CHAPTER 3
BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

This chapter focuses on two of the biggest building blocks for more effective human relations: the nature and development of self-esteem and self-confidence.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

I. THE MEANING OF SELF-ESTEEM, ITS DEVELOPMENT AND CONSEQUENCES
Understanding the self is important. A particularly important role is played by self-esteem, the overall evaluation people make about themselves whether positive or negative. Our self-concept is what we think about ourselves whereas self-esteem is what we feel about ourselves.

A. How Self-Esteem Develops
Self-esteem develops and evolves throughout our lives based on interactions with people, events, and things. Early-life experiences have a major impact on self-esteem. People who were encouraged to feel good about themselves and their accomplishments by others are more likely to enjoy high self-esteem. Praise alone does not build self-esteem. Instead, it results from accomplishing worthwhile activities, and then feeling proud of these accomplishments. To develop self-esteem people need to improve their skills for dealing with the world.

A study with Dutch college students found that self-esteem was related to procedural fairness and leadership that encourages self-rewards. Fair procedures had a stronger impact on self-esteem when the leader encourages self-rewards.

B. The Consequences of High Self-Esteem
High self-esteem has many positive consequences for people, as well as a few potential negative ones, as outlined in Table 4-1. In contrast, people with low self-esteem are likely to have less career success, poorer mental health, and profit less from feedback.

1. **Career Success.** People with positive self-esteem understand their
competence and worth, and have a positive perception of their ability to cope with problems and adversity. The core self-evaluations include self-esteem. A twenty-five-year study with 12,000 participants found that people with higher core self-evaluations tended to perform better in their jobs, and have much more career success that people with lower core self-evaluations. Later research suggests that people with high core self-evaluations are more likely to have high job performance when they combine positive attitudes toward the self with a concern for the welfare of others.

2. **Organizational Prosperity.** Companies gain the edge when, in addition to having and educated workforce, employees have high self-esteem, as shown by such behaviors as (a) being creative and innovative, (b) taking personal responsibilities for problems, and (c) taking the initiative to solve problems.

3. **Good Mental Health.** A major consequence of high self-esteem is good mental health. People with high self-esteem feel good about themselves and have a positive outlook on life. Positive self-esteem also contributes to good mental health because it helps us ward off being troubled by feelings of jealousy, and acting aggressively toward others because of our jealousy.

4. **Profiting from Feedback.** Although people with high self-esteem can readily shrug off underserved insults, they still profit from negative feedback.

5. **Serves as a Guide for Regulating Social Relationships.** Self-esteem provides a rise and fall of self-esteem faring during interaction with others.

6. **Potential Negative Consequences.** Both high and low self-esteem can have some negative consequences, as follows: Development of narcissism when self-esteem is too high; envying too many people when self-esteem is low; poor romantic relationships with self-esteem is low. A general point about the consequences of self-esteem is that our own reference group has the biggest impact on self-esteem.
II. ENHANCING SELF-ESTEEM

Following are five approaches to enhancing self-esteem that relate to how self-esteem develops. Each of these approaches has a skill component, such as learning to avoid situations that make you feel incompetent.

A. Attain Legitimate Accomplishments
To repeat, accomplishing worthwhile activities is a major contributor to self-esteem in both children and adults. To be real, self-esteem must be based on something true. Social science research suggests this sequence of events: Person establishes a goal; person pursues the goal; person achieves the goal; person develops esteem-like feelings. [Ask class members what life experiences have boosted their self-esteem.]

B. Be Aware of Personal Strengths
Developing an appreciation of strengths and accomplishments can improve self-esteem. A good starting point is for a person to list his or her strengths and accomplishments on a word processing document or paper. A useful technique is to discuss strengths in a small group, with each member receiving a turn.

C. Rebut the Inner Critic
Rebut the voice inside you that sends negative messages about your capabilities.
Rebutting critical statements made about you might also be considered another way of appreciating your strengths.

D. Practice Self-Nurturing
Treat yourself as a worthwhile person. Nurture and care for yourself in ways that show how valuable, competent, deserving and lovable you really are. One example is to administer self-rewards for a job well done. Another is taking care of yourself mentally and physically.

E. Minimizing Setting and Interactions that Detract from Your Feelings of Competence
Minimizing exposure to situations in which you do not feel at your best can lead to fewer feelings of incompetence. Yet it is good for self-esteem to conquer situations in which you feel challenged.

F. Get Help from Others
Self-esteem is strongly shaped by how others perceive us so getting help from others is a major step a person can take to improve his or her self-esteem. Asking for support from friends can include such basic steps as: (1) Ask friends to tell you what they like about you or what they think that you do well. (2) Ask for a hug. Getting help from teachers and other helpers can include: (1) Ask professors or tutors for help
with work you find to be challenging. (2) Take classes or attempt new activities to increase your self-confidence in weak areas.

Another way of getting help from others is to talk and socialize frequently with people who can boost your self-esteem. People who can raise your self-esteem are usually those with high self-esteem themselves. The same people will give you more honest feedback. Weak people may flatter you, but not offer the honest feedback you need to build self-esteem.

G. Model the Behavior of People with High Self-Esteem
Observe the way people who you believe to have high self-esteem stand, walk, speak, and act. Choose your models of high self-esteem from people you know personally, as well as celebrities you might watch on television and interview shows.

H. Create a High Self-Esteem Living Space
A panel of mental health specialists recommends that to enhance your self-esteem you should make your living space one that honors the person you are. Make the space comfortable and attractive for you. Your living space is part of your self-image.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY
Self-confidence is almost the equivalent of self-esteem. Self-efficacy is confidence in your ability to carry out a specific task, in contrast to generalized self-confidence. Self-efficacy relates to job performance, and self-confidence is associated with leadership.

Feelings of self-confidence stem from five sources of information: (1) actual experience, (2) the experience of others, or modeling, (3) social comparison, (4) social persuasion, the process of convincing another person, and (5) emotional arousal including managing emotions.

IV. TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE
Self-confidence is generally achieved by succeeding in a variety of situations. However, some people who seem to succeed at everything still have lingering self-doubt. Following are seven specific strategies and tactics for building self-esteem.

A. Develop a Solid Knowledge Base
Solving problems from a base of facts helps project a confident image. Formal education is very important, and day-by-day absorption of career-related information is also important.

B. Use Positive Self-Talk
To appear self-confident, use positive self-talk, or saying positive things about
yourself. The first step is to objectively state the incident that is casting doubt about self-worth. Positive self-talk is useful for getting people past difficult times. Positive self-talk is included in self-compassion, or treating yourself kindly. Research suggests that self-compassionate people are happier.

C. Avoid Negative Self-Talk
Minimize negative comments about yourself to bolster self-confidence. For example, do not say “I may be stupid but…” or “Nobody asked my opinion.”

D. Practice Public Speaking
Dale Carnegie had it right. If you can stand in front of an audience, even during a small meeting, and deliver your thoughts effectively you will gain in self-confidence.

E. Use Positive Visual Imagery
To use positive visual imagery, or picturing a positive outcome in your mind. Imagine yourself performing well in an upcoming situation that represents a challenge.

F. Set High Expectations for Yourself (the Galatea Effect)
Setting high expectations and succeeding is likely to boost self-confidence. The Galatea effect is a type of self-fulfilling prophecy in which high expectations lead to high performance. You expect to win, so you do.

G. Develop the Explanatory Style of Optimists
Explaining events in an optimistic way can help preserve self-confidence and self-esteem. When experiencing trouble, optimists tend to explain the problems to themselves as temporary.

H. Strive for Peak Performance
A key strategy for projecting self-confidence is to display peak performance, or exceptional accomplishment on a given task. Peak performance requires total focus on the task at hand, leading to being mentally calm and physically at ease.

I. Bounce Back from Setbacks and Embarrassments
Resilience is a major contributor to personal effectiveness. Overcoming setbacks builds self-confidence. An effective self-confidence builder is to convince yourself that you can conquer adversity such as setbacks and embarrassments.
1. *Get past the emotional turmoil.* You must accept the reality of your problem, avoid panicking, and get help from your support network.

2. *Find a creative solution to your problem.* An inescapable part of planning a comeback is to solve your problem, often searching for a creative solution.
   A useful approach to finding a creative solution to your problem is to use response-oriented thinking that focuses on finding answers. An example: “What can I do to begin addressing the problem now?”

3. *Strive to develop positive psychological capital.* A comprehensive way of becoming more self-confident is to develop **positive psychological capital,** a positive state of development in which you have hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW**

1. Why does holding an important job contribute to one’s self-esteem?

   Self-esteem is shaped in part by how we are perceived by others. In many cultures, people tend to perceive you more positively when you hold an important job. These positive perceptions in turn enhance the person’s self-esteem.

2. A study by economists indicated that workers with higher levels of self-esteem tended to be more productive. What would be an explanation of this finding?

   The workers with high self-esteem would take more pride in their work, thereby doing a better job leading to higher productivity. Organizational productivity, in turn, improves based on a higher number of individual workers being productive.

3. Why are people with high self-esteem to the point of being a narcissist often disliked by many other people?

   The problem is that narcissists consistently do several things that many people find annoying. Narcissists talk so much about themselves, often to the exclusion of listening to other people. Narcissists relate most conversations back to themselves. Another key problem is that narcissists have limited empathy for others which creates poor interpersonal relationships.
4. The criticism is often heard that the American emphasis on building the self-esteem of children has resulted in a generation of young adults who expect to be strongly praised by their bosses, no matter that they accomplish. What is your opinion of this criticism?

Although this stereotype of younger workers might be true of the average or typical young worker, similar to most group stereotypes it may be just slightly more than 50 percent true. One reason for the exception is that not all parents, other family members, teachers, and coaches hand out indiscriminate praise. As a result, these children would not be expecting so much undeserved praise.

5. Why is self-confidence considered to be so important for being an effective leader?

Self-confidence is fundamental for leadership for a variety of reasons. First, it takes courage and self-confidence to handle leadership responsibilities. Second, if the leader appears self-confident, more people will be willing to “follow the leader.” Third, group members who are not highly self-confident prefer to be led by someone who is self-confident.

6. What positive self-talk can you use after you have failed on a major assignment?

Creating positive self-talk after failing a major assignment is a challenge. Simple rationalization is not good enough. Some possibilities of positive self-talk here are (a) “I’ve learned a lot from this setback, so I will know how to prepare better next time” (b) “Now that I have hit bottom, I’m headed up”, and (c) “I am glad that I have identified where I need to improve.”

7. In what way does your program of studies contribute to building your self-confidence and self-esteem?

A self-esteem and self-confidence booster for many students is that they perceive their program of studies as helping them develop or enhance valuable skills. Having these skills will help them succeed in a career, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and self-esteem.
8. Many pharmaceutical firms actively recruit cheerleaders as sales representatives to call on doctors to recommend their brand of prescription drugs. The firms in question say that cheerleaders make good sales reps because they are so self-confident. What is your opinion on this controversial issue?

An argument against believing that cheerleaders as a group are self-confident is that the self-confidence is not general self-confidence but self-efficacy about being athletic and cheerful. This self-efficacy might not spill over to having self-efficacy about dealing with pharmaceuticals. The positive argument is that you have to be self-confident to be a cheerleader, and you also have to be self-confident to be a pharmaceutical sales rep. Many students may be aware that recruiting cheerleaders is sometimes interpreted as discrimination against candidates who do not resemble the stereotype of a cheerleader. There is at least one employment agency that specializes in matching companies with cheerleaders.

9. What is it about success in public speaking that tends to boost the self-confidence of the public speaker?

Public speaking is widely perceived to be a feared activity, so if a person succeeds at public speaking her or she will experience the surge in self-confidence that stems from performing well in an extremely demanding task. Another factor is that after having done a good job at public speaking, members of the audience will clap, and later shake hands with the speaker. Both are self-confidence builders.

10. Interview a person whom you perceive to have a successful career. Ask that person to describe how he or she developed high self-esteem. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class.

We can anticipate a good learning experience for students who take this assignment seriously. Many people with successful careers will probably explain that parents, teachers, and bosses helped them develop self-esteem through encouragement. And some of the more perceptive people interviewed will describe how their early-life accomplishments boosted their self-esteem.

ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

*High Self-Esteem Brandy*
The case about Brandy illustrates how flaunting self-esteem and self-confidence can result in a negative reaction from others. A personal brand may seem like a narcissistic endeavor yet a brand can be promoted with sensitivity and tact.

1. How effectively is Brandy Barclay presenting herself as a brand (or a unique individual)?

   As mentioned in the above comment, Brandy is going too far in presenting herself in a positive, confident manner. She is flaunting her brand to the point of appearing narcissistic. Brandy’s self-centeredness appears to be annoying the interviewer.

2. What suggestions can you offer Barclay for presenting herself as a strong individual more effectively?

   Barclay might focus more on what she can do for the company in terms of the position under consideration. She might talk about her past experience and talents would be an asset in the administrative assistant position. She is placing too much emphasis on how she wants to move forward in her career.

3. To what extent do you think that Brandy’s self-esteem has reached the point of narcissism?

   It appears that Brandy’s high self-esteem has reached the point of narcissism. She has become self-absorbed, as in her statement, “I’m a whiz at Microsoft Office Suite, and I’m sweet with people. Kind of catchy, don’t you think?” Brandy could also be showing low empathy because she does not recognize the interviewer’s need to focus on the position under consideration.

Anthony Needs a Boost

This case illustrates a familiar scenario. Anthony is taking a hit to his self-confidence because of setbacks in work and personal life.

1. To what extent is Anthony facing a self-confidence problem?

   Anthony gives strong evidence that he is facing a self-confidence problems as exemplified by his statements, “I’m losing my mojo” and “I’m losing faith in my abilities.”
2. What do you do to recommend that Anthony do to re-gain his self-confidence.

   Anthony has been hit hard lately. His best hope for re-gaining his self-confidence is to experience a few small victories, such as making a modest sale, driving safely, and finding somebody to date even if she is not a total replacement for his fiancé. A little positive self-talk would also be helpful.

3. How might Anthony’s manager be able to help Anthony boost his self-confidence?

   If possible, the manager should give Anthony a moderately difficult assignment in which he is most likely to succeed, and then discussing the good results with Anthony. A comparable approach is to praise Anthony on his next positive result, such as booking an order. The general point is that the manager should facilitate Anthony experiencing a few small wins in order to boost his self-confidence.