



## **CHANGE YOUR PICTURE, CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

What does your picture look like? In other words, how do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as someone who can handle any challenge life throws your way? Or do you see a victim? Do you see yourself as someone who is “in the way” or someone who is “on the way”?

Whatever you see, just know that the picture we have of ourselves affects every aspect of our lives – our level of self-esteem and confidence, our attitude, our performance, our career choices, our choice of friends, and the amount of risk we are willing to take. Our mental picture impacts virtually everything we do, or will ever attempt to do. It is not other people, circumstances or events that keep us from reaching our full potential. It is the mental picture we carry around with us each and every day. When we change that picture, we change our lives.

The picture or image we have of ourselves is largely developed during childhood. When we were born, we literally had a clean slate. Over the years, our picture was shaped through experiences with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and sometimes the media. If a negative image resulted from those early childhood experiences, then we must transform or change the picture.

Changing the picture is much like eradicating weeds. You must start at the root. This means thoroughly examining those early childhood experiences. You examine those childhood experiences not to play the blame game but to better understand what helped to influence and shape our lives. Some people, too many, in fact play the blame game. Take Vivian, for example. She is a well educated professional who has had great success in business and limited success with relationships. She consistently finds herself in drama-filled, disempowering relationships. While she has spent numerous hours examining her early childhood experiences and clearly recognizes that she has self-esteem issues, she still blames the lack of parental love and affection and the fact that her home was always filled with drama on her lack of success with the opposite sex. While this may have impacted her life, it does not define it. At some point she needs to declare, “*My past does not determine my future.*” And, move on.

Life has a lot of different intricacies and often throws some mean curves, so it may take some hard work on your part to change your picture. But, it can be done. Some ways to get started are:

- **Get to know yourself.** You must get to know the real you; the *you* who is separate and apart from what you do; the you who is defined not by labels describing your physical characteristics, age, or career but by who you are inside. In order to get to know the real you, sit quietly and list all of your positive qualities. Focus only on the positives. Too often, we feel the urge to throw in a few negatives. Do not include even one negative on this list. If you can't find a lot of positive attributes, then ask your closest friend or a family member what they like most about you. If they can't think of anything good to say, ask them to lie. Getting to know yourself helps you to get in touch with your feelings and it helps you have a greater appreciation of yourself.
- **Listen to the inner voice and train that voice to always be positive.** The inner voice can think and say whatever it is trained to say. Those thought processes are habits, built from the feedback of parents, friends, and self. The initial step in changing our self-image is to change our inner conversations. For example, instead of saying "I can't do this" say, "I don't know how to do this but I can learn." Changing your inner voice allows you to tell right from wrong, make the right decisions in your life, and solve problems more easily.  
Mahatma Gandhi stated that "*A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.*"
- **Practice self-nurturing.** Taking care of yourself seems to fly in the face of childhood lessons of modesty and humility. But taking care of yourself and holding yourself in high self-regard allows you to give much more freely of yourself to others. People who have a difficult time nurturing themselves, usually have low self-esteem and it shows in their interactions with other people. Exercise is a good first step in self-nurturing. It is a proven benefit for both physical and mental health.
- **Act the way you want people to see you.** Don't be limited by your internal image, step outside of it and break free, it doesn't have to control you or keep you down. Acting differently will change how others see you and will also help to change your own attitude towards yourself and your abilities.
- **Care about the happiness of others by offering help and encouragement.** Caring about others and yourself is an implication of a high self-image. When you care about and reach out to other people, it portrays a sense of purpose in life. This, in turn, builds not only a stronger more positive image. It also builds self-esteem.

- **Leave past mistakes behind and focus on successes.** "Should have, could have, would have ..." Try not to constantly second guess yourself, criticize yourself for what you "should" have done better, or expect too much from yourself. Don't put standards on yourself that you wouldn't expect from others. It's great to want to do well, but expecting yourself to be perfect (which is impossible) and then punishing yourself when you fail is a vicious cycle. Using expressions like "I should have" is just a way of punishing yourself after the fact. Instead you should learn from your mistakes. The mistakes you made will encourage you to try harder to achieve a better product, or come up with a more logical solution.
- **Get help from others.** Surround yourself with positive people and learn from them. These individuals can give you that extra little push you might need to strive harder. Relying on professionals and friends helps you get your power back.

The picture we have of ourselves affects every aspect of our lives. Changing your picture starts from within. Although developing a positive self-image seems easy, is not an instantaneous thing. It takes systematic practice. Working on improving a small amount each day can make all the difference.

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