

***Coaching Leadership: Building Educational Leadership Capacity through Coaching Partnerships*, Robertson, J. (2005), Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press, ISBN 9 781877 398025**

Reviewer: Erica Holley, Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University

I wish every head teacher in the UK could be sent a copy of this book, instead of the huge amount of directives and guidance they usually receive from the Department for Education and Skills. Robertson's book is just what is needed at a time when schools face complex change, there is an acknowledged shortage of head teachers and coaching in schools is being introduced, often badly, as a way of improving teacher performance. As someone who began academic research when she was a school principal, Robertson, now an Associate Professor and Assistant Dean, manages to combine scholarship and a strong argument for leadership coaching with clear, practical advice about how to go about it. While the author is based in New Zealand, she has an international perspective and the scenarios she describes will be very familiar to anyone in a leadership role in UK schools. Her descriptions of what goes on in schools and when leaders meet together are perceptive and illustrated by the voices of those involved in leadership coaching.

The book is clearly structured in two main parts: part one concentrates on theory and part two, practice. Each chapter begins with a short overview and ends with a succinct summary of the main points. Robertson explains that the chapters are chronological and detail the evolving nature of action research studies and thinking behind the development of her model. She invites the reader to participate in coaching and to learn, critique and develop new ways of thinking and acting.

Part One introduces the concept of coaching with definitions and models, emphasises the importance of educational leadership, outlines research on life-long learning and professional development and demonstrates how action research can enable communities of learners to be established. Robertson is clear that educational leadership is about the 'continuous improvement of learning and teaching' and that her model of coaching is about developing 'critically reflective leaders committed to the continual improvement of their leadership practice'. She integrates well-referenced literature on educational leadership and managing change with a coaching model that enhances quality leadership development. She recognises that school leaders can all too easily get sidetracked by the minutiae of their everyday work but offers examples from head teachers who have developed effective ways of coping.

Part Two offers detailed, practical advice about how to get started, develop the appropriate skills and facilitate the process of coaching. It also identifies the challenges to be considered. The coaching process is aligned with Fullan's (1985) model of the change process and the case studies show how the coaching relationship develops during the 'initiation phase' so that leaders are confident enough to be open to new ideas and ways of working in the 'implementation phase' and become autonomous and authoritative in their coaching relationship in the 'institutionalisation phase' when their coaching

practices have become an accepted and integrated way of working. Part Two offers school leaders a way of combining reflective interviewing and self assessment structured by the GROW model (Whitmore 2002) and the acronym SMART (so that goals are specific, measured, achievable, relevant and timed) which will appeal to head teachers who are driven by targets. The section is rich with useful and thought-provoking 'reflective activities', questionnaires and examples of practice. Robertson does not suggest that the process is an easy one and devotes a chapter to the difficulties experienced by leaders who wish to undertake coaching in a market-driven education system. Readers will be relieved that she understands how factors such as lack of time, guilt, lack of confidence and coaching partnerships that don't work, mitigate against success although she offers sensible ways forward.

The final section of the book considers the links between coaching, boundary-breaking leadership, and learning communities. Readers are challenged to think about how coaching can be used as an agent of change and transformation within wider society. She is persuasive in arguing that coaching is a transformative process because it allows educational leaders to act with agency, 'to know they can contribute to and develop the system rather than be a cog within it.'

Robertson's book will become essential reading for school leaders who want to develop a culture of learning in their institutions. Until now educationalists that have wanted to develop coaching have only had reference to books that have largely used examples from the world of business. Such books are always read with the knowledge that business is different and a little removed from education. Robertson's book is firmly placed in schools. Educators will be confident that she understands their world and offers optimism and ways forward in improving educational leadership.

***Achieving Excellence in Your Coaching Practice: How to Run a Highly Successful Coaching Business*, McMahon, G., Palmer, S and Wilding, C. (2006) London, Routledge, ISBN: 0471426245.**

Reviewer: Christine K Champion.  
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*Achieving Excellence in Your Coaching Practice* focuses on the business skills rather than the coaching skills required to succeed as a self-employed coach or coaching psychologist. The authors of this book are very well positioned, in terms of their knowledge and experience of coaching and related disciplines of counselling, psychotherapy, psychology and human resource management, to offer practical advice on how to set up and run a successful coaching practice. This is the first UK based book to target trained coaches and those with coaching ambitions, and as such is a welcome addition to the preceding, more marketing focused, American text by Fairley and Stout (2004).

The approach is down to earth and practically based with plenty of exercises and activities to stimulate interest and encourage the reader to more fully consider their own situation. The focus is on how to develop and put in place effective strategies for success in this endeavour, rather than writing from an academic perspective on business start-up and success. The book is written on the assumption of the reader having no prior knowledge or experience of running a business. Nevertheless there is much on offer for the interested reader. The book lends itself to being read cover to cover or for more general reference to specific areas of interest.

The broad approach within the title is reflected in the five sections: Being self-employed, Making your business work, Money matters, Selling your services and Going into Business. The first part of the book applies coaching skills to effectively coach the coach, including reflective opportunities in this area of critical decision making. Indeed there may be some useful wider applications of the techniques developed by the authors, and included in this part. (Palmer et al 2003) The book is very effective in creating awareness of the stressful challenges involved in setting up and running a business.

There is an informative chapter in the second part, Making your business work, which reviews the causes of success versus failure and provides a framework for the analysis of risks involved. This is an essential consideration in an economy with such a high rate of business failure from business start-ups. Key characteristics for success are identified as motivation, leadership skills and decision-making ability.

In the financial section, practical tips range from recognition of the importance of cash flow to a business, with some excellent practical examples of cash flow charts, to helpful advice on the requirement for detailed record keeping. These tips will be ignored at the reader's peril! Although it is never possible to comprehensively cover all subject areas in this type of text, this reviewer proposes that there is a sound business case to include discussion of the important initial choices to be made around the legal format of the business and the resultant employment status of the founder. It might be expedient to recognise that there are alternative choices to 'self-employed' status through, for example, the formation of a limited company.

Part Four, Selling your services provides a much broader approach than the title to this part suggests. It recognises the important role of the wider marketing mix in creating an opportunity for business and supporting sales. Chapters are well written and include Marketing, Image and the significance of the Location decision. The authors note the important role of networking in building prospects, by recommending that a clear networking strategy should be developed to include a selective, pro-active approach. The use of the internet as a promotional tool and as an additional virtual channel to market is highlighted with some very helpful tips on how to register a domain name, design and maintain a website.

Part Five, Going into Business, draws attention to the limiting factor of the coach's time and the implications of this for a business, which generally charges out an hourly rate.

The focus here is on developing traditional time-management techniques. For more entrepreneurial readers it could have been interesting to explore opportunities for creating a more scaleable approach, perhaps through linked coaching products and services, not limited by the finite resource of time. A short chapter draws attention to the legal requirements and to the complex nature of the confidentiality issue and the law. In a later chapter on Keeping Records the requirements of the Data Protection Act are briefly discussed along with the potential for conflict with a professional Codes of Ethics in a legal context. The importance of the competence of the coach is emphasized, recognising the current unregulated nature of the profession, and the commitment to on-going personal development is recommended. Reference is made to the nature and process of evaluation of coaching, currently a topic that is of interest to the evidence-base of the emerging profession.

The book concludes with a useful list of contacts and websites and this resource will save the reader much research time.

*Achieving Excellence in Your Coaching Practice* is a first-rate addition to the series in *Essential Coaching Skills and Knowledge* by Routledge and delivers suitably against the stated objectives of being 'practical and highly accessible'. The range and depth of subject area included reflects the diverse knowledge and experience of the three authors and I would certainly recommend this book to any aspiring coach seeking to establish and succeed with their own coaching practice. In particular the experiential learning and interactive approach was found to be particularly effective – as one might reasonably expect from a book written by successful coaching professionals!

## **References**

Fairley, S G and Stout, C E (2004) *Getting Started in Personal and Executive Coaching*. New Jersey. Wiley.

Palmer, S., Cooper C., and Thomas, K. (2003) *Creating a Balance: Managing Stress*. London. British Library.