

If you ever feel bad about yourself, look deep within, realize that no one is perfect, neither are you, but even with all your flaws and qualities you are a unique person in the universe, which is what makes you special and loved by God.



TRAINING REFLECTION
March 2022

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Self-knowledge, self-image, self-esteem and talents

Part 1

Introduction

The year 2021 was rather complicated all over the world. The pandemic, which has still not ended, has forced us to make many changes in our lives, customs, values, habits and feelings. It is important at the beginning of this new year to take a break **to realize and reflect on** how we have faced these difficult times and how we are going to move forward with our lives, how we are going to continue to cope with the challenges we face and what tools we have at our disposal.

This is why we suggest that each of us, in an atmosphere of prayer, should enter into our inner self and review our life plan.

We would like the following training material to help and encourage us all. May it fill us with hope and trust in God, who loves us with an infinite love.

1. Self-knowledge

In her great work *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa of Ávila invites us to enter the inner castle of our soul.

She says that we usually live outside the castle, believing that everything that exists is outside, and we are then missing all the beauty and grandeur of the life taking place inside. She invites us to get to know our inner self.

St. Teresa tells us about three forms of knowledge:

- Knowing God himself
- Knowing the plan that God has for each one of us, valuing our dignity and considering the gifts and talents we have received
- Becoming aware of our weakness, but seeing it through God's loving gaze



Self-knowledge consists in knowing ourselves deeply. This means knowing and understanding:

- Our qualities and flaws
- Our strengths and weaknesses
- The emotions we find manageable and those that are more difficult for us to handle
- Our personal values, interests and beliefs
- The experiences that have marked us
- Our expectations, dreams, desires and goals
- What we are afraid of and what motivates us to act

Knowing ourselves is a lifelong task. By working on it, we develop personally, our relationships are enhanced and the results of our actions improve.

In order to know ourselves we must:

- Observe ourselves
- Be in touch with our feelings, recognize them and accept them
- Be aware of our thoughts
- Analyze our automatic reactions and our behavior in general

Obstacles to knowing ourselves:

- Our own subjectivity and bias
- Justifying ourselves so as not to feel guilty
- Fear of finding something that upsets us
- Looking for answers outside of ourselves

Things that can help us to know ourselves:

- Accepting ourselves without judging, criticizing or devaluing ourselves
- Forgiving ourselves
- Not forming our self-image based on the opinions of others

Self-knowledge necessarily leads to self-esteem.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. In these times of pandemic, have you behaved as you would have expected or have you had to go inside yourself to reflect on your reactions and behavior?
2. What lessons do you think you learned about yourself while in lockdown? What did you learn about the people around you?



2. Self-image

Before defining self-esteem, it is necessary to define and understand what self-image is, since self-esteem is based on self-image.

Our perception of ourselves forms a mental image of who we are and how we behave. We all have a mental image of ourselves, that is, a perception and an idea of how we are both physically and psychologically.

We form this image over time, starting in our childhood. Our image of ourselves may or may not coincide with the image that others have of us, and this image may or may not coincide with reality.

The more realistic our self-image is, the more adequate our interaction with the environment around us will be. We will also be more accepting of ourselves, and have a greater capacity for personal growth and more solid self-esteem.

3. Self-esteem



"I love myself"

Self-esteem can be defined as a set of elements: what I think of myself, how I feel about these thoughts and what I do with my life having all of this in mind.

It manifests itself through the way we look at ourselves (self-image), our emotions, our behavior and our thoughts. It is a tool that shows us how our interactions with others are.

Self-esteem does not result from evaluating ourselves positively in every situation, but from observing ourselves objectively and especially from valuing and accepting our self-image.

Self-esteem is not something fixed and stable: it depends on our life situation and circumstances, and changes throughout our life.

The importance of self-esteem

When we have enough self-esteem:

- we can interact with the world in a healthy way, being confident in any situation and defending our rights without wavering.
- we are immune or not very vulnerable to personal attacks from our surroundings and will act calmly in any situation, accepting ourselves unconditionally, which will make us satisfied with our reactions and behavior.

Self-esteem is also one of the foundations of human relationships and it therefore directly affects the way we act in the world and relate to others.

Nothing in our way of thinking, feeling and acting escapes the influence of self-esteem.

A healthy self-esteem allows us to have a series of behaviors and attitudes that have beneficial effects on our health and quality of life, and it prevents illnesses such as depression or anxiety.

A person with healthy self-esteem:

- Is willing to stand up for their own rights even in the face of opposition or personal attacks.
- Has enough confidence in themselves to change their opinion or judgment if experience proves them wrong.
- Learns from the past and plans for the future, but experiences the present with great intensity.
- Is confident in their ability to solve their own problems without being discouraged by failures and difficulties, and when they really need it, is willing to ask for help from others.
- Considers themselves and feels equal to everyone else as a person, neither inferior nor superior but simply equal in dignity, and at the same time recognizes differences in specific talents, professional status or economic position.
- Recognizes that they can be interesting and valuable to others.
- Does not let themselves be manipulated.
- Recognizes and accepts in themselves different feelings and emotions, both positive and negative, and is willing to show them to others when appropriate and worthwhile to do so.
- Is able to enjoy a wide variety of activities.
- Is sensitive to the feelings and needs of others.



- Is able to make the best of the present moment, depending on their environment.

In conclusion, it is clear that having a healthy self-esteem will bring us great benefits in all aspects of our life.

Types of self-esteem

In general terms, we can distinguish between two types of self-esteem, although they are not exclusive of one another and can refer to different aspects of a person.

High self-esteem

People with high self-esteem typically have great confidence in their abilities. This enables them to make decisions, take risks and face tasks with a high expectation of success, because they see themselves in a positive light.

As our self-esteem increases, we will feel better prepared and will have a greater ability and disposition to carry out various activities. We will become more enthusiastic and will have a stronger desire to share things with others.

Low self-esteem

People with low self-esteem may feel insecure, dissatisfied and sensitive to criticism. Another characteristic of people with low self-esteem can be their difficulty to be assertive, that is, to claim their rights in an appropriate way.

Low self-esteem can result from many things, for example the value we give ourselves, the opinion we have about our personality, and our beliefs, among others.

Sometimes people with low self-esteem may try to please others in order to receive positive reinforcement and thus increase their self-esteem.

Developing and strengthening our self-esteem

In order to strengthen our self-esteem we need to:

- understand where our limitations and mistakes in how we manage our life come from, and above all work on developing new ways of being (a bit more calm, a bit more confident, a bit more daring, a bit more indifferent to others' opinions and how they see us), always taking into account our personality traits. This implies working on our relationship with ourselves at the same time as we progress in our relationship with others.
- reflect, act and repeat the process until "appreciating oneself" becomes as natural as breathing, in order to be able to address everything else: others, life, etc.

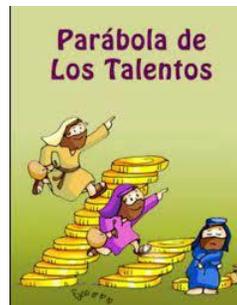


Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Do you think your self-esteem has changed over the different stages of your life? If so, in what way?
2. Have you ever had to change anything in your life as a result of your own introspection?
3. Do you think your self-esteem has changed during the pandemic? If so, why?

4. Talents and gifts

We invite you to read the Gospel of St Matthew, Chapter 25, 14-30



“Parable of the Talents”

This parable teaches us that when we have a gift, we cannot let it wither and go to waste. Instead, we must share it by putting it at the service of others.

God gives us different gifts. It does not matter what He gives us, what matters is whether each of us has discovered all of our gifts and whether we have put them to work to share them.

The master in the parable of the talents (God) entrusts to each servant what they can manage. He does not give the same to all, nor does He require the same from them. He respects the abilities of each one. No one is forced to give more than they can, and everyone is required to give according to what they receive. He is simply content that we work with what He gives us. It would be a sin of omission not to work with what He has given us.

If we know ourselves and if we have high self-esteem, knowing that we are who we are by God’s grace, we will surely not spend our time comparing ourselves with others. Instead, we will recognize and value what each of us is and will know how to be happy and make others happy.

Let us ask the Lord to be able to listen to the words He wants to say to us at the end of our lives, with the assurance of having known our gifts and having shared them with others. **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things [...] Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Mt 25:21)**



Question to discuss in your groups:

What gifts do you think God has given you? Do you find there are many? Do you put them all at the service of others?

Exercise:

Make a list of your qualities and gifts and another list of your flaws and place them before the Lord. Pray that you will be able to continue to offer your qualities to your volunteer group and that He will help you to manage your flaws.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Come, Holy Spirit, and help me to look at myself with love and patience.
Teach me to discover all the good that you have sown in me.
Help me to recognize that in me there is beauty and goodness because I am the
work of a Father who loves me and has given me His Spirit.
Sometimes the memories of mistakes I have made pain me.
Help me to look at myself as Jesus looks at me, so that I may understand and
forgive myself.
Come, Holy Spirit, pour into me all your strength.
Do not allow me to be dominated by regrets, for your love always enables me to
begin again.
Come, Holy Spirit.”
Amen

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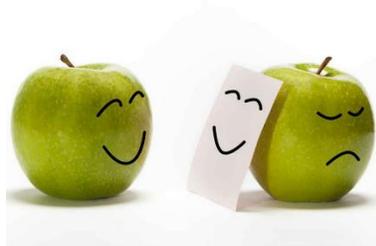


PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Assertiveness and Resilience

Part 2

Assertiveness



“Don’t say everything you think,
but think everything you say.”

Assertiveness is the ability to recognize our own feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves to manage emotions appropriately both within ourselves and in our relationships with others.

Being assertive essentially means respecting ourselves and others, knowing that our own opinions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings are as important as those of any other person.

We can say that a person is **assertive** when they are able to exercise and/or defend their own rights, for example by **saying “no”**, expressing disagreements, giving an opposite opinion and/or expressing negative feelings, without being manipulated as a submissive person would be, and without manipulating or violating the rights of others.

What are the rights of an assertive person?

- The **right** to be treated with respect and dignity
- The **right** to be wrong and to take responsibility for your own mistakes
- The **right** to have your own values and opinions
- The **right** to have your own needs and for them to be as important as those of others
- The **right** to be your only judge, to experience and express your own feelings
- The **right** to change your opinion, idea or course of action

- The **right** to protest when you are treated unfairly
- The **right** to change what is not satisfactory
- The **right** to stop and think before acting
- The **right** to ask for what you want
- The **right** to be independent
- The **right** to refuse requests without feeling guilty or selfish
- The **right** not to justify yourself to others
- The **right** not to be dependent on the goodwill of others
- The **right** to choose to respond or not to respond
- The **right** to do anything as long as it does not violate the rights of another person
- The **right** to feel and express pain

Assertiveness is linked to high self-esteem and is something **we can learn** as part of an emotional development process.

Being assertive also means **communicating** effectively, saying firmly what we want to convey, while being respectful and empathetic towards others and ourselves. Assertiveness, in short, is our ability to communicate effectively.

We can distinguish between three communication styles:

- ***Passive or non-assertive communicators*** tend not to defend their personal boundaries, thereby allowing aggressive people to hurt them.
- ***Aggressive people*** tend not to respect the personal boundaries of others, and are therefore compelled to harm others while trying to influence them.
- ***People communicate assertively*** when they are not afraid to speak their mind or to try to influence others, but do so in a way that respects the personal boundaries of others. Assertive people are also willing to defend themselves against aggressive incursions.

One of the reasons why people are not assertive is that they think they are not entitled to their beliefs, rights or opinions. In this regard, assertiveness training teaches us that we are all entitled to defend our rights when faced with situations that are clearly unfair.

Techniques for being assertive

- **Positive assertiveness:** Consists in expressing genuine affection and appreciation for other people. Positive assertiveness implies that we remain attentive to the goodness and value within other people and communicate the awareness of these qualities verbally or non-verbally.



- **Empathic assertiveness:** Empathic assertiveness allows us to hear and understand the needs of our interlocutor and to act based on them, and to be, in turn, heard and understood by them.
- **Confrontational assertiveness:** Confrontational assertive behavior is useful when we notice an apparent contradiction between the words and actions of our interlocutor. With a calm voice and words, without using an accusing or reproaching tone, we must limit ourselves to inquiring, asking questions, and then expressing directly a legitimate wish.
- **Negative interrogation:** Negative interrogation consists in asking to clarify comments made by another person. The goal is to clarify whether the comments are constructive or manipulative criticism.
- **Selective ignoring:** When during a discussion the other person insists on mixing topics that are not related to the central topic of the discussion, we can ignore these topics and only respond when the person is saying something about the topic of interest.
- **Disarming anger or rage:** Consists in refusing to argue with a person who is irritated or annoyed while they are in this state.
- **Sorting out problems:** In a conversation or discussion, we should deal with only one topic at a time and not move on to another one without having exhausted the first.
- **Assertive irony:** Responding to hostile criticism with a “thank you”.
- **Processing change:** Shifting the focus of a discussion to the analysis of what is going on between you and your interlocutor, leaving aside the issue that apparently provoked the discussion.
- **Breaking down the process:** Responding to provocative criticisms with laconic phrases: yes, no, maybe, etc.

Social skills, and more specifically assertiveness, are basic skills for daily life. People have different interests and ways of seeing the world, so interpersonal conflicts are to be expected. However, when these skills are not sufficiently developed or are used in the wrong way, frustration and dissatisfaction arise.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Do you think you are an assertive person? If so, in what way?
2. Do you think it is possible for a non-assertive person to become assertive?
3. Which of the techniques for being assertive have you used? Which ones have you not used?
4. Would being an assertive person make the collaboration among your group members easier?



Resilience



“From suffering emerge the strongest souls. The strongest characters are riddled with scars.”

- Gibran Jalil

During our lives, we may face situations that cause us anxiety, worry, uncertainty, and this may cause us to give up on our goals. In response to such situations, it is important to develop resilience.

What is resilience and how can we develop it?

Resilience is a virtue that consists in overcoming and adapting to adverse situations, with the confidence that you will be able to move forward and grow from these experiences.

There are many events that can affect you emotionally: a breakup, financial difficulties, failed projects, an illness, among others. All of these can put your resilience to the test.

Being resilient does not mean that a person does not experience difficulties or anxiety. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered great adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to be filled with obstacles that affect our emotional state.

Resilience is not a characteristic that people either have or do not have. It includes behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed by anyone.

You are a resilient person when:

- **You have emotional intelligence**, meaning that you know your emotions and how to manage them, but you can also identify and understand the emotions of others.
- **Your self-knowledge is well developed**: you are aware of your capabilities and limits, which allows you to set realistic goals.
- **You are tolerant and flexible when faced with change**, because you know that it is often inevitable. As a result, you face problems with greater confidence and creativity.
- **You are optimistic** and see obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow in every way.
- **You feel confident**, and therefore you have initiative, patience and perseverance to achieve what you set out to do.
- **You are able to communicate your concerns** to feel understood and comforted, without letting your ego interfere.

- **You try to surround yourself with people who have several of these characteristics,** since forming a team of resilient people is essential to accomplishing shared projects.

How to build resilience

- **Build relationships:** It is important to build good relationships with close family members, friends and other important people in your life. Accept help and support from the people who love you and listen to you. Belonging to an AIC group can strengthen resilience.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable obstacles:** You cannot stop stressful events from happening, but you can change the way you interpret and react to them.
- **Accept that change is part of life:** It is possible that as a result of an adverse situation you may not be able to achieve certain goals. Accepting the circumstances you cannot change can help you focus on the circumstances you can change.
- **Move towards your goals:** Develop realistic goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that you cannot seem to accomplish, reflect on the things you can accomplish today that help you move in the direction you want to go.
- **Look for opportunities to discover yourself:** Many people who have experienced difficult situations have great personal strength, a sense of improved self-esteem and a strengthened spiritual life.
- **Cultivate a positive view of yourself:** Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
- **Never lose hope:** An optimistic outlook allows you to expect good things to happen in your life. Try to visualize what you want instead of worrying about what you fear.
- **Take care of yourself:** Pay attention to your needs and desires. Take an interest in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps keep your mind and body ready to face situations that require resilience.
- **Maintain an attitude of tolerance and flexibility:** Trusting yourself will lead you to trust others and accept them as they are.



Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. What kinds of events have been the most difficult for you and how have they affected you?
2. When faced with a difficult experience, who have you turned to for help?
3. What have you learned about yourself and about your interactions with others during difficult times?
4. Have you been able to overcome obstacles, and if so, how did you do it?
5. What makes you feel most hopeful about the future?

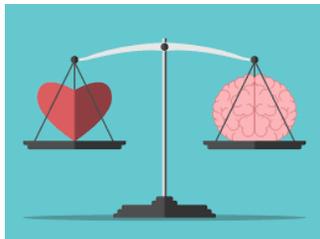


PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Emotional and spiritual intelligence

Part 3

Emotional intelligence



“The more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings”

- Daniel Goleman

Emotional intelligence refers to the mental **abilities and skills related to feeling, understanding, controlling and changing our own emotions and those of others.**

An emotionally intelligent person is someone who is able to manage emotions successfully **to achieve positive results in their relationships with others.**

There are two basic forms of emotional intelligence:

- **Interpersonal intelligence:** Feeling and understanding the emotions of others and being able to react according to other people’s mood.
- **Intrapersonal intelligence:** Feeling and understanding our own emotions, taking them into account when making decisions and being able to control our emotions according to the situation.

Emotional intelligence plays a **key role in the success or failure of all types of human relationships**, from romantic and family relationships to work relationships.

It is also a **determining factor in how organizations function**, since empathy, emotional self-control and people’s motivations can have an impact on **teamwork**, making it more or less efficient and satisfactory.



These skills are also important for **people's ability to convince**, manipulate and/or guide others. Leaders tend to be emotionally intelligent people.

The term "emotional intelligence" was coined by psychologist Daniel Goleman.

According to Goleman, this intelligence has 5 components:

1. **Self-awareness**, defined as an awareness of our own emotions and feelings and of how they influence us.
2. **Self-regulation**, i.e., the ability to control ourselves and to prevent emotions from overwhelming and controlling us completely.
3. **Motivation**, understood as the ability to guide our emotions to achieve our goals. Being proactive.
4. **Empathy**, or "putting ourselves in another person's shoes", is the ability to recognize the emotions of others.
5. **Social skills**. Humans are social beings and, as such, need to maintain rich and satisfactory interpersonal relationships in order to feel fulfilled.

In short, training our emotional intelligence will allow us to have a better understanding of our own emotions and of how to manage them, identify them better in others, prevent the harmful effects of intense negative emotions and develop skills to generate positive emotions. All of this will translate into a sense of well-being that will support personal success throughout our life.

At this point, we need to define the concept of **emotion**.

An **emotion** is understood as a state of excitement or disturbance of the organism that predisposes us to an organized response. This state serves as a signal for us that something is happening in the external or internal world. Therefore, emotions fulfill different functions:

- They serve as signals.
- They may tell us that something is wrong.
- They prepare us for action.
- They tell us about the state of our relationships.
- They serve as signals to others.

What are the basic emotions? Fear, Anger, Sadness, Joy, Surprise, Disgust

Some characteristics of emotions:

- **They are innate:** The part of the cerebral cortex that houses emotions is one of the first to develop, which is why children are so expressive and are often overwhelmed



by their own emotions, as they have not yet developed the “more rational” part of their brain and sometimes find it impossible to be “in balance”.

- **They are universal:** Emotions are present in all human beings regardless of age, sex, race or socioeconomic status.
- **They are expressed in a characteristic way:** When we are happy we smile, when we are surprised we raise our eyebrows and open our mouth, and when we feel disgust we wrinkle our nose and raise our upper lip.
- **They fulfill an adaptive function:** They have allowed us to survive as a species. For example, thanks to fear we avoid places such as cliffs where we might have an accident, and thanks to disgust we do not eat spoiled food that might poison us.

Furthermore, contrary to common belief, **emotions in themselves are neither good nor bad**. In fact, they all have a positive dimension, since they all give us important information, although there are certainly emotions that are pleasant to feel and others that are rather unpleasant. However, it is important that we feel and express each one of them.

A question that arises is the following one: is emotion the same as **feeling**? The answer is *no*.

Feelings are more complex, and are also called secondary emotions. Here are some characteristics of feelings:

- **They arise from basic emotions:** For example, when surprise and fear are mixed, the feeling of shock appears.
- **They are more complex:** We must have developed our values and thoughts in order to have feelings, and they are therefore much more subjective and personal.
- **What we feel is linked to** what we think and do, usually mixing several emotions.
- **Feelings vary a lot** depending on where we are born and how we are brought up.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Do you think having emotional intelligence will be helpful when interacting with your fellow service members?
2. Do you think you have emotional intelligence? What skills make you think you do?
3. Do you think it is necessary to have emotional intelligence in order to be a leader? If so, why?
4. Are you able to express your emotions or are you someone who tends to hide them?



Spiritual intelligence



Keep your feet on the ground,
but let your heart soar as high
as it can.

Spiritual intelligence is found in our hearts.

Spiritual or transcendent intelligence is what allows us to understand the world, others and ourselves from a deeper and more meaningful perspective, as it helps us to transcend suffering and to see beyond the material world, entering into a wide and interconnected spiritual dimension far away from the material world in which we live every day. For this reason, many authors consider it the highest type of intelligence of all.

Spiritual intelligence aims to integrate the inner life of the mind and spirit with the outer life. Spiritual intelligence is needed in order to gauge which spiritual decisions will contribute to mental well-being, inner peace, happiness and physical health.

People with spiritual intelligence have certain abilities such as:

- The **ability** to seek transcendence.
- The **ability** to find a sense of sacredness in daily activities.
- The **ability** to use spiritual resources to solve practical problems in life.
- The **ability** to commit to leading a virtuous life expressed in the practice of humility, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness and wisdom.
- The **ability** to face and transcend pain and suffering.
- The **ability** to see things in a holistic way, meaning to see them as a whole.
- The **ability** to always ask “Why?” and/or “What for?” in situations they face, and to look for fundamental answers to these questions.
- The **ability** to be creative.
- The **ability** to refrain from doing harm and to avoid unnecessary criticism.
- The **ability** to prioritize values and to consistently live according to them.
- The **ability** to know themselves and to be self-aware at all times.

Questions to discuss in your groups:

1. Is it the purpose of your life to reach perfection and to do God's Will in all things?
2. Does daily prayer, understood as dialogue with a benevolent God, help you to grow spiritually?

Conclusions

Now that we have examined these three training reflections, we can see that all of their topics are related to one another. Understanding them and putting this knowledge into practice will make us:

- Thank God every day, hour and minute of our lives for the love with which He has created us and for the ability He has given us to work towards becoming like Him.
- Be sure that knowing ourselves, appreciating ourselves and being aware of the enormous potential we have will help us to strive to overcome our flaws and to develop our qualities to put them at the service of those who need us most: people in material and/or spiritual poverty.
- Be well, confident and grateful, which will make our relationships with others harmonious and enriching.
- Realize that the secret to changing and/or improving is to channel all our energies *not* into fighting the old, but into building the new.

Let us finish with a few words from St Vincent de Paul:

In his important lecture on the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, on December 6, 1658, he expressed, once again, his rejection of people who shut themselves away, like snails into their shells:

“People who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one sport; they don't want to leave it, and if they're shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells” (CCD, XII, p.81).



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