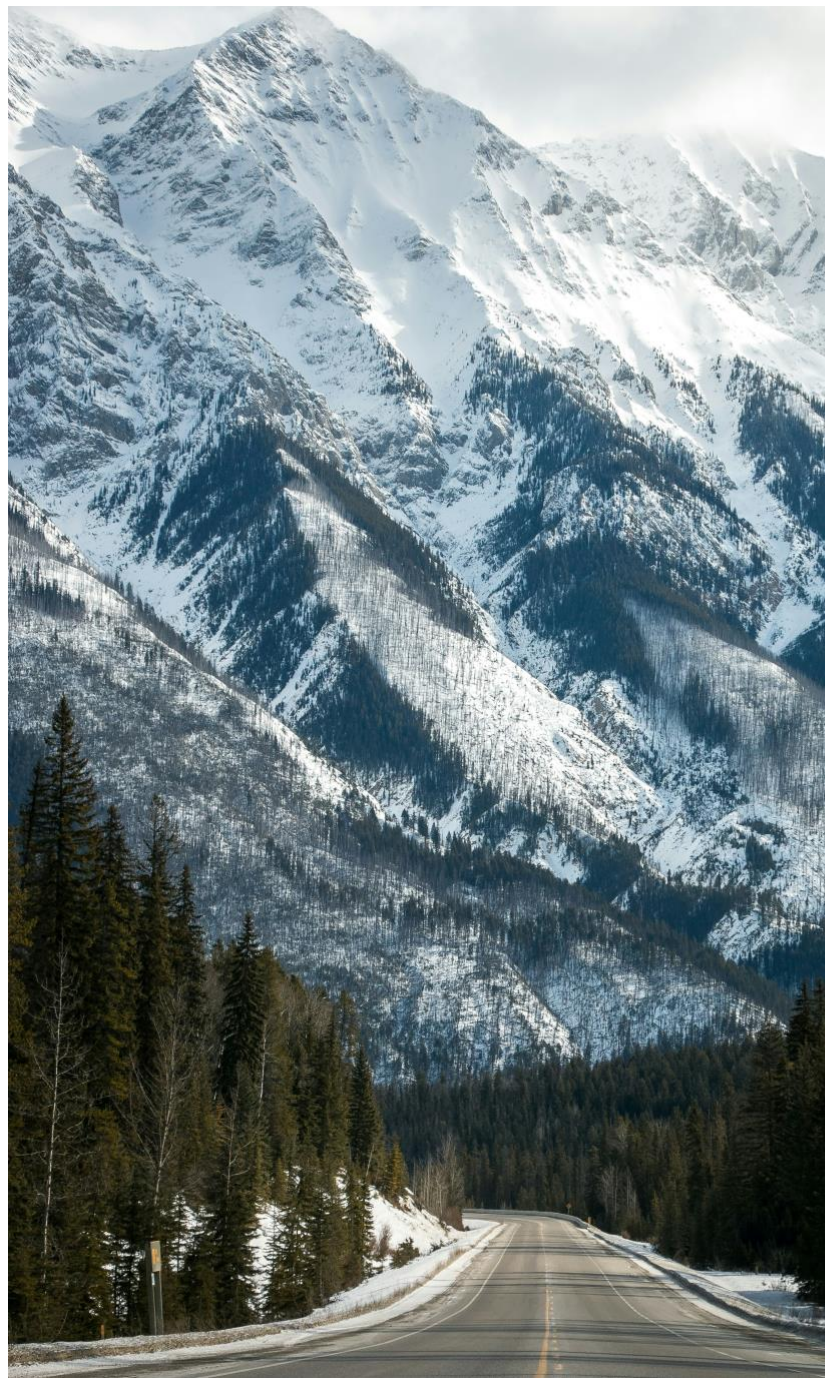


Swanvesha

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WELCOME TO SWANVESHA

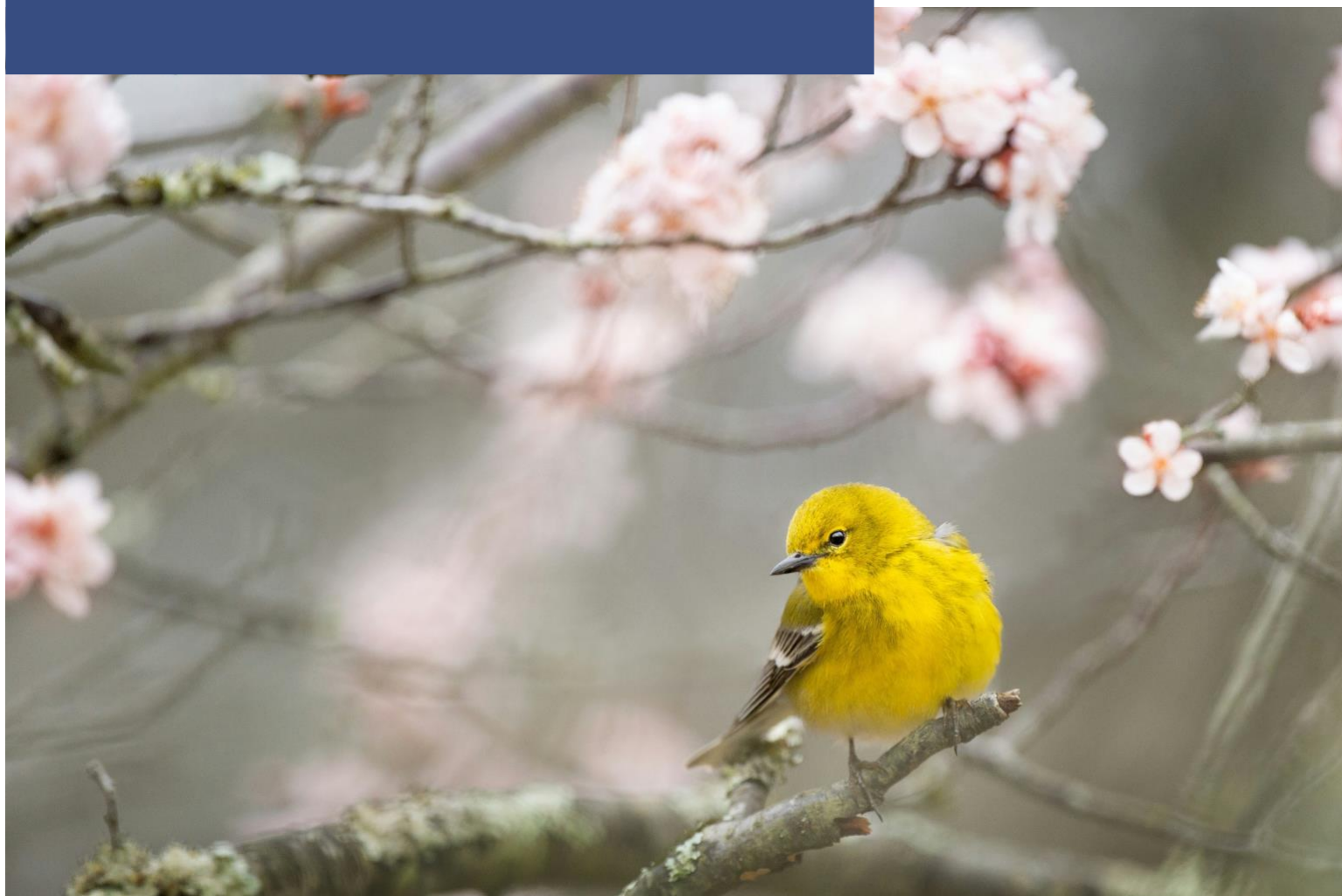
Swanvesha (*Swa-Anvesha*, Sanskrit for *Self-Inquiry*) offers insights, stories, and actionable strategies to help leaders grow and adapt in an ever-changing world. Stay informed, inspired, and lead with purpose.

“For most of history, Anonymous
was a woman”

–*Virginia Woolf*

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TALLY HO



WELCOME NOTES

We are fast approaching spring. I am humming “*Here comes the Sun*” by the Beatles and soaking in the warmth. This month’s newsletter does not have a theme. It’s reflective of the times. Lots of things happening all around us.

Under ***Musings***, I attempt to see leadership in an imperfect reality and explore the flexibility required. In ***Novella***, I share a story about a rich man’s attempt at learning the meaning of happiness and sadness and use this to explore the cognitive readiness and absorption capacity in humans. Finally, in ***Corporate Culture***, I share details from the Leadership Reflex Quiz, currently available on my website and wonderful insights.

I am an Executive and Leadership Coach. Connect with me on my website www.swanvesha.com for more resources or write to me at swanvesha@gmail.com. Happy reading.

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Musings



IT IS WHAT IT IS

In an era of rapid technological advancement and unprecedented comfort, we have come to view "improvement" not just as a goal, but as a default expectation. We demand better systems, empathetic leadership, and seamless workflows. These are vital goals, but what happens when the ideal is stripped away? What happens when the reality is simply: **"It is what it is"**?

I am not suggesting that we should simply accept poor management or justify rigid mandates. I am simply asking a different question: **If you had no choice, would you still do the work to the best of your ability?**

Modern professional discourse often retreats into comfort the moment it faces friction. A request for longer hours is met with immediate debates on work-life balance; a reduction in travel perks is viewed as a lack of organizational care. While these are valid conversations, they often mask a deeper vulnerability—a diminishing capacity to function in suboptimal conditions. In an almost transactional world, where every individual must feel they have received their perceived value, the idea of "making do" feels out of place.

Yet, in many industries, this isn't a philosophical debate; it is a daily reality. From **uniformed professionals** and **first responders** who must deliver in life-or-death moments, to **frontline service personnel** who manage the friction of daily operations, the requirement remains the same: to perform with capability when the ideal is stripped away. Whether on a battlefield or at a service desk, the work must be done.

We seem to live in two different worlds: one that says, "Accept reality and be silent," and another that says "I am justified in my demands; stop this nonsense." In truth, the answer lies in **emotional maturity**.

While we are justified in any sector to seek fairness, clarity, and systemic change, you must also recognize that leadership, in its purest form, is not the act of waiting for the perfect environment. **True leadership is the ability to make effective decisions within an imperfect reality.**

If you are travelling for work and circumstances require you to stay in a standard hotel rather than a luxury one, it is alright. This is not an endorsement of the conditions, but a test of your internal standard. If these conditions become chronic, then do the right thing and address the system. But in the moment of execution, emotional maturity lies in knowing the difference between a temporary inconvenience and a systemic failure—and having the grit to deliver regardless.



A rich man once asked a fakir the difference between happiness and sadness, offering him a bag of money for the answer.

The fakir took the bag and ran. Furious, the man chased him through the village until the fakir finally stopped and handed the money back. Before the rich man could say anything, the fakir asked, “*When I took the bag and ran, did you feel anger?*” the fakir asked. “*Yes,*” said the man. “*That was sadness.*” replied the fakir “*And when I returned it, did you feel relief?*” “*Yes.*” said the rich man. “*That was happiness,*” said the fakir.

Humans differ in their **cognitive readiness and absorption capacity**. They do not always process ideas at the same speed or through the same pathways. Some respond better to direct frameworks and structured models. Others understand concepts more deeply through stories, metaphors, and experience-based learning, while some other even visualize things, scenarios and outcomes. The goal of coaching is not to make ideas smaller or simpler. The goal is to make ideas accessible in a way that allows each person to reach their own understanding.

This is one part. The second part is our own learning as coaches. Despite our best intentions, coaches also carry prejudices and biases about what they think is best for their clients. Even if we are correct, we need to always know that the person taking the decision is not us but our clients. So even if cognitive abilities are different, what is best is what the client wants or decides.

If we extend this thinking to organizations, we often see the same pattern when people interpret corporate values, vision, or purpose statements. These are often written with the assumption that meaning is shared. In reality, people interpret organizational intent through their own experiences, roles, and cognitive frames. As a result, there is rarely a single common understanding of abstract organizational messages.

I have worked mainly in 2 organizations and each of them had a unique value and purpose statement that I still remember and learn from. At AC Nielsen, the core values in 2008 were “**Simple, Open, Integrated**” and at PwC, the purpose is “**Building trust in society and solving important problems**”. They can mean different things to different people – but all those meanings can still be helpful and meaningful to them.

To conclude, in coaching, leadership, and organizational life, meaning is not transferred – it is interpreted. What one can do is create the conditions where insight can emerge and then trusting people to make the decisions that are best for them.

Corporate Culture



THE QUIZ

I recently conducted a pilot **Leadership Reflex Assessment** with 25 senior professionals, generating 250 total behavioral data points across 10 scenario-based questions. While the sample size is modest, the results offer compelling validation of how experienced leaders—primarily aged 40+ with over a decade of experience in professional services—navigate pressure. The key takeaway *“Leadership is not about the speed of decision-making; it is about the awareness of choices before acting.”*



The Core Reflexes: By the Numbers

- Deflect was the dominant reflex (58.1%). (Deflect can mean avoidance, but also as a preference for guiding, redirecting, and distributing ownership)
- Avoidance as Strategy (23.4%). (Avoid was frequently associated with patience, perspective, and strategic restraint—knowing when *not* to engage is as vital as knowing when to step in.)
- The Rarity of Confrontation (18.7%). (Direct intervention was the least common reflex. Leaders appear to be balancing immediate action against long-term political, relational, and organizational consequences.)

What We Learned: The qualitative feedback highlighted a shift in what senior professionals want from growth tools. About **70% of respondents** noted the exercise acted as a self-awareness tool rather than a standard personality test. Two key themes emerged:

1. **Shadow Risks:** Instead of binary "strengths and weaknesses," the model framed development as a balance. Every reflex carries both a capability and a vulnerability.
2. **Insight Density:** Modern leaders value learning experiences that respect their time while provoking meaningful reflection. They want tools that are fast, practical, and dense with insight.

Conclusion: From Instinct to Consciousness

A probable reason for dominance of **Deflect** and the lower rate of **Confront** are heavily influenced by the professional services environment, where success is rarely built on individual heroics. Instead, it depends on delegation, sophisticated collaboration, and the management of long-term client relationships.

This pilot suggests that better leadership occurs when we move away from instinctive reactions and toward a conscious choice between confronting, avoiding, or deflecting leadership development should focus less on *who* leaders are—and more on **how they decide**.

Hasta Luego



THANK YOU

2026 is the 115th year of celebrating International Women's Day.

First mooted by Clara Zetkin in 1908, and March 8th being declared IWD by Vladimir Lenin, this celebration is about women and their own identity, not in any terms a man would say, but just as nature created them.

Humankind has not always been kind, but women do not need permission to live the lives they choose. Saluting women on such a day does not do justice, but it reminds us of their achievements and the significance of their contributions. One way to reflect on this day is to remember those who became the first to do something that had never been done before. To this effect, my 3 favourites are:

- Valentina Tereshkova – First Woman in Space
- Marie Curie - First woman to win Nobel prize and the first human to win it twice
- Nadia Comăneci – the first woman to get a perfect 10 in Gymnastics.

Do you have your favourites? Write to me at swanvesha@gmail.com