Base Metal...

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Alchemy of Coaching

Introduction

The Association for Coaching accreditation assessment requirements include the writing of "My Coaching Approach". This provides an opportunity for the applicant to produce a reasoned and coherent account of what coaching means for them and why and how they go about it. Reading these accounts is often fascinating for the assessors who gain insights into many different varieties of coaching. Assessors are concerned with finding consistency between the approach described and the practices revealed throughout the other elements of the application. In this edition of Base Metal Ray explores some related thoughts.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Coaching principles and pragmatics

Ethics and Codes of Practice are properly held to be essential for responsible coaching. Coaching bodies have invested time and attention in working to align such guidance so that the nature and standards of coaching are made explicit and can be upheld. Common principles form the basis of sound practice. Nonetheless ethical issues and dilemmas may arise which the coach can take to supervision to explore and gain clarity.

Q. Have you experienced ethical challenges in your coaching? How do you go about resolving these?

Our clients are seeking to develop themselves. Working with a coach offers attention, witness, support and appropriate challenge. In the Alchemy of Coaching coach training programme we encourage participants to bring their whole selves to their coaching, including their knowledge, skills, experience, values, personality, styles and preferences - and to be aware of the context of the client. Rather than to prescribe a particular kind of coaching, we invite them to begin from "Who am I as I coach?" Examples include some who hold to "unconditional positive regard" for the client; some who choose a dedicated listening approach such as Nancy Klein's "Time to Think"; some who like to employ "Clean Language" with its associated structured questions; and some who prefer Gestalt or NLP or Ontological approaches.

Q. If you are not accredited or credentialed as a coach, have you written about your coaching approach? This can be a beneficial way to understand better your purpose and practice. If you have written or thought carefully about your coaching approach, has this changed with more experience? Is it ready for revision?

Research, for example by Erik de Haan, suggests that the efficacy of coaching, rather than being dependent on a particular approach, is a function of the quality of the relationship between coach and client. Expectations and agreements form the framework for building, sustaining and, if need be, recreating the relationship. Hence Contracting is a key ingredient both at the outset and during the assignment. Recontracting may be required so that the process is not unhelpfully forced along a predetermined course. Attention and flexibility play their parts - the contract can be both clear and structured and organic and evolving through time. It can be complex if there are multiple stakeholders.

Q. How does Contracting feature in your coaching? How does this affect the quality of your relationship?

Various terms are used for the initial stage in coaching, for example "chemistry session", "intake appointment", "on-boarding". These provide a "go/no go" choice as to whether to proceed. Factors may include a feeling that "this is/isn't a good match"; a sense of alignment/conflict of values; a recognition that

coaching is/is not what's best at this point for the prospective client/situation; access to/absence of time or funds. Depending on circumstance and temperament of either or both coach and client there may be inclination to say "yes" or "no " - and if "yes" this may be brought into question and have to be addressed at a later stage.

Whether you are a "development coach" or a "performance coach", or do not make this distinction, you may find yourself supporting decisions or directions taken by your client with which you disagree. This is likely to be at least disturbing. If you take a view that your job is to support your client to become whomever they want, then you will probably continue. If the conflict is deeper you will need to explore it, lest otherwise you can no longer act with integrity.

Q. How do you respond to issues arising around values and/or behaviours which compromise your coaching?

Some coaches hold fast to a particular definition of coaching and its inherent practice and processes; others are principled in their ethical commitments and at the same time pragmatic in their practice and processes. Such difference is illustrated by coaches who hold their client fully capable and resourceful and offer no suggestions in contrast to coaches who do offer suggestions to their clients or seek agreement to adopt a mentoring role when they believe this would be in service of the client.

Q. How would you characterise your coaching approach? Purist or pragmatic? What are the implications?

Book review

"The Transformational Coach - Free your thinking and break through to coaching mastery", Clare Norman, Right Book Press, 2022.

This book is about shifting our own mindset as coaches in order the better to support our clients to shift theirs. The work starts with ourselves. In order to become transformative in our coaching we are urged first to let go of unhelpful programming, and unlearn many of our scripts, trappings and beliefs - from parents, schools, peers, workplaces, managers, and our experience. These categories of mindset are identified and challenged via 83 specific shifts and several retrieval practices. Connection is made to ICF Competencies and Professional Certified Coach Markers. A bibliography is provided.

Clare worked for seventeen years with leaders in Accenture. She practises non-directive coaching: she does not provide answers, lead clients to answers she thinks would be good for them, disguise advice as a question, mentor, nor teach. "*The premise is that 'the thinker' (the person you are coaching) is 'creative, resourceful and whole' (Whitworth et al, 1998) - that they have the answers within them.*"

"Essential reading for coaches." Marie Quigley. Forewords by Jonathan Passmore and Bob Gerard.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"…the coaching will be formed by the two of you together….The relationship with the client will be unique. The two of you will tailor-make an alliance that is intended to serve them. This is true even if the company is paying the bill." Ian McDermott and Jan Elfline, ITS.

"Who I've been being isn't necessarily who I am - this could be a habit." Anon.

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Contact us We look forward to all kinds of communication for **Base Metal**… it's a forum for sharing and learning about coaching. Please do send us ideas, thoughts, suggestions or feedback.

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