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SLOW DOWN

Pause, notice and listen, then choose

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Being disrupted in any form or degree is, as the word sounds, penetrating, challenging and often so dramatic we don't recognize that it is occurring immediately. Still, you are being disrupted, whether you recognize it or not.

As you read this issue of *choice*, seven months have passed in your journey with the pandemic plus the cascading effect on the rhythm of your life, both personally and professionally. If you are like most

people drawn to professional coaching, your preference each day is to be helpful, useful and a productive contributor to the emerging future. Like many, you may feel the inspiration to act as a soulful calling and it is oh-so-tempting to leap into and pursue a worthy cause, to assist others to restore a new relationship with work, family and community. I invite you to pause and read this article so you may notice, listen and then choose, from presence, wisdom and wholeness.

The speed and ferocity of this time of disruption are historic in scale. Your words will never do service to the stress, emotional pain and hopelessness that cascade in times of great struggle. Neither will those words capture the courage of those who do choose to face another day; the anonymous millions who generate a collective resilience. It is your instinct to survive – everyone's instinct to survive – that ultimately fuels vision and grit to set a course for certainty in

an uncertain time. To do so, consider how you open with integrity, honoring your authentic self and with eyes wide, alert, present, conscious and accepting of the world as it is, not as you wish it to be. In the words of Chogyam Trunpa, a Tibetan Rinpoche, “open to the world as it is and you may discover that gentleness, decency and bravery are available not only to yourself, but to all human beings.”

Even in less disruptive times, you know that attending to your own wellbeing is essential and a dependent step for being effective in your coaching partnerships. The International Coaching Federation Code of Ethics, standard 17, amplifies this idea further: “Recognize my personal limitations or circumstances that may impair, conflict with or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships.”

Be brutally honest with yourself. What is the impact of the world as it is on you? You are likely discovering that routines, habits, and common methods for efficiency are not working as they once did. The simplest of tasks require more time and evoke doubt and hesitation. In the study of trauma, this experience has a useful acronym: UDIN moments.

Unexpected – What is happening has no precedent for you. The experience disrupts your expectations.

Dramatic– The event evokes intense emotions. The emotions impact you and others deeply.

Isolating – The scope of disruption is very personal. Irrationally, you believe you are alone in the experience.

No resources or strategies – Normal reasoning is blocked by your feelings. History of trauma is activated and is often your source of block.

Pause and consider that if UDIN moments are occurring for you, they are also occurring for your clients and colleagues. Notice that no matter how

helpful or useful you are being, it is less than what you intend because you, too, are experiencing trauma. This is the point behind the ethical standard, especially when faced with disruption, and the importance of slowing down to listen carefully within, before choosing to act.

A principle of wholeness, yours and your clients, underpins all forms

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of professional coaching. From this principle arises a commitment to cultivate trust and safety so that you evoke awareness and facilitate client growth. What do you do when that foundational principle is disrupted? Pause and notice this is so, first for yourself and then with and on behalf of your client.

Here are three practical steps to pause artfully, as often daily as you are able to recognize as the moments unfold:

1 Notice your feelings and in the moment, discern if the feeling is of pleasure or pain. Stay with the feeling without analysis or answering the question, “why?”

2 Listen to your inner dialogue with this question: Is the action you just experienced motivated from choice, or habit?

3 Ask yourself if the action was sourced from within you, aligned to your values and essence, or from outside of you to fulfill another person’s expectations.

Habits form in the brain based upon past experience, and our brains prefer those history-based filters that recognize what is known and more comfortable. When your environment is disrupted, those habits are far less useful if not counterproductive.

An alert, present-moment choice that arises from deep listening about you is how to create personal safety and align with your own sense of center, balance and well-being. How much thought you do give toward cultivating safety in your coaching relationships? For that matter, how much attention do you give toward your own safety in any form, for example, financial, emo-

tional, mental or physical? Answering these questions consistently is central to living up to the ethical standard.

The parallel process with your clients requires more diligence in creating safety for clients, including slowing down to ensure that your clients purposefully choose to adopt practices for their safety. Seeking to facilitate client action during a major disruption without first asserting client safety does not work.

We change the world by the way we choose to live in it. The pull to serve another person who has suffered is as basic to the human condition as breathing. Like all human beings, you are by nature social and compassionate. Society builds a framework for all people to recognize what is just, fair and respectful for your relationships. When that framework is violated you suffer, and you channel your suffering to assist those who are caught in exploitive circumstances.

How we assist matters, and that is an inside job if you are to be successful in generating change that works and sustains. Your well-being is your responsibility, every day, and it’s yours alone. The same is true for your clients. Be with each client, fully present in the moment, pausing, noticing and listening, and you will discover gentleness, decency and bravery to face the world as it is, and marvel at our collective resilience. ●