

Coaching to a New York City State of Mind

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I find that when I visit and work in cities around the world, they often help to frame the way in which I am experiencing my own internal world as well as the environment of the city. Each city has its own character, its own history and its own culture. Just as organizations have their own cultures and subcultures (Bergquist, 1993; Bergquist, Guest and Rooney, 2003; Bergquist and Pawlak, 2007, Bergquist and Brock, 2008)), so I believe that cities have their own “state-of-mind” and this state of mind can influence the way in which we view and work in the world both short-term (as visitors to the city) and long-term (as residents of the city).

I propose that there are frames of mind that exist in our coaching clients (and in our own minds) that parallel those of specific cities. If nothing else, the “state-of-mind” analysis of a specific city can serve as a rich metaphor for our coaching clients. They can talk about being in a Chicago-state-of-mind or in a Paris-state-of-mind or in a Tokyo-state-of-mind—even if they have never been to this city but have only heard or read about the unique character of this city. While any single analysis of a city’s state-of-mind is clearly a generalization and even a stereotype, it doesn’t hurt to play with this generalization or stereotype as a coach if this is done on behalf of the client’s own self-awareness regarding underlying assumptions and ways in which her environment (inside her organization or inside her own city or town) influences the ways in which she thinks, feels, decides and acts.

In a series of essays, I will be offering my own reflections on how specific cities impact me and will suggest ways in we might find similar states-of-mind in our clients – whether or not they have ever visited this specific city. I begin with the “Big Apple” – New York City—a metropolis to which I often travel in my work and my leisure time.

A City of Diversity

We have all known for many years, through the movies we watch, novels we have read and even the stories we have heard told by our parents (or more often grandparents) that New York City is the fountainhead of American Immigration. Many immigrants (especially from Europe) were processed through Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty lovingly offers a welcome to immigrants in its harbor location and its words of dedication. New York City’s reputation as a city of diversity goes well beyond the stories of immigration. Many immigrants moved away from New York City soon after they arrived.

However, other immigrants stayed and even those who moved on left their imprint. New York City is truly a “melting pot” or more appropriately a “smorgasbord” (with individual ethnic identities often being preserved in specific neighborhoods). As a visitor to New York City I can savor the same food that I would order in Italy, China or Ethiopia, witness or even participate in the same rituals and ceremonies I would find in a Mid-Eastern Mosque or Taiwanese Temple, and listen to conversations spoken in many different languages. I can even visit the United Nations when visiting New York City—the symbol of ultimate multi-culturalism.

As experts in ecological systems tell us, it is at the boundaries between systems that there is to be found the most abundant life. Much of the life on our planet, for instance, is to be found at the boundary between sea and land. Environmental richness—the diversity of species—exists where one system collides with another. One of the prominent scholars of complexity, Scott Page, writes extensively about the benefits to be derived from diversity. According to Page (2011), diversity enhances the robustness of complex systems, drives innovation and productivity, makes any system more interesting and absorbs large scale events that would otherwise have a profound impact on the functioning of an ecological system. Perhaps most importantly, diversity in any system, such as New York City, increases complexity. This is a real challenge for anyone living in a diverse system, for complexity produces ambiguity, bewilderment, anxiety and sheer exhaustion. It is not only because complex (and diverse) systems contain many moving parts (this is a complicated system), it is also because these moving parts are all interconnected. When any one part moves (changes) then all other parts of the system have to change. That’s what makes complex systems (such as New York City) so “tippy” (unstable) and unpredictable. One thing gets messed up (an auto accident or construction project on the Lower East Side) and the ramifications are widespread (traffic jams all the way to the Upper West Side and on the bridges leading into and out of Manhattan). Thus, a diverse city such as New York and a state of mind that is filled with diversity tends to offer great opportunities –and many challenges.

Frans Johansson writes about these dynamic opportunities and challenges as they relate to the fostering of creativity specifically within organizations. Johansson focuses on what he calls the *Medici Effect* and the “Intersections” between different disciplines and cultures—what Thomas Kuhn (1962) might consider the Intersections between differing paradigms. Harkening back to the “explosion of remarkable ideas” during the reign of the Medici family in Florence during the Italian Renaissance, Johansson suggests that “if we can just reach an intersection of disciplines or cultures, we will have a greater change of innovating, simply because there are so many unusual ideas to go around.” (Johansson, 2004, p. 20) Like Florence of the 14th and 15th Centuries, New York City is filled with Intersections that create opportunities for the generation of new ideas, as well as the challenge of choice and potential diffusion of power and control.

In a recently published book, Moisés Naim (2013) writes about the impact of diversity and complexity on the allocation and application of power. We find that the traditional, centralized sources of power—the government, churches, large corporations—are no longer able to command full authority. In large part this is because there are now many sources and kinds of power. We are living in a world (at least in New York City) that is diverse with regard to disciplines and cultures. It is also diverse with regard to power, leading to what Naim calls the “end of power.”

The BIG Apple

New York City is BIG. It is big in many ways. A large number of people live in the city--especially when you include all of the boroughs (not just Manhattan). But there is something much greater in terms of being BIG. Many cities in the world are much larger than New York City when it comes to total population. Somehow, New York City remains the BIG apple. When you enter Manhattan, everything seems large—size of many buildings, number of people wandering around the streets, famous names on the buildings and streets (Broadway, Carnegie Hall, the Empire State Building and the lingering “ghosts” of the World Trade Center). Some of this has to do with the Big Apple being a remnant of the modern era when there was an emphasis on size.

Ambivalence is to be found in this modern emphasis on size. While we still seem to be enthralled with big business, big ventures, big finance and big ideas, we are entering an era when some small things also entice us. The niche marketplace is now in fashion: microbreweries and small boutique wineries, craft fairs, farmers markets, made-to-order dressmakers, small theaters. We appreciate specialized products for a distinct customer base. Yet, there is New York City, featuring both big and small. Though Las Vegas was the first city to be declared “postmodern,” New York should really win the prize. It is startling. Very postmodern. Yet, also modern. We live in a world that is both modern and postmodern.

New York City is also premodern. Many of the businesses that seem very postmodern are actually throwbacks to a premodern era of craftspeople and local marketplaces. Small is beautiful, as is large. Part of the diversity is to be found not just in the different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds of New York City, but also in the intimate intermixing of premodern, modern and postmodern forums. Like certain other cities in the world that are even older than New York (such as Paris, Rome and London in the Western World), New York City is actually composed in large part of a cluster of premodern neighborhoods. This is part of the excitement of New York City and part of the excitement of a New York City State of Mind—a mixture of premodern, modern and postmodern. A diversity of social structures as well as a diversity of cultures, ethnic identities and races.

At the heart of the matter, however, is the large size of New York City. To be big is to be beautiful and seductive. A big city like New York is compelling. Everyone wants to visit and maybe live there for a little while. The BIG apple attracts new resources and gets even bigger and even more attractive. Chaos theorists talk and write about “strange attractors”—forces that pull in resources from the outside, which in turn fuels further attraction and expansion. The avalanche is a classic example of the strange attractor. The snowpack that is cascading down the mountainside not only gains in speed, it also pulls in snow, rock and debris (including trees) from the surrounding area. We find much more at the bottom of the hill than just the original falling snowpack.

This modern emphasis on BIG is also the source of many troubles both in New York City and in the lives of men and women we coach. To be big is to be arrogant. If you are big then nothing can harm you. Too big to fail. Too big to be bullied around. Too big to be vulnerable to outside forces. There is a tendency for those in a big city such as New York (or those associated with a big organization or government) to assume that the whole world revolves around them. This is the Washington D.C. “beltway” mentality and the distorted vision of reality to be found in many very large technology organizations prior to the dot.com crash and in many financial institutions prior to the Wall Street crisis of 2009.

There is also the alienation associated with being large. To be BIG is often to be indifferent to the plight of those individuals who live and work in the Bigness. We see this alienation, for instance, in the massive housing projects of New York. The city planners of the Bronx and Brooklyn did a nice job of eliminating the decaying slums that were prevalent in these boroughs during the first half of the 20th Century. Yet, these slums were the site of vibrant local neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were often destroyed by the well-intended city planners. In my own work in the Soviet Union during the years of its collapse I saw the same alienating massive housing projects. (Bergquist, 1994) I could have been walking into the housing projects of the Bronx rather than the projects of Moscow or Tallinn. One of my Soviet colleagues wrote about the “stone cities” in his country. He could have been describing the stone cities of New York. BIG is not always desirable or a source of beauty and personal gratification. This alienating factor is important for us to keep in mind as coaches to clients who are in a New York City State of Mind.

There are also the financial problems associated with being BIG. As the media and many financial reform advocates have noted, the very large banks are not only too big to fail, they are also quite vulnerable. The same can be said for many other very large organizations—financial or otherwise. Part of the reason for this vulnerability resides in the increasing percentage of resources (people, money, time, space) allocated to indirect services (overhead), resulting in increasing costs for products and services. (Bergquist, 1993) A very large corporation or city often must devote more than 50% of its revenues to services that keep the

organization together—what Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) identified many years ago as the “integrative” sectors of an organization. These are all the people and processes that aren’t actually involved in manufacturing the product being sold by the organization or providing the direct services for which the organization is being paid (what Lawrence and Lorsch identified as the “differentiated” sectors of an organization). For every police officer that a metropolis such as New York City adds to its law enforcement in order to get “more cops on the street” it must add at least 3 additional administrative staff to help keep everything well-coordinated, to ensure that there is clear communication between the expanding silos in the organization, and to provide the metrics needed to respond to demands for accountability.

Coaching that addresses the New York City State of Mind will often require reflection by the coach and client on the challenge of size and growth. Leaders are often tempted to solve organizational problems by helping their organization grow larger. Unfortunately, this often results in the organization becoming less efficient. Indirect costs and integrative services increase, while costs associated with production and direct services must either be reduced (via technology and mass production) or passed on to the consumers of these products and services. The increased costs must be addressed, in turn, either through control of the marketplace or a substantial increase in marketing and sales costs (further decreasing the percentage of resources devoted to production and direct services). A vicious circle can often be avoided only with skillful and challenging coaching: Is there any other way to address this problem other than growing larger? Are you sure that efficiency increases by adding to your workforce or adding this new division? Are increasing sales really the answer and what will it cost (in terms of expenses and potential quality of product or service) to expand the size of your customer base? How do you as a coach invite a client to explore both the upsides and downsides of a New York City State of Mind with regard to size? Is the BIG apple always easy to digest?

Sanctuary and Order in the Midst of Chaos

With all of the challenges of diversity and size in New York City, there is clearly a need for sanctuary. Like many of the grand old cities in Europe and Asia, there are many sanctuaries in New York City that serve as a critical balance to the challenges of life in NYC. These sanctuaries usually take the form of parks. But in smaller dimensions, they are also to be found in the squares and circles that abound in New York (particularly Manhattan). The most impressive sanctuary—for most people—is Central Park. I have often got “lost” in the serenity of Central Park. It is hard to remember that a large city is to be found all around this park, until one looks up and sees the high-rise buildings looming over the top of trees and boulders in the park.

While Central Park made perfect sense in the original design of New York City, given that it was not much more than a rather unsightly swamp prior to being transformed into a lovely park, the park today stands out as an “anomaly” that contrasts sharply with the bustling world surrounding it. I suspect that in many ways, skillful coaching is also something of an anomaly for many busy leaders, contrasting with the hustle and bustle of their daily life—and often contrasting with the rapid-fire and reflection-free style of command that is required of these leaders (even though they are constantly confronted with complexity, unpredictability and turbulence). (Bergquist and Mura, 2005) Is the sanctuary of a Central-Park type setting for coaching an antidote to the New York City State of Mind that is required of many coaching clients? Is a sanctuary required for an executive to feel truly comfortable and at home in their own head and heart when faced with the ambiguity of postmodern life?

There is a second way to frame the Central Park anomaly. This second frame takes us back to city planning in New York City. As was the case with many urban planners of the late 19th and early 20th Century who were working in old cities, there was the need to accept the crazy (and often quite charming) patterns of movement established around cow pastures, clusters of shops, waterside docks, and so forth. This often meant that streets converged rather than running parallel and that whole areas of the city had been set aside for something other than residencies. In Manhattan, this seeming chaos is still apparent in the circles, squares and parks; however, there is also a great deal of order in the midst of the chaos. Streets and avenues are numbered and run north and south, east and west. There are the rogue and legendary boulevards such as Broadway and the parkways following the course of the Hudson River and East River, but these stand out as exceptions rather than the rule.

This suggests that the city plan of Manhattan embraces all four of the patterns to be found in any turbulent system (such as a mountain stream). (Bergquist and Mura, 2005) There are straightforward, fast moving currents. These would be the numbered streets and avenues in NYC. This is the subsystem that is usually associated with the rapid, rational and systematic operations in an organization. There are also eddies and whirlpools created by some obstruction in the mountain stream, such as a submerged rock, a fallen tree or simply a bend in the path of the stream. This second subsystem is represented by the circles and squares of Manhattan—such “obstacles” as Columbus Circle or Washington Square. Third, there are the chaotic currents that disrupt the flow of the first two subsystems. These are the Broadways and river roads of Manhattan. These are the chaotic and unpredictable events and dynamic interactions that occur in an organization. Finally, there are the quiet pools, where nothing seems to be moving. While these still places in a mountain stream are often labeled “stagnant,” they are actually the primary source of nutrients for those creatures that live in the stream. These would be the sanctuaries (the parks) of New York City,

where people can find nurturance and renewed vitality so that they can once again enter one of the other three subsystems. Similarly, coaching is the quite pool that allows for renewal and refocusing.

A City of Unreality

The challenges of New York City are met in yet another way. There is not only sanctuary—to be found in the parks. There is also escape and denial. Rather than moving into a space that is real but quite different from the hustle and bustle of urban life, we can move into fantasy. In New York City this is represented by a specific “industry” (show business) and a specific place (“Broadway”). There is no business like show business and no place like Broadway. Actually there are many businesses other than show business that provide fantasy and escape—the most profitable being the trafficking of legal and illegal mind and mood altering substances (ranging from alcohol and caffeine to cocaine and crack). There are also places other than Broadway—in fact most of the truly groundbreaking theatrical productions in New York City occur “off-Broadway.” However, there is still something magical about Broadway and the “Great White Way.” This rogue boulevard not only defies the orderly streets (and names) of Manhattan, it also serves as the primary conduit for the most magical of all circles and squares in New York City—namely Time Square.

It would seem that any city or state-of-mind that is filled with major challenges (such as diversity and size) needs both a sanctuary and an escape valve. I am reminded of E. L. Doctorow’s (1985) novel, *World’s Fair*, which features another (temporary) source of escape and fantasy—namely the 1930s World’s Fair in New York. Like Disneyland, Disney World and other theme parks in our contemporary world, the World’s Fair in New York (the Bronx rather than Manhattan) provided escape into alternative cultures (featuring exhibits from throughout the world), alternative moments in time (both the past and future) and alternative forms of excitement (terrifying rides and tantalizing peep shows). As Doctorow so poignantly observed, people could live vicariously for a few moments or days in the alternative world of the fair, much as they could spend time at the theater (live or on film) or in a sanctuary (such as Central Park).

What about coaching? Is this always a sanctuary or does it sometime provide a doorway for escape and even denial? What type of function are we serving when we ask our clients to imagine an alternative future for themselves, when we invite them to follow their true “bliss,” or suggest that they role play a productive session with their boss or board? Are we providing a Broadway to counter their Brooklyn? Are we inviting them to the fair when they have spent most of their past two weeks in a free-for-all? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Are theaters and fairs any different from parks and other sanctuaries? As Matthew Miles (1964) suggested many years ago, perhaps all of these are “temporary systems” that

provide a moment away from a stressful existence and may even enable us to find a bit of “flow” in our life, to borrow from the insightful concept introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) regarding the space between anxiety and boredom. These are important points for discussion and inquiry in dealing as coaches with men and women who are in a New York City State of Mind.

The Challenge of Choice

Throughout this essay, I have tried to trace out some of the implications for the coaching process of a client who is in a New York City State of Mind. To conclude this essay, I want to move directly into the heart of the issue and suggest several specific coaching strategies. I will focus first on the challenge of choice to be found in a New York City State of Mind and then turn to the rich opportunities found in the multiple Intersections to be found in this state of mind. I conclude by briefly introducing the concept of “internal context” that I am borrowing from my colleague, Sandra Hill. I suggest that ultimately the New York City State of Mind has to do with the exploration by our coaching clients of character and this internal context.

When our coaching clients are in a New York City State of Mind, they are faced with many options. They might easily feel flooded by choice and options. As Kenneth Gergen (1991) notes, their “self” becomes “saturated.” They are not sure what is their real self and what is a manufactured or externally-imposed (or marketed) self. Is our coaching client standing on Wall Street, Main Street or Broadway? Is it all theater and show business or to quote a show business phrase is it “the real McCoy?” Ironically, our clients must first make a decision about decision-making. They must choose between several ways to make choices when faced with this challenge of choice and the discernment required to address their saturation.

One option is to try to do everything. After all, New York City is “one hell of a town!!” For a visitor to this great city, this certainly is a very tempting option and it certainly is the one chosen by many people who have only two days to tour the Big Apple. Unfortunately, this option leads to superficiality and eventual burnout. We often see this outcome among the very busy men and women we coach. They never seem to spend enough time with anything (either projects or other people). They don’t even have time for themselves. As Robert Rosenblatt (2001) noted in an essay written while lingering at Dover Beach, the appointments we most often cancel are the appointments we make with ourselves.

As a coach, we can do several things to help our option one clients address the issue of over-extension. First, we can help them with time management. As many experts in this field have proposed, the issue is not really the management of time. It is the management of priorities. What is most important for our clients to experience, to feel, to achieve, to complete? What is their bucket list for the next year (not just

for the end of their life)? Many coaches have tools to help their clients establish priorities and these tools should be pulled out of the coach's satchel at this point.

The second thing we can do as coaches is encourage our saturated clients to focus on the experiences they have been having in their New York City State of Mind. It is very easy when saturated to feel nothing and remember nothing. The impact of any one experience is diminished when we try to experience everything. There is no relishing, no time to reflect and no place to store the memory. The neuroscientists put it this way: we have only limited memory capacity; consequently, we must be vigilant about what we retain in short term memory and miserly about what we transfer at night from short term to long term memory. As a coach, we should encourage our client to slow down and spend a bit of time dwelling on a specific event that has occurred today: what makes it special? How do you feel? What are the implications? This period of reflection is followed up one day later by a phone call from the coach to the client. What do they now remember about yesterday? They will probably remember the coaching session and even more specifically they will remember the event on which they and the coach reflected. It was stored in memory rather than discarded. The client can now begin to recognize the value of not only reflection but also prioritization. What do I want to remember from today's events? Practitioners of positive psychology (such as Martin Seligman) recommend that we identify and reflect on one or two positive events every day just before going to sleep. We now know that these positive events are likely to be the ones we store in long-term memory. The process of prioritization is not just about selective memory. It is also about selective action. What can I cut out of my daily routine that will enable me to spend more time on the important things and allow me to reflect on and retain the rich lessons to be learned from the events associated with these important things?

There is a second option. When we are overwhelmed and saturated, we can escape. Rather than trying to do everything, we can do very little or profoundly constrain ourselves. I wrote many years ago about my experiences in Eastern Europe during the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Bergquist and Weiss, 1994) Citizens were suddenly confronted with many choices. They often felt overwhelmed and as a result fell back into old ideologies or were vulnerable to new ideologies that simplified their world and eliminated most options. I wrote about the "escape from freedom" that was chosen by many of these Eastern European citizens. As Erik Fromm noted in his analysis of Germany after World War I (Fromm, 1941) and America during the 1950s (Fromm, 1955), there is an initial joy in being "free from" repression, poverty, war, etc. But then there is a frightening realization that the next step is "free to" do what is best or what is fulfilling. And this is scary. The New York City State of Mind can have a similar impact.

Those living in New York can escape by remaining in their own neighborhood and viewing everyone who is different from themselves as the enemy. Leonard Bernstein and his colleagues portrayed this poetically (and musically) in *West Side Story*. Robert Bellah and his colleagues provided a sociological perspective on this retreat in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah and Associates, 1985)) when they identified the escape of many Americans into lifestyle “enclaves.” New York is filled with these enclaves as are many American communities—and these enclaves are particularly prevalent today in the tragic splitting of our political landscape into the severe left and right wings. For visitors to New York City, the temptation is to see the Big Apple from only one perspective. I’ll spend all my time on Broadway and ignore what is happening only blocks away. I am here on business and will travel from my hotel to the corporate office building without looking out the window of my cab. I am frightened of people who are different from me and I fear for my own personal safety--so I won’t venture very far from my tourist bus or planned itinerary.

Under these conditions of fear, we tend to make fast decisions that are based primarily on stereotypes or intuition (Gilbert, 2006; Lehrer, 2009). We also tend to rely on third party judgments and look to “authority” (such as the *Zagat* restaurant guides) as a way to reduce ambiguity and the number of criteria needed to make a choice. In other words, we escape from freedom. As coaches, we need to be particularly sensitive to this dynamic. It is very tempting to be sources of judgment and authority ourselves. Our clients will lean on us for advice. We take on their “monkey” (ownership of the problem) as a way of feeling better about ourselves as “experts,” but also as a way to reduce our client’s anxiety and range of options. Sometimes the collusion is even more complex. We first encourage our clients to consider all of the options available to them in their lives. Then when they are sufficiently scared as the New York City State of Mind envelops them, we become the expert who helps them make the decision about which option to choose. We encourage them to move from too many options to a single option (that happens to be our own preference).

There is an alternative. We can help our clients find a balance between the challenge of too many options and the constraint of too few options. This is the power of diversity and Intersection that have been so effectively articulated by both Page and Johansson (The Medici Effect). I will turn to Johansson’s strategies shortly; however, the first step is all about the balance—this is where the coach comes in. As a coach I help my client identify the options and articulate the strengths and problems associated with each option. The tools of polarity management (Johnson, 1996) can be very helpful here: spend time looking at both sides of each option rather than leaping immediately to another option. The reflective process I mentioned above is appropriate here: what is special about some event that occurred today? This “specialness” may come with a mixture of both hope and fear—this is not a bad thing. Various special events that occur in the client’s life should be identified and assessed during several sessions—rather than

being packed into a single session (one day visiting everything in New York City). This more deliberate pace is especially important if one's client is in a New York City State of Mind.

The next step is to sort through these reflective sessions to find out what lingers: what remains special over several weeks or months? What remains surprising or puzzling? What remains compelling? This is the process of discernment—the reflection on rich lessons learned in a complex and busy life. A coach can be critical to this discernment and sorting process, especially if the coach does not let her own personal preferences and values get in the way. The coach is to be a skillful and knowledgeable guide to the New York City State of Mind. She helps the visitor (or resident) identify and articulate what they (the client) most wants to see and experience, rather than trying to sell the client on a pre-planned tourist package. All of this work as a coach leads a client to the Intersections and to the rich opportunity for effective use of diversity.

The Intersection Opportunities

Frans Johansson writes extensively about how to forge Intersections in ourselves and in our organizations. He offers many suggestions in his original book, *The Medici Effect* (2004), and his more recent books (Johansson, 2006, 2012). I will identify only a few of the strategies offered by Johansson in his first book and suggest that the reader/coach turn to his abundant toolkits for more ideas. Johansson first suggests that we expose ourselves to a range of cultures. This is certainly possible in New York City and with a coach's encouragement this can also be part of the agenda for a client when considering ways to expand the number and diversity of Intersections in their life: travel, reading, or lingering around the less-often visited neighborhoods in their own town or city.

Second, Johansson suggests that we learn to learn differently. While he doesn't mention the work of David Kolb (1983), I imagine that Johansson would be in full support of Kolb's description of differing learning strategies and Kolb's recommendation that we learn how to learn using each of these strategies: (1) *concrete experience* (learning by going out into the world and experiencing it directly), (2) *reflective observation* (learning by watching how other people engage their world and reflecting on one's own experience of the world), (3) *abstract conceptualization* (building a conceptual model of the world into which to place, categorize, and interrelate various experiences) and (4) *active experimentation* (directly engaging the world through specific actions that yield feedback for use in further modification of the action). Intersections are likely to be more often encountered with the use of this diverse set of learning strategies. A coach can not only encourage this diversity, she can also emulate this diversity through the different ways in which she engages with her client in his own work as a coaching client.

The third Intersection strategy suggested by Johansson is the reversal of assumptions. A coach can be particularly helpful in facilitating this reversal. As Argyris and Schön (1974) and their very successful protégé, Peter Senge (1990) have noted, we move through the world with many untested assumptions (what they identify as the “left column”) which profoundly influence the way in which we interact with other people (and Johansson would add, the way in which we interact with ideas). I have written about the use of coaching techniques that surface and test these assumptions in a recent book, coauthored with my colleague, Agnes Mura. (Bergquist and Mura, 2011) Our description of “decisional-coaching” is particularly appropriate, though Johansson moves further than we do in encouraging not only surfacing and testing the accuracy of assumptions, but also reversing these assumptions. Mura and I identify a similar strategy (the “absurd suggestion”) in describing the Argyris and Schön-derived coaching strategy called “advocacy-inviting-inquiry”. (Bergquist and Mura, 2011, p. 283)

Fourth, Johansson invites us to try on different perspectives. This means viewing a specific issue from several different angles. Many years ago I worked with a woman who taught drawing at a Chicago-area university. She would invite her students to sit in a circle, surrounding a still-life (fruit, several goblets and a ceramic bowl). She would have them draw what they saw and once they had done so, would have them compare their own drawing with those drawn by the other students. Not only would different drawing styles (and skills) be on display, but also different perspectives on the still life. I invited my colleague to try out this same studio technique in non-art-related settings. What would it look like to view a philosophical issue from multiple perspectives—or a novel? She thrived in this work, creating studios in many different settings, working with faculty members from diverse academic disciplines in her own university. As coaches, how do we emulate this art teacher, encouraging our client to study their coaching issues from diverse perspectives? How do we create a coaching studio for our client? As Johansson notes, Intersections increase with a greater diversity in perspective. When wandering through New York City, we can’t help but notice the rich interplay of sights and sounds. This diversity encourages us (even forces us) to view the world from multiple points of view. We are not just viewing a still-life from different parts of the room—the still life is itself constantly changing! As a coach, how do we create this New York City State of Mind in our client—without having to travel to the Big Apple?

Coaching the Internal Context

While all four of Johansson’s strategies (and many more) help us increase the number and diversity of Intersections in our life, I would suggest that there is a second dimension to explore when considering ways in which to create and use Intersections. I specifically propose that there are two different types of Intersection and both types are abundant in New York City. There are first of all the *Spirit-ful*

Intersections. These are Intersections that elicit optimistic, big picture ideas. They encourage us to move upward. We look at the high-rising building in New York City and are inspired. Even as we enter Manhattan from Brooklyn or New Jersey, we are awestruck by the skyline.

There are also *Soul-ful* Intersections. These are the Intersections that elicit reflection and often painful remembrance. We soulfully grieve the absence of the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center and the aspirations these buildings (and those working in these buildings) brought to the world of international commerce. The new 9/11 memorial site, with the water dropping off as a four-sided waterfall into the deep recesses of the earth inspires us in a quite different manner than the high-rise buildings. The cathedrals, synagogues and mosques similarly pull us deeper and into a state of solemnity and prayer. Even if we are not oriented toward a religious life, we find the sanctuaries of New York City (of which I wrote earlier) to be sources of soul-ful Intersection. I would suggest that New York City is filled more with the spirit than the soul. By contrast, my hunch is that New Orleans (of which I will write shortly) is filled more with the soul than the spirit. However, I do think that both types of Intersections are present in New York City—and both are present in a New York City State of Mind. An effective coach will encourage both the spirit-ful movement upward and outward with her client, and the soul-ful movement downward and inward. The New York City State of Mind is incomplete without both types of Intersections.

These two types of Intersection also set the stage for a fuller representation of the New York City State of Mind—or any state of mind for that matter. When describing a state of mind, I am exploring the internal context of my client—which is usually the primary focus of my coaching sessions. As coaches we are looking for diversity not only in the environment in which our clients dwell, but also in the mind and heart that dictate how our clients process and act upon this world. As my colleague, Sandra Hill notes, we must pay attention to not only the external context in which leaders operate, but also to their own internal context. Cities like New York have both character and culture – as do coaching clients. Character is all about the internal context and culture is about the external context. The New York City State of Mind is about the internal context of our clients—how their mind and heart take in and operate with diversity, the challenge of growth and size, and the appearance of many Intersections. With the help of a coach, clients can create and learn to live constructively and creatively within a New York City State of Mind. They can begin to truly appreciate their own rich and distinctive internal context and character.

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