

Review – The Secret to Using Your Body: A Manual for Looking Better and Feeling Younger with the Alexander Technique by Leland Vall

Review by Alan Bowers

Leland Vall's new e-book, *The Secret to Using Your Body: A Manual for Looking Better and Feeling Younger with the Alexander Technique*, is a significant addition to the body of self-guided explorations of the Alexander Technique. The book might at one time have been called a *vademecum*, a "go with me," a handbook that you carry in your pocket and reach for when the need arises.

Vall's e-book consists of an introduction and ten parts, each part involving the guided exploration of a procedure such as "Lying Down" or "Standing and Bending." Each procedure is presented with the precision of a legal argument, articulating goals that might structure the reader's work for years.

A reader who dips back into the book after a break will immediately find familiar territory because of the way the book is organized. The exploration of each procedure is divided into several steps. There are, for instance, four steps—or competencies—involved in "Find Room as You Move." As the last step in each procedure is presented, all the preceding steps are reiterated.

Vall speaks the language of letting and allowing. He returns to those concepts throughout as well as to the wish that the student ought to "gently point the top of the spin as if it were reaching past the back of the head." The tone is always positive, and the goals well articulated.

Vall offers compassionate, relevant advice. On the subject of shortening, he cautions: "This tendency is part of the fabric of our lives, and when our energy level goes up, the tendency to shorten and narrow the body goes up with it." He treats end-gaining in a creative, positive way. "Movement," he says, "does not have to mean going from position to position...almost all movement can be part of one smoother and easier continuum." Vall's commitment to Alexander's principles clearly shines through.

In the introduction, Vall describes an experience familiar to many students of the Technique, the "Aha!" moment precipitated by the hands of an experienced teacher. He then asks that the reader do the same kind of solo work that guided Alexander to his discoveries. It is a lot to ask of a modern reader whose attention span is conditioned by the Internet! Vall deliberately slows he reader down. He advocates quiet self-observation—an enhanced awareness.

This book is not, in my opinion, for the new student of the Alexander Technique but rather for one who has some experience monitoring his or her own use. It would be a good place to send students, motivated to work on their own, who want structure between lessons.

The book is available for purchase on the author's website as a PDF file. You can print out the entire book or a page or two, stick those pages in your pocket, and provide a little structure for you break from work or your day at the beach, or own *vademeccum*.

Alan bowers, graduate of the American Center for the Alexander Technique, has served on the voice faculties of California State University-Northridge, Simpson College, Ithaca College, and the University of Hawaii, and has conducted symposia throughout the United States. In 2003 he received the New York Singing Teachers Association's Distinguished Professional Certificate. He teaches both voice and the Alexander Technique in New York City.