

### Where Were All The Coaches When The Banks Went Down?

John Blakey & Ian Day  
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I came to this book with some reluctance; partly as the fires of my outrage were already well enough stoked; partly as my own coaching practice is unlikely to take me into the banking sector, at least not yet. I'm pleased that I overcame my reluctance, however, as this short, straightforward and very readable book contains some useful and thought provoking things for all coaches working in organisational settings.

The authors bravely challenge some of the orthodoxies of coaching, which they see arising in large part from the prosperous economic conditions surrounding the birth and early development of coaching. This comfort has fostered a tendency in coaches to serve the individual client significantly more than they serve the sponsoring organisation and to neglect the wider social and economic systems in which coaching takes place. The emphasis has been to privilege the coach-client relationship sometimes to the point of collusion and at the expense of delivering improved outcomes and client accountability.

The central orthodoxy which is challenged is that coaching must be non-directive. While remaining a core principle, the authors see that applying it too strictly can be unhelpful and let clients off the hook, with potentially hideous consequences of the kind we have seen in the last couple of years. They propose that we should use a **F**ACTS approach, which emphasises: (i) **F**eedback in the moment - being much more willing to offer feedback on the effect the client is having on you; (ii) **A**ccountability - being more ready, courageous and forthright in holding the client to account for action plans and in particular for any incongruence between their words and their actions; (iii) **C**hallenge - having and expressing higher expectations of clients so they stretch themselves; (iv) **T**ension - being prepared to sustain or even create tension in the coach-client relationship as a means of transformation; and (v) **S**ystems thinking - inviting clients to view their proposals and actions from the perspectives of others within the wider

system.

There is a flavour here of the coach acting as the client's conscience, though the authors express this as offering "tough love". In taking the FACTS approach, they contend that coaching will have a far stronger impact for the client far sooner in the coaching relationship than other more customary approaches. I'm not sure that this is true, as the timing and nature of change is I'm sure conditioned by other, additional variables outside their model. Nonetheless their call to redress the balance between focusing on relationship and on delivery, though not an especially radical proposal, is a compelling one for coaches to consider, given the context in which they place it.

The authors have high aspirations which they deliver in a modest but effective vehicle. There are points over which one could quibble: the section on systems thinking is somewhat simplistic, though given the book's aims at accessibility, sensibly resists the temptation to stray into more theoretical complexities. I found the case studies artificial and a touch irritating at times but again they support the preceding material well enough. The extensive prescription of the FACTS contract seemed to me overplayed but serves as a reminder of the critical place of contracting and holds up a mirror for how we might currently be going about it.

Though the provocative title might suggest a more polemical critique of the coaching industry, the authors' intention is less to leave coaches blushing with shame at a failure to foster more scrupulous behaviour; but much more to get us to reflect on what coaches could and should be doing; not only for those clients in particularly influential places, but also for the world we live in.

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