Base Metal...

February 2024

Alchemy of Coaching

Introduction

Last month's Base Metal topic was *self-care* - a theme echoed by the focus at February's Coaching Central meeting on *building resilience*. Both discussions addressed how in a seemingly increasingly turbulent world we can maintain our wellbeing and our ability to support our clients. In this edition Ray explores some related perspectives and issues for the role and responsibilities of the coach.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Coaching through climate breakdown

Boundaries are important to me as a coach in my relationship with my client, for example my ability to separate my own issues from those of the client; recognition of the likelihood and effects of bias, projection and transference; my tendencies to want to fix the client's problem or influence their level of aspiration and ambition to change; and matters of confidentiality and ethical practice.

Important too is my appreciation of the context of the coaching, including the stakeholders involved and their sometimes differing expectations of the coaching. Similarly important are the beliefs and assumptions which I and my client have about the coaching and our willingness and ability to surface, recognise and identify where these are aligned and to explore and resolve where they may conflict.

Prominent in my coach training and continual professional development are the requirements and abilities I have as the coach to deploy emotional intelligence: to be self-aware; able to regulate my own emotions; to empathise; and to build, maintain and rebuild connection and rapport.

My responsibilities include taking account of my own and my client's mental state, both before contracting and during the coaching, including judgement about when some other form of support is needed and how to manage bringing the coaching to an appropriate conclusion. I benefit from having a supervisor to whom to take such concerns.

My capacity to be fully present and to listen is an essential ingredient of my coaching. Before I begin a session, I choose consciously to check in with myself - how I am, physically, emotionally and mentally. When we begin I inquire of my client "How are you?" and invest my full attention. I seek to remain as fully present as possible during the coaching - and there will be considerations to address requiring attention to what has happened in the past and what arrangements are needed for the future.

Q. *How do I prepare myself for my coaching? How aware am I of my own state and that of my client?*

The particular context of the coaching is surrounded and influenced by its wider environment of organisation, communities and society. Predominantly now this greater context is shaped by concerns of uncertainty and volatility - a sense of having even less control over events - economic, political, personal - than we may have enjoyed before. When the future is unpredictable and feels threatening, anxiety is likely to increase. Worries - about cost of living, homelessness, illness, war,

abuse of power, and inability to influence events - sap energy and resolve, and contribute to deteriorating mental health. Pre-eminent amongst such concerns is climate breakdown. Faced with evidence of massively unstainable population growth, floods, fires, degrading of biodiversity, food and water deprivation, increasing displacement of very large numbers of people, and increasing conflict, some people adopt a mood of resignation: *human kind is doomed; there is little or nothing I can do about it*. Others wait and see: *someone or something will sort this out*. Some prefer, whether consciously or unconsciously, to ignore it: *carry on as usual*. Then there are those who engage (typically, and not exclusively, grandparents and young people): *raise awareness; take positive action*.

Q. How much do I attend to existential challenges? How much does my client? With what response?

I recently attended a talk on climate breakdown and threats to food security, informed by research, scenario work, and findings from a powerful simulation entitled "The Game". The current evidence and predictions of catastrophe are very sobering. I was sharply reminded of a provocation from a mentor: *wake up!* I realise that whilst it's important for me to be present when I'm coaching, it's also important for me to be curious and aware, for me to meet my client as human being with human being, to show up real and alive, to be able to empathise, and to be both prepared and resourceful.

Q. *How do you prepare yourself to coach in the wider context of global uncertainty and challenge?*

Book review

For information about serious risks to food security and policies and practices to respond, visit The Birmingham Food Council: www.birminghamfoodcouncil.org

For a book on the scale of the threat, see **"Hothouse Earth: An Inhabitant's Guide"**, by Bill McGuire, Icon Books, 2022.

For books by coaches who have chosen to specialise explicitly in responses to climate breakdown, see

"Climate Change Coaching - The Power of Connection to Create Climate Action" by Charly Cox and Sarah Flynn, McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2022;

"Ecological and Climate Conscious Coaching Guide to Evolving Coaching Practice", editors: Alyson Whybrow, Eve Turner, Josie McLean, Peter Hawkins, Routledge, 2022.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Most world leaders just don't get climate breakdown. They don't understand how bad it is going to be. It's going to reach into the global economy and society and tear its heart out." Bill McGuire.

"It is time for the scientific community to grapple with the challenge of better understanding catastrophic climate change." Luke Kemp.

Let us know your response to Base Metal articles and reviews. *We welcome guest contributors!*

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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