Well hello. Welcome to episode thirteen of the Calm Living Blueprint Podcast. I am your host, Candice Esposito, the founder of the Calm Living Blueprint.

Thanks for listening. I hope you’re managing to stay comfortable wherever you are right now. Where I’m at – in northern Ontario, Canada – we’ve been hit by a heat wave. Normally, I wouldn’t be complaining about the heat, but the humidity is at like 98%. I know, you might be laughing at me right now, thinking, “That’s nothing” if you’re living somewhere where it’s like that all the time.

I guess it’s all comes down to what we’re acclimated to or used to, eh? I’ve turned off my little dinky air conditioner to record this episode because it’s really loud and I don’t want it to disrupt the sound quality of this recording. However, I may have to make this episode a little shorter than usual for fear of turning into just this big sweat puddle.

Anyway, if that’s the worst I’ve got to complain about, I’m pretty darn fortunate. So, as I like to say, let’s carry on...

In this episode you’re going to discover why self-esteem is overrated. Yes, I said OVER-rated. I know a lot of self-help books and programs out there are all about boosting your self-esteem. Well, I’m going to tell why those don’t work and why you don’t need to waste your money on them.

Before I do, a quick reminder that the show notes for every episode are available on the Calm Living Blueprint website. The show notes include the actual mp3 recording, the transcript of the podcast, any resources mentioned, as well as the homeplay that I recommend in each episode. The show notes for today’s episode can be found at CalmLivingBlueprint.com/13. That’s the number 13 as in episode number 13.

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Alright, on with the show...

What do you most dislike about yourself?

When I pose this question to my Inner Circle clients I got responses like:
I’m too shy. I’m too anxious. I’m too fearful.
I’m stupid.
I’m selfish.
I’m a failure. I’m a loser.
I’m boring. I’m unmotivated.

And those are just a sample. Everyone has their own personal dislikes. Maybe you can relate to some of those I’ve just said.

What’s the commonality to all those statements?

They all go back to the same basic theme: I’m not good enough as I am. There is something wrong with me or lacking in me.

You’re not alone if you can relate to this. It’s a message our minds send us again and again.

No matter how hard we try or how much we achieve, our thinking self can always find something to dislike, some way in which we are lacking, deficient, not good enough.

[If you are unfamiliar with the thinking self I encourage you to listen to episode 9.]

Why does our mind do this?

Well, if you think back to our ancestors it makes sense. By constantly comparing themselves to other members of the clan it ensured they didn’t get rejected. It constantly drew their attention to their weaknesses so they could improve on them. Rejection equalled death. It was all about survival.
The problem now is that that mechanism doesn’t serve us as so well since it leads us to think we’re unsuccessful, inadequate, unworthy, unlovable, incompetent, or whatever not good enough means to you.

And what’s the term that sums all this up?
Low self-esteem. (repeat)

But, what exactly is self-esteem?

It’s an opinion. An opinion you hold about yourself. Low self-esteem is a low or negative opinion, high self-esteem is a high or positive opinion.

Self-esteem is basically a bunch of thoughts about whether or not you’re a so-called “good person.”

And when I say good or bad please know that I’m using air quotations around them.

Here’s the reason why self-esteem is overrated: self-esteem is not a fact; it’s just an opinion.

It’s not the truth. It’s nothing more than a highly subjective judgement.

Now, you might be thinking, “Sure, but isn’t it important that I have a good opinion of myself?”

No, not necessarily.

Okay, I know I may be blowing your mind here so let me explain ... 

First of all, what’s an opinion? It’s a story. Nothing more than words.

Second of all, it’s a judgement, not a factual description.

For example, the statement Julia Roberts is a film actress is a factual description. The statement Julia Roberts is a very talented actress is an opinion or judgement.

See how that works?
So self-esteem is basically a judgement that our thinking self makes about us as a person.

Think about what people do when they want high self-esteem. How do they go about getting it?

They tend to do a whole lot of reasoning, justifying, and negotiating until maybe, eventually they convince their thinking self to declare that I’m a “good person.” Maybe they tell themselves, “I’m doing well at my job, I’m exercising regularly, I’m eating healthily, I help people out – so basically that means I’m a good person.”

And if they really believe that last bit about being a “good person” they have high self-esteem.

What’s the problem with this though?

You constantly have to justify this good opinion.

You constantly have to challenge those “not good enough” stories in your mind.

And that takes a whole lot of time and a whole lot of effort. It’s like a never-ending game of chess.

Imagine a chessboard where on one side we have the black pieces – all your “bad” thoughts and feelings. On the other side are the white pieces – all your “good” thoughts and feelings.

The white chess pieces attack the black pieces. The black chess pieces attack the white pieces. It’s an ongoing battle that never ends because there are an infinite number of pieces on both sides. No matter how many pieces get knocked off, there are always others to replace them.

So to boost your self-esteem you gather as many white pieces together as you can with thoughts like “My boss just gave me a raise,” “I’m going to the gym three nights per week,” “I had a vegetable smoothie today,” and on and on.
As you advance these white pieces across the chess board your self-esteem starts to rise. But here’s the problem: there’s a whole army of black pieces waiting to counterattack.

And the moment you slip up, the moment you stop doing any of those things you’re using to justify, “I’m a good person” – those black chess pieces attack and your self-esteem disintegrates.

Say you stop exercising for a few days ... your mind says, “See? You knew it couldn’t last!” You make a mistake at work, “Jeez, how incompetent!”

So you try to rally more white chess pieces. Maybe you pull out some positive affirmations, repeating over and over things like, “I’m a wonderful human being, full of love, strength, courage.”

Do you really believe what you are saying?

Isn’t it a bit like saying, “I am Superman” or “I am Wonder Woman?” Would you ever really believe regardless of how many times you said it to yourself?

The other problem with positive affirmations is that regardless of whether it’s true, it naturally tends to attract a negative response. The white chess pieces always attract the black chess pieces.

Don’t believe me?

Try this exercise out for yourself...

I’m going to a say a few sentences and after each one I want you to say that sentence slowly to yourself and try your hardest to believe it.

Here goes...

I am a human being.

I am a worthwhile human being.

I am a lovable, worthwhile human being.

I am a competent, lovable, worthwhile human being.
I am a perfect, competent, lovable, worthwhile human being.

What happened as you tried to believe those thoughts? For most people, including myself, the more positive the thought, the more resistance there is ... thoughts like “Yeah, right!” “Who are you kidding?” “Maybe in your dreams” automatically pop up.

And if you are one of the few who actually manage to fuse with those affirmations and feel wonderful as a result ... I hate to break this to you, but it’ll only be for a moment. The feeling doesn’t last. Pretty soon the black chess pieces will attack again.

Now do the same exercise with one more sentence:

I am a useless piece of human garbage.

What happened that time? Most people automatically have thoughts pop up in their defence, like, “Whoa, wait a minute here, I’m not that bad!” or “No, I don’t believe that.”

And, again, maybe you’re among the few who fuses with the thought and feel lousy as a result.

The reality is you can find an infinite number of good and bad stories to tell about yourself and as long as you’re invested in self-esteem you’re going to waste a lot of time in this chess game, fighting an endless battle against your own limitless supply of negative thoughts.

Do you want to spend a huge chunk of your life caught up in this game?

While all your attention is on this chess game, it’s pretty hard to connect with anything else. You disconnect from life and the world around you, totally lost in the struggle with your own opinions.

Is that really how you want to spend your time? Fighting your own thoughts? Trying to prove to yourself that you’re a good person? Continually having to justify your worthiness?

Wouldn’t you prefer to just leave the battle?
What if you completely let go of judging yourself as a person? What would life be like if you were to let go of self-esteem altogether?

Sure, your thinking self would continue to make up all the usual judgements, but you would see them for what they are – just words – and let them come and go like passing cars.

There’s that not good enough story again. Thanks, mind. I’m having the thought that I’m not good enough. Use your defusion techniques.

Yeah, it can be that simple.

How does that seem to you? Weird? Wonderful? Too good to be true?

I know this can be a lot to wrap your mind around and a few questions may be coming up like...

But, don’t people with high self-esteem have better lives?

That is actually a myth. Sure, a few people with high self-esteem do lead better lives, but it’s not a predictor for a good life by any means.

Research actually tells us that high self-esteem creates major problems for people. It easily leads to arrogance, righteousness, selfishness, egotism, or a false sense of superiority.

Think about someone whose high self-esteem is dependent upon excelling at work. When they perform well, they feel great, but as soon as their performance drops (as it always will, sooner or later), their self-esteem crashes. This leads to a vicious cycle ... putting increasing pressure on themselves to perform even better, which leads to high stress, fatigue, and burnout.

The good news is that leading a rich, full and meaningful life does not depend upon self-esteem at all.

So, what’s the alternative?
Let go of trying to prove yourself. Let go of thinking of yourself as a "good person." Let go of trying to justify your self-worth. Whatever judgements your thinking self makes of you – positive or negative – see them for what they are (just words) and let them go.

When you choose to leave the battle with self-esteem, here’s where you end up:

Self-acceptance.

Being okay with who you are. Treating yourself kindly. Accepting that you are a human being and therefore imperfect. Allowing yourself to mess up, make mistakes and learn from them.

Instead of judging yourself you recognize your strengths and weaknesses and you do what you can to be the person you want to be.

Your mind is going to tell you a million stories about what sort of person you are, but you don’t have to believe them.

Think of it this way...

Have you ever watched a documentary about Africa? What did you see? Lions, antelopes, gorillas, giraffes, tribal dances, warfare, colourful marketplaces, beautiful people, an amazing countryside?

Sure, you can learn a lot from watching a documentary, but a documentary about Africa is not Africa itself.

The documentary can give you some impressions of Africa, some dramatic sights and sounds, but it can’t give you the real life experience – the taste and smell of the food, the feel of the dessert, the feel of an elephant’s hide, the pleasure of interacting with the people.

No matter how brilliantly filmed that documentary is, it can’t come close to the experience of actually being there.

A documentary about Africa is not the same thing as Africa itself.
And in the same way, a documentary about you would not be the same thing as you yourself. Even if it lasted for a thousand hours and included all sorts of scenes from your life, all sorts of interviews with people who know you, even then the documentary would not be you.

Think of the person you love most on this planet. Which would you prefer to spend time with: the actual living person or a documentary about that person?

No matter how “truthful” the documentary is it doesn’t compare.

And the bias of the film director is nothing compared to the bias of our thinking self.

Your thinking self selects a few dramatic memories, edits them together with some related judgements and opinions and turns them into a powerful documentary entitled, “This Is Who I Am” perhaps with the subtitle, “Why I’m Not Good Enough.”

The problem is when we watch the documentary we forget just how heavily edited it is. Instead we believe that we are the video!

But remember, just in the same way that a documentary about Africa is not Africa, a documentary about you is not you.

The story that your thinking self creates is not you.

Your self-esteem is nothing more than thoughts, images, memories and stories.

That is why self-esteem is highly overrated.

I hope you feel a sense of freedom in realizing that.

What do you choose: self-esteem or self-acceptance?

Let me know how that works out for you.
‘Til next time,

I’m Candice Esposito.
Keep calm and carry on.

END TRANSCRIPT