CONNECTIONS

Think Positive, Be Personable

Remembering who and what you value can make you more socially confident

Does mingling at parties make you nervous? You don’t need to hide behind a floor lamp; instead, remind yourself of what matters in life. Reflecting on what you value, such as friends or religious beliefs, can help you socialize, even if you’re usually insecure around others, according to new research published in Psychological Science.

In the study, participants wrote about their most or least important values. Writing about top values—a form of self-affirmation—boosted socially insecure people’s confidence and behavior. Some participants felt less uptight as much as two months later, says co-researcher Christine Logel, Ph.D., a social psychologist at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. Conversely, writing about less important values had zero effect.

But now that you’re tempted to write down your values—as the study participants did—here’s some advice: Don’t do it. Participants didn’t know the exercise might boost their self-confidence, but you would know and could, thus, expect too much…and end up feeling worse. “The takeaway of our research is that we have different parts of ourselves we can draw on when we need to,” Logel says. So just focus on something good, and feel free to carry a memento of it. That’s what Logel does: Her key chain reads SISTERS, to remind her of her siblings’ support. —Tina Adler

Should Decisions Go Her Way...or His?

Why men and women disagree when they’re under stress

As if men and women didn’t have enough differences, here’s another: When making decisions, we respond to pressure differently. Stressed men tend to move quickly, especially to obtain rewards—such as earning money on investments—whereas stressed women tend to take their time, a new study from the University of Southern California finds. “This could create conflict by making it difficult to come to a consensus,” says lead researcher Nichole Lighthall. But if we know why we’re different, she adds, we may find it easier to cope.

So how should a man respond if his female colleague wants to delay a big project? And what should a wife do when her husband insists they book that trip right now? Differing perspectives let you consider more options, but you shouldn’t make joint decisions when feeling strained, Lighthall says. “Men and women in our studies made decisions in a similar way under nonstressed conditions—they differed significantly only under stress,” she adds. Her advice: Since stress is what makes us decide differently, make the final call when you’re calm. —Leslie Quander Wooldridge