



Strengths@work

Consulting Women

A Norfolk Retreat - June 2010

Every year Gill and I take five days away for a retreat; it is a time to re-examine our individual and collective journeys. This year we went to Norfolk where I have a cottage, full of light and warmth and in itself, a nourishing environment. Being more accessible than our usual venue on the Isles of Scilly, it felt right to invite others to join us for a day and to hold “Consulting Women’s Norfolk Retreat June 2010”

Nine women came together. The purpose of the day was to create some breathing space, to bring attention back to ourselves, to allow inward reflection and to be in a safe space which permitted growth/healing/nourishment and play.

We encouraged participants to bring with them and connect to, a personal question, so that each of the sessions could inform them inwardly on something that they wanted to shift or grow.

What I am writing about here is the Café style conversations that we had on two questions, firstly in small groups and then shared more widely:

What nourishes us as women? And how do we access that nourishment?

These discussions caused us to reflect deeply into our sense of who we are and how we serve ourselves in the world. Here are some of the key words and expressions that came up on Nourishing;

Providing good tasty food, time alone, nature, beauty, colour, sexual emotional physical and mental health, enjoying the comfort created by other women, being the hub of the family, building the heart(h), social contact, talking to other women, understanding each other at a feeling level, massage, managing our energy, planning and prioritising, making time, having the confidence to speak our mind, being on retreat, development work, fun, love, relationships, dancing, laughing, cakes and chocolate, friendship, exercise, heart hugs, discipline, reading, sleeping, time.....and more.

It became clear that in those moments that we have inner confidence:

- we do not Feel Guilty about nourishing ourselves;
- we are able to Accept ourselves for who we are;
- and if we then use our inner Discipline to bring towards us what nourishes us;
- we can Give Nourishment to those around us.

We sat with the vibrancy and colour of our conversations recorded on flip charts in the centre of the room and the truth of the steps that had emerged. Then we asked ourselves ‘what is the unexpressed question that is here with us’. A silence settled. ‘Acceptance is at the heart of this’. We explored this further and arrived at the question ‘How do we accept being women?’ If the nourishment we described contributes to and flows from, truly being women (rather than simply, people), are we bold enough to accept our own womanhood?

Since the retreat I have been holding that question of what really nourishes me, and working with it in two ways. Firstly asking myself, am I being nourished by this activity, this thought, or this conversation? I may or may not be, but being aware of whether I am or not is a good start to building on the things that do nourish me, and to helping me to seek them out more actively. Secondly when I know I am being nourished, then I am chanting that knowledge to myself so as to withstand the inner voices that would sabotage that nourishment.

Of course there have been some great moments when all those thoughts of nourishment have been blown out of the window. A difficult business discussion and working out how to deal with some family conflicts both left me way out of touch with my inner confidence. But I was also able to reflect afterwards on what might have been different, and what I needed to do right then to pull me back to a sense of self. One of the things, so clear to me after both of those events, was the strength I gather from reaching out to close friends who know me and who will give me a reality check. And the other thing was having a good work discussion where I was at my best and so able to reconnect with my strengths.

So I think at the end of the day, that is what I need and what nourishes me most, using my strengths to good effect and reaching out for those connections with others that enable me to pull myself back together, rather than remaining splattered out there all over the place!

We plan more retreats (both in London and Norfolk) with new topics to delve into. In the meantime I hope that, through this summary, the work we did that day will go beyond nourishing those that were able to join us and will now reach out to those that might join us next time.

In the meantime I encourage you to start observing what nourishes you and seeing just how much of that you allow into your life.

Moir