

How to Be a Better Person

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Life is a constant exercise in self-improvement. And while some of that focus lands squarely on becoming more educated or rising in the ranks of the workplace, sometimes we forget to improve how we treat ourselves and those around us. In the rush to achieve, the idea of being "better" can become lost to ambition and selfishness. The journey to improving your soul and your compassion toward yourself and others begins here.

Part
1

Part 1 of 3: Getting Started



1 **Accept that this is a process.** "Becoming a better person" is a process that you will likely spend **the rest of your life** on, so accept the fact that it's going to take a long process to become a better person. There isn't one specific moment where you will finally have it all together and no longer have any room for growth. Opening yourself up to the process of change and growth helps you develop flexibility, and flexibility is key to consistently being the type of person you want to be in each situation.^[1]

- Accept that your goals and values may change over time. They may also change between situations. This is normal.^[2]



2 Determine your values. Even the best of intentions are unlikely to go anywhere unless you have a solid understanding of your values.^[3] “Values” are what you hold most important in life. They are the core beliefs that shape who you are as a person, and how you live your life.^[4] Reflecting on your values will help you determine what is truly important to you.

- For example, “being a good parent” or “spending time with friends” could be valued. These are things that help you define your sense of your best self.
- “Value congruence” is how much your behavior aligns with your values. For example, if a value is “spending time with friends,” but you always allow work to take precedence over socializing, that isn’t value-congruent. Behavior that isn’t value-congruent can cause you to feel dissatisfied, unhappy, or guilty.^[5]



3 Examine what you believe about yourself. Our identities are also shaped by those around us.^[6] For example, psychological studies have repeatedly demonstrated that people begin learning prejudice at a very early age.^[7] These learned behaviors and beliefs affect the way we perceive ourselves and those around us. Understanding where your ideas about yourself come from can help you modify unhelpful beliefs, and embrace the ones that make sense to you.

- We also learn from others how to consider ourselves in relation to larger groups, such as race or gender. These can be essential components of our own identity.^[8]



4 Examine your behavior thoroughly and honestly. Consider how you react to stress, how you cope with loss, how you manage your anger, how you treat your loved ones. You have to understand how you are now before you can understand how to grow.

- Once you've reflected on your behavior, you should have a better idea of the specific changes you'd like to make.



5 Determine what changes you want to see. Try to be as specific as possible. Rather than saying “I’d like to be a better friend,” break it down into parts. What do you mean by that? Do you mean reaching out to others more often? Do you mean making yourself available to spend time together?

- Inventor and entrepreneur Steve Jobs said once that he asked himself the following question every morning: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” If he couldn’t answer “yes,” he decided to make changes. This question could be helpful for you to ask, too.[9]
- Keep your ideas about change reasonable. If you’re a naturally introverted person, for example, it might not be effective or value-congruent for you to define “be a better person” as “go out to parties.” Instead, you could frame your change as something achievable and in line with what you know about yourself: “Practice saying hello to new people.”



6 Set goals for yourself. If it helps, write them down on a piece of paper, or better yet, start a journal. This will open up your introspective side, and allow you to better understand yourself from an objective standpoint.^[10]

- Journaling needs to be an active, reflective activity. Simply writing down random thoughts is not likely to be very helpful. Instead, write about situations you encounter, how they made you feel at the time, how you reacted, how you felt about them later, and what you think you could do differently.^[11]
- Here are some questions to get you started: Is there a particular relationship with a loved one that you would like to improve? Would you like to become more philanthropic? Do you want to do more for the environment? Do you want to learn how to be a better spouse or partner?



7 Frame goals positively. Research has shown that you're more likely to achieve your goals if they are framed as "positive" (something you will do) rather than negative (something you will stop doing).^[12] Framing your goals as negatives could lead to you being judgmental of yourself or feeling guilty over your progress. Think about your goals as something you're working towards, rather than something you're moving away from.

- For example, if you've decided you want to be more grateful, frame it positively: "I want to express my gratitude to people when they are kind to me." Avoid framing it as a judgment on past behavior, such as "I want to stop being so ungrateful."



8 Find a role model. Role models are a great source of inspiration, and their stories can make us feel strong when times get tough. You might choose a religious figure, politician, or artist, or you might choose someone close to you whom you admire.

- It is often more helpful to use people we know as role models. If you only model your behavior on someone you have no interaction with, it can be easy to develop a distorted perception of them. This could lead to unhealthy thinking about yourself. Even Beyonce isn't *really* flawless, after all.^[13]
- Role models don't have to be world-changers. Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa are incredibly inspiring figures, but they aren't the only people whose behavior you can learn from. It is often the small, everyday behaviors and ways of thinking that you can learn the most from. So, for example, if one of your coworkers seems to be cheerful all the time, ask her why. Ask how she thinks about life. Ask what she does. You might be surprised what you can learn if you only ask.
- That isn't to say that you can't find inspiration in others' stories. Finding somebody whose story you can relate to can help you, especially if you do not have many role models in your own life.
- Eminent astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson argues against the traditional idea of role models as someone you want to "be." Instead, he suggests that you examine how those people got to where you want to get. What books do they read? What paths did they choose? How is it that people get to wherever it is you want to be? Asking these questions and finding the answers will help you develop your own path, rather than trying to exactly copy someone else's.^[14]



1 Practice self-compassion. Before you can learn to love others, you will have to learn to love yourself. This isn't the sort of vain, self-absorbed love; it's the love that accepts you for the person you are, that delves deep to unearth the skills and values that truly make up who you are and embraces these. Remind yourself that you are a kind, compassionate person and most of all, that you're worthy. Coupled with virtuous and kind actions, this will help you to be more self-accepting and understanding.

- Try writing about your experiences from the perspective of a totally loving, accepting friend, rather than from your own point of view. Studies suggest that getting this kind of distance can help you process negative emotions rather than ignore or repress them. Acknowledging your feelings is a key component of self-compassion. We're often far kinder to others than we are to ourselves; show yourself the same acceptance you would a loved one.^[15]
- Give yourself small moments of self-compassion throughout the day, especially when you notice that you're experiencing something unpleasant. For example, if you are really behind on a project at work, you might judge yourself or work yourself into an anxiety attack. Instead, first use mindfulness to acknowledge your stress: "I'm feeling stressed right now." Then, acknowledge that everyone experiences this from time to time: "I'm not alone in this." Finally, give yourself a compassionate touch, such as placing your hand over your heart. Repeat something positive to yourself: "I can learn to be strong. I can learn to be patient. I can learn to accept myself."^[16]



2 Stop criticizing yourself. Take time to appreciate your talents and best features, whether they are physical or internal. The more hostile you are toward yourself, the more hostile you are likely to be toward others.^[17]

- Begin by keeping a record of when you experience negative thoughts about yourself. Note what the situation was, what you thought, and the consequences of those thoughts.
- For example, you might create an entry that looks something like this: "Today I went to the gym. I was surrounded by skinny people and started feeling fat. I felt angry with myself and ashamed of being at the gym. I didn't even want to finish my workout."
- Next, find a rational response to those thoughts. This can be difficult, but by consistently challenging your negative self-talk with cold, hard facts and logic, you can change how you think.
- For example, a rational response to the above situation could look like this: "I go to the gym to take care of my body and health. That is an act of kindness and caring for myself. Why should I feel ashamed of caring for myself? Everyone's bodies are different, and mine may not look like someone else's. The people at the gym who are very fit could have been working at it longer than I have. They might just have good genes. If others judge me based on my appearance, do I even really value their opinion? Or do I want to value people who support and encourage my acts of caring for myself?"^[18]
- Self-criticism often comes in the form of "shoulds," such as "I should have a fancy car" or "I should wear a certain clothes size." When we compare ourselves to standards set by others, we can end up unhappy and ashamed. Determine what you want for you, and reject what others say you "should" be.^[19]



3 Examine your routines. Sometimes, we can become complacent with ourselves and our lives. Monotonous routines can keep us stuck in reactive or avoidant patterns of behavior. You may also have developed unhelpful habits and behaviors without even realizing it.[20]

- For example, if you were hurt by someone earlier in your life, you might be more inclined to construct boundaries that keep other people at a distance. These boundaries may help keep you from getting hurt again, but even more importantly, they keep you from potentially experiencing joy and connection with others.
- Experimenting with new routines, such as participating in social activities or seeking out new friendships, can be a great way to discover capacities you didn't even know you had. It can also help you form relationships with others and discover new things about your emotions.[21]
- Finding ways to break out of your habits can also bring you into contact with diverse people who can change your perspective on life. Research has shown that unhelpful attitudes, such as prejudices or fears, are often improved by experiencing someone else's culture or perspective.[22] You will find that you can learn from others, and they can probably learn from you, too.



- 4 Work on controlling your anger and jealousy.** These emotions are a natural part of life, but if you constantly feel angry or jealous toward others, you are going to have a difficult time finding happiness. As with cultivating self-compassion, accepting the behaviors and desires of others is a necessary step in becoming the type of person you want to be.
- Anger can often occur because we believe things “shouldn’t” happen to us. We may become angry if we perceive things going a way other than how we envisioned. Developing the flexibility to appreciate that things will not always work out the way you expected will help you reduce your anger.^[23]
 - Focus on those things in life that you do have control over, and worry less about what you can’t control. Remember: You can control your actions, but not their outcomes. Focusing on your actions rather than trying to control uncontrollable outcomes can help you relax and feel less anger when things go awry (which they will, from time to time).^[24]



5 Forgive others. Forgiveness has physical health benefits. Dwelling on grudges and past wrongs can increase your blood pressure and heart rates, while practicing forgiveness can reduce your body's stress.^[25] Despite its many benefits, forgiving others can be one of the hardest things in the world to do.^[26] ^[27]

- Think about the wrong you want to forgive. Notice the thoughts you experience about that wrong. How do you feel towards that person? How does your body feel?
- Reflect on that experience through the lens of learning. How could you have done something differently? What could the other person have done differently? Can you learn from this experience for the future? Transforming a painful experience into a learning experience can help you let go of your sense of injury.
- Talk with the other person. Don't make accusations; that will only put the other person on their defensive side. Instead, use "I"-statements to express your feelings, and ask for them to share theirs with you.^[28]
- Value peace over justice. One reason why it can be so hard to forgive is our sense of "fairness." The person who wronged you may never "get what's coming to them," but holding on to your anger and injury ultimately only harms you. Don't make forgiveness contingent on a particular action or result.
- Remember that forgiveness is not absolution. The wrong still happened, and you haven't made an excuse for it by forgiving it. What you have done is release the burden of carrying your own anger around with you.



- 6 Practice active gratitude.** Gratitude is more than a feeling; it's an active practice. Cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" can make you a more positive, happier, healthier person.^[29] Gratitude has been shown to help people overcome trauma, strengthen their relationships, and show compassion to others.^[30] ^[31] ^[32]
- Keep a gratitude journal. Record things that you experience for which you're grateful. These can be small, like a sunny morning or a delicious cup of perfectly brewed coffee. They can be impossible to measure, such as a partner's love or a friendship. Paying attention to these things and recording them will help you store them up so you can remember them later.^[33]
 - Savor surprises. Something unexpected or surprising can have a stronger effect on you than something mundane. Even these can be small; for example, note when your partner does the dishes or when you get a text from a friend you haven't heard from in months.
 - Share your gratitude with others. You're more likely to remember positive things if you share them with others. Sharing also has the benefit of brightening someone else's day, and possibly inspiring gratitude of their own.^[34]



7 Cultivate empathy. Humans, like many other animals, are built to build social relationships with those around them.^[35] From an early age, we learn how to “read” others and imitate their behaviors. We do this to fit in, to get what we want and need, and to feel connected to others.^[36] However, empathy is more than being able to interpret others' behaviors and sense their emotions. It's about imagining what it is like to experience life as they do, to think what they think, to feel what they feel.^[37] Cultivating empathy will help you be more sensitive toward other peoples' feelings, learn to bond with others, and feel less isolated. And practicing empathy will help you to treat others as you would like to be treated.

- Studies have shown that [loving-kindness meditation](#), or [compassion meditation](#), can stimulate the area of your brain responsible for emotional activity. It can also help you feel less stressed and more stable.^[38] [Mindfulness meditation](#) has similar effects, but is slightly less useful in developing empathy.^[39]
- Research has shown that actively imagining what others are experiencing can help boost your empathy.^[40] Even reading fiction can encourage you to take on someone else's perspective.^[41]
- Suspend judgment whenever possible. Research has shown that we are less likely to empathize with people whom we believe are responsible for their suffering -- i.e., people who “get what they deserve.” Recognize that you don't know the other person's circumstances or past.^[42]
- Seek out diverse people. Studies have shown that exposure to someone else's culture or beliefs can help you empathize with them.^[43] The more exposure you have to people who may think and behave differently from you, the less likely you are to form uninformed judgments or hold on to prejudices.



8 Focus on people, not objects. We are far more likely to experience real gratitude for immaterial things, such as the experience of feeling loved or an act of kindness. In fact, striving for more material things is often a sign that you are trying to fulfill some deeper need.^[44] ^[45] ^[46]

- Research has shown that materialistic people are often *less* happy than their peers.^[47] They feel less happy with their lives as a whole, and are more likely to experience negative emotions such as fear and sadness.^[48]



9 Give to others. Not everybody can afford to donate thousands of dollars to their favorite charity, but that doesn't mean you can't make small contributions to help those in need. Helping others not only benefits them, it benefits you. Research has shown that people who are altruistic are happier and may even experience an endorphin boost known as a "helper's high" from doing good for others.^[49]

- Volunteer. Instead of spending your weekends in front of the TV, volunteer at your local homeless shelter or SPCA. Serving others can help you feel more connected to them, and can help you feel more like part of a community than an isolated individual.^[50]
- Practice random acts of kindness every day. This could be as small an act as helping an elderly person carry groceries to their car, or giving somebody the right of way when driving. The more you do this, the more you will realize how gratifying it feels to help others, which will ultimately help you overcome selfishness.
- Research has shown that the "pay it forward" principle actually exists. Altruistic acts spread from person to person. Your small show of kindness and generosity could inspire someone else to do the same thing, which could inspire someone else, which could inspire someone else, and so forth.^[51]



10 Take notice of how your behavior impacts others. We can spend so much time focusing on our own behavior that we don't take the time to notice how we are affecting others. Part of this is a psychological defense mechanism to help us handle interactions with others.^[52] If everyone responds to you in a similar way, you may have developed some habits that aren't helpful. You could be allowing your defense mechanisms to get in the way of growth.

- For example, consider how others respond to you. Do they seem to get hurt easily by things you say? It's possible that, rather than everyone you know being overly sensitive -- which just isn't likely --- you have developed a defense mechanism of putting others down in order to make yourself feel better. Experiment with different ways to communicate with others that don't elicit the same hurt response.
- Look at how you interact with others. Look for patterns, and determine which of these patterns are helpful and which aren't. The more you learn to be flexible and adaptable with your behavior, the better attuned you can be to those around you.^[53]

Part 3 of 3: Choosing the Right Path



1 Explore your talents. Everybody has a skill or interest that they excel in and genuinely enjoy. If you don't think you have a talent, you probably just haven't found it yet. It's often necessary to be persistent and try many things before you find one that suits you.

- Similar types of people may also be attracted to the same activities. For example, adrenaline junkies may not be drawn to the quiet, slow pace of a knitting club, but someone who enjoys other quiet activities might be. Determining *who* you enjoy being around may help you figure out *what* you'll enjoy.
- Be patient. Change does not come all at once. It requires practice and time. It can be difficult to break out of old routines and meet new people or try new activities, especially if you're busy (and who isn't?). Persistence is the key.
- Enroll in a class you're interested in, or pick up a new instrument or sport. Not only will you learn something new, you'll meet others who are interested in learning too. Trying to learn something new can also be a safe and productive way to push yourself out of your comfort zone.



2 Do what you love. No matter how much money you make, you will not be happy if you spend your entire life doing something you hate. While not all of us are lucky enough to make a career out of our favorite hobby, it's important to at least devote some of your time to things that make you happy.

- Doing things that are meaningful to you will help you feel more happy and fulfilled. Creative pursuits, such as art or music, can help you express your feelings and thoughts in productive, healthy ways.^[54]
- It's a common myth that the people who succeed most in life are the most single-minded. They don't let anything get in the way of their one goal, including taking time for themselves. Unfortunately, that can be a very unhealthy way of living. Try not to allow yourself to focus so much on one aspect of your life that you forget to nurture the other ones.^[55]
- If you're chronically unhappy at your job, consider why. It's possible that some changes could change how you feel about it. If the reason you're unhappy is because you feel like your job isn't meaningful, or isn't in line with your values, consider finding another line of work.^[56]



3 Experiment with life. Life must be a balance between work and play. Focusing exclusively on one or the other will eventually lead to stagnation and monotonous daily routines. Humans adapt very quickly to positive events. Because of that, we can become desensitized to positive experiences, especially if that's our only experience.^[57]

- Research has shown that when we're squarely in our comfort zone, we aren't as productive as we are when we step just beyond it.^[58] It's important to seek out new experiences and interactions with others, even when those are a little scary. Doing so can help you achieve more.
- Our desire to avoid discomfort and hurt can lead us to refuse flexibility. However, research shows that embracing vulnerability -- including the possibility that something will go wrong -- is crucial to experiencing *all* of life.^[59]
- Mindfulness meditation can be a good place to start. One of the goals of mindfulness is to become more aware of any repetitive thought patterns that may be getting in the way of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Find a class or do some research to find out what techniques work best for you.^[60]



Community Q&A

Question

How do I stop being a rude person?



Community Answer

Rudeness often stems from being too preoccupied with yourself and your wants, needs, and problems to be conscious of others. Step back from what grips you on a day to day basis and make an effort to pay attention to the people around you. That's a huge first step.

Helpful 83 Not Helpful 5

Question

How do I stop being a jerk to other people?



Community Answer

First, you should ask yourself why you are being this way. Is it because of jealousy? Bad experiences? Trust issues? Try to live in the "here and now" and let go of the past. Think of bad experiences as useful. If you're in a conflict with someone, be the one taking initiative to fix the relationship. Over all, just be positive and see the good in everything.

Helpful 65 Not Helpful 5

Question

What if I want to change, but I don't see any difference in what I tried to change?



Community Answer

Keep trying new and varied solutions, and don't give up! Just having the attitude and willingness to change means you've made some degree of change already.

Helpful 96 Not Helpful 9

Question

How do I fix my overall attitude?



Community Answer

Think positive thoughts and ignore the things that make you have that attitude. Talk to people like therapists, friends and family to help you through this.

Helpful 67 Not Helpful 8

Question

How do I stop gossiping?



Community Answer

Just don't do it. If you hear gossip, don't spread it. Think about what you stand to gain by breaking the habit - people will consider you level-headed and trustworthy.

Helpful 90 Not Helpful 10

Question

What if I have already tried to change but I can't?



Community Answer

Don't give up! Analyze what went wrong in your first attempt and try again and again until you get it.

Helpful 90 Not Helpful 11

Question

What should I do if people always make me feel like I'm not good enough?



Community Answer

You should stop spending time with those people, and find people who will make you feel better about yourself. If you can't remove those people from your life, do what you can to stay positive and use the tips above to reinforce your work. Keep up good habits and healthy relationships, and soon you'll be able to know it's good enough--or even better than you ever expected.

Helpful 111 Not Helpful 15

Question

There is someone at my school who I highly dislike. They have treated my friends and me rudely and I have gotten myself into trouble because of my hatred for them. What do I do?



Community Answer

That's where forgiveness comes in. Now you have to forgive, not because you are doing this person a favor, but because you are doing it for yourself. Holding on to the wrong done to you will only hurt you more.

Helpful 38 Not Helpful 6

Question

What's the biggest challenge in life?



Bella Rose
Community Answer

The biggest challenge in life is not having a relationship with people. No matter the cars and money you have in life you still need support from others in one way or another. Having a good relationship with others and being jobless is better than having a job with no relationship.

Helpful 62 Not Helpful 14

Question

How do I stop being a bossy person?



Community Answer

Remember that you can't always be right, and you can't always get your way. Put yourself in others' shoes and give them the opportunity to lead, choose activities, or go their own way. If all else fails, remind yourself that people will not want to be your friend if you're too bossy.

Helpful 16 Not Helpful 3

[See more answers](#)



Tips

- Every morning, before you go on with your daily activities, look in the mirror and give yourself a compliment; it can be anything - even "your jeans are nice" will work. It will give you confidence and you'll feel great when you walk down your street!
- Treat others the way you want to be treated.

- It may take years for you to learn how to be self-aware and to identify the parts of your life that you would like to improve. Take your time.
- Volunteer work can be a humbling experience and broaden your horizons. Give the most important gift to any community: time and attention.
- Try to give second chances to others as well as yourself.
- Have respect for other people.
- Never give up trying to be the best you can towards other human beings.
- Try to remember that almost everyone tries the best they can.
- If you have wronged someone, admit it right away, or as soon as possible.
- **Be yourself** and people will notice who you really are.
- By identifying your values and priorities, it can assist you in the direction you may like to pursue and be a guide to you.
- Help others when they need it.

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About This Article



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