Coaching in Nature

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**SPEAKERS**

Jo Wheatley, Zoe Hawkins

**Jo Wheatley** 00:03

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers,

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:10

people who are passionate about helping others to find alignment in their lives through coaching, and do a thinking of training and developing as a coach.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:21

Hello, and welcome to the Coaching Crowd podcast with me, Jo Wheatley, and my friend and co host, Zoe Hawkins.

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:27

Hi, everybody, great to be here for another episode. And this week, we're talking about coaching in nature. And one of the reasons we're doing this is because we have a number of our alumni who are specialising in coaching outdoors and coaching in nature, and we've seen that grow in popularity. And also, I think it's great provocation for those of you as internal coaches, or people building a coaching culture within organisations to think about how do you do coaching differently? How can you marry self care and well being with your coaching provision, and start to really get creative about the ways that you provide coaching to those within your organisation, even as a line manager? How do you have those coaching conversations, those supportive conversations in different ways to be able to really start to think about the creativity and relaxation that being out in nature can bring, so we're just going to talk about the topic for you, and hopefully provide some inspiration for ways that you might be able to do your coaching differently, I

**Jo Wheatley** 01:28

think it's really important that we kind of uncage ourselves as coaches, that we don't get rigid into an approach that we have to our coaching and that we really stay in that space of focusing on tailoring the coaching to the individual that we're working with. And the world of work has changed so much, even just in the last few years. And it's really important that we as coaches are able to keep up and keep experimenting as well. There are some examples that come to mind for me when I think about coaching in nature. So fairly recently, one of my exec clients said, Oh, Jo, would you mind if I'm running while we do our session today? And the initial thought was thinking is that is that ethical? How should I How How should I this? Should you notice that in the how should I respond to this, and then I was able to very quickly centre myself back into what do I know about the client, you know, this isn't about the client saying I'm not interested in so I'm just gonna go for a run, it's like I want to get the most from it. And I also it's also important for me to keep up with my fitness, we had a session and we were talking about restructuring, you know, really serious things and, and it was a really beneficial session. So that's fresh in my mind, and they wanted to be outside and it helped them to process the information. And it helps to kind of reduce the inner saboteur as well, I think the that kind of kinesthetic acts both of being outside and also gently jogging, I should say, I was just thinking

**Zoe Hawkins** 02:53

that it is inspiring to think that your coachee, she can have a coaching conversation whilst running, I know that wouldn't be something I would currently be able to do. So kudos to your client there. And I love what you said there around silence in this the saboteur, because I think, when you're moving, and movement can be obviously if describe their running, but maybe strolling and walking through nature, there is something about movement that helps to silence that part of of your mind. You know, there's something mindful, I think about movement. And in coaching, you don't want that internal critic necessarily coming through. And I think, you know, for for coaches who get to experience being out in nature, when they're on the coaching sessions, either with you, or perhaps virtually, you know, they can do their part of the coaching when they're strolling or outdoors. It can just help to ignite parts of their mind, perhaps that they haven't had access to, particularly if they're coming from a busy office, the shift in the environmental conditions and the change that the coaching session outdoors would bring, can really help to land a person in a coaching session, if you imagine certainly how coaching used to be you come out of one busy meeting, and you move next door into the next meeting room and you sit down and you start your coaching session, you're bringing that energy with you into the coaching session. Whereas if you're able to move outdoors and start walking around already, you're in a different place, both physically and mentally. So I think it has those benefits of being able to ground the coachee into a coaching space to access their best self.

**Jo Wheatley** 04:33

And this client actually invited me to go outside as well for the coaching session and to go on a walk. And I thought actually, yes, because I wasn't going to go for a walk because they we had this early session. And so I thought Yeah, I will and there was the invitation. And so it wasn't actually a great way to build rapport in that situation and be open to it. We just thought well, we'll do it as a learning experience. And we'll see. We'll see how it goes. And then we can reflect on that. But as you say, also can shift the mindset of the coach as well. And keeping them fresh. Some other experiences that I've had coaching outdoors, I was actually a when chose to go along to a women's circle, never been to one before I went with a friend. So in this sense if you'd like I was the coachee, rather than the coach. And we went along because my friend was experiencing a big shift in her life. And I thought it might be helpful and I was interested to experience it as something new. And in the invitation to join the circle, we were invited to take a walk in nature and collect some pieces from nature, not not breaking anything, but just look for, you know, cone on the floor, or, or different things or pebble on the beach, that spoke to us. And there were certain prompts for the things that we're going to collect and to bring along. But also to create a sort of an altar in front of us in the days before we we attended it, and then to bring them along and connected them. And I really enjoyed that. Because again, it was an invitation to get outside and to connect with the experience that we were going to have in advance of the time. And so you can also invite your clients to do that bring that kind of an activity in some of you may give your clients things to do to support their reflections in between sessions. If you don't, it might be just inviting them if they are out while while you're coaching. So you may choose to coach people in person and be in nature and go on a walk together, you might choose to actually sit in a in a space and outdoor space together. It may be as I described that both of you are outdoors, but you're connected remotely. Obviously you need to think about good signal for your phones and so on. But we won't get into that just right now. Or it may be that one of you is out in it in a space. So think about the metaphors that nature offers are amazing, you know, what are they noticing how it's the colours, the sounds, the touch, and all of those things, as you were saying, so that can ignite new perspectives, new insights, new connections, even just thinking about who am I when I am in nature? You do get a sense as you think about that question. Actually, I am somebody a bit different when I when I'm out in nature. For me, I live by the coast and my office has has a view of the water, I can see the horizon. And for me, that really helps to sustain me from a wellbeing perspective, because I can look at that, and it just resets me and reminds me how small I am. How insignificant really in the in the grand scheme of things. And that constant lapping of the water, the tide going in and out has been happening since the start of time. And I'm here just for a very small period on this planet.

**Zoe Hawkins** 07:53

I think there's something very regenerating about nature. You know, when you're out walking, regardless of what season you're in, you know, if you're in spring, obviously that brings that essence of kind of rebirth and growth, doesn't it? If you're in autumn, you know, it's reflective of endings and beginnings. Does your cycle Yeah, cycles? Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, as you said, yes, there's metaphor all around. So as the coach, you're able to draw on that depending on what comes up in your conversations. But I think even just being in that energy, can help your client to sort of tap into what nature has to offer. So for me, I find nature, very calming, you know, it enables me to ignite my intuition. So really, as we said before silencing that saboteur, but really starting to listen to my kind internal voice, my helpful internal voice, the one which is creative and generates ideas and provides guidance. And I think that's because in nature, for me, there is a silence and also there's not a silence, does that make sense to sometimes in a coaching conversation, when you're working with a client, and you're, you're leaving a pause and sitting in silence, the the client is left with their thoughts. Whereas when you're in nature, you're also left with the sounds of the wind or the sounds of the birds or the crisper the leaves. And actually just sitting in that space can be restorative and regenerative. And I think people lack that. Generally speaking, on a day to day basis, people move from one thing to the next, in a busy sort of treadmill, often of life and we can often forget to just pause and be and I think being able to bring that into a coaching session can really help your coachee to also reconnect with that part of themselves. Of course, if that's something that they want to do and feel inspired to do, but the option is there. Whereas perhaps if you're not coaching, outdoors or in nature, the option to have that part of coaching isn't there. So I think there's some really great benefits to be able to draw on from bringing your coaching out into the outdoor or space are into nature in some way.

**Jo Wheatley** 10:02

It's kind of like experiencing a real life visualisation. Because you may use a visualisation with a client, if you're sat at your desk, and there's that, wherever they're sat for their coaching session, and you may guide them through like a nature, often it is nature related kind of visualisation, or certainly out of moving, but you can experience that together. I've had an experience of a coaching again, this was I was a participant of a leadership programme. And that was held at the Eden Project. And for any of you that visited the Eden projects and amazing place, was the one in Cornwall that I visited. And we went a night. So there are certain will have certain activities that we did during the day. But then we had an activity in the evening where we went into the dome at night, and we had to find somewhere and we had to lie down and we had all these questions to, to muse. And you know, I remember it to this day, because it was a very different experience. So there's an angle, there's an anchoring piece to this as well. I think you know, what, which what coaching sessions are most memorable to you? And in what way and I've been to the lost gardens of Heligan in Cornwall as well. And there's beautiful sculptures and things. And so again, you know, you can link your questions to the things in front of you, you know, what do you see in that that may be helpful to you, as you're reflecting on what you want to do next, if you're walking along a pathway together with your client and the path forks, and then you invite the client to choose which way they want to go. How might that show up? Something that they might be experiencing, which might be around decision making procrastination, and then you've got a physical representation of it. And so there's so much that can be brought in and learned, you've got rope bridges, if there's all sorts of things, you know, how do you feel about taking the next steps towards this goal? You know, they might say, remember that bridge that we walked over earlier? That's how I feel about it. Tell me more about that. Would you like to get back to that bridge? Would you like what sort of experience do you want to have with it? If you were to build your own one? Well, you know, there's so many avenues for it. And often on this podcast, we talk about one to one coaching, I think when it comes to group coaching, you often will, people will often experience group coaching outside. So one of the things I would think about is sitting around a fire, for example, you know, an open fire, and the conversations that can be had around a fire, things that pop into your mind, you know, as the flames are dancing in front of you, or your you know, kicking a marshmallow or, you know, again, that may silence and enable you to connect in new ways with yourself and with others. Yeah, and

**Zoe Hawkins** 12:44

you're talking about experiences there where you're together. But I think, you know, what we alluded to earlier is those experiences can also be separate. So if you wanted to run a session, with a group of people that were all in different places, you can still invite them to be able to do that, from a place in nature, get them set up with the things that they were going to need to bring or the place that they want to be able to dial in from they can check they've got the signal to be able to do that. So you don't have to let a location be a barrier for you. But obviously, if you are thinking about location, there are practicalities to consider. Are you going to get parked? Is the traffic and allow you to get there on time? Do you actually know the route? Make sure you don't get lost? You know, all things like that? Is it going to rain? If it is going to rain? You know? How are you going to deal with that you're going to go out or weathers or you're going to postpone and do things differently? You know, lots of practical things to consider. But we would encourage you not to let those practicalities get in the way of being creative and getting creative with your coaching and thinking about different ways that you can engage and what we know from clients, certainly clients that we work with, or senior leaders and CEOs, people are quite keen to habit stack, you know, that's something from atomic habits. But generally people know they want more time away from their screens and more time away from their desk and be able to get more fresh air. But rarely do they necessarily create the time to do that. So if you can offer a space where they're already committed and engaging and coaching, to be able to enable them to access that as well then what a wonderful benefit that you're offering with your coaching on top of them.

**Jo Wheatley** 14:19

Yeah, I'm thinking about other practicalities as well. So if you're going somewhere that neither of you have been before, how will you know at what point you need to turn around? Is it a circular route? Do you come back on yourself? If and if so how does that relate? Or how could that be helpful to the client? Might you have longer sessions if you're coaching outdoors to enable you to have a longer experience or to complete a particular route? How do you say goodbye to each other at the end of a coaching session when you've been outdoors? Are you going to hug each other? Is that part of your contract? Is there a particular thing that you're going to do? Confidentiality is important obviously, you may be you know, walking past other people for sitting down on a bench or if you're sat down, you know, in a park, for example, what's the agreement between the two of you around confidentiality? Is anybody going to take notes on it? And if so, how will that happen? And how can that happen in a way that wouldn't interfere with the experience? So just exploring those things together? And and if if you haven't contracted for something, and then it becomes clear, Oh, we didn't contract for it. That's okay. Do some spot contracting together around that?

**Zoe Hawkins** 15:32

Absolutely. I think what we're saying is, you know, you don't have to have a one trick pony. When it comes to coaching, you don't have to be a specialist to be able to experience coaching in nature. And, you know, for you getting started perhaps in coaching in nature, maybe it's just about starting with yourself, not necessarily bringing clients into that space. But taking yourself out in nature with some journaling questions and experiencing it, you know, through your own eyes first and starting to think, oh, how could I incorporate this into my coaching or embody this into a coaching session. So that could be a great way to get started?

**Jo Wheatley** 16:13

I, for me, personally, I find being out in nature, very restorative. So in between coaching clients, or before, I'm starting to work with coaching clients, I feel a lot of gratitude and appreciation when I'm out in nature. And I love that feeling I feel good about myself when I'm in that zone. And I think the other part of it is, enable it gives you something to talk to your clients about so many clients are So hi, how are you to be able to say, oh, yeah, great, just come back from a walk, you're kind of modelling to them, like get up out of your chair, don't stay in your seat, you know, all day long. And they might say, I've been meaning to get out for a walk today. And then you can lead into Oh, so when are you going to do that, or you might come back to that later on in a conversation. Or maybe you've seen something, you know, out on a walk, that might be a metaphor that you could offer to your client that would, you know, give them new insight into their situation is very easy to sit at your desk all day. And coach or, you know, do the pieces around the edge of it. And I've in fact, so we I've been thinking about when we have our meetings that I might actually join them without walking, you know, that I don't need to be sat at my desk and lots of people that choose to pivot their career into coaching or add coaching into a portfolio. do so because of the need and the desire for flexibility. And it's so easy to just totally recreate what you did before and forget that actually flexibility can mean so many different things. So if you've got a goal to do 10,000 steps a day, how are you possibly going to achieve that if you're, you know, if you're at your desk for all of those hours, and then you've got all the other things that you might need to do so. So there are other ways that you can bring that into it. You might also find that after your coaching session, maybe you've written notes from the session, or maybe you go for a walk to help you process the experience and kind of end and create a separation between your clients and getting physically up and out of your space out into nature can help you to do that. You can also if your client can't get out into nature, or you know, perhaps they are in a city and they don't live close to you know, park or, what you might automatically assume is that even just inviting them to connect with what's outside of their window, you know, at certain points in the kitchen conversation can just help to a shift the energy help them to get new perspectives, perhaps bring a smile to their face, maybe give them you know, motivation to do something differently to run.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:47

Those team meetings out walking in nature might be an interesting, we'll have to choose a different path and the coast path will be disconnecting every

**Jo Wheatley** 18:54

five minutes. That's a challenge, isn't it? Yeah,

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:58

I mean, I hope today is provided some thought provocation around how you can get creative using nature in coaching and maybe just get started with some different approaches. And if you are coaching in organisations, I really encourage you to give that try you know where might be the places that you can go to bring nature back into the experience that people are having at work through coaching. So if you've enjoyed today's podcast, please do rate the podcast for us. Please leave us a review if you can, you can if you're listening on Apple, and we would really appreciate if you hit that subscribe button and follow our podcast as well. And if you want to come and find out more about the communities that we are a part of then come and check out our website IG company.co.uk Thank you for listening to the coaching crowd podcast with Zoe Hawkins and Jo Wheatley. We'd love for you to join our inclusive community to learn and grow in the coaching space.

**Jo Wheatley** 19:53

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