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"FINDING BALANCE AMIDST THE 'WHITE-WATER' PACE OF CHANGE IN YOUR CLIENT ORGANIZATION"

A Personal Story...

I enter the empty elevator and hope there are no stops to pick up others on my way to the top floor of our high-rise corporate headquarters. I take deep breaths to ground myself and to provide a safe and protective energy shield.

Then I reflect on the call from the assistant to my executive client. "John wants you up here immediately. Can you come?" With my agreement, she adds, "Just to let you know he's really in a bad mood!" That means he is angry and I could be the cause of it or have to bear the brunt of it. I take another deep breath to ensure my grounding, walk off the elevator and approach John's office. His assistant smiles at me and whispers, "Good luck!"

I walk in feeling strong, confident, and well-protected. As soon as he sees me, he starts yelling and demanding that I change the plans for a carefully designed meeting scheduled for the next day. I keep my voice calm and low and begin asking him what his concerns are. Because of my calmness, he is unable to intimidate me and begins to calm down. He continues, however, to demand changes in the meeting. I continue to tell him that I don't agree and give him my reasons. He ultimately agrees that I am right and with a laugh says, "You are one hard-headed woman!"

I leave his office knowing that I have gained in credibility with John and grateful for my grounding and centering which gave me natural balance and helped me avoid taking on John's anger. This is one of many ways that I found my grounding and centering practices helped me cope with the challenges of living in my client organization.

Life as an Internal

With experience as an external consultant and over fifteen years as an internal consultant living in my client's organization, I believe there are significant differences an internal must address in order to successfully survive both personally and professionally. Internals must learn to balance paradoxical issues with no easy answers. Some of those issues include:

- **Marginal Role:** The internal consultant is a member of the organization yet must maintain distance, objectivity and neutrality. To be marginal in the sociological sense is to stand and work at the boundary, to be in the organization and to be outside the organization. The internal consultant is in the organization as a member but must stand outside the organization to view it with objectivity and distance. Although externals also serve in marginal roles, they are never literally members. In contrast, internal consultants are defined as employees on the payroll and subject to the organizational policies and procedures, influenced by the norms and culture, and directed by management in the performance of their jobs. Thus the role of the internal is a stressful one. We must constantly calibrate our positions...shifting to be more congruent with our clients in order to be acceptable, to build relationships to increase trust...then, shifting to a more neutral outsider stance in order to bring alternative perspectives, hold up the mirror or introduce

new alternatives. We never quite belong or identify fully as members. We are always marginal.

- **Multiple Roles:** Because the work is driven by the needs of the organization, internals have more opportunity and are expected to take more varied and diverse consulting roles demanding a breath of expertise...serving as the neutral outsider facilitating resolution of problems within a team, coaching an executive on the alignment of the culture with the business strategy, providing advice based on knowledge of organizational behavior, leading a task force advocating a change initiative, or guiding a steering committee on managing a change process. These multiple roles provide opportunities for learning, but also demand that we be flexible, multi-skilled, clear about our abilities and at the same time remember which hat we are wearing.
- **Supporting Cast versus Starring Roles:** To survive and be accepted internally often requires a personal style with low ego-needs and a willingness to partner and be a team player. Many externals are viewed as stars, prophets, or gurus for their clients, flying in to perform, hold center-stage, and share pearls of wisdom. By contrast the internal often must work backstage, be a member of the supporting cast and be team players. Executive clients often don't see internals with the credibility, competence or wisdom they see with externals. It is difficult to be "a prophet in your own land."
- **Politically Neutral or Politically Savvy:** Internals often are victims of internal political battles because of reporting relationships, major clients, or involvement in risky or unpopular change initiatives. Most internal consultants, helping their clients manage change, are frequently asked to lead a change initiative which puts them in an advocacy position. They can no longer be perceived as neutral and are less able to be "empathic" to those who disagree or resist. The internal consultant who leads a change initiative, then, becomes aligned with the senior manager sponsoring the change and may succeed or fail as that manager's reputation rises or falls. Learning to manage the grapevine's inaccurate slant on your role, navigate the land mines of political alliances, and choose when to be an advocate or when to say no are continual dilemmas for the internal. If something doesn't go well, the external leaves and can work for another client. For internals, the results achieved are visible and passed along the informally. Your reputation is at stake with every intervention.
- **Balancing the Boss-Subordinate Relationships:** For some, negotiating their role as a neutral consultant who maintains confidentiality may be a challenge. Many bosses traditionally don't like surprises and want to be kept in the loop. It may be difficult for your boss to understand why your work requires confidentiality or why you can't keep him or her informed about the maneuverings of other political camps. I also found that my clients assumed I represented my boss's position or would carry tales back to corporate based on their prior negative experience.

In addition, internals often have little choice and control, usually move from one intervention to the next with little or no time for re-charging, and often must handle multiple projects. Maintaining personal balance, energy and focus with these demands amidst the fast paced, hard business realities of changing strategies, new leadership, cost-cutting, and process improvement initiatives, is a constant challenge that many of us as internals can find overwhelming.

Several years ago, I was introduced to a Grounding and Centering technique which gave me access to my natural balance, my intuition, my intellect and my heart, which enabled me to be more present, aware and available for my clients, and which allowed me to practice with emotional integrity. The Grounding and Centering techniques I learned and used, as well as the Seven Fundamental Areas of Self-Care, enabled me to handle the stresses and challenges as an internal, and to survive for fifteen years in the "white water" rapids (Thanks to Peter Vaill for this wonderfully descriptive term) as change swirled through my organization.

What Does It Mean to be Grounded?

A person who is grounded is one who is strong and powerful, who can't easily be knocked off balance, and who is clear, present and aware. With this strong presence, balance and clarity, one can utilize the full range of human capacity to think, to move, to express feelings and to access our higher wisdom. We can maintain balance and presence no matter what comes our way. It contrasts with being ungrounded, which is like standing with your two feet held tightly together and your knees locked, very vulnerable to losing your balance and keeling over.

A familiar exercise clearly demonstrates the physical quality of groundedness. Working with a partner, stand with your right arm extended straight from the shoulder out in front of you. Ask your partner to give a trial push down on your arm as you hold strong to calibrate the strength of the push it takes to lower your arm. Then close your eyes and focus your attention on your forehead. When you have all your attention in your forehead, open your eyes to let your partner know to push down on your arm. Surprise! Your arm has no strength! Close your eyes again and focus all your attention in your chest. When you have all your attention in your chest, open your eyes to signal your partner to push down on your arm. Again, your arm has no strength! Now, close your eyes again and focus your attention in your abdomen. When you have all your attention focused in your abdomen, open your eyes to signal your partner to push down on your arm again. This time you are strong!

What a surprise! With your attention focused in your abdomen, your arm holds strong in contrast to a lack of strength when your focus is in your head or your heart! To be grounded then, is to center your attention in your abdomen, giving you the natural strength and power to hold strong with much less effort and without being a "push-over" or a "soft-touch". With this balance, you have options, can make more accurate assessments because you are fully present, and can be responsive to people and events while using your intuition. However, this balanced energy is not automatic. We must learn to be responsible to renew our own energy and maintain our energetic integrity by not draining energy from others or allowing them to take ours.

I have found that once I developed a practice of both grounding and centering several times a day, I was less likely to take on the emotional or physical symptoms of others, I more easily managed the stress in my work environment, and I successfully accomplished many challenging assignments.

The Grounding Process

Internal consultants work in a "white-water" environment with strong currents and many hidden boulders. We must navigate those currents, avoid the snags, steer around the rocky shallow water, and avoid sinking with too heavy a load. I found Grounding gave me the most

practical, solid foundation to meet these challenges. The following techniques can be practiced in the privacy of your office or your home.

1. Find a comfortable position, loosen your belt, and move around a bit until you are sitting comfortably relaxed. Place your feet firmly on the floor about a foot apart with your knees resting comfortably above your feet. Place your hands palms down on your thighs and gently close your eyes.
2. Breathe a little more fully and allow yourself to relax. Notice how your body feels. Notice any spots of tension and breathe into them. You may hold tension in your shoulders, the back of your neck your knees or your jaw. Continue breathing fully, breathing into the spots of tension and letting them go. Find the balance of relaxed awareness so you won't drift off to sleep.
3. Shift your attention to the base of your spine. Visualize a grounding cord attached to the base of your spine. (You may see the cord like a root of a tree or like a strong steel cable. Whatever works for you.) With your awareness on this cord, inhale deeply. Then exhale fully (through your open mouth) into this grounding cord that extends deep into the center of the earth. Once again, inhale deeply and exhale again, making your grounding cord denser and stronger. With your breath, exhale two similar cords from the base of your spine, through your legs and feet into the center of the earth.
4. Now shift your breath to a bellows breath, a deep breath in through your nose and a short out-breath through your mouth with a forceful "haaa". Visualize the warm earth energy flowing up through the grounding cords in your legs with each breath. (Be sure to bring up the earth energy through the two cords in your legs and not through the central grounding cord) Take six to eight of these breaths. Pause and allow the earth energy to fill every cell in your body. Take a moment to compare how you feel now with how you felt when you started the exercise. Open your eyes gently, feeling refreshed and recharged.

When you are first learning the grounding process, it is helpful to practice it slowly every day. When I started, I would begin and end my day with this exercise. As I became more familiar with the process, I could also use it frequently during the day to re-establish my grounding with a deep breath as I did in the elevator in the story above. I re-ground myself not only when a stressful event threatens my balance, but any time I need clarity and focus to release negative energy I pick up from the environment around me. Once this energetic circuitry is established, the central grounding cord serves as a drainpipe to send negative energy down and away. The three grounding cords give you balance like a dynamic three legged stool which has flexibility and mobility, allowing you to smoothly move and flex with the swirling currents around you. With your grounding firmly in place, you have the energy and balance to navigate the white-water pace of change.

The Centering Process

After you have established the grounding circuitry described above, you can add the Centering process to your practice. Centering is a way of protecting yourself from the negative energy around you. Our clients are often highly stressed, exhausted and ungrounded. They feel over-whelmed, seem to go in circles, forget important meetings, drop files or have small accidents. Their balance is precarious. As "helpers", it is easy for OD consultants to be

sympathetic and take on some of our client's issues. Yet as professionals, it is our responsibility to be objective, stay somewhat above the turmoil, and maintain our balance, presence and availability for our clients. The Centering process has provided me with a protective energetic shield that allows me to be present and open for my clients, have empathy, warmth and caring, but not take on their issues personally. It also minimizes the risk of my storing up the minor irritations and annoyances or the toxic, angry frustrations that come my way from those around me.

The Centering process encircles you with a protective blue flame much like the blue ozone layer that encircles and protects planet earth. The ozone layer allows the healthy rays of the sun needed for growth and warmth to reach the earth, and filters out the damaging radioactive rays. The blue flame in the Centering process serves the same purpose. It allows in warmth, caring and supportive energy from those around you and protects you from damaging negative energy. After you have completed the Grounding process and before you open your eyes, follow these steps to complete your Centering:

1. About 15 inches above your head imagine a small flicker of blue flame, much like a pilot light on a gas burner. Inhale a deep breath and as you exhale, imagine bringing a swath of blue flame from above your head all the way down the front, 15 inches under your feet and up your back.
2. Then breathe a swath down the sides and seal it all around to ensure that you are completely surrounded by your own protective blue ozone layer.
3. Take a moment to feel your grounding into the earth, and the safe protection of your blue flame.
4. Then bend over, place your hands on the floor, drop your head between your knees and gently shake it from side to side, take a deep breath and let go of any excess energy you may have taken in. You may feel a tingling or some heat. Let that pass and then slowly sit up and gently open your eyes feeling safe, refreshed, and energized.

Although to some this technique may seem either silly or scary, I have found the Centering Process very valuable to give me my own ozone layer, a protective shield from energetic contamination as frustrations, fears, and anxieties so prevalent during "white water" change build within individuals and organizations.

Seven Fundamental Areas of Self Care

Although we can practice the Grounding and Centering meditation daily, other self-care practices will help to maintain vitality, aliveness and full energy. These practices which are familiar admonitions, have been important practices in maintaining my ability to remain healthy and to be present, available and caring for my clients..

1. **Nutrition:** Proper nutrition varies for each individual. For some a vegetarian diet works because they carefully balance their protein intake. For others, animal protein is important to maintain good health. Some of us must avoid foods like dairy and wheat because of dietary allergies. Eating the proper diet and ensuring good nutrition for your body is important for your good health and energy.

2. **Water:** Drink at least eight or more glasses every day. Just as car batteries used to need water, our own internal batteries need to be flushed and re-charged with water. Our bodies can become stiff and arthritic if we don't keep ourselves hydrated.
3. **Exercise:** The evidence is overwhelming in support of 30-60 minutes of exercise daily to prevent serious illness and promote good health. A half hour walk is a wonderful way to relax and release stress and tension.
4. **Rest and Time Alone:** We all need to re-charge and rejuvenate our internal batteries. As OD practitioners we are giving and using ourselves in our work. Taking time alone to reflect, to meditate, close your eyes or take a cat nap is a good way to rebuild our internal resources.
5. **Breathing:** Taking deep breaths brings fresh oxygen to the whole cellular structure of the body. We can breath new life into our systems through laughter, a wonderful walk in nature, or through the grounding breath. A deep long exhale also releases tension and tight muscles.
6. **Fun:** Having fun and laughing bring health and healing. Our lives can become too serious and heavy working with the organizational and personal challenges we confront daily. Friends and fun relationships bring joy and deep nurturing to our lives and our hearts. With a heart full of love and joy we can give to our clients with warmth and caring.
7. **Meaningful Work:** It is important for us to ask on a regular basis, "Is my work meaningful?" "Am I staying on purpose with my work?" Both our lives and our work with clients suffer when our work no longer has meaning. If the answer to these questions is no, it is time to review alternatives and perhaps make a change.

I find it useful to do a daily assessment of how well I am practicing my self care. The following questions reviewed at the end of the day help me ensure that I don't neglect my needs and in turn undermine my ability to meet my client needs:

1. What did I not do for myself today that I needed to do?
2. What did I do for myself today that I did not need to do?
3. What did I do for myself today that I did need to do?

A pattern of neglecting one or two areas over a week or so reminds me to make some shifts to regenerate my health and well-being.

Final Thoughts

Working as an internal consultant is full of opportunity to learn, to develop long term relationships and to make a commitment to health and success of an organization. To gain the most from this opportunity, we must find ways to take care of ourselves, refresh and renew our energy, and keep our natural balance which contributes to a sense of control in a rapidly shifting

environment. By focusing on our own health and vitality, we can support the increased health and vitality of our client organizations in the midst of "white-water change".