

# TAKING THE TRYING OUT OF BEING

Alexander Newsletter August 2004

THIS NEWSLETTER IS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE READY TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF MIND AND BODY WORKING TOGETHER

WE GROW THROUGH YOUR RECOMMENDATION – PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FEW FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES.

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## 1. SILLY SEASON REFLECTIONS ON AUTOMATIC PILOT

With the summer holidays once more upon us, who feels they have the time, or the inclination, to think 'Alexander thoughts'? Either there is too much to do, or else it just seems like too much effort to have to give some thought to those things that are usually relegated to automatic pilot.

Now, since this is the season when baggage handlers and traffic controllers threaten, or worse, take strike action, would you be willing, momentarily to play with a scenario in which your body did the same? Not, we hasten to add, through illness or trauma, because we have no wish to appear flippant about pain or limitation, but just out of sheer bloody-mindedness.

Suppose, that like these groups of airport workers to whom we are generally happy not to give a thought for as long as they just get on with the job, your body were suddenly to demand radical improvements in its terms and conditions of employment.

Suppose, that instead of just getting on with the job of transporting you through your day, your body suddenly turned militant and demanded better working conditions and a seat on the Board, threatening pickets and strikes and whatever other kind of inconvenience and disruption you'd rather not to contemplate?

What if, in other words, your body suddenly turned the tables and said: 'Sorry, chum, but

I don't have the time or the inclination to carry you right now. It's my time for some quality 'me time' right now contemplating my navel. If you don't start to pull your weight in the forward planning department (a), you'll be left looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger in Terminator 3, when the switch was pulled on him.'

Improbable? Well, yes, admittedly. But if your body suddenly downed tools, would you know how to get yourself up and down stairs? How you play any sport or swim? How you organise yourself as you open your mouth to speak? How it gears you up to deal with the difficulties you have to confront in your day?

If the answer is 'no', have you ever thought that you are not actually concerning yourself with conserving your physical resources? That, unwittingly, you could be that, as yet unrecognised phenomenon, a Body Vandal?

Now we are not proposing that either you, or we, don fluffy, pastel green balaclavas and start mobilising as the Body Liberation Front. Despite our dislike of seating in public places, we don't suggest fighting back through

a series of attacks on particularly remiss chairs and sofas....

What we do advocate, as ever, is starting to show more concern and awareness for your physicality, promoting it to partnership on the Board of your being, simply by including it in your routine thinking.

Why not after all? It's the only body you're going to get.

(a) [Editors' note: all physical activity requires forward planning at some level.]

## 2. A THINKING ENVIRONMENT

This month we have been reading Nancy Kline's fascinating 'Time to think listening to ignite the human mind. Ms Kline's thesis is as simple as it is powerful: we place two main obstacles in the way of a creative, positive thinking environment. They are:

The urge to provide a solution, without first having truly heard and acknowledged the problem  
The self-limiting assumptions that, unconsciously as often as not, stymie us.

A 'thinking environment' is one in which the person with the problem is accorded the time, space and respect to express his/her situation. In a thinking environment, the person with the problem will not be offered solutions, but only incisive questions that enable him/her to confront and move beyond the self-limiting assumptions.

Ms Kline's conviction is that these assumptions block our inherent resources. Once they have been successfully confronted, they will disintegrate and the individual will be able to access the solutions that work best for him/her in the situation.

Ms Kline makes the point that this is a cooperative, supportive way of working. It is not criticism or competition that fuels the most creative and far reaching change but facilitation.

How does this relate to the Alexander Technique? Well, if we had a £1 coin for every time a pupil said: 'I know it sounds stupid, but...' we would be able to offer grossly discounted lessons throughout the year. And we'd hate it. We'd hate it because we would be raking money in from pupils' self-limiting assumptions.

When pupils say: 'I know it sounds stupid...' , we tend to hold our breath, because what follows is, inevitably, a remarkably acute perception. The problem lies with the fact that the perception does not tally with received wisdom. To take a very common example: a pupil will say: 'I know it sounds stupid, but I feel taller..' before going out and, at worst, clouting their head as they get back into their car.

Received wisdom tells us that beyond a certain age we cannot grow. Of course, received wisdom is absolutely right: physically we will not have a growth spurt in our thirties, or forties or beyond (if only!!!), yet our height can increase. Received wisdom does not have all the answers. But our reliance on received wisdom has taught us not to trust our perceptions.

In terms of our physicality, this means that we dismiss or undervalue the significance of the messages we are constantly receiving from our body – no wonder it might consider agitating for a seat on the Board! If we do this long and well enough, we stop 'hearing' the messages all together.

As Alexander teachers, it is our role to create a 'psycho-physical thinking environment' for our pupils. We are facilitators who create this environment by incisive questioning of our pupils' self-limiting assumptions about their physicality. We do this, at least as much through our hands as through our words. Hopefully, we teach pupils how they can internalise the time, space and respect for their physicality that will create a far more creative, harmonious and productive partnership of body and mind.

Given that the pressure – if not the heat – is off most of us in August, perhaps we should bear in mind this Taoist saying:

'There is so much to do.

There is so little time.

We must go slowly.'

Oh, and if you were wondering about how long all this respectful listening, that Nancy Kline advocates, actually takes: the answer is not very long. She observes that really listening, without interruption or impatience, allows someone to work through an issue surprisingly swiftly. And, of course, there is all the time saved in not going round the loop again and again.

As regards the AT, how slow is slow? Generally, it means the split second it takes to ask yourself: 'shall I do this on automatic pilot, or shall I give it a moment's thought?' As Alexander said: 'We can throw away the habit of a lifetime in a few minutes if we use our brains.' Given that most of our habits are based on limiting assumptions, 'going slowly' might move us on from the routine of habit, to the fun of exploration and self-discovery.

### **3. SPOT THE LIMITING ASSUMPTION**

A man was very worried when his blonde wife failed to return home on time from a business trip.

So he called her hotel.

She was crying when she answered the phone. He asked her what was wrong, and his wife said she couldn't get out of her room.

"You can't get out of your room?" the husband asked. "Why not?"

His wife replied, "There are only three doors in here," she sobbed. "One is the bathroom, one is the closet and one has a sign on it that says 'Do Not Disturb!'"

### **4. FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

Madelene will be running an Alexander Technique Introductory class on Saturday September 25 2004 from 3pm until 6pm at Shine Holistic, 52 Stoke Newington Church Street, N16. Call 07939 347099 or Shine on 7241 5033 for more information.

Have a great August

## **Annie and Madelene**

DON'T KEEP US A SECRET. IF YOU LIKE IT, PLEASE FORWARD THIS

E-NEWSLETTER TO FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES WHO YOU THINK COULD BENEFIT FROM SOME AT INPUT.

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