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# Coaching Perspectives

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Disruption from  
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“PROMOTING EXCELLENCE & ETHICS IN COACHING”



‘What we need nowadays,’ a senior HR executive of a global media company told me recently, ‘is coaches who know how to be provocative. Asking lots of clever questions and listening sympathetically just isn’t enough for my top-level leaders.’

Disruption – our theme for this issue – is about step change, not gradual evolution. A term originally applied to new technologies, ‘disruptive innovation’ is about changing the very nature of the landscape or market, and introducing a fundamentally new underpinning that displaces the status quo<sup>1</sup>. In its radicalism it belongs to the armoury of the coach.

But we coaches need to be aware that disruption comes in all shapes and sizes. I’ve just returned from a yoga-meditation weekend. It was wonderful, of course. But it was also disruptive. The silence and stillness forced me to confront my own priorities and reflect on those of some of my clients. It is moments like these – the sudden removal of technological props, a chance encounter or word, the kindness of strangers – that can be just as truly disruptive as the advance of AI and robotics into our working landscapes.

One of the retreat leaders, a young Buddhist and ex-banker spoke about her former life: ‘I had meditation as a nice add-on,’ she said, ‘I’d go on retreat, get restored, then go back to my crazy-busy life, make lots of money and go shopping... I didn’t realise how hungry I was for something deeper.’ I was touched at the openness of this young woman, and her words skidded across the tracks of my thinking. This is disruption – something that changes the rules of the game – irrevocably.

These themes are echoed by our contributors. *John Mattone*, in this issue’s interview, and *Maureen Salmon* both focus on the power of emotion, of vulnerability, empathy and

optimism, to disrupt the status quo – to get us off the tramlines of goal-attainment or the stuck record of low confidence, and seek fundamentally more human ways of attaining high performance.

*Sharron McPherson* explores the power of disruptive technologies to create a new leadership paradigm, one that re-evaluates the very premise of business in the face of the existential threats confronting our planet. And how will coaches adapt, as *Laura Ashley-Timms* asks, to a faster world where change is inevitable, technology is here to stay, and we are only starting to understand the downsides of 24/7 digital overload? For *Janet Sernack* and *Judith Cardenas*, it’s all about learning: about ‘failing fast’ and cultivating an agile mindset, remaining open, curious and non-judgemental. And on this latter note, true diversity can and will be disruptive of current workplace structures and processes. *Rajvinder Kaur Uppal* outlines the responsibility of coaching to advance this agenda, while *Sue Congram* describes a project to develop women leaders at Barclays – and how women lead differently.

Happy reading and do send us your comments – we always like to hear from you.

With warm wishes for a disruptive and exciting 2018 – may your coaching bring change to the benefit of your clients and beyond.

Hetty Einzig  
**Editor**

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## TRIPLE ACTION: THE POWER OF EMPATHY + HAPPINESS + OPTIMISM FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE

**Maureen Salmon** shares her insights from a practice-led research project on emotional intelligence, academic performance and design thinking carried out by final year students on BA Design Management and Cultures course at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts.

The value of design thinking to shaping our lives to navigate the complexities and challenges of society is being widely debated, and there many good examples of how it is being used in different countries, cultures and contexts. So much so, that along with emotional intelligence, design thinking has now been identified among the key skills we all need for the future (World Economic Forum<sup>1</sup>; Design Council 2015<sup>2</sup>; Siddall 2017<sup>3</sup>).

This is in line with the future direction of the role of coaching, recently explored in her 2017 book by Hetty Einzig<sup>4</sup>, and earlier advocated by the late Sir John Whitmore<sup>5</sup>. According to Whitmore, 'Coaching is part of human evolution, it's part of self-responsibility. It is the human way of learning in the wider political, economic and social context of society. We must embrace the bigger picture of our place in the world. Coaching is the tool for making people responsible – help people find their individual reality.'

Whitmore argued for better education, and for learning to be more balanced human beings. He also talked about the need for coaching children, young people, teachers and parents. Within every single one of us, there is a purpose. Continuous

learning harnesses the energy in all of us. The best learning is through our own experience and we must be open to learning.

Whitmore's words resonated with me. I noted them in my journal and then incorporated coaching into my learning and teaching practice. As course co-leader for Design Management and Cultures at London College of Communication (LCC), out of curiosity and in conversations with students, I co-designed a pilot project on 'Emotional Intelligence + Design Thinking, Academic Performance' in 2015. Insights from this pilot led to a substantial project, supported by the LCC Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund. The project was integrated into the Professional Practice unit from October 2016 to June 2017.

Coaching is the tool for making people responsible – help people find their individual reality

The project was underpinned by research that showed emotional intelligence as a critical predictor of academic performance, work and life success (Salovey and Mayer 1990<sup>6</sup>; Goleman 1995<sup>7</sup>; Seal et al 2010<sup>8</sup>; Petrides 2017<sup>9</sup>). It also informed design industry practice, which showed the correlation between emotional and design thinking – a human-centered approach to problem-solving. Tim Brown, CEO of international design and consulting firm IDEO, identified a number of personal traits that designers should have, such as empathy and optimism.

Insights for the project were gathered from a number of sources<sup>10</sup>:

- Qualitative interpretative data from the students' Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEIQue) reports; coaching, conversations, reflective journals, and professional practice portfolios;
- A roundtable panel discussion led by the students and Professor Petrides;
- A video of the students' stories made by students on Television and Live Events and Illustrations BA courses;
- Tutors' observations and reflections on students' transformational journeys, not just during their final year, but since starting they started the course in 2014.

Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEIQue), developed by Professor Petrides<sup>11</sup> is a comprehensive framework, widely used in the workplace and education sector to measure a range of emotional self-perceptions that are relevant to personal performance. TEIQue helps identify how to thrive in a dynamic, changing environment and identify the areas to develop.

**TEIQue assesses:**

- Well-being Factors: Happiness, Optimism, Self-Esteem
- Self-Control Factors: Emotional Regulation, Impulse Control, Stress Management
- Emotional Factors: Empathy, Emotional Perception, Emotional Expression, Relationships
- Sociability Factor: Emotional Management, Assertiveness, Social Awareness
- Independent Facets: Self-Motivation, Adaptability

Each student completed the online self-assessment and received one-to-one coaching feedback on their results that were presented in a detailed developmental report. Empathy, happiness and optimism were the three factors that the students connected with most. As a result the project was branded 'Empathy + Happiness + Optimism' (EiHO). The students understood these factors both from their personal perspectives and also in the context of design thinking. However, their reports and scores helped them to gain a deeper understanding of emotional balance.

Extracts of the students' stories in their EiHO video highlighted:<sup>12</sup>

- 'EI has helped me to reformulate the image that normally I give of myself to other people'
- 'I think this report has given awareness to myself, who am I and the people around me'
- 'I think the project has helped me view how I see myself and what I can bring to the world'
- 'EI improved how I take on stress in a team, because I often feel the stress of other people so I am trying to say no to things rather than saying yes to everything'
- 'I have taken the EI test two times and I feel I have benefitted from it both times. The first time, I saw a lot of improvement in my academic performance, I could see myself collaborating better, focusing on my strengths and the second time I could work on my assertiveness'
- 'EI test allowed me to get a deeper understanding of the way my qualities can be perceived by others'

The second learning intervention was coaching conversations - to give feedback on the TEIQue reports which would also provide deeper learning and professional development. My approach was to capitalise on the experiences of the students to inspire critical thinking, growth and change leading to actions. The conversations focused on the students' human strengths to help identify problems, solutions and address areas for development. Through these conversations, the students increased their self-awareness, self-confidence and professional competence. The coaching conversations also helped the students to understand each other's point of view (empathy), and learn how to work collaboratively and provide constructive feedback. There were moments of mutual 'concern' in some of the conversations, where words would be misinterpreted or were counter-productive. This was particularly evident where the students were feeling anxious and/or vulnerable. How I made the students feel about themselves, and their future, was far more important than what I said. My 'emotional fit' in terms of my TEIQue result and reflective abilities was critical to the students' emotional well-being and success. This reinforced the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching and coaching practices.

Not long after the students received the feedback on their TEIQue reports and engaged in peer group discussions, there was a significant change in behaviour - attendance, punctuality, engagement, motivation and communication improved. There were some amazing classes, when attendance hit 95% - particularly on the topic 'Creating Your Future'.

Essentially, my role was to nurture the students to challenge themselves and think differently, find their passions and create the futures that they wanted. To navigate the turbulent waters of the rapidly changing, complex and competitive world, they will need to be like well-designed

lifeboats. Throughout their career cycles, they will need to reinvent, rebrand and redesign their futures every three to five years.

## HOW EMPATHY, HAPPINESS AND OPTIMISM IMPROVED STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE

The students' self-perception is the most powerful measurement of their achievements in terms of self-confidence, academic performance and employability potential.

As final year students, all had previous experience of using design thinking, but had not applied it to themselves to solve their own problems. However, they were using design thinking process similar to Ayse Birsel's<sup>13</sup> process in her book *Design the Life You Love* (Deconstruction, Point of View, Reconstruction, Expression) to craft their futures and create their professional practice portfolios.

An analysis of final marks awarded at the end of second year of their degree and actual final degree marks, showed that overall the majority students' academic results had improved: in some cases by two to three grades. To illustrate, one of students whose mark increased from C+ to A (first class honours degree), attributed this achievement to emotional learning, personal professional development and growth. This was evidenced by this student's reflective writings and portfolio of professional practice. Emotional intelligence is not an end in itself, but rather a means to helping students realise their full potential to create value and find their purpose in the world. As Seal et al (2010)<sup>14</sup> explain, it is not enough to produce the brightest and the best technically minded experts. Universities must seek to develop the whole person, better prepare graduates for future success. Students who are able to develop their capacity to understand themselves and the world, build meaningful relationships, and foster positive change have the advantage in education, work and life.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maureen Salmon is a consultant, coach and educator. She created Freshwaters Consultancy to inspire fresh thinking, new perspectives on creating sustainable futures for individuals and organisations internationally. Alongside her industry practice, Maureen is a senior lecturer at the University of the Arts London where she teaches on a range of undergraduate and post graduates courses. Maureen is a member of the Association For Coaching, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Chartered Management Institute, Higher Education Academy. She is an experienced emotional intelligence practitioner.

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