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Julia Yates

Book review

***Values and ethics in coaching* by Ioanna Iordanou, Rachel Hawley and Christiana Iordanou.
London: Sage, 2017, ISBN 978-1-4739-1956-3, 207 pages, £21.59 paperback**

Coaching is now a \$2billion industry, boasting over 47,000 professionals worldwide (Scoular, 2011; PwC, 2012). Yet despite its size and notwithstanding the increasing influence of a number of professional bodies, the profession remains wholly unregulated. Values and ethics should lie at the heart of every coaching practice, practitioner and conversation, but the lack of professional regulation leaves us in an interesting position: it is the responsibility of each individual coach to regulate their own ethical practice, but there is no real recourse if their ethical practice is wanting.

It is therefore particularly important for educators, writers and researchers in this field to ensure that ethical practice takes centre stage within our profession. We need to raise its profile, to make sure that all coaches really understand how important it is, and we need to offer coaches practical tools to help them to understand what ethical practice looks like and how it can be enacted. *Values and ethics in coaching*, by Ioanna Iordanou, Rachel Hawley and Christiana Iordanou is a book which does just that, offering a comprehensive and thoughtful guide to ethical practice in coaching.

The book is divided into three sections. Part one looks at the nature of values and ethics, defining terms and offering the reader some practical support as they identify their own professional value system and work out how their values might influence their practice. In section two the authors explore the nature of ethical practice, looking at the coaching relationship, evidence based practice and practitioner reflexivity. Section three examines the way that ethical dilemmas and ethical practice can differ from one context to another looking specifically at issues within business coaching, sports coaching, coaching in healthcare, and within coach training.

A key strength of the book is that it offers a genuinely comprehensive and holistic treatment of values and ethics in coaching. The book addresses a broad spectrum of the myriad different aspects of coaching which are influenced by values and ethics, examining training, practice and contexts. The topics are wide ranging but the authors make sure that they maintain their focus, and the narrative is always explicitly linked to the core subject of the book. As well as looking at the causes and consequences of ethical behaviour, the authors address the issues in depth. In the section which examines the training of coaches, for example, the authors don't just trot out the usual sage advice that we all need to be properly trained, but rather they question the assumptions (do we actually need to be trained?) and try to define what makes good training, going so far as to wonder whether it is indeed possible to train a coach.

The book is written by experienced reflective practitioners and their commitment to the underpinning philosophy of coaching is clear both in their style of writing and their approach to the topic. The authors adopt a coaching approach to their writing, stimulating thought, offering a range of perspectives and asking questions of the reader. The authors write with humanity, showing a non-judgemental philosophy in their writing which aligns with the coaching ethos they promote. The authors develop a positive relationship with the reader – I felt challenged and respected, and never patronised. They do not shy away from addressing some real but complex and challenging issues, inviting the reader to question their own value system and really think through the implications of their choices, yet managed to make me, as the reader, feel that I myself was being coached through the topic.

The writing seems to reflect the authors' non-directive coaching philosophy and a writing style which is entirely consistent with the authors' values feels very suitable for a book on this topic. But I did wonder if this approach had its limitations. The authors do offer their own views throughout the book, summarising different perspectives and concluding with a phrase such as 'we feel that...'. As such they offer some gentle, authentic guidance for readers who are looking for it, but the messages might have been clearer and more effectively communicated if the authors had presented their own opinions in a more robust style, moving from 'we feel' to 'it is', to allow them to assert themselves as the experts in the field that they undoubtedly are.

On top of the written style of the book, which seems to reflect the authors' ethos, their coaching philosophy is clear in their conceptualisation of ethical practice. Rather than working towards a universal code of ethics, the authors are keen to encourage coaches to identify their own codes of ethics, based on their own values and suited to the context in which they work. This person-centred approach makes values-driven practice much more complex, but also more meaningful.

The book is practical and interactive and the structure of each chapter helps to make the topic, which could risk being rather dry and abstract, accessible and relevant. The chapters are set out with summary bullet points, key words, interactive exercises and pauses for reflection. The information is presented in bite-sized chunks so is easy to digest and there are useful practical exercises to help readers to identify their own values. The book synthesises material from a wide range of sources and makes use of interesting quotations and examples to bring the ideas to life. The authors give very thoughtful suggestions for further reading – indicating what kind of resource it is and why the reader might find it useful.

I wondered if the theoretical aspects of the book could have been covered in more depth and perhaps with more criticality. The authors draw on concepts such as mindfulness and emotional intelligence, both of which have been shown to make a contribution to coaching practice so deserve their place in the book. But both have been robustly criticised in the literature and a nod to these discourses would align with the questioning and challenging coaching ethos of the book.

But perhaps this desire for a more theoretical approach will not be shared with many readers and *Values and ethics in coaching* will surely have wide appeal. It will be of value to coaches working in all contexts, and is suitable for both novice and experienced practitioners. Ethics is more than an add-on to good coaching; it lies at the heart of what good coaching is and it deserves the thoughtful and thorough treatment it receives in this book.

References

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