

# DEVELOPING MENTORING & COACHING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> EMCC Research Conference  
7 & 8 July 2011, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

**Book Extract:**

**Self-Care at Work and its practical  
Development: Coaches as a Case  
in Point**

Jane Keep

Editors:  
Ines O'Donovan  
David Megginson

**EMCC**

*European Mentoring &  
Coaching Council*



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# **EMCC**

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# SELF-CARE AT WORK AND ITS PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT: COACHES AS A CASE IN POINT

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Jane Keep  
UK

*This synopsis is based on a PhD Study that looked at the practical development of self-care at work using coaches as a case in point. The study used autoethnography, a participant inquiry group, as well as a literature and desk based review. Early findings show that very few focus on 'me' and consider self truly during their working day; many see the client as 'king', and, some over-rely on coaching processes or techniques, particularly if they are not feeling 100%. In addition, if we keep working when we are feeling under 'par' it is uncomfortable, and often our services suffer. Choosing to develop a deeper relationship with self via self-awareness does help to develop self-care. Developing self-care can have an impact on the services we offer.*

Keywords: self-care, coach, self-awareness, physical well-being

## INTRODUCTION

The PhD study is an exploration of the impetus to deepen self-care as a coach, and, once inspired to develop self-care, via deepening self-awareness. It explores the practical development of self-care over a period of time, using coaching as a case in point. It is an auto-ethnography, which is triangulated with an inquiry group of coaches (and facilitators and leaders); a desk review of codes of ethics and codes of conduct and a review of the continuing professional development and ongoing workshops and seminars offered to coaches; as well as a literature review on coaching, and related themes. This paper is a 'snapshot' of the overall study, which is currently in the write up phase.

## IMPETUS

The impetus to this study goes back to the late 1970's when I started working in the National Health Service, and I looked around at my colleagues, and wondered how and who was looking after the well-being of those providing services to patients and clients. Equally in years to follow, I wondered how employees in many organisations managed to stay steady through the constant change of the environment, and their workplaces. I became more curious about how people took care of themselves at work.

I was for many years highly 'successful', top marks in my studies, promotion, after promotion at work, as well as a freelancing Coach, Facilitator and OD Practitioner, my books were always full of clients. I had vast and wide connections & networks, and my lifestyle had a high income, and luxury living, I was also 'physically fit' (a black belt in martial arts). But - being honest now, it never felt right, and, underneath it, my health was suffering, as were my relationships, and I was becoming more and more exhausted...

So I started to observe colleagues, and clients, and society and asked what is going on in humanity? Something doesn't add up... how can someone (e.g. me) be 'successful', yet feel empty, and exhausted? And what was the impact this was having on the services I offered? What was it about my life that didn't make sense, and what was missing?

## **INSPIRATION**

Whilst having a personal development session with Serge Benhayon, Universal Medicine, I was inspired by this quote that Serge shared from one of his books:

*'The true delivery of service begins first by delivering that same service to self in every way, and to others (e.g. clients & colleagues) by the same manner, that are within the group/team/organisation - BEFORE any organisation (or individual) can truly serve' (Serge Benhayon, 2008).*

I reflected and many questions arose. Was I truly taking care of (serving) myself? A BIG FAT NO! How could I offer a service to others as I was not self-caring? How much self-awareness and self-observation did I truly have? How could I understand more about myself, so that I could truly serve? What were my services like when I was tired, or distracted? Were those around me who offered services e.g. coaching looking after themselves? How could I understand more about others offering similar services e.g. coaching? And, could it be possible that if I and others did take a deeper care of self, then this could offer an inspiration to others, those we serve? These questions formed the basis of my research study, which led me to the questions that became the focus of the study:

"A practical 'study' on developing self-care – a case in point - as a coach: what is the practical development of self-care as a coach? How do and how can coaches take care of self in their daily living and working practices and, where in the literature has this been written about or studied before?"

Then I asked myself, 'how could I study this?'. I was after all a practitioner - not a researcher.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I self-funded a PhD Study where I chose to use autoethnography and participatory inquiry - me, and a group of co-inquirers (coaches, facilitators, and leaders). Autoethnography is a 'promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending socialised understanding' (Wall, 2008). It is a "qualitative research method, utilises ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographic data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and others" (Chang, 2008). And it includes auto = self; ethno = people/culture; graphy = writing/describing/study which can vary in emphases. What I particularly liked was that it was "practitioner research - an iterative process - research & practice inextricably linked & continuously evolving' (Reed-Danahay, 1997) and 'an excellent vehicle through which researchers come to understand themselves & others' (Chang, 2008). And what really resonated with me was the potential that "reflexive ethnographers ideally use all their

senses, their bodies, feelings & whole being, they use self to learn about the other & they use their experiences in other worlds to reflect critically on their own” (Ellis, 2004). As part of this study was about deepening my self-awareness, and self-observation, autoethnography seemed to fit well.

I used self-narrative, observations, feelings, thoughts through a diary and transcripts, and drawings and diagrams. With the 35 co-participants, I undertook a number of inquiry group discussions, interviews (group and 1:1), held workshops, used their case studies, as well as using emails, and e-based discussions and transcripts. In addition, all of us undertook ‘homework’ whereby we observed ourselves or others on aspects of self-care or daily living and working, and, where we carried out mini ‘experiments’ whereby we tried and tested potential new things, and we shared this, and more when we meet in the workshops, or the interviews, or via email.

## LITERATURE

I undertook a number of literature reviews. Firstly on coaching - the what, why & how to coach (tools, techniques, e.g. Barner & Higgins, 2007, Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005; Bluckert, 2006; Passmore, 2006, Stober & Grant, 2006, Rogers 2006), coach supervision (e.g. Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Shohet, 2008; Passmore, 2011), the development of coaching practice, coaching capacity in organisations, setting up as a coach (e.g. Rogers, 2006), coaching ethics (e.g. Williams & Anderson,,2006), and the well-being of the coach.

I also reviewed related literature including resilience, integrity, authenticity, servant leadership (e.g. Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009; Greenleaf, 1998), moral philosophy, health and well-being, HR, occupational health, mentoring, consultancy, preparedness, self, development, learning, self-awareness.

In addition, I undertook a desk review of professional (e.g. leadership, managerial, HR, Coaching, Mentoring associations, and organisations), codes of conduct & codes of ethics, and, I tracked for a year the type of courses, workshops, and continuing professional development that was offered to coaches. The Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision (APECS), the professional body for executive coaching and for the supervision of executive coaches, was one of the only professional bodies that did have a mention of self-care in their statement ‘Caring for self - to look after oneself physically, emotionally, mentally and motivationally so that clients and organisations receive the best service possible’.

Overall, I found that there was little mention of self-care for coaches, or of the personal, physical or physiological well-being of the coach. I found there was a lot of literature whether coaching, or authentic leadership, or organisational development for instance that discussed self-awareness (e.g. Wong & Cummings, 2009; Hardingham et al, 2004; Cheung-Judge & Holbeche, 2011 ) and, literature around personal development and reflective practice for instance that discussed the practical development of new things, or skills or developing new skills (e.g. Etherington, 2004; Ghaye, 2010; Kolb, 1984). There was also a growing literature on the ethics of coaching (e.g. Williams & Anderson, 2006). In addition to



this, I found that whilst the content as shown on curriculum didn't always mention the care of the coach, when I spoke with coaches, their experience of undertaking coaching training or development was that this was an area that was mentioned, albeit not at length.

In light of the literature findings, the area the PhD study then focused on more deeply was self-care, how to change practices, understanding personal and physical well-being practically, using self-observation and self-awareness as self-caring rituals, and using the physical body as a 'marker' (Benhayon, 2008).

Findings so far

As I write the PhD thesis, this is a brief summary of the findings that are pertinent at this time, as this is work in progress.

In the first part of the study the key findings included:

- Very few (coaches or facilitators) focus on 'me' and consider self and self-care deeply during their working day (or otherwise) (also reflected in the lack of this in the literature)
- The client 'is king' (so that the coach, or person providing the service sometimes doesn't take care of self, as they are more focused on the client)
- Some coaches and facilitators over-rely on processes or techniques of coaching, particularly if they lack confidence, or are tired, or distracted.
- Running - or working when the 'orange light is flickering' is very uncomfortable and is often done making it hard to concentrate, hard to stay focused, easily distracted, easily get absorbed etc.

From this part of the study I had a number of stories from co-participants describing how it felt when they were tired, or under 'par', and the impact they felt it had on the services they were offering. Many of them, while they reflected, realised how uncomfortable they felt while offering their services if they were 'under par'. In doing this reflection, they were inspired to make some changes to the way they were looking after themselves. I too realised throughout the whole PhD study, (and I continue to do so) the many things I had not paid attention to in taking care of myself, and, the number of daily compromises I made had then compromised the services I offered to others. My experiences of these became more 'tangible' as I chose to deepen my self-observation and take a closer look at what was going on.

One of the first things we all did was to deliberately deepen our self-observation, and observe when we did or didn't feel we were offering ourselves care, and also to continue to observe the effect this had on the services we offered. Over a period of time, this deepened our self-awareness. This for me enabled me to realise a number of patterns of behaviours (not just symptoms), that were occurring, and, gave me the opportunity to look at why the patterns of behaviours were occurring. For example, practically speaking if I was eating handfuls of nuts, or consuming larger amounts of fruit, (in other words craving sugar), I realised on those days I was tired, and hence my need for sugar was raised. I then tracked

back to make sense of why on some days I was more tired than others. I then realised for instance how much I put my client 'first', and, how much I had been looking for recognition or acceptance from the client and this was draining me. I also realised that there were times when I did not go to bed in the evenings when I was tired, or, I tried to fit in too much into some days which left me exhausted the following day. All of this continued to deepen my self-awareness, and heightened my need to deepen my self-care. Similarly, some of the co-participants experienced that the more self-observant they became, the more self-aware they became, and from this they could expose some of the ways they were living. Once I realised that there were many areas in my life where I did not take care of myself, (and once the co-participants experienced similarly a realisation of where they had not been self-caring) the question then arose around 'how can we deepen our self-care given what we now know about ourselves?' In the second part of the study the focus was on how we develop self-care.

I found from the data I collected from the co-participants, and my ongoing discussions with coaches, that many did do a number of practical things during their work weeks to support themselves, or at least they had the intention to undertake the things they knew were of support to them. These included anything from walking, resting, the type of food they ate, taking time during the day to reflect, and learning to say 'no'. One of the questions that arose then was 'why didn't we continue to offer ourselves the things that supported us?' What got in the way of any self-care rituals? This then required myself, and the co-participants to take their self-observation and self-awareness deeper, to understand why for instance, when a particularly self-caring ritual was established it was either easily compromised, or only undertaken occasionally. All of this was taking personal responsibility much deeper. And in this, I then became aware that I had far more choice in my working day, or working weeks about the way I took care of myself, and the way I prepared myself for work. What I also realised was that there were times when I didn't actually know what would support me. This was similar for some of the co-participants. This second part of the PhD study then also focused on undertaking mini 'experiments', to try and test new things, new ways of living, new ways of preparing for the working week, or new ways of supporting self.

These mini 'experiments' were very practical. They could be as simple as drinking more water for a week, or going to bed earlier for a week, or not eating gluten or dairy for a week, and getting a sense of the difference this made. They also included learning to 'say no' or diary planning that allowed more space in the week, and experimenting with this too. These mini 'experiments' allowed me to learn more about myself, and the kinds of things that supported me more on any given week. During the 5 years of this PhD study I have literally tried hundreds of these mini 'experiments' and they still continue even now!

One of the most profound, for me, findings of this study is the support I have from my physical body. I had for years not taken much notice of the twinges, aches and pains, or sensations in my physical body, even though on a daily basis I could feel them. It simply didn't occur to me that I could use them, and my body as a 'barometer' to support my daily living choices, and to support me to change any daily living rituals that didn't work. The more I observed myself, the more I could feel, and the more aware I became. The more I

acted upon what I felt, the more I started to build confidence in myself in the way I was taking care of myself. This process continues daily. This again was something that some of the co-participants also found to be useful. An example of this was if I ate gluten I felt bloated, and when I felt bloated I was not able to focus so well on my work, and I felt extremely tired. So when I experimented with food, I found I was able to work with much more focus when I was not bloated, and that eating in a way that supported me actually supported me more than I realised. In that it did change the way I offered my services to others, as I was clearer, focused, and open to whatever was needed.

Key findings in the second part of the study so far are:

- Deliberate self-observation, creates a deeper self-awareness, and this creates the potential for self-honesty, and deepening a relationship with self
- There are many practical ways we can support ourselves during our working weeks, and sometimes we need to 'try and test' things out in order to ascertain what works for us
- Our physical bodies can offer us a huge amount of support, and information if we take the time to get to know them, and to understand the ways our bodies work. In choosing to let the body show us (like a barometer) the things that do or do not support us, it can help to confirm the choices we make.

## CONCLUSIONS

I am still coming to conclusions, and at the time of writing, these are my early conclusions.

We too often forget about self-care, or forget to give ourselves permission that we matter, and thus our care of self matters. Self-Care is very practical and simple - as is the physical body, the physical body is always talking to us, even seemingly minor aches or pains are indicating something isn't right, we just often don't take the time to listen to it, or honor it. Practical self-care can include anything from taking gentle exercise, or wearing super comfy shoes, to regularly pausing for a moment to check in with myself and my body, as well as saying no to what doesn't work and, taking time to 'experiment' with new things to see what works and what doesn't.

Self-Care can and does make a difference to the services we offer our clients - they can also be inspired by us when it is evident that we ourselves take care of self.

It does require the personal commitment to being open to seeing things for instance about myself that I didn't want to see; and getting to the root of things, and being prepared to make changes. It also requires an honesty about how self-aware we truly are and to feel raw and exposed at times.

From a practitioner research perspective I am at this time of writing also reflecting on the research itself, the processes and methods I have used, and how they have supported what I set out to explore and discover. I can see 'messiness' in my research, and, this is part of my development.

”Often we go to great lengths to hide the messiness of our research because we fear our project may be seen as unscientific or unscholarly” (Ellis, 2004).

Using Autoethnography with an inquiry group and the other sources of data and information have provided a combination and a triangulation of what was studied. Autoethnography in itself as a research methodology has supported the need in this study to be reflexive, and to deepen self-awareness. It is a useful method for a ‘study of self’ - particularly in relation to the wider society (in this case - the coaching community).

### ***Limitations and implications for future research and practice:***

Whilst this study focused primarily on coaches, and facilitators, it is possible that the same research, or indeed the same processes for developing self-awareness, and developing self-care could apply to others at work, whatever their profession, and further research could be undertaken to prove or disprove this. In addition to this, making a direct link to productivity or a direct link to quality of service as received by the recipients (e.g. coachees) could be further studied. If self-care, and physical well-being were included on more codes of conduct in the future for instance for coaches, or managers, or leaders, a piece of research could be undertaken to ascertain whether having self-care or physical well-being actually on a code of conduct, or a set of values makes a difference or influences practitioners to become more self-caring. Further work could be undertaken into using the physical body as a ‘marker’, and how practically useful this is.

Finally, if coaches chose to continue to deepen their self-care, and physical well-being, a study on the potential of inspiration by role modelling could be undertaken, so as to ascertain whether a well-balanced, steady and consistent coach for instance, by the way they are, actually had an influence on the way the coachees responded to their services, and whether this had any impact on the coachees commitment to self, or commitment to the development of self-care at work.

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