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Self-Confidence at Work

Kasia Lyczkowska

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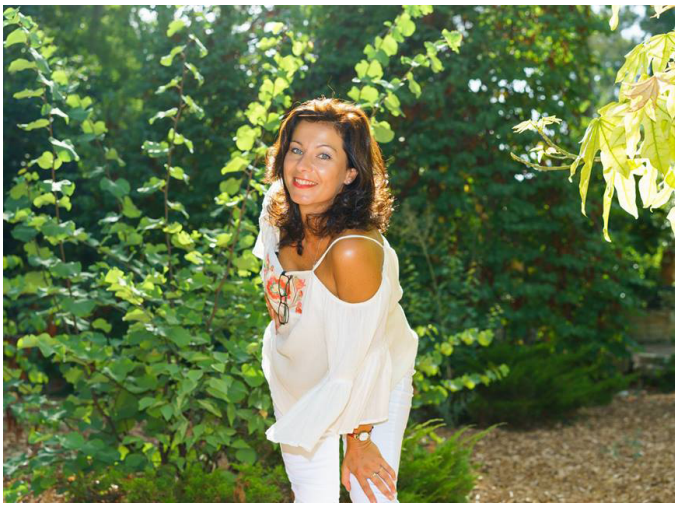
Short Biography



"Self-confidence is freedom from doubt; it is trust in yourself, your abilities and your judgment. It is the inner conviction that you can go through any task or action. It is the mark of inner strength. To be confident is to say: What I am and what I have done is okay, good or even great". ~ Kasia Lyczkowska

Kasia Lyczkowska, MSc in Psychology in Leadership Development and Coaching is a certified Coach and Counselor working as an Educational and Career Coach at the University of Liverpool. She is the author of a number of articles on leadership development, organizational analysis, and solution-oriented and person-centered coaching. She also writes her blog and column about wellbeing and positive psychology in the major newspaper dedicated to expats living in the Netherlands.

She has served as Vice President of Education in Amsterdam Fusion Toastmasters Club being responsible for development and progress of communication and leadership skills of over 30 members.

Kasia is currently running her private Growth and Development Coaching practice in Amsterdam. Her passion and work focuses on personal development of expats who are at a turning point in their lives, seeking vision, fulfillment and purpose. She promotes strengths, passion, hope, positive change, and world of opportunities as means to step out from her own and her clients' roadblocks to build fulfilling and joyful life.

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Intro

I have written this book using research data from few scientific disciplines, such as cognitive, behavioral, organizational and positive psychology. I also used my own and my client's experiences to bring examples. It intends to be a manual for working professionals, but given that work is just one of the parts of our lives, it can be used for any other aspect: be it at home, on a date or at friend's picnic. Thus dual meaning of the title: *Self-confidence at Work*.

It is written in a style that means you can open it and read on almost any page at random. I kept the content mainly to the core aspects of self-confidence, such as body language, goal settings, self-efficacy, self-discipline, internal and external communication and acting from strengths.

Self-confidence at Work will make you more aware of your serving and un-serving thinking patterns, your own non-verbal cues and signals, and will show how to get what you want by developing self-discipline and self-efficacy.

This book isolates and examines each component of self-confidence in simple terms to make it accessible for you.

There will always be those who throw up their hands in claim that the study of self-confidence is just another means by which scientific knowledge can be used to exploit or manipulate. This book however seeks to give you greater insight into self-confidence so that you can have a deeper understanding of yourself, and others. Self-confidence doesn't happen by default, so understanding how it works make life easier, whereas ignorance promotes fear making you more critical to yourselves and others.

A birdwatcher doesn't study birds so that he can shoot them down and keep them as trophies. In the same way, the knowledge and skills in self-confidence serve to make your new professional and personal ventures a more exciting experience.

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Personal Note

I would be a complete hypocrite if I told you that I am self-confident all the time. On the contrary, for the first half of my life I experienced the terror of confusion, insecurity and self-doubt. It began when my parents started to criticize me for really silly things. After a while, it made me doubt myself and I started to criticize myself for these very silly things. Not an ideal situation, is it? My soul was filled with anger, fear, scarcity, hopelessness and all negative thoughts imaginable. The world, and my place in it, seemed wrong.

Does this ring a bell? If so, how have things changed for you?

I started to work on the one thing over which I could have control – myself. I wanted to regain my self-confidence and see who I could be without my parents' influence.

I invested my time, energy and money on self-development. I read hundreds of books, and watched hundreds of movies and Ted Talks. I was coached to step out from my insecurities. I studied psychology to better understand myself and others. All of those actions were driven by the idea that there must be a better and more joyful way of living, and I was about to discover it.

Confidence… where does it come from? It took me years to find out it comes from knowing and believing that within me lies an extraordinary power to create whatever it is I need in life. That's confidence!

The problem is we often seem to forget it by falling into old habits, victimhood, and non-serving thinking patterns. The good news is that because habits are learnt, they can be unlearnt. They can be replaced by new ones. Easier said than done, but what do you really have to lose?

You can break old habits by practicing more serving ways of thinking. The sooner you start, the better. When you think thoughts of joy, creativity, success, connectedness, intuition, love and peace you discover a more confident self and a better world.

This book is meant as a constant reminder for you and me that we can learn to be more confident. You just need to follow certain exercises. By applying them daily and systematically you will not only become more confident but you will also be on the right path to fulfill yourself and live a more satisfying life.

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Your application of these tools will open a door to doing new, exciting and unimaginable things. As you progress, I promise that you will embrace life with feelings of trust, courage, success, power, fulfillment and joy.

I wish you great success and tons of self-confidence for the upcoming years.

Kasia Lyczkowska

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1 Power of Visualization

"Dreaming is not enough. You have to go a step further and use your imagination to visualize, with intent! Forget everything you've ever been taught, and believe it will happen, just as you imagined it. That is the secret. That is the mystery of life." ~ Christine Anderson

Visualization known as one form of mental rehearsal has been popular since the Soviets started using it back in the 1970s to compete in sports. Many athletes employ this technique, including Tiger Woods, Adam Małysz, Mohammed Ali, or Emily Cook who has been using it since her teen years. Seasoned athletes use vivid, highly detailed internal images and run-throughs of the entire performance, engaging all their senses in their visualization, and they combine their knowledge of the sports venue with it. World Champion Golfer, Jack Nicklaus has said: "I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp in-focus picture of it in my head".

For someone like Matthew Nagle who is paralyzed in all four limbs, mental practices have transformed his entire way of life. Matthew had a silicon chip implanted in brain. Astonishingly, after just 4 days of mental practice, he could: move a computer cursor on a screen, open email, play a computer game, and control robotic arm. While our circumstances may be less stringent than those that Matthew endures, it's quite obvious that every person can benefit from mental practice.

Being able to make yourself feel certain of success can give you a massive edge in many professional and personal endeavors. Studies have shown that confidence is the deciding factor in making a sale, closing a deal, acing a test, nailing an audition, being hired or promoted. And lack of confidence can put you into the decrepit state where even though you have the intellectual resources to succeed, you don't even make the attempt – you fail to ask for the sale, the raise, the help etc. You find yourself shying away from challenges, procrastinating on goals you set, earning less money, or even experiencing problems in your interactions with others.

Lack of confidence has the power to cause great problems in your life, not only because it makes you feel powerless and out of control, but also because it triggers you to act in ways that are usually counterproductive to what you want to accomplish. Visualization is one great way to help boost your confidence in many situations in your life.

If great athletes use this technique to enhance performance, how can it enhance your life and positively impact your confidence?

The key to feeling confident lies in a quote from Albert Einstein: "Imagination is more powerful than knowledge." Even when your knowledge tells you to expect failure, you have the ability to consciously direct your imagination to override that impulse and feel certain of success anyway.

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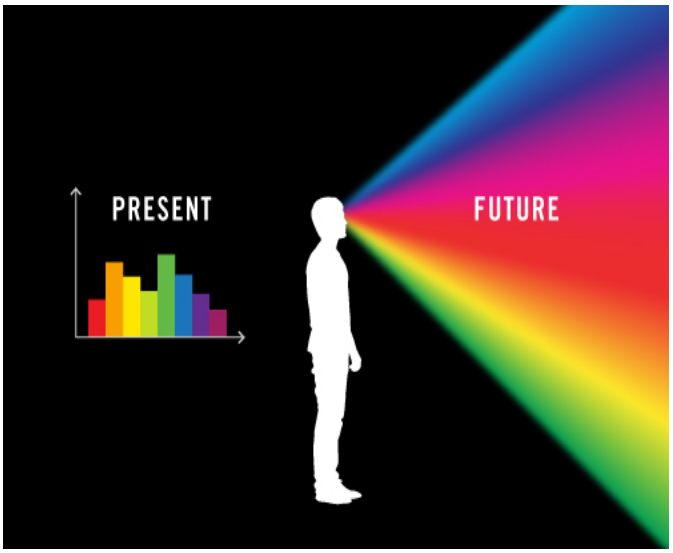

Studies in mental imagery have shown that the brain cannot distinguish from a real or an imaginary picture. The same chemicals release and the same electrical activity displays in the brain whether we are visualizing something or actually doing it. A repeated thought, or feeling, can actually become a belief over time. In other words, your brain is getting trained for actual performance during visualization. So seeing is believing.

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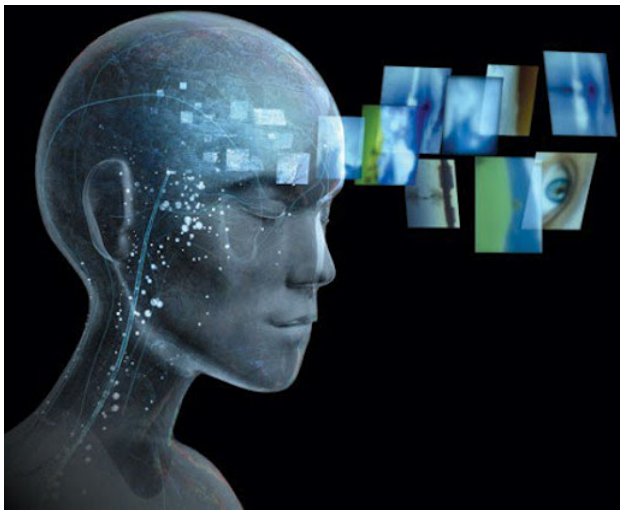

Using visualization to boost your confidence requires changing and improving your self-image, from the inside out. According to studies, low self-confidence is accompanied by a negative or limiting self-image, so creating a new, positive self-image through visualization will result in increased confidence.

Visualization to Create a More Confident You

1. Take a few minutes to write down some ideas about the self-image you'd like to have. Obviously, confidence will be one of the traits you'll include on your list, but also consider other traits you'd like to have, like compassion, discipline, ambitions, integrity, motivation, focus, and so on.
2. Sit with a straight spine, close your eyes and call up a mental image of your current self. Does this person have any of the traits you've just written down? Most likely you'll have at least one or two – even if you'd like them to be more prevalent.
3. Now, imagine that those traits and the others you've chosen are beginning to become obvious in this mental image of yourself. For example, you might see yourself standing a bit taller, smiling with happiness and purpose, or wearing an expression of peacefulness on your face.
4. Keep adding more and more visual cues to this mental image of yourself until you can see yourself as the person you want to be. Engage as many of the five senses as you can in your visualization. Who are you with? Which emotions are you feeling right now? What are you wearing? Is there a smell in the air? What do you hear? What is your environment? It will probably take more than one- 10 minutes' session to gain a clear and strong mental image of this new you, but do the best you can. The more you practice, the easier it will become.
5. Now, as you look at this strong, confident person you created in your mind, begin to switch your focus slightly so that you are feeling and behaving as he or she does, mimicking his or her demeanor and posture. Feel yourself growing more confident, self-assured, impassioned about your life, motivated about your goals, and so on.
6. See yourself interacting in your daily life with newfound confidence and enthusiasm! You're interacting with people easily, making eye contact and moving through your life experiences with zest. Stay with this inner vision for as long as you can, making it feel as real as possible.

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After returning to your normal activities, be sure to keep calling to mind a mental picture of this new you as often as you can, and make an attempt to feel and act like that person did during your visualization exercise. Eliminate any doubts, if they come to you. Repeat this practice often. Combine with meditation or an affirmation, for example: "I am courageous; I am strong".

Rather than reacting to situations like you normally would, pause and remember that you are now a confident, self-assured person! How would such a person handle this situation?

The more you shift your focus to express this new self-image, the easier it will become to keep it going – and gradually become that person inside and out! If you mastered your self-image you can use the same steps to visualize the things you want to achieve professionally and in your private life.

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2 Self-Efficacy and "Yes, I Can" attitude

"Whether you think that you can or you can't, you're usually right." Henry Ford

Henry Ford said it best! But few of us realize the veracity of his statement. Fortunately, there's science, and a little bit of fiction to back it up – so read on!

"I Can! I Can!"

Do you remember the children's story *The Little Engine that Could*? Defying impossible odds, the little engine did! But did we somehow miss the message of this tale? 50 years have past since the book was first published, and when trying to overcome hardship or pursue our dreams, many of us still think, "I can't." Sound familiar?

"Self-efficacy" – the scientific term for "I-can" is a psychological phenomenon that enhances goal achievement. Introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, over thirty years later the scientific potency persists in academia and in business world. But even with science on our side, we still haven't quite gotten it. Self-efficacy isn't about a sense of self-worth; it's about believing you are capable of producing a desired result – that you can achieve your goals.

The truth is – there's so much more to "I can" attitude than children's fiction, or a clichéd, feel-good maxim.

The Influence of Self-Efficacy

Everyone has something they'd like to change or improve; everyone has goals. Therefore, self-efficacy is of universal appeal and widespread need. Beyond that, it offers up some really great benefits.

For instance, people high in self-efficacy take better care of themselves, see tasks as something to be mastered, and they feel more empowered. They're not controlled by circumstances. They see setbacks as challenges to be overcome and can cope with hardship better than those with low self-efficacy. They learn from failure and channel it into success, like Thomas Jefferson, Walt Disney and J.K. Rowling. People higher in self-efficacy also have a greater sense of motivation and persistence.

Self efficacy – what does it influence?

1. The choices you make
2. The effort you put forth
3. How long you persist when confronted with obstacles
4. How you feel

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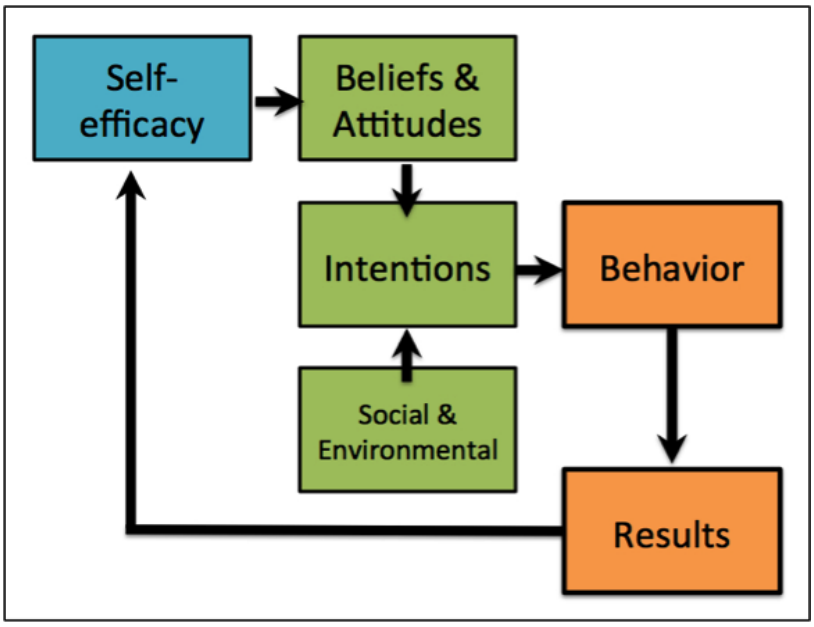
What does self-efficacy predict?

- Motivation (choice, effort, persistence)
- Learning
- Self-regulation
- Achievement



Try this

Just to test yourself for fun; how confident are you to go for higher position or to make a new career move? Assess yourself on the scale below:

0 – Not confident at all
5 – Moderately confident
10 – Highly confident

Fortunately, whether your current level is average, ample or absent, much like physical attributes, self-efficacy can be enhanced.

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Enhancing "Yes, I can"

Here are some simple exercises that you can use to boost your sense of self-efficacy.

1. **Take One Step at A Time**
   Self-efficacy is developed, in part, through success – and even small achievements can pack a powerful punch. Build up slowly. Pick one small change you'd like to make and go for it. Then pick another small change. Then another. Reflect on each success before moving on to your next small goal. Like any other change, enhancing self-efficacy is best achieved one step at a time.

2. **Draw from Your Past**
   Reminiscing on past successes can help drum up a greater sense of self-efficacy. Reflect on times when you succeeded at accomplishing things you didn't think you could do. Reflect on those moments. What did you accomplish? How did you accomplish it? How can these accomplishments be channeled to help you achieve future goals? What do these accomplishments say about your ability to succeed?

3. **See to Believe**
   Visualization is a powerful tool. Not only is seeing believing, when it comes to self-efficacy, believing is seeing… results. Visualization not only primes your brain for success and enhances self-efficacy; it also helps you to see the smaller steps you need to take to reach your end goal. See a separate chapter on visualization in this book.

4. **Accept Self-Doubt…but Put it in its Place**
   Managing your self-doubt is just one more way to keep "I think I can't" thoughts from derailing your success. When self-defeating thoughts pale up, accept them as part of the process and move on. These types of thoughts don't necessarily reflect your true capabilities. The key is to not let them stop you from moving forward. See a separate chapter on limiting beliefs in this book.

5. **Get Happy**
   A good mood can also boost self-efficacy while a bad mood can undermine it. Write out all the things that uplift you (i.e. special songs, favorite quotes, etc.) and use them to your advantage as you navigate towards your goals.

6. **Solicit Social Support**
   Another great way to build self-efficacy beliefs is to elicit encouragement from friends and family and to stay away from those who discourage you. Quality social support is a key ingredient to self-efficacy, persistence and ultimately success. Find your best advocates and invite them to be part of your campaign for change.

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3 Internal Communication – Dealing with Limiting Beliefs

"Reality is a projection of your thoughts or the things you habitually think about." ~ Stephen Richards

You are smart, beautiful, and hilarious. You have tasted some successes in life already… at least that's what your relatives and friends say. So how is it possible you don't always feel that way?

Instead of feeling satisfaction, with every smaller or bigger achievement you're filled with anxiety that you will be unmasked as an incompetent fraud…

I have worked with people from many walks of life. They were educators, students, managers, sales agents, marketing officers, executives; the list can go on…

What they share in common is a deep desire to understand why, in the face of often overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we continue to doubt ourselves, our competence, and our abilities.

Is it the past that can explain some of 'why's'? Is it lack of self-acceptance? Or is it too many self-limiting beliefs?

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Have you ever wonder why it's so hard to break old habits and patterns of thinking?

The scientific answer could be that neural pathways of your brain have formed around a particular belief for years and are not easily removed. Think of the years of conditioning like a full-blown tree with strong deep roots into the ground.

"I'm horrible sales representative."

"Me? Cook? Impossible!"

"Visiting new countries is just not my thing – I prefer to stay at home."

We don't just become who we are. The outcome is very much influenced by decisions we have made along the way, people we've observed and seeds that have been planted personally or by others about our abilities, limitations, preferences, values and principles. Are these statements actually true or have these beliefs been shaped inaccurately, limiting your ability to break from an artificial mold?

A limiting belief is a false idea that a person acquires as a result of making an incorrect conclusion about something in life. The biggest problem about these beliefs is that they force you to live below your potential. So if there's a rock that weighs 5kg but you believed that it weighs 50kg you might not ever try to move it because you whole heartedly think you can't. This belief and the rock as a metaphor for challenges in your life will remain on your path, not because it belongs there, but because you don't believe in your ability to move it.

Science gives a body of evidence that lack of self-confidence is the effect of internal factors such as perception and negative, self-limiting thinking. Such thinking leads to behaving in one or few of the following ways:

Perfectionism
Defensiveness
Can't handle criticism
Talking down to yourself
Constant worrying
Blaming yourself and others
Making excuses
Depending on others
No boundaries
Pessimistic attitude
Isolating yourself
Running away from change and new experiences

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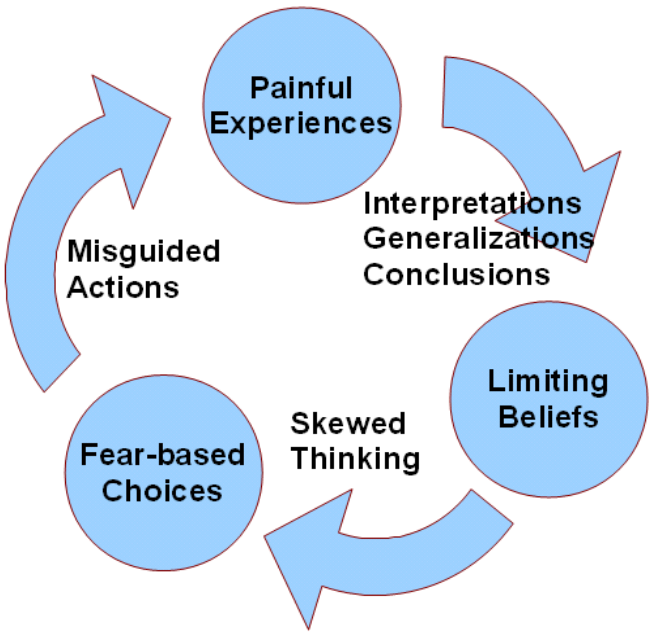
How many of those behaviors do you 'cultivate'without knowing? I used to cultivate three from the list, and it wasn't conscious. Since I have realized what it was, then I consciously started to learn new ways of dealing with the situation. For example, whenever I felt down and my self-confidence was close to none, I used to isolate myself from the world, my friends, and my colleagues for a long days. The outcome of it was that my self-confidence lowered even more. Now whenever I catch myself on doing it again I push my comfort zone and dial the number to my best friend and talk. It is my way which now helps me greatly; you can find best suited way which works best for you. But first, it is important to identify what are those behaviors and more importantly what are the self-limiting beliefs standing behind them.



Types of Limiting Beliefs

Limiting beliefs come in a variety of forms. Here are some of the most common.

If-then beliefs

- If I start a new job, I will fail, and that would be humiliating.
- If I speak with my boss about raise, it will get rejected.
- If I succeed in a big way, my friends won't like me as much.

Universal Beliefs

- Employees in corporations are inherently selfish.
- Children always misbehave.
- Money is the root of all evil.

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Personal and Self-Esteem Beliefs

- I'm not good enough.
- I don't matter.
- I'm contantly ignored.

Beating a monster – undressing self-limiting beliefs and finding ways to dissolve them

Have you held back because you're afraid of what might happen if you try and don't quite succeed? Or did you avoid action because you were afraid of what other people might think or say? Whatever it was you were thinking, you have a few basic options for dealing with limiting beliefs.

You can begin by asking yourself a series of probing questions to unhinge you from the beliefs holding you back and train your brain to see yourself in a different light. Go grab a pen and paper, and write down the answers to the following questions:

1. **What is your most limiting belief?**
   We all have many limiting beliefs, but isolate one that really interferes with your growth or impacts your ability to take action. You don't feel good enough at work? You don't make enough money? You're not smart enough? You aren't noticed by your colleagues?

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2. **Why do you have this limiting belief?**
   This is a question you should ask until you run out of answers. Write down every reason you can think of, starting with the main one that probably occurred when you were small. Write these reasons down so you don't forget them.

3. **What evidence do you have that undermines your limiting belief?**
   You might feel a certain way about yourself, but that doesn't make it true. And even if there were truth in the original belief and feelings, you have lived a lot of life since then. There are hundreds of reasons why you are smart, lovable, attractive, etc. Write those down too.

4. **In what ways are you not fully alive and engaged in life and work?**
   How has your limiting belief held you back from the fullness and joy of life? Write down all of the possible situations you can think of.

5. **How does it make you feel to have missed engaging in life and work in the ways you listed above?**
   Pay attention to the feelings you have knowing what life and work should be like for you and the ways your belief has prevented you from experiencing it fully. Write down your feelings.

6. **What would you do with your life if you no longer had this limiting belief?**
   Imagine the belief disappeared instantly. How would this change your perceptions of what you can do and how you can change your life? What goals would you set for yourself?

7. **How is your limiting belief impacting your relationships now or in the past?**
   Often we compromise our relationships when we remain stuck in a false belief. Can you see how any of your close relationships have been impacted?

8. **Would you be willing to write down your limiting belief on a small piece of paper and seal it in an envelope for a week?**
   Could you operate in your life by putting this belief "on hold" for a week and act "as if" it didn't exist? Write it down on a piece of paper and assign a number to it between 1–10, with 10 being "extremely limiting" and 1 being "not very limiting" based on how you feel about the belief now.

9. **What is the most pressing or compelling goal you listed in your answer to question 6?**
   Of all of the things you've wanted to achieve but avoided due to your limiting belief, which one stands out as the first you'd like to work toward?

10. **What are 3–5 small, manageable actions you could take on your goal this week while your limiting belief is sealed in an envelope?**
    Acting "as if" you have no limiting belief around your goal, please create a few actions you will commit to take in the direction of your goal and write them on a calendar.

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Now that your limiting belief is isolated, undermined, and locked in an envelope, use this time of freedom from the belief to take action. Commit to the actions you outlined and mark them on your calendar.

You will likely see how taking action further loosens the grip of this belief. How has it changed for you?

Consider extending the envelope isolation time for your belief for another week of two, until the power of the belief is almost totally diminished. Or go through this exercise for another limiting belief.

Continue working through your limiting beliefs this way, addressing and undermining them and taking forward action in the direction of your goals and dreams.

Moving forward

Self-limiting beliefs have stopped you from reaching the success you truly want and deserve. They stop you and keep you from trying new things – and from succeeding at them.

As humans, it's our natural instinct to stay in our comfort zones. But change occurs only when we step into new territory, expanding our thinking and acting.

So how do you ensure you're able to take a step – and then subsequent steps – into new territory?

You develop self-serving beliefs to feed your self-confidence. OK, you can say, but how?

Well, for example you can look at people like Richard Branson, Soichiro Honda or Thomas Edison!

Even the fifth richest person in the U.K., Richard Branson, didn't get to where he is now without a few failures along the way. Along with his famous Virgin Records and Virgin Airlines, he also developed Virgin Cola and Virgin Vodka. The fact that you don't recognize them says it all.

Honda initially applied for a job at Toyota as an engineer, but was turned down. Being jobless, he started making scooters at home, which he sold to neighbors. With the support of his family, he founded Honda, the world's largest motorcycle manufacturer and one of the most profitable automakers.

Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in history, holding over 1000 U.S. patents, was told as a boy by his teacher that he was too stupid to learn anything and suggested he go into a field that did not require intelligence. He tried more than 9,000 experiments before he created the first successful light bulb.

Could they be so great without a self-confidence or belief that 'they can'?! Could they find fame and fortune without experiencing a failure before?

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They believed they can and they were halfway there. They also showed: perseverance, determination, action.

Most successful people have incredible levels of self-confidence. They seem unstoppable. They have accomplished great levels of success and happiness in their lives thank to a goal, determination, discipline, practice, and openness to get support from others.

When you develop self-confidence, you, too, can become unstoppable. Everyone is capable of being self-confident, you too!

Please check the following tips on taking action and developing self-confidence to bring you things you want in your life.

Five ways to take action and boost your self-confidence

Confidence is not a black and white issue. However some of us think it's either you have it, or you don't. I like to think of confidence as a skill; it comes from practicing certain mental and behavioral habits.

There is no guarantee the confidence will stay after reaching it. It's like a marriage. It's a lifestyle choice where you constantly tweak and shift yourself and your life, beliefs and values in order to consistently build that confidence. It is lifelong commitment.

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Key ingredients you need before trying tips below:

- Few grams of Self-worth
- Few grams of Self-Love
- 1 Kilo of Motivation
- 1 Ton of Practice

1. **Learn from confident and successful people and then get off your ass**
   Confident people share similar characteristics, have a certain body posture, use certain words and vocal modulation. Learn from them.

   Confident people feel the confidence from accomplishing something. They aim for that. They strive to get things done so that they can feel good about themselves for the rest of the day. Get things done. One thing at the time!

2. **Learn from failure**
   Failure is a way of learning and growing as a human being. When you fail or are wrong, view it as a learning experience instead of something catastrophic. Sometimes we can learn from the mistakes of others, but often we have to fail on our own to gain experience. When you fail, you discover the world is not going to end. By failing, you at least have taken a chance.

3. **Face your fears**
   Come to grips with your fear just like confident people do. Fear can hinder you from taking action. However, there usually is no basis to what we fear. Face your fear and do what you want anyway!

   Fear is often described as false evidence appearing real. Discover precisely what you are afraid of and take action to discard your worry. Feeling of anxiety and discomfort can be sign that you're heading in the right direction. You feel it when you are expending your comfort zone and when you grow.

4. **Run Achievement Diary**
   Make a log of the ways in which you have been successful. List your achievements, such as writing a poem, recognition for your hard work, graduating with a degree, a special task you performed well or even a great meal that you have prepared for team potluck lunch.

   Inspect your 'Achievement Log'. To enrich it add a list of your strengths. If it is difficult then think about what your friends would consider as your strengths.

   Look at this log often, letting yourself enjoy these successes and strengths a few minutes every week.

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5. **Have goals**

   Work on accomplishing something, just like Thomas Edison did. However do not take whatever you are going to embark on too seriously or you will feel overwhelmed. Relax and focus on your task with a lighter state of mind. Start with a small goal. Don't start off too big or you will get discouraged.

   Establish a goal you know you can accomplish, and then set out to go for it. You'll gain more confidence achieving a small goal first. Once you have accomplished many small goals, you can set larger ones. Always make sure your goals are realistic and achievable. Please check the chart below for goal setting guidelines.

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4 External Communication – Body Language

"I'm bilingual, speaking English and body language. I prefer the latter, because I can speak it silently and without listening and while my back is turned." ~ Jarod Kintz

Body Language and Self-Confidence

Confidence is one of the most important skills in life that you can acquire. I am sure you know how important even a little bit of confidence can be in everyday situations, whether it's negotiating with your boss for a raise, buying a car, giving a presentation, or meeting your partner's parents. But have you ever wondered how to appear more confident instantly by adjusting your body posture and gestures? There is a fruitful body of research confirming that body language tells a volume about us.

A classic study by Dr. Albert Mehabrian gives us this insight: "the total impact of a message is based on: 7% words used; 38% tone of voice, volume, rate of speech, vocal pitch; 55% facial expressions, hand gestures, postures and other forms of body language."

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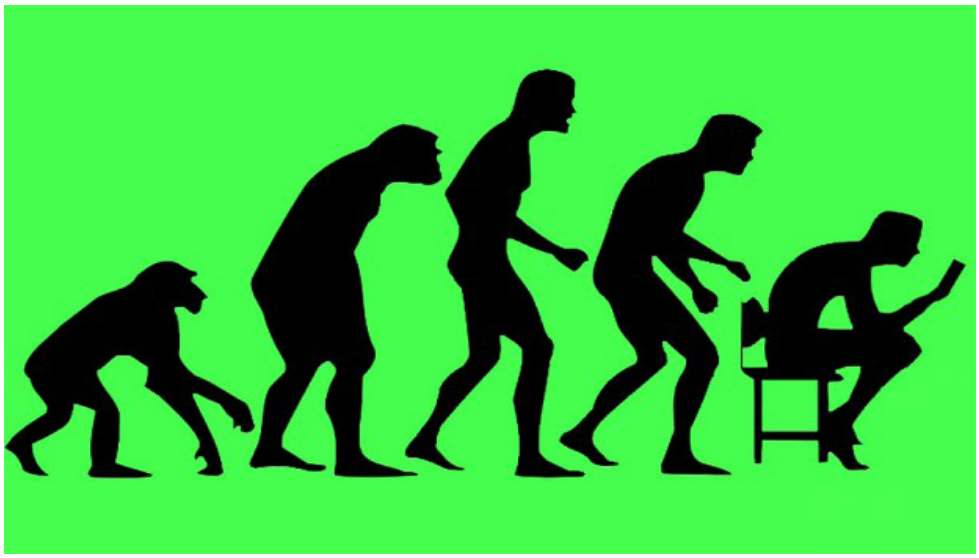
If you want to check if it is true, then I encourage you to watch a movie in a foreign language, I bet you will accurately guess 93 percent of the content by watching body language. Body language will reveal underlying emotions, motives, and feelings. People will evaluate most of the emotional content of your message, not by what you say but by your nonverbal signals.

One of the ways to become more confident is to start behaving like a confident person. This means keeping certain posture, gestures and expressions.

Here are three steps that you can take to start seeing a difference immediately.

As you follow these three steps, you'll start to appear more confident, which will make some of your encounters more successful, which will instill more confidence in you, which will then make even more of your encounters successful, and so on. Think of your confidence like a giant snowball with lots of inertia – tough to get started, but once it's rolling the momentum will take over.

1. No more slouching



Working on developing good posture is the first step.

I used to have awful posture through most of my life, which caused lots of lower back pain. It wasn't until I made a conscious effort to focus on standing up straight and strengthening my lower back that the pain went away. I also used the help of the local physiotherapist to move forward.

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Here's how you can get started:

1. **Stand up as tall as you can,** like you're a soldier, or puppet and somebody just pulled the string that's attached to the top of your noggin
2. **Pick your chin up and look straight ahead** – stop looking down while walking around, there's a whole world out there for you to see
3. **Pull your shoulder blades down and back as far as possible** – This will feel strange if you spend a lot of time hunched over a desk

Here are few additional tips I got from my physiotherapist. If you have trouble pulling your shoulder blades back, try standing with your heels, bottom, and head against a wall, and then pull your shoulder blades back until they're touching the wall too. Do this daily and increase the length of the stretch each time.

If you spend all day in a chair, try this: sit down in your chair, and then stand back up without having to rock forward. If you have to lean forward even slightly, you're doing it wrong. Sit straight up like you're always ready to stand without having to lean forward. Your lower back will probably get tired sitting like this because it's not used to the new position – work on it.

This is probably the hardest step of all, as you've probably spent years developing poor posture without even thinking about it. Spend a month making a conscious effort to have better posture however, and you'll be well on your way to a more confident appearance. Pretty soon you won't even have to think about it!

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2. Slow down to shake nervousness

For some people, nervousness can be quite incapacitating and leave them feeling terror-struck at a time when clear thinking and togetherness are required. It's difficult to impress a future employer in an interview, or inspire an audience, if your hands are shaky and sweaty, your mind is blank and you're trying so hard to catch your breath that talking is an afterthought.

A little nervousness before an event is not necessarily a bad thing and can even help to improve performance by increasing levels of alertness and vigilance. However, if nervousness becomes bothersome to the point where it affects your ability to perform negatively, then there are a number of things you can do to help yourself**.**

1. **Carbohydrates will calm down the mind** as they release serotonin in the brain; however, they aren't so good for those trying to cut back on their sugar intake. All carbohydrates like rice, pasta, potatoes, and bread have been described as comfort foods, because they can act as a **mild tranquilizer on the body.** It is important to stick with complex carbohydrates such as whole wheat breads and pastas when you are eating them, to help to keep the body satiated.
2. **It's not as it seems** – it's helpful to know that while you may think your nervousness is glaringly obvious, it never looks as bad as it feels. Many people who feel sure that everyone notices their nervous feelings are surprised to hear friends and colleagues remark on how confident they seemed!
3. **Deep breathing** is one of the most helpful tools to help with nerves. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose (try to breathe from your diaphragm rather than from your chest), hold your breath in for a few seconds and then release your breath slowly from your mouth. Repeat 4–7 times and notice the difference.

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4. **Try to be prepared** for the event that is making you nervous. The more solid your preparation, the more confident and less nervous you will be.
5. **Watch out and stop any negative thoughts** about possible bad outcomes. To help you do this, change "What ifs" to "So what's." There is a separate chapter in this book on dealing with negative and limiting thoughts and beliefs.

3. Smile

People don't smile enough these days. Smiling however has many benefits. It makes you seem more friendly and approachable. It makes you look more attractive. And, while smiling comes easily to some people, others naturally have more serious expressions or may feel awkward about smiling.

If you're one of those people and would like to learn what smiling can do to you, read on.

Smiling raises your confidence as it affects your emotions because of a brain-body connection. It triggers scientifically measurable activity in the left frontal cortex – the area of the brain where happiness is registered.

It reduces stress that your body and mind feel, almost similar to getting good sleep, according to recent studies. Smiling also helps to generate more positive emotions within you that generate more positive emotions, which generate more positive emotions, and so on. It is just like Thich Nhat Hanh said: "Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy."

Each time you smile you throw a little feel-good party in your brain. The act of smiling activates neural messaging that benefits your health and happiness.

The endorphins realized by smiling also act as a natural pain reliever. Finally, the serotonin release brought on by your smile serves as an anti-depressant and mood lifter.

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What can you do to smile more and in more genuine way? Here are few things you can try

1. **Practice smiling in front of the mirror**
   Here is something I've done for almost a few years in the morning: Stand in front of the mirror and smile. Practice to activate both your mouth corners and your eye sockets. You will know whenever your smile is genuine, because you will immediately feel happy and relaxed. The power of a smile, even practiced in the mirror is that it can invoke the emotion immediately.

2. **Imagine a situation of joy before an event**
   One of the best ways to make your smile more genuine and real comes from researcher Andrew Newberg:
   "We just asked a person, before they engage in a conversation with someone else, to visualize someone they deeply love, or recall an event that brought them deep satisfaction and joy. It's such an easy exercise, and we train people to do it in our workshops."

3. **Become comfortable with smiling**
   A lot of people see smiling as something that makes you weak. Personally, I've found that developing a better smile starts with being very comfortable to smile a lot. If in your head, you can imagine yourself going through the day and smiling lots to everyone and everything, that's often when a happier life starts.

   Yes, this might be just a small change in thinking. And yet, for me personally, that was the most important part to smile more every day.

4. **Smile at a stranger**
   You've probably heard it said that smiling is contagious. Usually when you smile at a person, they can't help but smile back.

   Put that theory to the test and make the effort to smile at a complete stranger at least once a day – whether it's someone on the street, someone at work or school or someone sitting beside you in traffic. Imagine that one friendly gesture setting off a chain reaction that causes your smile to go viral. Pretty good feeling, isn't it?

   In reality, some people will think you're weird and some won't smile back, but don't let that stop you! Think of your smile as a good deed or an act of kindness that could make someone's day just a little bit brighter.

   But if the other person does smile back, and most will, you'll have shared a special moment with that person, a fleeting connection with another human being.

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Your homework for today

While walking down the street with your head held high, shoulders back, and a genuine smile on your face, make direct eye contact with at least five strangers that walk by and give them a simple "hi."

The first few times will feel really awkward, but who cares – you'll never see them again. As you get more "missions" under your belt, you can progress to other more challenging objectives, like striking up a conversation with a stranger, giving a speech, etc.

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5 Self-discipline

"Self-discipline is an act of cultivation. It requires you to connect today's actions to tomorrow's results. There's a season for sowing a season for reaping. Self-discipline helps you know which is which." ~ Gary Ryan Blair

Two of the most important life skills you can have are self-confidence and self-discipline. These essential skills have a supreme effect on your ability to reach your dreams, achieve short and long-term goals, including everyday tasks. If you aspire to be a leader you need to possess self-control as a key leadership skill.

One of my favorite books, The Book of Dharma, written by Simon Haas, stresses on importance of self-discipline as one of the guiding principles in life. Haas writes: "When carbon, the element that makes up ordinary coal, undergoes intense heat and crushing pressures in the depths of the earth, it transforms into a diamond". Following this train of thought, to reveal our full potential and to manifest our purpose, similarly requires "heat", or intensity. This could be done by employing discipline to your life.

Most if not all of my academic and professional achievements came from practicing self-discipline, determination and perseverance. I was a master of creating a "heat"! Completing MSc studies while working full time wouldn't be possible if not that self-controlling skill. Self-discipline, of course, is not always a rosy and dream-filled experience. Sometimes, self-discipline makes us painfully aware of our own shortcomings. For example: I started my Master's in Psychology when I was 34, this means I had a gap of studying for over 14 years. I also decided to study it in English, which was not my first language. My academic skills like reading and comprehension, and academic writing were close to non-existent.

It was taking me 2–3 hours or more, and many tries, to read and re-read 17-pages academic article to fully comprehend it. It was accompanied by dozen of cigarettes smoked one after another just as if they supposed to help me to find a focus. Realizing my shortcomings of academic skills made me enroll for academic skills programme which helped me greatly in that area, so that I could later proceed with my programme without necessity of giving up and quitting it. I recognize now this would never happen without determination and self-discipline.

You may also discover devastating triggers that derail your efforts and cause you to fall short of your goals. Understanding these weaknesses, however, won't damage your self-confidence. On the contrary, knowing your weaknesses will help you develop a more realistic assessment of yourself. You'll be confident in spite of your weaknesses. And you can always make a decision what to do with those weaknesses. You are in charge here, so you can ignore them, accept them, change them, develop or improve them – you can make decision now, remembering there is a consequence to whatever you do or don't do. If you expect positive consequences then the positive action will need to come before.

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Contrary to common belief, self-discipline does not mean being harsh toward yourself, or living a limited, restrictive lifestyle. Self-discipline means self-control, which is a sign of inner strength and control of yourself, your actions, and your reactions.

Self-discipline gives you the power to stick to your decisions and follow them through, without changing your mind, and is therefore, one of the most important requirements for achieving goals.

In the business world, self-discipline is one of the most important traits any employee or entrepreneur can have. It is a sign of self-control and most importantly, in the context of this book, self-discipline breeds more self-confidence, another important element of a successful person. Before you move to understanding how self-discipline breeds your confidence have a quick look on the following tips to improve your self-discipline.

Three Essential Tips to Improve Your Self-Discipline

1. **Remove temptations.** It is a first important step, and as the old saying goes: "out of sight, out of mind"; get rid of your distractions from your environment. Ask your office intern to leave you off of the daily lunch order email or ask your colleagues to not come to your desk when you are busy. If you want to improve your focus while working, turn off your cell phone and remove the clutter from your desk. If you're really having trouble, download the SelfControl app on your computer to block distraction websites – Facebook, Youtube, even e-mail – for a set period of time. Set yourself up for success by ditching the bad influences.
2. **Don't wait for it to "feel right."** Improving your self-discipline means changing up your normal routine. This can feel uncomfortable and awkward. Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, explains that habit behaviors are traced to a part of the brain called the basal ganglia – a portion of the brain associated with emotions, patterns, and memories. Decisions, on the other hand, are made in the prefrontal cortex, a completely different area. When a behavior becomes habit, we stop using our decision-making skills and instead function on auto-pilot. Therefore, breaking a bad habit and building a new habit not only requires us to make active decisions, it will feel wrong. Your brain will resist the change in favor of what it has been programmed to do. The solution? Embrace the wrong. Acknowledge that it will take a while for your new regime to feel right or good or natural. Keep chugging along. It will happen.
3. **Schedule breaks, treats, and rewards for yourself.** Self- discipline does not mean your new regimen needs to be entirely hard core, or drill sergeant-like in execution. In fact, giving yourself zero recognition often results in failures, disappointments, and giving into your old ways. While practicing self-control, schedule specific breaks, treats, and rewards for yourself. Trying to work hard at the office avoiding all distractions? Treat yourself with a fancy massage after a week of the effort. Working on controlling your spending? Allow yourself some money splurge at the mall next to your office. (Leave the credit cards at home, and bring cash only). Self discipline can be hard. Reward your effort.

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How Your Self-Discipline Can Create a Strong Sense of Self-Confidence

The Achievement of Small, Measurable Goals

Self confidence is something that is earned and developed over time. You cannot simply go to sleep and wake one morning with a renewed and strong sense of self confidence. Self confidence must be nurtured and fed, like a growing child. One way to provide continual sustenance to one's sense of self confidence is to set small, achievable goals and then use self-discipline to achieve those goals. The process of regularly achieving the goals you set for yourself will help to create a strong sense of self-confidence. Start by setting a few goals that can be achieved in a single day. When your self-discipline has grown enough to meet those goals, try setting goals that take a week or a month to achieve.

Your Biggest Critic

Your biggest critic is, of course, yourself. People are hardest on themselves because they place unnecessary expectations on their own lives. They may set unreachable goals or compare their own lives to the lives of others. When you develop a sense of self-discipline, you will be able to stop disappointing yourself. The key, of course, is to set goals that you can realistically achieve. Shooting for the stars is great in theory, but practically it will only lead to disappointment and devastation. If you have low self-confidence, try exercising your self-discipline. Improving one helps to improve the other.

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More Accurate Image of Your True Self

Self-discipline can help you create a more accurate image of yourself. Often, the real problem behind low self-confidence is an inaccurate or unfair self-image. When we practice self discipline, we are able to identify our strengths, talents, and skills alongside our weaknesses, trouble spots, and areas where skill is lacking. Having a realistic understanding of both characteristics will help you to establish a strong and stable sense of self-confidence.

Understanding Your Goals and Hopes

Self-discipline requires you to clearly determine your goals, hopes, and dreams. In order to create milestones for achievement, you must understand in what direction you are heading. Knowing this about yourself can also improve your self-confidence. Having clear visions and dreams can create confidence, especially when you start making progress toward those dreams. This is just another example of how self-discipline and self-confidence are inseparably linked.

Earn the Admiration and Respect of Others

Self-discipline is a difficult trait to master. When you do master this trait, you'll have the recognition and approval of your peers and your superiors. People respect hard work and determination, and this admiration and respect can improve your own sense of self-confidence.

Goals Become Easier to Achieve

When you continually practice self-discipline, you'll find that the goals you set for yourself become easier and easier to achieve. A person who is in the habit of making goals and achieving goals begins to develop a "Yes, I can" attitude. This attitude of self-efficacy I was writing about in another chapter of this book, can make all the difference in a business setting. A person who regularly sets goals and falls short of those goals begins to assume that they will always fall short of the mark. This negative attitude is detrimental to your chances of success and to your sense of self-confidence. Every time you reach a goal, you make a deposit in the "self-confidence bank." The more deposits you make, the more the principal balance will grow.

Failures Become Easier to Move Past

On the flip side, regular self-discipline also teaches a person how to move past failures. For an individual without self-discipline, failures often spell disaster. A single failure can spread out and affect a variety of other tasks and goals. Many people let failures start a domino effect in their lives; one domino knocks over the next, which knocks over the next, and so on. With self-discipline, however, mistakes are perceived as temporary setbacks and nothing more. Your self-confidence will improve when you don't let mistakes shake your resolve.

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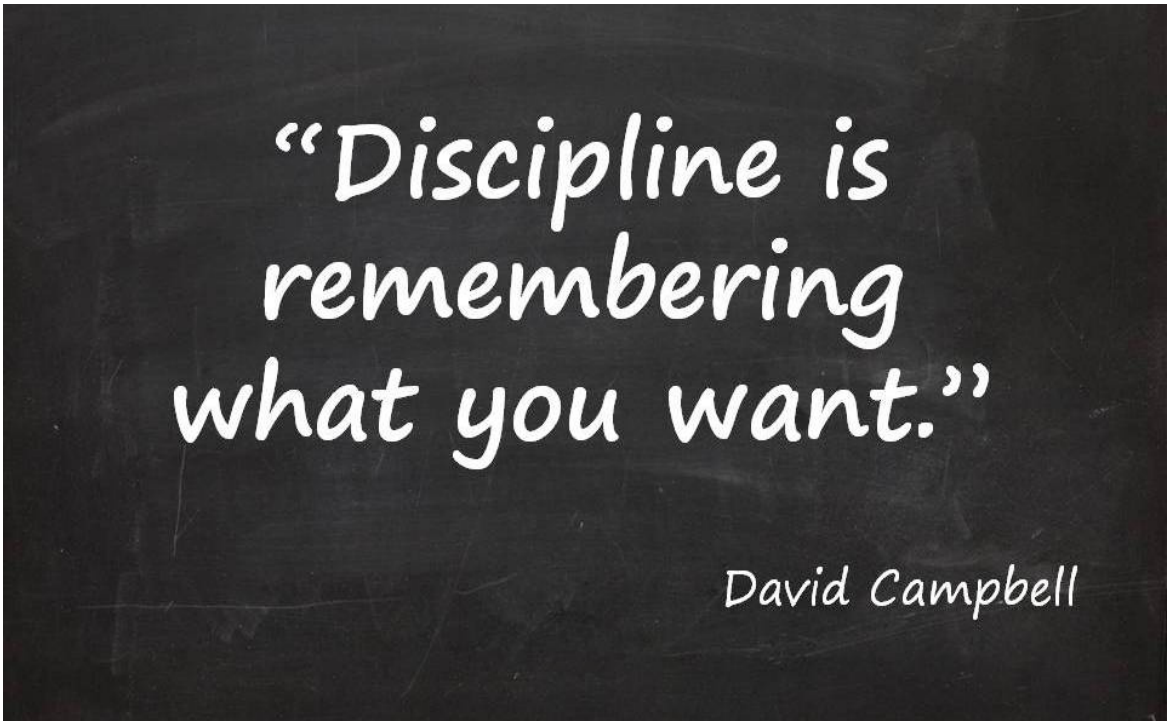
Self-Discipline Creates Your Ideal You

Above all, self-discipline helps to create your ideal concept of your own person. Everyone has a realistic self-image and an ideal self-image. The more you practice self-discipline, the more your realistic self moves closer to achieving the status of your ideal self. This, of course, will dramatically boost your self confidence because you'll have achieved your own defined version of success.

Failing to implement self-discipline strategies may negatively affect your self-confidence, which in turn can derail even the most promising business endeavors.



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6 Acting from your strengths

"Strengths are not activities you're good at, they're activities that strengthen you. Strength is an activity that before you're doing it, you look forward to doing it; while you're doing it, time goes by quickly and you can concentrate; after you've done it, it seems to fulfill a need of yours". Marcus Buckingham

Do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?

Chances are you don't. I didn't just like most of my clients, colleagues and friends also didn't. All too often our natural talents go untapped. From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to fixing our weaknesses than to developing our strengths. It is part of our culture, including many organizational cultures. The cost of it is staggering.

In recent Gallup poll, among those who "strongly disagreed" or "disagreed" with: "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day" statement, not one single person was emotionally engaged on the job. The vast majority of people is so busy providing for families or to keep the job in highly unemployed society, that the opportunity to focus on what they do best is rather non-existent. Gallup surveyed more than 10 million people on this specific topic, and approximately 7 million are falling short.

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What happens when you are not in the "strengths zone"? You become a different person. In the workplace, you are six times less likely to be engaged in your job. When you are not able to use your strengths at work, chances are that you:

• Dread going to work
• Have more negative than positive interactions with your colleagues
• Treat your customers poorly
• Tell your friend what a miserable company you work for
• Achieve less on daily bases
• Have fewer positive and creative moments

Beyond the world of work, there are even more serious implications for your health and relationships if you are not in the strengths zone.

In stark contrast, people who do have the opportunity to focus on their strengths and apply them in their jobs are six times likely to be engaged in their jobs, and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general.

So why don't we live life with a strength-based approach?

There could be many reasons.

For over two decades of my life I simply didn't know what I am good at. My clients experience similar issue being unaware of, and unable to describe their own strengths.

We live in the world that is fixed on deficits. Schooling and educational systems could be a good example. Parents and teachers often reward excellence with apathy and stress on improving grades in the areas we are not good at. The reality is that the person, who always struggled with numbers is unlikely to be a great statistician or accountant.

Most parents and teachers want us to focus more time and attention to improve the lowest grades. The problem with this is simply that we can't be good in everything. Even the legendary Mike Tyson who embodied the power of raw talent in boxing, could not become the best golf or basketball player, no matter how hard he tried.

Each of us has a great potential for success in specific areas, and the key to your further development is to build on who you already are and what you are good at.

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Another reason for not living life based on strengths could be that we work in the environments where management ignores us or focuses on our weaknesses instead of pointing and building our strengths. However, the epidemic of active disengagement we see in the workplace, or in our lives, could be curable just as much as we can become more aware of our own strengths. Learning about your strengths will offer you great benefits if you have opportunity to practice and develop them in real world.

Strengths recipe

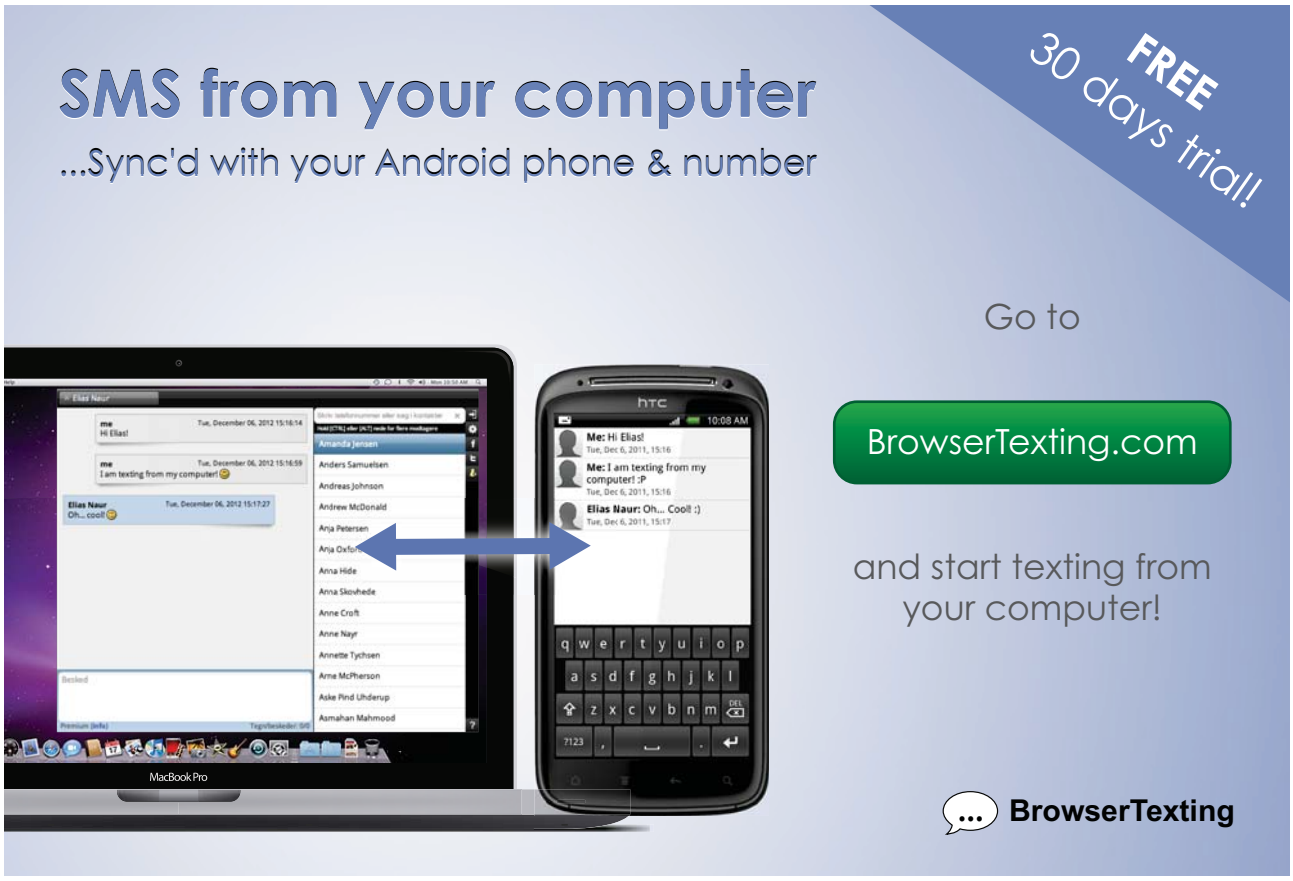
The formula to fining your strengths is this:

Talent × **Investment** = **Strength** (ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)

First step is to discover your dominant talent; a natural way of thinking, feeling and behaving – and then add skills, knowledge and practice. You will need to invest time for it.

Knowledge, skills, and practice quite important parts of the strengths equation. Without basic facts in your mind and skills at your disposal, talent can go untapped.

Once you found your talent it is easier to add knowledge and skills to your repertoire. For example if leadership is your natural talent, you can always take a course on leadership development, just as you can always learn how to use certain leadership style to fit the situation.



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If you find it difficult to name all of your talents, take a step back, and you will see that talents often have something in common, something that connects them.

For example: I have a natural tendency to share thoughts, to create stories, and to find a perfect word – the common theme of this talent is communication.

Another example: My client has a natural sense of commitment, dependability, and avoidance of excuses – the common theme here is: Responsibility Talents.

To begin to think, talk and act on your talents, you can start by calling them using the theme, for example: Communication or Responsibility Talents.

Is it still difficult to discover what your talent could be? If it is read on, and do the following test.

Check this out – VIA Survey

If you still find it challenging to identify your strengths, you can use scientifically validated, free of charge VIA survey here: http://www.viacharacter.org/www/. It will help you discover your 24 main strengths. Importantly, VIA survey will give you suggestions of where and how to apply your strengths to optimize the outcome.

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The survey is composed of 120 questions and shouldn't take you longer than 15–20 minutes. It can be time worth spending, considering that finding and application of your strengths can help you increase confidence, happiness at home and work, improve relationships, discover balance with your health, and achieve goals.

I also want to share few steps and ideas that proved to work for my coaching clients, who were on the quest of searching for their strengths and talents. It requires a little bit of self-observation and self-reflection, so have your pen and paper handy for some of the following tips.

Five steps to finding and developing your strengths

If you are into the business press like I am, you will quickly notice how often it showcases the heroes of industry and business gurus, such as Steve Jobs, Richard Branson or Sheryl Sandberg.

As much as we love business visionaries like them – we are simply not them. We have a set of our own unique talents, which can be used in many ways to bring out the best in ourselves and others.

Here are 5 ways to find and develop your own strengths and put them to work in your professional and personal life.

1. **Don't compare yourself with others – make contact with people who inspire, and even intimidate, you**
   Are there people in your life who wow or even intimidate you? Are you jealous of them? Consider aligning yourself with people you feel competitive toward – it's a new world and we have much to learn from each other.

2. **Ask other people**
   People in your life are likely to notice things about your personality and talents which you haven't. Chat to a family member, friend, colleague, or your coach about what they see as the best parts of your personality.

3. **Pay attention to what energizes you and what you are most proud of**
   If you're proud of something you have done and achieved, then think of what exactly have you applied to achieve it. Did it require focus, creativity, bravery etc.? What activities energize you and make you want to soar?

4. **Ask yourself: "When do I feel most like myself?"**
   When you apply yourself effortlessly, and feel happy while doing it, it is a sign of using natural strengths. For example, you might be happiest when you're making other people laugh. This could indicate that you're using your natural strength of humor.

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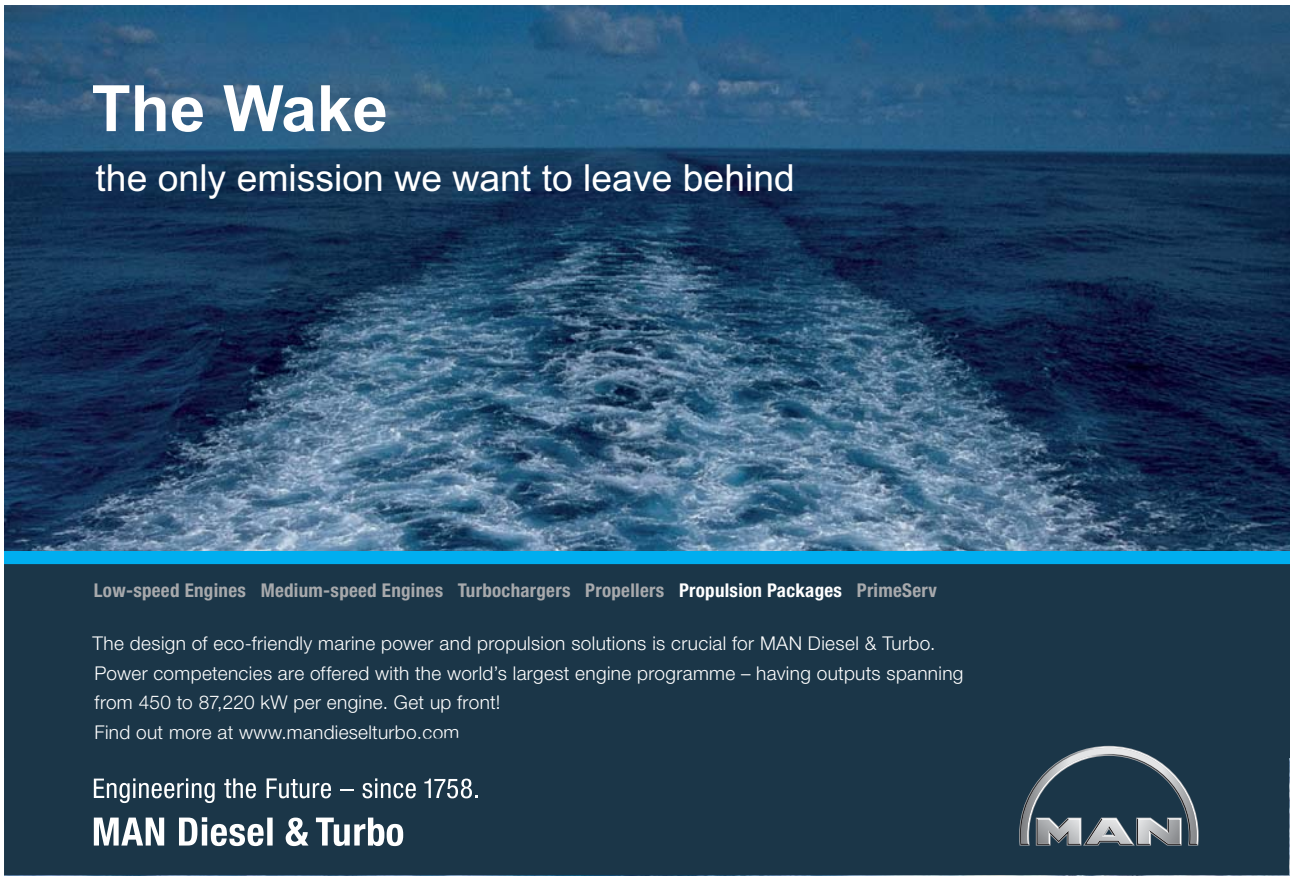
5. **Eliminate your weaknesses by partnering with others**
   Albert Einstein was initially a failure who leaned heavily on his wife. Many now believe she ultimately helped him devise his famous equation. Let's be honest: He was a dreamer with his head in the clouds (and thank goodness he was). He came to success in roundabout ways. His wife kept her head on straight and together they accomplished greatness. That is the value of having a partner and team, varieties of perspectives, talents, and skills to get the job done. How is your team?

   Do you have someone's back? Do they have yours? Are there complimentary skill sets involved? If you have people who believe in you, you can go far together. Whether it's a mentor, employee, or co-worker, get their back and let them get yours.



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