

Confidence: how do we build it, improve it, have it more often? Because we all enjoy learning from each other, I recently asked a number of friends, colleagues and clients to share their experiences. Here are some extracts from their wonderful stories, advice and wisdom. Enjoy....

Just do it!

- "Believe in yourself and just do it!"
- "I know one person who does anything that frightens them. They say it helps them to break through perceptual barriers of what they can or can't do."
- "Looking for the next challenge and being very prepared to take myself out of the comfort zone"

Build on your strengths

- "Draw from your 'strong' attributes e.g. your mind, your looks, your charm, your knowledge"
- "Confidence is something that you have to work on because it's a feeling of strength from within"
- "It was that breakthrough moment....an experience I think about when I think I can't do something. It helps me always."
- "I already know how to be calm and confident...[now I'm learning to do this] in *all* situations"

Have good support

- "Building confidence is all about being supported by good people"
- "Just picking up the phone and contacting a singing teacher marks a turning point in most peoples lives"
- "I was being 100% encouraged by people all around me! They all stopped what they were doing to give me their help and support to achieve my goal."
- "You can do anything when you are surrounded by people who believe in you until you get to the point where you believe in yourself"
- "People build confidence by surrounding themselves with like-minded people who are confident themselves, but not arrogant - they either believe in you or share the same goal(s) as you. People whose actions speak louder than words. It really is the good-parenting principle how parents can build confidence in their kids - by example and by consistency and encouragement."
- "I ask someone I trust and respect to give me feedback"
- "I was very fortunate to have a supervisor who was an excellent role model - she encouraged learning and was always supportive and enthusiastic about my development"

Embody confidence

- "What I say to myself as I am about to [speak to groups] and am nervous is 'It's show time!'. This helps me to get over my nerves - it gives me instant boost of confidence - like I am an actor about to 'perform'"
- "If you have never experienced a time when you have felt confidence then you can think of someone you know who demonstrates confidence. I used this technique with an 11-year old boy who chose his favourite cartoon character. He started to put himself forward, started expressing himself, engaging with the other kids and generally felt a lot better about himself. The more he did it the better he got at it."

Take small steps

- "We celebrate our progress, even the small wins"
- "Just starting by working on the smaller problems helps me to build up"
- "Be patient, it takes time!"

Think positive

- "There are times when I just have to screen out the negative chatter – it's irrelevant"
- "The best way I know to build confidence is to really believe in yourself"

Don't panic

- "Avoid people, managers, and anything else which creates panic, because it sends you into a downward spin at a time when you least need it"

Find meaning

- “When I feel like my work is important, I’m read to go that extra stretch”

Be yourself

- “My best speeches have been when I’ve been my natural self... what people really connect to, and respond to, is a speaker being natural, genuine and authentic”

Find your voice

- “Showing people how to find their voice, is an incredibly empowering experience”

The role of the leader

- “Acknowledge when good work is done...positive reinforcement; always telling them how talented they are (which they are); allowing them to learn by making mistakes and acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes [whatever their level in the organisation]; expanding the work and the responsibilities. And, personally, believing that they are able to do the work assigned.”

To support this view, Harvard Professor, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her book “Confidence” (2004):

“A leader’s essential ingredient is confidence in other people”

“Positive expectations by leaders make people want to rise to the occasion”

And finally, a good story sent by a friend. This illustrates many of the points above:

(Names have been changed)

“A woman I know, Mary, was given an ex-racehorse by her partner and was completely intimidated. It had been many years since she last owned a horse and although she loved the horse, the mare was too much to handle. Mary couldn’t even catch the horse, and her partner helpfully kept telling her that all she had to do was show the mare who was boss. Mary’s initial love and joy soon turned to discouragement and avoidance. But, it was a little thing that turned the tide: a trainer, Jenny, showed her a technique to catch the horse. Each day the time it took was shorter, and as time passed Mary learned more and more from Jenny. *Always, slowly and one step at a time*...slow successful steps were all that were asked. At each point if she felt nervous or unsure she retreated to doing the tasks she was already comfortable and successful with, and then improved from there.

Next, Mary confessed she was too scared to ride the horse. Jenny said, ‘That’s ok; let me show you all the fun things you can do together with you on the ground.’ As Mary gained her confidence on the ground, she started to ride. At first, it was only to sit on the horse for a few minutes, then slowly she started to walk, then trot, canter and now she rides bareback at all the gaits with complete confidence in her relationship with her horse. And now having the confidence not only does she ride but she has built resilience so that if she does fall off (and then only rarely) she can take it as a momentary set back, not a complete failing.

Mary’s confidence is not a brash, overt thing but rather a deep inner satisfaction that she can do this and do it well. And by the way, her partner still can’t catch the mare....!”

What’s your confidence tip? Let me know....

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Each monthly email aims to provide you and your teams with information for your professional and personal development. Topics are based on areas of interest raised by clients and colleagues, with material drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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