

SELF REGARD: Introduction

The concept of self-regard is similar to others which relate to how we see and feel about ourselves, such as “self-esteem” and “self-worth.”

Self-regard is an authentic sense of self-acceptance based on a true understanding of who you are; this means knowing and accepting not only your abilities, accomplishments and positive attributes, but also your weaknesses, challenges and potential areas for self-improvement.

The way we view and regard ourselves is a fundamental force in life. It affects our behaviour, how we see our world, the way we make judgments, and how we relate to others. Self-regard is also central to our relationship with our self, which in fact, is the basic relationship that affects all other relationships we will develop. Thus, working on our self-regard continually helps us to relate well to various people in our lives and, ultimately, to become our authentic self.

The reverse side of the *Staying on Top of Your Game™* Wheel offers five strategies for people who want to think more about and perhaps work on the area of self-regard. Let's look at each one in detail.

Strategy: *Take time for reflection (e.g., try writing in a personal journal, etc.).*

We all have ideas about who we are and how we feel about ourselves. However, it's wise to re-examine these ideas regularly. Research and clinical practice suggest that many of us do not have the level of self-knowledge that enables personal growth. We may be blind to certain aspects of our character or have trouble understanding our behaviour or feelings. And, of course, we continue to develop and change throughout our lives and the circumstances and challenges we must deal with shift as well.

Fortunately, as human beings we have the ability to think critically and reflectively about ourselves. Why do we believe in certain ideas? Why do our actions lead to certain results? Why do people react to us the way they do? Pondering these sorts of questions can help us to understand ourselves better and make positive changes if need be. However, personal change is not always easy. Abraham Maslow, who is considered the founder of humanistic psychology, once said that *although we need to know ourselves, we fear what we might find out*. If we are to change, we must embrace this risk and be prepared to grow beyond familiar and secure places.

What exactly is reflection?

Reflection means taking time to think in a relaxed, unhurried way about ourselves, our lives and important issues. So often we do our thinking in circumstances where we feel pressured to find instant solutions and conclusions. Reflection is a slower, deeper, less structured form of thinking that is not aimed at providing quick answers. Thus, it is one good way to increase our self-awareness. Reflection can be particularly useful when we are trying to sort out the complex questions, feelings, problems and challenges we face from time to time.

Making Time to Reflect

Most of us have to make time for reflection or even push ourselves to do it. When our lives are busy we tend to focus mainly on solving short-term problems and doing what needs to get done day by day. Taking time to reflect can easily be pushed aside for another day.

In order to reflect, you need to be able to clear your mind of day-to-day concerns and tasks. People have various ways of doing this, often by engaging in peaceful activities: meditation or prayer, going for a long walk, doing yoga, attending a retreat, spending quiet time in nature, going for a long drive in the country, or even doing a physical activity that leaves your mind free for unstructured thought, like weeding a garden or riding a bicycle. Developing the skill of reflection takes time and regular practice. Scheduling a specific time for reflecting – even putting it into your weekly calendar is one way to help ensure you make time for reflection.

Journal Writing: A Way to Practice Reflection

Wilson Van Dusen, a clinical psychologist and pioneer of the concept of “inner space” (i.e., people’s inner world including dreams, mystical experiences and self-reflection), suggested that people are constantly generating clues to their own nature. He recommended regularly writing reflections in a journal as a way to harness these clues and thereby increase our self-knowledge.

There are a number of approaches to keeping a journal:

- Journals can be hand written or electronic.
- Some people set a time each day for writing down observations, significant thoughts, feelings and events from the day.
- Others write in their journal once a week or at regular intervals.
- Some people simply jot down brief notes about interesting ideas or experiences, whenever they think of them.

Journaling: Proven Health Benefits

Some research has shown that writing in a journal can actually improve both physical and mental health. One study (Cepeda, 2008) found that cancer patients who spent as little as 20 minutes a week writing about their emotional experiences of their illness reported less pain and higher levels of well-being. Another study (Smith, C.E., 2003) showed that journal writing reduced levels of depression.

Summing Up

Obviously writing in a journal is not just about reflecting, nor is it the only way to reflect. The point is - reflection is a valuable and productive use of our time, and journaling is one strategy that can help people develop the habit.

Take some time to learn what helps you reflect, whether it’s going for a long walk, soaking in a hot bath, listening to calming music, spending unstructured time with a close friend, or whatever else helps you relax and clear your mind. This kind of leisurely,

less goal-oriented thinking is an important way to improve our understanding of ourselves. That, in turn, can improve our feelings of self-regard.

Additional Information

For ideas about how to get started with journal writing:

<http://www.journal-writing.com/>
<http://www.createwritenow.com/>

Article in Best Health Magazine about journaling for health:

<http://www.besthealthmag.ca/embrace-life/wellness/how-journal-writing-can-make-you-healthier>

References

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