

Chapter 1 – Making Peace with the Mirror:

Why Altering Your Self-Image is the #1 Key to Changing

Your Body

By Conor Kelly

A while back Oprah Winfrey did a radio interview. The radio host asked her,
“How do you feel about your work?”

“My workout?” she replied.

“No, your work.”

“Oh, I love my work! It’s just such a blessing to do what I do, to make an
impact and to be able to help millions of people every day!”

“That’s great! So how do you feel about your workout?”

Silence.

“Oprah, you still there?”

“Yes, yes. How do I feel about my workouts? Well, I just want to lose my
fat ass!”

Now let me ask you something: Can you feel the difference in the communication offered regarding her work and her workouts? Take a minute and think about the EMOTION that lies behind each response.

Oprah is extremely passionate about her work. Clearly, she sees herself as being able to help MILLIONS of people on a daily basis. When it comes to business, she's a powerhouse, one of the most influential and, might I add, well-spoken people ever.

The second response was pure frustration, laced with straight emotion. As you may or may not know, Oprah's had a very public and very prolonged battle with her weight, filled with the typical ups and downs and wins and losses we all share at one time or another. So, how does one of the world's most successful women fail so massively in achieving one of her chief goals in life?

Two words: self-image.

Stop Putting Limits On Your Future

How we view ourselves determines the limits of what we're able to create in our lives. That's it. It's nothing else. We always act in accordance with what we believe to be true about ourselves. In fact, it's impossible to do otherwise. We simply cannot behave in a way that's inconsistent with our own self image.

I can pretty much guarantee you that almost every single person that struggles with their weight has something in common with the second Oprah – the world’s most infamous yo-yo dieter – namely, in one form or another, **they see themselves as fat.**

I’ve mentioned in my seminars and in my blogs that for the longest time, and despite my best efforts, I failed to change because I saw myself as being fat. My entire identity was linked to this single, physical trait; it colored, affected and even tainted nearly everything I said, did or tried to enjoy. It was only when I shifted my thoughts that my transformation accelerated.

Is there any area in your life you’re unhappy with, and in talking about where you sound similar to Oprah when she talks about her weight? I’d bet if you’re here, reading this book, there is.

In fact, I’m almost certain that you offer that type of communication when it comes every area of your life that you’re not happy with. In Oprah’s case, she has a very healthy self-image when it comes to her work. She could never be anything other than extremely successful. But unless she changes her self image regarding her weight, she is destined to prolong her struggles in that particular department. Do you get that?

If you are not where you'd like to be physically, it means that what you believe to be true about yourself is inconsistent with the thing you want: **your ideal body**.

Before my transformation, my body was a mirror image of what I felt about myself. It literally reflected my self-belief at the time. But since that time I've been able to find a new perspective, to see myself differently, and I quickly conquered any doubt that losing weight and keeping it off was possible for me.

I've since come to believe that the #1 key to a successful transformation lies in altering your self-image. In other words, how you think of yourself in the process of achieving your perfect weight. Until you learn to see yourself as though you are already living in your perfect body, your physical reality either won't change, or any change will be temporary and fleeting because you're simply not convinced it's the "real you."

Sorry, but it's the truth. (And don't shoot the messenger!)

There is a silver lining here, however. You CAN work on your self-image and alter it with time through positive and habitual behavior. When you are successful in learning to see yourself in a new way, you will already have catapulted your life to a new level.

I can tell you from personal experience that this won't be easy, especially if there are things about yourself which you do not like. I can also tell you that's it's

most definitely worth the effort, and if you commit to this process you'll discover it is the most rewarding work you will ever do.

How Do I Start to Change My Self-Image?

As a teenager I had long hair and really bad acne. Not a great combination. I got used to thinking of myself as ugly. When I started getting serious about gaining strength, and not just muscle, I got very focused on increasing my overall bodyweight, because I thought that's what would make me stronger.

At that time, I started gaining a lot of fat as well, but I figured, "I'm already ugly, why not be fat as well?" It sort of came naturally to my way of thinking at the time. I was the big, ugly strong guy. That became a part of my identity at the time. I'd successfully convinced myself that I was proud of being that way.

Later in life, when I decided to trim down, I struggled at first. A big part of that struggle had to do with the fact that losing weight or becoming "ripped" didn't exactly jive with my self-image at the time. And trust me, self-perception is a strong habit to break, even for a power lifter.

I'd become so accustomed to thinking of myself as the "big, ugly strong guy" that my subconscious couldn't reconcile my self-concept with the "ripped underwear model" that I wished I'd become. I failed many times, not even

realizing why or how it was happening. I just defaulted to what I knew because it was comfortable, familiar, habitual. Perhaps it wasn't comfortable so much as it was known. As the saying goes, "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know."

Be the Author of Your Own Self Perception

Although it was a slow process, I gradually learned to rewrite my story about the kind of person I am. I still loved being strong, and I just wanted to add being ripped, feeling great about myself, my body and my appearance. I focused on real examples of what I would like to emulate, such as World's Strongest Man champions like Jouka Ahola of Finland and Mariusz Pudzianowski of Poland. These guys were strong and very lean, and I thought, "Maybe I should try being like that for a change." One World's Strongest Man winner, Svend Karlsson of Norway, a former bodybuilding champion, used to love saying, "You don't have to be fat to be strong."

I thought, "You know, he might have something there..."

Over time, I was able to separate the elements of "strong" and "ugly" in my awareness of myself. This wasn't an overnight thing. I sincerely doubted I could be

like these guys, but I overcame these doubts as I always have: with **practice** and **patience**.

By taking action in spite of my fears, and practicing thinking, speaking and acting more confidently – even when I didn't feel all that confident – I gradually transformed how I saw myself. I now understand that this transformation in my mind was necessary to accomplish the transformation that I achieved with my physique.

Looking back, I almost feel as though there was a moment that my new self-image sort of “clicked.” I felt, somewhere deep inside, that I'd flipped a switch from the “off” into the “on” position. It was as though I'd finally accepted the possibility that I could be the person I envisioned, and have the body I wanted. The physical aspects of my transformation then proceeded very quickly. It was more a formality than anything else at that point.

This is where you'd like to be. You'd do well to reach the point where your self-concept seemingly pulls you to achieve your goal rather than in the opposite direction.

At this point, for me, it feels natural to succeed. That is my expectation now. However, this is a transformation that must occur in mind before it manifests in a new body. Too often we reverse the process, challenging the body to achieve something the mind simply isn't ready to believe.

I never did achieve the level of muscularity or strength of the great champions I mentioned previously, but I did ultimately achieve a low, six percent body fat and was quite strong, being able to do log presses with three hundred pounds and to walk a hundred feet carrying a seven hundred pound yoke. To this day I maintain a lean physique with a consistent ten percent body fat. I'm also much stronger than the average 180 pound man, still bench pressing double my bodyweight and dead lifting triple my bodyweight.

The point is I had finally achieved a comfort level with who I was. For the first time in a long time I felt happy in my own skin, which is a great feeling. It's horrible when you don't like the body you live in; it makes you feel trapped.

Even when you're used to thinking in these terms, to feeling frustrated or trapped, you can still make a change. It takes a bit of time for your self-image to catch up to your new ambitions, but what's important is not how long it takes, it's committing to constantly working on your self-image, and learning to recondition your thoughts.

When you understand the power of your own language, you can effectively talk yourself into a successful transformation. It begins by noticing what you say and think most often, and observing whether it serves you or not. If it does, keep it. If not, throw it away. Find new ways to think and speak that are supportive, and

learn to make these your new mantra. This is the fastest way to reshape your image of yourself, and thereby reshape your body.

Focus on people who are examples of what you'd like to be, and begin to model yourself after them. Use their existence as proof of the possibility that you can be different. If my story resonates with you, use me as an example of what you can be, or borrow from certain elements of what I've done.

Oprah is a great person to look up to in business and contribution, but a poor model for long term weight loss. No matter what your current condition, you can find people who were like you and are now where you want to be. Devote yourself to noticing them, and to noticing how abundant these examples are, as this will help increase your belief.

Finally, make a decision to practice seeing yourself as how you'd like to be. It doesn't matter if you don't fully believe it at first. That's completely normal. Make up new stories about yourself, supportive ones, and repeat them often. Try living your life as though that story were true, even if just for a few days, just to see what it feels like.

Try on a new story like a new pair of pants! Why not? What do you have to lose? And always ask yourself, "What if the new story was true?" How would you act differently than you do now? How would you think differently?

What would you say differently?

Change Your Story, Change Your Life

When I used to train for strongman competitions, I had a friend and training partner called Jeff. Jeff was actually a very accomplished athlete. He was a Canadian champion arm wrestler with his left arm. He also had a touch of cerebral palsy, meaning he was somewhat physically challenged. While he was unusually strong in his left arm, most of the right side of his body didn't have the same strength or mobility.

His right arm was slightly atrophied and held close to his body. He walked with a pronounced limp. But he was enthusiastic about the sport of strength athletics; he had a real passion for it. Over the years I'd been blessed many times to observe Jeff compete and train. While he did not have the physical tools to do well in many of the events, it never seemed to stop him. His determination was palpable.

He always worked hard and never gave up. He was totally committed to improving, regardless of the outcome of any training session or competition.

Many strongman events are based on either a seventy-five second or ninety second time limit. If an event was timed for ninety seconds, Jeff would stand there trying for ninety seconds, even if he could not do the event whatsoever. He would

continue trying to lift, pull or push the object until the whistle blew. In training, he would continue for three to five minutes or more, unless we stopped him. Many times we didn't. We were strength enthusiasts witnessing true strength: the power of will and sheer determination.

We may have been able to lift more by the numbers, but he was the star wherever we went. You couldn't help but be inspired by him. To this day, he still ranks as one of my greatest heroes.

What I found so amazing about Jeff is that you never once heard him mention or suggest even a hint of anything having to do with his disability. It was like it didn't exist for him. If he had what he felt was a poor performance, he would immediately be asking for feedback on what he could do better. He wanted to know what more he needed to do in training, or what technique he needed to learn to improve his performance for next time. I never once heard him use his disability as an excuse, nor make any excuses of any kind!

There are many lessons I learned from Jeff. I learned not to accept my perceived limitations or any limitations placed on me by external sources. I routinely competed against much larger men. Strongman is a big man's sport. There are no weight categories, at least there weren't back then. Even if there was, I was against it. The concept of a "strongest man" competition is to find out who the strongest man is, period. Not who is the strongest in relation to their size.

Many of the guys were 6 foot 4 and 300 plus pounds, yet I competed at 5 foot 6 and 200 something pounds. I learned from Jeff to never use my size as an excuse. It would be easy enough to do, and no one would have faulted me for it. But it would limit what I could achieve in the sport. I started placing higher in contests as soon as I realized that.

No excuse is a good excuse. As soon as you rationalize, justify or otherwise attempt to explain away a mistake, poor performance or not following through on a promise, you miss out on one of life's best learning opportunities.

In fact, you close yourself off to improvement.

There are no limitations except the ones we believe about ourselves. You'll either live up to your own expectations, or live down to the expectations someone else has for you. Let Jeff's story – and my story – be an example of what's possible for you, and learn to be extremely careful as to what stories about yourself you accept as true.

The Power of Stories

One woman I worked with had “issues with food.” She was an overeater that had tendencies toward bingeing and emotional eating. While it can be a challenge to

defeat this type of pattern or habit, changing how you think about the problem is essential to moving past it, if you are ever to move past it at all.

In her case, the larger problem was not the pattern of overeating itself but the overarching thought that she had “issues with food” or identified herself as an emotional eater.

The distinction here is that how you choose to eat does not define who you are. You have the ability to choose a healthier pattern; nothing is stopping you – except for yourself. That’s because as long as you identify yourself with the problem, it’s impossible for you to separate yourself from it long enough to take action on the solution.

It’s hard to see the picture when you’re in the frame!

Because she chose to call herself an “emotional eater,” this woman was never able to move past her self-proclaimed “issues with food.” All that she repeated to herself over and over again was that she had “issues with food.” How could she ever hope to move past them if she chose to believe them and wore them like a badge?

What she was really saying was, “I am the type of person who could never have a healthy relationship with food.” And any time she would do really well with her nutrition, it was not in harmony with her opinion of herself, and therefore she must eventually sabotage herself or risk losing her identity. Do you see how

powerful stories can be? Your story always becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy unless you do something to rewrite it.

Be exceedingly cautious about what words you use after the phrase, “I am.” “I am” is a creative force; it is a statement of identity. Repeat it often enough and you’re stuck with whatever you said:

- **“I am... an emotional eater.”**
- **“I am... doomed to look just like my mother.”**
- **“I am... pear shaped.”**
- **“I am... an emotional eater.”**
- **“I am... a carb addict.”**
- **“I am... fill in the blank here.”**

Until, that is, you decide to change it.

Your language patterns reveal the stories you believe to be true about yourself. I’ve corrected language patterns in my trainees on many occasions and with amazing results. Often people are not realizing how many times in conversation they repeat to themselves expressions like “my eating’s always been my problem,” “eating well is a huge problem for me because I love to eat,” or “I’m failing at the nutrition aspect of my program.”

What you speak about, you bring about.

Becoming very present to the words you are using over and over again around a specific goal that you have allows you to understand what message you're sending to your subconscious, and ultimately what you believe about yourself, is how you will behave in the process of striving for the goal. You will always act in accordance with what you believe about yourself.

You'll start to "catch yourself in the act," when you're saying something based in a failure mentality. Correct it by replacing those words with the story you'd truly love to believe about yourself:

- **“My nutrition is a work in progress, and I’m enjoying getting there at my own pace.”**
- **“I’m going to do an even better job of eating well from now on.”**
- **“I feel great when I eat well and I’m working on doing it more often.”**

Repeat these phrases to yourself at every opportunity, whether you believe them to be true or not. Use them frequently in conversations with others. Commit to doing this consistently and pretty soon you'll notice that your thoughts begin to

change, and you start living a new story, one that supports you in being healthy, happy, and successful.

Change your story, and you'll change your life.

What Should I Do First? *3 Steps for Altering Your Self Image*

Knowledge is great, but action is required to turn knowledge into change.

That is why I've created the following **3 Steps for Altering Your Self Image**:

Step 1: *Accentuate the Positive*

First, work on completely ignoring anything negative you might think about yourself or your body. Your habit of focusing on these things is literally preventing you from having the body you want.

Stop weighing yourself, and stop looking at yourself in the mirror. All that does is cause you to notice things about your body you don't like. When I had my transformation, I absolutely refused to look at my body in the mirror for the longest time. Until one day I happened to peak and I really liked what I saw.

Then I couldn't stop looking. I've settled down a bit on the "mirror time" these days, but if you've been heavy most of your life you should get a little

leeway to indulge in some self-gratifying narcissism when the opportunity presents itself. Skinny people do it and they've never been fat! Just saying.

When you start to see significant changes (and you will if you follow my recommendations) you'll want to make an effort to notice them a lot, but at first, and for a while, avoid looking at yourself!

Instead, practice seeing a picture in your mind of how you'd like to look. Experience it and enjoy it as though you already looked that way. And don't worry about how long it takes. It may take a few months, it may take a year.

If you're doing this right, it almost won't matter to you whether you have the body you want or not, because you're already experiencing the joy of it in your thoughts. If you're thinking "yeah right," just go with the process, you'll see. See your desired outcome as though it's already fact and it's just a matter of time until it comes into your experience.

What we celebrate today, we enjoy tomorrow.

Step 2: *Get to Know Yourself*

Next, find one thing you like about yourself; just one. Then, spend all your time focusing exclusively on that. Obsess about it. Seriously. What this will do is

lead you to discover other things you like about yourself. When those come up, obsess about them also.

After a while, you'll find so many things to like about yourself that may just fall in love. Or maybe you'll just want to date. Whatever. Get to know yourself first before you commit to anything long term though. If you try hard enough to find something you like, you might get to see it.

Step 3: *Be a Bookworm*

Finally, one of the most important ways to work on changing your self-image is to **read a lot**. This book is a great start, but commit to reading a few pages of something POSITIVE every day.

Why reading? Why now? Reading interrupts the pattern of negative focusing and gets you to focus on, "I can do it. I can change."

What books should you read? Just know reading one book won't necessarily change everything for you, although it certainly could. Ultimately, it's the ongoing commitment to learning, and feeding your mind with positive material that will pay the greatest dividends in your experience over time.

We often fall into patterns with how we spend our free time, and even replacing a little TV or (computer/tablet) screen time with 10-15 minutes of positive, uplifting, inspiring reading can turn you onto its addictive properties!

Parting Words About Making Peace With the Mirror

Follow these three steps and be sure to give it time. You'll know it's working because you'll start to feel a bit better about the whole situation. You might not feel great just yet, but you will feel a sense of relief. Your communication will begin to change.

Start each day by saying, "I love being at my perfect weight because..." and enumerate all the ways it will feel fantastic to live in your ideal body. The words will feel foreign to you at first. But that will change.

Be consistent with all the above and, trust me, the results *will* come. After a while, you'll feel pulled to do all the things that support you in having the body you want. Exercising and eating right will no longer be a chore. You'll start to actually enjoy how it makes you feel. When that happens, you'll be on the fast track to a successful (and permanent) body transformation.