



Why working on yourself may be the most altruistic thing you do.

2 May 2026

Quite naturally, given my field of study and the career I am in, I would be a proponent of personal development. So, I am definitely going to be in favour of working on yourself, learning from your mistakes, developing new and better mindsets, and building the skills and relationships that help you have a happier and more successful life. Quite a number of people choose to work on themselves. The reasons can vary from wanting to be more successful in their career, wanting their relationships to work, wanting to escape the ways in which they self-sabotage their lives, overwhelming mental anguish because their lives do not resemble anything they want them to look like, wanting a promotion, wanting to be successful in leadership positions, and so the list goes on. I have even come across people who have taken a short sabbatical to work on themselves. Sometimes this is not so much about developing themselves as about finding themselves. Often it is about both. And, once again, given what I do, I think that is a great idea and immensely beneficial.

When people decide to increase their level of self-awareness, grow their skills, understand how they think and feel and act and what shaped such thoughts and feelings and actions, it is usually done because they believe it will improve their life. They will feel better. They will have better relationships. They will succeed in their careers. They will be better parents. And of course, this is one of the reasons why people invest in self-understanding and personal development. But it has another consequence. It is not only for the benefit of the person doing the work. Those around you and with whom you come into contact benefit as well. Altruism is concern for the well-being of others independent of personal benefit. When you work on yourself you are saying I want to be a better person, and in doing so, you are also a better person to those around you. Working on yourself, while usually done because of pleasure (to get more of what we see as pleasurable) or pain (to avoid repeating painful outcomes), or both (in which case you will be quite motivated to do the work), and to benefit ourselves, has unintended benefits for those we interact with. Others benefit from the work you do on yourself.

Hurting people hurt people. This is not always the case as some people who are in great mental pain are the kindest and most empathic people you can meet. But when you meet someone who is cruel and vindictive they are often hurting. And sometimes they are determined (consciously and unconsciously) to inflict their pain onto others. When you choose to work on yourself, you not only make your own life better, you make the lives of those around you better. In fact, one of the kindest most considerate things you can do for those you love and work with, is to work on yourself, improve your level of self-awareness, understand the reasons for your behaviour, and be more conscious and deliberate in how you choose to act.

What are some of the ways in which your own growth can benefit those around you:

1. Without being aware of it, most people have actions or habits that can hurt others. I am not talking irritate here. We all do things that will irritate others at some point in life. That is to some extent just being human. We get tired and snap at others. We are stressed and the last thing we feel like doing is being understanding. I am talking about words and actions that inflict pain on others. The more you have worked on yourself, the more you have grown in self-understanding, in personal and interpersonal skills, and in examining your own behaviour, the less likely you are to hurt other people because you will be far more conscious of your actions towards others and the possible consequences.
2. Sometimes in the process of working on ourselves, we discover aspects of ourselves that we don't like. As we become aware of our weaknesses as well as our strengths, we are more likely to develop compassion and understanding for the weaknesses and mistakes of others. We don't constantly find fault with others. We are not always criticising everything they do. We understand we are not perfect and the same applies for others. People who have worked on themselves are likely to be more tolerant of others and be more helpful than directly critical.
3. Without any formal procedures in place, you become a role model and mentor for others. Most often, you can see when someone has done work on themselves. Whether we like it or not we all grow up in imperfect environments to a lesser or greater extent. So, we all do have things to work on. We all do have faults to overcome. We all do have behaviour that is better off changed. And when someone has done the work, it is seen. And fortunately, those people often become the admired, the respected, and the mentors or role models for others.

For those who are asking how do I work on myself? There are many ways. There are the traditional therapy, counselling, coaching approaches where you work with a professional. There are questionnaires and assessments you can complete. There is a wealth of information online, but be careful of the source. Stick to reputable sources. You can attend workshops, seminars, courses, read material and listen to audio and videos. There isn't a shortage of methods. Not in this day and age with tech being the way it is.

It takes time and effort to work on yourself. It can take money as well. It also takes courage and humility. Courage because our brain is wired to like the familiar, and anything that requires change is often scary as well as hard. We don't change overnight. Old patterns are hard to change. It requires humility because you need to acknowledge you may not be this fantastic person you thought you were. Some people come with the saying, "well that is just the way I am". Many people in therapy are there to heal from people who should be in therapy. We all have areas of improvement. We could all do with some introspection around our behaviour. It takes self-esteem, self-respect, as well as self-care to work on yourself. But I know of no one who did the work and regretted it. Yes, it is hard. But see this as a gift. A gift to yourself and to others.