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The **AUTISM** magazine  
TAP INTO IT.™  
**perspective**

# “AGifted Autistic!”

*A Candid Interview with Johnny Seitz  
How He Helped American Icon Dick Clark*



**FLOORTIME:**  
What It Is and What It Isn't

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Growing Up Aspie

# “A Gifted Autistic!”

A candid interview of Johnny Seitz by Chris Rials-Seitz



“Forget my little tics and my strange little rituals for just a second and weigh my honesty and my loyalty against artificial facades and hidden meanings.

If God does not make garbage, then who made me?  
Maybe I am a gift that you forgot to open!”

(Last stanza from “God Does Not Make Garbage” by Johnny Seitz)

*As a Life Coach who happens to be a person with autism, what do you think is the asset that enables you to make a difference in people's lives?*

As an autistic person, unmanaged stress and stored tensions in a body were danger signals to me. I see tense or stressed-out people and I get scared that they will unleash that stress against me. And with the lack of social skills that I had as a child, I made a pretty good target for built-up stress. What my autism gave me was an ability to really see and to understand the mechanics of stress in the human body.

As is often noted, autistic people are often able to take in complex systems more easily than neurotypicals. Think about the complexity of a computer software program. One of the highest concentrations of Aspies in America is Silicone Valley. Why? Because it takes 'geeks' to be able to picture and debug these complex programs. Think of Raymond in "Rainman," he saw the box of toothpicks fall and he didn't see a bunch of toothpicks, he saw exactly 497 individual toothpicks.

Well, when I look at someone doing a sit-up, I don't see just a sit-up. I see the synergistic movement of dozens of core stabilizers and abdominal muscles working in a complex 'program.' As well as making me a good trainer, my 'gift' enables me to see where one's movement choices are inefficient and often, why they are. And that 'why' often has a lot to do with stress or emotions that are held in the body, and I instantly see and know how to release them.

Once people become aware of where they are holding stress in their bodies, teaching them to release it is just a question of debugging a human program created by the stressors or trauma.

The human body is a perfectly designed

stress management machine. It has a number of what I call 'primary muscle recruitment patterns' that ideally are discovered in childhood to manage physical objects, and are naturally later applied to managing stress in adult life. Unfortunately, not all of us discover these patterns living in an urban environment. Or, once discovered, the parents do not ratify them. What I do is reconnect the different parts of the body, mind and spirit to reaffirm or perhaps learn and access for the first



time, these natural, full-body muscle recruitment patterns. In this way, I help people integrate their lives in areas where they had been split or cut off from.

*Have you been doing this kind of work long before the term "Life Coach" became a trend in our culture?*

'Life Coach' is just a term I learned that people use to describe what I do. I re-

ally never set out to be any such thing. I just happened to have an eye for seeing stress and stored emotions in people. My work as a personal trainer morphed into 'Life Coaching' as society tagged it.

So, here I am working as a personal trainer and I see all these stored stresses or emotions in my clients and I feel the need to try to help people release them. I have a lot of success and, BOOM, I'm labeled as "Life Coach." It's kind of funny but I have been doing what a 'Life Coach' does long before that term became trendy; I am what I am and it's great that I have been able to access my gift so that I can help others.

*In a recent publication, "The Stroke Connection," you are highlighted on the front cover as "a man with a GIFT." It alludes to your work as "a gift" and how this gift facilitated change for one of your celebrity clients, Dick Clark. Can you tell us about this gift and Dick Clark?*

I have a friend, Dr. Ralph Potkin, who is the director of the Beverly Hills Center for Hyperbaric Medicine. Dr. Potkin has experienced my work and feels I have a unique, yet precise method of working, which he found to be very effective. One day, Dr. Potkin told me he had a client that he felt could benefit from my work. Thus the referral was made and Dick Clark showed up at my studio.

Dick Clark, an American music icon and host of American Bandstand had survived a stroke in December of 2004. Dick had lost the ability to use the right side of his body and his voice was extremely affected. When we met, I saw a wounded man, withdrawn, maybe bitter, and hopeless, not to mention the dramatic muscle loss to the right side of his body and a curled up right hand. This was

a man who had loved his life, his wife, his work and his family passionately and now appeared broken-hearted and defeated.

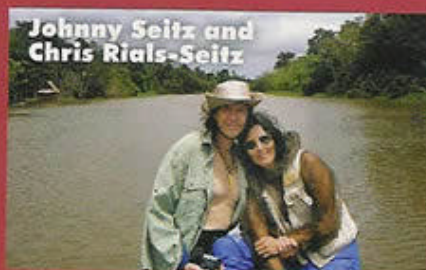
As I said, autistic people are often credited with being able to easily envision and encapsulate very complex systems more easily than normal people. For me, the mechanics of the human body are more exposed than it seems to be for others. I can hold all 600+ muscles and 200+ bones in my mind as I work with a body. If I possess a 'gift,' I guess it is the ability to encapsulate human biomechanics. I understand all of the things that must happen for human movement to result into action. For example, in a walk, all of the core stabilizers must be working, as well as the relatively complex synchronistic actions of the muscles in the floor of the pelvis and the legs and feet. I also can visualize the mental functions that send the message, "cross the room," to the muscles and all the things that must then happen for it to work. The average physical therapist doesn't have my autistic overview of the complex mechanics. But there is something else. I seem to have the ability to 'drop into' another person's body, complete with all of the physical limitations and know what is needed to get a specific action done. It is kind of like what Temple Grandin does for cows: I just happen to do this for humans. I can become a stroke victim's body and mind. This really helped in my process with Dick Clark. I needed to take into account both his physical and emotional state of being.

It also seems that, perhaps because of my autism, I am able to perceive messages being sent to the muscles, even tiny ones or unfocused ones, and I can guide the client to augment and to amplify these messages into actual controlled movements.

In fact, a doctor who called me after the article came out told me that they do this with something called EMG. They use machines to show the patient neuro-impulses that are being sent, even if the muscle doesn't respond, and help the patient to push harder until

movement is achieved. My autism seems to make me into a human EMG biofeedback machine that also can empathize with the mind of the person sending the messages and the trauma to the system that must be worked through.

Dick is a courageous, valiant soul! He has worked with his body, mind and spirit giving it his 100%. I laid out a vision for him after exploring his deficits and potential. My vision was that he would be able to stand and walk without a cane. It seemed like a demanding challenge for both of us. I worked using sensory stimulation, laughter,



*We need to be accepted, maybe understood a little better, but not cured.*

energy/stress management, positive reinforcement, something that I call 'bilateral muscle innervations' and 'cross-lateral contractions.' I won't bore you with elaborating what these technical terms mean, but I can tell you that it required showing up and Dick took it on like nobody's business. It was kind of like training for the Olympics, but in Dick's case, it was training for hosting the New Year's Eve 2006 celebration. And meet the challenge he did! He did New Year's Eve like the pro that he's always been. And his doubts about ever walking without a cane or using his right hand again are now gone. Today, he does both and continues to be as feisty as ever, meeting his everyday challenge of his ongoing recovery.

*Does it seem as though Dick relates to you as an autistic person?*

I believe he relates to me as someone who has had to deal with a serious disability like him, and he knows intimately the frustrations and limitations of living in a world where the simplest actions are very difficult and must be learned slowly and painfully. He is always surprised when I mention any inhibition about my acceptance in society because of certain challenges that present themselves because of my autism. For example, he has expressed astonishment when I question whether the medical community will embrace me. He is very much on my side!

*Tell us about why you think it is important that people acknowledge the gifts of autism and not just focus on curing autism.*

Well, where would the great inventions of history be without Leonardo Da Vinci or a government without Thomas Jefferson? How dull would the world be without Michelangelo? My work with Dick Clark, as well as others, is a perfect example. And curing autism? I do not need to be cured, I'm fine! We need to be accepted, maybe understood a little better, but not cured. We are not broken, we are different!

I do understand the value of continuing research, looking for interventions and perhaps cures. However, those of us that currently live with the differences presented by autism and contribute to society in one way or another need to be highlighted. We are powerful examples of what potentials probably lie hidden in a person with autism that might be overlooked while people are busily looking for a cure. There are so many of us that do contribute to society and no one even knows we have autism. People always say, "Wow, you don't seem autistic!" I think it is important because it helps to change people's perspective of what autism looks like. People can then have a different idea and look for what potential and possibility might look like. **TAP**