# Base Metal...

## August 2024

Alchemy of Coaching

### Introduction

Ray's holiday has prompted him to be grateful for new places and people, to value those he has returned to, and to ask how in coaching and leadership the practice of reflection plays a vital part in achieving desired change.

**Paul and Ray** **The Alchemy team**

### Action and reflection

In Base Metal for June this year I wrote about being congruent: fully alive and present in the moment. For me this state of vitality, of being "in the zone", is free of thought and effort. I aspire to experience more often this marvellous quality of being. The example I gave came from a time when I was deeply engaged in an adventure, realising my long-held dream to see Everest close up. The point of the story was to prompt other instances when that same clarity and joy has occurred and to sense how I might experience more of these special moments both for myself and with my clients.

***Q. When have you been fully alive? Does this occur when you are coaching?***

One of my coaching questions is "What do you love to do?" Another is "What do you really care about?" A third is "What do you notice when work (or life) is going really well? I find that these questions can evoke significant insights and elicit possibilities for my clients. If they have an "Aha" discovery I will sometimes invite them to make a reminder note of what they have found.

***Q. What questions do you ask of yourself and others to access the essence of being fully alive?***

I am writing this soon after my return from another adventure. I've been away on holiday driving through the Lake District and Scotland, indulging my love of mountain and forest scenery. I combined my tour with visiting friends, some of whom I rarely see. I've experienced magnificent scenery, mixed weather, lovely gardens, good food and memorable conversations (some of these with strangers). For two weeks I was free of e-mail and telephone messages and wonderfully unable to deal with matters arising: the break from routine was very refreshing. New places and perspectives have challenged me to reconsider some of my priorities.

***Q. What real or imagined adventures offer you, and your clients, fresh perspectives and choices?***

In my re-enlivened state I'm able to look afresh at the familiar around me, to appreciate places and tasks as if these were new and unknown. This is an opportunity to notice and make adjustments. I will do so now, before the novelty wears off and I fall back into habitual patterns which may no longer serve me. I am reminded of how coaching can help in a similar reassessment of what helps or hinders.

***Q. How can a change of scene help in deciding on what to do differently?***

During my time away I was often travelling alone with ample time for thinking. I was reminded of the importance of reflection in making sense of what matters most. Reflective practice is a theme in Alchemy of Coaching coach training and leadership courses and supervision and of the webinars we have presented for the Association for Coaching. Hence my choice of book to review this month.

The adult learning cycles offered by Honey and Mumford and Kolb and Rubin show how an individual's preference for one or two styles of learning can be at the expense of a full appreciation of, and benefit from, completing the cycle. For example, If I confine myself to theory and reflection I may not move to action; if I pay attention only to action and pragmatism I may not understand either the system or the limitations of my habitual behaviour. Best instead to seek to visit all parts of the cycle, however uncomfortable that may be.

***Q. What importance do you afford to reflective practice in your coaching?***

## Book review

**"Weekly Leadership Contemplations", Amanda Ridings, Matador, 2020.**

I am pleased to return to this book, first reviewed in Base Metal in October 2020. I have attended some of Amanda's workshops and have the highest regard for her writing, facilitation and dialogue work.

This book is for leaders, coaches and other practitioners to gain inspiration for their own reflection and learning. Prefaced with an invitation to reflect on your leadership (whether or not you are in any way a leader in role or title) are 52 pieces, grouped into Self-leadership, Leadership in conversations, Leadership perspectives, Leading and learning, and a coda on Rejoicing. Each piece comprises two or three carefully crafted pages, closing with questions to stimulate contemplation. Amanda brings clarity and depth to her own enquiries, sharing the bright and the dark of being human and navigating towards a way of being which serves both self and others.

The book is rewarding whether as a manual for weekly practice or a treasure trove to dip into at any time. Highly recommended.

## Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"To think is not enough; you must think of something." Jules Renard

"The function of the imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange." G. K. Chesterton

"Few people think more than two or three times a year; I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking once or twice a week." George Bernard Shaw

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paul@alchemyofcoaching.com ray@alchemyofcoaching.com

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