



Self-Reliance: Set Your Own Course & Take Charge of Your Life

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Self-reliance means different things to different people.

The famous author, Ralph Waldo Emerson, considered self-reliance to be the avoidance of conformity and foolish consistence. He believed that people should develop their own ideas and beliefs.

To others, self-reliance means stockpiling five years' worth of food, buying a diesel generator, and building a bomb shelter.

From a practical viewpoint, a self-reliant person is able to pursue original thoughts and ideas, while successfully navigating the basics of life without an unreasonable amount of assistance.

This includes the ability to procure food and shelter, live a healthy lifestyle, earn a living, and maintain healthy relationships.

Total self-reliance is neither possible nor desirable. No one can handle the challenges of modern day life without the assistance of others. Sooner or later, you'll need legal assistance, a new transmission, or a trip to the emergency room.

Total self-sufficiency would also exclude others from your life. Relationships are an important part of the human experience. Imagine how empty life would be without others to share in life's ups and downs.

What's important is learning to take care of yourself to the best of your ability.

“It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pitfalls of Dependence

The opposite of self-sufficiency is dependence. If you rely excessively on friends, family, romantic partners, drugs, or televisions, you're not being self-reliant. A self-reliant person can deal effectively with boredom, emotions, and other challenges.

An unhealthy dependence on others will sap your belief in yourself. Dependence is the ultimate expression of incompleteness. Do you depend on others to complete you?

We often seek people, things, relationships, activities, and places to fulfill emotional needs. This is not self-sufficiency.

That's not to say that the people, things, and activities in your life can't be appreciated and enjoyed. Rather, if you're self-reliant, your well-being and happiness aren't totally dependent upon them.

“The trick is in what one emphasizes. We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves happy. The amount of work is the same.”

- Carlos Castaneda

Benefits of Self-Reliance

Consider the advantages that self-reliance can bring you:

1. **Maximize self-esteem.** There's nothing more soul crushing than needing help with something that everyone else seems to be able to handle alone. Whether it's paying your bills or getting across town, when you consistently need help, you lose a little bit of your self-esteem each time.
2. **Increase self-confidence.** When you can take care of business effectively, your confidence in yourself grows.
3. **Your successes and failures are your own.** There's no one else to blame. You make your own decisions and take your own course of action. You can enjoy the fruits of your successes and benefit from your mistakes. If you allow someone else to make your decisions for you, you'll never know if your instincts were right or wrong. Maybe you had a better way.
4. **You have everything you need. *You can manage the world on your own terms.*** You have more options available to you than those that are dependent. You can move through the world more easily.
5. **You maximize your ability to grow.** By depending on yourself, you'll have more opportunities to grow and develop. You can learn about yourself in a way that others cannot.
6. **You won't be socially dependent.** You can't be authentic if the opinions of others matter to you. If you're concerned whether your actions are popular, you're at the mercy of others. You're free from this burden if you're self-reliant.
7. **You're a joy to be around. *Self-sufficiency means that you provide more than you take away.*** You provide more support than you take. You contribute more than you consume.
 - Do you have a friend or family member that takes more than they provide? They wear you out, don't they?

Self-reliance isn't for the faint of heart, but the benefits are enormous. By building your self-reliance, you'll be helping yourself and others. Reach for your best and build your ability to be self-reliant.

“If you truly want to be respected by people you love, you must prove to them that you can survive without them.”

- Michael Bassey Johnson

5 Pillars of Self-Reliance

Being self-reliant is hard work. You must take good care of yourself and have sufficient resources.

There are several components to self-reliance:

- Good health
- Individuality
- Mental toughness
- Relationships
- Financial stability

Maximizing each of these areas will provide the greatest opportunity for self-reliance.

Health

Consider implementing these habits to allow your health to support your self-reliance:

1. **Place a priority on daily physical activity.** It's a mistake to believe that one can exercise a few times each week for an hour and be physically vibrant. It's not necessary to run a 5-minute mile, but it is necessary to move your body each day.
 - The more you move the more energy you'll develop. *Having more energy results in an enhanced ability to manage your life.*
 - Excessive sitting has become the latest epidemic. Sedentary jobs and lifestyles have become the norm. Get up at least once each hour and take a short walk.
2. **Visit the doctor.** You might feel perfectly fine, but there are several serious ailments that have few symptoms until your health is in real jeopardy:
 - Hypertension
 - Kidney Disease

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Heart disease
- High cholesterol

This is just the short list!

Many of us, particularly men, avoid a yearly visit to the doctor. ***Many serious conditions are treatable and even preventable if caught early.*** Be brave. Visit your physician regularly.

3. **Follow a healthy diet.** It can be confusing to choose an eating style. There are so many options. However, you already know which foods are healthy and which are not. At the very least, drop the unhealthy foods from your diet and add more fruits and vegetables. Consult with your doctor for additional guidance.
 - Avoid underestimating the value of a healthy diet. Most of the diseases listed in the previous point are preventable with a diet that supports good health.
 - Your diet also includes beverages. Focus on drinking more water and avoid excessive amounts of caffeine.
 - If you want to embrace the ultimate in self-reliance, take up gardening. You can control the quality of your food supply and get more exercise.
4. **Get enough sleep.** Sleep studies show that most of us would benefit from additional sleep. If you're well rested, you'll perform better at work and have more energy for your family. You'll also boost your health.
5. **Live a healthy lifestyle.** We all face choices each day that either risk or preserve our health. Staying out at a bar until 3am isn't healthy. Driving on worn tires is risky. Before making a decision, reflect on how it might impact your life.

Place a priority on your health. ***Everything becomes more challenging when your health is compromised.*** Your health status is most affected by your daily habits. Strive to take good care of yourself each day and visit your physician regularly.

“You cannot help people permanently by doing for them, what they could and should do for themselves.”

- Abraham Lincoln

Individuality

The most valuable parts of you are the parts that are unique. Gold and diamonds are valuable because they're rare. Your hands and feet are valuable to you, but the rest of world doesn't care. There are plenty of hands and feet. Your ability to drive a car or speak English is commonplace.

- What can you do better than the average person?
- How can you take advantage of that? Can you build a career around your uniqueness?
- What is your greatest strength?

The advantages of individuality are significant:

1. **You can contribute to the world in a more meaningful way.** You're able to think outside the box and provide new solutions. You have the emotional freedom to share your ideas openly.
2. **Your ability to influence and inspire others is enhanced.** When you're able to take a stand or share a new perspective, others are inspired to do the same. The freedom that you demonstrate to others is uplifting.
 - Show others how to be free and put their own unique stamp on the world.
3. **You are free of the opinions of others.** Imagine making decisions without worrying about what others will think! It's common for people to impose their fears on others. You can be free of that burden. You can think for yourself.
4. **Your self-esteem is higher when you're comfortable being yourself.** How many times have you said to yourself, "I should've _____, but I was afraid of looking like an idiot"?
 - *When we fail to do or say what we know to be "right," our self-esteem takes a beating.* While it can be stressful in the short-term, following one's conscience is satisfying after the smoke has cleared.

A healthy dose of individuality is a component of self-reliance. However, avoid the need to separate yourself from others. Seek yourself rather than avoid the crowd. If you avoid what everyone else is doing, you're still dependent on others.

Showing your individuality is difficult if you've been a conformist throughout your life. There's no need to build your individuality. You already have it. *The key is to allow the world to see it each day.* Practice makes perfect.

Take these steps to nurture your individuality:

1. **Embrace your uniqueness.** Recognize that your unique talents and view of the world are valuable.
2. **Identify your values.** It's important to know your values. While it's important to avoid conforming blindly, it's just as important not to shun all convention without giving the situation some thought.
 - If you're aware of your values, it will be much easier to make wise choices. Sticking to your values also makes it easier to challenge the status quo.
3. **Start small. *Be brave enough to stand out in some small way.*** Maybe it's a crazy pair of socks or a mailbox that looks like a doghouse. What can you do to show your individuality without giving yourself a panic attack?
4. **Try one new thing you've been too embarrassed to do in the past.** Have you always wanted to learn how to play the ukulele? Maybe you've always wanted to write a scandalous novel. After a few smaller victories, you'll be ready for something bigger. *Your self-esteem and enjoyment will soar.*
5. **Learn to ignore those that don't support you.** If you don't want to deal with any naysayers, the only solution is to stay at home. You're going to be criticized no matter what you do. You may as well do the things you love along the way.
6. **Find others who have an individual streak.** You'll be inspired and feel comfortable around them.

Be yourself. *Show yourself that you're good enough.* You're not just helping yourself. You're helping others, too.

"We are so accustomed to the comforts of "I cannot", "I do not want to" and "it is too difficult" that we forget to realize when we stop doing things for ourselves and expect others to dance around us, we are not achieving greatness. We have made ourselves weak."

- Pandora Poikilos, Excuse Me, My Brains Have Stepped Out

Mental Toughness

Mental fortitude is invaluable. It will allow you to persevere during challenging circumstances. It will also allow your individuality to grow.

When you hit a financial snag, do you call your parents or find a way out of your mess? Do you become overwhelmed? Or do you get busy and create solutions? Mental toughness is an important part of self-reliance.

Develop your mental toughness with these strategies:

1. **Maintain positive thoughts.** Become aware of your thoughts and the things you say to yourself.
 - Negative thoughts can influence your beliefs and actions. *Telling yourself, “I can’t do anything right” will wear down anyone’s confidence after a while.*
 - You can’t reach your full potential if your thoughts are betraying you.
 - Keep your thoughts positive and relevant. It requires a lot of attention to monitor your thinking.
2. **Learn how to deal with discomfort.** All animals avoid discomfort. It’s part of our DNA. However, you can build tolerance to discomfort, just as you can build a tolerance to exercise.
 - Learn to accept what you’re feeling. You might be anxious, angry, or scared, but you aren’t required to be influenced by them. Recognize your feelings and allow them to exist. Remember that you’re in control.
 - Avoid being impulsive. Suppose you’re working on a report at work and you have the urge to quit. Stick with it for another 15 minutes before switching tasks. When you have the urge to eat a snack, force yourself to wait. Rather than giving in to your impulses, put them off. Your ability to wait and persevere will grow with practice.
 - Breathe. When you start to feel uncomfortable, take a few deep breaths and relax.
3. **Stay focused.** Keep your attention on the task. If your mind is focused, you’ll have an easier time keeping any negative emotions at bay.
4. **Take cold showers.** Not only will cold showers increase your mental toughness, the activity has been shown to boost the immune system. *You’ll be amazed at how your ability to deal with discomfort strengthens with time and practice.*
5. **Be a finisher.** Too many people give up near the end. Avoid leaving the greasy roast pan in the sink until tomorrow. Trim the lawn after you’ve finished mowing. Avoid leaving tasks 90% completed. Practice getting things done.
6. **Meditate.** It’s easy to quit when you look at the future and think about how long something is likely to take. Meditation will teach you how to be present, instead, and help you persevere.

Building your mental toughness takes time and effort. It's no different than building your ability to exercise. As your strength and experience grow, you'll be able to deal with larger challenges. ***Focus on small advances in your mental toughness.*** Be proud of your progress. As your ability to handle difficult challenges increases, your self-sufficiency will increase as well.

“Sure, it sucked to be lost, but I'd long ago realized I preferred it to depending on anyone else to get me where I needed to go. That was the thing about being alone, in theory or in principle. Whatever happened- good, bad, or anywhere in between- it was always, if nothing else, all your own.”

- Sarah Dessen, Lock and Key

Relationships

Relationships are a tricky area. It's easy to become dependent on others. Some of the people in our lives are so willing to help that they actually encourage us to be anything other than self-reliant. Having the right mix of people in your life will enhance your ability to depend on yourself.

It's difficult to thrive without sharing experiences with others. Feelings of loneliness will hamper your ability to take care of yourself.

Consider these ideas for developing healthy relationships that also support your self-reliance:

1. **Build empowering relationships.** There are plenty of self-reliant people out there. Include a few of them in your life.
 - Find people that will encourage and support you. Find people that inspire you.
 - Healthy relationships actually enhance your ability to be self-reliant.
2. **Avoid dependency.** It's easy to rely on others when we're feeling lazy or incapable. Everyone has a tough day now and then. We all need to rely on others from time to time, but avoid unhealthy dependence.
3. **Give more than you receive.** This is perhaps the best way to ensure the relationship isn't creating dependence. On the other hand, be careful that the relationship isn't costing you too much either. ***Your self-sufficiency is decreased when others take too much from you.***
4. **Be able to walk away.** Be able to let go of unhealthy relationships. There are other fish in the sea.

A full life requires the presence of others. ***Build and maintain healthy relationships, and your self-sufficiency will be enhanced.*** Poor relationships sap your resources and can create dependency.

“It is folly for a man to pray to the gods for that which he has the power to obtain by himself.”

- Epicurus

Financial Stability

It’s much easier to care for yourself if you have the financial means to do so. Even a middle-class lifestyle isn’t cheap. Regardless of your income, living below your means is necessary to deal with the inevitable financial hiccups.

If your finances are shaky, your ability to be self-reliant is hampered.

Increase your financial stability to increase your self-reliance:

1. **Have a sufficient source of income.** A safe and healthy existence isn’t free. To have true self-sufficiency, it’s important to have a sufficient income. ***Seek ways to increase your income if you’re not earning enough.***
2. **Have a stable source of income.** The stability of your income is also important. If your income varies significantly from week to week, make an effort to find some stability.
 - A second source of income can greatly enhance your financial stability. If you lose one source, you’ll still have money coming in.
3. **Save regularly.** Few of us have an income that can weather any storm. It’s necessary to save in case of an emergency.
 - Financial experts recommend an emergency fund of 3-6 months of living expenses. Even after you’ve achieved this milestone, continue saving. Be prepared for any financial disaster.
 - Prepare for retirement. If you want to be self-reliant, save enough money to fund your retirement.
4. **Live modestly.** You’re not self-reliant if your life revolves around debt. ***Debt only decreases your ability to care for yourself in the long-term.*** Avoid the belief that consumption is the key to happiness. Being debt-free is the ultimate freedom.
 - A modest lifestyle will also increase the amount you’re able to save.

Build your financial resources and your ability to handle financial challenges. ***Money is an important resource, and true independence is much more challenging without it.*** Avoid being at the mercy of financial emergencies.

“Associate with noblest people you can find; read the best books; live with the mighty. But learn to be happy alone. Rely upon your own energies, and so not wait for, or depend on other people.”

- Thomas Davidson

Conclusion

It's not necessary to grow your own food or build your house by hand. Leave the excessive food storage practices to the preppers of the world. ***Healthy self-reliance involves building your internal and external resources to provide you with more freedom and control over your life.***

With sufficient financial resources, it isn't necessary to spend a lot of time worrying about the external resources. Focus on your inner resources.

Take care of your health. Nothing will degrade your ability to be self-sufficient more than failing health. Exercise, eat, sleep, and visit the doctor. Make healthy choices.

Allow your individuality to grow and shine. ***It's your greatest resource.*** Learn to make decisions for yourself. Feel free to seek expert advice, but take responsibility for making the final decision. Grow your self-esteem and confidence. Learn from your mistakes.

Enhance your mental toughness. The more you can handle yourself, the less dependent you'll be on others. You'll have the ability to persevere and finish what you've started.

Relationships make the world go round and add value to life. However, it's important to avoid becoming so dependent on your relationships that you inhibit your individuality and self-reliance. Add more to your relationships than you take. Be prepared to move on if a relationship isn't adding value to your life.

Self-reliance isn't shutting yourself off from the world. ***Self-reliance is building yourself up to your potential.*** Take responsibility for your words and actions and you'll find that you have greater control of both your present and your future.