

Soar with Confidence

Midgie Thompson



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1 Introduction

The purpose of this book is to help you understand more about what confidence is and provide an array of tools, techniques and strategies to help you boost your confidence levels. Oftentimes individuals may feel more confident in one area of their life and less confident in others. This is normal and you can strengthen your sense of confidence in those less-than-confident areas so that you soar with unshakeable confidence in all areas of your life.

Let us look at an example to start with. Many of us have seen, in all walks of life, situations in which two people are equally talented, experienced and able, yet one succeeds and one fails. It is most dramatic in the case of sports performance where two athletes of equal calibre compete for that top spot or that gold medal. In a work area, you can often see one person's career progress while the other remains relatively stagnant, even though they graduated with the same degree and have the same skills and knowledge.

So, what is the difference between these individuals? What is the difference that *makes the difference* between the person who succeeds and flourishes, and the person who fails or struggles?

The difference that makes the difference is their mindset, and their levels of confidence in themselves and their abilities. Self-confidence is based on your judgement of your capabilities to succeed at the task at hand, to be able to do something or achieve something, regardless of what that "something" is. Although many people might view self-confidence as an inherent trait that people either have or do not have, in reality, it is a skill that can be developed, practiced and strengthened for use in all areas of your life. If you examine all great successful individuals, be that in business, in sports or in life; their levels of confidence may not have always been there and not always have been that strong. More often than not, it came with time, with experience, with practice and with the self-belief that they could achieve what they wanted to achieve.

You might look at others and think they are confident simply because of their success and achievements. Although someone appears to be confident because of the way they walk and talk, or perhaps because of how successful they are, they might actually not feel that confident. They might simply be "acting as though" they have the confidence yet do not genuinely feel it or believe it. The reality is probably that they do indeed have confidence in some areas of their lives yet not in other areas.

Take a moment right now to think of confident people you know. What makes you believe that they are confident? What sorts of things do they do? What do they say? How do they behave and how do they interact with others?

These might all be external factors that you can see and be evidence that, to you, they are confident. These individuals might be successful in what they are doing; they might stand very tall, with broad shoulders, and keep good eye contact. Maybe they have a strong voice, speak clearly and are positive about what they have just done.

It is almost like an upward spiral; the more confident you are, the better you will perform. The better you perform; the more you will succeed. Whether it is in business, in sport or in life, confidence can permeate into every area of your life. Oftentimes, confident people are clear on their outcomes; they know what it will take to get there, they are focused on the necessary actions and they get there. There may be a few detours, delays or setbacks, yet they continue and get there in the end.

Even with all that success and achievement, it is important to note that confidence is not something you are just born with. Confidence is more often nurtured and developed over time and grows with each experience. So, it is something that can be practiced and developed by everyone, including you.

Whether you want to develop and strengthen your own confidence in a particular area of your life or would like to help a colleague, an employee or a friend, this book will provide many tools, techniques and strategies specifically for growing confidence. Many of these are based on neuro linguistic programming (NLP) approaches. Richard Bandler and John Grinder initially developed NLP in the early 1970s. The name NLP, according to O'Connor (2001) came from the three areas it brings together:

- neurology – related to the mind and how we think
- linguistics – related to how we use language and how it affects us
- programming – related to how we sequence our actions to achieve our goals

In other words, the language we use affects how we behave and we often behave, and react, in an automatic manner without thinking. Therefore, by becoming more aware of our language, we can help ourselves and boost our confidence levels.

To help build solid foundations, you will firstly look at what confidence is, and what it is not, and how it might show up in your life. We then move on to taking a look at your own confidence levels and how they might be influencing and impacting on your life. Armed with this insight, you will then look at several tools, techniques and strategies that you can play around with to help you boost your confidence levels in areas where you might need them the most.

2 The Foundations

Before we get into developing self-confidence in ourselves and in others, it is important to ensure that we have the same understanding of what we are talking about. Oftentimes, the terms self-confidence, self-esteem and self-belief are used interchangeably. Yet there are differences between these three. So, let us explore the definitions of these terms and create a better understanding of what confidence is, before we go on to create a solid foundation upon which to build.

2.1 Definitions

Confidence is defined, according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2013), as having the “feeling or belief that one can have faith in or rely on someone or something”. It is the “state of feeling certain about the truth of something or a feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of one’s own abilities or qualities”. It also defines confidence as “the telling of private matters or secrets with mutual trust”. Added to this, Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) suggest that this judgement on whether you can or cannot do something is based on weighing up all your capabilities, including your abilities, your motivation and all your resources, against the requirements of the task at hand.

In other words, confidence is about having the feeling and belief that you can do something based on your skills, knowledge and capabilities. For example, an individual may be confident in their ability to complete a particular task at work because they have done it before and know they can do it again.

Self-esteem, according to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2013), is defined as “confidence in one’s own worth or abilities”. The *Cambridge Dictionary* online (2013) similarly defines self-esteem as the “belief and confidence in one’s own abilities and value.” Effectively, it is the value that you place on your abilities and yourself. Self-esteem touches on a person’s sense of their own worth and encompasses their beliefs and emotions related to a given situation.

Since beliefs touch on both self-esteem and self-confidence, let us look at the definition of self-belief. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* online (2013), self-belief is a “trust in one’s abilities”. It is also referred to as self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations”. Effectively, it is one’s belief about whether they will or will not be able to do and succeed in a given situation or task. Your self-belief will influence how you perceive, act and react to situations.

2.2 What Confidence is

Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) point out that self-confidence is based on perceptions of one's own capabilities and what the task requires. However, our perception of ourselves may be distorted and may not be accurate. Sometimes our self-confidence is not based on the skills to do the task or on the task requirements. Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) also make it quite clear that self-confidence is task-specific and a person may be confident doing a particular task or in a particular area of their lives, yet not in others. They stress the point that self-confidence is something that can be changed.

Self-confidence can be changed, just like your mindset, your attitude and your approach to what you do. According to Dweck (2006) who explored the mindset of individuals, a person with a growth mindset will most likely have greater confidence within themselves and their abilities. A person with a fixed mindset, on the other hand, may be somewhat more pessimistic. A growth mindset is open to take on new challenges and welcomes feedback as an opportunity to grow, develop and learn even more. A fixed mindset believes that nothing can change and sees feedback as a criticism of what they have done. A growth mindset is generally attributed to someone who is more confident and positive, whereas a fixed mindset may be attributed to someone who lacks confidence and may be pessimistic about their outcomes.

Craig (2007) summarised the differences between Dweck's fixed mindset and a growth mindset as follows:

Belief of growth mindset	Belief of fixed mindset
Ability and many personal characteristics are malleable.	Ability and many personal characteristics are fixed by nature.
Failure, mistakes and criticism can be helpful as they help you learn and improve.	Failure, mistakes and criticism must be avoided at all costs as they reveal bad things about you.
People improve through effort and hard work.	It is riskier to try and fail than not try at all.
It is not competition with others that is most important – it is self-improvement.	If you have to work hard it shows that you are not a "natural".
	You must compete with others to prove that you are intelligence and have good qualities.
	Confidence is fragile and so has to be protected.

Your attitude and approach towards a given task will certainly influence your confidence to actually do the task. Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) have come up with a “Self-Confidence Formula” that is based on your perceived capability minus the perceived task requirements. In other words, how challenging or difficult a task is and how able are you to achieve that task. Do you have the skills, experience and knowledge to complete the task with ease or with difficulty? Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) conclude that self-confidence develops with reinforcement. Each time an individual completes a task well, they feel good about their achievement and this helps them feel good about themselves. The next time they have a similar task, they can call upon how they handled and managed the previous one and draw upon their knowledge as to the best way to handle the new task. Conversely, if the individual did not have any previous experience, they might be less confident in their ability to deal with and achieve the new task. They may hesitate, question and refrain from going ahead and pursuing the new task for fear of making mistakes or not succeeding.

You may have heard the expression “success breeds success” before. This is much like confidence. Confidence breeds more confidence. Just like an athlete goes to the gym and strengthens the muscles in their body with consistent attention and action, you can also strengthen your confidence with consistent attention and action. The more self-confidence someone has in their abilities, the more likely it is that they will set bigger, more challenging, goals or take bigger risks. As a result of their confidence, these individuals are likely to apply greater effort in achieving the goal or task, which generates better results and success. Conversely, someone with lower confidence levels would possibly pick a goal or task that is less than challenging in order to stay safe and within their comfort zone. They might also apply less effort and energy to the outcome and their results would reflect that. If you believe you can achieve what you want to achieve and you have an optimistic attitude towards things, you will grow your confidence levels. It is often the confident and positive attitude that employers look for, in addition to the hard skills required to do the job.

My definition of confidence is the belief in yourself that you can do what you want to do; it is the self-assurance that you are capable and prepared to take on the task or challenge you have set yourself for. Confidence stems from your own experiences and your perception of how you measure up against your own “measures of success”. These “measures of success” stem from your own definition of what success means to you, rather than how other people define it for you.

People with confidence have a “can do” attitude and focus on the positives. They look for something positive, even when there do not seem to be many positives. A confident athlete will be calm and assured that they have done the training they needed to do and know they will do the best they can on the day, regardless of the outcome. They can be quietly confident that they can do the job at hand. A confident businessperson will also have those same traits and characteristics. Overall, a confident person will admit when they make mistakes and will learn from them. Someone who is not so confident may beat themselves up for “not being good enough” and not entertain what they could do differently the next time.

Effectively, confidence is a by-product of things you do to reaffirm that you can do something and do it well. Much like having good health is a by-product of eating well, drinking sufficient fluids, getting enough sleep, exercising and handling stress effectively. Confidence is a by-product of setting goals and targets, taking action, getting support, feedback, making adjustments and keeping on going.

You can also give the impression of being confident. Whether a person actually feels confident or not, they may look confident from the outside. Think about a time when you were speaking with someone who had their shoulders hunched over, their eyes downcast and spoke in a low voice. Did they give you the impression they were confident? Most likely not! However, if you think of speaking with a person who stood tall and straight, who had good eye contact and spoke with a clear strong voice, you might make the assumption that they were confident. Even if they were not feeling confident, they were acting as if they were confident!

Many factors and influences contribute towards your levels of confidence in what you do. This might include your family, friends, coaches, teachers, colleagues and bosses, among so many more. Anyone who may have had an impact, either directly or indirectly, on your development as a person will influence how high or low your confidence levels are. You develop your confidence based on feedback – be that from what you do and the results you achieve or what others say to you. Yet confidence also comes from yourself, your expectations and your viewpoint. Having confidence in yourself contributes to you feeling good about what you are about to do, to you having the expectation that you can perform up to your current ability and to achieve what you are setting out to achieve.



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Take, for example, when you start a new job. Your confidence levels may not be very high because you do not know what to do or how to do it. You might feel intimidated by others on the team because they have more experience than you, and you might even think of them as better than you. You might not know the best way to complete some of the tasks you need to do and all this uncertainty and insecurity may contribute to a lack of confidence. Can you remember your first job and what it felt like? Or maybe you have job experience yet are moving to a new job, a new company or even the same type of job in a new sector. How confident were you then?

Now, what might be the difference if you started a new job within the same firm? Perhaps you got a promotion to another department or took on new responsibilities. How did you feel?

Starting a new job within the same firm may not have seemed as scary or daunting to you because you were already familiar with the culture and the company. Whereas, if you started with a new company, everything from the way they do things to the office politics would seem to be different. Your confidence levels may differ from when things are familiar to when they are all new.

Now, take another example where you have been doing a particular job for quite some time. You know how to do what is required, you know the people and you know what is expected. You might even take some new employee under your wing, give them encouragement and give them tips and hints based on your experiences. This certainty of what you are doing demonstrates a confident you.

Yet, how can you actually “see” confidence, when confidence is more like an internal feeling and a mindset about what you are going to do? There are indeed certain behaviours, attitudes and approaches that confident people typically exhibit. According to Craig (2007, p. 5), those who are confident will find it easier to:

- Try new things and be more open to learning
- Relish challenging tasks
- Risk making mistakes
- Express themselves as individuals
- Say they don't understand and ask for help
- Concentrate and not be sidetracked by fear of failure

Other characteristics and traits of a confident person include that they:

- View difficult situations as challenging rather than problematic
- Recover from setbacks and disappointments, and carry on
- Have a positive attitude and approach to most tasks
- Focus on the positives and what they do have, rather than any lack or deficiency
- Have a strong and assertive body language; they stand tall, hold their head high, make good eye contact
- They use positive and assertive language
- Encourage others and welcome team work rather than viewing it as competition

2.3 What Confidence is Not

I thought it was important in this book on confidence to take a look at what confidence is not. The reason for this is that, during the numerous workshops I have run, when I have asked participants about the traits, behaviours and characteristics of confident people, some have said that people who have lots of confidence are arrogant, loud, brash and ‘in your face’. Effectively, they see people who have high levels of confidence as arrogant!

In fact, arrogance is usually a sign of lack of self-confidence. The more arrogant someone is, the more they lack confidence. Bragging about one’s own achievements also indicates a lack of confidence.

There is a fine balance between acknowledging your achievements and being proud of having done all that you have done, versus bragging. Individuals who need to brag about their achievements and shout out what they have done do so out of wanting recognition and approval. They are generally not accepting of what they have done nor able to acknowledge what they have achieved. They want others to tell them how great and fantastic they are. They need this external approval to give themselves a confidence boost.

People who are arrogant generally look down on others as though they are “less than” themselves where there is no real basis or evidence about that. They might even bully or make comments to put others down or make them feel small in order to make themselves feel big. Yet, they make no effort to build themselves up or do something to boost their own sense of self.

Rather than having an internal contentment about doing well, they seek external input to help them feel good about themselves. Such external comments and acknowledgement are not within their control. Therefore, the person continually seeks more and more external approval in order to simply feel good about himself.

When you see someone who is arrogant or brags about their achievements, perhaps consider whether this is true confidence or whether it is masking their own insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.

2.4 How Confidence Might Appear

Just to help you have a greater appreciation of how your confidence can affect your performance abilities, let us take a look at how this might show up when you are about to perform – be that in a business, sporting or personal area. Common indicators of a person with a lack of confidence include:

- They are never fully prepared – they could always do with another week or match under their belt before they are ready
- They are scared of taking a risk in case they fail
- They think negatively and doubt their own talents and ability
- They think and feel that they are not good enough
- They often lose concentration and do not focus on the job at hand
- They do not have a game plan or they have one however do not carry it out

Effectively, people who are confident are more likely to try new things and be more open to learning, relish challenging tasks and even rise to whatever challenges they are presented with. They are willing to take risks, make mistakes and then learn from them. A confident person is able to ask for help when they do not understand things and is resilient therefore able to bounce back more easily after setbacks.

Having taken a look at what confidence means and how it might be demonstrated, let us now take a look at your own confidence levels in all areas of your life.

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3 Understanding Confidence

As we have said before, some individuals have lots of confidence in one area of their lives yet not in others. Some individuals may appear confident when in reality they do not feel confident. So, let us explore your own confidence in all areas of your life to help you strengthen it in all. Take a moment now to reflect on your own confidence levels. Where in your life do you feel confident within yourself and with your abilities? Where in your life do you feel less confident? We will explore this further later in the chapter, yet for now, I just want you to have a few thoughts about your own confidence levels.

Before we start exploring your confidence levels, it is important to point out that individuals who are confident still have doubts, fears and insecurities about what they are about to do. Much like Jeffers's (1993) book, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, confident people have the same fears, yet they carry on. They do not berate themselves for poor performance nor do they compare themselves with others. They simply focus on themselves and what they can do to be at their best.

There will always be people who are better than them just as there will always be people who are not. So, rather than dwell on their "lack of" in comparison with others, they focus on what they do have and what they *can* do. They also often have a mindset of continuous improvement in order to be even better the next time.

Overall, the negative and pessimistic mindset will not miraculously disappear over time. What is likely however is that negative mindsets will gradually turn into positives. This is along the lines of what Dweck (2006) suggests with the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset.

Bearing in mind that even confident people have fears and insecurities, let us explore your current levels of confidence in more depth.

3.1 Self-Assessment Test to Determine own Confidence Levels

With measuring confidence levels, your rating will be subjective. It is your interpretation and your sense of whether you feel confident or not in regards to different areas of your life. Yet saying that, there is a self-esteem scale, developed by Rosenberg (1965), and that is still widely used today. A sense of self is tied closely to a sense of confidence. The Rosenberg scale is based on questions that you answer with "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree" or "strongly disagree". You then give each rating a score and the total score gives you an overall indication of level of self-esteem.

For each statement below, tick the box to indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plan with others.				
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.				
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.				
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people				
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.				
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.				
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.				
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself				
9. I certainly feel useless at times.				
10. At times, I think I am no good at all.				

To calculate the scores, for items 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7, give points based on:

Strongly agree = 3

Agree = 2

Disagree = 1

Strongly disagree = 0

To calculate the score for items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10, give the following points:

Strongly agree = 0

Agree = 1

Disagree = 2

Strongly disagree = 3

Now, total up your score for all 10 questions.

Scores between 15 and 25 are considered within the normal self-esteem range whereas score below 15 suggest low self-esteem.

Whenever you do any self-assessment like this one, it is important to recognise that it reflects how you are feeling and what your mindset is at that point in time. If you were to complete the self-assessment another day, you might score things somewhat differently depending on how you feel on the day, what is going on with you and what is going on in your life. It is a snapshot for that moment in time.

Another way to “measure” your confidence levels is to look at different areas of your life and give a subjective rating, say on a scale of 1 to 10, as to how confident you feel.

3.2 Exploring Different Areas in Your Life

The subjective evaluation of your confidence levels will be unique to you. It is you measuring how confident you feel within yourself, and this does not compare to others. To start this evaluation, take a moment to list all the different roles and responsibilities you have in all areas of your life. This might include such things as:

- Family roles such as mother / father, sister / brother, daughter / son, aunt / uncle
- Work-related roles such as employee reporting to someone higher up. For example, boss / manager / team leader looking after and supervising others, colleague and peer, business contact or connection; and particular tasks such as doing a presentation for work or writing a report
- Outside roles including member as a student (whether formal or casual environment), sports club, hobbies for which you participate in a group, local community groups or church

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Once you have listed all the different roles and tasks, give a rating as to your sense of confidence levels on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10 being high levels of confidence.

After you have rated each area of your life, what sort of picture does that paint? Which, if any, areas would you like to focus on to further develop your confidence levels? Remember, not everyone has high levels of confidence in all areas of their lives. The difference is whether it actually stops them from doing what they want to do or not.

Also, sometimes people focus on the negatives and dismiss the positives. They might only see the areas where they lack confidence and somehow be blinded by the areas where they are in fact confident within themselves. These broad-brush generalizations can be detrimental to one's overall sense of confidence with themselves. So, clarifying the areas where you do have confidence is important.

The reasons why some individuals experience low levels of self-confidence might be due to several factors. It could be due to excessive criticism from a trusted parent, teacher or even boss. Sometimes the messages you heard as a child impact on how confident you feel today. Yet, as an adult, you can choose to become more aware of what has happened in the past and the negative messages you may have heard and to see and understand these messages for what they are, other people's issues. Positively reframing these messages will help you feel better about yourself and more confident within yourself.

If you think back to some of your earlier experiences in life, what sorts of messages did you hear? What were the common sayings in your family about you, your behaviour and your abilities? Even if your experiences were poor, unhelpful or unhealthy, you can choose whether you still want to listen to them or discard them and change. A self-help guide from the NHS Dumfries and Galloway (undated) suggests asking yourself the following questions:

- How important is it for me to change and to develop a better view of myself?
- Why is it unimportant to me?
- Why is it important to me?
- What is your low self-esteem affecting and in what way?
- What do you predict will happen if you don't change?
- What do you predict will happen if you do change?
- Is there anything at risk if you do change?
- Is there anything at risk if you don't change?

It is important here to say that this book, *Soar with Confidence*, is meant as a support to help you build your levels of self-confidence; it not meant as a replacement for medical or professional support. It is up to you to decide whether this book helps you and whether you can implement the suggestions on your own, or whether you need outside support to help you address things from your past to help you move forward.

At this stage, we are only asking you to look at yourself and identify where you might have more confidence and where you might have less confidence. We will suggest ideas and strategies to boost your confidence levels in Chapter 4 – Building Confidence.

3.3 Identifying How You Demonstrate Confidence

Although individuals will demonstrate their confidence, or lack thereof, in their own unique way, people do generally follow a similar pattern. Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) say that those individuals with greater self-confidence work harder and keep at the task in order to achieve the results even when they encounter problems and difficulties. Individuals who are self-confident perceive challenges as opportunities to rise up and do not see them with fear or as a threat. Their very nature is able to deal with the risk of being wrong and to proceed with calculated risks. Hollenbeck and Hall (2004, p. 259) say, “Effective performance typically demands a cool head and steady hand.” Therefore, those with higher levels of self-confidence are better able to deal with new, difficult or challenging situations because they are able to see things in a more rational and non-threatening manner and are more confident that they will be able to deal with situations as and when they arise. This correlates to Dweck’s (2006) growth mindset and the approach that individuals take towards what they do in a more positive, resourceful and resilient manner.

Hollenbeck and Hall (2004, p. 260) then go on to say that confident people actually think differently. In particular, confident people:

- Use their analytical thinking abilities more effectively in finding solutions
- Set higher goals than less confident people, and those goals spur them to better performance
- Make different choices of working associates, of projects, of the challenges they face

This is along the same lines as the *TFAR* model that is often used by coaches with their clients whereby *thoughts* influence *feelings* and this impacts on *actions*, and actions influence *results*. For example, if you think something is going to be difficult, it most likely makes you feel hesitant about doing it for fear of not getting it right, not knowing what or how to do it or whatever else. These feelings might then influence how you take action – either whole-heartedly, with a sense of determination or purpose, or hesitantly and tentatively. In the case of the latter, the outcome may not be as successful as it could have been. Equally, the converse is true. If you think something is going to be easy or enjoyable, you are more likely to feel positive about the task at hand, and as a result take action sooner rather than later. The result is that you achieve the results quicker, and quite possibly more successfully, simply because of your mindset.

Now, let us take this example into practice. Say, for instance, you are asked to deliver a presentation to your senior management committee next week. Your initial thoughts may be “oh no, I hate speaking in public and I don’t know what to say. What if I get it wrong?” These thoughts influence how you feel about the presentation and you may start feeling more fearful and doubt whether you can actually do the presentation. These fears and doubts may influence how much action you take. You might procrastinate and put off preparing, you might not practice and get no feedback before the actual presentation. This will impact what you deliver and your results. You might end up delivering a speech that is somewhat disorganised and incoherent, and that does not meet the original aims and objectives of the presentation. You might appear as though you are unconfident and do not know what you are talking about. The result of you thinking, feeling and acting in a fearful and unconfident manner is that the presentation may not be as positive as you might have liked it to be.

Now, let us turn this around and say that you love speaking in public and are excited about the chance to get in front of the senior management committee. You see this as an exciting opportunity to raise your professional profile and possibly open up doors for new projects and promotions. These positive thoughts and feelings will impact on all your preparation and practice, and possibly even lead you to seek feedback before you actually deliver the presentation. The result is that you deliver a slick and well-prepared speech that does meet the aims and objectives of the presentation. You come across as a confident person who knows what they are talking about.



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What you achieve, whether that is in a presentation speech or elsewhere in your life, will be influenced by the thoughts you have surrounding the task, your feelings surrounding doing and achieving the task, and the actions you take.

In regards to public speaking, many people are so afraid of standing up and delivering a presentation to an audience that they avoid it altogether. Some even avoid taking new jobs or accepting promotions because the role involves lots of public speaking. Yet, it is a skill that can be developed like any other skill, and simply by changing your thoughts regarding what the presentation means to you, and with some practice, you can change the results you achieve!

Another example of the *TFAR* model takes a thought that so many people who experience low levels of confidence have had: “I am not good enough”. That one little thought triggers feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and insecurity. In turn, those feelings impact on your actions; you might not express your opinions or views on a situation, you might hold back when you have ideas to contribute, you might put others before yourself and defer to their options and ideas. You might even be overly helpful and never, or rarely, say no to avoid displeasing people even when it is to your own detriment. All of these actions result in not enhancing your self-confidence. Others might view you as an “easy pushover” and take advantage of you; they may regard you as not intelligent or believe that you have nothing of value to contribute. They may even keep on asking you to do things simply because you always say yes. Some people might also assume you are a weak-willed person who has no opinion of their own and can’t stand up for themselves which may leave a target for bullying. All of these results only lower an individual’s sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. It becomes like a vicious downwards spiral whereby self-esteem and confidence just get lower, and lower.

Yet, by taking small steps to boost your self-confidence, by speaking up, setting boundaries for what is and is not acceptable, you do begin to develop greater confidence levels. It does take some practice and at times may feel uncomfortable, as you are stretching your comfort zones, but it’s worth it!

Take a few moments now to reflect on how your thoughts affect your feelings and how that impacts on your actions and your results. Perhaps pick some of the areas in which you have lower levels of confidence; what generally are your thoughts and feelings? If you thought differently, how might that change your feelings and your actions, as well as your results?

You can benefit from monitoring your thoughts to help you remain positive and confident. This helps you to keep things in check, and if the thoughts are not helpful, to change them to something that is more helpful. Thoughts that are more positive have an uplifting effect on your feelings, which helps shift your actions and your results! By becoming more aware and more conscious of checking in with yourself, you can build up your confidence levels by not letting those negative, unhelpful, unsupportive thoughts influence your feelings, your actions and your results for any length of time.

It is important to recognise that, although you might have good levels of confidence, there may be times in life where that takes a dip. Situations such as a job loss, not getting a job promotion or interview, or even the breakdown of a significant relationship can all impact on one's sense of self-esteem and confidence. Even something like illness and injury (particularly in sports-oriented people) can cause a dip in confidence levels because they cannot do what they normally are able to do. The key is to put things into context and see that the dip in confidence levels is situational and not a broad generalization of you as an individual all the time.

Moving on to you and how you demonstrate confidence, think of a time when you felt you had high confidence levels. What were you doing? How were you behaving? What were you thinking and saying to yourself? What else was happening in your life at the time and how were you feeling about it?

Now, think of a time when you did not have confidence levels as high as you wanted. What were you doing? How were you behaving? What were you thinking and saying to yourself? What else was happening in your life at the time and how were you feeling about it?

What differences did you notice between the time when you had high confidence levels and when you had lower confidence levels? What were you doing, saying and thinking differently? Also, was anything major going on elsewhere in your life? How might that have impacted on the situation?

Recognizing the differences between times when you had good strong confidence levels and when you did not will help you to see the differences. With that awareness, you can start making a change.

3.4 Effects on Performance and Motivation

Confidence levels do have a ripple effect on an individual's level of motivation and the outcome of what they do. We have previously looked at the *TFAR* model whereby *thoughts* influence *feelings* which impacts on *actions* which influences *results*. Let's explore that in more detail.

Robinson and Kleiner (1989, p. 5) suggest, "People tend to perform in accordance with their self-perception." It's important to have this healthy self-image, not only on a personal level, it is also for business. Employees need a positive self-image in order to perform effectively and make a more positive contribution to the workplace.

In the workplace, managers need to be aware of how poor or low self-esteem, and therefore confidence, may manifest as this has a detrimental effect on performance and a negative impact on the overall business. Robinson and Kleiner (1989) identify common indicators of poor self-image including:

- Excessive fear of failure. Employees may either avoid doing a particular job because they might feel overwhelmed by the task or fear the possibility of failure and if they fail, it will have a negative impact on their already weak sense of self-esteem.
- Perfectionism. Although having perfectionist tendencies might suggest very high standards, in fact, it masks a lack of confidence and self-belief. Perfectionists generally spend an inordinate amount of time completing a task because of their need to get it “perfect”. Their fear of being “imperfect” can, at times, be overwhelming and debilitating such that, if they can avoid doing the task altogether, they do not risk jeopardizing their sense of self-esteem.
- Lack of assertiveness. Due to their low self-esteem, they rarely speak up and fear rejection if they do, so they avoid the possibility of rejection simply by neither contributing nor speaking up.
- Disavowing achievements. Individuals with low self-esteem often put down their own achievements and find it difficult to accept recognition for a job well done. They do not believe they deserve success or that what they did warrants any praise or admiration.

As you can see, lower levels of confidence impact on every area of an individual’s life. So, whether you are trying to build up your own confidence levels or trying to help an employee build up theirs, the ideas in the following chapter can help.



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4 Building Confidence

The aim of this chapter is to explore different tools, techniques and strategies that individuals and managers can use to build up and strengthen confidence levels. It will provide an array of practical tools and techniques to improve confidence levels. When practiced repeatedly, confidence levels will most certainly increase.

It is important to recognise that everyone is unique and that what works for one person might not work so well for another. The ideas suggested in this chapter can therefore be played with, adjusted or even simply discarded. The key thing to remember is to try things out, see what works for you and make any adjustments as suits you.

Just in case you are wondering, the order in which the tools, techniques and strategies are given is random.

4.1 Summary of Achievements

Much like a CV of all your job experiences, you could write a CV of all your successes and achievements. This could then be used as a reminder to boost your sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Take some time now to write down all your achievements, all those things that you have done and are proud of. These can be anything, big or small; simply things that help you feel good about yourself. It might be securing a new job promotion, negotiating with a challenging client, delivering a report that impressed your boss. It might be that you did your exercise today when you really didn't feel like going to the gym or you stuck to your healthy eating plan so that you are on target to achieve your ideal weight. Perhaps you might include a particular conversation you had with someone that went well. Write down everything you can think of, and keep on going as more evidence will inevitably pop up.

Thompson (2013) suggests looking for occasions on which you stretched yourself and for which you can give yourself a pat on the back. This might include small achievements, minute details that make a difference or some other aspect for which you can tell yourself "well done"!

Now, how does it feel as you recall the details of those achievements? I imagine it gives you a boost and a lift just thinking about all of them.

So now, whenever you want a confidence boost, as if you were giving yourself an injection of pure confidence, read through your list again. Simply by re-reading your list and feeling that sense of confidence at all that you have done will help you to embark on something else with all those same feelings of confidence. Reminding yourself of the achievements and reminding yourself of how you felt can give you a boost that carries over to the new task you are about to undertake.

Take as an example that you are about to go for a job interview and are feeling somewhat nervous. By recalling these past achievements and feel that good confidence, you will most likely go into the interview feeling a lot more confident. That confidence will come through in how you respond in the interview and help you to be the best you can!

You can continue to add to this resume of achievements each day if you like. This will give you a daily dose of “confidence”. Over time, you will improve your overall levels of confidence because each and every day you are acknowledging things that you have done. And remember, they do not have to be major achievements; they could be as small as remaining calm when a colleague irritated you or when dealing with a difficult customer.

Some people approach this resume of achievements as their own personal success journal. It proves to be a constant reminder of all the things that make you feel good about yourself. Regardless of what you are about to embark upon and undertake, this boost of confidence will help lift you up and help you do what needs to be done.

Over time, you may notice that indeed your confidence is growing stronger and stronger with this repeated focus and attention to even the baby steps you take.

4.2 Feel It and Believe It

If you struggle to come up with concrete and specific examples of when you felt good about yourself and confident within yourself, there are two approaches to help you build a sense of confidence to feel it and then believe it.

Take a moment to imagine that you do have great levels of confidence. Perhaps you are standing that bit taller, speaking out with more conviction and pursuing those things you would only have toyed with before. Imagine how it feels in the body when you have such great levels of confidence. Imagine how you would stand, imagine how your body posture would be and how your eye contact would be. Imagine how your voice would sound with all that confidence. Really get into this sense of feeling what confidence is like for future reference so you can call upon this feeling when you want to give yourself a boost.

If that in itself is challenging, another approach is to think about a few people you admire and respect. They could be people you know personally, professionally or simply people that you have heard about in the media. Once you have selected at least three individuals, ask yourself: what behaviours, traits, characteristics and attitudes do they exhibit that tells you they are confident? What sort of things do they do, what sort of things do they say, how do they hold themselves? Next, imagine you adopt and take on as yours those same behaviours, traits, characteristics and attitudes. How does that feel?

With this level of confidence, either from your own experience or imagined; how might you do things differently? Imagine how different things might be for you if you were able to step into this feeling of confidence at any time. Might things go more easily and effortlessly?

By tapping into this feeling of confidence, whether it is real or imagined, you are starting to strengthen that confidence muscle. With repeated workouts, you will strengthen your muscles even more.

4.3 Effective Goal Setting

You have undoubtedly come across goal setting as a way to become more successful. Well, you can use it equally to help build your confidence. Deciding to pursue a challenging goal helps you to stretch your thinking about what is possible and expand your beliefs. Yet, keep this in manageable, bite-sized chunks, so that you can grow your confidence levels one step at a time.

The key to goal setting and confidence building is that you can give yourself a pat on the back when you achieve each goal, and acknowledge an achievement. This helps you feel good about you, which then helps you feel more confident.

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Take, for example, becoming a qualified professional such as an accountant. At first glance, that goal will take many years of hard work and you might not even get there. Yet, if you break down that big scary goal into smaller milestone goals, you can gain a sense of confidence and mastery when you achieve each of those milestone goals.

What small actions can you take each day to give yourself the opportunity to see progress? They might be simply to walk that bit further than you normally do or to eat a smaller portion size or get out and do a short bit of exercise simply to get your body moving. Perhaps your smaller daily goals might be to start a conversation with someone new, however brief the conversation might be, or speak up in a conversation when you might normally remain silent. All these small daily actions are an opportunity to gain a sense of achievement and, ultimately, confidence that you can indeed set goals and achieve them, one step at a time. Why not set a goal to build your confidence?

Another example is securing an important client. Think about all the things you need to do to achieve that end goal. Now, a goal such as this is out of your control to a certain extent because whether they chose to sign or not is the client's decision. What you can do, however, is ensure that you deliver the best possible presentation and develop the best possible relationship that you can. Regardless of whether they sign on as a client or not, you can take time to acknowledge what a good job you did. So, what sorts of things would help you make contact, develop a relationship and deliver an outstanding presentation to secure this client?

When you set goals, consider the long-term objective and then identify smaller, shorter-term goals that act as stepping-stones. Even then, you could have mini-milestones to reach each of those. Focus on the things you can control and focus on being the best you can be.

If you struggle with achieving a big goal, think back to a time when you did achieve a goal. Perhaps it was a goal that you originally thought was not possible; you did not believe you could actually do it, yet in the end, with small, consistent steps, you did. So, how is this situation any different? You can dig deep and draw upon your past successful experiences to tell yourself that if you did it the last time, you can do it again...even if the experiences are completely different. What is key here is the fact that you did not believe you could achieve something and you did, so you can do it again!

4.4 Affirmations and Self Talk

Using positive affirmation and positive self-talk does indeed make a difference to how you feel about yourself and how you act and react to situations.

Let's look at positive self-talk in the first instance. Looking at one particular area in your life where you have confidence levels that are lower than you would like, take a few moments to consider what sorts of things you say to yourself. Do you say, for example, when tackling a big report, "this is going to be tough" or "I don't know where to start or how to tackle it" or "I'm not that creative so I can't come up with something good enough"? With this kind of negative mindset, you are almost creating barriers to your success before you even start!

I encourage you to actually write down all the things you think about yourself when you are about to do a particularly challenging thing. It might sound crazy, yet it is beneficial to actually write down these seemingly random thoughts because thoughts simply come and go through your consciousness, your mind. We often do not pay much attention to them because they float in, and then out. When you actually put them down on paper, you can see more clearly what those thoughts are.

Having written down your thoughts about yourself, let us take a look at them. Take a good hard look at what you have written down. How does it make you feel reading through that list? If the list is full of negative self talk, does it lower your confidence levels in yourself and your abilities? If the list is positive, then that is fantastic! Yet is there any room or space for improvements somewhere?

So, let us turn things around. Take a step back and re-read the same list. Ask yourself, for each negative statement, whether there is any evidence or basis for that statement. If there is not, then tell yourself to let it go. Much like a balloon floating off in the distance, allow that negative thought to drift away. If you believe the statement has some truth, ask yourself, how could I turn it around to something that is more positive and uplifting?

For example, if you say to yourself that you cannot write a good report for your boss, is that true? How do you know it is true? What evidence do you have that says you cannot write a good report for your boss? If you have written good reports in the past, then the chances are that you will be able to do an equally good job. If you are struggling to write a good report, think of where you could go to for some assistance, support or input. Can you get some feedback along the way to ensure that it is good enough?

Rather than allowing yourself to wallow in negative thoughts, turn them around into something more positive, supportive and uplifting. This will help shift your confidence in yourself and your abilities to something more positive.

Now, moving onto positive affirmations. These are personal statements that you can repeat to yourself to give you a boost of confidence. They must start with an "I am..." statement, be in present tense such as "I am smart / good enough" rather than "I will be..." and use positive direct language such as "I am smart" rather than "I am not dumb". Effective goal setting follows the same principles; the goals must be positively stated, in the present tense and forward focused.

Remember the areas you looked at in your life and where you have successes and achievements. What sort of positive statement could you create that could be used as an affirmation for each of these areas?

Examples might include:

- I am a good parent / spouse / sibling to x
- I am a knowledgeable and productive employee who makes a good contribution
- I am a good team member as I always play to the best of my ability

All of these positive affirmations are relatively short sentences that can be easily repeated to yourself each and every day. By repeating these positive statements about yourself to yourself, you will start to believe them and they will give you that boost of confidence.

4.5 Shift Perspectives

Not everyone is successful all the time in all that they do. Having the ability to deal with situations that do not turn out as you would have expected is a critical skill that confident people have developed. Rather than dwelling on the defeats and the mistakes, they channel their energy towards doing things differently the next time. Having confidence in yourself and your abilities is about being able to deal with the disappointments, the failures and the setbacks in a positive manner. This is also sometimes referred to as having emotional resilience.

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Emotional resilience is the ability to bounce back after setbacks and to keep on going. Some adjustments may need to be made or the goal might need to be realigned with what they can now do, yet, emotionally resilient people do keep on going. They see setbacks as an opportunity to improve, to learn and to grow. This is inline with Dweck's (2006) growth mindset.

Think about a recent setback you experienced or a time when you did not achieve the goal you wanted to achieve. Write this down. Next, think about what kinds of feelings surfaced as a result of this experience? What kind of beliefs about you does this result in?

For example, "I failed to deliver that report on time and this causes me to feel disorganized and unable to do my job."

Next, let us turn things around and reframe it into something more positive. So, how could you reframe the situation in a more positive light? How could you explain the result in a manner that helps you to feel better about yourself? What other factors may have contributed towards you not achieving your goal?

When you think of not getting that report done on time, did you have additional tasks asked of you so that you had less time available? Were you organised and had you set sufficient time aside to prepare? Did something urgent come in from an important client that required immediate attention, leaving you without time available to finish the report? Was it a question of organizing your time and your workload with clear boundaries as to what you could and could not do? Do you need to implement some sort of system that will help you focus on important reports, letting other tasks take a back burner until you complete them?

Reframing is a means of shifting your perspective towards a way of seeing and interpreting things to help you feel better about yourself. You could include a plan of action as to how to handle things differently the next time. This could be implementing a strategy so you will not be interrupted the next time you need to complete a similar report, or it could be that you give yourself more time in order to complete it by the deadline. Some people turn off their phones and emails or even go to a separate location, such as a quiet office space, just so they can keep focused on the task at hand.

When you write out the situation in a "reframed" manner, how does that make you feel? Hopefully, it will help you feel more uplifted, positive and therefore confident that you have learned something and can do things differently the next time.

Also, with shifting perspectives, try to see the situation from different angles. Rather than simply seeing the situation through your eyes and your mind, imagine what it is like from your boss's perspective, from the client's perspective or from your colleague's perspective. How does assuming different viewpoints help you see your situation differently?

In addition to managing your time differently and scheduling things differently, would your boss or the client prefer to have something done to a higher standard with less errors and omissions? Would your colleagues be able to handle other work situations like phone calls on your behalf while you concentrate on completing the report; could you do the same for them when they need to focus?

Knowing that you have some ideas as to how to handle the situation differently the next time contributes towards you feeling better about what you are doing and how you are doing it. Rather than using a broad-brush generalization that you are unable to do your job, this helps you to shift your perspective for that particular task so that you know you can do things differently the next time, which you can, and you will, improve.

4.6 Mental Rehearsal

Another great way to give yourself a boost of confidence is to imagine yourself with even greater levels of confidence. This is called mental rehearsal.

One way is to imagine you are watching a movie of yourself doing whatever it is you want to perform well. Let us use delivering a powerful presentation as an example. So, start the movie at the beginning where you are getting ready to deliver that powerful presentation. Perhaps you are at your desk and getting your papers together or perhaps you are travelling to where you are going to deliver this presentation. Then, imagine yourself in the room, imagine the audience and see yourself standing up confidently (or at least pretending that you are very confident) and delivering a great speech. Get a sense of how well your presentation went, how engaged the audience was and what great questions and feedback you received. If you expect to have some challenging questions, then imagine yourself handling them easily and confidently regardless of what they are.

This imaginary movie of you delivering a great presentation can be really powerful as you can get into the detail of what you will see, hear and even feel. As it is your movie, imagine you get the best possible outcome imaginable! Watch this movie over and over until you get to the actual presentation. Repeatedly watching your movie helps to pre-programme you for success. It helps to boost your confidence that you know what you are going to do and you simply have to do it.

Mental rehearsal is well known amongst athletes as the greatest mental skill they can develop because all the rehearsal means that when they actually get to their big event or their big match, all they have to do is let their body do what they have programmed it to do. Although they still have to engage their brain to play and do their sport, if they can get their mind out of thinking too much, then they will play all that more effectively.

Also, mental rehearsal takes the nervousness out of the big performance because there is a sense of familiarity. You have watched your performance play out time and time again, and therefore have a sense of knowing what is going to happen. This lowering of the nerves gives you a sense of more confidence. And with that extra confidence, you will perform even better.

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4.7 Act “As Though”

By pretending, acting “as though”, you already have all the confidence you want, it will most certainly grow. Ask yourself what sorts of behaviours a confident person would have in the situation, what sort of things they would say, how they would hold themselves, what they might think. Whatever answers you come up with, start using them yourself. Here are a few questions you might ask:

- How would you hold yourself? What would your posture be?
- How would you be talking to yourself? What sorts of things would you be saying?
- How would you be speaking with others? What is different with having that confidence?
- What would you *see* inside your mind to instantly help you to feel more confident?
- What would you *hear* inside your mind to instantly help you to feel more confident?
- What would you *feel* inside your body to instantly help you feel more confident?
- Where in your body would you feel that confidence? How could you magnify and intensify those feelings?
- If that confident feeling had a shape and colour, what would it be? How can you recall that shape and colour in an instant?

Stand like the confident person would stand, have the same body postures and movement and gestures that a confident person would have, say to yourself the positive and confident things a confident person would think. After repeated acting “as though” you have that confidence, your own confidence will grow.

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4.8 Change Your Words

Language has a very powerful effect on how confident you are, so becoming aware of what your language reveals about you can make a difference. You can improve your confidence levels simply by changing your language. Think of words such as “try”, “but”, “would”, “should” or “could” and “wish”. Let us look at them one by one to notice the difference between a less confident person and a confident one. Ideally, remove these words from your vocabulary!

The word “try” suggests you may make the effort to do something rather than actually doing it. For example, “let’s try to meet up sometime for a catch up” is a softer, less assertive approach. Whereas “let’s meet up for a catch up. When are you free?” comes across as more assertive, definite and confident.

Another example is, “I’ll try to get this work done by the end of the day.” This makes it almost a certainty that the work will *not* get done by the end of the day because the person can always say that they tried, and were unsuccessful. Whereas saying “I will get this work done by the end of the day” gives a sense of certainty and assuredness that it will be done.

The word “but” negates everything that you have said before it. For example, “I want to have dinner with you but I’m busy tonight.” The unconscious mind deletes everything that comes before the “but” so in the example, it is as if they do not even want to have dinner with the person. I suggest you replace the word “but” with “however” or “and”.

How does this sound to you now? “I want to have dinner with you, however, I am busy tonight.” This sounds as though the person does want to have dinner with their colleague or friend and it is only because they are busy that they are unable to go.

The words “would”, “could” and “should” are very similar in that they are not absolute. “Would” suggests that they will do something only on condition that something else happens. The word “could”, again, is conditional and “should” suggests an implied action rather than something they are currently doing.

Examples include, “I would/could finish this report today if only the other department would give me its input.” versus “I will finish this report today only if the other department gives me its input.” This slight difference has a significant impact. Another example is, “I should finish this report today, however, I have this other piece of work to do.” compared to “I will finish this report after I have completed the other piece of work.”

All of these examples have a slightly different impact when you hear them. So, by paying attention to the words you use, you can appear more confident, help build your confidence and become more assertive and definitive in the way you communicate.

Words that enhance confidence, according to Sayre (2001, p. 35), include:

- Absolutely
- Definitely
- Positively
- Assuredly
- Without a doubt
- Of course
- Certainly
- Undoubtedly
- Obviously
- Guaranteed
- Naturally
- Sure

These confident types of words convey the message that something is definite, and people respond to this type of language in an equally positive manner.

Now, how about the often-said phrases “I don’t know”, “I don’t care”, “it doesn’t matter to me”. These sentences may indicate that someone is not very assertive or confident in themselves. It is one thing to be “easy going”, quite another to have no opinion at all. A more assertive and confident person might say, “I would like to do x” (go out to a particular movie, eat at a particular restaurant). If the other person does not like the suggestion, then they can always discuss and come to a compromise.

4.9 Do Something Different

Sometimes you get into a rut with things and that can have a detrimental effect on your confidence level. By doing something different, you can give yourself a boost of confidence!

Hazelton (2012) suggests stretching your comfort zones and expanding your horizons by going out and meeting new people or joining new groups. Not only is it fun and interesting, it is also stimulating. Going out and doing something different is another way to build your confidence. Whether it is a business networking group, a social activity or some sort of club, find something that is of interest to you, then go and explore. According to Hazelton (p. 130), “ideally, you’re looking for people who don’t share the same views as you – which will gently challenge your thinking and provide food for thought, and more importantly, will fuel your growth.” Simply expanding your horizons and your normal way of thinking will help you learn, grow and develop.

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If you do something new, join a club or get involved in a new activity, you might not have a lot of confidence initially however with time and practice, you will do. You will become more proficient in the club's activity and gain a sense of mastery over a new skill and this will help to grow confidence levels.

Additionally, you might consider enrolling in a course. Although you may not have a lot of knowledge or skill when you start out, you can gain a sense of mastery and knowledge in a new area. Perhaps you've always wanted to try learning a language. Well, pick the appropriate level of study and you will be with others trying to learn.

Initially, learning new skills might seem like quite a challenge. Recognizing that it is something new and different can help you as you progress and when you reflect on where you started, your progress can give you a boost of confidence upon which to draw.

The course does not have to be professionally related; it can be anything that you have been interested in for some time but have never approached. So, take some time to reflect on the various dreams or interests you have had over the years and see which one interests you the most.

Perhaps it is mastering a cooking skill or a type of cooking; perhaps it is becoming a better car or bike mechanic so you can do your own basic repairs. Maybe you have wanted to learn more about project management or a particular piece of software, just for the fun of it (what about art, painting, dance, sport?).



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By learning new things, you give yourself a boost not only of knowledge and skill, and also of confidence. You can prove to yourself that you are able to do things and perhaps this injection of confidence is just what you need to help you feel more confident in other areas of your life.

Sometimes however when you learn new skills, you do not feel that proficient or confident. So, to help you through those tough times, according to Hazelton (2012, p. 133), “take five minutes and write down all the reasons you’ve chosen it. Having clear written reasons describing your original drivers and motivations can help with your motivation to continue when facing the bit in the middle”.

Plus, as you learn the new skill, you will possibly develop new coping strategies for dealing with defeats and setbacks. These new strategies can then easily be applied elsewhere in your life.

4.10 Create a Recipe for Success

Continue flexing those muscles and try another exercise. For this exercise, reflect on recent successes or times when things went well. What things contributed to your success? What factors made a difference? If you have done sports at any level, let us take, for example, your last sporting event. Factors that contributed to your performance might include that your training had gone well, you felt well rested and had eaten nourishing foods, it was a bright sunny day and the racecourse was flat. You might have been feeling good about yourself because something positive happened at work or at home.

Now, just for comparison, think back to events when things did not go well. What elements contributed to this experience? Had your training been inconsistent, were you feeling run down and poorly, were you feeling distracted by a problem elsewhere? Perhaps you didn’t get a good night’s sleep the night before the event or you had been feeling somewhat stressed about a work situation. What is the difference between these two scenarios?

After you have written your answers for good performance and poor performances, take a step back. What do you notice? What are the key differences between the performances? Can you minimise or eliminate any factors that contributed to poor performances and ensure that you do all the things you did when you had good performances?

This type of exercise helps you to create your own model of excellence, your own “recipe for success” including all the things that contribute to good performances. Then you can know what to do in future to repeat the good performances. Over time and with practice, you can add to and adjust your model of excellence to refine the process and guarantee that if you do everything that you need to do, your performances will be great!

Although the example used is a sports performance, this works equally well in business. Take, for example, delivering a presentation, you can create your own recipe of all the things you need to do and what you need to have in order to deliver a really great presentation. You might even use this for when you go for job interviews or hold important meetings.

4.11 Anchor Confidence

Another technique you can use to help boost your confidence is to create an anchor. O'Connor (2001) says that anchors are any stimuli that evoke a response. Anchors change your state and can occur naturally or are set up intentionally. Can you recall hearing a particular song that makes you think of a special occasion? How about a particular sight or smell? Do they sometimes bring back memories and feelings? How many of you react, positively or negatively, either to a simple gaze or a raised eyebrow?

Those songs, sights, smells, words and gestures are anchors. These anchors trigger stored thoughts, memories and feelings. Often anchors are set up unconsciously and you react to them without being aware of what is happening. You can, however, intentionally set up anchors to trigger specific thoughts, feelings and states. The anchors become directly linked between a trigger gesture or image and the visualised states, such as confidence.

Some athletes link a sense of confidence to a memory or a photo of great race where they were feeling strong, powerful and confident. Perhaps this photo is of them as they crossed the finish line or had a silly grin holding their medal. Others recall, with vivid sensations, what it feels like to be incredibly confident and then anchor that to a trigger gesture such as making a strong fist or holding a thumb and forefinger together. Simply recalling that image or the sensation or doing that trigger gesture helps them to tap into those confident feelings.

Once those confident feelings are tapped into, you can then carry on as if you had all that confidence. Practice recalling a trigger that gives you that confident feeling until you are able to feel the feeling easily and effortlessly. My confidence anchor is a strong, powerful fist where I feel a surge of energy and confidence travel through my hand, my forearm, my shoulder and then my chest. With that feeling of confidence in my chest, I stand that much taller, I look that much brighter and I confidently proceed with what I am about to do – be that in a sporting context or elsewhere in life.

Within a business and personal context, what sorts of triggers can you anchor that give you a sense of confidence and give you a boost when you need it the most?

Ultimately, you decide what works best for you. Some people prefer recalling an image or photo while others prefer doing a trigger gesture. Perhaps it was you receiving an award of recognition or maybe it was someone telling you that you had done a good job.

The key is to practice the anchor often so that you can call upon it easily and effortlessly when you need it the most. The important thing is to remember to play around with the different exercises to see what works best for you.

4.12 Building Confidence in Others

In order to deal with and manage individuals who have low sense of self-esteem, a careful approach needs to be considered. Small steps for small achievements are recommended in order for the individual to slowly build up their sense of success, achievement and ultimately their sense of self-esteem and confidence. So, as a manager, Robinson and Kleiner (1989, p. 7) suggest taking the following steps:

- Define the task. Be specific about the goals.
- Set standards. Be specific regarding time frame and output requirements.
- Describe the resources available to the employee (authority, people, equipment, facilities).
- Remove any organizational barriers to task completion. For example, lay the groundwork for any interdepartmental co-operation needs.
- Provide any training necessary.
- Offer coaching appropriate to a new or challenging task.
- Break the task into smaller units of intermediate goals.
- Establish a timetable for intermediate goals.



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It can help the employee with low levels of self-belief and self-confidence to do the job if they approach a series of small, easily achievable steps. Over time, individuals can come to lack confidence in their ability to complete a task because they become overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of what they see ahead. Yet, when the task is actually broken down into smaller, more manageable, tasks, then it is easier to see a way forward.

By completing the smaller steps, and making progress towards the overall goal, the individual can grow in confidence and their ability to do what they set out to do.

Robinson and Kleiner (1989, p. 8) conclude, “Managers should respect an individual’s esteem needs and work to fulfil them, since this makes for happier, more confident and capable employees. If one is successful the pay-off is increased productivity, since positive self-esteem and confidence release the employee’s potential. This cannot be accomplished with a policy of intimidation, which is only a short-term motivator of performance at best. However, a strategy based on positive support and respect encourages success and growth for the individual, and as self-esteem and confidence build, he or she will begin to create their own momentum.”

Concluding this practical chapter full of tools, techniques and strategies for building confidence in yourself and others, I would like to leave you with a summary of Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) who suggest that you can grow confidence by:

- Taking risks and stretching your comfort zones.
- Work the confidence formula (perceived capability less perceived task requirements) by taking small steps towards achieving the task and ultimately work towards the overall completion and achievement of the task.
- Look for self-confidence in others and learn what they do and how they do it. Then, emulate it.
- Talk to others and learn how they developed confidence as they might be doing things that you can adopt yourself.
- Do your own self-confidence resume and identify how well you manage your self-confidence and where you have more/less self-confidence, then see what you can take from those insights.
- Review your self-confidence experiences. This is similar to a resume of all the experiences, decisions and actions you have taken in the past where you felt confident. How can you then use that in a new situation?

5 Conclusion

This concluding chapter aims to encourage readers to commit to taking action on a regular and consistent basis, and ways to deal with setbacks.

5.1 Commit to Taking Action

There are some very simple steps that you can take to help build confidence in yourself and others including, based on ideas promoted by Craig (2007):

- Be challenging in order to develop mastery over things. This may include some setbacks, failures and frustration however ultimately, a sense of accomplishment.
- Goal setting that promotes a sense of achievement in being able to do things and achieve things.
- See failure constructively in that it is simply an opportunity to learn, grow and make changes in order to succeed the next time.
- Give feedback that encourages good strategies for improvement rather than feedback that discourages or leaves one feeling unable to do anything about it.
- Give genuine encouragement, rather than vacant praise, of something concrete and specific that leads to genuine improvements.
- Encourage self-reflection as this can help individuals boost their own sense of confidence and self-esteem as they reflect on their achievements, their behaviours and what could be done differently.
- Think, and say to yourself, “I can” and develop a “can do” attitude.

5.2 Dealing with Mistakes and Setbacks

One thing that not-so-confident people are good at is remembering all the mistakes they have made in the past! It is almost as though they have a running commentary of their failures, their mistakes and their mishaps. This feeds into the negative internal dialogue of “I’m not good enough”.

So, it is therefore important to release your hold on those past mistakes in order to move on with more confidence. By keeping your focus on the negatives, you effectively drag yourself down and do not allow yourself to progress. You cannot change what has already happened, you can only change what you do in the present!

Letting go of mistakes frees you up to do things differently and to focus on the present.

If you do make a mistake, ask yourself these questions to help you learn and grow from the experience. What contributed to the mistake? How could you do things differently if you were in the same situation in the future? Remind yourself that the mistake is simply the result of an action you took (or did not take) and not a reflection of you as a human being, as a person. Then adjust your behaviour and your mindset for the future so you do not repeat the same mistake again.

In regards to setbacks, we all experience setbacks when the results we achieve are not what we wanted or expected. This may affect your confidence levels. Therefore, it is important to keep things in perspective and take a step back. This is a good opportunity to learn from the experience.

Reflect on whether you did everything you could have done, whether there were any external or extenuating factors that impacted on the results, and also, in the grand scheme of things, on how this one result fits in.

For example, say you are working on a big client presentation and then someone in your family got seriously ill. The stress, worry and possible time out of the office to take care of that person may impact on your ability to focus and deliver the kind of presentation that you would like. Sometimes a change in personal circumstances, the death of close family or friend or a change in routine, can impact on your abilities and your confidence levels.

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So, it is important to put things into perspective with the grand scheme of your life and learn any lessons. Ask yourself; did you do the best you could give the circumstances? Could you have delegated some of the work or even the entire presentation to a colleague while you focused on things that were more important at the time?

Another example is not being able to meet a deadline due to something beyond your control. This might require reviewing and revising the original deadline. Oftentimes, individuals have to review their goals and revise them when setbacks occur. By doing that, you can at least maintain a sense of confidence in what you are doing rather than failing to meet the original goal and have that impact negatively on your confidence levels. This helps you build your mental resilience. What about when you did not get that job you were going for; did that dent your confidence levels? How did you recover from that? What sorts of things did you say to yourself?

This mental resilience, the ability to bounce back after setbacks and remain positive regardless of the situation, will help you become a strong and more confident individual. You will be able to deal more easily with mistakes or adapt when things are not going according to your plan. The key to mental resilience is your ability to stay calm under pressure and deal with stress; stay strong in your belief that you can do what you set out to do, make your motivation work for you, and maintain focus on what you need to do and what you can control. According to the American Psychological Association (2013, cited in Thompson, 2013), some of the keys to developing mental resilience include:

- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** You cannot change what has happened however you do have control over how you react after they have happened.
- **Move towards your goals.** Continue to do whatever you can towards your goals, even if this is just small steps towards ultimately getting you back on track with things.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Look at things keeping the bigger picture and long-term goals in sight rather than blowing the situation out of proportion.
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** Keep an optimistic outlook that things will improve rather than worrying or being fearful about things and the future.
- **Take care of yourself.** Even though you may face a challenging situation, nurture yourself and be kind to yourself.

Thompson (2013) suggests that rather than spending lots of time and energy worrying about what could be, simply stay focused on what you can do today to help remain hopeful about what you can do tomorrow. Even if you have to revise your goal, you can still continue onwards and remember pursue progress, not perfection. Above all else, make sure you take care of yourself and be gentle, acknowledging the small steps you make, and know that you are indeed making progress.

5.3 On a Final Note

Confidence is a quality that everyone can develop within themselves, regardless of their previous circumstances, experiences or challenges. With time and perseverance, everyone can develop stronger confidence within themselves in all areas of their lives. The key is focusing on the positives of what you can do well and reminding yourself that you can strengthen your “confidence muscles” with regular practice and attention.

Ultimately, we all continue to learn, grow and develop and by keeping an open mind as to the possibilities of what you can do to improve, your confidence will grow. So, become your own cheerleader supporting you, encouraging you to be the best you can be. Yet be aware that there may be times and situations whereby you do make mistakes, when you do not achieve what you want, when you do experience setbacks. The key is to recognise it, pick yourself up, refocus on where you are going and what you want to achieve, and keep on going.

To sum up what confidence is, here is a tidy list of what confident people are like. They:

1. Work at developing their confidence, their knowledge, their skills and their abilities.
2. Take a stand and voice their opinions.
3. Listen to others, rather than jumping in.
4. They do not need to shout out how great and fantastic they are, because they know they are.
5. They do not gossip or put others down.
6. They are able to deal constructively with criticism and see it as an opportunity to do better.
7. They never blame others for mistakes, and accept responsibility for their part.
8. They ask for help and see it as a sign of strength rather than weakness.
9. They generally help others and help build confidence in others.

One last thing, the more confidence you gain in yourself, your work and your relationships, the more confident (and competent) people will be drawn to you, and that feeds the cycle of happiness for all of us.

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8 About the Author

Midgie Thompson, a Canadian residing in the UK since 1996, is a mental performance coach specialising in “Inspiring Excellence” in individuals and teams. As a Master Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Hypnotherapy, she helps develop performance skills by combining mental toughness techniques with balanced lifestyle choices.

Midgie founded Bright Futures Coaching Ltd in 2003 and has been providing motivational, mental performance and personal development coaching ever since. The company also offers business performance, management and communication skills courses.

Midgie regularly writes, and is a spokesperson in the media, on mental preparation skills, peak performance, goal setting, motivation and confidence building for sporting and business journals. She also lectures at the University of Brighton Business School teaching academic and interpersonal skills to first-year business students as well as a module that she helped develop called Creativity in Enterprise. Additionally, Midgie provides coaching and advice to Mind Tools™ Career Excellence Club.

She has coached athletes at all levels from amateur to World Championship, and worked with people in the business world to Managing Director level.

Midgie lives in Brighton, UK, and is a year-round sea swimmer, runner and triathlete.