



Why Be More Confident

Description

Being confident means feeling sure of yourself and your abilities based on what you've learned or achieved in the past. However, confidence can waver based on how these abilities and knowledge are tested. If I asked you if you knew how a zipper works, would you answer yes or no? If you said yes and then I asked you to explain the steps involved in a zipper's operation, what exactly could you tell me? It turns out most of us do say yes, but very few of us can actually offer a reasonable explanation of how a zipper works beyond saying something about the teeth coming together to fasten the zip.

This example, drawn from Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach's excellent book, [The Knowledge Illusion](#), speaks to how much we think we know and even claim publicly to know, but don't really know.

This is why [self-assessments](#) ask people not only to calculate what they know but also rate their confidence in their response. The result is revealing—people are often highly overconfident about what they think they know. This can have serious implications; in a health and safety situation, an overconfident attitude could lead serious and possibly harmful mistakes. Less hazardous situations might not risk personal injury, but can still cause lasting ramifications. Indeed, most errors of judgment we witness or make ourselves can be argued to be the result of overconfidence rather than willful neglect.

Solely relying on confidence is also an issue because when you have no evidence to draw upon, you are at a loss. If you believe you can only do things you've accomplished before, how do you expect to create new results in your future? Further, what can you do to match your confidence to your competence? To answer that, let's explore confidence, self-confidence, and self-concept.

What Is Self-Confidence?

Self-confidence can be described as a positive attitude about your own skills and abilities. It means you accept and trust yourself and have a sense of control in your life. You recognize your strengths and weaknesses, and have a positive view of yourself. You set realistic expectations and goals, communicate assertively, and can handle criticism. Self-confidence is not the same as self-esteem,

which is an evaluation of one's own worth, but is trusting in your own abilities to achieve goals.

Self-Confidence and Self-Concept

You can't explore confidence without taking self-concept into account. Our self-concept informs, shores up, or can undermine our confidence. Put simply, self-concept is your evaluation of your own abilities in a wide range of domains, such as academic and cognitive skills, physical skills, physical attractiveness, and interpersonal skills. Your self-concepts can be described normatively; for example, you might say, "I can create spreadsheets" or "I can code software." Self-concepts can also be evaluations of skills harder to define, such as, "I work effectively in a team" or "My proposals are well written."

While self-concept relates to specific domains, confidence is a broader assessment of abilities. Importantly, while self-concept is relatively stable ("if I can create spreadsheets today, I am likely to believe I can create them tomorrow"), confidence is volatile. Your confidence can fluctuate for a number of reasons—you're under stress, you're fatigued, you've made a mistake and you feel silly, etc.

Implications of Self-Confidence

Self-confidence carries many implications, but consider these two:

Managing your negative triggers

People must learn what triggers moments of low confidence and how to manage them. This might involve how you manage your self-talk—that narrative in your head that explains yourself to yourself. Equally, it may mean revising your initial assessments of your ability or competence and working on your knowledge or skills.

Confidence and Self-Assessments

Too little confidence can be as bad as too much, so it is a good idea to calibrate your confidence in your self-assessments. One of the findings from the Kaplan Insight self-assessment tool, which assessed the confidence and competence of over 10,000 respondents, has been to reveal individuals who lack confidence in areas where they in fact demonstrate great competence.

Confidence is the central theme of Kaplan's new Confident New Hire Program. Learn more about it [here](#).

Date Created

May 2021

Author

drew-teichman