



BOOT CAMP THERAPY

Brief Action-Oriented Clinical Approaches to ANXIETY, ANGER and DEPRESSION

Robert Taibbi

Reviewed by David Hanlon

You may be excused for thinking “this book doesn’t apply to me: I don’t fit the clinical category!!” Well, you will be surprised. The tools covered in this book are useful in all walks of life – not just for a psychologist’s consulting room.

In today’s world, people want quick payback – and if this is not forthcoming, then they quit. Bootcamp Therapy developed in part to cope with the realities of the modern world, however there was also an emerging body of work that suggested that with the right approach, rapid therapy had good payoffs.

"It's easier to cure a phobia in ten minutes than in five years... I didn't realize that the speed with which you do things makes them last... I taught people the phobia cure. They'd do part of it one week, part of it the next, and part of it the week after. Then they'd come to me and say, "It doesn't work!" If, however, you do it in five minutes, and repeat it till it happens very fast, the brain understands. That's part of how the brain learns... I discovered that the human mind does not learn slowly. It learns quickly. I didn't know that.

Richard Bandler¹

In the same vein, managers want staff to change behaviours quickly. And we regularly use a number of steps outlined in this book in our own training and coaching activities.

The bootcamp approach

Taibbi has three overarching steps. These are:

1. Focus on the immediate behavioural change

Taibbi’s mantra (see box) is something we use frequently in executive coaching and in organisational improvement. Behaviour is the single biggest thing we have most control over – far more than emotions and what we may think about something.

“If you keep doing the same thing, you will keep feeling the same way.”
Taibbi

2. Focus on Process

The approach here is to move:

From...

- WHAT (content) – what happened and when, our theory as to why this happened, our story around how we feel the way we do and how we stack facts and evidence to support our case

To...

- HOW (process) – how we actively deal with the situation, how we approach problems, how we deal with troubling emotions or thoughts.

“Track the process like a blood hound.”
Taibbi

¹ Bandler, Richard. (1993), *Time for a Change*. Cupertino, Calif.: Meta Publications.
Robert Taibbi-Bootcamp Therapy .docx
© The Right Mind (2015)



This approach is consistent with that used by organisational behavioural change specialists who are insistent that the team be responsible for calling everyone on the behaviours they want implemented. Do this for 90 days and you will have embedded change.

3. Focus on the core dynamic

Here, there is often a departure from what managers and skilled facilitator's can do. We may behave in a certain way because of three reasons. These are:

- a. Skill. We simply don't have the skills (or appropriate tools) to behave in any other way. Here a manager can coach or train so we gain the necessary skills/tools.
- b. Emotional override. We know what to do, however our emotions override our ability to apply them. For example, I know I need to give correction to a team member to ensure they pay better attention to the job and finish things off, however emotionally I avoid confronting conversations.
- c. Core dynamic. Here there is often a departure from what managers can do and skilled psychologist/facilitator's can achieve. This is where the more hard-wired coping style was developed as a child, but it no longer works in adulthood. It has to be identified and direct solution-focused strategies put in place to overcome this fatal flaw.

The big six – core concepts

Drawing out the framework described above.

1. How you do anything is how you do everything

Moving.....

From WHAT someone does.

TO getting them to see HOW they do it.

Unravelling the core dynamic

1. We all walk out of childhood with emotional wounds
2. These wounds, filtered through the child view, create a worldview of self and others
3. The child develops coping strategies to deal with potential re-wounding
 - a. Prevent being criticised become good and accommodating
 - b. When in the face of control, become angry and defensive
 - c. When neglected become passive or withdraw
 - d. The child's options are limited – get good, get angry, withdraw
4. Childhood wounds are often triggered in the adult
5. Triggering of wounds results in the adult reverting to childhood coping styles
6. You develop a high tolerance of the wounding behaviours of others
 - a. If your boss is a highly critical person, you tend to endure his criticism longer than others

2. Be adult

The concept of being adult is the destination. When we are not adults we act out one of the roles outlined below. These roles are attributed to psychiatrist, Stephen Karpman and now commonly known as Karpman's triangle.

They appear in many guises in families and the workplace, so we have summarised them in more detail and added some helpful hints to manage.



- The Victim: The Victim's stance is "**Poor me!**" When we are in this stage, we feel powerless and unable to make decisions or solve problems. Frequently, if not being persecuted, they will seek out a Persecutor and also a Rescuer who will "save" the day but also perpetuate their negative feelings.
- The Rescuer: The rescuer's line is "**Let me help you.**" A classic enabler, the Rescuer feels guilty if he/she doesn't go to the rescue. However, this position has negative effects. We keep the Victim dependent and also we give him/her permission to fail. The rewards derived from this rescue role are that the focus is taken off of the rescuer. When he/she focuses their energy on someone else, it enables them to ignore their own anxiety and issues. This rescue role is also very pivotal, because their actual primary interest is really an avoidance of their own problems disguised as concern for the victim's needs.
- The Persecutor: The persecutor insists, "**It's all your fault.**" The Persecutor is controlling, blaming, critical, angry, authoritative, and superior.

We act out these roles when we lack the skills to have our unspoken (and frequently unconscious) psychological wishes/needs met in a manner they feel justified, without having to acknowledge the broader dysfunction or harm done in the situation as a whole.

Two of the problems the rescuer and victim have in their relationship is that they do expect a lot of mindreading - you should know what is going on or how to help without my having to say so - and then feel frustrated or disappointed or angry when the other does not. They also have a distorted sense of responsibility. The rescuer tends to be over-responsible - your problems are my problems, I'm happy if you are happy, and it is my job to make sure you are happy. In the attempt to "make" the victim happy, the victim over time begins to feel pressure and control, which sets up the explosion. Similarly, the victim tends to be under-responsible - my problems are your problems - I expect you to fix them, and I either have to wait or manipulate you into doing so.

Being Adult

The adults, in contrast, are clear about who has the problem. By being aware of who has the problem, then we can avoid the defensiveness, anxiety, control, and manipulation of those who are caught in the triangle.

If being adult means to be successful, we must learn to recognise the gaps in our behaviour. For example, the rescuer needs to learn to recognise his/her wants, and take the risk of not being good and over-responsible. Similarly, the victim needs to improve self-confidence, by taking risks and doing things on his/her own. A good start is to break problems into bits so there is less of a feeling of being so overwhelmed. Finally, the persecutor needs to recognise that anger is a defence. S/he has to look for the softer emotions that s/he sees in the victim - the hurt, the sadness, the regret.

3. Look for the holes

This is building on what has been discussed above and increases the focus. In particular, you are attentive to:

- What is not being said – about the "problem/s"?
- What is not being presented in the room?
- What is keeping him/her from not being an adult?



Holes exist because we are comfortable talking about familiar ground – the challenge for us as managers and leaders is to take people to the uncomfortable and less familiar ground.

Examples of holes:

- Soft emotions. Someone who always talks about the anger or aggression of a family member or team colleague, but rarely the soft emotions like hurt, worry or care shown – then the hole is these soft emotions.
- Future. The past is always talked about but nothing about future options and opportunities, then the hole is the future.

As a manager, you need to ensure you don't fall into one or more of Karpman's roles. It is very important to be impartial to ensure you don't tract with the person you are dealing with: that is, you don't become the rescuer and say things like: "you're perfectly justified in not feeling able to cope with xx". Or "toughen up – being a wimp won't get you anywhere".

4. Don't do it right, do it differently (there are no mistakes)

Things that impact on the three major emotions discussed in this book have to do with what we do.

As Taibbi points out:

- Anxiety. if you are worried about making mistakes, you become anxious
- Depression. if you are critical of yourself for making mistakes, you become depressed
- Anger. if you believe others shouldn't make mistakes you become angry

The two-part solution Taibbi suggests are:

1. Decide what you are going to do or say and then do it
2. Observe what happens

If the outcome is not what you expected, then do part 1 differently next time (making sure it is different). Keep repeating the pattern until what you observe works. We too often, stop or not do something for fear of the negative outcome.

5. Problems are bad solutions

Often our problems are solutions to something deeper.

Seeing problems as bad solutions helps us step out of the who-what-where-good-bad content and judgement that is occupying our thoughts and distorting our view. It enables us to consider a broader view and a new story that can mobilise our energy.

Ask the hard questions..
"If...is a bad solution, then
what do you think is the
problem?"
Taibbi

6. Be honest

By being honest, you are the model for good communication. If you don't know what to do for this person, say so.

Taking control

A number of tools and techniques are discussed in this section. We commonly use a number of them with clients. I have briefly summarised a few that are helpful to use in a leadership/management context.



1. **Deep Breathing.** This is a process we regularly use for managing stress. Getting in the habit of shifting breathing patterns so that you reduce your heart rate variability (which is different to lowering heart rate), shifts the chemicals released within your body and reduces stress. In particular, a lower HRV results in less cortisol (the major stress chemical) being produced.
2. **Mindfulness.** It is being aware of what you are feeling at any particular point in time. At any point of anxiety for example, shift your thoughts to something else – the colour of the room, the patterns on the floor, etc and focus hard on these.
3. **Thought stopping.** Scary as it sounds, we have around 60-70,000 thoughts per day and sadly 70% things we will think about today are the same as yesterday. Stopping specific thoughts requires discipline as it requires pattern interruption. Yes, this may involve up to 1,000 interruptions per day to speed up the rewiring of the brain. This is helped enormously if accompanied by a physical activity. For example, if you have a particular thought, the ritual for anxiety might be:
 - a. Say “STOP”. That brings the subconscious behaviour into conscious focus.
 - b. Do an activity (eg. Jotting down the good things that have happened today) and this should be instant and short.
4. **Exercise.** Exercise has been proven to help in many cases for anxiety, depression and anger. Deliberately making yourself exercise changes the chemistry within your body.

Specific treatment maps for Anxiety, Depression and Anger

I will not go into the detail of these, leaving the discovery of the content for the reader who is more interested in counselling or therapy.

For each area, Taibbi details the steps to take, including quick assessment, establishment of a treatment plan, and the process and content of the therapy sessions. The topics are ordered in under the headings outlined below.

1. Treatment map for anxiety

- Types. Specific, panic disorder, generalised
- Goals. Lowering thresholds, first-aid techniques, long-term approach to anxiety
- 1st session. Keys to assessment, client education, typical homework assignments
- 2nd session. Teaching meditation & EFT
- 3rd session. Focus on controlling your mind; problem-solving, voice-overs, action
- Focusing on core issues. Increasing anxiety tolerance, emotional flexibility

2. Treatment map for anger management

- Goals. Self-regulation, self responsibility, anger as information
- 1st Session. Assessment: Key questions and emotional monitoring
- 2nd Session. First aid for self-regulation, uncovering grief, hyper vigilance
- 3rd Session. Turning anger into problem solving, defining wants vs. shoulds
- Focusing on core issues. Creating emotional flexibility



3. Treatment map for depression

- Types. Situational vs. biological
- Goals. Getting unstuck, being proactive, pushing back against the depressive mind
- 1st Session. Assessment: Asking the hard questions, setting contracts for action
- 2nd Session. Developing action plans, letter-writing, role-playing, empty-chair
- 3rd Session. Defining stuck points & core dynamic
- Focusing on core issues. Cultivating optimism, staying on the offensive

The case examples Taibbi uses throughout the book make it interesting and highly readable. Finally, he ends with a chapter that focuses specifically on how to incorporate techniques into your everyday practice, summarising key points and providing even more tips for applying the core concepts of this method.

His concluding remarks for working with family and friends apply equally to the workplace. They are:

1. Define the goal [objective] of the session [meeting]
2. Take a few minutes to build rapport
3. Get and keep the conversation going
4. Make sure the conversation is balanced
5. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions
6. Resist the urge to find solutions
7. Take care of yourself.

Summary

Boot Camp Therapy is a book that has great value for those working in the field of coaching and counselling. Managers who wish to improve their individual coaching skills are encouraged to read the book. As managers we frequently have to deal with staff who suffer from varying degrees of anxiety, depression and anger. The book does provide some good tips and there are plenty of questions that can be incorporated in to your own conversation. It does not mean you become a qualified counsellor or that you should take on cases that are beyond your capability.

Availability

Boot Camp Therapy is available in good bookstores and in e-book.

The reviewer

David Hanlon is a Director with The Right Mind International Pty Ltd. He works in the area leadership training and organisational alignment.