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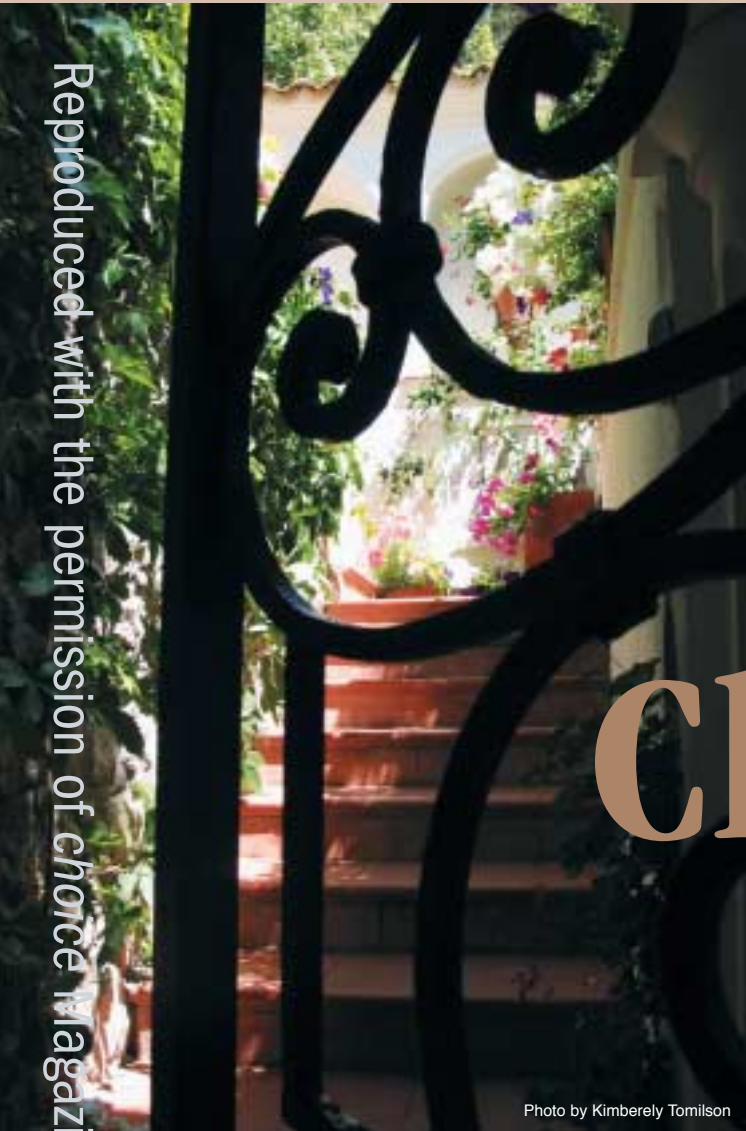


Photo by Kimberely Tomilson

“As emotionally and spiritually **integrated adults**, we know that **external approval is a lofty goal without sustainable reward.**”

● “This life is your journey” and **Melanie DewBerry-Jones** shares her vision on how self-naming and claiming helps determine the path.

THE ACTS OF Self- Naming AND Claiming

As a trainer of coaches, I often teach my students to move beyond the skill of coaching into the skill of self-trusting. Having great mastery of a specific skill is important, but without self-mastery all we become are manipulators of open-ended questions. Coaching is much more than that.

One of the most important aspects of being a success in any career, but especially in an emerging career such as coaching, is the ability to “know thyself” without question or fear. It is vital that you trust yourself as you define yourself as a coach, whether this entails defining a particular niche or being a generalist.

Perhaps, like me, you have never had to represent yourself to the world on your own terms. My previous careers led me to the structured business place most people find themselves in: that nine-to-five venue with a boss, an HR department and all those things and people who tell you what to do and help create your identity for you. I was happy to leave all that behind to begin my work as a spiritual coach. Yet, I had some unsettling questions about this new life that kept me hidden under the sheets: Who was I now? And how would I get people to buy into spirituality as a means of fully accessing their own power and truth? Henceforth, whatever the world was going to know of me would depend on how I thought of and defined myself.

I completed my coaching training many years ago when coaching was still new and practically unheard of. With my mixed cultural heritage — African- and Native-American, and my chosen coaching niche — spiritual coaching, I managed to triple the population wherever I went within the

coaching community. There were few African-American coaches, no Native-American ones, and even fewer spiritual coaches that I could discover. Alone and scared, I trusted little of what I knew to be true of my abilities and myself.

As a student back then I listened to all the dos and don'ts of coaching, tested my skills on my willing clients, poor things, but still remained frightened to death. My fear lay not in my ability as a coach — I was confident that my skill would grow — but in my ability to attract people to my niche. I am a spiritual coach. My passion for growing the adult to spiritual and emotional maturity is all consuming. Yet, at that time, I had little faith that anyone would value this kind of coaching. I certainly had not seen it modeled in any of the courses I had taken, and so I deferred to others to define for me what I should offer my clients.

I leaned heavily on other coaches' opinions of the value of spirituality in coaching. When I would sheepishly mumble, "What do you think of spirituality in coaching?" their replies would always amount to some version of: "It's great, just don't use the 'S' word. Don't be too woo-woo

the loss of a valuable resource to this world. Copying others or allowing ourselves to be recast in another's mold is copping out — a form of resignation, an unconscious conformity that signals the refusal to learn something new. The world needs innovation not imitation.

It's easier to surrender our identities to a corporation, culture or a community than to take the bold step of naming self and claiming yourself. When we reject another's naming, we risk being excluded. And since, as social creatures, we all feel the need to belong; it seems risky to resist others' attempts at naming us. Paradoxically, the act of self-naming sets us on the path of self-claiming, which announces to the world that we have chosen to be solely responsible for our own destinies.

In order to name ourselves, we must know ourselves. Often, in our quest to claim our holy grail we tread in deep, and sometimes murky, waters. We come to know ourselves only when we break out of the mold — our comfort zones — claim our space, take risks, fail widely, ask for help, stand and walk again.

“The world needs innovation not imitation”

or touchy-feely, business people don't like that.” Some would reply, “I bring spirituality into my coaching but I would never call it that.” Great! I thought. Still too scared to challenge their opinions, my coaching practice and I suffered like a pre-pubescent girl — underdeveloped and straining to bloom. By being unwilling to take the risk of naming myself, I not only sold out myself but, ultimately, the clients whom I could have assisted.

For two years I allowed mind chatter to keep me in limbo. I had abandoned my own inner compass for gauging my truth while hiding my natural abilities. I relied on others to invalidate what I knew to be a valid and worthwhile offering.

Trying to hide that I was a spiritual coach was like trying to hide that I am a Black woman. I was only kidding myself. Finally, the Universe had had enough of my bellyaching. As I prayed about it one evening, I heard the smallest of voices saying very clearly, “Fine, we'll find someone else to do it!” Well, that just pissed me off! How dare she/he pull the ultimate coaching tactic — “the take away” — on me?

That evening I called my friends and boldly announced myself as a spiritual coach, and off I went. The very next day I got business cards with the title “Spiritual Coach” emblazoned on them. The following day I changed my voice mail to announce my newly embraced status to would-be callers.

The threat of having the option taken away was exponentially scarier than coming out of the spiritual closet. With each step forward, I knew there was no going back. I was out now, and I liked it. Today, I am successful. There are thousands of spiritual coaches with whom to keep company. Once I had named myself, it was easier for other spiritual coaches to find me. And those corporate types — they are my main client base.

Lessons learned

Throughout life, there will be attempts by others to name you. Each moment that we are unwilling to name ourselves, we enable and facilitate

The truth is that no one else can tell you who you are. Leaving the summation of your character, your spiritual identity, to another is, at best, to relegate yourself to acting the part chosen and bestowed on you or, at worst, to risk having none. This life is your journey! It requires that you name yourself as part of its navigation. As you courageously come to know and trust yourself, you will name and rename yourself with each new inclusion of lessons learned — that's the beauty of the human experience!

As a coach, your ability to know yourself and to trust what you know is more important than any acquired skill. When you grant yourself permission to be fully available to yourself and others, you expand the bandwidth of niche possibilities that invariably creates room for others — including those clients just waiting to be found. When we love who we are, we have more available to love others and it is that self-love — not our skills alone — that will assist clients in navigating their own journeys along the path to becoming their greatest selves.

As emotionally and spiritually integrated adults, we know that external approval is a lofty goal without sustainable reward. We also know that, when we truly accept ourselves, others naturally gravitate towards us who seek the gifts we have to offer. And those who have no need of our particular soul offering inevitably move beyond our spheres of influence. When we trust ourselves, we trust that the world wants us, is delighted by our presence, laughs with us at our mistakes, helps us when we are down and always, always loves us. Because another's measure of who you are changes in relation to who they are, it's best that the acts of self-naming and claiming come from your most trusted ally — you! ●

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