Base Metal...

November 2024

Introduction

Ian Saunders, dedicated co-founder of Alchemy of Coaching and originator and architect of our programmes and Coach Development Guides, has "returned to write his final Base Metal article". We hope to persuade him to provide an encore at some point; meanwhile he asks "What about learning?"

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Intent/Purpose, Direction, Goals!! What about learning?

Goals are often cited as critical and without goals coaching might just be a cosy chat. Thinking about goals recently led me to the conclusion that they are not enough on their own.

In this short article I want to encourage thinking and discussion about Intent/Purpose (I shall use Intent for the remainder of this article) and Direction when coaching as well as Goals and pose the question "are Intent and Direction equally as important as Goals?" I also want to suggest that learning for the client from each session and the overall assignment is as important as intent, direction and goals. (Learning is equally important for the coach).

Intent, Direction and Goals are like Russian dolls – all three fit one inside the other. Intent addresses the **Where to** and **why** of a coaching assignment and is the largest doll. Direction provides a **potential route** and aims to help keep the coaching moving forward – and is the middle doll. Goals are **agreed** for **each session** and are represented by the smallest doll which fits inside the others. In organisational settings it is sometimes the bigger picture or larger, longer term outcomes, e.g. Intent, that Line Managers are most concerned about rather than individual session goals.

If we take 'improving confidence' (a common reason for coaching) then the Intent might be to contribute more within the team or improve promotion prospects. Direction might start with developing greater assertiveness and willingness to contribute in team meetings building up to larger events. And a specific session goal might be 'what would you have to do to speak more in the next team meeting?'

In early conversations between coach and client we need to talk about all three. Without some connection of all three elements it is easy for coaching to hop from one specific session goal to another without a clear idea where the coaching is leading. In the Alchemy of Coaching Coach Development Guide Number 1 "What is at the heart of coaching", Intent is the central tenet.

Q. To what extent do you consider Purpose/Intent and Direction as well as Goals?

And where does learning fit into your conversations with your clients? I would contend that if the client gets no learning from their sessions - that they can apply in other settings - the coaching falls well short of what is possible and of greatest benefit. And this is the case even if they achieve all the goals that they set. So it is important to ensure that the client explores ways that they learn within each session and considers ways that this learning can be applied in settings beyond the immediate goal.

Q. How much do you think about the learning that the client takes from their coaching sessions?

Why do I believe that Intent, Direction, Goals and Learning need to be appropriately integrated? Let's start with Goals. Setting Goals for each session provides a focus and when achieved a satisfactory end point. This is all good. What do you do, as coach, if the specific goal is achieved within the first few minutes of the session? If there is an agreed direction that supports the overall intent then it is easy to explore another goal within the session, or consider what learning is derived from achieving the goal and how might it be used elsewhere. In fact considering the learning could become another goal within the session.

Without some idea of direction coaching can meander all over the place achieving specific goals and failing to move the client forward in any meaningful way. And if direction provides a route that the coaching can take, the overall intent gives some indication of a possible destination. And learning underpins all three by enabling the client to significantly enhance their skills, capabilities and opportunities.

Q. What is your view about the importance of explicitly integrating learning into your coaching?

I hope that I have made a case for the importance for a coach and client to consider Intent, Direction, and Goals from the outset and to regularly review progress of all three elements. It is also important to review learning at each session. My final question, in a coaching session, was often "what have you learned today?" and I generally viewed this as at least as or often more important than have we achieved the goals that you set.

Q. To what extent will you pay more attention to integrating Purpose/Intent, Direction, Goals and Learning within your own coaching practice?

Book review

"Coaching for performance - A Practical Guide to Growing Your Own Skills" by John Whitmore, Nicholas Brealey, 1992.

The basis for the GROW model of coaching questions; in the introduction we find "…people's potential to learn fast and perform to a very high level…"

"Mindset - The New Psychology of Success" by Carol S. Dweck, Random House, 2006

Introducing the difference between having a *fixed mindset* or a *growth mindset*. We can choose: success is about learning and learning requires the growth mindset. "If you have a growth mindset … you know that talents can be developed and that great abilities are built over time".

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Coaching is where I learn everything" – *Marshall Goldsmith*

"Coaching is not just for problems but for the improvement of your best" – *Michael Bungay Stanier*

"Coaching encourages learning as well as meeting goals" – Ian Saunders

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.

paul@alchemyofcoaching.com **ray@alchemyofcoaching.com**

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