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## Foreword

**Professor Marius Romme, Sandra Escher**

This book is a great achievement in developing a change in attitude and approach towards hearing voices.

This book is for voice hearers and the people they select to support them. It will enable people who have difficulties to cope with their voices and to discover different sides to their voices. Following a systematic approach it will unfold their relation with the voices and by doing so will stimulate them to acquire more effective ways of coping. Most important in this process, and well stimulated in this workbook, is to take ownership of the experience from writing one's own life history in relation to ones voices. Becoming more curious about the voices is stimulated by the questions and promotes ownership as well.

This book stimulates you to plan ones own life again, this is especially helpful for those who are feeling to overpowered by the voices to become their master.

In social fields and in medical care hearing voices is seen as the consequence of mental illness. Voices are felt only to be very negative, and must be controlled by professionals. Voices are hardly ever interpreted as the messengers of the persons life history.

### **This book however helps a person to overcome three handicaps:**

- 1) The idea that hearing voices is the consequence of an existing illness within the person, most likely being schizophrenia, an illness of unknown origin.
- 2) The idea that schizophrenia is a diagnosis of an illness not related in an understandable manner with the life history of that person.
- 3) The idea that the person as the consequence of the illness concept is powerless against the voices, that the voices are not owned by the person, while in fact the voices are a persons own experience understandable from the personal trauma's or overpowering problems with life.

Let us first explain how Psychiatry came to look at hearing voices. It has already been 100 years since Kraepelin formulated the concept of 'illness entities' in clinical psychiatry. In this concept all symptoms are seen as the results of an existing illness within the person of which the origin is still unknown. Science in the meantime has proven that the construct of an existing illness entity is not valid. Schizophrenia for instance is a construct that represents a broad range of complaints shown by very different persons (Bentall 1990, Boyle 1990 etc. etc.).

Schizophrenia does not represent a diagnosis. In a diagnosis one tries to understand what has led up to the complaints. One analyses the complex interaction between the persons capacities, the personal development and social conditions's/he is living in.

The term schizophrenia, in the classification system as used in the DSM, represents a category based upon a rather broad range of available symptoms at a certain moment or period in time. This period does not tell us anything about the possible causes nor does it include the personal experiences and their meaning for the person involved. Neither does it indicate how to cope with the experience.

Calling a person who cannot cope with the voices 'ill' is understandable when the voices and the emotions or behaviour they provoke are dominating the persons functioning and life. It is reasonable to call the person 'ill' when the voices are not an integrated part of the person but destroy ones free will. It is not right however to look at hearing voices in itself as a symptom of an illness. No it is the coping with that experience that might give rise to the emotions and behaviour that can be called ill.

Therefore a person who hears voices but cannot cope with them, needs support to overcome the powerlessness and to be able to begin living again. Support is needed in coping with voices. Support is also needed in order to become stronger in ones own identity. Lastly support is needed in accepting that what has happened has happened and should not be felt guilty about rather it needs to be placed back in the life history, placing the responsibility where it belongs with the activist not the recipient.

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It is the great merit of Ron Coleman that he has seen these three handicaps in his own life and with great persistence has changed his life. Becoming a victor after having been a victim. He did not deny what has happened to him, but became critical in a way that made it possible to build his own life. His second great merit is that he found companions in the mental health professional world. It is the vision of Mike Smith that has seen the value of Ron's work and has joined with him to follow this different road. They wrote in partnership this fantastic book. It is a great opportunity that Mike and Ron have worked together to develop this practical support system for those voice hearers who intend to build up their own life. Not denying the hard work to come but commencing on the road instead of waiting for some coming wonder. This book is based upon our research as far as overcoming the first handicap is concerned, it is based on Ron's private experience as far as the second and third handicaps are concerned. It is however further based upon the experience of many other voice hearers met in support groups in the U.K. These people have taught Mike and Ron to ask the right questions. It is based on experience, not yet on scientific evaluation.

**Romme & Escher 1997.**



## Introduction to the Second Edition

It is hard for us to believe that seven years have passed since the first edition of *Working with Voices* was written. The workbook has in this time been translated into fourteen languages and has been received enthusiastically in many countries. In the United Kingdom alone the book has been reprinted nine times and there has been a temptation on our part to just continue with reprinting. Both of us however have agreed that the first edition as good as it was for the time it was written is now no longer reflective of how we have moved on indeed how the world of understanding voices has moved and we decided it was time to completely re-write the work. The background is in essence the same in 2004 as it was in 1997 as are the principles of working with people. It is clear to us that what has changed is our own and others' experience of working with people who hear voices and that over the last seven years voice hearers have taught us a great deal that we believe will be useful to others.

In this, the second edition of *Working with Voices* we have taken a slightly different approach to both how we gather information about someone's voice hearing experience and more importantly what we do with that information and how we use it to form an action plan that keeps the voice hearer at the centre of the process. In this edition we have tried to identify the gaps in the first edition and rectify them by using the numerous evaluations and comments we have received from those who have used the workbook to inform and guide this edition. We have no doubt that this edition will also be subject to scrutiny by both ourselves' and others' and time will once again cause us to make further changes. We believe that if the time ever comes when there are no more changes to be made (in our opinion) then it would probably mean it is time for us to give up working with voices.

This edition has also been designed in such a way to allow practitioners to be more effective in their own practice, whilst retaining the voice hearers' position of being in control of the process and more importantly their own experiences.