

**AEDP Author as True Other:  
A Successful Application of AEDP Ethos in a Self-Help Book:  
A Review of Ron Frederick's**

***Loving Like You Mean It: Use the Power of Emotional Mindfulness to  
Rewire Your Brain and Transform Your Relationships***

**Carrie Ruggieri**

*Loving Like You Mean It* is a sequel to Ron Frederick's 2009 best-selling book, *Living Like You Mean It*. On the surface it is a self-help book. But in fact, it is whatever a reader needs it to be (an AEDP primer, a model for how to scaffold complex information yet retain the complexity, how to write suspenseful vignettes, how to rewire a brain, how to author as a True Other, and how to free oneself to love like you meant it). This is not simply masterful; it is wizardry.

Frederick enables the reader, at once and throughout, to apprehend the mysteries of the human heart in animate layers. Through a cognitive illumination of how our earliest relationships wire our brains to affect our perceptions and behaviors in our adult relationships, into an experienced-near reflection of how we live this wiring in our most tender and vital of emotions, and throughout this integrated cognitive-experiential reading, we find ourselves swept up from its gravity, only to be captured by astonishment.

AEDP therapists will recognize that Frederick has transported us directly into the map of state transformation (Fosha, 2009), the spiral coiled neatly upon itself. Frederick accomplishes this with bone-deep knowing and a faithful erudition of our AEDP ethos (Fosha, 2010), that binds this multidimensional self-help/AEDP-therapist primer.

He begins where the first of our AEDP ethos would have us begin, by establishing safety and “undoing aloneness” through his unsparing self-disclosure (Prenn, 2009). From the get-go he joins us in the most elemental human suffering, how to love and be loved, by sharing the story of his youthful challenges with intimacy. He invites us to join him at any level of intimacy which feels emotionally safe (Pando-Mars, 2016), be it intellectual illumination or emotional identification and self-reflection. No matter, Frederick is present for all of it. He writes,

*The falling in love part—going from butterflies and sweaty palms to  
passion and*

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*euphoria in what seemed like an instant—was pretty easy and amazing. But it was the staying-there-and-making-it-work part that was already tripping me up. I just didn't get it. Wasn't loving someone supposed to be fairly effortless, I wondered? Was there something I was missing or not getting? Was there something I was doing wrong? (p. xi)*

Though our sympathetic memory, we feel the tug of poignancy and tenderness, and his narrative re-ignites the truer core sorrow. While our truer sorrow is present, so is Frederick's foresight into his complete and healed future self. He shares with us his emblematic passage from Rainer Maria Rilke, given to him by his therapist:

*For one human being to love another:  
that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks;  
the ultimate, the last test and proof,  
the work for which all other work is but preparation.*

Following Frederick's self-disclosure, we are invited into the healing journeys of Karla, Craig, Sheri and Bruce. Each is an archetypal hero of their respective attachment style. It struck me our heroes are so familiar, and their angst in intimacy so ordinary yet urgent, that the effect is to invoke in us the feeling of wordless bewilderment Frederick described for himself: How can something as essential as breathing, so defining of the human experience, be so darn elusive?

Through Frederick's patients we can witness our relational blunders while feeling the surety of our author's soothing and confident reassurance. We wince at Bruce's unwitting comment while he is dressing, and we feel Karla's bewilderment following the churn of confusion and fear by a seeming innocuous statement over coffee with her partner. While holding Karla and Bruce, Frederick's brilliance is to bring us into their emotional experience in order to be also held by our author. He does this by writing exceptionally vivid and suspenseful portraits. I surprised myself with hearing the sound of my voice in exclaiming, "*Oh come ON Craig...!*" But my True-Other author was instantly present to offer a compassionate explanation of Craig's behavior and a promise that Craig will come around in the end, and so will I.

Embedded in every word of Frederick's writing is his supreme faith in our AEDP ethos that when presented with a healing environment, we will recognize it and we will respond (Fosha, 2001, Russell, 2015). But we don't have to climb mountains. A reflective stroll with a wise and kind true other may be all that is needed. Frederick writes,

*We don't have to be completely healed to have better relationships. That's not realistic. But when we can be with our emotional experience and effectively respond to different aspects of it, we can bring our better self to our relationships and relate to our partners more skillfully. We can speak to them from our adult-self, rather than through the eyes of an overwhelmed, frightened child... In fact, this is precisely what Craig did (pg. 118.)*

The core of the book is Ron's four-step emotional mindfulness-based, self-help approach he introduced in 2009: (1) recognize and name, (2) stop, drop and stay, (3) pause and reflect, and (4) mindfully relate. Frederick's approach became the basis for several research studies which found his approach to be an effective treatment for anxiety and depression (Johansson, 2015).

As Frederick's patients achingly and valiantly progress through the four steps of emotional mindfulness, we become immersed in messages of tenacious confidence and fierce compassion for his clients. We cheer on Blake and marvel at how he got from rigid (on page 12) to vulnerable (on page 203). As his patients progress at a pace of experience and reflection, disruption-recalibration-repair-re-attunement, Frederick lifts the veil of mystery. Where we leaned into Frederick's hard-earned clarity, we now envision some clarity of our own possibilities, i.e., how we might perceive and respond in ways that ensure we give and receive love as it is meant to be.

Faithful to yet another AEDP ethos, Frederick is insistent *that his readers have an experience*. He guides us to self-reflect with workbook-style reflection exercises. Having had the vicarious experience of successful and safe reflection through Craig and Karla in therapy with our author, we are primed to be kinder to ourselves than we might otherwise be. Frederick's precise pacing and scaffolding has equipped us to feel and deal with confidence. There is a palpable sense that our author has not abandoned us to our self-reflection. This effect seems to be accomplished through his moment-to-moment anticipation of what we might need to hear from him at the right time. He paces and supports our self-reflection with comments such as, "I say this to you from a very specific place," "I get it," and, "Are you with me?" He anticipates reactions and swoops in to supply regulation: "Now before you start getting down on yourself..." "You may be feeling, but..." He is careful to prevent shame reaction by using language such as, "those of us" as opposed to the more detached, "people who." Our author lets us know over and over that he cares for us: "And last but not least, you don't have to do it alone, I'm going to help you" (p. xxi).

Frederick's closes with the allegory of the velveteen rabbit. It is an image that circles us back to the quintessential security that lay within our being, before, during and ever after our Rilkean trials to 'work hard' our way into freedom to love and be loved. Yet, it is also evocative from any perspective, for every reader. I experience this closing from the rabbit's perspective: Amazed and grateful for my author's wizardry, for "Once you are real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

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