

COACHING ON THE COUCH

part one

Over many years of working with a wide range of coaches as their client, colleague and supervisor, it has become clear that we're people who love to read.

We find solace and inspiration for our work in books, even if we do not always see direct and obvious impact from books on our practice. We cherish insights from psychology, philosophy, spirituality and 'self-help' guides, and the sublimations of those insights in poetry, prose and drama.

Why we love to read such a variety of books is not entirely clear. Indeed, some light may be thrown on this question by Alice Miller's book *The Drama of Being a Child*, in which the

author explores several coaches' 'back stories' and discovers how, at some time in their professional careers, many coaches may have suffered a form of 'helper's syndrome'.

Of course, coaching is very different from reading. While books on the subject may inspire and educate, coaching tends to be acquired mainly through practice.

One similarity between coaching and reading does, however, emerge. I refer to the practice of visiting and revisiting a topic, whether a book or the coachee's concerns – each time trying to bring an open mind. Reading, as well as coaching is, I feel, best done 'without memory and desire', as the analyst and writer Wilfred Bion once famously said.

My aim is to introduce you to books that have inspired and informed my coaching. Over the coming months, I intend to intersperse specific coaching books with inspirational titles from literature,

philosophy and psychotherapy.

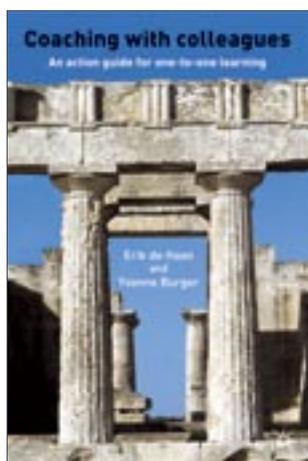
In the first quarter of the year I will concentrate on books that have helped to define and 'ground' this wide-ranging and rich profession. During the second quarter, analytic approaches to coaching will be central, while in the third quarter I will address more person-centred outlooks on coaching. Finally, the focus of the fourth quarter will be on books addressing origin, growth and development of coaches.

Each month I will explain why I feel the book is relevant, offer a description of the work and give you my interpretation of its premise.

My own book, *Coaching with Colleagues*, has been my philosophical starting point for exploring these books. The book has been a point of departure, but also a point of return, as I now expand and amend that book for its second edition.

In it, my co-author Yvonne Burger and I compare and contrast four approaches to coaching: problem-centred, solution-centred, person-centred, and insight-centred. We trace these back to their historical origins, examine their significance for everyday coaching practice, and show what they might mean for specific coaching interventions, for coaching different clients and different issues, and for application by internal coaches. Thus we arrive at an initial intuitive response to the question 'what works for who?'. Also, with the help of explicit methodology and tools, we seek to make these approaches come alive in real coaching conversations.

Over the coming months, readers of this column are invited to join me on a journey of exploration. I will approach the books in my list in the spirit of Bion, without memory or desire, and I hope you will enjoy the experience. ■



Erik de Haan introduces TJ readers to books that have inspired him as an executive coach and supervisor

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