



CONFIDENCE: TRAPS AND GAPS

Five simple things you can do to become more confident

1. Carry yourself with confidence! If you slump or slouch you convey a lack of confidence. But when you walk and behave as *if* you were a confident person, you boost your own spirits. Your behaviour changes your attitude.
2. Just *start* that difficult thing that matters to you! Confidence is built on a genuine sense of accomplishment. Procrastination undermines happiness and self-confidence. Don't wait for perfect circumstances. Make a 5 minute start on the very first step.
3. Accept that very often 'good enough' will do! Don't spend time fretting over options or waiting until you are sure you can excel. Give yourself permission to be human and therefore not perfect.
4. Frame mistakes as valuable feedback! Remember Thomas Edison who famously failed 10,000 times before he succeeded. He said he "failed his way to success". Reframe your failures as useful information.
5. Give your attention to others! Looking to see where and how you might help others, moves your focus outwards not inwards, away from yourself and your feelings.

If you felt more confident, would your life be different?

This is a question that comes up for many people at times. Just when you think you're handling your life pretty well, the ground shifts, more is demanded of you, some new complexity emerges ... and self-doubt strikes! Perhaps you haven't seized an exciting new opportunity because your lack of self-confidence constrained you to stick with the tried and true. Maybe you look back with regret at a time when you *didn't* take the 'road less travelled,' even though you secretly wanted to have a go!

Do you relate to this? Why don't you take a moment to think over whether you've ever missed out on some great opportunities or even given up some things because of a lack of confidence?

A vicious cycle - and the way out

When it comes to your goals, setbacks can sap your confidence and motivation. If you convince yourself that a recent failure was because you're just not smart enough or lucky enough, then it can be hard to persist. Self-esteem and self-confidence can be bruised surprisingly easily. Failure can be persuasive and confidence fragile. Then a self-defeating cycle can set in. By not taking the actions you need, you ensure, in effect, that you won't succeed. Then failure becomes 'proof' that success was impossible all along!

But researchers have found that the very experience of coping with challenges and surviving setbacks increases confidence. If you avoid challenges because of the risk of failure, you send yourself a message that you believe you couldn't handle failure, so your confidence goes down. But if you push on anyway, the message you internalise is that you are resilient enough to handle potential failure. Taking on challenges and sticking with a goal, instead of giving up, has a greater long term impact on self-esteem than either winning or losing. Paradoxically setbacks can reinforce confidence!

Why do people often lack confidence?

Of course, there are probably lots of things you do on a daily basis with effortless confidence! No-one lacks confidence in everything: it usually relates to specific activities or areas of life. Research suggests there are five reasons why this happens. The first is excessive expectations. Perhaps you want to be perfect at all you do! You set the bar so high for yourself that it becomes daunting even to have a go. Related to this is harsh self-judgement. Do you constantly tell yourself that you aren't as talented as others? In other words, many people are hopeless at coaching themselves! The third is a pre-occupation with fear. Psychologists argue that fears are quite normal. They are to be expected and don't of themselves affect our

confidence. It's when we constantly dwell on them and stew on them that problems arise.

The fourth cause is a straightforward lack of experience. Social scientists have looked closely at what it takes in terms of time and effort to become good at something. It's a lot of hours! Closely linked to this is the fifth cause: a lack of skills. For instance, you might have clocked up some experience in managing performance problems in a team here in Australia. But now, in your new role, you have a team that spans several countries. You have to manage performance across cultures and, for the most part, virtually. You now need a new skill set.

The confidence cycle

You can see from the above list that many of these causes of low confidence are entirely reasonable. In fact, it could be argued that a person *should* feel slightly unselfconfident when faced with a task they have never done before, where they have few skills. Only an idiot would be 100% sure of themselves! Building confidence is a lot about becoming good at doing something new. There are four steps: practise the skills; apply them effectively; assess the results; learn and modify as you need. In other words, there isn't a magic formula! It's pretty much that combination of mindfulness and hard work that your common sense would already have identified.

DARE - or how to get out of the low confidence trap

One of the Australian researchers at the forefront of these new approaches to building confidence is psychologist Russ Harris. He has published widely on how to tackle the gap between the confidence someone has and the confidence they'd like to have. The acronym DARE is one Russ uses and we also use it with our coaching clients to good effect. Each letter stands for a dynamic step in tackling low confidence.

D is for 'defusion' or simply detaching yourself from that stream of undermining 'you can't do it' thinking. Don't challenge. Just detach and let the thoughts flow past. **A** is for acceptance - of discomfort. You'll be out of your usual comfort zone when you try something new. That's OK! **R** stands for 'realistic goals'. Fine! I've left it a tad late to be an astronaut! I'll just have some different goals, ones that are more realistic. Finally, **E** is for embrace your values. When you live your life according to your values, then you experience an inner energy and confidence because you're aligned with what truly matters to you. When you act according to your values, you succeed in the ways that count most.

The essence of the new approach is as follows: the *actions* of confidence come first - the *feelings* of confidence come later. Try it and see for yourself!