

## **Interview with Nancy Oelklaus, author of Journey from Head to Heart: Living and Working Authentically**

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is happy to be joined by Nancy Oelklaus, who is here to talk about her new book “Journey from Head to Heart: Living and Working Authentically.”

*Backed by a 30-year career in education, Nancy Oelklaus is a leader in the fields of organizational development, change, systems thinking, and adult learning. Her national and international experience brings diversity to her work, which is grounded in a knowledge base of the brain and systems.*

*Dr. Oelklaus has written for “The Systems Thinker,” “Leverage,” “The American School Board Journal,” “Leaders of Learners” and “Austin Business Journal.” Her leadership profile, “The Power of Love,” appears in “Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder,” published by the Taos Institute.*

*Nancy Oelklaus holds the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Administration from Texas A&M University, Commerce. Awards include Vision to Action Award from the Visions of a Better World Foundation, Boston, MA. She is an executive coach in Austin, Texas.*

**Tyler:** Welcome, Nancy, and thank you for joining me today. I understand “Journey from Head to Heart” is written for those tired of solving constant problems and not arriving at the destination they desire. What made you feel the need to write such a book?

**Nancy:** Two reasons. First, it is my family’s tradition to pass on what we learn. Our experiences can help others only if we talk about them. Secondly, in my own spiritual journey I found pieces that helped along the way, but no comprehensive system that integrated with what I already knew. That is, I read books about neuroscience; I read New Age works; I read religious works; I read leadership books; I recalled my own academic training. But I longed for something that brought all of these different disciplines and fields into harmony—into one whole. That’s my intent in writing this book—to bring a more complete, comprehensive approach into one book so that people find deeper, more lasting help.

**Tyler:** Will you tell us a little bit about your personal background and how it influenced writing “Journey from Head to Heart”?

**Nancy:** I love to teach. As I told my daughter once, “I’m in my fourth career. I’ve been through divorce and almost-divorce. I’ve fractured many relationships. I just wish you’d ask me what I learned.” This book is what I learned. My heart’s desire is that it helps readers so that they never again experience the pain of damaged relationships.

**Tyler:** What advice would you give to help people avoid damaged relationships?

**Nancy:** Always say what you truly need to say, even when you don’t think it will be well received. Don’t ignore your feelings and allow your emotion to build up over time to a point when it explodes. It’s the explosion that does the damage.

**Tyler:** Nancy, you talk in “Journey from Head to Heart” about overcoming the ego so the Authentic self can work from the power of the human spirit. Would you clarify what you mean by ego and Authentic self?

**Nancy:** Ego is formed from a child’s mind trying to make sense of an adult world. Our brains’ most rapid growth is before the age of six. In these years we form patterns—ways of dealing with the world and keeping ourselves safe. Many of these patterns are egocentric and just plain wrong. We learn to please people instead of being true to ourselves; we learn to control others so that we don’t incur their wrath. We draw conclusions about ourselves based on adult situations that we couldn’t possibly understand, and then these beliefs about ourselves control us for the rest of our lives, unless we stop to examine and change them. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” The movie “Groundhog Day” is the story of how someone can keep repeating negative experiences for an entire life! But each of us has a soul—a wise counselor who absolutely knows what’s right for us. Some people experience this as a “still, small voice.” I’ve talked to many people who have been guided by this voice, and they are always led to the lives they truly want to lead. Another word for this still, small voice is the Authentic Self, that part of us that connects with God. As one of my clients put it, “Once that “God spot” in my brain came alive, I could see the tiny lights along the path, and I just follow them.”

**Tyler:** What is the best way for a person to get in touch with this “still, small voice” that should be a personal guidance system?

**Nancy:** Get quiet. Just sit. Close your eyes. Ask this voice to speak and tell you what you need to hear. In the book I describe my first experience with meditation. I was terrified to go so deeply within. But once I found the courage to do it, I found incredible beauty, peace, love, and joy.

**Tyler:** You have also studied the mind, which is why you start the journey from the head. What have you learned about human thought processes that you think are detrimental or favorable for our achieving our desires?

**Nancy:** I’ll answer the detrimental part first. What is detrimental is allowing a negative thought about ourselves or others to repeat itself so often in our heads that we mistake it for fact. An example is that I believed I was not a good mother for decades. It’s what I told myself in my mind. Through the grace of my daughter’s love, I have learned very recently that I am a good mother. Thinking I was not did untold damage to me and to my relationships with my children. What I’ve found to be most favorable is thinking about achieving my desires “easily and joyfully.” My heart loves these two words. When I write a goal using these words—and my heart feels them—the goal is accomplished quickly, often beyond my highest hopes.

**Tyler:** Is writing down our goals important? What about writing is significant in achieving peace and our desires?

**Nancy:** What’s significant about writing goals is our emotional state of mind while we’re doing it. A goal isn’t wishful thinking. It’s a heartfelt request—something we truly want. Our business is to ask and then be willing and open to receive. Writing the goal gives it clarity and form, making it more powerful. So often I find myself thinking, when I write the goal, “Now how am I going to do that?” When I catch myself thinking like this, I stop. My job is to ask and be willing and open to receive. A power higher than I am fulfills the request. I do my part, listening to the still, small voice and taking action according to what it says. All I have to do is follow instructions.

**Tyler:** You talk in the book about the need to live a conscious life with purpose? Will you expand on this and explain why it is important?

**Nancy:** Some people say that our unconscious is controlling us 96% of the time. That is, 96% of the time we are on “automatic pilot.” Many of us are not aware at all of our own thinking. We’re just letting it drive us. We say, “That’s just my personality.” Or we say, “I’m angry because he’s an asshole.” And we stay stuck, repeating the same patterns for an entire life. So an important step is to “hear” the thoughts that are going through our heads and make a decision about whether or not these are thoughts we would choose if we were in our right minds. Love is the strongest force in the universe. I believe we are here to learn to love God, ourselves, and each other. Life becomes more joyful and meaningful when we discover what lies beneath our goals—what is driving us—when we get quiet enough to hear our Authentic Voice.

**Tyler:** I understand in writing the book you integrate logic, reason, emotion, Christianity, science and ancient wisdom. At the same time, the book is written for those wary of New Age philosophies. How does your book stand out from the other spiritual books out there?

**Nancy:** Well, I haven't read all the spiritual books out there, but from those I have read, I would say that my book is a more holistic, inclusive approach that includes tools and processes for making and sustaining personal change.

**Tyler:** And to go back to the mention of people being wary of New Age philosophies, what about these philosophies do you think are problematic? What are they lacking that "Journey from Head to Heart" can remedy?

**Nancy:** I sometimes feel that New Age approaches do not integrate head and heart. I've been around New Age followers who seem ungrounded, and this makes me uneasy. To me the various approaches—New Age philosophy, science, religion—are just different languages. No one "language" is the correct one; each has its value, its nuances, its truth. But for me the real power comes from not choosing one but integrating all of them into a more powerful whole.

**Tyler:** What are some of the tools you advocate using for personal change—are there activities you suggest that people practice?

**Nancy:** Lots of exercises, tools, and processes are integrated throughout the book. It's book and workbook combined. The first tool I discovered in my journey is so simple. You draw a circle. Then write inside the circle what you want in your life or in a specific situation. Write outside the circle what you do not want. Then, first thing in the morning for at least 40 days, read what you've written and look at your circle, meditating on it. Be awake and observant as what you want comes into reality. Just last week I talked with a skeptic who had just read the book. She wanted to know why she had to keep looking at the circle for at least 40 days. This is a person who operates from her head. If she "knows" it, she thinks that's all she has to do. But people change very, very slowly. Your head may know it, but the message hasn't yet reached all the other cells throughout the rest of your body where emotional memory is stored. It takes time and focus for these cells to reprogram. So you have to stay with it. I see people using this book for many years as a reference when difficult situations arise. I'm confident that the toolkit is sufficient to get them through tough times.

**Tyler:** Nancy, who do you see as the audience for your book?

**Nancy:** This book is for people who are hungry for more meaning, more peace, less stress, and greater fulfillment in life.

**Tyler:** Nancy, will you tell us a little bit about the other work you do—your teaching, public speaking and coaching background?

**Nancy:** I teach these concepts in seminars over a four-month period for small groups of people. I love speaking, especially on the topic *The Eye of the Needle: Tool for Difficult Conversations*. This tool is the heart of the book, and it's a good overall introduction to the concepts in the book. Coaching is what really makes my heart sing. Working one-on-one with someone over months or years, I see change. That person's life improves, and that's what I'm here for. Most people underestimate the time and effort required for true change to occur. They think because they read the book or heard the speech, they've got it. Not true. They have to do the work. Coaching is where they do the work.

**Tyler:** What do you think is the single biggest factor that prevents people from doing the work needed to change, and how can they overcome this resistance?

**Nancy:** The scientific term for this is inertia, the tendency for an organism to keep on doing what it has been doing. Another factor is fear. In "Hamlet," Shakespeare put it this way: "Thus what we know makes cowards of us all and makes us rather bear the ills we have than to fly to others that we know not." I tell people to feel the fear and do it anyway. They'll go through some pain—maybe severe emotional pain—but on the other side is joy. It's the only way to joy.

**Tyler:** What do you hope will be the result after someone reads "Journey from Head to Heart"?

**Nancy:** They decide to start the journey—to become the person they are truly meant to be.

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Nancy. Before we go, would you tell us a little bit about your website and what additional information may be found there about "Journey from Head to Heart"?

**Nancy:** My website, [www.HeadtoHeart.info](http://www.HeadtoHeart.info) contains a preview of the book that accurately conveys its intent and value for readers. Also, you can hear me read a sample chapter or read chapter 1 for yourself. There's a link where you can order the book, as well as 3 related CD's. I especially love the media of CD's because people can play them in their cars on their way to work and slowly absorb this powerful knowledge.

**Tyler:** Thank you, Nancy. I hope your "Journey from Head to Heart" is a success for you and that it successfully helps your readers live life more fully.

**Nancy:** Thank you, Tyler.