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Clarion Review

Building Better Relationship
Jim Swanger
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Most relationship improvement books are marketed to women. Perhaps it's because women are more eager to fix and/or improve relationships. Men are known for avoiding in-your-face emotion and are unlikely to read a book about relationship building unless coerced by a partner. This guidebook on improving relationships, written by a male therapist, caters exclusively to men and is a great resource to help them do the inner work necessary for transforming their relationships.

Building Better Relationships is divided into seven chapters, each arranged according to a therapeutic journey. The first two chapters compare relationship building to building a bridge. They describe the necessary components using analogies like blueprints, building codes, reinforcements, guidelines, pouring a foundation, paving the roadway, and getting paid. Next, the author discusses self-sabotages that can occur when one decides to make major changes, including forgetfulness, anger, drinking, and boredom.

Chapters four through seven focus on a series of meditations and journaling exercises or "road trips" that guide the reader on the journey to a new relationship. Final sections include an appendix of lined pages on which to write notes, a recommended reading list, and the bibliography.

A licensed marriage and family psychotherapist with more than ten years of experience, Jim Swaniger specializes in relationship issues, depression, anxiety, and fear. Swaniger works with individuals, couples, and families to help them gain emotional insight and improve their relationships.

Overall, this is a good book with helpful content and real-life case studies and examples. Swaniger asks readers to take inventory of their lives and relationships and offers tools that can help lighten the burdens of the past. Particularly helpful are the studies of the destructive forces of alcoholism and self-medication that can reverberate through generations.

Certain cosmetic changes would help improve the book's flow. Because Building Better Relationships is written for an audience that's reluctant to ask for help, it would be best to begin

the therapeutic work in chapter two instead of four. The long three-chapter buildup, which is repetitious at times, may put off an already reluctant reader. Instead of using the “notes” section, readers should be encouraged to use a separate notebook, since this kind of work usually takes many years and multiple journals.

The author is a trained hypnotist, and an effective addition to this publication would be a companion hypnosis CD with relaxation music and vocals for the guided imagery exercises.

The little book demands a lot of dedicated hard work. To improve relationships, it’s not enough to simply have knowledge of the past; readers must also understand how past events impact the present. Understanding who you are based on your past goes a long way toward making changes that build better relationships with others.

Angela Black