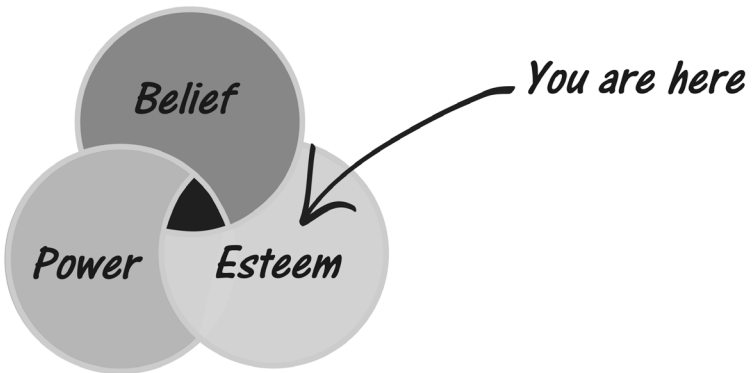


Self-esteem inside out



If you are not clear regarding what self-esteem actually is, and what it means to you, you are not alone. Let's take a quick look at the history behind it to understand why so many people find it confusing.

1890: James started it...

The story of Self-Esteem began in 1890 when Harvard University lecturer and psychologist William James, who is considered the father of modern-day psychology, defined self-esteem. He talked about how we could raise our self-esteem.

His work was *ignored* for 75 years.

1943: Maslow mentioned it...

In 1943, the now famous fellow American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, wrote a paper, 'A Theory of Human Motivation'.¹⁹ You may have heard of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Esteem is in there!

Mid 1960s: Rosenberg (tried to) measure it...

In the mid-1960s, sociologist Morris Rosenberg developed the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, which became the most-widely used scale to measure self-esteem.²⁰ It was basically a self-assessment scale in which you rated your level of esteem.

Late 1960s: Branden promoted it...

Nathaniel Branden was a psychotherapist who made self-esteem popular. He wrote many books on the topic. He

is considered by many to be the intellectual father of the self-esteem movement.²¹ He talked about how it can be boosted. People got excited!

In the late 1960s the *Self-Esteem Movement* was born!

Between the 1960s and 1980s there were many different definitions and theories put forward. Parents were told to 'raise' their child's self-esteem by praising them. Teachers were instructed to focus on 'boosting' the self-esteem of their students. Self-esteem became the buzz word and the 'Self-help' industry jumped on board. In the years between 1970 and 2000, over fifteen thousand research articles relating to self-esteem were published. The problem was, a large proportion of the research results *were contradictory or inconclusive*.

2000s: Baumeister questioned it...

After much hype, in 2003 the Association for Psychological Science asked Dr. Roy Baumeister, then a leading proponent of self-esteem, to review the self-esteem literature. He concluded that only 200 of 15,000 studies met their rigorous standards.²² He delivered some astonishing findings. What he found turned the self-esteem movement on its head. His research concluded that:

1. The idea that low self-esteem was a problem, and that curing it could cure many social ills, was 'completely false'.
2. The idea that having high self-esteem was important for good relationships was false.

3. He no longer believed that it was possible to artificially boost self-esteem.

Roy Baumeister said coming to these conclusions was '*one of the biggest disappointments of my career*'.

Today: Dweck and Seligman still wonder about it...

And today, some of the world's most respected psychologists are describing a Self-Esteem Backlash, suggesting the self-esteem movement did more harm than good. These include Harvard University Professor and best-selling author of *Mindset*, Carol Dweck, and popular psychologist Martin Seligman. Seligman puts forward a number of powerful arguments *against* the idea that self-esteem is something that can be externally boosted.

Why the mini history lesson?

There are currently so many different, confusing, and at times contradicting messages regarding what self-esteem actually is, and what we can do with it. Based on the work of Dr. L Michael Hall, I have defined it in a way that is useful and easy to apply. Given self-esteem is a key component in the Unshakable formula, it's important to be clear on what we are actually talking about. I'm going to offer you a useful way of thinking about self-esteem. I'll show you how to think about in a way to ensure your self-esteem in NEVER reduced, lowered or destroyed by a customer (or anyone!). A way that has helped hundreds of people move from Shakeable towards Unshakeable.

Self-esteem and self-confidence

Let's start by getting clear on what we are talking about by clarifying the difference between self-esteem and self-confidence.²³ Many people confuse self-confidence (feeling confident in your ability to perform a particular skill, like your tasks at work), and self-esteem (your value and worth as a person).

Self-confidence

- Self-confidence is very much about what you do – your performance.
- Self-confidence is usually experienced as a feeling about your ability to achieve a specific task in a certain context.
- How confident you feel fluctuates.
- Confidence is contextual.

Self-confidence comes in degrees from high to low. It is based on your past performance. You can rate how confident you feel about performing a task on a scale from zero to ten. Think back to when you first started in your current role, you might not have felt very confident in your ability to perform the role. Right now I'm guessing you feel more confident.

How confident you feel in your ability to do something fluctuates – which means you are only as confident as your last performance. In general, how confident you feel in your ability to do something increases over time, especially

if you allow yourself to practice, fail, make mistakes - yep, if you allow yourself to learn.

Confidence is contextual. Your level of self-confidence varies greatly in different situations. For example, you might feel confident in your ability to talk one-on-one with a customer, but not very confident about delivering a twenty-minute presentation at a work conference. You may feel very confident in your ability to drive to your local supermarket, but if we entered you into the world's most prestigious car race, the Monaco Grand Prix, your confidence in your ability to perform well there would probably decrease.

Self-esteem

Self-Esteem relates to how you value yourself as a person, and consider your worth as a given.

Similar to resilience, most people talk about self-esteem as if it exists, but it's not a tangible thing. It doesn't exist physically. You can't hold your self-esteem in your hands. It's a process, a verb, a doing word. It's something you do to yourself. You esteem yourself by deciding you are valuable and consider yourself as worthy.

Now that you know self-esteem is a process, (something you do to yourself) and not a thing that exists, it makes sense that no one can 'take it off you', 'take it away from you', 'destroy it' or 'lower it'. No customer can lower your self-esteem for two reasons:

1. Self-esteem does not come in high or low. It's impossible to lower something that is a process.
2. Self-esteem is something you, and only you, 'do' to yourself. Just as no one gives you self-esteem, no-one takes it away from you.

In summary, self-esteem refers to your own sense of personal value and worth. Your worth comes from within you, and does not come from your performance. You are more than what you do.

Your worth as a person is not linked to your performance. You are more than your performance.

Conditional and unconditional self-esteem

Many people esteem themselves conditionally, meaning they must meet certain conditions before giving themselves permission to feel worthy. This results in them believing their self-esteem goes up and down, (like self-confidence does). Unconditional self-esteem occurs when you value yourself and consider yourself worthy just for being born, for no other reason than you are human. Unconditional self-esteem does not go up and down.

Conditional self-esteem

When you esteem yourself conditionally you falsely believe you must earn the right to be worthy. In your mind, your value and worth is conditional upon meeting certain

criteria. You strive to achieve things to prove your worth to yourself and others by constantly doing and achieving (because you *need* to). You might be described by others as driven. You might be a high achiever or successful, but you will still feel like you are endlessly chasing your tail, trying desperately to feel good about yourself – only it doesn't last long. When you esteem yourself conditionally, you are only as good as your last performance. Off you go chasing your tail again! Sounds exhausting, doesn't it? I call this the self-esteem roller coaster, but it's not a fun ride.

Unconditional self-esteem

When you esteem yourself unconditionally, you believe in your value and worth as a human, without question. You have a solid sense of innate worth and dignity. You have unconditional love for yourself. Even when you stuff up and make huge mistakes, you still know you are valuable as a person. You know you are more than your behaviours, your stuff-ups, your achievements and your performance. You can still be a high achiever, because you *want* to, not because you *need* to. You consider your value, importance and significance as a person is a given. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Getting off the self-esteem roller coaster

When you esteem yourself unconditionally you can get off the self-esteem roller coaster. You can let go of perfectionism. You can stuff up, make mistakes, suck at something and **STILL FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF**. You are more open to trying new things. And if you fail at

them you know you are failing in performing that skill / task / thing, not failing as a person. You challenge yourself, fail, learn and grow.

A customer's harsh words will have little effect on how you feel about yourself when you esteem yourself unconditionally. This is because you know your self-esteem comes from within you, it's something you do to yourself. Therefore, when a customer is abusive your esteem is not affected. You chose to care or not care about what the customer thinks about your performance, and / or you as a person. In fact, what a customer thinks about you as a person is none of your business (remember they own their thoughts about you).

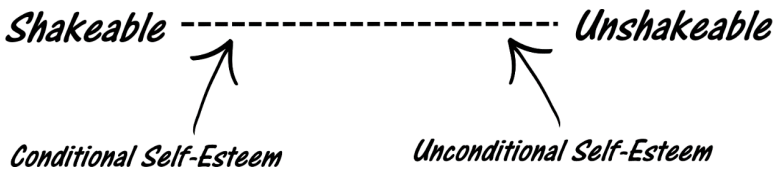
With unconditional self-esteem, when a customer calls you every name under the sun, you remain unaffected.

Esteeming yourself unconditionally also means you are more open to receiving feedback. It's important to separate 'you' the person, from your performance. Once you know the feedback is about your performance, and not you as a person, it is not a threat any more. This enables you to hear it and take it on board without taking it personally. When you esteem yourself unconditionally you do not make feedback a threat or a danger to you as a person, meaning you are less likely to experience a fight or flight response. When you esteem yourself unconditionally you actually welcome feedback.

Self-esteem and Shakeability

I have noticed five key factors in people who are towards the Unshakeable end of the continuum:

1. They have a clear understanding of the difference between their self-confidence and their self-esteem.
2. They have decided their self-esteem is a given; their self-esteem does not go up and down.
3. They esteem themselves unconditionally; and have no conditions on their worth, not even one tiny one.
4. They understand their worth as a person is not related to their performance. They separate who they are as a person from what they do.
5. They understand their self-esteem comes from within themselves, not externally.



How to UN-condition your self-esteem

In addition to having conditions on their self-esteem, many people make the conditions just about impossible to achieve, and make a 'rule' that these conditions must be met 100% of the time, therefore setting themselves up to '*never feel good enough*'. Sound familiar?

Some common examples of conditional self-esteem include, in the client's words, 'My self-esteem will go up when':

- I lose twenty kilos
- I own that car, house, investment property
- I'm on top of my game, I've got my act together, I'm more organised
- I have finished my degree, Masters, PhD
- I am team leader / manager / area manager etc.
- Everyone likes me all the time
- I am the perfect friend, spouse, mother, daughter, father, son, boss, employee, sister, brother, boyfriend, girlfriend (everything to everyone all of the time!).

These are just a few examples, you can probably think of ones that relate specifically to you. Choose one, and have a go at using the Triple A process to explore it.

1. Awareness

What condition do you currently have on your self-esteem?

Kate: I'll feel good about myself when I lose weight. I hate myself at this size.

2. Audit

How useful is that condition, knowing you could choose to esteem yourself unconditionally and take all the pressure off yourself?

If you discover you have a condition on your self-esteem you are reluctant to give up or let go, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the benefits of keeping this condition or criterion?
- What is keeping this condition or criterion costing me?

Kate: The condition I have placed on my self-esteem - I will feel good about myself when I lose weight - is not very useful. In fact, I feel bad about not losing weight and then I eat chocolate to cheer myself up about feeling bad about not losing weight. Now that I think about it, I haven't lost any weight by having the condition that I will feel good about myself when I lose weight. In fact it seems to just keep me feeling bad about myself.

3. Adjust

This is an easy one. No conditions on your self-esteem are useful. Decide you don't need this condition anymore. Delete, delete, delete. Set yourself free from your conditions and choose to value yourself just because you exist 😊

Kate: So you mean just decide to feel good about myself right now? Even though I'm overweight? I

didn't know I could do that. Just accept me for me and then decide to lose weight because I want to, rather than because my worth depends on it? Wow! That instantly takes the pressure off. I've never thought about it in that way before. It's weird, but I feel lighter already.

Esteeming yourself unconditionally is a journey. There is no magical switch or on / off button instantly taking you from conditional to unconditional self-esteem. It's unlikely to happen overnight, but it will happen as you consistently make the decision to value yourself and acknowledge your own worth.

The process of consistently esteeming yourself unconditionally involves deciding to value yourself in all contexts, situations and experiences, no matter what customers throw at you. The goal is being able to say to yourself:

Self, you know what, even though X, Y and Z happened to me, even though I have been successful in many ways, and have failed miserably in some areas of my life, I am still valuable because I'm alive. I have worth just because I am.

Customers can call me whatever they want and I just don't value their opinion of me. Why would I? When they try to push my buttons, it doesn't work.

Marea, 39, Local Government Contact Centre

Keeping it together

You are not super-human and you will make mistakes at work. Unfortunately, in a customer service role when you make a mistake, the customer can be abusive and very vocal about it. The payoff to esteeming yourself unconditionally is that you can face each day knowing a customer's abuse can never have an effect on your self-esteem. You have the tools and strategies to handle the consequences of making a mistake, which might include the customer abusing you and your team leader giving you feedback. Rather than fall apart, you keep it together. You can take on board the feedback and the learnings, but not the abuse.



ACTIVITY

1. Grab some paper and write down all the conditions you place on your value and worth.
I'll feel good about myself when....
Blah...
Blah...
Blah...
2. Try on this useful belief:
*I have decided to esteem myself unconditionally.
My value and worth is a given for no other reason
than I exist in the world.*
3. Screw up the piece of paper and throw it away.
You don't need those conditions any more.
4. Feel fabulous about yourself, for no reason 😊



Sabotaging your worth

Amanda was a forty-year-old coaching client. She described herself as someone with 'low' self-esteem (her words). During coaching she was excited to learn she could esteem herself unconditionally. She wanted to start esteeming herself immediately. She eagerly made the decision to unconditionally value her self-esteem. Amanda was clear about the difference between self-confidence and esteeming herself. She understood the difference between conditional and unconditional self-esteem. She understood it all - in theory.

Amanda's between-sessions task was to uncover any conditions she placed upon herself. When she returned two weeks later for her next coaching session, she was confused and frustrated. I asked her questions about the process she used to value herself, and it all seemed fine: *'I identified all my conditions. I decided I no longer needed any of them. I valued and esteemed myself every day, but I still don't feel any different.'*

Then I asked her one simple question: *'In what way, if any, do you devalue yourself?'*

After an initial silence, tears flowed down her face as Amanda became aware of the many ways in which she devalued herself.

She realised she constantly criticised herself and called herself 'stupid' or 'an idiot' for the slightest

indication of imperfection. She had been unaware of how often she did this, but as she reflected upon it in the coaching session she realised it wasn't just once per day, she did it at least once every hour! Amanda had told herself she was useless every day since she was a child. Now, aged forty, she wanted to change that. Together we celebrated her new awareness. Now she was aware of her pattern, she could interrupt it.

Although Amanda was actively valuing and considering herself as worthy, she had been sabotaging and undoing her valuing by her incredible ability to devalue herself.

In what way, if any, do you devalue yourself? Maybe you devalue yourself by allowing others to treat you poorly. Maybe you don't take ownership of your personal powers. Maybe you take on the role of the martyr and constantly put the needs of others ahead of your own needs. Maybe this is a pattern for you. If it is, until you recognise it is a pattern, change will be more difficult.



Quick Tips

- Self-esteem is not a thing. It's a verb. It's something you do to yourself.
- Your confidence goes up and down, your self-esteem doesn't.
- When someone asks you how confident you are feeling, ask them, 'In my ability to do what?' - This helps you remember confidence is always about your ability to do something, not you as a person.
- Unconditional self-esteem is the useful type of self-esteem.
- Get rid of any conditions on your self-esteem - they are holding you back from being your best.
- Stop describing self-esteem as 'High' or 'Low', and start describing it as 'Unconditional' or 'Conditional'.
- You are more than your performance.
- Separate out YOU as a person, from what you do.

