Epidode 105 Coaching Using Constellations

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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.

00:24

Hello, and

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:25

welcome to the coaching crowd podcast with me Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo Wheatley.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:30

Hi, everybody. We're talking to you today about coaching using constellations. And we're talking to you about this because it's a tool that I love to use, or an approach that I love to use in my coaching, work both one to one and group coaching. It is engaging with our coachee and helping them to engage with the system and the wider relationships in their life, which is so important to consider when we're supporting clients or coaches to achieve their goals. And it's a way for you to get creative in your coaching too, which is something that we always encourage, because different clients have different preferences, different ways of processing their experience, both in the here and now from the past, and also as they look towards the future.

**Zoe Hawkins** 01:17

Yeah, and I remember it was you I think that introduced me to constellations a number of years ago, when we went on a I think it was either a taster day or a day's course with John Whittington who has a great book around constellations, which will reference in the show notes for you. And I remember thinking, What a load of nonsense, you know, it was that kind of like, at the point in time, where I was probably quite reserved with my coaching and a little bit more unsure of what I saw to be quite out there techniques. But actually, on the programme, what I experienced was something really powerful about constellations. So probably best if we start with what is a constellation and as you said, Jo, it's about taking the systemic lens, and a constellation, it's about creating a map of really the internal workings of your mind in the context of your goal. So if we talk through a typical constellation using objects, for example, you may invite the client to collect different objects from around their space, or they may have a set of objects that they use. On this particular course, we had wooden figurines of all different sorts of shapes and sizes, and a board that we could plot these this constellation on. And you think about your goal. And then you're invited to place yourself on the board or on a space in front of you, in relation to where you at in the context of your goal. And then you can start to plot in all sorts of things really, you might be the situations that are happening around the context of your goal. It may be the different players, the the people, the events, it may be the emotions, but you start to create a visual map of what is happening in the context of your goal. How else would you explain it, Jo? What would you build

**Jo Wheatley** 03:11

on? Well, constellations is an approach that was developed in Europe by Bert Hollinger, and it originates in family systems. So thinking about those relationships, but it helps an individual to be able to step out of their kind of their heads, their sort of conscious reality, you know, how we can all get a bit over analytical stuck in our thoughts. And it's a way to be able to engage more with your felt sense. And it is a way that you can, the client can start to feel often a sense of more of a sense of control over their current situation and the future. Because as you say, Zoe, by plotting the current reality, they get to almost like walk around that board. If we talk about that, and look at the situation from different angles and perspectives like in a really physical way, like getting that movement and starting to consider other people's perspectives, what their experience might be, in this really like a metaphorical representation of the reality. And the great thing about these little wooden items are that you can then invite the client to move them into a position that represents what they would like to be experiencing or where they would like to get to. And then as the coach helping the client to explore what impact does that have, how do they feel about that? Are there any pieces that would like to talk to one another? What would they like to say? And it really helps the client to engage I think more with that kind of gut feel response, because they're questions and things that you're doing with the clients that your clients probably have not done for themselves. Yeah, I'd

**Zoe Hawkins** 04:57

like that piece that you talked about around the unconscious It's like a zooming out, isn't it and being able to look almost look down upon your situation and see things from a very different lens. And the power isn't just in the plotting, of course, it's in the facilitation of what you do with that conversation. So when you have a converse, when you have a constellation mapped out, as the facilitator, you will ask questions like, tell me about where you've placed yourself, you know, what's relevant about that? What are you seeing, hearing and experiencing from that position, you know, so you'll be the person who is facilitating the value in in the conversation that you can get from being able to map out a constellation. And of course, doing it physically is just. And of course, doing it physically is just one way that you can map that out. So you can also draw a constellation on a piece of paper. And you may choose to draw a square or a circle or something, which is your boundary, and then start to draw in the different players, events, people, emotions, whatever, you know, however, you want to facilitate the mapping of that constellation.

**Jo Wheatley** 06:10

And there are some really important considerations when we think about, like the plotting is a way to acknowledge the reality in a system. And there's a lot of thinking that the system has a natural force or forces at play, like. So if you think about the relationships, if you think about a workplace dynamic or situation, let's say that a client brings, and there will be forces at play, because about the system likes to kind of keep things in balance. And so it needs there's thinking, that says that the system, the reality needs to be acknowledged, in order for it to be able to change and the sort of hidden forces that you might think about in organisations or like how long people have been in a team, for example, you probably when I say that all have a sense of, oh, yeah, like, you know, I remember when, when somebody joined, and, or when I joined a team, and I didn't feel like I had much power or influence in the team. But over time, as new people came in, or even I think about my son's football team, and three players left recently out of a team of eight. And that was a real shock, everybody experienced this like reverberation, and other people going to leave because all this energy was exiting. And then we've had new players come in and say, My son has gone from being feeling a little bit on the outside, because he was the newest and now feeling a bit, you know, wide shouldered, and, you know, I'm part of the, not the originals, but the latest, you know, version of it, and that that does have a real impact. And I do think that, that that happens in organisations as well. And then you've also obviously got, you know, the roles that people have, like the status that that natural roles have, within the order. And then also that desire for like the communication within teams. So there's lots of things to consider. And you can do the desktop version, as you've described, sorry, like, you know, placing things in and I've done it before, as you say, weighing in person and getting people to get things out of their bag, or you know, in a virtual world, what's on their desk or around them that represents that. So it might be themselves might be something that represents their boss, but I've also been involved in very powerful experiences of in person constellations. And that's where an individual chooses other people's this would be group experience to represent the people or the things like so for example, Joy, I think I've represented one time. And you see it placed out with people, it's an the power and the emotion that gets created and the ability for the different individuals to be able to really channel the coach's experience when they have no knowledge of the individual is absolutely fascinating.

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:05

And you're talking there about kind of using embodiment and somatic senses, which of course can be you know, deep areas of interest for different coaches. So it's a great blend of different skills and sensors that you can bring into coaching. And I think what's great about working with constellations is it really ignites a different energy in the coaching. So you can, as you said before, you can get creative so this can really appeal to visual learners, if you're doing it creatively and drawing things out. It can really appeal to kinesthetic learners because there's those tactile pieces that you can actually pick up and put down and move around. But that can also be helpful for people who are more kind of auditory digital who have an internal self talk because it gets them out of the thinking and the talking and breaks like a habit or a pattern to be able to access you your challenge or your aspiration through a different doorway, you know, so it's a way to really change up the energy in your coaching. So if your client is getting stuck, you know, so you're trying different things, and you're circling around the same topic and the work that you've done hasn't really worked. And a change in energy in the coaching can really help to facilitate a movement. So you know, think about how you can go and read around constellations or get some training around constellations, so that you have the capacity to be able to radically shift in the way that you are approaching the work you're doing with your client to give more options, and access to new perspectives.

**Jo Wheatley** 10:42

And as a coach, I think, taking or some of inspiration for some of the principles of constellations, and maybe introducing or offering it to a client in the situations like as you described there, so for me, the impact can be moving the coaching from like 1d into 3d or 4d, because often our clients come because they're stuck in soulmates like they're looking at another individual, let's say if it's a conflict or tension in a relationship type situation, or, or they see obstacles that obstacles are often related to, in some way to other people. But they see it as like themselves versus others, rather than when you start to work with a constellation or help them to create that constellation, it really helps them to explore the possibility that everything is connected to every thing else. And not only that, but to illuminate hidden dynamics. So it sort of moves it beyond, you know, me in conversation with another person to how come that person is showing up in that way? What are the other influences on them? And what are the influences on me? Do I always experience this kind of thing in this way? Or are there other forces at work here that I perhaps haven't considered? And if I become aware, you know, increase my awareness to these other possibilities? Then how many more options does that give me? And how does that support me in flexibility of my own behaviour, getting to know myself more, and, and helping me to get to a decision as to what I want to do next within this, so it does really help to create that internal map, or the map of the system, and then the coach is there to help the clients and navigate through that in the best way for them.

**Zoe Hawkins** 12:35

We have an activity around constellations on our emotions coaching practitioner training, and I would say it's probably one of the favourites that our learners report back on, isn't it and we had somebody share on one of the integration sessions recently, which is where we come together as a group and share learnings and ask questions and explore different challenges. This, this particular coach had begun using it in the intake session. And I thought, what an amazing idea to be able to work with your client in the early stages of you know, this, in this particular instance, emotions coaching, to be able to take a map of where the client is at and help the client to appreciate and understand where they're at and where they want to go. And then you can repeat the constellation at the end of the work that you've done together to look at how has that internal map changed. And I think what's particularly powerful about the work that we do in this emotions coaching, is being able to take a lens and recognise what is the impact on my emotions from the wider world, you know, because we often think it's the, you know, the city as you describe their day, the situation right in front of us, or the person right in front of us that it's having this influence on our emotions, or the particular challenge that we're experiencing. But when you zoom out, and you consider all the different impacts, I remember doing this constellation when we were making the training and producing it. And I really got into contact with the impact that things like climate change was having on me emotionally, with young children, and, you know, sometimes just getting drawn into that overwhelming state of where the world is at. And when you map that out, you can honour that, and really take a moment to be like, Ah, so I'm not just stressed, because I've got a short deadline, there are these external influences that are taking that are taking place, both within me and around me. And I think that really helps to just catch your breath and appreciate where you're at. And of course, that can create clarity and the ability to move forward. And not all of those things, can you action, you know, constellation brings to light many things that are outside of control. But that also helps you to know what you can put down and what you really need to focus on in terms of being able to move forward. So it's really an interesting, fascinating you liberating work when you can integrate constellations into your coaching.

**Jo Wheatley** 15:05

For me, one of the most powerful things is like I've also facilitated, like what's called Deep democracy exercises. And you know, like anything that I can see constellations show up in many places, activities and and trainings that I've done before. And it's that idea of how do we ensure that all of the voices in the system are heard? And especially the voices that are you that are in the margins or in the periphery? And I think creating that map or system and maps are one of the oldest things in the world, aren't they? When you think about it really helps to give an opportunity for those voices to be heard. So I talked about earlier, like, where you feel there's an energy or the client is interested in Oh, I wonder what that that person who now I look at it, I can see that they're facing away from me, but I experienced it on a day to day as if they're, you know, like that, why have I placed them? What's the reason I've placed them there? And I wonder what their experience is, what can they see that I can't currently see. And if you you know, from the coach's perspective, it's about how do you support your clients to be able to trust themselves and their own inner voice or how they can channel that without self sabotaging by, you know, holding those voices back because they feel embarrassed or weird, you know, weird somehow. So there's a lot of skill on behalf of the coach in these scenarios, to work with the client to experiment with, say, with something new and being open to it without judgement, just see what comes up and, and where they can go from it. And where clients get stuck with words, you might be asking them questions, and you just sense that they're stuck and the words aren't coming. They are disconnected, like in some way, maybe from themselves or the situation and doing a constellation or offering that can help just to break through the stuckness by doing something completely and utterly different.

**Zoe Hawkins** 17:12

Yeah, so a good place to start if you're interested in this constellation is to get John Whittington 's book, which is behind me, systemic coaching and constellations, we're not affiliates to his we just love to read, and obviously sampled some of his work. So that would be a good place to start, which gives you some of the foundations of constellation work and just a place to maybe kickstart your interest.

**Jo Wheatley** 17:39

Or come and join our emotions coaching practitioner training, because as you're saying, we have a constellation activity in there that is aligned and focused more to emotional experiences. So it's a good opportunity to integrate, integrate those two areas. And we encourage you more broadly to think about how do you invite creativity into your work with clients? How do you enquire with them around? What are the best ways to help them overcome what's in the gap for them between their current reality and their goal coaching does not need to be all about the two of you sat at a desk having a conversation we know getting outdoors, but there are other things and tools and techniques. And we encourage you to always remain open to exploring you know what's new in the coaching world and get inspired by different approaches, maybe you could end up creating your own approach, there may be an idea within you that's percolating at the moment, thinking about what you can bring into your work with your clients, which reminds me of an earlier podcast episode we did around creativity and coaching. So if you aren't a regular listener, scroll back through the episodes and find that one have a listen because that might give you some great ideas as well.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:58

So if you found today's podcast valuable, we would really appreciate it if you could review the podcast if that's possible from where you're listening. And if you haven't subscribed, make sure you do so you never miss an episode, and we'll see you again next Monday. 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. Go over to Facebook and search for the coaching crowd to be in good company with other aspiring coaches.