

Liz Hall

Mindfulness and NLP coaching

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

I've been coaching since 2004 and remember thinking that all the tuning in to our visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory senses exercises was very like mindfulness during my NLP training. Yet Liz Hall's work bringing mindfulness more firmly into coaching still feels pretty radical.

'It's not fluffy anymore,' says Liz, a mindful compassionate coach and the author of *Mindful Coaching*. 'There's a huge evidence base for meditation.' Apart from helping coaches to be more present with clients and to be with whatever arises during the session, mindfulness helps support goal setting (in NLP terms, it would be the sensory acuity element as well as all the VAKOG awareness). It also helps us be more aware of what's our stuff and what's our clients.'

Liz got into coaching by writing about it and running the magazine, *Coaching at Work*. 'I was hearing all these inspiring stories. I'd been a journalist, writing about health, HR and business for about 20 years but this got me hooked. I wanted to get trained.'

While her background is more coaching than NLP, she did some training with Shelle Rose Charvet and says she uses NLP without knowing it.

'I first came across mindfulness about 20 years ago. In terms of daily application, it was the idea of a way of being, weaving mindfulness into everyday life. I was a young, single mum, writing about work life balance and not having any work life balance myself. A friend suggested I might want to try it. We hear about it all the time now but it was quite mind-blowing back then.'

Consciously combining mindfulness with coaching has been an ongoing journey. 'For ages, I considered myself a bit of a closet meditator. Even about five years ago, I was still feeling I couldn't talk about it. Gradually, I started getting a bit more brave, trying it out with some clients. Just a bit. I was getting a sense that there was a lot each had to offer the other. I delved and realised there was not much out there on mindful coaching. Yet they've got so much in common. Once I started to look, I thought it crazy that they combine so beautifully.'

'How does looking at the future, trying to achieve, sit with being present? It's not either or at all. Thinking about the future helps us get more in touch with our values.'



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'Mindfulness and coaching are perfect bedfellows. One area a lot of people find challenging is turning towards the difficult. Some people don't want to do that but for others, it can be transformational. Of course you need to know when to refer people on. I've had some beautiful times with clients where I've been brave enough and it felt appropriate to get to mindful enquiry. Helping people develop compassion with themselves is key.'

'Some people find it hard to notice what's going on or to even imagine. There can also be challenges around turning towards the difficult. People can sometimes find it quite hard work to feel difficult feelings. My stance is that there's a richness in what's difficult. That's where the potential for transformation lies.'

Naturally, mindfulness is important in Liz's own life. 'Whether I'm working from home or somewhere else, I

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get up and do some mindful movement first thing. It's a different experience if I've stretched and done some movement. Then I go into my sitting practice. On a good day, I'll do half an hour at least then I try to punctuate my day with little moments of mindfulness. I try to remind myself to come back to the present, even when I put the kettle on. If I'm out and about or in any kind of meeting, I take a moment beforehand. The challenge is when I have lots of deadlines and get more and more scrunched up. We're all human beings but I know the importance of punctuating my day with little practices.

'I'd love to see more research. It's coming but I'd love to see more with examples and case studies showing how it's being applied in different ways. It would be lovely to have more stories about how people are using it. Personally, and I know some people don't like the word compassion, the compassionate element is important. There's compassion focused therapy and compassion focused coaching.'

Mindfulness and Coaching Survey (2012)

Liz undertook her own survey due to the absence of available research and published the full results in her book, *Mindful Coaching*. Here are some highlights.

The majority of coaches who practised mindfulness wanted to live more fully in the moment (74 per cent). Other reasons they gave included becoming more self-aware (73 per cent), managing stress (67 per cent), being more present for their clients (65 per cent) and to help with focus (64 per cent).

Twenty per cent often used mindfulness with their clients, 9 per cent always did and 34 per cent said sometimes.

Seventy-four per cent shared mindfulness practices for clients to do at home, 67 per cent used it for themselves during the sessions and 64 per cent invited clients to do a mindfulness practice within the session.

Mindful minute

When I heard Liz speak a couple of years ago, I loved this exercise she shared and have used it with countless clients and students since.

All you need to do is to notice when you're breathing in a comfortably relaxed way and then time yourself for 30 seconds (counting an inhalation and exhalation as one complete breath) then double your number. This gives you your Mindful Minute number and using it, practically anytime and anywhere, you can bring more mindfulness into your day. By bringing your awareness to your breath and simply counting however many your minute was, there's no need for a clock or watch.

So simple, yet so transformative. As Liz says, waiting for the kettle to boil? Breathe more mindfully. Similarly, waiting for a client to arrive or call or even sitting on a train... Play with it. ■

