

# Beyond the Five Reasons why Focusing is not Better known (yet)

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## 1. Introduction

When I got to know Focusing and fell in love with it, I wondered myself why it needed so much time for me to find this wonderful gem. I had been interested in the dynamic of relationships, communication and psychology since my youth. I had studied psychology for two semesters and had read a lot of books about it, visited several workshops about Non-Violent Communication and did the Parent Effectiveness Training by Thomas Gordon (who was part of Carl Rogers' team just like Eugene Gendlin and Marshall Rosenberg), had been trained in the field of Emergency Counseling and Systemic Counseling, had found my way to a regular meditation habit and I could go on like this for several lines more...

So how could it be that I needed so many years and a short introduction of my Psychological Counseling Teacher (who said: 'If you buy a book about Focusing, buy the one written by Ann Weiser Cornell. She's the best!') to finally cross way with this process that felt like I had been searching for it all of my life?

Having this question in mind, I smiled when I read Ann's article 'Five Reasons Why Focusing is Not Better Known (Yet)' in my German translation of 'The Radical Acceptance of Everything' (it can also be found online: <https://focusingresources.com/five-reasons-why-focusing-is-not-better-known-yet/> - in the book, there's also an introduction to the article written by Ann), that showed me that I'm not alone with this question (even when the article was originally published in the year 1996) and gave me (five) answers to it.

In case you haven't read the article yet or it has been some time since you did it and might have forgotten, what these reasons were, I want to give you a short version of them:

1. Focusing is not very dramatic, flashy or somehow impressive to watch
2. Focusing is (too) general in purpose, in contrast to methods that for example just concentrate on trauma
3. The steps of Focusing teaching froze in 1978, when Gene Gendlin's book was published

*(in the introduction, Ann herself no longer agrees with this reason, seeing how every Focusing Teacher has their own way of teaching Focusing that differs just a little bit from what they had been taught. Instead, she added the reason that it's difficult for Focusers to talk about Focusing with people who don't know it, because our understanding of words and their meaning (like body) changes as soon as we start to do Focusing in a way that is hard to explain to non-Focusers)*

4. Focusing is radical. It counters the mainstream trends and themes of our society, like rationality, speed and clarity. It's not goal- or results-oriented.
5. "You haven't heard of this before, because now is the time." (Janet van Berger)

After reading this article, I somehow felt unsatisfied. These reasons sounded plausible, of course, but what about the (Yet) in the title? Didn't it mean that there's hope that it would change? Or that there was hope in the year 1996? So... did it change? Was it just my personal impression that it is – after more than 25 years - still very unknown? And if not, what could be done about it? What could I do about it?

These questions stayed with me, remaining unanswered. So when it came to choosing my project, these questions returned and I felt the wish to finally find some answers to them – not just my personal, but also those of my fellow trainees and Focusing partners.

## 2. My five questions

In order to find answers, there needed to be clear questions. Thinking about them, it felt fitting to me to ask five of them, to match the five reasons. Those questions were:

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**1. How did you get to know Focusing?**

**2. Would you say that practicing Focusing changed your life? And if so, in which ways?**

**3. In my personal environment, Focusing is still far less known than Nonviolent Communication or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Do you share this perception? And if you do, what do you think might be the reasons why Focusing is not better known?**

**4. Imagine a world in which much more people - especially leaders - would have the ability to pause before acting, to be Self-in-Presence, to sense what's going on inside of them and to establish a kind relationship themselves and their parts. Do you believe that this would change the world we're living in? And if you do, how would this change look like?**

**5. What would be needed to make Focusing more known and popular? Is there a first step that could be done in the near future... or even now?**

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As you probably noticed, I intended to design them by a certain order, going from near (the personal experience) to far (the human world), from past, to present and beyond, from experiences that are clear and concrete to the fuzzy realm of imagination, returning back to a clear and concrete action that could be executed in the near future.

First, I answered the questions for myself and then I sent them to my 11 co-trainees and 2 partners, offering them to answer in written form, by recording via Signal or by doing an interview with me. In the result, eight people participated in the survey (thank you so much!) - two of them did interviews with me, one person spoke her answer on Signal and the other ones replied in written form.

### 3. My own answers

Before I share the summarized results with you, I want to share my own answers in detailed form.

#### **3.1 How did you get to know Focusing?**

My 'Psychological Counselor'-teacher told us about it in class and since I was searching for a method that can improve my body awareness at that time, I immediately bought and read the book and fell in love. That's how it began...

#### **3.2. Would you say that practicing Focusing changed your life? And if so, in which ways?**

Practicing Focusing definitely changed my life. In which ways... Well first, since taking Focusing classes, I've met a lot of wonderful people and right now, I have six Focusing partners (plus my triad). So Focusing gave me a precious emotional support network that I can turn to in time of struggles... and ensures I take time for everyone inside who needs me. This support gives me confidence that I can make it okay through hard times. Plus my life is much more beautiful and fun with these wonderful partners and I'm so grateful to have them at my side.

Also... on the outside, it gave me a career option that makes me feel like it's made for me.

More on the inside... that's hard to describe. I feel like someone in me expected that it would lead to widening and overcoming my boundaries... like becoming a superhero who's always friendly and can shoulder anything. So this one is somehow disappointed that practicing Focusing led me to the opposite... to taking my boundaries more serious - to taking my time to rest and to say 'no' when something doesn't feel right to me (while also being in contact with the ones being ashamed of my limitations). To realize how much of an introvert I am and to accept that I need a lot of alone-time to wholeheartedly enjoy human interaction. And to be with the parts that have a lot of ideas and want to have a lot of action, instead of acting them out, alternating from enthusiasm to exhaustion back and fourth...

So overall it feels like I know and accept myself way better than I did two years ago and my life feels more balanced now.

#### **3.3. In my personal environment, Focusing is still far less known than Nonviolent Communication or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Do you share this perception? And if you do, what do you think might be the reasons why Focusing is not better known?**

Okay, I already partly answered this one in the question itself. Still I can sense further into it and I think of the mental health education programs I was offered at my workplaces (regular and the voluntary ones) and the classes that were offered at the community colleges and places like meditation centers that I knew... there were classes for general relaxation techniques, Nonviolent Communication, meditation and yoga... but not once did I find a Focusing class. And the people I know who have heard about Focusing before, are healing professionals or did hear about it from a healing professional.

So my impression is that when you're not involved into this therapeutic world, the chances that you'll ever hear about Focusing are very small. And if this is true, then it's no

wonder that it is not better known in contrast to methods that are more present 'outside the healing world'.

***3.4. Imagine a world in which much more people - especially leaders - would have the ability to pause before acting, to be Self-in-Presence, to sense what's going on inside of them and to establish a kind relationship themselves and their parts.***

***Do you believe that this would change the world we're living in? And if you do, how would this change look like?***

Well, obviously that's something I believe in, although I have no idea how this change would look like. Certainly I'm hoping for more peace, people being able to listen to and connect with each other more easily (instead of feeling divided when they have different opinions about important topics). I want people who carry a lot of responsibility for other people to have... inner support when dealing with outer crisis.

As mother, I worry a lot about the climate crisis and the future that might await us if we fail to meet it united. So I hope that if we learn to listen to ourselves with kindness and then learn to listen to each other with kindness... maybe we could find a way to face this enormous task together.

***3.5. What would be needed to make Focusing more known and popular? Is there a first step that could be done in the near future... or even now?***

Okay, here are some spontaneous thoughts and ideas:

- It would be really cool to have some popular YouTube (mental) health influencer(s) like Professor Andrew Huberman, whose more popular videos get thousands and millions of clicks, to recommend (Inner Relationship) Focusing. Although I'm just thinking about whether that's really a good idea to get too much attention at once, when we're not prepared for something like this...
- To get some attention of people who want scientific proof in order to engage in something, it would be great to have more high quality studies... like for example a long-term study with a group that practices Inner Relationship Focusing regularly and a control group that practices MBSR instead, doing interviews and brain scans at the beginning of the experiment, 6 weeks and 6 months and maybe some years later.
- It would be helpful if health insurances would support Focusing as precautionary measure like some do with meditation classes and programs (oh, I just googled it and it seems to be possible (at least in Germany) to register classes once you're a certified professional)
- Also, teaching older kids at schools would be nice. In my son's first elementary school, they offered an activity about getting to know one's emotions and I've read that some schools had included subjects like 'happiness' and 'awareness' into their curriculum. So maybe that's a place where we could also offer our assistance.

***3.6. How was it for me to answer these questions?***

Before I go into the replies of the other Focusers, I want to take a moment to reflect how it was for me to fill out this quiz. It was harder than I had expected when thinking of the questions. Although I planned to just sense into these questions, sharing what comes wi-

thout judging it, I got very anxious and self-conscious while writing it down (especially when answering the last question), thinking ‘this is stupid’ and imagining the negative reactions it might invoke in you who’s reading this. At various points I thought about deleting everything and writing a ‘better’ version.

After this experience, my gratitude for those, who helped me by sharing their answers, grew even bigger.

## 4. The Results

So finally and without more ado, here are the summarized answers of the seven Focusers:

### 4.1 *How did you get to know Focusing?*

Like it was in my case, three participants first heard about Focusing from their teacher as part of their training (osteopathic advanced training, Transformation Coach Training) or while learning about something else (Enneagram). In one case, Focusing and Gene Gendlin were just mentioned briefly and on the pass, in the other case, Focusing was a significant part of the training, but wasn’t mentioned in its description.

When I came up with the question, I had guessed that at least one participant had learned about Focusing from their therapist, and my assumption was actually correct in one case. The therapist was a Focuser and facilitated sessions which were a combo of IRF and Internal Family Systems.

There was another example of the knowledge of Focusing spreading directly from one person to another, in this case it was the Focuser’s aunt who is a Certified Focusing Practitioner. At her visit, she did a Focusing Session with the later Focuser and left the book ‘Radical Acceptance’, which was re-discovered years later and led to joining the ‘Path to Lasting Change.’

One participant learned about Focusing by chance. They were exploring YouTube videos about Non-Violent Communication and came across [this one](#) (from Gina Siluwa) that sparked it all (personal remark: no wonder! What a beautiful explanation what Focusing is (and what not!)).

Two participants were dealing with personal issues and found Focusing when they were looking for a helpful method or a way to deal with it. One of them googled the term “an-nehmen” (‘accept’) and found “Die Kunst des Annehmens” (‘The Radical Acceptance of Everything’) and reading the book made them curious for more. Another person had read/heard of Focusing during their search for answers and support and re-encountered it when looking specifically for a body-oriented method.

### 4.2 *Would you say that practicing Focusing changed your life? And if so, in which ways?*

Since the answers of this questions were so beautiful and inspiring and show the wide range of the ways Focusing can have an impact on one’s life, I want to share these as full quotes (or with more details, at least).

One participant wrote that they wouldn't say it changed their life because that happened years earlier with other self exploration methods. They added:

*"But it changed something: it gave me a more direct key to my intrinsic-body-knowing than I knew already. With Focusing I can decide (we say "invite") with my awareness for a certain starting place and in this way I can choose a very specific and personal topic I would like to work with for inducing a change and also to get to know me better. Maybe Focusing is the most effective way from all I know to integrate and transform unpleasant feelings and/or physical sensations."*

There was another person who agreed on Focusing not changing their life, but improving it in many ways:

*"I wouldn't say Focusing has changed my life as such, but as with all things that I have experienced, it IS influencing my life – and that's in a positive way ☺.*

*If you ask in which way it influences or effects my life...*

- *I'm listening to my partner and children better (Really listening!)*
- *I'm not getting so flustered or upset with other people's issues or reactions towards me*
- *I have a lot clearer direction in my life*
- *I am beginning to truly know myself better and feeling more peace within."*

While another participant perceived the skills, that Focusing gave them as life-changing:

*"Focusing changed my life in that I feel better able to manage my life. I can attend to my own experiences with greater skill and flexibility (emotional regulation). I can also make better decisions for myself, rather than relying on what would be conventionally accepted/recommended, the cultural blueprint if you will (internal locust of control)."*

They were not the only one who wrote/said that Focusing clearly changed their life:

*"Yes, changed AND is changing, all the time.*

*Something in me that is reflexively reactive is much less so. It's still there, and it now knows it can trust me to show up most of the time, so it doesn't have to make a choice RIGHT NOW.*

*The whole feel of it right now is that my body...the cells, the molecules...have been freed from their fixed positions of fear and reflex, have spread out, rearranged, and settled into a more comfortable place. Not all of them by far, but a LOT of them, and even the ones that have settled are free to move again! I'm more comfortable in myself than ever. And there's more that is still suffering in place that needs Untangling. My body carries the faith that what seems "impossible" (because change freedom for my Small Ones "could destroy things") IS possible, and it won't destroy anything...and we can go as slowly and gently as my slowest parts need to...*

*How this looks in my life: is subtle. My husband (we've been together for 27 years) confirms that since starting PATH in 2019, I am less reactive, my moods are less extreme, I'm more accessible and "easier to love" because I'm more "there". And it's easier for me – to live with and love others in their suffering. I'm feel less of a need to "fix" them."*

Another participant appreciated the confidence to face the hardships of life that Focusing gave them: *"Yes, practicing Focusing has changed my life a lot and continues to change it. Sometimes I don't see the change so well or think it should happen even more and faster. Then there are times when I am very impressed by things/situations/people/encounters that I now perceive or judge differently or no longer judge at all. Overall, focusing makes it possible for me to be more aware, to be more with myself, to have more distance*

from things, etc. But what I value most is the feeling that there can no longer be a situation or something similar in my life that I cannot cope with. Focusing is the resource to deal with and interact with all possible circumstances.” (Translated from German)

Additionally to the improvement of the skill to sense their body, one participant saw the change that they starting to like going inside, instead of solve everything in a sole cognitive way. This led to the point where they started to take their body and its wisdom more seriously, listening more to their gut feeling, sensing their boundaries and stepping back from already made decisions (lie appointments), when they sensed that their body needed something else. Valuing their well-being over the expectation of other people. They also became aware that results of other methods became deeper and more intensive when they focused on it. Overall, Focusing gave them more enjoyment of life, more stability and also became helpful in their work with their own clients.

Another participant felt that they did Focusing all their life without knowing it. They followed their inner sense of rightness, no matter what other people said about it. Learning about it still changed their life and still does, deepening the connection to themselves. They also valued the possibility to apply it in daily life and in their creative work. Also, they can more fully accept themselves, which eases the challenge of dealing with other people and their expectations.

#### ***4.3. In my personal environment, Focusing is still far less known than Nonviolent Communication or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Do you share this perception? And if you do, what do you think might be the reasons why Focusing is not better known?***

Everyone answering this question shared my perception that Focusing is still not very much known (maybe a little better among therapists). Here are the possible explanations they shared.

- The word ‘Focusing’ itself is not self-explaining like ‘Non-Violent Communication’ or ‘Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction’, and at the same time misleading, because it’s a general term and people think they know what it’s about. So it’s necessary to explain WHAT it means, which is a hard thing to do and takes effort from both sides.
- In order to be willing to learn it, people already need a special kind of mindset. They already need presence to sense that Focusing is something that’s worth investing time, effort and money, instead of choosing more well-known, familiar, easy, direct or ‘promising’ ways to solve their problems (“You can’t convince parts.”). The other way might be through a lot of suffering and the feeling that they had tried out everything else.
- It’s a complete new concept and not a variation of something people already do (like Non-Violent Communication is a special way of communication) or a special application (like the name ‘Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction’ already tells what it is applied for).
- There’s a lack of research on Focusing and specially for Focusing interventions (those that teach people how to Focus) - MBSR came to popularity by way of research).
- You have to experience it by yourself to understand how different and powerful it is. It’s something that can’t be explained by words
- It’s not well-known because it isn’t well-known, in term that there aren’t many people who teach it (especially not as a standalone method, not as part of some-

thing else). It isn't mentioned in newspaper articles (with very few exceptions) and other sources of information or (social) media. So you need to be really lucky to find it in the first place and then to find a teacher and class that suits you (especially if you're not speaking English)

- Our society (and maybe especially the German one) doesn't support the inner relationship or sensing our bodies, stressing the importance of outside goals and achievements. Spiritual methods like meditation are tolerated if they serve your self-improvement so you can work more effectively.
- This concentration on the outside world, that is promoted by our society, might lead to an alienation with the world inside, so the thought of returning there might be foreign, unattractive and maybe even scary to some people.
- Because Focusing can be added to other methods so well, it doesn't stand out on its own. Also some people might not see that it's more complex than just adding bodywork.
- It's been incorporated into psychological practice, seen as yet another professional method that therapists can use for treating clients, instead of something that's easily found and attractive for everyone (especially those who don't have much money).
- The result of the study that Gendlin and his colleagues did - that it needs the skill of Focusing to make therapies successful - isn't widely known (and maybe not too popular in the therapeutic world).
- Most Focusing professionals don't like to do big marketing campaigns or flashy advertising, since it doesn't feel authentic to them.
- Some things just need their time to grow.

***4.4. Imagine a world in which much more people - especially leaders - would have the ability to pause before acting, to be Self-in-Presence, to sense what's going on inside of them and to establish a kind relationship themselves and their parts. Do you believe that this would change the world we're living in? And if you do, how would this change look like?***

All participants agreed that a world in which more people had access to those qualities would be a different, a better one ("a dream come true"). Three of them added that they think that it should rather be slow, sustainable growth from below, than something that is passed/pushed from above – starting with youth, with voters, rather than with the elected leaders (bottom up instead of top down). In result, the elected representatives would be more trustworthy because voters could sense who was best to speak for them from a place of inner knowing and care.

From the point of view of the participants, leaders (and people in general) with such qualities would be searching for more fitting solutions that directly address the challenges of the day, rather than seeking blame or glory. They would slow down and take their time to make more equitable decisions that would be healthy and good, for themselves, others and the planet, leading to less materialism, strictly performance-oriented mindsets, conflict, dehumanization and violence and to an increase of the ability to take responsibility for themselves and their deeds, harmony, connectedness, (mental) health, serenity, happiness, kindness, respect, appreciation, fairness, peace, commitment to environmental protection and care for everyone's needs.



Two persons noted such a change should happen fast, so that we can keep up with the rapid development of artificial intelligence and because the world is in such a devastating state.

#### ***4.5. What would be needed to make Focusing more known and popular? Is there a first step that could be done in the near future... or even now?***

Here are the ideas of the participants:

- Teach it in (primary) schools or maybe starting even earlier in kindergarten, so children grow up with it and it becomes their second nature to pause, breathe and saying ‘something in me...’, sensing their inner wisdom. (this was suggested by three participants)
- Having a name like ‘Inner Relationship Focusing’ already helps because it is self-explaining and people recognize at the same time that it is supposed to be something different than they imagine with "Focusing".
- More (German) books about it
- More presence in the (social) media (like podcasts, interviews, spreading it via mental health influencers)
- Being a living example, so other people can see for themselves how Focusing changes us
- Talk about Focusing
- Talk about Focusing without saying the word ‘Focusing’ or trying to explain it, more like: ‘You have a problem? I have something you could try out to solve it.’
- Research on the outcomes of Focusing intervention.
- Survey marketers who practice Focusing.
- Ask this question of all Focusers to crowdsource ideas!
- Fund more scholarships or find other ways to make Focusing training and counseling more inclusive and accessible for EVERYONE. We need a broader representation of humanity benefitting from it and sharing those benefits and bringing their own richness of experience to contribute to the body of Focusing.
- Teach it at community colleges.
- Having more teachers for it, so it can be found everywhere.
- Set up a project group to find answers for this question, maybe finding a language that makes Focusing more accessible and attractive to people
- Offer free taster webinars
- Bringing it to people in a trauma-sensitive way with understanding for the people who are afraid to go inside, finding a softer, more resource-based way for the transition from the world outside to the inner world.
- Offer a network for partnerships for daily short sessions (10 or even 5 minutes each - ,coffee break Focusing‘)

## **5. Conclusions**

After reading all these answers, what first comes to my mind is that everyone who took the survey has experienced positive changes by doing Focusing on a regular basis (may they’ve been seen as life-changing or not) and think that it would be a good thing if more people could do it. This may be no wonder, since all of them are committed Focusers, still I think it’s worth noting.

The second thought, that comes, is that we all had some kind of journey finding Inner Relationship Focusing. It wasn't straight-forward like me and meditation (reading about it, searching for it on the internet, finding guided meditations for beginners, trying them out and keeping sticking to do it on a regular basis), there were often (year) long pauses between one step and the next one. It seems to me like there already was some kind of Focusing involved, some kind of taking in, pausing and taking next right step when the time is right. So most of us aren't part of Gendlin's target group: people who don't have this kind of access to their inner wisdom.

So when wanting to offer Focusing to a larger audience and especially those who wouldn't have successful therapies, we face the difficulty that most of us Focusers are sensitive introverts who don't feel comfortable competing with loud, flashy advertising. And there's the fact that it's challenging to make people (especially those who aren't already mental health enthusiasts) understand, what Focusing actually is and what it gives to us.

The next sticking point is the contradiction between the world being in this devastating state and the feeling that things need to change quickly because of the pressing threats and challenges on the one and the impression that sustainable growth needs time and needs to start with the roots in a bottom-up approach on the other side.

Personally, what I'm taking with me after doing this survey, is this deeper feeling of complexity and contradictions of this issue. It also strengthened my wish to work with non-professionals, be it by offering classes in community colleges or talking to schools about possible cooperations.

Again, I want to thank everyone who offered their time and insights by doing this survey and hope that you, who's now reading this, enjoyed reading their stories and ideas as much as I did.

Warmly,  
Julia Richling

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