

Conversations on Therapy

David R. Grove and Jay Haley

Publisher: W.W. Norton
£15.95 / \$22.95 ISBN: 0-393-70155-7

FORTY YEARS ago a young Jay Haley met Milton H. Erickson during a weekend seminar in hypnosis. Further meetings followed and soon Haley was regularly visiting Erickson in Phoenix to discuss problems about cases he was treating.

Twenty years on the fruits of those meetings appeared in that outstanding book *Uncommon Therapy. The Psychiatric Techniques of Milton H. Erickson.* (Norton 1973)

The wheel turns full circle and now there is another young man, David Grove, discussing his problems with Haley. **Conversations on Therapy** makes us privileged onlookers as they consider eleven difficult cases. This short extract conveys the flavour ... and perhaps you will hear echoes of Erickson's voice.

HALEY: *Where is the father?*

GROVE: *His father's dead. Why do you ask about the father?*

HALEY: *If a kid is violent you assume two people are in conflict about how to deal with him. One adult is on his side, and one's against him. If an older man is violent, I think there's still two people in conflict about him. One on his side and one against him.*

One thing of great interest in these exchanges is the questions that Haley asks. This is the more interesting because it is hard to find any examples of Erickson's questioning technique, and one of the big differences between the expert and the novice in any field is the quality of their questions. You can only find out about a client through asking questions, and the failure to ask the right one can lead to overlooking quite obvious things.

We get an example of Haley's expertise in this area in the very first question of the very first case: "*What do the boys call their stepdad?*"

When, at the end of the case, Grove describes how the problems respond to Haley's suggestions, we find that in this difficult family case the most valuable step he took was to get the sons to call their stepfather "*Dad*". Definitely a hole in one for Haley!

What do the questions have in common? Broadly the answer is they are concrete rather than abstract, and focus on things that can be changed in the present. We could contrast this with a Freudian analyst whose questions might characteristically deal with the cloudy ephemera of

dreams and unchangeable past experiences.

The questions a man asks come out of his world-view and Jay's therapy, like his questions, is oriented to the present and to concrete interventions. It is also family oriented: i.e. adopts the view – revolutionary in the late 1950s – that what were once called symptoms or individual problems are best seen as products of personal relationships.

This would not necessarily be totally endorsed by Erickson, who is on record as saying in the context of a case on bedwetting:

"In other words, in doing therapy you regard your patient as an individual and no matter how much of a problem her bedwetting was to her parents, her sisters, neighbours and school children, it was primarily her problem. All she needed to know was something she already knew ... and the therapy for all the others was letting them make their own adjustments." Rosen (1982), *My voice will go with you*. Norton.

As well as being a treasure house of questions, this book is a gold mine for the many detailed suggestions for changes that the therapist can introduce into the functioning of relationships: those small changes so characteristic of Ericksonian therapy which, like seeds, grow in time to become sturdy and fruitful trees.

Such changes are truly organic: they do not dam up the powers of life but gently divert them into clearer and sweeter channels. Hercules, like many therapists, wasted vast amounts of time and energy shovelling muck out of the Augean stables. Erickson, and Haley after him, realised – as Hercules did belatedly – that if you can divert a living stream through the stables, then time and nature will finish the job for you.

An excellent example of this is the final case, a spectacular one of split personality. It responds dramatically to the single idea given to the dominant personality that it would be safe to communicate with the hidden one. From this seed shoots quickly grew and over a matter of weeks unfurled and bloomed into a whole and healed person.

This is truly a fascinating book.

Dylan Morgan

A gold mine for the many detailed suggestions for changes the therapist can introduce into the functioning of relationships

Relaxation in a Week

Pat & Colin Dyke

Publisher: Headway-Hodder & Stoughton
£5.99 ISBN:0-340-56152-1

THE TITLE of this book is a little misleading: it does not actually set the reader the task of progressing to total relaxation in seven days - a goal which in itself might induce stress.

It is part of a series of "In a week" books on different topics and it takes its structure from the week, in that it has seven sections each devoted to a particular programme for relaxation designed to take about 20 minutes a day.

The authors are clearly experienced in "hands-on" dealing with stress management and the book offers an introduction to a number of therapeutic techniques and other ideas which have been found to be effective in reducing stress. These range from keeping a pet, reading, hobbies and sports to complementary therapies such as aromatherapy, autogenic training and auto-hypnosis.

The techniques included in the daily programmes centre largely on visualisation, self-awareness exercises and positive affirmation, with some programmes including instructions for making a self-hypnosis tape and using various induction techniques such as gazing at a blue bulb or a spinning disc. The tone of the book is cheerful and it is illustrated with pleasant photographs designed to facilitate visualisation.

My impression is that the book has grown out of the practical work done by its authors with their clients and it seems best suited to being used as a handbook which could usefully be given to clients as an adjunct to therapy or counselling.

However, like many "self-help" books I feel it will be most useful to people who are already quite well organised as, particularly at the beginning, it would be rather difficult to fit the programmes into 20 minutes per day. Also, many people do not find it easy to learn successfully to practise self-hypnosis, for example, from written instructions alone. Many hypnotherapists have had clients who have tried "doing it from a book" and who find the "real thing" a totally different experience.

The book does not supply any detailed definitions or information about stress, for example its biological effects. Yet information is a great stress reliever, with ignorance concerning physical symptoms of stress often inducing

further anxiety in sufferers, who interpret them as signs of organic illness. Also, the authors seem to take a rather limited view of stress as being always due to excessive demands being made on a person. They refer to boredom, for example, as "too little stress" rather than actually causing stress in itself through lack of fulfilment and frustration at failing to solve the problem of finding something interesting to do.

In addition, the cheerful approach of the authors does not deal in any depth with the psychological problems which often underlie stress and which are not likely to be resolved by the brief introductions to various techniques offered here. Advice such as "When you have unwanted thoughts put a large red stop sign in your mind" does not make any concession to the cathartic method! Yet, in their Introduction to the book, the authors claim "This book will allow you to become your own therapist and friend" and this statement is not qualified in any way.

It would have been helpful to include at least a list of addresses where expert help could be obtained if required, but the book contains no references at all other than a recommendation to try to find some books in one's local library.

I was also unable to find any warnings that persons suffering from epilepsy, for example, should not try to induce hypnosis particularly by gazing at a spinning disc or a blue bulb. Nor could I locate any hints that extremely susceptible subjects may experience much more powerful effects from self-hypnosis techniques than the pleasant drowsiness and relaxation suggested by the authors. Without forewarning such effects can be alarming.

Within the limitations of its genre the book is competently put together and written in a practical and friendly style. I am sure that many people could find it useful. I however would be happier if it contained a clear warning there are many problems whose symptoms may include a high level of stress, but whose treatment does not come within the range of this book.

*Within
the
limitations
of its
genre,
the book is
competently
put
together
... but*

J. Rochford Butler