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BOOK REVIEW**Solution-Focused Coaching for Agile Teams: A Guide to Collaborative Leadership**

Veronika Jungwirth and Ralph Miarka

Solutions Books, 2021, 270 pages, ISBN 978-0-9933463-4-7, £28.99 paperback

Review by Louise Bower-Hatchard

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With “agile” approaches to organisational ways of working becoming increasingly common and the power of coaching increasingly understood, this book provides a toolkit for coaches, leaders, and team managers in a wide range of fields. The blurb promises accessible, detailed, and practical guidance and it delivers that well. I particularly liked the balance between theory, ideas of how to utilise the theoretical models in a variety of kinesthetic ways with teams, and practical tips (clearly learned from experience) of the (sometimes small) things that can make a big difference to the way the tools are received by teams.

The examples in the book describe workplaces that fully use the “agile” way of working - and as a leader in a more traditional organisational setting I found this to be a really interesting insight into the benefits and potential pitfalls of this way of working, along with suggestions of how to maximise engagement and support individuals to fully commit to team success.

The book describes a range of solution focused tools and techniques that can be used with teams in team meetings, in development sessions or in dealing with difficulties with team dynamics including in conflict resolution. These are useful for anyone working with or leading teams, regardless of whether the organisation uses agile ways of working. The book includes good explanations of how Nancy Kline’s *Time to Think* principles can help in meetings (Kline, 1998), and how the SCARF model (Rock, 2008) supports understanding of when & why individuals in a team may feel at risk and respond defensively. Most importantly, the book explains how awareness of these elements combined with solution focused approaches can support people to work together in the most productive and successful way.

The authors come across as skilled experienced coaches sharing their experience and lessons learned with the reader, to encourage the reader to give these techniques a go and to offer assurance that the reality of working with teams is complex. The stories from practice give insight into real world case studies that describe the difficulties that the authors have overcome, and the persistence, flexibility and re-framing needed to find the approach that got the best out of the team. The variety of ways the tools can be used are described well (down to the detail of the stationery needed) and give inspiration of using space, props, visual cues, movement and sociodrama techniques to facilitate the team to communicate their differing views and reflect on progress and strengths in a way that stimulates learning, sharing and growth. Helpfully, and unusually for most coaching books, there is also guidance on when coaching is and is not helpful/appropriate – which feels like a friendly warning for managers to heed so as to consider what approach is most useful in a given circumstance.

The book also gives helpful suggested questions to ask and ways to phrase appreciation to team members to literally give words to the reader that can be tried out with the teams that they work with. This feels like friendly hand-holding to support the reader to translate the theory into observable behaviour that they could easily enact.

The end of each chapter gives prompts for self-reflection and suggestions for experiments and exercises that could be tried by the reader, which prompt consideration of what the reader may wish to put into practice and to gently encourage trying out something new.

Overall, this book is a fantastic resource for learning and applying solution focused team coaching approaches and certainly a book that I will revisit often for inspiration and ideas.

References

Kline, N. (1998.) *Time to think: Listening to ignite the human mind*. Cassell Octopus.

Rock, D. (2008.) SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 1.

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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 formal 1:1 coaching sessions, and trains frontline practitioners in understanding solution-focused approaches to child protection and family wellbeing.

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