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Book Review - Focus on solutions: A health professional's guide (Revised second edition)

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Focus on solutions: A health professional's guide

(Revised second edition)

Kidge Burns

2016. London: Solution Books.

Paperback, 192 pages. £12.99/\$AU11.99 (also Kindle)

Review by Jonas Wells

National Network of Coordination Agencies, Sweden

This is a revised second edition of the 2005 book on Solutions Focus set in the world of health professionals. The author has long experience, more than 20 years, working with and training speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, nurses and social workers. This book very well reflects that breath of experience as there are countless examples from real practice, both longer case examples and transcripts of whole conversations, as well as many snippets of a wide range of different types of conversations with different adaptations of Solution Focused techniques with a wide range of clients. It has been a delight to read and delve into. Especially for me, it has been rewarding as I work with coordinating and training health professionals. I find it quite rare to come across a book I would so readily recommend and place in my colleagues and fellow professional's hands. It has been very refreshing to find all these recognizable situations and examples of

everyday conversations in a hospital or healthcare setting, something that I think is quite rare and very much in demand.

Comparing the book to the first edition, it is inspiring to see in text the changes the author makes explicit about her own way thinking and talking about SF. Certain aspects have become more important like making a clear contract with clients utilising questions like best hopes from the work. Also made explicit is the non-verbal development, respecting silence and the client's time, and of talking less from the SF practitioner's point of view. Even as a reader I get the clear sense of an author very much in ease and in control of the process. I felt smitten by the space that was provided for me as a reader. I don't know if this was intentional. It could very well be a by-product of the author's wonderful grasp of SF, the many years of experience and the subtle tone that emerges from someone still learning and passionate about the approach. This is further evidenced by the easy, uncomplicated language, the simple words and all the real examples from real professional conversations.

The book is structured as I can tell in three discernible parts. Chapters one to three lays out the techniques and the thinking associated with SF way of working. Frequently the questions and the techniques are made explicit and given a fresh perspective. The texts are littered with quotes, examples of questions, highlighted key points, nice summaries and case examples. The many case examples reflect work done in health care settings. As a reader I am exposed to many different places and many different types of clients and situations common to health professionals experiences. I really liked how the SF thinking and techniques emerge so nicely from the case examples, not just stopping there but also connecting them to the work of Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and BRIEF amongst others. I also liked the way the author chooses to focus in more detail on the assumptions of SF.

Chapters four and five offer full transcripts of two whole conversations. This is a very rich material and it both reinforces the techniques and thinking introduced and discussed in the earlier chapters as well as giving a real sense of context and circumstance to the cases. Both examples show the stance of the practitioner, the interplay with the client and the language used. As before both chapters are punctuated with highlighted key points and the chance for the reader to reflect and make note of important aspects of the approach.

Chapters six and seven extend the work socially looking at and reflecting both the client's and the health professional's work done in networks, with carers and other professionals in a social context. Also client work done with groups is made explicit and discussed as well as SF work done in multi-professional teams. The book ends with an expanded chapter on tools for evaluation like the ORS/SRS, aids for self-monitoring as well as research evidence

collated since the book's first edition.

In summary, this is a timely book and a rewarding reading experience. In a time where time with health professionals is more and more constrained, stress not uncommon and the stakes high for all involved parties, the introduction of well-intentioned SF question could make the difference between a step forward towards hope and resilience or a step towards despair and desperation. Set in this light, I see myself offering this book to countless health professionals in my own network.

The reviewer

Jonas Wells is an English/Swedish anthropologist working as a coordinating manager for something very Swedish, a coordination agency, a governmental body that finances and supports joined-up working between health care, social work, social insurance and job centres. Working both locally in Southern Dalarna in Sweden and nationally with the development of coordination agencies throughout Sweden, Jonas has had great effect using the Solution-Focused approach. Since 2002, when he came into contact with the approach through the work of Björn Johansson and Eva Persson, it has become an embodied practice and a way of life. Currently he is exploring the notion of aesthetics in SF practice, the specific craft of coordination work and the development and implementation of indicators of successful collaboration between the aforementioned public sectors. He also likes to sew 14-15th Century medieval clothes and curates the Solution Focus Playlist on Spotify, (currently 533 songs strong).

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