

An Introduction to Coaching Skills: A Practical Guide

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This is a very practical text which is full of useful hints and tips for the coach to explore and utilise in their own professional practice. Since many of the skills and techniques suggested are evident in counselling and mentoring, the book's usage is also much broader than its title suggests.

The many definitions of coaching in work-placed development and beyond are outlined and discussed in the early chapters of the book. The author explains that coaching can be seen as "a one-to-one conversation, which is the foundation of powerful relationships" (p. 5); and again, many of the terms, techniques, skills and theories can also relate to mentoring. The author reminds the reader that there is "no legal definition of coaching" (p. 4), but that it is often perceived as short term and relates to own personal skill development.

The book consists of six parts in which many chapters outline further reading on the topics raised, with links to the companion website which accompanies the book. There is excellent use of "stories from practice" and "snapshot" sections to illustrate points made. This, together with specified activities to embed the chapter content, makes the book easy to digest and follow by the solo reader.

This book is a second edition, which perhaps testifies to the success of the original publication. Indeed, there is a section at the beginning of the book which is called "praise for the first edition" followed by "about the author", and includes a "guided tour" of the book with a list of videos available on the "companion website". The companion website access code is clearly visible on the inside book cover page. A preface and acknowledgement section is also present.

Although the author explains that there are many theoretical models of coaching, the GROW model is emphasised and highlighted. The writing style and flow is good throughout, although gender division is not always neutral but is clearly feminine – see pp. 13, 15, 16, 17, 32, 121, 124 and 128 for some examples. The reason I mention this is to endeavour not to have a situation where coaching is perceived to be the feminine gender and mentoring the masculine. "In practice, phrases can be adapted to avoid use of gender-specific pronouns" (www.skillsyouneed.com). Indeed, Truss (2003, p. 203) reminds us, somewhat tongue in cheek, that "we ignore the rules of punctuation at our political peril as well as to our moral detriment". Nevertheless, the author writes in a very positive manner, taking the reader on "an exciting learning journey" (p. 3). A very positive and empowering style of writing is evident which engages the learner and creates an "I can do" attitude. The author is clearly a person with much experience and knowledge of the coaching world.

Part 1 is called Context and consists of two chapters: Chapter 1 – First things first and Chapter 2 – Becoming a coach. Both these chapters set out the essentials. The first chapter



discusses the basic principles of coaching; the similarity between coaching, mentoring and counselling (although not exhaustively explained); and the various definitions provided by a number of authors together with a detailed overview of book chapters. Chapter 2 discusses becoming a coach and the three elements of effective coaching – process, skills and way of being.

Part 2 is Key Skills and consists of four chapters: Chapter 3 – Listening to encourage thinking, Chapter 4 – Asking powerful questions, Chapter 5 – Paraphrasing and summarising and Chapter 6 – Giving and receiving feedback. The chapter titles clearly emphasise the topic under discussion.

A Conversational Framework is Part 3. This section consists of three chapters: Chapter 7 – Coaching process; Chapter 8 – Beyond behaviour: exploring our thinking; Chapter 9 – Bias towards the positive. Here the emphasis is on the coaching process and its link to theory. In particular, the use of the GROW model is discussed and highlighted. This, together with positive and negative attitudes, changing behaviour as a cognitive approach, plus the benefits of solution-based coaching and using positive approaches, makes up the content of these chapters and this section.

Part 4 is Practical Tools and Techniques and consists of four chapters: Chapter 10 – Body language and emotional intelligence; Chapter 11 – Inspiring creativity: let's talk; Chapter 12 – Inspiring creativity: let's draw; Chapter 13 – Inspiring creativity: let's play. This section, as the chapter titles highlight, provides a range of tools and techniques for the coach to assess and utilise in their own roles. New ideas and ways to engage the coachee are suggested. Various resources and aids are discussed with examples of usage, including thought showers, mind maps and role play.

Part 5 is Coaching Way of Being and has two chapters: Chapter 14 – Being human and Chapter 15 – Inspiring others. Both these chapters summarise some important principles including those of partnership, reflectivity, inspiring others and allowing individuals to make their own decisions. The skills and attributes required to be an effective coach are highlighted and suggestions made that these are upheld and used in everyday life.

The last section is Part 6, Conclusion, and consists of one chapter: Chapter 16 – Reflecting on practice. This final chapter emphasises the importance of coaching being developed through reflective practices. Codes of ethics, contract details and journal usage are all discussed as useful tools. One-to-one, group and peer sessions together with advice from experienced coaches can all be used to develop effective coaching skills for the new coach. The author reminds us that these can be used continually to ensure development and growth for the coach, both professionally and personally.

I would highly recommend this book for the novice coach or those in the early stages of their coaching profession. Nevertheless, the more experienced coach may also find this text a useful reference source. Indeed, given the aforementioned overlaps between coaching and mentoring, counselling and personal development, practitioners in each of these fields would find much to aid them in this very practical and useful book.

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References

Skills You Need, available at: www.skillsyouneed.com

Truss, L. (2003), *Eats shoots & Leaves: the zero tolerance approach to punctuation*.