

SUPPORTING LEADERS • BUILDING RESILIENCE • MANAGING METARUPTION • LEADING TEAMS

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A central image of a globe made of shattered glass, with many sharp fragments floating around it, set against a blue sky background. The globe is cracked and broken, symbolizing chaos and a rapidly changing world.

COACHING IN CHAOS

Navigating a rapidly changing world

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Managing Meta- *ruption*

Coaching in chaos through
adaptive presence

By Dorothy E. Siminovitch, MCC, Ph.D.

For much of modern organizational life, leadership has been shaped by the implicit premise that with the right models, enough expertise and rigorous planning, disruptions can be managed and stability restored. Disruption, in this view, is an event to be overcome and left behind.

This premise is now being dismantled. Today's leaders and their coaches operate in an environment where disruption is both continuous and compounding. This is the experience of metarruption — a relentless, accelerated and dynamic convergence of disruptions across fields of technology, geopolitics, climate, economics, social systems, and even personal identity.

Reinvention expert Dr. Nadya Zhxembayeva explains, “Disruptions no longer interrupt the system. They are the system.” To survive and thrive within such chaos requires new premises and different strategies. It requires developing and bolstering an experiential adaptive capacity.

When leaders see their corporate mandate as stability maintenance, their responses to chaos tend toward over-analysis, rigid decision-making or rushed activity. These reactions can create an appearance of competence, but they rarely generate clarity, trust or sustainable progress. More often, these demands exhaust individuals and erode organizational capabilities. Nowadays, restoring or returning to some perceived order isn’t a viable goal.

Today’s central leadership challenge is not how to eliminate chaos, but how to engage it without becoming reactive, fragmented or paralyzed. Resilience is not built by tightening control, but by strengthening the human system at the core of leadership.

The metarupture shift calls for a leadership capacity described as adaptive presence. Adaptive presence is not a performance stance, a communication technique or a personality trait. It is a developmental capability — the ability to remain grounded, aware and relationally attuned while operating inside volatility, uncertainty and incomplete information. It allows leaders and coaches to respond intentionally rather than reflexively when familiar assumptions, structures and planning tools no longer apply.

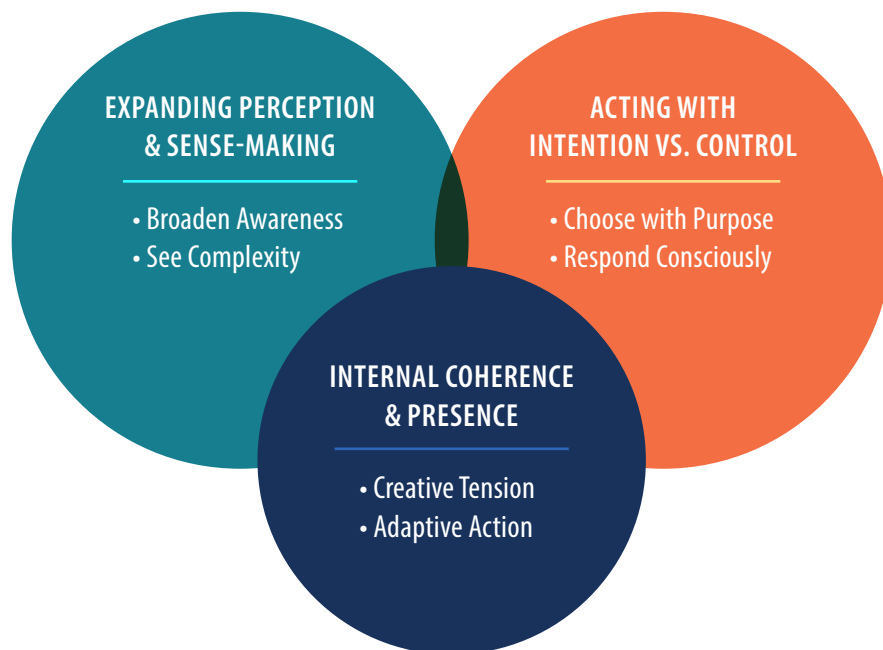
Adaptive presence invites a learning orientation that anticipates being disturbed and positions oneself accordingly.

Resilience is not built by tightening control, but by strengthening the human system at the core of leadership.

DEVELOPING CAPACITIES

If chaos is no longer temporary, leadership effectiveness depends less on having the right answers and more on cultivating the needed capacities. The necessary capacity today is to remain present in the

Stabilizing the Inner System



Stable Self = Focused Impact

moment, to read the emergent data of the moment, and to use one’s presence to identify and consider what is needed, wanted or missing.

Models and their strategies can become outdated, but presence endures.

Adaptive presence functions as a meta-capacity, integrating awareness, emotional regulation, relational attunement, and intentional choice. Rather than attempting to master external volatility,

sense-making, from control to coherence, from certainty to discernment.

For coaches, too, this reframing is pivotal. Coaching in times of chaos is not only about supporting clients to find solutions. It is also about helping them develop the capacity to function well when any solutions may be provisional, partial, or short-lived.

ADAPTIVE PRESENCE

Adaptive presence can be understood through three interrelated dimensions, each addressing a common breakdown leaders experience under sustained disruption.

1 Stabilizing the Inner System

Chaos first impacts the nervous system. Under relentless disruption, leaders often operate in chronic threat states — fight, flight or freeze — without recognizing how these states shape their thinking, behavior, and relationships.

Adaptive presence begins with awareness of internal experience data: breath, posture, emotional tone and habitual

it strengthens the internal conditions through which leaders perceive, decide, and act. This reframes chaos itself. Instead of something to be resolved, chaos becomes something to be worked with. The leader’s task shifts from prediction to

responses. When leaders can self-regulate, they regain access to curiosity, perspective and choice.

Anxiety may still be present, but it no longer powers the system because it has become a signal for regulation. For coaches, regulation means slowing the pace of conversation, supporting somatic awareness, and helping clients recognize how their internal states influence external outcomes. Presence means paying attention to the data of the moment within oneself and with others.

2 Expanding Perception

Metarupture overwhelms linear logic. Cause and effect blur, and past experience becomes an unreliable guide. Adaptive presence supports a shift from prediction (what comes next) to sensing (what's happening now).

Expanding leaders' perception involves coaching for awareness practices: tracking somatic cues, emotional reactivity, relational dynamics, and contextual signals across systems. Such reflection slows interpretation long enough to surface hidden assumptions and narratives, and allows for other perspectives to emerge.

An expanded perceptual field becomes the ground for more deliberate, more accurate action. In chaotic environments,

expanded perception is not an indulgence — it is a strategic advantage that enlarges awareness and choice.

3 Acting with Intention

Acting with intention in metaruptive conditions requires shifting from control-focused reactivity to purposeful choice rooted in core values. Drawing on Robert Fritz's concept of "creative tension," coaches invite leaders to work with the tension between present reality and desired direction, and to allow that tension to generate energy and innovation.

Action becomes less about predicting and controlling outcomes, and more about aligning with values, vision, and relational impact. Adaptive presence supports choosing next steps with clarity and coherence.

Helping clients become more efficient inside collapsing systems is counter-productive. Focusing on adaptive presence shifts the coaching agenda.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES

Under conditions of metarupture, coaching cannot remain focused on optimization alone. Helping clients become more efficient inside collapsing systems is counter-productive. Focusing on adaptive presence shifts the coaching agenda.

The work becomes developmental rather than corrective, capacity-building rather than problem-solving. Coaches attend not only to what clients are saying and doing, but to who they are while doing it.

This includes supporting clients to:

- Recognize and regulate reactivity.
- Tolerate ambiguity without rushing to closure.
- Engage others in shared sense-making.
- Align action with values rather than fear.

Coaches who cultivate their own presence are better able to hold uncertainty alongside their clients, modeling the very capacity the work requires.

WHO WE MUST BECOME

The defining leadership question is no longer "How do we stop the chaos?" but "Who must we become in order to lead well from within the chaos?" Adaptive presence doesn't aim to remove uncertainty. Rather, it enables leaders and coaches to meet uncertainty with clarity, resilience and ethical choice. In doing so, chaos itself becomes a context for learning, reinvention and purposeful leadership.

In a metaruptive environment, familiar optimization strategies for long-range planning quickly lose their relevance. What abides as an inexhaustible resource is leadership as structure. Adaptive presence functions as the primary stabilizing force, enabling leaders and coaches to hold the particulars of current reality and

future vision simultaneously, without falling into reactivity, false certainty or premature action.

Adaptive presence is an internal framework that uses embodied awareness, emotional regulation, and field sensitivity to generate coherence amid chaos, allowing responses to emerge from the data of moment rather than being externally imposed. Adaptive presence is thus not a "soft competency" but a structural necessity — the stabilizing experiential architecture that makes intentional action possible when the environment itself can no longer be stabilized. ●

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COACHING FOR ADAPTIVE PRESENCE

- Where is your client attempting to control chaos rather than work with it?
- What somatic or emotional signals suggest a threat response?
- How might slowing your client's perception expand choice?
- What becomes possible when your client acts with intention rather than certainty?

COACHING VIGNETTE

Using adaptive presence within disruption

Maria, a senior executive in a global organization, entered coaching exhausted. Supply-chain

breakdowns, automation pressures, geopolitical instability, and leadership turnover meant that every attempt to stabilize her system triggered new disruptions. "It never stops," she said. "I can't get ahead of it."



Initially, Maria wanted strategies to regain control — clearer priorities, faster decisions, firmer execution. Yet her urgency was palpable: shallow breathing, tight shoulders, no pause between thoughts. Chaos was not only around her; it was in her.

The coaching work began with heightening awareness rather than strategy. As the pace slowed, Maria recognized that she was operating almost constantly in threat mode. She was reacting quickly, filling every gap with action, and equating stillness with risk. Learning to pause and ground herself before moving to action marked the first shift toward adaptive presence.

As her internal state stabilized, her perception widened. Instead of asking "What do I fix next?," she began noticing patterns across the system and understanding how her own sense of urgency impacted her team's climate.

In a pivotal moment, Maria resisted issuing an immediate directive during a major setback. Instead, she named the uncertainty and invited shared sensing. Engagement and shared ownership replaced compliance.

Maria did not eliminate disruption. What changed was who she became while leading from within it.

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