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## Seven tips for building more confidence

1. The actions of confidence come first: the feelings will come later. So start acting in line with your values and goals! Right now, what might be some small things you could do which align with your values and goals? Do them and you will start to feel more confident.
2. Confidence is not the absence of fear – it's creating a different relationship with your fears – one of acceptance. Our fears are a normal part of being human.
3. Negative thoughts are also quite normal. Don't feel you have to fight them. Just gently let them be there. Defuse from them. Let them float past you. Don't identify with them.
4. True success is living according to your values. Do you know what yours are?
5. Don't get too fixated on outcomes – focus instead on the process. Make sure it's high quality – as good as you can make it.
6. Yes, failure can be painful. But it can also be a great teacher, if we are willing to learn!
7. The key to peak performance is being fully engaged with what you're doing. This will build your confidence. What engages you?

## HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU?

*'If only I felt more confident, my life would be different!'*

This is a question that comes up for many of us at times. Just when we think we're handling our lives pretty well, the ground shifts, more is demanded of us, some new complexity emerges ... and self-doubt strikes! In our coaching work with senior executives, we find a confidence gap can be the cause of other problems too, such as poor delegation, ineffective decision making, weak influencing or even a damaging interpersonal style. Sometimes we don't seize an exciting new opportunity because our lack of self-confidence constrains us to stick with the tried and true. Later, we can look back with regret at a time when we *didn't* take the 'road less travelled,' even though we'd have loved to have had a go!

Do you relate to this? Why don't you take a moment to think over whether you've missed out on some great opportunities or even given up some things because you felt a lack of confidence in your ability? In this briefing, you'll learn about exciting new research that sheds light on this common problem.

The findings provide a fresh approach. It's gentler, more thoughtful and more practical - a far cry from the old-style, aggressive self-help platitudes that urged us to recite positive affirmations and banned any negative thinking. The essence of the new approach is as follows: the *actions* of confidence come first – the *feelings* of confidence come later!

### *Welcome to the new world of work!*

Over the last fifteen years, there has been an inexorable move away from security and towards freedom – and uncertainty. A job for life has virtually gone. How work is organised reflects our rapidly changing global economy. Contracts and sub-contracts, projects and portfolios, temp and freelance are now common terms. As Tom Peters prophesied, "We are all CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc." The consequence is that your most important job (one that never goes away!) is to be Chief Marketing Officer of the brand called 'You'. This requires more self-confidence than your parents ever needed. You can't assume that if you do a great job, your merit will be noticed and rewarded.

### *Why do we so often lack confidence?*

Of course there are lots of things we do on a daily basis with effortless confidence! No-one lacks confidence in everything: it usually relates to specific activities or areas of our lives. Research suggests there are five reasons why this happens. The first is excessive expectations. We insist on being perfect at all we do! We set the bar so high for ourselves that it becomes daunting even to have a go. Related to this is harsh self-judgement. We constantly tell ourselves we aren't as talented as others. In other words, we're hopeless at coaching ourselves! 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 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 our 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. The box of tips at the side sums up advice he gives to people who experience a gap between the confidence they have 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. Try it and see for yourself!