



Real solutions for real business

CARE's WorkLife Solutions Weekly Wire

Getting the Respect You Deserve

November 2011

This month's Wire is taken from one of the many articles found on our website. The article, "Getting the Respect You Deserve," relates to our November Webinar topic, "High Impact Parenting," which is attached. To access this article, log-on to www.caresworklivesolutions.com, click on the World Icon and enter your unique company password. (If you do not have a company password, contact CARE's WorkLife Solutions to request a temporary password.) Next, click on the Site Search tab on the right, click on Advanced Search and enter "Respect," in the Search the Website by Title field. You will find this article as well as other relevant articles.

Getting the Respect You Deserve

How to Change Other People's Behavior by Changing Your Own

If you wrote down the names of all the living people you *respect*, who'd be on your list? Would there be colleagues, religious leaders, the president, or maybe sports stars? Would you be on your list?

Respect—high regard, esteem, or honor—isn't reserved for the brave and famous. Everyone needs respect. It provides people with a deep sense of value about who they are.

Some people find that respecting others comes to them easily, by virtue of their manner and way of relating. But others find respect hard to come by. They seem cursed with a tendency to attract mean, insensitive people. If you are one of these people, you might have a boss who treats you like a child, friends who don't take you seriously, or children who ignore your parental authority.

You want to be treated with respect, you may have even tried to make other people stop their disrespectful behavior, but it keeps happening. What's going on?

You may be familiar with the idea that you must first respect yourself before you can expect others to respect you. If you find that people in your life frequently mistreat you, perhaps they're simply doing what you ask. You may not consciously be telling people that you want mistreatment, but your behavior may be saying just that.

Here are some things that you can do to change the situation:

- Listen to your negative self-talk.
- Root out the lies.
- Confront disrespectful behavior.

Listen to your negative self-talk.

"Carla" (her name has been changed to protect her privacy) arrived at a counseling session with a cup of coffee she bought on her way. As she sat down, the plastic lid on her cup popped off, sloshing coffee on the counselor's sofa.

The first words out of her mouth were, "How stupid of me. I'm so sorry." The counselor assured Carla that it was no big deal and thanked her for being concerned.

But she continued, "I can't believe how clumsy I am sometimes. I promise not to bring any other beverages with me to sessions." Seeing that she wasn't going to easily let herself off the hook, the counselor decided to use the situation in a therapeutic way.

"Carla, why are you being so hard on yourself? It was a mistake and I'm not angry with you." the counselor said.

"I know," she said, "but I do a lot of stupid things." Carla wasn't just saying her mistake was stupid, but that she was stupid. She felt compelled to convince the counselor to agree with her view of herself as inept. She was unconsciously inviting the counselor to put her down. And had the counselor done so, she would have felt it was deserved.

Carla was engaging in *negative self-talk*—putting herself down in her own mind. This is apparent when she says, in effect, "I'm stupid. Don't you agree?"

But the truth is she's quite intelligent. Carla is like many people who give off beacon signals saying, "I don't like myself very much, and neither should you."

People like Carla berate themselves for mistakes they make, they try hard to be perfect and they go to great lengths to please others. If you are one of these people, take heart. You can end any misperceptions that you are perpetuating with your negative self-talk.

Root out the lies.

Over time, our self-talk is shaped by important relationships and circumstances. If you've been exposed to a lot of criticism, rejection, or abuse, you'll most likely have a low opinion of yourself. It doesn't mean you think of yourself as worthless—but that you lack confidence, you're prone to self-doubt, and you find it difficult to ask for what you need. These are symptoms of the lies that are embedded in your negative self-talk. You have to root out these lies. It isn't easy, but with deliberate effort, it's possible.

The best way to start is by listening to what you say. When you make a mistake or disappoint someone, can you acknowledge it, forgive yourself, and move on? Or do you apologize repeatedly? Do you find yourself searching for some type of penance as a way of making up for it? Do you put yourself down, call yourself derogatory names, or use self-deprecating humor?

If you follow a mistake with repeated apologies or self-criticism, tune into how you do this. Write down the phrases you hear yourself saying. And alongside each negative phrase you write, jot down a way you could have said it differently so as not to put yourself down.

Practice these new approaches in everyday conversations. It will feel unnatural at first, but that's only because you're rewiring your mental circuits. Give it time and you'll start to believe that the worth you're attaching to yourself truly belongs to you.

Confront disrespectful behavior.

So what do you do with all those people in your life who are accustomed to treating you like a doormat? Train them to treat you differently.

Start by refusing to speak about yourself in negative terms as you normally would. When other people revert to customary behaviors of disrespect, call them on it. Extend respect to them by helping them understand that you are working on valuing yourself more. Tell them how you'd like to be treated differently.

One counseling client, "Debbie," did this well with her best friend. Debbie decided she needed to confront her friend about her friend's sarcastic put-downs. The next time her friend made a demeaning remark, Debbie said, "I'd appreciate if you don't talk to me that way anymore. It hurts me when you put me down."

"I was just joking," her friend said, misunderstanding. "It never seemed to bother you before."

"But it did bother me," Debbie replied. "I just never spoke up for myself. But now I'm trying to change—to value myself more. You can help me by not putting me down." It took time, but Debbie's friend eventually got the message, and their relationship grew closer.

By asking for what you need from these people, you are validating your worth in a powerful way. It reinforces positive self-talk and clearly communicates that you want others to treat you similarly.

Unfortunately, not everyone is going to comply with your wishes. They may oppose you by intensifying their disrespect. Many of your friends, coworkers, and possibly even family members may not understand the change in you.

This was the case with "Tom"—who was raised in an unhealthy family. He hated going to family gatherings because his three siblings teased him mercilessly, just as they did when he was a child. He left these events feeling lousy about himself.

Tom asked them several times to stop the teasing, but his pleas only provided ammunition for more taunting. Finally, he decided to write each sibling a letter explaining why this behavior hurt him, and how he wanted to have a different relationship with each of them now that they were all adults.

None of his siblings responded to, or even acknowledged Tom's letter. It seemed that his siblings were determined to live by the old patterns that Tom wanted to break. So, he decided to skip family gatherings until they stopped denying him the respect he deserved.

Some people are simply toxic to be around. If your efforts to help them understand what you need go unheard or unheeded, sometimes the best route is to spend little or no time with them. A relationship can't grow when it's built on disrespect.

Don't become sidetracked by trying to change these people. The focus of your work is to catch and root out self-talk lies that undermine your worth. Stay the course in this process.

Over time, those who truly care for you will extend respect to you. These will be the relationships that become the most precious because they reflect the truth—that you deserve respect. And the reason you'll get it from others is because you first gave it to yourself.