

HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

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Introduction

While conducting hundreds of workshops on self-esteem in many parts of the world, I have come across numerous participants who regarded themselves as being incompetent, inadequate and unlovable. One senior manager rejected an offer to be the CEO of a leading insurance company because he “perceived himself” as not being competent enough to lead the company effectively. He became a victim of self-doubt.

There was an attractive, 25 year old Malaysian woman with a height of 152 centimetres. She lacked self-acceptance due to her belief that she was “too short”. This belief resulted in her viewing herself erroneously as being “unattractive”. Due to this faulty self-image, she never fully portrayed her positive personality traits. Other participants disliked themselves for being dark-skinned, having small breasts, overweight, bald, or having hairy legs and hands.

According to Nathaniel Branden, “Of all the judgements we pass in life, none is as important as the one we pass on ourselves.” Hence, stop sabotaging yourself and being your own worst enemy by being a victim of negative self-image and low self-esteem. Regardless of your experiences, age or upbringing, you can enhance your self-esteem.

What Is Self-Esteem?

Most experts generally agree that self-esteem is the overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way; it is essentially one’s overall sense of self-competence and self-worth. Self-competence is basically having self-confidence and the conviction that one is capable of coping with the basic challenges in life. Self-worth is accepting yourself unconditionally and having the feeling of being worthy of living and attaining happiness.

Importance of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem has a profound impact on all aspects of our lives for numerous reasons. First, high self-esteem makes the most of one's personality and abilities; it triggers enthusiasm and empowers individuals from within to attain challenging goals. Second, self-esteem enhances establishment of good interpersonal relations. To form nourishing relationships with others, you must first truly love yourself. It is also an established fact that self-respect is the foundation of respect for others. In the words of Virginia Satir, "Good human relations and appropriate and loving behaviour stem from persons of self-worth." Third, research shows that self-esteem is positively related to motivation, job performance, creativity and leadership. Fourth and finally, self-esteem is significantly associated with effective functioning of individuals (psychological wellbeing). This fact has been aptly summarized by Carl Rogers as follows: "If I were to search for the central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them, it is that in the great majority of cases they despise themselves, regarding themselves as worthless and unlovable."

Building Blocks of Self-Esteem

The building blocks of self-esteem are self-awareness, self-acceptance, a positive self-image, self-responsibility and taking action. To strengthen or maintain your self-esteem, you need to practise self-renewal in the mental, physical, social and spiritual dimensions.

Ten Tips on Enhancing Self-Esteem

1. **Discover your true self.** What are your inner thoughts and feelings? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Where are you headed in life? What does success mean to you?
2. **Make a list of what you like about yourself.** Recognize and appreciate your abilities and positive personality traits. Learn to love and accept yourself as you are. Improve your personal appearance by dressing differently, losing weight or changing your hairstyle. Accept gracefully what you cannot change.
3. **Do not compare yourself unfavourably with others.** You are unique. Count your blessings such as good health and a loving spouse instead of wallowing in self-pity. Never belittle yourself. Accept compliments with a "thank you" and a smile. Do your best with what God gave you!

4. **Re-engineer yourself.** Identify and discard false beliefs about yourself. Visualize success in your career and other aspects of your life. Have and reflect a positive attitude of “I can do it.” Success is 80% attitude and 20% aptitude. Practise positive self-talk. Talk about your winners. Never underestimate your abilities. Overcome your fears by doing exactly what you fear. Don’t worry about things beyond your control. Have faith in God and hope for the best.
5. **Accept 100% responsibility for your life.** Make a firm decision to change for the better. Determine your long-term and short-term goals. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant to your personal mission, and time-bounded. Base your actions on self-chosen values, not circumstances. Celebrate your accomplishments and successes.
6. **Let go of perfectionism.** No one is perfect. Give yourself the freedom to fail because perfectionists never feel “good enough”. Avoid unreasonable expectations of yourself and others. Avoid labelling yourself or indulging in self-criticism.
7. **Let go of your negative past and look to the future.** Treat mistakes and failures as learning experiences or stepping stones to subsequent success. Avoid saying “I can’t do it.” Say instead, “I haven’t been able to do it up till now!” Be courageous and dare to take calculated risks.
8. **Wake up happy.** Start the day with positive thoughts. Associate with high achievers and friends who are nourishing. Avoid negativists. Ignore any unkind or unjustified comments made by others about you. Unkind remarks are often compliments in disguise or mere manifestations of envy. Develop a good sense of humour.
9. **Monitor progress.** Review progress towards attainment of your goals and take the necessary corrective action. Be flexible and adapt well to changes in your life. Maintain perseverance and self-discipline.
10. **Lead a balanced life and seek continuous self-improvement.** Maintain your health through proper nutrition, exercise and sufficient rest. Read at least one new book every month and be open to new ideas. Accept constructive criticism as one often stops learning and improving without it.