

SIX STEPS TO HIGH SELF ESTEEM!



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“Self-esteem isn’t everything, it’s just that there’s nothing without it.” Gloria Steinem

What has been clear to me working with a wide range of clients, of all ages and coming from a wide range of socio-economic groups, is that:

1. Poor self-esteem is a common issue. In fact low self-esteem is far more common than a lot of people realise. People often don’t realise that some of their limiting behaviour patterns are associated with low self-esteem.
2. That it is possible for people to rapidly and dramatically improve their self-esteem.

I would like to share some of the things that I have learned working with all these amazing clients, who have transformed their lives using the powerful tools they have learned.

TAKE THE SELF ESTEEM TEST

Signs of Low Self Esteem

Indicators of low self-esteem are listed below. This is not a scientific approach, but is designed to give you some indication of your Self Esteem. Score each statement and then total your scores.

Section 1: Score the following statements 0-3:

0 I don't do this at all

3 I do this a lot/all the time

1. Feeling bad about oneself/poor self image _____
2. Placing more importance on the opinions of others than our own opinions, especially towards oneself _____
3. Destructive internal dialogue _____
4. Being a people pleaser/being super nice in the hope that people will like me _____
5. Needing others to agree with me _____
6. Continually apologizing _____

Section 2: Score the following statements 0-5:

0 I don't do this at all

5 I do this a lot/all the time

7. Arrogance or aggression _____
8. Putting others down _____
9. Seeing yourself as being better than others _____

Section 3: Score the following statements 0-3:

0 I don't do this at all

3 I do this a lot/all the time

10. Finding it difficult to say sorry _____
11. Finding it difficult to admit to being wrong _____
12. Perfectionism _____
13. Needing to be right, needing to win the argument _____
14. Finding it difficult to acknowledge your own flaws _____

Section 1 Total: _____
Section 2 Total: _____
Section 3 Total: _____
Overall Total _____

Scores (Maximum of 48)

0-16 If you scored between 0-9 then this suggests that you have very high self-esteem. If you scored between 9-16 then your esteem is still high. Look at the areas where you could focus to improve your esteem further.

17-32 Your score suggests you have average self-esteem. Look at your scores and identify the areas to focus on. My report will give you suggestions as to how to improve your esteem.

33-48 Your score suggests low self-esteem. Think about how your esteem is affecting you, your life and your relationships, and the practical steps you can take to start to improve your self-esteem. My report will give you suggestions as to how to improve your esteem.

You may have noticed that these indicators of low self-esteem fall into 3 categories:

- I am not good enough
- I am better than others
- I have to be perfect

Which section had the highest score? This will give you some insight into the beliefs that you have about yourself, and the area to focus on first.

There is likely to be some overlap between these categories; for example people who do perfectionism often feel that they are not good enough as they are; people who feel a need to demonstrate that they are superior to others have an underlying feeling of insecurity/feelings that they are not good enough.

Consequences of Low Self Esteem

We all want to feel good about ourselves, and much of what we do is in order to achieve this. So let's look at what happens when a person, for whatever reason, develops low self-esteem and displays a number of the indicators that were discussed earlier.

1. I am not good enough

One response to this belief is to accept it, to resign oneself to this idea, and to act accordingly, having low expectations of what life has to offer. A person who believes that "I am not good enough" can place more importance on the other people's views and opinions of things, even telling themselves that other people's opinion about them are more important than their own. This approach does not result in the person feeling good about themselves.

One strategy for feeling better about oneself is to become a people pleaser; being super-nice in the hope that people will like you. The problem with this is that whilst some people might think that you are a nice person, others will see that it stems from low self-esteem and will not respect you, or may even take advantage of your good nature.

For example, I had a client, who was on benefits, whose neighbours would knock on her door, saying that were short of money or food. She would give them her last bit of money or her next meal, leaving her with nothing.

2. I am better than others

A strategy for people who have feelings of inferiority is to attempt to show themselves as being superior in some way. These people have a tendency to be highly judgemental and aggressive towards others and enjoy pointing to other people's shortcomings, whilst overlooking their own flaws. People on the receiving end are less likely to challenge this aggressive behaviour, especially if they have low self-esteem.

3. I have to be perfect

If a person feels that they are not good enough as they are, one strategy for dealing with this is to decide that you have to be perfect. This strategy can be a result of high expectations, either coming from others or from oneself.

The problem with trying to be perfect is that it is impossible to be totally in control, and even when perfectionists do a great job, they are often

still not satisfied with the result. People who are perfectionists often have very high expectations of others and can be judgemental. Some people who find it difficult to say sorry, admit to being wrong or need to be right, will go to great lengths to maintain the idea in their own or others eyes that they are not at fault or wrong, and are even prepared to lie or question the other person's judgement, or to blame others, rather than take responsibility for things.

I am: not good enough, better than others, I have to be perfect

The problem with all of these strategies is that they stem from low self-esteem, and although they might result in momentary feelings of feeling good, they don't last, and certainly don't address the underlying issues causing low self-esteem.

A useful question to ask is:

Are these behaviours characteristic of a person who is happy and having a life they love? And clearly the answer is No!

These are all behaviours that actually prevent us from feeling good about ourselves.

Steps to Self-Esteem

Step 1: Taking Charge

“You take your life in your own hands, and what happens? A terrible thing: no one to blame.” Erica Jong

The first thing we need to do if we want to improve our self-esteem is to take responsibility for ourselves. People tend to blame:

1. Others
2. Circumstances
3. Themselves

For the fact that their life is not the way they want it to be.

For instance, let's say a person believes that it is their parents' fault that they have low self-esteem. It may be true that their parents didn't do a great job. However, knowing this isn't going to improve their self-esteem.

So the first step is to take responsibility for our lives and ourselves. However, some people find this difficult to do, as taking responsibility inevitably results in self-criticism. So in order to be able to take responsibility, we will also need to be able to take the second step, which is to accept ourselves.

Step 2: Accept Ourselves

***“Mistakes are merely steps up the ladder”.* Paul J Meyer**

One of the key issues that stop people from taking responsibility for themselves is that doing so involves discomfort.

This is a common pattern that people run:

1. They make a mistake.
2. Their internal response, which can be unconscious, is: 'I made a mistake. I am stupid'.
3. They feel bad about themselves
4. They experience having low self-esteem, so that if they make another mistake, they do this pattern again!

One strategy for avoiding this loop is to avoid taking responsibility for their error. If they can blame someone else or circumstances, then they can avoid feeling bad about themselves. However, at some level, they know that they are just kidding themselves, and this does not help their self-esteem.

However there is a solution that breaks this negative spiral.

The steps for boosting Self Esteem are to:

1. Make a mistake.
2. Take responsibility for your error.
3. Forgive yourself, telling yourself 'its ok to make mistakes. No one is perfect!' Keep telling yourself this until it feels ok to not be perfect, you may need to say it to yourself 20-50 times.
4. It may also help to recognise that those people who are very good at pointing out our shortcomings, and enjoy pointing out our mistakes, are also very good at over-looking their own flaws.

Step 3: Take Action

“Whether you think you can or think you can’t- you are right.”

Henry Ford

Whatever issue we have that is affecting our self-esteem, there is something that we can do to positively influence our self-esteem.

I recall listening to a programme on the radio, which documented a group of women who had come from a country that had been at war. These women had experienced trauma: loved ones had been murdered; some had been raped and tortured. They now lived in London, and once each week they met, prepared, cooked and ate a meal together, and talked about their experiences, supporting each other through their grief. Many said that this meeting was a lifeline, and helped them enormously.

So whatever issues we have, there is a way forward. There are support groups, Internet groups, workshops, therapists, self-help books etc. If you have an issue that is holding you back, find a way of moving things forward.

Step 4: Talk To Yourself The Way You Talk To Friends

“Learning is a matter of attitude, not aptitude.”

Georgi Lozanov

In order to build self-esteem, it is crucial to pay attention to the way you talk to yourself. We talk to ourselves constantly. Consider that:

- There are 86,400 seconds in a day. That is a lot of time for lots of unhelpful thoughts
- A lot of these thoughts are the same thoughts as we had yesterday
- Many of these thoughts are negative

Consider how many of your thoughts are:

- Positive, constructive and pragmatic; seeing the bigger picture and keeping things in perspective, or are they
- Negative, destructive, judgemental and self-critical?

One of the commonest issues for people with low self-esteem is that they talk to themselves in negative ways. Consider this question: If you talked to/treated your friends the way you talk to/treat yourself, would you have any friends?

Imagine that you have to undertake a project or task, something that you haven't done before, for instance giving a talk or presentation. Lets say that overall the talk goes well, although you made a few mistakes. Do you:

Tell yourself that you did a great job, given that it was the first time you have given a talk, and that with a few more practices, you will be fantastic at giving talks. You recognise that there is room for improvements; you are going to learn from the mistakes and work on those areas, so that the next talk will be even better. Overall you are pleased with your efforts.

Instead of focussing on the 80% that went well, you focus on the 20% that didn't go so well, and you ignore those areas where you could give yourself praise. You tell yourself what an idiot you were to make those mistakes, think about what you imagine others would be thinking about you, and dread having to give another presentation. This is a common strategy!

Exercise

Without thinking too much about it, estimate what percentage of the thoughts you have that are positive, nurturing thoughts. Write down your score. Whatever score you give yourself, consider whether this is high enough. If it is less than 70% (ideally it is useful to be aiming for at least 80% and working to achieve in higher than this), then it means that you really need to think about whether you want to carry on spending a lot of time generating negative thoughts.

Think about people who have high self-esteem, who are generally happy and content with themselves and their lives. What percentage of the time spend do you think they spend talking to themselves in positive ways?

Developing Constructive Self Talk Strategies

Here are some suggestions for improving the way you talk to yourself.

1. Rubber band.

One strategy people use is to change negative self-talk involves the use of a rubber band. The steps are to:

Score your self-esteem from 0-10, with 10 being very high self-esteem. If the score is less than 8 out of 10, decide whether you are committed to increasing this score. If you are, then follow the next steps. If your score is 8 or 9, then you can still decide to improve on this!

Put a date in your diary/mobile phone, to score your self-esteem again in a month's time.

Put a rubber band around the wrist, and every time you catch yourself talking negatively to yourself, snap the rubber band. The idea is that by doing this, you are giving yourself a reminder of the destructive effect of continuing this pattern. You have to decide whether you want to inflict pain on yourself in order to change this destructive pattern. I would prefer that you don't inflict

pain on yourself, either through your internal dialogue or via the elastic band.

A month later, check your score for your self-esteem. If your score was less than 8 and has significantly improved, then you are on track, keep up the great work. If it hasn't improved, then consider other ways of improving self-esteem.

2. Write It Down!

Get a notebook, and spend some time (5-10 minutes) at the beginning of the day, writing down the main negative thoughts that you are having. Once you have written them down, if you catch yourself repeating the same negative thought, then simply tell yourself 'I have already had that thought today, I am going to have some new thoughts that are helpful today', or something like that.

Remember:

- There are 86,400 seconds in a day. That is a lot of time for lots of unhelpful thoughts
- A lot of these thoughts are the same thoughts as we had yesterday
- Many of these thoughts are negative

Do you really want to keep repeating those same crappy negative thoughts?

3. Destroy It!

The objective here is to follow the steps above (Write It Down!) but to rip out the piece of paper, and tear it up into little pieces and put it in the bin, where these thoughts belong, or shred it. One client burns the piece of paper: if you do burn it, make sure you do this outside SAFELY!!

4. Acknowledge Your Successes

This may sound obvious, but it is amazing how consistently some people acknowledge their shortcomings, but don't acknowledge their successes. So start to recognise your successes, and congratulate yourself for your achievements! Again, you can use a notepad/journal, and find a regular time to do this. Reviewing your achievements at the end of the day is a great way of finishing the day.

5. Speak To Your Friends The Way You Talk To Yourself

If you catch yourself talking to your self harshly, let's say because you made a mistake, then stop doing this. Now consider how you might talk to a friend if they had made this mistake. Would you talk to your friend in this way? I hope not. (If you do, and your friends put up with this, then they have esteem issues!)

Think about how you would talk to your friend, and start to talk to yourself like this.

Step 5: Recognise Inappropriate Behaviour

“It is not powerful people who rob others of their rights. It is those who feel powerless inside who must oppress”. Danaan Parry

In order to develop self-esteem, we need to recognise when others are behaving inappropriately. As children, we may have had the experience of a parent or teacher telling us that we are stupid, clumsy etc, and we believed them, taking on this idea wholesale.

Children, especially at a young age, don't generally have the capacity to scrutinise the behaviour of that person. It is important for our self-esteem to be able to recognise that the way someone behaves is simply information about them; how they communicate, where they are lacking in social skills and emotional development. How we respond to them is information about us. Consider a number of different responses to someone saying 'You are stupid'.

'They think I am stupid. They must be right, I am stupid'

'They are entitled to their opinion, but it is just an opinion'

'They are very judgemental'

'This person has issues'

'This person is behaving like a child, not an adult'.

By recognising when others are behaving inappropriately, our sense of self-esteem is not dependant on the opinions of others, and more influenced by our own opinions.

Step 6: Challenge Others

“High self worth means being able to respond to people but not be defined by them.” Virginia Satir

Following on from Step 5, the next step is that having recognised that someone is behaving inappropriately is to challenge his or her behaviour. People with low self-esteem are often not good at being assertive, but these skills can be learned. Ways of acquiring these skills include:

Model Others

Talking to others who you perceive as being good at standing up for themselves. Ask them how they might deal with a situation, what they would say. NB You will need to decide if you think their strategies are useful for you, and ensure that they are able to communicate assertively, not aggressively. Aggressive communication is likely to exacerbate situations! Assertive communication is honest, respectful and transparent (i.e. no hidden agenda).

Read A Book On Assertive Communication

Non-Violent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg is an excellent book on this subject.

Do A Course On Assertive Communication

Let Some Issues Go

One of the principles of Assertiveness is that you don't have to deal with every issue that arises. It is reasonable to discern which issues to address and which to let go. You are allowed a day off!

Feedback

I'd love to know your thoughts on this issue and how helpful you found this article.

Is this an issue that is affecting you? Contact me for a free consultation.

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About Simon Pimenta

I am a Hypnotherapist, Coach and Consultant working with people to boost resilience and performance, and minimise stress.

I spent 10 years in the charitable sector, integrating former psychiatric patients into the community. I loved the job, it was at times challenging, but always interesting.

I spent 4 years as the Director of a Housing Trust. It was a busy and intense role, and I ended up on sick leave and remained unable to work for the next 8 years. I discovered a pioneering approach to resolving health issues and quickly got back my health, and I now train others using these same techniques.

I offer:

1. One to One Sessions in Hypnotherapy, Life Coaching and NLP
2. Building Resilience, an empowering training programme, which has helped many people make extraordinary changes in their lives, helping many clients resolve issues, ranging from severe fatigue, anxiety and panic attacks, stress, agoraphobia and other phobias and many other issues.
3. Assertive Communication Training, teaching people how to become more effective communicators.

Contact

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