

Book review

Reflective Practices for Coaches: A Guidebook for Advanced Professional Development by Iain McCormick (2023). Routledge, London.

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This is a timely guide for the increasing number of psychologists and other helping professionals using coaching. Iain McCormick's book is timely also because of the growing research (and meta-analysis of that research) about what makes coaching effective. The application of Reflective Practice is a foundation of the book and McCormick also provides coverage of what makes Reflective Practice effective..

While this workbook is for “advanced professional development” McCormick indicates its potential for use by students learning coaching, the basis for peer-based Reflective Practice sessions, a guide for facilitators of professional development groups and a source for those involved in such groups.

The core content:

1. Reflective Practice as a method of professional development for coaches
2. Group Reflective Practice sessions– including safety and baseline measures
3. What coaching is and its effectiveness, including rapid, solution-focused coaching, coaching skills, self-assessment and Reflective Practice exercises
4. Innovative therapeutic methods
5. Reflective questions – how a coach can set up their own Reflective Practice

McCormick approaches coaching, and Reflective Practice, as an evidence-based practitioner. He uses case studies together with clear outlines of approaches and of the evidence behind them to illustrate how to apply coaching techniques.

He errs on the side of inclusiveness in bringing together the evidence. The value of this is that coaches get to review the evidence to guide their development of an integrated approach for their client.

McCormick provides a systematic review of the value of Reflective Practice. He emphasises that this can be done alone, including writing (using his excellent worksheets), and also with a supervisor, and with peers (including in peer-based coaching development sessions – with appropriate safety arrangements).

McCormick illustrates the universal encouragement of Reflective Practice by professional coaching bodies. No criticism of McCormick, but in my view it would be good to be able to identify the effective ingredients of Reflective Practice.

In organisational psychologist Adam Grant's latest book (*Hidden Potential*, 2023), he distinguishes the difference between deliberate practice (structured repetition of a task to improve performance based on clear goals and immediate feedback), and deliberate play (a structured activity designed to make skill development enjoyable with complex tasks broken into simpler parts introducing novelty and variety).

This might sound trivial but there is evidence that engaging learners through games, role-play and even improv results in improved performance. In one experiment with health-care workers, deliberate play-informed approaches (including introducing themselves to patients in terms of their relevant expertise, such as "Nurse Quick Shot") improved these health workers' performance and well-being.

As McCormick notes - engagement with Reflective Practice correlates with benefits gained. McCormick recommends mixing up Reflective Practice to include peer, supervisor and individual exercises. He introduces a range of individual Reflective Practice techniques – including some especially creative ones (for example, "If my coaching work were an animal, what would it be?"). I look forward to training games such as the number of times someone can use scaling in a role-play, or the number of creative alternatives they can coax out of the role-play "client" in describing the benefits of embarking on a new course of action.

Building on the consistent finding in the coaching research that the number of sessions is not a critical aspect of success (unsurprisingly such success is a product of the working relationship), McCormick puts early emphasis on the value of solution-focused coaching. He provides a clear identification of the steps of the solution-focused model, illustrated with a useful case study.

Before outlining further approaches McCormick distinguishes between "eclectic" and "integrated" approaches to coaching. He emphasises the value of working systematically with one model while retaining the ability to use alternative approaches, with suitable signposting and clarification for the client, when the coach and client are not making progress.

The seven further "innovative" approaches (beyond solution-focused coaching) match with what has been described as Third Wave cognitive behavioural coaching (Passmore and Leach, 2022). This is a great introduction to such approaches – again grounded in the research, and with practical suggestions. Thinking of how I could help a client with an aggressive internal critic I turned to the chapter on Compassion-focused Techniques and found it very useful.

This section is followed by a pragmatic chapter on When to Use Which Therapeutic Technique or Approach. Here Table 19.1 presents the issue that has been identified and the relevant chapters. For example "Stress" is linked with Chapter 18 – Stress Inoculation and with Chapter 12 – Unified Protocol Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Techniques.

The Conclusion ensures final reflections (and the opportunity for the reader's reflections, together with action steps). This is not just a "How To" guide, rather *Reflective Practice for Coaches* is a great guide to ongoing development as a coach.

References

- Grant, A. (2023). *Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things*. Penguin, Random House, UK.
- Passmore, J. and Leach, S. (2022). *Third Wave Cognitive Behavioural Coaching: Contextual, Behavioural and Neuroscience Approaches for Evidence-Based Coaches*. Pavilion Publishing and Media, West Sussex.