

## SEEING WHAT'S INVISIBLE PART 1

*One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.*

*-- The Little Prince*



When these invitations show up to write for the WIAL Newsletter my first sense is that I really have nothing to tell anyone. So, why not use this opportunity for some hard thinking to organize my ideas on how some of my practices may be showing up to help me to see beneath the surface or as I will refer to it “see” the invisible in different situations.

I’m sure I’m not alone in the sense that as an Action Learning Coach, at times I “see” – or at least respond effectively to - something essential yet invisible. In this “non-rational” realm I find personal hope, learning and growth through group reflection with other AL coaches so I’d love to hear your stories on this theme!

In a recent AL coach gathering I shared this experience:

It was 2019. I was in the 2nd month of a 6-month corporate leadership project. Eight members were meeting once a month, using Action Learning (AL) to solve

complex problems and develop leadership skills. I was the coach. One of the organization's Directors has been assigned as supportive mentor. In the mornings we tackled a personal work issue and in the afternoons an organizational one.

On this morning our problem presenter (PP) was also the youngest team member. Her problem was "How to build a sense of belonging in my team." The set was lively, with full participation. Questions flowed, including clarifying questions from the PP. As a coach I experienced a sense of wellness, enthusiasm and flow. Then, near the end, from the side, the corporate mentor suddenly asked the PP "What are you going to do?" Silence fell. The PP froze. Finally she raised her voice, saying: "I DON'T KNOW! That's why I am asking you guys!" followed by dead silence.

Let's pause here. Imagine being the coach in this situation. What impulses do you notice in yourself? What might you do next? Perhaps you'd say it's time to move on to the actions. You might simply give the PP some quiet time, followed by asking her actions. Clearly there were some emotions attached, so you may consider shifting attention to team members, asking "Now, what questions can we ask in order to help PP?" You could directly ask the PP, "What do you need from the team at this moment?" or "What questions could the team ask in order to help you?" You may be assuming that the PP is stuck.

As an Action Learning coach there's an infinite choice of possible and reasonable responses. What did I do? I asked the PP to take a moment and think what actions she wanted to take. Then, I surprised myself. I invited her to stand up while doing this, turning her back on everyone. She did. Then, surprisingly, within 2-3 seconds she articulated a full and systematic answer, including a four-step action plan. The group broke into applause. The room tone changed to a kind of euphoria.



That's the story. Now 2 provocative questions from our AL coach sharing

**Q: How I had intervened so cleverly in that moment?**

It was a kind of mystery - a gut feeling – and I certainly didn't feel clever. I was, however, confident in the PP. After all, I had an hour of observing her with the team. I sensed that she already had some “a-ha” moments and great insights. Two things stood out for me in her response to the director's question. First, she said she didn't know what to do. Second, her voice changed. I was intuitively forming an assumption that she might have become stuck or "disturbed." My “sense” of the moment was a rebellious teenager wanting to escape her “Helicopter Dad.” My intent/thought was about how to offer her more space to center herself, both externally (physical) and internally, then I thought about giving space without leaving and I made my suggestion.

**Q: How do you cultivate this kind of gut feeling?**

That question from the director and her response really caught me! As a coach this moment of awareness is always a time of choosing which alternative among many I need to do or not do. In this case in addition to the other choices within a few seconds an awareness rose up of many practices I have engaged over the past few

years that greatly inspired my own self-exploration. In that moment it came down to “Using my self experience” my awareness of the person the team and the moment to form my gut feeling and then choose that alternative.

“If you were me, what are your answers for cultivating this kind of gut feeling?” I will share more with you next time. TO BE Continued...

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