

Vic – on growth edge coaching

My circuitous route to coaching began with a year living in a Cascade mountain retreat at the age of 17. Curiosity about connection, community, spirituality, collaboration, and collective behavior began here. Over the next few decades I studied psychology, business, communities and spirituality, not running into adult and spiritual development frameworks until my 40's. I came into these models/conversations as I sought to gain deeper understand of organizational and leadership growth. I also found myself somehow "at odds" with my own being and becoming. I found colleagues to study and explore with. I worked at hospice; raised children; developed community programs; wondered about time; did deeper inquiry around spiritual traditions; was intrigued by how my clients grew resilience and leadership spirit (was designing organizational compensation plans at that time); tried to piece together how and why beliefs that soothed and protected me for so long now felt confining and inauthentic. I began to see more of this tension in others.

As my interest in adult and consciousness development grew, I became fascinated by how adults navigate conflict, complexity, blind spots, commitments, relationships, and emotions. I was also drawn to the question of how adults grow toward wholeness in life and work as they lead, collaborate, contribute, and unfold. This all has landed me in a coaching approach with clients in a way that focuses on their developmental edges. I care about these edges because there is so much suffering as we find ourselves "betwixt and between", often not knowing why we feel so torn. I care about holding a developmental map (be it imperfect) because it can help some of us navigate better toward that which we care about. Knowing about this map can help us know where we might be along our own path and what small experiments we can take to live into this territory more fully, with courage, curiosity and compassion. I care also about a developmental approach because as we each learn to hold and embody our own developmental edges and possibilities, not only might it open doors to new ways of being for us, it may also contribute toward where we need to grow as a collective. It can help develop more complex awareness and meaning making systems impacting our abilities to hold ourselves, each other and our differences.

Growth edge coaching can take many forms, lean on a number of different frameworks and open different territories for clients yet, in my opinion, the most helpful thing about this type of coaching is the compassion and courage it invites us, as coaches, into... both for ourselves as learners and growers and for those with whom we work, live and love. As this community reminds us – the sweet spot for development is the navigation between what our life requires of us, how our spirits yearn to grow, what is pulling us forward (or what is keeping stabilized) and what is needed to live less constricted and more fully "in" our lives. It is doing the best we can to walk there with ourselves and others that we can participate in the collective growth of consciousness AND hold the individual journey sacred.

At this very moment, what I hold the dearest about doing this work is that I have developed a much greater compassion around the beauty of each "spot/territory" along the way. I have a

friend who says, "I live in a box; I love my box; I know it is a box; and I love serving well in this box". She is one of the most beautiful humans I know – devoted, humble and kind. I used to sit in judgement. I have other connections who outgrew their box and play with the "unfurling" of who they want to be and contribute in a more complex way. The frameworks of different developmental and spiritual models have deepened my love for where each person is... which is also true for my love for myself.

Case Study

Shannon is a young leader who is brilliant, compassionate and curious. We began our coaching when she was in transition between jobs, leaving familiar location, friends and family. She found herself "in between" spaces and visions, wondering how to let go and step into unknown territory.

We began our work with the immunity to change process. The assumptions she uncovered were:

- *If I am not small and withdraw, then I will be big and arrogant and If I am big and arrogant, others will not like who I am and pass judgment on me.*
- *If I don't live up to others' expectations of me, I will be unworthy.*
- *If I rest into what feels right for me and hold myself with honor, I may make the wrong decisions and may find myself to be a disappointment to others*
- *If I trust my instinct to let myself unfold and stand in uncertainty, to be curious and discover my own path, I will let others down and may make a terrible mistake. If I make mistakes and take the wrong course, I may not recover... I must settle for others' design for me.*

Thus, began our journey into her world somewhere in and in-between socialized and self-authored. The defined, predictable world that she grew up in no longer felt "quite right". Her stories of how she navigated her world no longer provided the hope and dreams she longed for. She was struggling deeply with how to step into her own life where she could BOTH love her life as it had been (nurturing the sweet spots) and create a clean boundary with room for her next self. This pattern rang true also in her work as a leader and colleague as she found herself torn between the opinions of most of the individuals most of the time.

What has been so interesting for me is that my walk with Shannon has given me a deep compassion for these in-between places in a salient way. It is hard to "grow-up" loyalties. It is hard to experience the loss of changing loyalties. It is hard to know how to chart a way forward. It is hard to sense all this from an embodied place. It is hard and scary to shift and create new practices that require "leave-taking".

Shannon and I have spent time with the developmental map (Kegan's). Standing back and looking at her life through these lenses together have opened a much greater compassion that Shannon has for herself. It has allowed her ways to hold her version of how understanding developmental stage (hers and others she engages with) might grow relationship, dignity and courage.

For Shannon – when we began our work, she could not yet write her own rules; could not yet get perspective on her relationships – she WAS her relationships. She was unconsciously “had” by the rules which, if followed, meant being a good daughter, a good Christian, a good employee. Any conflict she viewed as a threat to her very self. She could not disagree without tremendous self-judgment and anxiety. She did not yet believe that she could write her own story and yet, she knew there was something else in her life that she yearned for.

She is still in this territory but is gaining more of her “self” exclusive of her surround. She has made big leaps forward and then triggered back. It makes we wonder about if trauma might make the territory between stages more complex. She now has more perspectives/tools and practices available to help her move forward. She often uses reflective practices in which she tries to locate herself somewhere on the continuum between 3 and 4 (although we don't use those terms). She has a sense of this move over time, practices returning to center, practices reflecting on her loyalties for the sake of what she cares about and more often holds her humanness as a gift. She is experimenting with embodied practices of holding her dignity and power. She has a broader perspective on her own development and is playing with ways to “grow-up” her relationships from her past and stand in new ways with her leadership and future.

Adult development models, as well as embodied learning, have help me stand with her more tenderly and patiently and have given us scaffolds to travel on.

I am grateful.