

## Why Self Respect Has To Be Earned

Self-respect is different to self-esteem or self-worth. When the issue of worth arises in Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) we tend to suggest to people that all human beings have worth by virtue of being human. Human worth is not something that results from things we do. It is an article of faith with us CBT-ers that all human beings have equal worth and their worth cannot be diminished. This is an important point, not only because of how we think of ourselves, but other people too. If worth were to be something earned by achievement, where would that leave people who are too young to have achieved much or those who lack the ability to achieve very much?

However, sometimes people come to see because, although they have a sense of worth, they lack self-respect. People may lack respect because they have been put down and not given respect from an early age. They assume that because others haven't respected them enough they are not worthy of respect. This is a mistaken conclusion and an error in perception. However, there are another group of people whom I suspect might be right not to respect themselves. They are the people who know they have not been true to themselves: people who have had the opportunity, potential and desire to achieve their goals and yet who have taken the easy, safe option. These people know that they have short-changed themselves and they feel guilty. They have heard the clarion call of their own ambition and they have turned away. They are leading smaller lives than they would have chosen had they been more courageous. They have chosen ease over fulfilment and they are ashamed of themselves.

In the past I might have emphasised to people in this position that they had worth, or I might have encouraged them to question the validity of their ambitions. Lately I have begun to think that a more honest response is to agree that they have let themselves off the hook in some way and to ask them what they are going to do about it.

Sometimes the appropriate response to mental pain is to change your perceptions so that you look at things differently, and sometimes the right thing to do is change the world through action.

Have you worked hard enough and been brave enough to earn your self-respect and, if not, what are you going to do about it?

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Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.