



The 12 Commandments of Sisterhood

I am a firm believer in women owning their lives and the direction those lives take, without the least bit of regard for what pleases men, what men like, what men want, or of what men might say. I advocate that women throw off any social conventions which have been designed to "keep women in their place" -- below men. Refusing to be dependent on men for their emotional health, and having the confidence to choose the direction their life takes, independent of what men approve of is a struggle for many women, especially African American women due to the influence of religion on black culture.

However, a key component to feeling empowered is to think independently and of self. To me this thought process should be an integral component, a solid cornerstone of the Black Women's Empowerment movement. After all, as long as one needs validation from others, or requires acknowledgement and approval from others to feel okay, one will never feel whole or complete or good enough. Others cannot GIVE you happiness, confidence or self-esteem -- those are things you must provide for and to yourself. True empowerment will be achieved by following these 12 commandments of sisterhood:

1. **Take Care of Self.** Though others are important to me, I will give myself permission to make myself, my peace of mind, and my needs a priority. My spirit, mind and body are precious things that I will protect from negative images and thoughts that make me feel badly about myself as a black woman. I will reject all words, writings, media and music which attempts to discount, shame or humiliate me as a black woman. Instead, I will focus only on the persons, places and things that bring me joy and happiness.
2. **Enrich Our Existence.** I will center my efforts around improving my life and the lives of my Sistahs by focusing on artistic endeavors and professional achievements, establishing financial stability for myself and my offspring, and the acquisition of education and skills in demand.
3. **Develop a Global Approach.** I will expand my horizons with travel. I will acquire a passport and use it. In preparation for this journey, I will learn at least one foreign language well enough to use it to communicate with the natives when I go abroad.
4. **Embrace My Power.** I will take back the power I have given to men to judge, validate or condemn me as a black woman. I will not ask for their cooperation or permission; I will take it because it is mine to take.

5. **Demand My Place in the Sun.** I will reject all cultural norms which limit my equity in society, and the status quo attitudes which place women, especially black women, in a position of inferiority to men.
6. **Seek the Best in Myself and Others.** I will help and support my fellow black women, striving to uplift, advance, encourage, enhance the lives of, and look out for the well being of one another. I will lovingly help guide those who have taken missteps back to the correct path, because I seek the best for her as I do myself.
7. **Speak Positivity into the Universe.** I will eliminate any and all attitudes which prohibit sharing of information or assistance to fellow Sistahs by only speaking positive things into the lives of others. When my Sistahs are successful, so am I.
8. **Respect My Body and Womb.** I will care for the precious gift I have been given of a healthy body by eating well, resting, exercising, and selectively sharing my sexuality and fertility only with men that meet my moral standards and values, and for whom reciprocity is a mandatory.
9. **Protect and Support Our Girls.** I will embrace, educate and protect young black girls from predators or detractors, helping them to develop to the maximum of their ability with high self esteem and the confidence that they can be and do anything they imagine.
10. **Become a Fierce Army.** I will join forces with other black women to fight racist and sexist stereotypes which in any way denigrate or disrespect black womanhood. I will take responsibility for leading this fight and avoid sharing, duplicating, or spreading images or messages which will unnecessarily injure the spirits of my Sistahs.
11. **Share My Joy.** I will acknowledge and affirm other black women for their achievements, beauty, skills and goals. I will also validate myself daily, and immediately turn off the negative voices in my head that tell me I am not enough.
12. **Teach and Learn.** I will do these things as a teacher/sister/friend with and for any black woman willing to listen and learn, regardless of her age, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, educational level, or cultural background. I will in turn open my mind to learn from those with wisdom and experiences to share with me.

The only way out of the mental and emotional hole black women are in is to join hands and pull each other up. I think these 12 Commandments of Sisterhood is a great starting point.



Veteran social researcher, advice columnist and author Deborah Cooper is the visionary creator of AskHeartBeat.Com. Launched in 1997, Ask HeartBeat! was the first site on the web to focus on black, interracial and intercultural romantic relationships. Deborah is the author of four books, including the hilariously funny, award winning dating guides *Sucka Free Love! How to Avoid Dating the Dumb, the Deceitful, the Dastardly, the Dysfunctional & the Deranged* and *The 24 Types of Suckas to Avoid*. Deborah is best known for the controversial article that launched national dialogue on black churches, black women and the prosperity doctrine: "The Black Church: How Black Churches Keep African American Women Single & Lonely." The book which followed a year later, *The Black Church: Where Women Pray and Men Prey*, took the conversation a step deeper. Over the course of her 20-year career as an online columnist, Deborah has penned thousands of answers to dating advice questions, and more than 400 articles on modern society and culture, fitness, health and nutrition, natural hair care, black America, and relationships. Read her works on SurvivingDating.Com, AskHeartBeat.Com, YourNaturalHair.Com, and Examiner.Com. Connect with Deborah on Facebook, or follow her on Twitter at @msheartbeat.