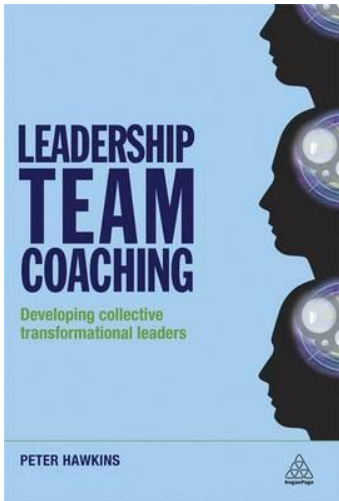**Book Review: Leadership Team Coaching. Professor Peter Hawkins. Sunday, 22 May, 2011.**

It took me quite a while to read this book. Part of the reason lay in my own neglect in maintaining my own edge in eruditeness. Attempting to assimilate a work assembled by as sharp a mind as Professor Hawkins' is challenging if the reader's has not been continuously worked, laid to the grindstone at regular intervals, and perhaps re-forged in the fires of actual coaching/ consulting practice. Having said that, I did find the experience remarkably gratifying.

I might not have read the book at all had I not been invited to a talk by Professor Hawkins at the Civil Service College on 20 Apr 2011. For this, I would like to thank Goh Thee Woon of Coaching Republic, who, along with Ian Tan of Lifeskills Enrichment, was also instrumental in introducing me to the coaching world via "The Art & Science of Coaching", of which I was privileged to be included in the second batch of coaches to be trained in Singapore in 2010.

Leadership Team Coaching is presented in four parts as follows:

Part One: High-Performing Teams

Part Two: Team Coaching

Part Three: Coaching Different Types of Teams

Part Four: Selecting, Developing and Supervising Team Coaches

Professor Hawkins has already given a very clear outline as to what the reader may expect in his *Introduction.* What I intend to do in this review is to present:

- First Impressions
- Comments on specific passages
- How this book will help me in my coaching journey

I hope you will find it useful.

First Impressions

Having worked both in and with various types of teams during my 24 years as an Infantryman, I found most of what was presented throughout the book to be remarkably familiar. The assertion that many teams, be they leadership teams or otherwise, tend to function at "less than the sum of their parts" has been played and re-played more times than I care to recount. I realized as I read more that the way I have worked with teams in the past has been to focus on the team leaders and not on the team as a whole. While the system I was in provided for team evaluations and not just team leader evaluations, my own interventions were largely with team leaders and not the whole team. Indeed, the value and effectiveness of the team to the other stakeholders was not even a priority at the time. Team leaders were expected to play a very active role in the training, not so much coaching, of their team members. Unfortunately, the competencies, capabilities and capacities of the team leaders were widely varied and not all of them were able to forge teams that were more than the sum of the individual team members. There were those that did, and it gave me a great feeling of satisfaction to be able to see the results of my limited, as I now realize them to be, interventions. Had I been given opportunity to work with the teams in rather more specific ways, including working with all individual team members, the results would perhaps have been vastly different.

The assertion that most teams need to be coached regarding their relationships with their stakeholders and the wider system in general rather than just on systemic coaching within the team context and seeking to improve interpersonal relationships between team members is a very good one. The concept of having the team take ownership of their place in the organization, assuming responsibility for the organization's value to stakeholders and the wider system is very valuable. Theoretically, Infantry team leaders were supposed to be trained "two levels up". This meant, for example, that a Platoon Commander ought to be able to assume at least temporary command of a Battalion if the Commanding Officer, all the Battalion's key Staff Officers, and all Company Commanders happened to be annihilated or otherwise incapacitated at the same time. For that to happen, teams ought to be able to at least support other teams, Departments or Divisions above, across and below them in the organization to the tune of two groupings away. Of course, a certain amount of "silo-ing" may be necessary where an adjacent team may not be able to fully support another team needing help, but this concept of shared ownership and responsibility jointly and severally would stand many organizations in good stead.

As I read on, the feeling of the necessity of forging relationships based on "covenantal" approaches rather than "contractual" approaches grew more and more. The difference between the two is that a "covenantal" relationship is based on trust and a firm commitment to the greatest good of the stakeholders. A "contractual" approach is based on fear and a holding of the team to a set of minimum specifications. In other words, a covenant goes for the higher standard, while a contract ensures that minimum standards are enforced.

Finally, I found that the idea about the team coach not "rising into arrogance" nor "sinking into deference" but rather learning together with the team as something superbly wonderful, as this is the very essence of true humility, which will benefit both team coach and team immeasurably.

Comments on Specific Passages

Both the *Introduction* and p8 of Chapter One refer to the "Perfect CEO" myth that is supposed to have been perpetuated at least in recent times. I don't know about that – who perpetuated this myth? The great conquerors of old certainly knew that they needed to have team members around them that had qualities making up for those they lacked. Even Chinggis (Genghis) Khan had the corpulent Subedei (Subotai) drawing up his campaign plans for him, and highly able generals like Chepe (Jebei, who, by the way, was actually part of a conquered city's defences and had actually shot and wounded Chinggis with an arrow) to lead his divisions (Tumen). For the Khan's successor, there was always a great council or *Khuriltai* where the assembled chieftains all agreed together as to who would be best suited to be Khan. In today's context, I think the myth of the "Perfect CEO" is fast disappearing, although I suspect that, at heart, most people would rather abdicate responsibility in helping to select the CEO and the other C-Suite members in order to remain "blameless", and therefore would still hope for this mythical "Perfect CEO" to somehow appear and miraculously bring redemption to the company and take it to greater heights. Indeed, even if a group of C-Suite members and/ or Board Directors meet to select a CEO, it is doubtful if every single member would choose to put aside self-interest and choose the CEO based on the selected candidate's qualities, abilities, acceptability to stakeholders, etc., or, to put it simply, to recognize who would be the best person for the post and be committed to supporting him/ her in that role for the greater good. In the light of this, I think that character development at all levels be continuously nurtured and reinforced.

I found the exposition on "The Five Disciplines of Successful Team Practice" in Chapter 3 to be very helpful in giving me a visual map of the piecemeal attempts at it in practice but rarely as a system. Figure 3.1 was particularly helpful not only in outlining what the Five Disciplines were but also explaining the connections thereof. This model alone makes this book worth reading.

The expression "co-missioning" on p89, Chapter 6, caught my eye. It spoke volumes about both the team and the team coach having a mandate for the coaching intervention that was clear and firmly acceptable to stakeholders and the wider system as well. This would go a long way in ensuring the success of the coaching intervention for all concerned.

Finally, in Chapter 7, p105, under "Management Teams", Professor Hawkins states that "Many organizations suffer from a lack of middle management teams aligning their work, which causes unnecessary duplication and frustration". Sadly, I have found this to be absolutely true. This can be ameliorated somewhat by having the equivalent of an "Operations Centre" that is responsible for collecting relevant information from different departments, processing that information so that it is actually useful to all, disseminating this information to all Departments, and co-ordinating efforts so that the organization's internal friction is kept to a minimum, saving resources for fulfilling its *raison d'etre*, especially how it is perceived by its stakeholders.

How this book will help me in my coaching journey

Professor Hawkins has certainly recorded his wisdom from years of team coaching well in this book. Many nuggets are scattered throughout the volume. This method of writing is, in my mind, superior to gathering different clusters of nuggets in separate areas, because *Homo* becomes *Sapiens* incrementally over time. Here a little, there a little. I will use this as a very handy reference and carry it with me frequently until I have completely assimilated the wisdom it offers. I trust you will use it in your own unique way.