

Leap of power: Take control of alcohol, drugs and your life

By Robert Schwebel

Viva Press, 2019, 163 pp

The author of this book, Robert Schwebel, was involved in the Radical Psychiatry Collective in the early 1970s, and worked closely with Claude Steiner who, in many ways, represented the interface of radical psychiatry (RP) with transactional analysis (TA). Both RP, with its emphasis on power, and TA, with its emphasis on the contractual method, protection and permission, are evident throughout the book, from the 'Notes to Readers', which emphasises the reader's personal responsibility, onwards.

We (the two reviewers) come to this book with different experiences and connections. Johnny as a psychotherapist and a chief operating officer of a large addiction treatment therapeutic community, and Keith as a transactional analyst with a strong interest in RP, and having known and worked with Claude Steiner (Tudor, 2020) – and, more recently, having corresponded with and met Robert Schwebel online. So, inevitably, so we have picked up on different aspects of the book, but woven our comments together. We mention Robert 'Bob' Schwebel's connection with Claude Steiner as, in a number of ways, this book draws on Steiner's own work on addictions and, specifically, alcoholism, including his two books on the subject: *Games Alcoholics Play* (Steiner, 1971) and *Healing Alcoholism* (Steiner, 1979).

The book is framed in terms of seven challenges – which focus on honesty (about addiction), on what is likeable about alcohol and other drugs, and on what is harmful, on responsibility, on evaluation of one's direction in life, on making thoughtful decisions, and on taking action to succeed in life. The way the challenges are worded and elaborated in the seven chapters of the book is clear, kind in that is very accepting of the person, and, of course, challenging. In Chapter 1, Schwebel writes specifically about guarding against lying to one's self as well as to others, and the importance of self-awareness and honesty. These particular pages reminded me (Keith) of the old RP slogan which defined co-operative contracts: 'No lies, no power plays, and no Rescues' (see Tudor, 2020). We also note the importance of honesty with regard to treatment in therapeutic communities.

Early on (in Chapter 1), the author introduces the concept and guiding principle of 'Mastery living' which he defines as 'a way of life that is practiced by people who want to take charge of their own destiny' (p. 12). This is very aligned with TA and one of its core principles, that is, that people can make decisions – and re-decisions and, therefore, decide their own destiny (see Berne [1972/1975] and Minikin [2020]) (in this special issue of the journal *Psychotherapy and Politics International*).

Other influences from TA in the book include 'oppressive self-talk', which is a manifestation of the Critical Parent, and 'nurturing self-talk' which, traditionally, is viewed as a manifestation of the Nurturing Parent. The influences from RP in the book include viewing overcoming addiction as a form of liberation, the concept of 'privilegism', which Schwebel describes as 'the downside of having everything' (p. 66), and a useful discussion (in Chapters 5 and 6) of how people are powerful (rather than powerless).

For me (Johnny), the book presented methods that are tried and true – and useful. This includes looking at the different parts of the substance abuser's life; this is important as addiction is holistic in that it involves all aspects of one's life. Schwebel also discusses (in Chapter 6) medication-assisted treatment which he frames part of helping managing craving. Although medication is often overprescribed for people suffering from addiction issues, it does have value in a number of cases. This represents a move away from RP which, at least in the 1970s, was fairly anti-medication.

Whilst I found the book useful, I didn't find much new in the first six chapters. I did, however, think that Chapter 7 on 'Taking action' was the most interesting chapter. I particularly liked the author's creation and use of the acronym KARMA, which stands for **K**now your triggers, **A**void situations that could trigger drug use, **R**esist urges (and don't surrender to temptation), **M**onitor yourself – as Schwebel puts it 'You need to watch yourself with ruthless honesty' (p. 129), and **A**ccountability, that is, to what you said you were going to do. For people suffering from addiction it's a good idea to know what your triggers are; and Schwebel's emphasis on relapse prevention is important: it's not stopping but staying stopped that's the most important part for someone who uses. I also appreciated that the book reinforces the importance of not doing it alone and using appropriate support networks.

The book is very well written and easy to read. It especially works as a workbook, and will appeal as much for family and friends as for someone thinking about their overuse of chemical substances. In this, the book could be useful for the large population of those who do not have control of alcohol, drugs and, therefore, of their lives. It may be less useful for the small(er) percentage of the population with severe addictions who would need residential services and intensive psychotherapy. Perhaps that could be the author's next book?

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