

Book Review

A Guide to Coaching and Mental Health: The recognition and management of psychological issues, Hove: Routledge (2006)

Authors: Andrew Buckley and Carole Buckley

Reviewer: Elaine Cox, Oxford Brookes University

At a recent coaching conference¹, Michael Cavanagh confirmed the importance for coaches of understanding the manifestation of mental illness in their clients. Andrew and Carole Buckley's book is therefore timely, coming at a point in the development of coaching, where a recognition of significant knowledge and professional understanding are important to the reputation and continued professionalisation of the industry.

On page four of their book, the authors confirm that "what the coach needs is an ability to recognise when coaching is not the whole solution". This book enhances the coach's ability to do just that.

The book has three sections. In section one, entitled 'Working on the Boundary'; the authors begin by looking at what is normal and the signs to look out for in abnormal behaviour. Following this, the section dealing with categories of suffering (functional, dysfunctional and mental illness) is particularly helpful in that it reminds the reader that we are all subject to temporary dysfunction and this does not necessarily imply mental illness. This first section acknowledges the trajectory of the coaching relationship, and pays particular attention to contracting as a means of ensuring boundaries are in place. Within a clearly formed and bounded coaching relationship those structures can be revisited if mental health problems are uncovered.

In section two, 'What's being said?' a range of client case studies is presented. The emphasis is on how a coach could identify and deal with suspected mental health issues. One of the case studies, that of Hilary, is useful because it highlights the grey area between mental health and mental illness. Hilary is often distracted, excited, over enthusiastic or pre-occupied, but, as the authors explain, this could just as well be due to an erratic personality as mental illness.

Section three, 'Categories of Mental Illness' provides medical definitions and highlights the main features of the most common mental health problems. The section on depression is particularly valuable in helping to differentiate between an everyday depressed mood and more serious types of clinical depression. It also explains normal patterns of grief. The only criticism I had of the book was in this section: I thought it confusing and inappropriate to have a chapter on disabilities right in the middle of this section on mental illnesses and felt that this chapter could have been placed differently. Nevertheless, such useful summaries, and the brief overview of treatments and therapies, should be required reading for everyone, not just coaches.

¹ First International Coaching Psychology Conference at City University London, 18th and 19th December 2006

This book provides essential reading for practicing coaches and students of coaching and fills a gap in current coaching literature in relation to what Grant might term the 'clinical population' (). There is a limit to how much can be covered a book of this size, but the effort to raise awareness of this vital areas has been worthwhile and provides very valuable starting place, particularly for the non-psychologist.

References

Grant, A. & Cavanagh, M. (2004) Toward a profession of coaching: Sixty-five years of progress and challenges for the future, *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1-16.