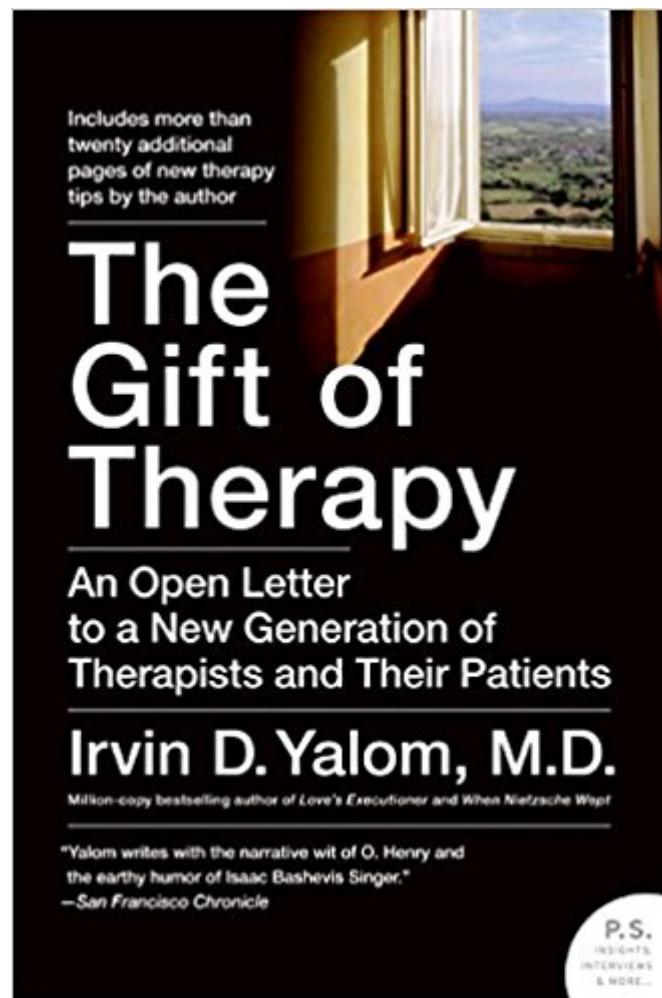




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The Gift Of Therapy: An Open Letter To A New Generation Of Therapists And Their Patients



Synopsis

The culmination of master psychiatrist Dr. Irvin D. Yalom's more than thirty-five years in clinical practice, *The Gift of Therapy* is a remarkable and essential guidebook that illustrates through real case studies how patients and therapists alike can get the most out of therapy. The bestselling author of *Love's Executioner* shares his uniquely fresh approach and the valuable insights he has gained—presented as eighty-five personal and provocative "tips for beginner therapists," including: Let the patient matter to you Acknowledge your errors Create a new therapy for each patient Do home visits (Almost) never make decisions for the patient Freud was not always wrong A book aimed at enriching the therapeutic process for a new generation of patients and counselors, Yalom's *Gift of Therapy* is an entertaining, informative, and insightful read for anyone with an interest in the subject.

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Customer Reviews

The Gift of Therapy by Irvin Yalom, M.D. Reviewed by Suzanne M. Retzinger, Ph.D. Waiting for my brother to complete his three-hour dialysis, I browsed the bookshelf provided for the waiting. I came across *Love's Executioner* and read it for the first time. I had read Yalom's *Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* text in grad school - like all requirements. Now he grabbed me by the shoulders and forced me to listen - inspired, I had to read more and found *The Gift of Therapy* (2003, Perennial edition; 263 pages \$12.95). Yalom is the first, of many that I've read on the therapeutic relationship, who doesn't "talk" about the therapeutic relationship - but "shows" it - a path for the bold to venture, a real connection between therapist and patient. My interest in his work

lies in his openness about his own feelings and how he uses them therapeutically. Nothing, he says, "takes precedence over care and maintenance of my relationship to the patient,... and how we regard each other." Most patients come to therapy starving for intimacy, their conflicts being precisely in this area - and it is the therapeutic relationship, itself, that creates change. For this reason, the "blank screen" model is far from what Yalom sees as effective patient therapist relationship; he sees therapist opacity as counterproductive. Because of the alienated nature of many clients' lives, the here and now space between therapist and patient is what matters. It's about the space that we create with our clients and how we use that space - "the betweenness". Yalom spells out 3 levels of therapist transparency that can be productive or not, asking of each, "is this disclosure in the best interest of the client?".

Dr. Yalom is a good writer and offers a unique perspective here on his decades of work in psychotherapy. It's definitely thought-provoking reading, and very easy to follow. But it left me with questions for the author (and some serious reservations)--never a good feeling at the end of a book. On the one hand, I appreciate that his training was to remain distant from patients where, as he described it, even helping an elderly woman put on a coat would be frowned on. I appreciate that, through experience with real-life patients, he realized the importance of establishing warmth, an interpersonal connection, a -human- relationship with patients rather than a distant "psychiatrist-as-remote-God-like" figure. However, reading many of the chapters here, I couldn't help but think some of the therapy methods he describes could be too intimate and too seductive with his patients. I kept feeling that it would be very easy to act like this and wind up crossing the line--or being misunderstood--in a therapy setting. Sexual attraction (and, as he says, even unconsummated love that is mutually felt) is a recurrent theme in so many stories he shares from his practice. There seemed to me to be much too much emphasis on talking about the therapist-patient relationship each week. Dr. Yalom writes, over and over, that he realizes he is far more important to his patients, personally, than they are to him. And yet he also seemed to intentionally intensify their feelings for him in the course of therapy, giving example after example of how he pushed them to share dreams about him, fantasies about him, etc.

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