



Penni Cox

HPCSA Registered Counselling Psychologist

Global Speaker

Founder and Director, Root to Rise Global (Pty) Ltd

MPsych, Nelson Mandela University (Cum Laude, 2008)

BPsych, Stellenbosch University (2003)

Business Diploma, Stellenbosch Business School (2012)

HPCSA Registered Counselling Psychologist

Former United Nations Staff Counsellor (2017 - 2024)

Advanced Eco-Psychology Certified, Pacifica Institute (2024)

Ecotherapy Nature-Connection Practitioner, Zen Guiding (2025)

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Practitioner, SA DBT Institute (2014 / 2025)

Brainwiring Recursive Therapy (BWRT) Practitioner (2025)

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Certified, Livingworks (2023)

Leela Self-Awareness Game Certified (2024)

Trained MSF Mental Health Advisor (2015)

Forest Bathing Guides Organization South Africa (2025)

Called a "Flying Psychologist" by Doctors Without Borders, Penni Cox is a HPCSA registered counselling psychologist and the Managing Director of Root to Rise Global (Pty) Ltd. Root to Rise Global is her overarching company, under which sit four chapters: consultancy, professional speaking, Alive Eco-Journeys (nature connection interventions for groups), and a private practice offering local and international clinical supervision.

For over 20 years Penni has worked with individuals and teams from Afghanistan to New York, from adolescents in private clinics and with great affection as a school counsellor, to the top female leaders retreat hosted by the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations. She has supported MSF (Doctors without Borders) and United Nations staff in global emergencies, walked alongside people navigating personal crisis, and facilitated teams in boardrooms, bush clearings and everything in between. She is a TEDx speaker, a burnout overcomer, and by her own admission, a people person.

Growth mindset is not a topic Penni picked up along the way. It is woven into the fabric of who she is. She has spent two decades helping people grow - not the comfortable, predictable kind that fits neatly into a performance review, but the real kind that changes how a person shows up in their work and their life. Her clinical training in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Advanced Eco-Psychology and Brainwiring Recursive Therapy gives her a rigorous, evidence-based foundation. Her lived experience gives it life.

What to Expect in the Room

Penni creates experiences. Whether she is working with a team of five or an audience of five hundred, she meets people where they are. Her sessions are alive with real examples drawn from two decades of working at the edges of human experience: from refugee camps to corporate boardrooms, from crisis hotlines to Central Park.

She draws audiences in with humour and honesty, then delivers skills that people can actually use. Her approach is deeply participatory - she believes that insight lands differently when people discover it themselves, and she designs every session to make that possible. Expect storytelling, reflection, moments of genuine laughter, and practical tools that leave with you long after the talk ends.

Penni holds a room by being fully and proudly human in it.

THE KEYNOTE Proudly Unfinished

what a growth mindset really means

We have spent fifteen years putting growth mindset on posters, and somewhere along the way growing became exhausting. Another target. Another thing to be good at. In this keynote, counselling psychologist Penni Cox takes the idea apart, follows the research through its rise, its very public fall and its surprising resolution, then rebuilds it into something leaders can actually use on Monday morning.

Mindset does not only live in a person's head. It lives in the culture around them. Social psychologist Mary Murphy draws the distinction sharply: a *culture of genius*, where people must constantly prove they have it, and a *culture of growth*, where it is safe to be in progress. Cultures of genius are where blame travels faster than learning and mistakes get hidden. They are also where disrespect and bullying survive, because fear becomes the operating system.

Drawing on twenty years at the edges of human experience, from boardrooms and crisis zones to the United Nations in New York, Penni argues that growth was never about pushing harder. It rests on two things. The first is the climate a leader sets, the safety and curiosity that let a frightened person speak, admit a mistake, take one small step. *You are the climate*. The second is the one most speakers miss: growth is also developmental. A fragile mindset depends on the conditions. A mature one makes its own safety, and knows when a workplace will no longer let it grow. And then people leave, with their feet or with their spirit. Which is exactly why leaders must understand a growth mindset in themselves first.

“Don’t take the massive step. Take the small one in front of you.”

What Your Delegates Will Take Away

- What a growth mindset actually is, and the common way it is misused.
- Why cultures that prize proving over learning produce fear, silence, and the conditions in which bullying takes hold.
- Safety and curiosity as the two conditions that make respect, accountability and belonging possible.
- One simple tool they can use immediately, and a renewed sense that they set the climate.

“The team loved the energy and the different perspective on a growth mindset. I could have listened on for another hour. Penni has a wonderful way of delivering her message through animated storytelling and using personal experiences.”

Melanie Pillay, Senior Business Partner, People and Culture

Advtech Principals Conference, keynote: Proudly Unfinished

Ideal for: workplace leaders, including executive teams, HR and people leaders, line managers, and anyone responsible for the culture of a workplace.

Format: 45 to 60 minute keynote, in person or online. Adaptable to a half day or full day workshop.

Speaker fee: R20 000 for keynote. Workshop rates on request.

Grounded in: Carol Dweck, Angela Duckworth and Mary Murphy, plus two decades of practice in boardrooms and crisis zones.

Selected Speaking Experience

- TEDx Cape Town: "Be Curious, Be Connected"
- UNICEF Global: Multiple keynotes and wellbeing interventions across all regions, including online therapeutic storytelling for UNICEF children during Covid, and "Transitioning Through Change: Looking Through a Mental Health Lens" (public resource, UNICEF Knowledge Hub)
- UNFPA: Family Day presentations, Wild By Design series and burnout series
- Doctors Without Borders (MSF): Internal training and mental health advisory
- Rotary Sandton, Johannesburg: "Wild By Design"
- PechaKucha Johannesburg: "The Pendulum Swings"
- Professional Speakers Association of South Africa (PSASA): "Speakers Have Rights, Right?"
- Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA): "What is an Ecotherapist?"
- International Education and Psychology Summit, Turkey: "Edges of Breakthrough"
- Stellenbosch Women's Alumnae Network (SWAN): "Taking Bold Leaps for Wellness"
- GP Expo, Sandton Convention Centre: "Green Prescription"
- Multiple podcast appearances on mental health, burnout recovery, self-growth and nature connection

What People Say

"Her warmth, humor, creativity and all-around good nature round out her technical qualifications beautifully. She has positively influenced our team in truly immeasurable ways and I am exceedingly grateful on behalf of our entire team!"

Team Manager, United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF) New York, HQ

"Penni's expertise, professional approach, and engaging facilitation created a refreshing and empowering experience for staff. She is highly recommended for future work."

Human Resources, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern Europe and Central Asia



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