

Self Esteem In Leaders. Overused? Vilified?

~ No One Can Make You Feel Inferior Without Your Consent ~ Eleanor Roosevelt

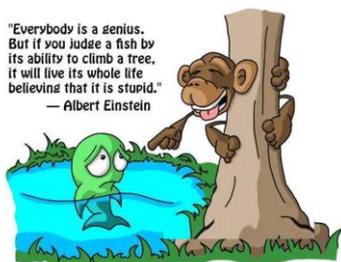
If you are a leader, read this with a view to being better equipped to grow yourself. It is only when we grow that we are able to help others. If you don't think you're a leader, I've got news for you – you had better be, because you are already a leader if you know people younger than yourself!

When it comes to questions of self esteem, we seem to embrace a wholesale dichotomy. There are those who extol it as a necessary virtue, while others say to beware of pride. I've found that, as in so many cases, truth lies somewhere in the middle, if we would only exert ourselves a little to find it. The same situation arises when we discuss the quality of humility. The entire spectrum of meaning, from severe self-deprecation to hidden pride, seems to manifest itself. The truth is that humility is nothing more than coming to an objective recognition of where one stands in life, and having an attitude of gratitude for people and circumstances that have helped us along the way.

Self esteem is somewhat similar. It is simply having an appreciation for who we are, recognizing our gifts, capabilities and capacities and deliberately contributing to the society in which we live in our own special ways. I do have a suspicion that we all know this to be true. So why do we allow ourselves to be trapped in a state of constant worry over whether we have too much or too little self esteem?

The answer to this is fear. Fear of "losing out" to others. Fear of rejection. Fear of not being good enough, whether in our own eyes or what we might perceive to be in the eyes of others. I am not talking about a healthy fear of heights, imminent danger or the kind of fear that actually keeps us alive. I am talking about fears of the imagination, fears which we conjure up for ourselves and which keep us boxed in and never able to fulfill all that we were meant to be and do. So how do we go about reducing the level of unnecessary fear? Too many people go down the road of false bravado, which never stands any true test requiring boldness. Here is what we ought to do instead.

1. Accept who we are as designed.



Too many people spend their whole lives trying to be like the proverbial fish that thinks its worth is measured by its ability to climb a tree. You can get a good idea of your true gifts and abilities by listing down what you like to do and what you'd like to do given a chance. Go back to your childhood dreams and ask yourself if those dreams are still alive. Be realistic about your abilities. I'm a pretty good shot but I'll never make it as a champion shooter simply because I need fifty rounds to get myself calibrated compared to a champion shooter's five. Sure, I might win a championship or two, but would it be worth that kind of effort? I would spend those resources better by focusing on what I do best, which is putting plans into action and discerning patterns that help us decide

what to do next. We need to spend more time honing our own innate abilities rather than trying to be like some rock star.

2. Understand that innate abilities and skills need to be practised and honed.

There is only one way to get better. That way is not simply practice. It's what some people call "perfect practice". Rehearsing the wrong thing over and over again does not make you better at what you're doing. It makes you better at doing it the wrong way. A Rolex advertisement that used to appear quite frequently on the back pages of the National Geographic featured Japanese ballerina Yoko Morishita, who used to dance with the likes of Rudolf Nureyev. She said something like this: "...human muscles have a short memory. If I miss one day's practice, I notice the slack. Two days, and my partner notices. Three days, and the audience notices". That was a world-class ballerina speaking, my friend. If she needed practice, I think I do, too. In fact, even more! Get off your butt and practice whatever it is you want to be good at. You'll find that self esteem growing, and you'll start to appreciate the hard work of others a little better, too!



3. Don't "Follow Your Heart", follow what you KNOW is right.

The phrase "follow your heart" is actually quite misleading, because most people mistake fleeting desires and wanton emotions for what they really, really want. Deep down inside, we really want to be people who will stand by and do what we know to be right. However, what so often happens is that we allow ourselves to get kidnapped by emotion and be swept off towards what we know is not right. We then spend an enormous amount of energy trying to justify our demonstrated lack of conviction. Self esteem always comes from deliberately and consciously standing up for what we know to be right. As the saying goes, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything", and none of us likes to be an easy pushover, whether we think other people know that about us or not.

4. Associate with the right people.

Are you still hanging around with people who refuse to grow, and who impudently try to pull you back down to the level you came up from? Stop it. I do not say that you should cut off ties with them. I do say that you should stop spending more time with them than is absolutely necessary. The saying "Evil company corrupts good manners" is true. Face it. While those with whom you used to associate may not be downright "evil", they may still be clinging on to bad habits and attitudes that keep them at that level of existence. The principal functions of a leader are growth and reproduction. As we grow, we help others around us to grow as well. They may grow at different rates, but the important thing is that they grow. Focus your efforts on people who are

willing to grow, and throw the rest out of your organization in the same way a tumour ought to be excised. I hope you also realize that that means you ought to understand what caused the tumour and get the situation resolved. At the same time, find people who will challenge you to become better as time goes by, and spend some discretionary time with them. Move on if those same people stop growing. Make no mistake, my friend. If you continue to hang around with your old school mates who are still indulging in bad habits, they will drag you down into destruction together with them. Move on!

5. Promote virtue in others.



There is a difference between praise and flattery. Praise is when you extol the good character qualities you have observed in others. Flattery is when you draw attention to attributes that the person did not have to work for. Remarking about a lady's nubile, curvaceous figure is flattery. Complimenting her for her diligence in keeping herself healthy, neat and presentable in public is praise. So is talking about her benevolence in helping others. When we promote good character in others, others cannot help but do the same for us. There is an enormous fallacy in marketing circles that we should "toot our own horn". I am not saying that we should be self-effacing. Rather, humility is acknowledging our accomplishments and publicly according credit to those who have helped us get there. When we do so, our self esteem rises to the nth degree. Let others toot your horn for you!

Having trouble with self esteem? Think you have too much? Too little? Take what I've said to heart, and you will be on your way to better self esteem. In yourself and in others.