Base Metal...

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Introduction

Usually, and by no means always, coaching clients have some sense of what outcome they would like the coaching to help them to attain. In the November 2024 edition of Base Metal Ian proposed that learning is at least as, if not more important than, whether the goals have been achieved. In this edition, Ray, prompted by Ian's article and by reading "Coaching a-z", asks more questions.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Where to?

Q. What proportion of your clients have a clear destination for their coaching?

Most people who book a taxi, queue for or hail a cab, or request a lift, know where they want to go. That observation may seem obvious! It's an example of a 'towards' motivation - in contrast to an 'away from' motivation. Research suggests that whilst 'away from' motivations can have high short-term impact - e.g. in the car example "Get me away from here!" - 'towards' motivations have longer lasting effects - "Arriving now at destination". The latter is a desired state on which to build - even when it may turn out not to fulfil expectations. A version of this 'towards/away from' difference is that "If you don't know where you're going you'll certainly get there - only you won't know where you are". A more philosophical view could be "Wherever I am, here I am: what/where next?"

Q. Using the metaphor of coaching as a travel service, what kind of 'transport' do you offer?

One derivation of the term 'coaching', given by Joseph O'Connor and Andrea Lages in "How Coaching Works", A & C Black 2007 (one of my favourite coaching books) is that the term "comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word for a carriage, something that takes you from where you are to where you want to be". Perhaps our practice is closer to the service provided by self-guided holiday companies: support is provided and the traveller has to do the work rather than rely on a leader/the cab driver. Part of that responsibility and self-reliance involves knowing when to ask for and obtain help. O'Connor and Lages use the description "Quest" which resonates for me with the eponymous healthy quadrant of Steve Downing's Archetypal Stories (Quest, Conflict, Tragedy, Scam: which prevails in your culture?).

Q. When coaching, from where do you start?

In "Coaching a-z" (reviewed below) Haesun Moon shows how "Where to" (Ian's Intent/Purpose?) is a useful question from which to begin - rather than, as many coaches do, starting with "Where from?" (Present State): polite initial inquiry such as "How are you?" can unintentionally mire the client in the unwanted condition, preoccupied by "away from". She writes that instead of asking "What's the matter?" we can ask "What matters to you?" to find out what they really care about. She goes on to assist her client to identify and acknowledge what they have achieved already (Haesun's "a" word is "already") in moving toward the wanted state: rather than a problem focus, this is a solution focus. For a user of 'GROW' this could mean paying more attention to 'Goal' and 'Options' rather than to 'Reality'. In organisations this is the choice of Appreciative Inquiry: examining how what is working well can be developed and adapted. Choosing to begin by looking ahead aligns with and can be

supported by strengths-based coaching, using those strengths which help rather than hinder.

Q. Do you tend to begin with, or soon move to, "where from" inquiry? What might you change?

Some clients repeat, and ruminate on, what has happened to them - to the extent of seeming, or indeed being, stuck in their story; they may be so familiar with and attached to their account that it has become an essential part of their identity. For such clients letting go is difficult, and change is illusive. They may desire something different, commit to it intellectually, and be unable emotionally to move towards resolution. They may need a therapeutic intervention before coaching can help them. For others the possibility of re-writing their script may be too daunting, yet this can happen as a result of their focussing on what they want and what they have already done to move towards it.

Q. How might you apply "Where to?" in this way to your coaching and to your business and life?

Book review

"Coaching a-z: the Extraordinary Use of Ordinary Words" by Haesun Moon PhD, Macmillan, 2022

Eminently readable and insightful, this book from an experienced communication specialist, coach, coach trainer and consultant opens with the expectation of "A Gift of Better Conversation". The author's 'listening compass' offers an excellent sensing device: "a conversational GPS" to orientate us to the landscape of this particular client; a kind of map then follows with powerful words as the key. Each letter of the alphabet in turn informs the choice of a single word to guide the coach in engaging appropriately in the coaching conversation. The effect, and affect, of that word is brought to life through Haesun Moon's own experience - a personal story, from childhood, as a mother, at work, and as a coach. She provides short extracts from coaching conversations to illustrate the difference that can be made.

I found the book kept my full attention, prompting fresh thinking, and as I went along I benefitted from answering the questions in the Reflection Guide which accompanies each chapter.

"Coaching a-z" is recommended on her website by fellow-Canadian Michael Bungay Stanier and shares the clarity and practicality of his own books "The Coaching Habit" and "The Advice Trap". Few books live up to their advertising blurb as deservedly as this one: *"Your indispensable guide to coaching mastery"*.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"…people realise that they are much closer to what they want than they thought…" Haesun Moon

"Stay curious longer." Michael Bungay Stanier

"…I can ignore my own urge to interrupt…" Julie Starr

"We succeed or fail in life, gradually and then suddenly, one conversation at a time." Graham Thompson.

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