118 Will AI Replace Human Coaches\_

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**SPEAKERS**

Zoe Hawkins, Jo Wheatley

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:03

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers, 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. Hello, and welcome to the Coaching Crowd podcast with me, Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo

**Jo Wheatley** 00:26

Wheatley. Hi, everybody. We're excited to bring you today's episode on AI and coaching. And the reason that we wanted to come on and talk about this is because we attended a conference recently, that prompted a lot of reflections. And we wanted to share with you some of those reflections give you some prompts for your own thoughts and reflections about AI and coaching. And we've thought for a while about doing an episode on AI and coaching thought we can't we don't know enough, but haven't been to the conference and started learning more in this area. We come to you today, not as AI experts, but just to be able to share a little bit about where we're at in terms of our insights into AI and coaching. So we hope you enjoy our discussion, which will broadly focus on the opportunities that we think are occurring and developing, and some of the challenges that we might need to be mindful of moving forwards.

**Zoe Hawkins** 01:21

Yeah, and I think setting some context, when we approached the conference on AI, it was from a place of being feeling ill informed. And feeling like the world is busy accelerating at a rapid pace of change. And we felt like we were on the backfoot. So very much behind and not really sure what this thing AI was going to bring to the industry. And I think the first thing that I would share is that actually, I was fairly reassured by the conference that we went to, and the and that essence of like, don't panic, you know, like coaching is not going anywhere. The demand for coaching is going to stick around, you're not out of date as a human coach, you're not going to be replaced by different bots. And we'll talk more about some of those things, I'm sure as the conversation unfolds, but the think the overriding message is you Yes, you would do well to start paying attention to technology, as always, you know, as always has been the case in terms of technology and how that's influenced coaching. It's just a different, it's a new and different technology that is that is coming in. So there is absolutely reassurance that has come through from what we have seen and learned from spending a bit of time learning about AI. Yeah,

**Jo Wheatley** 02:42

and I think somebody shared on the day, I don't remember who it was. But if we use an embrace technology, we can become superhuman coaches, which I guess leads to the question or the reflection, do you want to become a superhuman coach.? So, you know, coaching isn't all about what happens in the conversation between coach and client. It's also about what happens in the spaces in between the times when you're together. And and that perhaps is a place where some coaches, and some clients might choose to embrace a form of AI to assist or accelerate their growth and development in between the sessions that they have.

**Zoe Hawkins** 03:21

Yeah, I place I'm thinking of starting as around chatbots. Because I think that's a very common and accessible AI tool that that many people know about. And you will be interacting with chat bots on websites all the time, like when we're looking at cars at the moment you go to a website, a little little box pops up and says oh, what are you looking for? Do you have a question? So chatbots are a piece of AI technology that is being refined at the moment to be able to offer a type of coaching at scale to organisations. So if you think in a typical organisation that maybe let's take a manufacturing organisation, there are many people who are unlikely to ever get coaching possibly because of the nature of their job, the tools and resources that they have to hand. So chat bots are a way to massively open up accessibility to what is being labelled currently as coaching but I would describe it and many people talking about it their more as a reflective practice or a reflective partner through a chatbot and what we saw was a level of sophistication in this chatbot posing questions based around a topic. So for example, it may start by saying hello, what would you like to focus on today and what is your goal and you would type in an answer to that question and it is able to predict questions that would be useful next. So it will have in its awareness concepts like grow or clear or Oscar or tools like Johari Window and comfort zone and and all things like this and it will be able to present quite engines that I, I saw were fairly well tailored to the responses that the client gave. And so when you look at it through this window, and the technology is very young, that technology will become more and more sophisticated, and more and more clever and adept at being able to respond to the prompts that are given by the person they're interacting with. And so to open up access to people to be supported through reflective practice, and being asked questions and their day to day work, I think is a great thing for the coaching industry. There is a flip side to that, which we'll we'll maybe touch on later, I'm going to pause there and just let you share any of your experiences around seeing that chat bot as well, Joe?

**Jo Wheatley** 05:42

Well, I think some of the discussion on the day was around how you might find that, that tool that chat, bot, whatever it gets called, you might start to see popping up in the benefits packaged descriptions of organisations, you know, everybody would have access to it, and you can have access to this. So an organisation would buy into that. And it's something that they could afford to do at scale, whereas they perhaps couldn't financially afford to invest in a human coach for every single individual. So the flip side of that is that human coaching may come back to being you know, accessible more for more senior level people in organisations, which actually is where coaching started out. So we might might start to see that kind of cyclic, a cyclical pattern that we often see in other areas of our life as well. So, you know, there can be opportunities, whilst there may also be considered to be a threat, you know, for some coaches, and one of some of the comments on the day were around, you know, the AI tools or the Chatbot, for example, being able to provide a level of coaching that would be equivalent to foundation level, or if you're thinking about ICF, the ACC level of coaching, but the chatbots, which the breakthrough thought or realisation, for me was when people described AI as maths. It's all about predictions. And, and as soon as I thought about it as maths that helps it to be less scary. For me personally, I'm like, okay, so it's just maths. And it's based on predictions. And I think, of course, humans, human coaches, make predictions have hypotheses, we formulate questions, you know, based based on those things. But what they're saying is that the, the Chatbot cannot provide the level of coaching that you would get from, let's say, a master level coach, who is no longer coaching, you know, through through models, they might, they might share some models with the client, but actually a coaching from a more sophisticated level of interaction, human to human interaction. And I thought that was a really interesting point, and actually is quite exciting them because I'm okay, so there is a place for human coaches still, but also, you know, chatbots, to in to enhance, and to be able to enable more people to have access to a level of coaching. And you and I are excited, of course, because of our emotions, kitchen practitioner training, like, yeah, so the difference here is emotions. What we saw in the demonstration is, and it was quite fun, really, because the person that was playing with the tech, which is, you know, the way they were suggesting they were engaging with it is let's, let's play with it and try and break it, which they did try and break it. And they did break it in the sense of the Chatbot reached a certain point. And it couldn't then respond to the basically the emotional reaction that the person playing with it was presenting the couch, and it started looping around and, and then there was some delay, and then eventually it came back. But it was clear that there was a gap, it's not to say that it won't be able to develop, I'm sure it will continue to develop and develop and develop, but where it is at the moment, it certainly isn't able to coach yet at the level that we would coach up.

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:14

And to give a very simple example of some of that there was a point in the conversation where the person interacting with it was going to try and invoke the chatbot to hold silence which obviously is a key skill in coaching to hold silence for somebody to let them explore their own thinking. And as you're doing so if you take the Nancy Klein esque approach of like to ignite their thinking through listening and so I think the prompt was something like I'm getting a little bit overwhelmed could you you know, just hold some silence for me for for a while. And the Chatbot replied with Sure no problem. I'll be here whenever you like. And I think asked I think it goes something like 10 seconds before it checked back in again on on how the person was doing. So, you know, concepts like that are very hard for technology to understand. So even in asking for silence, it needed to respond to that prompt. So there's so much in coaching that is uncertain, unseen. That obviously, there is a limitation. There's only so far that these chat bots can go. And the caveat is they will continue to develop in the levels of sophistication. And on on that as when I was talking about accessibility, I think the more you open up access to coaching, the more people learn what coaching is, it increases demand for coaching overall. So so long as coaches do an excellent job of differentiating between what is chatbot coaching and what is real coaching, then we're going to be just fine. The risk is that coaches don't get involved in the conversation, to be able to talk about the values and benefits that we can bring as human coaches, to the story. So I think there's a call to action on us as coaches to be really clear around, what coaching is, what mastery is, you know, what happens in a coaching session, how we help and support and how it's different, perhaps from the experience, certainly in the future that you may be getting through a chatbot because I I believe that when somebody interacts with a chatbot, and they get a great experience of that, that will feed their appetite for like, wow, if this is what I can get from a machine. I'm gonna go and check out what I can get from a human because at the essence of humanity is connection. And as much as a chatbot may do a great job of pretending and feigning empathy. It cannot empathise so, so that that for me that whole discussion around you know, How good can coaching chat bots be was, was really fascinating. I think

**Jo Wheatley** 11:51

the realisation that the chat bot couldn't process time was just a great AHA in the room. It's like, ah, you know, as a as a basic kind of function. It can't do that. Yeah, I think everybody was a bit like, few, we've still got, you know, we've still got some time here to inform this. David Clutterbuck was one of the speakers on the day. And he posed the question, what if you become too attached to your AI? Who is the robot then? So you know, whether you think about yourself as a coach, you might be a coach that's actually loving AI is incorporating it into, you know, different ways as experimenting to help the technologies grow and develop, but it was just thought that was a really fascinating question that he posed there. So the other bit that really interested me, and I thought was a great opportunity. And for us, as a training provider, as well as individual coaches, or how there are AI tools that can help you to develop your coaching practice. And it will help you it will reflect on the patterns of language that he used in the coaching session, it will tell you, what percentage of the time you spoke versus your client talking. And that's often feedback we give when we're observing coaches, you know, the balance of, you know, the types of questions you use open questions or closed questions, it will give you feedback on that sentences versus statements give you feedback on that. And also even pick out some key moments that it suggests that you review in the conversation. So that could help you obviously, if you want to provide notes for your client, but also just in your own reflective practice. So at the moment, our coaches, our coaches in training, have the facilitators observing them, give them feedback, they have their kgs, giving them feedback, but none of them would be able to give you the information. I've just shared the like it to the exact percentages. And I think that for us was like a wow, now that could be really, really brilliant for coaches in training. Yeah,

**Zoe Hawkins** 14:05

yeah. And it's definitely technology will keep our eye on again, currently, it's in its infancy, but that's just going to get more and more sophisticated, very quickly. And that excites us as training providers as a level to be able to really help our coaches and ourselves to develop excellent practice. And I think what you were touching on before Joe was like about the coach getting attached to their AI. So there's lots of tools emerging on the market that you can incorporate to support you with your coaching. So there are for example, tools that can listen in transcribe your coaching sessions provide summaries of notes that you can then send on to your clients, which is which is great for a number of reasons. However, one of the big pieces that was talked about at this conference was confidentiality and confidentiality is obviously at the back Bone of coaching. And it's a real challenge because as soon as you start to introduce AI, you don't have confidentiality. And I, and I would just, I'm not a tech kid. So I don't think I fully understand the limits of AI. But I think if I say I'm fairly representative of many others, if you have aI listening into a conversation to transcribe those notes, where does that information go? It doesn't, it probably goes into the learning model. So that that chatbot, or that listening tool can get more and more sophisticated. And so you don't really have confidentiality. Now, that may not bother many people, because it's a different level of confidentiality, it's not like that is being sent to their line manager or it's not like that is being posted on Instagram. It's going into space and time for for AI to learn from it. Is that okay? Is that not okay? And I think what it bought up is this piece around, you know, ethics and confidentiality as really core to the coaching industry. And we had representation from the coaching bodies there who are working hard to build in guidance around. So what does aI mean for ethics and confidentiality? What are some of the things that as coaches we need to be thinking of? We don't have answers to that right now. So I think that as a coach is something to watch around what does aI mean for your levels of competency? I know, I have come across people who are reluctant to use certain platforms, because of perceived confidentiality, but I don't know if other alternative platforms are actually any better. So that is an open loop, something I don't have an answer to something I think that the coaching industry doesn't have an answer to but it is, it is they're kind of bubbling around that we need to keep a close eye on. I

**Jo Wheatley** 16:59

think the the question in a nutshell that was raised at the conferences is confidentiality as a cornerstone of coaching no more. So you know, that that often is a selling point, isn't it, you know, get to clients, it's confidential conversation, as coaches, we're used to saying, you know, this, this session is confidential, unless you disclose to me something leads me to believe your risk of harm to yourself or others, and in which case that added at that that is unlikely to remain the, you know, the bit that you're going to share with the other person. And so that links into, you know, what about privacy, data, privacy, data security? And what will you need to include in that, and I don't think that that's necessarily new, I think there have been changes already, but when, you know, but perhaps, you know, we're not, yeah, not keeping up with it. So as coaches, I think we have a responsibility to, to be aware and informed and inform our clients, you know, of what may happen to their data.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:05

I think there's something for me, which I don't know if I can articulate yet. But what I'm aware of is that AI learns from the information that it's fed. And it's drawing that information from a wide variety of, of resources. So for me, AI is only going to be as good as the information it receives and the information it receives is probably from us, right? Human the human race. What we know is that not all coaches are great coaches, not all coaches are unbiased, and a lot of information out there, there's still a lot of bias and problem within information. And so AI can only learn from the information that it's receiving. Now, in a coaching session, that is a mastery coaching session. Those coaches are trained to make sure that they don't ask questions that will ignite shame, for example, in their clients, so they're not going to ask questions that are that are leading in any way or they're not going to assume certain are going to try not to assume certain unconscious stereotypes and things like that. So unconscious bias will come in. But most coaches now I think are starting to notice they need to educate themselves on how to be as aware of their unconscious bias as possible. I don't know if AI is going to be able to do that because it is fed information from the general population. So I think that for me, there's something that I can't quite articulate there around. risk in relying on AI as a coaching, tool, or technique, because of its potential inherent limitations, that

**Jo Wheatley** 20:01

you're talking about safeguarding issues as well, you know, we, they shared with us at the conference about a client having committed suicide, not somebody that was at the conference, but they haven't been reported that a client had committed suicide after having AI, only coaching. Now, I haven't read the full facts of that. But that's just take safeguarding as an issue. So if you're noticing, you know, at what stage will it be trained to a degree that it will be able to, you know, notice, notice warning signs, you know, where we would need to refer on? And how, how would it refer, then the question is, you know, how effective are humans at being able to do that? And what are the roles and responsibilities, you know, have human coaches versus AI coaches? So, you know, it all comes down to conversation, education, somebody asked me that was sat next to this conference on the second day, and he turned to me and said, Are you frightened about AI? And my sort of just answer on the spot was, No, I'm not frightened. Like, I'm only frightened when I'm, when I don't have information. But when I have enough information, where I feel like actually, I'm learning about it, then I start to get excited, but we can't deny, you know, the advancements that are happening. So think it's about how can we ensure that we leverage the opportunities to enhance the work we do, and the mission that we are here, you know, for us are very mission led? So my focus is around how, you know, what are the bits of technology, you know, AI and beyond? Because they're also talking about quantum computing, computer, brain interface, web, 3.0, etc, etc. So what are the bits that we may choose to leverage that will enhance the coaching that we do and the outcomes that our clients can get? And what do I need to be aware of in terms of some of the risks that that may entail. And you know, there were on a different level, we were shared, simple tools when we around if your client is a very visual thinker, for example. And maybe when we, you know, when you're coaching in person, perhaps you might take some cards along, or if you were doing like a, you know, facilitating a session with a group or a team, when you're doing it online, what's the most effective way to do that, and you can use all sorts of different things. Now, some individuals are gonna find that an interruption to the space and the connection that you have bringing up the tech. But there were, there was like a tool that we were shown where you can give it a prompt, so the client could say, basically, please create an image that represents the feeling of being at a crossroads, unsure which direction to go in. And then the AI will produce four different options for that, and then the client will choose the one that most represents it. And so you're working with metaphor, and the acumen coach then is using their questioning skills and prompts for reflection, and, you know, connections with the client. Now, some clients are going to love that. And they'll feel that it's enhancing the session, and they'll love that they can download it and take it away. And they might use that as an anchor for further reflections, or, you know, the value that it brings to them. Other people are not gonna like it. But to me, that's the same as any other thing that you might introduce to it to a client. So you know, when we're talking about AI and coaching, what I'm trying to say there is, there are very, almost familiar tools like AI tools that will do what we used to do in person that will enable us to do it in a virtual world. And then, you know, we go all the way up through to thinking about AI and how it may be able to replace a degree of coaching.

**Zoe Hawkins** 24:06

Yeah, yeah. And I think the message is to stay involved in the conversation. I think coaches have a really important role to play in how AI evolves. And like, how do you get involved in that, like, go and volunteer for the coaching bodies, you know, join different forums, join in with different webinars and seminars that you see. Because it's an important, it's an important conversation that will affect us all. And my prediction is that it will be really positive. You know, I think that in the future, like way into the future, let's say, you know, 2530 years, I think people will be talking about their human coach with pride, like, Oh, I've got a human coach. Whereas if everybody has a chatbot, then suddenly it's not very, it's not very interesting anymore. It's not very appealing. And so I think the The presence of being able to have a human coach will will be high in demand in the future. That's my, that's my prediction. And maybe when I'm in my rocking chair, looking back on my life, I'll find and stumble upon this podcast episode and see if see if I was accurate. And I think, you know, that's on us to own our value in the market, and to make sure that, you know, we're committed to coaching, we're committed to coaching mastery, you know, we're committed to being the very best that we can be. And making sure that we bring heart, soul intuition, human connection to those relationships, because those are the things that cannot be replicated, I believe there is an energy exchange between humans in a coaching relationship that just simply cannot be replicated when you're interacting with a non sentient being. So that I'm laying on the table as my prediction.

**Jo Wheatley** 25:59

I also hope that you know, that the developments that we're seeing this kind of merging of AI and coaching will encourage and enable more younger people to enter the coaching profession, because we typically see people that are probably roughly age 30 Plus that kind of enter into the coaching profession. And I think actually, you know, younger people are going to probably be much more familiar with the tech much more able to bring it in, but also it may accelerate their learning and their ability to develop as master coaches. And I think, you know, coaching is a mindset and a toolkit that can help everybody from you know, very young children all the way up throughout our lives. So I hope that it ends up attracting greater diversity in in all ways into the coaching profession. But if you want to keep the human edge, as he was talking about, we firmly believe that that is in the area of emotions and being able to develop your own relationship with your emotions and learn tools and techniques and, and have a greater understanding of how you can support clients with their emotions, building their emotional vocabulary, their emotional agility, and confidence. Then come and join us on our emotions coaching practitioner training, there's a accredited coaching course and you can find details about that on our webpage, IG company.co.uk forward slash emotions coaching.

**Zoe Hawkins** 27:34

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