

COACHING FOR CHANGE • A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE • CLIMATE RESILIENCE • TAKING ACTION

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**Climate
Consciousness
& Coaching**

Making the connection

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Going Upstream

How coaches can make the shift from reacting to shaping a sustainable future

By Lydia Stevens & Grattan Donnelly

Business, governments and all of humanity require a shift in mindsets and leadership capabilities to tackle the polycrises we are facing. As Albert Einstein said: “The thinking that got us to where we are is not the thinking that will get us to where we want to be.”

Coaching is well positioned to support leaders in transforming from old ways of thinking and being into what is now needed to sustain and regenerate a thriving planet. This article examines why coaching and climate change are connected, and how you as a coach can play an invaluable role in tackling the crisis.

Let’s begin by sharing a story. A group of villagers downstream can remember the day the first body came down the river. Every day more bodies came down the river, and while the villagers got better

at rescuing, many people still drowned. Over the years, the villagers built amazing infrastructure and got faster boats, more modern ambulances and first rate hospitals. Yet the bodies continued to come down the river, and while many were rescued, many still drowned.

Every now and again, some of the villagers would ask: “Maybe we should go upstream and find out what’s causing the bodies to end up in the river?” Invariably they were met with: “No, no. We’re far too busy to go upstream. The work we are doing here is way too important. We can’t let people drown!”

Most of us know that how we are living our lives is not sustainable. “Business-as-usual” and “busyness-as-usual” are taking us in the wrong direction. There is a real opportunity for coaches to invite clients to go upstream and take preventative action.

This is a systemic issue that requires collective action and a shift in perspectives, demanding a profound transformation in how individuals, organizations and societies operate.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Our economy and livelihoods are dependent on a healthy society, which is in turn dependent on a healthy planet. This was clearly shown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are flip sides of the same coin, and are also interconnected with rising inequality across the globe.

Those who have caused the most harm generally don’t live in small island states whose homes are already being submerged by rising sea levels, so these existential crises can often feel distant yet overwhelming and disempowering.

WHY COACHING?

Coaching is a process that fosters self-awareness, growth and transformational change. By cultivating climate consciousness, coaches can support leaders, teams and individuals to get out of the river and go upstream to find ways of contributing to a better future for all. Coaches help clients find purpose, meaning and motivation in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. What if nature also had a voice at the table?

Organizations are required to comply with increasingly stringent environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards. Leaders require coaches who are comfortable supporting and challenging different perspectives when faced with complexity, uncertainty and “not-knowing.”

Coaching traditionally covers the self, team and organizational levels. The 6 Systems Dimensions model below invites a wider context for coaching. To what extent do you work across all six dimensions?

In our contracting with clients, what if nature was a stakeholder? What if nature had a voice? How would longer term time horizons frame the risks to the

business? The interconnected systems diagram can support this discussion with clients.

Do we feel isolated in stepping away from mainstream coaching? What is holding us back from serving not just the person or team in front of us, but the whole of humanity and all living systems?

CLIMATE COACHING TOOLS

The Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA) is a global network of around 4,000 coaches who share a common purpose: “transforming our practice; transforming our impact; and transforming the profession.” The CCA’s 2024 Shaping Tomorrow Playbook has many tools, practices and approaches that can be adapted as needed by coaches when working with clients in response to the climate crisis.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has certified a Climate Biodiversity coaching course based on the framework in the graphic below.

Here are some practical ways that coaches can include tackling the climate crisis as part of their approach to coaching:

1 Establish & Maintain Agreements

Setting up clear agreements and maintaining psychological safety are core to coaching. How might you modify your existing agreements and discuss your own values in relation to the six systems dimensions diagram above? What language and priority does your client place on long term climate and biodiversity outcomes as well as the day to day? What language does the client use to cover aspects of sustainability or regeneration? What role would they like the coach to play?

2 Think & Relate Systemically

Coaching encourages a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of actions and their consequences. For example, a coach might help a corporate executive recognize how sustainability initiatives can align with profitability while fostering environmental stewardship. Nature is interconnected and we can learn how nature operates when working with our clients.

3 Understand Presence in Relation to Climate and Biodiversity Coaching

Be mindful and present in coaching, particularly in the context of climate and biodiversity challenges.

4 Demonstrate Ethical Practice

Ensure ethical behavior in coaching, particularly when engaging with sensitive or complex climate and nature related topics. Coaches often operate within ethical frameworks that emphasize doing no harm and acting in the client’s best interest. Addressing climate change aligns with these principles by ensuring actions are sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders.

5 Integrate Climate Science into Coaching Without Attachment

Use climate science knowledge lightly, and let go of emotional attachment to the outcome. Are we letting go of our own fears? How are we supporting our clients to find collaborative, creative solutions alongside multiple stakeholders, including nature? Does the space we hold

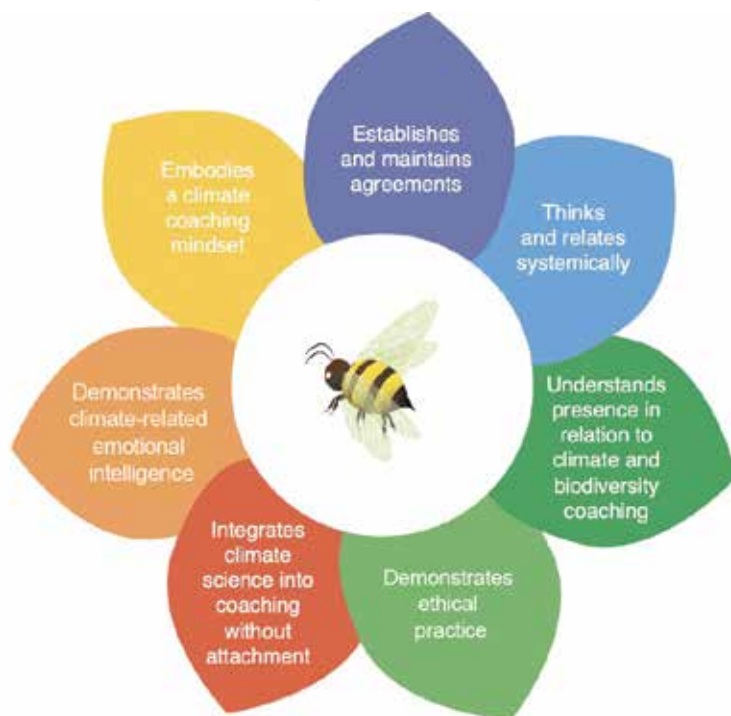
Think Like a Forest

6 Systems Dimensions framework



Source: Think Like a Tree, Sarah Spencer & J.K. McQuinn

Framework for Climate Biodiversity Coaching Capabilities



Source: Climate Biodiversity Coaching CIC

facilitate experimenting with steps towards long-lasting outcomes which make sense ecologically, and are meaningful to them?

6 Demonstrate Climate-Related Emotional Intelligence

Show empathy and emotional awareness while addressing climate concerns and help others process their feelings around these issues. Climate change can evoke fear, grief and helplessness, which can paralyze action. Coaches can help clients process these emotions constructively, building the resilience needed to face difficult truths and make courageous decisions.

7 Embody a Climate Coaching Mindset

Reflect a personal and professional commitment to sustainability and climate-conscious practices will be reflected in our coaching and vice versa. As Edna Murdoch said: “Who you are is how you coach.” We all come with our biases and perspectives, and the more we understand climate-related issues, the better we are able to support

our clients finding their own paths out of the situation we all find ourselves in.

Climate consciousness and coaching are deeply interconnected. Coaching offers a powerful avenue to inspire and empower individuals and organizations to tackle the challenges of climate change with courage, creativity and compassion. By developing leaders’ capacities to think systemically, align with their values and embrace transformative change, coaches play a crucial role in shaping a sustainable future.

Coaching creates a safe space for leaders to venture upstream and question what is needed for the biosphere and wider ecosystem to be supported. The time to connect the dots between coaching and climate action is now. Together, we can transform awareness into action and contribute to a thriving planet for future generations to enjoy. •

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- thinklikeatree.co.uk
- climatebiodiversitycoaching.com
- grattandonnelly.com
- climatecoachingalliance.org
- jgsg.one



Invitation to Pause, Reflect & Journal

1. What images come to mind when you read this article?
2. Close your eyes and dream of a positive future for you, your family and future generations. What questions are your children and grandchildren asking of you?
3. Look at the Climate Biodiversity Coaching Capabilities graphic and score yourself (from 1 to 10) in relation to each petal. Why have you chosen each number, and where would you like to be?
4. Where are you in relation to supporting your clients in tackling the cause and/or effect of climate change and biodiversity loss?
5. What are your own challenges and opportunities? What are your own strengths, and what would you like to improve in your practice and your own consciousness around climate and biodiversity?