



Top Tips for Personal Development

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Introduction

Why is it that we think we don't have to continue our self development once we have finished our education? Maybe it is because we equate learning and development with the educational institutions that we have spent so much time in during our early years. Of course, we continue to develop throughout our lives, and continue to gain new skills and attributes throughout our working lives and our lives as partners, parents, grandparents, and our involvement with our communities.

The desire to improve is paramount here. If we get to the point of thinking that we no longer need to improve, we are showing how closed our minds are, and how entrenched our attitudes. This approach to life doesn't allow for change, and doesn't allow for development. To be a fully rounded and healthy person, it is necessary to be able to respond to changes in our lives, in our environments and in our hearts and minds.

Rigidity in life will impact not only on ourselves, but on others, and will make our lives difficult when change is necessary or forced upon us.

No-one is perfect, and no-one knows everything there is to know. Thankfully we generally don't need to know everything, but we do need to know when we need to learn something, and when we need to develop new skills and abilities.

Generally speaking, it helps to have a goal or two in mind to guide our self development program, and to have the right sort of attitude. For example,

it's best not to get too worried about what it is you can't do, or need to improve. Rather, we should take the knowledge of our shortcomings and examine ways in which we can improve. Worrying will do no good at all. Our energy should be directed to working out exactly what it is we need to do better and how.

Confidence is everything really, and confidence in your ability to learn and improve will make an amazing difference to your success. If you are convinced that you can't learn something, then you have already lost the battle. If you can tell yourself that if other people can do it, then so can you, this is a sign that you are on the way to success.

Making the most of yourself means treating others as you would like to be treated yourself. Treat people with respect and you are showing that you are worthy of respect too. So don't mess people about, do make sure you are on time if you have arranged to meet someone, and do be courteous and pleasant. If you patronize someone or treat them dismissively, they will remember this about you, and this will not be helpful to you should you need at some point to ask them a favor, or if you find that you are employing them.

Once you have given yourself permission to be confident about your abilities, and to hold your head high with others, you can really work on the aspirations for improvement. Make sure you aim high enough. Low level goals are too easy, and don't test your abilities sufficiently. Aiming too high means you are less likely to meet your target - so maybe you need to set goals that divide up the big task and deal with these one at a time. It is important to make a realistic assessment about how you are going to achieve your goals.

Once you know what you are aiming for, you need to make a sensible plan of how you are going to get there. Plans are essential. Plans allocate time for certain tasks, and break tasks down into manageable proportions. Plans enable you to make the best use of your time, and to develop the skills required to get things done.

It is important to be goal oriented. It is all very well reading up on something, but you need to put theory into practice. For many people, it's a matter of lots of talk, but not so much action. With everything you do, try and ensure there is a measurable outcome that you can identify as a target, and can be seen to be done.

Don't let obstacles get in your way. When things get difficult, it's important that you don't give up. If we never have to overcome problems on our way, we would find life to be an easy ride. The test is how you overcome problems on the road to achievement and success.

If you consider some of the most successful people in the world today, you will find many of them have had more than one career, and many of them have experienced failure in the first degree and continued on to great future success. This reflects their self belief and determination.

So when things go wrong, learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others. Never think you know best all the time, and acknowledge that sometimes you do. You should always think it possible to learn something new.

There are various stages in the path to self development. First, you need to take stock of yourself, your life and your dreams. If you don't

have any dreams, or visions of the future, then you need to spend some time working out where you are going in your life, and whether you should be changing anything.

You need to consider carefully whether your attitudes, feelings and beliefs, your behavior and your actions, are quite what you want them to be. Are they going to hinder or help you achieve your goals and desires? Or do you need to take steps to retrain yourself in certain ways, and work towards a healthier, better life management plan?

Self confidence, self belief, a certain amount of modesty, a positive attitude and a serious commitment are all essential elements to self development. Self development involves work, but it is work that will enable you to live your life fully, and give you the satisfaction of making not only your own dreams come true, but helping others to do so too.

Chapter One –

Learn Self Confidence

Confidence is all important. Confidence in yourself will influence how other people see you, and the extent to which they trust you both as an individual, and as a part of a team. If you can put aside self doubt, and mistrust, and stop thinking that you 'can't do this or can't do that', you are on your way to self confidence and success.

Some people are just born oozing self confidence, and others develop it as they grow up and develop specific skills and abilities and establish their life path.

For others, however, it's something that needs to be worked on as an adult. This may be because they have too often been told that they are useless, incapable etc. They may have been unfortunate enough to have overbearing parents or older siblings, or perhaps been bullied at school or by others in the neighborhood.

It can be hard to unlearn those views of yourself that have probably been internalized over many years. However, it is always, always worth shedding self doubt and re-learning about your self worth.

There are lots of ways that you can achieve this. Self hypnosis, using affirmations and neuro

linguistic programming techniques are all possible aids to learning self confidence.

For all of them, however, you first of all need to understand that we, as humans, are programmed. Our brain and our conscious and sub-conscious minds operate very effectively. If you pile in to the brain statements about how useless we are, then the brain will effectively fill our data bank with this detail. If we ensure that our brain is told that we are able, can learn, and can achieve, then our data bank will reflect this.

If we then ask of ourselves 'what sort of person am I', it is the data in the brain that will give us the answer. So a data bank full of positive information will give positive answers.

Opening the channel to the subconscious is the key to internalizing the data. Try playing a tape or CD of affirmations when you are just about to go to sleep. Your brain has told your conscious mind that its time to sleep - which is an example of self hypnosis really. So your conscious mind switches off, and your subconscious mind is receptive.

This is the technique used to hypnotize people. When a hypnotist tells you that you are feeling sleepy and your eyes are closing, and you will listen to what is being said - this is exactly what you will do.

Your subconscious mind will accept the information it receives, and any instructions it receives. So you can be hypnotized into believing that you are a mouse, a dog, a horse etc. Equally, you can be convinced that you are sensible, capable, able and confident.

Self hypnosis is really about learning how to open the door to your sub-conscious mind, and to transmit the information that you want - just the same way that someone else would do. Using tapes or CD's is a good way of receiving the information you want.

Using affirmations is effective and can be done anywhere and any time.

First thing in the morning, while you are getting ready in the bathroom, look at yourself in the mirror and repeat your affirmations. For example:
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I am a confident and capable person.

I am an achiever, and will be successful.

I work hard and deserve to succeed.

I find solutions when there are problems.

I am goal oriented and successful.

Repeating affirmations, whatever they are, has to be done on a regular basis, and with belief in what you are saying.

Self confidence is the key to learning new skills, progressing in your work and home life, and the foundation of all self development.

Chapter Two –

Identify and Deal with Your Shortcomings

Self improvement requires an initial self assessment, and identification of those characteristics or shortcomings that you want to improve.

Chapter one deals with learning to improve your self confidence, and in this chapter, you need to learn to be modest, insightful and self critical. Mostly we know those aspects of our character that we would like to change, but, modesty aside, it sometimes helps to get some feedback from someone else. So first of all, see what sort of list you come up with by thinking about what you believe you need to improve on.

At work, of course, it is sensible to consider what it is you do well, but also where you might fall short a little. What is it you need to work on to give you the best chance for promotion? Don't make the mistake of thinking that the things you are good at will be sufficient. It is always worth improving your skills, and you never know how important that might be for your future.

It also shows that you are not too big headed, and that you are prepared to work at things even though they may present difficulties for you.

For example, are you impatient, snappy, and too easily able to criticize others? Do you think you are always right, or more able than others?

Or are you too timid or frightened to put yourself forward, always thinking that other people would do something better?

Or are you worried that you are slow to pick up on things, or don't like taking any risks, or worried that someone might laugh at your suggestions?

Do you worry about the way you look, your clothes, your self presentation?

Each of the above categories reflects an area that you might want to change. Starting from the last first, self presentation is a great confidence booster, and good confidence levels will help you work positively towards your development.

Check your wardrobe, check you hair style, and check your personal hygiene. All these things are just taken for granted by many, and sometimes we get a bit behind the times with our fashion sense, and sometimes slip into some lazy personal habits.

However it is absolutely the case that the better you look, the better you feel, and the better you feel, the more you feel capable of.

Sometimes it helps to get a friend or relative to give you an honest assessment and make some suggestions. Take a deep breath, as you might not enjoy hearing that your clothes no longer fit you so well, or that you do wear unsuitable clothes to work. Ensuring that you look business like and professional is much, much more important than

trying to wear the absolute latest fashion, which might look great at a club, but not in the office!

Sometimes time is tight, and things like ensuring finger nails are trim and clean take a back seat - however things like this make a real impression. If you look as if you take care of your appearance and presentation, this will influence other people when making their assessment of you too.

Poor presentation can be overcome with a little thought, a little time, and not too much money.

There are, however, other shortcomings that may need a bit more consideration and time to improve on.

Attitude is incredibly important. A friendly, helpful and self confident attitude will always impress. However, learning how to behave calmly when under pressure is not always easy. This is, of course, just one example. Sometimes you will need to project confidence you might not feel. It may be that you are just shy and feel ill at ease with some people. Even pretty confident people can sometimes just feel as if they are on the back foot with someone who seems to exude self confidence and self belief.

Attitude change is achievable with effort, time and belief that you can change your behavior. Practice your affirmations, and if possible, find someone to help you work through role play. It may feel strange at first, but it will help.

Being able to apply yourself to something new and a bit daunting is sometimes difficult if you have low self esteem. One way of avoiding things you don't want to do is to just not allow yourself enough

time. That way you always have the excuse that there just wasn't enough time!

Really though, you need to meet the challenge. Make the time to do the things you don't necessarily want to do, but which you really know you ought to do. Nine times out of ten, these things are not really too difficult. They just need you to concentrate, to put any fear of failure aside and perhaps to break down the tasks into smaller and more manageable ones. Incrementally, you will find you can achieve everything you need.

The key here is to be quite honest about why some things are difficult for you, or why you just don't want to do them. Acknowledging that you might be frightened of not doing something well is often the only thing between your fear, and your doing away with that fear.

Chapter Three –

Plan for Success

Thinking and acting in a positive manner is part of training yourself to feel and believe you are positive in your approach to things, and that you are going to be successful. It is self fulfilling prophecy! However it only works if you make it work!

First of all, you do need to plan things. First, you need to plan out your long term goals. Decide where you want to be, and then you need to decide on your strategy and have an action plan with target achievements and target dates.

This plan needs to be a visible part of your life every day. Every morning you need to review your goals, and review how you are going to achieve them. Everyday you need to have at least one thing to achieve that takes you nearer your long term goal. If you fail to keep sight of your goals, you won't get to achieve them.

A way of helping you believe in yourself, and in reaching your goals, is to visualize yourself in the position you hope to achieve.

For example, you can, in your mind, see yourself in the boardroom, or receiving that longed for award, or sailing that fabulous boat in wonderful warm blue seas. You can see yourself living in that wonderful penthouse, with a huge terrace, wonderful

views and a hot tub. Or maybe you see yourself as an acclaimed musician, golfer, or artist. It doesn't matter what your dream is - what matters is that you work at achieving it.

Make the absolute most of your time. If you let your emotional fear hold you up, you will put off starting the things you need to do. And if you start, you will prevaricate and find distractions - anything to avoid actually doing what you need to do. This is something you have to overcome to be successful.

Acknowledge the fear, and work out short periods of time to do at least a part of a task. Don't allow yourself to be distracted. Ensure you have peace and quiet, and make sure you take your water or coffee with you.

This way you won't be tempted to just 'put the kettle on while thinking of task A', and won't just wander off to the fridge when you should be concentrating on task B'

Students particularly suffer from the procrastination syndrome. It's easy to say 'oh well, I work much better under pressure', but, in fact, it's rarely true, and most people just make life harder by putting off the moment.

So learn to work to the plan, live with the plan, and see the plan as your route to success. Don't treat it as an enemy - actually it is your best friend.

Make sure your plan allows time for you to think about where you want to go, and why. Thinking about your future is a good way to keep your goals in sight, and to adapt them if need be. It is

worth dreaming a little about how it will feel when you achieve your goals.

Make sure your goals are not too easy, or way too difficult. The long term goals may be a real stretch, and you know you have to work on progress in a realistic manner.

So set your interim goals, but review them on a regular basis. Your 'next' goal should always be just a little bit harder than you think you can manage. Always ensure you have to aim a tad higher than you think you can reasonably get to at each stage.

Review your progress and goals at appropriate times. Build in your reviews to your critical path.

Yes, you should have a critical path plan. That way, you can save time instead of constantly thinking about what you should do next. The plan should show each task in a format that tracks the sequence of your goals and tasks.

A critical path also enables you to build in flexibility and potential for change. It doesn't mean you are absolutely tied to each goal, each date and each vision. It should enable you to see how well you are doing at meeting your targets, though.

You can build almost anything into your critical path. If you need to get your diet right, then you can build in targets for reducing your dependence on sugary foods.

You can have a target date for stopping smoking and weaning yourself off that bad old nicotine. You

can build in the need on a regular basis to examine your attitudes, feelings and self esteem.

Chapter Four –

Obligations and Responsibilities

In this life, we need to think not only of ourselves, but of others. What we do does affect other people, just as other people's attitudes, behavior and actions affect us.

What is wonderful these days is that the individual is encouraged to strive for improvement, not just financially, but intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

We have obligations to ourselves to strive to be rounded, successful and happy. This obligation, I believe, is to ensure that we make the most of our opportunities and situations so that we can give back to those close to us, those who have supported us and also to our communities.

Our communities, families, professions, towns and countries are all organs that are the consequence of the individuals and organizations that participate in their development.

Our own self development is part of the development of our environment, our culture, and our children's futures.

Therefore, if we see our future, and our vision of what we want to achieve, we need to examine not

only the value of those goals and their effects on others, but we also need to consider others in our development path, and our actions in the short and medium term.

So if making money is your long term goal, there is nothing wrong with that at all. Money can do wonderful things. However, how we make money, and how we use it, and how we perceive ourselves, regardless of the amount of money we have - all these things are important.

If, in the process of making money, you don't take any care of the consequences of your actions on other people, you can't expect to be treated well by others on their way up the wealth ladder.

And as we all know, its best to be civil and respectful to those we meet on the way up - just in case we meet them on the way down!

What it all comes down to is that money is not everything. If striving to achieve great wealth is the most important thing, it can appear at times to be more important than our families, our neighbors, our friends and our colleagues.

But you can't take it with you, and wealth doesn't bring respect - but how you achieve it and what you do with it does. Self respect and respect for others is the mainstay of being happy and contented, and is going to be influential in determining our progress and success in life.

Chapter Five –

Commitment and Consistency

Nothing happens overnight, and success doesn't generally arrive overnight unless you are a prodigy, or it is, in fact, the result of many years of working towards your success (or you've won the lottery...but don't hold your breath, just in case).

When problems arise and difficulties set us back, it is essential to keep sight of the long term goal, and not to become disillusioned.

Part of a good self development plan is building in a commitment to pick ourselves up and start again, should set back or disaster strike. In fact, it is really a question of learning from any mistakes we make, analyzing how and why things didn't work out as planned, and making sure lessons are learned for the future.

Learning can, and should be continuous. None of us ever know everything, and all of us can learn from other people, from their experience, and from their achievements or setbacks, as well as our own.

So learning not to fall into a stale routine when things don't go right is really important. Your self esteem is not directly linked to any one project, any one target, or any one goal. Your self respect and self esteem is linked to your

ability to deal with things as they occur in life. Finding solutions to problems is important, but the process is also important.

Someone once explained to me the difference between being problem centered and solution oriented. If all you can do is think about the problem, you are not really working your way to a solution. If you are determined to find the right outcome, you will be able to see the problem clearly and what is possible to rectify the situation.

Most management training courses will recommend not being problem centered, or 'stuck in the cornflakes', as one manager described it.

For many people, the path to self improvement can only really begin when we learn to stop feeling guilty, or worried about past events and actions. In other words, allowing our life chances to be held back by being stuck on old problems.

Going forward and developing your future in a positive and healthy way almost certainly means that you need to shed some of the angst of the past.

If you are still worrying about something you did or didn't do in the past, or have a feeling of failure or inadequacy that just hangs around you, you really need to let it go.

You can't go back and undo anything that you did. Nor can you go back and do something that you didn't. If you live in the past, this is only in your mind.

You can't go back to the time of the event that keeps nagging you. You can only decide either to allow it to continue to torment you and hold you

back, or decide that its time to let go, put whatever it is in the past, and move forward.

What is also important is that you also deal with any unhealthy attitudes; attitudes that you know are damaging and that only you can deal with.

For example, how can you move forward, with a positive attitude that enables you to see clearly and rationally how to act and behave to achieve your best, if you know you have, for example, an emotional leg iron that leads to drinking too much alcohol or dependency on nicotine, or poor eating habits?

Addictions can be broken. There are millions of people who will attest to the fact that you can break the habit, and you can train your body not to crave addictive substances like alcohol or nicotine.

More often than not, there are emotional reasons why people become addicted. So we need to consider what emotional debris we are carrying around with us, and then shed it and move on.

Eating disorders can be just as damaging as any other. Again, there are generally emotional reasons why we may need to concentrate on controlling what we eat and eating too little, or binge eating.

It is imperative that we become emotionally adult, i.e. we take responsibility for our health and behavior that affects our health. This applies to all sorts of things too.

Understanding that our emotional reaction to things can lead to child like responses is a key to taking rational control of our lives.

It is more and more commonplace to read that we are what we eat (or take in to our bodies), and that having a good healthy and balanced diet will make a big difference not only to our physical and mental health, but also to our ability to function effectively.

Use brain training to stop eating unhealthy sugary foods that give you an energy rush one minute, and leaves you feeling depleted half an hour later, try to learn how to change your diet. Plan it, and give yourself a reasonable timescale.

They call it called cognitive dissonance or neuro linguistic programming, or self hypnosis, but it doesn't really matter what its technical term is. It is about re-educating your brain.

You can find all sorts of techniques to do this. You can make tapes and play them at night as you are going off to sleep, or you can self hypnotize yourself to be receptive to self instruction.

You believe what your brain has been trained to believe. Lots of this training comes from you. Some of it from other people and what you hear. However, it is how you program the information that goes into the brain that matters.

If you have always believed that you are worthless and incapable of doing anything worth while, you have to train your brain to accept new information.

Tell your brain that you are clever, and perfectly capable, and can achieve great things. Believe me, your brain will believe it if you keep telling it that this is the case.

If you keep telling yourself that you don't like cakes, each time you have the urge to get to the fridge for a nice piece of chocolate cake, tell yourself 'no! I don't like cake'. Keep on doing this every time, every day, and after a week you will be surprised. Your brain will have 'remembered' that you don't like cake, and your urges will go away.

Similarly, we need to ensure that we drink lots of water, and get regular exercise.

This way we are showing our commitment to our health, our potential and our well being.

One other thing, and sometimes difficult to address, is the need to ensure we are not being held back or damaged by relationships or friendships that are just not right for us.

This doesn't mean that you need to just ditch your partner, and 'lose' your family. It does, however, mean that damaging relationships need to be addressed, carefully, and if necessary, changes need to happen. You need to have support, just as your family and friends will need your support. Balance is important here, as in all things.

So your commitment to your self development is very important. If success doesn't come as you expect it to, don't give in. Keep going, keep working at it.

Hand in hand with this commitment is consistency. Like all things, it is quite possible to train yourself to be consistent in your attitudes and behavior.

It's important to not only believe, but to put in the effort in a consistent manner. Doing your best for one day a week isn't really going to do it for you.

It's very important to develop the right attitude, which means really that you have to 'live' your plan. Living your plan means taking everything you do seriously, and ensuring that you are doing your best.

This doesn't mean you don't get to have time off - far from it. Some of the most successful people are successful in different areas of their lives. The trick is not to waste time or opportunity. When it's time for recreation, make the most of that time by ensuring you really do enjoy this time and the activities you choose.

When it's time to spend together with family or friends, make the most of that time, and ensure your concentration is on the interaction with them, and not on something else.

So living an authentic life, i.e., making decisions about how you live, how you spend your time, and how you behave with others are major steps towards ensuring you reach your potential. It is a foundation stone for your self development journey.

Chapter Six –

Consolidation

So now you have examined your weaknesses, and have a program for improving in areas where you know your abilities are lacking, or performance is weak. You have analyzed your attitudes, and are able to see where you need to make changes.

Your emotional well being is being dealt with, and you are taking rational control of any areas where emotional problems were leading to difficulties. Now you have considered your goals, your strategy, and your values.

You have achieved a comfortable and healthy diet, and have ensured you have good, strong, supportive and healthy relationships with family and friends.

Last but not least, you are working towards a balance in your physical, mental, emotional, professional and spiritual lives and seeking consolidation.

OK so maybe you haven't achieved all these things, but you are on the way, and no longer delude yourself, or allow yourself to drift away from your plan.

Consolidation is now the key to moving forward. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you have dealt with everything and that's that. Don't get over confident. Don't lose sight of the fact that the path to self improvement and self fulfillment

is a life long path. You may be achieving some of your early goals, and you may be setting new ones, but it is only when you have fully internalized the knowledge that self development is a permanent and ongoing part of life that you are really ensuring you will reap the long term benefits.

For some people, realizing their potential involves some quite radical changes in goals. Maybe it's just a question of having achieved your desired level of success, and then needing to move on to something else.

Maybe in the course of your progress in reaching your initial goals, you realized that your vision of how that success would feel didn't quite feel right.

Maybe you find that money isn't all that you thought it was, and that you need to pursue goals that are less about money, and more about your inner life.

Or you could find that making the money is easier than you ever thought it could be, and much more interesting is how it can be spent to achieve really wonderful outcomes for others who are not as able as you.

This level of consolidation is the level necessary for you to move towards helping others to fulfill their dreams, their potential and their path to self development.

When you find you enjoy helping others as much as, or more than you enjoy helping yourself, you will have become efficient in your self development. Of course, this is the point where you need to remind yourself of the requirement for a little humility

and modesty in life, and the need to definitely avoid feeling smug.

And finally...

Let's hope that your path to self fulfillment is truly mind blowing, and that the process, as well as the achievements, is positive, and energizing.

We are programmed to survive, but really to want to do our best, and to achieve our best means some self examination, some effort and some dedication.

Don't be fooled into thinking there are quick fixes to getting the most out of life, or that it is a question of this method or that method.

The questions and the answers are always inside you, as are those unique abilities to discover and enjoy your potential

Good luck!