

Chapter 1

Assessing Your Confidence

In This Chapter

- ▶ Identifying the key ingredients of confidence
- ▶ Rating yourself on the confidence indicators
- ▶ Celebrating your good points
- ▶ Visualising the super-confident new you
- ▶ Getting started on changing

Welcome to the start of your confidence-building programme. It's great to have you on board for what we promise will be a wonderful and transformational journey. With confidence comes more fun, freedom, and opportunities to do what really works for you.

In this chapter, we lay the foundations for our travels together, starting with some definitions of confidence and a practical, nuts-and-bolts assessment of where you are today.

Here you start flexing your confidence muscles – and we know from experience that you're probably in a much more confident shape than you may give yourself credit for. You can also celebrate what you're already good at and imagine the new super-confident you on the horizon as your confidence-building work progresses.

Then, it's about getting toolled up ready for action. After all, what's the point of hiding your talents when there's so much important work to be done in this world?

Defining Confidence

When asked to think what confidence means, most people have a feel for it but find it quite difficult to tie down precisely. After all, confidence is not some miracle pill or wonder food you can buy in a shop.

Before you dive into this book on how to be more confident, we invite you to explore the definition of confidence. A good dictionary provides at least three definitions for *confidence*, and it's important to understand each aspect as it is easy to muddle them:

- ✓ **Self-assuredness:** This relates to your confidence in your ability to perform to a certain standard.
- ✓ **Belief in the ability of other people:** This definition focuses on how you expect others to behave in a trustworthy or competent way.
- ✓ **Keeping certain information secret or restricted to a few people:** This definition concerns the idea of keeping a confidence.

We think an even better definition exists. One that's more useful to you in everyday life. One that's true no matter how tough a situation you face, or how comfortable you feel about it. Our definition:

At its heart, *confidence* is the ability to take appropriate and effective action in any situation, however challenging it appears to you or others.



Confidence is not about feeling good inside, although it's a bonus if you do.

What it is in practice

Now, how does confidence show up in daily life? Well, have you ever started something – perhaps an exercise session or presentation at work – even though you didn't feel like doing it at that moment, only to find that once you got going, you started to feel okay about it and even glad you tackled it? This kind of shift in how you experience a situation gives you a taste of what confidence is in practice. It is your ability to reach beyond how you are feeling in the moment in order to take action that leads to the outcome you want.

Anish is an accountant turned management consultant who has travelled the world on international assignments for large corporations. Now running his own partnership, he leads complex projects and presents a calm, rational, and focused image in business meetings. When deadlines are pressing and tempers rise in project teams, he is the one who patiently exudes confidence that delivery can and will happen on time.

How does he do this under pressure? 'I experience the situation as a series of hoops that I just need to get through – like a tunnel,' he says. 'Sometimes there will just be two or three. At other times, as

many as twenty in a row. I can feel as anxious inside about what needs to be done as the next person, but I experience it as a sequence to go through patiently one by one, and it gets easier as I see the light beckoning at the end.'

Approaching challenges with confidence in Anish's style brings clear benefits. For example:

- ✔ You believe that it is possible to tackle and achieve things that others consider difficult.
- ✔ You inspire others around you and stop them panicking.
- ✔ You break down a large project into smaller parts that you can tackle one by one.

How it feels

Don't worry about whether you feel comfortable performing a challenging activity or are fully relaxed about the action you are taking. Confident people are okay with the feeling of not knowing all the answers. Phew, what a relief. Confidence is just the feeling that it'll be okay.

The sense of feeling confident inside comes with increased practice and familiarity with what you do. You can also create it from your life experiences and bring it out when you need it. This doesn't mean that you won't ever feel scared. You will, but the good news is that you'll be able to live with the fear.

Here are some ways that you can recognise confidence in yourself:

- ✔ You feel poised and balanced.
- ✔ You are breathing easily.
- ✔ You are moving towards a goal or action with a sense of purpose.
- ✔ You are being proactive rather than defensive.
- ✔ You know that you'll be able to deal with whatever life throws at you, even if you can't control it.
- ✔ You can laugh at yourself.
- ✔ You know everything will be alright in the end, however long it takes.

So, we're going to support you as you find your inner confidence to take the first step to wherever you want to go, however scary or difficult it seems just now.

Determining Where You Stand Now

Any measure of confidence is by its nature pretty subjective. Other people may form an opinion about how confident you are based on your outside appearance and actions, but only you can know for sure what you feel like on the inside – what you believe to be true, and what it's like to be you.

In this section, we invite you to make your own assessment of where your confidence level is today.

Your confidence level is different according to the time and place. If you think back ten years to a younger you, you probably realise that your confidence has grown since then according to the experiences you have faced, knowing that you have lived to tell the tale. How confident you feel differs in various situations, and may well fluctuate from day to day and week to week according to what's happening at work and at home. There may be areas where you've taken a risk, or suffered a loss, for example, and your confidence has dropped.

If you've been unwell and have taken on too much work, your confidence level may dip and wobble. Yet when you're well and have a sense of completing your work, you may feel as if you can conquer the world. Think of your confidence as a pair of old-fashioned scales – it's a delicate balancing mechanism and anything, even something feather light, may tip it either way unexpectedly.



Make change easy on yourself. Rome wasn't built in a day. We're not going to suggest you go hang gliding off a mountain top today if standing on a stepladder gives you the collywobbles in your stomach. Allow yourself time and space to improve. Lots of smaller steps are often more realistic and maintainable compared to giant leaps for mankind.

Looking at indicators of confidence

We pinpoint ten core indicators of confidence that we explore in depth throughout this book. When you act with confidence, you are likely to have a good selection of these ten qualities:

- ✓ **Direction and values:** You know what you want, where you want to go, and what's really important to you.

- ✔ **Motivation:** You are motivated by and enjoy what you do. In fact, you're likely to get so engrossed in what you're doing that nothing distracts you.
- ✔ **Emotional stability:** You have a calm and focused approach to how you are yourself and how you are with other people as you tackle challenges. You notice difficult emotions such as anger and anxiety, but you work with them rather than letting them overcome you.
- ✔ **A positive mind-set:** You have the ability to stay optimistic and see the bright side even when you encounter setbacks. You hold positive regard for yourself as well as other people.
- ✔ **Self-awareness:** You know what you are good at, how capable you feel, and how you look and sound to others. You also acknowledge that you are a human being, and you don't expect to be perfect.
- ✔ **Flexibility in behaviour:** You adapt your behaviour according to circumstance. You can see the bigger picture as well as paying attention to details. You take other people's views on board in making decisions.
- ✔ **Eagerness to develop:** You enjoy stretching yourself, treating each day as a learning experience, rather than acting as if you are already an expert with nothing new to find out. You take your discoveries to new experiences.
- ✔ **Health and energy:** You're in touch with your body, respect it, and have a sense that your energy is flowing freely. You manage stressful situations without becoming ill.
- ✔ **A willingness to take risks:** You have the ability to act in the face of uncertainty – and put yourself on the line even when you don't have the answers or all the skills to get things right.
- ✔ **A sense of purpose:** You have an increasing sense of the coherence of the different parts of your life. You have chosen a theme or purpose for your life.

You can use these indicators to help figure out where you are stuck in life because you lack the confidence to move on. Moving out of that feels like escaping from treading in treacle.

Finding your place on the scale

The 20 statements in Table 1-1 relate to the indicators of confidence we laid out in the preceding section. Consider each and decide on the extent to which you agree or disagree using the five-point scale provided. Take the test as often as you like and keep a note of your developing profile.

Frankl's search for meaning

Viktor E. Frankl, the founder of Logotherapy, was one of the 20th century's great therapists. He formulated his revolutionary approach to psychotherapy in four Nazi death camps, including Auschwitz, where he was captive from 1942 to 1945.

At the heart of his theory is the belief that, whatever our personal circumstance, what keeps us going most surely is the meaning we find in living. This belief helped him survive the camps against all odds when millions of others perished, and after the war it enabled him to treat many of its victims.

Frankl agreed with the philosopher Nietzsche that 'he who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.' In the camps, Frankl saw that people who had hope of being reunited with loved ones, who had projects they felt a need to complete, or who had great faith tended to have a better chance at survival than those who had little to keep them going through the difficulties.

When one of Frankl's patients faced a collapse of confidence through the loss of meaning in his or her life, Frankl would seek to bring relief through three routes:

1. To broaden the patient's appreciation of life by making conscious the fuller value of all that person was achieving, creating, and accomplishing (and yet dismissing).
2. To recover and re-live powerful if transient experiences of feeling most alive: the view from a mountain top, the love for another, the perfect athletic performance (what Maslow might have called 'Peak Experiences' see Chapter 4).
3. To find a powerful positive meaning by the reframing of apparently meaningless situations. For example, a man surviving his wife after a long and happy union had saved her from the trauma he was having to bear of living alone.

Frankl's experience and his thinking are beautifully set out in his book: *Man's Search for Meaning*.



Do the evaluation now and make a note in your diary to come back and review it in, say, six months' time and notice what you've learnt.

Completing this questionnaire provides you with a very simple stock take of some of the main areas of your life affecting your confidence right now. If you answer the questions accurately, you can use specific chapters of this book to target the areas that merit your immediate attention.



There are no right or wrong answers. If you answer as honestly as you can, you get a rounded view of how your confidence indicators stack up as you begin building your confidence through this book.

Table 1-1 Evaluating Your Confidence				
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree Strongly Disagree
I have a clear sense of what is important to me.				
I know what I want in life.				
I never beat myself up about my failings.				
I can stand back and think clearly when things get emotional.				
A lot of my work involves things I enjoy doing.				
I sometimes become totally engrossed in an activity.				
I am known for being optimistic.				
I respect myself and many of those around me.				
I have a realistic view of my strengths and weaknesses.				
I know what others consider to be my strengths.				
I consult others, where appropriate, before taking decisions.				
I am comfortable with both the big picture and the important details of a situation.				
I enjoy doing new things and taking on fresh challenges.				
I relish the opportunity to learn and to grow.				

(continued)

Table 1-1 (continued)

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
I take care of my body.					
I feel able to handle any stress in my life.					
I have a healthy attitude to risk taking.					
I don't always have to have every 't' crossed and 'i' dotted before taking action.					
I sometimes meditate or think deeply about the connectedness of different parts of my life.					
I know what I am here to do. I have a chosen mission or purpose.					

Now, give yourself 5 points for every tick in the *strongly agree* column, 4 for every one in the *agree* column, 3 for *neutral*, 2 for *disagree*, and finally 1 for *strongly disagree*. Add up your points and check the next section for advice related to your total score. The second stage of the scoring process – in the 'Personal profile' section – encourages you to determine which areas of your life and this book are worthy of your immediate attention.

Overall rating

Find your total score in one of the following categories:

- ✓ **80–100: Congratulations!** By any standards, you are what most people consider to be a confident person. You are clear on your priorities and are in positive pursuit of the life you want.
Take note of any areas where you scored below par and consider the advice in the 'Personal profile' section below.
- ✓ **60–80: Well done!** You are already pretty confident in most situations. Just a few areas bring you down in the test and in your life. You can find plenty of guidance for dealing with these trouble spots in this book. Look at the advice in the next section to make the most rapid progress.

- ✓ **40–60: You are in the right place!** You may be experiencing some confusion or uncertainty in your life right now, and you may wonder whether there is anything you can do about it. Give yourself time to work on the areas that need attention and you will be amazed by the progress you can make.
- ✓ **20–40: Full marks for honesty and courage!** Your confidence may be at low ebb right now, but it doesn't have to stay that way. You can find good advice that you can put to use on almost every page of this book. If you take our advice, and act upon it, you face the possibility of life transformation.

Personal profile

After you score your questionnaire and read the relevant advice in the preceding section, take another look at your scoring and note the areas that brought your overall score down. Look at statements you most strongly disagreed with. If you scored high on most questions, look at the statements with which you find yourself unable to strongly agree.

You can use your individual scores to create your personal confidence profile. This now gives you something specific to think about. Let's say you are unclear about what is most important to you in life, or you beat yourself up over every little mistake. Perhaps you fail to consult others, or you feel alone and isolated. All of these things affect how confident you feel, and how prepared you are to take action.

You can find advice and action guidance on all these issues in the chapters that follow. Use the contents pages and chapter summaries to find those areas that can give your confidence the quickest and biggest boosts.



This is a simple exercise, designed to give you a quick start and an immediate agenda for improvement. You can use the test to monitor your growing confidence. However, if you want a more detailed analysis, go to our Web site at www.yourmostconfidentself.com.

Recognising Your Strengths

Mark Twain said that each one of us has the substance within to achieve whatever our goals and dreams define. What we are missing are the wisdom and insight to use what we already have.

A key aspect of confident people is that they have high self-esteem – they hold themselves in positive self-regard. This means that they know how to love themselves and that they acknowledge what

they're good at. These realisations boost their resilience and ability to take on greater challenges.

Your ability to take appropriate, effective action is affected by various things in your life that may seem to have little direct relation to the task at hand. Your values are a good example of this. Your self-confidence is likely to waver if you don't value what you excel at doing. Research shows that if you value what you're good at, you're likely to be highly confident in that area. If you value what you're not so good at, then you will not feel so confident, even though your friends may reassure you that this is not much of a problem at all.

Building confidence begins with going with your strengths. If you're great at music, don't beat yourself up because you're not going to play international rugby. Pat yourself on the back, practise accepting compliments for everything you do well, and enjoy the positive reinforcement from others. Respect and honour yourself, and you'll find that you get respect and honour from those around you.



For confidence to thrive and grow, you must concentrate your attention on what you're good at, rather than trying to turn yourself into something that you're not.

You also need to free yourself from unhelpful negative thoughts about your shortcomings or negative incidents in your life – more about that in Chapter 2.

Celebrating your own talents first

Everybody has different interests and skills. (Thank goodness for that!) So, your first step in developing confidence is to decide what you're really good at, and build on it. It's time to recognise your qualities and build up your talent store. Use the worksheet in Table 1-3 to list some of the things you think you're good at both at work and in your home life. Record during what period of your life you best put those skills and talents to use.

We want you to become consciously aware of what you are good at. It's too easy to take your talents for granted and assume everyone else is good at what you're good at. Well, they're not. You have your own special skills – attributes that make you stand out. When you notice what you do well, and when, in what context, then you can choose to repeat these to build your confidence.

The sample worksheet in Table 1-2 gives you some ideas for the kinds of strengths you can include in your own worksheet.

Table 1-2 Sample Strengths Worksheet		
<i>Things I Am Good At</i>	<i>When I Was At My Best</i>	<i>Actions I Can Put in Place to Encourage This Talent</i>
At work		
Strong, decisive manager at the power plant.	Put myself forward for next promotion board.	Volunteer to be press spokesperson.
Good, creative contributor in team meetings.	Suggested the new shift rota, which was adopted.	Follow through other suggestions with my boss.
At home		
Telling jokes that people find funny.	Speech at my brother's wedding.	Get more funny material to do Comic Relief spot at the Arts Centre.
House improvements – I'm constantly repairing or upgrading something in the house.	New bathroom – installed all by myself in six weekends.	Agree on list of creative DIY projects with my wife.
Football coaching for John's school team.	Best results in ten sessions. Strong competition for places.	Get school team to enter for higher league.

Now, fill out Table 1-3 with your own strengths and talents.

Table 1-3 Strengths Worksheet		
<i>Things I Am Good At</i>	<i>When I Was At My Best</i>	<i>Actions I Can Put in Place to Encourage This Talent</i>
At work		
At home		

Decide which of these talents you'd like to make more of and what action you can take to sponsor and encourage each of your useful talents.

Once you're with your list of actions, don't file them away in a drawer and forget about them until next year. Instead, set a timescale for

things you'll do in the shorter term – next week or month – and for those to do in the longer term. Chapter 3 offers advice on setting steps to achieve your goals.

Gathering feedback

Getting feedback from others is a powerful shortcut to building your confidence. Apart from performance reviews at work, you may not be in the habit of asking people to give you feedback on how you're doing, and you may be amazed at what you learn about yourself by doing so. Quite often people don't recognise what they do well. 'Isn't everyone good at that?' they ask. Most people are their own worst critic, and it can be a wonderful experience to receive positive feedback from your nearest and dearest. Having that outside view from another person may help you notice what you excel at and uncover some hidden talents.



Ask six people who have known you a while if they'd be prepared to give you some feedback about yourself. Choose people who represent the different groups in which you mix, including family members, friends, work colleagues, and those who know you from your interests in the community, church, or a sports club. Ask each of them these questions:

- ✓ What am I good at?
- ✓ When have you seen me operate at my best?
- ✓ What should I do more of?
- ✓ What should I do less of?
- ✓ What can you rely on me for?
- ✓ Where do you think I can stretch myself?

After collecting feedback, look for the common trends and themes and think of ways to build them into your goals and development plans. If a number of people tell you similar things, it's likely there's some truth in the message and worth taking notice. (The odd negative comment from your nearest and dearest may be less helpful and more about their needs than yours – test it out.) Your attention then needs to be on working with the good stuff, stretching yourself and letting go of the rest. For example, if you have particular talent, look for ways to tell others about it and use it more. Consider delegating or changing the things people suggest you should do less of.



Feedback is just someone's opinion. The point of feedback is to take what you can from it in the way that's right for you. Listen to it, take what supports you in building your confidence, and let the rest go.

Picturing the Life You'd Like to Lead

Confidence is almost all about perception. Very few people are wholly confident in every area of their life. Those who appear to be so are probably good at acting – with themselves as the audience.

Imagine having a PhD in Confidence. Think about how your life would be different if you had studied the subject, taken the learning on board, and were supremely confident, firing on all cylinders.



Find yourself a quiet place to sit and contemplate for ten minutes. Picture yourself with your newfound super-confidence. Think of a real-life time coming up in your calendar where you'd like to be supremely confident in that 'I can conquer the world' quality. And start to notice. . .

- ✓ Where are you and who is with you?
- ✓ What are you doing?
- ✓ What skills and talents do you have now?
- ✓ What are your thoughts and feelings?
- ✓ What's really important to you about this newfound confidence?
- ✓ What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

Adjust the picture so that it feels right for you. Hold the picture for yourself and savour it so that you will be able to recall it whenever you want to.



Visualisation involves focusing your thoughts on the things you want to happen in your life and picturing them happening. Although it's a simple mental discipline, it can have dramatic effects. It's a powerful motivational tool that will help you take your confidence sky high.

Paying attention to what matters

As you become more confident, you start paying more attention to what's important to you in life rather than bowing to the pressures that those around you place on you. By the time you have read this book, we expect you to know very clearly what's important for you, and where you're going to choose to put your time and energy going forward.

Start now by answering one simple question: What really matters to you in your life right now? For example, do you want a loving partner or family around you, a successful career, or perhaps your health is your top priority. You may be working towards a very specific goal such as running a marathon or getting married.

Write your answer down and make this the priority for your confidence-building muscles.

Uncovering your confidence

You may still be curious as to what kind of confident person you can be at your best. This is a question that even the most experienced, capable chief executives and media personalities ask themselves regularly. Successful people stretch themselves.

You have enormous potential limited only by yourself. And it's up to you to realise it. Gandhi had to overcome acute shyness to take on injustice in the world and free his people. And the more you connect with what is important to you, the more you become true to your most confident self.

People often feel a fraud when they take a leadership role that's new and more senior to the one they are used to. If you feel this, then remember you've been selected for that senior job because your company believes you will do it well. It's not realistic to expect to have all the knowledge on day one. People invite you to join them because they know you can contribute, and they want you.

Not everyone wants or needs to be an international leader on the world stage, but you can see yourself as a leader in your own world. You can lead by your example. Look back over time to things that you may take for granted. You have learnt to ride a bike or drive a car, to operate a computer, or renovate your house. As your skills and competence grow, so you become more confident to take on bigger challenges. Something that seemed hard five years ago may be a piece of cake today.



Be your own sponsor as well as critic. You may be good at giving yourself a hard time by comparing yourself unfavourably with others: 'I'll never be as good as. . .' Comparisons with others are valuable in that they can help you to excel and raise your game as a budding Tiger Woods on the golf circuit, for example. But don't waste energy beating yourself up by not being as good as the expert who dedicates every day of their life to practice.

You are important in this world and have a real contribution to make. Support, mentoring, and personal sponsorship of various

types can help you to be the very best you can be. Begin by assuming you are going to be successful, and surround yourself with people who honour you and support your growth.

So who are you really? The ‘you’ that you want to become is up to you, as you will find out when you follow your own direction.

In the words of Gandhi: ‘You must be the change you wish to see in the world.’

Preparing for Action

When are you going to get started? You agree, we hope, that there’s no time like the present. Confidence starts here and now. Yes, that means today. Not on Monday morning after the excesses of the weekend.

Getting your confident self fired up means adopting a new, positive mind-set, and getting rid of any doubts you have. You’ll get help with this in the next few chapters by cleaning up on your doubts. So before you set off on the journey, first check inside yourself. Ask yourself:

- ✔ Is it okay to make this change and become a more confident me?
- ✔ What do I stand to lose or gain if I do?

Once you’re happy that your answers are in the positive, even if it feels a bit scary, you’re ready for the next step of the journey.



If there’s a part of you that is really unduly scared of change, it may be for a valid reason. Think about it, and if you’re worried, check with your family or even a health professional about your physical and mental well-being.

Setting your intentions

As you set out on the journey, we want to state our intentions for you, the reader, and invite you to do the same. Our commitment is:

We are committed to giving you our full support and sharing all our knowledge. We believe that you are a unique and special human being with your individual strengths. We also know that being kind and honest with yourself gives you the best results. We know that if you follow the tips and ideas in this book and put them into practice, you will build a more confident version of yourself to take out into the world.

Now, we ask that you make a declaration of your intent and speak it out loud to yourself three times with increasing commitment:

I make a commitment to build my confidence in the way that's right for me, honouring myself as a unique and special human being. I will be honest with and kind to myself on the journey to be the very best I can be. I promise to have fun along the way.

Acknowledging the perils and perks of change

Any kind of change has its ups and downs. You can focus on the downside and say that you may be under threat from those around you who don't want a new confident you, you may find changing scary, and you may put yourself on the line and open yourself up to criticism and sarcasm. So what? The power of change far outweighs the negatives. Just look around you and make your own judgement about who has the best life – the confident person or the shrinking violet. Confident people earn more money, have more fun, enjoy more freedom, and relish new experiences. They have a go, they discover, they have a zest for living. They love the power that comes from being confident to do the things that many of those around them shy away from.

A few tips then for riding the waves, the ups and downs as you change:

- ✔ **Flex your knees over the bumpy days.** Stay resolute and adapt your approach.
- ✔ **Look at the worst scenario.** Face up to it (it usually isn't all that bad), and then expect the best to happen. It usually does.
- ✔ **Ask yourself: What will this be like in a week's time, a month's time, or this time next year?** Taking a longer-term view usually strips away the anxiety.

Welcome on board the confidence train and happy travels!