Alchemy of Coaching

Base Metal...

January 2026

Introduction

January is traditionally a month for New Year resolutions: a ritual for installing fresh commitments. This practice has a mixed reputation - worthy, sometimes effective and often unreliable. Best intentions can be easily overtaken by old habits. Perhaps the most frequently achieved resolution is not to make another. In this edition of Base Metal Ray approaches the topic from a different starting point.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy team**

Taking stock

My dictionary defines "take stock" as "to think carefully about a situation before making a decision". For shopkeepers, warehouse managers and accountants the "stock take" is an event - typically an annual systematic and comprehensive examination of current assets: what do we have and what's missing? It's this perspective that I'm bringing to mind. I recall vividly my first experiences as a facilitator of developmental workshops. At the time of local government reorganisation in England, my colleague and mentor at the National Council of Social Service (now NCVO), Iain McNeill, invited me to join him in taking a renewal initiative to several member organisations around the country. We named these events "Taking Stock". Management committees and staff met to examine their purpose, priorities and resources - to achieve a reset and readiness for challenge and change. This rewarding endeavour was hard work, requiring realism, care and compassion.

Essential ingredients in "Taking Stock" were noticing what's changing in the context; identifying ambition and resources; discovering, addressing and resolving differences; and assessing gaps. This process was akin to what I later found in use in business and industry: the SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses. Opportunities, and Threats, combined with implications, choices, decisions and action. In each - unique - Taking Stock, information was gathered, possibilities were envisaged, dependencies and conflicts were examined, commitments were assessed, minds changed, and people stepped up or stepped away.

Q. How well is your own version of "Taking Stock" working for you as a coach? What have you found?

A significant feature of "Taking Stock" was the contribution made by external facilitators. We were able to bring an understanding of the changing context and at the same time a degree of distance from local history and entangled relationships. Our job was to support each organisation to find its own best way forward, when without our involvement they might not have been able to change.

When we coach, we are offering this kind of opportunity to our clients, to review, reflect and renew.

As coaches we can call on support in a similar way. Examples are co-coaching practice and feedback; coaching supervision; coach training courses; taking part in communities of practice e.g. local coaching groups; attending meetings and webinars provided by professional coaching bodies such as the Association for Coaching, the International Coaching Federation, the European Coaching and Mentoring Council; reading coaching journals e.g. Coaching at Work; attending coaching conferences in person or on-line; listening to podcasts; viewing videos; reading or listening to books and articles; and having a coach for yourself.

In considering your own evolution and development as a coach, notice what works best for you, how you can respond to setbacks and challenges, and what will help you to learn, grow and thrive.

Q. Are you getting the support you need? If not, how will you find it?

The shopkeeper's or storekeeper's Annual Stock Take would result in 'remaindering' tired or outdated items, and ordering replacements and new offerings. A coaching device for this activity is "stop, start and continue": cease doing whatever no longer adds value; begin doing what's now required; continue doing those things which fuel and tune the engine of the enterprise - and, in order to make space and time for the new, identify what else we can stop doing. This discipline need not be a once-a-year task - rather it is a mindset and a way of being - an embedded process. And there's the rub - as with New Year Resolutions, so with this: we are hostage to habits. What can we do to counter this tendency? The methods of "Atomic Habits" (James Clear's 2018 book) address this challenge.

Three coaching questions I find valuable are: *What do you really care about? What do you love to do? What are your strengths?* These are about your values, your intrinsic motivation (your heart is in it), and your capability. A bonus question is *What is your capacity?* - this one is important for taking account of energy and wellbeing. Michael Bungay Stanier asks *When you say yes to this, what are you saying no to?* And Graham Allcott asks *What are you looking forward to?*

Q. What in particular is helping you to turn your intentions into actions and results?

Book review

"The Self Factor - The Power of Being You - A Coaching Approach", Duncan Coppock, Findhorn Press, 2005

Temporarily grounded in Spain by the effects of the Icelandic ash cloud, I took the fortunate opportunity to attend a coaching course delivered by Duncan Coppock - and subsequently joined a further module of his programme. Duncan's book "The Self Factor" encompasses his ideas, experience and coaching wisdom.

Dina Glouberman describes it as "an invaluable resource for coaches, therapists, managers and anyone who uses coaching in their work" and Edna Murdoch says of it "This book has art and heart in abundance… a genuinely transformational read." I've returned to it and recommend it because I share their endorsements.

"The Self Factor" is, in my view, a great place to begin to explore who you are as a coach, your contribution and resources - and to go back to from time to time, to take stock.

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"The brain's tendency to prioritize the present moment means you can't rely on good intentions." James Clear

"Creating positive change isn't as hard as you think." B. J. Fogg

"Every human being has the freedom to change at any instant." Viktor Frankl

"You will never get everything finished." Graham Allcott

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