

To be conscious means to seek to be aware of everything that bears on our actions, purposes, values, and goals, to the best of our ability, whatever that ability may be, and to behave in accordance with that which we see and know. We cannot feel competent, worthy and experience high self-esteem while conducting our lives in a mental fog. Self-esteem asks not for flawless success, but for the earnest intention to be conscious.



- A mind that is active rather than passive and is a servant to my being – to not indulge in the fantasy that someone else can spare me the necessity of thought or make my decisions for me.
- An intelligence that takes joy in its own function. My natural inclination is to make use of the mind no less than that of body and make my primary business learning, which in turn is also my primary entertainment.
- Doing what I'm doing while I am doing it and being present to the experience. Being "in the moment" without losing the wider context and being trapped in the moment, or obsessing about the past or future.
- Reaching out for relevant facts rather than withdrawing from them because of "how they make me feel" or because they are "inconvenient".

- Being concerned to distinguish among facts, interpretations, judgments, projections, and emotions. To live consciously, I need to be sensitive to these distinctions. What I perceive, what I interpret it to mean, and how I feel about it are three separate questions. If I am not conscious to these I tend to treat these as the voice of reality, which leads to suffering.
- Noticing and confronting my impulses to avoid or deny painful or threatening realities as well as understanding when I am in survival mode. Fear and pain are to be treated as signals to not close our eyes but to open them wider – not to look away but to look more attentively.
- Being concerned to know "where I am" relative to my various (personal and professional) goals and projects, and whether I am succeeding or failing.
- Being concerned to know if my actions are in alignment with my purpose and values and therefore showing remarkable congruence between what I claim to stand for and how I live my life.
- Searching for feedback from the environment so as to adjust or correct my course accordingly. The potential always exists that new information will require an adjustment of our plans and intentions. How quick we will be to note such developments and respond appropriately has everything to do with the level of consciousness at which we operate.
- Persevering in the attempt to understand in spite of difficulties
- Being receptive to new knowledge and willing to reexamine old assumptions because even when we are not mistaken to begin with, even when our starting premises are valid, new clarifications, amendments, and improvements in our understanding are always possible.
- Being willing to see, take responsibility for, and correct mistakes. Living consciously implies that my first loyalty is to truth, not to making myself right.
- Seeking always to expand awareness — a commitment to learning — therefore a commitment to growth as a way of life. ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN AN INFORMATION AGE.
- A concern to understand the world around me. We affect and are affected by the world in which we live. To be oblivious to the forces around us, and to imagine that we operate in a bubble is truly to live like a sleepwalker. Therefore, a concern to learn about our biases, stereotyping and any and all other conditioning so as to determine if we caused harm so that we can take responsibility and make amends – all without judgment.
- A concern to know not only the external reality but also internal reality, the reality of my needs, feelings, aspirations, and motives, so that I am not a stranger or a mystery to myself. I am not living consciously if my consciousness is used for everything but self-understanding. For instance, is the "program" I am living one I accepted uncritically from others, or is it genuinely of my own choosing? Do I know what I am doing when I particularly like myself and what I am doing when I don't?

Adapted from: Branden, Nathaniel. (1994).

The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem. New York, NY. Bantam

Six practices most essential to building self-esteem. All are relevant for leadership agility in an information age.

With high self-esteem we can have compassion for others. It starts with loving ourself and not falling into the trap of Imposter Syndrome.

1 THE PRACTICE OF LIVING CONSCIOUSLY

Respect for facts; being present to what we are doing while we are doing it (e.g., if our client, manager, employee, colleague, spouse, child is talking to us, being present to the encounter); seeking and being eagerly open to any information, knowledge, or feedback that bears on our interests, values, goals, and projects – to the best of our ability, whatever that ability may be – and to behave in accordance with that which we see and know; seeking to understand not only the world external to self but also our inner world as well, so that we do not act out of self-blindness. Seeking always to expand awareness — a commitment to learning — therefore a commitment to growth as a way of life. ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN AN INFORMATION AGE.

2 THE PRACTICE OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

To be self-accepting is to be on my own side – to be for myself, with compassion, being a friend to myself. The willingness to own, experience, and take responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and actions, without evasion, denial, or disowning – and also without self-repudiation; giving oneself permission to think one’s thoughts, experience one’s emotions, and look at one’s actions without necessarily liking, endorsing or condoning them. If we are self-accepting, we do not experience ourselves as always “on trial”. Self-acceptance is the precondition of change and growth. Thus, if I am confronted with a mistake I have made, in accepting that it is mine I am free to learn from it and to do better in the future. I cannot learn from a mistake I cannot accept having made.

3 THE PRACTICE OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Realizing that we are the authors of our choices and actions; that each one of us is responsible for our life and well-being and for the attainment of our goals; that if we need the cooperation of other people to achieve our goals, we must offer values in exchange; and that the question is not “Who’s to blame?” but always “What needs to be done?” and “What is here to learn?” Self-responsibility shows up as an active orientation to work/life rather than a passive one. Living actively entails independent thinking in contrast to passive conformity to the beliefs of others.

4 THE PRACTICE OF SELF-ASSERTIVENESS

Honoring my wants, needs, and values and seeking appropriate forms of their expression in reality. Being authentic in our dealings with others; treating our values and persons with decent respect in social contexts; refusing to fake the reality of who we are or what we esteem in order to avoid someone’s disapproval; the willingness to stand up for ourselves and our ideas in appropriate ways in appropriate circumstances and invite others to stand for their own. Self-assertion entails the willingness to confront rather than evade the challenges of life and to strive for mastery. When we expand the boundaries of our willingness to cope, we expand self-efficacy and self-respect. When we commit ourselves to new areas of learning, when we take on tasks that stretch us, we raise our personal power. We thrust ourselves further into the universe. We assert our existence.

5 THE PRACTICE OF LIVING PURPOSEFULLY

To live purposefully is to live productively, which is a necessity of making ourselves competent to life. Productivity is the act of supporting our existence by translating our thoughts into reality, of setting our goals and working for their achievement, of bringing knowledge, goods, or services into existence. It is not that achievements “prove” our worth but rather that the process of achieving is the means by which we develop our effectiveness, our competence at living. To understand that our goal is not to “prove” ourselves or to ward off the fear of failure, our aim instead is self-expression rather than self-justification.

6 THE PRACTICE OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY

Living with congruence between what we know, what we profess, and what we do; telling the truth, honoring our commitments, exemplifying in action the values we profess to admire; dealing with others fairly and benevolently. When we betray our values, we betray our mind, and self-esteem is an inevitable casualty. If we are consistent in our integrity, we will experience dishonesty on our part as disturbing and will feel a thrust to resolve the dissonance and restore the inner sense of moral cleanliness. A culture of accountability will support our moral aspirations.

Branden, Nathaniel. (1994). *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. New York, NY. Bantam