

So what makes you so special?

Paul Bress tops up teachers' self-esteem.

Not many people these days seem to doubt the crucial role that self-esteem plays in a person's mental well-being. Those who value themselves highly are less likely to be anxious or depressed, while those who don't, tend to experience a considerable degree of anxiety and/or depression.

The problem with any treatment for anxiety and depression is that there is no linear progression from ill health to good health. Getting better is a messy business, and it is perfectly normal for people to 'regress', to experience levels of anxiety and depression which they haven't experienced for several months, or even years. This can be an exasperating experience, and when it happens, people need to find a way back. They need to redirect their focus from anxiety to their own self worth.

'Self-esteem top-up cards', which I use to help people get back on track and value themselves more, could also, I believe, be useful for teachers in need of a self-esteem boost.

So let's imagine that you feel that your lack of self-esteem (however great) is causing you to malfunction in the world and the classroom, and you want to redress the balance. This is what you can do.

Your own self-esteem top-up card

Get a pen and a piece of paper, and sit on a comfortable chair.

Write down all the things that mark you out as a special person. Avoid anything negative. Begin with *I am ...* or *I can ...*. It is best to do this exercise really slowly. Make sure you've got the wording exactly how you want it.

Now word-process the information so that it fits exactly onto a piece of paper of the same dimensions as a

credit card. If you've got too many words, you can either edit them down or extend the text so that it fits onto *both* sides of a credit card.

To give you an example of what it might look like, here is my own self-esteem top-up card. Note the title and the use of bullet points, which I recommend you also use.

WHY I'M SPECIAL

- I have the ability to see underlying patterns in things and to describe them in a way that other people can understand.
- I'm a caring, empathic, encouraging, kind person, who gives his time to people.
- I'm a very balanced person, who enjoys all the different aspects of life.
- I'm a dynamic, energetic, ambitious achiever in all areas of life: academic research, creativity, business, travel, interpersonal relationships, spirituality, fitness and technological expertise.
- I'm a humble person, who does not derive satisfaction from power trips.
- I'm honest, confrontative and confident.

Print the document and stick it onto a card, eg your own business card. Keep your self-esteem top-up card with you at all times, together with your credit cards.

Whenever you feel anxiety creeping into your life, take the card out, read it slowly and silently, and picture yourself doing the good things you've described. Repeat this as many times as you want, until you feel your negativity subside.

What's that I hear you say? You're sceptical? You're thinking that a few square centimetres of paper with writing on cannot possibly have any beneficial effect on your self-esteem? Well, let's just look at how and why the self-esteem top-up card works:

How and why it works

The card doesn't contain anything about you that isn't true. It contains information that *is* true (but that you need to keep reminding yourself about). Therefore, this system cannot be accused of encouraging dishonesty or deceit.

The more time and effort you put into the preparatory work, the better the card will work. The point is: you know that you've taken the trouble to sit down and work out why you're so special – so when you read your card, the words you read should have special significance for you and make you feel better about yourself.

The physical presence of the card is crucial. An Olympian with a gold medal, a stockbroker with a big fat cheque, an academic with a newly-won doctorate, all glow with pride from having these artifacts on their bodies. The self-esteem top-up card contains information about a person that is *even more special*, and should, therefore, effect an even stronger glow of self-confidence.

Research in the field of prejudice and prejudice reduction suggests that 'saying is believing', ie when we say something, we tend subsequently to defend the point of view we have expressed. Now, against that context, imagine the power of actually *writing* something *down* (especially writing something that is very personal, profound and intended for daily use)!



Still feeling sceptical? Of course, in the area of personal growth, the proof is always in the pudding. But why not take an hour or two out of your precious schedule? Follow the steps above – one by one – and see how your own personal self-esteem top-up card works for you. After all, when did you last remind yourself of just how special you are? **P**



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