

## 1 - Feeling Good about Yourself

*The thing that becomes true about you is the thing you think most often.*

- Kenny Werner, *Effortless Mastery*

The other day a student walked into my studio, plunked herself down on the bench, and stated, “I’ve decided that I’ll never be good at playing the piano and I should just quit, because I’m wasting my time.” It was true that she was not doing well. She was a beginner, an eighteen-year-old college student, only two months into lessons, and had been timid and uncertain from the start.

As I thought about what to say to her, I reviewed her lessons in my mind. The interesting thing was that it was not her playing that was really so bad, it was how she *felt* about her playing that was bad. Her lack of self-confidence was apparent in every note she played. It was clearly time to address this.

“Sandy,” I said, “May I be totally honest with you?” She nodded. “Your problem is the way you’re approaching the music. Your attitude. I’ll bet when you sit down to practice, you think to yourself, ‘I’ll never be very good at this,’ or ‘I don’t have any talent,’ don’t you?”

She looked at me as though I was a mind reader. “How did you know that?”

“Because it shows in your playing,” I responded. “Describe your practice to me.”

“Well, usually my boyfriend is there, too, and he makes faces when I make a mistake. If my Dad’s home, he hollers at me from the next room when I make a mistake.”

I stared at her, aghast at the extent of people’s insensitivity.

“No, no, no,” I said. “You are *not* allowed to practice that way this week. First of all, you must practice alone. No one can focus on practicing if there’s someone close by criticizing. It’s distracting. And in your case, they are only reinforcing your negative feelings about yourself. Second, I want you to give yourself different messages when you sit down to practice. If you keep telling yourself that you’re a failure, it will be true. Don’t you see what you’re doing? You’re not just practicing your lesson; *you’re practicing feeling bad about yourself.*”

She stared at me, surprised. “I never thought about it that way.”

“I want you to practice feeling good about yourself. Say things like, ‘I can do this,’ and ‘If I just work hard I know I’ll improve,’ and ‘I’m so glad I’m finally doing this.’”

She looked at me skeptically, “Well, okay.”

When she returned the following week, before she began to play I asked if she had practiced her attitude. She beamed at me and said, “Yes, and I managed to practice alone every time but once!” She was eager to play her lesson for me and show me what she had accomplished. It was much better. Not only did she play her assignments well, but she played them with self-confidence.

Most of us have been giving ourselves negative messages for years. It stands to reason that permanent change takes time, too. However, you can see the results of positive messages almost instantly, and each time you reinforce it, you will believe it more fully.



**Feeling good about yourself takes practice.**