

HOW TO OVERCOME SHYNESS

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HOW TO OVERCOME YOUR SHYNESS AND DEVELOP YOUR COURAGE

How often have you found yourself trembling, heart pounding, legs weak, cheeks on fire, when facing a colleague or your boss, a teacher or a traffic cop, or simply a person of the opposite sex?

Shyness can be paralyzing at any age. It causes bizarre anxieties, nightmares, indigestion and, when the occasion to be strong and affirmative has passed, infinite regrets.

Do you think you're beyond hope?

If you do, you're wrong. Shyness can be treated. You might not be aware that most psychologists who have published works on the subject, were at one time very shy themselves. Who is more likely to be interested in shyness, and write hundreds of pages about it, than a person who is shy!

Those who have never suffered from shyness are incapable of understanding to what point it can ruin our lives and make us unhappy.

Self assurance, confidence and ease of expression are the main qualities of a magnetic personality. If being shy is forcing you to hide behind a shell, then you're missing out

on many of the beauties of existence. Throw away your shell, and learn to live a full and satisfying life!

What kind of shy person are you?

This is no joke. There are varying degrees and numerous types of shyness.

This test will tell you what category you belong to:

1. You're invited to a party with thirty other people.

You only know one of them:

1. You don't leave that person's side the whole evening. (5)
2. You chat with two or three other people, who seem as alone as you are. (3)
3. You move from one group to another, and take advantage of the opportunity to make new acquaintances. (0)

2. You have to go to an interview for a new job:

1. You don't sleep the night before. (5)
2. You have a hard time getting to sleep, convinced that the other candidates have more chance of getting the job than you do. (3)
3. You get a good night's sleep, confident of your abilities and qualifications. (0)

3. You arrive late for a conference, and realize that the entrance is right in front of the audience.

1. You walk right in. (0)

2. You wait in the hallway for another latecomer, and slip in behind. (3)
3. You wait for a break in the proceedings before entering. (5)

4. During a group discussion, you're asked to voice your opinion about a subject that is familiar to you:

1. You feel uncomfortable because people are looking at you, but you are able to provide an acceptable explanation. (3)
2. You're taken by surprise, and find yourself incapable of expressing yourself coherently. (5)
3. You provide a clear and concise explanation, without feeling in the least embarrassed. (0)

5. At a meeting where the participants are asked to state their views:

1. You never take the floor because you're convinced that you have nothing important to say. (5)
2. You speak out whenever you have a suggestion. (0)
3. You take the floor, and joke a bit before stating your opinion in a clear and concise manner. (3)

6. The opinions of your colleagues:

1. Sometimes cause you to change your attitude in order to please them. (3)
2. Slide off you like water off a duck's tail. (0)
3. Often prevent you from sleeping. (5)

7. You're waiting in line when a few people push in front of you:

1. You automatically step back in front of them. (3)
2. You ask them firmly but politely not to push in line. (0)
3. You're afraid they'll get aggressive and don't say anything. (5)

8. You're discussing a subject you don't know much about with a group of specialists:

1. You are very impressed, and feel somewhat inadequate. (5)
2. You avoid saying much because you're not familiar with the subject, but you don't feel inferior because you do have a lot of expertise in other fields. (3)
3. You admit your ignorance, and show a desire to learn more. (0)

9. You find yourself with a group of people who are somewhat snobbish:

1. You let them know that you're nobody's fool. (0)
2. You try and be as snobbish as they are. (3)
3. You're very impressed, and don't dare say anything for fear of appearing ridiculous. (5)

10. Your boss turns around and blames you for doing exactly what he asked you to do:

1. You start excusing yourself and feel guilty. (5)

2. You excuse yourself and explain that you had trouble understanding his orders correctly. (3)
3. You remind him of his orders, politely but firmly. (0)

11. You're in the waiting room of a doctor who specializes in sexually transmitted diseases:

1. You wonder what the other people must think of you. (5)
2. You behave as if you were in any other waiting room. (3)
3. You try to let the other patients know that you haven't got that kind of problem. (0)

12. Do you wear sunglasses:

1. Never (0)
2. Sometimes (3)
3. Very often (5)

13. When you have to make a speech or a presentation:

1. You concentrate only on what you're going to say, and neglect to listen to other people's speeches. (5)
2. You half listen, but you're distracted. (3)
3. You listen closely, and adapt your own speech to what has been said before. (0)

14. You get the impression that other people:

1. Treat you as an equal. (0)

2. Treat you with condescension. (3)
3. Make fun of you. (5)

15. When someone compliments you:

1. You feel uncomfortable, and mutter a few indistinct words in return. (5)
2. You transfer the credit to someone else, and quickly change the subject. (3)
3. You thank the person who complimented you. (0)

16. When someone says something nasty about you:

1. You are incapable of replying on the spot, and then spend the next two hours regretting that you didn't come up with this or that retort. (3)
2. You feel rejected, misunderstood and disliked. (5)
3. You reply immediately. (0)

17. Do you think that others know how shy you are?

1. Somewhat (3)
2. Perfectly (5)
3. Not at all (0)

18. When someone you don't know raises their voice nearby:

1. You immediately feel guilty. (5)
2. You think that the person needs to learn more self control. (3)
3. You laugh about it because whatever the cause is, it doesn't concern you. (0)

19. You're on vacation, and someone invites you to join their group for dinner:

1. You refuse because you don't know the people, and end up eating alone. (3)
2. You refuse at first, but then feel obligated to accept when the person insists. (5)
3. You accept or decline, according to how your mood, without feeling in the least disturbed. (0)

20. Your shyness:

1. Prevents you from saying what you think. (5)
2. Makes you say things that you really don't think. (3)
3. Does not prevent you from expressing yourself. (0)

RESULTS

If you got between 70 and 100 points:

You are deeply and obsessively shy. You probably gave up trying to overcome your shyness, which has ruined your life and prevented you from fulfilling yourself, a long time ago. Other people probably find you nice, if a little standoffish. When you're with people you don't know, you hide your shyness by being distant, which unfortunately comes across as arrogance.

Between 40 and 70 points:

You are shy, certainly, but you often succeed in hiding it. You're very self conscious, and make constant efforts to express yourself and gain other people's respect. This usually works, and people who don't know you well are

fooled. You must have a whole series of little “tricks” which create the illusion of self assurance and courage. You’re a person who hides your shyness.

Less than 40 points:

You suffer from occasional bouts of shyness, but they’re not frequent enough to affect your life, and you’ve learned to make the effort required to overcome attacks of shyness which could cause problems. You may have become more self assured as you matured. Or maybe your successes have improved your self image and given you the confidence you lacked. Or you may just feel comfortable doing exactly what you like. Whatever the reason, you are only occasionally and slightly shy.

STEP NO. 1: IDENTIFY YOUR ENEMY

To fight an enemy, you first have to know who or what it is. Therefore, the aim of the first exercise you should do is to objectively study your shyness. Over the next few days, you're going to observe your shyness in action, coldly and clinically, as if you were a specialist examining an interesting prehistoric specimen which everyone thought had been extinct for hundreds of thousands of years.

Exercise: Split your personality

1- Get comfortable in front of a mirror and look at yourself attentively. The person you see is a stranger whom you're meeting for the first time. Observe yourself curiously. Absorb the image in front of you. You should always keep it in mind.

2- From now on you will be split into two persons: an "actor" who goes through the movements of day to day living, and an "observer" who stands in the wings and care-

fully examines those acts and gestures. Try to see yourself, exactly like you were in the mirror.

Never lose sight of yourself!

3- Get a notebook and pen, and keep them with you constantly for the next two weeks.

4- For two weeks, observe yourself getting up in the morning, taking a shower, getting dressed, eating breakfast and leaving for work. Watch yourself walking in the street, taking the bus, shopping, etc.

5- At some point during the day, you're going to confront your shyness. But not right away. Take time to observe yourself carrying out mundane and familiar activities, which don't require any special effort.

After a few hours, the mechanism of splitting and observing yourself will come naturally. And that's when you will be asked to do something that will force you to take charge of yourself.

It could concern a meeting with your boss, or a request you have to make from someone you don't know, or trying to get a refund from a supplier, etc.

6- Every time you feel an attack of shyness coming on, do what is called a "stop-frame" in movie jargon.

7- Immediately ask yourself the following questions and write your answers down in your notebook:

What am I afraid of at this moment? That the person I have to deal with will find me ridiculous? Or that I'm not dressed well enough? Or that my makeup ran because I had to walk in the rain?

That they'll be aggressive? That my boss is calling me into his office to criticize my work. Maybe what I'm wearing makes him uncomfortable. Etc. etc.

If you're really shy, you'll have no trouble identifying these types of questions and of answering them straight-

away, because the situation is familiar to you. However this will be the first time you analyze your behavior objectively.

8- Each night, take a few minutes and study the answers you hastily scrawled in your notebook. Transform passive thoughts ("What do you want from me? I'm shy! It isn't my fault...") to active ones ("I am shy, but I'm doing something about it...")

9- Find a remedy for each reason you wrote down for your shy-ness. For example: "I felt intimidated because I was afraid my boss would criticize me. But why should he have any reason to criticize me? Did I make a mistake? If so, how can I rectify it?"

"I don't like walking down this corridor because it's always full of people, sitting around and watching what's going on. So what?

Should I be ashamed of the way I look? Of my clothes, of my hair?

Why? What concrete steps can I take so that I won't be ashamed of myself any more? What if it's all in my head? What if everyone isn't looking at me..."

The 4 main causes of shyness

If you apply yourself, it shouldn't take more than two weeks to determine the causes of your shyness, and the kinds of situations that set off your fear reflex. Don't worry, there aren't that many! In general, shyness is caused by:

- shame of our physical appearance, either of our body or our clothes;
- fear of aggression from unknown persons, either mocking or scornful;

- fear of being rejected by persons we consider important (both in our private and professional lives);
- a feeling of superiority (oh yes!) which causes us to imprison ourselves in an “ivory tower”.

After two weeks of doing this exercise you’ll notice that your powers of observation are considerably sharpened. You’ll find yourself reacting differently to situations that you find terrifying, or that make you uncomfortable. You’ll feel that you’ve already made some progress, without knowing exactly where the improvement lies.

How to attack the root of the problem

Actually, what has happened is that you’ve taken the “drama” out of your shyness. It’s very difficult to get upset about a situation that you’re able to analyze objectively.

As long as your shyness remained some kind of omnipresent but vague enemy, a mysterious, frightening dragon that reared its ugly head out of the depths of your imagination from time to time, it was terrifying.

But as soon as you’re able to put your finger on the essential root of the problem, by objectively answering the questions you’ve learned to ask yourself, you’ve already covered a good deal of ground on the road to victory.

You’re not completely cured, of course! The shyness you’ve been carrying around for ten, twenty or even thirty years, is not going to disappear in two weeks. You are still shy, and you may always be a little shy.

Understanding others better

An important element of the path you've just taken is the lucidity which it has automatically given you. The role of observer, which you've been playing for the past few weeks, has allowed you not only to identify your own motivations, but also to gain some insight into the motivations of others.

There's no mystery involved.

By sharpening your perception of yourself, you also get rid of the apprehension which has prevented you from seeing others as they are, in the full light of day. Where before you saw some kind of ogre, you now see an ordinary human being.

So a person who seemed arrogant and frightening, now appears insecure, hiding their feelings of inferiority behind an aggressive personality, full of sabre-rattling bravado and boasting.

You'll need a few more weeks of discipline, as well as a reasonable dose of introspection and self honesty. But you've already passed the most difficult part of the test - you are now able to confront your shyness.

Even if you remain somewhat reserved and uncomfortable in the limelight for the rest of your life, don't worry.

Being a little shy is not a defect - on the contrary.

Most of us are put off by people who are too arrogant, too sure of themselves, who impose themselves on others without ever considering that they might not be appreciated. Modesty, tact and sensitivity are all qualities that should be cultivated.

STEP NO. 2: BALANCE THE ACCOUNTS

The time has come to balance the accounts of your two weeks of “split personality” observations.

Get comfortable, with your notebook handy, and ask yourself these questions:

- Do you feel you know yourself better?
- Do you think you have more control over your imagination?
- Have your faculties of observation improved?
- Do you laugh more often?
- Have you noticed that you're less likely to be clumsy in your day to day activities?
- Do you think you've gotten to the root of your shyness?

- Do you feel as frightened as before by other people?

Logically, you should observe a significant improvement.

Now the next question is very important. If you can honestly answer in the affirmative, then you're doing very well. If not, you should continue with the "split personality" exercise - go back to the beginning and start all over again.

- Do you have a greater understanding of what motivates other people?

STEP NO. 3: ELIMINATE NEGATIVE IMAGES

The preceding method was designed to help you confront your shyness head on, and to analyze it from a number of different points of view. It was a general method. Why not add a few more exercises, which are more precise and designed to overcome certain specific aspects of your shyness? You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain!

You're probably convinced that being shy makes you some kind of inferior being. To fight this negative image you have of yourself, open your faithful notebook and do the following exercise:

Exercise: Cost - Profit

In this exercise, you're going to make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of the negative image you have of yourself. You're convinced that your shyness is detrimental to your value as a person.

This conviction has advantages and disadvantages.

You're going to write them down clearly, in black and

white, in two columns, and then calculate the percentage of advantages as op-posed to disadvantages.

Then you'll do exactly the same thing, only using a positive self image as a base, something like: "My shyness doesn't make me an inferior being - I'm just human, vulnerable and sensitive."

Here's an example of some of the things you could write down in this excellent exercise:

Negative idea: My shyness reduces my value as a person

Advantages of this conviction:

1. This attitude forces me to master my feelings and hide my weaknesses.
2. If I hide my feelings well, people won't realize just how badly I feel about myself, and won't reject me.

33%

Disadvantages of this conviction:

1. Trying to hide my true self only emphasizes my shyness.
2. My shyness creates the impression that nothing about me is positive, and that I'm incapable of doing anything.
3. My self esteem is zero.
4. I am lonely, because I can't share my feelings with other people.

66%

Positive image: "My shyness is just part of being human - I'm vulnerable and sensitive like everyone else."

Advantages of this image

1. I can stop hating myself be-cause I have no reason to doubt my self worth.

2. I now know that I can cure my shyness. I am fully capable of doing it.

3. I'll be less afraid to talk to other people, because there's absolutely no reason why they should think I'm stupid or a failure.

75%

Disadvantages of this conviction:

1. By taking my chances with other people, I risk being rejected.

25%

Here again, clarity and objectivity are your best allies.

By coldly analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the image you have of yourself, you can exorcise the demon that has been haunting you for so long. But we must repeat that complete honesty is essential if you hope to succeed.

Now it's your turn:

Advantages of this image

Disadvantages of this image

Exercise: Inner dialogue

This exercise is also designed to help you combat your ingrained negative self image. You'll be making use of the split personality technique once again, since you'll be asking the questions as well as supplying the answers.

1. Each day, write down three negative thoughts which make you shy.
2. Next, find positive thoughts to counterbalance these negative ideas.

3. Keep doing this for two weeks.

Here are some examples of the kind of inner dialogue you should be having. You shouldn't have any trouble using them as a model for identifying your own anxieties.

Negative Idea: "I'm very attracted to this person, but I don't think it's the right place to start a conversation."

Positive Idea: "If I feel like talking to someone, the place has nothing to do with it."

Negative Idea: "I don't dare walk down this hallway because it's always full of people."

Positive Idea: "I must be pretty self centered if I think that these people have nothing better to do than watch me and criticize me."

Negative Idea: "It shouldn't be an effort to make friends. It should happen naturally, by itself."

Positive Idea: "In life, nothing happens on its own. There's nothing wrong with making an effort to meet people and forging lasting friendships."

Negative Idea: "If I talk to someone I don't know, they'll immediately think I'm out to get something."

Positive Idea: "If he or she is incapable of differentiating between friendly conversation and some kind of underhanded proposition, that's their problem, not mine."

STEP NO. 4: YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

Shy people are often arrogant.
“What!” I hear you say, “isn’t that a contradiction in terms?”

Well, you read correctly. Shy people are arrogant because they imagine - and this is one of the underlying causes of shyness - that they’re unique, that they’re one of a kind, that no one else on earth is as shy as they are.

If that’s not arrogance, then tell me what is!

You’re wrong to believe that you’re the only shy person on earth, that no one else suddenly finds themselves with a dry mouth and pounding heart and intestines made of marmalade when facing a person of authority.

To convince yourself, do the following “survey” exercise.

Exercise: Survey

This exercise will expand your horizons considerably.

As its name indicates, you’re going to conduct a survey amongst your friends and acquaintances. Tell them you’re

interested in the subject, and that you'd appreciate it if they helped with your survey on shyness.

On the following page you'll find a questionnaire. Photocopy it, and ask as many people as you can to fill it out, instructing them to answer as honestly as possible.

You are free to add any questions that come to mind, adapting them to your subjects.

Survey

1. Have you ever felt nervous when talking to a person of the opposite sex for the first time?
2. Do you have to make an effort to invite someone you find attractive to go out with you?
3. Do you feel nervous and anxious when you have to speak in public?
4. In what type of normal situations do you feel most shy or uncomfortable?
5. Do you suffer from any physical symptoms when you have to take an oral exam or be interviewed for a job?
6. Do you think that shy people are inferior?

What conclusions can you draw from the exercise?



THIS EXERCISE WILL PROVE that a large number of people, even those who seem most self-assured, have at one time or another in their lives felt the same symptoms of shyness as you. This discovery should reassure you, and eradicate that terrible feeling of solitude which often troubles shy people.

From now on, the fact of knowing that you're not alone

will represent a large step on your path towards overcoming your shyness altogether.

Others feel no more at ease than you

Think back to the days when you were just a young high school student. Didn't you ever get to school in the morning with your homework unfinished, because you weren't able to find the answer to some math or physics problem? Your heart was probably pounding with anxiety. You timidly started asking your co-students if they had managed to find the answer.

To your great relief, you discovered that the other kids were also stuck on the problem. No one was able to come up with the solution. "Wow, I'm not the only one!" you thought, and your anxieties instantly disappeared.

This is exactly what will happen to you when you realize first-hand that you're not the only person on earth suffering from shyness.

Do your exercises every day for at least six months, in stages of two weeks at a time. You'll realise that your shyness is gradually diminishing, allowing other people to feel more comfortable with you.

This will be a double victory, since both you and everyone you come in contact with will benefit!

Improve your social skills

A last piece of advice to help you fight your shyness towards other people: read a book about improving your social skills.

This is no joke.

Although many of these books are outdated and refer to

a lifestyle that has long since become obsolete, some of the more modern ones contain a quantity of useful advice on what attitudes to adopt and how to behave in the company of others. They provide clear answers to questions we ask ourselves all the time, but don't dare ask others, for fear of appearing ignorant or naive.

A great sense of security

You don't have to follow these authors' advice to the letter. Use your common sense. But you'll quickly realize that the simple fact of knowing exactly what should and should not be done in a given situation - what is acceptable and what isn't - will give you a great feeling of security.

Because when you're with company, shyness is often provoked or exacerbated by your ignorance of accepted forms of social behavior, i.e. by your fear of doing something stupid and appearing clumsy and uneducated.

Get rid of this aspect of shyness! It's easy to eliminate, so why not do it. Find out exactly how you should behave in your day to day encounters. You'll soon acquire a degree of self assurance that will astonish you!

SUMMARY

The shyness which has ruined your life up to now is not an invincible enemy. It's not even as powerful a force as you thought.

The extremely simple method you learned in this chapter is based on three principles. The first consists of getting you to objectively analyze your shyness and negative thoughts about yourself. This enables you to see the enemy for what it really is.

Next you combat the acquired ideas which are often the root cause of shyness. By analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of these acquired ideas, you'll realize that it's much more profitable to get rid of them than to drag them around with you, like weights chained to our ankles.

You're not the only person on earth to feel unpleasant physical and psychological symptoms when confronted with certain situations.

On the contrary - everybody does to some extent. Join the human race, and stop hiding in your ivory tower of shyness.

Finally, read a book on social behavior. It will provide you with a marvelous feeling of security. There's nothing like knowing exactly the "right thing" to do or say to instill a sense of self assurance in yourself!

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