



**Stuart Pritchard** suggests that *self-confidence is a state of mind, and we can change our minds to help us achieve our goals*

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Confidence is a state of mind. We feel confident when we believe in ourselves and have a clear sense of our own self-worth. When we believe in ourselves, we view the world in a positive light; we view success as well earned, and setbacks as opportunities to develop further. Whatever happens in the world, we view through the positive lens of self-belief, feeling inside that we are creative and resourceful enough to cope with whatever comes.

A clear sense of self-worth means that we know who we are, and the value of our contribution to the world - even when others doubt it. It helps us deal with the fear of social exclusion (one of the fears which underpins a lack of confidence) because we know we are worthwhile, and our expectation is that others will understand that. Being unsure of our self-worth makes us worry that others will reject us, and makes us reluctant to “put ourselves out there”.

A clear and stable understanding of our unique value in the world does the opposite; it makes us feel able to take a risk, confident that failure does not diminish us in others' eyes.

If the heart of confidence is belief in ourselves and being clear about our own worth, then it means that confidence is all about our relationship with ourselves – what we believe to be true about ourselves.

Often, people say they don't feel confident in front of an audience, because they are fearful of how the audience will react, of being judged if they get things wrong. I agree that's how it seems - but there's something deeper going on.

Confidence in front of others isn't as much about them as we might think – *our* view of ourselves is much more important. The judgment we are often most afraid of isn't that which comes from the audience – it's our own.

When we are not feeling confident, we are often in a state where our own inner critic is conspiring against us. It tells us we'll fail, that we're not good enough, that the audience will reject us, or any number of other unpleasant things. To this inner critic, our performance is a source of ammunition, helping it undermine our confidence, but as Eleanor Roosevelt said:

“no one can make you feel inferior without your consent”.

Why would we do that to ourselves? Why would we attack ourselves in that way?

In fact, our inner critic is trying to do something positive for us - it's just it goes about it in a way which isn't very helpful!

Often, the purpose of our inner critic is to help keep us safe. It doesn't want us to get hurt, so it tries to protect us from potentially harmful situations, by stopping us taking a risk – the risk of putting ourselves “out there” in front of others.

Of course, we don't literally have a separate being inside of us who acts as our inner critic; it's a part of ourselves that's doing the talking. That means that we can change what our inner voice says to us - helping it do its work of protecting us in a much more constructive way, a way that boosts our confidence rather than diminishing it.

### ***“confidence is all about our relationship with ourselves”***

Ultimately then, confidence is about what we believe to be true about ourselves. It stems from our beliefs.

Beliefs usually form over a long period of time. We observe an event in the world, a thought we have, or perhaps a comment that someone makes. What happens next, is the source of our beliefs about the world – and about ourselves.

Humans are meaning-making machines; we have evolved such that we make meaning from events, sometimes even the most trivial ones.

We observe events in the world, then relate them to our previous experience and existing beliefs. Based on those, we evaluate the event, and project a meaning onto it. We do this by telling ourselves a story about the event “she didn’t return my call, that means she doesn’t like me” is a simple example. The first half of this phrase is a statement of fact – she didn’t return my call. The second half is a story we told ourselves about it – that means she doesn’t like me. Of course it may mean nothing of the sort. The person in question may have lost her phone, be busy or away from home, there are any number of reasons they may not have called back – they key thing is that we choose the reason we want to believe.

Once we have projected our story onto an event, made our “meaning” from it, we develop an emotion associated with it, which then drives our behavior. This is how we rob ourselves of confidence – by developing beliefs based on our own stories about events, and then behaving as if those beliefs were objectively true.

Fortunately however, beliefs can be changed. There are a number of ways that our beliefs about ourselves can be changed. In my experience, coaching is the most effective of these.

In coaching, you are in control of the conversation. You discuss the changes you want to make, and the coach reflects those back, asking questions and working with you to arrive at a much deeper level of self-understanding. This allows you to change the ways in which you relate to yourself – your beliefs.

Since self-confidence flows from our beliefs about ourselves, changing our beliefs can bring about a profound and permanent change in our confidence.

We may sometimes seem powerless to influence how we feel about ourselves - but in fact we can understand and change it. To find out more, get in touch – we’d love to hear from you.

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