

The Ultimate Personal Power Tool: The Antifragile Ego

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An antifragile ego is one of the fundamental blocks of personal power.

And I might even classify as the most important building block of mental power.

By the end of this article, you will know what's an antifragile ego, and how to develop one.

Let's start with some theory first:

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What's Ego

Technically, your [ego](#) is your sense of self.

It is your identity and your concept of self.

The [ego strength](#) is your capacity to keep your ego intact despite psychological distress, internal turmoil and the changing conditions of the world around you.

Ego VS Self Esteem

If the ego is the sense of self, self-esteem is the measure of *how* you think of yourself.

A low self-esteem is associated with a poor image of oneself.

While a high self-esteem is associated with a high opinion of oneself.

That being said, the way “ego” is most often interpreted today, it has come to encompass the meaning of self-esteem as well.

In the rest of this article, I will use the extended meaning of ego which includes our sense of self, how we view ourself (self-esteem) and the degree of pain and pleasure we derive from our self-image.

Resilient Ego VS Antifragile Ego

A resilient ego allows to maintain emotional stability.

Ideally, a high self-esteem associated with a resilient ego allows you to maintain that healthy image of yourself even despite personal setbacks, bad feedback from the world or a lack of results.

A resilient ego is good, *as long as you can also take that feedback into account*, is good.

But an antifragile ego is the next step.

Why We Need to Develop a Better Ego

First of all: what's wrong with our default ego?

Why do we need to change it in the first place?

You probably know this quote:

[you are the result of 4 billions yes evolutionary success, act like it](#)

It reflects the view that evolution shaped us as the best possible machines.

But it's wrong.

We are a remarkable species, but the idea we're as good as it gets is patently false.

And our ego is the perfect example of how our mind can often work against our own best interests.

Our default ego is stopping us from being the best version of ourselves.

Let's now see what's wrong with our default ego and how we can develop an antifragile ego.

What's Wrong With Our Ego

For our purposes, I will define ego as:

The ensemble of feelings of either pain or pleasure that we derive from who we are, how we behave and what we achieve.

It's composed of identity, projected identity, behavior, and connected feelings.

Our default ego is built to project a positive image of ourselves to ourselves as well as to the people around us.

It doesn't matter if that projection is fake, it makes us unhappy or if doesn't help us reach our goals. Our ego is built to make us look good. To others first, and to ourselves second.

This is how most people's ego works:

JOY	PAIN	Consequences
Be Right	Be Wrong	-Seek confirmation, not truth -Don't risk anything different, go with the crowd -Focus on winning, not on best solution
Be Good	Be Bad	-Look for praise, not truth -Do what you know, not anything new -Make up lies of how good you are, never actually try

Be Accepted Be Rejected -Don't meet anyone new: it's risky
-Say what people agree with, not your real opinions

You will realize our default ego is not about long term growth, happiness, life enjoyment or achievement. Most people's default ego is about *looking* good, which most often means "faking it", short term thinking and, of course, sacrificing our unique contributions to please the crowd.

Our default ego sacrifices our true self and our most honest expressions to seek positive confirmation and people's approval.

It also makes us less confident, because a major trait of confidence is that of acting accordingly to our identity.

So let's now introduce identity.

Identity Drives Behavior

Identity overlaps with "ego", but it also includes our fixed traits such as nationality and gender and it includes how we *would like* to be.

Our identities, who we are, drives our behavior.

Importantly, our identity can drive our behavior even when we *don't* feel like doing something.

That makes identity an incredibly powerful tool in reaching our goals.

It's because we humans have a tendency to seek consistency within ourselves.

When our actions are not aligned with our identity we feel discomfort (called [cognitive dissonance](#) first theorized by [Festinger, 1957](#)). The tendency to keep our internal identities, values and actions in balance is called, as described by Cialdini, is the commitment and consistency principle ([Cialdini, 1984](#)).

Note:

Sometimes our "real" identity can be different from who we think we are. Some personality issues can arise from it (check [Reaction Formation in Ramachandran](#)). But for simplicity we will not deal with it here.

Low Self Esteem: Gap Between Identity & Behavior

As we've seen, self-esteem is our evaluation of our own worth.

When we live up and uphold our standards and values no matter what, then we feel worthy.

Our self esteem goes up and we are proud of ourselves.

For most of us, we rarely do and say as our identities tell us though.

That means that for most of us, our behavior is very much out of whack with who we really are.

It's because identities are deeper, which makes them a bit more impermeable to external influences -albeit *not* fully impermeable-.

But our actions instead are strongly influenced by the environment and [social conditioning](#), which leads to a disconnect between identity and our actions.

Basically, in an effort to look good, we want to project a different identity with our words and actions so that people around will like us, accept us and welcome us.

The problem is that **a disconnect between our identity and our actions leads to low self esteem**.

It's because we're not being true to ourselves and we feel like we are "fake" and not in control of our

lives.

Social conditioning affects behavior more than identity

Do you know what's [the number one regret of dying people](#)?

The biggest regret of dying people is that they'd had the courage to live to their true self!

The first step towards a high self esteem and happy life then is to heed your identity a bit more and a bit less what people want you to say and do.

Like [Tim Grover](#) said, to get what you really want, you first must be who you really are.

To get what you really want, you must first be who you really are

How To Have High Self Esteem

When our behavior is in sync with our identity, we have much higher self esteem.

But don't jump to conclusions just yet. This is not a post to tell you to "be yourself".

Scratch that cr*p.

This post wants to take you to a whole new level.

Indeed the very highest self esteem is when our behavior matches our *ideal* identity.

You probably know the feeling. It happens when you manage to follow through with actions on what your ideal self would love to do. For example:

- You disagreed but were fearful of saying it publicly. But you do it anyway
- Confronting your neighbor wasn't easy, but you did and you're proud of yourself
- She had a boyfriend, but you asked anyway and you're glad about it

Framework Happiness

When we manage to progressively move towards the person whom want to be, not only we get a natural high self esteem, but we reach what [Tom Bylieu](#) refers to as "framework happiness".

Framework happiness is the constant joy derived from becoming who you want to be.

The goal of this post then is to remove the most unhelpful bits of your current self-identity and replace them with your ideal identity.

High Self-Esteem NEEDS An Antifragile Ego

High self-esteem without a growth mindset and an antifragile ego is dangerous.

The idea that self-esteem is always good is one of the worst examples of [pop-psychology](#) and [self-help myths](#).

A high self-esteem without an antifragile ego will thwart your learning abilities and can lead to violence.

As [Baumeister](#) says:

Violence ensues when people feel that their favorable views of themselves are threatened or disputed by others.

As a result, people whose self-esteem is high but lacks a firm basis in genuine accomplishment are especially prone to be violent because they are most likely to have their

| narcissistic bubble burst.

This is the case for people with high but fluctuating self esteem ([see Kernis](#) for research on self-esteem stability).

Bullies indeed tend to have high but vulnerable self-esteem (ie.: fragile ego).

Paradoxically then, the higher the self-esteem, the more threats one perceives to his ego, and the more defensive and possibly aggressive one becomes.

And that's why to become a high value man you need high self-esteem *with* an antifragile ego.

How To Change Self Identity

On this guide I will draw a bit from the wonderful Tony Robbins' [Creating Lasting Change](#).

Also look at [how to develop a growth mindset](#) since the changes are similar.

#1. Create Disturbance

First of all, you need to challenge your current identity and limiting beliefs.

Do you see yourself as a guy who is poor socially?

No wonder you avoid social situations!

Think of all the times you were *not* poor socially.

Think of all the times you *enjoyed* social situations.

The idea is that you want to draw on so many experiences that you naturally and rationally start doubting your beliefs.

Maybe there was a time you had a good conversation.

Or maybe there's someone who likes you.

Think about those daily

If you can't think of anything, imagine it.

#2. Discover What Shaped Your Identity

If you can go back to childhood and understand why you adopted a certain identity, that can more easily help you to let go of that identity.

#3. Link Pain & Pleasure

Link pain to your old identity and link pleasure to your new identity.

Think of the consequences your current identity is bringing you. Think of what you're missing because of your limiting belief.

No friends, no partner, no fun.. That sucks.

Now start imagining yourself as a popular man.

How good would that feel. With a growth mindset and an antifragile ego that's fully within your reach.

Commit to drop the old identity and embrace the new one.

#4. Change Physiology

Associate a new physiology to the new identity.

The new you moves and speaks differently.

Stand straight, shoulders rolled back in and head held high.

Your new physiology will help break away from the past and serve as a cue for your new mindset as well.

#5. Say It Out Loud

Repeat to yourself who's the new you.

A social man who enjoys people. Say it to everyone so you will have peer pressure to keep you on course as well ([Awaken The Giant Within](#)).

#6. Change Your Environment

As we've seen the environment plays a big role on your ego pyramid.

Cut out bad influences and make friends with people behaving more like the man you want to be.

#7. Change Your Actions

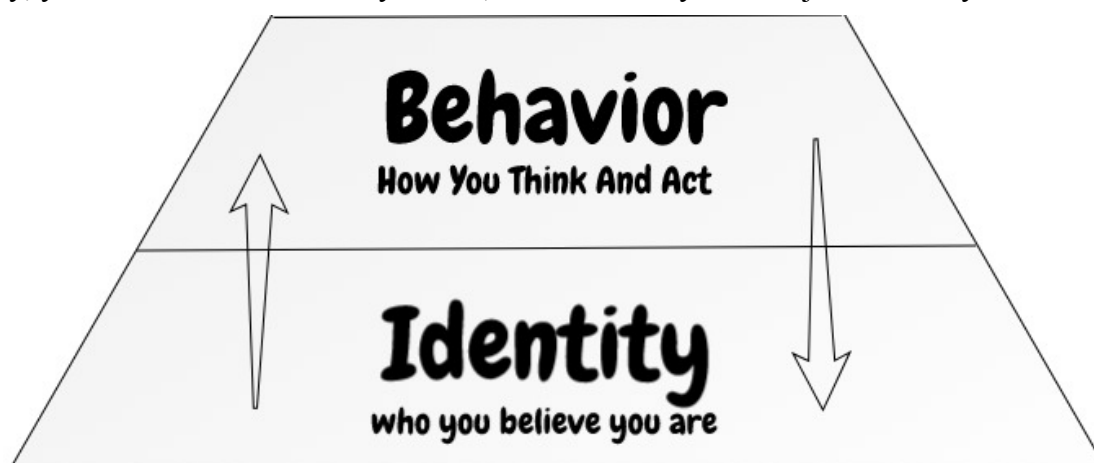
This is the most important step.

[Daryl Bem](#) in 1972 first proposed a radical idea at the time: identity doesn't just drive actions, but it's (also) the other way around: actions drive identity!

It's because our brain looks at our behaviors and then infers that if we behave a certain way, then it must be because we *are* a certain way (also read [Incognito](#) by Eagleman).

You can then first [develop the habits](#) of the man you want to be, which with repetition will solidify your identity.

Eventually, you will not need to force yourself, because what you do is just... Who you are.



#8. The Daily Mental Grind

Especially in the beginning you will tend to slip back to your old mental habits.

It's important you stay vigilant and every time you catch thinking or saying anything not in line with your new identity, change it immediately.

Your New Antifragile Ego

[Some people](#) suggest you should destroy your ego.

That's wrong.

Terribly wrong.

A healthy ego makes for a healthy human being.

And you better *recruit* that ego instead of fighting it.

A high self esteem is also useful.

Even pride is useful.

You muse *use* your ego to propel you forward. An antifragile ego will do just that.

Antifragile is a concept Nassima Taleb came up with in the [homonymos book](#).

Antifragile doesn't mean strong, because strong is still defined by its breaking point. Antifragile means the more you attack it, the stronger it gets.

Wouldn't it be great if the more you fail the stronger you get? It's not as crazy as it sounds.

Here are a few ideas of antifragile identities you can adopt:

- **I'm a learner**

This is the basic quality of [growth mindset](#). I'm not good, I'm not skilled. I'm an eternal learner.

There's no glory in being good, the glory is in advancing.

I love finding out my shortcomings because they show how much better I can still get.

- **I'm for going for it and doing my best no matter the situation**

Winning is great.

But that's not what I take pride on.

I take pride in preparing myself better than anyone else and going for it. As Don Miguel suggests in [The Four Agreements](#) "my only task is doing my best no matter the situation."

When I go for it and fail, I'm proud of myself.

- **I am proud of my love for the struggle**

Some guys are talented.

Good for them.

Me, I love to work hard. It allows me to show to myself what a gritty, tenacious and dogged mofo I am.

Like Coyle says in [The Talent Code](#), **to get good you have to love being bad.**

And I'll outlast any of those talented motha**ckas.

Go ahead and stop "when you're done". I love the struggle independently of the result, so I'll only stop when I die.

- **I'm proud of using my worst moments as fuel**

I cherish the memories of people rejecting me, putting me down, firing me or tell me off.

When I'm tired and beat, they give me strength to go the last mile.

- **I'm proud of putting truth first**

I could care less who says the right thing or who proposes the best solution. I take pride in going behind it full energy and full speed if that helps us to move towards our goal.

As [Ray Dalio](#) said, I love reality even when it hurts. *Especially* when it hurts, because it tells me I found something important.

- **I enjoy social interactions, even when they bomb**

I enjoy social interactions. Especially when they get difficult because it means I'm pushing my limits and I'm learning.

How To Pick Self-Identities

Here are some primers to help you choose your new identities:

- **Process-rewarding**

I am in big disagreement with [proponents](#) of "only results matter".

You can't control all the variables dictating the result, which means your self esteem would depend on external factors.

Not good: you want to be the master of your world. Better rewarding the process instead.

That's what [Ray Dalio](#) refers to when he says "look at the swing more than the hit".

Success is not guaranteed, the struggle is. So reward the struggle, not the result.

- **Choose Antifragile**

Antifragile identities are great especially when you're facing long odds because they turn failures on their head.

Example:

I relied on antifragile training in martial arts.

In the beginning I was the guy nobody picked for training. And I went home bruised and battered.

I wouldn't have endured with a default ego.

But my ego was built on being the guy who sucks and shows up anyway. So I felt great any time I showed up and that got me over the hump.

- **Pick Something You Love**

It's best to select the identities of the person you want to be.

When you pick identities that make you behave like your favorite hero it's easy to follow through because you're intrinsically motivated.

- **Pick Something Not Too Far From Current Identity/Behavior**

Sometimes you need a revolution.

But when you have the choice, it will make your job easier to pick an identity not too dissimilar with your current self.

For example, if you want to get fit and you've never watched sports in your life, there's no need to pick a "sport buff" identity.

Say instead you're the kind of person who eats healthy and exercise daily. It's a much smaller and easier step, but brings the same results.

Your New Identity: Assignment

Think about who you would like to be and write it down.

Then think about your goals and what identity would help you reach them (for example: being accurate, staying with a task till its done etc. etc.).

Then select the top 5 and start with them.

Practice and live them for a few months until they become who you are. Then go down the list.

Changing identity is easier than it sounds.

It's because when you know how it will help you, you will be motivated and you will find pleasure in the process -that's the beginning of your framework happiness-.

Summary

Identity drives behavior.

When identity and behavior are in sync, it means we are living to our true self and we have a healthy, high self esteem.

The highest self esteem is when our behavior matches fully with our *ideal* identity -the person we would really love to be-.

Finally, we can and we should change our identity (ie.: what we build our self esteem around) in a way that empowers us and best helps us reach our goals.

When you live and act like the person we want to be, you will move towards your goal while living a naturally fulfilling and joyful life (and with perennial high self esteem).

More Sources:

An antifragile ego is one of the 7 key psychological foundations that will help you achieve self control and help you lead a truly empowered life.

For the whole list take a look at [Ultimate Power](#)

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