



The  
*Truth*  
About **Ego**

# The Truth About Ego

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## INTRODUCTION

**A** *healthy amount of ego facilitates success and happiness.* But how much is too much?

On the one hand, you have the Donald Trumps of the world. No one would argue that he has a big ego. You might admire his money, cars, planes, helicopters, penthouse, or his younger, attractive wife.

But it can easily be argued that he's insecure.

He'll never have enough money, attention, or admiration to take a break from his pursuit of those things. And his motivation is to impress himself and others.

***Imagine being thirsty all of the time.*** You spend your time either thinking about water, searching for it, or drinking it, but it's never enough. You're still thirsty all the time.

Donald Trump will never have enough.

***Contrast that with a Buddhist monk.*** He has nothing. He's only permitted to own a bowl, a spoon, and a couple of robes. Money, sex, and entertainment are out of the question. Buddhist monks aren't even allowed to prepare

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their own food. Someone else has to do it for them. They spend their days helping others, not helping themselves. But they are content. They require nothing else to be happy.

On the other hand, those with a big ego tend to be the same people that accomplish amazing things. They're the people that make a billion dollars, invent technologies that changes society, and become CEOs or high-level politicians.

There's another type of ego. The ego of confidence or being pleased with yourself.

***Without some ego, you will lack the confidence to reach even a minimal level of success. Too much ego results in overconfidence and poor judgement.***

What's the solution?

It's up to you. As with many things, for most people, the answer lies somewhere in the middle.

*"Ego is one of the biggest weapons that is used to take us down. It's self-destructive. It's a problem on all levels - even regular people can have big ego problems.*

*- Yehuda Berg*

## DEFINING THE EGO

How many types of ego are there? Some philosophers have defined as many as seven types. In the name of practicality, we'll only consider two:

- Your sense of self-esteem or self-importance.
- The part of you that feels a need to impress yourself or others. For example, buying an expensive car for the purpose of impressing your neighbor is an ego-driven activity. You wouldn't have purchased it if no one would ever see it.
- Or you may want to prove to yourself that you can run a marathon. That's also an ego-driven decision.

***The first type is necessary, but must be possessed in the proper amount.*** Too little is paralyzing. Too much leads to arrogance.

***The need for the second type of ego is debatable.***

It might be useful under the right circumstances, but it's not a happy place to be. When you're jumping through hoops and making decisions to impress someone, including yourself, you're not as free as you can be. You're a servant.

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*“All bad qualities centre round the ego.  
When the ego is gone, realization results by itself.  
There are neither good nor bad qualities in the Self.  
The Self is free from all qualities.  
Qualities pertain to the mind only.”*

*- Ramana Maharshi*



# THE EGO OF SELF-ESTEEM

This type of ego is important to possess, within reason. You want to have a strong enough ego that you can handle the challenges of life and achieve your goals. A healthy amount of self-esteem and self-confidence is necessary for success and good mental health.

## **There are disadvantages to having too little ego of self-esteem:**

1. **Depression.** Those with low self-esteem and low self-worth are more likely to suffer from depression.
  - ▶ Low self-esteem has also been shown to increase the likelihood of obsessive-compulsive behaviors and addiction.
2. **Lack of assertiveness.** Being assertive requires confidence. A lack of assertiveness leads to feelings of disempowerment. ***When you can't voice your opinions, desires, and needs, they'll rarely be fulfilled.***
3. **Passive-aggressiveness.** When you can't voice your opinions freely, you may resort to giving them subtly, without taking responsibility for them.
  - ▶ You might punish a friend for being late by "forgetting" to pick him up at the airport. It might

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make you feel a little better, but it fails to address the real issue.

4. **Overachievement or underachievement.** Those with low self-esteem may overachieve or underachieve. The results are very different, but the motivation is the same.
  - ▶ The overachiever is attempting to compensate for his poor self-image. The underachiever figures he can't do anything worthwhile, so why even try?
  
5. **Poor social skills.** Interacting confidently with others requires self-esteem. When you're lacking confidence and feel uncomfortable, you make others feel uncomfortable, too. A small ego makes for awkward company.
  
6. **Anxiety.** Low self-esteem and high self-doubt go hand-in-hand. If you're concerned about the future or your ability to handle what life brings, you'll feel anxiety. A lack of self-confidence naturally results in anxiety.
  
7. **Strained relationships.** Those with low self-esteem struggle in relationships. They can't openly share their needs or ask for help. They're needy and have poor boundaries.

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You want to avoid being arrogant. **But going through life with low self-esteem is a difficult path.**

It's good to be humble, but taking it too far is detrimental to your life, happiness, and success.

While too little ego can be a bad thing, having too much can also present challenges.

*“Because of its phantom nature, and despite elaborate defense mechanisms, the ego is very vulnerable and insecure, and it sees itself as constantly under threat. This, by the way, is the case even if the ego is outwardly very confident.”*

*- Eckhart Tolle*

## *Disadvantages*

**There are also disadvantages to having too much ego:**

1. **Arrogance. *Arrogance ultimately leads to failure.*** Being overconfident in your abilities leads to poor decisions and mistakes.
2. **You're less likeable.** A few women are drawn to arrogant men, but most members of both sexes find arrogance obnoxious and undesirable. Being arrogant will damage your social life and relationships.
3. **Selfishness.** If you're overly pleased with yourself, you'll think you deserve more than everyone else. Your needs are more important than everyone else's. Selfish people can be successful, but expect to be lonely and disliked.

The ability to make good decisions is important. ***Poor decisions lead to trouble, and arrogance leads to poor decisions.*** Avoid being arrogant. There's nothing to be gained.

If your ego needs a boost, there are many ways to approach it.

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*"I have to tell you, you can't have an ego when you're an actor. A lot of actors have them, but in reality most of those people are just sensitive artists dying for a hug and a compliment."*

*- Josh Brolin*

### *How to Build Your Ego*

1. **Speak positively to yourself.** If your ego could use a boost, you're probably not talking to yourself in a positive manner. One leads to the other. Keep your self-talk positive.
  - ▶ Take control of what you're saying to yourself and say things you'd like to hear.
2. **Avoid the need to be perfect.** The need to be perfect results in failure. Failure leads to a lower ego. Perfection is a myth. It's acceptable to strive for perfection, but understand that it can never be achieved.

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- ▶ Have reasonable expectations and you'll be more successful. Success is like fertilizer for the ego.
3. **Focus on the strengths. *Focusing on your weaknesses hurts your ego.*** Focus on your strengths instead.
    - ▶ Make a list of your strengths and review it daily.
    - ▶ Take advantage of your strengths by putting them to work.
  4. **Focus on your accomplishments.** You've done some amazing things. ***Remind yourself of your accomplishments regularly.*** Remember how great it felt to be successful and achieve those things.
  5. **Spend time doing things you enjoy that you're also good at.** Are you great at basketball? Join a basketball league. Or put your artistic skills to good use. Spend some time each day being successful.
  6. **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** There will always be someone better looking, wealthier, or possessing better dance skills. There are too many people in the world to be the best, biggest, or most successful at anything.
    - ▶ Pay attention to the growth in your abilities and skills. That's controllable and far more important.

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You have a lot to be proud of.

***Focus on your achievements and remember how much you've accomplished.***

There's nothing wrong with being confident in your abilities. In fact, you'll be much more effective.

If you're currently at the other end of the spectrum. It would be wise to get your ego under control.

*"I think at all social networks, be it Facebook or Twitter or whatever it is, there's an ecosystem that exists there. But there's also an ego system that exists there."*

*- Ashton Kutcher*

## *How to Chop Your Ego Down to Size*

1. **Acknowledge your limitations.** You're not the best at anything. You're also not good at everything. To protect your ego, you've conveniently forgotten all the things you're not good at.
  - ▶ Admit that you have limitations and list a few of them. Remind yourself of a few of your failures over the years.
2. **Admit your mistakes to yourself and others.** Be honest. Hiding your mistakes demonstrates that you're inconsiderate and selfish. So admit them. You've made more than a few.
3. **Acknowledge your faults.** Judging others is just a way to avoid judging yourself. ***By making yourself aware of your own shortcomings, you'll stop judging others so harshly.*** How can you improve yourself?
4. **Have gratitude.** You owe others some credit for your success. Are you a model? Thank your parents for your wonderful genes. Did you graduate from Harvard Law School? Be grateful you had the supportive environment that others didn't have.



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- ▶ You may have spent 6 hours each day working on your jump shot to earn a college scholarship. But it wouldn't have mattered if you were slow or under 6-feet tall.
5. **Avoid bragging. *If you feel good about yourself, you won't have the need to constantly brag about yourself or your achievements.***
    - ▶ People eventually find out everything on their own. You don't have to bring your accomplishments to their attention every 15 minutes. Turn it down a notch or two.
  6. **Take an interest in others.** It's not all about you. Pay attention to what others have to say and to share. Put the focus on someone else.
  7. **Help others.** Volunteer or use your amazing abilities to help your friends, neighbors, and family.
  8. **Ask yourself why you behave arrogantly.** Most arrogant people don't actually believe in their own greatness. ***They're actually covering for feelings of inadequacy.*** If that's you, skip this section and focus on the previous list!

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Having too much self-esteem can be as bad as having too little. ***If you find yourself acting arrogantly, ask yourself why.*** You might find that the cause is a lack of self-esteem.

***There's another type of ego, the ego of the self.*** This type of ego is different and a little more challenging to define.

*“Ego stops you from getting things done and getting people to work with you. That's why I firmly believe that ego and success are not compatible.”*

*- Harvey Mackay*

## THE EGO OF SELF

This is the need to be right, to impress, or to have things be a certain way. This is the ego that 99% of us have too much of!

Various Eastern religions refer to this as the ego of the self. ***It's the need to be separate from others, to have a unique identity.***

Western culture strongly favors this type of ego, because it can lead to impressive accomplishments. Acquiring money, things, and accolades is emphasized in the west, and this the right type of ego to get you there.

***However, it's very empty and provides little satisfaction in the end.*** A Mercedes is great, but a Ferrari is even better. A million-dollar salary is okay, but it's nothing compared to a \$10 million salary. Where is the end?

It never ends. At the end of your life, you still feel dissatisfied.

***This type of ego is the cause of most of the pain in your life.*** It has difficulty accepting other people and situations as they are. It's insatiable and always judging.

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However, most people are uncomfortable at the prospect of letting go of the ego of the self.

### **Symptoms of too much of this “other” ego:**

1. **Being annoyed when things aren't the way you think they should be.** You might be bothered by the seating arrangement at a party or by the way a husband and wife interact. Or you're annoyed that the neighbor doesn't mow his grass as often as you think he should.
  - ▶ ***There's an underlying assumption that your way is the right way,*** and any other version is incorrect.
  - ▶ ***Second, there's an inability to let the feelings go.*** It gnaws at you. This is a principle feature of those that might be defined as having a “salty” personality. Petulant people are like this. Everything bothers them.
  - ▶ You might even be annoyed by the weather. Isn't it odd to be annoyed by something that you have so little control over? You also make yourself miserable.
  - ▶ If you complain or argue a lot, this is you!
2. **Concern for the opinions of others.** Do you buy clothes that you like, or do you buy clothes that you think others will find attractive on you?

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- ▶ Do you own the car that makes sense for your situation? Or did you consider what your friends, family, and strangers might think of your choice?
- ▶ Did you become a doctor solely because it interested you?

Or was part of the reason to have a career that would be impressive to society and have a lifestyle that would make the average person jealous?

- ▶ Defensiveness is a result of too much concern for the opinions of others.

3. **Doing things to impress yourself.** The ego wants to be separate from the rest of the people in the world. This doesn't mean hiding in a cabin on a mountain top.

***This is a desire to outperform others*** – to do something challenging for the sake of proving to yourself that you're special and superior to others.

- ▶ This can take many forms. You might want to run a marathon or climb a mountain for the sense of accomplishment it brings.

You might argue that this isn't a bad thing, perhaps. But consider that if you were free from this urge, you wouldn't have to spend six nights

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on a mountaintop in minus 30-degree weather, risking your life.

- ▶ There's a difference between doing things out of curiosity or interest and doing them to impress.

***Why do you need to impress yourself?*** Instead of spending all of that time, money, and effort, why not address the underlying issue and free yourself from this bondage?

4. **Never having enough.** The ego of desire is never satisfied. The house is never big enough. The bank account is never full enough. There are never enough friends. The desire for more is insatiable.
5. **You're impatient.** You want what you want and you expect it to happen right now.
6. **It's hard for you to apologize.** Admitting that you're wrong is hard on this type of ego. It has a need to always be right.
7. **The inability to enjoy reality as it is.** Billions of years' worth of things outside of your control have led to the precise moment in front of you.

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Exploding stars, your ancestors, the weather, a falling tree, the tides, and countless other phenomena provided this moment. But you can't relax and accept it as it is. You want something different.

8. **The need to preserve your identity.** You think of yourself as the smart guy or the athletic girl. Or you're the person that's good at learning foreign languages or understanding math.

- ▶ Maybe you're always the best dressed person in your group.
- ▶ If a stranger commented that he didn't like your shoes, would you be able to let it go? Or would you feel upset? Would you have to go so far that you had to defend yourself or insult the other person?

9. **The need to avoid feeling foolish or incapable.** This is more than the need to be impressive. It's a need to appear infallible.

Do you censor your speech to the extreme? Are you constantly afraid of doing the wrong thing? Saying the wrong words?

- ▶ You might think that you're overly polite. You're actually afraid. You're protecting your fragile ego.

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These symptoms describe the people you know that are chronically unhappy. How could you be happy and experience these symptoms on a daily basis? You'll also find that many of the most successful people in the world share these traits.

Is it worth it?

*"We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires."*

*- Pope Benedict XVI*



# HOW TO DISSOLVE THE EGO OF THE SELF

Ridding yourself of this type of ego is a significant challenge. We all have preferences. We all have past experiences that define and limit our thinking. **We also like to think of ourselves in a certain way.** It's not easy to give that up.

## Let go of your ego and experience real freedom:

1. **Meditate daily. *The goal of meditation is to quiet the ego.*** The ego is constantly judging and commenting on everything. Meditation is a way to work around the ego.
2. **Stay with the present moment.** The ego of the self is still trying to justify the past and control the future. It's not interested in the present moment. It would rather focus on something it considers more interesting.
  - ▶ **Focus on the sensations of your body.** What are you feeling at that moment? What do you see? How warm is the air? What do you hear? Be aware of what your senses are registering.

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- ▶ **Stay with the moment.** If you're watching your son play baseball, keep your mind on the game and your surroundings. Keep your mind from wandering. You haven't seen your high school girlfriend in 23 years. Why think about her now?
3. **Notice that your mental discomfort is the result of resistance.** Most situations can be viewed as neutral. ***It's our ego's reaction to them that makes them negative.*** We resist the current situation and our reaction to it. That resistance causes the suffering. ***It's a choice.***
- Instead, let go of your resistance and allow the situation to be as it is.
  - That doesn't mean that you can't act to change the situation. But do so without getting upset. If a bird poops on your car, either let it go or wipe it up. But handle it without the typical drama.
4. **Accept your current circumstances.** Be accepting of your appearance, health, social circle, housing, and habits. Acceptance without judgment will allow you to see the obvious path to a more agreeable situation. Again, take care of your business, but do so without the emotional charge.

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5. **Forgive others.** You can now see why others do so many things that are disagreeable. Everyone has an ego disease. There's no reason to take the poor behavior and off-hand comments of others seriously. It's easy to forgive when you let go of your ego.
6. **Work on your listening skills.** Are you able to focus on another person while they speak, or is your mind somewhere else? Are you able to listen without forming judgments?

### **Here are a few examples of judgmental thoughts:**

- ▶ "This is boring."
- ▶ "I'm not surprised this happened. You're a fool."
- ▶ "Soccer isn't an interesting sport."
- ▶ "You talk too slowly."
- ▶ "Your teeth are horrible."
- ▶ "He's so good looking."
- ▶ "This person is funny."

***Judging doesn't have to be negative.*** Positive thoughts are still a form of judging. You're making a statement to yourself that something is good or bad or right or wrong.

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7. **Repeatedly ask yourself, “Who am I?”** What is it that’s constant about you regardless of your circumstances? That’s the real you. Think about what that really is. That’s the ultimate freedom from the ego.

The ego of the self is ingrained in our society. It’s easy to believe that giving up your ego would result in sitting under a tree for the rest of your life, that your ego is what drives you to accomplish anything worthwhile.

### **But there are other motivations. For example:**

- You can exercise to be healthy and to live longer for your family, as opposed to exercising to look good at the beach.
- You can earn a lot of money to provide for your family, as opposed to being able to purchase a fancy car to show off your wealth.
- You can climb a mountain for the experience of doing it, rather than proving to yourself that you’re fit enough or tough enough.
- You can post a picture on Facebook to share your life with others, rather than using it as an opportunity to show off your new swimming pool.
- You can paint a picture to enjoy the process of being creative, rather than showing off your skills.

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**When your ego is under control, your motivation is much purer.** You spend your time and energy on the things that truly matter, rather than jumping through a bunch of self-created hoops.

By removing your ego-based motivations, you're free to be yourself and spend your time more wisely.

*"I work really hard at trying to see the big picture and not getting stuck in ego. I believe we're all put on this planet for a purpose, and we all have a different purpose... When you connect with that love and that compassion, that's when everything unfolds."*

*- Ellen DeGeneres*

## CONCLUSION

***A healthy amount of self-confidence and self-esteem are important to your mental health and success.***

Too little spells disaster: you're unable to handle daily living successfully or achieve your goals.

Too much creates a different challenge. Arrogance leads to poor decision making and turns off those around you.

***There's a fine balance that allows you to be maximally effective while still living peacefully among others.***

***The ego of the self is trickier.*** The ultra-successful people of the world often have a strong sense of self. They're constantly reaffirming their identity by acquiring money, achievements, or praise.

We admire these people and wish our bank accounts were similar, but as a group, these same people never know any peace. There's never enough to allow a break. For example, Donald Trump has stated that he never takes a vacation.

***Ridding yourself of the ego of self has no downside.*** You can still be successful and achieve great things, but

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you'll do them for positive reasons, and not because you need to affirm your identity to yourself or to impress someone else.

Evaluate your current ego situation and decide if a change is in order. Have confidence in yourself, while avoiding the need to show off. Practice this each day, and soon enough, you'll feel the joys of a freedom that you didn't know existed.