



Possible Selves: Creating Your Future Today

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.



Aspiration enables us to craft models of our future selves. Inspiration fuels our passion and purpose to realize our future. Orchestration allows us to choose and arrange the elements necessary enabling us to realize what we want to become. Personal and professional paths evolve throughout our lives. Occasionally, our potential is realized accidentally. However, without a development plan and opportunities to develop talents, our potential will likely remain unrealized for ourselves and unknown to ourselves and others. The 2nd century Stoic philosopher, Epictetus said “First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.” This statement of aspiration provides a philosophic framework for creating development plans aimed at realizing our possible selves. However, in order to implement it, we need to acknowledge and examine and understand how we define our world. Typically, to understand our world we construct mental maps or schemas. As we mature, these self-schemas converge enabling us to develop three core self perceptions. First, self-concept, a map of who we are. Second, self-esteem, our sense of self value or worth. Third, self-efficacy, our belief that we can succeed. Awareness of our personal and professional schema can enable us to identify and realize our possible selves.

Let’s explore these three concepts associated with our possible selves and creating the future today.

Self Concept

The concept of self-concept begins with the French philosopher and mathematician Rene’ Descartes (1596-1650) in his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644). He wrote “Cogito Ergo Sum” (“I think, therefore I am”). Descartes proposed that doubt was a requisite tool of inquiry. He reasoned that because he was able to doubt, he was thinking, and as a result, existed. A contemporary perspective suggests self-concept is composed of complex and dynamic schemas or beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that we formulate about ourselves and our relationship to the world throughout our lives. Our schemas provide context and information used for organizing our world view, in turn enabling us to decide what actions to take and behaviors to choose.

Self concept is constructed through self-assessments. Throughout our lives, we assess our skills and attributes which inform self-concept. Self-concept is an evolving self-construction, *a work in progress* continually being reviewed and revised in order to maintain a positive and reinforcing environment for growth and goal achievement. Professionally, self concept enables us to conceive and project what we wish to become.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of our self-concept. It is composed of belief schemas that we create concerning our personal and professional worth. The psychotherapist and author Nathaniel Brandon modeled self-esteem on three levels:

- High Self-Esteem—Feeling competent, confident, and comfortable, able to manage personal and professional

challenges and worthy of happiness and success.

- Low Self Esteem—Feeling unprepared to engage personal and professional challenges, in turn lacking the confidence necessary to manage challenges and unworthy of happiness or success.
- Middle-Ground Self-Esteem—Vacillating between high and low self esteem; feeling confident and insecure, positive and negative, empowered and disempowered. In addition, evidencing behaviors associated with each state, in turn establishing and reinforcing inconsistency.

Coaching can enable individuals to develop and enhance their self-esteem. High self-esteem is especially important in high visibility positions such as organization leadership, sales, and customer service.

Self-Efficacy

Psychologist Albert Bandera defined self-efficacy as our belief in ourselves and ability to succeed. This orientation influences how we set goals, engage tasks, and approach challenges. Fundamental to self-efficacy is the idea that our responses to events are influenced by the observations we made of others as they engage events. Our memory of others actions influence our thinking and behavior. As a result, our sense of self-efficacy is constructed by the interaction of external events and self-perception. This is important relative to our choices associated with how we think and behave in the future. For example, individuals possessing high self-efficacy believe they can acquire the skills necessary to perform effectively in most situations. Typically, they view difficult tasks as challenges-to-be mastered, not conditions or obstacles inhibiting goal achievement.

Dr. Christina Murphy, Senior Director, Learning and Development, Century 21 Real Estate, LLC. states, “Self-efficacy is key enabler of learning and performance. It fuels learning. Often, professionals evidencing strong self-efficacy embrace change, drive for results, and create their success. They recognize the degrees of self-efficacy necessary to achieve goals. So, in order to achieve their goals, they develop key skill areas such as interpersonal communications, critical thinking, and behavioral discipline supported by continuous learning initiatives.”

Nobel Prize Physicist Albert Einstein wrote, “I know quite certainly that I myself have no special talent. Curiosity, obsession, and dogged endurance, combined with self-criticism, have brought me to my ideas.” Partner with a coach to explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

Identify your possible selves; begin creating your future today. ■

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