



Muse

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How to be yourself and like it!

By Cindy Trevitt, Registered Professional Counsellor

Do you feel a gnawing sense of doubt about who you are and whether you're good enough? You may feel that a better life awaits you if you figure out or change who you are but there is no bridge in sight. Maybe you even believe that who you are, or aspects of you, are no good and you're never going to change. In life we go through periods of personal questioning and self doubt ... a few times. For some it is a mild sense of floating like dandelion seeds on a soft puff of air. For others it is akin to being jammed in a bear trap with the release button just out of their reach.

Merely existing steadily buffers our sense of self: what the family wants, what your partner doesn't like, what your coworkers think and why the counter clerk, server, bus driver, or even strangers treat you as they do. New circumstances also challenge who we are. Losing a job. Starting a new job. Beginning or ending a relationship. Moving. All these test our public and private persona. Just being ourselves doesn't seem to be enough. Who should I be in these circumstances? My carefree, fun-loving, colourful self? My professional, cutting-edge, career-oriented self? My low-key, watchful, and introspective self? Or shall I continue to circle the wagons around my perpetual sense of 'not-good-enough'? The prac-

tice of ceaseless self-questioning can drive us to the brink of madness.

The hard news:

Know this, if you don't know who you are, don't lay that responsibility on others. If you are filled with uncertainty and tentativeness and self-doubt, you may be *behaving* that way and others may sense your discomfort. Their consequent behaviour may be merely a mirror of your insecurities - *not* of your true value or worth. So, their behaviour is *not* evidence of your failings...at the worst, it is evidence that you are insecure. If you have insecurities, that proves that you are human - not a failure. If you have beliefs that successful, confident people are never insecure....guess again! Everyone has doubts and questions about themselves. So, if you have the expectation that you should never be insecure, I have a piece of advice for you....*give up!* Expect and accept insecurity as a part of you.

How to like yourself:

The best way to feel confident in the presence of others is to feel confident within yourself - know and accept who you are, what you feel and think. Choose more positive self-images. Instead of seeing yourself as a flabby, pale-skinned, undesirable

grub, what would you lose out on if you decided to see yourself as a natural beauty with juicy curves, vivaciousness and a delightful joie de vivre? Next, do not place your value and worth in the hands of others - that's where you lose control over how you feel about yourself. You are who you are and they are who they are. Differences are not problems and we're all different. Imagine a box of crayons with only one colour versus a box with many - which is better? Appreciate the qualities that you admire in others as well as the good qualities in you and your own goals. If you are secure in yourself, others' differences become okay with you.

"Self-worth cannot be verified by others. You are worthy because you say it is so. If you depend on others for your value it is other-worth."

– Dr. Wayne Dyer



If you feel the only way to feel fulfilled or have approval is to expect others to satisfy or approve of you, you may be feeling dissatisfied much of the time. If you love yourself and appreciate that you are important, worthy, and special you won't need others to reinforce your value.



"...change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not."

– Arnold R. Beisser

Go ahead! Dwell on your flaws!

Make two lists. The first is a list of everything you don't like about yourself. This may take some time. Use as much paper as you need. Then sit down with this list and *really dwell on it*. Get into it. Really feel the miserable, sinking, low, dark feelings you get when you examine this list. Now, write down everything you accomplished by this activity. You may realize that it seems rather pointless. EXACTLY! But, this mental list-making habit is exactly the anchor tied to your ass that's bringing you down in life... and you practice reciting this list every day! Trust me, the list is there...in the back of your mind... getting reviewed often. You do it almost subconsciously, like brushing your teeth or blinking.

Now dwell on the good stuff:

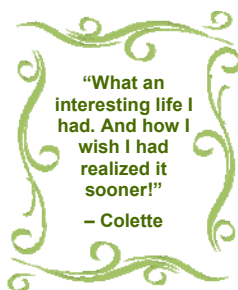
Make a second list of everything you accept or appreciate about yourself. This may take less time and be more challenging. At the end of your list, write, "I am open and willing to look for ways to accept myself and look for more items to add to this list." Now, I'm not talking about false optimism, rosy affirmations and a ponies, rainbows and bubbles kind of list. I'm talking about getting real, practical and pragmatic. Instead of saying, "I'm a loser", say, "I am a mature, responsible, caring adult who has some skills and abilities. Sometimes I am hard on myself but I now know that a better way to feel good about myself is to appreciate myself as I am." Now, was that so hard?

Practice, practice, practice:

If you went to the gym once, would you expect to be entirely fit for life? Or do you understand that a regular fitness regime is necessary to get fit and stay that way? Practice catching your negative self-talk and replacing it with something more realistic. Write it down as a reminder. Repeat a million times.

Success and the easy stuff:

Practice reviewing your successes. For some people this is hard because they encounter irrational beliefs about themselves. A common one is, "If I can do it then anyone can", or, "If I can do it, it's too easy and stupid." If there is something that you can do, and it is very easy for you, it might be a strength of yours. That's what strong points are, things that



come more easily or naturally to us. To make this process easier, try making a list of things that are easy for you to do. This is a list of your skills and abilities.

Break the pattern:

Stop identifying yourself with negatives such as, *I'm forgetful* or *careless* or *stupid*. Break free from your past by not saying, "That's me" or "I've always been that way" or "I can't help it." Such statements are used to excuse us from changing or risking doing things differently. Replace these statements with sentences such as, "Until today I've been that way....", or, "I used to label myself..." Set goals to behave differently than before.

Identify what you need:

Figure out what you need and want in life and set out to achieve it. Make that something you think about every day. Treat yourself. Discover daily pleasures that you can indulge in and, here's a novel thought, start your day off with that! A favourite book, a walk in the park, a change of scenery, a creative expression, you name it. Understand that your feelings are the results of needs going met or unmet. If you're unhappy, that's a signal that you have unmet need(s). If you're satisfied, that's a signal that a need is being met... pay attention to those especially. What is one thing you can do differently each morning that will make you feel good?

The negative filter:

Some of us have a stronger *negative filter* which identifies everything negative going on in our lives - *exclusively*. True, life is full of negatives. The *negative filter*; however, will *only* recognize the negative and will filter out any positives or even reality-based information. Your nose has a little bump in the middle and is a little long. Is it a hideous deformity making you look like the hunchback of Notre Dame? Is it the proboscis that enables you to identify and occasionally enjoy aromas? Is it an exotic feature adding to your incredibly unique and intriguing personality? Can you guess which one the negative filter will see? Remind yourself that there are ample positive or reality based considerations

and dare your mind to consciously *choose* to see them. At the very least, try to understand that you do have a choice.

The negative filter can also completely negate any positive information...it's kind of like an endless, black sponge. Information comes in and is thrust to the very darkest centre. If someone gives you a compliment, you believe they're saying that just to be nice or because they want something. Instead of your usual re-

"Needing approval is tantamount to saying, 'Your view of me is more important than my own opinion of myself.'"

- Dr. Wayne Dyer



sponse (say they pointed out how good looking you are), respond cheerily with, "Thank you for noticing!" and mentally credit them for their powers of observation and good taste.

Core beliefs get in the way:

To some of you, some of this stuff might be obvious and you've heard it all before. Sometimes it's nice to get the refresher but then you might say, "If it were that easy, then why aren't I already there?" You are likely inhibited by your *core beliefs* which go hand in hand with the negative filter. Core beliefs are a series of beliefs, often ones we aren't conscious of, that inhabit our mind, influence our behaviours and choices, and prevent us from changing. For example, it is very common for someone to complain at great length and demonstrate great pain over some aspect of themselves they do not like such as their looks or abilities. At the root is a deep desire or belief to *not change* because if they change then it will be impossible to uphold that change forever or they'll fail or people will expect more from them or that only *other, more worthy people* can have these things. This list goes on and on. Many of our core beliefs are irrational and don't contribute to our growth and well-being. They do a brilliant job of keeping us depressed and down on our selves. Also, they are not readily visible. We often need help seeing them. It sometimes feels like trying to determine your eye colour by merely looking out of your eyes. It may be beneficial to seek help from trusted friends to see your 'blind side'; read self help books on



cognitive restructuring and negative core beliefs or seek the help of a therapist. Often times you can recognize yourself in the lists common to others (most people have such a list) such as (from www.coping.org/growth/beliefs.htm):

- *I do not deserve positive attention from others.
- *I should never burden others with my problems or fears.
- *I am junk.
- *I am uncreative, nonproductive, ineffective, and untalented.
- *I am worthless.
- *I am the worst example on earth of a person.
- *I am powerless to solve my problems.
- *I have so many problems; I might as well give up right now.
- *I am so dumb about things, I can never solve anything as complex as this.
- *I am the ugliest, most unattractive, unappealing, fat slob in the world.

How do you feel after reading such a list?

How do you know if your belief is irrational?

Most beliefs have been programmed or conditioned into you - you weren't born with it. Since you've likely had the belief for a long, long time it has likely taken on dogmatic characteristics and it is very, very difficult to see beyond it to any other possibilities. If you are unsure if your belief is irrational, try answering the following questions (from www.coping.org/growth/beliefs.htm) with *yes* or *no*:

- * Is there any basis in reality to support this belief as **always** being true?
- * Does this belief encourage personal growth, emotional maturity, independence of thinking and action, and stable mental health?
- * Is this belief one which, if ascribed to, will help you overcome this or future problems in your life?
- * Is this belief one which, if ascribed to, will result in behavior that is self defeating for you?
- * Does this belief protect you and your rights as a person?

- * Does this belief assist you in connecting honestly and openly with others so that healthy, growth engendering interpersonal relationships result?
- * Does this belief assist you in being a creative, rational problem solver who is able to identify a series of alternatives from which you can choose your own personal priority solutions?
- * Does this belief stifle your thinking and problem solving ability to the point of immobilization?
- * When you tell others of this belief do they support you because that is the way everyone in your family, peer group, work, church, or community thinks?
- * Is this belief an absolute? Is it a black or white, yes or no, win or lose, no options in the middle type of belief?

Healthy answers are: 1-no; 2-yes; 3-yes; 4-no; 5-yes; 6-yes; 7-yes; 8-no; 9-no; 10-no

If you are unable to give healthy answers to one or more questions, then your belief is most likely irrational.

Refuting your negative core beliefs:

Once you have established that your belief is probably irrational you can begin to challenge the belief and change it. Here are some questions (from www.coping.org/growth/beliefs.htm) to ask yourself to help with this process:

- * How do I consistently feel when I think of this belief?
- * Is there anything in reality to support this belief as being true?
- * What in reality supports the lack of absolute truth in this belief?
- * Does the truth of this belief exist only in the way I talk, act, or feel about this problem?
- * What is the worst thing that could happen to me if I do not hold on to this belief?
- * What positive things might happen to me if I do not hold on to this belief?
- * What would be an appropriate, realistic belief I could substitute for this irrational belief?
- * How would I feel if I substituted this new belief for my blocking belief?
- * How will I grow and how will my rights and the rights of others be pro-

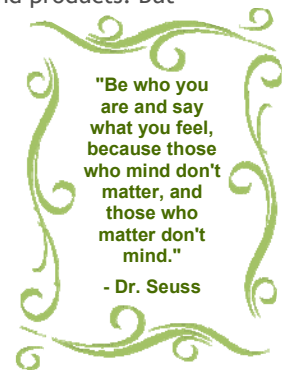
tected by this substitute belief?

- * What is keeping me from accepting this alternate belief?

Once you have answered these questions, substitute with a rational belief and act on it.

Against the tide:

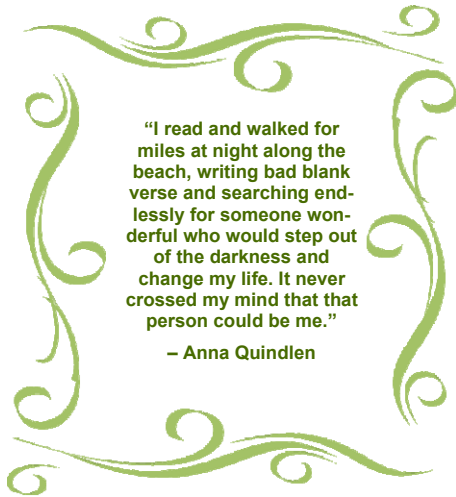
I would like to acknowledge our multi-billion dollar advertising industry that positively consumes and overwhelms our sensibilities with a steady influx of information about how we should be better looking; have shinier hair; whiter teeth; weigh less (or more); no cellulite; pert noses; sharp jaw-lines; taut muscles; cute butts; defined abdominal muscles; live in swanky and immaculate digs with germ-free environments; have stylish cars; pocket dogs; endless evenings with our attractive, laughing friends hanging out by our lakeside retreat wearing our fashionable togs and drinking the beloved bubbly beverage loved the world over. Okay, of course people should be able to market their goods and products. But collectively, this is an overpowering and crushing monster that is far overheded by our population and there appears to be very little counter balance to this force. The result? So many people who live in great pain and misery over their deficiencies when compared to these impossible and unreal messages. The solution? Stop! Stop paying attention to all the commercials. Give up trying to measure up to these fictional, fabricated fantasies! Stop reading those magazines (unless you walk away feeling super groovy about yourself). Stop looking at celebrity-anything on the internet. Cut down on all the electronic distractions: TV; internet; online networks; etc. Get plugged into your own real life.



"Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."
- Dr. Seuss

Get to know yourself:

What's your favourite colour? Hobby? Interest? Music? What types of people do you like? What's your character like? What's your style? Are you an indoor or an outdoor person? Urban or country? Leader, follower, or facilitator? Toe



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Tuesdays–Thursdays	Fridays	Saturdays
9:30–5:30,	10:00–7:00,	10:00–6:00,
Broadway & Victoria	Broadway & Cambie	Broadway & Cambie

socks or tube socks? Get in touch with what you love. What do you enjoy doing? What are your goals? Values? Dreams? Get creative! Do an archaeological dig on your personality. There are no wrong answers.

For most people, getting to know who they are is truly a life long process and it changes. Don't expect to find out everything overnight but don't expect results if you don't start asking questions either. You are a complex being with many facets. Think of it as a sort of treasure hunt or inner safari.

"No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself."

- Virginia Woolf



This may seem like an oversimplification but often times I discover that people had the answers all along and it was buried under the negative beliefs. They didn't believe that they could do it or couldn't believe that who they are was acceptable or worthy.

Do something outside of your comfort zone:

Once in a while try to do something that you ordinarily wouldn't do - something that challenges you. Something that you might even be a little afraid of. Nothing boosts your confidence more than realizing what you can do!

Approve of yourself

When you approve of yourself, your self-esteem can soar and last forever! Approve of what you think, feel, believe, want and need. Focus on your attributes. Seek out situations, jobs and people that affirm your worth and avoid situations or people who are hurtful, harmful or demeaning to you. If you don't value yourself, who will?

You are normal!

Most people experience some form of self doubt and uncertainty at different stages of their lives. I think it's a valuable exercise to stop and take inventory

"I warn you, I am living for the last time."

- Anna Akhmatova



of what you've done so far and where you're going - fine tune your plans along the way. If you think that only losers don't know who they are or where they are going... wrong again! Nearly everyone gets lost or questions themselves at one point or another. It's common to start hitting these questioning periods - sometimes lasting for years.

Take care of yourself!

Make sure that you live a good quality, balanced life filled with fun, rest, good food, exercise and play!

Go ahead! Open your box of crayons!

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