Base Metal...

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Alchemy of Coaching

Introduction

Coaching is highly regarded both by satisfied clients and capable coaches, yet how sure can we be that the coaching is effective? Much of the information we have is anecdotal and self-reported. It is likely that failures are not well-publicised or rigorously examined. How can we assess the value of the coaching? Perhaps this measurement is easier in performance coaching than in developmental coaching. Ray touches on this question below and reviews a research-based book on understanding the nature and value of the coaching process.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Learning from critical moments in coaching

What are 'critical moments' in coaching? When and how do they occur? What consequences do they have for coachee and coach? What as a coach can I learn from them?

'Critical moments' or 'moments of truth' can be defined as points in time when a significant shift occurs. This can happen during a coaching session or outside of the session - whether soon afterwards or at a later date. Such shifts can be in the state of the coachee, the state of the coach or the state of the relationship.

Examples for the coachee include:

- the coachee has a powerful insight
- the physiology and/or emotional state of the coachee shows a marked change
- the coachee engages at a new level of commitment
- the coachee's story changes profoundly
- The coachee moves decisively to action
- the coachee declares that they are now 'done'
- the coachee suddenly terminates the coaching without explanation

Examples for the coach include:

- Some way into the session the coach realises that coaching is not occurring
- the presence and attention of the coach are lost
- the coach notices "I don't know what to do"
- the coach realises the conversation has become about them
- the coach becomes aware that the session is not working for the coachee
- the coach acts in a new way which immediately alters the dynamic
- the coach moves unexpectedly to terminate the session

Q. What 'critical moments' have I experienced in my coaching? What happened? What did I learn?

Coaching in organisations brings particular challenges, whether I am an external coaching provider; an internal coach; or a 'leader (or manager) as coach'. As an external coach I may be subject to the expectations of several stakeholders and to their often differing amounts of involvement and investment in the nature, delivery and

outcomes of the coaching; I may become caught up in being a surrogate supervisor or inadvertently assume responsibilities which belong to the line manager. As an internal coach I am more likely to be affected and constrained by the politics of the workplace. As a leader or manager seeking to incorporate explicit coaching or a coaching style in my day-to-day work I will probably encounter issues with employees concerning how I lead and manage. In all of these cases clear contracting is essential. Critical moments provide important prompts to revisit the expectations, roles and responsibilities of the parties.

Q. How in my contracting do I anticipate and limit the incidence of damaging critical moments?

Each 'critical moment' requires a response appropriate to the particular nature of the shift. Some can be addressed there and then, others may become evident later. Such incidents benefit from review and exploration in supervision, when learning can be deepened and alternative responses considered. Regular reflective practice assists me to evaluate my coaching; identify where my skills and knowledge are strong, adequate or lacking; and make commitments to pursue continuous professional development to improve my confidence and competence. Alchemy of Coaching have created coaching guides to assist this process, including descriptions of the "capabilities" I can use to monitor my fitness. https://alchemyofcoaching.com

Q. Do I engage in reflective practice? How do I identify the particular capabilities I want to enhance?

Book review

"Critical Moments in Executive Coaching - Understanding the Coaching Process through Research and Evidence-Based Theory", Erik de Haan, Routledge, 2019

This book is described by Frans Hoek as "Thoughtful, revealing, frank and honest. The handbook for professionals who want to continue learning." Erik de Haan leads the Ashridge Centre for Coaching; he has drawn on a wealth of qualitative empirical research to offer evidence-based insights into the value of coaching conversations and the impact of critical "moments of change", from the perspectives of coaches, clients, stakeholders and sponsors. He provides numerous case studies and records of actual coaching moments to inform the reader, and innovative models and concepts to assist coaches to learn.

Each chapter has three parts: a themed example; conclusions from the example; and detailed discussion of the methodology, hypotheses, tentative conclusions and limitations (mainly based on peer-reviewed articles).

Whilst the research is taken from a range of real coaching conversations and relationships in workplace and executive contexts, it is instructive for coaches in any environment. It looks into the practice of both experienced and inexperienced coaches, their clients and their commissioners, and provides practical advice.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Open your heart, mind and gut - with curiosity, care and courage." Marcia Reynolds.

"Deprived of adventure, our optimism fades." Julia Cameron.

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