

## Self-Confidence and the Workplace

Self-confidence is that delicate space between shattered self-esteem and an arrogance laced ego – Your self-confidence; it makes a difference. My years of coaching has taught me that those who are successful believe that their own self-confidence has been significantly enhanced by the explicit positive actions, behaviours and successes of those they have worked with or observed. If this is true, then as managers and leaders we have an obligation to manage our own self-confidence levels, and moreover, to inspire others to positively manage theirs.

Experience tells me, that for many, self-confidence levels are well below a successful mindset. Indeed, they are much more fragile than we would imagine. This mindset is one of “can’t do” rather than “can do” and is unfortunately imprinted by many more negative than positive influences. I would suggest that, within my coaching practice, self-confidence levels, in the majority of people I see, are well below healthy levels. I would further contend that a healthy level of self-confidence is a corner stone to performance and success.

Self-confidence is generally described as a mental state of being certain or self-assured with any thought or situation in the moment. It might be viewed as an emotional state of mind or belief in oneself to step forward and succeed. What self-confidence does is enable individuals to obtain control of situations or circumstances rather than being controlled by them. In doing so, it can assist in relieving anxiety or unnecessary and unhealthy fears. More importantly, it can set positive expectations for positive outcomes.

I offer this thought – self-confidence is owned. The self-confidence you have within you is yours and belongs only to you. You should protect and continue to build on it even if that means a face-to-face chat with the reflection you see in the mirror. I would never suggest that it will not come under extreme pressure from time to time but the power to control it is within you. In fact, you can learn how to use your self-confidence as a means to out-perform others around you. Believing in yourself allows you to gain the upper hand on those who are unable to model those same positive beliefs. It means that in all situations, and regardless of who is around you, you can feel in control. Of course, that means you must be willing to take all necessary steps to accomplish what is set out in front of you. Your self-confidence is the foundation to your personal and professional successes. Never allow anyone to strip away the self-confidence you have in yourself. It is yours to keep and hang onto forever. And, it is only you who can allow others to diminish your self-confidence.

At all levels of an organization, people are individuals. It is only social rules, experience or corporate governance that has provided particular individuals with unique benefits such as privileged knowledge, titles, corner offices and executive perks. In turn, this has provided some with power, real or perceived, or with a position of authority. Or, more to the point, they have been provided with the knowledge or power that you or they feel gives them power over you. The reality is that they came into the world the same way and they will leave the same way – with a first and final breath. What individuals have been exposed to during their lives and what they have learned or how they choose to use what they have experienced is what positions them in relation to others. In fact, on a personal note, I know I have observed and experienced both high and low levels of self-confidence regardless of stature, role or title.

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Very early in my career I had the opportunity to get to know on the president of the company on a personal level. On one particular occasion I was out in a canoe with him on a lake at his summer home. I was trying to be very exact with all of my actions. My dialogue was stiff and uncomfortable, more or less saying “Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir”. As we approached the dock, and he stepped out of the canoe, he tipped me into the lake. As he extended his hand to help me out of the water with a friendly smile he casually reminded me that like everyone else he liked to have fun too. I never forgot that lesson; that conversation instilled within me a level of self-confidence for all the years that followed. I learned how to treat people more senior than I. While I treat more senior people with the respect they deserve or that they have earned, the fact is, they really are the same as you and I. We all deserve and should earn the right degree of personal respect. Consider that the interaction and observations you will have with individuals along the road to success could significantly influence your learning and the development of your own self-confidence.

**Managing Upward** – Your superior self-confidence will be critical in dealing with individuals in more senior positions. They will quickly recognize it, will more likely be at ease with you and will respect your capabilities, whatever the situation. It is possible that the leaders themselves might be unsure or not be knowledgeable on certain topics. Not surprisingly, leaders cannot be expected to be experts in all areas. Your self-confidence level will allow for continued reliance in you. They will come to appreciate you for the value you bring to them in the workplace. You might find that more tasks will likely be delegated to you as their confidence in you increases. At times, they will not always be able to determine or properly assess your ability or personal motivation for a particular task. So, you will have to work at making that clear to them in order to complete the task effectively. Managing up is an important skill to learn as you discover the real certainty and knowledge within you. This self-confidence will emerge from within you. Indeed, it may be the key ingredient in providing you that opportunity to succeed. At the same time, it can make you a role model for other employees to manage up as well.

On many occasions I have done what I could to manage up or become a coach for my manager. For example, I have given them tips on how things might work best or alternatives that work well in prior similar situations. One of the easiest ways to proceed is to simply ask how they felt about how something unfolded or how they might have done it differently. Sometimes I would come right out and ask if they are open to an alternative approach and then have just left them with compelling ideas that they can pick and choose from. Overtime, and with the right level of respect, leaders will often seek you out – a very rewarding experience.

**Managing Downward** – As you interact with your employees, your self-confidence will be a beacon for their determined reliance in you as a manager; as your self-confidence on an issue builds, so too will theirs. Allow it to slip and you will come under scrutiny. An important practice is that of allowing and encouraging your employees to bring forward ideas – especially ideas that might be better than your own. Encourage them to be their best and accept openly that some will some day move at a pace faster than you. Encouraging this will allow them to see that they, too, can become more successful than they ever realized. And, they will respect you for encouraging such a mindset. Don't try and guess or interpret what individuals want, as this will shut them off to a world that they don't yet know exists. As a leader, it is up to you to provide an environment that is open and to provide guidance as to how to explore the world at their fingertips. In doing so, what happens? They have self-confidence in you, you in them, and they in themselves. You have created a powerful energy that will propel success – theirs and yours!

**Managing Across** – In working with your peers the same holds true as with managing upwards or downwards.

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You will be observed and scrutinized. There is both a collaborative and competitive nature to the environment and the individual with the greatest level of self-confidence will often stride further than their peers might. Obtain knowledge or facts, become realistic of the situation, set appropriate goals for yourself and others and enlist the support of those who will positively influence the outcomes. A leadership team with soaring self-confidence will, in fact, define the culture of an organization, a culture of self-confidence! This is a culture that asks more than tells and rewards more than punishes.

As you learn to accept your own level of self-confidence and use it in a positive way, it can be a powerful tool for advancing you closer to your personal and professional goals. A word of caution though, be sure that you do not mistake uncontrolled ego for controlled or perceived self-confidence in yourself and in others. I have learned first hand, that the self-confidence managers and leaders have should be worked at in two ways, equally; sustaining and enhancing one's own confidence and also eliciting it in those you lead. The success of leadership should not be a measurement of the leader alone but rather by the confidence within those that they are accountable for.



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