

authors have drawn extensively from their experience, giving professionals solid and practical interventions as well as supplying all comers with a deeper understanding of the variety and depth of our grief responses.

Alison Cowzer, support worker for Cruse Bereavement Care, and trainee counsellor

Transactional analysis: 100 key points and techniques

Mark Widdowson

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When I saw this title advertised, I imagined a book divided into 100 points, each of which would be a short, profound sentence or two.

One hundred easily digested soundbites. In fact, the title turns out to be a marketing exercise, in which the book (and presumably others in the series) is written in 100 short but extremely dense chapters.

So rather than 100 points, there are seven parts. Each part takes the reader through a section of TA, beginning with a discussion of the different approaches within TA. This section includes an interesting chapter on TA as cognitive behavioural therapy, as well as the more traditional TA as radical therapy (a throwback to the seventies), TA as a relational therapy, as a psychodynamic therapy, classical TA and more.

The succeeding sections move on to discuss, in more general terms, the TA approach to the therapeutic relationship, to diagnosis, to contracting, and to treatment planning. There is a section that discusses common pitfalls, and finally a chapter dedicated to refining therapeutic skills (within a TA

context). Interestingly, the chapters are of an unequal length, with fewer than 20 pages dedicated to treatment planning, but more than 100 given over to the last section, refining skills. All this comes in at under 400 words, which means that the writing is very dense indeed

The introduction makes clear that this is not an introductory book, and that familiarity with TA concepts and methods is assumed. This means that TA language (of which there is a lot) is used throughout the book. The reader's familiarity is taken for granted. In many ways, this is refreshing. There are too few books for experienced practitioners, and in TA at least, this book plugs a gap.

However, even allowing for a reasonable level of knowledge, TA is rich in its own particular jargon, and this can sometimes be totally incomprehensible to the uninitiated, and difficult for all but experienced practitioners. For example, Widdowson, quite early on, discusses the 'P0 and C0 ego states overlapping, with the intersection being the A0 ego state'. There is no explanation offered of this concept, or others along the way, so the reader does need to have an extremely good understanding of the terms. A diagram here, and at other key points, would have been helpful.

Widdowson is both knowledgeable and passionate about his subject. These two qualities make for an engaging read in a book that takes a very thorough look at the theory, and, to a lesser degree, the practice of transactional analysis. I am impressed by the thoroughness of what he has done, particularly when he allows himself free rein to write about important concepts such as transference and contracting, that have much wider applications than TA alone.

While the book is by no means uncritical of parts of TA, it does fail to address some (of my) areas of concern. For example, there is an underlying assumption that the

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