**Book review**

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## Isaacson, S. (2021). How to thrive as a coach in a digital world: Coaching with Technology

**By James Bridgeman**
United Kingdom

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Sam Isaacson is unashamed in his enthusiasm for blending coaching and technology (he calls it 'coachtech') and for the benefits he feels it will bring to coaches, their clients, their supervisors, and hence the wider world. Coaching as a profession is in the business of bringing about change, he argues, and it is our responsibility as coaches to raise our awareness of how technology is changing our world in myriad ways.

While the author writes from a broadly positive, even excited stance towards technology, nevertheless he maintains a positivist attitude towards the information he relays: his stated aim is to produce "a strong foundation of objective facts, enabling practical actions". The book draws on the latest empirical research across the fields of coaching, technology, and sociology to deliver this goal, while remaining thoroughly readable and straightforward in its tone.

The areas explored range from scene-setting: outlining the opportunities, risks and delving into the ethical dilemmas thrown up by tech advances, to more practical overviews of how tech is changing the coaching landscape and what coaches and supervisors can be doing now to empower themselves digitally. Isaacson reminds us that it is not just about our own attitudes, whether we are technophiles or technophobes, but also about our clients' technological preferences which we need to consider and understand.

At the book's heart is a pragmatic tour of the technological playground in front of us. We learn how applications are streamlining the admin process and boosting coach productivity, and how new platforms, such as online collaboration tools, avatars, and virtual reality, are bringing new dimensions to coaching conversations. As a primer for how to embrace digital tools to the benefit of your practice and your clients, the middle section of the book is a valuable exploration. And yes, looking toward the future, Isaacson addresses the question on many coaches' minds: will I be replaced by artificial intelligence? (Spoiler alert: not likely. Straightforward performance coaching with bots may well be "so close we can taste it", but human coaches use empathy to work more deeply than robots ever could)

As befits a book about the increasing influence of the digital world, there are useful aspects of its structure that borrow from internet culture. A 'read-time' in minutes heads every chapter, which even this tortoise-paced reviewer found pretty accurate – allowing the

reader to dip into a section if they have half-hour to spare. Don't have that long? Each chapter ends with a TL;DR section (geek speak for 'Too Long; Didn't Read') which helpfully summarises the key points of that chapter in a series of bullet points. While the ongoing fictional narrative that runs throughout the book won't be to everyone's taste, it serves to provide a near-future illustration showcasing many of the advances outlined.

If Sam Isaacson's aim were to demystify and normalise all technological advances for all coaches, then he would surely have a mountain to climb. There are many who may not wish to get on board with some of the wackier digital toys he describes. As he concedes, due to the breakneck pace of change, many of the technologies he refers to will have been superseded in the time since the book's publication. But what the book does admirably is to provide an entertaining, enlightening, thought-provoking and practically useful overview of where we are with 'coachtech', and where we're likely to go with it, should we be open to the possibilities it offers. The book closes with several visions of the future – the bleak, the bright, and landing ultimately on the likely. A final, tub-thumping rallying cry closes the piece, exhorting all coaches to understand what technology can enable, to be alive to its potential, and through its wise, mindful use, to continue to deliver what it never will be able to: a deep, empathic human connection that empowers change.