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INSIGHT

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To Love Yourself, Know Yourself

We tend to admire people we perceive as selfless and constantly giving to others. And we are critical of those we perceive to be selfish and constantly putting themselves first.

In essence, we pit one against the other. We either give to ourselves or we give to others. One or the other.

While no one would argue with considering others, it could be worthwhile to re-examine our beliefs around being "self-centered." Do we really aspire to be selfless—without concern for ourselves? Or is it important to value and love ourselves, to think for ourselves, to have a life of our own and to be able to love others without losing ourselves?

The question is how do we differentiate between valuing ourselves and egotistically indulging ourselves?

The answers lie in self-knowledge. When we undertake an inner journey and come to truly understand ourselves—the sacred and profane dimensions of our lives—we develop the capacity to deal honestly, thoughtfully and lovingly with ourselves, as well as other people.

"The process of attaining self-knowledge both softens and strengthens us and serves to help us love and appreciate life and other people," says Bud Harris, author of the book *Sacred Selfishness: A Guide to Living a Life of Substance*.

Understanding ourselves better means discovering the negative effects of our histories, working to change them, building on our strengths and potentials, and relating to people in a more straightforward, authentic manner. It also means learning to love ourselves, to take in the fullest meaning of the biblical maxim "Love your neighbor as yourself."

"Self-love is the firm foundation that determines how strongly we can give

love and receive love," Harris says.

Inner work, or the quest for self-knowledge, is greatly assisted by using the following three tools of self-discovery. Inner work is not a quick-fix, but a life-long deepening of the connection to your truest self that can enrich your life beyond words.

Talking with Your Emotions

With this tool, you give voice to your emotions and states of being and actually converse with them. For example, ask anxiety why it has been so ever-present in your life. What is its role for you now? What does it want, what does it fear?

Either write down your dialogue or enact it. If you choose to role play, stand in a different space, with a different posture and facial characteristics, when you become the trait with whom you are conversing.

Working with Your Dreams

Dream images can have several layers of meaning, but all speak the language of the soul. Step 1 in working with dreams is to remember and record them. Keep a pad of paper or a cassette recorder by your bed and record what you can remember as you awaken.

Journal Writing

Writing in journals is not just recording events, as in a diary. To journal is to explore feelings, thoughts, experiences, to look for connections and themes, to express the innermost aspects of your life experience. Best is to pick a time—the same time every day—for regular journaling. If you can't think of anything to write at first, just write, "Can't think of anything, can't think of anything," until the hand begins to fly with the stuff just under the surface. Read Julie Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way*, for great suggestions on journal writing. *

10 Ways We Create Stress for Ourselves

Ask people why they're stressed, and they're likely to blame it on external circumstances. While these can certainly add to a pressure-cooker atmosphere, they're not really the main cause. At fault more than anything is the tremendous internal pressure and anxiety that we create for ourselves through the following:

- 1. Self-criticism.** Tame your inner critic, focus on your strengths and forgive yourself.
- 2. Powerlessness.** We are all powerful beyond measure. See all the choices available to you.
- 3. Perfectionism.** Do your best, but let the elusive "perfect" go.
- 4. Worry.** Faith and action are the best antidote to worry, especially about situations we cannot control.
- 5. Unrealistic expectations.** Life can never be problem-free. Our outlook can.
- 6. Insecurity.** What we need to be emotionally secure is inside each one of us. Stop looking to others to provide it.
- 7. Hurrying.** Try walking slower, chewing slower and taking deep breaths as you work. You may find yourself performing better.
- 8. Comparing to others.** The question should be whether you have met your own standard.
- 9. Pessimism.** When we expect the best from life, life has a way of handing it to us (even when it may first look like the worst).
- 10. Competition.** Try turning every encounter into a win-win situation rather than a win-lose one. *

A Letter From

Ann F. Schmitt



The overarching theme of this issue speaks to the need for, and benefits of, self-awareness and self-acceptance, including self-awareness about how we commit to people and projects.

The cover story suggests that “self-centeredness” — an emotionally laden term with major negative associations — could be seen as positive, if we look at it as the idea of valuing ourselves and our lives enough to take the journey of self-awareness.

The Top 10 looks at the ways we create internal pressure and anxiety for ourselves, while the quiz lets you test your temper.

The page 3 article on commitment is not just for those with trouble saying “I do” in romantic relationships. Difficulty making a commitment comes in many forms, and awareness of our relationship TO commitment goes a long way to greater satisfaction in our lives.

Finally, the back page article addresses that perfection-driven inner voice that wants us to believe that we’re not enough compared to everyone else—including ourselves!

Please do not hesitate to call for additional copies of this newsletter or if you would like help with any issues in your life. Have a beautiful day!

Is Anger Putting Your Health at Risk?

If you “fly off the handle” easily, you’re at risk of damaged relationships, unfulfilling lives, feelings of worthlessness, even trouble with the law. But that’s not all! You may also be at greater risk for heart attacks or other illnesses. Test your temper with this quiz, to see how much risky business there is in your life.



True False

- 1. It doesn’t take much to get me mad.
- 2. When other people’s mistakes slow me down, it can upset me for the whole day.
- 3. I swear loudly to blow off steam.
- 4. I feel annoyed when I’m not recognized for doing good work.
- 5. I feel like hitting someone who makes me very angry.
- 6. I feel stupid and inadequate in challenging situations, and I hate that.
- 7. I get furious when I’m criticized, corrected or embarrassed in front of others.
- 8. Sometimes I feel so powerless.
- 9. I often wish people who have hurt me could be punished somehow.
- 10. I feel infuriated when I do a good job and get a poor evaluation.
- 11. People call me hotheaded and tell me I should calm down.
- 12. I blow up at terrible drivers.
- 13. I have a hard time forgiving others when they hurt or frustrate me.
- 14. I hate the way I get treated at restaurants or stores.
- 15. When I get mad, I say nasty things.
- 16. I’m a very ambitious person, so sometimes I get impatient and angry with other people.
- 17. I’ve been known to break things when I’m frustrated.

If you answered “true” more often than “false,” you may have a problem controlling your anger. It’s helpful to realize that underneath anger are usually feelings of fear and hurt. Understanding your deepest feelings will help you curb your anger, get along better with co-workers and bosses, improve relationships and improve your life. Here are some healthier ways to respond to anger.

- 1. I can—and often do—laugh at myself, or at a difficult situation.
- 2. When I’m really angry, I remove myself from the situation and go for a walk or do some light exercise.
- 3. I use “I messages” as much as I can instead of pointing fingers.
- 4. When I begin to feel angry about a situation, I try to step back and figure out why I have let other people get to me.
- 5. I understand where my anger comes from, as well as my habit of acting out angrily, and I am actively trying to learn a different way.
- 6. I accept the fact that only I can make myself feel anger, that it is actually my choice to feel or not feel anger. *

Making Commitments that Count—in Love and in Life

Amy always seemed to gravitate to men with “commitment issues.” They were: married, from a faraway place, getting over an old girlfriend, available by email but never in person, living with an infirm mother, a workaholic, finishing a book, and on and on. Unavailable, in other words.

Amy, herself, was overwhelmingly focused on love, and completely willing to commit. She always wanted more out of the relationship, while the men wanted space.

But what Amy didn't recognize was that she was exhibiting the same conflict over commitment as the men she was criticizing.

“Then it dawned on me one day that if I keep finding myself with men who are running away from commitment, then I'm running away, too,” she said. By choosing men with one foot permanently out the door, Amy kept her own options always open.

Amy's “passive” avoidance, as compared with the “active” avoidance of running away, is perhaps less recognized, say Steven Carver and Julia Sokol, in their book *He's Scared, She's Scared*. But it is no less common.

Commitment and Life

Like Amy, many of us fail to understand the ways we avoid commitment and the ways in which this hidden conflict may be creating chaos or pain in our personal lives. And if we don't understand how these feelings affect our behavior, we run the risk of sabotaging not only our relationships, but other areas of our life, as well.

“Commitment isn't just about romance, it's about life,” write Carver and Sokol. “If you are hypersensitive to commitment, your struggle is going to emerge in



more than one area.”

Commitment conflicts can influence the way we handle our career, our money and our friendships. Consider some of the following:

- Are you hard to reach and don't like to make plans?
- Are you constantly searching for the perfect profession or perfect job?
- Do you think of your living quarters as temporary, taking pride in your ability to move at the drop of a hat? Does buying a house sound like a nightmare?
- Are pets an overwhelming responsibility? Kids?
- How hard it is to make major purchases? Does making a choice drive you crazy because it limits your options?

“To the outside world, you may look solid, sound and committed,” say Carver and Sokol. “But inside your brain, your conflicts are raging, and you always have a contingency plan.”

What drives these conflicted feelings about commitment is a complex stew of anxieties, worries and concerns. Unexamined, these “ingredients” blend to create a powerful recipe for difficulty in finding and keeping love.

What We Fear

There are probably as many reasons why we worry about commitment as there are people who worry. A few of the multitude of fears that can present themselves: losing freedom and personal space; giving up control; being bored; being stuck; losing individuality and sense of self; loving too much; being dependent on someone else; being “found out”; giving up your lifestyle; making another mistake; being financially responsible or sharing your money; making life more complicated.

It's important to remember that the problem is not *having* the fear. Everyone has fears, to greater or lesser degrees. The question is whether your fears are driving you away from good choices and pushing you toward partnerships and life choices that are ultimately unsatisfying, hurtful or painful. *

How to Sustain a Committed Relationship

Establishing and sustaining a genuinely committed relationship isn't simple, particularly in a society that promotes so many misunderstandings, myths and fairy tales about them. The chief myth is that of a soul mate, that perfectly matched man or woman who will reflect our taste and status, see us for who we are, love us for all the “right” reasons and help us become the person we want to be. Few partnerships consistently live up to this ideal.

To make commitments that count, Carver and Sokol suggest some of the following:

Acknowledge your conflicts and recognize your fears. Quit blaming your partner or looking for excuses. Examine how your fears have caused you to choose

or behave badly. Realize that just because you're anxious doesn't mean you immediately have to do something about it.

Make a commitment to yourself. Construct a meaningful, connected and full life. When you can commit to yourself, you can more easily commit to others.

Don't think too far ahead. It's too overwhelming. Keep your intentions good and make the best decisions possible moment by moment. Pray for the best.

Be present and accountable in all your relationships. Don't hide your feelings, thoughts or true self. And if you say you'll call or meet with someone, do so.

Stop falling in love with potential. This creates “if only” fantasies that never, ever go anywhere. If you want change, work on yourself, not your partner. *

The Comparison Trap—Stop Dwelling on Differences and Be You!

Ever felt like you're not smart enough? Or strong enough? Pretty, brave or talented enough?

When you're caught in the comparison trap, nothing about you ever seems quite good enough. You keep inhumane standards for yourself, and every perceived failure is magnified. You always feel as if you must do better. Life becomes a quest for utter perfection—like the carrot dangling in front of a horse, it is chased but never truly experienced.

"If I'm 98% perfect in anything I do, it's the 2% I've messed up I'll remember when I'm through," begins a little ditty.

The problem begins when we allow others—family members, our spouse, friends, a boss, popular culture—to define who we are or are not. Unfortunately, these roots of self-image stretch far back into childhood, when the negative messages we received from our parents imprinted us with a feeling of being stupid, fat, lazy, weak or otherwise inadequate.

But as adults, we can choose to truly accept ourselves—with all our strivings,

quirks, faults and shortcomings—as being enough right now. The more we do that, the less vulnerable we are to the opinions of others.

Perfection makes liberal use of comparisons. The next time you get that feeling of not being enough, stop to examine the standard you are using to gauge yourself.

A playful way to look at the power of comparisons is this: Compare your body to those of a person who represents ideal physical beauty by contemporary media standards. Dwell on the differences.

Then list all the achievements you've accomplished up to your current age. Be extra thorough. Now compare your list to that of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at age 12. By that time, Mozart spoke 15 languages and had composed numerous major pieces of music, including an opera. Dwell on the differences.

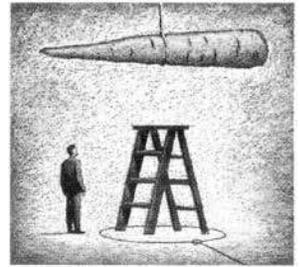
If you're perfectly miserable at this point, your job is to notice how negative comparisons affect your available energy for work, family, relationships—and for yourself. How do they block

the real you from showing up?

Here are some more questions to ponder:

- How is it that if something is not perfect, then it is nothing?
- Is it possible to accept myself and treat myself in a loving and caring manner regardless of my accomplishments or lack of them?
- Why must I be outstanding or special?
- Why does failing at something transform me into being a failure?
- What would my life be like with more humane standards?
- Can I be satisfied with progress, not perfection?

Life is a never-ending process of learning and growing in skills, experience, wisdom and compassion. Most of us are not spectacular in any category of life. And yet each one of us is worthy, lovable, competent, effective, attractive and smart enough to live lives of contribution, caring and value. ✧



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