

A book really can change your life!



After a series of life-changing events, Mandy Appleyard, 54, from York, found solace in what was, for her, the most surprising place

My life had taken a sudden turn for the worse. I'd always seen myself as a strong person, but as I lay on my bed in tears for the second day running, feeling panicky with nerves one minute and paralysed with fear the next, I hadn't a clue what to do.

I'd never encountered so many crises all at once. My parents had separated after 45 years of marriage, my eight-year relationship had ended after the heartbreak of two miscarriages, and, out of the blue, I had just been diagnosed with a potentially fatal liver disease.

My life had seemed quite charmed until this moment, but suddenly it looked like a dark and scary place. I confided in friends and family, cried and ate too much chocolate. Then my best friend Suzanne recommended a self-help book she loved, *The Road Less Travelled*, by M. Scott Peck. I was

unconvinced, even when she raved about how it had helped her. "They are full of jargon and clichés," I said.

But when I began to see a bereavement counsellor to help me come to terms with the miscarriages, he too recommended a self-help book, this time *Feeling Good – The New Mood Therapy* by psychiatrist Dr David Burns. Again, I was sceptical, even though he promised it would offer me techniques for a more positive outlook on life. "Trust me. Read this one," my counsellor urged.

I did – and so began my conversion to self-help books. I devoured David Burns' 700-page, wonderfully wise book, startled by how much it seemed relevant to how

I was feeling. What resonated most was his argument that: "It is only your beliefs about yourself that can affect the way you feel. Others can say or think whatever they want about you, but only your thoughts will influence your emotions."



Simple but true, it was empowering to realise I had control over my feelings, rather than them having power over me. It brought me to a better understanding of my mood swings and lack of confidence; to my addiction to love and approval, and my quickness to anger and criticise.

Admittedly, while the book wasn't a magic wand, it was quietly enlightening. Encouraged, I next read *You Can Change Your Life* by Tim Laurence, which proved to be another turning point. It's about identifying negative patterns of behaviour from your childhood and resolving the issues of the past that are holding you back. I was forced to look at myself, the dynamics in my family, and the anger I had been carrying from childhood; one I wasn't even aware of. I read about

forgiveness as a gateway to healing – which wasn't always easy – but I was willing to take the advice offered. And I'm glad I did.

These self-help books shed new light on me and my world, and clearly I am not alone. Behaviour change specialist Dr Michael Mantell says women find them useful to counter negative experiences. "When women have problems, they often blame themselves. Self-improvement books are an accessible way of helping them repair their lack of self esteem."

Since then, I have read scores of self-help books and continue to gain so much from them – whether about relationships, work or health. When I look back at that difficult chapter in my life, I know the books I once held in such cynical regard helped me out of a dark place and put me on a healthier path.

Six more self-help books that you should read when you're...

ANXIOUS AND LACK CONFIDENCE

READ THIS: *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan Jeffers (Vermilion, £8.99)

WHY: This classic bestseller offers dynamic techniques to help you grab hold of your fears and move forward with your life. Susan teaches us what we are afraid of and why, how to let go of the victim mentality, and the secret of making 'no lose' decisions. Includes daily mantras and practical exercises to help you feel less afraid.

TOP TIP: The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it!

LOOKING FOR LOVE

READ THIS: *Get the Guy* by Matthew Hussey (Bantam Press, £12.99)

WHY: An easy-to-read guide on how to find men, attract them and keep them interested. The author, a relationship expert and matchmaker, explains how to land a first date, establish emotional intimacy, flirt, and get what you want in bed. This is a fun read, and Matthew is a likeable guide to the human heart.

TOP TIP: Increasing the number of new men you meet each week will have a dramatic impact on your love life in just a few months.

WORRIED / ANXIOUS

READ THIS: *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* by Dale Carnegie (Cedar, £9.99)

WHY: This book's divided into 10 sections, each one tackling some aspect of worry and offering practical pointers for breaking out of this destructive habit. Tips include doing something good for others, being grateful for what you have and trying to live each day one day at a time. Inspiring success stories from people who changed their ways are there to help you see potential benefits.

TOP TIP: Use mantras such as: 'I will be happy. I will try to strengthen my mind by learning something new.'

STUCK IN A LIFE RUT

READ THIS: *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne (Atria, £16.99)

WHY: Wishful thinking gets real! This bestseller says that if you think about something really hard, you'll get it. Want a new car? Think positively, as if it's already yours, and by what this book calls 'the law of attraction', you'll get it. Yes, really! Sounds like a stretch, but over 19 million people worldwide have bought this book, and guru Oprah Winfrey is a big fan.

TOP TIP: There's no such thing as a hopeless situation. Every single circumstance of your life can change for the better.

DOUBTING YOURSELF

READ THIS: *Love Yourself Like Your Life Depends On It* by Kamal Ravikant

WHY: After finding himself sick, broken-hearted and in financial trouble, the author resolved to stop being miserable. This short, 63-page book shares the techniques he used to pull himself out of depression and back to full health, by repeating the words 'I love myself' in his head all day. Sounds crazy? Maybe, but it worked for him, so it might for you!

TOP TIP: Believe in yourself and love yourself intensely every day.

BROKEN-HEARTED

READ THIS: *How to Survive the Loss of a Love* by Peter McWilliams, Harold H

WHY: Comforting and inspiring, its one-page chapters are full of reminders, proverbs and advice for anyone trying to overcome loss. Sections include Understanding Loss, Surviving, and Healing and Growing, in a gentle, easy-to-read format. There's even a 'write-your-own poetry' lesson. Short and sweet, but very useful.

TOP TIP: Let yourself hurt, you will survive, you will smile again, life really is worth living.