

## **The Self-improvement Handbook**

**"The Art and Science of Success Distilled into  
One Simple But Powerful Life-Changing Guide!"**

**by Pat Dunham**

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my mother and father who are no longer with me. My parents never once said "no", nor did they ever tell me I couldn't do something.

I want to thank my husband and my children who have always been my driving force to want to do more, be more and be the absolute best I can be in every area of my life. Because of them, I am inspired to be the best wife, mother and business woman I can be.

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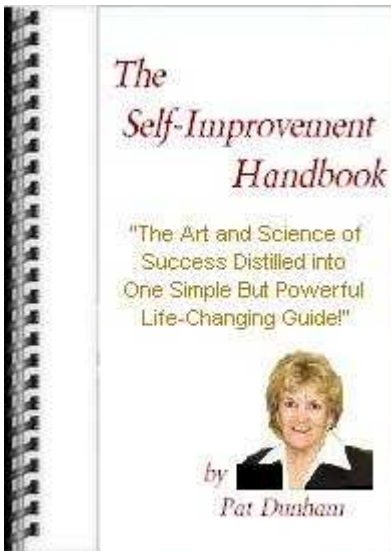
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# The Self-Improvement Handbook

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## Self-Improvement & Success Go Hand in Hand

Everything that happens to us has purpose; and sometimes, one thing leads to another. Instead of locking yourself up in your cage of fears and crying over past heartaches, embarrassment and failures, treat them as your teachers and they will become your tools in both self-improvement and success.

**Patch Adams**, a great contemporary film, features Hunter “Patch” Adams as a medical student who failed to pass the board exams. After months of suffering melancholy and depression, he decided to seek medical attention and voluntarily admitted himself to a psychiatric ward. His lengthy stay in the hospital led to his meeting a variety of multi-faceted people. The catatonic, the mentally handicapped, the schizophrenic, all giving him insight to the many phases of life and its setbacks.

Patch found ways of recognizing and treating his own ailment, finally creating a path to get himself back on a forward track. He woke up one morning realizing that he still wanted to become a doctor. His positive attitude, fortitude, faith in himself and perseverance brought him success. Not only did he improve his quality of life, but he had a profound effect on the people around him. Did he succeed? Needless to say, he became the best doctor this country has ever known.

So, when does self-improvement become synonymous with success? Where do we start? Take these tips:

- **If things don't work out the way you want the first, or second or even the third time you try, think of it as a learning experience and move forward – don't give up in an attitude of defeat.** Persistence is the key.

**When you see hunks and models on TV, concentrate on ways to improve yourself instead of down-grading yourself because you're not like them.** Self-acceptance is not about having slender legs or great

- abs or red hair or long eyelashes. Concentrate on inner beauty. How can others accept you if YOU can't accept YOU?
- **When people around you are feeling depressed, give them a helping hand with positive feedback.** Don't commiserate with them. It does not help them *or* you. Keep yourself in a positive frame of mind, no matter what others are experiencing.
  - **The world is a constant teacher and gives you a wide range for mistakes.** There will be another science quiz, job opportunity or party to attend. You will have another chance to make the right decision or give the right answer.
  - **Deal with each situation as it arises.** Self-improvement is a one-day-at-a-time process.
  - **Self-improvement rewards you with inner stability, personality development and SUCCESS,** which all stem from self-confidence, self-appreciation and self-esteem.
  - **Set meaningful and achievable goals.** Model yourself after those with the traits you admire; but your goal is an improved and better YOU.
  - **Little things mean a lot to other people.** You may not realize that the little things you do like patting someone on the back, greeting your co-worker with a smile and a "good morning" or telling Mr. Smith that you love his tie, are simple things that could mean so much to other people. When you appreciate and acknowledge others, it reflects on your own self image and makes you feel good about yourself.
  - **Self-improvement is a personal journey.** The world is filled with people of all types – our differences are what make us unique and interesting. What works for one doesn't necessarily mean that same thing will work for anyone else, so remember the things you are learning about and for yourself are yours. Don't get discouraged if people with whom you want to share your new-found knowledge aren't as excited as you expect them to be. Every one person is on his or her own journey.

We should always remember that there is no such thing as 'over night success'. Be thankful for who you are now and the positive changes you make along your path to a better you. A very nice quote says that, "*When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.*" We are all here to learn. Parents, school teachers, friends, colleagues, co-workers, neighbors... they are our teachers. When we open our minds to self-improvement, we learn from everyone and every experience.



## The Importance of Improving Yourself

Sometimes, when all our doubts, fears and insecurities wrap around us, we wish we were someone else. We think that because the Joneses of the world have a big house and flashy car, they are happy-go-lucky without a single care in the world, when in reality, the fact is, most people have just as many challenges as you or I. The important factor is the way you deal with those challenges. If you are choosing to be happy and peaceful within, most issues of your life can be handled and worked out to a satisfactory solution.

For example, you are at a party and see a beautiful young woman sitting by herself sipping on some wine and you think to yourself, "She looks so perfectly calm and confident." But if you could read her thoughts, you might just be amazed that she's thinking, "Are people talking about why I am sitting here alone?... Why don't guys find me attractive? ...I don't like my skinny ankles ... I wish I were as intelligent as my best friend."

Another example is a rich young business entrepreneur and you think, "*Whoa!... what else could he ask for?*" But you don't know that when he stares at himself in the mirror, he may say, "I hate my big eyes...I wonder why my friends won't talk to me... I hope Mom and Dad can still work things out."

Isn't it funny? We look at other people, envy them for looking so outrageously perfect and wish we could trade places with them, while they look at us and think the same thing. People have their own individual problems, challenges and issues and more than we realize live in quiet desperation. But you are responsible for your own life, so take the steps now to make a change for a brighter and happier future. Only you can do it for yourself.

One key to self-improvement is to find someone you trust, with whom you can be completely candid, who will be completely honest with you. Ask questions like, "Do you think I am ill-mannered?", "Do I always sound so argumentative?", "Do I talk too loud?", "Does my breath smell?", "Do I ever bore you when we're together?". When you ask these questions, however, be sure you are ready to hear and deal with the truthful answers. Open up your mind and heart and listen. A word of warning: You are seeking and asking for the truth about yourself from your trusted confidante, but that does not mean that your companion is asking

the same. Do not adopt a defensive attitude and give back information that has not been requested.

One of Whitney Houston's songs says "*Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.*" **True enough!** In order to love others, you must love yourself first. Remember, you cannot give what you do not have.

Instead of telling people ways to change and improve, let them see you as a representative and product of self-improvement. It makes us better people who act as inspiration to other people.

Take the "if only" factor out of your vocabulary - "If only I were richer... if only I were thinner". Richer than or thinner than who? Stop comparing yourself to others, who have their own insecurities. Nobody is perfect. We can always strive to be healthier, in better shape, wealthier; but life need not be perfect for you to be at peace with yourself. Accepting and being happy with your true self is the first step to self-improvement.

Self-improvement and loving yourself is not a matter of shouting to the whole world that you are perfect and you are the best. It's the virtue of acceptance and contentment. When we begin to improve ourselves, we then begin to feel contented and happy.

## **Building Your Self-Esteem**

So how do you stay calm, composed and maintain self-esteem in a tough environment? Here is an exercise you may find helpful:

**Imagine yourself as a Dart Board.** Everything and everyone else around you are dart pins. These dart pins carry the negatives in everyday life. Don't let them get the best of you. Recognize which dart pins you should avoid.

### **Dart Pin #1 : Negative Work Environment**

Beware of the 'dog-eat-dog' theory pushing everyone to fight just to get ahead. This is where non-appreciative people usually thrive. No one will appreciate your contributions, even if you miss lunch and dinner and stay up late. You are expected to work too much without getting help from people concerned. Don't get caught up in this mindset because it will ruin your self-esteem. Competition is everywhere. Be healthy enough to compete, but keep it healthy for you.

### **Dart Pin #2: Other People's Behavior**

Bulldozers, brown nosers, gossipmongers, whiners, backstabbers, snipers, controllers, naggers, complainers, exploders, patronizers, sluffers... all these kinds of people will hijack your self-esteem.

### **Dart Pin #3: Changing Environment**

Changes challenge our paradigms. They test our flexibility, our adaptability and they alter the way we think. Changes may make life difficult or stressful for awhile, but the challenge makes us stronger. Change is always around us, therefore, we must be adaptable.

### **Dart Pin #4: Past Experience**

It's okay to say "ouch!" when we experience pain. But don't let pain transform itself into fear. Treat each painful situation as a lesson.

### **Dart Pin #5: Negative World View**

You can react or respond to a situation, depending on your negative or positive way of looking at it. In building self-esteem, we must learn how to make the best of the worst situations.

### **Dart Pin #6: Determination Theory**

The way you are and the way you behave are products of your inherited traits (genetics), your upbringing (psychic), and your environmental surroundings. You have your own identity, your own will power and you can make your own choices. If your father is an unhappy man, you do not have to be unhappy, too. Learn from other people's experiences, so you can avoid making the same mistakes.

In Zig Ziglar's book, **See You At The Top**, he wrote about a cause for a poor self-image, when you compare your worst features to someone else's best features. Zig wrote, "One woman did that and ended up at age 38, a scrub woman on welfare.

Then she read Claude M. Bristol's **The Magic of Believing**. she took inventory of her positive qualities, one of which was the ability to make people laugh, and she started believing in those qualities. Since that time, even though she still doesn't compete with the beauties of the world, Phyllis Diller has earned as much as \$1,000,000 in a single year.

You may wonder if some people are born leaders and positive thinkers. NO. **Being positive, and staying positive is a choice.** Building self-esteem and drawing lines for self-improvement is a choice, not a rule or a talent.

It is a constant challenge to stay positive. Although it is not always easy, work on eliminating the negative powers in your life. Associate with positive, successful people. Watch educational and uplifting shows if you must watch TV. Listen to music. Laugh out loud whenever possible. Take a walk with someone you love through the woods or a flower garden. We each have the power to choose what we think and the way we act. Make those choices carefully.

Building self-esteem will lead to self-improvement if you take responsibility for who you are, what you have and what you do. So what are the building blocks of

self-esteem? To develop self-esteem, make a true assessment and take control of your mission, values and discipline with determination. Be positive. Be content. Be happy. Be thankful. And be kind to others.

## Spiritual Growth: The Spiritual Challenge in Modern Times

Our world today seems to be defined by power, money, and influence. Modern conveniences, gadgets, and tools, as well as the constant barrage of television, magazines, and the web are designed to focus our attention in order to obtain bigger and better material assets. As a result, our concepts of self-worth and self-meaning are sometimes lost in the hustle of our busy and stressful lives. We grab at whatever gives us instant gratification and then quickly move on to something else. How can we strike a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of our lives in today's world?

### **To grow spiritually, you have to look inwardly:**

Introspection goes beyond recalling the things that happened to us today, this week, or last month. You need to look closely and reflect on your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and motivations. By periodically examining your experiences, the decisions you make, the relationships you have, and your activities, these can then provide you with useful insights on your life goals, on the good traits you must sustain and the bad traits you need to discard. Moreover, your assessment gives you clues on how to act, react, and conduct yourself in the midst of any situation. Like any skill, introspection can be learned, but it takes courage and the willingness to seek the truths that lie within you. When you look at yourself, be objective, be forgiving, and be honest, focusing on the areas that need improving.

### **To grow spiritually, you have to develop your potential:**

Generally speaking, religion and science have differing views on matters of the human spirit. Religion often views people as spiritual beings temporarily living on Earth, while science views the spirit as just one dimension of an individual. Mastery of the self is a recurring theme in almost all religious teachings. In Psychology, realizing one's full potential is to self-actualize. Either way, when you have satisfied your basic physiological and emotional needs, then spiritual needs, or our needs that pertain to us understanding our own existence, come next. Achieving the fulfillment of each of these needs that are mentioned above,

leads to the total development of the individual. Most people will benefit from seeking a balance in their own physical and spiritual needs, and each individual must determine the appropriate result for themselves.

**To grow spiritually, you have to search for your own meaning:**

Whether we believe that life's meaning is either pre-determined, self-directed, or some combination of these two, to grow in spirit is to realize that we do not *merely* exist. We do not know the meaning of our lives at birth; but we gain knowledge and wisdom from our interactions with people and from our actions and reactions to the situations we experience. As we discover our own meaning, we encounter beliefs and values that we either reject or accept, and our lives develop purpose as a result. This purpose puts all our physical, emotional, and intellectual potentials to use, sustains us during trying times, and gives us the foundation for the goals that we strive to achieve, our destination. A person without purpose or meaning is like a drifting ship at sea.

**To grow spiritually, we have to recognize connectedness:**

Generally speaking, religions stress the concept of our relatedness to all creation, both live and inanimate. Moreover, many deity-centered religions speak of the relationship between humans and a higher being. On the other hand, science expounds on our link to other living things through the evolution theory. In either belief you hold, this relatedness is clearly seen in the concept of ecology, the interaction between living and non-living things. In psychology, connectedness is a characteristic of self-transcendence, surpassing our ordinary limits. Recognizing your connection to all things makes you more humble and respectful of people, animals, plants, and things in nature. It makes you appreciate everything around you. It moves you to go beyond your comfort zone and reach out to other people, and become champions of all things around you.

Thus to grow in spirit is a **day-to-day** encounter. The important thing is to realize that this continuous learning, this gaining of knowledge, allows us the possibility of further spiritual growth.

## Motivation: The Heart of Self-Improvement

Pain motivates change. Being grounded for a failing grade on a test may motivate a child to study. The rising cost of living and a pile of unpaid bills may motivate you to search for a better source of income. Stepping on and being stung by a bee will motivate you to wear shoes when you go outside. Sometimes pain is just the right amount of motivation we need to improve ourselves.

Here are the ABC's of Motivation:

- A. **Achieve your dreams.** Avoid negative people, things and places. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."
- B. **Believe in yourself,** and in what you can do.
- C. **Consider things from every angle and aspect.** Motivation and determination bring positive results.
- D. **Don't give in and don't give up.** The story goes that Thomas Edison failed more than 10,000 times when trying to create the light bulb. When asked about it, Edison allegedly said, "I have not failed 10,000 times, I have successfully discovered 10,000 ways not to make a light bulb."
- E. **Enjoy.** Work as if you don't need money. Dance as if nobody's watching. Love as if you never cried. Learn as if you'll live forever. Motivation takes place when people are happy.
- F. **Family and Friends** – are life's greatest treasures. Savor each one.
- G. **Give more than enough.** That 'little extra' you give comes back to you in enormous benefits.
- H. **Hang on to your dreams.** Your dreams are your driving force.
- I. **Ignore the negatives.** Stay away from toxic people and circumstances and stay on your own course of action.
- J. **Just be yourself.** The key to your personal success is to be yourself.



- K. **Keep trying no matter the circumstances.** Determination and perseverance is the pathway to self-improvement.
- L. **Love yourself.** Now isn't that easy?
- M. **Make things happen.** Dress your dreams in work clothes.
- N. **Never lie, cheat or steal.** Always play fair.
- O. **Open your eyes and your mind.** See things the way they are, but dream things the way you want them to be.
- P. **Practice makes perfect.** Repetitive positive action forms good habits.
- Q. **Quitters never win.** And winners never quit. Only you can make that choice.
- R. **Ready yourself.** Motivation is also about preparation. Plan your work and work your plan.
- S. **Stop procrastinating!** Just do it!
- T. **Take control of your life.** Discipline and self control are key factors in self-improvement.
- U. **Understand others.** Be a good listener.
- V. **Visualize it.** See it, feel it, make it happen.
- W. **Want it more than anything.** Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.
- X. **X Factor will set you apart.** When you are motivated, you add "extras" into your life like extra time for family, extra help at work and extra care for friends.
- Y. **You are unique.** You give value to the world. You are loved.
- Z. **Zero in on your dreams and GO FOR IT!!!**

## Unlocking Your Self-Improvement Power

Like it or not, change happens. At times in all our lives, we experience turning points, some of which may trigger our desire for self-improvement, not because of an outside source, but because we realize its for our own good.

**Happy, well adjusted people don't just accept change, they embrace it.** Fear of the unknown may cause you to resist the changes you need to have a fuller, happier life, but if you look at your fear as an opportunity to learn and challenge yourself, you can easily see your new path as an adventure and enable yourself to enjoy the process.

I had occasion to have a conversation with a young man who I'll call John (not his real name). I was familiar with his family back ground, which was not the best. His mother was heavy handed in disciplining him, and a bit fanatical, which ended her marriage in divorce. After the divorce, his father was not active in his life, and yet I noted how good he turned out.

He was an extremely smart and articulate young man who worked hard and was clever with his money. He later married and became an excellent husband and father. I admired the man he had become and often wondered how he did that in view of where he came from.

He told me something I want to share with you. He said, "I looked at families who were 'normal' and knew that what I had endured was not 'normal'. I picked out men who I admired for their various good qualities and then I watched them and I emulated them." It makes sense that if you see other people doing things you like, you can say to your self, "If they can do it, so can I". And that is what that young man did.

I often find myself doing something similar. When I see someone succeeding in their chosen profession and it is something I have wanted to do, I say to myself, "If they can do it, so can I".

Unlock the power you have within and experience the freedom that self-awareness brings. Experience the strength that self-sufficiency brings. Experience the contentment that self-approval brings. It's right there inside you – and you have the key. Use it and take the first step to a brighter tomorrow.

## **7-Day Program to Self-Improvement**

Self-Improvement is a life-long venture. No one is a perfect being; but as you strive for happiness and fulfillment, you will continue to better yourself in sometimes small and sometimes very significant measures.

Below you will find a 7-day guide to help you find the path that suits you best. Focus on each step and practice the concepts until they are second nature to you. And above all, enjoy the journey.

### **Day 1: Identify your purpose.**

Are you wandering through life with little direction - *hoping* that you'll stumble upon happiness, health and prosperity? Identify your personal goals. If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there? Write your goals down on paper. Once you have your purpose in mind and have a commitment in black and white, you will be more determined to find the path that leads you there.

### **Day 2: Acknowledge your values.**

Make a list of your top 5 values. Some examples might be honesty, perseverance, courage, loyalty or charity. As you search for your purpose, look at your values to keep them both aligned. You will more ably reach a goal that compliments your set of values.

### **Day 3: Know your needs.**

Unfulfilled needs will keep you from living authentically. Take care of yourself above all else. When your 'self' is at peace, you can then travel your life's path in harmony, with focus and determination.

### **Day 4: Remember your passions.**

If you coincide your goals with your passions, you will truly express and honor yourself and give tribute to the people who have inspired you to become the very person you are now and aspire to become.

**Day 5: Live from the inside out.**

Increase awareness of your inner wisdom by regularly reflecting in silence. Take a few deep breaths to quiet your distracted mind. Become comfortable in your own company. Even if for a few moments in each busy day, relish the solitude of your individuality and let your inner beauty breathe free.

**Day 6: Honor your strengths.**

What are your positive traits? What special talents do you have? List three - if you get stuck, ask those closest to you to help identify these. Are you imaginative, poetic, witty, good with your hands? Find ways to express your authentic self through your strengths. You can increase your self-confidence when you share what you do best.

**Day 7: Serve others.**

When you are true to yourself, living your purpose and giving of your talents to the world around you, you give back in spirit and service to others. When you live authentically, you develop an interconnected sense of being. The rewards come back to you in bountiful proportions.

Self-improvement is a lifestyle and a way of life. Take the old adage “Learn Something New Everyday” a step further and find a little something in you everyday to improve – you won’t believe the joy and satisfaction you’ll get from them both.

## 12 Inspirational Self-Improvement Quotes

1. “Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”  
- Harold Whitman
2. “It's not what's happening to you now or what has happened in your past that determines who you become. Rather, it's your decisions about what to focus on, what things mean to you and what you're going to do about them that will determine your ultimate destiny.”  
- Anthony Robbins
3. “Every human has four endowments: self-awareness, conscience, independent will and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom...The power to choose, to respond, to change.”  
- Dr. Stephen Covey
4. “Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation.”  
- Brian Tracy
5. “You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself.”  
- Jim Rohn

6. "Predetermine the objectives you want to accomplish. Think big, act big and set out to accomplish big results."  
- Mark Victor Hansen
  
7. "You clearly decide what it is that you're absolutely committed to achieving,
  1. You're willing to take massive action,
  2. You notice what's working and what is not, and
  3. You continue to change your approach until you achieve what you want, using whatever life gives you along the way."- Anthony Robbins
  
8. "Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are."  
- Dale Carnegie
  
9. "There is one quality which one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning desire to possess it."  
- Napoleon Hill
  
10. "The unique ability to take decisive action while maintaining focus on the ultimate mission is what defines a true leader."  
- Robert Kiyosaki
  
11. "Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience."  
- Denis Waitley
  
12. "The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining."  
- John F. Kennedy

## About The Author

I was born and raised in East Hampton, Connecticut, where my grandfather was a founding member of the community. He ran a big chicken farm with my father and his other sons. There is a street named after our family, "Alden's Crossing", which is where the cows crossed the road back in my grandfather's day. I am actually a direct descendant of John Alden who came over on the Mayflower. So one might say I am also part of the founding members of the first colonies.

My father was a self-employed carpenter who rarely had work during the winter. Because we had very little money during those months, we would close off the extra rooms in our house and my sister and I would be confined to two rooms, the kitchen and my parents' room, all heated by the wood burning kitchen stove.

At a very early age I noticed how the kids at school dressed better than me. They wore pretty shoes and pretty little anklets, while I wore scuffed brown lace-up shoes with ugly dark colored striped socks. It probably was the best thing that happened to me as I reflect back, because it most likely was the driving force behind my constant desire to improve my situation.

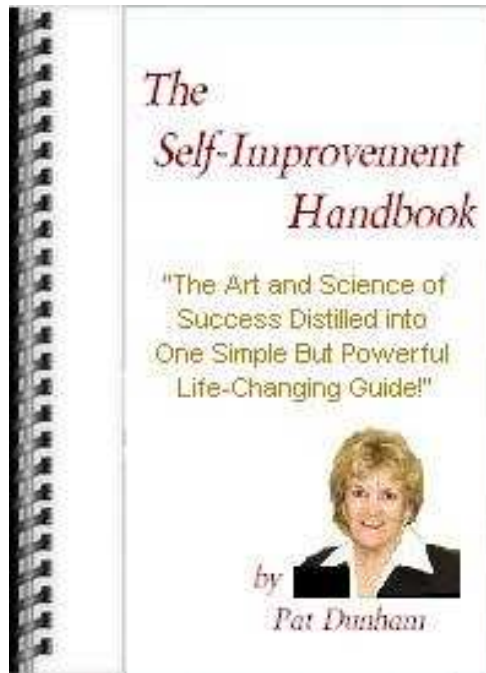
When I was only 11 years old, I discovered that I could make my own money by baby sitting and selling greeting cards to the neighbors. Even though we always had enough food, I had very few clothes and most of them were hand-me-downs. I used my baby sitting money to buy clothes. You might say I had a strong desire to keep up with the Jones's at the time. I discovered party plan sales at 16 years old and never looked back.

To this day, I continue to strive for bigger and better things. I love sharing what I have learned, hoping to help others who can benefit from my experiences and shorten the learning curve for them.

Your Partner In Success,

*Pat Dunham*





**Pat Dunham**

[Pat@PatDunham.com](mailto:Pat@PatDunham.com)

727-224-9771

**Email me your success story using the tips included in this book.  
I may feature your story in a future updated version of the book.**



## **YOUR PERSONAL NOTES:**

Use these extra pages for reminders of your thoughts, ideas and progress.


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