Coaching-In-Depth I: Sigmund Freud as a Mid-21st-Century Life Coach

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Sigmund Freud was the father of one type of human service that continues to be a valuable venue for the exploration of self and the healing of psychological wounds. What if Sigmund Freud were living today? Could he have embraced another form of human service that also guides the exploration of self? What if he were a life coach? Imagine that a middle-aged man, whom we will call Donald, came to Dr. Freud's office and engaged in eight sessions of life coaching with this wise counsellor?

I offer Donald's summary account of what occurred during these eight sessions.

Session One

I entered the office of Sig Freud, a life coach. Unlike most life coaches, I find that Sig Freud prefers to operate in a very formal manner. He prefers to be called Dr. Freud and always dresses quite fashionably in a coat and tie. I notice that he even wears cuff links. Kind of a throwback to another era. I am also impressed immediately with the large bookcase in his office. It is filled not only with books, but also with many artifacts from ancient times. I will have to find a good excuse during one of our sessions to look at the books and to ask Dr. Freud about the clay pots, wooden statues, and pieces of very old jewelry on his shelves.

Dr. Freud greets me with a formal handshake and asks me to sit in one of the two large wingback chairs located at one side of his spacious office. I noticed a richly textured rug on which the chairs were located. Dr. Freud is obviously a man with exquisite (and probably expensive) taste. He also seems to be living a bit in the past. He offers me some carefully brewed coffee or tea. I decline this offer, probably because I am anxious to get on with the coaching session. I detected some lingering cigar smell. I noticed that there was an unfinished cigar placed on a dish located on Dr. Freud's desk. He must have been smoking the cigar just before I entered his office.

I am a little uncomfortable with Dr. Freud's heavy foreign accent; however, I am put at ease when I notice a diploma on his wall that was issued by a prestigious university in Vienna, Austria.

We begin our coaching session. Dr. Freud asks me why I had come to see him. While I had mentioned my reasons in an email I had sent him, it was somehow quite different to share my pain with this man in person. I indicated that I have been an account executive in an advertising firm for eight years. While I did most of my work at home during COVID, most of my clients had returned to a request for in-person interactions when working on an ad campaign, as well as when making an initial "pitch" for serving an account. I had grown quite tired of being "on the

road" (or actually often "in the air"); furthermore, I was finding the work to often be boring and routine. While I occasionally was working on an ad campaign that was innovative and demanding of creativity, most of my clients in recent years have chosen to "play it safe." COVID seems to have driven everyone to a state of anxious freeze regarding how to bring their message to the public.

This all came to a head several weeks ago when I was flying into Chicago. As usual, O'Hare was jammed up. Even though my flight was held up for a while before take-off because of traffic at O'Hare, we were still placed on hold and were forced to circle around the skies of Southern Wisconsin. I decided to take out my smartphone and play one of the CDs I had just loaded. It was an album of classical music works by Ralph Vaughan Williams (one of my favorite composers). A piece of music that I had never heard was suddenly swirling around my head and heart. It was *Flos Campi*. The soulful musical expression of the cello and wordless choir touched me deeply.

As I looked out the window of the airplane, viewing the verdant green countryside of Southern Wisconsin, and listening to this remarkable composition by Vaughan Williams, I began to quietly cry (which I never do). I felt the pain of living with a job I no longer found inspiring, spending time away from a home and family that I deeply love, and, frankly, mourning a life now being led with little purpose or joy. I found myself tearing up a bit, just telling Dr. Freud of my state of mind and heart while hovering north of O'Hara. When I eventually did land, I immediately called my wife and told her that it was time for me to move on with my life. Surprisingly, my wife was neither surprised nor resistant to my declared change in plans. When I got home several days later, my wife suggested that I see a life coach to sort out where to go next. She had heard of your work from a dear friend, found your website, and encouraged me to contact you. So, here I am.

Dr. Freud acknowledged that it was appropriate for me to contact him. This type of career and life crisis resided at the heart of his coaching practice. Dr. Freud then asked me many questions for the next twenty minutes or so. He asks me quite a few questions about my childhood, focusing on my parents and the way they raised me from birth until adolescence. He also inquired into my institutional affiliations during my early years. What kind of schools did I attend? In what kind of neighborhood do I live? I was surprised to be asked about my religious affiliations when I was growing up, and about my parents' political perspectives. I'm not sure if it is appropriate for a life coach to be asking these sensitive questions about religion and politics; however, I shared this information with Dr. Freud.

There were also a considerable number of questions addressed to my physiology and health. Dr. Freud asked about the food I most enjoy eating, about exercises in which I engage, about my sleep habits, and most importantly, about what makes me anxious, happy, sad, and gratified—and how these feelings are manifested in my state of health. I had never been asked about this relationship between feelings and health, even by my primary care physician.

Dr. Freud then turned to his own perspectives regarding the role he plays as a life coach. First, he talked about the importance of childhood experiences in our establishment of priorities and practices during our adult years. He talked about the ways we are "haunted" by the aspirations laid on us as children by our parents, as well as the biases inculcated in us as children by the

society and institutions with which we were affiliated. No wonder he spends a considerable amount of time asking about my childhood.

Dr. Freud shared a second perspective about life coaching. He indicated that we "live in our bodies" and "our bodies are attuned to the opportunities and challenges we all face in our lives." This helps to explain why he focused on my physiology and health.

Finally, Dr. Freud indicated, with some strong feelings, that he believes we human beings need not be "captured" by our childhood or by our body. We can gain an understanding of and control over that which "haunts" us and can freely choose our future. I find this declaration to be inspiring. Furthermore, while he is quite formal, I find Dr. Freud to be kind and friendly. I could see him being kind of a "father figure" for me, even though he is probably not much older than me. I look forward to working with Dr. Freud as a life coach.

Session Two

Dr. Freud asked me about my hopes for the coming year and then about my long-term aspirations. He asked me to envision a wonderful future, even if unrealistic. He then asked me to identify any fears associated with this wonderful future. Also, he asked how I was feeling and how my body was reacting to my immediate hopes, my longer-term aspirations, and my wondrous future. I talked with the good doctor about many things. Perhaps the most important information I provided concerned my feelings of burden regarding the financial pressures I am feeling. I have to set aside a considerable amount of money for my children's college education. I find myself growing angry regarding what colleges are now charging.

Another major issue concerns my wife's career. She set aside her promising work as a financial planner to devote herself full-time to child-rearing. Now, with our kids growing older, she can return to this work. However, the field has now become increasingly competitive. And she has lost ground in building a reputation and becoming part of a referral network. She probably has to join one of the major financial planning firms. And she will probably have to take some costly training programs to update and enrich her background and expertise. This is not a good time for me to consider a shift in jobs and a potential drop in pay (or even a period of time with no income). I feel trapped. However, I don't resent my wife's wishes, since she sacrificed for our family and me. My feelings are mixed and mostly negative and tinged with anger.

At this point, Dr. Freud reverted to his European background. He introduced a German word: *einstellung.* He mentioned that this word refers to getting stuck in a cognitive or emotional rut. It is particularly likely to take over in our lives when we are anxious. Where might I now be "stuck?" Clearly, I feel stuck in my current job as an account executive. It was not only being stuck in a boring job but also being stuck with routine ad campaigns—largely because my clients were themselves "stuck" in post-COVID anxiety and uncertainty. I also must admit that I feel stuck in the stance I am taking with regard to the obligations I feel in supporting the college education of my children and the renewed career aspirations of my wife. I am grateful to be able to provide this

support. However, I also feel stuck, because this support might require that I stick with my account executive job.

Perhaps I am even stuck on the career expectations of my parents. They wanted me to get a job that not only paid well but also was stable. They also wanted me to be a successful "bread-winning" husband and father. They were delighted when I told them about accepting a job with a very successful advertising firm. My previous exploration of jobs in artistic fields and working with struggling arts organizations and theater groups was not their idea of either good pay or job security. Dr. Freud then probed even deeper: Am I stuck on the assumptions that I need to please my parents. I indicated to Dr. Freud that they both passed away several years ago, yet I am still trying to please them! Their deaths in quick succession (three months apart) were quite traumatizing for me. Perhaps this might have encouraged my stuckness. Dr. Freud agreed that this could be the case. I was "honoring" my parents' wishes as a way to grieve their death.

Dr. Freud encouraged me to consider other ways in which I am stuck. I noted that I am stuck on following the advice offered by my wife. I turned directly to Dr. Freud: "Including her recommendation that I come here to meet with you!" We both briefly chuckled. However, Dr. Freud got serious for a moment. He suggested that this recommendation made by my wife might be an important point with regard to my continuing engagement with him.

I then identified another stuck point: I realized that I have long been stuck on the idea that I must somehow keep changing my career until I feel happy and content with the work I am doing every day. And happy and content with all of the people I am working with. Why can't I ever find the right job!! While these last eight years have been a long time for me remaining in one job, it also might be the case that I am bored precisely because this is a much longer tenure with one job and one organization. "So, why exactly am I wanting to move to another job?" Dr. Freud indicated that our time is up and that this might be a good question to ponder between sessions.

Session Three

Dr. Freud mentions that his Adlerian colleagues talk about the influence that our relatives from seven generations past have over us, and how what we think and do will influence seven generations in our future. WE are "haunted" by our past.

Dr. Freud asks me to reflect on what my grandparents would think about me at this point in my life. Even if I didn't know them (which I didn't except for one grandfather), I might speculate about their view of me, given their own background (ethnic, socio-economic level, historical context). I sat there in silence for about 30 seconds (I appreciate Dr. Freud's willingness to just let me think for a while). I found myself reflecting back on what the world (and America in particular) would have looked like for my grandparents. It would have been the first half and the middle of the 20th century. They would have lived through the depression and World War II. I told Dr. Freud that I suspect all four of them would have suggested that I keep my current job.

Having survived the depression, my grandparents would have been cautious about taking any financial risks. Having survived World War II and found their country enmeshed in a Cold War

against the Communist Soviet Union, they would have also been cautious about planning very far ahead in life. Furthermore, the field of advertising would have just come into full operation when they were adults. It was considered an exciting, newly emerging field.

I would imagine that they consider the role of account executive to always be filled with creativity and innovation. I also would expect my two grandmothers to gently confront me about being a bit "selfish" regarding the welfare of my wife. They would have been living through a time when women were just beginning to find their freedom and identity away from family. These two women would have appreciated my wife's sacrifices (having engaged in similar sacrifices themselves). They probably would have told me, "It's your wife's turn now. Stay where you are and provide financial stability, so that your wife can realize her own, independent ambitions."

At this point, I came to an important realization that my own parents' wishes regarding my life and work were no doubt strongly influenced by their parents. Dr. Freud noted that the American depression, World War II and the early Women's Lib movement were still casting shadows over our mid-21st Century lives. He briefly mentioned his own belief that we human beings have a powerful pull toward not just life-giving love and meaningful work, but also death-seeking alienation and violence. I think he was a little embarrassed about this "pontification." However, I appreciated his expression of passionate personal beliefs.

He then asked me to go back even further. What about my great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents? I pushed hard to conceive what life might have been like for these ancestors and what they might think of me. I reflected on a time in America when there was no television (let alone computers) and even a time when there were no automobiles and no electricity. I also recalled that my great-great-grandparents on my father's side were actually immigrants from Eastern Europe. On my mother's side, the lineage goes way back in American history. These two sides of my family would have viewed my current life and work in quite different ways.

I suspect that my mother's family would have been quite conservative and would have wanted me to remain in my current job. However, I know that they were quite liberal in their politics and might have been critical of my work in a field that "deceived" people and got them to buy stuff that they didn't really need. My father's side might have been much more encouraging of my venturing forth into a new career and into new territory. After all, they took the big risk of coming to America from a foreign land so that they might create a new life for themselves. They might also have suggested that it would be the responsibility of my wife to support my job change.

I recall my father telling me that his grandmother was the one who really pushed for their immigration to America. He would talk about this very "driven" women who would do anything to help her husband get ahead in the world, after arriving in the United States. He ended up establishing himself as a very successful owner of a grocery store in the Midwest. So, perhaps I am now living with two sets of ancestral voices. One is telling me to stay put. The other is telling me to move forward. Dr. Freud indicated that these two voices should be taken seriously. While these ancestors lived in a quite different world, they are offering me two sets of important values that exist independent of particular circumstances. Dr. Freud noted that many European families once

had family crests on which were placed visual statements of their family values. Once again, Dr. Freud seemed to be a bit embarrassed. He was allowing his own European roots to show up. He has his own ancestral history and voices!

Dr. Freud suggested that I might want to contact one of the organizations that generate ancestry documentation and histories. There might be other rich sources of insight regarding family values.

Session Four

Dr. Freud offers some insights about how we manage major changes in our lives. Some of us tend to "slide" into major changes. Dr. Freud talks about these as Transitional changes. It is "smooth sailing" for those of us who navigate changes through a series of gradual transitions. However, when making these many small changes, we can easily lose our way and end up in a place that we did not intend initially to reach. For some of us, the pattern of change is quite different from this. We make big, disruptive changes that impact in significant ways on the life we lead. Dr. Freud calls these Transformational changes. We are in for a "bumpy ride" when making a couple of these Transformational changes in some sector of our life.

Dr. Freud asked me to reflect on the pattern of change in my own life. I described my life in terms of several big-time changes. One of these was the big change I am considering right now, in leaving a comfortable position as a senior account executive in a prospering ad agency. In the past, there was the choice to leave a low-paying job in an art gallery to pursue my current account executive position. And before that, there was the dramatic decision to leave graduate school and take a position as development director in a local theater organization. Both of these dramatic changes came with considerable pain and anxiety expressed by my parents. The second change from art gallery to ad agency came with a horrible disruption in my newly formed relationship with the woman I would soon marry.

Given this pattern, Dr. Freud offered an image of pushing off in a boat onto an unknown sea. He was being a bit metaphoric in his description of the swirling sea and the small boat on which I find myself. Dr. Freud described a sea that is filled with childhood fears, pronouncement from significant adults in my life regarding what might happen to me if I am "disobedient," and the challenges conditions we face right now in a world that is volatile, uncertain, and complexity, He describes a turbulent sea that contains many currents that are pushing the boat in opposite directions.

Dr. Freud pauses for a moment to let is all sink in. He then asks me if any of these forces he has mentioned strike home with me. I shared once again that I was told repeatedly as a child that it is critical as a "grown-up man" to be a solid provider for my family. I also mentioned that I was frightened as a child when my father arrived home from a hard day of work and threatened to quit his job. I remember my mother's expression of sheer horror when hearing this pronouncement from my father. She never said anything, but her facial expression told me everything I needed to know about what it would be like to "let down" someone I would love

someday. I also mentioned that the challenging conditions of volatility, uncertainty, and complexity were quite appropriate given the nature of contemporary advertising --- especially uncertainty. Everything in the business keeps changing as our clients change their minds, customers change their minds, and my bosses are always changing their minds.

Dr. Freud listens patiently as I "spill out my guts" about the validity of the turbulent sea he has described. Dr. Freud picks up on the "spilling of the guts" by asking me to attend for a few moments to my own "guts." Do I feel at all "queasy?" My answer is "Yes", especially when reflecting on the expression in my mother's eyes. My guts also seem to seize up when I mentioned the volatility and uncertainty associated with my bosses' expectations regarding my current priorities and future career pathway in our agency.

Given the challenges I am facing and the potential impact these challenges have on not just my psychology but also my physiology, Dr. Freud suggested that we need to face these challenges and potential impacts in several different ways, including holding on to things from our past while dealing with the present and potential future. His voice softened as he shared some of his own thoughts, feelings, and practices for a couple of minutes.

Dr. Freud pointed to the many artifacts on his shelf. He noted that each of these objects contains a rich and warm history. When things are "challenging" in his life, then he can turn to these objects and recall the message of hope and fulfillment contained in their distinctive history. In this moment of personal intimacy, Dr. Freud used the term "verklempt" to describe the condition that leads him to his shelf of artifacts. I asked him what this word means. He says "verklempt" is an old Yiddish word from his childhood in Vienna. It refers to the powerful sense of being overwhelmed with emotions. I indicated that I join with Dr. Freud and many other people in feeling "verklempted" right now in my personal and professional life. We both gently laughed regarding my clumsy use of this powerful old Yiddish word.

A new English term was then introduced by the good doctor. He talked about "transitional objects," these being possessions and memories that we carry with us during major points of change in our life. Dr. Freud mentioned the tattered pieces of a baby blanket or the teddy bear we may be keeping with us, as treasured objects into our adulthood. I mentioned that I still have a worn-out hand puppet from my childhood that I keep secretly stored away in my underwear drawer. Dr. Freud asked me what I think and feel is still of value in what this puppet represents. I mentioned that this puppet often was able to say things that I couldn't say. There is a cherished memory of honesty from my childhood that is represented in this torn puppet.

Dr. Freud also notes that the initiation of major transformations—shoving off from the shore often is precipitated by some major "awe-some" experience. It might be the death of a parent (such as I have experienced) or the death of a marriage. It can also be something that is "awesomely" wonderful, such as the consecration of a marriage, the birth of a child, or the achievement of some major goal. There are also the "awesome" experiences that come with the appearance of something quite beautiful—such as my listening to the Vaughan Williams composition while looking out the airplane window at the forests of Wisconsin. Dr. Freud recalled

that one of his recent clients experienced a transformation while looking out over the massive landscape of the Grand Canyon. For another client, it was attending the Passion Play at Oberammergau in Germany.

Dr. Freud indicates that it sometimes takes the warmth (even heat) of an exceptional, awesome experience to "unfreeze" a stuckness. Dr. Freud offers another image. We may need to kindle a fire in our heart or soul that will keep us warm as we embark on a journey through cold and treacherous water. I briefly mention that this notion of awesome warmth fits with my own experience. I often recall and even replay the *Flos Campi* piece by Vaughan Williams. I feel the warmth (and grieving) once again that took place over the forests of Wisconsin. This warmth makes me even more resolute to make some changes in my life.

Dr. Freud then shares an insight with me. He observes that we can't just leave the past behind us. There are certain elements in our past that we want to keep with us. Some are temporarily held by us – the teddy bear—while other are important to hold tightly so they are not loss during the transformational journey. There are yet other elements that we must leave behind, but must mourn, for they played an important role in our past life. We can't really move forward into our new life until we adequately mourn that which we are leaving behind. Dr. Freud asked me to reflect on one of the major changes made previously in my life: what did I hold on to temporarily, hold on to "with dear life," and sufficiently mourn its loss. With our session coming to an end, Dr. Freud encouraged me to reflect on these matters prior to our next coaching session. This has been a very powerful session. Dr. Freud ends up being a challenging, but compassionate, teacher.

Session Five

As this session got underway, I shared with Dr. Freud some of my thoughts and feelings about major changes I have made in my life. I spoke quite a bit about the pain and confusion that took place with many of these big shifts in my life. Dr. Freud held up his hand at one point and asked me to pause for a moment. He then talked about ways that major transformations can be made on a temporary basis. We find a way to "pilot test" the change before taking it on "full force." It's like the "wind tunnel" used to test out new airplane designs before the actual airplanes are produced. He noted, for instance, that my renewed interest in the arts and theater might be "pilot tested." Perhaps I could volunteer to provide some marketing for one of my local art galleries or community theaters. These nonprofit organizations could certainly benefit from my experience and expertise. While I had occasionally thought about doing some volunteer work, Dr. Freud got me thinking seriously about this option. I could enter the "wind tunnel" of the local arts! An intriguing idea.

Dr. Freud then invited me to return to my pain and confusion. In particular, he observed that there were several things that I had left behind during my latest major transformation ("big bump") that seemed to be a source of major grieving for me. I had been "grieving" the loss of excitement regarding the permission of my former ad agency boss for me to be creative and "out-of-the-box." This was a time when our agency was noted for being a source of innovative messaging. I shared with Dr. Freud several of the creative ad campaigns I led. He listened

patiently as I sputtered out my excitement. He only interrupted me to check on how I was feeling at the time. I was invited once again to turn my attention to my Gut. Dr. Freud mentioned very briefly that our Gut is connected in many ways to our brain. We are "smart" or "dumb" in our Guts as well as our Brain. And then on I went again into a scurrying review of my past successes.

I then talked hesitantly about the grieving that was occurring in my marriage. I reiterated the emotional confusion I experienced regarding my wife's own life plans. I grieved, in advance, a decision I might have to make regarding my current job. I might have to stay where I am right now. And I will have to "grin-and-bear it." Dr. Freud invites me to attend once again to my Gut. I notice that I am clenched up. I am also sweating and my jaw is clenched. Dr. Freud softly asks: "what would it be like if you spent the rest of your life in this physical condition." I didn't respond, but tears welled up in my eyes.

Dr. Freud talks about the nature of grieving in the lives of many people he has coached. First, he mentioned that some clients have shared that their grieving actually feels a whole lot like fear. They find that there is an emerging fear of further losses in their life. They desperately want to hold on to what they have. It is as if they decide to sit, huddled up in a corner somewhere, clinging to what is most precious in their life.

For other clients, grieving is loaded with a whole lot of anger. They are angry at fate or their God. "What happened to my God when I needed him/her most!" Or they are angry at other people for bringing about the loss. "Where was he when I most needed him?" "Why did she do that. Doesn't she have any feelings?" Ultimately, they often direct anger toward themselves. "I really messed up." "Or I didn't care enough about this thing/person before I lost them." Then there is a third set of clients for whom grieving feels very cold. They feel frozen in place and disconnected from the world for a period of time. For this third group of clients, grieving often spirals into what Dr. Freud calls "situational depression".

I talked about the way in which I have been handling grieving during this current potential change in my life. First, I shared that I will be grieving the times in my current job that are truly challenging and stimulating my creative juices. My old love of theater and art is reestablished as I prepare a script with my colleagues that portrays satisfaction with a newfound product or that leads to the resolution of a difficult problem. I also love to assist in identifying or creating the visuals that accompany this script. It is as if my work in the gallery and work with the theater company are coming together. Though what I am producing is a promotion of something trivial (such as the use of a deodorant) rather than something profound (like the enactment of a scene of reconciliation in a play I am helping to promote).

I also mention that I am grieving the potential loss of strong relationships with other members of the ad agency with which I am working. They are often frustrated, former players in the fields of art or theater. I will miss our extended conversations after work regarding Bertold Brecht or Wassily Kandinsky. Finally, and most importantly, I am grieving the potential loss of the centering relationship in my life. This being with my wife. I am very fearful about what could happen if she and I parted ways. My Guts are gnarled up as I speak about my wife. Would the

gnarling of my Gut remain forever in place if I were to be alone in my life. The tears well up again. I don't push them away.

We closed the session by Dr. Freud pointing to a motivating factor that is even stronger than the fear of loss. This is the fear of regret. We will do almost anything to avoid regretting what we didn't do, the decisions we didn't make, the path we didn't take. While we would like to achieve something in our life, we are much more concerned about regretting not attempting to achieve something. Dr. Freud gave me a homework assignment. He asked me to identify several things I have regretted in my life. He would like me to bring these regrets to our next session.

Session Six

When I entered Dr. Freud's office, I was drawn to a specific artifact he has on his bookshelf. He explains that this is an ancient representation of Hope. This crude statue comes from an African tribe where the sense of an impending future is big in their collective consciousness. In essence, they live in the future and worship the figure represented in this statute because it evokes a hopeful image of the future.

I talked a bit about my own hopes for the near future. Dr. Freud then asks me to talk a bit about the regrets I had identified after our last session. He noted that our regrets often relate closely to our hopes. We either regret not hoping for something—playing it too safe—or we regret hoping for something that was never realistic. Even worse, we may have spent time not just engaged in fanciful hoping but also wasting time and energy trying to act on this fanciful hope. I identified one of my regrets that fits this category of fanciful hopes. I mentioned that I had hoped, as a young, creative member of my ad agency, to be rewarded for my efforts and would receive multiple promotions that would enable me to lead large-scale, paradigm-shattering projects. Furthermore, these projects would relate to matters of social and environmental importance. I would be doing good, while also being creative and making a good living in terms of both finances and security. While I do have a fair amount of financial security in my job, the rest of the dream has been pretty much shattered. Not much hope on the horizon.

This led to an exploration of what makes me happy. What hopes do I have that relate to finding happiness in my life –rather than just avoiding pain or failure. Dr. Freud offered another one of his distinctions. When asked about happiness in their own life, some of his clients situate happiness outside themselves. They talk about being happy is they have enough money, if they can purchase that cottage by the lake, or if their child will finally leave home and get a good-paying job!! For these clients, happiness is an external factor. These clients have what Dr. Freud calls an "external locus of control." While this is kind of a fancy psychological term, I do understand what he is talking about. I know that I sometimes assume that happiness is something that is given to me.

It is a gift from God or from my wife!! Dr. Freud and I both kind of chuckle about the source of happiness residing in the hands of my wife. I use this moment of mutual appreciation of the role played by my wife in my life, to talk a bit about how she has been quite supportive of my full-time

commitment to work—especially when I have been able to be creative and when I am working for a client who is doing something good in the world. She will have a full meal waiting for me when I come home late from work. Or she will even hold off eating this meal herself until I get home. On weekends, she will accept my return to the office and will even go with me, bringing along a novel which she will read, seated in the reception room. I also mention that she is supportive in a somewhat different way when things aren't going well. She is there to hold my hand, provide me with a glass of our favorite wine, and cook me a special meal.

After this journey into my domestic life, Dr. Freud brings up an alternative perspective, that he labels an "internal locus of control." This seems to be his favorite perspective. It seems that some of Dr. Freud's client believe that happiness is an internal affair. They choose to feel happy or to feel unhappy in a way that is independent of external circumstances. He mentioned a line from an old American opera called Porgy and Bess. Porgy sings that he's got "plenty of nothin', and nothin' is plenty for me." It seems that happiness is within our control. We choose to be happy. This doesn't mean that we avoid the challenges that would take away our happiness; but it does mean that we take responsibility for our happiness and have no one or no institution – or no God—to blame for our unhappiness.

I am both inspired and a bit bothered by what Dr. Freud has to say. I realize that I have often leaned on an external perspective and done a whole lot of blaming of other people –including my wife. Both Dr. Freud and I are silent for a while as some important insights set in for me. The session comes to a close. This coaching work has become very important for me.

Session Seven

I begin this session with Dr. Freud, chatting away about the insights I have gained from this last session. I am hopeful about the new directions in which I can move. I also share my experience of talking to my wife about these insights. She and I consider ways in which we can better relate to one another, especially when either of us is sharing something about what we would to change in our life, or what we hope to happen in our personal future and in our shared future.

Dr. Freud expresses his appreciation for the insights I have gained and the actions I have taken. However, he offers some cautionary notes for me to consider. He notes that happiness is often hard not only to achieve but also to maintain. There is a whole lot of pain in the world right now, and we can't avoid experiencing this pain and confronting the challenges that elicit this pain. There is also the irony of being unhappy about not being happy.

Dr. Freud notes that it is very tempting to turn back to an external perspective. It is very easy to blame others for our unhappiness. Dr. Freud waxes a bit philosophical for a moment, suggesting that we do possess what he calls "Free-Will." Our life is not determined by outside forces. However, "Free-Will" requires us to be courageous. He pauses for a moment, whipping away a tear in his eye. This is obviously a point of great personal importance to this gentleman.

We pause for a moment. I then talk with some hesitation, accompanied by some strong feelings, about a moment in my life when I was brave. These are moments when I have done what is right

rather than what is easy to do or even what other people expect me to do. I also share a bit about one of my regrets. I have not always been courageous. I have not always been there for my children—or for my wife. I have also sometimes been what I would call "expedient" in my working relationship with other people in organizations where I have been employed.

Dr. Freud listens patiently as I "beat myself up" for a few minutes. He then asks a very important question: "What have I learned from these moments when I have failed to be brave? What did I fear at these moments? What could I have done differently given the size and scope of the challenges I was facing at these moments?" I spend some time considering what I learned at the time or what I might now learn about these moments when courage eluded me. Our coaching session came to a close with me recognizing that I have much to ponder before our next session, which will be the last to be held with me by Dr. Freud.

Session Eight

As Dr. Freud had often suggested during our coaching sessions, the purpose of our work together is not to establish a long-term, dependent relationship. Instead, we would limit our work to that done during these eight sessions. It would then be my "task" to keep working on the insights gained when continuing to plan for my future. Dr. Freud indicated at the start of this session that all of this is in the spirit of claiming "Free-Will" as a coaching client. I am free to do whatever I wish with the work done during these eight sessions. This final session is to be one in which I take "center stage." I am to report on what I have learned and what actions I might take following the conclusion of these coaching sessions.

I identify six major points.

1. I don't want to remain where I am right now. I feel (a) stuck, (b) anxious, (c) frustrated, (d) angry (mostly at myself) and (e) I regret that I have let things go to this stage.
2. I am grateful that my wife nudged me to seek help—and that I have "hung in" with you even though it has often been quite stressful.
3. I will take better care of my health during this period of time when I am going through a major transition—navigating the sea. Knowing that my life will continue to be stressful, I will set aside time for exercise, assist my wife in preparing healthy foods, and regularly get a good night of sleep. I will do a better job listening to my Gutt.
4. I realize that this must be a joint decision with my wife: (a) any decision I make or she makes impacts both of us individually and us as a couple, (b) my wife and I must both avoid ending up with regrets and accompanying anger. My wife and I have both decided that we should set up an appointment with a couple's therapist who can help us make these difficult decisions.
5. I do like the idea of a "pilot test" where I volunteer to do some work with an arts organization or community theater company. My wife agrees that this is a good idea. I am going to start checking out some options.

6. If I do stay in my current job, then I am going to negotiate some major changes. I might meet with a performance/organizational coach to prepare for these negotiations. Do you have any recommendations?

Dr. Freud looks pleased with the work I have done since our seventh session. He indicates that he is particularly pleased that I am seeking some additional, diverse professional support. These are likely to be difficult times navigating this stormy sea and it is indeed best not to go it alone—and to set sail with my wife on board!

After a brief pause, Dr. Freud makes a specific recommendation. He suggests that my wife and I prepare what he calls a *Charter*. This collaboratively prepared document would list a set of goals and values that the two of us share. We would identify actions steps to be taken in preparing for the new phase in our careers and in our marriage. In this charter there would also be ways in which we can monitor our progress toward this set of goals and the alignment of our work together with the values we have identified. Most importantly, the charter would include our commitment to learn from our failures as well as our successes (perhaps with the assistance of a couple's therapist or coach). We would engage in this shared learning so that we could continue to revise this chapter and establish new commitments as a sign of our growth individually and as a couple.

I let Dr. Freud know that my wife and I have already begun to work on this chapter without knowing that this is what we are doing. We were looking at our bookshelf and determining what values we were displaying on these shelves. We also spent a few minutes noticing what we had removed from our big shelf over the last couple of years. And we even talked a bit about the disputes we have had in recent years regarding what do and does not get placed on this shelf—as well as a second shelf filled with memorabilia and favorite books that is located in our bedroom. This got the two of us talking about what values we wish to share with other people, and which are shared just with one another. I thanked Dr. Freud for his bookshelf. He gently chuckled.

Dr. Freud got serious again and indicated that this charter might be drawn up in conjunction with the couples' therapy that my wife and I hope to begin. Dr. Freud indicated that he has someone to recommend who often helps couples create this kind of charter. He wrote down the name and email address of this person, as well as a performance/organization coach he thinks could be of assistance if I remain in my current job

With this final "hand-off" to other professionals, Dr. Freud shook my hand warmly and conveyed best wishes for my continuing work: "Please let me know how you are doing and feel to set up a new set of coaching sessions with me in the future if you think they would be beneficial."

I do like this somewhat crusty, but deeply caring coach from Vienna. And I love his bookshelf!

Freud's Perspectives and Practices: An Expanding Analysis

We now have Donald's narrative of his work with Sigmund Freud as a mid-21st-century life coach. Given this narrative, we might ask what is to be learned from the perspectives and practices being

engaged by this founder of the school of psychoanalysis who has turned to life coaching. I have identified six major lessons to be learned from Dr. Freud in his work with Donald. In bringing forth these lessons, I have invited several colleagues and influential authors to join with me in providing this expanded case study analysis.

Lesson One: Three Domains of Coaching

As we follow Dr. Freud's process of coaching with Daniel, there is a shift between inviting Daniel to share information about his current state, to identify his major intentions regarding career and family, and to explore old and new ideas about how best to work toward these intentions, given the current status. While Dr. Freud might not be fully aware that he was moving with Daniel through the three coaching domains of information, intentions, and ideas, the presence of all three domains is assured by the type of inquiry in which he engages with Daniel.

I invite my colleague, Agnes Mura, to join me in expanding on these three domains. Agnes and I wrote a book about coaching strategies quite a few years ago (Bergquist, and Mura, 2011) in which we introduced the concept of Domain (taken from the medieval era when each kingdom in Europe operated in its own Domain, provided its own set of rules, norms, and values that were often represented in a shield). In contemporary times, those of us who operate as coaches also have our own three domains, each with its own rules, norms, and values. Agnes and I offered a basic model regarding the ways in which we approach the many challenges of mid-21st Century life.

This model concerns the ways in which we identify our current reality, our desired reality, and the ways in which to move from the current to the desired state. In Europe of the Middle Ages, there were many small fiefdoms, rather than several small and large countries (as there are today). Leaders of each fiefdom establish their own set of rules and a code of conduct for their realm. Each fiefdom has its own history of success and struggle, and its own rulers. Thus, there was a set of domains in Europe that required one to recognize distinctive differences in perspective and practice when crossing the boundary into a new fiefdom.

Agnes and I suggested that the same occurs when we move from one set of perspectives and practices to another domain when tackling a challenging set of issues, such as those facing Daniel when deciding on his future life course. There are three domains on which we wish to focus. These are the domains of *information* (where am I or where are we right now), *intentions* (where do I want to be or where do we want to be), and *ideas* (how do I or how do we get from where we are to where we want to be).

The *domain of information* is entered whenever we attempt to find out more about the current condition in which our coaching client finds herself. In seeking to identify this information, we act as researchers, asking questions that can be answered by a systematic collection of information. In understanding the current situation, we (individually or collectively) must seek information that is valid. This is not easy in a world filled with misinformation and alternative realities. We must also seek information that is useful.

One of Dr. Freud's coaching tasks, as a life coach, is to help Daniel identify a valid pathway to his future career and life.

Many realistic plans can be established, and problems can be solved through the systematic collection of valid and useful information. This lies at the heart of rational, linear planning and problem-solving. In other instances, unfortunately, effective planning and problem-solving cannot exclusively be based on information about the current situation. Many important decisions, particularly those involving people rather than numbers, center, at least in part, on conflicting goals, objectives, or desired outcomes. Attention must shift from the domain of information to that of intentions. This domain is likely to be particularly important in today's environment, given that it is filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2025; Bergquist, 2026).

The *domain of intentions* is entered whenever we attempt to understand and clarify our personal mission, vision, values, or purposes. While research prevails in the area of information, clarification prevails in the area of intentions. Unlike traditional approaches to the clarification of intentions, which tend to emphasize enforcement or modeling, intention clarification focuses on the way in which mission, vision, values, and purposes come into being. This clarification is particularly important in a VUCA-Plus environment where one's intentions are often conflicting.

As we personally become clearer about intentions, we will begin to produce career and life plans that are more and more consistent with these intentions. The process of clarifying intentions becomes richer and more profound as each of us moves toward greater maturity. A mature intention is freely chosen; it is not imposed (an imposed requirement is part of the situation). A mature statement of mission, vision, values, and purpose is prized and affirmed; this statement serves as a guiding charter for one's life. It is repeatedly acted on in a consistent and persistent manner. A life planning coach, such as Dr. Freud, can play a major role in helping a client like Daniel create this charter.

The *domain of ideas* is entered whenever we attempt to generate a proposal intended to move from the current to the desired state. Ideas are sometimes fragile, often misunderstood, and easily lost. While information exists everywhere, we often ignore or misinterpret it. However, we can usually go back and retrieve it. Similarly, even though intentions may be ignored or distorted, they resist extinction. Their resistance to change is often a source of frustration: old values linger as do old visions and purposes. Good ideas, on the other hand, are easy to lose and hard to recover. We are easily stranded in plotting out our career and life course by the scarcity of viable options.

Settings must be created in which ideas can readily be generated and retained. A set of life planning sessions, such as Dr. Freud is providing, can be invaluable. Two processes are essential. *Divergence* produces creative ideas. Divergence requires minimal censorship of ideas, minimal restriction on clients offering their own dreams, exploring risky propositions, and minimally adhering to the usual ways of generating new ideas. The second process is *Convergence*. Clients must be encouraged to build on ideas that they have expressed tentatively: "And if you went ahead with that plan, what would happen?" Or "How would you make that work?" The effective life coach will also help their client identify similarities in their ideas. Diverse courses of action are identified. The domain of ideas often requires that we display a subtle and skillful interplay between convergence and divergence.

While Sigmund Freud's life coaching work aligns with the three domains identified by Agnes and me, he seems to approach each domain more deeply than many coaches do. Specifically, Dr. Freud is assuming what is often referred to as an ego psychological perspective on human functioning. While Sigmund Freud had not yet embraced this emerging perspective on psychoanalysis during his actual lifetime, his daughter, Anna Freud, was one of the founders of this sub-school of psychoanalysis.

We know from many sources that Sigmund Freud was closely aligned with his daughter and often conferred with her during their years together in London. At this point, I bring in Armand Nicholi (Nicholi,2002), who wrote a book on the hypothetical meeting of Sigmund Freud with the noted philosopher and novelist, C. S. Lewis. *Freud's Last Session*, a play that is based on Nicholl's book portrays Sigmund Freud as often calling Anna during the day to see how her work (often lecturing) is going. It is not hard to conclude that Dr. Freud would have begun aligning with his daughter's ego psychological perspective.

What then is this perspective, and how did it show up in Dr. Freud's work with Daniel? Specifically, ego psychology has to do with the way we human beings adapt to our challenging environment. What are the defensive structures we create in seeking to bring about this adaptation, and what are the motives that drive our behavior on behalf of this adaptation? It is worth noting that Anna Freud specialized in the description of defensive structures (A. Freud, 2018). When asking questions in the domain of information, Dr. Freud is not just finding out about Daniel's current status; Freud is inviting inquiry into how Daniel's ego is transferring experiences from the external world into his internal world.

When entering the domain of intentions, Dr. Freud delved specifically into the functioning of Daniel's internal life. Put in older psychoanalytic terms, Daniel is reflecting on how childhood motives and aspirations that were originally driven by primitive "Id" desires and later modified by "Super-ego"-based parental and societal prohibitions, are being modified and made more "mature" and adaptive by Daniel's ego function. However, we must ask which Dr. Freud is showing up for the coaching of Daniel. The old Sigmund Freud would not trust Daniel's identification of his intentions. While this identification could engage Daniel's ego in some very important accessing of deeply held dreams, hopes and fears, the old Freud would suggest that the ego is being engaged instead to elude the irrationality of the "real" intentions of Daniel (which were created and instilled during childhood).

As noted in a recently published book by Adam Phillips (Phillips, 2026; Kaag,2026), the pragmatism of someone like William James and, more recently, Richard Rorty, might not have yet penetrated the belief system of our contemporary Sig Freud. Can we actually recognize and move beyond these primitive intentions. Is it possible that psychoanalysis and pragmatism can "expose and renew each other"? (Kaag, 2026, p. N10). As Phillips suggests, the deep probing of original intentions (psychoanalysis) might be "necessary preparation" for a do-able clarification of mature intentions (pragmatism) (Kaag, 2026, p. N10). While Phillips is not sure that this interplay between psychoanalysis and pragmatism can be successfully engaged, I would suggest that a bridge might have been built between psychoanalysis and pragmatism by those psychoanalysts who portrayed a much more powerful ego that the old Sigmund Freud envisioned.

Some of the ego psychologists write about something called "secondary autonomy" (Hartman, 1958). They are referring to the primitive motives and aspirations of early childhood that can be retained and modified in adulthood. They are now being driven by mature ("secondary") needs that operate independently ("autonomy") of the primitive needs. Following in the pragmatic footsteps of William James, a noted American psychologist, Gordon Allport (1937), identified a similar process that he labeled "functional autonomy." If the new Dr. Freud has been influenced at all by William James, Gordon Allport or his ego psychological colleagues, then he might be prepared to help Daniel with his intentions. Dr. Freud could help Daniel explore not just the newly emerging motives in his life but also some of the motives and aspirations of his childhood that are still valid, though intended to meet a new set of intentions.

Regarding the domain of ideas, Dr. Freud is helping Daniel move from his current dilemmas and messes (nested dilemmas) to future, compelling images of what can be done to achieve the mature intentions that Daniel has identified. Engaging his ego function, Daniel identifies intermediate steps to be taken, ways to "pilot test" alternative ideas, and the liberation of existing barriers to creativity and free choice.

Lesson Two: Values Revealed in the Objects "On Our Shelf"

Daniel notes that Dr. Freud has many objects on the large bookshelf in his office. Dr. Freud, himself, comments on these objects and suggests that these objects can be a comfort to him when facing challenging situations. I bring in Lou Breger, another of my colleagues (and valued mentor), who has written one of the definitive biographies about Sigmund Freud (Breger, 2000). Breger offers the following brief description (Breger, 2000, p. 29). Freud had a "revealing habit of bringing his latest purchase of an antiquity, usually a small statue, to the dinner table and placing it in front of him as a companion during the meal".

As Breger notes (2000, p. 361), Freud often escaped "into a fantasized ancient world [this] was one of Freuds' older means of dealing with trauma . . .throughout his adult life he spent hours in his office surrounded by ancient artifacts." During World War I, for instance, Freud worked closely with Oto Rank, his "faithful secretary" (who later became a famous psychoanalyst), "cataloging his books and fondling his ancient artifacts." (Breger, 2000, p. 237) Later in his life, Sigmund Freud was particularly engrossed in deep appreciation of and reflections on the history and meaning of his artifacts. He had escaped with members of his family, arriving in London to escape Nazi repression. World War II was just around the corner in London; therefore, as Breger (2000. P. 361) notes: "Little wonder that he preferred to live in this imaginary world than amid the horrors of contemporary Europe.

For Daniel, the artifacts of Dr. Freud turned out to be not just a point of interest (along with Freud's dapper appearance); they also provided a gateway for Daniel's exploration of his own valued possessions. What did the objects on his own shelf convey about what he valued? As Ruesch and Kees have noted (Ruesch and Kees, 1969), the "alter" that exists in our home often

contains objects that display that which we most value in our life or what our family values. Much as the shields hanging on the walls of a kingdom or church display the values of this domain, so does our shelf (which often is vertical and alter-like) tell us and others who visit our home, what we consider to be important.

The objects on our shelf can be "totems" that contain memories of important past events in our life. The shelf might also contain books that represent something about what is important in our world, rather than conveying something about what we have learned and now know. In fact, it is not unusual for many of the books on our shelf to have never been read.

All of this suggests that it might be appropriate and beneficial for us as professional coaches to invite our clients to examine their own bookshelf and determine the ways in which it is an "alter" on which we have placed things of not just beauty but also value. Perhaps, when we are involved in life planning, an inspection of our shelf is revealing. Furthermore, when we are downsizing at some point in our life, maybe the "junk" on that shelf in our living room is not expendable. It might have become dusty and perhaps even "taken for granted" (and ignored) for many years. But it still might hold great value as a source of important memories and as a display of our personal achievements or of our collective family "shield."

Lesson Three: Tragic Triangle of Regret, Loss and Anger

Dr. Freud spent a fair amount of time exploring the matter of regret with Daniel. While this attention might surprise some people, it comes as no surprise to those researchers and theorists who are building the new interdisciplinary field called Behavioral Economics. Numerous studies have shown that regret is a very powerful motivator—perhaps more powerful than either the prospect of loss or the prospect of success.

One of the major behavioral economists, Daniel Kahneman (Kahneman, 2011) devotes considerable time to the power and dynamics of Regret. He (Kahneman, 2011, p. 347) notes that:

> Regret is an emotion, and it is also a punishment that we administer to ourselves. The fear of regret is a factor in many of the decisions that people make ("Don't do this, you will regret it") is a common warning, and the actual experience of regret is familiar.

The feeling of Regret is particularly tricky because it goes both ways. There is the error of commission ("I regret what I have done") and the error of omission ("I regret what I didn't do.") This emotion has it coming and going. As a double-edged blade, regret cuts deeply into our physiology. It is wrapped up not only with several areas of our brain that are involved with decision-making and planning (orbital frontal cortex in particular), with several areas that are centrally involved in the processing of our emotions (the amygdala in particular), and areas that link decision-making and planning to emotions (anterior cingulate cortex). It seems that Regret is tricky not only because it involves both omission and commission but also because it involves both agency (doing or not doing something) and emotion (how we feel about doing or not doing something).

There is one other important feature about regret that should be acknowledged, especially as it relates to professional coaching. It seems that we human beings are more concerned with the regret of inaction (omission) than the regret of wrongful action (commission). I bring in Daniel Gilbert, another behavioral economist, to reinforce this finding (Gilbert, 2006, p. 197):

> . . . in the long run, people of every age and in every walk of life seem to regret *not* having done things much more than they regret things they *did*, which is why the most popular regrets include not going to college, not grasping profitable business opportunities, and not spending enough time with family and friends.

Gilbert suggests that we focus on omission because it is much easier to produce positive and credible images of what could have happened if we had taken action than it is to generate images regarding the consequences of doing the wrong thing. "We can rationalize an excess of courage more easily than an excess of cowardice." (Gilbert, 2006, p. 197)

While it is hard to be kind to ourselves when we can vividly recall our horrible blunder, it is relatively easy for us to repress any memory of this blunder. Better yet, we can learn from this blunder. It is much harder to yearn over that which never occurred. We can easily envision the parade that we never saw and beat ourselves up for failing to find the willpower needed to take action. My colleague, John Preston, often noted that willpower requires the activation of multiple areas of our brain. It is not a simple operation to move from inaction to action—just recall the act of getting out of bed in the morning! Struggles in the domain of ideas are particularly prevalent, given the role played by willpower in moving an idea to action.

It is instructive to note that Dr. Freud didn't just address the matter of Regret. He also brought in the matter of loss and the grieving of that which is no longer present in our life—such as the psychological security we gave up when moving from youth through adolescence to adulthood (our personal exile from Eden). For Sigmund Freud, the dynamics do not stop here. There is also the matter of anger. We are angry because we are left in a state of regret. We are angry because of our loss. And we are angry because we are angry. The Tragic Triangle of Regret, Loss and Anger can readily appear when we are facing major challenges in our life, especially when these challenges involve competing interests (dilemmas and polarities) (Johnson, 1996; Bergquist, 2025; Bergquist, 2026).

Most importantly, it should be noted that Anxiety resides at the heart of the Tragic Triangle. Anxiety is produced by the three conditions of Regret, Loss, and Anger. Furthermore, Anxiety will contribute to the emergence of Regret, the probability of Loss, and the intensity of Anger. Anxiety also ensures that these three conditions will be sustained. The ghosts of Regret, Loss, and Anger are found in the lingering anxiety in our life; these ghosts are even more pronounced when there is a collective anxiety (angst) about the troubling conditions existing in our contemporary world (Bergquist, 2026). One final point to which Dr. Freud pointed. Stubbornness and rigidity (*einstellung*) inevitably accompany anxiety. We get fixated on the current way of doing things and on our current perspective on the world as it now exists and should always exist. Under these

conditions, it is hard to recover from Loss, reconcile Regret, or resolve Anger. Nothing changes. That is why this triangle is tragic.

Anger and aggression were always elusive and disruptive processes in a psychic world where Freud long thought was dominated by the life-giving and affirming forces of sexuality (*Libido*). It was only later in his life, after facing the grotesque, destructive forces of World War I and the equally grotesque antisemitic forces of Nazi Germany, that Freud reluctantly acknowledged (or perhaps manufactured) the counterforce of a drive toward death (*Thanatos*).

Our Dr. Freud of the 21st century would have full knowledge of multiple wars and multiple sources of discrimination and genocide; he would also be fully aware of the more deeply embedded alienation found in many contemporary societies. Several of his own followers formed the Frankfurt School, in which Freudian theory was blended with Marxist theory, yielding a social-critical perspective on modern (and postmodern) society. While our Dr. Freud might not be a social-critical life coach, he is fully aware of the Tragic Triangle and ways Regret, Loss and Anger become endemic to a consumer-oriented, alienating society. While he might not always be pushing his clients to leave alienating corporate jobs, he does seem to be encouraging Daniel to consider moving away from the potentially socially and environmentally destructive world of advertising.

Lesson Four: Committee of the Gut

Dr. Freud often directed Daniel's attention to his gut, especially when Daniel was addressing emotionally charged issues. This is quite understandable since Sigmund Freud was a physician and often declared himself to be a biologically oriented scientist. This attention is even more appropriate given the recent attraction of psychoanalytically oriented theorists and therapists to findings in the neurosciences that support and amplify many of the often-discounted models of psychophysiological dynamics long proposed by those in the various schools of psychoanalysis. I invite Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull to the conversation. They interweave neuroscientific findings with psychoanalytic theory in *The Brain and the Inner World* (Solms and Turnbull, 2002).

Solms and Turnbull consider the Gut (and more broadly the entire viscera) to be a critical waystation between the internal world (brain) and the external world. What happens in our external environment at any one point influences the operations of our viscera, and our viscera, in turn, influences the actions we take in the external world (Solms and Turnbullo, 2002, p. 29). In many ways, the actions taken are instinctual in nature and align closely with our emotional state. Traditional psychoanalysts might identify the forces driving these actions as being those of the Id.

Furthermore, our gut and other elements of our viscera (such as our heart) are closely linked to our brain and are profoundly influenced by the operations of our brain (especially our lower-level reptilian brain and our limbic system). The gut, in turn, extensively influences what happens in our brain. In many ways, our Gut serves as a second brain. While the Gut has often been considered an Id-based element of the human psyche, it is probably better to consider it to also be an element of the Ego.

As a waystation between our internal and external world, as a venue for adjustments of internal physiological operations, and as a second brain, our Gut serves many important functions. Among them is the monitoring of our emotional state and reactions to this state. It is this function to which Dr. Freud referred when working with Daniel. Many other important functions are also being served, of which Dr. Freud and all of us who do professional coaching should be aware. At this point, I bring in my colleague, Gay Teurman. Together, we have identified a complex set of Gut-related functions that we group as the Committee of the Gut. I offer an extended description, adapted from *Salus! An Appeal to Good Health*, a book that Gay Teurman and I have just co-authored with Jeremy Fish (Bergquist, Fish and Teurman, 2026).

There are many ways in which human beings bring together entities from inside their mind and body, along with entities from outside their body, in order to create meaning or energy. At nighttime, this assembling and assimilation often occurs through our dreaming function. Deirdre Barrett (Barrett, 2001) has labeled this function "the committee of sleep." When we are awake, similar dream-like assembling occurs through daydreaming or engaging in mindfulness processes (such as meditation).

However, the major assimilation we do during the day involves something other than memories, images, or psychological desires. Vital assimilation occurs when we convert the food we digest into energy. However, the Gut is much more than just a digestive organ. The Gut serves as a central hub within a network. It represents six interconnected roles that reflect how healthy systems operate. As with the dreams we weave, the Gut operates like a committee, with many contributing agents. Within the metaphor of the "Committee of the Gut," each role can be envisioned as a member with distinct responsibilities that together ensure the overall health and adaptability of the system. This committee evaluates incoming substances, decides how to process them, and coordinates responses to meet both immediate needs and long-term balance. By acting collectively, the committee sustains both the integrity and the flexibility of the entire organism.

Self-Organization: Viewed from a systemic perspective, the Gut is not a passive organ but a self-organizing center. As we find in many systems, the Gut, being the central hub, has a central committee. The Gut embodies the dual functions of:

- **Indicator** (diagnostic, reflective, sensing the state of the whole)
- **Instigator** (active, generative, reorganizing, and catalyzing change).

In other words, the Gut doesn't just belong to the system; it *organizes the system* by bridging matter (food), meaning (information), and momentum (energy)

The Gut both consolidates what is familiar and reorganizes itself in response to the new. In both cases, the goal is to transform the outside world into something the system can utilize without losing coherence.

Members of the Committee: six members of the committee can be identified. There are undoubtedly additional functions. However, the preliminary list should provide us with a vivid image of the many functions being served by our Gut.

Indicator Role (Feedback Loop): The Gut will act as a sensor and reporter, providing real-time data about the biological system. Signals such as hunger, bloating, discomfort, or even "gut feelings" are feedback loops that inform the brain and body about current conditions. As is the case with many (if not all) systems (biological or otherwise), the Gut plays an important modulating role. It acts as a kind of dashboard, revealing system stressors (e.g., poor diet, unresolved emotion, microbial imbalance) before they escalate into breakdowns elsewhere.

Biochemist Role: This committee member functions by testing the level of toxicity, status of neurotransmitters, and introduction of a "new" ingredient that is not often processed by the Gut (accommodation).

Telegraph Operator Role: This member facilitates internal communication by sending messages to other committee members. What do we do about processing or expelling this "new stuff"?) The telegraph operator also facilitates external communication by sending information to the Vagus nerve, which sends the message on to the brain. Therein lies the production of neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine, GABA), generating immune responses, altering mood, decision-making, and energy distribution. In systems language, the Gut is a driver node, an initiating force that can reorganize downstream processes, from sleep quality to immune resilience.

The Processor Role: Utilizing the microbiome or microbes, this committee member changes the chemical state of the Gut by adding (changing the ratio of good and bad), killing (reducing the number of bad) microbiota or microbes. The Gut processes raw inputs from food, toxins, and even psychological stress and translates them into meaningful signals. It serves as both a decoder and a translator in the system, much like a data team converts raw numbers into actionable insights.

The Contributor Role: This committee member's responsibility is to generate usable energy through digestion and absorption literally. It takes in external resources, breaks them down, and redistributes them to the system. In systems terms, it is the operations department, the machinery that ensures resources are converted into usable forms and allocated efficiently.

The Executioner's Role: A biological executioner refers to a type of cell or organism that plays a role in programmed cell death, also known as apoptosis, a natural process that eliminates unwanted or damaged cells in multicellular organisms. At times, we may use antibiotics to facilitate this function. Biological executioners are often involved in signaling pathways that trigger apoptosis or an immune response by targeting and destroying infected or cancerous cells. As is the case with many systems, the Gut utilizes the executioner in its need to rid itself of dysfunction in the bodily system.

Exit Manager/Garbage Sorter Role: This committee member decides what stays in the Gut and what is expelled. The Gut acts as both a filter and an eliminator, separating nutrients from waste.

Sorting: Like a recycling plant, the Gut distinguishes absorbable nutrients from indigestible or harmful substances.

Detoxification: It works in conjunction with the liver, bile, and microbiome to neutralize toxins and pathogens.

Clearing Space: Waste removal prevents toxicity, inflammation, and system breakdown, making elimination as crucial as absorption. . .

Instigator/Generator/Assimilator Role: The Gut acts as a key communication center, connecting the nervous, immune, and endocrine systems. It works like a hub, keeping body "departments" in sync:

Nervous system → messaging and quick response

Immune system → protection

Endocrine system → hormone control and adaptation

It does not just reflect the system; it drives it. It creates fuel, initiates the change, and integrates the new into the existing.

Similar to the coordination office in other systems, it avoids isolation and ensures all parts share information. The Instigator/Generator/Assimilator role functions as a chief of staff or central coordination office, facilitating collaboration, promoting information sharing, and maintaining alignment. In all systems, this function prevents stagnation, powers growth, and ensures new elements become part of the whole rather than destabilizing it.

Together, these six roles show the Gut as both mirror and motor:

- A mirror reflecting the health of the entire system.
- A motor, generating energy, driving change, and keeping processes in motion.

Healthy biological systems require not only intake and generation, but also filtering, integration, and elimination. The Gut teaches us that survival and renewal are inseparable: you cannot grow without also clearing space. Perhaps Daniel needs a bit more clearing or space in her Gut. The healthcare system might be treating him ineffectively when he is under stress. With the assistance of Dr. Freud, Daniel might have to clear himself of outmoded assumptions, fears, and expectations that might be twisting up his Guts.

With a focus on the psychic functions of human beings, psychoanalytically oriented theorists such as Solms and Turnbull (2002, pp.106-108) are particularly interested in the presence and influence of emotions. They note that emotions are a perceptual tool that is directed solely to our internal state. While other people can see what we are seeing, hear what we are hearing, and perhaps even feel what we are feeling, they have no access to our emotions. While other perceptual tools point us to what is happening outside ourselves, our emotions are all about what is happening inside ourselves. And our Gut and other organs in our visceral system have much to say about the emotions that we are "experiencing."

In alignment with our survey of the Committee of the Gut, Solms and Turnbull (2002, p. 91) would probably suggest that the indicator and mirror functions played by the Gut are particularly

important, at least concerning the operation of internal psychic functions – such as emotions and what they would consider the unconscious processes of the human psyche (and what I am about to identify as the peremptory ideational train of the psyche. We look to the Gut for an assessment of our internal reality, much as Dr. Freud suggested that Daniel could gain a better understanding of his emotional state by examining the status of his own Gut.

Lesson Five: Deep Causes of Our Life Pattern

Dr. Freud is not gliding across the surface of Daniel's life. He is inquiring about Daniel's family, about his marriage, and about his feelings, both coming from his childhood and his adult life. While Dr. Freud is not engaged in psychoanalysis with Daniel, he is engaging in some depth of analysis. With his love of archeology, Sigmund Freud finds it appropriate to dig into the many layers of Daniel's life, uncovering important treasures (memories, emotions, narratives) that can be of benefit as Daniel engages in life planning.

For Dr. Freud, it is not just a matter of appreciating the lessons to be learned from the past; it is also a matter of determining how past events and people in Daniel's earlier life have "caused" the person who Daniel is today. Furthermore, Dr. Freud is looking for similar events and similar interpersonal interactions that reinforce existing beliefs, feelings, and behavioral predispositions. He is looking for beneficial patterns that can be reinforced in Daniel's future, as well as patterns that block Daniel's progress toward a life filled with clear purpose and enriching interpersonal relationships—to mention Dr. Freud's own biases regarding the importance of love and work (Smelser and Erikson, 1980).

Fractals and Strange Attractors: While Dr. Freud thinks of himself as a scientist, he might not be aware of a phenomenon and related concept that comes from one of the interdisciplinary fields that have gained prominence in recent years. The field concerns the study of complex systems (Miller and Page, 2007), the concept concerns patterning in nature (fractals) (Briggs and Peat, 1989), and the related phenomenon is called "strange attractor" (Gleick, 1987; Lorenz,1995). As some complexity scientists would suggest, "Mother Nature" often appears to be quite lazy. She will discover that a specific structure or design is operating quite successfully in nature and will then replicate this structure or design repeatedly in a specific natural object.

These replicating fractals are found in coniferous trees, where the structure of the needle is replicated in the branch of the tree and even in the structure of the entire tree. We find similar patterning in the branching of waterways and blossoming of flowers. Perhaps, fractals also operate in human behavior. Like Mother Nature, we might be a bit lazy and simply replicate behavior patterns that were successful for us early in life (such as the way we interact with someone in authority) throughout the rest of our life. Psychoanalysts identify this as transference; we can become complexity scientists and refer to these repeated behavior patterns as "human fractals." Dr. Freud seems to be aware at some level of this push toward patterning when asking Daniel to reflect on thoughts, feelings and behaviors that seem to be recurrent in his life.

Fractals are particularly common in complex systems, where many different and closely interrelated functions are in operation. As Mother Nature suggests, it is expeditious to design these functions such that they operate in a very similar manner (thereby making multiple functions that much easier to coordinate). Something particularly intriguing is operating that makes replication much more likely. Specific structures and designs (patterns) that have been successfully operating in one system actually attract the creation of similar structures and designs in neighboring systems. We see this operating simply when we begin to tap our foot when hearing music emanating from a nearby building or a street band playing in front of our home. Complexity researchers suggest that a "strange attractor" is in operation when our foot taps or, even more impressively, when we are improvising a beat and a tune when playing in that jazz band at our local club.

Nonhuman examples of strange attractors include the avalanche, which recruits snow, rocks and debris from the neighboring snow-covered slopes down which it is careening, or the notorious pothole, which attracts neighboring sand, crumbling asphalt and related debris that expands the size of the pothole and make subsequent sealing of the pothole very difficult (the edges of the former pothole where the new asphalt meets the old asphalt becoming strange attractors once again for sand, crumbling asphalt and debris).

Returning to human affairs, we may be seeing our favorite, existing thoughts, feelings and behaviors "strangely" attracting new thoughts, feelings and behaviors that closely resemble these old ones. Our avalanche of fears precipitated by one threatening experience in our current life begins to recruit old fearful memories, childhood beliefs that we are powerless to defend ourselves, and patterns of withdrawal from a threatening world in which we are helpless.

As Daniel noted, a consideration of how best to address the legitimate demand that it is time for his wife to engage her priorities, "strangely attracts" his memories of trying to be a "good," considerate boy during his youth. The "preachy" voice of his parent might be pulled in, indicating that his highest priority as a grown man should be to become a solid "breadwinner." Thoughts about financial security, feelings concerning obligations, and behaviors related to remaining silent about job-related frustrations are swirling around Daniel's head and heart. A powerful psychic attractor is in full operation, even if not consciously acknowledged by Daniel. It is appropriate for Dr. Freud to dig a bit deep into the soil of Daniel's psyche to unearth the content (and dynamics) of this strange attractor.

Peremptory Ideation: I wish to push the matter of life patterns a bit further and in doing so will be turning to psychoanalytically oriented research conducted by George Klein at New York University. In one of his many essays, Klein (1967) introduced an interesting concept regarding the dynamic unconscious processes operating deep in our psyche. He described a process called Peremptory Ideation that I suggest relates not just to the matter of ongoing and reinforced life patterns but also to the dynamics and power of the Tragic Triangle (Regret, Loss and Anger).

Klein proposed that in our internal world (psyche), we create a specific idea or image that begins to "travel" around our psyche (head and heart). It operates as a strange attractor, recruiting

thoughts, feelings and behaviors as it courses through our psyche. This train, which is already filled with ideas and images, picks up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, and thoughts) along the way. The ideational train operates much like the avalanche, pothole, and other forms of "strange attractors". The train becomes increasingly rich and emotionally powerful as it picks up new intra-psychic material. It gains increasing energy from this unconscious material.

At some point, this ideation begins to pull in material from outside the psyche. External events suddenly take on greater saliency (more emotional power and vividness). This may be a point when our objects of value gain even greater saliency, for they are aligned with and are picked up by the moving psychic train. Klein suggested that this ideation takes priority when valuing, attending, and remembering in the external world. It assumes a commanding ("peremptory") presence.

A positive (reinforcing) loop is created, with the external material now joining the interior material. They all cluster around the original (often primitive) ideation. Vibrance is to be found in their clustering. There is a strong pull—a strange attractor—that leads to patterning of our behavior. As the train travels once again to a specific unconscious place, it will pull for specific behavior in our waking life, thus adding to the repetition of behavior, hopes, fears—as well as Regrets, a sense of Loss, Anger, and Anxiety,

Catching the Train: While Klein focused on the internal dynamics of peremptory ideation, I propose that this internal ideation might align with an external ideation arising from challenges in our life—these challenges are often related to dilemmas and polarities that we encounter. We can envision the internal ideation "hooking on" to the ideological "train" passing by us from an external source. We hitch our thoughts and emotions to an outside train. Irrational and anxiety-saturated external ideation—such as Regrets, Losses and feelings of Anger—can be particularly attractive, given that this internal ideation is likely to be quite primitive (often taking on a "haunting" presence). The internal ideation may be "haunted" by ghosts and goblins of Regret, Loss, and Anger from childhood and early adulthood.

We are also haunted by a collective unconscious inherited from our ancestors and culture. Regrets, a history of Loss, and the legacy of Anger are passed on from generation to generation. That is why Dr. Freud was asking Daniel about the history of his family. It can be traumatizing when the train is drawing in the peremptory ideation of many people. We find that there are many societies in which there is a history of collective regret, loss and anger (slavery, war, ostracism, etc.). These collective, unconsciously held regrets, loses and experiences of anger produce what is now called the "social unconscious" (Hopper and Weinberg, 2019).

Members of this traumatized society held a common set of troubling images. Citizens often report similar regret-filled dreams and stressful bouts of loss-associated sorrow. Feelings of anger are easily triggered by events that produce nothing more than mild stress in many other societies. With this powerful alignment of internal and external material, we become victims of personal and collective peremptory ideation. This new unconscious coalition demands attention. We are obsessed, closed-minded, passionate, and regretful. Sometimes, we are driven to action.

Anxious Passengers: Collective regret, loss and anger can escalate collectively engaged peremptory ideation. Everyone on the train is uneasy about what is happening in their society or what has occurred in the past. Racism looms big and is often unacknowledged in American societies—and in those found in South Africa and Indonesia. The anxiety associated with this Regret, Loss and Anger can, in turn, be produced by the loss of confidence in a chosen leader or by mild public protests regarding some social ordinance. It might very well be that the "social unconscious" material appears in our internal peremptory ideation. This being the case, one can imagine that an ideational train carries or is at least aligned with external images—such as one's impressions of a leader or a public protest.

A "perfect" storm of prejudice, intolerance, fear of the "other," and (eventually) violence is created. This is where Freud's "soft" alignment with the Marxist oriented Frankfurt School might come to the surface. He is concerned about the kind of work Daniel is now doing—but does not make a forceful stand against the business of advertising. At some level, Dr. Freud would be troubled by the way advertisements generate feelings of regret among consumers. The ads also point dramatically to the losses we experience, be they losses associated with illness, poor financial decisions, or family time. The ad agencies can offer a remedy for the loss, and reasons to avoid regret. They can also, indirectly, promote anger (against the wrong product, wrong political party, or wrong life priorities). Above all, the ads provide us with potential reasons to be anxious personally and collectively. We are given good reasons to worry about our bodily odors as well as our financial future.

One final point. It is more likely that this ideational train will be fully operational and pulling on external images when we are tired and overwhelmed. Such a state is not uncommon when living in what several social observers have identified as the conditions of exhaustion (Newport, 2016; Stoycheva, 2022). We step on board the train in an anxious and fatigued condition. We soon find that the train is filled with passengers who match our anxiety and fatigue. They also hold an often-unacknowledged feeling of regret regarding their personal life as well as their collective life. Together, we create and maintain even more bizarre fictional accounts of the menacing world in which we now live and work.

No wonder that Daniel is struggling a bit with his plans for the future. Does he really want to push off on a psychic boat that will leave him on a stormy sea without a clear destination and little control over the direction in which his boat is headed?

Lesson Six: Stormy Sea and Its Navigation

Dr. Freud provided Daniel with a preliminary picture of the sea on which he might have to navigate if the choice is made to leave his current job. What does the stormy sea look like? Does it potentially resemble the deep, dread-filled sea portrayed by Soren Kierkegaard (1980). Or is that too dramatic, pessimistic and existential a sea for Freud (and Daniel). Perhaps it is the somewhat more tranquil sea that Agnes Mura and I envisioned when describing Bill Bridges' (1980) model of transition (Mura and Bergquist, 2020). We don't know what either Dr. Freud or (later) Daniel envisioned as a stormy sea on which to navigate.

In whatever way Dr. Freud and Daniel have envisioned the sea, navigation of this sea would no doubt be quite a challenge. One can easily be caught in a stormy sea of Regret, Loss, Anger and Anxiety. We do have a narrative regarding this stormy sea that may have been offered by Tennessee Williams, one of the major playwrights of our time. There is considerable controversy regarding the source of this narrative (Shaw, 2023); however, the author is fully caught up in Regret, Loss, Anger and Anxiety. Williams may have offered this description to an impressionistic young man, James Grissom, who has been given an assignment by Williams to record some of Williams' own life experiences, as well as the impressions of Williams to be offered by important women in his life.

A Stormy Sea: Grissom or Williams (Grissom, 2015, p. 147) offered a belief that:

> God will not come and save us. Life will not treat us fairly if we dutifully follow the rules. Our friends, the true ones who can be counted on one hand, might come to our aid, unless they are dressed and perfumed and waiting for their own gentleman caller to arrive. We are utterly, completely alone, and when I have been my most fragile, my most shattered, that has been when I have fully realized how vulnerable I am. Far more frightening is the realization that those on whom I often need to lean are equally fragile, and can be—and have been—plucked from my life with sickening swiftness.

Grissom or Williams is particularly focused on the lies and untruths with which one lives in order to remain living. We must choose between truth and a state of "mendacity" (a term Williams is fond of using) (Grissom, 2015, p. 147):

> To face this, brutally and openly, would be for me to die, so I found my solace, my lie, in the illusion of writing, in which I could create alternate worlds with alternate people, and rule them beneficently. I was saved by writing, and later, when I was no longer able to love fully and clearly, and therefore could no longer write, I found solace, and still find it, in alcohol, drugs, in a multifaceted God who does as I choose. We are not created by God; our God is created by us. You cannot find salvation or solace anywhere until you find it in yourself and it is there [he points to his heart] that you then create your God.

At this point, a major "strange attractor" is identified—this being Tennessee Willliam's mother (Grissom, 2015, 2015, p. 147):

> My mother found her happiness in her past . . . and it was one we all might covet—a past in which she was pretty and cosseted and appeared to hold promise. Perhaps that was her gift, her one niggardly ornament in life: a beginning in life that held promise. And suddenly the promise is gone, and reality has taken residence in her heart and head, and it is too much.

Like his mother, Tennessee Williams is stuck. He repeats the same pattern of destructive behavior in his life. He escapes from this sea by altering his sense of reality—much as the mid-21st-century men and women I write about in a recent book who escape down a rabbit hole to a wonderland of

"alternative reality" and false serenity. Grissom or William speaks of an altered reality based in altered memories (Grissom, 2015, pg. 152)

> Memory is what cures us of a loss." "I was stupidly afraid of my memories for so long, because I was afraid to feel, but memories are the ultimate illusion—perhaps the final one—in that they allow us to believe that those we love are forever with us, within us.

Grissom or Williams is "no longer grasp for greatness. The goal is to grasp "merely for feeling."

Daniel's Stormy Sea: It is in his attempt to free Daniel from being stuck in his distorted and isolating feelings, that Dr. Freud might be doing some of his best work. He has warned Daniel about the perils of navigating on a stormy sea. Dr. Freud then tries to provide some guidance and support regarding this navigation. Most importantly, Dr. Freud is providing Daniel with the opportunity to exert some free will.

Clearly, Sigmund is deterministic in his belief that patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior are established early in life, structure themselves as fractals, and strangely attract thoughts, feelings, and behaviors later in life. However, Dr. Freud does open up the possibility of viewing the sea as a source of nourishment, learning, and progress. Instead of the sea aligning with a Tragic Triangle of Regret, Loss, and Anger, it is possible to envision (and help to create) a sea that is aligned with the Appreciative Triangle of Nourishment, Learning, and Progress.

We see something quite similar to the prospect of Dr. Freud opening the Appreciative Triangle for Daniel, in the perspective offered by Peter Vaill, the guide to white-water environments (Vaill, 1989). Vaill (1996, p. 43) offers us the concept of "learning as a way of being":

> In the phrase learning as a way of being, being refers to the whole person—to something that goes on all the time and that extends into all aspects of a person's life; it means all our levels of awareness and, indeed, must include our unconscious minds. If learning as a way of being is a mode for everyone, being then must include interpersonal being as well as personal socially expressive being—my learning as a way of being will somehow exist in relation to your learning as a way of being. In short, there are no boundaries to being.

Clearly, as Peter Vaill (1996, p. 43) admits, "learning as a way of being is a very capacious idea." This enterprise is not for the faint of heart. And it requires a sustained appreciation for learning in all of its many forms. We are invited to view the world and our state of being from quite a range of perspectives—and even perspectives that seem contradictory. Dr. Freud did a good job of varying the perspectives and modes of learning he introduces to Daniel. He took his client on a trip down a turbulent world of multiple ideas, diverse sources of information, and a cluster of sometimes contradictory intentions. It is while traveling through this white-water environment that Daniel potentially gains a clear, insightful sense of his own being. As Peter Vaill suggests, this might be the most important learning outcomes that we can achieve.

Joy's Sea: Following up on the profound perspective regarding learning offered by Peter Vaill, I wish to introduce an extraordinary spiritual leader, Brugh Joy, who has conducted many workshops on consciousness and transcendence and written about his own spiritual journey. Joy

can speak to the ingredients of an Appreciative Triangle and to Vaill's journey through a white-water environment.

Brugh Joy (Joy, 1979, p. 7) promotes the expansion of (and intense appreciation for) the reality that we can choose to create and embrace outside us and inside us:

> Transformation enlarges the context of reality. The awareness is lifted up into states of consciousness where the multidimensional nature of existence is perceived, not just conceived; where it is experienced, not just imagined; where each dogma and each absolute truth is seen as but a single facet of a superconscious whole called Beingness. In the totality of Beingness there is no absolute anything—no rights or wrongs, no higher or lower aspects—only the infinite interaction of forces, subtle and gross, that have meaning only in relationship to one another. Absolutes are concoctions of our rational minds. Reality must never be confused with concoctions. The Transformational Process, the release from fixed beliefs, allows the fragmented awareness to meld into universality.

We find the essence of transcendent leveraging in this breathtaking challenge to our usual way of seeing and being in reality. The other leveraging challenges in our life, range from the role played by memories (residing in our hippocampus) to the role played by emotions (residing in our amygdala). It is worth noting that these two neural structures reside alongside one another in our limbic system. These limbic structures merge into Brugh Joy s transformation process. Perhaps, as Joy suggests, it is a matter of abandoning our grown-up" sense of reality—what Thomas Kuhn (2012) labeled, normal science"--and returning to a fresh, pre-socialized sense of wonderment about reality (Kuhn's preparadigmatic state). Joy (Joy, 1979, p. 20) proclaims:

> . . . as we begin to use the beginner's mind to see things the way they are rather than the way we have been conditioned to see them, we can also begin to understand . . . fundamentally, our all-too-human habit of taking our belief systems as real. . . . [W]e can also learn to see the magnificence of our creative potential in the rich variations of themes called life, religion, government and so on.

Maybe this is the "regression in the service of the ego" that ego psychologists aligned with Freud often have identified (Hartman, 1958).

At this point, Brush Joy brings us back to the fundamental distinction to be drawn between an objectivist and constructivist perspective on reality." Joy (Joy, 1979, p. 2) opts for a constructivist perspective:

> The difference between the awful insanity and the creative glory is nothing more than the recognition that belief systems are only belief systems and not realities. At this level of consciousness, we can create anything we desire, and once we realize that we live only in an idea level of existence that is not based on any intrinsic realness, we may consider the possibility that there are options to our experience and expression of reality. The questioning process brings us naturally, easily and inevitably to the threshold of higher states of consciousness.

The leveraging of transcendence is fully evident in Joy s proposal that we engage a beginner s mind" when discerning what is actually real." We should not only re-enter our world without a pre-existing frame of mind (Kuhn's paradigm) but also with a focus on that which is particularly important for us.

Conclusions

We are living in a VUCA-Plus world that requires us to focus on our ultimate concern." (Tillich,1957/2001) We are to transform the VUCA-Plus conditions on behalf of this concern. Transcendence is not for the faint of Heart" and must be used to leverage those changes in perspective and practice that are the essence of Peter Vaill's "learning as a way of being" (Vaill, 1996)

Armand Nicholi (2002) envisioned Sigmund Freud struggling with the theology of C. S. Lewis. I wonder what Nicholi would have to say about the approach Sigmund Freud take when emersed in a dialogue with either Brugh Joy or Peter Vaill. And would the perspective of either Joy or Vaill enrich the life coaching that Dr. Freud is providing Daniel?

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