

Multiple Perspectives and Multiple Truths: Challenges and Opportunities for Professional Coaches

William Bergquist, Ph.D.

In this essay, I wish to build on a utopian proposal offered by the philosopher, Richard Rorty (1989), and relate it to the psyche being described by the psychoanalyst, Carl Jung (1979). Along with Rorty, I propose that the condition of irony (within Jung's psyche) is one in which we must recognize and appreciate multiple perspectives, multiple truths and multiple narratives within our own psyche. I further propose that as professional coaches we can assist our clients in becoming more appreciative of Rorty's "unfamiliar sorts of people" and the unfamiliar thoughts and "truths" that accompany these people. It seems that "unfamiliar" others increasingly populate the global environment in which we live and work.

Engaging the Wisdom of Carl Jung and Richard Rorty

The work of Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychoanalyst, is littered with dichotomies. Everything in the human psyche seems to have a counter-weight (or more accurately a counter-energy) that offsets or at least modifies the dominance of any one element of our psyche. The conscious element of the psyche is balanced off by the unconscious. The *persona* is balanced off by the *shadow*, the *anima* force by the *animus* force, sensation by intuition, thinking by feeling, the personal unconscious by the collective unconscious. In many ways, Jung's psyche is like an accountant's ledger: everything balances out in the end.

There is much more involved, of course, in Jung's psyche. It is dynamic and ever-changing unlike the accountant's ledger. While Freud's psyche often resembles an archeological site, with layers of unconscious material remaining undiscovered until it is carefully unearthed with the help of the expert archeologist/therapist, the various elements in Jung's psyche are moving back and forth between consciousness and

unconsciousness. So-called unconscious elements are manifest in daily life when we “slip up,” are “caught off guard” or find ourselves infatuated, frustrated, angry or hopeful for a moment. These elements are also displayed publicly in works of art, religious symbols and rituals, and in various temporary systems (Miles, 1964) and sanctuaries (e.g. festivals, taverns, theatrical events, television and movies, Internet games).

According to Jung, we arrive at truth through our thinking function and through our feeling function. Our persona presents one version of truth to the outer world, as does our shadow. We find truth in our personal unconscious and in the archetypal images (*imago*) of our collective unconscious. It is a condition of contingency in which we must willingly embrace these multiple realities and enter these realities into our own consciousness – despite the (ironic) fact that these realities might contradict one another. We embrace these multiple realities (and accompanying truths) by fully appreciating and empathizing with the emotional experiences (especially pain and suffering) of not just ourselves, but also those who live with these alternative realities and truths in their own lives and psyches. These are what Rorty identifies as the “unfamiliar others.”

In terms of organizational dynamics and leadership, we can begin to embrace Rorty’s sensitive ironist perspective (and our coaching clients can begin to embrace this perspective) by gaining a fuller appreciation of the wisdom regarding the human psyche that is provided by Carl Jung.

As organizational coaches, we can encourage our client not just to understand and appreciate the values and perspectives of the unfamiliar other, but also wholeheartedly claim each of these values and perspectives as being part-and-parcel of their working perspective regarding their challenging life (Hard Irony). The environment in which our clients work and their organizations now operate is filled with complexity, unpredictability and turbulence. It requires that our coaching clients have access to all of the different elements of their psyche.

Our clients (and we as professional coaches) must be thinkers and feelers. They (and we) must be attuned to sensations and the accompanying sense of reality; while also being attuned to an intuitive side and the accompanying sense of both history and vision. Our clients and we as professional coaches must acknowledge both feminine (anima) and masculine (animus) sources of energy, while honoring the power and guidance provided by the primal (archetypal) images inherent in our societal and collective unconscious.

The Ironic Dynamics in Contemporary Leadership

To illustrate the brief analysis I have just offered, I will provide two brief case studies of clients with whom I have worked as a coach in recent years. Both of these client/leaders have had to come to terms with specific ironic conditions in their own lives as leaders (and as human beings).

Kristen

The first leader, whom I will call Kristen, serves as senior vice president and regional director of a major health care system operating in the United States. I will call this system, HealthForce. Kristen is operating in a very conservative system that has recently faced the challenge of major change and reform (as do all health care system in the United States during this decade). Over the past fifteen years Kristen has been a force for change at Healthforce (the irony associated with the name of the organization does not go unnoticed by Kristen). Yet, to have much of an influence in Healthforce, Kristen has also served as an effective administrator and as a force for coherence and stability inside her region. She is greatly admired and supported by the CEO and COO of Healthforce (and still is the only woman operating in a senior vice president role in this system).

Kristen has been with Healthforce for 25 years and has served as regional director for the past 15 years. As the numbers indicate, Kristen began to advocate for change since coming into her directorship. She was mostly a “good worker” prior to taking over the

directorship; her “true colors” as a change advocate only emerged after she was appointed to this powerful position. There is some ambivalence on the part of the CEO (who was serving as COO when Kristen became director) regarding this emergent advocacy role assumed by Kristen.

The CEO still greatly appreciates Kristen’s loyalty to the organization and relies on her organizational competencies (while often feeling less confident regarding the male directors of other Healthforce regions). He has not appreciated her push for reform in Healthforce – at least not until recently. The CEO now looks to Kristen for new ideas-- given the calls for reform throughout the American health care system. He still does not like the ideas Kristen is presenting and deeply resents the imperatives that have been imposed on his organization by the US government and health care marketplace.

The ambivalence of Kristen’s CEO is evident every time she meets with him. He listens to her and takes many notes, but grumbles about the changes being advocated by Kristen. At times he bursts out with considerable anger about the imperatives that Healthforce is now confronting. Kristen doesn’t know quite how to react to his display of emotions. He is a man who was very careful about expressing emotions during the first years of his leadership (“holding his cards close to his vest”). Is he just getting burned out in his very demanding job? Should she get out of the way and let some other leaders in the organization become advocates for change? Has she worn out her welcome and credibility? Is she now identified with the “enemy” (the government as well as a volatile and demanding marketplace)?

Faced with these challenging conditions, Kristen is finding that her own psyche is highly active – even chaotic. She is faced with many dynamic ironies. First, she presents what Jung would call a persona of competence and dedication. She is hard-working and skillfully collaborative. Kristen might even be labeled a “company man [woman].” She has worked at Healthforce all of her adult life, having been appointed to a lower level administrative position straight out of her Master’s Degree program in Public Administration (with a focus on health care).

Yet, there is also the Shadow side to Kristen. She has a festering anger about contemporary health care and chose to specialize in health care administration precisely because she wanted to bring about reform. As a junior administrator, Kristen kept the Shadow function at bay. It only slipped out when she went for a drink with her best friend (another female junior executive at Healthforce). They could both vent their frustration and empathize with one another regarding the “good girl” image that both of them had to convey in order to get ahead in the organization.

Kristen’s best friend left the organization (and health care) within five years, leaving Kristen with no one to talk to. She “repressed” her Shadow and remained mute about reform until promoted to the position of regional director. At this point, Kristen decided to let her “radical” ideas be known. Yet, there is still the need for discretion, which Kristen’s Shadow does not always observe. Over the past fifteen years, Kristen has often regretted her expression of new ideas after a stressful meeting has been adjourned. She is fully aware of her CEO’s ambivalence and hates her own “stupid” expression of ideas that she knows he will reject.

Now he has to listen to her ideas and she is not sure if this is the right role for her to play in Healthforce. She is faced with the ironic tension between a well-developed and highly successful Persona and a Shadow that is based on her justifiable (and now widely-accepted) critique of contemporary health care. Kristen is engaged with and living in Hard Irony. The insights offered by both Rorty and Jung seem to be relevant in fully appreciating the challenges being faced by Kristen.

There is a second level of irony. Kristen is a great administrator who makes effective use of her sensing and thinking functions. She can be realistic and systematic. This has made her very successful in Healthforce. On the other hand, she holds an intuitive vision of what American health care (and Healthforce in particular) can be. Kristen is constantly hearing her feeling function criticizing the compromises she has made in moving up through the organization. Kristen’s sensing and thinking functions tend to

constellate around her masculine energies (animus), leading her to be quite skillful in working primarily with men at Healthforce.

Her intuitive and feeling functions tend to constellate around her feminine energy (anima) and often are accompanied by a sense of vulnerability and isolation (especially since her best friend left the organization). Kristen is caught in the dynamic Hard Irony of competing perspectives and priorities. There is truth embedded in each of the functions and both the masculine and feminine energies are being used in an appropriate manner (most of the time). But there is irony in all of this and Kristen never quite feels at home in any one sector of her psyche.

At an even deeper level, Kristen seems to be confronted with a powerful and primitive archetypal irony: the imago of the Great Mother who is both vision-embracing and grounding. On the one hand, the Great Mother is the creator and the source of all living things. In this role, the Great Mother is the innovator and inventor. She sees what could be and creates it. On the other hand, the Great Mother is the earth and the source of all nurturance. While the Wise Father resides in heaven and reigns from afar, the Great Mother is “down-to-earth” and cares about the daily life of her children. Kristen considers this image of the Great Mother to be highly offensive and the source of great repression in the history of Western Civilization. Yet, she is also caught up in the irony inherent in the two functions served by the Great Mother.

Kristen is both the vision-embracer and grounding figure in her organization. Not only can she be captured by this ironic archetype, we find that other members of Healthforce are also influenced by the collective image of a Great Mother. Kristen is undoubtedly pulled into this image as the first (and only) female leader of the organization.

Organizational theorists with a system or psychodynamic (Tavistock) orientation suggest that “role-suction” operates in all human groups and organizations. Individual members (or subgroups) of the group or organization are being pulled into specific roles, with specific expectations assigned to each role. These role-suctions are very powerful and are not easily abandoned. For Kristen, the role suction might be

particularly great (as it is for any minority of one or two) and further energized by the Great Mother imago that is held unconsciously and collectively by all members of her organization.

Kristen finds that these various levels of psychic irony tend to appear and constellate around one specific emotion: anxiety. Anxiety is often Hard Irony's companion. When she is anxious the psychic tensions seem to escalate. As a result, she gets confused and distracted, which leads to even greater anxiety. Kristen is accustomed to being thoughtful and caring, yet when her psychic ironies are constellating, Kristen finds it difficult to be thoughtful or caring of other people. It seems like a vicious circle--as it is for any (and all) of us who have experienced the unanticipated constellation of psychic ironies – who engage and live in Hard Irony.

Joshua

The second case study concerns a man I will call Joshua. He operates a day-treatment center for adolescents who can no longer function successfully in the public school system of their city. In many cases, these adolescents were abused as children, were born with major neurological challenges as a result of their mother's extensive use of drugs, or have been passed on from foster home to foster home. In each case, the life stories of these adolescent residents are heartbreaking.

One can't help but grow increasingly distressed regarding the unfair world in which these young men and women dwell. The day-treatment center, that I will call Fairhills, is 20 years old and is the last hope for these adolescent clients. If they don't make it at Fairhills, they are likely to spend the rest of their life in a mental institution or will end up on the streets and eventually in prison.

Joshua serves as Executive Director of Fairhills. He had worked for many years as a social worker and as Director of Training at a large mental health treatment center in a nearby urban setting. As a social worker and training director, Joshua focused on the treatment of adolescents and worked with his client's families whenever possible. With

this background, it seemed very appropriate that Joshua tackle the major challenge of leading an adolescent treatment center such as Fairhills.

He faces many challenges of irony at Fairhills. At the most immediate level is the ironic policy of the public schools in his city. The official policy is to rehabilitate the Fairhills clients, so that these young men and women can return to the regular classroom (or at least return to a special education program at one of the public schools). This return, however, rarely happens. The school officials don't really want these difficult students back in their schools. They have neither the budget nor the expertise to handle these students.

Hence, the real choice for these adolescents is between an extended stay at Fairhills (usually until they are at least 16 years old) or transfer to one of the state's overcrowded mental health facilities. The discrepancy between formal policy and actual practices can never be formally discussed by either Joshua or the public school administrators with whom he meets. Joshua can appreciate this from a bit of a distance. He can be contingent (to use Rorty's word) or "painfully flexible" (to use Joshua's own words) in confronting this irony-filled condition. Joshua receives funding on a per-capita basis, so he needs to keep his adolescent clients at Fairhills, but can't really admit to this financial imperative; the school administrators don't want the kids back yet must not declare this publicly. So, nothing is said about this discrepancy between private and public priorities.

At a personal level, Joshua is faced with the Hard Irony of operating from both a thinking and feeling perspective. He cares about the kids and wants to provide them with hope and opportunity. This is supported by and nurtures his feeling function. Yet, as the chief administrator of his organization and as the principle financial steward of Fairhills, Joshua must keep the place filled and must continue to receive substantial checks coming in from city, state and federal sources. Fairhills can't be too effective — enabling clients to return to the public schools. Fairhills also can't be too ineffective — requiring the transfer of clients to mental health facilities. It's a delicate balancing act.

Joshua hates this tension between rational financial planning and the way these kids tug on his heart. He hates being contingent!

At yet another level, Joshua is vaguely aware of an ironic tension between his own feminine (anima) and masculine (animus) sources of energy. As a psychotherapist working often with young men and women who are struggling with their own feminine and masculine identity, Joshua is fully cognizant of the dynamic interplay between the male and female in each of us. With regard to his own psyche, Joshua senses that his long career as a therapist appealed mostly to his nurturing, feminine side.

This side of Joshua is also apparent in his commitment to the welfare of his Fairhills clients and in his underlying frustration (and often anger) regarding the lack of care these clients often have received from their mothers (and fathers). When confronted with the seemingly never-ending onslaught of governmental regulations at Fairhills, Joshua finds energy and renewed commitment by spending some time with his clients and with the remarkable men and women he supervises who choose to work (at low wages) with these damaged adolescents.

The irony resides in the fact that Joshua must return to his office and set aside this feminine energy, focusing on the traditionally masculine task of running the organization. When being perfectly candid with himself, Joshua acknowledges that he also finds energy in performing these administrative tasks, solving organizational problems, and finding ways to make a strong case for services being offered by Fairhills when seeking renewed (and hopefully increased) government support for his programs.

Joshua will even admit to gaining some masculine ego gratification from now being king-of-the-hill and from being acknowledged in his city as an innovative human service provider. On the one hand, this double source of energy keeps Joshua going through very difficult and challenging times. On the other hand, these two sources of

energy often seem to bump into one another and create a “perfect storm” in Joshua’s psyche – leading him to confusion, fatigue and even some depression (and potential drug abuse).

As in the case of Kristen, the ironic dynamics operating in Joshua’s psyche becomes even more complex and empowered through the deep level archetypes operating at a personal and collective level within Joshua and within his organization. The archetype that seems most prevalent is one of the Great Warrior. While the image (imago) of the Great Warrior is often assigned a masculine identity (the aggressive and courageous father/general), it can also be feminine (the protective and defending mother). For Joshua, there is the appeal of both the masculine imago (defeating the evil government bureaucrat) and the feminine imago (defending the vulnerable children). In many ways, the ironic interplay between Joshua’s anima and animus is resolved at a deep level through the merging of the feminine and masculine Great Warrior.

This resolution certainly can account for the reason why (or at least one of the reasons why) Joshua has latched on to this archetype at an unconscious level. What might account for his initial pull toward the image of Great Warrior? Like all young men (and many young women) in American society, there is a pervasive sense that the Great Warrior is needed to solve complex problems and is rewarded for the courage and cunning displayed in winning a great battle. We have only to look at movies like the Star Wars series or more recently the super-hero films. For Joshua, there might also be a special appeal because his namesake was a great biblical warrior. Many Jungians point out that one’s given name can impact in a profound (often unacknowledged) way on self-image as well as the initial assumptions other people make about oneself.

Joshua seems to be gathering support from the environment in which he works for the prevalence of the Great Warrior archetype. Members of the Fairhills staff (and board) seem to support the role of Joshua as both the masculine and feminine Warrior. They admire his administrative and advocacy skills and often assign Joshua too much

competency and give him too much personal credit for the financial success and stability of Fairhills.

As in the case of archetypes operating in all organizations, the staff members at Fairhills project their own archetypal images (in this case the image of Great Warrior) onto their leader (Joshua) – in part because this is a very powerful, unacknowledged and often frightening energy source in their own personal psyche. This source must be isolated and assigned to some source outside themselves. The projection benefits the staff members because they can more readily absolve themselves of responsibility for the success or failure of their own work and the overall welfare of the organization – looking instead for their leader(s) to take on full responsibility as the Great Warrior (or All Nurturing Mother or Ultra-Brave Leader or Profound Visionary, etc.).

Carl Jung suggests that deeply held archetypes come with considerable baggage. As I noted with regard to the image of Great Mother in Kristen's personal psyche and in the collective psyche operating in her organization, there is considerable irony inherent in the image of Great Warrior that seems to be driving at least some of Joshua's behavior and the reactions (and over-reactions of other people) to his behavior. The Great Warrior can be very brave--but can also be unrealistic: charging out of the foxhole with neither enough ammunition nor a sense of where the enemy is located or the magnitude of the enemy's strength.

Those who work at Fairhills may project great wisdom onto Joshua, but in doing so they may be distorting their own sense of reality or assigning responsibility for defining reality onto Joshua. He makes a mistake, but this mistake is acknowledged neither by himself nor those working around him. Joshua can become the great imposture (Ket de Vries, 2003). A bubble of omniscience is created around Joshua, leading to a failure of staff and board member (and Joshua himself) to create an organizational learning environment at Fairhills. The same mistakes are repeated because no one is willing to admit that Joshua is human and that wisdom is a shared commodity in organizations

like Fairhills that face complex, unpredictable, turbulent – and contradictory – conditions in serving a damaged adolescent population.

There is a second fundamental flaw inherent in the Great Warrior archetype – and in virtually all of the other archetypes that pervade organizations. This flaw concerns the indispensability of the leader who has been assigned the role of emulating and displaying this archetype. This is a step beyond role-suction. Not only is a leader like Joshua pulled into a specific, unalterable role in the organization. There is no one else that can take his place. Succession planning is a major challenge when members of an organization are captivated by, enthralled with and dependent on a specific archetype and its manifestation in a specific person (or specific group of people). Everyone is caught up in a collusive imposturing.

Joshua doesn't want to remain CEO of Fairhills forever. He would like to return to the role of therapist or perhaps take on a new challenge. But will his organization allow him to leave? Who will take his place? Will the organization collapse without Joshua being in charge? If Joshua does leave, then there is likely to be a pervasive sense of betrayal in the organization.

Staff members and board members will be angry: how dare he leave the scene of the battle! Has he become a coward or has he always been a coward (we just didn't see it)? Has he really been using us for his own gains and glorification? The impostureship collapses. A new collusion-based sense of betrayal enters – leaving no room for organizational learning. Psychotherapists with a psychodynamic orientation identify this as the “splitting” function that can operate very powerfully in the psyche of their patients. We now know that this splitting can also be observed in the collective (and colluding) behavior of many people in an organization.

Even if the organization plans carefully for the departure of Joshua, it is likely to place the new CEO into the same role as Joshua occupied – even if the new leader neither wants to be in this role nor is skilled in the areas required of the Great Warrior. It is not

unusual that a successor to someone like Joshua will fail in their job. The organization then often selects and tosses out or wears out a string of leaders before finding someone to fit into the role occupied by an archotypically-saturated leader like Joshua.

Members of the organization become disillusioned with the leader and seek to get rid of him because the person he really is doesn't fit very well with the highly distorted (and unacknowledged) image that is being held collectively in the organization. When this occurs then we often observe the "auditioning" of someone from inside the organization who will take on the role assigned to the former archotypically-saturated leader. The new leader must fit into the role occupied by the old leader. The impostership will be renewed. Nothing is acknowledged, appreciated or learned about the role suction or about the underlying archetypal image. Nothing is learned in this profound important dimension of organizational life. As a result, little in the organization will change.

To return specifically to Joshua, we find not only that he is facing many psychic dynamics operating in himself and in his organization, but also that these dynamics are escalated when Joshua experiences a specific emotion: anger. Anger, along with anxiety is often a companion of Hard Irony. As in the case of Kristen, Joshua's various psychic ironies tend to constellate when he experiences a specific emotion associated with either his own actions or the actions being taken by other people in his organization. Part of the problem is that Joshua can't openly express his anger in many settings. There is so much tension operating in his organization – related to the treatment of very difficult clients – that he doesn't want to add to the tension by expressing his anger regarding the performance of other people working in Fairhills.

Joshua also has to restrain his considerable anger regarding the past and current performance of his client's parent(s). As a therapist he must understand the emotions experienced and expressed by these stressed-out parents. As a social worker, he also must appreciate the complex and challenging environments in which these parents live and the ways in which public institutions and policies contribute to the mess in which

Joshua's clients and parents find themselves. He must appreciate the Soft Irony and be contingent in his own work with the parents – even though they are ‘unfamiliar people’ (Rorty). Joshua also knows that it is counterproductive to vent his anger and frustration regarding the public school administrators with whom he must work. He knows that ultimately it is not their fault and that he won't get any cooperation if he expressed his anger about their decisions and actions.

So, the anger stays bottled up and, the ironic dynamics within his psyche are constellating and escalating as the anger increases – which makes him even angrier. He is now angry about his anger and about his inability to express this anger in any kind of therapeutic manner without hurting his own work, his own leadership, and the future of an organization (Fairhills) about which he cares deeply. Joshua hates his contingency and the “unfamiliar other” parent with whom he must work. The vicious circle begins for Joshua, just as it does for Kristen.

The Coaching Implications

There is certainly much for both Kristen and Joshua to gain from Carl Jung, a doctor from Switzerland with challenging ideas about psyche dynamics. There is also much to be learned about irony from an American philosopher, Richard Rorty, who believes in a utopian vision of a world in which people come to more fully appreciate “unfamiliar sorts of people.” Carl Jung's and Richard Rorty's insights might be of great benefit to those who work in and lead 21st Century organizations. These insights can also provide a distinctive set of guidelines for those of us who provide professional coaching to these challenged leaders. While there are many implications to be drawn, I will focus on five.

Acknowledging Both Sides

When we come to appreciate the irony that is inherent in the bifurcated human psyche, then we must also acknowledge that each perspective is valid and critical to our own engagement with the world in which we live. Both Kristen and Joshua will be effective leaders to the extent that they bring both sides of themselves to the fray. As professional

coachs we can be of value to our clients if we encourage them to not only identify each side, but also appreciate the contribution being made by each side to their own work.

This acknowledgement is not easy. The acknowledgement moves one into Hard Irony.

It adds complexity to our sense of self and pulls us in at least two different directions.

When should each of our sides become prominent? What is the wisdom associated with each side and when is each side stupid or easily duped? As coaches, we can assist in this sorting out process. In many traditional mystical practices, this sorting out relates to something called *discernment*.

Mystics had access to not only the words of the divine, but also the words of the not-so-divine (satanic perspectives). They were wise not only because they had access to spiritual truths, but also because they could differentiate between the divine and satanic. In secular terms, they could discern that which was aligned with the greater good of the world and that which was aligned with their own self-interests and ego. A similar kind of discernment must take place when a leader faces the irony inherent in their own personal psyche. A coach can be of great value in asking tough discernment questions – such as “Why are you doing this?” “How do you know this is true (real)?” “How will you know if you have succeeded?”

Assessing the Appropriate Use of Strengths

There is a second level at which the coaching inquiry can be engaged. We know that successful leaders rely on their strengths and make extensive use of strengths associated with particular dimensions of their psyche. Jung even goes so far as to suggest that the first half of life is all about honing the strengths that we have inherited or acquired early in our life. We also know, however, that it is often the strengths which leaders possess that get them in trouble. They overuse their strength or use their strength in inappropriate settings. Joshua might be too consumed in administrative detail or get too wrapped up in the treatment plans for a specific adolescent client. Kristen might

overplay her hand as an advocate for change or might (like Joshua) get too wrapped up in her administrative role.

Jung would suggest that this overuse of specific strengths is usually aligned with the reliance of a leader on their public persona. These leaders begin to believe that their persona is actually their true self and that other aspects of their psyche aren't really valuable or even present. They begin down the path of impostership. At this point, Jung would suggest, the Shadow often comes to the fore. Leaders not only make excessive or inappropriate use of their strengths – they also mess up in the use of their strengths. Both Joshua and Kristen become obsessed with their administrative duties. For Kristen, this obsession might relate to the constellation of her psychic tensions and to the resulting anxiety, confusion and distraction. Joshua might become obsessed with administrative details because he is angry and is taking out this anger on his own paperwork or the men and women with whom he works (rather than his adolescent clients, their parents, the school system or society in general).

As a coach to either Kristen or Joshua, I would help them identify the moments when their strengths are being used in a skillful and appropriate manner – and then identify when their strengths are not being used in a skillful manner (often because they are anxious or angry) or are being used in an inappropriate manner or in an inappropriate setting. The tendency of leaders is often to abandon their strengths when these strengths get them in trouble: “I was too vocal at this meeting. Next time I’m not going to speak at all!” “I’ve had it with this accreditation process. Next time I’m going to hand it off to one of my assistants!” “I’m sick and tired of always being the nice guy. From now on, I’m going to be tough-as-nails!” This discarding of one’s strengths is never the answer.

An organizational coach can help her client ease off from the polar (polarity) shift and help her client achieve a more balanced perspective. Furthermore, given the ironic nature of the leader’s psyche, it also might be of great benefit for the coach to help her client identify how the shift to an opposite perspective or behavioral pattern can be

beneficial – if it is done not in despair or disgust regarding the dominant strength. It is done because strength can also be found on the opposite side of the psyche. “I can become quieter during future meetings and can do a bit more listening. I can engage this more reflective side.” “I don’t have to run the whole show when I get anxious about the accreditation process. I do know how to bring in other people to assist me.” “I can establish firmer boundaries regarding my interpersonal relationships and do not have to always give in to other people.

Finding the Shadow in Other People

A professional coach can be of assistance to their client with regard to not only the intrapsychic dynamics of irony, but also the dynamics associated with irony in interpersonal relationships. We find ourselves conflicted not only about the apparent contradictions within ourselves, but also the contradictions that we experience in our experience of and feelings about other people with whom we work – and (in particular) with those people whom we love and with whom we share our personal life. As Jung and Rorty both note, we are often bonded to people who seem quite different from ourselves. In Jungian terms we are attracted to and at the same time repelled by those who represent the Shadow side of our own psyche. In Rortian terms, human solidarity is based on mutual recognition of the differences between perspectives, truths and narratives among people within a society.

We have already encountered this interpersonal dynamic when describing the impact of collective archetypes on the leadership of both Kristen and Joshua. People with whom they work will tend to discount or isolate elements of their own psyche and project these elements onto their leader(s) (Kristen or Joshua). They have, in essence, casted their shadow over Kristen and Joshua. They have begun to believe that this shadow is actually the real person operating in a real world. As a coach, we can help our clients discern what is and is not their real self and the real world in which they operate. Obviously, there is no one reality (especially as Rorty has noted when irony is thrown into the mix). It is of great value, therefore, for a leader to have someone

alongside them to sort things out a bit about projections onto them from other people. As I will note shortly, this task is even more important given the additional dynamic associated with collective archetypes.

There is a second way in which shadow functions are important to identify when coaching someone like Joshua or Kristen. Leaders not only have shadows projected on them, they also project their own shadow onto other people. This is the bonding process I mentioned above and the fundamental collusion inherent in imposterships. The leader must herself reclaim her own projections and acknowledge the other side of her own psyche and the often unacknowledged and underappreciated other side of her strength as a leader. Leaders often look to other people to pick up the slack regarding their own supposed weaknesses. A visionary leader looks to a member of her administrative staff to be the “realist.” A “people-person” looks to a colleague to be the “numbers-person.” As Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) noted in her legendary *Men and Women of the Corporation* (and as we witnessed in the TV series *Mad Men*) male executives often looked to their secretaries during an earlier era to fill-in the social and interpersonal gaps in their own persona.

As organizational coaches, we can encourage and help our clients reclaim the dissociated parts of themselves. They may find it not only confusing and anxiety-provoking to acknowledge the disparate parts of their own psyche – but might also find it quite a challenge to reclaim responsibility (and authority) for functions that they have conveniently assigned to other people. It is hard to abandon imposterships. The coaching client need not take on full responsibility for all of the functions associated with their job, but they can at least acknowledge that they can do this work and can engage often under-utilized strengths to engage this work when needed.

Pulling Away from the Organizational Role Suction and Archetypes

It is not only the case that leaders are likely to have shadows cast over them, they are also likely, as I noted above, to be pulled into specific roles and to absorb a collective

unconscious archetype (such as Kristen experiences with the Great Mother and Joshua experiences with the Great Warrior). As a coach, I can assist my client in assessing the nature and impact of these powerful organizational forces. In general, the strength of role suction and the influence of collective archetypes become greater the higher up a person is in the formal authority structure of an organization. Imposterships reign at the top of an organization! The role suction and archetypes become more powerful not only because this person has more authority and often more control in the organization, but also because this person often becomes less accessible to many members of the organization (thereby decreasing the impact of reality on the members' image of the leader).

Given these dynamics, a leader at or near the top of an organization is particularly in need of someone (like a coach) who can be a thoughtful, insightful and candid observer of what's going on in the organization and of the leader's own thought processes and emotions. It is very easy for the leader to be drawn into these dynamics – especially if it means that the leader doesn't have to acknowledge their own internal ironic dynamics. It is much easier to be either the hero or villain than someone who is a bit of both the hero and villain or someone who is sometimes talented and wise and sometimes a bit of a dolt and fool. Imposterships can be the antidote to Hard Irony.

The professional coach can also be of great value in helping her client pull out of the role suction and she can help her client challenge the collective archetype. Typically, it is very difficult for any one member of an organization to cast aside the role to which they have been assigned by other members of the organization (often with their own initial collusion). The role suction usually fulfills an important function in the organization.

Somewhere in the organization there needs to be dreams and visions and somewhere there must be realistic assessments and truth-telling. Somewhere in the organization there needs to be a concern for values and justice, and somewhere there must be a concern for expedience and practicality. The problem is that responsibility for

fulfillment of these needs is often assigned to one person or to one small group of people – and this becomes destructive role suction and the constellation of organizational energy and emotions around specific collective archetypes. This becomes a fertile setting for imposterships.

A professional coach can help her client address these powerful dynamics in three ways. First, the coach can help her client identify and rehearse ways in which to make these dynamics apparent and discussable within the organization. How does one bring up these difficult issues – given the risk of appearing to be either mad or self-serving? The client can try out several different scenarios with his coach and the two of them can work toward a viable script. Second, the coach can assist her client in identifying support within the organization to match the challenge of articulating a difficult (and usually unacknowledged) organizational dynamic. Can the client recruit colleagues with organizational credibility who can provide support to the client and verify the client's observations?

Third, the coach can help her client identify the way(s) in which his own psyche interplays with the role suction and collective unconscious. In many instances, the role and archetype are assigned (at least initially) because the recipient at some level wants to claim this role or archetype. This attraction is usually countered with a desire to avoid or escape from the role or archetype. The client's perspective on the role suction and collective archetype is often saturated with ambivalence and the condition of irony is prevalent.

Ultimately, the coaching client will be well-served by acknowledging this ambivalence and Hard Irony. He will search for ways in which to still fulfill part of the function and meet some of the responsibilities associated with the role or archetype. The client will find sources of continuing gratification in partially fulfilling this function and meeting some of these responsibilities. The key point is to not be left "holding the bag". Other people in the organization must step forward and assume some responsibility.

Identifying and Nurturing Sources of Energy

There is a fifth way in which professional coaches can be of great value in helping their clients address and engage the challenge of hard psychic irony. This fifth way concerns the multiple sources of energy that are available to a leader when seeking to sustain her work in a complex, unpredictable and turbulent organizational environment. Many people who have become acquainted with Jungian theory recognize the distinction drawn between those people who derive much of their energy from being with many other people and interacting with their environment (extraverts) and those people who derive much of their energy instead from their own private (and often introspective) pursuits or from interacting with a few, carefully chosen people in their inner-circle (introverts).

It is less often recognized that energy also derives from other elements of the human psyche. The anima (female) and animus (male) are great sources of energy as are the collective archetypes. These psychic structures can either consolidate (constellate) energy that comes from other sources – providing focus and direction – or generate the energy themselves. Energy from these sources is manifest in the vast array of rituals, myths and works of art to be found in all societies.

It is not particularly difficult for a coach to assist his client in identifying sources of energy within their own work life. Usually it only takes a single question: “when you reflect on your own job, what keeps you going and what picks you up?” Surprisingly, many of the men and women with whom I have worked rarely ask themselves this obvious question. It is a question that must frequently be posed, because the sources of energy can shift over time – given changes in the client’s own psychic dynamics and in the organizational environment.

The question also must be posed frequently because sources of energy are often at some level contradictory – this speaks to the Hard Irony inherent in the psyche of our clients (and our own psyche as professional coaches). We are motivated by many activities and

find gratification in many different outcomes. While we might initially believe that our energy comes from a specific source or from several different sources that are closely aligned with one another, we often come to realize (especially as we grow older) that it is a much more complicated picture. We are excited when given the task of envisioning a new project, but also are pulled toward an existing project that we know will continue to be successful. We look forward to assuming responsibility for a task force in our organization – but know that we will miss the gratification that comes from being allowed to work alone on a project. We are delighted to know that we are going to be babysitting our grandchildren, but also long for the peace-and-quiet of a good book.

As organizational coaches, we can be of great benefit to our clients when we help them identify the various sources of energy in their organizational (and personal) life. Burn-out can often be avoided if a leader comes to recognize that they can shift to a different task or take on a different role when their current endeavors have ceased to be either motivating or gratifying. We know that this capacity to shift focus and activity is central to the capacity of many men and women to keep fully engaged in their work. While some leaders prefer more variety than do other leaders, it is appropriate to assume that there are multiple sources of energy that any leader can tap in order to stay “alive” in their organization and engage in a world of Irony.

Conclusions

There are many more implications to be drawn from the rich insights offered by Carl Jung and Richard Rorty. While we can assume that these two men – one a philosopher and the other a psychoanalyst – probably never met one another, I suspect that they would have much to share. If they were alive today, I suspect that both would have much to share with those involved in professional coaching. I would have loved to be present when they talked about irony and the complex texture of the human psyche – and as they entered into a dialogue regarding their personal visions of societal diversity and solidarity. I would be honored to hear them mutually envision a utopian world that complements the ironic dynamics of the personal psyche. And I would greatly

appreciate their own recommendations regarding the effective use of professional coaching strategies in helping contemporary leaders address the irony operating in their own personal psyches. What a treat this would be!

References

Jung, C. (1979) *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kanter, R. M. (1977) *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Kets de Vries, M. (2003) *Leaders, Fools and Impostors*. New York: iUniverse.

Miles, M. (1964) "On Temporary Systems" In M. Miles (Ed.), *Innovation in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony & Solidarity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.