



## Tool 11

### Life-Sustaining Metaphors

Metaphor is a vivid way in which we capture the essence of abstract, intangible concepts by linking them to our concrete, sensory experiences. Metaphors help us dig deeper, making links on a variety of levels, so that we can further understand ourselves and our world.

*“The soul never thinks without an image.”*

—Aristotle

#### Exercise: Life-Sustaining Metaphor

Since metaphors provide access to many layers of meaning, they are a rich source for supporting the journey forward. This exercise invites you, as mentor-coach, and the mentee to remember and share metaphors that you have used to sustain yourselves on your life journeys. Together, you can explore the metaphors’ symbolic nature, power, and impact and how metaphors can help us understand complex experiences, feelings, challenges, and behaviours.

#### 1. Recall, Capture, and Share

Consider your own life experience and identify and share metaphors that you have used to sustain yourself on your life journeys. See examples from Jeanie below.

##### From Jeanie



Here are few metaphors that sustained me as I set out on a new path, when I chose to move on from teaching drama and didn’t know what I was going to step into next.

- *Going out the door:* I was clear that if I really wanted to create another path for myself, I needed to “go out the door,” into the world, and make connections and bump into possibilities. I knew that if I stayed at home, literally and figuratively, I would not discover a new path.
- *Faith in the river:* I often reminded myself that I did indeed have “faith in the river”—that the river I was in was supporting me on my journey toward the sea. (Even in the moment, when I wasn’t sure if I was moving at all, or wondered what was around the next bend, or worried that difficult rapids and the like would catch me by surprise, I reminded myself that I had faith in the river.)



## 2. Discuss

Together, discuss how the metaphors from your lives have supported you.

## 3. Take It Further

*What metaphor captures the essence of the capacity building that you are part of now?*

Invite the mentee to identify a metaphor for each of the following:

- Who am I at my best?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What will my future self look like?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What am I being drawn toward?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What matters to me in terms of leadership? teaching? learning?

## Option

You might invite the mentee to find a metaphor out in the world for one of their responses to the questions above. Ask the mentee to send or bring an image that represents the metaphor to your next mentor-coaching conversation.