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Catalyst – Management

Seven qualities for self-management

Be sensitive to others, keep in good cheer and appreciate yourself. You will find life vibrant and fulfilling.

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IF you would like to be a fully functional, alive and responding human being, there are some key personal qualities that help make this possible. These are:

Appreciating yourself: To be liked and well-regarded is a natural and valid need. But we are reluctant to appreciate ourselves. We are quick to disregard our integrity, sense of humour, courage and wisdom.

Walking in another's shoes: The question to ask yourself is, do I want to understand and do I want to be understood? Both require effort.

Unconditionally accepting of myself and others: Each one of us is trying to be someone that we are not. Attempting to become this ideal image is like chasing a mirage. Instead, accept that it is natural to make mistakes, to feel insecure, unsure, and scared. Reflect on what good is in you and nurture it. Accept yourself and the world the way it is.

Choosing your attitude: Everybody has the choice to exercise their will, including the choice not to do so. It is "the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." (Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*)

Being present: By being actively involved in the present — taking charge of our current lives and rejecting the self-limiting beliefs of the past that govern the present — we can move forward and live more fully today.

Have fun: Enjoy life and work; when you enjoy your work you not only make your day but make another's day, too.

Practise Kaizen: Decide to put into practice these ideas just for today. Don't think about whether you will be able to practice these ideas tomorrow.

Each of these ideas will be further illustrated through a story or explored through exercises that you can do on your own or along with others. The exercises will enable you to examine these concepts for yourself and identify some of your beliefs and values which currently help or hinder your self-management.

The quality of self-appreciation

We are all keen that others should think well of us. To be liked and well-regarded is a natural and valid need. Hence, to fulfil this need for affirmation, we do what we believe will bring appreciation from others. Yet, we are reluctant to appreciate ourselves. We are quick to overlook and even disregard our integrity, sense of humour, courage and wisdom. These are precious gifts we can unreservedly give to one another and ourselves. Indeed, the reality is that you cannot truly and sincerely affirm others if you cannot or will not honestly value yourself.

Exercise 1: Write a description of yourself in the third person. Start with the words "(Your name) is an interesting person who . . ." Use information about yourself that you know to be positive.

Exercise 2: Try this activity with a friend. Put out your left hand, close your eyes and say to yourself, "I am useless." Your friend now tries to push your hand down. Does it go down easily? Now put out your hand again and tell yourself, "I am great," say it loudly and repeatedly. Your friend once again tries to push down your hand. Does it go down easily? You will notice that the first time the hand went down without any resistance. The second time it was more difficult.

Exercise 3: Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Imagine you are walking out of the room and walking on to the road. Ahead of you, you see a door leading into a hall. As you enter the hall you notice several statues. Far away you see one statue surrounded by several people. You walk towards the statue and as you do so you realise it is your statue and you hear people speaking well of it. What are the words you hear? Listen to them. After a while you leave the hall and you return to the present. Gently open your eyes and reflect on your experience. If a friend is with you, share your experience.

Walking in another's shoes

When we walk in another's shoes, we then not only know what that person is experiencing, we are able "to communicate that understanding" with sensitivity to the individual. This is also called empathy. As with self-appreciation, empathy for another is made easier when we learn to tune into our own feelings, accurately label them and identify the reason underlying the emotion. What matters then is the question — do I want to understand and do I want to be understood? For, both require effort. I must be willing to stretch and make the effort to understand and be understood.

Here's a story: A husband complained to God that his wife had an easy life. "Make me the wife and let me experience her joy," he pleaded to God. So, God obliged and the next day the roles were reversed. At five in the morning the new wife rose to boil the milk, cook the meals and get the children ready for school. The new husband rose at 7:00 a.m. and left for work - unaware of the wife's toil.

The wife then swept and swabbed the house, washed the clothes and cleaned the utensils, by which time it was time for lunch. Barely had she eaten, when the children

arrived home from school. She gave them their tea, got them bathed and then sat with them while they did their homework.

The husband arrived at 6:00 p.m. and had to be attended to. The wife then went about her chores getting the meal for the night organised. By the time she retired it was past 10:00 p.m. The husband decided that he needed looking after and spent the next hour chatting with his wife. She finally went to sleep at midnight and rose again at 5:00 a.m.

The new wife now approached God and complained about the new role. She pleaded that she be restored to being the husband. God said, "It is possible; only, there is a slight problem. You are pregnant and will have to wait for nine months!"

Exercise: Remove your footwear and wear a friend's shoe. How does it feel? You will experience the difference in footwear because you have tried on another's shoe.

Unconditionally accepting of myself and others

Each one of us is trying to be someone that we are not. We try to mould ourselves into an ideal image, often ignoring or turning our back on who we really are. Attempting to become this ideal image is not possible. It is like chasing a mirage. Similarly, we expect others to fit in with our image of them and meet those expectations. We tell ourselves "others owe it to me to live up to my expectations, whether I'm right or wrong." Soon life becomes a nightmare of obligations - determined by a virtual law of conditional acceptance - one that we put on others and that others place on us.

However, if you will stop torturing yourself "for not being good enough, for not being perfect"; and instead accept that it is natural to make mistakes, feel insecure, unsure and scared, then you will be free to accept yourself and the world the way it is. Instead of focusing on your perceived weaknesses, reflect on what good is in you and nurture it.

There is a range of shoulds and shouldn'ts, ought tos and ought not tos, musts and mustn'ts that stops us from freely accepting ourselves and others. Some of these are:

- I must be nice to everybody. Everybody must be nice to me;
- I must not have any needs of my own. Others must sense my needs without my having to tell them;
- I must not ask for what I want. Others must not ask for what they want. Others must know what I want without my telling them;
- I must give into others' needs always. Others must appreciate me when I give in to their needs. And, in turn give in to my needs;
- I must be feminine; I must be masculine;
- I must be self-effacing. Others must be self-effacing;
- Others mustn't reject me; Others mustn't criticise me;
- Others must understand my point, etc;

Exercise: Identify some of the expectations / conditions you place on other and that others place on you.

Choosing my attitude

Everybody has the choice to exercise their will — including the choice not to do so. Viktor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist and holocaust survivor, describes this inner freedom as "the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances . . ." Every moment of life we are faced with the choice to submit to or resist the circumstances that conspire to take away from us our knowledge of our true worth and value.

All of us have the same 1,440 minutes given to us each day. How we choose to use this time is our decision. If we won't decide then life will decide for us. Similarly, we have the ability to choose the way we feel by changing our motives for our actions and our expectations of the outcome. Often positive and negative feelings are the outcome of whether or not our motives and our expectations have been met.

Story: A young boy once wanted to be a champion. His father carped at him and told him that he was useless. The boy, however, was determined to achieve success. Unfortunately, in an accident at a very young age he lost one hand. Determined to still make it, he approached various coaches in his school. But no one would take him on their team. Finally, the handball coach took him on. The young boy extremely well and went on to represent his country in the Olympics.

Several years later, now retired, he was sitting in a restaurant when a youngster approached him and introduced himself as the current handball champion. He told the old champion, "Sir, you had a problem!" The old man asked, "What was the problem?" "Sir, you have only one hand and therefore you had a problem catching the ball," pointed out the youngster. "Young man," said the old champion, "it is you who has a problem. When the ball is thrown at me, I don't have to choose. You have to!"

Like a boatman who rows towards his goal irrespective of the wind, we cannot determine the direction of the wind - we can only choose our attitude.

Exercise: Write five or six sentences using the phrase "I should . . ." Now read the sentences aloud to yourself and experience how you feel. You will notice that when you use the word 'should' you put pressure on yourself and feel like you don't have a choice.

Now, strike out the word "should" in the sentences and substitute it with "could". Again, read the sentences aloud and experience how you feel. You will notice that the altered vocabulary gives you a sense of freedom — of choice.

Be present

It helps if you can accept one reality — you cannot change the past. It cannot even be "selectively edited". The past is here to stay. And the memories will stir up "periodic pain." But, by being actively involved in the present — taking charge of our current lives and rejecting the self-limiting beliefs of the past that govern the present — we can move forward and live more fully today. The decision to shoulder or shed the baggage of the past and live in the present can only be an individual one.

Exercise: Note the different meanings of "sugar" on a sheet of paper. Now take a spoonful of sugar and eat it. What was your first reaction? Was it - "It's sweet!", "It's crunchy!"? Now refer to your sheet and go over what you had written. Compare what you wrote with actual experience of eating sugar.

Exercise: Sit down with a friend and ask your friend to talk for a couple of minutes on a subject of their choice. Listen to your friend without interruption. After your friend finishes speaking, repeat verbatim what was just said. You will find that you falter as you try to recall the exact words spoken. Hence, to till the gap, you will find yourself introducing your perception / interpretation of what was said. This shows us that we are rarely present in the "Here and Now," but are either dwelling on an anxious past or an anticipatory future.

Have fun, enjoy life and work

Most work is repetitive. The same task you carried out yesterday, you will carry out today and again tomorrow. But if we can bring cheer to what we do, we are able to digest life's drudgery better. When you enjoy your work you not only make your day but make another's day, too. It is therefore, enjoined upon us to bring cheer to what we do.

Story: A toll collector in America was often seen to dance when he handed out the tickets and collected money. He was asked about this strange habit and he responded by saying, "When I dance and give out a ticket I see a smile on a tired face, it makes my day."

Exercise: It helps if there are several participants for this activity. Form two or more groups. One group creates a rhythm machine. The rest of the participants must identify the machine.

Practise Kaizen

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first mile. Small incremental changes will mature into a major transformation. Decide to put into practice these ideas just for today. Don't think about whether you will be able to practice these ideas tomorrow. And so, each day let your goal be for just that one day. With such small resolutions we can build the strength and knowledge necessary for permanent change

Exercise: Start a journal where you record your experience of each day. Write in longhand. Write about three pages each day. Write without censoring or editing your thoughts. Don't read what you have written. After about two months, go over your journal and observe the changes in the way you experience each day.

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