Base Metal...

April 2026

Introduction

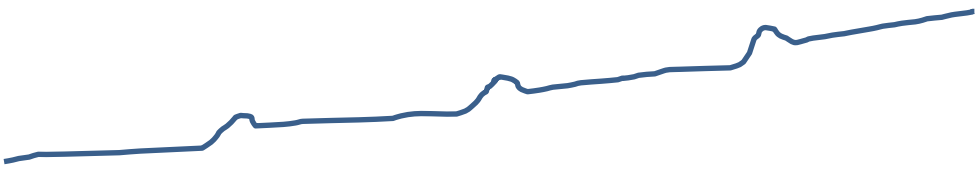
Back in 2021 we wrote: "Coaches are in the business of learning; how do we experience change?" Since then, the speed of change has accelerated and rapid developments in AI have created opportunity and raised serious concerns. The need for attention to change is ever more pressing: neither we nor our clients can afford to ignore it, so, for this edition, Paul returns to this theme.

Paul and Ray **The Alchemy Team**

Three types of change

Paul writes: Coaching in recent months, as well as recalling how I was thinking about coach development in preparing for the webinar series we ran for the Association for Coaching, has led me to reflect on change processes and how different people experience and respond to change. As a coach, it has struck me that some understanding about what sort of change my coachee might be experiencing, or indeed what they might be open to, is a very useful thing to know. What I have been noticing are (at least) three different types of change.

According to the classic model, particularly when thinking about personal development, change often occurs in a non-linear fashion – particular experiences or 'lightbulb moments', with the right support, resulting in a significant shift, and one that occurs extremely fast. A version of this is when we experience long periods with no discernible change or improvement, and then a desired yet unexpected shift to a new level – the result of many hours of practice. George Leonard, in his book 'Mastery' uses the following graphic to illustrate this pattern:



One might perhaps term this 'step change', and those experiencing it tend to be aware of it.[1]

In apparent contrast to Leonard's plateau pattern, there is quite a significant amount in the literature about incremental change, whether relating to elite sport, business or life in general: to put this in mathematical terms, if I can be 1% better every day, over a year that translates to an almost 38% improvement.[2] Or to think of it another way, if I can improve several different areas by a tiny amount, those tiny amounts can add up to something substantial. The bigger challenge here may be awareness of those incremental changes, and often the significance is not apparent until much further down the line, when the difference between the present and the past is more apparent. Small shifts of mindset are often like this, where the role of the coach might be to support their client in seeing and recognising both the shift and the difference it can make.

1The difficult bit after recognition, as shown in Leonard's diagram, can be the cementing of that learning, ensuring that the change is lasting. Continued practice is necessary to reduce the risk of decline and increase the chance of further gain.

2 The sum goes like this: $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

There is also a third type, of perhaps a slightly different nature – what one might call experimental change. If I recognise that there is something I want to work on, but my path to improvement is not clear, one way to explore this is through taking an experimental, semi-scientific approach. One of hypothesis testing (whether in simply thought experiment terms, or in real situations). What would happen if I took this different approach? How do I feel about that? Are there areas of my life where I could try this out, where the risk is lower?

For me, there is a crucial element of this sort of change, and which is often neglected: it relates to evaluation. For this experimental approach to be successful, there are, in my experience two prerequisites: firstly, conscious choice to try something new; and secondly, post hoc specific assessment of the outcome. 'I made the choice today to go into a meeting with a particular mindset. Did I manage to do that, and what results did I observe?' Without this clarity of experimental evaluation, the chance of making a lasting change is significantly reduced, as is the potential of an iterative experimental process, where over time and experience, you find what works for you.

Noticing which road our coachee might be on seems important to me, as how I, as a coach, might support and challenge them may differ quite significantly depending on that understanding.

Q. *What types of change do you observe in your clients, and how do you go about supporting them through it?*

Book review

"Coach yourself - make real change in your life. It's your life. What are you going to do with it?", Anthony M. Grant and Jane Greene, Momentum / Pearson Education, 2001.

In "Coach Yourself" Anthony Grant and Jane Greene assert that coaching is about change, and provide a wealth of practical information and tools to address it. They explore why being able to change is important, explain what coaching is, and provide a solution-focussed set of techniques for coaching yourself and relevant evidence from research. Chapters include what works and doesn't, finding out what you want, understanding motivation, moving from negative to positive, gathering strength, staying on track, success, and co-coaching. This book is valuable for my own development and to inform my practice as a coach for others.

"Immunity To Change - How to overcome it and unlock the potential in yourself and your organisation", Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, Harvard Business Press, 2009.

Reviewing this book, Peter Senge observes that it provides "a wonderfully original approach to a familiar problem: why many crucial change efforts fail. It shows how the core problems of resistance to change stem from the critical gaps between what is required and a leader's own level of development." Food for thought!

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"There are four traps into which an individual or group may fall: illusion, panic, exhaustion, and stagnation." Robert E. Quinn, in 'Deep Change'.

"The personal sustainability of the helper or coach is central to the ability to continue effectively helping others be open, develop, and change." Richard Boyatzis, Melvin Smith and Ellen Van Oosten, in "Helping People Change".

"…coaching is not about fixing someone's problems but about tapping into their inspiring personal vision".

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