



Self-love, High-level Performance and Wellbeing

‘You should practice self-love.’ Who, like me, has heard this before and wondered what it actually means? It is easy to understand and use tools to help us to sleep better or improve alertness and focus, but when it comes to self-love many of us still struggle. Read on and find greater clarity on what self-love is and isn’t, and learn how it can boost your confidence, accomplishments and overall wellbeing.

Many coaches and relationship experts recognise the relationship between self-love, confidence and wellbeing. So, why are so many people still waking up feeling miserable about themselves? According to new [research](#) by Shadi Kourosh, assistant professor of dermatology at Harvard Medical School, the pandemic and the transition to or increased reliance on video-conferencing seems to have contributed to the increased development of body dysmorphic disorders. But even before the rise of social media, psychologists found that people who stared at themselves in a mirror became more self-conscious.

How can we practise not only being more aware of our self-talk, but also being kinder and more compassionate towards ourselves? For a long time, I struggled to understand what self-love entailed and its implications on my career, relationships, performance and overall wellbeing. So, let’s find out.

What is Self-love?

Oxford defines self-love as ‘a regard for one’s own wellbeing and happiness’. Self-love is to say ‘yes’ to your needs and to not sacrifice your wellbeing to please others. It is a state of appreciation for yourself that is strengthened by actions that support your physical, psychological and spiritual growth.

Western cultures have become obsessed with individualism. In the past few years, the lexicon of ‘self’ – self-love, self-care, self-made, the selfie, etc. – has sparked intense debate, and one might wonder whether self-love has become a marketing term.

Self-love is not about entitlement, i.e. believing you are unconditionally owed something regardless of effort, merit or context (not be confused with the idea of recognising your self-worth). Nor is self-love about selfish obsession. Although self-love is a reflective process in which you divert your energy inwards and listen, the benefits are not selfish. In actuality, to care for others effectively, you must first care for yourself.

Self-love isn’t meant to go against principles or moral groundings. It is the enlightened journey to care and be kind to yourself to initiate a domino effect of care and compassion for those around you.

It is what is needed to create and participate in an inclusive society. Self-love is less about the ability to withstand loneliness or establish independence (which is really more about self-reliance) and more about awareness and acceptance of our incompleteness. It’s about letting others love us even when we feel unlovable because their version of us is often kinder than our own. In the words of psychotherapist Esther Perel, ‘In order to love another, we must love ourselves. In order to love ourselves, we must allow ourselves to be loved by others.’

But being loved by others still requires sufficient self-love to protect us against anyone who potentially wants to control, manipulate or trap us in any way or form. Young and vulnerable people can especially misunderstand the definition of love. ‘Love misused can be a particularly malignant type of power. But power, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. It’s the particular type of power we’re talking about – the patriarchal value of “power-over” – that we really need to understand and confront in our relationships, our families and within our systems,’ says journalist and award-winning author, Jess Hill. If you’d like to hear more about the topic of abuse and manipulation, listen to her new podcast series, [The Trap](#).

Why Self-love Boosts Performance

Change is constant, unpredictable and necessary, but it can be extremely difficult. With innovations in artificial intelligence and ongoing digitisation comes constant change that demands ongoing transformation, and new and different ways of working and upskilling, which can be a significant cause of chronic stress. According to the World Health Organisation, even before COVID-19 the global stress epidemic was costing the world at least one trillion dollars annually just in measurable areas, like absenteeism, and likely much more in innovation and creativity – two of the very things humans need for the future of work. Yet, some people can thrive and grow during change by exercising one evergreen meta-skill: adaptability. Cited by HR and executives alike, adaptability consistently lands at the top of desired employee skills, a [McKinsey survey](#) found.

Self-love plays a big part in this. Perel notes that it’s our ability to see ourselves as a flawed individual and still hold ourselves in high regard. ‘Self-love is the ability to not fall into a puddle of contempt even when we mess up. It’s trying new things knowing that we could fail, without thinking of ourselves, therefore, as failures.’ Self-love is maintaining a [growth mindset](#), having an explorer attitude and holding oneself in warm regard despite failure.

Speaking from personal experience, a time when I practised self-love was being kind to myself, instead of feeling defeated, when my first online interview didn’t go as smoothly as I had hoped. These days, I enjoy the humorous side that comes along with a slightly unplanned outcome. I take it as a lesson and an opportunity for growth. Compared to my younger self, I feel more grounded, I trust my instincts and I know my skill set without having a know-it-all attitude or sense of entitlement.

Self-love, as described above, will ultimately lead to greater resilience and adaptability, along with a willingness to explore new pathways, be more confident and improve wellbeing.

Here is your self-love test. Try asking yourself the following questions.

Can I ...

- acknowledge that I messed up without telling myself I’m a mess?
- experience regret without falling to pieces?
- take responsibility with an ‘I can’t do it, yet’ attitude?
- apologise for a mistake?
- acknowledge a time when I could have been a better leader in my own life?
- reach out and release myself from the humiliation of having not responded sooner?
- accept that I will be okay, even if someone who hurt me doesn’t admit the pain they caused?
- let someone treat me for a coffee, dinner or movie without feeling guilty?
- accept help from someone without jumping to the conclusion that they want something?
- hold my point of view, even without being validated for it?

A critical component of self-love is recognising your limits, needs and values, and asserting boundaries as needed to uphold them. True self-love can be enacted by taking accountability and responsibility as you courageously embark on difficult paths. The process of self-love begins with the mere task of being able to appreciate you for you. Give yourself some credit, even if you start small.

A self-love practice provides you with the opportunity to see yourself completely, to recognise and value your strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and challenges. With an emphasis on yourself, this journey is ultimately an independent one. Although, it is helpful to unite with others who are on a similar path. At the end of the day, self-growth is predominantly dependent on personal effort.

‘With realisation of one’s own potential and self-confidence in one’s ability, one can build a better world.’ – Dalai Lama.

Get in contact if you would like support in discovering your values and strengths, developing your vision and noticing choices that will lead to building a confident, self-loving you.

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