

Positively Speaking: The Art of Constructive Conversations with a Solutions Focus.

Paul Z Jackson and Janine Waldman

The Solutions Focus, 2010, 148 pages, ISBN 9780956526908, £14.99 paperback.

Review by Dr Alasdair Macdonald

Paul Z Jackson and Janine Waldman have worked together in management consultancy and coaching for some years. As one would expect from these authors, the language of this book is clear and unambiguous.

The format is a workbook providing a six week programme to change your conversation and to learn how to apply the SF model within the workplace. Each week's assignment is broken down into six to ten topics. In most of the topics, brief illustrative conversations demonstrate the approach.

Several relatively new ideas are included. The idea of sharing stories from your own experience or that of other coachees is given as a way of generating new and creative thinking (p. 71). This is not referenced to any other author. I myself have seen this used with benefit, and therefore I am interested in how others will use the idea.

The use of 'instead' as a word to convert negative statements into positive ones is mentioned briefly (p. 43). This is an extremely useful piece of micro-conversation and I would have liked to see an example or more detail on how to do this.

There is an interesting and useful section on the use of improvisational skills (p. 88). I suspect this drew largely on Paul Jackson's past experience in the media.

On p. 122 there is a description of two 'microtools' to use in preparing for 'a conversation' and 'a tricky conversation'. The tools given here look promising and give an idea of the

concept. Essentially, ‘microtools’ are short question sets put together for specific situations, which are used in conjunction with the overall use of solution-focused conversations. The microtools concept was presented by Michael Hjerth from Stockholm in 2007, and these two were produced by Jackie Keddy in the United Kingdom.

Challenging questions do not disappear when one becomes solution-focused. On p. 131 there is a useful section on using the ‘CEA: Clarify, Emotion, Answer’ format as a regular method for acknowledging and responding to challenges. Here and elsewhere exercises for the student alone or with a willing colleague are provided.

In general, the book is well presented. There is a small number of non-significant typographical errors. An unusual but sensible idea is the inclusion of a summary and self-rating scale at the mid-point of the course (p. 79).

In conclusion, I found this book readable and instructive. There are new ideas in it even for experienced solution-focused workers. The format is effective and makes it easier to learn the approach.

Reference

Hjerth, M. (2008), *Microtools*. Presentation, SOLworld annual conference, Koln.

Dr Alasdair Macdonald is a psychiatrist, family therapist and trainer. macdonald@solutionsdoc.co.uk