


BOOK REVIEWS

Creating Sustainable Results With Solution-Focused Applied Psychology by Louis Cauffman

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Creating Sustainable Results with Solution-Focused Applied Psychology by Louis Cauffman

Routledge, 2023, 220 pages, ISBN 9781032335384, £29.43 paperback (Kindle edition available)

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Creating Sustainable Results with Solution-Focused Applied Psychology begins with several chapters that provide a useful philosophical foundation. The first provides an outline of several areas of focus: SF practitioners are resource-focused, believe in individual resilience, are invested in well- (versus ill-) being, are client-oriented, and appreciate context, to name a few. The second chapter builds on these by focusing on the co-constructive alliance, and the third offers a solid discussion of “common sense” principles.

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Many of these principles will be familiar to SF novitiates, but also include enough nuance to make these discussions as thought-provoking as they are informative.

In fact, I immediately warmed to the book precisely because of the nuances present in these early chapters. My largest and longest-standing critique of SF work, in general, is that it can feel as if the visionary founders of this technology developed a powerful set of tools decades ago, and then... nothing much happened. I find myself asking, “What are the new, exciting tools and thinking coming out of the SF community?” I would expect that old tools are cast aside as new data emerge showing that they do not work as well as expected. Or that these tools would be revised in clever ways. Or that new tools would emerge. And yet, I am often answered with the same chorus of tools: scaling, the miracle question, and interviewing for exceptions.

Creating Sustainable Results was, in this context, a breath of fresh air. Even as the authors hiked along well-trod ground, they used renewed language, updated research, or fresh case studies to make SF feel as current as it is effective. Case in point: Chapter 5 outlines the so-called “7 Step Tango.” You know these types of chapters — they cover the key points of intervention work using a catchy acronym or, in this case, an allusion to the Argentine dance. In many ways, this chapter is the core of the book, and evidence for this can be found in the fact that it is by far the longest chapter. On the one hand, the steps of this dance include straightforward fare such “uncovering resources” and “giving compliments.” On the other, there are moments of nuance. In the discussion of “making contact,” for instance, the authors take time to reflect on “gradations of contact.” They rightly point out that saying hello to a client in a parking lot is distinct from discussing client worries within a session. The very idea of “contact” is treated intelligently, as a “volume knob with which the intensity can be adjusted according to the circumstances” (p.97). I found that I thought about gradients of client interactions for weeks after reading this book. It was a topic I was intuitively attuned to, but I benefitted from having it made overt.

I similarly appreciated, in the same chapter, the discussion of the “mother of all goals.” For centuries, people have argued over the extent to which well-being is the ultimate concern — as in the idea that we seek out promotions, vacations, and dates because they are the straw we spin into the gold of happiness. The authors of *Creating Sustainable Results* do not provide a conclusion — nor even a monolithic definition of well-being. Instead, the benefit is in the fact that they raise the question at all. Savvy readers will pick up the baton of reflection, and muse about the ways that a focus on well-being *might* — both overtly and covertly — differentially affect SF practice.

Some readers might take issue with the middle path approach of the authors. After all, who is the intended readership of this book? Is it psychotherapists, with their training in diagnosis, treatment planning, and psychometric assessment? Is it coaches, with their training in facilitative change conversations? It would be easy to say “both”, until you wander

into the thorny brambles of speaking to each group — coach readers might, for example, scratch their heads at the discussion of therapy waiting lists. The most overt discussion of the distinction between these modalities is a two-paragraph brush-by that makes claims such as that the goals of the two modalities “are different” and require “different knowledge.” Despite this nit-pickery, coach and therapist readers will find much common ground worth their consideration. For instance, I found the loose taxonomy of problem types presented across Chapter 6 (cloud-like problems, massive problems, self-annihilating problems, excessive goals, etc.) to be useful food for thought, regardless of the modality of my practice.

Throughout *Creating Sustainable Results* are stories and details that make it engaging and readable. We hear anecdotes about the founders of SF, read quotes from Milton Erickson, explore case studies that ground the theory in everyday practice, and learn about results from research. In reflecting on these, I realized that writing a review for a book like this isn’t about a recommendation; it is not an argument about *whether* you should read the book, but rather, *how* you should read it. There is so much contained between the covers of this book, ranging from philosophical axioms that merit reflection to nuts-and-bolts tools that beg to be tested. The best way to learn and implement its contents, in my experience, has been to read the book slowly, focusing on distinct chapters and specific content with greater depth than breadth. But, that is just me. There are alternative approaches, and the authors — I am certain — would want you to do what works for you.

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