

BECOMING REAL

Knowing Your Worth In A World Of Conformity

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

“NO one can make you feel inferior without your consent,” said Eleanor Roosevelt. So if we can't get our self-worth from others, how do you find and sustain it within yourself? Here are a few clues to consider.

Let go of pleasing others

Stop for a moment and make a list of all the people who have expectations of you, either now or in the past (sometimes we are still trying to measure up to the expectations of people long since deceased). Here's a start: children, significant other, teachers, friends, religious leaders, colleagues, siblings, employees, bosses, people you serve in your work, in-laws, the media, advertisers, competitors, telemarketers, neighbors, health care professionals, and other “experts” who propose they know what is best for you. Now endeavor to meet every one of these demands. Trying to meet every one of these expectations is a sure way to land you in a psychiatric ward.

Now make a list of expectations you have of *yourself*, aside from all the world's demands. Your pathway to freedom comes from knowing the difference. By slowing down, making time for daily solitude, silence, and to attend to the voice within, you get away from the myriad of voices in the world, and can begin to attune to your inner wisdom. Then you can love and serve without pleasing. I've learned that pleasing is different than loving. Pleasing comes from weakness and insecurity, from needing to take care of others so they will take care of you in return. On the other hand, loving comes from strength, confidence, and trust in your own voice. Loving results from overflow, not emptiness. When you love, you give freely of yourself knowing that your generosity is fueled by self-care. You don't have to please others to get there.

Don't let critics run your life

When I published my first book in 1997, I was given some good advice from a friend. “Remember, for every player who has the courage to get in the game there are a million critics watching. Everyone sitting in the stands and lying on their couches has an opinion. Don't let the critics run your life.”

I try to remember this wise council. When you have put yourself fully into the game of life, when you risk opening yourself up and bringing your gifts to the world, people will have an opinion of you. I've learned to accept criticism from others as it indicates that I am moving forward. Even when you get valuable praise and encouragement from others, you have to remind yourself that this is also someone else's opinion of you. As I age I am learning to not worry so much about what people think of me, and attend more to what I think of myself, finding an opinion that will be sustaining. Listen to and trust your instinct. As television producer and writer Norman Lear once said, “When I've been most effective, I've listened to my inner voice.”

Get out of situations that are unacceptable

P.T. Barnum once had a sideshow attraction where a lamb, wolf, leopard, and lion were trained to stay with each other in one cage. Asked if this was a bit problematic, Barnum said, “No. But every now and then we have to get a new lamb.”

Every so often you will run into situations that are unacceptable, conditions that violate principles or values you stand for. These

circumstances can rob you of your dignity and erode the fabric of your character. If you find yourself living or working in a place that violates you, have the courage to get out of the cage. I have three simple rules that make my life saner and more peaceful, and self-worth is my reward: 1) Change the changeable; 2) Accept the unchangeable; 3) Remove yourself from the unacceptable.

Keep your promises, both to yourself and others

Barack Obama's inaugural speech inspired Americans and other citizens around the world. One of the rousing statements in his oration was, “...there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.” This new president of the United States understands a vital principle of self-worth. Self-worth is not a *prerequisite* to getting what you want in life. Self-worth is an *outcome* of right living. It results from having a vision, making a promise, and then courageously following through with an agreement, even in the face of discomfort and difficulty. You don't take pride or experience self-worth by doing something easy. Discipline can be defined as doing what needs doing, when it needs doing, whether you feel like it or not because it's the right thing to do. When you are known, both to yourself and others, as a person who keeps her word, self-worth will be your reward.

Practice self-acceptance

The feeling of self-worth, like everything in life, is cyclical. It comes and goes. Living life fully means there will be days when you feel the discomfort of inadequacy. With the sensitivity to serve comes the vulnerability of unworthiness. Like all emotions, it passes. You just have to be careful not to let it deter you from the work that needs to be done. We don't have to be afraid of feeling insecure. It shows that we're human, that we're investing enough in the experience of living to feel both the tragedy and the ecstasy of this human experience. Sometimes I have to give the critic that rides around on my shoulder a good hard flick with my finger, treating it like an unwanted insect. I then have to remind myself that I'm doing the best I can as I step forward with renewed courage and self-acceptance, even in the face of insecurity. To help me practice self-acceptance, I often have to let go of the results, learn from the experience, and trust the process. After all, successes and failures by the world's standards will be a part of life. These are not measurements of your worth. They are, instead, learning opportunities and indicators that you are in the game.

This is but a short list to get you started. I invite you to write me. I'd love to hear *your* experience of developing self-worth from within and what's worked for you.

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. David is the best selling author of five books. His most recent book is *Bridges Of Trust: Making Accountability Authentic*. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at www.davidirvine.com

For information on how David can bring value to your organization, contact david@davidirvine.com or call 1-866-621-7008 (toll free).