Book Review:
The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and issues for a new era

Edited by David B. Drake, Diane Brennan & Kim Gørtz

Leslie Hilton

This article first appeared in the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2008, 6(4), 120-124. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com
The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and issues for a new era

Edited by David B. Drake, Diane Brennan & Kim Gørtz

A REVIEW BY LESLIE HILTON

Where did coaching come from, and where is it – or should it be - going? Co-editors David B. Drake, Diane Brennan and Kim Gørtz have edited a collection of contributions from an international group of coaches, including themselves, to help answer these questions. They focus on the need for professional self-development and maturity, and the use of evidence-based approaches in the practice of coaching. Their book, The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and issues for a new era, was conceived as “a way to bring a deeper inquiry and further philosophical reflection into the field of coaching so that both the field and the people involved will be nourished in creating the future in a more thoughtful, ethical and loving way.” The editors encouraged contributors to demonstrate the integration of scholarship and research into daily practice, and expose their thought processes as authors as well as coaches. The book provokes inquiry and reflection. It makes a philosophical point that coaches need to consider and take action regarding their own level of professionalism and that of coaching generally.

A book entitled The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching might imply a direct treatment of the philosophical development of coaching including a broader philosophical view of its existence, purpose, and the developments that form its context. It would have been helpful to hear the editors articulate their overarching philosophy of coaching as it informs the issues addressed in the book. Perhaps the lack of a unifying philosophical theme is part of what makes this book worth reading, as it invites the reader to make the effort to consider each chapter fully and bring some synthesis to the multiplicity of views offered.

The first two sections of the book focus on coaching that derives largely from the person-centered disciplines of psychology and philosophy, such as life coaching and coaching to develop mental toughness and resilience. The final section focuses on coaching...
that derives primarily from the disciplines of organization development and leadership development, and is targeted more towards organizational outcomes. In this segmentation, they acknowledge that coaching derives from, and builds upon, established disciplines—giving some shape to the questions around coaching's identity. There is something to be learned from each contribution in the book, although some adhere more closely to the evidence-based approach espoused by the editors. Those authors also do a generally better job of avoiding unexplored assumptions and discussing possible limitations in their theories.

In Part I, the editors have selected contributions on three issues. Chapters on the first issue, the genesis of coaching, are incomplete in addressing this issue. However, they still deliver valuable perspective about some of the disciplines upon which coaching has been built. The second issue, coach’s obligation for self-management and professional development, is directly and well addressed. The use of coaching-related research in practice, the third issues, is addressed both directly and by implication throughout the rest of the book, as most authors refer to relevant theories, or lack thereof, for evidence for their theories.

Patrick Williams makes the point that coach-practitioners should be familiar with, and understand psychology’s influence on life coaching in terms of theorists and theories, and that end-users of life coaching should understand that coaching has theoretical grounding. Travis Kemp discusses the need for coaches to self-manage their biases and perspectives in order to practice coaching in an ethical and professional manner. This is a critical topic and could be the basis for an entire volume on issues for the development of coaching as a profession.

Peter Jackson continues the themes of self-development and self-management with a focus on how coaches think about the foundations and assumptions of their own practices. Jackson takes to task what he identifies as the ‘market-compatible’ view among many practitioners that coaching is practical and outcome focused, and therefore somehow distinct from, or antithetical to, well-researched theory. (The reader might reflect back on this chapter when reading chapter 10, in which the authors proclaim that their approach is not based on research.) Co-editor David Drake then presents his views on, and approach to, narrative psychology and its contribution to coaching to help clients achieve the personal changes they are seeking. Drake’s approach is multi-layered and subtle, and points to an area of professional development for coaches as they deepen their ability to guide clients. Other discussions of self-management and development in this book that add to the overall topic include the presentation by Charles Hamrick of coaching as a consciousness-raising practice.
Part II looks at the application of coaching to address what the authors identify as five important issues facing today’s organizations and communities: (1) enhancing mental toughness and resilience; (2) work as a global coach; (3) stress in the workplace; (4) the need for wiser leaders; and (5) bringing out the human spirit in clients, or helping people live from the place of their highest self. One chapter provides an overview of how two authors researched and developed their executive coaching model.

Sandy Gordon addresses the development of mental toughness as a performance driver in business executives and teams through coaching, asserting that strengths-based strategies such as Appreciative Inquiry Coaching are better suited for this purpose than other coaching approaches. Charles Hamrick explores competencies for intercultural coaching, and considers how coaches in any culture can expand first their individual coaching skills and competencies, their clients’ skills and competencies and then consciousness itself. Workplace stress is a serious issue that can be effectively addressed by coaching, asserts Kristina Gyllesten, although there is currently a lack of literature and research on coaching and stress. Gyllesten’s piece highlights one of this book’s themes: the need for well-designed coaching interventions that look with an open mind to theory, evidence and the experience of others for guidance and direction in service of the client. Peter Webb posits that a worthy purpose of coaching business leaders is to enable wise decisions and elicit wisdom-related performance. This chapter provides a fascinating look at attempts to approach the eternal concept of wisdom and its development scientifically.

Authors Peter J. Reding and Marcia Collins discuss the development of their coaching model while addressing the perceived need for individuals to connect with their Human Spirit. The authors fail to cite specifically the foundational work from which their work is drawn, making it difficult to discern or assess the true nature, validity or content of their model and methods. This entry seems incomplete and out of alignment with the overall intention of the book to raise questions for reflection through an integration of scholarship with theory and practice.

At the close of Part II, Sabine Dembkowski and Fiona Eldridge describe their process in developing a coaching model in order to support an assertion regarding the value of executive coaching to organizational buyers. An interesting point in their chapter derives from a surprising statistic: nearly 40% of clients in one survey reported their coach did not follow up after coaching sessions to check on the client’s progress. The authors seemingly intend to reinforce their notion that follow-up encouragement helps the client maintain momentum, confidence, and sustainable change. However, this idea of encouraging momentum seems to require more careful investigation and emphasis given the
authors’ assertion that continuous reinforcement and encouragement drives makes sustainable change easier.

In Part III, *The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching* looks at the uses, expectations, impact and value of “coaching the organization” and draws on coaching’s roots in organization-centered disciplines such as organization development and leadership development. “Coaching the organization” in this case refers to alignment of coaching interventions with more sustainable, organization-wide outcomes.

David Clutterbuck addresses professionalism in workplace team coaching and underlines a strong distinction between team facilitation and team building, and team coaching. He states that coaching individuals is not the same as coaching teams and should only be done by appropriately trained professionals. He raises a current debate about whether team coaches should be expected to have a separate, additional qualification above that of executive coaches due to the complexity of their role.

Co-editor Diane Brennan addresses the impact of leadership coaching on the organization through exposition of a case in which she coached a CEO, and then conducted individual and group meetings with his senior leadership team (later identified as “team coaching” – a designation worth more discussion, based on Clutterbuck’s piece). It is disappointing that she does not summarize her findings in a way that ties her conclusion of success to any of the evidence that might have been available, or at least makes a solid connection between the outcomes of the individual and team coaching and the outcomes experienced by the organization.

Vicki Escude next delves into a recurring theme in organizational coaching: creating a “coaching culture”. She states that her organization has coached CEOs in adopting a coaching approach to leadership. These CEOs then report many benefits that she states are echoed by research from Case Western Reserve University. She does not give specifics on the benefits reported in her own cases or the research used to define those outcomes. Escude references ongoing research related to benefits of a coaching culture, but fails to point the reader in the direction of such research or case studies that might help illuminate the way.

William Bergquist, co-founder of the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, and Vikki Brock identify and discuss six organizational cultures they believe strongly influence the ways in which organizational leaders and coaches frame their work and expectations of coaching outcomes. They add a powerful lens through which coaches can illuminate their own untested assumptions and expand their ability to target their coaching
to the assumptions that arise from the influence of the client’s organizational culture.

Co-editor Kim Gørtz asserts that coaching can be used to foster the psychological state known as “flow” and thereby become a tool for successful implementation of organizational change. One might compare this discussion of flow with that in Chapter 7, where Hamrick describes coaching “in a nutshell” as “relationship, natural flow and personal discovery”.

At the close of the third section, Merrill C. Anderson offers critical insights gleaned from his return on investment (ROI) studies evaluating leadership coaching and development initiatives. What may be missing for some readers is discussion of research findings regarding sustainable gains from a coaching-based intervention. This does not, however, detract from the learning for organizational coaches about the multiple benefits available from integrating an evidence-based component into their work.

I recommend this volume for serious coaches at all levels despite its limitations. I suggest readers use the reflective questions at the end of each section to engage in the critical thinking and self-reflection necessary to increase the credibility and professional stature of coaching. The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching gives practitioners the chance to learn from others who make the case for coaching as a legitimate, credible and powerful intervention that serves society. Professional coaches are true believers in the efficacy and distinct value of coaching. Rather than let that belief limit our openness to being contradicted, we will all serve the growth of coaching by questioning and understanding what we do as professionals. We can identify and challenge our own assumptions, and then have the faith and courage to refine our practice through addressing and testing the difficult issues we face as professionally-motivated practitioners of an emerging set of philosophies and methodologies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Hilton, MCC

Phone: 303-388-3440
Email: leslie@successpartner.com

Leslie Hilton, Managing Principal of SuccessPartner LLC, practices executive coaching and consulting with a focus on aligned strategy, leadership, organizational performance, human dynamics of change, and career success. Leslie combines over 15 years of experience in business and leadership with 15 years of training and practice in leadership, organizational and career coaching. Her second graduate degree is an MSc in Management/Coaching and Consulting for Change from the University of Oxford’s Said School of Business and Haute Ecole d’Commerce, Paris. She serves on the Regulatory Committee of the International Coach Federation and the Editorial Board for the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations. Leslie researched and wrote her MSc graduate thesis on the scholarly antecedents of executive coaching.
Resource Center for Professional Coaching in Organizations

The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations (IJCO) is the signature publication of Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). In addition to this internationally acclaimed journal, PCPI publishes books on topics of interest to those in the coaching community, whether practitioner, decision maker, or end user. You can count on PCPI, Inc. to provide content that pushes the envelope — bringing theory, research and application together in ways that inform, engage and provoke. Visit the PCPI website, www.pcpionline.com, to view and purchase our growing line of products.

If you have administrative questions, please refer them to our IJCO Office Manager, at officemanager@ijco.info. For advertising, marketing and operations inquiries, please refer them to John Lazar, IJCO Co-Executive Editor, at john@ijco.info. Please submit unsolicited manuscripts for peer review consideration to the IJCO office manager at officemanager@ijco.info.

Visit Both Our Sites at Your Convenience

Journal information:  www.ijco.info  

Purchases:  www.pcpionline.com