

Just bank on yourself

Our self-worth is based on how we feel about ourselves as a person — in terms of our skills, achievements, status, financial resources and physical attributes. But who defines our self-worth? What should it be measured against? It's often confused with net worth. The very fact that it relates to 'self' signifies that it refers to a feeling of being whole and complete.

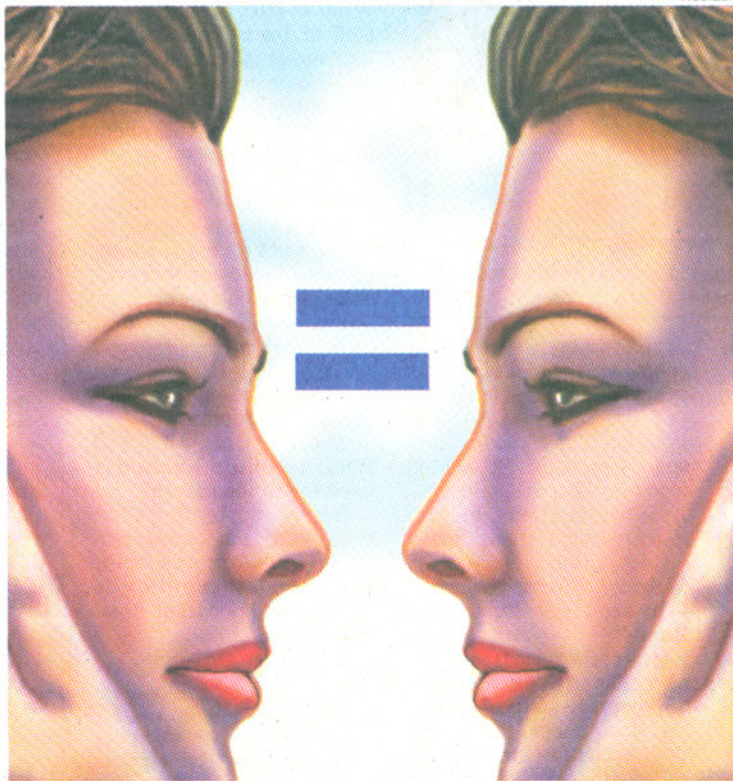
Aspirations to fulfill our basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter drive us to work towards a goal. Gradually, our needs propel us to climb higher up the social ladder. Efforts translate into success and our basic needs graduate into indulgence. The basic need for a house grows into the need for a larger home and then into the desire to have the best address in town. Over time, our material possessions become an integral part of our identity.

Then the sub-prime crisis happened. Not only did it change the face of economies but it affected people's 'self-worth'. People's material desires have been compromised and their self worth has diminished. When most measurable possessions are suddenly taken away, what are you left with? Material objects become crutches and we seem to lose our ability to live without them. There is such a high emotional attachment to one's possessions that a feeling of helplessness creeps in once they are gone.

All of us have basic emotional needs. They vary from person to person and depend upon the stage of life we're at. Leadership consultant Anthony Robbins has classified our emotional needs into six categories: Certainty; Uncertainty; Significance; Love and connection; Growth and Contribution.

People often have two or more needs working in parallel. But, the one need that dominates all of us is the 'need for approval'. We seek approval by looking good, working hard, having a beautiful home, bringing up successful children and so on. We depend on 'others' to give us our sense of our self worth. This desire arises either due to lack of positive reinforcement as a child or a sense of rejection or neglect in the early years. In order to fulfill the need to 'fit in', people get professional degrees and try to gain material success, fame

Forget the downturn. It's not all about the money. Nor should it be about seeking other people's approval. Self-worth lies within us, says Anshu Khanna



and money. Some resort to slandering others in a bid to get approval.

The constant search for validation of our self-worth is exhausting and debilitating. Becoming dependent on others to feel good about ourselves or waiting for positive affirmation restricts our growth.

Consider the way people respond to other people's acknowledgement, say, by being called on stage to receive a standing ovation. Some people respond by opening their arms wide, laughing and even jumping up and down. Others barely tolerate a few seconds of applause before holding up their hands as if to say, "Enough. Please stop. I'm getting uncomfortable."

How do you overcome this constraint? What is self-worth really? Do you love yourself and accept yourself for who you are? Or are you constantly trying to measure yourself using transient things?

After all, the earliest man survived without many amenities. He found creative ways to seek shelter

to protect himself from the vagaries of nature. He discovered caves and then brick houses. Starting from leaves and animal skin, he moved on to discover cloth yarn to cover his body. So, what was the early man equipped with, when he had no house or clothing? He operated from the knowledge that he carried within him the means of overcoming the

challenges of the day-to-day living.

Every experience in life adds to our knowledge. And self-worth can only be measured by the strength of one's intellect and a strong mind. It is a well of knowledge, which we constantly need to draw upon. We need to develop an inventory of all the positive attributes we possess; this will outweigh all our fears.

Lack of self-worth can be masked by indulgence in material items. With the world hit by a financial crisis and the value of property and other assets dropping substantially, what remains intact is the value of our skills or the knowledge within us.

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During the course of our lives, we absorb knowledge from various sources, including formal education, experiences, environment and our families. That knowledge is our true wealth and is not transient. It is a gift we can share with each other. As it is written: "The fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive a smile in return..."

I once read about a successful businesswoman who was diagnosed with cancer. The doctors discouraged her from working at the hospital. She responded with the words: "My body is sick but not my mind!" We have to carry on digging into our internal 'goldmine'.

Many may constantly be waiting for a miracle to transform the world, create jobs and secure everyone's future. But all of us possess the capacity to trigger change. Engage with your own self-worth. It is this love for 'self' that will give you the basic material to overcome difficult circumstances and create miracles in your life.

(Anshu Khanna is an executive coach and leadership development consultant)