

BUILDING UP POSITIVE FEELINGS OF SELF-ESTEEM

"Until you make peace with who you are, you'll never be content with what you have."

Doris Mortman

HOW TO RAISE OUR SELF-ESTEEM

"No amount of self improvement can make up for a lack of self acceptance." Robert Holden, Ph D, author of *Shift Happens! Powerful Ways to Transform Your Life*.

Like a conflict between two tribes, not liking ourselves creates an internal conflict; however, if we are conscious of this conflict, this darkness, we can choose to begin to see the light.

We need to see our self-esteem as an organic skill that requires constant nurturing, and like any skill, requires life-long care and commitment. But one thing is for certain: when you are okay with yourself, and feel gratitude, the universe is your playground. Self-esteem is the corridor between the rooms of unconsciousness and the room of consciousness.

Fourteen major tips to raise and maintain your self-esteem:

"The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have." Norman Vincent Peale

Falling in love with a balanced life is all about a life-long commitment to raising the feeling at your core — your self-worth. This is how you do it:

Pioneer of self-esteem Dr. Nathaniel Branden suggests that building self-esteem requires "ongoing commitment to self-examination". Branden has cited "Six Pillars of Self-Esteem: Living consciously (looking closely at needs and goals), Self-acceptance, Self-responsibility, Self-assertiveness (know our values and speak from deep conviction), Living purposefully (purposeful goals) and Integrity (acting in congruence with our core values and beliefs).¹⁵

Based on the Dr. Branden's 6-pillars, here are my fourteen top tips to build self-esteem:

- 1. Listen to your inner landscape and become conscious:** Being conscious of and savouring the moment must be an ongoing goal. Live your life by being exceptionally alert to your inner and outer-environments (bi-vironment). Just for now, make an effort to relax and listen. Reflect. Listen to your breath. Soak in and enjoy immediate reality. When Thomas Merton said, "Solitude is a way to defend the spirit against the 'murderous din of our materialism,'" he was suggesting we tune out our greedy id-ego by fine-tuning into a more spiritual source. Use your conscious prefrontal mind and not your id-ego to guide your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Catch and generate positive thoughts and reject negative thoughts. Have a book or file on your computer called "My book of Life" and spend ten minutes alone every day (or an hour once a week) tuning into the remaining 13 exercises below.

2. **Realise you are 100 percent responsible:** A Swedish Proverb says, "The best place to find a helping hand is at the end of your own arm," so make your mind up now to take full responsibility for the rest of your life. From now on, you are responsible for every thought, feeling, and action. Start believing in yourself. Use this premise to start searching for your worthy ideal.
3. **Accept yourself and remove resentment:** E.E. Cummings has said, "To be yourself, in a world that tries, night and day, to make you just like everybody else — is to fight the greatest battle there ever is to fight, and never stop fighting." This battle can easily be fought by *self-acceptance* and a strong belief in yourself. Carl Jung said, "We cannot change anything until we accept it." This identity exercise is a crucial to self-awareness.

Whilst being conscious of your systemic inner and outer-worlds (bi-vironment), make a list of things about your life that you resent *but can't change*, even if you tried to change them; things like your genes, height, shoe size, speech impediments, past parenting, childhood, education, past relationships, hair colour, skin colour, failure at important events, looks, tone deafness... everything. Resentments are baggage – blockages that cause physical and spiritual dis-ease, skewing our thought process.

"If I were to choose one sentence to sum up my whole philosophy, I should say: allow no evil in your thoughts." Confucius, (551 BC- 479 BC)

Psychologist Carl Rogers discovered that we can only really change once we have accepted ourselves as we are. We need to surrender. Paradoxically, when we look at those weaknesses that we cannot change, but accept them, they cease to bother us. The unconscious anxiety disappears, allowing us to get on with what matters. Or as John Wooden encouraged, "Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." Don't be circumspect about your warts and weaknesses, *acknowledge them, accept them, or remove them*. Only after we feel our authentic worth (being ourselves, warts and all) can we muster the energy to change. It is in accepting our weaknesses that we can then grow to our full potential. This is one of the fastest ways to satisfy the id-ego and feel instant relief from its bondage. This is how the "shift" happens to do what we want to do.

Enjoy being yourself: Follow Friedrich Nietzsche's advice: "The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself." After coming to a point of self-acceptance, you will immediately be able to enjoy being yourself more. You'll feel your mind, body and soul rise.

The very essence of nature is uniqueness. We are all different, so stop making comparisons. Enjoy your own identity. Our life circumstances and definition of success should all be slightly, if not radically, different. Comparing yourself to your neighbour is like comparing peaches with pears – crazy, so do not even try!

Benchmark yourself against yourself. Life is about self-mastery not other-mastery; that is fraud. Do you respect yourself? You are a one-off, so stop watching your back and get on with your own life. Focus on special intrinsic gifts that you bring to the world as a leader. Is it your talent, skill, love, creativity, compassion, understanding, wisdom, enthusiasm, sharing of wealth, sharing of knowledge, or even a combination of the above? Start and end your day by acknowledging your strengths. By repeating the following affirmations your subconscious eventually starts to improve your self-worth. Say with emotion: "I'm so lucky to have all my strengths. I love life. I love this organisation." The trick is to say it and *truly mean it*, or there will be little behavioural difference. The neuroplasticity of your brain requires charged emotions to map out the new neural pathways, required to form new habits.

Don't take what everyone says *personally*: Use your own positive self-talk to negate insults and false accusations that you may have received from teachers, significant others, colleague, family, or friends. I once read that for every negative comment we receive, we will need to hear 14 positive comments to negate it. You will never hear that many positive comments (not even from your mother), so where will they all come from if not from yourself? Take full responsibility for negating insults, but do accept necessary and constructive feedback.

4. **Love your career:** We spend so much time at work, and because work then seeps into every fibre of our other life areas too, work can easily contribute to the core of our self-esteem. So if you have a bad attitude towards work, either re-frame your attitude or change your career. Interestingly, Sir Michael Marmont has discovered that actors who won an Oscar live four years longer than those who were just nominated. He suggests that just having a job is in itself a self-esteem booster.¹⁶
5. **Aim for financial freedom:** Being preoccupied with how you are going to pay for mounting debt eats up mental, emotional, and physical energy. Stay out of debt. Buying an appreciating asset like property using borrowed money makes sense, but attempt to pay cash for almost everything else.
6. **Fix your relationships:** The Xhosa of South Africa have a wonderful expression to describe how reliant we are on each other — "ubuntu" which means "I am, because of you." If you want a successful life you must work as a team with others. You must feel an emotional connection. Do not isolate yourself, but integrate yourself into your bi-vironment. If you want a serene and passionate life, you must commit yourself to healthy relationships with family, friends, and work colleagues. In their book *Gesundheit*, physicians Patch Adams and Maureen Lander stress that healthy relationships are self-esteem building. They highlight health as follows:

"The most distressing health problem for most people is the combination of boredom, fear, and loneliness. Our health is damaged most by loneliness and lovelessness. If relationships with our families, friends, and ourselves are not going well, no amount of physical health can compensate. Huge numbers of physically healthy people lead miserable lives. Conversely, if our relationships to family, friends, and self are strong and sustaining, then even a dying person can enjoy the bliss of community."¹⁷

With first marriage divorce statistics around 40 percent in the USA, and second and third marriages failures over 70 percent, one needs to consider the reasons. Although the common rhetoric blames “poor communication” as the root cause of the divorce, most people I have worked with agree that a *lack of trust or respect* is the root cause. And at the core of this trust issue is when one or both parties has no love of self, no self-trust and self-respect, then through transference that is exactly how they will treat each other.

“Respect yourself and others will respect you.” Confucius

The second cause is not agreeing with each other's goals and roles in the relationship. For example, how many kids are we going to have? And who exactly is the breadwinner? Other major stresses and strains in a marriage are incompatibility in spiritual beliefs, no spiritual convictions, unrealistic lifestyle expectations, financial strain, and infidelity (or even just suspicion thereof).

If you want a peaceful life, never have an enemy or a string of shattered relationships. The feelings of resentment towards people will invade your soul and provoke your id-ego to run your life. Make a list of all the people you resent, and deliberately choose to make peace with them. Forgiveness frees us.

To soften the situation, Richard Carlson recommends picturing people as infants and as one-hundred-year-old adults.¹⁸ The Bible recommends that you pray for your enemies, and believe it or not, when you wish your enemies well, you may just feel so much compassion that if you bumped into them, you may accidentally give them a hug! Another way of feeling better about an adversary is to bring out the best in them. Make a list of their positive traits and they will take on a new persona, albeit only in your mind. Write them a letter and then tear it up, and if that does not work, try Dr Susan Forwards' advice and actually send it.

If you are in a relationship, write down a list of reasons you appreciate yourself and your partner, and then share these with each other.

Birds of a feather flock together. Watch who you mix with because you will be influenced by their actions, feelings, and thoughts. Mix with positive people and you will become more positive. If you siesta with dogs, you will get up with fleas. Aim to have close friends who stretch your integrity and goals. Stop socialising with negative people, as their low self-esteem and accompanying habits will literally rub off onto your mirror neuron system.

7. **See failure as normal:** Do not knock yourself for failures, but rather learn from the experiences — then move on. Forgive yourself. If you have had failures that are still gnawing away at you, re-frame them in a positive light. Learn from your failures but focus on your successes. Secondly, do not overburden yourself and feel responsible for other people's failures; give support and guidance, but do not take others' failures personally.
8. **Make a gratitude list:** We cannot be passionate about life and ungrateful at the same time. Gratitude releases us from the grip of a self-centred id-ego obsession. After the

above steps, the next most powerful step is to make a long list of why it is so good to be alive. Think about all six-life-areas. You *must* write out the list or it will not have the same powerful effect. You can also boost your gratitude weekly by combing through the list again and again. There is *always* a reason to be grateful. On receiving a gift from her aunt, my five-year-old daughter Jesse exclaimed "I'm so lucky to be me." Regardless of the situation, keep reminding your family, work colleagues, and friends how lucky we *all* are. Start each day by thinking about what you are grateful for in your life. Look out of the window and marvel at the spectacle of nature. Stop for a moment and realise why you are happy to be yourself. Make a list of your strengths, skills, talents, characteristics, good deeds, incidences in your bi-vironment, and successes, which you can enjoy reading during your daily quiet time. Make it a daily habit to add more points to this list. For quick access, you can keep this list on your PC desktop. Another advantage of keeping a gratitude list is you activate your RAS to be on the lookout for forthcoming random moments of gratitude. We develop an *expectancy* of forthcoming gratifying events; thus events that would have normally gone unnoticed now get logged as great moments.

9. **Find your spiritual ballast:** In her book *EQ, Emotional Intelligence for Everyone*, Stephanie Vermeulen has observes that people who have posited too much emphasis on superficial image and status are more vulnerable to being hit hard by spiritual stress and depression at a later stage. You need to find meaning in your career and life in general — know why you exist. Vermeulen says, "The more meaningful your existence, the less likely you are to experience this spiritual crisis. Many people find meaning and solace in either religion or spiritual practice; but if neither is for you, your spirituality need not be ignored. The older you are, the more pronounced this need becomes; and feeling that life is empty is one of the main symptoms of spiritual stress"¹⁹
10. **Focus on self-improvement – achieve your worthy ideal:** Having accepted the things *out* of your control (self-acceptance), you will feel a surge of energy to improve areas of your life most appropriate for improved self-worth. As covered in detail in the previous chapter (Chapter 5), do the exercises on **page xx** to unearth your core purpose and guiding values. As Dr Maxwell Maltz has said, "We are built to conquer environment, solve problems, achieve goals, and we find no real satisfaction or happiness in life without obstacles to conquer and goals to achieve." But these goals must be aligned with your guiding values and purpose. By doing this you will replace that lacklustre expression with a deep golden patina – the stuff that will promptly get you and your followers out of bed. Never stop researching and reading about topics of interest, as our worthy-ideal changes during different life stages. Using the goal sheet in this book (Chapter 5), set spiritual, health, intellectual, career, financial, recreational and social goals (wellbeing goals). Nurture your creative talents. Do not forget to use the 4R approach to goal setting (Chapter 5): Research your goals, be sure they're Realistic (initially) and Relevant, and then Roll them out! As mentioned, to ensure your goals are relevant, complete the "core purpose and value" exercise (Chapter 5).

Like a racehorse on the racetrack, once your id-ego knows it is on track to achieving its goals, it becomes more rational. Goal setting automatically raises your energy levels, whilst learning a new skill is extremely empowering and fulfilling to your super-ego. Daily visualise achieving your goals, and during your visualisation, savour the accompanying

feelings of success. These frequent affirmations will get your subconscious and super-conscience RAS working *for* you, and with every passing day you will become more passionate and more like the person you *want* to become. But do not forget to savour the journey and enjoy life along the way.

11. Plan and then act: Plan and keep busy on short, medium, and long-term projects that will make you feel fulfilled. It is difficult to worry and act at the same time. This is why it is imperative to have a plan and act upon it.

12. Help your community: Helping others provides the all-important ingredient of self-esteem, a sense of purpose. When we have a good relationship on the 'inside', the relationships on the 'outside' take better shape. Charity begins at home, with helping yourself and immediate family. Helping others is also a fast way of achieving self-esteem, which Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs embraces too. Dr Maslow's level before self-esteem is the need for love and belonging. Maslow cites, as does the Bible and all mainstream religions, that self-respect is important. Maslow does not say you cannot love when you do not like who you are, but says you are more naturally able to love another when you have food in your stomach, shelter, and feel secure. Maslow even suggests helping others, making friends, and establishing a healthy family life is essential *before* self-esteem occurs, and once you have self-esteem, you can move on to self-actualisation where you naturally dedicate your life to helping others. When Abraham Lincoln said, "When I do good, I feel good," he understood the benefits of grounding himself on a higher plane. There is even evidence that people who *give* have a better sense of well-being than those who receive. Giving is thus a great way of receiving a healthy spiritual grounding. Novelist Henry James put it this way: "Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind." Or in Mother Teresa's words, "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier."

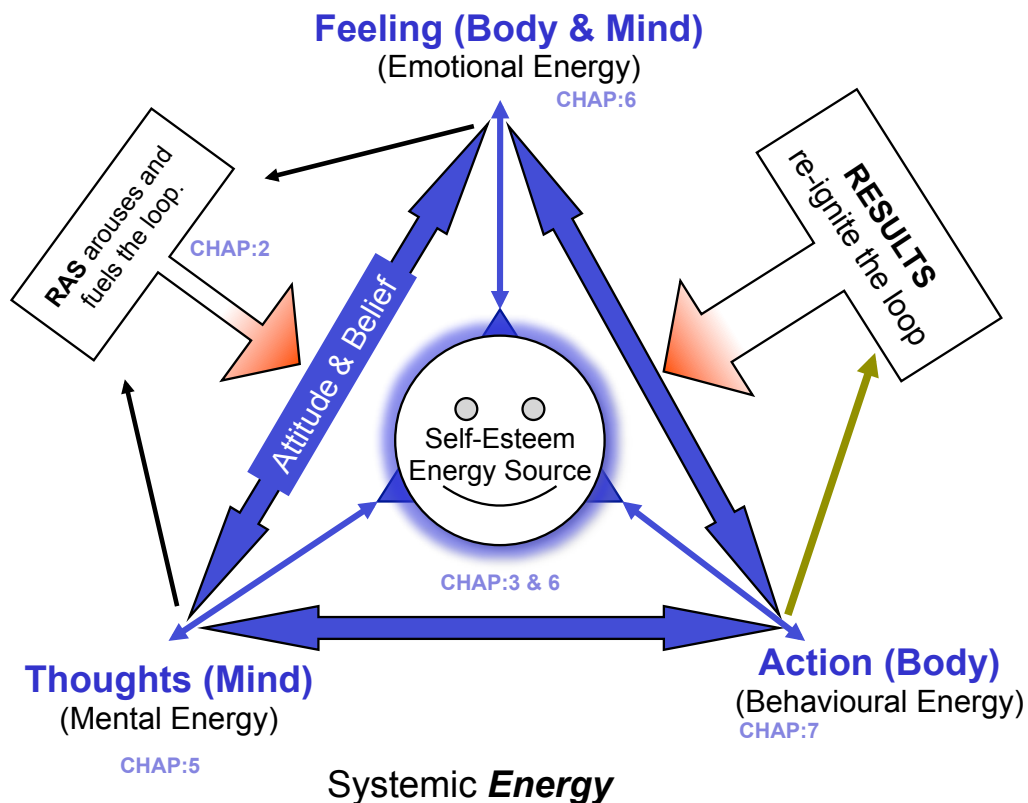
Be **p**olite, **a**lert, and **r**elevant (PAR) to others. This is the "Law of Similar Responses," (often referred to as the Law of Attraction), which says others will be PAR in return. Be loving and optimistic and you will 'attract' loving and optimistic people.

13. Physical exercise: The body is the temple of your soul (emotions), so do not harm your body. Be responsible for your body, mind, and soul. Your physical body and mind are intertwined; for instance, your mind and body produces natural feel-good chemicals when exercising. Although the mind is in charge of the body, the body and the feelings that it houses severely affect the mind – they're strongly interlinked. An unhealthy body is a toxic body, which pollutes the mind and emotions (soul). With exercise, you sleep more soundly and thus need less sleep. Exercise is a mood stabiliser. You will also be able to work faster and think more clearly about your future goals and tackle them with an improved positive self-concept. (Read more about the benefits of physical exercise in Chapter 4, *Uncovering a Leader's Well-being and Ability to Implement Strategy*.)

14. Self-fulfilling prophecy: To avoid negative action, take full responsibility and break the habit of negative self-talk (thoughts, feelings). You already are and will become what you think, feel and do. Guard your thought pattern by being alert to your inner self-talk.

Believe that you can transform your future. Deliberately drop positive thoughts in to your mind and positive feelings and actions tend to surface. Once you connect with the truth of who you are, you automatically replace negative self-talk with the acknowledgement of your authentic internal worth.

The Framework of Feelings, Thinking, Action, and Results



The above diagram illustrates the interconnectedness of our thoughts, feelings and actions. Most importantly though, at the centre of our source is how we feel about ourselves – our self-esteem – which in turn affects our thoughts, feelings and actions – self-esteem affects our emotional intelligence.

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