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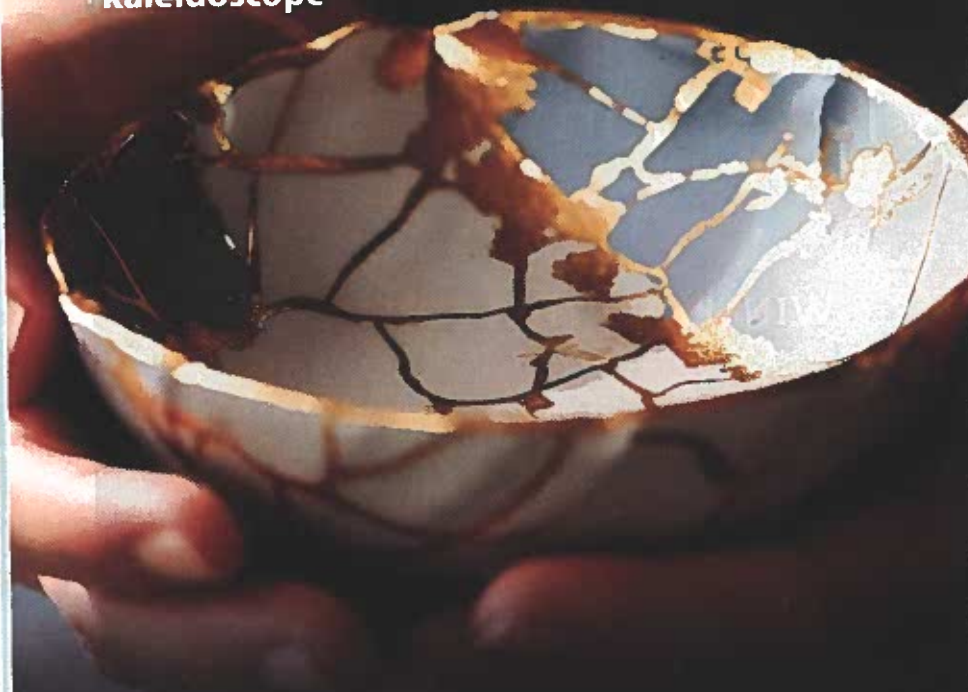
the magazine of professional coaching



NEUROSCIENCE & COACHING:

*Separating myth
from reality*

VOLUME 21 • NUMBER 4
choice-online.com



RISING AWARENESS

The journey towards celebrating unity in diversity

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Over the past few years, the world has been in a state of flux and upheaval. Since 2020, people have experienced (and continue to experience) the global pandemic, economic downturn, climate instabilities, immigration crisis, political tension, racial unrest, healthcare inequities and more. This changing landscape has caused an increase in sensitivities, biases and stereotypes. As more people turn to coaches for support, some coaches have had “IT” happen. If IT hasn’t happened to you yet, just wait.

WHAT IS “IT”? CAN YOU RELATE TO ANY OF THESE EXAMPLES?

- An HR manager who keeps hearing complaints from employees that the same group of people are continually promoted over more competent employees. The HR manager, your client, wants to be coached prior to an upcoming town hall session and keeps using terms like “those people,” “they can’t be trusted,” “they can’t represent the face of the organization.” As the coach, do you ignore those comments, ask for clarification, or start to have an uncomfortable conversation about race, social and cultural issues?

- An employee who is normally quiet had a recent outburst in your client’s office. The client calls security and has the employee terminated. Calling you after hours, the client wants to debrief the situation and asks how to prevent something similar. You hear the fear in your client’s voice and just keep silent as the one-sided conversation continues. The client takes a breath and asks if you are still listening. Do you ignore the rant, ask for clarity, or start to have an uncomfortable conversation about race, social and cultural issues?
- An executive just approved a new advertising campaign and shares the news with you. You find the campaign offensive due to your race and ethnicity. Since you never shared your race and ethnicity, how would you choose to react?
- You’ve been asked to group coach for a small company. In the process of giving you background on each of the participants, the client makes derogatory remarks about some individuals and uses slang expressions to describe them. How do you choose to react?

There are many more examples of clients who have learned and unconscious (yet implicit) biases, behaviors and stereotypes. And just as our clients have them, so do we as coaches. These inherent judgments sometimes cause us to react in a negative or neutral manner, resulting in a misunderstanding that can sometimes create unwanted tension, anxiety and/or violence. And, when IT happens, we feel so small, so confused or so stunned because we didn’t get IT. We didn’t recognize IT. We sometimes try to avoid the missteps, but rarely do we try to learn about and correct them. Rarely do we try to find and celebrate the unity in our diversity.

We have all kinds of diversity celebrations that seem to fan the flames instead of celebrating unity in diversity. We’ve seen the creation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion positions that lack

power and sometimes funding but seem to check an invisible box. Well, let me share with you my Rising Awareness Journey (RAJ), also known as simply “journey”) and how I learned to become more comfortable with uncomfortable conversations about social constructs and racism. The only prerequisite was that I have a willingness to try, and to be open to learning, adjusting and adding new skills to my coaching toolbox.

RAJ (risingawareness.org) is a movement that educates, teaches and equips coaches, consultants and others on how to “actively mend (repair), knit (interlock) like a fractured or broken bone, and heal The Human Race from racism and related social constructs through professional coaching, one person and conversation at a time.”

The philosophy and methodology of RAJ are awareness, advocacy, allyship and activism, also known as the 4 As.

AWARENESS: The continual raising of consciousness and acknowledgment that systemic racism has been and continues to be a part of our story worldwide.

ADVOCACY: The public act and process of supporting the cause of social change and equity so that apathy does not set in again and again.

ALLYSHIP: The continued public supportive association with another person or group, specifically with members of a marginalized or mistreated group.

ACTIVISM: The vigorous act of campaigning to bring about social change by co-creating relationships to connect first and then heal.

The core competencies of RAJ are similar to those found in coaching:

Co-creating the Relationship to Connect First: Usually during my first coaching session with a client, we discuss “what makes us tick.” I ask them to share their hot buttons, and a little of their background which, with their permission, I explore. I then share my culturally diverse background which, 90 percent of the time, gets them to open up even more. I strive to have a conversation seeking a “common ground.” You see, just as we are

different, we are similar, so my conversation is simply to create that safe space for future conversations to occur. I want the client to learn to trust me and know that our conversations are confidential. I want the client to feel like I am aligned with them.

Activism & Accountability Through Sharing, Learning and Growing: We are in the age of technology. Everything occurs rather quickly around us. News spreads so fast, you can be overwhelmed with the daily reports of violence, racism, political unrest, financial insecurities and health care issues across the globe. By having those tough conversations in a safe environment, coaches can help their client transform, develop a plan of action and execution of it.

Conversational Vital Sign #1 (Heartsyles): Put simply, taking the time to assess or examine what moti-

1. Listening with a discerning ear and being non-judging.
2. Recapping in a non-intrusive/neutral manner (for example, if the client uses a lot of profanity, flowery and otherwise insulting language, you take the high road, summarizing in a more professional and less intimidating manner).
3. Having an educational type of conversation.
4. Showing courage to bring up the ‘hot topic.’

As I continue to progress on my journey, I have found that I have become a ‘change and healing agent’ – a term those of us on this journey call ourselves. Becoming a change and healing agent helps to improve diversity, advance equality and instill inclusion.

I am continually learning and growing more comfortable with having the

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vates what we say and do. By using the L.A.C.E. method (Love, Authenticity, Courage and Empathy), we can help bring change in people, their relationships, and the systems that they might inhabit.

Conversational Vital Sign #2 (Conversational Intelligence): As you might have guessed, this competency pertains to navigating the challenging conversations about race, social and cultural issues.

As a coach, we already know how to ask powerful questions. Now add to our toolbox, the ability to ask AND receive questions even when it hits your “hot button.” Authentic communication that is deliberate and intentional can help us, and others, to heal.

I also found the following to be helpful and have added to my coach toolbox:

uncomfortable conversations. And, in the back of my mind I hear Rodney King (circa 1992) saying, “Why can’t we all just get along?”

More than ever, it’s time to start celebrating our unity in diversity. As Audre Lorde, an internationally acclaimed poet, professor, feminist, civil rights champion and LGBTQ+ advocate once said, “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.”

Won’t you join me on this journey, the Rising Awareness Journey, to become a change and healing agent by having one constructive coaching conversation at a time? It’s time to heal. It’s time to start celebrating our unity in diversity. •