

SECTION SEVEN: REVIEWS

Coaching and Mentoring: A Critical Text

Simon Western

Sage

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Coaching and Mentoring: A Critical Text does indeed provide the reader with a critical, novel and often controversial perspective to the fields of coaching and mentoring. The book aims to encourage coaches to reflect upon not only their own practice but also the foundations on which their practice is based.

The book is split into four sections; firstly setting the scene for viewing the fields of coaching and mentoring through a critical lens, secondly providing a genealogy of coaching, then outlining Western's classification of the dominant discourse in coaching and finally providing details of the future of coaching in relation to a discussion of coaching theory and coaching education. The book is aimed at coaches, academics and HR professionals alike; however the content is probably more academically inclined than practitioner.

Through the 14 chapters in the book, Western engages in many interesting debates regarding issues such as accreditation, coaching techniques, coaching background, underlying assumptions and ethics. However, some of Western's claims may not sit comfortably with the reader who is not supportive of the psychoanalytical perspective to coaching.

Particular highlights in the book for me were 'The Managerial Discourse' and 'The Network Coaching Discourse' chapters. These chapters outline particularly approaches that coaches are likely to adopt (often without an explicit awareness that they are doing so) and highlights the strengths and potential limitations of these approaches. These chapters were very insightful and lead me to question many of the underlying assumptions my research and practice is based on. Also the chapter 'Developing Coaching Theory' is excellent and succinctly highlights the key challenges in the literature in this area. Unfortunately the following chapter 'Creating a New Coaching Meta-theory' is a difficult, confusing and an often abstract chapter, leaving me struggling to fully grasp Western's argument.

Overall, Western succeeds in providing a critical perspective to coaching. You may not agree with all he has to say but it is likely that he will lead you to reflect on coaching in a new way.

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