

Why It's So Hard to Love Yourself and How It Can Change Your Life

February 7, 2016 by Allison Fallon

Loving myself has not always been something on my radar. In fact, if you would have asked me five years ago, I would have told you that the idea of “loving myself” seemed sort of secondary to the really important things in life—you know, like loving other people. The whole thing seemed a little too self-focused for me.

But then one day I was having a conversation with a friend who is a huge “Love Yourself!” advocate. She was asking me how things were going and I was telling her about a few different frustrating circumstances in my life. I mentioned the job where I was working and how I felt like I was always being taken advantage of by my boss. I told her about the relationship I was in and how I felt like I was constantly being criticized and even **manipulated**. It seems like nothing I ever did was good enough.



I admitted that I felt under-appreciated for my contributions or hard work. My tendency was to support, to say “yes,” to go with the flow, to concede my point first, to avoid arguing, and at the end of the day, I felt like so many of my friends and significant others and employers took advantage of that.

If I was being really honest, I told her, I often felt overlooked, **overburdened**, and like I never really got what I wanted.

What *do* you want? She asked.

I stood there and looked at her for a few minutes with that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. The truth was I didn't even know.

It wasn't until later that I would learn this is really common experience for people—especially women—who work their entire lives to be accepted and considered desirable by others but who have no idea who they truly are or what matters to them. The concept of loving themselves is foreign, not just because they have misunderstood what it means, but also because they don't even know who their “selves” really are.

*“We try to appear attractive, nice, good, valid, legitimate or worthy to someone else instead of discovering what we actually feel and want for ourselves. In this kind of conscious or unconscious arrangement, other people are expected to provide our own feelings over power, worth, or vitality at the expense of our authentic development.” —Polly Young-Eisendrath, **Women & Desire***

While it might feel or seem like we're being “selfless” by focusing on others and forgetting about ourselves, the truth is this is not selfless at all. In fact, a person who forfeits her sense of self ends up relying on others inordinately to support her and validate her and make her feel okay.

Loving ourselves is more important than we ever realized.

That's what I learned as I sat there talking to my friend. After my rant, she didn't tell me I should quit my job or even that I should end certain friendships or leave my relationship. In fact, she put the ball completely in my court. She told me:

“You need to raise your opinion of yourself. If you don't love yourself,” she said, “you'll have a hard time finding or experiencing love from others.”

I looked at her skeptically.

“And you won’t be able to truly love anyone until you’re able to love yourself.”

To be honest, I wasn’t sure I believed her. But I was also desperate. I felt like a hollow, emptied out shell of a human being and I needed to be filled up. So I told her I would give this “raising my opinion of myself” a try and I asked her what I should do next. She referred me to a few books.

Here’s what she recommended:

- *The Power Is Within You* by Louise Hay
- *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise Hay
- *You Can Heal Your Body* by Louise Hay
- *The Confidence Code* by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman
- *Women and Desire* by Polly Young-Eisendrath
- *Lovability* by Dr. Robert Holden

Over the course of the next few months, as I read these books and developed a curiosity about what it would look like to raise my opinion of myself and learn how to cultivate self-love, I began to practice some of the tactics I learned. I wasn’t sure they would make a difference.

As it turns out, love is an incredibly powerful force in this world and we have endless supplies of it to give, as long as we can learn to first accept the love that’s freely and readily available to us.

Here are just a few ways my life changed as I learned to love myself.

1. Your physical health improves

If you haven’t ever considered the connection between your mind and your body before, it can sound a little bit strange. But think about this: what happens to you when you feel fear? Your hair stands up on the back of your neck, you may get goosebumps, your heart-rate increases. This is the mind-body connection.

Your physical body responds to an emotional state you experience. It’s really as simple as that.

A great book that unpacks the mind-body connection is called *You Can Heal Your Body* by Louise Hay. In the book, she discusses what a powerful impact love (or a lack of love) can have on our physical health. She attributes a lack of self-love to ailments all the way from headaches to diabetes to back pain.

To be clear, she is not saying that any of the diseases or ailments we experience in our body are cured *simply* by love. Nothing is that simple.

She merely says there is a strong connection, which is hard to deny.

I've written before about the incredible impact changing my own self-talk had on my physical body. But for the sake of this article, I have one simple assignment for you. Think about a physical ailment you are experiencing regularly. Do you have digestive problems? Constant back pain? Hormone imbalance? Acne? What might these physical ailments be trying to tell you? If you had to write yourself a letter from the pain or problem you're experiencing, what would the letter say? Would it ask you to slow down? To pay attention? To be kinder to yourself?

When we are kind to our bodies, they are kind to us.

2. Your relationships improve

Recently I was on a business trip and texting with a friend. She and I had talked about the idea of meeting up in the city where I was staying when I was finished with my work. As we texted back and forth solidifying plans, I told her I would be done by around 5:00 on Friday and she could come whenever. But as I sat there in my hotel room, exhausted from that day of work and staring down another long one, a thought came over my brain. It went like this:

Why do you keep doing this to yourself?

To me, the thought meant: why do you keep pushing yourself so hard? You're exhausted. You need rest. You still have to drive home. Of course you want to see your friend, but you know yourself. You are going to need some downtime or you aren't going to be very useful to yourself or anyone else next week.

So I reluctantly typed out a text back to my friend that said, “actually, can we reschedule? I know we talked about this, and it was a plan, but I’m just so exhausted and I feel like I’m on the verge of getting sick.” I felt badly for changing plans. But her response back made me feel so loved. She said, “are you kidding? Thank you for telling me the truth! No need to apologize. I get it.”

My love for myself in that moment—loving myself enough to say, “hey, I’m too tired for this”—set me up to receive her love and friendship, which came in the form of, “no worries!”

Without my love for myself, I never would have experienced that love from her. The good and also hard truth about loving yourself enough to take good care of yourself is that your relationships will start to shift. Some of them will end.

Certain people, as you begin to respect yourself, will raise their opinions of you as you raise your opinion of yourself. Others will not be interested in respecting you in that way and those relationships will come to a close.

As painful as that can be, you can feel thankful that the only relationships in your life will be with people who respect you and care for you and wish you well.

3. New career opportunities open up for you

For years, I worked jobs I hated, for bosses who didn’t respect me, because I didn’t believe there was anything better out there. Actually, the truth was, I didn’t believe I deserved anything better than where I was working. For so many of us, our career problems are a problem of self-love and self-worth.

Let me ask you: do you believe you deserve to work that satisfies you? Do you believe you deserve to get paid what you’re worth? Do you have a hard time even talking about, or thinking about, what you’re worth?

I know I did. In fact one of the things I realized—after reading Katty Kay and Claire Shipman’s book *The Confidence Code*—was that my confidence in my ability to achieve work that satisfied me was *as important* as my skills to do that work. I was lacking in **confidence**. So after finishing the book, I sat down and put into writing several accomplishments or areas of expertise that felt significant to me.

My list looked something like this:

- I have a Masters degree
- I sold all of my possession and spent a year traveling the United States
- I've visited 20+ countries
- I wrote a book and was nominated for "Best New Author" by the ECPA
- I have coached dozens, if not hundreds, of people through writing their own books
- I've co-founded multiple companies and written two online curriculums for authors
- I have managed multiple high-level online platforms

I don't know about you but that is so hard for me to do. It feels like bragging. Can you relate?

What would be on your list of accomplishments? Can you list what you would consider your greatest accomplishments?

When I finally started addressing some of my self-worth issues around my work, doors started opening for me in my career. The more I believed I was worthy of the opportunities, the more the opportunities came. I still have a lot of work to do in this area, but the work is so rewarding, it hardly feels like work.

I'm convinced our career success is at least as much about our confidence in our skills as it is about our skills themselves.

*Imagine all the things over the years you wish you had said or done or tried—but didn't because something held you back. Chances are, that something was a lack of confidence. Without it we are mired in unfulfilled desires, running excuses around in our heads, until we are paralyzed. It can be exhausting, frustrating, and depressing. Whether you work or you don't, whether you want the top job or the part-time job—wouldn't it just be great to slough off the anxiety and the fretting about all the things you'd love to try but don't trust yourself to do? IN the most basic terms, what we need to do is start acting and risking and failing, and stop mumbling and apologizing and prevaricating. —**The Confidence Code**, by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman*

When you love yourself and have confidence in yourself, you are willing to put yourself out there without fear of rejection. You can admit what you're good at and what you have to offer. You bring that confidence into an interview room—or hey, even into a Christmas party where you might meet a potential employer, business partner, or client. You can ask for help or answer honestly and bravely when someone asks, “So, what do you do?”

When you learn to love yourself well, the whole world will seem like it's open to you; and you will be open to receive it.

4. You have fewer feelings of loneliness

In a world that is hyper-connected and yet not really connected at all, we are living in a **culture of loneliness**. And although we've found all kinds of ways to numb our loneliness—Netflix, social media, phones, etc.—that lonely feeling is never really far away. Maybe you can relate. Do you ever feel like you have a million “friends” and yet nobody really knows you?

One of the things I noticed was that, as I began to grow in love for myself, I grew in like for myself too. By that I mean those feelings of loneliness dissipated as my relationships grew deeper and more satisfying and I as I discovered how comforting and satisfying and even fun it could be to spend time on my own.

I started finding myself craving more down time and alone time because, hey, I was a really fun person to be around.

In fact, thanks to Julia Cameron, I even started taking myself on dates. In her book *The Artist's Way* She ask you to think about what someone who knew you really well would do for you on a date. It doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate. It just has to be kind and thoughtful. The idea is to stop sitting around waiting for someone to do something nice for you when you can do something nice for yourself.

This is not to say we don't need other people. We definitely do. Our friends teach us how to love ourselves by being loving to us. But what happens as we learn to love ourselves is we realize we really enjoy being alone and a night by ourselves doesn't feel like punishment.

What could you do to take yourself on a date this week?

5. You are happier and have more fun

One of the greatest misconceptions about loving yourself, if you ask me, is that it's all about expensive shopping trips and pampering. This is not only untrue; it's also misleading for two reasons. First, because a person who shops and pampers herself does not necessarily love herself.

And second is because true love is totally free.

Learning to love ourselves can look like allowing ourselves to sleep in for an extra hour on a Saturday morning or choosing to take a night off from social activities because we know we need it. Maybe it's about eating something really healthy or making a trip to the gym. Maybe it's about taking a night *off* from exercise so you can let your body rest.

Perhaps loving yourself looks like asking for help from a friend when you really need it or inviting a close friend to come over and talk.

What ends up happening, inevitably, as we allow ourselves to take these radical steps of self-love and self-care is we realize life does not have to be this knock-down, drag-out, white-knuckle, exhausting fight all the time. It can actually be really fun. When someone offers to pay for something for me, I can receive it. When the opportunity presents itself to sleep in, I can enjoy it. When I get a day off, I don't have to feel guilty. I can laugh. I can play. I can enjoy myself. The world's beauty is unfolding for me and I can soak it all in.

