

The Mirror Exercise

Introduction

The mirror exercise is one of the simplest and most powerful self-esteem and self-confidence building exercises in the world. Its purpose is to replace the normal negative self-talk that dominates our thoughts with positive, self-affirming self-talk. It is an exercise that should be performed every night for a minimum of 40 days.

Talking Points

Starting tonight, before going to bed, stand in front of a mirror and appreciate yourself out loud for all that you accomplished during the day. Start with a few seconds of looking into the eyes of the person in the mirror — your mirror image of your self, looking back at you. Then start by saying your name, followed by appreciating yourself (out loud) for the following things:

- Any achievements (business, financial, educational, personal, emotional)
- Any personal disciplines you kept (exercise, meditation, prayer, dietary)
- Any temptations that you did not give in to (eating dessert, lying, drinking too much, staying up too late playing video games or surfing the internet, etc.)

Maintain eye contact with yourself throughout the exercise. When you are done, end the exercise by continuing to look deeply into your own eyes and say, “I love you (your name).” Then stand there for another few seconds to really feel the impact of the experience — as if you were the one in the mirror who had just listened to all of this appreciation. The trick during this last part is to not just turn away from the mirror feeling embarrassed or thinking of yourself or the exercise as stupid.

Here is an example of what it might sound like.

“Jack, I want to appreciate you for the following things today. First, I want to appreciate you for going to bed on time last night without staying up too late watching TV, so you got up bright and early this morning and you had a really good conversation with Inga. And then you meditated for 20 minutes before you took a shower. You helped with getting the kids’ lunches together, and you ate a healthy breakfast.

“You got to work on time and led a very good staff meeting with your support team. You did a great job of helping everyone listen to everybody’s feelings and ideas. And you were great at drawing out the quiet ones.

“Let’s see ... oh, and then you ate a really healthy lunch—soup and salad—and you didn’t have the dessert that was offered. And you drank the 10 glasses of water that you committed to drinking every day. Congratulations on that one!

“You stayed in a good mood all day today. You didn’t let other people’s problems become your problems. It would have been easy to let Deborah’s complaints get to you, but you didn’t. You were able to not feel personally responsible for what happened to her. And you didn’t take anything she said personally. Good job!

“Let’s see, you finished editing the new staff orientation manual, and you got a really good start on scheduling the summer management training program. And then you filled in your Daily Positive Focus Form before you left work. Oh, and you appreciated your assistant for all of her contributions for the day. It was great to see how she just lit up. And when you got home, you spent quality time playing with the kids, especially Christopher, and then you read a book to all of the kids. That was really special. And now you’re going to bed at a good time again and not staying up all night surfing the net. You were great today....

“And one more thing — Jack, I love you!”

It is not unusual to have a number of reactions the first few times you do this. They include feeling silly, feeling embarrassed, feeling like crying (or actually crying), and generally feeling uncomfortable. Occasionally, people have even reported breaking out in hives, feeling hot and sweaty, or feeling a little light headed. These are natural and normal reactions, as this is a very unfamiliar thing to be doing. We are not trained to acknowledge ourselves. In fact, we are mostly trained to do the opposite: “Don’t toot your own horn. Don’t get a swelled head. Don’t get a stuffed shirt. Pride is a sin.”

As you begin to act in more positive and nurturing ways to yourself, it is natural to have physical and emotional reactions as you release the old negative self-judgments, unrealistic expectations, parental wounds and so forth. If you experience any of these things — and not all people do — don’t let them stop you. They are only temporary and will pass after a few days of doing the exercise.

Procedure

While standing in front of a mirror and making eye contact with yourself...

1. Say your name.
2. Appreciate yourself for:
 - Achievements
 - Disciplines kept
 - Temptations overcome
3. Say, “I love you,” to yourself.
4. Take it in (receive it) and breathe.

If you find yourself lying in bed, and you realize you haven’t done the exercise, get out of bed and do it. The part of looking at yourself in the mirror is a very important part of the exercise. Remember, you will only get as much out of this exercise as you put into it.

One last bit of advice: If you live with someone (spouse, children, roommate, parents), let them know in advance that you will be doing this exercise each evening for a month or so. You do not want them to walk in on you while you are doing it and think you have lost it!

Do this exercise for a minimum of 40 days. For the best results, do it every day for a whole year.

FACILITATOR TIP: If you are conducting an on-going or multi-day workshop, assign this for homework the first night. Then review on the following morning and invite participants to share their experiences by asking, “What happened when you did the mirror exercise?”