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You Were Always Teachable

Old Rule: Confidence is something you are born with

New Rule: Confidence is a skill you practise

Maybe she's born with it. I was five years old. Maybelline had just launched their iconic '*Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline*' campaign. Now I'm no advertising exec but the reason this campaign became such a significant part of pop culture isn't because the word *maybe* is very close to *Maybelline*. It's that women are taught that the key attributes and skills that fuel confidence, progress and power are innate.

You are taught that confidence is a natural gift bestowed upon the lucky few and there's no hope for the rest of us (unless you buy their product of course).

So you tell yourself, every damn day, you were not born with it. You concede to moving through the world without actively learning confidence. This is exceptionally good news for the status quo because for as long as you think confidence is unteachable and unlearnable you stay exactly where you are. Knowing that you are capable of so much more,

and not knowing where or how to begin. This book is where you begin.

Without confidence, you are far less likely to challenge authority, to speak up against injustice, be wealthy, be in a position of authority and be taken seriously. Psychologist Albert Bandura called it ‘self-efficacy’, and the research is clear: people who believe they can do something are far more likely to set bold goals, keep going when it gets hard and grab the opportunities that lead to power, wealth and influence. Without confidence, you leave money, power and opportunities on the table. Researchers call it the ‘confidence pay penalty’, and it’s costing women like you thousands over your lifetime.

How would your daily life change if confidence was not a fixed trait but something you could learn? How would our world change if every single woman in the world learned confidence?

We’re going to find out. Together. Me and you. Because confidence is a skill you can learn and this truth changes everything.

With practice, you can and will develop the confidence you need to do anything you can possibly imagine. It’s a muscle. It’s a muscle that you build, stretch, tear and grow. What’s more, the world is your gymnasium. The reps are saying yes to the opportunity. The weights are the moments you choose to step outside your comfort zone.

‘Maybe she learned it’ doesn’t have the same ring to it. But it’s the truth. And actually I kind of like it: ‘Maybe she learned it, maybe it’s confidence’.

A real-world example—and not one bathed in celebrity—is the simple act of driving. I wasn’t born knowing how to drive, children can’t drive at all. At first, it felt impossible, so many things to think about at once. Do you remember? My hands were tense on the wheel, my foot hovered nervously over the clutch, my eyes darted between mirrors, signs and the

road ahead. Driving demanded coordination, judgement, presence and trust in myself—skills I didn't know I had yet.

Little by little, I learned. I practised staying calm in chaos. I learned to anticipate problems, to make quick decisions, to trust my instincts under pressure. I learned how to take up space on the road and in my life. Driving isn't just physical; it's mental and emotional. You have to manage fear, assert yourself and believe you belong, especially when you're merging into fast-moving traffic. That's confidence.

And that's the point. Confidence, like driving, is a skill made up of many smaller ones—awareness, self-trust, risk-taking and repetition. You weren't born knowing how to drive, but you learned. You practised. You got better. And now you go places.

Even if you haven't learned to drive (yet or ever), the point still stands, right? Think of anything that once scared you, that felt out of reach until you tried—riding your first bike, booking a solo trip or creating a formula in excel. Confidence is never just one thing. It's a collection of learnable skills: self-trust, presence, risk, resilience. You weren't born with it. You built it.

Now we have some real-world examples. Confidence isn't a personality trait reserved for the lucky few. It's a learned behaviour. Something that can be built, grown and shared in many ways, and science says so too.

The Science

A meta-analysis of over 100 studies in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields found that confidence is shaped by mastering experiences, encouragement, observation and emotional regulation.¹ In other words, you gain confidence by doing hard things, seeing others do

them and hearing ‘you can do this’ from people who believe in us. Can you hear me shouting ‘you can do this’ in my best Billy Connolly voice? I really do believe you can do it, with all my heart.

Across 26 studies, researchers found a strong link between self-efficacy and behaviour, proving that confidence grows when it’s nurtured early. When children are given the space to try, fail, try again and be supported through it, their belief in themselves grows.²

And it doesn’t stop there. In second-language acquisition, students who believed in their abilities performed better. Confidence doesn’t just follow success; it fuels it. Believing in yourself makes everything better and easier.

In perhaps one of the most sweeping studies, a meta-analysis of over 16 million students confirmed that targeted interventions aimed at boosting self-belief significantly improved academic outcomes.

So if you’ve ever questioned whether confidence can be learned, the answer is a resounding: yes.

Now you know you can learn it, what will you do with that power?

UPFRONT Moment

As I shared in the Introduction, these UPFRONT Moments are invitations. Invitations to pause. To listen in. To have a conversation with the person who knows your confidence better than anyone else: and that’s YOU.

There is no right or wrong way to journal here. Use pen and paper. Use your Notes app. Doodle in the margins of this book. The format doesn’t matter, your honesty does.

If you feel resistance when you read the question, that’s a signal. It means this question *needs* your attention. Nobody is

going to read what you write. You don't need to explain it, share it or make it sound clever. This is not school. You won't be graded. Spelling doesn't matter. Neatness doesn't matter. Coherence doesn't matter. Mess is welcome here.

If you're new to journalling, your inner critic might clear her throat and step up to the mic. That's OK. Let her speak, then hand her a cup of tea and tell her to take several seats. She has *no idea* what's coming.

Unlearning is hard. It's sweaty, heart-opening, confidence-building work. And that's what makes it so powerful. Let's begin. I'm rooting for you.

1. **What were you taught about confidence as you were growing up? What are the inherited stories you've absorbed about who gets to be confident, what confidence looks like and what it means if you *have* it (or don't)?**

Things you might want to consider as you think about this question:

- What did the adults around you model?
- Were you praised more for being quiet or for speaking up?
- Was confidence seen as admirable or as arrogance?
- Were boys and girls encouraged differently?
- What did school, culture, media or religion teach you?
- What were you told about bragging, boldness or ambition?
- Did anyone ever call you 'too much' or 'not enough'?
- Whose confidence were you taught to fear, envy, admire or shrink from?

Write it all down—the big moments, the throwaway comments, the family mantras, the classroom rules.

These are the roots of your confidence story. This is where you start. With seeing them clearly and honestly so you can choose what to carry forward and what to leave behind.

2. What does your *confidence* look like, not the version you were taught to admire or aspire to, but the version that feels like yours?

In this chapter, we talked about the myth that confidence is a fixed personality trait—you either have it or you don't. And you've started to unravel that myth. But there's another layer to explore: even when you *do* pursue confidence, you often chase a version that doesn't belong to you. The kind that's always loud, always extroverted, always 'on'. The kind that speaks without pausing. Wears suits and heels every day. Stands at the front of the room. Says yes to everything without thought. This is what culture taught you confidence looks like. But your confidence is unique to you. Go deeper—what does your confidence feel like in your body, in your voice; when does it show up in your daily life?

We're moving to a place where confidence isn't something you *have* or *don't have*. It's something you *do*. Where it shows up in your body, your voice and the choices you make every day.

So try asking yourself:

- What does my body feel like when I feel confident?
Maybe your shoulders are back, your eyes are up, your stomach feels calm, or maybe it's full of butterflies, but you're still doing the thing anyway.

- What does my voice sound like when I believe in what I'm saying?
Is it loud? Is it soft? Clear? Do you speak faster or slower? Do you ask questions, or share ideas even when you're nervous?
- What are the moments when you feel most like *you*?
Specifically in the moments when you try something new? When you help someone? When you're learning with others?

Confidence looks different for everyone. It's not always about being the loudest or the first. So what does *your* confidence look like?

Write it all down. Get specific. Make it yours. This is how you begin to build confidence that's UPFRONT. Confidence that fits you like your skin, not a cheap costume.

Notes

1. Sheu, H.-B., Lent, R.W., Miller, M.J., Penn, L.T., Cusick, M.E., and Truong, N.N. (2018). Sources of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics domains: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.10.003>.
2. Holden, G. (1990). Self-efficacy of children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Reports* 66 (3): 1044–1046. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1990.66.3.1044>.

