

21 Ways to Feel Good about Yourself

© Rick Hanson, PhD, 2008
www.RickHanson.net

1. Do the right thing. The bliss of blamelessness. Practice the virtues that are the foundation of any psychological growth or spiritual practice.
2. Tend to the causes of accomplishment; do the things that will legitimately earn you success. All you can do is feed the fruit tree; you can't make it give you an apple. Take initiative, be "ardent, diligent, resolute, and mindful," and be at peace with whatever happens. As Meher Baba said: "Don't worry. Be happy. Make efforts."
3. Love. Practice lovingkindness for everyone, including (especially?!) neutral and difficult people. Feelings of love neutralize feelings of shame.
4. Do things that ground you increasingly in a sense of your own beingness, always already awake, benign, and contented. For example, meditate, spend time in nature, cuddle your children (or sweetie), do yoga, etc.
5. Relax "self." Take things less personally. Give up trying to perfect yourself; that's like trying to polish Jell-O.
6. Accept yourself as you are. You are what you are, and you cannot change how you are in this instant, though you can create the causes that will develop you in the future. But at any moment of *now*, there is nothing you can do besides accept it and act to improve it. In particular, try to accept the vulnerable or not-so-pretty parts of your self; everyone has these; for example, it is not bad to be anxious, sad, or needy.
7. Accept where you are in the four natural, unavoidable stages of learning and getting better at anything: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, unconscious competence. The second stage - conscious incompetence - is the hardest one, and it's where people are prone to quit, but keep going toward growing competence, which will support your sense of worth.
8. Serve the world. Donate to charity. Tend to your friends and family (including animal companions). Be nice to strangers.
9. Exercise your capacities. If you have talents lying fallow, start using them. "The most expensive piece of equipment is the one not making any money."

10. Reflect on your accomplishments and good qualities each day. Perhaps take brief inventory before going to bed each night, answering questions like these: What did I get better at today? How did I act with good character? What have I gotten done? In what ways did I help others?

11. Be in reality about the facts of who you are, and what you have done in your life (the good and the bad). See yourself as a mosaic with a hundred tiles, and tell the truth about what is actually there; it's always mostly good.

12. Be fair. You would want to be fair in your judgments of others; why do you, another human being like them, deserve any less?

13. Take in the evidence of your own contributions, skills, accomplishments, loveableness, value to others. Fill that hole in your heart so that you become less hungry for "narcissistic supplies" over time.

14. Spend more time with people who like you. Perhaps even identify a kind of "go-to" or support team of key people who are major and credible validators of you, and deepen your involvement with them.

Spend less time with people who are neutral, indifferent, or negative toward you. If people are critical, it can help to reflect on the myriad factors that led them to treat you that way, which can put it in context and make it feel less personal. If appropriate – and not just getting sucked into wrestling with the tar baby – stick up for yourself. If appropriate, ask others to stick up for you, too.

15. Ask for appropriate positive feedback. It is a lot more useful to know what you are doing right than what you are doing wrong, since the latter only tells you that you're missing the target, not where it is or how to hit it.

16. Get a sense or image of internal nurturing and encouraging figures, such as the loving eyes of your doting grandmother, a guardian angel, or simply a clear voice of reason in about your good qualities. Build up the realness of those internal "nurturing parent," "protector," or "guide" figures, and listen to them more often.

17. Sort criticisms about you into four piles – "not valid," "valid but to heck with it, I'm not going to change that one," "not a moral fault but worth putting in correction from now on," and "deserves a healthy wince of remorse" – take maximum reasonable responsibility for the third and fourth piles, make the appropriate changes sincerely and diligently (perhaps even specific amendments or expiations for serious wrongdoings), and move on.

18. Forgive yourself your past misdeeds and your present faults. This does not mean letting yourself off the hook for them, but means instead not berating or whipping yourself over and over for them. In a way, self-flagellation is a kind of avoidance of responsibility; when we take true responsibility, there is a kind of forgiveness, an honest facing and then a moving on. If you like, write out sentences like, "I forgive myself for _____ ." Or imagine others forgiving you, like the other people involved, or beings who have a powerful meaning to you (e.g., a teacher, Jesus, the Buddha).

19. See the empty nature of both your good qualities and your bad ones. They are all compounded from smaller parts, they're the result of ten thousand factors (give or take a few), and they arise and disappear interdependently with the whole wide world; therefore, they have no inherent static independent existence. They are simply qualities, some good, some bad. The good ones are worth encouraging, and the bad ones worth discouraging – for the sake of yourself and all beings – but none of them is worth identifying with.

20. Stick up for yourself within yourself. Talk back to irrational or self-critical thoughts. Classic examples: Comparing yourself to others (especially unfair comparisons); equating the worth of who you *are* with the success of what you *do*;

21. You should treat yourself as if you matter. Listen to your innermost hopes and dreams, don't dash them, don't rain on that parade, but encourage them in realistic ways. Give yourself empathic attunement – which may have been in short supply when you were a child – for your own feelings, being mindful of them, friendly toward them, and accepting (meditation is great for developing this ability). Let yourself let down sometimes; drop the load, put your feet up, and relax; maybe you need a good cry, for real; build in routine times for rest and respite; take more long baths, long walks, long lovemaking, long board games with the kids, long chats with good friends.