

Episode 62 – Emotion at Work in AI in the Future of Coaching

Phil Willcox: Hello, and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast where we take a deep dive into the human condition. And today's topic is one that has been kind of present and prevalent in the workforce for I think it's got to be at least the last 15, if not 20 years. And that's the role of coaching and to a certain degree, the future of coaching. And when I first encountered coaching probably back in, I don't know, when it was probably 2005, maybe 2006, it was very much a, an in sync, in person synchronous activity facilitated by a human and that has maintained consistently since then. However, I would probably say over the last few years approaches and methods of coaching have sort of changed and shifted, both in my practice in terms of doing remote coaching, and I'm a big fan of walking coaching as anyone who listens to the podcast will know already. And then more broadly in the coaching world and our guest today is Sam Isaacson, now Sam is a coach, a coaching and technology thought leader but also an organisational coaching adviser, and a trailblazer on a new coaching apprenticeship, which I'm really interested to find out more about as we work our way through this episode today. And Sam's got perspectives on the present and the future of coaching. Sam is also an author and writes covering all aspects of coaching with technology and email and coaching platforms and metaverse. And one of his most recent books, Superhuman Coaching highlights 10 technologies that can catalyse creativity in coaching conversations. Just got to love that alliteration within, the within tagline. So, let's get our guest on the air. So welcome to the emotion at work podcast Sam Isaacson. Hi, Sam.

Sam Isaacson: Hi, Phil. Yeah, it's great to be with you today. Thank you for having me.

Phil Willcox: Oh, thank you so much for agreeing to come on. I'm really excited. I think this episode is gonna be really useful and practical one for our listeners. So yeah, really excited about today. So thank you for joining.

Sam Isaacson: Brilliant, yeah. And as per usual then for this podcast, will open with an unexpected yet innocuous question. So what I'd like to know from you then Sam is what's got you smiling recently?

Sam Isaacson: Do you know I was I knew that you were going to ask an unexpected question. And it's very difficult to prepare for something like that, isn't it? So? What has got me smiling recently? I suppose, as it's so silly and flippant, isn't it, but I am based in London, and the weather has become a little more sunny recently. And I can't deny that that has changed my mood a little bit, you know, from typical grey overcast to something that's little more positive. And looking forward to the summer, I have managed to book, there you go, this is a better answer. Next week is the children's school holiday. And I've got four children. And so it's a big part of my life, and managed to book in some time taking them away to see my parents and then also away just for a night or two with the whole family or with my you know, with my close family. So really looking forward to that. So that's definitely put a smile on my face.

Phil Willcox: Oh, wonderful. That sounds like it's gonna be good for you and for the children as well.

Sam Isaacson: I hope so, yes. Although I expect particularly going up to see my parents that that will end up being them childcare while I keep on doing a bit of work in the background. So I'll try to keep that to a minimum but you know, it never goes away.

Phil Willcox: I'm sure they enjoy that responsibility that they take on as well Sam.

Sam Isaacson: Yes. Yeah, absolutely.

Phil Willcox: So what's got me smiling recently? So I'm not I don't feel like I've smiled that much recently. So definitely, I'm yesterday. So we're recording this on a Monday. So yesterday was a Sunday, which is the day my son plays football. So I was definitely smiling yesterday. So partly because his team won and he scored which was which was good. But I did have a bit of Chardon Freud yesterday, which was smiling at someone else's misfortune. So one of his, one of his teammates were stood on the on the side of the pitch and one of the defenders for the other team came across and kicks the ball out of play. And it hit his his teammate in a rather delicate place and, and I did find that quite funny. I'm not sure his parents found it as funny as I did, but I certainly found it quite funny and I can hear it in my voice that I'm still smiling about it now.

Sam Isaacson: No judgement from me on that at all. Having kicked a football yesterday at my son and kicking him in what sounds like exactly the same place so yeah, I'm I've got little more empathy for him.

Phil Willcox: Oh wonderful and I think a big part of why, why I came up with the use of the innocuous questions is partly because of the I don't know, I tried to try and change the rituals that happened in conversations. So the kind of blind date classic, what's your name? Or where do you come from? But also from a personal perspective, from a coaching point of view, I find having the innocuous questions are a useful addition to my kind of coaching kitbag, I suppose not necessarily for for the middle of a coaching session when you're already in a topic, but as a way of kind of entering in to a to a conversation that that can still kind of elicit useful information. It doesn't necessarily feel as ritualised or that you have to like dive straight into the into the coaching topic as it were, I find it gives us a nice way in. Do you have a particular way that you kind of open up? Or you start coaching sessions that you run Sam?

Sam Isaacson: No, not particularly, which is, I guess it's part of my calling card is that I, I surprise myself, I tend to go with whatever I'm, whatever occurs to me in that moment, I'm definitely not the biggest fan of the way that I was trained to start coaching sessions, which is to ask the coachee, you know, what topic have you brought today? Or what would you like to achieve from our time together? Because I find that I suppose I was taught that the way to coach according to the textbook is to ask the coachee, what their goal is for the session. And then they come up with this perfectly formed goal. And then we have a conversation about the goal, and then they go off and do an action that's connected to the goal. And then in practice, what I find is that, even if I ask them, what goal have you brought, and they've brought one, we end up talking about all sorts of different things. And in fact, the, you know, the value that's in the conversation is helping them to discover that they, you know, they haven't got as nearly as much clarity around the situation as they do in real life, because

reality doesn't really work like that. So I tend to, I tend to just say, what comes into my head? Really? Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, I have a similar experience, I think in terms of where we begin, or where, okay, she may think they want to begin a conversation may be different to where it goes or where it ends up. And, and I think the when, when I first got introduced to Nancy Klein's work, the thinking environment, I can't remember when that was now, nine years ago, I think, 9, 10 years ago. That really changed my perspective on, on, on thinking about, you know, really giving the coachee that freedom to go where their thinking wants to go, rather than, you know, where they first say, yes, this is the goal I'd like to talk about, or this is the topic that's bothering me today, or whatever that might be. So yeah.

Sam Isaacson: I do I sometimes use Nancy, Nancy Klein's opening question, which is, what would you like to think about today? And what are your thoughts? I sometimes use that one. And I'm quite a big fan of her work. I think that's been quite instrumental in terms of the way that I approach coaching. In fact, I was listening to some coaching feedback from a supervisor this morning, who said, there's one thing that I really admire about your coaching Sam which is that you clearly very comfortable with silence, and you hold it in a way that then allows the coachee to sort of explore things. And then while talking about a separate point said he knows one thing that quite frustrates me about your coaching actually Sam, is that you need to increase your pace. Okay, there's a, there's a sort of shadow side to that strength, isn't there? So? Yes, definitely a big part of, I suppose who I've become as a coach. Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Okay. And you mentioned just off air before we before we hit the record button that you've you've got a role as a, as I mentioned it in the introduction, is it a trailblazer on occasioning? Apprenticeship? Is that right?

Sam Isaacson: Yeah, that's right. So that, and this is gonna get a little bit technical, which is going to really excite certain people and turn other people off. But within the world of apprenticeships, when a new apprenticeship is created, then there's this concept of a trailblazer group and so you get a number of employers who have committed at least hypothetically to using a potential future apprenticeship. And it's that group that then works together to define the knowledge skills and behaviours, which would be required to do this particular role. And so back in well, I think in 2016, I think the story started when a group of people tried to start a trailblazer and didn't get government approval to, to form one. And so it didn't happen. And then in 2018, I picked up this role of being the chair of a new trailblazer group. And, you know, coaching has become very popular, is now a central part of the way a lot of organisations think about leadership and about development and culture change. And so we were able to form a group, very quickly, I ended up with more than 100 employers of coaches in that group.

Phil Willcox: Wow.

Sam Isaacson: As well as all of the big coaching professional bodies. And and all of the ones that most organisations that try to train people to become coaches will have heard of, like the ILM and the CMI, British School of Psychology, and some of the, and some global organisations as well,

particularly training organisations. And yes, we worked very hard to try to navigate this system over a couple of years. And in 2020, it was signed off by government, and so it's live now. And what that offers is organisations that would like to train their people to become coaches can get funding for that from the apprenticeship levy, so that effectively, they get the training for free, if they're a bigger employer, if you're a small employer, so you don't pay into the apprenticeship levy, then you still have to pay 5% of the fee, which is almost nothing. When you think about a professional qualification. So it's a really great thing, I'm so happy to have been part of that I'm not going to be starting to do anything else in that space ever again. But in terms of having something to have achieved, I'm really pleased with kind of how that turned out. Yeah.

Phil Willcox: And I guess for the listener then, there must be a lot of useful insight that you'll have in terms of what are some of those approaches that might work for for kind of developing and creating coaching pools or coaching networks within organisations? Or if you're looking to work with coaches, what would be kind of a useful way to do that? So is that something you'd be willing to share? In terms of some yeah, what would be some of those practical or useful approaches or techniques or hints or tips that you would give?

Sam Isaacson: Yeah, so yeah, absolutely. Having had conversations in a one to one setting, and in bigger groups with all of these people who are part of the trailblazer group, I've managed to get this insight into how organisations or particularly the biggest fans of coaching, you know, those organisations that really are wanting to have coaching as a core part of what they're doing, how they're going about thinking about approaching that, you know, what their strategies are, what the business cases for coaching in their organisation, because that's different across different sectors, particularly and within different organisations themselves. And so yeah, the question around, I suppose the apprenticeship is focused specifically on training internal coaches, which is a good thing to do in a lot of organisations. And that works, whether that's creating an internal coach pool. So you know, we'd like to implement coaching in our organisation, and so creating a pool of internal coaches is a sensible thing to do. That's very rarely that looks like full time coaches, you know, a team of coaches within an L&D department. More often, it looks like, I use the term job plus coaching, which I'm not sure how widely used that is, but it was certainly used within our group. And, and that looks like people who have got kind of a real job, and then also contributing some time, you know, an hour a week or something like that to being part of an internal pool. And in a lot of cases, then it's really more about this idea of changing a leadership style within an organisation. So I was working with Grant Thornton, at the time that I started this work and Grant Thornton's approach had been looking into the future of accounting. There's a lot of technology that's being developed that's going to be able to do the work of an accountant at least as effectively and efficiently as a human accountant. So the strategy to kind of deal with that in terms of keeping the business going into the future could be let's invest heavily in technology and effectively become a technology company that delivers accounting services or, and it's also about increasing the human qualities of working with that particular firm, which then gives you a competitive advantage because actually going out and delivering accounting services to a certain extent, you're ticking the box to say that you've done it. And also, the client would like a certain experience around the edge of that, that's maybe more than just putting the tick in the box. And so having that strategic driver to say we're going to be adopting a coaching mindset at a leadership level, and we'd like that to be felt across the entire organisation. If you're able to do that, through a government funded qualification,

then that benefits all kinds of different people in different ways. And so that's quite a common use case, really, um, for how to implement that.

Phil Willcox: That's really interesting. And what what were some of the considerations? Either maybe the Grant Thornton had, or what would be some of the considerations that you would sort of suggest, so if there's people professional listening to this, whether they'd be working in organisational development, or maybe HR or learning and development, depending on the size of the organisation, so if they were thinking of, I'll ask quite inspirational actually, that that idea of having some of our processes or some of the ways you work by being more automated, and or we want to do that human development work and have this this, this this job plus pool of people who, who as well as being able to do their job pretty well can, can can take a coaching approach, what might be some of the the recommendations or maybe considerations for them?

Sam Isaacson: I suppose recommendation number one would be give me a call. Let's have a conversation.

Phil Willcox: Where can people find you?

Sam Isaacson: Yes, well, the answer to that question is, I'm on LinkedIn, that's always the easiest place to find anyone, isn't it? But it certainly is for me. So look me up, and you'll find me.

Phil Willcox: And we'll put a link, we'll put a link to your profile in the show notes as well Sam.

Sam Isaacson: Sure, thank you. I'm sure, but I suppose I write articles on LinkedIn relatively frequently. And one that I wrote quite recently, I think the title of it was something like when coaching needs to grow up. And it was talking about the maturity of coaching specifically within organisations. And that the way that I described this, and from my experience, I haven't done any proper peer reviewed research into this or anything, but from my experience, which I've had lots of conversations with people, I think it's relatively true is that a lot of organisations, the way that they use coaching starts with an individual joining the organisation who has had a positive experience of coaching from a previous organisation and therefore starts to introduce it within whatever their sphere of influence is. So that could be somebody within HR, L&D, OD, who thinks this is a good idea. And so let's try to build something ourselves, maybe they're a coach themselves, and so they start to offer that where they're the one that's providing it, or quite often it can be a senior leader joins and recognises the potential of somebody in their team, and, and sees this is something that is going to benefit the organisation certainly going to benefit my team. And so I would like to introduce you to the coach that I worked with. And so we start doing some coaching. But the coaching is kind of happening in pockets on an ad hoc basis, across the organisation, there's no consistency, there's no real strategy behind it, but it is there is coaching happening within the organisation. And as we go through this sort of capability maturity curve, you end up in a place where actually coaching can be delivered at scale, following an organisational purpose that's fully aligned to the strategy of the business. And it doesn't just work in businesses, you know, it could work in not for profits as well. Where that's there's a level of assurance that can be performed over the activity. So we can see how much coaching has happened, what sorts of themes are coming out of those coaching sessions, which elements of the organisation are using it more than others, and what value we're generating

from that, in some very unique cases that might look like ROI. But in a lot of cases, it's going to be something that's a bit more intangible like a leadership mindset change, or maybe something like the retention figures of staff within teams that are being led by somebody who's received that coaching. And when you can implement technology around that, then you're able to get a level of insight that increases the visibility of the impact that coaching is having, which then increases the justification for wanting to invest more in it because there's always this challenge around coaching, where everybody who receives coaching says that it's helpful and every coach knows that it's helpful, and yet at the same time, when there are challenging circumstances within markets or, you know, within a government budget, then it's an easy thing to cut. Because visibly what it looks like is people losing an hour or two, to have a conversation in a room and as pleasant as that conversation is it isn't delivering against what we need to. And so being able to demonstrate what value is being generated through this activity is a really powerful way for making sure we are providing assurance that their coaching is doing what it's meant to and increasing that investment into the future. So that's only really possible (a) through technology and (b) through thinking about it properly from a kind of top down purpose lead perspective, rather than that more ad hoc oh, you look like you could do some coaching and I know somebody's which is a complex thing to think through, but I think it's worth doing and doing properly.

Phil Willcox: Definitely. Definitely. Okay. So, so that that purpose, I guess, that purposeful, or deliberate, those deliberate, purposeful and deliberate choices around why are we doing this? And what is it we're trying to achieve? And, and how could that work? And in terms of developing those talent, herself, sorry, communicating into my talent management thing, because I was using the word pools and therefore I put the word talent in front of it. So if I'm, if I am looking to develop those, those coach pools or to develop that, that capability and or capacity for coaching within, within the organisation, is there something else or something more that, that our listeners should be thinking about? Or considering?

Sam Isaacson: Well, I, for me that it all, then it's all cascades from that, the purpose for it, and it doesn't need to be one purpose across the whole organisation, there might be several different purposes, you know, you've got one, which is a culture change piece, and another, which is a leadership development piece. And another, which is, I don't know, you know, the increasing the productivity within a team or supporting trainees with that public speaking capability or something like this and each of those purposes, ought to then flow into what the answer to that question is, because I've just talked a bit about internal coach pools, that isn't always the best solution, particularly if you've got something which is around a specific skill set. And I don't want to get too dragged into the difference between coaching and mentoring or consulting or training or anything like that. But if there's a particular focus area, you're thinking, we'd like to use coaching as a solution for this. But we haven't got the capabilities in house to be able to do that, then using an external coach or an external coaching provider, you know, it'd be able to do that at a larger scale. That's absolutely valid in some cases. And often at the most senior levels. I know there's been a move over the last 5, 10 years around this democratisation of coaching to not allow coaching to only be for that senior level, when we're thinking about the most senior levels, then there can be a challenge around offering them an internal coach who's working within their organisation and is more junior to them. There's concerns around confidentiality and skill set, and you know, the whole perception of hierarchy, which can be challenging for coach and coachee. So actually offering them an external

coach, it's certainly a cleaner approach, it's much easier to kind of have that conversation with somebody to say, oh, here's a coach, you know, they're excellent. Here's their profile, and they don't work within the organisation. So, yeah, for me, it does come back to purpose to get the right answer to that question, because it isn't, you know, it isn't a case of, well, you know, this provider is the best one. And so go with them for everything. I think thinking through when an internal coach pool is the best solution, and when an external coaches a better solution, or when there are other options, like using technology to replace the human coaching and interaction, which is almost always going to be cheaper, and often just as effective, then, yeah, we can consider that.

Phil Willcox: And I think I'll take that segue in a moment Sam. I think I wanted to build on what you were saying. So within Emotion at Work, so so there's five of us that work within Emotion at Work, and we all have a coach. So everyone and that coach is an external coach for that very reason that you were talking, well, I say for that very reason, for very similar reasons to the one that you're outlining there. So because we're a small organisation, I'm really I'm really conscious that being the founder or the I'm not even sure what my job title is, either the founder, the CEO, or the MD either way, you know being the boss I suppose. It it would force a different relationship, I think and so, so having an external coach in place, or an external coaching solution available for everybody. So some, you know, some are actively involved in with a coach at the moment others are not at the moment, and that's okay. But I made a deliberate choice to say it should be somebody from outside Emotion at Work rather than somebody from within, because I want them to have that, that, I guess that safety or that security in knowledge that whatever they discuss is whatever they discuss, and nothing makes its way back to me unless the coach is particularly concerned about their well-being or their welfare, or unless it's something that both the individual and the coach have consensus to be shared with me otherwise, whatever is discussed stays between the coach and the coachee. And I think that's a an important support mechanism for people to have in place. So yeah.

Sam Isaacson: Yeah, now that sounds exactly right. Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Okay, so let's take that, that segue that you gave me then into the into the technology solution then. So you mentioned that the technology solution can sometimes be cheaper, may sometimes be quicker to scale up as well, because you can always sort of switch the switch the tech on as soon as it's been purchased and approved. So what might be some of the, again, some of the considerations that an individual or an organisation might want to have, if they're thinking about using tech to support a coaching approach within their organisations.

Sam Isaacson: There's quite a lot to think about really, I think technology can feel quite tempting, and particularly, with everything that's been happening in the technology world, over the last, I mean, certainly in the last six months, but over the last several years, it feels like technology seems to be able to offer a solution to every problem. And yet, as it's doing that, it's presenting new issues and ethical dilemmas, some of which we're not even aware of yet. And so I it says certainly not something that we should just leap on. Because it's flavour of the month or because it seems to offer a solution to something without having thought that all the way through. I wrote a book a couple of years ago, called, "How to Thrive as a Coach in a Digital World". And in that one, then I talked about the benefits of technology, this is any technology, it doesn't have to be to do with coaching. I'll see if I can remember them off the top of my head, but it's effectively efficiency, consistency, which ties in

with risk management. So you know, a machine will do things the same way every time, won't make mistakes, it increases the scale, you're able to do things in, it expands the impact, and so allows you to do new things. And it's, it's more sustainable, it's not reliant on key individuals. And as a general rule, it's better for the environment as well. And at the same time, it presents new risks. And so there's risks that the technology just becomes unavailable. And suddenly, you're not able to do the thing that you had intended on doing, there's a risk that it could change. And when it changes, then people aren't able to use it in the same way. Or even if even if they know how to use it, then a change, you know, they can have an upgrade. And suddenly all of the buttons have changed places. And so it impacts on people's ability to use it well. There's risk around security. And in a coaching context, that's a huge issue. Because one of the core foundational principles of coaching is that it's a confidential conversation. And the sort of, you know, when you tell somebody something in confidence, then the expectation that you have is that that person is never going to tell anybody ever. And within a technology context. So we know we're speaking over Zoom at the moment. Zoom is a secure platform. And so we're able to have a conversation and we know that that message is being encrypted, there's a password on it, so people can't listen in. But it's not confidential, because if you're a Zoom administrator, then you do have access to it. It's authorised access. But that's not that's not what you want, you know, in a coaching conversation, you'd like it to be fully confidential. So it's a, it's an important distinction to draw. And of course, it can go wrong. People do get hacked. And there's how, there's another one as well. Oh, yes, it relies on data. And unfortunately, technology seems very confident. So regardless of what data you put into it, it will tell you that that is the answer to your question. And the data isn't always 100% complete and accurate. You know, it might, that there might be an interface that has gone down and so it hasn't got all of the data that it needs or that data could have got corrupted and so it's presenting something that's different. And we'll all have heard those stories around bias existing in datasets. And for us to not recognise that there's the bias there and try to do something to acknowledge that and address it is to miss an important piece of the puzzle. And we've seen something like this, you know, all of those together happening with the emergence of Chat, ChatGPT, which has happened in the last few months become very popular. And, you know, most people now have seen ChatGPT operating in some way. But almost all of those issues have been encountered, you know, it does just go down, you try to access it, and it just isn't available. Well, if you're starting to run an element of your organisation relying on that technology, that's a risk. You know, if you're trying to deliver coaching conversations, and people can't receive the coaching through that technology, then it's, it's useless, you know, it's worse than that. And it presents erroneous information. Through its design, you know, it's really good at generating information that looks valid. And as far as it's concerned, it is valid, because it's continuing the conversation, and it's giving you what you're asking for, but it could be presenting you with facts and statistics, and statistics, even referencing them to fictional journals, and, you know, giving you all kinds of information that just isn't true. And so there are all kinds of issues that we're encountering, as we use technology more and more. That doesn't mean that we should throw the baby out with the bathwater, because like I say, it's a really can save a huge amount of money if you're, you know, if you're running the NHS, so you've got more than a million employees, you do and under certainly with the budgets that the NHS has, you don't have the option of giving everybody a human coach. But you could have the option of giving them a tech or a piece of technology that can offer at least the indicators of what people might recognise as coaching. Yeah, and by that what I mean, is it I mentioned my foundational coach training and I'm not suggesting that everybody needs a coach that is a foundational coach. But some people would benefit from that

a lot. And the key things you're looking for, as a foundational coach are your ability to listen and understand, your ability to summarise and kind of play back what you're hearing, which is useful for the coachee. And then you ask good open questions that help the coachee in their thinking, particularly following some simple model, like a GROW Model or something like that. Well, a piece of technology can do that and beat a human every time. I would suggest that coaching as a philosophy is much deeper than that, and requires a human to a certain extent. But in terms of being able to deliver what, let's say 30% of coaches need, technology is more than able to do that as it currently exists. So I think to acknowledge it as part of the rich tapestry that we weave in supporting an organisation with its people support practices. I think it's sensible to do that. Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Yeah. And I think, again, talking experientially, you know, for me having having that as something that I could go to, when I'm just when I'm struggling to get my thinking clear on something. So it's not me, to then have somewhere I can go that says, you know, I don't know what, you know, what's on your mind at that moment. And then I put in what's on my mind, I've got, I've got too many things. I've not got enough time and I feel like I'm being pulled in in 20 different directions. You know, and then there's some kind of automated response, the who might be around for like, trying to write a script in my head up then some kind of automated response that maybe will, what do you, how do you feel about having those two different things and being pulled in all those different directions? What feelings is that creating for you? I'm feeling angry and frustrated and, and like, I'm letting people down and, and then things aren't progressing as well as they, as well as they'd like to. Okay, and what would you like to do about that? I'm not really sure I feel like I could do this or this or this. Which of those options feels most realistic? Oh, these ones. So what would you like to do with those? I'd like to do these. When would you do them by? So you've got that classic kind of GROW formula that's in there. That could just give me some some momentary perspective on on on the thing that I'm thinking about if that makes sense.

Sam Isaacson: Yeah, well, that that is the simplest way to programme it. And I mean, you and I, we could do that today, using Excel. You know, it's not a difficult thing, it's just ask this sequence of questions, you've got to put a bit of effort into creating a front end, that creates enough of a pleasing experience, that you don't need to be actively putting effort into being coached in order for it to happen. So I'll give you an example, real life example of this, I found out several years ago, now, I found out that a member of my wider family had committed suicide, which was a terrible piece of news to receive, obviously. And I just was incapable of processing this thought by myself. So I was feeling at the time. And so I quickly loaded up a tool, which is called Eliza, and Eliza has been around since the 1960s. So this is not modern technology at all. But what Eliza does is it uses Carl Rogers style therapy interventions, to just ask you these open questions, it's in some cases, it will take bits of your words and kind of play them back and just ask you these open questions that sort of help you in a therapeutic sense. And I found it a really helpful way, I wanted to think it through I needed a bit of prompting, and Eliza did it for me, you know, really helpful. The sorts of things that we can do with something like ChatGPT now, and there are many others out there, by the way, but that one just is, is the one that's.

Phil Willcox: Yeah, particularly common at the moment.

Sam Isaacson: That there are some really great solutions that you can do to kind of connect different forms of generative AI together to create the illusion of very powerful interaction. One that I saw only this last week, you can, you can create these audio tools now where you can choose a person where there's sufficient level of recording of them having spoken. You type in the text, and then it will create the sound of that person saying those words. So the example that I saw was Steve Jobs. You can tell ChatGPT I want you to act as Steve Jobs. In all of your responses to me, act as if you're Steve Jobs, use his logic, use his style of speaking, if he were to be giving advice, give the sort of advice that Steve Jobs would give. And then you can tie those two pieces together and use a bit of speech to text so that I can speak to the computer, it will record my voice, turn it into text, send that to ChatGPT, ChatGPT will generate a response, which is the sort of thing Steve Jobs would say, put it through this audio file generator and then play the audio back to me. At the moment that is not fast enough. So it sounds like there's quite a significant delay between you sending a message and receiving something back. But effectively, we've just digitised Steve Jobs as my personal coach. And you can do that today for free. So, you know, the future of what could a coach look like? Actually, if I've got a different solution to a different sort of problem? You know if I would like coaching by I don't know, I'm trying to come up with some ludicrous examples here.

Phil Willcox: Erik Ten Hag.

Sam Isaacson: Yes, yeah, no Ten Hag, Sun Tzu, Nelson Mandela, I can just, I can just call on these people. I'd like to have a conversation with such and such to help me think through this issue because I would like to approach it the same way they would then off we go and just have a little conversation with them. What a helpful addition to my day, which comes up with all sorts of ethical issues by the way, I'm not you know, sweeping it away saying that they're simple I guess it's a good illustration of how it is, but that yeah, there you go. We're able to really enhance the way that we're operating using coaching tied with technology.

Phil Willcox: It made me think of, there was a BBC drama, it wasn't to do with coaching, I can't remember what it was called is, the key kind of principle of it was the ability to spoof video and audio in real time.

Sam Isaacson: Yes the capture, the capture that was it? Thank you. Yes. And similarly I've seen, I can't remember the lady's surname Trish, I'll find the link and put it in the show notes. She's been doing some videos where she's created not just, where AI is, not just created a voice but she's uploaded pictures of herself or video of herself, talking about different things, but she's created like this this kind of virtual Trish, Trish Uhl, it is, there you go, its come back to me. So yeah, she's created this virtual Trish Uhl who is speaking with her voice, and it's her face that's animated. But it's all done through different, through different AI tools. It's just fascinating.

Sam Isaacson: Yes, yeah, it's over. I was saying this to somebody the other day actually that it feels like with, with new technology, when we first encounter it, it seems magical. And I, I'm using that word with the greatest level of weight that I can, you know, it seems magical in the same way that Merlin the magician seemed magical that there's something that's inexplicable about what's happening here. And I don't understand it at all. But I accept that it's doing something really powerful. But then what happens with technology? I remember seeing the launch of the iPod. Was it

the iPod, or the iPhone? Well, anyway, you know, something way back in the olden days. At time I remember watching that announcement, and the audience being stunned, and I'm watching it over the internet and seeing seeing this piece of technology from the future and thinking, oh my goodness, you just swipe your finger, you know, you pinch and it zooms out. What an extraordinary experience. You know, this is we're living in Thunderbirds, and then now which and it wasn't that long ago, you know, 20 years ago. Actually, if somebody showed me one of the original iPhones now, I'd be underwhelmed. You know, it's slow, doesn't have a camera, isn't able to do half of what I'm expecting our phone to be able to do nowadays, the internet on it is extremely slow and unreliable. Hasn't got anything like a Siri or something like that built into it. Why were we so blown away by how incredible it was. And yet, I still think that there is something magical about humans having a conversation. And I've been having conversations with humans for my whole life. And I still, you know, we start at the start of this conversation. I said, I'm seeing my parents next week. And I'm so looking forward to it. And I spent spent the first 18 years of my life seeing them every single day. Why on earth do I? Why do I still look forward to this? It's it shouldn't you know, rationally speaking, I should be bored. And I am bored by old technology. But I'm not bored by connecting with humans. And so I think it's, we we need to be careful with ourselves that we don't see something like that and find it so magical that we sort of throw everything into it. And then in five years time, think why why did we do that? You know, there's other things that are better for us. Yeah.

Phil Willcox: Okay. So we've worked our way, I guess, through a real range of topics, all to do with coaching. We're talking through a range of topics from from the coaching apprenticeship, through through that, that in kind of in person, synchronous coaching and how we might develop coaching pools or how we might look at different coaching options to support coaching approach or developing the coaching capability and or capacity within organisations. We then also we make sure that we signposted, the people should talk to you about looking to develop their coaching provision and coaching apprenticeships, so we should do that. Also, then we moved into the different I guess, ways that technology can can help us with the associated benefits that that can bring in terms of things like efficiency, and effectiveness and scale. And also some of the risks that can come with it, as well. And I suppose as I start to bring us together and close us off then, I'm thinking what might be some final suggestions or final recommendations or final things that you think you know, it's important for the listener to think about these things or to hear these things. So is there's something finally that you would want to add Sam that we haven't maybe talked about already?

Sam Isaacson: Sure. Well, I think, I'll say that there are three things that I'm going to suggest and then let's see if I end up with three, okay. The first would be I think if you are responsible for coaching in your organisation, or there's or it's a new thing and you think it could be of interest and so maybe I ought to be doing that. I would really suggest that you think it through strategically rather than tactically because the temptation is to think, oh, I know coaching is a good idea. And for example, I know that we should be doing six sessions, you know, there's no rule anywhere saying it ought to be six, but people often go for that. So I'm just going to start introducing coaching for a couple of people doing six sessions at a time, I think it's makes a lot more sense to think it through in the same way that you would think through any organisational change piece, you know, if you're introducing a new, a new activity into an organisation that you'd think that through in terms of the entire lifecycle, you know, I use the word purpose quite a lot, but thinking about what is the objective of this? And then how can I validate that it's going to be doing that? And therefore, what

should it look like in practice, and who should be involved? I think it's just good to do that. So I'd really suggest thinking in that way. The second thing I'd say is that when we're thinking about technology, it's really important for us to educate ourselves, a lot of people end up moving into a people role, or particularly coaching, because it's so kind of conversational and relational. Part of the reason why we do that is because we have an aversion to all of the controls and systems and processes that sits around technology. And actually, the idea of being coached by a spreadsheet is like a nightmare. And so if we put a bit of effort into understanding, like what sort of technology is out there, you know, who should I be following on LinkedIn? Or which newspapers should I be reading in order for me to just understand what is possible today? I think educating ourselves is a good thing to do. And the third thing I'd say is, I'm quite genuine about this, you know, if this sort of thing is interesting you and do you think that having a conversation would be helpful, I love it. I absolutely love having these conversations with people. And so please do get in touch. And it'd be interesting to kind of see what other people are thinking about it. I would love that.

Phil Willcox: Fantastic. Thank you so much, Sam. And we mentioned earlier on about your LinkedIn profile and putting a link in the show notes. Is that how you'd prefer people to get in touch? Or would you rather, they get in contact with you in a different way?

Sam Isaacson: I think LinkedIn is just the easiest way. You know, if as long as you can spell my name, you'll find me there. I do have a website, but it is not very good at all. And yeah, so yeah, connecting with me on LinkedIn is definitely the easiest way.

Phil Willcox: All right. Wonderful. Thank you. And then a couple of I guess our final wrap up questions then Sam if I may. You mentioned to me off air that you've listened to enough of my episodes to know what the vibe of the of the podcast is about which I didn't say thank you for at the time, so I'll say thank you now. And is there? Is there someone that you would, you'd recommend that we try and find and say, oh, we'd love to get you on the podcast?

Sam Isaacson: Oh, well, if you are interested in the development of artificial intelligence, in the coaching world, then the person that I instinctively go to is a professor based in South Africa called Nikky Terblanche. And he's, he's the only person who is or at the time aware of at least he's the only person who is kind of leading peer reviewed scientific research into the effectiveness of AI and coaching. So as somebody who can speak with real authority on it, and, you know, knows the data behind it. He's, he's a really good person to connect with. So yeah, I'd recommend him very highly.

Phil Willcox: Fantastic. Thank you, Sam. And then in terms of resources for for the for the listeners, help them out then. So I've been capturing a list of things as we've worked our way through. So we've got your books, we've got the LinkedIn article you mentioned around when coaching needs to grow up. I'll also put links into the Eliza tool into chat GPT into also putting links to the capture interest model, who were the things that I mentioned, is there something else that you think, you know, on this topic in particular, that would be a really useful video or TED talk or a book or resource for people to go and have a look at or consume in some way?

Sam Isaacson: Often we're in this space, it's quite interesting. It does seem to be that podcasts is the way that this information is being communicated. Which is interesting though, because I'll have to

go and do some thinking about precisely why that is. But the Association for Coaching has run a series of podcasts all around what they've done a number of different series, but they're particularly done one around technology, and they have got some really good people on there saying some interesting things. And there's another podcast. Gosh, I forget the name of it. Now something about the tech No technology and coaching or something is run by Evoach. I'll find you the link so that you're able to reference it.

Phil Willcox: Ah that would be lovely, yes please. Thank you.

Sam Isaacson: But yeah, both of those are really interesting. So, yeah, I do encourage you to engage with them.

Phil Willcox: Fantastic. All right, then. Final question then for you Sam, is there something else or something more than that you're thinking feeling or would like to say?

Sam Isaacson: I would just like to say thank you so much for having me on your podcast and having a really interesting and varied conversation. It's not often that I get to speak about apprenticeships and AI in the same conversation. So yeah, it's nice to go around all of that. So thank you.

Phil Willcox: No, I appreciate that so much. I think you're right, we have covered a variety of areas. And I think all of those I think would be really interesting for the listener. So yeah, really delighted to have had you on today. Thank you for, for sharing your thinking, really appreciate it.

Sam Isaacson: Thank you.

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