

Handbook of Coaching Psychology

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

Edited by

Stephen Palmer and Alison Whybrow



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To Josh and Sam; to Maggie for her support on this project; to all my colleagues who supported the setting up of coaching psychology in the UK and around the world. (SP)

To my mum for making all things possible, my husband for his enduring support and of course Millie and Georgie. (AW)

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Foreword

Traditions of coaching are truly ancient. They stretch back across not mere tens of years but hundreds and perhaps thousands. The image of the wise teacher, guiding the student through a series of learning experiences, combining encouragement with analysis and reflection, has formed the basis of legends. The journey from ignorance to knowledge, from doubt to confidence and from inexperience to achievement.

In an age where much store is set on maximising personal and organisational potential, it is not surprising to find a thriving industry has arisen offering a modern day equivalent. Abraham Maslow would have recognised this as the drive for 'self-actualisation'. Whether in the context of commerce, sport or just personal satisfaction, it is the urge to be the best that you can be.

Yet all teachers are not equal. How does the prospective 'student' decide which of the many paths to follow?

The emergence of coaching psychology provides some answers to that dilemma. Here opportunities are built on sound foundations of tried and tested psychological theory and practice. Drawing on psychological science, we can have confidence in approaches and techniques that have survived critical analysis and evaluation to provide a strong evidence base for their effectiveness.

Many branches of applied psychology have contributed to this discipline and a strength of coaching psychology within the British Psychological Society has been the recognition that it transcends professional practice boundaries. The methods are appropriate to, and found in, such diverse areas as clinical, educational and occupational settings.

So how has coaching psychology made a significant additional contribution? Martin Seligman, pioneer of the Positive Psychology movement, has criticised traditional applied psychology as starting from the basis of identifying and treating deficiencies, weaknesses or psychopathology. Many applied psychologists contest that view, believing that a major part of therapeutic intervention is about recognising and building on strengths. Nonetheless, there is some truth in the notion that many people access these services

through routes such as healthcare or counselling where there is some implicit notion of dysfunction.

Coaching psychology has a different starting point. Rather than dysfunction, the implicit assumption is of a desire to grow, develop and improve: to gain new skills and to hone existing ones. It reaches out to a new clientele, offering the benefits of psychology to people and organisations wishing to make the most of the resources that lie within the individual.

The British Psychological Society often uses the strapline 'Bringing Psychology to Society'. Coaching psychology is achieving that goal. Readers of this handbook will have the opportunity to judge for themselves. A thorough analysis of its origins is backed up by clear descriptions of its rich theoretical underpinnings and explicit guidance on practice and implementation. It is a timely book for those seeking to explore and utilise the new opportunities: incorporating the best evidence-based practice as well as practice-based evidence. A wise teacher for both the discerning student and the experienced practitioner who wants further encouragement, analysis and reflection.

Ray Miller
Vice President, British Psychological Society

Preface

Why a *Handbook of Coaching Psychology*? Since 2000, when Dr Anthony Grant (2000) announced that coaching psychology had come of age, the coaching psychology movement in terms of the establishment of both the Australian Psychological Society Interest Group in Coaching Psychology (IGCP) and the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology (SGCP) has occurred. The IGCP has over 740 members and the SGCP has over 2000 members so both groups have quite substantial memberships in terms of the psychology community. In fact the IGCP were supportive of the setting up of the SGCP. In addition, the IGCP and SGCP collaborated to launch and edit an international peer-reviewed publication, the *International Coaching Psychology Review*. The SGCP also publishes *The Coaching Psychologist*. These journals have provided coaching psychologists and others with an outlet for articles focusing on coaching psychology research, theory and practice.

With the development of coaching psychology groups has been the advent of national coaching psychology conferences and symposiums too. In Australia this has included health coaching symposia. In December 2006, the First International Coaching Psychology Conference was held at City University, London, UK, and was organised by the SGCP. Other professional coaching psychology groups or bodies have also been set up in Switzerland and Denmark and we predict that we will see more collaborative work between all of the professional psychological bodies over the next few years (see page 450). There certainly has been ongoing collaboration between the coaching bodies at national, European and international levels.

Since 2000 university-based units have developed, including the Coaching Psychology Unit at the University of Sydney, Australia, the Coaching Psychology Unit at City University, London, UK and more recently the Coaching Psychology Institute at Harvard Medical School, USA. University accredited postgraduate and doctorate programmes in coaching psychology are run at a number of universities and external centres too.

This *Handbook* has been published at an exciting time in the fields of coaching and coaching psychology. The interface between the two arenas will

further the development of evidence-based coaching. We hope that this *Handbook* will provide trainees and experienced practitioners with an insight into the theory and practice of coaching psychology.

Finally, we would like to thank The Australian Psychological Society, Interest Group in Coaching Psychology and the British Psychological Society, Special Group in Coaching Psychology for reproduction of their history, terms of reference, and definitions, taken from various sources. Their support has encouraged the growth of coaching psychology.

Stephen Palmer
Alison Whybrow
November 2007

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Grant, A. M. (2000) Coaching psychology comes of age. *PsychNews* 4(4): 12–14.

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