



THE ICC ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR GROWING GREAT COACHES

MARCH 2023



HI WONDERFUL COACHES,

We hope you're doing well and that you've settled into the swing of the year. It's hard to believe that Easter is nearly here!

As you know, clients usually approach a coach because they're not in a great headspace. Perhaps they feel stressed, or just stuck in a rut, going around and around the same old challenge.

When clients are in this un-resourceful state, especially if there are intense feelings like anxiety or fear involved, there's a good chance that the amygdala is running the show, upstairs. The amygdala is part of the brain's limbic system, which is responsible for identifying threats, figuring out how to respond, and storing that information so it can be used again in future.

It's comparable to a very clever guard dog. But the challenge is that when we're in a state of stress or overwhelm, the amygdala and limbic system become too dominant, and our clients can no longer think in a logical or rational way.

How might we help clients to move through their overwhelm, so they can start to respond in a more considered way? One key strategy is **affective labelling**, or naming the emotions in order to tame them, as described by Dr Daniel Siegel, Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA. [Researchers have found](#) that when people are put into an fMRI machine and prompted into a stress state, the simple act of describing feelings in words leads to a downswing in activity in the fear centre (ie the amygdala and limbic system), and an upswing in activity in the cortex, which is generally associated with executive function and rational thought.

So labelling emotions is positive, because it helps our clients out of that high-stress state. But it's even better if clients have a *wide range* of emotional labels, and the ability to distinguish between similar but different emotions. This is called **emotional granularity**, and it shows up when we can tell the difference between, for instance, fear that a talk might go badly, excitement at the chance to address such a large audience, and hope that this event will lead to future work.

EMOTIONAL GRANULARITY IS USEFUL ON MULTIPLE FRONTS

First off, on the negative front. If someone can describe *specifically* what they are feeling, then they'll be better placed to identify the *cause* of that feeling, and *to do something about it*. In one diary study, researchers found that people who can distinguish between different negative emotions use a wider range of coping strategies – like removing themselves from a situation, seeking to control what they can, reframing the situation in their mind, or engaging in self-soothing activities like exercise and relaxation. In contrast, if someone feels a *general sense* of anxiety or foreboding, it's very difficult to address it – and it may lead to unhelpful coping mechanisms. What a great insight for us as coaches to have to get those negative feelings specifically expressed in the coaching session.

Second, in a mirror image of the point above, being able to distinguish between positive emotions can help people to identify what causes those feelings, and to design the contributing factors into their life. For instance, if running a half-marathon evokes a runner's high from the endorphins, pride from doing something challenging, and belonging thanks to running with friends – then the runner can find ways to dial up their baseline level of exercise, challenge and belonging, to maintain those positive experiences and feelings. For those of you who have done the ICC Foundational Coach Training programme, you will recognise the similarity of this research with the "value behind the goal" exercise we learn on the course.

The third benefit of emotional granularity? It's a super-skill that is linked to better interpersonal relationships and performance. Because when you understand yourself, you're also in a better position to understand other people, and to operate in a more emotionally intelligent way. Therefore as coaches we can help enhance EQ through various coaching approaches or models that can help our clients define these emotions.

In short, emotional granularity matters. We can play a key role in helping our clients to get *more specific* in describing what they feel, so they can be *more deliberate* in addressing stressors and dialling up the good things in their lives.

What's more, neuroscientists have shown that emotions are the engine of action, when it comes to behaviour change. So when you reach the end of your coaching sessions, it's useful to test your client's commitment to their next step. Is their heart really in it? Do they feel there's value in that action? If not, keep the discussion open and put the onus on the client to come up with a next step that they find compelling.

Finally, if you're feeling *unsure* of your emotional vocab, *curious* about the breadth of emotional descriptors out there, or *excited* about adding to your repertoire – you may like to check out [Atlas of the Heart by Brene Brown](#). The book covers 87 emotions and experiences that unite us as humans, and it's both an informative and insightful read.

Have a wonderful Easter break when it comes, and we'll see you in April!

The team at ICC New Zealand

2024 DATES FOR COACH TRAINING

FOUNDATION COACH TRAINING

May-Jul 2024

Module 1: 22nd and 23rd May

Module 2: 5th and 6th June

Module 3: 19th and 20th June

Oct-Nov 2024

Module 1: 16th and 17th October

Module 2: 30th and 31st October

Module 3: 13th and 14th November

Module 4: 27th and 28th November

TEAM COACH TRAINING

Aug-Sept 2024

Module 1: 20th, 21st and 22nd of August

Module 2: 17th, 18th and 19th of September



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