Become a Creativity Coach Now!

ERIC MAISEL

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by Eric Maisel

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Become a Creativity Coach Now! introduces you to the art and practice of creativity coaching. It is the text used in Eric Maisel's Introduction to Creativity Coaching training and will give you a solid sense of what creativity coaches do. Many coach-in-training responses are included, to give you a sense of what coaches who are starting out think about and encounter as they begin to get their feet wet in the field of coaching. This text is not a substitute for trainings or for practical experience but it does provide a wide-ranging introduction to creativity coaching.

For more information on Dr. Maisel's trainings and services, please visit:

http://www.ericmaisel.com

For more information on the offerings of the Creativity Coaching Association, including their certification program (which requires Dr. Maisel's introduction to creativity coaching training and advanced creativity coaching training), please visit:

http://www.creativitycoachingassociation.com/

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INTRODUCTION

I'm a creativity coach. I've been doing this work for more than thirty years. First, I was a novelist; then I became a psychotherapist (technically, a licensed marriage and family therapist); then I glided into creativity coaching, inventing the territory as I went.

This is a very typical route for creativity coaches: to have a background in the arts, a second background as a therapist or helping professional of some sort, and to parlay that experience and those interests into a niche career which they themselves design. Nobody comes out of college a creativity coach. We are all born along the way, often in our mid- to late-thirties.

I've also been writing for forty-five years. Over the course of those years I've written fifty or more books. This, too, is quite typical: creativity coaches are usually creators who, sometimes only in fits and starts, keep at their art while they coach. It is the rare creativity coach who doesn't have an art discipline he or she loves and works in some of the time. The majority of creativity coaches are writers (novelists, poets, nonfiction writers, screenwriters), the next largest group is made up of visual artists (with many craftspeople included), but every artistic and intellectual discipline is represented, including the hard sciences.

As a creativity coach, I work with world-famous creators and unknown creators. I work with regularly producing creators, blocked creators, and would-be creators. Some of my clients have bestsellers to their credit, million-selling albums, hit television shows, a net worth of eight- or nine-figures. Most have day jobs and many have trouble making ends meet. All share a certain set of attributes and beliefs about the world. They feel fulfilled, if only for a moment, when they create well. Creating is how they make their meaning. They are challenged by their own personality, by the work of creating, and by their culture and society. And they can all use the guidance and support that creativity coaches provide.

I have been working as a creativity coach for some time. I began calling myself a creativity coach more than twenty-five years ago, perhaps coining the term in the process. Indeed, this field is very new. Most creativity coaches only began coaching since 2000. Many of these new creativity coaches have only the smallest of practices. Since the field of creativity coaching is very new, most creative people know nothing about creativity coaching, not even that it exists.

I think this will change as more people enter this embryonic field and call themselves creativity coaches. I am helping some number of people do just that. In addition to working with clients--by phone, by Skype, by e-mail, in groups and in workshops--I also train creativity coaches. Coaches-in-training and the clients they coach during trainings live in Paris, Singapore, New Zealand, Switzerland, Germany, the rural South, Los Angeles, everywhere and anywhere that email, phone and Skype reach. As you encounter the material in this book, I hope you will think seriously about entering this fledgling field yourself.

In this book, I will address you as a prospective creativity coach and teach you how to coach, how to build and maintain a practice, and how to nurture your creative life. If you heed my advice, respond to the "food for thought" section at the end of each lesson, possess at least some hands-on experience as a creator, and are mature and evolved enough to be of service to another person, you can launch your creativity coaching practice before too long. If you have the requisite mindset, experience, and skills and if you apply yourself, this is a process that can take months rather than years.

What do creativity coaches do? They help clients create and make meaning. With their clients, they investigate issues of blockage, self-doubt, anxiety, fear of failure, worries about mistakes, and the other process and personality issues that interfere with getting creative work done. They help creators deal with marketplace issues, career issues, issues of isolation and alienation, and the other issues that inevitably

arise for people who have chosen to create. They cheerlead, listen, educate, respond, and help their creative clients get their work done and live in the real world.

In the process, creativity coaches also become much more effective self-coaches. The creativity coaches I train find it impossible not to look at their own creativity issues as they work with clients and think long and hard about what helps and hinders creative expression. A coach-in-training begins to see why she never finished her mystery novel as she works with a blocked painter or a blocked composer. Another coach-in-training discovers that her negative self-talk has caused her to stand on the creativity sidelines. Coaches-in-training learn that they can be of great help to their clients; they also learn how to help themselves. Coaches-in-training learn what it takes to create, not abstractly or intellectually but personally and viscerally.

Never before has it been possible for two people separated by great distances to communicate with each other so quickly, easily, and cheaply. A creativity coach in Ireland can work with a client in Israel, and a writer in Georgia and a painter in Delhi can work with the same creativity coach in Chicago. One of the many advantages of this new reality is that coaches, who could not possibly build a practice in their locale because it isn't home to enough creative people, can begin to build a practice by reaching out across the country and around the world.

We shall see if this new ease aids the growth of this new profession. Coaching has exploded as a field. Creativity coaching is a branch of coaching that may see its own growth spurt in the coming years as more creativity coaches are trained and as individuals looking for help with their creative efforts learn about the existence of creativity coaches. Perhaps you will find yourself at the cutting edge of this new work. Whether you are just getting acquainted with creativity coaching or whether you are already a practicing creativity coach, I hope this book serves you well.

SELF-COACHING

Every person interested in manifesting her creative potential, creating regularly and deeply, surviving the rigors of a creative life, managing the light and shadow of her contradictory personality, and finding love and support in her relationships, must learn to become her own creativity coach. While she may sometimes hire a creativity coach and receive advice and counsel from people other than herself, the main coaching she receives has to be self-originating. Ultimately, only you are in a real position to help you.

This is doubly true for a creative person, who is likely to find less support from her culture than a conformist will, less support from her mate than if she'd chosen a more conventional path, less support from her parents, who may doubt her path and fear for her survival. Many people find themselves supported by their circle and their society because they blend in well. But not creative people, for whom meaning-making is an obligation and not an occasional thing. If you are creative, or if you intend to be creative, the burden of supporting you will rest with you.

What issues are bound to confront you? Among many others are the following five:

+ Issues of meaning: whether and to what extent the creative path you have chosen is a meaningful one, whether and to what extent your current creative project is a meaningful one, and whether and to what extent life feels meaningful to you. A self-coach is also a meaning expert and an existential guru.

+ Issues related to the creative process: how to unblock, how to choose worthy creative projects, how to maintain momentum even as you hate your current project, how to know when to revise a piece and when to abandon it, and so on.

+ Issues of personality: nurturing healthy narcissism and the "necessary arrogance" of a personal meaning-maker while also minimizing unhealthy narcissism and the "big

ego" and grandiosity that many creators manifest; how to increase desirable personality traits, like confidence, energy, thoughtfulness, discipline, etc., while monitoring the shadow side of each of these traits; and so on.

+ Relationship issues: balancing a pressing need for solitude with a sometimes-grudging willingness to relate to others, managing the challenges that arise when two creative people try to form an intimate partnership, dealing effectively with marketplace players, finding advocates and audiences, and so on.

+ Marketplace issues: fashioning a career in highly competitive disciplines where supply far outstrips demand, integrating personal work and commercial work, so that one's products are wanted in the marketplace but still have integrity, dealing with the anxiety that accompanies marketplace encounters, and so on.

This book does not do a complete job covering these many issues. However, if you include my other books as part of your self-coaching library, as well as other books on the market that are available to you, you can create a large, useful reference library to aid you in your self-coaching efforts. Art marketing books, time management books and money management books written expressly for creative people, books on increasing creativity and nurturing a creative life, insider looks at the various art disciplines, and spiritually-oriented and psychologically-oriented books for creators are all available to you.

In this book, the "you" I'm addressing are creativity coaches. To use it for self-coaching you'll need to translate the lessons into self-coaching terms. When I suggest to creativity coaches that they might want to try out a certain strategy, exercise, or approach with clients, you can say to yourself, "Let me try that out." When I underline the importance of coaches joining with their clients, you might wonder, "What does self-joining mean and entail?" If you are genuinely interested in learning how to coach yourself, you will find that this translation work is effortless.

The information in this book will also help you decide if you want to seek out and work with a creativity coach. You may have sought out therapy for issues in your creative life but may have felt that your psychotherapist didn't quite understand those issues. You may find that working with a creativity coach is a different, better experience than working with a therapist on creativity issues. You can contact me to see if I am available or you can check out the Creativity Coaching Association and learn about the certified creativity coaches listed there.

Maybe the picture of creativity coaching that I'm presenting in this book will intrigue you so much that you decide to become a creativity coach yourself, as a "meaning supplement" to the creative work you already do. If so, welcome to this fledgling profession, one ready to be shaped, molded, and created by people just like you.

INTRODUCTION FOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

How much do psychotherapists need to concern themselves with the "creativity issues" of their clients? It goes without saying that it would be useful for them to know something about the "creative process," the "creative personality," and the realities of the creative life if they work with creative and performing artists or with anyone who creates. But does an understanding of creativity need to go any further than this?

I believe that it does. I believe that the word "creativity" stands for a vital human self-relationship whose presence or absence determines how successfully a person manages to live. "Creativity" is the expression of a person who has opted to matter and who has decided to make personal meaning. To say that someone is or isn't creative is to say something about a person's willingness or unwillingness to exist on her own terms, not something about talents and aptitudes.

If a client is not creative and doesn't wish to be, that is not only real information--it may also be that person's defining feature. If she isn't manifesting her creative

potential but wishes that she would, that is crucial information in its own right. If she is attempting to manifest her creative potential and butting her head against the brick wall of her formed personality, the difficulties inherent in creating, and/or the realities of the marketplace, that is the main work in her life with which she will need help. To ignore the "creativity issues" of a psychotherapy client is to ignore how she is really constituted.

Therapists are turning a blind eye to their clients' reality when they fail to address "creativity issues" in therapy. Since training program fails to prepare therapists to investigate these issues, and since most therapists feel uncomfortable closely examining their own relationship to creating, they tend to avoid talking about creativity in therapy. But a therapist who does not embrace creativity as a central issue of every course of therapy, even with clients who never bring it up or who look to be anything but creative, runs the risk of doing superficial and even wrong-headed work.

Therefore, therapists and relationship counselors can learn from creativity coaches, who focus on the creative and meaning-making side of a client's life, and from this book, which describes the issues and challenges that a creative and would-be creative person face and what can be done to address those issues and meet those challenges. No matter what theoretical orientation a therapist adopts or what she does in the counseling hour, she can usefully add a creativity coach's perspective to her own to broaden her base of knowledge and widen the scope of her understanding.

If you begin to incorporate creativity coaching into your current therapy practice, you might get into the habit of checking in on the creativity and meaning-making issues of each of your clients as part of each session. You can operate this way with self-identified creative clients and with clients who do not bring up any nameable creativity issues but whom you think would benefit from having such issues aired. You can do some brief work at the beginning of sessions, signaling that you consider it important work, or you can check in at the end of sessions, just remembering not to conclude on too down a note, say with a shared sense that a block is intractable or a project doomed.

Imagine that you've gotten into the habit of spending five minutes each session on creativity issues with all clients. You actively listen and look for ways to bring such issues up and actively return to them every session. Consider how this might work with a client you know you will see for only six sessions in a brief-therapy framework. Your client is a professional woman presenting a variety of issues. You learn that she minored in English, loves to read, has thought about writing, and has even thought about a particular article she's wants to write. When you ask whether writing this article might be one goal of therapy, you get an ambivalent response.

If you considered the matter of only slight importance, you might drop it right there. But if you suspect that your client's reluctance to write this article may be more central than peripheral--if, for instance, you see it connecting to low self-esteem issues and anxiety issues—you might persist and remark that "creativity issues" often turn out to be important in therapy and that you will keep the article she has wanted to write in mind and bring it up again another time. In this way, you set the stage for a continued monitoring of creativity issues in your work with this client.

During the second session, when you bring the article up again, you will probably learn that she has been thinking about it a lot. She may tell you that thinking about it has made her very anxious. You might then do some educating about the naturalness of her response, since the thought of creating makes most people anxious, and even suggest that she spend a minute or two working on the article right in session "to bring the anxiety into the room." If, as will probably happen, she finds it too difficult to write in session--providing you with performance anxiety clues and examples of her self-talk as she tries--you might simply praise her for the effort.

In session three you may well learn that she is angry with you for having subjected her to that in-session writing assignment. Or you may discover that she found the attempt painful but also revealing. You might take the opportunity to focus on the value of incorporating a regular writing routine into her schedule and discuss her devoting an hour each day, at the same time each day, to the article. You might also

teach her the affirmation process and co-create an affirmation or two that she can use to support herself in her attempt to write this article. Alternately, you might teach her an anxiety-management strategy that she can use before getting started on her writing each day.

In session four you may learn that she was not able to keep to her routine at all and that she hasn't really made use of her affirmations, but that she did manage to do a little work on the article just before session. You can frame this as a success and as an important first step in the process, even as you wonder aloud about what getting the work done just before session might mean. You might then pick a specific goal for the coming week together: that, for instance, she attempts some work on the article the very next day, whether she wants to or not.

In session five you may learn that she could not get to the article the next day, but that she did work on it three days after the session, and for two days running. But now she's "not sure" that the article is really worth writing. Here you might congratulate her for managing to work for two days running and educate her about the importance of maintaining a "don't know" attitude with respect to the work. This is a time for her to love the article and give it a chance, not to criticize it or appraise it. It is likewise a time to endeavor to make meaning, not to feel like meaning is draining out of the enterprise just because she has doubts and worries.

In session six, your last session together, you might ask for permission to put aside checking in on the article and rather check in on "creativity issues" more generally. What has she learned about herself? What would she like to continue pursuing with regard to realizing her creative potential? What resources, like a writers' group, might she like to employ? You might conclude by simply affirming the value and meaning of creativity in a person's life. Probably, at the end of these six sessions, you would not consider that your client has been "transformed" with respect to her creativity issues, but by the same token you will have done some real work together and gotten important seeds planted.

This is one way that you might incorporate what creativity coaches do into your therapeutic model. As you read this book, give some thought to how you might make use of the information I provide to augment your clinical practice. You may also find my practice-building tips of value. Perhaps most importantly, look to your own creativity issues. Therapists are nothing but human. They get tired of managed care, they marry and divorce, they make meaning and lose meaning, and they have epiphanies and get blue. Because they are human beings, they have their own creativity issues.

Some dream of writing in their field. Some want to pour meaning into poetry, painting, or acting. Some want to go deeper with clients and suspect that this deepening can only come about through an unlocking of their own creative nature. Some have lost their love for therapy and find themselves embroiled in a meaning crisis. All of these are creativity issues and lead therapists to the same intertwined matters of realizing potential, refiguring self-relationship, and manifesting personal creativity that confront their clients. Therefore, this book may provide you with more than some new insights and strategies. It may help you unlock your potential and increase the meaning in your life.

I. Introduction to Creativity Coaching

Lesson 1. What is Creativity?

Creativity is usually defined as the ability to make original or unusual connections and/or products. This is putting the cart far before the horse and makes creativity sound like an innate talent. Creativity is not a talent or ability. It is the fruit of a person's decision to matter. You do not climb Everest because you have a talent for climbing. You do not lay down your life for your child because you have a talent for dying. Neither do you write a novel or invent a technology because you have a talent for writing or a talent for inventing.

You climb Everest because you have a desire to climb Everest and because you have prepared yourself to climb Everest. You lay down your life for your child because you love your child and because you are willing to sacrifice yourself on her behalf. You write a novel because you find it meaningful to write a novel and because you are willing to do what it takes to write that novel. You invent because you have inventing on your mind and in your heart. In each case you have decided what matters to you.

Creativity is nothing but the fruit of deciding to matter. Once you decide to matter, you enter into a particular self-relationship; out of that self-relationship, a certain awareness state naturally arises; ideas are born; and the work of elaborating those ideas begins. Any sound definition of creativity must contain these four elements: a necessary self-relationship; a necessary awareness state; the generation of ideas; and the elaboration of ideas into inventions, theories, works of art, and other fruits of creating.

As soon as you decide to think your own thoughts, you enter into a self-relationship with far-reaching consequences. To the world you may look idiosyncratic, because you are carving out your own path; arrogant and self-centered, because you are putting a fundamental premium on your own ideas; introverted, because in order to

think your thoughts you will need to daydream, cogitate, muse, calculate, and all the rest; skeptical, because you doubt the meanings of others; etc. Thus, we begin to see the "creative personality" arise as a function of the self-relationship a person enters into when she announces, "I will know for myself and be exactly myself."

The goals of this person are radically different from the goals of other people. The goals of the creative person are not primarily to conform, fit in, be liked or admired, make money, or even survive. For instance, Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, in their study of 200 full-time art students, found that their subjects scored a full standard deviation or more below the norm on the Scale of Economic and Social Value. That is, these students deviated significantly from the most common money and meaning values held by their culture and their society.

Getzels and Jackson, in their study of "highly creative" versus "highly intelligent" adolescents, concluded, "The creative adolescent seemed to possess the ability to free himself from the usual, to 'diverge' from the customary. He seemed to enjoy the risk and uncertainty of the unknown. In contrast, the high-I.Q. adolescent seemed to possess to a high degree the ability and the need to focus on the usual, to be 'channeled and controlled' in the direction of the right answer--the customary. He appeared to shy away from the risk and the uncertainty of the unknown and to seek out the safety and security of the known."

Once you decide to make personal meaning you are naturally obliged to cultivate a certain awareness state, one that allows you to commune with your thoughts. The creative person intentionally achieves that quiet, alert and active state of mind during which the brain works most effectively. This special awareness state is at once a thinking state and a state of reverie, a state of keen intention and no intention, a state in which more neurons that usual are enlisted in the service of making connections. One gets to be Mozart or Beethoven first of all by declaring, "I intend to be a conduit for music, I intend to think about music, to feel it, wrestle with it, and love it, and to do all that I must be empty and quiet."

What makes this awareness state different from other states of consciousness which it somewhat resembles is the person's intention to pursue a line of thought, make connections, and integrate material into meaningful outcomes like scientific hypotheses, symphonies, or plays. A person who intends to matter is not after "quiet mind" for "quiet mind's" sake, for a "quiet mind" not in the service of making meaning is just a "quiet mind." The mind of a person who is intending to matter percolates; when that brain endeavors to quiet itself, it is so as to quiet the extraneous noise that prevents it from thinking about what it dearly wishes to consider.

Because of this special self-relationship and the awareness state that it provokes, ideas inevitably arise. Ideas are coalesced bits of personal knowing that creators elaborate into the books, sculptures, and scores, the new theories and technologies, that we associate with the creative process and creative person. The "work" of creativity then follows: elaborating these ideas and producing products based on these ideas. You intend to matter, you will yourself to think, ideas arise, and then you start to work. You continue working until your idea is elaborated: until your novel is written, your tapestry woven, your biological idea tested, your invention built.

Breathing is involuntary. Ethical action requires thought and conviction. Creating is more like ethical action than like breathing. It is more intentional than involuntary, more like work than like magic, more an existential decision than an aptitude. A five-octave vocal range does not make you creative, nor does the ability to draw a perfect circle freehand, nor does an IQ of 170. These talents and aptitudes may help you greatly if you decide to matter, but if you have not embarked on a journey of self-actualization and personal meaning-making, you will not create.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you define creativity?

2. How would you define a creative life?

3. Given your definition of creativity and a creative life, what are the pluses and minuses of endeavoring to create?

4. Given your definition of creativity, are you creative? Are you living a creative life?

Lesson 2. What is Coaching?

Coaching is not an arcane or mysterious idea: it is simply being of help. It is easy enough to be of help—if that's what you want to be. If it's more important that you be right, get your way, look good, protect yourself, or "win" when you interact with people, well, that's another matter. But if you would actually like to be of help and help your son, the players on the soccer team you coach, your friend, or your coaching clients, that's a straightforward matter.

This book is written for the person who thinks that she might like to go into coaching as a profession. I think that this book will help you coach anyone, from your kids to your employees, but its main purpose is to provide a simple, straightforward guide to becoming a professional coach. In real life, most coaching is done for free. You typically do not charge your child to help him learn to use a toilet, tie his shoelaces, or recover from a rebuff on the playground. You typically do not charge your friend to listen to her current love problems and sympathize and make suggestions. You typically do not charge your co-worker for helping him understand how to use some new bit of technology. If it is one of our objectives to be of help, then we coach for free all the time: it is simply our desire to be decent, friendly, and useful made manifest.

Coaching is simply helping another person. You draw on your life experience and your wisdom and you learn by doing. There is no other way to learn but by doing. That means that your first clients are getting an unseasoned you, but someone has to get an unseasoned you. Most coaching programs use the dyadic peer model: two coaches coaching each other. You can learn by coaching a peer, by coaching a buddy, by coaching volunteer clients, and so on: but you only learn by actually coaching. Take on free clients; coach your friends; coach strangers; work with human beings; add on paying clients; and get better.

What else do you need, in addition to doing? You need some basic principles or guidelines, about being of help, being respectful, working from a client-centered perspective, providing support, holding clients accountable, and so on. You need to think about what's transpired after it's transpired. You need not to beat yourself up or to unduly blame yourself for some putative failure but to try to fathom what went on and what you might want to try in the next session or with a new client. You need courage; a helping attitude; compassion; and your wits about you.

What is the work? Helping clients with the issues they raise and identifying issues they have not raised. How do you help? You ask clarifying questions that cause a client to think. You wonder aloud about whether a client might want to try x, y, or z. You offer suggestions. You propose exercises. You teach—maybe a cognitive technique, a breathing technique, or an organizational technique. You are "in it" with your client, using whatever you have in your human arsenal to help your client deal with her challenges and solve her problems. You are being of help. That is the work.

Coaching is helping a person with the thing he says he wants changed or improved. Maybe he can't say what it is he wants improved; then you help identify what's wanted. One tennis player may want to be coached on his backhand; another may "want to get better" and is hoping that you can spot where he can improve. That is, a client may come in with concrete issues ("If I can manage to write and sell my novel my life will feel much more meaningful!") or with a global, amorphous need ("I don't know what I need but I know that I've had problems with meaning since childhood").

With one client, you work on his backhand and with another client you work on every part of his game. That is, with a client who feels that his main concern is getting recognized as a writer, you help him do exactly what he says he wants to do: write his novel, sell it, have a career, make his mark, and so on. You take him at his word and focus where he has asked you to focus. With another client, you work on every part of his game, either because he has expressed that many things aren't working (his backhand, his forehand, his serve, his court movement, and so on) or because he can't name what exactly isn't working.

What is the actual work? If a client says, "I think that if I felt more confident, stopped letting my mate walk all over me, finally gave my dad a piece of my mind, and got my painting career started, I would feel a lot better and might get rid of my malaise," you help her plot and plan how she is going to feel more confident, stop letting her mate walk all over her, give her dad a piece of her mind, and get her painting career started. Your client has done a lovely job of explaining to you where she wants help; then you start to help.

You work with clients in the ways that you deem best for you, best for your client, and/or the most strategic. You can see clients face-to-face, you can work with clients on the telephone or via Skype, you can work with clients via email, you can work with clients in groups, you can work with a given client in several ways, both via the phone and via email, and so on. A session can be 30 minutes, 45 minutes, 60 minutes or any length of time that makes sense to you. You can work with clients once a week, once every two weeks, once a month, or as often as makes sense to you. In short, you create every aspect of your coaching practice based on what you learn works for you. In the beginning, you are likely not to know what works; then, over time, you will learn.

You hone your skills. These include your listening skills, your ability to empathize, your ways of being direct, your ways of holding another person accountable, and so on. There are many helping skills to hone over time, from problem-solving skills to

skills of personal presence. These skills fall into two rough categories: skills that help you support your client and skills that help you hold a client accountable. You are both a cheerleader and a taskmaster and both identities require honing.

You deal with everything and anything except for those things that you can't deal with or that you shouldn't deal with. You deal in a "common sense" way with all sorts of psychological matters but you don't engage in therapy. You don't offer legal advice, medical advice, and so on but you offer lots of advice and suggestions in those areas where it makes sense for you to offer advice and suggestions.

You build your practice in ordinary ways and in exceptional ways. Ordinary ways, like just creating a website, will not prove sufficient. You will want a public face and a public presence. You will want to be known widely. You will want to employ marketing tactics that reach large numbers of people. You will want to associate with and collaborate with entities that already have a large presence and that already reach many people: active websites, active blogs, and so on. You want to sell products that are "irresistible": a "complete program," a "complete guide to x," and so on. You will want to teach online classes and workshops that are sponsored by entities that can reach large numbers of prospective participants. It will not do to build a website and wait for clients. Much more is required.

You supplement and complement your work with clients with all sorts of activities like public speaking, writing, and so on. You look for opportunities to be interviewed. You speak at small gatherings and at large gatherings. You dream up a book idea, write a strong book proposal, and begin the process of trying to get published. You look to do a podcast with an established podcast network. You look to do a radio show with an established radio network. You look to be a guest on podcasts and radio shows. You find bloggers with active blogs to interview you. You get known.

All of this falls under the headings of "coaching" and "building your practice." You learn how to help people and you learn how to build your practice. It is exactly this simple—and this difficult.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you define coaching?

2. What informal coaching have you done already?

3. What formal coaching have you done already?

4. Are you prepared to be of help?

Lesson 3. What is Creativity Coaching?

Creativity coaching means different things to different people. In the world of business, it tends to mean the art of helping individuals become better problem-solvers and innovators. Very often it means teaching a course or leading a workshop based on a text, typically Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* or, less often, my book *Fearless Creating*. Sometimes it stands for a mentoring relationship between a coach and an artist aimed primarily at solving marketplace problems, like how to price your canvases or how to land gigs for your band. It's also become a new rubric for classical teaching, so that a course that was called novel writing a decade ago might now be reframed by its instructor as a course in unlocking creative potential. These are some of the senses and uses of the phrase.

These are all reasonable. But I have something different in mind when I use the phrase. By creativity coaching I mean the activity of one person helping another

person with every aspect of that person's creative life, including the psychological, emotional, existential, and practical problems that arise as a client tries to create. Virtually nothing is out-of-bounds as a creativity coach endeavors to help his client write, paint, invent, or compose, find and make meaning, maintain mental health, enjoy a measure of happiness, and lead a good life centered on creating.

This is what I mean by creativity coaching. Probably it could also be called life coaching for creative people. In whatever way it is named, I think that it is a new vocation for a new century. The need for good creativity coaches is already critical and will only grow greater as millions of people try to honor their creative impulses and, as a result, are confronted by the problems that all creators face.

Recently I received the following letter.

"Dear Dr. Maisel:

Your books have meant a great deal to me in working through a lifetime of creative anorexia. The power of that self-withholding has been difficult to face and fear itself is the first and most massive desert that I feel I am still crossing.

The temptation to escape into dreams of 'if only' are so warm and comforting and the distant mountains of mastery seem so remote and, when glimpsed, such cold and solitary comfort (though not without beauty) that I have been tempted more than once to go the way of the little match girl. But, as you point out, there is a force so compelling and so instinctual to create meaning in one's life, that with rather hobbled steps I'm still trying.

With that preamble, I come to the reason for my letter. I wonder if you know of any groups of people or practitioners like yourself in Seattle, Washington whom I can contact and get some personal support from in this effort? I am a painter and writer and have taken classes at most of the art schools in the area. These have been good

but isolated encounters and I have not yet found the bridge between a beginner's effort and a deeper creative traction.

This letter may make it seem as though I am just beginning this journey. But my entire career as a producer of film and video projects and art exhibitions for others has been dancing around the edges of the creative life only to dance away again into the next thing that pays the rent. My decision to write to you is a commitment to myself that has been a long time coming. I have danced away into helping some very talented people fulfill their creative visions, only to find that I have given away the very energy and determination I needed to do the hard work of personal mastery.

I am 50 years old and not unaware that my mid-life transition is making the process all the more urgent. And I imagine I am also right in the middle of a pretty fat demographic in this regard. But none of that discourages me. I look forward to your reply and I thank you for any time you can find to respond to my request."

This artist is not looking for a psychotherapist, a marketing guru, a painting class, or a class in creativity. She is looking for a kind of support and direction that is not offered in art schools, counseling clinics, pastoral offices, or career centers. She is one of countless people who feel an inner necessity to manifest potential and make meaning but who come up against inner and outer obstacles and become blocked and thwarted.

In my own case, I am trained as a psychotherapist, and that informs what I do, and I have been a writer for forty-five years, which also informs what I do. But creativity coaching is not psychotherapy and it is not the teaching of writing, painting, inventing, composing, acting, and so on. Creativity coaching is unlike any other kind of coaching or advising, primarily because of what it encompasses. It encompasses the whole of a client's life and the totality of human nature in a way that not even pastoral counseling or psychotherapy does. A cleric may invite you to do soul work. A psychotherapist may invite you to do personality work. But a creativity coach invites you to think hard, feel deeply, dream big, and be great. A creativity coach

invites you to manifest your potential. A creativity coach asks you to step up to the plate and live a vital, authentic life. That is a lot to ask.

Because that is a lot to ask, and because almost all people are burdened in ways that make it hard for them to create, I have to be modest about what I expect. At the same time, because clients know that not creating is the equivalent of spiritual death, they will only respond if a lot is asked of them. So, I have to hold out a large vision. This is the path a creativity coach walks, setting out the baby steps that a client is able to take while at the same time honoring the client's need to do work that is deep and grand. The client may hunger to be a new Shakespeare or Mozart but may only get a few indifferent lines penned this month. That is not enough but it is also not to be sneered at. A creativity coach builds on that modest but real success to urge clients on further.

Creativity coaching has another meaning as well. It refers to the activity of self-coaching that a creative person engages in when she steps back and tries to figure out what she needs to do to unblock, recover from criticism and rejection, thoughtfully choose her next creative project, successfully market her work, and so on. This is creativity self-coaching: the art and practice of helping yourself create and live a creative life.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you define creativity coaching?

2. How would you define creativity self-coaching?

3. Would you ever hire a creativity coach? If not, can you articulate why you might be reluctant to do so?

4. Start a pair of notebooks, one for your creativity coaching thoughts and one for your creativity self-coaching thoughts. You might want to do this even if you see yourself as exclusively a coach or exclusively a self-coach.

Lesson 4. Who Becomes a Creativity Coach?

Not everyone who creates is automatically a creativity coach. Creativity coaches should have a firsthand knowledge of creating but they need considerably more than personal experience as a painter, dancer, poet, inventor, botanist, or weaver. At first glance this may not seem true. Virtually any experienced lawyer can coach a new lawyer. An experienced doctor can coach an intern. In almost any area that we could name, from parenting to parachute jumping, from accounting to acrobatics, a seasoned practitioner has a lot to offer a newcomer. But whereas any experienced baker, carpenter, physician, or lawyer has the right knowledge (if not necessarily the right mentoring skills) to mentor and coach, even really experienced creators do not. Just having created will not make you a creativity coach.

This is true for many important reasons that bear on the nature of creativity coaching. Here are eight of them:

1. Creators live the creative process but they often do not understand it and frequently claim not to want to understand it.

2. Creators are often burdened by the knowledge that they have not sufficiently manifested their own potential, do not know how to help themselves, and are in no position to help others.

3. Unless they are practiced at interpersonal relating and fairly mentally healthy, creators will find their coaching subverted by their shadowy feelings of envy, unhealthy narcissism, despair, rage at the system, and so on.

4. Creators may know their discipline but not know any other discipline, so while they may have something to say to poets they may have nothing to say to potters, or vice versa.

5. Creators may resort to the jargon of theory and offer advice about accessing the unconscious, identifying archetypes, opening to the Muse, and so on, advice which as a rule does not help another person create.

6. Creators may harbor the feeling that there is really nothing to say, that creativity is all in the doing, and may actually resent the idea of communicating with another person.

7. Creators may be less than excellent at what they do and may pass along mediocre ideas about what it takes to create and what it means to create.

8. Creators may know how to create but not know how to help another person, just as they may know how to ride a bicycle but not know how to help their child deal with the fears, bumps, and bruises of beginning to ride.

This is only a part of the picture. But I think it is enough to show that creators are not creativity coaches merely by virtue of the fact that they can create.

By the same token, psychotherapists are not creativity coaches merely by virtue of the fact that they have some psychological training and some training as helpers. Here is a short list of why this is so:

1. There is no training that will help a person who is not instinctively interested in human nature become a person of that sort. Many psychotherapists do not know human nature very well and do not care to know about it.

2. The training a psychotherapist receives is aimed at helping her diagnose and treat illness or, if she dislikes the medical model, psychological and emotional problems. But nothing in her training prepares her to help a client manifest potential.

3. Psychotherapists are not trained to think about meaning. Creative clients are always thinking about meaning and are often in the throes of a mild, moderate, or severe meaning crisis, so they need a kind of help that psychotherapists are not terribly equipped to offer.

4. A psychotherapist may have no particular understanding of the realities of the creative process or the creative personality. Those who have some idea may still have too limited an understanding and may fall back on thoughtless labeling and rote treatment planning.

5. A psychotherapist may have no conception of the goals and objectives of the creative client sitting across from her. She may find it sensible to focus on a presenting depression but her client may need help unblocking and creating, at which time the depression would lift of its own accord.

6. The creative life may make no sense to the psychotherapist, as she may hold conventional ideas about where meaning resides and may have no heartfelt grasp of why a client would cling fiercely to the need to write poetry or have his ideas about string theory validated and vindicated.

7. Although it is her job, a psychotherapist may not know how to help another person.

8. A psychotherapist may inadvertently or maliciously pathologize her creative clients, labeling natural artistic anxiety an anxiety disorder or the necessary stubborn pride, arrogance, and self-direction of the creator a narcissistic personality disorder.

A typical therapist needs more than her usual understanding and procedures if she is to help a creative client. A veteran poet may not be equipped to help another poet and a veteran therapist may be similarly unequipped. What the veteran poet knows may be inchoate and unavailable and what the veteran therapist knows may be misguided and incorrect. Nor is there some other professional who necessarily comes equipped with what is needed--no cleric, social worker, dance therapist, editor, acting teacher, or, for that matter, self-proclaimed creativity coach. Creativity coaches are only creativity coaches if they have the right stuff.

What is this right stuff? What ought a creativity coach know and understand? She ought to know and understand the following six things:

1. The creative process

2. The creative personality

3. Existential reality

4. Practical reality

5. Human nature

6. How to help

That's all, really. She only needs to know just about everything. Of course, we will all fall short of this ideal. But there really is an ideal and our goal is to approach these lofty heights.

As to creativity self-coaching, every creative person can and should become her own self-coach and learn how to help herself maintain her creative life, her everyday life, and her mental health. Even if she finds herself in the financial position to hire a creativity coach from time to time and even if she can locate a good creativity coach with whom to work, she will nevertheless be thrown back on her own resources for the lion's share of her time on earth. Her ability to survive as a creative person is largely dependent on her ability to successfully coach herself through the many rough periods that will inevitably arise when she pursues a life that obliges her to stretch and risk.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What do you see as the strengths you bring to creativity coaching?

2. What do you see as the strengths you bring to creativity self-coaching?

3. What worries you about becoming a creativity coach? Can you address these worries at this time or must they be handled in due time, as you become a more experienced, knowledgeable creativity coach?

4. What worries you about becoming an effective creativity self-coach? Can you

address any of those doubts and fears at this time, perhaps as your first self-coaching project?

Lesson 5. Training Opportunities

As I write this, coaching is unregulated. You can coach your child's Sunday soccer team, your writer neighbor, or the CEO of a corporation without your community, city, state, or country demanding that you have any particular training, credentials, licenses, or certification. If you receive money for helping your neighbor get her novel written, you would have to adhere to all the necessary guidelines about reporting income and being business-like, but that's a different matter from being regulated as a coach and needing the approval or permission of some governmental body (like the state) or some organized entity (like a labor union) to coach her.

You can call yourself a creativity coach right now. This is akin to being a writer, painter, or musician and being able to attempt to sell your wares without institutional or governmental interference. The customer—a literary agent, gallery owner, or musical director—is the one who says to you, "No, I don't want to represent your novel" or "No, I don't want to hang your paintings" or "No, you don't play the oboe well enough for my orchestra." For writers, the government doesn't say, "You need to have written for three years, have an MFA from an accredited university, and keep your short stories to under two thousand words." The marketplace decides.

YOU MUST CHECK TO SEE IF THIS IS STILL TRUE WITH RESPECT TO COACHING.

As I write this, it is true, but the situation may have changed. Your city, state, or country may have decided to regulate coaching. If it has, then you will need to follow

their guidelines or else move out of their jurisdiction. If the government has gotten involved, you will need to train in a certain way, get licensed or credentialed, meet spelled-out standards, and engage in spelled-out practices. You will be obliged to keep records in a certain way, advertise in a certain way, represent yourself in a certain way, and so on. You may need to take standardized tests, accumulate such-and-so-many hours of supervised coaching, and so on. If, as you read this, some government agency has become involved in regulating coaching, you must follow their rules and regulations in order to represent yourself as a creativity coach and practice as a creativity coach.

As it stands as I write this, each of the codes of ethics, training requirements, and guidelines regarding the practice of coaching that currently exist are promulgated by individual coaches or coaching training programs. An individual or a group of like-minded individuals, themselves unregulated and perhaps even untrained, have announced standards and practices. They have made a rhetorical case for the logic of their training program or certification program. In this context, certification tends not to mean "certified by a government board or an accredited school" but rather "certified by us." That isn't to say that the guidelines they may be promulgating aren't sensible or reasonable, only that they carry a very different force, weight, and logic from "certified public accountant" or "registered nurse."

Given these conditions and realities, what do you need to do to prepare yourself as a creativity coach, to call yourself a creativity coach, and to function effectively as a creativity coach? First of all, and to repeat myself, you must check to see if these conditions still obtain, as regulation may have arrived by the time you read this. For the sake of argument, however, let's say that the situation is exactly the same: that it is completely on your shoulders to decide how to proceed. What makes sense?

I think that the following makes sense:

1. You should look at the coaching schools, trainings and certification programs that exist, including the creativity coaching ones, educate yourself about them, try to

distinguish among them, get a basic sense of the difference between residential learning and distance learning, and make an effort to comprehend what's available and what it all means. For creativity coaching, you can train with me and you can also become certified through the Creativity Coaching Association.

2. Talk to working coaches. See if they are able to attract clients, build a practice, and make a go of it. See what they think about the choice they made to coach. Get a sense of the upside and the downside of this profession. The primary upside is likely to be that they love the work; the primary downside is likely to be that making a living at it is much harder than they imagined it would be. Reality-test by chatting with a number of coaches representing a real diversity of specialties, geographic areas, and working methods. You can find information on certified creativity coaches at the Creativity Coaching Association website, if you would like to chat with some of them.

3. Get a beginning sense of whether you think you need to become one sort of coach first—a life coach, a business coach, an executive coach, etc.—and only then move into creativity coaching, or whether you want to move directly into creativity coaching. The upside of becoming another sort of coach first is that you will gain experience, training, and credibility. The downside is that it will take time and money, that the experience may be scant and the training spotty, and that the credential may not prove particularly useful or important. This is a complex emotional and practical issue that deserves your full attention.

4. Begin coaching informally. (See the lessons on "First Clients" and "Recruiting First Clients"). Begin to practice and gain experience. To repeat, if regulation hasn't set in, there is no reason why you can't charge from the outset for your services; but you may feel more comfortable starting out coaching informally and for free. The question of whether or not to charge at the outset is one you should think through carefully; but whether you charge or don't charge, you should begin to do the work.

5. Pay attention to your own creative life. Someone interested in becoming a creativity coach is invariably someone who is also a creator or a would-be creator. You want to

become your own best client and your own excellent self-coach, in part so that you are better prepared to coach others but, more importantly, so that you keep your creative life afloat and realize your own creative dreams. It is unlikely that you will feel completely good about helping others manifest their creative potential if you skip or avoid manifesting your own.

6. Plan for becoming a creativity coach. Once you've done your investigative work, thought about the upside and downside of becoming a creativity coach, done some informal coaching, made some basic decisions about whether or not to train and, if training is in the picture, some decisions about with whom to train, then it is time to sit down with yourself and map out a reasonable plan. The plan should include a timeline, goals and markers, special challenges (like raising money or talking with your mate about your plan), and anything else that will help turn your dream into a solid reality.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What is the upside of a field not being regulated and what is the downside?

2. Your life experiences naturally count as part of your readiness to coach. How have your life experiences already prepared you to be a creativity coach?

3. What are the pluses and minuses of becoming "another sort of coach" before becoming a creativity coach?

4. What are the pros and cons of getting trained as a creativity coach versus

launching yourself right now as a creativity coach (assuming that the field is still unregulated)?

Lesson 6. Ethical Standards

Coaches, like other human beings, ought to act ethically. It isn't possible to describe or codify all the ways in which a coach ought to act ethically, especially since ethics are nuanced and contextual. However, coaching organizations find themselves obliged to provide the coaches they train, certify, and recommend with some guidelines and guidance.

I recommend that you visit the following sites and thoroughly familiarize yourself with the guidelines that each of these organizations has promulgated. You will see common themes and common threads and get a good sense of the issues that confront coaches and the standards to which they should hold themselves. (Naturally, links change over time. These are current as of this writing.)

The International Coach Federation code of ethics:

http://www.coachfederation.org/ethics/

The International Association of Coaching code of ethics:

http://www.certifiedcoach.org/ethics.html

The Association for Coaching code of ethics:

http://www.associationforcoaching.com/about/about02.htm

The Worldwide Association of Business Coaches Code of Business Coaching Ethics and Integrity

http://www.wabccoaches.com/includes/popups/code_of_ethics_2nd_edition_december_17_2007.html

Over the centuries there has been a movement in the various professions from the idea of "acting honorably" ("as any gentleman might") to the idea of abiding by a given set of rules or guidelines. Karen Weiner writes in *The Little Book of Ethics for Coaches*: "The word 'profession' is Latin for 'bound by an oath.' A professional, in essence, was a gentleman who needed no written instruction in how to behave. The Boston Medical Society had this type of code by 1808. Within half a century, however, a shift had taken place. As the professions became more defined and refined, behaviorally oriented codes moved to the forefront. In 1847 the newly formed American Medical Association adopted the first code to be denominated a 'code of ethics.' This code focused on behavior rather than honor."

Current codes of ethics for coaches focus on ideas like agreements and informed consent, record-keeping, confidentiality, privacy, distinguishing between coaching and other helping professions, appropriate advertising and public statements, risk management, rights of the client to terminate, setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries, and many other issues. Elaine Cox explains in *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* that "looking at codes of ethics across various disciplines, the common themes are: 1) Do no harm: do not cause needless injury or harm to others; 2) Duty of care: act in ways that promote the welfare of other people; 3) Know your limits: competence and practice within your scope; 4) Respect the interests of the client; and 5) Respect the law."

She goes on to say, "Coaching is a powerful process that is increasingly evolving in research, understanding of theories, practice and professional qualifications. Coaches have a responsibility to engage as professionals and to recognize their responsibility and contribution to their clients, colleagues and society as a whole." Your first obligation is to your client but you and your client are also players in a cultural context, in a society governed by laws as well as rules, and so you must do a smart, careful job of balancing your obligations to your client with your equally pressing obligations to society-at-large.

The Canadian Psychological Association in its Preamble provides some excellent language that pertains to coaches as well as to psychologists: "Every discipline that has relatively autonomous control over its entry requirements, training, development of knowledge, standards, methods, and practices does so only within the context of a contract with the society in which it functions. The social contract is based on attitudes of mutual respect and trust, with society granting support for the autonomy of a discipline in exchange for a commitment by the discipline to do everything it can to assure that its members act ethically in conducting the affairs of the discipline within society."

The complete range of ethical issues is quite wide and includes matters like whether or not to see clients in your home, whether to create and use a "contract" with clients, whether to maintain liability insurance, and so on. None of these matters are straightforward or come with one-size-fits-all answers. Nevertheless, they must be addressed. Whether or not you belong to a coach organization and whether or not you decide to adhere to one particular professional code of ethics, you do have the duty and the obligation to act ethically in your work with coaching clients.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. How would you describe the central ethical obligation of a coach?

2. Think through the matter of confidentiality. Can you think of situations when you would not keep to yourself what your client has told you?

3. What do you imagine are the pros and cons of entering into a "coaching contract" with clients?

4. What, if any, are the special ethical obligations of creativity coaches?

Lesson 7. Becoming an Entrepreneur

A doctor on staff at a busy HMO doesn't have to recruit patients. A lawyer who has joined a thriving law practice has some recruiting tasks but the name recognition of the firm will bring in many clients; so many, in fact, that his problem may be more keeping up with the current work load than finding new clients. Public school teachers don't have to recruit students, roofers don't have to recruit customers after a hurricane, civil servants don't have to hustle up their work.

By contrast, a new restaurant must attract customers or die. An artist must find buyers for her paintings or starve. An independent trucker must find product to haul. Therapists, dentists, acupuncturists, landscape designers must build their practice or find additional work—the therapist joining the staff of a home for troubled girls, the dentist dabbling in real estate on the side, the acupuncturist adding acupressure to her list of services, the landscape designer waiting tables at night.

Nine out of ten small businesses fail. Becoming a creativity coach is exactly like starting a small business, and a precarious one at that, and nothing like stepping into a

thriving organization where you can just do your job. It is fine to ignore this reality, if you like, just as it is fine for a novelist to ignore the long odds against him constructing a writing life that manages to pay the bills or a piano student in conservatory choosing to ignore the long odds against her having a solo career. Sometimes it is important to ignore reality because we have a dream and hope to prove the exception. But that doesn't mean that the people who are saying that the odds are long against us succeeding are wrong in their opinion.

If making a living at creativity coaching isn't an agenda item for you, then you won't have to expend tons of your energy, devote full days, weeks, and months of your time, or adopt marketing strategies that may gall you, all in the service of building your practice. You can see the occasional client, give the occasional workshop, and write the occasional article. This may be exactly what you want to do. You may currently have a flourishing life and excellent revenue streams that allow you to keep creativity coaching at the level of calling and part-time employment.

If, however, you need creativity coaching to replace your current odious day job or career, be the thing that keeps your poorly-paying writing or painting career afloat, be the way you make the transition out of your life as a therapist or teacher, or in any other sense amount to a real, full-time living,

YOU WILL HAVE TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR.

You can love and embrace the marketing of your creativity coaching practice or you can hate it and only do it through gritted teeth, but whether you love it or hate it you will have to do it with great intensity and skill to have any chance at making a living.

Even if you do all that, it is not clear that consumers are ready to pay for this service. You might make them aware of your services and spell out the benefits of hiring you as a creativity coach and still not move them from curious spectator to customer. This is the truth of the situation as I write this. In the coming years this may change and there are signs that this change is coming, as big business begins to hire creativity

coaches, as the profession becomes better known, and as the phrase "creativity coach" begins to elicit knowing nods rather than blank stares.

Whether the profession remains precarious or becomes entrenched, you will have to prove an excellent marketer of your services in order to create and maintain a creativity coaching practice. You will also probably need to diversify and do a variety of things in addition to the one-on-one coaching you do: you will probably need to run workshops, retreats, classes, trainings, groups, and the like; write books, articles, columns, and so on; speak to groups, both for pay and to promote your services; find niche specialties, like working with graduate students on their dissertations, writers on their first novels, painters on their marketing plans, and so on; and more.

It is no great problem if you currently lack enthusiasm for becoming an entrepreneur. That enthusiasm may grow, as may your skills as a promoter and marketer of your wares, as you begin to do the actual work of creativity coaching and discover that you want to build a practice. Down the road, however, not willing yourself to become an entrepreneur will prove a real problem. Therefore, you might want to begin to educate yourself right now about how coaches market themselves and about what tactics and strategies work, not in order to transform yourself overnight into an entrepreneur but rather to let that future reality begin to sink in.

I have gone from giving workshops for three people to giving keynotes for five hundred, from writing the occasional article on creativity to writing more than twenty books on the subject, from seeing few clients to turning clients away. I am the exception—and so must you be if you want a robust, thriving practice. Just as our creative clients need to prove the exception if they are to realize their dreams, so each creativity coach must prove the exception. If that were to happen, the rule would be that the profession had become viable. We have a very long way to go before that is even a remote possibility; and to get there will require the entrepreneurial energy and savvy of those who choose to walk this path.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Can you be an entrepreneur in the service of something you love?

2. Do you want to learn marketing and promoting strategies now or wait until further down the road?

3. Have you been an effective entrepreneur in the service of your creative life? If not, what has stopped you?

4. Do you "get" the real-world difficulties of turning a desire to do creativity coaching into an actual business?

**

Coach-in-training response:

Can you be an entrepreneur in the service of something you love?

Part of working for yourself and not working for an employer is having the freedom to dedicate your time and energy towards doing something you're most passionate about. When I'm focused on making something I love turn into something successful, I'm not easily bored. In fact, it is the very thing that gets me out of bed first thing in the morning without the need for an alarm clock. As long as I can remember, I have always been highly motivated by the idea of being responsible for the success of my own business. For many people, this idea is scary and intimidating and is why many have resorted to the safety of a regular 9-5 job.

There is something empowering about the idea that I am ultimately in control of my income, success and the growth of my business. Versus having those things in the

hands of an employer who could at any moment decide to let me go and leave me jobless. I am inspired by the creativity that goes into building a business. It offers me an array of challenges and problems to solve, which is the very thing that also keeps me interested.

For instance, the idea of marketing my business energizes me. Instead of seeing it as a chore, as many do, I see it has an exciting opportunity to let others know what I can offer them. Another aspect I enjoy about being an entrepreneur is doing the little administrative stuff. For instance, putting together an organizational system or writing up an agreement, represent the building blocks of my business and a forward motion. All in all, I definitely can see myself being an entrepreneur in the service of helping individuals reach their creative potential.

Do you "get" the real-world difficulties of turning a desire to do creativity coaching into an actual business?

Yes, I am very aware of the realities involved in making something into an actual business versus a hobby on the side. My goal is to make sure it not only becomes my career, but also becomes an actual operating business. I realize that it takes a lot of time and energy, along with making proactive decisions in order to keep the business growing. It requires serious commitment, time and dedication to transform something from a hobby into an actual business. I am also very much aware that I will not be making the big bucks from the get go and that I may need to find other ways to supplement my income while the business is growing. Part of making the right decisions is being aware of the possibilities as well as the limitations of launching a new business.

Lesson 8. Developing Your Style

Over time you will develop your own personal style. The following are some basic styles to consider:

1. The problem-solver.

"You might want to try getting up a little earlier each morning, since it sounds like you're too tired to paint at night."

"I think you might try sending out your query letter to several agents at once."

"It sounds like you should try telling John directly that he's stepping on your lines, and if that didn't work you could talk to the director."

2. The listener.

"I think you're saying that you can't find the motivation to get back to sculpting? Have I got that right?"

"I hear you saying that your husband isn't very supportive about your sculpting? Is he not supportive in other ways, too?

"You've been through a lot. I can see why you've been having so much trouble getting back to the writing."

3. The analyst.

"The problems you're having with your daughter may be making it hard for you to believe in your novel about mothers and daughters. Maybe you're saying to yourself, 'How can I get in my characters' minds when I don't even know what my daughter is thinking?'"

"Maybe you don't think you can direct because you were never allowed to direct anything as a child. Since you always had to take orders, maybe you don't know how to give orders."

"The poems we've talked about seem to fall into five categories. Maybe the reason you can't put your collection together is that your poems are like apples and oranges ... and pears, persimmons, and bananas."

4. The resource person.

"I just learned that there are some Artists Anonymous meetings in your town. Have you heard about Artists Anonymous? What do you think about trying out one of those?"

"There's a site where many online writing classes are offered. A couple of them might be just right for you. Why don't you take a look?"

"A new book just came out on creativity and depression. I think it may have something to say to you."

5. The intuitive.

"I have the sense that you're at a crossroads, trying to decide between returning to the rigors of black-and-white and plunging ahead into the dangers of color."

"I have a gut feeling that it's time for you to return to your novel."

"This is just a hunch, but do you think that what your sister said last week had a big negative effect on you?"

6. The friend.

"What a hard few days you've had! That must have been terrible, hearing that news about your mother."

"Good work, Lisa! I'm really glad you were able to create every day this week, despite everything that's been going on."

"That really wasn't okay, what that literary agent wrote to you. It makes me sad that an agent would be that callous and rude."

7. The teacher.

"The creative process always comes with its fair share of anxiety. Maybe we need to look at anxiety directly and see if it's a core blocker in your life?"

"If you want to take a look at whether you are or aren't in control of your drinking, you might try having exactly one drink a day. For many people that's incredibly harder than stopping entirely."

"You seem very upset that the editor who asked to see your work hasn't responded yet. But it usually takes several months for an editor to accept a book from a newcomer, as she has to get buy-in from many other players at her publishing house. You should be patient--but not idle, of course!"

8. The peer.

"Like you, I've had a lot of mixed experiences with literary agents. I doubt that there's a perfect agent to find, just a reasonably okay one with good connections."

"I had the same experience with my first juried show. It wasn't just not winning, it was seeing what did win!"

"I've been struggling with tendinitis, too, which has hampered my own clarinet playing. Here are some of things I've tried to deal with the tendinitis."

9. The task-master.

"I think it might be a good idea to refocus on the schedule you set last week. You said then that you would have time to write two hours each day. Is that still a reasonable goal?"

"You seem to want the writing of your novel to be easy. But for much of the time it won't be. Will you go ahead and write it even though it calls for sweat and tears?"

"Practicing your instrument for fifteen minutes each day is great, but it's not really enough time to gain the mastery you say you're after. I think at least two or three hours a day are necessary."

10. The cheerleader.

"Great work, Betty. Keep it up!"

"What excellent news! I'm thrilled that you got your first story published!"

"Please get back to the screenplay, Mark! I know the rejection hurt, but what you're doing is too important for you to stop now!"

Your style will evolve. Each of us has a predominant style, usually near one end or the other of the directive/non-directive continuum. The directive person likes to problem-solve. The non-directive person prefers to listen and reflect. An effective creativity coach combines elements of the directive style and the non-directive style, being brave enough to risk making suggestions and being ego-less enough to just listen. You may want to keep track of your evolving style, say by monitoring the emails you send to clients and by thinking through what your responses indicate about your predominant style.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Describe your current style.

2. In what direction do you see your style evolving?

3. What will help you evolve in that direction?

4. If you were a client, what coaching style would you want your coach to employ?

Lesson 9. Identifying Specialties

Virtually all creativity coaches will be generalists first and will work with an array of clients and an array of client issues. However, it is equally likely that you will naturally acquire a specialty area or several specialty areas over time, because of your knowledge about a certain art discipline, your history as a certain kind of artist, because certain clients come your way and you become known as someone who works with a particular issue or clientele, or because you choose to pursue certain avenues that interest you.

Specialties come in the following dozen categories:

1. You might articulate a particular way of looking at creativity. For example:

+ Creativity as opening to spirit

+ Creativity as child's play

+ Creativity as a seven-step process

+ Creativity as "the dance of discipline and surrender"

2. You might isolate one element of the creative process and focus on it. For example:

+ Managing anxiety

+ Overcoming blocks

+ Starting projects

+ Completing projects

3. You might identify an element of the creative life that interests you or that you believe would be a marketable niche. For example:

+ Art marketing

+ Networking and relationship-building

+ Making career choices

+ Managing day job challenges

4. You might decide to work with individuals who are wrestling with a particular issue and focus on that client base. For example:

+ Artists with performance anxiety issues

+ Artists with chronic fatigue

+ Artists with environmental allergies

+ Artists with low self-esteem

5. You might specialize in working with individuals who create in a certain genre or discipline. For example:

+ Writers (broad)

+ Mystery writers (narrower)

+ Mystery writers working on their first mystery novel (narrower still)

+ Mystery writers working on their first mystery novel in an anticipated series (narrowest)

6. You might specialize in working with creators who belong to a certain group. For example:

+ African-American artists

+ Women artists

+ Lesbian artists

+ Mid-career artists

7. You might focus on creativity in various social and/or business settings. For example:

+ Creativity in business

+ Creativity in the schools

+ Creativity in government

+ Creativity in religious communities

8. You might focus on creativity as a tool. For example:

+ Creativity as a tool for problem-solving

+ Creativity as a tool for self-discovery

+ Creativity as a tool for growth

+ Creativity as a tool for personal satisfaction

9. You might focus on creativity as a healing agent. For example:

+ Healing from childhood sexual abuse through creating

+ Healing from midlife crisis through creating

+ Healing from divorce through creating

+ Healing from the "empty nest syndrome" through creating

10. You might focus on a particular aspect of personality that increases creativity. For example:

+ Building self-confidence

+ Learning self-trust

+ Increasing energy

+ Practicing discipline

11. You might connect creativity with another discipline. For example:

+ Zen Buddhism and creativity

+ Taoism and creativity

+ Jungian psychology and creativity

+ Existentialism and creativity

12. You might focus on a way or style of delivering your message and material. For example:

+ You might specialize in offering retreats

+ You might specialize in writing about creativity

+ You might specialize in working with groups

+ You might specialize in touring with a workshop

Because many of these possibilities may intrigue you, you may find yourself overwhelmed by an abundance of riches. The best approach is to grieve the fact that you can't do everything and rejoice in the fact that you can acquire more than a few specialties over time.

For now, begin by listing all the specialties that potentially interest you, those from my list and/or those that you dream up yourself. Let the list be as long as it needs to be, because the choice that interests you the most may be the twentieth one that pops into your head and not the first.

Once you've produced your list, identify three or four favorites. Then create a simple, sensible business plan for each specialty. For example, if you decided that you wanted to specialize in work with mid-career artists, you would need to:

1. Define "mid-career artist" for yourself, so that you know exactly whom you are talking about.

2. Think through and articulate the issues that mid-career artists face, so that you come to understand more clearly what issues you will be addressing in your work with this population.

3. Create a paragraph or bulleted list that describes what benefits a mid-career artist would receive from working with you (e.g., help with career planning, strategies for dealing with burn-out, support in finding renewed motivation to create, etc.).

4. Think through how you might deliver your message and news of your service to mid-career artists. Especially consider how the Internet might be used to reach mid-

career artists, whether there might be specialized mailing lists available, whether they tend to read one particular publication, etc.

5. Spend additional time--say, a weekend--continuing to think through how you would define your specialty, what services you intend to offer, how potential clients would be helped by hiring you, etc. A logical outgrowth of this thinking might be an article: "How Creativity Coaching Can Help Artists with Chronic Fatigue," "The Special Issues of African-American Artists," "How Artists Can Increase Their Self-Confidence," etc. You might then endeavor to have your article published, in print or somewhere on the Internet, which would make you something of an expert and which might be read by exactly those individuals you are seeking to reach.

6. Begin to tell people about your specialty, choose a few of the methods presented in the "reaching clients" lesson, and begin to market your specialty.

7. Repeat this process with another specialty or two. You can launch two or three specialties simultaneously and thereby start to learn which one actually interests you the most, which is the easiest to market, and which resonates the most with potential clients.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Are you averse to specializing? If you are, would you like to work on changing your mind or are you comfortable operating as a generalist?

2. What is the best way for a person to become known for her specialty? In light of your answer, what will you do to become known in your own right?

3. Is it possible to have several specialties? If so, can they be disparate and unrelated or should they be logically related?

4. As an exercise, choose a specialty that interests you and write a short "sales pitch" announcing your specialty.

II. Working with Clients

Lesson 10. First Clients

Every coach has to begin somewhere. Your first client may be your partner in a coaching class or someone you recruit to coach for free while you learn. Wherever your first clients come from, you have no choice but to be a beginner with them, as you are just beginning. That isn't to say that you won't be bringing a lot of experience and skills to the table, but it is the case that you can't really know how to coach except through trial-and-error experience.

The lessons in this guide will help you understand what sorts of issues your clients are likely to bring to the table and what sorts of strategies you can employ to be of help. But reading and thinking about even an infinite number of lessons is no substitute for coaching actual human beings, hearing firsthand what troubles them, and learning what actually works to help them progress.

You should try to get your feet wet working with clients as soon as you can. As soon as you do begin to work with clients, you will want to keep track of your work with them and record your contact hours, as the work you do with clients, even at the very beginning, can count toward fulfilling the client contact requirement of the Creativity Coaching Association's certification program, if certification as a creativity coach is one of your goals.

You can work with clients face-to-face, over the phone, via Skype, via email, in groups, and in other Internet-based and live ways. A "client" is simply someone who has agreed that he or she would like to receive some coaching from you, whether for free or for a fee, and who has agreed to work with you in whatever framework you propose. This agreement can be as simple as your client agreeing to work with you for, say, the coming two months on her creativity issues and agreeing to call you at appointed times on appointed days. You can add all kinds of extras to a basic

agreement of this sort—that she will fill out an assessment form or a questionnaire at the start of coaching, that she will fill out an evaluation form or an exit form at the end of coaching, and so on—but the basic agreement is very simple in essence. She agrees to be coached and the two of you set up how and when you'll be in contact.

In the lessons that follow you'll learn what your goals are as a coach, what strategies you can employ to help your clients, how to say the things you intend to say (there are always more effective and less effective ways of saying things), how to structure a coaching session, what questions to ask, and so on. But even if you skipped all those lessons, you could begin with clients right now, just so long as you stepped firmly into the shoes of someone intending to be of help.

You listen to what your new client has to say and you say to yourself, "What might help?" You might decide that a certain suggestion might help: "Mary, given that you've been talking a lot about the chaos you feel, I wonder if organizing your space might be a priority?" This is what coaching sounds like. Your client might well respond, "Yes, that would help!" Then you might chat about the concrete details of organizing her space. You are ready to have conversations of this sort right now, without further ado—if you believe that you are.

There are no rules about how long you should work with a given client, how long a session should be, whether you should be "directive" or "non-directive," and so on. The only rule is that you are trying to be of help. That is what your client wants and needs (even if she is resistant to that help). Because she may be resistant or conflicted, she may agree to one of your suggestions and then not put it into action, present you with one problem and then change her mind in mid-sentence and present a different problem, and so on. That is, she is going to be a real human being. Insofar as you are already able to talk with another human being and understand another human being, you are ready to coach.

Please get it into your head that you want clients and that you want them soon. Naturally it is unlikely that prospective clients will be inclined to pay you at this point,

although if you have a lot of life experience and feel ready to begin charging right out of the gate, that is fine. Often therapy interns in their first semester of a counseling program find themselves working in a setting where, while they are not being paid directly, the clients they are seeing are paying the counseling center. These brand-new "therapists in training" are in essence being paid for their services—even if the person sitting across from them is their very first client ever. So being paid right out of the gate is not completely implausible.

Naturally it may make more sense, and you may feel more comfortable, if you wait until you complete the lessons in this manual before you tackle working with clients. You may also want to get some additional training before embarking on your work with clients. But I would suggest that you think about working with clients sooner rather than later, as working with first clients is a hurdle you want to get over.

I think the following is a sensible approach:

+ Gauge how much experience you've had working with people in a helping way. If you've had a lot of experience, start with coaching clients very soon. If you've had a moderate amount of experience, start with coaching clients after you've read through this manual once. If you've had little experience, you may want to do some training before embarking with clients.

+ Create a good, solid system for keeping track of your work with clients.

+ Think through what support system you might want to put into place as you work with clients. This might include connecting with a certified creativity coach and setting up a certain number of sessions to discuss your ongoing work with clients, joining a coaching group where support is offered, and so on.

The headline is that there is no substitute for actually working with clients. If you wait until you feel "really ready" to coach, you may find yourself waiting a very long time.

If by the time you've gotten to the end of this manual you still aren't working with clients, start the manual over again—and when you get to this section, really think through if it isn't time to begin working with clients.

Note: If you want to keep track of your client contact hours, the Creativity Coaching Association suggests the following procedure. Create a form with four columns: client name, date of coaching session, coaching method (email, phone, etc.), and time spent (i.e., 30 minutes; 60 minutes, etc.). According to the Creativity Coaching Association, for email coaching you may allocate up to one hour for each correspondence you have with a client. For phone and in-person coaching, round out your coaching time to the nearest half-hour. 100 hours of coaching contact is required to meet the client contact requirement for the CCA Creativity Coaching Certification Program.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

+ What do you see as the pros of working with clients "very early" in the process, even as you are just starting to learn the ropes?

+ What do you see as the cons of working with clients "very early" in the process, even as you are just starting to learn the ropes?

+ What would make it easier for you to take on clients "very early" in process?

+ Can you put into words when you'd like to begin working with clients?

Lesson 11. Recruiting First Clients

By "recruiting clients" I don't mean finding fee-paying clients. That's a separate practice-building question. Rather, I mean finding "first clients" whom you (likely) see for free because you want the experience of working with actual creative and performing artists on their creativity issues.

The simplest way to recruit free clients of this sort is to say to your friends that you are teaching yourself to be a creativity coach and might they be interested in doing some free creativity coaching with you? You might present your offer in some variation of the following way:

"Hi, Mary, I've been thinking a lot about what you were telling me the other day about how hard it is for you to do all the marketplace things you think you need to be doing. I'm teaching myself creativity coaching and I wonder if you'd like to be my 'free client' and let me see if I can help you with your marketplace issues. Do you want to give that a try? If you do, I'd like to propose the following. Let's meet once every two weeks at the Starbucks on Main Street and do an hour 'session.' Maybe we could commit to doing this for the next couple of months—let's say, for all of March and April. I'd love this opportunity and I think you might find it really useful. What do you say?"

Or you might put out the following message to several of your friends, acquaintances, and peers:

"Hi, everybody, I would love to run a free creativity support group and I wonder if you'd like to participate? It wouldn't be leaderless—I would take responsibility for facilitating sessions, as I am trying to learn how to be a creativity coach. We would work on whatever issues you find personally important—getting to your creative work more regularly, going more deeply into your work, marketing your work, whatever is on your mind. I know it's going to be hard to find a time and a place that suits

everybody but let's give it a try, if you're interested! I propose that we meet in my living room and I propose that we meet every other Wednesday at 7 pm for ninety minutes. We'd start by trying it out for two months to see if it's serving folks. Would you like to participate?"

Naturally there are an infinite number of possible variations with respect to the above two offers. You might suggest phone or Skype coaching with a prospective free client, rather than face-to-face coaching; you might suggest that the support group be Internet-based rather than live; you might not ask for any particular commitment; you might ask for a considerably longer commitment. There are many ways to frame your invitation and all sorts of technical considerations to ponder (for example, whether or not you want people coming to your space). The main points are that you actually ask and that you then energetically follow through, even in the face of difficulties.

What sorts of difficulties may arise? If, say, two people would like the group to meet on Wednesdays, two can't meet on Wednesdays but could meet on Fridays, a fifth can only meet on Tuesdays, and so on, you deal with these realities. You might stick with Wednesdays and run a very small group, you might switch the group from your living room to cyberspace, or you might find some other way to deal with these everyday difficulties. Rather than throwing up your hands and exclaiming that it is too difficult to get your group together, you practice the art of making things happen.

You might recruit from among your friends; if you are an artist working in one of the disciplines, you might recruit from among your peers, say by making an announcement on Facebook or on one of the lists to which you belong; you might use your other social networking forums; you might make the announcement at meetings you attend, for example at your monthly writers' club meeting; you might mention it on your blog or in your newsletter, if you maintain a blog or newsletter; you might ask someone you know who has a longer reach than you do to mention this "free client" opportunity to his or her followers.

If you patiently think through the various ways you might recruit clients, you are bound to come up with several. All that remains is following through.

You can always stop. If you start working with a free client and find that you do not enjoy the work or that you do not feel ready to do the work, just explain to your client that you must stop. Naturally you do not blame your client for your decision: you would never say, "Golly, working with you has been so difficult, I never want to work with a blocked writer again!" You simply say something along the lines of "My everyday responsibilities are falling through the cracks and I fear I must stop the free coaching" or "I see that I am not quite ready to work with clients and I think I'm going to pursue some more training before I work with clients again." Let yourself off the hook but make sure that you frame the matter as you having the issue.

Recruit a few free clients as soon as you feel reasonably ready. Don't expect to feel "really ready"—why should you feel that way? There is so much that you don't know and that you can't know about what it's like to coach! But you will only gain that knowledge and understanding by working with clients, so the sooner you get your feet wet the better.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

+ Where will you look for your first clients?

+ Can you generate a list of individuals you might contact?

+ Can you generate a list of places where you might "put up a notice" (including cyberspace places)?

+ Do you think you would prefer to begin by seeing individual clients or by running a group?

Lesson 12. The Five Goals of a Creativity Coach

What goals do creativity coaches have in mind when they begin work with clients? The following five are the primary ones.

1. The first goal is to have no goal

When you speak with a client, having no personal goal (apart from being of help) will sound like "What's on your mind?" or "What would you like to work on?"

What does it feel like to have no set goals as a coach? Does it feel like you are "doing nothing" and that the coaching will "go nowhere"? You may want to connect the idea that you are available and useful with the idea that you have no goal, which might internally sound like "I am here to help but I have no goals or objectives."

This is not the same thing as saying that you have no stake in the process. The stake you have is your obligation to be present and to try your best to be of help. But you cannot make another person create, deal with her problems, and so on. That is why you cannot have goals that are separate from the reality of your client. You cannot have the goal that she finally gets her novel written: only she can have that goal.

2. The second goal is to try to understand

This will sound like, "I want to understand. Tell me a little more about that." This will also sound like, "I think I understand and I have the following suggestions."

We understand a lot already (if we aren't too distracted to think, too defended against what we know, etc.). We understand when a person is sounding afraid, down on herself, overwhelmed by current circumstances, unmotivated, and so on. We also understand what to suggest in such circumstances, if we think about it.

We can suggest a small thing to try, a belief or behavior to begin to change, and so on. You start by asking yourself, "If I were stuck this way, what might help me a little?" or "If I were this down, what might I want or need to hear?" Then you offer your best suggestion. If you really don't know how to think about the situation, then you ask your client to tell you more. As she does, answers may come to her or they may come to you.

3. The third goal is to show support.

This will sound like "That sounds hard" or "That was excellent work you did, writing even though you didn't feel motivated to write."

What gets in the way of you supporting another person? Being too adamant about the "right way" things should be done? Finding yourself unable to get out of your own shoes and see the world through another person's eyes? Your bitterness about not having been supported all that well yourself as a person or an artist?

When you don't feel supportive, that may mean that your client is being difficult and resistant or it may mean that some shadowy thing has come up that has caused you not to feel on your client's side. It is one thing to believe, as an intellectual matter,

that you ought to support your clients. It is another matter to lower your defenses, empathize, and actually feel supportive.

4. The fourth goal is to be real.

This will sound like: "Is that true? My impression was that reputable literary agents don't charge hefty reading fees."

When you are pretty certain that your client is misinformed about something or has misconstrued something, you want to have internal permission to tell her what's on your mind. You will need to say this very carefully, as any difference of opinion can--and usually does--feel like criticism. But if she believes, for example, that she can find a literary agent to handle her poetry, when literary agents do not handle poetry, or if she believes that she can live on the proceeds of the sale of her first nonfiction book, when you know that all she is likely to get, even if she can sell her book, is five or ten thousand dollars, you will want to find the way to reality-test and speak the truth.

5. The fifth goal (and the first goal, and the only goal) is to be of help.

This will sound like: "Whenever you mention your novel, you also tend to say some very negative things about yourself, about how you have no talent and how you have nothing to say. I wonder if your negative self-talk isn't doing a lot of damage and preventing you from working on your book?"

There are many strategies and tactics you can employ in order to be of help. You can make suggestions, offer opinions, explain what has worked and what hasn't worked for you, provide exercises and homework, focus on some area that you think is particularly important (like working on self-confidence or quieting a too-noisy mind), and so on. We will look at many of these helping strategies as we go along. For now, you want to keep in mind the simple-sounding but profound idea that you mean to be of help.

Whereas a creativity coach cannot have as her goal that her client writes her novel or composes her symphony, as a self-coach you can and should. Your goals as a self-coach include all of the following: that you create; that you create deeply and regularly; that you learn how to survive the many crises that come with a creative life; that you avoid some crises by gaining knowledge and wisdom about yourself, the creative process, and the operations of the marketplace; and that you upgrade your personality so that it serves you well.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. In addition to the goals I've named, are there other goals that a creativity coach should keep in mind?

2. How do the goals of a creativity coach and a creativity self-coach differ?

3. What are your goals for yourself in terms of becoming a creativity coach?

4. What are your goals for yourself as a creative person?

Lesson 13. Offering Support

Of the many things that a creative person needs from a creativity coach or from herself, the main one is support. Support can mean many things and can manifest itself it many ways but the synonym that captures its central meaning is compassion and its most profound manifestation is kindness.

For personality reasons, cultural reasons, and even species reasons, it is hard for most people to be self-compassionate and self-kind. When they haven't written their novel for several years, have been telling themselves that they ought to be writing, and feel like cripples and failures, nothing like self-compassion or self-kindness is likely to find its way into their lives.

There is a bias against offering kindness and compassion built into the helping professions and lodged in the hearts of many helping professionals. Primarily this is because the people they see are self-protective, thin-skinned, unwilling to change, often unreliable, and entirely human. That these people are also other, positive things--which is why they can be loved and sometimes helped--doesn't alter the fact that they come with deep shadows. Helping professionals are naturally wary of these shadows, the scary and difficult aspects of human nature. Still, the way to help and to heal is to bring kindness and compassion forward. That is the magic formula.

Alice Miller wondered aloud in *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness* why some troubled or traumatized children became artists and others turned into Hitlers. It seemed to her that the spared children had been saved by virtue of having had at least one sympathetic witness or supporter in childhood. She explained about Picasso:

"An earthquake in Malaga in 1884? What's so unusual about that? Witness to the birth of his sister? What's so unusual about that? But if we put everything together--the earthquake and the birth, the plight of his parents and of the whole city, an upbringing of seeing but remaining silent--a particular constellation emerges that was of indelible significance for this particular individual, Pablo Picasso. Had Picasso not been carried along the Calle de la Victoria in the arms of the father he loved, he might have become psychotic or he might have had to repress the trauma so totally that he would have become an upstanding, compulsive functionary in Franco's Spain. Thus, he escaped psychosis as well as total emotional self-alienation (which characterizes the life of so many people) even though he suffered a severe trauma not only at the age of three but even at birth."

It is probably too simple to say that a Hitler received no support and that an artist received at least some support and that "the support issue" distinguishes one from the other. But it is not wrong to argue that compassion, kindness, love and support make a profound difference in a person's life. In one of the more interesting books about therapy with creative people, *The Artist in Society*, the psychoanalytically trained Lawrence Hatterer argued against the dispassionate, clinical methods of psychoanalysis by explaining:

"Supportive therapy is an essential ingredient in the treatment of artists. It is inconceivable to passively sit by and coldly analyze creative artists, since their needs for support of their ideas, projects, and products are too urgent to be ignored. The benefit they receive from supportive therapy outweighs by far possible contamination of technique. Our therapeutic practices have sanctioned an overriding uncommunicativeness to these stirrings and attempts of the artist. This practice should be jettisoned. Supportive therapy has been dismissed in the past as superficial and transient but as a means of help it has been underestimated and the cooperative aspect of a patient's behavior and attitude was overlooked."

Support is often in terribly short supply in a creative person's life. There is no one to talk to about the work. There is no one to talk to about the struggle. There is no one to talk to about the enormous gap between the dream the person had and the reality the person is living. Indeed, many creative people have been looking their whole life for one single advocate, for one person who will say, "You have it in you and I will help." They are tired of supporting themselves and telling themselves over and over again, "You matter, what you have to offer is important, you'll make it yet." They are as weary as a homeless person who needs a little shelter.

This is not to say that it is easy to know what constitutes support in a given case. Nor is it easy to actually provide it. These are goals, not givens. Support may mean kindly asking your client or yourself to institute a new routine, embrace anxiety, go more deeply inside, forgive herself, not feel that it is too late or that she doesn't have what it

takes, forge a new relationship with her creative work and with the marketplace, and so on. Support is an attitude but it is also an activity: the activity of choosing what to support and of helping change happen.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Try to articulate what it is you are supporting as a creativity coach, why you have chosen to offer that particular support, and what outcomes will signal that you have made the right choice.

2. It is reasonable to wonder if you will be able to support your clients if you yourself do not feel sufficiently supported in your life and in your creative efforts. Do you feel supported enough to support others? Can you find a way to support others even if you do not have all the support you need and crave?

3. Try to articulate what support you yourself need, making no distinction as to whether that support is the kind that you can provide or whether it is the kind that only others can provide. You can do this in list form or more discursively. When you've completed this exercise, pick an area of needed support (say, help with your current novel) and try to analyze how you can help yourself and how others might help.

4. What small thing can you do to help yourself better support your creative life? Then ask yourself, "Do I really believe that small things are worth trying? If I don't, can I change my mind and commit to making one small, useful change?"

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Coach-in-training response:

I found this lesson on support interesting personally because I have always felt myself to be very blessed in this regard. My parents always supported my creative interests. My mother was an artist, and my father's older sister was also one, and he is an artist in the garden. My husband, who is one-of-a-kind, has always supported my creative efforts whether writing, weaving, or doing dream work. He is a true partner in every sense of the word. So, while I may have other issues, support is not one of them.

I learned what a lack of support can do while I was acting as a substitute teacher in a program for high school students who, without the program, would have been dropouts. These were kids who had families with little or no time, energy, finances, or know-how to support them in their efforts to succeed in the educational process. The usual structures, rules, expectations, and disciplines of the public school were too much for them to handle given broken homes, abuse of one kind or another, and the conflict of part-time jobs and unusual family responsibilities.

In this program, however, which they attended for only half a day, they received support from three teachers. These teachers provided structure, discipline, and education, but also a listening ear, a willingness to let each student be himself or herself, and a "you can do it" belief and attitude for each student. The success rate for graduating students from that program was remarkable.

I think the core of supporting anyone, and most especially an artist, is a vocalized belief of the value/worth of that person and her achievements, and of that person's creative efforts and results. It seems to me that first creative people must believe that they themselves have worth/value before they can believe that their creations do. How can anything of value come from something worthless?

Helping people believe in their own worth is a challenging and long-term effort, especially when dealing with an adult. We want to believe it but if we have been told over and over again by our parents that we are worthless, well, who is this creativity coach to tell us any differently?

My first client, "Joan," is struggling with issues of self-esteem about herself and her work. I suggested she make a list of 20 things in her lifetime that she is proud of. Interestingly enough, she prefaced the list with the statement that she had only two paintings she was proud of but listed 19 additional things that she "has used to impress other people and saved me from failing the assignment"! And they were pretty impressive in terms of accomplishments. Some of us would be happy to have done half as much. Yet she doesn't seem to own any pride in them, added one additional item to the list to prove to me she could, and then denigrated that achievement (writing a couple of books that have yet to be published.)

When I asked her, as part of our first exchange, to write some affirmations from her list of accomplishments, she came up with five and none of them were stated in the first person but distanced, stated without a pronoun. The one thing she was happy about was when I asked her to imagine if she were on a desert island with no demands, no responsibilities, and the ability to make any creative tool or resource appear with a wish, what would that fantasy look like? She was clear, concise, and even playfully humorous about it. She wanted three major museums and an art warehouse with paint supplies and plenty of canned food. She mentioned probably growing tired of coconuts after a while but wouldn't care if the rescue boat never came!

I believe she is going to require a lot of emotional support and affirmation from me about her life accomplishments and the value of her dreams - and time, lots of time. I intend to acknowledge her accomplishments, admire her courage, commitment, and strength of will, and then see if we can move from there into directing these traits into her work. I want to see if she is willing to reframe her affirmations and then even paint them large enough to hang somewhere where she can see them frequently throughout the day. And I think I may use fantasy and dream work to help her begin to envision a creative life for herself, something we can help her manifest.

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Coach-in-training response:

I have contacted my four “free” clients, heard briefly back from all four, and have begun to get started with one, a writer. The response to her concerns came quickly. I found it easy to identify with her struggle of feeling too terrified to write anything down. I offered what I thought I would need to hear in that moment.

Before beginning this course work, I craved "a guard at the door," someone who would stand guard, keeping out any disturbance, requests, competitors for my time. I wanted a place of safety. I intend to offer that kind of support. I talked to her about how we as artists work alone, but we do not live in isolation. We do the work seemingly for ourselves, but other human beings believe in the time we give to the work, to the risks involved and to the commitment needed. We need the direct support of others, or at least one other to go on. I believe that for now this is about all I can offer.

What interests me is the anonymity of this process. I almost feel like it is might become more effective than supporting someone you love, or that you teach. With the relationships that you are invested in on a daily life level, there are countless other layers that also pull and get involved. Relating to a "client" is almost like creating another type of human connection. In some ways it feels abstract, perhaps because this is just the nature of the introductory stage. But I am interested in paying attention to the differences. It might reveal what gets one bogged down in the day to day. I presume a loved one would never speak only from support, although that support is profound in its enduring quality.

More specifically, in relating to one's client, I am having a hard time, and we have only begun, of course, knowing the difference between holding out something large, and not presenting something too large that will seem intimidating. For instance, when I wrote my first introductory email to my first client, I closed with, "I hope you are expecting great things for yourself. I am." I had a sleepless night. I asked for something superficial, really, even though I meant all of the encouragement it

suggested. I changed the closings on the remaining three emails to "I am looking forward to our work together."

Lesson 14. Getting into Your Client's Shoes

Coaching isn't therapy; but it's useful to think about what a therapist is "supposed to do" when he or she first meets a client. According to textbooks on what should happen in the first session of psychotherapy, a diligent therapist should come away knowing his client's presenting problems, current mental status, mental health history and personal history, symptom pictures with respect to any syndromes that may be present (from depression and substance abuse to spiritual problems), red flag issues like child abuse, elder abuse, suicidality and dangerousness, and so much more that a therapist is inclined to wonder, "When do I relate, counsel a little, and just plain listen?"

The demand to gather information, exacerbated by managed care and brief therapy pressures, is only one of the many obstacles to the formation of a genuine human relationship between therapist and client. Similar obstacles to building a relationship can exist between a creativity coach and her clients. Therapists and coaches alike can put up walls, preach rather than interact, problem-solve rather than listen, offer up theories rather than think, dismiss their feelings, and remain safe and in charge. Many people are not able to genuinely empathize and many people, even self-proclaimed creativity coaches, are not attuned to the realities of the creative life.

Let me give you an example what not empathizing looks like. Some years ago, I noticed that a well-known writer on the subject of treating artists was hosting an open house for clinicians and postgraduate students who might be interested in studying with him. The flyer indicated that he would be presenting clinical vignettes of his

work with creative clients, so I decided to attend. Only six of us came, three visitors, two staff of the institute, and the presenter, who read his vignettes, talked about the institute, and answered questions.

Not once in the three hours that we were there did he ask us who we were. There were only three of us and we were not invited to introduce ourselves. In that intimate setting it was strange, even surreal, not to be included. But this is not an uncommon practice among clinicians. Many psychotherapists are taught that intimacy contaminates technique. This injunction "meets them where they are at," since they are often inclined to feel superior and smug. They like the idea that their clients ought not to possess much reality. Too often their goals are to diagnose, to treat, and to bill, not to know, to care, or to help.

Creativity coaches need to join with their clients. Joining means inhabiting your client's universe and getting into her shoes. Joining means understanding that a client who wishes to write as brilliantly as Shakespeare need not be expressing any unhealthy narcissism or unwarranted grandiosity but only high ideals and grand aspirations. Joining means understanding what a hundred consecutive rejections of a person's poem or short story does to the heart. Joining means understanding that the anxiety your client is presenting--her "artistic anxiety," if you like--is more like a ground of being, intrinsic to the struggle, than a symptom to be relieved. Joining means letting go of theoretical or stereotypical thinking about creative individuals and learning their reality.

Can you feel the hold the drug habit has on the rock musician sitting across from you? Can you feel what it is like for the painter when she announces that she is bored by her own paintings? Can you feel what it is like to habitually need to do things in a meticulous way--to bind anxiety through vigilance and carefulness--and then to try to risk making a mess by writing a novel? How high the stakes feel, though nothing more than putting words on paper is being ventured!

In walks a Pollock, a Virginia Woolf, a Beethoven, or a Tina Turner. In walks an extraordinary and well-defended creative person. For something good to happen, a creativity coach must smile and say hello and begin to join. This is not a ploy or mere technique on the creativity coach's part. Rather, it is a practiced and heartfelt way of opening the door to help and change.

How do you join?

+ You join by getting to know yourself. If you are shadowy and unknown to yourself, your client will feel like she is walking into a dark place.

+ You join by calming down. The more anxious you are, the more your client will feel that she is a big problem and a threat to you.

+ You join by the way you listen. Clients know if you are listening or if you are just waiting for your turn to speak.

+ You join by the quality of the support you offer. A tiny bit of heartfelt support is more valuable than a mountain of rote support.

+ You join by not presuming. You know lots of things and many of those things will help your client, but that is not the same as presuming that you are superior and that she is inferior.

+ You join by being present. When something scares us in life we run away, fight back, or dodge the problem and rationalize away our inability to remain present. Confronted by the scariness of a client with needs, defenses, and demands, your objective is to stay put.

+ You join by guarding against thinking about you. You are not impervious to feeling hurt, challenged, criticized, or threatened by something your client says or does. It is certainly important that you protect yourself. But it is also important that you do not overreact or grow too defensive when a client disagrees with you or isn't happy with something you said.

To join means to take your client's side and to wish her well. Wish your clients well. They will know when you are holding that intention and they will know when you are not.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Joining is a feeling. When and where have you experienced it?

2. What gets in the way of joining for you?

3. What might help you better join with yourself to support your creative efforts and creative life?

4. Do you feel on your own side? If you don't, how might you come around?

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Coach-in-training response:

As I thought about joining, with myself and with clients, I realized that the less I joined with myself, the less I was able to join with clients. I would do with clients what I did with myself: stand to the side, appraising, making assessments, and applying some arbitrary standards and, of course, a few "shoulds."

What I've come to see is that when I step to the side like that (an excellent skill in some ways), somehow I abandon the meaning-making part of myself. Not only do I abandon that part but I also heap on it a lot of negative self-talk. When I do that to myself, I soon feel down and low energy because I've been berating myself inside without even registering it.

I like to use the word "partnership" to describe an inner connection where aspects of self can find a way to engage, dialog, and have a give-and-take interaction instead of an "it's either you or me" kind of relationship. To help in doing more joining with myself, I've searched for the time and place in my past where I chose to withdraw and step aside from myself. I think that if at some point I chose to withdraw, I can choose again now to re-engage, carefully, a step at a time. The pain that caused me to choose to withdraw also needs to be acknowledged, engaged, and partnered with, in order to loosen up and let go of its grip on my creative expression.

I think it would also help if I make it a goal to:

+ Stop presuming and stop laying down countless shoulds toward myself.

+ Ask, rather than tell or preach at myself.

+ Listen to myself

+ Find another place in myself (a fair-minded "overviewer") to look upon both "sides" with compassion and fairness.

My intention now is to do a lot of asking and listening within myself, and keep the dialog ongoing. During deep writing, I have been doing more asking and listening about what the piece I'm writing needs. I find that doing sleep thinking feels like an

ongoing asking and listening for a response. I want to take my own side instead of taking sides against myself. With that approach, I trust that I will end up taking my clients' side too, and join better with them.

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Coach-in-training response:

Two of the writers with whom I am working have very severe inner critic issues. Not surprisingly, both of them had very repressive (and abusive) childhood experiences, which they mentioned in passing in response to a "catalyst" question I asked them. To work through the critic issue, I encouraged them to give their critic a name and its "own voice," such as its own notebook, and to respond to it (out loud) so that they could separate the critic from their artistic self.

As a result of this exercise, one of the clients has made a breakthrough and has begun writing in a whole new genre. The other client's critic is more insidious. Not only is it attacking her desire to write, it is attacking her RIGHT to create. Once I realized that, I encouraged her by saying: "It doesn't matter if you only want to write nursery rhymes. What is at stake here is your right to do that if you so choose, whenever you so choose. You have a right to say NO to your critic."

The lesson on joining was extremely insightful and deeply appreciated. Because I also have inner critic issues with my own work, I feel as if I join the two clients I previously mentioned every time I write back to encourage them. I not only feel their pain, I KNOW it intimately. I do acknowledge their pain. I also tell them that I believe in them and am there to help them work through their challenges. Because I make that pledge, I feel as if it is imperative for me to do battle with my own inner critic, so that I can be honest and also share my experience. I also am candid about my victories and defeats so that I can share the lessons I learned in those battles.

My challenge on the issue of joining is giving too much. Would that be called "over-joining?" I feel compelled to give my clients the information (probably too much) I think will help them "fix" the problem. What I'm learning is that I need to learn how to facilitate their journey and ask more probing questions that will help them feel "joined" but not overwhelmed.

Lesson 15. Setting and Operationalizing Goals

Your client has the job of telling you what she wants to work on and what she wants to accomplish. She sets her goals. But as she presents her story and tells you what's on her mind, you may have the intuition that she might profitably pursue certain goals that she hasn't identified yet. The following are the kinds of goals you might decide to suggest:

+ That your client engages in the process of choosing a creative project to work on, if she doesn't have a project in mind.

+ That she increases the time she spends on her creative work.

+ That she learns to better handle one or another of the obstacles that gets in the way of her manifesting her creativity.

+ That she completes a current project.

+ That she makes plans and schedules for her creative life, tells you about them, and checks in with you as to whether she is keeping to her plan and schedule.

+ To this last goal might be added the goal of having her keep track of what interferes with her ability to follow through on her own plans.

+ You might also ask her to begin to distinguish between internal and external blockers. Many things that at first glance look to be external are ultimately internal matters. For instance, the phone ringing is an external matter; but picking it up, rather than letting the answering machine take the call, is internal.

+ That she works on an aspect of personality, like self-confidence, discipline, concentration, risk-taking, playfulness, nonconformity, etc. You can invite your client to consider what traits she would like to work on and agree to keep an eye peeled to see if any personality traits present themselves as problems.

+ That she works on her career. This can and will mean different things to different clients and may mean anything from networking to choosing projects that are wanted in the marketplace. An initial goal might be that she identifies several small steps that she would like to take to enhance her career, choose one or a few to work on, and begin that work.

Once you and your client have a goal or goals in mind, you will want to translate them into "doable" chunks. I'm calling this process of translating vague or abstract goals into clear or concrete goals "operationalizing goals." This translation process sounds like the following.

Client: "I'd like to get back to work on my novel."

Coach: "Can you tell me a little bit about the schedule you'd like to set up to work on your novel? How many days a week do you want to work on it, which days, how many hours, and so on?"

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Client: "I want to get better at marketing my paintings."

Coach: "Can you tell me what you mean specifically? Do you want to visit the galleries in your area and meet gallery owners? Get your website set up? Cultivate collectors? What did you have in mind?"

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Client: "I want to finish at least one of the stories I've been working on."

Coach: "Can you tell me which one you want to work on? Can we choose from the various possibilities right now?"

Try your hand at operationalizing the following client goals:

+ "I want to learn monoprinting."

+ "I need to stop bad-mouthing myself."

+ "I have to get my husband to understand that I need time and space to create."

+ "I've got to figure out a way to do my music even though my life is incredibly busy."

+ "I'm a dancer and I'm having trouble with my hip. I need to get some help."

+ "I'd like more confidence."

+ "I don't feel motivated to write."

+ "I can't seem to juggle everything and find any time for myself."

"I can't do the paintings I have in mind until I can draw a lot better."

+ "I want to learn how to concentrate."

+ "I want to start an on-line consulting business."

+ "I'd like to audition more."

+ "I want to tackle a project larger than anything I've tried before."

+ "I desperately need a few commercials successes."

Often your client will have several goals in mind. For example, she wants to finally begin her novel, she is hoping to write more regularly, she is looking for some way to support herself by writing, and she wants to feel less blue. In your own mind, you will want to make distinctions among her goals and decide which are the ones you want to single out for support.

You may decide that helping her start her novel is the primary goal, because if she starts on it and gets off to a good start she will naturally and even inevitably want to write more regularly. She may also feel less depressed as a result of finally beginning her novel. Furthermore, she may find herself able to write pieces for the marketplace because her own novel writing is at last going forward. Her four goals get met because you have helped her focus on a primary goal.

You may also decide to support some goal that your client hasn't articulated but that you sense might come before her stated goals or go alongside her stated goals. You may decide that it would be good if she were more confident, if she bad-mouthed herself less, or if she fell back in love with creating. You may decide that you can't ignore something that she has said about her life circumstances, her past experiences, or her personality. Your client presents you with goals but you also do your own thinking about what goals might serve her.

The goals you set for your client and the goals you set for yourself as a self-coach come in many shapes and sizes. One goal may be to help her improve her personality, to become a little more confident or a little better risk-taker. Another goal may be to help her "make believe" that her work is important during the initial period when artists often doubt that the work has any real value. Another goal may be to help her better understand and begin to master the marketplace, since it is hard to feel happy if one's creative work has no audience and no place to go. The list of possible goals is very long. But you only need to articulate a couple in order to begin your work with your client or your work with yourself.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What do you suppose are the most common goals clients will want to set for themselves?

2. How might you operationalize the goals you just named?

3. Think about your own creative life. What are a few goals you might articulate for yourself?

4. Can you single out one goal that you would like to work on?

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Coach-in-training response:

I guess this week's lesson for me is a lesson in flexibility. Initially, when I got the assignment, I had grand plans. I had made initial contacts with my three coachees. I had written letters introducing myself and suggesting how to get started. I got a short note from one stating he would get in touch soon. I got more extensive responses from the other two, and reflected back some of the major points and began to focus on goals and strategies. Then, as the week passed, I heard again from only one. I'll discuss him in a minute. I didn't hear from the other two. This has forced me to reassess my goals. My goal for these two is to "establish and maintain a connection."

For the one who only replied with a brief note and nothing since, it's possible that he's just not interested. He has some interest, however, since he initially responded, so I ventured an interpretation. I acknowledged that, from his bio his life sounded pretty busy and maybe he hadn't been able to find time to reply for the creativity coaching. I wondered if, since he had said in his bio that he wanted to develop a certain creative aspect of his life, if he was also having trouble finding time to develop that. I suggested that finding time to do the coaching might help him find time to meet his creative goal. I also added, "Does this make sense or am I way off the mark?" so if the reason is completely different, he can let me know.

Silence from the second person surprised me. We had a pretty intense and, I thought, pretty productive exchange. I gently asked her how she was doing. In her earlier communications, she had said that it was difficult to collect her thoughts in front of the computer screen. I was afraid that I might have overwhelmed her, responding to too much and suggesting too much, possibly leading her to think that she had to do a huge amount before she could reply. I shared this speculation and suggested that, if this was the case, she just give a short reply to a small aspect of what she's dealing with. I just sent this out.

For the one who has kept contact, we are still working on what exactly to focus on as he is a musician and has two goals, to develop his musical skills more, so as to be less dependent on others to write and create music, and to focus on marketing his songs. He's telling me how much time he wants to focus on each and I'm using that as a barometer to measure how much of each to focus on in my responses. So far, we're dealing with being creative in the business/marketing aspect as this is his highest priority. He also says that he has, as a goal, to eventually give up his day job (he's employed as a professional) and support himself with music, making the same amount of money.

For me this gets into the area of "being real." If this is his dream and driving force, I don't want to shoot it down or say that it is impossible. On the other hand, from my experience in the music business, I know that this isn't an easy thing. I know a lot of very talented musicians who are very creative but either have a marginal income or depend on a day job for extra income. I responded to him with two things. First, I reminded him that there have been great composers who have supported themselves by other means (Charles Ives, for example), to help him separate income from validity and recognition. Also, I told him that I anticipated that the process would be a gradual one, at first, the music income supplementing his other income until a point when it grows enough so that he can give up his other job. I think this will help with little steps and allow him to validate little steps that he takes, seeing them as steps in the right direction rather than thinking that he's not successful because he still has a day job.

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Coach-in-training response:

All of my clients seem to be having problems setting some goals. They're avoiding the subject by announcing that they don't think that setting goals is so important. They have wishes and desires but none so strong that they want to commit to setting a goal.

I'm working on getting them to think about what it means to them to set a goal. What are the feelings around goal-setting and why is it so hard for them to nurture their dreams? I'm trying to help them build up confidence in themselves, to listen to their heart so they can remember what they love about their art.

The issues that seem to be coming up are related mostly to "old tapes," all the negative messages that come up during the creative process that are hard to quiet. Or they have all these great ideas but it's hard for them to focus on one project at a time. My objective is to start slowly, asking them to look more closely at their issues with me there to guide them.

With one client, we're working together with Eric's book Fearless Creating since she needs "something visual" to help her. I suggested to another client who has trouble focusing to start what I call a "projects notebook" where she can write or draw her ideas. It's helping her keep that information handy for later reference but still enables her to let it go and avoid feeling overwhelmed. Another has started a journal.

I have never had problems setting goals. It's cultivating them that's difficult. One of my biggest obstacles with sticking to a goal is the feeling that I don't really know what I'm doing and that my creative ideas are just not interesting. I've learned to be more selective about the goals I set, knowing the disappointment I have experienced in the past when not meeting goals felt like failing. I've learned to take baby steps.

This process helps me focus more on achievable goals rather than on bigger, unattainable ones. It helps me to see results quicker and therefore leads to feelings of worth. I frequently give myself pep talks as well as visits to museums, the zoo, art shows and libraries to help stimulate me. Knowing that my inner critics can, at any time, give me countless reasons why it's not possible for me to achieve my goals, I'm constantly reassuring myself that I originally set this goal because it was something that I believed in. I try to remain focused on the excitement and joy I found when the

goal first appeared as a wish. I'm not sure how long it will take, but perhaps, with practice, the confidence will build and goal-setting will become easier.

Lesson 16. How to Say What You Say

What you say is important but how you say it is just as important. You want to cultivate a non-judgmental way of speaking that honors your client's difficulties while at the same time allowing you to make the recommendations and suggestions that you want to make.

The following are the kinds of circumlocutions you will want to cultivate:

+ "I wonder if you might want to try ... "

+ "I was thinking that it might be useful to try ... "

+ "Do you think it might be a good idea if you ... "

+ "What small but important thing would you like to accomplish in the coming week?"

+ "I wonder if you're feeling up to ... "

+ "Now that you've done 'x,' I wonder what you might like to try your hand at next?"

Email messages can have a very cold, curt, and bullying sound to them. You want to make extra-sure that your email messages do not come off sounding that way. You want to be professional but also warm and friendly. Your responses are not the responses of a friend but of a professional coach who is thinking about the needs of your client, as best as you understand them, and about what will help her achieve her goals. But there is no reason why a professional-sounding response shouldn't also be warm and friendly.

When using email, think matters through twice before you say them. You don't have this same luxury when you are doing in-office or on-the-phone coaching, although even then you must sometimes spend a split-second checking to make sure that what you are about to say is on target. With email coaching, you have the luxury of writing a draft of your email, reading it through, and considering the pros and cons of what you are about to say. As a general rule, if there is something in the email that troubles you, makes you wonder if you are saying the right thing, or in some other way sends up a warning flare, take your doubts seriously. In almost all such cases, it is better to take the "offending" material out.

The following is another aspect of "how you say things": namely, how you talk about yourself. Your client may begin by wanting to ask you questions about you or about creativity coaching. You will want to answer such questions simply, directly, non-defensively, and briefly. To be prepared for this, you might want to craft your answers to the following questions. Each answer should be no more than a sentence or two in length.

+ "Are you an artist? What's your art discipline?"

+ "Can you tell me a little bit about your background?"

+ "How do you see creativity coaching working?"

+ "What will we be doing?"

+ "Do you think you can help me?"

While these are perfectly legitimate questions and while it is readily understandable why a client might ask them, it is still something of a red flag when a client asks about you rather than getting right to what is on her mind. You should briefly reassure her but you do not want to spend too much time explaining who you are or what might happen in the coaching relationship. For example:

"Are you an artist? What's your art discipline?"

Direct answer: "I've been painting for fifteen years."

Too much: "I've been painting for fifteen years but I've sold hardly anything."

Too much: "I've been painting for fifteen years and I'm represented by three galleries, one in New York, one in Aspen, and one in Taos."

Too much: "I'm an abstract expressionist painter and I have my MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute."

Too much: "I've been painting for fifteen years, though I rarely get to my studio these days."

Too much: "I've been painting for fifteen years, but I've been slowed down by wrist pain in recent years."

Whatever you add to the basic fact that you paint sets up an unnecessary vibration. You may seem more advanced or better placed than your client and excite her envy, you may seem less advanced or more troubled than she and therefore not likely to be able to help her, and so on. This question should not be viewed as an opportunity for you to tell her who you really are or for you to vent some of your own frustrations.

Here are some more examples:

"Can you tell me a little bit about your background?"

Direct answer: "I have an advanced degree in science and I've worked primarily as a researcher, but now I want to help individuals manifest their potential."

"How do you see creativity coaching working?"

Direct answer: "You'll tell me what's on your mind and together we'll try to figure out some solutions."

"What will we be doing?"

Direct answer: "We'll try to identify what's getting in the way of you creating and try to come up with some things for you to try out."

"Do you think you can help me?"

Direct answer: "I believe that I can! We'll have to begin and see what happens."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Create your own simple, direct answer to the question, “How does creativity coaching work?”

2. Create your own simple, direct answer to the question, “Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?”

3. Create your own simple, direct answer to the question, “Are you an artist?”

4. What would you like to do or say if a client insists on knowing more about you?

Lesson 17. When You Don’t Know What to Do

There are things that you can't or shouldn't handle. It is often the proper and the smart thing to say, "Mary, it sounds like you might want to get in touch with a (lawyer, doctor, therapist, accountant) and get some help with that." Do not give legal advice, medical advice, or any other specialized advice that you ought not to give. Do not say things like "I know a good cure for migraine headaches" or "My brother-in-law went through a bankruptcy and all he had to do was file a few papers."

You especially do not want to do any mental health diagnosing or characterizing. Of course, you can say things like "I wonder if you're feeling anxious about that" or "I wonder if you've been feeling down this week." Just use your common sense and do not cross over the line between talking the way any layperson might talk to another person about emotional matters and sounding like you have special expertise.

Err on the side of caution. There are many issues that creative people face that will be outside the scope of your expertise. Clients may bring up drinking problems, addictions, intense anxiety states (like panic attacks), eating disorders, severe depression, other mood disorders (like mania), suicidal thoughts, even breaks with reality that signal psychosis. You want to be compassionate, supportive, but not expert. Aim your client at experts. Let that be part of your work together, that you nudge your client in the direction of finding appropriate help for such problems.

Maybe what your client is experiencing is within the scope of your expertise but you're nevertheless not quite sure what to do. Here are twenty things you can say or do when you aren't exactly certain how to help.

1. Ask your client, "What do you think might work?"

2. Ask your client, "What would you like to try?"

3. Research the issue on the Internet.

4. Read a book on the subject.

5. Ask a fellow creativity coach what he or she thinks.

6. Put yourself in your client's shoes and remain there, looking out at the world through her eyes, for five minutes.

7. Think about your own life and consider parallels.

8. Walk along the beach or down to the corner grocery and think about nothing.

9. Write down your thoughts and look for clues in what you've written.

10. Sleep on it.

11. Ask your client for more information.

12. Reread your email exchanges with your client.

13. Think and feel through whether your client is participating in the process and, if she isn't, how you might address that.

14. Ask yourself, "Is this a shadow issue for me? Am I coming up against my own stuff?"

15. Ask yourself, "What progress am I expecting? And why am I expecting it?"

16. Try to identify if there's a missing link or a missing piece to the puzzle.

17. Re-read this book or the relevant parts of it.

18. Ask your client to check in with her current thoughts.

19. Make a tentative suggestion.

20. Think in threes (see next)

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. How will you distinguish between something you can handle (like a client feeling anxious) and something you can't handle (like a client feeling tremendously anxious all the time)?

2. What's the first thing you'll try when you aren't exactly certain what to do next?

3. How do you unravel puzzles in your own life?

4. Which three or four of these twenty tactics seem most congenial to you?

Lesson 18. Thinking in Threes

When a client presents an issue, one way to think through what the issue means is by asking yourself, "What three recommendations might I make?" You then read over your three recommendations and think through which one, given this client and the work you have done so far, you want to offer.

Here are some examples:

a. Choices.

Your client says: "I want to work on x but I'm also very drawn to working on y."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Try either, without worrying which is the right one. But really commit to that one for the next month."

2. "Which one allows you to go deepest?"

3. "If it interested you to keep an eye on the marketplace, which one would be easiest to sell?"

b. Lengthy blocks

Your client says: "I've been blocked for six years and I don't think I can possibly get started on anything."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Can you identify what you might like to work on?"

2. "What is the smallest thing you might do to jump start your creative life?

3. "Do you have some sense why you have been blocked for six years?"

c. Lack of commercial success.

Your client says: "I've never been able to sell anything and that makes it hard for me to want to continue creating."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Do you want to start thinking fresh about the marketplace?"

2. "Do you want to work on your marketing skills?"

3. "Do you think it's possible to work deeply for a while and not think about the marketplace for a month?"

d. Obstacles

Your client says: "My health prevents me from creating."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Given the reality of this challenge, what have you tried so far?"

2. "Is this a situation that can be changed or are you looking at having to live with it?"

3. "Should we look at making a little time and space for your creative efforts, taking your health problems into account?"

e. Felt lack of talent.

Your client says: "I'd love to try my hand at a novel, but I have no talent in that direction."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Would you like to try it anyway?"

2. "Talent is such a funny word. Sometimes all it means is that you don't have the experience."

3. "Do you think that talent is the issue? Or is it just daunting to think about trying something that big?"

f. Blaming.

Your client says: "I'm in this big fight with a literary agent and I can't concentrate on my writing."

Three possible recommendations:

1. "Being in charge of your own mind is a worthy goal. Do you want to try to return to your writing even though you are in the middle of a fight?"

2. "What were you working on before this fight erupted? Tell me a little bit about that project."

3. "Do you think that your anger about the marketplace is stopping you from writing?"

When you feel a little stuck and a little unsure about how to nudge a client along, think—between emails, between sessions, or even in the moment—about two or three alternative tactics you might try, choose one of them, and try it.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Your client is waiting to hear back from an editor about her novel—and has been waiting without doing any writing for three long months now. What three suggestions or tactics might you dream up to help her resume writing while she waits and which one would you be inclined to offer?

2. Your client wants to move from painting to sculpting but feels frightened about learning a whole medium. What three suggestions or tactics might you dream up to help her move forward and which one would you be inclined to offer?

3. Your client hasn't auditioned in six months. What three suggestions or tactics might you dream up to help her resume auditioning and which one would you be inclined to offer.

4. Your client has an important concert coming up but hasn't been practicing. What three suggestions or tactics might you dream up to help her get back to practicing and which one would you be inclined to offer.

Lesson 19. Viewing Clients' Creative Work

As a creativity coach, your job is not to critique your client's creative work. You are not an editor, art critic, music critic, or anything along those lines.

Sometimes you will want to focus on the work very directly and there will be times when you will want to know a lot about a client's current work. You may find

yourself saying that you have worries about where your client is taking her novel, the sense that her film is going in a direction different from the one she articulated last month, a fear that she is trying to get too much onto her CD, given her looming deadline, and so on. But despite the fact that you sometimes and maybe even often will deal with your client's creative work in a real, direct, and intense way, you are not an editor or critic.

It is fine (and very useful) if your client wants to tell you about her novel. It is not so fine if she wants to send you her novel. Unless you have a special arrangement with your client that you are going to read and comment on her novel or her nonfiction book proposal, look at her new suite of paintings on her web site, or otherwise work on or comment on her creative efforts, you will want to be very careful not to make yourself available in such ways. First, this would be far too time-consuming (and if you do enter into such a relationship, you should be paid for the extra time you spend). Second, any comments you make, even positive ones, can harm your working relationship with your client.

But while it is a sensible rule not to look at or comment on your client's creative work, in practice it is very hard to keep to this rule. In fact, I think it is virtually impossible, because as soon as a client makes such a request a dynamic is set up where you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. Very often it feels easier to agree to look at the work and to put off worrying through what you will say about the work until after you encounter it. Still, it is better not to agree.

When you need to tell your client that you are not available to look at or comment on her work, these are some of the kinds of things you can say:

"I'd love to, but I've found that it just isn't such a good idea. I hope it will be all right if I decline."

"I'd love to, but it would be better if we focused on the work we've set for ourselves."

"I would really love to listen to your CD. May I listen to it without having to comment on it? Because any comment I make, apart from telling you that I loved it, might hurt our work together. Let me know if this would be all right."

Sometimes it will simply make no sense not to look at the work, for instance if your client emails you a photo of her latest sculpture. It will feel too strict and odd to delete the photo and tell her that you couldn't look at it. In such circumstances, when you are obliged to look at a client's creative work or when you feel that you want to look at it, you will want to measure VERY carefully what you say about it.

If you decide that you must say something critical or negative--say, because you feel that the work reveals something about your client's block that she ought to be informed about, because its lack of depth worries you, and so on--be prepared for her to be upset and even to terminate the relationship. You will want to weigh the importance of your pronouncement against the possibility that she will be upset. You may decide that it is of the utmost importance that you voice your concern, in which case you should prepare yourself for her negative feelings. Or you may decide that, on balance, and even though what you have to say is valid and important, it will be a better policy to hold your tongue and say something neutral.

The following are the kinds of neutral responses you might make:

"Thanks for telling me about your site! I really enjoyed visiting it."

"Thanks so much for your CD. I listened to it last night and enjoyed it very much."

"I read your story and enjoyed it very much. I wonder, was there anything different about the creative process this time that helped you get it written?"

"Thank you for showing me your latest painting. I'm pleased that you managed to complete it. How are you feeling about it?"

"That article about your work was very interesting. What was your reaction to it?"

"I read the synopsis of your novel that you sent me and I see how it deals with the themes we've been discussing. Where do you intend to go next?"

However, a client may persist and want more than no response or this neutral response. She may say, "I don't think you can know me unless you understand my paintings" or "It doesn't feel good to me that you won't comment on my stories." If a client persists in demanding that you comment on her creative work, you will find yourself at a crossroads without any really good path to take. You can continue to temporize and hope that she will stop making this demand, you can try offering a new reason why you think commenting would be a bad idea, you can ask her if she wants to change your arrangement (if this is a paying situation) and let her know what your fees are for reading her manuscript, watching her movie, and so on, or you can acquiesce.

You will find this to be one of the trickiest areas in your work as a creativity coach. For one thing, you want to know what she is doing creatively but you don't want to be put in the position of being forced to comment on her work. In essence, you want to be in charge of the rules, asking about her work when you feel that is a good idea but not commenting on her work when you think that not commenting would be the wiser course. Even when you become very experienced at handling these matters, you will still sometimes find yourself with no really good options.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Do you have a specialty that you intend to offer (like writing coaching) along with creativity coaching? If so, describe how you intend to distinguish between the two when you present them to clients.

2. In the signature line of the email you just received from a new client is the link to her website. Will you visit it? If so, with what intention are you visiting?

3. What do you intend to say when a client asks if you mind going to her website and looking at her latest photographs?

4. What do you intend to say when a client asks you if you could possibly look at "just the first page or two of my novel"?

Lesson 20. Brief and Short-Term Creativity Coaching

The briefest creativity coaching I provide is of the following sort. I answer a person's question or chat with someone for a minute at a lecture, booksigning event, or workshop. Or I reply to an e-mail or a phone call. Just as a practicing Buddhist monk or a Taoist poet is that thing all the time, a creativity coach is always a creativity coach, aware at all times of the needs and rhythms of her own creative life, always advocating for the practice of creativity, and always looking for ways to support another person's creative efforts, even if that person is only asking a question at a workshop.

It is entirely possible to help another person even though all you know about her is as little as the following:

Q: "I set my studio up and I bought this beautiful, expensive watercolor paper. But I can't seem to get started. What should I do?"

A: "Ah, we may be in the territory of anxiety and self-doubt. First, you have to really decide that it's all right to ruin that paper. Second, you need to remember how much you love color, that you want that experience again. Third, I would carefully notice the things you say to yourself when you think about painting—you may find that they're pretty negative. I'd work to get rid of that language and substitute more affirmative language."

Or:

Q: "I wrote a couple of novels, but I couldn't get them published. I have this idea for a new novel that I've been carrying around in my head for almost a year, but I can't seem to work on it. What do you think is up?"

A: "Probably what's up is that you're not over the pain and disappointment of your first novels not selling and you don't want that experience again. You probably don't trust that this one will sell either and you suspect that you'll have another miserable experience. What you might try this time is to invest just a little meaning in the enterprise, rather than your whole soul, by carefully crafting a two-page piece that represents your best understanding of the novel and then trying that synopsis out on a few trusted friends. That would give you the chance to get some early feedback and at the same time inch your way rather than plunge your way into the writing of this book."

Or:

Q: "I've had trouble with directors my whole life. I try to listen to all their advice, start to play the character their way, then get lost. I've never been able to just say, 'Look, please, can I try it my way first?' I feel like such an idiot and a wimp!"

A: "There may be lots of reasons why you have trouble speaking up. But I think the main thing to do is just to practice speaking that way. Just set a goal for yourself that when you find yourself in those kinds of circumstances you will craft short, declarative sentences that are no more than six or seven words long. Can we try that now? 'Can I try the scene my way?' Try it. 'Can I try the scene my way?' Give it a try. Saying such things out loud is an important first step."

A single response can provide a client with a wealth of information and real direction. A single creativity coaching session can do all of that and more. I often see clients for just a single session. In that single session I am listening, joining, appraising, making use of myself, intervening, disputing negative self-talk, encouraging, explaining, wondering out loud, suggesting, and living deeply and completely with that person for an hour. I am listening for self-disparaging comments, for hints of dreams deferred, for the presence of profound blockers. But I am not "working hard." I am just meeting my client, who has been ready for this interaction for the longest time.

The reason that short-term creativity coaching can be effective is that your client, however resistant and defended she may be, is also primed to throw open the window of her mind and let a breath of fresh air in. That is why she asked her question, contacted you, hired you, or came to your workshop. She is far more than idly curious about what you do or innocently exploring why she isn't painting or composing. She is primed for change. She may not feel up to making the necessary changes and she may, in fact, not end up making them. But she is right on the cusp of trying.

You are offering your client the chance to hear from her own lips what she already knows. Given this chance, she is likely to reveal to herself what she knows. Then you can follow up your client's insights with the innocent-sounding question, "What

would you like to do?" Here, too, your client is likely to know. But she may not want to say what she knows, maybe because she is not ready to make the changes she would need to make and not ready to face the demons she would need to face. So, she may backtrack and provide an answer that is not as rich and truthful as you would have liked.

To this "disappointing" answer a creativity coach mildly replies, "Yes, you could do that. Or you might try x. Or you might try y. What do you think?" By providing her with these rich alternatives, you reinforce what she knows to be true and you give her a second chance to picture making those big changes. What your client is likely to reply is something like, "I would love to do x or y but I think I can only manage what I've said." To this you might reply, "So let's hold out x and y as future goals but focus on your plan for now."

In abbreviated form, an interchange of this sort might sound like the following:

"I have this idea for a screenplay but I never get around to writing it."

"Yes. Why is that?"

"Maybe I'm just scared. Or maybe I don't think it's really such a good idea."

"What would you like to do to get started?"

"Well, I'd like to work on it at least one day a week."

"That would be great. Or you might try to work on it for an hour every day. Or we might even work on it right here in session."

"Oh, I don't know! I don't think I could get to it every day. One day a week would be a beginning! And I'm not sure how we could work on it here and now."

"Okay! Then let's make sure that you write one day this week. But let's keep those other ideas in mind and maybe we can come back to them."

Creativity coaching is made up of these sorts of interactions. A complete interaction can take twenty seconds and profoundly help your client. The main things to remember about standing ready to creativity coach are that every interaction with a client can make a difference and that many really will.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Are there ways that you need to grow or change so that you will be ready to creativity coach at all times?

2. Imagine in your mind's eye a one-hour creativity coaching session. What could be accomplished?

3. Acting as your own coach, what do you need to ask yourself so as to elicit the important information you already know you know?

4. What changes would you need to make in order to make use of this important information?

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Coach-in-training response:

One aspect of this week's message struck me with particular strength: always being a creativity coach in all aspects of my life. I have been segmenting it, putting on my coach hat at times and leaving it off other times. This may be appropriate at times but I realized that I am often on the wrong side of the fence when I am talking with others about coaching.

I have tried to develop an "elevator speech" describing creativity coaching to someone in a manner that is brief but gives him or her a picture of what it is. I'm doing it as a self-affirmation, talking about it to make it more tangible and also as a word-of-mouth marketing tool. The more people know that I do this, the better the chance that somebody who can benefit from creativity coaching will seek me out. Responses range from "deer in the headlights look" to polite interest to a conversation about creativity.

The idea of actually doing a little creativity coaching in this situation is intriguing. What I like about it is that it is win-win. I'm able to give something away, the other person may gain something useful which will benefit his/her life, and I will be able to communicate more about creativity coaching experientially than even a long discussion in the abstract would allow. My resistance to it is wanting to be careful not to be preachy, intrusive, telling somebody else how they should live their life, being a "born again" creativity coach.

Example 1. An opportunity missed. I was at some friends' house, picking up my son who had been playing with their son. I was telling them how great this creativity coaching class was and how excited I was. The wife told me about a creative writing group that she was involved in, meeting weekly. The husband, an architect, said, "You know, I really should find some creative outlet. Everybody thinks that architecture is really creative, but most of the time I'm in boring meetings, working on mundane things. I really should get involved in some creative project outside of work." I

responded "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea," and we moved on. In hindsight, I could have used that as an opportunity. I could have said "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea. Do you have a half hour this weekend that you would like to spend on exploring that?" If he was interested, a possible direction would have been for me to suggest he pick a time, make an appointment with himself, maybe teach him a "hushing" exercise, and encourage him to brainstorm and write a list of all the possible creative projects he could pursue, realistic and unrealistic, profound and mundane.

Example 2. An opportunity taken. I'm at a dinner party, again talking about creativity coaching. A friend of mine, a project manager for a computer game company, started talking about how he thought of being an artist when he started school but then switched to engineering so that he could have less subjective indicators of success. I made a conscious effort to listen with a Creativity Coaching stance. An hour later, we had covered life decisions that he had made, career decisions that he had made, what was creative and uncreative about his current job and his life. In a nutshell, we had a deeper conversation than we had ever had and I think he had a better understanding about his life. He had been devaluing what he had done and hadn't given himself credit for the decisions that he had made. He was more empowered to take an active stance in creating his life in the future.

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Coach-in-training response:

Trouble at Black Rock. An old blocking feeling that every writer knows she "shouldn't" have snaked from under a hot cactus and struck a number of us. Pete, one of the students in last Tuesday's class on writing scenes (novels as well as screenplays) came up with character descriptions and dialog at once so apt and vivid that the rest of us sat stunned. Worse, Pete's work showed a remarkable facility for wringing dramatic story out of the slightest, most everyday events. Some of us, I knew, had claimed we'd kill to be able to do that.

Whether mercy or curse, Pete had read last. We stumbled out and went our separate ways. It came as no comfort as I went on alone to know I wasn't the only one in pain. Like the others, I was aware of all the "right" things to tell myself about not comparing my work to another's, about trusting my own process, about hushing the inner critic. I'd lived through it before, but I sure hated to have to do it again. What I was feeling was going to take too big a toll in time, productivity and my sense of well-being. Next week, I'd have to read for the class and Pete would sit there listening.

Then the new creativity coach in me cleared her throat. "You took a hit," she said. "Want some help?" Out poured my woes. "Nuff said," said the coach. "Do you want to look at some alternative ways of reacting?" What made that question work for me? Of course, I'd been desperately seeking a way out. But starting to look for alternative responses (1) made me believe there might really be some, and (2) gave me the idea that maybe what I needed was a way in.

Notebook and fountain pen at the ready, with a speed that surprised me, I identified for the coach the steps I thought I needed. First, acknowledge the effect I'd heard in Pete's writing that I wanted in my own. I wrote it out specifically and affirmed it. Second, identify the elements that produced that effect. Third, imagine three adjectives describing how I wanted my next writing (subject already chosen and material committed) to strike its readers.

Looking at this now I wonder why it didn't seem like obvious analysis in the heat of the moment. (If it had, I might have declared that analyzing things won't help.) Yet this experience was wholly unlike any of the obsessing that I'd ever done in journals. Not only did responses come instantly (the whole thing took barely 10 minutes), but once they'd been jotted in the notebook my mind seemed free and clear. No circling back.

I've now finished a draft of what I'll read next Tuesday, and I know without waiting for the group's response that I've achieved the effects I declared that I wanted. This

feeling has value for me because I'll be free to learn unexpected things from their comments. Feedback does no good when people are telling me about the flaws I myself have already recognized. At this stage, one way I know that my draft has succeeded is because it surprised me in the ways it arrived at the desired effects. Surprising myself is why I keep writing.

My suffering didn't linger beyond last Tuesday night's emergency session. On Wednesday morning, I called a classmate (something I would not ordinarily do) to see how she fared. Out poured her woes. I shared with her some notions about coaching questions, but without filling her up with mine. She told a friend and later that class member called me. I am not skilled at protecting me (or my space) from another person's problems and at some points during both conversations could only remain silent. On the whole, however, a little spot-on creativity coaching boosted all three of us and lifted the plane of our thinking.

Lesson 21. Long-term Creativity Coaching

When you work with a client for some time you learn many things about her. Consider how the following reports might color your feelings about the person who is making the report.

Jane, an actress and director, explained:

"I was raised by my grandmother. My father, who didn't want a daughter, left, and my mother was physically and emotionally abusive. My relationship with my mother was like having a jealous older sister. At about age three I was molested by my grandfather. When I was about five I was enrolled in dance. My grandmother would take me. I loved it and felt I excelled at it but it wasn't considered a stable endeavor

by my grandmother and mother appeared to be disappointed that I wasn't good enough.

“I stopped dancing for two years, returned, and continued dancing out of my own desire to regain the happiness I used to experience. I didn't meet my father until I was ten. I admired his musical ability and wanted him to see that ability in me, in order to have a connection with him. But what was fostered most in me was the idea that I was not talented enough, not pretty, and, of course, stupid."

Tom, an actor and acting teacher, explained:

"My childhood was turbulent. My mother married four times and committed suicide in her late 50's. We moved all around the south a lot because my natural father was a hospital administrator. I went to sixteen different schools before graduating high school. Mother had six kids, three of them died at birth. My natural father was a horror, evidently an abusive man, but I can't remember him in any detail. He left when I was ten, at which time I stopped having fainting spells and bad headaches.

“Mother remarried when I was thirteen to an ineffectual man, sweet though he was. She forever confided in me, quite inappropriately, her sexual frustrations with him. Evidently, he was impotent. She divorced him after a few years and subsequently married two more men, one an alcoholic and the last a nice man who soon died from Parkinson's Disease. Tennessee Williams couldn't have written a better scenario than my childhood."

Anne, a classical musician and conductor, described growing up in Germany with two powerful parents, one Jewish and one gentile:

"My father was a psychiatrist and my mother was a psychologist who specialized in family relationships. There was constant friction between them and they divorced when I was 23. Before that, when the war began, my father was protected from being

sent to a concentration camp by being married to a gentile, and he became terribly dependent on my mother's good will. But still there was constant fighting and accusations and each parent tried to use me as a pawn in their power struggle.

“My mother was the dominant personality--she had seen my father through medical school and never let him forget what he owed her. It was she who found tutors and other activities for me when a new law terminated school attendance for all Mischlinge (children of Jewish-gentile parentage) in 1942. It was my mother who arranged after the war for us to immigrate to America.

"Both my parents were success-oriented. My mother was a very powerful person who seemed to be able to do things other people would find impossible even to try, like getting my father out of a Gestapo jail after he was arrested for helping some Jewish patients commit suicide to avoid transportation to Auschwitz. I always felt I had to compete, too, to be better than other kids at what I did, get better grades, and live up to higher standards. But I knew that in order to break away I had to do it in an area in which neither of my parents was competent. That's one of the main reasons I went into music."

Angela, an actress, playwright, and director, described her childhood in the following way:

"My childhood was traumatic and full of upheaval--although it felt quite normal to me, of course. I was adopted at a very early age by my parents, who after having one son could no longer have children. My father was a minister, my mother a painter and model. At the age of three my father and I had a very bad lawn mower accident that nearly crippled me for life. Soon after that he left the ministry and my parents divorced and married the parents of my best friend (my mother married her father and my father married her mother.)

“My stepfather was a psychiatrist and although extremely successful in his practice he was a very disturbed man and the brunt of it was placed on me. My father became an alcoholic meanwhile and although the families stayed in contact, because of the relationships involved, he was quite non-present for 20 years. I was raped at the age of twelve and became severely anorexic after that. I was always very emotional and moody and my mother and stepfather would call me Sarah Bernhardt and encourage my performing. Everybody always thought that I was very smart but very screwed up and that the theater was the best place for me to be."

Did these reports inspire confidence in you that these individuals would have the internal resources to make the progress they hope to make? Or did you feel yourself predicting failure for them (and for you) and resenting them for their pasts?

I think that the best path is to not worry about these news flashes when you receive them. It is simply impossible to know how a person has been affected by past events, even the most dire and traumatic ones, and equally impossible to know whether or not they have it in them to live the creative life they hope to live. People with rocky pasts can and will surprise you. You may want to surprise them by not jumping to the conclusion that a difficult past predicts a ruined future.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Do you have the sense that it is useful or counter-productive to know a lot about your client's history? In light of what you think about this, what sort of history and what amount of history, if any, would you want to gather from clients?

2. Do you have strong beliefs about how childhood affects personality? Do you have a "theory of personality"? Do you believe that there is more value in having or not having such a theory?

3. How did your childhood affect you?

4. If it affected you negatively, in what sense can you "put that behind you"?

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Coach-in-training response:

Is knowing a client's history useful? I think a creativity coach needs to be aware of a client's past history only if it arises and gets in the way when the client tries to pursue a coach's suggestions for attaining creative goals.

In the beginning of coaching, I would ask a client only for a description of what blocks have come up in the past when doing creative work. Asking for more than that might turn attention away from the creative work and onto the issues. Not that the issues aren't important; they just aren't the primary focus of coaching. I would expect that the parts of a person's past that needed attention would naturally come up in the course of the coaching. If it became apparent that the person needed psychotherapy in addition to creativity coaching, I would then suggest that the person contact a psychotherapist to work on the issues, along with doing creative work.

I've been thinking about the personality skills that come into being as "side-effects" of going through a painful experience. Perhaps some of the personality traits that a person develops in order to survive trauma could be used in doing creative work, for example, a keen eye, a sensitivity to nuances of others, empathy, a tolerance for the solitude needed for some kinds of creative work, a deeper view of the world, or a keen ability to analyze a situation and move quickly in response to a need. A creativity coach could encourage a client to find and use those kinds of skills when doing her creative work.

What can a coach do when something in the person's past impedes the creative process? For example, the coach suggests A and the client says, "I can't do A because

it makes me think of my mother's death and I get nothing done." When this happens, I am thinking of trying these things:

+ Work with a client to gain clarity and understanding of how trauma in the past is affecting the current creative process.

+ Make an appeal to the part of the person that makes meaning, to hold the painful past with compassion, and choose to try again.

+ Encourage the client step-by-step to regain the ability to create meaning, through teaching creative process skills.

+ Support the client in ongoing meaning-making and creative work.

When pain from the past gets in the way of the creative process, a coach can work with a client to find alternative ways to reach a creative goal. Perhaps a way could be found to bring meaning to the past experience by incorporating it into the client's creative work. Sometimes, where the pain is, a lot of passion and energy to create resides.

The question that keeps returning to me is: what can a creativity coach do to encourage a client to relate to past trauma in such a way that he or she feels encouraged to continue meaning-making, rather than holding it as a burden or albatross? When it's too painful to just 'set aside,' what can the person do to change it from being 'in the way' to being 'part of the way ahead?'

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Coach-in-training response:

I have spent 30 years dealing with the public when they are in a state of crisis, transition, upheaval, repositioning their lives, etc. I also discovered I was not immune from some unusual trauma affecting members of my own family and myself in the last ten years. My overall view on this is: you deal with things in as many ways as you need to, and then you move on. Although anyone facing a problem needs time to handle it, if there are deep emotional issues, they should be directed towards a therapist, in the same way that if there are legal issues they should be directed towards a lawyer, the court system, etc.

I am more oriented towards dealing with the present and the future and the journey from here to there. I have never found that having any client reveal excessive personal history has made me more effective in coaching them. It most often creates an expectation from the client that, having heard all the angst (and sometimes truly heartbreaking stories), I am now connected to them on an entirely different level, and in reality, that history is always sitting between us from that point forward. The expectation is that I will deal with them on a heart level, making special concessions. I will "understand" why they "cannot" complete a task or concentrate. They will steer future conversations to "You remember what I told you about X?" To some extent it binds us both to that history and impedes progress.

This assignment has been personally interesting to me, as it has made me look at the different ways that I relate to people. As a career counselor, I want to achieve steady progress and enlightenment for the client, and unless their personal history would prevent them from completing goals (molested by last two male bosses, for instance, would affect the situation being sought in the next job; phobias caused by being held hostage in a bank robbery as a teller, etc.), then I don't want our time together spent on lengthy gnashing over why their personal past hasn't been pleasant--it's not the focus that will help us succeed. Looking at what "didn't work before" can be useful as a tool when it is kept in perspective and ONLY considered a tool.

As a disability counselor, past events are necessary to take into consideration, but again are best dealt with on a more factual, "need to know" basis, or the focus becomes "that won't work because" and we're off on emotional stories that repetition only serves to reinforce negative thought patterns. Again, I steer in such a way that we work on what the person wants and how do we get there.

As a facilitator in personal growth groups, I have learned that personal histories may tend to help bond the group and serve a very important purpose in encouraging them to more quickly become supportive of each other, but once that has occurred, it serves NO constructive purpose to allow individuals to repeatedly bring up past history. It has always been the case that focusing on the present and future is what keeps the group in progress and feeling successful, regardless of the quantity of the progress.

With the creativity coaching students I have now, there has been just enough history to acknowledge passions and fears, but not so much that the situation becomes a talkfest between friends. For myself, doing that would change and probably weaken the situation. I might find I really like the person, personal history would lead to too much exchange, and we end up commiserating rather than focusing on coaching/ progress. Or, I might find I dislike them or don't respect what they've done in the past (and the person I project them to be), and it would become a chore for me to work with them and I would end up contributing very little.

I assume everyone has history. But my connection with them is not to relive this history or try to change it. It's just my personal belief that dwelling on the past impedes progress. The kind of listening I'd rather be doing revolves around what they envision themselves accomplishing, not what happened in their childhood. Being creative, being successful, being happy, being effective, being vital, contributing -- these all require the person to choose looking forward, not backward, and decide to set goals, not run home movies in their head. I want them to get excited, and it's been my experience that comes with new territory, not old.

My final thought on this, and the reason why this assignment has been so interesting to me, is the realization that my beliefs, which sound so impersonal as I reread them above, do not reflect the "image" my clients have of me. I usually hear words like "warm, understanding, caring, really listens, etc." - all those things we like to hear and that convey lots of warm fuzzies. So, somehow, I manage to project that image while internally I'm sounding more like Joe Friday on Dragnet.

And that's what I've mulled over all week, how it is that I've created that outward image when the inward me may be sounding far less patient. I hadn't analyzed how results-oriented I am, and realize I may need to be more careful in creativity coaching than I am in the other types of coaching I do. So far, there has been nothing to indicate to me that I "push," only that I listen and seem to put my finger on something important they hadn't recognized, which is good, makes me feel good, makes them feel good, etc. But I am now more aware that part of me needs to keep an eye on my own results-oriented self, and not allow situations to surprise me when lack of results may feel like lack of success, for either the client or myself.

III. Client Issues

Lesson 22. Resistance to Coaching

Probably your new client will be excited to be working with you, happy to be returning to her creative work, and hopeful that with your help she will make a lot of progress. But after just a day or two she will find herself confronted by the realities of creating, the realities of her personality, and the realities of her circumstances. The honeymoon period may end very quickly as your client realizes that not so much has changed just because you are there to offer her help and support.

You want to be especially encouraging and hopeful during these first few days, balancing an acknowledgement of your client's realities and difficulties ("Yes, it is hard to find the time and the peace of mind to paint when you have two small children") with a clear, persistent message of hope and encouragement ("But I wonder if you can do one or two small things in the service of your painting this week?")

When your client gets frustrated, you will feel frustrated. Try not to "go to this place" of frustration. Breathe, forgive your client, and forgive the universe for setting her so many internal and external obstacles. Then put out your hand again.

If you are working via email with your client, or if you maintain email contact with your client between phone sessions or between in-person sessions, you may find the following dynamic happening. Your client may stop contacting you—even if she agreed to contact you in a regular way. If your client is doing her work and she isn't bothering to contact you, that's fine. You can check in but you don't want to interrupt her by making her explain what she's gotten accomplished or if some exercise or idea you presented has worked. Some delicate work on your part is needed here to fathom why she isn't contacting you and to distinguish between these two scenarios, that she isn't contacting you because she is busily working and that she isn't contacting you because she *isn't* busily working and doesn't want to confront or admit that reality.

How will you know if she is doing her work? You may have to intuit this from her latest messages and from your sense of whether you would or wouldn't be working if you were in her shoes. If you intuit that she is working, let her work. However, if you have the sense that she probably isn't working--if, say, she says that she has a lot of company coming to stay and then you don't hear from her for four days--you will want to check in and gently remind her that she has her creative work to do. This might sound like, "Hi, Mary, I bet you've been very busy with your company! But I wonder if you've managed to get a little writing done this week?" You want your message to be as gentle and non-judgmental as you can make it, as, if she hasn't been working, she is already feeling guilty and unhappy.

If you've sent a client two or three check-in emails and she hasn't responded for a long-ish period of time (for several days, say), you want to let her know that you look forward to continuing your work with her. This might sound like, "Hi, Mary, I just wanted to let you know that I'm still here but I don't want to bother you with any further emails. So just get in touch when and if you want to."

By the same token, you want to manage your own resistances and anxieties and not "disappear" on clients. Naturally you will be less reluctant to disappear on paying clients than on your first "free practice clients," but even with paying clients your resistances and anxieties may rise up and make you wish that you could "fire all of your clients." Talk yourself down from this wish and recommit to the coaching.

Even with your "free practice clients" it is important that you do not disappear. If you cannot continue with a client because of your life circumstances or if you don't want to continue with a client because you are finding it too frustrating to deal with her, you will need to marshal your wits and your energy and give your client some closure. You don't want to run away and hide and make believe that your client doesn't exist. You absolutely do not need to reveal why you are meaning to stop, but you do need to send a kind, smart email to let her know that you must stop and you need to reply to her follow-up e-mail, should she have some last things to discuss.

Remember this simple truth: your clients, as much as they really do want to manifest their creative nature, nevertheless experience real difficulties in trying to do so and can be very resistant to acknowledging these difficulties, tackling these difficulties, or admitting these difficulties to another person, even the person they have hired for the express purpose of helping them with these difficulties. Just think of how poor compliance is among patients who must take medication—and in their case all they need to do is take a pill every four hours! They are resistant to confessing to their doctor their lack of compliance—think of how much more resistant a frustrated novelist is, having to confess that she still isn't writing her novel.

Be prepared for this resistance, do not take it personally, and begin to develop strategies and techniques that help resistant clients progress despite their reluctance.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Think through why clients are likely to prove resistant to coaching, even though they have signed up for it.

2. Can you articulate your approach to dealing with and working with this resistance?

3. Imagine yourself as a client who isn't keeping up and who is embarrassed to admit it. What might your coach do or say that would help you want to continue?

4. What will you do on the days when you are resistant to coaching and don't want to face your clients?

Lesson 23. Resistance to Planning

Just as clients are likely to be resistant to getting their creative work done and resistant to meeting their other stated goals, and just as they may be resistant to your ideas and suggestions, they are also likely to be resistant to planning.

Making a plan to do our creative work--or anything else in the service of our creative life, like business phone calls or market research--is the equivalent of making a commitment. Because it is the equivalent, making such a plan provokes anxiety. We fear that we will fail and not keep to the plan, and then we feel pre-guilty as we predict our failure.

Likewise, we are less than sure that our plan is perfect or even adequate, so we begin to doubt the merits of our plan and drift toward the idea (that is partly our wish anyway) that we might as well do nothing. Furthermore, we know that if we keep to our plan we will have to confront the anxiety of thinking, feeling, creating, and whatever else is required of us, and that looming confrontation unnerves us. Our plan can easily feel doomed--and be doomed--before we begin it.

For these reasons, it is important to do the following things as you help your clients create and implement the plans they are hoping to put into place:

1. Let the plan be simple. It is hard enough to make a plan and keep to a plan. Adding details, rules, sub-ideas and complexities only makes this hard thing harder. A simple writing plan is to try to write every day. You can add such-and-so-many minutes or such-and-so-many words to this plan as an added goal or demand, but that added demand is actually only burdensome. "Write each day" (or "paint each day," "compose each day," etc.) is about as perfect as a plan can get.

2. Let the plan be sensible. Can your client--or anyone--learn hundreds of lines in twenty minutes? Can your client--or anyone--write the draft of her novel in three

weekends? Can your client--or anyone--earn a living from writing short stories? It is not wise of us to support unreasonable plans, though we must disagree carefully and keep a measure of hope and optimism afloat even as we dash our client's unrealistic hopes.

This careful dashing can sound like:

"I'm amazed that you can memorize your lines that fast! But please spend more time than that, if you happen to need it. There's no reason to set yourself up for failure by choosing an arbitrary number like twenty minutes and then not meeting your plan."

"Yes, I've read that Simenon wrote his mysteries in three weeks' time. But he would always get his doctor's permission first! Joking aside, I hope you will be easy on yourself about this three-week plan and give yourself more time--as much time as you need--to get the draft done."

"I've heard about one or two short story collections doing very well. But I didn't realize that anyone could make a living from writing stories. Do you know that for a fact? I'm a little worried about the reality of that. To write excellent stories, to get them published, to make a name for yourself—all of that makes sense to me. But the financial part feels very iffy."

3. Let the plan fit the person. You may believe (as I do) that it would be nice if your client did her creative work first thing each morning, so as to use morning quiet and to make use of her night thoughts (her sleep thinking). I try to sell this idea to every client. But if a client is adamant that she must work in the evening, that in the morning she is consumed by her to-do list as soon as her feet hit the carpet and it is only in the evening that she can relax, breath, and create, there is no reason to quarrel with that. If her own plan does not work as well as she would have liked it to work, you can revisit your ideas later and pitch them again.

A simple, sensible, and personalized plan has the best chance of getting implemented.

Is there a difference between a goal and a plan? I think the word "plan" has a built-in sense of regularity and routine. There is some tonal difference between "My goal is to write every day" and "I plan to write every day." By supporting regularity and routine you are providing a great service to someone who may not feel equal to such regularity and routine and who may even have something of an aversion to the idea.

We all get a little righteous about how boring routines can be and how routines may even be creativity inhibitors. But we protest too much and reveal that we are more worried about confronting our work than antagonistic to the idea of routine. What exactly is "routine" about working every day in a deep way on your own cherished projects? Nothing.

Support your client's desire to plan if she brings the idea up and promote the idea of planning if your client doesn't bring it up. This latter invitation can sound like the following:

"I wonder if you'd like to consciously schedule some painting time for the coming week?"

"I know that you want to get your book proposal in the hands of some agents. Do you have a plan for going about that?"

"There feel like a lot of elements to the research you want to do. How does listing the different parts and making for a plan for each part sound?"

"How many writing days would you like to commit to for the coming week?"

"What sort of plan did you have in mind for getting your music into the hands of record company execs?"

Help your clients plan. And make plans for yourself!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Do you harbor any reservations about the validity or utility of planning? How might those reservations affect your work with clients?

2. Let's say that wanted to start a creativity coaching practice. What would your plan be?

3. Describe a good plan for the next month that will help you create more often and more deeply.

4. What sorts of challenges or obstacles might keep your from keeping to your plan?

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Coach-in-training response:

Planning, even just thinking of planning, has brought up fears for me in the past: fear of being forced to do something I haven't chosen myself, fear of failing to do the plan at all or less than effectively, and fear that the plan isn't the right plan.

These days I approach a plan as something flexible and yielding, capable of being reviewed and revised. I give myself permission to change a plan when immersion in it suggests a new direction. Since planning can feel like "forcing" instead of "allowing

creative juices to flow," I try to keep the "making myself do it" part reserved to getting myself to my desk. Once there, I let go into the freedom of the creative flow. Excitement takes over and the fears fade--mostly. I end up feeling happy that I've created a balance of "willing" and "allowing."

A drawback to planning for me is that it brings out my inner critic, who wants to judge whether I've lived up to the plan. When this judge appears, I often end up feeling depressed out of guilt for "not doing it good enough." Various writers advise ways to deal with the inner critic: put it on the shelf, get angry at it and push it back, ignore it, etc. But what has worked best for me is to find ways to make it my ally: to dialog with it, update it on my current goals, and get it to agree to a less harsh way of criticizing and evaluating, to be more fluid by coming up with alternatives or better ways to accomplish something.

The deepest fear about making plans is about taking action, period: that it won't be the "right" action. I've spent years not acting on what has the deepest meaning for me, for fear that I might not make the right choice. What has helped me is to know that not taking action is like killing my creative self, and to accept that being creative means making mistakes and messes. Affirming these things has helped me in my creative process, and also helped me feel more at ease in suggesting plans to clients and reassuring them that setting a plan doesn't mean setting themselves up for failure.

Now that I'm getting used to making plans for creative projects, I'm rather surprised that I'm beginning to see some of its positive aspects. I'm finding that making a plan for writing creates a better connection between me and the project, an alliance of sorts, that is firmer than if I just "think about" the project in a general way. Making a plan is like creating a vessel. The plan creates a place for the writing to be held and take a shape, the way a pottery jar holds grain. I still keep an eye on the plan so that it doesn't become too rigid a container. So, in my analogy, the pottery jar is made of clay that never dries, so that I can keep reshaping it as needed!

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Coach-in-training response:

Well, I see that it is time to practice what I preach. I've been working with my clients, encouraging them to work on their creative projects. Meanwhile, my self-defined creative project, my creativity business, has been on cruise control. I've been reacting to what has come in, clients, lessons and postings, and I have let my proactive work fall by the wayside. Back to the proactive.

#1 Most Important Goal -Spend some time every day working on my creativity coaching business. For me, at this time in my life, the creative project that I am working on is my business, which deals with different aspects of creativity, including coaching. If I can't find the time, I have to do what I tell my clients to do; make an appointment with myself for a set period of time and honor that commitment just as much as any other commitment.

2. Advertising.

a. Within the next two weeks, place an ad in the local paper for creativity coaching. This is to test the waters to see if there is any response. Make sure I am prepared to answer the responses with clear, concise information.

b. Explore other papers, journals, media that would have a high ratio of readers interested in creativity.

c. Make a flyer and find bulletin boards where it would be appropriate to post it.

d. Brainstorm other ideas.

3. Public Speaking. Prepare presentations on different aspects of creativity and approach different organizations to allow me to be a speaker at an event. This is kind of scary for me, selling myself, but, when I have done this, I've had a great time and have had a positive response. It's a great opportunity to demystify the creative process, promote creativity in all aspects of life, and let people know about creativity coaching. I have handouts for people to use and keep, which also have my name and phone number on them.

4. Seminars. Plan a 4-week seminar for the month of May on the creative process. I see the seminars and the individual coaching as interrelated. I'll advertise them together. Someone might not want to commit to an individual coaching relationship but might feel safer in a seminar. Seminars can be a way of communicating a lot of great information, helping a lot of people, and still keeping it personal. It also builds credibility; if somebody likes what they get from the seminar and wants more, they will be more likely to use me as a coach than if they only know me as a name in an ad.

Putting deadlines on these items is important for me. I'm great at planning and not so great in executing those plans. As I said at the top, it's easy for me to just let things happen. I think, if I can have the courage and discipline to make things happen instead, my coaching business has the potential to grow tremendously, which is what I want.

Lesson 24. Identifying Meaningful Creative Projects

We feel eager to create if we sense that the project we have in mind is a meaningful one. Yet we rarely ask the question, "What would make for a meaningful project?" Questions that sound similar, like "What interests me?" or "What would I like to work on?", don't have the same resonance as the sharper, tougher "What would make for a

meaningful project?" We tend to ask ourselves questions like the former because we fear that we can't make sense of our own meaning questions or answer them in a satisfying way.

One goal of a creativity coach is to help clients articulate what would make for a meaningful creative project. This articulation can be rather abstract to begin with but ultimately it needs to attach to a concrete and specific project. It is fine for a client to start out by announcing that she would like to work on some realistic paintings that capture what it feels like to not be free. That she can say that she would like to work on the idea of a "lack of freedom" is a good, useful step in the journey to making meaningful art. But soon she will need to start on an actual painting that makes concrete her desire to matter.

For each of us, some meanings remain the same over time and some meanings change. We may never waver in our belief that "free will" or "mystery" or "free speech" amount to meaningful subjects. But we may discover that our interest in the meaning of "isolation" has been replaced by a new interest in the meaning of "relatedness." We may take a long, circuitous meaning journey from Catholicism to Buddhism to Taoism to atheism back to Catholicism. Both the enduring meanings and the more plastic meanings in our lives color what we can create and what we want to create at any given moment.

Questions of meaning are very difficult to pose, very difficult to entertain, and very difficult to answer. Say that your client has put a dozen years into obtaining a certain academic degree, working in a certain discipline, and doing certain work. Now she discovers that what she is doing is not all that meaningful to her. How can she entertain your question about the meaningful projects in her life without feeling like she is risking a serious meaning crisis? Even if she is luckier and finds her work to be generally meaningful, she is still likely to find "meaning" difficult to think about and difficult to speak about. So, while checking in on meaning is a vital part of your work as a creativity coach, it is not such easy work.

You can sometimes bring up these ideas more easily and more effectively by using synonyms for the word "meaning." A person is more apt to respond to a question like "What deep work would you like to do?", "What rich work would you like to do?", or "What passionate work would you like to do?" than to the question "What meaningful work would you like to do?" These synonyms are real synonyms and aim a person in the direction of a good meaning investigation without at the same time making her feel defensive. Whether you use these synonyms or some others, over time you will find your ways of talking about meaning with your clients--and with yourself.

Many people are doing work that they don't find meaningful and harbor the dream that they can find new meaningful work to tackle. As a creativity coach, you can help facilitate this movement and this journey. When the movement to new meaning eventually happens, it can sound like the following. The painter Robert Farber explained in Andrea Vaucher's *Muses from Chaos and Ash*:

"Three years ago, I was doing only large abstract work, color fields. It was very impersonal and influenced by landscape. Then I got tired of all of that, I wanted to change everything around artistically. In therapy, I was exploring the dysfunctionalism of my family. I decided that I wanted to explore nightmares that were always part of my experience, a horror I was always drawn to. At the same time, I wanted to tell the story of what it was like to use drugs in the seventies and eighties. So, I started doing completely different work, figurative work. I tried to capture not only the horror of that kind of voracious pleasure seeking but the craziness of it. But intermingled with that were also personal demons that I was exorcising. This culminated with a major piece that I felt said it all: what it was like to be on drugs, the downtown scene, the pleasure and the sex and all the craziness of it."

There is no perfect way for an artist to answer the question of whether she should move from abstraction to realism or from realism to abstraction, from poetry to prose or from prose to poetry, from collage to film or from film to collage, from big novel to small novel or from small novel to big novel, except by understanding her meaning

intentions and discovering what meaning issues she wants to tackle. These are not aesthetic questions, ultimately, but meaning questions having to do with finding the right medium and the right container for the things she values. For some of you, creativity coaching may be the right medium and the right container for doing meaningful and valuable work. It is more than just "interesting" or "new" work--it is work that matters. Your clients, too, want to do work that matters.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What are some ways that you might talk about meaning with your clients?

2. With respect to one of your clients, if you are working with clients, what does she believe is her more meaningful work and what her less meaningful work? Do you agree with her assessment?

3. As a creative person, what does "meaningful work" mean to you?

4. Is there a "particularly meaningful project" that you would like to commence?

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Coach-in-training response:

This lesson struck quite a strong chord with me. When I was in college, it seemed that I did work mainly to impress my teachers and peers as well as learn this or that technique. Nowhere did the discussion of meaning or why we create the work that we do ever come up (a great failing in the public university system, I think). Later, I realized exactly what Eric explains in his lesson, that after succeeding academically and professionally for years, I found that I was extremely unhappy and, after intense

exploration, I realized that the work I was doing had no meaning for me. This began a journey to meaning for me in my life and my creative work.

Interestingly, I have a client who is experiencing this crisis, although it was only recently that I mentioned it to her and I think she is slowly recognizing that this is her problem. She is a person who feels strongly that her work should help the world, and it's not enough that it should just satisfy her own ego or someone else's idea of what is good; or enough that it fetch a good price. I have suggested to her that understanding why she does the work she does is very important to her, and that her belief that it needs to help people is a significant thing to realize about her work. I am still trying to figure out how to help her with this deep exploration, but I know it's a very personal journey and I'm trying not to put too much pressure on myself to "fix" it for her. At the same time, I feel very excited for her, because I think rewarding things come from such explorations.

For my client, and for myself, I think now starts the most difficult but most exciting aspect of this journey. What do you do now? Now that you know that your work needs to be meaningful, what will you create? I am still trying to understand what this means to me. This question continuously overlaps from my life into my creativity and back. Creating the concrete work is where I now find myself in my process and I'm anxious and inspired to begin.

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Coach-in-training response:

In thinking about meaningful work, I tried to forget for a moment that we are dealing in the realm of creativity and asked myself how I might talk with any person about this issue. What would I ask my brother the criminal lawyer, or the wife of my boss who cares for her grandchildren all day and then goes swimming at four o'clock most days, or my father who has been seemingly idle since my mother died, or my neighbor

who works construction from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every day, is in his late fifties and has never been married? It seems that for many people (not necessarily the ones just mentioned) work and meaning easily fall out of a shared context.

If I don't do my creative work, meaning remains buried. And I get very lost. I shop, clean, and worry about daily life and about life questions, all wrapped around each other. If I am working without meaning, I am very busy and occupied, but my "self" is somewhere else. Sometimes the very act of creating something itself calms me down, whether meaning is or isn't present. It is like a focused exercise and certainly fills in very beautifully for meaningful work. Sometimes, the act of creating is the best I can do. As with swimming, it gets me into some place I need to be in order to get comfortable enough to fall into a deep work mode.

The creative act seems to come from the same place that one's need, hope and demand for meaning originate. Sitting down to do something creative (AND engaging in this lesson!) provokes the meaning question. Meaning, for me, is made when very private experience is brought outward with honesty, humanity, clarity, risk and intelligence, and because of this directed evolution of the work, it is recognized by strangers as their very own private experience.

The pleasure of creating meaningful work comes from the overwhelming relief of having returned something to a place where there was previously no clue as to what was missing. That's also what makes embarking on the work so frightening. You don't know exactly what is missing, but you feel its absence, and you have to bring it forth. There is no one else in the world who can tell you how to do it because they do not feel what you are feeling. They do not have any sense of what you are reaching inward for. So, no one can help you create your meaning.

But what someone CAN DO is say, "Yes, this is damn important. It might be the most important thing ever in the history of the world. Who knows? Or it might be the most important thing of your day. I know how important it is to you. More than that, it is important to us that you take this seriously and keep going. The act itself

changes the world. There is a courageous person in you who is struggling. You are not just assembling blocks. You are doing magic. Where would we be without you and without each other's books, movies, and music? These are life lessons. These provide deep pleasure for the rest of us. These have meaning for our lives. We are creating not only meaning, but also culture. And I thank you for doing the culture's work."

Lesson 25. Reality-Testing While Affirming Dreams

Human beings engage in wishful thinking. Human beings also dream large. One job of a creativity coach is to dispute the former and affirm the latter. A creativity coach agrees with her client that her client has a novel in him. That dream ought to be affirmed. However, a creativity coach does not support her client's methods of writing or selling his novel if they don't ring true to her, especially if they are not producing results. She doesn't contradict her client directly too often, as that is likely to produce a rupture, but she does make suggestions that she hopes will help her client dream large but also be real.

In existential psychotherapy "authenticity" is a central therapeutic goal. An authentic life may be a happy life sometimes--happiness is not to be scorned—but happiness is not seen as the primary goal of existential psychotherapy. The primary goals are that a client honor and assimilate truths about the human condition, many of them painful, and plot a righteous and reasoned course for herself that is rich in dreams and rich in action. A creativity coach promotes a similar idea. You are hoping that you and your clients will live an authentic life.

"Authenticity" is a complicated concept, because it posits the need for a person to accept reality but it also posits the need for a person to reject it by dreaming large. A

song of peace sung in a dark coffee house will probably not do very much to stop the killing in a faraway land. If you are real you know that. At the same time, you must act as if what you are doing will have real effects, even though you know that they quite probably won't. A performance piece about blackened lungs will not do very much to weaken the tobacco lobby. An authentic person knows that perfectly well. But living authentically means crafting and performing that piece anyway, taking as your charge the belief that doing something is the right way and doing nothing is the wrong way.

In his essay "Create Dangerously" Albert Camus explained: "The loftiest work will always be, as in the Greek tragedians, Melville, Tolstoy, or Moliere, the work that maintains an equilibrium between reality and man's rejection of that reality, each forcing the other upward in a ceaseless overflowing, characteristic of life itself at its most joyous and heart-rending extremes. Then, every once in a while, a new world appears, different from the everyday world and yet the same, particular but universal, full of innocent insecurity--called forth for a few hours by the power and longing of genius." Great dreaming is a moral imperative and so is reality-testing. When they come together an artist is born and an artist is happy, if only for a moment.

A creativity coach is asking her client to create meaning and to believe in the meaning he creates. A coach does not demand action or expect action but calls for action. The action might be to try out a new thought or a new behavior, to choose between two creative projects, to spend more time in solitude, quieting inner demons and cultivating the awareness state from which ideas flow. The call is the absurd call: to take life seriously, to be authentic, to act. What meaningful thing would your client like to take responsibility for this coming week? Write five hundred words a day? Try to make a certain phone call or a certain contact? Take some small step in the direction of dealing with an addiction? Count to ten before belittling himself and his work? Creativity coaches make such suggestions in order to promote reality and in order to uphold a client's own best dreams.

To force meaning on life is absurd. It feels absurd to take life as seriously as it demands to be taken. But it also feels absurd to take life anything less than seriously, since the path of self-dismissal and self-disparagement is itself experienced as absurd. It feels absurd to say that you are free and absurd to say that you are not free. It feels absurd to judge when you do not believe in judging and absurd not to judge when things strike you as patently right or wrong. The playwright Eugene Ionesco described in his journal what it feels like to live in the vise grip of this painful absurdity:

"Which is the right way? Indifference, perhaps. That's not possible; since we are here, we can't help participating; we can't be detached from the manifest world, since we are immersed in it. We cannot reject the world. Then let's take everything seriously; that's equally ridiculous. Or can I be like a tree: but I'm not a tree. Or can I follow the drift of history, in the direction of cosmic evolution? But nobody knows quite what that means. I don't know the basic elements of the game. One ought at least to feel at ease; I cannot, because living is the source of my unease. Anxiety is ignorance. Non-anxiety is also ignorance. I seem to be going around in a circle. Perhaps I'm not going around in a circle. Perhaps there is no circle. I cannot laugh, nor weep, nor sit down, nor lie down, nor get up, nor desire, nor not desire. I am paralyzed."

A creativity coach fights this paralysis with hope, as absurd as hope may seem. In this context of absurd possibility, client and coach feel a little less alone and spend a portion of meaningful time together. It is far better than empty time and nothingness. Clients know--but must learn again--that their dreams must be grounded and rooted in reality and their reality grounded and rooted in their dreams. A long-term goal you might set for yourself is to find your own idiosyncratic ways of promoting this reality-testing and this dream-upholding in your clients and in yourself.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Try to describe in a paragraph or two an authentic life.

2. Can you articulate the experience of trying to reality-test and dream-uphold with one of your clients, if you are working with clients?

3. How does absurdity stymie you in your creative life?

4. Describe one real thing you would like to do in support of your dreams.

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Coach-in-training response:

I have a client who has experienced so many disappointments in her life that she hardly dares to dream anymore. When I invited her to tell me what has energy or passion for her, she said, "Nothing!" When I probed further, I was relieved to find that she could remember a dream she held before she lost hope. But when she expressed it, the dream came out so large that she saw it as impossible to try for. Her own inner reality-testing scanned the dream, saw it as impossible, and scratched it off the list as a possibility. She could say what her dream was, but she couldn't believe in it and rejected it right away.

In the face of her disbelief and feelings of hopelessness, I find that I have to reach way down deep inside myself for the courage to suggest that she take some small action toward realizing her dream. It is one of the hardest things for me to do in creativity coaching. I feel like I'm creating something out of nothing. Maybe that's the most deeply creative thing a creativity coach does; at least that's true for me.

After I took a deep inner breath and reached down inside for a bit of hope to extend to this client, I was surprised and relieved to hear that she actually could see the value of trying for just a portion of her dream. She has been willing to try taking small

steps and aiming for bite-sized goals. She still gets depressed about how little she accomplishes compared to her larger dream, but she seems to be willing to try accomplishing her dream a little bit at a time.

I think the next step in our work together will be for me to suggest that she think about reevaluating her dream in the light of what she's accomplished and to listen to her creative work. I'll ask her to look at what she's accomplished, listen to what it says about its own direction and its own dream of itself. Then she can compare it to her original dream, compare it to how she feels now, and then come up with an evaluation that reflects more of her current reality. My hope for her is that she'll enter into an ongoing interaction with her creative work and be willing to adjust her dream to balance with the reality of what she is actually creating at the moment.

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Coach-in-training response:

The issue of dream upholding and reality testing is prominent for me with one of my clients. This person is a songwriter, trying to market his songs to the music industry. As we were establishing what to focus on in coaching, he felt he needed more help with creative marketing rather than songwriting, so that has been our focus.

He currently has a job as a professional in another field but wants his music business to get to the point that he can support himself with the music and quit his other job. He has expressed a lot of frustration with his inability to do this. For me, the main aspect of reality testing versus dream upholding is in his desire, actually an expectation on himself, to have music be his only source of income. As long as he is dependent on his other job, he feels like a failure.

I was a musician for many years and I knew many very talented and gifted musicians who were playing and performing regularly but still needed other means of income.

On the one hand, I don't want to blindly support his dream and build up false hopes, which will cause him to devalue the work that he is doing because he isn't making a living doing it. On the other hand, I don't want to paint an unrealistically bleak picture based on my own experience. There are people who are making a good living writing sound tracks for soap operas, TV commercials, etc. Could he join their ranks?

Through him, I may even be vicariously pursuing a path that I didn't take. Working with him in this area is arousing some demons of my own. In my own history, I was a professional musician for 15 years. I had many dreams, some fulfilled, some not. I fulfilled my dreams of playing in bands regularly, playing music that I loved, developing my improvisational skills, and soloing often. I composed music and made sound tracks for modern dances and fulfilled dreams of hearing my music performed in wonderful settings. I fulfilled my dream of supporting myself as a musician, although it was very modest (on the verge of poverty at times). I didn't fulfill other dreams such as being a big star, becoming a commercial success, or becoming a commercially successful songwriter.

As far as the songwriting went, I did write quite a bit of music but never took the next step to market my music. At the time, it seemed mysterious to me. I beat myself up for not being able to market my songs. I felt like I should have been able to do this but still I was unable to. I knew I was stuck, I suspected I was blocked, but I couldn't get unstuck. Now, in retrospect, after reading Eric's Fearless Creating I see I was blocked in his last stage "Showing Your Work." I could take all sorts of risks on stage in front of hundreds of people, showing my work, but I was unable to pick up a phone to make cold calls to people in the industry to try to sell my songs. Subconsciously, I avoided the anxiety of presenting my songs to people in the industry by never seeming to find the time to do it or being unable to figure out how to do it.

As I deal with my client marketing himself in the music industry, I am reminded about how blocked I was in this area. I am using this as an opportunity to see if these same blocks are presenting themselves in my current profession. Am I spending a lot

of time researching and preparing to be a therapist (and coach) but am I still blocking in that crucial area of truly selling myself (showing my work)? Are the same dynamics that prevented me from selling myself to record companies interfering with my efforts to sell myself as a Creativity Coach? I've got work to do.

Lesson 26. Communicating Skillfully

Creators face the ordinary communication challenges faced by everyone. They also face many special problems, like having to describe an indescribable painting, novel, or song or having a split second to convince a literary agent or gallery owner to represent them. What can they do to become better communicators?

One thing that they can do is to get help from you. It turns out that a creativity coach should be an effective communications coach as well. Here are five tips to help you on your path to becoming an effective communications coach.

1. Honor that communicating is scary but vital.

Most creators find it scary to say "I'd like you to read my novel and give me some honest feedback" or "I'm wondering if I can set up a meeting so that you can look at my portfolio" or "I know we said we'd collaborate on this project but I think I'd like to do it on my own." The most important things that creators have to say are also among the scariest, so it is crucial that creators remind themselves that they must communicate even if they are feeling anxious or frightened.

This is equally true for you as a coach. Many times, you will find that what you're about to say to a client feels scary but must be said. Craft your message carefully, internally double-check its soundness, and then speak.

2. Speak about what matters and help your clients speak about what matters.

Many creators are shy observers who do not find it easy to say what they need to say. Other creators talk a lot but dance around the truth. It is one thing to think, "I would love to ask Mary to make a personal pitch to that editor she told me about." It is another thing to say out loud to Mary, "This isn't easy for me to ask, but I wonder if you would get in touch with that editor you mentioned, tell her about me, and see if you can get her to agree to look at my work." Help clients practice speaking--out loud, to the people who need to hear their message--about the things that matter the most to them. At the same time, practice speaking to your clients about what you perceive to be the important matters in their life.

3. Communicate from your better self and coach your clients to communicate the same way.

A part of every creative person is angry, agitated, upset, sad, egotistical, envious, domineering, and shadowy. In that same person are patience, compassion, empathy, love, wisdom, farsightedness and other excellent qualities. It is our choice whether we will speak from the shadows or speak from the light. It may be momentarily more satisfying to respond in an angry way to a rude literary agent's note or to communicate egotistically and enviously at a gathering of our fellow scientists. We can even live a whole--but unsatisfactory--life communicating from our worst self. However, we will reap some very big rewards if we choose to communicate from our best self.

4. Learn and teach the ABC rule: be affirmative, brief, and clear.

What does being affirmative sound like?

+ Wrong: "I know that someone with more experience might treat the subject more effectively ... "

+ Right: "I am passionate about my subject and exactly the right person to write this book."

What does being brief sound like?

+ Wrong: "I had a lot of trouble getting what I wanted to say pared down, so I ended up writing maybe two hundred thousand words to begin with, then I took all those notes up with me to Maine to this cabin that my father-in-law uses for duck hunting, which is not something I condone but I must admit that the cabin is beautiful ... "

+ Right: "My novel is 75,000 words long."

What does being clear sound like?

+ Wrong: "I've had the opportunity to connect with the forensic details in my book over the past dozen years both in a lab setting and in the field ... "

+ Right: "I've been a coroner for twelve years."

Practice being affirmative, brief, and clear in the messages you send to clients. In that way, you will model and teach the ABC rule.

5. Help clients prepare to ask for what they want and prepare yourself in the same way.

Here is what being prepared and asking for what you want sound like:

+ "I know you're thinking about putting my book out as a paperback, but I wonder if we could discuss the possibility of it coming out in hardback. I have a few thoughts about why that might be a good idea ... "

+ I know that the budget may not allow for this, but I would like to attend two conferences next year, both the national and the international microbiologists' meetings. Let me tell you why I think this is justified ... "

+ "I know we've decided what goes on our next album, but I have a new song and I'd like us to consider including it. It would work beautifully as the third song and we were thinking that something different was needed there ... "

+ "I know that you're considering me for the role of Molly, but I wonder if you would let me read for Karen's part. I think I have a really strong take on who she is ... "

Before your client has an important interaction with a marketplace player or anyone interested in her work, or before any situation where preparation and rehearsal might prove beneficial (including talking to her mate about financial matters, talking to her boss about flex time, etc.), help her think through what she intends to ask for and how she will frame her request.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What prevents you from being affirmative, brief, and clear in your communications?

2. What has been your experience with rehearsing important interactions? Do you have a sense of how to help clients rehearse?

3. Ask for something you want.

4. How do anger, envy, disappointment, and similar feelings color the way you communicate?

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Coach-in-training response:

What prevents me from being affirmative, brief, and clear in my communications? The short answer is anxiety and a lack of confidence. If I'm anxious and lacking confidence, my tendency is to use a lot of words to avoid saying anything. It feels safer to "beat around the bush" than to be brief. If it's not brief, it's not clear, and it's wishy-washy rather than affirmative.

I am aware of this behavior from the talking I do with bodywork clients. If I want to respond to something the client has said, but am anxious and uncertain about my ability to say the right thing, I will tend to blurt out the first thing that comes to mind and go on too long with my comments. What I need to do when I feel anxious is to pause and reflect before I reply. This is easier for me to do in emails than in a live conversation.

When I was doing my coaching training, I noticed that, in an effort to further the dialogue, I would frequently ask a client two or three questions rather than one question. It was as if I was afraid I might not select the right question and, by offering alternatives, I was covering myself. Surely one of these would be the right question. In a live conversation, this can feel overwhelming to the client (plus, it undoubtedly conveys my anxiety, which the client picks up on). It's different in email. I think Eric's advice to give the client a number of choices is a good one. It functions as an

invitation to the client to create the question or idea that would be most appropriate for her.

I think the main question for me with regard to communicating with a client is: Do I have the courage to assert myself? Would I hesitate to say something that might disturb the client (ideally in a positive way) due to my strong desire to avoid creating tension in the relationship? For example, how would I tell a client I thought the direction she was taking in her novel was a mistake? Or that the process she was using was not optimal?

I have a client whose method of writing is to edit as she goes. She needs to get it just right. Otherwise, she fears, the novel might take a "wrong turn." This method is working for the client. She makes daily progress. It's also taking a very long time, which concerns her. I don't feel free to say to this client "Allow yourself to write a crappy first draft." I am certain she would reject this and would feel I didn't understand her. She seems to be a purist who doesn't allow herself simply to flounder about generating ideas. I don't feel that my desire for her to loosen up is projection or an imposition of my own agenda. I believe it would help her. We recently had an exchange where I had an opportunity to refer to my perception of her.

I hesitated to write the following sentences: "My impression of the way you work is that you don't like to spend time putting down words you don't expect to use. That you don't give yourself that freedom." This may seem like a fairly mild thing to say, but my concern was that she might take it as personal criticism. I hesitated and then went ahead. The last I'd heard from her, we were discussing a problem she was having at the end of Part 2 of her novel. Here is the exchange.

Her: "I finished the scene and chapter 7 and now I'm starting a new third part of the book and a new chapter. A couple of days ruminating have left me wondering ... are there any techniques you know of for crossing the psychological divide caused by these artificial breaks in writing/stories/plot? I've mapped out the chronology of part 3 ... I've put the action items into each chapter at least as place holders, so I know

what is going to be happening in this chapter. Now I'm trying to get the engine going here and am having difficulty doing that. Any tricks?"

Me: "Congratulations on finishing part two! It's wonderful that you're overcoming whatever obstacles are coming up and that you're moving forward so persistently. If I understand you correctly, part three is a little like starting a new book and your question is about how to generate momentum, since you can't draw on what you were just doing in part two. There are lots of tricks, like Rico's clustering, free writing, writing with the screen turned off so you can't judge it. My impression of the way you work is that you don't like to spend time putting down words you don't expect you will use, that you don't give yourself that freedom. That makes it hard simply to warm up. Would you consider writing an email to someone (which you don't need to send), telling them what happens in part three?"

Her: "Thanks - great suggestion. Funny how the really good ideas are the practical, easy solutions!"

I think the important lesson for me about communication is that I need to be comfortable being more assertive. My Chinese horoscope describes my communication style as the iron fist in the velvet glove. I feel more comfortable with the velvet than the iron. I'd like to become stronger and more direct in my communication with clients.

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Coach-in-training response:

How do anger, envy, disappointment, and similar feelings color the way I communicate? Active feelings like these when not expressed can close me down temporarily and make it hard for me to get in touch with the full truth of a situation and what others are communicating. I lose my equanimity. I may not listen very well. I

may not exactly speak the truth. I may harbor resentment. I'm often too confused to say much when in the heat of the feelings.

On the other hand, taking a moment to check in with myself when such feelings arise can put things back in perspective. Feelings always arise for a reason, and just on the other side of an intense feeling is usually some kind of insight. If I'm angry, I'm often holding back the truth. When I feel envious, I need to look at what quality it is I want for myself that I envy in someone else, and think about how I can develop it. When I'm disappointed I need to look back at my expectations and see if they were reasonable. Being a very emotional person, I do this kind of processing a lot.

In sculptural work, my feelings literally color my communication, which is the sculpture itself. Because the work so often comes out of a deeply personal place, the colors I choose have everything to do with feelings. The sculpture is a Gestalt containing memories, connections, thoughts and feelings. The colors are often chosen intuitively, colors that resonate with the piece in a very personal way.

So, intense feelings can be an obstacle to communication or they can act like radar. They can be clues for broadening understanding, and they can be the focus of artistic expression. I try to stay tuned in to my feelings when dealing with clients and students, and use them as tools of understanding.

What prevents me from being affirmative, brief, and clear in my communications? The following are some of the things that prevent me:

+ Being in too big of a hurry.

I'm operating on a bunch of assumptions. I have an off-the-top answer. I haven't thought it through. Let's get to the bottom line. Who needs explanations? Let's take action. This is HUGE for me and I see it affecting many things I do.

+ Being upset/having a button pushed

I might go on and on, trying to get clear. The feelings are still overwhelming. I haven't found the keys to unlock them yet. I'm too busy reacting to invisibles to communicate clearly.

+ Being unclear on the concept

If I don't understand the principle, I don't recognize the feeling, I can't see the point in something, I may communicate in circles, again, trying to rid myself of uncomfortable uncertainty.

+ Thinking I need to communicate in someone else's way

I'm trying to sound smart. I'm not working off my hunches. It's not authentic.

I see that I need to continue to need to think all this through!

Lesson 27. Using Cognitive Tools

Many techniques from cognitive therapy--identifying "maladaptive self-talk," teaching thought blocking and thought substitution, designing behavioral contracts, etc.--can be adapted by creativity coaches to use in their work with creative clients. If, for example, a client's self-statements are self-accusatory, then noticing that, commenting on that, and working together on new inner language can be extremely beneficial. Consider the following example, reported by Aaron Beck, one of the founders of cognitive therapy:

"A patient reported that he felt blue every time he made a mistake, and he could not understand why he should feel this way. He fully accepted the notion that there was nothing wrong in making mistakes and that it was an inevitable part of living. He was instructed to focus on his thoughts the next time he felt an unpleasant affect in connection with making a mistake. At the next interview, he reported the observation that whenever he made a mistake he would think 'I'm a dope' or 'I never do anything right' or 'How can anybody be so dumb?' After having one of these thoughts he would become depressed. By becoming aware of these self-criticisms, however, he was able to recognize how unreasonable they were. This recognition seemed to remove the sting from his blue reactions."

Boice provides another good example. In 1983, he assessed the contributions of the different psychotherapy schools with regard to the treatment of writers' block, concluding that cognitive therapy produced the best results. He went on to describe his own method of work. In his method, he focused on identifying what clients were saying to themselves, bringing that language into conscious awareness, noting which self-statements were distracting or counterproductive, and creating a treatment plan to change maladaptive self-talk and institute new behaviors. He explained:

"Initially, the cognitions of these blocked writers were typically counterproductive to writing. Clients at this stage tended to list thoughts that encouraged avoidance (e.g., 'I really have to get the car washed'), that demeaned the task (e.g., 'Most of what gets published today is garbage; why should I add to it?'), or that simply distracted them (e.g., 'I wonder what I'll make for dinner tomorrow?'). Emphasis in early therapy sessions was placed on recognizing how these thoughts interfered with writing by competing for time and/or by inducing anxiety and self-doubt. Later, attention was shifted toward thought substitution. Clients were taught, via modeling and the other tactics just mentioned, to substitute more positive and relaxing thoughts that would help them get on task."

The same basic methods have proven relatively effective in treating performance anxiety. Salmon and Meyer, for example, teach a cognitive-behavioral approach to the remediation of performance anxiety. They explain: "This problem-solving approach can be illustrated through the example of Diane, an organist who, like many performers, was terrified of playing her music from memory. Doing so made her so anxious that she avoided it whenever possible. 'I have a poor memory,' is the way she first described the problem. To cope with this problem, she learned to monitor her 'stream of consciousness' for self-defeating thoughts that tended to discourage and distract her. She also employed a technique called 'thought stopping,' in which she consciously terminated such thoughts as soon as she became aware of them. Such thoughts can interfere with memory or almost any other skill. Eventually the strategies that seemed best suited to her situation were put into effect in performances, which at first were deliberately arranged to minimize the amount of anxiety they provoked. By the time her efforts were completed nearly four months had elapsed, but her treatment had been a productive and rewarding experience."

Cognitive therapy, however, is only a starting point, not an end point. The basic premise of cognitive therapy, that the maladaptive self-statement troubling a client is so simple and straightforward that it can be excised whole and replaced by the equivalent of an affirmation, is often not true. Our self-statements are usually more complicated than that, more nuanced than that, and generally full of tangled meanings. Because our thoughts and self-statements are only sometimes of the form "I am such an idiot" or "I am such a loser," utterances which the techniques of cognitive therapy indeed work well on, a creativity coach borrows from cognitive therapy but goes further.

Take the following very typical client utterance. "I would love to do 'x' but I need to do 'y'." The temptation is to suggest to a client that she attempt to do what she says that she would love to do. Indeed, it may be fine to make that suggestion and in fact a client may turn in the direction of the thing that she says she loves because of a creativity coach's encouragement. But it is just as likely that we do not know what our client means by such a sentence. We may be better advised to presume that a tangle

of meanings is present, including the possibility that our client must do 'y' before she can do 'x' (a notion embedded in the very form of the sentence).

Consider the following examples:

+ "I need to continue as a symphony musician, but I would love to be a beachcomber."

+ "I need to be a good mother, but I would love to paint."

+ "I need financial security, but I would love to act."

+ "I need to write professional articles, but I would love to write a novel."

+ "I need to do some more singing for hire, but I would love to get my own band together."

A computer program can't possibly make sense of these utterances, all of which have the same linguistic form but each of which is in fact a very different bundle of meanings. Take the following sentence of the same form. "I need to perfluget, but I would love to flabinate." One approach is to try to help your client flabinate, just because she says she would love to and even though you have no idea what perflugeting or flabinating means. A second approach is to try to understand what perflugeting implies and entails, what flabinating implies and entails, and how perflugeting and flabinating relate.

Both approaches are reasonable. Let me repeat that: both approaches are reasonable. It is eminently reasonable to take a client at her word and encourage her to become a beachcomber, a painter, an actor, a novelist, a flabinator and let the process unfold. But it is also eminently reasonable to have thoughts and feelings about how 'x' and 'y'

relate and then to presume that 'z' ought to be addressed. In the first example above, about the symphony musician who would love to become a beachcomber, 'z' might sound like the following:

"I think that you're saying that a symphony musician is incredibly burdened by having to play perfectly, and that's why you're dreaming about becoming a beachcomber. But I remember a great soloist saying something like, 'If you don't care whether I play with feeling, I will never miss a single note.' Is it only the soloist who gets away with playing with feeling and missing the occasional note? Are we perhaps talking about the terrible problem that an ensemble player like you experiences, of having to be perfect and consequently not being permitted to feel? What are your thoughts about this?"

In the world of psychotherapy, these kinds of responses are called interpretations. Making them requires that you have a sense of what it means to be a symphony musician, a mother, a beachcomber, a painter, a poor person, a professional, a flabinator, and so on. While we can always tell a client to "just flabinate," which we will often do, if we come to understand what every profession, discipline, and way of life means--what its rules are, what its challenges are, why a person might both love it and hate it, and so on--then we can begin to make useful interpretations that begin to untangle the bundle of meanings that most utterances represent.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Choose one of the following client utterances and provide an interpretation to your client in the form of "I wonder if ... " or "It might be the case that ... " or some other linguistic gambit. Then try to imagine what the consequences might be: how might your client react, both positively and negatively, to your interpretation?

+ "I need to get some new products together for an upcoming big crafts fair, but I would also love to do some painting."

+ "I need to make money from writing, but I would really love to write poetry."

2. Given the realities of the art discipline you are in, make an interpretation about yourself.

3. Is your self-talk more of the "simple, negative" kind or more of the "bundle of meanings" kind? Can you provide yourself with some thought substitutes or affirmations for the first and some useful interpretations for the second?

4. Try to notice your self-talk this week. Write down any self-statements that you find interesting, perplexing, particularly negative, etc. You don't have to "do" anything with them, just become better aware of them.

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Coach-in-training response:

This week, I caught myself in a thought that surprised me.

Tuesday night I'm sitting on my bed with an 18 x 24 drawing pad across my lap and I'm charting chunks of my novel. I've reached a point in the writing where the enormous number of ideas that I've generated needs a way to relate to the spine of the book or another of Adam's ribs will have to go.

Five or six large pages, vivid with ovals and arrows, spill across the bed and onto the floor. For weeks, I'd been feeling pleased that my current mix of characters and events have attracted a strong flow, especially since not having enough material had been an old fear. I'd been lucky to strike a gusher.

I'm not a stranger to monitoring self-talk. Years of thought stopping, affirmations, meditation, trained listening and journal writing started to reshape my inner landscape. I've added a few exotics, too, such as education in East Asian philosophy and religions (and for fun I once learned the basics of ancient Mandarin, a language that itself claims a skepticism of words). I've laid to rest a "Narrator" and an "Historian" whose voices used to run like rodents on a wheel, and with regard to practicing art I'm on civil terms with my inner critic.

So, who is this saying: "You know how you over complicate things. Keep it simple, can't you?"

I didn't notice this commentary at first. I'd been intent on what I was doing and believed I was enjoying the process when I started to feel a dark mood, rather like it happens in a science fiction movie where an alien space ship casts a giant shadow over a city. I wanted to shoo it away. Then I finally noticed the words I'd been hearing.

I've lots of experience at counteracting blurts, so I didn't stop to analyze. Instantly, I treated myself to a positive affirmation and printed it at the top of the page I'd been working on. Right-mind: "You have wonderfully rich resources to draw upon."

The space ship withdrew and I happily filled another eight or so pages, printing the positive thought at the top of each. Soon I was hearing myself say, "Why, this outline already reads like a novel." So, I started printing that at the top of each page too.

Not until Friday did I have time to reflect on this experience, although I'd realized Tuesday night that I'd been hearing this admonishment in school and at work for most of my life. And it's true: I do complicate and I revel in complexity.

What has become harmful is the judgment that I should always pare down the ideas that occur to me and that I limit the issues I take into account. In my work, I do tend to see more angles and unanswered questions than most others on my team. Of

necessity, I've learned to be judicious about what I bring to the table for public discussion, and I'm careful to stick precisely to the objectives of a project.

Before last Tuesday, however, I doubt that I'd appreciated how constantly regulating the limits might be affecting my private energy. My moods I could always blame on something else. I do know that in my early years of education I got the impression that I my thinking was complicated and complex because I was not as smart as the others. If I were brighter, I too could keep it simple. (KISS)

Simplicity, I believe, is the end of the process, not the beginning. I've always loathed a perfunctory kind of simple-minded work that doesn't bother to take much into account. In any case, before the end of last week I had the whole of my complex notions laid out in a 2,500-word outline. In all my grand maneuvering of material, only one little strand happened to atrophy and of its own will fall away.

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Coach-in-training response:

In a week like this one, when my 'day job' schedule picks up pace and requires more hours than usual, my negative self-talk increases a lot. This week I heard myself thinking: "Why did I decide to take this technical writing assignment? It is sucking up all my energy so I have no time to work on my creative projects. I must not have been thinking very well to make that decision."

And "I can't do creative work when I'm working more than 8 hours a day."

And "What's the use trying to learn pen and ink drawing? Visual art takes more time than I have to devote to it. It's hard enough to find time to write as it is, without taking on more."

As these thoughts came up, I sometimes countered them with more self-affirmative thoughts, like: "I made the best decision I could at the time, given the circumstances." Or "Even if I'm tired, I can take a half hour tonight to stay in touch with my creative project by just reading what I've written so far on it."

The affirmations help some, but what really helps me most is looking at where the negative self-talk comes from. When I go deeper into it, I begin to see that I may be giving in to the demands of work and relationship too much. I start to wonder if I could be more of my own self-advocate. I see that perhaps I'm thinking the external world has more power to affect my life than it actually does, or that at least I could respond to it differently.

Even deeper down, what I find is an inner stance that gives rise to the negative self-talk in the first place. When I look, I find that I'm abandoning myself and letting external demands outweigh my own needs. Overall, I notice that I appear to be focusing more on what I can't do rather than on what's possible. Once I understand all this, I start to feel more free and positive somehow.

My plan for myself is to try out a different inner stance--to befriend myself! And to take opportunities to look at what is possible. On the practical level, this means taking time for restoring my energy, creating self-talk that reflects being my own self-advocate, and breaking down what appear large projects into tiny doable bits. It feels like such a simple, yet powerful thing, to go over to my own side, rather than to side against myself.

Lesson 28. Creative Blocks I

All creative people are blocked sometimes. Therefore, a creativity coach's job is, first, to "normalize" blockage and assert to a client who comes in blocked that what he or she is experiencing is a universal human experience. Second, a creativity coach may want to attempt to discover and name the causes of the block, though this is an optional and not a necessary step. Third, and most important, a creativity coach provides strategies that help client unblock, whether or not the causes of the block have been identified.

Most blocks represent profound difficulties that a client is having in entering into right self-relationship. In a real and important sense the problem is rarely about the work itself, for if the work happens to be too hard, too poorly made, ill-conceived, etc., a person in right self-relationship with himself does the next appropriate thing. He revises the work, revisions it, or abandons it. In this sense, the work can't block a person: the block is always in the person.

If one central blocker is self-relationship difficulties, a second is anxiety. If you had to focus on just one idea with respect to your clients' creative blocks, focusing on anxiety--on a fear of making mistakes, a fear of criticism, a fear of exposure, a fear of being proven talentless, and so on--would be the one to choose. You might focus on it in a cognitive-behavioral way, working to replace anxious self-talk with calming self-talk. You might address it in an existential way, by talking openly about the courage required to combat fear. Whatever method you adopted, however, your clear-eyed focus on anxiety would prove a profitable one.

Many factors can and do contribute to the experience of blockage, in addition to core issues of anxiety and self-relationship. If you want to make a feature-length commercial film and you have no money, that is a profound blocker. If none of your first seven novels have been wanted in the marketplace, that is a profound blocker. If you live in a noisy environment, with roommates and constant crises, that must contribute to blockage. If meaning has drained out of the enterprise of sculpting,

such that you sculpt sporadically and only out of a sense of duty, that is a profound blocker.

In all such cases, work on anxiety and self-relationship are not enough. Your client may have to revision her creative products, create a new plan to achieve success in the marketplace, find new meaning sparks, and so on. In order to unblock, most clients will have important work to do in addition to, and different from, self-relationship work and anxiety-management work. In the following lesson, many of these contributory factors are listed and described. Take some time to think through the differences and similarities of these various contributing factors and, if you feel up to it, name a strategy you might employ with respect to each one.

You can use the list in the next lesson in either or both of the following ways. First, you can check in with your client to see how powerful and influential a given issue is in your client's life. Is it a severe blocker, only a slight blocker, or even something of a red herring, masking a more central issue? For instance, your client may assert that an extended visit by his in-laws is preventing him from resuming his abandoned creative project. You would want to do some exploring to see whether this is the actual blocker or whether something else is going on.

Second, you might provide your client with the entire list and ask him to help you understand what factors are in fact contributing to his experience of blockage. If your client reports, as he well might, that a great many of these factors are present--which realization has made the problem of blockage seem overwhelming and intractable--you can truthfully respond that very often work on one issue, for example on a personality trait, resolves a multitude of interrelated issues.

It is important to remember that all creative clients will report blockage and will want and need to work on unblocking at one point or another in their work with you. By the same token, all not-yet-creative clients are, by definition, blocked, whether they report it or not. So, it is your job to place unblocking on the agenda in your work with them. Even a productive artist may be blocked, in the sense that he creates

fluently and often but in a rote, repetitive way, repeating his signature work again and again. With this client, too, you have the job of investigating blockage, even though your client may be defended against the idea.

Creative blockage is a significant problem in the lives of creators, for the obvious reason that no creative work is getting done while the block is in place but also because it represents a self-relationship failure, an inability to make personal meaning, and a victory for anxiety. Maintaining freedom and meaning-making are arduous, ongoing tasks, anxiety and difficulty always attach to the creative process, and so creative blockage is actually epidemic and at the root of countless depressions and miseries among creators. Blockage requires a creativity coach's full attention.

A virtually limitless number of particulars, both inside and outside the person, can contribute to blockage. On any given day, there are more than enough reasons not to engage in the creative process and not to make personal meaning. This means that creativity coaches must acquire their own humane but persistent way of returning clients to the issue of blockage, even if clients are ashamed to bring it up or despair of ever unblocking.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How do you conceptualize creative blocks?

2. How will you help with creative blocks? What sorts of things might you try?

3. What is your own history with creative blocks?

4. What have you learned to do to unblock?

Lesson 29. Creative Blocks II

Any of the following can cause or contribute to a case of creative blockage:

I. Personality and Psychological Issues

1. Primary self-relationship issues

e.g., an inability to frame the self as central meaning-maker, a fleeing from the self and the responsibilities of freedom, etc.

2. Psychodynamic issues

e.g., devaluation at the hands of critical parents, anxiety syndromes resulting from disturbed family dynamics, enduring intrapsychic conflicts with regard to self-worth, etc.

3. Personality trait issues

e.g., the excessive or insufficient manifestation of particular personality traits, like passion, self-direction, etc., a too-tame or too-wild personality arising from the combining of personality traits in a certain way, etc.

4. Fears and anxieties

e.g., fear of negative responses and evaluations, fear of loss of self-esteem, fear of self-exposure, fear of the unexpected and the unknown, fear of failure and fear of success, etc.

5. Issues of individuation and separation

e.g., an inability to handle the stresses of independent living and independent decision-making, an emotional dependency on others which prevents the flowering of self-trust, etc.

6. Ego defenses

e.g., the use of ego defenses to protect the self from unwanted information and unsafe-feeling experiences, such that one intellectualizes about art rather than encountering the blank canvas, daydreams and fantasies but not in the service of one's creative work, etc.

7. Depression (or sadness, despair, etc.)

e.g., depression arising for existential reasons, because one has "seen through" the culture's most commonly-held values, which crisis causes a meaning loss, saps motivational energy, and leaves one without reasons to create.

8. Addictions

e.g., the long-term consequences of alcohol and other drug use, which use binds anxiety, including artistic anxiety, in the beginning, but which ultimately blocks and ruins the individual.

9. Personality disturbances

e.g., any number of severe disturbances, including psychotic and near-psychotic episodes, clinical mania, profound anxiety disorders, etc.

II. Culture and Cultural Climate Issues

1. Repressive and authoritarian childhood

e.g., an anti-intellectual, anti-expressive, anti-art childhood, coupled with parental criticism, rejection, dogmatic rules and assertions, punishing responses, etc.

2. Repressive and authoritarian childhood culture

e.g., religious injunctions regarding sin, a tyrannical social environment where governing metaphors and authority figures could not be questioned or taken to task, etc.

3. Repressive and authoritarian adult culture

e.g., finding oneself in a group, culture, or social system where creativity is despised or forbidden, etc.

4. Group identifications

e.g., identifying with an inhibiting group stereotype, which one takes in and owns over time, having to do with a lack of intelligence, will power, skills, sensitivity, courage, etc.

5. Sense of lack of entitlement

e.g., a sense, arising from group or class identifications or as a result of family myths about a lack of standing or luck, that one is not entitled to be creative or successful.

III. Creative Process and Work Issues

1. Inability to enter or maintain awareness state

e.g., the presence of an anxious, chaotic, or "noisy" inner environment or the presence of negative self-talk, doubts, worries, fears, etc., such that the awareness state necessary for creative effort can't be achieved or maintained, etc.

2. Myths and idealizations

e.g., a naive or calculated misunderstanding about the place of intuition in the creative process, such that one determines to "wait to be inspired" before beginning, mythic idealizations about how talented, productive, effective, special, or different well-

known creative individuals are, which idealization serves to keep one in one's place and spares one the pain of trying and possibly failing, etc.

3. Lack of a clear, integrated sense of the creative process

e.g., not understanding or not accepting how comfortable one has to become with "not knowing" beforehand what something will look like; not understanding how to embrace, rather than battle, the anxiety that naturally attaches to the creative process; not understanding how to "hold the intention" to return to one's work when one is on break, etc.

4. Skill deficits

e.g., insufficient practice and attention paid to drawing, if drawing is central to one's painting, such that one is never really satisfied with the painting outcome, which dissatisfaction leads to meaning drains and blockage, etc.

5. Material blocks

e.g., becoming blocked by virtue of the difficulty inherent in the work one is currently doing. The work may suddenly require some research, without which research progress can't be made; the sculpture one is chiseling may have been ruined by the last gouge, which fact the sculptor would rather deny, etc.

6. Pressure paralysis

e.g., blockage arising because one has committed to too many projects or has too many deadlines approaching; because an upcoming gallery show or concert is unusually important or is perceived as unusually important; etc.

IV. Global Issues

1. Alienation

e.g., a mistrust, distaste for, or felt separation from the prevailing culture and the pursuits and ideas of others, which alienation provokes a meaning crisis. Why create, if one doesn't respect or like one's potential audience? Or the presence of other outsider feelings--that the door is locked, preventing entry into the marketplace, that one is too eccentric to be accepted, etc.

2. Pessimism and defeat

e.g., a repeated battering in the marketplace, failure to make products or give performances that feel worthy, rejection by critics, and other person-and-world failures that lead to a pessimistic outlook and a pervasive sense of defeat.

3. Marketplace issues

e.g., a lack of opportunities, repeated rejections, an inability to pass the gatekeepers and break in, an inability to be heard by marketplace players, a lack of understanding about how best to approach the marketplace and "play its games," an inability to craft a career and maintain momentum, etc.

4. Issues of showing and selling

e.g., blockage resulting from the conscious or half-conscious fear that, were the work to be completed, an attempt would have to be made to show it and sell it, which attempt might result in criticism, rejection, failure, and defeat; blockage resulting from the accumulation of unsold products; etc.

5. Role uncertainty

e.g., uncertainty about what one is attempting to "do" with one's creative nature and capabilities. Is one supposed to enlighten or entertain? Be congenial or abrasive? Tell hard truths or gain some popularity? Etc.

6. Postmodern vacuum

e.g., recognizing the important truths of the postmodern revolution but not arriving at ways of reconstructing metaphors that aren't themselves vulnerable to deconstruction. Or feeling that all motives and all versions of reality can be questioned, leading to repeated intellectual, motivational, and existential crises.

V. Existential Issues

1. Meaning crises

e.g., suddenly feeling that dance, which once seemed so meaningful, no longer does, or that the writing of academic poetry, which made use of one's ingenuity and cleverness, now only seems sterile and heartless, etc.

2. Meaning drains

e.g., having one's work repeatedly rejected, doing a string of work that one considers unrealized or inferior, sensing that one's genre is no longer respected by the culture, concluding that one's grand dreams will never be realized, etc.

3. Meaning shifts

e.g., understanding in a corner of conscious awareness that "x" has become more meaningful than "y"--that writing is now more meaningful than painting, that biology is now more meaningful than poetry--but fearing that knowledge, because of the great investment one has made in loving and mastering "y" and how far one would have to travel to master "x," etc.

4. Fear of meaninglessness

e.g., an inability to confront creative work because of fears that in the encounter one will experience the void or in some other way get too clear a whiff of meaninglessness.

5. Motivational malaise and existential doubt

e.g., being plagued by doubts about the importance of any work, creative or otherwise, arising from a profound, even more central doubt about the importance of one's existence or the importance of the existence of the species, etc.

VI. Issues of Circumstance

1. Poverty

e.g., an inability to afford necessary materials or the latest technology, multiple crises including hunger, disease, dangerous neighborhoods, etc.

2. Day job and second career issues

e.g., fatigue from a taxing day job, an abiding need to pay attention to one's second career, increasing investments in one's second career and decreasing investments in one's art, etc.

3. Relationship demands

e.g., spousal bitterness with your time spent in solitude or time spent auditioning, practicing, etc., necessary demands of parenting or single parenting, multiple demands of children and aging parents, etc.

4. Particular wounds and traumas

e.g., receiving particularly harsh criticism from a teacher or editor, producing a kind of work that was wanted previously but that is not wanted today, becoming expert in a technology that has been replaced by a newer technology, etc.

5. Real world crises

e.g., floods, fires, economic upheavals, wars, and personal crises, the ending of relationships, downsizing, health emergencies, etc.

6. Chores

e.g., endless small and large chores--shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, paying bills, answering email--and also anxiety about all the chores one isn't getting done, how one isn't shopping for the best auto insurance, keeping the roses pruned, saving for retirement, etc.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How might you make use of a daunting list of this sort in your work with clients?

2. Of these contributing factors, which do you suppose would be the hardest to deal with? Which the easiest?

3. In your own life, what causes you to block?

4. Have you created different personal unblocking solutions depending on the nature of the block?

Lesson 30. Doubts, Fears, and Messages from the Past

No one knows how the past influences the present, so we are free to conceptualize that relationship any way we choose. If we knew for sure how the past influences us, we would be constrained to work with those facts, just as we are constrained to fight AIDS as if it were a retrovirus, because it is a retrovirus. But as creativity coaches we can treat the past a-theoretically and even a-factually, "as if" it was anything we like, since cause-and-effect in human affairs remains a mystery. This is a great advantage we have over a therapist with a theoretical orientation who must act "as if" he

understands cause-and-effect. We can try anything that we think might lead to a successful outcome, unburdened by theoretical constraints.

No doubt we suspect that people are universally harmed by certain experiences, like being shamed, beaten, ignored, discounted, tyrannized, mocked, lied to, abandoned, stigmatized, hated, and so on. Likewise, people are almost certainly harmed by encountering too many disappointments, rejections, criticisms, defeats, burst dreams, unsuccessful outcomes, etc. We further suspect that people become constrained by the self-concept or identity they form of themselves, as low, unworthy, unlucky, ruined, incompetent, untalented, undisciplined, hopeless, and so on.

We may have all of these suspicions. As long as we don't leap to the conclusion that we have a perfect idea how--or even whether--a past x is causing a present y and as long as we keep an open mind about the extent to which some current self-concept z is or isn't inflexibly in place, we can honor these suspicions and act "as if" a certain amount of past harm is affecting our client's ability to accomplish her goals. Given this suspicion, our central question becomes: when harm has been done in the past, what now helps?

+ Love helps. What Carl Rogers called "unconditional positive regard" is probably as good a definition as any other of the kind of love that helps.

+ Success helps. Having a short story published is important in the life of a short story writer, not for the money it produces and not because she now has a clip to show but because the sense of accomplishment and the sense of completion that come with publication undo some portion of past harm.

+ Support helps. It is better to hear that you are doing well than to never hear it, better to receive a little praise than to operate in complete silence, better to have a friend than to have no friends, etc.

+ Cognitive change helps. Learning the very simple principles of cognitive therapy, that we can monitor, confront, and replace our negative thoughts, can help.

+ Behavioral change helps. Doing a small thing in the right direction--writing five words on our novel, rather than none, sending out one of our poems, if not all fifty--helps.

+ Insight and awareness help. Noticing how we operate helps. Letting down our defenses to see our blind spots helps. Understanding how fear, worry, anxiety, and stress operate in our life helps.

+ Hope helps. Rekindling hope can feel like a miraculous help. Finding a small hope when the moment before there was no hope helps.

+ Effort helps. Getting out of our chair is better than staying in our chair. Working until we are tired and even after we are tired help.

Take the statement "I just can't seem to write my novel" uttered by someone who was always told that she wrote well but who, for thirty years, hasn't been able to do the writing she thought she would do. We can suppose that a world of harm has led her to this impasse, though we will never arrive at an exact idea of what caused that harm.

We presume that she has been harmed and we say to ourselves, "What might help, given that she has been harmed?" We reply, if she were loved, that would help, if she could experience a little success, that would help, if she were supported, that would help, if she could change the way she talked to herself, that would help, and so on. We therefore have many avenues to take. While it is best that we suggest one road at a time for our client to take, so as not to overwhelm her, we have many back-up suggestions to make if that first suggestion doesn't help enough.

In short, we deal with our client's doubts, fears, and messages from the past in no single way. If we opt for a single way, because we have some theory, we are making a mistake. All of this is equally true when it comes to self-coaching. If I imagine that there is only one right thing for me to do or only one right thing for me to say when I am having a problem, that is a mistake. If I say, "What should I do?" I am already making a kind of mistake, because embedded in that sentence is the idea that there is one right thing to do. It would be better to get in the habit of saying, "Of the many things I might do to help myself, which one shall I choose to do?" This is much more cumbersome than the first, but it is also much more helpful.

You can reduce and personalize this phrase so that it is no more cumbersome than the customary and unfortunate "What should I do?": for instance, you might reduce it to a succinct "Which of many?" Even in so-to-speak hard science there is rarely only one answer. If we hold that there are many ways to heal from the harm done to us, rather than a perfect one that appears to be eluding us, we give ourselves options and hope.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What self-talk continues to interfere with your ability to create and/or to coach? What work would you like to do to minimize or eliminate that counter-productive self-talk?

2. Imagine that your client is like a child who has been harmed. How do you want to help her and respond to her?

3. Identify one negative message from the past and create two or three thought substitutes, one or another of which you will say the instant you hear that negative message appear in your mind.

4. Is it possible to never doubt yourself? If not, what does that imply?

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Coach-in-training response:

In asking us to think of the client as a child who has been harmed, one of my actual clients comes to mind immediately. "Sally" thought she should be writing a novel because her spouse was a published novelist. When we first started, she mentioned she had three or four "starts" sitting in a drawer and knew she should be working on them but really didn't want to.

Her daily schedule consisted of doing chores her husband had assigned to her, and once those were done, to assist him by editing or whatever he needed. She was very much living the life of a child, with no contacts, in a remote area, and never initiating activity of her own. She simply did as she was told each day.

I started with a really small baby-step, just to test the waters and my gut feelings, when I suggested that perhaps she would like to set up an email account under her own name, since I had noticed that all her emails were under his name. Her reaction to this was disproportionately grateful and gleefully excited.

Since this seemed to touch upon a very active "harm" with the lack of an established sense of worth or support for "Sally," (and potentially a lifelong pattern), this is what I concentrated on. She said she just hated the thought of picking up those novels, but would like to be able to just write short things as they struck her interest. But, she had no idea if that was "all right" and how to start. I suggested she surf a few of the sites where there are public prompts and postings and critiquing.

Within 4 days, she had written 12 pieces of varying lengths, posted them all, developed "friends" online who gave her support, praise, and constructive criticism, sent her favorite piece to two publishers and had it accepted for publication. Almost

every "help" listed in the lesson was going on simultaneously within a day of just getting her own email account with her own name on it.

Who would have thought such a small thing held such a representational key to a person's whole sense of identity? When I suggested a few weeks later that there were also free online classes and tutorials for writers, she said "let me look" and a few days later wrote that she had enrolled in one and knew two more she wanted to take next.

Once she had an identity as Sally, not as Sam's assistant, and people were addressing HER, not his shadow, she was in a writing frenzy. She got support online that she could not get in her small real-world surroundings, where writing only counted if it was for a book that would be published and make money. In her last email, she was thinking that maybe she did, after all, have a novel inside her, but it would be about a story of her own choice and characters that she cared about. I think there's some parallel here about her feeling "cared about" and learning to care ABOUT herself as well.

**

Coach-in-training response:

I was an art major in college and graduated in 1969 with a BA and a teaching certificate. It was my hope, dream, and intention to teach art at the high school level. My counselor told me to hold out for the kind of job I really wanted, not to settle for less; that the jobs were out there, and I wouldn't have a problem getting one. That may not have been the best advice.

Neither my counselor nor I realized I'd be moving to one of the highest paid school districts in the country, that jobs there were at a premium, or that there would be hundreds of applications for every one of the few art teaching jobs that there were.

So I turned down the junior high school job and the elementary school job. I held out for the high school job I dreamed of, but it never came to be.

Back in the 60's the people interviewing me had no problem saying things like "Well, you're newly married, so you'll probably just leave to have a baby anyway, and we don't want to take a chance on that" and all sorts of things no one would be permitted to say now. But I saw myself as "unworthy," not talented enough, not a good enough artist, not a good teacher, etc. I gave up my art and the idea of teaching for many years—for decades. It was only by chance--hmm, I take that back, perhaps it was destiny--that I slipped back into teaching art without even realizing or trying. It's as if the art teaching assignments found me ... literally.

And still I feel unsure of myself. I feel like I'm not the best artist, not the best art teacher. But I do inspire people often, my students enjoy my classes, and many have rediscovered their own art as a result. So, I must be doing something right.

My self-statements and my new thought substitutes:

1. I am not a very good artist

I really enjoy my art, and sometimes I'm even good at it!

2. I'm not the best teacher

I'm a good teacher, and my students really enjoy my classes. I love teaching; I inspire my students and they inspire me.

Is it possible to never doubt yourself? I doubt it. But it is possible to turn that doubt around, to look at it to see what it's about, what the real issues are, and figure out what you have to do to get beyond it. Maybe you have to learn more, study more, or

maybe not. Maybe the doubt is unfounded and based on old messages. I've come a long way on this road and I've pushed myself to make progress in spite of my doubts. I still have a long way to go but I feel good about how far I've come.

Lesson 31. Creating in the Middle of Things

There are many ways to think about creative blocks and how life interferences contribute to our inability to create. Over time you will devise an arsenal of strategies for addressing these issues with your clients.

One central idea that you will want to keep in mind is that your clients will have to create "in the middle things." There will never be a perfect, ideal time in their life to create. There will always be worries, doubts, fears, responsibilities, duties, relationship pressures, work pressures, and every manner of life pressure getting in the way. One client may be luckier than another in terms of the support she receives from family and friends, the quality of her childhood, and so on, but still every creative person finds that she must create "in the middle of things."

What will help her create in the middle of things? An important answer is: holding the intention to create. Because there are so many distractions and difficulties in life, it is necessary for creators to actively hold the intention to create. We create because we are intending to create, not because we are wishing that we would create or wanting to create. "Intending" and "wishing" feel different in the mind, in the stomach, and up and down the spine. The following are seven "holding the intention to create" tips that you can use with clients.

1. Affirm your intention

"Mary, you say that you want to work on your novel. I wonder if you can change the way you say that. It might be better if you were to say, 'I intend to write this novel and I intend to work on it every day, no matter what else comes up and no matter how I'm feeling.' Can you say something like that and really affirm your intention to get this novel written?"

2. Aim yourself in the direction of your writing

"Mary, you might want to try out the following idea. Get a good mental image of your writing space and its physical location in the universe. Then act like a compass. True north is your writing space and your goal is to be able to turn in its direction effortlessly and instantly. Make yourself turn in its direction many times a day, even at times when you can't go to it, like when you're at your day job. This is not unlike a believer turning in the direction of a holy city several times each day. Of course, it would be great if some of the times that you turn in the direction of your writing space you head over there and write!"

3. Intend to matter

"Mary, intending to write your novel is intimately connected to intending to matter. If you don't really think that you, your ideas, or your work matter, you will not have enough motivational juice to write. So I would like you to say 'I intend to matter' or 'I matter' as many times each day as you can. Will you do that?"

4. Identify any disincliners

"Mary, I wonder if you can identify why you're disinclined to write your novel? I'm purposefully not using the word 'block' because 'block' makes us think of walls,

boulders and other large obstacles, whereas something smaller and easier to handle may be in the way, just some disinclination. Can you identify any disincliners with respect to this novel?"

5. Introduce the 'big but'

"Mary, as you know there are always things up that get in the way of our writing. You might try using the following sentence whenever you hear yourself offering up a reason not to write. 'Yes, I am tired tonight, BUT I will write anyway.' 'Yes, it's been a stressful day and my nerves are raw, BUT I will write anyway, at least for a few minutes. 'Yes, I can't stand it that I'm fighting with John and I know that conflict ruins my creative life, BUT I will write anyway, even though I don't feel like it at all.' Want to give that a try?"

6. Drop everything

"Mary, one habit to work on is dropping everything and rushing to your creative work. This can feel very artificial if you are only rushing there to work so as to acquire a habit and not because you really want to create, but as artificial as that feels it is still an excellent thing to do. So--even though you may not be in the mood at all--I would like you to drop everything, including your thoughts about why this is stupid or impossible to do, and rush to your creative work right now."

7. Think of a snow globe

"Mary, you know how, when you shake up a snow globe, first the snow swirls chaotically, then it begins to settle nicely, then all is quiet again? When we think about creating we do something equivalent to that shaking. We shake ourselves up and make inner chaos. Then, feeling all that chaos, we don't want to create. We forget that we could settle down and get quiet if only we gave ourselves half a chance. So I'd like you to think about snow globes when you want to create. Picture the chaos, then the

settling, and then the quiet. When things are swirling around you or swirling inside of you, try to use the snow globe imagery to help yourself settle down, get quiet, and create."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What is the first thing you would want to suggest to a client to help her "create in the middle of things"? What is the rationale for your choice?

2. Invent and describe an exercise to help clients "create in the middle of things."

3. Please take a little time and identify two or three tactics you can use--ones that have been effective in the past or that you intuit might be effective--to help you "create in the middle of things."

4. Conflict stops us from creating. When conflict is the "thing" that you are in the middle of, what will you do to create anyway?

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Coach-in-training response:

I find myself creating in the middle of things all the time, if only in my head. Thinking of designs, colors or figuring out how to achieve a certain idea. I must create or I feel like a part of me is dead. I can't not create. My relationship with my art is just as important to me as my relationship with my partner, children, family or friends. Therefore, I willingly make the time for what's important.

I found it difficult in the past to allow smaller portions of time to creativity. I would use excuses like "it takes too long to set things up," or "I couldn't just turn on my

creativity like a light switch." It was those excuses that kept me stifled and uncommitted to my art. By making my art a priority, I've found that I actually can turn it on that quickly and I do want to go through the process of setting up. I've learned that if I don't create life gets even more difficult and stressful. It's the absence of creating that makes for more stress for me.

I have a client who goes through periods of physical pain brought on by a car accident she was in recently. Although I believe this is a problem for her, there is also a suggestion that she uses this as an excuse for not creating. I figure that if it was important enough for her to sign up for this coaching, then she must have a strong desire, so I tend to push her more. I remind her of that.

I've suggested to her that when she's not able to work in her studio she can continue her art by drawing, organizing, writing, designing or any other activity related to her art that doesn't involve too much movement. We've also worked together on scheduling shorter creating time periods. This has seemed to help her feel productive instead of reacting in a negative way and feeling like she can't continue her creative process.

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Coach-in-training response:

Each of my strategies for "creating in the middle of things" embodies a primary choice that I've already made: that being able to write is fundamental to my wellbeing.

"Suit up and show up."

Time-honored advice from AA can work for creating in the middle of things as well. Recovering alcoholics can't keep cutting work because they feel rotten or because they

still haven't got their act together. Setting times to write and then showing up at the keyboard no matter what is the backbone of my writing strategy. "Suit up and show up" doesn't mean that it has to be pretty. I don't even have to feel prepared. I just can't afford any more excuses.

"Don't snivel."

One student from Iowa's well-known writing program published an article in a slick magazine (the type you'd read in a hair salon) about the slogan taped to her computer. "Don't snivel," she said, embodied her whole creative philosophy. It's surprisingly powerful. Once you make the choice to cut off the pipeline of complaint, you free millions of watts of energy. Not whining, not having to "process" issues was the single biggest aid in stopping my dependence on self-indulgent journal writing.

"Avoid Anticipating."

Samuel Johnson repeatedly made the point that anticipation (or expectation) stood as the enemy of creativity. If I'm anticipating what fine and shining thing I will write, the first sentence I put on the page will blast my dream to bits. As I keep my writing appointments (a minimum of three each day), I write my first sentences without any expectation at all. Thinking how the mightiest river begins somewhere with a tiny, uncertain trickle, I'm unconcerned when my first sentences don't seem roar.

"Flawless Ignition System."

I may have borrowed the image of an ignition system from somewhere in Eric's Fearless Creating. I've used it long and happily, and forgotten its source. During moments before I write each morning (while feeding the cat and starting the coffee), I hold the picture of a car starting effortlessly on the first try. If I'm not already hearing my first sentences in my head, I'll savor the details of feeling a car key in my hand, turning it in the ignition, hearing a satisfying "vroom" as the engine fires. Since

I can count on myself to start every morning, I'm less anxious about slow-downs during the course of two hours of writing. The road will not always be a straight-shot, and I'll know it's okay to shift down when I have to take a steep hill.

"Get Physical."

Getting the mind into the body makes writing easier. I'm a great believer in meditation, yoga, and biofeedback exercises for grounding. (Most people these days are aware of how we exist mostly with our thoughts "out there somewhere," and that consciously bringing the mind back into the body enhances a sense of being here and now.) A quick, eyes-closed routine conditions the nervous system for entry into a trance-state of writing. But more important for me is how the body can show me how to guide my writing efforts.

Lesson 32. Career Issues

If you are painter, it is not your goal to paint an occasional painting and hide it away in your attic. If you are a creativity coach, it is not your goal to help an occasional client and wait months or years for the next occasion to help. "Career" is the word we use to stand for our desire to work in a regular, productive, and effective way, sell our products and services, and have the chance to grow that only years of practice and sufficient successes afford.

But "career" is not synonymous with "making a living." A career poet can't live on the money she makes from her poetry "sales." She can't come close. Ninety-nine out of a hundred career actors will not earn a living by acting. They won't come close. A career creativity coach is likely to find herself in the same position, doing what she

loves but not making enough money to completely support her. Whereas a "career" in most fields connotes climbing a ladder, making increasingly more money, acquiring security and seniority, and readying oneself for retirement, "career" for a creative person or a creativity coach must connote something else.

What is that "something else"? A career for a painter includes having those things happen which happen if you are having a painting career. The same is true for a musician, a writer, or a biologist. This sounds like a Confucian or Taoist way of defining career, and it is: each discipline has its own way. A poet has a career if she publishes scores of individual poems and three books of poetry, gives readings and is invited to read, teaches poetry-writing, and so on. This is the Tao of a poetry career. A screenwriter has a career if seven of his screenplays are optioned, five of those go into some form of pre-production, and three of those make it to the screen. This is the Tao of a screenwriting career. A physicist has a career if she teaches at a university, finds an area of physics she enjoys, writes articles in that area and makes a small contribution, and so on. This is the Tao of a career in physics.

Of course, these markers and numbers are completely inexact. You can have a career as a biologist without ever teaching: you may find yourself in industry. You can publish one or two novels and little or nothing else and have an enormous career: Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and J. D. Salinger (*Catcher in the Rye*) are examples of this possibility. You can play live music and not record and have a career and you can record and not play live music and have a career. So, the Tao of each career is not a set thing with so many markers and so many accomplishments. Yet it is an objective thing and not entirely subjective. It is both the person herself saying, "I had a career" and an observer saying, "Yes, indeed, you did have a career!"

An excellent career is something else again and, because creators dream big, see themselves with bestsellers, Academy Awards, Nobel Prizes, schools and movements named after them, and so on, anything short of an "excellent career" is likely to cause psychological pain and suffering. Having no career feels bad but having no excellent career also feels bad and can even feel worse.

As a creativity coach, then, you will want to acquire the following over time:

1. You want to acquire a sense of what a baseline career in each discipline feels like and how that can be distinguished from an excellent career. If I say to you, "I am represented by three galleries, I have an individual show every two or three years, and quite a few people collect me, but no art magazine has ever done an article on me and no museum has ever purchased my work," is my problem that I have no career or is it that some markers of an excellent career have eluded me?

In this case, I would say that it is the latter: this painter has a career and needs to be helped to see how exceptional it is that she has the career she has, even if it still falls short of an image she has of the "big time." At the same time, she can be helped to acquire what she still wants to acquire, with that goal placed in a context of present abundance rather than in a context of painful need.

2. You want to acquire a sense of what it takes to have a career in each discipline: what your client ought to do, what the game is and what the rules of the game are, what work is more marketable and what work is less marketable, and so on. These are fine questions to ask of your client, especially if you have no real clue yourself.

It is also wise--and enjoyable--to read about life in the different disciplines: what it's like to make a television pilot (for example, *The Unkindest Cut of All*), what it's like to be a professional dancer (for example, *Dancing on My Grave*), what it's like to be a concert pianist (for example, *Great Pianists Speak for Themselves*), and so on. Reading one such book every so often (and highlighting resonant quotes, which you can use in your articles, books, and workshops down the road) can be a very pleasant part of your education as a creativity coach.

3. You want to hold that certain qualities help a person have a career and that therefore you will support these qualities in your clients. These qualities include

assertiveness, single-mindedness, passion, curiosity, desire, enterprise, effort, self-promotion, and so on. A client who wants more of a career can set as her goals writing a novel and publishing a novel, but she can also set as her goals manifesting those traits which will help her have a career and working on them at the same time that she works on her actual novel. She can begin to assert herself in non-writing situations or start self-promoting in non-writing situations, etc.

Every client can be asked a question that encapsulates these three points: "What do you mean when you say that you want a career as an x, what does it take to have that career, and what personal qualities will you need to manifest to make that happen?"

Related questions, which can be asked of clients if framed carefully, are of the following sort: To be a violinist (though not concertmaster) in a symphony orchestra (though not a prestigious or great one) is to have a career as a violinist. If that isn't "enough," where is the problem and what can be done about it? Is the solution to strive to move up from chair to chair or to audition for famous orchestras, is it to accept and enjoy the career you have and to supplement it in some way, or is it to fully accept and enjoy the career you have and to let go of the feeling that it needs improving or supplementing?

It may be less useful to have a client try to tell you directly and "too clearly" how she would distinguish between a career and an excellent career, as that distinction, while real, can inject an inadvertent note of pessimism into the interaction. She will sense that this thing you are helping her obtain, a career, is itself a shadow of this other thing, an excellent career, and sensing that shadow can remove motivational juice. For example, you might define "excellent career" as a creativity coach as including a bestselling book, but it is not very useful to have that on the table when you have your first articles and your first workshops still to do.

However, it is the case that such things as "bestsellers down the road" are likely part of the dream, so there is a way in which they are present at the outset and need to be incorporated into the work. You focus--with clients and with yourself--on the more

modest idea of "career," which is itself a very large matter, but thoughts about "excellent career" are rarely very far away.

**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you describe the career you want as a creativity coach (even though this is all very new to you)?

2. For you, what markers and accomplishments would distinguish a career as a creativity coach from an excellent career as a creativity coach (if you can get your head around that question at this early stage)?

3. If you feel that you want a career in your art discipline, describe what an acceptable career would look like.

4. If you feel that you want a career in your art discipline, describe what an excellent career would look like.

**

Coach-in-training response:

I have been struggling for several weeks now about how I see myself incorporating coaching into a still-mysterious future career. I currently work one full-time job and two part-time jobs. I'll remain in my full-time job until October (not that anyone is counting months until retirement, ahem...) but would like to be fashioning a satisfying continuing career so as to smoothly transition into a delightfully different pace at that time.

I see myself most comfortable working with a group of people I respect and with whom I can share insights and interests. Right now, I do this via the web. In the future, I can picture myself working perhaps both from home on the internet and two days a week as part of a cooperative set-up, part of a collection of individuals interested in growth and fulfillment, using different techniques but with the same goals at heart. I know I have skills in doing group presentations as well as working one-on-one, so workshops are a definite possibility.

Short-term, I would like to be a "resident expert" at one or more already established websites that would benefit from having a coach on board. The problem, of course, is money. The money issue is hitting everywhere. Sites that used to hire freely now depend on volunteers or else have to shut down. There are a gazillion coaching sites -- have you tried doing a Google search? I don't want to "open a coaching business" per se. As I said, I've been struggling trying to figure this out. Now, I'm practicing patience. I keep preparing my skills and "putting it out there for the universe" and being open to ideas.

Markers, for me, of "being somewhere" with all this, will include being part of a community of people I respect and who believe I have something to contribute to mutual growth, either on the net or in person. I know that's disconcertingly vague, but it's just where I am right now. I want to be conducting life-affirming workshops in my region and being asked to participate in retreat workshops nationwide. How about being an expert on one of those themed Caribbean Cruise travel companies, where you give a few talks to the group in exchange for the trip, and conduct individual paid consultations?

Possibly there might be a book, combining career and creativity coaching, assessment testing, intuition—along the lines of finding creativity and satisfaction in your work despite the fact you're not an "artist." I might address some of the frustration that people are facing every day in trying to find more meaning in their lives and turning it into joy. Somewhere in all this, there would be some volunteer work, also; probably

hands-on workshops, again seeking to lift spirit and find meaning in your daily life regardless of where you are at the moment. I want to help people to find that "aha!" moment.

All fuzzy, not very focused, but that describes me right now. I feel like the answers are just out of sight around the corner and I'm trying to catch up to them.

**

Coach-in-training response:

I have always thought that an acceptable career in art for me would simply mean that I could support myself enough to give up my day job. I would love to be able to be successful enough to not have to work to pay the mortgage and have enough time to focus on creativity only. That would actually feel great and I think I would feel very rewarded by that and that might suffice even as an "excellent" career. I know, however, that this would be down the road quite a bit, if it ever happens, so realistically, my goal now is to have a habit, not necessarily a career, of being creative every week at regular and consistent intervals.

For now, I think it is very important that this be my definition of an acceptable career. I have to be realistic, because I have to work in the here and now and move forward one day at a time and not put too much pressure on myself. When I operate from the idea that the work I do now must be so good as to support me, I ultimately feel so much pressure that it causes paralysis and perfectionism. Then I have no career. I've discovered that the necessary balance here is having a clear future goal but being very involved in the day-to-day steps it takes to reach it.

I do have ideas about an excellent career. They are very romantic and grand in scope, but at their core they involve being around creativity, creative people and creative work all day. Having a body of finished and recognized work (published, produced,

paid, etc.) is also critical. The work would have to have meaning and touch people. It would be very important to me to get feedback about how my work has affected others and to know that it has made an impact. But my main desire, even at this level, is to know that my work has given me the ability to keep on doing it, so that I can go forward with it as the focus of my days.

Lesson 33. 12 C's

As a brief summary of the issues that clients will bring to you, consider the following "12 C's," divided into three areas: personality issues, issues with the work, and issues connected to the world in which clients find themselves. These issues are framed in terms of how a client might want to think about them.

PERSONALITY

1. Character Trait Issues

You have the job of understanding what traits and qualities you intend to manifest and the job of manifesting them.

2. Cognitions and Self-Talk

You have the job of noticing what you say to yourself, identifying maladaptive or negative self-talk, and replacing unwanted self-talk with "better thoughts."

3. Compulsions, Obsessions, and Addictions

You have the job of monitoring your obsessive, compulsive, and addictive tendencies, making distinctions (as between healthy and unhealthy obsessions), and acquiring strategies for dealing with these tendencies.

4. Crises (especially of anxiety, depression and meaning)

You have the job of identifying anxiety crises, depression crises, meaning crises, and other life crises and the job of acquiring the tools to handle such crises.

WORK

5. Choices

You have the job of choosing what art to make, what meaning to make, what values to uphold, what relationships to fashion, and what life to lead.

6. Control Issues

You have the job of learning what can and what can't be controlled, in the creative process, in the reception of your work, and in life generally.

7. Craft Issues

You have the job of learning your craft deeply and well, practicing it, and repeating this intentional process when you launch into new territories.

8. Creative Process Issues

You have the job of intimately learning the creative process and honoring it through best practices and thoughtful work.

WORLD

9. Connections

You have the job of caring about relating and the job of fashioning intimate relationships, friendly relationships, and career relationships.

10. Criticism and Rejection Issues

You have the job of learning to handle the many instances of criticism and rejection that you will inevitably face as a working artist.

11. Culture Issues

You have the job of understanding the shape and demands of your culture, including the ways "you are your culture."

12. Career Issues

You have the job of understanding what strategies and ways of being will help you build a career and the job of doing the work required to build your career.

Here are a few exercises that you can use with clients in some of these areas:

Cognitions and Self-Talk

Exercise: Our inner self-talk is often very self-unfriendly. We often disparage our abilities and our chances. But this self-talk typically is more like a background whisper than something we hear clearly. The first step in getting rid of unwanted self-talk is really hearing it. Think about the negative things you say to yourself, especially those that you only whisper to yourself, and write them down. Next, choose one of these pieces of negative self-talk and create a "thought substitute" to replace it.

Crises (especially of anxiety, depression and meaning)

Exercise: Have you ever experienced a time when none of your creative work felt particularly meaningful? What seemed to cause that to happen, if you know? Did that feeling just pass or did you do something to help yourself create meaningfully again? As a pair of follow-up questions, what do you take the phrase "meaning crisis" to mean and have you had any experiences with meaning crises? If so, what seems to cause them and what seems to work to manage them?

Choices

Exercise: Your ability to create is intimately connected to your intention to matter. If you don't really think that you, your ideas, or your work matter, you won't have the motivational juice to create. Mattering is a choice! Please think through why affirming that what you do matters (at least to you!) and write down the ways that you will support your intention to matter. Try to come up with several different ways that you'll support your intention to matter and describe each one in some detail.

Control Issues

Exercise: You gain control of your life and the situations that arise in your life by actively practicing self-awareness. One way to practice self-awareness is to name a pressing issue, name the fears that arise in you with respect to that issue, remind yourself why you don't want to give in to those fears, name some concrete strategies to deal with the issue, and announce what steps you will take "in the world" to handle the issue. Try this with some issue that is currently "up" for you.

Craft Issues

Exercise: Excellence and mastery are high ideals but exactly the sort of ideals that working artists hold. Please try to articulate what an artist needs to do in order to achieve excellence with her work (for instance, repeated practice on fundamentals, a lifelong desire to learn, a willingness to work hard and often, stretching and taking risks, etc.) For each item that you name, please try to describe what you might do to help yourself improve in that area.

Creative Process Issues

Exercise: Most, if not all, creative people "block" some of the time. Because there are so many potential blockers, and because it can be very hard to identify what blocker is operating, it is an excellent idea to create some "generic unblocking strategies" for yourself to use when you encounter creative blockage. Please think through and describe what strategies you might try to employ to handle your episodes of creative blockage.

Connections

Exercise: Art-making is more than a meditation or an effort at self-actualization. It is also an act of communication with others. Therefore, you want and need an audience. Given that there are many obstacles to obtaining an audience, how will you successfully bridge the gap to your audience? Describe some strategies that you might adopt now or in the future to help you reach your audience.

Criticism and Rejection Issues

Exercise: Some of the feedback and criticism you receive you can make use of to improve your work or to make improvements in your career or your life. Other feedback and criticism will be off the mark and of no particular use to you. How can you tell which is which? Try to imagine what criteria you might use to help you distinguish between feedback and criticism you mean to consider and feedback and criticism you mean to ignore.

Culture Issues

Exercise: Imagine that you spent the early morning in church, the late morning at a peace rally, the afternoon among art students, the evening at a gathering of collectors, and the late night alone at your studio. How are you different in each of these settings? What internal and external pressures are put to bear on you in these different settings? In which of these settings are you "really you"?

Career Issues

Exercise: "Career" is the word we use to stand for our desire to work in a regular, productive, effective way, sell our products and services, and have the chance to grow that only years of practice and sufficient successes afford us. Whereas a "career" in

many fields connotes climbing a ladder, "career" for a creative person connotes something else. What is that "something else"? Describe in your own words what markers you will use to know if your career in the arts is on track.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Create an exercise that you might use with clients.

2. Think through how you might introduce exercises in your work with clients. How would you broach the subject?

3. In what circumstances might you avoid using exercises with a given client?

4. Which of these twelve areas strike you as most problematic in your own life? If you can isolate one area, carefully consider what you might do to make some positive changes.

IV. Session Work

Lesson 34. The Coaching Session

A coaching session is a block of time devoted to your work with a given client. If you were to sit down with your mate, your child, or your friend with the agreement that the two of you would be chatting about a certain subject for a certain amount of time, you would have created an environment that feels exactly like a session. It is the agreement to be together for a certain amount of time and to focus on issues that gives a coaching session its special flavor.

In whatever way the session begins, the coach's goal is to get working. There may be an initial moment of pleasant chitchat but both client and coach understand that this is precious time devoted to helping the client with his issues. The coach aims her client in this direction by using prompts like, "Catch me up a little on what we discussed last week" or "Let's start with you filling me in on how approaching gallery owners went" or "I think you were going to work last week both on organizing your nonfiction book and rewriting the first part of your novel—which do you want to start with?" The coach focuses her client quickly on the serious matters at hand without wasting time or flinching.

Each session proceeds in its own way according to what the client presents. In one session, the client may be frustrated with himself and disappointed in his efforts and the work of the session may be helping the client forgive himself and recommit to the same goals he "failed at" the previous week. In another session, the client may have made a lot of progress and not know what to tackle next, in which case the work is carefully and sensibly choosing the next goals. In another session, the client may want to meander and chitchat so as to avoid admitting that he hasn't done the work he said he would do, in which case the coach allows for a certain amount of meandering and chitchatting but at some point, sooner rather than later, directly asks about the work, fully expecting to be presented with a sheepish confession.

This is a human interaction. Sometimes the coach listens; sometimes the coach coaxes; sometimes the coach teaches. In whatever way the coach operates, she dignifies the session with her humanness. She may have been trained to use a certain method or may have come to the conclusion that she will adopt a certain method but in the end, she uses everything she possesses in order to be of help, as no method really suffices. Once she realizes that a coaching session is not so much about looking professional but rather about being of real service, she can relax into the fascinating work of being with another human being who is trying to make some progress.

Sessions take twists and turns. It isn't that you do a certain thing for five minutes, another thing for ten minutes, and so on, but rather that, as in any conversation, you go back and forth and around and around in an effort to make sense of the issues at hand. You may start out a session checking in on how well your client managed to get to his screenplay and soon discover that you are discussing his desire to change careers, his longing to once again play in a band, or the fact that his neighbors are making his life miserable. A person's reality is made up of disparate elements like these and so is a coaching session.

Over time you will figure out what you consider the "ideal" length for a coaching session. I find half-hour phone or Skype sessions ideal. Many coaches prefer an hour. You might discover that you love forty-five minutes or some other idiosyncratic amount of time. You might even decide to build a little flexibility into your session scheduling. I do half-hour sessions but I schedule them on the hour; in that way, I can always "go over a little" if that feels appropriate. In the beginning, choose an amount of time that seems sensible to you—for most beginning coaches, that will probably be an hour—and notice as you work with clients if you want to make a change.

During a given session you might find that you do all of the following:

+ Listen as your client tries to articulate his issues

+ Ask questions to help you better understand what your client is getting at

+ Help your client arrive at concrete goals

+ Cheerlead and help motivate your client

+ Single out something your client said because you consider it important

+ Make suggestions and problem-solve

+ Teach a little

+ Come to an agreement about what your client will work on between sessions

+ And more

The coaching session is a beautiful, artificial chunk of time defined by one person's need for help and another person's willingness to help. It is bound by certain agreements, for instance that it will last an hour and be conducted by telephone, and has about it an air of seriousness, industry, and hope. The coach engages in artful practice, rather than method, and takes pride in protecting the session and trying her best to be of help.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What sorts of preparations, if any, do you want to make for each session?

2. What sorts of notes, if any, do you want to take during or after sessions?

3. What's your sense at this moment of what length sessions you want to run?

4. What might cause you to decide to shorten or lengthen your coaching sessions?

Lesson 35. The Beginning, Middle and End of Sessions

How might a session with a client start? Here are ten approaches and all are perfectly sound.

1. "Hi, Gloria, why don't you catch me up a bit on what's been going on these past two weeks?"

(Characteristic response: "Sure. Etc.")

2. "Hi, Gloria. Where would you like to start today?"

(Characteristic response: "What we talked about last time has been on mind a lot and … etc.)

3. "Hi, Gloria. I thought we might start with what you wrote me last week about X. How did that play itself out?"

(Characteristic response: "Pretty well! I was surprised that the work we did on Y allowed me to do X exactly as we'd discussed.")

4. "Hi, Gloria. Well, I think we ended our last chat focusing on A and you were going to try B. Did you manage to try B?—and if you did, how did it go?"

(Characteristic response: "I was afraid you were going to remember that! No, I didn't do a lick of B. And I didn't much want to call today.")

5. "Hi, Gloria. I was wondering how that problem with X was going? What's been up with that?"

(Characteristic response: "It's been going a lot better. I think that when we decided that I would try Z, something clicked and … etc.)

6. "Hi, Gloria. I was thinking about what we talked about last time and I had a question or two. Can we start there? Or did you have a place where you'd prefer to start?"

(Characteristic response: "No, starting where you like is fine. Etc.")

7. "Hi, Gloria. I can't wait to hear about X! Is that a good place to start?"

(Characteristic response: "Something else has come up that I think I want to talk about more. Can I start there?")

8. "Hi, Gloria. I know we've been focusing on x, y, and z. Want to catch me up on all three?"

(Characteristic response: "Yes. That makes a lot of sense."

9. "Hi, Gloria. You sound a little down. Am I hearing that right?"

(Characteristic response: "Oh, no! It's just that I'm on my cell phone and I'm worried if the reception's going to be okay.")

10. "Hi, Gloria. What's been on your mind?"

(Characteristic response: "Well, I'm still fighting with John about my space and … etc.)

I almost always start sessions with number 1, "Hi, Gloria, why don't you catch me up a bit on what's been going on these past two weeks?" Then the session begins and you manage the various threads that arise. Your client will bring up many issues during the course of coaching—and many quite important issues will seem to be "getting lost" as you deal with other issues.

For instance, say that your client is primarily working on building her Internet business and dealing with an unsupportive mate but has also let you know that she has family-of-origin issues having to do with growing up in a lower-class household with lots of drama and turmoil where she was told that no one in her family had any chance of success.

That issue has not been coming up in any direct way but you have not forgotten about it—you are holding that thread. Here are the kinds of openings in the course of coaching where, if you like (there is no demand that you do so), you might "remind" your client of her family of origin issue and, by so doing, help her knit or weave together the threads of her life.

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Client: "My husband was telling me that he was reading somewhere that businesses like mine had maybe a five percent chance of succeeding--"

Coach: "You know, that sounds like the same message that you got in childhood, that you had no real chance of succeeding--"

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Client: "I found that I couldn't go into that sketchy neighborhood, even though that's where I have to buy my supplies--"

Coach: "You know, that reminds me of something you said about your childhood … "

**

Client: "My business has started to take off! But I still have all of these doubts and fears about it working--"

Coach: "That makes perfect sense, doesn't it, given what you said about your childhood? You were told that you never would succeed and here you are succeeding and that's bound to bring up things from the past."

**

Client: "I wonder why I can't feel successful even though the business is going very well?"

Coach: "I think we could look at that from different angles. The one I want to try on first is the following one—that you are still carrying some message from childhood about how you can't succeed."

* *

It isn't that you are looking for opportunities to do this sort of reminding, as if you had a menu beside your phone and needed to make sure that you touched on every issue on your checklist before the session ended. It is rather that the art of coaching involves acquiring this sort of awareness and tactfully manifesting the courage to interrupt your client with an observation of this sort, when you want to do so.

Sometimes you'll experience the feeling that you're drifting in the coaching with a certain client and you sense that neither you nor your client know exactly what you are currently working on together. What might you do to get the coaching back on track? Here are five suggestions:

1. You know, Bob, I have the feeling that it might make great sense if we renamed what we're working on. What two or three things do you think we ought to be focusing on?"

2. "You know, Bob, I was looking over the very first email you sent me and in it you indicated that you wanted to work on x, y, and z. I think we've been paying good attention to x and y but haven't looked at z in a long time."

3. "You know, Bob, I think that lately we haven't been creating any concrete work for you to do between sessions. I wonder if maybe you could articulate one or two concrete things you want to get accomplished in the coming two weeks."

4. "You know, Bob, I think that the coming holiday season (or the coming of Spring, the arrival of a new month, etc.) might give us an opportunity to regroup and see where we are. Why don't you try to articulate what you'd like us to focus on, given that the holiday season is coming."

5. "You know, Bob, I've been meaning to ask you about X. I don't think we've touched on that in a long time. Does it seem worth our time to pay a little attention to that?"

When we get out of our own way, the "coaching hour," whatever its precise length, is a vast amount of time. You can completely change your client's life in an hour. You may help her solve her problems and, even more dramatically, you may help her see her creative life in a new way, as something she has to pay more attention to, as something she has to become more aware about, and as something she has to become smarter about. Do not fear or feel that an hour is too short—it is an eternity.

Of course, not everything can get covered in an hour or a lifetime, for that matter. Coming to a sense of completion in a session is both a good thing and a useful goal. You want to avoid as much as possible ending a session with unfinished business remaining. If, for instance, I am aware that something is not complete and the hour is up, I will go over five or ten minutes to get the unfinished business finished.

If I have sessions back-to-back or for some other reason can't stay on past the hour, I will make the conscious decision to interrupt at five minutes before the session ends (all of this is intuitive and not timed on a watch) and say, "We left the matter of whether or not you were getting back to your novel hanging and I want us to get clarity on that. Are you intending to resume your novel, are you intending to begin on that short story, or both?"

In such ways you start, work, and end. That is a session!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What in your opinion are the pluses and minuses of starting out each session "in the same way"?

2. Imagine that you are in the middle of a session with a client and that the opportunity to remind your client of something that you consider important has arisen. What kind of "interrupting circumlocution" might you employ? List one or a couple of these gambits that you think might suit your voice and your style of working.

3. What do you think you might try when the coaching drifts?

4. What do you need to keep in mind with respect to ending sessions?

Lesson 36. Between Sessions

What are you asking your client to do between sessions? You might be asking him to do any of the following:

+ You may be asking him to work on whatever it is the two of you decided that he would work on. In session, he might have mentioned that he felt ready to approach literary agents in the coming week. You agreed that was a great idea and the two of you discussed what he needed to do in order to effectively approach agents, maybe focusing on him strengthening the subject line of his query email and the body of his query email.

At the end of the session you might have said, "So, let me go over what we agreed on. In the coming week, you'll work on creating an effective subject line for your query email, creating the body of your email, and figuring out which agents you intend to approach. Does that sound correct?" Your client may have concurred that you accurately recounted the agreement or he may have made some modifications—for instance, he may have said, "Not only do I want to figure out which agents to approach, I want to actually approach them!" At the end of this discussion the two of you know exactly what your client intends to work on during the coming week.

+ You might be asking him to keep in touch with you about the progress he's making (or not making). This might sound like you saying the following at the end of the session, "Okay, Frank, I know that you're going to try working on your first symphony this week. By all means feel free to drop me an email and let me know how that's going or to let me know about any obstacles that have come up. Okay?"

You are most likely to make an offer of this sort if you are working with your client in a "combination" way, say a combination of phone coaching and email coaching, and if the email interactions are built into the price of the package that you've offered your client. But even if your client isn't formally paying for email contact or email coaching between sessions, you may still sometimes make this suggestion or offer and let him know that you are available to continue your work together between sessions via email.

+ You might ask him to check in with you on a daily basis to report his progress. This might sound like you saying, "Okay, here's what I'd like you to do, if you feel that it might serve you. Every day after you've finished your two hours in the studio, just drop me a quick email that reads 'Done!' I may not respond to your email or I may say 'Congrats!' Do you think that checking in that way on a daily basis is useful you or more like a burden? What are your thoughts?" If your client feels that checking in that way serves him, then that becomes part of his work between sessions.

+ You might ask her to report on a particular event or interaction. This might sound like you saying, "Okay, Mary, that editor said that she'd be in touch with you this week and we've rehearsed how you want to respond to the questions she's likely to ask you. Do you want to check in after you've spoken with her and let me know how it went? I'd love to hear! What are your thoughts on checking in with me via email after you've chatted with her?"

Your client may not want to do this, fearing that if the interaction goes poorly she'll be in no mood to report to you, or she may see the check-in as valuable to her. If the idea appeals to her, then checking in with you after she's chatted with the editor in question is part of her "between sessions" work.

+ Your client may assign herself all sorts of work that she hopes to accomplish between one session and the next. She might be working on taking a certain risk, engaging in a certain sort of research, networking in the marketplace, making choices about which creative projects to tackle, and so on. Whatever she announces that she intends to work on between sessions, it is a good idea for you to briefly repeat her decisions back to her at the end of the session.

This might sound like, "Okay, let's see where we are. I think you've said that over the course of the next two weeks you want to finish your mural, learn a certain new mosaic tile technique, and talk to that friend of yours about having her announce your new class. Is that the picture?" In this way, both of you leave the session with a clear idea of what your client intends to work on between sessions.

What is *your* work between sessions?

+ If you are keeping notes, then you have the job of noting what transpired during the session, thinking through what you might want to bring up at the next session, and so on.

+ If you've asked your client to check in with you on a daily or regular basis, then you have the job of noticing whether or not your client is in fact checking in with you and reminding him about checking in if he isn't.

+ If your client has agreed to check in after a particular event or interaction, you have the job of noticing whether he has or hasn't checked in—and deciding whether you want to remind him or just wait to chat about the matter at your next session.

+ You have the general, ongoing job of keeping your appointments straight, making changes to your schedule if you or your client have to reschedule, billing clients, and all the usual and routine work of maintaining a coaching practice.

Between sessions your client will be working in ways that the two of you discussed during your last session and in all the other ways that naturally arose for him or her in the course of living. Similarly, you have your own work to do, which may be minimal but which is nevertheless a necessary part of building and maintaining a coaching practice. Much goes on in a given session; and much goes on between sessions, too.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Describe how you will manage the end of sessions so that your clients leave the session with a clear idea of what's expected of them between sessions.

2. What are the pros and cons of assigning your clients "homework"? Do you expect that you will be assigning your clients "homework"?

3. What are the pros and cons of asking a client to "check in" with you via email between sessions? Do you expect that sometimes you'll ask clients to check in with you in this way?

4. Describe the sorts of suggestions you intend to make to help clients understand how they're to proceed between sessions.

Lesson 37. Offering Invitations

During sessions, you can offer your client a certain sort of invitation. You can invite her to attempt things which she might enjoy trying and might profit from enormously but which, for one reason or another, she is not currently pursuing.

Your client might well love to submit her latest short story to a well-known magazine but not have the courage to try. She might relish studying a new painting technique but not have thought to learn something new. She might profit from turning her research into a nonfiction book but not know how to begin. You can invite her to attempt things which she has told you she would like to try and/or things which you independently think she might benefit from doing.

The following are examples of invitations you can offer clients:

1. "I noticed that this month's Writer's Digest is devoted to writers' conferences. Since we talked about you possibly attending one, I thought I'd let you know."

2. "I was watching the weather channel and noticed that you're starting to get some warm weather. Since we talked about you painting outdoors this spring, I wondered if you were giving that some thought?"

3. "You mentioned in passing that you had put aside a half-completed nonfiction book last year. I wonder if you'd like to talk about that? Should we bring that to a front burner?"

4. "I just remembered that you have a meeting coming up with a literary agent. I wonder if you'd like to role play and rehearse that meeting?"

5. "I wonder if you're ready to look into Ph.D. programs? You've been sounding ready to take the next step in your professional and intellectual life. Might this be a good time to start gathering some facts and figures?"

6. "Have you ever thought about marrying your love of color and your love of wood and painting directly on wood?"

7. "I just happened upon some inexpensive Internet writing courses that look interesting. Would you like the link?"

8. "You say that you have a lot more research to do before you can start of your article. Yet you sound extremely well informed about your subject. I wonder if you could write a draft right now, using what you currently know?"

9. "I know that your publisher is looking for another romance novel from you, but I wonder if it's time to take a break from writing what no longer interests you and try your hand at the adventure novel we've been talking about?"

10. "You were so eloquent in your appreciation of the mandolin, I wonder if you might want to learn it? I know it's hard to begin an instrument as an adult and I know you haven't had much luck learning instruments in the past, but maybe with my help you might succeed this time. What do you think?"

11. "Is this maybe the right time to increase the prices of your paintings, now that you're starting to be collected?"

12. "You say that you love Beethoven's piano sonatas but you never find the time to listen to them. Why don't you listen to one tonight?"

13. "I think that you may be stymied in writing your historical novel by not being able to really picture eleventh-century Madrid. Would you like to spend a couple of weeks doing some research?"

14. "I just read an interview with a literary agent who claims to love representing exactly the kind of book you're writing. I know that contacting agents has seemed scary to you, but I wonder if you might like to contact this one?"

15. "Are you getting closer to scheduling studio time for your next CD? I know you don't feel nearly ready, but I also know that you have a contract deadline looming. Would it feel good to have a set date to get into the studio or would that just be an added pressure?"

16. "Why don't you take Saturday off and visit a museum? You deserve a treat!"

17. "Is it time for you to present at a conference? We've been talking about that possibility for months and maybe that stretch is exactly what you need now?"

18. "I know you've been toying with the idea, but would you like to try your hand at directing?"

19. "I know you feel stuck at your current school. Is it time to get your resume out and begin applying for teaching jobs at other universities?"

20. "I think about a year ago you mentioned that you wanted to try a novel after you wrote your short stories. Now that the story collection is done, is it time to think about a novel?"

If you have an empathetic understanding of your client's situation and inner landscape, you will naturally want to invite her to try out things that you know are already on her mind or that are just out of her conscious awareness and that she would love to try if only someone mentioned them to her. There is virtually no risk in extending these invitations and a tremendous upside, as your client may be thrilled to receive your one- or two-sentence invitation and may even be transformed by it.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Describe some of the invitations you might like to extend to clients.

2. Are there some sorts of invitations you feel reluctant to extend?

3. What would you like to invite yourself to do with respect to your creative life?

4. What would you like to invite yourself to do with respect to your creativity coaching practice?

Lesson 38. Asking Questions

Creativity coaches ask questions. We increase our understanding of the person sitting across from us by asking pertinent questions and by bringing a spirit of inquiry into the coaching hour.

We ask questions when we don't understand and when we need a little or a lot of clarification. We also ask questions as a way of stopping a narrative so that we can educate, reflect back, punctuate, share a concern, and so on. Asking questions serves many purposes and is its own art form, one that takes time and practice to master.

We don't ask idle questions. Every question we ask is pointed and intentional. Consider the following scenario. A client comes in and says that she's been writing a novel but that she's gotten stuck and hasn't written for four months. All of the following are questions a creativity coach might ask and all have a different intention behind them.

"What's your novel about?"

I don't ask this question because I care what the novel is about. I ask it because in my experience writers regularly block by virtue of the fact that they do not know what their writing is about, which is natural, normal, and no special problem; are made anxious by this lack of knowledge, which is also natural, normal, and no special problem; and then can't get past their anxiety, which is also natural, normal, but a big problem.

This question is important because if a writer knows too little about her novel or has sent it off in the wrong direction, that is valuable information, and also important because it begins the process of identifying the writer's relationship to anxiety, self-doubt, and so on.

"Have you written other novels?"

If she hasn't written other novels, then she has limited experience in the writing of novels and may be expected not to understand how many obstacles arise along the way or what to do about overcoming those obstacles. What doctor isn't tempted to

stop her first operation as soon as the blood starts spurting? What skydiver isn't a little disinclined to jump out of the plane that first time? So too for the writer on her first novel, whose work is as scary in its own way as what the surgeon or the skydiver is attempting.

If, however, she has written other novels, then the natural follow-up question is, "What makes this novel more difficult to write?" Maybe it is a more ambitious novel. Maybe it is a more commercial novel. Maybe her life circumstances are different. Maybe she is more depressed or anxious than she was five years ago. Maybe she is disappointed that her first two novels didn't sell and so has no motivational juice to write this one. Who knows? We learn by asking one question after another until we do know.

"Do you think about your novel a lot?"

I ask this question because I want to tease apart the following two ideas: thinking about the work and thinking about oneself as a non-writer. Almost invariably, the reply to the question "Do you think about your novel a lot?" will be "All the time!" But when I examine what the writer means, it turns out that she is thinking all the time about the fact that she is not writing her novel and condemning herself for her lack of talent, will power, courage, and so on.

The writer is not thinking about her novel at all; rather, she is obsessing about herself as a non-writer. The innocent-sounding "Do you think about your novel a lot?" is one way to begin teaching clients about the important distinction between focusing on the work and focusing on the self.

"Do you tend to finish things at your day job?"

I am expecting my client to assert that she does finish things at her day job, which allows me to pursue the idea that everyday work and creative work are different

enterprises, that creative work is the harder work, and that it is natural to get blocked and stuck simply because it is the harder work.

In this way, I am affirming and supporting my client, but I am doing so by telling the truth. It is easier (though perhaps also tiresome, boring, and unfulfilling) to file, reply to an email, send out an invoice, order new stationery, or do whatever it is that we do at our day jobs than it is to write our novel. I want my client to notice this, to remember this, and to react by saying, "Yes, it is damn hard! Why didn't I think of that?"

Let's look at these four questions again.

1. "What's your novel about?"

2. "Have you written other novels?"

3. "Do you think about your novel a lot?"

4. "Do you tend to finish things at your day job?"

If there are no real intentions and understanding behind these questions when you ask them, they are not significant or provocative questions. A guest at a party might ask a second guest exactly these questions (more or less) and the second guest, our blocked writer, would probably get very little out of the conversation. The form and content of a creativity coach's questions may look innocent and ordinary; but, because the coach means something by them in his own mind and because he knows where to go next in the inquiry, they are as important as the "simple" questions of an experienced trial lawyer or internist.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Are you aware of the intentions behind the questions you ask?

2. What makes for a "good question" in the context of creativity coaching?

3. Is there some question you suspect you ought to ask yourself about your own creative life?

4. If there is, will you ask it? And try answer it?

Lesson 39. Asking Follow-Up Questions

You ask an intentional question. You get an answer. What question do you ask next? That depends on the answer you received to your preceding question. If that answer confused you, you might ask a clarifying question. If that answer put you in mind of some issue and you want to lead your client in a particular direction, you might ask a leading question. If that answer signals that your client has a lot to say about a certain issue and you would like to hear the full story, you might ask an open-ended question and invite a narrative answer.

Take the following example. I asked some high school students interested in a career in the theater the following question: "What do you find most difficult about being a young theater artist?" Here are some of their answers:

Student 1:

"Self-consciousness. The idea that many teenagers have that you have to fit into some kind of mold to 'be cool' makes it hard and sometimes embarrassing to express yourself truly."

Student 2:

"I get highly disappointed when I get turned down for a role. I know it's a learning experience, but it's hard to be told 'No.'"

Student 3:

"Stage fright. And not being able to think before doing improvisation."

Student 4:

"Conflicting advice. You are brought up being told to shut up or keep your emotions inside and you teach yourself to be invulnerable, lest you get hurt, but now you are supposed to spill your insides to the world."

Student 5:

"The constant judgment of your own 'talent' as an actor and whether your are talented enough to make the theater a career."

Student 6:

"Young people in general don't get very much respect. And on the same note actors in general don't get very much respect. So, put both together and you get us."

Student 7:

"There are so many actors in our school alone, and they are all so talented, I find it hard to get parts."

Student 8:

"There are a lot of kids who get primped by mothers twenty-four hours a day and show up at auditions with a fancy resume, and then there are those (like me) who must make it on their own."

Student 9:

"Taking risks, expressing my ideas, just going for it, even though judgment of me may come out of it."

It is easy to see how each of these answers suggests issues to pursue and follow-up questions to ask. With one student, I might want to work directly and immediately on anxiety and ask a question about the symptoms of his stage fright. With a second student, I might want to work on expressing emotions, and on the psychological material that inevitably comes up when emotions get expressed, and ask, "Does it feel dangerous to express emotions?" With several of them I might want to work on "low self-esteem" and "negative self-image" issues suggested by their characterizations of themselves as "untalented," maybe by asking the simple sounding "What do you mean by 'talent'?"

The follow-up question I ask is based on my understanding of what my client's initial response signifies, what additional information I want, what information I want to communicate to my client, and where I want to lead. For example, take the case of a writer who is describing her inability to write a commercial novel. I might ask her, "Are you trying your hand at a commercial novel now because of the modest sales of your first two novels?" I want to know the answer to this question but I am also suggesting something: namely, that she may be writing this commercial novel less because she finds it a meaningful project and more because she is reacting to the reception of her first two non-commercial novels. With this question, I am both asking and telling.

Irrespective of whether she answers, "Yes" or "No," I might follow up with, "And is it in you to write commercial fiction?" With this question, I am again asking and telling. I am saying something like, "Are you capable of writing commercial fiction, given its intense plot demands?" I am also saying, "Are you willing to be more of an entertainer than a witness?" I am presenting a picture of what I believe to be some of the problems inherent in attempting commercial fiction and simultaneously I am asking a genuine question.

There are two characteristic responses to this sort of question. One is "Good question!" The other is, "I don't understand. What do you mean?" In the second instance, I would need to explain what was on my mind, doing some educating in the process. Thinking about my question and my clarifying comments, if any, my client is quite likely to reply, "I'm not sure," "I don't know," or something similar. My next follow-up question might be the open-ended, "Can you help me understand what it is you don't know?"

This question is pure asking and no telling. I am saying, "I am willing to listen as you think out loud about whether or not you have it in you to write commercial fiction." We may fall silent for several seconds or even longer as she considers her answer. My client may make several false starts as she analyzes the demands of writing

commercial fiction. But in all likelihood, we will soon be in fruitful territory, with me asking follow-up questions as necessary.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of posing short, crisp questions?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of longer questions?

3. What makes for a successful question in the context of creativity coaching?

4. Think of an issue in your creative life. Ask yourself a question and follow-up questions until you come to a better understanding of the nature of the issue and what you want to do about it.

Lesson 40. Interrupting

If, as a general rule, you let your clients tell their stories without interruption--because you find the flow useful, out of politeness, because you're not sure when to interrupt, and so on—then you will need to present your stored-up inquiries when your client has finished. However, sometimes interrupting may be the better bet, especially if you've learned how to return a client to his narrative thread. You can interrupt, ask a question, take in the information you receive with a nod, and return your client to his story by apologizing, "Before I interrupted, you were saying--"

The following are characteristic of the useful interruptions I have in mind.

**

"I've always wanted to compose, but I don't have anything musically to say--"

"I'd like to check in on that. What exactly do you mean by, 'You don't have anything musically to say?'"

**

"I have a few paintings that are done, maybe enough for a show--"

"And you've tried for a show?"

"Not yet. I can't afford the framing, and I don't have good slides--"

"Of course. We'll certainly get back to this. You were saying that you have a few paintings done, maybe enough for a show--"

**

"I've wanted to write an article, but it would take so much research and I don't have the time--"

"Let me stop you for a second. You're saying that you don't know enough to write the article right now?"

**

"I can write pretty well when it comes to facts, but with fiction I'm not very talented--"

"Are you sure that you mean 'talent'? What do you mean when you use that word?"

**

"I only want to paint for myself. I don't want to show it or sell it--"

"Really? Can you help me understand why you wouldn't want to show or sell your art?"

**

"I procrastinate a lot--"

"You know, I tend to think of procrastination as an anxiety state. Might your procrastinating have something to do with anxiety?"

**

"I hate the business end of writing. I need to find someone to sell my writing--"

"Are you also saying that you don't understand how the publishing industry works?"

**

Sometimes you'll interrupt, listen to your client's response, and pursue what your client has just brought up, rather than allowing him to return him to his narrative thread. This might sound like either of the following:

**

"I couldn't just call a literary agent cold."

"Still, is that a stretch you'd like to make?"

"No. It's too scary!"

"But if you were sufficiently prepared?"

"Prepared, how?"

"Let's talk about that. How does a person get ready to talk to an agent?"

**

"I just don't think I can speak other people's lines one more time! It's just too boring! I can't make myself audition--"

"What about speaking your own lines? Is it perhaps time to write a performance piece?"

"I've been thinking about that for the longest time."

"And?"

"I don't know. Those are different skills. I'm not sure I'm talented in that way--"

"But you do want to write a performance piece? To speak in your own voice?"

"I do."

"Maybe we can focus on that for a few minutes?"

**

Sometimes you interrupt because you need clarification or more information. Sometimes you interrupt because you want to take the lead and steer your client in a certain direction. Sometimes you interrupt because you want to educate or consult. The basic rhythm of a session, whether conducted in person or on the phone, is for a client to present her thoughts and for you to ask questions and sometimes to interrupt your client's answers with further questions.

If it isn't in your nature to interrupt or if it isn't a habit with you to interrupt, you may find yourself confronted by long narratives that contain so much unaddressed material that you have no idea where to begin or what to say once your client finished speaking. It is a better policy to interrupt a long narrative with intentional questions that allow you to coach as you go. In the sense in which I've just described, interrupting is an important habit to acquire.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Are you accustomed to interrupting for the sake of eliciting clarifying information or in order to steer a conversation in a certain direction?

2. Can you articulate the difference between "useful interrupting" and "just interrupting"?

3. Are you in the habit of interrupting your own inner discourse, ongoing narrative, or train of thought with useful questions and asides?

4. Practice some "useful interrupting" on yourself. The next time you have a problem to solve or an unpleasant train of thought, see if you can stop yourself in your tracks and ask yourself some relevant, intentional questions.

Lesson 41. Following and Leading

A client may frame a problem in a certain way and, while you want to support her way of framing the problem, at the same time you may believe that she is making a conscious or unconscious mistake. She may believe, for example, that she is supposed to wait for inspiration before she begins her new painting, an idea you might accept if she hadn't been waiting for inspiration for three years already.

You have the feeling that something very different is going on--maybe she's depressed, maybe she doesn't believe that there are good reasons to paint, maybe she's struggling hard just to survive--and you suspect that her claim about "waiting for inspiration" is a way for her to avoid looking at what's going on in her creative life.

How will you proceed? To know how to proceed is to know how to do creativity coaching. There is no single or simple answer. You will only learn by trail-and-error experimentation as to what works. But you can proceed by keeping in mind the five

goals I discussed in an earlier lesson. You might say to yourself: "I am not invested in her painting or not painting. In fact, I have my doubts that she'll begin painting any time soon and I don't want to get too attached to needing her to begin. But I would like to understand why she is having so much trouble beginning. I would also like to support her desire to begin. So, I think I might ask her what, in addition to not feeling inspired, is getting in the way of her starting. Maybe that will provide me--and her--with some clues about how we might proceed. I don't think I need to say that her waiting for inspiration is an excuse--I can't see how saying that would help our relationship. So, while I doubt her formulation about what's preventing her from painting, I intend to go slowly and check in about what she thinks may be going on."

By checking in with her about what, in addition to not feeling inspired, may be preventing her from painting, you are presenting the possibility that something else may well be going on. But you are not disputing your client's formulation of the situation. By being careful and circumspect, you are much more likely to allow her to drop her defenses and to think clearly about the situation. You are leading, but not in a high-handed or aggressive manner. In fact, you may do a lot of leading of this sort; but you are also following, because you are taking seriously your client's thoughts and feelings and her analysis of the situation.

Sometimes you will lead very directly, for example by saying something like, "I would like you try painting first thing tomorrow morning." More often you will lead indirectly, for example by saying, "You say that you don't like to paint in the morning. But you also say that the morning is really your only free time. How might you resolve this dilemma?"

Sometimes you will actively disagree with a client's formulation, for example by saying, "I don't think I agree when you say that lots of literary agents handle poetry collections." More often you will disagree while seeming to agree, for example by saying, "You may be right that there are many agents who handle poetry collections, though I have my doubts about that. Why don't you see if you can get the names of some agents who represent poetry collections?" The subtleties of these dynamics can

only be learned by monitoring how clients react to your responses and by noticing what helps and doesn't help them make progress.

What you say is important and how you say what you say is just as important. You want to cultivate a non-judgmental way of leading that honors your client's difficulties. At the same time, you want to make the recommendations and suggestions that you want to make. The following are some of the kinds of circumlocutions that you are likely to want to cultivate:

+ "I wonder if you might want to try ... "

+ "I was thinking that it might be useful to try ... "

+ "Do you think it might be a good idea if you ... "

+ "What small but important thing would you like to accomplish this week?"

+ "I wonder if you're feeling up to ... "

+ "Now that you've done 'x,' I wonder what you might like to try your hand at next?"

+ "I have some doubts about your plan, but I'm hoping that when you explain it to me more fully I'll see its merits."

+ "I have a feeling that anxiety may be getting in the way, but your interpretation may be the right one."

If you're coaching via email, remember that email messages often have a cold, curt, and bullying ring to them. You'll want to make extra-sure that your messages don't

come off sounding that way. So, think things through twice before you send an email. With email coaching, you have the luxury of writing a draft, reading it through, and considering the pros and cons of what you are about to say. As a general rule, if there is something in the email that troubles you, makes you wonder if you are saying the right thing, or in some other way sends up a warning flare, take your doubts seriously. Usually it is better to take the "offending" material out.

You don't have the same luxury of thinking things through twice before you say them when you are doing in-office or on-the-phone coaching. But you can still spend a split-second double-checking to make sure that what you are about to say is on target and presented non-judgmentally. You can pause, take your time, and even say, "I need a second to think about that." Following and leading require exactly this sort of care, attention, and presence.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Do you feel more comfortable following or leading?

2. If either following or leading is a problem for you, what might you do to improve as a leader or follower?

3. If you were a client of a creativity coach, when would you want your coach to lead and when would you want your coach to follow?

4. Do you see yourself as a leader in your creative discipline? Is that a goal you have for yourself or a role you see for yourself?

Lesson 42. In-Person Coaching

When you sit across from a client during an in-person creativity coaching session, what model of interaction should we envision? What best describes the situation? None of the following are really appropriate. It isn't a doctor-patient interaction, because you are not treating an illness. It isn't a lawyer-client interaction, because you aren't armed with a body of arcane knowledge or working in a formal system. It isn't a cleric-parishioner relationship, because you are not a representative of any sect. It isn't a teacher-student relationship, because you aren't trying to impart specific knowledge. It isn't a therapist-client relationship, because you aren't diagnosing and treating syndromes. What is it, then?

It is closest to two friends chatting, as two friends might chat in a coffee house or on a back porch. Your client is having some troubles; you know some things (and don't know lots of others); you chat about your client's troubles and what she might like to do about them. The scene is informal rather than formal, intimate rather than distant, human rather than detached, colloquial rather than jargon-filled, broad ranging rather than narrow. If your client is not exactly your new friend as she sits there across from you, she is closer to that than anything suggested by the word client, patient, student, or parishioner.

Therefore, you don't have to sit behind a big desk. You can have coffee, if you like, as can your client. You can relax. You are mindful, intent, and professional, but also relaxed and human. There is nothing for you to do except what one friend does for another, nothing for you to fix, nothing for you to cure, nothing for you to explain. Maybe you can help; maybe you can't; the two of you chat and see what happens.

Do you even need an office? Not really. You may not want to see clients in your home, because your homeowner's insurance may not protect you if a client slips and falls and because it may not be legal to operate a business of this sort out of your home. But these are technical reasons for not using your home, not philosophical

reasons. Philosophically, there is no reason why you and your client couldn't sit in facing chairs on your porch and chat there.

Similarly, there are technical reasons why you would probably not want to conduct your in-person coaching in a cafe or a library, having to do with obvious prohibitions about doing business in such places. But otherwise there would be no reason not to. Two artists in a coffee house is the oldest form of creativity coaching we have, virtually the only form until recently, and that remains in no way inferior to a more formal arrangement and an office setting.

A session is as long as it makes sense for it to be. Fifteen minutes is probably not enough time; two hours is a very long time. The therapist's fifty-minute hour is certainly a reasonable amount of time. I find that sixty-minute first sessions and half-hour subsequent sessions work just fine for me, all of which nowadays I conduct via the phone or Skype. Sessions can happen as often as the two of you like: very regularly, say every week, two weeks, or month, or much more occasionally. Naturally, the more frequently you see a client, the more built-in intensity the relationship possesses. You can imagine the difference in dynamics between seeing your psychoanalyst three times a week versus once every two months.

If you saw him three times a week, he would be on your mind virtually all the time (as would his cost), you would be always either getting ready to see him or just getting back from seeing him, and you would be perpetually monitoring your progress with respect to the goals you'd set and the work you were doing together. This might be an excellent thing is you were making regular progress and terrifically burdensome if you weren't. Conversely, if you saw him every two months you would probably forget about him for the most part, forget about your goals and your work together, too, and hold your relationship as the opposite of intense.

I think that seeing clients every two weeks can work well. This provides for an adequate space between sessions for clients to get some work done but isn't so long a time that clients feel disconnected from you, the process, or their goals. Both a

weekly-session model and monthly-session model can also work well, as many clients benefit from weekly contact while many clients do beautifully being seen at monthly intervals.

You can set up one model for everyone, based on your intuition about the best rhythm for meeting, your income needs and desires, your schedule, and the willingness of clients to accept your model; or you can operate with several models, seeing some clients every week, some clients every two weeks, some monthly, and so on. You get to decide.

Irrespective of what a client wants to talk about in any given session--light things, heavy things, process things, product things, pure creativity, marketplace issues, etc.—sessions proceed in the same way, as a dance of following and leading. You are not only entitled but you are even duty-bound to lead when you feel that you must. Conversely, you are not the boss and as a rule you follow rather than lead. Just as a conversation between two friends is exactly this sort of dance, each taking turns listening, speaking, advising, and learning, and so on, so too is every creativity coaching session.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Do you have any particular fears or worries about conducting in-person coaching sessions? If so, how might you address them?

2. Describe the space in which you would like to see clients. What does your ideal space look and feel like?

3. How frequently will you see clients and how long will sessions run?

4. If you were a client, what would you expect from an in-person creativity coaching session? Describe how such a session might proceed.

Lesson 43. Phone or Skype Coaching

A phone or Skype session (or some similar "distance chatting," say via Facetime) is essentially no different from an in-person session. To continue the metaphor of the last lesson, that creativity coaching is most like two friends chatting, a phone session is most like two friends chatting on the phone. This is the way that I do virtually all of my coaching nowadays, via the phone or Skype, as my clients are located all over the world.

Why the phone rather than in-person? For exactly the same reasons that two friends sometimes meet in person and sometimes talk on the phone. Perhaps it is hard for them to get their schedules coordinated. Maybe the trip is so long that a one-hour visit takes three hours counting the commute. Maybe it is even their preferred mode of communication, as each can sit comfortably in her own space, in casual attire, relaxed and cheered by a snack and cup of tea.

Phone sessions are surprisingly intimate, the two parties often concentrate better than they might in-person, and the work can go very deep. This is not to say that phone sessions are to be preferred over in-person session, but rather to underline that they are not an inferior approach to in-person work. Since you may well want to build your practice to include clients who live at a distance from you, and since some of these clients (and perhaps you yourself) will not be satisfied conducting coaching by email exclusively (or at all), you will want to get comfortable with phone coaching and/or Skype coaching as a viable option and excellent in its own right.

Phone sessions, perhaps because they are often more intimate and intense than in-person sessions, can be shorter than in-person sessions. I find that an in-person hour flies by and often feels short but that a half-hour phone session feels quite substantial and exactly the right amount of time. Or you might try forty-five minutes as your basic phone length, schedule an hour when "more is up," and schedule a half-hour (or even fifteen minutes) for more of a check-in and check-up.

Your client calls you and her phone charges are separate from the fee she pays you. Most people have calling plans that allow them to make inexpensive long-distance calls, so even an hour session would add only a modest amount to your client's costs. Therefore, the cost is no particular impediment. Indeed, phone sessions are typically more affordable than in-person sessions because your client doesn't have commuting costs and doesn't lose any time from work. (I only use a landline; personally, I wouldn't do sessions on a cellphone.)

Whereas I don't see clients in my home and wouldn't see clients in my home, I do take phone calls at home and conduct phone sessions from home. I am not aware of any technical reasons for not doing this and it is of course much more convenient than driving to an office that you don't really need. Additionally, if you rent your office space by the hour you may not be allowed to use the office phone at all. So, all in all, you may decide to coach from your home phone and, over time, you may even conclude that phone coaching and Skype coaching are your preferred modes. They are mine.

Before a phone session:

1. Sit down by the phone early, say five minutes before the appointed time or at least two or three minutes before.

2. Turn off your answering machine, especially if it is one that grabs calls quickly, or be prepared to answer quickly.

3. Empty your mind. You don't have to plan anything to say or prepare in any particular way, although of course you may jot down some notes if there is something in particular you intend to say: some suggestion you mean to make, some resource you want to mention, etc.

4. You can even do a little work while you wait, just as long as it is routine, casual work that doesn't engross you too deeply and that you can let go of in a split second. For instance, you can address some envelopes, make a to-do list for the next day, etc.

5. If your client doesn't call on time, wait a few minutes (I usually wait three or four minutes) and then drop her an email to see what's up. Include your phone number or Skype handle in the email—sometimes it happens that your client has misplaced it. Alternately, you might not email at all and just consider the session missed. Whether you charge for missed calls depends on your temperament, your philosophy, your finances, and the way you've set up your practice. I tend not to charge for missed calls or brief check-in calls but there are certainly good reasons to charge for your time. The choice is yours.

6. It's a good idea to keep track of the time and reserve two or three minutes at the end to underline any points you want to make to your client. I will typically say something like, "I think there were three main points today. First, you recommitted to your current novel. Second, you decided on a new writing plan--writing every day. Third, you want to get braver about literary agents and contact a few. Does that sound correct?" Often a client will make some amendment or addition, for example: "Yes, and I want to get my space better organized. That's important, too!" This routine is a good way to bring closure to a phone or Skype session.

7. Last, you would put your calendars together and get your next session scheduled.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Are you comfortable on the phone or on Skype? If not, does it seem worth your while to practice becoming more comfortable?

2. What seem like the limitations of phone coaching or Skype coaching?

3. What seem like the strengths of phone coaching or Skype coaching?

4. If you were a client looking for creativity coaching, would you be interested in phone coaching or Skype coaching? If so, why? If not, why not?

Lesson 44. Email Coaching

Email creativity coaching is a limited but viable way for coaches to work with clients and makes it possible for coaches and clients separated by a significant distance to work together (as do phone coaching and Skype coaching). You can learn much more about email coaching from my book *Secrets of a Creativity Coach*, which includes my verbatim email coaching with twenty-five artists from around the world.

A coach in New Zealand can work with a client in New York and a coach in San Francisco can work with a client in India. It may even be the preferred mode of communication between people who live next door to each other. Living at a great distance from one another is not the only reason to choose email as a coaching mode.

As a practical matter, creativity coaches choose between open-ended email contact, where clients email as often as they like and coaches respond to each email promptly

and as it comes in, or a more formal and circumscribed arrangement, say where a coach responds once or twice a week, irrespective of how many emails her client sends. Generally speaking, coaches charge by the month, not by the email or by the week, and of course they let clients know how the arrangement is to work at the beginning of their work together.

Typically, nowadays a client approaches you via email in order to express her interest in working with you. You send her a return email thanking her for her interest and outlining how creativity coaching will work. She replies that she would like to begin and wonders what she should do next. What do you want to say in your next email? Any of the following are reasonable approaches to take, as is a combination of them.

+ You might ask your client to tell you a little bit about herself.

+ You might ask her what's been on her mind.

+ You might ask her to tell you what she thinks she would like to work on.

+ You might ask her to name some things that have gotten in her way in the past, that are currently getting in her way, or that she anticipates will get in her way as the two of you work together. In presenting this you can use words like "blocks," "obstacles," "life circumstances," "problems," etc.

+ You might ask her what she feels is the most important creative work that she wants to get done; if there is any creative work that she has long dreamed of doing; or in some other way give her permission to think about the biggest creative projects on her plate.

+ You might wonder aloud about whether there are any traits that she would like to work on, like confidence, energy, discipline, etc.

+ And of course you would indicate that you are looking forward to your work together.

Here a few approaches to avoid:

+ You probably do not want to ask her if she has any questions or concerns about creativity coaching, if she would like to know a little bit more about you, or make other invitations that deflect her from beginning to think about her creative life.

+ You probably do not want to say too much and burden her with too many things to think about right off the bat.

+ You probably do not want to suggest that some aspect of her life is more interesting to you or more important to discuss than other aspects of her life, unless you genuinely feel that her dreams, say, or her childhood experiences are special material that you intend the two of you to look at. It is likely that whatever you ask a client to pay special attention to she will, so only ask her to focus in a particular direction if you truly believe that such focusing is warranted.

You will want to think through whether you will dream up and offer things for your client to try out, like exercises, tasks, homework, recommendations, etc., or whether you will ask your client to devise her own activities and her own next steps. It is a good rule to use both approaches, occasionally supplying clients with a next step or a few different next steps from which to choose and more often asking clients how they would like to proceed. Since this is a reasonable approach, you may want to build a library of exercises, homework assignments, and the like from which to draw.

You will also want to think through what your general rule will be with regard to whether you will say a lot or a little in each of your email. Usually less is more. When we say a lot that often means that we are showing off, dancing around the fact that we

do not know what to say, engaging in abstract or theoretical niceties, or in some other way not really responding to our client's needs. So being brief (but not curt or abrupt) is often the best policy. There will be times when you feel that you must say a lot--say, when you are trying to pull together various themes or threads or when you want to indicate how one thing in your client's life might be connected to another thing. But usually being brief is the best policy.

The rhythms of email coaching will vary from client to client and with the same client over time. There may be occasions when you and your client email several times in one day (if your arrangements permit this) and other occasions when you don't hear from your client for a week or two. As a general rule, when a client is engaged in the process, not distracted by life circumstances, and not blocked, she will email you more frequently than when creativity and creativity coaching are far from her mind. However, this is only a general rule, and sometimes when a client is working very well she will have no reason to chat with you and will prefer to just keep working.

Similarly, if a client is defending herself against knowing her truth, a feature of her defensiveness may be to bombard you with emails. So, silence is no guarantee that things are going poorly and, conversely, a barrage of emails is not a guarantee that your client is engaged in the process or making progress.

How will you set your email boundaries? The following are some possible ways:

1. Your client can send you as many email as she likes, but you will respond to them only once or twice a week. You might say, "You'll be hearing from me each Tuesday and each Friday" or something along those lines.

2. You and your client email back-and-forth at a set time, on the order of a "chat." (Or you might actually "chat," say via text messages.)

3. You answer your client's email promptly, but she limits herself to sending one email per day.

4. You send your client reminders or brief notes during the week, but you only "really" respond once a week.

5. You answer all of your client's emails. Only if she steps over some line do you reel her in and set additional boundaries.

Many variations and permutations are possible. Your first task is to figure out what sort of basic set-up you want to put into place. I think that a sensible one is to allow your client to send you as many emails as she likes, especially if many of them are of the check-in variety ("I've been writing all day and it feels great!"); and to let her know that you will be replying only, say, twice a week. In the way that I worked in the past, with a combination of phone coaching and email coaching, I did not set any limits on how many emails a client could send and I replied to them as they came in. Nowadays I use the phone and Skype fairly exclusively and maintain only limited email contact with clients.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Are you comfortable using email as a primary mode of communication?

2. What do you see as the pluses and minuses of creativity coaching via email?

3. What guidelines (about number of contacts per week, time that might elapse between receiving an email and responding, and so on) do you think you would want to put into place?

4. Imagine that you are the client. What do you see as the pluses and minuses of email creativity coaching? Given the pluses and minuses, do you think you would be inclined to give it a try as a client?

Lesson 45. Group Coaching

Roughly speaking, there are ten sorts of groups that a creativity coach might facilitate. They are:

1. Support group

A support group is organized around the idea that each of us needs support in the pursuit of our dreams and goals. Generally speaking, participants in a support group take turns each session articulating some challenge or issue and receiving support from the other group members.

In one support group the model might be that each person takes a turn speaking without feedback from the group or from the facilitator, whereas in another group the model might be that after each person speaks the group endeavors to help that person. The advantage of the first model is that everyone gets a chance to speak and speakers are not bombarded with "helpful hints"; the advantage of the second model is that speakers may in fact receive genuinely useful feedback.

2. Process group

In a process group the focus is on noticing process, honoring process, and liberating process. A characteristic process group might be one organized around the

experience of painting, where group members paint on butcher paper taped to the wall and try to "get into the experience" of painting without concern for "making art" or the look of the finished product. After a certain amount of time devoted to this free painting, members might then take turns talking about the experience.

3. Career-oriented group

In this group, the focus is on the career concerns and career goals of group members. The facilitator helps members articulate what they need to do to get ahead in their discipline, explores career-related issues like finding literary agents or handling auditions, and, as a rule, has members set goals each session. At the next session, participants report on the progress they made (or didn't make) and set new goals for themselves, which, if they made little or no progress during the period between sessions, might be a repeat of the goal they set at the previous session.

4. Critique group

In a critique group, members look at each other's work and comment on it. For writing groups, there are two basic models: either members receive the material to be critiqued beforehand and come prepared to discuss the material, or else they receive the material on the spot and use a portion of the session to digest the material. There may be rules as to how the critiquing will proceed (for instance, that every critique will begin with a positive comment) or no special rules beyond those dictated by common sense and common decency.

5. Themed-session group

In a group of this sort, the facilitator takes charge of providing a starting point for each session, using an exercise, printed materials, a prompt to provoke conversation, etc. He then endeavors to keep the session focused on that theme. One session's theme might be "breaking through blocks," another session's theme might be "what

to do when you hate your current project," etc. Themed-session groups can also function as open drop-in groups: participants come when the theme interests them, without any commitment to ongoing work.

6. Issue-oriented group

A group of this sort focuses on one specific issue, for instance performance anxiety, artists in recovery, artists with chronic fatigue, blocks and procrastination, etc. The facilitator may do some teaching and provide printed materials, a text may be used, and members may set weekly goals with respect to the issue in question. Such a group may even venture into the world on occasion, for instance to attend a performance of a member who is working to overcome stage fright or to attend a lecture by an authority in the field.

7. Program group

A group of this sort is based on a program, in the manner of twelve-step programs or weight loss programs. The program may be an existing non-proprietary program, one designed by the facilitator, or one franchised from the program's owner. The advantages of a program group for the facilitator who designs his own program are several-fold: he will have a unique product, gain name recognition, and likely produce a book or manual that adds to his revenue.

8. Text-based group

A text-based group makes use of a published work and covers a certain amount of the book (usually a chapter) at each session. Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* is the text most often used in creativity groups, with other books (like my own *Fearless Creating*) being employed more infrequently. Text-based groups work well on the Internet, where participants have a common bond and common reference point that makes up somewhat for their lack of personal contact.

9. Collaboration group

In a collaboration group, members work together on a jointly designated task. They may write a mystery novel together, paint a mural together, or band together to secure better rights for freelance writers. Many artists' collectives are in essence leaderless collaboration groups, where joint interests (like maintaining a space) and joint projects (like annual art sales) require the collaborative good will and energy of the group's members.

10. Healing group

A healing group takes as its main focus alleviating the pain and suffering of group members. Participants share their experiences and begin to heal as a result of ventilating feelings and telling their truth in a safe environment. Artists who are also incest survivors, children of alcoholics, children of a mentally ill parent, etc., can benefit greatly from a group of this sort, where process takes precedence over goal-setting or problem-solving.

The role of a creativity coach/group facilitator varies depending on the nature of the group. Sometimes the facilitator's primary role is to supply ideas, exercises and material. Sometimes his primary role is to describe the stages or steps of a program and lead members week by week in working the program. Sometimes he is more of a teacher, sometimes more of a consultant, sometimes more of a peer. At all times, he is mindful of the basic requirements of group work: that participants feel fairly treated and safe.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What have your group experiences been like? Have any been particularly successful? If so, why?

2. Describe a creativity group you might start.

3. Describe how you might put the group together and make it a reality.

4. In terms of your own creative life, what would you want from a creativity group? Can you envision one that would serve your needs?

V. Personality Trait Work

Lesson 46. Introducing Personality Trait Work

Creativity coaches can help their clients become more effective, productive creators by suggesting that they focus on one or another of certain personality traits, among them confidence, discipline, concentration, energy, thoughtfulness, assertiveness, resiliency, and persistence, the eight that we will look at in detail in the next eight lessons. In fact, there are more than seventy-five traits that serve creators and focusing on any one of them is potentially valuable in your work with clients.

This longer list of traits includes:

1. Access to emotions

2. Alert to gaps in knowledge

3. Ambitiousness

4. Asks "Why?" questions

5. Assertiveness

6. Breadth of knowledge

7. Calmness (anxiety tolerance)

8. Compassion

9. Concentration

10. Confidence

11. Convergent thinking abilities

12. Copes with novelty

13. Courage

14. Creativity

15. Creativity in a domain

16. Curiosity

17. Decision-making capabilities

18. Depth of knowledge

19. Discipline

20. Divergent thinking abilities

21. Empathy

22. Energy

23. Evaluative abilities

24. Existential outlook

25. Flexibility

26. Honesty

27. Humanitarianism

28. Imagination

29. Ingenuity

30. Intellectual honesty

31. Intellectual playfulness

32. Intelligence

33. Interest in challenges

34. Interest in problems

35. Interest in solutions

36. Intrinsically motivated

37. Introspective stance

38. Intuition

39. Love of beauty

40. Love of complexity

41. Love of doubt

42. Love of freedom

43. Love of goodness

44. Love of language

45. Love of logic

46. Love of mystery

47. Love of simplicity

48. Metaphoric thinking abilities

49. Moral outlook

50. Nonconformity

51. Openness to experience

52. Optimism

53. Originality

54. Passion

55. Patience

56. Persistence

57. Playfulness

58. Presence

59. Questions norms and assumptions

60. Reality-testing abilities

61. Resiliency

62. Risk-taking orientation

63. Self-centeredness

64. Self-direction

65. Self-trust

66. Sense of humor

67. Sensitivity

68. Seriousness

69. Skepticism

70. Spiritual outlook

71. Thoughtfulness

72. Tolerance

73. Tolerance for ambiguity

74. Unconcern with social approval

75. Uses knowledge base

Isolating one of the seventy-five traits and working on it can be a rewarding experience for clients. A client could focus on becoming a better risk-taker, for example, focusing on just that trait for a period of time and inventing exercises and tasks that help her take new risks. She could decide to tackle a project whose bigness frightens her, make the risky-feeling decision of committing to completing the project come hell or high water, and in the process risk ridicule, embarrassment, or

indifference. She might never tackle such an enormous project except in the context of "working on risk-taking."

Generally speaking, clients will tend to manifest "too little" of each trait and will hope to manifest "more" of the traits they single out to work on. The typical client will want to manifest more courage, more discipline, more imagination, more passion, and so on. However, a given client may need to manifest "less" of a certain trait: for example, if her skepticism has slid into nihilism, her energy has crossed into mania, or her necessary self-direction has inclined toward unhealthy narcissism. So, the rule is not that every client needs "more" of all seventy-five traits but rather that each client needs the "right amount" of each trait and the "right integration" of all seventy-five traits.

You can present clients with this entire list and wonder aloud if there are some traits on the list that they would like to work on. Since all of these traits are clearly important to a creative life, clients who read this list for the first time will be inclined to say, "I should work on all of them!" and naturally feel overwhelmed and stymied by the prospect. Lists that are as long as this one are almost invariably daunting and even downright unhelpful, as the last thing any of us needs is to feel that so much stands between us and manifesting our creative nature.

Therefore it is generally a better idea to make it a habit to check on a certain number of these traits, say three or four, as a routine matter (that is, check in with all clients as to whether they feel confident enough, disciplined enough, and calm enough to create), to wait until you "hear" a trait come up in your work with clients (that is, to stop a client as soon as you hear that she is not feeling "confident enough" to proceed and single out that trait to work on), or to do both (that is, to regularly check in with clients on a short list of traits and pursue work on additional traits as they make their presence known).

Perhaps a client would like to work on "becoming more optimistic" so that she can nip depressions before they occur. Perhaps she would like to "work on assertiveness"

so that she can forestall the panic attacks that strike her when she auditions or when she tries to talk to gallery owners. Perhaps she would like to "work on resiliency" now rather than when the rejection letters start arriving. In this way clients can be helped to think about working on certain personality traits "before they are desperately needed."

It is also possible that you will not name these personality traits out loud as you work with clients. You may not have a good reason or a good opening to say, "I think we should work on your lack of a sense of humor" or "I fear your skepticism has plummeted you into an existential depression." You may never voice the direct connection you believe exists between your client's trait insufficiencies and her inability to create or between your client's trait excesses and the unruliness of her life. What is important is that *you yourself* make these connections, even if you never directly share your hypotheses with clients.

For example, your client may seem to rely too heavily on authority--on you, on a book she has read, on a religious figure, on some theory--and this may suggest to you that she is "insufficiently self-directing." Instead of saying anything to her about self-direction as a personality trait or about the harmfulness of insufficient self-direction, you might work indirectly on the issue by, for example, engaging in an in-session role play where she is "the director" and you are "waiting to receive her directions." Any of the seventy-five personality traits on the list can be worked on obliquely and metaphorically with clients, if a frontal approach strikes you as inappropriate.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. "Personality trait" is a metaphor. Is there some other metaphor that you would prefer to use in your work with clients, rather than "personality trait"? If so, what is the rationale for your choice?

2. As an exercise, try to "cluster" these seventy-traits into a more manageable number of traits, say eight, ten, or twelve. This will give you a sense of which traits "go" with which other traits.

3. Describe in a paragraph what the ideal "balance" or "integration" of personality traits might look like in an effective and mentally healthy creator.

4. Do some of these traits leap out at you as traits that you would like to work on in your own life? If so, describe how to would coach yourself with respect to the personality traits you name.

Lesson 47. Confidence

Most people tend to recognize that they do not feel as confident as they would like to feel. However, this recognition is often obscured by the fact that they may feel quite confident about some aspects of their life and fairly confident about some others. They may work a day job where they supervise a dozen people or handle a budget of millions of dollars and feel confident about their ability to manage employees, get projects done on time, handle the never-ending interpersonal and practical problems that arise in the typical workplace, and so on. Therefore, when it comes time to create and they can't, they are not likely to identify "lack of confidence" as the issue, since, for most of their day, they are acting confidently (or at least managing to look confident).

Consequently, it is a good idea to remind clients that a lack of confidence may well be an issue for them even if they feel confident in some areas of their life. This lack of confidence is a personality trait issue, not a transient state or a lack of some skill, and represents an erosion of their natural willingness to write, draw, think, and so on, an

erosion that has occurred because they have grown fearful of making mistakes, revealing themselves, and taking risks. They have become afraid and one manifestation of that fear is a lack of confidence.

You can introduce the idea of "working on confidence" by saying something like the following:

"Hi, Mary. You indicate that you're having trouble getting your novel started and seem to feel that the problem is your lack of a good idea for a novel. I wonder if the problem might be something else. Maybe you don't really feel confident about starting a novel at this time? Many people are less confident about launching a big creative project than they realize, so I find that taking a look at confidence is generally a good idea. Should we do that?"

If your client replies in the affirmative and asks, "What should we do?", you can try any of the following:

1. You might ask her, "What would you never dare to do?" When she replies, "I would never dare to think of myself as a good writer" or "I would never dare to write a novel unless I had a clear idea of the plot and the characters," you could reply, "Can you dare yourself to do exactly that?" If she reluctantly agrees, you would then help her understand what "taking the dare" means: that she is obliged to begin thinking of herself as a good writer, concretely by saying out loud "I am a good writer" many times a day, or that she is obliged to actually begin her novel, even though she has no clear idea of its plot or characters.

If she replies that she can't do such a thing, you might ask her why she can't. She may reply, "Because I'm embarrassed," "Because I'm afraid," or "I don't know why." Whatever her precise answer, the fact that she can't call herself a good writer or begin her novel speaks volumes to both of you. Her reluctance provides you with the opportunity to reaffirm that a lack of confidence seems to be an issue in her life and

that you would like her to continue focusing on "meeting her own dare" until she succeeds.

2. You might introduce the metaphor of "leader and follower" and explain that creators are by necessity leaders of a certain sort, at the very least as the champion of their own ideas, efforts, and products. While "participation" is a necessary component of a creative life, so is "leadership." What anxieties arise in your client when she imagines herself as a leader? Does she have permission from herself to be a leader? Has she had sufficient opportunities to lead? Does she see her creative efforts as "leadership opportunities"? In this way you can connect the ideas of "confidence" and "leadership" and suggest that effective creators are those who regularly manifest leadership qualities.

3. You might introduce the metaphor of "student" and "teacher" and explain that while every artist must be a dedicated student, learning from other artists and from those who have gone before her, she must also be a dedicated teacher, teaching herself by working in her medium and teaching others by sharing her products. Is your client comfortable wearing the mantle of "teacher"? You might suggest that she "teach you" about her current work-in-progress, about what makes for a good art marketing plan, about what distinguishes a strong novel synopsis from a weak one, etc.

A proven way to grow more confident is to teach, for in order to teach you must organize your thoughts and by doing that learn, sometimes for the first time, what it is that you actually think. You can invite your client to begin thinking of herself as a teacher and/or to start literally teaching: teaching herself a new technique, teaching you about her ideas, or teaching others via her work. You might also articulate the notion that your client "knows enough already" to do whatever she is hoping to do and that whatever isn't known to her is best learned by doing: that she will want to "teach herself" whatever it is she needs to know.

All of the following are confidence-builders, so you can work indirectly on building a client's confidence by having her set as her goal:

+ taking risks

+ completing projects

+ finding marketplace advocates

+ creating every day (or almost every day)

+ listening to her intuition

+ planning and following through

+ creating work that pleases her

A great many people lack the confidence required of them to create and to advocate for their creations. Putting this issue compassionately but directly on the table can spur clients to begin to recognize the ways in which that their lack of confidence inhibits them and it can motivate them to act more confidently even when they aren't feeling particularly confident.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you present the matter of "confidence" (or a "lack of confidence") to clients?

2. Create one exercise designed to help clients "gain confidence."

3. To what extent is a lack of confidence an issue in your own life?

4. If a lack of confidence is a significant issue in your own life, how would you coach yourself to greater confidence? Describe in detail your personal plan for growing in confidence.

Lesson 48. Discipline

There is everyday discipline and then there's "creator's discipline." A person who practices yoga every morning, attends to all her chores, is never late for appointments, keeps her checkbook balanced, and in small and large ways maintains everyday discipline may or may not be able to work on her symphony in a regular, disciplined way, as that effort requires another sort of discipline altogether. Indeed, someone who appears quite disciplined in her everyday life may be frightened of chaos and unwilling to make mistakes and messes, in which case she will be a candidate for creative blockage and unlikely to manifest the special discipline required of creative people.

Because most creators are not aware of the distinction between everyday discipline and creator's discipline, they tend to throw out the baby with the bath water and argue that they have no need for discipline, that discipline is hampering, constricting, and somehow anti-creative. What they actually mean is that everyday discipline is problematic. Once a creativity coach points out the distinction and assures them that everyday discipline is not the goal--they don't have to become expert dieters, model employees, or exercise pros, unless those also happen to be their goals--then clients are likely to embrace the idea that acquiring "creator's discipline" is a good thing.

What is "creator's discipline"? The discipline necessary to tolerate the anxiety associated with creating, return to your creative projects regularly, and "hold" your current project all the time, even when you are doing other things. The short-order cook who lets the hamburger she's cooking burn because she is thinking about a scene in her current screenplay has lots of creator's discipline, though her boss may call her undisciplined. The academic with a messy study and no interest in cleaning it, because his mind is entirely on his current research, has lots of creator's discipline, although his landlady may call him undisciplined. It is overstating matters to say that we must be undisciplined in certain aspects of our life in order to maintain creator's discipline; but saying such a thing is not overstating matters by much.

A creative person needs to feel disciplined with respect to her creative work. A lack of discipline in that regard is experienced as a painful problem. But the same person is less likely to feel a need to be disciplined in other ways, believing the discipline of the accountant or administrator petty and valueless. So we need to draw a distinction between "creator's discipline" and everyday discipline and recognize that there are four and not two excesses and insufficiencies to consider: too much and too little creator's discipline, and too much and too little everyday discipline.

"Too much" creator's discipline plays itself out as workaholism. "Too much" everyday discipline plays itself out as obsessions with rules, schedules, standards, orderliness, etc., and workaholism of a different sort. The first person works twenty hours a day on her documentary film, running up a huge credit card debt on stimulants alone, or practices her dancing more than any other dancer in class so as to master the steps and make them beautiful. In neither case is there any time left for life. The second person also works late into the night but dutifully, fearfully, and even angrily, on work brought home from the office or on household chores instead of on the long-ago abandoned novel she meant to write.

In working with "too much" creator's discipline, you might wonder aloud if your client considers life meaningless when she isn't working on a creative project in a relentless, full-time way, and, if so, whether she can revision "empty time" as periods

of renewal, times to enjoy some intimacy, or opportunities for new meaning-making. This idea can be presented as part of a discussion about the virtues of balance, about how "useful breaks" and "unstructured days" have their place in a mentally healthy life. You can also make the distinction between being "engrossed" in your work and being "obsessed" by your work. Healthy obsessions are fine and even necessary, but so are real breaks from those obsessions.

If your client feels disciplined with regard to her creative efforts but undisciplined in other areas of her life, suggest that she think of discipline as a "transferable skill" that can be applied to any activity. If this frame is rejected, you might wonder aloud whether she really cares very much about maintaining discipline with respect to paying the bills or getting timely oil changes. The coaching work may turn out to be about "caring more"--about locating reasons why discipline in non-creative areas is even worth bothering about--rather than about maintaining discipline per se.

In working with the second shadow issue, "too much" everyday discipline, you might make a distinction between "discipline in one's own service" and "discipline in the service of others," angling toward the idea that your client's "disciplined efforts" at her day job, in maintaining a clean house, or in seeing that her children get their homework done, may be primarily anxiety-binding maneuvers. You might connect this to the observation that her ability to work in a disciplined way does not seem to extend her own creative efforts and wonder aloud whether the same anxiety that produces discipline at work prevents it in the studio.

Most clients will not present too much creative discipline or too much everyday discipline as the problem they are facing. Most will feel that they are too undisciplined, both with respect to everyday matters and with respect to their creative efforts. With these clients, you might:

+ Frame coaching as a "disciplined effort" in its own right and wonder aloud, "What shape should our disciplined work of coaching take?" You might connect this to the idea of your client beginning a "disciplined writing program," a "disciplined marketing

program," etc., taking every opportunity to insert the word "discipline" into the way you frame your work together.

+ You might maintain a focus on "routine." Your undisciplined client is likely to argue either that she can't keep to a routine or else that she doesn't like the idea of a routine, but you might respond that routines are not boring or anti-creative but are really "sacred rituals." You might suggest that she create a weekly or monthly schedule, penciling in periods of creative work, time for relationships, time for joy, time for daydreaming, etc., and that she take her schedule as seriously as she would take "any real commitment."

+ Shift the focus from "personal discipline" to "doing what the work requires." You might suggest to your client that she not strive for discipline for its own sake, but rather because her work "deserves" it or "requires" it. In keeping with this theme, you might investigate what kind of attention her novel or symphony actually does require--everyday attention, twice-a-day attention, full days every weekend, etc.

FOOR FOR THOUGHT.

1. Create a short three- or four-point "program for increasing creator's discipline" that you can present to clients.

2. Do you see a difference between "everyday discipline" and "creator's discipline"? If you do, try to articulate the difference.

3. Is a lack of discipline an issue in your own life? Is it more a lack of everyday discipline, creator's discipline, or both?

4. If a lack of discipline is an issue in your own life, how would you like to begin addressing it?

Lesson 49. Concentration

Concentration can be defined as focusing your mind on the task at hand. The chess player, research chemist, sculptor, or science writer who intends to concentrate demands that her brain settle down and focus. She also demands of her body that it stay put and become an instrument in the service of her senses. Her potential energy must be canalized, because she can't release her pent-up energy in a physical way. The necessity of canalizing energy, of releasing energy but also staying put, helps explain the quirks of the concentrating person: why she may scratch her head raw, why she may need complete silence or music of a certain sort, why she may need strong coffee or herb tea by her side at all times, and so on.

Concentration has about it a vigilant quality, as one fends off distractions and strives to focus. It also has an obsessional quality about it, as one gets progressively more caught up in a chain of thought. Third, there is a meditative quality about it, producing the lost look of the absorbed thinker caught up in the trance of working. This complicated, intense state is hard on the body, which explains why most people want to avoid it and are unwilling or unable to concentrate for very long periods of time. Sometimes concentrating for even five or ten minutes is more than a person can manage.

Concentration is the mind at work. Some people run their minds hard and well, thinking deeply, gestating and elaborating ideas, and turning their ideas into theories, books, or performances. This is the path of good concentration. Other people run their minds hard but in a narrow and exclusionary way, allowing too little life in. This is the path of narrow concentration. Others run their minds hard but veer off into unproductive obsessions, delusions, and other unwanted paths. This is the path of

misguided concentration. Most people simply do not use their minds enough. This is the path of insufficient concentration.

If you suspect that your client is able to concentrate but tends to concentrate too narrowly--on the trees but never on the forest, on a single element of a research project but not on other relevant parts, on one way of proceeding to the exclusion of other possible choices—you might check in (very delicately!) to see if your client's narrow focus is in fact a defense deeper thinking and more authentic living. Is your client's fine ability to concentrate on her thousand-page annotated bibliography, spending days at a time hunting down this or that obscure reference, masking significant problems? Is his intense concentrating in a narrow channel a defense against looking in the mirror?

If you suspect that your client is able to concentrate but tends to concentrate in a misguided way, you might check to see if he holds "obsession" and "concentration" as rough synonyms. If he does, you might make a distinction between the two, defining the former as an "out of control" intense use of mind and the latter as an "in control" intense use of mind. This distinction needs some refinement, because some obsessions are desirable: that is, the distinction is subtler than between "bad" obsession and "good" concentration (See my book *Brainstorm* for more on this.) Still, you might suggest that obsessions, because of the way they grip the mind, make it very hard for the "gripped" person to concentrate on anything else. If your client has been "obsessed" by a painting for the past year, say, to the exclusion of other important work, you might wonder aloud if there is a way that he can "loosen the grip of that obsession," not so as to be free of the painting but so as to be able to "concentrate on other things that are also important."

Most often, your client will complain of an inability to concentrate. An inability to concentrate can be conceptualized in either of two ways. To use the language of Otto Rank and the existentialists, it might be considered a flight from freedom, which flight forces the mind to dart about and never alight. The fear is that alighting will cause an unwanted confrontation with the self. Second, an inability to concentrate can be

thought of as an anxiety state, one treatable with breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, cognitive coping skills like thought blocking and thought stopping, or some other anxiety management skill that creativity coaches can learn to teach.

A combination of these two approaches works best. You provide the frame that concentration is a vital feature of self-actualization and requires an acceptance of the responsibilities of freedom. You also suggest that he will have to learn to manage the anxieties associated with this freedom. In this regard, you can introduce one or more anxiety management skills, starting with a guided visualization you create that your client can use whenever he wants to "enter the trance of working."

As a rule, you will want to listen for phrases like "I can't think" or "I don't like concentrating," interrupt your client when you hear such a phrase, and suggest that self-talk of that sort is probably interfering with her ability to concentrate. In the next breath, you can teach thought stopping and thought substitution. "I enjoy concentrating," "I enjoy thinking," or "I enjoy using my mind" are some thought substitutes or affirmations that can be presented as counters to negative self-talk like "I can't concentrate" or "I must have attention deficit disorder."

You might also investigate whether "obstacles to concentrating" existed in your client's childhood. Were threats of quarrels in the air? Was there too little privacy? Was your client discounted or made to feel anxious? Did family members sit for hours at a time engrossed in work that required them to concentrate? If not, is it possible that a lack of modeling left a lasting impression? If in fact it left a lasting impression, you might ask if your client now wants to "model for himself" what concentration might look like.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Create a guided visualization that will help clients "enter the trance of working."

2. Decide which anxiety management techniques you want to teach to clients and prepare yourself to teach them.

3. How would you characterize "concentration" and "obstacles to concentrating" in your own language?

4. With respect to your creative life, do you concentrate well? If not, what would you like to try to help yourself do a better job of concentrating?

Lesson 50. Energy

It is not at all clear what energy, passion, vitality, drive, desire, or the life force are; or what distinctions we would want to make among these related but different concepts. There is a whole literature just on "libidinal energy" and the "fixation" of that energy, a literature that tends to treats energy as an amount and that speculates on the ways that amount is captured, arrested, or reduced as a result of unresolved conflicts. Another literature concerns itself with mania and a third with obsessions, phenomena that look to be other aspects of energy.

We are hard-pressed to know what we are talking about when we talk about something as central to existence but also as mysterious as "the life force." And yet we assess with regard to it every day, formally or informally, as we sit with a person who looks drained of energy or practically on fire; as we try to make sensible distinctions between fine obsessions and mad obsessions; as we try to decide whether what we are seeing is the energy of love or the energy of possession. However, despite our troubles in understanding it, energy in its best aspects--as aliveness, life interest, passion, and so in--is what we intend to nurture, encourage, and support in our clients and in ourselves.

To be creative is to be energetic: to be passionate, alive, optimistic, full of curiosity. Whatever kills energy kills creativity and whatever addles energy and transforms it into bad mania, madness, or some other altered state takes a terrible toll on the meaning-making capabilities of a creator. The presence of energy is the best proof that an individual considers life worth living; that same energy, deformed by inner demons or chemistry, becomes the fuel for uncontrolled mania, compulsivity, and even madness.

The sorts of deformities of energy that we see on a regular basis in working with creative individuals are fixations, obsessions, manias and other "weird passions of the mind"; and dramas, compulsions, reckless acts, and other "weird passions of the body." If you sense that you are dealing with the "shadow side" of energy in your work with a client, you might:

+ Ask aloud if your client can conceive of a way of standing in "right relationship" to his obsessions and compulsions, despite the fact that they feel so powerful and uncontrollable. Is it "necessary" to obsess about his next-door neighbor and draft her love letters, is it "necessary" to become fixated on a certain unavailable brand of watercolor paper (whose unavailability makes painting impossible), is it "necessary" to obsess about all the acting roles one has lost to that certain special rival? At the beginning, it is highly unlikely that your client will gain much control over these unfortunate passions, or even show much interest in trying, but planting this seed about "right relationship" may reap benefits down the line.

+ Present the idea of "teasing apart energy and anxiety," with an eye toward having your client eliminate those "energetic activities" that are rooted in anxiety and, ultimately, attaining something like "calm wildness" or "measured passion." A metaphor like "calm wildness," which captures something of the paradoxical, complicated nature of the balance being sought, is often therapeutic in its own right. Part of the task of helping a client "effectively make meaning" is arriving at metaphors that are themselves rich in meaning.

The opposite of energy is deadness. Deadness takes many forms but the four most common are depression, fatigue, self-suppression, and conformity. This may seem like a strangely matched quartet, but conformity and self-suppression are "deadened" states just as surely as depression and fatigue are. If your client reports a lack of energy, passion, or vitality, or if you sense this lack, you might:

+ Wonder aloud if depression is present and, if your client says that it is, strongly suggest that he seek medical or therapeutic help. At the same time, you can hold this lack of energy as a temporary state and make suggestions that you think sensible: for example, you can invite your client to work on loving himself better, loving another person, or loving a creative project picked for its meaningfulness.

+ Dissect the meaning of "fatigue" in your client's life, perhaps by inquiring about what part of his "tiredness" or "low energy" seems psychological and what part biological. You might also wonder aloud if your client has "an investment" in his fatigue being purely physical, as a result of overwork, busyness, biochemical imbalances, "chronic fatigue syndrome," and so on, rather than psychological or emotional. This is of course a tender area of inquiry and a good working relationship is a prerequisite for this sort of investigation.

+ Educate your client on the possible relationship between conformity and deadness, possibly using a metaphor like "learned tameness"; and plan out (and perhaps rehearse) some conformity-busting behaviors. You might ask a question like, "What small, wild, energizing thing would you like to do this week?" You can also investigate if your client is holding any social, cultural, or familial injunctions against displaying passion, which investigation would also help underscore the relationship among conformity, lost energy, and unrealized creative potential.

+ Draw an analogy between "immune system suppression" and "making an opening for disease," on the one hand, and "self-suppression" and "making an opening for depression," on the other hand. There are many other metaphors you might use with

regard to the important issue of self-suppression--"speaking up" versus "remaining silent," "standing tall" versus "shrinking," "opening up" versus "shutting down," and so on.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How do you conceptualize "human energy"?

2. What distinctions would you make among energy, passion, life force, drive, desire, mania, and other terms in this family group?

3. What reduces your own energy and/or prevents you from being passionate?

4. What have you learned to do to restore your energy and/or your passion?

Lesson 51. Thoughtfulness

Thoughtfulness is not the same as either intelligence or concentration. A given intelligent person may have no stake in ideas and may avoid them at all costs, while another intelligent person may think hard and well but only in a narrow way. Similarly, a person may be able to concentrate but may have no real love of ideas or of life. The thoughtful person is not only intelligent and not only able to focus, calculate, and concentrate. Much more importantly, she is interested in life and in human affairs, takes a broad view, and is committed to going deep.

The thoughtful person is comfortable with ideas and generates her own ideas. She not only can tolerate solitude, but she loves it; in solitude, her imagination can be

exercised, fantasies can be spun, ideas can be generated, and creation can occur. This love of solitude and high comfort level with thinking produce an introspective person, one who tends to look inward and who, as a general rule, prefers her own company to the company of others.

The thoughtful person is also intellectually playful and an original thinker. Intellectual playfulness is exactly the joyous use of mind: telling stories, solving intellectual puzzles, enjoying what the brain can do. Originality is likewise nothing more than the product of a brain that is really working. The thoughtful person enjoys thinking and produces original work as straightforwardly as an apple tree produces apples.

The "overly" thoughtful is susceptible to social isolation, unwanted obsessions, and an avoidance of real life. For her, little outside of the mind may feel real, relationships may feel superficial and insubstantial, experiences that might foster growth are often missed, and information that might lead to a better understanding of the world is rarely let in. In working with the problem of "too much" thoughtfulness, you might suggest to your client that she focus away from "thinking activities" and toward doing, living, and relating. Special emphasis might be placed on "seeking opportunities to relate" and on "seeking opportunities to get out of your head." You might also suggest small "homework assignments in the real world": calling up an old friend, being of service, doing a physical thing, or joining in with others on some shared task.

A second shadow side of "too much" thoughtfulness is mania. The exuberance of a mind teeming with ideas can make for mild mania, a mania that, like all manias, has an anxious edge to it. Hovering nearby is the specter of disappointment, since it is impossible to take all of one's bristling ideas to fruition. John Ruskin described this particular mania in the following way: "I am almost sick and giddy with the quantity of things in my head, all tempting and wanting to be worked out." Robert Lowell described his mania in the following way: "I was overcome by an attack of pathological enthusiasm."

In working with this shadow issue, you might wonder aloud about the "limits of the human" and about what happens if a person tries to "overstep those limits." In this connection, you might discuss co-creating a plan for "quieting the mind" and investigate what strategies your client has so far found effective in "dealing with a million teeming thoughts." You can also suggest that your client "work on calmness" and reframe the issue as "insufficient calmness," rather than as "too much thoughtfulness."

zA third shadow side of thoughtfulness is the obsessive quality of real thought. When you have a deep intuition about something--about the motion of planets, about evolution, about how a cast of characters can be made to reveal a big truth about human nature--you naturally feel compelled to "get at" and "get to" that intuition, to pursue it, grab it, articulate it, and realize it, which compulsion leads to an altogether worthy but still dangerous attitude of obsession. You might work with this issue by wondering aloud if your client can tell you what activities constitute "appropriate breaks from obsessing." Can she "put an idea on hold," letting it incubate or rest, and attend to other matters that have value in their own right?

A fourth shadow side of thoughtfulness has to do with getting "far ahead" of others, intellectually speaking, and becoming alienated, misunderstood, and even victimized as a result. If you are doing something new, because your lively thinking has lead you to realize something others do not yet realize--that the earth revolves around the sun, that a plunging perspective makes for an exciting visual encounter, that the turbulence in a liquid flow is as interesting as the regularity of that flow--you are in danger of making enemies and being dismissed out of hand.

In working with this issue, you might wonder aloud about the requirements of leadership and suggest that having the best ideas or the right ideas may be only one element of leadership. A second, equally important element might involve "effectively selling your ideas in the marketplace." How might that be accomplished? Are there skills of diplomacy and networking to learn? Is your client willing to entertain the idea that he or she must "sell" as well as "think"? You might also carefully suggest

that there may be grief work to do. Your client may have no choice but to lead a martyr's life. If that happens, what will help mend her broken heart? How will she cope with criticism, rejection, or dismissal? How can a "good, humane life" be mapped out even though no one believes you when you say that the earth is round?

More often you will be dealing with "too little" thoughtfulness and not "too much." How might this insufficiency arise? The reasons are many: a desire to avoid the anxiety that arises when we try to think, a fear of our own thoughts, a lack of permission to be quiet and "do nothing" (as if thinking were nothing!), a fear that our thoughts are boring or inconsequential, a lack of motivation as a consequence of seeing no particular use for thinking, and so on.

In trying to increase a client's thoughtfulness, you might:

+ Begin by wondering out loud if your client finds thinking "safe." Do "inner demons" invade her solitude, "inner demons" like negative self-talk, messages about incompetence or a lack of talent, etc., and might an "exorcism" be attempted, one meant to make solitude a safer place? If this metaphor rings false, you might focus instead on "growing quiet," "getting the mind off auto scan," or some other idea designed to help produce a better "holding environment" for thinking.

+ Point out the crucial distinction between "thinking" and "worrying." Most people, when they "think they are thinking," are only worrying. They sit down to write their novel but do not think about their novel; they worry about its reception or about whether it will ever get written. They sit down to think about the interpretation they would like to give to the sonata they have chosen to perform, but worry instead about the fast passages and their memory failing. You might ask your client to notice to what extent this is true in her own case. Insofar as it is true, she might want to "refocus" on the project itself--on the plot and the characters, on the meaning in the music--and not on worries about the project.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. How would you characterize "thoughtfulness"?

2. Describe one exercise or strategy you might use to help clients become more thoughtful.

3. Try to answer the following to your own satisfaction: "Why is thinking regularly experienced as a stressful, fearful activity?"

4. Is a lack of thoughtfulness an issue in your own life? If it is, how might you self-coach yourself to increased thoughtfulness?

Lesson 52. Assertiveness

Every writer with a point to make, every singer with high notes to hit, every sculptor with a slab of marble to chisel, and every director with technicians to manage and actors to coax, must assert his or her will in order to succeed. That assertion of will may be presented in honey-coated tones or it may be presented tyrannically; but in whatever way it is presented, a creative person really must be able to say "Yes!" and "No!", clearly and in no uncertain terms, in order to make bold cuts in stone or a hundred dancers move just so.

That same assertiveness is required in a thousand small ways every day of a creative person's life. Every sentence of a good query letter is an assertion about what the writer can deliver and about the worth of the writer's product. To make a character come to life in an audition, an actor must assert that the character might drawl like

this or limp like that. The sculpting of self-effacing-seeming miniatures, when everyone is producing work on a monumental scale, is its own kind of assertion, as is simply getting to the studio or the computer every day.

Some creators are too assertive, making them cruel and grandiose. A larger number are too meek, rendering them weak and indecisive. In working with a client whom you deem to be too assertive, you may have to take certain risks, be assertive yourself, and speak clearly and directly about what's on your mind. A too-assertive client may steam roll your oblique and indirect approach and may really need you to speak your mind, as a clear, forceful message may be the only message that will penetrate.

You might also try to discover what injuries have helped cause your client to defend himself so aggressively. Your client may have named these injuries in passing but discounted their importance. Yes, his father was cold and his mother was indifferent, but so what? Should he cry over spilt milk? You might suggest that crying over spilt milk is exactly what's wanted. Better to feel the pain, you might continue, rather than take his revenge on every unsuspecting person who crosses his path.

Since there is anger and even rage fueling this over-aggressiveness, and since rage and violence go hand-in-hand, you might introduce "violence" as a metaphor and wonder whether your client would like to "reduce the violence" in his life. If this turns out to be a fruitful avenue, you might begin by teaching a simple technique like taking time outs, so that your client can, first, identify when anger is welling up in him, and, second, consciously decide whether he really wants to attack.

However, most creators--and especially most would-be creators--are too tame and not too aggressive. In working with a client's lack of assertiveness, a good approach is to suggest that he or she "grow wilder." Is your client willing to sing in the supermarket or write poetry in the middle of a school fundraiser? How would she define "growing wilder"? What seems especially dangerous about "wildness" and what can be done to make it seem less scary?

In this connection, you can also teach anxiety-management skills, like discharge techniques, systematic desensitization, or the affirmation process. You can then tie the anxiety management skill your client is learning to a specific goal by, for instance, co-creating a set of steps that your client can follow each day to reduce the anxiety associated with "wildly painting" or "wildly writing."

Another consequence of a lack of sufficient assertiveness is a passive-aggressive withdrawal from the creative arena. The promising painter becomes a shoemaker, the promising musician becomes a bicycle repairman, and each looks content enough in his respectable, not-very-well-paid job. But right under the surface are regrets, rage, and a penchant for stifling the creativity of others. Indeed, it is often the creative mate of this passive-aggressive person who seeks coaching and complains of being subtly undermined by her mate. With her, you might suggest that she fully air and honor her resentment and investigate to what extent her mate is more an albatross than a support.

You can help clients become more assertive in any of the following ways:

+ By providing risk-taking exercises.

+ By articulating the differences between assertiveness and aggressiveness.

+ By examining the relationships among self-trust, self-direction, and "necessary" assertiveness.

+ By identifying and underlining the role anxiety plays in a lack of assertiveness.

+ By identifying family rules against assertiveness (e.g., girls must not make demands).

+ By identifying negative memories associated with assertiveness (e.g., that your client's family members who were assertive were also cruel and dangerous).

+ By examining what specific dangers your client associates with acting assertively. If she can be helped to name these dangers, she is likely to see that they are not that terrifying once they are exposed to the light of day.

+ By asking your client to "assert something."

+ By suggesting that your client do something that she would "never dream of doing," like cold-calling a literary agent, walking into a gallery unannounced and showing her slides, applying for a spot at a prestigious writers' residency, writing a symphony, etc.

+ By suggesting that your client "rehearse in her own mind" the steps that she would need to take in order to act more assertively with respect to some specific issue, like asking her mate to remove his clutter from her work space or chatting with her editor about his marketing plans for her novel.

+ By underlining the relationship between assertiveness and courage.

+ By asking what "small steps" your client might want to take toward greater assertiveness and by reminding her that any small step she actually takes will reap significant rewards.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. Articulate the differences between assertiveness and aggressiveness.

2. How might you help someone you deem to be "too assertive"?

3. How might you help someone you deem to be "too tame"?

4. What are your own issues with respect to assertiveness?

Lesson 53. Resiliency

In the middle of a pogrom vigilantes confronted the Jewish painter Mark Chagall as he crossed a bridge. They demanded of him, "Are you a Jew?" The youthful Chagall responded, "I am not!" Of course, this moment of self-protective dishonesty requires no explanation or defense. But how exactly does a person "bounce back" from complicated traumas of this sort? It seems possible and even likely that Chagall spent his whole lifetime as a painter unaware of what he was doing as he "identified with the aggressor" by incorporating Christian imagery into his Jewish paintings. His moment on that bridge, a moment from which he may never have bounced back, may have had everything to do with his recurrent Christian imagery.

We all receive blows from which we must bounce back and recover. In school we fail some tests, in the job market we sometimes do not get hired, in the arena of relationships we are not always loved. However, creative individuals--because of the work they do, because of the nature of the art marketplace, and because of the demands put upon them by the culture--will receive more blows than the person who charts a more conventional course. The working writer, to take one example, is bound to receive every manner of criticism, from the compassionate and good-natured to the ruthless and insulting, and these wounds, even if they are mitigated by an occasional success, will still leave their scars.

Even though we manage to "bounce back" from most setbacks and disappointments, it is also the case that we begin to change as a result of them. Your story is rejected. Because you are resilient, you send it out again. Once again it is rejected. Once again you send it out. Once again it is rejected. What begins to happen? You start to grow sour and despairing. You may start to call yourself worthless and stupid and begin to settle for too little. So, the ideal of resiliency is not only to be able to bounce back from the many blows inflicted upon us but also to be able to identify the bruises those blows have caused, bruises which regularly surface as negative self-talk.

Occasionally a person may manifest what might be called "too much" resiliency, which is more likely a stubborn defensiveness that allows the individual to persist despite the many blows she receives. She is likely to begin to repeat behaviors and adopt attitudes which do not really serve her but which she repeats because she refuses to knuckle under. Refusing to bow to the marketplace, she writes another "difficult" novel or composes another "difficult" score, as much because she "refuses to be broken" as for any other reason. A tremendous resiliency is being manifested here but so is a stubborn defensiveness that is as unfortunate as it is understandable.

In working with "too much" resiliency, you might wonder aloud about how your client acquired her thick skin. No doubt she grew it in order to meet the challenges of living that confronted her and the blows that rained down upon her but might she now like to "consciously evolve" in a new direction? You might wonder if her single-minded resiliency has changed her in ways that she doesn't like or about which she is only dimly aware.

You might venture a question like, "How have you changed your shape in order to keep going?" and continue the discussion by wondering if she has gone "too far" in any direction: become "too suspicious," "too curt," "too oppositional," etc. If she agrees that she has adapted in some unfortunate ways, you might suggest that she use her undeniable resiliency and stubborn strength in support of a new vision of how she wants to be.

Of course, more clients will complain of "too little" resiliency and not "too much." However, their problem may be as much too many blows as too little resiliency. Even the self-assured, indefatigable artist can be worn down by a lack of opportunity, a lack of success, and other blows to her self-esteem and her ability to make meaning. So, you might investigate with your client whether the problem is more "the number and nature of the blows she's receiving" or more "a lack of resiliency."

If it seems to be more about the former, you can examine together if there is any way that she might "reduce the number of blows" she is receiving, which o course may or may not be possible. For example, she might send out her novel to one agent at a time rather than to a dozen agents simultaneously, thus reducing the sheer number of rejections she receives. But as this is likely a poor marketing decision, she may need to "risk all those blows" rather than contrive to reduce them. Even if "reducing the number of blows" she is receiving turns out not to be the answer, a discussion of this sort can prove illuminating.

If your client wants to work on "building greater resiliency," you can begin straightforwardly by wondering what "strategies for bouncing back" she already has in place in her life. Can remember a time when she effectively, quickly, or painlessly bounced back from a blow? If she can, what are her thoughts about why that happened? Was her self-talk more positive during that period? Did the goodness of a relationship buffer the blow? Did she have "so many things going on" that this one defeat weighed less heavily? Was she pursuing some activity--a meditation practice, an exercise regimen--that made a difference? Getting these possibilities named will alert your client to the sorts of things that can help her "bounce back" in the future.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What helps people "bounce back" from the blows they receive? List as many possibilities as you can dream up.

2. Think through to what extent "resiliency" and "defensiveness" might be related.

3. How might a person with the added vulnerability of childhood trauma or other significant psychological issues be helped to become "more resilient"?

4. Do you need to become "more resilient" yourself? If so, how might you coach yourself to greater resiliency?

Lesson 54. Persistence

When we see a person continue to work on her screenplay draft after painful draft or still audition after countless rejections, we are witnessing heroic meaning-making in action and the persistence required of a creative person. An evolutionary biologist might argue that this persistence is not wise and that the easier path is conformity, a bevy of children, a good-paying job, and a nice pension. But human beings are not just vehicles for the expression of their genes. They also know that they have potential to realize, dreams to nurture, and meaning to make. In order to matter, they need to manifest a heroic persistence.

A shadow side of this heroic persistence is over-stubbornness. It is likely overly-stubborn to try to resume a dance career after a hip transplant and against medical advice, overly-stubborn to write in a genre that has died, overly-stubborn to persist in advocating for a flat earth or against continental drift. Stubborn persistence of this sort may be more a defense against the truth or a display of thoughtless narcissism than persistence for the sake of making meaning.

To work on this shadow side of persistence, you might:

+ Suggest that your client consider learning how to detach, so that she can "let go" of an idea, dream, goal, or plan when it is no longer wise to hold onto it.

+ Wonder aloud if a problem that your client has mentioned--her insomnia, depression, chronic pain, etc.--might possibly be connected to the "adamant" way she holds her tasks. Can she "loosen her grip" on the need to "move painting into the next century" or to "articulate a unified field theory"? The point of this "loosening" is not to give up on the dream but rather to see if such loosening doesn't help, paradoxically enough, to further her goals and resolve her problems.

+ Introduce a phrase like "getting out of the vise grip of your own resolve" and the idea that "persistence can be a double-edged sword" with negative consequences.

Because defensiveness can look like persistence and persistence can look like defensiveness, a creativity coach can't know right off the bat if her client should be supported in her adamant, stubborn path or advised to stop, reflect, and change. Is seven years writing a memoir a persistence to be praised or a defensiveness to be confronted? Is it heroic to still be taking acting classes at fifty, despite not landing a part in a decade, or a defense against admitting that a new creative path might be wiser? You can only know as you work with a client, hear him speak about his path, gauge his ability to test reality and his honesty, and otherwise gain an understanding of his particular story.

Of course, more people will manifest insufficient persistence rather than a too-stubborn persistence. Most people are not persistent enough. Disappointed, harmed by criticism, rejection, and failure, daunted by a lack of success, conflicted about the ultimate value of their creative pursuits, and otherwise undermined in their pursuit of a meaningful life, most people do not fight tooth-and-nail for their dreams and do not persist in the face of the long odds against them. This is the more usual story. In working with this majority, you might:

+ Wonder aloud whether your client holds "persistence" as a taboo quality. Does it represent an assertiveness, independence, or autonomy not permitted in her family-of-origin?

+ Suggest that your client choose something to be "really persistent" about, even to the point of "overdoing it."

+ Frame persistence as a habit and suggest that your client work on becoming "routinely persistent" and "persistent on a daily basis."

+ Suggest that your client's lack of persistence might really be an inability to concentrate; and wonder aloud if she would like to work on blocking out distractions, changing her cognitive landscape, quieting her mind, and otherwise learning to concentrate better.

+ Wonder aloud, "What is meaningful enough to warrant real persistence?" If your client can't answer this question, then you can focus on the meaning problems that are preventing her from manifesting any serious resolve.

+ Work on finding metaphoric language that resonates for your client. Neither "persistence" nor "resolve" may ring a bell with some clients; maybe "hanging tough" or "refusing to give up" might.

Summarizing personality trait work:

1. Certain building blocks must be present if a person is to rise up as a fully creative person.

2. Each of these building blocks has a shadow side. It is possible for a person to manifest "too much" of a quality.

3. Most people, however, manifest trait insufficiencies. A typical client is likely to lack confidence, have trouble concentrating, manifest too little resolve, and so on.

4. A creativity coach can isolate traits to work on. If she notices that an issue can be framed in terms of personality trait work, she can wonder aloud if her client would like to work directly on "building confidence," "concentrating better," "growing more disciplined," and so on.

5. Systems theorists argue that no matter where you intervene in a system, you affect the entire system. This is also true with respect to personality trait work. If you can help a person grow more confident, she will also concentrate better. If you can help her grow more resolute, she will also grow more assertive. Personality trait work, although at first glance atomistic, is in fact holistic: you are working with and on the whole person.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

1. What in a person's upbringing might contribute to a lack of persistence?

2. Given these contributory factors, what strategies might you employ to help someone become more persistent?

3. If a lack of persistence is an issue for you, what would you say contributes to the problem?

4. What strategies would you like to try out to help yourself grow more persistent?

Appendix I. How I Begin with Clients

The following is how I begin with a new client.

First, a client gets in contact with me, almost always via email. In response, I say something like, yes, I'm available, please go to my site and pay, and then we'll begin. (I have a "store" on my site where folks can pay.)

If they want to begin, they go to my site and pay. When they pay, I get a notification from Paypal that the payment has been made. I then send my new client the following email with the subject line "Beginning." (Naturally I put the person's first name in the below email <smile>.)

(By the way, this is an example of a template email: that is, an email that you create once and use again and again. Templates emails are very valuable in your coaching practice. They save you all sorts of time and effort, once you've created them.)

**

Hello,

Great to be working with you! I'd like us to begin by doing a little email work leading up to us chatting. If you would, I'd love it if you'd answer the following three questions.

1. Can you start by describing your situation a little? What sort of art do you do, what's been your history with art-making and art-selling, what ups and downs have you experienced, and so on? Please write as little or as much as you like—but enough to give me a starting picture of "where you're at and where you've been."

2. What are your biggest challenges right now, either internal or external, with respect to your creative life?

3. What would you like to accomplish during these next few months with respect to your creative life? Do you maybe have some "minimum goals" and also some "Wow, that would be great!" goals?

I look forward to getting your responses. Take as long as you like but try not to labor too long over this <smile>. And of course, add anything you think is relevant that these three questions don't get at.

Best,

Eric

**

This gets me a ton of information. Sometimes I get a return email with the information in hours and sometimes it takes a week. Sometimes I have to press a little for it. Then, with all that information in hand, I usually will ask a follow-up question or two for clarification—almost always there's something I want to know a little bit more about. And in this way, we begin.

Appendix II. A Self-Assessment Checklist for Writers

(The following self-assessment checklist is designed for writers and writers' issues but can be easily translated into a checklist for any creative person and any creative discipline. Please enjoy playing with this, modifying it, and using it.)

All of these are writers: novelists, poets, playwrights, investigative reporters, science writers, columnists, essayists, self-help nonfiction writers, bloggers, children's book writers, romance writers, mystery writers, television writers, screenwriters—and so on. Folks in this group hold a certain dream, the dream of "being a writer," the dream of writing what they want to write, seeing their words in print, maybe making money from their writing, and maybe even having a career as a writer and living by writing.

Everyone writes—billions of people write email messages and send text messages and all industries require writers who write catalog copy, write marketing copy, work as advertising copywriters or technical writers, and so on. But not everyone has the goal and dream of "being a writer." Folks with that dream have something special in their heart and in their mind. They want to manifest their potential through the written word, they want to have a voice and find their voice, and they want an outlet for their unique vision.

This is their dream—and the source of many of their struggles. When you coach writers, this is the central issue they are presenting: that they have this dream and that countless obstacles are getting in the way of them realizing it.

The following checklist presents many of the issues that confront writers. You can use this checklist as a quick guide to writers' issues and you can also use it as a tool to present to a writer client at the beginning of coaching to help her identify her issues. What you will discover is that most writers will find many items on this list a challenge —that shouldn't surprise you or your client. You will want to assure your client, even as you present her with the list, that this is likely. The idea of this list is not to make

her feel that her path is an impossible one but rather to help her put a name to her issues and to let the two of you know where you might profitably work together.

Self-Assessment Checklist for Writers

Many challenges and obstacles confront writers. Below is a representative sampling of these issues. Check off those that pertain to you and star those that are of special importance or immediate concern. You will want to broach your starred issues with your creativity coach or your creativity self-coach.

You may well find that ALL of the issues listed on this self-assessment checklist are relevant to your writing life some of the time and to some extent. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise you that you may be doing a lot of checking! Try not to extrapolate from that truth that you are in any special trouble. Lists of this sort are always daunting and discouraging—ANY list of life challenges feels daunting and discouraging. Simply explain to yourself that you are committed to paying attention to your writing life and that this self-assessment is part of that commitment.

If you are working with a coach, you might want to single out two or three issues that seem most pressing to you, help your coach understand how the issue manifests and what you think you might like to do about addressing it, and invite your coach to help you implement (and/or supplement) your plan.

Existential Issues

_____ Not believing that your writing matters.

_____ Not believing that anything matters.

_____ Not feeling like your writing reaches the level of meaning.

_____ Not feeling equal to taking responsibility for creating the meaning in your life.

_____ Finding the effort required to write deeply and effectively absurdly arduous.

_____ Finding the marketplace absurdly difficult, whimsical, and cruel.

Personal History Issues

_____ A history of being devalued or criticized in childhood.

_____ A history of growing up in a punitive or regressive environment.

_____ A history of not believing in yourself or trusting yourself.

_____ A history of fleeing from risk-taking and the responsibilities of freedom.

_____ A history of emotional dependency on others.

_____ A history of sensitivity to stress and difficulties in dealing with anxiety.

Writing History

_____ A history of your writing being criticized.

_____ A history of your writing being rejected.

_____ A history of starting but not completing projects.

_____ A history of completing projects but not liking many (or any) of them.

_____ A history of choosing superficial or shallow projects.

_____ A history of choosing arch, unwieldy, or overly-experimental pieces.

Toxic Disappointments

_____ Disappointment with how little you have written.

_____ Disappointment with the quality of your writing.

_____ Disappointment with the reception your writing has received.

_____ Disappointment that certain pieces have gotten "so close" but not been published.

_____ Disappointment that your publishing credits have not provided you with the meaning or joy you thought they would bring.

_____ Disappointment that you never committed to your writing or to your writing life.

Toxic Doubts

_____ Doubts about your intelligence.

_____ Doubts about your talent.

_____ Doubts about the fertility of your imagination.

_____ Doubts about your courage.

_____ Doubts about your discipline.

_____ Doubts about your basic writing skills.

Toxic Limitations

_____ Limited time.

_____ Limited energy.

_____ Limited support.

_____ Limited motivation.

_____ Limited self-trust.

_____ Limited self-direction.

Personality Issues

_____ Profound mood disorders.

_____ Profound problems with addictions.

_____ Profound generalized anxiety.

_____ Profound depression.

_____ Profound self-sabotaging behaviors.

_____ Profound inner chaos or unsteadiness.

Issues of Avoidance and "Giving Yourself Away"

_____ Over-volunteering.

_____ Over-socializing.

_____ Over-parenting.

_____ Over-working a day job.

_____ Over-homemaking.

_____ Over-supporting a spouse.

Authority and Dependency Issues

_____ Looking to others for writing rules.

_____ Looking to others for writing direction.

_____ Looking to others for validation of your writing.

_____ Holding the opinions of others about your writing as more accurate and important than your opinions.

_____ Depending on validation for motivation.

_____ Depending on validation as markers of success.

Issues with Choosing

_____ Chronic inability to choose among projects.

_____ Chronic inability to abandon projects that ought to be abandoned.

_____ Chronic inability to stick with projects that ought not to be abandoned.

_____ Chronic inability to choose personal projects, out of fear of exposing yourself.

_____ Chronic inability to choose commercial projects, out of fear of prostituting yourself.

_____ Chronic inability to choose the arduousness of writing over the ease of not writing.

Issues of Circumstance

_____ Needing to maintain a numbing or draining day job.

_____ Multiple draining family duties and responsibilities.

_____ Significant health issues.

_____ Simmering conflicts (like relationship conflicts or work conflicts).

_____ Crises (hurricanes, wars, unemployment, divorce, etc.).

_____ Intense busyness (errands, tasks, responsibilities, etc.).

Writing "Misunderstandings"

_____ Not fully understanding that making mistakes and messes as you write is not only normal but required.

_____ Not fully understanding that a project morphing is a natural occurrence and not a sign of a lack of talent or a lack of intelligence.

_____ Not fully understanding that "not knowing" is not a problem but one of the states in which we write.

_____ Not fully understanding to what extent revising can improve a piece of writing.

_____ Not fully understanding that a writing life is bound to be punctuated by failed works and that failure is not a reason to stop.

_____ Not fully understanding how to relate to the writing marketplace and to marketplace players like agents and editors.

"In the Moment" Issues

_____ Hating your current project, and hence not working on it.

_____ Not understanding your current project, and hence not working on it.

_____ Being bored by your current project, and hence not working on it.

_____ Fearing making a mistake on your current project, and hence not working on it.

_____ Fearing exposing yourself, and hence not working on your current project.

_____ Fearing learning that your current project is not working, and hence not working on it.

Mistakes in Scheduling

_____ Waiting until you are very tired, and then trying to write.

_____ Letting writing be among the last things you do, rather than among the first.

_____ Scheduling writing time but journaling instead.

_____ Scheduling writing time but researching instead.

_____ Scheduling writing time but rereading your manuscript instead.

_____ Not keeping to a writing schedule.

Inability to Enter Appropriate Awareness State

_____ Presence of negative self-talk.

_____ Presence of doubts about your ability.

_____ Presence of doubts about this particular project.

_____ Presence of excessive ambient anxiety.

_____ Presence of inchoate fear.

_____ Presence of excessive inner noise.

Issues While Writing

_____ Leaving the writing when it gets hard.

_____ Being easily distracted by noises and external stimuli.

_____ Being easily distracted by random thoughts.

_____ Taking shortcuts so as to avoid tackling the difficulties that arise in the writing.

_____ Maintaining a negative or overly critical attitude toward the writing.

_____ Maintaining a grandiose or completely uncritical attitude toward the writing.

Skills Deficits

_____ Lack of focused practice at organizing ideas.

_____ Lack of focused practice at plotting, characterization, scene-setting, etc.

_____ Lack of focused practice at revising.

_____ Studied carelessness about grammar, syntax, and the logic of sentences.

_____ Limited focused practice at writing.

Marketplace Issues

_____ Fear of the marketplace.

_____ Scorn for the marketplace.

_____ Stubborn refusal to deal with the marketplace.

_____ Lack of experience with the marketplace.

_____ Social anxiety about networking and making connections.

_____ Recurrent battering at the hands of the marketplace.

Do not be daunted or discouraged if you discover that many of these issues apply to you. They apply to all writers. You deal with this truth by consciously addressing your most pressing issues—and by making sure to write.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

If you are a writer, which two or three of the issues on this list seem the most pressing or pertinent?

Taking each of these two or three in turn, create a plan to confront and handle the issue.

How would you characterize the special coaching issues of writers?

If you intend to coach writers, what about their reality particularly interests or intrigues you?

Appendix III: Artists' Intimate Relationships

As a creativity coach, you are not also a formal relationship counselor. But it is a very good idea to have a working understanding of artists' relationship issues. The following will give you a taste of those issues.

**

I've worked with creatives for thirty years as a family therapist, couples' counselor, and creativity coach. Over the course of that time I've acquired a good feel for why relationships in the arts prove so difficult. I've also learned what writers, painters, actors, musicians, filmmakers, dancers and other creative and performing artists can do to establish better, happier, more meaningful relationships.

What do these challenges sound like in the real lives of creatives? Here are three characteristic complaints.

John, a sculptor, lamented: "Being married to an art director is tough. My wife is very outspoken and sometimes hurts my feelings with her comments or criticisms, thereby dulling my creative spirit. How do I get her to stop telling me what's wrong with my artwork—and to start creating her own artworks once again? She is a very good artist in her own right but she seems to need to control my creative efforts. I wonder if this need to control and criticize flows from her high-pressure career in the advertising industry?"

Marjorie, a mystery writer, explained, "I was engaged to a nice man once but I couldn't go through with it. Why? He was unable or unwilling to give me any time alone to read, write, or engage in other artistic pursuits. I knew marriage wouldn't help matters. The man I marry doesn't have to be an artist but he must appreciate my bohemian side enough to leave me alone for a set amount of time to do what I need to do. I will be glad to make it up to him afterwards!"

Suzanne, a painter, described what happened when she was forced to work at home: "There was a fire in my studio and with a lot of angst I set up a home studio. That month was MISERABLE!!! My new husband had no idea how to leave me alone. I hadn't realized how important my space was to me. I couldn't deal with him coming into my studio and asking, 'What are you doing?' I finally had to put post-it notes on my door: 'No Interruptions, Please. Thank you.' All this has made me wonder if I made a big mistake marrying!"

Few people are spared relationship problems. For thousands of years the divorce rate was kept artificially low by cultural injunctions against divorce, cultural norms that painted marriage as the only right and normal option, a vesting of privilege and control in men's hands, and the enactment of laws limiting the grounds upon which a divorce could be sought. These artificial constraints forced unhappy couples to remain together and kept closeted the relationship problems that were indubitably there.

As freedom gained ground, as religion lost its iron grip, and as women secured rights and power, a time came when marriages had to stand on their own two feet if they were to survive. Between half and two-thirds of them couldn't—and still can't. It turns out that if society doesn't step in to artificially shore them up, the majority of intimate relationships are likely to fail.

There is nothing surprising about this. It is a myth that it ought to be easy for two people to live together in intimate relationship. It is a myth that someone or something is wrong if two people come together but can't remain together. It is human nature to cast blame but many relationships fail simply because the two people who are involved with each other do not possess sufficient reasons to share a bed, bodily fluids, and their dreams. This is true across cultures, in straight and gay relationships, and whether the couple is comprised of two non-artists, an artist and a non-artist, or two artists.

For an artist, many special factors enter the equation and make her relationship options both more scant and more complicated. Like anyone, she would love her mate to be her friend, lover, partner, sympathetic ear, intimate, and soul mate. But she also has some other special requirements. She needs her mate to provide her with real freedom, the freedom to hold her own ideas, make artistic and human mistakes and messes, spend vast quantities of time in solitude, and, in a sense which inevitably stretches the fabric of relationship, live a fully independent life.

She also needs her mate to appreciate her life project as an artist, that her commitment to the creative life is not "one of the things she does" but an imperative as real as breathing. Likewise, she needs her mate to put up with her inevitably rich and roiling inner life, an inner life that manifests itself as dreams, nightmares, a sudden need for Paris, a sudden desire to throw over painting for sculpture, and so on. To be sure, she may settle for a mate who does not meet these criteria—but if she does, she will experience the relationship as a settling.

She is also likely to have special survival needs because of the way our culture is constituted. If she could paint and pay her bills, she would not need a mate with a salary. Because so few artists in any of the disciplines can earn anything like a middle-class income, because typically there are only the extremes of poverty and celebrity, she is likely to be poor and to make certain mental calculations about how she might survive. One path, not always held consciously but nevertheless held, is to look for someone who, rather than choosing to manifest his creative potential, has gone into accounting.

An artist knows that she is not entering a relationship of this sort with clean hands. By the same token, she may truly believe that there are enough good reasons in play to counterbalance her calculated decision. The gal or fellow in question may be sweet, decent, charmed by the artist's life, happy to provide, genuinely encouraging, and so on. Still, an artist's choice to opt for this kind of security is likely to come back to haunt her.

Conversely an artist may say to herself "I will not choose a boring mate just because I could then get to paint" and may therefore choose her mate based on sympathetic resonances, resonances which will likely be found in the being and body of a similarly impoverished artist. Then the endless dramas and negotiations can't help but begin: who will work the day job, who has the better prospects and is more entitled to a full shot at an art career, who will sacrifice for the other, who will bite the bullet and go into the world when times are hard (which will be too often or even all the time), and so on.

The upshot is that many artists find themselves spending long periods of time alone, as their needs and requirements are not easily met by the people they encounter; in distant relationships whose distance is a function of the basic incompatibility of the partners; in dramatic relationships, where each partner feels unjustly treated and makes that dissatisfaction known; in brief relationships, as their needs for intimacy collide with the fact that insufficient reasons exist for remaining with this or that partner; or in despairing relationships, where both partners feel emotionally and existentially under the weather.

Artists struggle as they try to balance their desire for relationship with the many real and perceived drawbacks of relationship. Some come to feel that they do best with a partner whom they see relatively rarely—and then wonder if that is really a completely satisfactory solution. Coco, a performance artist, explained:

"An artist's desire to keep things interesting, alive, spontaneous, independent and free: that's me. Those are exactly the reasons why I shy away from longer-term relationships or the idea of marriage. I'm not sure I'm capable of compromising any of those things, no matter how much I love the other person. I'm afraid of commitment because I know myself and I know that I have a powerful need for change.

"Luckily my current partner, who is living half-way across the globe, feels exactly the same way. He is an artist who very much needs and loves his own space and

independence. He, too, wants to know who he is and what his life would be like without the influence of a full-time partner. We love being together when we're together and I feel lucky to have someone who is so like me and who understands my needs."

"I've noticed, though, that we never seem to be creative at the same time. He seems to be less inspired to do his work when he is with me. I feel like he is losing out on more when he is with me, no matter how much I encourage and support him. I do wish that our situation could be different and that we could be creative together. I would love one day to feel more like part of a team rather than on my own with a boyfriend who most of the time is thousands of miles away; and who, when he's with me, is kind of itching to get away again."

If you marry a Jackson Pollock you get his drinking and his rages. If you marry a Diego Rivera you get his womanizing. If you marry a Virginia Woolf you get her manias and her despair. If you marry a Paul Gauguin you get his sarcasm—which he will call irony. If you marry a Picasso and you upset him, he will put his cigarette out on your arm. If you marry a Judy Garland or a Marilyn Monroe you'll get a bottomless well of unhappiness right behind the charm. If you marry a Dali you will get a man so claustrophobic and anxious that he couldn't tolerate riding on the Paris Metro. If you marry …

Buyer beware.

The time to notice if a prospective partner is right for you is early on. Do they keep their word? Are they cavalierly cruel? Are they incapable of listening? Are they always rushing off and running around? Are their plans plausible or do they smack of wishful thinking? Do they do the simple things with some grace and good cheer? Is everything a drama or an argument? Early on is the time to notice the failings of a prospective partner. If you notice them and do not heed them—well, you know the consequences of that.

All too often the needs of one partner collide with the needs of the other partner. Egos are involved; big dreams are involved; and often enough a rather grandiose, selfish and entitled creative will make unreasonable demands on his or her partner. Consider the following vignette from my coaching practice. Jake, a would-be filmmaker in his early thirties, came to see me and we chatted.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm good. I'm pushing along with my film—it's getting there. It's my wife … she has the problem."

"What's that?"

"The film is going to cost … a lot. And we're spending our own money on it. The money we'd saved as a down payment for a house."

"She isn't on board with that idea?"

"She hates it. We've had hellacious fights."

"I don't think I'd be too happy either!" I laughed. "But you seem to have made up your mind. About the film versus your relationship."

"No! It isn't like that at all–"

"You're not holding the film as more important than the relationship?"

"No!" he said excitedly. "If she could just see where this will lead … how good this will be for both of us."

I nodded. "You want her to change her mind and get on board with an open heart?"

"Yes!"

"While you're spending the down payment for the house she wants."

He bit his lip.

"Did she save that money?" I said.

He didn't reply. "Part of it came from a small inheritance I got!" he finally blurted out. "This film could win an Academy Award!"

It's hard not to be self-interested—or selfish. With the proliferation of reality shows, we are getting a very nice education in the grandiosity and selfishness of some people, whether they are celebrity hairdressers, chefs, or real estate agents. Arrogant, narcissistic, defensive, combative—we are getting an eyeful. It was going to be interesting to see to what extent Jake had a conscience and some character.

"You've tried to find outside funding?" I said.

He shook his head. "That's way too hard! We have the money and we have credit cards and I can borrow more from my parents if need be—I can keep it all right inside our family and get the film done without having to go around begging."

"Begging?"

He made a face. "That's what it feels like!"

"You've tried it?"

"No." He hesitated. "I wouldn't even know where to begin."

"So, it seems easier to spend the down payment money than investigate funding?"

"I don't feel like you're really on my side," he said, shifting uneasily.

"Why? Because I think your wife's concerns also matter?"

He got up abruptly and walked around the room. Finally, he sat back down.

"I don't think you understand the upside of this project. Everybody I tell about the concept loves it."

"So, tell me," I said. "How much of the movie is made?"

"I have a rough draft of the script. A rough draft of most of the script—half at least."

I nodded. "But you've already spent a lot of money?"

"On equipment. You need the right equipment. And I paid to have an original score composed—that's been a mess! And I hired someone to scout locations … there are a lot of expenses before you can actually get started!"

I nodded. "Absolutely. But I'm trying to understand your approach to this. Why commission an original score when money is tight?"

He threw up his hands. "I could hear just the right music in my head. But the composer I hired didn't really get it."

I took a breath.

"Okay," I said. "Let me make sure I'm getting this right. Are you saying that you're having problems making this movie or are you just having problems getting your wife's buy-in?"

He shook his head. "Well, it's very complicated making a movie and this is my first one. And I got off on the wrong foot with the composer and with this editor I hired to look at my partial script … and I was supposed to get better tech support on the equipment I bought, that's been kind of a nightmare … but I just wish my wife was in this with me. She keeps nagging me and I can't concentrate on getting the script finished."

"A lot of relationship problems," I said.

He shrugged. "I just need people to do what they say. That's all."

"Your wife said that she would support you in this?"

"She did! In the beginning. I told her about my dream when we first met and she was all gung-ho for it. Then some years passed while I was working on the script … and she changed her tune. She was all for it in the beginning!"

"Things changed."

"My dream didn't!"

We continued on in this vein. I renewed my wonder about the possibility and reasonableness of hunting for outside funding—not interested. I wondered if it made sense not to spend more money until he had a viable script ready—not possible. I wondered if there was any way his wife could get her house and he could get his film —no. I put on the table the question of whether he had entered into clear agreements with the composer, the location scout, the editor, the tech support people—of course he had. Everything was fine, if only his wife would second the motion.

Some of the silences grew very long. He had less and less to say—he knew what I was thinking. He knew that I was thinking that he had the problem. He couldn't wait to leave. Finally, our time was up and he got his wish. We did not set up a second appointment.

I didn't expect that I would ever see Jake again. I had confronted him too much. Years ago, I worked with court-mandated clients who had to return even after I confronted them—but no court had sent Jake to see me. Unlike those court-mandated clients, Jake was free to make his movie and disrespect his wife. I didn't expect that I would ever see Jake again—or ever learn that his movie had gotten made.

Can Jake's wife change him? Almost certainly she can't. But she can upgrade her own personality and perhaps become a person who can deal more effectively with Jake, if they stay together, or, because of her personality upgrade, someone who leaves Jake sooner rather than later, if leaving him is her smartest option. One part of the relationship puzzle is choosing wisely. A mirror image task is upgrading your own personality so that you are the sort of person you want to be and need to be, someone equal to the responsibilities of partnership.

It is your duty to minimize your own unwanted qualities, whatever they are—your addiction, your unhealthy narcissism, your overly critical nature, your histrionics, your timidity, your lack of self-confidence, your arrogance, or whatever else it might be. It

would be lovely if both you and your partner did this work but your partner is not in your control: only you are.

The necessity for a personality upgrade makes itself known in all of the small and large bones of contention that partners encounter as they interact. These bones of contentions are growth opportunities for you, if you take them as such. They allow you to begin to look in the mirror, take a fearless personal inventory, identify and then change those aspects of your personality that harm the relationship, and start the process of minimizing your unwanted qualities, those qualities that you yourself decide ought to be changed.

What are these bones of contention? Take the following as a typical example. I was seeing a painter and a musician who were mad at each other because each felt that the other wasn't willing to take "just a little time off" to fix a broken window in their house. That was their current hot button bone of contention: that the other was acting selfishly, cavalierly, and unfairly with regard to the "window thing." Where to start with this tangled issue? I began in a straightforward way: by looking at the exact nature of the window-fixing task.

I knew that each of them was refusing to really add up how much time was involved in tackling this "little project" and so I had them lay out what was involved in fixing the window. It turned out that it was going to take one or the other of them at least a dozen hours to get the job done, a dozen hours at a minimum, since they were also going to have to learn how to replace the window as part of this "little task." They had been denying this reality so as to be able to more easily charge the other with a relationship sin. We often "block" on tackling a project because we know that there are things that we have to learn, work that we have to do, and costs that we have to assume and, rather than admit and confess to all that, we refuse to honestly look at the task. My couple was doing exactly that.

I forced John, the musician, and Stephanie, the painter, to sit still and add up the hours. Time spent traveling to and from the home supply store: such and so much

time. Time spent learning how to replace a window: such and so much time—and double that, since neither one was very handy. Time spent returning to the home supply store because something got forgotten or something broke or something couldn't be fathomed: such and so much time. Time spent repainting the sash, if that was part of the project—and had they remembered to get touch-up paint? And did they know what color paint to order? And then cleaning up … they sat very, very quietly.

"Okay," I said, "do we agree that neither of you has been very real or fair about this?" They grudgingly agreed. "So," I asked, "let's try to get some clarity around why you've been using this 'window thing' to level charges against one another. This bone of contention is a stand-in for the real problems in the relationship. What are those? Someone care to take a stab at that?" John said nothing; after a bit Stephanie said, "We both feel behind the eight ball; neither of us is doing as well as we would like; and we're using 'a lack of time' as the straw man. We both want more time in the day —which really means, we both want more good things to be happening in our careers."

This was the door opening. We could then begin to chat about what really mattered: that neither had the career that he or she wanted; and that, in order to have that career, both were going to need to improve their marketplace skills and increase their willingness to market and promote their wares. John was going to have to stop obsessing about whether one drummer or another drummer was best for the band and get on with the excruciating task of making money from his music. Stephanie was going to have stop pestering herself about whether her current output amounted to two bodies of work or a single body of work and get on with the excruciating task of making money from her painting. Here was a clear place where they needed to upgrade their personality: they needed to become more willing and able salespeople.

"And what about the window?" I asked after a bit. "The hell with the window!" John exclaimed. "We'll reframe it as 'more fresh air'!" Stephanie laughed. This was probably the happiest they'd been in a very long while. Then I asked the obvious question I'd

held of asking all session. "Why not hire a handyman to fix it?" I asked. "Money," John said. "Money," Stephanie said. And so, we had the next elephant in the room identified: how poor they were and how their lack of money ate away at their good spirits and kept them at each other's throats. This observation reinforced the theme that they were going to have to pay attention to their careers in new ways that would require them stretching far out of their current comfort zones.

Let's say that you agree that you need a personality upgrade. How can you pull that off? It is exactly as simple and exactly as hard as admitting your drinking problem and entering recovery, seeing yourself in the mirror and beginning a diet and exercise program, listening how you speak to yourself and beginning a regimen of more positive self-talk, or acknowledging that life makes you anxious and learning an anxiety management strategy or two that works for you. Upgrading is that simple and that hard. Countless books, workshops, and programs are available to you. The starting place is that magic sentence: "I need to work on this."

Let's say that both you and your partner want to work on upgrading yourselves. Excellent! Then you might try the following. Pick a quiet Sunday morning or some other quiet time. Go your own separate ways, for instance one of you to a café and one of you to the library. There, have a written conversation with yourself and identify what you want to upgrade in your personality. Get the thing named clearly —"I want to begin to think thoughts that serve me"; "I want to increase my self-confidence"; "I want to reduce my arrogance and grandiosity"—and describe concretely what you intend to do over the coming two weeks to begin to accomplish your goal.

When you get home have a celebration, celebrating your individual willingness to work on yourselves—but do not discuss your plans or intentions. Keep them private for now. Over the coming two weeks do what you intended to do and arrange for a conversation at the end of that time when the two of you will visit and report. On, say, that Saturday night two weeks hence, explain what you have hoped to accomplish and report on what you in fact accomplished. If you got nothing done, ruefully admit

that. Then announce your intentions for the next two-week period. Don't ask for suggestions or feedback and don't offer suggestions or feedback. Just listen, nod, and smile. You are both working!

If, as a creative person, you would like to create a strong, long-lasting relationship with another human being, you almost certainly have areas of improvement—as, of course, does your partner. Make yourself proud by becoming the person you know you would like to be. If your partner doesn't also grow and change, that is on him or her. You have your own work to do, which will improve your relationship or make it easier for you to leave the relationship if your partner lags too far behind.

What, then, is required of two people, when one or both of them is creative, if they want a solid relationship? Here are sixteen keys that I think are important:

1. Being friendly. Nothing is more crucial to the viability of an intimate relationship than that the partners are friendly toward one another; and friendship, like love, requires its own sort of care and attention.

2. Caring for each other's solitude. It must be all right and more than all right for each partner to spend significant amounts of time pursuing his or her own activities and communing with his or her inner life.

3. Providing emotional security. Each partner is not only aware of the other's feelings but takes them into account and actively works to help his partner feel good rather than bad.

4. Meeting meaning needs. Partners understand that meaning comes and goes and that meaning crises will inevitably arise and will require both partners' attention; and that identifying shared values and principles is a key to meaning maintenance.

5. Maintaining passion. Partners will not let themselves become too busy for love, too tired for love, or too disinterested in love.

6. Gently demanding discipline. Each partner will strive to work in a productive, regular way, with few creative tantrums and few excuses about not being inspired or not being in the mood.

7. Gently exchanging truths. When there is something that must be said it should be said carefully and compassionately—and also clearly and directly. A creative and his or her partner will want to speak clearly about the many large and small relationship matters that arise endlessly and that fester if not addressed.

8. Accepting difficulty. While partners will naturally expect a lot from themselves and from their partner, they will also recognize and accept that failures of nerve, black moods, and pratfalls do happen. Each partner will have a hard time of it some of the time.

9. Minimizing one's own unwanted qualities. Each partner will bravely look in the mirror, take a fearless personal inventory, and identify and then change those aspects of personality that harm the relationship.

10. Supporting each other's career. Each person in the partnership is likely to have a career and hence career demands that need to be respected—and negotiated.

11. Managing one's own journey. Each partner has the job of taking responsibility for his or her own life, for setting goals and planning, for making choices and taking action, and for proceeding as a responsible adult—of course in consultation with one's partner.

12. Bringing one's artfulness to the partnership. A creative person can bless her relationship by bringing the same qualities to it that she brings to her art, qualities as diverse as whimsy, imagination, resilience, and meticulousness.

13. Maintaining a present and future orientation. Each partner lets go of past grievances, not to engage in wishful thinking or denial but so as to deal with issues in their specific and current reality; and likewise maintains hope for the future, both individually and for the couple.

14. Treating each other fairly. Fairness in everything—in the honoring of agreements, the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, the respect shown in word and deed—is the glue that holds a healthy relationship together.

15. Creating at least occasional happiness. Partners will actually ask questions of each other like "What would make us happy?" and "What would make you happy?" And when something would make them happy, they say so.

16. Creating a truly supportive relationship. Even if two people find it easy to relate, even if both are "low maintenance," they will still have to invest time and pay real attention to this thing they have created together, a real relationship.

The goal for an artist and his or her partner is the creation by two ever-changing people of a bastion of safety and sanity in a dangerous world. It is the creation of a tight-knit unit, like a resistance cell in an occupied country, where each protects, supports, and respects the other. This fine relating eludes most artists and most human beings but it remains the high ideal and the special prize worth pursuing.

Contact Information and Trainings

You can learn more about my creativity coaching trainings at the following spot:

http://ericmaisel.com/trainings/creativity-coaching-trainings/

You can learn more about my books, services, and other workshops here:

http://ericmaisel.com/

Books that complement this book are:

Your Great Coaching Career (about building your coaching your practice)

Secrets of a Creativity Coach (how email coaching works, including verbatim transcripts of my email coaching with twenty-five artists)

You can be in touch with me at ericmaisel@hotmail.com

Good luck to you, in your coaching and in life!