

4. Recognise And Embrace Your Uniqueness

Understanding the meaning of the first critical step

The very first step to certain, reliable reserves of self-confidence, around which each of the other steps is pivotal, is the recognition and embracing of your uniqueness. Just as with each of the other critical steps the acknowledgment of your own originality, and then the embracing of that individuality, is not difficult.

It is important to be absolutely certain of the meanings of the three key words of that first critical step. Those key words are *recognition*, *embracing*, and *uniqueness*.

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word *recognition* as “the mental process of identifying what has been known before”. That is why you were told in the first chapter that the only requirement from you is an acceptance and appreciation of things that you may find you already knew and had forgotten, or not given much thought to, for many years.

The Oxford Dictionary defines *embracement* as a, “willing acceptance” and to “accept as a friend”, while the Macquarie Dictionary gives the meaning of *embracing* as, “Cultivating. To improve and develop by education and/or training”. Finally the Collins Dictionary says to *embrace* is to “accept willingly or eagerly”.

You will find the word *unique* is used often throughout this book. Its use is very important. Nothing can be “rather unique” or “very unique”. *Uniqueness* is an absolute state. The Collins Dictionary describes *unique* as meaning, “without equal, incomparable, unequalled, unmatched, being the only one of a particular type, and very remarkable”. Therefore that first critical step is asking you to identify the incomparable and remarkable person that you have always known, and to willingly and eagerly accept yourself as a friend, as someone whom you choose to cultivate and develop.

The reference to dictionary meanings is important because as you read throughout these pages about recognising and embracing of your uniqueness you must remember that these are more than just words. It is important that on each occasion when you see these words you realise what they refer to, and that you appreciate all of those vital descriptions as a minimum requirement.

An effort has been made, because of their significance, to provide the literal meanings of those key words used in this crucial stage. Those meanings could, for ease of acceptance of this process, be applied collectively in a much broader, generic sense to encompass other words. For instance, individuality, distinctiveness, and originality are just some of the words that have a similar descriptive impact to *uniqueness*.

Therefore it is expected that this first significant phase will teach you in practice to value your distinctiveness, admire your singularity, hold your originality in high regard, appreciate your individuality — or any similar descriptive comparisons — just so long as you follow the general message being presented.

You will not only look at your individuality here; more importantly, you will look at how and why your acknowledgment and your admiration for your own remarkable self is the first real key to your gaining and maintaining self-confidence, and how it secures your thoughts and actions to the *Cycle of Confidence*.

What is uniqueness?

You are made up of many different physical features and emotional characteristics, the sum of which determines your singularity. Hence, it's meaningful to have an appreciation of how you can identify that uniqueness as a concept.

If you were to stand on a beach at sunset with one hundred other people, and all of you were to write a brief description of what you see, looking at the sun, surf and sand, how many

of those descriptions of such a simple subject would you expect to be the same? Even though you are all looking at the same three main objects, the descriptions will probably all be different. Seeing the same things doesn't necessarily mean having the same view. Shared experiences will still be interpreted differently. Different interpretations of the same view are reflected by your uniqueness.

That concept is, of course, very simple. However the opportunities that the recognition of your separateness invokes are endless. Take for example the proposition that the realisation of your own originality is your only real claim to importance. It is exactly the same claim as for anybody who has ever walked on this planet. What other real claim does anybody have that you have ever known or admired?

Think of people you admire now or have admired in the past, for whatever reason. Your acknowledgment of their uniqueness, manifested in some skill, characteristic, quality, or even their physical appearance, is what you came to admire. Although physical appearance may seem to be a very superficial quality to admire, it must be included here because it is so prevalent in identifying individuality. You could be told that it is your hormones that make you look at beautiful people that you're attracted to. Whatever the reason for the attraction, the fact remains that it is a recognition of their distinctiveness manifested in their physical appearance.

Even historical figures are often portrayed by physical features, which include appearance. It is a commonplace that two queens of Egypt, Queen Nefertiti who reigned during the 14th century BC, and Cleopatra VII (69BC-30BC), are both described by historians as beautiful women. Although it is certain that they both had other attributes, they are remembered because one aspect of their originality was manifested in their physical beauty.

It doesn't matter if the people you admire are historical figures or modern day political or sports people, great musicians or entertainers. You may have read about them, been told

about them or you may have observed them yourself. The only difference between yourself and the people you admire, dead or alive, from the population of the entire world since the beginning of time, is that their actions or appearance have led you to acknowledge some aspect of their uniqueness. Some skill, appearance or character quality of their originality has led you to identify them as important or at least worthy of your admiration. As you think about that and the realisation that their only real claim to importance is your recognition of some aspect of their distinctiveness, where does that leave you?

You are entitled to the realisation that your only real claim to importance is exactly the same as theirs. If you don't through your actions, proclaim your separateness from the rest of the world, then others may never know of your importance. For every action of your originality there is a reaction where someone, maybe just yourself but hopefully many others, will acknowledge your importance because of that action.

Do others want to know of your individuality and importance? You're walking down the street and are recognised by someone coming towards you. Manners can provide an opportunity for a simple exchange of pleasantries, or alternatively, an opportunity to display real interest in the originality and wellbeing of each other. The scale of admiration for the importance of that recognition can be measured by the enthusiasm of your respective greetings. When there is an exchange of genuine affection that goes well past any initial requirements of etiquette, you're both showing real interest in each other's individuality and importance.

Showing your uniqueness to others will bring them happiness, which will then be reflected, back to you. Even the simple gesture of a smile from someone you know when he or she sees you coming can be an acknowledgment that you have previously brought him or her some happiness. It is their smile that is part of the process of returning that happiness to you.

Recognition of your own uniqueness

What steps can you now take to show your uniqueness to everyone else?

The very first step is to acknowledge that distinctiveness in yourself. That is a fundamental prerequisite to your own personal growth and self-confidence. For it is the identifying (and embracing) of your own separateness that will determine the character you display, and will determine how the rest of the world recognises and treats you. It is time to be introspective and realise that you are *incomparable, unequalled, unmatched, and very remarkable*.

This is not about vanity, conceit or egotism. You don't need to reach any conclusions about being better than anyone else. You are entitled to the perception that many of your attributes may be very ordinary. You may have concerns about personality traits or identify weaknesses of character within yourself that you believe have some bearing on how you see yourself. The views you currently hold about your skills, appearance, personality or current level of confidence will not affect how this will work for you.

If you have any personal concerns about the person that you are, for whatever reason, those concerns can be put aside for now as they will be easily dealt with in further chapters. You don't need to decide if you're better looking, smarter, nicer, more talented or more athletic than others. To do that, you need to think about making comparisons, and distinctiveness has no comparisons. As uniqueness is an absolute state you only have to determine that you are without equal, you are not the same as everyone else. That is what makes you unparalleled as a person.

Remember this is not about your vanity; this is about your distinctiveness. Your responses to the qualities and characteristics of others reflect the value you've put on their originality. You are merely accepting the same value in yourself.

Making comparisons

Comparisons are very interesting. You make comparisons of others every day. That is how you choose your partners and your friends. That is how you maintain an edge in competitive endeavours. You are entitled to feel good about, and gain confidence from, any skill or quality you possess that is comparable to others. Any skill or character quality you can attain by comparison to others will advance your levels of self-belief.

That makes comparisons with others a valuable, and certainly useful, instinctive skill to exercise. However when you apply the same process to yourself, when searching for your originality, you are leaving yourself vulnerable to unhappiness and a loss of self-assurance. Suppose you were to sit down and seriously decide to write just one thing that you don't like about yourself, just one! Try it now and you will see that whatever you write can be compared with what you would like to see about yourself. You will have made a comparison.

It is unfair to your individuality to do that, and a waste of your intellectual resources, because you are questioning your ability to maintain your certainty when you make personal comparisons to find what it is that makes you original. That is why the recognition of your separateness must stand alone and be unquestioned in your mind.

Your individuality can never be taken from you, and it can never be placed second, as it has no comparisons. Acknowledgment (and the embracing) of your uniqueness will ultimately remain the catalyst for your unshakeable reserves of self-confidence.

Without that recognition of your unmatched self there can be no progress. When you go for a walk and you are alone you can feel your individuality. When you go shopping in a centre with hundreds of other customers you know that amongst them you are still distinct. When you go to a football Grand Final with one hundred thousand other people, you may feel crowded, but there's still only one original you. From the billions of people born on this

planet and the many billions that will be born, your singularity always stands alone. You are unique. If you need to stop reading and go for a walk or sit alone quietly somewhere to think about acknowledging your distinctiveness, go and do it now.

Choose to embrace your uniqueness

Having determined to identify that originality within yourself, you are now ready to take the steps to embrace that recognition, to achieve, maintain and enhance your self-confidence. Of course when you look at the requirement to willingly and eagerly accept yourself as a friend, which describes embracing your uniqueness, you are being asked to like yourself.

Although you have a responsibility to yourself to do that anyway, it is never as easy as a book can make it sound. It is one thing to be able to identify your singularity and it is another thing to like what you have acknowledged.

Remember it is your originality alone that you are being asked to respect, not the actual qualities that represent features of your personality. In other words, you shouldn't be attempting to qualify your view of yourself by saying that you can appreciate your distinctiveness because you are a good spouse, or because you have a social conscience, or a kind disposition etc. These are all good attributes that will support any self-belief attained. However, they are still comparisons. It is more important that you admire and value yourself for your individuality alone because uniqueness has no comparisons. The only irrefutable reason to hold your remarkable self in high regard is because you are distinctly original.

That is all that is needed at this stage, because the socially attractive attributes of your personality are going to develop eventually because of the process of confidence building that you are now learning anyway. It is also reasonable to expect that you may not automatically embrace your inimitable self right now, just because it is written here. It is often not until you

have completed part of the third critical step that you have the ability to look back, like what you have learnt, and then find you've developed the conviction required to appreciate this first step.

Unless you have attained, and can maintain, a reasonable level of self-belief, you cannot expect automatically to like your unequivocal self. There is a real need to obtain and then maintain reserves of self-confidence, so that you can continually feel happy with the embracing of your individuality. The remaining critical steps will provide that support.

You will find that once you are prepared to appreciate the uniqueness that you have now recognised, you can go on to develop the trust and certainty in yourself which is required to complete this first important phase to your self-confidence. You will find as you move through this process that the choices you make about your life will be determined by the value that you put on your very remarkable self. The things you choose to do in life are motivated by whatever is most important to you. Hence part of the function of this process will be to continually reinforce the importance you should place on yourself.

If your decisions are to be influenced by whatever you value the most, it stands to reason that the eager acceptance of your incomparable self should be a high priority, to ensure that you will always make the choices that support and build trust and belief in yourself first. Having that trust in yourself will give you the ability to stand alone on occasions, confident of being right.

I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left and that friend shall be down inside me.

(Abraham Lincoln 1809-1856)

From this quotation you will see that Abraham Lincoln was proud to respect his individuality, because he was prepared to speak publicly about the *friend* within himself. By identifying that friend within, Abraham Lincoln was embracing his own uniqueness. That shows a man who was not only prepared to acknowledge and appreciate his distinctiveness but also had no personal doubts about his direction. By the willing acceptance of his very remarkable self, Abraham Lincoln had the trust and positiveness to stand alone, if necessary, to make what he knew to be the right decisions.

There are good reasons for having the recognition and the embracing of your uniqueness placed together to form the first critical step of enhancing your self-belief. The main reason is that the concept of recognising, although important, can mean very little unless you have the capacity to like what you see. If you don't yet have the confidence to value your unequivocal self, which is generated by the respect for your individuality, then the concept of merely identifying your originality can appear hollow. Gaining that required self-belief will become easier as you are shown how the approaching critical steps will link together to provide that faith in yourself.

By embracing the acknowledgment of your uniqueness you are celebrating your individuality. Although you may have always known you are distinct, you should be choosing to willingly and eagerly accept yourself as a friend you can trust. Having achieved recognition of your own separateness, and being prepared to hold that recognition in high regard, will have put you into an upward spiral.

Once you have determined to never lose sight of your originality, and to value that distinctiveness always, that is an accomplishment in itself. That achievement will contribute to your self-belief and the confidence that will lead to further fulfilment. As time goes on you will realise that achievements become easier because you willingly accept that remarkable

and trusted friend within you, and it is that appreciation of your uniqueness that can lead to some very amazing stories.

Recognition and embracing of uniqueness in practice

Take the story of Wilma Goldean Rudolph (23/6/40-12/11/94). Wilma came from a very poor family. She was the third youngest of twenty-two children. As a small child she was left paralysed in her left leg after contracting double pneumonia and scarlet fever. The doctors, who told Wilma she might never walk properly again, provided her with an iron brace so that she had some mobility.

Years later Wilma would give credit to her mother for encouraging her to recognise and embrace her own uniqueness, and having done so, Wilma decided she wanted to run. This seemed a very ambitious goal for a little girl who, until she was nine, couldn't even walk without a leg brace. Even after Wilma abandoned the brace she would still need to wear an orthopaedic shoe so that she could walk. However Wilma knew that she could trust the friend within herself, and two years after removing the brace, she also abandoned the orthopaedic shoe. What Wilma would never abandon was the willing acceptance of her originality, which provided her with the confidence to maintain her desire to run. Having removed the brace and orthopaedic shoe, Wilma was walking and running awkwardly. It took another two years of her life for her to develop a rhythmic gait. It was Wilma's determination to respect her remarkable self that took her on to become a basketball player and sprinter at the Clarksville (Tennessee) High School.

At sixteen, as a student at the Tennessee State University at Nashville, Wilma was such an improved athlete that she was selected in the United States sprint team to compete at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Wilma was a member of the 4x100-metre relay team that won the bronze medal in Melbourne.

At the 1960 Rome Olympics the previously crippled four-year-old, who was determined to value her distinctiveness so that she could fulfil her desire to run, won gold medals in the 100 metre sprint, the 200 metre sprint and the 4x100-metre sprint relay. The relay team broke the world record and Wilma held the world records in the 100 metres and the 200 metres as well.

Wilma Rudolph had become the greatest runner in the world.

The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.

Walter Bagehot (1826-1877)

There are very few pleasures in life that provide as much satisfaction as triumph in something that others have said you cannot achieve. Self-confidence is going to show you how to achieve many things that others and possibly yourself believed you could not accomplish.

Encourage others to embrace their uniqueness

That of course is not just Wilma's story; it is the story of her mother as well. Her encouragement of her daughter to acknowledge and then to respect her own individuality is an inspiring message to any parent. But this may turn out to be hollow praise, if children are merely told that they're special, and then find that they are beaten in educational or physical endeavours. So if you choose to tell your children that they are special, don't forget to tell them why. It is firstly because they are very remarkable and one of a kind, and secondly because they can choose to really love the nice characteristics that they can identify within themselves.

Competition is also easier to deal with when children can recognise and appreciate their own originality. Furthermore their uniqueness can never be disputed or taken from them, no matter what the results of exams or sporting endeavours.

Irrespective of your desires, or expectations, you will also find that it is not probable that you or others can alter the natural abilities of your children in sporting or academic areas, whatever your plans or hopes for them. That is because their originality is not yours, it's theirs.

Professor Robert Winston, the renowned British sociologist said,

“If you're born with short legs and a tendency to be a bit fat, you're not likely to become an Olympic running champion, even if your parents try to force you. But each child inherits some genes from either parent in a completely random way and therefore each child has its own unique potential”. (1)

You will see that if your children understand that your unconditional love for them is generated by their distinctiveness, they will choose to admire that separateness themselves. When your children can appreciate their own individuality they can then set their own standards, and those standards will be high because the acknowledgment and consideration for their own originality will provide them with self-reliance and confidence. It is self-trust that is the first pre-requisite of any personal success. It is self-belief that provides the impetus to attempt the great endeavours that will lead to even greater self-assurance in themselves for the future.

Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings.

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

It will be your children's self-confidence that provides them with the encouragement to seek their own great undertakings that everyone always hopes to see from future generations.

Just suppose you feel that you can identify and respect your singularity completely right now. Does that make you feel confident? You should realise that if you do feel positive, it is an expected, and yet unintended, bonus at this early stage. You must be aware that even though this first critical step is pivotal to your self-confidence, it may only provide temporary encouragement until you have understood and utilised the other critical steps as part of a complete process. You are most fortunate if you are already feeling confident. That points to the future process as being very rewarding.

Summary

- a) Recognise that you are unique.
- b) You are important because of your uniqueness.
- c) As your individuality is absolute, with no comparisons, it should be the catalyst for your self-confidence.
- d) Your greatest responsibility is to like yourself.
- e) Self-belief is the first pre-requisite of any personal success.
- f) Recognition and embracing of your uniqueness can make you feel positive, even though it is just the first step to obtaining ongoing self-confidence within the *Cycle of Confidence*.

The next chapter will emphasise what you have learnt of the intuitive nature of achievements and how, with self-confidence, they will work together to provide the incentive to make the embracing of your uniqueness so much more easy to accept.