

# Meet the member



## Karen Richardson

is a dual-qualified practitioner in private practice with a background in human resources and executive coaching. She has a Level 4 diploma in therapeutic counselling, and also holds a certificate in autism-informed practice from the National Centre for Autism and Mental Health, accredited by the British Psychological Society.

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### How would you describe your journey from therapist to coach (or coach to therapist)?

For over 25 years, I worked in human resources (HR) in global senior leadership roles, mainly in international law firms. Executive coaching helped me to realise that I was at my best in my HR role when I was enabling others to find paths forward from wherever they found themselves. The reality of my day-to-day work had shifted some way from this and I was beginning to feel somewhat stuck. HR was all I knew, and financially, I was struggling to see how I could realistically step away. I embarked on an introduction to counselling course to dip my toe in the water, and quickly realised that adopting counselling skills felt quite natural to me. Once qualified, I realised that with an additional coaching qualification it would be possible for me to provide a more holistic offering to my clients. Ethically, I could be a pure therapist, or executive coach, but my experience was that, for some clients, by combining both skill sets I could support them in focusing on their goals for the future, and also work with experiences from the past that could be holding them back from achieving those goals. I became a member of BACP Coaching, and subsequently completed Trish Turner's 'Therapist to Coach' course. In November 2024, I began running my own practice as a dual-qualified practitioner.

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### Do you have a coaching niche?

I would describe my coaching niche as working compassionately with the self-limiting beliefs that can hinder how people think and feel about themselves. I often remark to my clients that we never talk to anyone more than we talk to ourselves in our own heads – so what is that conversation like? I say this because what drives a high performing professional can be underpinned by deep insecurities and a critical inner voice. Challenging that inner voice and exploring where it may come from can provide positive insights that facilitate the achievement of coaching goals.

I also hold a certificate in autism-informed practice, which has been transformative in terms of how I approach both coaching and therapeutic services for clients, especially women who have received a late-life diagnosis. I work collaboratively to create a space where we connect to the strengths of the client, and explore how sensory overload in day-to-day living can impact relationships and careers.

### How has becoming a coach changed you as a person?

Since becoming a coach, I have learned to harness the power of curiosity. By this, I mean I have learned to immerse myself in the world of the client to check understanding around what certain words or phrases mean to them. Being an autism-informed practitioner has also guided me in using creative methods other than words to connect to the world of an autistic client, building on that theme of being curious. For example, rather than simply asking 'How do you feel?', I might ask a question such as: 'If you were an animal, what animal would best represent you today?' This enables me to enter the world of my client rather than expect them to conform to a neurotypical way of being. Working in HR for so many years honed my problem-solving skills; becoming a coach has necessitated letting these go because it is for my client to find the solution. I am most certainly more relaxed as a result!

### Where do you practise?

I combine working near my home on the Surrey/Sussex border, where I have my own space, with working in the City of London. I also see clients online.

### Do you have a typical client?

I find that I am working frequently with women who are exploring the challenges of juggling work with their home life, with or without children. I also work with several senior HR leaders who value working with a coach who understands the unique challenges of being a senior HR professional in organisations. However, there is a general theme to everything my clients bring that is centred on: *I have worked hard to get here; now I'm here, is it all I hoped it would be, and if not – what now?*

### How would you describe your particular approach to coaching/therapy?

I would describe myself very much as a strengths-based coach/therapist. By this, I mean I will approach the client relationship by focusing on their strengths rather than adopting a deficit-based approach. I believe if we 'turbocharge' the things we are naturally great at, this can deliver stronger gains. Otherwise, that critical negative inner voice I mentioned earlier can create a narrative of 'never being good enough' which, in my experience, heightens experiences such as anxiety. Of course, we can also explore areas where a client may wish to change, but grounding this with what they already do well can be a powerful combination.

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Image: Karen Richardson

### What advice would you give therapists interested in coaching?

I would say, be confident that you have significant transferable skills that you are already putting into practice with clients.

In addition, coaching work can be 'lighter' in terms of what you hold emotionally, so I find having a hedged business enables me to have a balance of work, which in turn supports how many clients I can work with.

### How do you resource yourself? What do you enjoy in your spare time?

Running and yoga are my absolute non-negotiables in terms of how I manage my own energy to enable me to the best I can be for my clients. I am blessed that I practise yoga in a beautiful setting a few minutes' drive from my home in West Sussex. When I walk across the bridge (see photo, right), I know I am putting my world down for an hour. That time to focus on breathing and moving is so precious, and I really feel it when I have not been able to practise.

### What does being a member of the Coaching division give you?

I am really interested to see how the thinking evolves in terms of the transition from therapist to coach and vice versa. Being a member of BACP Coaching helps me keep up to date with the latest insights and developments as the profession grapples with how, or not, to integrate the transferable skills that both therapists and coaches possess. I am excited to see what happens next. ■

### Get in touch

If you are a BACP Coaching member and would like to feature in this column, please contact the Editor at: [coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk](mailto:coachingtoday.editorial@bacp.co.uk)