

Confidence: It's All in the Doing

A few years ago, I convinced a good friend of mine to go canoeing with me. This friend had never been canoeing before, and she was wary of the dark river water. My friend decided that she would assume the position at the front of the canoe, since I was more comfortable sitting at the back and carrying out the role of guiding the canoe through the water. My friend was somewhat nervous, and I did my best to assuage her concerns. She paddled strongly and consistently.

As we glided by the scenic riverbanks, I stopped paddling occasionally to admire the beauty and craftsmanship of the carefully placed cottages. Soon, my friend noticed that while she continued to paddle vigorously in the front of the canoe, I was taking numerous "breaks" in the back. She identified that she was the one keeping our canoe going, and soon she declared that she could do a much better job of handling the canoe than I could. We both had a good laugh about it, and now my friend has no concerns about being out in a canoe. She is confident that she can handle the situation.

This memory surfaced from the pools of my mind when I was recently considering the nature of confidence. It is often while we are engaged in the process of doing something, such as a new activity, that confidence has the opportunity to develop. If we never try anything new, we never have the chance to see just what we are capable of and how much we can accomplish. I think confidence is like a muscle that we need to use regularly in order to strengthen it.

Confidence necessitates believing in ourselves, and what we can do. It is about allowing our heads to get around a new idea, and a new way of seeing ourselves. I think the process of building confidence begins with identifying something we truly want to do, even if it has been presented as a problem (which could also be called an opportunity or challenge), and allowing ourselves to do it. If we stay in our comfort zone, we will never discover all of the abilities we actually possess.

Developing an awareness of what you believe in and what you are good at will provide you with a solid starting point for building confidence. Focusing on your strengths (we all have them!) can help to remind you that you have been able to overcome obstacles in the past. Using supportive self-talk, and coaching yourself in the way you would a good friend, you can begin to tackle the particular opportunity that is before you.

Knowing both your successes and your insecurities can help you to build confidence because you will be able to identify the areas of greatest challenge for you. Self-acceptance provides a solid foundation for building confidence, and vice-versa. If you can work on some of the most challenging parts of yourself in an open and honest way, you might find that they also provide you with the most rewarding outcomes.

If you choose to act from your own values, you will be able to confidently live your own life. When you have the strength of your convictions to fall back on, or when you are standing up for someone or something you believe in, you can be surprised by the confidence with which you voice your opinion. Seeing is believing, and the more that you practice building the muscle of confidence the stronger it will become. Autumn is often a time when many new projects and/or academic programs are beginning. Bringing your most confident self to the task at hand could make the work process much more fun and satisfying from start to finish.