**Inside the Executive Coaches’ Gulag: AD 2025**

Two older greying men pace their grim prison exercise yard, each solid inch of their stiff yellow pyjama suits emblazoned with every acronym known to coaching man. In their long moments of boredom, they sit in their solitary cells, shouting out an acronym or two into the void, in the hope that someone might hear them. Hoping that those now empty three-letter mantras would somehow resonate. Resonate. That was a word they used to use a lot, ad nauseam, in their former illustrious lives. Now the only resonation they hear is the clank of their metal slop-out buckets on the cold stone floor.

As they walk, they break into desultory conversation – pursuing a well-trodden conversational lament as circular as their grooved perambulation, always clockwise, around the yard.

Brian: How has it ever come to this? I never thought it would come to this.

Michael: Me neither. But don’t you remember? Damned Hungarian Government started all of this back in 2021, with their Charlatans’ Law banning all talking therapies, including coaching, unless the practitioner were trained through a state institution and licenced by government.

Brian: Goddam Hungarian despots. But back then we shook our heads in faux pity, never thinking for one minute the Charlatans Law would spread like bush fire across the whole coaching planet.

Michael: First, they came for the Hungarians …

Brian: It’s true, they did … but it is hardly their fault, what happened next. We provoked all the western authorities by drawing attention to our attempts at coaching self-regulation. Which we boasted applied globally, enforced through our high-sounding Global Code of Ethics. Such hubris.

Michael: What fools we were. They took a look at our verbose ordinances and decided they didn’t even apply in own backyards, never mind on a planetary basis … they called our self-regulation the ‘Hypocrites Charter.’

Brian: They did. On top of which, once we were caught in the headlights, they started to add up just how much all of us were creaming off clients – not to mention how we were shilling gullible coaches through our training schools and supervision scams, which had become a major revenue stream.

Michael: Yep. Then they did the math and decided that they wanted a piece of our $25 billion dollar global pie

Brian: Not just a slice of the pie chart – they wanted to gobble up the whole damn thing … and that 2021 pandemic allowed governments to act with complete disregard for business opposition.

Michael: Truth …the more we protested, the harder they came down on us

Brian: We should never have stirred up the Chinese…

Michael: And those Russian coaching double agents blowing the whistle on us all.

Brian: I remember as if it were yesterday. Painful. The whole coaching circus came tumbling down. They rounded up us thought leaders first

Michael: Yep, bags over our heads…

Brian: Then the perp walk out of our colleges, in front of all of our fee-paying students

Michael: The shame of it.

Brian: Then the rendition, here, to this gulag in unmarked military planes … we could be anywhere.

Michael: Hmm. And after they had corralled all of us thought leaders, they came for the business school professors. Wiped the smug smile off their faces.

Brian: They sure did, having smelled our blood first. They did quite a number of the professors under violation of the rushed-through Global Anti Confirmative Bias Law, the GACBL.

Michael: Then they took over the business schools’ chrome and glass buildings, installing apparatchiks who would do their pedagogic bidding. Allowing them to practice in a world where all that is to be known about coaching is now fixed – and therefore would never need researching again.

Brian: Yep. Then they counted up the coaching books and found there were as many authors as coaches, and toxic plagiarism was evident across the piece.

Michael: So, they invaded the libraries and bulldozed the lot, shut down whole categories of e-books, banished off social media and even the dark web.

Brian: And at the same time, they closely scrutinised our claims on LinkedIn for the number of hours of executive coaching we had done. How I lived to rue all that braggadocio.

Michael: Me too. I claimed 10,000 hours which meant 416 days which felt not so bad … but then they factorised that quantum by the number of letters after our names; which pushed me to 5,000 days, or 13 years.

Brian: 13 years. `Hmm. Same me. I wish we hadn’t copied each other’s claims so blindly.

Michael: Mimetic isomorphism?

Brian: Shush, for god’s sake. You know we’re not allowed jargon anymore. The philistines’ eyes and ears are everywhere. But yes, we were forever trying to match and outdo each other.

Brian and Michael exhale a collective sigh, as they lean on the chain fence of the thought leaders’ yard, gaze absently towards a more densely populated yard; the yard designated for junior thought-follower coaches, from whence occasional squeals of laughter ring out amid improvised games of basketball.

Michael: Funny how the thought-followers are allowed to wear flowing gowns, isn’t it?

Brian: Well, they are mainly women. And they were handed down lesser sentences than us … they claimed mitigation on the grounds that they were just obeying the orders laid down in their elder and betters’ competency grids.

Michael: And in many ways they were simply doing that. Blindly following.

Brian: Funny that we only have two women thought leaders in our wing and they are given special privileges? Like the Excessive Empathy Extraction programme? The EEE?

Michael: I know. I know. And they are let off the compulsory weekly salsa classes

Brian: They are so humiliating, those salsa classes – where did the idea of that excruciating punishment come from anyway?

Michael: Well, it all started when some enlightened thought leader said there were many parallels between salsa, at which he claimed to be an expert, and coaching. So now we must practice it weekly, groin to groin.

Brian: The weekly grind. Just to prove the analogy doesn’t work.They don’t half rub it in.

Michael: Making us rub together? It ain’t easy.

Brian: Didn’t they use the same aversion therapy logic to deem that we have to suffer listening to free-form contemporary jazz through the corridor loud speakers 24 - 7? To prove that coaches need to know how to improvise?

Michael: They did. Though you might look closer to home on that one? Wasn’t it your business partner who drew the as-for-jazz, so-to-for-coaching read-across, in her book, ‘Blow your Coaching Trumpet’?

Brian: Yes, it’s true. Fair cop. Stupid parallel processing.

Michael: Did she ever withdraw the harassment charges, before you split?

Brian: Never had the time – she scarpered quick and took a job in mental health nursing.

Michael: Well, it is brutal, what they are putting us through…but it may just be that their re-programming regime is working on us, drip by drip…

Brian: You know, I think you may be right, reluctant though I am to admit it. I was awarded a Master of Correctional Competences by the warden last week, MCC. Felt good to be back among the prizes again - but of course I am not allowed to use the letters after my name. Not while inside anyway.

Michael: Lucky you. And I was given a level one GROW award - Global Repudiation of Orthodox Wellness programmes.

Brian: Well done – is that one of those twelve step things?

Michael: Yes!! And it feels so good to be back in the accreditation groove.

Brian: What is your supervisor like?

Michael: Awful -- totally existential.

Brian: Oh no - I have one of the Lacanian ones. Much more libidinous.

Michael: Tell me more sometime. But hey, there goes the bell for lunch. That little Tibetan tinkle to goad us with echoes of a more symbolic life.

Brian: Groan. This diet of conference nibbles and warm white wine is playing hell with my inners

Michael: I know. But it’s the price we have to pay for years of freeloading at others expense.

Brian: Feels like it is going to be a long afternoon. All alone, scratching my blog on the cell wall.

Michael: Don’t get too doomy. It will serve well as your legacy, that blog will, for the next inmate to read and inwardly digest. He might even syndicate it for you.