

Confidence is Key

Modern human society has evolved into a culture with conflicted aspirations towards self-esteem. Young girls and boys are raised to know that they are beautiful, important, and capable, but these girls and boys are shunned by the media and parents every time they acknowledge those qualities in themselves. As a society, we are taught that confidence is beautiful, but many contemporary artists, such as One Direction, idealize girls with low self-esteem by saying, "You don't know you're beautiful, and that's what makes you beautiful."

It is no surprise that one of the biggest issues in youth today is that of self-esteem. Today's youth walk a fine line between being told they are amazing the way they are and being shown unrealistic ideals to live up to. We are taught from a young age that to be successful in this life you need to be attractive, smart, musical, artistic, accomplished, and above all, humble. While all these attributes in and of themselves are certainly good things to strive for, it is unrealistic to expect yourself to have them all.

Many people justify their low self-esteem by arguing that they aren't perfect. No one seems to realize that one does not have to be perfect to have high self-esteem. Self-esteem is the ability not only to see your worth and competence, but to accept your faults and have confidence in your ability to improve.

Achieving a feeling of self-worth is the first and perhaps the most pivotal part to loving oneself and having a high self-esteem. Even if you need to reach out to others for affirmation or manage find it for yourself, it is important to know you have worth. In Kathryn Stockett's book, *The Help*, one of the African-American nannies repeatedly tells the young girl she looks after to repeat the phrase, "I is kind. I is smart. I is important. [SIC]" I'm

not implying that in order to love yourself you need to stand in front of a mirror and tell yourself that you are amazing in every way, but you should acknowledge your virtues from time to time instead of tearing yourself down.

I am the first to admit that finding a sense of self-worth is the hardest facet of self-esteem. For a long time I could only see what was bad about me: I had poor fashion sense, I was big, I was loud, and I was embarrassing. It took me a long time to see that there was a reason that others could find worth in me. While all of those vices I just listed still exist, I am now able to realize that I am also funny, I have a level head in times of crisis, I am empathetic, and, in my own eyes, actually fairly attractive.

Self-esteem naturally breeds confidence. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines confidence as, “a feeling or belief that you can do something well or succeed at something.” According to an article by Sara Novak:

Confidence is among our most important assets—more important than skills, knowledge, and experience. [...] Confidence equals competence. Confidence creates trust [,] helps us communicate [, and] allows us to be comfortable in our own skin. You can tell a confident person from a mile away. They walk into a room and people stare. But on the other hand, if you’re afraid to be yourself then no one will ever have the honor of meeting the true you.

Confident people are able to try more things and enjoy whatever outcome arises far easier than those who are timid. Confidence makes it a lot easier to do hard things and get outside of your comfort zone. Four years ago, you couldn’t get me to dance in any circumstance. I felt stupid and awkward because I had no idea how to dance. As I have grown more confident over the years, I have become far more comfortable with improvising dance moves and getting over the fact that I can’t actually dance.

If no one stepped out on a limb and risked failure, nothing would ever be learned or discovered. There would be no electricity, no indoor plumbing, no automobiles, and no ballpoint pens if no one had been confident enough to invent those things. You can only become competent in something after risking, or even experiencing, failure and acknowledging your initial ignorance on the subject. Only a person with self-confidence, after acknowledging that failure doesn't define them, can accomplish anything of importance. In that way Novak's notion that "confidence equals competence" is completely true. Self-esteem, through confidence, helps a person to realize that they are capable of many things. While the notion that you can do anything you set your mind to can be easily disproved, many things can be done if you believe that you can do them.

The greatest enemies to self-esteem are, and will always be, the things we can't change in this life. Every one of us has to deal with something completely out of our control, whether it is a learning disorder, poor health, a bad environment, or not being able to communicate or connect with other people. Though I hate to admit it, many of those things can't be solved, but can only be accepted and worked around. The ability to acknowledge that, though you are deeply flawed, you are still a beautifully complex person that has worth and potential is the keystone to self-esteem. You need to love yourself as you would love your best friend. You need to be able to forgive yourself and root for yourself after you fall down. You need to have faith that you will improve if you work at improving.

Sadly, there is no magic recipe for overnight self-esteem. It takes a long time, and is never a permanent personality trait. Everyone will feel down on themselves or insignificant at some point in their life. That's just the nature of human consciousness. Sometimes, though, a little perspective on the situation helps dramatically. In "The Galaxy Song" by Monty Python, the singer attempts to cheer up a woman by telling her:

Whenever life gets you down, Mrs. Brown [...] Remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving and revolving at nine hundred miles an hour. That's orbiting at nineteen miles a second, so it's reckoned, a sun that is the source of all our power. The sun and you and me and all the stars that we can see are moving at a million miles a day In an outer spiral arm, at forty thousand miles an hour, Of the galaxy we call the 'milky way' [...] So remember when you're feeling very small and insecure, how amazingly unlikely is your birth.

Not only do self-esteem and confidence improve your ability to see your worth and potential, it also helps you to *realize* that potential. Having that high self-esteem helps you to see worth in other people. Self-esteem helps you to be kinder, more empathetic, and more willing to help others who are struggling with their own self-esteem. I know from experience that self-esteem not only lets you love yourself, but to become better. If you want to see yourself succeed, you are more likely to work for and achieve that success. You will want to improve so you can be proud of yourself, just as you would want a sibling or friend to improve.

Self-esteem helps you to build up others and yourself. It helps you to be true to yourself and your values and ideals. It is far easier to stand alone when you are confident in who you are and where you stand. You have greater capacity to brush off or endure negativity, sarcasm, and even bullying from others if you believe in and love yourself. To love yourself in a world where having high self-esteem is considered prideful, arrogant, or even intimidating is becoming more important every day.

We need people who love themselves, and in turn love others. Truly, you cannot love others if you do not first accept and love yourself. The way the world is going now, it's almost brave to have self-esteem. Everyone wants a world full of love, yet few realize it's okay if you only love one person, and it's okay if that person is you.

Works Cited

"Confidence." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2014.

Idle, Eric. *The Galaxy Song*. Monty Python. MCA, 1983. MP3

Novak, Sara. "6 Reasons Confidence Is So Important and How To Cultivate It." *Discovery Fit & Health: Sara Novak*' Discovery, 04 Aug. 2012. Web. 18 Nov. 2014.

One Direction. *That's What Makes You Beautiful*. 2011. MP3.

Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help*. New York: Amy Einhorn, 2009. 443. Print.