

Personal Excellence

www.LeaderExcel.com

The Magazine of Personal Leadership



September 2009

Nathaniel Branden
Consultant

**Your Brain
Power**

**Paving
It Forward**

Self-Esteem
Realize Your Potential



"Personal Excellence is the only reading you'll need to do for continual self-improvement both personally and professionally!"

—Sharlene Hawkes, Former Miss America,
award-winning ESPN broadcaster

Self-Esteem

Seek now to cultivate it.



by Nathaniel Branden

THE KEY TO HUMAN MOTIVATION is self-esteem. By self-esteem I mean much more than that innate sense of self-worth that presumably is our human birthright—that spark that we seek to fan in others. Self-esteem is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. Self-esteem is *confidence* in our ability to think, to cope with the challenges of life, and in our right to be happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to respect our needs and wants and to enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

Self-esteem is not a free gift that you need only claim: its possession over time represents an achievement. Self-esteem is a basic need—indispensable to normal and healthy development. Lacking positive self-esteem, your psychological growth is stunted. Positive self-esteem operates as the immune system of consciousness, providing resistance, strength, and capacity for regeneration. When self-esteem is low, your resilience in the face of adversities is diminished. You crumble before vicissitudes that a healthier sense of self could vanquish. You tend to be more influenced by the desire to avoid pain than to experience joy; negatives have more power over you than positives. If you don't believe in yourself—neither in your efficacy nor in your goodness—the universe is a frightening place.

This does not mean that we are incapable of achieving any real value. Some of us may have the talent and drive to achieve a great deal, in spite of a poor self-concept—like the highly productive workaholic who is driven to prove his worth to, say, a father who predicted he would amount to nothing. But we will be less effective—less creative—than we have the power to be; and we will be crippled in our ability to find joy in our achievements. Nothing we do will ever feel like “enough.”

If we have a realistic confidence in our mind and value, if we feel secure within ourselves, we tend to experience the world as open to us and to respond appropriately to challenges and opportunities. Self-esteem empowers, energizes, motivates. It inspires us to

achieve and allows us to take pleasure and pride in our achievements, to experience satisfaction. A healthy sense of self-value is not all you need to assure happiness and success. Its presence does not guarantee fulfillment; but its lack guarantees some measure of anxiety, frustration, and despair. Self-esteem proclaims itself as a need by virtue of the fact that its relative absence impairs our ability to function.

Today self-esteem is both a psychological need and economic need—the attribute imperative for adaptiveness to a complex, challenging world that demands a greater capacity for innovation, self-management, personal responsibility, and self-direction. Today, we need not only a higher level of knowledge and skill, but also a higher level of personal autonomy, self-reliance, self-trust, and initiative.



In a world of many choices, options, and possibilities, you need higher personal autonomy—a need to exercise independent judgment, to cultivate your own resources, and to take responsibility for the choices, values, and actions that shape your life; a need for self-trust, self-reliance, and a reality-based belief in yourself. The more choices and decisions you need to make, the more urgent your need for self-esteem.

Self-Esteem Bolsters Confidence

To the extent that you're confident in the efficacy of your mind—confident of your ability to think, learn, understand—you tend to persevere when faced with difficult or complex challenges. Persevering, you tend to succeed more, thus reinforcing your sense of efficacy.

With high self-esteem, you seek the stimulation of demanding goals; and reaching goals nurtures your self-esteem. With low self-esteem, you seek the safety of the familiar and undemanding, thus weakening your self-esteem.

The higher your self-esteem, the better able you are to cope with adversity in your career or personal life; the faster you can pick yourself up after a fall; the more energy you have to begin anew.

The higher your self-esteem, the more ambitious you tend to be, not necessarily in a career or financial sense, but in terms of what you hope to experience in life—emotionally, creatively, spiritually. The lower your self-esteem, the less you aspire to, and the less you are likely to achieve. Either path tends to be self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating.

The higher your self-esteem, the more disposed you are to form nourishing relationships—since like is drawn to like, health is attracted to health and vitality.

You tend to feel most comfortable, most “at home,” with persons whose self-esteem level resembles your own. High self-esteem individuals tend to be drawn to high self-esteem individuals. Low self-esteem seeks low self-esteem in others. The most disastrous relationships are those between two persons *both of whom* think poorly of themselves.

The higher your self-esteem, the more inclined you are to treat others with respect, benevolence, good will, and fairness—since you do not tend to perceive them as a threat, and since self-respect facilitates respect for others.

Two Interrelated Aspects

Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: a sense of personal efficacy (self-efficacy) and a sense of personal worth (self-respect). As a fully realized psychological experience, it is the integrated sum of these two aspects.

- Self-efficacy means confidence in your ability to think, judge, choose, decide, and know the facts of reality that fall within your interests and needs; cognitive self-trust and self-reliance.
- Self-respect means assurance of your value—an affirmative attitude toward your right to live and to be happy; comfort in appropriately asserting your thoughts, wants, and needs; the feeling that joy is your natural birthright.

Self-efficacy and self-respect are the pillars of healthy self-esteem; absent either one, self-esteem is impaired. Self-efficacy generates the sense of having control over your life—not being a passive spectator and a victim of events.

Self-respect enables a benevolent, non-neurotic sense of community with other individuals, the fellowship of independence and mutual regard—not *alienated estrangement* or *mindless submergence*.

Self-esteem is the disposition to experience yourself as competent to cope with the challenges of life and as deserving of happiness. PE

Nathaniel Branden is the author of *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. Visit www.NathanielBranden.com.

ACTION: Cultivate your self-esteem.