

## Chapter 11: Reflections on this journey

*“I have begun to wonder if the secret of living well is not in having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company”.*

*Rachel Naomi Remen (2000, p.337)*

### It's all perfect

I imagined this inquiry would encompass my professional life; I would understand more about who and how I am as a supervisor. I do; the journey touched every facet of my life, enabling personal and professional growth. The drive to become an inquiring practitioner, over the last almost five years, has resulted in being awake to the many layers of complexity in my practice. I have become adept at moving in and out of academic literature, curious about what may be going on, energetically using my felt sense, intellect and heart, able to pause and reflect in the moment, experiment, observe and assess, embrace what emerges and integrate the learning into my ways of supervising. Writing this thesis provided the process for catching up with my own development.

I developed a depth of self-acceptance that was unexpected. My relationship with learning shifted in meaningful ways. I shared in Chapter 5 that I had been a life-long learner, driven by perfectionism, and wondering if I was enough as I constantly sought additional knowledge and experience to be in service to others and soothe my performance anxieties. I am now a learner for the sake of curiosity and inquiry, wonder and enchantment. I have moved into that space which Clutterbuck and Megginson (2011) describe as having the “ability to savor where you are, to contextualize it and to be able to look both forward and backward along the path” (p. 313). My internal narratives have been reshaped; I am enough.

This found sense of myself as whole, sufficient and worthy has influenced many aspects of my life. Here are the four most important ways. First, cultivating my voice. The

completion of this thesis required I trust my voice, my perceptions, and my meaning making. Second, self-acceptance. Who I am as a supervisor has been transformed by the shift from having a critical eye on my actions to an appreciation that there is learning in whatever happens in the room. Bringing the mantra “Don’t you see it’s all perfect?” (Dass and Das, 2013, p.104) to my own stance has minimized my negative ruminations and made room for seeking excellence while letting go of striving for perfection. Third, pursuing my goals to influence the adoption of supervision in North America. I have two new appointments, to co-lead a global Community of Practice on Coaching Supervision, and to co-lead a coaching supervisor training programme in North America. I have also accepted new opportunities to teach about group supervision in two coaching supervision programmes. Fourth, I have made major changes in my personal life. Each of these, and a myriad of other facets of my ways of being, have brought me across the threshold to a new phase of life.

## [My learning](#)

### [Requires articulation](#)

When I contrast how I have learned through the programme with other learning throughout my adult life, two things stand out. First, learning within formal programmes, whether a certification program, a course, or supervision of my practice, with opportunities to practice, experiment, assess, reflect, redesign and integrate, have been effective. I have developed as a leader, as an executive coach, and coaching supervisor with these approaches. Second, and more importantly for my continuing development, I have learned, in this endeavor, that I advance as a practitioner and as a human, when there are compelling reasons to synthesize and articulate what I have experienced and learned. It was in the retelling and reliving (Clandinin, 2016) that deeper transformation happened within me.

### Is inhibited by deference

I knew at the outset, as I explained in Chapter 1, that I learn in community. The dialogue, the differing voices, the opening of perspectives, the challenges and encouragement all contributed. I have had a healthy amount of deference, particularly to those I respected and admired, and who were my elders, not necessarily by age, but by my perceptions of their wisdom and knowledge. Deference was to leaders, teachers, authors, colleagues and practitioners. Deference was the other half of the fierce inner critic who faulted my own performance; deference was putting others on pedestals of perfection. I trusted what they knew, often more than I trusted myself.

A fascinating conundrum is that while this was true in the worlds of coaching and coaching supervision, it was never true in my corporate career where I was almost always trusting of myself over others. I found those parts of me that trust myself in my present endeavors through this project.

### Requires balanced inner voices

My fierce inner critic was a traveling companion for much of this journey. It had taken up residence with me very early in my life. I had less balance within my inner voices – the critic, the encourager, the learner, the young student, the seasoned human. I was often 150% critical of my actions as a newer supervisor and first-time researcher, compelled by the passion for improvement. I failed to acknowledge many of my attributes. Fortunately, through the years I had cultivated reservoirs of resilience necessary to sustain the determination to complete what I had undertaken. It made the learning more challenging; the performance anxieties inhibited the process. What I understand and have internalized, as mentioned above, is the balance of voices within me, the inner critic wanting excellence, the encourager being kind, the voices of self-acceptance, which will facilitate more ease, fun and lightness in the learning going forward.

## Requires reflective spaces

The quote that captures my commitment to reflective practice:

*The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.*

*(R.D. Laing, cited in Seymour, Crain & Crockett. 1993, p.53)*

I had consistently engaged in reflective practice with myself, with a psychoanalyst, and through engaging in supervision of my coaching and supervision practices. Those practices deepened with the applications of my learning through this project. I have added to these practices. I used two written reflective practices through journaling and writing meditations; the meditations were a process I developed while in the research. I used watercolors – taking paintbrush to paper with a simple set of paints, to see what images emerged in contemplation. Through the course of the research, images came to me in this way and opened up new perspectives on the field texts. Each of these practices enabled me to access different parts of myself – my mind, my body, my heart and my spirit. No single one would have been sufficient. I did not engage in any one method every day; I listened for what was calling me, and what was in my diary (e.g., supervision).

The shift to appreciating myself opened up panoramas of new reflections and learning.

## Requires communities

As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, I learn in community. As I consider the landscape of communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner, *et.al.*, 2015), I appreciate the ones that I was part of as I came into this program, and those that have developed.

There were over the last five years important ones that included supervision of my supervision; the faculty at the supervisor training academy; my colleagues within the supervision center; my supervision clients and the laboratory we co-created in our engagements, and the ones that will emerge with my new appointments. I know how to

engage in these as they are similar to other communities of practice that comprised work colleagues, clients, and non-profit sector colleagues. What I did not know how to do was to engage with the academic literature as an equal.

One of the purposes of undertaking this project, as with most doctoral research projects, was to learn about, and work with the academic literature. To transition from a reader, to a stance of being in dialogue with the authors, comparing and contrasting my thoughts, ways of being, practice and knowledge with theirs. My deference tendencies showed up strongly as I was studying in the certification programme to become a supervisor, and again as I engaged in the research, dipping into a variety of academic fields to read widely. I was in the grip of deference, initially, as I read about concepts such as ontologies and epistemologies. Terminologies and conceptual framing that were new to me that did not feel related to my practice. I came to realize they were inherent and embedded in my theories of practice, in my approach to the research, in my approach to the field texts, and interwoven in my writing. I could, over time and then quite suddenly, visualize myself at a round table of the authors, engaged in dialogue, appreciating what they brought as well as what I was contributing to the collective knowledge.

Interestingly I find it important to state that visualizing myself at the table means that I am able to deeply listen, question, and add what I have experienced and learned; to assess and evaluate; to pull pieces to experiment with; to challenge, rather than accept on face value as “truth”.

### Requires play and laughter

Finishing this thesis in the times of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have reminded me of the importance play and laughter as I am sheltering in place, locked in by governmental orders, holding the convictions that taking care of my community and myself requires adherence to the rules and guidelines. Play and laughter are required and have been throughout. Of course, the avenues for such were much easier pre-COVID. Yet, we know that all mammals play (Brown and Vaughan, 2009). The integration of theatre, music, movies, books, travel, adventures, friends and family have never been as

important as they are in this moment, when none of these can be done in person with others.

### In conclusion

*“...writing is a human and a living art, the beginning being the motive and the end the object of the work, each inspires it; each runs through organically, and the two between them give life to what you do”.*

*(Belloc, 1908, location 16359)*

I am a traveler along the path toward mastery. It has been a privilege, a delight, and a joy to engage in learning and becoming a doctoral level researcher. I feel incredible gratitude. I have become a different supervisor, a different human being. This is a contribution to the field of coaching, supervision and reflective practice; it will open potential and possibilities, and perhaps more importantly, be a call toward new lines of inquiry, curiosity, and the wonder of our practice.