University of Richmond Employee Wellness

Valentine’s Day: The Importance of Loving Yourself on February 14

The cry of the simpering singletons on Valentine’s Day is always the same: “I just want to be loved.” It’s the day for sighs and teeth-gnashing from the romantically unattached and competitive smugness from those who are taken – but whoever said the day should just be about one very limiting definition of the word “love”? Happy people rarely see the need to boast and these types of attention-seeking behaviors are more likely to be a symptom of vulnerability and desperately low self-esteem.

Even romantic or sexual love can be sub-divided, varying from passionate love to companionate love via obsessive and nurturing, but why over-focus on mating partnerships at all? Romantic love might be the most written-about, sung-about and intense, but that intensity can involve intense emotional pain as well as pleasure. Other forms of love might be less dramatic – but that doesn’t always mean they are less important in our lives.

We love our parents and our friends and we love our pets. We also love ourselves but sadly we’d often be way down the list of “loveables” in our lives and for many of us our feelings about ourselves are complex, negative and downright baffling. Self-hatred is a common problem that can lead to depression and anger, but whereas when we have negative feelings about someone else we try to deal with them, when it’s ourselves we have a tendency to ignore those feelings or wallow in them, which will in turn make them worse.

Self-love really can be “the greatest love of all” and it is worth effort and analysis, as it is key to obtaining all the other loving relationships in our lives. Yet we rarely make enough effort to obtain it or improve it and when we do put it under the microscope we often confuse it with vanity and arrogance – which it isn’t.

To love and be loved by other people you must first love yourself. Does that sound like the mantra of an arrogant egotist? Well it shouldn’t, because self-love must never be confused with narcissism or other selfish behaviors. Ideal self-love involves workable levels of confidence and self-awareness – but never selfishness or the kind of constant navel-gazing self-obsession that can be so keenly promoted by gurus and life-coaches.

We live in an age of rabid self-promotion and vanity, with people bombarding social media with selfies and reports of all the minutest trivia of their lives. Facebook is awash with self-publicists who share photos and stories to suggest they are having perfect lives, meaning it’s all too easy to assume that these people have it nailed in terms of self-love and self-confidence. In fact the opposite is usually true, as genuinely

Genuine self-love of the useful kind comes with a hefty side-order of humor and an airy acknowledgment of all our flaws and randomness. It’s a realistic love affair, not a besotted obsession. It’s about making allowances and it’s about never over-defining the perception of “who I am”, because we are all a multitude of often conflicting personality traits and behaviors.

It is perfectly possible to love yourself but still strive to change for the better rather than just shrugging off criticism or mistakes with a cry of “I’m being myself, this is who I am”. It’s about having values but not being overly judgmental or intolerant of others. We are all work in progress in terms of self-development and skidding to a halt just to stand and admire a false sense of integrity is not the kind of self-love that works.

One of the best things about self-love is that it is contagious. We are all drawn to and attracted by that person in a room that signals the right levels of confidence because it is the type of easy-going confidence that makes us all feel better for having met them. Self-lovers make us feel better about ourselves not worse, which is why they should never be confused with the vampiric self-love of the narcissist, who sucks the confidence out of other people to feed their own self-obsessions.

So while rushing off to buy a Valentine’s card with the words ‘I LOVE ME’ across the front might not be the perfect way of expressing yourself, some acknowledgement of all your more lovely and lovable traits might be a start – plus a quiet but realistic pat on the back for all your efforts and achievements so far in your life. Charm and flattery are a traditional feature of Valentine’s Day so why not turn a little of both on yourself for a change?

Source: International Business Times
Educational Corner: Five Symptoms that May Signal Heart Failure

Chest pain is not always present in people with heart disease. Instead, other symptoms can be the signals that alert you to heart disease.

"Any symptom that seems to be provoked by exertion and relieved by rest could be heart-related. Particularly in people with underlying risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, tobacco use, a sedentary lifestyle, obesity, and a strong family history of heart disease, other symptoms besides chest pain may be the clue to a heart problem," says Dr. Randall Zusman, a cardiologist with Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital.

When any of the following symptoms appear with no obvious reason, pay attention and report them to your doctor.

1. **Fatigue:** Fatigue can be caused by many illnesses and by medicines. But a constant, new fatigue also can sometimes signal heart failure (a condition in which the heart fails to pump well) or coronary artery disease. "It’s less common as an indication of coronary artery disease, but it can be," Dr. Zusman says.

2. **Unexplained Aches and Pains:** The blockage of the blood supply to the heart muscle that occurs with coronary artery disease leads the heart to "cry out in pain" when it is asked to work harder. However, that pain is not always felt in the chest. Sometimes it is felt in the shoulders, arms, back, jaw, or abdomen. Particularly when pain in these locations occurs with exercise and disappears with rest, the pain could well be a sign of heart disease.

3. **Shortness of Breath:** Don’t be too quick to assume shortness of breath is just a matter of being out of shape. Unexplained shortness of breath that occurs with small amounts of activity could indicate heart trouble. "If you climb up five flights of stairs, I expect you to be short of breath. But if you go up 10 stairs and you’re short of breath, that may indicate a heart problem," Dr. Zusman warns.

4. **Swollen Feet or Ankles:** Leg, ankle, or foot swelling—the kind that leaves an indentation if you press your finger into it—could be a sign of heart failure. It also could be caused by kidney disease, liver failure, eating too much salty food, inefficient blood flow in your legs (venous insufficiency), or a side effect of some drugs (particularly calcium-channel blockers).

5. **Heart Palpitations:** The term "palpitations" means a heartbeat that feels irregular or rapid. Most palpitations are harmless. They may be caused by anxiety, caffeine intake, or dehydration. But sometimes palpitations indicate a heart problem. It’s important to note how your palpitations feel, how often they occur, and what you’re doing when you experience them. For example, if you’re resting—like watching television—and your heart suddenly starts beating irregularly or rapidly, bring that to your doctor’s attention.

Source: Harvard Health

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Tuscan White Bean, Kale, and Sausage Soup

**Ingredients:**
2 tbsp. olive oil, divided
1 lb. smoked sausage, ground or links
1 medium white onion, peeled and diced
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced
6 cloves garlic, minced
8 cups chicken stock
2 15 oz. cans white beans (cannellini or Great Northern)
2 tbsp. Italian seasoning
1 bunch lacinato or curly kale, roughly chopped with stems removed
Sea salt and black pepper, to taste
Grated Parmesan cheese

**Directions:**
1. Heat one tablespoon oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat. Add sausage and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until browned. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the sausage to a clean plate, and set aside. Discard remaining grease.
2. Add the remaining oil to the pot. Add the onion and carrot, and sauté for 7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onion is soft and translucent. Stir in garlic and sauté for 1-2 more minutes, stirring frequently, until fragrant.
3. Add in the chicken stock, white beans, herbs, and cooked sausage and stir until combined. Continue cooking until the soup reaches a simmer.
4. Stir in the kale, cover, and cook for 5 more minutes, or until the kale has softened a bit.
5. Taste, and season with a few pinches of salt and pepper, as needed.
6. Serve warm, garnished with lots of Parmesan cheese. Or refrigerate for up to 3 days, and freeze for up to 3 months.
Why Random Acts of Kindness Are So Important

We first heard the saying practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty many years ago when we were at Findhorn, the renowned spiritual community in Scotland. It always struck us as being the most obvious thing to do, that practicing kindness and beauty should be a natural expression of who we are.

Although wonderful in its intention, recently there appears to be some confusion about it, particularly the practice random acts of kindness part. This misunderstanding seems to arise from the idea that the receiver might not appreciate the kindness, that it might even make them apprehensive or distrustful. Sadly, this speaks more about the suspicious world we live in than about the nature of kindness. It is a shame that this maybe the case, but if so then what is needed are more acts of kindness and done by more of us, not less.

Wikipedia says that a random act of kindness is: “...a selfless act performed by a person or persons wishing to either assist or cheer up an individual... There will generally be no reason other than to make people smile, or be happier.” Perhaps it is the use of the world random that is misleading, and that it would be easier if we used the word spontaneous or impulsive instead. Spontaneity means we are acting on an impulse, in the moment, freely; particularly, that we are moved to do something for someone without any thought of receiving something in return. Such behavior is surely the ground of a healthy and joyful society, where we happily give of ourselves to help another and such an act is happily received.

What stops us from acting this way? Invariably it is our insecurities, lack of self-esteem and self-love, doubts and inadequacies. And the same qualities also stop us from being able to freely receive. If we feel unworthy then we believe we have nothing to give; if we don’t love ourselves then we don’t trust why someone would be kind to us. We may fear that if someone gives without reason that they actually want something from us, or that they have an ulterior motive.

When we feel uncomfortable with generosity it can make us get stuck in ourselves and our issues. When we can appreciate the beauty of spontaneity it takes us out of such self-centeredness; it enables us to let go of focusing on self and to freely reach out to each other. We can both give and receive. Such egoless moments are exquisite!

Giving spontaneously can also have a remarkable affect on all those who come in contact with both the act and the players. For instance, HuffPost blogger Arthur Rosenfield was in the drive-thru line at Starbucks. The man in line behind him was getting impatient and angry, leaning on his horn and shouting insults at both Arthur and the Starbucks workers. Beginning to get angry himself, Arthur chose to keep his cool and change the negativity into something positive. He paid for the man’s coffee and drove away. When he got home at the end of the day, he discovered that he had created a chain of giving that had not only continued all that day but had been highlighted on NBC News and within twenty-four hours had spread around the world on the Internet.

Random acts of kindness are essential to our wellbeing, as they liberate us from self-obsession, selfishness, and isolation; they are the effect of an open and loving nature. True generosity is giving without expectation, with no need to be repaid in any form. This is the most powerful act of generosity, as it is unconditional, unattached, and free to land wherever it will. Whether we give to our family, friends, or to strangers, it is the same.

We may feel we have little to offer, but whether it is a few pennies or a whole bankroll, a cup of tea or a banquet is irrelevant—it is the act of giving itself that is important. As Mahatma Gandhi said, Almost anything we do will seem insignificant, but it is very important that we do it.

Source: Huffington Post
Why is dark chocolate better than milk chocolate? First, you have to know the composition of the different types of chocolate. Dark chocolate contains 50-90% cocoa solids, cocoa butter, and sugar, whereas milk chocolate contains anywhere from 10-50% cocoa solids, cocoa butter, milk, and sugar. The higher percent of cocoa solids means the more flavanols that the chocolate contains. Flavanols act like antioxidants and have been found to help protect your heart. Dark chocolate contains up to 2-3 times more flavanol-rich cocoa solids than milk chocolate. Dark chocolate has also been shown to relax your blood vessels and improve blood flow, therefore lowering blood pressure. Studies have found that 6 grams of dark chocolate daily (1-2 small squares) have been associated with the reduced risk of heart disease. Additionally, dark chocolate is rich in iron, copper, magnesium, zinc, and phosphorus.

Don’t forget that dark chocolate is high in calories, ~150-170 calories per ounce, which can contribute to weight gain if eaten in excess. Even though it has beneficial properties, make sure you eat it in moderation.

Source: Harvard School of Public Health