

# Kort's Korner



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## 10 Smart Things Book Review

Reviewed by Toby Johnson

*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.*

Back in the mid-80s, when I was in private practice as a gay psychotherapist, I used to give clients a copy of Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* after their first session. The book very nicely described issues that regularly come up in therapy by recounting case-histories of Peck's clients and, more importantly, presented how the psychotherapeutic process of talking over one's personal life history can dramatically change patterns that have proved painful and unfulfilling. Peck focused on the distinction between "neurosis" and "character disorder" as unifying theme of all the case histories, and so of his description of healthy personality functioning. (He also explained why paying the therapist was an essential part of the healing process—something every therapist in private practice has to confront.)

Reading about other people's psychological patterns and life problems—and especially how they solved them—in itself can be amazingly healing, and can certainly provide motivation for making changes for oneself.

I loved Scott Peck's book (it helped me through a "midlife crisis" of my own). I was happy to give it to prospective clients to get them started on their own healing journey down that "road less taken" to psychological insight and self-understanding.

Well, if I were in back in practice today, I'd buy a case of Joe Kort's *10 Smart Things* and start passing them out!

Though more succinct and to the point—and less quasi-religious—than Peck, Kort does precisely the same thing. Through recounting case-histories of clients he has seen in his 16-year psychotherapy practice, Kort presents a list of ten maxims for the successful gay life. Much the way, Scott Peck focused on the

neurosis/character disorder axis, Joe Kort focuses his model of healthy functioning on a closeted vs gay/sex obsessed axis. And, most importantly, he offers the same kind of healing discussion that is therapeutic in itself and that gives motivation and zeal for entering therapy with a gay positive practitioner.

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*"We wanted to be a part of the process of legalizing marriage for gays by participating as it unfolds."*

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Kort's 10 things are obvious, but bear articulation and elucidation. The Ten Commandments of Moses are obvious too, but inscribing them in stone made all the difference.

- Take responsibility for your own life
- Affirm yourself by coming out
- Resolve issues with your family
- Graduate from eternal adolescence
- Avoid (or overcome) sexual addiction

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*Continued on reverse*

- Learn from successful mentors
- Take advantage of psychotherapy “workouts”
- Maintain rewarding relationships
- Understand the stages of love
- Commit to a partner

The book gets better and better as it goes along. I found the chapter on “Therapy as Workout” to be the richest. Kort defines the Gay and Lesbian Affirmative Psychotherapeutic approach, describes the common life stages of gay men’s development (following Erik Erikson’s familiar model *mutatis mutandis*), explains the concept of transference, and demonstrates how self-examination fosters wholeness and happiness.

Some of the chapters offer very specific how-to advice, like a six-point list of symptoms of sexual addiction or a twelve-point list of tips for successful dating. There’s an appealing interweaving of Joe Kort’s own life story with his discussions of clients’ stories and problems. The final chapter celebrates Kort’s own long-term relationship in the process of arguing that long-term relationships are much more prevalent and successful than commonly seen.

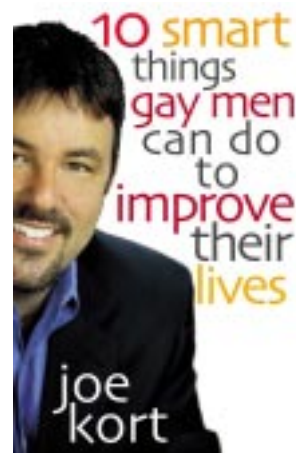
In the context of reviewing this book in White Crane Journal, I have to observe there is an 11<sup>th</sup> smart thing gay men can—and need to—do for their happiness and fulfillment, and that is to “Understand the nature of

religion.” Kort discusses religion tangentially in the process of describing gay men’s negative conditioning. He doesn’t go the next step to explain how gay insight into the superstitious and obsessive-compulsive side of religion can help free everybody, gay and straight, to create a successful and modern personal “spirituality.”

This book is just what you’re looking for if you’re thinking about making changes in your life or entering therapy, or if you’re just wanting a little touch-up in your psychological functioning.

And—I know this sounds superficial, especially in light of Kort’s various warnings about falling into pop-gay sex obsession—the cover of the Alyson edition is graced with a handsome photo of Joe Kort (looking a little like the recently deceased TV personality, John Ritter). You’ll probably enjoy occasionally closing the book and gazing at the cover, thinking how nice to have a sweet, sensible, caring and realistically good-looking gay man for a psycho-spiritual guide. And how generous of Joe to have made himself so!

There’s additional information on the book and the *10 Smart Things* at [joekort.com](http://joekort.com).



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