

# Healthy Marriage Tip

## Self Worth and a Healthy Marriage By The National Healthy Marriage Institute LLC

If you want a healthy marriage then it is vital you build a healthy sense of self worth. By self worth we mean how you feel about yourself and not your perception of what you think other people think about you. Those who rely on their spouse or others to determine their sense of self worth are in store for a roller coaster ride of emotions that ultimately leads to destructive crashes.

A low sense of self worth can be very destructive to a marital relationship. We tend to self medicate when we don't feel good about ourselves. Food, shopping, porn, alcohol, drugs, etc can all temporarily offer escape but leave us feeling worse about ourselves as we deal with the subsequent consequences and their negative effects on our marriage.

If you want to be happy and healthy, the long term solution is to strengthen your sense of self-worth. Self-worth is built by becoming a better person than you were the day before.

To better understand how to strengthen your sense of self-worth it is important to understand how you weaken it. You also need to understand how you can overcome the things that weaken your sense of self worth.

Five ways to weaken your sense of self worth are:

Dwelling on your faults

Comparing yourself to others

Intentionally making the wrong choice when you know what the right choice is

Taking a break from improving yourself

Not forgiving others

### **Dwelling On Your Faults**

Dwelling on our faults is a sign we have not forgiven ourselves for mistakes we have made. Forgiving ourselves is sometimes very difficult to do. In fact, in many cases we find it easier to forgive others than to forgive ourselves. The bottom line is that no one is perfect, and we all make mistakes. We only make things worse by not forgiving

ourselves because our ability to strengthen our sense of self-worth is decreased.

A good strategy to use when we have made mistakes is called Acknowledge, Move On. It is important to acknowledge the mistakes we make. Some people skip this step and go straight to moving on. Skipping this step only increases the chances of repeating the same mistake again and again. While it is possible to never acknowledge the mistakes you make, it is impossible to escape the consequences of those mistakes.

Another problem people face is they get stuck in the first step and acknowledge their mistake over and over. This is very damaging to their sense of self-worth.

The key to not repeating the same mistake and strengthening your sense of self-worth is to complete all the steps of the Acknowledge, Move On strategy.

The first step is to acknowledge the mistake you made. You can't work on what you can't see. Sometimes you may only be able to see the consequences of your mistake but find yourself unable to recognize the mistake itself. This is natural since everyone's perception of reality is seen through the lenses they have developed throughout their lives. Sometimes it is necessary to ask someone you trust to look at the situation through their lenses. See if they can recognize your mistake that led to the consequences you are experiencing. Once you have recognized the mistake, you are ready to move on to the next step.

The second step is to recognize all the factors that contributed to your decision to make the mistake. There are usually a series of events that lead to the actual mistake itself. One example is adultery. Most married people don't see someone they are attracted to and immediately commit adultery. Thoughts, location, strength of marriage, and willingness to reciprocate initial advances, all play a role in the path leading to adultery. By changing just one or two of the events that led to adultery, the mistake and consequences could have been avoided. When you recognize the events preceding your mistake, you will be able to change this pattern of events in the future. This will help you to not make the same mistake over and over.

The third step is to develop a specific plan on what you will do differently early on in the same pattern of events that has led to the mistake. You may also need to develop a plan to change a personal weakness that contributes to your mistakes. In the adultery example this weakness may be looking at attractive individuals, allowing your thoughts to linger on how attractive they are, and then wonder what it might be like to have sex with that person.

If your first plan doesn't work very well, don't get discouraged. Go back to the first

two steps and see if you have missed anything and then develop a new plan.

The fourth step is the most important. Don't let anything stop you from implementing your plan for not repeating the same mistake again.

The fifth step is to move on! Don't dwell on your mistake. Whenever you find yourself thinking about your past mistake remind yourself of your action plan. Finally make a mental list of all the positive things you have done lately.

### **Comparing Yourself To Others**

The second way to weaken your sense of self worth is to compare yourself to others. Most of us compare our worst self to others at their best. Comparing ourselves to others is always damaging in the long run. We may feel better about ourselves in the short run, but the good feelings won't last long. Comparing ourselves to others increases the chances we will rely on external comparisons for our sense of self worth. This ultimately leads to a low sense of self-worth. The most successful long-term strategy to increase your self-worth is to only compare yourself to yourself.

### **Making Wrong Choices**

The third way to weaken your sense of self-worth is to intentionally make wrong choices when you know what the right choice is. In essence, we are betraying our self when we intentionally do something we know is wrong. Over time this weakens our sense of self-worth. To strengthen our self-worth we must do what we know is right even if it is hard.

### **Taking A Break**

The fourth way to weaken your sense of self worth is to take a break from improving yourself. There are times when we just want to take a break from all the effort we are putting into improving ourselves. However, you can only neglect your self-worth for so long before you will start to notice the negative effects.

The key is to pace yourself. Don't try to work on too much or too little. It is impossible to work on all of your faults at once or to eliminate them overnight. However, you can choose a few faults to work on each day.

Each morning write down a specific plan for improving yourself. Each night evaluate what did or did not work. If you have made the slightest improvement, then recognize it by writing it down. The next morning take what you have learned from the day before and use it in your new action plan. Each time you sense yourself dwelling on or being overwhelmed by your faults, remind yourself of all the recent improvements you have made. Then think of your specific plan for improving that day. You don't

have to conquer your faults all at once! By finding a challenging pace, you will strengthen your sense of self-worth and lead a healthier and happier life.

### **Not Forgiving Others**

The fifth way to weaken your sense of self-worth is to not forgive others. We trap the bitterness, anger and emotional pain inside when we don't forgive others. Over time these feelings can build up and decrease our ability to strengthen our self-worth. Many people self-medicate the emotional pain these trapped feelings cause with alcohol, drugs, shopping, eating and other forms of temporary pleasure. Numbing emotional pain with pleasure is a temporary solution. The pain will still be there after the feeling of pleasure has worn off. Making matters worse the consequences of the pleasure you indulged in will also be there as well.

The only effective long term solution is to remove the bitterness, anger and emotional pain with the healing balm of love. Abraham Lincoln recognized love was needed to heal the wounds caused by the civil war when he said "With malice toward none, with charity for all, let us bind up the wounds." This is not easy and for most it does not happen overnight. But those who don't give up are able to free themselves from the damaging effects of bitterness, anger and emotional pain.

How can you feel the kind of love that is needed to permanently remove the feelings of bitterness, anger and emotional pain? This is especially difficult when the person has inflicted a tremendous amount of emotional pain. The answer is simple but it can be very difficult to implement. We have the ability to choose the emotions we feel.

We all have the ability to choose to feel love or to choose to feel anger. Sometimes the circumstances are such that it is easy to choose to feel love or it seems we have no choice but to feel anger. The reality is we still have the ability to choose no matter what the circumstances are. We also have the ability to change negative feelings to positive feelings in less than a second.

Imagine your spouse has promised to pick you up at the end of a 20 mile run. You are out in the middle of nowhere, the temperature is starting to drop and you are cold, tired and hungry. Your spouse promised to pick you up at 5:00 but has still not arrived. Ten minutes go by and you start thinking about the last time your spouse promised to pick you up at the end of a run and was 30 minutes late. The excuse was, "I'm so sorry, I lost track of time. It will never happen again." You then start thinking about the time your spouse was an hour late for the dinner you were having with your parents. The excuse of, "There was a major problem at work, and I couldn't get away" didn't seem very sincere at the time and even less so now. Thirty minutes have now gone by giving you more time to remember all the other times your spouse has been

late. You start to realize that these aren't just isolated incidents. This is part of a pattern that has been forming for years. It dawns on you that you are married to a selfish jerk who thinks of nobody but him or herself. The outside temperature continues to fall but your internal temperature is boiling. You tell yourself your spouse knows he or she is late but probably stopped to grab a bite to eat. Your spouse probably didn't even think to get some extra food for you. Two hours go by and your spouse has still not shown up. A thought creeps into your mind that perhaps your spouse has gotten into an accident and is hurt. You are so angry at this point that you immediately dismiss this thought. In fact he or she better be hurt because who knows what you will do when your spouse finally does drive up! And then you see the headlights coming down the road. The rage inside you is out of control. There is nothing your spouse can say or do to change it. As the car gets closer you notice the tears and then you notice the blood. Through the tears your spouse tells how a little girl was hit by a car and how your spouse held her little body as she died. In an instant all of the bitterness, anger and rage you had been feeling towards your spouse is gone. In that instant you chose to stop feeling anger and instead chose to feel love and compassion. The love and compassion immediately heals any long term effects of the anger that had totally consumed you just seconds before .

Obviously this is an extreme example, but it illustrates how quickly you can replace intense feelings of anger and hurt with love and compassion. The fact your spouse was late and you were still very tired, hungry and cold had not changed. What changed was which feelings you choose to feel towards your spouse. Your perception of reality also changed. By changing your perception of reality it became much easier to choose to feel love and compassion towards your spouse rather than choosing to feel bitterness, anger and hurt.

If you need a more common example think of the last time you were very angry with a spouse or a child and the phone rang. As if by magic you probably suddenly discovered the ability to control the tone and volume of your voice as you answered the phone. Yet seconds before, you were "unable" to control the tone and volume of your voice. The reality is we do indeed have the ability to choose how we think, act and feel. The key is learning how to use that ability when circumstances make it difficult to do so.

Can you experience a sudden change in how you feel towards someone without changing your perception of reality? The answer is yes.

Corrie Ten Boom lived through the Nazi concentration camps in World War II. She experienced extreme hardships and cruelty at the hands of the guards. She even watched her sister die as a result of being imprisoned in the camps.

After the War she traveled through Europe speaking about the healing qualities of forgiveness. After speaking one night a man approached her to thank her for the message of hope she had delivered. She immediately recognized him as one of her former concentration camp prison guards. Everything she had experienced came flooding back. He extended his hand to shake hers, but she couldn't find the strength to extend her hand. She had been speaking about the healing power of forgiveness and yet it was clear to her she did not have the ability to forgive this man. She then turned to a higher power and asked God to give her the ability to forgive him. She records, "As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me."

Corrie Ten Boom had experienced the power of the healing balm of love. The bitterness, anger and hurt she felt towards this man was replaced by love. She had not been able to do this on her own. Only by asking a higher power was she able to forgive him.

How will you know when you have forgiven the person who hurt you so deeply? Some people think you have only forgiven when you have forgotten. This is simply not true. You will know you have forgiven someone when you can think back on what took place and no longer feel the bitterness, pain and hurt.

The most effective way to forgive is to ask a higher power to help you replace the bitterness, anger and hurt with the healing balm of love.

If you don't believe in a higher power, then you can work on changing your perception of the events that took place.

Either way until you remove the feelings of bitterness, anger, and hurt your ability to strengthen your sense of self-worth will be weakened.

One note of caution, although you have forgiven someone, you do not need to place yourself in a position to be hurt again and again by that person. This is especially true in cases of domestic violence. If you are a victim of domestic violence, you need to immediately seek professional assistance and then begin the process of healing by forgiving.

Once again, forgiveness does not mean you should return when the chances of being abused again are still very high.

The ability to forgive does not always come instantly. In some cases you may struggle for an extended period of time to forgive. The most important thing is to never give up.

Removing the built up feelings of bitterness, anger and hurt and replacing them with love will be worth all the effort it takes.

Five Tips to Improve Yourself:

- Each week choose a topic you have never learned about and read up on it
- Set aside a block of time each day just to reflect on how you are doing and what you can do to improve
- Look for opportunities to serve others
- Work on developing a new skill
- Spend time each day keeping your surroundings organized