

Introduction

This book came about through an interview I did with Spencer Mazyck for “Stealth Lawyer,” a Bloomberg Law series about lawyers who are no longer practicing law. In my case, Spencer wanted to know why I quit “Big Law” and got involved with something mysterious called the Alexander Technique—and also, as it turned out, he wanted to know what this Alexander Technique was all about. The interview prompted Jonathan Malysiak of ABA Publishing to contact me to see if I would be interested in writing this book.

My first reaction was to think to myself, “The world doesn’t need another book about the Alexander Technique.” Many good books about the technique already exist. In any case, I believe that books are a feeble substitute for in-person, hands-on work with a trained teacher of the Alexander Technique. Books are a useful adjunct to such work, but I wondered if I really had anything new and different to say.

But on further reflection, I decided that it would be worthwhile to write a book aimed at lawyers and others who work in similar high-skill, high-stress occupations. The Alexander Technique is best known in this country among performing artists, who are often exposed to it during their training. (It is a required part of the curriculum at such institutions as The Julliard School and the Yale School of Drama.) But I rarely encounter someone from the worlds of law, finance, and business who has heard of the Alexander Technique—and when I do, it usually turns out that he or she has a connection to the performing arts, such as a relative who is an actor, a dancer, or a musician.

I have long believed that the Alexander Technique would be of enormous benefit to lawyers, bankers, and business people if only they knew about it. My background—my twenty-five-year career as a lawyer—gives me some credibility with this potential audience. And I am able to speak and write about the technique in ways that make sense to people with similar educational and professional backgrounds to my own. The response to my interview demonstrated that.

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Most lawyers think and speak of the mind and the body as two separate aspects of themselves. We tend to erect a wall between mind and body, and most lawyers spend most of their time living on the mental side. The Alexander Technique knocks down that wall. In fact, it asserts that the wall is a fiction—a dangerous fiction that is a major contributor to back pain, neck pain, repetitive strain injuries, headaches, anxiety, insomnia, and many other problems that the Alexander Technique addresses.

The Alexander Technique teaches how the mind—our conscious thinking process—can be used to bring about beneficial changes in how we function physically, mentally, and emotionally. Because thinking is the primary tool of the technique, it is an ideal method for lawyers and other highly educated people to handle stress, alleviate pain, and improve performance. It is, moreover, very practical. It does not require that you believe in any particular philosophy or any elusive concept like chakras or energy (though it does not require that you abandon any such belief, either). Rather, it emphasizes practical experience and experimentation as a way to bring about beneficial changes in yourself.

Sometimes the technique can seem mysterious, both in the way people talk about it and in the way it feels in the moment. I enjoy the mysterious feelings, but I tend to get impatient with the mysterious talking. I like things to make sense, and I like to explain the technique to others in ways that make sense to them. This book contains my current best efforts at clearly explaining what I know about the Alexander Technique.

The substance of what I have to say comes largely from those who have taught me, including my first Alexander Technique teacher, Jessica Wolf, and my current teacher, Judy Stern; the faculty at the American Center for the Alexander Technique, where I trained and received my teacher certification; the colleagues with whom I exchange ideas and hands-on practice; and my students, from whom I learn every time we meet. All of these rich sources have informed my understanding and my teaching.

What follows is my personal perspective on the Alexander Technique: its origins, the basic concepts and skills that it teaches, how it enabled me to overcome chronic pain and feel better than I had dreamed possible, and what it can do for anyone who is inquisitive and persistent enough to spend some time working with a teacher. I hope it will inspire my readers to seek out a personal experience of the Alexander Technique.