

Imagine a laundry detergent commercial with a woman holding a box of powder and saying, “I know you’re busy, and you’re probably doing just fine with the detergent you’re already using, but if you have a moment and would like to try a new detergent, perhaps you could try this one.” If the company doesn’t *believe* in their detergent and consider it an excellent use of anyone’s resources, no one else will either.

Ask yourself this simple question: “Can I expect other people to believe in something I don’t believe in myself?” There’s an even greater philosophical question: if you don’t trust what you have to offer, wouldn’t it be unkind to ask others to trust it? Wouldn’t that be asking them to build their castles on shifting sand?

ARE YOU QUALIFIED TO SELECT THE WINNER?

I’m sure you’ve heard the old expression “To love others you must first love yourself.” Why is this true? If you don’t love yourself, how will you value the love you have to give? After all, it comes from a person you don’t love, so what could it be worth? And why would you want to give away something you don’t value? That would be like saying to a friend, “Hey, I really don’t like this shirt. It’s a miserable excuse for upper-body clothing. Here, you have it.”

There is a corollary that strikes to the root of violence and conflict in our society: if you don’t value yourself, neither will you value anyone else. How can something that’s worthless determine the worth of something else? In what contest does a judge with no value select the winner? He wouldn’t have the inner wherewithal to perform the task since he has no personal experience with finding value. The prerequisite for the job of valuing another person is to value yourself.

Self-love is the gateway to other-love because love is actualized in only one way—giving—and you can’t give away something you don’t

have. If you want to give a box of chocolates to someone you admire, you first have to be the proud owner of a box of chocolates. If you don't have any chocolates, you're plumb out of luck—and so is she. If loving others, building relationships, creating a family, or any measure of personal or professional success is high on your list of priorities, you simply must learn how to love yourself. This is the most important ingredient for building the high-quality, premium foundation that is necessary to bring anything you desire into your life.

Unfortunately, there's another side of the lack-of-self-love equation: if you don't feel worthy of love, you question and devalue it when it's given to you. When someone offers you that same box of chocolates, you ask yourself, "Why is she being so kind to me? She must want something"—or, even worse, you question the gift itself. You say, "There must be something wrong with these chocolates. They must be spoiled or of poor quality. Surely if they were good chocolates she wouldn't be giving them to *me*."

When someone agrees to meet with you, the meeting becomes the box of chocolates. You say, "She must be meeting me out of obligation," or "She must be tired of working and need a break, and no one else is around." Because you don't value yourself, you assume there must be a *reason* she wants to spend time with you since, after all, Time with You is in the liability rather than asset column of her life.

Trust me on this one. I know because I've been there. I spent the first half of my life second-guessing others because I couldn't believe they actually enjoyed being around me. Why? Because I didn't enjoy being around myself. I couldn't detect on the outside what I wasn't familiar with on the inside—no matter what the evidence objectively stated. Just as you only hate in others what's already inside you, the same is true for love.

What about you? In the workplace, does your self-doubt lead you to distrust your instincts and let opportunities to speak up and suggest

important changes pass you by? Do you refuse to allow your creativity, imagination, and brilliance to surface for others to experience because you don't believe in what you have inside? In your personal relationships, do you push others away by questioning their motives since, after all, they can't genuinely love or care about you? Until you accept love from yourself, you won't accept it from others.

The comedian Groucho Marx once said, "I would never join any club that would have me as a member." If you want to form a special society of people who truly love you and want to make you a priority in their lives, you have to become the first card-carrying member. Without self-love, hoping for other-love is fruitless. Why? Because the only way to lead is from the front, by example. Otherwise you're expecting others to do what you're unwilling to do yourself.

DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS

I couldn't hold down food, and had lost over thirty pounds. I kept asking myself, "What am I doing here in Africa?" My mind flashed back to when I was twenty and traveled alone outside the U.S. for the first time. I spent a week in a decrepit budget hotel room in Portugal with a stomach flu so incapacitating I couldn't even lean up in bed without running to the toilet. I stared at the ceiling hour after miserable hour, wondering if I had what it takes to travel on my own.

Shakespeare refers to doubts as "traitors." Worse still, they're traitors that regenerate themselves. Like the government agents in the film *Men in Black*, your doubts effortlessly replace each other, one after the other, until you realize that trying to conquer them is a worthless endeavor. Just as faith in yourself generates more faith, doubting yourself generates more doubt. First you question why you can't get a date. Within