Base Metal...

February 2025

Introduction

When in 2011 David Adams, Caroline Doughty, Ian Saunders, Melanie Jones, Ray Charlton and Trevor Smith - all then members of a community of practice called The Coaching Forum - envisaged a new programme to provide advanced coach training, they wondered what name they would give to this exciting enterprise. They chose **Alchemy of Coaching**. A company was created, a web address was registered, Masterclasses were prepared, and the first running of the programme was designed. In January 2013 they launched a monthly discussion paper for coaches: in this 146th edition Ray reflects on the significance of choosing **Base Metal** for its title.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Panning for gold

Perhaps the metaphor of Alchemy, with its implications both of magic and of frustration, might be less applicable to coaching than that of searching directly for gold...

As an introduction to this line of inquiry let's look first at what Alchemy of Coaching has produced.

From the outset we shared the view that our advanced training programme would not espouse one particular model of coaching, nor deliver the only right way to coach. Whilst we did gain accreditation for the programme from the Association for Coaching - which entailed meeting specific criteria for scope and quality and preparedness for application for personal accreditation - our founding principle is to co-create with our participants a supportive learning community composed of individuals coaching from who they are in ways which allow them uniquely to be themselves at their best. We start with the person and then seek the coach.

We were guided by the Association for Coaching Competencies - and developed these further into our Alchemy of Coaching Capabilities. We held development days with our alumni; identified and refined a wide range of distinctive coaching tools and models; distilled our experience and understanding into webinars hosted by the Association for Coaching; and wrote and published a comprehensive series of Coach Development Guides which can be found for sale on our website. We were engaged in continual learning and development and reflective practice. Each cohort of participants in the programme has been provided with face-to-face practice and supervision.

We have called the programme "***Alchemy of Coaching - In Search of Wisdom and Mastery***". For what reasons did we choose this description?

Firstly *Alchemy*: because alchemy is a process of transformation - a realisation of greater value, a conversion of base metal into gold. And because alchemy exudes magic and mystery. So coaching can be considered a marvellous deliverer of change for the better: of movement from dark to light.

Secondly the *Search*: because we believe that wisdom and mastery are both eminently worthwhile aims and yet are unattainable: 'the more I know and can do the more I recognise what I do not know and cannot do'. This idea is the essence of lifelong learning - a quest, rather than an attainment. Only after Ian and I had achieved our respective Master Coach accreditations did Ian instigate the writing of our Coach Development series: the number of draft versions of each guide shared between Ian,

Paul and me before its publication attests to the individual and shared learning process which accompanied their creation.

A more modern assessment of coaching, emphasising evidence and research, would eschew the magic implied by alchemy in favour of rational explanation. Yet measurement can be problematic and causation elusive. What part does intuition or instinct play when you are in flow in your coaching such that the client does the work, owns the change and surprises both of you? As you reflect on how that worked, what do you notice?

I return to my opening provocation: would *panning for gold* be a more appropriate metaphor for coaching? The difference here is that the gold is already there: this is a process of discovery - of uncovering and accessing strengths, qualities and capabilities which in turn allow action which delivers better outcomes. The analogy breaks down if the holder of the pan - the coach - is doing the work. We can contrive to achieve a better fit by imagining that the clients are working their own pans - as we witness them identifying and using the gold they discover for themselves. I will stretch this metaphor to make a link with the book review below: the client has first to recognise their context, stake their claim, assemble their tools and begin to work. Are they in a conducive frame of mind, with a perspective of what the coaching is for, a willingness to engage, and with an idea, if the coach is in some sense their taxi driver, of "where to?". Another metaphor for another discussion.

Book review

" Cultivating Coachability - How to leverage coaching readiness so thinkers can optimise value", Clare Norman MCC with Dr Sam Humphrey, Right Book Press, 2024

The premise of this book is that not everyone is coachable: "the most significant variable in coaching is the readiness, willingness and ability of clients to change in ways that are meaningful to them" Drake, 2023. 'Coachability' depends upon context, stakeholders and readiness. Clare Norman re-asserts the principle that "your role as coach is to pull coachability out of the thinker, rather than attempting to pour something in through teaching and telling." In describing the first encounter session with the client she prefers the designation 'Compatibility' to the commonly used 'Chemistry'. She covers three-way contracting settings as well as one-to-one self-referrals. A consistent theme throughout is the importance of the agency of the client to make change: "Your job as coach is *not* to create value. Your job is to be a catalyst for the creation of value, but not to create value yourself. … "Change comes from within, not from without." She shows how to recognise coaching readiness - and hence how to say "no" to a potential contract. She also restates: "a book is only as useful as the changes you make to your own practice."

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Time spent doing nothing is rarely wasted." John Lennon.

"We must not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we first began and to know the place for the first time". T.S. Elliot.

"We don't value things, we value their meaning." Rory Sutherland.

"What do we want? What can we do? Who can we be?" D. Heath and C. Heath.

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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Our coach development guides, articles and papers are available from www.alchemyofcoaching.com

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