

Spirit Level Success™ System - Six Secrets of Self-Esteem

Secret #4 SKILLS – Week 4

S.T.R.E.A.M.™ – Evidence

The **E** in **S.T.R.E.A.M.™** stands for **Evidence**. Many people go through life without any conscious awareness of how to just 'be' in relation to their behaviour and capabilities. You may never before have taken the time to reflect with curiosity and compassion towards yourself in relation to things that you get 'wrong'. I deliberately place in the word 'wrong' in inverted commas because it's always right to question such judgements. In whose view is something 'wrong'. Sure, if you break the law or engage in behaviour that is morally reprehensible that might be an easy question to answer.

But 'wrong' in other contexts may simply be that you are being seriously and overly judgemental on yourself. Which just isn't fair. And will absolutely work to lower your sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

I am now 50 years old and I still remember the time when I was invited to play a piano piece at an evening concert at School (I would have been about 15 years old at the time). I arrived on the night, having been given no instruction about what to wear, in (what I thought was) my gorgeous, stripy bat-wing sleeved purple jumper (seriously trendy at the time which was unusual for me) and some trousers. I recall the teacher making a passing comment about the fact that a nice crisp white blouse would have looked much smarter.

So why didn't she mention that before the event?

What was my internal response? I think you can probably guess, bearing in mind I can recall this event so clearly over 35 years later.

Isn't it incredible how something so small, can have such an impact. And unless you are able to reflect, with curiosity and compassion, these little events can continue to have an impact on your self-esteem for many years.

One of these such events in isolation wouldn't really have that effect, but over the years whilst you're growing up and finding your way, the cumulative layering effect can have a profound impact on how you feel about yourself.

So it is always useful to look for the evidence (facts and circumstances) that was relevant at the time whenever one of these seemingly random events pops into your mind from time to time, to see if you can loosen the effect of whatever you made this mean about you at the time.

Your thoughts will always influence how you feel, and your feelings will drive your behaviour.

So when the teacher made this comment, my immediate and automatic response (completely out of my awareness by the way) was to tell myself words to the effect of 'I should have known better', 'I could have tried harder', 'I don't look very smart', 'I've let her down', – and all sorts of other negative (and actually false) statements that fuelled a feeling of being 'less than'. Now the fact that none of those statements is or was actually true is not relevant to the effect caused by them. Because you will eventually believe what you repeatedly tell yourself – for better or for worse.

And our brains naturally delete, distort and generalise our experiences and our recollections. So the purpose of gathering evidence, is to rebalance your memory so you can have a different relationship to it.

In my example, taking account of the intensity of those thoughts at the time, 'I should have known better', 'I could have tried harder', 'I don't look very smart', 'I've let her down', understandably had me feeling quite down on myself - who wouldn't, hearing those sorts of comments? (and this was all despite the fact that the teacher hadn't actually said any of them, and I had no evidence that this was what she was even thinking).

And it's the intensity of your feelings that will usually drive proportionate behaviour, so if you are engaging in any kind of unhelpful behaviour (such as drinking alcohol) as a coping mechanism or as an emotional release, then lessening the intensity of your feelings can help you to adapt your behaviour in the new way you want to.

So go back and look at *all* the evidence – both back then at the time, and subsequently with the benefit of reflection.

In my case, if I take full account of the fact that;

- I was only 15 at the time
- It was my first piano recital performance
- The teacher, who was older and much more experienced, gave me no guidance beforehand on what to wear
- Visitors were there to listen to my playing, not judge me on what I was wearing
- I did the best I knew how
- It's ok to make mistakes and I was learning how to 'be' at these sorts of events
- My piano playing actually went really well
- Nobody today will have any recollection of the clothes I was wearing

All of the above statements are actually 100% true. So, they should be given more weight than the ones I 'made-up' at the time, which actually weren't completely 100% true all of the time, if at all.

When I recall the memory now, I am able to have a different relationship to it – which also means I can let it go, it has no energy to it now so it can't hurt me.

Try this process with a memory of your own.

What's the memory?

What did you make this mean about yourself? What specific statements did you tell yourself at the time?

What is the evidence that supports or contradicts those statements? Detail here all relevant facts and circumstances. Both at the time and subsequently, having had time to reflect.

What's the effect of the shift in your relationship to the memory?

It is really important that you take time during this week to repeat the work covered so far in this Secret.

Value yourself enough and really connect with your motivation, so you can prioritise this and spend *sufficient* time on it, ensuring you make a meaningful emotional connection with each step you take.

This is your time now, and you matter.