

COACHING ON THE COUCH

Erik de Haan looks at a groundbreaking work on the psychology of executive coaching

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Bruce Peltier's book, *The Psychology of Executive Coaching* (2001), begins from the vision that an executive coach can learn from the theory and practice of psychotherapy. It is a sophisticated translation of therapeutic approaches into executive coaching practice, and covers the field of sports coaching as well.



Peltier starts with the premise that coaching skills are similar to those used for counselling and therapy. He believes that some theoretical knowledge about these other fields will make coaching more effective and gives practical guidelines for setting about the task, with case studies and systematic checklists.

He defines executive coaching as the use of psychological skills to help a person develop into a more effective leader. These skills are applied to specific work problems to build the coachee's 'leadership repertoire'. Peltier suggests that the coach should select, from the various approaches, those elements that best fit with their own view of life and which employ their personal core competencies to best effect.

Most chapters in the book are devoted to an introduction to some of the main strands of counselling and psychotherapy: psychodynamic, behavioural, person-centred, cognitive, systems, hypnotic, social psychological and existential approaches take up the bulk of the book. Uniquely, Peltier includes sports coaching literature in his overview, which he summarises into valuable themes for the executive coach. There are also useful chapters on assessment, ethics and how to start your own coaching practice.

For me, the strength of this well-researched book is the translation

of psychotherapy theory for executive coaches. It also boldly asserts that psychotherapy should form the basis of all business coaching, where many coaches would think general management and organisation consulting also have something to contribute, or would even argue that coaching is specifically not therapy.

The relatedness of executive coaching and psychotherapy will always be a moot point. I think most readers will agree that executive coaching should work towards most coaches being well trained, well supervised and well accredited, as are most psychotherapists. Peltier's book certainly helps us to move towards that goal.

Executive coaches have two reasons to return to this book on a regular basis. The first is the presence of carefully edited checklists giving overviews of the phenomena we all encounter in our coaching conversations. The checklists most helpful to me were those listing psychological defence mechanisms, styles of distorted thinking, and family roles that our coachees may take up in the workplace (such as the scapegoat, cheerleader, jester, etc.)

The other reason to revisit this book is that it provides a rare insight into how therapists see and experience the field of executive coaching. In this way it gives us a useful 'outside perspective' on our profession.

The last chapter, which is devoted to helping therapists move into the coaching world and set up a coaching practice, reminds us of some of the underlying foundations of our work and competencies that we often tend to take for granted.

The exhaustive overview of approaches, the literature reviews, the many checklists and the translations from one profession into another make this a book of systematic inspiration. ■