

Alchemy
of Coaching

Base Metal…

The Monthly Newsletter
from
Alchemy of Coaching

The 2020 edition

Introduction

We write Base Metal every month with the intent that it stimulates, challenges, encourages and may even provoke coaches into thinking about and reflecting on their coaching. We write in a largely questioning mode that aims to encourage thinking and reflection.

We are passionate about the importance of coaches continually reflecting on what they do and how they do it, and even more about how they are being when acting as coaches.

Each month we write a short article about a topic we believe is of interest and ally it with an accompanying book review that is relevant or connected to the article.

In this e-book we have compiled all the articles and book reviews from the twelve editions of Base Metal in 2019.

We hope that you find Base Metal useful and ask you to pass this annual review on to anyone that you believe may be interested. Please also ask them to let us know if they would like to receive the monthly version of Base Metal.

The Alchemy team — Ian, Ray and Paul

December 2020





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January 2020

Psychometrics and Coaching

Having recently taken a course which qualifies me to use and interpret the NEO-PI-3 personality tool, I have been thinking a lot about the place of such metrics in coaching. I have to admit to being something of a sceptic, and while my internal jury is still 'reaching a verdict', my understanding of this instrument (and of other tests), their reliability and validity, and how they might be used is certainly significantly more developed than it was before.

I have had many conversations over the years about the input of NEO or MBTI (other tools are, of course, available) into coaching conversations. I have spoken to some who refuse to coach without some psychometric input beforehand, arguing that they can only address their clients' issues with a solid prior understanding of them as an individual, and can best relate to them with knowledge of their interactional preferences. I have generally taken the contrary view, that as a coach, I would rather interact with a coachee as they present, and not have any pre-conceived or externally constructed ideas about them before we meet. That way, my thinking went, I have the best chance of being authentic and present in the moment, giving me the best chance to serve my coachee on their agenda. I also run fewer risks of allowing my own assumptions about them (based on the psychometric profile) to colour, or even drive, the focus of the sessions.

It is clear that psychometrics, when used appropriately, can in themselves facilitate self-awareness and personal insight, and a good feedback session often functions as real Coaching in an important sense. As an input to coaching, psychometric profiles can provide evidence for the anecdotal or descriptive, and can facilitate meaningful discussion about current state as well as point towards potential development. Reports that show information graphically can help coachees conceptualise complex ideas more easily, and a discussion about whether a coachee recognises elements of their own profile is often a fruitful one. For those new to coaching as an idea, having something to start from can be useful too, if only to begin to explore a framework that will then point towards relevant agenda items for the coaching conversations, while also providing some level of common language for ideas they perhaps have not thought about in this way before.

Am I a convert then? Perhaps in part. External, objective measures can be powerful motivators for change, particularly in ambitious individuals, and the combination of such data with subjective personal feedback can release significant development potential. They can also facilitate the beginning of a conversation where a coachee has no idea where to go, and can undoubtedly facilitate the pinpointing of particular relevant issues. Personally, I still have concerns about the use of psychometrics as coaching diagnostics in and of themselves. In my experience, it is often the rambling initial discussion of what might be relevant that both encourages the building of good rapport and trust, while at the same time shining a light towards the most significant area of work. That light might be diffuse and insubstantial, but surely it is the job of the coach and coachee together to focus it, whether or not that process is assisted by a psychometric profile.

Q. Do you use psychometrics in your coaching? If so, how, and what role do the profiles play in the relationship? If not, do you want to? How might you begin?

Book review

Psychometrics in coaching. Jonathan Passmore, ed. AC/Kogan Page, 2008

This book does not make recommendations; nor does it claim to be comprehensive: "it contains a small sample of the tools and questionnaires that can be productively used in the coaching relationship to aid the coachee". It does provide a rich resource for understanding the range and application of psychometrics in coaching: my copy of the first edition has 18 chapters contributed by 34 authors [the revised second edition includes a chapter on designing questionnaires].

The many instruments covered in the first edition include FIRO B (interpersonal relations orientation), Hogan (behaviour), MBTI (psychological type), OPQ (personality), VIA (values and strengths), MSCEIT (emotional intelligence), ELQ (leadership), MTQ48 (resilience), LSI (thinking styles and self-concept), MQ (motivation), Saville Consulting Wave (individual, organisational and work variables), StressScan, TMS (team management systems) and CTT (cultural transformation). Other tools are mentioned in an overview, e.g. NEO (personality), Thomas International (personal profile analysis) and SDI (strength deployment of motivational preferences). There are chapters on using tools in coaching - including approaches and benefits, feedback, and using archetypes. A glossary is provided.

This book is a valuable resource for those considering how and when to use psychometrics and concerned with their reliability, validity and relationship to theory and research.

February 2020

Systemic Constellations and Coaching

What, for you, are the distinctions between the coaching you provide and the services of other specialists e.g. therapy, counselling, mentoring, consultancy? Where do you place the boundaries? ***When is it appropriate for you to recommend that your client seeks a different service?*** For some coaches the boundaries are fixed and clear; for others they are situational, reflecting the particular context of the coachee and the life experiences and sense of personal and professional competence of the coach. Making these judgements is properly a matter of responsible and ethical practice.

Whilst I would describe the majority of my coaching as executive - and developmental in scope rather than performance focussed - my sense is that I am ***coaching the whole person***. The salient features of their context are rarely confined to their job or workplace, even when the employing organisation is paying for the coaching. I am interested in the perception of context which the coachee brings - what for them is relevant and connected. I like to consider what is systemic and to differentiate this from a systematic analysis - I suppose I am persuaded that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, often in ways which are not obvious. I'm curious about what is explicit in the situation and what is implicit: about known and, as yet, unknown phenomena which may be influencing the coachee's choices and ability to take action. If the coachee is stuck, what is inhibiting them? If they are set upon a course, what might be the unintended consequences?

I have used timelines to explore some of these aspects, inviting the coachee to visit their past and future to sense what is significant for them. I have used insights from Generative Coaching to support the coachee to turn obstacles into allies; and methods from positive psychology, gestalt, and NLP e.g. to elicit positive states and to anchor golden moments so as to retrieve these rapidly and create a shift in state whenever needed. I have supported coachees to explore their inner conflicts - for example competing selves in contest with one another - so that they can achieve some recognition, acknowledgement, and reconciliation or re-integration of disparate parts. I notice that these powerful ***processes sometimes fall short***.

More is going on than meets the eye. I wonder what's missing. An existential approach would allow me to recognise that the solution may not lie in fixing "the problem" - there may not be a practical coaching solution. Through Generative Coaching I can work in territory more commonly confined to explicitly therapeutic interventions. Ontological Coaching can provide me with opportunity for sharing experience of being human, where as coach I may be "coaching from my wounds" and the coaching conversation is an emerging empathic partnership. Alternatively I may adopt a Clean Language method, the better to respect the unique world of the coachee; or employ Time to Think so that the coachee has access to the optimum environment for witnessed and facilitated reflection and reconfiguration. Yet still I may be unable to ***assist the coachee to find some resolution***. Why is this?

Systemic Constellations can provide a means to free entanglements which have blocked movement. Bert Hellinger employed and developed the recognition of constellations in his practice as a family therapist. He identified how suffering and entanglement get in the way of healing, and developed ways to uncover and address imbalances in what has been given and taken, what is lost and unacknowledged yet belongs in the system, and how inclusion of relationships in their time and place affect our aliveness and self-expression. His therapeutic work has been adopted increasingly in organisational work to release blockages and ***free people to contribute more effectively***. When we are unaware of exclusions and incompletions, or deny them recognition and belonging, we may be unable to function well in our family, community or organisation.

By representing elements and people in spatial relationship, whether through volunteers chosen by the client in a room, or by objects placed on a table top, the client can create a map, uncover what or who is missing, and by attending to distance apart and direction of facing, sense quality of connection. Missing people or elements can be uncovered and introduced; if volunteers chosen by the client to represent people in the constellation tune in to their feelings and intuitions they can sense and voice what they are experiencing and move in relation to each other without recourse to the client's explanations or story. The client can ***gain deep insights*** from what is reported and may step into the constellation to discover their own intuitions and experience the emergent reconfiguration of their map. The facilitator holds the space and process for the constellation and asks questions to elicit insights; the coach plays a similar role when working with a table top constellation.

How does this therapeutic process work? The constellation is a representation of how we are all inter-connected in systems; ***each of us is unique and yet similar in our common origins and humanity***. The client chooses the representative they sense to be most appropriate for each person or element in the system. Being especially intuitive is not a prerequisite for the volunteer: he or she who senses little or nothing may be in touch with a disconnection in the system. The most effective way to understand constellations is to experience them.

Q. Do you use constellations in your coaching? If so, what have you discovered? If not, might you?

Book review

"Acknowledging what is" by Bert Hellinger and Gabriele ten Hovel. Zeig, Tucker & Co Inc. 1999.

Conversations with Bert Hellinger - interviews describing the nature and principles of human constellations and how they can be used to free entanglements and provide resolution.

"**Systemic Coaching & Constellations - an introduction to the principles, practices and application" by John Whittington, Kogan Page, London, 2012.**

Reviewed in Base Metal, June 2013, this is a practical and authoritative account of how systemic coaching can be deployed; it includes principles, examples, illustrations and guidance and references for further study. "…lucid explanations built on depth of experience…essential reading for coaches…" Alison Hardingham, author of "The Coach's Coach - Personal Development for Personal Developers".

March 2020

The ICF Updated Core Competencies – an invitation to reflect on your practice as a coach by Mike White

The ICF, recently renamed the International ***Coaching*** Federation, launched its updated Core Competency Model late last year. Full details can be found at: https://coachfederation.org/core-competencies but in general terms while incorporating nearly all the current concepts, the new model is more concise, consistent and cohesive. Key features include the importance of ethical behaviour, a coaching mindset, client-centric partnership, and reflective practice. Structurally the model comprises 8 logically ordered equally valued Core Competencies, each with between 6 and 11 sub competencies. While the model will not be used for training, assessment or credentialing purposes until early 2021, its launch provides a useful opportunity for ICF coaches and perhaps those from other professional bodies to reflect on their practice. In what follows, the updated ICF Core Competencies are listed in **bold** together with their definition in *italics*. For each I share my practice reflections as a professional coach and mentor coach, with reference to some of - by no means all - the core competency sub competencies where relevant. A question in ***bold italics*** inviting your own reflection accompanies each Core Competency.

Demonstrates Ethical Practice: *Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching*
Grounded in the ICF core values of Respect, Integrity, Collaboration and Excellence, this update to the original competency on ethics and standards coincides with the introduction of a revised Code of Ethics. There's a renewed emphasis on client confidentiality, coach integrity, and explicit reference to the importance of professional boundaries in, 'Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions'. Critically the coach is also required to be '...sensitive to the clients' identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs'. ***Reflection: How are you being sensitive to your clients' identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs?***

Embodies a Coaching Mindset: *Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered*
This is a new and welcome competency from ICF, encouraging the coach to invest in their continuing professional development, and '... an on-going reflective practice to enhance one's coaching'. Specifics from the sub competencies include; preparing mentally and emotionally for each session, and acknowledging the need for client/coach equality by remaining '...aware of and open to the influence of context and culture on self and others.'
Reflection: What do you have in place to continually develop your on-going practice as a coach?

Establishes and Maintains Agreements: *Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.*
While it permeates throughout the new model, this updated competency focused on coaching agreements is where ICF is most explicit about partnership, '...as a coach and client coming together to develop a working partnership in which both parties work towards a common client-centric goal'. Sub competency 7 for example states 'Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session'. However it's important to note from the revised competency that partnership and agreement where appropriate needs to be with the organisational sponsor, as well as with the client both within individual sessions and throughout the series of sessions that form the coaching programme.
Reflection: How are you ensuring that you are working in partnership with your clients?

Cultivates Trust and Safety: *Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.*
The partnership theme is further developed through the cultivation of trust during the life of the coaching programme, where the coach, 'Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process'. This competency also highlights the need for the coach to respond to the client's context, style, feelings, perceptions, and concerns.
Reflection: How are you acknowledging and respecting your client's unique talents?

Maintains Presence: *Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident*
Being open, flexible, grounded and confident as described by this competency is achieved where the coach is focused, empathic, and curious. This enables the creation of client '…space for silence, pause or reflection'. Perhaps most significantly the coach is also invited to be '...comfortable in a space of not knowing'.
Reflection: How comfortable are you with not knowing?

Listens Actively: *Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression*
A cosmetic change of title from the former 'Actively Listens' competency hides the power of the detail contained within the sub competencies, most notably the reference to 'integration' and 'noticing'. In the former the coach draws on what's being communicated by the client through, '...words, tone of voice and body language...' In the latter the coach, '...acknowledges and explores the client's emotions, energy shifts, non-verbal cues or other behaviors', both within and across sessions.
Reflection: How are you enabling your clients to notice what's really going on?

Evokes Awareness: *Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy*
ICF coaches will recognise that this competency pulls together elements of the former 'Powerful Questions', 'Direct Communications', and 'Creating Awareness'. The updated competency further recognises that during a coaching session there are many ways to evoke awareness, and support and challenge the client to move forward. There's also a challenge to the coach who 'Shares observations, insights and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new learning for the client'.
Reflection: How attached are you to the observations insights and feelings you share with your clients?

Facilitates Client Growth: *Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.*
The eighth and logically final competency in the new model brings together the former, 'Designing Actions', 'Planning and Goal Setting', and 'Managing Progress and Accountability'. Here we also return to the theme of partnership as the coach, 'Celebrates the client's progress and successes', and 'Works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight or learning into their worldview and behaviors.'
Reflection: How are you partnering with your clients to enable them to access their new thinking and the celebration of their success?

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Book review

"The Coach's coach – personal development for personal developers" by Alison Hardingham with Mike Brealey, Adrian Moorhouse and Brendan Venter. CIPD, 2004

A great guide to coaching better, starting with the coachee, this book includes a chapter on reflecting, and a bibliography

April 2020

Ten characteristics of a great coach

Ray writes I've been sorting through old files, and found these characteristics hand written as a list on a page of notes for a quality initiative with an industrial company with whom I was working in February 1991.

- **Committed to the other person's commitment**
- **Listening *for* the other person**
- **Outside the box**
- **Empowering**
- **Ruthlessly compassionate**
- **Trusting**
- **100% responsible for being a great coach**
- **Quick and timely**
- **Intuitive and rational**
- **Grounded in real needs and opportunities**

They ring true for me today, so I will take each one in turn and expand on what it might require.

Committed to the other person's commitment

Coaching is about the coachee. Last week I received from a friend who is a coach, Alison Goldie, a moving account of her experience of having caught Covid19. She writes *"Coaches are not supposed to talk about themselves. Coaching is 'client focused', and when you come to me for help, our time together is about your story, your needs, your fears, your resources, your dreams of a better future. ... When clients come to see me … they are there because of a pressing urgency to change something, and their words often tumble out of them in their gratitude for a neutral listener who is paying full attention, and not interrupting them to impose their own story into proceedings. It is unprofessional to talk about myself."*
Being committed to the coachee's commitment isn't always easy - our preferences and biases can intrude and we may have value conflicts which are best revealed and addressed. As human being to human being, sometimes we will rightly respond from our feelings and experience.

Listening *for* the other person
Dan Fauci, creator of The Mastery workshop, says that every person needs a witness to acknowledge their life. Alison Goldie wrote because she wanted to *"…tell you about the experience* [of Covid19] *to offer a story which might be helpful if you are suffering with it yourself, or if you are anticipating it and are scared. I also want to communicate some of what I learnt about myself whilst it was happening."*
Listening *for* the other person is different from listening to, or listening at, that person.
Real listening, without interruption, judgement or advice is perhaps the greatest gift I can give.

Outside the box
We are in unprecedented, scary times. We will call on our strengths and our supporters - and we will require fresh thinking, letting go, and openness to the future which is waiting to emerge.

Empowering
At a World Poverty Congress held in Manchester some fifty years ago I vividly recall an impassioned plea for us to take our own power: not to wait, not to expect to be given permission, not to be helpless - to step up and be heard, to make a difference. As a leader and a coach I seek to get out of my own way (fears, excuses, procrastinating) and to get out of your (my coachee's) way.

Ruthlessly compassionate
I empathise with you to the best of my ability - and care so much that I will not compromise my support and challenge for you to be the person you are committed to becoming. I will give feedback.

Trusting
I can't fix your problems or guarantee your opportunities. I can trust that you will be real with me and I with you.

100% responsible for being a great coach
I will observe the ethics and codes of practice required of me as a coach, and pursue my continual professional development, the better to learn.

Quick and timely
Alert, considered, and never more necessary than in the midst of the crisis.

Intuitive *and* rational
Bigger picture, *both and*: emotional intelligence, aesthetic intelligence and cerebral intelligence. Systemically linked connection between head, heart and gut. Whole person with and for whole person.

Grounded in real needs and opportunities
Appropriate to what is so. Recognising the reality. Acknowledging the feelings. Working with what is. Being alongside our coachees through loss and transition, exploration and commitment.

Q. How do these ten characteristics speak to you in your coaching at this time? Let us know.

Book review

"Coaching in times of crisis and transformation" edited by Liz Hall. Kogan Page, 2015.

To connect with so many real and relatable stories of people's triumph in almost impossible experiences…an inspiring read." Julie Starr, author of "The Coaching Manual".

May 2020

Positive psychology and coaching

Ray writes A response from a reader to last month's Base Metal raised the question of ***how*** to listen ***for*** the other person. Listening for the other person requires qualities of emotional intelligence and attention which allow me to be fully present and go beyond what is said and heard, to sense the whole person.

This question reminded me of an article I found in the Style - wellbeing section of the Sunday Times, which I think is about the *absence* of respectful listening, entitled "**Are you suffering from toxic positivity**?" The author, Fleur Britten, quotes American psychotherapists Jamie Long and Samara Quintero: "*When positivity is used to silence the human experience, it becomes toxic".* She continues *"Examples include trying to 'just get on with it' by dismissing emotions, minimising the experiences of others with feelgood statements, and shaming people for expressing anything other than positivity. Toxic positivity is a dogma that insists, they write, 'that only keeping positive is the right way to live your life.'"* This might be construed as a contemporary version of the "stiff upper lip" in which denial of feelings is replaced by imposition of "rose-coloured spectacles" fantasy.

The article provided a wake-up call for me to re-examine my enthusiasm for the positive - for many years I have run workshops on **The Extraordinary Power of Positive Thinking and Speaking**. I decided to offer a session for Coaching Central entitled **Positive Psychology - grey area or blue sky thinking?** "*Prompted by reading an article entitled 'Toxic positivity', and aware of the profound challenges of the Covid crisis, I will explore with you what positive psychology can offer for coaches and their clients, including:*

- *what is positive psychology?*
- *what advocates of positive psychology claim for it*
- *what critics say about it*
- *evidence*
- *how it relates to resilience, mindfulness and happiness*
- *when and how I use it - being present, noticing, empathy, example, congruence, challenge*
- *ideas and insights to take away*

Whether your glass is half full or half empty - or you'd settle for a larger glass - join in the discussion and share your experience and views."

A lively and deeply thoughtful discussion ensued among more than twenty coaches, meeting on Zoom.

Here I will describe briefly some of the ingredients of my talk and some highlights from the discussion.

What is positive psychology? A very recent development in psychology, created by Martin Seligman in 1998, focussing on strengths and virtues for the individual and for families, communities and societies: a new theory of wellbeing. Seligman has researched and written about 'Learned Optimism' and 'Authentic Happiness'.

What advocates of positive psychology claim for it: It can help us find meaning in life, build self-esteem and resilience, be creative and productive, improve emotional intelligence, think positively, act generously.

What critics say about it: It omits *qualitative* methods of inquiry**,** hence is separated from humanistic psychology; it can promote a belief that positive thinking is generally an effective strategy.

Evidence: The optimistic conclusions from its research are that most people can get more satisfaction from their work and psychological wellbeing at work can reduce mental ill-health and stress-related absence.

How it relates to resilience, mindfulness and happiness: Its research shows that trying to maximise happiness leads to unhappiness; resilience is "ordinary"; mindfulness can prevent our being overwhelmed by feelings.

When and how I use it - being present, noticing, empathy, example, congruence, challenge: I bring my preference for being, and choosing to be, positive to my life and to my coaching. Rather than impose this positivity, I aim to connect to and respect the other person's reality, to empathise - and only then to challenge.

Ideas and insights to take away: The session was thought-provoking, prompting consideration of values, mindsets and attitudes; preferences for optimism or pessimism; fresh perspectives on the productive aspects of taking a negative, or problem-focussed, approach, and on the nature of melancholy; and appreciation of the constructive nature of positive thinking and its contribution to mood, morale and resilience. My personal take away was confirmation of the importance of acknowledging and allowing my feelings, rather than supressing them, for wellbeing. Attention to positive strengths is important; so, too, is recognition of the shadow side of the psyche. Giving attention and appropriate expression to both sides is beneficial for mental health; there are risks in 'fake it till you make it' - better to fake it until you accomplish it (practice, practice, practice). A participant alluded to Benjamin Zander's invitation: award yourself an A, then live into it.

Q. How do you / can you apply insights from Positive Psychology to your coaching?

Book review

"Positive Psychology Coaching in Practice", edited by Suzy Green and Stephen Palmer, Routledge, 2019

A comprehensive overview of evidence-based practice, including reference to mindfulness, wellness and resilience, ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and relevant neuroscience.

"The art of the good life - clear thinking for business and a better life", Rolf Dobelli, Sceptre, 2018

Fifty-two short sharp chapters, each providing intellectual challenge, best ideas and evidence for how to act - a stimulating read for coaches to think about their own lives and those of their clients.

June 2020

Digital silence

Paul writes During the current ongoing COVID situation, I (like many of you, I'm sure) have been coaching virtually rather than in person. Prior to March this year, my strong preference was always to meet face-to-face for coaching, but if recent months have shown anything, they spotlight what is possible digitally, and at a more than acceptable level. Granted, there are limitations of working in this way, but pretty much everyone I speak to is of the opinion that such video interactions will form part of our ongoing lives, both professionally and personally. And, as many others have also observed, the advantages of not having to travel and of our clients being more able to manage their own time more, are not insignificant.

What struck me this week however was how one potentially significant element of many coaching conversations is qualitatively different in a virtual setting – silence. As Nancy Kline (among many others) has shown us, silence can be a very powerful tool in coaching, but one that often depends on other elements for its effectiveness. Coaching is a long way away from the classic negotiating paradigm of 'he

who speaks next loses'. For silence to be effective for a coachee, attention is key, alongside the ability to effectively hold the coaching space, and both of these are more difficult virtually. For a start, the fact that webcams are never in the same place as the screen display (which typically only shows the head and shoulders anyway) can have a significant impact on how as a coachee we feel that we are being attended to in a deep and meaningful sense. Small gestures, facial expressions, vocal elements of engagement or assent come across less readily, all of which contribute to the risk of the digital medium becoming much more of a divide than a desk or table might be. Maybe as a coach, I have to work harder visually to signal that ongoing level of attention (which might be partly why so many coaches are expressing susceptibility to 'Zoom fatigue'). All of this potentially has an impact on the quality of silence in a coaching context.

Which leads me to perhaps the most significant element here – how, as coach or coachee, can I distinguish between meaningful, chosen, coaching silence, and the (not infrequent) digital glitch/freeze or loss of connection. Over a digital link, it is very easy to assume that any significant period of silence is a result of technological failure, rather than a natural (and potentially useful) part of the session, and that assumption seems to be relevant for both coach and coachee. I have observed potentially significant trains of thought in a coachee interrupted by the question "are you still there?" or the "you seem to have frozen" comment, and that moment is very difficult to regain. Part of this, stems from a societal or cultural rejection of interactional silence, and part perhaps from a (justified) lack of trust in the technology. I'd hazard a guess that if we weren't all experiencing outages, connection drops and freezing in our digital meetings, this might be less of an issue, but at present, I find myself asking whether I have 'lost' my client, or whether the technology has cut off my ability to hold the space. Similarly, the temptation (on both sides) to 'fill' silence seems significantly greater in such digitally mediated interactions.

I am therefore left with several questions for myself:

Do I notice myself becoming tempted to 'fill the silence' when coaching virtually?

What strategies might I use to improve my coachee's experience of my attention when digitally mediated?

How can I still use the power of silence effectively in remote coaching?

Book review

"Shut Up and Listen! - the truth about how to communicate at work", Theo Theobald and Cary Cooper, Kogan Page, 2004

This book is a practical guide. It includes chapters on *Listening - how and when* and *Listening and talking*, with advice on making presentations, using voice mail, and dealing with cultural differences. There are numerous recommendations, for example from David Clutterbuck: *"… the critical quality of a good communicator is the ability to adapt to the other person you're working with*."

"Presence - how to use positive energy for success", Patsy Rodenburg, Penguin, 2009

More than thirty short chapters include one devoted to listening. The book is based on a concept of three circles of energy: *self and withdrawal*; *bluff and force*; and *connecting*. "*Listening is an acquired skill …unless you listen in Second Circle* [a place of awareness, noticing and accepting background noise] *you do not hear properly"*. Amongst many quotations are the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley from "To a Skylark": "*The world should listen then, as I am listening now*."

"The Art of Listening in Coaching and Mentoring", Stephen Burt, Routledge, 2019
Introduced by *"Listening is the heart of coaching."* The textbook on the subject.

July 2019

Coaching, group coaching, team coaching, systemic coaching and complexity!

Many coaches work one-to-one with the person they coach. Such contracts may be solely with the individual. If set in the context of an organisation, there are implications when involving multiple stakeholders. The coach may be self-employed; or may be employed directly by, or sub-contracted to, a providing body: what are the implications when the provision includes several stakeholders? The setting may be one in which the coach is internal to the organisation, potentially raising political issues. All of this is rich territory for ethical considerations and care in defining roles, responsibilities, expectations, confidentiality and boundaries. 'Objectivity' may be aspirational, illusive or unrealistic. Among many possible approaches to one-to-one coaching the coach may choose to use behaviour rehearsals to allow the client to experiment with crucial conversations to access new appreciations of other parties in their context and fresh ways to engage with them.

Group coaching occurs when individuals learn together - either on individual issues and opportunities or in addressing a common purpose e.g. related to a specific project. Classical action learning is a powerful form of group coaching where a set adviser facilitates the process of peer coaching.

Team coaching has become an area of increasing attention: currently it is in the ascendant. Is this growing interest a function of tighter budgets, or recognition of the need for systemic interventions? Does it represent more opportunity for work for coaches and for extension and deepening of their coach competencies? Clarity of definition matters here too. Who are the participants in the team? Do they include the manager / leader? Is the leader being coached separately? Are the members being coached individually - and by the same coach? Is the coaching in plenary i.e. with all present? What is the focus of the coaching: on improvement e.g. in behaviour, performance, accountability? Or on development e.g. in readiness, capability, capacity, realisation of potential? How, and from where, is the coach selected? Who are the stakeholders?

Systemic coaching explicitly takes into account the system in which the client is a part. That system exists now; has its roots in what happened before; and has influence over what will occur in the future. Systemic constellations coaching can be employed with the individual - the system is represented by objects or by other people acting as representatives, and a process of discovery is facilitated. Principles and consequences of time, place and exchange are uncovered. Scenarios unfold to allow insights and resolution. Chronic problems in the organisation can be freed.

Are these all examples of a prevailing paradigm for coaching? If there were to be a new paradigm what would this be? In whichever form the coaching occurs, questions arise about how and by whom the work is funded and evaluated.

As I have cleared old paperwork I have re-discovered ways of working and intervention designs which seem to me remarkably applicable to the current environment of uncertainty, apprehension and loss. We have closed Transition Partnerships, ironically when transitions have become ever more relevant, and migrated a legacy of close to thirty years of practice to add to the resources of the Alchemy website. Among the papers are articles on leadership and organisation development which remind us that we have been rooted in systemic work. Whilst we now appreciate much more about emergence and uncertainty and are learning about complexity and neuroscience, the foundations of our practice remain strong and relevant. We realise that with our background in OD we have been conscious of, and attentive to, the significance of context and the big picture, of networks, of the fallibility of planning, of the frailty of project management, of the inappropriateness of reliance on command and control, of the importance of navigating rather than driving or managing change, and of the vital importance of diversity and collaboration. As that holistic OD inspired by the wellbeing mindsets of the 1960s and 70s was supplanted

by attention to individualism, competition and pre-occupation with organisational design and functional efficiency, we did our best to maintain our values and approach in major leadership development programmes; latterly we have become more involved in coaching as a primary activity. We did not lose our conviction that coaching is one ingredient for learning in a much more complex setting. That is the old paradigm which we are bringing again into the light. We believe it has a new lease of life. Perhaps those readers who were not part of that evolution will be intrigued by the brilliance of this old lens and will help us to polish it.

Q. In my coaching how am I engaging with context and complexity?

Book review

Among the authors who influenced my practice are Fordyce and Weil, French and Bell, Warner Burke, Weisbord, Argyris, Block, Deming, Francis - and many others who contributed to the seminal Addison-Wesley 1970s OD series. One who is still contributing is Edgar Schein - see for example his "Humble inquiry". For a more recent take on OD see "**Organization Development - a practitioner's guide for OD and HR" by Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge and Linda Holbeche, Kogan Page, Second Edition 2015.**

For a summary account of our view of the OD field, see our occasional paper number 14 in the Downloadable Resources section of the Alchemy of Coaching website: www.alchemyofcoaching.com

August 2020

TUT and Coaching

Paul writes: Like many of us I'm sure, under lockdown I found myself both keener and more able to make time for outdoor exercise, and that time with the trainers (or cleats) on has given me pause for thought in relation to my coaching practice. What might the useful parallels be between exercise and coaching?

Aside from the obvious 'we get better at it, the more we do' (which interestingly seems to me to apply to both coaches and coachees), there is one specific element that might be worthy of attention. The concept of 'time under tension' (or TUT as it is known in bodybuilding and weightlifting circles). The underlying idea here is that increasing the amount of time that a muscle group is working (i.e. under tension) across a set of repetitions helps build muscle more efficiently. Exponents of this approach might, for example, lighten weights while increasing the number of reps, and slow down the speed of each rep (in particular the eccentric – or lowering – phase) to increase the TUT[1].

One of the reported effects of a TUT approach is an increase in awareness and focus, and the possibility of more mindful routines which have greater emphasis on process than on outcome, which strikes a chord with me when reflecting on some of my recent coaching experiences. It might even be argued that in this sense, coaching is the TUT of mental development, building capacity and endurance just as bicep curls build arms. It strikes me too that this is partly about bigger goals and the macro scale – if I lift weights, each repetition has a goal as does the set, but what is my larger outcome here? Why am I doing this? What is my wider purpose?

A crucial element is this notion of awareness – a challenge of any coaching relationship to encourage and develop the noticing and observational ability of a coachee in order to facilitate growth and change. Without that building of awareness, ownership of change is much more difficult, and what seems potentially transformational in the context of a coaching session risks becoming transient; embedding new thoughts and behaviours becomes much more difficult.

The other angle relates to a 'smoothing of the curve', where the stretch (the tension in this example) is noticeably different from the norm (comfort, if you will), but is not so far removed from it as to be of a

1 The contrary approach would be to increase weight and decrease reps, lifting heavier weights more quickly.

completely different sort (the equivalent of the snatch lift, for those of you who like weights). Many of us will recognise the effects of constant stress and tension in our clients, and what I like about this parallel is the recognition that time under tension is good (it's a learning and growth space), but that we cannot be in that space all of the time. If we are, the potential benefits of the stretch are diminished, and can eventually turn to entirely negative consequences of pressure, fatigue and overwhelm. This comes back again to the awareness angle as being paramount, both when 'exercising', and at rest, and the choices that might open up if we are able to build that capacity.

Q. Do I have a client for whom TUT might be a useful coaching parallel?

Book review

"The C Zone: Peak Performance Under Pressure" by Robert J. Kriegel and Marilyn Harris Kriegel, first published in 1984 Based on a study of US athletes, this book provides insights into operating with confidence, commitment and control in high pressure environments - including how to stay calm in a crisis. I included it as recommended reading for participants in "Improving Personal Performance" - an experiential development module which became the basis of numerous workshops and programmes provided for clients by Transition Partnerships. The book was one of the inspirations for "Comfort, Stretch and Panic", one of our most used models, included in the Alchemy of Coaching tools: to find out more about this set, see the *Downloadable Resources section of the Alchemy of Coaching website: www.alchemyofcoaching.com*

"The Path of Least Resistance" by Robert Fritz, Butterworth Heinemann, first published in 1984 Peter Senge writes that this book "*presents the essence of Robert Fritz's teaching: at the starting point in developing personal mastery is understanding the creative process and your commitment to its practice.*" This work is about creative change: chapters include "*Creating is No Problem - Problem Solving is Not Creating*"; "*Tension Seeks Resolution*"; and "*The Power of Transcendence*".

The titles of both of these books capture their respective messages, which I believe are as timely and rewarding to study for coaches and clients now as when they first appeared.

September 2020

Coaching essentials

Ray writes: What do we know about coaching which continues to sustain our contribution and development in uncertain times? Coaching occurs in a systemic context. The coach will be present, attentive, listening, noticing and sensing - in service of the coachee, encouraging a genuinely mutual and shared relationship. In an Association for Coaching article, "The coach's journey towards mastery", published in 2017, Ian Saunders and I set out *elements* of coaching mastery (worthwhile pursuit of an unattainable goal):

- Being aware of self, other and situation
- Creating and holding the coaching space
- Noticing "What to do when I don't know what to do?"
- Integrating everything to greatest benefit for the coachee.

These elements can be experienced as states of awareness, attention, action and competence. The "greatest benefit for the coachee" is an expression of purpose and value: a basic universal tenet of coaching.
In the same article we identified four constituent *themes* of coaching mastery:

- Contracting
- Are you operating as a specialist or a generalist?
- What tools do you have to use?

- Reflection and supervision

We described the four elements acting interdependently with the four themes:

1. Contracting
Contracting, and re-contracting, is required at all stages of the coaching relationship and is a vital part of coaching mastery.
2. Specialist or generalist
Knowing the nature and scope of the coaching offered enables focus and depth, whether as a master specialist or a master generalist.
3. The toolkit
The master coach's toolkit is constantly being expanded, as are the skill and flexibility with which each tool is used. The master coach is able to apply tools which are specific to a particular element, and others to support any of the elements.
4. Reflection and supervision
Reflective practice and use of supervision are hallmarks of the development of a master coach. Topics and challenges from any of the elements or themes benefit from examination through reflection and discussion with a supervisor. Insights from these disciplines enhance the coach's reach and competence and contribute to the desired - and illusive - attainment of mastery. The coach will be highly skilled and developing continually.

A further consideration for all coaches deserving of particular attention in the turbulent and emotionally demanding context of the pandemic, is *fitness to practice*. This encompasses adherence to ethical codes and standards - working with integrity and sound governance including recognition of and response to multiple stakeholders; and personal wellbeing and capacity - working only when able to do so in a sufficiently resourceful state. In the same sense that aspiring to mastery does not expect or require perfection, being sufficiently resourceful does not require superlative wellness. Rather the coach brings her or his experience of the wider context, in order to empathise with and relate to the circumstances of the coachee - whilst seeking to avoid over-identification, dependence and transference. Concerns arising from possible conflicts of interest can be brought to supervision.

Q. What are the essential tenets which inform your coaching?

Book review

"A Coach's Guide to Emotional Intelligence - strategies for developing successful leaders", James Bradford Terrell and Marcia Hughes, with contributions from Julio Olalla, Terrie Lupberger and Lee Salmon, Pfeiffer, 2008

The authors present the case for Emotional Intelligence as a foundation for effective coaching: relationships with ourselves and each other are at the heart of being human and are a key to accessing the optimism and commitment necessary to respond to the complex challenges we face. The book provides descriptions of social and emotional effectiveness, and asserts the need for multiple perspectives, acknowledging and working with difference and conflict and how to connect. *Responsive awareness* - choosing our response based on full conscious awareness - is presented as a capacity for coach and client to develop in collaboration. Rather than ask the client *wh*y you feel what you feel, reflect their feeling in their own words. Action by the client is a vital step and is likely to require courage. The book explores the motivation required for such purposeful behaviour - actions consistent with what we most care about.

As a coach, developing my own emotional awareness is essential. This book is a sound resource for this work. Reference is made to the Newfield Network's *Ontology of Emotions.* Short case studies and three pages of further reading related are provided.

October 2020

Breath and Coaching

Paul writes: Over recent months, I have been writing a series of articles for online publication on the subject of breath and leadership, and we thought that this area might well be of interest to coaches too. My overall thrust across those pieces is that as leaders, awareness of the impact of our breath on ourselves and others can be a significant factor in how we come across, but more than that, there are opportunities for us to use our breath much more actively in leadership situations.

As coaches, whether or not we have a personal affinity with mindfulness, or indeed choose to use its ideas with our clients, its focus on the breath cannot have escaped our notice. Using the breath as a moment of pause, whether at the beginning of a session or within it, can be a very useful tool to get ourselves into a good mental space in the service of our client. Similarly, I know coaches who actively use their own breath to temper and manage their tendency to intervene, and the physical, embodied act of conscious breath can also act to improve focus.

How many of us, however, have thought about making a more active use of breath as a coaching tool – as, for example, a means of conscious non-verbal signalling with a specific goal in mind? It may well be that you have experienced the effect of something unconscious in this regard: perhaps where a sharp intake of breath in response to a coachee had a noticeable effect on them, or perhaps where even breathing had a relaxing (or even soporific) outcome. What interests me most here is the embodied nature of breath, and the potential it contains in a coaching space.

One, perhaps more obvious, way to think about this might be in terms of the practice of mirroring (or indeed of contrasting) in order to provide insight and awareness. As part of unconditional positive regard and building rapport, I'm sure many of us find ourselves engaging in this practice, and it can be immensely powerful if done in terms of breath. For me, the dual challenge manifests itself in conscious desired outcomes, and authenticity of approach. If I notice myself mirroring, I might offer myself various choices: do I continue or stop? If the former, to what end? Where is the line past which I risk simply 'making a point', and when do I choose to step near to or indeed over that line?

Another significant area for me here looks through the lens the other way – what is my coachee communicating through their breath, how might that be relevant to the presenting situation, and in what way might a coaching intervention focus on this aspect to assist them? To take a specific example, few would argue that leadership presence is significantly affected by posture (whether standing or sitting), and posture is greatly affected by breath. As a singer and conductor, this area of non-verbal presence is key to both my performance and the performance of others. I can communicate an enormous amount of information through the simple act of how I breathe, and can actively use this process to, for example, set a tone, set a speed, or encode detailed information regarding what is about to happen. In a leadership position, and I would argue that of the coach too, awareness of the latent power of the breath and developing the means to make conscious use of it, carry compelling potential for all of us.Book review

Book review

"Pause for Breath - Bringing the practices of mindfulness and dialogue to leadership and conversation", Amanda Ridings, Live It Publishing, 2011 *Nautilus Book Awards Business and Leadership Silver Award, 2012*

In an increasingly hectic world of information overload, turbulence and uncertainty many people crave breathing space. Amanda Ridings is a coach and coaching supervisor who facilitates dialogue groups and workshops to allow a "Pause for Breath". Wisdom and ways of being are distilled in this book to provide essential reading for leaders and coaches. "Pause for Breath" is more than a guide to effective leadership

conversations - it offers examples, insights and exercises for a centred and healthy life. Amanda Ridings draws on her experience and her practice to share the means to become more present, grounded and congruent. She shows through honest practical instances how enhanced awareness of self and other allows possibility, beyond habitual reactions, for a different quality of attention, presence and relationship.

I can begin by noticing my internal conversations. When I am mindful I have the space to make choices, including how I engage with others. When I have conscious connection with mind, body and spirit I can be more focused, resilient and assertive. "Pause for Breath" is a handbook to help me to be so. It is constructed in six parts: preparation and beginning; mind and conversation; body and conversation; spirit and conversation; versatility in conversations; towards dialogue. Each chapter includes a specific practice and space for notes and reflection. I echo the appreciation of other reviewers: this is a very special book.

"Weekly Leadership Contemplations", Amanda Ridings, Matador, 2020

Fifty-two weekly pieces for reflection, introduced with a preface and distilled by a coda, with key terms and references, and searching questions for each piece.

"…this wonderful offering…" Zachary Green; "…a guide and companion that will sit alongside us every day as we consider what is important." Tania Watson; "…better resourced to meet the future." Dr Steve Marshall.

November 2020

Coaching for teams

Ray writes: Many organisations are now engaging in team coaching. What issues might be important for the coach and the client? Here are some questions for consideration.

*What is the **organisational context**? What is the history? What is changing?*

*Is the team coaching part of a **strategy** for the organisation?*

*For what reasons, and by whom, is team coaching identified as **necessary**?*

*What is the explicit **purpose** of the team coaching?*

*Who are the direct and indirect **stakeholders**? What are their **expectations**?*

*What will be the **frequency** and **duration** of the team coaching?*

*How, and by whom, will **evaluation** of the team coaching be conducted?*

*How, and from where, is **the coach** selected/appointed?*

*What team coaching **contract** is appropriate?*

*How is **confidentiality** treated?*

*Who are the **participants**? Do they include the **manager** / **leader**?*

*Is the coaching **complementary** to, not a substitute for, the responsibilities of the team's manager?*

*What are the current, and desired, **team dynamics**?*

*Is the **focus** of the coaching on the improvement of the team e.g. in climate, behaviour, collaboration, accountability, performance?*

*Is the focus on team **development** e.g. in readiness, capability, capacity, realisation of potential?*

*For team building or team development, what **other interventions** may be required and by whom?*

*Does the team have **operating principles** e.g. ground rules or a Team Charter? If so, how do they use these agreements? If not, are they desirable? How are they/can they be used in the team coaching?*

*How **open** and vulnerable are participants prepared to be? How willing to give and receive **feedback**?*

*What **tools** or frameworks will the coach use, e.g. psychometric profiles, 360 feedback?*

*Is the team coaching conducted **in plenary** i.e. with all present? How is absence dealt with?*

*Is the leader being coached **separately**? By the same coach or a different one? Implications?*

*Are some/all members also being coached individually? By the **same coach or different coaches**?*

*How are **changes** in team membership or function recognised and handled?*

*Does the coaching address relations between this team and **other teams**? How?*

*Is the team coaching **delivered virtually**? If so, how - and what, if any, constraints apply?*

*How is **time** used during sessions?*

*How is **participation** facilitated?*

*What, if any, **support** does the coach provide between sessions?*

*How is **progress** measured and acknowledged and by whom?*

*Does the team coach have **access** to other coaches working with the organisation? On what basis?*

*Does the team coach have **supervision**? What other **resources** and support are available to the coach?*

Q. Are you involved in team coaching? Are these questions helpful? What others occur to you?

Book Review

"Group and Team Coaching - The Essential Guide", Christine Thornton, Routledge, 2010

Grounded in the context of organisational life, this book draws on psychology, group analysis and systems theory, including attention to subconscious and non-verbal processes. Distinctions are made between group coaching (including action learning) in which the focus is usually on the individual, and team coaching where the focus is on collective effectiveness and the parts individuals can play in delivering it. Christine Thornton explores "the secret life of groups", and discusses group dynamics, common dilemmas, ethics and supervision, pitfalls of group coaching, and how to design coaching interventions. Practical guidance is offered for specific issues and difficulties which arise from working with groups, including understanding and tackling dysfunctional patterns and problem behaviour; and managing beginnings, middles and endings, and boundaries. This book lives up to its 'essential' title.

Sections include learning, holding and exchange; factors influencing learning and change; learning group coaching; supervision groups; frequently asked questions - compiled from members of the Association for Coaching; and an extensive bibliography and references, chapter by chapter.

December 2020

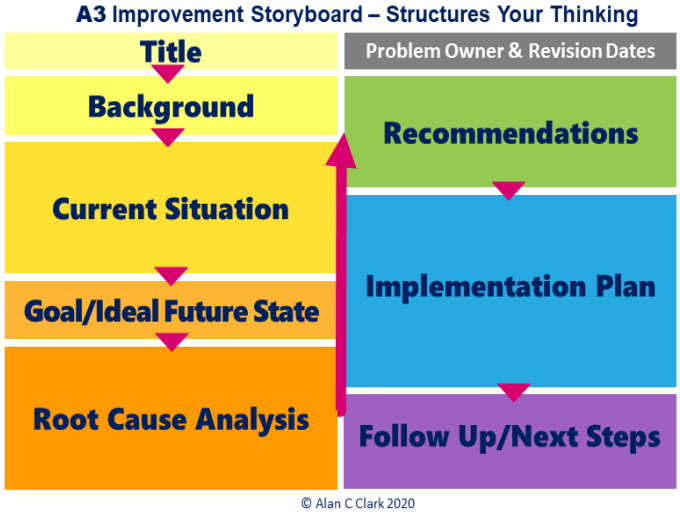
Structuring Coaching Conversations Using the A3 Storyboard

Some problems that a coach and coachee must deal with may appear at first sight to be insoluble. And sometimes the coachee will find it hard to say, "I don't know", even with the most carefully put coaching questions. Eventually, they come to it.

This may be due to complexity, involving management or organisational issues, where either the coachee is too remote from the problem or lacking in the necessary knowledge of the situation. How might they be "reassured" (their confidence increased) that it is possible to find a way forward? Providing a structure

or roadmap towards a way forward a step at a time can provide the reassurance that they need. This is where the A3 process and the associated storyboard document can help.

There are three "parts" to A3 coaching. First there is the storyboard or document that gives the process its name. Then there are two types of conversation, the coaching conversation and then a number of conversations between the coachee and those who are directly involved with the issue. The coaching conversation uses the A3 storyboard to guide the coaching process. A3 describes the size of the commonly used sheet of paper on which the way forward is developed. This development takes place as the coachee completes each of the eight sections of the document in turn.



As the figure shows, there are two sides to the format. The left-hand half is the "what is happening and why" side and on the right is the "way forward". A feature of the A3 storyboard is its brevity - using bullet points and visual presentation of information, such as diagrams or charts. Someone unfamiliar with the whole situation should be able to understand it in about five minutes from the storyboard.

Starting top left, the coach gets the coachee to write a *title* and describe the *background* to the issue in, ideally, two bullet points which should link to some higher level "aims" such as business need or personal developmental issues.

Importantly, the *current situation* needs to draw on input from conversations with those directly involved. Visual images are then useful in describing the current situation, the issue or problem. There may be a bullet pointed problem statement. This leads on to the desired *goal or ideal future state* in the next section. Again, only a single sentence or a couple of bullet points and to be agreed with those familiar with the situation.

So far so conventional. The final section on this half requires digging to understand the underlying *root causes* of the situation. Involving those people directly involved with the situation. There are many visual methods of analysis; however, with care, the so-called "5 Whys" questioning method is effective and can also be made more visual. Moving to the right-hand side, the coachee next focuses on generating *recommended ways forward*. Again, input from those in the situation is essential. The aim should be to generate at least two or three possibilities. The final way forward would then need to be selected based on effectiveness, cost and risk. Having chosen a way forward, an *implementation plan* is required detailing who will do what, when, ideally using a Gantt chart and possibly including any special instructions.

Finally, the *follow up* will include indications of how the outcome of the way forward will be evaluated, ideally with some form of measurement. Possibly, also, indications of possible follow-on activities. Using the A3 roadmap for guidance and reassurance, coachees can have greater confidence in working out ways forward that will be effective.

Q. How might the A3 be useful to you in your coaching?

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Book Review

"Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn - Lessons from Toyota Leader Isao Yoshino on a Lifetime of Continuous Learning", Katie Anderson, Integrand Press,2020

At the front of this book there are 34 endorsements in praise of it, including from coach Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *The Coaching Habit* and *The Advice Trap*; and Kate Colbert, who writes that this is for "those of us wanting to embrace the opportunity to become heart-centred, thoughtful, people-centred leaders"; "…culture and corporate success come down to the personal behaviours and attitudes of employees …at every level." The foreword is by John Shook, who worked in Toyota and has written a book about the A3 process: he says of "Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn: "…executive coaches…will find in these pages a rich expression of the thinking and practices of a deeply thoughtful, extraordinarily reflective practitioner of the craft." The publishers write that this is for those "who strive to create a culture of continuous learning and to lead with intention by helping others discover their best selves – while also developing themselves". I recommend it.