



The Bulletin of the Association for Coaching

Autumn 2007
Issue 13

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Welcome

Welcome to the Autumn issue of the *AC Bulletin*. This is my 10th *AC Bulletin* and I continue to be impressed at the rising level of informed debate in the industry as represented by the submissions I receive.

Features

In our first feature in this edition, Carole Pemberton discusses the coach's ultimate tool, their 'self'. Carole has a distinguished 'back catalogue' of writing on issues of personal development, and I am delighted to include this recent thinking about the practitioner themselves.

Eve Turner returns to the *Bulletin* to discuss where 'meaning and purpose' sit in the coaching process. Eve looks at existing conceptualisations, recent research and reflects on her own research with practising coaches.

Reviews

We have three reviews in this issue: Gill Dickers reviews Leimon, Moscovici and McMahon's *Essential Business Coaching*, and Andy Smith reviews the new edition of

McKergow and Jackson's *The Solutions Focus*. In a slightly different style, David Adams gives us his own response to Sir John Whitmore's AC workshop in July of this year.



As ever, I am grateful to all the authors for their contributions – and indeed all those who have contributed over the last four years - which all reflect a great deal of thought and care in their preparation. I hope you get as much out of reading them as I have. I intend to stand down as editor at the upcoming AGM and would like to wish my successor and their readers every success.

Best wishes to all.

Peter Jackson
Head of Communications

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Submissions

The editor welcomes submissions from members for inclusion in all sections of *the Bulletin*. Articles may deal with the whole range of practice, theory, wider professional and business issues, or topics of general interest to coaches. They may be presented in any appropriate format, including case studies, research reports, interviews and discussion articles.

Articles should generally be between 800 and 1500 words in length and there should be a clear benefit to the reader. Sources should be fully referenced using the Harvard (name, date) referencing system. See previous articles for

examples. Full guides on Harvard referencing are readily available on the websites of many university libraries.

Articles for submission should be sent to acbulletin@associationforcoaching.com. Reviews should be sent to reviews@associationforcoaching.com. The submission deadline for Issue 14 (New Year) is December 15 2007; the deadline for Issue 15 (Spring) is March 15 2008, the deadline for Issue 16 (Summer) is June 15, 2007.

Publisher/author requests for reviews should also be sent to reviews@associationforcoaching.com

Start With Yourself - Carole Pemberton

Attend a coaching conference, and any session which promises to deliver a framework that can be used in a coaching session will be packed. Subscribe to an on line coaching discussion list, and it will be peppered with coaches offering workshops at which, for a price, the attendees will be trained in a technique that will enhance their skill and earning power.

The desire for new tools for the tool bag is understandable, but also undersells what we bring ourselves to coaching.

Listening to a skilled, experienced coach about to complete a further qualification, I was saddened when she spoke of now needing to think about what else she needed to put into her bag'. With qualifications in a range of disciplines, years of therapy and work experience with a number of consultancies her bag was already full. Her need to find that next bit of learning was more a statement of her own lack of confidence than her lack of credibility. What she ignored in her view of learning, were those things which came with her whether or not she pulled a new tool out of the bag. She gave a level of attention which encouraged others to feel safe in opening up. She could hold threads in a session and weave them together so that the other person could see the cloth. She had an ability to know when to throw something in 'left field' that challenged the other person to think differently, and did so with humour. None of this had come with a label in a workshop. It all came from who she was, and yet she saw

"The desire for new tools for the tool bag is understandable, but also undersells what we bring ourselves to coaching."

that as inadequate for the job.

She is not alone. In my own practice, I recently took to supervision my concerns about a first meeting with a newly appointed MD. The brief I had been given was that business strategy was an issue and that the business credibility of the coach was central to him. My focus was on a strategy framework that would provide a protective armour, because the unacknowledged emotion I was bringing to the meeting was fear. Fear of not being good enough. Fear of being found out.

Fear of not looking credible as a business coach. Once the issue of fear was unearthed, I was able to look into my internal tool bag, and find resources within me that would be more valuable in the discussion. I left the supervision believ-

ing that what I had was enough to help him, which released my own energies to be able to listen to him. Unsurprisingly, once I did that, strategy was revealed as his protective armour against looking at his own anxieties about being a leader.

Both examples highlight that the focus on technique and tools can get in the way of the most important instrument we take to coaching – ourselves. The difficulty for many coaches, both more and less experienced is that we don't acknowledge what we bring. What we bring is more than inviting a focus

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on strengths. It is equally about acknowledging what has shaped us that influences where we have blind spots, or a skew. Where we may avoid what needs to be addressed, as well as where we will have a high degree of comfort.

Coaching programmes' assessment approaches often focus on competences and assesses the individual against the degree to which they have contracted, actively listened, facilitated deeper understanding and achieved an outcome. An alternative model is to see coaching as a constant movement between two needs – thought and action – interacting with two modes of intervention: support and challenge. See Figure 1.

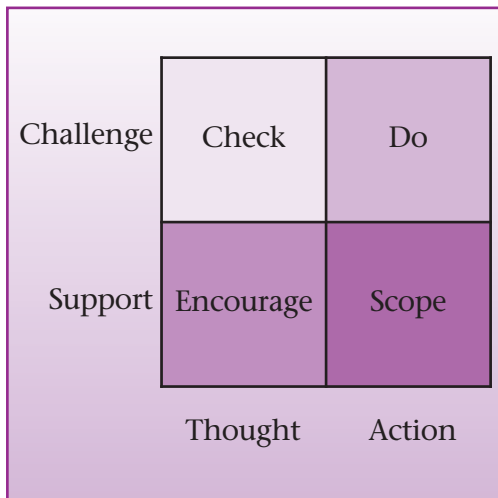


Figure 1

In any coaching session, the coach is assessing the client moment to moment, to assess the degree to which they require encouragement to open up, the point at which to provide a check or different perspective, listening for the scope that the individual is capable of taking on, and judging when to move into outcome. The four quadrants have a place in

any coaching conversation, but as coaches we are not equally equipped to manage them all.

As individuals we have been shaped by our life experiences in ways which shape how we manage that dance with our clients, which in turn will influence the outcome of sessions.

Ask yourself the following questions about your own life experience:

- What are the key messages that have stayed with you since your childhood e.g. 'winning is everything' or 'it's important to put other's before yourself.'
- What are the messages that you took from the experience of being part of your family. Messages which you took from your own observation of what being in that family brought e.g. 'working hard gets you money but no quality of living' or 'it's important to succeed because I saw what not being successful brought.'
- What have your most difficult life experiences taught you?
- Who have been the most important role models for you in your life and work. What have you taken from them and absorbed?

Then consider how those learnings affect how you approach your coaching. Where you most like the coaching conversation to be? When you feel most engaged, and of value? When it feels more like hard work? Which parts you want to get through quickly?

Answering those questions is not easy, but in doing so it enables us to look at the coaching dance, and to consider how what we bring influences how that dance is conducted.

Being comfortable with Support for Thought,

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but less comfortable with Challenging for Action, means clients enjoy the conversation but feel no responsibility to turn insight into act.

Enjoying Challenging for Action over Support for Thought can lead us to bulldoze the client towards an outcome before they have fully understood or committed.

The pleasure of Challenge for Thought overriding Support for Thought can lead to the client being able to intellectually consider an issue whilst keeping a distance from underlying emotions.

A focus on Support for Thought without Challenge for Thought allows the client to present their world as the one perception of reality, and allows them to avoid having to consider their actions and beliefs from others' perspectives.

No coach comes fully equipped to move with equal facility between all four quadrants. Our life experiences shape the areas in which we are likely to spend more time and to signal more energy and interest to our clients. Our challenge is to be conscious of that skew and its implications and to focus our development on addressing our imbalances, rather than searching for another tool for the tool bag.

Carole Pemberton
Coaching To Solutions

Carole Pemberton is MD of Coaching to Solutions, an organisation involved in executive coaching and the training of line manager coaches. She is author of a number of books including 'Strike a New Career Deal' and 'Coaching to Solutions: A Manager's Took Kit for Performance Delivery.' She is a Faculty Member of the Academy of Executive

Coaching.

For further details of her work including DVD material see www.coachingtosolutions.com

Don't miss the Association for Coaching's 4th International Conference, "Embracing Excellence" being held in London on the 13th and 14th of March 2008 - book early, as all the past conferences have sold out! The event will consist of over 30 workshops, 4 keynotes, exhibitor stands, papers, and more. Details and booking available on the dedicated website at www.acconference.com by the end of November, 2007. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor or exhibitor, there are a few spaces left. Email conference@associationforcoaching.com for a sponsorship pack!

Book reviewers

Would you like to write a book or conference review for the AC Bulletin?

If the answer is yes, please e-mail a condensed CV, together with areas of interest and a copy of a previous book review (if possible) to the Reviews Editor at reviews@associationforcoaching.com

Guidelines will be sent to you and you will get to keep the book you review.

Does meaning matter in coaching?

- Eve Turner



Talk about meaning and purpose and we might worry that people will start feeling uncomfortable and might even move to the other side of the room! Mention spirituality and we could fear people thinking we've 'lost it!' In the world of coaching, at first glance, dealing with these issues might seem a world away from solutions, or actions. But is that right? Having reviewed some of the literature around meaning and purpose, and undertaken some research with practising coaches, I would suggest such that they are issues that are extremely relevant to the results-oriented world of business. This article doesn't pretend to have answers to questions that have kept philosophers going for many centuries! But in this changing world of constant and increasing demands on us it considers whether tackling those questions may be critical to our satisfaction as human beings and an important issue for some clients.

Can we define meaning and purpose?

There is no single way to define meaning and purpose. This article examines a number of perspectives that can loosely be described as transpersonal in nature – that is looking for something that goes beyond our individual experiences and awareness and relates to the feeling of connectedness.

The transpersonal is one way of seeing the world used in this article. I am mindful that we will all, whether coaches or clients, have a

“A survey of 735 managers by the Roffey Park Institute found that 70% were looking for a greater sense of meaning in their working lives”

different interpretation of our world and our journey: “we do not describe the world we see, but we see the world we describe” (Jaworski, 1998, p. 178). Jaworski highlights his own inner journey to “unity consciousness” and the “interrelatedness of the universe” (p. 56). This path to oneness with

something greater than ourselves is an emergent theme in the western world in a tradition that embraces Jung (1954), Maslow (1962), Assagioli (1972), Ferrucci (1995) and others.

Different perspectives on meaning

Firman and Vargui (1979) make a key distinction between our personal and transpersonal worlds: the first being the “meaning of *our own individual existence* and the second, the meaning of *the world we live in – ultimately of life itself*” (Firman and Vargui, 1979, p.60). The pursuit of the former, often shown as the horizontal route to signify the passage through time, is described as “*the personal dimension of growth*” and is more task-focused, connected to everyday life, about achieving. I picture myself here for years as I searched for external success and was very busy “doing”!

The search for a wider meaning leads to “*the transpersonal or spiritual dimension of growth*” (Firman & Vargui, 1979, p.61). This *transper-*

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sonal dimension is shown as vertical which relates to the heights and depths of consciousness and being. It is often described as, “the ‘eastern’ view [that] values most highly the individual who cultivates the inner spiritual life.” (p.62). It values compassion, altruism, selfless service to others and the genius that is concerned with humanity as a whole. Taken to a stereotypical extreme it might relate to a mystic who lives in contemplation and has little connection with the everyday world. While I don’t have clients who cut themselves off from everyday life to that extent, I have worked with clients who are galloping down the horizontal route. And between the two dimensions there is a balance which in my experience is one many clients seek.

Roberto Assagioli (1975) argued both dimensions were necessary and that we should aim to integrate them and to experience unity - with ourselves, others or society. Diana Whitmore writes that, “without the experience of unity, life is liable to become increasingly fragmented and meaningless” (Whitmore, 1990, p.15), thereby echoing Assagioli who sees unity as the goal for lasting satisfaction. Piero Ferrucci talks about “The Transpersonal Self” which retains a sense of individuality and also “lives at the level of universality, in a realm where personal plans and concerns are overshadowed by the wider vision of the whole” (1995, p.28).

The search for meaning is also a key focus of existential thinkers. Viktor Frankl quotes Nietzsche: “He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how” (Frankl, 1987, p. 106). Describing a time when he felt death was imminent while a prisoner at Auschwitz, Frankl talks of his spirit ... “piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world and from somewhere I heard a victorious ‘Yes’ in answer to

my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose” (p.39). To Frankl spiritual freedom – the one thing that couldn’t be taken away in a concentration camp – was what made life meaningful and purposeful (p.66). For Frankl life had no intrinsic meaning until you found it – by doing a deed, experiencing a value or by, in his case, suffering (p. 113). In a later book Frankl expands his view on meaning writing “...it can’t be denied that there is also some sort of meaning that is ‘up to heaven’ as it were; some sort of ultimate meaning, that is; a meaning of the whole, of the ‘universe’...” (Frankl, 2000, p. 143). He talks of “another dimension, a world beyond man’s world” (p.144) which for some people, but not all, equates to religion.

This view differs from James Hillman who believes each person is born with a purpose, which is pre-ordained (Hillman, 1997, p.4). In what he calls his acorn theory Hillman claims that “each life is formed by a unique image....that calls it to a destiny”; it is the soul’s code or DNA and we live out that destiny (p39). For Hillman our journey may be about rediscovering where we were meant to be. Some clients may feel they are not living according to their own potential and their own goals; coaching may give them permission to rethink their careers or other parts of their lives and do what they genuinely feel is right for them.

Meaning in leadership and coaching

So is any of this relevant to business and coaches working in the business world? A survey of 735 managers by the Roffey Park Institute found that 70% were looking for a greater sense of meaning in their working lives (Holbeche & Springett, 2004, p.3). Meaning was seen as “connecting with others, having a sense of personal purpose, a

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heightened understanding of what is really important, of what it is to be human....a sense of community..." (p.4).

Richard Barrett underlines this when he writes that "Employees are motivated by work that gives their lives meaning. When they can see that their efforts are making a differenceto customers and society at large, they tap into their highest levels of productivity and creativity" (Barrett, 1998, pp143-4).

Another way of saying this might be that when people can achieve in their lives a co-creation between the transpersonal and personal perspective they seem to have a sense of becoming more "themselves." It could be this perspective that drives satisfaction in their working life.

Another study of 112,232 college students in the USA showed that three-quarters said they were "searching for meaning/purpose in their life" though not all of those considered themselves religious; three in five talked of spiritual experiences "witnessing the beauty and harmony of nature" and half "while listening to beautiful music" (Astin & Astin, 2004, p.4). Ofsted, the organisation that inspects schools in England and Wales, also argues the importance of discussing meaning in schools. A report on promoting and evaluating pupils' all-round development addresses "questions which are at the heart and root of existence" and identified "the idea of the spiritual quest, of asking who you are and where you are going." (Ofsted, 2004, p.8).

The coaches I talked to believed that issues around meaning and purpose were present in

coaching conversations at least some of the time. Some felt meaning and purpose was always an issue and they seemed to take a proactive approach in seeking opportunities to raise it. All the participants saw crisis or incongruence as a trigger for discussion on meaning and purpose e.g. "it seems to occur at a crossroads in our lives." "When people are stuck ...it is usually because the goals and the journey towards them is not ...resonating with their meaning and purpose."

"The majority of coaches felt meaning and purpose arose in most or every coaching session and tended to draw it out through their questioning"

Some coaches felt that work-life balance was an underlying issue. Other triggers were the threat of redundancy and coping with a new job. However one warning was sounded about jumping to

conclusions: "You've got to hold the fact that because someone's going through a difficult situation at work doesn't mean they are having a crisis of meaning...we need to respect whether the client wants to go....and not pushing your personal interests."

My own research with coaches, albeit limited in scope, therefore supports the research done by Roffey Park and others and reflects the writers above. All the coaches, to some degree, thought meaning and purpose was important to their coachees and to themselves. It seemed that the coach's own perspective – whether they look through a transpersonal or personal lens – may colour their response to their clients' stories, and how much they saw meaning and purpose in conversations.

The majority felt meaning and purpose arose in most or every coaching session and tended to draw it out through their questioning rather than a specific technique, though

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approaches like using drawing, gestalt, NLP, Heron's styles or using the MBTI (Myers Briggs type indicator) did play a part. Most adopted an Appreciative Inquiry approach in their questioning - its positive nature seemed to support the approach coaches wanted to take with clients to help them discover and follow the path that was right for them. Ultimately we all listen to what the client wants but gaining a larger context can help with those, in business and elsewhere, who, as they travel on their life journey desire a connection with something beyond "doing" and the day-to-day. Like others I have learned to be alert to the possibility that at times meaning and purpose might be an underlying issue while respecting that the timing and

context needs to be right and the client leads. Sometimes a conversation can drop to a deeper level if I ask a client who is struggling: "What is life asking of you in all this?"

Eve Turner

After many years as a senior leader Eve left the BBC this autumn to work as a coach and consultant. She is currently completing her dissertation at Portsmouth University Business School – on the MSc course in coaching and development jointly run by Performance Consultants and The Performance Coach. Eve has an MBA and is an AC and BBC accredited coach. Email: eve@eve-turner.com and website: www.eve-turner.com.

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Midwife coaches - David Adams

Let's be on the same page
 About coaching
 It starts in you – in here
 The emotionally intelligent
 You remember
 You relate
 To be a decent coach
 You've got to go there
 Like a leader
 But GROW is only a sequence
 Coach and build yourself
 And, others
 Get them to be aware and
 responsible
 Overcome the opposition
 In your own head
 Ask – what's the block
 In your own head?
 The time it takes is
 The time it takes
 Just ask – what would you do?
 We are our history. So, change
 Our outer behaviour –
 That doesn't work – it's not
 Coaching – it's instruction
 From psychology to coaching
 Be more aware
 It'll all be Okay.
 But ya got to be spiritual
 Ya got to be aware
 Beyond your person
 But the next stage is
 Already here.
 As we take the unmentioned
 Evolutionary journey
 Through four stages (of con-
 sciousness)
 From ego-centric
 To ethno-centric
 And then
 From World-centric
 To Kosmo-centric –

All that is...all that is...
 We have to change instruc-
 tion
 To coaching. This is the way
 We have to think. Driving.
 OK, half an hour to change
 the world.
 Have you been there
 Yourself?
 Are you on a horizontal or
 A vertical journey to your
 Crisis of Meaning?
 What was meaningful yester-
 day
 Is not so meaningful today.
 Where do I intervene?
 Give them the graph
 And ask them what it means;
 Listen, to the conversation
 And find the direction
 For now
 In order to pay the rent!
 In my crisis of duality
 Get in touch with that part of
 me
 That knows – the higher self.
 But the upper hand will
 become
 The lower hand and
 The lower hand will in turn
 Become the upper, the upper
 And Eeyore, the victim
 And Tigger the hero
 And who you really are
 So what part of you wants

To do that?
 Recognise, accept, co-operate
 and
 Integrate. Harmonise. Make
 every cell
 Go in the same direction
 And then dis-identify
 Tuning up individually
 Before the concert
 But then you need
 The conductor.
 Become the conductor of your
 own orchestra
 Become the "I"
 Have pure will and
 Pure consciousness
 Build the awareness
 Build the responsibility
 But it is a journey – not
 A destination.
 We have allowed
 Ethno-centric people to rule
 The World. And coaching
 Is at the OK end
 Of the spectrum
 People
 Find out
 Who
 They really are.
 Passion coupled with humility
 Poetry at the super conscious
 level.
 Be the midwives of the trans-
 formation
 Of the world.

David Adams, with thanks to Sir John Whitmore
 London, 3 July 2007.

David Adams' poetry is also available at
<http://davidadams.podbean.com/>

Earlier this Summer, the Association for Coaching further expanded its reach with the launch of the Association for Coaching in Ireland. The launch events took place in Dublin and Belfast in June with Katherine Tulpa, AC Chair, leading a masterclass entitled, "Coaching – A Platform for Performance". The events were very well attended with over 100 people joining us for the workshops.



The Association for Coaching in Ireland steering team has established an exciting series of events for 2007 and 2008 linked to the theme of "Excellence in Coaching". The second event took place in early October. Our guest was Myles

Downey who led a masterclass on "The Inner And Outer Games Of Coaching".

Our third event will be taking place on the 27 November 2007 in Dublin and 28 November 2007 in Belfast and will be a masterclass led by Sir John Whitmore whose

seminar is entitled "Coaching: A Mandatory Skill for 21st Century Leaders". If you are interested in knowing more about the events we have planned in Ireland or would like to support us as a member of our steering team to support the growth of the Association for Coaching in Ireland, do get in touch. You can reach us at acireland@associationforcoaching.com

Upcoming events

"The Future of Coaching" – Sir John Whitmore, Newcastle, 6th November
Coaching has gone through its fledgling stages and is growing into a mature industry. The key question is - how it is going to mature, and what might be its function in the future?

- Understand the role and of coaching in cultural evolution.
- Recognise that coaching is not a tool, but a way of being.
- Coach at a deeper psychological level.
- Coach clients in their spiritual development.
- Take a step closer to discovering who you really are.
- Coach corporate leaders and individuals to the awareness and action required for social and environmental sustainability.

"Motivating in a Moment" - Wendy Sullivan, Bedford, 15th November.

How often do you wish to motivate a client quickly, or help them to decide what they would like and how to achieve it? And how do you ensure that the change is congruent with them as an individual, and therefore 'sticks'? You will learn a quick process for enhancing motivation and commitment to change.

"Pioneering Corporate Coaching in Scotland" - Glasgow, 21st November.

With presentations from BBC, BT, LogicaCMG on how they have introduced Coaching and what they have learnt and achieved. Learn about a model of professionalism which emphasises excellence in diversity and an agenda for professional development which is based on developing professional knowledge. Speakers include Liz McCann, Frank Bowles, Paul Barker, Alice Hurley, Peter Jackson.

For full details and online booking for AC events see:

<http://www.associationforcoaching.com/event/event.htm>

Title Essential Business Coaching
Author Averil Leimon, François Muscoviçi, Gladeana McMahon
Publisher Routledge
Published 2005
Price £14.99
ISBN 1-58391-883-3

What makes a good business coach? What science do they use? Do coaches need to be psychologists or business coaches or both? What is quality? What do business clients want? What works best for individual clients? By naming and tackling these tough questions, I believe the authors have progressed the profession.

This book is not a manual for coaching, but, rather, offers an objective analysis and sharing of best practice, so that readers can apply it to their own experience. It is aimed at sponsors, clients, and practitioners and, on the whole, written in practical and jargon free language. It gives those interested in business coaching a view of the profession from different viewpoints and does not shy away from the challenges we face.

As with all new and rising professions, for example, counselling and art therapy, there are times when practitioners, clients and researchers need to review the evidence base for their work, articulate their values, and clarify their theoretical frameworks and foundations. This book does this, and as such, furthers the position of the profession in relation to other 'helping' professions'

The structure of the book is sound. The initial chapters look at why we need business coaching, the theoretical frameworks, what business coaches do, and what the specific issues are. Chapters 5 and 6 offer fascinating summaries from conversations with sponsors and feedback from clients. Chapter 7 tackles some of the more difficult issues in the profession.

The chapter on theory provides solid and time-honoured frameworks for practice. For those of us entering coaching from therapeutic route, it would have been helpful if it had also provided additional information on the organization of businesses, including small businesses and, perhaps, systems theory. However, I absolutely agree with the central theme of this chapter, that coaches must be explicit about their preferred theoretical frameworks and their models of practice. If we are not how then can we explain what we do to our clients?

I liked the tone of the chapter three, where the author explores 'what works?' and 'why does it work?' We are offered a five stage business coaching framework for practice, i.e. build the relationship, draw out the picture, achieve change, motivate for results, and conclude the relationship. Each stage includes sound practice wisdom. For example, if the coach finds it hard to have respect for the client, then they should find just one aspect of their lives that they can respect, and build the relationship from this.

Likewise, chapter four is also practical, it suggest three broad reasons why people in business may benefit from coaching. There may be issues related to different business personalities, e.g. stress or gender, or clients may be at different stages in their business careers, i.e. the coaching requirements of a new entry will be different to those in the mature stages of their career. Coaching can also help clients develop new skills, e.g. networking or presentation skills.

Chapters five and six are lively; this is where the people, on both sides of the experience, have their say. There are some fascinating insights here (and stories). For example, the business coach must be informed about the

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company and its business plans: the company must be prepared to balance the need for feedback with the need for confidentiality.

The professional guidance offered in chapter six and in the appendix is generous, practical and highly professional. The summarizing chapter neatly rounds up the arguments made i.e. that business coaching needs increased objectivity and that there is strong evidence of increased professionalism by all parties.

For me, the strength of the book is in its wide appeal: it gives an all round assessment of the profession, and implicitly offers an evidence base to practice. To be a strong profession, we

need to grasp the range of research tools at our disposal from case studies to number crunching and ROIs. This book contributes to bank of evidence about the efficacy of business coaching and re-assures us that we are, indeed, growing as a profession and as professionals.

Gill Dickers

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- Lifelong Firework Career Coach Licence to use the programme with your clients
- Follow-up teleconference with Marianne Craig MCC, Director Firework Coaching Company, to answer your questions and discuss best practice



23rd November 2007 Regents Conference Centre London

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■ E-mail marianne@fireworkcoaching.com ■ www.fireworkcoaching.com

aTitle *The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE (Second Edition)*
Author Paul Z Jackson and Mark McKergow
Publisher Nicholas Brealey International
Published 2007
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When the first edition of *The Solutions Focus* came out in 2002 it marked a genuine step forward in thinking about organisational change. It brought the insights of Solution Focused Therapy (developed in the late seventies by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg) into the workplace. The second edition, published in 2007, broadens its usefulness to coaches with the addition of new chapters outlining Jackson and McKergow's OSKAR coaching model, manager as coach, team coaching and solution-focused approaches to management consulting.

The beauty of the solution-focused approach is twofold; firstly, like the compatible Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, it focuses on what is working and what is desired rather than on problems and trying to solve them, so it tends to have a heartening and morale-raising effect on individuals, teams and organisations that experience it.

Secondly, and rather unlike AI (or my own background discipline of NLP for that matter), it emphasises the need for simplicity and is refreshingly free from jargon and what many people in organisations, desperate for practical ways of dealing with ever-increasing demands, may view as "tree-hugging hippy rubbish" (as one participant at a recent AI event I helped facilitate put it recently).

The book's writing style does justice to its subject. I knew from taking an accelerated

learning course with them about 10 years ago that Jackson and McKergow would present the material in an intelligent and brain-friendly way (the "reformed physicist" McKergow in particular is possessed of the proverbial "brain the size of a planet", while Jackson's background in improvisational comedy adds immediacy and lightness of touch) – and so it proves, with each chapter divided into short, easily digestible sub-headings, and plenty of illustrations and practical examples.

The book gives us six principles of what they refer to as 'The Solutions Focus', organised under the acronym SIMPLE:

Solutions not problems

Inbetween – the action is in the interaction (between people)

Make use of what's there (the parts of the solution that are already happening in the current situation)

Possibilities – the resources and possibilities that will take us towards the solution

Every case is different

Something like the 'Inbetween' principle (the idea that some aspects of the solution exist in the interaction between people or as emergent qualities of the system, rather than being owned by any one individual) must have been present in solution-focused therapy as it applied to families. It was a new one on this reader though, as I had previously only used solution-focus in therapy and coaching with individuals. By emphasising the principle here, Jackson and McKergow build a very useful bridge between using solution focus with individuals and applying it to teams and organisations.

We are also given a clear description of the various tools of the Solutions Focus

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approach. The present situation, the starting point for change, is described as the 'Platform' (with its connotations of somewhere to depart or lift off from). The desired outcome – what it would be like if the problem disappeared completely – is the 'Future Perfect'. 'Resources' are things that are already working, and times when parts of the solution are happening already are called 'Counters'. (This metaphor which I suppose is some kind of board game analogy didn't work quite as well for me personally.) The other tools are 'Affirming' whatever is helping, taking 'Small Actions' (which can make a big difference, and in any case add up), and the extremely useful 'Scaling' (of progress towards a solution, confidence in a chosen option working, or commitment to a course of action) on a scale of 0 to 10.

The part of the book from which I got the most value is the new material added for the second edition. The authors give many practical examples of how to use the Solutions Focus approach in coaching individuals, team coaching, and organisational consultancy. There is also a useful chapter on coaching as a manager.

One of the most helpful insights (no news to experienced management consultants, I'm sure, but very helpful to someone like me with a background in individual coaching who is increasingly moving into organisational change work) is about the need to find a 'customer for change'. This is someone in an organisation who is aware that it is time for a change, and prepared to do something about it. If the consultant can't find one, their change interventions are unlikely to get very far.

Also new to the second edition is the OSKAR coaching model. The acronym

stands for Outcome, Scaling, Know-How, Affirm and action, and Review. In some ways this seems to have been bolted on to the rest of the book; looked at from one angle, it seems merely a relabelling of some of the tools described earlier. 'Know-How', for example, seems to be much the same as the resources and abilities described as 'Counters' earlier in the book.

My other quibble with the model is that it is more a description of tools than a process model; although the authors say it can be used as a process, the 'Scaling', 'Know-How', and the 'Affirm' part of 'Affirm and action' might be used both when eliciting what is working in the current situation (the 'Platform'), and when deciding what to do to get closer to the 'Future Perfect'. Also, the authors say that the 'Outcome' stage would include both establishing the 'Platform' and envisioning the 'Future Perfect', while the sample questions they give are exclusively about the future, which might lead the careless reader to skim on exploring the current situation. These are however minor caveats, which I hope a third edition will eventually resolve.

The book finishes up with a short history tracing the evolution and intellectual roots of the Solutions Focus model, placing it in a lineage which includes Bateson's work on paradox and levels of abstraction, Erickson's concept of utilisation, and complexity theory.

All in all, *The Solutions Focus* is an eye-opening book for anyone looking for greater simplicity and effectiveness in coaching, team-building, or organisational change.

Andy Smith

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