



“It is a sign of a creeping inner death when we no longer can praise the living”

“Your hair smells good”, “You make a great spag bol” and “You crack me up”, then move on to bigger, more awesome compliments such as, “I wish I had a fraction of your talent”, or “I’m never happier than when I’m with you”.

And why stop the compliments when it comes to yourself? There are few things more depressing than a person who talks himself down, or beats herself up, or thinks badly of themselves.

Like so many others, I can give myself a hard time when I think I’ve acted like a dill, or I’ve been supremely selfish, or whatever. But, conversely, when I achieve something – especially when it has come at some emotional cost – I can’t help but feel chuffed.

“The art of being yourself at your best is the art of unfolding your personality into the [person] you want to be ... Be gentle with yourself, learn to love yourself, to forgive yourself, for only as we have the right attitude toward ourselves can we have the right attitude toward others.”

Author Wilferd Peterson wrote that, and Lucille Ball echoed his wisdom when she said: “Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”

And that’s another reason why I’m not becoming Ms Modesty any time soon. ●

Josephine Brouard has a psychology degree and a fascination for human behaviour. Got a point of view? Tell us at twitter.com/healthsmartmag

Modesty forbids

To talk yourself up or talk yourself down, that is the question. In the self-deprecation stakes, which way do you prefer to go?

By Josephine Brouard

MODESTY AND ME, we’re like the North and South Pole. I love humility and self-deprecation in other people but, personally speaking, I don’t do either very well, and anyone who knows me would agree. Some people suffer from low self-esteem. Me? Honestly? *Nah*.

But enough about me, fabulous though I am. Rather, let’s look at why modesty is so often lauded, and the reverse – self-praise – typically results in backlash.

In Australia, thinking you’re great can get you chopped down faster than you can say *Look at me*. It’s just not in the armoury of the national character, which is very likely why the term “tall poppy syndrome” took root and flourished in the Australian argot.

Let’s face it: Aussies much prefer sarcasm, irony or a deft putdown. It’s a cultural thing.

I first noticed it when I hooked up with an Aussie 16 years ago. From the outset I’d bristle at the sarcasm – still today not my favourite form of wit – while my partner, now my husband, would sigh deeply and roll his eyes heavenwards as I pointed out just how fabulous I was (and, by the way, am still).

It was at that point, I believe, that the phrase “to have tickets on yourself” first appeared on my radar. Again, this is an idiom peculiar to Aussies, up there with terms of endearment (affectionate

insults?) such as “face like a drover’s dog”; “stubby short of a six-pack”; “bludger” and “banana bender”.

It’s not just the Aussies, though. A lot of people wouldn’t dream of big-noting themselves. Or, come to think of it, big-noting anyone else either. What is it with people and their penny-pinching attitude to compliments? The world seems awash with opinion and critique, with precious little credit given where it’s long overdue.

I may not be famous for self-effacement, but I am renowned for dishing out praise. And why not, if it’s well deserved? “It is a sign of a creeping inner death when we no longer can praise the living,” wrote US philosopher Eric Hoffer. This reminds me how people are often heaped with praise once they’re dead – yet, sadly, frequently ignored, overlooked or taken for granted when still alive.

Obituaries, more than anything, tend to focus on the positive. Why can’t we do that when we’re all upright and breathing?

“Oh, she knows I love her, I don’t have to tell her,” your friend’s husband will say when you try to explain why his wife is feeling like a parched plant. *Um, no, Roger, you don’t get it. Your wife needs to hear those words – and she needs to hear them coming out of your mouth. And while you’re at it, could you describe in detail at least a dozen different ways that you love her?*

There should be classes for people to learn how to praise. They could start small, stating the bleeding obvious, like