

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2003

THIS NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT TAKING THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE INTO EVERYDAY ACTIVITY AND IS FOR EVERYBODY PREPARED TO DEVELOP THEIR THINKING TO IMPROVE THEIR OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE.

1. **February's Alexander newsletter flies, determinedly, in the face of political correctness. This is not because we are in any way contemptuous of any grouping whatsoever. In fact, we are personally respectful of all groups and individuals. Our Alexander training constantly reminds us to take that respect into all areas of our life and work.**

Having said that, political correctness flies in the face of our Alexander training; inasmuch as it is about an automatic response to a stimulus. We would argue for thinking about each individual issue, as we think – ideally – about each movement. That way we can be light, and have fun in everything we do.

Sometimes, we feel, it pays to lampoon the stereotypes in the interests of clarity. So here goes.

If you feel moved to comment, we would love to hear from you.

2. Top Ten Reasons Why Men Don't Want To Learn The Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique has been in existence for well over a hundred years and it has proved tremendously successful in enabling people to manage back and other mobility problems effectively. So why is it that more women than men choose to learn it?

1. **The majority of Alexander teachers are women.** So what if F.M. Alexander was a man and, to be precise, a 'man's man'? A rugged individualist with an enduring love of horses and horse racing, he developed his Technique because it was his nature to be proactive and contribute to the solution of his health problems. Regrettably, he also had his sensitive, intuitive side, and this is shared by a lot of women (and men) who have since trained in his Technique.
2. **Alexander teachers are vegetarians who do yoga and want to save the planet.** As a breed, AT teachers *are* socially responsible. Still, there are plenty of red meat eaters among them. There are also sports people, martial artists, musicians, actors, computer nerds... in fact, they're rather like the general population. (They can even be sexist and politically incorrect.) But they're committed to helping people maximise their sense of physical wholeness.
3. **Real men prefer to grin and bear it.** Why? Real men don't go to the doctor. They may complain, but they accept pain and limitations of movement as the cross they have to bear. If they were to learn the AT, it would mean learning different ways of thinking about their everyday physical activity. It could mean making an enduring commitment to their physical well being.
4. **Real men don't need to find out about esoteric subjects – and alternative therapies.** If the information were that important they would already have heard about it. They don't need to read books and magazines to find out what they don't already know. At best, they might

surf the Internet. AT teachers tend to prefer communicating person to person, rather than in cyberspace.

5. **Real men don't do alternative therapies.** How many men do you know who are up for colonic irrigation??? In reality, the AT is not a therapy, it is a progressive re-education in the art of free movement. So people who learn the AT are not patients or clients, but pupils – which might be even worse. Also the AT is not about getting it right (or wrong) so it doesn't foster the competitive spirit.
6. **It's not butch enough.** The AT is not like football. It is not practised in a pack, in a noisy, smoke-filled, alcohol-fuelled atmosphere. It is practised one to one, with a Teacher who is sensitive to the pupil's individual make-up. An AT teacher is attuned to the pupil's body and encourages the pupil to become increasingly aware of what they could stop doing to themselves so as to facilitate optimum working.
7. **You have to do it for yourself.** It's not like taking your car to the garage, where you pay your money and leave the mechanic to get on with it. With the AT you pay your money and you learn how it's done! The AT argument is that it's your body so learning how to use it responsibly has to be in your best interest. It can even be empowering and open up all kinds of new vistas. But it does blow the: 'You've got to make allowances for me; my back's hurting' model out of the water.
8. **It will probably involve deferring to your partner's superior judgement.** There are plenty of men who sit slumped in their armchair and say to their partner: 'You really should do something about your posture. It's terrible.' They may even be right. But The Little Lady can't be expected to know what's good for you. *She* might have problems, but you're fine just the way you are. Different rules apply.
9. **It teaches you how to break old, unproductive habits.** Specifically, it teaches you how to get out of the old set physical patterns that cause undue wear and tear on discs and joints. You learn a new way of thinking that's a transferable skill; you can apply it to any habit at all that doesn't serve you well. If you have any bad habits, that is. Or maybe they're the domain of your partner.
10. **You can't get up a sweat doing it.** Unfortunately you won't need a good shower; so it won't result in extra bear hugs for your partner. Sad because sweaty men *always* seem to be affectionate men – a bit like dogs. Nor will you wake up the next morning with aching muscles. But you may find that you look taller, straighter, broader and even leaner. It's not a 'more is more' thing. It's about achieving maximum results, in the gentlest, subtlest way possible.

N.B. A necessary distinction: there are Real men and men – just as there are Little women and women. We both have lots of delightful pupils who are men.

2. **The Husband Shopping Center**

The "Husband Shopping Center" opened, giving women a place to choose a husband from many men. It was laid out in five floors, with the men increasing in positive

attributes as you ascended up the floors. The only rule was, once you opened the door to any floor, you must either choose a man from that floor or leave. There was no going back.

So, a couple of girlfriends go to the place to find men. On the first floor, the door had a sign that read, "These men have jobs and love kids." The women read the sign and say "Well that's better than not having jobs, or not loving kids, but I wonder what's further up?" So up they go.

The sign on the second floor door read: "These men have high paying jobs, love kids, and are extremely good looking" Hmmm, say the girls. "But, I wonder what's further up?"

Third floor: "These men have high paying jobs, are extremely good looking, love kids and help with the housework." "Wow!", say the women. "Very tempting, BUT, there's more further up!?" And so again, they go up.

Fourth floor: "These men have high paying jobs, love kids, are extremely good looking, help with the housework, and have a strong romantic streak. Oh, mercy me. But just think!?!? What must be awaiting us further on!"

So up to the fifth floor they go. The sign on that door said: "This floor is empty and exists only to prove that women are impossible to please. Thank you for shopping and have a nice day."

3. Respect and the Alexander Technique

The old adage is that respect is something you have to earn. You do this by observing certain standards of behaviour in various relatively public areas of your life.

Then there is the issue of self-respect. This tends to require that your actions are congruent with your own beliefs, ethics and tastes. Equally, self-respect can serve as a deterrent: there are various things you simply cannot do, without forfeiting your self-respect. Such things are, ultimately, subjective but might –we feel- include:

- Buying a Doris Day CD
- Fancying Robin Cook like mad
- Preferring the Teletubbies to Lord of the Rings

For Alexander teachers and pupils there is also 'psycho-physical' respect. F.M. Alexander treated the human being who came to him for work as a 'psycho-physical whole'; someone for whom thinking and physicality were all of a piece.

So? You might say. The notion of a link between mind and body is hardly ground-breaking. Yet every time a new pupil comes to us and announces: 'I've got bad posture', we're struck by the way they have looked at this aspect of themselves, as if it were a separate entity, and found it wanting.

But if you don't own it and accept it, you can't change it. Before you can embrace change you have to acknowledge things as they are. Your posture may not please you, but, prior to learning the AT, it was the best strategy you'd found for physically managing your life.

Once you can respect where you're at, i.e. your psycho-physical reality, then you can start to improve it.

As Alexander teachers, we believe that respect is something that you learn.

4. Forthcoming Events.

Madelene will be doing an Introductory talk on the Alexander Technique on Sunday February 23rd from 11.00a.m. – 12.00p.m. at Shine Holistic, 52 Stoke Newington Church St., London N16 ONB For further details contact 0793 9347099

Annie will be doing a workshop in Brentwood on March 8th from 11.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m, at Pearl of the Orient, 33 Warley Hill, Brentwood. Cost £40. Application forms are available from Annie or at Pearl of the Orient.

Wishing you a thoroughly politically incorrect February,

Annie and Madelene

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