

Top ideas from the book -

Self Esteem: The immune system of consciousness

- Self-esteem, fully realized, is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self-esteem is confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life; and confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts. To trust one's mind and to know that one is worthy of happiness is the essence of self-esteem.
- We need to know who we are and to be centered within ourselves. We need to know what matters to us; otherwise, it is easy to be swept up and swept along by alien values, pursuing goals that do not nourish who we really are. We need reality-based self-trust and self-reliance. The greater the number of choices and decisions we need to make at a conscious level, the more urgent our need for self-esteem.
- Self-esteem has two interrelated components. One is a sense of basic confidence in the face of life's challenges: self-efficacy. The other is a sense of being worthy of happiness: self-respect. Self-efficacy means confidence in the functioning of my mind, in my ability to think, understand, learn, choose, and make decisions; confidence in my ability to understand the facts of reality that fall within the sphere of my interests and needs; self-trust; self-reliance. Self-respect means an assurance of my value; an affirmative attitude toward my right to live and to be happy; comfort in appropriately asserting my thoughts, wants, and needs; the feeling that joy and fulfillment are my natural birthright.

- Healthy self-esteem is significantly correlated with rationality, realism, intuitiveness, creativity, independence, flexibility, ability to manage change, willingness to admit (and correct) mistakes, benevolence, and cooperativeness. Nothing is more common than to pursue self-esteem by means that will not and cannot work. Instead of seeking self-esteem through consciousness, responsibility, and integrity, we may seek it through popularity, material acquisitions, or sexual exploits. Instead of seeking self-respect through honesty, we may seek it through philanthropy—I must be a good person, I do “good works.”
- The acclaim of others does not create our self-esteem. Neither does erudition, material possessions, marriage, parenthood, philanthropic endeavors, sexual conquests, or face-lifts. These things can sometimes make us feel better about ourselves temporarily or more comfortable in particular situations. But comfort is not self-esteem. We shall see that “the six pillars of self-esteem”—the practices indispensable to the health of the mind and the effective functioning of the person—are all operations of consciousness. All involve choices. They are choices that confront us every hour of our existence. A “practice” implies a discipline of acting in a certain way over and over again—consistently.
- The six pillars of self-esteem are:- a) The practice of living consciously b) The practice of self-acceptance c) The practice of self-responsibility d) The practice of self-assertiveness e) The practice of living purposefully f) The practice of personal integrity.

- **The practice of living consciously:**- If we do not bring an appropriate level of consciousness to our activities, if we do not live mindfully, the inevitable penalty is a diminished sense of self-efficacy and self-respect. We cannot feel competent and worthy while conducting our lives in a mental fog. Living consciously means more than seeing and knowing; it means acting on what one sees and knows. Living consciously is living responsibly toward reality. We do not necessarily have to like what we see, but we recognize that that which is, is, and that which is not, is not. Wishes or fears or denials do not alter facts.
- The Practice of Self-Few specifics of living consciously is: A mind that is active rather than passive, An intelligence that takes joy in its own function, Being “in the moment,”, Being concerned to distinguish among facts, interpretations, and emotions, Being concerned to know if my actions are in alignment with my purposes etc.
- **The practice of self-acceptance:**- While self-esteem is something we experience, self-acceptance is something we do. Some people are self-rejecting at so deep a level that no growth work can even begin until and unless this problem is addressed. Self-acceptance entails our willingness to experience—that is, to make real to ourselves, without denial—that we think what we think, feel what we feel, desire what we desire, have done what we have done, and are what we are. Often, when we fully experience and accept negative feelings, we are able to let go of them; they have been allowed to have their say and they relinquish center stage. If I am thinking these disturbing thoughts, I am thinking them; I accept the full reality of my experience. I am feeling what I am feeling and I accept the reality of my experience. if I am confronted with a mistake I have made, in accepting that it is mine I am free to learn from it and to do better in the future. I cannot learn from a mistake I cannot accept having made.

- Self-acceptance entails the idea of compassion, of being a friend to myself. Self-acceptance does not deny reality, does not argue that what is wrong is really all right, but it inquires into the context in which the action was taken. It wants to understand the why. It wants to know why something that is wrong or inappropriate felt desirable or appropriate or even necessary at the time. The act of experiencing and accepting our emotions is implemented through (1) focusing on the feeling or emotion, (2) breathing gently and deeply, allowing muscles to relax, allowing the feeling to be felt, and (3) making real that this is my feeling (which we call owning it). When we allow ourselves to experience our emotions and accept them, sometimes this allows us to move to a deeper level of awareness where important information presents itself.
- What should you do when self-acceptance feels impossible? We feel powerless not to block and contract. The solution is not to try to resist our resistance. If we cannot accept a feeling (or a thought or a memory), we should accept our resistance. In other words, start by accepting where we are. Be present to the now and experience it fully. If we stay with the resistance at a conscious level, it will usually begin to dissolve. Acceptance of what is, is the precondition of change. And denial of what is leaves me stuck in it.
- **The practice of Self-Responsibility:-** It involves a) I am responsible for the achievement of my desires. b) I am responsible for my choices and actions. c) I am responsible for the level of consciousness I bring to my work. d) I am responsible for the level of consciousness I bring to my relationships. e) I am responsible for my behavior with other people—coworkers, associates, customers, spouses, children, friends. f) I am responsible for how I prioritize my time. g) I am responsible for raising my self-esteem. h) I am responsible for my personal happiness.

- **The practice of self-Assertiveness:-** Self-assertiveness means honoring my wants, needs, and values and seeking appropriate forms of their expression in reality. To practice self-assertiveness is to live authentically, to speak and act from my innermost convictions and feelings—as a way of life, as a rule. To practice self-assertiveness logically and consistently is to be committed to my right to exist, which proceeds from the knowledge that my life does not belong to others and that I am not here on earth to live up to someone else's expectations. To practice self-assertiveness consistently I need the conviction that my ideas and wants are important. It often takes courage to honor what we want and to fight for it. My life does not belong to others and I am not here on earth to live up to someone else's expectations. Its opposite is that surrender to timidity that consists of consigning myself to a perpetual underground where everything that I am lies hidden or stillborn—to avoid confrontation with someone whose values differ from mine, or to please, placate, or manipulate someone, or simply to “belong.”
- **The practice of living purposefully:-** To live purposefully is to use our powers for the attainment of goals we have selected. It is our goals that lead us forward, that call on the exercise of our faculties, that energize our existence. Self-responsible men and women do not pass to others the burden of supporting their existence. To live purposefully is to be concerned with these questions: What am I trying to achieve? How am I trying to achieve it? Why do I think these means are appropriate? Does the feedback from the environment convey that I am succeeding or failing? Is there new information that I need to consider? Do I need to make adjustments in my course, or in my strategy, or in my practices? And it applies to my work life, as well as personal life and relationships.

- To live purposefully and productively requires that we cultivate within ourselves a capacity for self-discipline. Self-discipline is the ability to organize our behavior over time in the service of specific tasks. Self-discipline requires the ability to defer immediate gratification in the service of a remote goal. The practice of living purposefully entails the following core issues. a) Taking responsibility for formulating one's goals and purposes consciously. b) Being concerned to identify the actions necessary to achieve one's goals. c) Monitoring behavior to check that it is in alignment with one's goals. d) Paying attention to the outcomes of one's actions, to know whether they are leading where one wants to go.
- To observe that the practice of living purposefully is essential to fully realized self-esteem should not be understood to mean that the measure of an individual's worth is his or her external achievements. The root of our self-esteem is not our achievements but those internally generated practices that, among other things, make it possible for us to achieve.
- **The practice of Personal integrity:-** Integrity means congruence. Words and behavior match. In most organizations, however, there are men and women whom others trust. Why? They keep their word. They honor their commitments. They don't just promise to stick up for their people, they do it. They just don't preach fairness, they practice it. They don't just counsel honesty and integrity, they live it. If I act against what I myself regard as right, if my actions clash with my expressed values, then I act against my judgment, I betray my mind. When it comes to matters of self-esteem, I have more to fear from my own judgment than from anyone else's. In the inner courtroom of my mind, mine is the only judgment that counts.

- Nurturing a child's self-esteem:- Five conditions are associated with high self-esteem in children. a) The child experiences total acceptance of thoughts, feelings, and the value of his or her person. b) The child operates in a context of clearly defined and enforced limits that are fair, nonoppressive, and negotiable. The child is not given unrestricted "freedom." c) The child experiences respect for his or her dignity as a human being. The parents do not use violence or humiliation or ridicule to control and manipulate. The parents take the child's needs and wish seriously, whether or not they can accede to them in a particular instance. d) The parents uphold high standards and high expectations in terms of behavior and performance. Their attitude is not "anything goes." e) The parents themselves tend to enjoy a high level of self-esteem. They model (what I call) self-efficacy and self-respect. The child sees living examples of that which he or she needs to learn.
- A child who receives respect from adults tends to learn self-respect. Respect is conveyed by addressing a child with the courtesy one normally extends to adults. Parents need to be informed: "Be careful what you say to your children. They may agree with you." Before calling a child "stupid" or "clumsy" or "bad" or "a disappointment," consider the question, "Is this how I want my child to experience him or herself?" A child whose thoughts and feelings are treated with acceptance tends to internalize the response and to learn self-acceptance. A child has a natural desire to be seen, heard, understood, and responded to appropriately.