

Therapist as Life Coach: Transforming your practice

Williams, P. and Davis, D. (2002), New York, WW Norton.

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Therapist as Life Coach makes a bold statement at the outset that "therapists are the professionals best positioned to move into this rapidly growing field" and that "becoming a coach usually requires only a little additional fine-tuning, specific skill building and marketing know-how. This book is one-stop shopping for the therapist wishing to explore the coaching field". Are the authors suggesting that by reading a book, therapists can simply convert themselves into life coaches? Life coaching is a much more up beat term and a more 'lucrative' profession than therapy in the U.S.A. and my curiosity was raised - I had to read on.

As a Life Coach with a keen interest and involvement in the training of coaches and the setting of standards in Britain, I was intrigued to understand the position and viewpoint of our American colleagues. In Britain, where Life Coaching is still a very young profession, we are keen to define boundaries between coaching and therapy/counselling, honouring each as a distinct intervention that serves a client in a unique way. Professional integrity is upheld within each intervention when the client is aware of which intervention they are seeking and that this is the most appropriate one for the outcomes that they are wanting to achieve.

From the introduction onwards, the authors set a balanced and grounded tone to this book which encourages the reader, whether therapist or not, to continue to explore what is written. The perspectives shared come from genuine experience and understanding of the potential of coaching for the prospective client as well as the benefits to those who have dedicated themselves to the helping professions in the U.S.A.

A section on the characteristics of successful coaches provides a comprehensive and insightful list of qualities that the authors believe 'well-adjusted, masterful therapists' also possess.

The chapter on the History and Evolution of Life Coaching is a very approachable exploration of the contributions made by eminent people in their fields such as Jung and Erickson, which have contributed to the emergence of Modern Life Coaching at the end of the 20th Century. A pity that Socrates did not get a mention as coaching as we are now coming to understand it started long before the last century.

Nevertheless, this is one of the few books amongst the many that are now flooding the market that make reference to the fact that systematic literature reviews and comprehensive historical accounts of life coaching are yet to be undertaken and that this entire field is waiting for the academics who enjoy this rigorous approach. Their input will assist in further validating this emerging profession.

The book continues with a clear debate of therapy and life coaching that I believe will assist professionals from both sides of the fence with further understanding of the similarities and essential differences between these interventions, before launching into encouragement and support for the therapist in developing a practice.

The Marketing section, although intended for the American therapist wishing to diversify, holds many sound ideas that are cross cultural and that could be recommended for any individual setting out in practice.

Self care for Life Coaches is vital and again this section contains solid ideas to support the Coach. The topic of 'burn out' was dealt with as one major reason for therapists looking to convert to coaches, so I was slightly bemused to see 'burn out' appearing as a problem for coaches. Having had the pleasure of meeting Patrick Williams at a recent Coaching Convention, I was pleased to have the opportunity to quiz him on this for greater

clarity to discover that for those who do suffer this, they may need to address how they see themselves as coaches in relation to their roles as therapists. Clearly, therapists who look to convert to Coaches need to unlearn the therapeutic approach, which may not always be easy. And for those of us to come to Coaching without a therapists training we do not have this challenge.

This is a very comprehensive book that will be an important contribution to the Life Coaching profession on both sides of the Atlantic. A book that has equal value for an understanding of coaching vs. therapy for Coaches who come from a non-therapeutic and therapeutic background.