

# Coaching Today

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## Circles of influence

'If Generation Z is central to leading and driving organisational change, how can coaching support them with this?'

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change



# Reflecting on reflections

an integrated model  
for navigating change

Coaching and occupational psychologist **Charlotte Housden** shares the genesis and development of a new practice model for helping clients and practitioners through the process of change, and the research that inspired it

**O**n clear nights, it can be a joy to watch the Moon glide across the sky as the Earth slowly rotates on its axis. The bond between Moon and Earth is known as 'synchronous rotation', which the Institute of Physics (IOP) explains as follows:

'In the distant past, the Moon was rapidly spinning close to the Earth. But then gravity from Earth's huge mass began to take effect. Tidal forces allowed the Moon to drift away from the Earth in its orbit and slowed its spin. Eventually, the Moon reached a point where one side was always facing the Earth.'<sup>1</sup>

This 'gravitational tug' reminds me of the relationship between counselling and coaching: two bodies spinning around each other for years, finally settling into synchronous rotation. Perhaps over time, gravity will pull them even closer together?

*'Although it may be possible to divide the activities of counselling and coaching, it is not possible to divide the client!'*<sup>2</sup>

There are benefits to bringing these two bodies together and working integratively – a view that is supported within the developing field of integrated coach-counselling.<sup>2-5</sup>

*'All participants agreed that... there was a significant grey area where the clients' needs could be addressed both by therapists and coaches.'*<sup>3</sup>

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*'Knowing that coaching is underpinned with a therapeutic approach gives comfort to me as the CEO of the company... [so] my team have the greatest opportunity to actually get to the bottom of this causal effect and deal with the real issues.'*<sup>4</sup>

*'Integrative approaches create an opportunity for both psychological provision and support for behavioural change and goal attainment... [and] can lead to a reduction in young people's psychological distress and that can support them in making constructive changes.'*<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of their work with us, clients take a leap of faith. Questions such as, 'What do I need?' and 'Can this person help?', circle in their mind before they can make a decision. Most of our clients don't know the difference between coaching, counselling or therapy – they just want positive change. But working with a professional who uses a range of approaches means a client is more likely to get the help they need.

*'I always find it interesting that most clients do not really know what they need until they start.'*<sup>6</sup>

### The research

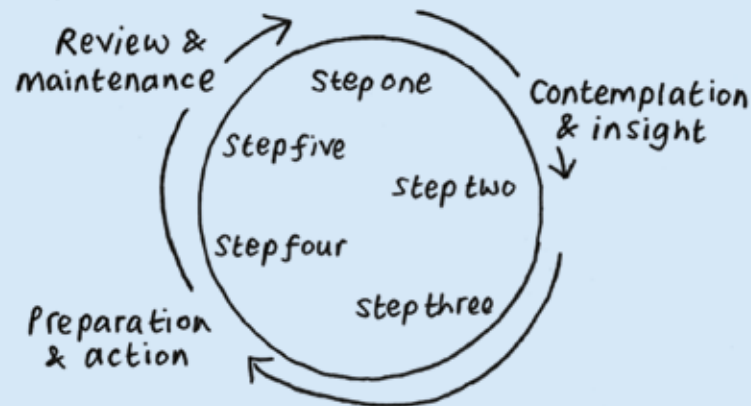
Change is a topic shared by therapy and coaching and I'm fascinated by how clients navigate this change. During 2019–2020, I interviewed 108 people across 27 countries, exploring what helped or hindered them while they made shifts in their lives.

I analysed 75 hours of participant interviews using a deductive thematic analysis<sup>7</sup>, identifying 18 key themes, including happiness, self-awareness, aligning values, authenticity, pressure to conform and resources. Participant shifts ranged from career change, to moving countries, dealing with injury, or becoming a parent. Many worked with therapists, counsellors and coaches to help them through these transformations. Examples of their interview feedback included:

*'I would definitely recommend having some therapy or coaching to really get underneath what it is you're dissatisfied with and where it comes from. Otherwise, it will just be a temporary fix.'*

*'Knowing what I know now and having changed myself through therapy in the last four or five years, the biggest change I would make is I would get therapy earlier.'*

*'Coaching isn't just for someone who's got a particular issue to be addressed. Everyone's got something going on in their world they could be talking about. It changed my views. Having problems that are on your mind is normal, not unusual.'*

**Figure 1:** Swim Jump Fly Five-Step model of change

### The Swim Jump Fly Five-Step model of change

After completing the research, I developed a change process, building on Prochaska and DiClemente's transtheoretical model<sup>8</sup> and Palmer's PRACTICE model.<sup>9</sup>

I wanted to create a simple approach to help people who couldn't access support; for clients, it was a model they could follow on their own, and for professionals, it offered avenues for exploration.

My research highlighted the need to slow down the initial stages of change, since participants often experienced a phenomenon that I called 'snap response'. This appeared 85 times in the research, through ideas like 'running away' because it had become 'too much' or 'sudden quitting' and 'unplanned-for change'. Some called it 'straw on the camel's back' while others talked about 'jumping out of their everyday life' or needing 'radical change'. Occasionally this worked but mostly it created a false start; encouraging them to run away from something they didn't like, only to fall into something just as challenging.

I thought slowing down the change process might be useful – an opportunity to reflect on what's needed, identifying a direction of travel, before moving into action. I therefore extended the model's 'contemplation and insight' phase by creating three steps.

**Step one:** Building awareness, gaining clarity over where a client wants to head, the purpose of shifting and the destination/direction of travel, which often changes over time.

**Step two:** Evaluation of the size of the change versus the comfort an individual has with change. Opportunities to address a gap between these two include breaking actions into smaller steps, lowering expectations over the time it might take, or adapting the goal.

**Step three:** Clarity over what needs shifting, focusing on the 'what' or the 'how.'

### N's story: the model in action

Participant N had always dreamt of being a journalist, but despite achieving his life-long goal of working for a number of prestigious news outlets, by his mid-30s he felt he was 'doing the wrong thing entirely.' He had often wondered what it would be like to be an entrepreneur so began to speak to people who had set up their own businesses. However, after quite a few conversations, he felt he wasn't progressing. He kept speaking to people but felt unable to move to action.

One day, N spoke to a group of people contemplating career change and had this epiphany: 'They described what they were passionate about and their jobs. These two things were completely different. When I spoke about what I was passionate about as a child, what I'm passionate about now, my job, well... all of them aligned.' He realised that it 'wasn't that I was in the wrong line of work at all. I was just doing it wrong.'

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I interviewed N early on in my research and was still working out what I was hearing from participants. His story encouraged me to reflect on the difference between *what* individuals were doing versus *how* they were doing it. Others shared similar stories with me and I started to realise this could be an important step in the change process – one that could help clients focus their efforts and energies in useful places.

The final phases were:

**Step four:** Planning next steps and experimenting with what works.

**Step five:** Reviewing progress using different measures, balancing 'how much' (quantity of change) with 'how well' (quality of progress).

I wrote the research into a coaching blog for clients and other readers, posting articles once a week for 18 months. Reader feedback was positive and some suggested I turn it into a book so I could reach more people. *Swim Jump Fly: A Guide to Changing your Life*<sup>10</sup> was published a year later.

### Revelations and insights

During this time, I had a series of awakenings. First, I concluded that I knew a lot less than I thought I did. I was keen to make psychology accessible, which means knowing your subject. I therefore needed to re-explore theories and models that I had forgotten or had never fully understood in the first place. I realised that learning is never ending. At times, that was exciting, and at others, a little energy sapping.

A second area of awareness was focusing on how much I enjoyed collaborating and external deadlines to get things done. To address this, I invited blog readers to review topics and offer accountability. The group included coaches, therapists, change managers and consultants, HR professionals and others with no background in psychology at all. The reviewers didn't pull any punches and some of their feedback was challenging. However, I wouldn't have finished the book without them.

My third revelation was around playfulness. I had been in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) for a while – keen to experience the other side of the fence, to ascertain whether to train in it. My therapist and I spent time working through my interest in playfulness and humour, concluding that I bring more of it into my work and life. I therefore wrote the book in a light-hearted and playful way, and hired an illustrator to create cartoons to bring the ideas to life with humour.

Finally, in late 2021, the British Psychology Society's Special Group of Coaching Psychology evolved to become the Division of Coaching Psychology. With that came the opportunity to become chartered as a coaching psychologist. I could do this via peer review, as I was already a chartered occupational psychologist; however, this was time-bound, requiring a longer route if I missed the deadline. This meant throwing myself into deep reflection... even though 'throwing' and 'reflecting' were not easy bedfellows.

The work required deep introspection and critical evaluation of my practice. I worked in the evenings and weekends which



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was tiring, sifting through CPD records, reviewing client notes, reflecting on changes in direction and benchmarking myself against a long list of detailed standards. I identified gaps, uncovering areas of weakness in my technical knowledge and how I ran my practice. It felt uncomfortable at times.

Some months after successfully attaining chartership, I stopped and reflected back, encouraging my final realisation. While I had regular supervision, this process had been at another level, demanding a broader analysis as well as a deeper one. I had to ask existential questions: *who am I, where have I come from, where am I now, where am I headed?* At the same time, I needed to undertake a detailed bottom-up analysis of my skills and knowledge. The whole process felt like viewing myself from the balcony while I tangoed on the dance floor.

Of course, it was hard work, but it also offered benefits: an opportunity to stand back and deeply reflect on the last few years – see the patterns and understand where the work needed to be. I realised how useful it would be to do this periodically, so I added a third level of reflexivity to my practice.

Here are the three levels that I now use:

**1) Micro:** After each client session. These are questions you might already be asking yourself:

- How did I support and challenge my client?
- Which behaviours endorsed my coaching philosophy/approach? Which contradicted them?
- What power position did I occupy?
- What could have got in the way of the work?
- How authentic was I?
- What did I appreciate about my work?
- What would I do differently next time?
- What would I take to supervision?

**2) Meso** (from the Greek 'mesos' – middle or between):

Individual or group supervision, multiple times a year. Here are some questions I might work through with my supervisor:

- What contracting or GDPR processes do I have in place?
- How do I know when I am outside my competence?

- How do I refer clients?
- What conflicts of interest do I experience and how do I address them?
- How do I ensure confidentiality? What else am I doing to maintain an ethical practice?
- What do I have in place to reflect on my use of power?
- How do I manage my emotions and judgments that may arise?
- What am I doing to manage my stress or potential burnout?
- What themes are arising from my clients?

**3) Macro:** An annual deep reflection, which might include changes in direction as we find our skills deepening or interests shifting. For example, following the charterhip process, I am now focusing more on academic research and emphasising counselling/therapeutic training. These are some of the questions I've been asking myself:

- Where have I come from, where am I now and where am I going?
- Where are the edges of my learning?
- What new development, or modalities could I be exploring?
- How might my practice be supporting a better society? What harm might I be creating?
- How do I justify selling the same service for higher fees (when using a sliding scale)? What is the least amount I would be willing to charge/what am I charging?
- How has my practice changed since last year? How did this occur?
- What do I contribute to the reputation of my profession?
- What is the purpose of my work?

As we're reflecting on reflections, I'll finish with some personal insights from the last few years. First, I see a 'synchronous rotation' between occupational and coaching psychology, along with my more recent explorations into therapy. Second, collaborating and having external deadlines enable me to reflect more deeply. Writing this article has really helped! Third, bringing humour and playfulness into my work feels congruent and brings me satisfaction. Finally, there is no full stop after learning (except this grammatical one that the editor requires). ■

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**I had to ask existential questions: who am I, where have I come from, where am I now, where am I headed?**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Charlotte Housden** is a chartered coaching and occupational psychologist running a consulting and coaching practice. She is currently training in a number of psychotherapeutic modalities and also running a research project on how to make academic research more accessible for practitioners. Contact her via [Swimjumpfly.com](https://www.swimjumpfly.com), [LinkedIn](#) or at [ch@charlottehousden.com](mailto:ch@charlottehousden.com).

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