

Values and Ethics in Coaching

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This book about ethical issues in coaching provides a highly accessible, thought provoking and important contribution to the field. The authors accomplish their aim to provide a guide “which can help coaches navigate the complex landscape of ethical coaching practice” (p. 3) in several ways. First, the opening discussion problematises the wider context of coaching regarding its uncertain professional status and current lack of regulation. This enables the authors to highlight a central message of their book – the importance of developing a reflective and reflexive coaching practice. Second, they support the development of this approach by providing questions, interactive activities, real-life case studies and examples of existing research which succeed in informing the reader, encouraging self-analysis and stimulating further debate about ethical issues in coaching. Third, the authors emphasise and illustrate the variety of contexts in which coaching takes place. This helps the reader to consider the impact of both the background of the coach and the organisational setting/s in which they work on coaching practices.

The three authors have varied backgrounds, which include academia, business, nursing, psychology, history and drama therapy. They draw on these interdisciplinary specialisms and experiences to inform this innovative exploration of ethical issues in coaching.

The book is suitable for coaches, future coaches, trainers/educators of coaches and existing and potential stakeholders who implement or are considering implementing a coaching scheme. It contains useful practical information, such as how to effectively establish, maintain and end coaching relationships, as well as posing crucial underlying questions, such as what is the purpose of the coaching, and who are coaches accountable to: the client or the sponsoring organisation?

The book is divided into three main parts. Part I consists of two chapters which explore the nature of values and ethics. In Chapter 1, definitions of values and ethics are discussed, including a brief introduction to their philosophical origins. This is followed by a useful introduction to current professional coaching associations and their ethical codes. Readers are invited to begin to reflect on their own values which may impact their coaching practice, a theme which is extended further in Chapter 2 where the terms reflective and reflexive practice are introduced.

Part II of the book focusses on establishing and maintaining ethical coaching practices. This section begins with Chapter 3, which covers how to effectively set up a coaching relationship. Amongst other factors, it highlights the importance and usefulness of contracting when anticipating and addressing ethical issues. Chapter 4 explores how to maintain an ethical coaching practice and includes topics such as competency models in coaching, how the educational background of coaches may impact their approach and the role of supervision. A theme touched upon here, and then developed in Chapter 5, is how coaches can engage with research to inform and shape their practice. The term “evidence-based practice” is outlined as involving “first, the most recent knowledge (research findings); second, the coach’s know-how (the application of research findings in practice); and third the adaptation of findings” to the



needs of the individual client (p. 81). Given this description, perhaps “evidence informed” may be a more accurate term for this practice advocated by the authors. They discuss both the advantages and the challenges of coaches becoming involved in research and suggest that a starting point might be for practitioners to “critically evaluate” research they read (p. 83). To this end, it is suggested that coaches will need to develop knowledge about research. In relation to this, the authors then provide a useful introduction to positivist, interpretivist and critical realist theoretical perspectives. However, it is likely practitioners without prior research experience will need additional education and/or support to effectively evaluate existing studies and undertake their own inquiries.

Chapter 6 revisits the topic of reflective and reflexive practice in greater depth. The meanings of these terms are discussed and some strategies for enhancing this practice are offered, including critical thinking, mindfulness and emotional intelligence. This serves as a very effective introduction to reflective and reflexive practice as a way to develop “an ethical mindset” (p. 92). I consider there is scope to facilitate even further these ways of thinking for coaches, and those in other related helping roles, through a greater number of activities and case studies; however, I recognise this perhaps could warrant a book in itself (a follow-up publication for the authors perhaps?).

Finally in this section, Chapter 7 considers the varied contexts and forms that coaching can take. It centres on three questions: *Who* are we in the coaching relationship? *Where* are we in the coaching relationship? And *how* do we coach? (p. 107). In this chapter, there is a brief and interesting discussion of coaching theories and models; this helps to raise awareness and consciousness of coaching approaches and the ethical implications of different practices, a discussion that coaches, supervisors and stakeholders could pursue further.

The third and final part of this book examines ethical issues which can arise in four particular settings: business coaching, coach education and training, sports coaching and healthcare. In Chapter 8 on business coaching, amongst other issues, the ethical implications of the “coach-manager” are discussed and questions are raised about the appropriateness of such a “dual role” (pp. 131-134). In the following chapter on coach education and training, the lack of “formal or standardised coaching qualifications” are noted and potential ethical issues are raised around the design of coaching courses such as “academic rigour versus practical skills” (p. 143), “power and the role of the trainer” (p. 145) and “the boundaries of confidentiality in the learning process” (p. 147). The authors outline their view that “through opportunities for reflection on co-created learning, instructors and learners can help each other develop ethical consciousness” (p. 151). The next chapter on sports coaching contains noteworthy insights into the role and the need to develop a “deep understanding of the intrinsic attributes that help athletes reach their peak performance” (p. 157) – a quality which coaches, and other helping professionals, in all fields may benefit from, perhaps. Finally, the chapter on coaching in healthcare includes an interesting account of the different types of coaching taking place in this sector, from coaching for leaders and managers through to patients. Discussions here include the difference between the role of “expert” and “coach” and the move in “UK healthcare away from ‘doing to’ people, towards ‘doing with’ people” (p. 181). Although these chapters are written about specific settings, each contains highly useful insights and discussions pertinent to coaching practices in other contexts.

In the concluding section of this book, the authors express caution around “the usefulness and value of prescriptive codes and ethics” (p. 183) and promote a focus “not on solving ethical issues but, rather, on creating those conditions and conversations that will bring them to the surface” (p. 186). With this book, the authors certainly contribute towards creating those conditions, and I would recommend that anyone with an interest in coaching, or indeed any helping profession, engages with the conversations featured in this new and valuable publication.

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