

Base Metal…

The Monthly Newsletter
from
Alchemy of Coaching

The 2018 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 first twenty four months 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 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, Paul and , David

February 2019






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January 2018

Mastery – an aspirational challenge?

I don't recall the words 'mastery' or 'master' appearing in the coaching world until about 2005 when the major professional coaching bodies revamped their accreditation schemes and included 'master' in their highest level of accreditation. This revision to the accreditation scheme of the Association for Coaching prompted a group of us to reflect on what 'master coach' meant and what skills and experience were required and how might these be learned. In this short article I would like to explore 'mastery' drawing on a number of sources and highlighting some differences of option to provide you with possible ideas for your own development.

At a very simple level I have identified three views about mastery.

The first seems based on knowledge about new models and approaches being the route to mastery. The 'master' understands and is able to use a number of fundamentally different approaches. They have learned new models and then learned how to apply them. This approach is based on the idea of **know, do, be** as the order for development.

A second approach, as outlined in the books on mastery by Robert Greene and George Leonard, suggests that mastery comes with lots of practice and is obtained in a series of noticeable shifts in capability followed by consolidation of this new capability. This seems to support the idea of Gladwell's 10,000 hours.

The third approach, which the Alchemy team prefer, reverses the model outlined in the first approach to become **be, do, know** (sometimes called the success model). In this approach it is mastering self that comes first. Aboodi Shabi defined mastery (in a recent AC webinar) as "an expert wants to get to the answer as quickly as possible and a master is willing to stay in not knowing as long as possible". On our Alchemy programme we define mastery as "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**".**

It is clear that whilst all the three approaches need skill **and** knowledge their starting points appear quite different. The first implies that knowledge of ideas and approaches is fundamental to mastery: 'masters' know many different approaches and have the skill to apply them. The second combines learning in action with lots of practice and recognises occasional step changes in capability. The third focuses much more on being aware of and understanding self and self within any coaching relationship – with the coach being aware of and understanding "what is going on within each of us and between us". This third approach places much greater attention on being comfortable with self and with not-knowing than on choosing to use any one of a number of well-learned models or approaches.

As Robert Greene outlines in his book Mastery, the master has a kind of intuition about what is needed. This seems to me to be a very powerful place beyond knowledge or skill in that it incorporates knowledge, skills, experience, understanding and awareness. In this place the coach has many choices at any moment in time. It is the apparently intuitive choices that the coach makes that are the sign of mastery. This 'intuition' is the product of learning over many hours, occasionally trying things out that do not work, making mistakes and learning from them and always seeking to improve. This notion accords with an idea, first considered when 'master' appeared in the coaching world, that the artisan trades of, for example, stonemason, cabinet maker, wood carver provide us with a good model for developing as a coach. The 'masters' in these trades (and if you have watched a stone mason or wood carver at work you will notice the point I want to make) seem to have a confidence about where to make the cut or the chop or the break, that defies logic or immediate understanding. They are integrating all their skill, knowledge, experience and learning as they work to deliver on their objectives. They are doing so much more than applying a model.

So, how are you learning? Are you learning skills and knowledge? Are you learning about yourself?

How are you applying your learning? How do you find situations where making mistakes will not be too costly?

How well are you progressing towards mastery and do you see it as an aspirational challenge rather than an attainable goal?

Book review

"Mastery", Robert Greene, Profile Books, 2012

Introduced with a definition of mastery, its evolution and three phases in realising its power, this book invites you to find your calling, then to embark upon *The Ideal Apprenticeship* - preparing for the creative challenges on the way towards mastery. Robert Greene draws for inspiration on a very wide array of sources including Leonardo Da Vinci, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Carl Jung, Frank Lloyd Wright, Marie Curie, Buckminster Fuller, Martha Graham, Zora Neale Hurston, Zen Master Hakuin and John Coltrane. Additionally he provides short biographies for and insights from interviews he conducted in person with nine contemporary masters including neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran and anthropologist-linguist Daniel Everett.

The contents section alone is extraordinary, extending to ten pages, outlining the depth of his approach to mastery and pointing to the many examples which inform his perspective. Beyond the introduction, the book consists of six major parts, addressing the life's task, reality, the mentor, social intelligence, the dimensional mind, and mastery - this last being to fuse the intuitive with the rational. **"Mastery"** will more than repay the attention of coaches. Robert Green writes "Your whole life is a kind of apprenticeship to which you apply your learning skills. Everything that happens to you is a form of instruction if you pay attention."

February 2018

Continuing Professional Development – CPD: *some observations and thoughts*

CPD is an important part of our professional development. How much time and thought do you give to what CPD you undertake? In this short article I will share some observations from my role as an accreditation assessor, a tutor on a coach development programme, the founder of a Coaching Forum and a member of three coaching groups. I do not intent to suggest any special strategy or direction for CPD, only to share what I notice and encourage you to ask yourself some questions about the CPD you undertake.

Q. Are you working to any deliberate plan as you seek to increase your capability?

I observe that CPD seems to fit into a number of distinct and different groupings.

1. Attending courses or workshops about specific topics or subjects, whether coaching-specific or coaching- related. Coaches seem to undertake this form of CPD for two different reasons. Firstly to expand their general knowledge, to learn sometime about a new topic or approach and so expand their repertoire through increased breadth of knowledge, understanding and capability. The second use of this kind of CPD is to deepen knowledge. To explore in greater depth a topic or approach and so increase their capability and skill in using it by enhanced understanding and application. I notice some topics are common amongst both approaches. Time to Think, Neuroscience and NLP are frequently identified. Perhaps they are currently in vogue or is it because they are particularly good ways to expand and deepen our capabilities?

Q. Do you tend to increase breadth or to go for depth or a combination of both in your CPD?

2. The second grouping for CPD is co-coaching. This is usually done within a group that meets regularly and sometimes the co-coaching meetings are interspersed with speaker led sessions. These speaker sessions may embrace topics similar to those outlined in the paragraph above, although rarely have time to do more than act as an introduction to a topic or approach. Co-coaching is an important component of most coaches' development. It helps to enhance awareness, skill and capability and provides an opportunity to hone listening and questioning skills. I am often surprised that many coaches have no ready opportunity to practice their skills except with clients. I know the Association for Coaching runs many co-coaching groups and I suspect the other professional bodies have something similar.

Q. Are you a member of a group that offers the opportunity for co-coaching?

3. The third common grouping is coaches tutoring on other coaching programmes. Helping other coaches to develop provides a valuable route for one's own development. Having to learn to communicate ideas and knowledge usually helps with our own understanding of a topic and may encourage deeper learning than is necessary for any particular course. Learning to give high quality feedback to others doing coaching practice or learning particular skills is also valuable. Giving good feedback is rare and can be useful when coaching clients.

Q. Could you find opportunities to tutor on a coach development programme?

4. The final common grouping is reading books and articles. The journal *Coaching at Work* is most often mentioned. Reading about coaching topics is very useful and it does beg the following question.

Q. What reading do you do and how do you incorporate what you read into your coaching practice?

I am sure there is more I could write about CPD and as usual in these short articles I have run out of space. Best The wishes for you as you undertake your CPD.

Q. Are you doing the CPD that will most help you with your development?

Book review

"The Hidden Pleasures of Life - a New Way of Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future" by Theodore Zeldin, Maclehose Press, 2016

Drawn to the idea that change begins when the conversation changes, I was delighted by my first encounter with Theodore Zeldin's writing through his book **"Conversation**", variously described by critics as "warm and welcoming", "a guide to modern living" and "erudite and fun". I went on to enjoy his "**An Intimate History of Humanity"** - "brilliantly illuminating", "original and outstanding", "deeply humane", "unsettling" and "unusually thought provoking". Now I have found "The Hidden Pleasures of Life", described by Margaret Heffernan as "transformative… full of wisdom", by *The Financial Times* reviewer as "Scintillating… Prophetic… Engaging" and by Ron Emerson as "providing new frames to guide us in discovering how we want to live our lives". Each of the twenty-nine chapters is framed with a question, for example *"How can prejudices be overcome?", "Why do so many people feel unappreciated, unloved and only half alive?", "What is more interesting than becoming a leader?", "What is worth knowing?" and "What does it mean to be alive?".*

This book provides a resonant counterpoint for my recent reading of **Yuval Noah Harari's "Sapiens - A Brief History of Humankind", Vintage, 2014, and "Homo Deus - A Brief History of Tomorrow", Vintage, 2017.** All three works serve to stretch my thinking and challenge my assumptions. I had intended to choose for this month's Base Metal review a title dealing explicitly with coaching, then changed my mind in favour of a broad canvas aligned with my sense of the requirements for my coaching CPD. *"I cannot consider myself fully alive if I know only my own thoughts… Learning is only a beginning." (Zeldin).* Let the conversation begin!

March 2018

Boundaries part 1

In the March and April editions of Base Metal we will be looking at boundaries. This month Ray is exploring boundaries between coaching and therapy/counselling. In the April edition Ian will be turning our attention towards the coaching and mentoring boundary. Both articles seek to provide some perspective on these respective boundaries and how we, as coaches, can and do pay appropriate attention to them whilst continuing to deliver our best help to clients.

Ethics and contracting The Association for Coaching Global Code of Ethics includes the requirements that members "are responsible for setting and keeping clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern interactions, physical or otherwise, with clients or sponsor(s)" and "will encourage the client or sponsor to stop the coaching or mentoring engagement if it is believed that the client or sponsor would be served better by another coach, mentor or another form of professional help". The coach is responsible for recognising and respecting both interpersonal boundaries and professional boundaries. Members are also required to undertake regular supervision; the supervisor is a source of guidance for examining how these boundaries apply in practice, e.g. how far will I go into the territory of counselling and therapy?

Q. How do I contract with you so that we share clear expectations of each other's role and boundaries?

Purpose and focus As coach I am in service of my client. My client is the focus of my attention. My client "does the work"; I am responsible for providing space, process, attention and confidentiality for that work.

Q. How do I bring all of myself to my contribution as coach? How do I do so such that I am self-aware and able to remain focussed on the needs of my client? What work have I done to know myself (my selves) sufficiently to keep my own unresolved issues from hijacking my coaching? How do I know, and test, my limits?

Person to person We are human beings. I am in relationship with you as I coach. Whether or not I seek to be detached and objective, I am meeting you and you are meeting me, together. Even if I behave as a silent witness, or choose to coach "content free", I will influence you by being here. What does this mean?

Q. How do I show up - real and alive? How do I empathise with you? How much will I engage with the content you bring? How does any actual or perceived power difference impact on this coaching? How do we relate?

Locus of attention I think of coaching as primarily attending to *now and next*: how are you now, how do you want to be, and how can and will you be? Sometimes this exploration will include reference to what has been so up to now, e.g. when eliciting patterns (if this has happened to you before, what do you notice about that?). In contrast I think of **counselling and therapy** as concerned primarily with *before and now*: how what has happened to you in the past and is happening to you now can be explored and resolved in ways which support you now. Hence coaching may follow on from therapy. Therapy may not be necessary for coaching to be effective. Coaching may be ineffective if trauma is unresolved. That trauma may be consciously acknowledged or not, and can be mine or yours - or both. Therapists usually avoid any social relationship with their clients; this is often not the case for coaches with their clients, particularly if the coach is internal to the organisation.

Q. How as coach do I judge the boundaries of the relationship? How do I know that I am at the limit of my expertise, or of my resources, and so decide to refer my client or advise them to seek support elsewhere?

Capability to coach Through reflective practice, giving and receiving feedback, coach training and continual professional development, I can build my capability as a coach, broadening and deepening my

awareness, knowledge and skills. I find that participating in co-coaching and coaching groups is particularly rewarding.

Q. How committed am I to my development as a coach? Do I participate in a community of practice? Do I refer, for example, to the Association for Coaching Competencies or equivalent? How do I grow as a coach?

Capacity to coach Whether as a leader or as coach, I believe that learning and change begin with me. In order to be fully present to my client, I will prepare myself and seek to be in as resourceful a state as I can be. This does not mean that I am perfect! I have a duty to notice how I am and whether I am sufficiently competent to conduct the coaching. I can take guidance from my supervisor - my learning and development partner. I am also responsible for noticing my state during a coaching session and how this is affecting the coaching. I can own my feelings - and can decide to share them in order to explore what may be occurring - or take time out.

Q. How able am I to be emotionally aware, of both self and other? How can I act with emotional intelligence? What is my understanding of the psychological dynamics between us, and how will I respond to these?

Book review

"Where Did You Learn To Behave Like That? - A Coaching Guide For Working With Leaders", Sarah Hill, Dialogix, 2017

Coaching can provide a route for me to find and adopt different behaviours, more suited to producing better outcomes. Especially when I am under pressure I may be unaware in the moment that my behaviour is inappropriate; and even when I notice, and want to change the habits and patterns that give rise to inappropriate behaviour, I may find that I am unable to do so. Such patterns result from my experiences in childhood, good and bad; and from the story I have created about myself to make sense of those experiences. When the stakes are high I may repeatedly react from my child's story of how to survive, unable to realise in the moment that the circumstances now are different and the child's behaviour I display is not useful.

Sarah Hill shares openly her experience of her own childhood story, acknowledging it, examining it and, with help, re-writing the narrative. As *Story-sharer* she is supported by her coach as *Story-guide.* The book provides examples from coaches and leaders describing their own experience and reflections. She proposes that this work need not be the remit of therapists and counsellors: with training and practice coaches can undertake it and make a profound and positive difference for their clients. Whilst as a human being I will have my own story to resolve, my responsibility as a coach is to be in service of my client. Commitment both to examine my own childhood story and to be in supervision as a coach doing this work are essential. So, too, is a practice model: Sarah's is that of David Kantor, whose Structural Dynamics dialogue model of Move, Follow, Oppose and Bystand underpins her work. She includes recommended reading and a website link for guidance and support.

April 2017

Boundaries part 2

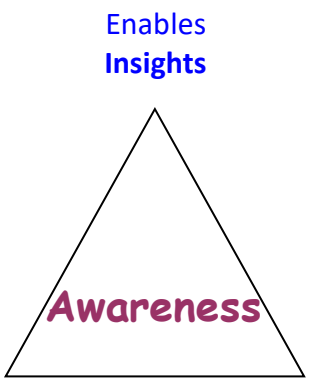
In the March and April editions of Base Metal we look at boundaries. In March Ray explored the boundary between coaching and therapy/counselling. In this edition Ian is turning our attention towards the coaching and mentoring boundary. Both articles seek to provide some perspective on these respective boundaries and how we, as coaches, can and do pay appropriate attention to them whilst continuing to deliver our best help to clients.

In last month's Base Metal Ray wrote about Boundaries and towards the end of his article focused on the boundary between Coaching and Therapy/Counselling. In the lead up to his focus on this boundary he outlined thoughts relating to Ethics, Contracting, Purpose and Intent. Some of his questions have corresponding validity in this article and will be used again here. He outlined that the coaching/therapy boundary focused on the issue of therapy being *before and now* and coaching/mentoring being *now and then.* I want to build on these key ideas and then focus my attention on the boundary between Coaching and Mentoring.

As a coach it is always important that I pay proper attention to ethics and contracting, and that I make sure that I do not stray beyond my current capabilities. How do I know what my current capabilities are if I never push against my boundaries? This is why, as Ray outlined in the March article, supervision is so important and why the professional bodies make it a key component of their accreditation schemes.

A model that I use, both in my own practice and when training coaches, is The Coaching Triangle. At the three points of the triangle are **Encouraging Reflection, Enabling Insight** and **Exploring Possibilities** and in the middle of the triangle is **Awareness** (see diagram over the page). This model can also work for Mentoring.

So, if this model provides us with some intentions within a coaching or mentoring relationship, where or what is the boundary between them? Is it a different type of boundary to that described by Ray in March in relation to coaching and therapy? In my opinion the boundary is more of a broad line rather than a narrow line. It is a line, or may be more appropriately named an area, into which the coach should be able to go, mindful of what is happening and how to ensure they stay true to their original contracting. If within this contracting the intention is to help the coachee in the best way that they can then offering ideas – which is often seen as mentoring and not coaching – which can then be explored as **possibilities,** becomes OK. If, as I also believe, I want to bring all of my experience and knowledge to my coaching relationships, then bringing ideas from my experience or ideas from my knowledge is a part of good coaching. I am often baffled by people who suggest that these ideas are not a part of coaching and yet see using personality instruments or bringing in models as in some way different. The boundary issue is about my awareness of it and how and when I bring in my experience and knowledge.



What are the coach and coachee actually doing?
Seeking agreed actions in the form of
Choices, Possibilities, Behaviours, Implications, Changes and/or Measures

So, I am suggesting that the boundary between Coaching and Mentoring is wide and permeable, and the coach should be capable of entering this space, knowingly and with confidence. What it does require is that the coach addresses one of Ray's questions.

Q*. How do I contract with you so that we share clear expectations of each other's role and boundaries?*

Like Ray I believe my purpose is to be in service of my client. Offering ideas or information for exploration seems to me to fall within this purpose. What I need to be clear about is that these ideas or models are only offered as possibilities for exploration. The coachee has the option to reject or not explore them. It is usually helpful to signpost any information that is coming from the coach's experience or knowledge so that the coachee is clear that it is an offer, not an instruction.

Let me end with more questions.

***Q**. How as coach do I judge the boundaries of the relationship? How do I know that I am taking on too much responsibility for the agenda when offering ideas?*

***Q.** How do I ensure that I bring all of myself, my experience and knowledge into my coaching relationships whilst ensuring that the coachee holds primary responsibility for the agenda?*

Book review

"Everyone Needs a Mentor", David Clutterbuck, CIPD, 5th Edition, 2014

Based on almost thirty years of research, the 4th edition (2004) of this work is headed "The UK's Number One Mentoring Book". This is the edition I have been reading, and whilst I realise that the 5th edition, cited above, will be a revised version, I can still recommend the edition I have, as it is remarkably comprehensive. Sixteen chapters cover the spectrum of mentoring, offering definitions, contexts, stakeholders, applications, benefits, required competencies, peer and reverse examples, problems, practicalities and potential. Mentoring as it is typically practised in the USA is differentiated from prevailing forms in the UK and Europe. Mentoring is examined in differing settings, for example in education, in support of diversity, for various levels in organisations - from graduate entrants to aspiring partners and senior leaders, and via face-to-face and electronic means. The text is complemented by figures, tables, checklists, references and index.

The relationship between coaching and mentoring is helpfully explored in several parts of the book.

May 2018

Coaching in organisations - to be effective, how much do we need to know about the organisation?

For any coach who works with people from within a corporate environment some understanding of that organisation's values, culture and style is important. Whilst it is fairly obvious that you need to understand a client's organisational values and culture in fact all coaching takes place within an environment that needs to be understood and acknowledged.

So this article seeks to explore the extent to which, as a coach, we need to know about an organisation's culture, and the impact that it might have on any coaching, regardless of who is actually paying the bills. The AC has three specific competencies which are a requirement for anyone wanting accreditation as an executive coach. These give us a steer - although they are perhaps a little too prescriptive - towards what is important when coaching within an organisational context. The three are: Understanding the organisational context, Understanding leadership issues and Working in partnership with the organisation.

Understanding the context is important in any coaching assignment so what is different when working within an organisation? As a general point, you are likely to have more people to consider as stakeholders and the organisation's values and culture will have an impact on the outcomes of your coaching. You may not always have more stakeholders, as the examples below illustrate. Your initial contact may have come through HR or the manager who wants one of their team coached. In any case you need to understand their intentions and expectations. So I want to offer two examples of coaching within an organisational context that show a very different need for understanding stakeholders and culture.

In the first example the client was the Managing Director of a division of a large corporate organisation. He had considerable autonomy and contracted directly with me for some coaching. In this instance I needed to be aware of the organisation's culture, how what we worked on might be perceived by his director and what impact any changes he chose to put in place might have within his own division and on the wider organisation. In my view I needed to understand him, his values, his division's culture and his own vision for running his business. In contracting directly with him I was not beholden to any other person within the organisation.

In the second example I was coaching an HR Director who was encountering many challenges. The contracting process explicitly involved the Managing Director and we agreed that we would report progress towards mutually agreed targets at regular intervals. In this instance I was beholden to two direct stakeholders. So, when I believed I needed to focus more on the challenges the individual was facing as a 'human being', I felt a clear need to explain this to the MD and gain his agreement to a small divergence from agreed goals.

These examples illustrate different stakeholder requirements. In both cases I needed to be aware of key aspects of the company culture. One organisation was a large former government agency and whilst the MD had considerable autonomy his division operated within a bigger corporate culture. So, my primary need was to be aware of the larger corporate culture rather than anything else. In the second case the client was MD of the UK division of a German company. Once again it was important that I was aware of the wider corporate culture which had a number of explicit requirements e.g. the German parent set many of the standards and HR procedures; there was a clear desk policy; and the owner had an input into certain decisions. I needed to have an understanding of leadership expectations within both organisations and to have clearly agreed objectives about reporting and outcomes. I was fortunate to be doing other work with both of these organisations and so had opportunity and time to gather information. Had I not had this additional work I would have needed to invest particular effort to understand them.

For both examples the contracting process was critical as this set the scene for everything that was to follow.

What are the elements that define company culture that one can investigate or research before an organisational coaching assignment? In his recently published book *The power of company culture* Chris Dyer defines 7 Pillars of company culture: Transparency, Positivity, Measurement, Acknowledgement, Uniqueness, Listening, and Mistakes. They are a good guide to the aspects of an organisation you need to understand.

How well do you understand these seven pillars when working within an organisation?

Book review

In **"Coaching & Mentoring Supervision - Theory and Practice", McGraw Hill, 2011, edited by Tatiana Bachkirova, Peter Jackson and David Clutterbuck,** Michel Moral in his chapter on a French model of coaching supervision refers to company culture as a subsystem with which coaches will be working. This reference prompts me as a coach to be aware of, and attend to, national cultures as well as organisational cultures.

Coaches are typically working with clients who want to learn, develop and improve - to make a difference. Executive coaches are dealing with organisational context and commonly have multiple stakeholders with whom to manage expectations, through contracting and re-contracting. In a rapidly changing environment of technological and social innovation and economic and political uncertainties, dealing only with the status quo will not suffice. Executive, team and leadership coaching occur under emergent and disruptive conditions.

In **"Reinventing organizations - A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness", Nelson Parker, 2014**, Frederic Laloux provides insights into developments in consciousness, culture and social systems and how these shape organisations. He offers well researched and referenced perspectives on emergent organisational models, examples and practices which will resonate with readers familiar with Theory U, Spiral Dynamics, Action Inquiry, Holacracy and Integral Theory. This book is a valuable resource and lens for the future for organisation development consultants and for executive coaches.

June 2018

Expectations in coaching – the positive contribution of contracting

"Be prepared." This is generally sound advice for identifying and responding to problems or opportunity. When I have thought about the endeavour in which I'm engaged, understood why it matters to me, assessed its challenges, examined my capabilities and resources, devised a plan, considered contingencies, checked that I really want it, and set my expectations of progress, then I am reasonably, and most probably thoroughly, prepared. Nonetheless I may be confounded by what occurs, as a significant limitation of my preparation is that in many circumstances I can't be sure of what will happen next. Hence the often cited advice "Expect the unexpected." This is philosophically intriguing and practically difficult. How can I know the unexpected when this is outside my awareness?

Q. How do you expect the unexpected?

Clients are known to bring their versions of this puzzle to their coach. They may be seeking different kinds of assistance, ranging from "Listen to me as I think aloud" to "Tell me what to do" or "Support me to regain some control" or "Help me to navigate uncertainty" or "I want to be more resourceful/resilient/confident" or "Stop the world, I want to get off." They may make their challenge explicit from the outset, or they may take time to recognise and express it. Their interactions with the coach can help to clarify, confirm, question, challenge or redefine their requirement. Each coach will have their own unique way to respond.

Q. How do you discover and confirm what your coachee wants?

Part of the requirement for coach accreditation by the Association for Coaching is that the coach writes an account of "My Coaching Approach". Producing this document prompts me to reflect on why I coach; what my values are; what I am responsible for ethically and professionally; my assumptions and perspectives about people, behaviour, performance, learning and development; the particular type and focus of the coaching I offer; the frameworks, models, tools, techniques and instruments which I choose to employ in my coaching, and how I go about introducing and applying these.

Q. How, and when, do you communicate your coaching approach to your client?

I wonder if you have experienced moments in your coaching when you notice that you have lost direction or focus or rapport. Or times when you sense that your coachee is stuck and you realise that you are too; or occasions when the coaching lacked impetus or desired results for your client. Or when, explicitly or implicitly, your coachee expressed surprise and dissatisfaction: "I didn't think the coaching would be like this."

Q. How, and when, do you inquire into the effectiveness of your coaching?

Much of the growing reputation and credibility of coaching has rested on anecdotal examples. Attention is increasingly being directed to researching coaching to demonstrate evidence of efficacy. Whilst demonstrating causality is problematic, some patterns are discernible, for example that the high quality of the relationship established and maintained between coach and client is the determining indicator for value added, not the particular coaching approach or technique itself.

Q. Do you formally evaluate your coaching, and if so by what means and when?

In coaching occurring in an organisational context there can be several stakeholders, for example the person being coached; their manager; the person providing the budget; other parties to the programme of coaching of which this is a part - in the client organisation and/or in the supplier (of which the coach may be an employee or associate); and the coach and their supervisor…

Q. How can you manage risk and opportunity and optimise outcomes in multi-stakeholder coaching contexts?

Organisational consultants and facilitators seek to co-create a "container" in which to hold their work and encourage openness, dialogue and the building of trust. We can consider the art of contracting as a means to do the same for coaching. During or after the initial "chemistry session" to assess whether coach and client are suited and wish to work together, we can introduce the importance of sharing, respecting and managing our expectations of each other - going beyond the practicalities of how/where/at what time/frequency/purchase authority/billing/communication between sessions/evaluation - and the ethical essentials of conduct and confidentiality - to engage in how we can assess value as we go along, and deal with issues as they arise.

Q. How do you contract at the start for your coaching; and re-contract as necessary during the relationship?

Book review

"Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy - Supervision and Development", Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith, Open University Press, 2006; 2nd Edition 2013

My much-used and respected copy of this text is a reprint of the first paperback edition. I return to it often; as other reviewers have remarked, this is a rich resource for coaches as well as for consultants and supervisors. The book begins with a Preface covering rationale and assumptions, touching on transformational change and the nature of systems; then acknowledgements; and an opening chapter identifying the golden threads of practice. Three main sections follow, each with an introduction and five sub-sections: coaching, mentoring and organizational consulting; development and supervision; and the skills and capacities for coaches, mentors, consultants and supervisors. There are five appendices offering information on relevant bodies and ethical guidelines; a bibliography and a comprehensive index. The essence of this substantial volume is distilled on the back cover in three questions: What are the key skills needed to be a successful coach, mentor or supervisor? How can personal development be effectively facilitated? What are the ethical guidelines for practising as a coach, mentor or organizational consultant?

Whilst contracting is approached from the perspective of the supervisor, most of what is offered is equally pertinent to the coach - a useful checklist, taken from the work of Inskipp and Proctor, is presented as a table, adapted particularly to the requirements of coaches.

July 2018

The agenda in a coaching relationship – who holds the cards?

This month I want to explore the thorny issue (thorny in my view) of the coach's role and actions around the agenda or direction for coaching sessions.

It is common in much of the coaching literature to find that "the client sets the agenda", or the "coach has no role in the agenda or direction". Let's begin by examining these ideas. In her book 'Coaching Skills' Jenny Rogers states that it is the client's job to create the agenda and the coach's role to frame their agenda items into goals on which they can work. So, straight away here we have a scenario where the coach quite clearly has a role in the agenda, as taking the lead in framing goals has an influence on direction and outcome. As for the coach having no role in the agenda or direction my perspective is that by their very presence they have a role.

So, if the coach does have some kind of role, what kind is appropriate? It seems to me that awareness becomes a guiding light. If - and you may not agree with me - by my presence as coach I will have an influence on agenda, direction and outcomes, then being aware about how and in what ways I might be

influencing my coachees is vital. Unless I am completely neutral - which I am implying is impossible - I need to know and understand in what ways my values, beliefs, habits and preferences are likely to influence how I coach and how they may influence my coachee.

Q. To what extent are you aware of how and in what way your values, beliefs, habits and preferences may influence your role with your coachees?

The second area of this thorny issue that I would like to address is the impact on the agenda that the coach's structure and pattern of sessions invokes. I have recently been completing some accreditation assessments where each of the coaches follows a very clear and particular sequence: I do this in session 1, this in session 2 etc. It seems to me that this 'fixed' pattern has a clear influence on the agenda.

Q. Do you use a structure in your sessions that follows a common pattern? If so, how much influence do you believe this has on the client's agenda?

It is not my intention to suggest having a regular structure or pattern is 'wrong' - only to provoke you to think about the possible impact this has on your client and their agenda. If you sense that it might have a greater impact than you previously thought how could you mitigate this without having to change your approach?

A third area to consider is "are there any circumstances when it would be right or appropriate for the coach to take an active part in setting the agenda?" If our instinct is to say "no, no – that is wrong" do the points made earlier suggest that we may unconsciously have a greater impact than we imagined? When might it actually really be appropriate? How would we choose to influence the agenda, and what would we do to remain aligned with the basic premise that the coachee sets the agenda?

Q. How do you start?

The most obvious example, to me, is when the coachee is uncertain about which direction to go in with their agenda and as the coach I might suggest a starting point. If I do this then I need to ensure that I do it in a way that the coachee can reject (this is a point of view that I hold about any idea or suggestion that the coach may offer – it has to be done in a manner that allows for rejection). Otherwise the coach is clearly making a direct impact on the agenda.

Q. What do you notice about your own part in the agenda?

I hope that I have stimulated your thinking about the agenda for a coaching session allied with your influence and impact - both conscious and unconscious. If I have encouraged you to give this thought, to raise your level of awareness, then I have achieved my goal!Book review

"Coaching Presence - Building Consciousness and Awareness in Coaching Interventions", Maria Iliffe-Wood, Kogan Page, 2014

This book examines how the coach can build self-awareness - noticing how their presence influences their interactions and how their values and beliefs affect their coaching interventions. It examines how, by paying close attention to the motivations behind their decisions when coaching, and how they are being present, the coach can reduce unconscious bias and so contribute to a better outcome for the client and the wider system. Rather than seeking to be invisible to the coachee, the coach can recognise when and how to choose to be consciously visible. The author draws attention to the collaborative nature of the coaching relationship, and proposes four modes of coaching presence: invisible, emergent, evident and visible. She explores the impact on the coaching of the coach's personality, life experience, emotions and distractions, and level of awareness, including channels of perception, use of language, and relationship with time. A key premise of the book is that in order to assist their coachees to tap into their own inner wisdom, coaches have first to be able and willing to do this for themselves. A structure for reflective practice is recommended. The role of coaching for the coach, the contribution of supervision

and the parts played by gaining coaching qualifications and accreditation are explored, concluding with key principles for coach development. Resources and references are provided.

Described as “an invitation to a journey to coaching maturity”, this book resonates with our interest “in search of wisdom and mastery”, offering a valuable aid to engage with the questions posed in the article above.

August 2018

On being real - positively, with attention, appreciation and tenacity

Where do retired coaches find parking space? This one is a volunteer, working with and leading other volunteers. My Alchemy colleagues have asked me to reflect on this.

What is the volunteering ‘contract’? Every contract entails an exchange. When the main token ceases to be financial, other values become more obvious. I want to give help effectively, and be part of something that holds meaning for me; I will work hard and creatively for these benefits. Does this motivation differ from paid employment? Again for myself, when it comes to feeding a family, finance has been the overriding need. In terms of personal fulfilment, however, my motivation, whether paid or unpaid, feels much the same.

Volunteering is a bit like running one’s own business; nobody can fire you. Of course, ‘they’ (often charity staff) can - and sometimes do - refuse to give you work, and that, too, parallels self-employment. On the other hand, there are simply not enough volunteers for all the things that need doing voluntarily, and this is where real differences begin to emerge.

A couple of years ago I took over as Chair of Edinburgh Branch of Parkinson’s UK. After 14 very effective years in it himself, my predecessor was keen to hand me the job; fortunately he continues as Vice Chair. I am finding my coaching and mentoring experience most useful in navigating this new role. [My partner has Parkinson’s. It is a neurodegenerative condition, and you can find more about it from the Parkinson’s UK website.]

Any collective activity needs organisation, and the charity has its rulebook and procedures for voluntary groups to underpin their activities. The key thing that we do is to foster practical wellbeing and engaged hope among people with Parkinson’s (PwPs) and their partners. The Branch has evolved to support research, to promote personal wellbeing and to develop as a community. We have gathered over 20 volunteers (half are themselves PwPs) and over 250 members. For those that get involved, the benefits in improved mobility, wellbeing and fun in community can be huge. And yet at best we are reaching a small minority, not even counting all their carers, families and friends. Unfortunately, a great many people with Parkinson’s stay away.

What drives us to challenge the odds? Volunteering needs an abundance of hope and tenacity; without them the effort to make an impact could seem overwhelming. These vital elements thrive on appreciation. Above all aspects of the role I perform, I rate appreciation as by far the most important. It affirms belief in good intent, it accepts outcomes for what they are, of whatever standard, and it always inspires people to do better. Of course there are ways of giving appreciation, and an art-in-practice in choosing what to appreciate and how to express it; this gives volunteers and others guidance, and calls for continuous attentive awareness.

In a different century I spent some years as a professional fundraiser for charitable enterprises. I had to face the exceptional human sensitivity to all things that could be cast - reasonably or unreasonably - in the negative, with a dreadful impact on project perceptions and uncertainties. So I found that without distortion or falsification, I could structure everything that I spoke and wrote in positive language. 'No' became a non-word - a hesitation on the way to readiness for 'yes'! This approach continues to pay dividends with our volunteers. It is never to distort anything by making it sound better than it is. It is simply to tell it like it is, positively. People like to join causes that are working well; ours is - and we appreciate it!

Book review

"Notes from a Friend - a Quick and Simple Guide to Taking Charge of Your Life", Anthony Robbins, Simon and Schuster, 1991

What book would resonate for me with this month's theme? One which acknowledges the contribution of volunteers, and the power of positivity… I went to my shelves and quickly and intuitively took out this slim volume which I had first read in 1997, and have often recommended since. It is dedicated "*To those who understand that life's greatest gift is love, and life's greatest joy is sharing it. Especially for the volunteers and staff of the Anthony Robbins Foundation, whose efforts consistently improve, change, and save lives*". Short - a hundred large print pages - and straightforward, it is based on the concepts and examples presented in the author's "Awaken the Giant Within" and "Unlimited Power".

Robbins refers to "*the simplicity of this little book*"; he describes "Notes from a Friend" as "*a reminder of the fundamentals it takes to truly succeed in creating and enjoying a quality life*". Drawing on how he turned his own life around, he asserts that positive thinking alone is not enough - action is required to produce a change, and belief to make it last. Focus is on what I can do today, on persistence, and on what I can do that will be valuable for other people: what am I grateful for, and what can I give back? He provides questions to assist towards solutions. He emphasises both mental and physical wellbeing and offers guidance on transforming negative emotions into positives. He writes about tapping into "*one of the deepest of human needs: the need for a sense of contribution*".

This book is both an invitation and a means to make a difference; it speaks to volunteers and to coaches.

September 2018

Resistance - experienced as a coach and in the coachee or client

As coaches we see 'challenging the client' as a key part of our role. In **Challenging Coaching** by John Blakey and Ian Day they talk about the ZOUD – the zone of uncomfortable discussion. This is the place where we might be reluctant to go, to explore or even to consider.

What is at the bottom of this difficult place? There might be a number of things and often these show up as 'resistance', either in the coachee/client or in ourselves as the coach. In this short article I want to explore both sides: resistance in the client and resistance in myself as the coach.

Q. *How aware are you of resistance in your client or yourself? What are the signs?*

In our clients the common observable features of resistance – and Peter Block in **Flawless Consulting** goes into much more detail than I have space for here – are: overly aggressive behaviour in the form of anger or very passive behaviour showing up as silence; continually seeking more information or data; challenging your methods or approach; or saying 'it's resolved' (when it clearly appears not to be). Beware – these behaviours do not, in themselves, mean you are encountering resistance as they are all appropriate behaviours at some time. And, if you keep encountering the same set of behaviours, for no apparent reason, then you are likely to be facing resistance.

Q. *How do you, or would you, deal with them?*

This means entering the ZOUD – the zone of uncomfortable discussion. And it may mean confronting the client with their behaviour. As Block outlines, 'naming the resistance' is the starting point, e.g. "It seems that you want more information than is required?"; "You are remaining silent – is this an indication of some underlying concern?"; or just letting the anger subside before asking "What might be causing your anger?". These suggestions may work for you in some situations and they are used here only as illustrations: you still have to make your own judgements in the moment. What you are doing is getting into the uncomfortable area that Blakey and Day call the ZOUD. It can help you make a breakthrough with your client. You are challenging the client to look more deeply into the issue at hand. You may be helping the client to understand themselves or their situation more fully. And remember to remain aware of the state of your client during these challenges.

What about resistance in you as the coach? We all have situations that make us uncomfortable where we are reluctant to go and they vary from person to person. Such situations can arise when we are coaching.

Q. *How well do you know the situations that make you uncomfortable and what do you do when you encounter them? How aware – in the moment – are you when they occur?*

One of the challenges we face as coaches when we encounter these situations is that they are likely to make us less willing to enter the ZOUD, less likely to challenge or confront our clients just when this may be most necessary. So, what can we do? Firstly recognising this is how we feel may enable us to tackle it. Being aware gives us the opportunity to choose to try out new options. Being aware may be an opportunity to share our disquiet with our client. So noticing our own discomfort is the first and most important feature.

Secondly, once we recognise the kinds of situation when this occurs we can set ourselves some learning goals to explore what we are resisting and to overcome our resistance. It might mean challenging some limiting beliefs or expanding our repertoire of emotional resilience. It might be a topic to take to supervision.

Resistance is around us much of the time. As coaches we need to get better at recognising it in our clients and in ourselves so that we have the opportunity to do something more positive.

References. ***Challenging Coaching**, John Blakey and Ian Day, Nicholas Brealey, 2012*
***Flawless Consulting,** Peter Block, Jossey Bass 3rd edition, 2011*

Book review

The references above provide rewarding practical guidance of value both to coaches and consultants. Peter Block devotes two whole chapters to understanding resistance and dealing with resistance, asserting that the required skill is difficult, as resistance arises from underlying concerns of control and vulnerability. He advises on picking up cues, trusting what you see more than what you hear, and listening to your own body. Whilst some people speak of overcoming resistance he believes that "there is no way you can talk clients out of their resistance, because resistance is an emotional process". This insight into emotional intelligence is echoed in

Psychological Dimensions of Executive Coaching, Peter Bluckert, McGraw Hill Open University Press, 2006

Whilst this book is written for executive coaches, and Parts 1, 2 and 3 address executive coaching specifically, it provides information which is pertinent to any kind of coaching and useful for consultants, leaders, managers, teachers, social workers and therapists. Part 3 deals with the foundations of a psychological approach to coaching and Part 4 offers a gestalt perspective to supporting people through change. Bluckert sets out eleven desirable proficiencies for psychologically oriented coaching, and explores Prochaska's theory of stages of change. Reference is made to Timothy Gallwey's insight on self-acceptance as a prerequisite for incentive and capacity for spontaneous change; to William Perry's proposition "if we want deeper understanding of the prospect of change, we must pay closer attention to

our own powerful inclination not to change"; and to J.C. Zinker's paradox of change: "If you support what is, and not what should be, change will take place - if you support resistance to change, little resistance will be encountered and change will take place". Listen!

October 2018

The Thinking Environment

How can the Ten Components inform our coaching practice?

At a recent CPD event organised by the Shropshire Coaches Group, I was reintroduced to Nancy Kline's work on **the Thinking Environment**.

The session reminded me of her powerful question, 'Everything begins with thinking and so what does it take for us to think for ourselves with rigour, imagination, courage, and grace?'

As I discovered that day Nancy's approach has many applications and I was particularly struck by the potential of her 'Ten Components'.

That thought, aided by some active listening from one of my coaching colleagues, got me wondering about how the Ten Components can serve as a helpful reminder of the competencies we work to as coaches.

So here I offer a brief summary of the Ten Components, sharing my thinking on how they might support and challenge the practice of a coach.

Attention: listening with respect and without interruption, challenges the coach to be a truly active listener. Meanwhile not being interrupted frees up the client to think for themselves.
Equality: being clear on boundaries is one of the areas highlighted here, and emphasises the crucial need for ethical practice. Equality also highlights the client/coach relationship as being a partnership, not a hierarchy.
Ease: in partnership the client and coach create the time and space for reflection and learning. Being at ease enables creativity and energy.

Appreciation: the client's creativity and energy is further enhanced where the coach acknowledges qualities and achievements.

Encouragement: as a balance to appreciation, does the coach have the courage to challenge the client to explore uncharted waters and unmapped territories?
Feelings: enabling the client to surface their emotions and safely express how they feel, can generate behavioural shifts and transformational change.
Information: skillful use of direct communication by the coach can help enable client awareness and clarity, perhaps through the exploration of limiting beliefs.
Diversity: here the coach's role is to encourage the client to acknowledge and celebrate difference as steps to tapping into their creativity and divergent thinking.
Incisive questions: perhaps an obvious read across to what we generally refer to as powerful questions?
Place: paying due attention to the 'space' for coaching and being present tells the client 'you matter' whether that be in a face to face, virtual or phone call based coaching session.

Over to you - what are you thinking and what are your thoughts?

Mike White

Book review

"Time to Think – listening to ignite the human mind", Nancy Kline, Cassell, 1999

In this book Nancy Kline introduces the components of a thinking environment, and shows how we can create such an environment, how to develop a thinking partnership, and how this relates to the thinking society and to a thinking future. She develops both theory and practice in her next book, **"More Time to Think – a way of being in the world", Fisher King Publishing, 2009.** She believes that *"the greatest gift we can offer each other is the framework in which to think for ourselves".* This book deals with coaching in a thinking environment, addressing the coaching relationship, contracting, and coach supervision; and goes on to explore thinking environments for mentoring and dialogue, and at work. In her third book, **"Living with Time to Think – the goddaughter letters", Cassell, 2014**, she provides examples of the thinking environment in relationships, illustrating how we can live well, find meaning in our lives, and be happy: thinking for ourselves underpins all of these dimensions.

These principles, processes and practices of being are valuable for coaches and their clients.

November 2018

Choices

choice (n) – 1. Choosing, deciding between possibilities; a necessity to choose, a selection.

2. The power, right, or faculty of choosing; option.

(Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

In recent weeks it has struck me more and more forcibly that notions around choices are central for coachees and coaches alike.

I was working with a group in the financial industry the other day, and whether the discussions relating to their leadership styles and challenges were focussed on adaptive leadership, agility, mindsets or collaborative styles, the underlying 'red thread' was about choices. Leaders continually face decision making choices from the very personal 'how should I be today' to the more practical 'what is required of me in the current situation'? The more self-aware leaders are, the better choices they are likely to make when faced with these sorts of decisions.

Q. How likely are you as a coach to ask yourself these sorts of questions? When and where?

Particularly in a stressful or new situation, natural human instinct leads us to act according to our natural preference. To take a very straightforward archetypal dichotomy, the 'detail freak' will instinctively gravitate towards the minutiae (with the potential attendant loss of the whole), while the strategist risks their balcony moving towards the 20th floor (with the potential disconnect that entails). If however, this choice of how to act becomes both more conscious and informed by the needs of the situation, not only are good choices more likely, they also become more replicable and more transferrable.

As coaches too it is incumbent on us to be aware both of the choices we are making in coaching situations, and also what the other potential choices open to us are at particular key moments in a coaching conversation. This is where healthy reflective practice can be extremely helpful, informing in retrospect, and allowing heightened sensitivity in the future. It is a mark of the master coach to be both willing and able to take a conscious choice contrary to their own preference or style in the service of their client.

Q. How often do you make conscious choices between specific alternatives in a coaching situation? How do you do that?

Book review

"The Fertile Void - Gestalt Coaching at Work" by John Leary-Joyce, AoEC Press, 2014

Written in response to requests from participants of many Association of Executive Coaching workshops, masterclasses, programmes, conferences and lectures, this book expects that the reader has a basic understanding of coaching and wants to add a deeper dimension, increase awareness and enrich interactions with coachees; it is about developing yourself, increasing your creativity and opening your mind to a more profound experience. The foundation for this is the author's long experience of, and training in, Gestalt practice - applicable in life, in business and in coaching.

The three parts of the book reflect respectively on theoretical underpinning, how to use the Gestalt approach in coaching, and two key elements for developing capability as a Gestalt coach: Signature Presence and Supervision. Whilst it is particularly aimed at internal coaches and the complexity of the context in which they work, it is, as Peter Hawkins describes, "…a great and very readable book for any coach who wants to increase their ability to work with emergent change in their individual or team coaching relationships."

Rather than concentrate on changing behaviour, the Gestalt focus invites us to become more of who we are, "exploring, uncovering and understanding what is really going on, from the inside out". Thus, the premise is that by fully experiencing what is going on in the present, "change happens without trying and our behaviour adjusts naturally, without effort".

Theory, examples, tools and exercises are provided, including for somatic practice and constellation work. Centred, present, alive, mindful, the coach brings calm, attentive resourcefulness to their work.

December 2018

What are we learning or have we learned?

This is the 72nd edition of Base Metal and so I thought it worthwhile to reflect on what the Alchemy team have learned from our coaching over this period. We plan to continue producing Base Metal with the intention of its being interesting, stimulating, provocative and challenging, as without these elements coaching cannot move forwards and as coaches we risk dropping into complacency.

Our learning over the past six years covers a wide range of elements from **technique** to **tools** to **approaches** and I plan to use these headings for my review.

Technique. I am reminded of George 'the wild elder' Metcalf's comment "I can explain coaching to anyone in 90 seconds. It then takes a lifetime to become any good at it!". Skill and capability take time to develop: they need regular practice and reflection. In his small book "Mastery" George Leonard (article in November 2016) outlines gaining new skills and techniques and then the necessary period of consolidation and reinforcement before they become automatic. We continue to find this an important aspect of development – 'time for practice'. I was very surprised by discovering how few coaches were part of practice groups or met with colleagues to share, practice and learn. I know that it takes energy and effort to practise and even more to lead local groups. I have found the effort and experience worthwhile in contributing to my own development and helping others in theirs.

Q. Do you make enough time for both practice and reflection? Could you do more in 2019?

Tools. Over the past few years I have discovered that learning 'tools' can be a challenge. When we wrote *TP's tools* most of the tools we included were already familiar to us, and so we believed others could pick them up from the written page. Whilst this is possible it is not as easy as we imagined. Tools need to be understood, used in a context, used with care and thoughtfulness. Simply sitting down and learning a tool does not appear to work. Just like technique it requires practice, being tried out in safe settings before use with clients. We have also discovered that many of the tools available to coaches can be used in three ways: 1) by the coach without the client knowing – as a 'helpmate' to the coach; 2) between coach and client, perhaps by filling in something together, going through a model or idea within a session; or 3) as something for the client to take away and do on their own. We realised that we had learned our range of tools over many years and that we actually use regularly a selection far smaller than we realised. To

increase our store we needed to explore, discover, read and then consciously learn to use new tools. So the same question applies to this section:

Q. Practice – do you do enough?

Approaches. The Eclectic approach to coaching seems to remain the most widely used although we know of colleagues who specialise in one particular approach or another with Time to Think, NLP, CBT and Solution Focus being the four we hear about most often. To learn a new approach takes time, effort and practice. To begin to use a specialised approach without proper training or supervision is irresponsible, probably unethical. Just as taking a very short coach training programme leaves me concerned about the trainee's competence so someone setting out after learning a new approach needs to devote time for practice and reinforcement. So again practice and reflection feature in this paragraph.

Whilst I had not planned it, it seems that my comments in all three categories focus on the need for practice, or 'rehearsal' as a colleague believes is a better term to use. Any top sportsperson, musician or performer will tell you that practice and rehearsal are essential parts of honing and improving your craft. And coaching is clearly a craft-based profession delivered largely through skills, judgement and capability. Perhaps the most important learning I take from the 72 editions of Base Metal and the four cohorts of the Alchemy programme is that I have to spend time, practicing/rehearsing, learning new ideas and practising them so they become automatic, together with reflecting on my coaching regularly with both a supervisor and colleagues.

So here are some questions for you to ponder over Christmas and the New Year:

Q*. Do you practise your coaching enough and are you a member of a group where you can practise and share?*

Q. *Are you getting the best from your supervision? How could this be of even greater benefit?*

Q. *Are you making the most of CPD opportunities?*

Book review

"The Practicing Mind – Developing Focus and Discipline in Your Life" by Thomas M. Sterner, New World Library, 2012

This book invites readers to "master any skill or challenge by learning to love the process". Resonant with the wisdom of Timothy Gallwey's "The Inner Game", Thomas Sterner's proposition is that by focusing on "process, not product", we will learn to live in each moment, finding calmness and equanimity, pleasure and willingness. Focus on the process frees us from attachment to outcomes we cannot control. Through mindfulness we can be present, observe without judging, and so liberate our natural ability to learn. This is a reminder to slow down, become more aware from moment to moment, and let go of the desire for immediate gratification. Through offering examples from his experience, the author shares his learning and distils the essence of practice. He advocates DOC: *do, observe, correct*, evoking for me the value of Shewhart's and Deming's cycle of Plan, Do, Study, Act. *Correct* can be effected when we pause to *observe* and so notice what is occurring and gain insight into what's missing and what to *do* about it. This book is a personal account of a lifelong learning journey where practice allows the process of becoming to transform from a struggle to an adventure.