Base Metal...

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Introduction

Paul invites us this month into his musical sphere and asks us to consider the differences between mindset states and how this might be relevant for us as coaches, and indeed for those with whom we work.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy Team**

Practice, Rehearsal and Performance

Practice to develop new skills is fundamental. Rehearsing in safe environments before Performance is also important to build confidence in new skills, choices and ideas. What is less often explained - except perhaps in the musical world - is the importance of rehearsal. This is where we take our skills practice and put it into a 'safe' rehearsal space before using it in a performance. Local co-coaching groups are excellent places to 'rehearse'.



The Alchemy team have developed a model, shown in this simple diagram with the accompanying words. This model, or way of thinking, originates from my background as a musician, and can be utilised in various different spheres of experience, and in several different ways. At its root, it is a locating model, rather than a linear one - a way of recognising, or informing oneself about which of the three states one is in (or would like to be in) at any given time. That knowledge and awareness can be game changing in developmental terms. The three 'states' are all connected but not necessarily in a step-by-step progression. The utility of the model is in recognition of which state you are in, and the various choices that knowledge opens up to you. It might inform and facilitate more effective use of the current state, or point at changes that might be made to achieve that improvement. It might also flag the potential to move to another state, and raise pertinent questions about the nature and timing of that move.

Practice

In this state, the focus is on building technical capability. For a pianist, for example, this might include scales, studies or exercises that are working specific areas of technique. It might also involve focussed effort on specific passages of an individual piece that need work due to difficulty. Elite musicians often have an ability to work in this state for significant periods of time, honing and finessing the technical backbone of their craft.

The goal of the practice state of mind is to allow the musician to be freed from the technical elements of what they do when they perform by continually maintaining and finessing those technical underpinnings through focussed practice.

Q. *Do I practice enough?*

Rehearsal

In the rehearsal state, the focus now switches to what one might call 'developing an interpretation'. This is, in

its purest form, the freest and most creative of the three states, where experimentation and failure are the watchwords. Here, the musician spends time in an openly creative state, discovering for themselves (whether individually, or in a group) what their particular interpretation of a particular piece might be, today, in the current space, with the current instrument(s) (and people). Whilst individuals might well make decisions about interpretive options that 'don't work', the goal here is not to so finely hone a performance that it can then be simply repeated. It is about the learning process of exploration, of developing the range of expression and a suite of artistic choices, and one whose output is a musician who is ready to perform their art. Our general observation is that too few people (or indeed organisations) engage in this sort of 'real' rehearsal, often moving straight from practice to performance.

Q. *Do I have a means or a space in which I could 'rehearse'?*

Performance

This is about delivery - all of the preparation and exploration is done, giving the performer freedom to make their art in real time. This state is pointedly not about replicating what took place in rehearsal (though clearly many decisions made in the rehearsal process will impact on performance). Its focus is on engagement with both the music itself and any audience, on communication, and on the realisation of something unique and in the moment.

Q. Do I review my 'performance' to draw out the maximum learning and to provide some direction for where I need further practice?

So how is all of this relevant to coaching? In our experience, awareness of and clarity around which of the three states is in play at any particular time is not only useful for efficient and effective outcomes for our clients (an element perhaps that the camera over the shoulder is looking at): it also has much to tell us about our development. If I have spent time learning the technical underpinnings of a particular model or approach (practice), I might ask myself what elements of real rehearsal might put me in a position to understand my own potential usage of this model, and integrate its use (and the understanding gained from it) into my coaching practice.

'Practice makes perfect' may be the mantra that comes out of this for you, but be aware that the perfect is nigh-on unattainable (if perfect actually means anything at all in a coaching context). The development value is in the application of techniques learned, and the ability to make active choices in real time to use them with the confidence gained through effective practice and rehearsal.

Book review

"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster, 1989

Paul's exploration of practice and rehearsal takes me back to this classic book on personal development, and in particular to the author's seventh habit: "Sharpen the Saw" - "…the habit that makes all the others possible". Sharpening the saw is about renewal: of physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions of our nature. We benefit from exercising all four of these "in wise and balanced ways" through the habit of continual practice and learning. Discovering or rediscovering this book is rewarding for coach and coachee alike.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"It is strange how the more I practice the luckier I get!" - Gary Player

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paul@alchemyofcoaching.com ray@alchemyofcoaching.com
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