



**TAPPING IN:** Andrew Griffiths is real, raw, relevant. Picture: Brian Cassey

# Inspired by a stranger

Scarred by an abusive childhood, Andrew Griffiths recognised the pain in a woman's cry for help and connected with her. Now his book is reaching others, writes **Gavin King**.

**A**NDREW Griffiths will always remember her voice, the gut-wrenching desperation of it at the other end of the phone line.

The call came through in the middle of a frenetic Friday afternoon in December 2007.

With his diary bursting with appointments and project deadlines hurtling towards him, Griffiths was too busy to answer calls from a number he didn't recognise.

His overloaded schedule didn't allow for such distractions.

Then aged 40, Griffiths was running his businesses from his home base in Cairns, juggling the growing demands of his successful marketing firm, preparing keynote speeches for interstate conferences and ramping up a publicity tour for his latest book.

In the midst of this mad end-of-week scramble he had what he calls a momentary lapse of concentration and answered his phone.

A woman Griffiths had never met told him she wanted to kill herself. Through tears and a black fog of acute depression, she told him that every aspect of her life was falling apart, from her small business to her marriage.

He didn't know what to say or do, except to listen.

As an orphan raised very much like a character in a Charles Dickens novel, Griffiths had heard this woman's brand of pain before.

He had been through it himself.

"This woman had read one of my books about business marketing and just decided she would call me because she had no one else to turn to," he says.

"She was suicidal, she told me she was going to kill herself, her business was down the toilet, her husband was abusive and she was at her wit's end.

"We chatted for a couple of hours and she cried and cried and I listened and tried to get her out of that zone, and through the simple fact of someone listening to her she was able to go on and make it through.

"We still keep in touch to this day and that phone call became one of the real turning points in my life."

Up until that point Griffiths had focused his considerable reserve of energy on making it in the cutthroat world of business publishing, writing easy-to-digest books about marketing and small business tips.

Despite his series of best-selling

business books finding success in more than 50 countries and a burgeoning reputation on the lucrative public speaking circuit, he wasn't satisfied.

His personal life was still a closed book. Life-long friends had no idea about the traumatic details of his early childhood.

With his older sister Wendy, Griffiths was raised in a shifting array of suburbs in North Perth by an old lady named Winifred, whose bouts of psychotic rage scarred the children for life.

He was rescued by welfare officers when his primary school teachers discovered a deep wound across his stomach during a swimming lesson, the result of being slashed with a pair garden shears in one of Winifred's uncontrollable outbursts.

During that phone call in late 2007 the help he was able to offer to a woman he'd never met crystallised Griffiths' shift into the somewhat ethereal world of self-help books.

His latest book, *The Me Myth*, sits on bookstore shelves next to world-beating titles such as *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert and *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne.

The self-help industry first boomed in the 1980s, fuelled by the almost guru-like status of American motivational expert Anthony Robbins.

Australia has been much slower to latch on to the self-help and motivational phenomenon, a trend Griffiths believes is slowly changing.

"As Australians we're a bit more cynical about these types of things than the Americans are, but I think there's a wonderful shift going on where people are being open minded to being more positive and using new ways of thinking," he says.

"We're after more connection, more humanity, and to be more real in our business and our life.

"*The Me Myth* is resonating with people because it's really about the mistakes I've made in business and my personal life and what I did to

overcome them." Griffiths now grounds all his writing and speeches in the three Rs - raw, real and relevant.

"The whole concept of motivation is a bit worn out because it feels false," he says.

"It's a bit like a personal trainer trying to get people to run up a hill - when the personal trainer isn't there, you don't run up the hill.

"Instead, if you can inspire them with a story or real situation, then they will drive themselves forward and that can result in longer-lasting change."

With the ghosts of the global financial crisis still lingering around the edges of the Australian economy, Griffiths believes more people are looking for inspiration to turn their lives around.

"I was in New York last year and I saw a message spray-painted on a subway underpass that read 'What has the GFC taught us - that self-worth is far more important than net worth', and that really stayed with me," he says.

"I think the GFC has made us reflect on what we really want and created a thirst for people to want to reinvigorate and change their life.

"You have to challenge yourself and you have to grow, and that's what I want to inspire people to do."

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Andrew Griffiths' new book *The Me Myth* (Simon & Schuster, \$29.90) is out now.

## BEST-SELLING SELF-HELP BOOKS

1. *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert
2. *The Seven Spiritual Laws Of Success*, Deepak Chopra
3. *The Road Less Travelled*, Dr M. Scott Peck
4. *Don't Sweat The Small Stuff*, Richard Carlson
5. *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie
6. *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne
7. *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, Robert T. Kiyosaki
8. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey
9. *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle
10. *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen