

ON ROUTE TO A HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

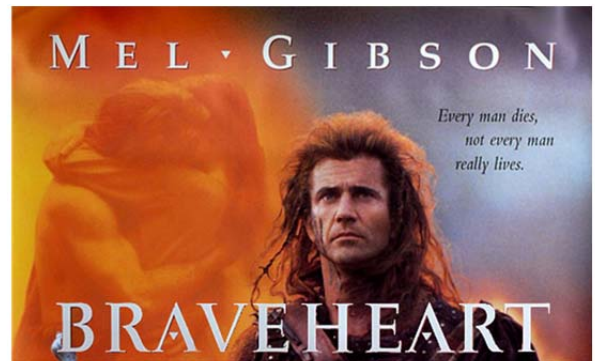
Are you comfortable in your own skin?

Have you ever heard the expression: "She is very comfortable in her own skin?" What is meant by this? It normally refers to someone who feels comfortable with themselves and with who they are. Another way of expressing this is to say that the person has a healthy self-esteem.

One Definition that really helps me understand self-esteem:

It is the confidence in your ability to think, confidence in your ability to cope with the basic challenges of life; and the confidence in your right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert your needs and wants, achieve your values, and enjoy the fruits of your efforts.

Nathaniel Branden



"You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What will you do with that freedom? Will you fight? Aye, fight and you may die, run and you'll live. At least for a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom! "

William Wallace - "Brave Heart"

What are the routes to a healthy Self-Esteem?



Route

1

"Live your life on purpose and with intention."

We have got to live with mindful awareness. Refusing to live with this kind of awareness often means we don't have to take responsibility. We end up living in the deluded belief that if we ignore the problem or irritation long enough, it will somehow disappear. And, it never disappears.

We often ignore our feelings /emotions, especially when they signal to us that something might be out of alignment. If we face up to the reality of experiencing and acknowledging our feelings then it can lead us to identifying the real facts behind these feelings, giving us insights to find solutions. The opposite to all of this is that when we bury our heads in the sand, we then develop an external locus of control. In this state we don't feel in control. We act and feel like victims, like hand puppets, living an existence which reacts to the commands, whims and fancies of others.

An example: I hosted a dinner at my home and observed how two men's conversation spiralled into a heated and violent debate. It finally ended up with one man slapping the other in public, to the absolute horror and shame of their children. I called the aggressor into my private study and enquired from him why he was so angry. Through a process of deep listening and confronting his behaviour, he finally acknowledged his anger. This was a breakthrough moment for him. We spent another 45 mins talking about what was feeding his anger. Upon hearing his story I felt understanding and appreciation for his situation. After the talk his whole body language spoke of a man who felt relieved and listened to. He invited the other man whom he had slapped into my private study and I witnessed a man with immense courage and honesty as he sought his

forgiveness. Upon hearing his story the other man forgave him. It all came together for this man when he fully acknowledged his feelings; he did not deny or bury his head in the sand. When he took responsibility, he regained his self-esteem. He could have denied his sadness and frustration around his life, blamed everything and everyone else. He would only have sunken deeper into the variations of his many insecurities, negative projections and continue to be prone to regrettable violent outbursts. This man needs guidance to help him understand that he must set a new vision and goal for his life. He needs to know that he must and can trust his mind, and live based on what he really wants for himself. He need not live out other people's expectations or projections over his life. He must take responsibility for his own life.

"You are either alive or proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can't care anyway."
Steven Biko

Route 2

"Accepting
yourself."

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

Hillel the elder, 30 BCE to CE

This kind of self-acceptance goes to the very root and heart of our natural human existence; some might call it our inalienable birthright, gifted to every human being. It's a kind of primitive egotism which, if we reject or undermine, will make all future personal transformative endeavours virtually impossible, until we are able to address the problem/s that sits at the root of self-rejection. The journey of self-acceptance must start with being compassionate towards yourself. This is not similar to condoning or accepting but appreciation of what lies at the root of your behaviour, attitude or emotion. This insight comes after compassionate self-evaluation of what may have caused it. Now let's move from an individual/personal scenario to one with a more insidious systemic social dimension and sad implications associated with mass self-rejection. (I mean, when whole groups of people have been taught and hypnotised into viewing themselves as "less than".)

A social commentary:

This mass self-rejection is well described by Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire when through their work respectively, they



recognised how large swaths of the world's peoples and ethnic minorities often descend into this often unconscious self-hate, adversarial approach to themselves and utter rejection of their own humanity. This self-destructive behaviour and

psychological mindset can often be attributed to the relentless and systematic experience (historical or present) of the various blatant and concealed forms of domination /oppression. The sad and tragic reality is that they do not only live out this unconscious hate of self on themselves, but also on their "in -group", people in their society like themselves, e.g. their neighbour. It explains to a large extent the parlous state of our society so graphically and painfully underscored by the daily occurrences of excessive and gratuitous violence, abuse of vulnerable children, drug and alcohol abuse of epidemic proportions, great school dropout rate, high teenage pregnancy rate etc. (Societal ills). This systemic impact has a domino, knock-on effect, into all corners of our society, no exception. These are all indicative of people in parts of our society with very low self-regard. These people are also employees, members of work teams and Brand Ambassadors. They are expected to be creative, innovative and be ambitious in the workplace. To help them to unleash their talent means that we have to guide them to love themselves in a fundamentally new way. We cannot ignore this; we are after all part of this interconnected symbiotic system of life and the best form of guidance we can give to them in this regard is to give them the space to be self-assertive and self-asserting. They do not need help which further psychologically wounds them and which leads to learnt helplessness.

Route 3

“Honour your needs
and wants.”

So what does self-assertion really mean, well one of the ways to understand this concept is that you must honour your needs, wants and values in an appropriate manner, without dishonouring the needs, wants and values of the other. It is truly knowing that your right to exist in this world is you expressing yourself confidently through your needs, wants and values.

However, equally important you must respect that others too have the right to exist in their own right. It doesn't help that you hold on to what is important to yourself and then proceed to bully and bulldoze others. This is plain old aggressiveness at work, masked and underwritten with much insecurity. So, to be self-assertive, really goes beyond just thinking about your needs and your wants. It is actively participating in life to live out and experience the joy and satisfaction of the fulfilment of your needs, wants and values. Much of the sadness I see around me comes from people who have often betrayed their deepest yearning and needs in order to please others, or live up to their expectations. It is important to experience your life, while you are living it.

Route 4

“Know what you are
about and where
you are going.”

Advance, and never halt, for advancing is perfection. Advance and do not fear the thorns in the path, for they draw only corrupt blood. *Khalil Gibran*

An important route to self-esteem is being responsible and accountable for your life. It means being willing to take responsibility for your life and your goals. We all need to experience that we have control over our lives. This feeds into our sense of personal competence and being worthy of happiness. Being clear about your purpose and where you are going in life is another important root which feeds your tree of self-esteem. While it takes discipline and dedication, it places your hands firmly on the wheel of your life and you are no longer a passenger on your own life's journey, but an engaged participant, co-operating with the Great Divine. You must practically map out the steps which will get you to the summit of your goals; there is no short cut, no exception. You must put in place a disciplined routine to regularly monitor and give yourself feedback on how you are doing in relation to your goal achievement. Sometimes this allows you to course correct and bring you back into alignment. This feedback routine also allows you to be creative and flexible to accommodate any

changes that might “pop up” along the way. If you are living with purpose then your life takes on meaning, you feel effective and competent, you begin to really feel good about yourself, and you feel positive about things in life.



A quote from the movie:

Christopher Gardner: “Hey. Don't ever let somebody tell you...You can't do something. Not even me. All right?”

Christopher (son): “All right.”

Christopher Gardner: “You got a dream... You got to protect it. People can't do something' themselves, they want to tell you, you can't do it. If you want something', go get it. Period.”

Route 5

“Be real and
keep it real.”

Integrity is when you have integrated into your everyday living the commitment to live your life according to your convictions, standards, beliefs and behaviour. In other

words, “walking your talk”. When you give these up to please others or to receive their approvals then you feel horrible about yourself. You might have made others happy but you are feeling miserable, and you have to go home and live with yourself. And those closest to you often get the *sharp end* of your low self-esteem. The only way to get back into integrity with yourself is to start again, reset. The reason we often feel so miserable when we betray our standards is that we have essentially invalidated ourselves at the deepest level. I have acted against what I believe is right, I have rejected my better judgement. Essentially I betray my mind, my heart, and my instincts. No wonder I no longer feel good about myself. We also have to be vigilant that our values do not lead us to self-destruction, self-abuse or the abuse and destruction of the other. So you must be open to look at your own values and needs from time to time and welcome feedback.

Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.
Pope John Paul II

In Conclusion

Someone once went up to Michelangelo and complimented him on the magnificent statue of David in Florence, Italy and asked him how it was possible for him to have crafted such a beautiful piece of art. Michelangelo apparently replied that it was not such a difficult feat. He said that David was

already in the block of marble and all he had to do was to chip away the bits that didn't belong to reveal the magnificence of David.

So what are the bits that don't belong to you that, if they were chipped away would reveal the beautiful piece of art that you are? Maybe a description by author Basil Pennington can assist us here. He asserts that we have a false self and a True Self.

The false self consists of three things namely:

- (1) What I do,
- (2) What I have, and
- (3) What others think of me.

We are not **what we do** (our jobs) because if we are, what happens when we don't do it anymore? We can sometimes see the impact of this when people who are their jobs, retire and don't know what to do with themselves, sometimes falling into depression and addiction. We are more than our external roles and titles.

We are not **what we have** because what happens if we lose our possessions? Do we still have value? Our inherent value never diminishes no matter what happens to our assets.

We are not **what other people think** of us. Our value depends on what WE think of ourselves as described earlier in this article, keeping in mind that other people are always prone to change their minds on what they think. It would therefore be

hard for us to keep changing ourselves as often as they change their minds or their projections.

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In Summary:

