Alchemy of Coaching

Base Metal...

November 2025

Introduction

Prompted by recent editions on CPD and reflection, we thought a return to a model might be of use here, and specifically one developed by Paul from his 'other life' in music. The alternative lens for this model however is a sporting one, which Paul explores this month.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy Team**

Practice, Rehearsal and Performance

Practice to develop new skills is fundamental. Rehearsal is where we take our skills practice and put it into a 'safe' rehearsal space before using it in a performance situation.



The Alchemy team have developed a model, shown in this simple diagram with the accompanying words. At its root, it is a locating model, rather than a linear one - a way of recognising, or informing oneself about which of the three states one is in (or would like to be in) at any given time. That knowledge and awareness can be game changing in developmental terms. The three 'states' are all connected but not necessarily in a step-by-step progression. Recognition of which state you are in, might inform and facilitate more effective use of the current state, or point at changes that might be made to achieve that improvement. It might also flag the potential to move to another state, and raise pertinent questions about the nature and timing of that move. In the exploration below, let us take the parallel of the golfer.

Practice

In this state, the focus is on building technical capability. Here, the golfer spends time on the range or practice ground (with her coach, or alone) working on the detail of complex and technical elements of biodynamics, swing paths, face angles, posture, hand speed etc. This is typically repetitive work, trying to 'groove' the swing or putting stroke, so that it becomes unconscious in execution. The goal of the practice state of mind is to focus on process not outcome, with the goal of allowing the individual to be freed from the technical elements of what they do when they face competitive play.

Q. *Do I practice enough?*

Rehearsal

In the rehearsal state, the focus now switches to what one might call 'application and development'. This is, in its purest form, the freest and most creative of the three states, where experimentation and failure are the watchwords. On the range (or on the course) she rehearses hitting specific shots to particular targets, working on ball flight and moving the ball laterally in the air. She is developing her range of expression in order to be able to use it by choice in real time and real situations (needing to navigate round obstacles like trees for example). The goal here is not to so finely hone a performance that it can then be simply repeated - we are very rarely faced with exactly the same shot as we practiced. Rather, it is about the learning process of

exploration, of developing the range of potential execution, and one whose output is a golfer who is ready to perform when the moment requires it, particularly under pressure. Our general observation is that too few people (or indeed organisations) engage in this sort of 'real' rehearsal, often moving straight from practice to performance.

Q. *Do I have a means or a space in which I could 'rehearse'?*

Performance

In tournament play, her entire focus is on delivery of the right shot at the right time under pressure, where the hours of technique and rehearsal allow her to perform. In this mindset, there is a significant risk of the technical getting in the way of the output. In performance, it is all about execution.

Q. *Do I review my 'performance' to draw out the maximum learning and to provide some direction for where I need further practice?*

So how is all of this relevant to coaching? In our experience, awareness of and clarity around which of the three states is in play at any particular time is not only useful for efficient and effective outcomes for our clients (an element perhaps that the camera over the shoulder is looking at): it also has much to tell us about our development. If I have spent time learning the technical underpinnings of a particular model or approach (practice), I might ask myself what elements of real rehearsal might put me in a position to understand my own potential usage of this model, and integrate its use (and the understanding gained from it) into my coaching practice.

Book review

"The Inner Game of Tennis", W. Timothy Gallwey", Pan, 1986. First published 1975 by Jonathan Cape Ltd; latest edition 2024.

Arguably a game-changer (forgive the pun) for learning to play, and coach, tennis - and adopted for other sports - this book is also credited with significantly influencing other kinds of coaching. John Whitmore In his acknowledgements at the start of "Coaching for Performance" (Nicholas Brealey, 1992) writes 'Tim Gallwey must undoubtedly head the list, as the creator of the Inner Game". Whitmore goes on to name nine Inner Game sports coaches, including Miles Downey and Graham Alexander, who 'applied their coaching skills in business with great effect'. Maurice Yaffe, in 'Psychology Today' described "The Inner Game" as 'much more than an approach to tennis; it is a whole philosophy of life".

Galwey identifies 'two selves': ego-mind and body - and proposes that the first sits in judgement of the second; we need to bring a greater harmony and awareness, letting go of self-judgement, to allow trust and self-confidence to emerge. By 'Quieting the Mind' and 'Letting it Happen' we can change habits, improve concentration and 'knowing', recover from lapses in concentration, and achieve new levels of self-awareness. In his last chapter he explores what he calls 'Self 3': a state in which 'consciousness is aware of itself' and 'full potential as a human being is allowed to unfold without interference from Self 1' - attainable 'within the capabilities of us all and not the special privilege of any elite'. Unconscious competence…?

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"It is strange how the more I practice the luckier I get!" - Gary Player

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