowledge what is good in their present lives is also part of a coach's work.

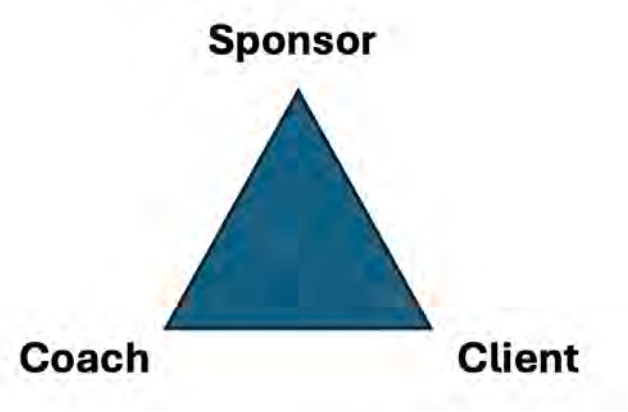
When polarised, both approaches mobilise hope in ways that serve the coach's desires and needs, rather than the client's. The Wounded-Self supporting the coach's desire to be a saviour; the Celebrated-Self, supporting the coach's desire to be a hopeful guru.

These discourses shape practice unconsciously unless the coach takes a critical stance, and most don't. Coaches often become defensive against recognising their influence on clients and like to idealise their practice as being neutral. Yet all coaching is infused with social and cultural norms such as therapy culture and the neo-liberal economics/politics that surround them. In supervision, these influence and patterns need to be surfaced and worked through. Sadly however, coaching supervisors alongside coach trainers often lack the critical awareness of these unconscious dynamics to do this work.

Best practice integrates both of these discourses, balancing hope for healing and reparation, with hope for resilience and growth, while remaining grounded in the reality principle. In the Eco-Leadership Institute, we train coaches on our Diploma in Leadership Coaching to reflect on the Wounded and Celebrated Self, and to be aware of how they, and their clients, might unconsciously slide into these discourses and unintentionally mobilise false hopes, supporting the coach's desire to be a saviour-healer or a hopeful guru.

3. WHO IS HOPING FOR WHAT? CLIENT, COACH, SPONSOR

In workplace coaching, hope is a dynamic force, and it is distributed across the three actors in the coaching triangle.



Each actor holds conscious and unconscious hopes, which may or may not align.

HOPE	Sponsor	Coach	Client
Overall Hope	Support team purpose/goals	To be impactful	Solve my problems
Material Hope	To improve client's role performance	Hope for more or higher-paid work	Enhance my career
Personal Hope	Make my life easier	To be successful and seen as 'a coaching expert'	To feel valued and to become happier/ more content

The three different hopeful perspectives may be aligned or in tension. The desire/hope of the coach is often repressed, as the coach is supposed to work only for their client's hopes. Yet as Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches us, the desire/hope of the therapist is of paramount importance and shapes the outcome of the psychoanalytic sessions. The sponsor's hope too influences the sessions, as both the client and coach want to gain recognition from the sponsor.

Hopeful tensions

The client's hope is that they will be valued, which means their hope is to gain positive recognition by the 'other'; in this case the coach and sponsor. The coach's hope for success depends on them being seen as an expert (by the client and the sponsor). This means the client and the coach are both hoping for recognition from the 'other'. The sponsor's investment, financial and emotional, is placed in the hope brought about by the BaP pairing of coach and client. The sponsor places their hope in the pair, believing it will give birth to something new, that will solve problems, make their life easier and potentially produce good things.

Two dangers arise here. Firstly, of a collusion between the coach and client, who both are investing their hope in being recognised and valued by each other. This can undermine a coach working at the edge: they may form a collusive, cosy pairing, holding back from striving for a deep and real encounter that leads to growth and change. The second danger is that the triad are all invested in unconsciously performing 'success' to each other, all recognising each other's value to fulfil their collective hope. To dash the hope is in nobody's interest.

Hope's power and pitfalls

Hope is foundational in coaching. It underpins coaching's future-focused promise of transformation, and hope is unconsciously mobilised through the BaP coaching pair. Yet hope can be problematic, especially when removed from the 'reality principle'.

> *Hope is foundational, it is both necessary and it has a shadow*

When hope becomes the substitute for real work; when the coach is idealised in a fantasy role of saviour, and when coaching becomes a performance of success in order to keep all parties hopeful and happy, then hope becomes a destructive force undermining developmental practice.

Similarly, when coaches unconsciously inhabit either the Wounded-Self or Celebrated-Self in a polemic way and without insight, then hope becomes distorted. In the Wounded-Self mode, hope fuels a saviour–victim dynamic; in the Celebrated-Self mode, hope fuels the 'happiness imperative' creating unrealistic pressures toward endless optimisation, which can lead to the very opposite, a feeling of never being enough.

Hope is foundational, it is both necessary and it has a shadow. It can obscure loss, protect against facing reality, focus on future fantasy and pull the work away from the present moment. Coaching at its best recognises the conscious and the unconscious dynamics of hope. Hope then can be used as a catalyst for grounded change rather than a flight from the developmental work that coaching promises.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Simon Western is a leading thinker, author and practitioner in coaching and leadership, internationally known for his books and teaching, he works with leading companies across the globe. He has directed Masters programs at Lancaster University Management School and Tavistock Clinic, served as president of ISPSO. He is CEO of the Eco-Leadership Institute that supports leaders to act in 'good faith' to help build the 'good society' and offers the Diploma in Leadership Coaching. Simon is host of the popular podcast Edgy Ideas.

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October 2026 – The Art of Reflection - Submission deadline 15th August 2026

Are we in danger of neglecting reflection in favour of pace? How does coaching enable deeper and generative reflection in clients, in teams and in organisations? What of reflective practice – how could we embrace technological advances such that we enhance, rather than dismiss, the power of reflection? In the wider arc of reflection – how do nostalgia and day-dreaming play their part? How might the art of reflection hold hope for the world's future?

Photo credit Marco Carmona

THE ROLE OF HOPE: EVERYTHING STARTS FOR MYSELF! 从我做起！

Sharing her journey of discovery, Laura Festa finds that cultivating hope for the planet begins with cultivating hope at a deeply personal level.

FROM DESPAIR AND SADNESS TO RESILIENCE AND ACTION

As I wrote a few years ago in the preface to the eco-sustainable project I created within the corporate I am working for, hope is often misunderstood.

Back in 2021, we were living in times of big uncertainty, especially for those of us living in China. One day, a sharing from some colleagues triggered me as if I had been punched in my stomach. The indifference and lack of awareness of the damage that the industry was causing to the planet- and therefore to us- and the lack of intention to be engaged in doing something better, made me so angry that I felt very sad.

I remember sharing this with my mindfulness mentor and trainer, and we considered two options: quit the company, or stay and act.

> *Our hope can spark from something outside, but it is generated from something inside*

I realised that quitting would have been a kind of submission to their point of view, which to me was unacceptable. At the same time, if I was going to stay, I needed to make a change and have the courage to fight against some barriers.

It was not an easy choice. After a few self-reflections, supported by my practice of self-compassion to stay with the waves of emotions being present, I decided to stay and act- engaged action rooted in the intention to do better and to inspire others to follow.

What I know now is that our hope can spark from something outside, but it is generated from something inside.

THE SPARK OF ACTION

After a coaching session where something said by the client triggered me, I shared this state with the client, who invited me to say more. At that moment, I realised that everything was related to my anger and sadness for what was going on in my team. As I got clear about the deep need for action, the client suggested I connect with someone who could help me to elaborate and build something- at that point I had no clue what that 'something' would be!

I then connected with a company working with, in, and for forests, providing means of self-sustainability to people taking care of the trees. Eco-Sustainability and Human Connection! This resonated with me deeply, and my journey to create began, followed by meetings, collection of information, evaluation of ups and downs, and writing my guidelines to be shared.

At that same time, Jane Goodall was offering a summit dedicated to hope. This was the drop that filled my glass. The speakers were elaborating, somehow, what was present in my heart. Integrating science and wisdom: hope is movement, movement is hope, hope as an act of resilience, where resilience means the capacity to cope with adversity to push through challenges in the pursuit of opportunities, as Rick Hanson well describes.[1]

PREPARING THE HOPE PROJECT

I secretly prepared the project, built the connection with the forest company, and asked for technical support from my engineering colleague. A few days before I was going to call the company CEO for a meeting where I would present everything—including the goals of having a forest—something unexpected happened: one of our major clients asked if our corporation was engaged in any eco-sustainability action or project.

The only colleague who was supporting me with his engineering expertise was present at the meeting and called me that night: 'I could not keep the secret, very sorry! I told our CEO that we actually already have a plan prepared, just a matter of receiving his approval.' I was so excited. The next day, I received an email from the CEO's assistant saying: 'Let's talk and go forward!' We agreed to build our forest gradually as compensation for our CO_2 emissions, with the goal to increase the number of trees for the benefit of local people's lives, and to decrease our internal emissions and waste.

The name I chose for the forest- without any doubt and without space for change- was Hope.

Hope Forest has been growing. I have since stepped away from the project but the soul of Hope is embedded into our daily small actions and choices. Today, in 2025, I am ready to face another challenge inside the company: to revise our approach to hope in order to build something regenerative before becoming sustainable again.

UNDERSTANDING REAL HOPE

Back in 2021, I wrote that people tend to think that hope is simply passive wishful thinking: 'I hope something will happen, but I'm not going to do anything about it.' This is the opposite of real hope, which requires self-awareness, inner strength, and engagement to reach a goal.

My goal has been, and is, to cultivate hope for our planet, which is actually equal to nourishing hope for our wellbeing. The existence of all living beings is based on the fulfilment of basic needs: safety, survival, and connection.

An individual action driven by the heart is equally important as global action to ensure that we and future generations can still have hope- to breathe, to eat, to love our Earth. She will always be with us and create even better conditions.

As we say here: 'Everything starts for myself! 从我做起!'

Hope shaped unto forest aims to be the starting point of global action to cultivate hope, contributing to offering hope to many people in our human community who lack resources to survive. It is my sincere desire that this action will help many others find direction in a time of uncertainty, and courage in a time of fear.

HOPE SPARKS FROM FEAR AND SADNESS

What we need to be aware of is that all emotions are equally important and messengers for life. As Taoism and Buddhism teaches us: 'Life is made of 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows.' If you see the sadness, then you can meet the joy; but if you close the door to sadness, you also lock out joy.

An individual action driven by the heart is equally important as global action to ensure that we and future generations can still have hope- to breathe, to eat, to love our Earth

The scale and expanse of nature enables us to switch perspective: the bigger the space, the smaller the issue looks.

GRATITUDE, WONDER, AND APPRECIATION: CREATING SAFETY FROM WITHIN

That is what I am doing through my coaching, rooted in awareness and somatic practice within nature. I support clients to create a safe container where they can explore and stay with what is present.

After sharing despair and the flow of feelings, I invite them to pause, take a breath and explore gratitude.

Practising the connection with the body, from an Eastern philosophy and practice standpoint, means connecting with the elements and finding the qualities you see in them. I hold a weekly meditation session. After a mindfulness-based meditation on the four elements, a client reflected: 'When I paused my hands on the water element, meaning on the kidneys, I got a hiccup- a kind of wake-up call. Kidneys are associated with fear, and my life now is full of fear. Does this mean I have to find courage?'

To me, this is where awareness was evoked and the shift happened: through stillness, she was able to connect safely with that and see the message brought to her by fear, instead of collapsing into it and getting stuck.

When possible, I encourage practising the sacred pause: walking into nature, breathing with nature, finding the anchor elements there. It happened that sunlight was seen as a source of warmth and support by a client going through a dark time. Hugging a tree became the anchor to feel calm. Jumping on rocks and staying with the qualities of the rock helped release unrevealed trauma.

In my current coaching experience with Chinese clients, a few shared the fear of survival due to economic changes and the sensation of not seeing the future as safe enough: Some lacking in resources fell into depression and apathy, which can be seen as a silent reaction. Others found the courage to call for individual sessions or join group sessions in nature.

My wish as a coach is to accompany them to learn how to hold these sensations and related feelings, to find the anchor in order to remember how is to feel nourished and safe and to create their own hope in the new life dimension they are going through.

HOPE AS ENERGY

I believe that hope can be shaped into different kinds of actions based on different energies, where the forces of yin and yang are combined and balanced.

I recently launched a '100 Days Mindful Challenge' to support the community to cultivate self-awareness for better self-growth. I can recognise different energies in the practices that have been chosen: as said in diamond sutra:

- The Meditator, who needs stillness to engage
- The Artist, who uses curiosity and playfulness to tackle the challenge and act
- The Warrior, who owns courage

These three energies are interrelated, but one can dominate depending on the situation, on who we are and what we need in that moment. Becoming aware of whether we need to calm down, create joy, or step up with compassion is what serves us to build wise action and see our way to hope.

Everything starts for myself. 从我做起!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Italy, Laura Festa has lived and worked in China for over two decades. An ICF-accredited coach, she holds certifications in Mindfulness Coaching from Within, Tara Brach Mindfulness Mentor program, and Ecosomatic Coach foundation training. Fluent in five languages, she integrates curiosity, intuition, and cultural sensitivity into her coaching. A lifelong traveler, she draws harmony and clarity from nature, while mindfulness serves as a steady anchor informing her curious and compassionate professional approach in all her client engagements.

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Photo credit Marco Carmona

HUMOUR AS THE EDGE: HOPE FOR HUMAN COACHING?

Humans love to laugh. As a species this is one of the things which makes us distinctive. Used with care, humour in coaching can warm the room, can help clients shift their perspective and manage their way through sticky moments. Here Jonathan Passmore and Peter Hayward explore why humour may offer hope to human coaches, as being one way that they can amplify the difference between themselves and AI technologies.

WHY HUMOUR

AI coaching agents are improving fast. A recent study[1] suggested that some AI coachbots can demonstrate coach competencies and thus successfully pass professional body assessments. New AI coaching tools continue to emerge, and not surprisingly many coaches feel threatened by these emerging technologies[2]. Coaches may ask: How can I compete with a tool that's instantly available, 24 hours a day, 365 days a week, and provides its service at less than 5% of my cost? There is hope. The answer, we suggest, lies not in trying to become another low-cost service provider, but seeking to differentiate through quality and capability- it's the difference between clothing from Shein and a Reiss or a Colhay. Both have a place in the market, but for the human coach, finding out what AI does less well provides a way to differentiate human services, as being personal, intimate and connected.

One aspect we think is worthy of exploration is humour. We are not referring to a joke, which is a pre-prepared, scripted attempt to make others laugh. Instead, we are referring to the shared, lived experience which relies on the relationship, shared experience and timing to create a humorous moment.

To help us understand the role of humour in coaching better we interviewed twelve experienced coaches drawn from six countries and explored exactly how humour showed up in their practice, how they used it and the benefits it offered.

For the human coach, finding out what AI does less well provides a way to differentiate human services, as being personal, intimate and connected

Laughter has strong roots in human bonding and the evidence from both research and our practice as teachers, is that it helps learning stick. These findings are echoed in wider scholarship on humour and relationships, learning, therapy and playfulness in coaching[3,4,5,6].

TRUST, TIMING, A RELEASE VALVE – HUMOUR IN FOCUS

Across the interviews, six themes emerged. Coaches described humour as a builder of trust, a matter of timing, a catalyst for insight, a tension reliever, a practice with risks and something that must align with the personality of the coach. Such themes are simple to state, but they also reveal that humour is subtle in its use.

HUMOUR BUILDS TRUST

Coaches told us that warm, light moments often deepen the bond. Clients relax, show more of themselves and sense the coach as fully

human. One coach said, 'We connect by laughing together,' which captures the feel of a shared moment rather than a performance[7]. Humour becomes a signal of presence and care. It can shift the conversation from transactional to relational. It invites mutual vulnerability without making light of serious topics, and as a result this is hard for AI tools to replicate in the same way as a human.

Humour can lift a heavy topic, open a stuck frame and allow a client to see the situation afresh. Lightness is not the enemy of depth

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Humour works best when trust is already forming. Many coaches would not lead with it in a first session. Instead, they attend to warmth, safety and attunement, then notice when a light comment is welcome. Coaches described this as a felt sense, an in-the-moment judgement rather than a technique to deploy on a schedule. They watch the client's face, energy and tone. If a remark does not land, they drop it and move on. This is not guesswork, but a skilled attention to the here and now, supported by the coach's self-management and empathy, with the coach always acting in what serves the client's needs as opposed to the coach's desires.

A CATALYST FOR INSIGHT AND LEARNING

Humour can lift a heavy topic, open a stuck frame and allow a client to see the situation afresh. Lightness is not the enemy of depth. Many coaches described how a playful metaphor or shared chuckle unlocked new angles. When people feel safer and more open, reflection becomes possible. These experiences are consistent with work showing that appropriate humour supports creativity, reframe and recall in learning[8,9]. What matters is humour which is relational and situational- reflecting shared insights and experiences, not a script.

A RELEASE VALVE FOR PRESSURE

Coaching can touch intense emotions. At times, brief lightness offers relief, resets the nervous system and allows progress. Coaches spoke about moments of shared tears followed by a small laugh at the realness of it all. Not as a deflection, but as a pause that restores breath and agency. Used well, humour helped clients name what felt overwhelming and move on. Some coaches also noted that lightness keeps their own energy steady across demanding days, which in turn serves the client.

RISKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Humour is powerful, which means it can harm if used carelessly. Coaches warned against sarcasm and cleverness at the client's expense. Meanness is never funny in the room. Overuse can also crowd out reflection. Cultural, generational and power differences also matter greatly. What may be playful teasing to the coach can be experienced as inappropriate, even offensive to another person. Being aware of gender, race, power and privilege are as important as what's said. The safe rule is kindness. Let humour serve the client's work, not the coach's performance. When in doubt, hold back and return to empathic presence.

Coaches warned against sarcasm and cleverness at the client's expense. Meanness is never funny in the room

ALIGNMENT WITH THE COACH YOU ARE

The most reliable guide is authenticity. If you are not playful by nature, you do not need to pretend. If you are, you still need judgement. Several coaches said they grew into ease with humour as their confidence rose. They learned to notice when lightness supported depth and when it blocked it. For many, that discernment came with experience and supervision, and for us as supervisors this is one of the aspects we explore with our clients.

Practice suggestion	How to use it in sessions	Useful when	Watch-outs	Supervision prompt
Start with warmth, then invite lightness	Build safety first with steady presence, then notice small openings for a smile or a gentle aside that validates the person	Early rapport building and when anxiety is high	Jumping in too soon or using humour to dodge discomfort	When did lightness help trust form, and how did you know?
Let humour serve the reframe	Offer a playful metaphor or a surprising question that loosens a stuck story, then pause so insight can land	Clients feel bogged down or narrow in viewpoint	Turning the moment into entertainment or rushing past the learning	What reframe emerged, and what made it land safely?
Use laughter as feedback	Treat shared laughter or a relaxed sigh as data about release and readiness to go deeper; name it and ask what shifted	Emotional intensity or pressure is building	Using humour to avoid emotion rather than to process it	How did humour change the emotional tone, and what followed?
Contract for tone and culture	Invite clients to tell you what playful looks like for them, including any topics that are off limits given culture, role and power	Cross-cultural work or seniority gaps	Assumptions about what is funny, sarcasm, or jokes at someone's expense	Where might my humour reflect my culture more than theirs?
Keep it kind, brief and client-centred	Use lightness sparingly, return to the client's meaning and needs, and check impact in the moment	At any point, once trust exists	Overuse that fills space and reduces reflection	If it missed, how did I repair it and re-centre the client?

Table 1: Five practice suggestions you can apply in your next session

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COACH EDUCATION

Many coaches told us they did not learn much about humour or playfulness during initial training. They picked it up over time. We believe there is room for programmes to address timing, cultural sensitivity and ethical use of lightness. This would not mean teaching people to be funny. It would mean building awareness, presence and judgement, so that humour supports learning rather than distracts from it. The therapy literature has long noted both the benefits and the risks of humour; and argues for training that helps practitioners use it well. Our research suggests[10] a similar need in coaching, including space to practise playfulness and to reflect on personal style.

THE HUMAN DIFFERENCE IN AN AGE OF AI

We started this and a series of other studies to explore how human coaches can amplify their humanity. While AI agents can simulate a joke, from our experience what they cannot hold is the shared, lived experience, which sits within a unique relationship. Humour in coaching is contextual, relational and deeply bound to trust. It grows from lived experience and mutual human vulnerability. This makes it a promising human differentiator for coaches to focus on.

Lightness can be serious business: it can be part of your signature as a coach

We believe there are other aspects too which are currently under investigation, including work experience, lived experience and affective empathy. When used with care, humour becomes a signature of human coaching rather than an add-on.

In summary, humour is not a trick, it is a relational skill that, when used with care, can deepen trust, unlock fresh thinking and ease the strain of hard topics. It asks for warmth, timing and kindness. It keeps the work human in a world that is rapidly automating routines. As the study shows, lightness can be serious business: it can be part of your signature as a coach. While AI technologies may technically improve, attributes which are uniquely human, such as humour, give us hope that we might have the last laugh.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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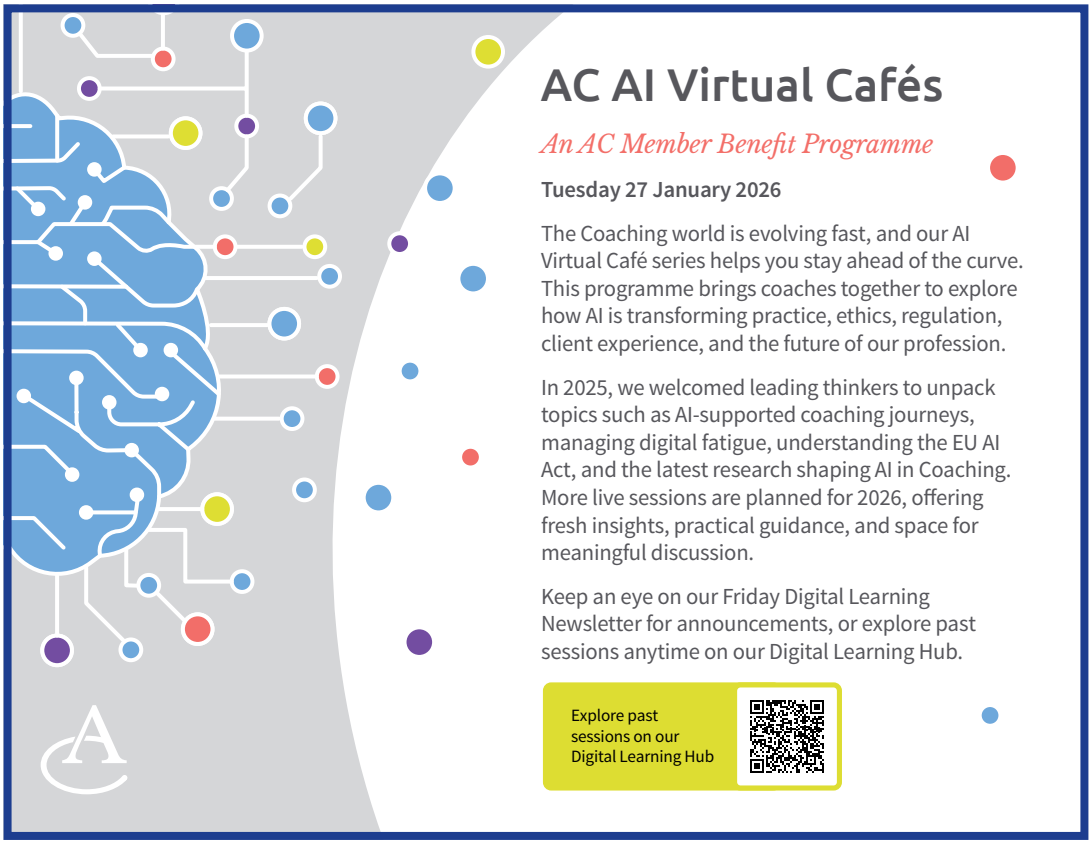

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WHEN THE COUNSELLOR BECOMES THE COACH

Introducing hope as the bridge between healing and growth, Shane Warren and Pauline Triggiani consider the point at which a counselling relationship may become a coaching one, offering a framework and practical actions for this practice.

There is a moment in many helping conversations when something quiet changes. A client who once spoke from the weight of loss begins to wonder what could come next. Posture softens, sentences tilt toward 'perhaps', and an imagined future flickers into view. That's the moment the counsellor becomes the coach.

In this article we offer a practitioner's roadmap for handling that transition ethically and effectively. Our aim is not to collapse distinctions between counselling and coaching, but to help practitioners recognise when hope is ready to move and how to translate that readiness into proportionate action, culturally and contextually right for the client.

WHY THE SHIFT HAPPENS AND HOW TO MEET IT

The old story told us: counselling heals the past; coaching builds the future. Real life is messier. Clients oscillate, meaning-making one week, testing a small action the next. Research in coaching psychology and integrative practice observes this natural movement along a helping continuum, where the client's evolving need (not our professional label) should guide the stance we take.[1,2,3] In that continuum, hope is the hinge: counselling restores hope (safety, coherence, identity) and coaching mobilises it (structure, feedback, outcomes).[4]

Hope, in this sense, isn't cheerfulness: it's an applied psychology of forward motion

The practical question becomes: how do we recognise the readiness to mobilise hope and shift stance without abandoning depth?

PUT PRACTICE FIRST: THE COUNSELLOR-AS-COACH FRAMEWORK

Our focus in these moments is to keep the toolkit light and the stance central. Organise the session progress into three interlocking modes you can flow between (not rigid stages):

1. **Containment & Repair:** This is about psychological safety, trust, and emotional literacy. In this stage the clients stabilise, name what hurts, and feel held.
2. **Meaning & Motivation:** This time in the sessions speaks to values, identity, and preference clarification. This is where nascent hope returns which we witness through a modest 'maybe' rather than a trumpet blast.
3. **Action & Accountability:** Here we see small, client-chosen experiments; two or more pathways begin to appear within the session dialogue; feedback loops; and clear need for re-contracting if distress spikes.

Two practical markers tell you the aperture is opening: (a) micro-signals of readiness curiosity enter the dialogue, softer affect is noticeable, with future-tense language more present; and (b) relationships around the client can safely carry some of the lift. If either is missing, you stay with containment and meaning. If both show up, it's often ethical, and relieving, to invite action.

HOPE: FROM CONCEPT TO CONVERSATION

It helps to make hope operational. The authors lean towards Snyder's view of hope as agency ('I can') and pathways ('here's how'). This model

teaches us that early in repair, agency is fragile and pathways are foggy. As coherence grows, a coaching stance can firm agency- a commitment that the client authors- and clarify pathways, as two viable routes; with anticipated obstacles and quick feedback. Hope, in this sense, isn't cheerfulness: it's an applied psychology of forward motion.

A moment from practice: Mara arrives certain nothing will change. We don't push goals. We steady the ground: breath, naming what hurts, finding one corner of the week that is slightly workable. A week later she volunteers, 'If mornings are worst, could evenings be my time to try?' That's nascent hope. We shape it: a single 10-minute experiment, two pathways, and a plan for noticing what helps. The stance throughout: We won't carry you, and we won't leave you. We'll walk beside you while you carry yourself.

FROM PRESENCE TO POSSIBILITY

The counsellor's craft remains attuned listening; tolerance for complexity; pacing that protects dignity. What changes is the aperture. Alongside 'What happened to you?' we begin to ask, 'Who are you becoming, and what would honour that becoming here, in your world?' This is not an abandonment of therapy; it is therapy arriving at its natural endpoint, where insight requests expression.

You can feel this shift in the room. The practitioner tunes for micro-readiness ('perhaps…', 'I could…') and invites one more sentence rather than a performance plan: 'If this pain eased a fraction, what might you do with that daylight?' In cross-cultural contexts the practitioner might add, 'Who else would need to be included for this to feel right?' Possibility arrives in right relationship.

In some cultural contexts, Kele, for example, believes 'ambition' betrays family. Effective practice is to honour the moral weight of that story first. As safety grows, joy in tutoring cousins and pride in remittances appear. We wonder together, 'If supporting your family is the point, what shape of study or work would honour that?' The path that emerges is co-authored as we explore options such as evening classes paced around care-giving, milestones marked by shared meals. The future does not overwrite loyalty; it operationalises it.

MICRO-MOVES THAT MAKE HOPE ETHICAL AND REAL

Hope becomes ethical in the small moves that follow. They're not prescriptions, but flexible gestures that match culture, context and readiness:

- **Name dignity first.** 'Given what you've carried, it makes sense you're tired.' Safety lowers pressure: people can breathe.
- **Invite a tiny horizon.** Ask for a 5% shift: 'On your best day recently, what was a little easier?' Pathways are elicited, not forced.
- **Co-own the experiment.** 'Would a 10-minute trial feel doable? How will you tell if it helped?' Agency meets feedback.
- **Guard against rescuing.** Offer scaffolds (prompts, check-ins) without taking the work away. Support; don't substitute.
- **Guard against cynicism.** Notice micro-gains out loud. Evidence builds belief, belief fuels next steps.
- **Re-contract when needed.** If risk or trauma resurfaces, pause activation and return to repair. Ethics precedes momentum.

HOPE ACROSS CULTURES

Before we can explore the Counsellor as Coach models we must understand hope in cultural context. It's easy to default to a Western image of hope: my goals, my agency, a straight line from A to B. In many traditions, hope is relational and collective- sustained by kinship, reciprocity, land, language, and spirit.[5,6] People move forward with others and by re-entering the right relationship with community and country.

A small moment. A young engineer feels 'behind.' Coaching questions about goals tighten the knot. We pause and ask, 'When does life feel most aligned?' She lights up about weekend cooking with aunties, festivals that stitch the year together, and the relief of sending money home. Progress for her is restored rhythm, not a steeper solo climb. Once that frame is visible, the agenda changes: design work and study around cycles that keep her connected and resourced.

In many traditions, hope is relational and collective - sustained by kinship, reciprocity, land, language, and spirit

This is why 'forward motion' cannot be our only definition of progress. In cross-cultural practice, hope may present as harmony regained, contribution to family or village, or alignment with seasonal/cyclical time such as. planting and harvest; or ceremony and rest.[7] Agency still matters, but it is often co-agency: decisions taken with elders, partners or peers. Outcomes are judged not only by personal advancement but by strengthened belonging, dignity and balance.

Practically, we slow down and ask: 'What does hope mean for you, in your world? Who else is it for? What needs to be in balance for change to last?' We then co-design steps that honour those rhythms: pacing study around holy days; setting milestones that include ceremonies of acknowledgement; or building influence at work through preparation, reciprocity and sponsor allies (not performative self-assertion).

INTEGRATIVE PRACTICE FOR SYSTEM-LEVEL NEED

Demand is rising; the workforce is tight; and funders increasingly ask for earlier, preventative responses that keep people well rather than waiting for crisis.[8] In that context, a rigid 'either therapy or coaching' boundary can become a bottleneck. Clients don't present in neat boxes; needs often move within a single session, from stabilising emotion to testing a small step. Integrative practitioners - counsellors trained to coach; coaches literate in counselling dynamics- can pivot ethically with readiness, without dilution.[9]

This responsiveness matters especially in cross-cultural settings. If services only measure progress as linear, self-authored forward motion, we risk mislabelling culturally anchored thriving as 'lack of ambition.' Integration corrects the bias: we honour co-agency; pace activation around seasonal/spiritual rhythms; and contract for outcomes that include harmony regained or role contribution alongside conventional performance metrics.

At service level, integration is structure with permeability. Teams agree what sits in Containment & Repair and what sits in Action & Accountability; with explicit re-contracting when risk resurfaces. Supervision spans both paradigms so practitioners aren't forced to choose between psychological depth and developmental momentum. Commissioners can help by funding blended roles (primary care, education, Employee Assistance Programmes, community health) and by valuing culturally valid endpoints (belonging, dignity, restored balance), not just output counts.

Clients don't present in neat boxes; needs often move within a single session, from stabilising emotion to testing a small step. Integrative practitioners- counsellors trained to coach; coaches literate in counselling dynamics- can pivot ethically with readiness, without dilution

Blending coaching and counselling psychologies may be the next phase of applied helping, so long as ethics leads clear contracting, scope-based referrals, reflective practice, and adherence to the profession's codes.[10,11] Done well, integration isn't corner-cutting; it is care made agile.

A FRAMEWORK FOR HOPE-INFUSED PRACTICE

If 'presence to possibility' is the stance, this framework is how to do it; lightly and ethically, in ways that fit the client's world. It is achieved by working across three lenses that the practitioner brings in and out of focus as readiness changes.

1. Cognitive… make a path thinkable
With clients, the practitioners must co-define 'good enough' outcomes and two viable pathways for small, contained experiments. Obstacles are treated as design features, not personal failure. For an executive: 'What would 'good enough by Friday' look like?' For a carer: 'What would bring the household back into balance this week?' The cognitive lens is map-making.

2. Affective… widen the emotional aperture
The research tells us positive emotions broaden options and build resources.[12] The practitioner does not cheerlead; they seed conditions for curiosity, relief, pride or tenderness that genuinely enlarge the client's field of view. With trauma-touched clients, the affective task might simply be a reliable moment of calm or humour. In many cultures, affect arises from belonging such as shared meals, prayer, music, and these states fuel action more reliably than solitary grit.

3. Relational… build co-agency and accountability
In most cultures, hope is rarely a solo project. Self-determination theory reminds us that competence, autonomy and relatedness sustain motivation.[13] The practitioner and client therefore co-design supporting roles (the auntie who checks in on study nights; a colleague who swaps shifts; a peer who walks after dinner), and agree what accountability looks like in related culture: quiet witnessing, collective acknowledgement, or private tracking.

Bringing the lenses together… A small cognitive plan lowers threat, which frees affect; positive affect widens options, which invites people to include others, which strengthens the plan. When any lens wobbles (plans too big; feelings flooding), the practitioner then guides a process to downshift, re-contract and repair. In this way the counsellor-coach becomes a hope architect not by forcing change, but by shaping conditions in which change becomes likely.

A brief vignette. Rina wants to 'be less overwhelmed'. We translate that into her language of thriving. Cognitive: one evening a week where dinner and homework feel calm; two pathways: maybe Sunday meal-prep or a neighbourhood cook-up. Affective: a phone call with her sister before the cook-up reliably steadies her. Relational: an older cousin supervises homework on Tuesdays; the auntie who hosts the cook-up sends leftovers home. Progress is counted in evenings that feel like belonging, with breath in it. In such an experience, hope then holds because it fits.

CHALLENGES AND CRITIQUES

Blending roles carries risks as well as promise. Critics warn that a premature coaching stance can leapfrog unresolved trauma, while a therapy-heavy stance can pathologise normal performance problems.[14] Both cautions are useful. The capacity that makes integrative work valuable, the ability to pivot, also creates opportunities for drift.

In practice, drift looks like over-hoping (experiments before safety) or over-holding (endless processing to avoid action). A middle path treats hope not as a guarantee of outcomes but as the conviction that this step makes sense; proportionate, culturally right, within scope. When a client's nervous system is dysregulated (sleep collapsing, appetite gone, flashbacks spiking), coaching questions land as pressure; we re-contract to Containment & Repair. Conversely, when affect is stable, language tilts to the future, and relationships can carry some of the lift, a light coaching move often reduces distress by widening the field of action.

The counsellor-coach becomes a hope architect not by forcing change, but by shaping conditions in which change becomes likely

Cross-cultural practice adds more nuance. 'Speak up more in meetings,' may make sense in an individualistic frame yet violate norms of seniority or harmony elsewhere. The antidote isn't to avoid activation, but to translate goals so they preserve dignity and belonging (deference-appropriate phrases, sponsor allies, influence via preparation and reciprocity). The aim is not a clever hybrid but rather the right conversation, at the right time, for this person, in this culture, under these pressures.

Safeguards are simple to name and hard to practise: say out loud which hat you're wearing and why; invite consent to shift; normalise stepping back when risk resurfaces; use supervision to test your stance ('Am I rushing to escape suffering? Am I delaying because I fear failing with action?'); and let evidence, not enthusiasm, decide when to recalibrate.

HOPE AS PROFESSIONAL PRAXIS

Despair spreads through systems as much as stories do. Against that backdrop, counsellors and coaches carry a quiet civic duty: to be credible stewards of hope. Credible, because we ground hope in proportionate plans, culturally right partnerships and ethical boundaries. Stewards, because we hold it long enough for clients to try it on themselves.

Counsellors and coaches carry a quiet civic duty: to be credible stewards of hope

When the counsellor becomes the coach, the dialogue expands. We keep asking, 'What happened to you?' whenever the ground shakes. And we also ask, 'Who are you becoming, and what would honour that becoming here?' Most clients hold two stories at once: one that needs healing, and one that is waiting to be written. Our work is to help them author both letting insight ripen into action without abandoning care and letting action deepen insight without abandoning pace.

Do this well and integration stops being a trend; it becomes a service to the times. Systems under strain get agile care; clients get conversations that fit; and practitioners get a way of working that is both human and effective. From reflection to resilience, from insight to action, from pain to possibility, not as slogans, but as the quiet arc of real practice.

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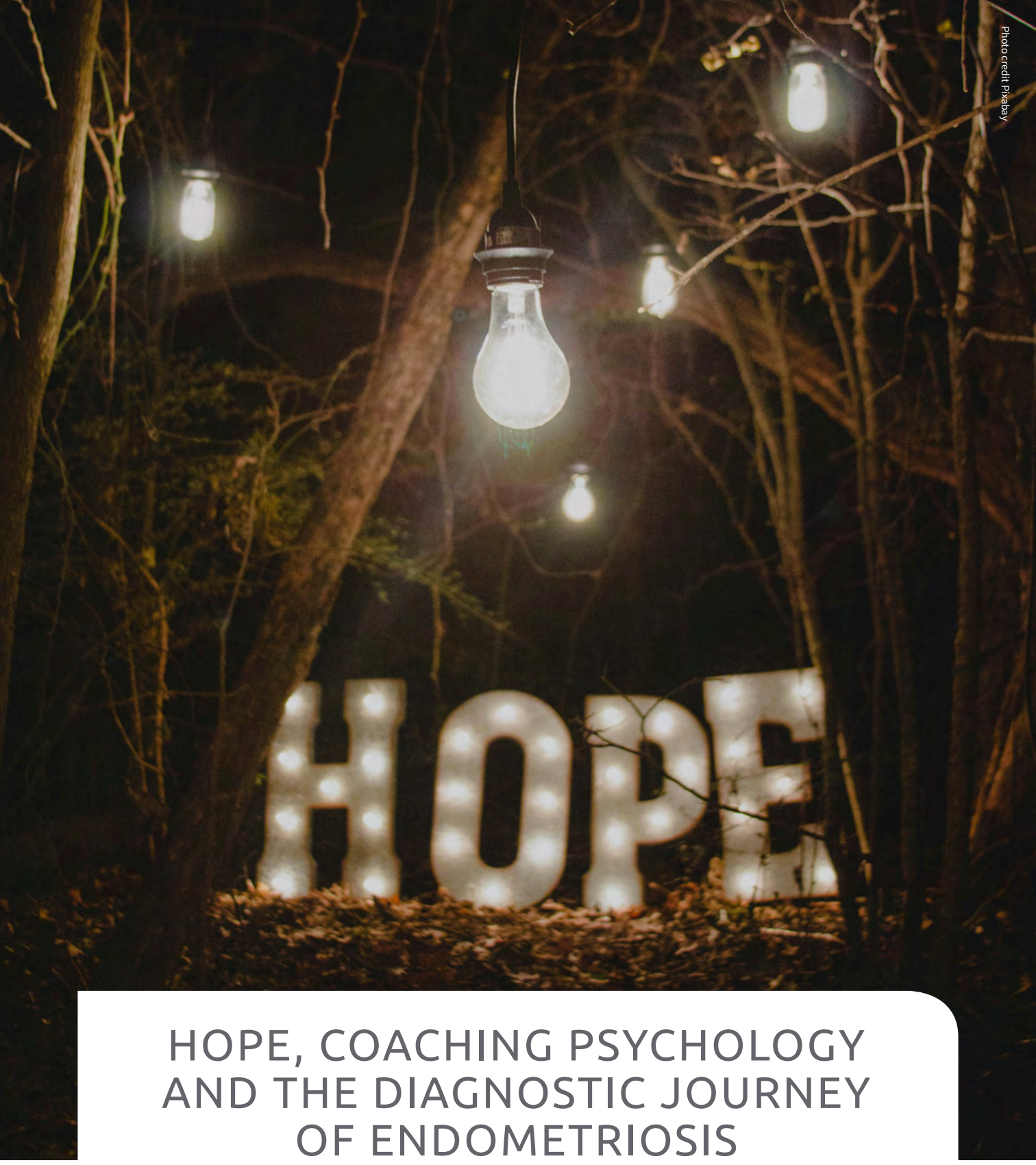

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HOPE, COACHING PSYCHOLOGY AND THE DIAGNOSTIC JOURNEY OF ENDOMETRIOSIS

Linda Beswick shares her deeply personal account of living with endometriosis, how hope has played an integral part in her journey, and how this experience shapes her coaching practice.

Desmond Tutu[1] said, 'Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness.'

As a woman who has suffered with endometriosis for 32 years, I have found my way through the darkness and found the light. Let me start by telling you about my journey.

I've always wanted to be a psychologist. As an 80s child, I was captivated by the crime and detective shows of the time: Cracker, Silent Witness, Waking The Dead, and Poirot filled my formative years and sparked a deep fascination with the human mind and behaviour.

Today, I'm a coaching psychologist undertaking a PhD in Psychology. But the path to get here has not been straightforward. My early hopes of becoming a psychologist were challenged and stalled for over a decade by the physical and emotional toll of undiagnosed endometriosis. For 12 years, I lived with symptoms that had no name and no validation.

Hope is a belief that a better future is possible even when the path and the future is unclear. For women with endometriosis, cultivating this kind of hope is essential

My first operation came at 25, just as I was completing my MSc in Forensic Psychology. My last operation, 14 years later, was a total hysterectomy. Eighteen years after that first surgery, I returned to university to pursue an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology. Despite everything, the hope I'd carried since childhood had never left me.

That MSc did more than revive a long-held dream, it transformed it. As I studied coaching and positive psychology, I realised these were the very frameworks I had instinctively drawn on during my illness. My hope to become a psychologist expanded into something broader: a hope for others with endometriosis. I began to see how coaching psychology could be a powerful source of agency, identity, and healing for people navigating this invisible illness.

Endometriosis is a chronic, systemic condition where tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows in other areas of the body. This tissue responds to hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle, resulting in inflammation, internal bleeding, organ adhesions, and scar tissue. While commonly found in the pelvis, endometriosis has been documented in the lungs, diaphragm, and even the brain, where it can cause complex and often debilitating symptoms. Despite its severity, the average time to diagnosis is currently around 12 years. This prolonged delay is often punctuated by medical gaslighting, misdiagnoses, and the repeated dismissal of reported pain. My own experience reflects this. I was given antibiotics for infections I didn't have, mislabelled with IBS, and repeatedly told the pain was either in my head or 'normal'. One of the most damaging moments came from a female manager who told me, flatly, that I 'couldn't possibly be in that much pain.' Over time, these messages eroded my trust in both my body and my perception of reality.

Endometriosis typically begins at the onset of menstruation; This means many women experience debilitating symptoms throughout their teenage years and into early adulthood. These are critical stages for identity development, education, peer relationships, and careers. The result is often a profound psychological impact, including anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and an interrupted sense of future self and biographical disruption. For many, romantic and sexual relationships are also impacted due to the pain associated with intercourse and the uncertainty around fertility. Another recurring theme in many women's narratives is reproductive reductionism, the idea that a woman's worth, and the solution to their illness, lies in reproduction. Phrases like 'Have a baby, it will sort it out,' reflect a paternalistic model of care that fails to see women as whole people, beyond their reproductive organs, and ignoring the wider impact of endometriosis on quality of life.

In the face of this, hope becomes more than optimism. Hope is resilience. As Rick Snyder's Hope theory[2] posits, hope comprises three elements: goals, pathways, and agency. Without these, hope diminishes. For women with endometriosis, rebuilding these elements, especially in the face of disbelief and dismissal, is an act of reclaiming power and self-worth.

Coaching psychology is a science-based approach that applies psychological theory and evidence-based coaching practice to support personal growth, wellbeing, and goal attainment. While positive psychology is the study of what enables individuals to thrive, coaching psychology focuses on building strengths, values alignment, and meaningful action, even in the face of real-life challenge. Together I believe that they hold huge potential in supporting women with endometriosis.

Coaching offers something powerful for those living with chronic, invisible illness. It doesn't try to fix it; it does however enable us to work with the whole person

A LONG AND CHALLENGING ROAD

The diagnostic journey for individuals navigating a chronic illness like endometriosis is rarely straightforward. They experience identity and biographical disruption, grief for what has been lost or delayed, and trauma resulting from years of being unheard or disbelieved. Coaching psychology doesn't bypass or minimise these realities- it doesn't offer false hope. It aims to meet people where they are, validating the complexity of their lived experience while supporting them to reconnect with their goals, aspirations and to reignite hope. Uncertainty is a theme that is constant in chronic illness. Coaching psychology works with that to promote acceptance and create space for growth, where hope can flourish. By supporting women to explore their strengths and values, they can connect with what truly matters, identify and build on their internal resources and strengthen their resilience to thrive during this journey.

This is where the concept of hope becomes vital, more than a feeling. Hope is a belief that a better future is possible even when the path and the future is unclear. For women with endometriosis, cultivating this kind of hope is essential. When the medical system reduces them to reproductive function, or when pain is dismissed or reduced to fertility, hope must become something internally generated and nurtured through connection, meaning, and purpose.

This is the foundation of my PhD research at the University of East London. I am investigating how coaching psychology and positive psychology can support women throughout the diagnostic journey, whether through 1:1 coaching, group coaching, or self-administered positive psychology interventions. My hope is to transform not only how we support individuals, but also how we view the potential of coaching in the context of chronic illness.

WHERE COACHING FITS IN: BUILDING AGENCY

In my coaching practice, I've had the privilege of working 1:1 with women navigating endometriosis. One client came to coaching shortly after receiving a diagnosis. She had suspected the symptoms might be endometriosis but experienced the same medical gaslighting that many other women had received. She was in her early twenties, at the start of her career, and struggling to make sense of what this diagnosis meant for her future. The emotions she experienced mirrored my own feelings: relief at finally having a name for her symptoms, grief for the years spent feeling disbelieved and fear and uncertainty about the future. This is a common thread for many women post-diagnosis: the long-awaited 'answer' being a validation of 'I told you so,' and then the subsequent realisation that it was not over.

We began by slowing down and creating space for her story to emerge. Through exploring her values and using strengths-based coaching, we identified inner resources she had drawn on- often unknowingly- to survive years of uncertainty. Naming these strengths supported her to reframe her story and see what was still possible.

Endometriosis symptoms can fluctuate, including levels of pain, and chronic fatigue. We worked with realistic, flexible goals and explored self-compassion, boundary-setting, and energy management. This supported her in moving forward in a way that allowed for ambition while being kind to her body and its needs. Coaching didn't remove her uncertainty, but it gave her hope, and a way to live with it more confidently.

This experience reinforced what I know both personally and professionally: coaching offers something powerful for those living with chronic, invisible illness. It doesn't try to fix it; it does however enable us to work with the whole person. Endometriosis is a whole-body condition and needs to be approached that way.

NOT JUST COPING, BUT THRIVING

As part of my PhD research, I will be developing group coaching interventions to explore whether similar benefits emerge in a shared, peer-supported space. My hope is that coaching can support women not just to cope, but to thrive; and despite everything, see that they still have a future full of meaning and purpose.

Hope isn't created in isolation but shaped by the world around us. For women with endometriosis their life can feel anything but hopeful: years of disbelief, dismissal and delay can impact every area of their life. How are we expected to hold onto hope in the face of that? From an early age, women are told that pain is normal. Period pain is brushed off and minimised, so that when that pain becomes unmanageable, it is still met with disbelief and a narrative of being a hysterical woman. This is not only present in the medical model, but at home, at school, at work and with families and friends. Further layers include a medical system built around outdated models and theories which prioritise reproduction and overlook the wider psychological impact. Reproductive reductionism remains deeply embedded in our culture and continues to define women by their ability to have children and be caregivers.

Coaching psychology offers something different. It gives women space to be heard, to explore their identity and, particularly in a group setting, to experience validation through shared pain. Coaching supports women to reconnect with themselves and to explore who they are, what matters to them and what is still possible. That is hope.

When hope feels impossible, our presence can be the thing that makes it feel just a little more within reach

I am driven by a desire for my work to drive meaningful change, both in how we understand chronic illness and in how we support those living with it. My research is not just academic, it's personal and rooted in the belief that coaching psychology offers a compassionate, validating and empowering way to relate to illness. Coaching allows us to walk alongside our clients as they make sense of their story, access their strengths, and begin to imagine new possibilities. When hope feels impossible, our presence can be the thing that makes it feel just a little more within reach.

Reflection and reflexivity have been central to my journey. Through my MSc and now my PhD, I've been coached and I've seen the impact coaching can have. More than anything it gave me my hope back. My research has given me meaning and purpose, and it has helped me to make sense of, come to terms with, and thrive while living with endometriosis.

Now I have hope for the future, both for myself and for other women. I can help light the way for others who are still finding their path.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Beswick is a Coaching Psychologist with over 15 years' experience working in primary care mental health, supporting individuals living with severe mental illness. Now completing a PhD in Psychology, her research explores the psychological impact of an endometriosis and how coaching and positive psychology can offer meaningful support. Drawing on both academic insight and lived experience, Linda creates a compassionate space where women can reconnect with their identity, rebuild confidence, and hold onto hope through uncertainty.

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Photo credit Lina Trochez

ACTIVATING HOPE WHEN IT'S HARD TO FIND

This conversation between Chris Johnstone and Alison Maitland offers a process that readers can use to activate hope in themselves, in one-to-one coaching, and in group settings.

C: Something I'm coming across more and more is loss of hope, particularly about our world situation and the future we're heading into. I'm so pleased we've got together to continue a conversation we've been having for over two years, exploring what coaching can offer here. Alison, what are your hopes of what we might cover?

A: In *Active Hope*, the book you wrote with Joanna Macy, you describe a powerful four-part framework for transformative journeys: 'Gratitude', 'Honouring our Pain for the World', 'Seeing with New Eyes', and finally, the action part, 'Going Forth'.[1] This is a process we can follow again and again, which is why you call it 'the spiral of Active Hope'. Shall we use that as a structure for our conversation?

> ***I have strong hopes of how I'd like the world to be, but I've learned to let go of how those turn out and just focus on what's in my power to do, here and now***

C: That's a great idea. I love the focus on activating hope. A hope is active when it happens through people's choices and actions. We activate hope when we take part in the story of moving towards, or making more likely, the hopes that we hold dear. But just focusing on the action side isn't enough, as it is common for people to feel overwhelmed or defeated when looking at their fears and hopes for our collective future. That's why this spiral structure is so helpful, because it energises hope and offers pathways through common blocks. We can start with gratitude by being curious about it. What are you grateful for?

GROUNDING OURSELVES IN GRATITUDE

A: I'm grateful to have discovered *Active Hope*, and to understand this as something we do, not something we have. After I'd read the book, I did the online course and then trained to become a facilitator. It was a bit like coming home. Here was something accessible yet profound. I use it to centre myself when I'm oscillating between hope and despair, and I bring it into my coaching, and into group work.

I have strong hopes of how I'd like the world to be, but I've learned to let go of how those turn out and just focus on what's in my power to do, here and now.

C: It's lovely hearing you, Alison. If we think of hope as a story that happens through us, the outcome is what might happen in later chapters. But when we're in the midst of a story, we can't know how things will work out. Our deep hopes tell us what to aim for and that gives our lives a sense of purpose and direction.

Something I picked up is that when you face bad news, a deep hope you have is to bring something useful to it, and particularly to apply your training and experience to support your hoped-for version of how things might go. It sounds like it was a breakthrough recognising that you didn't have to be hopeful to act with hope. What makes the difference is how you respond to what you face, however hopeful or unhopeful you may be.

Cultivating gratitude resources us, giving us a stronger starting point from which to respond.

A: Yes. And gratitude brings a buoyancy that carries us, before we move into heaviness.

C: So, we now come to honouring our pain for the world. What does that mean to you?

THE DEEP ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HONOURING PAIN

A: I love that expression because honouring pain is about acknowledging that the grief, or anger, or despair we feel reveals our love, our care, our compassion. Honouring these emotions feels like giving a gift to somebody who's suffering, who's come to you saying, 'I just feel despair', or 'I can't see a way out'. And sitting with those emotions, exploring them, not running away from them. It's saying to them: 'What you're feeling is legitimate, it's real, it's raw, it's revealing'.

C: I see 'pain for the world' as a broad umbrella term that includes feeling empty, numb or shut off, as well as alarm, sadness, guilt, dread or waking up at 4am in anguish about what might happen. What's striking is how common these feelings are, yet how rarely they're talked about. Many people have told me they fear being labelled as depressing company if they reveal how horrified they are.

A: What's important for us as coaches when we encounter these emotions?

C: Here I think about psychological safety. If people think that coaching requires them to be optimistic or positive, they may not see it as a safe place to reveal their fears for the future. I find the phrase 'We feel what we feel' so helpful. It opens a space for people to say how it is for them, whatever their starting point.

There's also the meaning we give to what we – or they – feel. If pain for the world is seen as a symptom of dysfunction, as something to be fixed, that pathologises what might be, as you've suggested, an expression of deep care and awareness of danger. When we honour pain for the world, we recognise the life-preserving role it might play in rousing our response. Making room to hear and value these emotional 'calls to adventure' is part of the process of activating hope.

If, as coaches, we find this emotional territory too difficult to be with, there's a danger we might think 'I don't want to go there. That's too depressing. Let's change the subject.' That's why it is helpful to learn to be with our own depths, and to do the work of exploring our own reactions to what's happening in the world.

A: Indeed. And I find it's hard doing that inner work on my own. Working with other people eases the way. I find huge support in the Climate Coaching Alliance.[2] It's a worldwide movement of thousands of coaches, and it offers many enriching events, including on compassion and self-compassion. People are open in sharing their hopes and fears, so we can dive in, learn and be vulnerable together, and that's validating and uplifting.

Honouring pain is about acknowledging that the grief, or anger, or despair we feel reveals our love, our care, our compassion

Doing this work together dispels the feeling many people have – confirmed by a large international survey[3] – that they are in a minority in caring about the ecological emergency, when actually, most people care.

AN INVITATION TO NEW PERSPECTIVES

C: Yet even when people do make room for the alarm, and even when they know they're not alone, they may still wonder whether they can make any difference. The experience of powerlessness is the next hurdle, and this is where the third part of the spiral, Seeing with New Eyes, is so helpful. There's an image that sums it up for me. It's a whole load of squares arranged in the shape of a circle. If you ask, 'Which square makes the circle happen?' none of them can by themselves. The circle is bigger than the squares. But if you ask, 'Which square helps the circle happen?' they all do. If that circle represented a larger story of hope, of the healing of our world, that's too big for any of us to make happen by ourselves. But we can all help it happen. We can all play our part.

A: Maybe it's useful here to share a recent experience of powerlessness, and how I found something that helped me through. I got a cancer diagnosis and had some very dark moments waiting for surgery – the bleak awfulness of not knowing the outcome, of hoping for the best while also fearing the worst. I didn't have any control over that, apart from how I chose to think about it. Around that time, I received your newsletter about 'Thrutopian Story Patterns' that can help us through challenges. One of your sentence starters was: 'If it were to work out well, I'd hope that…' It made me think about my hopes if I got through this. I thought, 'It won't be just for me. Obviously, it will be for me, my family, those I hold close. But it's also for the work I still want to do in the world.' That helped to lift me up.

C: You found a navigational signal. When you have a bigger purpose that wants to happen through you, that is a vitalising factor. I'm reminded of some research about hope that highlights the importance of agency and pathways thinking.[4] That's what hope gives us, a heartfelt sense of direction. And that's what you described just then.

A: I have come through OK, and for that I feel enormous gratitude. And I'm very conscious there are many situations where hopelessness and darkness just go on and on, and it's very hard to see a way through. People whose lives and livelihoods are being destroyed by conflict or climate disasters. What happens to hope then? Chris, you have an example of how, even in those situations, we can activate hope by seeing with new eyes.

C: Yes, in 2020 I was invited to run an online resilience practitioner training for a group of Lebanese coaches and mental health professionals. We looked at what might support resilience and recovery in Lebanon. They'd been through civil war, earthquakes, invasion, economic collapse, and then the pandemic hit on top of that. One of the things they found most useful was the concept of active hope as something you do, rather than hope as something you have. This was seeing hope with new eyes.

After we'd been meeting weekly for nearly two months, there was a massive blast as thousands of tons of stored, but unstable, fertiliser exploded in Beirut. It was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in recorded history, and it destroyed a large area of the city, including the home of someone in the group. Facing the scale of this disaster together, they found it so helpful to meet as a group and to recognise they had a role to play. I think that's true for us generally – when facing disasters that leave us overwhelmed, finding networks of support and common purpose in responding can make such a difference.

We coaches could think of ourselves as first responders, both in helping others through difficult and sometimes awful situations, and in providing support to each other to enable us to continue

A KIT BAG OF RESOURCES FOR GOING FORTH

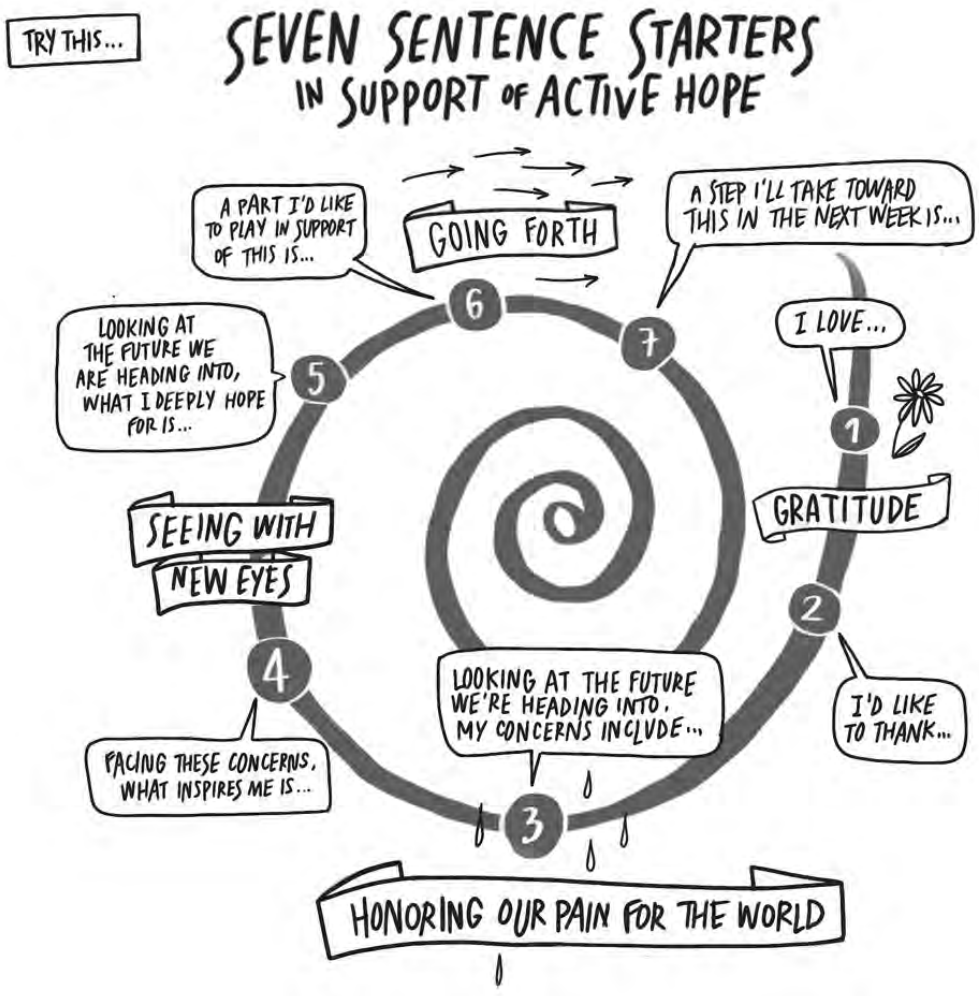
A: Here we come to the action- Going Forth. What is ours to do as we face these crises? I'm wondering whether we coaches could think of ourselves as first responders, both in helping others through difficult and sometimes awful situations, and in providing support to each other to enable us to continue doing that work.

C: I like that. Three questions I find helpful, for myself and people I coach, are: 'What is your deepest hope? How might the story go of supporting that hope? What's a part you can play in that story?'

A: I also recommend people try your 'sentence starters' to move through the four stages of the Active Hope spiral. (see illustration[5]). They're open sentences, which I find very inclusive, because everyone answers in their own words, sharing their own feelings. That means they then feel ownership for the actions they take. They also hear others speak from their lived experience about what contribution they intend to make.

C: We've got a YouTube video of some people doing it, so readers could try this as a practice to activate hope if they are finding themselves getting overwhelmed.[6]

A: I think we can do a huge service by offering these practices to the leaders we work with. They carry a particularly heavy burden, because people look to them for hope. We can also offer these practices widely across organisations and communities, so that more people gain agency and a belief that they, too, have a contribution to make, wherever they are.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chris Johnstone is a trainer and coach for resilience, wellbeing and active hope, active in these fields for more than three decades. With a background in medicine, psychology, groupwork and coaching, his books include Active Hope (with Joanna Macy, published in 18 languages) and Seven Ways to Build Resilience. In the last twelve years his focus has shifted to online education, with courses reaching thousands of people and participants in seventy-eight countries.

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Alison Maitland is a coach, author and former international journalist. She works with change-makers who are addressing global challenges on climate, health, sustainability and social justice. She's a trained climate coach and facilitator of Active Hope resilience workshops. A farmer Reuters and Financial Times journalist and co-author of three books about social and organisational change, she is active in the Climate Coaching Alliance and a mentor for racial equity, gender and climate programmes.

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3 89% of people globally want stronger political action on climate change. But people mistakenly believe their fellow citizens do not support it, hampering a unified response. Nature Climate Change survey across 125 countries. 2024: www.nature.com/articles/s41558-024-01925-3

4 Snyder, C. R. Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind, Psychological Inquiry, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), pp. 249-275

5 Illustration by Carlotta Cataldi, from Active Hope (ibid).

6 https://youtu.be/y4862iAGvbc

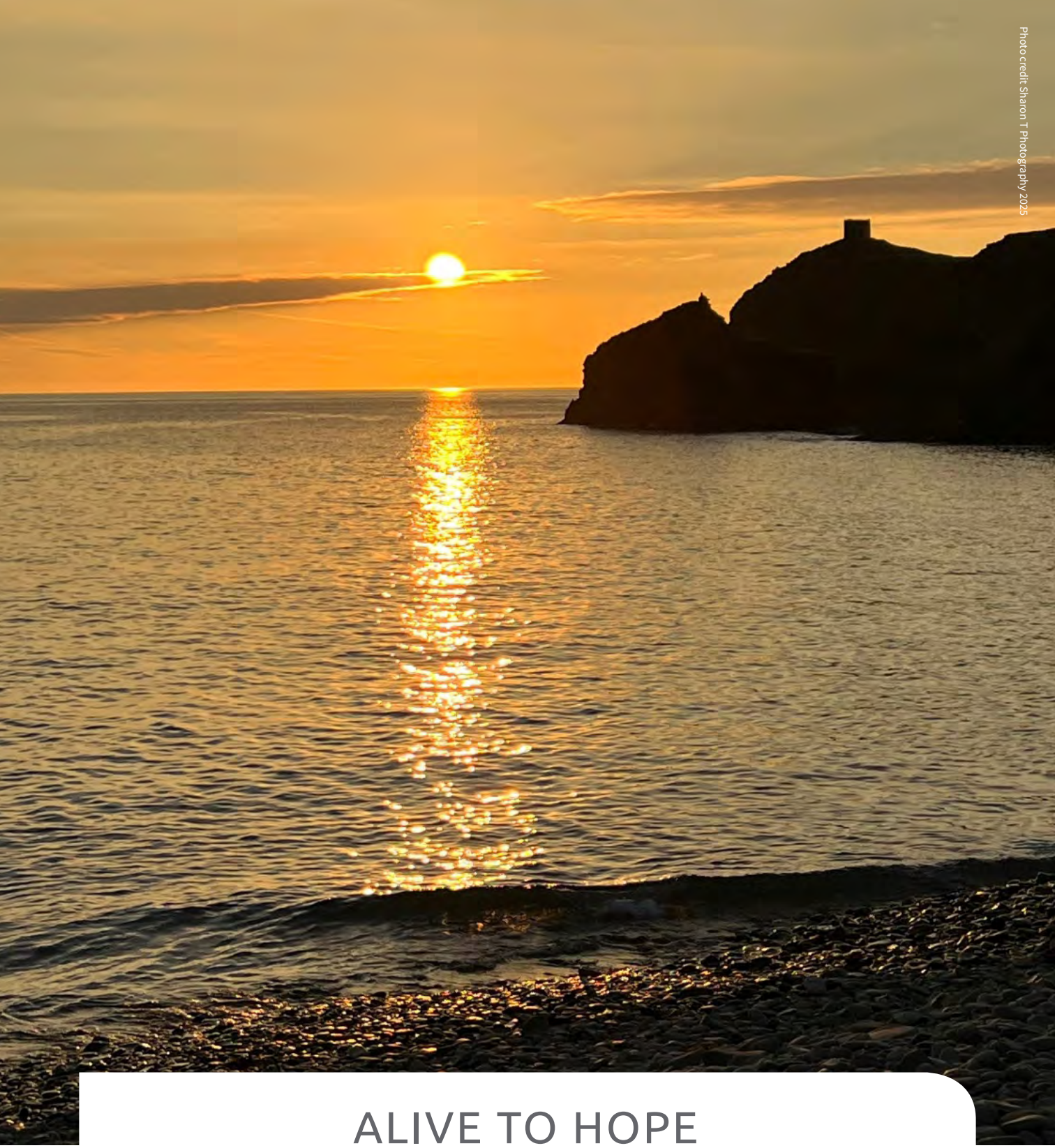

Photo credit Sharon T Photography 2025

ALIVE TO HOPE

Are we alive enough to the role the emotion of hope plays? What might be possible when we prime ourselves to generate hope through cumulative daily practices? Lorenza Clifford offers a relational perspective on hope, inviting us to participate: reflect and draw or journal on our own experiences over a week.

A loud crack at my closed window! I'm surprised to see a tiny, beautiful wren. Such a delicate bird, such a loud bang! She is still. Could she survive such an impact? She is normally so vigilant, quick to startle or hide. On the stone window sill, she makes a tiny flutter, clearly stunned. I see risks for her, but instead of despair, I experience a small instance of hope in my chest, which enlivens me. 'Go! See what can be done!' I slip on my boots and make my way outside.

A fellow participant from an online course reaches out on LinkedIn, as they start what they describe as 'something big and exciting' which is in that overlap of things that matter to both of us. I feel suddenly alive to possibilities. Here is another instance of hope: warm across my back: positive, supportive, encouraging feeling. 'Not alone', it seems to say.

Day 1 Reflect: Remember a moment when you felt the emotion of hope in your lifetime. Where did you experience it, and what was that like? What does it tell you? You might like to write about these memories, or sketch something that represents them.

What's possible in life is bound up closely with a capacity to project forward into the future, and hold wishes and intentions in another time frame.

'…humans are capable of symbolic thought, which allows us not only to imagine, but also to combine ideas, leading to the evolution of what and how we do things.'[1]

We have amazing thinking power, and incredibly complex equipment to give us that capability; equipment that evolved over time because it helped us adapt and survive. And humans don't always use their potential capabilities, or remember how to, when it matters.

Day 2 Reflect: Recall experiences of holding back; of being unable to muster your energy or resources to do something. Remember and write or draw: What was going on for you, in terms of prevalent emotions?

How does this relate to the presence or absence of hope?

Practising how to tap into our powers seems to be a constant and worthwhile theme. An absence of hope can lead us to helplessness where there should be capacity, or a presence of hope can boost resourcefulness just when it seems most unlikely!

'A growing body of empirical research indicates that a hopeful mindset has several personal benefits. First, hopeful people tend to lead healthier lives both in terms of psychological health and physical health. Second, research indicates that hopeful people exhibit success in a variety of life domains including academics, athletics, job/career, and parenting.'[2]

Day 3 Reflect: Is it worth exploring and expanding the role of hope in our lives, for our health and success? What could that exploration replace, in our schedule, in our hearts and minds? What might the possible effects be? Spend a moment writing as you reflect again.

Change happens when the conditions are right. One of the conditions that allows change to happen in human systems is the presence of hope in at least one human.

Hope provides energy for resource seeking and inventiveness in a single human, and for innovating, sharing and collaborating in groups. Hope is an emotion that may start in one individual and seems to spark hope in others too.

Day 4 Reflect: When was the last time you felt hope? Any kind of hope will do for this, it can be a small glimmer or high hopes. Notice what happened just before, then remember the experience of hoping, and then what happened just after you felt hope. Make a few notes or draw something to represent the chain of experiences.

Hope arises in circumstances in which people fear the worst, yet yearn for better, to paraphrase Lazarus[3]. It is often experienced as a positive emotion, that sits at odds with a grim situation in which it arises. Things are not yet better, yet they feel better with hope than without it.

Like Barbara Fredrickson[4], I believe that through the evolutionary process, we have kept emotions that serve us, and it is easy to guess why natural selection favoured hope. It creates the urge to draw on reserves and capabilities, in daily instances or even in the grimmest moments. It sustains us, giving us energy for resilience and inventiveness to re-emerge. It makes us more attentive and resource-aware, and open to collaborations, even unlikely ones through our usual world view.

Over time, some human constructs for living have become overblown, unpegged from the context within which they made sense: unsustainable on Earth with her finite resources.

In Climate Biodiversity Coaching[5], we actively remind ourselves of our part in systems. That our usual world views, stories and scripts, are chosen. We can choose better ones, that fit Earth's resources better. Choose where to get our inspiration from. We can collaborate with others: to construct a shared narrative, one that combines powers, shapes group cultural understanding and informs actions and movements.

When we seek to create more helpful constructs, we can open up to other ways of seeing and being that may be better attuned to the earthly context we find ourselves in. Earth's life forces also affect us. It strikes me that our ongoing existence on Earth alongside other forms of matter, living and inanimate, can be seen as an expression of hope.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Hope fluctuates, more in some people, in some moments, than in others.

Hope can arise unconsciously, to support us naturally.

Hope can be raised through conscious practice.

KEY PRACTICES:

Contact

Quality contact with nature is our natural way to replenish. We have the equipment that is co-evolved for it: our senses.

Day 5 Part 1 Reflect: Sit outside, allowing time to connect with place; purposefully allowing the familiar old stories in your head to fade into the background, as you use your senses, become absorbed in awe and observant of your relationship with aspects of the natural world for a moment[6]: pay attention to beauty, to what it stirs in you.

What represents hope, in the natural scene you are taking in? What are the features of this, which might be symbolic of aspects of hope? What function might these features have in your story going forward? Go straight on to the next reflection.

Gratitude

Gratitude is about recalling what we love, what makes the difference for us. It is important for self-nourishment, nurturing us in our context in nature and in our groups, evolved as social animals. Gratitude puts us in tune with what matters.

Day 5 Part 2 Reflect: What are you/we grateful for today, this season, this place, this group? Write or draw something. This is a worthwhile investment of time, building your experience of gratitude for easier access later.

Stories that matter are meant to be lived. ' When we find a good story and fully give ourselves to it, that story can act through us, breathing new life into everything we do'[7].

Acceptance

If we were only to focus on positive experiences, we would discount important information and limit our full capacity. Negative experiences can yield learning too, in their moment of harvest.

Day 6 Part 1 Reflect: Give time to feeling all your feelings, which have evolved for the purpose of informing us. Feel your joy and equally honour your pain, fear or anger. This part of hope building practice is about being in our reality fully, not trying to feel something different but properly recognising and experiencing each emotion that exists.

If you find that this is too much, perhaps you can allow yourself to feel a tenth of it, for a time, enough to notice where it is located in your body, get to know the qualities of what you are feeling, and accept that it exists.

Experiment with being curious and write about what the lasting resource is from each feeling, or doodle, to draw it out. Why, over the ages of evolution did our human ancestors need this emotion? What edge or reserve did it give them for survival? How might that serve you now? Hold lightly in mind for now, and then notice what emotion you experience next.

Resilience

Integrating what we know now to adapt and respond. Allow thinking space for the previous parts of our reflection to combine with openness for it to change something within us: a willingness to be resourced differently by it. This leads to the potential for seeing things afresh over time.


Photo credit Sharon T Photography 2025

Day 6 Part 2 Reflect: Talk with someone about the reflections so far and invite them to respond. See their responses as part of 'milling and mulling', not to be swallowed whole, but to be chewed over and digested, creating something fertile for later. Sleep on it, let it emerge in good time.

Mattering

The feeling of hope often comes in the process of this, especially when seeking the development of mattering together, as hope in one individual can often spread to others in a group.

Day 7 Integrate: Look back on your drawings and reflections from the previous six days. Feel your connectedness and seek the pathways for your story to evolve. Write, talk, or draw this into culmination, experiencing your emotions, intention, and capability to create more of what matters out of your reflective material.

As coaches we can include in our role what enhances awareness and capacity in our clients. These practices can increase hope and enhance access to hopefulness by strengthening the pathways.

I am reminded of how collaborating matters in challenging moments like these; as human to human, sharing capabilities, responding to our energetic sparks, mattering to each other. I reach out in gratitude, offer what I do best, coaching. We are interconnected in ways real as life itself. In this process, I experience more hope.

I gently move the little wren to an empty swallow's nest in our covered entrance, where she can recover quietly away from hawk, fox or crow. Later I check, and smile. The bird has safely flown. I hope my children will see her children.

A note of care for readers.

This article is aimed at raising awareness and enhancing resilience among coaches and their clients. Reflecting on hope can carry complex associations. Coaching supervision or therapy may be appropriate in the context of your work and life. Be aware of the risks in your surroundings when out in nature.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorenza Clifford works with Leaders and Coaches: facing realities, challenges and transitions; working 'with the grain' of who you are; our nature, ecosystems and economy. New realities emerge through enhanced curiosity, presence, choice in relationships.

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Photo credit Iryna Varanovich

COACHING, SUPERVISION AND THE THING WITH FEATHERS

Taking inspiration from Emily Dickinson and the HopePunk concept, Ian Mitchell uncovers a series of 'contrapuntal weavings' for coaches and supervisors to ponder in their practice.

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

- Emily Dickinson

Some years back, I completed a Professional MA in Coaching Leaders through Transition and Change. Back then, I could never have guessed what the world might look like when our species arrived in the mid-2020s. I had no idea of the transitions we would experience on the journey here and what changes might be being asked of us coaches as a result.

However, the pace and extent of change in the world have been such that many of us have, to some degree, been left reeling. The conversations in some of my Supervision and Reflective Practice groups have certainly reflected this. So, in 2024 and 2025, I donned my explorer's identity once again and completed a Research project focusing on exploring what Spirituality[1], in its broadest sense, might offer to the world of Leadership Coaching.

And, as part of that research, I came across Mike Perk and Charles Matthews' excellent book *HopePunk*[2].

Subtitling their book 'A guide for optimists bettering workplaces', Mike and Charlie say that the HopePunk genre is for people who believe

that bettering our organisations, society, humanity, and the planet is the most essential purpose we can have. The term itself comes from a 2017 Tumblr post by author Alexandra Rowland, who declared, 'The opposite of grimdark is hopepunk. Pass it on.'[3]

Emerging as a reaction against the bleakness and cynicism of the grimdark gaming subgenre, HopePunk celebrates radical kindness, defiance, and optimism in the face of despair.

I, as their coach, may need to whisper: 'The opposite of grimdark is hopepunk. Pass it on'

I don't want to expend too much energy in exploring how Grimdark's bleakness and cynicism might translate from *Warhammer 40,000©* into a byword for the human world in which we carry out our coaching. Suffice to say, the core elements of its harsh, amoral world, with a focus on conflict and survival, might not be completely unrecognisable to some of our clients as they reflect on their working landscape. It certainly mirrors the language that some of my clients use when they've reached a place of feeling psychologically safe enough to give attention and voice to their deepest physical and emotional responses to the world that they inhabit.

And it is in that moment that I, as their coach, may need to whisper: 'The opposite of grimdark is hopepunk. Pass it on.' And, as a coach supervisor, it's a whisper I find myself offering more and more in individual and group conversations. And what truth might that whisper contain?

'Hope,' say Matthews and Perk, 'is the force of will and creativity that can imagine better outcomes against all odds…(Meanwhile) to be Punk is …to exhibit the self-belief to be our full true selves, without fear of failure, being shamed, or feeling isolated.'[4]

It's a whisper that, in the words of a dear friend of mine, 'can move molecules.'

The contrapuntal whisper at the heart of Emily Dickinson's poem re-casts hope not as optimism, force, or strategy, but rather in the form of a connection with felt presence. As a living, relational force that perches itself somewhere 'in the soul' and begins to sing a tune that is transformative in its ability to offer new ways of reading ourselves, our relationships and our systemic context.

And for me, in both supervision and in coaching, when we invite our clients into that understanding, we enable them (and indeed ourselves) to uncover a surprisingly powerful developmental lens. A lens that can, in adult developmental terms, expand our meaning-making to a place in which the potential levels of ambiguity, perceived naivety or excessive moral certainty that critics often suggest to be Achilles heels in the HopePunk mindset can be more readily navigated.

Before exploring this any further, let's briefly talk about Counterpoint. In musical composition, it's a device that allows two melodic lines to move with their own integrity while sounding together, creating a richness neither could achieve alone. Paul Simon's Graceland, for example, uses counterpoint to stunning effect, particularly in tracks featuring Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

Take, for instance, 'Homeless', where Simon's lead line moves in one emotional direction whilst the choral lines move in another; the result is a layered clarity in which distinct voices, each true to themselves, weave into something fuller than any could offer alone.

In coaching or supervision, contrasting perspectives or energies can work together in a similar way. Perhaps one lens offers steadiness whilst another brings provocation; sometimes one softens and another sharpens. When brought together with sensitivity and held side by side, they illuminate one another- counterpoint allows difference to resonate, revealing patterns and possibilities that were previously hidden. In this interplay, clarity can deepen, complexity can become more easily navigated, and a fuller, more truthful picture of the client's developmental experiences can begin to emerge and take shape.

And so, for me, the contrapuntal resonance between Dickinson's thing with feathers and HopePunk's forcefully creative will is a sound that might offer a potentially powerful transformative frame. Offered as an integrated coaching or supervisory perspective, the blend may well offer a fuller field of awareness, which may facilitate our clients to confront reality as they see it, whilst also preparing themselves to step with agency and imagination, toward the reality that they feel might yet become.

And perhaps it is by allowing this resonance to infuse our own coaching or supervisory stance that those of us who offer this work might find new opportunities presenting themselves to us. And in my own practice, I'm exploring four practical 'contrapuntal weavings' in which both I and those with whom I work can embody a hope-filled response to the world in which we find ourselves.

1. Hope as an inner orientation | Hope as a chosen stance

Dickinson tells us that the thing with feathers 'perches in the soul.' I don't want to get into some kind of debate around the body and soul dichotomy; theologians have argued about that for centuries. Rather, for me, the point that Emily is making is that hope begins as an inner orientation. A quieting of our interior posture, one often emanating from parts of us that proponents of Internal Family System thinking might call our inner Firefighters and Managers and steadying our capacity to see.

Of course, for HopePunks, once we steady that capacity, it needs to seep into our chosen stance within the world. Hope, they argue, is not naïve or passive. It's not something that should remain as simply an orientation; it needs to become a deliberate stance that we choose to adopt, even when circumstances give us no reason to do so. As Nikita Mor, writing in the Thought Catalog Website[5], puts it:

There will come a time when you will let yourself give in to a life-changing epiphany, and you will realise that soft is strong. Soft is changeable, Soft is malleable. Soft is adaptable. Soft is natural. Soft is you, the real you, and when you remember to be soft again, you will finally, finally be free

Soft is strong. And it perches in the soul. Perhaps as supervisors and coaches, we might, as Jung is attributed to having put it, when meeting our clients human soul to human soul, embody a thing with feathers and hold the space for them to soften. And in softening, emancipate themselves from whatever areas of Grimdark they might currently be experiencing.

2. Hope as a constant accompanying presence | Hope as embodied emotional resilience

Hope, says Emily Dickinson, 'never stops at all.' She sees it as a continuous, wordless tune that makes itself heard above the most cataclysmic foreground noises, but I think that might be a bit harsh. Maybe the thing with feathers simply uses words that we humans don't understand. Maybe it's singing with what Van Morrison called the 'Inarticulate speech of the heart'[6] - a notion he says that he adapted from a G.B. Shaw comment (uncredited) about:

> That idea of communicating with as little articulation as possible, at the same time being emotionally articulate

Now there's a competency for coaches and supervisors to ponder. Emotional articulacy, offered to our clients in a way that never stops at all. I'd love to explore that idea with anyone who's interested.

Meanwhile, over at Hopepunk, we can find, for example, Rapelang Rabana saying:

> Early on, I started to doubt this thing of living on autopilot…My ability to stay close to uncomfortable questions allowed me to keep questioning and to be a fly on the wall of my own life. I'm living my life, but I can also step out of my feelings and my mind and just look at myself.[7]

A millionaire by the time she was 25, Rabana now co-leads Grindstone Ventures, a female-led African venture capital fund. Born and raised to embody hopeful resilience by parents who themselves were born into poverty yet fought and overcame class structures, she embodies the notion of emotional resilience in her mindful, confident approach to life.

There's a competency for coaches and supervisors to ponder. Emotional articulacy, offered to our clients in a way that never stops at all

And so perhaps there's another potential competency for us coaches and supervisors to ponder. An understanding of Hope that's not simply about positivity but invites our clients to keep questioning in a manner that makes their own lives an object of developmental observation and inquiry.

3. Hope as an intimate relationship | Hope as actively embracing failure.

I love how Dickinson talks in relational terms about hope. There's such a strong visual portrayal in her words. Hope 'perches'; think about that for a second. It implies intimacy, conjures images of conversations on high kitchen stools between friends. There's not a lot of formality in the image.

And hope doesn't get 'abashed'. Abashment, according to Google, is an acute, negative emotional response to a perceived threat to one's social image or competence. Seen through the totally subjective lens ground out and polished by the life I've lived, it can be a response to a perceived threat to self-worth; negative professional, family or social evaluation; awareness of what I believe to be uncontrollable internal inadequacy, or failure to live up to whatever external standards to which I believe I should be subject.

Hope is an internal companion, inherently human, and one that, once discovered, is instrumental in accompanying and sustaining any of us through whatever beautiful or terrible moments, events and situations that life unfolds

But hope roots itself in intimate relationship, inviting me to approach life differently.

The counterpoint in HopePunk, through the voice of Sahil Lavinga[8], articulates the difference like this:

> For years, I considered myself a failure. At my lowest point, I had to lay off 75 per cent of my company, including many of my best friends. I had failed.

The owner of Gumroad, a digital platform for artists, musicians, and other creators, continues:

> It took me years to realise that I was misguided from the outset. I no longer feel shame in the path I took to get to where I am today – but for a long time I did.

The HopePunk take on failure is the creation of an invitation to embrace, but not to celebrate, and that feels to me like a stance that might, to paraphrase Perk and Matthews:

> Enable your client to be more Punk and try new approaches, stances, experiments and so on, without the fear of retribution if they don't work out.[9]

And so perhaps we are uncovering another potential supervisory or coaching competency on which to ponder. An embodiment, through relationship, of the level of mutuality that allows for shared vulnerability that encourages failure to be embraced in an honest and accepting audit, but not performatively celebrated as an attempt to manipulate our client's meaning-making.

4. Hope as Non-Transactional Gift | Hope as Ethical Resistance

In Emily's beautiful framing hope 'never asks a crumb of me.' Not even in the most extreme situations. Rather, it perches and sings without looking for anything at all in return. Hope, she says, is non-transactional. In the world inhabited by ourselves and many of our clients, this is indeed a rare commodity.

And hope is unearned; though it's not presented by her as an external gift from a supranatural source, but as an internal companion, inherently human, and one that, once discovered, is instrumental in accompanying and sustaining any of us through whatever beautiful or terrible moments, events and situations that life unfolds.

I wonder if this might hint at yet another potential supervisory or coaching competency on which to ponder, that of our representing, or saving a chair for, the notion of living a non-transactionally based life. Of course, we'd need to understand and embody that notion pretty comprehensively ourselves first, and that's not always an easy thing to do.

In another poem[10], Dickinson calls hope a 'strange invention' moving with 'its unique momentum', 'unremitting' yet 'never wearing out'. And in doing so, it's as if she opens a doorway into HopePunk's contrapuntal sound.

To be Punk is to push back against the oppression born from the need to control and the inequality that this creates. It's about standing up to and stripping away the complexity, and with that finding the space and freedom to express one's true self.[11]

Or, in the language of author and developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, 'experiencing a self-authoring transition'[12]. Kegan views this as a crucial developmental milestone in adulthood, moving from being defined by external expectations to constructing one's own internal values and direction. Perk and Matthews might prefer the term 'being more Punk'.

And 'being more Punk' is all about ethical resistance. Resistance to cynicism. To dehumanisation. And to the Grimdark despair that can find its way into our coaching and supervision conversations more times than we might deem to be usual these days. Maybe 'being more Punk' as a supervisor or coach might lead us away from asking our clients to reflect on questions such as 'What outcome will this hope get me?' and towards others such as 'What kind of leader do I choose to be in the face of this?' 'What is the ethical stance I want to embody?'

And maybe in that notion lie the seeds of another potential coaching or supervisory competency on which to ponder.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian Mitchell, through Harthill, offers integrative coaching and supervision rooted in presence, meaning-making, and the active weaving of inner work with whole-context awareness. Alongside his long-time colleague Siân Lumsden and others, he co-facilitates an AC-accredited developmental programme for coaches drawn to the possibility of working in this way.

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FROM CONTRACTING TO CURATING: SHIFTING FROM FEAR TO HOPE

Jo Reeves has beef with 'contracting' when it's conducted as a checklist, a formality to 'get right', rather than a relational, co-curated human act that provides safety, clarity and partnership.

I really dislike the word contracting in coaching.

There, I've said it.

We all know why it exists- to create structure, boundaries, shared expectations and safety between coach and client. It's embedded across every professional framework: the ICF competencies talk about Establishing and Maintaining Agreements, the EMCC includes Managing the Contract, and the Association for Coaching capability model lists contracting as part of clarifying outcomes, boundaries and the coaching relationship.[1]

And in most accredited coach training programmes, contracting is one of the very first skills we learn- and one of the first we're assessed on. It's presented as essential (which of course it is), but the emphasis on 'getting it right' can unintentionally turn it into a performance.

That's where the problem begins.

My thoughts are when we approach contracting through the lens of correctness- as something to perfect rather than to explore- we risk missing its relational heart. Coaching isn't about perfection; it's about presence. But, for many new coaches, the fear of 'doing it wrong' takes up more space than curiosity ever could.

Because contracting, to me, feels like a checklist.

And coaching is far from that, right?

WHEN 'DOING IT RIGHT' GETS IN THE WAY

During my own coaching assessment many years ago, I remember feeling tense at the start of my observed session. I knew I needed to demonstrate effective contracting- so I ran through the mental list: goals, confidentiality, timing, roles, expectations. All the while I was internally questioning myself: Have I covered everything? Will this tick the assessor's box?

It felt mechanical, not relational.

Halfway through, instinct took over (thank goodness)! I drew a large circle on a piece of paper between us and said, 'Let's imagine this as the space we're working in. What would you like this space to hold for you today?'

My client picked up the pen and began to draw- words, shapes, doodles. I added a few of mine. The conversation softened. We both breathed out. The energy changed.

Language has weight. Words influence posture. 'Contract' suggests something fixed, legal and binary. It can unintentionally nudge us toward caution rather than curiosity

It was as though the space became visible- no longer something abstract in my head, but something we could both see and feel. The act of drawing grounded us in the moment, bringing clarity and calm.

What I'd been trying to achieve through 'contracting'- safety, clarity, partnership- emerged the moment we stopped talking about boundaries and started co-curating the space itself.

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORD

Contracting feels heavy. Legal. Binding. Black and white. It sounds like something you sign off and file away.

And in reality- is that what happens? Hmmm?

For many coaches- especially those in training, newly qualified, or whose practice has become less regular, the word can ignite fear. It sounds formal, even corrective. And when fear enters the coaching room, curiosity takes a step back.

Yet the true intention of contracting is rooted in hope: establishing the safety and trust that allow exploration, creativity and courage.

Amy Edmondson's research into psychological safety[2] shows that learning and innovation thrive where people can take risks without fear of humiliation. A good coaching relationship should do the same.

A QUICK LOOK BACK

The word contract in a coaching context, comes from Transactional Analysis (TA), where it referred to a clear agreement to work towards change and avoid hidden agendas. When coaching borrowed the idea, the vocabulary stayed. Over time, professional bodies formalised it into their competency frameworks.

These frameworks are invaluable for standards and ethics. But language has weight. Words influence posture. 'Contract' suggests something fixed, legal and binary. It can unintentionally nudge us toward caution rather than curiosity[3].

LANGUAGE SHAPES PRESENCE

Words create worlds.

When I say contracting, I can feel my shoulders square and my tone sharpen. It signals structure and compliance.

When I say curating, something shifts. It's visual, sensory, person-centred. I think of light, texture, movement- of intentionally arranging space so something meaningful can emerge.

Co-curating goes further: it invites collaboration and feeling. The client becomes a partner in shaping the conditions- not just the content- of the conversation. It invites metaphor, imagination and even creativity.

And that matters, because emotion is information. When we curate, we don't only set intellectual boundaries; we tend to the emotional tone of the space. We notice the energy, the temperature, the rhythm. We make room for feeling.

That's where transformation happens- in spaces that are felt, not merely managed.

WHEN WORDS BLUR: A NEURODIVERGENT PERSPECTIVE

I remember attending a group coaching course where the coach shared their screen to 'walk us through the contracting document.'

It was a busy Word doc- pages of bullet points and columns. Within moments, my neurodivergent brain was overwhelmed. The words blurred into noise; my eyes lost focus; I drifted off.

It wasn't that I didn't care- quite the opposite. I simply couldn't enter the conversation through that doorway.

That experience reminded me how easily process can override presence. Depending on how our brains work, a word-heavy, checklist-driven approach can sometimes make the space feel narrower. Co-curating offers something different: flexibility, imagery, movement, pause, and choice.

THE RELATIONSHIP IS THE WORK

Research on the working alliance[4] shows that the quality of the relationship- empathy, mutual trust, responsiveness- is one of the strongest predictors of outcomes. The relationship is not the backdrop; it is the coaching.

If we approach contracting as a one-off task, we risk fixing what should be fluid. Curating, by contrast, treats the relationship as something alive- like tending a fire or shaping clay. It evolves through shared attention and regular touch.

FROM CHECKLIST TO COLLABORATION

Here's what I believe: curating space for your client is the absolute core of a good coaching relationship.

Because what we're really doing isn't a one-time agreement. It's an ongoing, evolving process- a living, breathing collaboration.

When we curate, we move from compliance to creativity. We ask questions like:

- 'What kind of space helps you think best today?'
- 'What needs to be present here for you to feel safe enough to stretch?'
- 'What would make this space feel more supportive or spacious as we continue?'

FEAR VS HOPE

Fear narrows focus. Hope widens it.

In psychological terms, hope is not wishful thinking- it's agency plus pathways[5] - the belief that we can find ways forward and the motivation to pursue them. When we curate space, we are helping clients reconnect to both.

Hopeful coaching spaces feel lighter, warmer, more dynamic. They make room for movement and emotion- two key ingredients of change.

HOLDING SPACE FOR THE TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

As coaching becomes more accessible, it's inevitable that we'll encounter clients who bring big, complex, and sometimes painful topics into the room- bereavement, loss, trauma, burnout, and yes, even suicide.

The likelihood is that every coach will meet this at some point, simply by virtue of being human and working with humans.

One in five people will experience suicidal thoughts, and one in 15 will attempt.

Coaches are not clinicians- and we must know our own boundaries- but we can, and must, stay human.

For me, this is where co-curating safety becomes vital. When we create and maintain a space grounded in psychological and emotional safety, we can meet the whole of the client's experience- without shame, without panic, and without abandoning the person in front of us.

Curating safety isn't about taking responsibility for the client; it's about staying resourceful with them- calm, centred, and able to hold presence while supporting them to find the right professional help when needed.

I often return to the COACH vs CRASH model[6] to describe this difference in state:

CRASH: Contracted, Reactive, Analysis paralysis, Separating, Hurt / hurtful

COACH: Centred, Open, Attending, Connected, Holding space

Co-curation sits firmly in the COACH state- centred, open, connected, holding. It enables both coach and client to stay steady when big emotions arise, creating conditions of hope rather than fear.

We can't predict what a client will bring. But we can choose how we meet it.

RETHINKING HOW WE TEACH IT

Across many accredited programmes, contracting remains a core competence. Rightly so: it ensures ethics, safety and clarity. But how it's taught can make the difference between fear and freedom.

In my experience as a tutor and mentor coach, trainees often freeze when assessed on 'contracting.' They worry about missing a step. Perhaps it's time to re-imagine how we develop this skill.

Instead of 'Have you covered every point?', what if assessors asked:

- 'How did you and your client co-create clarity and safety?'
- 'What did you notice about the energy or emotion in that opening conversation?'

That shift invites reflection, artistry and confidence- all signals of a hopeful practitioner.

A MORE HOPEFUL LANGUAGE

If contracting primes fear- fear of doing it wrong, fear of being judged- curating primes hope. Hope of discovery. Hope of partnership. Hope that both coach and client can keep reshaping the space as the work deepens.

It's language that moves us from head to heart, to gut. From checklist to connection.

Coaching isn't just cognitive. It's emotional. It's sensory. It's human.

So yes, the intention behind contracting matters: safety, clarity, expectations. But the word itself? We can do better.

When we teach and practise contracting as a process-driven task, we risk creating distance and fear. When we curate space with our clients- and keep co-curating it- we invite hope, emotion and transformation.

It isn't about signing off a contract.

It's about curating the conditions for transformation.

Note: The practical stuff still matters. Timings, payment, cancellation, emergency contact- all of that sits in what I call a coaching agreement. Simple, clear, and separate from the ongoing work of curating the coaching space.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jo Reeves PCC, PGCert, is a transformational change coach, tutor, and speaker with nearly a decade of experience creating coaching cultures within global brands. An ICF-accredited PCC, Certified Burnout Coach, and Supervisor, she brings a rich background in substance misuse, addiction recovery, and behavioural change to her work. A proud Brummie, Jo combines warmth with evidence-based practice to inspire authentic, lasting transformation. Her insights have featured in Psychologies, Women & Home, and People Management magazines.

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To find out more, or to register interest in our programmes for organisations, leaders or coaches, get in touch via the website or connect on Linked in. **https://www.linkedin.com/in/poojasachdev/**

HAPPY ENOUGH: RETHINKING WELLBEING FOR LEADERS, TEAMS AND ORGANISATIONS

Is wellbeing being weaponised? **Pooja Sachdev** argues that the constant striving for peak performance risks another route towards burnout and she shares her model for sustainable flourishing.

Have you had your 5 portions of fruit and veg today? 8 hours of sleep? The right number of steps? Grams of protein? Minutes of screen time…? We live in an age of high-performance wellbeing, where every part of life- body, mind, work- can be optimised, tracked, and benchmarked. Managing all this can sometimes feel like a full-time job!

Organisations, too, are increasingly concerned with employee wellbeing and engagement. Companies host wellness weeks, offer meditation apps and mindfulness sessions, and leaders talk about thriving cultures. The implicit message is: you must feel better to perform better. Wellbeing has become another KPI.

The more we chase happiness, the further it seems to drift

Yet, despite our collective effort, the proportion of people struggling with mental health is growing, and levels of burnout and quiet quitting at work remain high. In fact, the more we chase happiness, the further it seems to drift.

And I sometimes wonder whether we may be chasing the wrong thing.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS?

The 'pursuit of happiness' has long been held as a fundamental human right, and in many ways, seen as the meaning of life itself[1].

Modern wellbeing culture, however, often equates happiness with constant positivity, energy, and motivation. That's an unrealistic (and frankly exhausting) expectation, especially in the context of work. No-one can feel inspired every day, and no workplace can be a permanent source of joy.

People don't need to be ecstatic at work- they need psychological safety, meaning, and space for the full range of human emotions.

When we chase an idealised form of happiness, we inevitably fall short and then feel guilty or defective.

Happy Enough is my invitation to replace the pursuit of 'more' with the practice of 'enough' - a state of contentment that allows for fluctuation, imperfection, and even struggle.

WHAT DOES HAPPY ENOUGH MEAN?

Happy Enough reframes wellbeing as sustainable flourishing[2].

It replaces the relentless pursuit of positivity with a hopeful steadiness - a balance of joy, purpose, and acceptance.

To be well, not perfect. To be enough, not exhaustive.

To do this, we need to think beyond simplistic definitions of happiness and understand the wider picture that incorporates context and culture.

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF HAPPINESS

Happiness itself has many forms.

Psychologists distinguish between hedonic happiness (the pleasure of positive emotion, comfort, and joy in the moment) and eudaimonic happiness (the deeper fulfilment that comes from purpose, meaning and growth over time).

Layered on this is social or relational wellbeing, which comes from a sense of belonging and connectedness that sustains us through life's ups and downs.

In the workplace, these play out differently. A team social can spark hedonic joy in the moment (or maybe the opposite for some people who dread those 'forced fun' events!). But the long-term sense of fulfilment (the eudaimonic kind) comes from knowing that our work matters, and that we're learning and growing. When organisations focus only on the first type (pizza Fridays, perks, etc.), they miss the deeper levers of wellbeing that sustain people over time.

Embracing Happy Enough begins with understanding the different types of happiness and recognising that meaning, purpose and relationships matter as much as mood. This becomes even more nuanced when we look at context and culture.

CONTEXT AND CULTURE

Previous generations held a more pragmatic relationship with work satisfaction. Our parents and grandparents didn't expect their jobs to be endlessly inspiring. Work was often a source of structure, security, and contribution, not necessarily a daily passion or designed for self-actualisation.

I'm not advocating for a return to a purely transactional mindset when it comes to our careers; but there is something to be said for allowing the possibility that a 'good enough' job can coexist with a rich, fulfilling life. Purpose can be distributed across different spheres: family, friendships, community, creativity. Maybe not every job needs to light us up every day. Maybe in some cases, stability in the work sphere is just what we need- while joy or fulfilment comes from elsewhere.

Our understanding of happiness is also profoundly shaped by culture.

In Western societies, happiness is often seen as individual achievement – a personal state of success or satisfaction. In many Eastern and collectivist cultures, happiness is tied to harmony, duty, and relational balance. There's no universal formula for happiness. Global organisations need to recognise how cultural narratives might shape employee expectations and experiences.

Without context and culture, we risk promoting a narrow version of wellbeing that might not resonate with or serve everyone.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ORGANISATIONS?

For organisations, this requires a mindset shift.

As someone who has spent a large chunk of my career analysing employee survey data, I know how much we hang on that crucial engagement score! But sometimes, perhaps it's not about simply driving a higher number, but taking a step back and asking: 'What's a realistic score for this person or this team at this time?' and 'What else do we need to be measuring or understanding about their context?'

> ***At the heart of this is hope - the quiet confidence and conviction that you don't have to be perfect to be fulfilled, and you don't need constant excitement to feel alive***

We need to design cultures where people are enabled to contribute, and experience meaning and growth, in a way that makes sense for them, without necessarily feeling pressure to be perpetually engaged or seen to be 'thriving'.

This might mean:

- **Having honest conversations** to understand what people need, and what their context and challenges are right now, rather than relying solely on simple universal metrics
- **Challenging ways of working that drive exhaustion** e.g. back-to-back meetings, always-on pressure, role confusion- does it really need to be this way? What's the long-term cost of not changing these norms?
- **Systemic changes** that drive sustainable wellbeing (like flexible working and manageable workloads) rather than quick fixes or superficial perks (like smoothies and apps)
- **Job design** that takes account of recovery and rhythm, normalising boundaries and rest, rather than endless urgency
- **Valuing steadiness and resilience,** not just high engagement, and looking at long-term performance not just short-term results
- **Building belonging, fairness and psychological safety,** so people can be honest when they are not OK. Do people here feel safe? Heard? Hopeful about their future?
- **Adaptive environments** that respect different life stages and needs, and cultures, rather than 'one size fits all' wellness

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LEADERS AND COACHES?

As leaders and coaches, we need to recognise that engagement and inspiration will naturally ebb and flow. Our role is to help people find what they need to be able to be well and do well- in the long term.

Here are some reflections that could guide a coaching conversation around sustainable wellbeing rooted in resilience, purpose and hope:

1. **Understand the context and range for each person**
   You can ask: 'Where in your life do you have enough?' and 'What are you hopeful for?'

   Invite people to define their own 'minimum viable wellbeing' – the essentials that keep them steady and optimistic.
2. **Reframe trade-offs as choices, not failures**
   Help people see that every yes carries a no. Making intentional trade-offs preserves wellbeing – perfection is rarely possible. Ask: 'Where might ''good enough' serve you better than 'perfect''?
3. **Normalise variability**
   We are cyclical beings. Ebb and flow, recovery and renewal are all part of the process. No one can be productive and positive all the time!
4. **Revisit the purpose of work**
   Not every role needs to inspire awe always. Sometimes meaning lies in doing solid, reliable work that supports others. Recognise and value the quieter satisfactions of competence and contribution. Ask: 'What does your work mean to you right now? How does it serve your purpose?'
5. **Articulate hope amidst uncertainty**
   At the heart of this is hope – the quiet confidence and conviction that you don't have to be perfect to be fulfilled, and you don't need constant excitement to feel alive. You can do well and have a meaningful, satisfying life even if it's messy, uncertain, or imperfect. Ask: 'How can hope guide your next step – even when the full picture isn't clear?'

A QUIET REBELLION

In a culture obsessed with optimisation, Happy Enough is a quiet rebellion – but it's not about 'settling'.

It's about discerning what truly matters and giving each person permission to define their own happiness, to choose realism over perfection, to have seasons of contentment rather than constant striving. To perform without breaking.

As coaches, leaders, and culture-shapers, our job is not to push people towards constant peak performance or euphoric motivation. It's to create conditions where people can do good work, rest well, and live whole lives – within and beyond the workplace.

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1 Sachdev, Pooja. 'Positive Psychology, Psychotherapy and the Pursuit of Happiness' (Thesis, MA Integrative Counselling, 2011)

2 Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. New York: Free Press.

With MBA and PSYD (forensic psychology) qualifications, **Dr. Joan Swart** spent 20 years in corporate management roles before switching to a psychology practice. Since then, she has designed curricula, supervised, and trained learners at institutions like the Dr. Bosman Group and the Jay Shetty Certification School. She has authored three books and various book chapters and peer-reviewed articles. Joan is an accredited supervisor with the Association for Coaching and Corporate Programme Director at Coaching Minds.

WHEN HOPE IS CO-CREATED

Joan Swart outlines the relational foundations of change in coaching: a collaborative process that gives birth to hope through connection.

Hope is often described as a feeling, a belief, or an attitude toward the future. Yet in coaching practice, hope functions less as an internal emotion and more as a relational process. Clients rarely arrive with fully formed optimism; instead, hope emerges through connection — through being seen, understood, and accompanied as they make sense of what feels difficult. In a period marked by social isolation, uncertainty, and cognitive overload, the coaching relationship itself becomes a vital container for restoring a client's sense of possibility.

HOPE AS A RELATIONAL PHENOMENON

While psychological models frequently frame hope as an individual attribute, contemporary research increasingly positions it as a capacity shaped by relationships. Co-regulation — the neurobiological process through which human beings stabilise one another's emotional states — expands a person's cognitive bandwidth, enabling creativity, planning, and resilience[1]. Within a coaching alliance marked by psychological safety, attunement, and steady presence, clients often find clarity that feels out of reach when they are alone.

This widening effect mirrors the 'broaden-and-build' principle in positive psychology, which suggests that supportive interactions help individuals move from narrowed, threat-focused thinking toward broader perspectives and more flexible problem-solving[2]. When a client experiences the coach as grounded, open, and curious, it becomes easier to imagine routes forward — not because obstacles disappear, but because the nervous system shifts from protection to engagement.

WHEN CLIENTS LOSE HOPE

Clients encountering despair rarely express it directly. Instead, it shows up as withdrawal, rumination, overwhelm, or a 'narrowing of options'. Despair is not merely emotional; it is cognitive. It constricts imagination, suppresses initiative, and makes future thinking feel impossible. In this state, exploring goals or strategies prematurely risks reinforcing the client's sense of inadequacy.

A more effective approach is relational: slowing the pace, listening deeply, reflecting emotional cues, and gently naming what is present. This allows the client to reconnect with their own internal resources at a tolerable rhythm. The following vignette illustrates this dynamic.

A mid-career professional entered coaching describing a 'narrowing of options'. Although objectively capable, she felt emotionally flat and disconnected from her usual confidence. Instead of pushing goal-setting, the coach focused on steady presence, naming what he noticed in her tone and posture. Over time, she reported that the sessions felt like 'borrowing clarity' until her own returned. As connection strengthened, she began identifying new possibilities she had previously dismissed.

Her renewed agency emerged directly from feeling seen, attuned to, and emotionally accompanied.

WHAT CULTURAL DIVERSITY TEACHES ABOUT HOPE

Understanding hope as relational is particularly important in cross-cultural coaching. In many Western contexts, hope is framed as an individual mindset linked to personal achievement and autonomy. By contrast, numerous collectivist cultures understand hope as something held and sustained by community, ancestry, and shared purpose[3].

For clients drawing from communal traditions, hope is often strengthened through relational belonging rather than individual goal pursuit. A culturally responsive coach will therefore explore:

- how clients' communities interpret hope
- whether hope is experienced individually or collectively
- how relationships, history, and social context shape a client's sense of possibility

TURNING RELATIONAL HOPE INTO ACTION

Relational hope becomes most powerful when it supports meaningful action. Once clients regain cognitive openness and emotional steadiness, coaches can help them convert emerging possibilities into steps that feel manageable. Effective methods include:

- co-creating micro-goals that build early momentum
- drawing attention to strengths and past evidence of competence
- mapping options together rather than prescribing solutions
- identifying supportive relationships that reinforce agency

Hope in coaching is not a motivational technique but a relational experience that restores a client's capacity to imagine, choose, and act. When coaches offer attuned presence, genuine curiosity, and a space of psychological safety, clients often rediscover the agency they feared had been lost. In this sense, hope is not merely felt — it is co-created between people, and from that connection, meaningful change becomes possible.

1 Porges, S. W. (2011). The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation. New York: W. W. Norton.

2 Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory. American Psychologist, 56(3), 218–226. https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.218

3 Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. Psychological Review, 98(2), 224–253. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224

Dr. Robert Biswas-Diener is a coach, researcher, and Thinkers50 nominee. His most recent coaching book is Positive Provocation: 25 Questions to elevate your coaching practice (2023).

Prof. Christian van Nieuwerburgh is Professor of Coaching and Positive Psychology at the Centre for Positive Psychology and Health at RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences. He is a best-selling author of coaching books and a highly-respected international speaker and consultant.

THE ROLE OF HOPE IN COACHING

Drawing on Hope Theory, **Robert Biswas-Diener** and **Christian van Nieuwerburgh** outline how an awareness of pathways and agency thinking can unlock crucial creativity and determination in clients.

In 1999, nine elite female track athletes from the University of Montana (USA) participated in a psychological study that spanned an academic term. Over the weeks, they logged their training, their moods, their athletic performance, and their hope. Although it is easy to believe that the strongest and most talented athletes win, the researchers discovered that hope had an outsized effect on sports performance.

It turns out that this finding spans various areas of life: hope is related to better academic performance, less risky health behaviours, improved commitment to education, and enhanced work performance. Given the role of hope as an important element of success, it makes sense that we would pay attention to it in coaching.

THE TWO FACES OF HOPE

Like many psychological topics, it can be difficult to pin down what, exactly, hope is. This is, in part, because of the way we use the word in English. We often use it as a synonym for optimism, desire, yearning, longing, wishing, and dreaming. Certainly, each of these words is distinct from the others but also contains a fair amount of conceptual overlap. To sidestep this thorny linguistic thicket, we will focus only on formal Hope Theory.

Hope is related to better academic performance, less risky health behaviours, improved commitment to education, and enhanced work performance

Hope Theory, originally created by the psychologist Rick Snyder, centres around the idea that people think in predictable ways about their goals. This thinking can be reliably divided into two distinct ways of thinking.

The first is called 'agency thinking' and it is the idea that a person has a sense of control over the circumstances of their life. People high in agency thinking believe that they can exert some influence over their goals. They believe that they have the strengths, support, or other resources to bring to bear on the outcomes they desire.

The second type is called 'pathways thinking'. This is the idea that a person sees options. They believe that there are multiple routes to achieving their goal. As a result, people high in pathways thinking are less likely to get discouraged or give up because they are always game to shift to a new strategy.

HOPE THEORY IN COACHING

In coaching, dealing with hope is more than just asking a client if they are optimistic about a goal. We can, instead, use hope theory to help us understand how our client is thinking. This is, perhaps, most obvious in cases that the client expresses a lack of hope: discouragement, frustration, or pessimism. When this happens, we can ask ourselves, 'Is what the client saying indicative of one particular type of thinking?'

If a client tells us, 'I just don't see how it can be done' this suggests that they are struggling with pathways thinking. By contrast, if they say, 'I'm not up to this challenge' that's a struggle with agency thinking. Occasionally, clients express a problem with both types of thinking, alternating across a coaching session.

The good news is, once we have a handle on their particular brand of- for lack of a better word- hopelessness, we can intervene in a targeted way.

There are several common coaching techniques that serve as a handy way to address pathways thinking issues. Among these, brainstorming explicitly generates new options, while 'meta-view' asks the client to consider the situation from someone else's point of view, engaging creativity.

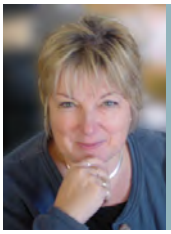
When confronting a client struggling with agency thinking, it can be useful to first assess the relative realism of their comments. Perhaps the client is, in fact, ill-equipped to handle their challenge. A seemingly negative statement such as 'I can't do it,' might, in reality, be accurate self-knowledge.

If the client's goal is to boost their agency thinking, then any conversation that helps resource the client can be useful. This includes asking about past progress, how they are currently managing the resources they have at their disposal, personal strengths, and spheres over which they have some influence.

To conclude, an aesthetic note about using hope theory in coaching. We have often used pathways and agency thinking to help us understand how the client is viewing their goal. That said, we often leave this theory invisible to the client. Rather than explaining the theory, or even using the terminology related to it, we simply employ some brainstorming or resourcing conversation as the circumstances warrant. We hope you will experiment with this in your own coaching.

Further Reading on Hope

Lopez, S (2014). Making Hope Happen: Create the future you want for yourself and others. Atria Books.



Marie Faire has an MA in Management Learning and is an AC accredited Master Executive Coach and an AC accredited Coach Supervisor. She is the lead trainer on both an AC accredited Coach Diploma and an AC accredited Coach Supervisor Programme. She is co-founder of the Beyond Partnership. **http://www.thebeyondpartnership.co.uk**

ON HOPE

For **Marie Faire**, hope is found in the proactive, purposeful, determined hunt for where we can each make a difference, however small.

When people ask me how I am, my current answer is 'It depends on which part of me you ask!'

Like most, I can be a jumble of conflicting emotions at the best of times. Right now? Hope does get a look in, but despair is never far away.

Personally, I am incredibly fortunate – I have enough of everything in my life.

When I meet a young man demonstrating deep emotional intelligence (think Roman Kemp talking about suicide prevention[1]) or I read about unbelievable acts of bravery (exemplified by Médecins Sans Frontières doctors in Gaza[2]) or I hear of simple acts of kindness and generosity: I feel hope.

And then my attention turns to the latest news of the excesses of neoliberalism and the rise of fascism- genocide, inequity, poverty, environmental degradation, cruelty: I feel despair.

I feel impotent.

While the examples are mine, I don't think for one moment that I am alone in the sentiments that I am expressing here. Many of the wonderful, skilled coaches and supervisors with whom I work tell me that their clients are expressing, and they themselves are experiencing, similar conflicting emotions.

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' Margaret Mead

I am a member and long-time supporter of a small charity: The Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BCT). It punches way above its weight and is making significant progress in a very specific and targeted approach to protecting and conserving rare bumblebee species in the UK. I attended the (online) AGM last week. They have a scientific and rigorous process for deciding what projects they initiate and support: they ensure they are in service of their core purpose, are in keeping with their values, maximise impact, and are sustainable. In answer to a question, the CEO talked about why they didn't merge with other larger organisations; mainly so they can keep a single focus and remain agile, but they also look to collaborate with others whenever there are mutual benefits in doing so, for example in responding to government policies and proposals.

I left inspired, grateful and with some hope. And thoughtful and reflective, with lots of questions, not about what they are doing but rather what I am doing.

They are making a difference. I know that I too can, and do, as Loren Eiseley said in the Starfish story, 'Make a difference to that one'[3] - so do you. And yet I wonder, when am I, or when are you, missing opportunities? When could I/you be more strategic, more purposeful, more intentional?

The BCT know how and when to act alone, and how and when to work with others. When do we need to join forces with allies to utilise synergies and have a greater impact than we can ever have on our own?

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'
- Margaret Mead[4]

I wonder what we could do today not necessarily to reduce the despair, but rather to add, at least a little more hope?

1 Roman Kemp Our Silent Emergency https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XGG12q4c2U
2 Eiseley. Loren (1979) The Star Thrower, Harper Perennial
3 Médecins Sans Frontières https://msf.org.uk/secure/donate-to-msf
4 The Bumblebee Conservation Trust https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/join-and-donate/join/

PODCAST REVIEWS

Top AC Podcasts on Hope for Coaches and Leaders

1. A Leader's Guide to Cultivating a Culture of Growth and Connection

Series: The Future of Leadership is Human

Host: Simone Sweeney

Guest: Yusuf Bayez

Why listen: It shows leaders how to create communities where people genuinely grow, connect, and stick around.

2. The Beauty and Impact of Coaching Young People

Series: Coaching Our Future Generations

Host: Maisie Barlow

Guest: Felicity Rose Sunderland Hall

Why listen: It reveals how thoughtful coaching can unlock confidence and possibility in the next generation.

3. How Coaching Transforms Young Lives

Series: Coaching for Good

Host: Julie Flower

Guests: Ana Collier and Duncan Cherrett

Why listen: It highlights real transformations that happen when young people are given structured support and someone who believes in them.

4. A Day in the Life of Val Mullally

Series: A Day in the Life of…

Host: Maxine Bell

Guest: Val Mullally

Why listen: It offers an honest, intimate look at the rhythms and insights of an experienced coach navigating everyday challenges.

5. The Consciousness of Belonging

Series: The Conscience of Coaching

Host: George Warren

Guest: Chris Johnstone

Why listen: It digs into the deep human need for belonging and shows how coaches can cultivate it with intention and skill.

PODCAST REVIEWS

Smaranda Dochia shares the best of the podcasts she has found on our topic of hope, and highlights two favourite episodes

Title: Active Hope Practices to Inspire Positive Change

Podcast: The AC Podcast

Host: George Warren

Guest: Dr. Chris Johnstone, Co-author of Active Hope

Release Date: 16 August 2021

Duration: ~65 minutes

In this reflective and purpose-driven episode, host George Warren sits down with Dr. Chris Johnstone to explore how coaches, leaders, and change-makers can move beyond passive optimism and instead embrace active hope- a practical, intentional framework for facing complexity and global uncertainty with purpose.

Drawing on decades of work in psychology, resilience building, and his long-term collaboration with Joanna Macy, Chris reframes hope as a skill rather than a feeling. Hope, in this framing, becomes something that can be practised, strengthened, and refined. Rather than waiting for circumstances to improve, individuals can choose a preferred future and take steps- however small- towards bringing it closer.

George guides the conversation with clarity and curiosity, prompting Chris to unpack how acknowledging discomfort, grief, or overwhelm is not an obstacle to progress but a catalyst for deeper alignment. Instead of bypassing difficult emotions, the Active Hope approach teaches us to metabolise them, using emotional truth as fuel for meaningful action. The episode gently challenges the coaching world's tendency to over-focus on positivity and personal achievement, inviting a more expansive and interconnected way of working.

The dialogue is rich with practical strategies: rituals for emotional grounding, practices for shifting perspective, and methods for building supportive communities that sustain long-term motivation. Chris consistently returns to the central message that hope grows stronger in groups and movements, not in isolation.

Key takeaways include:

- **Hope as a practice:** Active hope begins with choosing a preferred future, then identifying real, achievable steps toward it.
- **Seeing with new eyes:** Re-framing clients' stories from isolated struggles to parts of wider systems can reveal new pathways for change.
- **Honouring hard emotions:** Discomfort and grief can be valuable sources of insight when handled with care and curiosity.
- **Small, sustainable practices:** Brief but consistent habits- reflection, gratitude, connection-help maintain resilience over time.
- **Collective action matters:** Real change becomes possible when individuals collaborate, share resources, and support each other's hope.

George's steady, grounded interviewing style allows the conversation to flow naturally while still landing clear, applicable insights. Coaches will find themselves invited not only to use these ideas with clients but to apply them personally- particularly when navigating fatigue, uncertainty, or the wider pressures of an unstable world.

Who should listen?

This episode is an excellent choice for coaches, facilitators, wellbeing practitioners, and leaders seeking tools that extend beyond mindset work and goal-setting. It offers an accessible route into more systemic, emotionally honest, and sustainable forms of change- making it especially relevant for anyone guiding others through turbulent times.

It is a thoughtful, resonant conversation that inspires listeners to stay engaged with the world as it is, while actively working toward the world they hope to help create.

Listen to the episode: Click here

Title: Standing on Firm Ground: Hope, Courage, and Clarity series

Podcast: Dare to Lead with Brené Brown

Host(s): Brené Brown & Adam Grant

Context: Released in 2025 as an eight-part series (effectively six main episodes + two ask-me-anything episodes) companion to the book Strong Ground by Brené Brown.

In a time when uncertainty feels less like an occasional visitor and more like the air we breathe, Brené Brown and Adam Grant's Strong Ground Podcast series arrives with a rare and steadying intention. Rather than offering quick wins or leadership clichés, the series invites listeners back to something sturdier: a grounded sense of self, rooted values, honest empathy, and the kind of hope that gives shape to purposeful action.

Across its episodes, Brené and Adam explore what it means to stand on 'strong ground' - a metaphor they use to describe the place within us that holds firm when the external world tilts. It is not a call to false confidence. It is a call to clarity. In the opening conversation on finding one's values, they examine how knowing what matters most forms both an anchor and a compass. Leaders and coaches navigating volatility often look outward for stability; this series argues that the most reliable steadiness comes from within.

What the series covers:

- Clear values. In Part 1 ('Finding our Strong Ground'), the conversation dives into why knowing who you are- and what you stand for- brings deeper meaning to work and life. This clarity gives individuals and teams both stability and direction, which becomes vital when the landscape is shifting.
- Embracing paradox and complexity. Part 2 (''n the Power of Paradoxical Leadership') challenges us to hold seemingly conflicting demands at once- stability and adaptability; empathy and boundaries; compassion and accountability. That tension becomes fertile ground for growth and resilience.
- Time, presence, and pace in a hurry-up world. In Part 3 ('On Slowing Down and Making Time in the Midst of Scarcity', they dissect how scarcity (time, attention, resources) pressures leaders- and how slowing down, asking better questions, and nurturing 'pocket presence' vs 'executive presence' creates more mindful, sustainable action.
- Empathy without enmeshment: Parts 4 ('On Empathy vs. Enmeshment' and 5 ('On the Skillsets of Empathy') explore the pitfalls of empathy- distinguishing between healthy empathy and over-identifying, and building real, grounded skill sets around listening, perspective-taking, and support.
- Rewarding growth, not just success: In Part 6 ('On Rewarding Effort With Our Time and Coaching'), Brené and Adam discuss why leaders should reward effort, learning, and openness- even when mastery or 'winning' isn't yet visible. For coaching and leadership contexts, this reframes what 'success' really means, putting emphasis on growth, process, and authenticity.
- Practical courage and self-awareness: In the 'Ask Me Anything' episodes, listeners' questions guide reflections about decision-making, boldness, and how to act ethically and courageously when choices feel murky- especially in uncertain or complex times.

Why is 'hope' woven deeply through this series?

What the series offers isn't the kind of hope that wishes for easy answers. Instead, it fosters rooted hope- based on self-knowledge, clarity of values, and courageous vulnerability. When speakers talk about 'ground,' they mean something real and stable under your feet: your convictions, your values, your capacity for empathy and integrity. That ground becomes both anchor and launchpad.

This form of hope is durable because it doesn't depend on external conditions. Whether we face personal stress, organisational upheaval, cultural conflict, or global turbulence, the tools of grounded values + clarity + empathy + courage means we can still act meaningfully. That's hope grounded in agency, not fantasy.

For coaches, leaders, or change-makers, the message is powerful: you don't wait for the world to stabilise; you build your strong ground so you can work with the world as it is.

Who should listen to this series?

- Coaches, mentors, and facilitators working with teams or individuals undergoing change, uncertainty, or stress.
- Organisational leaders seeking a grounded, human-centred model of leadership- especially useful when navigating paradox, rapid change, or complexity.
- Anyone striving to lead a meaningful, values-aligned life/work in turbulent times- not by escaping reality, but by holding a stable ground from which to act.

This podcast series feels like a subtle recalibration of hope and leadership: less about polished success, more about rooted clarity, courageous vulnerability, and steady purpose. It's not a 'quick fix' series- but for those ready to build inner stability and lead with integrity, it offers a deep, practical toolkit. Highly recommended for coaches and leaders who want to stay grounded- and keep moving forward- without losing their hope or compass.

Listen to the episode: Click here

BOOK REVIEWS

RELATIONAL MINDFULNESS FOR COACHES

Lorna McDowell reflects on what makes this an outstandingly useful manual and transformative contribution to the coaching field.

At a time when many coaching methodologies risk becoming overly cognitive, technique-driven or transactional, this book offers a refreshing shift back to the heart of coaching: human connection. Through a weaving of mindfulness, relational awareness, compassion and courageous presence, the authors invite coaches to deepen the quality of their attention- not only to their clients but to themselves- and the relational field that arises between them.

One of the most compelling aspects of this book is its grounding in lived, embodied practice. Rather than treating mindfulness as a set of abstract principles, the authors emphasise moment-to-moment awareness as a dynamic skill that shapes the entire coaching encounter. They guide the reader into an experiential exploration of presence: how to notice internal sensations, emotions, impulses and biases; how to tune into subtle cues from clients; and how to stay grounded when conversations touch into complexity, tension or vulnerability. In doing so, they make mindfulness feel both accessible and richly nuanced, even for those who may be sceptical or unfamiliar with contemplative practices.

The relational dimension of mindfulness is perhaps where the book shines most. Many coaching texts focus on the individual coach's capacity- skills, mindsets, ethics, competencies. This book, however, illuminates the 'space between': the dynamic, co-created relational field that profoundly shapes outcomes in coaching. The authors show how relational mindfulness enables coaches to hold this shared space with greater steadiness, curiosity and compassion. Rather than rushing to fix, direct or solve, coaches are encouraged to slow down, notice what is emerging, and honour the client's experience with a deeper level of attunement. It is a powerful reminder that the quality of relationship, not the sophistication of the toolset, is often what drives real transformation.

For all its conceptual clarity, the book is highly practical. Each chapter includes reflective prompts, mindfulness exercises and relational practices that coaches can immediately apply in their work. These practices are not prescriptive; instead, they function as gentle invitations to explore new ways of being. Whether it is noticing bodily responses during a difficult session, pausing to breathe before offering a question, or cultivating compassion for oneself when a coaching conversation feels challenging, the exercises help build a grounded, embodied coaching presence.

There's a welcome focus on compassion and courage- two capacities often under-discussed in coaching. They frame compassion as an essential relational competency that enables coaches to meet clients with kindness, patience and emotional resonance, without slipping into rescuing or over-identification. Courage, in their view, involves the willingness to turn toward discomfort- within oneself, within the client and within the coaching relationship. This includes naming what feels unsaid, approaching difficult topics with openness, and leaning into relational authenticity. In a field that sometimes prioritises smoothness and positivity, their emphasis on courageous compassion feels both timely and necessary.

TITLE: Relational Mindfulness for Coaches

AUTHOR: Emma Donaldson-Feilder and Liz Hall

PUBLISHER: Routledge

PUBLICATION DATE: 1st edition, 19 Mar. 2025

PAPERBACK/HARDBACK PRICE: £27.69/ £115

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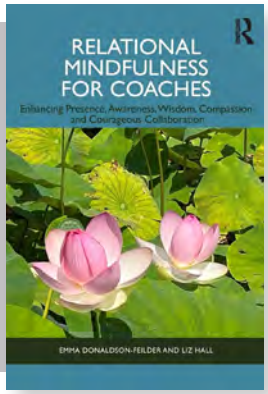

Another strength is the book's integration of wisdom. Rather than positioning wisdom as something mystical or esoteric, the authors describe it as the capacity to see clearly, respond appropriately, and hold a broader perspective. They connect wisdom with mindfulness and ethical awareness, suggesting that a wise coach is one who remains grounded, discerning and attuned to the wider human context. This framing elevates coaching beyond goal achievement, re-framing it as a practice of human development- for both coach and client.

Stylistically, the book is warm, clear and accessible. Donaldson-Feilder and Hall write with humility and authenticity, sharing their own experiences and challenges as practitioners. Their tone is invitational rather than authoritative, encouraging coaches to experiment, reflect and evolve at their own pace. The blend of research, practice-based insight and reflective inquiry makes the book suitable both for new coaches seeking a grounding in relational presence, and experienced practitioners wishing to refresh their approach.

Ultimately, Relational Mindfulness for Coaches asks coaches to cultivate a more humane, spacious, compassionate and courageous presence; to honour the relational complexity of every interaction; and to view the coaching encounter as a shared journey of awareness and growth. In an era where speed, productivity and cognitive optimisation often dominate organisational life, this book offers a gentle yet radical alternative: slow down, notice more, connect deeply, and trust the wisdom of the relational moment.

For any coach wishing to move beyond the mechanics of coaching and into a more embodied, relationally intelligent practice, this book is not just valuable- it is essential.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Lorna McDowell, founder and CEO of Xenergie, brings over 30 years experience in developing coaching business, communities and consulting on in-house coaching development and culture globally. She has pioneered the field of systemic transformation coaching (an AC-accredited Advanced Diploma programme), to help leaders develop the art and science of leading people into new, uncertain times.Adam is an ILM Level 7 qualified Executive coach, and a member of the Association for Coaching. He is also Associate Lecturer, teaching on Managing Organisation Change, Leadership and Management, in the School of Organisational Studies, University of the West of England.

TEAM OF TEAMS COACHING

Mihaela Diaconu appreciates this book which widens the lens and ask us to consider the system of interconnected teams that make up organisational life. The authors argument is simple, yet powerful: in complex environments, coaching isolated teams is beneficial, but it doesn't necessarily benefit the whole.

TITLE: Team of Teams Coaching: Using a Teaming Approach to Increase Business Impact

AUTHOR: Peter Hawkins & Catherine Carr

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For those familiar with Hawkins' systemic team coaching work, this book represents a natural evolution, from working systemically with a single team to working systemically across an entire network of teams. For those of us who spend our time in organisations where work constantly crosses boundaries, this lens feels less like an optional enhancement and more like an essential shift in practice.

Why a team-of-teams lens matters

The concept of a 'team of teams' has been in circulation since McChrystal described how interdependent units need to coordinate quickly in unpredictable environments. Hawkins and Carr pick up the concept but apply it to the everyday complexities that characterise organisational life.

Their starting point is that most organisations still develop teams as if they operate independently, when in reality, very little work is done in isolation. Teams share customers, resources, decisions and risks. They constantly bump up against other teams' timelines, capacities and interpretations. Yet many coaching and development approaches still treat them as discrete units.

Hawkins and Carr suggest that until organisations view themselves as systems of teams, they will continue to experience the familiar organisational drag: work that is individually sensible but collectively slow.

As a practitioner I've often felt that much of my work is helping people articulate cross-team issues that have been felt but not named. This book gives language and legitimacy to that kind of work.

Structure

We begin by considering contemporary organisational realities: complexity, interdependence and the inadequacy of team-by-team development in fragmented systems. They explicitly draw on OD traditions, systems thinking, socio-technical design and dialogic OD to argue that leadership and coaching must increasingly address the spaces between teams.

The Systemic Team of Teams Approach (STOTA) is the conceptual centre of the book, which introduces principles and developmental practices that can be adapted to different organisational contexts. Drawing from OD inquiry, systemic constellations, team coaching and collective sense-making, they outline a process involving mapping interdependencies, facilitating cross-team dialogue, and supporting iterative cycles of learning. The approach is firmly grounded in the belief that relational processes determine systemic outcomes.

Subsequent chapters explore the interplay between organisational, team and individual development; and Ethics and Professional Practice, considering the ethical challenges of multi-team work. Rather than prescriptive rules, the authors offer reflective questions that honour the complexity of working with multiple levels of a system at once.

The book closes with a quiet call to the profession, suggesting that coaches, consultants, and OD practitioners need to expand their field of view to match the interdependent realities of modern organisations.

How this differs from other cross-functional approaches

Many organisations already use cross-functional approaches, such as design thinking, customer journey mapping, and agile methodologies, as well as organisational development toolkits. Hawkins and Carr position their work alongside, but distinct from, these methods. The book's novelty is the integration of multiple disciplines into a coherent developmental approach. Most cross-functional tools assume that once the process is straightforward, collaboration will follow. Team-of-teams coaching is explicit about this relational layer. Hawkins and Carr offer the connective tissue that allows other methods to take root.

Team of Teams Coaching feels like a book written for the kinds of situations many of us now support: organisations where no single team holds the whole picture, and where progress depends on how well teams navigate the spaces between them. Hawkins and Carr offer a way of seeing and working that honours that complexity without making it heavier.

For OD practitioners and coaches who seek to make better sense of, or deepen their systemic practice of the cross-team patterns they encounter daily, this book is a valuable companion: practical, thoughtful, and grounded in the realities of contemporary organisational life.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Mihaela is an organisational psychologist focussing on leadership, people and organisational development/ effectiveness as a coach, facilitator and consultant. Mihaela's mission is to support humans flourish at work and build thriving workplaces and communities, using business psychology principles, one conversation, one experience, and one process at a time.

She is a certified Corporate and Executive Coach, a Certified Business Psychologist, MSc Organisational Psychology, a Fellow CMI (Chartered Management Institute) with an extensive background in operational, project and product management and also a BPS (British Psychological Association) Psychometrics Test User.

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