

PSYCHOLOGIES  
MAGAZINE

“A wonderful guide to having the courage to be who you uniquely are – with self belief and confidence.”

-Professor Tanya Byron,  
clinical psychologist and author  
of *The Skeleton Cupboard*

# REAL CONFIDENCE

Stop feeling small and  
start being *brave*



CAPSTONE  
A Wiley Brand

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Stop feeling small and start being  
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**PSYCHOLOGIES**  
MAGAZINE

This edition first published 2016

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John Wiley and Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-857-08657-0 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-857-08658-7 (ebk)    ISBN 978-0-857-08659-4 (ebk)

Cover design: Wiley

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# FOREWORD

*by Suzy Greaves, Editor, Psychologies*

When I'm out and about meeting and hanging out with our *Psychologies* readers at our events and festivals, we often talk about no-limits, 'magic wand' thinking. If you could wave a wand and could change something about yourself - what would you change? 'Confidence' is the word I hear over and over again. Deep down we believe that if we could only be a little bit more confident and comfortable in our own skin, the world would be our oyster ... we could do anything ... the sky would be the limit. But because we're not confident, we can't. So we sit quietly and leave it to those confident people over there to conquer the world and reach for the sky.

So if that is your belief, this book may very well change your life - as well as challenge you quite a bit. Because this book is going to invite you to be brave. You will be relieved (I was!) to discover that it's normal - and healthy - to feel scared when you're about to do something new - be it a new role at work, a first date or learning a new skill. And you will learn that the only way to overcome your fears is by being brave. This book will show you how - from overcoming your initial fears to just 'having a go' until you become more skilled - as you slowly take baby steps out of your comfort zone. Then, over time, you can build your confidence on a foundation of real skill and faith in your ability versus that dreadful 'I feel a fraud' dread that haunts your every move. Courage and striving for accomplishment is the secret to real confidence - and I'm delighted that even though you're scared, you've been brave enough to pick up this book and come on this journey



with us. No more sitting quietly over there, it's time to conquer the world and reach for the sky.

Ready?

**Suzy Greaves, Editor, *Psychologies***

## INTRODUCTION

You might be surprised to know this, but buying a book about confidence is in fact a sign of confidence. At *Psychologies* magazine we believe that confidence begins with self-awareness, knowing exactly who you are and how you are in different life situations.

Right now you've identified that finding real confidence is what you need. Perhaps you might be aware that chronic low confidence is at the root of all your problems. Or perhaps you lack confidence in one particular area in your life - maybe you shine at work but want to disappear behind the curtains at social events. There might be just one particular fear like public speaking that you'd like to find the confidence for.

Whatever your reasons are for buying this book, one thing is for sure: you're not alone. Although there aren't any official statistics on people suffering from lack of confidence we know that it's a huge preoccupation for people. We know this from our readership research, from what psychologists, psychotherapists, life coaches and all the experts we talk to tell us. We know that people are Googling confidence, self-confidence, how to be confident and every variation. That's why we decided to create this book for you, providing all the latest research and the best expert knowledge in one handy book. We've done the research for you and formulated our philosophy so that you have a clear understanding of what to do next.

What we hope this book will do for you is help you understand what confidence really is while showing you how to develop confidence for real. Understanding why you lack confidence is of course important, but we're not going

to dwell on that too much. We believe it's good to understand why we are the way we are, but we know that you've bought this book because you want to leave the past behind and become the best you. If you didn't believe this was possible, you wouldn't be reading this - and that in itself is a sign of confidence.

You've probably read or been told that you should fake it until you make it, that you should *act* confident. But think of your favourite actors and why you love them and one of the main reasons is that whichever character they play they are totally believable. They don't appear to be 'acting'.

Our approach to confidence is based on not acting. We want you to feel relaxed in absolutely any situation and accept who you are. We want to show you that confidence has nothing to do with any type of personality and that what you may think of as confidence is often a fake front, arrogance or narcissism. And that's not the person you want to be. Having a go at what you find difficult, slowly trying and going step by baby step, staying on track, being patient and focused on developing different skills is what real confidence is.

## **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

We've divided this book into three parts (How Confident Are You? Why Do You Lack Confidence? How Can You Learn to be Confident?). In Part 1 you'll gain a sense of how low your confidence really is by understanding the true meaning of confidence. You may indeed discover you're not so bad after all. In Part 2 you'll explore why you are the way you are, which will help you move on. Finally, in Part 3 we have lots of practical advice. To help you take immediate action we also have confidence boosters throughout the book so that you can work on your confidence immediately.

At the end of the first five chapters there are tests that will help you assess yourself. There are also key 'Ask Yourself' questions at the end of each chapter for you to reflect on so that you can relate each chapter to your personal experience. You will also find case studies, who are all real people (with names and identifying circumstances changed). Their journeys will help you see how it's possible to overcome low confidence.

We interviewed two psychologists, two acting coaches, two life coaches and one neuroscientist, all of them top of their fields, and the best experts on confidence. Instead of just one perspective we wanted to tackle every aspect and show you how experts from different areas converge. We wanted to create a *Psychologies* perspective on Real Confidence that is multidimensional, giving you an all-round, thorough approach. We hope that through this you are able to stop seeing lack of confidence as a problem that is an obstacle to your happiness.

## OUR EXPERTS

**Annie Ashdown, Harley Street business and personal development coach, clinical hypnotherapist, and intuitive**

Ashdown's clients include CEOs, lawyers, entrepreneurs, diplomats, doctors, corporate employees, top achievers in business, celebrities and teenagers.

She is the author of ***Doormat Nor Diva Be - How to Take Back Control of your Life and Relationships (Infinite Ideas)*** and ***The Confidence Factor - 7 Secrets of Successful People*** (Crimson Publishing).

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**Dr Ilona Boniwell, founder of the European Network of Positive Psychology, head of the International MSc in Applied Positive Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (UK and France) and head of training consultancy Positran**

Boniwell has been involved in helping the government of Bhutan develop a framework for happiness-based public policy. She has contributed to, edited and written several books. Her latest as an author is *Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford University Press) and positive psychology tools, such as Strength Cards and The Happiness Box (Positran).

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**Dawn Breslin, life coach, TV presenter and author**

Breslin's extensive TV work includes presenter and confidence-building expert for GMTV, and presenter for Discovery Channel's Life Coach Series. She helps people from all walks of life repair their self-esteem and rebuild their confidence.

She is the author of three books, *Zest for Life*, *Super Confidence* and *The Power Book* (Hay House) and was a consultant on Lorraine Kelly's book, *Real Life Solutions* (Century).

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**Dr Nitasha Buldeo, research scientist in biophysiology**

Buldeo is qualified in health sciences and psychology, neuroscience, nutrition and NLP. As a product-innovator and entrepreneur she has been awarded scholarships from the UK Department of Trade and Industry to study at the Kellogg School of Management in Chicago, USA. She was also awarded a scholarship at business school, Cranfield School of Management.

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**Dr Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Psychologist and Professor of Business Psychology at University College London and Columbia University, CEO of Hogan Assessment Systems (psychological profiling)**

Chamorro-Premuzic advises clients in financial services, media, consumer, fashion and government and appears regularly on news channels including the BBC, CNN and Sky. He is the author of eight books, including his latest *Confidence: The Surprising Truth About How Much You Need and How to Get It* (Profile Books).

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**Niki Flacks, award-winning veteran Broadway actress, director, acting/corporate training coach, psychologist, therapist, founder of the Bergerac Company**

Flacks, also a former assistant professor in theatre at Southern Methodist University, fuses psychology and neuroscience to help actors handle nerves and create authentic characters. Her flagship programme for

corporations is Power Talk, which trains employees in overcoming fear of public speaking. She is the author of *Acting with Passion* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama).

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**Patsy Rodenburg OBE, Head of Voice at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, leadership coach**

Rodenburg was former Head of Voice at the Royal National Theatre, and works with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court, the Donmar and Almeida theatres, as well as A-list stars. She travels all over the world coaching business leaders, athletes and politicians. She is the author of five books including *Presence* (Penguin).

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**1**

**HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU?**



# CHAPTER 1

## DEFINING CONFIDENCE - IS IT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS?

We suspect you believe lack of confidence is the reason certain aspects of your life are not working out the way they do for everyone else who has confidence. You don't blame anyone else for not earning more money, or not finding a job post-redundancy, or not finding love after divorce, or not buying a home, or not having children, or not changing careers, or not losing weight, or not getting fit, or not making new friends. This feeling, that it's *your* fault, that it's all because you've got no confidence, is very common. You're not alone. Lacking confidence doesn't feel good. You feel like there's some screw missing from the intricate parts of your brain, or there's a malfunction in your brain's software, right? If you could just fix that, if there was a confidence app for your brain you'd be fine, right?

Confidence has become the holy grail of modern life. It's not just the big concepts like success and happiness that we've come to believe *depend* on confidence, somehow we think that it's the foundation to our inner structure, that it's what would enable us to create our ideal outer lives.

But do we even know what it *really* is? Unless you really know what confidence is, how can you develop it? What *is* it?

Analysing the meaning of confidence prompts fascinating discussions. Let's start with the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition. Here we see that one aspect of the meaning is a feeling of *being able to trust or rely on someone or something*. That's a reminder that we need to learn to trust

and rely on ourselves. (If you already trust and rely on yourself, even just a little, then you can smile and feel good about yourself.)

As for the definition with regard to individuals, the following comes up in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

*A feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities.*

*A belief in your own ability to do something and be successful.*

*The feeling that you are certain about something.*

Specifying 'self-confidence' gives us the following dictionary definition:

*A feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities and judgement.*

If we also look at the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of self-esteem, it seems to be one step further than confidence in our own worth or abilities:

*A feeling of being happy with your own character and abilities.*

So is confidence based on self-esteem? Is self-esteem inner and confidence outer, or does outer confidence show inner self-esteem? Does high self-esteem lead to self-confidence? What a mental maze.

## **FINDING A PERSONAL DEFINITION**

Social psychology studies have shown that we try to manage our feelings of self-worth. With social media, and generations who haven't experienced life without social media, there is a whole new arena to research. A University

of Wisconsin and Madison<sup>1</sup> 2013 study measuring Facebook users' self-esteem looked at how quickly participants made positive associations about themselves when looking at their own profile. But the study didn't look at how and why a Facebook profile is a version of self, or to what extent it's a *true* version. If Photoshopped and filtered photos boost your self-esteem, then how real is it? If you've posted photos from parties where it looks as though you're having a fabulous time, but in reality you left early because your ex was there or you were bored, how does looking at photos of yourself looking good help you *feel* good at the next party or when you're on your own?

The above study didn't assess the effect of people looking at other people's profiles and newsfeeds. One that did was the 2014 study at the University of Queensland's School of Psychology,<sup>2</sup> which found that active participation in social media produces a positive sense of belonging. The study looked at one group of people in which half posted regularly on Facebook while the other half passively observed posts. According to the study, not posting for two days had a negative effect on those who were simply observing the posts. In another group, participants using anonymous accounts were encouraged to respond to each other. However, half of the group were unaware they were set up not to receive any responses. Those who didn't receive responses felt invisible with lower self-esteem. What does this tell us about self-esteem? That it's changeable, that it's vulnerable, that it's dependent on the group and peer activity? And how does this all tie up with confidence?

If you're someone who receives compliments about how together you are, if you can be the joker of the group, or if your job involves helping others at a high level, and yet lack of confidence is your guilty secret, then you know all too well that appearances are deceptive. If you can appear

to be confident to others but aren't inside, what does this mean? How can we define confidence to take these contradictions into account?

Enter the academics, with a term we don't use every day: self-efficacy. In the good old *Oxford English Dictionary*, efficacy is defined as *the ability of something to produce the results that are wanted* whilst self-efficacy is *the ability to produce a desire or intended result*.

Let's say you want to start going to a yoga class to de-stress. You've put it off because you feel hopeless at anything new, you don't like group activities and you don't like your body in gym clothes. In short your self-esteem is low. But finally, out of desperation to help you sleep, you go to a low-key class that a neighbour has recommended. Everyone is friendly, no one is in scary designer gear, no one is looking at anyone, you forget yourself and time, and during relaxation you go out like a light, and come round at the end of the class feeling refreshed. You've produced your intended result.

If we can change our personal definition of confidence, could that change our view of confidence? If you were totally clear about what confidence is, would it be less elusive and more attainable?

## **CONFIDENCE MEANS HAVING A GO**

One of the problems with defining confidence is that the psychologists themselves haven't researched this much. Most of the research is somewhere between self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a concept that first emerged in the 1970s through Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura<sup>3</sup> and has been researched extensively.

“ Self-esteem is more about liking yourself. Self-efficacy is our belief in our capacity to try and accomplish something.”

[Dr Ilona Boniwell, positive psychologist](#)

If you don't like yourself it's not easy to change this. If you don't like a part of yourself, it's not easy to change this. Let's say you don't like your body. You might very well find the idea of going to a gym intimidating because you picture that it will be full of people perfecting their six-packs and toned bodies. But you might decide to give running a try because you live near a splendid park and were pretty good at running at school. You discover it clears your head after work, you get fit and then proudly notice your body looking better.

Bandura's definition of self-efficacy in simple terms means: 'I can have a go. I'm hopeless at exercise, I've been a couch potato for years, but I was good at running at school, so I might like it again. I can give it a try and see how I get on.' What this shows is that confidence is a skill that can be learnt, as long as we simply try.

*“ I can have a go is not a guarantee of a positive outcome, but it's a positive feeling that you are able to try.”*

[Dr Ilona Boniwell, positive psychologist](#)

What Boniwell highlights is that there's confusion and misrepresentation in our society as to what confidence actually is. People with inflated self-esteem might have real confidence, but they might not. While self-esteem applies to our character in general, self-efficacy is what explains why we can be confident in one area of our lives and not in another.