

EMPOWERING MEN

Adrian Hanks

Steve Biddulph describes 7 steps to manhood. He says men need to:

"free their wild spirit the god of men does not dwell in the suburbs or the office towers. Inner steadiness does not come from achievements or possessions."

Speaking specifically to men, he says:

"You need to find a spiritual basis for your inner life that is specifically masculine and based in nature, which connects you to the earth (and) ... as you get older this will be your source of strength and harmony, freeing you from fear and dependency on others"

(1994, *Manhood: A book about setting men free*).

Empowering Men is the name of a program I facilitate with days in the bush, men's groups, workshops, and is also the name of a section in my monthly newsletter, wherein I honour the men who have been part of my life and development in becoming a man of spirit.



Some of these men are: My grandfathers Bert & George, my father Dennis, my uncles and other men such as Ian, Peter, Bob, Yehuda, John, David, Craig, Malcolm, Robert, All Saints Men's group, Northern Rivers Men's Circle, the Manshine committee, Rudolf, Madiba, Wessel, Andrew, Jeremiah, Steve, Jason, Dean and many more ... I also honor my sons for the opportunities they give me. Thank you all.

It is, I believe, what we see, experience and learn from other men, which plays a big part in making us who we are as men. This can obviously be positive or a negative, depending on our experience. Much of what we do in our lives stems from

how we have observed, been shown, taught, told or been expected by others, to do things. Standing on our own two feet and making our own decisions can be a big challenge. With the right support, encouragement, mentoring, learning and positive challenges, we are more able to do this and to learn to be powerful and confident men.

Having the courage and taking the time to learn and practice being in our power and confidence, rather than being in an attacking or defensive ego, can take discipline and will. In my observation, is rare for men to do this, though things *are* moving, with men's workshops, groups and retreats becoming more common since the surge in the men's movement since the mid 80s.

One influence contributing to this surge were the books: *Manhood* by Steve Biddulph in Australia and *Iron John* by Robert Bly in USA. These two books helped to spurn a new conscious awakening in men. Men's groups were forming at a faster rate throughout the western world and a few men took up the reins to support and guide the evolution of the modern day men's groups.

Many thousands of men are now participating in men's gatherings, men's groups, workshops and retreats. Steve Biddulph continues to be a beacon of light and inspiration for many men. His book has sold over 3 million copies in over 15 languages across the globe in the past 20 years.

I have met Steve several times and first heard him speak in 1996 at Hobart University, in Tasmania. I remember Steve walking onto the stage and greeting about 300 people: "Where are all the men?" he asked. The auditorium was packed with a high percentage of women!

When I read Steve's book in 1995 I got mad. I got mad as I had a deeper realization and belief that '*men had let me down*'. I got mad at my own father and mankind in general for all of my 'wrongs' and 'hurts' and 'emotional wounds'. I was mad at the way I had been treated and left alone to deal with my journey. During 1995 I was part of a men's group in Hobart and all the men in this group were working through some issue, challenge or pain on some level. One day I decided that I was going to the UK to visit and confront my father. It was time. I wrote him a long letter and sent him the book *Manhood*. In hindsight, I can see that I was in reaction; that I was trying to find someone to 'blame' for my past hurts and wounds.

I went to see my father and we had a beautiful time together. We connected deeper than we had ever connected before. My father took time off work and we went driving around the countryside looking at all the buildings and creations he had done as a builder (read creative artist). We spent time walking through paddocks and woodlands talking about our lives. He shared stories of when he was a boy and a young man and shared stories about his own father, my grandfather. It was a magical time and I learn much about myself, my needs, my wounds and my way of blaming, projecting and judging others.

I am now at peace with my father and our relationship. Recently my father told me that he loved me. It has taken 48 years for him to say it and I think it has taken me 48 years to truly know and accept it. This was a big part of my growth into manhood.



When we contemplate what it is to be a man

What do we ask ourselves?

What is it that makes us a man?

How and when does it happen?

These are difficult and challenging questions to answer as we develop our 'manhood' in different stages, in many different ways, and in our own individual ways. The only thing that I can draw upon, are my own understandings, insights and experiences, and the understandings and experiences I have learnt from other men.

I have been part of, and have been facilitating, men's work for almost two decades. During this time I have been in the company of many hundreds of men from all walks of life;

coming from different economic, social, religious, spiritual, sexual, racial and cultural backgrounds. My observations are that men learn, in part, what it is to be a man by being around and observing other men. What is often challenging for men is the lack of 'Good Men' in their families or in their community.

When, in our more modern world, was the last time that men had other good men to model themselves on? When were men present to teach and show their boys and other men their good qualities, their deeper more soulful and spiritual, and understandings of life?

The word power is not used to mean that power which we see being thrown around by men who are in their ego, anger, fear, greed or loss. I mean power in the sense of controlled, conscious, empathetic and caring, courageous power. Words that help to express and sum this up are '**The Peaceful Warrior**' and '**Spirit Man**'. In these images I can hold a vision in my consciousness; a vision I can aspire to become each day. So, how do we, as men, claim our power, our manhood and our essence? What can we do to become a man of courage, wisdom and spirit, how can we become an 'Empowered Man' – and - what does this mean?

Each month '**Empowering Men**' explores this question through the newsletter; on the bush journeys; and in the men's groups, as well as in our everyday life. Each month we will journey



through many questions, insights, understandings, challenges and sharing, expressing our insights - journeying together as a 'community of good men' to support, guide and encourage each other to step in and step up as men.

Click on the following links to:

- Read about 2 men in the latest **CLD Newsletter** www.psychophonetics.com.au/articles/2/1/Adrian-Hanks/Page1.html
- Visit the website: www.empoweringmen.org

