



How To Get People To Do Their Healing Work: Lead By Example, Change the Culture, Peak Performance

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2026 Note: This essay was first written more than twenty-five years ago. As the reader will realize, some of the hoped-for changes regarding attitudes toward therapy and emotional healing have begun to occur in many churches.

A student in our pastoral counseling class asked the very understandable question: "How do you get people to heal their old wounds, instead of 'inflicting their pain on others'?" I have tried to write out some of my thoughts:

I. An introductory thought: My assessment is that the Immanuel Approach and EMDR are much more accessible (realistic investment of time, energy, money) than any prior mode of therapy or healing tool. This changes the equation with respect to how easy/hard it will be to get others to do it. (It's a lot easier to get people to brush their teeth than to get root canals.) It should become easier to get people to pursue their own healing as the general population becomes more aware of how realistically available and effective the Immanuel Approach and EMDR are (just as it became much easier to get people to see a dentist as high speed drills and Novocain became widely available and known).

II. Some ideas that might work, especially with those who are less severely wounded:

- **Teach about it:** Give examples of the kinds of old wounds that can affect us, the kind of burdens/hindrances they will produce when not healed, and the kind of freedom one can expect with healing.
- **Encourage people to get healing for old wounds, and offer or direct them to a realistically available resource:** For example: "Pastor _____ and I have time each Wednesday afternoon for healing prayer. Please let us know if you would like us to pray with you." Refer folks to someone they know and trust who uses the Immanuel Approach and/or EMDR.
- **Help lay people get training and facilitate healing for each other:** An important part of the ideal picture is for many lay-people to get at least basic Immanuel Approach training and then facilitate healing for each other. This is an especially reasonable option if there are intermediate-advanced Immanuel Approach facilitators that can provide back-up.

III. Lead by example, change the culture:

- Being painfully honest, I think that direct confrontation, encouragement, request, and direction will often fail. It is very difficult for a deeply wounded person to face the truth about his/her woundedness and need for healing *in the face of pain, fear, denial, defenses, AND all the stigma and implications in our current culture.* My observation is that the direct approach often results in a direct correlation:

the more

- deeply wounded the person is
- dysfunctional his/her behavior, thoughts, and emotions are
- obvious and urgent his/her need for healing is

the more

- likely he/she will be to misinterpret your confrontation, encouragement, request, direction,
- threatened and unsafe he/she will feel,
- intensely defensive he/she will become,

and the less likely he/she will be to seek out the healing he/she needs.

- The most important component of the short term solution is to lead by example. The pastors and the strongest, healthiest, bravest, wisest, and most mature members of the church need to lead humbly in this process. They need to acknowledge their own brokenness, do their own emotional healing work, and then share openly about their old wounds, personal struggles, healing experiences, and increasing freedom. Furthermore, others in the community will observe steadily increasing positive changes as these leaders embrace a lifestyle of regular Immanuel Approach healing work. My hope is that the people who are most healthy will feel strong enough and secure enough to try this. Their example, testimony, and steadily increasing observable fruit can help tremendously with encouraging others to get healing.
- An even more powerful long term solution will be to change the culture regarding woundedness, personal struggle, and emotional healing. My hope is that we can eliminate the stigma of doing emotional healing work by changing the culture (especially in the church) **from:** "the needy, defective, wounded, mentally ill people need emotional healing, but the rest of us strong, healthy people don't" **to:** "We ALL need healing. The wisest, strongest, healthiest, bravest, most-mature people are pushing and shoving to get in line for healing. They realize how much it will bless them and they make it a high priority."
- My fantasy ideal is a deep and profound change in the culture in our churches regarding woundedness, personal struggles, and emotional healing. In our current culture:
 - We wonder "Hmm, I saw Tom coming out of Dr. Lehman's office. I wonder what is wrong with him? We shouldn't have him on the council if he is wounded, needy, or has problems."
 - Someone who needs healing feels: "If anybody knows I have problems and am seeing Dr. Lehman they will think less of me/fire me/vote me off the council, etc."
 - If you suggest/advise/encourage someone to do emotional healing work, they will feel insulted, criticized, and threatened. "Are you saying I am weak? Needy? That I can't handle it? That I need help? That I'm mentally ill? 'Sick?', 'Crazy?' etc."In contrast, in my hoped-for culture:
 - We will wonder "Hmm, John is one of the few people in our church who has not done any emotional healing work. I wonder what he is afraid of? I wonder how we can help him deal with his fears and get healing. We certainly don't want anybody in leadership who is not able to see their own woundedness and to get help."
 - Someone who needs emotional healing will think, "I am really afraid to acknowledge and face this stuff, but people will start to wonder if I wait much longer. I know that I am one of the few people in our church who has not done any emotional healing work, and I can see that the others who have been avoiding it are the most fearful, defensive, and dysfunctional members. If I don't want to be stigmatized I better get to it."

- Most of the time there will be no need to suggest that a person needs to do emotional healing work, since everybody will assume that is the norm. The healthiest will be most able to perceive their need and get what they need. If someone suggests or encourages that a person do emotional healing work, it would be much easier to feel: "Oh, of course, everybody does this. Thanks for pointing out my blind spot -- I didn't see it. Now I can get rid of it." At the worst, the most defensive, insecure, and dysfunctional people will be the only ones who need encouragement. Instead of feeling, "Why are you singling me out as being in need of emotional healing?" they might think "Oh no! I have been found out. I was afraid someone would realize that I am one of the few people in our church avoiding any personal healing work. I know I need it too, but I have been so afraid!"

IV. Marriage enrichment as a special context: Presenting this new approach for emotional healing in the context of marriage enrichment and as a tool for marriage enrichment may provide an especially un-intimidating way to introduce the Immanuel Approach.

- **General stigma:** My perception is that the average church member will feel less intimidated and/or self-conscious receiving emotional healing in the context of marriage enrichment. And most people will feel more comfortable signing up for a seminar presented as marriage enrichment than for a seminar for emotional healing.
- **Our own marriage:** Charlotte and I have found Immanuel Approach healing work with each other to be a profound experience of intimacy and healing. Facilitating Immanuel Approach healing for each other in the context of our marriage has been the single most powerful source and avenue of healing in our lives. In the context of my psychotherapy practice, I am constantly encouraging people regarding their courage and wisdom in acknowledging their problems and coming for help in pursuing their healing. But if I am painfully honest, I felt self-conscious and experienced some amount of embarrassment when I was working with a therapist at the front end of my healing journey. Working with Charlotte as my emotional-healing facilitator has been particularly un-intimidating in this respect.
- **Emotional healing marriage seminars:** There are legitimate concerns and cautions with respect to couples facilitating emotional healing for each other, but these concerns can be appropriately addressed. When Charlotte and I led a couple of seminars training couples to do healing work with each other, they were challenging, but overall they were powerful and positive, with deep experiences of healing and intimacy during the demonstration and practice times.

V. Display steadily increasing observable fruit (2026 addition): This point was mentioned just briefly above, but deserves some additional attention. When we are trying to convince others to try the Immanuel Approach, one of the most effective things we can do is to embrace an Immanuel Approach lifestyle and then display steadily increasing positive transformation. One of the most powerful examples of this phenomena is when parents get healing, and then their children become much more open to getting their own healing when they see their parents changing.

Just for fun, here's a particularly dramatic example of this phenomena. My friend John Curlin would spend several months each year in Panama City with his daughter and her family, and while he was there he would offer Immanuel Prayer. "I'll be in the counseling office in the

church basement every Saturday morning, and I'll pray with anybody who shows up." He would always ask the recipients how they had found out about his Saturday morning prayer sessions, and after a while he noticed something interesting. Six different people all reported that they had heard about his Immanuel Prayer ministry from Miriam – a lady in their church who had experience a lot of deep healing through the Immanuel Approach. And then a couple more recipients reported that they had heard about him from Miriam. And then a couple more. When the tenth (maybe twelfth?) person mentioned that she had heard about him from Miriam he decided that he needed to talk to her. When he asked her what was happening, she shared the most amazing story: "I'm just walking around the city, minding my own business, and complete strangers come up to me and say, 'Who are you, what do you have, and how can I get some?'" And I tell them, 'Go to the counseling office at our church on Saturday morning and prayer with Dr. John. He'll help you to experience the living, tangible, personal presence of Jesus and it will change your life!' And then I tell them how to get to the church."

VI. Peak Performance by resolving our own trauma and building our maturity skills (2026 addition): Special windows of opportunity for helping people to do their healing work often open in the middle of intense, difficult, painful situations. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to spot these windows of opportunity (especially since we are often also in the middle of the difficult situation, along with the person we are trying to help). Furthermore, it can be especially difficult to take advantage of these windows of opportunity – to recognize that the person is triggered, to recognize that they might be unusually open to healing work because of the intensity and the pain, and to be able to navigate the intense, delicate interactions that are often required to help them see that they are triggered and be willing to do healing work.

I'm sure the reader can see that our chances of success will be much better if we are at peak performance when we encounter these windows of opportunity. That is, our chances of success will be much greater if we have done a lot of our own healing work and also built our relational maturity skills so that we are *not* triggered in the middle of these intense, difficult, painful window-of-opportunity situations. To put this another way, we cannot afford to be impaired by triggering when we encounter these opportunities – we cannot afford to have our relational circuits off line, our perceptions distorted, our discernment blunted, and ability to connect with the Lord decreased. And we can both increase the chance of being at peak performance and decrease the chance of being impaired by building our relational maturity skills and preemptively resolving our own trauma.

VII. Make sure your relational circuits are online and start with attunement: When we are asking about how to get someone else to do their healing work, we are often subtly triggered ourselves. And in these situations the main reason we want them to get healing is usually part of trying to manage them so they stop making us uncomfortable. Not surprisingly, when we are subtly triggered, in non-relational mode with our relational circuits offline, and usually also subtly judgmental, it doesn't go well when we try to get someone else to recognize their triggers and to deal with the underlying trauma. In contrast, any attempts to help someone else recognize their triggers and deal with the underlying trauma will go *much* better if we start with checking our relational circuits, recognizing that we are subtly triggered and subtly judgmental, getting our relational circuits back online, and then starting the interaction with attuning to their distress.

See *Outsmarting Yourself* chapter twenty-five, "Make Sure to Start with Offering Attunement" for additional discussion of this important point.

VIII. Simplify the system by resolving as much as possible on *your* side of the equation

(2026 addition): Sometimes the desire to get someone else to do their healing work is part of a complicated, messy, interpersonal conflict. For example, there was a season in my and Charlotte’s marriage in which we were working on several especially persistent “unresolvable” points of conflict. All of these especially difficult disagreements had specific points that were especially messy and complicated because we were both triggered, we each thought that the *other* person’s traumatic implicit memory was the most strategic, important problem, and we each thought that the key to resolution was for the *other* person to acknowledge and resolve their triggered, distorted, traumatic implicit memory content.¹ Fortunately we were eventually able to get breakthrough when I did a lot of healing work to dramatically reduce the triggered distortions that I was bringing to the conflicts. This reduced the complexity, confusion, and mess to the point that Charlotte was able to recognize and deal with her triggered distortions. Not surprisingly, with most of the triggered distortions resolved on both sides, it was then fairly easy to permanently dismantle these previously “unresolvable” conflicts.

See *Outsmarting Yourself* chapter twenty-seven, “Simplify the System by Dealing with Stuff on Our Side” for additional discussion of this important point.

¹At least it felt like the other person’s traumatic implicit memory was *more* of the problem, and that they should take responsibility for being more of the problem by working on their triggered, distorted toxic implicit memory content first.