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## *Sanctuary: Implications for Organizational Coaches Working with 21st Century Clients*

Bruce Willats and William Bergquist

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# Sanctuary: Implications for Organizational Coaches Working with 21st Century Clients

Bruce Willats and William Bergquist

*Sanctuary is that place or time or situation (which is created for us, or which we create for ourselves), in which we can drop out of the busy flow of life for a few moments, gather ourselves together, restore our integrity and our energies, and focus again on our highest priorities and deepest yearnings. Sanctuary is where we "come home," where we can love and care for ourselves deeply, and therefore for others. In this article, the two authors explore the nature and dynamics of sanctuary (and false sanctuary) and identify several bridges between sanctuary and both ancient wisdom and organizational coaching.*

Every civilization has had some kind of sanctuary system. In medieval Europe, there were feast days when no one worked and all fighting stopped. This was called "The Peace of God." The church or cathedral was itself a sacred sanctuary. The word "sanctuary" comes from the Latin word for "holy." It was forbidden to kill someone who was in a cathedral. When you go to Hawaii you may see a ring of stones called a *heiau* (hay-a-oo) – a sacred temple. One is called The City of Refuge; you can visit it on the Big Island. When ancient Hawaiian tribes were at war with one another, if a warrior could make it to a heiau, he could stay there and rest. No one could touch him. He could, as so many of us need to do in our daily wars, just stop. What makes it sacred is that it was a place set aside (sanctified) for holy use, in this case a sanctuary for warriors on the run.

Here are a few contemporary examples of sanctuary. A traveling home-visit nurse in Los Angeles stops for five minutes between each house to listen to music. Muslims stop what they are doing five times a day to bow toward Mecca and pray. A graduate student in San Rafael sits in the Convent garden for a few minutes after class. A CEO in Massachusetts collects beach glass off the beach when he goes home after work. A Buddhist businessman in Boston takes every full moon day and every half moon day as a day dedicated to study and meditation. A California university president, when she is not traveling, always has a one hour dinner with her spouse promptly at six. A saleswoman at Sears counts ten full breaths before addressing the next customer. The governor of a major state takes a 30 day retreat with the Jesuits. A mother sews. A man carves wood. An artist in Laguna Beach surfs.

## The Need for Sanctuary

One of us wrote a book during the early 1990s about living in a postmodern world. There were three pages in this book about sanctuary and the need for it in such a world. The author received as many comments on those three pages as on any other part of the book. There is a hunger for sanctuary: a hunger to talk about it, a hunger to know about it, and most of all a hunger to find it. It is almost as if, in our intense search for all the many kinds of well being, we have nearly lost one of the most precious kinds of well being of all. We have lost our ability to find sanctuary – real, true, healing, transforming, and deeply comforting sanctuary – in our lives. And we don't know how or where to look to find it again.

In many ways sanctuaries are more important today than they were fifty years ago. There is a constant need for sanctuary throughout the history of any society. In most societies at most times, there are a sufficient number of forms and occasions for sanctuary to meet the needs of the society. However, there may be periods of change in which the normal forms of sanctuary are not available, and new ones have not yet been instituted within a society. During these periods there will be a felt need for finding new forms, or recovering old forms, of sanctuary. At the same time, during periods of change or crisis (T. S. Eliot: "the center cannot hold"), there may be a need to provide a greater number, more frequent, and "deeper" sanctuaries in a specific society.

When ancient Israel was at war, they had to go to the temple more often, and stay there longer. Why? Because in such periods, present behavior, assumptions, beliefs have to be examined deeply, and one has to be set apart

to do that. Because in such periods, frightening, or unthinkable, or previously unimaginable possibilities have to be entertained, and one has to be away from conventional thinking and the power of the collective to do that. A study of any society may in the future show that there are cycles involving the renewal of old forms of sanctuary and the invention of new forms. There seems to be a great need for sanctuary at times of rapid change, between eras, or in times of turbulence. We certainly seem to be operating in such a world at the present time. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why coaching has emerged in contemporary organizations as a viable human service strategy – and perhaps as a source of sanctuary.

At the same time, there seem to be fewer sanctuaries today than in the past, or at least we are less inclined to acknowledge either the presence or vital role to be played by sanctuaries in our life. Over the past one hundred years, in our eagerness to appear very “modern” and up-to-date, we have abandoned many of the old institutions and societal functions (such as interpersonal and institutional covenants, religiously-based celebrations and rituals, and community-based parades and commemorations). Sanctuaries are among the premodern institutions that we have often cast aside and that may be particularly important right now in our new postmodern world. Perhaps this also makes organizational coaching particularly valuable.

A church will have an all-church weekend, but it is not sanctuary, it is for planning the year. A corporation will have a senior staff retreat, but it is often just a work day in another guise. Hardly anyone keeps the Sabbath; we use it to catch up on things left undone from the week. Time speeds by so fast that we feel we can’t afford, or can’t relax into, a truly quiet time. When we do take time off, we often feel guilty. Our culture doesn’t help. When we are quiet, we aren’t spending money. Our notion of the good life is to fill life up, not empty it out. We are urged to “grab all the gusto” we can, not release our frantic grip.

### **What Sanctuary Does**

The need for sanctuary seems to be established deep within our instinctual lives, in our DNA, within our bones, as it were. Every life form, including the planet Earth, lives in cycles (sometimes we call them circadian cycles). As the writer of Ecclesiastes noted, and the folk singer sang: “For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven; . . . a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;. . . a time for war, and a time for peace.”

Bears hibernate in the winter, not just because there is snow on the ground, but because of the need for periods of activity and inactivity. Certain insects require long

gestation periods within the cocoon before they can emerge as butterflies or moths. Even the mud frogs of the Serengeti Desert require long periods of time in the mud before they can come out, mate, give birth, and die. If the rain comes too early, and the frog comes out too soon, the cycle is broken and no birth occurs. Nature itself has life-giving seasons. Contemporary homo sapiens seem to be the only creatures who try to live life “on” all the time, without sufficient “off” time for the inner work to occur.

Sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, get away, rest. We all need to stop. We need to stop physically, mentally, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually. Animals seem to spend a lot of time resting. They know how to stop physically. Children do too. So do adults who live near the equator. We seem to be the only creatures who have trouble learning to stop and rest. . . at least until we are forced to by illness or age. T. S. Eliot wrote 60 years ago, anticipating the desperate need in modern society for sanctuary, for stopping, for resting: “Teach us to sit still.” (*Ash Wednesday*). And where do we rest? “At the still point of the turning world. . . Neither from nor towards; At the still point, there the dance is. . . Where past and future are gathered. . . There is only the dance.” (*Four Quartets*)

Our bodies give us natural times of resting, and these (with a stretch of the imagination) could be called mini-sanctuaries or even nano-sanctuaries. The heart rests between beats, the lungs between breaths. Our days are interwoven with moments of rest, and hopefully reflection. When the day is over, we go into a major physical sanctuary called sleep. What a curse it can be for those with insomnia who cannot sleep! In sleep we not only rest, but some (from ancient sources of wisdom) say we commune with our deeper selves in dreams. A person who is awakened when he starts to dream (in dream deprivation experiments, for example) soon becomes irritable, then finally exhausted, no matter how much dreamless sleep he gets. Sleep seems to be for more than rest. It is also for some kind of psychological adjustment and inner dialogue. Without it, we might perish.

We also need to stop being quite so conscious sometimes. We need mental rest. (Some call it “veging out,” or “zoning out,” or just “checking out.” But whatever it is, we are “out.”) Actually, we alternate between consciousness and unconsciousness most of the time. Consciousness, real consciousness, is a recent and hard won human achievement. We have only been truly conscious (whatever level of consciousness we have in fact achieved) for a few thousand years. Consciousness was difficult to come by, and to this day it is hard to hold on to, hard to sustain. After only a few moments of genuine awareness, we are often flooded

with lack of awareness. As coaches we are well aware of these all-too-fleeting moments of true consciousness. We come back to awareness a minute later and wonder “where we went”. What spouse hasn’t said to the other in a conversation, “Where did you go?”

Robert the Bruce, the great hero who united the Scots against the English in the 12th Century, was totally defeated three years before. His army was destroyed, his family gone, his personal fortune lost, his reputation in ruins. With a sense of utter defeat, he rested in a cave for three days near Sterling. There he watched a spider on a twig trying to throw her web to another twig. She tried and failed again and again. Finally she rested and thought (if spiders think). Then she measured the distance to the other twig, gathered up the web, waited for the wind to be blowing in the right direction, and threw the web with all her strength. It held! She had succeeded. She then, with care and deliberation, spun her web, strong and complete.

Robert the Bruce took this “sanctuary” lesson and awoke to a new kind of consciousness. He reviewed his options, his strengths, and his weaknesses. He remembered assets he had overlooked, and allies he had failed to consult. Then, with more mindfulness than before, and with great conviction and intentionality, he gathered his forces and those of the other Lairds of Scotland, and drove the English out of Scotland for 100 years, defeating them handily at the Battle of Sterling Castle. Perhaps the spider was his coach. Was the spider compensated for this exceptional work?

With physical and mental rest often, but not always, comes emotional rest. The problem with some vacations is that we may take our troubles with us. We don’t get psychological rest. We may call the office, or check on the kids, or merely worry about the mortgage, or the in-laws, or aging. How do we get psychological rest? When we are exhausted, as the warrior in the heiau, it is easy. We just collapse. But on vacation, how do you do it? One solution is to take up all our emotional energy with something else. Gamblers in Las Vegas do this. So do surfers and fly fishermen. When visitors to Las Vegas are gambling, they report that nothing else exists for them. (And there aren’t even any clocks around!) Ironically, this is also the experience of the surfer sitting on her board waiting for the next wave and the fly fisherman casting for trout in a Montana mountain stream. In that moment, which stretches out into hours and days, nothing else exists.

Is there such a thing as spiritual rest? Does the soul, or the spirit, rest in sanctuary? It is difficult to say until we know more about the true nature of soul or spirit. However, people do report finding rest for their souls in sanctuary, and finding deep spiritual restoration in

holy moments and in holy places. When a believer comes to a sacred shrine, she often experiences coming home to herself, home to a peace of the deepest kind, home to reality, or home to God. Sometimes the sanctuary is in a small corner of her house; an altar with a crucifix, or a *puja* table in India with flowers, incense, and a picture on it, or a prayer window looking out into a garden. Sometimes it is a time and a ritual, like evening prayers for the Jew or one of the five times of prayer for the Muslim. Sometimes it is a practice, like stopping in the park to feed pigeons, or having a quiet cup of coffee in the staff room of a busy corporation. Not always, but often enough to keep us engaged, these moments take us to a place we call our true home. We are spiritually rested and renewed. We say, “Now I am more myself again.” Sanctuary enables us to stop, hide, get away, rest, and become more “who we truly are.”

Sanctuary enables us to heal, repair, regroup, recover. While we are resting our bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits, we often also heal. Hospitals are great public sanctuaries for healing in the Western world. Originally in many parts of the world (including North America) hospitals served as refuges for the poor and downtrodden. Nuns and nurses ministered to the nutritional and spiritual needs of the have-nots, as well as their physical needs. While the mission of most hospitals has changed in recent times, there still are separate rules for hospitals. There are boundaries. There are expected behaviors. There are ranks and protocols. We know when we are in a hospital.

People also come to sanctuary who have been defeated. Perhaps, there is a renewed interest in sanctuary because we are, in some sense, a defeated society. (The solution is in levels of defeat, and what “victory” and “defeat” actually mean.) Sanctuary is where you go to lick your wounds to either come out and fight again, or adjust to your defeat. When a politician is defeated, or a business executive fired, he goes to a sanctuary to pull his life together again. Does organizational coaching ever serve as a sanctuary for defeated leaders? Our society may need to reclaim the practice of going to sanctuary before one is defeated, or without having to be defeated. Perhaps if more people (politicians, businessmen, scholars, athletes, movie stars) spent more time in sanctuary, they might experience fewer defeats. Can coaching help?

Sanctuary deals with positive and negative hubris, ego inflation and ego deflation. It traditionally is a place where one is brought low - or raised up - to the level of ordinary humans, where one is brought to humility, brought “down” (or “up” if one is in hell) to earth, to humus, to being (merely) human. When there is no ego inflation, no hubris, there is usually no defeat or failure as such. When there is not much ego investment

(mystics and contemplatives know this), there is not much loss. One still has one's self. In the language of the Greeks, where there is no hubris, there is no nemesis.

Sanctuary enables us to find our deep center and reorient to our own deeper compass again. At the heart of sanctuary for many people is the sense of a place, time or situation where the conditions of ordinary living are suspended for a time. This makes sanctuary different from all other parts of life in time, space, and situation. In these suspended moments, the demands and rules of ordinary life are suspended. The heavy weight of blame, guilt, danger, limitations, and sanctions is lifted. In addition, some uplifting forces are added, including greater true freedom, openness, possibility, and empowerment.

Under these conditions personal truth, honesty, and illumination are possible. Truth and illumination actually occurs, however, only when (1) the need for illumination increases to critical mass (pressure), (2) the danger presented by illumination is reduced (resistance, counter pressure, field theory), and (3) a third force enters in (different from the usual ego coping mechanisms, sometimes called Grace. This is not to say that sanctuary provides a place for libertine behavior; rather, it encourages guiltless, blameless open and creative thinking.

In sanctuary there is the real possibility for renewal and healing at a deep level: body, mind, interpersonal, spiritual, situational. There is a real possibility for spection: seeing oneself as one is (introspection); seeing a situation as it is (extrospection); seeing others as they are, and so forth. There is a real possibility for creative new thinking, being open to new possibilities, being able to envision oneself in new possibilities. There is a possibility of some kind of coming home to one's own truth. There can be a kind of coming to oneself.

Sanctuary enables us to grow by engaging and encountering something inner or other, and then to return. There is a close relationship between sanctuary and learning. We have identified sanctuary as refuge, yet sanctuary can also mean challenge and learning. Learning occurs both within the context of what is to be learned, and apart from it. One has to have direct experience, but also reflection from a place of disengagement. The place of disengagement is a temporary sanctuary.

Learning involves a balance between support and challenge. Challenge occurs in the process of engagement. Support often means the provision of physical, emotional, social, intellectual or spiritual resources. Challenge is added in small manageable

increments at a speed with which the student is able to cope. The learning environment is a mini-sanctuary in which the full demands of the new learning are not yet applied. It is a place where failure can occur. Sanctuary provides safety. Is coaching just such a mini-sanctuary for learning?

Publicly identified sanctuaries — places and times labeled as sanctuaries — provide the circumstances in which certain kinds of deeper learning, healing, integrating, meaning-making, and self-communication can take place. One could argue that all learning takes place in some sort of sanctuary-oid setting, and that the most important integrative and developmental learning we do as adults occurs both in imbedded settings (in the world) and sanctuary settings (away from the world).

### **False Sanctuaries**

There are many kinds of false sanctuary in the world. False sanctuary makes the situation worse, not better. Both true and false sanctuaries take us out of the ordinary world and offer us a change of place, time and situation. But a true sanctuary also helps us access the deepest and truest parts of ourselves. A false sanctuary hinders that process and clouds access to our deepest and truest self.

The world beckons us to a multitude of false sanctuaries. In times past this might have included an opium den in China, absinth drinkers in Paris or New Orleans, or the Circus Maximus in the Rome of Nero. Today examples of false sanctuary could include: alcohol abuse, drugs, television abuse, addiction to news, the internet, video games, pornography, illicit sex, and gambling; political and religious fanaticism, too much time at the gym, excessive prayer and meditation, and overwork.

Each of these, including excessive prayer and overwork, can mean intense engagement with one part of life, but also profound disengagement with another part of life, and with the Self. The purpose of sanctuary is to bring life into balance and into alignment with one's deepest Self. Any sanctuary which takes one's life out of balance over a long period of time, and keeps one disconnected with one's deepest truest Self, is likely to be false.

### **The Nature of Sanctuaries**

Sanctuaries are as old as the human race. Humans, and even animals before them, seem to have always had sanctuaries of one kind or another. Within a single animal family or species, there are time and places, seasons and locations, when animals of the same species will not hunt or kill each other. Traditional societies have always had their holy spots, their sacred

trees, their stone enclosures, where you were safe, where no one could harm you, and where you went for healing. Long before the great European cathedrals were built, there were sacred spaces. There were times and seasons when warfare stopped, and healing could occur. Similarly, there were days ("the feast of fools") when traditional hierarchies were turned on their head and alternative roles could be explored (not unlike our emerging use of Halloween as a day of pretend and altered roles for adults in many contemporary organizations).

### **Sanctuary as Place, Time and State of Mind**

A sanctuary is three things: a place, a time, and a state of mind. A sanctuary is a place of safety or healing or transformation, usually a holy place. Sanctuary is a time when warfare or strife stops, a time when enmity can cease and reconciliation ensue, at least for the moment, and a time for reflection. Sanctuary is a state of mind, in an individual, a group, or a culture. It is a moment of rest, a moment when healing can occur, when we can stop long enough to get our bearings again, to find our center, and to set our course anew. It is an important moment, for an individual or for a society, in this postmodern world.

It is our view that there is a great, largely unmet, need for sanctuary today. It was not always so. In the Western World, before the Renaissance, before the Enlightenment of the 18th Century, and especially before the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century, sanctuary was built into the very fabric of society. There were safe and holy places: cathedrals, churches, monasteries, the courtyard of the castle in some cases. There were safe and holy times: Sunday, the Lord's day; religious holidays in the Christian year; feasts for special royal occasions; festivals before and after planting and harvesting; and often long nights for reflection and restoration. Because the pervasive culture was religious, there was interior sanctuary. When the bell of the village church tolled the hours of the holy office in the nearby monastery, workers in the field, homemakers in the homes, crafts people at their benches, and shopkeepers in the shops often paused for a moment of reflection and prayer (as devout Muslims do today).

Today, these things do not happen in the West and happen less often in the East. Instead of settling down to deep (or even shallow, for that matter) reflection in the still of a dark night, we settle into non-reflective television. It is interesting that, in the age of television, we may actually have less community than our Medieval forebears did. Rather than visiting with each other by the waning embers of a fire, we - each one in our separate rooms - "visit" with the guests on Oprah or some other talk show. Individual people watching a collective television has replaced genuine human contact.

This is our new form of intimacy - "intimacy" with talk show guests.

Yet we still need, and actually do find, sanctuary. We find it in the coffee room at the office during coffee break, a place and time where the boss would not dare load more work on us. We still find it in our churches and synagogues (though Catholic chapels are no longer open all night as they once were, and parishioners report that their church life is filled more with activity and noise than with stillness and silence).

We find it in the outdoors, though the beaches and parks are now full, and we have to hike further to find that quiet spot by the lake or the serene fishing hole of half a century ago. We also find sanctuaries in our families, though the station wagon life of the suburbs and the high divorce rate have split the family. Most of all, for some people, we find it in our spouses and life partners. They themselves provide sanctuary for many of us. Sometimes that is the most precious kind of all.

### **The Wisdom Tradition and Sanctuary**

The Wisdom Traditions insist on sanctuary. A wisely lived and productive life is impossible without sanctuary. The wise heart knows the need for time and solitude and reflection, as a wise gardener knows the need for seasons and care if plants are to grow and flourish, to give nourishment and beauty. Every Wisdom Tradition calls for both time alone and time engaged in community or society or "the marketplace," alternating the two throughout the days and years.

There are two parts to the equation, and both are essential. Only time alone, in true sanctuary, can provide a deep and intimate relationship with the Self, with Spirit, and with all that is. Only time in community can hone one to a mature level of application and service. Only alone can you hear, know, care for and deeply love and serve yourself. Only in community can you hear, know, care for and deeply love others. The two sides make one coin.

Joseph Campbell brought this vision to our world during the 1980s with his books (and TV programs) on myth. The hero typically starts at home, then goes out to be alone in the wilderness (including into sanctuary), faces himself, and then comes back richer. He then shares his riches with the community. Without going out (or inward) there are no riches. Without coming back, there is no value. We leave shallow and disoriented, we come back deeper and more oriented, oriented and aligned to our own true North Star. Home to ourselves, perhaps for the first time. A mature life (and a mature society) needs both. T. S. Eliot wrote about this exploration and coming home:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
(*Four Quartets*)

### **Organizational Coaching and Sanctuary**

Where and when do our clients need coaching as a sanctuary? Do they need sanctuary when they wish to stop, hide, get away or rest (the first purpose)? Perhaps, this is when we provide an ample amount of support to our coaching clients – but maybe not enough challenge (challenge and support both being essential to sanctuary and effective coaching). One of us is now coaching a harried executive. It is tempting to be in the business of primarily reassuring this person, rather than challenging her in any way. Yet, is this what we should be doing as coaches? The reassurance might prolong the coaching contract, but is this effective coaching? On the other hand, maybe reassurance is all that is needed at times. When we (as clients) are confronted with massive change and uncertainty, perhaps all we really want and need is for a coach to suggest – based on their own rich and varied postmodern experience as coach and leader – that we are not “unusual” or “crazy” in our fear, confusion, ambivalence or uncertainty.

What about the second function of sanctuary (to heal, repair, regroup and recover)? This certainly seems to be an appropriate use of coaching. We are present as coaches to help our client retreat for a minute or two from a daunting challenge, and to come back to this challenge (like Robert the Bruce) with renewed energy and new insights. One of us is now working with another coach, who is struggling with his own career challenges. Our job as a coach is primarily to be a witness to his frustrations and disappointments, to assist him in discovering new pathways and uncovering dimly perceived opportunities. This is some of the best coaching we are both doing at the present time.

The third purpose of sanctuary – “to find our deep center and reorient to our deeper compass again” – is often controversial for an organizational coach. It requires one’s client to grant permission for the coaching session to delve into deeper, more personal, and often more spiritual issues. Here is where organizational coaching interplays with personal coaching, or at least where organizational coaching shifts from executive and performance coaching to the realm of alignment coaching (Lazar and Bergquist, 1993). Certainly, the notion of “coming home to one’s own truth” is a foundation of effective coaching. The question only is:

which truths is it appropriate for us to explore in an organizational setting as coach and client?

The fourth purpose, which concerns the interplay between sanctuary and learning, is clearly appropriate to the coaching process. Organizational coaching is often used most effectively in conjunction with other programs that provoke rich personal learning (such as a leadership development program). There are many good reasons to believe that learning achieved in professional development programs will be enhanced when participants in these programs are assigned a coach. The learning is both more readily retained and transferred when coaching services are provided during and for at least six months after a major development program. In this regard, organizational coaching is clearly a “mini-sanctuary” where learning can be enhanced and further refined, as well as a “mini-sanctuary” in which actions based on this learning can be identified, described, analyzed and even challenged by a coach. What about false sanctuaries? Where and when do our clients cling to false sanctuary? What is our role as coaches in pointing out the lure and negative impact of these false sanctuaries? Where does our society find and encourage false sanctuaries? Do we play a role, as coaches, in pointing out and helping to derail the attempts of our clients to seek out those socially-sanctioned false sanctuaries and substitute the real thing?

Where do we as coaches find sanctuary – and are we tempted to find our own false sanctuaries? Is organizational coaching ever a false sanctuary for either our clients or us (as coaches)? Successful coaches find balance in their own lives. They make use of their own sanctuaries for renewal, reflection and deeper personal understanding. What might each of us do to discover and maintain our own sanctuaries – and to whom do we turn for our own coaching regarding the lure of false sanctuaries. Do we ever distort our own coaching practices to find personal (false) sanctuary? We reassure our client and, in turn, are reassured by them regarding our compassion, our warmth and our competence – a false sanctuary for both of us! We offer advice that is eagerly received by our client, even when we haven’t fully appreciated the complex setting in which she works. Our client wants to believe this is the correct solution – and we are both lulled into a false sense of completion – a false sanctuary that leads to denial and complacency. Are we fully aware of the powerful pull associated with this kind of collusion between coach and client? Do we help to create false sanctuaries that are of little long-term benefit to our client? These are fundamental questions that should be engaged by any ethical and reflective organizational coach.

### **Coaching as a Venue with Boundaries, Doors and Rituals**

Sanctuaries have boundaries, doors and rituals — so does effective organizational coaching. Both sanctuaries and the coaching session have boundaries of time, space, and behavior. These boundaries tell us when and where the coaching session and sanctuary is “in operation”, and what behaviors are allowed within those boundaries. In traditional societies, boundaries are fixed, clear, and acknowledged. At times of change (such as now), the boundaries shift, become unclear, and are not acknowledged. As coaches we need to clearly define boundaries, in part because there are so few boundaries in our society, and in part because the coaching session must itself be a sanctuary for our harried client.

Sanctuaries also have access doors — ways to enter and exit the sanctuary. Entrance is often accompanied by ritual. In the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem during the first century BCE, it was absolutely clear where the boundaries and doors of the sanctuary were, and how one was to get in and out. You had to change your robe upon entering, and then change it back on exit. In the Catholic Church today you sprinkle holy water on your head upon entering. Muslim’s wash their feet. What is the access door for a coaching relationship? The contract? The “check-in” time at the beginning of each session? The notes that a coach sends her client following each session and which serve as an invitation and guide for the next session?

What are the accompanying rituals for coaches and their clients? These may vary with each coaching relationship. The ritual may consist of a simple “how’s it been going since our last session” to something more elaborate, such as ordering a cup of coffee (if the session is held at a coffee shop), mapping out the agenda or recording creative ideas on a flip chart during a session, or even taking a moment in silence to establish an appreciative perspective for the session or to be thankful for the “gifts” (including moments of painful learning and increased self-awareness) that have been given to the client (and perhaps even the coach) between sessions. For a sanctuary — and for a coaching session — to be effective, there must be good boundaries, good doors, and usually good rituals. These tell the deep psyche that it is time for a change of consciousness, a shift from the outer world to the inner world. And this knowledge must be shared with the outside world (the spouse, children or colleague) if the sanctuary is to be safe.

How can we help our coaching clients or ourselves create or find sanctuaries with clear and safe boundaries, protected by effective doors and rituals?

How might we, as coaches, include sanctuary in our work with clients, and put sanctuaries into our lives? We would suggest that these questions (and those posed throughout this article) are of great importance in the ongoing maturation of organizational coaching — a human service endeavor of which we all care deeply. Sanctuaries are needed and organizational coaching may become one of the most valuable ways in which true sanctuary is found during the 21st Century.

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William Bergquist has authored or co-authored 40 books and more than 50 articles. In recent years, Bill has been writing extensively about the postmodern condition in the lives of individuals, groups, organizations and societies and about the many premodern elements (such as sanctuaries) that are essential to life in a postmodern setting. He bases much of his work on research and scholarship conducted in North America, Europe and Asia. Bill also presides over a graduate school (The Professional School of Psychology) in Sacramento California. It has offered Masters and Doctoral degrees in both clinical and organizational psychology to mature, accomplished adults for the past twenty seven years. He also serves as co-executive editor of *IJCO* and as a founding board member of the International Consortium for Coaching in Organizations.

## Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

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