Base Metal...

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Introduction

What part does imagination play in your life? Do you nurture a childlike sense of curiosity - of wonder, and thoughts of *what if*…? Do other people's stories prompt invention in your own? In this month's Base Metal, Paul engages with the theme of imagination and explores the contribution it can make in coaching.

Ian, Paul, and Ray **The Alchemy Team**

Imagine

The human imagination is a very powerful thing. It has given birth to the greatest inventions of human history, jaw-dropping art and architecture, transformational music. It is the engine of innovation, the centre of creativity and the one common element which characterises children's play. It also has the potential to become a hugely destructive force if allowed to spiral downwards.

Q. As coaches, are we trying to harness this mental power in our coachees for their benefit?

It can be very tempting (for both coaches and coachees) to fall back on the classic mantras that are around this area: 'fake it till you make it', 'if you believe you can achieve', 'live your dreams'. In my experience, however, there is greater risk that such a way of thinking becomes superficial, and doesn't result in ownership or authenticity on the part of the coachee, both of which are crucial for any change to be embedded and real. To my way of thinking, the job of the coach here is to construct a safe space where the coachee's imagination can be brought into play in a way that has the potential to shift perspective, and enable insight.

Several times in recent months, I have encouraged a coachee to realise (and I mean this in its 'make real' sense) the core content of the session – does this thing have a form? What does it look like? When that image (or sound or entity) is voiced and 'made real' by a coachee, that can open up huge potential to use it and extend it: for it to become a 'red thread' through a whole session (or indeed across sessions); a touchstone. Once it is voiced, that also opens up the conversation about choices and strategies, which is where a skilful coach's imagination can be brought to bear on something that is already real for the coachee.

Many coaching approaches try to make use of imaginative practice whether through linguistic metaphor, visualisation or the more formal structures of NLP for example. I would suggest, however, that there might be more opportunities than we normally recognise in coaching conversations to encourage the drawing on the power of the imagination in the service of our clients.

Q. Have you used an imaginative approach in your coaching recently? Did it work, and how might you tailor such methods in the future? If not, what might it look like if you did?

Book review

"The Heart Aroused - Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America", David Whyte, Currency Doubleday, 1994

"What would our days be like if we came out of hiding and brought our fears, loves, and dreams directly into the workplace?" In "The Heart Aroused", English born US poet and organisation development consultant David Whyte invites his readers to reimagine the workplace - radically and fruitfully. He draws on his own experience of fear, brought vividly to life for me in his example of an apparently insurmountable broken bridge encountered during a trek in Nepal… This analogy with moments of truth in the workplace offers insight into how we can find courage from others and choose to be alive and real.

"Creative Intelligence & Self-liberation - Korzybski, Non-Aristotelian Thinking and Enlightenment", Ted Falconar, Crown House Publishing, revised edition 2007

The author, whilst Managing Director of the Tetley Tea Company, turned the business around and made it profitable. He maintained and applied a lifelong search for purpose and meaning in life. Drawing on his experience of India and his wide reading, in this book he explores the power of visualisation and non-verbal thinking for creativity. He weaves together Western and Eastern philosophies and prompts the unlearning of rigid patterns of thinking. Hilary Smith, Early Years Teacher comments: "Ted Falconar's book is an inspiration. It looks like a difficult read, but really in essence it is simple. We can change the way we think. We don't always need to think only in words, otherwise this limits us. Once I understand that my whole way of thinking can change."

Thoughts, ideas and quotations

"Imagine" John Lennon

"Imagination is more important that knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." Albert Einstein

"An imaginative conception of what *might* be true is the starting point of all great discoveries in science." Peter Medawar, and "The world shall perish not for lack of wonders, but for lack of wonder." J. B. S. Haldane, quoted in "Phantoms of the Brain" by S. Blakeslee and V.S. Ramachandran

"Dreams are the touchstones of our characters." Henry David Thoreau

"Stand in awe of what arises from the imagination of others." David Whyte

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