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Beyond Coping: Finding Your Way Forward

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BOOK REVIEW**Beyond Coping: Finding Your Way Forward**

Ben Scott, A. Biba Rbolj and Greg Oberbeck

BT Press, 2021, 136 pages, ISBN 978-1-871697-80-3, £10.00 paperback

Review by Louise Bower-Hatchard

IASTI Certified Solution-Focused Practitioner

This pocket-sized book is a light and easy introduction to solution-focused thinking that anyone and everyone can apply to their own lives and circumstances in a useful way. The book sets itself firmly in the COVID era, making it hugely current and helpful for thinking through our current reality and into our preferred future. The blurb pitches the book as a self-help resource that will give insights and learning to help readers to “thrive during the pandemic and in the post pandemic world” delivered through “a unique fairy tale for grown ups”. And this it does.

The book starts with a rich description of the main character’s experience of what many of us may feel is a clunky reality that resonates with our own daily grind of living through lock-down – a stressful mix of anxieties, frustrations, family conflict and the unrelenting cycle of housework and chores. And then the story unfolds with this character meeting others on an extended jog that becomes a journey of self-discovery. The people that she meets that day ask her useful questions that prompt her thinking, leading to new more positive ways of behaving. The fictional day-in-the-life of “The Jogger” takes the reader on a structured course through a solution-focused framework that gives both a great overview of solution focused thinking but also encourages self-reflection and personal growth. Also included are some beautiful illustrations along the way, which are a charming and unusual addition to a book aimed at adults.

Whilst reading I did have to suspend disbelief a couple of times about the incredible friendliness and wisdom of the strangers that The Jogger came across, and about how as a mother The Jogger was not constantly stressing about having to rush back to her family – however this may well say more about me and/or our current society than anything else. This is described as a fairy story after all. And in our collective preferred future wouldn’t we all wish for more meaningful, generous and insightful interactions with the people in our community? Wouldn’t all parents love to feel able to enjoy guilt-free escape time when family life feels overwhelming? In these ways I feel that the book also provokes reflection about the kind of community we want to be part of post-covid and how we want to interact with the wider world having been limited to only our own households for so very long.

Often when people are at their most stressed and at the limits of their coping abilities, a long heavy read is the last thing that people can engage with. This book however is a light and easy read, with each short chapter including self-coaching questions at the end which the reader is invited to reflect on personally. This book would make an excellent gift for a friend or relative who is struggling and wants a little time and support to think through how to come out of this pandemic stronger. It would also act as a great introduction to solution-focused thinking and approaches for anyone who is interested in understanding more about it, as it equips the reader with some excellent questions and a good insight into the underlying principles of the solution-focused approach. Although the main character is a parent, the language of the book is written in such clear and beautifully simple language that it would also be suitable for young people to read and use - “If you keep your focused on where you want to go and what it will be like, then your feet, and steps, will naturally follow” (p. 37).

I found it interesting and helpful to complete the activities myself as I read the book - and the good quality thinking that this provoked most definitely has helped me to reflect on my own way forward into my post-pandemic preferred future.

The reviewer

Louise Bower-Hatchard is an IASTI Certified Solution-Focused Practitioner. Louise works full time as a senior manager in Children & Families Services in Sheffield, UK, where she applies solution focused approaches to organisational change, provides coaching, and trains frontline practitioners in understanding solution-focused approaches to child protection and family wellbeing.

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