

## **THE TOP 5 TIPS TO CREATING LASTING CONFIDENCE**

Confidence is often seen as something you are born with. Those who lack confidence look on enviously at those who seem to have it and some of those who appear to be confident on the outside spend their time feeling insecure on the inside. There is some evidence to suggest that some elements of confidence such as being an extrovert may be genetic and therefore passed on. However, there is also an increasing body of research that suggests much of what we think of as being genetic is, in fact, only learnt behaviour.

One study in the States estimated that a minimum of 60% of how we behave and feel is down to the skills we have learnt rather than our inherited biological make-up. This means that even the most pessimistic, insecure people can only inherit a maximum of 40% of their behavioural and emotional characteristics. This means that your ability to be confident lies essentially in your own hands.

If you think about it these findings make perfect sense. One way of thinking about how confidence is developed is to see childhood as a long training course so that from the moment a child is born he or she receives messages from all those around them. It is a bit like going on a training

course for the first eighteen years of your life. If your trainers have the right skills and can pass these on to you then you are likely to develop a real sense of who you are and enjoy genuine confidence in yourself.

However, if your trainers don't have the necessary skills or due to life circumstances find themselves unable to cope then they are unlikely to be able to pass on the appropriate skills.

Many of my clients seek coaching because of a lack of confidence which they believe gets in the way of them achieving what they want.

Interestingly, many people believe that celebrities have all the confidence in the world and yet many of my celebrity clients battle with insecurity, anxiety and, for some, a deep lack of confidence.

The following 5 tips are aimed at helping you improve your confidence.

### **1. Stop Discounting Yourself!**

Stop discounting yourself – recognise your personal qualities and give yourself credit for what you do. Avoid saying things like *“that doesn't count”*, *“other people could do it better”* and *“anyone could have done it”* – congratulate yourself the way you would your best friend. There are a number of psychological studies that link this type of thinking to

depression and poor self-esteem. The less you value what you do the more you drag yourself down and we know that a key element of depression is negative thinking. Cognitive-Behavioural therapists have known for a long time that if you want to feel worthless, inadequate and depressed then all you have to do is think in put-down terms about yourself. Professor Windy Dryden of Goldsmith's College has written an excellent book entitled "How to Make Yourself Miserable", Windy Dryden, Sheldon Press, £7.99 in which he outlines all the ways in which negative thinking drains you and makes you ill.

## **2. Learn to appreciate life**

In the last ten years, the whole area of Positive Psychology has grown both in terms of studies and in terms of understanding what it takes to increase our life experience. Historically, much of therapy has focused on helping people move from a minus position to zero whereas Positive Psychology looks at how to take a person who is already at zero to a plus ten position. One study found that those people who wrote down three things that they were pleased about at the end of every day together with the reasons why they were pleased were able to improve their moods significantly in two weeks. Not only did this exercise improve mood but also when people were tested over a period of time they still felt the

benefits some six months later. So get yourself a journal and write down three things that you are pleased about at the end of each day and also write down why you were pleased. For example, *“I liked the way I spoke to the kids - I am so lucky to have such lovely children and I felt so much better about myself being able to be firm without losing it”*. It is often the little things in life that build confidence and improving our ability to feel gratitude also increases our confidence. If you visit [www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com) you will find all the latest information on positive psychology together with a whole host of activities to help you develop your confidence. Read “Authentic Happiness”, Martin Seligman, Free Press, £11.55.

### **3. If you Look Good you’ll feel good**

Get a makeover - you don’t have to spend a fortune to do this. Find a charity shop in a good residential area and you will often find designer clothes and other good quality items for next to nothing. Find out where your local hairdressing and beauty training schools are, as they will be looking for models and charge very little. A personal shopper can make all the difference as he or she is likely to look for clothes that they think will suit you and very often other people see the potential in us that we

cannot see ourselves. I remember putting myself in the hands of a stylist and being completely surprised at the clothes that she made me try. At first, I felt a little uncomfortable because I had trained myself to see myself in one way. However, I soon realised I had become stuck in a rut and now I feel like a million dollars. In the past year my wardrobe has changed dramatically and I feel so much better for it. Stylists do not have to cost the earth and if you have a birthday coming up why not suggest to your friends and loved ones that they make a donation towards your styling fund and then splash out on a day out shopping with a stylist. Changing the way you look can give your confidence a boost. Read “What You Wear Can Change Your Life”, Trinny Woodhall & Susanah Constantine, Orion Publishing, £20.00.

#### **4. Think about what you need from life.**

Think about yourself and your needs – it is all too easy to meet everyone else’s needs and forget your own. If you do this you drain your confidence levels. Behave like a doormat but don’t be surprised if people walk all over you! Learn to say ‘No’. Find an assertiveness training course at a local adult education institute and when you find yourself saying, “*I can’t*” say “*What’s the worst that can happen?*”

Stand back and take a good look at your life and make some decisions about those areas that are working and those that are not. Take control and begin to change the things that are not. Read, “Confidence Works – learn to be your own Life Coach”, Gladeana McMahon, Sheldon Press, £7.99 to find a whole new way of looking at yourself.

## **5. Take Risks**

Confident people take risks. You take a risk every minute of your life so make your risks work for you. If you pretend you are something then you are more likely to become it. Psychologists call this the “as if” principle. If you act as if you are confident then you are more likely to become confident. If you think of going to a party then think of the most confident people you know and ask yourself how they behave? What do they say? What do they do? What do they wear? If you have the chance watch them in action and make a note of all the things they do and then practice doing these yourself. This technique is called modelling and successful people do it without even realising they do it. Research shows that it takes 21 days to create a new habit pathway in the brain and a further 63 days of regular activity to consolidate what you have learnt. Yes, you will feel strange at first but keep on practising and soon it will feel as if you have always behaved this way. Many people who lack

confidence look down at the floor, avoid eye contact and often look as if they are really miserable or aggressive. The reality is that they are scared and this fear makes them try to protect themselves and yet all it does is become a self-fulfilling prophecy. After all, if you look as if you are unapproachable then why would people want to come near you? Of course, you can then tell yourself that you were right all the time and people really are unfriendly because no one talks to you. We can spend so much time worrying about what others might think that we forget to think about the way we come across. Fat, thin, tall or short people are attracted to those who smile and are approachable. Try acting *as if you are this type of person* and you'll be surprised at how many friends you make and how much better you feel about yourself. If you have trouble taking risks and need some help then visit

[www.associationforcoaching.com](http://www.associationforcoaching.com) to find the details of a life coach who can help you. Read "Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway", Susan Jeffers, Ebury Press, £9.99 or "Confidence Works – learn to be your own Life Coach, Gladeana McMahon, £7.99, Sheldon Press.

Gladeana McMahon

[www.gladeanamcmahon.com](http://www.gladeanamcmahon.com)

Listed as one of the UK's Top Coaches by the *Independent on Sunday*.

Author of a range of self help books and TV Coach/Therapist.