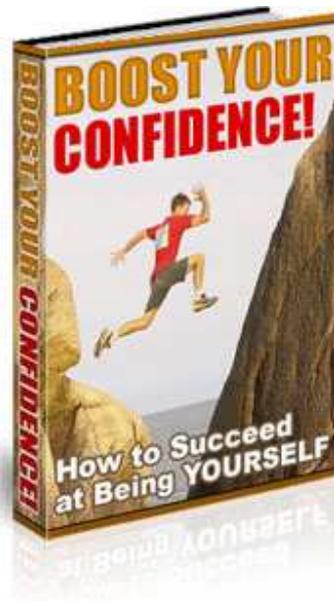


# BOOST YOUR CONFIDENCE!

## How to Succeed At Being Yourself

By Keith Cook, CC and Joy Bing Fleming, MBA, CC



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## Introduction

Have you ever wished that you could simply go to a store and say, "I'd like a kilo of self-confidence, please?" Tell me where to buy and for sure a long stretch of line leads to this store!

So what then is self-confidence? How can we acquire it if we need bottomless supply? This book provides the answer.

Have you ever tried looking at yourself in a full-length mirror? Did you feel a tinge of shyness? Did you squirm at your image? Did you wish you could be more proud of yourself and carried yourself better? If you feel guilty of this habit, then this book is for you.

This book will teach you how to:

- Boost your self-worth or self-esteem
- Appreciate your uniqueness and strengths
- Help others become more confident
- Improve your self-confidence without becoming self-centered
- Relate confidence with nurturing relationships

If you are not content with your self-image, it only shows that you have no self-confidence. If you, yourself, lack self-confidence, then how can others have faith in you?

During interviews, confidence boosts your chances of clinching that dream job. Consider a situation where two applicants are vying for the same position. During the interview, one exudes poise and self-assurance, while the other is a nervous wreck. Do I need to ask who will get the job?

Why is self-confidence often equated with effectiveness? A person's self-confidence shows assurance in his own decision. This level of assurance directs others to put their confidence on this person's judgment.

Confidence also has the power to overcome fears, hindrances, opposition, and setbacks that can confront the best of plans. People with a high degree of self-confidence are normally more likely to be successful – all other aspects being equal.

It is equally significant to find out the different situations that weaken self-confidence. People who are trapped in an environment that fosters negativity and constant criticism become disheartened and discouraged. An embarrassing incident can suck the confidence out of a person.

The best part in all of these is that confidence is something that can be developed. It is something that can be learned. Learning starts now...

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Wanted: Lasting Improvements**

*“There is no value-judgment more important to man – no factor more decisive in his psychological development and motivation – than the estimate he passes on himself.”*  
- Nathaniel Branden

Year in, year out, we make resolutions, don't we? Why do we fail in our resolution to improve ourselves? Out of frustration, we seek out various self-improvement programs and books. Has it occurred to you why the number of self-help books is on the rise?

Many people nowadays read self-help books and enroll in some new self-improvement program. They wanted to lose weight, quit smoking, begin exercising, read faster, improve their personality, or learn new skills. Most people embark on such programs because they are discontented with themselves. They believe that if they can modify something in themselves, they will experience contentment.

People's experiences led them to believe that if they implement any external changes within themselves, they will feel better on the inside. When they receive honors, degrees, and accolades from peers, they feel good. This led to the belief that a good feeling *does* complement accomplishment. They conclude that by changing things on the outside, by becoming what other people like them to be, their inside world will change.

It is surprising that most people got it all wrong! Actually, it works the opposite way. **CHANGE MUST BEGIN FROM WITHIN.**

The process starts with a change in thoughts and way of thinking. This change of thought often leads to a change in lifestyle. You can improve the way you think,

notice a shift in your behavior and perspective, and start to see yourself in a better light.

While you may have initiated that conversion of the inner world, it needs to be sustained to avoid going back to the old ways. As you read along, you will be introduced to simple, useful, logical, time-tested procedures that thousands of successful people have applied to change self-doubt into self-confidence. Some are daily exercises to build up your self-image, while others are reminders of universal laws to help you stay on the right track when you become too reactive to successes and failures.

Just a reality check: Changing the way you feel about yourself cannot just happen overnight and will not happen without any exertion. Quick fixes do not work. Lasting inner change requires time and effort.

Our society is enamored with instant solutions and quick fixes. Perhaps we can learn from an old proverb about the Chinese bamboo tree: "After the seed for this amazing tree is planted, you see nothing, absolutely nothing, for four years except for a tiny shoot coming out of a bulb. During those four years, all the growth is underground in a massive, fibrous root structure that spreads wide and deep in the earth. But then on the following year, the Chinese bamboo tree grows up to eighty feet!" From this we learn the virtue of patience and a deeper appreciation of lasting change.

The good news is that confidence is a product accessible to everyone. While initially we were not born with it, this trait can be taught, nurtured and built over the years, at any stage in life.

Dr. Karl Menninger once wrote, "Fears are educated into us, and they can, if they wish, be educated out." Confidence can be educated into us too.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **What is Self-Confidence?**

*“Unwarranted fear is the door that stops progress toward that which we want in life and it is the door that closes on self-confidence.”*

*- Kevin Hogan*

Self-confidence is a strong and reasonable belief in oneself. It entails consciousness of one's strengths and awareness of one's own capabilities. It is a positive mindset that leans towards the thinking that one is equipped with the necessary resources to respond positively to all the challenges in life.

The degree of confidence is an outcome of how you perceive yourself. This has a bearing on how people will perceive you. How people interrelate and respond to you is a reflection of how you perceive yourself. Therefore, if you do not have high self-esteem, people generally will have a hard time trusting your capabilities.

Low self-esteem is a product of too much focus on your negative traits and on what you are doing wrong. In other words, you are being your own worst enemy!

People exuding self-confidence do not necessarily rely on the approval of others. They listen and are respectful of the opinion of others; but still, in the end, they decide on their own.

Like most people, confident people have realistic goals, aim for practical aspirations, and pursue their dreams. They also encounter challenges. What do self-confident people do when things do not go their way? Confident people take a step back to assess the situation and try the best options available.

If, despite these efforts, things did not go as planned, they come to a point where they realize and willingly accept that they cannot always get what they want.

From this stage, they move on and carry with them the lessons learned from previous experience. They are excited to tackle new goals and dreams. The strong belief in their capabilities remain intact, knowing that they are now stronger, more capable, and better equipped with wisdom.

## **What It Is NOT**

Let us get straight to the point: we're not born with self-confidence. Simply put, self-confidence is not something innate. Self-confidence takes time to develop and requires the same to be nurtured.

In addition, confidence is the personal ownership of no one. Confidence and attitude are accessible to all. It is up to you to determine your requirements.

People's obsession over self-confidence makes it seem like some sort of a magic potion. It appears that this trait is the be-all-and-end-all which will make all problems disappear. Confidence alone will not lead you to the dream life you are aspiring for. Foremost, you need to take action. You need perseverance, patience, logical reasoning, trustworthy mentors, and a whole gamut of others in order to succeed. Confidence is the first crucial step.

When we see one self-assured person, we often think that he is confident in ALL of his capabilities. Confidence is not all encompassing. Let us take one example. ***Rich Dad, Poor Dad*** author, Robert Kiyosaki, exudes confidence in his business and entrepreneurial skills. Yet, he is honest enough to admit that he struggled in academic subjects at school.

A friend of mine is confident of her skill as a writer. But ask her to add up numbers and she immediately transports herself to the farthest known planet away

where numbers, fractions, sums, differences, products, and quotients cannot reach her! Confidence is not all encompassing. It is not pervasive.

## **How Our Early Years Shaped Us**

Behavioral scientists have coined a special term which is often related to the way we were raised by our families. They call this conditioning.

Psychologists argued, "The attitudes of parents are vital to how the children feel about themselves, especially during their childhood." Parents have an important role in developing self-confidence during the early years as this forms the foundation for raising well-rounded teens and mature adults.

Imagine yourself as a child, living in a household with parents who are perfectionists, and living with unrealistic expectations. They are so hard on themselves that they also expect you to keep impossibly-high standards. At this early stage in our life, it seems you are already set up to fail. Imagine the negative effect it would have on your confidence. You will definitely always experience fear that will limit you from exploring your full potentials if you use unrealistic standards set by family or members of society.

Picture yourself in another scenario where your parents are well-known in their own professions. For example, they are doctors; so they expect you to follow in their footsteps. You bring up the idea of pursuing a different profession, like that of a painter or chef, and an argument ensues. They discourage you to explore your talents, assert your independence, and dissuade you by finding faults by saying, "You are not creative enough, you are better off as a doctor!"

Often times, parents are overprotective with regards to their children. As much as possible, parents want to shield their children from harsh realities. They love them to a fault that their children become dependent on them for life. Children brought up this way do not commit errors; and thus, never learn from mistakes.

Your choice of friends and role models can also influence your upbringing. In your teenage years, remember how you loved the idea of belonging to the popular group! You looked up to the most popular people in campus. How you wished you can be them! You may even have tried copying their stance and way of dressing, and have joined their circle of friends. As you grow up, you begin to realize that it is more fulfilling "to be yourself" than just be a copy of these people.

What then should be the role of the parents and friends in boosting confidence? Parents and friends must be models to children. Parents and friends should provide good examples by feeling good about themselves, becoming independent thinkers, overcoming hurdles, and most importantly, becoming confident themselves. They are living proofs that you can succeed at being yourself.

## **Self-Confidence and Effectiveness**

Self-confidence is most frequently equated with success. Success leads to self-confidence, and self-confidence frequently appears to lead to success.

We should be cautious, however, that we do not over generalize. Other than self-confidence, people generally need a combination of specific and general abilities to be effective and efficient depending on circumstances. These may include specific technical skills connected to the specific project or job you are dealing with. These

may also be general skills – such as skills in interviewing, providing feedback, or evaluating strengths and weaknesses.

In some instances, people become overconfident and ignore important steps such as preparation and practice that lead to lack-luster performance and low efficiency.

Maintaining a right sense of balance and correct timing is the key. There are instances where it is better to have the humility to admit your lack of knowledge over the subject matter, seek suggestions, and invite views and suggestion of others. When all facts have been considered and all angles of the subject have been carefully studied, you can make clever judgments. This is the right time to affirm your situation with confidence.

## **Self-Confidence and Ability**

Self-confidence and ability go together. We feel confident when we are faced with circumstances we know that we can handle or those we have dealt with in the past.

We are less likely to feel confident when we are confronted with circumstances for the first time, when we are hesitant of our ability, when we have little or zero understanding of the situation, or when we have failed in similar circumstances in the past.

We can see this simple connection: skilled performance results in success and leads to improved self-confidence. In the same way, unskilled performance leads to failure, which may result in decreased self-confidence.

## **Improve Knowledge and Abilities**

Another method to improve performance and boost self-confidence is to work on improving your knowledge and abilities.

For instance, consider the case of Aaron and Chris. Aaron and Chris were both appointed new members of a safety committee. For a time, they were both fairly quiet in business meetings and let the more experienced members do most of the talking.

After four months, Aaron became active by asking questions, volunteering information, and even challenging some of the opinions of other members of the committee. Chris, on the other hand, still took a back seat, seldom putting forward his opinions and always deciding in favor of the majority.

The main difference between Aaron and Chris was that Aaron strove hard to collect data on matters that involved the committee and he judiciously prepared for the business meetings. Chris did not exert any extra effort to learn about the committee or the technical and legal concerns facing it. He attended the business meetings and sat through them, without having done much preparation. As a committee member, Aaron was seen more effective and self-confident.

This is not an extraordinary story. You become more effective and more self-confident if you spend time and effort for preparation and learning. This learning generally starts with the acquisition of information. At times, people do not take the initiative to read and learn about things that concern them. These people are either over confident about their current knowledge, not concerned about being effective and efficient, or just plain lazy.

## **Self-Esteem**

Part of self-confidence is a general trust in oneself and a genuine liking of oneself. Self-confidence is also synonymous with self-esteem and self-worth.

American psychologist Eric Berne used everyday language to illustrate the esteem in which we regard others and ourselves. He says that we think of ourselves as OK or Not OK.

According to Berne, during our early lives we all go through a stage of low self-esteem where we think that we are Not OK. After a series of positive experiences, we like ourselves more and hold ourselves with high esteem where we feel I'm OK.

According to him, the great divide lies in how people generally see themselves. He saw that there are people who always affirm to themselves, "I'm OK" (i.e. high self-esteem) and then there were those whose usual view about themselves is "I'm Not OK" (i.e. low self-esteem).

This level of self-esteem may differ at any one time, depending on the situation. Attaining success in a task may increase one's level of self-esteem. Likewise, failure or criticism may have a negative impact. Independent of these situations, some people have higher degrees of self-esteem, hence self-confidence, than others.

## **Positive Thoughts**

Your quality of thinking affects your self-esteem and self-confidence. When confronted by a challenge, a person's mind may be filled with negative thoughts, such as:

- "I'll never be able to do this!"

- “Everyone’s going to laugh at me!”
- “I’m very stupid!”
- “I’m a hothead, and my anger is going to get me in trouble one of these days.”
- “This is so unfair!”
- “Anyone else but me could do this right!”

These negative and depreciating thoughts have a propensity to weaken self-confidence and cause more difficulty to function effectively.

There are three positive ways of overcoming these negative thoughts.

- **Search for the truth.**

At times, negative thoughts include deceptions and exaggerations. Is it actually true that “Anyone else but me could do this right?” Is it actually true that “I’m very stupid?” These two messages are most likely untrue and they are useless.

- **Face your fears.**

At times, we are fearful and worried about exaggerated concerns or things that will not happen at all. We refuse to confront our fears because we are afraid of committing terrible mistakes. We fear, “Everyone’s going to laugh at me!” However, if this is the worst that can ever happen, why not give it a try?

- **Send positive thoughts.**

Substitute negative thoughts with more positive messages. Shift to realistic, reasonable, and supportive messages that will help in achieving the objective.

## **Misleading Notions About Self-Confidence**

Over the years, a number of wrong notions about self-confidence emerged. People think that self-confidence, just like being famous and wealthy, is something inherent. Majority of individuals in society believe "You have to be born with it." This is absolutely untrue! If this is true, why is insecurity one of the most common problems of humankind? Do not believe this wrong notion. Confidence is a skill. You can learn how to be confident just like you can learn how to cook or drive a car.

Secondly, some people believe that once they lose their self-confidence, it is gone for good. It is not true. It may take time to build self-confidence back, but you can still overcome your insecurities if you really want to.

Thirdly, people believe that you can only have self-confidence if you are able to conquer a new challenge. There is more to confidence than achieving something new.

## **Overcoming Self-Defeating Thought Habits**

Recognizing wrong notions about self-confidence is just a starting point for overcoming low morale. Part of the recognition is the need for a shift in perspective or paradigm. Stephen Covey, author of ***7 Habits of Highly Effective People***, defines paradigms as "the way we see the world, not in terms of our visual sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting."

One example of a thought defeating paradigm focuses on **perfectionism**. Have you experienced working with a perfectionist boss? A friend of mine used to work for one. She submits a one-page memo, her boss reads it, writes her comments, and sends back the report. Nothing wrong with this, you would say. I absolutely agree with you, except that the memo went back and forth for more than ten times!

My very patient friend reached her limit (I wouldn't have lasted beyond the third revision on a one-page memo!) and confronted her Boss. The boss replied, "I want everything to be perfect. I want to be superior in every aspect of work; this gives me a sense of accomplishment."

Her poor boss lives within a paradigm that states that confidence can be gained from accomplishments or worse, from achieving perfection. However, the reality is that all people commit mistakes and we learn more from mistakes. We must be careful and judicious about our work, but *our sense of self-worth must go beyond outputs and tangible accomplishments.*

Other authors relate paradigms into belief systems. Anthony Robbins shares his definition, "It influences how you think and feel every moment you're alive. It determines what you will do and what you will not do. It determines how you feel about anything that occurs in your life. That force is your beliefs."

How do you define your self? **Most people define themselves based on what others say or want, rather than what they *really* want.** Traditional Japanese married women used to define themselves as submissive wives who submit to the whims and approval of their husbands. They serve them, take care of their men, and all the while forgetting that they have their own separate identities to live not requiring the approval or nod of anybody. Believe that you have it within you to live to your fullest potential!

Other people live for the approval of others. Some would say "Do you think I am pretty (or handsome)?" or "In your opinion, which shirt looks good on me?" Another symptom of this malaise is difficulty in accepting compliments. You will hear these people say, "You like this shirt? Oh, its an old one!"

Some psychologists often refer to beliefs as internal dialogues. These are dialogues that are running inside our heads 24/7. If you are tuned in to wrong paradigms, destructive beliefs, and negative internal dialogues, you have symptoms of low self-esteem and dispirited morale.

One favorite internal dialogue is **living in the past** and it goes "I failed in the past, therefore, I am a failure." Heed the advice of Anthony Robbins: "Your past does not equal your future." Past experiences already happened, but mistakes should not stop you from living your life to the fullest. Stop those destructive internal dialogues!

In order to increase self-confidence you have to believe in yourself. If you believe in yourself, then you can succeed in anything and everything you set your mind to achieve. You may not succeed the first time you try, but you need to keep trying until you do succeed.

Listed below are additional destructive beliefs, with corresponding examples, that can influence your self-confidence. Steer clear from these!

- **All-Or-Nothing Principle.**

"I'm a complete failure when my presentation is imperfect."

- **Seeing the Dark Clouds Only.**

This is also referred to as magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive.

This refers to too much focus on a single negative comment, criticism, or a passing remark that the good and positive aspects are completely forgotten.

"I got a D on one biology exam, now I won't be able to enter into a medical school."

"Even though I won seven chess games consecutively, I feel awful about myself losing this one."

- **Uncritically Accepting Feelings as Truth.**

“I feel ugly so it must be true.”

- **Over emphasizing “Should” Statements.**

“Should” statements frequently reflect others’ standards instead of expressing your personal needs and desires.

“Every person should have a career plan when they go to college. I don’t have one, hence, something is wrong with me.”

- **Labeling.**

This is a simplistic procedure that expresses a blame.

“I’m always a loser and it’s all my fault.”

- **Difficulty Accepting Praises or Compliments.**

“You do like this dress? I think I look terrible with this outfit.”

## **Steps In Building Self-Confidence**

After being aware of self-defeating habits, what are the steps to building self-confidence? Consider these steps as the building blocks for greater confidence in any aspect of your life.

### **1. Start writing a journal.**

One way to do an effective self-analysis is to start with a personal journal or diary. Write down your perceptions about self-confidence. Write any thoughts that come to mind. Also, try to ask yourself what stops you from getting to a point in your life that you want to achieve.

Dr. Gordon MacDonald, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship President, speaks about the significance of keeping this spiritual practice: “For many years I have kept

a daily journal of what I am doing, why I am doing it, and what the results are. Just forcing it onto paper makes me ask what is going on in my life.” That method will guarantee a particular quantity of impartiality, for when you look at your feelings and your life on paper, it is easier to be objective and see your faults and the aspects where you are misleading yourself.

Bear in mind, practices such as this do not work for everyone, and if, after experimenting with a journal, it does not increase your self-confidence, try another technique.

## **2. Recharge regularly.**

Arrange to spend time alone to recharge yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually. Take some time off to relax by yourself in a quiet place.

Glenn Gould, a Canadian pianist, believes that “for every hour that you spend in the company of other human beings you need X number of hours alone. Now what that X represents, I don’t really know; it might be two and seven-eighths or seven and two-eighths, but it’s a substantial ratio.”

## **3. Do a self-evaluation.**

Learn to assess yourself objectively. Doing so allows you to prevent the constant state of confusion that comes from dependence on other people’s views. Concentrating internally on how you think and feel about your own behavior, lifestyle, work, etc. will provide you a stronger sense of self awareness. This will put an end to your practice of giving away your personal power to other people.

## **4. Accept and love yourself.**

With the conduct of a self-assessment comes the realization of your weak points. Do not be dissuaded by this discovery.

Learn to embrace and accept yourself for who you are as a person. Everyone has his own distinctive abilities, qualities, and characteristics. We are all born differently for a reason. Never compare yourself to others.

In your journal, make an inventory of things that make you unique. For example, you can make a list under the title, "What Makes Me Unique." Write down interests and preferences that make you distinct.

Be proud of your achievements and revel in your uniqueness. You must learn to accept and be proud of who you are. Only then will you feel your self-confidence shot up to the skies!

#### **5. Concentrate on your strengths rather than on your weaknesses.**

Confidence comes from within. Concentrate on positive things about yourself. Remember the past is over; you can only change the future. Write down ten positive things about yourself. Go through your journal and look at all the positive things about yourself.

Concentrate on your potentials. These are the reasons why you love and believe in yourself. Give yourself credit for every positive thing you have written about yourself. Remember, you are somebody special.

#### **6. Overcome fears and doubts.**

Some people feel insecure, thinking they can never be successful in anything they do. Such insecurity will only lead to lack of confidence in yourself and in everything you do in your life.

Keep in mind: If you haven't tried something, you can never say that you will fail in it. For instance, your boss is asking you to supervise a group but you fear that you will make a mess out of it. Such fear will stop you from taking on that job.

However, if you're a confident person, you would not think twice about failing and willingly take on that job. Lack of confidence can affect your career growth.

### **7. Motivate yourself.**

Whether it is for a presentation, an interview, or anything at all, remind yourself that you can do it. Motivate yourself every day; and soon, you will find your confidence level increasing.

A helpful way to motivate yourself is by keeping a list of at least five things that you did well for that day. This activity reaffirms your strong belief that you can achieve what you set your mind to accomplish.

### **8. Engage in positive self-talk.**

Use positive self-talk as a chance to displace destructive thoughts crowding your mind. When you catch yourself thinking negative thoughts, remind yourself to "stop" and replace them with positive ones .

For instance, if your mind is filled with gloomy thoughts, replace them by thinking of happy moments. If you see yourself pushing for perfection, tell yourself to try doing your best. This will allow you to be more forgiving of yourself; at the same time, continue working to improve.

One good way to crowd out negative thoughts is by reading and listening to positive things. Reading and listening to positive and affirming materials will enrich your abilities and talents to develop your self-confidence.

Read and listen to inspiring stories of successful individuals. You will discover that a lot of them underwent tough circumstances, had many difficulties and challenges in life, yet they overcame these difficulties and became successful in their

endeavors. Such approach will reap good dividends in the future as these become sources of positive stream of consciousness in your mind.

### **9. Visualize your future success.**

Regularly imagine yourself enjoying success! Feel the excitement, anticipation, exhilaration, and thrill of victory. In order to become more confident, you must picture yourself as a person with high self-esteem. Picture yourself tackling a tough challenge and overcoming it with poise and confidence.

Use your five senses to make the picture in your mind vivid and seem real. Let us say you will have your piano recital and you have trouble relaxing. Imagine yourself on the stage confidently striding towards the piano. Visualize yourself performing with confidence and joy. Imagine people clapping their hands and shouting, "Encore!" Take in the sight, smell and taste of success. Isn't it exhilarating?

### **10. Acknowledge your success.**

Give yourself credit for everything you try. Emphasize the process of achieving, those brave and simple efforts exerted, instead of focusing on success itself as the end product.

Congratulate and reward yourself each time you do something that makes you feel satisfied. Treat yourself to a restaurant, a spa, or a day off for the rest of the day.

Nurture this feeling by reminding yourself of past successes. In your journal, write the instances where you feel the happiest. It may be an incident or performance where you felt appreciation and a deep sense of accomplishment.

Bask on these memories and draw strength from these. Say this aloud, "If I was able to achieve these in the past, I can achieve more today and in the future."

### **11. Accept and reframe failures.**

It is an indication of a healthy mind if you are able to accept negative aspects of yourself. If you are always crying over the errors that you made in the past, you will never get anywhere.

Always remember that past mistakes and failures cannot be reversed; what is done is done. Thus, there is no use crying over spilled milk. Accept that mistakes do happen. Understand that every mistake or failure you make is a step towards success. When you recognize mistakes as an opportunity to learn, you minimize fear of failure and boost your confidence.

## **12. Take risks.**

Try doing things that you have never tried before. It is always a challenge to do new things. The mere act of accepting these challenges, whether you become successful or not, adds a tremendous boost in your self-confidence.

Shrinking from challenges prevents us from learning new skills, discourages us from testing our limits, and forces us to live unexciting lives within our comfort zones.

People with high level of self-confidence are not afraid of going out and doing things. They may have limited talent or capability; but going out and doing "it" is no problem for them because they feel confident that they will succeed. They are less afraid of committing mistakes and they utilize more opportunities to succeed.

Self-confident people probably commit more mistakes than those who are not self-confident, but they are most likely to have far more enriching successes than the average Joes because of their confidence in themselves.

## **13. Act confidently.**

Your success at nearly every endeavor you undertake is largely affected by your self-image. People who have confidence in their self-worth seem to be magnets for success and happiness. Think confident and act confident.

#### **14. Attend seminars.**

It is good to attend seminars with professional and motivational speakers offering suggestions and guidance on building confidence. During the lecture, you can pick up tips on public speaking by observing the speaker's body language and the manner he projects himself.

These strategies can help you strengthen and build your self-confidence in every stage of your life. Make use of these strategies and see a positive change in your self.

## CHAPTER III

### How To Tap Your Potentials

*“I believe fervently in our species and have no patience with the current fashion of running down with the human being as a useful part of nature. On the contrary, we are a spectacular, splendid manifestation of life.”*

*- Lewis Thomas, M.D.*

People succeed because they choose to concentrate on their strengths and on their capacities, instead of dwelling on their limitations. Therefore, one of the steps for building self-confidence is to: **Concentrate On Your Strengths Rather Than On Your Weaknesses.**

This book does not offer Pollyanna advice or support easy and thoughtless ideas that lead to nowhere. Other inspirational speakers offer various techniques. They tell us that we are magnificent, our opportunities are infinite, and if we only believe in ourselves, we can achieve anything. If this works for you, use them.

You should be careful when you say to your children that they can achieve anything they desire. This may decrease their self-confidence instead of increasing it. When their wishes do not come true, they think that there is something wrong with them.

However, it is realistic to tell your children that they are very important, that within them lay unused and powerful resources. You can tell them that they have untapped *potentials* that they can explore. We all do carry within us the opportunity of changing the world by changing our viewpoints, belief systems, and paradigms.

In his last book, Einstein noted the fact that only a small part of his potential had been used. Admiral Byrd, who was the first person to fly over the North and South

Poles, once said: "Few people come anywhere near exhausting the resources within them. There are deep wells of strength that are never used."

## **The Inner Filter**

If a Higher Force created humans with such beauty and honor, what holds so many people from using their capacities? This is what happens if you become obsessed with your imperfections instead of viewing the entire picture from a bigger perspective.

A beautiful girl is getting ready to go out on a date. She notices a pimple on her face. She begins to cry and decides to postpone her date. Does she really see all the good traits that endeared her to her suitors? No, she notices only the pimple.

People who doubt themselves frequently cannot accept praises or accolades. One would assume that if people have low self-confidence, they would be willing to accept great compliments. However, it is the other way around. If their self-perception is off and they hate the way they are, it is often times difficult to talk them out of that situation. When someone criticizes them, they hear every single word, but praises drift over them.

Why is this so? We seem to have an internal filter that accepts only selected information. You hear only the compliments that fit in your belief system. For example, you believe the following things about yourself:

- I'm pretty good at math.
- I'm poor at sports.
- My IQ is about average.
- I see myself as fat and pimply.

- I've got a beautiful face but a terrible figure.

When new information comes in, it runs through this filter. If it conforms to what you believe you are, then the information flows through the filter. If someone says: "You're very good at Geometry," that is allowed to pass through and you acknowledge the person since the compliment fits to your view of yourself (I'm pretty good at math).

However if someone says: "You sure are looking nice and trim!" That is screened out, since this does not fit in the internal picture.

## **Get Rid of Comparisons**

Another variable makes us obsessed with our weaknesses: we tend to compare ourselves with other people. No other practice effectively destructs your self-confidence as the practice of putting yourself side by side with the people around you. It is as if you have a radar dish on your forehead, continually scanning to see if someone else is faster, tanner, or smarter. When you find that at times someone is, you may become frustrated or depressed.

It is foolish to build your self-esteem based on unrealistic comparisons. Maybe you are feeling quite good about your appearance one day and suddenly find someone with strikingly good looks. All of a sudden, you feel horrible and want to vanish. Maybe you know you have above-average IQ, but you find yourself at dinner with smarter people. Every single word that comes from your mouth sounds like intellectual mud.

Several of us grew up with older siblings whom we look up to and sought to imitate. Regardless of how hard we tried to look and sound like our older siblings, we

are smaller and clumsier than they were. When they mock us, as typical older brothers and sisters may do, we criticize ourselves. In many instances, self-criticism became a permanent practice.

Remember that our Creator did not make you to be like your brothers and sisters or anyone else. You are totally distinct. You are the outcome of 23 chromosomes from your father and 23 chromosomes from your mother. Genetic scientists say that the chances of your parents having another child like you are one in  $10^{2,000,000,000}$ !

Your main principle should not be reduced when you find yourself with people who are more talented or more famous/wealthier than you are. You have your own self worth distinct from any other individual, for you are unique in your own special ways.

## **Give Your Best**

*“There is dignity in work only when it is freely accepted.”*

- Albert Camus

All of us have limitations. The technique is to find out which ones can be improved, work on those, and stop thinking about the rest.

For instance, some of us will never be as good at math like the others. What is important is to stop the habit of kicking yourself when you are not quick at math problems. You must concentrate on developing your own talents. After all, your duty is to maximize your talents for the highest possible achievement.

There are two good reasons to do your best.

Firstly, when you give one hundred percent in whatever you do, you become more fulfilled and happier. Visualize yourself back when you were in school. Remember what it felt like going to school, especially those days when you had done all of your homework and had done your best. Didn't you feel more enthusiastic and self-confident?

It does not matter whether you have been out of school for fifty years, the "homework principle" still applies. Your teacher told you to work hard, your parents told you to work hard, bosses tell you to work hard – but you do not work to please parents and teachers and to keep your boss off your back. You do it for your own sense of accomplishment and to boost your confidence.

Secondly, the universe has a way of punishing laziness and arrogance. Things will not go exceptionally well in your life if you do not exert your best or if only give a halfhearted effort. Ask the boxer who underestimates his opponent. Ask the businessperson who underestimates his competition.

Have you ever noticed how some taxi drivers make your trip pleasurable while some make it a painful experience? Happy cabbies have a different philosophy and it is NOT this: "Good cabbies give good service because they're cheerful." Rather, they adopt this way of thinking: "They're cheerful because they give good service."

People who enjoy their work wake up saying: "*Today, I am going to be more effective and caring than I was yesterday.*" They may not always hit the bull's eye, but eventually, after so many practices, they hit their mark.

Is it crucial that you have stratospheric IQ, or that you do not set any limitations? No, the important thing is that you give the best that you can give.

Instead of getting obsessed with your limitations, you should capitalize on your potentials.

**In a Nutshell**

You give your best not because you need to impress people. You give your best because that's the only way to enjoy your work.

## CHAPTER IV

# How To Aspire For Personal Excellence

*“One does not “find oneself” by pursuing one’s self, but on the contrary by pursuing something else and learning through discipline or routine... who one is and wants to be.”*

- May Sarton

Your worth does not come from your achievements; your achievements are the products of your inherent worth. The bonus that you get is this: As you achieve something valuable, your self-confidence improves. You are more than what you do, but what you do represents an important part of who you are.

Anyone with strong self-confidence also has a sense of reason in life. Therefore, another principle for building self-confidence is to: **Find your passion and do it well.** Performing something you love makes you do it over and over again with confidence.

There are two important steps to putting this principle into practice:

1. Evaluate your gifts and discover where you can make significant contributions.
2. Take on a difficult task and practice improving it so you become exceptional at one thing.

## Talent

Talent does not only mean painting masterpieces. Caring for people is a talent. Teaching is a talent. Making people feel welcomed is a talent. Solving problems is a talent. Managing is a talent. Parenting is a talent.

Too often, people underestimate their our own talents. The potter says: “If I could only make music now that would be something.” The pianist says: “If only I

could make things with my hands ....” Stop pitting your skills against that of others. Do the best that you can do. Accept what talents you have. Fulfillment comes from developing your talents, not wishing for someone else’s.

Having said this, *talent is useful, but it isn’t everything!* When people talk about Jack Nicklaus’ golfing success, they usually talk of his *extraordinary talent*. When Jack talks of his success, he talks about the *extra practice ball he hit*. Jack knew that the difference between Jack Nicklaus and a thousand other talented golfers was attitude and hard work.

Onlookers and underachievers put major emphasis on talent. For them, talent, or the lack of it, is a great excuse to do nothing. If there is an outstanding quality common to great artists, scientists, sports stars, humanitarians, and business tycoons, it is not their talent – it is their *focus*. Once you know what you want to do, get focused! You cannot do everything. You cannot save the whales, heal the sick, and plug the ozone layer all at the same time. Leave some deeds for the rest of humanity.

## CHAPTER V

# How To Improve Your Internal Dialogue

*“The only difference between the best performance and the worst performance is the variation in our self-talk.”*

*- Dorothy and Bette Harris*

If you could plug a set of headphones into the minds of most people and listen to the messages they say to themselves all day, you can be quite certain that the majority of these messages would be negative. You are likely to hear some of these messages:

- “I’m running late once more – as usual.”
- “My hair looks horrible this morning.”
- “That was a stupid comment to make – she most likely thinks I’m a dummy.”

By the thousands, these messages bombard people’s brains everyday and it is no wonder that the outcome is a reduced personality.

One effective daily exercise for developing self-confidence is to practice a friendlier internal dialog: **Substitute Self-Criticism With Regular Positive Self-Talk.**

Donald Meichenbaum has developed a complicated approach on helping people change their stream of internal discussion. Here is how an impulsive and extremely self-critical child might handle an assignment:

Oh my, this is going to be hard. I’m certainly going to make a mess of this. Oh, there you go, you’ve already made an error. I could never draw. Stupid! You were supposed to go down there. He’ll see my mistakes and the erasures I’ve made. It seems others are doing well, but this is a total mess. That’s as good as I can do, but it’s not what they want.

Here is a more effective manner that Meichenbaum teaches the same child to keep as internal dialogue:

Okay, what is it I have to do? You want me to copy the picture with the different lines. I have to go slow and be cautious. Okay, draw the line down, down, *good*; then to the right, *that's it*; now down some more and to the left. *Good, I'm doing well so far*. Remember go slow. Now back up again. *No, I was supposed to go down. That's okay*. Just erase the line carefully ... carefully. Okay. I have to go down now. *Finished, I did it*.

Such a manner of talking to yourself can be a great help in reprogramming your personality.

## **The Origins of Self-Criticism**

Where did people learn to accuse and talk down to themselves? They learned it from other people, for sure. The thousands of negative thoughts that came from parents, teachers, older brothers and sisters, and friends are all stored in their memory banks. These negative talks are part of their "loving" attempts to change other people into socially acceptable individuals.

Many of these thoughts get incorporated into the general pattern of dialogue you keep on with yourself all day. "Why are you always late ... What's the matter with you, do you want to get run over? ... This way, Idiot. ... Can't you even catch the ball?"

You learn from the assessments of people around you. Some psychologists theorize that we know more about ourselves only from other people's responses. Suppose someone says, "You have trouble with math, don't you?" You may easily believe him especially if the person is older and smarter. Then for the rest of your life,

whenever a set of numbers appears before your eyes, your automatic reaction is, "Remember, you always have trouble with math."

## **Talk More Positively to Children**

These studies about internal dialogues are more significant when you consider pushing for positive messages into the young minds around you. Obviously, you must correct your children when they commit mistakes. However, you can do it in a loving and positive manner such as these:

- "You're a bright guy – you can see that it's unsafe to swing the bat here in the house."
- "This is not like you. Your work is usually so neat. I want you to do that page over."
- "You're one of the best-behaved boys in the class, Bryan. What's wrong today that you're talking so much?"
- "I love you, Billy, but you're making me nervous tonight."

This kind of method of parenting and teaching will harvest good dividends in the future. The outcome provides a more positive stream of consciousness in those children. They will grow up with the following running dialogues in their minds:

- "I'm no dummy. I can figure this one with a little time."
- "This is not like me. Got to figure out what's wrong so I can get back to normal production."
- "I like getting along with people, and always feel good when I walk into this office. I'm pretty well accepted around here, and that feels good."

## **The Displacement Law**

Let us say that you have not been so lucky in the past and you have absorbed hundreds and thousands of negative thoughts. You have the habit of addressing yourself, "I'm no good at math," or "I'm going to get into trouble!" Can anything be done about this habit? Absolutely!

You can begin by understanding the principle of displacement. The way to eliminate depreciating thoughts is to fill your minds with good messages, so that the negative ones can be automatically dislodged and displaced. Like everything else, you will learn to talk to yourself more gently and positively with practice.

## **Statements of Hope**

One way to start-off the practice of running positive streams of self-dialogue through your mind is to put it on paper. Often times in prayers, your mind easily drifts. Because of this, some people find it easier to pray by writing their prayers. Writing positive messages help direct your concentration.

How to do this is very similar to that of saying a prayer. Here is how it works. Try to do this first thing in the morning. In your journal each day, jot down some affirming statements such as these:

- I feel optimistic about the day that is about to unfold.
- I am a competent decision-maker and trust that I'll do the right things as I go through this day.
- I enjoy nature and feel good as I look out this window at the foggy morning.
- I am determined to be self-confident!

- I am enthusiastic and eager for achievement!
- I am thankful for life and opportunity!
- I desire to be influential!
- I resolve to grow and progress!
- I aspire for greatness!
- I have absolute faith in myself!
- I grow daily in courage!
- I am ambitious for conquest!
- I will positively succeed!
- I have set my heart upon truth!
- I aspire for lofty heights!
- I am developing self-reliance!
- I am pushing to the front!
- I shall absolutely win!

These are not so much goals for the day as statements of belief. When repeated repeatedly, these can change how you think about yourself.

If it is true that you become what you believe, then it will change the essence of your being.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **How Love Can Boost Self-Confidence: Expanding a Network of Love**

*“Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute. ... It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap, he does not fill in, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.”*

*- Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

At times, I ask people if they are in an important relationship.

“Are you in love? Do you have lots of good friends?”

“No,” the person frequently responds, “I’m not yet prepared for that. I want to get my personality straightened out, only then perhaps that I’ll be ready to seek intimate relationships.”

This sounds like a grown-up man delaying exercise until he is in shape! This clearly shows a way of thinking that states: I must have positive personality first before I can have a lasting relationship. Why not have both at the same time?

One of the most certain ways to increase confidence is to ensure you have a lot of love in your life to take the needed steps to build a network of supportive relationships.

Love results in self-confidence, most especially when **You Nurture Your Relationships With People Who Help You Grow.**

Here’s a simple example. I met a woman on her thirties. My personal feeling of gloom is nothing compared to her. She lives in a huge house. Every morning, she eats her breakfast alone, goes down to her parking garage, drives out onto the expressway, and parks in another underground parking lot beneath her office building.

She works alone in a small workplace, with not much communication with her officemates. She frequently eats her lunch alone. At the end of the day, she drives back to her empty house. Being alone, she never bothers with hot meals and just eats while standing at the sink. At around 8:00, she goes to bed eagerly and falls asleep. According to her, "those 12 hours of sleeping time are the only respite I have from this terrible solitude."

This woman was already hospitalized four times and had been in and out of therapy all her adult life. The ancient rabbis were correct when they said: "Anyone who goes too far alone goes mad."

In her case, it is not enough that she improves her personality. She also needs loving support of people to help her through with the internal changes. She needs someone to boost her morale, help pick-up the pieces when relationships break, assist her in working out what she did wrong, motivate her to go for more success, and nurture whatever she has achieved to boost her self-confidence.

## **The Must for Love**

*"'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."*

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

People nowadays have this great need to connect. People yearn for good friendships but they fear to get too close. They make all kinds of explanations and excuses: they're very busy, they can't trust people, they've learned to survive without having anyone, and they choose to live alone. Yet, beneath these excuses lay an intense longing for love and being loved.

Several people make the mistake of assuming that they will be happy and contented only when they find the perfect man or the perfect woman to marry that they totally ignore one crucial element in a loving relationship: friendship.

Many people are prepared for a sexual relationship but they are not ready to maintain and nurture friendships. You need not marry to be contented with your life, but you do need to receive love from friends.

People are afraid to be in a serious relationship due to the realities of divorce. Thousands of marriages end up in divorce, which is a painful process.

Some say that relationships encourage over-dependence. A woman once remarked, "I don't need any other friends – my husband is my best friend!" We should be happy for her, but we should also remind her that she is placing too much stress on her marriage. There is no way that one person can satisfy all our emotional wants. Your partners should be your best friend, but not your only friend.

How does one develop supportive and nurturing relationships? Most of us believe the main problem is being in the right place at the right time to be able to meet great people. However, the answer lies not in meeting new people, but in strengthening the relationships we currently have. Many people initially start out as acquaintances. Upon learning more about each other, they become good friends. Perhaps, you need not look farther, for the best foundation of love may be found in your existing group of family and friends.

## **The Value of Family**

Some college-educated women who are already in their 30s are afraid of the scenario of spending their lives alone. Studies have shown that these women have a small probability of pursuing married lives.

All is not lost for these single women and men who are destined to enjoy single blessedness. After all, they still have their immediate and extended families. It is significant to build and nurture powerful networks of support that includes the family. A valuable aspect is the extended family, which includes uncles and aunts, cousins, nieces, and grandparents.

My mom's friend, who is 47 years old, tells me that in every visit, she re-establishes contacts with her relatives!

She rationalizes, "But it is important for me to be around my family. I observe my grandfather's gestures and my parents' traits." Through these interactions, she has many realizations. "So, that's where I got my mannerism!" "So, that's why I respond this way." She narrates, "I understand myself better. I have better understanding of who I am, where I came from, and where I want to go." What a clever woman!

Many of us have detached ourselves from our past and moved thousands of miles away. We try to forget our past by changing ourselves, when in reality we are forever linked to our ancestry. Our ancestry is comprised of family ancestors who have names, inheritable characters, and recognizable physical traits.

You need to keep these family links for they help you understand yourself. You need to be recognized by someone, trace your roots, and understand your identity. As

John Dos Passos says, "A sense of continuity with the generations gone before can stretch a lifeline across the scary present."

## **The Importance of a Group**

Years ago, I found out that people can learn more from a month of group counseling than in a year of individual therapy. This is because the group provides numerous precise comments or reactions as to how I interact with other people.

Various types of groups provide support. Alcoholic Anonymous assists people fighting with chemical addiction. Clubs, sports groups, and church groups can also be sources of support. It is important to choose a group that concentrates on common objectives. We should also choose groups whose members we can trust, as some groups encourage group-sharing activities to release anxieties freely.

When you enclose yourself with nurturing friendships, you construct a pipeline that provides a stream of caring support. It may entail huge amounts of effort, but it is worth every ounce of energy you exert. Groups enable you to improve your self-confidence, which aids in developing a network of supporting and loving relationships.

At times, people who come for therapy are in unstable emotional condition. Often times, they do not have sufficient love in their lives and are usually screaming, "Somebody please love me!" Marked improvement occurs when they start to lighten up, learn to stop demanding for love, and begin to start loving.

Usually, these people just need a shoulder they can cry on, an arm to hug them, a comforting voice who will tell them that everything will be all right, and a giving heart that will teach them to love.

Begin looking for people who need love and take the initiative in giving it to them; love will then start flowing back to you.

## CHAPTER VII

### Summary

*"The mightiest works have been accomplished by men who have somehow kept their ability to dream great dreams."*

- Walter Russell Bowie

Loving and being loved are just some of the best ways to gain self-confidence. Other ways to boost self-confidence are to improve your skills and abilities, increase your knowledge, accept yourself, bask in your successes, reframe your failures, and use positive thoughts in your internal dialogues.

You must remember that it is by being full of love that you are able to give love to others. You should not relate self-confidence with arrogance, pride, and being "extremely in love with yourself."

Self-confidence represents a reasonable belief in oneself and one's abilities. It is also believed that one sign of a confident person is his ability to laugh at his own faults.

Few years ago, I watched on TV one talk show with an overweight man as guest. What struck me was that this man was not conscious about how he looked on the television. This person succeeded in six various professions and was now partially retired.

On television, he did not try to hide his stomach. He sat on the edge of his chair, waved his arms, and let his coat fly open. He laughed, grumbled, moaned, and his eyes shone with pleasure and wonder. He was comfortable and confident.

He was just as frank about the spectacular failures of his life. He had been dismissed from a top post. "Management informed me that they would announce that

I resign to save face. They wanted me to vacate my table on Saturday so there would be no questions asked. I had never been fired from a job in my life.”

“Was that traumatic for you?” asked the host.

“Traumatic?” he cried out. “How I hated myself! I went home straight to bed, pulled the blanket over my face, and stayed there for two days. I would not be able to recover from such experience if I did not have my wife with me. She is a spiritual woman. She nurtured me and gave me unconditional love. She gave me strength to stand up on my own two feet again and learn to love myself again.” He picked up the pieces and gained confidence. From there, he now leads a life sharing what he went through, hoping that other people will learn valuable lessons from his experience.

This fellow learned the true meaning of healthy self-love. He is honest about his weaknesses and laughs at himself willingly. He does not take himself too seriously. Despite all these, he retains self-respect.

This person gets his boost of self-confidence from knowing that the Universe supports him as he pursues his purpose in life. He refuses to waste his life. He leads a life that involves serving other people. He tries his best and finds joy in what he is doing.

That man on TV appears to have found his place in the world. It is hoped that you, too, will find your own special place in the sun. In this special place, you can walk with determination and with conviction. It is a place where you can be comfortable with both your talents and your faults. It is a place where you can laugh at your limitations. That special place is probably that piece of earth you are standing on, experiencing the true meaning of self-confidence.

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