

Solution-Focused Team Coaching

Kirsten Dierolf

SolutionsAcademy Verlag, 2014, 192pp,
ISBN 978-3-944293-06-6, £18.50

Review by Anton Stellamans

Kirsten Dierolf hardly needs any introduction in the Solution Focused (SF) world. She is an SF professional with many years of experience as an executive and team coach and organisational and talent developer. Combine this with an excellent pen and an outspoken sharp insight in to SF, and you know that any book of hers will be worth reading.

So she knows what she is talking about in her new book on SF team coaching. In every chapter you can find telling cases that illustrate the points she is making. What I really like about these examples is that they are taken out of the 'ordinary' life of an SF team coach. For example: "If you don't know how to go on, call a coffee break to have time to think". No Ericksonian magical solutions, which leave readers with a lot of admiration for the expert but with less confidence in themselves. On the contrary, Dierolf's examples inspire us to come up with clever responses to whatever the client brings.

But that is only the first of the three main qualities this book has for me. The second is the quality of insight into SF. A reader with no prior knowledge of SF will find this book an excellent introduction to the approach. Experienced SF professionals will enjoy how brilliantly the author is able to describe what SF is all about . . . and what it is not. On the one hand she is very respectful towards other approaches, but on the other she is very outspoken and clear about the difference between them and SF. Dierolf shows what we do and what we don't do. For example, using diagnostics or typologies to analyse what is lacking in a team, or adopting an observer role as a consultant and giving outside feedback on the way the team functions.

A third quality of the book is the mass of practical tips it offers to foster effective cooperation with in teams, such as dealing with difficult clients or what to do in the contracting phase. You can also find an outline of a team coaching process – elegant and brief as it should be.

And finally, Dierolf's book shows how practical philosophy can be. Following Wittgenstein and de Shazer, she steers away from impractical distinctions between cause and effect, surface and depth, emotions and behaviour, etc. For example, when she talks about the relationship between the coach and the team. Other methods may claim that you have to work hard on acquiring trust and acceptance from the team. Dierolf, with de Shazer, however points out that rapport is already there and that you simply have to take care not to lose it. So keep your introductions simple and act normally.

The book is well written and has a nice structure. It starts with the foundations of SF Team Coaching. Chapter 2 discusses the similarities and differences between individual and team coaching. Chapter 3 offers an overview of SF tools and how to use them with teams. Chapter 4 describes the whole team coaching process, from contracting to scenario design. And the final 2 chapters focus on the difficulties and typical requests you can come across as a team coach.

Kirsten Dierolf's book does not offer a recipe but teaches you how to cook. I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do.

Anton Stellamans is co-owner of Ilfaro, a Belgian-based SF coaching, training and consultancy centre.

Anton.Stellamans@ilfaro.be