

Compassionate Coaching in the Corporate World

Julia Menaul



JULIA MENAUL

COMPASSIONATE COACHING IN THE CORPORATE WORLD

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PREFACE

This book is intended to be an introduction to a new emerging theme within the field of personal development – **COMPASSION**.

It will look at ideas arriving through advances in neuroscience and how this links to personal and organisational development.

The book is aimed at professionals who have an interest in people development and talent management. These may be leaders, line managers, human resource professionals and coaches.

Coaches will find it invaluable in helping clients to become more compassionate with themselves and others leading to better work/life balance, less stress and increased work performance. Coaches will also learn how to become more compassionate in the coaching room to enable greater shifts and enhanced customer relationships.

Managers (whether in the line or in HR) will gain evidence to use on the benefits of organisational compassion and how this impacts management style, increased employee wellbeing and ultimately better productivity.

The examples in the book are all real but their names and organisations have been changed to protect confidentiality. The terms 'he' or 'she' are used interchangeably and do not reflect any gender differences unless stated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This book is written by Julia Menaul, who has been running her own successful practice, Spark Coaching and Training, since 2001. Julia is an Accredited Professional Executive Coach (Association for Coaching) and has 1500 hours coaching experience.



Julia Menaul BA (Psychol),
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She coaches senior and middle managers and their teams across all sectors, as befits her eclectic background after working in a number of industries over the past 25 years. She also runs coach skills training for managers and leaders.

Julia's psychology degree and interest in behavioural change led to her discovering her passion for people development. A Chartered Fellow of the CIPD, she was Training and Development Manager within areas as diverse as retail, a charity, electronics and the criminal justice system.

Coach supervising since 2006, Julia is one of the few supervisors to have coaching supervision qualifications from the two leading providers in the UK (Bath Consultancy Group and the Coaching Supervision Academy). She supervises many independent coaches (1-1 and group), other supervisors, as well as internal coaches in larger organisations such as the NHS and the Prison Service.

She is the Regional Organiser in North West England for the Association of Coaching Supervisors and is an active and well-respected member of the coaching community in the UK.

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Other eBooks by Julia:

Bookboon: *How to Run a Successful Executive Coaching Business*

Amazon: *From Fierce Lion to Pussy Cat: How to Tame the Abrasive Employee*

INTRODUCTION

This book is called *Compassionate Coaching in the Corporate World*.

The topic of compassion is one that has been growing for some time and I am indebted to Paul Gilbert's book *The Compassionate Mind* (2008). His book sparked some of my own neural connections in seeing how my work as an executive coach in organisations and as a supervisor of other corporate coaches could be enhanced through greater understanding of compassion.

The corporate landscape has changed radically since the financial crisis, and to some extent the world of work is more stressful than ever, with employers and employees requiring greater flexibility and resilience in very fast changing times.

At the time of writing, the UK has just voted to leave the European Union and this has created a maelstrom of uncertainty throughout corporate life (and society!). Coupled with the increasing cruelty we see in our world via terrorism and war, it would be easy for all of us to put our heads down and just think about ourselves in all this.

However, humans are designed for change, and the ability to connect and care for our fellow man has never been greater than it is now.

My intention here is nothing as grand as world peace, but how we might start the process of becoming happier and more compassionate (and they are related) in the one area where we spend a huge proportion of our lives – work.

1 COMPASSION: WHAT IS IT?

1.1 THE HARD SCIENCE – IT’S NOT ALL PINK AND FLUFFY

Defining compassion is an essential place to start, not just because this is what one often does when writing about a specific topic. In the case of compassion, it is crucial because the word itself is loaded with all sorts of baggage and expectations. For so long it has been saddled with a reputation for being ‘a bit pink and fluffy’ and all about being nice to people.

When looking at definitions from a variety of authors it’s easy to see why.

Here is one:

“Compassion is about caring about the suffering of others and wanting to help.

It is more than just sympathy for someone’s needs, or an act that benefits someone else. It involves an emotional response to another person’s suffering and an authentic desire to help.”

www.actionforhappiness.org

In **Chapter 3** of *Compassionate Coaching in the Corporate World*, we will look at the dangers of wanting to help too much.

Even in business environments, research has shown that when we contribute to others without expecting anything in return, then we often show greater achievement and success than those who choose to focus solely on themselves.

Recent advances in neuroscience and the widespread use of MRI scans have shown up connections in the brain called **mirror neurons**. These appear to fire in the brain in the same way as when we see someone else experiencing something, e.g. if we see someone joyful and excited, our own neurons for those emotions have been shown to fire off as if it was happening to us. This is probably the neural basis for feeling empathy for others.

Other advances in neuroscience have shown that “Neurons that fire together wire together” (Dan Siegel, 2010).

These create networks that underpin our memories, learning, whole belief systems and essentially what we call our minds. The more often you experience neural activity related to compassion, kindness and caring by giving and receiving, the more likely you are to create a brain/mind that is compassion focussed in this way. So compassion can be learned!

1.2 HOW DID IT EVOLVE IN HUMANS? THE BRAIN'S TRADE-OFFS

As wondrous as our brains are, they have been cobbled together over millennia. The brains we have now are a product of over two million years of evolution but it is important to remember that each 'improvement' to the brain over this period is just overlaying on top of what is already there.

In very simple terms, the human brain has three key parts:

1. **The Reptilian Brain** – we have inherited this primitive part from our ancestors who crawled out of the sea and it is essentially the bit of the brain that keeps all our basic functions ticking such as breathing, sleeping, eating and reproduction.
2. **The Limbic Brain** – this is often seen to be our emotional brain and therefore evolved later. It can be seen in higher level mammals. If you have a dog you will certainly recognise that they experience emotions such as joy, anger and fear like us. This part is our emotional storehouse of memories, habits and beliefs developed from childhood. It evolved to protect us. You may be familiar with the term 'fight or flight' in response to threat, and our limbic system is a finely tuned radar looking for threat all the time, whether it was woolly mammoths in prehistoric times or a rampaging boss in modern times.
3. **The Cortex** – This is the outer layer of the brain which evolved much later than the other sections of the brain. We share this part with related species such as other primates, although ours is more developed and includes language. This is often referred to as our 'thinking brain' and we like to think it makes us superior, logical, rational beings rather like Mr Spock from Star Trek. As we will see later, our Limbic system has been around much longer and tends to run the show, which makes us more like Homer Simpson than Mr Spock on most days!

1.3 THREAT VERSUS SAFETY: BABIES SHOW US THE WAY

We are born to be caring and compassionate. It starts with our first relationship: the parent-infant bond. We are already hard-wired when we arrive in this world to respond to the care and compassion of our mothers, and our mothers receive positive emotional boosts to their own brains through this process of bonding.

The benefits for humans of being cared for when we are most vulnerable and dependent are huge. We are one of the few mammals that are largely dependent on our parents for many years after birth. From an evolutionary perspective, our survival was then more assured with the resultant passing on of genes to the next generations and the growth of communities.

In the modern era, research has shown that there are significant health benefits to becoming more compassionate, e.g. improved cardiovascular function, enhanced immunity and reduced inflammation.

In fact, we are threat detecting machines. Our ever alert Amygdala (a part of the Limbic System) is on the lookout for negative events that may be dangerous. We move toward what we see as rewarding and away from what we perceive as dangerous. However, they are not equal in the level of response. Our brains give much more credence to events that appear to threaten than things that may provide a reward. No wonder we can view the world as a hostile place most of the time!

Yet feeling safe is not just about the absence of threat. Paul Gilbert (2008) talks about how not only do we need to quieten the self-critic but also find ways to self-soothe. We have a system in our brains, the attachment system, that links to our soothing and contentment system and lays down memories of being loved and soothed. Depending on how we were loved and soothed as babies can make a big difference to how we react as adults towards compassionate behaviour. This is not just because of the direct experience of being loved, but that soothing instigates structural changes in the brain.

1.4 COMPASSION IN A WORLD OF CRUELTY – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

Compassion is needed because we have a real propensity for cruelty and callousness.

– Paul Gilbert

Every day we are bombarded with terrible news of death and destruction perpetrated by human beings. It was ever thus. We like to look back at the barbarism of our ancestors when we study history, and congratulate ourselves that things have moved on, but our daily viewing of the News tells a familiar story of genocide, war and other horrors.

Our ability to be cruel to our fellow human beings seems to fly in the face of the scientific evidence that says we are basically wired to need love, affection and a sense of belonging and we cease to thrive without these almost as much as if air and water were missing.

As a psychology undergraduate in the 1980s, I well remember an exam question asking me what was the number one psychology experiment I would remember in ten years' time. My answer was Stanley Milgram's famous (infamous?) 1963 work on *Obedience to Authority*.

The experiment was this. A subject in a laboratory is asked to teach word associations to another subject who is in fact a collaborator of the researcher. The teaching method however required our subject to administer increasing electric shocks to his fellow participant. At a certain level of electric shock it becomes obvious that the fellow subject is in pain and distressed and carrying on further may pose very serious risks to their health.

By this point, our subject questions the experimenter who assures them it's alright, so they continue. Many participants carry on administering shocks until silence ensues from the 'victim'. In fact 65% carry on giving shocks to the highest level. Only 35% refuse.

So why would people continue to do this cruel and dangerous thing to a fellow human being?

This experiment has not been without controversy. Some say that it does not show our propensity for cruelty or even if it's about our obedience to authority. (Milgram was heavily influenced by the Nazi War Criminal trial of Adolf Eichmann, a couple of years earlier.) Some have also said that the laboratory setting may have led some to guess it wasn't real. There were also questions marks about the experiment being conducted in the first place due to its questionable ethics.

Either way, it provides some food for thought as we hear of atrocities committed on others even being videoed and put on the internet. We, observing in horror, may feel compassion for the victims but why don't the perpetrators? Milgram's point being that he believed many of us could be perpetrators in the right setting and the example of what happened in Nazi Germany was not that unique. Further genocides since then rather bears that out.

1.5 SELF-COMPASSION – WHY ARE WE SO TOUGH ON OURSELVES?

If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.

– Paul Gilbert

Given that self-compassion may have a positive impact on subjective feelings of happiness, optimism, wisdom, curiosity, agreeableness and extraversion, why are we so tough on ourselves? Why do we often feel over-indulgent when we are kind to ourselves?

Many of us have a daily battle with our inner critic. Many of my coaching clients over the years would feel much happier if they could wrestle some control over the metaphorical monkey that sits on their shoulder and whispers negative comments in their ear all day long.

Being compassionate to ourselves is not just about being kind and saying, “I’ve had a horrible day today so I’m going to be nice to myself and eat this huge chocolate bar”, (although I must admit I can make a case for that!).

Self-compassion has three components to it:

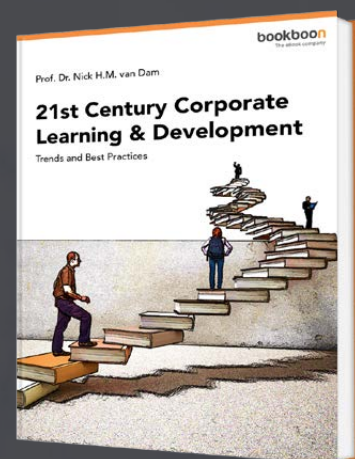
1. Self-kindness versus self-criticism – being kind and understanding to ourselves, not self-critical.
2. Common Humanity versus self-isolation – seeing our negative experiences as part of the human condition (we are all human and flawed, none of us is perfect, none of us get out of here alive, etc.).
3. Mindful Acceptance versus Emotional Entanglement – mindful equanimity rather than over identifying with painful thoughts and feelings.

One of the first studies to look at self-compassion was published in 2007, and looked at the relationship between self-esteem and self-compassion. What they found was that fostering a sense of self-compassion may have beneficial effects for people with low self-esteem. Given that many coaches work with clients on trying to raise their self-esteem, then this may suggest that the focus should be more toward developing self-compassion instead.

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I quote here directly from the research (Neff and Germer, www.mindfulnesscompassion.org) which found:

- People with higher self-compassion had less negative emotional reactions to real, remembered and imagined bad events.
- Self-compassion allowed people to accept responsibility for a negative experience, but to counteract bad feelings about it.
- Self-compassion protects people from negative events differently – and in some cases better than self-esteem. In addition, the positive feelings that characterise self-compassionate people do not appear to involve the hubris, narcissism or self-enhancing illusions that characterise many people with high self-esteem.
- Being self-compassionate is particularly important for people with low self-esteem. People with low self-esteem who treat themselves kindly in spite of unflattering self-evaluations fare as well as, if not better than, those with high self-esteem.
- For self-compassionate people, their view of themselves depends less on the outcomes of events, presumably because they respond in a kind and accepting manner toward themselves whether things go well or badly.

One of the essential elements of mindfulness which we look at later is a focus on the ‘here and now’. The only time we have is the present. Most of us are caught up in thinking about the past or worrying about the future, when all we have is now, this minute, this moment. To be compassionate to ourselves involves accepting what our experiences are at this minute, irrespective of what they actually are. Through this acceptance we can let things be by just noticing and observing, rather than judging and criticising ourselves and others.

The central tenet of Mindfulness is this ability to pay attention but to be non-attached to it at the same time. For example, I may say I feel angry but I am not my anger, and I can choose to see myself not as an angry person (over-identify with it) but as just something I am experiencing in this moment and it will soon be over.

Using our energy to pay attention to something will then hard-wire something new and is therefore self-directed neuroplasticity. (Neuroplasticity is the brain’s amazing ability to flexibly change itself in response to events.) So by paying particular attention to being compassionate, we actually create a mind/brain that has more of a propensity to be more compassionate in the future. We rewire it ourselves.

The true skill is being able to look at things with curiosity even in the midst of emotional upheaval. I remember being on a webinar where the speaker was talking about how to handle betrayal with a light and curious touch (a heavy topic at the best of times). I loved his encouragement to us to say, “Oh look I’ve been betrayed, how fascinating!”

I have to admit I’m still working on getting to that level of equanimity!

1.6 THE KINDNESS CONUNDRUM OR COURAGE IN THE FACE OF COMPASSION

The core of compassion is courage. Most people think it is kindness. Courage is the capacity to descend into the reality of human experience.

– Paul Gilbert

So just going around being kind to everyone you meet is not the easy answer here. It takes a brave person to be able to be vulnerable with others and take a risk in showing that vulnerability. However, by self-disclosing our own inner fears and compassion to ourselves, it has been shown to encourage others to do the same in a reciprocal arrangement. As we saw with common humanity, we feel less alone if we know that others have the capacity to feel the same as us. Too often we think everyone else is leading wonderful normal lives. The human condition is universal though.

So here’s the conundrum. How do you get that courage to be kind to others if you are stuck in your own cycle of self-loathing and fearful of being seen as weak?

As we will see in later chapters, the answers are already inside us and there is not just one route to greater compassionate living and working.

1.7 COMPASSION FATIGUE

As we talked about earlier, sometimes it is hard for us to maintain compassion over a long period of time – it’s quite hard work for our brains!

A Personal Example

My husband has some long-term health issues which mean it is a constant in our lives. For most people illness appears and disappears after a short period of time.

As his wife, I certainly identify with compassion fatigue and even though I love him and I feel great empathy for his situation, I notice that it waxes and wanes depending on my mood and whether I'm preoccupied with my own stressors. I also sense compassion fatigue amongst my closest friends who are obviously aware of our situation, are very supportive of me and its impact on me personally. However, I suspect it can be difficult for them to keep up a continuous feeling of kindness when I am relating a situation that never seems to change. It's a hard fact of life that sometimes it may seem a bit boring!

Largely we find it easier to be compassionate to individuals as opposed to bigger groups and as we will see later, the possibility of compassion fatigue may ironically motivate us to curb some of our compassion.

Compassion can be really difficult to generate when our own brain chemistry is driving the bus of our behaviour towards a more callous and cruel approach born out of self-preservation. It has therefore been suggested that compassion consists of three main requirements:

1. People must feel that the troubles that evoke their feelings are serious
We can feel cross and slightly duped if made to feel compassionate about something that then turns out to be trivial or a lie.
2. People require that sufferer's troubles are not self-inflicted
This can be a tricky moral minefield. A good example is how compassionate you might feel towards someone with an alcohol problem.
3. People must be able to picture themselves with the same problems
This connects with our common humanity. People have quite a wide scope of different views on the migrant crisis. This may be due to a greater or lesser extent to their own ability to imagine themselves having to move countries and continents and leave home/family behind under very difficult circumstances.

So far we have focused on the bigger picture of compassion in an ever changing world. Luckily most of us do not have the misfortune of having to leave our home and countries behind. Our biggest stressors come within the world of work where any compassion can sometimes be thin on the ground.

2 THE COMPASSIONATE CORPORATION

Michael Jenkins, CEO at Roffey Park, in his article for *People Management*, describes some of the research on compassion in the workplace. Anyone with even a passing acquaintance of corporate life, in any sector, will know that compassion is often sorely lacking in most organisations. As mentioned in **Chapter 1**, the very idea of compassion at work can be equated with being soft and weak. Jenkins says we need to frame compassion as a business necessity for the benefits to hit home.

The Roffey Park research defines compassion in five ways:

1. Being alive to the suffering of others
2. Being non-judgemental
3. Tolerating personal distress
4. Being empathetic
5. Taking appropriate action

Being alive to the suffering of others involves hearing their suffering in the first place. Most managers rate themselves highly for listening skills even though their subordinates often do not. The higher up an organisation you go the more likely you are to be cut off from listening to what is actually being said by those lower down the ranks. The power imbued by the hierarchy can unwittingly lead to a closing off from the distress of others.

2.1 MORE POWER EQUALS LESS EMPATHY – THE ROLE OF THE TOXIC BOSS

The more power you have, the less empathetic you are to those subordinate to you.

– Paul Gilbert

We can all recognise the Toxic Boss in many corporations. Dr Travis Bradberry (2017) quotes some research of the percentages of US workers describing their bosses as follows:

- Self-oriented (60%)
- Stubborn (49%)
- Overly demanding (43%)
- Impulsive (41%)
- Interruptive (39%)

He then goes on to say that bosses are not actually surprised by the figure and admit they need to work on their management skills. However, when asked what they need to focus on, they say “bringing the numbers in”. In fact most managers get sacked for poor people skills. As we will see later on, the way employees are managed, especially around their welfare, is far more important to a successful corporation than full on attention to just bringing the numbers in.

In one study quoted by Bradberry in his 2017 blog, 69% of US workers compared bosses with too much power to toddlers with too much power! Power is heavily linked to influencing, and can be abused by toxic bosses so that it is used to intimidate people.

There are five acknowledged types of power:

1. Personal Power
2. Reward Power
3. Position Power
4. Resource Power
5. Coercive Power

The Toxic Boss can use all elements of these powers to get what he/she wants from people.

Personal Power is about using your personality in a way that influences people. Most times this is a positive thing and you will see people using their talent for charisma and approachability here. The Toxic Boss, however, will use the dominating side of his personality with a loud voice and possibly overwhelming body language to get what he wants.

Reward Power is when someone has a position in an organisation to control reward or punishment – usually your pay rise or next promotion. A Toxic Boss with this responsibility can use this power for nefarious means.

Position Power is using your seniority in an organisation to get what you want. So if you are the subordinate of the Toxic Boss, then by definition he has more power than you because of his role and position and will use it when he feels threatened.

Resource Power is similar to reward power, as leaders here control some of the purse strings which may put you in a vulnerable position if you are a subordinate or a peer needing something from the Toxic Boss.

Coercive Power is an obvious one for Toxic Bosses. They may withdraw privileges or allocate unattractive tasks.

So the more senior you become as a manager, the more you need to focus on developing empathy towards others, rather than allowing your natural power to dominate.

2.2 HOW THE COMPETITIVE MIND BLOCKS COMPASSION

Earlier we talked about how biased our thinking is towards “threat”. We are hard-wired to react to threat with greater intensity than reward; therefore we have to work twice as hard not to let this unduly affect our behaviour and therefore our interactions/relationships.

David Rock, the neuroscientist and coach has devised a model that provides a useful framework for managers in the corporate world.

The SCARF model helps us to think about how we might minimise threats and maximise rewards using the SCARF acronym to highlight the key behavioural Drivers of our behaviour. It is applicable for coaches too who are helping clients to work out what their triggers are and how to perform better despite them. For leaders it is about managing people in such a way that interactions encourage more ‘towards’ responses (reward) rather than ‘away from’ responses (threat).

SCARF stands for:

Status, which is about relative importance to others.

Certainty, which concerns being able to predict the future.

Autonomy, which provides people with a sense of control over events.

Relatedness, which is a sense of safety with others.

Fairness, which is a perception of fair exchanges between people.

For our purposes, when focussing on compassion, Rock’s descriptor of Relatedness seems particularly apposite.

Relatedness as a sense of belonging as a major motivator and contributor to good mental health has been known for some time. The feeling that you are ‘in’ or ‘out’ of a group is a judgement made very quickly by the brain. Being part of a group had evolutionary advantages hence us retaining this. Meeting a stranger generates rapid threat responses: “Are they a part of my group?” Moving from being ‘out’ of a group to ‘in’ releases a flood of oxytocin leading to an increase in trust and collaboration.

Given all this, it’s hardly a surprise then that we find it easier to be compassionate towards people who are part of our ‘in group’, i.e. family, friends, people who are like us.

We may pay less attention to people who seem ‘not like us’, become more judgemental and less tuned into their distress. A perfect example in the modern world is the plight of refugees. They may appear to be part of another tribe and we may perceive them as a threat. They may even kick off other parts of the SCARF model such as **Fairness**: “Why are they coming here and getting our jobs?” **Certainty**: “How can we predict how many will need our help? What will happen if we take them all in?”

When we do not have empathy and compassion it is easy to objectify others.

– Paul Gilbert

2.3 COMPASSION FOCUSED BUSINESS LEADERSHIP: WUSSIES NEED NOT APPLY

Our brains are designed in an open loop system as opposed to the circulatory system (heart, lungs, blood) which is a closed loop. Open loop means that it is influenced by external sources. We rely on connections with other people for our own emotional ability and are affected by other’s emotions i.e. they are ‘catching’. A classic example is how couples who are in love can trigger surges of oxytocin in one another’s brains. This has had an evolutionary advantage because it has allowed people to come to the rescue of others, e.g. mothers to soothe a crying infant, or a lookout to signal danger.

During social interactions too, at the start of a conversation two bodies will operate at different rhythms but within 15 minutes their physiological profiles will be the same (mirroring).

“In 70 work teams across diverse industries, members who sat in meetings together ended up sharing moods – either good or bad – within 2 hours.” (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002)

Leaders set the emotional standard even when they are not speaking. Optimistic enthusiastic leaders more easily retain their people, compared with those bosses who tend towards negative moods.

“Our analyses suggest that, overall, the climate i.e. how people feel about working at a company, can account for 20 to 30 percent of business performance”.

In short, a leader’s emotional states and actions do affect how the people they lead will feel and perform. Leaders need to manage their own moods because of affecting everyone else’s – this is not just personal but a business imperative.

A compassionate leader not only notices when people around them are in trouble, they also try to do something about it.

– Michael Jenkins, CEO Roffey Park

2.4 HAPPY EMPLOYEES ARE PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYEES

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

– The Dalai Lama

A study some years ago by the Work and Employment Research Centre at the University of Bath (with the CIPD), started from the premise that there was a clear connection between the way people were managed and the performance of an organisation. From this start point they did go on to try to ascertain why that was the case and what it was it specifically about the way people were managed that led to this greater output. The table below presents a simple approach that says the biggest leap in productivity occurs when the welfare of employees is specifically catered for through good Human Resource polices such as health and wellbeing, and good working relationships with colleagues and leaders. So, take note. It's not Research and Development that makes the biggest difference to productivity or profit, not even Business Strategy but it's a culture that emphasises how well employees are cared about.

		Variations in Profit	Variations in Productivity
Employee Attitudes	Mainly employees job Satisfaction levels	5%	16%
Organisational Culture	Employee welfare the main factor	10%	29%
Human Resource Management Practices	Especially flexible job design and acquisition development of skills	19%	18%
Business Strategy		2%	3%
Quality Emphasis		1%	1%
Advanced Technology		1%	1%
Research & Development		6%	8%

Figure 1: Connection between the Management and Performance of an Organisation

Happiness and Compassion do go hand in hand. Many studies have shown that we are happier when we can give to others; Cooperative behaviour has been seen to be contagious. People have a tendency to “pay it forwards” so it influences others within a network. This has obvious advantages within corporations with large numbers of people working together and interacting on a daily basis. Rather like the tribes we have evolved from. If you are a manager, do not underestimate the power you have as a role model for compassionate interactions.

2.5 THE EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT WORKPLACE

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to use your understanding of emotions, in yourself and others, to deal effectively with people and problems in a way which reduces anger and hostility, develops collaborative effort, enhances life balance and produces creative energy.

– Daniel Goleman

The four competences of Emotional Intelligence are closely intertwined. Daniel Goleman described them as **Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness and Relationship Management**.

Emotional intelligence has been shown over numerous studies to play the most significant part of the success of managers, with certain competences being more of a deal breaker than others.

A leader cannot manage his emotions if he has little awareness of them. If his emotions are out of control then relationships will suffer. The research shows an underlying theme – self-awareness facilitates both empathy and self-management and these two in combination allow effective relationship management. Ei leadership therefore comes from a foundation of self-awareness.

Self-awareness also plays a crucial role in empathy, or sensing how someone else sees a situation: if a person is *perpetually* oblivious to his own feelings, he will also be tuned out to how others feel. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one’s own emotions as well as strengths and weaknesses, values and motivations. Goleman has posited that empathy is possibly a deal-breaker when it comes to good leadership (and maybe even just for a successful and happy life). So feeling empathy in a leadership context is crucial for business success and the jury is still out on whether this can be trained and developed or whether it is essentially a part of someone’s makeup and therefore we need to recruit empathetic individuals (amongst other things) into management positions.

The most telling, though least visible, sign of self-awareness is the propensity for self-reflection and thoughtfulness.

This follows on from self-awareness because if we don't know how we are feeling then we are at a loss to control/manage emotions; we become a prisoner of our own emotions.

Self-Management also enables transparency which is not only a leadership virtue but an organisational strength. Transparency or an authentic openness to others about one's feelings, beliefs, and actions – allows integrity, or the sense that a leader can be trusted. This relates back to our previous discussion about the ability to be comfortable with vulnerability.

Social Awareness can also be described as empathy. Extended neural circuitry via the Amygdala allows us to literally read another person's face and voice for emotion. In this way we are continually updated to allow us to keep in sync with the person. This is shown when we feel on the same wavelength as someone because it signals that we have just experienced an interlocking of brains. A leader who lacks empathy will appear to be 'off-key'.



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Unfortunately in business, people are rarely rewarded for empathy. It doesn't mean everyone should be 'mushy' and adopt others' emotions, as that would be a nightmare. Empathy means taking employees' feelings into account when making intelligent decisions so that the feelings are worked into the response. For example, the lack of empathy shown by a major corporation who informed their staff of massive redundancies via text messages!

Relationship Management is quite simply 'friendliness with a purpose'. If a leader acts manipulatively or disingenuously, the emotional radar of followers will sense a note of falseness and they will instinctively distrust that leader.

2.6 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

David Clutterbuck (*The Listener*, 2016) suggests that knowing the difference between empathy and compassion is crucial especially in coaching in order to avoid "empathetic overload".

So let's start with empathy.



Figure 2: The Man Fallen through Ice Conundrum

Imagine that someone has fallen through the ice in a pond. How do you help?

- If you stand back and watch with indifference, the person may drown.
- If you rush onto the ice without thinking, you may risk your own life too.
- If you gradually feel your way onto the ice, until you get close enough to throw a line, they can haul themselves out.

This is analogous to developing empathy.

We allow ourselves to get emotionally close to the other person. We experience their world as if it were our own, without losing the ‘as if’.

We still maintain our own separateness.

Empathy is the ability to understand the emotional make up of other people.

– Daniel Goleman

Empathy is **not** imagining how **you** would feel in the other person’s situation; it is entering this person’s world by listening to them so well that you accurately pick up their thoughts and feelings. Empathy can play an important part in establishing rapport with others.

Empathy is a quality; the associated skill is empathetic responding. It is more than simply saying, “I understand”. Unless you can demonstrate you have really understood, your colleague may not feel sufficiently at ease to risk being open with you. It is important, therefore, to develop the skill of empathetic responding, as it is fundamental to making your empathy apparent. Empathetic responding involves communicating back, with appropriate sensitivity, your understanding of what they have communicated, in a language that ‘suits’ them.

Empathy is walking a mile in someone else’s moccasins.
Sympathy is feeling sorry their feet hurt.

– Rebecca O’Donnell

Central to understanding empathy is that people have different views of things. Emotions and feelings are triggered within us in different ways. We often think people see things as we do. Being a good manager (and coach) depends on us being able to understand another viewpoint. However we can become too good at doing this and find it hard to be objective. I have heard many coaches say they can find it difficult NOT to get emotionally involved with the feelings of their clients in their desire to help. Again Clutterbuck asserts that we need compassion as opposed to empathy in these situations. He says “**Whereas empathy is about *feeling with* another person, compassion is about *feeling for* them.**” In actual fact we can often hear ourselves say to others who are experiencing difficulties “Oh dear, I really *feel for* you right now.”

2.7 CAN EMPATHY BE DEVELOPED?

This was something that Daniel Goleman (1998) questioned fairly early on. He wondered whether we could train people or whether it would end up being what I would call the karaoke version of empathy, i.e. people could be taught to act empathetic (body language, words, tone) but would they actually be feeling it? There has been some work by Helen Reiss, the Director of Empathy and Relational Science Programme, Massachusetts Hospital (Harvard Review, December 2013) to suggest that the ‘fake it till you make it’ approach may actually work. That is, acting in a caring way, looking people in the eye and paying attention to their expressions even if you don’t really want to may lead to you feeling more engaged.

A number of years ago, when I was researching this topic I asked this very question to a group of professionals within the LinkedIn Group “The Emotional Intelligence Network” (2012). Here are some of their thoughts:

“After 19 years of coaching senior executives, I can give you a qualified YES. During coaching sessions, I have had clients realise that they were failing to show empathy where it would have been appropriate to do so. In those cases, they changed their behaviours and began to practice empathetic behaviours. Over time, they became more and more empathetic by nature. In other cases, clients have had this lack of empathetic responses pointed out to them but were not interested in changing their behaviour. I cannot say with certainty whether it is nature or nurture but I have been able to bring it out in some individuals.”

* * *

“Julia, I’m not a professional in your field (and never will be). Therefore I can only share my own experience. My experience is you cannot “add” any wisdom or whatsoever to others unless they want to. You have to be invited. Empathy can be learned on this condition. Following people that I trust took me to where I am now. I grew a lot during my lifetime in terms of empathy. I hope you will find an answer to your question because it’s a contribution to people’s lives.”

* * *

“There are very few things one couldn’t develop through coaching. But like others have said, there has to be an intrinsic “greed”. As a past principal of vocational college, I’ve seen (in both teachers and students), that externally one can push information to people. But that information will grow into a skill/competence only if the recipient has interest and openness to utilise it. So, you can develop empathy, but you might want to spend some time in order to understand the person more and hence be able to see which way to approach, i.e. a person with low self-esteem and low empathy is likely not to be able to develop in empathy before the self-esteem issues are dealt with.”

* * *

“I believe that empathy is the ability and willingness to know another person’s feelings, reasoning, values and point of view. I personally think that every baby is born with the ability of empathy hard-wired in her brain. In fact, if my knowledge is correct, then mirror neurons are the seat of motor-imitation in the brain. In individuals who have a highly developed sense of empathy, it’s probably these same very neurons (working in reverse direction) with their mechanism extended to emotional and logical functions. Having said that, it seems to me that empathy for feelings is limited by one’s own range of feeling experiences and learning. As such empathy of feelings may be difficult to coach and also it can easily be mistaken for compassion. As for empathy for reasoning and values, I believe that the degree to which coaching can succeed may depend upon the beliefs and values held by the coachee. If the coachee’s belief system holds “win-win” and “collaboration” as values then it may be easy to coach him on empathy of reason and values. On the other hand, when the coachee’s experiences have created value in “selfishness”, then it might be difficult to coach him, and even if it works, he may end up using empathy skills to achieve one-sided goals rather than to affect a two-sided win-win outcome. In that case the coach may need to work more as a counsellor and less as a coach.”

The overall themes from people’s responses appear to be that empathy can be developed but as with most things, the motivation needs to be there for them to want to change and develop this aspect of themselves. Helen Reiss felt that it could be developed. She helped physicians to monitor themselves by practising deep breathing techniques and cultivating an air of detachment so they could take a helicopter view of interactions. They learnt to view things from the ceiling rather than being lost in their own thoughts and feelings. This enabled them to work out if this was their own physiology reacting or something going on in their patients. Many coaches will recognise this skill, as it is often taught on coaching skills programmes under the banner of “Use of Self”, e.g. if you feel irritated in someone’s company that may be a signal that it is bothering your client too and it may be useful to reflect that back to see if it gives insight.

2.8 THE MANAGER'S GUIDE TO WORKING WITH MORE COMPASSION

"I can never put my finger on it, because no one is actually lying to me. But I can sense that people are hiding information or camouflaging key facts so I won't notice."

This is a case of the CEOs' disease. The higher up the organisation you go, the more likely people will be less inclined to tell you bad news (or even good news). Feedback for the leader is very hard to come by and therefore they are left to self-assess their own performance with often disastrous results.

Unfortunately it is the poorest performers who tend to exaggerate their abilities the most.

A study showed that CEOs from the poorest performing companies gave themselves the highest rating scores on seven of the ten leadership qualities. However, when their staff were asked to rate the same qualities, the results were reversed. Those at the highest levels had the least accurate view of how they acted.

It was found that even if they do get feedback to work on, their belief systems about their ability to change gets in the way i.e. they feel they have been operating in a way for so long that they cannot change. People around them also often believe the leader cannot change so they think it pointless to give them negative feedback with all the attendant risks.

However the evidence all points to the fact that "old leaders can learn new tricks" and "leaders are made not born". (Goleman, Richard Boyatzis & Annie McKee 2002)

Mindfulness training in corporations is very much seen as the "new trick" and is being embraced with gusto.

Developing compassion via mindfulness is now being introduced into organisations in a variety of ways:

- Within leadership and management development (as bookends at the start or end of daily workshops) or weaved into modules on emotional intelligence, resilience, health and wellbeing.
- HR policies and strategies focusing specifically on health and wellbeing.
- Making it a stated part of wider organisational learning and development programmes and offering mindfulness-based stress management programmes like the Transport for London example in **Chapter 4**.
- Coaches using it in coaching sessions and weaving it into coaching interventions. See "Case study: Kara" in **Chapter 4**.

Leaders who create compassionate goals create a supportive environment for themselves and others, with the proviso that they don't have high self-image goals. So there is something to be said for being humble and authentic as a leader and being less wrapped up in your own ego. We also need to be clear here that compassionate behaviour is distinct from submissiveness: it's not just being nice. It does not preclude leaders from being honest. It's just the way it is done that is different.

For most leaders, according to Paul Gilbert (2008) there is a real pull from themselves and their organisational culture between 3 key areas:

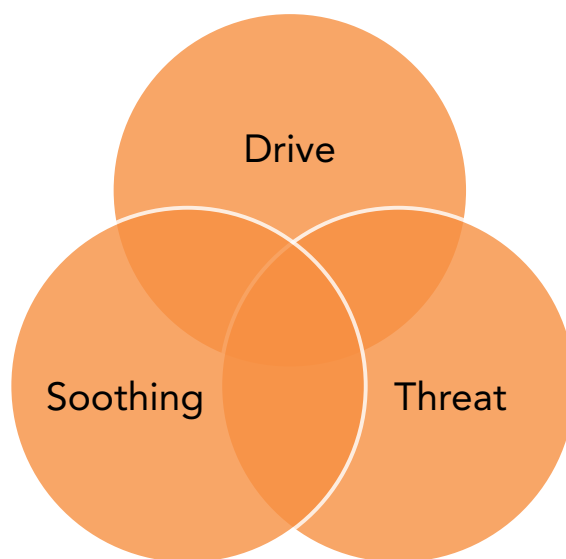


Figure 3: Key Pull Points for Leaders

As we saw in **Chapter 1**, our ability to self-soothe calms our parasympathetic system making us feel safer. In this place of safety we can be compassionate, open, creative and our best selves which is a great place to be as a leader. Compassionate behaviour is not the same as self-soothing which can be quite short term but it creates a stop point in order to focus on longer term goals. Soothing ability helps to balance out threat and drive so we achieve better wellbeing and connectedness.

Again, this self-soothing system can be switched on by mindfulness techniques and coaching around emotional self-management. Coaching leaders to look deeply at what it looks and sounds like for them when they are being empathetic, transparent, authentic and courageous (especially in tricky honest conversations) are all excellent long term development goals for better people management.

3 THE COMPASSIONATE COACH

3.1 PHYSICIAN HEAL THYSELF: DEVELOPING COMPASSION IN COACHES

Clutterbuck (2016) states that coaches are often encouraged to focus on empathy as part of their skills development in books and on training programmes. But empathetic overload can be a real problem, especially for coaches who do not have any support (via mentoring or supervision) to process emotions emanating from their clients and themselves. Burnout can be a real risk.

Empathy includes listening to understand and looking at things from the other person's perspective. For the coach, this can mean they can monitor their own responses as a reflection of what the client is saying. Empathetic coaches appear more approachable about wanting to hear what people say. This is reflected in the type of questions the coach asks. The coach must feel what the other person feels. However, there is a tie in with another Ei competence of self-regulation, as it would not be appropriate for the coach to feel so deeply empathetic that it slides into sympathy. The coach would get sucked in and not be able to give the detached help required.

In coaching we can often get swept away on the positivity vibe in our profession, however the human condition is also about pain, grief and suffering (P, G & S). I attended a webinar on this very topic and was struck by the willingness of the presenter to self-disclose traumatic things and be vulnerable to a group of strangers. The wave of compassion towards him was palpable. This has since reinforced my own courage in disclosing moments of self-doubt within both coaching and supervision. P, G & S can show up in coaching in the form of bereavement, infertility issues, mental illness, and divorce but not necessarily as the main focus of the coaching itself.

These topics are a part of life, but can remain hidden especially in **high pressure** corporate situations where people feel it will be perceived as a sign of weakness to even discuss these topics. Coaching is often seen as being about success, so what happens if clients feel they can't bring up these topics, and does the coach feel the same in supervision? Being able to talk about **failure, inadequacy and suffering**, I believe is the cornerstone of a good supervision relationship where the coach feels safe to explore these topics for themselves and their clients.

A key point that stood out for me was the statement that coaches are experiencing more and more clients with the topic of P, G & S, as **people are more likely now to employ coaches rather than therapists**. (Is this because there is less stigma in having coaching as opposed to counselling, I wonder?)

Coaches and supervisors therefore need to be aware of the whole picture of their client's lives. I found myself during the webinar listing many coachees from my own past work who I would categorise under this theme and then considered how this was the same for many coaches. For example, custody battles; a client's son with Autism; supervisee suicide; coachee with parental death as a child; sexual abuse; serious ill health issues such as MS; and many cases of marital breakdown.

An executive coach would do well to look back at their own client work and notice the pattern of human suffering even in a corporate context and connect with their compassion for them as well as for oneself.

Case Study: Janet and Caron, Compassion in Coaching Supervision

Caron was an internal coach working with managers in an organisational culture where many had a scientific background and there was a pervasive sense of right and wrong, black and white thinking. She came to supervision wanting to discuss her reaction to a particular coachee.

The coachee, Janet, was working on making a change to her career direction and had had three coaching sessions with Caron.

Caron was noticing that her coachee had repeated variations on the same phrase a number of times throughout each session when Caron asked her a question, e.g. "When you ask me that question, I don't think I've done it right", or, "Am I doing this right?", "Is this what I'm supposed to be bringing to coaching?"

Caron mentioned that she was uneasy and something was bugging her about this.

As I explored this with Caron, a number of things emerged:

- Janet, the coachee, appeared to be looking for reassurance.
- She was motivated but reticent about talking to others about the changes she wanted to make.
- Janet was doing a lot of research and wanting all the information before making a decision.
- Janet was hesitant in her speech and body language.
- She was not getting much support at home for her dream of a career change.
- She feared ridicule (her area was seen as 'pink and fluffy') and was feeling insecure.
- Caron the coach was feeling emotions herself akin to insecurity and a feeling that an old button had been pressed that she "didn't particularly want to be around".

Insight came for Caron from my question, “What might that be like for your client?” She realised that her own emotional reaction to the coachee’s situation had blinded her to how the coachee may have been feeling about it all. Caron realised that she needed to show more care and compassion for Janet to help reassure her rather than feedback her observations of the phrases she was saying in a more direct way than she would do with other clients. As Paul Gilbert says, “Caring is easily knocked out by other emotions such as stress, fatigue and anger. It’s easy for us to avoid being distressed by the distress of others by closing ourselves off to it.”

Caron’s own anxiety was blocking her compassion towards Janet. There was also a parallel here in that Caron was seeking reassurance herself in supervision by checking with me and wondering if she was over-analysing or being paranoid just as Janet had been.

3.2 BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE – DEVELOPING COMPASSION IN CLIENTS

Creating an environment to develop compassion in yourself as a coach, as a role model for your coachee, is crucial. The start point probably needs to be in your overall life rather than waiting for compassion to strike in the coaching room.

However, being able to develop a calm presence is a great competence for any coach to aspire to. In the slow calm space, a coach can see and hear things as if in slow motion which creates ideal conditions for the ‘right’ intervention to present itself to the coach.

On my coach training, I ask trainee coaches to think about how they prepare to coach and how they may ground themselves beforehand. There are a variety of answers but common themes are often around breathing techniques, listening to music, affirmations to one self and meditation.

Mindfulness based meditation is currently very popular with coaches who are also using the techniques with their clients too (see “Case study: Kara, Burnout and Mindfulness” in **Chapter 4**).

Being able to share our own vulnerability as coaches with our clients and for them to see us be self-compassionate despite the vulnerabilities, is an excellent start to developing their own compassion. Coaches can then encourage some enquiry into how coachees are compassionate (or not) to themselves and what implications that has on those around them. Being able to stand back and explore examples of when we have been compassionate and when we have not and what thoughts and feelings arose at those times leads to a gentle unpacking of what being compassionate actually looks like in practise.

3.3 THE AMBIGUITY OF VULNERABILITY IN COACHING SUPERVISION

As we saw earlier, being compassionate is sometimes about being brave enough to be vulnerable. As a coach supervisor, I believe that many coaches avoid supervision relationships because of this vulnerability. However, to quote Robin Shohet again: “It is a pleasure to hide but a tragedy not to be found”.

Supervision is a great place to learn from experience, process and overcome emotions linked to practise and to scrutinise the boundaries of our work as coaches. Unfortunately many coaches in supervision struggle with feelings of shame and being judged.

I remember my supervisor asking me after many years of working together, “What is the one thing you would not like your supervisor to know?” I recall sitting on this question for a long time before feeling brave enough to answer it.

Erik de Haan wrote an article (2016) *Trust and Safety in Supervision* in which he describes research that highlighted that coaches sometimes did not bring their most pertinent issues to supervision because it felt too painful or shaming. Given this, what chance do we as coaches have of helping clients if we can't role model vulnerability (and hence common humanity) as a cornerstone of compassion ourselves?

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Case study: Robert

Robert came to coaching at the request of his organisation for help with his abrasive manner but he also had lots of personal issues going on in the background, namely the custody battle with his ex-wife over his two children which was increasingly acrimonious. Although our contract was a corporate one I also worked with Robert on some of his personal issues which I believed were impacting on his work.

This involved helping him to prepare for court hearings and getting him to take the perspective of his ex-wife and the judge using a technique from Gestalt therapy called chair work. This is literally inviting the coachee to sit in various chairs representing himself, his ex-wife and judge to see and feel the situation through their eyes. What he saw of himself during these insights helped him realise that only by changing his approach (words and tone and body language) would he be able to show others around him that he was a caring responsible parent worthy of the shared custody of his children. Not only did he see how the Judge would view him and his ex-wife, but also he began to slowly feel some compassion for himself in all this, "this has been so hard for me no wonder I haven't been sleeping" (rather than righteous anger) and the first inkling of some compassion for his ex-wife, "It must be quite tough for her too" (no mean feat for him!).

3.4 OBSTACLES TO COMPASSION – THE ROLE OF DRIVERS THEORY ON OUR BEHAVIOUR

Sometimes with the best will in the world, we still find it difficult to be our best selves; kind, compassionate and caring. So why is that when we are trying so hard to change?

Drivers Theory is a very neat way of helping us to understand our own and others' behaviour.

A Driver describes a type of behaviour that we value so highly that we feel driven to keep repeating. We are 'driven', when we experience some discomfort doing the reverse of the Driver. Drivers are 'set up' to make us feel okay about ourselves. This concept originated with *Transactional Analysis* by Eric Berne. Transactional Analysis is a social psychology and a method to improve communication. There are five Drivers:

1. Be Strong
2. Please (others)
3. Hurry Up
4. Try Hard
5. Be Perfect

A Driver describes a type of behaviour that we value so highly that we feel driven to keep repeating. We are ‘driven’, when we experience some discomfort doing the reverse of the Driver. Some people have no Drivers, some have all five, but most of us are somewhere in between and have a combination, e.g. we may please others by being perfect or try hard to be strong!

Our Drivers have usually been conditioned in us during childhood where we learnt that if we behaved in particular ways then we would be rewarded usually with love or attention by our care givers. Therefore we are ‘driven’ to repeat this behaviour even when it does not serve us well.

Here is a short description of each Driver:

Be Perfect – People with this Driver are constantly pushing themselves. They may have been told, “if a thing is worth doing its worth doing well”. Good advice sometimes but often impossible in an imperfect world. As a coach, I often see high achieving managers with a strong Be Perfect Driver. This is more about having high standards than wanting to be perfect. Their childhood was often marked by parents who encouraged them to achieve and do well at school and in other activities. This serves them well most of the time and that is how they end up being captains of industry. Managers with a Be Perfect Driver tend to put themselves under pressure to complete everything 100% when some tasks only require 80%. Their permission mantra needs to be: “It’s okay to be just good enough”.

Please Others (Please Me) – this Driver shows up as a strong need to seek approval by doing things for others; meeting needs before the other has even requested it! It’s a form of rescuing and assuming the other person cannot take responsibility for themselves. The trap here is that people may not want this help, which leads to the individual with the Please Others Driver feeling irritated and resentful. Running around meeting others’ needs can also be tiring and stressful and lead to disappointments. These individuals need to work on believing that they do not have to do things for others as a way of getting positive strokes back for themselves.

Be Strong – shows itself in individuals who are good in a crisis and can take control. They will not be good at showing emotion though and can keep stress bottled up. They have been rewarded early on for keeping it all together (the English ‘stiff upper lip’ being an example). It’s often socialised in males although females can also show this Driver. These individuals need to learn that vulnerability is okay and not always a sign of weakness.

Hurry Up – these types have a very busy style. They talk fast and are often buzzing around getting loads done but feeling impatient with the slowness of everyone else. It can make them slipshod and prone to not finishing things off before starting something else. They see relaxing as a waste of time but can burn out quickly with an inability to live in the moment (and miss the pleasure in life) by rushing onto the next thing. Learning how to slow down and not expect others to be as speedy as them is a lifelong development area.

Try Hard – these people give maximum effort and attention to everything they do, even if it's not enjoyable for them! They are diligent and patient and will not give up. This can be great for projects that need real staying power. However, not being able to throttle back the energy on certain tasks means they also miss out on the pleasures of life by filling their time with tasks that do not add to the quality of life. They need to accept that sometimes it's okay to give up.

3.5 WHY ARE OUR 'DRIVERS' OBSTACLES TO COMPASSIONATE BEHAVIOUR?

As we've seen previously, the start point for more compassionate behaviour is to begin with the self but if we struggle with self-compassion we will almost surely struggle with others.

Let's look at each Driver and its relationship with compassion.

People with a strong **Be Perfect** Driver tend to be very hard on themselves and others in their drive for high standards. The drive may be so strong that they will set the bar very high for themselves in all areas of their life (an immaculate desk or house!) and with others around them, who may not have the same skills and ability or even Driver. This means that they may come across as impatient, unkind, and uncaring with people who do not want to push themselves as much as they do, and they may become blind to the impact this has on others. (Poor empathy).

Please Others/Please Me types can look, on the face of it, to be great examples of care and compassion as they run around after others. However, the danger here is that the helping behaviour may not be borne out of compassion but to meet their own particular wants and needs (that's the **Please Me** bit of the equation!). If we acknowledge that we have these needs, the shadow side of us, then we can notice them in ourselves so that they are not unconsciously running the show. It helps us not to use others for our own needs or even turn our clients into parts of ourselves we cannot face.

Be Strongs may be feeling a great deal of compassion for others (if not for themselves) but how would you ever know? Because they tend to bottle up their feelings, they are not able to verbalise their true connection. Inside they may feel compassion for another's suffering but will find it difficult to show empathy because it smacks too much of weakness and vulnerability which they fear to look at in themselves and subsequently in others. They will not be very well practised in even having the right vocabulary to communicate this anyway.

The **Hurry up** Driver can give real problems with allowing enough time to feel compassion for others and as we have seen in a previous chapter, stress and anxiety (the usual daily pattern for a **Hurry Up**) is a killer of compassion.

Finally, the **Try Hard** Driver may look like one of the best for observing compassion, at least for others and they will certainly try their best! The main pitfall here is that they may burn out and get compassion fatigue by trying to be there for everyone else's need and not paying attention to their own.

As a coach, helping clients to understand their behaviour creates a bedrock of theory to hang their own insights and examples on when they feel they are being dominated by their Drivers. I often comfort my clients with the knowledge that no one Driver is better than the other and that they are an integral part of who we are. So what is the point if you can't change them, they cry? Well, as John Whitmore, the 'Grandfather of Coaching', would say, "I am able to control only that which I am aware of. That which I am unaware of controls me. Awareness empowers me." For me, when I'm stressing about something that hasn't been done to my liking, I need to stop and say to myself, "Hang on, this is just your Be Perfect Driver and not everyone will do it to your standard, and does it really matter anyway? Is 80% good enough?" This gives me enough time to calm down and stand back rather than leap into habitual mode.

So apart from Mindfulness and Drivers Theory, what else can you do to help your coachees connect with compassion for self and others?

Here are a number of compassionate mind training techniques to use in the coaching room. I have assumed some familiarity with the basic underlying principles of some of these.

1. Working with clients who are self-critical and therefore struggle with self-compassion. Explore the emotions of the self-attack, what is the emotional tone? A coachee can be asked to imagine the self-attacking part as if it was a person: "What would it look like?" "What emotions is it directing at you, what is it saying to you?" This can help people recognise the power of the self-critical side.

2. Cognitive based approaches to generate alternative evidence to counteract negative thoughts, e.g. the ABC approach:

- A Activating Event or Situation
“What was the situation?”
- B Belief/Thought about the Situation
“What were you thinking at the time?”
- C Consequential Emotion/Behaviour
“What was the impact on your behaviours?”
- D Disputing the Belief
“What was it helping you to achieve?”
- E Exchanging the Thought
“What would be a more helpful thought to hold?”

Additionally the ‘D’ part can be expanded further:

- LOGIC “Just because...how does it follow that...?”
- EVIDENCE “Where’s the evidence that...?”
- PRAGMATIC How useful is it to hold the belief?
 - “Even if it were true, do you feel better or worse for thinking xxxx?”

3. Visualisation techniques work because the brain fires in the same way as if the person was actually doing the action they are visualising (as every sports professional knows!). Invite the coachee to imagine themselves being compassionate to themselves or others. Further NLP techniques can be used to anchor peak experiences as they associate themselves into the visualisation. Try Bookboon’s [How to Improve Your Workplace Wellness](#) by John Kyriazoglou.

4. Ask your coachee to engage in compassionate letter writing. Start first with one written to them.

5. Use Resilience Building techniques with a coachee. **See Chapter 4** “Cultivating Compassion for All”.

6. Ask coachees to keep a Gratitude journal of three pleasurable things noticed each day. These can be very small, e.g. seeing a robin hopping about on the lawn, taking a first sip of tea in the morning, receiving compliments, etc. This enables people to pay attention to all the positive things around them that they may be filtering out. The discipline of the exercise means that they will start looking out for things in order to fill out their journal. Once they have cracked three things, step up the target to five then ten.
7. And for coaches to explore for themselves, possibly with a supervisor, these suggested questions from David Clutterbuck (*The Listener*, 2016) are a great challenge:
 - What might I and my clients bring into the room that would undermine our compassion towards the others?
 - What might I and my clients bring into the room that would undermine our self-compassion?
 - How can I help my clients find the space and the courage to be self-compassionate?

4 CULTIVATING COMPASSION FOR ALL

As we have already discussed one of the ways of building more compassion in our lives, (and the world if we want to think big!) is not only to be compassionate towards others but to start by being compassionate to ourselves.

If we cannot show ourselves one iota of compassion then we find our brains are ‘unused’ to the idea of compassionate behaviour in our interpersonal interactions. We need to get into a habit of compassion.

4.1 DEVELOPING MINDFULNESS AS A ROUTE TO COMPASSION

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn as:

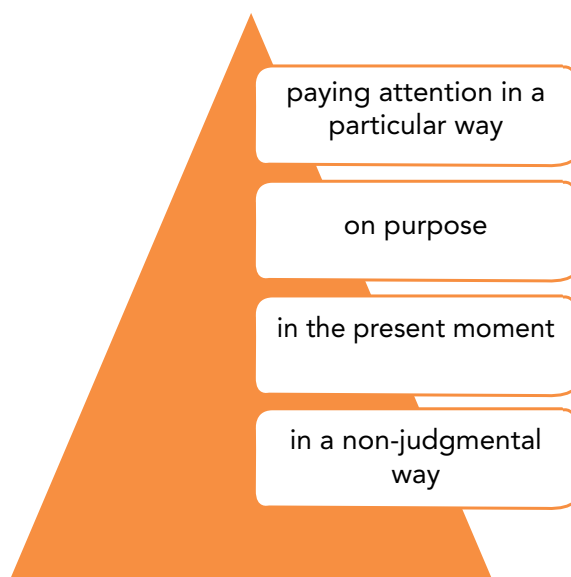


Figure 4: Mindfulness, as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness techniques including meditation and present-focussed awareness can be seen as a foundation for most brain-based coaching knowledge and skills. Brain structures have been found to be denser in meditators and functions enhanced such as empathy, intuition, emotion balancing, fear modulation, attuned communication and much more.

4.2 HOW DO YOU BECOME MORE MINDFUL?

There are many programmes and courses on mindfulness today enabling people to learn mindfulness meditation practise. “Practise” being the operative word as it is something of a skill to develop over a period of time.

Most programmes teach a stage by stage process (a few hours each week over eight weeks) of learning to sit quietly (meditation by another name!) in order to focus on our physical, emotional and mental landscape in a curious and accepting way. It helps us to treat ourselves and our inner thoughts with kindness rather than inwardly worrying and criticising our thoughts as they appear. Technology has now made it much easier to use audio and visual tools to help incorporate the discipline of regular meditation into daily life. It means we can create new habits (new neural pathways) and a re-wiring of our habitual thinking and emotional patterns. One that I have used personally is the Headspace app, which can be used to build up a foundation of being mindful. It also has special audios that are themed around topics that often give us the most stress such as insomnia, personal relationships, commuting, working, eating, etc. Headspace has just launched a new series all around the theme of kindness too.

4.3 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS IN THE WORKPLACE OF MORE MINDFULNESS?

Chaskalson (2011) talks about the many benefits of mindfulness in a business setting.

Some include:

- Less depression, anxiety stress and neuroticism.
- Greater wellbeing, life satisfaction, quicker recovery of low moods.
- Less frequent negative thoughts and ability to get over them quicker.
- More stable self-esteem that is not fully dependent on external factors, e.g. not feeling destroyed as a person if you are made redundant.
- More satisfying relationships, less conflict, better communications.
- Increased self-awareness and correlation to other emotional intelligence competencies, e.g. greater resistance to impulsive behaviour.
- Improvement in attention spans which leads to more creativity, productivity and efficacy.
- Physical benefits such as reduced blood pressure, lower likelihood of cardiovascular disease and better recovery if it does arise. As well as fewer hospital admissions for heart disease, cancer and infectious diseases.
- Reduction in addictive behaviour such as drugs, prescribed medicines, alcohol and caffeine.

That is some list!

Even just taking the reduction in stress as an example of a workplace benefit, the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) has estimated that in the UK, stress costs businesses £2,000 per employee per year and 14 million lost working days. Now if that isn't an incentive for companies to help people deal with stress via mindfulness then I don't know what is!

Depression also costs business more each year than hypertension or back problems and is comparable to diabetes and heart disease.

Mindfulness training (usually the industry standard eight week programme) has shown fantastic results in numerous countries included the UK and USA. In 2012, UK based Transport for London (TfL), presented some results of a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme. TfL saw a reduction of 70% in the number of days' absence of staff due to stress, anxiety and depression afterwards.

In the UK, the NHS has nailed its colours to the mast by recommending Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for patients with relapsed depression. The MBCT programme is very similar to the original Mindfulness programmes devised and run by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

However, the benefit of mindfulness for companies is not just about keeping employees healthy. Some authors within the management development field believe that mindfulness is a key management competency because of its obvious links with Emotional Intelligence which we discussed in a previous chapter. As a trainer facilitating programmes where managers are learning how to use coaching skills, a key component is to provide an opportunity within the programme for managers to learn how to tune into themselves emotionally, mentally and physically. This might not seem a big deal but it is surprising how many people are 'numbed' to what they are feeling, when they are feeling it. I have often heard participants say, "I don't do feelings", or, "I'm not sure I am noticing anything or even that I understand what you are asking of me". As Cooper and Sawaf say in their book *Executive EQ*, "If you cannot feel what moves you then you cannot feel what moves others".

All in all, given the relatively low cost of mounting such (mindfulness) trainings, the potential return on investment is considerable

– Michael Chaskalson

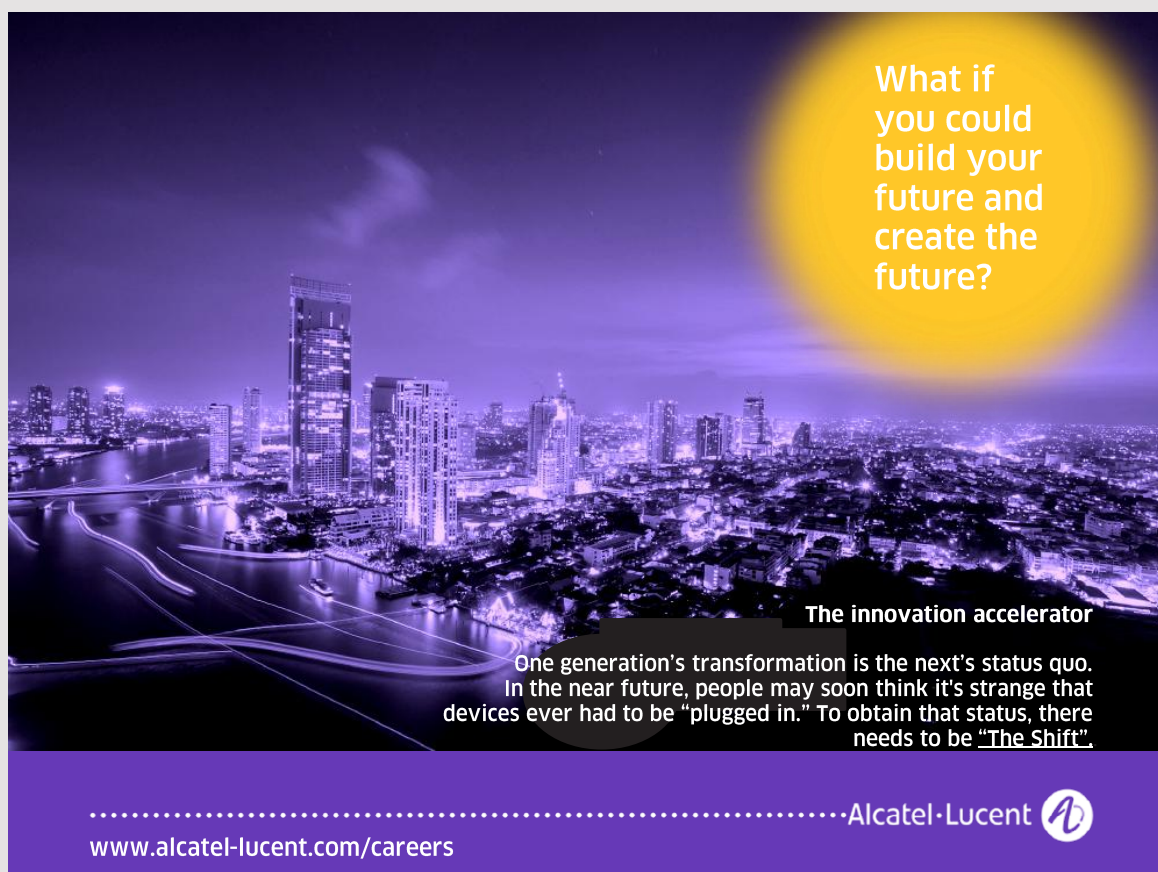
As managers we need to be able to make sense of people, their behaviour and the scenarios we are presented with each day in the corporate arena. What chance do we have if we don't even understand our own thoughts, feelings and behaviour!

Mindfulness training in the workplace can help people to tap into greater self-awareness and explore for themselves whether, for whatever reason, their empathy (authenticity, transparency, self-control and influencing are seen as crucial too) has been buried by lack of support and development during childhood and early career.

4.4 BEFRIENDING OURSELVES (BEING A FRIEND TO US)

So what's all this business about befriending ourselves? Again this can sound a bit 'woo-woo' to most people especially corporate types.


If we can train ourselves to accept more of what are our thoughts and emotions instead of rushing to judge and metaphorically beating ourselves up in the corner, then we can start to let go of the idea that we 'should' be thinking and feeling in a particular way. Mindfulness via meditation teaches people how to observe their thoughts often like clouds or bubbles so that you can get used to just watching them float away rather than chase them into a future that does not exist yet, or a past that has already happened and is unchangeable.



What if you could build your future and create the future?

The innovation accelerator

One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be "plugged in." To obtain that status, there needs to be "The Shift".

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Mindfulness, as we have seen, is all about focusing on the present, the here and now, moment by moment. Essentially that is all there is! This can free us up to notice there may be other ways of being, rather than reacting in the same old habitual pattern time and time again. As human beings we are very good at operating on automatic pilot and not be aware that it is happening but habits are only a particular piece of brain wiring that has been worn into a groove by constantly thinking or doing the same thing, rather like the grooves on an old vinyl record. Through mindfulness, eventually we can come to realise that our thoughts are just thoughts and they are not the total sum of us. By sometimes examining these habitual patterns of thought we can see how they lead us astray into unhelpful moods or behaviour. By doing this we can show ourselves some compassion to our own thoughts, even the negative ones, “Oh look, there’s one of my constant triggers about wet towels on the bathroom floor... Okay, I made that thought happen in my head... I don’t have to engage with it and start getting all irritated as usual... I can just let it float on by and be really kind to myself in this moment.”

With this in mind I keep a quotation on my office wall that says:

Be kind to yourself in the midst of suffering and it will change.

I can then ask myself what would be the nicest thing I could do for me during this difficult time that would be nurturing, until the storm has passed.

Another quotation I keep in mind is:

You can’t avoid suffering, but you can avoid suffering about the suffering.

This is a favourite of mine because it accepts that bad stuff happens in life (the first and third “sufferings”) but the second/middle “suffering” where you angst over it, is completely optional and you can choose to do something else.

Williams and Penman (2011) have a lovely Be-Friending meditation as part of the audio meditations section of their book (number 7). To cultivate a sense of kindness to self and others, wish ourselves well and extending this to others. It sounds easy but is quite a challenging exercise especially as you try to think of someone you may be having difficulty with.

4.5 COMPASSION-BASED RESILIENCE BUILDING

As we have seen stress can be a compassion killer, so the sooner we can bounce back the better.

Resilience is a hot topic right now and everyone wants to be more resilient. Who doesn't want to be able to withstand pressure more effectively during constant change and to resist crumbling from stress?

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly. The bounce back ability factor. The opposite of resilience can be seen by the words fragility, inflexibility, and weakness. Interestingly, it's not about never suffering in the first place. The very act of going through difficult times is the thing itself. "Character building", as my Mum always said.

For leaders, the ability to weather storms is a crucial aspect of working life in the 21st century. Being able to learn effectively is the key to resilience so that the ability to try and fail and then learn from those experiences is crucial.

However, there can be pitfalls to resilience. If you are too resilient you may be resisting the exact change that needs to happen. We can then try to withstand forces that are inevitable. For example, using the weathering storms analogy, could our ability to do that blind us to the fact of climate change and that something needs to be addressed rather than weathered?

We are all born with a certain amount of resilience but then it's a question of how we build this up through our lives.

4.6 BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH RENEWAL AND WELLBEING

This is about paying attention to your work/life balance and ensuring your bank balance of nourishing activities (those that feed your mind, body and soul) regularly outweigh any depleting activities (those that drain our energy and enthusiasm).

David Rock says in *Coaching with the Brain in Mind*, the number one important factor for building **Resilience** through **Renewal** is to surround yourself with caring and supportive relationships. Making time for friends and hobbies is essential for our wellbeing but interestingly it's one of the first things that gets dropped when we are stressed. (Our old favourite, compassion fatigue again!).

Being able to have strategies that you can rely on in times of trouble is also useful, such as relaxation techniques such as meditation, good exercise and eating regimes, shorter working hours, time for hobbies, holidays, plenty of sleep, etc.

There are some great ideas too on the blog post “Natural Stress Defeaters” (see “Resources” section).

The crucial thing is that these things need to be worked on and built up before they are needed. As the old saying goes, “It’s best to fix your roof when the sun is shining.”

Focussing on the positive creates neural firing in the brain that activates and energises us to aid the emergence of creative solutions as opposed to noticing all the things we need to rid ourselves of which only sets off our threat responses.

So in order to make ourselves springy, and bouncy we need to be proactive about taking care of ourselves and show ourselves some compassion. After all as they say on aeroplanes during the safety demos, “If you don’t put your own oxygen mask on first, you can’t help anyone else with theirs”.

An excellent activity for anyone to do, but a great tool for coaches to use with clients is invite them to list activities in a given week that have nurtured themselves (i.e. increased wellbeing) and those that have depleted (drained their energy). By analysing the list with a coachee, they can often see that some things on the ‘depletion list’ may not be able to be changed, like caring for an elderly parent, so it’s not always a case of removing depletions from your life. The way to achieve better balance is to increase the amount of nurturing activities on the other side of the equation. These might be as simple as taking time out to do an enjoyable hobby, visit friends, go for a walk, cook a nice meal, and lounge in a bubble bath.

All things that will help to restore balance to help one cope with the vicissitudes of life so that when challenging times come you can show compassion to yourself and those around you more readily.

Case Study: Kara, Burn Out and Mindfulness

Kara, in her fifties, was a senior manager in financial services who was referred to coaching because her manager was seriously worried about her health. Kara was a well-respected manager in the business and a diligent hard worker. She had a team of 27 staff and the company was undergoing expansion plans in their business. However, lately she had reported feeling unhappy and overwhelmed with the pressure of work. She had poor work life balance and often worked 12 hour days, plus took work home for evenings and the weekend. She had not suffered any serious health problems, but there was a concern that she could easily burn out. This was also affecting her personal relationships outside of work. Some help had been provided for Kara around restructuring of the team, an addition of a team leader to delegate work to and a pay rise. The overall aim of the coaching was with a view to improving performance via better delegation and time management and her sense of wellbeing. It was felt there was a significant risk to Kara's health which could lead to absence if no development was undertaken. Without coaching and development she could easily rely on using habitual ways of working that had served her well so far.

In our initial sessions, Kara talked about not being able to say no, feeling overwhelmed, being her own worst enemy, a perfectionist, and a workaholic. She was doing no exercise, drinking and eating too much and not allowing quality time with her partner. In fact on our very first session she talked at me at 100 mph! I felt as drained and as exhausted as she obviously was. A perfect example of parallel process; where the coachee unconsciously invites you to relive their situation. Kara was certainly burning out.

It was obvious we had to slow everything right down. I often suggest mindfulness techniques to clients, but this time I felt it was useful to actually do some in the session itself. This allowed Kara to check in and slow her pace and create a feeling of calmness before we started talking in the session. I used a recording of some meditation and we did some breathing and guided visualisation, so that we could do it together and create a peaceful space between us. Kara loved it and it encouraged her enough to do it outside the sessions, too. We also focussed on getting a balance between nurturing and depleting activities (see "Activity in nurturing and depleting" subchapter 4.6). A major realisation for Kara was that she needed to re-establish some old hobbies she had let go. Often the things that nurture us are the first to disappear when stress hits and then we get in a downward spiral of doing even less. Kara wanted to get back into watercolour painting which she enjoyed but also found therapeutic. Slowly but surely Kara started to add into her life other things apart from work. She also began to be more compassionate towards herself rather than berating herself for not being good enough and not being all things to all people. (She had a tendency to "Mother Hen" her staff.) Over a six month period, Kara was able to move her happiness score up from a 3 out of 10 to a 7 out of 10. Her stress levels decreased from 9 out of 10 to 5 out of 10.

4.7 THE INTERACTIVE FLOW OF COMPASSION

So in summary in this chapter about cultivating compassion for all, we have discussed a combination of things that all mesh together in order to create the right conditions for compassion. This is summarised below by Paul Gilbert (University of Derby Inaugural Lecture, December 2015).



Figure 5: The Interactive Flow of Compassion

SUMMARY

We have evolved naturally to respond to care and compassion and to give it to others; without it, we would literally die.

Compassion can be learned and the more attention we pay to this as part of our development the more we rewire our own mind/brains to be increasingly compassionate thus creating a virtuous circle.

Compassion and the workplace look like strange bedfellows but even in recent times we have seen the disastrous results of big business decisions taken without much concern for employees (and customers) within the banking industry culminating in the financial crisis of 2008.

Managers need to develop greater emotional intelligence which helps place a premium on creating the right environment for happy employees. And as we have seen happy employees are good for business.

For the executive coach, developing compassion is not just for the life coach or counsellor. If we follow the adage, “Who you are is how you coach”, then this means embracing vulnerability and pursuing courage as well as wisdom (often with the help of a supervisor). This paves the way for coaches to model an approach of “being” that is helpful to reflect back to the client.

Mindfulness meditation training has been shown to be an efficacious vehicle for promoting compassion inside and outside the workplace and has been endorsed by big employers like the NHS in the UK.

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