



BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

Develop Self-Confidence

FOCUS QUESTIONS

In which life roles do you feel most confident? In which do you experience self-doubt? What can you do to increase your overall self-confidence?

If people don't feel good about themselves and believe that they'll win a championship, they never will.

Tara VanDerveer, former head coach of the NCAA Championship Stanford University women's basketball team

On the first day of one semester, a woman intercepted me at the classroom door. "Can I ask you something?" she said. "How do I know if I'm cut out for college?"

"What's your opinion?" I asked.

"I think I'll do okay."

"Great," I said.

She stood there, still looking doubtful. "But . . . my high school counselor said. . . ." She paused.

"Let me guess. Your counselor said you wouldn't do well in college? Is that it?" She nodded. "I think he was wrong. But how do I know for sure?"

Indeed! How *do* we know? There will always be others who don't believe in us. What matters, however, is that we have confidence in ourselves. Self-confidence is the core belief that *I CAN*, the unwavering trust that I can successfully do whatever is necessary to achieve my realistic goals and dreams.

Ultimately, it matters little whether someone else thinks you can do something. It matters greatly whether *you* believe you can. Luck aside, you'll probably accomplish just about what you believe you can. In this section we'll explore three effective ways to develop greater self-confidence.

CREATE A SUCCESS IDENTITY

Are you confident that you can tie your shoes? Of course. And yet there was a time when you weren't. So how did you move from doubt to confidence? Wasn't it by practicing over and over? You built your self-confidence by stacking one small victory upon another. As a result, today you have confidence that you can tie your shoes every time you try. By the same method, you can build a success identity in virtually any endeavor.

The life of Nathan McCall illustrates the creation of a success identity under difficult circumstances. It also shows how a Creator mindset can help you overcome any feelings you have of being "different," such as not being part of the mainstream culture. McCall grew up in a Portsmouth, Virginia, ghetto where he faced prejudice and racism. His involvement with crimes and violence led to imprisonment. After his release, McCall attended college and studied journalism. As you might imagine, one of his greatest challenges was self-doubt. But he persevered, tackling each challenge as it came—one more test passed, one more course completed. After graduation, he got a job with a newspaper, and over the years he steadily rose to the position of bureau chief. Recalling his accumulated

Success brings its own self-confidence.

Lillian Vernon Katz

successes, McCall wrote in his journal, "These experiences solidify my belief that I can do anything I set my mind to do. The possibilities are boundless." Boundless indeed! McCall went from street-gang member and prison inmate to successful and respected reporter for the *Washington Post*, later author of a *New York Times* bestseller, and then became a faculty member at Emory University in Georgia.

Genuine self-confidence results from a history of success, and a history of success results from persistently taking purposeful actions. That's why a 32-day commitment (Journal Entry 14) is not only an effective self-management tool but also a great way to start building a success identity. After we experience success in one area of our lives, self-confidence begins to seep into every corner of our being, and we begin to believe *I CAN*.

CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESSES AND TALENTS

A friend showed me a school assignment that his eight-year-old daughter had brought home. At the top of the page was written: *Nice job, Lauren. Your spelling is very good. I am proud of you.* What made the comments remarkable is this: The teacher had merely put a check on the page; Lauren had added the compliments herself.

At the age of eight, Lauren has much to teach us about building self-confidence. It's great when someone else tells us how wonderful our successes and talents are. But it's even more important that we tell ourselves.

One way to acknowledge your success is to create a success deck: Every day, write at least one success (big or small) on an index card. Add it to your growing stack of successes and read through the deck every day. Or post the cards on a wall where you'll be reminded often of your accomplishments: *Got an 86 on history test. . . . Attended every class on time this week. . . . Exercised for two hours at the gym.* In addition to acknowledging your successes, you can celebrate them by rewarding yourself with something special—a favorite dinner, a movie, a night out with friends.

VISUALIZE PURPOSEFUL ACTIONS

We can also strengthen our self-confidence, as well as our abilities, by visualizing purposeful actions done well, especially actions outside our comfort zone. Psychologist Charles Garfield once performed an experiment to determine the impact of visualizations on a group of people who were afraid of public speaking. These nervous speakers were divided into three subgroups:

Group 1 read and studied how to give public speeches, but they delivered no actual speeches.

Group 2 read about speechmaking and also gave two talks each week to small audiences of classmates and friends.

Group 3 read about effective speaking and gave one talk each week to small groups. This group also watched videotapes of effective speakers and, twice a day, *mentally rehearsed* giving effective speeches of their own.

Research studies show that people who have high self-esteem regularly reward themselves in tangible and intangible ways. . . . By documenting and celebrating their successes, they insure that these successes will reoccur.

Marsha Sinetar

Peak performers develop powerful mental images of the behavior that will lead to the desired results. They see in their mind's eye the result they want, and the actions leading to it.

Charles Garfield

Mental practice is also referred to as "visualization" or "imagery rehearsal." We start with 20 to 30 minutes of relaxation training, followed by the visualization of some aspect of the athlete's game that needs improvement. It's the mental equivalent of physical practice.

Dr. Richard Suinn,
Sports Psychologist to
Olympic athletes

If we picture ourselves functioning in specific situations, it is nearly the same as the actual performance. Mental practice helps one to perform better in real life.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz

Experts on public speaking, unaware of the experiment, evaluated the effectiveness of these speakers both before and after their preparation. Group 1 did not improve at all. Group 2 improved significantly. Group 3, the group that had visualized themselves giving excellent speeches, improved the most.

When I first introduce the idea of visualizing to my students, many are skeptical. In particular, young male students are often outspoken. "That's just stupid," one basketball player said. Two things helped change the minds of many. First, they were intrigued to learn that world-class athletes use mental imagery to improve their skills. Three examples are basketball legend Michael Jordan, golf great Tiger Woods, and tennis superstar Roger Federer. Second, like me, many skeptics became believers after they gave visualization a serious try. My conversion occurred after I dramatically improved my backhand in racquetball. I got a book with still pictures showing each step of a perfect backhand. For weeks, I imagined those steps in my mind . . . and then practiced them on the court. My "aha" came the day that one of my backhands smacked the front wall with the crack of a pistol (instead of my usual marshmallow hitting a pillow).

Mentally rehearsing purposeful actions will not only help you improve your ability to do the action but will also reduce associated fears. Suppose you're feeling anxious about an upcoming test. Your Inner Critic is probably visualizing a disaster: *As soon as I walk into the exam room, my pulse starts racing, I start sweating, I start feeling weak, and my mind goes totally blank. I fail!*

What if you visualized a more positive experience? You could imagine yourself taking the test confidently, creating an ideal outcome. Your revised mental movie might look like this: *I walk into the exam fully prepared. I've attended all of my classes on time, done my very best work on all of my assignments, and studied effectively. Feeling confident, I find a comfortable seat and take a few moments to breathe deeply, relax, and focus myself. I concentrate on the subject matter of this test. I release all my other cares and worries, feeling excited about the opportunity to show how much I have learned. The instructor walks into the room and begins handing out the exams. I know that any question the instructor asks will be easy for me to answer. I glance at the test and see questions that my study group and I have prepared for all semester. Alert and aware, I begin to write. Every answer I write flows easily from the storehouse of knowledge I have in my mind. I work steadily and efficiently, and, after finishing, I check my answers thoroughly. I hand in the exam with a comfortable amount of time remaining, and as I leave the room, I feel a pleasant weariness. I am confident that I have done my very best.*

Because you choose the movies that play in your mind, why not choose to star in a movie in which you successfully complete purposeful actions?

Creators know there are many choices that will strengthen self-confidence. When we consciously choose options such as creating a success identity, celebrating our successes and talents, and visualizing the successful completion of purposeful actions, we will soon be able to say with supreme confidence: *I CAN.*

JOURNAL ENTRY 15

In this activity, you will practice ways to increase your self-confidence. Self-confident people *expect* success, which in turn strengthens their motivation and fuels their energy. If what they are doing isn't working, they don't quit. Instead, they switch to Plan B (or C or D) and persist. Then they finish strong, consistently giving their best to achieve their goals and dreams! In this way, the very success they want and expect often becomes a reality.

Make a choice: Do two of the following four actions:

- ① **List the successes you have created in your life.** The more successes you list, the more you will strengthen your self-confidence. Include small victories as well as big ones.
- ② **List your personal skills and talents.** Again, the longer your list, the more you will strengthen your self-confidence. What are you good at doing? What would your friends say are your skills and talents? Don't overlook talents that you use daily. No talent is too insignificant to acknowledge. If listing your personal skills and talents makes you uncomfortable, recall the old saying, "It ain't bragging if it's true!"
- ③ **List positive risks that you have taken in your life.** When did you stretch your comfort zone and do something despite your fear?
- ④ **Write a visualization of yourself successfully doing an important action that you presently have some resistance about doing.** For example, maybe you fear asking a question in your biology lecture or you're nervous about going to a scheduled job interview. Remember to use the four keys to effective visualizing discussed in Journal Entry 10:
 1. **Relax.**
 2. **Use present-tense verbs.**
 3. **Be specific and use many senses.**
 4. **Feel the feelings.**

As a model for your writing, reread the positive visualization that appears in the article right before this journal entry.

I wanted to be the best dentist that ever lived. People said, "But she's a woman; she's colored," and I said, "Ha! Just you wait and see."

Bessie Delany, dentist
and author

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