HOW DO I LOVE ME?
LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

BY DAYLLE DEANNA SCHWARTZ
AUTHOR OF NICE GIRLS FINISH FIRST
How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways
Daylle Deanna Schwartz

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SLM Books
The Self-Love Movement
This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my parents, Ruth and Lt. Colonel Robert C. Herman. Throughout my life as I struggled to find myself, their total faith in me was my support system. Mom didn’t understand my path but loved me anyway. She tried her best to accept an unconventional daughter and did her best to be the best mom possible. Dad encouraged me to be independent while everyone pushed me to fit a mold. He glowed with pride as I grew into the woman he always knew I was. His belief that I could do whatever I choose continues to sustain me. This book is a tribute to my dad’s spirit and my mom’s devotion to her children! With the help of their constant, unconditional love, I was able to learn to love myself unconditionally.

ABOUT

http://www.daylle.com
Daylle Deanna Schwartz, M.S. is a writer, speaker, self-empowerment counselor, and music business consultant. Her popular self-empowerment books include *Nice Girls Can Finish First, All Men Are Jerks until Proven Otherwise, and How to Please a Woman In & Out of Bed*. Daylle has been a guest on 400+ TV and radio shows, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show, Good Morning America, Howard Stern, Inside Edition, Strategy Room with Alan Combes, Fox News, CNN, BBC, Z-Morning Zoo* (New York), *Joey Reynolds* (WOR), *Jane Pratt* (Sirius radio), *Montel Williams, America in the Morning* with Jim Bohannon.

Daylle is also quoted or written about in dozens of publications, including *The New York Times, NY Post, Cosmopolitan, Chicago Sun-Times, Redbook, Chicago Tribune, NY Daily News, Women’s World, Men’s Fitness, Marie Claire, Men’s Health, First for Women, Billboard, Chicago Herald* and *Women’s World*. Daylle speaks for colleges, organizations, and corporations. *Effortless Entrepreneur: Work Smart, Play Hard, Make Millions* is Daylle’s latest book. Her best-selling music business books, including *Start & Run Your Own Record Label* and *I Don’t Need a Record Deal! Survival Guide for the Indie Music*
Revolution, for Billboard/Random House are popular globally. She’s writing her 13th book.

Daylle is a recovering DoorMat, which motivated her to launch her popular blog, Lessons From a Recovering DoorMat. She was pushed into marriage at 20 and became a schoolteacher, after buying into the “Shoulds and Can’ts” girls were taught. Her poor sense of self kept her stuck in a lifestyle she didn’t want. As she slowly learned to value herself, Daylle developed the courage to face life as a single woman. She made a vow to never let what others said stop her from pursuing her passions.

Now Daylle pushes past obstacles. She became more empowered after accepting a dare from students who said a white woman couldn’t rap, to show them stereotypes shouldn’t stop them. When people ripped her off as she tried to get a record deal, Daylle’s students encouraged revenge, offering to do nasty things to them. Instead, she taught them a spiritual lesson—use the energy behind anger for something positive. Daylle opened Revenge Productions and Revenge Records—her positive revenge. Nicknamed "the rappin' teach," she successfully ran the label for 5 years.

Daylle was one of the few women to start and successfully run a record label in the days when Russell Simmons was bringing Def Jam Records to the
forefront of hip hop. People didn’t take her seriously, humoring her instead of showing respect. But Daylle took herself seriously and developed techniques for handling herself in nice ways that earned respect from the men. Many are in her book, *Nice Girls Can Finish First*. After conquering the music industry, Daylle began educating musicians on how to develop a satisfying career by providing tools and resources so they could empower themselves.

Daylle is known for her straightforward, friendly style of communicating and mixes a good dose of practicality and spirituality in her books and lectures. Having overcome the obstacles that she speaks about, Daylle Deanna Schwartz motivates people to go out and take control of their own lives!
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How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways http://howdoiloveme.com
Introduction

Love yourself first and everything else falls into line.

You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world. Lucille Ball

I was at a dinner party with people I hadn't seen in a while. It was a rainy night so my hair was doing its own thing. After several dinners out that weekend I felt like a bloated pig. Yet I still felt great about myself overall. Several people said I looked fantastic and glowing. An old buddy got excited and said she figured out why I looked so radiant. I must be in love! I laughed, since I wasn't even dating anyone at that moment, until a revelation hit me. I was in love! I was in love with me, with my life, with my very existence. What an amazing change from being that scared woman who used to put everyone else first so that they'd like her; who couldn't be happy without a man in her life; who spent many years as an unsmiling DoorMat, giving herself away to everyone; who never saw herself beyond the vision of others.
Self-love is beautiful! It’s the foundation of good self-esteem, which instills confidence, appreciation of life, a positive attitude, and knowledge that we’re worthy of a wonderful existence. Good self-esteem is THE key to success. It helps you live in contentment and enables you to get taken more seriously. Good self-esteem makes you more attractive to the opposite sex, and more appealing to everyone. It increases your general level of happiness. After many years of hating myself, self-love brought me to a place to having total self-acceptance and confidence in who I am. Acquiring good self-esteem makes me feel richer than if I’d won a lottery! We torment ourselves with - what we don’t have - our shortcomings - how others see us - instead of developing appreciation for who we are right now. This book can redirect your focus!

Low self-esteem is said to be rampant. Many of us never learned to see ourselves in a positive light. I want to show you how! Loving yourself enough to develop good self-esteem is much better than feeling inferior, angry, guilty, unfulfilled, resentful, and in general, unhappy. People who love themselves aren’t victims and don’t feel helpless. We find ways to get what we need. People who love themselves don’t complain a lot. Contentment helps us temper anger. People with good self-esteem aren’t often lonely or bored. We create satisfying lives, so we enjoy our own company in addition to that of
others. While you can be your own worst enemy, it's nicer to be your own best friend! That inspires more self-love!

The last decade exploded with books and classes on personal growth, emphasizing self-love as crucial for positive development. Yet have you figured out how to increase yours yet? In questionnaires for this book, few people chose “very good” to describe theirs. Everyone wished to improve but most were clueless, even with all the books. You may agree with what you read, but not get busy. When nothing happens, you read another and another, looking for magic words to manifest self-love. But that's not how it works. Books only offer suggestions of what YOU can do. YOU have to carry them out. Attaining self-love requires consciousness and a desire to grow into a healthier person for YOU. Let’s do it!

Do you want to love yourself in comfortable ways? Welcome to Warm & Fuzzy Self-Love 101. I wrote this book because I understand how it feels to not love yourself. Been there! I relate to hating yourself in a mirror or feeling inadequate. I remember when I couldn’t imagine why an attractive man would want to be with me. I still smile when I think about the joy of first realizing that maybe I am someone special.
I know that someone with low self-esteem can develop a strong, positive sense of self, because I did. Having started out liking zippo about me and finding pleasant ways to change my perception, I now teach self-empowerment workshops, run support groups, and counsel women and men who are looking for alternative ways to build self-love, feel more empowered, improve relationships, and have a more satisfying life. I'll share my lessons, as well as loads of tips contributed by women and men from around the world. They share their pain and success on the road to strong self-love.

It's still amazes me that I love myself so much. I began adulthood as a DoorMat with no sense of self, beyond who I was to others. Pleasing people made me feel secure. I married right out of school in order to have an identity as someone's wife and was afraid that if I left, no man would want me and I'd be nothing. Back then I saw myself as fat, unattractive, and worthless. Getting married so young meant I hadn't lived yet. I allowed myself to be pushed into a traditional career because I was afraid to risk failing at the more creative path I longed for. Concrete blocks of fear kept me stuck.

There were many years between the time I felt a need to be on my own and the day I actually left. I had a different kind of biological clock ticking. It told me to get off my butt and follow my dreams, before I was too old to do
it! I'd never lived on my own or taken care of myself. Fear of stepping outside the boundaries of my safety zone prevented my growth. I stagnated as a housewife, living for everyone else, and lost my personal identity along the way. I'd ask myself “Who is Daylle as an individual?” but got no answers. After finally leaving the security of marriage, I began what I saw as my journey into self, determined to create an identity of my own. It was a time to get to know and be comfortable with Daylle. I explored my talents, dreams, and fears. I tried new things, experienced failure and rejection, but cheered myself on as I created a satisfying life. Now I'll cheer for you!

How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways is a power tool for a satisfying life. In Chapter 1 I'll motivate you by explaining why self-love is worth going after. Then the tools begin! Falling in love with Yourself in Chapter 2 is a delicious experience. You have so much to love and I'll show you where to look! You'll explore forgiveness for yourself and others, how to cut yourself slack, and how to enjoy being your own best friend. And what can be bad about nurturing and doing nice things for yourself? That's in Chapter 3, Nurture Nookies, chock full of ways to be healthier and make your life brighter. Hello! This should not feel like work since it will make you feel good! The
importance of developing your spiritual side is emphasized in Chapter 4. When you tap into the power of faith - watch out! You may not be able to stop smiling as you see how much you can attract with positive thinking. Faith helps you feel supported. You can commune with your higher power anywhere.

Chapter 5, an overview of common self-esteem busters, will get you percolating on what’s holding you back. I’ve devoted Chapters 6, 7 and 8 to the more common and heavy-duty self-esteem busters—pressure from potential love interests, appearance/weight, and age. You need to conquer these issues and you can! This former tubby DoorMat—now very hot confident chick (without losing weight)—can attest to it!

By Chapter 9 you’ll be ready to exude a radiant sense of confidence, blinding all in your path. Okay, I’m exaggerating, but I’m so confident you can do it! 😊 Oh, confidence! What a treat to have it. You’ll see for yourself. Please share with me how much you love having it! Once you’ve begun to develop faith and confidence we’ll tackle DoorMat habits used to secure friends as you wipe footprints from your face in chapter 10. Do you really want friends you buy with favors and selflessness? Let’s nail them! You’ll all be pros at saying “No” after this chapter.
In Chapter 11 you clean - your living and workspace, old messages, and emotional baggage (anger, jealousy, resentment). I love this therapy. I get a clean house and my self-love rises! Wait till you see how peaceful you feel when you don’t need to be angry anymore. I’ll give you lots of tips to see for yourself. Joy is definitely better! As your confidence grows you can work on becoming conscious of the words you use. Chapter 12 explains how words can harm self-love. I suggest what to watch out for when you speak to others and think to yourself. You’ll practice saying “thank you” (and then shutting your mouth quick) for compliments and kindness.

Chapter 13 is full of anecdotes from people on how they say, “I love me.” Look for things to try! “I love me.” It’s the greatest love of all! Follow my suggestions and enjoy all the benefits of saying, “I love me.” I’ll end this journey by giving you self-love power tools in Chapter 14 that you can put into practice immediately. I’ll encourage you to smile more, so get out the Chapstick if your lips are brittle from clenching them or being in a perpetual frown. Smiling is better! It releases chemicals that make you feel good. So smile now! Force it if you must. 😊

I want to inspire you to use the practical, spiritual, and concrete tools on the following pages. “I love me.” These words have enabled me, and those
who’ve attended my workshops, to attain a plethora of delicious goodies that manifest with good self-love. “I love me.” You CAN develop a strong, positive sense of self and love yourself! I own this power tool and wow, it gets things done! I'll give you all sorts of ways to work on yourself to own your power too. “I love me.” Get with the program ladies and gentlemen. It's time to love yourself and get more out of life in the process!

Oscar Wilde was right when he said "To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance." Enjoy my tools for creating and maintaining a loving courtship with yourself that nourishes self-empowerment. I knew I'd never be happy until I took my journey with soul searching, facing reality, and re-evaluating what I'd been told I'm supposed to be. It began with accepting that changing my thoughts gave me the power to change my life. I won't BS you. While lots of my suggestions are fun, getting out of your own way may be painful, scary, and seem impossible at first. Been there—done that! Patience is essential. It can take lots of time and that's okay. The rewards are more than worth it. It's delightful to look in the mirror and see my cellulite (and the rest of my imperfections) my wrinkles, and my hair doing its own thing, and still be thoroughly happy. Yes, I'd love to improve stuff, but that won't affect my overall outlook. Being happy with who you is much better than beating yourself
up. “I love me.” I’ll encourage you to love yourself more for each bit of progress you make.

Loving me feels superb! It took years to accept myself as a beautiful, special human being who deserves the best. Heck, it was worth the effort to be as content as I am today. I wouldn’t have my phenomenal career without developing self-love first. That enabled my self-esteem to blossom and motivated taking the risks that led to the career I have today. When I knew I was good enough to write and speak, others knew it too! For the first time I'm happy without a man being responsible for it. I own that blessing. It’s hard to describe how lovely it is to feel a strong appreciation for all that I am. What a nice place to be after my long journey.

You too can take a journey into self. Please allow me to be your guide. This book provides the vehicle. You may be consciously questioning whether you have it in you to love yourself. Of course you do! Otherwise, why are you reading this book? Caught you! You want to change for the better. So keep reading. Good self-esteem is the greatest gift you can give yourself. Don’t wait! Go to a mirror as soon as you can and say, "How do I love me?" Begin counting the ways. Write them down. By the end of this book, you'll have tools for finding more and more ways to count. I wish you all a very long list!
How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways http://howdoiloveme.com
Chapter 1: You ARE Good Enough NOW!

When we have not what we like, we must like what we have.

Roger Bussy Rabutin

Do you like gifts? Who doesn’t? You have the ability to give yourself the most special gift—yourself! It's a gift that can only come from you. This unique, cherished blessing can be yours now!

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FACT: The greatest gift you can give to yourself is yourself!

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The greatest gift! Living as a person you'd like to be instead of in the image of what others want makes the gift most precious.

The greatest gift! A best friend - yourself—a gift that lasts a lifetime.

The greatest gift! Unconditional self-love creates unlimited possibilities.
The greatest gift! The key to satisfaction is in owning the power to control what happens in your life.

This chapter is an advertisement for loving yourself to better self-esteem! Give yourself the greatest gift. Why wait for a birthday or holiday? Every day is a special occasion if you choose to make it so. Many people pursue careers, romantic partners, possessions, a great body, and everything else that we’re told will make us happy. That warps your perspective on how to actually feel happy.

Alex, a college student, said it disturbed him that most students at his school, who are very bright and graduate to good jobs, aren’t happy, even with high grades and trendy possessions. Maybe if manufacturers programmed “consciously be happy” into an iPhone or other gadget, they’d remember. I’m being facetious of course, but it troubles me that so many people don’t experience real happiness. There’s a big difference between feeling revved from outside factors [achieving something - approval from someone - attracting romantic attention - losing weight - etc.] and feeling happy.
just because you’re content inside. I’ll guide you to nurturing factors that can bring you the contented kind of happiness.

Happiness motivates you to take better care of yourself. External satisfaction is a more superficial, fleeting bits of happiness that keep you needing more. Are you waiting for the “right pieces” to be in place to be happy? As you get more, you often need more. That keeps happiness on the horizon but out of your grasp. Happiness isn’t a future goal. Make it an operative word for every day. Since I began practicing self-love, I’m happy most of the time. You can be too, by being more loving to you!

CONSCIOUS LOVIN’!

_We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit._

Aristotle

Everyone has unresolved “issues.” I hate that word because it sounds so heavy and debilitating. We all have shticks from our past that affect our present. That’s normal. When you change your perception of them, they become more manageable. You can focus on the misery of issues or find ways to override your shticks. While I’ll discuss how past incidents lower self-esteem, I focus on NOW. If you have serious unresolved shticks, I highly
recommend working on them with a therapist. But you can still build self-love NOW by being kinder to you.

Making Self-Esteem a Good Habit
Self-empowerment blossoms from self-love.

It’s easier to control your life when you like yourself. We’re not born with good or bad self-esteem. Habits develop while growing up. I think of most of what keeps self-esteem low as bad habits. So we’ll work on breaking those that hurt self-image. Doesn’t that sound more manageable than a psychological makeover? John Dryden said, "We first make our habits, and then our habits make us." You can break one habit at a time. I broke those that reinforced seeing myself in a poor light and treating myself worse than I did others. You can break habits that keep your self-esteem low, as my client Shelly did:

My mom accepted being a DoorMat. What a role model! When I came to you, I thought hating myself was my destiny. The breaking bad habits approach seemed do-able. When I saw my imperfection as bad habits, instead of faults or an indelible part of me, I paid more attention to my
actions and thoughts. Patience was hard but I was tired of feeling lousy about myself and tried. It began with just observing my habits. Eventually I stopped myself before doing or thinking things that were automatic and still maintain a heightened awareness of how I treat myself. Now I catch myself fast when I think negatively or allow poor treatment. I can honestly say I finally have a strong sense of self-love. It feels great to let go of old habits. Now people don’t get to me so much and I’m getting into the habit of being good to myself.

Don’t rush to break lifetime habits. For now, raise self-awareness. It took years to get where I am. Become aware of how you think of yourself in various situations. Are you loving or unforgiving? Do you expect more from you than from others? Identifying habits helps you develop better ones. A powerful tool for developing self-awareness is writing things down. It increases consciousness about what keeps self-esteem lower than you’d like and transfers feelings to paper. Please create a specific place to do the writing exercises suggested in this book. Use a notebook or journal, or create a folder in your computer. Writing things down helps put feelings into perspective and provides a record of how your perspective changes on each step of your journey into self.
**The Who of You**

My approach to good self-esteem is a loving one. Treating yourself lovingly creates a more positive consciousness about your worth. Good self-esteem evolves out of loving yourself. You don’t have to love yourself to show yourself love. You don’t even have to like yourself yet to treat yourself more lovingly. Don’t you fake with others? 😊 Loving actions and gestures trigger improved feelings about you. So fake self-love till it’s real! I’ll provide lots of ways. It translates into real if you don’t stop.

The most literal definition of self-esteem is how you value yourself, so developing good self-esteem is your choice. My favorite definition is being comfortable in your own skin: being happy in your less than flab-free body; accepting yourself beyond thinning hair or a small bank account; loving yourself despite failures and limitations. It’s okay if you don’t like everything. Good self-esteem is liking and accepting yourself for WHO you are, not for what you’ve accomplished or how good you can look. Think about WHO you are. Appearance and possessions embellish how you come across but they’re not who you are, unless you give them that power.
Are you your job? Your physique? People you attract? Your bank account? Car? Choices others make? Give yourself a break! These aren’t who you are as a person. Look inside and appreciate your uniqueness! Appearance and possessions embellish your image but aren’t you.

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**FACT: Good self-esteem is an inside job.**

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If self-esteem is based on external achievements, it doesn’t last! Do you like seesaws? You lose 5 pounds and feel great./You regain it and hate yourself. Your partner praises you and you feel wonderful./She puts you down and your self-esteem tanks. If you like seesaws, go play in the park! **Good self-esteem is an inside job.** You can’t get the real deal from anyone but you.

Like any skill, self-appreciation needs regular practice—a delightful way to keep good stuff coming! I’m still a work in progress but I appreciate me now! I have more lines, cellulite, and a bigger body than I’d ideally like. But hey, that’s me! I love me now! Hating yourself for having flaws guarantees low self-
esteem. I enjoy self-improvement but love myself during the process. Self-love motivates me to work towards getting healthier, fitter, better groomed, and more successful.

Orin told a support group:

*I thought my self-esteem would improve with tangible milestones. It didn't. I got into better shape but still felt lacking at work. After a promotion I waited for self-esteem to kick in, but other things were wrong. My hair was receding. My expenses increased. My son screwed up in school and I took it personally. This group made me understand that despite what I don’t like, I’m okay. I got lots of criticism growing up and still berate myself so I’m working on accepting me as a person. I treat myself much better and with more appreciation and feel relaxed. Comfortable in your own skin. I’m getting there. I just got a better job because I had more confidence to go after it. I'm still working on what I can but now I'm okay with the general package. The idea of loving myself seemed bizarre at first. Now it's a relief.*

Worrying about what you don't have or can't be distracts from appreciating your good qualities. If you've always been size 14, you may never be size 6,
and that's okay. Appreciate your lovely qualities and accept what you'd prefer were different. Brenda said, “I've got to be me. I know who I am and don’t have to rehearse to be myself.”

SELF-ESTEEM BUSTER HEADQUARTERS

A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval. Mark Twain

You’re CEO of your personal corporation. Your consciousness is headquarters. CEOs evaluate the overall picture to make decisions in the company’s best interest. You too! Every self-esteem buster must be accepted before it's processed. You can convince your personal board of directors (your thoughts and beliefs) to accept input, or veto it. It’s your choice to control the board and not vote busters into your consciousness. If you allow them to lobby and take control of how you see yourself, prepare for low self-esteem. Keep in mind Eleanor Roosevelt’s wise words, “Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission.” You CAN beat the busters!

To Bust or Be Busted

You’ve heard this but we can hear and not absorb. So absorb! No matter what others say or do - YOU choose the response. That’s
right! YOUR choice. Accepting that fact freed me. Self-esteem hinges on your perception. Jason says:

    My self-esteem was low because of my less-than-desirable way of interpreting events and reality. When I was 19 I decided that the mental and emotional pain I was feeling (due to a long depression) was too much and I had to change. So I started being more expressive, writing in a journal and exercising. I began to realize that reality is seldom the problem - the problem came with my interpretation of reality, which either motivates or de-motivates us to act.

It takes time and big old doses of self-love to gently change your perception of self-esteem busters. It’s your CHOICE to perceive yourself in a positive light, or not. Some folks think I’m fat. I bought this for years and felt unattractive. Now I perceive myself with love and KNOW I have a delicious, sexy body. Since I accepted this, men do too! PERCEPTION - it’s in your control. Annie took her power.

    I’m happy! I used to be angry, frustrated, and depressed all the time because I didn’t realize the power I have. I was raised to do what I was told. Period. That doesn’t leave room for choice or a sense of control.

    When I finally realized that everything is about choice and I am in control,
my whole life changed. I started making my own choices, having the guts to walk away from unhealthy situations, and taking control of my thoughts and actions. It's amazing how good you feel when you're in the driver's seat!

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**FACT: You deserve the best! Until you accept this, prepare to not get the best.**

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Don’t Just Talk. Do It!
I want to help you decide that enough is enough—to get so fed up with self-esteem busters that you can't wait to change. How much do you have to be dumped on, by yourself or others, before saying “no more?” How much unhappiness must you endure before deciding to go for happiness?

**EXERCISE:** Make 2 columns on a page. On the left, list everything you don’t like in your life. On the right, list everything you like. Anything at all. Keep adding to it until your awareness motivates action to make the right list much longer than the left.
We often yak about what we want and complain about what we don’t like, but do nothing. Complaining creates aggravation and sucks power. If you want change, take action! For example, almost everyone wants to lose weight, yet few do because their desire isn’t enough to eat better. To develop good self-esteem you must want it enough to take the first baby step, and keep walking. Don’t wait to hit rock bottom like I did—out of desperation. Get pro-active! Discuss your intention to improve with someone who cares. Call this person when you feel weak or need a pep talk. Any action gets you a step closer to happiness. Use my suggestions to show yourself love. Self-love is the best catalyst! Take baby steps to break unhealthy habits or develop a healthier new one.

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FACT: In order to change, you have to want it badly enough to do something.

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Developing a habit of treating yourself more lovingly takes time, patience, desire, and a heightened awareness of habits that bring you down. Love yourself at your own pace. Stop talking about how you want more self-love. Go after it! Say what you want out loud! Use the suggestions throughout this book. YOU DESERVE THE BEST!
GOING FOR YOURS!

There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged
to find the ways in which you yourself have altered. Nelson Mandela

As you work on yourself, progress may be so slow you may not notice it until someone you don’t see often points it out. Or, you may handle a situation that used to hammer you better. Recognize small bits of change! Note any time you have better control. By embarking on a journey into self, you can break old habits and replace them with more self-empowering ones.

Practice Never Makes Perfect!
Consistent perfection is impossible. A perfect rose is perfect until its petals wilt.

A perfect romantic partner loses his or her pedestal when he or she gets moody, demanding, or critical. Perfection can change quickly.

FACT: Good self-esteem is self-approval - today - at this moment.

Striving for perfection reinforces low self-esteem. There will always be a flaw that needs work, a pound to be lost, or a skill to be improved. But you can goof up or have a down day and still love yourself. Amanda shares:
My personal self-esteem is good most of the time, however, I have moments where I'm very down on myself for any number of issues - my looks, abilities, social skills. I call these "ugly days" and try and pick myself up. I know that ugly days are temporary.

Amanda accepts that she's human. We all have bad days but don't need to turn them into a bad life. If you want good self-esteem, chuck preconceived notions. Perfection is wishful thinking. See yourself as a person apart from your problems or faults. Don't wait to be perfect to love yourself. Why wait forever?

Name a benefit of low self-esteem. Nada! Nothing! Zippo! Good self-esteem is a magnet for positives. Studies show it sustains good health. People are attracted to those who love themselves. Good self-esteem empowers you to set high goals. Are you motivated to work on yours yet? Susan says, “When you have good self-esteem you see the world in a whole new light. It allows you to go out and conquer the world, rather than be its prisoner.” You can love yourself into good self-esteem!

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FIRST LESSONS

At any moment it may be necessary to sacrifice what we are for what we could become. Charles DuBos
I’ll repeat the lessons below throughout the book. Incorporate them into your thinking to begin showing yourself love RIGHT NOW. Prepare to let go of old habits, which may seem comforting but aren’t good for you. Good self-esteem definitely gives you more possibilities. Isabel declared, “Self-esteem gave me a life!” Good self-esteem is in your hands, once you adopt better new habits. I have more details throughout the book.

Drop the Victim Mentality!

Do things seem to go wrong regularly? When you attempt something new, do you expect to screw it up, since that happens often? Being a victim is your choice, not destiny! I believe we attract what we give out. If you expect to stay a victim, you will be. But you can change the pattern if you want to. It’s begins with a decision to no longer be a victim. Joanie says:

I’ve learned that by always falling back to the victim role, people who hurt me are getting their way. Maybe I’ve been afraid of success. It’s more comfortable being a victim—a well-known role to many. I played it to the hilt for year t. I walked away from my marriage because I’d had enough of the victim.
Some people thrive on being a victim - an excuse for not succeeding. Victims feel powerless to change. But it's a choice, not a sentence. I used to think I was jinxed when many things went wrong. “Why me?” “Things always go wrong.” Then I took control and replaced negative thoughts with positive ones. Becoming more pro-active made it harder to play victim. I worked harder, stopped thinking “poor me” and looked forward to good stuff happening. It all began with an affirmation—“I am willing to change patterns that keep me a victim.”—over and over. Find one that feels right and use it! Once you acknowledge you're willing to change, you begin to allow more positive experiences in your life. My client Grady says:

I never saw myself as a victim but I was. I chalked it up to an inordinate amount of bad luck. I was passed over for promotions, lost women I liked, had problems with roommates, and other negatives. When you said I brought bad luck on myself, I almost didn’t return. But I want a better life so I tried your suggestions. I explained to my supervisor why I deserved a promotion. When I got one, it motivated me to change my habits and show more self-love. I still didn’t even like myself, but consciously trying to change my lot made a big difference for my self-image. I developed more confidence with women and expected them to like me and switched
roommates, setting specific boundaries. I maintain the new habits. My life is much better and my control has increased.

Repeat, “I am willing to change the patterns that keep me a victim.” That’s not saying that you will change them. You’re affirming that you’re willing to. Reconciling that you’re willing helps create healthier habits.

Self-Esteem Begins TODAY!
If you sincerely want to love yourself more, begin NOW. Waiting for the right time to like yourself reinforces low self-esteem. Ellen says, “Working on my self-esteem helped me accept me for who I am and to enjoy life. I can stop trying to prove to everyone that I am good enough.” Are you waiting for the right circumstances to love yourself? Self-esteem is more an attitude than something concrete. If you’re serious about having better self-esteem, give yourself love RIGHT NOW! Hug yourself, do something you’ve procrastinated about, play music, buy yourself flowers, or other things in the book. Michele says, “I used to wish I were dead because I was tired of feeling like crap all the time. My self-esteem IS my life now!”

Building self-love is a process. The most effective way to succeed is with baby steps. Begin by nurturing your stronger points. As they get more solid, make other changes. Don't rush to the real hard stuff. Trying to build from
your weaker qualities is like trying to go down the toughest trail after your first ski lesson. If you don’t strengthen your skills and practice on easier trails first, you’ll probably get injured and never ski again. Start on the bunny trail of whatever you’re looking to achieve. Then progress to harder ones as your confidence grows. Building on something you already have instills the confidence needed to tackle more difficult goals.

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**FACT: Today is the first day of the rest of your life.**

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Empowering yourself takes time, but each baby step feels good. Every ounce of love nourishes your soul. Bitty changes add up. Amy shares, “I believe achieving self-love, or picking ourselves back up and moving on after something happens to deflate it, is a lifelong process.” Become a work in progress! Mary says, “Good self-esteem made me feel better about everything. I still have a long way to go, but I am making significant progress.” Don’t wait. Go for yours today! Sue advises, “It’s the only game in town!”

“*I Think, Therefore I Am.*” (Rene Descartes)
I’ll repeat Descartes’ quote throughout the book. Memorize it - repeat it to yourself. People get cues from you. They treat you as you see yourself. If you think you’re unworthy, you’ll seem unworthy. If you think you’re a wonderful person, you are one. If you believe you’re attractive, others will too. You can fake confidence until you have it. “I think, therefore I am.” Your mind determines self-image. Break the habit of making it a poor one!

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FACT: What you think is what you get!

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Are you ready to begin your journey into self? Fill it with love and determination to get to a joyful place. Bonnie is delighted with her development and says, “I still have a long way to go to increase my self-esteem, but everyday I wake up with a smile, knowing that I matter, and I look forward to another day.” You do matter and deserve to be happy. I hope by the end of this book that you’re waking up each day with a smile!
Chapter 2: Falling in Love with Yourself

What a lovely surprise to finally discover how unlonely being alone can be.

Ellen Burstyn

When you’re happy with yourself inside, it radiates to all aspects of your life. Looking for satisfaction in outside factors puts true happiness beyond your control. Happiness—the kind that makes you feel warm and fuzzy and glad to be alive—comes from loving yourself. Then, diffusing negatives gets easier.

HAVING A LOVE AFFAIR WITH YOURSELF

You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.

Buddha

Think about how you treat lovers. What loving things have you done for them? When we’re hot for someone, we work to please, often with less concern for
our own needs. For years I catered to any man who’d be with me. Oh please, let me keep him happy so he won’t leave! There was little for me, but I was too busy trying to please to care.

Do you treat yourself as well as you do others? If you don’t, start right now! Until you make yourself the most important person in your life, you won’t develop the most rewarding self-love. Self-love nurtures self-empowerment. I remember the joy of feeling more in control as I began to show myself love. So sweet! I want you to experience that. To taste it. Please try! Once you love your inner spirit, the outside stuff comes. I don’t love my cellulite and I’d love to be younger but I love me. Even when my hair frizzes or I goof up, I love me. Since I love me, not my hair or body, flaws no longer diminish the delicious, warm self-love that makes me take care of myself in ways no one else would.

Having been on both sides, I know that being consistently self-loving is the only way to truly nurture happiness. Withholding self-love when I’m not perfect hurts me, so I try not to do that anymore. It makes sense to lavish yourself with what you benefit from the most. So lavish now!
You're a unique individual, which makes you special.

**The Power Of Self-Love**

You've heard it before but if it had gotten through, you wouldn't need this book:

*If you want love from others, love yourself first.*

We often give love to others first. That's backwards! Why give oodles away and neglect yourself? If this is your pattern, don't worry. It's okay to not love yourself yet. You can make it a habit, IF you want to, by doing loving things for YOU. Being consciously self-loving puts a focus on YOU and fuels self-love. Jeanetta learned why when she tried it:

*I was very down on myself and didn’t know how to begin self-love. When you suggested doing nice things for me, I believed it wouldn’t work. But I persisted and began to enjoy my loving treats—special lotion, a day off from work to watch movies, and curbing self-flagellation. The more I consciously thought about what I’d enjoy, the better I felt about me. Being self-loving is becoming a habit that's completely changed my self-perception.*

Do you think self-love is out of your reach? I did, when I felt too fat to love me. In the mirror, I only saw what I thought of as my flubber dubbery body and frizzy hair. I pleased everyone but me and stayed married since I
was sure I’d be alone forever if I was single, tantamount to death back then. How did I become a confident woman who loves herself completely? It began with therapy. Mrs. Z. pointed out good qualities I’d never noticed since I only saw what I hated. She called me dynamic. Dynamic. That word echoed as I struggled to see the light. The seeds she planted eventually grew. Her compliments stayed in my subconscious. Years later I accepted them. I was kind. I was creative. I had beautiful eyes. And then, alas, I saw a beautiful face! My body and hair became less prominent. I was dynamic!

Little by little it sunk in that I wasn’t worthless.

Two incidents were significant. One, I visited a friend whose looks I’d envied. She was a bow-wow without the tons of makeup she usually sculpted on! Appreciation for my face increased ten-fold! The second was a trip. I longed for mountains. My sister pushed me to go to Aspen alone—spontaneously—no thinking or time for inner rebuttal. I hiked and went White Water rafting. It was my first time alone in a restaurant. I LOVED eating and reading and returned feeling empowered. It was the first self-loving thing I’d done and I pledged to do more. The synergy was amazing. Doing something loving made me feel
good, which made me want to do more for me. Self-love is an addictive tonic. Soon after, my journey into self began and I became lovingly single!

I speak from experience. I was at the bottom, willing to settle for crumbs of happiness; operating from fear instead of love. I know what an empowering miracle it is to fall in love with yourself and hope to convince YOU to court YOU. If I could do it, anyone can! People from way back don't recognize me since I found happiness in me. I say thanks every day for the blessing of loving me.

It’s time to get to know YOU! Take a personal inventory. Become aware of your good qualities. Often what you hate blinds you to your details. I didn’t consciously absorb that I had pretty green eyes until I was dragged to a mirror. Body hatred blinded me. If you’re blind too, ask someone you trust to plant seeds by pointing out your good qualities. Write them down to begin your positive self-awareness. You have lots to love if you look beyond what you don’t like! William advises, “Everybody has faults, but everybody has good points. You have to find yours and work on them.”

**EXERCISE:** List everything you like about you, even little things. Include compliments, however silly they seem. Keep adding and read it regularly. Feel good about what you may not have considered special before.
When Ellen first came to me, she said she had not one good point, so why bother? I told her what I liked about her and she wrote it down. I advised her to pay attention and note anything remotely positive. Two weeks later, with stars in her eyes, she was shocked to have a real list. Her overall opinion of herself was so low she never noticed her details. She said, “I’m excited to find good things about me. Paying attention and writing them down made me feel better. Maybe there is reason to love myself!” That was the beginning of a love affair that slowly blossomed into a good sense of self. Ellen says, “I now sincerely love myself. That first list got it going. I took slow steps forward. I never believed it could happen!”

Find your details! Don’t let what you see as faults blind you to them. It’s easy to spot negative stuff. Ignore that for now and search for good qualities. Ask someone to point them out if necessary. List them and add details as you find them. Don’t take anything for granted. Being a kind person is something to be proud of. So is being a good cook, being able to fix cars, taking care of parents repairing things, having good fashion sense, maintaining a nice home, etc. Some details can be broken down into smaller ones. Being a good cook can encompass:
- Creating new recipes that delight others.
- Helping your family feel good with healthy meals.
- Saving money by cooking economically.

Being able to fix things can include:

- Recognizing each skill as a talent.
- Saving money by doing it.
- Helping friends who can’t fix things.

Identify your details, break them down, and you’ll see lots to love!

**Practicing Self-Love**

If you want to love yourself, show yourself love. It’s that simple. I can’t give you magic to make it happen. YOU must do it. The good news is you can. Do at least one loving thing for yourself each day. The more you do, the more it makes you feel good and then the more you’ll feel good about yourself.

Jemma says, “Self-esteem helps me smile on the inside too.” Being loving reinforces that you’re special. Remember Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” Treating yourself in special ways eventually translates to being special. It sure feels better than beating yourself up! Kimberly says:

> When I love myself, I feel true inner peace and contentment. I greet strangers with a confident smile. People are drawn to me! My relationships
with family, friends, co-workers are more harmonious! I believe more men are appearing in my life! I feel genuinely admired and respected by other people too.

Start with my “I love me” tips. Chapter 3 is full of suggestions. If you want to love yourself, show yourself love. Do small things but start! YOU CAN GET INTO THE HABIT OF BEING LOVING TO YOU!

Whether you feel it or not, say, “I approve of myself as I am right now!” Over and over—quietly in public and aloud in private. Affirming it helps it sink in. Have you talked to yourself in a mirror? It’s a great tool. Sharath says, “During one of my low phases, a friend propped a mirror in front of me. It helped me see a lot more good than I imagined.” Self-love may be forced at first. But it develops by going after it. People struggle with mirror work. So struggle but do it! Jim says, “I was uncomfortable saying ‘I love you’ in the mirror but tried. And tried. It got easier. Now I feel good.” Doing it picks me up when I feel low and triggers taking care of me by reinforcing self-love. Tina wrote after reading about it in one of my books:
Being overweight, I have always felt down on myself, but I've been able to handle it a bit better as I've gotten older (I'm 19). However, you said to look at ourselves in the mirror and tell ourselves "I love you." I had never done that before, so right where I sat reading, I said to myself, "I love you," and I burst into tears! It was a fantastic moment for me!

**EXERCISE:** Create a paper titled, “How I Showed Myself Love Today.” Space the days of the week evenly down it and put lines between each. Make copies. Each Monday start a new sheet. Note the date and write everything loving you did. Include simple things like saying “I love me;” refraining from a bad habit one time; leaving some cake on your plate; taking a walk—anything kind you do for you. Have at least one for each day but list as many as you do. This will create consciousness about being more loving to YOU. As you smile more from the loving things you do, self-love grows.

Have you hugged yourself yet? Sometimes I wrap my arms around me. Hugs are therapeutic, even self ones. Feeling down? Be loving! Carolyn says, “I pat myself on the shoulder when I am hurting, to comfort and reassure myself like I would speak to a friend, when she or he is hurting. It's amazing
just how much this lifts my spirits!” Falling in love with yourself takes time, but it brings more joy than you can imagine!

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OWNING YOUR POWER

I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else. Winston Churchill

“I am the most important person in my life.”

Say that aloud. When you believe it, the world can be yours. Why not be your most important person? Who else treats you as one? As self-love nourishes your soul, you’ll have more to give others.

Do You Want To Own Your Life?

Develop self-empowerment by taking responsibility for everything in your life: those who hurt you; how people’s words affect you; being taken for granted; feeling used; letting the past affect now. Take responsibility in a loving manner to get control of situations so you can improve them.

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FACT: Taking responsibility gives you the power to change what you don’t like.

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Do you complain about how people treat you? The truth is they usually can’t do what you won’t allow. Don’t get angry at yourself. Accept this reality with joy! Taking responsibility gives you power to change what you don’t like.

So take it! Jonas says:

I finally realized I’d allowed friends I always supported to get away with murder. I helped when a car broke down and loaned money. Yet when I needed help I was let down and felt low. The concept of taking responsibility opened my eyes. I let friends do what I didn’t like! I was mad as hell at me but learned to say no. One buddy always teased me about being short. I’d laugh but felt lousy. I recently told him to stop. My self-esteem gets stronger each time I take responsibility and act on it. Now I understand how it feels to be in control.

The power of taking responsibility isn’t a psychological concept. It’s common sense! And doable. I bristled at responsibility for years. Now it’s set me free! Accepting I allow most of what people do turned a light on. It put me in control of my life and helped me curtail what I don’t like form others. Now I change my response. Bree shares:
The most powerful moment of my life was when I accepted that my boyfriend treated me poorly because I let him. As I changed my attitude about his inconsiderate behavior and he knew I’d had it, he shaped up. Now I take responsibility for how people treat me and for my response to what I don’t like. Whoa! I-am-in-charge-of-my-life! People have no choice but to treat me well if they want to deal with me. I accept nothing less these days!

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FACT: You can’t change anyone but yourself.

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You can’t change people but you can change your response to them.

Some will change if you don’t accept their behavior. “I think, therefore I am.” If you think and act unworthy of good, you settle for bits of joy. I finally recognize that I deserve the whole enchilada! Not a piece of it. Not leftovers. Not what others want for me. The whole enchilada! In all areas of my life. I don’t feel guilty or greedy by expecting it all. Oink! 😊
Self-esteem busters only work if you let them. When you chuck excuses and accept that you're mainly responsible for how others treat you, you free yourself from the shackles of being a victim. Your romantic partner will continue being late if you wait, even with an attitude. Your friend won't stop insulting you if you’re silent. Why should people stop taking you for granted if you keep giving, despite complaints? Change your response and give them no choice but to change or lose you. No more victim! Set boundaries for tardy folks: “I'll wait 10 minutes and then leave”—and leave. Walk out if someone puts you down. Stop giving unconditionally to those who don’t appreciate you. It’s YOUR choice to accept unacceptable behavior.

Taking responsibility is a power move. Responding differently puts you in control—better than whining to others and staying angry. Controlling YOU establishes indirect control over others. Find ways to heal any feelings of not being right or worthy (more in chapter 10). It doesn't matter who's dishing out dirt! NO ONE has a right to make you feel bad. Pay attention to how you allow folks to treat you. Give yourself a good dose of love and set boundaries. Even small changes increase your power and self-image. Take pride in each one and build from them!
I wrote Nice Girls Can Finish First to show women how to take responsibility of the need to be a people pleaser by using my tools to handle themselves in nice ways that also get positive results. Changing one’s behavior and attitude can turn a DoorMat like I was into an empowered person. People didn’t take advantage of my giving ways. I let them. As my self-love grew, I took more responsibility for how people treated me and earned a lot of respect in the process.

**Patience**

Patience allows time for growth. But we like instant gratification and want results immediately! Improving habits takes time. There’s a low success rate for dieting because we lose interest if we’re not thin in a month. Fortify your patience to go the distance if you want a successful *journey into self*. I’m taking you on the long, slow route for long-term results. Forget instant gratification. Look forward to the rest of your life as a happy, empowered person.
**EXERCISE:** Create a baby step progress list. Write down each little thing you do to move yourself forward. Pat yourself on the back for each.

Frustration is a patience buster. Control it by savoring each baby step. Revel in the slightest control over habits. Even if progress stalls, be proud if you don’t permanently regress to old ways. It’s hard to break habits. Patience allows you to. The great Mahatma Gandhi said, “To lose patience is to lose the battle.” Gloria agrees:

*I’d read a book or hear someone speak and get motivated to change. If nothing happened quickly, I’d feel gypped and go back to old ways. My self-esteem got bashed when I’d get angry with myself for not changing fast. I finally got fed up with hating myself and decided to see if loving myself slowly would eventually work. It’s been 6 months. I have good days and bad days but more good ones. I don’t want to go back to where I was so I’m making a big effort to be patient. Just feeling in control of being able to be patient, even with a big effort, makes me feel better about myself. The more I practice patience, the more patient I become. Nothing else worked so I’m grateful!*
Healthy Control

Someone with good self-esteem ONLY controls him/herself. Tammy said, “The world treats me how I treat myself.” If you control your reaction other people’s actions or word, your choice is:

- Get angry or control it by doing what’s best for you.
- Feel hurt or let it motivate you to change your response.
- Let others control your self-esteem or do it yourself.

Awareness of your responses helps create better ones. If you think more lovingly, you’re more likely to control negative responses instead of letting negatives control you. Jeremy learned:

_I used to lose my cool when I felt wronged—tell people off or make situations worse. My brother Bill enjoyed looking good at my expense. He pushed my buttons at family gatherings and I’d lose my temper. At work, I’d pick up my co-worker Leslie’s slack and then get testy. You advised I stop complaining and take responsibility. Next time I saw Bill, I smiled at his jabs. As he pushed my buttons I made him look stupid by asking, out loud, if he enjoyed annoying me. My dad nodded in approval. Bill stopped. At work I no longer do what Leslie doesn’t and calmly report that I can’t turn work in as I’m waiting on her, or recruit others for important stuff._
Leslie now tries to prove she can deliver. I’m in a much better mood these
days and proud of improving my situations.

I feel very empowered by striving to control my behavior, one baby step at
a time. If I want to lose weight, I don’t diet. I try to control my eating. Instead
of getting down on myself when I’m off-track, I try to control my work habits. I
was a total slob but now try to maintain my space. And most importantly, try
to control my response to what bothers me. I used to get angry. Now I set
boundaries and speak up. Notice I said, “Try to control.” Since I’m not perfect,
I can only try my best! Trying means I succeed, if it works or not. Making an
effort is taking control. People may not respond initially but making an effort
feels good. New habits grow over time. Results kick in with patience. Feeling
in control boosts self-esteem dramatically! Start by trying to control one thing
until it becomes a good habit (more in chapter 11).

**CUTTING YOURSELF SLACK**

People are just about as happy as they make up
their minds to be. Abraham Lincoln
How often do you kick yourself when you do something “wrong”? We’re usually harder on ourselves than on people we care about. I’ve learned to cut myself the same slack I cut others—if not more! Since accepting that I’m not perfect, my response to imperfections is kinder.

The Power Of Forgiving

It’s hard to forgive someone who hurt you but it’s loving for you. Holding onto bad feelings fuels aggravation. Forgiving lightens anger (more in Chapter 11). If you don’t, you give others power to ruin your day (or life). Jemma says, “I have learned the value of forgiveness. That added to my happiness immeasurably.” Even if people aren’t fair, forgive them - for you, not them! It’s a relief to reduce the weight of anger, says Jackson:

I used to think when I let people get away with being wrong, I was forgiving them. But I wasn’t. I just couldn’t say anything and always felt anger churning, which made me feel low. Now that I consciously forgive people, my anger level is way down. I still don’t like some actions but I’ve become wiser and feel more positive now.

Do you associate forgiving with forgetting? Not! If something unacceptable happens once, let it go if what’s done is acknowledged. If unacceptable behavior is ongoing, forgive but remember enough to cut your ties or set better
boundaries. You can forgive in your heart and not directly to the person. Holly said, “My ex hurt me badly. I can’t forgive that! He was wrong.” I explained that forgiving doesn’t condone unacceptable behavior. Separate the person from the action. “I forgive you but what you did was wrong.” Forgive, take responsibility, and respond differently. Holly tried:

There was a lot to forgive. It took time to really feel forgiving. I did it in my heart, not to him. I mentioned this to a mutual friend. She told Brian and he called, trying to get me back. I said while I forgave him, he did despicable things and I didn’t want him in my life. He didn’t get it but I’m peaceful. In the past, anger churned in me for months. But once I forgave in my heart, I let it go.

“I Forgive Me For Being Human”

Do you talk nicely to yourself, like "Way to go!" or "I look great today." Or is your inner dialogue more commonly, “I’m an idiot for that.” or "My stomach is flabby." You know it’s wrong to hurt someone you care about. Apply that to self! Treat you as you would friends - use kind words and accept
imperfections. If a friend goes wrong, would you bash her? If your buddy lost his girlfriend, would you encourage self-criticism? I doubt it. We reassure those we care about. Self-love means cutting yourself slack too! Jan shares:

*We don’t see what we do to ourselves. When my friend trashed herself, I challenged how she could call herself a big idiot when she was such a bright person who does things well. She pointed out I did the same thing. It was different! She laughed and said that’s how she felt about herself. It got me thinking. When I put myself down, I feel worse. I’ve made a conscious effort to tell myself it’s okay to make mistakes.*

Do you talk to friends like you talk to yourself?

* • "I'm a dummy for saying that."

* • "How stupid can I get!?"

Next time you go wrong, think of what you’d say if a good friend did the same thing. Would you chastise or reassure? Come on, you know if a friend breaks something, messes up his car, or says the wrong thing, you’d try to make them feel better, not name call. Yet we use harsh words on ourselves. Michele advises:

*Think of how you treat your best friend. When they have an achievement, you congratulate them on their hard work and call for a celebration. When*
their luck turns sour, you remind them that some things aren’t in their control and not everything is their fault. If others speak ill of this person you defend them. Often you feel like doing nice things for them in the absence of a special occasion.

Now think of yourself as this person, your own best friend. That is what it’s like to have good self-esteem.

I used awful words when I made “bonehead” moves, as I called them. 😊 Then it hit me. I was trying to love myself yet I didn’t speak lovingly. That led to one of my best new habits. “Silly me!” The word silly is kinder. I’ve made a habit of replacing bad words with silly. I’m no longer retarded or a dummy. I’m silly when I klutz out and silly when I break something. It took time to break habits of insulting me when I goofed (another kinder word) and use the word silly as a habit. It had a profound affect. I’d immediately replace a derogatory word with silly. “That was stupid, no silly.” I still smile when I use it. Instant self-forgiveness! No matter what I do wrong, I call myself silly and smile. This habit is VERY loving! Robert says:

I didn’t realize I automatically used critical words on myself. When you suggested I try silly, I did it for fun. But it made me see how much I
berated myself. So I said I was silly, laughed and felt better. Using silly more helps me focus on being nicer to myself. What an awakening. Now I’m just a silly guy who likes himself more instead of an idiot who screws up too much and hates himself for it. This consciousness makes me act kinder in other areas.

The more you fall in love with you, the less self-insults. The less you put yourself down, the more you’ll fall in love. Pay attention to your reaction when you goof. Adopt a habit of instant forgiveness with kinder responses. Calling yourself—an idiot for saying the wrong thing, a klutz for spilling ketchup, a fool to believe someone you trusted, stupid for forgetting—lowers self-confidence, diminishes self-love, and plain old isn’t nice. Do it only if you don’t want self-love! Mistakes can be seen as boners—or lessons. Self-recrimination wastes energy. Forgiving and moving on is loving. When you goof, do what you can to rectify it and move on.

Unnecessary Guilt Alert

I even stopped feeling guilty about not feeling guilty me, despite disapproval. Guilt zaps your power since accepting other people’s values over yours as self-
punishment. It reinforces that you're not worthy of making your needs a priority.

But you are!

When you try to live up to expectations or be a perfect spouse, parent, employee, or friend, you can lose yourself. I learned that if I try my best and not consciously hurt anyone, there’s no reason for guilt, no matter what others say. Why relinquish the power to decide what’s right or wrong for you? Often guilt is manipulation - people try to make you feel guilty for not doing what they want. I love myself too much to go there anymore!

It’s hard to break guilt habits, but you can. Become conscious and change your perception. “I feel guilty not helping her.” can be “I’d help but have no time.” Or “I can only do my best.” If someone tries to instill guilt, remember you’re a good person who can’t do it all. When I forget something, can’t help a friend, speak inappropriately, or anything I “should” feel guilty about, I acknowledge it, apologize if necessary, and let it go. We can’t be everything for everyone, including ourselves. Guilt is self-punishment. Love yourself enough to skip that! If you feel guilt brewing, ask yourself:

- Did I purposely hurt her?
- Was what I did in my best interest?
- Did I try my best?
• Was I truly wrong or is he trying to make me feel that way?

• Have I done something that warrants ruining my day with guilt?

Stopping guilt in its tracks is a loving act that makes your perception most important. Trusting your judgment leaves less room for guilt. Accept that you’re a good person and don’t owe everybody what they’d like. Forgive your mistakes. Let guilt take a back seat to self-love. Sarah shares:

_I was brought up in an atmosphere of guilt. Therapy helped me accept I wasn’t obligated to others. They didn’t worry about me. I pay attention when guilt comes on to see that I do nothing wrong and tell myself there’s nothing to feel guilty about. Now it’s easier. Living in a shroud of guilt made me feel pathetic. I have stronger self-worth since I stopped letting guilt consume my happiness._

Guilt means you hinder you from being happy. It tells you not to enjoy a nice day if there’s laundry to do; to skip fun to save money; to satisfy friends’ needs over yours. Stop letting guilt limit you! Clean later. Save for treats. Turn down favors you have no time
for. Be honest with yourself if guilt blocks your pleasure. Many people splurge on others and skimp on themselves. Hello! Do something that says, “I love me” instead.

This is important to absorb—don’t take blame for other people’s issues. Jim said, “My ex-wife was insecure. I felt like a rotten husband and failure to reassure her.” When Jim accepted that his wife’s insecurity wasn’t his fault and he’d done his best, his self-esteem improved. You can only be responsible for yourself. If you want to be happy, stop doing what others expect. DoorMats have less fun! Don’t delude yourself that self-sacrifice is noble. You help no one by running ragged. No matter how much guilt people throw, you’re healthier for you, and for others, if you care for you first. Hold onto that! Craig did:

My ex-wife was a pro at dishing guilt. If I didn’t jump for her whims, she used our boys as pawns. I was a rotten father if I didn’t acquiesce. I felt low and not entitled to a life. When you pointed out how she manipulated and I needed to heal, I ignored her demands. She made the boys reinforce them but I held my ground. The boys didn’t understand but I tried my best. Once I got away from her and worked on me, I became a whole person. Making my needs important made me a better father than I hoped to be
back then. I'm happy, not guilty all the time. One must take care of self to be the best person possible!

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BEING SOMEONE YOU'D LIKE TO BE FRIENDS WITH

There is only one corner of the universe that you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self.  Aldus Huxley

Who's your best friend? Is it your roommate in college or childhood trouble buddy? When you become your own best friend, you create power to make yourself happy. What qualities do you like in a friend? Slowly try to develop them in yourself.

Journal Your Journey

A journal is a record of you - your fears, failures, progress, goals and dreams. Putting experiences and feelings on paper (or a computer document) provides better understanding of your life and progress. Date each entry. Even if you think you've had little progress, reading it later proves more. I found an old, informal journal when I felt down about my progress.
Reading it was like sunshine after darkness. I was way more evolved than I’d thought. It showed how much I’d grown.

A journal is a terrific tool. Writing—what you’ve done, how you feel about it, your goals, how you see yourself—provides self-insight. You may think of solutions to problems as you write and identify what you want. Let it free-flow. It’s only for you so don’t worry if it’s messy or disorganized. What you write may surprise you. Vague thoughts have more meaning on paper. Get to know yourself better by recording thoughts in a journal, however informal it is.

**Growing Into Yourself**

You define you. While I see my faults, I choose to define me with qualities I like. Decide what represents you as a person. Are you a woman in an imperfect body or a lovely one inside and out? Are you a man without “enough money” or a great guy who a woman is lucky to have? Are you one who can't socialize because you've been made to feel inferior or a wonderful person whose company is special? Since people treat you as you treat yourself, you can show people who you are, despite past perceptions.

If you don't like your current definition, redefine yourself. I hated the “old me.” That version thought she had little to offer and was mainly concerned with pleasing others. Now I’ve upped my value and see a beautiful, caring,
spiritual woman with a loving heart; a smart, creative, intuitive, forever young free spirit living with passion. That’s me! Period. Gone is too fat and not worthy. Accepting my new definition made it true. “I think, therefore I am.” You define yourself. Make choices that benefit you with integrity.

Live as someone you're proud of. How? Define who you want to be. Don't just think about it. Act it out! “I think, therefore I am.” Find ways to develop qualities to fit the shoes you like. Close your critical eyes to flaws. People speak of re-inventing themselves as they change. I believe we already are who we are. What you dream or look to be just embellishes you. The process of self-appreciation, enhancing your appearance, achieving more, making yourself healthier, etc., is growing into yourself. You're already wonderful. Now let it show!

**EXERCISE:** Periodically write the answer to, “Who am I today?” Date entries to track changes and growth.

Recognize how you stifle your power. If you’re unhappy, strive to heal. Running to a new job or another relationship just moves old problems to a new scenario. Find peace in yourself first. That’s where happiness comes from.
It’s time to be yourself - for YOU! People have to accept you that way - or not. Christi is finally being true to herself:

*It’s like I’m living as a different person but for the first time I am truly being me. I used to try to be the person I thought I "should" be, not who I really was. I wanted to be the person I thought others would like. How exhausting! When I finally decided to just be myself, flaws and all, I found people liked me much better and I learned to love myself for the first time. People liked ME, not this person I was pretending to be. And if they don’t like me - I don’t care because I LIKE ME! My approval is the only approval I need.*

Do you not feeling capable or knowledgeable enough to have confidence? That's okay. Expand yourself! Learn what you don't know. Read. Take a class. Become more conscious about what's going on in the world. Rose says:

*When I began my job with a marketing company I hadn't finished college and felt insecure and dumb. So I registered for a marketing class. It began a process that took me from feeling useless to running the company. I discovered co-workers, including superiors, lacked important knowledge. My next classes filled me in. Then I handled projects they used an outside consultant for. The more concrete knowledge and skills I developed, the*
greater my confidence. When I saw a hole, I took a class. My advanced computer skills made me indispensable to the owner. He retired and I run the company. Five years ago I’d have never believed it possible. Now I know I can do anything, as long as there’s a teacher!

Don’t be afraid to ask questions or have someone show you how to do something. If computers intimidate you, take a class. Plug holes of your knowledge with education. Grow by acknowledging limitations and finding ways to improve them. You can learn almost anything. Thank yourself with lots of love when you feel increased confidence. Nasrin developed hers after translating my book, All Men Are jerks Until Proven Otherwise into Farsi and wrote to me:

To put myself first I decided to increase my knowledge by reading books because I believe that KNOWLEDGE IS POWER. Right at that time, God brought your helpful book into my life in an unexpected way. Since I translated it, I have a better feeling about me. The content was complementary power to my life. Through translation, I discovered my real interests and talent!
**Becoming a Solid Person**

Some of you refer to different personas that come out in various situations.

- "I’m talkative in a group but my shy side takes over when it’s one on one."
- "I’m aggressive at work but a pushover with my lady."
- "I handle my crew well but friends walk all over me."
- "I’m the life of the party when I know people but tongue-tied otherwise."

Is your confidence greater in specific situations? Do you see yourself as more than one person? I did, until a friend asked why I exuded tremendous confidence in business situations, but was a wimp in personal ones. Business abilities made me confident but I was insecure socially. My friend said the unconfident ME is also the confident ME. So I defined myself by the confident me and consciously carried it into weaker areas. It worked! First I absorbed my confident business behavior. When I’d normally turn into a nervous teen, I’d silently repeat that I was that respected businesswoman, reinforcing it in the mirror. Slowly I transferred the confidence from work into play. I WAS the same person. I’d never considered this simple reality. Now I live it!
EXERCISE: List positive attributes in your most confident personas. Find ways to bring them into areas of your life where confidence is lower.

Your stronger attributes can compensate for weaker ones. It took time to feel professional confidence outside of work but consciousness about being one person helped. Potential romantic situations were always my Achilles’ heel. But a confident nature eventually entered there too. I faked a lot at first, but now it’s all the real me! Find the area you feel most confident in and slowly integrate the assurance you feel into other situations.

Happy Autonomy!
People with good self-esteem are whole and complete by creating a satisfying life. If you don’t depend on someone else for happiness, it’s easier to love
yourself. Amy shares, “Independence always increased my self-esteem. That's not to say I don't have loved ones around me on whom I depend, but trying new things and proving to myself I can do them means a great deal to me.” Creating a happy life gives you freedom.

Many people look to others for a life to avoid being alone. That zaps your power to create a satisfying one! To own your life—BE it. What does that mean? Navigate your actions. Get comfortable with your company. Slowly try new activities. Do some solo. I couldn't handle alone time and bought companionship, which felt lousy. After feeling disgusted enough, I tried flying solo. My trip to Aspen was the first delicious taste. Now I go where I want, when I want. If I change my mind, no one cares. I'll plan a date with me to do what I love, look forward to it, and say I have plans if friends call. Gay left Trinidad to come to New York to be on her own:

_I left family and friends Trinidad to get to know myself. Without the womb they created for me, I was better able to experience life. Knowing I could do things on my own felt powerful_.

Before that, my self-esteem wasn't there. I made a decision to control situations to maintain who I am and not allow people to
manipulate me to the extent that they sap my strength and force me into an unwanted role. By doing things that pleased me instead of others, I realized I had it in me to do what was right for me. I made a conscious decision and God helped things to fall into place. There was no looking back. I now look forward to each day.

Enjoying your own company helps you fall in love with YOU. Slowly, plan solo activities. As you get comfy, appreciate enjoying your way. Lyzia took responsibility for her happiness. “I am the only person in the world who can make me happy and I have to love myself first. Only then people will love me. I do things I love doing alone: read, watch videos, go to the movies, for a walk or ride.” Why go somewhere unappealing, just to have plans? Why date just anyone, to avoid staying home? Chapter 3 is full of suggestions for enjoying your time. Ellie advises:

*My life is simple and focused. I am in charge of my choices and activities.*
*I don't answer to or consciously hurt others but am my own boss. I am alone a lot but there is minimal negativity in my life. Learn to enjoy your own company. Respect a need for space for yourself and others. Accept your need for down time.*

*Alone, Not Lonely*
As you try things on your own, focus on enjoying the activities. Diane says, “Being alone is a favorite time. I feel calm and content. At times, although seldom, I feel slightly lonely, but I do something about it and it doesn’t last.”

Break out of the loneliness mold and adopt a new perception—joy of being solo! Beatrice agrees:

*The key is to do what I enjoy, have fun with friends, keep my body in shape by exercising, read a lot, and keep learning. I have tried a million ways of keeping busy, finding myself, my career, enjoying my life, and trying not to get caught up in the depression that can easily creep into my life. I have vowed to see at least one Broadway show a month, and I'm always taking classes every semester to better myself - piano, art, computer, web design, journalism.*

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**FACT:** Alone does not mean lonely.

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There’s a big difference between being alone, and being lonely. Fear of loneliness makes us do silly things. When you fall in love with yourself, being alone is lovely. Roger says, “I've noticed that needy people get lonely, and healthy people spend time alone.” What a difference! Dianne advises, “Become
acquaint with yourself, discover your interests and pursue them. I assembled long lists of projects and activity choices to choose from when I feel stymied. Discover yourself. Get creative. Give birth to a newly developed you.” I’m rarely lonely since I discovered how lovely it is to spend time with just me.

Debra shares:

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When I am the loneliest, the best thing I can do is to be physically active. I can take control over it just by taking a walk, appreciating the beauty of nature, and talking to God. Changing your energy will change your mood. I love to dance, so I don’t hesitate to go out dancing by myself. Someone usually asks me to dance, but if not, I will approach a man and ask him.
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Self-love helps you appreciate, and even relish, solo time. William adds:

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I’m very comfortable being alone. Actually, I often look for it because it helps me think, away from activity and noise. I think about my life, motivations, goals, how I work and how things work. When I’m alone I can do whatever I wanna do without having to justify anything to anybody. One of the things I like best is my freedom.
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**EXERCISE:** List what bothers you about being alone. Ask yourself how you can change the perception or overcome fears.
Loneliness vs. being alone is perception. Being alone means no one else is there. It doesn’t mean lonely. Why devalue your company? Don’t just use solo time to for chores or phone calls. Have fun! Creating a complete life allows you choices: join friends or pass on invitations that aren’t palatable since you have satisfying options. I cherish time with just me. Lonely is a word I rarely use. So is boredom. I never have enough time to read, walk, see movies, write, and a zillion things I enjoy solo. Christi learned:

I felt lonely for most of my life. I didn't handle it well and cried until my eyes were swollen. One moment of loneliness felt like the world was ending. I remember once wanting to see a movie. Not finding anyone to go with, I decided to see it by myself. Everyone was with someone else and I cried hysterically. I felt like the only person in the world without someone to see a movie with. Now, years later, I actually PREFER going to a movie alone! If it’s a comedy, I like to go with someone else so we can laugh together. But if nobody wants to see it, I’ll go alone and laugh by myself. I go to the movies alone 95% of the time and like it that way!

**EXERCISE:** List things you enjoy, or think you might enjoy doing. Try one at a time. Plan a trip or activity and save for it.
Spend time solo and learn the pleasure of your company. I love to just be: a time to be me: no dressing up or pretenses, no plans or time constraints, no rushing or “shoulds.” Just be—relax and get in touch with you. Think about what little things would make you happy. Henry David Thoreau said, “I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.” Me too! When you fall in love with yourself, you’re never lonely.

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Chapter 3: Loving Nookies

Life begets life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself that one becomes rich.

Sarah Bernhardt

Taking care of yourself - physical - mental - spiritual - reinforces good self-esteem, which reflects in your attitude. Self-esteem is nourished by a life-style providing support and satisfaction. This chapter elaborates on ways to create one. The more you do for you, the better you feel. The better you feel, the more you want to do! A conscious effort to take care of your well-being and do things you enjoy keeps the focus on YOU. Every loving action reinforces that you’re worthy of love. The more you do for you, the stronger your self-esteem can get. So indulge! Start with one thing and add new ones as you feel the benefits.
MIND/BODY CONNECTIONS

A strong body makes the mind strong. Thomas Jefferson

A healthy life-style says, “I love me.” Since the body and mind work together, the healthier you feel, the happier you are. Healthy habits sustain good self-esteem. If you feel unfit, it’s harder to feel good. Say, "I love me" by taking control of your well-being!

Fit for You!

Do you diet or shape up for others? Do it for you instead! Staying fit helps you live longer, increases energy, reduces stress, slows the effects of aging, maintains the immune system, and improves self-esteem. Looking better is just a bonus!

Create a fitness standard that makes YOU feel good. Healthy doesn’t mean a perfect body. I’ll never be thin and my appearance doesn’t scream fit but my doctor says I am. It no longer matters if others disagree. I know I’m fit—that’s what counts! Having control over your well-being puts a lilt in your step, a smile on your face.
your face and makes you more productive. Lucy says her self-esteem increased by taking better care:

*I was always heavy. I joined Weight Watchers, and so far, I’ve lost almost 40 pounds. Now, I just want to take care of myself. I am starting to enjoy my own company. I am my own best friend. I feel that in order for someone to love me, I’ve got to love myself first.*

Weight loss is a “side effect” of exercise. When I’m stressed or bumbed, exercise improves my mood. Samantha says, “Exercise is one of the best cures for feeling blue.” Take control! Find an exercise buddy or class. Be creative on busy days. Walk! It burns calories and strengthens the heart. Get a jump rope. Use stairs instead of elevators when possible. I go up and down stairs when time is tight. Do calisthenics at home. Use dumbbells. Find ways to get movin’ and groovin’. Dance! Take pride in any effort to improve your body. It’s hard for some of us. When you actually do something, enjoy having control over old habits. Don’t berate yourself if you don’t do “enough.” Even a little helps! That’s love! Jennifer found love in exercise:

*I was a sloth. I’d always accepted being overweight. But not really. It hurt. You told me to take a walk, even just around the block. I could do that. It felt like I accomplished something. I walked around two the next day. I*
expected to be tired but the more I walked, the more I felt energetic. Soon I was skipping the elevator. It motivated me to eat healthier. Slowly my clothes got looser. More importantly, I’m proud of myself. Now I love walking all. I couldn’t love myself until I took control of my fitness. Now I understand why exercise shows self-love. It motivates me to do more!

How are your muscles? Strong ones increase longevity and support overall health. When I began slow motion weight training, I’d never used weights. This intense technique is one of the toughest things I’ve done. I lifted heavy weights and pushed myself. It was painful and I swore each session was my last. But I continued for a year and now on my own. Hanging in boosted my self-esteem. Working out with weights still hurts, but pride makes me feel I can do anything. I love myself for persevering! Tom shared in a group:

I tried exercise but didn’t build muscles I thought women liked, so I stopped. Why waste time if I didn’t impress the ladies? Now I exercise to feel fit for ME, not to look like a prize. It feels good and relieves job stress. I often exercise during lunch and return refreshed. Working out for just me has a
remarkable effect on my self-image. It keeps me focused on what's important and I function better!

Don’t exercise to meet standards that others say are acceptable. Studies show that people who exercise are happier. So the heck with the guy who thinks you should lose 10 pounds or the woman who doesn't like your abs. Exercise for YOU, to say, “I love me!”

Nourish Yourself

The healthier my lifestyle, the better I feel about me. Become conscious of how you treat your body. It’s not all or nothing! Occasional fries and junk food are still in my diet. Yet as I love myself more and eat healthier, the less I desire those foods. Most of the time, I hate putting something into my body that's bad for it! Moderating your sugar and fat intake is loving too.

Before I had self-respect, I laughed at vitamin takers. Now I pop them as an act of love to stay healthy. People who knew me in my low self-esteem days can’t believe I take vitamins since I could never swallow pills. By repeating, “I can swallow pills because I love myself and want to be healthy,” now I do. I also consciously pamper my skin. People say I look much younger than I am. It’s no accident! I’ve been told I don’t just cream my face - I
lovingly apply it and use good products, because I’m worth it. Men! Your skin needs care too! Caring for it every day reinforces love every day.

Get enough sleep! It’s critical to feeling good. If you like looking young - take advantage of the collagen produced at the end of a sleep cycle. Sleep nourishes skin. Have you noticed more lines after getting less than usual? Mine reflects the 7-8 hours a night I strive for, no matter how much I’d love time for other things. Erratic sleep makes us erratic. Being tired makes it harder to function. A good night’s sleep helps you feel better about you. Tiredness sags your spirit. Do you feel guilty about sleeping or taking down time? Get over it! Rest is very loving. Value yourself by making sleep a priority!

Get into good eating habits. Drink enough water. When you go the distance to stay healthy, you can’t help feeling better about you.

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STRESSBUSTERS

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadows. Helen Keller

You can’t always control stressful situations but you can control how to handle them. Stress makes it harder to function and hinders reaching an optimal level of good health. Don’t be a victim of it. Take control! Make relaxing a habit for
the best chance of maintaining good health. It also nurtures a greater capacity to enjoy life. Be loving by reducing your stress level.

**Lighten Up!**

Things get accomplished, or not, with or without unhealthy levels of stress. Why not without? Be loving and incorporate stress reduction into your lifestyle. Take breaks from the news. Laughter is a great stressbuster. It lightens situations, releasing chemicals that improve your mood. Did you know the act of smiling relaxes face muscles? Watch a funny movie, read comics, or other activities to laugh away stress. Savor the lighter feelings.

Exercise reduces tension. I take long walks when life gets to me. Larry says, "When I feel stress mounting, it's time to shoot hoops. All the better if someone is around to play with. Otherwise, I practice alone." Fredda likes to jog. "When I run, stress leaves my body. Afterwards, I'm relaxed." Alicia jumps rope. Marc rides his bike. Jenny rollerblades. John lifts weights. Many walk like me. Find your own method for stress relief.

**EXERCISE:** Identify stress triggers. Write down everything that can instigate it. When a new one pushes your buttons, note it. Make a habit of doing a stressbuster when a button is pushed.
The more tension in your muscles, the more chance of adverse effects. If you work in the same position for hours, stretch regularly. It can be quick. Stand up and reach toward the ceiling for a minute. Touch your toes a few times. Roll your head in circles in each direction—then your shoulders. Your body tells what needs stretching. The more limber your muscles, the greater your ability to manage stress. That’s love!

**Breathing**

You breathe anyway, so why not get more out of it? Develop a habit of taking deep, relaxing breaths. Conscious breathing releases stress. Shallow chest-breathing—with the upper chest instead of lower in the diaphragm—speeds the heart and tenses muscles to enhance stress. Deep breaths release stress and helps your nervous system settle down. Breathing is in your control and enables you to relax anytime, anywhere. Why allow stress to control you? Jack says:
Stress seemed normal, until my doc said it was making me prone to illness. I began taking mini-breaks at work, just a minute or two to sit still and deep breathe. If I’m alone, I close my eyes. Or, I stare at something inconspicuously. It’s had a profound effect. I’m more relaxed and more motivated to take better care of myself.

Deep breathing impacts your well-being. Stare out a window at work and breathe. At home, get comfy. Diaphragm breathing circulates more oxygen and creates calm faster. Stress accelerates breathing. Deep breathing slows it. See what’s moving when you breathe - your upper chest or belly. You can learn to breathe properly, at least sometimes.

**EXERCISE:** Close your eyes. Breathe with your hand on your belly to feel air go in and out. Take a deep breath through your nose as your belly expands. Hold the breath a few seconds. Then let it out slowly through your mouth, as your belly goes in.

Breathe slowly until you feel calmer. I practice while I walk. Use a rocking chair—the steady motion relaxes breathing. Try yoga, an effective stress buster that teaches breathing techniques and poses for relaxation. Doing at least 10
minutes of yoga each day brings greater stress reduction than longer periods of other techniques. Meditation and visualizing a serene scenario relieve stress too. Close your eyes, breathe, and paint a relaxing picture in your mind. It’s also calming to stare at a candle and deep breathe. Show yourself love by doing what you can to stay relaxed!

**CREATING A SATISFYING LIFE**

A well-rounded life is like a safety net under you.

*It allows you to do fancier tricks on the high wire.*  
Jane Pauley

Say, “I love me” by creating a satisfying life that's not dependent on someone else. Create a comfortable and happy living situation. Strive to improve each aspect of your life, one baby step at a time. In recent years I’ve said, “focus on self” over and over when I feel life getting out of my control. It helps me concentrate on finishing projects, decreasing stress, and maintaining physical and emotional health. This isn’t selfish. You can be kind to others while giving yourself attention. When you nurture you first, you have tons more for others!
FACT: You deserve the best!

Cultivate Your Interests

The best way to create a satisfying life is to find your passions and taste life more fully. Passion is the ability to savor life and all its details to the fullest—enthusiasm radiating from within. Passion is fuel for pleasure. It drives us to accomplish things. Amy writes:

I got fired from my first job ever in September; then discovered my relationship wasn't going where I thought it was. It wasn't really those things that made me feel on the verge of depression again. It was that I wasn't dedicating time to my passion—writing. I've recommitted myself and it makes me feel great!

What might you LOVE to try? Try it! Hanna wrote, “Developing good self-esteem has made me happier because I do things I never did before.” Do you love travel? Plan a vacation. Even if you save for a year, look forward to it. If you’re invited to something new, go! Subscribe to discount tickets programs. Try one new thing each month (or week). Judy said, “Learning to trust myself to learn new things is important to my self-esteem.” Doing fun things revs you!
Explore whatever might fulfill you. Join organizations relating to your profession, or a hobby/interest group. Participate. There are groups for almost everything. Get involved with a project. Take an interesting class. Get a pet. Unconditional pet love is a wonderful love nookie. Mitzi said, “Coming home from a bad date and seeing my animals is priceless!” Enjoy doing activities. Edwin learned:

*Keeping busy is great for people who wish to keep their mind on the best things in life. Mostly, I feel laid back. I try to think positively and don't worry too much. Staying busy is a great “Un-worry-er.”*

**EXERCISE:** Make a wish list of everything you might like to do, even “unrealistic” choices. Find ways to do the most realistic ones first. Go through your list one by one to accomplish them. Keep adding more.

I have a love affair with life each day. By enjoying little things, life keeps me smiling. Doing what you love improves life. Actively pursue happiness by trying new things. They don’t have to cost money. Celebrate you by doing fun things. Allow passion to sweep over you like a warm, fuzzy blanket. See how much fun it is when you nix old excuses and fears and love yourself enough to actively seek happiness.
Simple Splurges

Do something nice for you every day—or more—to reinforce you're special. I can’t repeat this enough! It doesn't have to be big. Take a break at work, even if it's busy. Fifteen minutes outdoors or doing meditation won't hurt your job. Treat yourself regularly to stuff you enjoy. Not super extravagant. Get an occasional massage. I barter for them in exchange for writing. Splurge on clothing or a toy that bring pleasure. Have an ice cream cone on a gorgeous day, despite your diet!

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**FACT: Doing nice things for yourself reinforces that you’re worthy of love.**

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Pamper yourself! I have an electric foot massager under my desk that keeps me smiling as I write. Get comforting products. Comfy clothing and soft fabrics are soothing. Delicious smelling lotions feel delightful. Do you only use good scents when you go out? I enjoy mine every day!
Buy something special and impractical that you’d love. It can be small but significant. For example, I loved my pot of tea when I stayed at B & Bs. I saw an okay one at a garage sale for two bucks but spent forty on a teapot I loved. I enjoy making a pot of tea and pouring a bit at a time so it’s always hot, especially in winter. I always smile. Buy one expensive glass or mug for every day use. I drink water out of a good beer mug from Germany. Just for me!

It’s okay to be impractical about self-love occasionally. Twenty-five bucks for one mug I don’t need, or forty for a teapot, seems extravagant in the small picture. But it’s not exorbitant. When I drink water from my mug or pour tea, I’m reminded that I’m significant. Show yourself love by buying something small but extravagant! Use it regularly as a reminder that you’re special. Claude saves for good cigars. Janice spends extra on an art calendar to enjoy each day. Dale splurged on a fancy ornament for his car. Gladys loves silk PJs. These small splurges strengthen self-love! Slowly get rid of things you don’t like but use since you have them. Self-love isn’t always practical. Allowing yourself to spring for goodies, just because you want them, says, “I love me.” Gina agrees:
My splurge was very good sheets. I’d always bought cheap ones but loved the thought of having very soft ones with deep pockets. When I decided to buy a set, it was fun shopping for the perfect ones. I feel loving when I go to sleep. The deep pockets make it easier to make the bed—another feel good. I alternated these special sheets with old ones until I decided I was worth a second set. I saved for them and threw out the old ones. I’m saving for a third set. Now I’m happy every night!

Nice gestures for you say, "I love me" and are reminders that you deserve happiness. Don’t say you can’t afford it. Don’t go into debt but an occasional treat works. Often we spend more on others than on ourselves. Treat yourself like a best friend—the worthy, beloved person you are. Laura’s dream was to travel through Europe for 6 months. She did it!

For a year I lived sparsely with roommates and had side jobs. I still saw friends but minimized spending. After saving enough, I sublet my room and left for Europe. I stayed in clean and friendly budget pensions. It was the experience of a lifetime and showed I could do what made me happy. My
self-esteem soared. I did it for me! I came back revived and went back to school at night to advance to a better career. I plan to travel a lot more!

I keep learning through experience. Valentine’s Day used to depress me if I had no guy. One year I broke up with one right before. I’d been looking forward to getting roses, craved a perfect one, and decided to get it. After all, I love me! I went on a mission to find the perfect rose and spent ten bucks on ONE! That’s love! I loved looking at it on my nightstand and smelled it all week. Now I buy a single rose occasionally. It taught me how complete I am!

**EXERCISE:** List every splurge you can think of that might make you smile - what you’d love but hesitate to spend time or money on. Figure out how to get them.

One rose is inexpensive but loving! Splurges needn’t cost much. I love taking magazines to a café or park for a reading fest. Ask someone to watch your kids, even if you hate asking. Spend a day walking/biking around town. Indulge in a $6 slice of cake. Buy a pillow for your bath. Get your nails done. Surf the Internet guilt-free. Go to the nearest body of water and relax. Run away one weekend and just be—with no obligations. Eat, sleep, and play how YOU want. Bring books or stuff you haven’t had time for. Catch up on
yourself. Chapter 13 is full of anecdotes from people with ways they show love. Get ideas from them! Yvonne advises:

*Look into your inner self. The answers lie there. You must have a relationship with yourself. What I mean by that is doing things for yourself—pamper yourself and treat yourself well. You must have a relationship and understanding of yourself before you can share with anyone else.*

**User Friendly Friends**

*Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.*

—Mark Twain

When my self-esteem was low, I hated very attractive, confident friends, thinking they made me look worse. Now I love them. Get conscious of who’s in your life. Dee says, “My friends are amazing individuals—who you are surrounded by reflects who you are.” Yep, my friends are smart and hot! I love the reflection! Strive for healthy friends! Christi learned:

*When I was younger, I didn’t feel I had enough friends. I always thought everyone else had more, which in turn meant they were more special. I took for granted the fact that I had a few TRUE friends. I’ve had the same best friend since the 7th grade and another very good friend since the 5th*
grade! I stay in touch with another friend I've known since I was 6 years old! How special is that?

Covet friends who are good for you. "I think, therefore I am." Positive friends reinforce being positive. If you're unhappy with friends, try making new ones. Christi adds, “I blow off people who think I'm anything less than wonderful!” Covet supportive and fun friends. Be the person you want to attract. Ray writes,

Happy attracts happy, good people. Then good things start happening to you and it just compounds itself till your life is full of nice and helpful friendly people. "Birds of a feather flock together" - then all the bull just goes away.

Negativity is contagious. After taking my workshop, Tracy put her friends on notice—if they only had complaints, leave her alone! She adds, “I'm more in control and positive. I love me enough to avoid negatives. Life is brighter.” I don't see friends as disposable, or advocate blowing off any that aren't your cheerleader. There's a difference between a friend with a current problem and one who lives to complain about a bad life.
Step back from one who constantly whines about the same thing but never takes action. Limit time with those who thrive on being unhappy. It makes room for positive people. Cheryl says:

As I let go of negative friends, I worried that I wouldn’t have enough. You said not to worry—I was cleaning out my life for better people. It made me nervous but you were right. I began meeting people with more to offer. Now I have great new friends, which makes me feel even better about who I am.

Create a support system of healthy, fun friends who tell you why you're wonderful if you're down, encourage you to achieve, and supply hugs. Judy C. says she has “a wonderful support group of friends and mentors in my writing who encourage my dreams.” Reach out—people are there. When I first moved to Manhattan, I put an ad in a local paper to start a support group. We met at a café and some became good friends.

**EXERCISE:** Have a Joy fest with friends. Everyone makes a list of what would make them happy. Take turns reading them. Then brainstorm together for more happy activities.

Find four like-minded people and have dinner together each month - people with similar objectives who aren't close friends. Take turns giving updates.
Share, encourage, support, suggest. Ellie says, “I go to a weekly class for support for my creativity.” When you do what interests you, you’ll meet people. Join organizations; volunteer; participate in events; take classes; do activities you love. Sharath says, “I just moved into web design. This introduced me to a new circle of people. The experience made me feel better about myself” Be more social. Expanding your circle of friends sweetens life. Good ones are priceless assets! Yvonne agrees:

I find so much love and pleasure from my friends and family. Through these wonderful relationships I found inner peace. They have improved my self-esteem and self worth. Your personal relationships with family and friends are so important that you must look to them to make your life fulfilling.

Turn to friends for support or to laugh with. Kim’s self-esteem increased from having “friends who love and accept me no matter what and stood by me through thick and thin for fifteen years.” Cherish people who care. They make the biggest difference in your life, nurture your self-image and stimulate more self-love. Friends and family make us very rich!

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GETTING COMFY AT HOME
The more the heart is nourished with happiness, the more it is insatiable.

Gabrielle Roy

Making your environment as pleasant as possible is one of the most loving things you can do. Put your heart into your home and workplace. Warm ambience and comfortable accessories create a foundation for happiness. Put love into every nook and cranny. Let it resonate through you!

Feathering Your Nest

Make your home yours. It's not just where you sleep—it's your nest. Whether you live in an apartment, house or room, make it yours. Small touches add love. I never cared when my place was just where I slept, ate, and threw things. Treating it as my sanctuary made it one. Home felt more peaceful and pleasant. Make your space a warm haven. You’re worth it!

If you hate your living space, find a way to move or make it more cozy. Delores says, "I love to look at my place and say ‘This is me. I did this for me!’" For years I had roommates and laughed at the chaos. I didn't appreciate home until my current apartment. It's so me—comfy, and inviting. When you love where you live, it's easier to be happy. Coming home to a place that feels good is delightful. I used to stay out a lot. Now I enjoy going home!

Lucy says:
My new apartment gave me a new lease on life. I felt that the move was the best thing because I was very depressed in the old apartment. There were too many sad memories there. I lived in it for 14 years, nine in an abusive relationship. I realized what I had to do. Move!

Living Warm & Fuzzy
Loving touches don’t have to cost much. Art from a craft sale, photos, souvenirs, throw pillows, a wind chime—things that brighten your home—also brighten your mood. My client Linda raved about a local artist. Her eyes twinkled while describing his paintings. I asked why she didn’t buy one and got budget tales. The paintings started at $30 but she wasn’t worth it! I insisted she buy one. The next week she arrived smiling.

I bought a painting! It was such fun deciding which to get. I’ve always been cheap with myself but I bought one that fit perfectly over my bed. It’s turned my studio into a friendly apartment. I smile whenever I look at it because I know I did something loving for me. I plan to splurge on other things occasionally. It makes a big difference!
Little touches stimulate smiles. Buy fresh flowers regularly to say, "I love me!" Even you guys! Jim said, "Someone brought me flowers and I felt silly. But I liked how they brightened my apartment. Now I buy them." I get inexpensive but pretty ones that last a while. Plants make a room friendlier. I put two large floor plants in my bedroom and smile when I see them. Music nurtures. Be conscious of what works for your moods or for atmosphere. When I'm cleaning I love rock to perk my energy. For writing, it's instrumental. Classical music relaxes me. Studies show that music can raise your antibodies if you listen for as little as 20 minutes. George said, “When I’m feeling low, my classic rock CDs pick me up.”

Make an effort to keep your place neat! Have good lighting, especially when sunshine is scarce. I get down from SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) during a streak of dark days. Using lights helps. Keeping up your spirits in all possible ways says, “I love me!” Show yourself love with delicious aromas to enhance relaxation. Lavender is known for calming stress. Dab some on your pillowcase. Scented candles improve my mood. Sometimes I light lilac ones in different rooms so my apartment smells like a garden. A scented bath smells yummy. Find scents you love. Use what make you feel good as much as possible. You're worth it!
Even if you have a teeny cubbyhole office, make it yours to feel better at work. Have a plant or fresh flowers on your desk. Keep it relatively neat. Frame special photos. Improve your work environment with personal touches. Pay attention to little things that make it more pleasant.

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THE GIFT OF TIME

*How you spend your time is more important than how you spend your money.*

*Money mistakes can be corrected, but time is gone forever.*  
David B. Morris

Do you try to fit as much as possible into a day? If you're often in a hurry, you miss things. Don't wait until you lose something or someone before waking up to how precious time is. Even with a demanding job or kids/a partner craving attention, you MUST make time for YOU!

**Slow the Clock!**

Do you appreciate time? I rushed through life when I didn't respect it. Now I make ME time. Love yourself enough to budget quality time for you. Value it like money. It enriches self-esteem. Time is a wonderful gift for YOU so spend
it wisely. Always rushing affects physical and mental health. Slow down! ME time stays with you. Suzi remembers:

*Once my major indulgence was a trip to the beach—for both the body and spirit. It never mattered how much housework was left undone. If it was time to get some sun, nothing else mattered. The funny thing is my memories of that time include many details of the beach itself and none of how many plates were in the sink or how much laundry was piled up.*

Enjoy quiet time to recharge energy, indulge thoughts, and counter stress. Rekindle by sitting quietly. Play soft music. Move slowly. Stillness calms you on a work intensive day. It breaks stress cycles. When you're overwhelmed, love yourself enough to find a retreat—a peaceful space. If you have kids, ask someone to watch them and take a break. Go to another room or outside. Occasionally go somewhere quiet, alone, to get centered. Take a drive. Take a mini vacation from your phone and computer. Exist in silence. Walk. Read. Breathe. Connect to yourself. Amy says:
I spend a lot of time by myself just doing my own work, and in silence. I think silence and going within are great tools. I began to become quieter several years ago. I haven't owned a TV for 3 years.

Do you get busy and neglect family and friends? Make quality time for those you love! Express what they mean to you. When I lost my parents, I was grateful not to regret unsaid feelings. People you love are more valuable than achievements. Don't take loved ones for granted! Enjoy their company and think about how nice it is to be with them. Tell them!

Nibbling Life

You miss many delights by rushing. High tech distracts from simple pleasures. Walking in the street with a cell phone hinders paying attention to details you pass. Observe without blinders. Perk up your senses. Nibble on little things. Savor the flavors, textures, sounds and other sensations of your life. Pay more attention to the details around you. Relish life slowly.

It’s hard to enjoy life if you’re absorbed with getting more money or stuff. Do something fun with what you have NOW. The pursuit of happiness isn’t synonymous with material pursuits. Taste life’s little pleasures with zest. They don’t have to cost much. A walk in a park, cappuccino at a café, watching
kids play, walking on a sunny day, are inexpensive, yet tasty treats. Take a drive to a quaint town. Find small pleasures and savor them! Joan says:

I grew up poor and equated money with fun. I put a price tag on everything—my happiness barometer. Except I wasn’t happy! When I became friends with Sarah, who earned much less, she took me to quaint, inexpensive cafes with great food and friendlier waiters than my usual haunts. We attended free concerts and took long walks. I smiled more as I saw the world through Sarah’s eyes. She loved life. I began to appreciate the basics: taking advantage of gorgeous weather by just being outdoors, shopping at flea markets, and the company of good people—better than how much I spend. Life was superficial before. Now my new friends make me happy just being themselves - no frills!

Make time for nurture nookies—small loving things for yourself. If you’re tired, refresh with a catnap. Call someone you miss. Buy watercolors and explore your creativity. Write in a journal. If you don’t live alone, be firm about not being disturbed for an hour. A favorite nookie is a leisurely bubble bath with candles, soft music, and wine or herbal tea. I even have a pillow for my head and am warm and mushy, and self-loving after. Find your nurture nookies—small things that bring peace and joy.
EXERCISE: List nurture nookies you’d enjoy - as many as you can. Refer to them as you think about giving yourself love.

Slow down regularly and enjoy little delights. Appreciate the small nooks and crannies of life. Smile at folks. Allow their smiles to warm you. Let sunshine brighten your day. Pay attention to the details around you and you’ll find some small pleasures. Hugs are great nookies. Get a healthy fix as you greet someone. I greet everyone with hugs, even in my classes! Scientists say that being touched greatly improves mental and physical health. So get hug nookies often! Greet friends with big, fat, full-bodied hugs. You may be surprised at how receptive others are. We all need them.

Flexible Love
How often have you stressed over doing something you absolutely didn’t want to do but felt you should? I’m referring to keeping plans, attending events, doing a favor, etc., and decisions to get stuff done. While I’m not encouraging selfishness, it’s good to show yourself love by being flexible in your intentions.

I used to see plans as obligations. If I said I’d go, I had to. People cancelled on me yet I couldn’t. But self-love includes self-consideration. The
first time I canceled plans was a miserable day. I was tired, cold and dreaded going out. I considered why go if I felt lousy? Would postponing dinner hurt my friend? No! I reschedule and felt loving being home in jammies instead of in the rain. Since then I don't set plans in stone. I won't blow off ticket events or terribly inconvenience someone, but it's empowering to not feel forced to do something and have choices—go out or cancel. John shares:

*My friends play football on Sunday. Once my girl and I were enjoying the day. Football was the last thing I wanted to get up for. I said I should. She asked why? Because I said I'd be there. She asked if the game would go on without me. Yes. Would the guys go ballistic if I canceled? Probably not. When I said I couldn't make it, all my friend said was he'd let me know info for next week. I learned life goes on even if I change plans. It's great to do what I want.*

You begin a day with a to-do list or agenda and something you’d rather do comes up but—inner voices insist you do what you intended. Be flexible! Self-love forgives pursuing happiness. While you can't leave dirty dishes for weeks or ignore things forever, you can accommodate what's more palatable. Ginger did:

*I took a day off to Christmas shop. I lost the mood in the crowded mall but pushed myself. It wasn’t fun. I thought of leaving but felt I should shop*
since that’s why I took off. Wait! In other years I’d forced myself to continue. This time I went to a quiet movie instead. It was wonderful to give myself permission to change plans. I returned in a great mood!

Few plans are concrete. Grant permission to change your mind if something doesn’t feel right. I’m EMPOWERED knowing I don’t HAVE TO do everything. Of course I consider how my choice will affect someone. But if I’m hurting no one by choosing to stay in one night or leaving chores for later, I do what makes me happier. Lina tried:

My friend organized a gathering with many people in a bar. I had problems at work and rushed home late. Getting ready, the idea of going to a packed bar stressed me. After my bad day, I just wanted to get undressed and chill. While my friend would feel bad if I didn’t come, I decided she wouldn’t miss me much. So I left her a message saying I was delayed at work and couldn’t make it, sort of the truth. Going would have ruined my day completely. Instead, I turned my bad mood around by staying home. I loved feeling it was okay.

The more you do for you, the more you kindle a fire under self-love.

Remember—the greatest gift you can give to yourself is yourself. Treat this gift
with care and wrap it in good health and love! Treat yourself lovingly and kindly. Your self-esteem will flourish as you nurture your body, mind and spirit.
Chapter 4: Spiritual Love

From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life.

Arthur Ashe

Faith is one of the most powerful tools for loving yourself. When I understood how my mental outlook affected the dynamics of my life, my most intense, productive, and delightful awakening began. My self-esteem accelerated as faith increased. Spiritual faith gives me an incredible sense of peace. I believe the best support for being a happy and satisfied individual is a spiritual connection. It still blows me away that I'm advising this, since I scoffed the idea of all things God for many years.

THE POWER OF FAITH

No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to uncharted land,
or opened a new doorway for the human spirit. Helen Keller

Are you skeptical of believing in something without concrete substance? I know how that feels. My arm had to be twisted to accept the power of spirituality until I decided, what can I lose by trying what might help? When miracles became a regular part of my life, I accepted that faith works. Veronica said, “Continued spiritual renewal increased my self-esteem.” Give yourself a good dose of love by nurturing faith. Spirituality won’t stop problems, but faith changes your perception. You can accept problems as part of life and feel supported in dealing with them.

Finding Faith - My Story

I had no belief system and scorned God. While my attitude was positive, I didn’t understand my spiritual power until a friend insisted I read You Can Heal Your Life by Louise Hay. It enlightened me that my outlook was spiritual without knowing it! My positive spirit reflected faith. I did things knowing they’d work out, without understanding why. When I acknowledged faith in the Universe, I manifested more.
FACT: Faith is simply trusting in spiritual support of your choice.

The concept of God still put me off until I lamented to a friend about a problem and he suggested I talk to God. Ha! I protested. He asked me to try. I agreed to humor him. That night I said, "God, I don't believe you exist but promised to ask you for guidance." The morning was a shocker—I knew exactly what to do! I tentatively talked to God again, testing Him, and always got clarity. If it feels funny talking to a higher power, giggle like me when I talked to what seemed like air. My giggling turned to delight as my air talks manifested what I needed. As my faith intensified, so did my concept of God. Finding God was my biggest personal miracle!!

Finding Your Inner Faith
There are many paths to faith. I had it before knowing and called it positive thinking. Hello Daylle! That's faith. Tapping into spirituality can begin with making your attitude more positive. I didn’t recognize its power when I was resistant yet I manifested in ignorance. Don't jump into spiritual stuff that's uncomfortable. Begin by monitoring your expectations. Work on negative thoughts and ask your higher being for support.
Don't worry about what to call your higher being, such as Universe, spirit or God. I've spoken with people who resisted spirituality because they couldn't handle labels. Use what's comfortable. The key is trusting that there's a power/energy/spirit that supports what you do. Amy noted:

I take time to walk my spiritual path and my own path of living. It's a neat process to discover what works for me! Whenever I turn to my spiritual work, my church, meditation, and neat rituals I go deeper and am more clear. I love that!

There's no rule for developing faith. You needn't do it my way or with my perception, but find a path to feeling supported. Some need religion for a relationship with God; some don't. Edwin says, “Attending worship services is great for keeping my self-esteem from sagging.” Cultivate a belief system in your own way—but find it—since it works! Test by asking for guidance or clarity about something specific. The answers I get may not be what I want, but faith allows me to accept it's best for me. Debra agrees. “I just put my mind to the issue at hand, ask God and the Universe for guidance, listen for answers, then follow through.”

I believe my higher being hears me from anywhere. I've advised doubters to ask for a show of good faith—a sign that you're heard and try to be open to
it. Start by living as a good person. Kindness and love are spiritual traits!

William agrees: “My opinions about myself stem from my concept of what is right and wrong. I follow a biblically based moral system that tells me my Creator loves me.” Test slowly with the tools below. As you see results, you’ll trust more. My faith in a God accelerated the development of my self-esteem.

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**FACT: The more faith you develop, the more you attract.**

The more you attract, the stronger your faith.

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Let go of limitations about what you should ask for or expect. I used to just pray for specific things, so as not to be a greedy girl. Now that I believe God wants me to be happy, I’m in oink mode! I’m no longer guilty or apologetic about asking for goodies in many areas. Why not? We can get support for the best life possible. No matter what your religious belief, or lack of one, I implore you to embrace a sense of faith in whatever way works for you.

**New “F” Word Perception – Fear to Faith**

*Every tomorrow has two handles. We can take hold of it with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.*  Henry Ward Beecher
Do you like being scared? Me neither! A spiritual mindset makes fear easier to handle. How much would you have without that nasty little “F” word to interfere with desires? Isn’t that worth giving spirituality a shot? As faith strengthens, so does self-confidence. Since embracing God, I feel safer.

Frank says, “My deep involvement in Judaism has provided a strong foundation in my life.” Beatrice adds, “I have learned to stop being so hard on myself through spiritual growth, when I realized my place in the Universe.”

Remember Bobby McFerrin’s song, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy?” That’s a great example of a spiritual mindset, unless you don’t enjoy smiling. The more you worry, the more you attract things to sweat over. Worrying anticipates problems that may not happen and might even attract them! The more I treat myself lovingly, the less I worry. Faith keeps me from dwelling on what might happen, which makes me even happier!

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**FACT:** Fear only hinders you IF you allow it to.

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Cheap people often don't have faith, or good self-esteem. I used to be cheap. I mean splitting a check by paying exactly my share to the penny; buying things I didn't love that were on sale; taking free samples to save on buying them; avoiding folks who might bring me to pricey places. It reinforced a mindset of lack. I felt richer as my faith and self-esteem grew. The less I worried about money, the more I avoided pinching pennies, and the better I felt me! If you pinch pennies, do a faith check. Linda says she did:

*I'm a freelancer and never felt safe financially, so I watched for sales, ate in inexpensive places, bought cheap gifts, and guarded money. My happiness was also guarded. A friend treated me to a workshop in spiritual principles. I argued with the leader that she didn't understand how precarious my work situation was. She said it was I who didn't understand. She was a freelancer too, and thankful for it. Her faith allowed her to trust she'd always earn enough. My perception was precarious. Hers was blessed and rich. As I let go of fears by focusing on the blessings of my work, I spent more and became generous with others too. When I treated a friend to dinner, it felt good. After buying a dress that wasn't on sale, I felt more loving. The less I worry about money, the more work I get. Now I*
live freely with faith and feel very empowered. I love myself for not being cheap anymore!

As your spiritual power works, get into oink mode and use it more! Start by asking for awareness and guidance about something you need. Be patient. Spirituality isn't magic. You just have to use it. The more faith you get, the more you'll manifest. It takes time before big benefits of faith become obvious. They may creep up in subtle ways until one day you realize that life is much better in directions you'd prayed for. YEAH!

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SPIRITUAL POWER TOOLS

If you can change the way you think, you can change your life. Louise Hay

Don't read too many books on spirituality. What you need is already inside you. There are many ways to view and develop spirituality. Tap into yourself instead of jumping from book to book, and practice-to-practice, looking for better ways to achieve spiritual growth. That's a stall tactic. Try it NOW! Don't wait to taste the flavor of the week. Work from the inside using whatever tools you're comfortable with.
Back to Descartes

“I think, therefore I am.” Descartes’ words are a reminder of your power. I believe with all my heart that you get support for all you think, positive and negative. Your thoughts become your reality—what YOU believe about you—not what others think. People can say you’re a loser but if you believe you’re a winner, you’re supported as a winner. You get as much as your mind allows. If you believe you can, you can. The contrary is true too. Have you ever said, "Everything bad always happens to me?" It came true, didn't it? You expected it to happen and got support. If you think or speak negatively, you attract it. Positive thoughts make life better.

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FACT: You have the power to attract positives.

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Henry Ford said, “If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right.”

Spiritual power is as simple as changing your thoughts. You choose them, not a critical mother, demanding boss, or the media. YOU!

Awareness of how thoughts affect your reality is a power tool for taking control of your life. It's free, easy, needs no installation,
and can last forever. The hard part is having patience to let it work. Janine came to me with no faith after being put down since childhood. She wanted a career but her family insisted she wasn’t college material. A few months later Janine was excited:

> My family taught me “well.” I took a boring job and was miserable. You advised paying attention to my thoughts. I thought my awful job was all I could get. I noticed how much I put myself down, to myself and others. My thoughts reinforced my family’s expectations. As I observed, and practiced self-esteem exercises, I slowly appreciated my assets. My thoughts got more positive. I said aloud—a lot—that I was good enough for a good job.

> Out of the blue, a former colleague asked me to interview for one. Before I’d have argued about why I couldn’t. But I went and begin Monday. I’ve also applied for college classes. After changing my thoughts about me, I’m getting MUCH more! I thank God a lot. Improving life begins with consciousness. I intend to stay on a positive track to be happy.

Your power to create circumstances begins with your beliefs. They direct energy that draws you to situations to fulfill them. Expectations strongly influence outcomes. Become conscious of your thoughts and actions. They add to problems or get you past them. Doesn’t it make sense to expect to be
happy? No matter what’s happening, find positive thoughts! You get what you expect. Make your self-fulfilling prophecy a positive one! The Law of Attraction can be harnessed to manifest what you need. That’s why I have a Law of Attraction in Action series on my blog every Tuesday.

**EXERCISE:** Write negative thoughts individually on a small piece of paper. Think about how each affects your life, then burn it when you’re ready to let go of the thought.

Be clear about what you want. Don’t just pray for a job—be specific about how you’d like to use your skills. Or write down details of what would make you happy. If you’re not sure, whether it’s a job, romantic partner, new location, etc., ask for what’s best for your highest good.

Often the hardest part of getting what you want is figuring out what that is. Ask for spiritual help for that too! Pay attention to how your thoughts affect what you receive. It’s important to hone your desires. Ricardo learned by doing.
When I moved to Manhattan, friends from my small town said I wouldn’t last a month. I need space and quiet. I saw many disappointing apartments. Agents said I was too picky and I’d never find one. But I focused on what was important. Then a colleague offered an apartment he was leaving. It wasn’t a desired location but was bright, quiet, safe, and spacious. Agents called me lucky. NO! I got a place that makes me happy by expecting it. The location actually works well!

Kevin and Kimberly Gullickson are a perfect example of the importance of being specific. Kimberly moved from Rochester, NY to New York City. In her prayers she asked to marry a man from Rochester. When she met Kevin in church, they knew they were meant to be. Kimberly laughed when she said she believes her Lord has a sense of humor. She got what she asked for but she wasn’t specific—he was from Rochester, MN! After more twenty years of marital bliss, she’s glad she left it to God.

If you’re not attracting what you want, monitor your thoughts. Your higher being doesn’t withhold. You do. If you don’t feel worthy, saying a few prayers won’t manifest much. But as faith develops by using it, you’ll attract more good. Slowly let go of thoughts that limit you. Developing strong faith opens
you to a power you’d never dream possible. I’m a witness. I wouldn’t be here without it!

**Affirming Goodies**

Affirmations—simple statements you say as if they were true—help achieve goals, gain confidence, and attract positive experiences. The beauty is that wanting to believe what you’re saying is enough. Repeating one regularly can make it reality. Affirmations calm stress and worries. For example, Sue was nervous about going to court. The judge was tough. I suggested repeating, “Everything will work out fine in court.” She called after.

> I was so scared of losing I was a basket case. How could words change things? But I repeated, “Everything will work out fine in court” and added, “I trust in the Universe to take care of me.” It calmed me down and I knew the hearing would be okay. It was! Affirmations convinced me to attract a positive ruling. I’m sure of that! Now I use them because they work.

Repeating an affirmation demonstrates a positive expectation. I use them for everything. While waiting for the X-ray of a sore tooth that my dentist was sure needed to be pulled, I repeated, “My tooth problem is minimal.” And it was! Before an important meeting I chanted, “Everything will work out fine.” I had confidence and got results! When I needed shoes, I repeated, “I’ll find the
perfect shoes” and there they were! When my agent couldn’t sell my first book, I repeated, “I have a good book deal,” and got the perfect one! Before an important call, I repeat, “I trust in myself to say the right thing.” It charges my confidence and the call always goes well!

Affirmations override negative thoughts. If you’re worrying, drown negative thoughts with affirmations, over and over, until they’re squelched. It’s hard to focus on negatives while repeating positives! Do it if you’re nervous. “I’ll be okay.” “I’m capable of doing the job.” “I have good support in all I do.” My favorite is "Everything will work out fine. Whatever is meant to be will be." Saying it over and over is calming when I anticipate a problem. I repeat it when nervous, and know it will work out.

“Why Me?” Find Out!
Sometimes undesirable stuff happens. You can’t just give God a menu and expect your order immediately. My faith strengthened when I accepted that things happen for a reason. If you don’t manifest what you want on schedule, don’t lose faith. Look for reasons later and you’ll accept glitches more easily. When I don’t manifest quickly, I might have to learn a lesson first. Or, another opportunity is coming. I’m much happier and get less disappointed since I have faith that whatever the outcome, it will work out.
Things happen. Roll with life’s ripples instead of letting them hurt your faith. There’s always a lesson if you look. You may not be ready for what you want. Some things aren’t right for you. Or, you may subconsciously block your desires with negative beliefs. While asking for one thing, your thoughts and actions may imply doubt, fear, or other negatives that counter faith. My client Eddie learned this:

*I wanted a management job in my company and applied for each opening. Nothing. I said affirmations and asked God for help for a job I wanted badly. When I didn’t get it, I lost faith, thinking God didn’t like me. You asked how I felt about the job. I admitted being scared of the responsibility and being disappointed again.*

You explained that while I did spiritual work, inner voices challenged my desires. I worked on reinforcing why I could handle responsibility and used faith in small situations. When it worked, my confidence strengthened. I got the next job I tried for. While it’s not perfect, it’s a start. I can go higher.

Eddie learned the difference between going through motions and having faith. He expected failure and got it. Negative thoughts dilute faith. Once Eddie
accepted that HE, not God, was a deterrent when spiritual work failed, he
used faith to move forward. If things go wrong, your higher being isn’t
punishing you or not answering prayers. You hinder yourself but can change
your thoughts. Be patient. A different perception of a situation can make it
more positive.

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FACT: Life works out IF you let it.

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Finding reasons for why things don’t go as you’d like makes negatives
meaningful. For example, my first literary agent expected a BIG deal for my
book. She souped me up but got nothing! I was devastated but kept repeating,
“Everything happens for a reason. Whatever is meant to be will be.” My clients
wanted my writing so I self-published a 12-page newsletter, writing most of it
myself. It helped me to become a better writer and my confidence as soared.
There was a reason for not getting that first deal. It wasn’t the right book. I
grew as a writer and got 3 book deals the following year! There’s always a
reasons if you look, as Tara did.

I was so in love with Charlie I tolerated bad behavior. One weekend he
disappeared. I prayed to hear from him. He called Sunday night. He had to
work at the last minute and tried calling

Friday. I heard the phone but was in the
shower. Why'd he call just then? He drove by
on Saturday when I went to the store for ten
minutes. Why such bad timing? He couldn't
get through when my phone went dead for

half hour Sunday. He tried again as I vacuumed and didn't hear. Furious, I
yelled to the Universe “Are you telling me something?” BING-O! It was
keeping me from a man who hurt me. It was too frequent to be

coincidence. The Universe spoke so loud I dumped him!

Knowing that everything happens for a reason strengthens my faith to
accept that what I need will come at the appropriate time. If you don't get
instant gratification, be patient. You may not be ready for what you think you
need. Don't let that weaken faith. You don't always get what you want, but can
get what you need. Practice trusting that what you want comes when you're
ready and flow with life's potholes.

Next time faith seems fruitless, do a thought check. What's sabotaging it?
Work on those thoughts and actions! If you doubt you'll get something, faith
supports that. Start small. Say affirmations for the train to arrive as you get
there, like I do. Ask for good weather on your day off or clarity for a decision. Hang in! Faith takes time to build. It's a wonder my skepticism didn’t completely block me. I began by asking for a show of good faith - small signs. They came in the form of a phone call I’d hoped for, an early arrival for my flight, an unexpected check. As I got more, my faith increased. Now there's no challenge too big to conquer!

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OH WHAT A MIRACULOUS LIFE I HAVE!

*You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.*  James Allen

Your thoughts can empower you to create a spectacular life. But you can't fool the Universe! If you say, “I want money” but think it won't happen, tighten your budget! A client called when her job was eliminated, asking, "Why do bad things always happen to me?" That was a negative affirmation and she promised to repeat, "Everything will work out fine. I have a good job." On her last day, she was offered a better job! She knew the affirmation attracted it. I got flowers!

Winning the Doubt Game!
Sample your spiritual power with baby steps. Pay attention. Answers can come through experiences you might miss if you’re not looking. Squelch doubts by affirming you’ll get what you need. Expect to see it! You receive what you’re open to. If you refer to yourself as poor, prepare to stay poor! I prefer to think and live in abundance.

Things won’t always go smoothly, even on a spiritual track. That’s life. But watch how they work out if you don’t lose faith. I hear folks say, “If there was really a God, this wouldn’t happen.” Not! As one who tests God to the max, I don’t always get my way. But it ALWAYS works out. Kendra came to me convinced life was against her. Making her take even a baby step was hard.

She says:

_I had a rough childhood and lousy relationships. If there was a God, he hated me. When you suggested faith, it seemed useless. I needed surgery but my insurance didn’t cover the best procedure—another of God’s punishments! You told me to say, “I have money for surgery,” often._

_Cynically, I asked for support. My grandma died and whaddaya know. She had money tucked away and left me exactly what I needed! I asked for more using affirmations to stifle negative thoughts. Slowly, life got better. I still don’t know about God but do believe in something. The more I say, “I_
trust the Universe to take care of me,” the better life gets. I slowly accepted that I deserve good and met a good man. Faith is getting stronger.

Do you remember Wally Piper's classic book, *The Little Engine That Could*? The big engine said it couldn't make it up the big hill. The little engine slowly did saying, "I think I can. I think I can." Your mind defeats desires or makes them reality. Think like that little engine. If you think you can, you can, with spiritual support. You might argue that it's just determination garnered from positive thoughts. Does it matter if it helps? Use it however it works for you. After years of using faith, mine is now on autopilot. How do you get to this point? Baby stepping up spiritual stairs. Successful affirmation by successful affirmation. Manifestation by manifestation. Miracle by miracle. I believe God wants us to have as much as we want so I ask for miracles often, and get them. Often. Miracles are fun, and easier to manifest than you’d think. I’ve gotten past obstacles that most people would never try to beat. Each time I

"I love me" Tip:

*When you have somewhere to go, purposely leave 10 minutes earlier so you can relax getting there.*

faith I have? Change your perception! Problems are only as bad as you deem them to be. Look for miracles behind given. You can change negatives with faith!
Voltaire said, “Faith consists in believing when it is beyond the power of reason to believe.” Some folks think I’m nuts for the expectations I declare, defying current circumstances. Then they chalk it up to luck when I’m right. Faith enables you to see a situation as it’s logically perceived, and then refuse to accept it. I do it ALL THE TIME by refusing to accept the “obvious.”

My operative response for negative situations is “No way!” and “I know how it looks but refuse to accept it.” A blizzard was predicted, with high-tech certainty, on a day I had an event. Only close friends weren’t shocked when it veered off suddenly. People ask if I have an event when bad weather is predicted and it’s sunny. Sometimes I do! 😊 I was once sick with classic symptoms of a disease. I refused to accept it and my doc couldn’t figure out how it ended up being nothing. I knew. I’ve refused to accept other ailments and they left, unceremoniously. Faith changes my perception—I transform problems by refusing to accept what logic points to.

Challenges are opportunities to prove how much faith works. When I drove across the country, the car sprung a bad oil leak. Three mechanics were sure it was my seals, which meant taking the entire engine apart. We didn’t have time. I repeated, “The problem with my car isn’t serious,” over and over. I asked God to lead me to the right mechanic in Streetsboro, Ohio. When I
found Bob’s Auto, my prayers were answered. He agreed with the diagnosis but promised to work fast. At bedtime I told God, “Things look bad but I refuse to accept a big problem. Thanks for support.” I said, “I expect BIG miracles,” over and over. Bob was shocked when it was a simple gasket leak. He said it was a miracle. Yep, the one I expected! As we left, all weather forecasts warned of snow in the Great Lakes region, where we headed. I affirmed we’d have no freezing precipitation. Another miracle! Snow was everywhere but on us!

I could fill a book with just my miracles. It’s inspiring to beat odds when I’m determined. After my cross-country drive, I was more grateful than ever for my powerful faith. People show up at the right time or necessary circumstances work out. As you overcome doubts and fear, prepare to smile more! Use affirmations, ask for clarity, or just pray. Find your way!

Counting Your Blessings
Do you show appreciation for blessings? You should! Expressing gratitude attracts more and boosts your mood. Consciously say thanks for all good. I
often look up and say “thank you” for the bus arriving fast, reaching someone important, a beautiful day, a headache leaving, things I appreciate. The more I appreciate, the better life gets. I also say thanks in advance to show my expectation. “Thanks for good weather tomorrow.” “Thank you for my next book deal.” That shows I KNOW it will happen. And it does!

Being conscious of blessings minimizes taking life for granted. When you don’t get EVERYTHING you want, appreciate current blessings. My parents gave me the gift of conscious appreciation for what I have. When I was young, I complained that my friend Helen had many more dolls and toys than me. My mom pointed out that Helen wasn’t happy and didn’t appreciate any toys. I enjoyed mine and loved my one doll. What an exceptional lesson that I still carry! I love being conscious of small things that make me big-time happy—sunshine, my wonderful apartment, a good night’s sleep, a friendly smile, and a gazillion other delicious little things in my life. Stay on a happy track by consciously enjoying your blessings!

Every day is a blessing if you recognize it. Do you need tragedy or a negative to wake you to how priceless your life is? Debra says, “I have learned to be grateful for the many blessings in my life, and focus on what I have, rather than what I don’t have.” Did you appreciate things more after
9/11? Why need a tragedy to trigger appreciation for life? Appreciate little things every day! Don’t be too busy to appreciate a neighbor’s smile, music, fresh air, the feeling of cool, clean sheets, etc. Dianne writes:

*It is said, "Count your blessings."* So, hey, I did that—made a long list to read over whenever I feel too alone or out of sorts. You can do it too. *Like a minor miracle, it's guaranteed to surprise you, pick you up out of the dumps, and get you moving again in a better frame of mind.*

Keep a blessings journal. Every night, write down something you’re grateful for that day. Even if you have to dig and stretch, find some good that came with your day. Read your list often. A record of blessings keeps you focused on the positives in your life and may inspire you to attract more goodies! Join my [Conscious Gratitude group on Yahoo](http://howdoiloveme.com) and post your blessings.

**Loving intentions**

Giving love attracts more. I encourage you to live with loving intentions to set a good internal tone. Being caring and generous makes me incredibly happy. Let love radiate to others. It feels good to give joy or ease pain. Frans said, “If you want to build positive self-esteem quickly, do something for others who cannot repay you in cash or kind.” If you feel down, being kind lifts your spirit too! Anthony says, “I try to be the best human being I can by showing
compassion for others.” DT adds, “I have a strong moral character that I stick to. I live each day knowing the person I go to bed and awake with is me. I do nothing I can't live with.”

Honesty and integrity are a strong foundation for a positive, spiritual life. Use your spiritual power without delay! I can't do it for you. Taste the rewards of having enough faith to believe that everything can work out for your highest good. Take that first spiritual baby step! Don’t wait because it will never go on sale—it's free to anyone who uses it. The more you do, the sweeter and more peaceful life becomes and the more self-love grows!

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Chapter 5 Self-Esteem Busters

. . . the first step towards self-esteem for most of us is not to learn but to unlearn. We need to demystify the forces that have told us what we should be before we can value what we are. —Gloria Steinem


FACT: How you handle self-esteem busters is what keeps self-esteem low.

Okay readers. Decide. Do you prefer to not get all you could, be less happy than possible, and live in a perpetual state of wanting? Self-esteem busters only work if you let them. Use them as excuses for not getting your act together or take control. Loving yourself is a lifestyle. Good self-esteem is in YOUR hands. Not mine. Not the person who withholds love or criticizes you. YOURS! Right here. Right now. Good self-esteem is a choice from within, not an elusive star to reach for. YOU create it. Only YOU lower it. If you learn
from past busters, you’re armed to stay on a better path. This chapter identifies common self-esteem busters to increase your awareness.

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HELLO! YOU'RE HUMAN!

Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced. James Baldwin

In order to grow, accept that you can only do your best. It’s normal to make mistakes and let emotions affect you. Your journey into self will have potholes, accidents, and detours. Don’t let them lower your self-esteem. Happiness isn’t contingent on what happens to you. What matters is how you handle it! Kathryn’s increased after “realizing the world isn’t going to end if I make a mistake. Mistakes are part of the process.”

Human = Being Imperfect

Self-esteem busters won’t work if you control them. Since you’re human, you’ll have low times. Roll with them! Good self-esteem isn’t all or nothing. You can feel terrific, have one goof up, and lose the mood instantly. Stop! Show yourself the tolerance you extend to friends. Gina says:
I'm very happy with my looks. Honest. But sometimes when I'm with someone with a perfect body, I get envious. I feel fatter and less pretty IF I pay too much attention to what others have. I hate comparing myself but I like myself so it doesn't last long. I keep envious moments in perspective by not losing sight of what I love about me.

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FACT: Humans goof up regularly.

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If you strive for perfection, prepare to not have good self-esteem! Kip insisted, "Self-esteem means achieving perfection. Until I tone my body enough, I won't be happy." Kip was always angry with himself. He looked darn good, but wanted better. Repeat after me: perfection is impossible. You'll never accept yourself if you can't accept that. Do you hold yourself to unreasonable standards? Be honest! Do you beat yourself up if you don't meet them? That's not loving! If you want good self-esteem, accept that you're human. Humans don't do everything right or best—and it's okay. Often we defeat ourselves before others can. Break that habit!

Childhood Messages
The foundation for how we see ourselves develops early. Were you criticized a lot? If so, it’s harder to appreciate your wonderful qualities. My low self-esteem began as a teen when someone said IF I lost a few pounds, I’d be attractive. When anything went wrong, I was sure it was because I was too fat. It took many years to delete that memory. Looking back I was never fat. I just wasn’t perfectly thin. Yet what “they” believed ruled me. Joy identified in a class:

My father wanted a son. When I didn’t learn to fix things fast enough, he called me stupid. I wasn’t good at technical stuff. STUPID! I was clumsy. STUPID! I wasn’t a straight A student. STUPID! He expected perfection and treated me like a loser. I believed it. I wanted to be a lawyer but didn’t think I was smart enough. I felt too incompetent to take risks. His words followed me until I paid attention to praise from colleagues. I finally accepted what a mean, arrogant man my father is and decided to prove him wrong. I graduate from law school next year. I wasted years living up to my father’s expectations. Now my self-esteem is soaring. Better later than never!
Your response to old messages begins self-image. Free yourself by reshaping your view. Judy says, “My childhood often involved criticism, which resulted in lots of self-criticism. I still have bouts when things don't go as planned. I've learned to give myself pep talks and pats on the back.” An abusive childhood leaves you feeling unworthy. Old defenses restrain loving feelings. Gail emphasizes, “We all have flaws and must remove blinders to see our goodness. It's not easy but can be done.”

What dreams and talents got knocked out of you as a kid? In kindergarten, my teacher made fun of my paintings, saying I had no talent. How can a teacher put a five-year-old down like that? I loved art but was terrified to pursue it openly and became a closet artist to avoid ridicule. At twenty-five, I “bravely” took a creative handicrafts class and did well. The instructor asked me to teach a class. I protested, explaining my teacher’s words. She said I was probably too creative for to understand my talent. After teaching classes and exhibiting at craft fairs, I finally painted again. Now I love doing watercolors. If Miss A., who I thought was like God, was wrong, others can be too!

Empower yourself by rewriting rules. Think about what interests you were stopped from pursuing and the worst that can happen if you give it a shot.
Even if you goof, trying is fun. My first watercolors weren’t great. But with practice I’m better and several friends have one in their homes. Don’t let others stop you from enjoying your interests.

Fear

Fear is a big, fat self-esteem buster. What counts is how you handle it. You can overcome what scares you or allow everything your mind conjures up as a possible outcome—the remote possibilities; expectations based on past mishaps; and the unknown (the biggest fear factor)—to dominate you. The latter makes you play the “what if” game. It can rule good sense. Jared says:

My wife bugged me to ask for a raise but I was paralyzed by irrational fear. My boss is a decent guy and I work hard. But I was unsure of his reaction and the unknown was intimidating enough to stop me, which lowered my self-image. Pressure from my wife emphasized what a wimp I was. I finally asked for it. My boss agreed. All that wasted energy being scared for nothing.

Fear keeps you from saying “no;” leaving a bad relationship; asking for things; speaking your mind; taking risks. Do you get stuck from imagined outcomes? Fear isn’t just a self-esteem buster. It gives other busters more power. A disrespectful boss or abusive partner are self-esteem busters. Fear
keeps you from speaking up, or leaving. If you’re scared to act, the busters keep busting. It’s normal to be scared of the unknown, but damaging if you let it control you.

Fear squashes self-esteem, shackles your dreams, hurts self-love and is an excuse to postpone taking care of yourself. Many of you don't live. You just exist, dodging problems and trying to keep things status quo. That’s what I did! It’s hard to let go of what you're used to, even if it makes you miserable. Go for what you want! No excuses. If you let fear conquer you, you’ll never truly taste life. Use the tools in Chapter 9.

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**NEED FOR APPROVAL**

*Now and then it’s good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy.*

Guillaume Apollinaire

It’s natural to want to be liked, as long as you keep its importance in perspective. Do you feel unlovable if you’re unappreciated? Does criticism deflate you? Do you accept what THEY say? If your energy chases approval, what’s left for you? Understanding the dynamics helps you control it.
Gender Differences
I hate stereotypes but must acknowledge the most prevalent self-esteem busters for each sex. Men commonly tie self-esteem to achievements and have more pressure to fix things. Feeling capable, solvent and successful makes you “feel like a man;” failure like a loser. But self-esteem isn’t based on success or failure. Lou writes, “I had it all but felt lousy about me until I quit my corporate job and became a carpenter. My self-esteem blossomed by being true to me.”
External factors impress others but don’t touch your soul. Self-love, which requires YOUR own approval, stimulates true self-esteem.

Women often base self-esteem on appearance, attracting a man, or acceptance from others. We strive for approval. External factors again! Since self-esteem is based on what you think of yourself, how can you develop the real deal if you’re conditioned to see yourself through the eyes of others? It’s a hard habit to break. Annie writes:

*I started school at an immature 4 1/2 years and never caught up. Teachers and other children implied I was stupid and incapable. My parents did very little to change it—that’s how it was back then. My father loved my sisters and I dearly, but made it clear that the function of women was to birth babies and keep the home. The goal was to get married and have a man take care of you. I did exactly that. I got married at twenty and let my*
husband take care of me for the next twenty years. When I hit forty, though, I started to grow up, and I've kept the ball rolling. At long last, I like myself. It has taken a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, but I finally reached the point where I accept myself - both my good and not so good qualities—and like the woman I have become. It was difficult to like myself before because I didn't have a "self."

Women are encouraged to be agreeable - do whatever it takes to be liked, which translates into giving more to others than to ourselves. Ginny says, “Women are traditionally taught to be ‘less than,’ and to allow herself to be disrespected to keep harmony within a relationship and society.” Pleasing others is a big self-esteem buster if you leave yourself in the dust. Break that habit in Chapter 10!

People critics

Criticism busts self-esteem. Julie D. says, “My self-esteem gets low when I let people put me down to feel better about themselves.” Why be a target of their antics!? Just because "they say" something, it’s not true if you ignore it. Amanda struggles:
I hate to admit it, but how others view me is very important to how I view myself. I was able to get over one of these hurdles recently. I received a lot of criticism that I now realize was unwarranted. Perhaps the criticism was a sign that I was performing my work above and beyond what was expected of me, and my supervisor felt threatened. I came to this conclusion with the help of co-workers, who assured me of my abilities. So, I still need outside affirmation.

Criticism is just someone's opinion and only matters if you accept it as truth. I've liked movies that were panned by critics and hated some highly rated ones. Buying into criticism gives your power to others. It's YOUR CHOICE to accept it, or define yourself. Self-love diminishes if you're not true to who you are. Jerri says:

*Criticism used to disarm me. I’d be having a great day and bam! One negative word and I’d feel lousy about me. Now I think, ‘Who the heck are they to judge me?’ Why give someone power over my day?*

Pressured from Others
We’re expected to live our parents’ dreams, marry “appropriately,” have an admirable career, and strive for what the media dictates. What makes YOU happy? William says, “My parents told me not to give attention to what people think. This principle helped me, subconsciously, when my self-esteem was in danger.” Self-acceptance is hard if you focus on what others think.

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**FACT:** Self-love is not related to what your mom, partner or friends think of you.

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Pressure to have a relationship can make you stay with someone who brings you down. Has a partner pushed you to change with the excuse, "just trying to be helpful"? I call that a Trojan horse attitude—criticism camouflaged in the guise of being supportive. Chad said, “My wife treated me like a renovation project. I felt trashed. She said it was out of love. How is love related to your wardrobe?” Self-esteem can crumble from this (More in chapter 6).

The media touts unrealistic ideals that we chase. Few people have a perfect body. Cristina shared, “In the past, being overweight made me feel self-conscious and unattractive. I felt like no one liked me for who I was because I was sure no one could see beyond that.” Appearance expectations are slam
bang self-esteem busters, especially when a romantic partner pressures you
(more in Chapter 7). To promote real self-love, maintain the self in self-esteem!

Emily says:

_I thought I had lots of self-esteem as a child because I excelled in school
so my parents approved of me; I was confident that I was at the top of
the heap and doing everything right. But I completely lost that assurance
towards the end of high school when I began to question why report cards
were so important. Because I had relied on outside markers to measure my
worth, my self-esteem was in fact very shaky; I wasn't proud of anything I
had done because it was all external and dictated by school and my
parents, rather than something I had chosen and worked on myself. I
completely caved in and lost my way for years. I increased my self-esteem
in adulthood. I am proud of small things like that I figured out how to pay
my bills on time. No one taught me how; I taught myself. Any time I take
a step towards autonomy and self-definition, there is a rise in my self-
estee. Any time I don't move forward, don't take action, don't make a
decision, there is a corresponding drop._

**Can Money Really Buy Happiness?**
Our culture links money and power to self-esteem. Some guys need lots to feel acceptable. Some women need a successful man to prove their worth. People do judge you by what you have. It's hard to separate money from who you are if you're keeping up with the Joneses. But a quest for wealth becomes a hole that's never filled if you keep wanting more. A need for money can overshadow real happiness. Steven shares:

I was taught that the more money I made, the better man I was. I pushed my career and married a woman with my values. The more I made, the more we needed. One day I bumped into a college buddy who lives in the seedier part of town. My first inclination was to judge him until I saw how content he was.

Bobby made less money yet his eyes lit up talking about work and family. My kids are spoiled rotten and I don't enjoy them. Bobby felt good about himself. I don't, in my pursuit of money. I was envious. He has much less money but is richer than me. He's filled with love, which I forgot long ago. All I loved was making money. I'm changing my values and hope someday
to feel good about who I am, not financial worth. The money part blows my sense of self.

There's nothing wrong with wanting financial security and nice things. I do. But money doesn't make us better people. You can own tons of expensive gear but never fully enjoy it if you're chasing the next goodie. If this proves your worth, you're nothing without accessories. Discontentment is high. Simple things are less appreciated when “stuff” is considered a necessity and acquiring them gets tied to happiness.

There's a big difference between wanting and needing. You need air, food, and water to live, not the latest electronic gadget, although some disagree. Needs are essentials. You can live without wants. Separate possessions from YOU. If you don’t enjoy what you have, it’s hard to be happy. Worth based on tangible items makes loving yourself take a back seat and self-love stays superficial.

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EXCUSE ME!

Do what thy manhood bids me thee do, from none but self expect applause;

He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes and keeps his self-made laws.

Sir Francis Bacon
There are loads of excuses for not having good self-esteem. If you don’t want it, be honest and settle for much less than possible. Excuses are self-inflicted self-esteem busters—roadblocks YOU create. If you’re sincere about developing good self-esteem, drop the excuses.

**EXERCISE**: List people you admire. Next to each, write their specific qualities you wish you had. Think about why you don’t have them and how you can change that.

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**I'm Not Good Enough**

If someone treats you badly do you do you believe you deserve it because you’re inadequate, not attractive enough or make too little money? NOT!

**YOU ARE WORTHY OF RESPECT!!!**

Insecurity can make you personalize situations. Terry said, “I always wonder what I did wrong to cause someone’s actions. If a friend doesn’t call, I worry she’s mad at me.” Low self-esteem makes you take responsibility for negative actions, even if you did nothing wrong. Stephen shares:
I've never been confident, even with a high corporate position. I was my brothers' scapegoat growing up and assumed the role at work. Even if something wasn't my fault, I felt responsible somehow and made excuses: maybe I could have done more. Frances, my long-time secretary noticed. She praised my work, saying I was very respected. Her eyes pierced mine as I got it. Time to respect me! I usually catch myself before taking blame. If I don't, Frances gives a look and I use the brakes!

We repeat self-love busters like mantras. "I'm not good enough to ____." Good enough for who? Usually others. Mistrusting yourself depletes self-love. Past failures keep us failing. "I'm bad with words so how can I ask for a raise?" You deserve one and can get help! "I'm clueless about women so I know she won't like me." If you know she won't, she won't. Doubts defeat you. If you consistently question your instincts and abilities, confidence sinks.

**EXERCISE:** Title a page “Why I deserve the best.” Start each sentence with “I deserve the best because...” List even small things. The first is “I deserve the best because I'm a decent human being.” Read your list out loud. Keep adding reasons until it kicks in.
Assuming failure is a self-fulfilling prophecy. "I'm a lousy writer and can't write a report properly." Ask for help—learn. Often we're “not good enough” because we need skills or knowledge. Bobby says, “I didn't think I’d ever master computers. So I hired someone to privately teach me to build confidence.” Acquire what’s needed to diffuse the “not good enough” buster. Kathryn expresses, “I am a beautiful person on the right track. I am far from perfect but try to learn something new each day.” It's time to get with the program and put your energy inward!

If you want to dispel old beliefs, start undoing them. Kim says, “I'm a good person who overcame a lot of obstacles to get where I am in life. My biggest struggle is not to blame others, my parents in particular, for difficulties and setbacks and move on to embrace the happiness I deserve.” Are you still haunted by what others said?

* "My mother said I wasn't smart enough to get a good job."

* "My teacher told me I was bad."

* "My friend says I'll never attract a husband."

* "My brother thinks I'm a loser."

So—will you buy into what others say or make new choices? Everyone can think you’re a loser but it’s not true unless you accept it. It takes time to let
go of negative limitations. But hey, you have the rest of your life! START NOW!! It’s one step closer to being happier. Charisse told a support group:

*My mother’s words dominated me. “You’re not pretty enough to get a good husband or smart enough for college–take what you get.”* So I got a clerical job and married Will, the first man who wanted me, thinking he was better than nothing. Wrong! Will put me down so I wouldn’t leave. It worked until my boss, bless him, said I was bright and offered me computer training. I forced myself to try. It helped me bloom enough to leave Will and prove the naysayers wrong! Now I love my job. After mastering computers, I took more notice of my positive qualities and liked myself more. And more. I’m angry thinking of the wasted years living up to what I’d been told. But thank God I found the truth. There’s no time to talk about Phil, the man in my life who thinks I’m the best.

**Compare Thee Not!**

Do you judge yourself by how you compare to others? Many of us do. That's a set-up for low self-esteem. There will always be someone thinner, or richer, or who attracts more dates, or who seems to have it better than you. I'm beyond compare! How can you compare a unique individual, which you are?
Obsessing over comparisons to others deflates self-esteem. Steven lived in his brother’s shadow for years:

*Brick is older and seemed perfect. I was a knucklehead in comparison. My teachers expected me to be him. Why bother? His shoes were too big, so I got in trouble. Even as adults, I compared myself to him. Brick’s a lawyer. I’m a photographer and couldn’t appreciate my success. It never seemed as good as Brick’s. Now I see it as a bad habit to break. I pay more attention to my accomplishments and try to leave Brick out. He and I get along better now that my jealousy eased.*

Who you are has nothing to do with others. Lena says, “I feel fat around thin people.” Craig feels dumb during training classes at work because his English “isn’t as good as the others.” Yet under normal circumstances, Lena doesn’t feel fat and Craig knows he’s bright. Comparisons are dangerous self-love busters. Don’t make someone’s accomplishments or attributes a reflection of your failure. There will always be someone with something you see as better. Dub thyself incomparable. You are!
**Tomorrow Never Comes**

Do you postpone liking yourself until you make more money, lose 10 pounds, get the job you want, pay off debts? There will always be an excuse to wait. Tomorrow never comes unless you pull the plug on perfection. You can spend your life waiting for perfect circumstances, or begin loving yourself today.

Caddie says:

_I used to envy people with lives that seemed better than mine. Now others envy me because I’m happy! Good self-esteem does that._

**EXERCISE:** List ANYTHING you believe keeps you from having good self-esteem. As yours improves, check them off.

Are you waiting for the best years of your life? Why wait? You can have them now, for the rest of your life. I’m in the best years of mine and intend to stay. The more I love me, the better life gets. Don’t wait for tomorrow to love yourself. Why be deprived of happiness you can experience now? Don’t always postpone pleasurable activities in favor of practical ones. Your life won’t suffer if your apartment isn’t vacuumed or laundry waits. Reading, walking, time with
family and friends, etc. enrich your life more than not doing chores will detract from it.

Stop saving things you enjoy for special occasions. Use your good dishes. Do errands in clothing you like; wear expensive cologne when you’re not going anywhere; write checks with a fancy pen instead of leaving it a draw. Do enjoyable stuff you save for the “right” time. Right now is the right time—that’s self-love! Enjoy luxuries because they make you feel good. Why save them? I live each day as my best yet so I treat myself special as the rule, not the exception. I no longer save things that make me happy. Lesley feels blessed to learn:

Even though you need other people, you still have to be able to draw what you need from yourself. You can’t depend on other people to make you happy. No one can provide you with an access to life. You have to find that yourself. The easiest way is with love.

When life is going your way, it’s easier to be happy. But you can smile even when it’s not perfect. I do it all the time! Seek to truly lift up your life so you have more control over you. Begin now—say, scream, proclaim, “No more!” No more excuses! No more complacency! No more procrastination! No more
putting my needs after everyone else’s! Keep saying it and you’ll eventually believe. Say over and over:

I take responsibility for myself. I chose to love myself enough to have the wonderful life I deserve. ❤️
Chapter 6: Loving Romance

We must be our own before we can be another’s. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mary B.: Sometimes I think I'm worthless and other times I'm on top of the world. The sad thing is I think it depends on the man who is in my life.

Tony: Rejection from women I'm attracted to lowers my self-esteem.

Bonnie: Failed relationships lower my self-esteem.

Jamal: My self-esteem is related to how many women I can attract.

Most of us have ridden a romantic seesaw. He loves you and you're wonderful./He leaves and you're nothing. She wants you and you're the man./She finds someone else and you're a loser. Making a partner your happiness keeps self-love riding up and down. It allows him/her to control it.

You may stay with someone bad for you. If we magnify the importance of a romantic partner, self-esteem takes a ride. DT says:
When I made the decision to leave him I realized I actually had respect for myself. When I physically left him, the feeling was magnified. I finally treated myself to the humanity I deserve . . . This situation both destroyed and revived my self-esteem.

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SWAPPING SELF-ESTEEM FOR ROMANCE

The way you treat yourself sets the standard for others. Sonya Friedman

A romantic partner can be a major self-esteem buster. You kiss self-esteem good-bye if your need for one becomes more important than taking care of you. Showing yourself love improves your perspective. Striving for ONLY a healthy partner is an act of love.

Two Halves Don’t Make A Whole

A romantic partner is a big success factor for women. Men say their self-esteem rises with an attractive one and being needed. Some women feel validated from getting married (acceptance); men from getting sex (achievement). Are you better if someone wants you? Hello! You are who you are, with or without a partner. Needing one to feel complete or happy
is counterproductive to developing inner happiness. Self-love comes first, even if Mom disagrees. Yes, pressure to find a mate is strong. Some people praise my professional achievements and then ask “but do you have a man?” I used to feel apologetic if I didn’t. Now, I’m proud of not settling. Kimberly says:

In the past, if a man suddenly stopped calling after weeks of pursuing me, I’d panic and question, "If I were so beautiful, sexy, smart, witty, and a great catch, why did he stop chasing me?" I gave up dating to do some personal reflections. Clearly these relationships did not work out because I wasn’t ready. I needed to grow on my own spiritually. I realize, looking back, I had low self-esteem.

Does a partner with your criterion (or if you’re desperate, is breathing) make you ignore negative factors? Having someone doesn’t build self-worth. Remember, self-love is an inside job. A partner can’t give it to you. Gail has been there:

Sometimes we hustle life and feel by a certain age we must have a boyfriend, a degree, be on our way to getting married and having children.

When it doesn’t happen, we become desperate and do things to make it happen. We can get mentally and physically abused in the process. When this happened to me, I felt fate dealt me a bad blow. At some point I
realized the person I was seeking wasn't intended for me. When I put the anger and desperation aside, I left myself open to meet someone who was truly caring. We have to be patient. It may happen later in life. I had to wait until I found my real self and learned the lessons behind going after what I was told I should have.

Do you want a partner to impress others? Jim shares, “I married Janice because she was stunning. But we had nothing to talk about. My friends envied me but I was unhappy.” Falling in love with someone you like as a person and share interests with is healthier than impressing others. Love yourself before giving it away! Ken rushed into marriage with Denise after an ultimatum. Then she became a shrew. He felt obligated to hang in. I advised him to stay and work on himself. As he got stronger, he’d have less tolerance for her nastiness. Ken adds:

Denise became demanding and insulting and sabotaged my creative endeavors. I stayed because as a man, I felt obligated to make it work and saw divorce as failure. After two miserable years trying to prove myself, I worked on being more self-loving. The more self-appreciation I felt, the less I wanted to stay. I finally let go of the need to provide and
did the most loving thing—got a divorce. I realized my unhappiness wasn’t worth the “success” of keeping the marriage together.

**EXERCISE:** List everything you’d like in a partner. Why is each important? Objectively decide if it’s healthy reasons.

Pressure for a mate hurts self-esteem if you feel defective without one. You may not just marry for yourself. Mom often wants a son/daughter-in-law and potential grandchildren and to brag to friends. If she pushes, you can feel like a loser. Emily writes:

*One gets very little support in this society for being a single, childless woman in one's 40s. It's not bad up into the 30s, but 35 seems like a watershed year. Even though I am a feminist, I find myself sometimes uncomfortable and almost ashamed of being single. I realize how much women my age relate to one another by talking about their husbands and children. It's hard to find common ground to talk about. I just know they're wondering what's wrong with me that I don't have anyone.*

Do you strive to make your partner happy? Do you complain to friends while putting ridiculous energy into manipulating HIM, or spend money on HER so she'll stay? Hello! Going after and maintaining a partner to prove your
worth makes it hard to love yourself and doesn’t bring long-lasting happiness.

Peni experienced this.

*I planned my wedding my whole life. My friends and my life revolved around guys. A year after I met James I pressured him into marriage. He said it was too soon but I pushed until he caved. My whole life was designed for it. I finally got my trappings—the wedding, a house, kids. I’d idealized marriage so much, I wasn’t prepared for the reality. Having kids was stressful with someone I married quickly. I got married to prove I was good enough to get a husband. Now I’m divorced with kids I wasn’t ready for. I don’t know who I am.*

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**FACT: Two wholes make the best partnership.**

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You can’t marry self-love, or buy it!

Pleasing mom won’t up your image past the moment! It’s hard. People do judge us by who we’re with. But when self-esteem is from within, what others think matters less and less. I hear:
"I need a man to feel complete."

"A good woman will be my better half."

Often we strive to be half instead of whole. People say they're on a mission to get married to be complete. What's complete? Depending on someone? Looking to another to make you happy? Be realistic! No one can complete you but you. A whole person attracts someone healthy. Love yourself enough to stand on your own first. Needing someone to complete you leaves you vulnerable to fall apart if your partner leaves or you can't snare one. Or, it keeps you in a bad relationship. You deserve better! Sherri advises:

If you feel like nothing without a partner, don't fight it or feel as though something is wrong with you. Accept that it's human to experience that, but also look into yourself and see what's lacking within. Why do you keep looking towards someone to fulfill you? What can you give yourself?

EXERCISE: Write down everything you get from having a partner. Figure out ways to give those things to yourself.

Leaving Bad Relationships
A bad relationship is a potent self-esteem buster. You may complain to friends, but stay. Someone giving compliments or good behavior until you’re hooked isn’t good for you. Don’t dwell on memories of earlier behavior, hoping it will return. Let unhappiness motivate you to end it.

Lucy says:

My abusive boyfriend wanted all my free time. I lost my friends because of him. My self-esteem was low. I felt I’d rather have a boyfriend like him than be alone. I was so afraid he’d leave if I stood up to him. I finally woke up and smelled the cappuccino. I was afraid of living on my own, but even more afraid of him. I called an old friend who was very understanding and helpful. I joined a social group she belonged to and made new friends. As I spent more time with them and less with him, I finally got up the courage to leave.

Are you scared to leave your partner? If he or she (more common than you think) is abusive, put this book down and get out. NEVER stay because you fear your partner. Talk to someone you trust—a friend, relative or clergyman—NOW! Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (www.ndvh.org)
at 1800-799-SAFE (7233). They have people 24-hours a day, 365 days a year and over 4,000 shelters and service providers. NO ONE has a right to abuse you, not even if they blame you or if you feel low. NO ONE. EVER. Abuse is a crime - the law is on your side. Show yourself enough love to leave the person.

Often people stay in a bad relationship for security, companionship, affection, sex, etc. But if most of your relationship feels bad, is a piece worth it? I ask myself if I'm happy or getting crumbs of happy thrown to appease me. If happiness in a relationship is often low, decide if crumbs are worth it. Go for the whole enchilada! It tastes much better. Walking on eggshells so your partner doesn’t throw a tantrum is exhausting. Fighting and dissatisfaction reinforces feeling unworthy of good. I’d hang in with guys until they wrung out every ounce of my self-worth, scared of losing their sweet stuff. Now I want a healthy relationship! A revelation was realizing that no matter how desperately I missed a special boyfriend, I was less unhappy without him than dealing with his shticks. That helped me get over him. Waiting for a healthy relationship is more loving than staying in one that hurts.

**EXERCISE:** List everything you love about your partner. Is everything that should be there on the list, like trust and trying to make you happy?
Do you use love as an excuse to stay? “But I love him” when you know you should go. "If two people love each other, they should make it work.” They--not just YOU! Do you love your partner or what you get? Love isn’t just getting good lovin’, being with someone attractive, or security. Often when we leave, we miss the goodies, not the person. It’s hard to sincerely love someone who makes you unhappy, but goodies are easy to love. Distinguish between goodies and the person.

Does guilt keep you stuck? Does your partner put you down and say it’s your fault? Beat you if the house isn’t clean enough? Reject you for not making enough money? Ridicule you to get into better shape? Wise up! You don’t deserve bad treatment! PERIOD! It’s your partner’s problem, not yours. Love yourself enough to leave it. FOCUS ON YOU!!

Dianne says:

*Mr. Excitement gave me a few years of great thrills, but when he left, I had to face my own life for the first time. I was widowed fairly young but the years since have flown by, marked by increasing scarcity of available male life partners, presently non-existent in my vicinity. But I refuse to mope around. Where does that get you? Nowhere!*
Staying in a bad relationship is your choice. If you're not ready to leave, pay attention to what's going on and work on yourself. Be self-loving, nurture self-appreciation, build your confidence, develop spirituality, get therapy if necessary, and create a more satisfying life outside of the relationship. Build your self-esteem and you'll eventually want to leave. Be patient. It's hard!

Annie discovered it can happen:

When I first separated from my husband, I went through anxiety attacks. Who would take care of me? Who would do this or that for me? What if such and such didn't happen? I worried myself sick. After falling on my face and picking myself up a bunch of times, I realized things always work out somehow, and I am quite capable of handling bumps that are put in my path. I learned to take care of myself! Surviving it all has made me realize I'm strong and capable. I've learned to be happy without a man in my life.

**EXERCISE:** List everything that makes you unhappy in your relationship and how your partner has hurt you - every incident. Read it regularly.

Awareness and love are powerful tools. Mandy agonized after reading my book, *All Men Are Jerks until Proven Otherwise*. She wrote to me that it
confirmed she should leave her guy and beat herself up for being too weak to do it. I recommended she stay vigilant and be good to herself. Recognizing someone’s negatives makes it harder to accept them when you love yourself. Reinforcing yourself with loving behavior makes you less tolerant of crap. Mandy wrote months later. She had a manicure, exercised more, used delicious lotions, had fun with friends, and lost 235 pounds - her guy! Self-awareness and kindness helped end a toxic three-year relationship. Lyzia adds:

My ex-boyfriend didn’t treat me the way I thought I deserved, but I stayed. One night I woke up from that nightmare and broke up with him. He was not good enough! I was really proud of myself and kept saying to me and to others I loved myself very much! I didn’t have to stand all that just for the sake of having someone by my side.

Glenn told a group that his girlfriend spent his money, was cool and nasty, but ah, she was stunning and sexual, at her whims. It made him feel low. Ms. Nasty turned on sweetness when he tried breaking up. We suggested he list everything she’d done to hurt him. Glenn was ashamed of what he tolerated. We encouraged him to be nicer to himself. He couldn’t leave but tolerated
less. He had fun with friends, bought a fancy bike he’d wanted and planned his dream vacation biking through Ireland. When he announced he ended his relationship, Glenn glowed:

_She had me by the balls! But acting on my personal desires helped me feel worthier. As I treated myself better, I felt more significant. The more self-loving, the more self-control I had. I paid attention to Lucia’s nasty behavior. As I pulled away, I liked myself more, which helped me back off until I left. Taking time to absorb how bad Lucia was and treating myself better motivated me._

Be patient. Maddy asked for help ending her two-year relationship with Charles. After paying attention to how he hurt her, she broke up with him, weakened and made up—four times! Each was shorter, until it ended for good:

_I was totally in love with Charles but he kept hurting me. I was proud when I broke up, but missed him terribly. He played on my need for affection, and then returned to his old ways. I was too aware to ignore it and left again. He knew how to play my vulnerability. It worked, but so did the list I’d made of how he’d hurt me. Reading it over and over helped end it for good. I treated myself to a massage, took a leisurely bubble bath, and said prayers. He persisted with sweet-talk but I hung up. Once_
the truth was obvious, it was like a cancer that I couldn’t accept. That list reminds me of how low I went. I consciously love me so I don’t weaken again.

Ah, the power of awareness combined with self-love!!!! It slaps you awake, strengthening you to leave a toxic partner. Before making a move, work on yourself. Say, “I love me” in the mirror. Keep reading the list of how your partner hurt you. Treat yourself lovingly. Develop interests. Spend time with friends. When you’re stronger, end it. Enjoy the empowerment it brings!

Are you scared to let go? Brie was always hurt but stayed. I asked why. “I’m afraid to be lonely.” I reminded her she felt lonely when her guy ignored her, except for crumbs to keep her hooked. What else? “It will hurt to miss him.” We discussed how much pain she had with him. What else? “I won’t have someone to hold me!” Or yell at you. Or lie to you. Or disappoint you. It took weeks to absorb the price she paid. Brie did more for herself. When she left, she said, “I was too busy making my relationship work to see how often I was unhappy. Now I make myself happy. I miss him but feel empowered by ending it.”
Breaking up with someone who’s bad for you is a big self-love booster. When it hurts, focus on your power move. That’s love! Rejoice! Shout to friends. The results of loving yourself enough to end a bad relationship brings more rewards than you’d think. Christina says, “After my ex and I broke up, I thought my newfound friends only knew me as "John's Girlfriend" and wouldn't want to hang out with me. Come to find out, they really didn't like John and they cheered me on for finally breaking up with him!”

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NO MORE SETTLING!

*Love yourself first and everything else falls into line.* Lucille Ball

Settling for a mate diffuses power. Sometimes it seems better than being alone. It's not. Short-term pleasure doesn’t sustain. Dianne wrote, “I have married friends who feel stuck and miserable but willingly compromise their lives as individuals, solely because of economic advantages.” Most folks that settle aren’t happy. We can be knuckleheads about relationships! Why do we allow needs to override good judgment? You know why. Break those habits!

As Good As We Get

Do you limit whom you might date? Jason shares, “Having low self-esteem prevented me from talking to women who probably would have been more
receptive than I thought.” Jenny adds, “I assumed I wasn’t good enough to attract good-looking guys. It was self-fulfilling—till I began loving me.” It’s hard to attract more than you think you’ll get. Brett writes:

_I got teased as a skinny kid. My first girlfriend asked why I was so thin, like it was my fault. My next two railed me to bulk up. I settled for women who’d stay. In my thirties I worked with Lois on a project. She suggested going for dinner and asked if I had a girlfriend. I joked that no one would want to date me. She said she did. When we had sex, I muttered about being too skinny. Lois said she liked my “lean” body and I relaxed. It increased my confidence. I no longer rule out attractive women. My confidence increased from trying. One woman’s skinny is another woman’s lean!_

Do you promise to find someone better but end up with clones? "I attract needy women." "All my boyfriends drink too much." "My girlfriends become moody monsters." "Are all men abusive?" How can you attract someone who treats you as special if you don’t treat yourself that way? You subconsciously attract what you’re used to, even if you hate it. Stop clones by becoming conscious of what you don’t want and why you accept it. Walk if you
recognize undesirable qualities. Wait for someone who makes you happy. Kyra says:

*Ideally, everyone should have at least some idea of who he or she is and what he or she wants, and should not sacrifice that for anything.* I’ve learned that people who feel inadequate are likely to have unhealthy relationships. People who feel inferior look to find in others what they think is missing in themselves. Almost inevitably, they attract someone who also is, emotionally speaking, immature. The unconfident mate will have more respect for his significant other than for himself. I over-idealized the object of my affections. Soon we began melding into one another, taking on identities which weren’t strictly our own. In these conditions, a relationship becomes unbalanced and no longer flourishes. This is perfect ground for someone to be mistreated. He began mistreating me. In accord with my passive disposition, I allowed it, repeatedly. When I learned through God to care about myself, I was finally strong enough to walk away, most importantly, without turning back.

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**Attracting Someone Healthy**

*I love me* Tip:

Go see a movie you’d love by yourself.
Pick a time that’s comfortable (no weekend nights).
Enjoy choosing what to see and when.
In a healthy relationship, each partner is an individual. You shouldn’t need everything from each other. If recent mates haven’t made you happy, call time-out and work on you. As self-love grows, re-evaluate what’s important in a partner. Concentrate on developing friendship too. If you can’t be friends with this person, why bother? Love yourself enough to leave one who makes you unhappy. A partner who treats you well nourishes self-image. Amy U. writes:

*What increased my self-esteem was being loved unconditionally in a relationship for the first time. It didn’t last and wasn’t meant to be, yet I got so much out of it. My mother never accepted me for all that I am, and this man did. So I really grew and blossomed and started living more of my dreams after that! I have attracted fabulous people into my life!*  

**EXERCISE:** List what you’d like in a partner. Put a star by qualities you can’t live without, like honesty. Be conscious of them as you date. Strive for a partner with the most important ones.

Do you *need* a partner to be happy? There’s a big difference between needing someone to be happy and wanting a romantic partner to enhance your already complete life. *Needing* motivates poor decisions. My happiness is no longer contingent on having a man, but I’d love one! If you *need* one, step
back and give yourself more love. No one should be more important than you. Love yourself enough to wait for someone who treats you well. Kimberly says:

*Going without a boyfriend increased my self-esteem! I faced one of my biggest fears—being alone. I used to believe having a boyfriend somehow validated who I was. No so! Going it alone has taught me I am a happy, whole woman, and a complete human being, with or without a boyfriend! I no longer stress over finding a boyfriend, which makes me feel he may be right around the corner!*

Rene Zellweger said on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, “I’m not single, I’m busy.” Me too! A full life on my own supports my happiness, with or without a guy. In my books, *All Men Are Jerks Until Proven Otherwise* and *How to Please a Woman In & Out of Bed*, I advise if you want a romantic partner, get a life! Creating a complete life attracts a win/win relationship—you win by enjoying your partner/you win by breaking up if your life is happy anyway. A relationship shouldn’t revolve around someone. Concentrate less on finding a partner and more on developing the qualities you’d like in a partner.

Dianne has a lovely perception of being single:

*I no longer think of it as being single. Instead, I think of it as being in a family of one, deserving of all the rights and enjoyments of any other family.*
Maybe I cheat a little. I live with a well-loved little dog, so I don't feel entirely alone at home. Certainly I get lonely at times, but know it's equally possible to feel lonely, upset or disappointed when you live under the same roof with another person.
Chapter 7 The Joy of Smiling in the Mirror

Outside show is a poor substitute for inner worth. Aesop

Appearance plays a major role in self-acceptance. Do you have a distorted mirror illuminating faults—every dimple of cellulite and little wrinkle; each spot lacking enough muscle; and other picky stuff? Is exercise never enough? Do you magnify teeny imperfections? I’d see mounds of fat—piles—rolls— and hated myself for years! Since accepting me, extra pounds and all, I see beauty. Judy C. says, “In the past, my self-image was flawed by trying to be something I wasn’t. It was only as I began to accept myself that I could see the true attractiveness that was there all along.” I want to help you accept yourself so you too can smile in the mirror.

THE PERFECT BODY MYTH

Beauty comes in all sizes - not just size five. Roseanne Barr
Body image is one of the worst self-esteem busters, especially for women.

We’re taught to want a perfect body. Teeny women moan about an extra half-pound. Men struggle to get six-pack abs. Anthony says, “I’m uncomfortable being out of shape. People look at you differently, even with just a little belly.” Expectations can make satisfaction impossible. But if you hate your body, how can you love you? William says, “Good self-esteem helped me be comfortable with my body. It helps me accept little faults, including physical ones.” While women seem more self-conscious about appearance, men can be just as insecure. They can get moody or act like it doesn’t matter, but it does. Both sexes struggle with a desire to look good.

Happiness comes from within. It’s good to be more conscious of keeping your body healthy, without obsessing. Love yourself on your journey to becoming more fit. You can be more accepting of your body by choosing to.

So come on, choose to! Use the tools below from this former fatty turned hottie, with no weight loss. 😊

**Arresting the Fat Police**

Women struggle to get thinner to please to men and avoid criticism. Men do too. Joe goes to the gym because: “I realize that a good body a big factor in
attracting members of the opposite sex.” Getting respect from guys is important too. Muscles is a macho thing, so many men become gym rats. Amy S. laments:

> It's sad, since I am a Ph.D. and a self-professed believer in reason, but the worst blow to my self-esteem has been the question of body image. I once was a skinny size 4, and now I am a rounder size 10. I am far healthier now, and more fit, but the loss of the waif look still bothers me at times. It's an irrational feeling, but one I haven't quite shaken.

Men get more slack. A small weight gain usually doesn’t shatter self-image. Achievements count more. A successful man can handle moderate weight gain. No matter how successful a woman is, a few extra pounds get noticed—often pointed out, to make sure she knows. Pressure to be slim creates paranoia. Women with dynamite bodies cry about an extra pound or bit of cellulite that needs to go before they can love themselves. That’s not loving! Amy W. says:

> I work hard to keep a body that makes me happy. I became a dietitian because of this. I used to obsess and be miserable about wanting to look a certain way. I found that by redirecting myself from those negative habits, I could maintain a more normal existence. This led to greater self-esteem. I sometimes fall back on my negative thought processes, but can now guide
myself back to a more healthy approach. I think body image plays a HUGE role in the self-esteem of many women. It's unfortunate, but I understand it.

I dodge fat police or use a retort to shut them up. Questions like “Are you sure you want to eat that?” drove me crazy. I’d have a nice plate of food and someone would imply I was too fat to enjoy it. Now I respond, “Do you realize how mean that is?” Yet some folks feel compelled to inform us we should diet. “You’d be beautiful without extra weight.” I say I’m beautiful now. Most truly think they’re helping. Don’t let them hurt you! Patti told a class:

I went shopping with a friend who suggested I buy bigger sweaters to cover my fat. A few years ago that statement would have deflated me. Now I avoid insensitive people who make dumb statements. I said that to my friend, who insisted she was just trying to be helpful. I told her not to call again until she’d gotten over her need to help me. I have eyes and can see what I do and don’t like.

Family, friends, teachers, romantic partners and even strangers assume a right to say your weight isn’t acceptable. That’s often their own insecurities talking. I have compassion for fat police. When you’re unhappy with yourself, you find fault with others. Those with good self-esteem are less likely to. Avoid critics when possible! Amy wrote:
My mom verbally and emotionally abused me. Away at college for the first time at age 18, I gained a little weight. Over the next four years, she constantly berated me about it. In truth, she was insecure and battled with weight her entire life after bearing children. She and her mom are very appearance conscious. She still criticizes me and picks on me but thinks she doesn't. So I don't do many things with her and occasionally cut her out of my life for months at a time. That feels good. The internal criticizing stopped and I really began to love myself!

Mack asked, “Do people think that if we’re out of shape, we’re stupid? My mom asks if I’ve noticed my pot belly. Does she think I’m blind?” Pressure to conform makes folks say dumb things. Speak up to fat police! I’ve explained, nicely, how they make me feel. Most don’t understand it hurts. Tell them - graphically, but without malice. Many will get it. Joi gets annoyed about how people suggest she tell her friend Lisa she should wear longer skirts:

People say if I were her friend I’d explain that her skirts are too short for her stubby legs. I refuse. They ask why I’m not being a friend by telling her. I am, by minding my own business. Why do people who barely know Lisa care so much? Lisa does wear short skirts and her legs do look better in longer ones. But who am I to tell her what to wear? Lisa has
great self-esteem and dresses proudly. While women pick away at Lisa’s legs, she has one boyfriend after another who thinks she’s terrific.

Older people seem most outspoken about weight. As a child, Leandra hated visiting her grandparents in Florida:

_I'd worry that I may have gained weight and be reminded over and over._

_My body was under scrutiny by everyone who saw me—relatives, neighbors, people my grandma barely knew. “Leandra, you’re getting chubbier.” “You need to watch what you eat.” Blah, blah! I wondered if these ladies had nothing better to do than make a girl feel low. It was always the first thing anyone noticed. They didn’t ask about school or if I was happy. Only my weight._

_Fight back! China stops advisors with, "I can see what I need to do, or not do, for myself." After getting hurt a zillion times, Linda smiles sweetly and asks if they enjoy making her feel bad: "It's blunt but shuts them up for a while." Len got tired of people commenting on his short height and_
answers, "I have two choices - live with it or kill myself. Your choice?" I've said, “Please accept me as I am. This is me.” I admit, it still hurts, but I get right past it instead of dwelling. Then I eat my second cookie.

**When We're the Problem**

What reflection do you see in the mirror? Insecurity magnifies things that others barely notice. Is your mirror distorted? That's common. Old messages or the media can distort your perception. Ultimately, it's YOUR perception that kills self-esteem. While others add to your inadequacy, you indoctrinate yourself with unfair standards. Cristina says:

> I realized that people could see through my physical appearance and that I had much more to offer than just looks. I learned that a lot of those insecurities are in our minds and not in the minds of those around us. No one else saw me in that negative light. Only I did. And when I stopped thinking that way, I no longer cared what other people thought.

Do you beat ourselves up while those who love you feel helpless? Rob laments, "Robin hates her legs. I love them but can't convince her a bit of cellulite adds nice curve." Elton shares, "My wife's body is hot! But no matter what I say and how much she sees me aroused by it, she still tries to lose weight and wants breast reduction. Her breasts are magnificent. She wants to
shrink them - she's been made to feel they're too big." Men also embellish perceived flaws. Dee is frustrated with Korey:

*He practically lives at the gym—he's obsessed with every inch of his body—much worse than stereotypical women. He's tall with an incredibly toned body yet he beats himself up for not being perfect. Last week he called to say he was upset to find liquid near his stomach. Here I was imagining the worst - a disease or condition. I worried until he came home. It seems a tiny flap of excess skin had caught water from his shower and he had to get rid of it. What an idiot!*

Stop seeing your body as clay for re-shaping! If you enjoy being unhappy, pursue perfection and wallow in misery when it doesn’t happen. I don’t think you want that! When you accept you’ll never be perfect, and it’s okay, self-acceptance begins. It’s hard enough to stand up to others. Why reinforce that your body is unacceptable? Kim says:

*I lost 30 pounds in the last year and feel better about myself, but I still attach an inflated sense of importance to my weight and appearance. If I'm having a "fat" day, no matter what the scale says, I feel bad about myself*
and it translates into everything I do, from work to social engagements to personal relationships.

Do you get an ice cream cone but ruin the pleasure with self-loathing? I’ve done that. Now I enjoy an occasional one—no guilt! Put food into perspective. You’re not a failure if you eat more than you think you should. It’s normal to enjoy food. Don’t be your worst enemy by tying your happiness/unhappiness to your body. Kathie says:

I used to glance around the room to see if there was anyone fatter than me. "Am I the fattest in here? Oh good, I'm not. She is." Or, "Oh no, I am. Now what?" What a waste of mental energy. There's always someone older/younger, smarter/dumber, fatter/thinner, taller/shorter, etc. Perhaps not in this room, but somewhere in the world. I figure if I stop judging others they'll stop judging me.

Eating Disorders
Eating disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive overeating, are all too common. Pressure to lose weight creates unhealthy eating habits that abuse your body, which is terribly unloving. Please get professional help if your eating is out of control. I'll enlighten you about how serious this is and encourage you to take steps.
Unhealthy food habits or obsessive eating is a symptom of other problems. People use food like band-aides to cover deeper emotions they can't deal with. Eating disorders are dangerous to your health and mind. They prevent you from saying “I love me.”

Some people try to control their eating because they can, even if it's unhealthy, if they feel out of control. I asked Ellen to explain her bulimia. In high school Ellen was frustrated by her inability to do gymnastics like her younger sister and disliked her legs and hair, which she had no control over. In college, she’d throw up after eating. Bulimia allowed her to control something. She explains:

_I started eating junk food in college because I felt out of place. I did not think anyone liked me and had no real friends. The bulimia got bad when I broke up with a boy I thought I would marry. When my brother visited me after my sophomore year, he got scared. I had gone from 115 to 97 pounds. With bulimia I could keep my weight down and eat what I wanted. When I felt alone and unloved during my last 2 years of college, it was at its worst—sometimes 3 or 4 times a day. During episodes of bulimia I felt in control and make my body do what I want._
Years later, Ellen acknowledged her eating was out of control with OA (Overeaters Anonymous) and group counseling and decided to stop. She read self-help books, took better care of herself, exercised and went for seven years with no slips. Then she encountered situations that made her feel unappreciated. Stress sent Ellen back to bulimia habits. She also learned she had A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder). It made her feel out of control. She says:

*It made me feel different. In my head my learning disorder is always with me. I did not learn like others but nobody knew about A.D.D. when I grew up. They said I’d outgrow it, or adjust. Bulimia, which lifts stress, helped me cope. In a way I showed my body who is boss. Yet in reality, I was out of control. I’d have more control if I’d eat properly—concentrate on food that goes in and be selective. I also have to feed my mind love, tell myself that my husband and best friend love me and they both can’t be wrong. I need more faith—especially in myself.*

Ellen’s husband asked me how to reassure her. He loves her body yet she disgustedly insults it. I asked why she couldn’t see what others do. “You can’t see the A.D.D. in the mirror!” The mirror reflects pain from her inability to
control things because of A.D.D. It blinds Ellen to her details. Her only sense of control is eating what she wants and bringing it up.

Guys struggle with eating too. It’s often more silent if they don’t know what to do. There are programs, therapists and support groups specializing in men’s eating disorders. Patrick, age 54, is a compulsive overeater who gained 200+ pounds. I asked him to share his story so you could peek into how someone loses control to eating and how he took it back. He explains:

When I ate compulsively, I saw food as a way to numb negative feelings. I felt shame and guilt but couldn’t express that, so I ate more. I didn’t know how to stop. Food became my comfort for the temporary relief I got. I didn’t realize my problem wasn’t with food. I couldn’t cope with my character defects, fears, resentments, etc. I had a hole in my soul that only food could fill. As with most compulsive overeaters, the disease progressively worsens. I managed to do my job and get around as best I could. It took a long time to realize that my life was becoming unmanageable.

Patrick was tired of temporary fixes creating a yo-yo syndrome—up and down weight gains and losses. He’d tried OA but couldn’t cope with the spiritual aspects. He acted like all was okay but beat himself up over his
inability to get a grip on it. It became harder to do simple things like tying shoes, driving a car, walking up stairs, etc. Patrick’s blood pressure needed three medications. He got frightened that he’d die or get very ill if he didn’t do something and wanted to experience a life. He explains:

 Did I want to live in isolation and misery? I finally accepted I had no choice but to return to OA and surrender my will to a higher power. I had no control of my overeating. It took a very long time to accept that stark realization. I was unable to deal when left to my free will. At issue was that I’d never gotten to the root of my problems, not willpower. It was not about eating. It was about what was eating me. If I didn’t get emotional and spiritual help, I’d surely not recover and probably not live long. OA offered a solution. In the past I wasn’t ready for the thorough honesty and openness required to get onto the path to recovery. I was desperate—at rock bottom, ready to climb out of the pit of despair. I became teachable. Now it made sense! If I believed that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity, and, accepted that if I turn my will and life over to the care of God, as I understand him, then I can live one day at a time and begin to accept life on life’s terms.
OA approaches the solution like Alcoholics Anonymous. Patrick avoided OA at first because he didn’t have a spiritual core and that part of the program turned him off. He joined out of desperation. The fellowship was his lifesaver. He got a sponsor, attended meetings, made phone calls, prayed, meditated and wrote about his attitude and frustrations. He now speaks at OA meetings and gives whatever service he can. It helps his recovery. He explains what he learned from going to OA, in addition to therapy and a men’s support group:

“Compulsive overeaters stuff food down so they can stuff down their feelings and not feel them for a while–like a drug that temporarily makes you forget problems. But it gets progressively worse. OA teaches you how to cope with life and deal with the problems. Problems and people won’t change. YOU have to change. I’m too scared to go back to where I came from. For today, I choose to avoid foods that might trigger a relapse that I might not be able to recover from again.

OA helps people with all eating disorders. Anorexics or bulimics may not be overweight, but problems that create their disease follow the same patterns. Patrick warns if you don’t take control, problems related to eating disorders can
kill you. Being thin isn’t the real issue for anorexia or bulimia. Why you’d damage your body to lose weight is. Many people never lose enough weight to be happy. Trudi says:

> I was so obsessed with being thin that I lost track of why. I tried to eat as little as possible. Everyone scolded me, which made me starve myself more. There was never “thin enough.” I’d barely eat for weeks. My hair fell out and I felt sick. And weak. Thank God a friend called an organization for support. I was still in denial but what I learned opened my eyes a little.

Jan pulled me in front of a mirror and pointed out that being thin was supposed to make me happy. Why did I feel no joy at 92 pounds? I went for help. At therapy I learned that I believed if I got thin enough, I’d be loved. It never happened. Now I give myself love and feel healthier and happy for the first time in my life. I still have to be careful but have enough support now to cope.

Is your mindset: “If only I looked like [_____} I’d be happy?” Those thoughts reinforce unhappiness. But “if onlys” don’t come. Happiness comes from within, not outside. Solve problems that make you abuse your body. Do you think that being thinner, or soothing yourself with food will make you happy? NOT! Are you happy now? If you use unhealthy eating patterns to be
happier, and you're not happy, it's not working! Ignoring problems that motivate bad eating habits keep you unhappy. If you're reading this book, you do want to be happy, at least deep down. Please do something to take control! At least read material from one of the organizations below and say, “I love me.” Today Patrick is ecstatic:

I'm one of the miracles they talk about in the program. I'm so proud. I walk for miles, run, and do strength training. My stamina and energy increased markedly. I travel, am comfortable on planes and buses, hike, climb stairs without even breathing hard and enjoy swimming. The sky's the limit if I get my daily reprieve from my disease of compulsive overeating. I must use the tools and work the 12-steps for my continuing recovery. I love myself now—before I only felt self-loathing and shame. It's an incredible high to buy stylish clothes in normal stores instead of just getting what fits. Now I get high on life instead of from sugar and salty foods. My relationships with everyone improved with my positive outlook. I use my fellowship and powers to turn fears and anxieties around. I have more patience and a sense of freedom. Thank God I found the right path before it was too late! Now I can say I love myself and I count the ways each day. I affirm that often.
Many people with eating disorders are in denial. Are you? Here’s some clues:

- Do folks bug you about how you eat?
- Do you obsessively weigh yourself and limit calories?
- Do you keep weird eating habits a secret?
- Do you feel out of control about food?
- You see fat when no one else does.

If you have an eating problem, get help with underlying problems. Many counselors specialize in eating disorders. Organizations that help with eating disorders provide referrals. Find them online. Ellen wants to beat it. She says going for help is a very important step but you must want to do it. “What motivates me to stop is that I am hurting my body - my little temple. God gave me this body to take care of. It houses my soul and it is up to me to protect, not abuse it. I need to find ways to feel in control and to love myself. I say ‘I love me.’ in the mirror.” Please contact an organization if I’ve touched a teeny nerve. You’re not alone. I asked Patrick for advice to someone with a pattern that could be an eating disorder. He recommends learning about OA but warns you must be ready to fully commit to their rigorous program, which is simple in concept but not so easy to work:
You must be ready to go to any lengths to get out of your rut. There is no softer, easier way for a compulsive overeater who has tried many diet programs. If you're sick of throwing away money on diet clubs, and the frustration of failing, you might be ready to find possibly the only way out. You can overcome (not cure) your disease (yes, it is one) if you are willing to reach out for help by admitting you are powerless over food and your life has become unmanageable. You then make a decision to turn it over to your higher power. If you can, other steps will clearly follow.

**TAKING CONTROL OF YOU**

*Most powerful is he who has himself in his own power.* Marcus Annaeus Seneca

Self-image improves as you love yourself more. I've gained weight (getting older does that!) but feel better than ever! The more I see my body as soft, feminine and curvy, instead of fat, the more others see me that way. If someone doesn't appreciate how delicious my body is, it's their problem. "I
think, therefore I am." We negate our beauty by chasing stereotypes and fantasies. Being comfortable with how you look is very attractive. Start appreciating you—others will too!

**Crackin’ a Smile**

If you don’t come to terms with NEVER: being size 6, cellulite-free, perfectly toned—forget having strong self-love! Chasing someone else’s concept of beauty is counterproductive. Work with what you have, not wishful thinking. Comfort yourself with food or take control. Losing weight takes time. Food is immediate. Most of us can’t wait for satisfaction so we postpone healthy eating till tomorrow and overeat now. That saps your control. Take it back! Christi says:

> I wear size 4. I got up to size 12 (they were snug!) when my self-esteem was the lowest. I couldn’t control what I ate—how bad is that? I was thin all my life but then looked dumpy, and older too. Men didn’t look at me like before. I missed compliments about my figure. I was letting my weight ruin my life and couldn’t feel good about myself because I felt so ugly.

*Something finally clicked and I started eating like a normal person. I didn't starve myself. I stopped overeating. I always exercised but ate so much it didn't matter. After eating less, exercise speeded weight loss. I lost 30 pounds and kept it off. People say I look much younger at 35 than at 30!*
doubt anyone is 100% comfortable with their body, but I’d say I’m at least 90% comfortable. Of course I wish I didn’t have cellulite. And my butt could be a lot firmer. But I am darned happy to be 35 and still getting catcalls!

I try to control my eating rather than diet. Dieting sounds awful. Control is empowering! Think in terms of building a healthier lifestyle. When I weaken over food, I say to myself, “I can control my need for this.” I use affirmations like, “I don’t need this cookie now.” Over and over until the craving subsides.

If I lose control, it’s okay. I try again. Eating healthier is a gift of love, not punishment. I take pleasure in controlling my need for sweets or too much food, which isn’t good for me. Sometimes I must have ice cream and you know what? It’s okay. I enjoy and then take control. Some people choose one day a week for a reasonable splurge. I’m more careful during the week than on weekends. But I don’t go to extremes with either.

**EXERCISE:** List unfattening things (a cup of tea, talking to a friend, exercise, etc) that give you comfort or satisfaction. Use them when a craving hits.

I avoid keeping things in the house that test me. Some cookies talk louder, so I buy quieter ones and have two instead of half a box. Know yourself and your weaknesses. Condition yourself to be satisfied with smaller treats and
tasty, healthier foods. Cut back on what you love in increments. Don’t deprive yourself too much. Find motivations. Once after gaining weight, I bought a great pair of too tight jeans. When eating tempted me, I’d try them on. Feeling them a little looser, or imagining myself wearing them, helped me take control. If you’re determined, find a healthy loving way.

**Clean Your Eyes**

If you want to be happy, edit your body perception. A distorted one kills contentment. Even thin people have fat days, or worse. Jill has a friend named Eve, who has a body many women would kill for. Jill is a content size 14. Eve is size 6, yet always moans about how fat she is. Jill is exasperated:

> I’ve seen no fat on Eve, yet she talks like she’s a hippo. On our vacation she ruined every ice cream and meal by ranting, “I’m a pig for eating this.”

> One day in a crowded mall and she whined, “Everyone is thin but me!”

> Irrational! I pointed out I was twice her size. She sincerely said I look good. I know it’s her perception. She’s not perfect so she sees herself as fat. I avoid her.

Eve’s obsession breeds self-hatred. WHAT IS THE POINT? You only have one life. Why ruin yours by tormenting yourself with unreasonable expectations? Being happy is much better! Many people say they’d prefer
romance with someone with extra weight who thinks they're attractive than to be with someone who's slim but keeps moaning about how fat they are. Few people have perfect bodies. You never know what's under clothes. Pay attention in a gym or try-on room?


For example, men lusted after Lila. She had a slender body that many women envied, me included. We went shopping and she asked for help in the dressing room. What a shock! She was bony and shapeless. Lila sensed my response and said she knew women wished for her body but look at it without clothes! Past boyfriends found her very un-sexy and criticized her badly. My envy vanished. I became grateful for my curves and saw that reality is often different. Did you know that models and celebrities get airbrushed for phony perfection? So you may be chasing fantasy. Trust me, those you seek to emulate may be more unhappy than you. Amanda entered a beauty field and found it to be pure folly. She says:

*Although I was accepted and made decent money, which should have perked me up, the constant criticisms and aiming to be better and better is incredibly hard. There's nothing like being told that you have gained "tons*
of weight" after you've gained five pounds, or that they're going to airbrush you a skinnier face, or that your butt is "just hopeless." Obsessing over your own appearance, which is what these professions are all about, is a road to heartbreak. They always hunt for the "perfect" woman, so anyone who isn't the perfect look for whatever that week's trend is, ends up feeling substandard. It's a lousy way to live.

I applaud Jamie Lee Curtis. She was photographed in MORE magazine in 2002 in her underwear, with no makeup, stylists, flattering camera angles and no airbrushing. She showed women the truth behind media images. Curtis, who's known for her good body, did this to illustrate how celebrities and models are altered to look perfect—creating a false sense of what women should look like. She wants women to feel better about themselves. During an interview on Dateline, she said, "Perfection is being happy with who you are." Yeah! Happy with YOU—not because you starved to achieve a look. Happy, with YOU—NOW—as you are. Not who you could be. You CAN achieve this by changing your perception!

Amy U. says:
I used to be a lot thinner. In the last few years I've learned that it's really who you are from the inside out. Men I've been in relationships have emphasized this. Now my goal of taking care of myself and eating healthier allows me to make better habits and enjoy myself more. I am fairly confident in myself now. However, sometimes what people think of me affects what I think of myself. I also know I am affected by what people say. I don't always like this, but this first step for me is to become aware of my habit/behavior. I think I'm a beautiful soul. I've done a lot to cultivate this. I am overweight, yet I know that beauty is more than what you look like, it comes from within. I credit myself for working on loving and accepting myself.

Comparing yourself to airbrushed or starved isn't reality. I was so darn unfair to me! Now my focus is to improve on already good instead of seeking it. When you hate looking at yourself in the mirror, it's hard to love you. Changing your perception and accepting your appearance changes how others see you. I want to help you clean your mirror!

**EXERCISE:** Get naked in front of a full-length mirror. Lovingly look at your body, beyond obvious annoyances, and find your good qualities.
It's funny how we often want what we don't have. Curvy women want to be thinner and thin women want curves. News flash: You can only work with what you have. Find good things about your body. A boyfriend once gushed about how great my soft curves felt. He'd been with hard-bodied aerobics instructors before me. They looked nice but he preferred soft. My body has advantages! I've been speaking for curvy women because coming from a place of self-hatred, it's nice to love my curvy body. But if I was very thin, I'd find benefits from that. I could wear outfits I can't now and I'd enjoy knowing my body was considered the ideal. Now I enjoy knowing soft women feel good, because I focus on what I have. Yet Clea says:

Most women want to be thin. Well I am thin and wish I had curves.

People teased me that I looked like a boy in college. Not funny! When I eat more, it goes to my stomach. I finally began working out with weights and the definition I'm getting makes me feel a bit better. I see women with great bodies complain they want to be thin and want to smack them!

Self-esteem is hurt by beliefs of being too fat, too thin, too endowed, not endowed enough, too short, too tall. Find positives about your body! Teria says, “I used to be very self-conscious because I'm very flat-chested. Now I accept it because I have discovered good things about my body.” Sharath
saying, “I'm not bad looking. I'm built just right but could do with at least 3 inches of height (I'm 5' 7”).” Elmer says, “I've always been a big dude. And hated it. But now I see some women like a larger man. They feel secure.”

Start appreciating what you have. When you carry yourself well, you look better. There will always be people with bodies that seem better. But that doesn't make you worse. When you accept you, prepare to feel sexier and more attractive! Judy C. says:

> Part of self-esteem is feeling good about yourself. If you are constantly uncomfortable with yourself and dwell on it, it definitely affects how you view yourself. Personally, I'd much rather my rear be quite a bit smaller, but know my body is not a reflection of what I am like on the inside—the real me.

**Fit for Me!**

I take care of my body for ME and love feeling healthy. Get into shape for YOU, not a love partner, parents, or other critics— for you— to feel good.

Remember, fitness is a love nookie. Kimberly says, “After working on my appearance, my spirits rise! I tell myself ‘now you will look as beautiful on the outside as you feel on the inside.’ It's an important act of self-care!” Lovingly choose to get into better shape for good health, increased energy, longevity
and to feel happier. Forget the guy who says you need a slimmer body before he loves you or the woman who insists on more muscles before she'll date you. Find a comfortable level for your body type. Fit feels good. People it attracts are a fringe benefit! Deonne says:

*I wish I had a perfectly flat stomach and no hint of saddlebags, but generally I feel I'm attractive in and out of clothing. This has a positive affect on my self-esteem. I do feel better when I'm working out regularly and eating well.*

Take baby steps. Trying to lose 10 (or 50) pounds is stressful, and hard. Trying to lovingly improve your health gets better results. Change your perception of fitness. You can be fit without being slim or muscular. Enjoy feeling healthier! Do your best. Healthier routines keep you focused on being healthy. Don’t base approval on your body. Julie D. says, “I used to feel that I weighed too much and thus, had a terrible body. I finally realized that there was no reason for me to feel that way. What other people think of you is nowhere near as important as what you think of yourself.”
Weight training helps tone. Barney says, “I joined a gym for the first time. My progress on the treadmill has increased greatly, which gives me a strong sense of empowerment.” My self-esteem soared from it. No matter how busy I am, I prioritize exercise, because I love me! Even if you’re busy, squeeze in bits. Keep dumbbells and stretch-bands at work. Use them! Do calisthenics. Work your muscles throughout the day. Do stomach crunches while watching TV; squats while brushing your teeth. I go up and down on my toes in the elevator and when waiting somewhere (I’m used to stares I get!). Take a walk. Run across each street you cross. Go up and down stairs. Play music and dance. It burns calories, relieves stress, and is fun. Rob says:

*I’m always afraid of getting out of shape and feel terrible seeing flab around my middle. I work long hours and stopped the gym. A few weeks ago I began locking my office for 10 minutes, three times a day. I take off my suit and do sit-ups, pushups, calisthenics. To add cardio, I often walk down from my 10th floor office and at least partly up. Just doing something makes me happier. I no longer worry about how I look to women. I want to feel in healthier shape and this is a start.*

Find physical activities you enjoy—you’re more likely to do them. While cardio-exercise is necessary for weight loss, I HATE gym machines. So I
speed walk for cardio and enjoy that. If I forced me to do what I don’t like, I’d make excuses. Consciously staying active increases energy—gotta love that! Do what feels good. Do physical problems hinder you? Ask a doctor for advice.

Even when limited, most people find something. Debra did:

*I was devastated when diagnosed with a genetic heart condition that can be life-threatening if I over-exert my heart. I am a dance teacher and was proud to have a fit and healthy body. Suddenly, I couldn’t do regular things to keep my body in shape, so I gained about 25 pounds. How I looked and felt upset me. It affected my self-esteem. I didn’t feel as attractive and was determined to find a way to become fitter without taxing my heart. I began doing 20 minutes of Yoga and Pilates every morning, and gradually increased to 45 minutes daily. I went from a size 12 to a size 8. Once again I am physically fit, and a good role model for my dance students.*

Don’t expect miracles! I accept that I’ll never be slim. I love food too much and don’t want to exercise more than I do. But I love being healthy! Taking control of your body in a realistic way is empowering. Mitzi says, “When I started working out and having pride in my body, my confidence went sky-
high.” When you feel in control of your body, you have more control over life in general. Get moving! Anything is better than nothing. Set small goals, like Vi did:

*I committed to walking half an hour, three times a week. Often it was more. When I got used to it, I increased it. Two walks became an hour. I made a conscious effort to think how easy it was. As a few pounds came off, my momentum increased. Now I increase speed at times and walk up stairs too. I couldn’t have begun where I ended up but adding things made it easier.*

Getting into better shape can bring up emotional shticks. Sometimes we get out of shape so people leave us alone. There may be fewer expectations if you’re overweight and you can blame failure on it. We sabotage self-love if we can’t resolve emotional shticks. If you think this might be your M.O. and you’re stuck, please get professional help. As you give yourself more love, it’s easier to change eating habits and get exercise. Clive said at my workshop:

*I was a chubby kid and kept it on. My parents expected a lot from me and I was always nervous so I ate and gained more. As I got older, my overweight status took pressure off. People expect less of fat guys. They don’t expect me to marry a gorgeous girl. Even at work, people don’t take
me as seriously. I equate love with food. When you asked us if we’re happy, I didn’t like my thoughts. I feel safer being fat, but not happy. I want to be.

Clive came to me privately and saw how parental pressure molded his perception of security. He wanted to be happy, with a romantic partner and more stimulating job. We discussed that self-love helps control eating and he took baby steps to walking and moving more. As he identified his good qualities, Clive lost a few pounds. That motivated being pro-active about fitness. He joined a support group for men. His confidence increased as he lost weight and found healthier eating options. When Clive joined a gym he was ecstatic:

I never thought I’d work out. Never! I’m much more in control and confident about trying new things. I asked a woman on a date. She agreed! I no longer care what others think. I can’t believe how much time I wasted hiding in a fat body. I’m still considered fat but now like me and am very proud of what I’ve done. I just registered for night classes—my next goal is a better job.

Please recognize the difference between being a little overweight and obese, which is dangerous. It’s wonderful that there are groups promoting “fat
is beautiful.” But overweight can be unhealthy. Check with your doc, not with charts. Excessive weight causes high blood pressure and other health problems. It can slow you down. If your doc sees no reason to change, that’s fine. Then YOU judge whether you need to shed pounds. Love yourself enough to maintain good health, no matter what your size.

LOVING TIDBITS: What I learned about controlling my body

Few people find changing habits easy. I’m a master of excuses, even now. I do great lazy and get so immersed in work that I don’t want to exercise. But I try my best. It’s easier after feeling the benefits of fitness. Often a conscious effort is needed to get my butt up or to pass on fries. Saying “I love me” helps. Take pride in each fitness baby step. Develop habits that help you to feel in control. Below are lessons that helped me take control of my lifestyle, without feeling like I was giving up an old friend. Trust me, the wonderful feeling of being fit is worth it!


* Instead of feeling like I’m withholding goodies, I think in terms of showing myself love by learning better eating habits.
When I eat in a less obsessive manner, my food metabolizes better and I lose weight more easily. When I stress over every bite, I only lose joy.

I accept that improving fitness is a lifestyle choice that includes giving up unhealthy habits and creating healthier ones. Choose to be an unhappy dieter, starving and usually losing the “battle,” or choose to be healthy. The healthy route feels better both mentally and physically.

Avoid fad diets. Products like Ephedra are NOT loving to your body. You’ll lose weight but can also get ill. It’s NOT fun to be thin and sick or dying.

Don’t get caught in the fat-free trap. Calories put on weight, not fat. Fat-free foods are often loaded with sugar to compensate—major calories!

A well-balanced diet with smaller portions sustains a fit body. Get a good balance of protein, healthy carbs (whole grain bread, fruits, veggies, legumes), and fat. Yes, we need fat, especially for the body to absorb vitamins. You can get it from healthy sources, like olive oil, nuts, avocados, etc.

Focusing on a balanced diet makes a big difference. I use chickpeas in my salads and in pasta dishes for a dose of protein and carbs.

Peanut butter is my friend! It has healthy fat. Studies show that eating a spoon of peanut butter before meals actually helps you lose weight since you feel fuller. When I get into an uncontrollable munchy mood, I take control by
licking one teaspoon of peanut butter off a spoon slowly. Having peanut butter on toast for breakfast keeps me more satisfied until lunch.

*My European friend says Americans get overweight if they don’t sit down for relaxing meals at the table. When I do, I enjoy it more and feel more satisfied than when I gobble on the run. Savor your food. Practice eating slower so digestion is better and you taste it longer.

*Use a smaller plate! I bought a pretty one at a garage sale and often use it when I eat alone. Mentally, I feel like I have more.

*Find local snacks to pig out on until cravings pass. I munch baby carrots.

*When my control over food weakens, I remind myself that food gives pleasure only during the short time I’m eating. A healthy body is long-term pleasure.

*I won’t give up dessert but stick with ones I can enjoy eating just a little of. I nibble so they last longer! Find your reasonable treat.

*Engage in controlled “cheating.” Don’t withhold everything you love. Use moderation without guilt. You’re not cheating! Being loving includes reasonable goodies. I’d never stick to eating healthy if it meant eliminating my treats. Denying all cravings makes a healthy lifestyle undesirable. Eat smaller portions of fattening foods. When eating out, plan in advance. Make trade-offs. For
higher-cal meals, decide what you’d normally have and give something up. For example, I love bread, potatoes and dessert. I choose what I want most and cut out some: a piece of a roll instead of two, and have dessert; skip potatoes or ask for just a little.

When I have a big meal, I divide everything in half and take it home instead of overstuffing.

* I pay attention to when I’m full instead of automatically vacuuming up my whole plate.

* Don’t get nuts if you overindulge. Enjoy it and then be more careful. An occasional splurge won’t ruin your healthy lifestyle. Guilt will.

* When emotions trigger eating, you’re out of control. Be conscious of what’s going on before diving for goodies. Try to get at least some control over situations that make you eat for comfort. Find healthy substitutes for those moments or have a little less, to have some control.

* We often eat just to eat. Are you hungry? I say, “I don’t need to eat right now to be happy.” Or, “I can control my eating, and will!” repeatedly until cravings weaken. Or, I ask myself, “Do I prefer to eat that or control my
weight?” Become conscious of why you eat. Beating a craving, it is an awesome feeling of power!

*Substitutes nuts for less healthy snacks. They’re good for you and satisfy longer than other goodies. Studies show that people who eat about 20 almonds a day lose more weight than someone eating exactly the same, minus the almonds. So you get some healthy fat, vitamins, fiber, fuller and fitter.

*Accepting your size does not mean you don’t need to exercise. Show love to your body to keep it healthy by getting it moving.

*While weight training is important, cardio activities burn calories. We need well-rounded exercise. If you want to flatten your tummy, just doing sit-ups won’t work. My trainer once bluntly said that to firm my tummy, I had to burn my fat first with cardio.

*I walk a lot but never lost an ounce. I learned that we need to change routines so the body doesn’t get used to it. I change pace as I walk—break into a jog for a minute or two and run up or down stairs if possible; walk faster for a minute; walk with hand weights. It helps.

*As you love your body more, you’ll want to work out more. While doing biceps curls, I look in the mirror and say, “Damn, you’re a sexy chick!”
*Make time for exercise. I went the excuse route for years. They keep you out of shape. Now exercise is a top priority. It keeps me looking better and helps my heart and overall health.

*It’s easier to be healthy than to be slim or buff. Healthy is a lifestyle!

*Instead of viewing eating healthier and working out as torture, take conscious pleasure in doing loving things for your body. A healthy body nurtures self-love.

Making Peace With Your Body

Few people like their bodies. Few people also seem truly happy. Coincidence? I doubt it. When you accept who you are, it’s easier to enjoy life! I want you to be happy. I lived on the other side—hating my body—and know it dampens everything. Invitations meant worrying about what outfit wouldn’t make me look too fat. Shopping was depressing. A fat-me perception made me insecure, afraid to get divorced and face dating, hesitant to pursue dreams, and a DoorMat so I’d be liked despite my fat. Happy wasn’t in my vocabulary. Nor was self-love. Hating your body becomes self-hatred since your body is part of you. Why waste a good life?

Choose—live unhappily wanting a better body, or love yourself now and strive to be healthier. Loren says, “I thought my sullen attitude was me, until I
accepted I look nice despite not being thin. My weight didn’t come off my body. It came off my shoulders. I used to hurt myself. Now I smile.” Heather is happy too: “I finally accept who I am instead of trying to be who others want me to be. I was unable to walk around the house without clothes. Now I can!” Louis adds, “I wanted a different body most of my life. Becoming healthier makes me happier in that same body.” Tami hates the judgmental perception of overweight people. She explains:

“Why oh why can’t I be thin?” I used to ask myself when I was younger. I enviously looked at my beautiful thin best friend and longed to share her clothes, get the same lustful looks from boys, and not feel guilty about pigging out with her. Why was I being punished? What made me feel the worst about myself was hearing her talk about how fat she was, while it was obvious I was much larger. Her statements made me feel terrible. I became insecure about everything and always wondered if people were judging me for how I looked. I gained a lot of confidence over the years and came to realize I’m a beautiful person and love myself for who I am. I am lucky to have supportive family and friends to help me recognize that my feelings about my weight were
holding me back. This newfound confidence is great! After graduation, I traveled around Europe by myself for two months, and realized I could do ANYTHING! I am still considered overweight, but a healthy and happy woman with a wonderful sense of self-confidence. I now wonder if my childhood friend made those harmful statements to make herself feel better about her own insecurities. They no longer bother me!

No matter what the media says, curves are sexy, warm and inviting. We need to break stereotypes that say only thin is appealing! It begins with accepting yourself. Society is out of sync with a woman’s body! The word rubenesque is now synonymous with fat, which it isn’t. When Rubens painted soft, round women, they were the ideal, beautiful state of a woman’s body. Nowadays, those lovely curves aren’t valued as much. Descriptions like curvaceous, full figured, womanly, well endowed signify fat, which makes words for positive qualities negative! We can’t stop what others think but don’t have to buy it. Since I accepted I was curvaceous—and proud of it—people, including men, find my body more appealing. Theresa found peace:

When I was 50 pounds heavier I was very unhappy. My self-esteem was at an all time low. Now, I could still lose another 10 or 20 pounds, but I look fine and I’m healthy. I had to accept my body. I am not built like a
model and never will be. My body is heavy in the hips and thighs and very small in the waist. My tummy has a pouch. I resemble the women in Renaissance paintings. Once I recognized that my body was what I was blessed with, I have made the best of it. Working out 3 times a week, walking every day and being active is very important to me. Eating what I like within reason is important too. So far, so good!

Embrace the beauty in your body type! Don’t put a dark cloud over the rest of your life for not being perfect! I’d like to be trimmer. If a fat fairy magically removed my excess I’d be an even happier camper. But I love me now! Many things are out of reach. I’d love to be younger too but it ain’t gonna happen! A spiritual outlook helps me accept that God endowed me for a reason. I’m not meant to be thin, but am meant to keep my body healthy. We owe it to ourselves to do that. Please make peace with your body. The alternative is an underlying unhappiness - a cloud over whatever you do.

Accepting herself is very important to Emily’s self-esteem:

I love how I look and do little to "improve" it; I rarely wear make-up, wear pretty but comfortable clothes, and enjoy what I see in the mirror. My parents over-emphasized good grades and achievement, not appearance and the need to conform to outside standards to attract a man. As a result
I have an extremely healthy attitude about my looks and body. I love my body and face. I'm not conventionally beautiful by any means, so it really takes guts to believe I'm beautiful and not bow to the pressure of society telling me I'm not. I love exercise and sports. My body always responds gratifyingly when I treat it right; it delights and reassures me every time.

REDEFINING YOUR APPEARANCE

Beauty is how you feel inside, and it reflects in your eyes. It is not something physical.

Sophia Loren

If you do your best to be well groomed, you'll feel more content and confident. Work with what you have, not what you wish you had. You can be attractive no matter your size, shape, hair, ages, etc. Jan said:

When I make myself as attractive as I can, it reflects in my interactions.

When I barely glance at the mirror before running out, I may have a bad day. I'm not trying to be a glamour girl or put on airs. But when I put on just a little make-up for some color, wear flattering, tailored and pressed clothes, and comb my hair into a flattering style, it raises my confidence dramatically.
Thinking Attractive

People are attracted to energy, not a perfect face or body. When you radiate inner beauty, they see it. Personality and good energy enhance appearance.

I’m the same person on the outside as when I hated me. Now happiness radiates my inner beauty. When you don’t like your looks, it reflects in the dimness of your eyes and attitude of inferiority. How you carry yourself makes a BIG difference. Radiating satisfaction for who you are makes you sizzle! It’s such fun to experience people finding me so attractive. I love me and it shows!

Maintaining your appearance stimulates confidence.

Mick says, “I always feel a bit fat, therefore not perfectly suited to success.” Perfect—that confidence buster again! “A little fat” doesn’t hold you back. Your response to it does. I didn’t lose weight to attract compliments. I lost my belief that my weight made me unattractive. Shawn learned:

*When I practiced the “I love me” exercises, my attitude slowly changed. As I focused on my better qualities, instead of fixating on cellulite and why I wasn’t as good as X, Y or Z woman, I felt more attractive. It wasn’t a sudden epiphany. First I smiled more. Then I felt more comfortable in*
social situations. When a cute guy asked me out, I was shocked. Guess he noticed the change too. That increased my awareness. It's affected all areas of my life. People treat me differently because I see myself in a more positive light. And I didn't lose weight to achieve this!

I took some women on a “field trip” to a singles party and walked around with a conscious attitude that said, “I am IT.” My group saw men drawn to me wherever I strutted my lovely self. I was IT that night and men read it in my face and body language. All that changed was my attitude. If you accept you look good, others will too. So you're not perfect. You can still be attractive with extra weight, a receding hairline, signs of aging, and other perceived flaws—IF you love yourself.

Packaging Reality
No matter what your distorted mirror says, you CAN look good. Dress for you! Define your style by what suits YOU and work your individuality! Feeling good about your appearance increases self-confidence. Focus on what matters most. When I like my hair, I feel gorgeous, even if my weight is up. I splurge on hair products and am fussy about getting the right cut. We all have thangs that bring us up if they’re lookin’ good, or down if they’re not. Enhance yours!
EXERCISE: Imagine how you’d feel if you looked VERY special. Spend a day acting like you feel that way. Hold your head up. Assume folks admire you as you walk by. Feel that energy. If you put on a good enough act, people may get the vibe. If you act like you know you’re good-looking and terrific, others believe it.

Women have more options to embellish and camouflage what we don’t like and emphasize what we do with make-up, a new hairstyle, clothes that flatter us the best. Look at Wonder bras! We waste energy enviously watching those who are well packaged. Put that energy into improving your packaging! Well-groomed fits any size. Vito says:

I’ve always been a big guy. My appearance reflected my self-image: untidy, clothes that fit poorly, bad posture. I hardly smiled. My sister always said I’d look good if I’d fix myself up. I saw it as sisterly blindness. But eventually I enlisted her help. Now my clothes fit well. She encouraged me to keep my shoulders up. A haircut helped. I didn’t like it but tried to stay neat and walk straight. When people complimented me, my confidence increased. My boss gave me more responsibility and a woman flirted. I figured if just sprucing got me so much, I should try to exercise and eat
better. I’m still a big guy but feel like I was reborn. I honestly like myself now, which makes me a happy guy.

Make the most of what you have! Emphasize your best qualities. The right clothing and grooming enhances you. Wear nice underclothes too. Dressing up underneath isn’t just to please someone. Please you, by wearing something that feels good and isn’t ripped. I love silk and have been asked if I was buying pretty lingerie for a boyfriend. No! It was to show myself love. I enjoy wearing them—for me. Get rid of underwear that’s ratty, stained or you wouldn’t like to see on someone else. Forget what mom said about doing it in case you’re in an accident. Wear it for YOU. Even if you’re not in a relationship, nice underwear feels good.

Trash photos you hate. Step back from the mirror and see the whole picture—not just what you don’t like. Don’t buy clothes on sale that you wouldn’t buy at full price. NEVER wear what you don’t like. Even if you’re doing errands, enjoy how you look. It perks up your day. I’d sometimes dress like a bum to run errands. One day I ran to the bank and I bumped into an ex. I was sooo grateful I looked good. You never know who you might see. It’s awful to duck because you don’t like how you look.
I like to look nice every day. That doesn’t mean dressing up, but I’ve gotten rid of clothes that don’t flatter me. I always wear a hint of make-up for some color. Don’t save nice outfits for special occasions. Wear them now. It feels good! Don’t hide behind baggy clothes if you feel fat or thin. That looks worse. Tailored clothes are the most flattering. So is stylish. Get into the habit of caring about your appearance every day. When you consciously put yourself together, it shows. Cleola says:

When felt fat, I hid under baggy clothing. My friends gave me a makeover on my birthday. I saw no point but they insisted. A new hairstyle and light makeup—I did look prettier. I got an outfit that fit well and saw the difference. Compliments felt great. I wanted to wear that outfit every day and asked friends to help update my wardrobe. I’m treated differently now. I just got promoted at work. Feeling good about me increases my confidence. Now I love clothes and accept I’m attractive.

Others agree!

Work your individuality. Carmen says, “I used to have a complex about being ugly. I remind myself how good I look and feel and I am lucky to have what only I can have. MY ORIGINALITY.” Enhance your assets. Pay attention
to your aura. Are you slumped? Sullen? Do you let unhappiness show?

Practice exuding a positive presence. Good posture everyone! When you walk straight, you look taller and more attractive. Suck in your belly. Chins up.

Shoulders straight. Confidence is extremely attractive. Even if yours is just a small bud waiting to bloom, fake it. People don't have to see the dork you feel like. Be self-conscious but don't let it show. When you carry yourself well, it translates into looking more attractive. Shari recalls:

*My last boyfriend was 5’4.” I’m 5’6”. He dressed nicely and carried himself with confidence. I never thought of him as short. He was so sexy I didn’t notice. The funny part is when I went for dinner with him and some of my friends, NO ONE noticed he was shorter than me. They just thought he was attractive. To this day, friends who remember him think I was mistaken about his height.*

Whew! What a long chapter. Body image and appearance are frequent power busters so I shared a lot. I implore you to take control of your body and mind. It lets in so much happiness and improved health. Begin to take control NOW! Do something small you don't normally do, like take a walk or pass on
dessert. Say to yourself, “I do this to say, ‘I love me.’”

❤️
Chapter 8: Getting Better:

Using Your Years Wisely

Try to keep your soul young and quivering right up to old age, and to imagine right up to the brink of death that life is only beginning. I think that is the only way to keep adding to one's talent, to one's affections, and to one's inner happiness. George Sand

You've all heard the expression, "You're not getting older. You're getting better." Do you actually believe that? Our youth oriented society makes aging seem unpleasant at best. It took many years to understand that I do get better every day. Really better! I'd like to help you change your perception of age so it doesn't block your happiness.

AGE PHOBIA
Getting older tends to affect women more. But, a large number of both sexes see it as going downhill. Getting older can make you feel less valuable or attractive. Negativity about aging hurts self-esteem and puts a damper on life.

Getting older isn't fatal! More people are enjoying a longer, satisfying life. I'm one of them. Join us! The real scary part about aging is how we let it hurt our happiness. I'd like to change your perception so it won't zap your power to enjoy life! That's self-love!

**Depressing Ourselves**

*Don't complain about growing old—too many people don't have that privilege.*

Earl Warren

I won't glorify aging. There are changes—in how we're perceived and in our bodies. As I get older, I feel more vulnerable. Hey, that sharp pain in my arm might not be from my backpack or that tummy twinge might not be gas. I'm more conscious of my body's quirks. But my strong spiritual faith offsets much of that. So has paying lots of attention to being healthy and fit. Giovanni skeptically says:
In the coldness of society, we are an aged wine. The stomping discipline of childhood gives us grape juice, and we are bought and sold that way. After adolescence we are the mass of cheaply priced wines. At twenty we are considered of poor intellectual quality but marketed to the unschooled consumer. Our thirties and forties bring us to an age of our finest quality, but after that we are most often considered vinegar.

I’m not vinegar! On the other hand, Brenda, 49, says, “I’m like fine wine, getting better with age.” We are what we think we are! Michelle, 33, says, “I feel like I am running out of time.” Golly, don’t tell that to my body since I’m older and my engine is running strong. But many people view getting older with a perception of doom. John, 45, says, “I’m a bit sensitive about gray hair, wrinkles and other physical age signs, although I believe I’m becoming wiser. I struggle with questions about a committed relationship, sex, family, etc. with passing time.” Stop seeing the end of your life when each day can be a new beginning, no matter what your age! Since you’ll only get older, why perceive life as only getting worse? That reduces happiness. Dianne, 58, says:

Getting older is not the problem. The problem is the Hollywood starlet standard that men, whether prospective lovers or prospective employers, try
to hold over all women of all ages. Getting older, I personally enjoy life more.

Tick, Tick, Tick
Are you convinced you need to be at a specific place by a certain age? If you're not there, the clock ticks. I don't have a family yet. Tick, Tick. I'm not making as much money as I should by now. Tick, Tick. I want a new career and it's getting too late. Tick, Tick. I'm getting too old to see the world. Tick, Tick. No one will want me when I'm older. Tick, Tick. ETC. I've never seen these rules! At least consider breaking them.

I've seen an age crisis begin in someone as young as twenty. Samantha, 27, says, “The older I get, the more depressed I get about not being where I expected to be in life by now. I almost feel like I'm running out of time.” Drop expectations and live! Make the most of NOW instead of seeing the clock ticking on what you “should” have. Does becoming an adult seem like the onset of your decline? What a waste of life! Let's stop being ridiculous and continue to enjoy every year. Diane, 61, says, “I seem to be getting happier, calmer and more content as I get older.” Arline is finally blossoming at 62:

As I look around and see younger people searching for themselves, what to do with their lives, I realize I have finally gained a degree of self
How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways http://howdoiloveme.com

esteem for I see how helpful my writing has been for others, as well as for myself because it is something I believe I do well without help from others.

Unfulfilled ambitions get more pronounced as years pass. When I was married, my biological clock ticked away the "good years" I assumed were left to "become someone." I didn't recognize I already was someone. My self-esteem plummeted from worries about being too old to pursue dreams. Thank goodness I proved me wrong! Developing self-esteem motivated me to go for the gold as I got older. Doubting yourself impedes you. Sharath, 44, says, “Sometimes, you wonder if you can fire on all cylinders as you grow older and how you will cope with competition from younger people, who could replace you.” Some people get crazy during a mid-life crisis. Do you think buying a new, expensive toy or getting a younger spouse makes you better? Looking for a fix sustains unhappiness. Don’t let age stop you! Norman says:

I swore I’d have my own company by forty. At thirty-eight I hated myself for having no plan in place. I assumed my wife was disappointed in me.

She denied it. By thirty-nine I was miserable. How could I be a good husband when I didn't feel like a man? I openly flirted with women at work. Some humored me and I felt better for the moment. It was humiliating. My secretary pointed out how foolish I acted and was surprised I felt like a
failure. Gert reminded me of my accomplishments and that I had a highly respected position AND enjoyed my job until this crisis. I'd been so fixated on old dreams I'd taken good stuff for granted. Gert said she wouldn't have worked for me so long if I weren't good. Now I concentrate on accomplishments instead of what I haven't done—yet. I'm slowly planning a small business on the side. I can do it at any age. Gert reminded me that as I get older, I'm growing as a businessman, not wearing out. She's sixty-two and going strong. I may take early retirement to do my own thing. But I know I'm already successful and life feels much better.

Many folks lie about age, especially women. Friends won't tell me theirs, though I'm older. Women act as if admitting age will shrivel them up in people's eyes. Once YOU accept it, others will. Society IS changing. Look at how many “older” women have great movie roles. Not long ago, women weren't shown as gorgeous and vital after forty. Now they are, because they are! Feeling ashamed of your years shows. I'm the same person now as when I was younger, but much wiser. So are you. Own it! When you love yourself, age becomes acceptable too.
YEARS OF IMPROVEMENT

At twenty years of age, the will reigns; at thirty, the wit; and at forty, the judgment.

Benjamin Franklin

We can improve with age, but how can you recognize it if you're overly concerned with what you're not. I date younger guys and they enjoy being with a woman who has her act together and understands more about life. Smart guys! Self-esteem at any age is attractive. Joe says, “Age and experience make me better and wiser every day.” DT adds:

Age has affected both the decisions I make in life, and the greater knowledge I have gained has affected decisions I made in the past. The saying "older and wiser" is true. My self-esteem has improved with age as a result, ergo, I no longer judge myself the same way as I did when I was younger, and I do not make the same foolish mistakes. A+B+C=better self-esteem.

Aging Beautifully
And then, not expecting it, you become middle-aged . . . You achieve a

wonderful freedom.

It is a positive thing. Doris Lessing

Age beautifully by taking extra special care of yourself. Get enough sleep.

Take supplements. Exercise. Eat healthy. Nurture your skin. It helps you look

and feel better. Debra says:

A strong, healthy body contributes to a strong, healthy

mind. I continue to think young, and not become an

“old thinking” person. I am flattered that people think I

am in my 30’s or 40’s, and don’t believe me when I tell

them I am 50. My appearance positively affects my self-

esteem.

Building self-love and happiness can counter signs of aging. As mine grew,

people often asked if I’d discovered the fountain of youth. I discovered ME!

Rochelle, 53, says, “The more you live, the more you love, the more you

learn.” Jemma, 62, says, “The older I get, the healthier I become. My self-

respect increases.” Show yourself love as you get older by being more vigilant

about your health. Then enjoy life!
A major contributor to a youthful appearance is happiness. Unhappy people take the doom path. If they feel lousy about aging, they want company and try to undermine the happy activities of others, using age as an excuse. I’m knocked for taking off with a backpack to places a woman my age “shouldn’t go to alone.” SHOULD! I figure they’re dying to go but can’t. Not me! Let them point out my age. When I spontaneously went to Alaska solo, most folks my age were on a cruise. I had a blast! Age doesn’t stop you. YOU stop you. My client Laura says:

*I was traumatized about aging since my twenties and saw life getting worse from then on. Being older meant having less fun. As years passed, life didn’t feel different. You pointed out it’s my choice how to age. I’d been in a funk for so long I’d stopped paying attention to having pleasure.*

*Now I work on being healthy. I’m 53 and exercise more than ever. Taking control of my body and mind empowers me. I’m told I look better than when I was younger. I intend to make the most of the rest of my years,* instead of ruining them.

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*FACT: Every year of your life adds value to who you are as a person!*
We're not our parents’ generation! People used to age faster. There are no rules for getting older—only some folks’ rigidity that you don’t have to listen to. Emily, 42, says, “I feel a lot more comfortable with clothing choices than I used to. Instead of fretting about how I never look quite right, or like everyone else, I just think, ‘the hell with it; this is my style.’” The media touts youth and striving to maintain it. But many people reach their 40’s and 50’s+ without buying into that. Frank, 46, says, “Age give you a healthier perspective on what's important in life. That builds self-esteem.” We do get better as we accumulate the wisdom, lessons, and experience of our years. Isabel, 62, says, “The older I get the more I appreciate myself. I don’t care what others think of me. I’m more authentic.”

The only one who can stop you from doing something is you! Kitty, 56, shares, “Young women question why I don’t seem in my 50’s. Because I won’t let age limit me! I do WHATEVER appeals to me, as I’ve always done. I still date men in their 40’s.” The knowledge and experience of our years contribute to confidence. Time teaches us take care of ourselves. Giovanni says, “When I was younger my mind was as blank as a sheet of paper. Now that I’m older my mind has retained the lessons not taught in school.” Life’s experiences
teach us to navigate better. Judy C., 44, says, “My self-esteem has been bolstered. I have learned that some things I thought so important in high school are relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things. This knowledge has been wonderfully freeing.” Kimberly, 28, says:

*My self-esteem is definitely improving with age. I'm finally starting to come into my own. I am not the same girl I was at 16, 21, or even 25. I am gaining experience, and greater confidence with age. As I near the end of my twenties, I realize I've worked many different types of jobs, dated many different types of men. I have felt very lost, confused at times about who I am, what I want out of life, and my purpose here. These experiences have taken me on a journey of inner growth and self-discovery. Things are slowly falling into place.*

Dee 38, says, “I'm gaining self-esteem as I get older. I continue to overcome hurdles and every time I do I learn that I am capable of most anything I put my mind to.” Younger men that I date say they love a woman with her values in place. There are more things to talk about. Some men say they find women in their twenties and even thirties more superficial than an older one who knows who she is, what she wants, and finds ways to get it.
My body may not be as slim and firm as younger women, but who I am makes up for it! Debra, 50 says:

*My self-esteem has improved with aging. I no longer care about most people's opinions. I care how I feel about myself, and some of the opinions of people I love. If I have a momentary lapse of self-esteem about aging when I see beautiful young people, I remember that my inner beauty is what counts, not just the outside package. I like the person I am today. I have lived through many life lessons, and continue to become a better person every day.*

**Age Attitude**

When I tell people my age, I'm often "reassured" that "age is just a number." Heck no! I am who I am because of the knowledge and personal growth that my age represents. That number is special—not "just a number." Their need to reassure me is insulting. We should own our age proudly. Muhammad Ali said, "A man who views the world at 50 the same as he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life."

Change your attitude about getting older! George says, "The older I get, little things don't bother me as much. I have more confidence with decision-making."
When my self-esteem was low, I'd be grateful if a boyfriend said I wasn't too old for him. Nowadays, I think in terms of whether he's too young for me. It's semantics but also an affirmation that I'm not intimidated or apologetic about my age. I no longer see myself as too old for anyone or anything.

Edwin, 78, says, “Age doesn't make much difference, as long as one doesn't grieve over getting older.” Christi, 35, writes:

*Each year I become more self-confident. Knowledge and experience directly contributes to that. The more I learn, the better I feel about myself. I do not feel that age contributes to self-esteem if you are not learning something in the process. I know plenty of middle-aged teenagers—stuck in one mindset—never open to new ideas and ways of looking at things. If you don’t do this, you’ll stay stuck in that self-pitying teenage mode forever. These are the people that puff and grumble while waiting in lines and drive like maniacs in traffic. They are stuck in "why me?" mode! (example: Why did that light turn red when it was MY turn! Why is there a long line at the store when "I'M" in a hurry?) "Why me?" is directly linked to low-self esteem in my opinion. I know, I used to be a "why me?" person!*

Age isn’t a quality or something tangible. Get in the habit of thinking about WHO you are instead of how old. Theresa says, “My self-esteem increased as
I've aged. I feel that I know more of what's important in life as I get older. Material things don't have as much value as opinions of the people I care about." Yes, looks change and health may be different. But we can revel in the experience and wisdom we have instead of focusing on facial lines or body readjustments. Joe, 51, says: "Maturity helps to put things in focus for the bigger picture and it brings self-assurance. I feel good about myself, much more so than when I was younger."

We may not be young in body but we can be young in spirit and heart. I'll never lose that "little girl" in me. Never! It keeps me from falling into ruts that older people can fall into. My passions actually get more intense and I satisfy them more than ever. My "little girl" attitude keeps my creative spirit alive, my curiosity high, and prevents taking life for granted. Your years can teach stronger values so your self-appreciation level can be higher. Amy S. says:

I am less apt to find authority figures to please rather than trusting my instincts and pleasing myself. In that sense, aging has given me a better perspective on myself. I am more willing to take risks personally and professionally than I was, because I trust my vision and my abilities.

Mencius said, "The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart." You can live up to the expression "young at heart." Getting older can make
you stagnant. A youthful spirit strives to learn new things. Age can make us set in our ways. Spirit provokes a willingness to try new things. Ellen, 51, says, “More maturity allows me to look inside myself to see that what makes me up is my feelings and beliefs and they get better and stronger each year. They no longer depend on my looks or what people think.” Amy U. sees aging as positive growth:

As I age, I gain more experience in life and believe in myself more. I see what works around me and what doesn’t. I realize what I came from and how few tools I was given to succeed emotionally and spiritually. My first key was to become aware of why I didn’t think much of myself; then to cut off those people/situations that did not contribute to making me feel good about myself. Too bad I can’t completely cut my mother out of my life…it may yet happen!

People over 40 with an adventurous, mischievous or innovative spirit are attractive. Those qualities make people quickly forget your age since you’re such a pleasure to be around, no matter how old you are! Mick says, “Getting older increases self-esteem. You develop a repertoire of life experiences.” Learn to make getting older work for you, instead of quitting life.

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ENJOYING LIFE AT ANY AGE
To be 70 years young is sometimes far more cheerful and hopeful than to be 40 years old.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

It’s never too late to try new things or go after dreams, unless you deem yourself too old. Why worry what others think? Julie, 55, says, “I think one's self-esteem gets better with age. You begin to realize that others' views of you are not as important as your view of yourself.” Life is as I choose, by MY rules. Expect the future to be good. Don’t hold onto disappointments. Work on intensifying your passion for life's gifts and create fun in your life. Don’t let age restrictions stop you. Be silly. Don’t waste the only life you have! Enjoy it.

It’s Never Too Late

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.

Henry Ford

We can grow into ourselves at any age. Pursuing new goals is too much fun to stop! If you give up doing what you love because you get older, it’s your CHOICE, not your age. Stan says, “At 55, I can still do most things I enjoy:
play basketball, kayaking, biking. Cosmetically, I think I look fine, even though I could lose 15 pounds." Much of aging is mental. We age much faster when we give up our passions. Anna says, "Now, at 70, I hike." People look older when they stop doing what they love and succumb to stereotypes about what we can do at each age.

"Act your age!" people tell me. By whose authority I ask? Hmmm. No answer. Society mandates *shoulds* we don't have to accept. Women are more harshly judged. You guys can play with friends and toys and we'll allow that "boys will be boys." We're expected to act like ladies. In some arenas, both sexes feel limitations. Age discrimination does exist. But we can fight it! I do. Since my divorce I've been catching up on things I'd wanted to do since my teens. My life felt stagnant in my twenties. I finally live and love it. But my lifestyle rocks the boat.

I refuse to grow up! Is this being immature or acting like a child? No way! But I refuse to lose the spirit of youth—curiosity, passion for living, knowledge that I can do anything—and won't buy into shoulds and can'ts of getting older. Our insular society sets limits. "Why don't you settle down Daylle?" Because I don't want to! Loving life keeps me too busy to worry that I'm "too old" for anything. If others disapprove—oh well! Gloria Steinem said, "It's never too late
to have a happy childhood.” Yes! There’s no time limit on what you can do.

Make a point of having fun with whatever you do. Yvonne, 51, says, “The ‘I-don't-care-what-people-think’ attitude is new and refreshing and is an advantage of getting older.” Isabel, age 54, shares:

_I've developed very good self-esteem, but it wasn't easy and included lots of therapy and growing up. I didn't have an opinion till I was over 40. (What if I was wrong?!)_ I didn’t really know who I was till after 50. What a waste. I'm such a terrific, interesting, interested person. I _lift my self-esteem every morning by writing from The Artist's Way by Julia Cameron. That book changed my whole career. It gave me permission to become a "star" and succeed—and I did. “Star” is a relative word of course, but for someone who threw up at her 40th birthday party because she couldn’t tolerate being the center of attraction, I'm a "star."

Will you let society’s version of grown up slot you into limitations? Don’t lose your sense of fun. Age won’t stop me from what’s designated for young women. I AM one, no matter what my birth certificate says! I approach life with the wonder of a child and the wisdom of experience. I'm "too old" to do adventure travel alone, but joyously travel the world as a free spirit. I was too old to date someone much younger. Men get congratulated for it. Why not
me? Kathryn says, “Getting older has increased my self-esteem. As I grow older I constantly learn new things, about myself and the world. I am learning what really matters and what doesn’t.” This is YOUR life—do what makes you happy, despite skepticism. Yvonne says:

*When I was younger I would panic about not having someone. Now that I am older, I don’t feel that way. I can go and do as I please. At times I truly want someone to share my life with but if I don’t have a lifetime partner, it won’t be a tragedy. I can live without it. I have a lot in my life to keep me a whole person.*

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**FACT: Age doesn’t stop us. We stop ourselves.**

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You can risk the adventure of being alive and happy at any age. We often spend the first half of adulthood being what others wanted us to be. It’s fun to reinvent yourself when you’re old enough to know what you’d really like. Are there things you haven’t tried that might make you happier? I got divorced in my thirties when. EVERYONE said I was too old to begin over. I HAD TO continue teaching because it was TOO LATE for me to reinvent myself. I knew if I listened, happiness was doomed. I was warned it was too late to find a
How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways http://howdoiloveme.com

passion-driven career Bah! I wouldn't trade my life for all the security in the world! Many folks trade happiness for approval and security. Good self-esteem puts what YOU think as the benchmark.

Following your passions keeps you young. When my students dared me to rap, I grabbed the challenge like a lifeline. It led me to learn how to rap, start a record label, write songs that got on radio, teach seminars and write bestselling books on music business topics. As I tried new things, I learned the lessons in my self-empowerment books and my blog, Lessons from a Recovering DoorMat. Keep an eye on my website. You never know what I may do next! I was considered WAY too old to start. But I have an amazing duel career because I refused to let age stop me. I climbed my first real mountain a few years ago. I'd been happily scaling what people see as mountains for years. And there are more to climb, no matter how old I get.

More and more people are chucking unsatisfying careers, going back to school, and living as they really want as they get older. You’re never to old to try something new or go after a dream, unless you deem yourself that way.

Elli, 63, says, “I have cleared many emotional and spiritual issues and have in
place tools for improvement and growth for life, creativity and in my art.” Don’t waste wonderful years lamenting about what could have been and assume it’s too late because of your age. My best friend’s mom and dad won’t let age stop them from living fully. After raising four kids, they used their time to improve their lives as they got older!

Irving Gall (now 88) never had time for politics when he was vice president of sales at a large corporation plus president of the his industry’s manufacturers company. Though he was dissatisfied with things in his town, he never had time to get involved. At 77 years young he ran for councilman and won. Though he’d accomplished a lot in business, being a councilman was very satisfying. It was a dream realized! Irving was shown a great deal of respect by other legislators and enjoyed that. His wife, Eva Gall (now 86) went back to school when she was in her fifties. She got an Associate Degree and then a paralegal degree. She still audits classes for self-improvement. Many of her friends doubted she could handle going back to school at her age. Her situation wouldn’t have been easy for someone half her age. She had to take a high school equivalency test first to get her high school diploma. Eva is very proud of what she accomplished because so many older people feel that it can’t be done.
Age gives you more moxie if you let it. You can do what you’d like at any age. Careers can change any time. Learn a new skill. Go back to school. Ted says, “As I get older, I have more to reflect upon to get a better sense of who I am and who I would like to be.” We often just do what we were programmed for, without joy. As we learn what would have made us happy, we believe it’s too late to try. Trash that thought! Happiness can come at any age! The only one stopping you is you. After a lifetime of doing what I was told, nothing will stop me from creating a satisfying life - not people, disapproval, nor age! Age taught me that wisdom! Anna says she didn’t begin to increase her self-esteem until age 60. At 70 she adds:

Now I have a lot of knowledge and accept who I am. I’ve had great times in my life and am very happy today. I look at young people I encounter and think it would be nice to be young. But I’d hate to go through that again. I’m comfortable because I know who I am. Getting older helps you realize who you are and what you want out of life. When you try too hard to make other people happy, you can lose yourself and become unhappy with who you are. You can’t move freely because of limitations of what others want you to be. Each of us has to really be free to be comfortable. You have to do what you want to do. If you try to make changes on the
outside but don’t make them within yourself, you’ll still be the same. Nine
out of ten times it’s not the situation, it’s you. A lot of older people are so
rigid. They expect others to change to their way of thinking. People can tell
that I’m comfortable with myself. Life is wonderful!

Anna says she now hikes, goes camping and does many things not
considered for seniors, usually with people in their twenties. She’s truly
enjoying life. General Douglas MacArthur put it well: “I promise to keep on
living as though I expected to live forever. Nobody grows old by merely living
a number of years. People grow old by deserting their ideals. Years may
wrinkle the skin, but to give up wrinkles the soul.” We don’t stop playing
because we grow old. We grow old faster if we stop playing. Determine what
you do by what you want, not by what’s right for your age. Live each day with
passion and without the blinders of limitations!

Todd told me, "When we're young, we're always in
a hurry so we don't miss anything. When we get older,
we take our time so we don't miss anything." The older
one is me. I take my time these days, to savor life’s
pleasures more. Guilty, and proud of it! Jonathan Swift
said, “No wise man ever wished to be younger.” Be
very wise!

To Fight, Or Not to Fight

Products promise to hide age. We can dye graying hair, rejuvenate aging skin, lift a sagging face, and fill in wrinkles. The media convinces us that the older we get, the less worthy we are and the harder we should work to be valued. It also tells us we aren’t as attractive. Should we age gracefully or give Mother Nature a good run for her money? YOUR call. Men are considered debonair as they age. Lines and gray hair can enhance a man’s appearance in our culture’s eyes. But they make many women feel older.

Looking as good as possible makes me feel good. If you’re happy without enhancement, great! I admit to dying my hair since my twenties. I like having rich hair color. Good skin products are my pleasure too. While I probably wouldn’t get a facelift, it’s great if it makes you feel good. Carolyn, 58, says, “I felt undesirable and unattractive—until I got my face lift.” I enjoy when folks guess my age as many years younger and know it’s a result of showing my skin lots of love and being happy. Do what makes you feel good!

Those of you who prefer to let age take its course can still fight the affects of years on your health. Keep your focus on health and fitness. If you stay in good shape, you’ll feel better. There are many vitamins and herbs that
counteract what our bodies lose or that make us feel better. When my mom's knees lost cartilage, she was in a lot of pain when walking and lost her zest for life. Some things that happen as you age can be dealt with. She refused to get knee replacement surgery but agreed to take Glucosamine with Chondroitin, proven to replace cartilage. Her knees improved and she resumed walking and swimming with a more youthful step. Weight training and cardio keeps you healthier. Don’t neglect yourself and blame it on age. At least fight from a health standpoint! Fit and healthy is attractive at any age!

Young people usually have much more energy than older folks but wisdom teaches us how to utilize what we have more efficiently. Young people often burn out by not thinking before acting. We can compete by knowing our bodies’ limitations and creating ways do things with the energy we have. People see me as very energetic, and I am. But I’m more conscious of not wasting it. That allows me to have what I need. Supplements and good nutrition help too!

Celebrate your birthday. When I was younger, I was scared of getting older. In college, girls mourned their twenty-first birthday. It seemed ridiculous but also gave me a message about aging. For years I didn’t celebrate my birthday. There seemed nothing worth celebrating in getting older. Then my
self-esteem kicked in. I realized I'm the same person, no matter what my age. And if I take loving care of myself, I can continue looking good. I began a tradition I still carry on. Every year on my birthday, friends meet me at the same restaurant. I only invite people I care about because I want to be surrounded by positive energy to celebrate my special day. It’s not just a birthday party. I consider it a celebration of my acceptance of getting older.

**Tips for Staying Young at Any Age**

W. Somerset Maugham said, “Old age has its pleasures, which, though different, are not less than the pleasures of youth.” Our youth oriented society creates a perception that aging is unattractive. Open your eyes! Look at all the “older” men and women who are thoroughly enjoying life way beyond their middle years. Yes, we change. But we have the power to create the perception of how we age. I KNOW I keep getting better. Most people I interact with agree. If I felt negatively, it would show. Don’t forget Descartes’ wisdom: “I think, therefore I am.” Think that you get better as you get older and others will see it too! A good life isn’t measured by years. What counts are the joyful experiences. Here are tips for enjoying life at any age.

- Expand yourself. Continue taking classes and learning how to do new things.
* Choose to only spend time with positive people.

* Laugh—a lot. Laugh at the changes in your body instead of mourning them.

* Stop and take more pleasure in life’s simple joys.

* Join organizations. Get involved in activities and causes.

* Walk regularly.

* Do whatever you can to maintain and improve your health.

* Limit commiserating with friends about your ailments. Share your joys.

* Create a support system of good friends.

* Don’t just pass time. It’s your life boys and girls - you can’t enjoy it when it’s gone, so make the most of it now!

* There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will have truly defeated age. * Sophia Loren, actress
Chapter 9: Confidence Boosters

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb. Winston Churchill

Confidence stimulates trust in your abilities and helps you face fears. It's one of the most attractive qualities you can possess. The nice thing about this precious tool is that it's accessible if you want it. Let's break habits that let confidence busters block good self-esteem! It makes it easier to love yourself.

FEAR: THE EVERYTHING BUSTER
Men succeed when they realize that their failures are the preparation for their victories.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Do you worry, “what if?” Does your mind simulate a paintbrush, creating pictures of what might happen? When you give “what ifs?” credence, you suffer whether it happens or not. If you want to paint, take an art class! Why stress over what may not occur - unless you like tormenting yourself? An unknown author said, “Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday and all is well.” Think about it. Things have a way of working out without worrying.

Fear of Failure

In the last years I’ve been a pillar of non-failure. Yep. Not one failure in ten years. Are you jealous? Hello!

You can live failure-free too. Memorize this: IF YOU DON'T QUIT, YOU CAN'T FAIL!!! I don't stop trying.

Mistakes don’t mean failure. They teach what doesn’t work. Thomas Edison said, “I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that don’t work.” Look what he accomplished! If you don’t make mistakes, you’re not trying hard enough! If what you try doesn’t work, you have no less than before. Trying is an accomplishment!
If you’re busy trying not to goof up, there’s less energy for creating a happier life. Carolyn says, “On a daily basis, I try to take things in as constructive a way as is humanly possible.” When things go wrong, reinterpret what happened and put it into a more realistic, loving framework. Ask yourself:

- What would I say to a friend in this situation to make him or her feel better?
- Are there any earth shattering consequences that will ruin my life?
- What wasn’t I paying attention to?
- What things did I do well or right?
- What one thing do I now see that I could have done differently?
- What are my different options for handling a similar situation?
- What baby step can I take to begin again?
- What would it take for me to accept that a mistake doesn’t make me a failure?

If you take a failure personally, get into the habit of telling yourself to stop it—out loud! Keep what doesn’t go right in perspective. Do you try to succeed, or just avoid failure? It’s crazy. Fear of failure makes us fail! Emily sees this:

I have a lot of talents and abilities, but haven’t accomplished much in my life because I haven’t gone and done things, taken risks, and tried. I never
set goals and went after them; I acted to get approval from others. I think this passivity results from my parents' emphasis in my childhood on doing things well (i.e. getting excellent grades). There was no tolerance for not doing things well. So trying new things is very scary; I still would rather do nothing and be safe than risk doing something badly.

Are you better at blaming yourself if something goes wrong than at taking credit for what you do well? Own your successes! Pride is empowering and can balance what doesn't work. Do you analyze mistakes to death? That wastes energy you can use to fix them. Ask for help. No one can do everything! A Chinese proverb says, “Ask a question and be a fool for five minutes. Do not ask a question and be a fool forever.” I’ll take the five-minute silly time! Elli advises:

Work, reasonably, on your weaknesses while noticing your strengths. Don’t avoid what produces stress if it's necessary to forward your vision. Do something even when it's terrifying or forgive yourself for procrastinating. Surround yourself with support before you need it. Take full responsibility for your life and pursue your dreams, while knowing you can't do it all alone.
Robert F. Kennedy said, “Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.” Even if you don’t succeed at first, a good attempt is satisfying if you don’t berate yourself for not getting the brass ring immediately. Glenn says, “When I do something I was nervous about, I feel proud, no matter what happens.” Each baby step is a small confidence booster that makes the next easier, IF you acknowledge it. I pat myself on the back when I try something I worried about. Just putting in the effort boosts me up. Dee says, “As I get older, I have more of an ‘oh, well, try something different’ attitude when I don’t get what I strive for.” When things go wrong, take time to adjust. It’s okay to feel lousy at first. But don’t beat yourself up. Just accept it happened. Breathe. Then distract yourself with something constructive. DT says:

I have a “C’est la vie” approach to life. Life is too short to get hung up on the minutia. If I will be in a situation that I think may diminish my self-confidence, I try to prepare for it. If there is no way to prepare, C’est la vie, there is nothing I can do, and I can’t blame myself.
Identify what helps lift you out of a bad mood: go to the gym, walk, get a massage, call a friend. When I goof, I say, “Who cares!” And I don’t. I look for alternatives, instead of chiding me. Frank struggles. “I think I am more successful than I allow myself to feel. Indecisiveness at times holds me back. I can be rock-solid confident or filled with self-doubt.” Own ALL positives, not just big ones!! Being a happy, persevering, not yet successful but trying un-failure is better than being a victim! Been both and it’s empowering to not be a failure anymore. Make each roadblock you conquer an empowering step. Stop using the word “failure!”

Getting Out of the Fear Box

Some scared people create an invisible box around themselves. The walls, built with bricks molded by fear, set boundaries that only allow specific acceptable conditions inside. Scared people try to control who and what they allow into their lives. The more fear, the more you try to control those around you and dodge what doesn’t fit. Scared people prefer familiar, even if it’s negative, since they already have defenses and don’t want to risk learning new ones. We get silly about protecting ourselves. But confidence can’t develop in a box!
Neither can happiness, since the walls also block sunshine. Craig said in a counseling session:

_I never thought I was afraid and blamed bad luck. I never met decent women and was stuck in a job I hated. You showed me I was stuck inside a box I created. Bad luck didn't stop me. I couldn't risk rejection so I avoided good women and I was afraid to leave my comfortable job. I once sent out resumes and got turned down—enough failure! Now I know I won't get what I want until I'm open to finding the right gal and pursue a more stimulating job. Persevere is new in my vocabulary. I feel more hopeful and less afraid to take chances. I don't want to live in a box._

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**FACT: Every problem brings an opportunity to get smarter.**

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Maintaining status quo feels safer but it's boring. Avoiding failure blocks fun and adventures. Risks are out. So are people you can't control. Do you want to live within the confines of perceived safety or rule your world? Claudia is finally starting to rule!

*My parents got mean if we weren't perfect. So I learned to protect myself. I grew into a rigid, scared woman. If I didn't get the upper hand I became*
a shrew. It was my way. Period. I finally realized I was terrified of being abused. My box had rules and expectations. I had no tolerance for those who disagreed. If they didn’t fit, I’d torment them to change, or leave. Now that I’ve recognized the box I hide in, I’m trying to get out. It’s hard. And scary. But I try small new things each day to get used to life outside the box. The fear that drove me into it is dissipating with each step I take out of it.

The only one who can get you out of the box is you. Awareness of your patterns helps. Pay attention. When you live in a box, you’re not in control. Fear is. Even if you try to control everything around you, ultimately, fear makes you lose out. It’s hard to be happy in a box. Use some of my tools to come out and play!

If You Face Your Fears They Really Do Go Away

In his First Inaugural Address, Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” How true! Often fear is worse than reality. So how do you beat it? By doing what you’re scared of. It’s not easy. Things will scare you but it gets easier. I know, that’s simple to say but hard to do. I’ve learned to peel off the layers of fears. When you’re scared, ask yourself what’s the
worst that can happen? Then ask whether you can cope with it. Be honest.
You don't have to like the outcome but will it stop your life? Often we realize we can handle most things.

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FACT: Worrying serves no purpose except to make you feel lousy.

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Identifying what scares me puts fear into perspective. I did a firewalk and learned there's always choices. I didn't worry about burning my feet on the hot coals. I identified the worst that could happen and my options. If my feet burned I could jump off onto the wet grass. Could I handle it? I'd be embarrassed but could handle that. Instead of worrying about burning my feet, I focused on my options and finished. It was empowering to conquer fear.

After, I wrote down, “I walked on fire. I can do anything I choose.” It's still on my mirror. When fear hits, remember:

* It's normal to get scared to try new things. If you choose to take risks and live fully, there will always be things that scare you.

* Identify what exactly you're afraid of. What specifically scares you?

Standing up to a colleague? Asking for a raise? Making your partner angry?

Speaking to a group?
*Ask what's the worst result in that situation.* Your colleague gets cold? Your boss says "no"? Your partner gets angry and leaves? You forget your speech?

* Decide how you'll cope. Can you handle the results? If your colleague ignores you, you'll live. If you don't get a raise, you're not losing money. If your partner is irritable, it will pass. If you forget your speech, make a joke and refer to your notes.

* Learn to see choices in situations. It's your choice to let a result hurt you. There are always options if you look. Plan a backup before taking action. Put out feelers for other jobs. Have fun things planned and friends who'll support you if you lose someone.

*Look for something positive in the result. “At least... “ Fill in the blank. You still have a job. You've learned a lesson. You see who your real friends are. You took control and overcame fear! That's very powerful! Hold onto it!

**EXERCISE:** List things you've done that scared you, no matter how small.

What fear did you feel?

I regularly ask what's the worst that can happen and how can I handle it and go through the layers of possibilities. This works well in stressful
situations. For example, I was driving to a lecture. Traffic snagged. I was afraid I'd be late. *What's the worst that can happen?* Answers: *I won't get a good seat; People might stare as I walk in; I'd miss the beginning.* Could I cope? *I'd still enjoy it from the back; I could endure 2 minutes of attention till I sat down. I'd speak to someone about what I missed.* It was liberating to relax, knowing I'd cope. Make it a habit to identify possible outcomes of your fears and find ways to deal with them. Remember Eleanor Roosevelt’s wise words:

> You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop and look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, "I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along."...you must do the things you think you cannot do.

Become pro-active in situations where you lack confidence! Try something new, even if it doesn’t work, instead convincing yourself you can’t. No matter what their facade, intimidating people are human. Picture them in human situations and laugh. No one is better than you are, unless you make them so. Dissect individual fears. Ask why something scares you. Debra says:

> Self-esteem helps to eliminate, or at least control fear. With self-esteem, you just feel the fear and do it anyway, whatever it is you want to do.
When you have positive self-esteem, you live your life the way that you want to, within your own boundaries, not someone else's.

Use spiritual power to control fear. Veronica says, “I remind myself almost daily that I'm a Child of God and He loves me.” Faith supports you. Affirmations reinforce it. I trust in the Universe to take care of me. When fear brews, repeat it until you calm down.

Affirmations distract you. It's hard to think two things at once. So create an affirmation to at least temporarily diffuse fear, instead of using a “what if?” to fuel it. Then take the first step to do what scares you. I repeated, “I can do this” all the way across the hot coals. I still visualize it when I'm scared.

DARING TO GO BEYOND

Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk.

Dalai Lama

People question my lifestyle. Since my divorce I've lived somewhat on the edge—no traditional financial security—by living off my talents. I try new things and travel alone. I'm not crazy, as some think. When you trust your ability to
survive and flourish, life feels secure. Trying new things, and those that scare me, increase my self-esteem, which boosts my desire and motivation to do even more! I bet I'm happier than 99.999% of those who takes a safe path.

**EXERCISE:** Write down what scares you right now. What's the worst that can happen?

**Here I Go!**

Successful folks know risks are part of achievement. Sometimes your attempts may not pan out. But if you never try, nothing does. James Carville said on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, “You’ll never be a winner unless you’re willing to lose.” Each risk builds armor for taking more. The more you take, the better self-image and the more risks you want to take. Debra agrees:

> A man I was involved with saw things in me which he helped me develop. He encouraged and challenged me to take risks, try new experiences, and not be afraid to be the person I really was inside.
The more I did, the more I wanted to do. My true character came out - no one ever encouraged it to blossom before. The more I did, the more it boosted my self-esteem.

Fear makes you cop out of doing what you'd like. Avoiding failure keeps you stuck in the safety zone—leaving dreams in bed. Don't be afraid of risks. Often, the worst outcome is you have to wait for what you want, or change direction. Not getting something on the first try isn't failure. Let's not be instant gratification pigs! Take small steps toward desires. Elli advises:

Take sensible risks, without knocking the pins from under yourself. Know it's never too late yet understand that when everything doesn't work perfectly and instantly, nothing happens until you're ready for it. And forgive yourself when you realize you've forgotten these things yet again and gotten despondent, attached to and/or impatient with your results!

**EXERCISE:** List your excuses for avoiding what you're afraid of failing at. Put an X next to each when you catch yourself and don't use it. Applaud yourself. When you have 10 X's by an excuse, cross it out and give yourself a thumb's up.
You must take risks to live fully! The safe lane avoids stuff that enhances life. When my self-esteem was low, I passed time in a comatose state. Why be bored when you can be excited? Why dream wistfully? Being too scared to take a risk keeps self-esteem in the rut fear creates. Risk getting out of the box to live! Tami says:

Taking risks makes me feel alive! Whether it's bungee jumping from a cable car in the Swiss Alps, skydiving in Montana, or riding the subway alone at night in New York City, I can't get enough! There's nothing like a quickening pulse, sweaty palms, and eyes wide with amazement to give me a rush. I need it, I crave it, and I can't imagine a life without it.

Testing my limits is a great confidence booster. Overcoming my fears of something scary makes me feel like a champion-prize fighter! Nothing in the world makes me more sure of myself than facing a frightening challenge and coming out on top. Just when I think can't do something, I go full force and push myself to conquer the formidable task, which leaves me feeling fulfilled in unimaginable ways. Although I don't jump from airplanes every day, I am always looking for new and exciting ways to experience my life. I only have one, and I plan on making the most of it!
Fake confidence until it's real! Even fake stuff feels better and strengthens your ability to face fears.

Remember Descartes, “I think, therefore I am.” I bet you’ve faked stuff. Use the confidence boosters below. Take an acting class to learn techniques for controlling your demeanor and to project yourself. I’m serious! It provides practice for controlling your façade. You can slowly stop feeling insecure. Act the role of the person you strive to be. Settling doesn’t bring happiness. Safety, yes. Security, maybe. Happy, no. Wishing won’t work. It’s hard to find a wish fairy to do what you won’t. To achieve you must work to make it happen. Emily says:

*I recently made my first pie! This is a total departure for me. My mother made cakes and cookies but never pies; I'd never seen anyone make a pie; I don't even own a rolling pin. My former boss told me how to make the crust. I'd always thought piecrust was terribly difficult, but it came out OK! This is a small thing, but one example of how I can decide to do anything I want and go out and make it happen—even totally "not me" things.*
Be spontaneous. Initiate a social activity with someone you'd like to know better. Go somewhere you've never been. Expand your wardrobe with new colors and styles. Try a new recipe. Kim says, “I don’t allow myself too much time to think about scary situations. I just plunge ahead before I have time to second-guess myself.” Breaking habits of automatically rejecting new scenarios slowly lowers walls. Don't do everything. Try one small new thing at a time.

Would you prefer to feel safe or be happy? Once confidence develops and you live without walls, enjoy both. Start with realistic risks—the most do-able ones. Congratulate yourself for the courage to try. When you overcome a fear, revel in how special that is.

**EXERCISE:** Be unrealistic: list EVERYTHING, big and small, you'd like to do or experience before you die. EVERYTHING! Read it regularly. Add more.

Choose the easiest first and make a plan. As you reach a goal, check it off.

Michele left several bad relationships and felt unprepared to find a good job. She was very insecure when she moved into an apartment over her parent’s garage. They encouraged her as she took baby steps to find a job and learn new skills. Her first job led to a better one. Michele’s confidence grew with each step. She developed good skills and learned a valuable lesson:
I had less need to drink, and more need to exercise, write, draw, sculpt—things that challenge me and make me feel good about myself. Forcing myself to deal with something unfamiliar or challenging often boosts my confidence because I discover that perceived obstacles are surmountable, or even nonexistent. Overcoming fears makes me feel powerful.

Develop yourself by observing people you admire. I call it CPW: Constructive People Watching. If you’re uncomfortable in a specific situation, observe someone who does it well. Are you shy? Watch those who assert themselves in ways you’d like to. Specifically how do they approach people? What do they talk about? Watch how someone you respect talks to others or handle sticky situations. Pay attention to qualities you’d like. Emulate them! Try all to find a good fit. Nobody starts with the ability to handle everything. You can learn! Gordon did:

Larry got along with my boss Jim. I didn’t. I complained to a co-worker about how Jim favored Larry. When I said Jim didn’t like me, she laughed. Jim was abrasive and treated most people like he treated me. While I bristled and pushed Jim’s buttons, Larry was pleasant, speaking softly to avoid setting Jim off. He let Jim talk but did what he saw fit, instead of trying to get Jim to see his point. I watched Larry to understand how to
handle Jim. When I emulated him, Jim responded well. Now I respect Larry more for finding ways to deal with our ornery boss ands learned his tricks!

**EXERCISE:** Create a CPW blueprint: Choose a role model, or several. List specifics ways they handle themselves in different situations. How do they communicate? Carry themselves? What do you like about them? Imitate how she expresses herself and her temperament. What would he do? Fake until you find your way to absorb those qualities into your own style.

As your confidence increases, try a bolder move. Emily was proud when she bought an apartment in NYC on her modest income. She says, “I saved well for years and had an excellent credit history. It was a big, scary thing to do on my own, but I love being a homeowner and am proud I had the guts to do it.” Emily didn’t just get an apartment. She saw she’s capable of getting what she wants. A risk to improve your quality of life is priceless! Cristina learned this:

*Moving to a new city and having to live independently has made me feel that I proved myself, that I’m strong and can do anything. It also showed*
me that no matter where I go, the person I am remains that same and that person is a good person.

Here’s What I Want!
As you accept that you’re a good person and increase self-love, the more you’ll speak up. Asking for a little rarely gets a lot. Ask for what you want. Do you want a discount? Don’t wait for an offer—ASK for it! Is someone at work leaving in a position you’d like? Express interest immediately and tell why you can do the job. ASK how to proceed. Do you deserve a raise? ASK! Write down your assets to convince yourself and ASK! People can’t read minds. Lori shared with a group:

Since I was brought up to do what I’m told, I never questioned anything at work. I’m in a small cubicle at a big company. People with lesser positions have bigger offices. I’ve complained to friends but never to my boss. When someone quit, I was dying for their space. I stewed, thinking they should give it to me. But someone relatively new got it. Later, I casually mentioned to my boss that I wish I’d gotten it. She said she wished I’d asked, as she’d have preferred me closer. She assumed I liked my space or I’d have said something. Now I force myself to speak up for what I want.
Act entitled to what you want. Even if inner voices say you’re not good enough. Even if you’re afraid of being turned down or you’re not 100% sure. If you don’t sound like you believe it, why would others? Acting serious gives you more credence. You’re entitled to a promotion and to take vacation days when you can use your family house and to ask for the larger cookie and to represent your company at a conference. Raise your expectations! The worst that can happen is you get turned down. You can handle that! Get into the habit of asking like you expect to get it. You just might get it!

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ACCOMPLISHMENT ROAD WARRIOR

Accept the challenges so that you may feel the exhilaration of victory. George S. Patton

It’s logical that going after what you want builds confidence and makes you happier. Don’t limit your wish list. Realistic wishes are possible ones, even if you don’t believe they are for you: a vacation in Fiji, new car, terrific new career, getting a degree. I used to ponder great things I could do as I’d fall asleep, but talk myself out of them. Why dream if you can’t have the reality?
Harnessing Dream Power

We’re all capable of making dreams come true. Don’t wait until you feel too old to go after them. It’s your choice: continue being a dreamer or become someone with a purpose. Often dreams don’t get fulfilled because of unworthy feelings, fear of trying, or concern with what others will think. Isabel says, “I spent too much time worrying about what other people would say about my opinions, dreams, desires.” Is disapproval worse than sitting home brooding over why others get goodies and you don’t? I’ve realized many dreams. It’s fun and empowering!

For me, happiness is a successful goal in itself. My neighbor Marcy always smiles. She says her mom never pressured her about what to do or how to look. Instead, she encouraged Marcy to have fun with whatever she does. Do you try to have fun? Life is too short not to enjoy it. Marcy lives with the intention of having fun in all endeavors. It shows in her demeanor. She’s happy with herself and enjoys life. When having fun in whatever you do is a goal, life seems less of a struggle. I seek fun with everything!

Do you live passively or on purpose? Waiting for things to happen doesn’t contribute to happiness. Live on purpose! Get in touch with what you’d like to do and consciously go after it. The more things you try, the more chances of finding what makes you happy. Achieving what you want is very empowering.
Dee says, “Accomplishment breeds self-esteem.” Do you like two for the price of one deals? Go accomplish and get better self-esteem and self-love too!

Don’t go for everything at once. Goals don’t have to be reached today. What’s important is taking a step. Don’t burn yourself out. Been there, done that too. No sleep, feeling run down, being discouraged, etc. become roadblocks. Be careful. Handle yourself with care as you proceed. Steady driving with lots of love and attention to your well-being inspires more in the long run. Set fair goals in teeny increments. Each baby step builds momentum. Beating fear is an achievement. So is being resourceful on your way to achieving a goal.

Get into the habit of applauding yourself for each bit of progress. Did you locate your resume to rewrite it? Yeah! Call a tourist office for brochures on travel? Hurray! Start going out more with friends if you know your relationship needs to end? Good for you! Gather info on the internet to relocate to another city? Great! You don’t have to reach the final goal to applaud yourself. A positive step is reason enough to pat yourself on the back and feel good about doing something for you. That’s love chickadees! Be loving to yourself with good self-deeds. Elli says:
I came back to my dreams, 15 years after giving up "for this lifetime," thinking I was hopeless. I've learned to take the next step—any action in the direction of what may appear hopeless—and take stock of my progress. I found incredible teachers to help me nurture me, my dreams and life.

Find real support. Take credit for attracting good support, good information, good people. Share it.

EXERCISE: Write down problems as they arise, but choose specific times to ponder them. Get into something comfy, sip wine or tea, and list every possible solution for each. It helps organize fears and actions to feel more in control. Try to only ponder them during the allotted times.

Get Off Your Buts

"I would do this but..." But is an excuse—a 3-letter dream-buster. You can always find a “but” if you’re scared. “But” is a small word with big impact.

Break the habit of stopping yourself with “butts.” Andrew learned:

I was a big talker BUT—I always had reasons not to follow through. I’d quit my job, BUT—I had school loans to repay. I had great ideas BUT—no time to pursue them. I wanted to marry Joanie BUT—I had those other BUTs to deal with first. Joanie said she didn’t want a BUT-man, pun intended, and was tired of watching me stop myself. I took a second job and paid off my
loan. Then I married Joanie, quit my job, and pursued my dreams. It seemed easier to make excuses than try, but once I took the first step, my confidence grew and I was okay. It's better to do what you like.

Treat life as an internship to learn new things and grow. Instead of thinking in terms of taking a risk, find something you'd like to do and approach it as an intern would. See it as a learning experience, a trial and error situation—not a potential for failure. Work for free if necessary to learn a skill. Read up on it. People don't expect too much from an intern. Try living as one in your mind for a while to free yourself.

You don't have to know what to do in order to change things in your life. Just be open to change. If you put faith in your higher being, and listen, you'll find your way. Even if change is uncomfortable, find joy and empowerment in trying. You can get past “buts” if you know you'll be spiritually supported. Stop making excuses for why you can’t do something. Bust the “buts”! Fight them! Knock them off their pedestals! Why stop yourself from going after what you want with “buts”? Sit on your butt and use “but” to get nowhere or, get off your butt and your “buts” to overcome obstacles if you want to succeed. Obstacles are often as big as you make them, or as manageable as you make them.
EXERCISE: Create a ME folder. Save letters of praise, emails with compliments—anything that recognizes a positive in you. List all compliments and include them. Add photos or souvenirs from happy times. If you feel down, go through it to fortify how terrific you are and how nice life can be.

Working Happiness

Is your job satisfying or just a paycheck? An unfulfilling one is a downer. I was pushed to teach school, which I never wanted to do. After divorcing, I stayed in the burbs and was miserable. My best friend asked what I’d like. I wanted to live in Manhattan and do something I enjoyed. BUT, how would I find a good apartment? At least teaching paid my bills. She gave a pep talk and kicked my butts and butt. I found a fantastic rent stabilized apartment in the city and have been smiling ever since.

I began workshops on the music industry and loved it! My self-empowerment grew as I became a whole person. My personal growth from my journey into self and I began doing counseling. Two years after moving, I burned my teaching license renewal and swore to only do what I love. It motivated me to work harder and get books...
published. People think I've been a well-known writer forever, because of my accomplishments and high profile. My first book was published in '97. Prior to that I was an explorer, using my resources to develop a satisfying career. Faith ensures I'll always have enough. It works! Even when things get slow, an opportunity always presents itself! I expect it and live fearlessly in faith.

It's a risk to change your job or career. Why risk your security? Because satisfaction in your professional life enhances your overall well-being. Frank says, “Starting a new career two years ago has strengthened my self-esteem.” Hey, it's your life! You spend a chunk of time working. Why compromise that much happiness? Not liking what you do often reinforces not feeling good about yourself. Do you rationalize that security is most important? While security does increase happiness, a satisfying career brings tenfold. There are factors to consider. Are you:

* Bored?

* Not using your skills?

* Making much less money than you’re worth?

* Unhappy with how your boss treats you?

* In a dead end position?

* Counting days till retirement in twenty years?
People may encourage you to stay. Why leave a steady job if a new one may pay less or not work out? Because stagnating in one that doesn't stimulate you, or feeling unappreciated, hurts self-love. If your job doesn't challenge as you'd like, challenge yourself! Are you confident in your abilities? If not, take a class or practice to improve. Lesley told me:

_I was bored with my job and wanted to travel so I became a flight attendant. I applied and got the job. I knew it had to be. I put myself into terrible debt to do it but it was okay. I knew the Universe would support me. I never worry about money because I always know when I need it, it will be here._

Do you love yourself enough to do what might make you happier? Take a risk. Don't adopt other people's fears. It's natural for those who care to worry. They may not understand. Oh well! Discouraging words don't mean they doubt your ability. Family and friends may follow a traditional path with the safest, most predictable route. Many are scared of change. Don't allow their fears to snag you. Decide what makes you happy. If your heart urges making a move, give it serious thought. Ultimately, your decision should please YOU. Amy says:
I took a gamble by one career where I was successful, to enter another, where I was untried. I went from a safe place professionally to a risky one. Of course I am glad that I succeeded, but having the courage to make the leap was a success in itself, one of which I am very proud.

Some people see any change as risky. But risks increase self-esteem. Do what you love! While you still have a job, do volunteer work to learn a new field and make contacts. Teria doubted she could have a music industry career. Now she knows she can learn what's needed. She came from Milwaukee to my music industry seminars and said, “I feel with hard work I can achieve it. I made this trip alone and know that’s wonderful. I'd never been to New York,”

Develop self-esteem at work by tuning into your skills and attributes. Gather references. Explore options slowly. Save your money. Show yourself lots of love. Harness the necessary faith to go for yours. It may be scary at first. You might have to budget. But a satisfying career will prove itself worth the initial discomfort. You can go back to a boring, secure job if the new one doesn't work out. Allow faith in a higher being, and in yourself, to give you courage to take a job risk. A satisfying job makes life more beautiful! Judy agrees: “Building my self-esteem has been a gradual process of baby steps
leading to bigger things. The most liberating of all things I did thus far was quitting a good career job to work for myself.”

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“I RULE!”

I’d rather regret the things that I have done than the things that I have not.

Lucille Ball

“I rule my world!” Say it over and over and over. Make this affirmation your reality. Below are some confidence boosters. Use them to empower you.

Know that you rule! If you show insecurity, you’ll come across as insecure. Why would anyone want to hire you if you act like you don’t trust yourself? Why would a healthy person want a relationship with someone like that? Know that you rule! Even if you don’t quite know it, fake it. It can sink in as you practice—if you want it to!

Fake it till it’s real. Doing something over and over creates a habit. Pretend you’re the most competent, attractive, smartest, individual in the universe. Laugh inside but practice acting until the persona fits. This may sound silly but it works! I’m often scared to death but appear confident. On my first TV appearances, I was terrified. But I looked in the mirror and affirmed I’d
be fine. I took deep breaths and acted confident while shaking inside. People don’t pay nearly as much attention as you think, so it’s easy to hide insecurity behind a façade of confidence. It’s fun when you realize you’re no longer faking! Now I’m everything I used to fake.

**Talk to yourself.** Since I’m my best friend, I encourage myself. In scary situations, I go to a mirror and say, “I’m Daylle Deanna Schwartz and am good enough to….” Or “I know I can do it.” Or “I can handle this situation.” Sometimes I repeat it like an affirmation to feel the power of my words. You CAN do it. This is from someone who never believed she’d do anything right!

**Take deep breaths before speaking.** Remember the breathing discussed in Chapter 3? Trying to sound confident is stressful. Taking slow, deep breaths keeps you calmer.

**Keep a positive attitude.** If you sound positive, people think you are. This is part of faking till you make it. Speaking in a positive tone makes you sound confident.

**Smile.** People wonder what you’re up to! Nervous people don’t smile. They may giggle at inappropriate times but without a confident smile. Smiling triggers confidence by stimulating good body chemicals. The act of smiling feels good. Polish your teeth and show them!
Develop a confident stance. Straightening up promotes overall well-being and relaxation. You’re judged by how you carry yourself. Stand straight and arch your shoulders with your head held high. People will see an image of confidence and take you more seriously. It sets a tone for their immediate perception of you. Good posture makes you feel more powerful.

Make eye contact. Insecure people have a harder time doing it. Force yourself to make eye contact when you speak. Don’t stare a person down but look into their eyes a lot.

Show a sense of humor. Being able to make others laugh gives the impression that you’re confident enough to crack some humor. It puts others at ease and keeps you from seeming too serious. Humor makes you look more relaxed with yourself.

Polish your balls! In situations where someone challenges your ability and you feel unsure, challenge back. Ask questions to buy time to think. For example, if someone questions your ability to do a job, ask what specifically elicits concern. Put the person on the spot to prove it. Don’t get defensive if someone tries to put you on the spot or show you up. Make them own up to what they say. Defensiveness doesn’t impress. Asking questions back shows confidence.
How Do I Love Me? Let Me Count the Ways http://howdoiloveme.com
I'm a recovering DoorMat! Growing up in a loving environment taught me to give unconditionally. I wasn't prepared for the outside world of people who liked taking. I suffered from DMS (DoorMat Syndrome) for many years. Being accommodating was as natural as breathing. When I finally realized people took advantage, I didn't know how to change. How could I dare to say no? Giving myself away was like an insurance policy that I’d have friends. I thought so little of myself that I was afraid I'd be alone if I stopped. But DoorMats aren't happy.
If you let a man kick you once, he'll kick you two or three times. Bluesman Corey Harris

People with DMS sacrifice themselves to please to others. It’s time to put your needs first—not in a selfish way—to show yourself the love you deserve. Making others more important keeps good self-esteem down. DMSers dilute their power to be happy. Say, “No more!”

Being A DoorMat

When I was on Oprah, we discussed whether people preferred being liked or respected. Overwhelmingly, the audience said being liked was more important. Much more! Girls are encouraged to please. Many of you guys were also raised to be nice. But being nice shouldn’t be a self-esteem buster! If your whole being, your social life, your security, and your sense of self hinges on being nice, that’s not nice to you—that’s being a DoorMat. My client Tasha says:

I hated the word nice. People praised me for being nice but it reinforced what a sucker I was. I wanted to ignore people’s demands but couldn’t.

“You’re such a nice girl.” I’d smile but wince inside. I knew I was a wuss to
do what others expected of me. When you asked me to define “nice” it made me think. Nice for them or for me? I want nice for me and not to be a DoorMat anymore. Just that realization gave me a boost. I’m slowly learning to put my energy into being nice to me.

Why does the DMS bug bite so many of us? Friends “like” us more when we cater to them. Someone may stay in a romantic relationship longer if you’re giving and supportive. You want to own your power, yet worry that people won’t like you if you don’t cater to them. But, the reality of knowing they’re with you because of what you do or how you make them feel hurts your feelings and sense of self. And, giving your all to someone is no guarantee they’ll give to you, or stick around. Feel pride in who you are and stop buying people!

It's natural to want to be liked. But YOU is too high a price! Do you think it’s not nice to turn people down? NOT! People pleasers lose their identity. Before gaining consciousness, I had no identity on my own, except DoorMat. A positive identity is possible by redefining “nice.” Are you afraid of losing companionship and attention that being agreeable brings? I'd treat “friends” to dinner or a movie to avoid going alone. It took years to realize I was still lonely and couldn’t count on those I sucked up to. When you’re always there
for others, they take you for granted. Does playing it safe seem better than setting boundaries? It’s not.

**The Truth About Being A DoorMat**

I've learned that many people like me without perks. I don’t want the others. It took years to accept that it's possible to be nice and considerate to everyone and still give my needs priority. DoorMats are often only wanted for their favors. When you stop, or people don't need anything, friends can become history. Gary says:

> I had revolving friends–there when they needed something–disappearing until they needed more. I can fix things and people took advantage. I felt good being around people and helping out, but lousy when they forgot me.

> I was Mr. DoorMat–fixer of everyone. Now I've fixed the problem of being used. I've made a few good friends who appreciate me and no longer answer when users call. A big feeling of empowerment hit me recently. I have more energy for me!

There's a big difference between being nice and being a DoorMat. Nice DOES NOT mean saying yes to everyone or agreeing with everything. I'm a very nice person but no longer try to please everyone. You CAN put YOUR needs first and still be nice to others. Pleasing others at your own expense
isn’t nice. That’s a DoorMat! A considerate person with kind intentions and self-respect is nice. DoorMats go overboard to please and call it “being nice.” Acting like your needs don’t matter, encourages users and shows you don’t value yourself. True nice people balance being kind to others with pleasing themselves. You can be nice without giving it away.

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FACT: No matter what you do, there will be people who won’t like you, and that’s okay.

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Affirm often: “It’s okay to not help everyone.” Striving to make people like you for what you do for them creates a sense of temporary security, but lowers self-esteem. Buying friends with favors, or more, alleviates loneliness for the moment but feels lousy. Been there, done that! Why spend money on what others want while your desires get ignored? Is this the kind of “nice” you want to be? Are you happy? Allow me to point you in a better direction!

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CHANGING DIRECTIONS

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. Carl Bard
It's time to take charge of what you do, and don't do! Believing that you should be the limitless caretaker of everyone is hogwash! It's not loving to let yourself be drained by others. You can be nice to them while being nicer to you.

Accepting Yourself As #1

After taking control of my DoorMat ways, I cut off most people and spent a year getting in touch with me, doing activities solo and consciously developing self-appreciation. I learned to nurture my needs, without losing the nice values my parents taught me. Studies show that successful people list "myself" their most important priority. Ask yourself what you get out of being a people pleaser. Do the people you help do things that make you happy? Become VERY conscious of what you're getting, or not getting. I had few real benefits. Others can't fill your voids. Only you can! Take care of you, since those who enjoy taking from you won't. Kim says:

*I'm an UN-DoorMat now. I used to give to everyone but me. What helped turn it around was being asked what I got out of it. Only occasional
companionship that I couldn’t count on. I’d gotten into a habit of being the
go-to person. Go-to Kim for whatever you need. After being let down too
much, I paid attention to why I should help each individual and found few
good reasons. So I did more for me for the first time, three years ago.
Now I give more than I ever did as a DoorMat. I like being kind but I
expect nothing and it’s okay. I feel good helping just to be kind, instead of
so they’ll like me.

I'm #1 in my life. You should be #1 in yours. That doesn’t mean skimping
on others. The more you love yourself, the more you'll have for them. Being
kind is wonderful. But don’t forget that self-love begins with kindness to you.
Sometimes when I'm feeling out of control, I say, “focus on self,” over and
over. It brings me back to what’s most important - me! Elizabeth adds, “The
fact is, being a little self-centered is good. You develop your own interests and
cultivate your own life.” Be legitimately nice for the right reasons. Happily nice
I call it. That’s where you do nice things for people just because. You’re not
trying to buy favors or sacrifice yourself. Being nice for the right reasons
makes your sense of self more positive.

Finding Balance
Create comfortable boundaries but beware. People may desert you if you're no longer on agreeable autopilot. Your friendship, not favors should be the perk. You can't be everything to all people if you want time for you. Accept this. You're ONE person.

Make choices based on what's best for your well-being.

So how do you set boundaries? Decide what you want and don't want and gently let others know with your response to their actions and requests. Would you rather be used/taken for granted or stop that pattern, even if someone doesn't like it? It takes time to accept it's okay to not please everyone. Setting boundaries is a critical tool for building self-empowerment. Identify your own needs and set boundaries accordingly.

I no longer fret if people don't like me because I turn them down. I set individual boundaries to decide who I can help—not based on what the person will do for me but just, do I want to help? I ask myself, “Is doing this specific favor okay for me?” Often it is, if I have time. When I'm busy, I say so. I'll go out of my way more for someone close to me. I may turn down those who treated me poorly. Or I still might, if I'm not inconvenienced. What goes
around, comes around. Find compromises. For example, I won’t play chauffeur but if I’m going out, I’ll tell the one who asked for a ride when I’m leaving and where I can drop them on the way. My strong spiritual belief guides me to help folks if I can. Don’t go extreme and say no to everyone.

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FACT: Most people won’t treat you better than you treat yourself.

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A common lament is "I don't want to be nice anymore," from folks tired of being taken for granted and not getting what they want. Women say that bitches to get more. Men think women aren’t attracted to nice guys. They are but they’re not attracted to people pleasers! Often the desire to get over DMS sends us the other way—refusing to help anyone. That’s not the person I want to be! I tried it and didn’t like myself. You can handle situations nicely and still be satisfied. I’m a nice girl who usually gets what she wants! Nice people can finish first! When you stop being a DoorMat, maintain your basic decent nature. Truly nice people—with boundaries—are happiest, and finish first.

Setting boundaries takes patience. People must get used to them. The first time I told someone I wasn't available for a favor, they thought I was joking. "Ha ha Daylle. Now be serious and help me." It took time for some to accept
my boundaries. I lost friends. But boy did my self-love soar as I did it anyway—for me! If you refuse to be a victim, you can change your actions so people perceive you in a positive way instead of seeing you as a powerless wimp. People worth keeping will get used to the positive you. Kimberly says:

*I* continue to be a challenge to say “no.” I worry about the needs of others sometimes more than my own! My first year working as an RN taught me I cannot perform miracles. When I must say to a patient no, "you must wait," it is never easy. But it's taught me to say “no" at work and in my personal life. I'm honest, direct, gentle and firm. It really works. I feel less like a victim, or frustrated and resentful toward others. Care-giving taught me to be mindful of good self-care. I try to eat well, get adequate sleep and exercise, socialize, and spend time alone to recharge on a consistent basis!

EXERCISE: List what you don't like people to say or do to you; what you don't like others expecting of you; what you'd love to say "no" to. Use it to guide you to set boundaries.

Accepting People As Is
Don't get angry if people take advantage of you or aren't being the friend you feel they should be. It's unfair to expect others to do what you would. I wanted everyone to be what I wanted them to be until it hit me. Duh—people have a right NOT to be or do what I want. If you choose to give yourself away, don't blame them for not meeting your expectations or returning kindness. No one has to. Be conscious but don't keep score. When someone's behavior makes you sincerely unhappy, pull back a bit.

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**FACT:** Just because you'll go the distance doesn't mean anyone must go an inch for you.

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I believe in choosing battles wisely and not making everything a big deal. When people disappoint you, calmly say something like: "Your actions send a message and I'm listening." They'll respond with a different perspective instead of anger. We can expect too much. How often do you say, "I'd never do that." Well, that's you! People have a right to do things differently. I learned:

> "I love me" Tip:
> Get up and at least move around regularly at work.
I went out of my way to be considerate and got mad a lot at what I perceived as lack of consideration. “Why can’t people do things the way I would?” Charla cancelled plans one morning because she had to work. I’d have called sooner and told her that. She yelled that she’s not me. She’s heard me critically compare others to what I’d do. When I apologized, she explained how unfair I was to expect others to live my way. She wasn’t a bad person - just different. Charla warned if I don’t start accepting people as they are, I’d always be unhappily complaining. She’s right. Now I focus on what feels best for me. And if someone consistently does things I feel are wrong, I stop hanging with them.

How can you change others? You can’t. You can just say what you’d like. Don’t whine about what you don’t like. Send a message with actions. The best way to get what you want is to change your response. If someone never helps you, be busy when they ask a favor. If you’re tired of waiting for someone to tell you when they’re coming over, make your own plans. If someone regularly doesn’t follow through with what they say, take nothing they say seriously. Do all of this with a smile and without an attitude. That’s control. If someone doesn’t want to lose you, they’ll adjust. Controlling your response to others is power!
THE TRUE SELF IN SELF-ESTEEM

*Problems are to the mind what exercise is to the muscles, they toughen and make strong.*

Norman Vincent Peale

Self-love isn’t self-absorption. It includes caring about others. As you develop yourself, be careful not to nurture an overblown sense of self-importance. Even if you’re not being self-absorbed, you may be accused of it. Prepare for reactions from others that you may not like. It’s part of the road to self-love.

ME! ME! ME!

There’s a fine line between self-love and self-absorption. It’s easy to get lost in newfound self-awareness and overcompensate with too much self-indulgence or act like no one else matters, which is unhealthy for friendship. You need to be #1 in your life but not Mr./Ms. One & Only. Self-absorption can be a transitional period. Health self-love balances concern for your needs and for others. James says:
As I felt better about me, I wanted to make up for everything I’d missed.

Nobody would get in my way and made my expectations known. Mom asked what happened to her sweet boy. I growled that he was replaced by a man who people had to take seriously. She said I’d turned into a monster. I scoffed and asked my best friend if he was proud of me for developing good self-esteem. He said I didn’t have much if I had to bully people. When he described the new me, I knew this wasn’t who I wanted to be. Now I do what I can for me, but try harder to be the kind of friend I want for myself.

Self-appreciation doesn’t mean full of yourself. At first, you may tout accomplishments and demand attention to the point of nausea, to compensate for the real deal. This isn't good self-esteem and reinforces that you still need outside validation. Just impress yourself. Others will notice without your bragging. People with good self-esteem don't need to flaunt themselves or stop helping others. Be the center of your world without expecting the world to revolve around you. As your sense of self grows, control your ego and sense of entitlement. Once you recognize your strong points, the world won’t need a press release as you live it. Avoid any thoughts that the world owes you for painful experiences or things you've been deprived of. Joan shares:
Jodie is lovely, kind and giving. She was a DoorMat for years. After getting therapy she's finally taking care of herself, which is good. But her expectations are excessive. When she wants something she doesn't just ask. She puts us on the spot. After catering to everyone she now wants to be catered to. She’s proud to assert herself. Her requests are intrusive. I don’t like loaning my car but Jodie asks to borrow it with an expectant attitude. If she knows I'm making soup, she asks me to put some aside for her. I'm often shocked at what she says she asks others for. Jodie is kind to her friends so I guess she doesn't understand that it's unfair to expect so much. Lately I've been saying no and she takes it poorly. I don’t know how to tell her we owe her nothing because she used to give herself away.

You owe it to yourself to do the best you can but no one else owes you. Self-absorption isn't the antithesis of DMS. Recovering DoorMats can become overly demanding or rigid, or selfish in unhealthy ways as they learn to take care of themselves. True healing and self-love includes helping those we care about.

No Shame In Loving You
Be prepared for people saying they liked you better before you loved yourself. Don’t worry! They’ll get used to your it. Some may hate not being able to manipulate you easily. People who got a lot from you may try to shame you back to pleasing autopilot. Don’t question yourself if they try to make you feel guilty about not giving enough. It’s a ruse to keep you a DoorMat!

Another ruse is what I call poison word darts. I was called bitch when I began saying “no.” It stung. At first I ran back to pleasing. I was a “nice girl!” Nice people get called nasty names or selfish by those trying to manipulate you to return to doing everything THEIR way. If you disagree, assert your needs, express anger, limit nurturing, or just tell them your needs are a priority, annoyance or nastiness can follow.

Word darts are especially used against women. We’re called “aggressive” if we stand up for ourselves. We’re called bitches when we’re honest or refuse to agree with everyone. Men are called names too. Glenn says, “My girlfriend called me a bastard when I didn’t do things her way. I tried harder but it got stale fast. I did nothing wrong.” People try to make us feel like we’re bad or wrong or unlikable if we don’t meet their expectations. Once you accept you’re entitled to put your needs first, don’t let accusations stop your loving self-care.

Jessica took my Nice Girls on Top class and emailed afterwards:
I was sick of never having my way but didn’t know what to do. When I’d turn down requests, I got slammed with guilt. After the class I held my ground more. My husband said I was becoming nasty. Why? Because I wanted to choose some of our activities—for the first time. I’d always gone along with everyone. It hit me hard—I wasn’t nasty for wanting something my way.

That was so unfair. When I told a friend I couldn’t watch her son, she said I wasn’t nice anymore. That worked before but I now know she’s unfair, and said so. I’ve been warned I’ll have no friends soon. If being a friend means always giving in, I’ll make new ones who only know me as someone with self-respect.

Word darts can mean you’re making progress in setting boundaries. If you’re called a name you haven’t earned, don’t sweat it. It’s the name-caller’s problem, unless you let it get to you. I’ve learned to laugh now when I hear this nonsense. If someone calls me a bitch because I’m doing something for me, I say, “thank you.” They don’t like that either! 😊 It makes me feel more powerful because they can’t get to me easily anymore.
ME Not Selfish

A big poison word dart is selfish. Making self-care a priority isn’t selfish. It’s logical. When you feel good, you have more to give. If you know you’re doing nothing wrong, what someone says shouldn’t change that. I've been unfairly called selfish for saying “no” to a very inconvenient favor. It feels nice not to let word darts hurt. Memorize this: Having good self-esteem, loving yourself, and making you a priority doesn’t make you selfish!! Self-love requires healthy doses of putting you first. Kevin says:

I accepted my right to put me first as I became more spiritual. People who call me selfish for doing what’s best for me are the selfish ones. I’m on earth to do my best, not to only please others. Those I care about most know this. I no longer worry about pleasing everyone. If I can help, I do.

But not at my expense, unless it's someone special. I don't have to prove I'm not selfish. I know I'm not.

When you care for you first, you have more to give others. It's practical, which is why the heart gets nourishment before the rest of the body. You must first self-nourish with love and meet your needs to have most value for others. Pay attention when you fly. Flight attendants say that if you’re traveling with a child, put on your own oxygen mask first. Taking care of you makes you more
able to help your child. A limping person is less able to help someone who needs support. When we put the needs of others first, we're weaker. How can you support someone if you're not supporting you? Make yourself strong first!

Rita says:

_I ran around helping others but felt drained for my own things. When I finally centered on my needs, my energy level rose dramatically. I now come first. People who knew me as available to them don't like it. Too bad! I'm such a happy camper now that I'm doing what's best for me. Lately I've noticed I'm actually doing more for people I care about, because this “new me” is in a healthier position. But I've accepted that I owe no one but me anything. My friends without cars are perfectly capable of taking the bus. I'm not playing chauffeur anymore! I love my mom but if she chooses to squabble with her friends, I can't spend too much time listening to her same old complaints. I enjoy an active social life now. I do what I can for others, while making me most important. If that's considered selfish - right on for selfish! I believe it's logical to prioritize my needs. I finally see how selfish the people around me are in their expectations of me. No more!_
If you're consistent, people will get used to the new you. If they don't, you probably don't need them. Don't waste energy trying to enlighten folks. They may not want to get it if they're selfishly trying to manipulate you with word darts. I've explained to dart throwers and they didn't like it. Too bad! I've also asked why they think they're more important than me. You guessed it. They don't like that either! 😊 People eventually will accept you. It ain't worth the effort to keep explaining to someone who doesn't want to listen. Julie says, “I realized that I needed to start pleasing me. As long as I treat people justly and decently and with love, I do not need to feel badly about myself.” As you accept your right to be #1 in your priorities, and that not being everything for everybody doesn't make you selfish, barbs roll off more easily.

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LETTING GO

The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.

Elbert Hubbard

Does rejection scare you? You're no less of a person if someone doesn't like what you do. What THEY think doesn't change who you are. Lighten up. Don't reject yourself if others do. There will be people who don't agree with you. That's the human factor again! Don't let someone's negative opinion affect your
self-image or dance to please others. Do a delightful waltz around negatives and enjoy knowing you beat them!

**Practice Makes Perfect No’s**

No—such a short word that can take a long time to utter. Many people complain they can’t say no. I couldn’t when I was a DoorMat because I wanted everyone to like me. And they did when I said yes! I’d worry something awful would happen that if I said no, like warts on my tongue. Or worse, people might not like me. Suzi learned it’s better to like yourself:

> *It seems the hardest and most recent way for me to express self-love is to say no. It was always a matter of self-denial for me - a lesson so old it's impossible to remember when it was learned. There are always demands on precious time, so my great gift to myself is to say no, to refuse others, to preserve time for myself - even if that time is spent doing nothing in particular.*

Do people whom you're good to say no to you? Pay attention to how easily they do and practice! I know it's not easy to break the habit of saying yes. At first, I had to forcibly enunciate no. Negative reactions felt awful. Not anymore! As I slowly got comfortable turning folks down, they got used to it.
Don’t feel guilty when you’re told you’ve let someone down by saying no. Keep telling yourself *I'm doing nothing wrong by putting my needs first*. That’s self-love!

It’s hard to say no if you’re afraid people won’t like you but it doesn’t mean you’re not nice. Selectively saying no is healthy for YOU. You can’t cater to everyone and be a whole person. Jumping to please leaves you short-changed. Saying no to others often says yes to you, which also says, “I love me.” That’s better than doing something you don’t want. It’s unnecessary to feel guilty for turning down a request that’s inconvenient. If you get an unexpected request, don’t respond on the spot. Say you’ll let them know. Think about whether you should do it and decline if you don’t want to do it. You’re entitled to have other things on your plate! Beatrice used to have trouble expressing herself. Now she says:

*I have no trouble speaking my mind, even though the listener may not exactly find what I am saying... let's just say... appealing. I have learned not to bite my tongue and go to bed stressed, while someone else has a perfectly good night's rest after spoiling my day.*

Still queasy about saying no? Start with affirmations, such as, “I have a right to turn people down.” Don't be apologetic and say, “I’m sorry I can’t do
it.” Are you really sorry? No? Then don’t dilute your resolve. An apologetic tone creates a mindset of guilt, which sabotages your effort. You deserve to choose who you help! Let people know you’re serious with a firm no. If they hear resolve, they’ll accept it. If they hear regret, they’ll keep at you. If you must apologize, say, “I’m sorry if you feel disappointed but I can’t do it.” Keep your power! Debra found hers:

As owner and the only teacher of a dance studio, I try to make the dance students and their parents happy. I had one pushy mother who thought her daughter had more talent than she had. To keep her as a customer, I listened to many unfounded complaints and tried to be accommodating. But when the mother questioned my judgment in not placing the child in a higher level class, and I knew she clearly did not have enough skill or maturity to be accelerated there, I said no. I also suggested that since she questioned my judgment as the teacher, that they go to another dance studio, and provided them with contact info. They did not leave, and have never questioned my judgment since.

Turn down one person at a time or just do it once in a while until you see no one kills you. I joke but know how tough those first few no’s can be. Expectations about what might happen are usually worse than reality. Changing
people's expectations of you takes time. They need to get used to your new persona and you need to get comfortable with disapproval. Be consistent and don't cave to pressure. Once you say no, show you mean it. Don't let guilt, names, etc. weaken you. People will eventually accept it. Kate said in a group:

*I was excited to get the nerve to say no to driving my sister to the airport when it was inconvenient. She rarely does me favors. I hated knowing she was annoyed, though I was glad to finally stand up for me. I kept remembering I'd done nothing wrong. She expected too much! It took a while to feel okay about not always helping her but it got easier. Now I say no to others with much less guilt!*

You can bypass saying *no* by giving a specific reason, such as, “It doesn’t fit into my schedule.” “I already have plans.” “That’s inconvenient for me.” As I got bolder, I’d just say, “I can’t do it” with conviction and didn’t get arguments. Once folks see you’re serious, they’ll look elsewhere for help. People need to stop expecting you to always be available. You may have to turn them down many times before it clicks that you don’t give unconditional cooperation.

A little fabrication can get you get comfortable with turning people down. Rather than risk a sticky scene or alienate someone, I make up an excuse, like “I’m waiting for a call.” Or “I have a deadline.” Or since I can do other
things if I don’t babysit, I say I have other things to do. 😊 As people get used to your turning them down, you’ll be more comfortable just saying you’re not available. Always remember, saying no often says, “I love me!”

**Redefining “The Right Thing”**

Some of you say that you like to do “the right thing” by people. Who defines “the right thing?” Often it’s other people. When doing “the right thing” means respectful, ethical behavior and showing basic consideration, it can be right for you. But when doing “the right thing” means right for someone else and not you, it’s not right.

I used to go out of my way to "do the right thing." So what is "the right thing?" Are there rules about this vague concept? No. Decide what it means to you. Redefine it. When I was a DoorMat, "the right thing" was based on what I'd like people to do for me. I'd try hard to do "the right thing" by everyone but neglected myself. Doing "the right thing" exhausted me at times. For many of us, doing "the right thing" is synonymous with trying to be perfect. And we know that doesn't work.
So back to the original question - What is "the right thing?" It's an excuse to strive for perfection AND, a self-love buster. Going out of your way to do a favor for someone who won't appreciate you isn't "the right thing". Letitia says:

_I felt it was the right thing to give rides to people without a car. My roommate always called me to pick her up. It was a pain but I did. When she called during a snowstorm, I'd just washed my hair and said I couldn't go out with wet hair, plus the snow was bad. She told me to put on a hat and come get her. Awakening! She didn't care about me. Heck, I didn't owe her because I worked an extra job to buy my car. If coming out in a snowstorm, with wet hair, was "the right thing," I had to change my definition. I told her "no" and don't give her a ride unless it's convenient._

Can you disappoint others in order to be true to what's best for you? Call a time-out on demands. Being the go-to person for everyone is stressful. Write down what concrete benefits you get from fulfilling needs. Are there good reasons? You may discover that saying yes is just a habit. Are you scared of losing people? Do you really want those you buy? Even with relatives, blood isn't always thicker than water when they don't treat you with respect or ask for favors unfairly. Set new boundaries whether they like it or not--guilt free!
Don’t tolerate intolerable behavior, no matter who’s dishing it. You can be considerate without letting them control you.

Sometimes no matter how much you care for someone, they may not care back, no matter what you do. Giving 100% to someone like that drains you most. It’s common to have the misguided belief that if you give enough, someone will eventually wake up and give you what you want. It rarely happens. Instead, you keep giving until you get bitter and leave, or they leave you. Try not to get to that point. People who care about YOU will stick around. While it hurts to lose someone, the emotional exhaustion and pain of sacrificing your happiness—dancing to please someone—being let down over and over—trying harder with diminishing returns—realizing that person would leave without perks—is worse. Letting go says, “I love me!”

Get into the habit of thinking higher and better for yourself. Most of us didn’t learn to expect enough. Mary A. says, “I hate to ask other people to do things for me. But I learned to hate it less and now I can easily.” Accepting you as a worthy, good, deserving individual opens the door for better treatment, including more respect from others. I look for good in all people and don’t expect to get screwed. I treat everyone with respect. But I don’t give myself to everyone. Being nice to people makes me happy. But it’s really nice,
not kissing up to buy friendship. There's a time to be giving and a time to receive. Learn the difference. Don't go one way or the other. You'll feel good being kind to others while also getting what you need. Practice random acts of unconditional kindness, with no expectations for something in return.

If you want to be appreciated, give it to others. When you don't take people for granted, you’re more conscious of when it happens to you so you can change the pattern. All recovering DoorMats, or about to be recovering DoorMats—repeat after me:

_It is my right to say no without feeling guilty._

_ I have the right to ask for what I want._

_It's okay to not please everyone._

_Self-care says, “I love me!”_
Chapter II: Cleaning Out Old Habits

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change. Charles Darwin

Self-esteem doesn’t mandate loving, or even liking bad habits. I don’t love mine. But I accept them and make an effort to change what I can. The more you love yourself, the more you’ll want to take control of you. Clearing old habits can increase self-esteem dramatically.

TAKING CONTROL

Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power. Lao Tzu

Your center of power lies in taking control of what you do. I no longer try to control others. Instead, I control my response to them, which elicits more of what I want. I don’t depend on others. I take classes and learn skills. When you control what you couldn’t before, your self-image brightens substantially.
Personal Growth Lip Service

Many people say they want to improve but don't do what's needed for real change. They do things that are a poor substitute for what needs to be done.

Do you talk the talk but not walk it? We take classes and read books on self-improvement and quote wisdom to others. But it's lip service if you don't live it.

For example, my client, Mark, regularly attends church and talks up spirituality but is always scared. He's immersed in spirituality, hangs with spiritual people, but never turned to God. He hoped spiritual power would just come. Now he's testing faith slowly and beginning to feel supported.

Do you douse yourself in personal growth? If it's not incorporated into your life, it's a crutch, not a tool. "I'm reading the book, right?" "Isn't it terrific that I take classes to help myself?" No! Going through the motions isn't enough! You OD on learning but wonder why nothing changes. People want what they've learned.

But you must live it to improve. Janice went through this:

*I used to give everyone advice. I read so many books I thought I knew it all. When I had problems, I'd buy the latest book, but didn't feel better.*

*Books reinforced my denial about what had to do. I self-righteously knew*
how to handle men yet kept getting hurt. I took anger workshops but still let anger control me. Friends pointed out that with all my self-help, I hadn’t changed. I choose my favorite book, read it slowly, and acted. Now I don’t talk as much—I concentrate on living lessons!

Don’t get caught in self-help overdose. List what you accomplished in the last year to grow as a person. If all you can think of is going to classes or reading books—stop! Choose a few books and read them slowly. Then live the lessons.

**Excuses**

Do you create excuses and look for people or situations to blame for blocking the self-esteem and fulfillment you crave? Growth ONLY comes from within. I provide tools for building self-esteem, but YOU must use them. People who've read my books write to me, BUT - "I'm a special case. Can you help me?" Rather than do what’s necessary, they make excuses and look to me for an easy solution. HELLO! This is do-able but not easy! I have no magic wand for instant progress. It took me years to go from being a worthless doormat to a confident, happy woman who loves herself. You have the power, if you ditch excuses. Your perception of situations provides them. Get into the habit of
looking for positives. Remember, we attract what we think. If you can change your consciousness, you'll create a different experience. Janice told me:

Everyone in my office is pressured to increase sales. I saw co-workers as unfriendly—buried in work. No one said "good morning." I hated my job. You suggested chucking the excuses created by my perception. I forced a cheerful attitude and people responded positively to my greetings. It felt good. When a big project ended, I suggested we celebrate and was shocked that we joked, shared stories and had a blast getting to know each other under fun circumstances. Now I love my job.

People are still wrapped up in projects but it no longer feels unfriendly. I'm thrilled with my positive perception!

Mary Kay Ash said, "Aerodynamically, the bumble bee shouldn't be able to fly, but the bumble bee doesn't know it so it goes on flying anyway." Clean out old perceptions that create excuses and choose a reality with more positive expectations. It works for Christi:

I handle criticism much better than I used to by trying to take it as only another's opinion. If it's warranted, I'll admit it and work on improvements. I
do want to be the best person I can be. I feel much better when I do this.

I used to over-defend myself, even if I knew they were right. I don't do that anymore.

No matter how things look, fly like a bumblebee!

EXERCISE: Create a list called "Things to be happy about."

Addictions
Most addictions are substitutes or distractions for things we lost or haven't had.

A need for love is common. When you're addicted to something, it controls you. It's almost impossible to have strong self-love if you're abusing yourself with unhealthy substances or depending on a fix of something to make you feel good. David started drinking regularly at 14 and stopped at the age of 28. He says:

During that time, I was more scared than anything. I was drinking for the wrong reasons, but there was no way out of my predicament. My only solace was when alcohol or drugs gave me a temporary sense of ease and comfort. I hated myself, and would try to overcompensate to make up for my failings (in relation to the high expectations I had for myself). This just made things worse. It's like trying to win your money back at gambling.
You just get deeper into the hole. The only hope in your life at that point is the fantasies in which you bury yourself (i.e.: it will be different next time).

Low self-esteem makes you more vulnerable to addictions. Carolyn says, "Abusing alcohol and drugs caused me to be untrue to my better self."

Addiction becomes a cycle. The more you feel out of control from substances, the worse you feel about yourself and the more you turn to a fix. Carolyn says, "I got my act together 16 years ago, by quitting alcohol and drugs."

Congratulations Carolyn! You can break habits too! Lara did.

I drank heavily for 5 years. My self-esteem went from bad to none. Each year I hated myself more. Friends abandoned me, except for Sherise, a recovering addict. She explained why I was worth helping and had me write down my old dreams. I finally went to an AA meeting with her and hated it. But I went back. It took 2 months to get up and speak. They applauded. That gave me hope and I worked on me. I'm now 3 years clean and sober. I celebrate the first day I spoke as my birthday - the beginning of my new life - taking control. Today I have self-love and appreciate my second chance.
David says he got to a point where he knew he had to change or die. "It's not something you can intellectualize. You just know when it happens. It's that "bottom" that addicts and alcoholics must reach in order to rebound back into recovery." Breaking addictions is hard on your own. If substances control you, love yourself enough to find a therapist or group for support. AA helps many people, as do other support groups. Find what works for you but find it. Spirituality provides special support for breaking addictions. David feels blessed:

When I was drinking, I was stuck in a cycle of self-loathing and self-abuse that was encased in an impending doom that seemed both real and impenetrable. Despite my belief that it couldn't get worse, it kept getting worse as the years went on. I can't even begin to express the growth I've been blessed with, both internally and externally in these last 16 years of sobriety.

Since getting clean and sober, David, who’d never been able to grasp school, received a degree in Computer Science. He’s now happily married, started a business and feels in control. You’ll only be happy when you’re in control of your actions, which addiction prevents. Love yourself enough to find a way out, and be patient. David advises:
I have been handling the peaks and valleys without even considering having a drink to take the edge off. I meditate each day for 45 minutes to an hour, just to calm down my reactions to an appropriate level. Life can still be extremely stressful, but the combination of sobriety and meditation has enabled me to handle new levels of stress that would have torn me apart in my drinking days. The number one enemy of anyone, especially those with a drinking problem, is pride. No one likes to admit they have a problem, and no one feels comfortable reaching out for help. Both are necessary if you are to begin the life of sobriety. Once you are willing to do that, a huge load will fall away from your shoulders. The rest is hard and honest work, and a willingness to move ahead—one day at a time.

If you have a substance abuse problem, I implore you to take the first step: acknowledge it. Work on your self-esteem and get help when you’re ready. Love yourself enough to do this. I know many recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who are grateful for the blessing of sobriety. For now, at least
think about it. Once you take control of an addiction, you’ll feel more empowered to handle the rest of the world!

![Heart emoji]

**CLEANING YOUR WAY TO CONTROL**

*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*  
John F. Kennedy

Cleaning is my favorite tool because it’s do-able! Eliminating clutter, people, situations, and thought patterns that drain energy leave more energy or you. Making something look or feel nicer elicits pride and feels loving. On a spiritual level, cleaning makes room for better stuff. Whenever I remove something or someone from my life, I say, "Close one door and another one opens." That tells the Universe I’m consciously making room for something or someone better. Cleaning is an easy, therapeutic way to improve life and feel more in control.

**Historic Me**

The past is your history. IT ONLY AFFECTS SELF-ESTEEM TODAY IF YOU GIVE IT POWER! Regretting past choices keeps you from enjoying today. It’s hard to be happy if you dwell on what was. I got married at twenty and insecurity made me feel stuck. Do I regret marrying so young and staying so
long? NO! I have two choices—waste time regretting what I did, or put all my energy into enjoying life today. There’s nothing I can do to change my history. You can’t change yours but can choose not to give it power over today. I can be unhappy thinking of the years I could have been happier, or focus on being happy NOW. I choose NOW!

    Leave your past where history belongs. The only reality it has is what you give it. When you recognize that it’s over, it’s easier to let go. What memories lower your self-image? History! If you accept that, they lose power over your present. You’re different now. Refuse to allow memories to muck up your thoughts. Research indicates that closure on past experiences improves self-image. Resolving past shticks promotes positive thinking. As you nurture your present self, it’s easier to handle the past. Mitzi learned:

        I love my mother dearly but she is almost 60 and has no self-esteem. I grew up with absolutely none, like her. I’ve had to literally fight out of that state. It took almost 25 years to realize, "Hey, I am important!" My mom is an educated, successful woman with a Master’s degree and professional career. But she doesn’t believe she personally has much value. She didn’t mean to raise me with no self-esteem. But I modeled my behavior after hers. Now I am her cheerleader, constantly telling her, "Don’t take that kind
of behavior from anybody. You deserve better." Maybe she'll listen someday.

\[ \text{FACT: Holding bad memories lowers self-confidence and self-worth.} \]

Declare independence in your mind! Freedom to choose your thoughts is a foundation of self-love. Make decisions based on what YOU think, not on what others say. Theresa says, "I go along with others if they're negative, rather than retain my positive thinking. Then I beat myself up over my shortcomings or mistakes." When you free your mind, possibilities are endless. Break the habit of following "shoulds" that have been dumped on you. Do what feels right for YOU. "Shoulds" create guilt if you can't meet them. Be a victim of the chains of yesterday or empower yourself by creating positive new thoughts. The second choice keeps me smiling!

All that really matters is right now. Clean out thoughts of what didn't work or what you couldn't do. Focus on what you can and the good stuff in your life. When a negative thought hits, replace it with a good one. Or, picture the person or situation in a toilet and flush it. It sounds silly but when I've been pissed at someone, I visualize them going down, sometimes more than once. It
works for a while, and makes me laugh. If necessary, get professional help to resolve your past. Support groups are a fantastic way to sort through it. Allow history to dictate your present or create a reality based on what you want today.

Your call. Gail agrees:

> Getting to know my spirit helped me remember things I wanted to forget in childhood that were buried in my memory. Looking back, knowing myself as I do today, made me come to terms with bad memories so I could let go of them, instead of hiding from them.

**Living Neatly**

I'm a recovering clutter bug and used to be ashamed of my place, which pummeled my self-esteem! I rationalized it was just my way. Then I discovered that an orderly space makes me function better, and smile. If this former slobaholic got control of bad habits, anyone can! Say, “I love me” by cleaning your living space.

When I was a mess, my place was a mess. I got used to clutter but hated it. It reflected my lack of self-control. When I made a conscious decision to take control, tidying my whole apartment was overwhelming. I began by making
my bathroom sparkle. My smile sparkled back each time I entered it! Zap! My self-love increased just from that. It felt so good, I tackled the kitchen next. When a friend commented that it looked nice, I felt proud.

My sweetest revelation—it wasn’t hard to do! A little scouring powder created sparkle. I kept unused take-out napkins in both rooms. Every few mornings, I shine the chrome one on the sink with a dry one. Then I wet it and wipe surfaces and the kitchen counters too, so gunk doesn’t build up. After each meal, I wet my napkin and quickly wipe something down, an ecological self-esteem move! Baby stepping works! I slowly tackled my whole apartment, one piece at a time. Overhauling my office and bedroom made it was a pleasure to come home. That took more effort but, oh, I felt good about me! While things still pile up a bit, it’s never like before. I do the easiest part first, for motivation. Keeping my place clean shouts, "I love me!"

When I’m down, scare, or feel out of control, I clean—an instant mood booster to take control! Getting rid of stuff makes room for better things and you feel organized. It took years to drop my perception that I’m a clutter bug. I learned a
valuable lesson when a boyfriend insulted my overloaded closets. After getting indignant, I realized I hated the mess too. First, I got rid of HIM! Then I figured out why I had so much stuff. Fear and habit. Fear that I might need stuff someday, made me keep everything, "just in case." Some stuff lived there out of habit.

I had a mad cleaning frenzy and tackled fear items by dissecting closets and drawers, asking why I needed each. If it was just in case I might need it someday—out! I no longer lived in lack. I didn't need old sweats, or PJs for an emergency guest. Ten big bags of fear stuff left. Nothing was sacred. Every nook and cranny got weeded. Not keeping things just because I owned them was cleansing. The vase I’d had for 10 years was a fixture. Did it love it? Out! I even tossed photos. Do I need 5 of someone I didn’t like or remember? Why keep those I looked bad in? Out! I gave myself permission to toss anything I didn’t currently need or enjoy.

Living neatly dissolved old perceptions of being out of control. I organized closet shelves by putting everything into pretty shopping bags and keep tiny ones in drawers to hold my girl-thangs. Seeing bags, instead of disorganized piles, makes me smile. Find whatever works to organize. Toss what you can and enjoy the freedom. Each December I begin intense cleaning for the new
year and find lots to give away. Donate unflattering, dated, or worn clothes to charity. The less stuff you have, the freer you are.

Control chores. I used to let dishes pile up. Now I consciously don’t. The dish drain clears by bedtime. Conquering that bad habit still makes me smile.

If there are dishes in the sink or drain before bedtime, I always do them, with pride for maintaining that habit. It reminds me I took control and said, “I love me.” Make your bed every day. I never did—never! Why waste time if you live alone? Because it’s control! Isn’t it nice to see a neat bed in a hotel? I only made my bed when expecting visitors. Now I make it every day—even when rushed—and still smile. It’s often not perfect, but my bedroom looks nicer and I feel better about me. What don’t you do? Do it! Creating good habits at home says, "I love me!" You'll like yourself more.

**Smiling Now!**

I think of my life as a garden, and plant seeds. Some sprout quickly. Some need replanting if they don't take at first. They need care, fertilizer (patience) and watering (love). Gardens require maintenance. Sometimes others try planting in my garden. Those who care about me add colorful blooms—compliments, love, encouragement, positive ideas. Some plant weeds—criticism,
pessimism, negative thoughts, disrespect, doubt, guilt. Bad habits are weeds too.

I don’t like weeds in my garden! They get out of control if allowed to. You can stop them. Awareness is a great weed controller. Have you noticed how some weeds look like flowers? Let them stay and they overpower everything. Weed your garden so your own beauty can bloom! Awareness helps you spot weeds (people who criticize you, bad habits, old messages, etc.) fast and eliminate them before they damage the blossoms of good self-esteem. Replace weeds with seeds of better habits and a happier outlook.

A fantastic way to increase self-love is to conquer a bad habit, like I just discussed about cleaning. List what you’d change if you could. Take control of one or two things at a time. Start with easier ones. For example, talking too much, too loud, was my M.O. At first, my loud motor mouthing was frustrating. Eventually, awareness of triggers helped stifle it occasionally, then more often, now more often than not. I still can get carried away but catch it faster. Take control, by consciously trying! As I talked less, with a softer tone, I was gleeful. Getting some control over a bad habit increases self-love, and your garden blooms.
Develop a step-by-step plan to improve habits. Take pride in the first step. Progress from there. If you’re always late, just be on time Tuesday. You’ll be in a good mood that day. As you control each Tuesday, try Thursday. Slowly add days. You may not always be punctual but even some control feels good. If you spend money frivolously, budget for a week. Organize your living or work space. As you control one thing, cross it off and begin another. Each bit of control over habits is a brick for building self-esteem.

Consciously improve different areas of your life. Does desk clutter annoy you? Don’t use it as an excuse for not being efficient. Stop and clean. Avoid negative folks as much as possible. Practice putting problems into perspective. Breaking bad habits gives you more control over your life. Everything that goes wrong doesn’t have to be a crisis. Controlling bad habits feeds self-esteem!

Dianne advises:

*Make some measurable progress in at least one area of your life. You can do lots of things or just one—learn to cook better, spend more effort on your appearance, dig into your job and apply for a promotion, become a better friend, clean up your house, take a night course, get a handle on your budget - the list is virtually endless.*
Stop settling for things that can be better. Find ways to fix what’s broken to improve your quality of life! Upgrade your computer. Why waste time or aggravate yourself if it’s slow or crashes? Get a new mattress if yours sinks your back. Don’t save money at the expense of your health! Toss dead plants instead of willing them back to life. If you tolerate inconvenience, you send a message that you’re not worth more. That’s not loving! When things work properly, you’re happier, with more energy to love yourself. No more settling!

Are you in your own way? I decided that I couldn’t go after certain guys, since I wasn’t thin enough. Even as my self-esteem grew, I limited me. Then I saw a hot guy at a lecture. As I wrote him off, I caught myself. Why not? Our thoughts attract what we get. I’m a smart, attractive, hot woman. Aha! What kept me from meeting great men? ME!! I confidently smiled and we had coffee after. Was it a fluke? The next week I set my sights on the cutest guy and got him. I didn’t get in my own way! Seeing how I limited myself allowed me to break old patterns. We can change our beliefs. Clean them out! Why have okay if you can have great? Eleanor says:

*In school, there were always smarter people. A teacher labeled me middle of the road. I studied liberal arts, thinking I wasn’t smart enough for business. I didn’t seek promotions at work, assuming others were smarter.*
Co-workers pushed me but I was stuck in my belief. When my boss offered a better position, I tentatively tried and flourished. As my perception cleared, I worked my way up in marketing, without a degree. When I saw no one stopped me but me, I got past it.

Perceptions start with something real. Eleanor heard her mother whispering that her brother was the smart one, which reinforced her belief. I was told that being a little chunky wouldn’t attract the best guys. We absorb messages and make them self-fulfilling prophecies. When you take a step past an old belief, it’s one step closer to control. When you become conscious of how you get in your own way, you can get break old habits.

I am the flower of my life. I clear weeds by letting go of old habits that keep me doing what I’d prefer not to. Then the best, satisfying parts of me have more room to bloom. You can be a good little gardener and control the weeds of your garden too.

You don’t need a green thumb! Loving yourself is the best tool!

❤️

MAKING ROOM FOR HAPPY!

Every time you get angry, you poison your own system.

Alfred Montapert
Negative emotions block happiness and hurt your well being. They weaken a body's immune system and healing mechanisms. Why feel sick or tired if you can be energetic? Get therapy if you can't get past stuff alone. Negative emotions are weeds in your garden of self-esteem. Begin clearing them and move to healthier realities. Pulling negative weeds stimulates happiness.

Weeds Be Gone!
If negative thoughts become reruns playing regularly, it's time for weed killer! Negative emotions—anger, jealousy, resentment, guilt, bitterness, hate—damage your life. Wouldn't you prefer to be happy? The more you dwell on bad memories, the less time for loving thoughts. Prevent weeds from crowding out flowers by activating awareness tools and paying attention to negatives. Learn from mistakes. Turn them into seeds that grow goodies in your garden. Clean out habits of kicking yourself when you're not perfect. Kimberly says:

I've been told, (and agree!) that I am my own worst critic. I admit to killing myself trying to be perfect at times! I examine everything—always finding flaws—trying to improve! I've spent much my life getting distressed, feeling bitter and becoming defensive from criticism. I've learned to accept I am not perfect, nor should I try to be! I am entitled to bad days, mistakes, lapses in judgment, bad decisions, etc. Now, I think, "I'll do better next
I also accept criticism well from someone I respect, who approaches me tactfully and even thankful for it at times!

Practice consciously acting in your best interest.

Things happen that you won't like. That's life. If negative emotions rule your perspective, situations can seem hard to control or fix. To counter, keep a realistic perspective on what's going on. Do you watch for things to go wrong to affirm you always get a raw deal? "Woe is me." "Nothing goes right."

Expecting them makes them true. Force yourself to replace them with positive thoughts, even if you fake! And, if you want to love yourself, let go of hate. You'll never love yourself completely if you hate someone.

Adopt a more positive attitude. When folks ask, "How are you?" they usually don't want to hear your problems. Nowadays, I give a big, fat cheery "great" and feel good saying it. Sharing woes to everyone increases their importance. The more positive you sound, the stronger the affirmation and the more you believe it. Do you criticize others? If you don't like being put down, break the habit of assessing people's faults. Kathie says, "We're all in this world together. No one is better or worse than I am. That sounds simplistic,
but it finally makes sense to me. It's very liberating." Gail advises adopting
tolerance as a way of life. "Tolerance of others, even if they go against what I
believe, helps me feel more relaxed and keeps bad feelings manageable."

FACT: What happens to you isn't nearly as important as how you respond to
it.

It's easy to feel lousy. Just complain and rehash annoyances without
resolution and feel worse. Is that what you want? I've been in those cycles of
whine–whine–whine. It's like picking a scab so it can't heal and then
wondering why it's infected. Dwelling on negatives is toxic. Consciously allow
joy into your world by sharpening your awareness of what's around you. Find
healthy outlets for your feelings. Crying can cleanse. Attention guys who stifle
eemotions: YOU especially need outlets. Break habits of focusing on the
potential down side of life's hiccups. Optimism is created and you can create
it. What are your thoughts? Bring in sunshine by consciously thinking happy
ones! Sing happy songs when you're alone. Milk what you enjoy instead of
painful emotions.
EXERCISE: Create 2 lists: the benefits of hate and of love. Read them back and consciously choose which direction you prefer.

Grrrr...

For every minute you are angry you lose 60 seconds of happiness. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mark Twain said, "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured." It has a profound influence on your well being. Anger is a weed that takes over a garden. A special gift of self-love is the ability to control anger. Chronic complainers live in refrains like, "She was unfair." "He took advantage." "They don’t help me - I was always there for them." Pissed! Hurt! Betrayed! Let down! Used! Yada! Yada! Controlling anger is MUCH better than being angry. This gift made my digestion better, my demeanor pleasant, my stress lower, and my happiness MUCH greater. Healthy outlets for anger allows for more self-loving.

Anger triggers unhealthy responses. Jenn says, "When I get angry, I close up or blow up. I feel it shatter my self-esteem when I know I could have handled the situation better." Anger leaves us out of control. Do you lash out in ways that hurt others or dodge anything that reminds you of old hurts?
Shawn says, "Anger is a wasted emotion. It consumes your whole being, limiting you to irrational thoughts, emotions and actions." His self-esteem grew with "the realization that I am in some control of my emotions." In order to be happy, you must develop healthy responses to anger.

Anger stimulates complaining, which is unattractive! It consumed me, created physical problems, upped stress, and made me unpleasant company. Any perceived injustice got me raging. Then it hit me. I was angry at me for allowing bad behavior. I raged at others but deep down blamed me. Light bulb time! Christi says:

I used to get so angry that it caused a great deal of mental and physical stress. I replayed it in my mind over and over. Someone made me mad in traffic and I literally thought about it all day! A jerk could send me to the brink of climbing a tower with a high-powered rifle. This greatly affected my self-esteem since I felt out of control and embarrassed. People must have thought I was nuts! I admired people who kept their cool under pressure. I wanted to be like them and decided to REALLY work on myself. I let small stuff rule my life—no more! I worked on my big stuff. Letting go of anger and learning to control it totally changed my life. I've never felt better about me, more in control, or happier! I'm self-confident in most situations. I
never realized how much anger issues affected my self-esteem until I let it go. I believe a lack of self-esteem is why we get so angry over things. That “why me?” syndrome.

Putting anger in perspective increases positive emotions. Taking responsibility for setting myself up to be let down broke my pattern. I was VERY angry at a friend who disappointed me—again—because I let her! Telling her off changed nothing. I gave myself away—automatically—to people taking me for granted. First, I forgave myself. Then I shut off people pleasing autopilot and set boundaries. How empowering! We're still friends but I give less and I'm more alert now. I've been taking responsibility ever since, with forgiveness to myself included.

Next I tackled my rage toward people I volunteered with, killing myself, for no appreciation. Hello Daylle! Your CHOICE to finish what they bailed on. Be glad you weren't my friend then! My whining hurt friend’s ears and gave me heartburn. After taking responsibility, the unappreciative slackers got a polite note explaining new boundaries. My heartburn left and I smiled after being
released from self-sacrifice! From then on, only MY job was my job. Letting go of anger brought intense joy. I still consciously give thanks for this gift. I haven't felt rage since learning to take responsibility. Taking responsibility for what causes anger gives you power to change it. Then you are charge, not your rage!

Become aware of how you set yourself up to get angry. Why did you allow a situation to happen? Forgive yourself! Instead of stewing, look for what specifically triggers anger and figure out what to do differently next time.

During my volunteer work, I complained but continued slaving. No one forced me to. It was my choice. So I chose to stop. What you can do differently? Learn without turning on yourself. Angie wonders, "What's wrong with me for allowing this to happen?" Nothing! Human alert! We all do it. Empower yourself by taking responsibility and changing your actions. George struggles with this:

I spew to others about a person or circumstance at the root of an angry situation but usually kick myself as soon as I'm alone. I blame ME for anything that goes wrong or whatever anyone does to me that's not right, which makes me feel low. I should know how to avoid bad situations or handle myself so people have to do right by me. I sort of know I'm unfair to myself but my dad taught me a man handles his life. These angry times
prove I'm not doing a good job. I did change my response recently after learning from another incident. Guess that's progress!

**Anger Management**

How you handle anger can make or break happiness. Do you push anger aside, hoping it will disappear? It won't! Anger infiltrates your life and may surface in other situations. Why explode at a friend who didn't hurt you? Why be sarcastic to a coworker who didn't mess up your computer? Avoiding confrontation creates frustration that seeks an outlet. Men often dodge feelings, perhaps feeling unmanly or ill equipped to express them. Bruce did.

*I used to close down for self-protection. I knew no other way. However, I'm learning, it's okay and natural to feel hurt and I accept it more. I try to remember there is a difference between hurt and anger. When I get hurt and don't let myself feel anger, I'm proud.*

Like many women, I tried to be a nice girl by shutting my mouth. No good! Instead, explain how you feel and try to resolve it peacefully and quickly to keep anger manageable. Do you say yes to things you don't want? Being agreeable to keep peace or be liked triggers anger. It's powerful to take
control. Gail says, "Letting go of anger helps you experience life on your own terms." Not being angry enhances self-image, increases productivity, keeps stress down, minimizes health problems, raises happiness to a MUCH higher level, and says, "I love me."

Do you keep anger alive to protect yourself? Unresolved anger can make you crazy. I needed to tell people how I felt, but couldn’t. Then I discovered what an effective tool writing is. It saved me from sleepless nights and agitation. I was steaming over a guy who'd done me wrong, pondering what to say if we spoke; replaying scenarios in my mind. One sleepless night, I wrote down my feelings, as if speaking to him. After turning out the light, I had more. Back to writing! Then I slept peacefully. I've used this tool ever since. Sam agrees:

*I'm a typical guy who kept things in until exploding, often at someone who didn’t deserve to be blown up by accumulated anger. I couldn’t talk about it but I could write. When I began scribbling my thoughts, I felt silly but it made me feel better. I can’t believe I’m saying this but now I always write when angry. It sorts what I’m feeling. This makes it easier to communicate with my girlfriend and people at work because I pay attention to what I’m feeling now, instead of just trying not to think about it. I'm much less angry in general and get along better with people.*
Writing helps put anger into perspective. When troubled, I keep a pad nearby and write as feelings come up. Spelling, grammar, handwriting, etc. don’t matter. Once on paper, it can be stored so you don’t have to hold it inside. If you need a reminder, take it out. What made you angry often loses its sting as you read. Writing is especially good for quieting thoughts that go through my head at night, when I have more time to think. Dianne finds writing helpful.

*Lists helped me a great deal. When I felt most frustrated, I divided a paper into 3 columns. On the left side I wrote all my complaints - every single thing that bothered me. In the middle I wrote as many solutions as I could think of for each complaint, regardless of feasible or far out. In the right, I decided what steps could begin to affect at least some solutions that were workable and listed them. Once I saw in print things or little steps I could do immediately, I put them into effect. I was able to imagine further steps to start gaining control of my life. That list was a pivotal point for me.*

When you’re alone, talk to someone who makes you angry as if they were there. It relieves emotions. Write them a letter. Explain how they made you feel. Yell, scream, cry, get angry! Then burn it. I’ve written letters, toyed with mailing them but didn’t. Burn baby burn! On New Years Eve I do what I call
an anger burning, IF I need it. On separate papers, I write to everyone who hurt me during the year. Then I light a candle in a pie tin in the sink (somewhere safe), read each aloud, forgive them, and burn each paper. I smile as I watch my anger go up in smoke, giving me a fresh start for the year. Lately I don’t, since my boundaries limit anger. My client Jody found it helpful too.

A close friend hurt me badly. For months I wanted to tell him off, or hurt him. You advised writing a short letter to send and a longer one to burn. I wrote the short one first, just stating my main point. I addressed the envelope and put it aside. Then I wrote one detailing everything I was feeling. As I wrote, I said the words out loud and sobbed. And sobbed. I read it aloud a few more times, lit a candle and burned it. I can’t express how much better I felt watching my anger burn. When I got the short letter to mail, I felt so cleansed that without thinking, I burned it, envelope and all. I’ve had no regrets since.
Consciously avoid the anger trap by watching for triggers. Identify and change your response to anger. Do you try to get even? Are friends sick of your complaints, like mine were? Do you let anger eat your potential happiness? Eileen says, "My emotions block my realistic thinking when I'm angry. After the anger I reason lots better." Anger is like a cancer. It erodes positives—a deadly weed! Be aware of what you feel and do when angry.

Debra understands:

*It takes a great deal to make me angry. Things that used to trigger an angry reaction no longer seem relevant. Life is too short to sweat the small stuff. My mother used to ask, "Will it matter 10 years from now?" If it is a major reason to be angry, I first determine the underlying cause. Recently, the man I love ended our relationship on the same night I was going to tell him that I wanted better treatment or I was going to end it. But the way he did it made me extremely angry. He humiliated me in front of another woman with actions and words. I felt helpless because I knew I lost this man I loved. My first reaction was to verbally lash out and hurt him, but my self-esteem took over. I was not going to lower myself to a battle of words. I had more self-respect than that. I simply told him he had lost his best friend, the greatest love of his life, and walked out.*
Debra empowered herself. If you don’t control your reactions, anger controls you. Losing your temper is losing control. Find healthy outlets. Jim slams a punching bag. Betsy hits pillows. Jean screams. William adds, "A good way to not be angry is to have good self-esteem, so your ego is not wounded by what people say." If you've been treated unfairly, why give it power over you? Will you get revenge? Stew for weeks? Allow resentment to poison you? When you feel annoyed, consider exiting the situation for your well-being. Like Kimberly:

*If the situation is a personal one, I count to ten, or twenty, say a quiet prayer, and find a private place to gather myself. If I am extremely upset, I prefer to be alone. I retreat to my bedroom for a good cry or yell, take my dog for a walk, or go running. I prefer to express my deepest feelings to others after I've reflected on them and identified specifics (what is it that I want/need that I'm not getting? what can be done about it?). Writing a mock letter in my journal helps. I accept that it's okay to be angry. When I explore my anger, I learn a lot about me. It’s had a positive effect on my self-esteem.*

**EXERCISE:** List what makes you angry and write how each makes you feel.
Clear communication cleans anger out. Express why you're angry. If someone hurts you, say how you feel in clear, unemotional, succinct words. The less you say, the more it sinks in. While you may want to lash out, it's more satisfying to get a point across. A person will more likely listen if you speak nicely. Enjoy feeling in control instead of emotions controlling you. I explain why I'm not happy with their action and take appropriate action to rectify it. The old Daylle sulked and complained for months. You hurt yourself more by getting immersed in anger. Michele says, "Anger at other people's inconsiderate behavior doesn't reflect poorly on me or damage my self-esteem because I recognize I don't deserve it." Communicate and let it go.

Temper anger by focusing on the action you don't like, not the person. Getting angry at what they did, not at them, makes it less personal. Put your energy into finding ways to prevent the incident from repeating, rather than wasting it on rage. Focusing on the action that bothered you keeps what happened in perspective so anger doesn't get out of control. Lisa shares:

*When I visit my mom, there's at least one blow-up—at her actions, not her.*

*She's old and miserable since my dad died. She harasses me unfairly, often making me rage. I force myself to get angry at what she does, not with her. She was a good mother before so I try to limit anger to her*
actions. Then I can still feel loving and force patience. It's hard but it lets me express feelings about her behavior without insulting her. She appreciates that and tries to have some control when I'm there.

All anger is justified if something makes you angry. But that doesn't give you license to hurt someone. A common response to anger is revenge. "She hurt me so I must hurt her back." But revenge attracts more bad energy and keeps anger simmering. What goes around does come back. If you try to hurt the one who hurt you, prepare to be hurt again. Anger gives no one the right to hurt someone else, no matter what they did. Take a time-out before acting. Defend yourself, tell the person how you feel, but love yourself enough to not sink to their level.

Getting angry happens, but getting bent out of shape isn’t healthy. It exhausted me! Finding outlets made me happier. Joe says, "I make a conscious effort to settle down when I feel angry. Otherwise I’d lose it and act irrationally. I’m able to keep myself in control so my self-esteem doesn’t get effected." Knowing I can choose my reaction is empowering. I avoid those who consistently treat me unfairly and no longer indulge in marathon complaining.
Now, I express how I feel, let it go and respond differently in the future. I’m not idealistic. I just prefer not having anger related stomach problems and stress and like me more as a non-complainer. I’m sure my friends agree!

Controlling anger says a big "I love me!"

**The Gift Of Compassion**

My best tool for handling anger is the Dalai Lama’s philosophy of seeking peacefulness through compassion—a kind way to handle people who push my buttons. My path to show it to those who hurt me came from understanding that people who hurt others are suffering more. They do awful things due to pain they've experienced and hurt themselves when they hurt others.

Who provoked you recently? Are they happy? Happy people don't need to hurt others. Insecure ones criticize and take advantage. People with a positive self-image are less likely to consciously do that. Insecure ones have been bashed themselves. Loving yourself makes it easier to be kind to unhappy folks. In situations that riled me, I realized what they did or said stemmed from their own unhappiness. Instead of anger, I feel sorry for them. Choose to let compassion temper anger. Why allow someone’s dysfunction to debilitate you?

After reading about compassion, I tested it. Someone said vicious things to me. I said I felt sorry that he had so much pain and needed to inflict it on
me. He raged at my remaining calm and tried to create drama. I wouldn’t let him. For the first time I was in complete control of anger! He blustered as I smiled and felt incredibly peaceful afterwards, with no anger. All people who want to hurt others have unresolved pain. Nasty and mean folks don’t love themselves. When you understand they’re are hurting themselves more, you can feel compassion instead of getting hurt. This philosophy nurtures my inner peace.

Compassion should be given on an individual basis. I still lose my temper occasionally when people my buttons are pushed too far. I do look for their source of pain so compassion can take over. It makes sense. Compassion takes nothing from me and anger does no good. Don’t let people get away with being unfair. I take appropriate action if I’m wronged. But my strong desire to take good care of myself motivates me instead of anger. I also express myself in a nice/firm way and take appropriate action to rectify the situation.

You CAN choose not to absorb someone's negativity. Practice. It sure feels good! Don’t give others power to affect you so much. Nor should you push anger aside because you feel sorry for the person. You can’t swallow anger without getting life indigestion. Have compassion but still express feelings. Get it out gently but get it out. Otherwise, anger multiplies at your expense. I feel
so blessed with my life, my positive attitude, and my total faith in God, that I’m generous. But I’ll end negative friendships and do what’s necessary to move on.

Be true to your values. Yes, there are unkind or downright evil people. But those who do the dirty on others are usually not happy. Mean people NEVER have enough money; NEVER have enough power; NEVER feel satisfied. To me THAT is punishment. These people may feel perverse pleasure by hurting others; they may be honored for something or become rich and famous. But I truly believe they can't be happy inside. They step on others to get more of what they're never satisfied with. I feel blessed with all I have—grateful as heck to be doing what I love. And I love being in a good mood most of the time.

When you experience the ability to let angry situations roll off you, you’ll understand why it’s such a blessing! Being generous with compassion to others is a gift—to YOU. It’s a lovely way to say, “I love me.”

❤️
Chapter 12: It's Not Just Semantics

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

Rudyard Kipling

As I writer, I vehemently defend the importance of words and bristle at, "It's just semantics." Crap--crap--crap!! Words set a tone and create an attitude. You don't have to be a writer to appreciate how constructive or lethal words can be. How we express something does matter. If you think "It's just semantics," change your perception. Empower yourself by respecting words.

SPEAKING KINDLY

Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill.  Buddha

How do you describe yourself? Are you positive? Apologetic? Defensive? How you speak of yourself reflects self-image. If you speak in a less than positive
manner, it’s harder to feel totally positive. Change your life by getting more conscious about the words you use.

Expressing Thoughts
Words influence your persona. Choose yours carefully. They can greatly affect the response you get and the perception of your message. Get in the habit of thinking before you speak. It’s easy to hurt good relationships, both pleasure and business, with poorly worded statements, or regret blurting words out. Pause instead of just reacting. Then find an appropriate response. This habit will serve you well in all areas of life.

Using kinder words softens negative feelings.

Referring to someone I dislike as a jerk, fuels anger. Gentler words, like “the poor soul,” show compassion. Refrain from using X-rated words.

Trust me, I can spew #@% words. But as my self-love grew, cursing lessened. I still #@% if I stub my toe or get angry in the moment, but less often. Looking back, I realized cursing fuels anger when I feel low inside. I did it thinking I’d get approval. Nowadays, I don’t need word accessories to prove anything.
Controlling a foul mouth improves self-image. Being more ladylike makes me feel better about me.

Do you preface ideas with self-defeating comments like, “You probably won’t like it but...” or “This sounds dumb but...” Why make the person expect to not like or it’s dumb? Enthusiasm and confidence hooks people so they at least consider your proposal objectively. Stay aware! You can break habits of using negative words. Even if you must force yourself to be positive or withhold a negative preface, force yourself! Losing those kinds of thoughts is loving and attracts more. It’s worth an effort. Jerry says:

After growing up told I wasn’t good at anything, I believed it. My father laughed at my dreams and I became gun-shy. I’m an architect. When I had to discuss ideas with a client, I kept apologizing for my plans and indicating she might not like them. We lost her because of it. My boss warned if I did it again I’d be fired. He said I was a good architect and should be confident. I listened as I spoke, and recognized how self-deprecating I was. So I forced myself to stop. The less I did it, the more confident I became, which resulted in several promotions.

I implore you not to put yourself down to others, even under the guise of a joke. Perhaps you do it so people won’t expect much of you. Do you believe
that if they’re expecting jack from you, your good work will seem better? NOT!

It screams insecurity to others, and to you. If you have nothing nice to say, say nothing. Beth says:

_I’ve always been self-conscious because I wasn’t thin and got in the habit of making fat jokes about myself. I figured if I did it first, others would think it didn’t bother me. When I did it in front of you, you suggested I stop. It did hurt me. I hated being overweight. I realized that it blew my size out of proportion. I’m not fat–just not perfectly thin. By stopping fat jokes, I’ve accepted my body more._

Don’t milk negative situations. Talking about them too much is as counterproductive as keeping everything in. Be selective in who you speak to about what bothers you. Gina said, “I have a friend who loves stirring things out of proportion. If I complain, she tries to get me angrier, which makes me feel worse. So I’ve learned to keep my mouth shut with her.” Don’t use a negative person as a sounding board. Share with someone you trust to be objective. Often one who just listens is best—much better than venting indiscriminately.
Whose mind controls your words, yours or theirs? Many of us parrot what others think. Why? Insecurity. A need to please. Fear of looking foolish. Societal pressure. Our thoughts stay contained in a little box of what’s expected of us. If you want to say, “I love me,” blow the lid off the box and choose your own thoughts! Why let others control them? Expressing an opinion shows confidence. Many people say this is a hard one, especially if you’re used to pleasing.

**Word Attitudes**

Listen to yourself. What attitude do you maintain in general? It’s harder for people who walk around angry or with a negative outlook to feel positive about themselves. Consciously listen. Do you complain a lot? Expect the worst? I believe we get back what we give out. Living on a negative tip—allowing people to bother you, hanging onto anger and being overly sensitive about what people say or do—keeps the better goodies from reaching us.

Pessimism dampens the spirit. I’ve made positive statements such as “I know you’ll be fine;” “You’ll pass the test;” “Everything will work out fine,” and gotten a noodly response such as “I guess so,” or “maybe.” It’s usually said with doubt that reflects in their demeanor. On a spiritual level, it says your
faith isn’t strong. Try some optimistic words. Just say, “Thanks for your encouragement,” if that’s all you can muster.

Insecurity dilutes intentions if you use cop-outs like "I might" - “I’ll try” - “If I can” - “I hope to.” When I give a pep talk to someone who wants something badly, and enthusiastically say they’ll get it, a common response is “hopefully.” I’ve stopped screaming “Don’t hope, know.” It’s hard for many to understand. These words express doubt and fear. They undermine confidence. We get back what we put out. If you express doubt or fear, your chances of accomplishment get more doubtful. Saying, “I hope so,” indicates you’re thinking about potential failure.

_We attract what we give out!!!_ Prepare for failure and receive! Or break old habits. Practice using “I can” or “I will” to state what you want. Over and over, even if you don’t quite believe it. It WILL get easier as you change your attitude and receive more. “I can” and “I will” set a positive expectation. Using them give you more control over outcomes. Saying them feels better than a doubtful, "I hope to" or "I should." “Can” and will” show commitment. Confident words instill a stronger, clearer determination to succeed than words expressing wishful thinking. They rev you up and put you into a better mindset to reach
goals. Replace all iffy, hopeful words with resolute ones! I hope my words have gotten through because this is a power tool. 😊

Saying, “I’m sorry” infers doing something wrong, but it’s often used casually. Break that habit! Apologizing carte blanche is a subtle self-esteem buster that feeds guilt. Why say, “I’m sorry” if you did nothing wrong? I’ve banged people accidentally and they say, “I’m sorry” before I can. It’s an automatic response. But saying “I’m sorry” sends a subtle message of blame, which isn’t necessary. Be selective and only apologize if you legitimately were wrong. Use other words for when you don’t. If you were right but feel bad, say a version of, “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings but I had to do it.” Apologize for how your actions affected someone without acting like you did something wrong—an unnecessary way to bring yourself down.

Were you taught to minimize accomplishments to be liked more? Sarah says, “Until recently, I’d lose a good opportunity rather than put myself in a good light since I had low self-esteem. Now I know I’m entitled to think well of me.” Jill agrees. “When I speak well about me out loud, I listen. If others don’t like it, let them work on themselves.” That’s the deal. If you put yourself down to build others up, self-esteem takes a hit. Vic says men have a different version:
My brother always brags. I’m insecure and don’t want to seem conceited like him. At a job interview. I sounded pathetic about my ability to do the job. Yet I knew I could ace it! Needless to say, I didn’t get it. When you encouraged me to create a script with my good qualities and practice in an upbeat way, I thought it wouldn’t work. But I was desperate and tried. And tried. Eventually the words sounded more confident. I rehearsed before my next job interview and got hired.

Even if you feel lousy, fool yourself. When asked how you’re doing say, “terrific!” even if you have problems. People prefer a positive reply. You’ll feel better giving one. Who do you like more, people who complain or those with a positive attitude? Be the kind of person you like.

Years ago I began giving an enthusiastic “great” or “very well, thanks” when asked how I was and got positive vibes back. Every time I said it, I felt a bit better. Now I believe it. Even if a specific thing isn’t going well, I still know I’m doing very well, thank you God.

Sticks & Stones
People say things to make you feel bad when they're angry, don't like you, are jealous, or, live in stupidity. Their words can be deflected and not allowed to hit their mark by putting them into perspective. Why listen to someone who throws word darts? The stupidity factor makes folks speak without considering the impact or even think it's in your best interest. Mandi told a class how her parents’ comments about her appearance used to hurt and how she overcame it:

*My parents love me and don't mean to hurt me but memories of them punching holes in my self-esteem with words are painful. Mom regularly suggested I diet, and more—for my good. It staggered me. I finally understand they spoke from ignorance, afraid if I don't improve, I won't find a guy to care for me. As I accepted that what matters is my own concept of me, I asked Mom if she grasped how she hurt me. She was shocked and felt awful, explaining she was trying to help and promised to stop. She can't, but I ignore it. Recently Dad whispered to my sister that it was a shame I'd gained weight on vacation. I still felt ouch, but it passed quickly. I'm in control, not letting words get to me as much. That nurtures my self-love.*
Only you give someone else's words validity. If you're called stupid or fat, that doesn't make you stupid or fat. Anyone can say anything. You make their words true, or not. Don't accept someone else's judgment! Words can NEVER harm you—unless you let them! Words don't hurt. Your response to them does. If someone's words sting, consciously remind yourself that their view is unimportant. When you lament that someone made you feel bad about yourself—STOP. Think about it. Words only hurt you if you give them power by accepting them as right. Your choice: shrug them off or let them under your skin. Make compliments much more important than negative comments. If something mean is said, compliment yourself. That's self-love!

THE POWER OF "THANK YOU"

I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks. William Shakespeare

We thank people for favors. It's considered polite. But many of us get tongue tied about graciously accepting compliments and kindness.

Do you put yourself down when given positive words? That's unfair to you! Accept that. Force yourself to receive good stuff
without diffusing it. It improves your self-perception. I used to trash myself in response to compliments or kindness. It still feels empowering to no longer negate positives.

**Deflecting Goodies**

Do you find it hard to accept a favor or something special? That’s a common bad habit. Low self-love makes it hard to believe you’re worthy. How can you accept a gift or kindness if you feel this way? Many of us are uncomfortable receiving. Cheri relates:

> I'm impossible about receiving. It's okay for me to give gifts but I get flustered if I get one. I usually say, "You shouldn't have" or ask if they're sure it's for me. When I see myself naked I wonder why anyone would be nice to someone with so much cellulite. I like getting gifts but my discomfort with people being nice to be me neutralizes any good feelings.

I asked a group why cellulite should prohibit deserving a gift? They laughed, but discussed their own shticks about receiving. Magda questioned why her friend gave her homemade goodies. Maybe she thought Magda was a lousy cook. Her friend loved sharing but Magda was uncomfortable receiving. Joni added, "If someone does something special for me I wonder why. Are they guilty? Do they feel sorry for me? It's hard to accept it's because they
like me." If you don't like yourself, it's hard to believe others could or that you deserve kindness. Eugenia say:

_I look for ulterior motives when someone does something for me that they don't have to. A piece of me knows I'm a good person and should be treated well but voices from the past make me doubt why anyone would think so._

Men negate stuff too, often for other reasons. Jed says, “I know I’m too hard on myself. When someone says I did a good job, I think I could have done better.” Larry says, “If someone offers to help me, I’m concerned they think I’m not capable of doing it myself.” Rick adds, “My girlfriend bought me a shirt and I accused her of not liking how I dress.” Sherman says having people do things for him stirs bad memories:

_My wife recently chided that I can’t receive. I help everyone but won’t accept it. Maybe I don’t believe I deserve it. I’ve always blamed Mom, who raised me to feel like I could do nothing for myself. Her fussing over me made me feel incompetent so I had to prove my competence. Now I try to accept_
more and notice when I do, I'm in a better mood. I need to convince myself that I do deserve what others offer. I guess the problem isn’t mom. It’s me.

A need to control can make you refute outside help. “I can do it myself!” Susan says, “My last boyfriend couldn’t do enough for me when I was sick. But when he got the flu, he called ME controlling for insisting on bringing him food. We actually broke up over it.” If you have an aversion to getting help, try to see where it comes from so you can break that habit. All you doubters: repeat after me: “I deserve goodies because I’m a good human being!”

"Thank You"
An inability to just say "thank you" to compliments used to plague me. Is this you too? On one level you love it but alarms go off. I don’t deserve it! I can’t accept it! So your tongue flounders, or denies it. Improving self-love can begin with learning to say "thank you," then shutting your mouth with a smile. Women in particular are taught that being modest or self-effacing makes us liked more. Compliments were like ping pong balls to me. I had to pop them back quick. As my self-esteem grew, so did my ability to accept them graciously, without embarrassment or questions. Carl agreed in a workshop:

I never liked compliments when I judged myself by perfect standards.

Whatever I did and however I looked was never good enough in my eyes
so I didn't deserve praise. Now that I appreciate myself, I enjoy knowing others do too.

Did you ever lie to negate compliments? I did. Denying a compliment seemed to please others more than owning it. Since I didn't know what to say, I'd demean myself. “You like THIS sweater? It was cheap at a discount store.” It wasn't. "My decorating is good? Lots of people did it for me." I'd done it myself. "No, I didn't lose weight. It must be the haircut." I'd lost weight. Geri says, "My response to compliments is denial. I can't understand how anyone sees good in me. Just saying 'thank you' is awkward but I'm trying." The more I put myself down after compliments, the more I felt secure about being liked me. But my self-love fell another notch. We diffuse compliments by knocking ourselves. Low self-esteem motivates:

- Deflecting positives: "I was lucky to get it right. I'm a lousy writer."
- Pointing out imperfections: "You like this? Did you see the uneven buttons?"
- Returning the compliment: "I was lucky to land the account. You did more."
- Giving credit to others: "My wife chose this for me."
Do you go overboard after a compliment or gesture with excessive gratitude? That reflects you don’t feel deserving. You are! Reminder: “I think, therefore I am.” If you act like you don’t deserve it, it screams insecurity. More importantly, you feel worse about yourself. Acting like you deserve it sinks in. Next time you get a compliment, just say “thank you.” Practice receiving without dispute! The first time I said “thank you,” and no more, was an exhilarating accomplishment but felt weird. Would she think I had a big ego or no longer like me? But it felt great to acknowledge I deserved the compliment. I had to consciously say “thank you” and clamp my mouth shut until I broke the habit of diluting kind words. Jessie heard this in a support group and shared:

Growing up the message was girls should be modest. I learned young about jealousy. One minute your friend exalted your qualities and the next, hated you for having them. I thought compliments cause bad feelings if you didn’t criticize yourself. This discussion made me realize how ridiculous it is not to enjoy praise. I now avoid people who prefer me to denounce myself. I’m beginning to love me—finally. Compliments reinforce self-love. That’s now more important than being liked by those who can’t accept me as wonderful. I’m free!
Practice receiving compliments, favors, gifts and kind gestures graciously. Self-love increases when you say "thank you." Quietly absorb compliments and enjoy the pleasure of people appreciating you, with your mouth shut in a smile! I still get a kick out of saying “thank you” without qualifying what was said about me.

CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION BOOSTERS

The wise ones fashioned speech with their thought, sifting it as grain is sifted through a sieve. Buddha

Communication means getting a point across clearly and listening to the person clearly. It doesn’t mean trying to get heard as much as possible. Effective communication is give and take. It enables you to get along better with others and get your message across more effectively. You can communicate confidence, even if you have none, with my tips for communicating in ways that can make you seem confident until you actually are.

Speak like you mean it. Your tone of voice sends a message. If you’re apologetic or tentative, practice speaking with authority. Use the confidence
skills in Chapter 9. The more you express assurance in your delivery, the more seriously folks take you.

**Tell, don’t ask.** In appropriate situations, state your request as a given. Instead of “May I do this?” assert what you intend to do. Start by convincing yourself that you’re entitled to it. Why ask for a raise if you can ask how much of raise they can swing? Julie discovered this when she got tired of settling for vacations at times she didn’t want:

*I like vacations in the summer but my boss would push mine to fall. Yet others went then. A friend invited me every year to her vacation home. I could never go. She scolded, “You’re a sucker. Don’t ask. Tell them you’re coming here in August.”* I finally took a stand with the head honcho.

*Instead of asking, I said I was going away for two specific weeks. Please note it. He looked me in the eyes as if to question me. I firmly returned his look. He said, “Fine.”* 

Asking implies choices - “yes or no.” Why make it easy to turn you down? Stating sets a definite tone. It’s heard differently. Lisa used to sound apologetic when asking for things. As she worked on her self-esteem, she realized she was selling herself short, explaining, “I decided I deserved better than being a wimp. Now I say what I expect and get it! I’ve got a ‘take me seriously’
attitude. Mom was wrong about being a good girl.” Let confidence—real or faked—show in into your attitude as you go for yours.

**Get an ear filter.** Listen without making assumptions. Insecurity makes you perceive simple statements as criticism. “I don’t want to go to the park since it’s too cold.” can be “I don’t want to spend time with you.” Joie filtered her peripheral hearing:

*I drove myself crazy wondering what people really meant. One day my friend asked for objective attention. She noted how often I worked myself into misery with paranoid reactions to comments. I jumped to false conclusions by misinterpreting words. She hated seeing me worked up over nothing. After analyzing my latest complaint, I saw how I embellish in my head. Now I try not to.*

Hear what people say at face value. Expect others to think well of you. Break any habits of expecting negatives and then hearing them in between the words. Pay attention. Filter what’s said with loving thoughts!

**Be someone people want to talk to.** Don’t talk at them. Listen too. Ask questions to show you’re paying attention or to draw them into a conversation. Make others feel special. Monologues work on stage but turn folks off.
Nervousness stimulates motor mouth. I know, since I can rev at 80 MPH.

Paying attention broadens the conversation.

**Shy? Say hi!** Being in a room full of strangers is uncomfortable for most people. Me too! Remind yourself that most people probably like you. Next time, approach someone and just say, “Hi. My name is __,” to break the ice and meet people. Once you do it a few times, it’s more comfortable. I force myself to do it. It comes across as confidence.

**Speak with authority.** Not loud or aggressive but a soft but firm tone that says you mean business. I used to talk loud and fast and I took control. Speaking in a calm but decisive tone gets you taken more seriously. If you’re calm, they listen objectively and are less likely to get defensive or angry. This control empowers me more.

**Stifle the "ums."** And other words and sounds don’t sound good. “Ya know.” “Like.” Become conscious and make an effort to minimize how often they come up.

**Think before you speak.** I hear: "What made me say that?" "I wish I could erase what I blurted out." Take deep breaths before responding, especially if you’re angry.
Speak slowly. It makes you sound in control and emphasizes your point. This gives you more real control. To get taken more seriously, speak slowly and enunciate words.

Monitor your pitch. The higher your voice goes from emotions, the less control. If you’re nervous, excited, or angry, start an octave lower, to allow leeway for emotions.

Learn to communicate without emotions. Getting emotional weakens control. Keep any anger or frustration in check with deep breaths. Scream or cry in private.

Each time you positively control communication, you also say, “I love me!”
Open yourself to the delicious moments of life and enjoy it to the fullest. Say, "I love me" with the same passion and determination as you'd use to cheer your favorite team, meet a celebrity, applaud your best friend, celebrate a special occasion. Every day is a special occasion if you make it so. Whenever you give to yourself, self-love is bolstered. MANY people don't go out of their way to love themselves. Are you too busy to do loving things for you? That dampens self-love. Get into the habit of doing loving things for you. Self-love builds from that.

Every loving thing you do for you, however small, is a brick in the foundation of self-love. Every kindness you show yourself can motivate more kindness since it feels good. The more you feel good about yourself, the more self-loving you become. I asked a large assortment of people to share ways
they say, "I love me." Get some ideas. I put Kathryn first because I think she sums up the importance of showing yourself love.

Kathryn, 36, New York: I grew up in a poor household where I could very rarely buy what I needed, much less what I wanted. So I was used to denying myself necessities and wants. Over the years, I learned that if you believe you can’t afford it, you can’t, and if you think you can afford it, you can. So, I started acting like I could afford most of the things I wanted. I started buying myself flowers, jewelry, clothes, art supplies, stationary, and nice pens. Now, I try to never deny myself things. It really is true you can afford what you think you can. Doing this changed my life. I am never going to deny myself again! I don’t understand why women are raised to believe that it is evil or bad to treat themselves well—almost like a badge of honor to deny yourself everything. It is very sad. I understand that we may have to deny ourselves fur coats, luxury cars, etc. But we shouldn’t deny ourselves simple pleasures like a cup of cappuccino in a café, a bouquet of our favorite flowers, a pair of earrings. It is crazy. The world would be a much better place if women started to value themselves and treat themselves well.
Tina, 60+, CA: *When my mother, who was profoundly depressed and emotionally unavailable all her life died, I had thought my child-self was over the pain of not being bonded to her after years of therapy. But, all the pain came flooding back, since the possibility she would change was gone. So I've been singing lullabies to myself every night before going to bed. It's very comforting, and helps a lot. If no one's around, I sing out loud. If my husband is near, I sing silently to myself. It works equally well.*

Sharon, NJ: *I go for a walk in nature. I make it a treat to get out, forget about the ringing phone, work and cleaning. I wave to neighbors and take in the sights, sounds, and smells of my neighborhood. I consider myself lucky to live where I do and appreciate nearby friends, the deer I see occasionally, and the great sunset view. I also have a scrapbook of all my professional accomplishments and awards, plus great photos of myself and my friends and family from memorable times. When I feel down, I flip through it. I also call my niece just hear her laugh. Something about a carefree, happy, child makes us all feel better.*

Tony, 43, FL: *I live alone and settled for the ratty old silverware I started with. I saw some really fine, very expensive cutlery in a store but my dad said it was too much money for a single guy. But then I thought how nice it would
be to eat with a fork that felt good, not like tin. I splurged and bought just 2 settings. I use it every day so it’s a constant reminder that I’m worth good silverware! I still get a charge when I use the fine spoon for my Cheerios and think about how my dad would flip if he knew.

Lea, 42, MA: Occasionally I allow myself an extravagant splurge. I’d wanted something from Tiffany’s, ever since I saw the movie on TV, but it’s so expensive. I had a small apartment and couldn’t entertain. One day I decided it was time to treat myself. I went to Tiffany’s and bought ONE gorgeous crystal water goblet. I use it every night to keep water by my bedside. It was such a loving thing to do that I still smile when I drink from it. It was worth every penny and a daily reminder that I’m worth it!

Gary, 37, IL: I love to get in the car by myself and drive out of Chicago for the day with no destination in mind. I think of it as purposely getting lost in enjoying an electronic-free day. I leave my cell phone home, not thinking too much about what I’m doing, having no schedule to follow, doing everything MY way. I usually discover interesting places to poke around in. I have an adventurous spirit that’s usually in check, especially at work. So allowing myself a day to explore is relaxing and just for me.
Amy: I go on trips with my friends. I don’t save, save, save my money for "one day" (although I am very financially responsible with savings acct. and 401K plans). I plan fun times for friends and myself. I read books and I think about what it takes to make me happy, and how I can get there.

Christi, 35, TN: The four "C's" of pampering: Expensive chocolate, expensive cosmetics, expensive candles, expensive champagne!!! I even have expensive champagne glasses I bought just for me! I used to think you needed a special occasion for bubbly but realized that ANY occasion is special when you treat yourself! Sometimes I take a bath and light scented candles, play soothing music and sip champagne—all alone!! It's great! I also get massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, eyebrow and bikini waxing! I can't afford all of these things every month, but I treat myself to AT LEAST one per month. I also started using expensive skincare and cosmetics. I actually used to make fun of people for wasting money on such things. I found a reason—it feels great knowing you are pampering yourself with special treats! Just knowing my cleanser cost $50 makes me feel special! Why should rich women have all the fun?

Debra, 50, PA: My special treats are dancing, candles, books, flowers and friends. Candles uplift me, with their light and fragrance, so I burn them at
home when I want a special lift or delight. Going out dancing always makes me feel good. Most of my best friends live far from me, but we stay in touch constantly by e-mail or telephone. It is always a special treat to take time to read a good book. In summer, I love to sit on my deck in the sun or the cool evening. In winter, I read in a place where the sun shines through my French doors. I am in touch with nature while reading something that uplifts me. I love to have fresh flowers in my kitchen that I pick during a walk, or I indulge and buy them at the flower shop.

Joanie, 54, NY: I treat myself to a lot of jewelry and trips. I'm on my own and treat myself special. I'm going to Antarctica next. Nobody else is going to take me. I'm taking me and it makes me feel really, really good. I'm happy that I can afford to do it.

Dolores, 30, FL: When I'm really tired and need rest, I turn off the phone, shut myself off from the world and spend time by myself. I try to get anything I want in life because I work hard and I deserve it.

Alexander, 40, NY: I sleep when I want to. I refuse work that I do not love. I spend a lot of money on sweets, though it ruins my teeth.
Amanda, 26, AK: Hot baths with candlelight and Bach playing; long walks through the woods by myself; a bit of make-up and nice clothes even though I work from home; baking an intricate, delicious dessert just for me; checking out a new book by my favorite author at the library; playing a CD of Irish fiddle music, flamenco, Motown, etc and dancing until I'm completely out of breath; buying postcards of my favorite artwork and getting them in small frames for around my desk; landscaping and planting a garden that is the kind I'll want to sit in all summer; standing on a bare rock jutting out into the ocean on a chilly, windy day and letting the wind and spray wash over me; sitting in a sunny window to read; 20 minutes of yoga first thing in the morning; buying flowers for the kitchen table; and always eating breakfast, even if it doesn't sound good at the time.

Nasrin, 28, Tehran, Iran: I try to do everything that gives me comfort: I buy everything I love for myself. I always put on the best clothes and shoes and use the best perfumes and cosmetics, in spite of not having a large salary. I take care of my skin and use the best creams every night. I never sacrifice myself for others, especially men.
Michelle, 21, FL: *Once in a while I eat fattening cheesecake and love every bite. I treat myself to a good dessert once a week, even on a tight budget.*

Edwin, 78, LA: *I love myself. I pamper me and like to buy nice clothes, when I feel like it. I may go out to dine with my sweetie and buy her something nice. We love to do for each other. Joy and happiness just follow us, like hungry pigs!* 

Julianne, 33, NM: *I take a brisk walk almost every day because it makes me feel good.*

Lionel, 42, NV: *At least once a month I do a long distance bike ride. When I do it I feel like nothing else matters. My girlfriend hates it but I do this for me!* 

Joyce, age 39, Maryland: *I’m married with two children. My life is very hectic and I can lose myself trying to handle work and home responsibilities. Last year my girlfriend and I decided we needed a vacation, just for US. We left the kids with our husbands and went to Las Vegas. We did fun things like 2 college kids. I didn’t ask permission. I knew I needed it so I just went. Everyone survived at home without me. The trip put me more in touch with*
myself and the need to do more for me. We plan to go away together, on our own, every year. That definitely promotes self-love!

Carolyn, 58, KS: I eat my favorite foods, wear nice clothing, and put on perfume before I go to bed.

Marc, 26, FL: After a hard workout or eating properly during the week, some ice cream. If I'm really lucky, I have a dance with my wife before I go to sleep. Always before falling asleep snuggling with her. All of these things give myself an "I love you and a pick me up." Staying in contact with friends that I haven't seen in awhile and occasionally seeing them is another big boost as well.

Emily, 42, NY: Getting a massage; taking a bath; going to a bookstore and reading the children's picture books; getting outdoors in beautiful weather for a walk in the park/woods/nature; going to an art museum; going to the ballet or a concert; cooking myself a nice, simple meal from scratch, including vegetables which I love but often don't take the time to prepare; staying in bed all day with a juicy novel and a box of chocolate chip cookies.

Ted, 27, GA: I view time as the most precious commodity and as a result have developed an interest in expensive timepieces. And I indulge myself.
Rosemary, 65+, NY: *I'm good to myself by limiting how others take advantage of me. My favorite splurge is ginger ice cream, and my who-cares? One is buying colored butterfly pins for my hair.*

Karen, 42, IA: *I look for ways to use my talents.*

Carmen, 22, NJ: *I love to shop for shoes I not quite sure why it make me feel like a women.*

Ed, 28, VA: *I pray to God, which give me great joy. When I'm through I feel wonderful knowing He answers my prayers.*

Cristina, 24, NY: *Books are an escape. I read wonderful ones as a treat on my way to and from work. I also try to celebrate everything that happens: new jobs; leaving jobs; birthdays; holidays; stitches out. Everything is worth celebrating since life is worth celebrating and all those silly little things are part of life. So I go out to dinner or for a drink or to a movie, something special to commemorate the event.*

Todd, 24, PA: *I give myself time for things that take time.*

Elli, 63, NY: *I eat something especially yummy, Jeremy's Micro-Batch triple-espresso ice cream. I eat healthy food that I really like. I go to a movie spontaneously. I rented a room to save myself from working so much to pay high rent. It gives me time to e-mail and network. I work less, read and relax*
more. I love saying "no" to something I intended to do to stay home and vege.

I push myself less and allow some laziness. I'm no longer hard on myself if my progress doesn't feel satisfactory.

James, 55+, NY: I play tennis and take dance lessons.

Amy U., 30, MN: I make sure I'm doing what's best for me in that moment. I make good decisions, take baths when my body is weary, listen to my body and do what it wants, go for walks (the silence and motion nurture all parts of me). I vacation by myself and read and write a lot on a beach or sailing or wherever I am. It allows me to return to myself. I listen to breathtaking music. It makes my soul sigh.

William, 20, France: I know I love me. Sometimes I just allow me to sleep a little more or do something completely crazy according to public opinion.

Margo, 32, OH: Once in a while I send myself flowers at my office. It perks me up. When people asked who sent them, they don't believe I did. But I don't care! I like feeling I deserve them.

Gineeda, 42, WA: I bought myself a set of sheets with a very high thread count when they were on sale. Each night when I snuggle into them, I smile, knowing I deserve to feel good in bed.
Carol, 28, NV: *Once a month I go to an ice cream parlor I love and get an expensive, decadent sundae. I’m normally conscious of eating healthy and watching my weight. But I enjoy that splurge.*

Vance, 38, RI: *My work schedule is very full but I wanted to get in better shape. I’m splurging on a personal trainer, which motivates me to do it. Knowing I have an appointment makes me keep it.*

Astrid, 35, MI: *Once a week my husband takes the kids. My friend and I take a one-hour yoga class and then go out for a light meal.*

Jessica, 24, WA: *I was making a lot of money doing a job I hated in a city I was bored of. One day I looked in the mirror and said, “You deserve more.” So I quit my job, packed a u-haul and moved to Seattle, a city I’d always wanted to live in. That was the turning point for me. It was a time of focusing on me and doing what made me happy. It made me appreciate myself so much more!*

Jamahl, 53, GA: *No matter how busy I get, I make time to get to the beach once a week, no matter what the weather. It may just be for half hour. As I walk and breath fresh air, I can feel my equilibrium balancing and my*
energy gets recharged. It reinforces that I care about my well-being. I leave smiling.

Sally, 75, MI: I always wanted a dog but it never worked with my schedule. Now that I’m retired, I adopted a puppy. It scampers around making a mess and I love it! Keeps me younger.

Cody, 19, AR: I make time to get in touch with my spirituality. Every day I sit quietly for at least 10 minutes, do deep breathing and meditate about my goals. Then I give thanks for all my blessings. It keeps me grounded and in deep touch with myself.

Judy C., 44, Brazil: I used to indulge in bubble baths, but since moving to Brazil, we only have showers. I allow myself to take some time every week that is just for me, to do whatever I want.

Chris, OH, 29: I take a nice hot bath. I buy myself nice things that I want and deserve because I work hard.

Mick, CT, 41: I eat out; purchase music equipment.

Yvonne R., 51, NE: I make a small pot of good coffee at night, grab two of my favorite cookies, put on my jammies and am a couch potato for a little bit. I swing on my grandma’s swing in my garden.
John W., 45, NY: I try to be patient. Do many simple nurturing things such as reading, exercise, socialize with friends, help others, bubble baths, and give myself permission for creative self-exploration.

Kim, 30, TX: Sushi and good wine. Can’t live without it -- and wouldn’t want to.

Sharath, 44, India: I just buy an expensive book when I want to reward myself. Or, maybe a little gizmo that I had put off, till I really deserved it.

Mary R., 29, NY: Sometimes I allow myself to buy a CD I really want. Other nice things I do is buy flowers for myself every once in awhile. Also, just treat myself to a manicure and feel like a queen.

Bonnie, 35, NY: I have weekend getaways, buy new make-up, get my nails done, go tanning.

Mary T., 37, NY: I work out and pay attention to what I put in my body.

Kishani, 22, Sri Lanka: I will take care of my life first, I will do stuff to make me happy and then I will think about others for a change.

Samantha, 27, FL: I try to give myself everything I want to make me happy instead of depending on someone else. I know I deserve and work hard for it. At the store I get seafood (my favorite food), even if I can’t afford it. I
pamper myself when I get the chance. I get my hair done every few months; my nails every 2 weeks. I’m really working on loving me all the time.

Joe, 32, NY: I make an effort to spend time alone with no distractions. I treat myself to a good meal at a nice restaurant. I bought myself that leather jacket I always wanted after a tough but successful work week. I earned it, and don’t ever forget: one must enjoy life!

Theresa, 39, DE: I get my nails done every three weeks, I started highlighting my hair, Jazzercise, occasional shopping trips for really good clothes.

DT: I jog. It is my own personal temple/meditation/time for just me and no-one else no-matter what. When I don’t get to jog, I am not as happy, nor as at peace.

Dee, 34, CA: A good glass of wine; a night alone with a great book; quality anything (underwear, writing pens, perfume).

Veronica, TX: Bubblebaths. A girls’ trip per year with 3 friends. A sitter two days a week for my baby so I can work, go to lunch with friends, run errands, search the internet... whatever I want to do.

David, 41, Puerto Rico: I moved to New York to make money but my heart was in Puerto Rico. People didn’t understand why I worked long hours. I saved
to build a house in my country. I wanted to do this for myself. After it was built, my mom lived in it while I worked to pay off the mortgage. I made a promise that as soon as it was paid, I'd go back and live in my house. I spent the next 5 years working steadily and sent all money to the bank. Now the house is mine! I quit my job and went home.

Arlene, 62, NJ: I'll take a whirlpool bath; read a good book; watch a movie, or spend the day with one of my favorite friends rather than sit at the computer.

Judy, 29, NY: I've been tight with myself compared to the past because of self-employment but when I finish a big project - I treat myself to a great haircut or facial. I truly believe in "work hard, play hard" so I splurge on vacations which are the ultimate thank-you's to myself.

Anthony, 33, NC: I love to treat myself out to eat, go to a good movie that will make me think hard. And then come home and take a nice, long, hot bath. I'll read a good book and go to sleep.

Julie, 55, MO: I get a massage, take bubble baths, enjoy long walks in nature.

Steve B., 59, NY: Cooking works for me.
Amy S., 28, CO: I have a separate little bath area with a tub just for me. There's a curtain that divides it from everything else. My special gift to myself is a bubble bath with the perfect music and the perfect glass of wine. It can last fifteen minutes or two hours, but that time is just for me to *feel*. I also keep special coffees and teas for myself, for quicker pick-me-ups. They don't have to be expensive or fancy; the fact that they are different is enough.

Dianne, 58, NC: I live frugally and keep careful accounts - but when I either need or very much want something, I buy it or if it costs much, I save up for it ahead of time. This year I bought several large pieces of exercise equipment and diet books. They have made me healthier and feeling better generally. And I took a great 3-week vacation back to my family in Maine and went to my 40th high school reunion. That went so well that I plan to move back there in the next few years. I look forward to it as starting a new and challenging life again, as it has been over 30 years that I have been stuck in the steamy south.

Jason, 23, KY: I remind myself that I am a wonderful person and because of this, unimaginable delights await me.

Brenda, 49, NY: I cook a full meal, with candles etc., just for me.
Bruce, 46, TX: *I take off in the car and go out of town on the spur of the moment. I worked hard to retire early and, am going to enjoy it.*

Ellen, 51, FL: *I work out and get into the hot tub, sauna or steam bath. Back rubs, facials, and pedicures are loving too!*

Clark, 25, NY: *I buy myself things such as CDs or tickets to sporting events.*

Fred, 36, NY: *A good pasta.*

Maggie, 34, CA: *I eat chocolate.*

Garvin, 26, MD: *Anything I see that I want to do - I do it. If I want it - I give it to me.*

Lyzia, 32, Brazil: *I have an appointment every week to have my nails done. And every 2 weeks an appointment to take care of my hair. When I wait a lot to get my turn I don't feel I'm wasting my time. I reserved that moment for me. I sometimes give myself presents, saying to I deserve them. Every now and then I give me an expensive present, a jewel or expensive clothes.*

Elizabeth, 17, NY: *Ice cream!*

Anna, 67, GA: *If I see something I really want or want to do, I do it!*
Linda, 42, TN: A glass of red wine or port; scented candles and a scented bath. I shop for clothes.

Julie, 40, NY: I’ll buy what I want, regardless of cost. I’ll get in a round of golf, even when I’m busy.

Judy S., 42, NY: Luxury! I will treat myself to things I love, even if they’re expensive.

Yvonne W., 48, NY: A day at a spa is nice. I usually buy myself a piece of jewelry that I would not expect to get from someone else.

Rochelle, 53, FL: I walk daily; swim 4 times a week; read ALL the time in between everything; subscribe to fun magazines for the beach. I get a massage at least twice a year, which is a real splurge. When I can afford it I give myself a solo vacation to see a friend in another state or go on a windjammer cruise. Now I buy 2 pens for $2.99 and that’s a big treat!

Sue, 40, NY: I write in my journal, take vitamins, exercise, eat chocolate, buy higher end clothes and accessories. At 40, I’ve earned it! I treat myself regularly to massages, facials, manicures and the girlie stuff - more expensive face and hand creams.

Frank, NY, 46: Studying Torah gives me deep satisfaction, so I try to make time for that.
Hanna, Australia, 21: *I treat myself to cosmetics and pampering products. I love it!*

Stan, N Y, 55: *I either take Friday off or leave in the afternoon to kayak, bike, or fish with friends.*

Ruxandra, 23, Romania: *Very often I say, "I love you" to myself. Sometime I do things I normally don’t do, like getting things I can’t afford because I deserve them.*

Chris, Ohio, 29: *I take a nice hot bath. I buy myself things I want and deserve because I work hard.*

Isabel, NY, 62: *I splurge on a hard cover book I really want; buy pretty stationary supplies (like pink post-its, interesting pens, colorful folders). I adore clothes shopping and don’t apologize for it!*

David, 42, Ottawa, Canada: *I like to write. It helps me to connect. I'm also starting to travel, which is generally fun, and a treat to myself.*

Mitzi, IN, 30: *I eat food that I know has toooooo much fat in it! Every Friday I treat myself to fast food as a reward for getting through the week.*

Beatrice, NY, 31: *I take warm bubble baths, have a glass of wine now and then, and pamper myself with manicures and pedicures.*

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Freda, NC, 29: *I buy myself some clothes or make-up. I treat myself to a movie or Chinese food. I enjoy a good night to myself, often with a bubble bath and candles.*

Irwin, NY, 33: *I take time to read and relax. Sometimes I buy nice clothes or music.*

Suzi, FL, 32: *I give various gifts to my body. Saving all year for a tattoo was one. I take myself out sometimes, usually for sushi.*

George, NY, 28: *I have a Whopper from Burger King every now and then and allow myself to sleep late on Sundays.*

Janice, WI, 43: *I used to do chores on Sunday night. I rarely made plans with friends and left all the dirty work for then. But I hated having all this grunge to do before the start of a work week. Now I do a little each day and leave Sunday nights for me. I love to get into something comfy, put on soft music, have a glass and read for hours without interruption. It always makes me feel more loving to myself.*

Sam, New York 70: *I spend time with my children and granddaughter.*

Annie, NJ, 47: *On a Saturday or Sunday morning I allow myself to sleep late; then I go downstairs and put together a breakfast tray with a pot of tea. I crawl back into bed with my feast and I read for an hour or two. Ahhh!*
Splurges, treats, and little delights are always related to food! I absolutely love to eat!!!! When I treat myself, I eat anything that tastes wonderful.

Roger, TX, 34: A fine wine and a great steak. A road trip. A good run around the park. A new toy. Or flirting with every attractive woman I see that day. That's always fun.

Kristi, OK, 44, I tan and have my nails done regularly. And I've begun to buy better/dressier clothes for myself. And if there is something, some little gadget or knickknack, that I really want and I have the money for it then I get it - without having to ask someone if it is alright or having to hide it.

William, 52, TN: I buy clothes, bicycle components, or a CD

Christina, 19, TX: I listen to good music. Every time I look in a mirror, I smile at myself and kinda whisper "I love you," making sure it has meaning for me. Usually, when I splurge, I go out and buy a CD I really want or I take a nice hot bath with great-smelling bath salts.

Karen, 49, CA: Writing in my journal is my "treat" for being with myself!
Chapter 14: Self-Esteem Power Tools

When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on! Franklin D. Roosevelt

MY 10 COMMANDMENTS OF SELF-LOVE

1. I shall lovingly accept myself as I am right now.
2. I shall appreciate all the beauty that makes me who I am.
3. I shall regularly give thanks for all of my blessings.
4. I shall trust in my ability to take care of myself.
5. I shall not criticize myself.
6. I shall not criticize others.
7. I shall forgive myself when I make a mistake.
8. I shall be kind to others, without sacrificing my own needs.
9. I shall take responsibility for my life.
10. I shall love myself to the best of my ability.
It’s time to look at the world with new vision! Without unrealistic expectations of others and wishful thinking. Without “what ifs” and “if onlys.” It’s time to accept that your life won’t change unless you do something about it. It’s time to stop waiting for your partner to turn into the Prince Charming/sex Goddess types we see in movies. It’s time to stop trying to be one. It’s time to stop waiting to lose extra pounds or become more successful before you love yourself. Self-love begins and ends with you! When you accept the reality of your life, you can nurture yourself to greater self-love.

It’s time to accept that you're not perfect, and never will be, and that's okay. It’s time to accept that that not everyone will like or approve of you, and that's okay too. It’s time to accept that it's hard to count on anyone but yourself, and that when people let you down, it's not always about you. It’s time to accept that your old view yourself and your world doesn’t have to be your reality anymore—you have choices! It’s time to take care of you. You can do it! Begin planning and creating a life that you want. It’s time to show yourself love! NOW!

Creating a happy life takes a conscious effort. Enjoy every step of the journey to being the best you can be by loving yourself! It takes time and patience. I included this chapter so you’ll have power tools to get started. A
little progress motivates you to take more steps. Remember, take one baby step at a time. Below are my principles for keeping on a positive track today. Try what sounds good to you!

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MY PRINCIPLES FOR A HAPPIER LIFE

*Freedom is what you do with what’s been done to you.* Jean-Paul Sartre

**Live as a person you'd want to have in your life.** Become a person you'd love to be friends with. What qualities do you appreciate most in people? Develop them in yourself, one at a time. Eric had lots of anger and complained about his friends. I asked if he'd want someone like him as a friend. He insisted he did. I suggested asking someone he trusted what kind of friend he was. The next week Eric was glum. He didn’t like what he heard. His sister said he was loud, sometimes brash, and often didn’t let someone get a word in. And more. Weeks later, Eric said:

> *I discovered I'm just as annoying as those I complain about. I watched myself, compared to what I want in others. I hate loudmouths but am one! I'm trying to speak softer and not say something without following through.*
I hate when others don’t keep their word! Now that I’ve changed, people treat me better. My friends didn’t have to change. I had to!

Become someone you’d like to be friends with. You’ll respect yourself a heck of a lot more, and attract those types. If you strive for integrity, you’ll like yourself more. Be proud of being ethical! Many folks aren’t. Living with integrity makes love me more!

Make an effort to tell the truth. Telling the truth gives you more credibility and makes you feel good as a person in the long run. A little white lie occasionally is normal. But be an honest person overall. Arnie says:

Before I met my wife, I told women little stories, which bloomed into big lies. I got so good I believed them! It set up a pattern of telling lies in other areas of my life. When I met Kimmie, I thought of marrying her yet said things that weren’t true out of habit. I hated myself and realized insecurity made me lie. I made an effort to tell the truth. Before proposing to Kimmie, I confessed my past. She thanked me for trusting her. Now I want to tell the truth. It makes me feel like a better person.

Truthfulness is a mainstay of integrity and helps sustain good self-esteem. It doesn’t matter how others are or what you’ve been. What matters is how
you want to be! When you make an effort to tell the truth, you’ll like yourself more.

**Smile! Smile! Smile! Laugh! Laugh! Laugh!** Smiling radiates confidence and reflects a positive attitude. Serotonin, which reduces stress and builds your immune system, is produced when you curl those lips into a grin. Plus, you look better smiling! People actually say they like seeing me because I smile a lot. That makes me smile more! Lea agreed in a workshop:

*I often had a grump on and never smiled around strangers in public. I was afraid someone would bother me if I did. One day, with my usual stoic street look, I walked by a man sitting on a step. His eyes twinkled as he told me to smile. I stopped and did it. He smiled again and said he knew I’d be prettier if I smiled. That made me smile more and put me into a good mood. People actually smiled at me that day. While I’m still not open to strangers, I smile a lot more. And I’m in a good mood more!*

Put yourself into a good mood by regularly finding reasons to laugh. Humor lightens the spirit. If you’re in a bad mood, make a silly face in the mirror. Get ridiculous if necessary until you can scrounge up a smile to take with you. Gail advises:
Learn to smile. I used to smile a lot before I met some bad situations.

Then I forgot to smile because things weighed me down. When I hardly smiled, people thought I was unapproachable. Now I've gotten back in the habit and feel much better because of it.

Watch out! Smiling and laughter are contagious! Be prepared for people to respond positively. Smiling and laughing make you feel better about life. That’s a nice way to show yourself love!

Practice patience. Not getting instant gratification is discouraging. But patience to wait for the right circumstances, person or possibility provides your best chance to find the right circumstances, person or possibility and shows stronger faith. Cindy says:

I used to have little value for my happiness. When I got sick of being an eternal doormat, I worked on myself for a few weeks. When nothing changed, I decided it was hopeless. Then I saw an old friend who radiated good energy. She used to be like me and said it took years to get where she was. So I got back on track and took my time. Now life is excellent!

Cindy expected big changes when making small efforts. Taking time to get comfortable with her new habits helped her love herself enough to be the
person she wants to be. No matter how small the steps, don’t give up! If you keep showing yourself love, your journey into self will have a happy ending! 🧡

**Leave the past in the past.** If you reach for broken tools from the past to cope with situations today, such as overeating or drinking or getting emotional or accepting bad behavior to keep the peace, bring yourself back to the present fast. Don’t use old defenses or excuses to face today. Look for healthier solutions instead succumbing to old, self-defeating habits. It’s NOW, not then. When situations remind you of past insecurities or hurts, distract yourself. I sing to unloving patterns. “La la. Go away, I don’t need you anymore!” Talk to yourself firmly about why you don’t want them. Do something loving to counter old shticks. Dianne advised:

*Focus not on what you can’t do any longer. Instead, focus on what you can do. When I first became a widow, I went to church and told the woman sitting next to me that I was a recent widow. She thought she was comforting me when she said "I’ve been a widow for 33 years." That sounded like a lifetime prison sentence and I burst into tears. Now I think it’s funny.*
Being a widow no longer defines Dianne. Today she’s created a happy life for herself. When you relax in the moment, it gets easier to detach from the past and stop worrying about the future. Face what’s going on with a conscious desire to do what’s best for you, not someone you used to worry about pleasing or are afraid of losing.

**Live for today.** Stop thinking about possible outcomes. Enjoy life now. Don’t project potential fears into the future. Worrying about what others will think or how something *may* play out stifles fun. Looking for the worst case scenario keeps you down. Mary said:

*I used to think out my actions, worrying about what others would think and what might happen later. It was like a dark cloud over everything I did.*

*Now I wait and see what really happens and feel much lighter.*

Mary learned to leave predicting the future to fortunetellers. Experience it when it arrives and stop worrying so much. Trust your instincts. When doubts and fears surface, visualize them in a toilet and flush them down so you can live for today! You never know what may happen tomorrow. Expect it to be terrific!

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Choose to be happy. Never forget that happiness is a choice. Love yourself enough to choose healthier options. Stewart is enjoying his freedom:

Family visits used to be a self-image downer. They take inventory. Aunt Lucy checks how far my hairline’s receded. Grandma discusses why I have no steady girlfriend. Mom picks apart my work. Dad waits until I’ve been duly bruised before rating me on his loser index of why I’m not making smarter investments like him. Last time I went home, I chose not to succumb and saw their antics as a TV comedy. When someone put me down, I laughed and left the room, saying I won’t listen to their criticism anymore. They don’t get it but I love me and they can’t make me unhappy anymore.

Stewart no longer feels obligated to take his family’s barbs seriously. He brushes them off and leaves. He used to let them hurt him. Now happiness is his choice, just as happiness can be yours by changing your perception. Only YOU can make you unhappy. Choose to be happy!

Embrace change with joy. Change brings better opportunities and gets you out of ruts. When I was very stuck years ago, making small changes opened up my life. You can stay a prisoner of your old ways or do something different. Change needn’t be unpleasant. Fran says:
I lived in the slow lane—boring but safe. I wanted loads of things but couldn’t leave my safety zone. When I was offered a chance of a lifetime job in another state, I lacked confidence to create a new life. My sister implored me to break our family rut. She was stuck with 2 young kids; my brother in a job to support his family. I had a shot at real happiness. So I moved and what a blessing! Doing this for me increased my self-esteem tenfold. I keep changing for the better. When my company needed volunteers in London to open up an office, I jumped at it. Now I see change as opportunities.

Change helps us grow. Courage to flow with it says, “I love me.” Do something different every day. Small things. Try a new dish for lunch, or buy different cologne. Say “hi” to someone you never speak to. Walk down a new street. Tell a joke. Put on music and dance. Be creative in finding something new to do each day.

Decide what you want and show that you’re very serious. Determine EXACTLY what you want and the most effective way to get it. Want more money? How can you earn it? Want to lose weight? What habit must change? Want a more satisfying job? What can you do? Wishing or complaining doesn’t help. Once you decide what you want, show you’re serious by doing
EVERYTHING in your power to get it. Get busy and do your best! Yearning without actions lowers self-esteem. Brandon came to me for consulting about getting his songs into films:

I took a songwriting workshop and sent demos to music supervisors. You said I wasn't serious. I objected but you were right. I went through motions without a BIG effort. It was too much work. Then I got serious. I searched for songwriter events, networked like crazy and got songs critiqued. I took 2 weeks off to approach everyone I could with all I had. It took time but I got a song into an independent film. I spent ALL my time hustling and just signed with a music publisher. I decided early what I wanted. It took much longer to get serious enough to do the work. Now I know why so many musicians don’t succeed. It’s easy to dream and hard to take action.

Be pro-active. Showing a serious intent with actions is both practical and spiritual. It’s practical to do what it takes to reach a goal; spiritual support comes by illustrating intentions with action, since you get supported in what you do. A pro-active attitude keeps you focused. Say to yourself, “I am serious about ....” I got my body into shape by consciously controlling my eating and putting effort into working out. I didn’t lose an ounce when I said I was dieting but cheated. Once I got serious, I got into shape. I longed to get published for
years and wrote but did little else. Once I researched literary agents and wrote
good book proposals, everything fell into place. I got 3 book deals the first
year—which I was told is impossible when I declared that as my intention. Get
serious about what you want—with actions!

Find your joy. Balance work and practical stuff with pleasurable activities.
Don’t always cut costs at the expense of fun. By creating a life filled with
things you enjoy, you’ll feel much better about you. It’s unloving to ignore what
gives you pleasure. Jackson found his joy:

I had a good job, a wife I loved, 2 beautiful children, good health, but felt
dead inside. I spoke to a mentor and he asked where my joy and passion
come from. I spent years devoted to my family and work and forgot my
passions. So I got tickets to a ballgame and invited old friends along. I
took my wife to an amusement park without the kids and set more
boundaries on work time to allow more to read and paint. Now I have a
zest for life again!

Jackson lost himself trying to be a good employee, husband and father.
Now he balances responsibility and pleasure and feels great. Self-love grows
with ever bit of joy you create. Don’t lose yourself in pursuit of money. Figure

**Be reasonable in your expectations.** While you shouldn’t settle, don’t expect family, friends and romantic partners to behave your way. If you disagree with their actions, have you said, “If it were me, I’d____.” Me too!

Well they’re not you! Lori says:

*I had a habit of telling people what I’d do in their shoes. A friend suggested I spend my time solo since my way seemed to be the only one I’d accept. I was horrified. She warned that if I didn’t stop expecting so much from friends, I’d have none soon. I’ve cooled my expectations and feel relaxed.*

It’s less stressful to accept folks and ease expectations. Being realistic about what to expect from people keeps anger down. They can only do their best, just like you. Don’t expect others to fulfill your expectations. They don’t have to! When you accept that, you’ll enjoy people more.
Be kind to others, without strings. It really does come back to you. Giving for the sake of helping, with no agenda, brings rich rewards. Feel good by bringing a smile or relief to others! Practice random acts of kindness. Do something for someone you don’t know, just because. Donate to charity. Carry someone’s bag. Buy a homeless person food. Kindness is love. Include yourself as a recipient of course!

Be happy for other people’s success. Often we’re envious or annoyed when someone shares something nice or talks about him/herself positively. Good self-esteem allows us to be happy for them. If you feel yourself getting jealous, send blessings to the person until it passes. Applaud friends when they have success or brag a bit. That enhances your own sense of self.

Practice moderation. Keep your life balanced by doing things in moderation. Being obsessive hurts you. Cutting yourself some slack says, “I love me.” If you diet, eat chips or sweets occasionally. Skip the gym if something comes up. Leave work on time whenever possible. Be patient if you can’t do everything as right as you’d like to. You’re entitled to relax. Controlling habits can include allowing you to goof, be naughty, have fun and not be perfect!
**Stop criticizing others.** Lose the need to tell folks what's wrong with them. You may subconsciously do it to feel better. If you don't want to be judged, don't judge! Finding fault in others hurts your self-esteem. Remember, you attract what you give out. Thinking more positively of others helps you think more kindly of you. People with good self-esteem support and praise people. Live as someone with good self-esteem and you'll become one!

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**Treat yourself as special.** Appreciate yourself. Eventually others will have no choice but to notice how terrific you are! Do something special for you regularly. That keeps you conscious of being good to yourself, because you deserve it. Try it - you'll love it - and yourself!

**Make yourself a priority.** Allow private time for gathering thoughts, meditating, reading, walking, taking a bath, phone chats, or pampering yourself in whatever ways please you. Every day. That's a concrete way to acknowledge you're worthy of self-love. For at least a half-hour each day, do only what YOU enjoy. Don't worry about other people or household chores. Go with what feels good to you, for that time!

**Find your spiritual center.** However it works for you. Embracing a spiritual belief system was my single biggest blessing. I wouldn't have my current life
without it. Feeling supported gives me the strength and conviction to live freely.

If you’re a doubter like I used to be, try the suggestions in chapter 4. Once you tap into the blessing of faith, the world can be yours!

Create daily habits that say, “I love me.” It can be something simple you do regularly, like exercise. I do a short meditation each night, to relax or stoke my energy. My health rituals (good skin care, vitamins, etc.) also reinforce self-love. Find your pleasure and fit it into each day.

Don’t settle for less than your heart’s desire. If you haven’t gotten what you desire yet, don’t give up! Write down what you want. Keep it in your face. Enjoy what you have now but continue pursuing dreams. Settling for a partner, job, living space, etc., says you’re not worthy of the best. BUT YOU ARE! Keep the faith that you can find someone who rocks your world, a job that’s tremendously satisfying, a living space that feels good, and anything else that makes you happy. Go after what you want! People told me it was too late to have a successful writing and speaking career. Hello! I’m still going! If you really want something, find a way to get it.

Find happiness in whatever you have. Make the most of everything. Happy people don't necessarily have the best circumstances. Being happy helps you
to find little joys. Appreciate life more by opening your eyes to blessings large and small. Things don’t have to always go well for you to feel happy. Appreciate learning a lesson from a negative experience. Not allowing negativity to affect you as much as before is reason for happiness, or even celebration!

Strive to simplify your life. Evaluate things and people you’re involved with. Decide which enhances your quality of life. Consciously cut down on those that don’t by going on a “life diet.” Just as you cut calories to lose weight, cut down on people or activities that drain you or don’t make your life better. Obligatory “shoulds” are like empty calories. They’re not healthy and waste energy that could be spent on joy.

Live to have no regrets. Sometimes you make poor choices - that’s okay. It’s better to learn than to live in a box packed with cotton to avoid risks. When things don’t work, put them behind and move on. If you don’t try, you may live with regrets, wondering what life would be like IF . . . Go after what sounds interesting or fun, even if it’s unorthodox or if the unknown outcome scares you. It’s better to find out what it’s like than not to try. Love yourself for trying, no matter what happens!
Affirm a positive life. Get into a habit of using affirmations to maneuver problems. Saying one can silence doubts, criticism or other negative emotions that invade your serenity. Don’t let them get to you! Repeat, “I can handle this.” “Everything will work out fine.” “Whatever is meant to be will be.” or whatever keeps you in control. Talk to yourself to override what distracts you from a positive path! As self-love grows, you’ll trust the affirmations more.

Say, “I love me” as often as possible. Even if you don’t quite feel it yet. Don’t take loving yourself for granted. Say it in the mirror and to yourself. The more you remind yourself, the more it will sink in. Add, “I approve of myself as is” whenever you can! It’s a lovely day when you say it and realize that it’s true! I said it when I still hated myself. My transformation was subtle and gradual. But one day I said it and smiled. I really felt it! What a glorious moment that is!

Live in a suspended state of perpetual gratitude. DON'T EVER TAKE LIFE FOR GRANTED! Keep appreciating little details of your life. Living in a suspended state of perpetual gratitude means being very conscious of all the good stuff in your life—large and small—and regularly giving thanks for it. As I write, I'm looking at trees and sunshine. It still brings me joy to have a taste of nature in the middle of NYC. I'll bet my neighbors barely notice the clouds
and plants and lovely view. I'm grateful for it every day. I inhale pleasure into my every day existence by appreciating everything. Living in a suspended state of perpetual gratitude nurtures inner peace. Life is as precious as your perception allows! Gina says:

Gratitude is a matter of perspective. Too often we lose the perspective that produces thanks-giving. We take people in our lives for granted and assume that material blessing is a right rather than the blessing it is. We forget what God has and is doing for us because we focus on what we want rather than what we need. People who manifest gratitude in all the varieties of life have learned that gratitude isn't a feeling, it's a discipline. It's something they do, rain or shine. Some days it's easy to be thankful - other days it takes an effort.

AMEN!

My gratitude runs deep! Life is an extraordinarily blessing. I have no regrets and forgive me for being too scared to stand on my own sooner. I don’t dwell on how life would be had I begun my career and self-awareness sooner. It serves no purpose and I’m too busy counting blessings! My biggest one is my faith in God, which gave me the courage to go so far in my journey
into self. My faith didn’t begin until I started loving me. Then it was like fuel in
an engine ready to soar. I’m also grateful for my good health, my spirit, my
wonderful family and friends, my courage to only earn a living doing what I
love, my happy apartment, people I’ve had the pleasure to work with,
sunshine, rain, and a gazillion other blessings. I’m especially grateful that I
learned to appreciate every little bit of my life and take nothing for granted.

I’m thrilled to share my lessons. It’s a blessing if I help make your life
easier. I had many unhappy years. The journey to loving me was hard but
amazing. Sometimes I felt hopeless. Mirrors made me cry. Birthdays
represented another wasted year and getting one year further from being
attractive and in my prime. BUT - each itty, bitty, teeny, weeny baby step
brought me forward. Each bit of love I gave myself stimulated a bit more. I
sometimes crawled when it felt like I’d never get out of my hole. But I crawled.
And then I baby stepped; then I skipped; then I ran. And ran. I plan to keep
dancing though the rest of my life! I can’t give myself too much love and
neither can you. I’m still a recovering DoorMat. You can always regress by
taking life for granted and not counting your blessings. I don’t want to stop - it
feels too good!
I help folks when I can. Appreciation for my blessings is deep. That’s why I’m giving this book away. Happiness is not about money. I’m not financially rich but see myself as abundantly rich because I get everything I need. I never feel any lack in my life. People think I’m nuts for donating this. NOT! What I get is MUCH BETTER! The blessing of sharing this book is priceless! If it helps you in any way, I’m blessed.

Please don’t take your life or yourself for granted. Stay conscious of who you are and what you have. I love to love myself each day. It’s SO MUCH better than wishing I were someone else! Keep building your life at your own pace. Get to a place where you feel whole and happy on your own. I’ll never settle for bits of happiness like I used to. NEVER! You shouldn’t either. Nor will I settle for a romantic partner anymore. I know I’m special and will wait for a man who’s worth sharing my time with. I already have a wonderful life. Desperation and self-love don’t belong in the same body. Desperation makes you settle for less than the joy you deserve. Self-love won’t allow that.

You can get to this place too! Please try. I never thought I could but it’s worth everything!! Use my tools and set your own pace. But do it! Go do something loving for you right now. I’ll wait. 😊 Take little steps until you can run. You’ll get there if you want to. Where is “there?” A place of contentment
with yourself; satisfaction with who you are; lots of smiles; a strong desire to be loving; being able to receive love.

Give yourself lots of love! I mean LOTS! The joy I feel each day can be yours. Love yourself enough to give yourself the great gift of all—yourself—whole and happy. I send you love and my prayers, and wish you a lifetime of love and blessings.

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