

Base Metal…

The Monthly Newsletter
from
Alchemy of Coaching

The 2019 edition

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

The Alchemy team — Ian, Ray and Paul

December 2019





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January 2019

Self-coaching - and support

Purpose

My intentions for 2019 include finding greater spaciousness - in awareness, possibility and physical environment: I want to deepen and enrich my field. This means, for me, recognising and letting go of - literally and metaphorically, those habits and objects of having and doing which no longer serve me. I aspire to (re)discover and express who I am and what I want to contribute: to be fully alive. I am reassessing what I most value and making choices about what I want to keep, what I will clear away, and where I will direct my energy and attention to allow for new insight and fresh experience.

Q. What is your purpose? How can you discover / recover it?

Taking time to reflect and connect

This work began in earnest for me when last October I took part in a residential retreat for coaches, unusually and wonderfully presented as a "courageous act of self-care". Influenced in part by Otto Scharmer's "Theory U" and by Wendy Palmer's "Conscious Embodiment", and held in Ireland, the retreat was designed to provide everyone there with opportunity to be calm: to pause, reflect and replenish, and to receive support from others. We invested time and care in mindfulness, physical exercise, connecting with nature, journaling, silence, dialogue and community ritual - honouring somatic, intuitive, mind and heart intelligence and deepening our sense of being and purpose. I offer my warm thanks to Monica Ross and Damion Wonfor for lovingly creating and guiding this profound experience of presence, wellbeing, renewal and regeneration.

Q. How do you pause - and find time and space to breathe, relax, and connect?

Knowing and managing your state

When I am intent on "becoming an instrument for transformational change" (the purpose of the retreat) I recognise that this change begins with me; I will sustain it only by creating and recreating it moment by moment. When I notice how I am - my state (mood, alertness, vitality, connection), I can choose to 'reboot my system' - to re-centre myself and summon the resources I need. Before a coaching session I 'prepare my state'. I have been practising this preparation of state as part of a programme of training in Generative Coaching, presented by Robert Dilts and Stephen Gilligan.

In every session coach and coachee access resources from their respective best state - centred, relaxed, open, aware, quiet mind - and co-create a field in which new possibilities can be discovered. In this field new relationships can be made with internal and external obstacles. Both coach and coachee are noticing when they have lost their most resourceful state and are able to recover it.

Q. How aware are you of state? How do you access - and recover - your most resourceful state?

Looking after yourself

I am most likely to be able to contribute to others when I am in reasonable shape myself: I will be embodying a degree of wellbeing, and have capacity to provide support through my example and in direct assistance. This does not preclude me from helping someone else when I'm not feeling great - this is often a good way to improve my own mood! Whilst I can help myself by helping someone else, as a coach I will want to be in as resourceful a state as I can be in order to be fully present to my client. By becoming aware of what feeds my spirit and my physical health, I can devote attention to self-care.

Q. How do you look after yourself? What works best for you? Are you nurturing yourself enough?

Getting support from others

I can easily lose touch with the importance of acknowledgement and support from others. The greater my neglect of my needs, the less likely I am to be at my best; perversely, the more important this becomes the less likely I am to recognise what's missing. When I most need help, I'm least likely to be able to ask for it. Staying in connection with others, belonging actively to communities of practice, investing in personal and professional development, and taking time for recreation all help.

Q. How do you receive, and give, enough support? How will you ask for the appreciation you need?

Book review

"From Chaos to Center - a Training Guide in the Art of Centering", Judith S. Warner, Aiki Works Inc., 1999

"Center is a state of being. You are centred when you are moving on purpose, without irritation or frustration. You are centered when you are open to discovery, no matter what the circumstances, when you are willing to learn and to change based on what you learn. Center is a mind/body state."

Short, succinct and highly practical, this book provides a guide to creating your own training to incorporate returning to center into your daily life. It is well-referenced with sources of further information and inspiration.

February 2019

Small change, big effect

My classic sports car is my pride and joy: fun to drive, turns heads, challenging to work on; and always capable of provoking thought. I never want to completely compromise its 'classic car' attributes, but I want it to be the best driving experience it can be (or at least that I can afford) and that can mean taking advantage of technological developments.

Recently I changed the wheels to a modern lightweight wheel, with remarkable results – twenty years of development has not stood still in wheel design. I did the work just expecting a bit more compliance from a higher profile tyre, but then on my first drive out it felt as though I had installed power steering! That got me thinking about what automotive designers call ***unsprung mass.***

The set of components (wheels, tyres, brakes etc) that are not supported by a car's suspension make up its unsprung mass. Making these elements lighter can make the car more agile, as less mass means a quicker response from the system, and higher efficiency in those components. In the right hands, that increased sensitivity to bumps in the road provides better feedback and faster, better-tailored responses to uncertain road conditions.

The suspension system of a car is made up of a sophisticated interplay between components, the driving environment and the driver. It's a complex system where changes in one area often affect others, in some cases disproportionately. This observation got me thinking about how, as a coach, I am often on the look out for those seemingly minor or insignificant little changes that can result in a big shift for a

coachee. One carefully phrased question can open up a tiny insight, the effect of which however, is both significant and wide-ranging.

The engineering compromise with unsprung mass relates to a trade-off between agility and ride comfort which again has an interesting read-across into the coaching space from both points of view. If either coach or coachee is too isolated from the detail of what is going on at 'the road surface', how can they react positively to events, or indeed take advantage of the terrain? Ultimately, comfort is not necessarily a good thing in developmental terms, but being more connected seems a potentially positive goal.

- *So, what might reducing 'unsprung mass' mean for us as coaches? What seemingly insignificant changes could we make that might have an amplified effect?*
- *What might reducing 'unsprung mass' mean for our coachees?*

It seems to me that exploring this idea might well allow us all to find better purchase on a twisty road, or even to generate more grip and accelerate ahead of the traffic.

Book review

"Flow - The Psychology of Happiness" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Rider, 1992

Many books have been published on the subject of happiness since this one first appeared. Its many reprints are testimony to the value of this foundational study. The author seeks to understand those states in which people report feelings of concentration and deep enjoyment. He determines that what makes our experience genuinely satisfying is flow - a degree of concentration so focused that it amounts to complete absorption in an activity. "Everyone experiences flow from time to time and will recognise its characteristics: people typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious and at the peak of their abilities. Emotional problems seem to disappear and there is an exhilarating feeling of transcendence. … The way of happiness lies not in mindless hedonism but in mindful challenge." Flow is described as "… joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life".

The book is not a manual or toolkit; rather it presents principles and examples, relying on the reader to make the transition from theory to practice. This endeavour - the pursuit of optimal experience - is likely to be difficult and may not be pleasant at the time of the effort. The reward can be a deep sense of participation in determining the content of life, and perhaps a sense of mastery. Areas explored include consciousness, quality of life, body, thought, work, solitude and other people, self, chaos, systems, complexity, purpose and the making of meaning. Psychological and philosophical lenses illuminate this positive inquiry. I believe it richly deserves a place in every coach's library.

March 2019

CPD – how much, what and when?

In my role as an assessor I have the invaluable opportunity to view the CPD that others undertake. It is often illuminating. As I commented a year ago, in the February 2018 edition of Base Metal, quite a few CPD records indicate that people tend to go broad – covering a range of topics, or deep – investigating the same topic in greater depth. There is also the question of 'how is your CPD connected to your personal development plan?' (you do have one don't you!!).

So, in this short article I want to consider CPD. What sort do we do, when do we do it, how much do we do and how is any of this connected to our personal development – planned or otherwise.

So, to begin

Q. What sort of CPD do you do? Planned, fitting into a pattern? Random or as your fancy and commitments allow? *No judgement is implied that one is better than the other. The question is posed to have you think about what you do.*

If you take the Association for Coaching CPD criteria/categories then a number of activities are accepted, that until I saw their form, I had not considered a part of my CPD. These include: reading books and articles; running workshops and the design elements that are connected to workshops; assessing other coaches; and the obvious ones of attending 'coaching workshops' of varying kinds and through various media. CPD can be coaching-specific or coaching-related.

The number of CPD hours that we have to complete to maintain accreditation is actually quite small, albeit split between input - where we attend as participants, and output - where we deliver CPD activities for others e.g. as lecturers, tutors or webinar presenters). Whilst his split may give cause for concern, as the output hours are often seen as the most difficult to accumulate, it can provide positive encouragement for us to find ways to help other coaches to develop. As I have found over many years, this is very valuable for one's own self development.

Q. How do you or could you help other coaches to develop?

Q. When do we do our CPD? Is it spread out over the year or connected to specific personal development objectives? I suspect for many it is related to attending workshops and events that catch our eye and/or appear interesting rather than to a specific pattern or plan.

Q. If this is the case for you, how might you turn these events even more towards opportunity for focused self-development?

I want to finish with a comment. I have been surprised, when talking to coaches, how many are not a part of any kind of local coaches' group. I am surprised by this, as these groups are an invaluable means of meeting other coaches (and coaches sometimes have a rather lonely existence) and discovering and/or practising other ways and approaches to coaching. These groups often offer co-coaching. Some of them provide certificates of credits towards your CPD hours.

Q. Are you a member of a local group? The coaching bodies, e.g. AC and ICF, will have information about existing groups. If there is not one near you that you could join, could you start one?

CPD is an essential part of our development. Please take it seriously, value and enjoy it.

Book review

"Supervision in Coaching: Supervision, Ethics and Continuous Professional Development", edited by Jonathan Passmore, Kogan Page, 2011

I reviewed this book for the April 2015 edition of Base Metal when our theme was "Our own development journey". I return to it now to draw particular attention to Part 3, which covers Continuous Professional Development for coaches (*David Hain, Philippa Hain and Lisa Matthewman*), Creative approaches to continuous development (*Anne Davidson and Dale Schwarz*), and Undertaking and reviewing coaching research as CPD. [Part 4 offers three related chapters addressing Personal reflection.] CPD is described as a means to "practise what we preach" by taking responsibility to undertake regular and progressive personal learning and development activities. Each coach's CPD will be unique to that individual. Case studies of creative CPD are provided. The chapter on research highlights professional integrity and responsibility to our clients, prompting us to become 'scientist practitioners', actively choosing research topics to pursue and offering guidance on how to do so.

April 2019

Coaching beyond words - holistic preparation and practice

Patterns When there's something I've been meaning to get done that doesn't happen; when I have brought the same issue to coaching more than once - even repeatedly, over long stretches of time; when I'm stuck, what prevents my resolving the matter? It's not an absence of desire or intention, nor is it a failure to envision success. It's not, in the moment of commitment, any lack of conviction, nor for want of a plan. I'm haunted by such things I want to change and yet don't. So what stops me?

Q. As the client, do you find that despite the coaching you haven't changed? What's that about?

What might be missing I wonder what you notice. Here are some examples.

Clarity of purpose: not being sufficiently certain of what it is I want and why it's important to me.

Empowering vision: the picture of the future state is unclear or unappealing to me.

Strength of intention: my commitment to make it happen lacks passion, depth and solidity.

Ownership: actually this is not my responsibility: someone else should do it.

Personal precedent: I have a poor track record, lacking evidence or memory of being able to do this.

Self-talk, thoughts and beliefs: I'm not good enough; I don't deserve it; it's not for me to have this.

Resources: I lack the time, skills, knowledge, enthusiasm, funds, or practical support required.

New ways of thinking and acting: I neglect to build fresh neural pathways of thought and behaviour.

Emotional and physical resilience: I'm not together enough, fit enough, energetic enough.

Rightness for me and others: do I really want it? What will it mean for other people in my life?

Q. Do any of these examples resonate with you? Do you hear them from your clients too?

What could help - requirements for effective growth and change

Clarity of purpose: I connect with and state clearly in a few words what I passionately care about.

Empowering vision: I picture a point in the future, imagine I am there, and see and feel it vividly.

Strength of intention: I sense my commitment - a score of 7 or more on a scale of 1 to 10.

Ownership: I know this is mine to deliver; I have agency and responsibility.

Personal precedent: I recall inspiring examples of my past achievements and anchor these.

Self-talk, thoughts and beliefs: I recognise and state positively who I am and what matters to me.

Resources: I summon help and support from past, present and potential future friends and allies.

New ways of thinking and acting: I experiment with fresh perspectives and first steps.

Emotional and physical resilience: I am compassionate towards and take good care of myself.

Rightness for me and others: I consider and take account of the consequences for others.

Q. Can any of these help you to move from stuck to productive? How will you find out?

Integrating intention and change - internal and external alignment for coaching beyond words

By centering myself in a powerful positive state, aligning my thoughts, feelings and intuitions - my head, heart and gut - I will be more in tune with who I am and what I want to create in the world.

Q. How do I centre myself, and return to centre when I falter? What practice will help me?

Book review

"Coaching The Brain - Practical Applications of Neuroscience to Coaching" by Joseph O'Connor and Andrea Lages, Routledge, 2019

Written by and designed primarily for coaches, and combining philosophy with neuroscience, this book offers much more: it is a guide for mental health and wellbeing. It has to do with our humanity and believing in and valuing ourselves. It spans the nature of the brain; neuroplasticity; cognition; thinking; emotions; making decisions; memory; habits; mental models; learning; relationships; and identity. It is well referenced and highly relevant for supervisors and leaders as well as coaches.

May 2019

Timing

Timing is everything in life and in golf. *Arnold Palmer*

Sportspeople, comedians, business leaders – all have claimed that a sense of timing is a crucial factor in success, whether that be in the golf swing, the delivery of a punchline or the business decision that changes the game. Many have also made claims about whether this ability is innate or can be taught. What I want to explore here is not so much our inner sense of timing (in whatever field) but rather how that sense can be affected by our surroundings, and more specifically by our interactions.

As a golfer myself, Arnold Palmer's observation feels fundamentally right to me – if the various mechanical moving parts of the golf swing do not fire in the right sequence, (i.e. our timing is slightly off), the clubhead is not travelling at its fastest pace when it strikes the ball, losing both distance and consistency as a result. The golfer may be an interesting metaphor for timing as, at one level, that timing is entirely internal: it is up to the player when to start the swing, how to stand, where to aim etc., unlike in many ball sports, tennis for example, where the ball is coming towards the player from the strings of his opponent's racket. However, this fails to take into consideration any outside influences, particularly on the mental side: the current state of the match/round/tournament, recent performances/results in similar positions, how the player is feeling at the time. This is fundamentally why in practice, hitting the shot is so much easier than when the match is on the line, and why however much we practice 'conversation', it never quite goes the way we had planned.

In interactions with other people, our innate sense of 'the right time' is frequently derailed by other parties - perhaps someone carries on speaking when we have something to say, and our chance is lost. For me as a coach, this is a constant balancing act: a continual awareness of when the 'right time' for an intervention might be (assuming such a thing even exists), and the nature of my possible responses or challenges in that individual context. And, all that processing has to happen in real time.

As a musician, timing is crucial to all that I do musically, not just in the obvious field of speed, but in the need to allow singers or instrumentalists to breathe, to allow the music the space the grow, and to find the potential of a piece to move beyond simple repetition. Conductors hold the crucial element of this timing need, and have to walk the careful line between the internal and external, taking responsibility for decision-making, while also being affected by the situation and the other individuals within it.

It strikes me that there are elements of similarity here to the coach, though perhaps at a lower level of agency. We are continually making decisions about what to do or say next, and when, and each of those decisions has the continual potential to change the situation, whether in the service of the coachee, or perhaps not. The mutual space created in a positive coaching scenario is very similar to that needed for collaborative music making, where openness, awareness and listening are at a high level on all sides, and the recognition of commonality towards something significant abounds.

What is our timing responsibility as coaches in a coaching situation, and how far does that responsibility go?

How can we use our observations (both in real time and post hoc) as input and learning for our own coaching development journey?

Book review

Inspired by the theme of timing, I've chosen two related books. The first is a short novel:

"Einstein's Dreams" by Alan Lightman, Sceptre, 1993. Lightman is a scientist and this book is a delightful work of imagination - described by reviewers as "…a world in which time does not march brutally through people's lives, but rather skips and gambols, forever quirky and unpredictable"; "where time is circular, flows backwards, slows down…"; "original, beautifully written...light, amusing, fresh… scintillating intellectual daring"; "to hoard and treasure for bleak times and empty spaces".

The second, one of several poetry books by a contributor to the Generative Coaching training course I've recently completed, is: **"Endless Horizon - Selected Poems" by Nick LeForce, Inner Works, 2013.** This collection has four sections: *Edge of Self, Edge of Other, Edge of Life*, and *Edge of Dreams*. These poems are, in the words of the author, "One way to widen your horizon…to engage it, to go to the edge and discover what is beyond it. When you peer over the edge of your own horizon, you will begin to see beyond the rim of possibility you have set for yourself. You will realise there is more to life than what you have allowed yourself to live." Of the 56 short poems in this volume, one in particular speaks most powerfully to me in the realm of time; here is the second stanza:

Take time to walk out of step

and step out of time;

to squeeze yourself

through that narrow space

between questions and answers

into the abyss we call life

where, for an instant, everything is possible

I recommend both of these books, and other books by both authors; I believe they have much to offer to us as coaches and can equally be valuable resources to those we coach.

June 2019

Back to basics – or some of the basics!!

As the title suggest this is only our view of the basics. It is easy to forget the basics, especially as we become more experienced. Making time to practice the basics can help us to avoid becoming overcomplicated.

So, what are the basics? The obvious ones are listening, awareness, good questions, challenge, support, rapport - all skills that relate, in some way or other, to building great relationships.

I want to start with **intention** as one of the most important aspects of coaching basics. What is our intention when we begin a coaching assignment or coaching session? I hope that my intention is always 'to help my coachee become the best them that they can', 'to help them achieve their desired goal for that session'. And sometimes I get beyond these simple intentions about 'my best help' and start to think "I know where it is best for this session to go!" This happens with the best of intentions and whilst I might sometimes have a clear view of something that would be helpful, if it is primarily my intention it runs the

risk of becoming my agenda and so I drift into 'taking over' control rather than offering help, guidance and support in helping the coachee getting to where they want to be.

Q. How often does your intention get muddled or confused? How quickly do you notice when this happens and how do you get back to your very best intention?

The second coaching basic is **awareness.** Unless I have a reasonably clear idea of what is going on between us then I am operating 'blind'. Sometimes my instinctive awareness is so good (rarely and it does happen occasionally) good questions just seem to happen. This state - sometimes called 'flow'- is rare and most of the time I need to pay attention to remaining aware of what is being said, the non-verbal elements of our communication and the unspoken. I have an image that helps me to do this. It is 'like I have a movie camera watching the session' - looking over my shoulder - and I can continually play back parts, interrogate the film and adjust according to what I observe from the 'playback'. This takes only a small proportion (10 to 15%) of my mental capacity and I find it helps me to remain aware.

The third basic is **listening**. This is a fairly obvious 'coaching basic'. And, as coaches, we generally discover quite quickly that listening really well is hard work and an active rather than passive activity. It requires concentration and effort. One of the TP tools is called Active Listening and includes the 10 Commandments of active listening with Stop talking being both commandment 1 and 10. If we are talking we cannot be listening. Listening with high quality attention is one of the key tenets of Nancy Kline's approach called Time to Think.

Q. How well do you listen? Could you do better?

Questioning is the next basic and is a specific part of the AC competencies, showing up in two of them - Raising awareness and insight and Maintaining forward momentum and evaluation. What is a good question? In simple terms and showing my own preferences it is one that makes the coachee reflect, think deeply about their answer and offer unexpected insight.

Q. What is your view of a really good question? **Can good questions be pre-prepared or is an important component that they are created in the moment?**

There is not enough space in this article to cover other coaching basics. What is your view of the basics? We would love to hear from you and will share your ideas in a future article.

Book review

This month, something slightly different in this slot, but a short book that might well be relevant to both coach and coachee alike (though I suspect as coaches we would like to think that we are better at this than our clients): **"Do/ Pause/ You are not a To Do list" by Robert Poynton, The Do Book Company, 2019**.

Rob is a colleague of mine at Saïd Business School, and his contribution to this field is a typically open-ended and non-prescriptive volume. His goal is to share his infectious curiosity with what 'pause' might mean for each of us in both our professional and personal lives, what benefits we might gain from exploring and understanding pause, and how we might integrate some element of pause into our busy lives. He draws evidential material from his own background in improvisational theatre and organisational development, as well as insight from a wide range of wider human experience, and what emerges is really an open invitation to experiment, with an assurance that such experiments might just work.

I was particular struck by a distinction he makes, drawn from improv actors, between 'Action' and 'Activity': "Action is what they need to create a story. It changes things – for the characters they are playing and for the audience. A simple line like 'It was me' or 'I'm pregnant' is action because it changes our understanding. This is different from 'activity'. Activity is stuff happening. Activity may be busy or

fast – one character chasing after another – but it doesn't make a difference to the story. The difference is important. You can't create a story or engage an audience with activity." (p.58)

In the context of our busy lives (i.e. activity) helping our clients find the action would seem a great goal for us as coaches, with potentially transformative outcomes.

July 2019

What works in coaching? Is listening enough?

"Thank you for listening". I received this sincere appreciation at the conclusion of a recent coaching session. At first I was pleased - I had been present, had given my full attention, and my coachee knew she had been heard. Indeed, she said that she had not felt able to speak about her experiences to anyone else. The confidential nature of the coaching and my distance from her circumstances enabled her to be open and to hear for herself what she thought and felt. This had been time to think.

Q. What is the quality of my listening? What feedback have I received?

Later when I reflected on the session, I asked myself whether my listening had been sufficient for her needs. Was my witnessing enough? Had I identified with her concerns and over empathised? What if she had wanted an alternative view, or more challenge? What cues might I have missed? Could my coaching have supported her differently? Had her thinking changed?

Q. What more could I provide?

I notice that my coachees often tell me that they are *not* heard - whether by people at work or in other relationships that matter greatly to them. Their lives are continually busy: they lack the opportunity to pause, to relax, to regain perspective, to regroup, to connect deeply with self and significant others, to find meaning or contentment. Simply being listened to is a rare and hugely valuable contribution - an oasis of calm, a much-needed temporary halt in a mad whirl of trying to keep too many plates spinning. The opportunity of some downtime is beyond price. Recognition of what isn't working can lead to re-consideration of what's important.

Q. When is listening enough?

Maybe in the example I am reviewing, I did do the best that I could do to have the session be of real service. How can I know? Perhaps my intuition, after the event, that I could have acted differently, is a clue to what may have been missing. This was not our last session so perhaps I will discover more when we next meet. I will be alert to whether anything has changed, and will contract for what's wanted now.

Q. What does my intuition tell me?

One way I can sense whether listening makes a difference is to notice patterns. How aware are we of what we tell ourselves about who we are? Is the story repetitious; is the narrative entrenched; is the person stuck? What if the coachee can access an alternative possibility? How might a different account lead to a new way of being? Whilst we cannot change what happens, we can change the interpretation and meaning we give it.

Q. What patterns do I notice in the language and story and mood and physical state of the coachee? Are they aware of their patterns? How might I check for understanding? What choices do I have to respond?

I am fortunate to be able to attend a co-coaching group. Most of the meeting time is devoted to coaching practice, working in pairs or trios. After each turn there is feedback for the coach from the coachee, e.g. what you did that worked, and what I would have preferred for you to have done differently. There is self-assessment by the coach e.g. what did I do well? What might I have done differently? And, with a trio, there is feedback from the observer, who often notices what the coach and the coachee may have missed. The coaching is about real issues, so has direct value for the coachee; importantly, the

opportunity for observation and feedback provides insights, and there is encouragement to experiment and develop skills.

Q. What opportunities do I take to receive feedback on my coaching and to reflect on my practice?

Book review

The pervasive busy-ness described above prompts me to choose two contrasting books which speak to this condition of mindless distraction. The first is a manual for achieving meaningful focus and productivity. In his **"Deep Work - Rules for Focussed Success in a Distracted World", Piatkus, 2016, Cal Newport** proposes that "*most people…have lost the ability to go deep - spending their days instead in a frantic blur of email and social media, not even realising there is a better way*". His remedy - deep work - is a means to create new value, improve our skill and cognitive abilities, achieve more in less time and provide a sense of true fulfilment.

The second book is itself a deep enquiry into the distracted world, although from a very different perspective: **Josh Cohen's "Not Working - Why We Have to Stop", Granta, 2018**. His proposition, summarised by reviewer Adam Phillips, is that "*work doesn't work for most people and even when it does work it is a refuge from so many other things.*" This book is an appeal to our humanity - as reviewer Lisa Appignanesi asserts: "*a passionate argument for the benefits of floating free from the chains of work. Scintillating*."

I commend these distinctive books to coaches and to leaders, as provocation to think and feel more profoundly and creatively about the challenges we all face in a turbulent world.

August 2019

Why do we coach?

I have been looking back over my working life as I move towards stopping work/retiring. At the same time there have been articles and events discussing where is coaching going and what role do/should coaches have with regard to issues like climate change, plastic pollution, financial crash etc.

I began to coach some years before the term came into popular usage. At the time I was working as a leadership and personal development manager within the assurance business. I was clear, and some of that clarity is probably with the benefit of hindsight, that I was trying to enable individual managers to do a better job, especially with regard to their people skills and awareness. Looking back I believe this was coaching or certainly using a coaching approach.

This led me to coin the phrases *Capital "C" coaching* for formal contracted sessions or assignments and *small "c" coaching* for using a coaching approach of questioning, encouragement, challenge and support as a way of helping people.

So, around this time, some 40 years ago, I realised that my aim was to help others. I was better at this than leading myself. I seemed to be able to quickly build rapport and trust with my clients that enabled challenge and support. I discovered that I was more challenging than I believed when a client responded to my saying, "I'm pretty gentle really" – with "Gentle… I don't think you realise how challenging you are…. however that is OK, even if tough to take, as it is so clearly done for my benefit".

This feedback gave me encouragement to continue to help people develop and improve their skills and performance and so led me to exploring becoming a coach, which at that time in the mid-1990s was developing as a profession. It seemed a logical step to take as this is what I was doing, always within an organisational context building on my experiences of being a training and development manager.

I participated in a number of 'coaching' workshops and completed my first accreditation in 2005, where much to my surprise I was one of the first 50 people accredited by the Association for Coaching.

Q. What led you to become a coach? Was it a straightforward decision?

Having become a coach I have found that the challenges then become multi-faceted, in how to improve as a coach and in how to develop a coaching practice and the most viable context in which to do so.

Q. How much time do you give to developing as a coach? What are your primary development activities?

Coaches can be fully occupied by finding clients and delivering the coaching. This focus on task can feel like an imperative, taking priority over any other consideration. Personal learning and continual development of knowledge and skills can be neglected. Joining a community of practice helps to provide feedback and fresh perspectives. Being in supervision plays a positive part in development, encourages reflective practice, and is a requirement of continued accreditation.

Q. How do you develop your coaching practice?

Coaching, for me, has been both a rewarding way to work and a rewarding occupation. It has become far more widespread over the years that I have been involved with it and has increased in both professionalism and variety. I have been an AC accreditation assessor for the past few years and have found that reading the 60 or so applications that I have had the privilege to assess has provided a great form of CPD and learning. These assessments have helped me to develop my own coaching understanding and my coaching practice. One of my enduring beliefs in the AC as the most appropriate coaching professional body is the effort it makes to embrace the widest possible variety of coaching styles and approaches within a clear and rigorous set of headline criteria.

I hope that you are able to enjoy and value your role as a coach as much as I have over more than 40 years.

Book review

"Values and Ethics in Coaching", Ioanna Iordanou, Rachel Hawley, Christiana Iordanou, Sage, 2017

With roles at the Universities of Oxford Brookes, Lincoln and Lancaster respectively, the authors bring their interest in ethical coaching practice to a wider readership. Covering contracting, confidentiality and boundaries, their book invites you to examine your own personal and professional values and to recognise and reconcile ethical dilemmas and choices. They explore ethical issues for coaching in business, education and training, sports and healthcare contexts, taking an evidence based approach. They promote reflexive practice as a critical and deeply reflective means to examine one's personal perspectives, assumptions, values and beliefs. The book includes stories from practice and is extensively referenced, with questions for reflection and suggestions for further reading.

"A must read for practitioners and HR professionals." Cary Cooper, University of Manchester.

September 2019

Imagine

The human imagination is a very powerful thing. It has given birth to the greatest inventions of human history, jaw-dropping art and architecture, transformational music. It is the engine of innovation, the centre of creativity and the one common element which characterises children's play. It also has the potential to become a hugely destructive force if allowed to spiral downwards.

Q. As coaches, are we trying to harness this mental power in our coachees for their benefit?

It can be very tempting (for both coaches and coachees) to fall back on the classic mantras that are around this area: 'fake it till you make it', 'if you believe you can achieve', 'live your dreams'. In my experience, however, there is greater risk that such a way of thinking becomes superficial, and doesn't result in ownership or authenticity on the part of the coachee, both of which are crucial for any change to

be embedded and real. To my way of thinking, the job of the coach here is to construct a safe space where the coachee's imagination can be brought into play in a way that has the potential to shift perspective, and enable insight.

Several times in recent months, I have encouraged a coachee to realise (and I mean this in its 'make real' sense) the core content of the session – does this thing have a form? What does it look like? When that image (or sound or entity) is voiced and 'made real' by a coachee, that can open up huge potential to use it and extend it: for it to become a 'red thread' through a whole session (or indeed across sessions); a touchstone. Once it is voiced, that also opens up the conversation about choices and strategies, which is where a skilful coach's imagination can be brought to bear on something that is already real for the coachee.

Many coaching approaches try to make use of imaginative practice whether through linguistic metaphor, visualisation or the more formal structures of NLP for example. I would suggest, however, that there might be more opportunities than we normally recognise in coaching conversations to encourage the drawing on the power of the imagination in the service of our clients.

Q. Have you used an imaginative approach in your coaching recently? Did it work, and how might you tailor such methods in the future? If not, what might it look like if you did?

Book review

"Human Givens - a new approach to emotional health and clear thinking ", Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell, HG, 2003 and **"The Master and his Emissary - the divided brain and the making of the Western World", Iain McGilchrist, Yale University Press, 2009**

The first (described by Nick Baylis as "of sufficient power to completely revolutionise our approach to parenting, teaching and the caring professions") proposes a way of understanding and supporting emotional health and the realisation of human potential; the second (described by A. C. Grayling as "beautifully written, erudite, fascinating and adventurous) reveals how rigid structures, narrow self-interest and a mechanistic view of the world exert an enormous cost to human happiness and the world around us. Both books are extensively referenced.

These books are not new, nor are they quick to read, at 400+ pages. Investigations in neuroscience are moving at great pace and already some of the propositions in these books have been challenged by fresh discoveries. Nevertheless I choose to recommend them for their capacity to stimulate our thinking and challenge our assumptions about psychology and culture and hence our practice; there is much in each volume to provoke questions about how we coach and what difference we can make.

Griffin and Tyrell draw attention to the misuse of imagination and invite us to use our imagination more effectively. McGilchrist shares Blake's distinction between Ratio, the God of Newton and creative imagination, the God of Milton. What is my relationship with imagination, and how might reading these works assist me to know myself and even to venture into the imagination of others?

October 2019

What has coaching got to do with it?

We pose some questions about being human, and suggest that they can be productive for the coach's reflective practice and for work with the coachee.

What do I want? People often express uncertainty about this question. Do I really want it, or is it something which I should want, something expected of me by others? Do I trust my intuition - and does this align with my rational assessment of what's right? How much compromise is necessary? How can I tell? If I could have this, would I truly want it? When I am clear what I want, how can I explain my inability

to behave effectively to deliver it? Is my desire unreasonable or unattainable, or is there something lacking in my motivation and commitment to achieve it? What else may be inhibiting my progress? Is someone else to blame? Such inquiries often arise in coaching.

Alchemy of Coaching employs the SOCK-I model: Self, Other, Context, Knowledge - and Integrating. Allowing that all models are untrue and some are useful, we will examine the questions above by viewing them through the lenses of SOCK-I.

A starting point can be with self: this is about me - so what is my part in it? How well do I know myself (my multiple selves)? Who am I - personality, character, preferences, behaviour, uniqueness?

Self: Q. *How well do you know yourself? How well do your coachees know themselves?*

I exist in relationship with others. What is the nature of my relationships? With whom am I connected? What is the quality of my relationships? Where do I invest my attention and energy? Where do I fit in - or not? What's missing in my connections with others? How important is this? Who are my friends and supporters? What values underpin my relationships?

Other: Q. *Who are the significant others in your life and how do you relate to them?*

Context is everything. I do not exist in isolation. I can know myself well only in so far as I recognise the circumstances in which I find myself and the systemic nature of my experience. Arguably this includes how I got here - my history; what's so now - current reality; and where I'm headed - my prospective future. Whilst I can't change what's actually happened, I can change the meaning I attribute to it, and so, potentially, alter what's in store for me. This is where coaching can make a difference.

Context: Q. *How accurate and honest is your sense of your context, current reality and prospects?*

I am shaped by my knowledge and skills, and equipped by them to make my way in the world. What I know and can do are valuable resources for me to call upon. How much do I recognise and nurture them? How much do I appreciate my abilities? What is my potential? How am I learning and growing?

Knowledge: Q**.** *How do you assess, appreciate, and develop your knowledge, skills and capabilities?*

Self, other, context and knowledge are ingredients in the complex mix of being human: they are interdependent, interacting continually in what we do, feel and experience. In the matter of doing and being, we are alive as we consciously engage in integrating them - with curiosity and awareness.

Integrating: Q. *How do you live with awareness, moment by moment - awake, alert, mindful?*

Working as a coach, and working with a coach, can be a way to developing embodied presence.

Book review

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

Julio Olalla, President of the Newfield Network of ontological coaches, in his appreciation of this book, reminds us that we have reduced learning and knowing to exercises of the disembodied intellect; and asserts that "coaching was born…to take care of these issues" and that in "Somatic Coaching" we will find a dimension of the art of learning which is an inspiration. The book is about linking actions, emotions, thinking, and energetic states to open up a world of possibilities. Through engaging body, heart and mind we can awaken energy, confidence, curiosity, commitment and transformation. The author's challenge to his readers is that "while these ideas may seem evident, even simple, embodying and living them is an entirely different matter". He advocates engaging a somatic coach, joining a community of somatic practitioners and finding partners for the journey. A positive place to start is to read this informative and inspiring book: it's about "waking up".

November 2019

The outside and inside of coaching

It was close to 9am on a crisp Monday morning as I approached the carpark on the edge of Cannock Chase. I had been looking forward to this walk ever since Jon and I had decided to go for a walk. We both enjoy the outdoors and value the direction that our chat takes.

As I arrive, I see Jon already donning his walking boots and windproof coat – obviously as keen as I was. We exchanged the usual pleasantries and then embarked on what would be another great chat. Jon and I are both executive coaches, and both love the outdoors. Our conversations are far-ranging but far from pointless. We stretch, challenge and encourage each other in a way that you can when you are outside. As we pump up another hill, our blood is circulating faster as we draw in the cold morning air into our lungs.

As we reach the top of the hill Jon asks "So, from this vantage point – which view are you drawn to?".

To the left is a duller sky with many trees interrupting what could have been a perfect view as I squinted into the sun. To the right was a view to behold, one of rolling hills blending in valleys and hidden dips. It was that one that I chose. We then went on to explore this in more detail using this gorgeous metaphor to encourage my creativity and thought. The breakthrough or light bulb moment had happened.

A few weeks later, I ran a co-coaching group where we used walking as the tool for coaching in the centre of Birmingham. The briskness of the walks, the concentration, comradery and challenge as non-eye contact yielded breakthrough for many on a Monday afternoon.

Why do I share these stories? I believe that there is real power in how using the outdoors as a coaching medium can break a deadlock in coaching. You can use this with clients, helping them out of their Dilbert-like office pod into an expanse that is limitless where boundaries can be stretched, and horizons expanded.

I implore you now – give the outside a go! Challenge your practice and thinking in a way that you may not have experienced. Let's face it – if nothing else (and it won't be), you will have had a nice walk in a surrounding that you will now know a little bit better.

If you are interested in trying some new things out – please check out our co-coaching group in Solihull – http://c0a.ch/coco

You can contact me at **simon@wheresmylunch.co.uk**

Book review

Spending time in nature is shown to be good for our health, and walking is similarly good for both mental and physical wellbeing. Here, in this spirit, are three books which enrich our theme of walking; and a fourth about the art of living well late in life.

"A Philosophy of Walking" by Frederic Gros, Verso, 2015, reviewed in the Observer as 'beautifully written: clear, simple, precise'; in the Financial Times as '…why so many of our most productive writers and philosophers…have also been indefatigable walkers'; and by National Geographic Traveler as 'Life affirming stuff'.

"Walking with Plato" by Gary Hayden, Oneworld, 2016, '…lifts the spirits with its lightness of touch'.

"The Vintage Book of Walking - an Anthology" edited by Duncan Minshull, Vintage, 2000, which celebrates some famous walks in world literature - 'over two hundred voices, each attempting to say why, how, and where they have made their tracks'.

"Travels with Epicurus", Daniel Klein, Oneworld, 2014: 'Meditations from a Greek island on the pleasures of old age', '…a delightful and spirited conversation…' '…charming and accessible', 'makes academic philosophy relevant to ordinary human emotion.'

December 2019

Reflecting on seven years of Base Metal

This is my final article for Base Metal as I am 'retiring' at Christmas. Whilst I will still be doing a littttttle coaching and some accreditation assessing I am drawing a line under my forty-odd years as a coach and Organisation Development person.

When we began Base Metal seven years ago we had a quite a few comments about the challenge we would face producing one a month. We have managed to keep up every month and only once in seven years have we not actually produced and distributed Base Metal within the month it is written. So, the whole Alchemy team feel proud of our achievement.

We have covered a very wide variety of topics over these seven years, returning a number of times to some themes – usually ones that we believe are critical to being an effective coach. Whilst the range of topics has been wide there has been no logic or order to them. We have generally looked a few months ahead and we have decided, as individuals, which topics we would take; the order has generally been decided by when articles were needed and who was able to write them at the time.

Whilst the majority of the articles have been written by members of the Alchemy team, and over the 7 years this has included Ray, David, Melanie, Trevor, Paul and myself, we have been delighted to include articles by six guest authors and we are very grateful for their contributions. We are always pleased to be offered articles and so please do let us know if you would like to write one.

Whilst the articles have been written by a variety of authors all but two of the book reviews have been written by Ray. As some of you will know he has an enviable library and loves to add to it. He has managed to find at least one book to review that fits the main article for all of our eighty-four editions to date – a notable feat. So great thanks to Ray.

I began by saying we have had articles scanning a variety of topics. Many have covered skills and competences critical to being an effective coach, such as listening, questioning, being present and awareness. We have also used our experience as accreditation assessors to identify important topics, such as Letting Go, Boundaries, Supervision, and Coach Development. A different set of articles, for the Association for Coaching, has explored *Why do we coach? How do we bring ourselves to a coaching conversation? How do we appropriately support our clients?* and *How do we work with the challenges of complexity, simplicity and dilemmas?*

A particular theme has been coach development, looking at it through a variety of lenses, for example learning new approaches, learning in supervision, and being in coach communities and groups. I have certainly been a little surprised and disappointed by how many coaches don't make time to meet with other coaches to exchange views and ideas or to practice. For me this has been a vital part of my own development and I am grateful to everyone I have met within groups over the past thirty-five years.

What of slightly less mainstream topics or approaches? We have looked at metaphor, somatic coaching, generative coaching, transformational coaching, Time to Think and The Wheel of Wisdom: all really interesting topics offering new ideas and possibilities.

I won't mention every theme we've covered, as they can all be viewed in our e-books which we put up on our website www.alchemyofcoaching.com at the end of each year.

Our profession has evolved over the seven years Base Metal has been published. It has become more organised and professional. I am sure that this trend will continue whilst allowing coaches to be themselves and use a broad church of styles and approaches.

I have found it valuable CPD writing my articles and I believe my colleagues would say the same. So, as I sign off from this part of my coaching career I want to wish all who see this Edition of Base Metal best wishes for the future.

Ian

Book review

"Helping People Change - Coaching with Compassion for Lifelong Learning and Growth", by Richard Boyatzis, Melvin Smith and Ellen Van Oosten, Harvard Business Review Press, 2019

The authors make a powerful distinction between *coaching for compliance* - shoulds, oughts, external expectations and mandates, and *coaching with compassion* - facilitating the discovery and expression of personal vision and purpose. This work is based on *Intentional Change Theory* and backed by extensive research, pointing to the greater longevity of constructive change delivered by coaching with compassion. The book includes numerous examples and key learning points and is thoroughly referenced. The invitation to imagine and *to dream* is equally applicable in formal coaching and in conversations with colleagues, friends and families. There are unlikely to be surprises here for those who coach self-motivated individuals; the positive provocation of the book is for anyone involved in performance coaching or multi-stakeholder coaching to explore and re-assess the efficacy of their approach and to discover that there is a better way.