

I AM POSSIBLE

Attitude



GOOD ATTITUDE BEGINS WITH SELF-ESTEEM

According to Webster's Dictionary the term self-esteem refers to having "confidence, self-respect, self-worth and satisfaction in oneself." One significant factor in our ability to develop confidence and satisfaction in ourselves can be the environment we are raised in. For example, when we are raised in a caring and supportive environment that encourages healthy self-acceptance, there is an increase in the degree to which we value ourselves. As we value and appreciate who we are, we are more likely to feel happy and to do better. Self-esteem therefore, occurs when our self-perception and our self-image personifies us as a unique and distinctive individual of value, capable of holding ourselves in high regard.

A Personal Empowerment View

*Figure it out for yourself my lad,
You've all that the greatest of men have had;
Two arms, two hands, two legs, two eyes,
And a brain to use if you would be wise,
With this equipment they all began.
So start from the top and say, "I can."*

*Look them over, the wise and the great,
They take their food from a common plate,
And similar knives and forks they use,
With similar laces they tie their shoes,
The world considers them brave and smart,
But you've all they had when they made their start.*



*You can triumph and come to skill,
You can be great if you only will.
You're well equipped for what fight you choose;
You have arms and legs and a brain to use,
And the man who has risen great deeds to do
Began his life with no more than you.*

*You are the handicap you must face,
You are the one who must choose your place.
You must say where you want to go,
How much you will study the truth to know;
God has equipped you for life, but He
Lets you decide what you want to be.*

*Courage must come from the soul within
The man must furnish the will to win.
So figure it out for yourself, my lad,
You were born with all that the great have had,
With your equipment they all began,
Get hold of yourself and say: "I can."*

Anonymous

In his book, *The Man Who Talks with the Flowers: The Life Story of Dr. George Washington Carver*, Glenn Clark identifies the poem frequently recited publicly by the late Dr. George Washington Carver during his tenure as professor of agricultural science at Tuskegee Institute (later renamed Tuskegee University in 1985). Dr. Carver is arguably one of history's most prolific agricultural scientists, educators, and chemical investigators and is best known for his contributions to agricultural science.

Dr. Carver's "favorite poem" delights as well as inspires readers to know that God has given us everything to be successful. The poem directs us to realize that the Creator benefits every person with the capacity and capability of tapping into an internal energy source or reservoir of will power. Will power is another way of describing the strength of mind, self-control, self-discipline and strength of will a person possesses to motivate them to accomplish a personal goal. In other words, will power can be observed as the jump-start process of mind over matter. Will power can also be thought of as a phenomenon brought about when a person develops a positive trust of self, and of their ability to accomplish what their mind conceives and what they believe. Possessing a consciousness that reflects a positive self-concept and self-worth allows a person to see within themselves those positive qualities, characteristics or attributes that can be accessed to power one's will or desire to have empowering expectations about their



ability to accomplish personal growth and development skills as well as academic skills. Therefore, will power in the context of this consciousness can also refer to having a positive self-esteem. The following quote helps illustrate this point:

The elders say, "The longest road you're going to have to walk in your life is from here to here. From the head to the heart." But they also say you can't speak to the people as a leader unless you've made the return journey.

Phil Lane, Jr., Yankton Sioux, 1992
From the heart back to the head

A self-empowered person is someone who possesses high self-esteem. Nathaniel Branden, author of *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* and leading expert in self-esteem, defines the self-esteem as follows:

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 life 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

(Branden, 1994)

According to Branden, genuine self-esteem must be founded on six practices:

- The practice of living consciously
- The practice of self-acceptance
- The practice of self-responsibility
- The practice of self-assertiveness
- The practice of living purposefully
- The practice of personal integrity

Self-esteem as a strategy to achieve empowerment consists of nurturing students by providing them with a positive sense of self. More specifically, by increasing the personal confidence and satisfaction in minority students in particular, we can improve the essential quality that facilitates their self-empowerment.

In her book, *21st Century Discipline*, Jane Bluestein discusses traditional ways of teaching. In particular, she discusses teaching strategies that cultivate self-esteem. Table 5.1 lists comparisons she provides to illustrate her point. It is also important to note that



the context of her paradigm is based upon a comparison between students whom she describes as obedient students and responsible students. Obedient students are those who exhibit an external locus of control, while responsible students exhibit an internal locus of control.

TABLE 5.1 The Obedient Student vs. the Responsible Student

The Obedient Student is characterized by the following traits:

- Motivated by external factors, such as the need to please authority and win extrinsic approval
- Follows orders
- May lack confidence to function effectively in absence of authority figures: lacks initiative; waits for orders
- Self-esteem is defined externally; feels worthwhile only when receiving approval
- Feels "I am my behavior"(and somebody else probably made me this way)
- Difficulty seeing connection between behavior and its consequences
- Difficulty seeing choices and options; finds it hard to make decisions
- Feelings of helplessness and teacher dependency are common
- Operates from an external value system (usually that of someone important to him or her, i.e., "significant others") that may not be personally appropriate and may even be harmful
- Obeys; may think

The Responsible Student is characterized by the following traits:

- Motivated by internal factors, such as the need to weigh choices and experience personal consequences
- Makes choices
- More confident to function effectively in the absence of authority; takes initiative
- Self-esteem: defined internally-worthwhile with or without approval (or even with disapproval)
- Knows "I am not my behavior, although I am responsible for how I behave"
- Better able to see the connection between behavior and its consequences
- Better able to see choices and options and to make decisions
- Personal sense of empowerment and independence is common
- Operates from internal value system (what is best or safest for him or her), while being considerate of the needs and values of others
- Thinks; may obey
- Has confidence in internal signals and in ability to act in own self-interest



- Lacks confidence in internal signals and in ability to act in own self-interest
 - Has difficulty predicting outcomes or consequences of actions
 - Has difficulty understanding or expressing personal needs
 - Limited ability to get needs met without hurting self or others
 - Limited negotiation skills; orientation is "You win-I lose"
 - Compliant
 - Oriented to avoid punishment, "keeping teacher off my back"
 - May experience conflict between internal and external needs (what I want versus what teacher wants); may experience guilt or rebelliousness
 - May make poor choices to avoid disapproval or abandonment (to make my friends like me more)
- Better able to predict outcomes or consequences of actions
 - Better able to understand and express personal needs
 - Better able to take care of own needs without hurting self or others
 - Better developed negotiation skills; orientation is "You win-I win"
 - Cooperative
 - Commitment to the task, experiencing outcome of positive choosing
 - Better able to resolve conflict between internal and external needs (what I want versus what the teacher wants); less inclined to guilt or rebelliousness
 - May make poor choices to experience personal consequences and to satisfy curiosity

Jane Bluestein's discussion on traditional ways of teaching strategies that cultivate self-esteem makes it easier to observe how self-esteem is a consequence of specific strategies designed to improve an individual's will power to excel. Self-esteem represents those strategies that increase a person's sense of self, while lifting their regard and value of self. One result or outcome of building self-esteem is that it allows a student to feel confident of her/his strength, worth, and adequacy. As a result of such feelings, the student becomes more competent and productive in all aspects of their personal and academic life. On the other hand, when a person experiences a lack of self-esteem, helplessness and discouragement, it usually results in a lack of sufficient confidence to engage in successful problem solving.

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