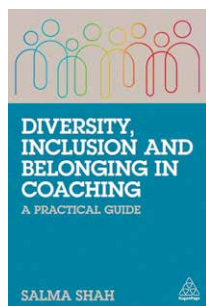


On the bookshelf: what you're reading

Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in Coaching: a practical guide

Salma Shah
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Rather than treating it as something that 'ought' to be added to our practice, this book shows how equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is genuinely part of the beating heart of excellent coaching. Getting better at creating intelligent and inclusive coaching spaces and workplaces, with an open-hearted welcome of difference, means becoming a more grounded and insightful coach. I am not at all surprised to find that Salma Shah is involved in training coaches, and, having read this book, I am delighted that she is.

The book models the intention to '...inform and establish the contour of the lived experience', beginning as it does with Shah's own story. The case studies are one of the most powerful elements of the book, conveying both the often very high costs of inequity and exclusion, and highlighting an appreciation of the values and strengths of those featured. Every story demonstrates how each person navigates inequity and becomes as authentically themselves as is possible, and how this process can be effectively supported by coaching. Throughout, the reader is given opportunities to reflect deeply on the principles of how to coach '...through a wider lens of inclusion, belonging equity and diversity' as well as learning examples of coaching approaches and models. There is a sense that we can be in this together, we are all fragile, we all have bias, and we all have a contribution to make, particularly if we hold power within the systems in the world of coaching or of work.

To coach the lived experience, as explored in the first chapter, means making a genuine

person-to-person connection. While Shah affirms that coaching is about being present and helping the coachee move forward, she also recognises that '...our lives are a culmination of whispers of past losses too'. Chapter 2 deepens the focus on our identities. If the cultural and systemic distance is wide, and if, as coaches, we have not experienced feeling excluded, rejected, shamed, abused or bullied as someone from an under-represented minority group, we may not understand the extent of the repercussions when they emerge in the coaching conversation. Learning to consider clients and ourselves in a cultural context and coach from that perspective could go some way to closing that gap. Belonging, which as Shah outlines is vital for our wellbeing and affects our patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving, is considered in chapter 3, with powerful questions that invite us to consider our own experiences in the systems of which we are part. In chapter 4, we are encouraged to be 'radically inclusive' in understanding our own biases and privilege, empathising with those who are different from us and being an ally rather than a bystander in our sphere of influence. How to coach when there is entanglement and conflicting loyalties in family and organisational systems is the focus of the fifth chapter. There is careful consideration of trauma in chapter 6, including a description of a trauma-informed coaching mindset. We explore resilience and its dark side – the danger of becoming over-tolerant of adversity – in chapter 7. Chapter 8 recognises that authenticity may involve a considerable amount of 'code-switching' if a person is not from a majority group, to maintain connection with self, while progressing, as far as it allows, within the system. Chapter 9 describes how a reframe is often needed to be able to allow vulnerability while remaining psychologically safe. Shah points out that psychological safety is '...not binary, but more of a sliding scale, depending on the context and our wider systemic experience'. The conditions for thriving are the focus of chapter 10, with some extremely useful questions focusing on how to explore 'the money story' in coaching. Chapter 11 focuses on equity and explores how

coaching for all can build a legacy of belonging, inclusion and social mobility. Here, Shah quotes Shoukry:¹ 'The coaching process needs to incorporate elements to deal with issues of power, internalized oppression and social action, and the development of coaches needs to prepare them to face the unique challenges of that context'.

Allyship is the theme of the final chapter, which begins with the observation that 'Talent is everywhere – but opportunity isn't'. This is a call to action for organisations to embed a coaching culture with access to coaching for all, and includes a useful checklist for organisations to consider. There is '...a need for coaches from a variety of socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds', an investment in training and development being a concrete action of allyship. Coaching supervision also needs to be well informed and recognised as pivotal for '...safeguarding... personal reflection and growth'. Finally, there is a need for team coaches to '...have the presence and compassion to stand in the truth of a system'.

This book comes at an important time for coaching, for our relationships and workplaces. It is for leaders, coaches, trainers and consultants who are committed to playing their part in creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive society, and who are ready to acknowledge the systemic realities of inequity and privilege. It is beautifully written, accessible, clear-sighted, informative and challenging, and I highly recommend it. ■

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Carolyn Mumby is a coach, supervisor and facilitator in private practice, and a founding member of the BACP Coaching for Social Impact group.

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REFERENCE

¹ Soukry H. Coaching for social change. In Bachkirova T, Spence G, Drake D (eds). The Sage handbook of coaching. London, Sage; 2016 (pp176–91).