

Dare To Be A Ten!

By Sharon S. Fountain

Being a "10" is not a measure of physical attractiveness, it's a state of mind and self-worth. Professionals, regardless of their major roles in life (family, social or career) realize that the keys to success lie in dealing effectively with other people, having a healthy self-image, and a thorough understanding of themselves. They further understand the importance of being able to separate who they **are** from the things they **do** as a person. This is a critical aspect of being a "10."

SELF-TALK

All of us have a voice in our head. This voice carries on conversations with us; telling us things like who we are, why we're here, and who are all these "others." It helps us decide what to do; how to act and react; when we're doing well or blowing it. These conversations are called "self-talk."

Self-talk can be critical ("*There you go again, messing everything up!*"); or it can be encouraging ("*You can do it, you're a '10!'*"). Who controls it? You do! You are the one ultimately in control of what you say to yourself. Further, this inner dialogue plays an important part in helping you get what you want out of life; or it can provide the stumbling blocks that prevent you from achieving your goals.

Self-talk and Identity are interrelated -- one reinforces the other. If you tell yourself you're stupid, clumsy and shy, over a period of time you become stupid, clumsy and shy. This is a dangerous bind we can easily get ourselves into unless we understand the concept of Identity and Role Separation.

IDENTITY vs. ROLE

Let's spend some time looking at who you **are** as a person -- your Identity; and the things you **do** as a person -- your Roles. Picture yourself in your mind's eye. What do you see?

Most people, when asked this question, see themselves doing something. Maybe you saw yourself interacting with your family; performing a task at work; or enjoying time with friends. These are all Roles,

not who we are as a person. Most of us find it difficult to see ourselves as separate from the things we do.

Your Identity is your individuality. It's what makes you unique, special, and different from anyone else who has ever lived. It is **who you are** as a person. Your Identity is made up of several different components: physical characteristics; emotions; mental abilities; attitudes and opinions; values; biases and prejudices (whether or not you think you have them, you do); and skills. Your Roles are the **things you do** as a person; they are any contact you have with the world.

If I asked you to rate your Identity (your worth as a person) on a scale of 1 - 10 (with 10 being high), you would probably give me a number somewhere between 5 and 9. The reasons given for this are frequently: "*Nobody's perfect.*" "*There's always room for improvement.*" "*I should ... lose weight ... be more tolerant ... be more organized.*" -- or other such lines of thinking. While it's true that none of us are perfect and that we will continue to change and grow all our lives, it is also true that we are as good as we can possibly be at any given time. You are as worthwhile a person as you can possibly be today! Who and what you are can and will change slightly by tomorrow, or next week.

Let's say the number you chose for yourself is a 7 ("*Above average, but not perfect. There's room for a lot of improvement,*" says your self-talk). What do you think will happen when you bring your "7-ness" into a Role? Most of the time your "best" performance will be at about a 7 level because you can only do as good a job as you have permission to do. Your Role performance must be consistent with how you "see" yourself.

What do you think might happen if, suddenly, you're operating at a 2 level in a Role. Your self-talk might say "*Hey, you're not great, but you're better than that!*"; and you'd find a way to do better -- you'd bring that performance up to an "acceptable" level (probably somewhere between 6 and 8).

By the same token, if you happen to be doing a great job; performing at about a 9 level, your self-talk might say "*I'm good, but not that good! Who am I to be winning big?*" and you'd find a way to bring that performance level down.

I'd like to ask you to allow yourself to **"Be a 10"** in your Identity. When you do this, and bring your 10-ness into your Roles, you have the whole universe of positive possibilities ahead of you; and permission to win and be OK no matter what.

The Professional understands that his or her Identity is neither right nor wrong, it just is. The Professional further understands that Identity characteristics cannot be judged or evaluated, except in relation to a Role.

For example, consider a man 5'2" tall. Can we criticize him for being 5'2"? While some of us might be quick to draw conclusions about what his approach to life might be, we can't and shouldn't criticize him. Being 5'2" tall is an Identity characteristic -- it has no significance until we put him in a Role. "*But what if he wants to be a professional basketball player?*" you might ask. Good question. Basketball is a Role, and in this instance what we would evaluate is whether or not the Identity characteristic of being 5'2" tall would work for or against his performance as a basketball player. We would look at the impact of the Identity characteristic on Role performance -- not the Identity characteristic itself.

Another example. Same 5'2" man, and he weighs 300 pounds. Can we criticize him how? Many of us are, again, quick to say yes. But the answer is still no, even if it's not a glandular problem. By itself, so what if he weighs 300 pounds? If we put him in the Role of father with young children, and he wants to romp and play with them and see them grow up and graduate from college, then the Identity trait of being 300 pounds might work against his being able to keep up with them. And, statistically, he might not live long enough to see them graduate from college because of possible strain on his heart. We

must look at Identity characteristics only in relation to their effect on Role performance.

A key part of being a "10" then, is to separate who we are (our Identity) from the things we do (our Roles) as a person. While this is an easy concept to grasp on the surface (it merely requires a mental decision on our part, and reinforcement by our self-talk) it's more complicated than you might imagine. It goes against our early childhood training.

Most of us were taught that our self-worth was determined by Role performance. We were "good kids" if we cleaned our rooms, did our homework, and closed the door softly. By the same token, we were "bad kids" if we threw our clothes on the floor, talked back, or didn't do our homework.

What this means to most people is that, over a period of time, we see ourselves to be only as good as our Role performance. We can be OK if we please others; but not OK if we don't. The bind this can put us in is that other people can define what good or poor performance is. If we are only as good as our Role performance, then our self-worth depends upon pleasing others who are constantly judging our performance, or lack of it. Sometimes their evaluations are reasonable and the yardstick valid. However, the yardstick is often unreasonable, and our measurement against it is harsh.

When on the receiving end of criticism or ridicule, the Professional downgrades the focus of the attack to the lowest possible Role. This is done regardless of the words used or the attempted focus of the antagonist. The Professional will use positive, reinforcing self-talk like, "I'm a '10' in my Identity. What is the specific Role this criticism pertains to?"

The Professional realizes that letting others be in charge of his or her self-worth is a process that sets up a Win/Lose concept of life -- with the Self on the losing end. This kind of thinking, and approach to living is incompatible with his or her Win/Win philosophy.

The Professional is constantly making the mental distinction between Identity and Role in his or her self-talk. This distinction applies not only to the Self, but to others also.

MEMORY TIPS

Here are couple of tips to help you remember and apply the concepts of self-talk and Identity/Role separation in the heat of battle. One is for protection when you are being criticized. The other is to help you be in a productive frame of mind when you must judge or criticize others' behavior.

The first merely involves physically placing your hand on your belly button! The rationale is: when we are physically ill, or under a lot of pressure or emotional distress, many of us feel tightness and discomfort in our stomach. Our muscles tense up and we may get butterflies or (in extreme cases) ulcers. Putting your hand on your belly button is a discrete gesture designed to take the pressure off you. Use this technique whenever you feel threatened or not OK about yourself. Cover up your belly button and say, "*I'm a 10! I must separate my Identity from my Role. Don't take it personally. Downgrade the problem and make it specific so I can deal with it productively.*"

The second tip. Do you remember the 5'2", 300-pound man we talked about earlier? There are a few things I did not tell you about him. First, he lives in Japan. Second, he's a sumo wrestler. Third, he's a national hero. And last but not least, he doesn't take criticism lightly! Please remember this when you are about to criticize someone, and remember to tell yourself "*They're a 10. Separate their Identity from the Role. Downgrade the problem and make it specific enough for them to deal with productively.*"

RULES TO REMEMBER

Identity characteristics are neither right nor wrong, they just are. They have no significance, good or bad, except in terms of impact on Role performance. Cover up your belly-

button. Remember these three rules and the importance of your self-talk ("**Be a 10!**") and you'll be well on your way to becoming a Professional in whatever Role you've chosen.

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