

BOOK REVIEW

Transforming Your Self

by Steve Andreas

Reviewed by Charles Faulkner

It must be the season of the self. The publishing industry is printing a record number of autobiographies as well as spiritual books like Thomas Moore's *Original Self*. Then there's pop-psychology's assault on the self currently being led by Phil McGraw with his book *Self Matters*. Well, it certainly does! So it shouldn't surprise anyone that an NLP author, editor, and trainer has taken on the task of modeling the many facets of how the self works. And since it's Steve Andreas, any resemblance to the rest of the crowd ends there. You won't find autobiographical ruminations or mystical quotes, or celebrity pontifications. There aren't even the usual anecdotes so popular in best-selling psychology books or the all-American daytime television diatribe on the one right way to be yourself. Instead, what you will find are clear descriptions of the key distinctions that make up the structure of your self, and easy-to-follow exercises that provide a practical methodology for changing your experience of yourself—and others if you choose to use them as a coach or therapist. *Transforming Your Self* is a book about understanding what your identity is made of, how it functions, and how

to use these understandings to change who you are.

Written as if you are a workshop participant, this book provides the immediacy and directness that you would experience if you were there. Since the seminar-to-book path often means the author has taken a short cut to publication that results in disorganization, confusion, and repetition, it is worth noting that this is emphatically not the case here. The introductions, demonstrations, examples, transcripts, and participant comments have been edited with evident care to give a breadth, depth, and clarity that recalls the NLP classic, *Frogs into Princes*.

The plain-spoken, down-to-earth style of Steve's presentations and writing creates an ease of learning that can be deceiving and obscure the richness, depth of thought, and the order of presentation. For example, you're told in the introduction that it is best to read the chapters in order. Further on you're told that this step-by-step approach can be used to model other kinds of excellence. As you become absorbed in the content of the model, it could easily slip right

by that this careful sequence is also an outline of how Steve approaches the process of modeling.

What is the model? Steve's self-concept model corresponds with the neurological level of Identity, the beliefs that we have about ourselves. With Steve's modeling skills, this often fuzzy category becomes a rich source of distinctions and techniques. He offers us a detailed look at how it works, including: how continuity is created across experience, how your future is created through feed-forward, and how recursive (apply-to-self) processes act upon themselves. All this is explained while guiding you through easy exercises that create a more durable, accurate, self-correcting, other-connecting sense of self that is an unconscious competence free of self-importance. You learn the difference between self-concept and self-esteem (and how many of the self-esteem building efforts in American schools are an attempt to have the tail wag the dog); how aspects of time, perceptual positions, and modalities (with their submodalities) combine to create the representations we have about ourselves; and about the structure of examples and

counter examples and how to change them.

Steve introduces an important new concept into NLP he calls the "summary representation," a long overdue expansion of the old idea of "complex equivalence." It has been assumed in NLP that hearing a word accesses a particular experience—often an exact memory. It turns out this is only occasionally the case. Take for example the word "dog." Just now, you might have thought of a particular memory of a dog, or you might have thought of some "archetypical" dog, that is, a representation that stands for all of the dogs you've experienced. And this is with a sensory-based representation. The more abstract the words, the more likely

they are to have many particular experiences or examples that are summarized with another representation. All nominalizations, which includes all the qualities, values, and beliefs that we use to describe ourselves—our identity—are abstractions that have complex equivalences that are large categories containing many examples. A summary representation is a very simplified image of the richness of the specific examples it represents, and therein lies both its strengths and weaknesses. A caricature can be quickly recognized, which makes for a fast response, but it is also reductive and stereotypical, which makes for rigid judgements.

With this concept, we have a practical way of determining if someone

has an impoverished sense of self or not, and how to make it richer if they do. Most previous identity change processes tried to change the summary representation, rather than the individual examples that it summarizes. While a summary representation can be difficult to change directly, the specific examples are easy to change. "Change enough of the small pictures, and you change the big picture."

In what is certain to be a surprise to many motivational speakers and self improvement authors, having no counter examples in your identity—not thinking of mistakes or "failures"—actually weakens the self, making it rigid, brittle, and perfectionistic. Not only can you

afford negative thoughts; when handled appropriately, with processes so easy they can be done conversationally, counter examples actually strengthen and enrich your sense of self, and also make it more open to feedback and continual improvement.

The positive uses of counter examples, their applications, and transformations are topics so rich that several chapters are devoted to them. You learn how to use them to strengthen an already existing positive quality of self, build a new quality that you want, transform an ambiguous quality into a positive one, and how to transform a completely unwanted quality of self. Be warned: a number of cherished "new age" beliefs are shattered in the process—and replaced each time with practical processes that are beautiful in their elegance and simplicity.

The change processes in *Transforming Your Self* are an interesting mix of classic NLP distinctions and techniques applied in new ways with these new understandings. For example, mapping between modalities (from *The Structure of Magic*, Vol. II) is used with integration at the level of specific examples for a much easier and more elegant version of the Visual Squash. A number of the Meta-programs get put to new uses as well. Time Frames become a way to amplify the continuity of self—an essential aspect of identity. The distribution of examples in time, the chunk size of examples, and "time spreading," provide easy ways to change self-concept. Future examples, it turns out, are particularly important in creating a recursive, feed-forward system that works

better than the Swish Pattern. Perceptual Positions, along with examining and adjusting the content and context are all additional ways to build in feedback, and strengthen the self, while maintaining your connection with others. Best of all, these processes are described in everyday language. The NLP jargon has been kept to a minimum.

There are many asides, observations and insights along the way. I was particularly struck with Steve's modeling of the structure of paranoia, something he didn't anticipate—a good sign of real modeling.) A hint—a negated self expresses one side of an ambiguous and uncertain sense of self. There is a discussion about the unknown "shadow self," and interesting speculation about the possible structure of multiple personality. Many people are writing about modeling and teaching modeling seminars, but few of them actually produce new models. This section and others offer an opportunity to listen in on a modeler practicing his craft.

Does this book say all there is to say about the self? I would have liked to have some of the ideas taken further, such as something on working with people with externally validated values—since they're the majority. And I wanted to find out what happened next with one of the main demonstration transcripts. Steve points out how natural language metaphors can help guide the elicitation process, but says less about how they assisted in the change processes. This, though, is nitpicking a book that is a triple resource. While presenting a comprehensive model of the structure of identity, *Transforming Your Self* describes how we

generalize about all our experience, and also provides the clearest application of the modeling process currently available. As Steve himself says, "Everything can always be improved, and this book is no exception." On a shelf groaning under the weight of NLP books that repeat the same old ideas, this one says new and important things.

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