

## God Helps Those Who Help Themselves!

By Stuart White  
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This week I bought Katie Byron's book "LOVING WHAT IS". Its sales pitch was 4 questions – "Would you like to; reach a new and profound understanding about your life? Replace pain with laughter and joy? Exchange depression for a lightness of being? and Find Freedom?" Sounds good to me - if I could achieve even one of those objectives it will be well worth the modest P175 investment. Buoyed by that thought I went on my way, only to bump into a friend of mine who noticed my purchase and commented "Oh you read THOSE books". Oh dear – I'd been put in the self-help box.

I have often wondered why they call it that. Clearly it helps direct people to the right section in the bookshop but let's face it - it's the most unsexy and uncool of titles and who wants to be seen strolling around there? You might just as well call it emotional cripples, sad losers or desperate suicide risk section.

It reminded me of the joke told by George Carlin "I went into a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, 'Where's the self-help section?', to which she replied 'If I told you, it would defeat the purpose'." But this subject is no laughing matter, neither is that category "self-help". Call it whatever and tag it with any dysphemism but the self-help industry is booming when other industries are crumbling around us. Americans spent \$11 billion in 2008 on self-help books, CDs, seminars, personal coaching, transformation and stress management programmes – up 13.6% on what was spent in 2005. Clearly it's big business!

So who typically buys this stuff? Well I was a bit disheartened to learn one study conclude it was middle aged females looking for hope. This does not fit with my own self-image (prime of life handsome bachelors, who have it all and are just looking for enlightenment). But this was an American study so I guess it is continent specific. The research also cited how often buyers purchase such books. Steve Salrino's book "SHAM. HOW THE SELF HELP MOVEMENT MADE AMERICA HOPELESS" noted that people who buy self-help paraphernalia are the same people who are likely to have bought a similar book in the past 18 months. Cynical Salerno observes – "surely if they need another book, tape, seminar or intervention, then the previous ones obviously didn't deliver on their promise".

Now while that may be true for the hopeless masses clutching at printed paper straws, there are a number of us out there who do believe that reading self-improvement books play a significant role in your self-development and that the more you read the more you grow. At any time I have a number of them on my bedside table. There is Deepak Chopra, Eckart Tolle, Dan Millman, Brandon Bays and now Katie Byron has joined them. Many of these books I am working through for the second and third time, finding different lessons, comparing thinking, hearing messages for the first time. Granted, my books tend to be spiritual, but these fit into the self-help section far away from the religion shelves.

But back to my friend's response which caught me by surprise because personal transformation, growth, whatever you call it, is just change and it's a goal to which everyone aspires. Losing weight, gaining self-esteem, finding balance, making more money - these are just some of the ways in which people the world over want to alter their lives.

So what does the size of the self help industry say about change? Well according to Dr. Jim Taylor, no-one has yet found the secret or the answer - titles which incidentally are two bestselling personal-transformation books. Of course there are charlatans and frauds and claims as long as Pinocchio's nose e.g. the Law of Attraction offered in THE SECRET. According to its author Rhona Byrnes, this is a natural law as real as gravity (for those of you who didn't read it, it basically purported that you become or attract what you think about the most) - and look how many people bought into that - yes, you are probably one of them. You see there is a market that wants to believe that they can get what they want - easily - and no surprise then that after it was endorsed by Oprah it made millions in books, movies and training programmes.

The industry is so lucrative because people are attracted to quick fixes. Shortcuts to wealth, happiness, reduced cellulite, less pain, ease from depression, remedy the relationship... cure what is not right in their world. The fact is, there is no shortcut and no easy answer, even in this 'I can have everything I want without any effort' culture.

Contrary to what anyone tells you, change is not easy, nor quick. It takes incredible commitment, time, energy and effort. How do I know - easy, I read it in a book.

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