

Coaching at Work

“p16 Int’l letter”

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The people of Bhutan lack material things, but are rich in spirituality. Can we embrace this in our practices?

STILL WATERS

AMANDA RIDINGS



The silence in Bhutan is profound. I could almost reach out and touch it – intense, resonant, forgiving. It seems able to absorb any sound: words and talk simply dissolve into this vastness, transient and inconsequential. Since my return, the visceral memory of this silence sustains me in challenging moments, supporting me to listen for my deeper wisdom – for universal wisdom. My ability to be present feels steadier and more resilient.

I went to Bhutan on a spiritual journey, led by the founder of Leadership Embodiment, Wendy Palmer. I wasn't sure what to expect – some travel by bus, some walking (at altitude), some meditating, some Leadership Embodiment practice for sure, but beyond the practicalities, what does a spiritual journey entail?

I knew, but couldn't articulate, that this adventure would benefit me, my work and my clients.

We travelled from West to East and back again – there are few roads, and they cling precariously to steep, forested slopes. Our eyes were filled with mountains, forests, rivers – all on a grand scale. It was almost too much to take in.

We visited significant spiritual sites, many on crags and rocky outcrops, involving a walk and a climb. We meditated in caves, in temples, on rocks beside a sacred river, in our hotels. I was often cold and stiff – we sat on the floor – no luxuries like meditation cushions! Somehow it didn't matter – the austerity added to the experience.

This offers a theme that engages me. The people of Bhutan have few of the material things that the West regards as essential, and yet they exude generosity and compassion. In keeping with Buddhist teachings, they have a felt sense of

the connectedness of living things and treat everything with respect. Despite material privation, Bhutanese lives have meaning, with spiritual and societal wealth that is humbling and moving.

My journey gave me a taste of life with a little less: a little less food, heating, luxury – and oxygen. Among the Bhutanese, there is a little less self-absorption, hurry and idle talk. Instead, there is more silence, sharing, graciousness and simplicity. A sense of the smallness of an individual life liberates rather than oppresses...

My experience of 'a little less' was vibrant and cathartic, but how do I embrace this back home? I aspire to travel more lightly, to pare back my life and practice. But how little is needed?

Some things have already been taken care of – it feels like Bhutan wiped the hard disk of my mind: quite a lot of details that are taken for granted are now missing. I have developed a tenuous relationship with time which, for a 'planful' person such as me, is somewhat disorientating.

Together, these changes have led to a number of 'dropped balls'. This is mostly amusing, but can have adverse consequences. The benefits include a sense of spaciousness, so I am being mindful about what I choose to re-install.

In my coaching and supervision practice, I am aiming for a little less intervention, hurry and effort. One immediate impact will be more silence and space and, in time, more acceptance, resonance and capacity for unfolding.

I am left hungry to go deeper into the silence of Bhutan, to do more walking and meditating. I intend to return. I don't know how or when. If you would like to join me, then let me know! ■

Amanda Ridings is an executive coach and author of *Pause for Breath*, bringing the practices of mindfulness and dialogue to leadership conversations (Live It Publishing, 2011).
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