



# The HeART

of

# ENCOURAGEMENT



By Gail Ostrishko

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ncouragement is literally the fine art of instilling courage and self-esteem. At the HeART of encouragement is the Latin root 'Coeur,' meaning heart.

It is our capacity and desire to acknowledge, support and nurture positive attributes in others and ourselves. Encouragement goes a level deeper than praise by actively demonstrating appreciation for not only an individual's unique abilities and attributes but also their efforts and their capacity to succeed. What we focus on expands; we find more of what we expect to see. When we look for the good that surrounds us we not only find it, but recognizing it becomes habit. Understood by many as the self-fulfilling prophecy, this Theory of Resonance, or Law of Attraction is rooted in the science of quantum physics.

Because our brains are designed for survival, they naturally notice what is going wrong rather than what is going right. Encouragement involves retraining our brains to focus on the positive and notice what works well in ourselves and others. Like all art forms, it comes more naturally to some than others, but it can be learned and we all have the capacity to master the art of encouragement.

One of the most significant and consistently documented findings in psychology over the past several decades is the fact that individuals can choose what they think and those choices have a profound impact on health, happiness, relationships and longevity. Coined as 'the power of positive thinking' by Zig Ziglar, and "Learned Optimism" by Martin Seligman, it is no secret that our minds create our own personal reality, and that reality determines our degree of happiness and satisfaction in life and relationships. Our bodies only know what our minds tell them, so why not send positive encouraging messages?

## BEGIN WITHIN

Encouragement begins within. We cannot do something for others that we have not experienced ourselves. We have a tendency to be our own worst enemy; criticizing even the simplest aspects of who we are and how we operate. Begin by monitoring your self-talk. What do you say to yourself about yourself? How long would you remain friends with someone who shared the same sentiment? We all have a tendency to magnify mistakes and 'should' on ourselves. Learn to love yourself and recognize opportunities for learning in every situation.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

The purpose of encouragement is to acknowledge and honor individual uniqueness, effort and capacity to succeed. Many of us were raised with the Golden Rule – Do unto others, as you would like others to do unto you. As a result, we tend to encourage others in the ways we like to be encouraged. The more modern version of this concept is coined the Platinum Rule: Treat others the way they want to be treated. Our capacity to encourage others is rooted in our relationships and knowledge of what others value and appreciate. It is fueled by a genuine desire to bring out the best in others and prepares us to do the same for ourselves.



*"Encouragement is to people what sunshine is to flowers."*

*-Gail Ostrishko*

## BE SPECIFIC

Use descriptive language that focuses on the positive and builds self-esteem. Capture what you see and appreciate in others. Acknowledge effort as well as outcome, the clearer you are about what you appreciate the easier it is for others to replicate and reciprocate specific words and behavior patterns. Tell others how you like to be encouraged so they can make it personal. Choose your words carefully and abandon negative language because words have power and you cannot take them back.

## COMMUNICATE CONSISTENTLY

It is not enough to recognize the best in others, we must also acknowledge it through words and actions. Verbal and nonverbal cues combine to create powerful messages, all of which either encourage or discourage; there is no neutral ground. Spoken words as simple as 'Thank You' or 'Good Job' go a long way towards instilling courage and self-esteem. I especially appreciate written notes of thanks and/or encouragement because they are powerful and permanent. In a world of junk mail, cyberspace and bills, it is refreshing to receive a handwritten note from someone eager to acknowledge your efforts. Smiling is a simple form of encouragement and is likely the most universal and contagious.

## Laugh Often

Laughter truly is the best medicine, and humor heals. Learn to laugh at yourself and you will never cease to be amused. An internal body massage for every organ, laughter releases chemicals that counteract cortisol. He who laughs LASTS!



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