

I'm working with a wonderful 40-something client whom I recently asked: "What difference have our sessions made to you?" She promptly replied: "Confidence!" Freshly divorced and ready to return to the workforce, she held a serious fear of not being 'good enough'. We explored and discussed this idea and found her doubts weren't grounded in reality; they'd simply created a big stop sign that prevented her from moving towards tomorrow with a sense of positivity and excitement.

It's not unusual for women to lose confidence after 40. A lot of us are sandwiched between bringing up children and looking after older parents, which creates a host of challenges and limits the time we spend nurturing ourselves. And some of us feel we need to do something new and different but lack the confidence to take the first step.

Though we hear it a lot, we rarely stop to reflect on the meaning of the word *confidence*. Albert Bandura, PhD, a prominent researcher on this subject, defines confidence as "the belief in one's personal capabilities" and says our level of confidence makes a significant difference to how we think, feel and act. Robust self-confidence is linked to better health, greater achievement and smoother social interactions. It stops your mind's constant loop of worry and self-consciousness and puts the wind in your sails to finally embark on that beckoning project or boldly turn a sticky corner.

## How to Scale the Confidence Mountain

### Be self-aware and develop a positive self-image

# 1

- ▶ **When you trust yourself**, are self-aware and can frame yourself in positive terms, your confidence soars.
- ▶ **To improve your self-awareness**, remember a time when you felt really good about who you are. Regularly recall this feeling, especially when you're trying to succeed at something that's important to you.
- ▶ **Keeping a journal** can help you track your thoughts and feelings, enabling you to revisit them and assess the tone of your self-talk. For example, if you write down something like *I can't do it*, try reframing this statement along these lines: *I haven't done this before, but I'm sure I can learn.*

### Take confidence cues from people you admire

# 2

- ▶ **You need to fake it 'til you make it!** Consider the way a confident person behaves—observe a friend, relative or colleague. He or she probably articulates thoughts clearly and assertively; displays assured body language; and targets specific, realistic goals.
- ▶ **Try weaving these kinds of character traits** into your own behaviour and use them until they enter your repertoire. Acting out positive emotions and behaviours tricks your brain into thinking you're happy and at ease with yourself, which then triggers the release of endorphins, brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) that produce feelings of wellbeing.


### Focus on your strengths, not your weaknesses

# 3

- ▶ **If you have a realistic understanding of your own strengths** and apply that to your most important and meaningful goals, you have a powerful tool with which to build self-confidence. For example, if you're creative, build on and revel in your creativity; if you're passionate about learning, your goal should be to acquire knowledge and further develop your intellect.
- ▶ **Regularly using your strengths** magnifies your self-confidence for one simple reason: you're doing something at which you know you excel. Discover how to identify your personal strengths at [yahoo7.com.au/prevention/mind](http://yahoo7.com.au/prevention/mind).

### Beware of barriers to achieving your objectives

# 4

- ▶ **If frustrating obstacles** or negative feedback cross your path, don't give up! Developing confidence takes a little persistence.
- ▶ **Set realistic expectations:** those lacking self-confidence often see an everyday barrier as a signal to throw in the towel. For example, if you're returning to the social rounds after a divorce, don't expect to be the life of the party right away—this unrealistic expectation puts too much pressure on you. A good party strategy is to give other guests your full attention. This not only shifts your focus away from thoughts like 'this is a disaster', but also makes people around you feel wonderful—a two-way confidence booster! 

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*“Confidence is that feeling by which the mind embarks in great and honourable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself.”*

—Marcus Tullius Cicero,  
106 to 43 BC



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