



A Step by Step Program
to Bring Out the Best Version of You
by Integrating the Mind, Body and Spirit

Therapize *Yourself*

Choose to Heal
and Find Your Truth



Carrie Leaf, MS, LMFT

THERAPIZE YOURSELF

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*A Step by Step Program to Bring Out the
Best Version of You by Integrating the Mind,
Body and Spirit*

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I want to take a moment to acknowledge that when we dig in and face ourselves, we are walking into the possibility of getting triggered by past hurt and pain that has been unresolved. As you move through your journey, if you begin to get triggered at any point, I want you to turn to the skills I share with you and the support you need from outside professional sources.

If you do begin to feel triggered, please STOP, put the book down, and refer to your list of professional resources, coping skills, or supports you have created.

If you feel highly triggered, have suicidal thoughts, or do not trust yourself to keep yourself safe, call 911, go to an emergency room, or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255, which is available 24 hours.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to every soul that has altered my course, in both positive and negative ways. These shifts have in turn led me to myself.

This book is especially dedicated to my husband, Jimmy, who by the nature of his genuine heart and high vibrations, often guides me in changing my course in radical, exciting ways.

Above all, this book is dedicated to my sons, Mason and Nolan Leaf, who have shifted my course towards myself in the most profound way and motivated me to put in the work necessary to be the best possible version of myself.

A special dedication also goes out to my step-children, Vincent and Alexis Leaf, for being wonderful additions to my life.

Finally, this book is dedicated to everyone I consider family. Without my family (and close friends whom I consider family), there is no one to show me where I need to grow. Without growth, I do not get to experience the most this life has to offer. Thank you for your joyful connections.

When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge.

—Tuli Kupferberg¹

¹ Tuli Kupferberg, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/57149>.



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FOREWORD

I was at my lowest point of life in college. The long, windy, and cold Midwest winters did not make the weight of life any easier for me. There is one distinct winter where everything felt a little warmer for me, and I will tell you about how my life shifted after that winter.

Until that point in my life, nobody had given me a safe space to speak what I thought or felt. I bottled everything up and kept it mostly to myself. The only place where I could share my deepest thoughts was in the depths of my journal. The benefit of this is that daily writing practices gave me the skills needed to cope in the present. I became a bestselling author in the personal development and emotional wellness space in the future, and I believe it's because I practiced writing about it for over a decade.

Experiencing trauma can often trigger patterns later that act as coping mechanisms. My pattern was choosing to be silent when I had a lot to say and deciding to listen too much when I wanted to speak—which was me not choosing my fullest expression. This was the result of growing up with two alcoholics who were emotionally unavailable and abusive.

During one of those cold winters, a ray of warmth came in. I met Carrie while I was doing undergrad, and she was studying for her master's. As a football player, the sport was my outlet for my pain, trauma, and unresolved issues. Carrie knew that I was choosing to be quiet, silent, and reserved—a trauma response. So, she challenged me safely to see my light; she held a candle up for me so I could walk out of the dungeons of my story and my suffering.

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At that time, society wasn't talking about mental health, but Carrie was. She would ask me every day, "How are you doing?" and "How do you feel today?" She asked me repeatedly until I gave her a genuine answer, and she wouldn't settle when I pushed her away. She made me answer complex questions about how I felt, how I wanted to heal, and who I wanted to become.

Carrie wasn't a clinician at this point, but her aura created a safety net, a warm place to share thoughts and ideas. When I think back to the coldest era of my life, I am comforted knowing there was a benevolent soul who always wanted to know how I was doing—not because she was ready to judge me, or to tell me I wasn't good enough—because she saw the light in me that I didn't see. Carrie was inviting me into my fullest expression, and that's what she's doing here in this book.

Carrie figured out how to ball up all of that energy and warmth—and now, over fifteen years of practice—into *Therapize Yourself*. I know how it feels to be in a dark winter, and when you see that warm light, it's soul-shifting. That is what *Therapize Yourself* is. It's that warm candle that's here to call us out of our dungeons.

As a man who now has healed all of those childhood traumas, someone who has become a nine-time bestselling author and a leader in the global mental health conversation, I can say with all of my heart that Carrie's voice in *Therapize Yourself* is timely, needed, and unique.

As I think about the young man who needed guidance, words, and healthy spaces to dive deeper into his subconscious mind, I see that *Therapize Yourself* is a tool that will meet those needs and will create a warm space for someone to heal.

Carrie gives us one of the safest invitations to intimacy possible in this book. She guides us down a path of trying to understand our family structures, ourselves, and the available behaviors that will give us love and healing.

Carrie does a masterful job teaching us about the integration of the mind, body, and spirit. One of my favorite parts of the book is when she

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invites us to examine our negative and limiting beliefs. One of the most potent qualities of this book—that separates it from other books in this genre—is that Carrie tells you, “Good job!” As a reader, it feels like you are sitting in her safe office with her as you talk about the healing that is available.

Therapize Yourself is an experience that creates genuine integration. It’s an invitation to explore the deeper layers we run from so we can begin to acknowledge and love our life holistically. It’s a fun book to read, with loving words, and it’s a needed voice at this time in our culture.

– Sylvester McNutt III



PREFACE

This book was created out of my desire to help and reach even more people than the incredible individuals who walk through my office door.

This book is a “spilling out” of all that I want to share with the collective energy of all souls.

This book is my attempt to organize all the thoughts, feelings, and art that are created in session with my truly amazing clients.

This book is a cumulation of things I’ve learned, experienced, witnessed, and grown from.

This book is a sharing of the best of me that I have to offer the world.

This book exists in the hopes that it will reach and touch even a single soul in a positive way.

This book is for you. This book is here to help guide, push, and motivate you to do the work required to heal and be healthy. This book is for the new you.



NOTE TO READER

Welcome to the first steps of creating a brand new you! For your benefit, I have included Notes pages at the end of each chapter and at the end of this book so you can journal your experiences and track your progress as you move through the exercises. I wish you every success with transforming your life and becoming the *You* you dream of being. Happy journaling!



*Whatever we plant in our subconscious mind
and nourish with repetition and emotion will one
day become a reality.*

—Earl Nightingale



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my husband, Jimmy, for being supportive in anything and everything I ever do, without an ounce of judgment. You allow me to be my true self in every shape and form that I show up as.

Thank you to Michael Ireland for holding my hand every step of the way and for answering a zillion and one questions.

Thank you to Kristen Wise and Maira Pedreira of PRESStinely for also holding my hand, answering a zillion questions, and being a comforting and supportive presence during the vulnerable steps towards visibility.

Thank you to Sylvester McNutt III for being a beautiful soul, a good friend, and an encouraging support.

Thank you to my clients, past, present, and future—you always inspire me.

—Carrie



*Learn to read symptoms not only as problems to
be overcome but as messages to be heeded.*

—Gabor Maté¹

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Here I am, sitting in a beautiful church in a small town in Eastern Iowa. The sun is shining divinely through the stained-glass windows, and I'm watching the reflected colors dance on my skin. The colors and the light are so bright—too bright. I feel like crying, but I'm avoiding it at all costs. Why? Because in this charming church, a group of practitioners are being trained in EMDR therapy. Another psychotherapist is practicing EMDR on me, but I'm not engaged with her. I have every excuse: The echoing noise of the other students is distracting. I'm not good at doing therapy. The lights on the EMDR apparatus we're using are moving too fast—and anyway, what could I possibly have to work on? At this point in my life, I've completed grad school and I've been a practicing marriage and family therapist for several years.

I wasn't expecting this. I am the helper, the healer, not the one who needs help. Generally, I'm happy, so what should I talk about? I can't identify a major problem, so I figure: "Keep it light." I pick an annoyance ... my dating woes. There's a pattern developing in this area of my life

¹ Gabor Maté, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4068613.Gabor_Maté?page=4.

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... I keep picking the wrong guy, over and over. At twenty-seven-years old, I'm single. When I was living in New York City, being single was fine ... everyone was single. Getting tied down wasn't on the radar or even a topic of discussion. However, when I came back to Iowa in my mid-twenties, I realized that many of my old classmates had already been married, divorced, and/or had kids. Culture shock.

“Okay,” I think, “I'll work on this annoyance, give my therapist-partner something to practice on. Who knows, I might even learn a thing or two. Or, at least it will entertain my practice partner, right?” (Little did I know that EMDR would change my practice—and my life.) Still, I'm resisting her. My mind goes blank. I feel bad. “I'm a terrible training partner,” I think. “It must be hard working with me. I'll bet she regrets getting me for a partner.” I'm not resisting her deliberately; it must be subconscious.

She keeps pushing. In a matter of minutes, the floodgates open. Suddenly, we are delving into a relationship with my ex-fiancé, which ended about six years ago. I'd rarely thought about him, and in fact, in my opinion, I'd dodged a bullet by getting out of the relationship. So why would that relationship resurface?

The therapist keeps pushing. The next thing I know, we're talking about my belief system around the relationship—a belief I didn't even know I had. Me, a licensed marriage and family therapist, oblivious to this deep-seated negative belief system hanging out in my subconscious mind. I realize I walked away from that relationship feeling like, “I'm a handful,” “I'm hard to love,” and “I'm not good enough.” My throat feels tight, tense, like there's a cement ball blocking my airway. It's hard to breathe, hard to swallow. What is this voodoo magic called EMDR therapy?!

In this moment; I'm changed forever. The power of the process and its ability to bring to my conscious mind my subconscious stuff was, well, mind-blowing. My takeaway? How could I be so blind? How could I have walked around with this subconscious belief system for so long? This realization didn't help the “I can't trust my judgment” negative

belief that was already swirling around inside me either. “Why and how?” I wondered. “Why am I so blind to my stuff?”

I’ve studied the world of psychology for the last eight years of my life. I’ve worked hard to differentiate my character and personality from those of my family of origin and to develop my own thoughts and beliefs about the world and who I am. I’ve pushed myself to grow, to learn the human mind, and to learn about myself. I have a great family, great childhood memories. I know I’m loved. So why would I feel this way about myself? I mean logically, I don’t feel that way in my head. But apparently, emotionally and physically, I do. How weird is that? How can my brain tell me one thing, but my heart and my body tell a completely different story? Oh ... that’s what I was always asking myself about the guys I dated. My gut and intuition said, “Run, girl, run.” But my over-analyzing, empathetic, co-dependent self convinced me there were a million reasons to stay. No wonder I picked the wrong guy over and over: Subconsciously, I didn’t stand a chance. On a subconscious level, I’m showing up in my life in a way that says, “I don’t believe I deserve anything better.” Whoa. I should stop doing that. Especially now that I know what I’m doing.

If only it were that easy. If only insight could change our deeply engrained belief systems and behavioral patterns. That EMDR session was a great breakthrough for me ... but now I knew I had to do the work to break free of those repeating patterns.

So, that’s me. What about you? What’s your deal, anyway? What are you stuck on? Why do you keep doing that thing you do over and over? Why don’t you learn? What’s holding you back? Maybe you’re stuck in a toxic relationship or a dead-end job. Maybe you’re stuck in depression. Maybe anxiety holds you back. Maybe you can’t lose weight. Maybe you can’t take a risk you desperately want to take because you’re afraid. Maybe you can’t get over an ex. Maybe you keep doing that same old song and dance with your mom, even though you’re forty-two years old. Whatever your problem is, wherever you’re stuck in life, there’s a negative belief behind it. My superpower is helping you identify and eliminate that negative belief so you can move forward and upward in

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life, so you can show up the way you want to—not in the unhealthy way you keep showing up over and over again on “repeat.”

The path to healing, personal growth, and finding how to function at your highest capacity can be rocky. Growth and healing don't happen on a linear path. There are a lot of ups and downs and back-and-forths—it's hard. But it *is* worth it. To function our best, to level up in life, first, we need to get grounded. We need to create a safe, solid launching pad for the bumpy (but worthwhile) journey to the healthiest version of ourselves.

As a psychotherapist, I hear myself repeating to my clients that, “Nothing worth having in this life comes easy. The things worth having take hard work.” If you picked up this book to gain something of value in your life, get ready. Get committed. Prepare to be uncomfortable for a bit. *Dig in.*

Just like therapy does not give you answers, this book will not give you answers. Why? Because you already have the answers. Yep, I just pulled the Jedi mind twist on you. You already have the answers you are searching for! Not only that, you are the only one who has the answers. Mind blowing, right? It's simple, really. You are the expert on you. You are the only person with access to what's in your head, heart, and soul. Therefore, you are the only one who can find your truth. You are the only one that can allow healing to take place on a mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual level.

You're probably thinking, “Well gee, thanks Carrie, I'm super glad I bought this book for you to put it all back on me. If I had the answers, I'd have done something about my problem already.”

I know, I know. That's why I said, “It's not easy.” This book won't tell you what your deal is or exactly how to “fix” it, but if you commit to this journey you're on, and you put in the time, effort, and energy, this book can help guide you to the answers within you. The best part? Once you've found your answers, you'll realize you already knew your answers—and that what you needed was the journey. Boom.

Okay. I'll stop talking in riddles and stop dropping the mind-bending bombs on you now ... Hehe. C'mon, let's have some fun. If we can't laugh at ourselves, at life, at our mistakes, at our humanness, we'll end up as angry, uptight people. Bring humor along for this ride ... we all do silly things.

On a serious note, arriving at our answers means going on this journey and facing some tough stuff about ourselves. There's no way around it. If we want to heal and grow, we have to go straight through the thick of it. For those of you who have kids, that last sentence sent me off into the song "We're Going on a Bear Hunt." If you haven't heard it, watch it on YouTube. I'm not sure whether to say, "You're welcome," or "I'm sorry"—but the song makes a valid point. We have to go through it. We can't go around it. We have to face it head on and deal with it. We have to learn how to tap into our intuition about what our mind, body, and soul need in order to heal and move forward in life. Go ahead, set this book down ... and find the kid's song on YouTube.

Whatever your "it" is has most likely been there for a long time. It doesn't matter if it's relationships, career, family, addiction, weight-loss issues, anxiety, depression, etc. As cliché as it is, your "it" probably originated somewhere in childhood. This isn't the case 100% of the time, but often it is. So, just as it took time to become a problem, it will take time to resolve the problem. The time spent healing, however, does not have to be equivalent to the time it took for your pain to hit the saturation point. The time it will take to heal will depend on your level of commitment, your willingness to be uncomfortable and push through, and your approach to doing so.

Ready to dig in?



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It is when you lose sight of yourself, that you lose your way. To keep your truth in sight you must keep yourself in sight and the world to you should be a mirror to reflect to you your image; the world should be a mirror that you reflect upon.

—C. JoyBell C.¹

Chapter 2

WHAT'S MY PROBLEM?

What if you already know what your “it” (problem) is? Great! However, if you haven’t made some progress towards healing, then you probably haven’t invited your “it” in and sat down with it at the table. I’ll say it again: Insight alone does not create behavioral change. Have you ever had an “Aha” moment of insight about yourself? For example, have you realized already why you keep choosing *that type* of guy, why you can’t stop overeating, or why you never ask for a raise at work? Perhaps you feel so empowered by knowing your “it” and your “why,” you’re determined to change. Perhaps you set out with ambitious intentions ... but nothing changed, and six months down the road you found yourself in the exact place you were before: You pick *that type* of guy again (even though you know better), you start working out and counting calories (but still binge on cookies and ice cream every night), you make a plan to talk to your boss (but never follow through). You’re

¹ C. JoyBell C., <https://www.goodreads.com>.

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stuck. Not only are you stuck, you're mad at yourself because you know better but don't do better. This is because even if you know what your "it" is, you've likely been avoiding it for a long time, so it is big and scary to you. I use the following analogy with my clients:

Say you have a huge debt. Let's say, for the sake of this analogy, that you're late on your car payment. You know the bill is coming in the mail. You don't know what to do ... you don't have the money. You're terrified. You shut down. You don't check the mailbox ... you don't want to see that bill telling you how much you owe and that they're coming to take your car. If you don't get the bill, you don't have to face the problem directly. It's not real; you just shove it away (for now). You might feel good for a while because you're out driving your car, and life goes on as usual. However, in the meantime, you're having strange physical symptoms: neck pain, stomach pain, but you aren't sure why. The anxiety is building underneath so intensely that it's manifesting in health issues. Still, you're avoiding the problem. Now you're getting late fees—and eventually, your car really is repossessed. Now you can't get to work. You lose your job. Your credit is dinged and drops. You can't get a new car, apartment, house, etc. with poor credit. You have a huge mess on your hands—all because you wouldn't address your problem. What started as one problem (which you could have resolved quickly with a payment plan—had you opened the mailbox and made a phone call)—is now magnified. It's turned into MANY problems.

Avoiding problems does not make them go away. Stop doing this. Face your stuff. We all have stuff. It's not how much stuff we have that is the problem, it's how we handle and manage the stuff that makes the difference. "My life is a great success. I am happy because I avoid my problems and pretend everything is great," said No One, ever.

So, what will you get from this book? This book helps you assess your life and lay down the healthiest, most solid foundation for deep healing and growth. Along the way, you might tackle some surface level "issues" too. Bonus! Together we will cover all the first steps I walk through with every client when they come through my office door. These steps are necessary to get you a solid base from which you can feel

comfortable and strong as you dive deep into your core issues. Having a healthy foundation gives you a solid footing, so you can tackle that which you will bring to the surface. There is a reason you suppressed certain feelings ... but those feelings didn't go away. They linger deep down inside and begin to boil ... and you're like a singing tea kettle, all steamed up and ready to blow.

It is likely that you picked this book up because, on some level, you can sense the steam rising around a situation in your life. Have you (or are you about to) hit your emotional suppression saturation point? Is it time to heal, grow, and live your best life? Why not do it before you boil over? Because let's be honest, that won't be pretty. Oh—and life is short, so stop wasting your precious time.

Why tackle the past in order to heal and grow? Because the past got you where you are now. It made you who you are. It created your worldview and your belief system about yourself. We all have past “stuff” that holds us back. People are people ... and that means we are human ... we make mistakes. Every single one of us makes mistakes. Even those “friends” you look at on social media that look “picture perfect” with their Pinterest-worthy vacations, homes, and cars. They make mistakes too; I promise you they do. So, even if you had (on paper) the happiest, healthiest, most picture-perfect upbringing ever in the whole wide world, you'd still have “stuff.” Your parents are human. They did (or didn't do) things that may have left a negative impact on you. Or at least a perceived one. You are human, which means you interpreted and internalized things in a way that may have impacted you negatively. There's no way around it—it's just “what it is.” We are human: crazy, beautiful, flawed ... and resilient. The struggle of suffering and the beauty of growth are all just a part of life. They are the Ying and the Yang of life, and we are better off accepting them, not resisting them.

Now maybe you believe you've dealt with your “stuff.” Even so, you're stuck. What gives? It could mean you *thought* you dealt with your stuff (and perhaps you did, on some level), but really you just shoved most of it down far enough that you believed it was gone. I see this happen regularly. My clients will tell me something traumatic that happened in their past and then say, “But I'm over it.” Three to five minutes later, as

they tell more of their story, tears well up and they say: “I don’t know why this made me cry.”

I’m guilty of this too. Remember that ex-fiancé I told you about? Not only would I have said, “I’m over that relationship and all that it put me through,” I would have said, “I’m proud of all the ‘work’ I did to heal.” Ha! I lied! I lied to myself about my healing. I cheated too ... I took the easy way out and suppressed it. Don’t get me wrong; I was over the guy. That’s why I believed I’d healed. The guy never crossed my mind, but I wasn’t over the belief system I’d developed in that relationship. I wasn’t healed from what being in that relationship did to my self-esteem.

Here’s another scenario I see when my clients think they’ve dealt with their stuff: They’re telling me their story, and I can’t find even a hint of soul in their eyes. It’s a horrific story of abuse, and they tell it straight, stone-faced, without an ounce of emotion. That “skill” of detaching is a trauma response. They’ve detached from the memory; they’ve pushed down layers of pain.

My point is this: You have to dig up the past for many reasons. Therapy helps you go through your life with a fine-tooth comb, making sure you’re clearing out all the junk. Maybe you thought you’d cleared it out—but really you just shoved it on a high shelf in the back of a closet that you never open. You forgot about it. Then, a year later (or five years later), you open that closet, and boom! There’s the junk, tumbling down on your head, smacking you in the face, demanding you deal with it. The junk always comes back with a vengeance.

This book will help you deal with that junk. By picking up this book, you took a first step toward that closet door. Now, you’ve opened the door. Working with this book is like reaching up and sorting through the jumble that’s fallen on your head and dealing with it, sorting through the junk piece by piece; making peace with it. That’s what this book is. It’s the wonderful feeling you get when you hire a professional organizer to come over and clean out, label, and completely reorganize a closet so it’s a breath of fresh air every time you open the door. I have experienced this wonderful feeling (quite literally with my kitchen closet). I hired someone to help me. Worth every penny, let me tell

you! Sometimes we just need help to get our life decluttered. There is nothing wrong with needing help. (Thanks Anne Ahmann!)²

What is this book *not*? It is not a substitute for therapy. Remember: The length of your healing and growth process depends on the approach you take. The process of therapy is always more than the sum of its parts. When you build a healthy, therapeutic bond with a therapist, and there is trust and comfort at the core, there is a powerful healing magic in that relationship. Using a good therapist can propel you quickly into deep growth; you'll make more progress in your healing than you might ever have imagined. Back to my closet analogy—I looked at my messy, yucky closet for an entire year before I called Anne for help. All I can say is: I wish I had called sooner.

I am a firm believer that every single person (I repeat: *every single person*) could and would be wise to benefit from therapy. In my Utopia, it would be a weekly requirement for everyone. By writing this book, I hope I can reach people who haven't yet stepped into a therapist's office. I hope I can help readers do a self-assessment, help them build a healthy foundation for growth and wellbeing. For those of you who have done some healing and growing already, I hope to guide you through a re-evaluation (or deeper evaluation) of *self*.

We change continually. From one day to the next, one month to the next, one year to the next, we become different people. Our problems at twenty-three years of age are gravely different from our problems at thirty-four (well, mostly, anyway). Doing a self-assessment can help us put our current "stuff" in perspective.

If you've got past stuff that needs to be cleared out, this book will help you prepare to change and grow so you can live your best life. Let's get started!



² Anne Ahmann, <https://www.happyhealthyhomedm.com/about>.

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