

being empowered

Don't Let Weeds Grow Around Your Dreams!

By Irene Hansen Savarese, M.S., L.M.H.C.

What does it mean to be empowered?

Empowerment is the process by which we get stronger. Power is our birthright. We all have personal power even though we don't always know it, and we don't always act as the powerful people we are. The empowerment process is the process where we are taking back the power that rightfully belongs to us.

To be the powerful person that we truly are, we need to sharpen our tools and aiming them in the right direction. We are always creating - but are we creating the life we want? To be empowered is to regard ourselves as being valuable and capable of creating the life we dream about living. When we make our choices consciously we use our power in our own interest: to achieve our goals, make our dreams a reality, and creating positive visions for the future.

Strong muscles need to be exercised repeatedly to stay strong. To start an empowerment process we need to exercise our inner empowerment muscles, getting stronger, step-by-step, moment-by-moment and day-by-day.

What does it take to be empowered?

Appreciation is for us what the sun is for the plant. We all have strengths, abilities, resources, skills and special talents or gifts. When we are appreciated, we will develop our full potential, and what we focus on becomes our reality. Focusing on strength and abilities highlights the best of what we already have. By over-focusing on problems and weaknesses, we tend to create more problems and think and feel inferior. Appreciation is the first step in the empowerment process.

Connection to Authentic Self is the foundation for empowerment.

When you are able to define yourself, be yourself, and act according to what you truly believe is important to you, you are connected to authentic self. If we don't have an intimate relationship with ourselves it is not very likely that we will feel and act powerful and in control. When we focus on what we feel, think and believe about ourselves and the world around us, we are being aware of Self. Focusing on Self is not the same as being selfish without regard to others. It is to be authentic - To be, respect and act in accordance with whom you truly are. Put primary energy into clarifying own beliefs, values and life goals. Connecting to authentic self is the second step in the empowerment process.

Intimacy is empowering. If we are connected to authentic self, we have far better chances of creating real intimacy in important key relationships. By defining a more whole and separate "I", we have the base for a more intimate and gratifying "We". Let's take an example: If a certain relationship is more important for you than taking care of yourself, you are probably ignoring own needs. Your authentic self can be suffering. Stress, aggression, depression and/or anxiety can be the outcome of neglecting yourself. The relationship might be emotionally intense (fighting and making up), but not necessarily intimate. Ask yourself if you know the person's values and beliefs and if

these are compatible with yours. Intensity and strong feelings are not the same as intimacy. Neither is being alike (sameness) and avoiding differences and conflicts. Intimacy is created between two people when they make the effort to get to know each other's beliefs and values, and learn to respect each other's differences. Connecting to others in authentic ways is the third step in the empowerment process.

Awareness of direction is empowering. Knowing what you want and where you can get it is the next step in the empowerment process. Sometimes the experience of a crisis or disruption makes you realize that something is missing in your life. This gives you the opportunity to reflect on your present life and how you want it to be. By letting dreams about a better life into our awareness, we can take the parts that stand out as the most important aspects, and translate these dream aspects into goals and steps to take to reach the goals. When we begin to pay attention to our dreams they change from blurry ideas to clear pictures of what we truly desire. Start a dream journal. Writing down dreams and translating them into goals and steps to take to get where you want to be is an extremely powerful act.

Obstacles To Empowerment

If you are not living your dream and doing what you love to do, there are obstacles you need to consider. Obstacles to empowerment are basically anything that keeps you from being the best you can be. Anything that takes power away from you is considered an obstacle, and anything that keeps you from being in control of your own life is hurting you and have the power to make you feel weak and powerless.

The empowerment process is the process of gaining consciousness about what works for you and what isn't working so well. Ask yourself what events are capable of triggering depressed mood. Is it certain people that have a tendency to put you down? Decide how to protect yourself. Choose to be with people that make you feel capable. Prolonged depressed mood is dangerous. Depression can rob you of your power and kill your dreams.

Other obstacles are socio-cultural in nature, but nevertheless very powerful forces you'll have to consider. For instance; if people you depend on (i.e. husband, boss, father, religious and/or political leaders) believe that women aren't suitable for powerful positions in society, and that women are too emotional to make a real difference – you have powerful outer obstacles to overcome. You'll have to go against the socio-cultural expectations of you because of your gender, *and* you'll have to go against your own evaluations of what you as a woman can achieve.

Some obstacles to empowerment are created by you and can only be overcome by you. I am thinking about the negative critic sitting on your shoulder telling you what you can and can't do. These negative thoughts and beliefs about yourself are for the most part *not* a true picture of what you are capable of if you put your heart and mind into it. Don't listen to the inner or outer critic. Create your own truth about you. Ask yourself this empowering question: "When is a good time for me to start dreaming?" Don't wait for the perfect time. Perfect is always a step away. The best time is right now!

Irene Hansen Savarese is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Private Practice in Fort Lauderdale. Please direct questions regarding this article to her office (954) 776-0406, ext 3, or email her at: irenesavarese@yahoo.com