

Kort's Korner



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Joe's practice specializes in sexual addiction, childhood sexual, physical and emotional abuse, depression and anxiety.

He offers workshops for couples and singles. He runs a gay men's group therapy and a men's sexuality group therapy for straight, bi and gay men who are struggling with specific sexual issues.

His therapy services are for gays and lesbians as well as heterosexuals.

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Between The Lines Newspaper Review

Review By D'Anne Witkowski, August 2003

We've all seen the headlines, whether on a site like MSN.com or a magazine like Cosmo, promising better sex or slimmer thighs in 10 easy steps. We've all fallen for the hook at some point, eagerly turning to the page only to find a short list of 10 things we already know, but probably don't bother to do (like eat less and exercise more), with very little to inspire us to change our ways.

So when I was asked to review Joe Kort's "*10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives*" I admit I was skeptical. However, I soon found myself reading a highly accessible and engaging book. As a lesbian, I was able to take much away from the book even though it was written for gay men. I not only gained a better understanding of my gay male friends and acquaintances, but I also found myself examining my own relationships with my partner and family.

Kort agrees that there really is a much wider audience for this book than just gay men. "What I'm hoping for is that somebody's mother could read this book. Somebody's father, somebody's sibling, and somebody's therapist could say, 'Oh I never thought of that' or 'I didn't realize that.' There are a lot of people, gay therapists and gay friendly therapists, who say, 'Well, because I'm gay or gay friendly I can treat gay men psychotherapeutically.' And that's just not true. At all. I thought the same thing at one point. There are lots of specifics that have to be dealt with."

The "*10 Smart Things*" Kort outlines for his readers isn't some vapid to-do list, but it isn't completely new information, either. Gay activists have been touting the importance of coming out of the closet, on Kort's list, for years. However, what makes Kort's 10 things different from, say, Cosmo's, is his use of case histories and personal examples to illustrate his points. He also doesn't claim that any of these steps will be easy—and they aren't—but he outlines exactly why they are so important and how gay men can benefit by putting these steps into place.

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The list of 10 things stemmed from his class at Wayne State University. "I teach social workers who are getting their masters. It's a gay and lesbian class. So there's 13, 14 weeks, but 10 of those weeks I picked and thought these are really important to me and to the clients who have been coming to see me and what I thought was most important to teach to therapists."

Kort, a psychotherapist in private practice in Royal Oak, does not assume that every gay man's life is in the dumps, nor does he claim to have all the answers. "*10 Smart Things*" is not a cure-all, but rather a gateway. Kort opens the door for gay men to do some serious self-examination, without accusing or blaming. Kort's goal is not to shame his readers into action, but to arm them with the information they need to make the changes necessary to live more fulfilled and healthy lives.

Continued on reverse

Kort's *10 Steps* can be revealed right here without spoiling anyone's need to actually read the book. Kort wants to help gay men do the following:

1. Take charge of their own lives
2. Affirm themselves by coming out
3. Resolve differences with parents and relatives
4. "Graduate" from delayed adolescence
5. Avoid—or overcome—sexual addiction
6. Learn from successful mentors who've been there, done that
7. Take advantage of "therapy workouts"
8. Achieve—and maintain—rewarding relationships
9. Understand the stages of love
10. Commit to their partner

Not exactly a cakewalk. Yet Kort approaches each of these topics in language that is simple and direct. By the end of each chapter the reader certainly has a lot of actual work to do to make each step happen, but they also have a lot of compelling reasons to do it.

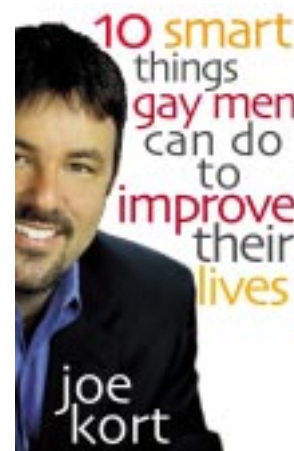
As he writes in the introduction, "Reading this book, I hope you'll recognize the stumbling blocks, both internal and external, that have held you back from living an effective, totally fulfilled gay life. Each of these *10 Smart Things* is an antidote to a specific problem that clients have brought to my office time and again." Kort has been in practice since 1985 and has seen literally thousands of gay men regarding everything from coming out to sexual addiction to relationship issues.

Why another self-help book? The book market is flooded with them. Amazon.com has over 17,000 titles alone under the general category of self-help. But narrow that search by using "gay" and Amazon scores only 78 hits. The lack of books specifically written for gay men about how to live a rewarding and happy life is one of the reasons Kort wrote this book in the first place.

The chapter on sexual addiction, Kort maintains, is the chapter he's proudest of. "The reason would be because there's nothing written about it. Twenty years ago Patrick Carnes coined the term 'sexual addiction' and has written several books primarily to the heterosexual male and women. But nothing has really been written in self-help book form for sexual addiction so a gay man could pick up the book and say, 'Am I a sex addict, or am I not?'"

Kort recognizes that gay men face dynamics in their lives that heterosexuals don't have to deal with on the way to personal wellness. But he also doesn't accept being gay and all of the baggage that comes with it as an excuse for living an unhappy and unfulfilled life. "You can lead a good life. I can't tell you how many clients come in, gay and lesbian, but more gay men, and say, 'Living in Michigan, it's so hard to be gay and I just can't do it.' And I say, 'Well, wait a minute. I live in Michigan, and I did it.' And so you can be a gay man and feel proud and have a good life no matter where you are."

Of course, a good life doesn't come without facing some demons and doing the hard work. Kort writes, "Without that do-it-yourself resolve to make things happen (as opposed to waiting around for them to happen), any attempt at a successful life - gay or otherwise - is doomed from the get-go." The first step could be as simple as opening this book.



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