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Speaks on

Self-Confidence
and You

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Introduction

“Go after the thing you want, with all your capacity, strength and sagacity, faith, hope, confidence and stern pertinacity. You will get it.”

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Crisis of Confidence

Who can forget the lovable Julie Andrews in the all-time hit movie ‘Sound of Music’, prepared to face her new life as governess to seven children? Brought up in a convent, with no experience whatsoever of life outside it, she experiences a confidence crisis as she steps out of the convent and into an unknown future.

What remains etched forever in our minds is the sight of Julie Andrews bolstering her confidence by singing a song to encourage herself and give the much-needed impetus to face up to what lies ahead.

“I have confidence in sunshine, I have confidence in rain.

I have confidence that spring will come again.

But above all, I have confidence, confidence in me.”

She marches forward with nothing more than a guitar in hand, wearing a drab, brown skirt, but with a song on her lips and confidence in her self.

All of us, like Julie Andrews in the movie, at some time or the other, go through a confidence crisis.

A confidence crisis can be caused by normal transition such as getting a new job, moving to a new city, starting a new business, struggling with relationships or even starting new ones. As women, we find ourselves in the eye of the storm much too often in every aspect of life, in all the roles that we are expected to perform. It’s no wonder that we find ourselves on the shifting sands of confidence more often than not.

Life’s losses too can cause confidence to sink – the loss of a relationship, the loss of a job, the loss of a dream we come to realize will never happen.

At times, our confidence is already shaky as a result of loss or change and a single incident like missing a deadline, getting a bad haircut or spilling coffee on a document can send us storming out of the confidence ‘café’.

The truth is, when we crash, it is usually because our daily diet has not included enough confidence eating foods. Confidence is the vitamin ‘C’ of our diet. Our bodies can only store it for some time before we need some more.

It is up to us to take up responsibility for planning our confidence meals and making sure we have large enough portions of it.

When you have a confidence crisis (all of us do – even the so-called confident people), don’t despair. Don’t reach for the hanky, or the bottle, or the bon-bons or someone’s shoulder.

Instead, begin to use some of the confidence-boosting techniques illustrated in this little book. Put the punch book into your life. Begin with at least two, then add a third and fourth, and, before you know it, you will have already taken big strides in your self-confidence journey. Above all, you will learn to love, honour and appreciate yourself even more.

1. Even eagles need to be pushed

“PEOPLE OFTEN SAY that this or that person has not yet found himself. But the self is not something that one finds. It is something that one creates.”

THOMAS SCHAAZ

Even eagles need to be pushed

THE EAGLE GENTLY coaxed her offspring towards the edge of the nest. Her heart quivered with conflicting emotions as she felt their resistance to her persistent nudging. “Why does the thrill of soaring have to begin with the fear of falling?” she thought. This ageless question was still unanswered for her.

The eagle’s nest was located on the shelf of a sheer rock face. Below, there was nothing but air to support the wings of each child. “It is possible that this time it won’t work.” But, despite her fears, she knew it was time to push.

The eagle drew courage from an innate wisdom: until her children discovered their wings, there was no purpose to their lives.

Until they learned how to soar, they would fail to understand what a privilege it was to have been born an eagle.

The push was the greatest gift the eagle had to offer – her supreme act of love. So, one by one, she pushed them and they flew!!

This is the push that we all need, as human beings, to live life the way it should be lived – with the belief that whatever happens, you have the faith and trust in your ability to handle whatever life throws in your way.

How many of us have it?

How many of us, like the fledglings, are apprehensive about taking the crucial steps?

How many of us turn away from our dreams because we don’t have the confidence to see it through?

How many of us live the life that others want us to live?

How many of us have accepted words like ‘compromise’, ‘adjustment’ or thoughts like “ I will never be able to do it” or “ What is the point of thinking about it when I know I can’t do it” as part of our daily vocabulary?

Flying on the wings confidence

MOST OF US are hesitant to do the things we want to do because we are unsure of the outcome. We lack the courage and are insecure about the things that frighten us. In other words, we lack the self-confidence to do what the eagle did for her children – give them the push.

But they! This doesn't mean that we get stuck in the nest. All we need to do is find our wings. But hold on, how will we know whether we can fly or not?

A catch 22 situation...

THIS IS WHAT most of us find ourselves in. To fly or not to fly? If we fly, what is the guarantee that we won't fall? But if we don't fly, how will we test our wings and know the pleasure of soaring?

Grounded or what

LEARN FROM THE wise eagle. By pushing her fledglings from the nest, the eagle displayed not only love but also confidence. Yes, the big 'C' that most of us spend aeons looking for, searching for, craving for, envying others for, shedding tears for. The elusive 'C' that keeps us grounded, prevents us from testing our wings, shackles us to the nest.

The lack of 'C' that we moan about, whine about, and feel insecure about.

Clueless about confidence?

MOST of US spend half of our time searching and groping for ways and means to make life better, to see it in the direction that we want it to go. And we spend the other half grumbling and complaining bitterly when things don't work out our way, blaming fate, destiny, other people and what have we.

Most of us also spend time admiring and envying other people's success stories and wishing that ours too would magically turn into one.

The million dollar question

HAVE WE EVER wondered what makes some people succeed?

Have we ever wondered what makes some people stand up for something even though the whole world is against them?

Have we ever wondered why some people stand out in a crowd?

Have we ever wondered what makes our heads turn around the minute such a person walks into a room?

Have we ever wondered why some people make winning look so easy?

Have we ever wondered what goes into the making of a Gandhi, a Lincoln, a Mother Teresa, a Helen Keller or even a next door neighbour who crusades against plastic bags, or a colleague at work who stands up for the rights of employees?

The million dollar answer

IS IT COURAGE? Is it hard work? Is it attitude? Is it conviction? Is it money? Is it background? Is it inborn?

Is it a case of some have it and some don't? Is it that some are born to be leaders and some followers? Is it a sense of right time, right place? Is it destiny?

Is it all or none of the above?

All these questions leap to the mind when we find some people's lives flowing smoothly in the direction that they steer. Whereas some of us are just jerked along or pulled in various directions or just plain stuck in the journey of life.

The answer is not as momentous or as earth shattering as we think it to be. It is not 'blowing in the wind' or 'written in the stars.'

The basic, simple reason as to why some people 'have it' as they say is because they are confident. Yes, self-confident. They can live life on their terms because they have confidence in their abilities, in their beliefs, in their self-worth, in their knowledge.

Above all, they have the self-confidence to know that their wings will help them fly and not fall. So they are never grounded.

The world is your oyster

SELF-CONFIDENCE IS a necessary ingredient for success. Self-confidence sells. It's something you can sense about a person upon entering a room. It's evident through body language and speech.

It's not just what you say, but how you say it. Some people think you're born with it.

Others have never experienced it.

Wouldn't it be great if you could just take a pill and – Wham! You radiated instant self-confidence?

Can it be this easy? If it were, our lives wouldn't be moving between 'ifs and buts'. We wouldn't be vacillating between 'Could I?' and 'Couldn't I?' 'Should have' and 'Shouldn't have'. We wouldn't be pressing our noses to the window, looking in envy at the way some people manage to live their lives so confidently.

But hey! Before you pack up, condemned to living a life in 'never, never land', wait for the good news.

Self-confidence is not inborn, innate or the domain of the 'chosen few.' It is an attitude. And like other attitudes, it can be cultivated, learnt and built upon. Remember that 'Great lives don't just happen, we make it happen'.

Building confidence is like building a muscle. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes hard work and sweat. And most important, it takes you and only you to work on it.

To be all that you can be, you must stretch, flex, try and go beyond your proven limits. But you need to go about it efficiently. You need to understand your fears and desires. Basically, you need to try. The first step is the toughest. But remember, 'Even eagles need to be pushed'.

2. The flight of the eagle

“CONFIDENCE IS THAT feeling by which the mind embarks on great and honourable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself.”

CICERO

Life is a numbers game.... The more you try something, the better are the odds of achieving it. So too, with self-confidence. The more self-confidence you have, the more times you'll try to do something.

More, more, more.....the more self-confidence you have, the less will temporary setbacks and short-term disappointments affect you.

The more self-confidence you have the likely it is that you'll live a life of achievement, riches, satisfaction and bliss.

Changing equation

IT'S NEVER TOO late! Its never too late to come out of the cold. Your life is in your hands, in your state of mind and in your attitude. Exploit your strengths and starve your weaknesses.

Celebrate your uniqueness, for, quite simply – you are extraordinary! Just have the self-confidence to know and acknowledge it. Stack the odds in your favour by piling yourself with confidence.

Say goodbye to sweaty palms and shaky knees.

No more disappearing into the woodwork or praying that the floor will swallow you.

No more cringing, creeping or slinking into a room.

No more shooting furtive, envious glances at others who have 'made it in life.'

It's time to straighten that back and stiffen that spine.

Time to put some starch into your life.

Time to say goodbye to doubts and worries.

Time to realise that you too can do it.

For, the answer is simple – it's all in your hands.

So, get started on your self-confidence journey.

Get savvy with the ‘know and ‘how’ of confidence.

3. In the ‘know’ of confidence

“I HAVE KNOWN the pain of failure, frustration, disappointment, defeat because I have taken the chance of winning, succeeding, achieving. It takes a lot of the first to get some of the second.”

NATASHA JOSE FOWITZ

Defining self-confidence

THE DICTIONARY MEANING of self-confidence is: “controlling, managing and understanding self – helping one deal, learn, know and master one’s self.”

As stated earlier, it is all about attitude:

An attitude which allows you to have a positive yet realistic view of yourself and your situation.

“ I want to be loved and liked by everybody in the world” is unrealistic.

It is more about loving yourself than about the world loving you. Anyway, who is keeping count!!

It is an attitude that allows you to trust your own abilities. To have a general sense of control in your life.

To make you believe that, within reason, you will be able to do what you wish, plan, and expect to do. In other words, setting attainable goals.

Wishing to climb Mount Everest with a wonky leg is an uphill task and doomed to disappointment. Pay heed to ‘within reason.’

- It is an attitude that says having self-confidence does not mean that you will be able to do everything. You need to have expectations that are realistic.

That means ‘You can’t win all the time.’ ‘Everything that you touch need not necessarily turn to gold.’ Every time you speak, people need not stop everything and pay you their full and complete attention.

- It is an attitude that makes you wisely shrug your shoulders even when some of your expectations are not met:

- “O.K, I didn’t top the exams this time. No big deal. I will study harder and do better next time. After all, there is always tomorrow.’
- It is an attitude that allows you to be positive and accept your failures as stepping-stones to success.
- An attitude that says: “If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Self-sabotagers

IF YOU HAVE no self-confidence, you have an attitude that keeps you stuck in sticky situations.

You are not confident if you:

- Depend excessively on the approval of others in order to feel good about yourself:
- “I will feel good about what I am wearing only if my friend so.”
- If you tend to avoid taking risks because you fear failure:
- How will I take up this project? I am sure I will fall flat on my face.”
- If you generally do not expect to be successful.
- “My friend has successfully started her boutique but I am sure if I attempt it, it will be a flop.”
- If you often put yourself down and tend to discount or ignore compliments paid to you:
- “How can you say that the food is good? I am sure I have gone overboard with the salt.”
- If you are constantly comparing yourself with other people all the time:
- “She speaks so well and is so intelligent. Why was I not born like her?”

Self-starters

BY CONTRAST, YOU are self-confident if:

- You are willing to risk the disapproval of others because you have implicit trust in your own abilities.
- “I know that this has not been attempted before, but I am sure that it will work out fine. I accept responsibility for it.”
- You are willing to accept yourself; if you feel that you don’t have to conform to what others expect of you.
- “I know that the clothes I am wearing will make me stand out like a sore thumb. But who cares as long as I feel comfortable wearing them.”
- You have the courage to do what you are most afraid of doing.
- “I am afraid of going up on stage and addressing the audience. But let me get over it. I must do it!”
- You follow your own star, instead of allowing others to decide what is right for you.
- “My parents want me to be a doctor but I want to be a teacher. I must convince them that this is what I intend to be.”

Rowing your own boat

SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE HAVE not been given some magic formulae to live life.

- They have not been ‘chosen’ or ‘destined’ to lead their lives a particular way.
- They have not been pushed up or propped up by external forces.
- They have forged ahead because they ‘know that they can do it.’ That ‘they can overcome’ because it’s all in their hands.

How much simpler can we get? It’s all up to us. It all stems from inner strength, from within. No more looking outward, searching for pearls or props when ‘you are your own sustenance, your own guiding star.’

Confidently yours

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR you to know that you can create self-confidence. You don't have to be born with it. Everyone is capable of learning how to be totally self-confident. It's like most other things. It can be learned.

If you have the keys to self-confidence, you'll be able to open doors. Doors of opportunity that you were convinced were locked – at least to you. So, why not uncover the keys, learn how they work and open those doors?

4. The 'how' of confidence

“IF YOU HAVE no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life. With confidence, you have won even before you have started.”

MARCUS GARVEY

Those who are willing to learn the skills leading to confidence and success will succeed.

What about you? Where have you given up along the path to success? Will you settle for being dissatisfied and ever trying to convince yourself that your dreams are not possible?

Aristotle, one of wisest men who ever lived, said, “What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing”.

So, be 'doing' person not a 'being person'. Learn the 'how' of confidence.

Commandments of confidence

Know thyself

That's the starting point of self-confidence.

We all want success. We all want accolades — from the people with whom we work and live, from family, from society. As we constantly seek for approval, we allow our confidence to be judged or undermined by those yardsticks that others have set for us. This is our greatest mistake. Confidence does not emerge from 'without', it stems from 'within'. Confidence is not arrogance, it's not brash, or pushy, it's quiet, strong, flexible and very calm.

Confidence begins with the 'self.' It comes from how well you know yourself. Sounds absurdly simple, doesn't it?

But many of us shy away from acknowledging this oh! so simple observation because this makes us responsible for our own lives: our failures and our successes. A very scary proposition! It's easier to lay the blame elsewhere when things go wrong: fate, destiny, society, family, etc.

But these are thoughts that definitely programme us to be 'whiners' or 'quitters.'

The first step towards self-confidence is to accept responsibility for who you are and what you want to be.

Success is not measured by how well you fulfil the expectations of others but by how honestly you live up to your own expectations.

To discover your dreams, get to know yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses –

What do you know about yourself?

What have you learnt about yourself?

When are you at your best?

What do you need to function well? (Sleep, quiet time, contact with those you love, etc.)

What is the best for you to avoid?

What is preventing you from moving forward?

What are your doubts and fears?

Beating a path

YOUR PATH TO self-confidence lies in answering all these questions. On the surface, it appears such a simple process, as simple as swallowing a pill, but most of us get stuck at the starting point because we prefer to turn our gaze outwards rather than inwards. We prefer to believe that external circumstances, over which we have no control, govern our lives.

Fears like:

“I have no money.”

“I have no knowledge.”

“I have no support.”

“I have no time.”

“I have no friends.”

And so on...start shackling you even before you start.

Negative thoughts like:

“I can never do this.”

“This is impossible.”

“How can I ever hope to...?”

“How can I face it?”

“How will I do it?”

Comparisons like:

“She is more beautiful.”

“She is more intelligent.”

“She is more self-assured.”

“She is more talented.”

Desperate desires like:

“I want to be liked by everyone.”

“I want to be the world’s greatest mother.”

“I want everyone to listen to me.”

“I want to be the centre of attention.”

Most of us go through our lives frustrated and disappointed because we spend it judging ourselves by other people’s standards and trying ourselves to others’ expectations.

So, be true to your ‘self’. Learn to value yourself.

Remember, it’s never too late to become what you might have been.

Respect thyself

SELF-CONFIDENCE IS a ‘non – starter’ without self-respect. It is not enough just to know the ‘what’, ‘why’ or ‘how’ of your self. It is also important that you respect the information you have gleaned about yourself, and value it without allowing other influences to change or undermine what you crave or dream for.

Respect doesn’t depend on what others think about you or what they give you in terms of attention or affection (although it is mistaken for that).

It depends largely on what you think about yourself.

Thoughts, thoughts, thoughts....

”ALL THAT WE are is the result of what we thought. We are what we think.”

DHAMMAPADA

There is inside us all the potential to be whatever we want to be. All of the energy to do whatever we want to do, provided we believe that we can accomplish anything that we choose. A big part of that believing rests on the feeling of faith and respect we have for ourselves.

True respect comes from within, from your thoughts and feelings about yourself.

A little morale booster

“BY CHANGING YOUR thinking, you change your beliefs. When you change your beliefs, you change your expectations.

When you change your expectations, you change your attitude.

When you change your attitude, you change your behaviour.

When you change your behaviour, you change your performance.

When you change your performance, you change your life!!”

-ANON

Respect has to be earned, it is not freely given. If you don’t value what you are, don’t blame life for walking all over you.

As Eleanor Roosevelt rightly said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” How true!!

Feel justly proud of what you are and watch yourself gain confidence in your great journey of life.

Trust thyself

“IF YOU THINK you are beaten, you are.

If you think you dare not, you don't

Life's battles don't always go

To the stranger or faster man;

But, sooner or later, the man who wins

Is the man who has the trust that he can.”

ANON

Self-trust is the first secret of success.

If you don't trust yourself, you have already lost the battle with confidence.

How can others trust you if you don't trust yourself?

Trust is the feeling of belief that you can accomplish anything that you choose.

An implicit faith that your wings will not let you down.

A feeling of loyalty that says that even if you fall, you have the faith that, like the phoenix, you will rise again.

Assert thyself

“YOU DON'T ALWAYS get what you ask for but you never get what you don't task for ... Unless it is contagious.”

FRANKLYIN BRUCDE

One of the biggest obstacles to self-assertion is to be a ‘people-pleasure’.

A large part of our confidence stems from being true to ourselves. But there are a large number of us who live in the shadow of what others want or think of us. We are constantly seeking approval and feel undermined when we don't get it.

We, as women, hesitate to speak up because we fear ridicule, embarrassment, social ostracism, etc.

So, most of us prefer the easy way out, quietly shelving our hopes and dreams because we don't have the courage to speak up or assert ourselves.

Self-confidence springs from self-assertion. There are no two ways about this. If we really want what we want, we need to go after it.

Self-assertion takes some practice. It can only be done if we can establish an inner sense of self that can stand alone, without looking at external forces. The strongest sense of self comes from knowing your feelings and manifesting them to the world. Thoughts can be borrowed, stolen or shared with others but feelings are your fingerprint of selfhood.

To assert your feelings is to create both an honest relationship with others, and build an inner sense of your own individuality.

Each time you speak up and express a feeling in a non-aggressive way, you are 'coming home' to the security of the self, a self that can travel anywhere because you are never alone. You will never be 'by yourself', but rather always 'with yourself'.

Praise thyself

“ALWAYS BE A first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.”

As women, modesty was drilled into us even before we could think or talk. Even today, changing times and all, many of us hate to speak up about our accomplishments, thinking it unseemly and inappropriate. But there is a big difference between appropriate glee in your own accomplishments, and self-promotion and meaningless bragging.

Few of us let the world know about the accomplishments that we are proud of. And few of us rarely acknowledge even to ourselves how good we are. The greatest blunder that we end up committing is to take ourselves for granted. And in doing so, allow the world to take us for granted.

What's really wrong with a pat on the back once in a while or smiling in approval at your image in the mirror?

What's really wrong in letting people know about events and experiences that you have excelled in?

What's wrong in blowing your own trumpet once in a while? Believe me, it's really sweet music to your ears as well as to your confidence level!

We need to say, loudly and clearly "I exist." "I am here." "I am proud of what I am."

If this sounds narcissistic, who cares? It's okay to tell yourself how good you are. Give yourself a feeling of self-worth.

Esteem thyself

"MAKE YOURSELF A door mat and people will wipe their feet on you" is a wise old proverb and this is what happens to those of us who have a sense of low self-esteem. Self-esteem is very important for self-confidence.

Increasing self-esteem improves self worth and value. Building self-esteem is the first step towards happiness and a better life.

Self-esteem increases confidence and allows you to respect your own wishes.

If you have confidence, you will give priority to your wishes and you will respect yourself. If you respect yourself you can respect others, so building self-esteem can help you improve your relationships, your personal performance and happiness...

Low self-esteem implies poor confidence levels. Others' desires may take preference over yours. The side effect – inner criticism, that nagging voice of disapproval inside you, causes you to stumble at every challenge and you will find it much harder to begin new or challenging products. Your debts will mean you are almost certain to fail....

Self-esteem is a building process and the responsibility of construction rests on you. Self-confidence rests on a strong construction.

Building self-esteem requires you to:

Face your fears and forget past failures.

Know what you want and ask for it.

Reward yourself when you have achieved something.

If you do fail, don't be defeated. Accept it, learn and try something else.

You are not going to be defeated by one failed attempt, are you? Doesn't everyone fail before they succeed? All you need is a different approach.

It won't happen overnight. Just take it step by step.

Empower thyself

“NOTHING WILL STOP a man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing will help a man with the wrong mental attitude in achieving his goal.”

W.W. ZEINE

The word 'empowerment' has become the latest byword especially where women are concerned. The power of the word should never be underestimated. In order to power your confidence and thus your goals and dreams, you need to empower yourself. Like everything else, this too has to be learnt.

Knowledge and information are the two important keys, for you to forge ahead. In this new age of technology, it is essential to arm oneself with facts and knowledge to make an impression.

The more you know, the less inhibited you feel and the more confident you will grow.

An essential part of empowerment not only stems from how much knowledge you have of the world, but also from how much you know about yourself.

For this:

You need to know and identify your interests – the things you are interested in are indicative of who you are, and those are the things you should concentrate on.

Live your bliss – Do what you enjoy. Apply your God-given talents towards the things that you love to do. To enjoy a high level of confidence, you must be living your life in a way that challenges you, stretches you and makes you grow.

Do what you are comfortable doing: step out of your dull 'Go thru the motions of life...' and into the life that's you.

Once you are true to yourself and follow your heart, you will find courage, integrity, conviction, and commitment – the essential ingredients of your self – confidence potion.

Celebrate thyself

“YOU ARE THE heroine of your own story.”

MARY
McCARTHY

Realise your gifts, act upon them and your self – confidence will rise so high that there are virtually no limits to what you won't try.

Sing an ode to yourself. You must! You are special! You must make up your mind to look at yourself honestly – warts and all – and make future decisions based on your uniqueness. Be guided by your feelings and your behaviour. As you follow your heart to where it leads you and with your empowered mind to guide you, self – confidence will also automatically become a part of your every action and thought.

5. Confidence busters

“YOU CANNOT DISCOVER new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

UNKNOWN

In this vast, complicated, unplumbed sea of life, the big ‘C’ is the oar with which we cross the ocean. But some of us get caught in storms, others get stuck midway, and some others don’t even try to get across to the other shore. What prevents us from rowing safely to the other side? What makes us turn away before we can sight the shore?

A lack of confidence? That’s hitting the nail on the head. Before we can pick up the oars of confidence, we need to recognize and remove the weeds that slow us or stall us. We need to identify the confidence busters.

The sum of all fears

“IT IS NOT because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that things are difficult.”

SENECA

Fear is the greatest underminer of confidence. It lurks everywhere and is the greatest stumbling block in your quest of confidence. Chokes you when you need to speak. Holds you down when you need to step forward. Strangles you when you need to express yourself. Makes you break into a sweat when you need to do something. Turns your knees into jelly when you try to attempt something difficult. In short, fear has a death grip on you that allows it to control your life.

But wait a moment. Before you condemn your life to the ‘twilight zone’, focus on the word ‘allow’ Fear dominates because we ‘allow’ it to dominate. It controls us because we ‘allow’ it to control us. The beauty of being a human being lies in a power that we have, a power that many of us don’t exercise, or even know that we possess. A power that can unlock the doors of confidence with ease: the power of ‘choice’. Yes! An important ‘C’ in the big ‘C’.

‘Fear’ or ‘Confidence which are you choosing?’

FEAR WEARS MANY masks, some of which include

- Fear of rejection
- Fear of failure
- Fear of losing
- Fear of succeeding
- Fear of not being good enough
- Fear of the future
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of being controlled
- Fear of being wrong
- Fear of change
- Fear of new ideas
- Fear of not being loved

These fears haunt us and shackle us. The doubts begin, the cracks appear, the comparisons start, unrealistic expectations take control and the frustration with life is complete. We find ourselves on the shifting sands of confidence.

Do we have a choice? Yes, we have! The only way to conquer fear is to face it. Sounds too easy? But it is!

It’s all a matter of attitude and attitude can be changed or learnt. It’s all in our hands.

The moot point

WHETHER YOU EXPERIENCE fear or confidence, it has nothing to do with the circumstances of your life, or your external environment. It is everything to do with your inner perceptions – the meaning you make of your situation. In every situation you encounter, you always have a choice to perceive it through the eyes of either fear or confidence.

For instance:

- You can blame others or take responsibility for your own life.
- You can cling to the past or experience each moment in the now.
- You can criticize others or appreciate them.
- You can doubt your abilities or feel confident.
- You can fear failure or celebrate your success.
- You can get defensive or open your mind.
- You can hold a grudge or forgive.

- You can judge others or seek to understand them.
- You can live life by others' rules and regulations or set your own.
- You can find a way to create win-win outcomes.
- You can push against what you don't want or create what you do want.
- You can resist change or flow with it.
- You can worry about what others are doing or focus on what you are doing.
- You can fret over the past or find comfort in what you have gained.
- You can worry about what others will think or be confident in your own knowledge.

From which stance – fear or confidence – are you viewing the circumstances of your life?

The answer to this question will see your life take on a totally different direction.

Social torpedoes

“A PERSON WHO doubts himself is like a man who would enlist in the ranks of his enemies and bear arms against himself. He makes his failure certain by himself being the first to be convinced of it.”

ALEXANDER DUMAS

A social occasion? Tied up in knots? Butterflies in the stomach? Agonising over what to wear? Feeling diffident about your social skills or the lack of them? Petrified that you will suffer from ‘foot in mouth’ syndrome? Dreading that you will be consigned to the background while others make it big? Picturing yourself to be a wallflower? Or, even worse, committing a social gaffe that will make you look ridiculous and embarrassed?

Does the scenario sound familiar? Most of us go through life blundering from one social crisis to the other. Being held to ransom by the so-called expectations and pressures of social conformity and rules.

It's a little known, yet much denied fact, that people treat you the way you secretly ask to be treated. Your body language, your words and thoughts, your relationships with others, your social network, are all powerful indicators of your inner life and determine how others behave towards you. There are many of us who believe that behaving and acting in a certain way, even when it goes against our nature will give us the respect and confidence that we crave for. And this is when we get socially and personally torpedoed.

For example:

- Fawning before people to win their favour.
- Expressing contrived concerns for someone's well being.
- Making inconsequential small talk to smooth out the edges.
- Hanging onto someone's every word.
- Looking for someone's approval all the time.
- Asking if someone is angry with you.
- Fishing for a kind word.
- Trying to impress someone.
- Gossiping in order to 'in' with the crowd.
- Explaining and justifying yourself to others.

The next time you feel yourself about to give in to any one of these confidence busters, run an inner scan. Listen to your inner voice.

What you think should mean more than anything in your life – more than where you live, more than your social position, more than what anyone would think about you. Stay conscious of what you want. This will arrest confidence sabotage.

Sagging confidence?

“THE TRAGEDY OF our time is that we are so eye centred, so appearance besotted.”

JESSAMYN WEST

One of the greatest confidence busters, especially with regard to women, is a poor or negative body image.

Body image involves far more than our perception of how we appear to others. It encompasses our self-esteem and self-respect, and it can impinge on everything; from a decision about what dress we wear to a party, to our relationships, work and health.

We are constantly evaluating ourselves, based on whether we look good and how we feel about our bodies. There is a direct relation between sagging confidence and sagging body image. By developing a better body image, we could all improve our self-confidence.

The 'Thin is in' mantra has obsessed the current generation of women, leading to eating disorders and distorted body images.

-

Do you have body angst? Are you:

UNKNOWN

- Preoccupied with body shape and size, constantly weighing yourself and feeling dissatisfied with your body.
- Continually seeking approval from friends about how you look, or experiencing a general feeling of insecurity about your body's appearance?
- Always comparing your body to others' and dwelling on your imperfections?
Frequently worrying over what to wear and hiding those parts of your body that you dislike?

If you think you have a poor body image, don't panic Body image can always be improved upon.

There is no quick-fix solution, but if you improve your relationship with your body, you can change your perception of it. Be proactive and persistent.

Here's how to start:

Think holistically. See yourself as a whole person. Refuse to judge yourself on your looks alone. You are a unique person, not just a physical body.

Value yourself. List your positive traits and celebrate your achievements. Don't put yourself down or negate your strengths. Invest in yourself. You alone have the power to improve your self-confidence.

Reject the beauty myth. Reject the idea that there is only one version of female beauty. Recognise that adverts are not reality. Accept your unique attractiveness and remember that all of us have imperfections.

Try to accept your size and shape. This is a tough one. We are all different size and shapes, as a result of genetic factors that are beyond our control. If you come from a family with a genetic predisposition to be overweight you need to accept this and try to follow a healthier diet.

Set achievable goals. Take up a realistic fitness regime. Don't expect unrealistic results, and don't be too hard on yourself if you don't meet your goals or have a setback. Stop comparing yourself to others. Accept your personal strengths and limitations. Becoming comfortable with yourself and your body may be a long process, especially if you are inclined to be self-critical.

You are not just your appearance. Acknowledge it and let the world know it.

Speaking confidently

ONE OF THE biggest confidence busters is the fear of public speaking. It is fear that all of us at one time or the other have to face, be it a family occasion or a presentation. How many of us secretly admire the nerves of steel some people possess when they are addressing an audience? How overawed are we at their confidence? But we too can be as sangfroid as they are. It just requires a few skills that can be learned. This will have all the 'Friends, Romans and countrymen', lending you their ears.

Tips on talking

YOUR KNEES MAY be shaking and your stomach may be looking for the nearest exit, but your audience doesn't have to know that!

Acknowledge your fears

Don't feel that you're the first, or only person to fear public speaking. You're in good company. Fear of public speaking is the number one fear that people share, even those people we think of as successful. Recognising the universality of this fear can help you put it in perspective.

Respect your knowledge

Be proud of the fact that you have been asked (or told) to make a speech. Just remember – if your boss, your co-workers or your friends didn't have confidence in you or felt the audience wouldn't be interested in what you had to say, you wouldn't be standing in front of the room! Accept their confidence and build on it!

Remember that your message is new to your audience. Your audience doesn't know what you're going to say. View your speech as an opportunity to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with others.

Practice simplicity

Confidence grows to the extent that you keep your speech as simple as possible. This will lead you to speak to them in an enthusiastic, conversational tone rather than simply reading to them – which is a quick route to boredom for all concerned. Confidence comes from talking, not reciting!

Anticipate objections

Try to locate holes in your arguments. When you identify the weak points, return to your speech and provide additional data.

Equally important, look for opportunities where your audience might question your interpretations. Be ready with facts to support your arguments and conclusions. If you are using overhead transparencies, have those, if necessary, ready for use in a handy file folder.

Nothing disarms an objection better than a presenter who smiles mischievously and says: "I'm glad you asked that!" and proceeds to confidently address the objection!

Familiarise yourself with the presentation environment

Arrive early and test out all equipment. Focus the slide projector before the audience arrives and familiarize yourself with its remote control. If you are using a wireless microphone, find out how to turn it off.

Introduce yourself to your audience

Welcome your audience as they enter the room. This creates a comfort zone for you and your audience. By introducing yourself to your audience, you become a likeable, vulnerable human. Likewise, you'll become more confident if you view your audience as a collection of individuals rather than a mob.

Start on time

Unless absolutely necessary, never delay the start of your speech. Always start on time.

Delaying the start of your speech to accommodate latecomers is not only an insult to those who made the effort to arrive on time, it also forces you to begin your presentation on an apologetic note.

The more you delay, the more time you have to get nervous.

Keep eye contact with the audience

LET THEM BUILD your confidence. Acceptance creates confidence. Accepting a nod of confidence on point one provides a foundation, which will help you make an even better presentation of point two!

Never ever take walkouts seriously

It's inevitable that, at some point, somebody is going to get up and leave during your presentation. Don't take it seriously, the person could be leaving for a number of reasons in no way connected to what you have been saying.

Your confidence will plummet if you take walkouts as a reflection on your presentation abilities, rather than as a reality that professional speakers face every day.

More important, pay no attention if a member of the audience walks out during your speech with a bored or annoyed look on his face. He may have just found out that he was in the wrong session, or, he may be genuinely unhappy with your presentation.

If you acknowledge the walkout, you take the chance of losing your enthusiasm and momentum.

You're likely to lose confidence if you allow your perception of your audience's reaction to demoralize you during your speech. So, just do your best! Let the evaluations fall where they may. If you're satisfied with your performance, your audience is likely to be so too. Sometimes a quiet audience is reflecting on the wisdom of what you're saying ("How could anyone ever know so much and express it so well?"). And sometimes a member of the audience, who you think is disagreeing with you, is simply trying to exercise a stiff neck!

6. Confidence boosters

“IT IS NOT the failure you experience that will determine your destiny. But your next step, and then your next, that will tell the story of your life.”

ANON

Knowing how to overcome a lack of confidence is a big part of being successful. Simple as it sounds and repetitive as it may seem, it boils down to the state of your mind, your attitude, and your sense of self-worth. You can do your own ‘busting’ or ‘boosting’. It’s all a matter of choice – your choice.

Some confidence builders: long term

Change the way you think of yourself

“AS A MAN thinketh, so is he” – You must change the image you have of yourself. You may be programming yourself for failure! Are you aware of what you were thinking before and during the times that you don’t feel confident? It’s always negative, isn’t it?

You must reprogram your mind. You must stop value judging.

“I should do this”; “I shouldn’t do that”. “I should have said that”, “I shouldn’t have said that”. All those ‘shoulds’ are value judgements that lower your self-confidence. Try accepting yourself, others and reality. Replace your ‘shoulds’ with non- judgemental words like ‘want’ or ‘choose’ or ‘prefer’. Just this one change will raise your self-confidence.

Stop Comparing

YOU CAN’T WIN in a comparison. Usually you will come out less than the person you compare yourself to. “She is smarter than I am”. But so what! Instead of comparing yourself to others, notice differences; don’t judge them. Remember, you are unique. You have to accept yourself. You don’t criticize a seed because it isn’t a tree yet. Like a seed, you too have lots of growing to do. That’s normal. Accepting yourself as you are now, makes it possible for you to grow and develop. When you feel okay about yourself, you are able to risk change.

Change the words you speak from negative to positive

“Think before you speak”

DO YOU CAREFULLY choose what you are going to say before you speak? Most people just dump whatever they’re thinking into their mouths! We hear more negative messages throughout the day than positive ones, unless we make a conscious effort to do so.

Thinking and speaking follow one another. If your thoughts are negative, then your speech will reflect it. If you choose how you will react to what happens to you in life, you will create what happens next, according to your thoughts, words and deeds.

“Be careful what you think, because speech follows thought, action follows speech, habits follow action, character follows habits, and destiny follows character.”

So, you need to constantly affirm yourself.

Each night before you go to bed, jot down ten things you feel good about from the day. They don’t need to be big things.

They could be the kindness you showed, the feelings you expressed or the commitments you honoured. For example, “The alarm went off, and I got up.” Or, “The traffic light was yellow and I stopped.” Do this every day for one month and watch your self-confidence grow!

Change your body language

80% OF COMMUNICATION is body language and voice tone. The expression “Actions speak louder than words” is so true. Slumped shoulders, slouched body, diffident tone and shuffling steps are great confidence betrayers.

No matter what you may say, people are reading and believing your body language. Closed posture, folded arms and lack of eye contact give negative messages. Open postures, eye contact and smiles are inviting and encourage interaction.

Make ‘learning mistakes’

A MISTAKE DOES not make you a failure. It’s a sign that you’re on your growing edge. Treat a mistake as a gift, an opportunity to learn. Don’t fall into the low self-esteem traps of blaming others, denying your mistakes, hiding them, defending your behaviour or criticizing yourself for not being perfect. Stretch yourself to be uncomfortable every day.

Practise saying, “I don’t know.’ If you aren’t making mistakes, you’re playing it too safe. Don’t give up on your dreams. Don’t lose sight of your goals. It could be that of starting a business. Perhaps it’s finding a compatible romantic relationship. It could be the pursuit of happiness.

Too many of us give up on our dreams. We simply stop trying because we don’t possess the confidence to continue. An obstacle or two is sufficient for us. Some of us are puzzled as we try one avenue after another, with little success.

But the trick is to keep trying. Not to give up. To set simple goals and achieve them. It could be something as simple as “Today, I am going to get up at five o’clock in the morning.”

Keep building on the simple goals and watch your confidence growing with every baby step.

Exercise your power of choice

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH people who are positive and affirmative. Sometimes this means you need to let go of a relationship. Or at least limit the amount of time you spend with that person. Your self-confidence will flourish like a flower in a garden – when you keep the garden weeded.

If you’re in a job in which you’re miserable and mistreated, you need to change your situation. If you’re involved in a relationship with someone who tells you that you’re not able to do things on your own or that you’re incompetent, you need to reconsider your relationship.

If your friends or family discourage you from getting an education or from bettering yourself, then either learn the skills necessary and define your boundaries, or, better yet, remove yourself from the source of the negativity.

Either people pull you down or build you up. If you find that you’re in a situation where you’re discouraged, rather than encouraged, then you’re allowing someone else to influence or determine your destiny. Give yourself the opportunity to grow and be happy. It’s your choice.

Beat self-consciousness

LEARN HOW TO keep your attention off yourself. Self-consciousness is the no.1 enemy of self-confidence. You can do this easily by following these steps.

If you notice you have become self-conscious, (you can usually tell because you begin to feel anxious), choose something everyday that you can see and study in detail. For example: examine a door, look at the different textures and shades of colour, wonder about who made it and how and so on. The important thing is that you're learning how to keep your attention off yourself.

If you feel self-conscious is a social situation, it's usually because you don't have enough to do! Focus on what your purpose in the situation is. Whether you're there to:

- Make others feel comfortable
- Find out some information
- Make business contacts

And so on...

It's easy to feel self-conscious if you have nothing to do, and much more difficult if your attention is occupied by a task.

Stop improving, start developing

WHEN YOU TRY to improve yourself, you start from a belief that there is something wrong with you that needs to be fixed. Each improvement leads to the need for still further improvements. Instead, start with your strengths, your talents, and the gifts that are uniquely yours. Develop these talents. You can then grow from a foundation of strength, instead of a foundation of weakness.

7. Quick-fix confidence fixers

Feel good whenever you want to

FOR TIMES WHEN you need a quick boost to your self-confidence, find three things that make you feel good. These could be memories of good times, a piece of music, a holiday souvenir, or even a person's face – use photos if it helps. Practice thinking about them and bringing them to mind.

Fill a box or scrapbook with evidence of your accomplishments. Touching cards from friends, a good review from your boss, a picture of your toddler, a trophy from a race that you had won, etc. These odds and ends will help remind you that you're loved and respected — and will give you a boost when you're feeling low. Think of this collection as something you can turn to whenever you need to feel better about yourself.

Because of the way emotions 'attach' themselves to memories, you will quickly train yourself to feel good when you want to – a great help in developing self – confidence that lasts.

Don't take undue criticism – even from yourself!

CHALLENGE YOUR OWN assumptions. Here are a few to get you started:

Confident looking people have bad moments too.

Just because you feel less confident, it doesn't mean other people can tell.

If you're saying things to yourself like "I'm no good at anything", then rest assured, you're wrong. Everyone can compose a sentence, get successfully to the store, and eat without choking.

Don't allow yourself to make sweeping statements about yourself. In the long run, it is this sort of thing that can really damage your self-image. Building self-confidence is not just about thinking good about yourself, it's about not thinking bad for no reason!

Just because you have felt bad about yourself in the past, doesn't mean you're always going to feel that way. Just because you failed the driving test once, doesn't mean that the same fate awaits every attempt. Learn to surprise yourself.

Persevere and don't expect everything all at once. Don't get into the trap of expecting perfection in everything you do. Give yourself a long rope.

Brainwash yourself

SELF-TALK DOES affect how you feel. If you're in the habit of saying nasty things to yourself ("Why did I finish off that pint of ice cream? I'm such a fat pig!"), replace those negative statements with words of encouragement that ring true for you. You might say: "I'm strong and capable" or "I can succeed in this project; I've done it before and I'll do it again."

Set challenging but do-able goals

CREATE A DAILY to-do list and a list stating a few longer-term goals. Make sure your lists include some tasks that are easily accomplished say, cleaning out the bedroom closet and others that require a bit of risk-taking — for instance, asking your boss for new responsibilities — or, better yet, a raise.

You can't grow without taking risks. When you reach outside your comfort zone to meet someone new or attain a fresh goal, that experience gets incorporated into things you don't think twice about doing. As a result, your confidence expands.

Fake it

IF YOU APT as if you like yourself — by looking people in the eye, standing tall and proud, and presenting yourself as a winner — eventually you'll come to believe it (and so will everyone else). The trick is to mentally rehearse being confident until it becomes an actuality.

There are some things you can't change in life, but you are always responsible for how you respond to them. And one you begin to appreciate how big an impact you can have on what happens in life, you'll feel more powerful.

8. Confidence bloaters

“PRIDE GOETH BEFORE destruction
And a haughty spirit before a fall.”

VERSE. 3, OLD TESTAMENT

Who has not heard the story of the tortoise and the hare? It is a parable to beat all parables. A story of “Slow and steady wins the race” – told to us by well-meaning parents, teachers and great thinkers. A lesson that all of us have taken to heart. A lesson that all of us would love to repeat when we see someone fail, not succeed, or not be able to accomplish something, simply because he has an inflated sense of his abilities, a sense of over-confidence.

Too much of confidence? Can there be something like ‘too much confidence?’

Yes, there can be. It is this fear that prompts parents to tell their children – “Study hard. Just because you did well in the previous exam doesn’t mean that you should not work hard for this one. Remember what happened to the hare? So, don’t get over-confident.

It is this feeling of over-confidence that makes kingdoms fall, empires tumble, athletes stumble, and people crumble.

It is this feeling of over-confidence that made the giant Goliath bite the dust when he sneered at David for daring to fight him.

All though this book we have learnt about building confidence and about problems arising due to a ‘lack of confidence’.

In this section, we need to talk about over-confidence. Does this exist? Yes, it does. Even the dictionary defines it – “The state or quality of being impudent or arrogantly self-confident.”

History is full of stories of great defeats and falls that stemmed from over-confidence, leading from arrogant assumptions about what a person can do.

If fear is the stumbling block to attaining self-confidence, then complacency is the other side of the same coin.

How much is too much?

IT IS A sane and sensible rule in life that too much of a good thing can be bad. So too with self-confidence. In fact over-confidence has a nasty way of spoiling your aim so that you tend to overshoot your target. It has a negative effect in that it can produce the opposite of what you are trying to achieve.

All of us at some time or the other, pay a price for our over-confidence. Although there is nothing wrong and everything right about having dreams and setting personal goals, the danger comes when we do not give ourselves enough 'wiggle room' to allow for changing circumstances.

"There is no doubt in my mind." "Anything you can do, I can do better." "I can pass my exams without studying. I remember everything." "Oh! What is so great about doing this. I can do this with my little finger." "Let's have a party. I am sure that the contract is mine.

All these above statements reveal a confirmation bias, bordering on arrogance and brashness.

A wise saying "Don't go claiming a great victory before you have even gone to war!" is so apt with certain people who believe, in their arrogance, that the world belongs to them and that things will happen to them without any effort on their part.

We can overcome...

OVER-CONFIDENCE CAN BE overcome with realistic self-confidence. "I can do anything I can set my mind to", has to precede and follow some effort on our part. To think otherwise, is to set ourselves up for self-deception and self-destruction.

Setting unreachable goals is a myth. Achieving goals not only requires self-confidence, it also requires time, determination, talent, abilities etc.

In short, we need to justify the confidence that we have. If we don't we will be like 'empty vessels', "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

We need to cultivate a little bit of humility. Humility, as mistaken by many, is not opposed to confidence. It is opposed to over-confidence, pride, and arrogance.

A little bit of humility makes us a vessel of learning. The great poet Goethe rightly said "When I look back and see all the great things I have done, I look forward and see how much more I have yet to do." We need to cultivate this.

A self-confidence lesson

SO, WHERE IS your self-confidence? Does it rest on money, looks, security, and society, or is it based on intelligence, talents, abilities and knowledge?

The answer to this will lead you out of the clutches of over-confidence. Remember that you need to place your confidence in the potter, not in the lumps of clay.

Conclusion

The eagle has landed

“HE WHO KNOWS not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool: shun him. He who knows not, and knows that he knows not, is a student; teach him. He who knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep: wake him. He who knows, and knows that he knows, is wise: follow him.”

ASIAN PROVERB

You have started on your self-confidence journey. You have discovered your wings and the joy of flying. You have embraced the truths of your life and the world around you. Armed with this confidence, you can conquer what lies ahead. Although the journey will not always be smooth sailing (or flying), the trick is to land safely on your feet.

When you are unsure of yourself but life expects you to be otherwise, it is comforting to remember that you can always borrow a self-confident attitude from your inner self who knows how terrific you are and gives you that little boost, which is all that you really need.

Self-confidence is a special elixir that helps each one of us to face and surmount the challenges of life. It is an aromatic blending of invigorating essences; attitude, experience, knowledge, wisdom, optimism and faith. What's important for us to realise, is that self-confidence is available to all of us.

An optimistic attitude is essential to self-confidence. So is learning from our mistakes and recognizing that everything in life can be used as a lesson, once we are willing to be taught.

Today, tell yourself that you can do anything that you want to do. Because you really can. Like an expensive perfume, only a smidgen of self-confidence is needed to enhance a woman's authentic aura.

End