

# Philosophy of Coaching

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## Editor's Introduction

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We are pleased to present this special issue of *Philosophy of Coaching*. For this issue we felt it was important to draw readers' attention to a scholarly meeting recently held in Sydney, Australia. Hosted by the University of Sydney, the *Australian Conference on Evidence-Based Coaching* had special significance as it marked the 20th anniversary of Coaching Psychology Unit (CPU); the world's first academic teaching and research unit dedicated to coaching psychology.

Appropriately, the issue commences with a reflection from Dr Sean O'Connor (newly appointed CPU Director and Conference Convener) who explains the importance of the event, whilst also offering his (and others') observations of the overall experience. In short, this was not an ordinary conference and, given recent world events, there is reason to be very grateful that this assembly of colleagues and friends was able to precede at all, and without the need for physical distancing. On a personal note, as delegates ourselves, we would like to thank Sean, Dr Michael Cavanagh, Ingrid Studholme, other members of the organising committee and the volunteers for the effort they put in to making the conference a memorable event.

As readers of this journal will well know, coaching is an applied discipline, with teaching and research closely tied to the practice of coaching. Perhaps more than most fields, these meetings allow practitioners, educators and researchers to gather, share ideas and learn together in an inspiring way. Our aim with this special issue has been to showcase something of the diversity on display at the conference, by inviting presenters to submit papers based on the talks they delivered. However, in order to keep the issue relatively compact, we challenged presenters to write shorter papers (approximately 2,500 words), which were then subjected to blind peer-review in the usual way. It is also worth noting that – rather suitably – three of the 10 contributors to this special issue (Suzi Skinner, Peter Webb and Be Parnell) are all graduates of the CPU.

What follows is a sampling of the conference through the presentation of seven short conference papers. As an added extra, we are also pleased to present one longer paper based on a thought-provoking and challenging keynote address. The papers are presented in the following order.

In the keynote paper, Tatiana Bachkirova and Simon Borrington note that the widespread embrace of three “beautiful ideas” in coaching (i.e., Positive Psychology, Mindfulness and Transformational Coaching) has largely occurred without much critical consideration. In a challenge to the coaching community, they propose these ideas are not unquestionably beneficial and, in some situations, may perpetuate “auto-exploitation”, exacerbate existing problems, and (unintentionally) “make us ill”. The paper concludes with an appeal to greater levels of reflexivity and criticality amongst coaches, students of coaching and the many organisations that are eager consumers of such ideas.

The short papers cover a diversity of topics. This includes two papers focused on the coach-as-performer, with explorations of what it means to be “fit for purpose” (Gordon Spence) and how coaches can “calibrate” themselves through engagement in growth-focused therapy (Travis Kemp). In contrast, the remaining five papers offer diverse perspectives on how coaching can be undertaken, including a pilot study focused on the use of Artificial Intelligence in coaching (Nicky Terblanche and Danie Cilliers); an explication of Leader Identity Formation Theory as it pertains to executive coaching (Suzi Skinner); a performance enhancement model derived from Thrive and Survive Theory (John Franklin); a blended psychodynamic, family systems analysis of working with difficult coaching clients (Be Parnell), and the cultivation of wisdom using coaching methods (Peter Webb).

We hope this collection of papers proves to be a stimulating intellectual resource, and a useful catalyst for evolving personal coaching practices and/or generating future research. We hope the conference may yet produce additional papers for the next issue and beyond. Due to the tight timeframe between the conference and this issue (along with the disruptive influence of the COVID-19 pandemic), not everyone who wanted to publish in this special issue has been able to do so. As such, we look forward to the possibility of receiving further contributions from conference presenters. Should these papers eventuate, we will make a point of highlighting that connection.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that the Association for Coaching (AC) have kindly offered to provide sponsorship of the *Philosophy of Coaching*. We are extremely grateful for this support and look forward to a long and mutually beneficial relationship.

Happy reading and stay safe!

Gordon Spence, PhD & Paul Lawrence, PhD

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