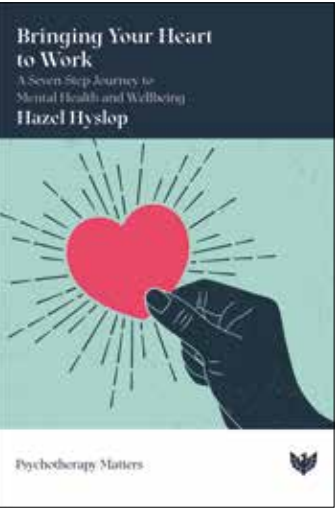


**Title:** *Bringing Your Heart to Work – A seven-step journey to mental health and wellbeing*  
**Author:** Hazel A Hyslop  
**Published by:** Karnac Books Limited

**Hazel Hyslop** is an executive professional leadership coach, as well as a systemic psychotherapist, tutor and supervisor with a background in mental health nursing. Her passion is in helping organisations invest in and develop their leaders, and she has a keen interest in working with women in leadership.  
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# Books



Life transitions rarely run smoothly and are often the reason that clients turn to therapy or coaching – sometimes for the first time in their lives. Being clearly aligned with your values will make the journey easier, says **Hazel Hyslop**, the author of a new book *Bringing Your Heart to Work*. With decades of experience working in the field of mental health in clinical, leadership and training roles in the NHS, her passion is in helping organisations invest in and develop their leaders. She talks to **Nicola Banning** about what it means to bring your heart to work and why we need to do it

**NB: What does it mean to bring your heart to work?**  
**HH:** I believe that the heart is the place of creativity, it represents that space where you are truly connected to the real you. You are able to feel, to be and surrender to everything in you and around you. It means using your compassion, empathy and full potential when engaging with work and relationships. It requires you to bring your whole self into the space of life and getting into a space to become all that you can be. This begins with learning to trust your inner wisdom, trusting your intuition. Heart-centred working is about working in love. When I'm talking about the heart, I'm leaning into a concept I heard the Canadian psychiatrist

Dr Karl Tomm refer to during a seminar, called 'therapeutic loving' – he says, 'I learn best when I fall in love'. If I consider therapeutic loving as a process, it invites me and the other to open up a space for collaboration, and heart-centred work is necessary for those of us who work in the service of others.  
These skills facilitate the healing in our clients, and are just as important as theory and practice. Something spiritual and mysterious happens between you and the client that is hard to explain, when you are being led to

ask specific questions or introduce techniques that just seem right at that moment. As both a therapist and coach, I am expected to work ethically on behalf of my clients and pay attention to my own wellbeing needs. The choices I make will be conscious and intuitive, which will be shaped by my belief system, the wider context and my ability to practise relational reflexivity.  
**NB: What is the consequence of not bringing our hearts to our work?**  
**HH:** The consequence of not bringing your heart to work can result in you

suppressing your true self, not living your life authentically, while disconnecting from your true values. This can lead to stress and burnout, loss of identity and purpose. When this happens, you no longer experience joy in your personal and professional life, and you may feel you are acting as a robot, doing the job for the sake of it and feeling resentful. In this position, no one benefits.

**NB: Knowing our values and being able to work and live by them is linked to our sense of self and self-esteem. While this is central to the work of being a therapist, arguably it could be harder for those working in the corporate world. How do you see this emerge in your work with people as a source of distress or crisis?**  
**HH:** In the context of work, this can show up in situations where there are high rates of sickness and absenteeism, quiet quitting, poor productivity and high turnover in the organisation. There is usually also a sense of apathy, cynicism and depersonalisation. Individually, people might experience physical and mental collapse with regular symptoms of headaches, colds, weight gain, low energy, lack of motivation, and in extreme cases, physical and mental illnesses such as heart disease and depression. It can also have an impact on relationships, whereby people start isolating themselves and reducing interest in their social activities. When staff in organisations are anxious or under stress, they tend to retreat from relationships, to become less interested in others and more interested in themselves.

**NB: You've witnessed a lot of sickness in the healthcare professions where there is a lack of care for the carers, and high rates of burnout and staff turnover as a consequence. Readers may also witness this and have positions of influence within the wider system but it's a heavy task; I wonder if you have any words of advice from your experience of working with organisations and their leaders about how to change the culture?**  
**HH:** I suggest starting with those within your circle of influence where you might be able to create change. You might start by asking yourself and others the following questions: Are you clear about everyone's roles and responsibilities? Do you know what is OK and what is not OK at work? Do you hold yourself accountable for your self-care? Are you modelling good self-care and good practice for your employees, colleagues or clients? Is your client or team able to do the same and if not, what support might they need? What is working well? What might be possible if you were going to reimagine a culture that is functioning, and what might you change to make it happen?

**NB: You write about your experience of racism in the NHS in the 1990s in your nursing training. Can you explain the impact it had on you and the decisions you went on to make about your own career?**  
**HH:** At that time in my career, I was living in a new country, with a new culture and learning context, and it felt overwhelming. When I experienced people in authority behave that way towards me, I was left with feelings of anger, shame and helplessness.

**'The consequence of not bringing your heart to work can result in you suppressing your true self, not living your life authentically, while disconnecting from your true values'**

However, at the same time, I felt a strong urge to change the system. I observed that nurses were not given much respect in relation to their professional identity, and that the roles of psychiatrist, psychologist and psychotherapist seemed to command more respect. Because of my interest in human behaviour, my observation of racism and discrimination, and my urge to challenge the medical model, I was determined to study psychology and later psychotherapy. I soon realised that the only way I could have an impact on changing the system was to join the system from the inside.

**NB: You write about hope – I wonder if you can expand on why hope is so important for carers and helpers?**  
**HH:** Dr Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist, psychotherapist and holocaust survivor, wrote that, 'whoever is still alive had reason to hope'. I cannot think of anyone else who could write about hope with such authority, given his experience. Hope is so important for anyone in the caring field. Without hope, there is nothing to work towards or look forward to. Hope is a belief that you hold in the present and the future, that says, no matter what happens, you are going to be OK. Hope is a belief that

things can and will get better. Hope is a catalyst for change and as a helper or carer, having a sense of hope or modelling hope to someone you are caring for can deeply impact the person's view of their future. It gives them an opportunity to see that in the future, there is a possibility that life can look and feel better. It shows that the helper believes in the work that they are doing, what they are offering and that can create possibility for others. Holding hope helps to increase optimism, as well as give others agency to participate in their care, to trust the process and envision a better future than their current experience.

**NB: There is a lot of creativity and curiosity in your book – the reader is encouraged to remember childhood, to dream and to imagine. At the end of the book, you encourage readers to write their promise to themselves and state that the power of this can be phenomenal. For those who haven't read the book, can you explain what this entails and why it's potentially such a powerful promise to our future self?**  
**HH:** Writing a promise to yourself is taking agency and responsibility for your journey of transformation. The act of writing a contract to yourself is a commitment to yourself and saying that you are responsible for you. Commitment is the evidence that you have got stronger and more resilient in spite of the many challenges. Your commitment starts with you. You are making a commitment to yourself, that no matter what, you are going to keep going. It is very important that you protect your time and space. It is very easy to get distracted or tempted into helping others. While there is nothing wrong with supporting others, you are the one who has to work hard to have boundaries in place, and be sure that you are not too available to give your time away. By choosing to live this way, you are no longer driven by what you believe people want you to do but instead you begin to take charge of your own destiny. You now begin to make choices which align with your values. ●