

Connecting beyond difference

7 keys to a real connection
with people with autism and many others!



Alex Peeters & Marleen Devisch

Original title: **Anders omgaan met 'anders'**

Original subtitle: **7 sleutels voor een betere relatie
met mensen met autisme en vele anderen!**

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ISBN: **978-94-0382-656-1** (paperback)

ISBN: **978-94-0382-667-7** (hardcover)

Publisher: **GROEI ACADEMIE BV**

Press-work: **Amazon** or **Printforce**

Edition: **First edition**

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If you come across any errors in this book, of any kind, we welcome your feedback. Much of what we have written here, we have also learned, read, unconsciously absorbed, borrowed, or copied from others who are smarter than us, or who in turn learned it from others. No one needs to reinvent the wheel to be successful. What we can do is refine it, replicate it, give it status, or add our own contribution. That is what we call innovation. Innovation is the most powerful path to success, both individually and as a human species.



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About the authors

***Marleen & Alex** help people reshape their lives so they spend more time feeling good than feeling bad. In essence, they guide others toward maximum quality of life, genuine happiness, and meaningful success.*

We often build our own mental prisons, only to become unhappy because of the way we think. We trap ourselves in patterns that limit us and keep us stuck. This creates a sense of inner confinement that holds us back from living freely.

***Marleen & Alex** work with NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) to help people gently shift toward a life in which different thoughts and emotions take center stage. The result? More freedom, joy, and impact, and with it, a fundamentally new way of living.*



Alex Peeters & Marleen Devisch

*Marleen & Alex have been not only life partners since October 2013, but also business partners. Together, they are co-directors of **GROEI ACADEMIE BV***

*Marleen Devisch, NLP Trainer™, NLP Coaching Trainer™, NLP Coach™ and mentor at **GROEI ACADEMIE**, has been active in the field of personal development for over 25 years. As Alex's life partner, she has mastered the art of creating a climate of growth for others. Her broad experience and deep understanding of people make her an indispensable guide for anyone attending a training. She specializes in helping people reconnect with the core of who they are and what drives them from within. Her calm and simple approach, combined with her contagious enthusiasm, inspires and moves people into action.*

*Alex Peeters, NLP Trainer™, NLP Coaching Trainer™, NLP Coach™ and mentor at **GROEI ACADEMIE**, is a living example of the kind of transformation someone can experience at **GROEI ACADEMIE**. Several years ago, he was diagnosed with autism. **Hardly anyone expected him to become a trainer.** Today, he is a respected expert in business-focused NLP training. He embraces his autism as a strength, and with his precision and sharp observation, he helps others rise to above-average levels in their personal growth. At **GROEI ACADEMIE**, Alex is the creative force behind many of the training programs and is also the originator of most of the books published by the organization. His passion for human development is infectious.*

What Alex wants to share you about this book

Many of our test readers asked how I, Alex, relate to the content of this book. Well, I, Alex, had to hear for the first 45 years of my life that I was impossible to live with.

When I fell in love with Marleen in October 2012, I had been single for 22 years, and she did for 20 years. We truly loved each other and wanted our relationship to work. But there were some breaking points for which we had no solution.

In 2014, the year we decided to get married, Marleen asked if I would consider being tested. She had a strong suspicion. I agreed, and the result confirmed what she had sensed, I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.

She wanted to know this so she could decide whether she could live with what she could and could not expect from me, or whether it would be a breaking point.

We kept fighting. We love each other more and more. We're happier together than ever. And our disagreements, well, they don't last as long anymore. In the beginning, we didn't speak to each other for three days, after a row. Now, most of the time, it's just a few minutes, and only rarely an hour.

And yes, by now, living with me is actually pretty wonderful. We continue to grow, always a little closer to one another.

The solutions Marleen describes in this book are mostly NLP techniques, explained in everyday language so that nearly anyone can work with them easily. During our NLP trainings, participants often discover the official names for these tools as well.

Some test readers asked how people with autism might apply these keys in practice. Well, NLP is the language of the unconscious, it's a very literal and direct way to communicate. That makes it an ideal language to learn for people with autism, since many of us are naturally quite literal.

There's a lot more I could say, but I won't, because this is Marleen's book.

What I will share is that I was her very first test reader. I read the entire book in one sitting, in a single breath. And I gave her my full and unconditional blessing to publish it, just as it is. She didn't have to change a word for me, even though tears of emotion were in my eyes while reading it.

Because the world deserves to know that even when you're different from the standard, you can be incredibly happy, with the right person by your side.

Marleen, thank you for allowing us to be this vulnerable. Connecting beyond difference has truly become a way of life for us.

Alex Peeters

About this book

How we usually relate to people who are 'different'

We all react in our own way to people who are 'different' from ourselves. We tend to pull what feels different or unfamiliar toward our own side because we believe our way of living is the best. It's in our nature. We are, at heart, an intolerant species. However, we are also a species that has shown, throughout time, that we are capable of growth and evolution. And that gives us possibilities...

Trying to pull others to our side means we don't allow them to be who they are. It means reshaping and molding them into someone who fits our way of thinking.

But when we give the other person the space to be themselves, they might actually add something valuable to our lives. They might be exactly the person we need at that moment. Or they might teach us something.

We are all unique instruments in the orchestra of life. Trying to turn a trumpet into a violin doesn't make better music. It's precisely because a trumpet is allowed to be fully trumpet that it adds something meaningful to the orchestra.

This book is, on the one hand, an example of how I, Marleen, spent years trying to pull Alex, my husband who has autism, to my side. On the other hand, it tells the story of the journey we took to stop doing that.

You'll read about our challenges and our evolution, which helped us learn to appreciate each other as we are: both different, both unique. Today, we enrich each other, and the 'difference' has become the greatest strength in our relationship and in our company, **GROEI ACADEMIE BV**

In this book, I share our story, nothing more, nothing less: our experience. It is not based on scientific research. I have no intention of generalizing. What helped us might not necessarily be helpful to others with autism or any other form of 'different'. So, please read this book with the right perspective.

My hope is that it will be a source of inspiration for your own journey. I have attached this hope to the following pages. If this book can contribute in any way to a new view of autism, on living with people with autism, and, more broadly, on people who are somehow 'different' from the average, then we have reached our goal.

We have attached seven keys to our story. These are the solutions we've found to the challenges we faced. They provide insight into how we've dealt with Alex's autism so far. They may clarify things you might experience in your own life. They may give you guidance when you are in contact with someone who is 'different'. They may also answer questions you have.

My husband has found his way in life, sometimes despite, but more often because of, his autism. I've learned so much about myself, my communication and relationship skills (and where they are lacking), by liv-

ing with him and continuing our shared journey toward greater happiness. I've especially learned that we, those who don't have the autism label, often overestimate our relationship and communication skills. People with autism, or other forms of 'different', have so much to teach us if we are open to it.

It is our dream that you take what you read and put it into practice in your everyday life. That you test it out and find your own path. A path where you are the chief architect. That you learn to dare to connect with someone who is 'different'. Or that you revisit your existing relationships and explore what changes.

Our deepest hope is that people with autism and their environment, or by extension, people we perceive as 'different' and their environment, will find their way together through life, and in doing so, make a difference for others. In this way, we contribute to a more communication-skilled society.

