

Learning To Give Yourself A Pat On The Back

from the American Counseling Association

The world can be a tough place. People can be critical or unappreciative of the things we do. But we sometimes are our own harshest critics. Rather than realistically seeing the results of tasks undertaken, some people can't accept compliments or believe that he or she really has done well.

In such cases, the person may constantly feel that the goal wasn't quite met and that no matter how many people are complimentary about what was done, the person doesn't accept or believe the compliments.

Facing life with such a critical attitude makes it difficult to find pleasure in our lives and accomplishments. We may always feel we "should" have done better and that if people really knew us they wouldn't say such nice things.

Professional counselors refer to the problem as "minimizing the positive" or "telescopic thinking." The reference is to looking through the wrong end of a telescope, thus making everything look smaller than it is rather than magnifying what's being viewed. This unrealistic view can lead to bigger problems.

It doesn't have to be that way. A professional counselor can provide help for someone who has this negative view of his or her life. While a counselor doesn't have a magic means of improving the way you see yourself and your life, he or she can usually help you find a more realistic way of looking at things.

Sometimes all you need is for someone to help guide you through a realistic evaluation of your activities. What a professional counselor can offer is a way to more honestly evaluate how you are performing, rather than the negative view you may have.

One initial approach may be to get you to focus on things you do well. This can be done by making a list of five things you do well, even if not perfectly. It might be things like, "I really care about other people," or "I work hard to be a good parent."

Once you have such a list, stop yourself whenever someone compliments you and you feel yourself minimizing or discounting what was said. Take out your list, look at it and remind yourself that there are things you do right.

But if you find that you can't feel good about what you are accomplishing, talk to a counseling professional. He or she can help you find that more positive attitude.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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