

Base Metal…

The Monthly Newsletter
from
Alchemy of Coaching

The 2015 and 2016 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.

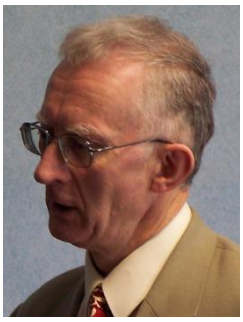
In this e-book we have compiled all the articles and book reviews from the 2015 and 2016 editions of Base Metal and we plan to repeat this every two years.

We hope that you find Base Metal useful and ask you to pass this bi-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 David

March 2017







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January 2015

Coaches learning together

The BPS Coaching Psychology Congress in December was entitled “Changing Lives, Changing Worlds – Inspiring Collaborations”. Its purpose *to engage with the wider world of people, practice, learning and research* was reflected in the range of participants and contributors and a rich variety of speakers and workshops.

In November the Euro Coach List Conference attracted a lively community of coaches most of whom are connected online by their membership of the List. The conference theme was “Encompass and Expand”. The opening session went deep from the outset: we were invited in trios to share our personal intention for the event. There was no plenary review: we ventured into the conference sessions with focus and commitment.

Eighteen sessions were planned, in parallel groups of three, allowing, for those present throughout, the opportunity of attendance at six of these. This menu provided very many different experiences – as too with the BPS Congress – making any kind of summing up a challenge for a closing speaker. At the BPS Congress Professor Stephen Palmer chose to give a short, dynamic and informative flavour of the value of connecting with nature for wellbeing: eco-psychology for coaches and clients.

At the Euro Coach List Conference we decided to use the World Café approach for our closing session - see overleaf for a reference. This provided a method for participants with diverse conference experiences to explore issues, opportunities and insights arising from the event.

We used an arrangement of five table groups – each of five, six or seven people, and invited everyone to mix randomly at these tables. Each table had sheets of flipchart paper on which to write or draw. Pre-prepared questions, designed to elicit essential messages, were placed on each table.

Seventy-five minutes were available - allowing ten minutes for a starting activity; ten minutes to explain the purpose and process and answer questions for clarification; six rounds at the café tables, each of seven minutes, plus time - three minutes in total - for transfers between tables; three minutes of quiet reflection; and a highlight volunteered from each table - firstly about the process, then about the products/outcomes.

We began outside, briefly in a large circle in the fresh air – the session was directly after lunch! On returning to the conference room these ground rules were introduced and displayed:

- Listen - with full attention and openness
- When moved to contribute, speak to the question – in the middle of the table
- Rather than debate or discuss, share your insights – what is evoked in you
- Meanwhile – write, doodle, scribble, draw your ideas on the flip charts on the table

and guidance was given:

- When requested, move to the next table, leaving (a) representative*(s) at your table to honour your work by sharing, briefly, some of the essence with the newcomers. *New one(s) each time.
- In due course, find that you have returned to your table of origin – and “know it for the first time”
- Close by reporting in plenary one “highlight” from each table.

Three conference attendees had worked together to decide the questions for the tables (with more time for the session, there would be benefit in incorporated into the table process the choosing of the questions and for longer periods at each table to respond to them). The questions were:

1. Reflect on the gap between my knowledge [skills and learning] and being wise. How do I become aware of any such gap
2. What is the future that is waiting to occur? What gifts are mine to take away from this conference? What do I want to acknowledge and celebrate?
3. What am I doing – and who am I being – so that I can coach (you)?
4. What are the traps for me to fall out of integrity and authenticity when I am making a sale?
5. What is it about my life story that I would like to bring more into who I am in my work?

This World Café closing session was well received. Several participants commented afterwards that the process was valuable, honoured their experiences - and was preferable to an individual or panel giving their summing up. Perhaps the questions used will be a stimulus for your own reflection at the start of a new year.

Book review

"The World Café – Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter"

Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community, Berrett-Koehler Publishing, 2005

With a foreword by Margaret J. Wheatley - *We Can Only Be Wise Together*; an epilogue by Anne W. Dosher - *How Can We Talk It Through?* ; and an afterword by Peter Senge - *Discovering The Magic Of Collective Creativity*, "The World Café" provides the means to evoke deep conversations for development and change.

Inspired by dialogue practice and by systems thinking this book contains many examples of the process in action. Having set out the case for the importance of conversation as a core means to co-create social value, the authors describe their seven principles: *Set the Context; Create Hospitable Space; Explore Questions That Matter; Encourage Everyone's Contribution; Cross-Pollinate and Connect Diverse Perspectives; Listen Together for Patterns, Insights, and Deeper Questions; Harvest and Share Collective Discoveries*. Further chapters cover *Guiding the Café Process: The Art of Hosting; Conversational Leadership: Cultivating Collective Intelligence* and *The Call of Our Times: Creating a Culture of Dialogue.*

World Café is applicable in business and community contexts. Further resources, connections and references are included. There are resonances with C. Otto Scharmer's "Theory U" and William Isaacs' "Dialogue".

Peter Senge writes: "The World Café is not a technique. It is an invitation into a way of being with one another that is already part of our nature." This book is a practical manual for conducting you own World Café sessions and discovering their power.

February 2015

It's that time of year

WOW it's snowing, it's that time of year. As I walk in this winter wonderland through South Parks, admiring the snow covered dreaming spires, people are having fun, throwing snow balls, building snow men, sledging down the hill, falling off before they get to the bottom. Surprisingly they get up, knock the snow off their clothes, red faced, still wet through and cold they pull their sledge back to the top of the hill to do it all again.

Confucius said "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall" Did he have a sledge too?

It's that time of year when many of us make New Year Resolutions or plans to change something for or about ourselves. It's easy, we are responsible for ourselves and therefore, setting personal goals that are SMART or tested and by any other acronym should work. Then comes 30 February (*yes I know it doesn't exist, any date will do – and it seems to be that time of year)* and we wonder why we haven't started or worse given up using any of the thousands of excuses. If you are short of excuses let me know.

Being curious about this odd behaviour of personal failure I notice there is a plethora of advice out there on this subject of goal setting, goal achievement etc. And it still keeps coming, as evidenced in Ray's book review below.

Isn't goal setting a fundamental of life to get from where we are to where we want to be? Is it that we become too ambitious with a list as long as your arm that causes failure? Apparently, the more resolutions / goals we make the more likely we are to break them. So focus on the priorities, weight loss? Oh not again!

My suggestion is that there are only four key elements for success.

One that people do things for a reason, THEIR reason whatever that may be. So all this advice and guidance may be excess effort if people haven't worked out what they really want first. Which brings me to the second element – energy. There is a need to have a passion, energy, emotion to do it. Then we come to the big issue of commitment to see it through knowing full well we will experience distractions, setbacks and well it's easier to stay where I am, overweight! And the fourth. It is very rare we can do anything without support: resources to help get us to where we want to be.

How does this fit to the real thing? Back to South Parks and the sledge run. People get on the sledge for their reason in conditions of being wet and cold and to many of us "They must be mad". Maybe they have aspirations of being the next Lizzy Yarnold MBE, Olympic Gold Medallist.

If they are lucky and arrive at the bottom and many don't, they need their energy to pull the sledge back or in one case of a four year old who insisted on the support of his father to pull the sledge to the top. The energy is needed to keep going even when they fall off, hurting with pain and embarrassment, I am sure in her preparation for what appears to be a treacherous event Lizzy has fallen off a few times and of course learnt from this, yet still musters the energy to carry on.



I wonder what Lizzy is thinking when she launches herself onto the skinny piece of carbon and hurtles perilously down the track. There is no turning back, she can't think halfway down "This is not for me." That's commitment, with only the shifting of her position on the skeleton sledge is she able to steer the fine line to success. Is this not the same when we are steering towards our goals continuously making adjustments to ensure success without turning back?

Of course Lizzy has not attained her amazing achievements on her own, physio's to tend to those bruises, sledge technicians to make the sledge go faster and, dare I mention, coaches to support her to attain remarkable success

We can but try? In the words of Samuel Beckett "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." So, when 30 February comes around create your reason, build up your energy, get committed, align your support and do your BEST.

Book review

3 books, each relevant to goals…

Get Productive! Boosting Your Productivity and Getting Things Done, Magdalena Bak-Maier, Capstone, 2012

Recently reviewed in the Association For Coaching Bulletin, *Get Productive!* Is "dedicated to those who value and commit to showing up in life with authenticity, courage and passion, those who want to share their skills/gifts with the world…". It is a highly practical guide, with reflective questions and exercises to help us find our real values, needs, wants and priorities, discover what personal productivity feels like, and take action.

Make Your Brain Work: How to Maximise Your Efficiency, Productivity and Effectiveness, Amy Brann, Kogan Page, 2013

Three characters go on their learning journey with the help of a coach. Illustrated with engaging diagrams, cartoons, stories, and experiments, this book offers insights from recent discoveries in neuroscience to enable the reader to "think your way to success instead of mindlessly doing the same old things over and over again."

The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results, Gary Keller with Jay Papasan, John Murray, 2013

As an antidote to the mythical, unattainable benefits of self-discipline and multi-tasking this book invites us to "master what matters" by focussing on the one thing that is most important now. How do we discover it? "How we phrase the questions we ask ourselves determines the answers that eventually become our life."

March 2015

Holding the Coaching Space.....

Coaches have lots to do. Besides attending to conversational context, content, style, purpose, process, the coaching contract, confidentiality - and to finding attractive, secure places in which to meet, the coach must hold the 'space' in which the coaching conversation takes place; the coaching space.

Physical space surrounds coach and coachee. The energetic space holds the state of relationship between them through its quality of atmosphere. Trust, understanding and connectedness exist both within and *between* the participants. This between-ness is the vital bit, the bit you and I can sense *together*; the energetic space.

This is where our personal fields can merge with empathy and rapport, or can distance with freeze, fight or flight responses. The space opens with positive, affirmative emotion or it closes down with negative, aggressive ones. We actively create the energetic space as we develop our understanding and relationship, and need to keep fully aware of it. For this space arbitrates the ease and potential of the conversation that coach and coachee can have, because of the emotional currents that play through it. The space in which we talk needs to be appreciative in character, if we are going to get anywhere interesting and productive.

But what to do when tough, highly charged or ugly issues erupt? They act to close the space, yet they have to be discussed – can only be discussed effectively – in a space that is appreciative, empathetic and courageous. If there's a shouting match (rare, but it happens), how does the coach also keep the space open and enabling, for the sake of the coachee's learning and reflection – and, most likely, too, for the sake of the contract?

Maintaining the coaching space tests the coach's own emotional resilience and wisdom. The inner qualities of listening, feedback, empathy, reflection and understanding that the coach has developed and honed within her/himself, and which they rely upon to hold the coaching space with requisite courage and integrity.

Alchemy put this to the test repeatedly with our participants during our fifteen month programme, In Search of Wisdom and Mastery. Along with the orderly – beautiful - design, principles and progression of the programme content, came space invasions from the messy, unpredictable roller-coaster of feelings, instincts, convictions and behaviours that fourteen human beings, faculty and participants, have about them.

Attending consciously, reflectively and sincerely to our energetic space, we collectively coached ourselves forward in the programme, getting past blunders and pitfalls, and sharing triumphs, to finish with a collective Academy which has transcended all of our early expectations.

A further dimension to this business of holding space is non-locality. Face to face presence is ideal, yet often far from practical. As electronic communications have developed, so has the human capacity to hold 'virtual' space. We can learn to behave and communicate 'as if' we were actually present with one another. This needs conscious focus and preparation, and demands emotional maturity and intentional integrity among participants. When achieved, as has come about with an international project this writer is engaged upon, the creative outputs can prove to be exceptionally effective. But this will have to wait for another Base Metal.

So a robust, resourceful and resilient coaching space can hold hopes, fears, dreams, passions, disappointments, frustrations, hubris, anger, tears, hilarity, remorse, insight, learning and compassion to produce creative conversations.

When fully attuned, the participants and the space merge; it feels as if the conversation is happening within a transparent vessel, a positive container of confidence and inquiry.

Book review

Two books, touching on space and attunement…

Open Space Technology - A User's Guide, Harrison Owen, Third Edition, Berrett-Koehler, 2008

Originator of *Open Space Technology* Harrison Owen writes for facilitators, offering "a very simple way to enable more effective and productive meetings". In this third edition he provides "much that is new, including a fuller description of holding space – what it means and how to do it". This includes the importance and use of intuition. He explores creating and holding time and space safely as both practical and subjective means to aid human interaction. Whilst the facilitator has much to do, influenced by cultural and individual difference, *being* rather than doing is the heart of the matter. The quality of a facilitator's presence is applicable for a coach.

Coaching Relationships – the relational coaching field book, edited by Erik de Haan and Charlotte Sills, Libri Publishing, 2012

This book focuses on the nature of executive coaching relationships, and the "…importance of here-and-now relating". Twenty authors contribute across five parts, addressing: introducing relational coaching in practice; radical perspectives; contracting and monitoring; inquiring; and quantitative research. In Part Four John Nuttall quotes W.A. Ward in *Leadership - with a human touch (1999)*: "We must be silent before we can listen …listen before we can learn … learn before we can prepare …prepare before we can serve …serve before we can lead."

April 2015

Our own coach development journey

The Alchemy team have given a lot of thought to coach development over the past few months. In this article we want to share some of our ideas, thoughts, reflections and questions to encourage you to do the same.

Whilst there are any number of ways to learn and develop we want to explore four here. They are Supervision, Reflection, Local Coaching groups and Volunteer roles. We have deliberately left out training as this is such a large subject that it would need its own article!

Supervision. This is a requirement for all of the professional coaching bodies. The resistance to having a supervisor has certainly diminished over the past decade as I can remember the majority of coaches questioning its value twenty years ago. Rather than debate its value here, we want much more to look and explore the potential learning that comes from Supervision and how we can apply that learning in our practice. We pose some questions and we encourage you to really challenge yourself in your answers.

- **What aspects of your coaching do you take to supervision?**
- **What do you learn about yourself during your supervision sessions?**
- **What insights do you gain about your coachees and your coaching relationships?**
- **How do you apply these learnings?**
- **Could you do more to both learn and apply your learning?**

Reflection. As with supervision, many of the accreditation processes require some form of reflective writing. Some coaches find this difficult. We have read a number of examples of 'reflection' that are more descriptive than reflective. In our view the purpose of reflective writing is seeking to get people to explore, be curious, to consider what is going on and how and what they might learn and develop. We know a number of coaches who regularly write down their reflections after coaching sessions or consciously spend time being reflective. These are enormously powerful learning opportunities and bring a number of benefits. Greater self-awareness, deeper insights, increased possibilities, areas for development and greater understanding about the coaching process. What do you do from a reflective perspective? **Could you and should you do more?**

Local Coaching groups. We have been surprised by how many coaches are not attending coaching groups. In no way do we wish to propose that participation in a local community of practice should be a requirement like supervision or reflective writing; we would like to suggest that coaches might be missing out on valuable learning opportunities. All of the Alchemy team are in various groups from which we gain different benefits. Let us outline some benefits of the different group.

1. A group that meets every five months [to avoid falling into a pattern] for a whole day. There is no pre-determined agenda and one is created on the day. This offers plenty of scope for variety and depth of discussion. It also requires individuals to take responsibility for getting what they want from the meetings

2. A local group that meets six or seven times a year, usually with a topic and speaker or facilitator for a three hour session on a Friday morning. This group has lots of members and so sharing and networking are enormously valuable plus the well organised and engaging content parts of the programme.

3. A local group that meets on a Monday evening once a month, sometimes with a speaker and sometimes for co-coaching. This group differs from examples 1 and 2 in meeting in the evening and including co-coaching.

There are other forms of groups out there. **Are you making the most of the opportunities that are available in your area?**

Volunteer roles. Two of the Alchemy team have volunteer roles in one of the professional coaching bodies and we both know how much we gain from this commitment. These roles allow us to meet and work with other coaches, help to explore new ideas for the coaching profession and to support others already in the profession. Our learning is very varied and the friendships invaluable. **Could you give some of your time and so gain some benefit for your own coaching?**

Are you doing enough for your own development?

Book review

"Supervision in Coaching: Supervision, Ethics and Continuous Professional Development"

Edited by Jonathan Passmore, Association for Coaching series, Kogan Page, 2011

Twenty-eight authors contribute seventeen chapters to this compilation. In her Foreword Katherine Tulpa, CEO and Founding Chair of the Association for Coaching, sets out the intent of the volume: "to embrace the different approaches used within this important area so readers can see the different perspectives, and choose what is most suitable for their practices." The book has an introduction by the editor and is then organised in four parts: approaches to supervision; coaching ethics and the law (including data protection); continuous professional development; and personal reflection. As coaching grows across the world the international context of regulation, practice and research becomes a consideration: the final chapter includes case studies from the UK, Europe and the USA.

The book is pertinent to this month's Base Metal discussion, addressing the value of supervision, CPD and reflection for the coach's learning and professional practice. Some of the contributors describe barriers to learning and suggestions for overcoming these. As none of the several books I had previously consulted in this area touch on accreditation, I was pleased to find reference to it here, albeit very briefly, in the introduction and in the chapter on CPD by David Hain, Philippa Hain and Lisa Matthewman; they offer guidance on where to find coach training and qualifications and reference is made to the various established trade bodies which represent the field.

May 2015

Silence

Using silence is a powerful aspect of coaching. It can be used as a component of 'holding the coaching space', as a means of asking questions – especially when used in conjunction with non-verbal signals such as raised eyebrows or a gesture; as a space to provide time to think – for the coach and coachee; and as a part of building the right rapport.

As with other interpersonal interactions pauses in speech can help to emphasise points and give all parties a few moments to gather their thoughts before continuing. Pausing can be especially important when coaching people with an Introvert character who like time to think before responding. So here I have been terribly tempted – and will follow this through – by leaving a 'silence' space: I ask you to imagine this as an opportunity to think about your own response to silence!

How long a silence are you comfortable with?

A space for silence…

A pause of at least three seconds before a question can help to emphasise the importance of what is being asked. A three second pause directly after a question can also be advantageous; it can prevent the questioner from immediately asking another question and indicates to the respondent that a response is required.

Pausing again after an initial response can encourage the respondent to continue with their answer in more detail. Pauses of less than three seconds have been proven to be less effective.

I would like to outline the exercise that I was asked to do that really had me thinking about, and then learning to use, silence more skilfully. It was at an evening session exploring the 'Power of silence'. As an exercise the facilitator asked us, in threes - one talker, one coach and the third an observer - to have the talker speak for seven to eight minutes about a topic that was concerning them (a sort of 'coaching topic'). The Coach was asked not to speak at all - not even to introduce themselves or get the session going. The observer had the usual passive watching role. As the coach I found it felt very unnatural. At the end the facilitator asked for our reactions. Many said that as coachee they had resolved their concerns and the process followed a remarkably consistent pattern. Five or so minutes talking about the 'problem', then a long uncomfortable pause; and then they really addressed the important issue and found a way forward. When we repeated the exercise and were allowed to speak or ask questions there was some evidence that the coaches became less helpful because they ran the risk of forcing the coachee off down avenues that were not necessarily as beneficial as the coachee deciding where to go entirely unaided.

This use of silence is an important part of Nancy Kline's "Time to Think" approach, which Ray has reviewed below. I encourage you all to try using silence more than you imagine might be helpful. Experiment in safe arenas, even try out the exercise that I have mentioned. You might be very surprised by its power.

Book review

"Time to Think - Listening to Ignite the Human Mind", Nancy Kline, Cassell, 1999

"More Time to Think - A Way of Being in the World", Nancy Kline, Fisher King, 2009

Informed by her proposition that the quintessential aspect of human nature is to think for ourselves, in "Time to Think" Nancy Kline offers a system of ten components to provide "A Thinking Environment". Essential to this way of being and behaving are the quality of our attention for each other and of our listening. Anathema to it are our limiting assumptions and the giving of advice. In service to a thinking society, she explores the vital importance of the model for health, education, politics, relationships and family life - and for executive coaching.

In "More Time to Think", she offers the theory and philosophy which underpins the model; how to use it in practice, in pairs and groups; examples of how it is being put into effect; the role of paradox in independent thinking; research references and a bibliography; comments on the role of mediation and of meditation; and seven examples of questions "that will wake you up".

These books are increasingly familiar to and valued by coaches, for whom listening is at the heart of practice.

June 2015

Integrating

A few years ago I had a conscious encounter with myself as a fragmented person. (During a ceremony of indigenous wisdom.) I felt my heart and aspirations in one direction, and my practice, actions and endeavours in another. They didn't mix properly. The conscious clarity came as a shock, though inwardly I had known it. I soon discovered this is

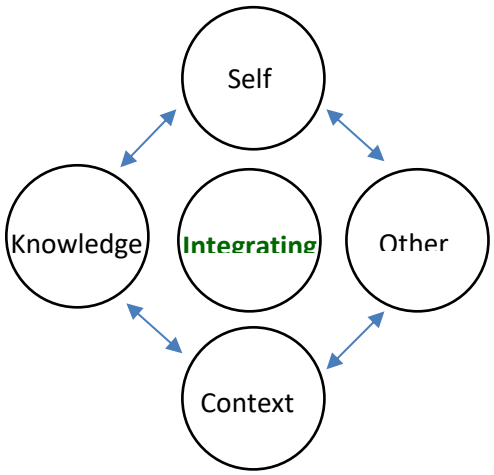
hardly a rare human experience. And I had imagined myself a person of integrity.

Integrity is often defined as honesty, wholeness and a consistent embodiment of moral principles. In coaching, we believe, it is worth unpacking the integrating process, to learn more about it and to discover how it comes about at a higher or deeper level.

Integrating, successfully, all our skills, capabilities, competencies and experiences is key to becoming a great coach. Integrating is much more than just lumping things together. It is about creating an effective pool of knowledge, understanding, experience, judgement and intuition so that we can be truly innovative and responsive to our coachee's needs. This 'pool' can seem a bit of a mystery: How does it happen? Who stirs the ingredients into the holistic soup? What's the magic?

Let us explore the challenge of integrating through a number of lenses.

Firstly, using the **SOCK-I** diagram



The central area of our **SOCK-I** model is **Integrating**. All four of the outer elements are key. We need to understand them all so that we use them wisely. We might ask ourselves a series of questions that can be related to each element before we even consider **Integrating** them.

Do I understand enough about these elements?

Which are my strengths and where are my gaps or weak areas?

What more do I need to learn or improve at and how will I do this?

Then we can address the **Integrating** part. Which of these 4 elements do you integrate most effectively and where are you falling short? What could you do about this - and what will you do?

Secondly – how do we integrate our experience? Most coaches, as we develop and become more experienced, unconsciously draw on ideas and intuition based on what has worked for us in the past.

So how do we Integrate our experiences *consciously* into our subsequent coaching? Awareness and reflection play a key part in this process, and so does thoughtful experimentation. Sometimes we will try out something completely new that we have learned or seen someone else use successfully.

A key thing for us is to *practice* the process of consciously integrating experience and new ideas - and our programme creates extra opportunities for doing so with our learning colleagues.

Could you do more? Should you do more?

A third view of **Integrating** is the idea of utilising the whole person whilst coaching - that we are fully present with everything we have and can use whilst coaching. So we can bring in all of our intelligence, our feelings, our reflections, our empathising etc. The list is a long one. Some would say that when coaching we are an empty vessel, there just to assist the coachee. Whilst the Alchemy team agree with the second point – we are there to assist the coachee - we believe that we are not there as an empty vessel. We are there as an authentic whole. The more that we can bring this person effectively to our coaching the better coach we will be. It seems absurd to imagine that we are anything but there as a whole person. It feels like we might be kidding ourselves if we ignore our own feelings, ideas and experience. How we use these wisely is a much more important question. As we search for wisdom and mastery as a coach **Integrating** all our skills, capabilities, competencies and experiences is a critical developmental aim. By Integrating everything we give ourselves the chance to exercise 'magic' with our coachees.

We encourage you to think about how you do your **Integrating**. Could you do it better? How might you take some bigger risks with what and how you integrate?

Book review

"Integral Life Practice: a 21st Century Blueprint for Physical Health, Emotional Balance, Mental Clarity and Spiritual Awakening" by Ken Wilber, Terry Patten, Adam Leonard and Marco Morelli, Integral Books, 2008

Since David Bohm wrote in 1980 about quantum science in "Wholeness and the Implicate Order" and Ken Wilbur in 2001 summarised his integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality in "A Theory of Everything", many more titles have appeared addressing the possibilities for holistic understanding and higher consciousness. In 2013 Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer produced "Leading from the Emerging Future: from Ego-System to Eco-System Economies". 2014 saw Frederick Laloux's "Re-inventing Organizations - a Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness": a book offering practical examples from three decades of emergent ways of thinking and working. Such contributions have a powerful influence on how we can engage with complexity and address challenges which seem impervious to current intelligence. Yet if we are to make a real difference we require new ways of being with ourselves and others, rooted in personal practice which changes behaviour and relationships. "Integral Life Practice" offers a handbook from which to begin to examine, clarify and strengthen vision, core values, life purpose and behaviours. This work is inspired by Michael Murphy and George Leonard, and by Clare Graves who proposed that the individual in second tier development "goes through a momentous leap of meaning". Anthony Robbins describes the book as "provocative and accessible … definitive…for your journey to an awakened life". Coaches may wish to read it!

July 2015

Metaphor

This month we want to explore and consider the use of metaphor when coaching. We will look at this topic from two contrasting angles. Firstly from the perspective of the coachee, paying special attention to the ideas of Symbolic Modelling, and secondly from the perspective of the coach. You might like to look back at the book review from August 2014 where Metaphors in Mind was reviewed.

Almost everyone uses metaphor in one way or another. Many years ago whilst on a clean language course I said that I didn't use metaphor (more an illustration of my poor understanding of English language!!!). Several minutes later a good friend commented "you have used four or five metaphors in the past few sentences!" This came as quite a shock and opened my eyes to the fact that I and most others use metaphors to describe many things. We use metaphors to understand and make sense of the world we live in and our experiences within it. "Metaphor", as defined in the Penguin English dictionary, is "*n.* figure of speech implying but not explicitly stating a comparison between two objects or actions".

So, let's begin with the use of metaphor from the coachee's view through the lens of Symbolic Modelling. The coachee generally uses metaphor to connect with a pattern that has significance to them by relating one set of events to another to help understand and process what is going on. Some of this might be conscious and some will undoubtedly be unconscious. Metaphor contains some remarkable characteristics. Whilst we might not understand everything within the metaphor we know that it is significant and this is what makes it important. A metaphor can describe a verbal, nonverbal, material or imaginative idea. It is this richness that underpins its value.

As the coachee is using metaphor to help them understand and make sense of things it is vital that the coach respects and reflects the choice of metaphor by using the coachee's exact words and descriptions.

This is why 'clean language' techniques are so important when working consciously with the metaphors the coachee uses.

So, some questions to ponder:

"How well do I recognise that the coachee is using metaphor to make sense of things?"

"To what extent do I recognise that using the coachee's exact words and phrases is really important in helping them to explore what is going on?"

- leading me, if I wish to understand the use of metaphor better, to consider:

"How much might I benefit from learning more about the techniques and ideas behind Clean Language?"

Our second perspective on the use of metaphor is how the coach might employ it to describe situations or experiences designed to help the coachee. When we share experiences, stories and ideas we will often use metaphor as our means of making a connection. So:

"How when coaching do I use metaphors - and is this always in best service of my coachees?"

"Do I use them to illustrate a point?"

"Do I use them to illustrate examples that I choose to bring to a coaching session?"

"What is the risk that I use metaphors to suit myself rather than being explicitly to the benefit of the coachee?"

To summarise. Metaphors provide a powerful way to understand and explore our experiences. As coach am I using them to best effect and what development might I want to consider as I contemplate metaphor?

Book review

"The Happiness Hypothesis - Putting Ancient Wisdom and Philosophy to the Test of Modern Science" Jonathan Haidt, Arrow Books, 2006

In *Developmental Coaching* (*reviewed, November 2013*) Tatiana Bachkirova explores stories of 'the self', and how these stories can help us as coaches, at one point quoting William James's "metaphor of a herd and herdsman … there is no permanent herdsman", and at another Guy Claxton: "Language cuts the world up, though the world itself is seamless and systemic". She introduces an analogy of the rider - the conscious mind, and the elephant - the rest of the organism, and acknowledges that she has "borrowed this metaphor from Haidt".

This led me to read "The Happiness Hypothesis" in which Jonathan Haidt writes "Human thinking depends on metaphor" and introduces his elephant and rider representation to help in describing his weakness of will: "when the elephant really wants to do something, I am no match for him" - reminding me of the unruly wild beast in Dr. Steve Peters' "The Chimp Paradox".

Alluding to Edwin Abbot's "Flatland", Haidt alerts us to the limitations of our understanding, and what is possible when something happens to give us "our first glimpse of another dimension". My experience of coaching and of being coached is characterised by such disturbing, revelatory or liberating glimpses.

In Haidt's introduction, entitled "Too Much Wisdom", he concludes: "Words of Wisdom, the meaning of life, perhaps even the answer sought… all of these wash over us every day but they can do little for us unless we savour them, engage with them, question them, improve them, and connect them to our lives. That is the goal". This book is resonant with "The Alchemy of Coaching: Towards Wisdom and Mastery": I warmly recommend it.

August 2015

The coaching container – a crucible?

When we sat down to think about this article we wondered what had prompted the title! [Senior moments seem to be coming more often nowadays!!] It obviously has connections to 'holding the coaching space', to 'integration' and 'metaphor' all of which we had written about recently. What new angle was there?

The Alchemy name and programme were derived from the age old idea of 'base metal into gold'. The ancient scientists used a crucible as their vessel to try to achieve this outcome. In a metaphorical way what is the crucible that the coach is using and what is the coach attempting to achieve?

Achieve

- some form of transformation with the coachee
- a level of change and progress they would not achieve on their own: change, learning or development
- to make a difference
- to learn for themselves (the coach)

Crucible

- a strong and trusting relationship – a genuine partnership
- an effective coaching space that enables challenge and encouragement
- to bring all their skill, knowledge and experience to play effectively

Let's look at each of these bullets and pose some questions for exploration.

Achieve

We can think of transformation with a capital T or a small t. A capital T transformation is something really or very significant to the coachee and might describe the coach's deliberate intent in their approach. A small t transformation might be more akin to the third bullet where the coach seeks more broadly to make a difference with and for the coachee.

Q. To what extent do you set out to achieve transformational change in your coaching? Is it a part of your general approach and how do you contract for it if it is a part of your approach?

Q. How do you measure or quantify change with your coachee?

Q. How do you measure, monitor or consider your part in helping achieve change or learning or development?

Q. If circumstances change during a session or assignment how do you re-contract?

Crucible

The metaphor of the crucible is a good one for the coaching space, relationship, partnership or connection between coach and coachee. Without this effective set up it is generally considered difficult to achieve good outcomes - certainly those transformational ones posited above.

Q. How much time and effort do you explicitly put into creating the relationship and coaching space?

Q. How well do you hold the coaching space whilst both encouraging and challenging? Could you do this better?

In the article in the March edition of Base Metal we wrote about Integration – a feature that the Alchemy team believe is crucial for really effective and masterful coaching.

Q. How well do you integrate all your training, knowledge and experience?

The idea of the crucible is evocative. It paints a picture through word and image of a special container where special chemistry can occur and outstanding results might be achieved. Whilst a crucible does not do anything directly to deliver the coachee's outcome it does provide the essential container. Bounded (safe), conductive (heat/stretch), the melting pot is a place for reformation, fresh discovery and transformation.

Book review

"Facilitating Organizational Change - Lessons from Complexity Science" by Edwin E. Olsen and Glenda H. Eoyang, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001

In this book, addressing best practice in Organisation Development through a frame of complex adaptive systems, the authors describe the part played by a container, whether physical, organisational or conceptual, which sets the bounds for the self-organising system. "A *container* establishes the semi-permeable boundary within which the change occurs [and] new relationships and structures form over time." They assert that "Just as a person needs time and space to incubate thoughts before a new idea can emerge, a system needs a bounded space for the emergence of new patterns." 'Trust' and 'safety', 'a good story' and 'right words' are characteristic of an effective container.

Their OD perspective prompts us to make an analogy with the container provided by the coaching relationship: a type of incubator for the development of the coachee. Relevant, too, is their account of the personal qualities of the change agent "such as humour, perspective, warmth, analytical rigour, and intuition". They propose a metaphor of the change agent "kneading the dough" - a connection with craft skills. Thus, as we ponder the nature of mastery and wisdom in coaching and venture to seek insights from other fields, we may find our way to "a beautiful little book about human excellence (New York Times)"

September 2015

Clean Language

Clean Language has gained widespread application over the past few years. It is based on pioneering work in the 1980s and 1990s by David Grove, a New Zealand psychotherapist, who created a new method of treatment for traumatic memories. He asked his clients questions of their metaphors by using what he called Clean Language which did not contaminate or distort what they said. His successful practice in clinical settings was studied and modelled by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins and, together with elements of cognitive linguistics, self-organising systems theory and NLP, informs their approach to personal change, described in their book "Metaphors in Mind - Transformation Through Symbolic Modelling". Clean Language has now spread into a wide variety of business environments, spawning Clean Coaching, Clean Meetings and Clean Space. It has been championed by Wendy Sullivan, Judy Rees and Caitlin Walker.

Clean Language is focused on 'enabling' principles rather than the more traditional 'manipulative' methods of influence where bias, persuasion and self-interest often come into play. It is based, at its core, on the coach using the coachee's exact language and vocabulary to ensure that the coach does not bring in their own interpretation and so, unintentionally or deliberately, distort the thinking of the coachee. Clean Language is a questioning technique used especially for discovering, exploring and working with people's own images and personal metaphors. The word 'metaphor' here refers to thinking

or expressing something in terms of a different concept or image. For example if someone says, "It's like..." or "It's as if…" then the next thing they say will probably be a metaphor.

David Grove's work was also influenced by his discovery that by focussing on the positive more successful outcomes were achieved. In his Clean Language he used an opening question, five developing questions and three specialist entry questions. Wendy Sullivan and Judy Rees have extended these to offer twelve questions grouped under three headings: Developing; Sequence and Source; and Intention. These twelve questions are set out below where X represents the word(s) of the coachee:

Developing Questions

"(And) what kind of X (is that X)?"

"(And) is there anything else about X?"

"(And) where is X? or (And) whereabouts is X?"

"(And) that's X like what?"

"(And) is there a relationship between X and Y?"

"(And) when X, what happens to Y?"

Sequence and Source Questions

"(And) then what happens? or (And) what happens next?"

"(And) what happens just before X?"

"(And) where could X come from?"

Intention Questions

"(And) what would X like to have happen?"

"(And) what needs to happen for X?"

"(And) can X (happen)?"

These clean questions are a means for coaches to use their client's exact language to help them as they go about sense making on their own terms. With this principle in mind I can consider:

- How often do I, without sufficient awareness, unconsciously ask questions that are not 'clean' and so introduce some element of my own agenda?
- How often do I alter or distort what the coachee is saying and influence their thinking by using my own, different, language and metaphors?
- How often do my questions or challenges actually stop the client thinking along their own lines?

What can I do to better align with my client's thinking, language and behaviour patterns?

Book review

"Clean Language: Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds", Wendy Sullivan, Judy Rees, Crown House, 2008

James Lawley and Penny Tompkins produced "Metaphors in Mind" in 2000, offering Symbolic Modelling as a means to bring the theory and practice of David Grove's Clean Language to therapists and coaches. Grove had asked himself how he could work with other people's metaphors without bringing his own metaphors into the conversation. He invented clean questions which rely on the words of the client. In

2008 Wendy Sullivan and Judy Rees followed on with their handbook for using Clean Language as a tool for effective communication.

They believe this method will be of value to "coaches, mentors, consultants, managers, health professionals, parents, teachers, journalists, salespeople…" In their Foreword Lawley and Tompkins extend this to include "researcher and subject, into team meetings, organisation development and many other areas". The book is an introduction; a reference guide for beginners; and a resource for experienced facilitators. The sixteen chapters include Getting Started, Great Questions, The Magic of Metaphor, Attending Exquisitely, Modelling Cleanly, and Clean Success Stories. Extensive references are provided. Appendices provide the Basic and Specialised Clean Language Questions. In praise of the book psychotherapist Philip Harland writes "An excellent, thorough, thoughtful, easy to follow, well-structured manual that starts with the basics and builds up to some quite advanced techniques." For NLP Trainer Toby McCartney it is "The communicator's bible".

October 2015

Neuro Linguistic Programming and coaching

There are many definitions of NLP, such as "how we do what we do", "studying what works", "the subjective nature and structure of experience", "modelling excellence in any field", "how habits, language patterns and strategies produce results", "learning how to learn", "presuppositions – *what if* assumptions about the world".

Common to all of these descriptions is the attention to 'how'. NLP can help us to develop our ability to notice patterns in human behaviour and communication, to examine and test these patterns and so to effect desired changes. Habitual ways of acting, in our internal and external communication, can be studied. How others achieve outcomes can be observed and investigated, for example by discovering what they think, feel and believe as they do so. Practitioners can assist me to become more aware of these strategies in myself. NLP is primarily concerned with structure and process; through identifying structure and noticing patterns I can choose to think, feel and speak differently. With improved acuity - keenness and accuracy of vision and thought - I can gain greater rapport - tuning into connection with others. Such quality of connection can enable greater awareness and respect for difference, improved collaboration and more effective teamwork.

NLP is derived from observation and study of what works, and has grown into an eclectic agglomeration of many tools and techniques which are used in therapeutic and developmental ways. A comparison could be made with *Appreciative Inquiry* which is used to study what works in communities and institutions so that successes and strengths can be replicated, amplified and deployed; NLP is a similar approach to positive development with individuals and relationships. Despite some scepticism and critique for its magic and mystique and lack of scientific validation it has become widely known and used and is increasingly adopted in organisations to enable development and improve performance.

There are resonances between NLP and systems thinking, systemic constellations, cognitive behavioural therapy, positive psychology, multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence and spiritual development. Unsurprisingly, NLP is a resource for coaches. Indeed, some coaches are certified as NLP coaches and adopt an NLP approach to their coaching. Others have been trained in NLP and incorporate some of the frameworks and tools of NLP in their practice. Training courses in NLP can now be found with explicit links to neuroscience as developments in this field become more pertinent to coaching. NLP information is widely available through a very extensive range of books, web references, seminars and qualification courses.

What elements of NLP are most used in coaching and how are they valuable? What do you think?

An NLP Practitioner programme designed particularly for coaches included, amongst more:

- Using timelines; using the NLP presuppositions - as if…
- managing personal state - e.g. anchoring resourceful states
- developing sensory acuity - e.g. calibrating states; creating, maintaining and breaking rapport
- recognising representational systems and sub-modalities and how to change these
- eliciting motivational and behavioural strategies including conscious and unconscious preferences
- use of language and metaphor, e.g. meta model and hypnotic patterns; clean language
- exploring beliefs and values and enabling belief change; reframing and creative strategies
- eliciting well-formed wanted outcomes - taking account of meta-programmes
- modelling excellence; accessing support; future pacing to test for sustainable change
- maintaining a learning journal and attending a practice group

Do you use some of these in your coaching? Do any of them prompt your curiosity to find out more?

Book review

"NLP Coaching - An evidence-based approach for coaches, leaders and individuals," Susie Linder-Pelz, Kogan Page, 2010

NLP can be compared to Marmite: there are those who love it and those who hate it, or at least are sceptical. Practitioners can be certified as NLP coaches; some designate themselves explicitly as an NLP coach, others adopt ideas and tools from NLP. This book sets out to define NLP coaching, identify what is distinctive about it, and tackle the question "Is it a valid methodology?" With the rapid growth of NLP in use, and many anecdotes of success from practitioners and clients, behavioural researchers and psychologists have begun to inquire into what NLP is and whether it works. Increasing emphasis on evidence based disciplines has prompted a growing demand for scientific studies of NLP, which is reflected both in this book and in increased attention to rigorous studies by the Association for NLP. Comparisons between NLP and cognitive behavioural therapy and recent developments in neuroscience have intensified the interest in investigating NLP.

Taking a researcher-practitioner perspective, the author offers an introduction; three themed sets of chapters - *NLP and coaching*; *An evidence-based approach to NLP coaching*; and *Towards best practice;* and conclusion. Along the way she addresses how the "magic" of NLP can be explained in relation to its structure; how the NLP coach is process-driven; how modelling is at the core of NLP practice; and competency-based NLP coach training. She also considers how scientific research and rigorous research are not necessarily the same thing – citing complexity theory and embodied subjective experience. She asserts that NLP coaching deserves to be taken seriously and to be further studied. The work is richly referenced with chapter notes and bibliography.

November 2015

The Role of Narrative in Coaching

As articulate beings, we humans are creatures of narrative. An array of narrative threads is woven tightly into the tapestry of each and every life. Through telling – and being told - our stories to ourselves and with others, we create and develop our distinctive personal identities.

Indeed, the health of my 'core' narrative can stand for the health and value of my life to me, my family and to the groups, tribes and nations with whom I associate. My career history forms a key part of my story, but can never be more than a dry summary of my life - shorthand notes from which the narrative can spring alive.

As coaches we are alert to the qualities and states of narrative expressed in each of our coachees. What is it about the way this person speaks, the events they chose to speak of, that typifies their being, their self-perceived reality, potential and limitations? How am I as coach relating to what I hear, and what influence might this be having?

For the coach has just as much of a narrative as the coachee, and it needs to be clear in any and every conversation which threads the current narrative is pursuing in this coaching event. And there are currents and undercurrents to every narrative to be listened to.

My client tells me the over-current story of their role in the organisation, their objectives and the issues they are tackling, the relationships they depend upon and those they find difficult, the pressures that bear, the opportunities they are grasping. It's real, clear, important. The telling is valuable and revealing.

At the same time they are telling an undercurrent story about the state of their humanity, existential predicaments and aspirations, and other hints of what may lie in their own and others' shadow narratives. There can be counter-currents, too. (I remember a time early in my career when I undermined my own performance, to face the reality that I *had* to change my job!)

So, how many narratives am I hearing in this conversation? And what kind of narratives are they? Tight and inflexible, loose and adaptable? Mythic or prosaic? Proprietary or second-hand? Passionate or mundane? If heroic, is it truly so, or an experiment, a kind of inner game of bluff? And what is the quality of my assessment of each narrative – what comparisons am I making, and are they legitimate?

Just as there are many narratives in a person, each narrative has its voice. Often our job as coach is to hear the unheard voice(s). When collective culture is looking for consonance among the voices, those at variance may go unheard. Whether this matters usually depends upon context; variety of narrative and of narrative voices is certainly necessary for resourcefulness and resilience. This is especially true for questions of leadership: telling the story forward in terms of vision, potential and inspiration for what is possible and needed and how it can be attained.

How, as a coach, do I hold my own story? How do I tell it? In how many voices – parental, adult and child-like? My stories of experience, of growing and becoming, of the realisation of who I am and can be, have their presence within me. I don't need to tell them to my coachees unless they are in some incidental way helpful; but I do need to have mastered my own narrative to be present with the narratives of others. And I can discover and pace the state of my mastery in regular supervision, and as I am gifted in each conversation with the magic and mysteries of ever-unfolding human stories!

Book review

"The New Story – Storytelling as a Pathway to Peace", Inger Lise Oelrich, Matador, 2015

This book is a personal account of the author's own path to storytelling, starting in Scandinavia and extending far beyond, as a means and contribution to peace and reconciliation in many parts of the world. It is also an introduction to the facilitation of storytelling. Woven throughout are many examples of ancient and more recent stories - from Egypt, Greece, Israel, Iraq, India, Kurdistan, Poland, China, North America, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Scotland. At the end are sections on sources, contributors and relevant organisations.

The exercises described throughout the text are practical and easy to follow, allowing both those new to storytelling and the more experienced to conduct a generative event. Readers are introduced to questions asked by the ALBA Peace Group, including how to create safe meeting places to allow people to breathe, listen, speak, see another perspective, respond to another's pain, let go of hate, create space for others, help to bring about real change. Such questions are for individuals and communities: we are encouraged to think of our own questions, to learn "new skills to heal the past, honour the present and create sustainable futures together… to develop and be creative, growing our humanity to embrace others, often very different from us".

December 2015

Rediscovering Wisdom

As systems of technology, livelihood, politics, economics, governance and belief interact faster, our inter-connected world gets more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Shifting weather and biological systems add a further twist. How are leaders and their coaches to respond wisely to unforeseeable and unknowable developments?

With far fewer numbers and very different technology, our tribal forebears met massive complexities of their survival with an inclusive process they called a Council. They needed the diversity of their intelligence and skills to survive against formidable odds. More than this – they needed the agreement and commitment of the whole tribe to the decisions they took.

Our ancestors found the learning necessary for their survival in the very circumstances that challenged them, and built their wisdom and praxis accordingly. They worked out a generative learning sequence that energised them with fresh insights and opportunities. The council pattern we inherit from them takes up a question of vital need in a circle of insistent, probing perspectives. Its sequence, *greatly simplified*, goes like this.

Begin with genius of spirit to envision powerful, desirable and necessary possibilities in relation to the initiating question. Next, look clearly and honestly at what actually is, the state of things now. Comparing these, what kind of a gap, what extent of unfulfilled need exists? How serious is this?

Next, what quality and scale of venture does this need call for? How hard is it, what obstacles are there? What is the responsibility? What demands upon motivation, trust, and perseverance?

And what is the pathway for this venture, what binds those who take it to fulfil it together? What narrative of meaning?

Then the question of resources. What sustains the journey? What has to be gathered for it, and what can be let go of to lighten the load? And when should the venture begin? What is the right timing for those involved, and in the wider flow and context of events?

In the final stage - having assessed the need, told forward the journey, gathered resources and looked into timing - comes commitment. Properly resourced, clearly committed action. An arrow of initiative and momentum that can carry the venture forward successfully. What is the true energy of this plan? Are all the participants effectively aligned? Is there integrity of undivided intention, principle and commitment in each element? Will it truly meet the identified need?

If any matters are still in doubt, the process can be strengthened in further rounds of council. Wisdom, in the context we are considering, becomes a matter of alive process and perspectives to evoke/provoke intuition, understanding and good action.

Knowledge, by contrast, comes from past learning. It is valuable for things that will repeat themselves. It can offer little or no help when matters get unpredictable.

What do you do, when you don't know what to do? (A favourite question among my colleagues.) This circumstance has been the crucible for stretching human capacity, the edge of learning, for millennia. When we respond, it calls us to a state of sensing; questing with all senses and faculties awakened at once. And it opens the remarkable range of intelligences that are available in everyone for inner discovery and a deeper, latent form of knowing.

The wisdom process is a bit like gardening, although it is gardening in human consciousness. Where there is much fertile ground yet to be tilled. Meg Wheatley has said, "We grow wise together." Our forebears practiced this. Maybe now is the time to play catch-up.

Book review

Blackfoot Physics, F. David Peat, Weiser Books, paperback edition 2005

David Peat brings an outsider's perspective - he has a PhD in theoretical physics - to indigenous North American cultures and languages and to "Native American metaphysics with its insistence upon relationship rather than object as the primary reality…". He explores distinct paradigms of the nature of the world and the place of humans held by Western scientists and Native American people, citing examples of profoundly damaging misunderstanding. "The context that gives a person's life meaning and identity" is experienced differently. "…interpretations always take place within a context of assumptions, ideas and social motivations that influence what a person does and sees."

"Native science cannot be separated from spirituality, art, ceremony, and the whole social order." "This book is intended to be a bridge and to provide people with a way of seeing things…differently… to begin to look at their own culture from a new perspective…and…develop a new sensitivity to the traditions and worldviews of Native Americans". "..the medicine wheel is more than a pattern of rocks, it is the relationship between the earth and cosmos, it is a circular movement, a process of healing, a ceremony, and a teaching". This book prompts us to "sit in a circle and listen to each other. Healing begins when we…show respect for another way of life and are willing to learn from it."

January 2016

The 5th BPS Special Group in Coaching Psychology European Conference – 10-11 December 2015

Ian and Ray attended most of this conference in London and ran a workshop on the second day. We thought that reporting on the themes of the conference, our learning from the event and a little about our workshop would be a good way to start Base Metal for 2016.

The conference had five keynote speeches and four themed streams: *Leadership, business and executive coaching psychology*, *Positive Psychology Coaching (including Resilience)*, *Tools and techniques in coaching psychology*, and *Learning in Action*. There were about 120 participants spread over the two days, a workshop with Dr Suzy Green the day before, and a delightful conference dinner on the evening between the conference days. Our workshop was a part of the Leadership stream. With such a multitude of keynotes, workshops and presentations offered, our comments come from the small number of sessions we attended.

Let us begin with the four keynote speeches that we heard. Helen Turnbull gave a very powerful input on our unconscious biases, titled "***Adjusting your Mirrors and Managing your Coaching Blind Spots: A perspective on diversity and inclusion".*** This was a fascinating keynote giving much pause for thought about just how much of what we do and think happens without conscious thought or mindful intent.

The final keynote of the first day was from Professor Roger Steare, titled "***Values-Based Leadership and Culture".*** It was another thought provoking input. He spoke powerfully about so many common business actions and processes really making little sense and frequently missing the point about engaging people and making best use of their skills and capabilities. He said "some things that organisations do are 'insane'". This was a very stimulating session to end Day 1. We thoroughly recommend that you listen to or attend a session when Roger is presenting or facilitating.

First thing on Day 2 Suzy Green outlined her historical perspective on the development of Positive Psychology, its place and its importance, entitled "**Positive Psychology & Coaching Psychology: Perfect partners creating a flourishing world**". Suzy is a very energetic person and so Day 2 began in a lively fashion. She made many informative references to significant initiatives and developments in her home country, Australia.

The final keynote was presented by Dr Tatiana Bachkirova, entitled "***Who shapes our identity as coaching psychologists?*** ". In this presentation she elaborated on her ground breaking work on **Self** that is outlined in her seminal book "Developmental Coaching".

We clearly had to pick and choose where we invested our time. On Day 1 I chose to attend a session by Ian Florance and Mary Watts, called ***"The lure of expertise and the importance of authenticity in leadership, executive and business coaching: Can coaches have personalities or are they good actors?"*** As I listened to them I became a little alarmed as they seemed to be covering very similar ground to the workshop Ray and I were scheduled to run on Day 2. When after this session I then listened to Helen Turnbull's keynote which covered similar ground I began to wonder if there was a hidden theme to the conference about how coaches take themselves into the coaching relationship, and how they present themselves in that relationship! This idea became clearer as we went to further sessions which approached this notion from a variety of angles.

As regular readers of Base Metal will know, the Alchemy team are very interested in how coaches approach their relationship with coachees. How do we bring ourselves appropriately to the relationship in skilful ways that enable us to bring our whole selves to our coaching and coaching relationships? Our workshop, in the afternoon of the second day, was entitled ***"The coach – an empty vessel in service of the client?"***. We aimed to explore with our participants the conscious, and perhaps unconscious, intentions they have when they coach; how we make judgements and decisions about what to do when coaching; and what 'empty vessel' might mean to us. These questions prompted some lively discussions, not least uncovering how differently the questions could be interpreted at the outset. For further information about our session please get in touch.

We found the conference stimulating and informative. This is the second year that Ray and I have taken part and contributed a session and each time we have enjoyed worthwhile and valuable learning and networking.

Book review

The Complete Handbook of Coaching, edited by Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck. Sage, 2nd ed, 2014

No pressure, then! Books with "total" or "complete" in the title raise expectations which can be hard to meet. This one makes an impressive impact through the contributions of more than forty highly experienced contributors from the UK, Australia and the USA. The appearance of a second edition of the

handbook within four years indicates the speed of change - and a rapid response by the editors to the useful question “what’s missing?” by the addition of more material on Cross Cultural Coaching, Health and Wellbeing, and Research. These themes build on those already represented: summaries of thirteen *Theoretical Approaches* to coaching; eleven *Genres and Contexts*; and five *Professional Practice Issues*; bracketed by a Foreword by David Megginson plus an Introduction by the editors and a Conclusion also by the editors. Numerous Figures and Tables and extensive thorough referencing support this comprehensive and valuable work as “a must for students and practitioners of coaching alike” (Dr Janice Russell).

February 2016

Coaching beyond words

Psychology has played a large part in shaping the theory and practice of coaching. Self, personality and the nature of the psyche are pervasive themes in coaching. Questioning, thinking and reflection are primary ingredients. Through the coaching conversation awareness is raised and clarified, choices become apparent and different actions can ensue. Change occurs through changing the conversation – the medium for most coaching. What other ways of coaching are there?

Coaching practice is responding to developments in describing and promoting emotional intelligence and to fresh discoveries about the brain and how we think, feel and behave. As we seek to keep up with the science we can examine how this relates to how we coach. Is my knowledge sound and up to date? What assumptions am I making? What changes are necessary? How do I find evidence for the contribution which my coaching makes? How might my coaching improve as I develop my skills to incorporate new knowledge?

The incidence and costs of stress, illness and absence from the workplace are attracting growing attention. Through the application of positive psychology and cognitive behavioural therapy and the adoption of practices of meditation and mindfulness, calm and quietness, resources are increasingly directed towards improvements in wellbeing. These developments are affecting the scope, nature and capability of coaching. How do I attend to my own state of wellbeing? What is my readiness to coach? How present and resourceful am I? How do I pace myself? When am I able to be silent? What help and support do I seek and receive? How can my having a coach, participating in co-coaching, undertaking coach training, and working with a supervisor contribute to my wellbeing and effectiveness as a coach?

Some ailments have been described as psychosomatic: physical phenomena emanating from the mind. Is my coaching like a placebo: do the attention and regard I offer and the rapport I achieve with my client account for resultant benefits almost irrespective of the models and techniques I use? Is the change which my client makes in their thinking sufficient to produce a positive shift? Is this change sustainable? What part does intention play?

In my coaching am I mostly “in my head” – thinking? How aware am I of my feelings, the feelings of my client, and the emotional interdependencies in the relationship? What is my gut telling me? What belongs here? Do I coach from my head, heart and gut? When I am integrating these, and bringing my whole self to my coaching, how am I allowing space for my client? What awareness do I have about this coaching space – mentally, emotionally, physically? Am I able to choose, or tune into, “the field”, to expand or shrink the boundaries?

The physical coaching space presents opportunity. What choices do I have for where I coach? Do we sit, or stand? Do we go for a walk - and talk, or in silence? Who leads? Who follows? How can this change? Indoors or outside? In what kind of environment? Somewhere familiar, somewhere new? Do I include physical position and posture in my coaching? Do I make requests or interventions to alter the stage and scene? What, both literally and metaphorically, is the distance between us? How do I, and can I, and my

client use the space - sensitively, appropriately, generatively, to support, to stretch, to challenge, to acknowledge?

There are ways I can use the physical space to change perspective and state, for example by inviting my client to explore first, second, third and even fourth position; to experiment with discovering their feelings and find insights when physically stepping into states or times - past, present, future. I can change my posture to invite a change in the other; or draw attention to posture or expression and inquire. What opportunities do I have?

I can learn, directly and indirectly, from conscious embodied practices, for example aikido, yoga, tai chi, the Alexander Technique. I may choose to use one or more of these for my own development. I can work with personal presence, supporting individuals to take their place and expand their choices for self-expression and interaction in the social space and to strengthen and deepen their assertiveness and leadership skills. From psyche to soma – becoming holistic: coaching beyond words.

Book review

Three books which speak to the theme of coaching beyond words:

The Art of Somatic Coaching - Embodying Skillful Action, Wisdom, and Compassion, Richard Strozzi-Heckler, North Atlantic Books, 2014

"How to make vital connections that link actions, emotions, thinking, and energetic states, opening up a world of possibilities".

The Intuitive Body - Discovering the Wisdom of Conscious Embodiment and Aikido, Wendy Palmer, Blue Snake Books, 1999

Daily practice "can help the process of integration, of deepening and unifying ourselves, and learning to find centre in a newly balanced state".

Leadership Embodiment – How the Way We Sit and Stand Can Change the Way We Think and Speak, Wendy Palmer and Janet Crawford, Embodiment International, 2013

"…access to my body's wisdom to become more effective in how I relate, speak, and act".

March 2016

Coaching – an Art or a Science?

This month we want to get you thinking about your coaching from the perspective of coaching as an Art or Science. Our intention is to have you think hard about your approach, your knowledge, skills and capabilities.

Let's begin considering coaching as an art. An 'art' – in my opinion, is a set of skills and capabilities that relies on touch and feel (using my experience as a racquet sports player to arrive at this opinion). Many would contend that coaching involves similar intuitive and sensory connection. Without a sense of what is going on, understanding or relating to the dynamic within the relationship or picking up emotional undercurrents, coaching will not enable the best outcomes.

In our **SOCK-I** diagram – outlined in the February Base Metal – we relate to five components: Self, Other, Context, Knowledge and Integrating. Integrating allows us to consider the dynamics of the relationship between the four primary components, so that we can 'artfully' work effectively. As we coach we will constantly be needing to make decisions about whether we ask this question or that question, whether we remain silent or not, whether we could helpfully offer a model or tool to help our coachee. It is

possible to regard all of these decisions as an 'art'. They are made in the moment based on observed or intuitive data or information. The decisions are based on in the moment thoughts plus experience.

So, here are some questions to prompt your own exploration and enquiry.

Q. How could you improve your decision making (in the sense it is used in the paragraph above) so that you are more skilful in the 'art' of coaching?

Q. How do you consolidate your experience, so that it is more readily accessible in the future?

Q. Viewing coaching as an art – what do you most need to improve?

Now let's think of coaching as a science. Over the years in which modern coaching has developed – in the past forty or fifty years at most – a wide variety of models and approaches have been put forward, sometimes as 'the way to do it!'. Few of them are genuinely scientific and many outline a series of steps or processes that act in a manner similar to scientific method. They prescribe a route. They provide a set of guiderails to help us coach, enabling the kind of 'artful' decisions outlined above. Used blindly these models and ideas can take away any intuitive feel or sensing and so detract from really good coaching. In the **SOCK-I** diagram the Context and Knowledge bubbles are as important as the Self and Other. If Self and Other are the starting point for intuition and sensing then Context and Knowledge underpin our coaching foundations. If we are unaware or do not formally recognise each individual context or do not have a clear sense of our knowledge then we are – to some extent – operating in the dark. So,

Q. How clear are you about the context for each coaching assignment or session?

Q. How do you increase your knowledge and how do you build it into your coaching?

Q. What models and approaches do you use? How could you employ them more artfully?

In the very recent past the field of neuroscience has taken a strong hold in the coaching arena. As neuroscientists make discoveries they can explain events and behaviour previously only observed or understood intuitively. Neuroscience really is a science. Is it being used as a science in coaching or is it being used to inform? I suspect some coaches are using it skilfully and some blindly. Like any model or approach it can help or hinder.

Q. Would understanding more about neuroscience in coaching be helpful to you?

In our view coaching is a mix of art and science. Models and approaches provide a foundation - the science helps to set a base for our coaching. And then we need to act upon our 'in the moment' senses and feelings - the art, to maintain the personal connection that we believe is so important.

Q. What is your view?

Book review

"The Art of Coaching - A Handbook of Tips and Tools", Jenny Bird & Sarah Gornall, Routledge, 2016

Eric de Haan describes this as a book which "…perfectly illustrates the balance between intellect and intuition which makes great coaching." The authors, each both coach and supervisor, provide a guide inspired by relationship at the heart of coaching. Their work is illustrated throughout with diagrams and sketches by Josie Vallely, to appeal to visual appreciation and to show how drawing can be used in coaching. The aim is to develop practice rather than theory; the many references allow the reader to inquire into the supporting research. The rationale for the book is followed by succinct descriptions of coaching, the coaching process, the coaching session; the contract and agendas; meaning and focus; persona, space, baggage, and communication. Further chapters explore learning and growth, leading, analysis, choice, change, supervision, team facilitation and developing creativity. There are dozens of models and tools. This distinctive book enables us to see ways to coach beyond words.

April 2016

Coaching in times of challenge

Context

Writing in *Learning Magazine* Andy Dickson calls for "leaders with agility, dynamism and responsiveness to navigate a turbulent modern landscape". He cites the US military acronym first used to describe unpredictable and extreme conditions in Afghanistan and Iraq - VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous. Liggy Webb addresses these conditions in her work with the UN to support people in many troubled parts of the world and in her writing on personal resilience and wellbeing. Both of these authors make the connection with close to home conditions in our social, political and economic environments. In like manner Ian Day and John Blakey have offered their wake up calls to coaches. *How do we respond, and what contribution can we make?*

I choose to believe that leadership and change begin with me. Recently I was prompted to reflect on what this really means for me when asked to write on the theme of "Changing the Game" for Charles Smith's coaching *Transformation Magazine*. In the words of John Lennon, life is what happens to us whilst we are making other plans. Over and over again. *How do we respond to our own - and others' - unexpected change*: redundancy, illness, injury, homelessness, bereavement?

Motivation, responsibility, wakefulness and resilience

During these challenges of change I have found myself coping by putting aspirations on hold: focussing only on getting through the day, the week, the month. In times of greatest doubt and uncertainty I have been helped by mentors: individuals who have recognised something in me that matters and provoked me to choose to show up and change my game. *How can we best stretch ourselves, and sponsor others?*

My interests in positive psychology and motivation may reflect what I have most needed to learn in order to help myself. When I have returned from an adventure I like to maintain my vital feeling of aliveness by sharing the story - to make sense of it and to feel acknowledged. I believe that individuals have uniquely different reasons to care; their best contribution is delivered when they are following their intrinsic motivation. This has profound implications for leadership, management and supervision, and how we offer and request help. *How do I really listen to you and respect and acknowledge who you are?*

In my work I have retained my interest in creativity and commitment, and added a desire to assist in managing transitions, developing leaders and providing coaching. I have invested in collaborating with colleagues who value learning and co-creation. In Alchemy of Coaching we hold that context is important, plus awareness of self and others, knowledge and skills, and, crucially, integration of these in the relationship. *How do we connect with ourselves and each other and express holistically what we know and who we are?*

I have concerns about troubles in the world - conflict, war, suffering, injustice, and feelings of sadness for people close to me and for those I have not met. I question my response to the challenges around me: am I doing enough? I can concentrate on enjoying my comfortable life and turn away from problems, or decide what feasible contribution to make to others. *What is my responsibility, and my response-ability?*

I aim to replace criticism with curiosity, and to use my curiosity wisely. This is a way to raise my game: to choose presence of mind, to be awake, moment by moment. I can pause for breath and notice what I notice. Then I have an opportunity to inhibit my habitual reaction - and, in place of it, to choose my response. By repeated practice I can lay down new neural pathways which alter my automatic reaction. In doing so I build my empathy and resilience. *How will I wake up, in the moment, again and again?*

My best example of changing my game is small - and beneficial. For two years I have followed a daily practice of choosing at the start of the day what two or three qualities I will embody: for example today I

will be calm, compassionate, productive; and at the end of the day writing down three things I am grateful for: for example friends, mobility, nourishing food. This practice has helped me to manage my own state: to be resourceful and responsive. Small change makes a difference. *How do I act on those things which I can change?*

I need not have sorted out all of my own issues before I can coach others, as Aboodi Shabi reminds us in his Association for Coaching Webinar "The World Beyond Coaching": we are human beings!

Book review

"Coaching In Times of Crisis & Transformation - How to help individuals and organizations flourish", Liz Hall et al, Kogan Page, 2016

With a foreword by Tatiana Bachkirova, several chapters by editor Liz Hall and twelve notable contributors, this volume presents perspectives, theories and frameworks - including neuroscience, NLP and mindfulness - through which the coach can respond to crisis, transition and transformation. Alison Whybrow comments: "The generosity of the material that is shared, the power in the stories, the vulnerability and honesty in the case studies make this book an exciting and compelling read that brings you face to face with your own learning edge of working with crisis *(and)* stretches the assumptions of what it is to coach."

May 2016

Coaching, Action Learning, and Team Coaching

At about the same time that I began coaching individual executives in the large industrial enterprise in which I was employed I was invited to participate in an external Action Learning set with members from a range of organisations. At first I knew little about either of these processes - and learned, quickly, as I went along. I soon discovered that a method they shared was ***the use of open questions***. Another characteristic which they had in common in my particular circumstance was that in both settings the clients were managers with very demanding jobs. In the case of the Action Learning set I was surprised and delighted to be in such experienced company and very grateful for the insights I gained which stood me in good stead in better recognising the tough challenges my coachees faced, the resources they could muster, and the opportunities they could identify.

In my coaching responsibilities I discovered difficulties in managing multiple stakeholders and dealing with differing expectations. My first coachees were assigned to me by my manager on behalf of their directors, for remedial purposes: I was expected to assist them somehow to turn their performance around - before more drastic steps were taken. This was not a good basis for getting off to a positive start! Some of them found reasons to preclude their meeting with me, some turned up and did not engage, a few grabbed hold of the lifeline (and would probably have succeeded without my efforts).

In the Action Learning set things were different. We had all chosen to attend and wanted to be there and members made it to most of the sessions. We each took our turn and share of the time and benefitted from the diversity of perspectives represented. The ethos was strikingly different: not an imposition with a threat behind it, rather an energising and liberating invitation to develop.

Since that time I have been in similar remedial coaching situations where I have gained in confidence in ***contracting*** more effectively, acknowledging the political realities, and being more robust and assertive about boundaries and confidentiality. I prefer to be in a developmental opportunity from the outset, where whilst there may be performance issues the ownership and agency of the coachee are recognised and respected by all parties: as coach I am neither messenger nor surrogate manager.

I have also experienced Action Learning contexts in which there is a change agenda and participants are mandated or expected to attend and do so with degrees of reluctance. The quality of start of such sets is vital to the health and productivity of the process: ***gaining clear agreement and commitment*** is a prerequisite and requires sensitive listening, inquiry and acknowledgement from the outset.

Most of my coaching is now with participants in leadership programmes, for whom the coaching is an integral part of the learning framework. These individuals are assigned to me, so there is no choice - ***my responsibility is to ensure that sufficient rapport and trust are engendered*** to allow the coaching to work. Presence, experience, reflection and ***supervision*** help me to succeed.

In those formative early years of my Coaching and Action Learning practice I was working in an Organisation Development role which frequently included Team Building and Team Development events. I liked to focus on live issues and challenges which made tangible positive differences to the climate and effectiveness of the teams. This often meant addressing clarity of purpose, leadership and alignment within the teams and responsibilities and relationships within and between teams. I recognise with hindsight that in doing this facilitation and consulting work I was often engaged in Team Coaching. Much of the growing literature on Team Coaching has appeared since that time.

When I consider Team Coaching I choose to differentiate this from Action Learning. I think of Team Coaching as characterised by complex implicit and explicit historic and here and now factors involving shared purpose, values, roles, processes, responsibilities, relationships, tasks, behaviours, rewards and sanctions: in taking a systems approach to Team coaching I may draw on Systemic Constellations work. By contrast I think of Action Learning as typified by peers learning individually with each other through a process of inquiry through open questioning, action and review. I recognise that Action Learning can be, and is, sometimes used for shared projects and may have a hierarchical component: if so, I think it may lose some of its capacity for openness and depth. I believe that a great strength of Action Learning is in the call to take action - and in so doing to discover what works. It also offers both the richness of individuals offering different sources of questions and the insights I gain into my own issue when I am experiencing someone else addressing an apparently unrelated concern.

Book review

“Act Like A Leader, Think Like A Leader”, Herminia Ibarra, Harvard Business Review Press, 2015

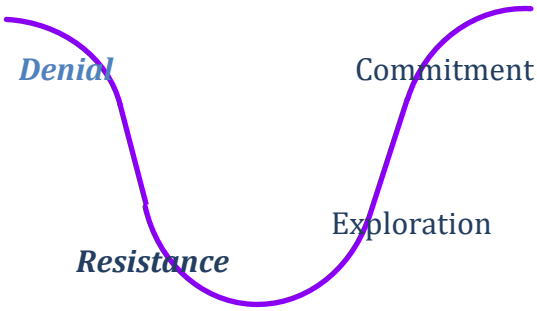
Written by a professor at INSEAD, this book of “transforming by doing” combines research findings, self-assessment questions and practical steps. Its defining difference is to assert that the *think first to gain self-awareness and insight from reflection* approach of many leadership development offerings is ineffective: instead what is required is *first to act and so gain outsight – the valuable external perspective you get from direct experiences and experimentation.* This message of stepping into the unfamiliar by acting first and thinking after has some resonance with the discipline of Action Learning.

June 2016

Coaching, coaches and resistance to change

Most of us have encountered resistance to change at some point in our lives. We can quite readily identify three obvious contexts where resistance to change is likely to be found: organisation, team and individual.

Much has been written about organisational change and the important requirement to assess and work constructively with creating an appropriate readiness for change. Many of us will have encountered the “Change Curve” diagram which provides a simple illustration of the common stages that individuals, teams and organisations go through, and can get stuck in, when working through change.



There are more complex diagrams than this one and it does give a useful picture of the most noticeable stages that are encountered on the change journey.

One of the most valuable uses of the change curve in assisting us in organisational change is the often unrecognised notion that those thinking about and planning the change are 'ahead' in their journey through the curve and forget to allow those being asked to respond to the change to catch up. Those ahead get frustrated by the apparent 'tardiness' of those following. Whilst this can simply be a timing effect, it is often compounded because those leading the change are more in touch with the need and rationale for the change, more involved in shaping the way ahead, and less likely to feel and fear expected or actual loss. Very similar dynamics occur in change for teams or units of an organisation.

So, we understand the need for being mindful about the time in transition between the stages when considering change for groups of people. What are the implications for us as coaches - both in terms of our relationship with clients and in relation to our own change and development?

Let's begin with considering change and our role as coaches. If we take the point of view that we are hoping to enable lasting change and development, rather than simply our clients achieving limited goals, then bearing in mind the requirements of time for change and overcoming resistance to change will be a feature of many coaching sessions. The Alchemy stance is very much that we are helping our clients to achieve deep and meaningful personal development so in our Alchemy of Coaching programme we work with our participants to help them to recognise and engage with the challenges that their coachees will face and encounter on their development journey. The coach needs to be a supportive, encouraging and challenging foil.

Q. Have you experienced the effects of the change curve in your own examples of being in change?

Q. Do you recognise the dynamics of the change curve and resistance to change in your coachees?

Q. Are you able to work with these successfully?

If we move now onto the second point: how open are we, as coaches, about our own change and development? Most coaches that I meet and work with are often seeking out new tools and ideas, wanting to increase their store of knowledge and 'stuff' or content material. How willing are we to really take ourselves on the same journey that we often encourage our clients to make – deep and meaningful personal change?

You might like to ask yourself

Q. Am I up for significant personal change?

Q. If so, how do I know in which direction I want to go?

Q. What support do I need to help me with this change?

Much of coaching is about change. Change is often scary, and usually needs time – it does not happen instantly. How can you enable and facilitate your own change and development?

Book review

"The Coach's Casebook: Mastering the twelve traits that trap us", Geoff Watts and Kim Morgan, Inspect and Adapt Ltd., 2015

Nancy Kline, author of “Time to Think”, describes The Coach’s Casebook as “Rigorous, challenging, pacy… this book provides an instantly digestible feast of learning”. Each of the twelve chapters addresses a story from coaching practice concerning a particular pattern of preference and behaviour found in coaches and their clients, and each chapter is accompanied by appropriate tools, techniques and coaching questions, an account of supervision, and an interview with a well- known person for whom the trait has been significant. Chapter Twelve, “Coping with Loss”, concerned with redundancy, includes the Kubler-Ross Change Curve, and an interview with Steve Cunningham, a blind athlete who has been described as “the most inspirational man alive”. This work makes rewarding reading for coaches and includes a matrix of the techniques described and references for further study.

July 2016

Complexity and simplicity

Last month’s topic was change. There is plenty of it, and we can expect more, and in the nature of change we will not be familiar with what is coming or sure of how we will respond. Often the change is both complex and complicated. Complexity is often accompanied by urgent demands for immediate action, when we have little clarity and capacity for commitment and complications can be overwhelming. Whether we act decisively or we delay in the hope of better information, there will be risks. What’s to be done?

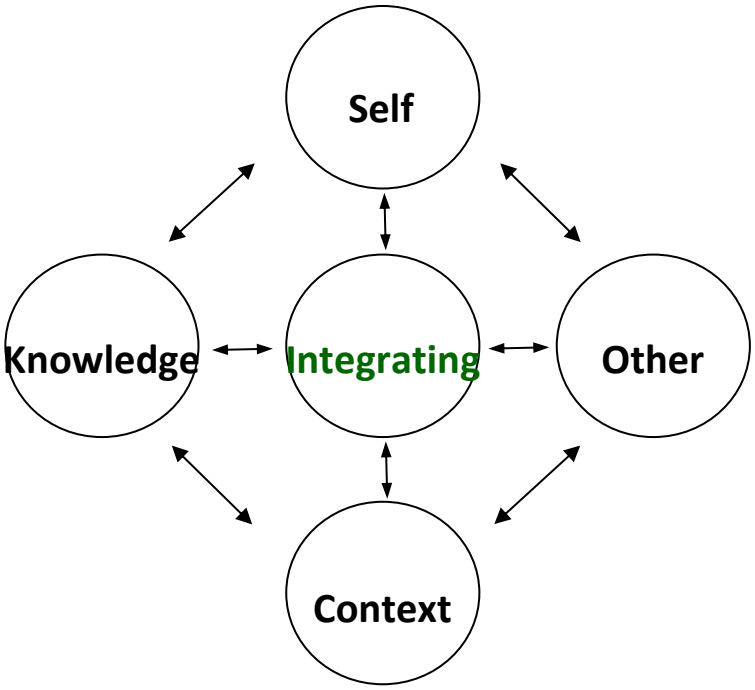
Knowing my core values - what’s important to me - and my principles - how I choose to behave - can help, even when these may be challenged and require re-examination. When my tenets are clear and I have some operating guidelines to inform my behaviour I can feel more secure and ready to respond and adapt. When I have a sense of purpose and direction I’m better able to assess where I am and where I’m heading. The investment I have made in determining my beliefs and intentions will stand me in good stead if I need to re-orientate or to pick up the pieces and begin again. In such circumstances I may be in shock and least able to recover. Building positive emotional reserves will help. So too will my willingness to seek assistance.

A coach may be one such source of support. Our coachees may bring us their concerns, confusions and distress, and hold varying expectations of the coaching opportunity. They may want their coach to be a dedicated listener who will be attentive to their story and show empathy. They may want their coach to provide more practical support, including suggestions - and advice - to assist them. Clear contracting is an important ingredient in managing expectations and defining what coaching can do.

A coachee may hold a view of their coach as capable and competent both in their role and responsibilities as a coach and in the wider aspects of their own life. This can raise doubts in the coach: do I need to have my own life sorted and in good order before I can venture to be of service to others? Or does the very complexity and incompletion of my own experience equip me the better to relate to the challenges faced by my coachee?

In the Alchemy of Coaching programme we speak of bringing the whole person to coaching - including the questions and issues which are unresolved: our essential humanity. Yes, as the coach we seek to be aware of “our own stuff” and to keep this out of the way of the coachee; yet at the same time that “stuff” is part of who we are and informs our ability to relate and engage and support. Hence the emphasis we place on *self*-awareness; awareness of the *other*; *knowledge*, know-how and experience; and *context* - the setting and circumstances and considerations in which the coachee is living, and in which the coaching is taking place.

The SOCK-I diagram



The model we use to map these components, the **SOCK- I** diagram, is a simplification of the interdependencies and complexities of the coaching relationship and processes. *Integrating* is at the heart of this model - the interplay of the elements in a dance with each other to make sense of what is so for the coach and for the coachee - and to allow for noticing "what do I do when I don't know what to do?"

Through simplifying in this way we can identify what may be missing, and move our attention appropriately to focus on an opportunity for fresh perspective, insight and action. This can happen for coach, coachee and both.

Book review

"The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever", Michael Bungay Stanier, Box of Crayons Press, 2016 In which the author "distils the essentials of coaching to seven core questions". Our Base Metal theme this month is Complexity and Simplicity: I can think of no better a book than this to guide the coach in simplifying their coaching to powerful and positive effect. Highly recommended!

August 2016

Working with dilemmas

Among the choices and options that life presents for learning and growth comes the particular category of dilemma. With an option, I choose among valuable things. With a choice, I select among valued alternatives. And I let go, painfully sometimes, what I haven't chosen or cannot have. With a dilemma, however, I face an order of challenge beyond mere choice and sacrifice.

In a dilemma I am faced with contrasting values that are (a) so different that they are incompatible, and (b) are both essential to my endeavours, and (c) will continue to be so as long as my endeavours

continue. I cannot afford to relinquish either of the values, and yet they will not naturally integrate. Dilemmas often show up as irreconcilabilities, insurmountable difficulties, polarities, blockages to progress and the like.

Take, for example, the contrasting values of conformity and independence, and the effects that they have in an organisation. People that argue for conformity want to hold things together in a turbulent world; and this restricts others' creative initiative. Others, who rally for greater personal independence to increase the variety of successful initiatives, risk cohesion fragmenting around them. My enterprise requires *both* of these qualities to a considerable and continuing degree, in order to sustain its success. (Among a great many more qualities, too, of course.)

Let's dig into this.

My dilemma is that if I pursue one value at the expense of the other - if I treat the alternatives as a choice, that is - either I get stuck in conformity; or I lose the plot by backing the group that will have none of it. I am pursuing one way or another for my endeavour to fail.

And yet, if I pursue both values at once, their intrinsic opposition creates insurmountable conflict, cancelling one another's advantages. I am again stuck for progress.

And I know, too, that if I bury my awareness in a dither and fudge the issue, my avoiding such active values will sap energy and incentive from the engagement, to leave the enterprise lifeless.

With four ways in which I could fail [i.e. choosing one; choosing the other; conflict; or compromise], how, am I to succeed? In this situation I have to discover, learn and apply a new level of skill to achieve some resolution of the dilemma and inspire my business.

Looking deeper, I notice the opposing horns of my dilemma, conformity and independence in this case, have distinctly different qualities. The structural and hierarchical quality of conformity stands in contrast to the fluidity and adaptability of independence. This is no accident. The archetypal dilemma of mythology has Odysseus navigating his vessel and crew between the monsters of Scylla, attempting wreckage on the rocks, and Charybdis' incessantly pulling whirlpool. Contrasts of form and fluidity give strong signals for dilemma discovery and mapping.

To navigate the besetting monsters of my dilemma (for monsters they will become if either grows out of proportion to my situation), I must learn all about them and their subtleties in their context. How much conformity is called for to hold this situation intact? What degrees of independence will energise peoples' initiative and creativity in this context? What course can I devise that will give me just enough of each to optimise my prospects?

Adventurous, attentive navigation liberates the generative value that is stored in every dilemma. Provided, that is, that the dilemma can be identified, and that it warrants the diligence and application that will be called for. Opposing values have gifts for one another which, when engaged, release their energy.

Dilemmas are not accidental; they are integral to endeavour. They come in all shapes, varieties and scales, personal and public, individual and corporate. A life dilemma has the quality – the gift – of a calling. It poses a challenge, an adventure: will I rise to it or not? Or, if I fail, as fail I will from time to time, will I learn enough to rise and surmount the next one? – surmount in terms of holding, navigating, and balancing the energies to glean the continuing gift!

Book review

"Charting the Corporate Mind: Graphic Solutions to Business Conflicts", Charles Hampden-Turner, The Free Press (New York), Collier Macmillan (London), 1990

The author acknowledges the influence of many other writers on business strategy and organisational learning who contributed to his thinking for this exploration of the ethics of business leadership and the creation of shared meaning. In his introduction he quotes Scott Fitzgerald: “holding two opposed ideas in your mind at the same time”: his premise is that “values are really contrasts among which there are necessarily dilemmas”. He uses diagrams, metaphors and cartoons to elicit and map a range of dilemmas and provides cases for exploration. His work precedes resonant offerings addressing the challenges and opportunities for corporate governance - from Bob Garratt, Colin Mayer and Roger Steare. The book offers “a set of tools for dealing with complexity”. Context is important, as are stakeholders. The singular pursuit of profit is “too narrow to learn from”; “*the important outcomes are the lessons to be learned*”.

September 2016

The development of a coach

As most coaches appreciate a coach’s development is lifelong. In this short piece we would like to focus on some of the challenges and concerns that are common at the start of a coach’s development journey.

It is common, when a coach begins their training, for their primary concern to be about “what to do?”, “what question to ask or what is the next step in the ‘coaching process’?”. These are justifiable concerns and so what is a good response?

Over the nearly three years that we have been producing Base Metal we have written a variety of articles about key aspects that underpin coaching. We created the **SOCK-I** diagram and the coaching triangle and identified four key components for effective coaching: Awareness, Holding the coaching space, What do you do when you don’t know what to do and Integrating everything you know into your coaching. (If you have not seen the articles about these ideas please ask and we can send them to you).

What has happened as we think about these ideas and how we train new coaches? It has occurred to us that rather than providing a model or specific process to help make a new coach ‘safe’ or ‘confident’ we serve our trainee coaches better if we work with them to make them safe as people, as a person in a coaching relationship. It became clearer that models, processes and diagrams can only help so much. The more aware we become, of self and situation and how to deal with yourself in unexpected or challenging circumstances, might be a better way of helping a coach at the start of their development journey.

So, if you are an experienced coach think back to when you were a novice:

Q. “What were your early experiences when coaching?”

Q. “What caused you anxiety or concern and how did you deal with it?”

If you are a new or novice coach:

Q. “What most concerns you when you anticipate a coaching assignment or a particularly challenging client?”

Q. “How do you prepare to be successful in these situations?”

In truth both sets of questions apply to all coaches rather than differentiating between coaches of differing experience, because our point is that

- how we use what we know about ourselves, and what we know about our current levels of skill, expertise, knowledge and experience, are always in play at every session.

If we blindly follow a model, idea or process without thinking how we relate to the client we are likely to miss something important that is happening right in front of us. So it seems to us at Alchemy that it is

more important for a coach, and especially one starting out on their development journey, to be asking questions of themselves rather than about seeking out more models, ideas or knowledge. It might be more helpful to ask some of the following questions.

Q. “What blindspots do I have that can sometimes catch me out?”

Q. “What is my personality best at, and where can it be a problem?”

Q. “What kinds of situations cause me most problems, and how can I best prepare myself to cope if and when they occur?”

Q. “How can I best use the knowledge and ideas that I have, without becoming a slave to them?”

We are sure that you can all find many more questions that help with the development process. First seek to understand yourself and all your existing knowledge and experience. With this foundation, searching for and applying new models and ideas becomes more rewarding and more effective.

Book review

“Mindsight: Transform Your Brain With The New Science Of Kindness”, Daniel Siegel, Oneworld, 2010

In this book Daniel Siegel identifies four areas of skills essential for success in life - self-awareness, empathy, self-mastery and social skills - and emphasises the importance of integration. He explores The Path To Wellbeing and The Power To Change, and provides an epilogue - Widening The Circle: Expanding The Self. The book is about the workings of the mind; why we think, feel and act in the ways we do; and how we can use our ability to transform our thinking, wellbeing and relationships. There is an introduction by Daniel Goleman.

Distilled from life experience, more than thirty years of medical training and practice, and spiritual wisdom, and referenced from science including neurobiology, Mindsight provides insights into how we can learn and grow. It has been described as “… a deeply compassionate and human account”, “… refreshingly accessible, offering practical advice…”, and “… a fascinating synthesis of his innovative ideas about the implications of the new brain science for understanding relationships and the processes of human change”. This is recommended reading for coaches in search of wisdom and mastery!

October 2016

Supervision

In Ray’s book review he outlines the valuable contribution that Clutterbuck, Whitaker and Lucas make to the debate and conversation about Supervision. In this short article I want to explore Supervision from an individual and perhaps more personal learning perspective.

Why do we undertake Supervision? I ask this initial question because in my travels I find lots of coaches who question its value and relevance. Often they are the coaches who equally spurn accreditation. If you go for accreditation then supervision is pretty well mandatory in all the major professional coaching bodies. So you have to do it and do it with a specified ration of supervision to coaching hours. That so many coaches only do it because they have to is a shame as I believe it has an important place (even if I do not like its name!)

So, in an effort to reflect on my own supervision and hopefully to initiate some insightful thinking for anyone reading this piece, in my last supervision session I thought that I would explore why do it, what benefits and how to make best use of it? So what came from this supervision session?

The most obvious and important outcome was to more fully understand that my supervision aids and facilitates critical reflection. And I notice, when assessing, this is something that many coaches find difficult. I am really clear that over my years of supervision being helped and challenged to ponder and reflect on what I do as a coach has been immensely helpful. So supervision provides a place for critical reflection. For myself, this is enough value to not need to write anything further. And I realise that it might be useful to explain how this critical reflection takes place, what makes it work (for me) and what tips or questions might this pose.

Firstly the coach (me) is generally the topic and the emphasis is on what did I do, what was its intention and its impact. This particular focus is – in my view – different from the type of topic and the nature of the coaching conversation in my usual coaching sessions. So, quite automatically I am encouraged to reflect. In my supervision sessions we tend to follow an informal Time To Think approach – where I talk the topics and situations through with little interruption and with only occasional prompts and questions. This works for me as I will generally talk myself to conclusions and future actions if given the space.

Q. "What is the best approach for you in a supervision session?"

I also notice that quite often I bring issues or concerns that relate to ethical or quasi-ethical criteria such as boundaries, degree of challenge, collusion, own agenda. The opportunity to critically reflect on these issues is vital to my remaining a 'safe and competent coach' whilst continually aiming to push my own capabilities. This aspect of supervision is likely to be more important amongst the less experienced coaches. And experienced coaches need to remember that they also need to reflect on these issues even if their range of skills and capabilities is much higher such that they have a greater range of choices in any particular situation.

Another significant area for my supervision is around "am I doing this (whatever this might be) right?" Whilst there is little explicitly right or wrong in coaching it is important to monitor one's own actions and patterns. "In this or that particular session did I push/challenge enough or too much? Was there a better way to handle that circumstance? How might I have dealt differently with this or that?"

Q. "How well do you reflect on what you have actually done in a coaching session? And would it be more effective if you were to reflect on it with another person (a supervisor)?"

My own experience of supervision has been positive. My supervisor knows when to let me arrive at my own understanding or actions and when to prompt and challenge. This aids what I believe to be the most important aspect of supervision: "critical reflection".

Q. "Are you doing enough critical reflection and could you use your supervision sessions to do more?"

Q. "Are you getting the best from your supervision?"

Supervision can provide a learning partnership and opportunity for continual improvement.

Book review

"Coaching Supervision – A Practical Guide For Supervisees", David Clutterbuck, Carol Whitaker and Michelle Lucas, Routledge, 2016

Whether you are sceptical or curious about supervision, looking for a supervisor, or already in a supervisory relationship, you are likely to find your questions addressed here. What is supervision? How is it valuable for a coach? What does it require? How do I choose a supervisor? This book examines coaching supervision through the perspective of the coach. The authors describe a collaborative endeavour in which coach and supervisor work together in a learning partnership. The heart of this guide "is a desire to build an understanding of how effective supervision can help us all to evolve our practice." In his preface Peter Hawkins writes "Coaching is not and should not be an easy calling, and to step up to

what is required we will need the challenge and support of each other and a commitment to quality lifelong learning and supervision."

Offering principles, models, frameworks, cases, and considerations of culture, diversity and bias this book is illustrated with useful diagrams and supported by extensive references. It includes a chapter on "Developing your internal supervisor" and concludes with questions for reflection and further research, including attention to supervision for supervisors. It does provide "a practical guide", a valuable resource for coach and supervisor.

November 2016

Mastery

When the Alchemy team first came together it was in response to the creation of new accreditation levels which included 'Master coach'. We began investigating mastery (and quite a few books came out not long after we coined the title **Alchemy of Coaching – *in search of wisdom and mastery***. A note to all: If you create a great phrase or tag line consider trademarking or copyrighting it ☺). We developed the definition that mastery was **"being able, in real time, to be aware of and understand what is going on and be able to make informed choices as a result of this awareness"**.

To do this a coach needs to be continually learning. Learning both to overcome immediate challenges - single loop learning, and to overcome challenges so that they can be avoided in the future - double loop learning, AND also *learning to learn* so that learning from one type of situation can be applied in different situations and circumstances. This triple loop learning is key to the coach's development journey and the development of mastery. And we firmly believe that mastery is a continuing journey. Its attainment is only transitory as you then seek the next step up. George Leonard describes this transitory nature with the words "It is a journey towards – a never ending journey. Every mile you progress you become two miles further away. The more I know the more I realise I still have to learn". This highlights the key point about *the more that I know the more I realise I do not yet know*. So at its heart mastery is about developing awareness, developing a greater and greater set of possibilities for how I can respond at any given moment and continually learn from experience.

Q. How clearly do you understand your own strengths, blind spots, and areas for development?

In Leonard's book called "Mastery" he highlights a number of key features about Mastery which the Alchemy team regard as a central focus of our approach:

- Mastery is available to everyone – it takes effort, application, persistence and time, which is a challenge in a world that likes quick fixes. *This point is echoed by Malcom Gladwell's idea of 10,000 hours to achieve deep capability*
- Begin immediately and it takes a long time to start!! We often resist the challenge of beginning. It is or can be scary to begin the challenge for big improvements
- Learning typically takes place in spurts followed by time on a plateau – there is a rhythm to the journey

A diagram to illustrate a learning journey



Leonard provides three descriptions of people who are not on the journey towards mastery: The Dabbler, The Obsessive and The Hacker.

Q. How do you measure up to the challenge of mastery?

He outlines a set of requirements [my word not his] for the development of mastery: these five master skills are Instruction, Practice, Surrender, Intentionality and The Edge. These can be simply explained as:

Instruction - work with the best instructors/teachers/mentors that you can

Practice, practice and more practice

Surrender to learning and the challenge of finding new skills and capabilities - being humble

Intentionality - having an image of what you are trying to achieve

The Edge - continually striving to find the 'edge' of capability: looking for the next 'step up'

Q. Could you do more to improve and increase your capabilities?

Mastery is a great goal to have as a coach. It requires constant development and is an endless journey.

Book review

"The Innovator's Way – Essential Practices for Successful Innovation" by Peter J. Denning and Robert Dunham, The MIT Press, 2010

Having reviewed "Mastery" - see above - for Base Metal August 2013, I looked elsewhere for a related resource, and found in "The Innovator's Way" Chapter 16: *Dispositions of the Masters*: "...from the beginner, to the competent, to the expert, and beyond." The authors' quotations from others on the nature of mastery include George Leonard - "not a goal or destination; it is a process, a journey"; Geoff Colvin - "…the result of deliberate practice"; and Michael Polyani and Paul Keegan - in response to "How can we learn what a master knows, if the master cannot even describe it?": "tacit knowledge". Citing Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000 hours - "hardly a definition of mastery", necessary and "not sufficient", they aver "…if we aspire to be masters, it is crucial to attend to the quality and focus of our practice". If hours of practice are a start, and qualities and abilities can be observed in masters, these are "not a fruitful way to define mastery" nor "a generative articulation of what masters do". This book recommends "immersion, reflection", "daily practice", and engaging in "learning communities". As James Carse observes "The true path of mastery is an infinite game".

December 2016

What to do when the client lacks the skills or knowledge to address their challenges

In general the Alchemy team work in the arena of genuinely development coaching, be it based around leadership issues or challenges, transitioning into a new role or exploring a change of any kind. And occasionally we are confronted by situations where the client has neither the experience, knowledge, understanding nor the skill to address their challenge or issue – at least as they see things.

The context for this situation arising is quite often when people discover they are having real problems with a colleague or members of a team they are working in. They know that they are unhappy, the relationship is difficult and work is not getting done in the way they would like or expect.

Q. Do you encounter these kinds of situation?

When reflecting on a recent coaching session during which this scenario cropped up I began to wonder if I had done a poor coaching job that day. Within the session the coachee described a difficult situation that they knew they needed to address and had no idea what they could do that would be different from their usual approach which would be largely to internalise their bad feelings about what was happening. And they were clear that they wanted to find a way to do something about the situation that might lead to better outcomes in future and have a greater chance that their expectations would be met. In my follow-up email to the coachee I attached a set of simple tools and ideas that might help them with the difficulties they were facing – most of which I had mentioned during the coaching session or said I would send. After careful thought I decided I had not been a poor coach, rather that the situation suggested moving more towards a 'skills development' approach (using the sequence, skills, performance and then development coaching as outlined in "The Reflecting Glass" by West and Milan). I had taken on a role that explicitly included a degree of 'expert knowledge' and sought to share this knowledge, explore how the client might incorporate the ideas into their skill set and more particularly use it in relation to their particular challenge.

Q. Based on this limited information – **what do you think you would have done in this situation?**

During the session I helped the coachee to explore what happened and what they would have liked to be different and shared a set of ideas – some of which we rehearsed – mostly to develop sufficient confidence to use them in an team meeting that was to take place a few hours later. By the end of the session we had arrived at some actions - seeking some clear outcomes from the team meeting (which was to include a discussion about her handing in a team assignment late); exploring ways to ensure it did not happen again and that she was not left feeling responsible for this occurrence when she believed a failure to be clearer about expectations and individual responsibility and actions had been a major part of the lateness. We discussed some ideas for making the team meeting more successful, including setting an agenda and expectations, to get the apology about the lateness addressed early and request more time be spent looking forward to ensure this does not happen again, and setting out her own expectations about how things might be different – whilst being clear that they were expectations not demands.

Whilst I have not had any feedback from the coachee yet I have a measure of confidence that having had our coaching session she will have gone into the meeting with a greater chance of success by focussing on the approach that we took – time will tell.

Q. What ideas do you share with your clients and what prompts you to take this approach?

As coaches we usually have a large toolkit of ideas and experience. How do we know, skilfully and appropriately, when to bring them out and how to introduce them to our clients? We welcome your ideas and are more than happy to run another article on the subject using your contributions. Please do send them to us.

Book review

"Mindset - how you can fulfil your potential", Carol S. Dweck, Random House (US) 2006, Robinson (UK) 2012.

This book is about growth. It is about how people differ. It is about lifelong learning. And it is about *mindsets*: two in particular. The first of these is the mindset of *fixed* traits and capabilities, which promotes the desire to measure and to prove oneself. The second is the *growth* mindset, which is open to discovering potential. Whilst the former leads to evaluation and justification, the latter allows for thriving in response to challenge.

No matter which of these mindsets I believe in, I am subject to feeling upset by what happens in life; those people with the growth mindset are more likely to be “ready to take risks, confront the challenges, and keep working at them”. According to research in creativity, perseverance and resilience are associated with the growth mindset. This book shows that if you have a fixed mindset you can change it.

Examples are given of stretch – “becoming is better than being”. Being successful is subject to the Achilles heel of pride. Confidence is found with both of these mindsets; it is less necessary for the growth mindset because this one is interested in *what I can learn*. In her chapter on Mindset and Leadership Carol Dweck describes how fixed mindset managers seek existing talent whilst growth mindset managers encourage feedback and promote and evoke development.

There are powerful messages here for coaches engaged with positive psychology and personal change.