

Improving Self-Esteem: Planned Framework of Action Toward the Achievement of Established Goals

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Everybody gets tired of everything, including of oneself. At different moments of our lives we project ourselves verbally and nonverbally in a manner not really suitable. That's usually the way we feel at that particular moment. Let's do, for example, the following exercise. It's a one-minute exercise. Write down on a paper the names of three animals. Just write them down without giving any second thoughts to the matter.

Now read the name of the first animal. That is how people perceive us in our daily life. Take a look at the second name. That is how you see yourself. Please look at the third one. That's the real you. We usually laugh because of this exercise, although this is serious matter. Our self-esteem, that is, how we feel about ourselves, depends daily on our biological cycles plus the intervention of external situations. Our self-esteem comprises thoughts and feelings about what we are and how we behave. External situations reflect in positive or negative ways, usually depending on how we feel at those particular moments.

One of my co-workers serves as volunteer with the homeless in my hometown. These people in particular are there mainly because of drug problems. One day she was giving out food to some of these homeless people. She began talking to a young woman, a drug addict, and asked if she needed anything else. The young woman said:

- "Yes, I need something".
- "Well, what do you need?"

After struggling with her words for a while, she merely said:

- "I need a hug".

While my co-worker was hugging her, she began crying for quite a while. More than food or money, what she needed was an assurance of her humanity.

Many methods have been used throughout the centuries to deal with people interactions, coming out from the individual's perception of self and others. Philosophers have put it one way; psychologists, another way. Many other support personnel have also dealt with those situations. The term self-esteem has been recently used. The term "recently" really means the last thirty years or so from the twentieth century. Now the word self-esteem is found in many dictionaries with its respective translation to other languages.

Along with the term, new methods, or old ones with new faces, have been presented. One of the methods used to help people solve either healing situations or decision-making processes is bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy generally refers to the use of literature to help people cope with emotional problems, mental illness, or changes in their lives (Pardeck, 1994), or to produce affective change and promote personality growth and development (Lenkowsky, 1987; Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989). In other words, it is defined as:

- Healing through books
- Reading books to help solve and better understand personal problems
- Mutual sharing of literature to structure interaction between a facilitator and a participant

The idea of healing through books is not really a new one. It can be traced back far in history, from the days of the first libraries in Greece. (Bibliotherapy, 1982). Nonetheless, classical scholars, physicians, social workers, nurses, parents, teachers, librarians, psychologists and counselors, have interpreted the use of books for this purpose differently. There is even confusion in determining the dividing line between reading guidance and bibliotherapy. (Smith, 1989). Besides, the professional literature available on bibliotherapy is usually narrowed down to the viewpoint of the helping hand that wrote it and the field in which the person is an expert.

Not every practitioner possesses the personal qualifications to be a facilitator in the process. But those who are interested should possess personal stability, a genuine interest in working with others and the ability to empathize with others without moralizing, threatening, or commanding. (Bibliotherapy, 1982).

Activities in bibliotherapy are generally designed to:

- Develop an individual's self-concept
- Increase an individual's understanding of human behavior or motivations
- Provide information
- Foster an individual's honest self-appraisal
- Provide a way for a person to find interests outside of self
- Relieve emotional or mental pressure
- Stimulate discussion about problems
- Communicate new values and attitudes
- Create awareness that other people have similar problems
- Help an individual plan a constructive course of action to solve a problem
- Provide realistic solutions to problems (Abdullah, 2002; Aiex, 1993).

The process goes through four basic stages (Pardeck, 1993):

- Identification

The person must identify the books available for the particular situation. Even though any book may be suitable, careful attention should be given to its content.

- Selection

The appropriate books are selected. These must provide correct information about the problem while not imparting a false sense of hope.

- Presentation

The books are presented carefully and strategically so that the clients identify themselves with the book content.

- Follow-up

In the follow-up stage the clients share what they have gained. Catharsis is expressed verbally in discussion or writing, or nonverbal means such as art (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000), role-playing, creative problem solving, or self-selected options for the persons to pursue individually (Herbert & Kent, 2000).

Research

Riordan and Wilson (1989), in a review of the literature on the effects of bibliotherapy, concluded that the explosion of self-help programs during the 1980's has contributed to the rise in the use of this technique, in the form of popular books, such as ***What color is your parachute***, and others.

More recent approaches assume that the therapeutic process is actually a more interactive one. The reader becomes part of the unfolding intellectual and emotional process of the book, and in struggling to understand what is being communicated at the deepest level, the reader responds by making a positive modification in behavior or attitude. (Myers, 1998).

Recent ongoing research by this author deals with improving one's self-esteem as a mean for providing an applied behavior analysis that may help to bring about assertiveness. Through a book, ***Improve self-esteem in fourteen days***, the author gives space to the reader to gain an insightful look at one's behavior. The main goal is improving self-esteem. The second one is establishing the usefulness of the book to both self-coaching and group coaching towards becoming an assertive person.

Let me describe the content of the book in a brief manner. The book begins and ends with a self-esteem test. Both the client and the counselor get an overall impression of the person's self-esteem before reading the book and after reading it and applying the exercises.

1. Accepting ourselves as we are – This particular exercise deals with identifying how other people perceive us, being conscious of the fact so that we may modify the negative aspects of our personality while reinforcing the positive ones.

2. Positive self-image – Thru this chapter we learn how to feed our minds with positive thoughts that may empower us to visualize ourselves as persons meeting their goals and having success in life. A current example is brought: Soraya, a musical composer and singer, who had radical mastectomy, becomes a fine example for all of us as a person who overcomes all difficulties and succeeds in life.

"I remember waking up one morning and feeling a difference in the way I was breathing. It was earlier this year; a day in January," says Soraya. "I took a

breath and felt like I was okay. I was well." It's that feeling Soraya captures on her inspirational song "No One Else" ("*Por Ser Quien Soy*") that she wrote and produced exclusively for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, the nation's leading catalyst in the fight against the disease. "It's a song for survivors and for women who are going through this experience," explains Soraya. "I think a lot of survivors will understand that moment of feeling like you just took your first breath of recovery." In this sense, music has always played a vital role in Soraya's life.

3. Understanding our limitations – Every human being have frustrations in life. These frustrations usually limit our actions. This chapter helps the person to identify those daily activities and routines that lead to limitations.

4. Having faith in God – Everybody has problems. Nevertheless just worrying about the problems won't solve them. Give them to God and ask for his help. "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the doors will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the doors opened to him". (Matthew 7:7-8).

5. Smile your life away – No matter what troubles you, give everybody a happy face. It will help create a better relationship environment. A positive chain reaction will follow.

6. The value of friendship – If you want to eat tomatoes, you have two options: buy them or grow them. The second option gives you the opportunity to undergo a process of selecting the seed, preparing the ground, getting some manure, watering the plants, and so forth. The process you may enrich you. If you buy friendship, it will mean nothing. It will be a mere financial transaction. If you grow friendship, you have the opportunity to undergo a process of selecting the people, getting ready for interpersonal relations, watering the relation with warm-hearted thoughts and doings.

7. Personal inventory – The reader goes into realizing what's going with life. Four stages in life are analyzed: My Before, My Now, My Future and What I Lost. In the "My Before" column the person writes everything that has been acquired in life: academic achievement, successes, etc. These are the former earnings in life. In the "My Now" column the person writes whatever describes him or her at the present moment. These are the current earnings in life. In the "My Future" column the person writes about what he or she expects to change in the near future. In the last column the reader reviews what has been lost in his or

her professional or personal life, and then goes on to determine what specific actions may be taken to improve in that stage.

Let's say you write down two columns: Losses and Action to be taken. For example, you may write down:

Losses	Action to be taken
Many people have gone away from me.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will identify if they were here for a reason or for a season. 2. I will identify the real reasons for their leave and try to see what I can do to gain them back.

8. Getting out of depression – Twelve hints are provided by which you may get out of depression. No Prozac needed! You just need your free will and a faith in yourself. Just select whatever option suits you and do it! You will surely feel much better. Let me explain one or two of these options. I personally prefer to take a cold shower and then take a two-hour nap. Even though my problems and my depression will still be there, those two hours will help to recharge my emotional batteries. When I get up, since I feel more peaceful I will be able to think more clearly and solve whatever needs to be taken care of.

But let's say that we are at work and we cannot take a shower nor take a nap. In that case you use creative visualization. You take your usual break and go to a quiet place. Then you close your eyes. During the next fifteen minutes strongly imagine that you are in a special place, like a beach, countryside, a farm, in warm waters in the Caribbean... You feel yourself having a good time. The image becomes so real that you begin to take control over your life at that particular moment.

9. Our role in life's drama – We are actors and actresses in the theater of life. We all play leading roles. But our roles may interfere with other people's roles. To create a positive atmosphere some exercises are suggested. When answering a phone, for example, draw a big smile on your face and then greet the person. The person on the other side of the line will feel a sensation of acceptance and a better communication may be established.

Establish a family relation in your workplace. Ask your workmates how they feel. Learn about their birthdays and congratulate them. These exercises and

many others will create a chain of positive effects and will help to foster a better world to live in.

10. Our physical assets – An evaluation of both physical assets and internal values in order to gain awareness of our interior beauty, that which comes from the spiritual self. I remember one anecdote dating back to 1967. On that occasion I had to address a group of people on God knows what subject!!! All of a sudden I felt isolated in front of this group, trembling from head to toes, shaking my heart out, while sweating like an ocean. After I finished, a friend of mine, who is now a lawyer, went to the microphone and said:

- "Well, fellows, let's review what Cirilo said.

He had to re-lecture because nobody had understood what I said. Even now I cannot remember the subject. I felt so bad that I decided to change. After an initial evaluation I began a reorientation in my life, which is still part of my daily routine.

11. Accepting one's own work – Like it or not, everybody has to deal with a daily job. A questionnaire leads to conclude whether you are satisfied with your work, or whether you are an invisible or apathetic figure.

12. Assertive behavior – Affirming our needs, thoughts and feelings without manipulating others or letting others manipulate us. After rounding up the main characteristics of an assertive person, a questionnaire is provided to verify our assertiveness and ways to improve in that respect.

13. Values in daily life – What are your real values? Are you honest, sincere, and trustable? Reinforcing old values within us and acquiring new ones is a necessary task for everybody on a never-ending basis.

14. I can – Yo puedo – After reading the rest of the book, done the exercises and determining your values and skills, this particular chapter empowers the reader to adopt a position of "I can". The mind is a powerful tool. What you see in your mind will eventually be true in your life. So, creating an image of power, of us having success, may trigger positive change within ourselves.

Liz Murray's life is a stunning example of triumph over adversity. As the child of cocaine-addicted parents in the Bronx, her life was bitterly grim. There was never food in the house, everything was filthy, drugs were everywhere, and the welfare checks were spent before they arrived. By age 15, Murray's mom had died

and she was homeless – living on the streets, riding the subway all night, and eating from dumpsters. Amidst this pain, she always imagined her life could be better.

- “I started to grasp the value of the lessons learned while living on the streets. I knew after overcoming those obstacles that next to nothing could hold me down.”

Determined to take charge of her life, Murray finished high school in just two years; while camping out in NYC parks and subway stations and went on to earn a scholarship to attend Harvard University. She is now enrolled at Columbia University where the *New York Times* is sponsoring her enrollment.

Murray’s innocently honest delivery takes audiences on a very personal journey where she achieves the improbable. Author of the poignant memoir ***Breaking Night***, her life story was also documented in the Lifetime movie ***Homeless to Harvard*** starring Thora Birch.

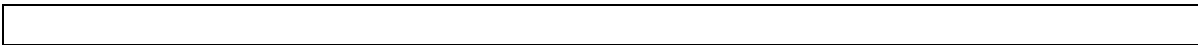
On each chapter you will also find a biblical reading related to the subject.

At the end of the book you will find a checklist.

Chapter	Before reading	After reading
Self-esteem		

	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
1. Accepting ourselves as we are		
What may I do to improve in this area?		

	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
2. Positive self-image		
What may I do to improve in this area?		



A fellow student is conducting a research on self-esteem and assertiveness in their relationship to drug addict behavior. Will this particular book be an useful tool in bringing about an applied behavior analysis in them towards developing a healthy self-esteem and assertiveness that might help them in their in their fight against drug addiction?

The organization selected for the research is the Hogar CREA. CREA means Comunidad Re-Educadora de Adictos. The translation in English is Home Community for the Reeducation of Addicts. José Juan García, a former drug addict whose rehabilitation has set an excellent example that "If you want to do something, you can do it", founded it on May 20, 1968. Today the organization houses six thousand people in eighty-five centers in Puerto Rico. It has widespread all over America in places like Venezuela, Panama, Dominican Republic, Chile and the United States, among others.

A stratified sample will be selected right after she gets all the necessary permissions from both the university and the organization. The eighty-five centers are grouped into eleven districts. People will be selected at random for both the experimental group and the control one. The directors of each district will take the selected ones to the regional offices where the researcher will meet them.

The procedure will be as follows. People in both groups will be given two pre-tests and two post-tests. The tests that will be employed are:

- ❑ Self-Esteem: Self-Help (Cirilo Toro Vargas, 1994)
- ❑ The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Spencer A. Rathus, 1973)

The control group will be instructed about the research, without mentioning the book whatsoever. The experimental group will receive a draft copy of the book ***Improve your self-esteem in fourteen days*** plus verbal and written instructions on how to read it and do the exercises. The objective of the research is determining the usefulness of this type of books in the applied behavior analysis of this particular population. Other population segments are being evaluated for possible research in the near future.

Remember that you may take a horse to the river, but you may not force it to drink water. Again, if a donkey goes on a trip, he won't return as a horse. Even though the book has been written to be read in fourteen days there is no

guarantee whatsoever that the person will read it and follow through all the exercises. On the other hand, it doesn't imply either that it is to be read only once. The whole idea is that a process is initiated whereby the person, the counselor or both the person and the counselor may undertake an evaluation. At this particular moment motivation by the counselor or other support personnel is essential as part of the process. That is what we call coaching.

After finishing those initial fourteen days, a renovation process has to be undertaken in order to be aware of the need for improving self-esteem, being more assertive and undergo a positive applied behavior analysis. The specific goals set forth in the book are:

1. Accepting ourselves just the way we are.
2. Developing a positive self-image.
3. Regaining faith in God.
4. Showing happiness no matter what.
5. Growing a strong sense of friendship.
6. Self-analysis of our life so far.
7. Getting out of depression.
8. Playing a positive leading role in our life.
9. Being assertive.
10. Identifying and reinforcing our values.
11. Accepting the fact that "I can".
12. Developing a checklist for personal follow-up of specific actions for achieving those goals.

A psychology student at our university recently sent a curious email on human behavior. She was at the library working on a paper for a class, when a classmate approached and asked her.

- "What do you see in this photo?"

Looking at a photo of a well-known singer and an also well-known tennis player, she answered:

- "Well, obviously one who thinks he is an actor and a model tennis player in a hypocrisy called romance".

- "Well" - he said - that's a good observation. What I say is the following: she is a lady very confident of the relation. But he completely doubts her".

She nodded out of curiosity and asked:

- "But then, why do human beings are so stubborn on things they should not insist? Why, for example, do we get in love with someone who doesn't suit us"

He smiled and answered:

"Thousands of people ask the same question over and over. Many times we neither see a person who pays attention to us, nor cares about us or simply his or her heart is somewhere else. That is the person that usually gets our attention. On the contrary, we may have a person full of attentions toward us, really caring about us, who thinks of us every day. Now in this case, we don't really care about this person. Human beings are rather masochist, liking some uncertainty, always knowing that along the line we are going to suffer. If we don't suffer, we get bored".

In certain occasions when we say good-bye in Puerto Rico, we usually say, "Be nice". Almost always the other person jokingly replies, "If I am nice, I won't have a good time. I'll be bored".

This particular student, after finishing this talk, went on to ask other person's opinions about this matter and came with the four most used reasons:

1. We insist on people that do not suit us because unconsciously we feel that the person has a need to be filled in. If the person has other sources for filling these needs in, he or she will usually turn us down. Or the person may take advantage of the moment with us and later on kick us out.

2. We are drawn towards whatever is impossible or difficult to attain. What's easy to attain does not represent a challenge.

3. Since we are nonconformists, not often we value what doesn't hurt us. We pay more attention to anything that hurts us.

4. We quickly take decisions without considering what we really need, but rather how the other person may make me happy.

Two people may watch one same thing, and see totally different things.

Many people have approached self-esteem in quite different ways. You are invited to use this particular book or any other that you find appropriate for

improving either your self-esteem or that of your clients in counseling. Suggestions are welcome, though, since they may help to improve the product.

Have a nice day!

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