



Meet Yourself: A User's Guide to Building Self-Esteem: Niko Everett (Transcript) | 1

Full transcript of leadership coach & strategist Niko Everett's TEDx Talk: **Meet Yourself: A User's Guide to Building Self-Esteem** at TEDxYouth@BommerCanyon conference.

Niko Everett - Leadership Coach & Strategist

I was 11 years old, and I was rubbing makeup all over my legs to cover up my freckles, because I hated them, and I thought they were so ugly.

I was 15, and I lived with my dad and my stepmom, and I lied about my mom. I lied about her, because she was a waitress, and she lived in a tiny apartment. And because she was a recovering drug addict, I lied about her because I was too ashamed to tell the truth.

I was 17. And I was down on my knees on a bathroom floor. And I was forcing myself to throw up everything that I'd eaten that morning. I was desperate to be thin; I was trying so hard to be perfect.

I was 21, and I didn't even realize what I was doing. But I was droning on and on to my friend Julie, telling her about all the people we knew and how great they were, and how amazing their lives were, and how much I wanted to be like them, how jealous I was.

And my dear friend Julie, she stopped me, and she said, "*Niko, you need to meet yourself.*"

And when she said that to me, it was like something changed. It was like she held a mirror up for me. And what she was showing me was so different from what I'd ever seen before.

She said, "*Niko, you should be jealous of yourself. You're gutsy; you're hard-working; you're resilient. If you could meet yourself, you might really*

like her."

But as quickly as she painted that image of me, it was gone.

And I was totally confused because I see myself as embarrassing, unlovable, awkward. But I loved that image that she created, and I wanted it back.

So I set out on this journey to find it and to try to make it stick. So eventually, I landed myself a job, working with young women. My job was to create a program for them to help them increase their self-esteem, which, of course, was kind of laughable because I had no self-esteem myself.

But I started to wonder — I started to wonder: **Could we create our own self-esteem?** Could we build it ourselves?

And I did a little research, and it turns out that **self-esteem - it's just based on our own thoughts of ourselves**. And I knew that we could control our own thoughts, so I thought, "Yeah. Maybe we could actually start to build our own self-esteem," and I was willing to try.

So the first session I had with these girls, I had no idea what to do. I mean, I've never done this before, so I was totally making it up.

So I decided I was going to have them each say one thing that they were proud of about themselves. We were going to test out this idea of starting to build more positive thoughts about ourselves. It didn't go so well.

These girls, they couldn't say one single thing about themselves that they were proud of. And I understood because I totally related, I mean, I felt the same way.

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So I decided to create an exercise for them, for all of us to do. So the idea was that every time we had a positive thought about ourselves, we would imagine turning up the volume, like literally turning up the volume on that thinking. And every time we had a negative thought about ourselves, we were going to press "**Delete**," just press "**Delete**" in our brain, let it magically disappear.

And it worked. It worked!

This idea of kind of stepping outside of ourselves so that we could see ourselves better. Little by little, we each came up with little things about ourselves that we liked.

But for me, for every little thing that I came up with that I liked, it was like there were 10 things that I didn't like - 10 things that I felt critical about. So I checked it out with the girls. They said, yeah, they felt the same way.

So, we decided that at the end of each class that we had together, we would have one of us stand in the middle, and the rest of us would stand around the others, and we would each tell the girl that was standing in the middle one thing that we admired about her, one thing that we really liked.

And it was so hard to stand in the middle. It was like we didn't want to let it in. We wanted to just keep those compliments out. And so we made up a rule.

The rule was that when someone gave us a compliment, we would simply say, "Thank you."

At the end of every session that we spent together, we all wrote down one

thing about ourselves that we admired. We forced ourselves to sort of build this list, to get our thinking going about the things that were important about ourselves.

And I want to read to you just a couple of things. These were the things we wrote on the very first day, I kept the list.

On the first day I wrote: *"I'm proud of my work with these girls."*

And the girls wrote:

"I'm proud that I stood up for the girl who was bullying my best friend."

"I think I'm smart."

"I like that I'm different."

"I'm a really fast sprinter."

And *"I'm a good artist."*

At the end of that year, these girls started to change. It was like they were walking a little taller. They were kinder to themselves, they were kinder to each other, and I started to change too.

It was like they showed me that I could rewrite my story. And I realized that we weren't the only ones struggling with that story; boys were struggling too. Teenagers, even adults were having a tough time coming up with one or two things to say about themselves that they felt good about.

And this negative self-image that we were holding on to, it was showing up in our culture in alarming ways. It turns out that teens' suicide: it's the

third leading cause of death amongst young people. One out of four girls says they have sex for the first time to be more liked, to be more popular.

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And boys and girls alike, they're joining gangs, and the number one reason is not to feel safer, it's to feel more important.

But here is the good news. The good news is that we can counteract this. The work that I did with those girls and the work I've done for the last 15 years, we've come up with ways for us to feel good about ourselves right now, today, and I want to share some of those things with you. OK?

So, the first thing that we can do to feel good about ourselves is **we can spend time with people who make us feel good**. This is me and Julie when I very first met her. Find your "Julie" and spend time with her or him.

The second thing is that we can **turn up the volume on our positive thinking**. We can build up those thoughts about ourselves that are good, and we can delete the negative thoughts, just press "delete."

The third thing: Start to tell the people around you - maybe the people around you today - start to tell them what you see about them that you like. Help them jumpstart their own positive thinking.

And the last thing is, when you receive a compliment, when we receive compliments, let's stand our ground, let's look them in the eye, and let's just say, "Thank you."

Let's create a new culture: a culture where we all get to grow up feeling good about ourselves. A culture where we can rewrite our histories, we can create new stories about ourselves.

I will start.

I'm 11, and I like these legs because someday they're going to help me run marathons.

I'm 15, and I'm proud of my mom for getting herself sober and for making a better life for us.

I'm 17, and I know that nobody is perfect.

I'm 21, and I think I'm just as successful as my friends.

I'm 37, and now, this is my story.

I invite you today. I invite you to do two things with me.

First, be "Julie" for someone; invite him/her to meet themselves. Because it might change their lives.

And second, I want you to get out a piece of paper, and I want you to write down 10 things about yourself that you admire.

The 10 things about yourself that if you were someone else, you might even be jealous of. And I want that to be the beginning of your story today. I'll help get you started, OK?

So, I just met you a couple hours ago, literally, just a couple hours ago. And I can already say that you are gutsy; you are hardworking; you are unique; you are resilient; you are talented, you are gentle; you are calm; you are all amazing!

Thank you.



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