

ATSA

MAKING SOCIETY SAFER

THE FORUM NEWSLETTER

Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers

Vol. XXVII, No. 1
Winter 2015

Book Review

Review submitted by David Prescott, Forum Review Editor

Ancient Ethics for Today's Healers

Geral Blanchard
NEARI Press

"Mr. Blanchard, I have to admit that I feel better about my life now that I've given up hope."

"Hey Gerry, I think I'm finally well enough to tell you how sick I really am!"

How can these humorous, bittersweet statements from clients exist in a book that purports to be about ethics? What kind of therapist collects these marvelous near-paradoxical statements? The answer to these questions is that *Ancient Ethics* is about far more than basic ethical codes; it's a deep exploration of the values underlying human beings' attempts to understand and help one another. The above quotes come from a section on humor and its place in therapy.

Geral Blanchard's unyielding passion for helping others heal has taken him on a journey of over 40 years. His primary area of focus across much of his career has been in helping those who have suffered and perpetrated interpersonal violence. During recent years, Geral has traveled the world many times over seeking to understand the ways of indigenous healers. This single fact alone makes Blanchard a very courageous man (he could simply work at his practice), and this book continues a trend of increasingly bold publications. In an era of increasing attention to evidence-based treatment protocols and the principles of effective correctional programming, others would be quick to find methodological flaws in Blanchard's methods. However, they would be missing his point. Blanchard is inviting us to return to the heart and soul of helping others.

In his 2011 companion to this volume, *Ancient Ways: Indigenous Healing Innovations for the Twenty-First Century*, Blanchard provided hundreds of pages of methods that he has collected over the years. Although at first glance, this may seem without application to today's methods, the book is full of excellent ideas and useful information. Even in the first chapters he reminds us of easily-forgotten aspects of how humans heal and change their lives. For example, he describes a number of universal activities common to ancient (and in many cases, modern) healing. These include the often long journey to a sacred space where healing can take place. Once there, there would be the equivalent of an altar or the like where the healer would work. Blanchard's point is that the journey and setting on their own build hope and expectancy, two elements found in virtually all bona fide forms of psychotherapy. While that may seem obvious in print, it should give us pause to think about the journeys that our clients take from where they reside to where treatment takes place. Many professionals put considerable thought into the arrangements of an office or group therapy room. How many among us consider how we might utilize each client's trip to our office? Or do we settle for



Geral Blanchard

the highly managed movement of a prison environment or the long ride on a bus to an outpatient provider? How might we better create hope and expectancy?

Where *Ancient Ways* explored indigenous healing methods, Blanchard's follow-up, *Ancient Ethics*, explores the ethical substrates of healing across time, place, and culture. He also explores how professionals can learn from indigenous healers in a respectful way. At the same time, Blanchard uses what he has learned to illustrate the many ways our current practices can cause harm (such as over-reliance on medications and the deceptive advertising of "Big Pharma", misuse of diagnostic labels). Topics include teaching fearlessness and hope; the roles of confidence, sincerity, and humility; the use of language; spirituality; the potential for some modern treatments to cause harm; the common factors in most successful current treatments and their correlates in indigenous healing, and many other topics.

One section of very direct relevance to professionals in the field is so worthy of consideration that it is worth including a significant passage. Blanchard's extensive history includes studying the responses to sexual abuse among the Hollow Water First Nation in Manitoba. About this, he writes:

Their revolutionary approach to equalizing relationships in the community and the courtroom is a beautiful experience to behold. . . . Women of this small community established guiding rules of conduct in dealing with the abuse problem. For example, their healing ethics hold that:

When a person commits a sexual assault it is too simple to regard it as a sign of individual pathology; it is a reflection of a community that is out of balance and is in need of healing...

Some crimes, like sexual assault, are too serious for jails to treat. Those who have abused must remain in their home community to dialog with their victims and their neighbors who have witnessed their acts first hand.

Isolation from the tribe, as imposed by incarceration, works against the healing process...

Courtrooms, with their impersonal processes, are not safe places for community members who have been abused. All adversarial environments, whether in the courtroom, therapy group, or probation office, establish barriers to healing.

Sexual abuse is not about broken laws but about broken relationships. Relationships are not restored in isolated jail cells or in solitary confinement far from home, nor by court orders disallowing all forms of contact between the people involved in abuse.

If persons engage in relationships of power and abuse, then healing justice must afford them experiences of relationships based on respect, sharing, and empowerment.

Healing processes are embedded in the day-to-day social aspects of a healthy group of people, as opposed to a few brief moments, every now and then, with an individual therapist who is usually a stranger.

Clearly, this is not an introductory text on assessment and treatment. Just the same, it belongs on every professional's bookshelf, both within the field of treating sexual abuse and without.

While so many in our field discuss which models work best and debate whether treatment even works at all, Blanchard has quietly gone about studying how people have actually helped one another across time, place, and culture. Far from a book about ethical violations such as the misuse of assessment measures, Blanchard brings us the world, leading us to assess ourselves.