

SELF ESTEEM

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A healthy self-esteem is to most of us what those beautiful windmills were to Don Quixote - something toward which we tilt but with which we manage only rare collisions. Any paperback from the psychology section - that's the really *big* section at the bookstore - will define the two main varieties of self-esteem, low and high. Predictably, low equals bad and high equals a Ph.D. from NYU, a best selling novel, a guest appearance on Letterman, a renovated farmhouse in Vermont, a dotting mate, a shiny new Volvo and a long and happy life (or whatever). There are aisles of paperbacks that will tell you how you can once and for all rid yourself of low self-esteem and go on to become someone who might have been raised by Jimmy Stewart and Mother Teresa. I'm convinced that almost everyone who wasn't raised by wolves (but by parents instead) is dealing with a low self-esteem problem. It's always been with us. It just took some really enterprising therapists to make it what it is today.

I don't think low self-esteem necessarily has to stop us from doing anything that we aspire to do. I think the trick is just to *deny it* as well as possible. Maybe a good definition of high self-esteem would be: the ability to remain oblivious to the fact that you suck. People with high self-esteem have nothing on us low self-esteemers. They're just oblivious to the truth. They're just *less astute*.

For years in what seems the distant past, I have had plenty of free time to explore my psyche - an activity that I now heartily discourage. In that past, I spent many a year undistracted by the frivolities of romance and had nothing much to do but work on myself. I did it all - rebirthing, TM, DMA (whatever that is), EST (oy) - you name it, I actually spent real cash money on it. It was Epiphany Central for a while, but I don't remember much of it now. Just bits and pieces - stand on your head, breath through your nose, wear copper, eat algae. You know the drill.

I remember one workshop in particular, similar to all the others in that there was a roomful of obviously intelligent but somehow flawed middle-agers, convinced by society that they just didn't cut the mustard. They all had anxious, expectant looks on their faces, nervously fingering their name tags. By the end of the first hour, there was a great light that arose from that conference room at the Ramada - it was the beaming of faces whose owners were now hopeful that, with the help of these two transcendental leaders, they *will* be OK after all. Redemption!

As the workshop progressed, I and several other attendees became increasingly aware of some serious manipulation going on by these "leaders" who are now many thousands of dollars richer by having us locked (yes, locked, to help combat our "natural resistance to change," you see) into this conference room. And I'm not talking Scientology, here. When one young woman raised her hand to honestly answer a "carefully guided" question they had posed, they proceeded to emotionally strip, tar and feather her for daring to defy their script, and a horrified hush fell over the rest of us. I remember seeing a woman seated in the row behind me begin to raise her hand until the woman next to her grabbed it and pushed it back to her lap, asking, "Are you nuts?" Hmm.

The young woman was crying in the hotel lobby and being "counseled" by one of the organization's minions by the time we got sprung for a "break." Not being oblivious to opportunity, I high-tailed it for the parking lot and drove home, saying in my head, "I feel *much* better about myself now."

My view from the present shows me that anyone who can make it through a day of... coffee that's bad and not even flavored, clients who are absolutely convinced that they know more about something you've done for 20 years than you do, computers that freeze, crash and belch forth cryptic errors at the very last moment before your deadline, and a nightcap of the latest war, murder, mayhem and socio-political flotsam that envelopes the late evening news... can consider themselves a big winner.