

**Shrink Rap Radio #1, August 22, 2005 – Intuition: An Interview with Dr. David Sowerby**  
**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews David Sowerby, Ph.D.**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Susan Argyelan)

**Dr. Dave:** My guest today is Dr. David Sowerby, and he’s in the studio with me. He’s an expert on the subject of intuition with over 20 years of experience in the field of psychology. Originally, he hails from Canada, where he got a B.A. in psychology, later went on to get a Master’s degree in Social Work, and finally, a Ph.D. in psychology. In addition to his private practice, he has been an adjunct faculty member at a number of San Francisco Bay Area colleges and universities, and he’s published professionally in the area of intuition and hypnosis and has also been interviewed for radio, television, and newspapers, and is a frequent guest speaker. Let me start out by asking you, when did you first know that you wanted to be a psychologist?

**David Sowerby:** I remember in high school a friend of mine asked me what I wanted to do with my life, and I said, “I’m either going to be a psychologist or an engineer,” which was kind of amusing because at that time, I knew nothing about psychology. But, I knew lots about engineering, because my father had studied it, and my brother was studying it. And so, I didn’t really do much with that, and one day I was in my back yard in the summertime, and I was pondering what I was going to do. I ended up wandering downtown in Toronto, where I lived, and I wandered into a bookstore and I found a really interesting book on psychology called *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*.

**Dr. Dave:** Huh.

**Sowerby:** And, I read it cover-to-cover; I basically devoured it. And, I was so interested in it. At that time, however, I didn’t really have enough information or social support to really go into that field. And I think the social conditioning moved me into the field of engineering, and I was interested in sports cars, so I went into engineering.

**Dr. Dave:** So, you actually started out in engineering.

**Sowerby:** I did. I studied engineering for two years, and then I actually switched into physics for a year.

**Dr. Dave:** Interesting.

**Sowerby:** And to make a long story short, I took a psychology course in my first year of university. I really loved it. And, I remember when I was looking for my grade up on those big boards with all the (laughs) rankings and everything. I think we had between 300-500 people in our class, and I found my ID number and my rank was

number 2 in the class, the second highest mark. And, I thought, well, there's got to be a mistake. And then I realized, well, maybe I'm good at this. It took a little while until I really realized this is what I loved, and that's what I wanted to study.

**Dr. Dave:** I didn't realize that was something we had in common, but I started out in engineering in college as well.

**Sowerby:** Huh.

**Dr. Dave:** And then, only much later I went into psychology. So what was it that grabbed you, other than the fact that you got a high grade in that class? What was it about psychology in particular that seemed to resonate for you?

**Sowerby:** Well, this is a... I'll try and give you a nice, succinct answer to this. It's rather a long answer, really, but my mother was a nurse, and she taught physiology, etc., and she said to me, "The most interesting thing in the whole world is the human body – understanding how it works." And, I said, "Well, to me, the most interesting thing is the human spirit and the soul..."

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm...

**Sowerby:** And, I was very interested in religion and philosophy and spiritual matters and psychology – and all these things and how they relate to each other. And, my first real interest in university was psychology, philosophy, religious studies. And, you know, I just mustered up enough courage to just finally dive into that, even though I didn't quite know where I was going with it.

**Dr. Dave:** It's interesting that you said you were interested in the soul, because I think most undergraduates would've said, "...in the workings of the mind," rather than in the workings of the soul. And, it seems to me like that somehow has led to your ongoing work all these years, which has been in the area of intuition. Maybe you can talk a little bit about what drew you to this work relating to intuition.

**Sowerby:** Well, again, there's a long answer to that, but I'll try and make it short. What happened in my life – it happened over the course of many years – is, I began to have what I would call intuitive experiences. And, I know that there are many definitions of that, and maybe we'll get to that soon. But, I began to have openings. I remember one of the first ones I had; I was playing sports. I was a big basketball fanatic, and you know, I can recall one of the best games I ever played. When the game began, I went into an altered state of consciousness and got into what people call the "flow" state...

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm...

**Sowerby:** ...and I was actually able to see the game happen before it happened. I saw plays happening before they happened. So, I was able to anticipate passes, and I

could see people where they were going to be on the court. And, I actually had an out-of-body experience where I witnessed this from above the court, and if my memory serves me correctly, I didn't miss a shot that game. And, it was probably one of the best games I've ever played, and I attribute that to getting into this what I would call intuitive state of consciousness, which is a state of oneness, basically. There's a lot of overlap of fields here, but I was at one with what I was doing – the sport, the activity – I was at one with the players, the environment, the flow of the game, so I really knew what was going to happen before it happened, and it was to my advantage. (laughs)

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. Just in case our listeners think any of this sounds weird or strange, I have to tell you that I'm sitting across from Dr. Sowerby, and he's a very normal-looking person, he's a handsome man, and the kind of experiences he's talking about have actually been written about extensively by others, notably Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who has written several books on the topic of "flow," and also, Michael Murphy, who's written at least a couple of books about sports experiences, such as you just described. So, there's actually quite a bit of literature on this. You talked about defining intuition, so I'm going to put you on the spot because probably different people have different ways of thinking about intuition. How do you define it?

**Sowerby:** Well, I think... David, let me backtrack just a little bit and give you one more quick story, I think, about how my intuition opened up, because this will help me define it.

**Dr. Dave:** Great, I love stories.

**Sowerby:** So, I think this is a challenging thing to do quickly, but I found that as I got older, the types of intuitive experiences I would have would change. I began to have what I would call very normal, everyday types of intuitive experiences, slight changes in mood – you know, thoughts would pop into my mind, new insights, simple things like that. And, other times, I would have what I would call much more profound states of consciousness, where I would feel – this is one of the things that's kind of a hallmark of my experiences – I feel a tingling sensation at the top of my scal

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm...

**Sowerby:** Sometimes it would move right through my body, and it would be a signal to me that whatever I was thinking or doing was leading down a productive track.

**Dr. Dave:** Mm-hmm...

**Sowerby:** So, again, many stories I could give, but my intuitive ability opened up gradually. Over the years, I started to have many, many dreams – especially, not only of the future, but of specific people. I used to get names and faces in my

dreams; sometimes, specific foods and herbs that are going to be useful for my diet. And so, you know, essentially what I'm talking about here is that there are different ways that intuition shows up. But, the way I would define intuition is simply... As you know, I did my doctoral dissertation on this topic, and when you start to dive into the literature, there are hundreds of definitions of this term. It's in philosophy, it's in spiritual studies, in psychology – and everyone has a different way of explaining it.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Sowerby:** So, my approach to this is pretty simple. I would say intuition is the recognition of truth.

**Dr. Dave:** Hmm... yeah.

**Sowerby:** That's a nice, slippery, amorphous definition...

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Sowerby:** But, to me, truth has many faces, and sides, as does intuition. So, one other way of explaining this is, in fact, a more tangible definition would be...it's quite common. Intuition for me would be knowing something immediately. There's an immediacy to it, a spontaneity to it, but it's combined with a sense of certitude that what I know, I have a strong conviction that this is actually true. So again, there are lots of other definitions, and I think I'll just give one more, to make it simple – is that intuition is inner knowing, or inner guidance, or inner wisdom.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** I think those definitions probably give you some idea of where I'm coming from.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now, not to be too challenging an interviewer (laughs), but it does raise the question about...there are people out there who have strong certainty and a sense of inner truth, you know, that are – for example, setting off bombs and so on. So how does one, how do you deal with that?

**Sowerby:** Okay, so this, actually, is one of the most important questions, I think. I think it's a good question to pose. My parents were both in the sciences. My father was a chiropractor and an engineer, and my mother was a nurse. And, so I really got grounded in the scientific method, and I studied those sciences for several years. It was really important for me to be practical...

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Sowerby:** ...and to have some evidence and proof. And, so one of the things that I was trying to do, initially, in my research – which goes back about 15 years or so – I was trying to figure out, are there clear signals or signs that intuition is present? And, can we really know it's intuition, or is it some guess that we have, or some strong conviction, some belief that we have which could be erroneous, easily.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** And so, what I tried to do is come up with a nice list – nice, succinct list of characteristics or qualities of intuition. And, the results of my research surprised me a little bit, and what I found was various things. But, one simple finding was that the only way, really, to recognize intuition is to do research on yourself. And so, what that means is, for example, this is a good way to explain it, I think. If I get a hunch, or a feeling, or an idea that I've discovered something important, some people say intuition is a hypothesis. Well, it needs to be supported somehow with evidence.

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** So, the key to me, though is this – is that intuition is a very subtle thing. I need to become – if I'm going to be strong in intuition – to become what I would call a connoisseur of the inner realms, and the subtleties of the inner realms. So, for example, if I say, "Oh, I have a feeling that this idea is an important discovery," well, I need to know much more about that feeling. How does that feeling or sense compare to other senses that I have had? So, what I recommend for – I do courses on this in Santa Rosa...

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** What I recommend, people keep a detailed – very detailed – journal on their intuitive experiences, so they can track the relationship between what we call this "immediate sense" or feeling and the result of it.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** So that we can see clearly, and then we've got some data to look at – the feeling that I *believe* is intuition and the result. And, if the result is a positive one, or productive, or however you want word it, then that perhaps is a reliable signal. But, if the result is not so fruitful, then I have to notice the difference between those types of signals that I'm getting.

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** And, it's only... I mean, this is rigorous, is what I would call it: a rigorous scientific approach. It's only over a period of time that I can have a higher degree of certainty that this signal that I have is actually intuition, and not some strong

desire that I have to discover something, or preconceived idea, or strong investment in a certain outcome. So, to me, to do this well, I need to be very neutral about it.

**Dr. Dave:** Interesting. So, really, your psyche is the instrument and you're sort of "calibrating" it, using your experience to verify and kind of calibrate these intuitive feelings that come through.

**Sowerby:** That's right. And, I think, you know, I'm going to try and hit a few key ideas during our talk today that I think are really essential. And, that is that... my experience is that everybody is intuitive. I mean, this is in the literature. I believe you're as intuitive as I am, as the next person. However, the difference is a lot of people miss the subtle signals or the signs of intuition when they show up. And then, even if we can determine, "Aha! There's a signal of intuition," it's very easy to misinterpret the signal, especially if it comes to us in a form that's not literal.

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** So, for example, if I have a dream – and I do get very literal dreams that tell me exactly what course of action to take – and other dreams are very metaphorical and cloaked in symbolism, as you know – you're an expert in dreams as well... And, the challenge is, okay, here is my signal; now, how do I interpret that? And, my understanding is that in order to get a correct or helpful interpretation – there could be many correct interpretations – there needs to be another confirming kind of intuitive state, or state of recognition. Some people call it an "aha" state, okay...

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** I would call it a slight shift in consciousness, or slight shift in state of consciousness or awareness. It can be very slight, or it can be very pronounced – very kind of like, almost like being hit over the head with a hammer, it's so obvious. But anyway, those are a few of...

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. What do you think's involved in this? Are we talking about ESP or subliminal perception, or what?

**Sowerby:** Well, see, this is a grand question. When you go into the literature, you see people defining intuition differently. And, the way I like this – the way I like to use this term – is similar to the way Frances Vaughan has done it. She has listed a whole series of what she calls examples of intuition. And, for me and for Frances Vaughan, ESP is only one category of intuitive experiences – and, I would say, a very specific type. And, all I can say is that the umbrella term – what I would call a latent construct; intuition is a latent construct, which means that it's a multidimensional term. And, it results from our experience and observation of a whole variety of phenomena. So, it's not a nice, compact little term.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** People use it in so many ways...

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** So, to get back to your question, ESP usually means receiving information from a channel that is not physical. And definitely, that's a nice description of intuition. But my study of intuition – my experience with it – is that intuition comes to us in sometimes very normal ways. For example, sometimes it shows up simply as a thought, sometimes as a body sensation – you know, I get this tingling feeling.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Sowerby:** Other people get it, as they say it's a gut reaction or a gut feeling. Now, people that are psychic – there's a term that I want to just throw it out there, because people have different reactions to that term – people that are psychic or have the ability of ESP, to me, have usually taken the intuitive ability and really developed it. So then, the form of the intuition shows up as a clairvoyant image; for example, they start to see inner images. Or, other psychics or people who have ESP are clairaudient; they hear inner voices, which are leading to useful discoveries, or what have you. So, the bottom line to me is that ESP is all part of the broad topic of intuition.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** But again, my experience with this is that ESP has been quite well documented now in various scientific journals as actually existing. But the mechanism by which it works is very much still a mystery.

**Dr. Dave:** Right, right. Okay. Are these personal stories that come to mind where intuition has served you well in your personal life?

**Sowerby:** Well, there are a number of them. It would be trying to figure out which ones to share quickly here. But, I'll give an example of one that comes to mind. When I first moved to California – I'm from Toronto – my plan was to continue in the area of psychotherapy. I was a psychotherapist when I was in Canada. And, immediately when I arrived in the United States, I had a thought that I'm to become a psychology professor. And, I thought, well, that's not my plan. And I thought, well, I noticed it, and I didn't think much of it. But, then I had a series of experiences all related to this. One day I was going for a walk, and my mind was...the way I would describe it, it was free; I really wasn't thinking about anything in particular. And, I was wandering around Stanford University campus late at night. I don't recommend this, necessarily, but... and I wandered into a classroom, and I picked up a piece of chalk, and I started writing on the board. I didn't really know what I was doing. And, I stopped and I said, oh, I'm going to be a psychology professor. And, this is what I would say is intuition showing up in the

form of a body movement, or a kinesthetic movement – not as a thought, but eventually became translated as a thought. But, you know, over the course of many years, I began to have many dreams that told me to be a psychology professor, to be a consultant, to be a writer...and I, as I followed those promptings from my dreams, I have found the pathways of my life opening up very easily.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Sowerby:** So that, to me, is a nice kind of lesson I've learned from intuition – that when I listen to my intuition, I save myself enormous amounts of time, effort, and what I call grief (laughs) from trying to force matters or go down roads that may not be very productive.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah. In my role as interviewer here, I'm playing a little bit dumb, because I certainly have had intuitive experiences of my own that I marvel at. I don't know where they came from, and they don't happen to me all the time. And, I generally don't recognize them until later, after things have unfolded. But, I love hearing your stories. Now, I know that you have been leading these classes in Santa Rosa – intuition course that you lead. And, so I gather you feel that intuition is something that can be developed. How do you go about doing that with your students in these courses?

**Sowerby:** Well, I use a number of techniques that are quite simple, but these are based on the research that I did and my own experiences and the experiences of others. Basically, learning to develop intuition is learning how to recognize our own unique signals of intuition and the forms that they show up in. So, I think a nice example might help with that again.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** These terms to me are important, and the language is significant. So, if I say the form intuition shows up for me, the way it often shows up for me is in the form of thoughts. Now, for the next person it doesn't show up as thoughts, often. It shows up as emotion or as a body sensation. For me, the interesting thing is, often, is in the form of a thought, but the signal is different, because during a typical day, I have all kinds of thoughts. How do I distinguish between what I would call an intuitive thought – one that is true – from one that is erroneous or false or misleading? And, what I have found is that there are signals that accompany intuition for me. And, some examples I've mentioned already, but I'll mention another one here. One example is when I think certain thoughts, I get this tingling feeling. So, when I experience that, it awakens me, makes me alert – that I'm on to something. So, the other signal that I get often is I get a high-pitched ringing in either one or both ears. Now, that may be interpreted as a ringing in the ears, a medical problem, by some. But for me, it actually signifies that the source of this information is coming from a place – now, now we get into more of the esoteric issues here – some people say it comes from a source of higher consciousness, or a

place where energy is vibrating at a higher frequency. Now, certainly this is debatable, but the interesting to me is that whenever I notice that signal, I pay attention to what I'm thinking, what I'm doing. And again, I track the result and have always found that the result is productive, if I follow through with that.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Sowerby:** So, what I'm doing is, I'm teaching my students to do the same – to track their own experiences. Now, their intuition's going to show up differently than mine shows up.

**Dr. Dave:** Some people might see pictures...

**Sowerby:** Exactly. A lot of my students, some of them are clairvoyant. They see images. Some hear voices, some of them get it as subtle body signals. One of my other students, her primary form that she gets it in is strong emotion. So, you see the differences here between one individual and the next. It's hard to come up with a nice, succinct list.

**Dr. Dave:** Right, right.

**Sowerby:** And, so what I do essentially is help people track their experiences so they can recognize intuition when it does show up. And then, I have people bring in their dreams and their journals of their intuitive experiences so we can go through it, and I go through it in tremendous detail.

**Dr. Dave:** So, you're kind of coaching them.

**Sowerby:** Yeah.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Sowerby:** And so, to me, the bottom line is that is the subtle differences between one moment and the next – one type of thought, one emotion to the next – that makes the difference. So what I recommend is, whenever people have an intuitive experience, that they write it down immediately so they don't lose the detail of the subtle thoughts or feelings or desires, or whatever they're experiencing. So then later – maybe sometimes a year later, or half a year later, or a week later – they can go back in their journal and say, "Now, there was the intuition, and now I see the result in my outer life, and I see the connection."

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Sowerby:** So to me, sometimes we get evidence in the outer world within a day or two, sometimes it comes much later. But, it's important for me to have my students catalog this in such a way that they can access it later.

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**Sowerby:** So, I help them to do that.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. Now, I know from prior conversations with you that one of the techniques you use in your own life and that I presume you teach to students is dream incubation. Can you say a little bit about what that is, and what your experience with it has been?

**Sowerby:** Yes. I've been working with dream incubation and playing with this for a long time, and I just want to give some credit to Gayle Delaney, here, and others who have tipped me off to this really useful skill. Gayle Delaney wrote a book called *Living Your Dreams* that I read quite sometime ago. And, the simple technique is to, before you go to sleep at night, to ask various questions, or if you have an important question you want answered or a problem to be solved, you form the question nice and clearly, and then you repeat it like a mantra before you go to bed. And, as you fall asleep, you repeat the question. And, as soon as you wake up, whether it be in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning, you stay still. And, you see if you can remember any dream you had, regardless of whether it seems relevant or not. I suggest people write it down anyway, because at a first glance sometimes, we say, "Aw, this isn't an answer to my question." And, that's how we dismiss our intuitive signals. And so, we write it down right away – the detail matters. And then later we can go back to sleep, and in the morning, we can look at it and say, "Well, is there an answer in here somewhere?" Sometimes the answer comes as a literal answer – no interpretation necessary. And other times, we need to play with the interpretation until it feels right.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Well, unfortunately, we are running out of time. I wonder if in parting, if there are any resources that you would send listeners to if they wanted to find out more about this whole intuitive realm?

**Sowerby:** Well, there are a number of resources. I'm just going to mention a few here that I have found particularly helpful. The first one I mentioned already – Gayle Delaney's book, *Living Your Dreams* – has been out for quite some time. That's a very good book. Another one, a classic by Frances Vaughan, *Awakening Intuition*, is quite good. I will also refer people to my doctoral dissertation, called *The Light of Inner Guidance: A Heuristic Study of the Recognition and Interpretation of Intuition*. This can be found on Dissertation Abstracts International, a database. And, it can be found online or through calling University Microfilms International. So, I've tried to pull together a lot of information in that particular volume. It's fairly extensive, but it does answer some of these key questions I'm trying to address today.

**Dr. Dave:** Great. Dr. David Sowerby, thank you so much for sharing with us, and I hope you'll come back and talk with us again sometime.

**Sowerby:** Okay. Thanks, David.