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A brief introduction

Do you feel like you can’t take action on some things in your life because you fear being rejected?

Do you feel like you are not someone who could have success in the most important areas in life such as love, friendship, career and health?

Do you feel like no matter how good you perform you are still not good enough?

Do you sabotage for yourself when things are going well for you?

Do you feel deep down like you don’t like yourself or that you are bad?

I have done that. I have been there and it is not a good place to be in. It can feel terribly restricting. And like life never seems to really start for you or truly grow compared to the people you see around you. But this is not something that is set in stone. Low self-esteem is an issue and a challenge but it is something that can be improved greatly upon so that you can feel great about yourself and live your life to its full potential too.

My story with self-esteem is a pretty common one I think. I didn’t have atrociously bad self-esteem but I was down on myself quite a lot and didn’t feel like I deserved very much in life.
Over the past half decade things have changed for me. And in this course I want to share what I have learned, what has actually worked and still works to keep my self-esteem up even through rough parts of my days and weeks.

I will share the strategies and exercises that helped me to understand myself better and to make steady improvements in how view myself and the world. I’ll share the ways I have learned to handle those common situations, habits and pitfalls that can drag your self-esteem down on a daily basis. I’ll share the habits and thinking that allows me to feel a lot better about myself and feel the freedom to explore life as I want to.

That is what a healthy sense of self-esteem is about. That you feel and think that you are worthy of good things. In your relationships and socially, at work or in school, with your health, finances and other important things in life. It is about you feeling good about yourself even you may encounter criticism, failure or if your work is not done in a perfect manner or if you are not making major achievements all the time.

Healthy self-esteem is about being good to yourself just like you would be good to your best friend. It is about expanding your sense of what you deserve in life and not holding yourself back from exploring your full potential. With healthy self-esteem you can actually start working towards your dreams and stay on that course with the dreams after you have achieved them (instead of self-sabotaging). And your mind will open up to new and great expectations and dreams.

There is a time for a real change. A time for freedom so that you can live the life you really want. A time to grow and to explore what you want deep down instead of holding yourself back. This is that time. So let’s get started.
About the author

I’m Henrik Edberg and I’m the author of four books & courses: *The Art of Relaxed Productivity*, *The Power of Positivity* and *The Simplicity Monthly Course*. I’m also the creator of the popular personal development website *the Positivity Blog* and the Positivity Newsletter where I write weekly articles and newsletters about improving your happiness, social life, health, effectiveness and general awesomeness.

Feel free to follow me on Twitter, become a fan on Facebook or send me an email by using this contact form.
Do the work =
Reap the benefits

I will keep things simple in this course.

Each week you will get just a few action steps to take.

The first part of the course is about get to know yourself better and get more empathy and compassion for yourself. Understanding usually leads to being kinder and more compassionate about anyone including yourself. No understanding on the other hand leads to misunderstandings and harshness and working on the wrong and less important issues that are just in your mind but not in reality really. And with understanding you will know what problems that you specifically need to work on to improve your self-esteem and the quality of your life.

The second part is about the tools and solutions to common self-esteem problems like a lack of assertiveness and not being able to handle or act in the face of failure or criticism.

The final part of the course is about your personal growth in life and beyond this course.

So, at the end of each week’s guide you get a couple of action steps to take that week to build your self-esteem. These steps always include doing some work with that week’s worksheet.
You have to do the exercises in the worksheets in this course to reap the full benefit. Yes, just reading the information here can help and inspire you to make a change. But you have to get to know yourself better to know what you need to work on specifically. You need to know where you need to put your effort and you need to know to become more conscious of your own difficulties and where they stem from.

So please do the exercises and fill the worksheets in this course. It is not much extra work per week and it will help you for the rest of your life to raise and maintain your self-esteem at a high level. Do that for yourself.

P.S: If you don’t have a printer to print out the worksheets simply use pen and paper or a Word-document (or something similar) on your computer to fill in the answers to the exercises and questions of the week.

What we will explore during these 12 weeks

Here’s what we will explore each week during these 12 weeks of self-esteem building:

- Week 1: How to Get to Know and Disarm Your Inner Critic
- Week 2: Your Unconditional Worth and Discovering Your Accurate Self-Image
- Week 3: The 11 Common Thought Habits That Keep Your Self-Esteem Down and How to Overcome Them
- Week 4: The Sneaky and Powerful Shoulds and How to Replace Them
- Week 5: How to Stop Being Victimized and Start Being Assertive
- Week 6: The Power of Acceptance and Mindfulness
- Week 7: Being Kind and Compassionate Towards Yourself and Your World
✓ Week 8: How to Handle Failure and Mistakes and Get Something Good Out of It
✓ Week 9: The Hurtfulness and Helpfulness of Criticism
✓ Week 10: How to Stop Comparing Yourself to Other People
✓ Week 11: Dreams, Focus and Personal Growth
✓ Week 12: To a New Life of Freedom and High Self-Esteem
Your Inner Critic and How to Disarm It

So where do you start if you want to build and improve your self-esteem? It is tempting to try to achieve even more things and grow in that way as a start. But I would suggest starting at different place.

Let’s start with your thoughts. With your inner dialogue. And with what one could call your inner critic.

Now, what is your inner critic?

It is that small or sometimes big voice that stabs or pokes you. It drives you down a downward spiral or negative thought patterns and creates a bad day or week from one small misstep or conversation for example.

It is the voice that tells you that you that:

- You are a bad person.
- No one really likes you for who you are.
- You always fail in relationships.
- You aren’t good at your job at all and someone will figure that out and throw you out.
- That you are worse or uglier than someone else.
- That you are the one to blame for everything that goes wrong.
Those are just some common examples. The inner critic has a lot of rules and shoulds that it wants you to live up to.

Even if that would cause you to become someone that simply isn’t you.

It is not always easy to understand that it is your inner critic, that it is that part of you that is pushing you down. For many it has become such a normal part of the everyday inner dialogue as you get up in the morning, go to work or school, come home for evening activities and as you lie in bed at night and are going to sleep that you may not react to those inaccurate, distorted and negative statements that you are telling yourself about yourself.

**So why do you have this voice inside of your head?**

Because it helps you in life. Yes, the inner critic actually helps you.

It helps you to achieve things and to stay motivated. It helps you to fit in with the people in your world. It helps you to cope with many situations in life. It helps you to avoid many painful situations. It protects you from fear of failure, fear of success, fear of rejection.

It reduces anxiety. It makes you feel safer and more comfortable.

So there are many benefits that you derive from the inner critic. It gives you ways to cope with life. But these ways are not ideal and you can replace them with better and healthier alternatives.
Where does the voice of the inner critic come from?

Many of the shoulds and rules that form acceptable behavior in the eyes of the critic come from your parents, other people around when you were a kid, friends, media and society.

Now, everyone has an inner critic. I do too. It isn’t something that you can magically eliminate.

But you can learn to manage your inner critic much better so it does not cause many problems at all. You can take back control over your life and disarm that inner voice as soon as it pops up instead of letting it walk right over you and restrict your journey in life.

So let’s get started with that.

There are three parts to disarming your inner critic:

1. **Discovering the themes of your own critic.** You do this by keeping a thought journal for a day or more and by analyzing the notes you take in that journal.

2. **Talking back to your critic.** You can do this by using two basic and effective techniques that I will share at the end of this week’s guide.

3. **Replacing the inner critic with something better.** We won’t go into this step this week but many of the upcoming weeks will be devoted in part to finding healthier and better ways to get what you want from yourself and from life and to handle difficult situations.
What is The Central Theme or Themes of Your Own Inner Critic?

We all have an inner critic. But not all critics fill the same main function for everyone.

For Bob the inner critic’s main theme may be to spur him on to achieve great things at work and to avoid rejection socially.

For Lisa the inner critic’s main theme may be to do everything perfectly to feel good about herself and also to force her to live by some of the rules that her own parents use to fit in with family and relatives.

So you got to get to know your own critic better. By doing so you can come up with ways tailor-made for you to make the critic less effective and be on your way to make it useless in your life.

You may already have something of a picture of the themes of your inner critic. Maybe you recognize some of the themes displayed in the examples above. But holding all the self-critical thoughts you have in your head and getting a fair picture is hard. Our memories are quite imperfect a lot of the time. Journaling is often a good help to find clarity in life, and I have found that is true in this case too.
So to make the picture clearer do the first exercise in this course and write down every self-critical thought you have during one day.

Print that one out from this week’s worksheet or use a pen and paper or your cell-phone to keep a thought journal. Then keep that printout, the piece of paper or your cell phone close by all day today. Write down all the self-critical thoughts during your day and number them with 1, 2, 3 and so forth in the order you had the thoughts.

Some examples of such self-critical thoughts could be:

1. Damn, late for work again, I’m so sloppy.
2. Wow, she looks cool. But someone like that would never like me.
3. I’ll probably not do well on the presentation this afternoon.

After you have done this you will already understand more about how self-critical you are. And you might start to see what function(s) you own critic fills.

During day 2 this week you will use your journal notes to do exercise 2 in the worksheet. This one helps you to explore the themes of your inner own inner critic and how it helps you out and helps you to cope with life. By going through your thoughts of the day and trying to see major themes of your own critic (these could be for example avoiding social rejection, living up to someone’s expectations, keeping yourself motivated to achieve in your career etc.) you will gain more clarity about the function of your own critic.

This new understanding helps you to change how you think and if needed to change your behavior too in a smart way that benefits your self-esteem (you may for example start using other, more positive ways to keep up your motivation to achieve what you want).
Talking Back to Your Inner Critic: 2 Essential Techniques

So how do you talk back to your inner critic and stop it from pulling you down into self-doubt or negative thoughts about yourself?

I use two simple habits.

1. **Saying Stop!**

   Whenever I get a negative and self-critical thought in my head one of the first things I often do is to say this in my own head:

   Stop!

   Or I say:

   No, no, no, we are not going there!

   Then I redirect my thoughts and focus on something more positive.

   You can do the same when your inner critic pipes up and starts to want to drag you down or keep you on track with its own methods.
When you have the self-critical thought that you suck or that you will never pass the test in school use your own stop-word or phrase as quickly as you can.

In your mind, say or shout: Stop!

Or tell yourself something that makes your thoughts stop and helps you to interrupt this thought pattern before it grows into more thoughts and you get lost in a negative funk for the rest of the afternoon.

I often use the one I mentioned above: No, no, no, we are not going there!

I have also found that: “No, that is just stupid” works well for me too.

Try these phrases and words or build a stop-word or phrase of your own that wakes you up and that stops the critic in its tracks. Then refocus your attention and mind to something more useful and self-esteem boosting.

An example if you failed a test in school would be to follow up with: “Yes, I failed the test this time. But I am still good as a person and by studying better for the retest I am likely to pass it.” We will look more at how to focus on more uplifting and positive things in the coming weeks.

By using something very simple like a word or phrase over and over during this week you will start to form a new habit of stopping the critic before it can take hold over you. It will take some time for the habit to stick but that is OK. Do the best you can, try to use your stop-phrase or word as often as you can and you will discover that after a while your mind may start to say it almost automatically when the critic pops up.
2. Getting very clear about the consequences of what the inner critic does

The second technique for getting your inner critic to shut up and to let go of the critic instead of feeling safe in its familiar arms is to become very clear about the negative consequences of listening to it.

By doing so you will get good arguments to reply back with when your critic tells you something. And it helps you to see all the essential reasons why it is a good choice to let go of the critic’s familiar presence and motivate yourself on a very deep level to make a change in this area of your life. So use to the worksheet and do exercise 4 for that.

The Action-Steps for This Week

- Day 1: Maintain a journal of your self-critical thoughts during the first day this week.
- Day 2: Figure out the main theme or themes of your own critic during day two by doing the second exercise in the worksheet. Take time during the rest of the week to think about your theme(s) too.
- Day 3: Come up with your own stop-phrase or word and start using it as often as you can when the inner critic tells you something during this week.
- Day 4: Do the exercise in the worksheet that helps you to see clearly how the inner critic is and will limit and hurt your life if you continue on your current path. Use the answers from this exercise during the week to stop the critic when it pops up.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 2: Your Unconditional Worth and Discovering Your Accurate Self-Image
Your Unconditional Worth

In this week’s module we will look at two very important things to keep a healthy sense of self-esteem.

The first thing is the unconditional worth that you have. This unconditional worth is something that cannot be compared or decreased. This is a worth that we all have as human beings no matter what we have achieved or not achieved. It is your inner core of worth that is unchanging.

The second thing this week is to find a more accurate image of yourself, your core worth and the outer part of your self-esteem such as your skills and achievements. If you have low self-esteem it is very easy to start underestimating yourself and to have a negatively distorted image of who you are and what you can do. By doing the exercises in this week’s worksheet you will be able to see yourself more clearly, kindly and in a more balanced way.

But first, your inner core of worth.

Maybe the most common way to derive self-esteem today is to do it through achievement. You do good and someone – mom or dad, teacher, boss, partner, friends, media – tell you that you are good and have worth.

I don’t think that there is anything wrong with focusing on doing the right thing. But problems occur when you do what someone else thinks is the right thing (instead of doing
what you deep down feel is right). And problems do pop up when you base your whole self-worth on just your accomplishments.

Such worth is based on various conditions (such as you accomplishing something or not). And then life and your self-esteem become more of a rollercoaster and something that is controlled by others than it needs to be.

No, things don’t have to be that way. Because there is another part of self-esteem that you get the day you are born and this is with you unchanging throughout your life.

It is your inner core of worth.

Where does it come from? Well, it already here even though you may not think of it that way.

You see, you already have a worth because you are here. You have been born into this world, you are alive here and now and you are an everyday miracle. Because of that you have a worth that is always there as long as you are here. And it is time to rediscover and to reclaim this core self-esteem from your own bad habits and outside forces that may have made you forget, neglect or de-value this important part of your worth.

You are a magnificent creation. So many things have had to go right and work together for you to exist. All your inner workings – your mind and all the cells and parts of your body – work in unison every day. You have the ability to learn new things and discover new parts of your world and yourself each day.
And you are unique.

- No one can see the world from your perspective.
- No one has exactly the same way of thinking.
- No one else has exactly your sense of humor or the combination of things you love or dislike.

There is no one quite like you among the 7 billion people in the world. And there has never been or will be either. This is true for everyone that are here now. And that is why we never can become worthless. Even though you may fail and feel bad about yourself your core of unconditional worth is still there inside of you.

Even though you have failed with one thing your body and mind still goes on. You still see things from your perspective, think your odd and awesome thoughts and laugh at the things you find funny. You are still you to the core. And no one or nothing can take your core worth away. It is there like an unchanging centre, a ball of light and beaming life and consciousness no matter what happens in your life.

In the upcoming weeks we will look at practical things you can do to affirm your unconditional worth such as replacing distorted thought habits and creating habits for appreciating yourself more.

But for now, just keep these thoughts in your mind. Recall them whenever you feel bad about yourself or your mood is low. Remember that you are never worthless as long as you are alive.
Discovering Your Accurate Self-Image and Seeing Yourself from a New Perspective

When you look at yourself, what do you see?

Do you see yourself just the way you are?

Probably not. I don’t think anyone does. We filter the world and even our image of ourselves through our mind and thoughts. The view of ourselves is warped, like the image in a fun-house mirror.

Some people may have a self-image where they overestimated themselves and think they are much more important than they are.

Others, that are having low self-esteem, may not think very highly about themselves. Or at least parts of themselves.

This image may come from what your parents said and did, what your teachers and kids at school told you, what your friends and partners have let you know over the years.
It also comes from how you choose to look at yourself and choose to accept what you have heard about yourself. Nothing unusual about that, we have all done it.

But have you are ever challenged your self-image? Maybe things aren’t quite as you think.

To discover a more accurate image of yourself we will do an exercise. You can find it in the worksheet for this week.

Print it out or use a pen and paper to do the first part of the exercise where you look at your strengths and weaknesses in important areas of life.

When you are done reading the page then please do that exercise and then move on to the next step in worksheet until all three exercises are completed.

The Action-Steps for This Week

That’s the end of this week’s guide. Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week. Use this week’s guide and worksheet and work through this:

- **Day 1**: Read about your unconditional worth and let those thoughts sink in. Then do the exercises in the worksheet to find your more accurate self-image.
- **The rest of the week**: Start your mornings with reading through your new view of your strengths and weaknesses. Remind yourself of your own unconditional worth during low points of your week. Keep working on talking back to your inner critic too.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 3: The 11 Thought Habits That Keep Your Self-Esteem Down and How to Overcome Them
The Common Thought Habits That Keeps Your Self-Esteem Down and How to Replace Them

In last week’s guide we looked at how you can discover a more balanced perspective on yourself.

This week we look at 11 thought habits, 11 habits that distort reality and your image of yourself. These habits can be very damaging to not only your sense of self-esteem but also how you view your world, the opportunities you pursue and how you allow yourself to grow and have success.

So let’s look at these destructive thought habits, how they work and how you can overcome each habit. In this week’s worksheet you find only one exercise. It will help you to take action to overcome your own most prominent habits among these eleven.

By just reading about these common thought distortions you take the first step towards overcoming them. You gain awareness about what they are, perhaps you see which ones that you are most often plagued by and by just keeping those distortions that are common for you in mind you can catch yourself when your mind throws one of them at you. And
you can use your stop-word or stop-phrase to not go down that road and to be able to refocus your mind to something more useful and self-esteem promoting instead.

1. Mindreading

Thinking that you can somehow sense what is in people’s minds can be used to take things personal. It can be used to misinterpret things in many ways and to build a sort of negative relationship based on nothing. But you could go on to make that relationship very real.

If you think that your boss do not like you every time you have a meeting or encounter you may start to behave and use words that conveys that fictitious relationship you have to him or her in your mind.

And so the boss that may have liked you or been pretty neutral to you can start to play his or her part too and start to dislike you because you are behaving in a weird way or a way that can bring out the dislike.

**How to overcome it:** Say stop to the inner critic. Then remind yourself that you cannot read minds.

Instead, go with the facts. What do you really know? Use a pen and paper if you like to separate the facts you know from the fiction you are spinning in your head.

Ask yourself: is it likely that this has something to do with me on personal level?
If someone is mean to you could it be because of other reasons? Maybe that person is having a bad day or is unhappy at someone else that he or she don’t want to confront so her or she lashes out at someone who just happens to be there – that is unfortunately you – to release some inner pressure.

There can be many reasons why people do things so don’t try to mindread them and make it about you all the time. Mindreading is not something you can do so instead you may just project your worst fears on to someone’s actions and words. And so you drag yourself down for no good reason at all.

Also, if possible, make it really simple and try asking them what they thought about or are thinking about.

2. Overgeneralizing

Overgeneralizing is something we looked during last week’s exercises. Overgeneralizing when you use words like never, always, everyone and no-one attached to your thoughts. You may think that nobody thinks you are funny or that everybody makes more money than you.

You see life in white and black.

**How to overcome it:** Last week one of the instructions to help you to rewrite you weaknesses was to find exceptions to counter perceived weaknesses. That and to use a language based in facts and reality rather than put downs on yourself work well for several of these self-esteem sucking thought habits.
In this case a good solution is to find an exception. When you catch yourself using words like everybody or nobody say your stop-word. Then find an exception or more to that overgeneralized thought.

Also, ask yourself: what is the evidence that I really have that make me think this thought?

You may find that your overgeneralizations stand on a shaky foundation based on very little or no evidence at all.

And remind yourself that life is more often gray than black or white. Even though such a black and white worldview may feel safe and like something you are used to it is not the most helpful way to relate to the world, yourself and the people around you.

3. Putting a label on yourself and others

This is when you put a label on yourself that tells you that you are something all the time. You may use words/labels like stupid, a failure or a loser.

**How to overcome it:** Like with the previous thought habit, find an exception. Think that warped thought through. Question it instead of accepting it blindly just because that is what your inner critic and perhaps people have told you for years or years ago.

Then use more accurate language instead of just slapping a simple label on yourself or someone else. By being accurate you can raise your self-esteem and find the real, smaller and specific issue you may want to work on to improve.
4. All or nothing thinking

This is when you think that you are either perfect or that you suck. And since you cannot be perfect, since you can very rarely reach some kind of perfect standards in your work and life you most often make yourself out to be someone that sucks.

**How to overcome it:** Again, say stop to the inner critic. Then think about your standards.

Are they even human? Are they smart to have?

Set the bar for what is good enough at human level instead. A level where you feel motivated but not have to achieve inhuman results to like yourself and to be satisfied. Because if you do that then the rest of your life will probably be filled with a lot pain.

We all fail. We all have trouble reaching our goals sometimes. That is OK and very human. So set standards that support. Standards that help you to achieve good or even great things. But also standards that at the same time help you to raise and maintain your self-esteem at a high level.

Not some standards someone else have set for you that they want to live by to achieve their goals or to get their acceptance. They may have done it out of the goodness of their hearts – or not, to for example maximize profits – but if the old standards do not work for you then it is time to find a better standard for yourself.

This is your life. You are an adult and you decide now. So set the standards that help you to both do good and to feel good.
5. Blaming yourself for everything

This is when you think that whatever happens, well, then it’s your fault. You apologize for everything, even when someone else has made a mistake.

**How to overcome it:** Use your stop-word or phrase.

Ask yourself: is this really something that I have done or I have control over?

Giving up control can be difficult. But trying to have control or take responsibility over what you never really had any control over is just an illusion that brings you pain and drags your self-esteem down.

Take responsibility for yourself and what you do. And let other people do the same. It may at first make you feel less important but on the other hand you’ll create less misery for yourself too. And there are better ways to pull your sense of worth up than thinking that you are responsible for everything.

6. Life viewed through a negative filter

You see your memories and the world through a negative filter and you find examples in the past and in the now of how you have no or little worth.

**How to overcome it:** Say stop to the inner critic. Then find exceptions from the past where you had success, things were good and positive and so on.
You can also try asking yourself questions like:

What is good about this memory or situation?

What can I learn from this?

What is the opportunity in this situation?

Asking yourself questions like these as often as you can in negative situations helps you to change how you filter a situation and helps you find a more useful perspective. And in the long run it helps you to build a more optimistic and constructive attitude.

7. All the control or no control

This is when you think you control the whole universe. Or that everyone but you have control and are in charge.

If you think you control the universe then for instance you feel responsible for every guest at your party having a good time. If you think you have no control then you feel like there is nothing you can do to improve your life. Trying feels pointless.

**How to overcome it:** As always, say stop to the inner critic.

Then be constructive. Don’t drag yourself down with dwelling on an issue.

Instead ask yourself: What can I do to overcome or solve this situation? Who can I ask for help? Where can I find information that will help me to solve this problem?
By being constructive you don’t get stuck in analysis paralysis but start moving forward to a solution instead. And that feels a whole lot better than being stuck.

If you feel like you have little or no control then it can help to try to calm down a bit. One good way to do that is to focus on your breathing. Just deeply breathe with your belly. Focus on just your in-breaths and out-breaths for a few minutes. This calms the body and mind down and makes it easier to then think constructively.

If you feel like you control the universe then ask yourself: is this really something that I have done or I have control over?

8. Emotional reasoning

Emotional reasoning is when you don’t calmly think about a situation but instead let your emotions direct your mind and interpret reality. If you for example feel down and negative then those emotions control your perception of reality. So life becomes a rollercoaster since our emotions often change and so does your perspective on things perhaps even several times a day.

**How to overcome it:** Stop the inner critic.

Take a few deep breaths to calm down. Or, if needed, breathe with your belly for several minutes and focus on just your breathing to really calm yourself down.

Ask yourself: am I letting my emotions run the show right now?
Try to calm down and think things through instead of falling into the deep end because of emotional thinking. Think about what you really know, think about the facts of the situation.

Remind yourself that this just how you feel now and if you look to the past then you have been in this situation before. You know it is just a thought habit of yours and even though it might feel bad your current thoughts are just as unlikely to predict reality as they have been in the past when you have done emotional reasoning.

9. Catastrophizing

This is when you build up a nightmare scenario of how everything could go totally wrong in some situation and imagine a big catastrophe in your mind.

You may have a presentation tomorrow and your mind starts to pull up a scenario where you have left your notes at home, you make a fool of yourself, you are embarrassed in front the whole company and your boss yells at you for 20 minutes after the meeting.

Scary stuff for sure.

**How to overcome it:** Pretty much in the same way that you can overcome emotional reasoning. First, say stop to the inner critic.

Take a few deep breaths to calm down.
Then think back to your past. How many times in the past have these catastrophe scenarios that your mind throws at you actually become reality? Never or very few times I would imagine. That has certainly been the case for me.

So say stop, calm yourself down and look to the past to calm that nervous mind and remind yourself of the actual facts from the past.

10. Shoulds

Shoulds can be a pretty big part of what brings down your self-esteem so I we’ll leave that one for this week and make it the single focus of next week’s guide.

11. Comparing yourself to others

Comparing yourself to others is a very common problem and one that can bring down your self-esteem every day. It’s a destructive habit and one I want to pay extra attention to so we will devote week 10 of this course entirely to this thought habit.

But for now, read the final section in this week’s guide for one helpful tip that works for me.
The unconditional worth is still there inside of you

Whenever you run into one of these thought habits use the solutions described in this guide.

Another thing that has worked well for me overall for some of the thought habits that has come up for me is to first say my stop phrase.

Then I remind myself of my core-worth, the inner and unchanging worth I wrote about in last week’s guide. If I have done something negative such as not preparing enough for a meeting and performing poorly there I acknowledge that and write down a reminder of what to think about for the next such situation.

But I don’t beat myself up. I acknowledge the reality of the situation and then tell myself “but I am still a good person” or “nevertheless, I still have a core of unconditional worth no matter what happened today” or “nevertheless, I still have many wonderful qualities and my own unique worth”.

That usually works to shift my mood and mind in a more positive direction and by repeating thoughts like these to myself I strengthen my awareness of my own core worth.

That last part is important because even if you still somewhere know you have that worth you have remind yourself of it over and over to bring it more quickly to the forefront of your mind on both good and bad days. Keeping that core worth in mind is habit like so many other important things in life.
The Action-Steps for This Week

That’s the end of this week’s guide. Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week. Use this week’s guide and worksheet and work through this:

- Day 1: Read through this guide and use the worksheet to find clarity in what your two most common thought habits of these eleven are and how you will handle them when they pop up in your life.
- The rest of the week: Work on handling those two most common thought distortions as they pop up in your everyday life.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 4: The Sneaky and Powerful Shoulds and How to Replace Them
The Sneaky Shoulds and How They Can Hurt Your Self-Esteem

Welcome to week 4 of the Self-Esteem Course. Last week we looked at thought distortion habits and how to handle them. At the end of that guide I mentioned that shoulds are also a negative thought habit but such an important one that I decided to split up the habit and give the shoulds their own part in this course.

So how can the shoulds drag down your self-esteem? Well, a should can become a rule that you always have to stick by. And it can become a rule not set by you and adapted to your situation but something you may have been taught by a parent or have picked up from someone in your life and during your past.

So the problem is that a should can become a strict rule you feel you need to live up to for you to be a good and worthy person but the rule is wrong for you or better suited to someone else’s life. Or it’s simply an unrealistic rule.

In movies and books we are often sold a sort of ideal life fantasy or fairy tale fantasy. We should have the perfect job, a fairy tale relationship with a partner and be the perfect parent. But things don’t work that way. So be careful and if you find that you think to yourself that life should be ideal or formed in a fairy tale kind of way then instead of trying to live up to that try to shape your ideals into something more healthy and human rather than striving for perfection.
Yes, being neat and tidy may be good but just because your mom felt that she should always be that way does not mean that you have to. Yes, your father may have excelled at math and said it was very important but you may be more interested in and talented with languages or with working with your hands. Society may tell you that you should do this and that and in some cases such things may be positive and other in cases things may be negative or something that society tells you because it wants to sell you things.

So instead, I suggest that you choose to create your own guidelines for your life that are better suited to your interests, talents and situation. And I recommend not making these guidelines into hard shoulds that tends to promote perfectionism – which leads to low self-esteem because it is impossible to be perfect or live an ideal life – and instead have more flexible and forgiving standards for yourself.

The shoulds do come from a place of need though. They are often there to meet basic needs for you.

It may be the need for love and approval. To belong. The need for emotional and/or physical well-being. To feel safe and to avoid pain.

These are basic things we all need. But inflexible shoulds that may help you but also create negative things in your life and inside of you are not the best alternatives.

So how do you change things for the better when it comes to your shoulds?

That is what you can do with the help of this week’s worksheet. But on the next page you can find a brief summary of that process.
Find your most common shoulds

First, what are your top shoulds? Maybe you know them or some of them already.

If not, ask yourself: do you feel guilty or do you feel an obligation in some situation? Do you often avoid doing something you feel you ought to do?

These questions can help you to find unhealthy shoulds that drag you down.

Evaluate the shoulds one by one

Is the should flexible and suitable for you and your situation?

If not, why not? What can you replace it with or how can you rework it to suit you better?

Transform a should into a flexible and healthy value

Some shoulds you may discard after you have looked at them more closely and see how it does not fit you and your life at all.

Other shoulds you may want to adapt into values that are flexible, realistic and that allow for failure and that fit your life (not someone else’s life). And be sure to use values that open up your life and makes it better.
You may for example transform the should: “My home should always be clean, neat and tidy” into something like “I like having a clean home, but if I do not have the energy to keep that up all the time then that’s OK. It is OK me to go for good enough rather than trying to live up to some unrealistic ideal that is frankly not of highest priority since I have things that are more important to me in my life”.

**Keep an eye on your vocabulary**

It is easy to keep going with a habit of telling yourself and others that you should or ought to do something. This is not helpful if you want to lose your shoulds. So what words can you use instead?

Try saying that you choose to do something instead of that you should do something. And try adding a good and positive reason (what you will gain, why this feels important etc.) why you choose to do this thing. Adding a good reason is sometimes helpful to get a more understanding attitude from other people. And it is most often beneficial to motivate yourself to get going to gain some important payoff.

**Explain to your critic why the old ways aren’t working anymore**

As you make the conscious effort to transform a should though habit into a more helpful value your inner critic can still pipe up in the mean-time and try to drag you back into your old ways.
If that happens then talk back by saying your stop-word or phrase. Then tell you critic the most important reason why you have given up this should. It might be that the should for example fits your father’s or your brother’s or someone else’s life but not yours.

Or that it is simply not a realistic way to do things in your situation in life, because you work very hard to stick with this should to gain acceptance from your parents but at the same time the should makes you very stressed and you feel overwhelmed and you miss out on your relationships because the should gives too little time and energy left for them.

The Action-Steps for This Week

- Day 1: Read through this guide and use the worksheet to find your top two shoulds and either transform them into two healthy values or discard them from your life if needed.
- The rest of the week: Work on remind yourself of your new values every time that your top two shoulds pop up in your head. If the inner critic pipes up say stop and explain with the most important reason why you have made a change. Whenever you catch yourself using the words should or ought too replace them with the word choose instead. No need for perfection as always with these exercises and new habits. Just do the best you can and things will change for the better.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 5: How to Stop BeingVictimized and Start Being Assertive
How to Start Being More Assertive, Say No and Ask for What You Want

This week we will take a look at one common problem that can drag your self-esteem down and restrict your life. The problem is being victimized by yourself and others by not being as assertive as would be healthy for you and your self-esteem.

This is of course not just about raising your self-esteem but by becoming more assertive you can get more of what you want out of life. You can create more freedom for yourself and improve your relationships. Becoming more assertive will also help you to overcome the fear of rejection.

Now, during week 2 you did the exercises to find a more accurate self-image. During those exercises you also found some things among the negatives that you would like to work on. I believe it is pretty common to do those exercises find that a lack of assertiveness of some kind is one of those issues. Maybe you just want to become better at saying no and setting limits in your relationships and life. Maybe you want to become more assertive in just one area of your life – like at work or with friends – or with just one person like a partner or a boss and be able to ask for what you want.
The Self-Esteem Course

The dangers of not being as assertive as you’d like

Let’s start with general thoughts and tips on becoming a more assertive person.

One of my big issues with self-esteem and growing as a person was certainly not being assertive enough.

I think it often boiled to a fear of rejection. I feared that if I asked someone for a date, if I asked someone for a favor, if I said no or drew a line in the sand then I would not be accepted and instead I would be rejected.

So I would not be as assertive as I liked or I would not ask for what I wanted. Life became limited. And sometimes I lapsed into passive aggressiveness. That is basically when you first say that you agree with something – a vacation plan, a decision at work etc. – but then act aggressively towards the person that you weren’t assertive with as you deep down wanted to be in the first place. Don’t do that, it will hurt your relationships and your self-esteem.

You have the right to ask for what you want and need in life

This is a very important point: you have the right to ask for legitimate needs in your life. Those needs could be physical, emotional, social or of other kinds.

You also have the right to ask for what you want in life.
If you feel you have low self-esteem and that you would like to be more assertive then there is also the risk that you underestimate what your legitimate needs are. You might see such a need as simply a want, as a something that would be nice or good to have but not really something that is necessary. And so you might not ask at all.

When you ask for something the person you ask has the right to respond or act as he or she wants. But remember, not matter what the response may be you always have right to ask.

**Raising the sense of what you deserve in life**

As your self-esteem goes up, as you for example talk back to the inner critic and as you change your negative thought habits your self-esteem goes up. And so does your sense of what you deserve in life too. I found that in my life, as my self-esteem went up I was no longer OK with accepting some kinds of behavior from people. And it seemed more natural to ask for things because I now felt I deserved to have such things in my life.

As your self-esteem goes up it becomes natural to talk back, to say no, to be more assertive to get what you feel you deserve. This is for one of the main reasons why I strive to keep my self-esteem high because then I know I will naturally open myself up to be more assertive and to go for what I feel I deserve. It is very exciting when you realize that and keeping up your work on your self-esteem then becomes even more important to you.
How to say no

One part of being more assertive is to ask for what you want. Another part is to set limits, to say no.

Not being able to say no can becomes something that both stresses you out and lowers your self-esteem. You may feel drained and have no time for yourself after you have done everything everyone wants you to do, you may feel like you are not behind the wheel in your own life but that you almost always working towards someone else’s goals. You may even feel used by people and become resentful with bitter taste in your mouth.

Learning to say no doesn’t have to be that hard though. By just raising your self-esteem as I mentioned on previous pages you will naturally feel like being treated better by people and you won’t accept or tolerate some kinds of requests or behavior. You will become the highest authority in your life. This makes it easier to say no to other people in an assertive way.

Now, saying no is not always fun, but you have to be the boss of your life. You have to make the decisions and say no both to yourself and to others if necessary.

Besides raising your self-esteem by doing the exercises and cultivating the habits already mentioned in the course I do also have a couple of other, more practical tips that I have used to build my habit of saying no and setting limits when needed.
Disarm and then state your need.

It becomes easier for people to accept your no if you disarm them first. You could for example do that by honestly saying that you are flattered or that you appreciate the kind offer. Then you, for instance, add that you do not have the time for accepting and doing what they want.

Since some pushy people want to overcome your objections and sell you something or convince you to do something even if you first say no with a valid reason you can try this: state how you feel as a reason for saying no. For example say that you do not feel that this offer is a good fit for your life right now. Or that you feel overwhelmed and superbly busy and so you cannot do whatever they want.

The point of telling someone how you feel is not only to make them understand your side of the issue better but also that it is a lot harder to argue with how you feel rather than how you think. How you feel is your thing and no one can really come up with good counterarguments to that.

Realize that a negative response isn’t that common and not the end of the world.

We often fear that people will be angry or very negative towards the choices we make. But you may have noticed in your life that people do not react that way to a no as often as you may fear. So, as I mentioned during week 3 when I wrote about catastrophizing, adjust your expectations to your past rather than letting your imagination run wild.

And if someone has a negative reaction then that is not the end of the world. It is uncomfortable for a while. But if you have priorities in life and if you are raising your
self-esteem you will in many cases be able to refocus on what is important for you and shake that negative experience off pretty quickly. That has been my experience.

**You teach people by how you behave**

Children do as you do, not as you say. This principle works for other people in your life too. People learn about you and your limits from your behavior more than your words. If you stand up and say no, if you set limits in your life and if you are assertive with what you want and don’t want people will pick on your new behavior. And you will encounter less situations where you have to say no or where someone tries to steamroll right over you.

**How to ask for what you want and make it more likely to get it**

Asking for what you want is something I used to have trouble with. It has become easier as my self-esteem has gone up and by using a couple of helpful strategies.

What do you have trouble asking for?

Who do you have trouble asking for something?

Think about those questions. Use the worksheet to find your own tough spots and solutions.
Be relaxed and present.

I have three techniques to share with you that will help you to be more relaxed, centered and confident as you make your request. Here is the first one.

If you are relaxed and if you are in the present moment, right here, right now to 100% you will not become nervous about if you get a no. Your mind is focused on what you are doing right now, not on the possible results. This makes it easier to do what you need to do.

Take belly-breaths for 2 minutes before you go to make the request. Only focus on the in-breath and out-breaths. Nothing else. This will help your body to relax, your mind to calm down and you to fully be in the moment.

Assume rapport.

Another way to relax yourself and get into your best and most confident mood to make it easier to ask and to get what you want is to assume rapport.

So, what is assuming rapport?

Basically, instead of going into a conversation or meeting nervously and thinking “how will this go?” you take different approach. You assume that you and the person(s) will establish a good connection (rapport).

How do you do that? Just before you make the request, you just think/pretend that you’ll be meeting a good friend. Then you’ll naturally slip into a more comfortable, confident
and enjoyable emotional state and frame of mind. In this state of mind the conversation tends to flow more naturally too, without much thinking. Just like with your friends.

If you are nervous then try to first focus on the breathing until you have calmed down a bit and then try to assume the rapport.

**Visualize how well it will go in your mind before you make the request.**

This is my final technique for getting into the right mood and headspace before you make your request. If you feel quite nervous, try doing the breathing exercise before you visualize.

Then, do this with closed or open eyes (try both options and see what works best for you):

Visualize how well things will go – see and hear it in your mind – and also how calm and confident you will feel as you make the request. See yourself smiling, being positive, open and having a great time. See the excellent outcome in your mind. Then visualize that it has already happened, that the meeting is over with the desired result.

This is surprisingly effective and will get you into a great and relaxed mood before you even step into that meeting.

**Keep the request small, specific and if possible make it win/win.**

Keep the request small enough to not get too much arguments and resistance. Then you can ask for a small thing later again or in some small way expand on what you asked for first. Take small steps towards what you want to make it more likely for people to say yes.
Make the request as specific as you can, it makes it easier to for the other person to understand exactly what you want, to negotiate and get what you want with less arguments. So you’ll save time and energy too.

If you can, try to make it a win/win request. Make sure to mention to the one you are asking what is in it for him or her to grant your request. This will of course make it easier to get what you want. You can also make it into a win/win request by making an exchange and suggest that you will do one thing if he or she does what you want.

**Keep an open body language.**

When you ask for the thing you want keep eye-contact, speak clearly and keep your body language open (no crossed arms or legs). You will do many of these things automatically if you have assumed rapport. Or if you are relaxed and focus your mind on the present moment when you make the request. So don’t forget about the belly-breaths.

**Prepare. Write down your request. Practice.**

If you want you can prepare your request and write it down. Keep it concise because people are busy and rarely have a lot of patience for roundabout talking. Just write down what you want, from who, when etc. as simply as you can. If you like you can practice your request in a mirror to make sure you know what you want to say, how you want to say it and to reduce nervousness.
Go further if you feel your needs are not met in a good way.

Go over someone’s head if you feel victimized and if you get into an argument that just goes in circles in a bank or at a store for instance. Ask to speak to the boss of the bank, the store or the restaurant if the person you are talking to isn’t listening or being helpful in the way you need. You have the right to ask for and to talk to someone else if you feel you want to.

The Action-Steps for This Week

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- Day 1: Use the worksheet. Find one thing you want to say no to or set a limit with. Find one thing that you would like to ask someone for and get.
- Day 2: Set one limit or say no to one thing from your worksheet.
- Day 3: Ask for one thing from your worksheet.
- The rest of the week: Feel free to do more limit-setting and asking for what you want. Continue to work on the areas that feel most important for you so far in this course.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 6: The Power of Acceptance and Mindfulness
How Acceptance and Mindfulness Can Help You to Raise Your Self-Esteem

Welcome to the sixth week of the Self-Esteem Course. We are just about halfway through the course now.

This week we’ll take a look at the power of acceptance and mindfulness when it comes to raising your self-esteem.

Being mindful means that you are fully aware of what you do in your everyday life, that you focus on what you are doing right now and that you see things as they are as best you can without overreacting.

As you move through your normal day in a mindful way you focus on just what is happening right now. You do the dishes and just focus on the water, the plates and forks and scrubbing it all clean. You write a rapport or an essay and you just focus on the words pouring out and not the distractions around you. You walk up the stairs and you feel how you legs work, how the steps feel beneath your feet, how it is heavy or light to take those steps.

You are not daydreaming about the future or going over some old conflict or memory in your mind (things that can certainly cause your self-esteem to drop). You are fully here and aware of the things you do and that are happening through all your senses.
If a negative thought pops up in your mind, maybe your inner critic pipes up or one of your negative thought habits start to pull on you, you don’t say stop and talk back.

You just sit back and accept that this thought is flowing through your mind at this moment. If you just accept that it is there and that you observing it – rather than that you are the thought – you can more easily detach from what is saying. You can quietly observe that thought like you would observe a bird that has flown into your backyard.

You understand that thoughts of all kinds can pop up in your mind and they are like a stream of water going through your mind. If you accept the negative thought as it shows up and you stay with it instead of struggling against it or trying to change what you are thinking then that negative thought loses power.

And so you tell yourself: “aha, there is a thought”. And as you just observe the thought and accept that it is in your mind is goes away. You let it go and then other thoughts flow through your mind.

**Daily inner peace and power**

As you can see, this is another way to handle the inner critic and other negative thought habits that can pop up as you get criticized or as you want to draw a limit and say no.

Saying stop and talking back works. Just accepting your thought and just letting it flow right through you works too.

You can use whichever solution you want and I encourage you try them both to see which one works the best for you. Or you may - as me – choose to use a combination of the two.
If one of them doesn’t work with a thought I try the other solution and one of them pretty much always has a good, positive effect. Now, just accepting what you inner critic says does not mean to give in and give up and to stop raising your self-esteem. No, you do not give up. You let the thought flow through you until it loses power and disappears or becomes so weak and silly that you just let it go. Then you can take action.

You may for example feel your inner critic and how it tells you that you cannot ask for what you want with your boss or partner today because you are not good at your job or a good enough partner yourself to deserve that. Then accept that this thought has come into your mind. Just look at it in a calm way. When it has passed and you feel more calm and centred again, go and ask for what you want.

So, to summarize, mindfulness and acceptance helps you with your self-esteem by:

- **Allowing you to look at things and thoughts with some detachment**, like a wise parent would look at a screaming and petulant child. You become a lot less likely to drive yourself down into negative thought spiral and action spirals and to make mountains out of molehills. Instead you can focus your energy on solutions or if there aren’t solutions then you can still change how you feel about the situation you are in.
- **Simply being able to often turn a negative or self-critical thought into dust** and as that thought has passed you become filled with more positive and calm emotions. This daily inner peace makes it easier to deal with anything in life, trust me on that.
- **Letting you stay in the present moment where you have the power to act and change things**. Rather than being in the past or a future scenario in your mind and letting negative things there drag your self-esteem down.
5 Practical Ways to Tap into Mindfulness and Acceptance in Your Daily Life

I’ll now share practical tips that work for me to build the habit of acceptance and mindfulness in my life. It is quite hard to stay mindful for long, especially in the beginning. So be kind towards yourself. If you’re like me you’ll make small but important improvements that will add up after a while.

**Do just one thing at a time**

When you start multi-tasking you start to add stress to your mind. You can become confused and speed up the tempo of your thinking to levels where you don’t do things quicker but just feel overwhelmed instead. It’s then easy to drift into the past or the future to try to escape the unpleasant feelings of stress and overwhelm and it is easy to start procrastinating.

So learn to do just one thing at a time and be there fully in that moment when doing it.

**Turn your attention fully outward**

When you are focused inward it becomes very easy to get stuck in the past or future. But when a tennis player is playing an important match where is his attention then? Does he think about if he is playing well and why he is sweating unusually much? No. He is fully focused outwards on the ball, the opponent and what is happening right now in this moment of time. There is no room for inner reflection.
By making a habit of living most of your day like the tennis player and being fully focused outward it becomes easier to stay in the present moment.

So let go of thinking so much about yourself. When you work truly focus on your work. When you are hanging out with friends, family or co-workers then truly listen to what they are saying instead of just waiting for your turn to talk. When you eat fully focus on the food and the company instead of using that time to go over the past, future and some problem for the eleventh time in your mind.

When you are doing something special or nothing much special at all and want to return to the present moment fully with your attention just focus on what is front of you. And around you. On you. See it, hear it, smell it, feel it. When you do so your attention is transported from somewhere in your mind to what is here right now.

**Focus on your breathing**

This is one of my favourite ways to return to the present. Just focus on your breathing for two minutes. Just take deep breaths with your belly – without overdoing it and becoming light-headed – and focus on your in-breath and out-breath, nothing more. This does not only allow you to return to the present again but is as I mentioned last week a good way to calm a stressed and worried body.

Also try it before the next exercise in this guide to able to calm down your mind and emotions and make it easier to accept and let go of something.
The let it all in exercise

When you feel a negative feeling then accept that feeling. Don’t try to fight it or to keep it out (like many of us have learned throughout life). Say yes to it.

Surrender and let it in. Sit still and just observe the feeling in your mind and body without labelling or judging it. If you let it all in – for me the feeling then often seems to physically locate itself to the middle of my chest – and just observe it for maybe a minute or two something wonderful happens. The feeling just vanishes. Or becomes a lot weaker. And your mind stops putting in new energy into the problem.

This simple exercise is something that you can use to free yourself whenever you feel you are struggling against something or are getting lost in negative thoughts and emotions.

Do what you are doing right now more slowly

When you are not in the present moment it’s easy to speed things up to much both in your thoughts and actions. To move mindfully through life again simply slow down what you are doing. Read this slower. Slow down your work. Eat slower, drive your car slower and walk slower.

It may feel weird or slightly uncomfortable at first. But you don’t have to do it forever. Just do it for a few minutes to reconnect with that single focus on what you are doing right now and all the details of it.
The Action-Steps for This Week

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- Day 1: Choose two ways of building the mindful and accepting attitude this week. Use them as often as best you can in your everyday life as thoughts and issues pop up at work, in school, at home and in your relationships and other important areas.
- The rest of the week: Do the best you can to be in the present moment and to accept the thoughts and emotions that pop up in your mind. Even if they may seem uncomfortable and you want fight back, talk back or flee from them. Remember to be kind to yourself this week and celebrate the small or bigger moments when you have success with acceptance and mindfulness.
- The last day of the week: Go through the second exercise in the worksheet and see how you did and where you had trouble with acceptance and mindfulness.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 7: Being Kind and Compassionate Towards Yourself and Your World
The Importance of Being Good to Yourself and Cultivating Compassion

In this week’s guide we will take a look at the importance of being good to yourself and cultivating compassion towards yourself and the people around you to build your self-esteem.

And I’ll share the practical ways that I have used to become kinder, more compassionate and more loving towards myself and the people around me.

What we’ll be talking about this week is important to uncover and remind you of your core self that I wrote about in the guide from week 2, the inner core of self-esteem that is always within you no matter what.

The core self-esteem is there but it is easy to forget about it or neglect it or that it gets covered up in many negative thoughts. To reveal it again and make it strong you can be more appreciative of yourself, kinder towards yourself and more compassionate. Habits like these will raise and make your self-esteem more stable. And of course it could also improve your relationship with other people for example.
How to Cultivate More Kindness and Compassion

Much of this course is about building kinder and more compassionate ways to relate to yourself and your life. Last week we did for example look at acceptance, one important thing to become more compassionate. Next week we will explore failure and mistakes and how to not beat yourself up about them but instead handle them in way so that your self-esteem does not plummet.

This week we will look at two more general ways to cultivate the compassion and kindness.

**The self-appreciation exercise**

Write down 5 things each evening this week that you appreciate about yourself. It could be a trait that you have like that you are curious or a good listener. It could be something you did or said that day. Try to not just list accomplishments though but also things that always with you like your humor, your kindness or something like that to uncover and strengthen your core self-esteem.

**Be understanding**

By going through this course you start to gain more awareness and understanding about how you work and how your own self-esteem works. You understand how you see yourself with strengths and weaknesses through the exercise during week 2, you
understand what your most common negative thought habits are and more about where they come from.

With understanding of yourself you become less inclined to just beat yourself up or feel that you are stupid when your inner critic pipes up and you start sliding down a valley that could drag your self-esteem down. You become more understanding of yourself and your own circumstances and situation. And that makes it easier and more natural to give yourself a break, to be kinder towards yourself and see yourself in a more compassionate light.

Also, by being more understanding towards others you not only stand to gain better relationships – new and old ones – but it also becomes more natural and easier to behave that way towards yourself too. By for example, judging other people less and instead trying to be understanding you tend to judge yourself less too and treat yourself with more compassion.

So focus on understanding and on being kind towards others and towards yourself.

The following questions help me to keep an understanding frame of mind or to switch to it when I get caught up in a judgemental headspace. I recommend asking yourself them as often as you feel negatively towards someone in a situation.

What needs is this person trying to meet?
What pain or other feelings are influencing his or her behaviour?
What parts of this person can I see in myself? How is he or she like me?
Everything you do is based in trying to meet a need. That is the case for everyone else too. So instead of judging them or becoming angry take a few breaths to calm down. Then ask yourself those questions to find more understanding and compassion in this situation. And you’ll sometimes understand that what they said or did may not have much to do with you but is because they are in pain or in bad mood.

Finally, remember to just listen and to ask questions to gain more understanding in a situation. Instead of assuming that they feel and think in one way or another. Reading minds, as mentioned during week 3, is kind of impossible and leads to misunderstanding and negative situations.

**The Action-Steps for This Week**

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- **This week:** Each evening take a few minutes and do the self-appreciation exercise. Write down 5 things you appreciate about yourself. It could be both traits and accomplishments. Use the worksheet to write down things you appreciate each evening. At the last day of the week read through your list of the things you appreciate about yourself. Save the list and reread it regularly.

- **This week:** Be understanding. Use this week to become more understanding. Try to do that as best you can instead of judging or becoming angry. Use the questions on the previous page to tap into your compassion in negative situations. Then at the last day of the week use the worksheet to see how your week went.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 8: How to Handle Failure and Mistakes and Get Something Good Out of It
How to Handle Failure and Mistakes in a Helpful Way

This week’s guide will be focused on failure and mistakes and how to handle those two things in a way that does not make your self-esteem plummet.

We have already looked at things in this course that will help you with these challenges. Your stop-word or stop-phrase can help you to not get dragged down into a low self-esteem valley when you make a mistake or encounter temporary failure. Or you can just accept the feeling you get when you have had a failure as described in the guide from week 6 to make the feeling and accompanying thoughts lose power and move through you and away faster.

The guide from week 3 can also be helpful as it contains tips for you if you tend to blame yourself for everything or if you tend to overgeneralize and think to yourself that you always make mistakes or fail in one area of life (or all of it).

Now, let’s move on to four more things that can help you to handle this area and maintain your self-esteem.
Use it as a reminder to move away from the fairy tale fantasy

What is the fairy tale fantasy?

Well, basically that life should work out in an ideal way like in a movie or the most perfect fantasy.

That doesn’t happen really though. Doesn’t mean that life has to be miserable or filled with failures or mistakes. But simply that failure and making mistakes is unavoidable if you want to take chances and if you want to grow in life. A certain percentage of the decisions you make will be mistakes. A certain amount of the things you do will encounter failures along the way.

When we learn to walk or ride the bike we don’t think about failure as being something bad. We just keep moving after we fall down. But later, in school, people start telling us that failure is something bad, that it and taking risks are things to avoid. We are told such things and we are graded. And so throughout the years, with the help of school and what other people around us tell us, we develop a fear of failure.

It is time to unlearn that and to still think before you act but to let go of a fairy tale fantasy and see life for what it really is with the natural failures and mistakes along the way.

Doing so will make it easier to keep your self-esteem stable.
Redefine failures and mistakes and learn from them

A failure or a mistake is a temporary thing. Not something that is reflection of the whole you. Not something that is unchanging because there are almost always more chances and opportunities even if you encounter a failure or make a mistake. So do not generalize one event into a permanent and unchanging thing (or label) in your mind.

Instead see these things as something you can often learn from. Those failures and mistakes are necessary to achieve success. Without failure you don’t get the feedback that is essential for your future success. And by making mistakes for yourself you get experience. Reading about someone else’s mistake or knowledge isn’t the same thing as experiencing it for yourself.

I have learned much from my own mistakes and failures. Of course, just after they have happened you are hurting and you certainly don’t feel like learning. But by for example accepting that I have had a failure I can often quickly reduce most of the negative feelings and see what has happened more clearly. This allows me to learn from what happened and to change my course so that I am likely to have more success the next time I take action in this area of my life.

By making mistakes and failing I have progressively desensitized myself to those things too. What that means is that what felt really bad once upon a time becomes less and less painful. Failure and mistakes still hurt, but much less and those things feel like a natural part of life now rather than something really scary that I shy away from.
And this is how things tend to work in my experience. Something may seem scary now. But after having done whatever you fear a few to a dozen times or so you may think: “Is that it?”. You almost feel disappointed about how anticlimactic it has become. You may even get a bit angry with yourself and wonder why you avoided doing it for so long.

**You did the best you could at the time**

What we do, the decisions we make are based on our needs and our awareness at that time.

We have certain needs at various times and we do not know everything about life and what to do. So the decision you make you do to meet your current need and it is based on your awareness of how things work at that time.

So if you make decision and that wind up being a mistake then you still made the best decision you could at that time. And you have already paid for it. And now you know better, you are learning and you will try to make a better decision and take a more appropriate action the next time you are in such a situation.

So don’t add more hurt and lower your self-esteem by beating yourself up for it. Don’t hold yourself to perfectionist standards or make yourself feel worse by what you can see through hindsight.

This is, in my experience, a helpful way to developing more compassion for and forgiveness of yourself while at the same time you look forward and work on growing and finding better ways to do things.
Remind yourself of your core value

If you feel down after a failure or after making a mistake then, as mentioned during week 2, remind yourself of your unchanging core-value to turn your thinking and mood around.

Reread the list from your self-appreciation journal that you created last week to see how you still have value in many ways.

And/or say you stop-word or phrase. Then tell yourself that “Yes, I made this mistake. Nevertheless, I still have many wonderful qualities and my own unique worth”. Or “This turned out to be a failure. But I am still a good person”.

The Action-Steps for This Week

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- Day 1: Use the worksheet to find clarity about how to handle mistakes and failure in your life. Choose two of the tips from the guide that will help you handle failure or mistakes better. I would recommend making the tip that you did the best you could at the time as one of them.
- This week: Use those two ways as best you can when you encounter failure or make a mistake to keep your self-esteem up.
- Day 7: Use the worksheet to explore how things went when you encountered failure or made a mistake this week.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 9: The Hurtfulness and Helpfulness of Criticism
How to Handle Criticism and Maintain Your Self-Esteem

Last week we took a look at how to handle mistakes and failure in a way that will not make your self-esteem plummet. This week we will take a look at criticism – another of those everyday things that can affect your self-esteem – and how to handle it in a good way.

In this guide I will share the steps I run through to keep my self-esteem up when I receive criticism and how you can get something positive out of it. Let’s start with step one.

1. Take some deep breaths before you reply

It is very easy to become riled up, angry or defensive when you receive some criticism. This is not a good position to be in to fire away a reply if you don’t want to wind up making the situation worse.

And to lash back at the one giving the critique or to not be the better person here can really hurt your self-esteem. It might feel good for a while to do so but it is a dirty high that comes with a hangover of feeling worse about yourself and subtle or not so subtle self-destructiveness.

So this is about your own well-being to a high degree.
Instead of replying right away take a couple of belly breaths to calm down your mind and body and to regain a bit of your balance at least. If there is time then, as mentioned last week, remind yourself of your core-worth to regain a more stable mood and perspective. Then reply to what was said. Or look closer at the email or other kind of message you received.

2. Really listen to the criticism

Instead of attacking the other person for his or her words and building a hostile atmosphere try to calm it down. Try to remain level-headed, open and figure out how this message can help you.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Can I learn something from this piece of criticism?
- Maybe there is something here that I do not want to hear but that could help me to improve?

3. Remember: the criticism isn’t always about you

This is a very important step to remember to keep your self-esteem up.

Some criticism is certainly helpful. Some isn’t that helpful or just simply attacks. What can you do then?
Well, in such situations I remember that criticism isn’t always about me. It would be nice if all criticism one gets comes from level-headed place. But in reality people will have a bad day or week. Some will hate some part of their life. Some might not be all that well at this moment and you are coincidentally in the wrong place at wrong time.

So they lash out at you to release pent up negative emotions. In school, at work or at home. It’s not fun. But it happens.

To lessen the sting of this criticism or these attacks I try to be understanding. I think that based on the message I got – often really angry or overly critical about some pretty minor thing – this person isn’t feeling too good right now and is overreacting or need to release some pent up emotions.

By being understanding of this it becomes easier to just let such messages go instead of feeling bad or becoming angry too.

You can revisit the guide from week 7 to reread the tips on becoming more understanding and you might find the questions in that section helpful to handle criticism in an understanding way. The three questions were:

- What needs is this person trying to meet?
- What pain or other feelings are influencing his or her behaviour?
- What parts of this person can I see in myself? How is he or she like me?

Asking yourself those questions could help you out. But you may also discover that you sometimes cannot come up with good answers for them. If that happens, don’t fall back into the negative thought habits that we explored during week 3 and think it must be your
fault in some way and that you can read the minds of all the people in your life. Instead, say your stop-word or stop-phrase and then remind yourself that people will have bad days and moments and that those things are often not about you at all.

4. Reply or let go

If you reply then try one or a few follow up questions if you think that could help you. And even when someone blurts out something not too constructive like “Your work/blog/product isn’t very good” you might want to ask a few open-ended questions to get more constructive information.

Questions like:

- What part of it did you not like or did you not find helpful?
- How can I improve it?

When I reply to a critical email for example I try to keep my attitude positive and kind no matter what they have written.

I thank him or her for what he or she wrote and brought to my attention. I do not apologize if I have not made a mistake. Do not apologize or say that you are sorry just because someone has a different opinion or viewpoint than you. That will only lower your self-esteem and the other person may see it as invitation to attack you (since some people do such things for one reason or another to people they perceive as weak or unassertive).
Also, you do not have to explain yourself every time if you do not want to. People do not have a right to demand an explanation (in most cases of course, so use common sense). They are not your parents and you are not 5 years old. Your life is yours to live.

Anyway, after I have thanked him or her for the message I may add a question or two to get more clarification. Then I send the email.

Sometimes I will then get a much more level-headed reply where they actually help me to improve what I am doing and although I may still feel a bit hurt it also feels good to be the better person in this situation and to create a constructive conversation. If they won’t answer your questions then they are probably just lashing out. And so it is time to let go.

I really don’t reply to all emails though. Nasty attacks are for example most often just put in the junk mail folder. I have more interesting things to focus on.

**Three final tips that will help you out**

I have a few more general tips that I use besides the four step strategy described in the previous pages.

**Work in a relaxed way.**

Extra stress makes you more susceptible to the negative messages and to overreacting to criticism. Be sure to take breaks every hour if you can and to single-task what you do to keep yourself as relaxed as you can while working.
Manage the 3 basic fundamentals.

That means to eat properly, to get enough sleep and to work out a couple of times a week. Keeping the balance of your physical fundamentals makes you mentally stronger too. We’ll look a bit more at these three fundamentals during the last week of this course.

Avoid replying via email if possible.

Since words are a small part of communication it may be wise to not reply to criticism via email if possible. It’s probably better to get the person who sent such an email on the phone or go see him or her in person. This can help you to avoid creating a whole mess of misunderstandings. Avoiding email is also useful to keep in mind when you are about to criticise someone.

The Action-Steps for This Week

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- This week: Use the four step strategy as best you can when you receive criticism this week.
- Day 7: Use the worksheet to explore how things went – what went well and what you had trouble with – when you received criticism this week.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 10: How to Stop Comparing Yourself to Other People
The Destructiveness of Comparing Yourself to Other People and How to Replace That Habit

This is the third and last week when we will explore a more specific and common issue that can lower your self-esteem. The upcoming and remaining two weeks of this course will be focused on your future, growth and how to keep the positive changes we have put into motion thriving after these 12 weeks are up.

Now, this week’s challenge is the habit of comparing yourself and your life to other people and their lives. And I’ll share how I have replaced this habit with better ones so that it seldom shows up in my life anymore.

Comparing in this way is a very common thought habit for many. I used to do it pretty much every day.

There are so many situations where you can do it. And things to compare.

You compare cars, houses, jobs, shoes, money, relationships, social popularity, your looks and so on. And at the end of the day you pummel your self-esteem to the ground and you create a lot of negative feelings within. And perhaps outside of yourself too.
So what can you do? How can you get a handle on this habit?

Let’s start with the two habits I use to replace this destructive habit. And finish this week’s guide off with a couple of more general tips.

**Compare yourself to yourself**

First, instead of listening to the inner critic when it compares you to other people create the healthier habit of comparing yourself to yourself. See how much you have grown, what you have achieved and what progress you have made towards your goals.

This habit has the benefit of creating gratitude, appreciation and kindness towards yourself as you observe how far you have come, the obstacles you have overcome and the good stuff you have done. You feel good about yourself without having to think less of other people.

You can make this habit stick by doing something we have already done a few weeks ago. You can do it by using variations of the appreciation exercise that I wrote about in the guide from week 7. So whenever you get drawn into comparing then say your stop-word or phrase. Then refocus your thoughts by spending a few moments using a portable journal (or you can just do this quick refocusing in your mind if you prefer) to write down how you have grown, how much closer you are to your goals now, what you have overcome and learned and so on.

By doing so your thinking will over time shift and your thought patterns will automatically become more focused on comparing you to you rather than to other people.
Be kind

The second habit is also something we have already covered to a large degree in this course. I have already written about how the way you behave and think towards others seems to have a big, big effect on how you behave towards yourself and think about yourself.

Judge and criticize people more and you tend to judge and criticize yourself more (often almost automatically). Be more kind to other people and help them and you tend to be more kind and helpful to yourself.

So focus your mind on helping people and being kind.

Focus on the positive things in yourself and in the people around you. Appreciate what is positive in yourself and others. This way you become more OK with yourself and the people in your world instead of ranking them and yourself and creating differences in your mind.

You are OK and so are they.
Three additional tips

Finally, a few more tips that can be helpful to move away from that comparison trap.

Just realize that you can’t win.

Just consciously realizing this is helpful. No matter what you do you can pretty much always find someone else in the world that has more than you or are better than you at something. Yes, you may feel good for a while when you get a nicer car than your neighbor. But a week or two later you’ll see someone with an even finer car than yours.

Give up both sides of comparing.

If you can’t stop doing the negative comparisons then stop doing the comparisons that make you feel good too. Give them both up, at least for a while. If you’re in the habit of comparing to feel better about yourself then it’s hard to just stop at that and to not also start comparing in way that make you feel worse and inferior too. So you may need to step out of that whole comparing habit because the two sides are often connected. Give up the upside to be able to move away from the downside.

Remind yourself of your core worth.

Just as with the challenges of criticism, mistakes and failure reminding yourself of your core-worth can be helpful for replacing this habit too. Doing so, together with comparing yourself to yourself, makes the desire to compare yourself to others even weaker.
The Action-Steps for This Week

Here’s a quick summary of the action-steps to take this week:

- **This week:** During your daily life, use your stop-word or stop-phrase whenever you start comparing yourself to someone else. Refuse to get drawn into that thought trap. Or use acceptance if that works better for you to handle the initial thought that could drag you down. Then redirect your attention to either being kind and helpful to someone else or try to focus on comparing yourself to yourself with a couple of thoughts (or use a portable journal that you can write in).
- **This week:** On day 7, use the worksheet and reflect on how you did with comparing during this week.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 11: Dreams, Focus and Personal Growth
The Power of Dreams, Focus and Personal Growth

A very important part of healthy self-esteem is to grow as a human being. To feel like you living up to your potential, to achieve what you want to achieve and to get what you want out of life. To feel like you are creating meaning in your life.

So this week will be all about your dreams and how to break them down into smaller pieces that you can take action on to make those dreams real. And it will be about doing it in a healthy and positive way rather than relying on your inner critic and negative thought habits as a way to move yourself forward and achieve things.

So, let’s start with:

What are your dreams?

What do you want out of your life?

How to find what you really want out of life

Figuring out what you want to do with your life isn’t always easy. You may already have one or a couple of dreams that you would like to make into reality. But you may on the other hand feel confused and not really know what you want.
Figuring that out could take time. And effort and energy, since what you think you want may not always be what you want. So you have to try different things out and see how they work for you in real life (rather than in your mind and in your dreams where they can be a bit different compared how they are in reality).

By gaining new experiences you can figure out more about what you want to do.

But a good starting point before doing that is to ask yourself some questions to help yourself to decide what you want to do with your life. Questions like:

- What makes you feel alive?
- What activities make you feel the happiest?
- What do you do for free just because you are so passionate about it/it’s so much fun?
- What activities that you do make time just disappear? What stuff can you spend hours on and makes you forget about time, hunger and the TV?
- What is your most important dream for each of these areas of life: your relationships, your career/school/business, your finances, your health, your overall life-skills (such as handling stress better or becoming more mindful)?

Think about those questions. Use the worksheet for this week to fill in your answers.
Breaking down your dream into goals you can achieve

Ok. So you have written down one or several dreams you would like to bring into your life.

To make that happen one thing that really helps is to break the dream down. First into a goal that you set up in a smart way and that you can work towards. After that into manageable chunks of tasks you can do each day to move closer to your goal and dream, step by step.

We’ll start with setting the goal.

Let’s say one of your dreams is to make more money so that you travel more and see the world.

We could break this down into at least two goals.

- To earn more money.
- To spend less money so you have more money saved for traveling.

Let’s set a goal to earn more money.

Now, you can set goals in different ways. Here is one that I use and that I have found to be effective. It is set up in five steps.
1. The most important thing about a goal is that YOU want to accomplish it.

This may seem obvious when you read it but people often make the mistake of setting goals that other people want them to reach. Or to set goals they don’t feel all too motivated about.

So think about your goals and think about if you really want to achieve them. Did the goal come from you or are you trying to live up to someone else’s expectations? Make sure that what you are trying to accomplish is something YOU really, really want.

Otherwise it will after a while be very hard to keep up the motivation and to keep taking action. And if you achieve the goal anyway you’ll be living someone else’s dream.

2. Make it specific.

The second key ingredient is to make the goal specific. It should not be that you will lose weight or that you will earn more money.

It should be specific, you should write down the amount of weight you want to lose and the amount of money you want to earn.

3. Write the goal down.

As you do that the goal goes from being some vague hope or thought floating around in your mind to something concrete. It is now words on a piece of paper. It does make a difference to write it down. And you can now use the paper to stay on track each day instead of forgetting about your goal for half the week. Just stick that piece of paper with
your goal somewhere where you cannot avoid seeing it. Recommended places are your bathroom mirror, fridge or your workspace.

4. Set a deadline.

A fourth ingredient that can be very effective, and in many cases essential, to reach the goal is to set a deadline. The deadline will put positive pressure on you to take action. It will make the achievement of the goal into something that you need to get going on now, not sometime in the future when you feel like it.

You however do not always have set to a deadline though to accomplish something. Instead of focusing on losing the weight you could write down the goal of ”running for 20 minutes three times each week”. Then there is no deadline to lose weight as you instead focus on the process of running consistently and let the loss of weight come on its own without you focusing so much upon it.

5. Already be there.

A fifth ingredient is to formulate your goal as if you are already there. Do not write ”I will make”. Write “I make”. Why is this important? Because when you think about your goal this way it becomes a vision in your mind of how you want yourself or your life to be. By holding your vision of what you want to be in your mind each day you will act and think according to this vision. And so as you act in this manner you will get the results that make the vision you are living in into reality.

So to pull it all together, in many cases a goal should look something like this: “I earn 500 dollars more a month by the 30:th of June 2012”.
Breaking down your goal into smaller, actionable steps

Now that you have your most important goal written down it is time to write down what you need to do to get there.

What are the steps you can take?

Let’s continue with your goal of earning 500 dollars more per month. Then you may write down steps like asking for a raise, working overtime, creating your own small business on the side, doing research and reading to find ways to make the extra money and finding support and valuable information in online forums or some off-line organization.

So you write that down and perhaps you wonder where you it would be smart to start? You feel overwhelmed and think that you will get started sometime next week or tomorrow.

Don’t fall into that time wasting and anxiety building trap. Instead sit down with your list and think about what the most important things on that list may be. What are the few top things that will make the biggest difference for you and bring you closer to your goal?

In this example those things could be to prepare why you should get a raise and to ask for that raise. Or to do research and see how you can create a small business on the side based on an interest and perhaps some skill you already have. Take a look at the list of tasks and by using numbers that you write beside each task order them in order of important.
Get the ball rolling right now

Here is a very important final step after you have set your goal and made that list of the most important things you need to do to reach your goal.

Take action on the list. Today. Right now.

Do not make the classic mistake of writing down what the most important things are and be satisfied with that. Yes, you should be satisfied that you have done this work and thought about what you want and how to get there. That is certainly well done.

But if you settle at that and think that you will take action on that tomorrow or during the week then it is very easy to forget it, let your current enthusiasm wane or just let life get in the way.

Instead, as you are probably feeling pretty good and optimistic about your plan, future and yourself right now book a meeting with your boss for next Thursday to ask for that raise. Then, sit down and make a plan and presentation to help you get a raise.

Make a specific plan that you and your boss need to keep, not that you and he or she will look things over and get back to one another later on sometime. Take that one action to get the ball rolling today to make sure that you will get started instead of getting stuck in the same old ways. And it is OK if you get it a bit wrong. We all do at first. Don’t fall into that trap of fearing to make the wrong decision and let that paralyze you from taking some kind of first small step and action. Remember that pretty much any action you take is better than taking no action.
Three powerful tips to help you stick with it until you reach your goals and dreams

Getting started is often the hardest part. But sticking with it through the ups and downs until you reach your goals and dreams can be difficult too.

You can make it easier to stay motivated and on track by adding some accountability and support.

Here are three tips that I have found to be very useful.

**Set a public deadline.**

A deadline is great to get yourself up from the comfy sofa and to start taking action. A public deadline can be even more powerful. You can tell your closest friend or a family member. Or announce it on your blog or Facebook-page. By making it public you put some positive social pressure on yourself to get going and to keep going until you achieve what you want to achieve.

**Get an accountability buddy.**

If no one is checking up on what you are doing from day to day or week to week then it is easy to slip. It is easy to procrastinate. Or to talk yourself into the old mindset that you will get going on that that thing “tomorrow”.

But if someone is checking up on you and you are checking up on him or her then the two of you will be a lot less likely to slip or simply avoid doing something. So find a friend that also wants to get in shape or reduce debt or improve socially. Then check up on each other and make sure that you are both each week taking the practical steps to improve that part of your life.

And you don’t have to have the same goal as your friend. You could for example go for losing 10 pounds and your friend can go for earning 300 dollars more each month. And then the both of you just make sure that the both of you are moving forward in a consistent way.

**Keep your self-esteem up.**

By keeping your self-esteem up by using what you learn in this course you can feel good about yourself even when you encounter criticism, failure or hit a plateau or valley where you seem to stand still for a while. By keeping that self-esteem up you will feel more deserving of good things in life and it will be natural to dream bigger and to take action to get what you want. So be careful with your self-esteem. Keep up the good work with it after this course is over. We will look at how to do that in next week’s guide, the last one of these twelve.
The Action-Steps for This Week

Use the worksheet and take these action-steps this week:

- **Day 1:** Write down at least one dream in your worksheet, break it down into a goal and break down that goal down into small actionable steps. Then take one small or big action to get the ball rolling. Also, think about and write down how you can use an accountability buddy and a public deadline.
- **This week:** Continue to dream and think about what you want out of life. If you like, write down other dreams, goals and plans made up of small actionable steps. But focus on taking action on the first dream and goal you wrote down on day 1 to keep the momentum going and to get things done so you move closer to that dream.
The Self-Esteem Course

Week 12: To a New Life of Freedom and High Self-Esteem
How to Keep the Self-Esteem Momentum Up and Make Your New Habits Stick Forever

Welcome to the last week and the last guide in this course. This final part will be about keeping on building your self-esteem and growing in a focused and smart way for years after you have finished this course.

You have now spent one week with many different parts of self-esteem such as talking back to your inner critic and replacing it with better habits, finding your strengths and weaknesses, building more understanding and compassion for yourself and others, finding ways to handle common obstacles to high self-esteem such as criticism and the habit of comparing yourself to others.

So how do you move on with this after the course is done?

In a simple way.
1. You focus on the one most important challenge from these guides for you right now.
2. And you keep on working towards the dream you started working towards last week.

If working on both at the same time becomes too much, I would recommend taking a break from working towards the dream and instead fully focusing on your most important self-esteem challenge since doing so will most likely have the biggest positive effect on your self-esteem in the long run. You can get back to working towards that dream a little later.

Now, maybe your most important challenge is learning to handle one or two of your major negative thought distortion habits even better. Maybe it is to learn to handle failure better. Maybe it is to reinforce your new perspective on yourself that we explored during week 2.

Whatever it is, focus on that challenge. Focus on what feels and seems most important for you. Or focus on the thing that maybe jumped out for you during the course as something new and important that you haven’t really noticed that drags your self-esteem down each week.

Focus on this one dream and this one challenge. If you have several of those challenges, choose one to work on at first.

Focus on just this one thing for at least one month. Try as best you can to work on it every day or as often it is possible (for example with criticism that you may not encounter every day).
If you feel you have developed good and stable habits for handling that self-esteem challenge after one month then move on. Move on to the second most important area for you and focus on that one for 30 days. If you do not feel like you are done or like you have not created a good enough handle on that first area after a month then no worries. If you like, spend another month with that one challenge.

For each challenge you work on the work will probably become easier as almost all areas from this course involve becoming better at using stop words/stop phrases or acceptance to shut your inner critic down. So when you get to your second most important area for example you’ll probably be a lot better at using one of those techniques than you were when you started your work on the first and most important area.

The importance of managing your three fundamentals for more easily maintaining your self-esteem

The first part of this week’s guide was about keeping it simple with that one most important area for you.

The second part will be about a few more things that you can work on and use to make it easier to raise and maintain high self-esteem.

The first one is what I like to call the three fundamentals. These three things are super-obvious but can be a big help for you. The first fundamental is:
Sleep

Not getting enough sleep is probably one of the most overlooked problems that people have when it comes to their energy levels and ability to focus.

So ask yourself these questions:

How much sleep do you need to feel balanced and well? 8 hours? 6 hours? 9 hours?

And how much sleep do you really get each night during a normal week?

If you aren’t getting enough sleep then in my experience it cannot just lead to focus problems, attention problems and energy problems but also more negative thinking, overthinking and other things that can make the voice of the inner critic and old thought habits stronger and more frequent.

So be kind to yourself. If you find that you aren’t getting enough sleep then start to go to bed earlier and/or take a nap from time to time.

Four tips that help me to sleep better are:

1. **No caffeine** of other stimulants after eight o clock in the evening.
2. **Keeping your bedroom as dark** as possible.
3. **No work a few hours before sleep.** If I work too late it becomes very hard to wind down in time for sleep and I toss and turn for an hour or more before finally going to sleep.
4. **Earplugs.** The quieter it is, the better and more calmly I sleep. So I always have earplugs close by when I am at home or while traveling. I do not always need them but they are great to have just in case.

Try these tips out and see if they help you to sleep better too.

The second fundamental is:

**What you eat**

There are thousands of books and blogs about eating healthier. But five tips that have helped me are:

1. **Switch to whole-grain products.** Eating whole-grain pasta and other such types of food keeps me alert and full longer. I am less likely to have to eat unnecessary snacks.
2. **Eat more fruit and vegetables.** Replaces some of the calorie dense pasta or potatoes with more vegetables. Eat a banana instead of more bread. This will give you more vitamins and minerals and not make you as drowsy as you digest the food. And it makes you eat a little less calories each day so it’s a simple way to help you lose or maintain your weight.
3. **Switch from coffee to green tea or yerba maté.** I find that I get a more relaxed boost in energy from green tea or yerba maté tea compared to the coffee that just makes me jittery and makes it hard to think clearly. My personal preference for my work hours is now yerba maté. I drink one cup of that at breakfast and one cup at lunch. It helps to keep me calm, alert and focused at the task at hand. Really awesome stuff.
4. **Replace what gets you into trouble.** Laziness and easy availability are two of the big reasons for developing kind of stupid and unnecessary habits. But you can use that to your advantage to change your snacking habits. If you have a bad habit of eating too much sugar then don’t have cookies and candy at home. I recommend having something to snack on though. I always keep some nuts and vegetables in my apartment. When I feel the craving for candy, but find none in my kitchen and don’t feel like walking all the way to the supermarket then I eat a tomato instead. Doing this will, over time, replace one habit with a healthier one.

5. **Have a cheat day.** If you want to eat healthy and stay away from the things that you love but that are bad for you then the mental pressure will ramp up and that usually ends with you getting such serious cravings that you can’t stop yourself from wolfing down a big pizza or a big bag of potato chips. So have a cheat day each week. I recommend Saturdays to enjoy tasty and sometimes unhealthy treats.

The third and final fundamental is:

**Regular exercise**

Regular exercise each week makes it easier to be optimistic and to avoid feeling mentally weak and fall down a mental hole when you encounter criticism, failure, your inner critic etc.

A few tips that helped me to form an exercise habit:

- **Find something you like and that really fits you.** I believe this may be one of the most important keys to establishing a consistent workout routine week after week. If you do not enjoy what you are doing and it does not fit you and your life then the
likelihood of you quitting is very high. I, for example, tried running and the stationary bike but I didn’t enjoy those activities and so I became very inconsistent. So try things out and try to find something you like doing.

- **Start slowly.** You do not have to start at full speed. That can become mentally and physically overwhelming and so you become reluctant to continue. Instead, make it easy on yourself. The important thing is to get into the mental habit of exercising and eventually feeling drawn to doing it instead of having to do it on willpower. It is not about getting into top physical shape within a month or to lose 20 pounds very quickly. If you want to run then start by walking and running perhaps just a little bit. Then, over the weeks, increase the amount of running you do and decrease the walking. The important things are to get started and to continue doing it. Not how well or how intensely you do it at first.

So those are some of my brief thoughts and tips for improving your three basic, physical fundamentals.

These are not things you have to start doing right now. Focus on your most important area as mentioned earlier in this guide.

But I want to leave you with some these thoughts and tips for you to have in the future because they are really important for not just your health and a life of high quality but also your self-esteem. Work on them when you can. If you like you can of course start sleeping better this week. And start taking a short walk or walks to work or school. But don’t do it if you feel it becomes too much to handle together with your most important area of self-esteem that you are focusing on already.
Continue creating an environment that supports your self-esteem instead of dragging it down

Your environment is of course very important to keep your self-esteem up. A negative environment makes it so much harder to grow as a person and to build healthy self-esteem. It can be like poison.

We have already looked at how you can create a better environment for self-esteem during for example last week, when I wrote about keeping your accountability up via a public deadline and an accountability buddy to make it easier to reach your goals and dreams. You can create a more supportive environment in more ways:

- **Spend more time with people who lift you up.** Or people who are at least neutral. And spend less time with negative people who drag you down.

- **Create surroundings that inspire you.** When you work and when you live your life do it in surroundings that inspire you. Play music that motivates you and makes you feel good. Write down uplifting quotes, goals and dreams on post-its and put them where you cannot avoid seeing them every day. Write down reminders that help you to reconnect with healthy solutions and self-esteem boosting thought patterns from this course for when you get lost. Find more places to write such things down such as your cell phone, a white board and your desktop wallpaper.

- **Make conscious choices about your media input.** Be careful about what you let into your mind. Media can wear your self-esteem down and keep it low and at the same
time make you scared and pessimistic about just about anything. So cut down on your media consumption. Don’t visit websites or forums that just make you feel and think in a negative way. You don’t have to become a hermit who knows nothing about the outside world, but surrounding yourself with a sea of negativity will make progress a whole lot harder than it needs to be. Instead take in more positive information like reading or listening to personal development books, reading biographies of successful people or watching inspiring or just funny movies and TV-shows.

And now we are reaching the end of this course.

I truly hope that you have found this course helpful to gain more insights into your own self-esteem and view of yourself and the world. And more importantly that it has and will assist you in making real changes to your own self-esteem and life so that you can live with more happiness, less limits and explore everything that is out there in the world and inside of you that you want and dream of.

A small request

If you have a minute to spare, write me a sentence or two – or more if you like – and let me know how The Self-Esteem Course has helped you out and share other opinions you may have about the course. It would be really helpful for me. Send your feedback to my email address: henrik@positivityblog.com

Now, on to the last summary section in this course, the final worksheet and your awesome future!
The Self-Esteem Course

The Action-Steps for This Week

Use the worksheet and take these action-steps this final week:

- Day 1: Write down what you believe is your most important challenge from this course and work on it for 30 days (or more).
- Day 2: Think about and write down how you can shape a more self-esteem supportive environment in your life.
- This week and beyond: Keep working towards your dream. And keep going with your most important self-esteem challenge until you feel you got a stable handle on it. Then move on to the second most important area for you and continue to grow.