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Book Review - Recrafting a Life: Solutions for Chronic Pain and Illness

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BOOK REVIEW**Recrafting a Life: Solutions for Chronic Pain and Illness**

Charles Johnson and Denise Weber

Brunner-Routledge Publishers, 2002, 337 pages, ISBN 1-58391-356-4, USD \$36.54 Kindle edition

Review by Rod Sherwin

Solutioneer

While this book was published in 2002, it arrived in my life in late 2017 about 18 months after I had been diagnosed with a serious health condition. It provides strategies for those who are perplexed about how to deal with the multiple challenges that accompany the experiences of long-term illness and/or pain. The book is written for mental health professionals, yet I found it an incredibly valuable self-help book.

For those dealing with chronic pain and illness, mainstream medicine focuses primarily on symptom relief through pharmaceuticals. You are seen as the patient and they are the experts. You get on the treadmill and follow the standard of care with little investigation into your own agency in coping with the condition. SF instead recognises the client as the expert in their world and, with the right help, being able to find solutions to not only cope with their condition but to enhance the quality of their lives. I found strong parallels with the Biopsychosocial Model for Chronic Pain Self-Management presented by Jay E. Valusek at the SFBTA Conference in 2018, as an alternative to the rising opioid addiction.

The book is organised in two major parts. Part 1 covers some of the theory underlying their approach (Chapters 2-4) while Part 2, the majority of the book, has 3 main sections: the Stages of Recrafting a Life (Chapter 5), using SF to enable refracting (Chapters 6-7), and using hypnosis as a therapeutic and self-help tool (Chapters 8-9). The final two chapters are about self-care as a caregiver and a handy catalogue of experiments in self-care.

Johnson and Weber use the story of Robinson Crusoe as a metaphor for those dealing with chronic health conditions as they go through in their journey. They explore Crusoe's different stages of progression after being shipwrecked on an island and also use his relationship with his companion Friday to talk about being a useful companion, carer or therapist. You don't need to have read the story of Robinson Crusoe or to have seen a movie to still find this metaphor useful.

As a way to meet the client in their resources and align with their current model of the world, Johnson and Weber describe five potential stages that a client may be in with their condition. A person who is just beginning their journey with a new health condition can benefit from different interventions compared with someone who has been dealing with it over the long-term. The five stages of recrafting are: Visitor, Sufferer/Victim, Seeker/Searcher, Explorer/Experimenter and Recrafter. These stages are not a linear progression and a client may move between the different stages depending on their energy levels and severity of symptoms at a given point in time. There are useful tables within the text which summarise the interventions suggested at each stage.

The SF section starts to describe familiar SF tools such as listening, goals, future orientation (the Miracle Question), looking for exceptions and scaling. These tools are modified in important ways to work around the reality that chronic pain and health issues aren't always getting better and may be getting worse over time.

For example, the Miracle Question is phrased around identifying the skills to have a higher quality of life rather than not having the condition at all. Looking for exceptions helps to identify self-care strategies that work for you, and follow up sessions using EARS (DeJong & Berg, 2013) start with "What's different?" rather than "What's better?" as things aren't always going to better. Johnson and Weber developed a tool called the Solution Identification Scale for Health (SISH) to help the client further identify useful exceptions between sessions.

As relapses are a part of life for chronic health conditions. A number of tools and tasks are suggested that can be developed with the client to help them plan for and cope for these situations, such as the Roadside Repair Kit, a Rainy Day Letter, the Memory Virus and the Fortune Cookie task.

I found the chapters on hypnosis very dense; it was easy to get bogged down in the theory and technical terminology. I do like the way that hypnotic suggestion could be combined with the SF tasks like noticing and experimentation.

The authors' depth of experience comes through very clearly, as well as the depth of knowledge and skill in applying SF and hypnosis skills, for the benefit of their clients. I highly recommend this book for both mental health professionals and for clients themselves.

The reviewer

Rod Sherwin is a Solutioneer specialising in using Solutions-focused approaches to help business respond and adapt to change.

References

DeJong, P., & Berg, I. K. (2013). *Interviewing for solutions* (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

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