

TITLE: Coaching and Trauma – From surviving to thriving [2019]

Author: Julia Vaughan Smith

My Story:

The opportunity to meet and listen to Julia was one of those serendipitous moments – often missed in the moment – when the universe sends you exactly what you need.

I had a growing number of clients who were coming to me, deeply traumatised by the Covid impact on their organisations and the impact on them as they struggled to support others. This support was being given and was expected by staff who were also trying to support pupils and families through traumatic experience, loss, and grief. It is rare for us to be equipped with the tools we need as coaches, to work effectively with traumatised clients and especially to be given clear guidance on how to be acutely aware of the impact that work can have on us – the Coach.

At Leadership Edge we are committed to working within the PURE Coaching approach and so we walk alongside the individual as they confront, understand, and begin to solve their own, often bespoke issues – the session is for them and is their own agenda. Organisational trauma was high on the agenda of my clients and ensuring my work was clearly boundaried was increasingly difficult.

Why do I think this is a great book?

It seemed to me that the usual coping mechanisms, for supporting others through times of prolonged stress, were no longer working and that many of my clients [mostly senior leaders] were ‘buckling under the strain’. This book supports the coach to a greater understanding of what trauma is, how it manifests itself and the impact on personal and professional life. The author also promotes the notion of coaching being ‘therapeutic if we consider it to be the achievement of healthy and favourable outcomes for our clients’. She explores the impact of early relationships, attachment issues and the methods we each develop to survive our environments and suppress ‘hurt’. These early patterns of behaviour will affect and influence our adult life. These behaviour patterns will then affect the way in which our clients are perceived and

experienced by 'others' within their world. The emphasis is on bringing these patterns of behaviour into the client's conscious awareness and to support our client in seeking 'healthy' choices. She uses metaphor, builds an understanding of how trauma affects the body and the way a client may respond to challenging questions – often from a coping place or one of denial.

Julia builds insight into how we – coaches- must be aware of the impact of our client's behaviour on us. How do we ensure we remain in a 'healthy place' as we work with these clients and do not get hooked into the trauma – how do we recognise the signs if that is happening for us? How do we stay grounded?

Whilst it is essential that we know when to recommend a client seeks alternative therapy and to support them in making that decision, she emphasises the excellent work we can do in supporting clients in recognising old behaviours, using models and theory – e.g The Drama Triangle – to better navigate the challenge of working within organisations where trauma is prevalent.

The Key Learning

Self- awareness – know yourself and how you may behave when your 'buttons' are pushed

Notice the impact of working with trauma and distressed clients – how does that impact on our own well-being, physical responses, and health. How do we remain grounded and mindful of our response both internal and external?

How effectively do we Contract for this work and challenging our clients?

How well do we use supervisory support to explore the impact on us?

Final Comment:

A valuable, challenging and revealing read. A book which demands more than one exploration. I found it relevant to the times we are living through and the work we are attracting especially when Coaching Leaders and teams in the current climate.

