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My Authentic Self: A Learning Journey of Self-Discovery, Acceptance, and New Beginnings

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My Capstone is my journey through the Organizational Dynamics program and Organizational Consulting and Executive Coaching (OCEC) cohort at the University of Pennsylvania. Within these pages I share my experiences as I came to accept and embrace my attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as it relates to both my authentic self as well as my professional life. I reflect on both my experiences and the lessons I have learned. I explore the theories I have learned, the tools I have acquired, and the experiences that have changed my life. My Capstone focuses on adult learning, my use of self, transformational learning processes, coaching, and consulting. Written as a personal narrative, my Capstone can provide insights to others as they navigate their own journeys and realize they are not alone!

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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania

Advisor: Charline S. Russo

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by

Kristina Iademarco-Sudell

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Approved by:

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Charline S. Russo, EdD., Advisor

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Bruce Friedman, MSOD, Reader

ABSTRACT

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my journey. He was not only a mentor but a friend.

Finally, I thank not only my peers, but give a shout-out to COHORT 8! They helped me make my transformation possible. I will never forget my Cohort 8 family.

LIST OF FIGURES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Chrysalis Evolves

As I sat in the still of the night, listening to nature's wondrous sounds echoing through the trees, a warm sense of contentment washed over me, a feeling I hadn't felt in sometime—if ever. I began to mull over the notion of this feeling and came to the realization that I truly have begun blossoming into my true authentic self. To this end, I must thank the Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania, in which I am enrolled as a graduate student, for showing me the directional path needed to come face to face with my relentless emotional demon known as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and all the idiosyncrasies that are attributed to this disability.

Victor Frankl exemplifies facing his demon and surviving a concentration camp. According to Frankl, who himself went through horrific unimaginable torment in a concentration camp as he clung to the belief, from the words of Richard Loveless's 1642 poem to Althea from prison, that "stonewalls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage." Frankl felt that it was up to the individual to face the challenges that lie before them, look for their why, and make the best of the given situation.

> We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change the situation—just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer—we are challenged to change ourselves. (Frankl, 2006, p. 112)

To me, life with ADHD was normal. It never occurred to me that there was more required of me, using Frankl's words, in "facing a fate that cannot be changed" so "that I will turn my predicament into a human achievement" (Frankl,2006, p. 112). As I am "challenged to change myself," I must state, however, that I always saw my life in terms of ADHD controlling me, whereas now I see myself in control of my ADHD.

As a child, I was unaware that I had ADHD. However, I knew I was active and adjectives such as full of life, enthusiastic, and passionate were used often to describe me. In my teen years, I began asking my parents what they meant by these words, which is when they told me I had ADHD. Through my cohort experience, I took Frankl's words to heart. With the cohort's help and philosophy of "trusting the process," I was given the tools and confidence to turn around a negative aura of my persona and alter it to emit a positive image of my true authentic self.

The goal of my Capstone is to take the reader through my transformational process using Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning applied to my experience.

> Transformational learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective….Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 75)

This journey was similar to a roller coaster ride as I noted the ups and downs of accepting my ADHD or at least beginning to understand how the disability affects my views and interactions with the world, both internally and externally. I believed that journaling allowed me to be direct and honest, as well as to express and disclose the emotional aspect of this life-altering journey and its effects. I want to convey through this Capstone how I came to see that the inability to embrace my ADHD hindered me from being able to see my true authentic self. As I began my transformational process, I came to understand the disability's importance and its relevance as I gained a clearer understanding of how this could help set me apart in a positive light rather than to see it as a negative. The twister that had gripped me tightly from within, holding me captive from perceiving myself in a positive light, began loosening its hold on me. I allowed the process to begin opening the door, peeling away the layers of shame, guilt, mistrust, and insecurities that came from my running and hiding, along with the lack of understanding on how debilitating ADHD can be. Layers of positivity replaced the negativity with an outer layer of understanding, trust, and self-acceptance via the transformational process through the acceptance of ADHD as a part of my persona.

This Capstone explains how the transformational learning I experienced incorporated Mezirow's transformational learning, interactions with my peers and faculty, assessments, 360 feedback, coaching experiences, and literature review brought me to a place in which I was able to develop the skills to exit the circular path. I am now well on my way in achieving my goals through understanding the many layers of myself and what I am able to bring to the table, whether in my personal or professional life.

The goal of this Capstone study is to describe and analyze the before-and-after-effects in recognizing and accepting ADHD in terms of my self-esteem, trust, and the ability to be my authentic self. Sharing this experience and how I gained these insights, as well as my transformation, helped me gain control of my learning to see my ADHD as a positive part of my authentic self.

Through this process I learned to say to myself: "I am okay—in fact, I am more than okay, I can…!" As noted by Cox (1993),

> If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own

life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. (p. 11)

I am getting ahead of myself. At this point, I would like to take a step back and give you an abridged version of my background.

Background

"Does the experience make the person or does the person make the experience?" —Unknown

I believe most people start out life on a linear path and, as each person traverses the twists and turns encountered throughout daily living, they will follow the dictates of their own persona by making a number of choices to achieve their desired goal(s). However, there are times when a challenge can occur and a person gets caught up in a circular path and continually goes around and around on an endless track, unable to see the path needed to attain their goal. That's how it was for me as I must admit to the ignorance of understanding ADHD as an integral part of my life and the powerful, long-lasting effects of this impairment in hindering my ability to attain my desired goals. Once I learned about my disability and accepted it, I found myself. As noted by Rogers (1995), "I find I am more effective when I can listen acceptingly to myself and can be myself" (p.160).

As a young child, I was always active. I was never able to pause. At a young age I would climb three-story trees in our yard and hide. As I became a school-age child, I found it difficult to focus on the topic at hand without my mind wandering to the tiniest movement in my surrounding environment. I can remember in third grade I began to be singled out for having "focus issues" and was separated from my peers by a large homemade cardboard box that surrounded my desk. I could not see anyone else and had no distractions, which left me feeling isolated and very alone. I discovered frequent visits to the nurse or bathroom as a way to get out of my box. I would wander the halls because I was unable to sit still and needed to be active. As a result, the teachers and my parents set up a behavior modification program with certain agreed-upon criteria and goals. Once a specific goal was obtained, a reward would be given at home, such as picking a family dessert. This program was used throughout grade school and middle school under varied circumstances.

I believed throughout my school years that most of my teachers would say I was a difficult student and that I was not in "lockstep" with the norm. It affected not only my relationships with my peers but also my self-esteem, schoolwork, trust, and the ability to be myself. As I became older, I would try and hide who I truly was so I could fit in and not be different. However, hiding who I was never seemed to work out. I couldn't hide the effects of my ADHD with my impulses to be active and easily distracted—no matter how hard I tried. Despite these challenges, I was able to graduate from college and begin my work career as a manager of several different restaurants.

Over the next several years I got married, bought a house, and became pregnant with my son. Then I realized I wanted to leave the restaurant industry and begin to look for a new career path, which led me to the position at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (Penn Medicine).

It wasn't until I became a mother and a staff member of Penn Medicine where I began to find my place within the Penn Organization when I began to awaken to endless possibilities. As I stood in awe of these accomplishments, I decided that I wanted to make a difference. I researched various graduate programs within the University of

Pennsylvania, and, after careful consideration, I chose the Organizational Dynamics program. I registered and was proud of myself because this was a MASTER'S PROGRAM! My head ran wild with various emotions, ranging from excitement to "What was I thinking?" But then I said to myself, "Something needs to change, if I ever hope to make a difference."

In celebrating my decision, I chose my first few classes. The first two classes I chose were DYNM 641: "The Art and Science of Organizational Coaching" and DYNM 602: "Leader-Manager as Coach." Thus, I began my journey in knowing myself and becoming a coach.

CHAPTER 2

BECOMING

"Just like the butterfly, I too will awaken in my own time."—Deborah Chaskin

I quickly realized these classes would not be like my undergraduate classes; they were certainly not what I expected. I knew there would be books to digest, papers to write, and methods to be studied. What I did not expect was how the teaching style throughout this program would influence my growth.

The old me—along with the ignorance, the lack of understanding, and the imperative nature of ADHD—was now being unraveled and replaced through the transformational learning process "on myself," and WOW, what a revelation! As I gained insight into my transformation from ignorance into understanding with the belief of "I Can," along with the imperative nature changing my perspective of ADHD, I began to realize my ADHD is only a small sliver of who I am.

My "ah-ha" moment came during my fourth or fifth class in the Master of Science in Organization Development (MSOD) program. I went to the first class of "Leading From the Center, Unleashing Your Leadership Potential" and found a blanket with various items such as a feather, a flower, and a singing bowl. The students were asked to reflect on the power of silence for approximately 1 hour in what I would call, soul searching, or being introspective while looking for my inner self. For me, with ADHD, this assignment was extremely challenging because sitting in a room with my peers in complete silence for even 5 minutes was torture, let alone an hour. I tried my best to embrace the silence. I tried to understand what it was like to sit with my own thoughts—

something I never had done. As I looked around at my peers, I could see they were relaxed and in a meditative state. I thought to myself, “Kris, you can do this.” I tried to mimic their quiet demeanors.

After making it through the hour, we then had to discuss what we felt about this experience. I didn’t even know what I felt, as my head was like a spinning top; I just tried my best to get through the hour. This self-meditation was something that happened a few more times throughout this class. I slowly embraced it and allowed myself to sit in a space where I began to relax and not feel so anxious. Then, much to my surprise, I started to enjoy the silent moments in my day. I did this by learning to relax and letting my mind go. I would take a ride on my motorcycle to nowhere with the whirr of the engine and allow myself to enjoy my own company. I would also take walks with the dogs to disconnect from electronics throughout the week. These relaxing tools are now part of my routine.

Another activity we were asked to do was to draw or use three-dimensional items to verbally interpret the design in class. During class we started an assignment to write our personal credos. I had never thought about what I believe in such a way that I could write my own credo. I inherently knew my core beliefs and guiding principles. However, I had never put them into words, let alone express my personal credo.

While I can’t speak for my cohort members, this assignment took me many hours of contemplation, deliberation, and a great deal of thought. And, with the help of William Shakespeare, I was able to borrow nine of his words that explained exactly my most inner belief system or credo, which I try to apply on a daily basis: “Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none….”(Shakespeare, “All’s Well That Ends Well,” 1.2).

My personal credo is as follows:

Love all. I try to always care for others, I try to not judge why that individual chose the path they are walking for either good or bad, and I try to demonstrate a quiet respect toward the individual.
Trust a few. For me, “the school of hard knocks” comes right to mind, and trust has to be earned, not just randomly given.
Do wrong to none. Although self-explanatory, these words apply right down to being mindful of holding the door for someone and not just letting it slam in their face. That simple act may take a frown off their face and smack it with a smile.

This credo continues to be a work in progress. Even with ADHD, this credo is possible. What I learned about my authentic self while writing my credo is that I am not alone, and I am not the only person who feels this way. Putting my credo down, pen to paper, allowed to me to accept my beliefs and really embrace and open myself up to accepting me for me.

In thinking about my reluctance to speak on topics such as the noble ideals of a credo, I am reminded of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Figure 1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Note: Maslow’s Pyramid. Adapted from *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow, 1954).

During this assignment, I permitted myself the opportunity to do some introspective thinking and, as a result, realized perhaps I am reaching a point in my life when I can progress from the bottom tier of the pyramid and give more focus to the top two layers, namely, esteem and self-actualization.

I believe my credo stands at the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid and weaves through the various levels. While I may not have known my credo on a conscious level, I have unknowingly had these nine little words encapsulated as a part of my persona. This was the starting place so I feel I can begin to make noticeable changes and allow myself to "trust the process," which was a mantra for my cohort; our professors often reminded us to "trust the process." The door was now ajar as I continued on my transformational learning path.

Learning Myself From Within

"Teachers open the door…you enter by yourself."—Confucius

When I decided to enroll in the MSOD program, I was not familiar with the cohort format. I didn't know what to expect from the MSOD program, let alone what was involved within a cohort. I had taken a class called "Leader Manager as Coach" with Dr. Charline Russo and Dr. Linda Pennington. Both Charline and Linda spoke about the cohort, which, in turn, led me to inquire about the program. I thought it would be both interesting and a positive experience to take six classes with the same peers. The following program description grabbed my attention:

> The Leadership Coaching Cohort Program provides the theory-based education required for practicing executive coaching and group coaching as well as a full coaching engagement, supervised by our affiliated faculty. Students in this concentration form a learning cohort community, practice coaching techniques, and study together in a format that allows students to continue working full-time. Through hands-on practice, exposure to psychological and developmental

> theories, and step-by-step strategies designed for diverse organizational contexts, this concentration prepares students to apply coaching techniques in any field. (https://www.lps.upenn.edu/degree-programs/dynamics/curriculum/concentrations-certificates)

This was the Organizational Consulting and Executive Coaching (OCEC) part of the cohort. This way I would build a network of people who not only share similar goals as me but would allow me a “safe space” to grow. I asked other students who were in the cohort about their thoughts. I asked them if I should join, and almost every student stated the same sentiments: “they can’t explain why, but it’s life-changing; it will transform you forever, and that I should definitely join.” I approached Linda about the cohort, and she told me I would have to interview with Dr. Alan Barstow, Director and Senior Scholar of the Organizational Dynamics program. This interview caused me a great deal of anxiety because I felt I could never get accepted to such an elite program at an Ivy League college. Once I interviewed with Dr. Barstow, I felt a little more relaxed. I was accepted. I was so excited to start this journey, but I was also frightened I wouldn’t be up to their standard as I continually asked myself what I could bring to this cohort.

Inwardly, I was genuinely excited because I would be able to go through six classes with the same group of people. Not only could I form new friendships but, since no one knew me, I could change and be whoever I wanted to be. Because I was new, I could put on whatever facade I felt others wanted to see. Little did I know the only expectation from the professors was for me to be my true, authentic self. And so the cohort began.

I still wasn’t sure what to expect from the first cohort course, “DYNM 720: Foundations of Organizational Consulting and Executive Coaching.” It was an intense weeklong course that started the process that allowed us to be vulnerable and authentic, learning to deal with conflict within ourselves and the group. It was also an opportunity to look deep within ourselves while sharing our thoughts and feelings with the group as we grew together. Reading the syllabus, I saw these courses were designed as experiential learning. I wasn't quite sure exactly what that meant so, of course, I Googled it. I learned that experiential learning is an approach to learning, development, and change in which the learner understands themselves as empowered to take charge of their own learning and development. The way you learn is the way you approach life in general. It is also the way you solve problems, make decisions, and meet life's challenges. Learning occurs in any setting and continues throughout your life. The experiential learning process supports performance improvement, learning and development.

> There are two goals in the experiential learning process. One is to learn the specifics of a particular subject, and the other is to learn about one's own learning process. (https://experientiallearninginstitute.org/resources/what-is-experiential-learning/)—David A. Kolb

This course was designed to help build trust within the group so that we could learn to "trust the process" through our learning experiences. The cohort learning experience was designed with the purpose of having us experience change through transformational learning.

The first night we got together, we had dinner at the Inn of Penn. This was the first time I was going to be meeting the other members of the cohort as we began our journey together. I was feeling insecure because I wondered if I would fit in and be able to contribute anything to the cohort. These are thoughts that have been with me since I was a child with ADHD. Dinner started off casual and relaxed; we talked in generalities as we became acquainted.

Then the professors discussed the upcoming week. We discussed various upcoming events and quickly reviewed the syllabus, emphasizing the fact that this course was designed to help build trust within the group so that we could leverage each other in our learning journey. The cohort was designed as an experiential learning experience in which we would experience transformational learning. We also discussed the fact that the group would create a contract consisting of commitments to each other that would be honored throughout the cohort experience. The contract would be our agreement on how we would engage with each other and the professors; this contract was due at the end of the first weeklong course in the cohort and would be presented to the cohort faculty on the final day of the course.

Now was the time to be thrown into the “ring of fire” with the introduction poster activity; this was out of my comfort zone. The professors requested that each of us take a turn introducing ourselves to the class, talk about expectations of self and others in the cohort, and how we planned to hold ourselves accountable during the program. My eyes went wide with “I can’t do this—sharing feelings, expectations of both the cohort and of myself? What was I thinking in taking this class? What was I going to say? Hi, my name is Kristina, and I have ADHD. Would I then watch as my newly formed cohort family recoiled in disbelief and judgment?

This was my first time experiencing experiential learning and learning by doing (Cox, 2006). I felt ill as I watched fellow members of the team nonchalantly take the hot seat of “personal disclosure.”. Their response was well presented with great thought. Then it was my turn. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly as I sat in the proverbial hot seat. I remember dancing very lightly with my words that evening during this exercise and not fully committing to the assignment; something was holding me back but I said just enough to get by. I was not ready to be too vulnerable in front of the other members of my cohort and my professors. I thought to myself, *I was not enough*. But I did it! Not one person laughed or mocked me; instead, they seemed caring and supportive. For once I put myself out there to talk, instead of who I thought they would have wanted to see. I allowed myself to verbally and physically show that I was anxious and nervous. I couldn't tell you what I said, but I was trying my best to be me.

> What I am saying here, put in another way, is that I have not found it to be helpful or effective in my relationships with other people to try and maintain a façade; to act in one way on the surface when I am experiencing something quite different underneath. (Rogers, 2011, 17)

As I drove home that night, I was thinking maybe things would be different if I allowed myself to commit, but I just couldn't as something was still holding me back. Mezirow identified this as a disorienting dilemma, which is the beginning of transformational change. Why was I so afraid to allow my true thoughts to emerge? Why was I refusing to be vulnerable? My head told me the cohort was designed to allow us to experience vulnerability. Even as my emotions and fear put up a wall, I began to accept the importance of my ability to reflect on my inner self so that instead of just going through the motions, I should try and allow myself to say it's okay and allow myself to be ME. This is when I realized I was not going to get anything out of the cohort if I wasn't willing to commit to "trusting the process."

During our next meeting we started the task of creating the contract. The week progressed quickly, and the contract was due the next evening. I assumed the contract would be completed by a normal hour, about 8 p.m. I was wrong! We didn't finish until approximately midnight and had to be back the next morning bright and early. I was terribly upset by this as I had to get home to my son and hadn't planned on staying out so late. I was also not feeling good about the fact that other members of the Cohort did not stay until the completion of the contract; they stated they had other priorities. This is when I started to question their commitment to the cohort team, leaving me to rethink how committed should I be if this is our foundation from the start?

The first few hours we sat in a classroom housed within the library, more divided and more like strangers than ever. Not one person could agree on something as simple as the basic format of the contract. This was beyond frustrating as we had just spent four full days together supposedly bonding and becoming one unit. Slowly, however, this scenario went from bad to worse as the process of working on the contract continued. My peers started to walk out of the room—whether it was frustration, anger, ignorance, or just straight exhaustion. I did not know as there was little to no communication at this juncture. I was at a point in which I just wanted to get the assignment done as it was due in a few hours and we were making no strides.

One of the members came back into the classroom and flipped the script. She stood up and stated, "Instead of focusing on the negative things, let's all pull out our strengths and show what we can bring to the table." We initiated a question-and-answer session in which we each had to label what we felt was our greatest strength with peer interactions. We then were able to complete the contract. While I am not sure how the group felt, I felt this was the turning point of the night, and this "process" seemed to bring us closer than we had been all week. I believe this was reflected in the contract.

Figure 2. Cohort 8 Contract

Our Cohort 8 contract is our commitment to each other, bound by unspoken loyalty and infinite bond.

OUR TEN PROMISES:

1. **SUPPORT:** We promise to support and empower each other through highs and lows
2. **TRUST**: We promise to trust the process and always keep each other's best interests at heart
3. **ENGAGE:** We promise to engage and connect regularly
4. **LISTEN:** We promise to listen with mindfulness, purpose and without judgement
5. **FLEXIBLE:** We promise to stay flexible and welcome changes
6. **AUTHENTICITY:** We promise to be authentic to ourselves and vulnerable with each other
7. **FEEDBACK:** We promise to seek, give, and receive feedback with grace
8. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** We promise to drive growth and learning through mutual accountability
9. **GRATITUDE:** We promise to express our appreciation and gratitude for each other
10. **FUN:** We promise to laugh, celebrate, and have fun together

These promises are a reflection on each individual member of the Cohort 8. We have the ability to change or amend the contract at any-time. In-case of conflict, we must "30 Second Zen" and go back to our foundation and promises to each other.

I came away from this week's session thinking "I can." I believe my label of being a "positive disrupter" (by my peers) was a constructive way to describe me. At this point I was able to allow myself to be vulnerable and begin to let my guard down. This was a good space for me to begin my next class with my cohort.

With our first week concluding successfully, an awareness was growing that it was time to continue this momentum and move forward for the next phase. That phase was the beginning of various assessments that would help us with self-discovery and self-awareness.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSMENTS IN THE COHORT EXPERIENCE

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."—Albert Einstein

During our cohort experience, we completed several assessments so we could experience the process of receiving results and gain insight into assessments and interpreting the feedback. We also considered how these tools may be used with clients and to understand how important it is to be qualified to use them. Assessments can be used by coaches as a less intrusive way to provide feedback to a client during the coaching engagement. Being able to collect data from different sources, analyze the data, and provide a report to the client can enrich the process, providing self-reported perceptions as well as feedback from others.

> Although much of this information could be collected through conversations with the client, assessments may provide a shortcut (Rogers, 2004), establish a common language for the coach and client, and build a foundation for developing a coaching plan. (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 315)

The cohort sampled several assessments, individually and as a team, throughout the Cohort program. We individually completed our assessment; after they were completed, they were then evaluated by the team in terms of relevance to both the team and the individual. This approach allowed each team member to decide for themself if the particular tool may be something to consider in a coaching engagement. I would consider using some of the assessment tools, depending on the client.

As we experienced the assessments, I was surprised at how much insight I gained about myself through the process of taking the assessment, receiving my feedback, sharing it with the cohort, and experiencing their feedback on individual and team results. I learned that the most value in assessments comes from the conversations between the person taking them and their coach about the process and the data. We shared a common language as we considered the results and learned how to question the feedback and how to ask others for their feedback. It expanded my way of seeing myself. While I may not always agree with the assessment results, they gave me an opportunity to expand how my behavior and ways of being may be received by others. The assessments had the potential to help me know myself and thus be able to show up more effectively as a coach.

I was introduced to my first assessment in my class called “DYNM 722, Making Meaning from Experience and Establishing Frameworks.”

> The Core Values Index™ (CVI) is an assessment that focuses on the unchanging nature of an individual. It characterizes and quantifies what [Abraham Maslow] called “the unchanging innate nature of a person” that inscribes where a person can make their highest and most productive contribution to the world. (https://www.resultist.com/)

Figure 3. Kristina’s Iademarco-Sudell CVI Assessment Results

Bergey, P. (2018b). Core Values Index Key [class handout]. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, DYNM 722

As we reviewed the results, the professor stated that one person in the class was totally different than everyone else. I immediately assumed it was me. I experienced a flashback of an unforgettable and horrible time with my fifth-grade teacher. We were working on a social studies project on presidents and were told to write our notes on 3" x 5" cards, then turn them in after our presentation as part of the grading system. After I turned in my cards to my teacher, she called my house at 6 a.m. the next morning. Needless to say, I was surprised! She ranted to my mother that in all her years of teaching, she had never, ever seen notes like my notes. She stated she called early because she was so upset. When I heard about this conversation, I was deflated, humiliated, and ashamed; I thought I had done a good job. When I brought the cards home that day to be redone, my mother stated the information was out of order, but the information was there. She felt the teacher's phone call was certainly out of line. Instead of making a big deal about this, I just rewrote the cards.

I hadn't thought of this incident in years; but upon my professor singling me out (I believed I was the one), the memory flooded back as if it had just happened. Although it only lasted a few seconds, the emotions that came with it were very real. Not only was it embarrassing, but I really didn't know how to take his remark as I was afraid it was an insult. At that point I felt I was various shades of red and my palms were sweaty. I remember turning to a classmate and stating the one individual who was different than everyone else is me. She said, "No way. Why would you think that?" That's when the professor said, "Sorry, Kristina, but your results are vastly different from the rest of the class."

As he distributed the results, we compared our results, and I was ready to cry. I completely shut down and felt like such an outsider. I didn't know what to think or what to say, but I had always felt like an outsider so this shouldn't have been new to me. But I was upset because up until this point I had felt like an insider, a member of the cohort. Below is what the professor reviewed with the class.

Figure 4. Cohort 8 Results of the CVI

Core Values Index (CVI) Results - Upenn Cohort 8 - Oct 2018

erence

Builder		Merchant		Innovator		Banker	
Actual #	Weighted %	Actual #	Weighted %	Actual #	Weighted %	Actual #	Weighted %
13	3%	21	21%	26	74%	12	2%
14	1%	19	3%	31	96%	8	0%
22	43%	22	42%	18	13%	10	2%
18	5%	26	50%	25	45%	3	0%
14	3%	28	74%	23	22%	7	0%
11	2%	23	48%	22	41%	16	9%
13	3%	26	70%	23	26%	10	1%
13	3%	28	77%	22	20%	9	0%
10	2%	23	46%	22	41%	17	11%
15	11%	18	18%	22	56%	17	15%
143		234		234		109	

eference

Builder	Merchant	Innovator	Banker
	21%		
	3%		
	42%		
		45%	
		22%	
		41%	
		26%	
		20%	
		41%	
	18%		
0	4	6	0

Bergey, P. (2018b). Core Values Index Key [class handout]. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, DYNM 722

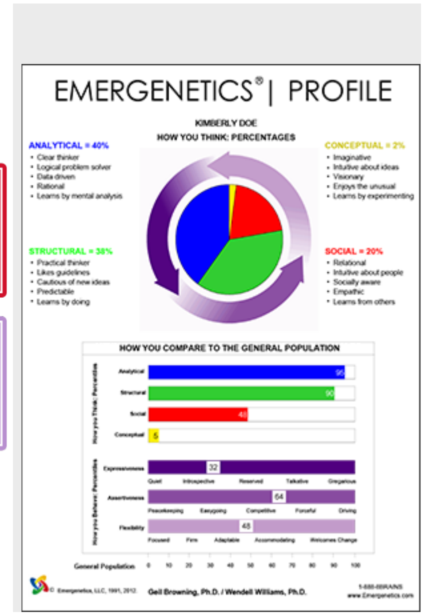
At this point I realized I was the only builder in the class. Was this a good thing or a bad thing? Was it neither? The numbers were substantially different from the others. Once again, I was put into a box all by myself, my life experience reappearing in the cohort. My newfound confidence was diminished. I wanted to fit in as a member of the cohort and be part of the group. But, once again, I was standing out like a sore thumb.

After discussing this assessment as a group and realizing that every group needs to have some variances, I recognized my peers and professor were not perceiving my preference—builder—as a negative. They actually viewed it as a positive. The fact that I was the only heavy weighted builder in the group allowed me to help the group move forward in discussions, projects, and assignments. Instead of getting tied up on multiple ideas, I started to finally relax with being the odd one out and started to embrace it by recognizing the value of having all preferences represented in the group.

The next assessment was on Emergenetics.

> Drs. Geil Browning and Wendell Williams developed the Emergenetics tool to combine the core principles of effective learning, communication styles, and team interaction. The 100-item questionnaire may appear simple but is actually the product of extensive social research proven to reliably capture the major thinking and behavioral preferences people commonly use. (https://emergenetics.com/our-science/).

Figure 5. Kristina's I-S Emergenetics Profile



Emergenetics. (n.d.). Emergenetics. http://www.emergenetics.com

Our guest presenter was an Emergenetics expert who gave an overview on how it works. She explained that how your brain functions is how you interact with the world around you and can be understood in terms of four areas: blue brain, yellow brain, green brain, and red brain. To be a blue brain means you are analytical, to be a yellow brain means you are conceptual, to be a green brain means you are structural, and to be a red brain means you are social. This overview of being right brain or left brain was related to the survey we had taken in the morning. We each then received our results.

My results indicated that I am analytical and conceptual. I was incredibly surprised and upset. I wasn't exactly sure why, but it truly bothered me. As I look back, I still don't fully know why this bothered me because it is who I am. But in reflecting back, I think it's the fact that my results differed from the rest of my class.

We all shared our results with each other. One of my classmates, who had already taken multiple classes with me, said she understood why my assessment results were what they were. “It makes sense,” she said, then added it’s because she knows I analyze everything, and I can see ahead. Then I realized I had already started analyzing my results. So, I reread my results:

> You have a bi-modal Profile, meaning you have two thinking preferences (each 23% or greater). Your pie chart illustrates your preferences for Analytical thinking (31%) and Conceptual thinking (40%). The Analytical/Conceptual combination is found in 13% of the population at large.

After letting this sit for a while, I spoke to my mom about it when I got home. She totally agreed with my profile. Who knows you better than your mom? The overall averages for the class were 54% analytical, 15% structural, 85% social, and 85% conceptual. I had my first taste of assessments and wanted more so I could better understand myself and what was holding me back from not only growing but understanding myself more fully. I understood the assessment provides data; it is through dialogue and discussion that we truly gain insight and understanding. Until we discussed our data and how we brought the behaviors to the group, I had felt alone and isolated. As we began to share and my cohort colleagues provided their feedback on how they experience and appreciate me, I began to feel included and important, bringing value to the cohort.

As I continued down this journey of self-reflection through the cohort, an opportunity to take the LIFO Assessment arose, and I relished the challenge. I didn’t really know what LIFO was but, again, was trying to “trust the process” and just go with the flow. I was told LIFO-Life Orientations is a different style of assessment in that it assesses one’s behavioral preferences. It can help with understanding various communication styles and how to effectively communicate with others. LIFO is a strength-based behavioral assessment tool that measures preferred behaviors in favorable and unfavorable (stress and/or conflict) situations.

> This approach leads to understanding the differences in how people work, how they receive information, and how they deliver information. Our goal is to get teams talking, providing feedback to each other, and working to understand their behavioral styles in order to capitalize not only on their own strengths, but also on the strengths of those around them. LIFO® is a unique approach and sustainable in organizations. (https://lifo.co/introduction-lifo/lifo-produces-results/)

Figure 6. LIFO Strength Feedback Chart

Image source : https ://lifo.co/introduction-lifo/lifo-produces-results/

I elected not to do "much" research in advance of taking the LIFO Assessment for fear that my "analytical thought processes" would be triggered and might taint the way I view the individual questions. We were asked to respond to the questions as Cohort 8 team members. We were told that we should answer them with a "first-time" read (or using our inner "gut"), not to overthink our responses.

It wasn't until taking the LIFO Assessment that my understanding of how impactful assessments could be in helping me gain a better understanding of my individual strengths and my weaknesses lie, along with how to co-manage while using them in both a positive way under *favorable* and *unfavorable* conditions.

Then we were introduced to David, an expert in the LIFO Assessment. He met with us via a video call. I quickly found it fascinating how "on point" David was with his individual assessments without ever meeting us. After asking each member if he could share their feedback, David told details about the specific cohort members using only the LIFO Assessment without having a conversation with that individual. To me, this spoke loudly on behalf of that assessment and showed me it could be a great resource in future endeavors as a tool in the coaching arena. I felt grateful I had the opportunity to see and speak with David about the LIFO Assessment tool because our discussions allowed me to gain a better understanding of its value, interpretations, and varied uses for me.

Scores in LIFO range from 9 to 36. My *favorable* condition strengths did not come as too much of a surprise. The LIFO Assessment measured my "controlling taking" as my most preferred behavioral preference, which was measured at 28. Right behind that was "supporting giving," which measured at 27. When the difference in the numbers is three or less, they are not significantly different. So, my 28 and 27 are most preferred styles. Then there was a gap, and "conserving holding" was measured at 21, ending with "adapting dealing," which measured at 14.

While I did not fully understand the categories, the values spoke to me. The values in my order when things are favorable are that I value action, excellence, reason, and, finally, harmony. What I learned from this feedback is that in the cohort my focus is on results, action, and excellence. This aligns with my builder and analytical/conceptual assessment. I want to drive projects and people to completion and to excellence. The downside is I often sacrifice inner harmony and making others feel included. Knowing this, I am more mindful of not jumping right into "doing"; I am taking measure of the group, listening, and taking their input. Then, of course, I can go into analyzing, conceptualizing, and building, thereby driving the process while including others as we move forward.

Previously, I didn't recognize how valuable gaining buy-in and letting others contribute is to group process, which is an important part of all projects. I recognize full speed ahead means collateral damage in my wake, and I do not want people to feel this way when they work with me. I want them to have respect and appreciation for what I bring to groups, just as I recognize how important it is for others to feel this way. These are powerful lessons for me, and they came from the assessment feedback that was shared, discussed, and considered in the cohort conversations.

If I had read them alone without the conversations and feedback, the results would be quite different. As a coach, I have learned that if I use assessments and provide feedback, there must be a discussion of the results, which is a critically important lesson, and the power of those discussions remain with me. For example, if this were a coaching engagement and these were my results taking the LIFO Assessment, the coach mindset would show I am known as a builder merchant and am more concerned with the overall end results, rather than with the harmonious interactions while coaching the client. While I desire the goals of the client to be met, I have to be mindful of the client's needs and wants. This is one of the unique values of LIFO as it recognizes that our behaviors are situational and that we can change them!

Going forward as I endeavor to make this a positive experience for all, I will also be extremely mindful of the team members. This approach should yield a positive result for all. For example, formulating the following questions to pose up front can be useful: How can we work in harmony? How do I get everyone to feel good about the decisions we are making? Does everyone like the changes we are making, and should we move forward with them?

I will not only be mindful of this approach but, hopefully, will receive the same if not better results while learning about both the client and the team members in a positive realm.

During *unfavorable* conditions, some of my strengths shifted. My highest strength became “conserving holding” (values reason), which measured at 29. Then my next strength became “controlling taking” (values action), which measured at 22 but then right after that is “supporting giving,” which measured at 21. Again, the difference is less than three points, so these are my most preferred styles in unfavorable conditions. My “adapting dealing” moved up a few points but is still my lowest score. I think this is a blind spot but focusing on this will allow me to change, grow, and transform in ways I did not even know possible. I will continue to take assessments with the use of my own personal coach while being reactive. Seeing these numbers on paper has allowed me to make the changes to be adaptive in situations and be aware of my blind spots.

I found the Slide-a-Style tool related to LIFO that we received with this assessment to be incredibly helpful, which is:

> a handy tool for improved communication. Moving the slide indicates what people with different communication styles want to know and how best to communicate with individuals of each style. Provides you with action steps to help you understand the most effective way to get your message heard. (https://lifo.co › 2014/11 › Participant-Materials).

I have used this tool when doing group activities to make sure I am not only meeting my needs but the needs of others. I am trying to make myself more aware of the "all" rather than the "just me." I find it helpful to know at what level my team members fall on the preference scale because it allows me to obtain the best possible outcome by focusing on an effective communication style that connects with them. I still have the same message but present it in a way they can "hear" it and in the way they process information.

Another tool that helped me continue to learn and understand myself and my cohort family was participating in the Human Graph, which is an activity in which the professors had us move to different areas of the room based on our preferred behavioral preferences. Seeing where everyone else fell visually in comparison to myself helped me gain a better understanding of the questions I have had throughout this learning process, such as "Why did this person react the way they did in a given situation?" It made me think back to some of the activities we had done in the past and helped me understand a little better why each person reacted or did not react in each situation. It also enabled me to question the way I reacted and how I could have changed myself to help others while still achieving the same results.

I am learning I can't change the way others react and what they may or may not say or even what they will do. But I am also learning I can continue to learn about who I am and how I can change the way I react, the way I say things, and the way I control the things I do while being mindful of others as well. If I am open to “ongoing change” and am willing to continually learn about myself, then I am on the right path to learning to “trust the process.” As I have started to try this approach, I have experienced positive results, which reinforces my continuing to apply this approach.

I previously saw my differences as a weakness or a negative, which was a roadblock holding me back from allowing me to trust in myself. But using the assessment results, along with the data they provided me about who I am, and then upon reflecting back not only on the data but the newfound insights of who I am as I shared my results and listened to others as they shared their experiences and perceptions has really helped me change my perspective on my differences and where and why other people reacted the way they do to various situations. It has also helped me better understand why others may react the way they do to me.

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”—Aristotle

I have learned so much from the Organizational Dynamics and cohort experiences such as building my self-confidence, gaining more self-esteem, and experiencing various tools and assessments I can use in the coaching and consulting process, as well as learning how to focus on the task at hand and be in the moment. Therefore, I knew it was time to put what I have learned into practice. The next phase of this process is to become a coach and coachee. Oh, how I can’t wait!

Rogers (2011) defines coaching as follows:

> Coaching is the act of facilitating another person’s learning, development, well-being and performance. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices. Through coaching, people are able to find their own solution, develop their own skills, and change their own attitudes and behaviors. The whole aim of coaching is to close the gap between people’s potential and their current state. (Rogers, p. 7)

The cohort was about to begin the process of coaching, experiencing it as a coach as well as a client. This dual experience was invaluable in helping us take our learning to the experiential level. We were ready to use our self-awareness, heightened by our experiences in the cohort, to make the critical recognition of choices and our awareness of how we have them and how we use them. We were assigned a coach and a client from within the cohort. We were supervised in each role by the instructor. This next level was our opportunity to put our learning to work, and we were ready!

CHAPTER 4

THE COACHING PROCESS: EXPERIENCING THE ROLES OF COACH AND CLIENT

"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It's helping them to learn rather than teaching them."—Tim Gallway

As we prepared for our roles as coaches and clients within the cohort, I was excited because I had been a sports coach for years and thoroughly enjoyed it. Coaching always brings a smile to my face. Now I would have the opportunity to take all this knowledge and insight and put it into practice with my fellow cohort members.

During our first course in the cohort, we had our first experience as a coach and as a client. We divided into groups of four people and would take turns being a coach, a client, a timekeeper, and an observer. We were given some helpful questions we could ask the client. We were reminded that good coaches do not ask leading questions, which is a lot easier said than done. I will never forget the "squeaker" (a dog toy) that the instructors used when we asked a leading question. The purpose of the "squeak" was to help redirect our approach as we were learning. To this day when I am coaching a client, I hear the squeaker in my head. This is when I found my love of coaching. I really enjoyed the art of asking questions while sitting in a space with the client and helping them figure out what it is they needed or wanted from our coaching session. One of my favorite aspects about coaching is challenging my clients.

> A key service coaches provide is challenging their clients. Challenge comes in many forms: pointing out inconsistencies, asking the person to reach higher, offering new perspectives, holding to boundaries and standards in the coaching relationship, or naming what you see in the person. (Stoltzfus, 2008, p. 74)

I was able to learn how to focus on reading my client's body language, as well as building a relationship with my client, so they could quickly learn to trust me as their coach.

This is where I learned that coaching is not only about the investment in the client but what the coach is willing to put into the process for personal exchange. I feel the more I know who I am as a person and a coach, the more I can help my client reach their goal by using my strengths to help the client reach their full potential. Knowing myself will also help me remain objective with the client. This is undoubtedly a two-way relationship that will affect the outcome. If the client isn't invested in the engagement and doesn't allow themself to look within, there is only so far, the coach can move the outcome.

What I learned through this process, our reading, our discussions, and experiencing coaching as a coach and as a client is the critical role of trust in the coaching relationship. I learned what trust means is not the same for everyone. The meaning is often different for each of us.

<u>Trust in the Coaching Relationship</u>

"Trust is a dicey subject; everyone wants to be trusted but only few people are willing to put in the work to show themselves trustworthy."—Ishika Das

Webster (n.d.) defines trust as

> assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something, one in which confidence is placed, dependence on something future or contingent**:** HOPE" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust?src=search-dict-box)

I became a great admirer of the trust that ensued between Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, which was described as follows:

> Helen described her early days without words as living in the gray zone of "no life" or "no world." She said, "I didn't know what it meant to be human." (Atkinson, 2007, p. 36)

While this unfortunate type of experience is extreme, it proves the beauty, necessity, and the significance of "trust" between two individuals. This trust allowed Helen, at the young age of 7 years old, the ability to separate the outer-self from the inner-self and enter her space. As noted,

> Helen described a great moment of breakthrough when she understood the idea of language. She felt the sign of the word water in her palm for the fortieth time and suddenly realized what a word was! (*Inner Dynamics of Coaching*, 2007, p. 36).

I believe the trust that existed between Helen and Anne had to be integral and profoundly strong. I can only imagine what was felt upon attaining such an amazing goal for both Helen and Anne.

> Later in life, when Helen was asked about her
>
> limitation of experience without sight and hearing, Helen laughed heartily. She replied, "It has nothing to do with functioning eyes and ears. Experience is huge!'" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 37)

I also agree that "experience is huge" for me. Experiences throughout life aid in a person's understanding of one's own abilities, which describes both Anne and Helen going against the grain to achieve what was once thought impossible to become possible. This is only one example of trust between two individuals that proved to have an extreme effect on both lives in which most people strive to attain—including myself. Through my experiential learning I realize the importance of understanding trust within a relationship as well as within myself.

> Trusting in yourself is another example of how experience plays a significant factor with trust, as Carl Rogers noted about himself: "I can trust in my experience I have found that when I have trusted some inner non-intellectual sensing, I have discovered wisdom in the move. In fact, I have found that when I

> have followed one of these unconventional paths because it felt right or true, then in five or ten years many of my colleagues have joined me, and I no longer need to feel alone in it. (Rogers, 1995, p. 22)

It is critically important to understand my background regarding the lack of trust in myself. I have come to understand that having ADHD and embracing its acceptance in my behavior was what was normal to me. You can't miss what you never had, but I did know that something was missing. With the help of the transformational learning process I experienced in my cohort, I was given the space to change and transform. This transformative experience allowed me to incorporate the ability to soar and see trust from many different angles as I will forever continue to learn, grow, and become my authentic self.

The cohort was what Mezirow (2000) refers to as a disorienting event. My previous school experiences had imprinted negative feelings and a lack of trust in the process. Before the cohort experience, I had experienced learning environments as a psychologically unsafe environment and a place where one did not take risks, especially with others in the learning situation. Edmundson (2014) defines psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. One way I was able to develop trust was in the cohort. I felt safe in a nonjudgmental environment and through various activities and experiences. I received constructive feedback, positive reinforcement, and coaching. Applying what Edmundson (2014) noted, I felt safe to take risks, be myself, and put myself out there. In the cohort I realized if I was going to be a good coach, I had to make sure I was able to build a foundation of trust, create that sense of psychological safety for my clients to be able to take risks, raise issues, and learn from our dialogue. Understanding this, I share my experience as an executive coach in my first coaching engagement.

As a Coach in a Coaching Engagement

"Who exactly seeks out a coach? Winners"—*Chicago Tribune*

While in the cohort, we studied various coaching styles and methods to help clients achieve their desired results. Now, for the first time, we would be able to apply these tools in an experiential learning assignment. We were paired with one partner as a coach and then again with a different partner as a coachee. These were full coaching engagements, including data management with 360 feedback and client reports. For my first major coaching experience, I was expected to conduct a 360-feedback coaching engagement with a classmate.

> 360 feedback is a planned process of soliciting comment from a selection of people in a range of relationships all around an individual, with the people typically coming from whatever significant constituencies. There are in the client's work life, for instance, peers, boss or other seniors, customers/clients and people who are direct reports. (Rogers, 2011, p. 97)

As Rogers noted, when you use 360 feedback, you are enhancing the value of the coaching process by bringing the observations of others into the process.

The 360 feedback is a process in which the coachee receives confidential, anonymous feedback from the people the coaching client chooses for the coach interview. The number of respondents varies by client; it is often 12 to 20 participants who are asked for feedback on how they experience the coachee as a leader or colleague. The 360 feedback covers a broad range of questions that the coach and coachee develop together. This feedback helps the coachee gain a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, developmental needs, how they are perceived, their behaviors and competencies, and what they need to change to have a positive impact. After the coach has concluded all the interviews, the coach analyzes the data and creates a feedback report to review with the client. This report may also include coach feedback and observations.

While the written feedback report is important, the presentation of the report, along with the coaching conversation with the client discussing the feedback, responding to questions, and considering how the feedback may be used, is a critically important part of the process. These feedback review sessions are typically 2 to 3 hours, followed by a period of time when the client is encouraged to “let the report sit for a while” before then reading it again. Even when a client has a good sense of what will be in the report, seeing it in writing makes it more powerful and often challenging. The space of several days between readings brings balance and perspective, as well as a greater readiness on the part of the client to plan next steps.

When a coach is delivering the report to the coachee, it is important to deliver it with authority, trust, credibility, and nonjudgment while keeping it a two-way conversation. Once the coach has delivered the report in a timely fashion, the coach should follow up with the client to address any questions the coachee may have.

Many ways exist for coach to deliver client feedback. I chose to deliver my coachee’s feedback of the 360-feedback report in person. I wanted to walk my client through their report line by line, giving her the chance to reflect and ask questions. As I could tell my client was nervous about reading the report, I was probably as, if not more, nervous delivering the report as this was the first time, I had done such a task. Once we got started, my nerves settled as I could tell she was comfortable with the feedback and our open dialogue. The most helpful way I found was to be positive, focus on the client's behaviors, be specific, timely, judgment free, and available for follow-up. Once the feedback has been shared with the client, the coaching goals can be revisited and adjusted as a result of the feedback. It is important to recognize feedback is a gift; it is the client who decides what to do with that gift. The coach serves an important role in questioning, exploring, assessing the feedback, and helping the client decide on the action plan going forward. The coach and the coachee can then develop the process that will help achieve the desired results.

Next, I discuss my role as a coach, followed by my experience as a coachee.

Kristina, the Coach

> A coach is someone who tells you what you don't want to hear, who has you see what you don't want to see, so that you can be who you have always known you could be.—Tom Landry

As I sit here and reflect on these past several months as a coach, it's interesting to see how far I've come in the understanding of the complexities of being a coach. It wasn't until I actually sat down with my coachee, one on one, that the nuances of coaching began to become apparent. This was during one of my last classes in the cohort called "DYNM 723: Consulting and Coaching Process: Knowing Yourself." I was to coach a classmate the professor had chosen for us. I knew all my peers in the class pretty well, so I was excited about this. I got to set up the engagement from start to finish while only checking in with my professor for feedback as needed throughout the process.

The process began slowly; perhaps because we were cohort peers, I had nervous anxiety or "who knows why," but as time ticked by, we both seemed to relax. We started to relax after about the fourth coaching meeting. Our assignment was to conduct approximately 12 coaching meetings. As the coach, I used various strategies and methods, both individually and in combination with each other. When my coachee and I came up with the goal, my first thought was that "this objective seems too simple and carried little relevance to me." Immediately, I took a step back and realized how I might be using my standards, not being empathetic with the client. I needed to remember it isn't my place to judge. I knew I needed to modulate my feelings immediately—from lacking empathy to understanding the coachee's feelings in terms of the desired goal—if our coaching engagement was to have a positive outcome. I did just that!

The way I was able to achieve this objective was by reminding myself that my role was to be a guide to help the person set the goal and then to help that person help themself achieve their goal. It was not my role to judge or assume what is important to my client, but my role was to fully offer support. Of course, I can and should ask clarifying questions, so the client is assured about the goal being set.

Now it came time to start working on my client's 360 feedback report. I was extremely nervous to do this because I had never been involved with one and did not know what expect. Knowing my coachee, I wasn't sure how to proceed because I knew it wasn't going to be easy getting the names and contact information from my client based on our previous interactions. I believe the coachee was hesitant about who to choose for her feedback. I wasn't exactly sure why she was hesitant but finally, I was able to get the information needed to start.

I made the first call; that person seemed to have had no advance notice that someone would be calling to ask several questions regarding the coachee. I thought to myself, *Okay, just roll with it*, and I did. After that call I had a good idea that the rest of the 360 feedback members were not made aware of any prospective calls that would be coming from me so I was prepared on what to expect and how to introduce myself and the process. I felt certain these people would be somewhat surprised and maybe even a little suspicious of the call, making me feel uneasy. Even after talking to my client and confirming with her multiple times the importance of reaching out to her 360 feedback participants and their agreement to participate, they were still surprised to hear from me. She had told me many times that she had spoken to them to participate but they still seemed surprised to hear from me. Therefore, I worked hard on making this group of people feel at ease while gaining their trust to answer my questions. These calls did become easier as time went on.

After the calls were finished, I knew I needed to find a creative way to analyze and compile the data, then present the data to my client. Given the negative and sensitive feedback, I wanted to tread lightly because I wanted to create a safe place for my client and have her understand I was here to help her as she received the feedback. I wanted to make sure we met face to face so that I would be able to read the “vibe” of my client as the information was being received. When we talked about the report, she saw the information in a positive way and talked positively about what she had learned and was excited on what to do next. I wanted to see not only her expressions but also her body language so I could be there to support her.

I was determined to make this experience a positive one. I would be straightforward and deliver the feedback with empathy and a nonjudgmental attitude. “Wow, it worked!!” My client took the feedback, both the good and the bad, and displayed a positive attitude upon hearing this information. That was when the engagement really started to take a turn for the better. I wanted to give my client the feeling of power within herself so she could look to the future. As Wildflower and Brennan (2011) stated,

> Help your client envision the life he would like to be leading. Support him in taking steps toward that future and encourage him to speak to other people about this, so that they are more likely to support and amplify his new sense of who he is. (p. 198)

We met about 2 weeks later regarding the 360 feedback report to give the coachee time to digest what she had heard, then configure any questions or clarifications from the feedback report she had, as well as for me to make sure the explanation of the feedback was fully understood by the client.

This is when my client used the information from the 360-feedback report and focused on something that was learned through the feedback. This is also when my client opened up about how she wanted to change their original goal, so it was a pivotal moment. I now knew the coachee was really “all in” and trust had formed. At this juncture in the process, I started to see how our trust had been building over time and how my patience worked for the positive. This is also when I decided to switch to the solution-focused approach. As noted by Grant (2006),

> The solution-focused approach…may seem simplistic to some, but … takes pride in keeping it simple. Staying focused on the solution in the essence of great coaching. (p. 89)

Furthermore, as noted by Cavanagy and Grant (2010):

> Solution-focused coaching is a constructivist practice that places primary emphasis on assisting the client to define a desired future state and to construct a pathway in both thinking and action to move toward the future state.

The client seemed to be engaged and was excited about our next meeting. The coachee was proactively taking a role in what was going on in our sessions and coming forth with her "authentic self." Together we decided that most of our sessions, moving forward, would be done over the phone. (This was the easiest way to get together, given our schedules.) Fortunately for myself, I had taken a class that taught me all about virtual coaching, which taught me how to focus on my client without being able to see the visual cues and thus making me more comfortable talking with the client. Being a visual person, even with this class, doing our sessions over the phone was slightly out of my comfort zone but was easier for my client. Nevertheless, I was determined to make it work. This understanding has helped me grow while allowing me insight as to what my future would look like if I took the path of becoming an executive coach.

We were now going at a steady pace and meeting about every 2 weeks for an hour. On the weeks in between, we were doing a "check-in" because my client had asked me to be a "reminder" to stay focused on her goal or big picture. Each week I sent the coachee a mid-week reminder, namely, a text, a phone call, or a quote as a reminder of the ultimate goal. The client said this activity really helped and kept the lines of communications open. As we moved forward, it felt as if we were becoming more of a team so agreed to continue to meet, but less often. We agreed to use more of a check-in process when the client felt she needed to talk.

This process has helped me understand the full experience of what an "active" coaching engagement feels like. It also helped me better understand the different avenues I may come across, as well as working in a time frame to build a relationship of trust with my client. Now that I have practiced being an executive coach, I realize I have acquired some knowledge through this experience, including the following lessons:

1. Flexibility with the client's needs means working with the client on time frames and setting realistic expectations.
2. W.A.I.T. (Why Am I Talking) refers to, as the coach, making sure I am listening more than talking.
3. Active listening involves listening to hear what the client needs, not jumping ahead assuming what they need.
4. The power of the pause involves sitting in silence with my client as long as my client needs.
5. The art of asking questions means not having questions prepared but asking questions as they arise.
6. Provide feedback—both positive and negative—and make sure I deliver it in a way, so the client receives it well.
7. Don't make any assumptions and make sure I am attending to this.
8. Reflection means not only does my client need space to reflect but I as a coach also need to reflect on my experiences.

Kristina, the Client

"Leave your comfort zone! You'll make wonderful things happen when you get to know your discomfort zone."—Roy T. Bennett

After experiencing the role of coach, it was my turn to be the client. My coach was another classmate (I'll refer to her as Emily). I was apprehensive and wondered how she would respond to my attitude on being the client. I had never experienced the 360-feedback process as the participant, and I was slightly uneasy about it. Then again, we learned it is natural to be anxious about being introduced to one's authentic self. I wondered who "Kristina" through the eyes of others would be. One positive aspect was that Emily knew me from class. I assumed she was aware from various classroom discussions or events that I am not comfortable discussing my private life openly with others, which has been painful for me in the past—both personally and professionally. To be comfortable with the person I am openly interacting with, I need to feel I am not being judged and that I have trust. Since she had previous experience with the 360-feedback process and encountered others like me, I assumed this was recognized. I believe I even shared this with her at some point in time, noting I was not looking forward to being a client. However, I am sure, even if not verbally stated, others have thought the same thing. However, I was looking forward to experiencing the entire process because I genuinely want to be an effective coach so being a client is important in developing good coaching skills. I was ready and willing to be “all in!”

Before the 360-feedback process, Emily and I had a few coaching meetings and worked on developing a goal for the coaching engagement. I was trying to figure out something that would not only work for me but also work for my coach because I knew it was also a class assignment for each of us. We developed a goal and a list of questions to be asked of the people I would identify for my 360-feedback report. I then could begin to think of various people I would identify for Emily’s 360 feedback interviews.

I decided to give Emily several people who were personal friends, several people who were professional contacts, and several people who were classmates. I wanted to make it clear that giving family names for feedback was not easy for me. I also thought I would make sure to go above and beyond to fully set the stage for her, meaning that the people I had chosen would be agreeable and aware that she would be calling to ask questions about me. I used my experience as a coach to make sure this important step in the process was included.

After Emily spoke to everyone regarding my 360 feedback, she gathered the information and prepared the client feedback report. We scheduled a meeting to get together in person in mid-June, about 2 to 3 weeks after she finalized the calls regarding my 360-feedback report, which was about 2 months after the engagement had started. I was, unfortunately, unable to meet in person because my son had been to the doctor's and was ill. We did, however, set up a Zoom call so we could continue to move forward because she was going to be away so wouldn't be able to meet for at least another few weeks. From my prospective, using Zoom to receive a 360-feedback report for the first time was not the best route. I was totally overwhelmed by what I was hearing and felt as if I was only hearing every third word. I remember tearing up. At the conclusion of our Zoom session, I was told to think about what was said. Per my coach's recommendation, not mine, I was told to complete the same questionnaire asked of my 360-feedback group and we would get back together in a couple of weeks. The call ended.

While I believe Emily did a good job putting the report together, I felt she was unaware of how I was receiving the information. She was unable to see any visual cues indicating I was getting upset or even had tears in my eyes as I was able to hide behind my computer screen. I feel that in this situation if I were my coach, I would have waited given the delay and delivered the report in person because I would have already been aware this client was apprehensive about this whole process. I now can only wonder if she had said, "Let's push the meeting back until we can meet in person, not do a Zoom call," would that have made a difference? As the client in this situation, I was not comfortable enough with my coach to tell her I would rather receive this information in person. This is the point when I felt my coaching engagement took a turn for the worse.

I was upset for weeks and didn't really understand why. I just kept rereading my report and didn't realize how others perceived me. I felt at that point I needed to sit in my own space and really take time to digest everything I just had learned about myself and really reflect on how I am perceived by others. I became quiet as I was trying to figure out what I needed to do with this new information. I probably should have voiced my concerns to my coach, but I didn't; I usually try to hide my inner feelings. This is when I felt our client-coach engagement grew even more distant; my coach seemed to make assumptions about me as the client, instead of reaching out to me for feedback. As a coach, I try not to make assumptions about my client or judgments. Instead, I ask questions on how they are feeling and even ask for feedback on my coaching and if they feel there is anything, I could change to help our engagement be more positive or effective.

After that Zoom call discussing my 360-feedback report, I knew Emily would be traveling. I also knew I needed to sit and reflect on the report. As I recall, we didn't reconnect until the end of July, approximately 5 weeks later via phone. I felt our session was kind of like a "breakup" instead of a "follow-up." I remember Emily saying she had planned that weekend to write her final paper on this engagement and complete the assignment, which confused me because I thought our engagement was just beginning. I also remember thinking we weren't even halfway done so how could she write her paper?

However, I knew she was the coach, and I was the coachee. Since I believed that to be her coaching style, I said nothing, and we ended our engagement. A powerful lesson was learned here by me. I learned that being coached is a precious gift. As the client, I should have known my coach understood that and was treating the engagement as valuable as I was. As the client, I should have demanded what I needed or wanted from her instead of having her make assumptions about me. I should have recognized this opportunity as my engagement, not hers. I also recall her saying she was headed out of town for most of August for a work assignment and would not be reachable. While I appreciated her transparency, I felt at that moment that I was not important or a priority. I remember going downstairs and telling my mom, “I think Emily just dumped me.” It was a very weird feeling, but I just tried to let it go because it seemed my coach had checked out so there was nothing, I could do about it.

As the coach in this situation, I would have made sure the client felt like the end goal was met before I ended the engagement. I would have made sure we had a final session or two to wrap up any underlying questions, comments, or feedback. I would not have assumed the client checked out and then made the solo decision the engagement had come to conclusion, which brought me right back to my feelings of insignificance, unimportance, and not being enough.

I assumed everything was okay and moved on when I then received a call from Charline asking me if I was okay. I was very confused by this call because everything seemed to be okay to me. She told me I wasn’t responding to emails, texts, and had “gone dark” in the course. I had no idea that anything was wrong with the coaching engagement because I felt as if my coach ended it, not me. I hadn’t even been able to start my assignment because I couldn’t get over my coaching engagement and grasp what had happened. I was also still in the process of being a coach so was waiting until I was done to complete my paper.

At this point there was little to no communication, and a huge learning happened. Looking back, I realized there was little to no trust building in the beginning of the engagement with my coach. If I were the coach, I would have had a few extra sessions in the beginning to learn about my client’s reasons for her hesitation and why she felt she was scared to be coached. I would have regular check-ins with my client and ask questions. I would then follow up with more questions and help my client to engage in open dialogue, allowing the client to dictate the next steps and what we would discuss at our next session. I would have focused on her hesitation from the start, instead of jumping right into the 360-feedback portion.

I reached out to Linda, who had been helpful throughout the process, to figure out what was going on. Then I realized my coach had quite a different perspective from mine about the situation. I felt a conversation needed to be had with Emily. It was a much-needed conversation about how we each viewed the engagement. I was glad I had spoken to Emily because I was able to understand where she was coming from and why she felt the way she did. But, equally important, I was also able to explain my perspective and why I felt the way I did. After we spoke, we agreed to have a video conversation with Linda to clear the air and help us understand how or why this engagement went so wrong.

I am learning through this process how important these conversations are and how easily miscommunication can be remedied by talking. I also learned how important having a coaching contract is, not only for the coach but the coachee; since this was a class assignment, we did not set one up. I feel when we had our final Zoom call, the three of us were able to get on the same page and come to a clear understanding about what had happened, why it happened, and how we could move forward from the situation. I felt we were in a good place, which helped me learn how to handle coaching engagements in the future so these situations do not occur.

Emily and I actually had another meeting after this final call to make sure we were okay and also to see what we needed to do to move forward. We discussed how and what each of us learned from this situation and how we could avoid repeating this type of scenario moving forward.

As I sit and write this reflective paper on being a coachee, I am really reflecting on taking something that started out positive, then turned somewhat negative, but later turned back to a positive coaching experience for both parties involved. I know an important part of the coaching process for the coach is the ability to be able to use various methods and strategies, as well as to be able to understand the need for timing, empathy, intuitiveness, and trust. In other words, it’s all about building the client relationship. Reflecting on the engagement, I feel Emily could have handled the situation a little differently from the start. According to Landsberg (1996),

> to make progress, you will need to diagnose why the potential coachee is resisting you. He or she may be reluctant to accept any form of coaching by anyone or may just be reluctant to have you as a coach at the current time. To take appropriate initiative, you will need to delve to at least one further level of diagnosis. (p.60)

CHAPTER 5

KRISTINA, THE CONSULTANT

"Wherever I was in the world, at the beginning of every consulting project, one thing was certain: I would know less about the business at hand than the people I was supposed to be advising."—Matthew Stewart

When I joined the MSOD program, I was excited not only about the classes but the practicums and the end of the OCEC portion. I felt this would allow me to gain real-world experience and a better of understanding of how I would like to apply my degree.

During August 2019 I received my first "real-life" assignment and was told Bruce Friedman would be my consulting mentor. I was excited about that because he had been the teaching assistant for a few of my classes and I really liked his "style."

After Charline and I had a meeting, tackling a few particulars—the nerves, excitement, anxiousness,—began to show, which I expressed in these words: "I was really getting a chance to do consulting for real" and "I don't want to mess this up!"

My first meeting with Bruce went well. I learned we would be working with a rare disease organization. Instead of him dictating the track on how we would be proceeding, we collaborated and developed a game plan. During this process he showed great patience and displayed ingenuity in making this pathway a positive learning experience.

I was assigned to create the PowerPoint, which was to be our guideline, then review it with Bruce to make the necessary changes. As I was making the final changes, I experienced an “ah-ha” moment—I realized Bruce had given me both positive and negative feedback; but instead of me getting defensive, I was able to incorporate the feedback into a positive learning experience. This is when I really started to see the changes that have slowly been developing within me over the past 2 years.

The “interviews” were to be the next phase of our process, and I was responsible for about 25 interviews with members of the organization’s community. I conducted the interviews alone after I reviewed the questions with the board members and Bruce. I had done interviews in my coaching assignment, but this was only the second time I was doing this work. I was again feeling some nerves creeping forward but knew Bruce would be there, if needed, for support.

After my first or second interview, I touched base with Bruce and was able to use him as a sounding board. Again, his patience was present, and his advice really helped me become more relaxed and confident. He also gave me feedback so I was able to incorporate his thoughts and hear the feedback as a positive instead of a negative, which is what I would have done in the past. His feedback guided me on how I was asking the questions, what follow-up questions I could ask, and then how I could process the information I was receiving. He also gave me feedback on how to reword questions when I was getting resistance without upsetting my interviewee.

As I continued the interview process, my comfort level grew; at about interview 15 or 16, I noticed a pattern. Either the interviewee would chat up a storm and go on about this/that or give simple, one/two-word replies. I found this to be most interesting; at some point I would like to see if there are similarities in personalities with the client’s choice of people chosen to be interviewed or is it random.

Once I completed the interviews, I compiled the data to present to the organization's board during a conference call. I was excited to send my data to Bruce for review. He once again exceeded my expectations with his style of delivering his feedback, leading me to feel confident and eager to make the changes and stressing the positive while downplaying the negative when giving his responses. The result, at least for me, was truly a good mentoring technique that I will make sure to include in my portfolio.

We had a teleconference call, which is when we prepped for the final phase of the project—a face-to-face meeting that would take place in New York City in early January. I learned the most about my growth during this meeting. The prep work was fairly self-explanatory since Bruce and I had met a few times prior to review how the day should go.

The day went well for the most part, and I was able to see Bruce in action with the client. It was amazing to watch how he controlled the temperament of the room, how he kept "things" moving along, and how he addressed the difficult conversations among a group of about 15 people. Bruce never lost his cool and kept the meeting flowing. His poise and style are what I strive to attain.

For me, however, at one point during the meeting fingers started to get pointed and then, somehow, they got turned back on me. It was then when I truly learned how much growth I had experienced in the MSOD program during my cohort program with the OCEC. I respectfully sat there quietly, in silence, rather than feeling the urge to defend myself. I'm not sure if Bruce was aware, he had given me a look of approval, making me feel I had made the correct decision, as if to say that's just the dynamics of this group. Once the meeting was over, Bruce and I spoke briefly about the day. For me, I knew I needed to decompress and reflect on how I felt the day went and what could I have done differently—if anything. Being able to not only attend this meeting but to help facilitate this meeting was a great confidence booster for me.

Now that the project is over, I almost miss the calls, emails, texts, and everyday conversations with Bruce. It was nice to be able to learn from someone so open-minded who allowed me to bring myself into the project. Working with him on my team gave me the confidence I needed to continue my growth in the “consulting” world. The entire consulting experience was truly a positive learning experience for me.

During this consulting engagement I found the ability to fully listen while sitting quietly without assuming I know what’s coming next. I learned how to trust myself because I had more self-confidence going into the engagement given to me by the program. I also learned how to handle difficult conversations with a larger group while keeping my composure in the situation. I am now able to use these lessons in my everyday world.

CHAPTER 6

AFTER THE PROGRAM

"A year ago, everything was different. And now that I look back, I realize that a year can do a lot to a person."—*The Mind Journal*

Recently completing my final consulting assignment on such an upbeat note was a definite high. With the cohort program coming to a close, I am able to transition into my new reality with my revised, refreshed, and updated authentic self at the forefront. While I sadly realize that my Cohort 8 family will physically fade into the background, I do know with great happiness that what will remain are the intrinsic feelings I received from them over the years. These feelings include pats on the back, good job remarks, both positive and negative feedbacks—just generally "all of it," and for this I will be forever grateful! Unknowingly, my cohort mates gave me the courage to face my ADHD without judgment or negativity. They provided me with patience and trust—and they held the door open as I took many unsteady baby steps through it. Now the path before me will allow me to traverse off the circular path that once held me and onto the path of any goal of my choice.

As this experience ended, life tossed out a curve ball, namely, the case of the coronavirus 19 (Covid-19) pandemic of 2020/2021. The horrific damage from Covid-19 was unfathomable in many ways. Around the world the deaths due to Covid-19 have been countless, and people have been in lockdown mode as if they have been prisoners with Covid-19 as their jailer. Small businesses, homes, and jobs have all been lost. This turmoil has led many to struggle with depression, great loneliness, and families drifting apart, both literally and figuratively. Sadly, with one stroke of a small virus, the world would be forever changed. My transformation through the MSOD program has equipped me for the past 18 months to not only deal with the new norms of the world but has also allowed me to focus on the matter at hand before me. It has also allowed me to focus on the positives rather than duel with the negatives. It has allowed me to be more confident in my decision-making process; some major life-altering decisions had to be made with little to no knowledge of what was to come next.

Experiencing Bridges' (2009) transitions with the ending, the neutral zone, and the new beginning is both applicable to the world and myself. While I cannot begin to unravel the future for the world, I can speak for myself.

For me, I was in the "ending" stage model presented by Bridges because I had left my job.

> Ending. This stage is typically characterized by confusion about what is really over, who has the power, and what has not ended. This resembles the early stages of Kubler-Ross cycle. Clients may find it hard to imagine life without the old role. If, for instance, they are having to compete for what they regard as their "own" jobs in reorganization, they may feel sadness and anxiety about what the future holds. If they are leaving, they may feel panic about whether they will ever get another job. (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 133)

This happened in February because my time was done there. I was going to allow myself several months to write my Capstone before a heavy push to job hunt, but then within a few weeks the pandemic came crashing down and the shutdowns and lockdowns began. I was stunned, along with countess millions of other people. The news was dire, the predictions of what was to come were dire, and the outcome was bleak. I expected to be in the "neutral zone" but certainly not like this.

> The neutral zone. Bridges describes this as a feeling like being "in continuous whitewater." The old has not quite ended, but the new has not quite begun. As

> well as noting the feelings of being buffeted and directionless, Bridges emphasizes that the neutral zone can be a time of creative renewal (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 133).

Bridges' (2009) transition model has three parts: endings, the neutral zone, and new beginnings.

> Endings: Transition starts with an ending. This is paradoxical but true. This first phase of transition begins when people identify what they are losing and learn how to manage these losses. They determine what is over and being left behind, and what they will keep. These may include relationships, processes, team members or locations.
>
> Neutral zone: The second step of transition comes after letting go: the neutral zone. People go through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. It is when the critical psychological realignments and repatterning's take place. It is the very core of the transition process. This is the time between the old reality and sense of identity and the new one. People are creating new processes and learning what their new roles will be. They are in flux and may feel confusion and distress. The neutral zone is the seedbed for new beginnings.
>
> New beginnings: Beginnings involve new understandings, values, and attitudes. Beginnings are marked by a release of energy in a new direction – they are an expression of a fresh identity. Well-managed transitions allow people to establish new roles with an understanding of their purpose, the part they play, and how to contribute and participate most effectively. As a result, they feel reoriented and renewed. (https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/)

Instead of quietly working on my Capstone, total chaos took over the household. I can only say that the new ME who emerged from the **c**ohort was needed. Patience and the ability to openly listen and redirect understood fears were just a few qualities that were very much needed in this scenario because I had to live with my mother, sister, a teenage niece, a ten-year-old niece, and my five-year-old son. There was great anxiety in our household. People were dying, people were sick, and no school and no work, everyone on lockdown, stores claiming to be low on food—all of it was extremely overwhelming for all of us. For the kids**,** it was a major unknown of many emotions**.** Throughout this mayhem, I tried a number of times to write my Capstone but to no avail. Instead, I found myself waiting in various lines for food and products we needed. My priorities had taken a new direction—the health and welfare of my family. Instead of being in the top two tiers of Maslow's pyramid, I had now gone to the bottom tier, which was addressing my basic survival needs, which ties to my physiological needs.

With the world in topsy-turvy mode, no clear direction, no end in sight, and no money (what money?), what path will I traverse? One saving factor was I was coming out of this program with an enlightened sense of who I am and where I wanted to go. I felt I was well prepared for almost any eventuality, but even this was a tough go. So, in April I decided to use the "neutral zone" again for a new and different path. I would look for a new job. In the past I would have just dwelled on the negative but, in this case, I was hopeful to make the best possible outcome of a bad situation.

I was not sure how well this would flow with so many businesses closed or using the "work from home" method. Out went many updated resumes and, amazingly, I got a job! Not only did I get a job, but I found a position in which I could grow, use my newfound skills, and really succeed in a company I had long dreamed of joining.

I don't know if this would have been possible without going through the transformational learning experience that the Organizational Dynamics program offered me. I was able to use the tools I learned and to move past the negatives of the situation, then continue to move forward and push through to have a positive outcome. While I did get a new job, I still was very much sitting in my "neutral zone" as this is a place, I have never thought I would have to navigate. I would be starting a new job without ever stepping foot into an office with my team. I have never had to do this. *How would I navigate this?* I thought.

How would I prove to my team I am enough? Then I paused and realized I had just gone through a program to help set me up for success. I took time to not only review past lessons I had learned but for the first time I reached out to my Cohort network to help me navigate these tough times. It was nice to be able to bounce ideas off others and reflect not only with myself but with my network by my side.

It has been 6 months since I started my new role. I feel like this is where I started to make my transition to Bridges' theory of the transition stage of "the new beginning."

> The new beginning. The new life is starting, but just as it was unclear psychologically what had really ended, so it might be equally unclear what has really begun. Clients starting new jobs may, for instance, feel deeply unsettled: Did they make the right decision? They may still miss former colleagues and friends or yearn for gossip about the old organization. The new role or organization feels provisional. (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p. 133-134)

Now, as I sit in this space, I am reflecting on the past few years of my life and realize how far I have come. I am embracing the new role with the new me. I am learning to embrace my true authentic self as a positive, instead of hiding it or treading lightly. I am still uncertain because the times around me seem uncertain. I am realizing that although my position with Penn is gone, I have my new position that fits better with the new me. I believe I made the right decision because this new role provides more growth opportunities that I know I am ready to take on. I am also starting to realize I have trust not only within myself but in my team members, which even a year ago I don't think would have been possible. I am trying new approaches with my team, and they are working. I am speaking up in meetings and am actually being heard. It's quite refreshing.

Time has passed; it's now been over a year since I left Penn. It's also been over a year since I started writing my Capstone. I can tell you that writing my Capstone while dealing with ADHD, my son now in kindergarten, my niece now in fifth grade, and my other niece a junior—all in virtual school because our school district did not allow in-person learning—along with the Covid-19 pandemic has not been easy and has been one of my toughest challenges to date. The Organization Dynamics experience and the cohort program with its emphasis on experiential learning positioned me to successfully take on the past 2 years, face my toughest challenges, and come through confident and ready to face the next normal.

Conclusion

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."—Aristotle

It's ironic how this is the conclusion of not only my Capstone but the Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania. Yet it seems to be the beginning for me. My future has endless possibilities. I am now in control of my ADHD; it no longer controls me. I have not only learned to embrace who I am but have learned through the transformational learning process how to use the differences that ADHD brings to the table as a positive versus a negative. I came to understand my disability's importance and its relevant nature to my persona. The shame, guilt, mistrust, and insecurities that came from hiding my ADHD are now replaced with understanding, trust, and self-acceptance as I've learned to "trust the process." All this was accomplished through my journey via the program, cohort, peers, professors, coaching experiences, consulting experiences, and assessments, just to name a few. Now I feel I am in a new chapter of my life for the first time as I forever sit here in the still of the night in a mindful state.

> Mindfulness means moment-to-moment awareness. It is learning to wake up to each moment of your life so that you are fully living your life in this moment. Mindfulness is not a mysterious mystical state; rather it is being fully aware of the reality around you. Mindfulness is maintaining awareness of the sensations in

> your body, the flow of thoughts through your mind, the sounds, and sights in your surroundings. Thus, mindfulness is awareness expanded into ourselves and outward into the world. (Wildflower & Brennan, 2011, p.203)

While I recognize that I continue to be a work in progress, my future is much improved with these new tools that the MSOD program, as well as the OCEC cohort, provided to me.

Through the Organizational Dynamics experience, I have learned we are all works in progress and that we are lifelong learners. Transformational change is an opportunity that is always present for life and offers us many disorienting dilemmas. Previously, those dilemmas might have been derailers for me. But now they are opportunities to be examined, explored, and considered. I have learned how to “socialize” my thinking by using my network of relationships.

My self-esteem has been reinforced by the assessment feedback and discussions I had with others about how they experience me, which informs my practice as a coach and as a listener who knows how to ask good questions and can give feedback as well as receive it. I can be present and in the moment without being overly distracted.

My coaching experiences in the cohort brought what the literature often presented to life for me. I experienced what the experts presented as part of the coaching process and learned how to address these challenges. Some of them I was able to ameliorate in the moment whereas some challenges were addressed later. I am proud I brought closure to difficult situations, learning how to communicate in the moment as well as post engagement.

I understand what trust means to me. With that understanding, I am able to create situations in which difficult conversations can explore that fragile process and reinforce it in professional relationships. I understand relationship building is fragile, delicate, and elegant as well as essential for good coaching engagement. I learned how to build, maintain, and repair trust.

All of these characteristics have become a part of the new Kristina, the Kristina who continues to evolve, and I plan to continue to allow myself to grow and be a lifelong learner.

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