

UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTING YOURSELF

While we'd all like nothing better than to be happy with ourselves, more often than not, we have a hard time *accepting* ourselves. Why? For three main reasons:

1. When we try to live our lives according to others expectations of us, versus realizing our own dreams, even successes feel foreign to us, and the self suffers instead of becoming realized.
2. When we repeat the same mistakes over and over again, we begin to feel like a failure – if it didn't work before, it will more than likely not work now.
3. When we fight our weaknesses instead of accepting them, we reject important parts of ourselves.

Wouldn't it be nice to:

- understand yourself better
- get in touch with your hopes and dreams
- learn new ways of solving your problems
- accept yourself as a whole

Let's begin with accepting our shortcomings, so all else feels easier.

Strengths and weaknesses are flip-sides of the same coin, and therefore need to co-exist. Whereas a strong and assertive individual may be good to have around in a take-charge moment, they might feel insensitive or controlling through a vulnerable moment. Hence, studies show that the very same things that attract us to our partners cause us to become disenchanted with them, over time. But if we accept both as parts of the same equation, we'll be able to delight in them. Likewise, our weaknesses can give us an opportunity to grow in other areas. Point being, we need to focus on adaptation, not avoidance. Personally, if I lack a certain ability that I'd really like, rather than ruminating over it, I treat it like the Ferrari I'll never have – I just have fun with what I have and don't give it a second thought. Besides, my SUV can go places the Ferrari never could, and it's all-season to boot!

Bottom line, if you can focus on your strengths, compensate for your weaknesses, and love yourself enough to treat yourself with the *same* respect and care as others you love, you'll be happier than ever, because that's where self-acceptance starts.

Beyond that, it's about learning from our mistakes, instead of repeating them. It is human nature to repeat our mistakes – for some reason we think that even though it didn't work

the last thousand times, it will be different this time. But *same* methods, generally generate *same* results. Einstein said, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” So why not break the pattern and try something different?

That said, the way we act can also be tied into our personalities. Although behaviours and attitudes can be changed with determination, like weight; personalities are harder to change, like height. But you can certainly mould how personalities present themselves. Our brain has three layers to it – the core that thinks in impulsive, basic ways; the limbic system that adds emotions to it, so we can change our reactive ways; and the cerebrum, the most sophisticated of the three layers, which can supersede anything, based on learning. Learn what you’re all about and how you can better manage yourself, so you live a more peaceful life, instead of an unfulfilled, judgmental one.

There are nine personality types, as identified by Enneagrams [from Greek word *ennea*, meaning nine]. Each individual fits one better than others. Find out what *your* type is. It will answer the question “Who am I” and thereby allow you to better plan your life, in accordance with your dreams and abilities, versus going against the grain. Remember, all types are equally important – no one is perfect, and no one is completely imperfect – we need all types to make the world run smoothly, since each has its special purpose.

1. Ones strive for perfection and completeness. They are hence serious people who live for work and deny themselves pleasure. Mistakes make them uneasy. Their weak spot is anger, which often comes across as fury, frustration, and stubbornness to others. Their gifts include persistence, patience, and calmness. But because they tend to judge others who lack those qualities, they often end up being loners. This is the person who’s never written a book, but will eagerly critique yours.
2. Twos are very helpful people, since they need to be needed. They can give to the point of creating dependency, and thrive on thanks and feelings of being indispensable. Their weak spot is pride, their life goal is closeness. Hence, their emotions constantly pull them in different directions.
3. Threes are driven by success and achievement. They thrive on competition and the prospect of success. Their weak spot is lying, not just to others, but also to themselves, since they can’t see themselves as doing wrong – they’re totally clued out, even in the presence of clear patterns. Their gifts include – vigour, optimism, depth of feeling, and the ability to translate vision into reality. For this reason, they make great entrepreneurs, they’re addicted to winning, and they can’t stand losing.
4. Fours are led by their longing – hence they’re oversensitive and susceptible to depression. They revere their individuality and are susceptible to envy. Hence they constantly compare themselves to others and try to restore originality. Their

strengths include creativity and the art of seeing what's special in others, however enviously, but it does help them learn and do better.

5. Fives love their privacy and like to shut themselves off from everyone and everything. They collect knowledge, analyse, and explore previously unexplored areas. Their weak spot is stinginess, not just monetary, but also with their time and emotions. They maintain their physical and emotional distance from others and prefer to be connected to the outside world only via online activity.
6. Sixes are loyal, cooperative, reliable, warm-hearted and cautious. They are very aware of hierarchies and love standing up for the insecure or the underdog. Their weak spot is fear, tied into the anticipation of danger, resulting in withdrawal. But they make up for it by their gifts of reliability, trust, introspection and courage. They often lead double lives and take pleasure in being a completely different person, from the persona they project.
7. Sevens are optimistic, enthusiastic, and fast. They want to be happy, therefore focus on positive possibilities, even when they're not realistic. And the quest for happiness doesn't just stop with themselves, they want everyone around them to be happy as well, and will thus give of themselves infinitely, without boundaries, lacking the ability to say "NO". Their weakness is extravagance – more is always better, whether it's how hard they work, play, or live. Their gifts include cheerfulness, innovative thinking, with a pragmatic sense of financing and realization of dreams. They enjoy life to the fullest, and try to help others do the same, with a strong cerebral and emotional sense backing them up.
8. Eights thrive on strength. They are energetic, direct, confrontational, and demand respect. Their weak spot is their brazenness, since they have little sense of how they hurt people when they cross lines. Their gifts include resilience, and exercising power, since they crave to end weakness, oppression, and inactivity.
9. The biggest concern for nines is peace, contentment, harmony, and comfort. They have set habits (which they're driven to maintain), can be absentminded to all else, and won't do stuff unless asked – but when asked, they're great with following instructions and do so cheerfully. Rare to make their own decisions, they may come across as lazy. Their gifts include empathy, peace-making, and hobbies that require energetic challenges.

By now, I'm sure most of you have seen yourself as being predominantly one of those nine types. If you have any doubts, grab a book that allows you to take an Enneagram test, since they are known as the best tool for self-analysis. It's time you go "a-ha", as you finally get yourself and life starts to make sense.

As you'll notice, all personality types list gifts and weaknesses, creating a unique combination that's naturally good at doing certain things. Embrace yours, so you have fun,

and experience that inner peace. Oriah Mountain Dreamer shared that when she visited a Shaman and asked him why she couldn't do certain things and be a certain way, he told her that she was asking the wrong question; what she should have been asking was why isn't she happy with the way she is?

The way each one of us was designed is for a purpose. If you don't know yours, it's time to find out, and embrace it. Whatever your purpose, whatever your dreams, you are a unique individual who needs to have the best relationship with yourself, since it is the one relationship you're involved in 24/7, and it determines all others. So like the serenity prayer, change what you can, accept what you can't, and have the wisdom to know the difference.

Seeing that the relationship you have with yourself is the most critical, let's explore that next.

1. Do you become undone in traffic?
2. Do you lay awake at night, worrying?
3. Do you wake up in the morning, exhausted, wondering how you'll *ever* get through the rest of the day?
4. Do you second guess yourself, because your heart, gut, and head are in constant battle?
5. Do you take things personally, and waste copious amounts of time, trying to figure out why someone treated you the way they did?
6. Does your mind get exhausted from constant internal dialogue, ruminating over how something should have gone down?
7. Does your mind *refuse* to address important issues, and chooses distractions to take their place – anything to avoid invoking strong emotions, right?
8. Do you find that you call yourself names, and put yourself down in ways you'd never find acceptable from others?
9. Do you feel guilty taking care of your *own* needs, since you feel you aren't important enough, thereby completely depleting yourself? If you do, you're no good to anybody, *including yourself*.
10. Are you overwhelmed with life, to the point that the slightest things stress you out?

If you answered “yes” to any of the aforementioned questions, you probably feel fairly stressed out, a lot of the time. Stress expert, Dr. David Posen, bestselling author of *The Little Book of Stress Relief*, says that, stress can affect us in four ways – physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural.

Physical: Symptoms include – fatigue, muscle aches, low back pain, palpitations, chest pressure, and various abdominal problems, like nausea, cramps, diarrhoea and constipation.

Mental: Symptoms include – decreased concentration, impaired memory, indecisiveness, and difficulty in making the slightest decisions.

Emotional: Symptoms include – anxiety, tension, nervousness, impatience, frustration, anger, and in some cases depression.

Behavioural: Symptoms include – pacing, fidgeting, nail biting, compulsive eating, drinking, smoking, and overindulging due to pressure. Additionally, stressed people tend to blame others, are abrupt, and are known to have an angry demeanour, to the point of yelling, screaming, and possibly swearing.

The saddest part of the whole ordeal is, most people undergoing these symptoms, are too stressed out to realize what's happening to them and how they are coming across to others, not to mention what they're doing to their *own* health.

A recent Health Canada study pointed out that almost 60% of Canadians employed outside their homes, cannot balance their work and family demands, which leaves them feeling depleted and unhealthy. They recommend that we admit what's going on, learn to say “no” to what doesn't matter, set priorities, and build in recharge time for ourselves. Additionally, what we put into our bodies – both mentally and physically – has a great impact on what our bodies crank out. As such, we need to:

- eat healthy
- make time to exercise, however moderately
- drink lots of water
- take time to breathe deeply; when we're anxious or anticipating pain, we either hold our breath or go into shallow breathing – the body takes this as a negative sign and it's emergency response system kicks in, creating a negative snowball effect that further depletes us – deep breaths on the other hand, signal serenity and relaxation, and reverse the snowball effect into a positive direction
- cut back on the time you watch TV – research show extreme benefits to mental health, rest time, relationship quality, among other things
- schedule quiet time for yourself, and approach it with a self-care attitude
- like Tarzan, thump your thymus in the middle of your chest for an energy boost
- get plenty of rest: for every hour you lack in the amount of sleep you need, you raise your stress level by 10% and reduce your concentration an equivalent of having a drink.

Now back to our questions:

1. If you find yourself becoming undone in traffic, it's time to make traffic fun – treat it as *your* private time, when you can listen to *your* kind of music or inspirational audio-books, as loudly or softly as *you* like, when no one is coming at you. Beyond that, I always give myself a bit of extra time to get to places, so I'm not perplexed through this private time I've managed to create.
2. If you lay awake at night, worrying, record your concerns in your smart phone, to revisit when you have the concentration – kinda like postponing reading to a time when you can better comprehend. More often than not, when your problems see the light of day – assuming they do – they won't feel as big, and you'd be in a position to lay out a game plan, instead of looking at them as all black and white, since black and white thinking is self-defeating. It'll help you change your thinking from, *if I didn't win, then I must be a loser*, to *I'm doing the best that I can*.
3. If you wake up exhausted in the mornings, wondering how you'll make it through the day, how about trying out the following to give yourself an energy boost:
 - eat nutritious foods, in *all* food groups
 - drink lots of water and cut back on caffeine, sugary drinks/foods, and alcohol
 - get out of your own way, ditching defeatist thinking that wears you down
 - express your feelings, if only to yourself – they're bubbling with energy that must come out and be addressed
 - make a plan to go to bed a bit earlier, so you may have enough rest, and possibly squeeze out some time to either exercise or pamper yourself in the morning – or at the very least, not be forced to rush around.
4. If you constantly second guess yourself, because the logic in your head, the feelings in your heart, and the intuition in your gut are in constant battle, learn to respect what's in your head and how you feel about it, and then let your intuition win out, within reason. Studies show that we don't use our intuition nearly enough, when it can be the best guide, when our head and heart are at battle. Intuition also keeps us from perfectionistic thinking, where we set higher standards for ourselves than we can meet – higher than what *anyone* else would expect from us, in fact.
5. If you take things personally, and waste copious amounts of time trying to figure out why someone treated you the way they did, stop right now! How *you* view yourself is all that matters, not what *others* think of you, and certainly not how others *treat* you. If you worry too much about others, you'll live a reactive life instead of a responsive one. Meet your *own* needs, with the time and energy you'd be wasting thinking about someone else. Besides, we can *never* fully understand someone else's behaviour, because we'll *never* know their motivation or intent.
6. If your mind gets exhausted from constant internal dialogue, and is stuck in rumination, you must become unstuck. To do this, you must *own* your feelings,

refuse to ruminate once you've acknowledged them, and then take charge of what's going on in your brain. Should've, could've don't mean much after the fact; neither does self blame. Work with the knowledge that you did the best under the circumstances, and now you will move forward from this point onwards. Affirm what you did right; don't waste time ruminating over what you did wrong. And never ever talk yourself into believing that how *you* feel is someone else's fault. Others may be able to *influence* our thoughts, but they can't *control* them – it's still *our* thoughts and reactions/responses.

7. If your mind *refuses* to address important issues, and chooses distractions to take their place, it's time to stop and focus on the issues, no matter how painful they might be, so you may address them with clarity. They're not going to go away on their own; in fact, they'll follow you wherever you go. Besides, keeping uncomfortable issues out of one's awareness, uses up a lot of energy – energy that could be used to solve the very problems being avoided. Find out what triggers make you space out – triggers such as anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, rage, grief – so you may stop the cycle. Left unattended, they'll fester and explode, like the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back.
8. If you find that you call yourself names and put yourself down in ways you'd never find acceptable from others, stop right now! Praise yourself in ways you want others to praise you. Write down a list of your good attributes, and remind yourself of what a *great* person you are. Avoid friends who corroborate your negative view of either yourself or your relationships. If you have a negative thought nonetheless, let them pass through, without allowing them to take its hold on you. Instead of calling yourself a dummy who can't get anything right, ask yourself what you can do to make things better and then do it! Once you get something right, remember to compliment yourself for it – don't take *yourself* for granted! If you find it hard to do that, ask yourself, "What is the most helpful thing I can say to myself – or do – right now, to make a positive difference?"
9. If you feel guilty taking care of your *own* needs, since you feel you aren't important enough, you'll end up completely depleting yourself, and you'll be no good to anybody – *including yourself*. So give yourself permission to change all that right now. And think from inside out, not outside in – you have little control over the outside world. When you think from within, you'll lead a more meaningful life.
10. If you are overwhelmed with life, to the point that the slightest things stress you out, listen to your feelings. They're trying to tell you something. We're encouraged to control our feelings, not share them with others, since they might react negatively to them. This makes us fear the strongest guide in our lives, our guiding light, which leads us to take better care of ourselves, and protect ourselves if need be, like the pain from a hot stove. Feelings are what they are, they can't be contrived. And they're different from one person to the next, depending upon our life experiences,

hence they must never be analysed in another individual. Suppressed feelings can explode when they come to the surface, causing more stress than ever. To avoid the vicious cycle, listen to your feelings in the present, so you may deal with them before they overwhelm you. The more we think about something, the more we add extraneous facts to the current situation, to build our argument, thereby losing the purity of what the emotion was trying to tell us in the first place. Don't let that distortion happen. Deal with it as it comes, and you'll minimize your stress-load.

Of all the relationships that affect us, the most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves. If we're kind to ourselves, nurture ourselves properly, and focus on the good within ourselves, that relationship will blossom like any other relationship, given the same chance and care. And once that happens, our life will feel better and more meaningful than ever before!