

SELF-CONFIDENCE

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

– Eleanor Roosevelt

Most of us have experienced low self-confidence at some point in our lives. Maybe you weren't a very good basketball player and were always chosen last when deciding teams in gym class. Or maybe you felt “different” from the other kids somehow and didn't fit in. Low self-confidence is often based on such unhappy past experiences.

Factors other than past experiences also result in low self-confidence. You may be faced with negative stereotypes based on your gender, race or other characteristics that cause you to doubt yourself. Or you may associate with others who constantly focus on failures rather than successes.

The above causes of low self-confidence incorporate attitudes and actions from others. As you are probably aware, it is next to impossible to try and change others. For this reason, you will find the most success when you start with yourself.

Building your own self-confidence:

- Accentuate the positive. This sounds simple, but can be awfully difficult to do. You need to force yourself to look for the positive side of every situation and focus on it. It is hard to find that silver lining in every cloud, but if you train yourself to do this, you will see a drastic change in your perspective (remember, according to Al Neuharth, the difference between a mountain and a molehill is your perspective).
- Be realistic. Set goals for yourself that are specific, challenging and attainable. Don't set yourself up for failure with unrealistic goals (i.e. “I'm going to lose 40 pounds by the end of the month”). And don't beat yourself up if you temporarily get off track - acknowledge it and move on.
- Eat those green veggies! In other words, take care of yourself. It is difficult to feel confident about yourself if you feel lazy, overweight or drained of energy.
- Strike up conversations. Studies show that nearly half of the adult population considers themselves shy. Don't sit at a dinner party and feel sorry for yourself because no one has approached you. Assume others are shy and take the initiative to talk to them.
- Wake up with a smile. As corny as it sounds, if you start off your day thinking about things that make you happy, chances are you will feel better about yourself the rest of the day.
- See obstacles in a new light. View any setbacks constructively. Rather than placing blame

or considering yourself a complete loser, focus on what was done well and what can be done even better next time. Failure is a learning experience - that's all.

- Avoid unnecessary stress. Get your assignments done early occasionally. Tackle some tasks that you have been avoiding so they quit haunting you. If being with your family causes you great stress, avoid going home every weekend.
- Help yourself by helping others. There are few better ways to make yourself feel good about yourself than by helping others less fortunate than you. Volunteer some of your time and talents to help others and it is almost guaranteed you will help yourself in the process.

Building self-confidence in others: It is possible that you feel pretty good about yourself but have a group member who is lacking in self-confidence. Again, it is very difficult to change others without them wanting to change. You can do things to facilitate this change, however.

- Minimize risk. Give them opportunities to express their ideas in a low-risk manner. Don't put them on the spot with difficult questions, but ask for their suggestions from time to time and thank them for their input.
- Compliment graciously. No matter how low people feel, a sincere compliment goes a long way in making them feel better about themselves. Is someone a snappy dresser? Does she have exceptional handwriting? Is he a good listener? Let them know!
- Keep your own positivity. Maintain your "silver lining" attitude. It is difficult for others to be negative or upset when surrounded by positive people.
- Delegate. Sound strange? Giving people responsibility and the opportunity for success can do wonders for their self-confidence – as well as the productivity of your group.
- Enthusiasm is contagious. It sells! Do things you really enjoy doing. Those around you will experience and eventually participate in your enthusiasm.

Training yourself to be a positive and uplifting person can be a challenging task, but the rewards are well worth the efforts. You may wish to choose a positive role model and/or mentor to help keep you on track. However you choose to improve your self-confidence, keep in mind that you are deserving of happiness, success and respect – not only from others, but from yourself as well.

Reference: Cypert, S.A. (1994). Power of Self-Esteem. NY:AMACOM.

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