Base Metal...

August 2025

Introduction

This summer Ray has enjoyed indulging his love of exploration and discovery by reading various books about the history and geography of the Himalayas, central Asia and the Silk Road. Whilst doing so he was reacquainted with a quotation that reminded him to return to his closing words in the February 2025 edition of Base Metal - "another metaphor for another discussion".

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Where to?

Whilst my mother never travelled beyond England, Wales and the Isle of Man, I owe my love of adventure in foreign lands at least in part to her. I still have her much loved copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes, 1878'. I was reminded of this when in reading Levison Wood's 'Eastern Horizons' I found these words from Stevenson: "*I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. The great affair is to move…to come down off this featherbed of civilisation and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints… [It] is no great industry, but it is one that serves to occupy and compose the mind. And when the present is so exacting, who can annoy himself about the future?*".

Especially in unfamiliar mountainous terrain, I take care to concentrate on placing one foot safely in front of the other: my focus on immediate survival takes away all of the myriad worries of everyday living. Yet to have arrived here has first taken preparation and planning: there is requirement for anticipation as well as for immersion in each moment. When do I concentrate on 'the menu' - options, and when do I begin eating 'the meal' - action? **How do I negotiate the tension between these choices?**

The present is indeed exacting - perhaps it was ever thus. Yet with modern communications media and apparently increasing schism, cynicism and distress and resultant helplessness and despair, recourse is increasingly taken to avoidance - "**What difference can I make?**" **Does this question arise in your coaching - whether from your client or from you? How do you respond?**

I return to the possibility of the metaphor of the coach as taxi driver: asking "Where to"? This implies that the coach will know the best route; therein the metaphor 'runs out of road' as the coach most probably does not know. Rather as coach we are fellow traveller, accompanying and sometimes supporting or challenging the client who is in charge of their own destination, working on self, and accessing their own fears, limiting beliefs, abilities and resources. Sometimes the client will not have an idea or apprehension of "Where to". **How do you work with a client who has no clear sense of their goal or outcome?** Probably by staying with their uncertainty or indifference; then by assisting them to inquire into what they do not want or wish to avoid, and helping them to explore there.

If we have a contract to act as a mentor we can emulate the 'open top bus' offering for visitors: a tour of possibilities, highlighting opportunities from our experience: attractions which may or may not

prompt the client to linger and investigate.

An information banner in my local Medical Centre describes 'Social Prescribing': a service staffed by volunteers to provide guidance and connection for isolated or lonely patients to introduce them to community activities and resources. The purpose of this provision is to replace a habitual inclination to ask "What's the matter?" with the more constructive question **"What matters?"**. As I sat in the waiting room reading this, I was struck by how resonant this reorientation is to the essence of coaching. By focussing on what is most important and valued, we get in touch with what really counts and hence may access answers to "Where to?". Given a sense of direction this shift then invites further questions such as "How might you get there?", "Who might help you with that?" and "What can you do to begin?" See Base Metal December 2024 for more on this theme.

Emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion reminds us of the variety of different contexts in which we may be coaching and the significant differences in individuals, organisations and cultures of which we may be more or less aware or entirely unaware. **How do we contract for responsible and effective coaching - including saying "no" when we may be too different from our client - or too similar?** The question concerns both the prospective client's coachability and our own coach ability. Were we the taxi driver our client may not need our particular cab; or we may not be wise to take this fare. This raises the issue of ethical practice - see reference below.

Book review

"Values and Ethics in Coaching", Ioanna Iordanou, Rachel Hawley, Christiana Iordanou, Sage, 2017

With an introduction by David Clutterbuck, this guide to the responsibilities of coaching practice covers theory, philosophical underpinnings, research, and examples of dilemmas and choices. Also addressed are the particular contexts of Business, Sports and Healthcare coaching and the domain of Coach Education and Training. Each section of this interactive handbook includes discussion, an activity, a pause for reflection, and suggestions for further reading. Values and ethics are defined, contracting and boundaries examined, and varied settings considered. Implications of individual difference are highlighted. The richness and complexity of the subject are thoroughly explored and extensively referenced.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"As a practitioner, if you catch yourself worrying over specific decisions you have to make in your practice, this is generally wonderful news. A right level of worry is indicative of your commitment to your clients and your will to provide them with a service that is right and appropriate for them. Moreover, a healthy dose of worry enables you to be humble and involved in your coaching practice and facilitates the development of your professional maturity." Values and Ethics in Coaching, above.

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