

Personality at the heart  
of modern coaching

my  
**Coaching**  
Style

Grant Gemmell

A **Facet5** publication

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# Introduction

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Hello Grant

**This book is for you:** whether you're in training, starting out or are hugely experienced, it depends on a simple observation: no-one coaches quite like you. Understanding how your individuality shapes and filters your skills and knowledge will deliver better coaching experiences for you and your clients. Understanding your own personality is one of the keys to this improvement.

Of course, professional, ethical coaching builds in part on skills, frameworks, theory and competencies. These give structure, protect quality and provide shared standards of practice. While this body of knowledge and skills changes and expands, its core elements are accepted and taught during initial coach training. They ensure that a coaching session is not just an informal chat and supports clients in a different way than traditional training or mentoring.

But anyone who has spent time in real coaching conversations identifies another foundation to effective coaching. Two coaches can be equally well trained, accredited and experienced, and yet their coaching can feel profoundly different. One coach may be quiet and deliberate, another energetic and expansive. One may challenge directly, another through careful questioning. One may build safety through warmth, another through steadiness and restraint.

Your coaching style is unique because you are unique. Coaching happens when two individuals form a relationship through their preferences, habits, blind spots and strengths. A client's personal style and behaviour is always a key element in these conversations. We tend to talk less about these aspects of a coach's role.

A coach is not a neutral conduit for techniques in a coaching relationship, but an active presence in the room. Who you are shapes:

- what sorts of information you notice;
- what you question, challenge, or accept;
- how you respond when you experience pressure, failure, or success in your coaching;
- which sorts of clients and issues you prefer to coach and where you find most difficulty or least satisfaction.

To sum up, much professional development focuses on what coaches should do, with less attention paid to how their natural style shapes what actually happens in practice. This book addresses that gap.

### **From technique to intent**

Obviously, personality is not the sole determinant of the quality of your coaching. In our practical approach our personality model explains patterns which, when understood, facilitate choice rather than habit. It invites you to look beneath technique and into the underlying tendencies that shape your coaching style, especially when facing pressure, complexity and uncertainty.

### **The self as instrument**

Musicians must tune, understand and practice their instruments to play well. Equally coaches must understand how their presence, judgement and preferences shape coaching relationships. They must practice how they can flex their style without becoming inauthentic and be aware of where their style becomes a barrier to progress in certain contexts with certain clients. An unexamined self plays automatically. By contrast, when it is understood and practiced it can be used with intent allowing the coach to make choices rather than be ruled by habit. So, a central idea running through this book is the self as instrument, understanding yourself better and therefore being able to use your style to greater effect for your clients.

So, this book is an exploration of:

- how personality influences coaching practice;
- how strengths can overplay under pressure;
- how capability is expressed differently by different coaches with different personalities;
- how you can 'stretch' your style to meet different situations without losing authenticity.

As these aims imply, this is not a manual of techniques, a competency checklist, or a description of 'correct' coaching. There are plenty of those around, many of which are excellent.

The shift from performance of techniques to individual presence is where coaching deepens and clients flourish. The pages that follow explore what becomes possible when personality, capability and intent are brought into conscious alignment.

## **Our approach to personality**

This book draws on a trait-based understanding of personality grounded in the principles of Facet5. Facet5 is built on the belief that personality is best understood as a pattern of preferences that influences how people think, relate and act, rather than as a fixed type or label. Traits are viewed as stable enough to explain consistent behaviour, yet flexible enough to support growth, adaptation and conscious choice.

At the heart of this approach is a strengths-based philosophy. Personality is not something to be corrected or overcome but understood and worked with. Strengths add value when they are applied with awareness and create risk when they are overused or applied without sensitivity to context.

Facet5 also holds a clear boundary around responsible use. Personality insight is intended to support self-awareness, reflection and development, not selection, ranking, labelling or prediction of success. It is a lens for enquiry rather than explanation and a foundation for dialogue rather than judgement.

# How to use this book

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This book is not designed to teach you how to coach. You already have knowledge, training and experience that shape your practice. Instead, this book focuses on something more personal and often less visible: how you use what you know and how your personality shapes your coaching in practice.

It invites you to pay close attention to the patterns that influence your judgement, presence and impact, particularly in the moments that matter most.

It offers:

- a way to understand your natural coaching style
- insight into how that style creates value
- awareness of where it may create blind spots
- practical guidance on how to stretch without losing authenticity

## **A book to work with, not just read**

This book is most valuable when used actively. You can read it from start to finish, but its real impact comes from pausing, reflecting and applying what you notice to your own coaching practice.

You may choose to:

- read it sequentially to build a full picture of your style
- focus on specific sections that feel most relevant right now
- return to chapters over time as your experience deepens

Key ideas are intentionally revisited throughout. This allows you to engage with individual sections without losing the overall narrative.

## **Understanding your coaching style**

Sections 1 and 2 introduce the core ideas behind the book:

- coaching is personal
- the coach is an active presence, not a neutral conduit
- personality provides a practical lens for understanding style

As you read these sections, consider:

- How do I naturally show up in coaching conversations?
- What do I tend to prioritise and what might I overlook?
- What feels effortless in my coaching? What is more effortful?

These chapters are not theoretical. They are there to help you begin observing yourself more clearly in your practice.

## **Exploring your style in action**

The Five Domains and Key Qualities sections translate personality into coaching behaviour.

They show how your style shapes:

- how you create direction
- how you engage and involve clients
- how you balance care and challenge
- how you support action and accountability
- how you respond under pressure

As you work through these sections:

- Notice what resonates immediately – these are often your core strengths
- Pay attention to what feels less familiar – these may highlight stretch areas
- Reflect on recent coaching conversations – where do you see these patterns in action?

This is where insight becomes practical.

## **From insight to development**

The chapters on Key Qualities and Capabilities are not assessments of competence.

They explore how capability is expressed through your personality.

For example:

- Two coaches may both 'challenge' – but in very different ways
- Two coaches may both 'build trust' – through entirely different behaviours

As you read, consider:

- How do I express this capability naturally?
- Where does it work well for me?
- Where might it become overused?
- What would stretching this look like in practice?

Development here is not necessarily about adding more tools. It is about becoming more intentional and flexible in how you use what you already have.

## **Using this book for reflection**

This book is designed to support ongoing reflective practice.

You may find it useful to:

- keep notes or a journal as you read
- capture moments of recognition or surprise
- link insights directly to real coaching situations

Helpful reflection prompts include:

- What patterns do I notice in my coaching across different clients?
- When do I feel most effective and why?
- When do I feel stretched or uncomfortable?
- What might my clients experience when I am under pressure?

Returning to these questions over time will deepen your self-awareness.

### **Using this book in supervision**

This book is particularly powerful when used in supervision.

It provides a shared language to explore:

- recurring patterns in your coaching
- strengths that may be overplayed
- situations where your style supports or limits progress
- opportunities for conscious stretch

You might bring to supervision:

- a specific Key Quality or domain you are exploring
- a recent coaching situation where something felt 'off'
- feedback from a client that you want to understand more deeply

Rather than asking *What should I do differently?* this book supports a more useful question:

*What is my natural tendency here and how can I work with it more effectively?*

## **Using this book for ongoing development**

Self-awareness is not a one-time insight, it is a practice. As your coaching evolves, different aspects of your style will become more or less relevant. What feels like a strength today may become a limitation in a different context.

We encourage you to:

- revisit this book periodically
- re-read sections as your experience grows
- use it alongside CPD, supervision and real coaching work

Over time, the aim is not to change who you are.

It is to expand your range, so that you can:

- stay grounded in your natural style
- adapt to different clients and situations
- respond with greater choice, not habit

## **A final note and welcome**

There is no 'ideal' coaching style. There is only your style, understood and used with intent.

This book is designed to help you:

- see that style more clearly
- understand how it creates value
- recognise where it may limit you
- and develop the flexibility to respond to what your clients need

When personality, capability and awareness come together, coaching becomes more than a set of skills. It becomes a conscious, human practice.

## Chapter 9

# Your key qualities

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### How to use the next chapters

The chapters that follow explore each key quality in turn.

Each chapter will:

- describe how the quality typically shows up in coaching;
- explore its value and contribution;
- highlight predictable overuse under pressure;
- suggest conscious stretch;
- invite reflective practice.

Our emphasis is on you understanding your own qualities, not mastering all of them. The aim is not to change your style, but to use it with greater intent. We have found the following strategies will help you get the most out of these chapters.




- See the whole map first. Step back and look at how your Key Qualities are distributed across the five domains. Where is your natural emphasis?
- Where is there less energy? This broad pattern shapes how others experience your coaching.
- Dive into each quality. Use the detail provided to explore the specific strengths and risks of your style. Notice what resonates immediately and what prompts you to reflect more deeply.
- Connect to your coaching reality. As you read, think about your current approach and any challenges. Where do these qualities support you? Where might they create friction? Where is there an opportunity to stretch?

- Use the language. The descriptions are designed to give you words you can use with your team, colleagues and other coaches. They create a common language that helps others understand you – and helps you understand them.
- Treat it as a practice. Self-awareness is not a one-time insight. It's an ongoing habit. Revisit these qualities regularly as your role evolves, as your team changes and as new challenges emerge.




## Your key qualities

# Summary




### Decision Making and Goal Setting

 <b>Goal Focused</b>	You bring pace, conviction and drive to what you do. You quickly make decisions and set direction, committing to your personal goals with purpose and determination.	Page 74
 <b>Assertive</b>	You give your opinion unambiguously and strongly defend your position. You are not afraid to disagree, confronting issues in the moment and bringing honest challenge and debate.	Page 79
 <b>Independent</b>	You form your own point of view and are guided by inner principles. You can persist in the face of opposition and are willing go your own way to make progress.	Page 84



### Engaging and Consulting

 <b>Enthusiastic</b>	You bring animated energy and dynamism that helps to kick-start new activities. You are excited about what is new and different, seeking out variety and welcoming change.	Page 90
 <b>Outgoing</b>	You are strongly sociable, making the most of every opportunity to engage with and involve people from a wide network. You like to keep things fun, and contribute to creating a warm, friendly, and inclusive atmosphere.	Page 95
 <b>Collaborative</b>	You actively bring others into your thinking, enjoying how ideas flow and develop through discussion. This helps to explore a breadth of ideas and blend together different points of view.	Page 99



### Task and People Focus

	<b>Pragmatic</b>	You take a broad view that considers the needs of others, bringing a people-centred approach to your work. You believe in doing good and work that is of value to others.	Page 104
	<b>Critical</b>	You bring a healthy scepticism and don't take on the struggles of others quickly. You provide support when genuinely required, pushing people to bring their full efforts and capabilities for themselves.	Page 109
	<b>Questioning</b>	You believe in giving people a chance and value relationships based on mutual trust. This encourages openness and sincere collaboration in the interest of a common good.	Page 114

### Managing Work and Commitments

	<b>Discerning</b>	You bring originality and imagination, often having a fresh perspective and enjoying change. You give others around you freedom to be individual and adapt to the situation.	Page 119
	<b>Open minded</b>	You bring a mature and responsible attitude to your work, interpreting expectations pragmatically while respecting tradition and authority. This allows for healthy flexibility without being disruptive.	Page 124

### Identifying Risk and Managing Stress

	<b>Composed</b>	You are aware of what is going on around you and respond to setbacks and difficult situations as they arise. Your level-headed perspective means you can respect others concerns without being drawn into them.	Page 129
	<b>Mature</b>	You are well-prepared, being thorough and not leaving things to chance. You bring your past experiences and feelings with you and give careful thought before committing to new ventures.	Page 134

## Goal focused

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This key quality looks at your inner drive to commit to your own ideas and set goals for yourself and others. It can help you understand how quickly you form your opinions and your willingness to consult others and make decisions.

### Your personality – strengths of your style

Your goal focused approach to coaching brings clarity, decisiveness and action to your sessions. You can help clients define clear objectives, commit to decisions and maintain focus on execution. Your ability to move quickly and assertively ensures that coaching remains productive, structured and results-driven.

- You can support clients in setting ambitious goals, ensuring they align their efforts with long-term objectives.
- Your decisive nature can streamline discussions, helping clients avoid overthinking and stay focused.
- You are able to challenge clients to commit to their decisions and take purposeful action.
- Your direct and to-the-point communication can drive clarity and alignment, ensuring momentum is maintained.

This style is particularly beneficial for clients who:

- need help defining and committing to clear goals;
- struggle with over-analysis or indecisiveness and benefit from structured decision-making;
- require a coach who will drive accountability and maintain forward momentum;
- work in fast-paced, outcome-driven environments where speed and execution are essential.

### **Strengths overplayed – what to watch out for**

While your clarity and decisiveness help drive action, overusing this strength may present challenges. Some clients may require more space for exploration, reflection and shared decision-making before they commit to a path forward.

- Your fast decision-making may intimidate clients who prefer a more thoughtful, inclusive approach.
- You may push for results too quickly, making clients feel rushed or unheard.
- Your strong goal focus may lead you to prioritise efficiency over deeper discussion, missing out on alternative perspectives.
- Some clients may feel they haven't fully processed their thoughts before being encouraged to take action.

By balancing decisiveness with openness and patience, you can ensure clients feel empowered, not pressured, in their decision-making process.

### Frustrations you may experience with clients unlike you

Goal focused coaches may feel challenged when working with:

#### 1 Clients who prefer to explore rather than commit

They may struggle with making firm decisions and need time to process their options.

**Reframe:** Instead of seeing their hesitation as avoidance, see it as thoughtful consideration and a desire for alignment before action.

**Ask:** *How can I support their exploration in a way that still leads toward meaningful progress?*

**Try:** Use a light-touch structure (for example, timelines or checkpoints) to create forward movement without rushing decisions. Encourage exploration with a clear intention (for example, *What will help you feel ready to commit?*). Celebrate clarity, even if it's not immediate action – progress can be mental, not just tangible.

#### 2 Clients who seek deeper discussion over efficiency

They may want to reflect at length rather than moving quickly to action.

**Reframe:** Rather than viewing in-depth reflection as inefficiency, see it as a way to build deeper commitment to action.

**Ask:** *How can I make reflection feel purposeful and tied to outcomes?*

**Try:** Allow space for reflection but guide the conversation toward application (for example, *How will this insight shape your next step?*). Use reflective exercises with clear links to goals. Summarise insights and translate them into action-oriented statements to maintain momentum.

### 3 Clients who avoid direct confrontation or assertiveness

Clients who are more reserved may feel overwhelmed by strong direction.

**Reframe:** Instead of interpreting their reserve as resistance, recognise it as a different communication style.

**Ask:** *How can I adjust my delivery to make direction feel supportive rather than overwhelming?*

**Try:** Soften your tone of feedback while keeping the message clear and actionable. Encourage ownership by asking empowering questions (for example, *What feels like a strong first step for you?*). Reinforce that progress can happen in quiet, steady ways – not just bold moves.

### Strategies to mitigate and balance your approach

Your ability to drive clarity and action is a strength, but balancing it with patience, adaptability and deeper listening will ensure a client-centred coaching approach.

#### 1 Slow down to create more engagement

- Recognise when a client needs time to process before committing to a decision.
- Ask yourself:

*Am I moving too quickly for this client's style?*

#### 2 Encourage thoughtful discussion before acting

- Balance efficiency with exploration, asking:

*Before we move forward, what other perspectives should we consider?*

*Is there anything we haven't fully explored yet?*

### 3 Give clients ownership of their process

- Instead of pushing decisions, allow clients to set their own pace by asking:

*What feels right for you at this moment?*

*What would help you feel more confident in this decision?*

### 4 Adapt your communication for more reserved clients

Some clients need gentler, more exploratory discussions rather than direct action steps. Use softer questioning like: *How do you feel about this direction?* instead of *Are you ready to take the next step?*

### 5 Balance drive with active listening

- Check in with yourself:  
*Am I listening enough before guiding the conversation?*
- Allow silence and space for clients to process before jumping in with next steps.
- By integrating more reflection, discussion and adaptability, your Goal Focused coaching style will remain action-driven while allowing for individual client needs.

## Enthusiastic

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This key quality measures your response to new ideas and events, and how you prefer to demonstrate enthusiasm for these. It will help you understand how you consider ideas before committing yourself and others.

### **Your personality – strengths of your style**

Your key quality, Enthusiastic, can bring momentum to your coaching, creating an engaging and motivating space for clients. Your enthusiasm has the potential to inspire action, foster creativity and encourage forward movement, helping individuals explore new possibilities with confidence.

- You can spark energy in your clients, helping them feel inspired and confident in their ability to take action.
- You have the potential to create a dynamic coaching space where clients feel encouraged to contribute, explore ideas and challenge themselves.
- Your enthusiasm can help clients break through limiting beliefs, encouraging them to embrace change and consider new opportunities.
- You may help clients gain traction by focusing on getting things started and maintaining progress toward their goals.

This style is particularly beneficial for clients who:

- feel stuck or uninspired and may need motivation to take action;
- are open to creative approaches and thrive in high-energy discussions;

- need encouragement to embrace change and innovation in their thinking or career;
- respond well to an engaging, fast-paced coaching dynamic.

### **Strengths overplayed – what to watch out for**

While your enthusiasm can be a powerful asset, overusing it may present challenges in your coaching approach. Clients may not always match your energy level or processing speed and some may require more space for reflection and deeper exploration.

- Your desire to keep sessions moving can lead to shifting topics too quickly, potentially missing deeper insights that need further exploration.
- Not all clients process at the same pace; some may need more time for reflection, emotional processing, or steady encouragement before moving forward.
- Your natural energy may overshadow quieter, more reflective clients, making it harder for them to contribute at their own pace.
- High energy isn't the same as deep listening, clients may benefit when you slow down, allow silence and ensure they have time to think before responding.

By balancing enthusiasm with patience, presence and adaptability, you can maintain an engaging coaching style while creating space for deeper reflection and sustainable progress.

### **Frustrations you may experience with clients unlike you**

Enthusiastic coaches may feel challenged when working with:

#### **1 Clients who are highly analytical or slow to engage**

They may seem hesitant, over-cautious, or resistant to your high-energy momentum.

**Reframe:** Instead of seeing their cautious approach as resistance, recognise it as a need for careful processing and deeper understanding.

**Ask:** *How can I align my energy with their need for thoughtful reflection?*

**Try:** Slow down and give them space to process before pushing for action. Use well-structured, logical reasoning alongside enthusiasm to engage them. Ask reflective questions that help them move forward at their own pace.

### 2 Clients who resist excitement or change.

Clients who prefer stability and are more considered in their response may seem to reject your ideas or enthusiasm.

**Reframe:** Rather than seeing their hesitation as rejection, recognise it as a preference for stability and consistency.

**Ask:** *How can I introduce new ideas in a way that feels safe and practical for them?*

**Try:** Introduce change gradually, linking it to familiar concepts they trust. Provide clear, logical benefits for change rather than relying solely on inspiration. Respect their preference for stability while showing them the value of adaptability.

### 3 Clients who lack urgency or struggle with motivation

Clients who need structure rather than inspiration may feel lost in an energetic coaching approach. They may need more from you than just ideas and energy.

**Reframe:** Instead of seeing their low energy as disinterest, realise that they may need structure rather than just enthusiasm.

**Ask:** *How can I channel my energy into practical steps that help them stay engaged?*

**Try:** Use accountability strategies to reinforce progress. Set small, achievable goals that create momentum without overwhelming them. Balance inspiration with clear structure, ensuring motivation translates into action.

## Strategies to mitigate and balance your approach

Your energy and passion can drive engagement and motivation, but balancing them with reflection, adaptability and deep listening ensures your coaching remains effective for all clients.

### 1 Slow down and create space for reflection

- Not all clients process at the same speed, some need time before taking action. Consciously pause and allow silence before moving forward.
- Ask:

*Before we move on, what else comes up for you?*

### 2 Adapt energy levels to client needs

- Match the client's pace and intensity, especially if they seem overwhelmed or hesitant.
- Shift from leading to partnering by asking:  
*How do you feel about this pace?*
- Watch for subtle signs of engagement, rather than expecting overt enthusiasm.

### 3 Balance vision with realism

- Avoid jumping into action too quickly, ground ideas in practical steps.
- Reframe resistance as thoughtful reflection rather than hesitation.
- Test ideas with:

*What would be the first small step to explore this?*

#### **4 Deepen listening and presence**

- Regularly check in:  
*Am I listening more than I'm speaking?*
- Use paraphrasing and reflection before jumping to solutions.
- Practice mindful coaching presence to stay fully attuned to client needs.

#### **5 Track and reinforce progress**

- Recognise small wins and subtle shifts in motivation, rather than expecting immediate transformations.
- Use structured accountability tools to maintain momentum while adapting to the client's pace.
- Revisit past sessions with: *What progress have you made on this since last time?*

Section 4

# **Coaching capabilities**

# 4

# Coaching Capabilities

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The capabilities that follow will be familiar to you. They appear, using similar headings, in most major professional coaching frameworks, often linked to characteristics such as presence, listening, evoking awareness, or facilitating growth. These capabilities are central to effective coaching practice. You will almost certainly attend to them consciously in your work. Because of this we do not seek to redefine them or introduce a new standard; instead, we focus on how they are expressed through you.

This section invites you to explore how these capabilities show up naturally in your coaching style, how they tend to support your work and where they may benefit from greater awareness or range. It offers an opportunity to deepen reflective practice, supervision conversations and professional judgement. Engaging with these capabilities in this way supports ongoing professional development and aligns with the intent of recognised coaching competency frameworks.

## Chapter 10

# Questioning and curiosity

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Questioning and curiosity sit at the heart of effective coaching. They are present, in different forms and language, across all major coaching frameworks and are often associated with listening, evoking awareness and facilitating insight. As a coach, this is not a new capability for you, it is something you already practice every time you invite reflection, challenge assumptions, or open up new perspectives.

In our approach, questioning and curiosity are not just seen as techniques to refine, but as expressions of your coaching style. How you become curious, what you tend to ask about and when you stop asking are all shaped by your natural preferences, your comfort with uncertainty and your internal sense of direction.

This chapter invites you to reflect on how you use questions to explore, focus, challenge, or move conversations forward and where curiosity expands thinking or quietly narrows it. This is not about asking better questions, but about becoming more aware of when, why and how you ask the questions you do.

### **How questioning naturally shows up for you**

You tend to approach questioning with intent and purpose. Your curiosity is often directed toward understanding structure, logic and underlying assumptions. You are likely to:

- ask questions that clarify thinking;
- challenge inconsistencies or gaps;
- test reasoning and conclusions;
- invite clients to think more rigorously.

Rather than asking many questions, you may be inclined ask fewer, more targeted ones, designed to move the client toward coherence and clarity. Clients may experience this as intellectually stretching and grounding.

### **The strengths this brings**

This approach to questioning supports:

- depth rather than breadth of enquiry;
- disciplined thinking;
- insight grounded in logic and evidence;
- efficient movement toward clarity.

This style of questioning is particularly effective when clients:

- are overwhelmed by complexity;
- struggle to articulate their thinking;
- need help testing assumptions;
- value precision and rigour.

The coach's curiosity is expressed through discernment, not volume.

### **When this capability is overplayed**

As a coach with a natural strength in analytical clarity, do you notice how your approach to questioning can sometimes become narrow once a coherent explanation or solution seems clear to you? Often, when you have worked out what appears to be the most logical direction, a subtle shift occurs. Questions may move from exploration toward confirmation. Enquiry can become more selective and alternative perspectives receive less attention. Internally, this can be accompanied by a sense of certainty or quiet impatience with what feels like unnecessary divergence. This response is rarely voiced, but it influences how you sustain curiosity.

When this shift happens, clients may feel they are being guided toward a conclusion rather than discovering it for themselves. The risk is not lack of insight, but that curiosity closes before the client's thinking has fully unfolded.

### **What stretch looks like**

Stretch in this capability involves holding enquiry open for longer, even when clarity feels within reach. This may include:

- asking one more open question before narrowing;
- exploring alternatives you believe are unlikely;
- letting ambiguity stand a little longer;
- noticing when confirmation replaces curiosity.

Stretch here is not about asking more questions. It is about staying curious beyond certainty.

#### **Working with different clients**

Some clients appreciate focused, incisive questioning. Others need broader exploration to arrive at their own insight. Clients who think aloud, explore through divergence and need emotional processing alongside logic may experience early narrowing as constraining.

Adapting does not require abandoning precision but matching the width of enquiry to the client's process, not just the coach's understanding.

## Reflective practice to consider

Use the questions below to deepen awareness of this capability:

- When do I decide internally that I understand the issue?
- How does that decision affect my questions?
- What happens when I ask one more exploratory question?
- How comfortable am I with uncertainty once clarity appears?
- Where might my curiosity be serving efficiency more than discovery?

You bring rigour, discipline and clarity to questioning and curiosity. When used with awareness, this style supports deep and lasting insight. By noticing the pull toward early resolution and consciously sustaining enquiry, you can ensure their questions support not just understanding, but true client-generated insight.

## How this capability aligns with major frameworks

- **International Coaching Federation (ICF)**  
*Active listening; evokes awareness*  
Questioning and curiosity support insight, exploration and client learning.
- **European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)**  
*Challenge and Support; Facilitating Learning*  
Curiosity underpins reflective dialogue and developmental challenge.
- **Association for Coaching (AC)**  
*Effective Communication; Enabling Insight*  
Questioning is central to helping clients think more deeply and broadly.

## Chapter 11

# Trust and psychological safety

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Trust and psychological safety are foundational to effective coaching. Across professional coaching frameworks, they are consistently described as essential conditions for learning, openness and meaningful change. They are not abstract concepts. They are states coaches help create from the very first moment of a conversation, through how they listen, respond, challenge and hold boundaries. Many coaches argue that trust and psychological safety are essential to successful coaching.

We explore these characteristics as experiences shaped by your presence and behaviour, not as states to achieve. How you signal acceptance, how quickly you build rapport and how you respond when conversations become uncomfortable are all influenced by your natural preferences, assumptions about people and tolerance for vulnerability. Different coaching styles can create safety in different ways, and each carries its own strengths and potential blind spots.

Here, we invite you to reflect on how safety is established and maintained in your coaching, how trust deepens over time and where it may be unintentionally weakened, particularly under pressure or when challenge is required. This is about understanding better how care, honesty and responsibility are balanced in your practice.

## **The capability: trust and psychological safety**

Trust and psychological safety are about creating conditions where clients:

- feel respected and taken seriously;
- believe their thinking will not be dismissed;
- feel safe to explore uncertainty or vulnerability;
- trust the coach's intent and judgement.

Safety is not created through warmth alone. It is also created through consistency, clarity and reliability. Different coaches signal safety in different ways.

## **How trust naturally shows up for you**

You tend to build trust through competence, consistency and intellectual integrity. You are likely to:

- be measured and thoughtful in your responses;
- avoid overreacting emotionally;
- treat client material seriously;
- maintain clear professional boundaries.

Rather than relying on overt reassurance, you tend to signal safety through steadiness and consistency. Clients may experience this as reassuring, particularly when situations are complex or high-stakes.

Trust builds gradually, through repeated experience of being listened to carefully and responded to with judgement rather than impulse.

### **How you signal this through your style**

Through your approach, psychological safety is often communicated implicitly. Clients may pick up safety through a coach's calm presence, careful use of language, respect for logic and evidence and consistency across sessions. This style can be especially effective with clients who value professionalism and rigour, are cautious about emotional exposure, need time to trust and who want to feel intellectually respected

Safety here is created through containment rather than closeness.

### **Strengths this brings to your coaching**

Your approach to trust and safety supports:

- clear boundaries;
- ethical restraint;
- reduced emotional volatility;
- a sense of reliability and seriousness;

Clients may feel respected rather than managed. able to think clearly under pressure and confident that their issues will be handled responsibly.

This can be particularly valuable in coaching contexts involving:

- senior leaders;
- sensitive decisions;
- confidential or complex issues;
- environments where credibility matters.

## **When this capability is overplayed**

As a coach who naturally creates safety through clarity and emotional consistency, do you notice how your approach to trust sometimes depends on context? Often, when a situation feels high-stakes, emotionally charged, or insufficiently thought through, a subtle shift may occur. You may instinctively tighten boundaries, reduce relational engagement, or prioritise control and clarity over connection. Internally, this can be accompanied by a concern for appropriateness, professionalism, or risk. This response is usually well-intentioned and rarely spoken, but it shapes how safety is expressed.

Clients may experience this shift as emotional distance or reserve. The risk is not lack of trust, but that safety becomes contingent on composure, making it harder for clients to bring uncertainty or vulnerability into the space.

## **What stretch looks like**

Stretch in this capability involves signalling safety even when the context feels messy or unclear. This may include:

- explicitly acknowledging uncertainty or emotion;
- softening boundaries without losing professionalism;
- checking how safe clients feel rather than assuming they do;
- allowing imperfection to be present.

Stretch here is not about becoming more emotive. It is about making safety more visible, especially when situations fall outside neat structure.

## Working with different clients

Some clients experience safety through clarity and calm. Others experience it through warmth and reassurance.

Clients who are highly self-critical, are navigating emotional complexity and need encouragement to speak freely may struggle if safety is conveyed only through restraint and structure.

Adapting does not require abandoning your emotional control. It involves layering relational signalling onto structural safety, so trust is felt as well as implied.

## Ethical considerations and boundaries

For you, ethical risk in this capability rarely comes from over-involvement. It is more likely to arise from over-reliance on distance as protection. Risks may include:

- assuming safety rather than checking it;
- prioritising control over inclusion;
- mistaking emotional neutrality for safety.

Ethical trust requires attention not just to what is held back, but to what is invited.

## Reflective practice to consider

Use the questions below to reflect on this capability.

- *How do I usually signal safety to clients?*
- *In what contexts do I become more reserved?*
- *How do clients respond when situations feel emotionally complex?*
- *What tells me a client feels safe enough to go further?*
- *How might I make safety more explicit without losing integrity?*

These reflections are particularly valuable in supervision, where relational dynamics can be explored thoughtfully.

You build trust through steadiness, professionalism and thoughtful engagement. When applied with awareness, this creates strong psychological safety, particularly in complex or high-stakes contexts.

By noticing when safety becomes conditional on control and consciously signalling trust even in uncertainty, you can ensure that their style supports openness as well as rigour.

### **How this capability aligns with major frameworks**

- **International Coaching Federation (ICF)**  
*Establishes and Maintains Trust and Safety*  
Trust enables openness, risk-taking and learning within the coaching relationship.
- **European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC)**  
*Creating the Environment; Managing the Relationship*  
Psychological safety supports reflective dialogue and ethical practice.
- **Association for Coaching (AC)**  
*Building and Sustaining the Relationship*  
*Trust and safety are essential for effective and responsible coaching conversations.*

# Appendices

## Appendix A

# Capability to competency mapping table

<b>Capability (book)</b>	<b>ICF Core Competencies</b>	<b>EMCC Framework</b>
<b>Questioning and curiosity</b>	Active Listening Evokes Awareness	Challenge and Support Facilitating Learning
<b>Trust and psychological safety</b>	Establishes and Maintains Trust and Safety	Creating the Environment Managing the Relationship
<b>Challenge and support</b>	Evokes Awareness Maintains Trust and Safety	Challenge and Support
<b>Action and accountability</b>	Facilitates Client Growth	Goal Clarity and Accountability
<b>Ethical judgement and boundaries</b>	Demonstrates Ethical Practice	Ethical Practice and Professional Standards
<b>Maintaining presence (across capabilities)</b>	Maintains Presence Coaching Mindset	Presence and Attunement
<b>Listening (across capabilities)</b>	Active Listening	Attentive Listening
<b>Reflection and supervision (integrated throughout)</b>	Coaching Mindset Reflective Practice	Supervision and Continuous Development

This table illustrates how the coaching capabilities explored in this book align with recognised professional frameworks, while being approached developmentally through the lens of personality, judgement and reflective practice.

<b>Association for Coaching (AC)</b>	<b>How this book approaches the capability</b>
Effective Communication Enabling Insight	Explores how curiosity and questioning are shaped by personality, judgement and comfort with uncertainty, focusing on how questions are asked and when inquiry opens or narrows thinking.
Building and Sustaining the Relationship	Examines how trust and safety are created through presence, boundaries and response to vulnerability, rather than rapport alone, including risks of over-support or avoidance.
Enabling Insight Managing the Relationship	Frames challenge as a relational and judgement-based capability, shaped by tolerance for tension and clarity of intent, rather than a technique to apply.
Enabling Responsibility and Action	Explores how action and accountability emerge through shared ownership, timing and responsibility, rather than pressure or task enforcement.
Ethics and Professional Conduct	Positions ethics as lived, moment-to-moment judgement under pressure, shaped by self-management, awareness of role and willingness to hold boundaries.
Self-Management	Addresses presence as an internal state influenced by confidence, pressure and emotional regulation, rather than a performative coaching stance.
Effective Communication	Explores how listening shifts with certainty, pressure and judgement, including where listening may narrow once clarity forms.
Reflective Practice and Supervision	Positions supervision as developmental inquiry into patterns, judgement and ethical awareness, supported by structured reflection rather than performance review.

## Appendix B

# Using this book in supervision and accreditation

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This book is designed to support coaching practice over time. While it is not an accreditation manual, it aligns closely with the intent of major professional coaching frameworks and can be used confidently alongside supervision, reflective practice and accreditation pathways.

### Using this book in supervision

Supervision allows patterns to be surfaced, assumptions to be tested and ethical judgement to be strengthened. This book is particularly well suited to supervision because it focuses on:

- coaching style rather than technique;
- patterns rather than isolated behaviours;
- strengths and overuse rather than deficits;
- judgement under pressure rather than ideal conditions.

### How supervisors may use this book

Supervisors may use this book to:

- explore recurring themes in a coach's practice;
- normalise stylistic differences without lowering standards;
- identify where strengths may be overplaying;
- support conscious stretch without loss of authenticity.

Chapters in Part 4 are especially useful as prompts for supervision dialogue, as they link professional capability directly to lived coaching behaviour.

## **Supervision questions prompted by this book**

The following questions may be useful in supervision:

- *Which coaching capabilities feel most natural for you and which feel effortful?*
- *Where do you notice your judgement becoming most certain?*
- *How does your personality show up under pressure?*
- *What feedback patterns repeat across clients?*
- *Where might stretch increase your range without diluting your style?*

These questions support reflective depth rather than performance evaluation.

## **Using this book for reflective practice**

Many accreditation pathways require evidence of reflective practice. This book can be used as a structured reflective companion. You may choose to:

- journal responses to the reflective questions in each chapter;
- revisit specific chapters when challenges recur;
- use the capability chapters to frame learning logs or reflective essays;
- note shifts in awareness over time.

Because the book focuses on patterns rather than prescriptions, it supports meaningful reflection rather than retrospective justification.