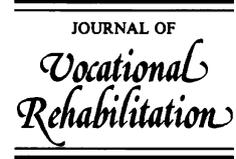




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## Book review

### **Self-Directed Behavior: Self-modification For Personal Adjustment (6th Edition), David L. Watson and Roland G., Tharp.**

Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1993, pp. 356.

Watson and Tharp combine introductory principles of applied behavior analysis with sections of former students' self-directed change procedures. This combination helps readers develop their own self-change procedures and monitor progress over time, taking into consideration the numerous recommendations and advice from the authors. The primary value of this book is two-fold: First, the principles contained in this publication can serve to once again tackle current challenges faced by professionals in either work or personal situations; second, many readers may be in a position to support individuals in their own self-directed change programs using this book as a guide.

#### **General highlights**

- Each chapter contains the following sections: outline of major content areas; learning objectives in the form of questions for the reader's initial review; actual content; chapter summary; a self-direction project (steps to take upon reading each chapter's content).
- Chapter titles are as follows:
  1. Adjustment and the Skills of Self-Direction
  2. Specifying the Goal, Overcoming Obstacles, and Building Commitment
  3. Self-Knowledge; Observation and Recording
  4. The Principles of Self-Regulation
  5. Antecedents
  6. Behaviors; Actions, Thoughts, and Feelings
  7. Consequences

#### 8. Putting It All Together

#### 9. Problem Solving and Relapse Prevention

- The bibliography contains 23 pages of references with many up-to-date citations for the interested reader.
- A name index (alphabetical listing of all authors cited in the text) and a subject index follow the bibliography.
- This book is in its sixth edition and the quality of revisions is highly evident as the authors gain feedback from readers and students who have used previous editions.
- The authors present useful forms in each chapter to provide guidance for readers as they develop a self-change procedure.
- Key pioneers in the self-change movement, including Bandura, Kanfer, and Meichenbaum, receive proper credit, and a good review of their contributing work is provided.
- The sequence of the topics allow readers to modify their self-change project based on new content and add ingredients based on newly acquired information.

#### **Specific areas of excellence**

- At the conclusion of several chapters, specific tips are provided for readers interested in self-directed change in the following areas: anxiety and stress; assertion; depression and low self-esteem; exercise and athletics; relations with others; social anxieties, social skills, and dating; smoking, drinking, and drugs; studying and time management.
- Occasional humor surfaces as in the citation for *The Unsuccessful Self-Treatment of a*

Case of 'Writer's Block' which contains a blank page found in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*.

- 'In general, people do not fail at self-modification because the techniques don't work; they fail because they don't use the techniques' (p. 23).
- The need to clearly define the target behavior in terms that can be measured is stated often with numerous examples. The authors urge readers not to concentrate on changing personality traits they think they have but to focus, instead, on specific behaviors that can be measured and to follow their progress.
- 'Self-efficacy is your own estimate of your skill in dealing with the task' (p. 43). This aspect of believing one is capable of developing strategies for change is emphasized. Specific advice is provided for increasing the reader's self-efficacy beliefs.
- Recommendations for brainstorming are provided and the authors suggest listing several potential options before deciding on a package of two or more ingredients for the self-change program.
- An excellent introduction is provided for antecedent-behavior-consequence (A-B-C) methods of recording narrative data. The primary purpose for collecting information in this fashion is to note patterns and relationships that currently exist to the target behavior.
- Several ideas are suggested for coding one's reaction to events along a Likert scale. Recommendations are provided for how to quantify feelings and reactions to events both prior to and during the self-change program.
- A general discussion is provided for different theories of how learning occurs, including an elementary introduction to respondent conditioning, regulation theory, operant conditioning, and modeling.
- Eleven general principles of self-regulation are offered to the reader as the authors provide the basic rules of how behavior change occurs.
- An excellent flavour throughout the book is the authors' emphasis to stay away from self-punishment as an option or choice. Punishment, in its behavioral context, is adequately explored but the general set of recommendations are presented to reinforce behaviors that are incompatible with the target behavior(s).
- An excellent checklist is presented on pages 262–263 to compare how thorough the reader's plan is compared to the recommendations contained in the book. This list provides a quick self-analysis for ensuring that specific recommendations have been considered and events, both before and after the target behavior, have been analyzed.
- The final two chapters are critically important and include information for changing self-directed programs based on feedback from the data and how to facilitate maintenance and transfer of newly acquired behaviors to new circumstances.

#### **Areas in which this publication could be enhanced**

- Merely reading the book without actively developing a self-directed change project will be disappointing to the reader. The maximum value of this book is acquired only by comparing the comments and suggestions by the authors to the reader's actual progress.
- The reader may wish to take advantage of the excellent bibliography and subject reference sections to expand his or her knowledge about the specific challenge of concern. In addition, information for each topic area can be updated by becoming familiar with *Current Contents* a reference resource found in most college and university libraries.
- Readers who are interested in learning about the development of self-change strategies over the past 25 years may wish to become acquainted with the original work of selected pioneers in self-directed programs.

- There is little mention of self-directed projects completed by individuals with disabilities, including mental retardation, autism, learning disabilities, and so on. Although this does not detract from the book's intent, the authors may wish to add a chapter in a future edition about how staff members have been able to assist the individuals they support to develop a self-directed program of their own.

#### **Common threads**

- The relationship among antecedents, behaviors, and consequences in both the planning and implementation phase of the project is continually highlighted.
- The authors are consistent in their emphasis on the attitude with which a reader enters into a self-directed process. Individuals must believe they are capable of change, and this self-efficacy becomes a critical first step in any self-change project.
- The excerpts and narrative accounts from people who have developed and implemented self-directed programs represent a cross section of challenges.

#### **Recommended usefulness for rehabilitation professionals**

- Rehabilitation professionals can benefit by embarking on a self-directed change program using many of the principles outlined in this book. As each professional pursues changes in their own lives, their ability to understand and learn about behavioral change strategies increases.
- Some readers who are in counseling positions will find this book to be extremely useful as reading material for the people they support. Assignments can be developed based on strategies that closely match that person's current challenge.
- Readers of this journal who currently teach a course in the area of learning styles of individuals with disabilities or an introduction to applied behavior analysis will find that this book makes an excellent supplemental text for their students.

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