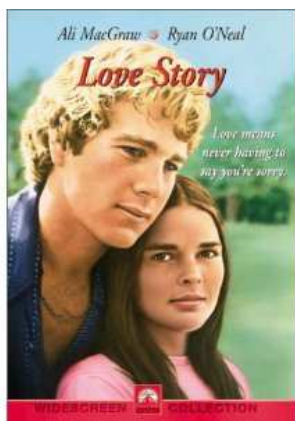


THINGS YOU MIGHT FIND DIFFICULT

By: JAMES LADD

Life Coach



"Love means never having to say you're sorry!" You may or may not be old enough to remember that line from the movie; "LOVE STORY," which believe it or not came out all the way back in 1970. I suppose the rationale for what was meant here was that love is unconditional and therefore does not require apologies.

Back around the time that this movie came out I was well, pretty young and just a little bit of a romantic. I remember sitting in the theater trying to hold back the tears and have to admit to believing it...that is that love was unconditional and required no apologies. Oh boy, did I learn my lesson and a few more along the way! But that is another story for another day.

Combining love with apologizing seemed like a good lead into what I wanted to write about this month.

Life presents us with all kinds of challenges and at times there are a number of things all of us find difficult. Two of those in particular that many find difficult are; saying we're sorry and telling someone we love them! I am sure that most of us can recall a time or two when we knew and should have apologized for something we did or did not do and when we could have said we loved someone, we knew we loved, in a situation or circumstance that called for it.

So what is it that prevents some of us from doing what we know is the right thing to do, from doing what we know is congruent with our values and our needs? I believe that it stems from; "our level of self-esteem," or lack thereof. We do not value ourselves sufficiently enough and therefore by extension others to the degree necessary to be able to say; "I am sorry or I love you."

The Function of Self-Esteem

To better understand let's break it down and look a bit more closely at what self-esteem actually is and how one goes about measuring it.

Self-esteem in its simplest terms is how you see yourself. It includes; how you feel you look, how you see your personality, what you believe others think of you, your perceived likeability and the status you feel you have.

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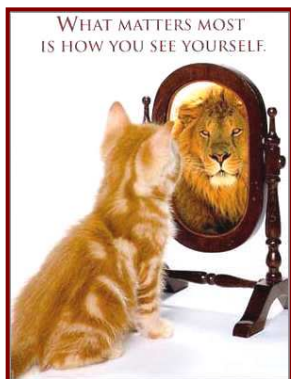
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If you are interested in investigating the possibility of having your own personal coach, please contact me for a one hour exploratory session at no charge!
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Let's say that there are three levels of self-esteem; low, average and high. If you have a **low level of self-esteem** you hold a negative view of self and a feeling that others have a negative view as well. Low self-esteem influences much of what you do, from your confidence level at work and your sensitivity with friends to your feelings of worth at home.

If you have an **average level of self-esteem** your acceptance varies with your roles in life. This means that you may confront a situation one day in which you bubble with confidence, and yet feel that you could have done much better in a different situation the next day. Most of us are this way, praising ourselves one moment, condemning ourselves the next. For most of us, this is an accurate reflection of our skills and our striving to do better. The important part of such a view is that we have accurate perceptions of when we are doing well and when we could have done better.

Finally, a **high level of self-esteem** means that you are saying that you are a confident and worthy individual.

Others probably find you easy to talk to, since you report that you accept both praise and criticism from others in an objective fashion. In addition you are likely to base your behaviour on internalized values and accept the responsibility for whatever the consequences of your behaviour may be. You feel comfortable about your ability to handle any problem or challenges that arise and overall have good feelings toward life.

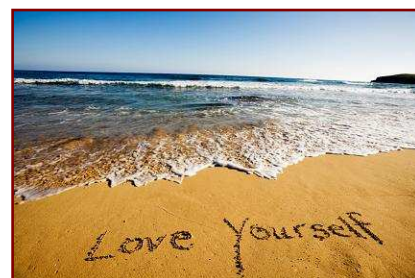
Whatever your level of self-esteem the picture that each of us has about him/herself is a portrait based largely on information provided to us by our social experiences. We are almost constantly adding information from our environment about the effects of our attitudes and behaviour on others and their reactions to us. Such social reactions form the basis for our feelings about other people and help us develop our view of what each of us is like as a person.

Where Does That Leave Us?



So where does that leave us with regard to apologizing and saying I love you?

It seems clear that a low level of self-esteem pretty much negates the possibility of us telling ourselves the truth and accepting responsibility for saying we are sorry for our behaviour when the situation demands it. This is often because a person with a low level of self-esteem views apologizing as a sign of weakness not in fact a sign of strength. Admitting any sign of weakness only serves to make them feel worse, of lesser value. If this is you it is important to alter what you view as having to do before you begin to become more accepting of yourself.



With an average level of self-esteem one's ability to apologize is more situational, meaning that it can go either way based upon the circumstances. For example, if the giving of the apology comes with a feeling of inadequacy than it is much more difficult to do. On the other hand feeling comfortable and safe makes the apologizing easier. Having said that though, a person with an average level of esteem is able to more easily look at themselves than one with a low level of esteem and can with effort make the necessary adjustments to move toward a higher level of esteem.

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Because one of the attributes of a person with high self-esteem is that they accept both praise and criticism from others in an objective manner, they will not have any difficulty with apologizing. For them apologizing is never an issue and is viewed as a sign of strength and not weakness.

"An apology? Bah! Disgusting! Cowardly! Beneath the dignity of any gentleman, however wrong he might be." Steve Martin

This brings us to the ability or inability to say I love you. Let's start by saying that everyone needs to be loved and those who are loved need to know they are loved, in fact need to hear the words. For those who it seems find saying the words difficult it is important to try as much as possible to understand what is preventing those cherished three words from being spoken when felt.

As previously mentioned in all likelihood the root cause is a fragile to somewhat fragile self-esteem. A sure sign that this might be an issue in your life would be an accompanying feeling of vulnerability.

No matter how hard a person may try, the words almost always catch in their throat and cannot escape. This sense of vulnerability could be based on a fear of rejection, of being laughed at or perhaps the biggest of all reasons for not being able to say the words or express ones innermost feelings is the fear of embarrassment.

Now if it happens that you are one of those individuals just described then perhaps part of what feeds this vulnerability, embarrassment, experience of rejection, of being laughed at is that you have experienced these emotions before in a similar situation and are replaying them in your present life circumstances. In part then, it has become an issue of trust.

Right about now, I'm guessing if you did not know a lot of this already, you're beginning to think; "hey, wait a minute; self-esteem is tied up with all aspects of our behaviour." And let me add that all aspects of our behaviour are driven by our needs. And it is here that the solution lies.



Abraham Maslow, the renowned psychologist and creator of the Hierarchy of Needs stated that one of the best ways to heighten ones level of self-esteem is to set meaningful, attainable goals and then see yourself achieving them.

He would go on to tell anyone experiencing a low to average level of self-esteem to search out the origins

Maslow's **Hierarchy of Needs**



of this negative view of the self and once done begin to set goals which are going to lead you 'away' from those original aching experiences of life toward a more self-actualized self.

Maslow defined self-actualization this way; "what a man can be, he must be." This forms the basis of the perceived need for self-actualization. This level of need pertains to what a person's full potential is and realizing that potential. Maslow describes this desire as the desire to become more and more of what one is to become, everything that one is capable of becoming. So you need to climb the pyramid, moving up through the various levels of need for however long it may take, until you reach the summit of your ultimate life purpose, the true meaning of your life. Each step up the ladder comes with it a greater feeling of self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

The end is the beginning. It is about first reaching a level of comfort with yourself before you will have the self confidence to apologize or say to someone that you love them.

Coach Ladd

