

Step 3: Recording: Your 'Positives Portfolio'

The next step is to make this awareness into an everyday event, rather than something you cultivate for short periods from time to time, when you remember. What you need to do here is to begin recording examples of your good points every day, as they occur, just as you have been recording examples of anxious predictions and self-critical thoughts. Your objective is to reach the point where you automatically notice examples of your good qualities, without needing a reminder.

One particularly helpful way of enhancing awareness of your good points is by using a 'Positives Portfolio'. As best you can, record examples of your good points as they occur. The idea is to correct the bias against yourself by focusing on and highlighting your positive qualities, bringing them forward to centre stage instead of leaving them lurking in the wings. Use your list of qualities, skills, strengths and talents as a prompt to help you get started. Make sure you keep your Portfolio with you, so that you can write things down as soon as they happen. Otherwise, examples may be missed, forgotten or retrospectively discounted. Each day, decide in advance how many examples of positive qualities you wish to record. Many people find that three is about right to start with. But if this feels like too many, don't be afraid to start with two, or even one. Wherever you start, as you get into the swing of it, you will be able to add more. When recording three incidents is easy, increase the number to four. When four is easy, go up to five, and so on. By then, noticing pluses should be pretty automatic.

For each entry in the notebook, record what you did, and what quality it exemplifies. Here, as an example, are some of the items from Lin's first week of using a Positives Portfolio

- Spent several hours completing a large landscape painting (hard-working)
- Went out for the evening with Simon — haven't laughed so much in ages (good drinking companion, funny)
- Bought flowers (creating a welcoming home)
- Tried cooking a Thai curry for the first time — tasted odd, but was edible (adventurous cook)
- Called Mother as it was her birthday (kind)
- Fixed shelving in workroom (practical)

Notice that Lin did not just write 'hard-working', 'funny', 'kind' and so on in her record. She put in enough detail to be able to remember later what had happened. This is important, because your record can then become a resource for you, a store of reminders of your

strengths and good qualities. You can use it regularly to reinforce your new, kinder perspective on yourself. And you can call on these pleasurable and confidence-building memories any time you are feeling stressed, low or bad about yourself.

So, at the end of each day, perhaps just before you go to bed, make time to relax and be comfortable and review what you have recorded. Look over your Portfolio and recreate the memory of what you did in vivid detail, reliving each example. Let it sink in, so that it affects your feelings and your sense of yourself. You can also review the Portfolio weekly, to get the bigger picture, and to decide how many examples of good points to look out for next week. As you do this, step by step, you are learning to appreciate and accept yourself, just as you are.

Adapted from: *Overcoming Low Self-Esteem: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques* (2016) by Dr Melanie Fennell