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Book Review - Team Talk: Building Excellence with Solution Focused Skills

Anne-Marie Wulf

kontakt@danskloesningsfokuseretinstitut.dk

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BOOK REVIEW**Team Talk: Building Excellence with Solution Focused Skills**

Susanne Burgstaller, Chris Iveson and Harald Karrer (illustrations)

Published by Usolvit, 2019, 73 pages, ISBN 978-1700056641, \$15.99 paperback, www.team-talk.usolvit.com (Kindle edition available)

Review by Anne-Marie Wulf

Danish Solution Focused Institute

Team Talk is a different kind of book, as you will notice right away when you see the front cover. The subtitle refers to creating and developing teams using Solution-Focused skills. Fifteen particular skills are depicted as people, creating a gallery of individuals in different colours, shapes, and types. For example, the “Preferred Future” is portrayed as a geography teacher with a map representing the skill. “Positive Assumption” is represented as a woman with a flower head wreath and a bark skirt, appearing as if she was Hawaiian. The front cover really stirs the curiosity and the reader is immediately drawn to engage with the book. There are only 73 pages, aiding in the book’s accessibility.

Following the foreword, the 15 members of the team, their aims, and specific colours are presented. We get to meet the sporty Mr. Best Self, the business look-alike Mrs. Tomorrow Question, the very tall long-limbed Mr. List, the adventurous Miss. Miracle Question, and the grumpy old Mr. Previous Solution, just to mention a few. Each team member is described along with a short, clear, and useful description of the particular skill, which is useful. Along with the descriptions are illustrations of how it may look when use Mr. Best Self in interactions with others. The illustrations make the book readily accessible and useful; surely anyone will gain something from this book.

Each skill comes along with applications for practice, supported by relevant tasks. For example, there is an exercise for self-coaching, an observation task for you and your team, and tasks centred on actions. The tasks are easy to do and are tailored towards teams or anyone wanting to master the Solution Focused approach.

The booklet ends presenting bonus material for “curious learners”. For me, this was the most interesting part of the book. Burgstaller and Iveson introduce “the Solution Focused Philosophy” by writing about “being” and “doing” Solution Focused. This single page (p. 68) lists their beliefs and assumptions about Solution Focused. Despite their renowned status, the beliefs presented from the stance of “being” might be slightly new to readers. The distinction between philosophy and process (the doing) makes it easy to understand the Solution Focused Approach, however, practicing might be more challenging. The book also refers to a website (www.team-talk.usolvit.com) where you can find more material and inspiration.

Towards the end of the book, the authors present and discuss turning the Solution Wheel, a four part conversation about teamwork. At this point, I began to think “Oh well, there is nothing new under the sun, and this is what I’m already doing”. Not to say that I’m an expert, I’m not, but it became clear to me that this book was just another way of presenting the process of solution focused conversations.

The purpose of this isn’t to introduce ground-breaking solution focused ideas. Instead, it provides basic techniques and skills from a fun and light perspective. I think the book will be useful for both newcomers to understand, learn, and master the Solution Focused approach. For more experienced practitioners, the authors’ innovative presentation can inspire their training and teaching. I definitely see the potential for this book. The authors state that: “This illustrated playbook we have created will help you understand and apply the most important Solution Focused skills.” (Burgstaller & Iveson, 2019, p.3), I couldn’t agree more. This is a playbook of how to understand and apply Solution Focused Skills.

Personally, I was pleased to find skills like The Miracle Question, The Experimental Task, and The Break. These skills sometime seem to belong to the “classic” manner of doing Solution Focused work. By incorporating all the skills, (i.e. new, current, and past) this short book is a significant contribution to the Solution Focused Approach include variations of practice. For that, I am grateful to the authors.

The reviewer

Anne-Marie Wulf is a family therapist & founder of Danish Solution Focused Institute, Copenhagen.

Email: kontakt@danskloesningsfokuseretinstitut.dk