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The True Genius of Virginia Satir

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Author's note

When Virginia Satir worked with someone, she offered her heart and soul—100 percent—both verbally and, more important, nonverbally. But she also used a wealth of very detailed and specific communication methods in order to make the session a dramatic and life-changing experience for the client.

The article below was written 23 years ago, shortly after Virginia's death. Two years later I expanded it into a book, *Virginia Satir: The Patterns of Her Magic*. In this book I use an annotated verbatim transcript of a videotaped session that Virginia conducted with a woman who hated her mother, showing in great detail exactly how the principles Satir used were evident in her work. Three years later, in a videotaped follow-up interview, the client tells how her mother has become her best friend: evidence of the depth and lasting effect of the session.

Although Satir's methods are easily taught and learned, unfortunately I see as little evidence in the work of most therapists today as I did 23 years ago. In both live and videotaped client demonstrations—and I watch as many as I can—I usually observe the therapist droning on, exhuming the dusty bones of the past (what Virginia called “archaeology”), instead of making the session live and breathe in the present. I hope that the re-publication of this article can revive interest in Virginia's great gifts—many of them unopened—to the field of psychotherapy.