

Intellectual Midwifery

by Thelma Fayle

Five Royal Roads University (RRU) graduates and two honeymooners from Seattle shared a misty April afternoon at Adrenaline Zipline adventure tours in Sooke, B.C. All decided to jump into an abyss as a way of celebrating their recent respective choices to take a new direction in life.

After participating in an intense seven-month Executive Coaching program, none of the mature-student graduates flinched a muscle when it came time to don the harness, step off the platform and swing through the tall fir trees of the coastal rainforest. The exhilarating ride moved each individual along at up to 60km/hr, at up to 150 feet off the ground, for stretches of up to 1000 feet.

Early in the RRU program, team members Cathy Comber, Karen Fudge-Jensen, Daniel Labonte, Kristin Nickells, and Mel Spencer developed their motto: “We will soar to the challenge and enjoy the ride.” As graduation neared, they decided that zip-lining represented the closest facsimile they could get (without taking flying lessons!), as a way to enliven their team motto.

The Royal Roads University has been rated by *Maclean's* magazine at first place for its collaborative team-style education model and the Executive Coaching program is attracting students from across the country.

Spencer volunteered to go first on the zip-lining trail called ‘the commitment run’. “Well you have got to take risks,” she said, with a broad smile and without a trace of reticence as she became airborne.

“After the last seven months I can do anything,” says Comber as she confidently disembarks after two hours of zip-lining.

The grueling final exams the day before the zip-lining adventure had the fresh coaches-to-be coaching a series of total strangers in front of a panel of Royal Roads University alumni coaches and instructors. The intensity of the curriculum, final exams and teamwork had coalesced the group of Certified Executive Coaching graduates; making links between the five bonded bodies almost palpable. “We are like family,” explains Nickells.; “how many people do you actually speak to on the phone for an hour every week for seven months. – guided by an on-track agenda for a group conference call.”

When the group was asked to come up with an appropriate name describing their Executive coaching process, Nickells coined the phrase ‘intellectual midwifery’ - the parallel being that an Executive Coach is not trying to impose ideas in any way. She is strictly aiming to assist the ‘coachee’ to gestate and deliver their own perfect solutions.

“Even high-powered executives can improve their performance with the help of an objective coach,” explains Fudge-Jensen. “We all want to be seen, heard and understood. When you apply that in terms of business leadership, you recognize the need that leaders also have to work out their problems.”

With a strong sense of gratitude and belief in the value of their new skills, the team have agreed to offer one pro bono project a year to a non-profit society. The RRU program has made each of the team-members realize the ripple effect of helping each other in our respective communities.

“Even though the course is over, I know our team will continue to connect regularly because it is easy to do so with internet communications,” says Labonte. The MBA graduate and successful business executive from Gatineau, Quebec spent four days hiking the Juan de Fuca trail – solo– as a way of reflecting on the exceptional value of the RRU Executive Coaching program.

All five graduates were impressed with the RRU program format of being on site combined with distance learning. These parents, grand-parents, employees with backgrounds in human resources, grassroots business, computer training, and leadership development, – just to name a few of the collective traits owned by the diversely-skilled team – all intend to work in service with people who are highly motivated to change.

Although 21 out of 27 in the class were women, the gender balance of the currently registered class is a 50-50 mix.

“This program is just a springboard for the many things I want to do,” explains Nickells. “I feel saturated in terms of learning and have so many ideas about how I want to use this coaching skill. For starters, I will be doing a Business Boot Camp for Dentists and am pitching a proposal to Royal Roads about including a business model in their program.”

Nickells offered a 30-minute coaching session to help me understand the coaching process. She helped me refine an idea I had for a plan to deal constructively with an illness that I have had for several years. I was surprised at the depth of the half-hour coaching experience. The process felt respectful and empowering.

These five determined mature-students are mining an intensely rich-vein of a newly refined and tailored constructive listening skill.

No wonder they are swinging from the trees.