

The Art of ENCOURAGEMENT



Written By Gail Ostrishko, Life Coach

Encouragement is the fine art of expressing approval and support, which is the foundation of inspiring courage and self-esteem in ourselves and others. It goes a level deeper than praise by acknowledging and demonstrating appreciation for an individual's unique contributions, efforts and capacity to succeed.



The origin of encouragement is the Latin root 'Coeur,' meaning heart. The heart of encouragement is our capacity to know and to nurture our own positive attributes and to recognize and honor the unique gifts of others.

Because our brains are designed for survival, they naturally emphasize what is going wrong rather than what is going right. Encouragement involves retraining our brains to focus on the positive and notice what is going right with ourselves and others.

Like all art forms, it must be learned and though it may come more naturally for

some than others, 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 few decades is the fact that individuals can choose what they think and those choices have a direct impact on health, happiness 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 level 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 smallest aspects of who we are and how we operate. Yet the Universal Law of Resonance ensures that what we focus on expands. So why not focus on what is good in anticipation of more of the same? When

we expect the best of ourselves and others, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Begin by motoring your self-talk. What do you say to yourself about yourself? How long would you remain friends with someone who said the same things about you?

We all have a tendency to 'should' on ourselves and to magnify mistakes. I prefer to recognize opportunities for learning in any decisions I find faulty.

Make it Personal

The purpose of encouragement is to acknowledge and honor individual uniqueness, effort and capacity rather than to express our own values and opinions. Many of us grew up with the Golden Rule – Do unto others, as you have others do unto you. As a result, we tend to encourage others in the ways we like to be encouraged.

Tony Alessandra popularized a more effective approach he called the Platinum Rule: Treat others the way they want to be treated. Our capacity to encourage others is rooted in our knowledge of the individual and what they value and appreciate. It is fueled by a genuine desire to bring out the

best in others and prepares individuals to do the same for themselves.

My husband knows how much I love flowers, and he often brings home a beautiful bouquet. I can still remember talking to him years ago on my way home from a particularly stressful day. What a nice surprise it was to come home to find a hot bath drawn and waiting for me in a clean candle-lit bathroom. I think most people are encouraged by any gesture aimed at reducing stress and workload.

Communicate Consistently

It is not enough to recognize the best in others, we must acknowledge it through words and action. Verbal and nonverbal cues combine to send powerful messages, all of which either encourage or discourage. 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, what an exciting moment it can be to receive a handwritten note from someone eager to acknowledge your efforts.

I also make a point to verbalize my appreciation for my meal or service when I have a particularly pleasant dining experience. While it usually catches people by surprise, I can tell they appreciate it. Encouragement costs nothing and takes very little time and effort, yet the potential returns are infinite.

Smiling is a simple form of encouragement and is likely the most contagious. It is universally understood and an accepted gesture. Consider how we instinctively smile at babies, and even newborns quickly reciprocate, which encourages everyone!

Hugs are one of my favorite forms of encouragement, and necessary for our survival and growth. Not everyone is comfortable with this level of physical contact as I learned early in my work with troubled teens and their families. My stepfather didn't even know how to hug when he married my mom, but we didn't mind teaching him and he caught on very quickly!

Listening with genuine interest sends a powerful message that you value a person and their ideas. It also encourages open, honest communication. Trusting, sharing responsibility and taking an interest in what others enjoy are also very encouraging behaviors. How do you like to be encouraged?

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

Encouragement is the fine art of instill-

Simple Steps for ENCOURAGING

Adopt an Attitude of Gratitude

Giving thanks for our blessings every day make us more aware and appreciative of them.

Focus on What is Positive

Every cloud has a silver lining, train your brain to see it!

Verbalize Only Words that Build Up: Abandon Negative Language

Choose your words carefully because you cannot take them back.

Express Confidence in Someone's Capacity to Succeed

Share responsibility and embrace mistakes as opportunities for learning.

ing courage in ourselves and others. It is a source of power and nourishment necessary for our survival and growth. It energizes and inspires us with the courage and hope we need to fully recognize, express and appreciate uniqueness. The more practice with and exposure to encouragement we have the more encouraging we become. While encouragement is a fine art, we must consciously cultivate it as a powerful approach to living that anyone can master and everyone can benefit from.

Gail Ostrishko is a creative catalyst for building relationships and organizations from the inside out. Consistently noted for her high energy and infectious enthusiasm, Gail works with individuals and organizations to increase productivity, satisfaction and retention by identifying and maximizing individual and collective strengths and creative capacity. Gail moved to Cary in 1965 and is a 1980 graduate of Cary High School. Please visit GailO.com or write to gailo@gailo.com to arrange your complimentary coaching session.

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