# Base Metal...

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### Introduction

In this edition of Base Metal Paul examines how attending to the relationship between physical fitness and mindful awareness can improve our ability, as coach and coachee, to survive and thrive in a turbulent world.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy Team**

### TUT and Coaching

Like many of us I'm sure, as the weather improves I find myself both keener and more able to make time for outdoor exercise, and that time with the trainers (or cleats) on has given me pause for thought in relation to my coaching practice. What might the useful parallels be between exercise and coaching?

Aside from the obvious 'we get better at it, the more we do' (which interestingly seems to me to apply to both coaches and coachees), there is one specific element that might be worthy of attention. The concept of 'time under tension' (or TUT as it is known in bodybuilding and weightlifting circles). The underlying idea here is that increasing the amount of time that a muscle group is working (i.e. under tension) across a set of repetitions helps build muscle more efficiently. Exponents of this approach might, for example, lighten weights while increasing the number of reps, and slow down the speed of each rep (in particular the eccentric – or lowering – phase) to increase the TUT[1].

One of the reported effects of a TUT approach is an increase in awareness and focus, and the possibility of more mindful routines which have greater emphasis on process than on outcome, which strikes a chord with me when reflecting on some of my recent coaching experiences. It might even be argued that in this sense, coaching is the TUT of mental development, building capacity and endurance just as bicep curls build arms. It strikes me too that this is partly about bigger goals and the macro scale – if I lift weights, each repetition has a goal as does the set, but what is my larger outcome here? Why am I doing this? What is my wider purpose?

A crucial element is this notion of awareness – a challenge of any coaching relationship to encourage and develop the noticing and observational ability of a coachee in order to facilitate growth and change. Without that building of awareness, ownership of change is much more difficult, and what seems potentially transformational in the context of a coaching session risks becoming transient; embedding new thoughts and behaviours becomes much more difficult.

The other angle relates to a 'smoothing of the curve', where the stretch (the tension in this example) is noticeably different from the norm (comfort, if you will), but is not so far removed from it as to be of a completely different sort (the equivalent of the snatch lift, for those of you who like weights). Many of us will recognise the effects of constant stress and tension in our clients, and what I like

1The contrary approach would be to increase weight and decrease reps, lifting heavier weights more quickly.

about this parallel is the recognition that time under tension is good (it's a learning and growth space), but that we cannot be in that space all of the time. If we are, the potential benefits of the stretch are diminished, and can eventually turn to entirely negative consequences of pressure, fatigue and overwhelm. This comes back again to the awareness angle as being paramount, both when 'exercising', and at rest, and the choices that might open up if we are able to build that capacity.

***Q. Do I have a client for whom TUT might be a useful coaching parallel?***

Two books published forty years ago whose messages remain rewarding for coaches and clients to study today; plus a 1990s guide to how to stay fit and flexible, and a 2020 system of movement.

**"The Path of Least Resistance" by Robert Fritz, Butterworth Heinemann, 1984** Peter Senge writes that this book "*presents the essence of Robert Fritz's teaching: at the starting point in developing personal mastery is understanding the creative process and your commitment to its practice.*" This work is about creative change: chapters include "*Creating is No Problem - Problem Solving is Not Creating*"; "*Tension Seeks Resolution*"; and "*The Power of Transcendence*".

**"The C Zone: Peak Performance Under Pressure" by Robert J. Kriegel and Marilyn Harris Kriegel, 1984** Based on a study of US athletes, this book provides insights into operating with confidence, commitment and control in high pressure environments - including how to stay calm in a crisis. I included it as recommended reading for participants in "Improving Personal Performance" - an experiential development module which became the basis of numerous workshops and programmes provided for clients by Transition Partnerships. The book was one of the inspirations for "Comfort, Stretch and Panic", one of our most used models, included in the Alchemy of Coaching tools: to find out more about this set, see the *Downloadable Resources section of the Alchemy of Coaching website:* [www.alchemyofcoaching.com](http://www.alchemyofcoaching.com)

**"The Supple Body" by Sara Black, Headline, 1995** An illustrated, well-referenced manual of exercises and relaxation methods synthesised from Eastern and Western practices, offering effective and enjoyable techniques to relieve tension, increase flexibility and strength and develop awareness and control for the whole body.

**"Move: Free Your Body Through Stretching Movement" by Lexie Williamson, Bloomsbury Sport, 2020** Ways to boost energy, get stronger, improve posture, release tension, move better, feel great.

**Thoughts, ideas and quotations**

"Physical exercise is the intentional practice of controlled discomfort. Regular exercising of the body makes it more resilient…" Dr Rangan Chatterjee, "Make Change That Lasts".

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