

Feeling Good about Yourself

Like yourself or change yourself

Your relationship with yourself is the most important you will ever have.

Would you like to know yourself if you weren't *you* already?

Treat yourself as you would your very best friend. Be supportive and urge yourself on to better things. Own up to everything you are, no matter how shocking or embarrassing.

You have to feel you're worth investing in. You can't afford to hate yourself. Life is difficult enough as it is, without you cutting off your nose to spite your face. Befriend yourself, that's how you'll succeed.

The more we take responsibility for ourselves, the better off we'll be. Owning up to who we are, what we think, what we do - is 99.9% up to us. We grow strong under the weight of that responsibility and pretty soon we're happier, funnier, and more confident because of it.

There is wonder in being different. Celebrate your difference and inventiveness.

Extraordinary individuals are distinguished less by their impressive "raw powers" than by their ability to identify their strengths and them to exploit them.

A dramatic example of the benefits of strategically playing to your key strengths is the way that during the Vietnam War, the Phantom Jet increased by *thirty fold* its success in dogfights by consistently deploying a well-rehearsed strategy that suited its high-power but poor manoeuvrability compared to the enemy MIG jet.

You can learn a lot that is valuable by being the misfit, the odd one out, and it can pay off handsomely later on down the line - generally in the form of leading a much more individual and rewarding life. The point is, life isn't linear and things can change very dramatically, particularly if you work at them.

Judge yourself by how well you play the hand you've been dealt, rather than by comparing yourself to others.

Do something each day that flatly contradicts a negative self-impression of yourself. For instance, if you suspect that you never quite finish a job, choose a twenty minute task and finish it properly. Also, try to catch your negative self-talk every time it crops up, and name three things that are highly positive about yourself.

Never perform for the audience or the critics. Do it for yourself.

Stop trying to second-guess what you think people want you to be or how they want you to behave. Put all your effort into behaving in a way that will get the best from the other person, and make communication easier and more effective. That has absolutely nothing to do with telling them what they want to hear or expect you to say. The best contribution you can make to anyone, no matter whether they are your best friends or your boss, is to contribute to their lives in ways they haven't been able to do for themselves.

Whatever value you place on yourself and your time, not everyone will agree with it, and it's up to them to decide whether they are willing to pay the price you ask to have you in their lives. You cannot make their decision for them.

We want not only to live but to have something worth living for. The great challenge is to create for yourself a meaningful life.

Finding a purpose to your life is crucial... it's a kind of falling in love with something that seems more important than yourself.

Aim to please *yourself* and to impress *yourself*. You'll be so much more comfortable around other people when you do.

The happiest individuals are characterised by their '*positive impatience*'. If they don't like where they are, or who they are, they change ASAP. They will proactively seek out environments where they can thrive in the ways they want to.

Be prepared to dump those bits of yourself that serve no purpose anymore - reinvent and re-launch a newer model. This isn't lying or acting, this is taking the best parts of you and building on them. It's making who you are an active choice rather than an accidental collection of all the baggage you have acquired along the way.

If you're not happy with who you are, you can chose to reinvent yourself, but you have to know how. It will probably mean putting yourself in a totally new environment, most easily done by working or studying overseas or far enough from home.

Search for those around you who have some aspect of their behaviour that you are deeply impressed by. Be prepared to copy it and adapt it to your own style. It is unlikely that every feature of someone else's character will be admirable. Your job is to concentrate on their best qualities and to pluck up the courage to ask them how they manage it.

When you're trying to change yourself or your way of life, there will be set backs and bad days, perhaps even bad months, but how well you cope with these will determine how far you succeed in your ambitions. Important changes do not and cannot happen overnight.

9 times out of 10, it is not other people or the system that is our worst enemy; it is ourselves, ourselves sabotaging the best of our ambitions and hopes - often without realising we're doing it. For instance, not realising that our attitudes or behaviour are unlikely to be helpful in anything but the short term. Don't look to blame others around you for why things aren't going your way, sit down and have words with yourself.

Feeling that you are a part of something, that you make a difference, or may even be indispensable, is very important to your sense of self-esteem - whether that's a football team, or a play or a band or whatever. Discover where you fit in.

Keep reminding yourself of who you are important to and why. Never lose sight of how much of an impact you can make. Team up with your friends and see how much more impact you can have. You'd be amazed. Don't hang around seeing what someone else will do. Be the first mover.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Finding your passion**
- **Your values and priorities**
- **Developing through new experiences**

Overcoming shyness & building self-confidence

Shyness is one of the most painful experiences of growing up. A few moments of embarrassment by daring to ask or say what you want, could save you months, perhaps years, of frustration or wrong directions.

Getting drunk doesn't cure shyness. Tomorrow you'll be sober and you'll *still* be shy. You have to learn to beat shyness face on in every situation, and it only postpones the battle if you resort to drink or other drugs. *Worse still*, you can very quickly start relying on drink and other drugs and then addiction might be just around the corner.

It's too easy to spend a lot of time knocking yourself down. Don't constantly attack yourself with criticism that you probably wouldn't say to your worst enemy. *Nourish yourself*.

Group or team activities build confidence - they allow the shyer individual to draw strength from the group until they're confident enough to do things alone.

Play to your strengths. Find a core of confidence and build on it.

The way to get the best from someone is encouragement: *try it on yourself*.

Self-confidence can often come about once you establish clarity of direction and a sense of identity that you're comfortable with.

The moment you start comparing yourself to those around you, you're doomed to feel unhappy. Better to simply look at yourself and improve upon that.

Learning to speak well is also learning to listen well. If you're worried about speaking, you'll be pretty poor at listening, too, because you'll be worrying about when it'll be your turn to say something. Try asking yourself if you could repeat back in your own words what the other person has just said.

Constantly develop your ability to use words well - both the written and spoken word. The former will help the latter, and the latter is increasingly the more important. Your good ideas will not receive the recognition they deserve unless you can express them well. So learn to talk on your feet, and to choose the right words for the moment. All of this takes practice, which itself will require you to get involved with the sorts of activities that will allow you to hone these skills: debating societies, discussions with friends, or just sticking your hand up in class and daring to engage in debate. We all find it rather terrifying, but make every effort to do it anyway.

Don't let fear make your decisions for you.

I spoke with a stammerer throughout my adolescence and early twenties, which was a real drag because there were no men, no heroes, who stammered - *or so I thought* - and so I couldn't quite see where I would fit in to the world. What I did not realise, was that my stammer placed me in the good company of Charles Darwin, Sir Winston Churchill, Siegfried Sassoon and, more latterly, Dr. Jonathan Miller, Rowan Atkinson, Bruce Willis and many other men and women by whose achievements I would have been much inspired. I would urge anyone with an enduring problem to find out who else might have overcome something similar. It helps you to appreciate just how much is still open to you far beyond that one difficult part of yourself.

If you're not keen on the sound of your own voice, take speech training lessons, in the same way you'd go to an aerobics class to tone up your muscles.

If you're doing an important interview, or talking in public, just think of yourself sitting in a front-room talking to a friend.

Find a niche for yourself in which your contribution counts and those around you value your being there. It might be a club or society or a circle of friends, preferably with some unifying purpose. But don't hide there. Use that niche as a secure homebase from which to explore other worlds.

Acquiring as much confidence as possible can only come about by doing things, and preferably doing things well. Acquire the confidence to initiate things for yourself - to act rather than react.

Setting manageable goals is the way to satisfaction. It's easier to build up confidence with small successes and then build upon those, rather than setting yourself some overwhelming task.

You have to take every opportunity to practice being bold with the really small challenges, and this makes it easier when the big stuff comes along. Don't waste any opportunity to go beyond your 'comfort zone' and get a little bit out of your depth, because you'll be building your bravery muscles when you do so - and you'll need these to go for the stuff you *really* want. For instance, you'd build up to asking someone for a date, by daring to ask the tutor a few questions out loud in class.

Everyone is scared of a whole range of new experiences: giving a speech, making a journey, asking for a date. Take tiny and gradual steps at first, because the more often you do, and if you go a little further each time, you will beat your fear. The sense of satisfaction and pride and the idea that "anything's possible!" will be very rewarding indeed, and far outweigh all the embarrassment. You might also think about who would make a good friend or coach to help you do this.

Try imagining you are a leading performer in your field - someone you respect. You'll be surprised how this 'impersonation', this 'act', can improve your own performance. This is a good illustration of how your self-concept can effect you and let you push through your previous limits.

It's only after I had messed up half-a-dozen major things over the same number of years, that I really got the hang of failure. I began to recognise its warning signals, and that's when I started achieving my major goals.

If you're good at something, develop that skill because it can bring a great sense of pride.

Try not to live in fear of things going wrong or of people disapproving.

Fear of what other people might say about us, is often a much greater barrier to doing things than is shortage of time or money. We have to learn to listen to our own heart beating, not other people's whispers.

Sometimes all a situation needs is for one single individual to stand up and say "Things can be different, can be better, and I'm going to show you how".

You'll feel so much more at ease with yourself when you start taking more of an interest in other people's lives. You'll learn more, too. Being self-centred is just a bad habit.

The pain of some embarrassment now could very well spare you the bitter regret and the shame of wrong directions and unfulfilled ambitions. You may be embarrassed but you should also feel brave because you were brave enough to ask and to speak your mind.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Communicating your emotions**
- **Love and friendship**
- **Learning from others**

Feeling comfortable with your body

Being *'fit, healthy and toned'* are high on everyone's agenda for how they'd like to feel about themselves, and what they love to see in other people.

Feeling physically healthy and at home inside your skin is an essential and fundamental pleasure.

Learning to look after your body and physical well-being are skills that are simply not met by compulsory Physical Education at school. You personally need to take an holistic approach on how you lead your everyday life: the chair you sit in, what you eat, how you travel, and how you spend your time.

Form follows function. That means, that if you exercise, your body will change shape to better accommodate that type of exercise. *You choose.*

Any change, whether it's in your weight or appearance or attitude to life, is only any good if it's *sustainable*, and it will only be sustainable for anything more than a few weeks if its enjoyable to do or brings you other very clear rewards.

Food will affect your mood, your energy level, and your appearance. Eat foods to help you in all these areas, not hinder you. Good quality food is an *ally* not an enemy; is a priority not a luxury. Take pleasure in feeding yourself considerately.

Your body and mind will do best when they can rely on three portions of fresh fruit a day and three good-size portions of lightly cooked or raw vegetables. Reduce to the odd occasion fried-foods and red-meats, while making fish and *unsugared* breakfast cereals part of your daily diet routine. Sweets and sugared drinks should not be a daily event because they blunt your appetite for far more useful snacks like fruit and nuts and milk. Remember to drink at least two pints of clear water every day to help your body function at full-performance and to cleanse itself. Try this whole strategy for a month and see and feel the results for yourself: better-looking hair, skin, eyes and fingernails, more concentration and energy, and more positive moods. And over the longer term, you increase the likelihood of a bone structure that grows stronger and taller, and teeth more resistant to decay. Your muscles, too, will grow stronger and less prone to fatigue. Admittedly, beneficial food may well taste 'unfamiliar' for the first couple of weeks, but you'll grow to love it. When you look at the whole range of immediate and longer-term benefits, eating well like this is a highly attractive option.

The popular emphasis on physical appearance is extremely damaging and very misplaced. It's the media companies and manufacturers that need us to put appearance as a number one priority. All of us who have friends and lovers know that there are other, *far more important qualities* at the heart of any relationship that's worth having.

Women are faced with impossible ideals which attack their sense of self-esteem. But they must remember that they are not tubs of cottage cheese with a "sell-by" sticker and a shelf-life.

I accept that I may not be good-looking by conventional human standards, and there's not too much I can do about that. But I can be sure that I'm noticed and needed for my other qualities which I can do a lot about. Like being positive and supportive about things, having a sense of humour, being helpful, being a good friend. People get used to someone's looks, but they need these other qualities day in day out, time and time again.

If you have problems with your skin, such as acne, eczema or whatever else, don't fight it alone. Make an appointment to see a doctor and ask their advice. You may have to do this on a regular basis to keep on top of the problem and to find the best solution for your particular type of skin. Meanwhile, you can probably help reduce the problem if you drink two or three pints of clean water each day, eat fresh vegetables, particularly raw carrots, and don't hassle your skin with lotions and potions which may very likely irritate it. People won't notice your zits even one fifth as much as you do, particularly if what you do is helpful and impressive. Actions speak louder than zits!

When it comes to physical attributes, eyes, smiles and voices are at the top of most people's list of what attracts them. That's no accident, because these features tell another person such a lot about you. For the same reason, *a clean and well-groomed appearance and taking good care of yourself* radiate the self-respect that seems attractive to just about everyone.

Many guys seem to think that what women like is lots of chunky muscles, when most women say they would be more than happy just to see the 6-pack of a flat stomach - and even that falls far behind the marks they attribute to good old '*eyes and smiles and voices*'.

Many women think that guys are mesmerised by a women's breast-size or leg-length, but fellas are also much more interested in eyes and smiles and voices.

What people most value in another person is *not* being a "big-shot" or "drop dead gorgeous, it's how you make them feel - your caring about them, listening to them, sharing things with them, making life feel better. It's all that personal stuff that makes the biggest impression.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Tackling depression, stress and exhaustion**
- **Avoiding unhelpful habits**
- **Finding a balance in life**

Being independent & in control

Feeling in control of your life is deeply satisfying, and there's a lot of evidence that it keeps you mentally and physically healthy. Lose that feeling of control, and you're very exposed to stress and depression.

There are few things worse than feeling helpless in the face of a chaotic life, so set out to take control of yourself, even if its only on paper for the moment.

In every study of accomplished lives, the conclusions note how fundamentally important it is to feel in control of your life, to feel that what you do affects your future outcomes in the short and long term. Don't give up that sense of control over who and what you are. Don't for instance, allow yourself to be bullied or bribed by the selfish demands of those individuals or institutions around you.

Even two weeks away from home doing your own thing can give you a great sense of independence.

Being 'responsible' doesn't necessarily mean doing what other people want you to. It means being in charge of yourself.

Get into the habit of planning and of writing down those plans down - or better still, writing them up on a wall map of where you're going and how and when you'll get there. You will probably need a 1 or 2 year long-term plan, and a month by month breakdown.

Don't wait for things to happen to *you*. You have to happen to things.

Beware of having a year-off between school and college that is planned or arranged by your school or by parents. You'll only get the full benefit if you personally have full responsibility, *and full credit*, for what ever you achieve. It's okay to let your trusted educators and parents *support* you in your decision-making, but try not to let them manipulate it.

Financial independence from your parents and your employers will afford you a sense of self-confidence and self-control. Take the trouble to manage your accounts.

Having enough money is a fundamental goal in life, particularly if you have had an uncertain financial background to start with. Work out how much is enough, and work out how to earn it fairly and squarely.

It's hell being in debt. I would estimate that 90% of people's problems are financial. A lot of tension is caused because you can't pay next month's mortgage or meet the bills. It can split up friends and partners.

If we don't take care of our finances, we are forced into things by circumstances - which is painful.

Being financially secure takes a lot of the tension out of life, but all the other usual problems still occur.

Earning enough money, if you invest it wisely, allows you to be a free spirit.

What money brings is the freedom to spend my time doing what I want to do rather than what somebody else wants me to do.

If you enjoyed the above section, you might like to take a look at these:

- **Don't wait to be taught**
- **Managing your time**
- **Landing a job**