

IF YOU COMPARE, BEWARE

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IF YOU COMPARE, BEWARE

By Pauline Wallin, Ph.D.

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Picture this scene: Little Johnny's mother places a large piece of chocolate cake on his plate. He's pretty happy with it -- until he glances over at his brother's portion and notices that it's even bigger than his own. Suddenly Johnny is no longer satisfied with what he got. He starts to pout and complain, and may even resort to throwing his cake on the floor.

Sound familiar? If you didn't have this experience growing up, you have surely observed it in others. And it's not only kids who engage in this sort of comparison. Adults do it too.

Suppose you get a 10% raise at work. "That's pretty good," you might say to yourself. But a few days later you find out that someone else got 12%. Now you're not so pleased. Your inner brat starts grumbling about your raise not being fair, or not being nearly enough.

The actual dollar amount of your raise hasn't changed, but your attitude toward it has. Why?

It's a result of what psychologists call "social comparison." Humans are social animals, so it's natural to view ourselves in relation to other people. It's not necessarily bad, either:

- Much of our helping behavior and charitable giving come from comparing our own circumstances with those who are less fortunate.
- Social comparison is useful in situations where we're not quite sure how to act. Let's say you're attending services at a house of worship whose rituals and procedures are unfamiliar to you. You'll probably look around and see what everyone else is doing so that you can follow along.
- Social comparison contributes to order in society. When people dress, behave and speak in similar ways they feel a sense of belonging and loyalty within the group.

BUT THERE IS A DOWNSIDE TO SOCIAL COMPARISON. Routinely comparing yourself to others -- especially when it comes to money, talent, recognition and material possessions -- will invariably lead

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to dissatisfaction, even if you come out on top.

Research has shown that people who make a habit of such comparisons are generally less happy than are those who base their success on their own internal standards.

Here's why:

When you compare yourself to people who have more than you, your inner brat gets into gear. Just like little Johnny and the chocolate cake described above, your inner brat dwells on what's missing, which makes you feel victimized. You'll never be satisfied, no matter how much you have, as long as someone else has more.

This is the same mentality that fuels the huge salary demands by top athletes, actors and CEOs: "I'm making \$20 million, but that's not enough because the other guy's getting \$30 million."

If comparing yourself to people who have more than you makes you feel worse, should you instead concentrate on comparing yourself to those who have less or accomplished less? Actually, no. While it might be comforting for the moment, it could backfire in the long run.

You could end up feeling even less secure, worrying that you'll lose what you have. Or you might feel guilty for having more than others, such that you subconsciously sabotage your future success.

It's best not to compare yourself to anyone. Other people's achievements don't diminish your own, and their misfortunes do not improve your lot.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't compete, nor that you shouldn't strive to improve. However, do it for the right reasons — not because your inner brat is whining, but rather to develop and grow. That way, you'll enjoy your accomplishments so much more.

Pauline Wallin, Ph.D. is a psychologist in Camp Hill, PA, and author of "Taming Your Inner Brat: A Guide for Transforming Self-defeating Behavior" (Wildcat Canyon Press, 2004) She is also a life coach. Visit <http://www.innerbrat.com> for more information, and subscribe to her free, monthly Inner Brat Newsletter.

Who Needs Heroes?

By Graham and Julie

When we were talking the other day we started to think about our heroes when we were young. After we had discussed the usual film star and sports stars that we idolised I remembered Derek. Derek was a couple of years ahead of me in school and he had everything; he always got straight 'A's' and was formidable on the football field as well as one of the fastest over 100 metres. What's more he didn't appear to work at it. When the rest of us were 'slaving' away at our homework or sweating buckets trying to impress on the football field or athletics track he just turned up and got on with it. A

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natural, was how one of our teachers described him.

Natural or hero, Derek caused me and others a lot of pain. His skills and our hero worship caused us to begin the 'beating yourself up' process. You know the; 'I'm not good enough'. 'If only I could do that.' 'I couldn't possibly do that'. The self defeating traits of inadequacy, insecurity and worthlessness and constant comparison with others all started here. With Derek, we started the comparison programme.

Comparison is just another name for subservience. When you compare yourself to someone you are really accepting that you are impressed by them, you want them to influence your life and are willingly bowing down to their perceived skills and abilities. The problem with subservience is that you can never be free. It takes away all your happiness and power. You end up confused and wilting like a flower.

The fact is comparing yourself with others not only stops you from being successful, it's destructive. As, Elizabeth Fisher an American author, stated;

'comparison is a death knell to sibling harmony'.

Suggesting that the minute you compare yourself with anybody the relationship is always going to be powerless. Because you are now in a subservient relationship.

The truth is that only prices, products and stores can be compared. Not people. You can compare key data any product, price or service. So when you compare yourself with others are you a product, price or service?

Remember those essays from school and university where you were always asked to compare and contrast something with the aim of showing the similarities and differences of an argument etc. But how do you do this with people? What is being compared or contrasted? How are people similar? Height, weight, age, the clothes they wear, walk, where they live, the cars they drive, their salary, their achievements, their views ?

Do you compare yourself with others?

Who do you compare yourself with?

What are the attributes you compare?

Are you comparing like with like?

You can compare males and females and they way they perform tasks, parents against children, different age groups. You can compare how your opinions are similar or different. But the best you can get is that you are mostly similar or mostly different. What about jealousy? How do you measure that?

You can compare products with different versions. But people? How do you compare yourself with your parents or grandparents? You could be like Shakespeare and compare yourself against nature i.e.

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beauty with day and night. But not compare one person against another.

Comparing yourself with others is like putting yourself in a prison. A prison which can only bring pain. A prison that stops you from experiencing your true talents. No one puts you in this prison, you do it all by yourself. You simply learn, as I did, not to accept yourself and reject who you really are in favour for what you perceive another person has. In other words you give yourself a hard time and delay your own growth because you thought the other person was better than you.

Trust yourself, you have all the skills you need to succeed. All you need is a change of process.

Stop judging yourself. Instead of comparing yourself with others, subverting your own power and constantly under performing; focus on your potential. What you want to be.

Meditate on where you want to be.

Imagine yourself achieving your potential. What does it look like, what does it feel like.

Surround yourself with images and artefacts depicting the future you and gradually, you will become what you always wanted to be.

The more you believe in your capabilities the more your behaviour will change. Access the hidden skills you have. Trust in yourself. You have far more skills and abilities than you are using at present.

If you have heroes then beware you could be taking away your skills, your individualism and making yourself subservient for the rest of your life. In which case who needs heroes?

Graham and Julie

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To see more of our work please go to:

Who Needs Heroes?

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