

The Alexander Technique: Empowered to Live Fully by Corinna Trabucco

If I were to use a one-word definition to describe the Alexander Technique, I would define it as consciousness. The Alexander Technique, named for its founder, F.M. Alexander, is unique in its ability to expand mind/body awareness in everyday activities such as sitting, standing, walking, and talking. A skilled teacher uses gentle hands-on guidance and verbal cues to help the student identify habits of tension and movement. These habits of tension can interfere with balance and coordination in the performance of any activity. Through a series of lessons, the Alexander Technique student gains more insight into these unwanted habits and becomes able to transfer the skill to new and more demanding activities such as public speaking or acting, singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, using a computer, golf, and horseback riding. Years of habitual tension and mal-coordination can be replaced with a sense of ease and well-being, improved balance and posture, and relief from pain.

As Frank Pierce Jones says in *Freedom to Change*: "...the Alexander Technique doesn't teach you something new to do. It teaches you how to bring more practical intelligence into what you are already doing: how to eliminate stereotyped responses: how to deal with habit and change. It leaves you free to choose your own goal but gives you a better *use of yourself* while you work toward it."¹ "Use" is the term that F.M. Alexander employed to describe the way a person performs any activity.

For example, you could identify a friend walking toward you from a fairly long distance by his gait. This gait is indicative of the way he "holds" himself, of his posture, and the tension which informs the way in which he moves. This way of moving has become instinctual, habitual, unconscious. Alexander defines instinct in *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* as "established habits, inherited or developed".² These habits are established in our senses and confirm for us what feels "right" or "wrong". Alexander discovered that the *feeling* of being right or wrong is often faulty. He called this "faulty sensory appreciation". For example, a person who has the habit of holding the head to the left side will "feel" as though his head is upright. When the head is delicately balanced and guided by an experienced Alexander teacher, he will incorrectly imagine that his head is now too far to the right.

FM Alexander was an actor who discovered that his vocal problems (chronic laryngitis) were directly related to the way he *used himself*. He noticed that he tightened his neck and pulled his head back and down which triggered a pattern of tension in his whole body: his shoulders lifted, his spine and back became compressed, his legs stiffened, and he gripped the floor by curling his toes. By observing himself in a three way mirror, he discovered that if he put his head forward and allowed his back to lengthen he improved his voice. He practiced this repeatedly by giving himself a set of mental directions "*I want to let my neck be free, to let my head move forward and up, to let my back be long and wide, to let my knees move forward and away*". He observed that his habit was so strong that the moment he opened his mouth to recite, he triggered the pattern of tension in himself.

He realized it was not enough to give himself these directions. While continuing to direct himself, Alexander decided he must refrain from or *inhibit* speaking, until he could keep from retracting his head when he opened his mouth to speak. Alexander experimented and found that he could interrupt and change his pattern which not only freed him from his vocal problems, but led him to a better use of himself in all his activities.

Over time, the improved state of being brought about by having lessons in the Alexander Technique, can influence the way people make decisions about themselves and their environment. Alexander found that people's beliefs about themselves and their world were often misguided or false and were closely linked with the way they used themselves and their faulty sensory perception. By using the "means whereby", Alexander's name for the "reasoned direction and control of the psycho-physical mechanisms"², people are empowered to change not only their use but their lives.

I have taught the Alexander Technique to people from all walks of life: from those who want to improve their posture to software engineers suffering from repetitive strain injury. Performing artists find it immensely helpful in controlling performance anxiety and developing agility, characterization, and authenticity. Horseback riders find great similarities between dressage training for horses and Alexander Technique for riders. Those trying to recover from injury and those suffering from chronic pain (often related to postural sets) find help in breaking these habits of compensation. They all benefit from the preventative focus of the technique.

During a lesson, the teacher will guide the student through activities such as sitting and standing by gently placing her hands on the student's neck, head, back, hips and legs. The teacher will lie the student on a table for part of the lesson to improve the relationship of her head, neck, back and limbs and then return her to standing to continue the work in sitting, standing, speaking, etc. In between lessons, students are encouraged to practice lying down and observe their use as they go about their day.

Footnotes:

1. *Freedom to Change*, Frank Pierce Jones
2. *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, FM Alexander

Corinna Trabucco is an [AmSAT](#) certified teacher of the Alexander Technique. In 1991, she completed the three-year training program required to become an Alexander Technique teacher and convey the kinesthetic experience with the hands that is the special craft on which teaching the Alexander Technique is based. She has an MA in Theatre Education and was an assistant professor and Director of the Dance Department of Emerson College from 1976-1981. She has taught in the College of Fine Arts at BU and Stonehill College, Easton, MA [Click for More Info](#). She has taught extensively throughout New England since 1991, has a private practice in Gloucester, Concord, Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA, and has assisted the training of teachers at the Dimon institute for the Alexander Technique. Corinna continues to hone her skills as an Alexander Technique Teacher and has completed a three-year training with Betsy Polatin in *The Actor's Secret* which involves combining work in Alexander Technique*

with those of the Breathing Coordination Techniques of Carl Stough and Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing.

** An AmSAT certified teacher of the Alexander Technique must complete a three (3) year, 1600 hour approved AmSAT training course. The training focuses on the continued change of the trainees' own use in order to convey the kinesthetic experience with the hands that is the special craft on which the teaching is based.*

For more information about the Alexander Technique:

www.corinnatrabucco.com

www.amsatonline.com