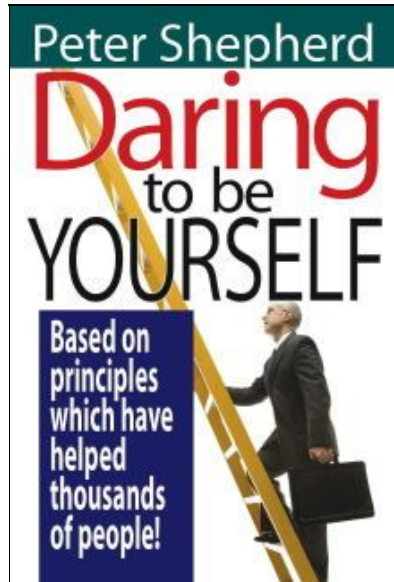


# Daring to be Yourself



## Mike Bundrant's interview with Peter Shepherd about the book, 'Daring to be Yourself'



**Peter Shepherd** is founder of [Trans4mind.com](http://Trans4mind.com) and author of *Daring to be Yourself*.



**Mike Bundrant** is publisher of [Healthy Times Newspaper](http://HealthyTimesNewspaper) and first included this interview in the Nov/Dec 2011 issue.

### Mike Bundrant: Why did you write this book, 'Daring to be Yourself' (your personal reasons)?

**Peter Shepherd:** Going back 15 years, I originally wrote 'Transforming the Mind' as a personal compilation of what I considered to be the most valuable information I had acquired from my psychology studies, particularly topics from transpersonal psychology and rational emotive psychotherapy. These may at first seem an odd combination, but in fact I believe they complement each other very well.

I then decided to put that material freely online in 1997, in the early days of the Internet, and I was surprised to find it was a popular download, indeed over half a million. It formed the basis of the [Trans4mind.com](http://Trans4mind.com) website, alongside the free Positive Approach course and our more in-depth products. More recently I was approached by a publisher to provide a text and I thought it sensible to compile the best of the book Transforming the Mind, expand a bit on the Positive Approach course, and select from the many articles I've written over the years, with revisions along the way to make it a whole.

Primarily, I have been trying to reach people with an empowering message, that they can have a much better life if they are true to themselves - their conscience, their inner knowing, their talents and creative potential.

**MB: Why "Daring"...? This presupposes that it takes courage or involves risk to be oneself. How is this the case?**

**PS:** That's right. Of course, one is already oneself, inside... one's spiritual and genetic makeup exists now. But you are not necessarily BEING that way, because that would require a re-awakening of parts of oneself that have long been put to sleep. Why were they put to sleep? Because we have learned to conform to other people's expectations and to other people's interpretations.

We may have been slapped down badly by parents or teachers in our early years, when we expressed our true feelings and inclinations. To belong to our peer group we may have had to compromise in a big way too, or to prevent being bullied. We may have had painful episodes when we tried doing (or being, feeling, saying) what we felt was right, and it all turned out wrong, so we don't try that again. Unfortunately this new, diminished way of being becomes a habit. Habits aren't changed easily, as we all know; it requires motivation and determination to do so, otherwise we slip back to what now seems "the easy way."

**MB: Isn't being myself the only choice I have?**

**PS:** No, you also have the easier choice of being a person who conforms to the expectations and standards of their peers and authority figures. Then, to awaken from that habitual way of being, we need a shock - such as a big failure or a powerful inspiration - to reveal to us that our life isn't all it could be, or that we have the chance now to start again, to achieve great things. That gives us the required motivation and determination.

We also need knowledge and experience, so that we don't fall down the same potholes as before. And we may need to acquire necessary life skills in order to succeed, such as better communication, relationships and marketing ability, or more subjectively, how to be mindful and more emotionally intelligent. All of these resources can be found in the best personal development information, such as we include at Trans4mind, and a lot of that know-how is included in my book as well.

**MB: Do you advocate a specific approach to becoming oneself - or an eclectic approach...tell us a little about the process.**

**PS:** I suppose the process is outlined most clearly in Part Four of the book called *A Positive Approach* and the first lesson, which is about Invalidation. It begins...

There are many and various ways you might have been put-down by others and as a result agreed to have less power. You need to look again at what happened and ask yourself: What choices did I make? Consider:

- What did I decide about myself ?
- What did I decide about the other person or other people?
- What did I choose to think?
- How did I choose to feel? What emotion did I choose?
- What did I choose to do?
- How did my choices affect my behavior going forward?
- What other choices could I have made, and what might the effect of each of those choices be?
- What positive learning can I get from this experience?

The positive learning is basically whatever insight you have found after realizing you have chosen one direction and that you can revise that choice if you want. For we always have choices, and the following lessons go on to look at issues such as co-dependence, suppression, criticism, taking responsibility, and then reconstructing the beliefs and considerations that drive emotions and resulting behaviors. Letting go of fear, grief, guilt and shame is then possible, and creating one's life purpose.

We all choose what we wish to be. No one can actually compel us... we may delude ourselves that it is so, but it is not. The same wind that blows a ship onto the rocks could equally blow it into safe harbor. In short, it is not the wind, it is the set of the sail. A thousand choices are daily open to every person, and we make our choices.

**MB: Can people become themselves on their own or through self-study - or is a coach, therapist or mentor a necessary part of it?**

**PS:** Having help and support from someone who has already travelled the same path can help immensely, and particularly, if certain issues are overwhelming then a psychotherapist may be needed. But given sufficient

motivation, self-directed personal development is well within most people's capability. It's all about going beyond simply reading and agreeing with some principle, but actually applying that principle in the practicalities of day-to-day living, and repeatedly so in order to develop a new habit.

There are two fundamental approaches that we adopt in life - we may be thinking about things or we may be taking action. We can do these in a masterful way, serene and calm; or we may find difficulties, get stressed and worry ourselves - in this case we have a life challenge. Well done personal development involves changing from living for tomorrow to living today. By learning to change our way of being, while facing challenges in life, and gradually developing the knowledge and skills we need, we move from stress and worry to serenity and calmness.

To illustrate this, imagine a tennis match between two players: both of whom are well involved in the action and playing well. But then it reaches a crucial point; one of the players becomes nervous, worries about whether their serve will be good enough and as a result, becomes self-conscious and serves badly. The other player stays cool and involved in the game, and thrashes the weak serve with a pass down the line. One player then is even more tense and 'out of the flow' of the game; the other is excited but calm and really into their flow.

This tennis match is just like the game of life. We all need to make plans, learn from the past, think about things, and then take action, by getting involved in making the plans a reality. But when we have challenging situations, often we have difficulties... We may not have the required knowledge and skills. We also may have previous negative experiences that we fear may happen again, or we may have acquired self-defeating beliefs as a result of our past experiences and conditioning.

These factors may prevent full involvement in, and commitment to, the actions you need to take, and impede the good performance that you need in order to succeed. By learning and applying the skills, insights and understandings that Trans4mind resources provide you are empowered to overcome these life challenges. Then although you are in the same situation, facing the same life challenge, you can now succeed!

**MB: What are the core aspect of a self (values, beliefs, assumptions, social filters?) Do you have a model for the self that you prefer?**

**PS:** The way I see it, your way of being involves a core self - the spiritual being that you brought into this world combined with your genetic inheritance - and a developed personality or ego. The ego is a model of the world and your relationship to it that is the result of all that you have experienced, through struggling to survive and express yourself. The core self is essentially loving, that's the spiritual essence, but also one is a survivalist, a product of the evolutionary line. It's easy for the ego - one's thinking self and face to the world - to become closed-minded, set in a defensive posture, with values, beliefs and assumptions based on fear, caution and anxiety, and the solutions of others that you have been conditioned to accept; but a developed, mature ego has a confident, independent, open-minded and adventurous mind-set and with values based on one's essential spirituality. Fear oriented or love oriented: these are the liability and the potential of human nature.

**MB: What is the role of individuation in becoming myself - individuation from parents, social hierarchy, etc...**

**PS:** Parents and authority figures do their best to demonstrate and teach a model of beliefs and behavior that they consider to be helpful and correct. However well-intentioned, their fears, prejudices and dogma will inevitably be passed on to the young person. In the teenage, rebellious years it may already be too late to easily brush off all this conditioning, but also in the process of rebellion and individuation a new set of values is often also adopted, that of the peer group, and it may be adopted unconsciously and without inspection. It is necessary to "grow up again" as we get older, and re-evaluate all that we believe and hold dear, in order to actually be our true selves... moving toward values based on courage, freedom and love.

**MB: Fundamentally - why don't more people set out to become themselves? It seems like this would be a primary goal - like going to college, getting a job or starting a family - but "becoming myself" isn't a popular goal and most people are not raised with clear ideas about what this means? Why?**

**PS:** We have learned to conform to the expectations of our parents and later our peers. We have established a safety net of fixed beliefs and solutions to the challenges involved in living. We may have little awareness of our inner self, as that has been suppressed alongside our natural desires and inner expression, which have so often been knocked on the head whenever they emerged in the past. Mindfulness, where we retain a certain objectivity to our emotional reactions and therefore open-mindedness, is a facet of maturity that is usually undeveloped at the time we start our careers. And as soon as we take on responsibilities it becomes increasingly difficult to take on new risks or to go against the grain. A person's self-image is their ego, and of course we identify with what we are being - we can't see that objectively.

To "change yourself" therefore appears like a betrayal of self, and all that has been invested in you, rather than the exciting possibility of actually becoming more of your true self... that is a concept few have discovered.

Parents, partners and peers also may consider it threatening to their relationship with you, and an implied criticism of their values and influence, when you express a desire to change or develop yourself. They may be jealous, envious, possessive or manipulative. For these reasons, personal development is a courageous (as well as honest and true) path to follow.

**MB: In the West are we lacking rites of passage? If so, what can we do to compensate for this?**

**PS:** In primitive societies young people are initiated in the knowledge and ways of their elders and given a chance to prove their courage and ability, to take their place as an adult. It's an empowering step, although also a commitment to the culture that would be hard to break. There is little in our society equivalent to this. Going to university perhaps. But we are inadequately prepared and often effectively alone in the passage to adulthood, and without mentors.

In particular, with society becoming more and more secular, we have failed to develop properly thought-out values. We are philosophically naive. We don't usually really know who we are, why we are here, and what the meaning of it all is.

One important thing we can do is to read widely. Reading is an active mental process and quite different from watching films or TV series, which are passive processes. Reading stimulates the imagination and provides insight into the workings of the minds of others. Empathy and understanding result from reading a wide range of classic novels, and this can't be so readily achieved in any other way, in my opinion.

We need to learn about love, above all else. Without that insight, we flounder. There's a passage in Taylor Caldwell's book, Captains and the Kings...

Joseph continued, "I was feeling, well, depressed, and I asked Harry what a man lives for. The average man. Even us. We work all our lives, struggle, plot, contrive, aim, direct our activities. That is our major occupation. Sometimes we like what we do, and it absorbs us. But in the main, the average man does not. So I asked Harry, what in the hell do we live for. For our daily bread, and endless work, and fighting, and marrying and having children, and disappointment or worse? What are our pleasures? A few hours of liberty a week, whether we live in a mansion or a hovel, a few opportunities for adultery and a few hundred pleasures, which most of us are too tired to enjoy anyway. Then we die and that is all there is. If this is so, I said to Harry, then it is not worth living."

Harry replied, "My grandmother was an old illiterate Lebanese woman, and she once told me that we live for love." Joseph laughed at that scornfully.

Unfortunately, Harry was the henchman of Joseph and never carried out his grandmother's advice. Through loyalty to Joseph he always compromised his integrity - his essential loving nature - so that finally, he killed himself to end this inner conflict.

Here is a quote from Margaret Wheatley that I feel makes life more understandable...

"When we seek for connection, we restore the world to wholeness. Our seemingly separate lives become meaningful as we discover how truly necessary we are to each other."

Love, and loving service to our fellows, connects us so we do not live isolated lives and life becomes meaningful. Krishnamurti says...

"It is love alone that leads to right action. What brings order in the world is to love and let love do what it will."

**MB: What are the top 2-5 things you'd recommend anyone do to grow more as a person?**

**PS:** Each of us can make a lot of headway by applying some simple principles and disciplines...

Firstly, to always be guided by Love, since Love is the creative force, the intent, the quality, that is your essential nature. It always leads to truth... it IS truth. So whenever you act, ask "Am I doing this through love?" This is the best way to get in touch with inner guidance, to start to know your true self.

Secondly, be mindful before reacting emotionally. Take time to breathe, to get into the present moment - pull yourself in from attention trapped in the past and the future and be grounded and centered in your body. Here and now. Then respond, from love and not from fear.

And thirdly, remember that communication is the solvent of problems. When in doubt, or you're anxious, or you feel stranded: communicate. That means to express your feelings and safeguard your rights - but equally to ask questions and listen intently, not just to spout off yourself.

These will take you a very long way. The key is to take what you learn and put it into practice in your daily life. To change the engrained habits of a lifetime, and even to change the nature programmed into your genes, is possible but it will take your determined application, over and over again, to reprogram your mind and transform yourself.

No one need accept that they must remain as they were shaped by their hereditary body-mind and by the conditioning of their childhood and culture. Each of us can evolve consciously by undertaking our own path of personal development, according to our individual needs, weaknesses and strengths.



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