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The Practical Negotiation Handbook: A Five-Step Approach to Lasting Partnerships -Written by Melissa Davies

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BOOK REVIEW**The Practical Negotiation Handbook: A Five-Step Approach to Lasting Partnerships**

Melissa Davies

Kogan Page Limited, 2021, 248 pages, ISBN 978 1 3986 0180 2 £23.29 paperback (hardback and kindle available)

Review by Andrew Gibson

Coach, Consultant, Author, and Speaker (UK)

When we listen to news and current affairs, virtually all stories involve negotiation. Whether dealing with global affairs such as Climate Change talks and Brexit, or local affairs such as neighbourly disputes over boundaries, negotiation plays a significant part in our daily lives. It is into this environment that Melissa Davies offers us her new book.

Based in Switzerland, Melissa has an incredible base of knowledge and experience, having worked in negotiations for over 28 years. She has developed a specific, successful methodology that she has applied to business, politics, and humanitarian environments. This book distils her approach into a practical, five step process that others can follow. The book draws on her Solution Focused practice as a coach helping people across all ages with personal and professional challenges.

Central to her approach is that the parties involved in any negotiation are co-creating a solution that works for all, in whole or in greater part. The use of Solution Focused Practice in this book is explicit throughout. It is interesting to see how Melissa has used SFP where the conversational aim is to realise a negotiated settlement for all parties. This is an application of SFP that differs from the more familiar 'coach/coachee' or 'therapist/client' dynamic.

When you consider 'negotiation', it is possible to enter a complex world full of problems and competing views. Competition exists in the approach to take, the outcomes sought, and the conversational tools that could apply at any stage. As can be seen in the global examples above, even agreeing the common goals, or as Melissa describes them, the 'Interest' that binds the parties together, can be complex in itself.

Melissa explains and illustrates every step of the process from initiation to completion. In her methodical approach, examples are given, tools shared, and the process starts to emerge as you read through her work. She uses well-chosen examples to provide context which helps the reader's understanding as the model builds.

One area I would like to explore further is the definition of the Goals as part of the Prerequisites and Preparation stages of her process. As described in her book, these are defined in isolation from the other parties at the start of the planning phase. There is a possible contrast with the use of SF to explore Goals in Coaching. When a client presents their goal to the SF Coach, the coach will accept what their client wants before exploring in conversation what they and others will notice when they get it. This opens alternative ways of the client getting what they want other than just the initial idea. It would be interesting to see if the SF Coaching approach has helped negotiating parties to clarify and simplify their Interests early in the negotiation process.

Melissa covers her five-step process in detail, with practicalities explained and illustrated by examples. She builds the process in a step-by-step way and offers comprehensive references for further reading. Her approach will work for negotiations from the very simple to the hugely complex. Bringing her approach right into modern times, she covers on-line negotiations, and how gender can influence negotiations too. The process resolves beautifully at stage 4 in her process, the chapters on 'The Offer and Implementation'. This stage turns the theory into practice and completes a solid structure that will help you co-create a solution through negotiation, just as Melissa intended.

I congratulate Melissa on taking a very complex, multi-layered subject matter, and offering us her wisdom in a format we can adopt. It is especially impressive when you consider Melissa has written this book in English which is not her native language.

This book will appeal to people working in business, politics and humanitarian settings, just as Melissa has enjoyed throughout her career. This book will also add dimensions to those of us who do not contribute to complex negotiations regularly, but who perhaps get involved in multi-party discussions within organisations of all types.

The reviewer

Andrew Gibson uses SFP to help charities and small businesses generate sustainable income from their activities. He is a coach, consultant, author, and speaker, based in Leeds, UK.

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