

COMMUNITY

Family Counseling Service: Learn to Accept Yourself (Warts and All)

BY LARRY DEAVERS

One of the biggest challenges many of us face is simply being able to accept ourselves. Most of us have a tendency to be harshly critical, judging ourselves for our past and comparing ourselves to others. Often, this has become such an ingrained perspective that we really do not even know what would make us content or how to come to terms with the, often painful, experiences that have helped make us who we are.

We all seek acceptance from others, sometimes even to our own detriment. What we are really seeking, though, is personal satisfaction with who we are. When we do not accept ourselves, we place an unhealthy importance on the acceptance of others. However, their approval will never fill the need we each have for self-acceptance. Placing such an emphasis on the approval of others does severe damage to our relationships, as it sets unreasonable demands on others to meet this need for us.

Here are a few key areas in which we all need to accept ourselves:

Acknowledge your strengths. Recognize the situations or tendencies where you excel. This does not mean you have to be the very best at it, but you are pretty good, even if you do say so!

Accept that you need to improve in some areas but don't beat yourself up over it. All of us make mistakes and no one escapes this life without regrets. Make a point of working toward resolving any self-blame and guilt so that you can accept, honestly, who you are. "Yes, I have suffered, and it has made me stronger, wiser, or more compassionate." This will empower you to shift your



focus from the past onto the present and the future.

Accept the areas you have no interest in improving. There may be an ability that you do not consider a strength, but you have learned to work around it, or even make it work for you. If you fear public speaking and have no intention of developing that skill, you might avoid taking on roles that require it or you may take on support roles for others who are willing to do it. Give yourself permission to simply not be good at something if it is not a priority for you. (Keep in mind, however, that circumstances sometimes change, and your priorities may have to change, as well. There is a difference between accepting yourself and limiting yourself.)

Know what brings you joy and what creates undue stress in your life. Determine which of those stressors, even

positive ones, are worth what it costs to deal with them, prioritizing where you choose to invest your limited resources of emotional energy. Those that are not worth the costs should be minimized as much as possible, or even eliminated from your life.

Accept that you will never be able to please everyone. Decide what is important to you, not what is important based on someone else's priorities. Living your life to someone else's standard always leaves you with the impending fear of their rejection. You will only be happy and fulfilled when you are able to find contentment in living according to what is important to you.

When you learn to accept yourself, warts and all, you will find that you are happier, freer, and have a more positive impact on those around you!



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