

Coaching for a changing world

*What are pioneer coaches teaching us about climate, systems and purpose, and how we put these learnings into practice?
Claire d'Aboville, Padraic O'Donnell and Fran Smith report*

The pioneers we interviewed



Zoe Cohen
UK



Charly Cox
UK



Hein Dijksterhuis
Netherlands



Prof. Peter Hawkins
UK



Tania Hodgkinson
Cyprus



Dr Duménil Magadela
South Africa



Don Maruska
USA



Dr Josie McLean
Australia



Rashmi Shetty
India



Stéphane Riot
France



Silvia Tassarotti
Italy



Jing Ye
China

It's difficult to escape the extreme weather events reported by NASA (2021), whether we experience them directly or watch them unfold in the news.

Awareness is rising: a United Nations study shows that 56% of people globally think about climate change daily or weekly, while 89% want stronger action from their government (UN, 2024). Human activity is acknowledged by 97-99% of the scientific community as the cause of current global warming (Allen et al., 2018).

In this context, compelling research shows that pioneering coaches demonstrate how our profession can help reverse course and embrace a regenerative story emerging alongside the disaster narrative. ➔

Survey results

The survey was taken by 229 members of the Climate Coaching Alliance, who represent professionals interested in responding to the climate and ecological crisis. Ninety-three per cent of respondents were coaches.

The vast majority (93%) incorporate systems change and consciousness shifts into their work. Some 68% of respondents reported their work in this area is both voluntary and paid, an indication that motivation is purpose-driven.

The biggest challenge faced is a lack of interest or pushback from clients (51%) followed by feeling they cannot introduce the topic due to coaching ethics (28%). Training and support have been sought in a variety of ways: participation in webinars/workshops (82%); reading and self-study (82%); reflective practice such as journaling (62%), specialist courses (56%) and peer coaching (56%), among others.

The majority of respondents have also made personal changes to their lifestyles, for example, in the areas of conserving and connecting with nature (61% significant change), recycling (61% significant change) and consumption (52% significant change).

HOW THIS RESEARCH BEGAN

We are three coaches (Francesca Smith, Padraic O'Donnell and Claire d'Aboville) who met on a climate coaching course. We came away with one big question:

How do we put this into practice?

We decided to learn from coaches who'd already walked this path and who had been earning revenue for at least two years through sustainability, regenerative or climate coaching. We wanted true global representation and scanned our networks accordingly. Our objective was simple: to learn from pioneers and share their insights.

DEFINITIONS

A range of terminology is being used by coaches. Sustainability coaching aims at maintaining balance and reducing harm with a mindset of preservation and responsibility. A regenerative approach focuses on restoring, renewing and enabling systems to evolve, with a mindset of vitality, creativity and co-evolution, mirroring nature itself.

Unsurprisingly, pioneers spoke constantly about 'systems', recognising the interaction between individual actions and wider structures. Interestingly, several didn't resonate with the term 'climate coaching', contesting its existence or narrow focus. Likewise, the ICF Converge conference audience (2025, San Diego, California) felt more drawn to 'regeneration' than 'climate'.

Climate coaching incorporates a systems perspective, works with emotional reactions to climate change and addresses our sense of power and agency.

For the sake of simplicity, we will often refer to 'sustainability coaching' in this article.

ICF CONVERGE 2025

Our enthusiasm grew with the acceptance for us to speak about future

Obstacles	Solutions
Client frustration and overwhelm caused by slow decision-making and the complexity of climate challenges.	Use a systemic lens and small, actionable steps to restore agency.
Risk of judgement or misalignment due to unclear boundaries or consent.	Maintain humility and use clear contracting to ensure alignment.
Emotional fatigue for coaches working with climate-related issues.	Support coach well-being through time in nature and reflective peer support.
Resistance in corporate settings where sustainability feels disconnected from business priorities.	Link sustainability and regenerative practices to core business goals and benefits.
Concern about demoralising clients or disengagement from climate topics.	Cultivate realistic hope through action, holding the topic lightly and refocusing when needed.

coaching trends. We had a deadline, an opportunity and an audience. Kat Haber, a coach and TED Talk organiser, joined Francesca to co-present. We chose a mixed-methods approach: qualitative research through interviews with pioneering coaches in the area, and quantitative research via a survey of members of the Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA), coaches active or interested in this field.

PIONEERS: VARIED PROFILES

We aimed for representation from all continents but couldn't identify coaches in South America or the Middle East fitting our requirements, emphasising how new this focus is to the coaching profession. We interviewed 12 individuals with diverse specialities but a deep concern for the environment.

What they share is a willingness to push boundaries and the courage to step up while remaining true to coaching principles. Several have written books on climate and coaching, and some are so established that clients seek them out specifically for this work.

All pioneers express a deep passion for helping clients move towards more sustainable or regenerative ways of being. Almost all mention future generations, often their own children or grandchildren. Connection to

nature, and grief at witnessing loss in the natural world, are other strong drivers. Some are motivated by transforming their grief or anger into purpose.

Many feel called to raise awareness to the poly-crisis, including social injustice: wealthier individuals contribute more to environmental degradation, while poorer communities suffer most from extreme weather events (*Schleussner & Heyl, 2025; Guivarch, Taconet, & Méjean, 2021*).

Unsurprisingly, these drivers touch on survival and morality. Dear reader, you might pause and ask yourself which, if any, resonate with you. The CCA members surveyed share similar concerns (*See box, p45: Survey results*).

HOW ARE COACHES INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY IN THEIR WORK?

Our interviews with pioneer coaches revealed several practical ways sustainability can be thoughtfully integrated into coaching while remaining aligned with core coaching principles. Survey results from CCA coaches reinforced these pioneer approaches.

One common entry point is the use of extreme weather events to open conversations about climate change. Because these events often arise

The questions we asked

How would you answer them?

1. How do climate, sustainability and ecology currently come into your work as a coach?
2. What originally motivated you to engage in climate change coaching, and what motivates you now?
3. How do you evoke awareness about the ecological and climate crisis in your clients?
4. How do you contract around climate-related issues? Do you ever bring it up yourself?
5. What percentage of your revenue is generated by climate coaching-related work?
6. Which obstacles have you faced, and what have you learned (initial obstacles and those you faced once more established)?
7. How have you found support?
8. How has your work had a positive impact? Please illustrate or describe a success story.
9. How have your professional skills developed through working with clients on these issues?
10. What do you see as the contribution of coaching towards solving the climate and ecological crisis?
11. Which tips would you give fellow coaches interested in adding climate coaching to their work?
12. How do you think climate coaching will evolve?

Success stories

- **Josie** co-created the Climate Coaching Alliance in November 2019. A politician, former leadership-training participant from a course Josie ran, later supported the large-scale adoption of solar panels across Australia.
- **Charly** founded the Climate Change Coaches learning organisation to accelerate the green transition through coaching and training. Some 43,000 people have now been trained in 26 countries. Charly observes growing confidence in her corporate clients.
- With 20 years' experience, **Stéphane** helped an executive in a destructive industry undergo a deep inner shift by reconnecting her with the beauty of the planet, ultimately leading her into the green transition economy.

naturally in coaching sessions, 76% of surveyed coaches reported using this approach. It allows coaches to gauge a client's interest and decide whether to explore the topic further.

Many pioneer coaches intentionally frame climate work systemically, helping clients see their challenges within broader contexts. Coaches support connections between climate issues, values, purpose and legacy through reflective questions such as how values of family, nature or justice relate to climate change.

CCA survey data show systemic thinking is already embedded in coaching practice: 91% link it to values work, 96% to long-term planning and legacy, 64% raise it in chemistry conversations, and 38% include it in coaching agreements. One example clause reads: *"I will sometimes ask questions to provoke reflection on the impact of decisions on society, the*

ecosystem, and future generations."

Transparency is essential. Communicating environmental values early, such as in a proposal, helps climate-related questions feel appropriate. Coaches can remain curiosity-driven while respecting a client's choice not to pursue the topic.

Additional practices include supporting emotional processing around climate change, incorporating embodiment, bringing nature into coaching sessions, and hosting leadership retreats in natural environments.

SOLUTIONS TO OBSTACLES

Our research identified key obstacles and effective approaches for integrating climate, sustainability, and regenerative themes into coaching (*see box, p46: Obstacles and Solutions*).

Pioneers have helped organisations embed sustainability into leadership,

reshape their business strategy to bring sustainability and purpose more to the front, frame leaders as change agents, and design concrete ecological actions. Individuals experience profound inner shifts and connect with their ecological identity, while organisations undergo cultural change and launch green initiatives.

The snowball effects are significant. Some clients move into new roles or organisations, carrying these mindsets with them (*see box above*).

The data is clear: there's growing momentum to bring green perspectives into coaching. With 93% of surveyed coaches already integrating systems change into their practice, we're witnessing a fundamental evolution from individual performance coaching to regenerative partnership. Nearly 40% of survey respondents have adopted these perspectives in the last five

Question 1. *In the face of the climate and ecological crisis with widespread systemic injustice & destruction, I see facilitating a shift in human consciousness and a focus on future-fit systemic change as part of my professional role* (229 responses)

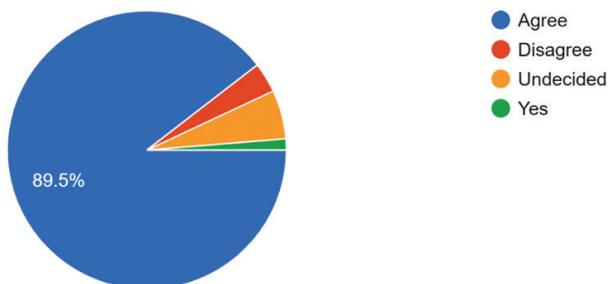


Figure 1. Motivators of CCA members, 229 respondents

years, signalling a rapid maturation of the field.

The transition from a niche interest to a core competency requires a paradigm shift in our ethical framework. We must move past the fear that discussing the climate is ‘imposing an agenda’ and, instead, recognise that ecological health is the foundation of all client contexts. When 77% of coaches report these issues surfacing naturally, it proves that the ‘outer world’ is already in the room.

To bridge the gap between awareness and action, coaches are developing the internal plumbing to handle complexity, uncertainty, and the intense emotions, both their own and their clients’, that the crisis evokes. This requires courageous contracting. By meeting clients with curiosity and navigating real or perceived pushback with empathy, exploration and mutual agreement, coaches act as catalysts for a multi-layered leverage effect. Impact ripples from an inner shift in personal values to outward organisational and societal change.

THE PATH FORWARD

To sustain this momentum, our ecosystem needs alignment:

● **Practising coaches** *How can you integrate an ecological perspective through your clients’ world, values and needs?*

● **Professional bodies** *How can climate and environmental-related competencies be embedded into credentialing frameworks so they support rather than block their integration?*

● **Educators** *How can you incorporate climate literacy and broader systems perspectives into your curricula, providing coaches with opportunities to learn, discuss, and integrate them?*

We, coaches, are no longer just catalysts for individual growth; we’re agents for wider systemic resilience. 🌱

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

● **Claire d’Aboville** PCC has been an executive coach since 2010. She supports organisations and individuals with sustainability at the heart of their strategy. She is part of the global leadership of the Climate Coaching Alliance.

● **Padraic O’Donnell** PCC has been an educational leadership coach since 2012. His focus is on raising awareness for sustainability and regenerative practices within educational organisations.

● **Fran Smith** MSc PCC has been a leadership coach since 2015. She also works as a coach educator and co-leads the Brazilian community of the Climate Coaching Alliance.

FURTHER INFORMATION

● Watch interviews on the CCA website: www.climatecoachingalliance.org/pioneers-12/

● The CCA’s Claire d’Aboville, Fran Smith and Kat Haber have been interviewed on the research and the video will be released at *Coaching at Work’s* Climate Coaching Action Day on 5 March. *More info here:* www.climatecoachingactionday.info/whats-happening/

References

- NASA (2021). <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/extreme-weather/>
- United Nations (27 June, 2024). *The world’s largest survey on climate change is out. Here’s what the results show.* <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/worlds-largest-survey-climate-change-out-heres-what-results-show>
- Allen, M.R., et al. (2018). Framing and Context. In Masson-Delmotte, V., et al. (eds.), *Global Warming of 1.5 °C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.* Cambridge University Press, pp. 49-92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157940.003>
- Schleussner, C., & Heyl, A. (7 May 2025). The world’s wealthiest 10% caused two thirds of global warming since 1990. In *International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2025.* <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-025-02325-x>
- Guivarch, C., Taconet, N., & Méjean, A. (2021). Linking Climate and Inequality. *F&D Magazine*, September 2021.