

SELF ACCEPTANCE

BY MIKEL O'LEARY



Transforming-lives-together.com

Self-Acceptance: How Compassion Frees You, Heals You, and Leads You to Radical Contentment

Introduction

When you think of having good emotional health, terms like happiness, self-esteem, self-confidence, optimism, and mental toughness likely come to mind. You might not consider the ideas of self-acceptance and contentment.

But isn't contentment what we're all seeking?

Contentment is the place where we don't need anything. We're completely satisfied as we are, as our life is.

Think of how many things you do each day in an effort to feel more content:

- You say or do things to impress others.
- You say or do things to avoid being ridiculed by others.
- You work at a job you don't like so you can make more money to buy things you want or to impress others.
- You exercise and diet beyond what is reasonable in order to look a certain way.

The list is really endless. We spend a lot of our day trying to feel more content. However, these things aren't the path to *radical* contentment.

The real secret is self-acceptance.

"The truth is: Belonging starts with self-acceptance. Your level of belonging, in fact, can never be greater than your level of self-acceptance, because believing that you're enough is what gives you the courage to be authentic, vulnerable and imperfect."

- Brene Brown

What is Self-Acceptance?

There are many ways to look at self-acceptance. Some of them are more constructive than others. It would be a mistake to think of self-acceptance to be a blanket acceptance of your weaknesses, bad habits, and negative tendencies in the absence of any responsibility to continue to improve.

Self-acceptance isn't an excuse for laziness and complacency. You can be content and still advocate self-improvement. It also doesn't mean that you accept your fate and determine that nothing can or should be done to change your life.

Self-acceptance is a reckoning with yourself. It's an acknowledgement of your shortcomings, character, strengths, habits, and tendencies. It's about facing the truth and accepting that reality. Once you know where you are, you can make a reasonable plan to move forward.

Self-acceptance ultimately leads to contentment because you are no longer fighting with yourself. Because let's face it, **you cannot be both your #1 fan and your #1 enemy.** It's self-defeating.

You need to free yourself from self-punishment in order to be healed. When you release yourself from the negative thoughts that hold you back – and *accept* where you're at – you are setting yourself on a **truly radical journey toward contentment, peace, and happiness.**

But that's easier said than done. In the next section, we'll explore the reasons why self-acceptance can be so challenging.

"For me, art really starts with acceptance, self-trust. Wherever you come to with art, it's perfect. You don't have to come with anything. What you bring to something is the art. That's where it's found. It's found within you."

- Jeff Koons

Why Accepting Yourself is So Challenging

We're hard on ourselves. **Many of us are more understanding and forgiving of others than we are of ourselves.** It doesn't make a lot of sense. If anyone is going to be on your side, it should be you!

There are several common signs that you're being too hard on yourself:

1. **You dwell on your mistakes.** This accomplishes nothing positive. It does accomplish several things that are negative. Avoid doing this.
 - We're all human and make mistakes. Dwelling on mistakes makes you feel less capable and miserable in general.
2. **You compare yourself to others.** There's always someone richer, better looking, more musically talented, "luckier," or has children that do better in school.
 - **Comparing yourself to others is dangerous.** You don't know the other person's background or available resources. They may have a huge advantage.
 - You're also more likely to compare yourself to exceptional people. Do you compare your looks to the middle-age man or woman at work that has three kids? Of course not! You compare yourself to the 21-year old intern that models on the side.
3. **You don't give your own ideas a fair chance.** How many great ideas have you had, but ultimately dismissed?
4. **You spend too much time thinking about your past failures. I. WANT. TO. REPEAT. THIS. YOU SPEND TOO MUCH TIME THINKING ABOUT YOUR PAST FAILURES!** Oh, the past. You chickened out and didn't ask Mary to prom. Or you majored in liberal arts instead of engineering. Maybe you didn't get that dream job. There's always something.
 - **If you focus on negative experiences, you're failing to accept yourself and your current reality.**
5. **You can't take a compliment well.** There are good things about you. It's okay when others acknowledge those things. Your inability to accept a compliment from others is a sign that you don't accept yourself.
6. **You're unrealistic.** Being unrealistic might be seen as being kind to yourself, but it's not. If you truly don't have what it takes to become an NBA star, or a Rhodes Scholar, or a CEO, you're not doing yourself any favors by holding onto unrealistic expectations. You're ultimately being hard on yourself.

It's not easy to accept yourself. We've been taught that the ideal person is financially successful, athletic, attractive, cool under pressure, hilarious, creative, and the life of the party. Most of us will ***never*** check all of those boxes.

There are many signs that you're not as accepting of yourself as you could be. Be on the lookout for these signs. You probably don't accept yourself as much as you think!

“Acceptance of one's life has nothing to do with resignation; it does not mean running away from the struggle. On the contrary, it means accepting it as it comes, with all the handicaps of heredity, of suffering, of psychological complexes and injustices.”

- Paul Tournier

9 Ways to Begin Accepting Yourself

Accepting yourself is a process. It's a habit. **The little things you do, or fail to do, each day determine your level of self-acceptance.** Developing these useful habits and dropping the negative habits is a huge step in the right direction. It's hard to accept yourself any other way.

Be accepting of yourself each and every day by making these actions habits:

1. **Let go of your mistakes and failures.** Take the necessary time to learn from your negative experiences. Once you've done that, there's nothing else to be gained by them. **Let them go.**
 - Decide how you can avoid making the same error in the future. Then move on.
2. **Only compare yourself to yourself.** Comparing yourself to someone else is like comparing a tree to a loaf of bread. There's no comparison. However, you can compare yourself to your previous results.
 - If you're doing "better," you have every right to be excited.
 - If you're coming up short, be excited that you know you can easily rectify the situation.
3. **Separate yourself from your emotions.** Your emotions are separate from you. They are something that you're experiencing, just like someone stepping on your toe. Observe them as a feeling in your body, or as a piece of paper blowing down

the street. **Just observe them.**

- A piece of paper blowing by doesn't have any control over you. Your emotions don't have to control you either.
4. **Be aware of what makes you unique and embrace it.** It might be your flaming red hair, your incredible IQ, or your compassion for animals. Maybe you're in the bottom 5th percentile for height. You're not exactly the same as anyone else.
 - **It's your uniqueness that potentially provides the most value to you and the world.**
 5. **Let go of the things you can't change or control.** You're not accepting of your life or your limitations if you worry about those things beyond your influence.
 - Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do about this?" ***If not, there's no reason to dwell on it.***
 6. **Do something that you've always wanted to do.** Avoid denying your impulses. If you've always wanted to learn how to play the bagpipes or write a sappy screenplay, now is the time. When you deny your healthy impulses, you're not accepting yourself.
 7. **Be more assertive.** Let people know what you think. Give your opinion. ***Allow your voice to be heard. Do the things you want to do.*** Assertiveness is a form of honesty - about you and your own desires.
 8. **Recognize your thoughts and feelings.** Examine your self-talk. Stand in front of a full-length mirror and take a good look at yourself. Notice your thoughts throughout the day. Acknowledge how you judge yourself.
 - Most people distract themselves with TV, the internet, food, their smartphone, or some other strategy. This is to avoid spending time with themselves. Turn off the distractions and notice what happens.
 9. **Continue evolving.** Those with little self-acceptance tend to be stuck. They can't move toward anything positive. Be honest with yourself about what you like and dislike and allow your life to evolve.

Treat each day as a new opportunity to practice self-acceptance. **You must choose self-acceptance if you want to experience it firsthand.** It won't happen by accident. Develop self-acceptance habits and drop your tendency to judge yourself harshly. Free yourself from your emotions.

I like the following quote. Another word for happiness is contentment. Are you content?

“I think happiness comes from self-acceptance. We all try different things, and we find some comfortable sense of who we are. We look at our parents and learn and grow and move on. We change.”

- Jamie Lee Curtis

Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

You can be aware of your shortcomings and still be happy with yourself. Your self-confidence doesn't have to suffer either. You can be honest with yourself and still be a powerful force in the world.

You might be thinking, “I thought I was supposed to be honest with myself, not build myself up.”

This is being honest with yourself. If you had a truly accurate picture of yourself and your situation, you'd be a lot happier with yourself and a lot more excited about life in general!

Build self-esteem and self-confidence simultaneously with these strategies:

1. **List your greatest successes.** Remember when you were at your best. Remind yourself how that felt.
2. **Make a list of the things you appreciate about yourself.** List three things each evening. See just how great you really are.
3. **Dress up.** You walk a little taller when you're wearing your nice clothes. You deserve to feel good. There's no reason to wait for a job interview, wedding, or funeral to look or feel your best.
4. **Live by your values.** When you live by your code, you feel good about yourself. You feel badly when you do the opposite.
5. **Set a small goal and achieve it.** Give yourself an easy path to feeling good and enhancing your life. Set an easy goal and taste success.

6. **Be kinder toward others.** If you're hard on others, you're probably hard on yourself, too. **Avoid saying anything negative and be a good listener.** That will get you 90% of the way there.

If you have sufficient self-esteem and self-confidence, self-acceptance is easier to find. **You're already pretty great**, so there's no reason not to recognize it. Treat yourself with the admiration and respect that you deserve.

"In my research, I've interviewed a lot of people who never fit in, who are what you might call 'different': scientists, artists, thinkers. And if you drop down deep into their work and who they are, there is a tremendous amount of self-acceptance."

- Brene Brown

Meditation as a Tool for Self-Acceptance

Meditation and mindfulness are all the rage these days. Though they have been around for several thousands of years, they have enjoyed a new level of popularity. Even the scientific world is getting involved. A quick search on your favorite search engine will demonstrate just how interested the world is in these topics.

While meditation accomplishes many things, we're interested in self-acceptance. **Meditation is a powerful method of stripping away the extraneous garbage that stands in the way of realizing the truth.**

Meditation allows you to see your erroneous thoughts and beliefs more easily. It also provides more emotional control. When your emotions are appropriate, and proportionate, it's easier to accept yourself and others.

"When you are discontent, you always want more, more, more. Your desire can never be satisfied. But when you practice contentment, you can say to yourself, 'Oh yes - I already have everything that I really need.'"

- Dalai Lama

Follow these tips to incorporate a daily meditation practice into your life:

1. **Create a daily schedule you can keep.** It's much better to meditate each day for a few minutes than to meditate for longer periods of time a couple of times a week. Be realistic. Ideally, you can set aside at least 20 minutes a day.
 - Avoid the mistake of failing to schedule your meditation time. If you wait until you have time, you'll never do it.
2. **Find a comfortable spot.** You don't need much. **Any quiet spot where you won't be disturbed will work just fine.** A firm chair or a seated position on the floor will work. Lying down can even work, provided you can stay awake!
3. **Start small.** It's more challenging to sit with yourself for 20 minutes than you think. **Five to ten minutes is a good start.**
4. **Meditation is a relationship with yourself.** So, be nice to yourself. It's about self-acceptance and compassion for yourself.
5. **Focus on your breathing.** Feel the air moving in and out of your body. Feel the sensation of the air moving past the edges of your nostrils.
6. **Continue until your mind wanders.** You probably won't even catch yourself the first several times your mind drifts away. All of sudden, you'll realize that you've been thinking about work, school, dinner, or your neighbor's annoying dog.
7. **When your mind wanders, let those thoughts go.** Think of thoughts as clouds blowing by. You don't have to pay attention to them or be affected by them. Just allow them to pass through your attention and return your attention to your breath.
 - Your mind will wander a lot at first. You might not even be able to last 30 seconds before your mind is off to another place. That's okay. Just keep going. **You'll get much better with practice.**

Meditation will show you that your mind creates thoughts. These thoughts lead to feelings and beliefs.

You'll also learn that you don't have to be affected by them. Being upset by your thoughts is a little like punching yourself in the face. Unclench that fist by allowing your thoughts to pass on through.

Most people spend so much time "thinking" and being influenced by their thoughts, they have a weak grasp of reality. The world is going on around you, not inside your head.

You'll have a more honest perspective of yourself, the world, and those around you if you can quiet your mind.

You'll quickly learn to avoid being bothered by your thoughts. They'll move along on their own, provided you don't engage with them.

This is crucial to contentment. When you're not being energized by your extraneous thoughts, you'll experience real peace. When something negative happens, the event isn't the real issue, it's all the thoughts that run through your head.

Learn to deal effectively with your thoughts, and you can easily push past any self-doubts that keep you from accepting yourself and finding contentment.

"Health is the greatest possession. Contentment is the greatest treasure. Confidence is the greatest friend. Non-being is the greatest joy."

- Lao Tzu

Conclusion

We're all seeking contentment, perhaps even more than happiness. But we need to view happiness as a side-effect of contentment. The fact is **contentment is a prerequisite to feeling happy**. Everyone is driven by the need for contentment.

Some of us seek contentment through achievement or wealth. Others seek it through altruism or creation. Both can be dead ends. Where does it stop? Does a billionaire ever feel content, or does he continuously feel the need to create greater wealth?

Nothing external can ever provide life-altering, *radical* contentment. Contentment must be found from the inside through kindness, compassion, and self-acceptance.

When you desire to design the best life you can have, I would be honored to set up discovery call to see how I can help you!

Mikel

Mikel.v.oleary@transforming-lives-together.com