

COACHING IN SCHOOLS

Pocketbook



A pocketful of practical skills and strategies for improving performance and raising attainment at every level in school

Andy Vass

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Foreword from Sir John Jones

Andy Vass has done it again. Just when we thought the science of coaching had become somewhat bewildering and, at times, almost inaccessible, he has gifted us this little gem of a book. Tommy Lasorda once said there were three types of baseball player – those who made it happen, those who watch it happen and those who wonder what happened! Andy Vass is one of those writers who helps us make it happen; who, like all great coaches, does not teach us but helps us to learn. Keep it by your side. It is insightful, memorable and, above all, useful.

He reminds us that coaching is fundamentally a conversation focused on outcomes and solutions. As humans, we are a collection of thoughts that we believe are true and, therefore, there is no such thing as the truth, just the truth as we perceive it to be. Such perceptions manifest themselves in our habits of thinking, speaking and behaving. Andy provides us with a clear coaching framework so that we can reflect on those perceptions and habits and better understand that we are not who we are but who we want to become.

Continued ►

Boldly, he suggests that we can battle negativity, bring about change and build a preferred future for ourselves. Visiting a headteacher once, I asked him how he was getting on. 'Breathing,' came the reply. If there had been an Olympic Games for pessimists this man wouldn't have fancied his chances! How I wish I'd had this great little book at hand.

How much he would have learned: the power of 'possibility' rather than a problem focus; the vital effect of encouragement and optimism; the impact of quality feedback; the need for empathy and the key skills of listening and reflection. Crucially, he would have understood two things: that the biggest influence on the behaviour of others is our behaviour, and the gap between the right words and the almost right words is chasmic.

The RIGAAR framework will give you an organising idea to help build effective and constructive conversations and also to stay with you as the perfect algorithm for coaching.

Continued ►

It was at Oxford University in the 1830s that the term 'coach' was first used as slang for 'tutor' – the person who would 'carry' you through exam revision and preparation. Andy's book, then, is aptly titled and will not only carry you through the complex world of human interaction but will ready you for the biggest examination of all, life. Whether a teacher, leader, colleague, partner or parent, you will be in the hands of a master in the arts of dialogue, of asking brilliant questions, of being less judgmental, of knowing what wisdom there is in silence and of grasping that individuals are more likely to engage with solutions that they have come up with themselves. In short, of being a more effective, productive human being.

All great thinkers render the complex simple, the unachievable doable and the out of reach attainable. That is Andy's special gift to us. The many thousands of books on and definitions of coaching drew Karen C Wise to talk of the need for uniformity and standardisation in what she calls 'the wild west of coaching'. This book is the panacea. Read it, enjoy it, use it, prosper and grow. My only regret – I did not write it.

Sir John Jones International Presenter, Writer, Educational Commentator,
Author '*The Magic-Weaving Business*'
Co-author '*Winning the H Factor – The Secrets of Happy schools*'.



Introduction



A Solutions Focus



Solution-focused Tools



Coaching Skills



Setting Goals



Developing Coaching in Your Own School



Making it Happen



Further Information



Introduction

Begin with success in mind



I'd like to ask you a few questions because that's what coaches do.

What happens when you imagine that this book is really useful to you? That it enhances your ability to hold influential and motivating conversations with colleagues, students and parents? That as a result of reading it now and dipping back in from time to time you become even more confident and even more effective in your work and maybe other areas of your life too?

*How will you recognise that this is happening?
What are you doing differently that pleases you? What else?
Who will notice that things are different and even better?
What are they noticing? What else?
What do these positive changes tell you about yourself?*

These are **solution-focused (SF)** coaching questions. They encourage you to think about future success. The coaching approach in this book is solution focused.



What is coaching?



A definition that fits the SF approach is:

'Unlocking a person's potential to maximise their performance. It is about helping them learn rather than teaching them.'

John Whitmore. (See reading recommendations, [page 126.](#))

Coaching seeks to create change. The process of change begins and is supported through conversations. These conversations could be ones we have with ourselves (self-talk) or those with colleagues. Often they are a combination of the two. However, it is VERY difficult to ask yourself a question that you don't already know the answer to.

A skilled coach will ask you questions which respectfully challenge your thinking, with the aim of helping you to set and achieve goals that help you become even better.

It is the skill of knowing how to ask the most useful question at the most appropriate time and in an empowering and thought-provoking way that distinguishes a really good coach.

What's in it for me?



Coaching, when skilfully and respectfully used, is a powerful learning experience. This is true whether you are coaching or being coached. Teachers I've coached describe the benefits variously as:

- Thinking more clearly about things
- Feeling valued and listened to
- Recognising and appreciating their skills and resources
- Increasing their range of options
- Clarifying how they'd like things to be as they get even better
- Understanding what they need to do to get there
- Becoming more creative and optimistic
- Feeling more positive and confident about change

Importantly, high quality SF coaching will always place your agenda within the school's development plan, at the centre of the process, making it empowering and motivational.