

## Acceptance.

It's one of those words that tends to put us on the immediate defense. A word that implicitey accuses us of burying our heads in the sand about our faults and imperfections, and demands that we now face them square on. A word that threatens to make us feel worse about ourselves than we already do. Can we just change the subject, please.....?

Okay, let's all take a deep breath and relax. Because we're going to spend some time here discussing the A word. And hopefully dispel some of the feelings that interfere with the positive changes acceptance can bring to our lives, if we learn to embrace it.

If you look up acceptance in the dictionary, you'll find no reference whatsoever to failure, or shortcomings. It simply means "an agreement with something that is true." So acceptance is as pure as truth itself. And that's a good thing. Now let's take it up a notch and give it a personal context: Self-acceptance. Agreeing with what is true about ourselves. No judgments. No focus on the good or bad. Just what's true. Again, a good thing. And potentially a very useful tool in dealing with weight loss and other personal struggles.

Self-acceptance helps us to determine which of those truths about ourselves we can change, which we don't want to change, and which we couldn't change anyway. All of which can result in an overall healthier view of who we are.

Some make the common mistake of viewing acceptance as the enemy of change. They feel it's better to remain self-critical because that's a stronger motivation to make changes for the better. This may work for the occasional short term fix, but in the long run it's unhealthy. Self esteem can only stand so much criticism, and discouragement ultimately wins out.

Think about how difficult it is to change your spouse, children, parents, or friends using criticism. On the other hand, have you noticed how a little tolerance, understanding, a little *acceptance* goes a long way toward improving your relationship with others?

No, acceptance is not the enemy of change. In many ways it's change's best friend. You don't have to be unhappy with yourself to recognize areas where you can improve. In fact, just knowing that you're taking a truthful inventory will make you instantly like yourself more.

Taking a less hostile, less reactive mental approach is another key to self-acceptance. Stop labeling your characteristics with absolutes like “Good” and “Bad”. Think in terms of what you’d like and not like to see instead. Talk to yourself like a friend. “I never exercise enough. I just watch TV. I’m so lazy!” is a criticism without motivation to improve. Whereas “ As much as I like TV, I want to feel better. So I’m going to cut down and exercise more.” Addresses the same problem in a healthier way. One that allows you to agree with the truth of the situation and still like yourself.

There are positives and negatives with just about any situation. A self accepting person will choose to focus on the positives. Let’s use the example of weight loss. People who lose 100 pounds have a great deal of positive to focus on. They’re more active, have better choices of clothing, they feel better, and they need fewer medications, just to name a few. On the other hand, they now may have to deal with loose skin, a stricter diet, and the threat of gaining again if they stray from their better lifestyle habits. So there’s a choice we can make as to how we view it. Which choice do you think will result in a healthier self-acceptance?

And as a final point, self-acceptance is so much easier to achieve when we think big picture. Too often we build our self worth on situations that could change tomorrow. Our physical appearance, our job, our relationships are all shaky foundations for defining who we are. Instead, aim higher. Think of the values you hold, your faith, your feelings toward others. Those lofty qualities that you’ve always had. The ones that don’t change with time and circumstance. The more we do, the more we’ll see that it’s okay to accept ourselves as a good person.

After all, that’s who you really are, right?