Base Metal...

April 2024

Alchemy of Coaching

Introduction

Base Metal articles range widely across the spectrum of coaching topics. In June 2018 we wrote about the positive contribution of contracting to address expectations in coaching. This month Ray returns to the theme of expectations, to examine how they influence the nature and outcomes of coaching and raise questions for coaches to consider.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Expectations and assumptions

The world seems to me to be increasingly turbulent and uncertain. The news is continually about distress, suffering and violence. I count my blessings. I feel especially fortunate to have a garden. This brings me great joy, particularly so in April and May when there is fresh growth and brilliant colour everywhere. As I write I can look out of my window and see myriad blooms: pink apple and white cherry blossom, purple lilac, red yellow and orange tulips, red and blue anemones, a sea of pale blue forget-me-nots, tall columbines, bright wallflowers of many hues, a dark green and purple curtain of honesty, white dead-nettles, golden dandelions and cream primroses. Very soon the first clematis will flower, then roses and extravagant peonies. All of this force of nature seems marvellous to me, feeding my spirit and sense of gratitude in being alive.

Q. *What brings you joy, solace and renewed vitality?*

My garden is partly wild, attracting bees and bugs and butterflies and birds. I hold on to my neglected oasis whilst all around me people are tearing up their gardens in favour of brick and concrete hard-standing to park their cars - there are now very few green areas close to the road and much of the wildlife, save for robins and blackbirds, has disappeared. What chance for biodiversity? I do my bit.

Despite my deliberate nurturing of a wild garden, I am frustrated by the unusually persistent cold and wet weather which has delayed my plan to sow seeds and transplant from pots which crowd my kitchen. I had expected that by now I would have created possibilities for many more wonderful contributions later in the year. Meanwhile I have invested in a form of cold-frame to help with the transition, and for those species for which the time is too late I will be saving the seeds for next year.

Q. *How do you respond when your desires and expectations are not met?*

I have expectations of myself as a coach. I want to do a good job. I aspire to make a difference. I seek meaning and validation from my work. I also recognise that my wishes for my client may be more about me than about them. I remind myself that I am not here to fix anything or to solve the problem that I imagine my client has; rather it is my responsibility to support them to do the work to find the resources they need. Any anxiety on my part that I may not be doing enough to help may get in the way of my being fully present and able to listen and be witness to their experience and concerns. My

being fully present and attentive is necessary and yet not sufficient: the work for me is about my own awareness and learning. Hence the value of being in supervision, participating in practice groups and maintaining my continual professional development.

Q. *How do you notice and manage your own expectations of your role and responsibilities as a coach?*

Establishing a clear contract between coach and client at the outset of the coaching will provide the foundations for both/all parties to share, clarify and agree their expectations; re-contracting during the coaching will help to maintain or re-align understanding. Assumptions play a significant part in how well the coaching will progress. Starting with negative assumptions - "this will not work"- is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. How about positive assumptions? These can result in setting the bar too high, with consequent disappointment or missed opportunity. Best begin with zero assumptions: neither negative nor positive - as open a starting place as possible (there will be unconscious bias and assumptions from those of my filters of which I'm unaware).

Q. *How aware are you of your assumptions when you coach? What might you do differently?*

Zero assumptions might seem incompatible with positivity. Not so! I can begin with no assumptions, then use what I know about how the brain works to aim towards positive outcomes. I will seek to end my conversation (my thoughts, writing, speaking) with the positive wanted outcome, thus prompting my brain to direct its attention accordingly. I can model this preference when with my clients.

Q. *How in coaching do you recognise and employ the power of positive thinking and speaking?*

Book review

"Solve for Happy - Engineer your path to joy", Mo Gawdat, Bluebird/Pan Macmillan, 2017

The author was already working on how to replace unhappiness with joy when he suffered the death of his son during routine surgery. He responded to this personal tragedy by choosing to develop and share his formula for joy in life, no matter what. The book is a moving expression of the challenges Mo faced in accepting, dealing with, and transcending his distress. He provides a thorough and precise description of what he did, setting out the means to recognise illusions and blind spots, identify truths and overcome or let go of obstacles to happiness. The chapters contain many concise powerful insights and reminders in bold text offering a formula to follow to "make the most of life".

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Happiness starts with a conscious choice." Mo Gawdat.

"Listen and connect with people." Ryan Holiday.

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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