

COACHING ON THE COUCH

Erik de Haan describes the value of *Individual Psychotherapy* to the modern coaching world

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There are many books about psychotherapy, but very few that are as difficult to ignore as *Individual Psychotherapy* (1979) by David Malan.

This is a bold and courageous book that takes a critical look at Freud's *œuvre*, investigating what in it we should keep because it is supported by evidence, and what in it we should discard because it consists of 'oversimplifications based on a narrow and unsatisfactory view of human instinct'.

Introducing the work

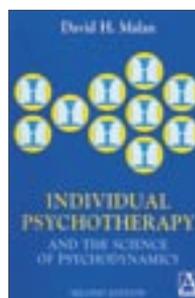
The book is constructed around a series of case studies, which Malan uses to explore the inner mechanisms of the human mind. He begins with frictions and small conflicts in everyday life, and ends with pathologies that take many years of daily analysis to heal.

After addressing unconscious communication and the role of the therapist, the book describes various disturbances and syndromes, moving to ever-more complicated ones that coaches will not have to deal with. However, even in those deeper areas, there is much to be gained from Malan's writing.

Individual Psychotherapy views psychodynamics and individual psychotherapy as a science, in which practitioners explore, gather evidence and present hypotheses.

I am very impressed by how this book handles and builds on the case studies it presents. They are treated as data on which to build evidence, and are presented with so much precision and accompanied by such a wealth of follow-up data, that we can reap the benefits from each of them.

This neat and thorough scientific work makes me wonder what a science of coaching would look like, and how executive coaches could do



more than just evaluate their 'cases' and inquire about the return on investment offered by coaching.

Why I think it's inspirational

In chapter ten, Malan introduces a few 'triangles' that I remind myself of in almost every one of my coaching conversations. The first has to do with transference, and in its three corners lie the parental figure, the 'other' in some present situation, and the coach. These are the three 'attractors' with whom clients can experience the same emotions.

The second triangle has to do with the aim of psychotherapy, which Malan sees as 'to enable the patient to understand his true feelings and experience them'. He shows us that the expression of any of these true feelings or impulses brings with it some form of anxiety, which is then often defended against.

In any piece of communication with our clients we can therefore assume a full triangle: (i) a defence, (ii) an anxiety that is defended against, and (iii) some underlying hidden feeling.

The other chapter that I believe is a must for every coach is number 17, about breaks and termination. This chapter makes clear the degree in which termination is itself an issue of coaching that should not be approached lightly. Malan shows that termination is not a separate issue, but is related to the main themes of coaching.

So many interesting phenomena that we regularly encounter in the last stages of a coaching journey can be related to the themes of the coaching itself. Everyone has residual grief and anger stored up about earlier terminations in their lives, and these tend to be released by the final stages of a successful coaching assignment, which makes all ending of coaching an emotional journey in itself. ■

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