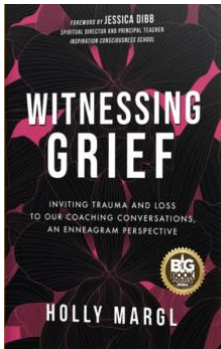


'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



November 2024 **Witnessing Grief**

Inviting Trauma and Loss to Our Coaching Conversations, An Enneagram Perspective

By Holly Margl

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Adam Kugajevsky

INTRO

- The author's son died unexpectedly. This book comes from her experience with helpful and unhelpful responses others had to her grief, and how it can inform coaches.
- Most people do not know how to talk about traumatic loss and grief. Even coaches, counselors, and therapists can say unhelpful and even harmful things.
 - How do we know if we are doing or saying something for ourselves or the other person?
- Coaches are not treating grief, loss, or trauma.
 - Treating grief, loss, and trauma is not the coach's objective (for counselors and therapists). What coaches can do is intentionally *witness* their clients with *conscious presence*

PART 1: MEETING GRIEF

CHAPTER 1 CONSCIOUS PRESENCE

Coaching

- People are not comfortable in the presence of a grieving mother and will do whatever it takes to escape *their* discomfort.
- **Your emotional response has the power to enhance or diminish your coaching relationship.**
- Remember that support is *being with* a person experiencing a distressing emotion without trying to change, improve, or redirect anything; in other words, *witnessing*. Additionally, with conscious presence, we can witness another human being's pain without getting caught up in it.

What Happens to Our Presence?

- Imagine working with a client striving to quit smoking... but, today, they share that their son just died by suicide – what happens to your presence?
 - Fight, flight, freeze – what is your capacity to intentionally stay present while feeling uneasy, unstable, and potentially inadequate?
 - What might be the impact of asking, “How did it go this week with your goal to smoke just one cigarette a day?” Compared to, “What feels important to talk about today, Client?”
- Joanne Story – 4 pages, violent death of her children by her ex-husband.
 - What happened to your presence and attention as you read Joanne’s story?

Inner Witness

- Our **inner witness** enables consciousness. The inner witness knows *who* senses, thinks, feels, and does and knows the motives behind the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and doing.
- The first job of our inner witness is observing our mental and emotional patterns, triggers, and habits.
 - *Inner witnessing* happens when we see past our ego defenses to our limitations and perhaps our blind spots.
 - When we can intentionally connect with our *inner witness*, we have the ability to *witness* another human being’s suffering, just like putting our oxygen mask on first.
- The second job of our *inner witness* is staying with our client and their story, not retreating to emotional safety. Withdrawal leads to offering platitudes like, “I can’t imagine what you’re going through” or “I’m sorry for your loss(es).”

Isabel Wilkerson’s book, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*: **Radical Empathy** means educating oneself and listening with a humble heart to understand another’s experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel... Instead, it is the kindred connection of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it.”

CHAPTER 2 DEFINING LOSS, TRAUMA, AND GRIEF

Role of the Coach

- **We can create a safe and inviting space for our grieving clients and model courage while facing fear, the unknown, and despair.**
- **Our objective as coaches is not to assuage or remove painful feelings such as grief and sorrow; it’s to be consciously present with our clients...** We are responsible for recognizing *our* reactions and setting ourselves aside to maintain objectivity and *witness* our clients.

Loss, Trauma, etc.

- Loss is a painfully familiar but sometimes unnoticed human experience.
- Grief is emotional suffering, sometimes called sorrow, resulting from loss and trauma. **Grief becomes part of our life’s tapestry as it is an ongoing process that ebbs and flows.**
 - It’s safe to say that grief will impact all of us during our lifetime
 - Examples: Toddlerhood; primary and secondary school years; marriage; having children; parenthood/motherhood; retirement and empty-nesting; aging; pandemic; addiction and mental illness; physical illness or disease; traumatic death; abduction; marginalization, discrimination, and intersectionality

Managing as a Coach

- The coaching relationship offers a secure space for uncomfortable conversations, but **who creates the safety, and what does security look like in a conversation?**

- Diverting an emotionally challenging topic in coaching conversations is common and akin to a bait and switch - *“Please bring anything to our conversations, Client, except for what makes me uncomfortable.”*
- [Example of client sharing child’s death] Many coaches would likely search for a more comfortable and stable topic, perhaps asking how they’re taking care of themselves rather than asking about their client’s emotional experience.
- Several examples. **Pause and reflect:**
 - What did you notice? Be honest with yourself.
 - What potential biases, projections, and implications does this coaching relationship face without the coach’s conscious presence and radical empathy?
 - Do you recognize the compounded losses in the examples? Not only are individuals and families impacted by traumatic grief, but assumptions and judgments tied to the victim’s identities could tragically rob the survivors of empathy, relatedness, and humanity
- **So, how do you hold your emotional reactions (stress response) in check and stay consciously present with your client’s experience when the topic is impossibly loaded?**

I’d like to mention that when grief maintains its grip with no signs of improvement for a year, it’s likely not what’s considered ‘normal’ grief. Normal grief ebbs and flows, though unpredictably, yet over time, it begins to lessen, and the griever can start assimilating their feelings.

CHAPTER THREE: THINKING ABOUT THE MIND

- Whether we’re ready or not or think it’s appropriate, **grief, loss, and trauma will enter our coaching conversations because they’re part of the human experience.**
- **Coaches must do their inner work or risk being ineffectual with these complex topics.**

Skills

- Identifying Emotional Reactions
 - Why is it beneficial to identify our emotional reactions? First, because coaches know the benefit of naming their emotions. Second, coaches need to ‘walk the talk’ for the ability to mirror their clients. Third, coaches need to recognize their mind’s innate reactions at the onset of a familiar emotion. And finally, coaches are responsible for avoiding patterned emotional reactions in a client’s presence.
- Self-Awareness
 - A coach’s self-regulation is essential so that our conversations remain focused on our clients, not on protecting ourselves from a painful, uncomfortable, or shocking topic.
- Meditation or Presence Practice
- Conscious Presence
 - When our mind (unconsciously) recognizes an uncomfortable or undesirable feeling, patterned neural pathways activate, and we go offline, even with clients.
 - Conscious presence helps us stay objectively present with an emotionally charged topic.
- Your Inner Witness

- Your inner witness observes your thoughts, feelings, and actions without judgment, evaluation, or agenda.
- Your inner witness knows your tricks and protective measures, known as blind spots and shadows.
- Inner Critic: when you listen to your inner critic while in a coaching session, you're not coaching – you're not even present
- Pausing: Pausing helps coaches ground themselves in a moment of distress.
- Categories: We might begin to recognize the inherent ways our mind files everything and everyone into categories to make meaning... Coaches must become familiar with their categories to avoid labeling clients.
- Non-attachment: Non-attachment is the gift of a calm, peaceful coaching presence without a role or identity distraction. Non-attachment completes conscious presence.

Exercise
Dr. Robert Kegan recommends using a consistent meditation practice that incorporates the inner observer to bring practiced objectivity to our patterned emotional reactions... He recommends imagining our thoughts, feelings, and urges as small objects to hold in the palm of our hand. He suggests that with this perspective, we can disconnect from our complicated thoughts and feelings and achieve a sense of peaceful solidarity with our fellow humans rather than our customary goal of individuality.

PART 2: USING THE ENNEAGRAM

CHAPTER 4: SHOWING UP

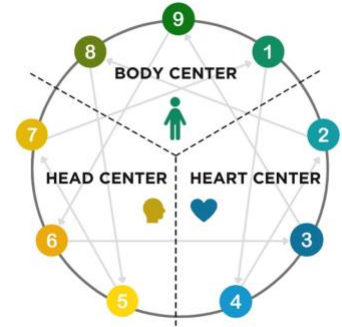
- It is our responsibility as coaches to recognize our habitual emotional patterns so that we arrive at each coaching session with curiosity and without an agenda.

Self-Determination Theory

- Theory recognizes *autonomy*, *relatedness*, and competence as psychological needs essential for moral human development and self-regulation
 - Autonomy: the integrity we experience when our actions, thoughts, and feelings are self-regulated and authentic
 - Relatedness: the care, bonding, and love we experience when connected with significant others
 - Competence: feeling effective and masterful when utilizing our strengths and expertise
- How you experience these needs affects how you interact with and interpret others, including your clients (e.g., if you fear that you lack *competence* in a complicated topic)
 - You surmise that your client's [reaction] suggests their psychological need for *relatedness* took a hit. So what do you choose to say?
 - Conversely, what if your psychological need for *competence* gets triggered when you don't know what to say?
 - Let's assume that you do not recognize your client's injured need for relatedness... your insecurity might cause you to fall into problem-solving, and saying something like, "It'll be important for you to keep your strength up in the coming weeks, let's brainstorm some ways."
 - Yikes! There's no validation of your client's loss or their feelings. **Instead, you've accomplished the swiftest path to your familiar ground thanks to well-worn neural pathways.**

ENNEAGRAM

- Purpose in this book is to **help you become familiar with your dominant Center of Intelligence.** *Knowing your client's dominant Center of Intelligence isn't necessary; knowing yours is what's important.*
- Sheds light on habitual patterns
- Centers of Intelligence:
 - Heart Center, or feeling center
 - Head Center, or thinking center
 - Belly Center, or instinctive center
- Numbers 1-9 represent "dominant biases", or descriptions of our typical human personality characteristics:
 1. Rectitude (Belly)
 2. Connection (Heart)
 3. Achievement (Heart)
 4. Uniqueness (Heart)
 5. Prowess (Head)
 6. Certitude (Head)
 7. Gratification (Head)
 8. Impact (Belly)
 9. Peace (Belly)
- Author introduces each Center of Intelligence and its characteristics, fears, positive contributions, etc.
- Impact on Coaching?
 - Overuse. We get stuck using one predominant center, creating a dominant filter (bias)
 - Mismatched Centers: if your Belly Center is dominant (seeking autonomy), and your client's Heart Center is dominant (pursuing relatedness), you as the coach might react with your Belly Center's innate emotional patterns and miss the mark on your clients need for emotional connection.
- Harmonic Groups: additional layer of common triads of dominant biases, each with their own nuance of potential (sub) dominant bias
 - **Positive Outlook** Harmonic Group (9, 2, 7 – Peace, Connection, Gratification)
 - **Rational Competency** Harmonic Group (3, 1, 5 – Achievement, Rectitude, Prowess)
 - **Emotional Realness** Harmonic Group (6, 4, 8 – Certitude, Uniqueness, Impact)
- Chapters 5 – 7 cover each Harmonic Group, and for each (sub) dominant bias gives:
 - How I Want You to Perceive Me
 - My Coaching Style
 - What I avoid
 - How This Might Show Up in Coaching
 - A Scenario
 - A Breathing Practice



PART 3: PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

CHAPTER 8: GETTING PRACTICAL

- Know your triggers to access your coaching skills in an uncomfortable conversation

- While there is no easy coaching response for grief, trauma, and loss, there are some guidelines for when you're engaging in difficult conversations with your clients
 - Practice listening for experiences of loss and trauma
 - With your inner witness, recognize your physical manifestations of your distress
 - Self-regulate when necessary using your presencing skills
 - Objectively refocus on your client when triggered
 - **Be with** your client, don't do coaching to them
- The Courage to Stay Present
 - A client's recalled experience may be emotionally triggering for you
 - Always respond thoughtfully and specifically to the client you're with rather than offering a convenient or hasty adage
 - Know that **leaning on trite phrases creates distance** between you and your client. Your client senses your escape from their discomfort when you echo platitudes
 - To create a safe and solid coaching environment, we're responsible for self-regulating our emotions
 - Empathic questions are not, "Oh my gosh, are you okay?" or "How are you managing?" Instead, it might be, "What would it mean to you to feel a sense of stability?"
- You won't always need to respond to it, but don't discount grief by forcing topics about the sunny side of life or suggesting ways to move on
- If you see a reaction in your client (smile, tears, etc.), ask what's coming up for them. Don't assume you know what it's about
- Your job is to create a safe space for your client to **be** while supporting their forward movement

"No matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining." – David Kessler, *The Sixth Stage of Grief*

CHAPTER 9: COACHING CONVERSATIONS

- Chapter 9 presents a range of coaching examples and scenarios for practice, offering "typical" responses and revised responses.
- Often we don't recognize how we obstruct the coaching relationship without self-awareness and self-regulation. In truth, our attempts to help might be more about meeting our needs than our client's needs. But how do we know the difference? The short answer is courageous self-observation

Example	Revised
How can you take extra care of yourself this weekend, some splurge you might give yourself, like a massage?	What makes it important to share that with me today?
Maybe there's a way to focus on what the cancer's remission will offer rather than what it takes away from you? Are there support groups you can join?	Who do you want to be?
I can't imagine losing my _____. How are you taking care of yourself now?	I noticed an energy shift as you said 'most days, it's been rather difficult.' What are you sensing right now?
You've got a lot going on... in what ways is your husband being difficult?	What track would you like to be on?

How did you survive all of that? Do you have a counselor?	Thank you for your transparency. What's important for me to understand about you related to our work together?
In the past, when have you felt successful in setting aside the judgment and practicing patience?	How will you know when you've achieved more patience and understanding?
So sorry for your loss. My sympathy to you.	What are you feeling as you share that with me?
I'm wondering if you have a counselor to talk with about these things?	What makes ____ important to you?
I had a horrible time when I had a similar experience. So, what went well this weekend?	What made it harder than you thought?
I'm so sorry to hear about your job loss!	What's coming up for you as you tell me that?
What were you able to do in place of a graduation ceremony?	What does missing out on graduation mean to you?
What a terrible disease. I'm so sorry. How is your aunt doing? How are you?	How is this news hitting you?
What does your current weight loss plan look like?	What's it like to feel ready to make yourself a priority?

CHAPTER 10: BEYOND THE SHOCK POINT

- ***It's not a coach's role to improve anything for their clients. Coaches need to witness their clients, not transform them. Transformation is always the client's job***
- Meaning and a Sense of Purpose: Be curious about what gives your client's life meaning and how that fits into their everyday experience
- If the trauma was not long ago, your client might be in shock. Therapy may be optimal... However, remember that you have a place in their care, too, as a witness.
 - Witnessing includes creating a safe space capable of holding any emotion while upholding professional boundaries. It's demonstrating courage without drama and often with few words. Witnessing is staying consciously present to your client's feelings, not their story and not your story
- **Author shares examples of her being witnessed after her son's death.**
 - There were no platitudes, fear, a changing of the subject, an attempt to fix or change, nor emotional expression or withdrawal. Instead, these people were present with me and my pain
 - These people became sources of strength because they could withstand my intense desperation without muddying it with an emotion of their own. They did not try to share my grief nor alter it; instead, they witnessed it
- The life-changing nature of trauma and grief brings reevaluation of priorities
 - Over time, inviting clients to explore and reframe their assumptions about life and suffering through powerful inquiries allows them to create a new inner-landscape

Examples of Author Being Witnessed:

- Love you
- Oh fuck, Holly
- *Silence and a hand on arm*
- Oh my gosh, tell me about him
- I thought of Nicholas today
- Sending you love... I remember him very well
- *Offered a hug strong enough to hold my grief*
- *Silence and looked at me with compassion for a moment*

- Remarkably, enhanced emotional growth and wisdom manifest for those living with the contrast of life before and after a traumatic experience. Traumatized folks find a new sense of purpose; they discover new meaning in their lives
- Who is the whole person when our client arrives with a story of grief, trauma, or loss?
 - If the wound is still fresh, set aside hopes of 'aha' moments and goal setting. Instead, when listening to narratives of grief and trauma, reserve your standard coaching methods for another time and be consciously present

EPILOGUE

"Happiness is beneficial for the body, but it is grief that develops the powers of the mind." – Marcel Proust

Things **not** to say that, nonetheless, are commonly said:

Message Sent	Examples
I'm uncomfortable; let's change the subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't cry ● You will feel happiness again ● Don't be sad; he's in a better place ● Take comfort in knowing that he's not suffering ● Time heals all wounds ● I'm sorry ● I can't imagine what you're going through ● My condolences ● Too bad ● That's a shame ● I will keep you in my thoughts ● This, too, shall pass ● How unfortunate ● He brought this on himself ● It must have been his time to go ● Think of all the fun times you had together ● Aren't you passed this yet? ● I hope you take comfort in the positive memories of him ● My sympathy to you ● Stop being so selfish – let her rest in peace ● Stop crying ● Pull yourself together
I know what's best for you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You can't keep saying things like that ● You will feel happiness again ● What are you doing to take care of yourself? ● Taking walks will help ● Have you tried yoga? ● Aren't you overacting? ● Think of your other children ● How could you just let him die? ● What's underneath this? ● Look on the bright side

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to look at the positive • Everything happens for a reason • It'll get easier • It'll get better • Nothing will ever hurt this much again • I'll bring you a casserole later today
You have it better than me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least you have other children • At least you spoke to him before he died, at least you have that • You can still have another child • At least you can have children
I'm all-knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You know you never have to do it again when you get through this • The pain won't always be this bad • He would want you to move on and be happy • You had eighteen great years with him • You'll feel better eventually • Time heals all wounds • At least he won't suffer anymore • God never gives you more than you can handle • He was such a good person that God wanted him in Heaven • It was God's will • Maybe it's better this way • At least the grief should be easier since she was so young • When life gives you lemons, make lemonade • Think about the good things in your life
I want to know the details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • How did he die? • What does your grief feel like? • Was it unexpected? • When did it happen? • Was it ____? • How did you lose your son?
Taking care of you makes me feel better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I help? • How are you? • What can I do? • He's in a better place • You can get through this • Here's a tissue
What about me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're handling things better than I am • When will you be back? • I miss who you used to be • I miss you • How long does grief take? • I know how you feel • I lost my ____ that way, too • It could have been worse; my ____ died by ____ • I wouldn't be able to get out of bed if I were you

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'd have to quit my job if it were me
--	---

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).