

CHAPTER FOUR

Self-esteem

WHEN YOU LOVE YOURSELF
YOU DON'T HURT YOURSELF

The Pervasiveness of Low Self-esteem

After I delivered the keynote address at a national business convention, an audience member drew me aside. He said he had something to discuss with me.

“I’ve just been promoted to a very high position in my company,” he said. “I’m scared to death. I’ve let them think that I know all about the job, that I’m extremely competent. But I don’t think I can do it. I’ll make a fool of myself!”

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever been in a situation in which your self-esteem was somewhat shaky? Probably so. In a recent seminar, I asked the people in the audience to raise their hands if they had all the self-confidence they wanted and needed. Most people laughed. Only a few of them were able to raise their hands.

The strange thing is most people look confident and composed on the outside—but they’ve got too much self-doubt on the inside. Dr. Robert Schuller confirmed this in a national study. He claims most people don’t have nearly enough self-esteem. They’re like cars sputtering along on fuel that has too low an octane rating.

The Importance of Self-esteem

Thousands of years ago, Sirach wrote, “Don’t underrate yourself. Humility deserves honor and respect, but a low opinion of yourself leads to sin.”

In the twentieth century, Dr. Charles Mayo said, “I never knew a man to die of overwork, but I have known men to die of doubt.” This self-esteem stuff isn’t some fancy pop psychology trend or passing fad. Great authors throughout history from many cultures have known the value of self-esteem.

Recently, Dr. David McClelland completed twenty-five years of research trying to determine the number one factor in success. Much to his chagrin, he found out it wasn’t his first idea, education; some people with doctoral degrees can’t even get jobs washing dishes in a restaurant. In contrast, many people with nothing more than a high school education do very, very well.

Then McClelland thought the number one factor in success might be intelligence. But, of course, you know that’s not the case either. Many brilliant people sit on their butts, going nowhere in life, while lots of folks with average intelligence go a long way.

After twenty-five years of research, McClelland concluded that the number one factor in success is self-esteem. High self-esteem is absolutely critical because your performance corresponds *exactly* to how you see yourself performing. Your view of yourself is the controlling mechanism in your life. If you cannot see yourself standing up in front of an audience and giving a speech without

notes or nervousness, you will never be able to do it. If you cannot see yourself making cold calls without the fear of rejection, you will never be able to do it. And if you cannot see yourself being patient with your kids, you never will be. You perform exactly as you see yourself performing.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz, author of *Psycho-Cybernetics*, backs this up. He says your behavior is always consistent with your self-image. If you hold an image of yourself as a failure, you will fail, despite your best intentions to do otherwise. But if you see yourself as victorious, you will find some way to succeed, despite the presence of obstacles in your life.

The Self-esteem Choice

You need a powerful, positive sense of self-esteem. That's not even debatable. And the good news is that you can have it. Improving your self-esteem is simply a matter of choice and a bit of practice.

That's right, choice! Even though you may have some doubts, even though the balance sheet of your life may show more liabilities than assets, you can choose to believe in yourself. Sugar Ray Robinson, the boxing champ, knows that. He said, "To be a champ, you have to believe in yourself when nobody else will." And he chooses to do exactly that.

The same could be said for country singer Dolly Parton. She says, "I'm not offended by all the dumb blond jokes because I know that I'm not dumb . . . and I also know that I'm not blond." She chooses to believe in herself.

Senator Robert Taft, one of the great politicians of the twentieth century, lived out a similar self-esteem choice. Early in his political career, Taft went into hostile territory to make a speech. Someone threw an overripe tomato at him. It hit him in the chest and burst all over his face, glasses, and hair.

How did he respond? Did he react with anger? Lash out? Quit? No. He didn't even wipe his face, glasses, or hair. He just went on giving his speech and never even referred to the tomato. When he finished, he stepped down from the platform and said, "Good-bye, boys," in a friendly manner. As Senator Taft walked down the aisle toward the door, the once-hostile crowd gave him a standing ovation.

That's what I call class. Taft believed in himself, and so can you—if you choose to do so.

The Practice of Self-esteem

So how do you go about believing in yourself? You can build better, stronger self-esteem with practice using seven techniques. The process is not all that difficult. As master juggler Rob Peck says, "You don't have to believe in magic—because the real magic is in believing." The magic is in believing in yourself.

What's important about these seven techniques is they allow you to build a lasting self-esteem that never lets you down. And that's what you need. You don't need self-esteem that goes up and down, back and forth, depending on the circumstances. But that's the way a lot of people live. One day you make a sale, feel pretty good, and believe in yourself. The next day you lose a sale, feel rejected, and doubt yourself. Later on, you make a presentation at the staff meeting, get some negative feedback, and feel bad—until another project gets some praise. And so it goes, the self-esteem going up and down, back and forth. It's an awful way to live.

Of course, you may be wondering how all this self-esteem stuff relates to the overall theme of this book. The connection is quite simple. When your self-esteem is in great shape, you'll have a very positive attitude. And if you've got a very positive attitude, you'll have lots of self-esteem. When you build one, you build the other.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discipline

YOU CANNOT CLIMB UPHILL
BY THINKING DOWNHILL THOUGHTS

A New Diet

By now, you're probably convinced that few things are more important to your success than developing an unshakable positive attitude. You would probably agree with Dale Carnegie, who said, "Happiness doesn't depend upon who you are or what you have; it depends on what you think." And you've read my review of Dr. Martin Seligman's research, where he found that successful people think twice as many positive thoughts as negative ones.

Of course, the challenge comes in the work that has to be done. How do you get to think that way and keep thinking that way? How do you get in shape and stay in shape when it comes to the area of positive attitudes? I've found a "positive attitude diet" that works for me and will work for you.

Like any other diet, the positive attitude diet is all about feeding yourself the right foods in the right proportions. After all, what

you feed your body determines to a large extent the kind of body you will have. And the same truth applies to your mind.

In addition, like any other diet, you must also follow a plan. You need to be consistent in following the diet if you expect the right kind of outcome.

So what are the right foods and what is the right plan? I call it the Seven-Day Mental Diet. All you have to do is write the seven strategies on seven different cards, and then carry one of the cards with you each day. Think about that strategy throughout the day, and whenever you do, practice the strategy for a few seconds. You'll get an immediate benefit.

Repeat that approach, focusing on a different strategy the next day. After you've gotten through all seven days, start the whole process over again. Just keep on doing this, and you will not only have a positive attitude, you will release the power of a positive attitude into all parts of your life.

The Seven-Day Mental Diet is simple and it works. All you have to do is follow it.

DAY ONE: FEED YOUR MIND

Instead of living your life on autopilot, letting any and all thoughts come into your mind, consciously feed your mind positive input. Feed your mind all the positive input you can give it. Read inspirational stories of people who have overcome great difficulties. Subscribe to "good news" magazines. And read spiritually uplifting devotionals. On the first day of every week, take a few minutes throughout the day to read inspirational material.

In addition to reading positive materials, listening to positive recordings is another great way to fill your mind with the fuel it needs. And fortunately, this approach is very easy. Thousands and thousands of hours of great motivational, educational, and

religious material are available on tape, CDs, and a host of other formats. In fact, never in history has so much good material been available to so many people in such a user-friendly format.

Personally, I own hundreds, maybe thousands of tapes and CDs of great talks that I've heard. And I take time to listen to those kinds of things every day, for at least ten minutes a day, like taking my daily vitamins. I even listen to some of the same recordings over and over again, because I know that it takes several exposures to the same material before it is totally assimilated.

Of course you're wondering if listening to motivational material works. You bet! Companies often report that their top salespeople listen to positive, motivational, inspirational recordings every single day of their lives. One sales manager said, "They don't listen because they are the best. They are the best because they listen."

It's true. As someone who has been a professor, professional speaker, and consultant during my adult life, I've seen it over and over again. The top people in every job and every profession are the ones who buy the recordings. They're the ones who listen. And they're the ones who show up for the motivational seminars and listen most intently.

The losers, on the other hand, resist all such activity. They may have twenty different excuses for not reading and listening to positive materials. Some of those negative people say it costs too much money to buy all those motivational materials. Yet those same people will find the money to pay for cable TV and junk food. They'll spend money on an insurance policy that covers their homes, but they won't insure their minds or their futures with a more positive attitude.

The average person, for example, spends about \$500 a year on the outside of his or her head, getting haircuts, applying shampoos, and using makeup. But the average person spends about \$50 educating the inside of his head. That's just plain crazy. A person's

mind is the one thing that will make a difference in a person's life, but the average person won't read ten positive books or listen to ten positive recordings in his or her entire lifetime.

Other folks say they're too busy to read and listen. What a flimsy excuse. Many people spend five years of their lives driving back and forth to work and two years of their lives eating. So they could find some time to feed their minds—if they really wanted to.

For example, you could reduce your TV viewing by a few minutes a day and take those few minutes to read some good positive materials. Or you could use your driving time as your positivity “feeding time.” Just pop a recording into your CD player as you commute to work each day. Do the same thing on the way home. It will prepare you for a productive day at work and meaningful time at home. And over time, it will change your life for the better.

Are you feeding your mind? Are you reading lots of positive motivational materials? Are you listening to motivational recordings on a regular basis? Or are you “too busy” or “too broke” to invest in yourself?

Starting your week with the positive will give you a huge release of power, life, and beauty—just like what happened to an area of Texas that hadn't seen rain in seven years. The ground had baked to the point where deep cracks formed in the earth. No plants could grow on the dusty, dry surface.

Then it rained. Seven inches of rain soaked the dead soil in twenty-four hours. Finally, beautiful bluebonnet flowers began to emerge from the barren earth, and soon the ground was covered with life.

Power and beauty were in the dry, cracked earth all the time, but it took the rain to bring it out. The same is true for you. Flood your mind with positive input at least once a week, and you'll be amazed at all the good things that come out of you.