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Make Life Simple -Written by Andrew Gibson

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BOOK REVIEW**Make Life Simple**

Andrew Gibson

Fisher King Publishing, 2020, 196 pages, ISBN 978-1-913170-52-3, £12.99 (Kindle edition available)

Review by Rayya Ghul

Academic and Author

It has always interested me that the solution-focused approach can be interpreted in so many different ways, given how simple it is. Every year there are a variety of conferences for solution-focused practitioners taking place around the world. Each conference has at least 20-30 speakers. How can they all be presenting something different, useful or engaging when the solution-focused approach provides a limited set of tools? The same is true of books and articles. The key is, I think, in that limitation. Like the colours of the rainbow, the tools can be used individually, blended together, toned up or down to create a seemingly infinite palette. The experienced solution-focused practitioner, like an artist, can begin to use the tools in such a way that they develop their own style, still recognisably a solution-focused approach, but a unique 'take' or perspective.

Make Life Simple is clearly derived from Gibson's practice as a business coach, often with third and public sector clients, and resonates with positivity, practicality and warmth. For him, being solution-focused is about slowing down, making better decisions and focusing on tangible benefits – desired or existing. He makes a clever distinction between being action-oriented and outcome-focused that I have not seen framed in this way before. He uses an example from the film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, to help the reader understand the distinction between the two orientations. The film's protagonists are constantly focused on taking action in response to what is happening right now, with no real regard for consequences and with mostly disastrous results. Gibson suggests that this reactive approach to life is what complicates it. We are constantly solving immediate problems that take up our time and energy and do not take us any closer to the outcomes or future we desire. Solution focus, on the other hand, slows us down and invites us to spend time determining our preferred outcomes so that we can make better decisions about which action (if any) to take. I think many readers will recognise the truth in this and it works well as a hook to engage the reader further.

From there on, *Make Life Simple* provides similar metaphors, examples and vignettes to illustrate putting a solution-focused approach to work in everyday life. Early on he brings out the importance of interaction and that 'change is out there'. This is expanded upon in a subsequent chapter that focuses on the importance of noticing signs of success. He addresses the 'problem with problem-solving' very well and I really liked the process diagram he uses to illustrate the value of identifying the differences when using a solution-focused approach instead. This is followed by a nice subversion of SMART goal setting into SOMIT; specific, observable, measurable, interactional and time-related – the natural outcome of asking about observable differences.

The final section of the book, Social Capital, was in my view an excellent way to bring the ideas to bear on career and business development. Gibson is well-known for his fun workshops on how to network and here he expands on the methods to build one's reputation and communicate about what you offer through storytelling. This links well to Gibson's other book, *What's Your URP?*, and together they would be an essential resource for anyone wanting to set up their own business and stay sane.

My only concern about the book would be that some of Gibson's examples, such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and cultural references such as Indiana Jones might make the book quickly outdated or less accessible to an international audience. I personally found the many, different examples began to feel like a bit of an assault of ideas, but they would also make dipping in and out of the book easy to do and this is often the way people use self-help books.

Solution-focused practice famously has no underpinning theory to explain how and why it works and for trainers, and particularly authors seeking to communicate the approach with others, this poses a challenge. For authors of self-help books, rather than professional ones, the challenge is immense. We cannot rely on existing knowledge of context

and practice. We are speaking to people who may never have engaged with ideas about how to live life beyond what they have learned from family, friends and pop psychology largely derived from deficit-based approaches. *Make Life Simple* has succeeded in communicating about the solution-focused approach in an engaging and enlightening way.

The reviewer

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