

on my mind

How Confident Women Are Made, Not Born

By Carole Radziwill

A funny thing happened on the way to the finish line. I went in search of self-esteem but instead found self-acceptance.

Last October, I ran the New York City Marathon—an admirable achievement for anyone, especially me, a woman who has happily and consistently sidestepped gyms, exercise, and sports bras. It wasn't a bucket-list item or a lifelong dream. In fact, pounding pavement for a random number of miles ran counterintuitive to everything I believed in. Namely, napping.

Apart from the exercise avoidance, my life up to this point was a carefully targeted series of high-achieving goals. It started in early childhood when I earned all my Girl Scout badges in one year. It continued when, at age 14, I worked my way up from cash-register girl to the customer-service department—practically management—at a store in my

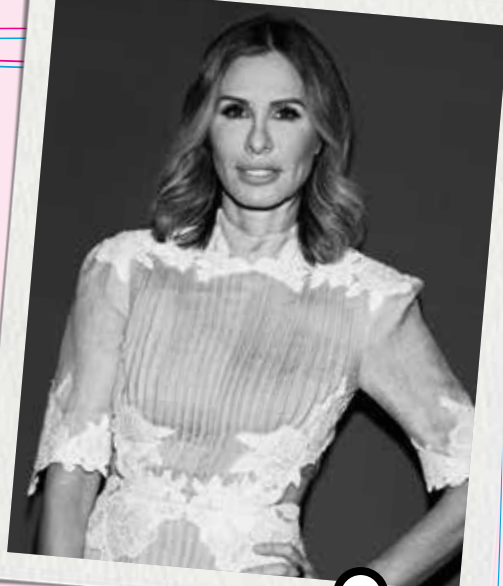
hometown. This habit stuck through college, when I went to work for Peter Jennings, the top news anchor at the time—never mind, I had no experience, no connections, and only a vague idea of world events. I set high objectives and worked hard to reach them. Each time I accomplished something I set out to do, I felt that rewarding hit of self-esteem. And I've believed that the reserve I have amassed from all those hits has served me well in my current occupation as a cast member on *The Real Housewives of New York*, where an unforthcoming party invitation can send one into a spiral of self-doubt.

It wasn't until I crossed the marathon finish line at 6 hours, 42 minutes, and 6 seconds (let's be honest, had I walked the entire length, I may have finished more quickly) that I began to question the very idea of self-esteem—or at least the eager way I went about pursuing it.

Yes, I'm proud of my accomplishment, but I came to realize that pinning my self-worth on completing a run that a year ago I would have thought pointless was absurd. Self-esteem isn't an emotion; it's not a hormone we are born with or a chemical, like serotonin or

dopamine, that can be regulated with a pill. It's a cognitive process that strains to access our self-worth. How much wiser would it be to strive for self-acceptance instead? Self-acceptance doesn't feed off lofty achievements or accolades to pump us up—it is simply the state of feeling content with who you are...or who you are slowly, thoughtfully evolving into.

Admittedly, it's hard to just passively accept yourself—at least for me. So I've learned that setting micro goals and achieving them is a saner path to cultivating confidence and self-satisfaction. The small but meaningful triumphs we have each day—getting to the gym, remembering a friend's birthday, solving a problem for a coworker, not texting your ex—when no one is cheering us on are perhaps more important to loving ourselves than those bigger and rarer wins. Even if you're the only one clapping when you cross the finish line.



Radziwill is a best-selling author and a star of the *RHONY* on Bravo.

