

TRIBUTE TO DR. ALBERT ELLIS

John Minor, Ph.D.

Okay, Al, you did it! Originated a system of mental health treatment spotlighting the influence of thinking in human affairs. Led a revolution in the mental health field with creative genius and efficiency over the last half century. Utilized both empirical and research findings to the best advantage, and generously acknowledged others' contributions. This system, REBT, has been adopted by numerous professionals to help others reduce mental disturbance, and used by thousands of nonprofessionals, at times without professional assistance, to reduce their emotional distress. Others seem disposed to ignore your primary role in the evolution of psychology. In this regard, Einsteins comment about the controversy surrounding the appointment of Bertrand Russell to the faculty of the City University of New York seems relevant to you: "Great spirits have always encountered opposition from mediocre minds. The mediocre mind is incapable of understanding the man who refuses to bow blindly to conventional prejudices and chooses instead to express his opinions courageously and honestly." (from the *New Quotable Einstein*, 2005) Russell won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.

Your clear, penetrating clinical insight, allowed you to understand and combine the complex array of observations, empirical findings, research data, and proven theoretical constructs of human behavior into a useful, comprehensible system. This arrangement appears to give the most complete account of present knowledge of human behavior, a practical approach that has led the way to development of REBT/CBT for treating the various kinds of emotional disturbances. You appeared alone in your early degree of emphasis on the philosophical basis for human emotional disturbance and happiness and your inclusion of Epicurean and other ancient philosophical ideas into a clinical system not limited by popular dogma. Your clinical experience and energy seem unequalled in the number of individuals you have treated or helped to develop mental toughness over the past 50 plus years. In fighting and prevailing against your difficult physical problems, you might be described as the lance Armstrong of psychology.

The common sense explanations of REBT seems to account more fully than other systems, for the relationships between our individually constructed perception of reality, our beliefs, attitudes and values about these perceptions, and the emotive and behavioral reactions we make to them. In avoiding highfalutin terminology and creatively and unimaginatively using down-to-earth words like musterbation or demandingness, LFT, unconditional self-acceptance, awfulizing or catastrophizing, fuzzy/screwball thinking, unconditional self-acceptance (USA), unconditional other acceptance (UOA), etc., you aided a practical approach. This language grabs our imagination, and pardon the pun, demands attention, for more effective psychotherapy and everyday living. This system, presently know as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, has helped thousands of individuals and has the potential to help millions more if it can replace popular dogma. Like $E=MC^2$, a theoretical physical construct by the other Albert, REBT seems deceptively simple in treating human behavior but powerful when applied diligently to helping human kind alter behaviors recognized to be harmful. Al, your dedication and contributions preferably deserve the Nobel Peace Prize for the potential benefits to humanity. They provide a framework for a non-aggressive but bold and assertive philosophy.

Your example of staying focused, in sport, in sex, and in life, seems obvious but often overlooked in attempts at effective living. Your writings have often appeared avant-garde, particularly your ideas on sexuality. Those writings have helped free untold numbers of individuals from societal repression and inhibited sexuality, which contributes to a reduction in their aggressive tendencies. As a mental health practitioner, you were virtually (a popular term now) the first to emphasize the importance of biology in therapeutic resistance, as a time when bad parenting or bad environment was blamed for practically everything. Your emphasis on blame as a central problem in human neurosis may be the most important one in human psychology. Your politically incorrect references to fallibility have been appreciated and noted. Of course, the term Fallible Human Being (FHB) is one not everyone would recognize or want to acknowledge. Actually, your description is a bit more colorful.

Your reminder that (following Alfred Korzbyski) reality often isn't either/or but also/and — helps increase logic and efficiency. Telling us to have a f--- ball, while preferring but not insisting on the approval of others, may threaten established religious dogma and be misinterpreted, but can help the most guilt-prone individual reduce self-defeating guilt. Your example of remaining hopeful in an uncaring universe, and acceptance of mortality without awfulizing, offers a way out of a dilemma that has bamboozled humankind since the beginning of recorded history (and before).

I want to close this with a cheer. To REBT we'll hold it dear:

Albert Ellis, Albert Ellis,
He did tell us.
Life's a Hassle,
Don't need a castle.
When you're absurd,
You're not a turd.
You can have fun
and exercise,
Those demands that
just demonize.
Where is it writ
You can't succeed?
Stick to your task
Go for the peak,
It's not perfection
you have to seek.
When life really does
seem to reek
When events give you
a great big hit,
Be sure to say — and
Mean it — Tough Shit!

— *John Minor PhD*
Associate Fellow, AEI

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Irwin F. Altrows, Ph.D.

In therapy as in life, Dr. Ellis is the consummate experimental scientist, in love with his subject and his art. With the mind of an intelligent adult hard at work, he continually formulates hypotheses and designs experiments. He then conducts the experiments and observes the results through the eyes of a fascinated child, hard at play. He uses these results in continuing his absorbing work-play. By word and example, he teaches clients and colleagues how to maintain a joyful involvement with their own work and lives. By intently carrying out our responsibilities, and learning from results rather than fearing them, we enrich our own lives and those of our clients. Thank you, Dr. Ellis.

— Irwin F. Altrows, Ph.D.