

The Solution Tango: Seven steps to solutions in management

Louis Cauffman with Kirsten Dierolf

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Review by Svea van der Hoorn

The Solution Tango is about “management as the art of getting things done through people” (p. 13). It promises insights and tools aimed at the achievement of organisational goals through managers who act as both leader (direction-giver) and coach (enablers of performance). It positions itself as a guide for practitioners – “theoretical considerations are reduced to a minimum” – but nevertheless offers material for the theoretically curious.

This book lends itself to regular use by anyone focused on improving management practice. Its structure, voice and style invite scan-reading followed by dipping in, rather than reading as an unfolding narrative. For busy managers, consultants and coaches its index is a real plus – six pages of finely detailed information, making it very user-friendly for the rushed. And the content?

Introduction – scope and how to use this book

Chapter 1 – The Basics – the SF approach and how it differs from the more familiar problem-focused approach to resolving business problems and dilemmas

Chapter 2 – Words are magic – developing solution-talk through expanding your language skills – listening and using words differently

Chapter 3 – The Seven Step dance – focuses on “how to do it”

Step 1: Socialising

Step 2: Contextualising

Step 3: Goal-setting

Step 4: Uncovering resources

Step 5: The art of giving compliments

Step 6: Offering differentiation by asking scaling questions

Step 7: Future-orientation

Chapter 4 – Flowchart – devoted to “when to do it” (the seven steps)

Chapter 5 – The Man in the Middle: A true story – the story of a company merger presented in play script format (actual dialogues)

Chapter 6 – Frequently asked questions and special issues.

Those who are following the development of SFBP (solution-focused brief practice) will notice that the book draws on exceptions and problem-free talk, and not the more recent contributions about focusing on fragments of the desired future that are already happening (Szabo, Switzerland) and opening with questions about best hopes (BRIEF, London).

What works and what may get in the way?

The world of work is present throughout the book, with many examples that illuminate the day-to-day dilemmas, challenges and aggravations of managers’ interactions. Refreshingly, it talks the language of business (without obscure jargon) rather than the language of therapy within the context of business. The voice is direct – “you” – and the short sentences create an energy and pithiness true to the tango metaphor used. The book could be criticised for being too prescriptive and hence not sufficiently aligned to a stance of co-construction. However, it invites experimentation

through its mix of statements providing guidance, and its questions that invite reflection and draw on the reader's resourcefulness.

The book is shot through with a thread of humour which starts from the title page – “Warning! Reading this book may be hazardous to your problem-oriented expertise”.

The tango metaphor alerts readers to the authors' focus on management as a two-person dance. “Most of the cases in the book are examples of one-on-one interventions. The same insights and techniques are equally valid when you work with a team or even with a corporation as a whole.” (p17). For those who dispute this position, a good companion book for working with teams and organisations is Daniel Meier's Solution Circle, with its focus on the complexity of working in a network of relationships.

Why buy this book – rather than borrow it?

It offers a wealth of ideas from which to develop SF management practice making it a valuable “what might I try now?” reference resource to return to repeatedly. For SF practitioners without business experience but working with managers, the many scripts and case material quotes bring walking the SF talk in the office context alive. For managers without SF experience, the book's pragmatism makes giving the SF tools and ideas a try appealing.

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