

25 Killer Actions to Boost Your Self-Confidence

Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit. – **E.E. Cummings**

BY LEO BABAUTA

One of the things that held me back from pursuing my dreams for many years was fear of failure ... and the lack of self-confidence that I needed to overcome that fear.

It's something we all face, to some degree, I think. The key question: how do you overcome that fear?

By working on your self-confidence and self-esteem. Without really thinking of it in those terms, that's what I've been doing over the years, and that's what helped me finally overcome my fears, and finally pursue my dreams.

I still have those fears, undoubtedly. But now I know that I can beat them, that I can break through that wall of fear and come out on the other side. I've done it many times now, and that success will fuel further success.

This post was inspired by reader Nick from Finland, who asked for an article about self-worth and self-confidence:

Many of the things you propose make people feel better about themselves and actually help building self-confidence. However, I would be interested on reading your input in general on this topic. Taking time out for your own plans and dreams, doing things another way than most other people and generally not necessarily "fitting in" can be quite hard with a low self-confidence.

Truer words have never been spoken. It's near impossible to make time for your dreams, to break free from the traditional mold, and to truly be yourself, if you have low self-esteem and self-confidence.

As an aside, I know that some people make a strong distinction between self-esteem and self-confidence. In this article, I use them interchangeably, even if there is a subtle but perhaps important difference ... the difference being whether you believe you're worthy of respect from others (self-esteem) and whether you believe in yourself (self-confidence). In the end, both amount to the same thing, and in the end, the actions I mention below give a boost to both self-esteem and self-confidence.

Taking control of your self-confidence

If you are low in self-confidence, is it possible to do things that will change that? Is your self-confidence in your control?

While it may not seem so, if you are low in self-confidence, I strongly believe that you can do things to increase your self-confidence. It is not genetic, and you do not have to be reliant on others to increase your self-confidence. And if you believe that you are not very competent, not very smart, not very attractive, etc. ... that can be changed.

You can become someone worthy of respect, and someone who can pursue what he wants despite the naysaying of others.

You can do this by taking control of your life, and taking control of your self-confidence. By taking concrete actions that improve your competence, your self-image, you can increase that self-confidence, without the help of anyone else.

Below, I outline 25 things that will help you do that. None of them is revolutionary, none of them will do it all by themselves. The list certainly isn't comprehensive. These are just some of my favorite things, stuff that's worked for me.

And you don't need to do all of them, as if this were a recipe ... pick and choose those that appeal to you, maybe just a couple at first, and give them a try. If they work, try others. If they don't, try others.

Here they are, in no particular order:

- 1. Groom yourself.** This seems like such an obvious one, but it's amazing how much of a difference a shower and a shave can make in your feelings of self-confidence and for your self-image. There have been days when I turned my mood around completely with this one little thing.
- 2. Dress nicely.** A corollary of the first item above ... if you dress nicely, you'll feel good about yourself. You'll feel successful and presentable and ready to tackle the world. Now, dressing nicely means something different for everyone ... it doesn't necessarily mean wearing a \$500 outfit, but could mean casual clothes that are nice looking and presentable.
- 3. Photoshop your self-image.** Our self-image means so much to us, more than we often realize. We have a mental picture of ourselves, and it determines how confident we are in ourselves. But this picture isn't fixed and immutable. You can change it. Use your mental Photoshopping skills, and work on your self-image. If it's not a very good one, change it. Figure out why you see yourself that way, and find a way to fix it.
- 4. Think positive.** One of the things I learned when I started running, about two years ago, what how to replace negative thoughts (see next item) with positive ones. How I can actually change my thoughts, and by doing so make great things happened. With this tiny little skill, I was able to train for and run a marathon within a year. It sounds so trite, so Norman Vincent Peale, but my goodness this works. Seriously. Try it if you haven't.
- 5. Kill negative thoughts.** Goes hand-in-hand with the above item, but it's so important that I made it a separate item. You have to learn to be aware of your self-talk, the thoughts you have about yourself and what you're doing. When I was running, sometimes my mind would start to say, "This is too hard. I want to stop and go watch TV." Well, I soon learned to recognize this negative self-talk, and soon I learned a trick that changed everything in my life: I would imagine that a negative thought was a bug, and I would vigilantly be on the lookout for these bugs. When I caught one, I would stomp on it (mentally of course) and squash it. Kill it dead. Then replace it with a positive one. ("C'mon, I can do this! Only one mile left!")

Know yourself and you will win all battles. – **Sun Tzu**

- 6. Get to know yourself.** When going into battle, the wisest general learns to know his enemy very, very well. You can't defeat the enemy without knowing him. And when you're trying to overcome a negative self-image and replace it with self-confidence, your enemy is yourself. Get to know yourself well. Start listening to your thoughts. Start writing a journal about yourself, and about the thoughts you have about yourself, and analyzing why you have such negative thoughts. And then think about the good things about yourself, the things you can do well, the things you like. Start thinking about your limitations, and whether they're real limitations or just ones you've allowed to be placed there, artificially. Dig deep within yourself, and you'll come out (eventually) with even greater self-confidence.
- 7. Act positive.** More than just thinking positive, you have to put it into action. Action, actually, is the key to developing self-confidence. It's one thing to learn to think positive, but when you start acting on it, you change yourself, one action at a time. You are what you do, and so if you change what you do, you change what you are. Act in a positive way, take action instead of telling yourself you can't, be positive. Talk to people in a positive way, put energy into your actions. You'll soon start to notice a difference.
- 8. Be kind and generous.** Oh, so corny. If this is too corny for you, move on. But for the rest of you, know that being kind to others, and generous with yourself and your time and what you have, is a tremendous way to improve your self-image. You act in accordance with the Golden Rule, and you start to feel good about yourself, and to think that you are a good person. It does wonders for your self-confidence, believe me.

One important key to success is self-confidence. A key to self-confidence is preparation. – **Arthur Ashe**

9. Get prepared. It's hard to be confident in yourself if you don't think you'll do well at something. Beat that feeling by preparing yourself as much as possible. Think about taking an exam: if you haven't studied, you won't have much confidence in your abilities to do well on the exam. But if you studied your butt off, you're prepared, and you'll be much more confident. Now think of life as your exam, and prepare yourself.

10. Know your principles and live them. What are the principles upon which your life is built? If you don't know, you will have trouble, because your life will feel directionless. For myself, I *try* to live the Golden Rule (and fail often). This is my key principle, and I try to live my life in accordance with it. I have others, but they are mostly in some way related to this rule (the major exception being to "Live my Passion"). Think about your principles ... you might have them but perhaps you haven't given them much thought. Now think about whether you actually live these principles, or if you just believe in them but don't act on them.

11. Speak slowly. Such a simple thing, but it can have a big difference in how others perceive you. A person in authority, with authority, speaks slowly. It shows confidence. A person who feels that he isn't worth listening to will speak quickly, because he doesn't want to keep others waiting on something not worthy of listening to. Even if you don't feel the confidence of someone who speaks slowly, try doing it a few times. It will make you feel more confident. Of course, don't take it to an extreme, but just don't sound rushed either.

12. Stand tall. I have horrible posture, so it will sound hypocritical for me to give this advice, but I know it works because I try it often. When I remind myself to stand tall and straight, I feel better about myself. I imagine that a rope is pulling the top of my head toward the sky, and the rest of my body straightens accordingly. As an aside, people who stand tall and confident are more attractive. That's a good thing any day, in my book.

13. Increase competence. How do you feel more competent? By becoming more competent. And how do you do that? By studying and practicing. Just do small bits at a time. If you want to be a more competent writer, for example, don't try to tackle the entire profession of writing all at once. Just begin to write more. Journal, blog, write short stories, do some freelance writing. The more you write, the better you'll be. Set aside 30 minutes a day to write (for example), and the practice will increase your competence.

14. Set a small goal and achieve it. People often make the mistake of shooting for the moon, and then when they fail, they get discouraged. Instead, shoot for something much more achievable. Set a goal you *know* you can achieve, and then achieve it. You'll feel good about that. Now set another small goal and achieve that. The more you achieve small goals, the better you'll be at it, and the better you'll feel. Soon you'll be setting bigger (but still achievable) goals and achieving those too.

15. Change a small habit. Not a big one, like quitting smoking. Just a small one, like writing things down. Or waking up 10 minutes earlier. Or drinking a glass of water when you wake up. Something small that you know you can do. Do it for a month. When you've accomplished it, you'll feel like a million bucks.

16. Focus on solutions. If you are a complainer, or focus on problems, change your focus now. Focusing on solutions instead of problems is one of the best things you can do for your confidence and your career. "I'm fat and lazy!" So how can you solve that? "But I can't motivate myself!" So how can you solve that? "But I have no energy!" So what's the solution?

17. Smile. Another trite one. But it works. I feel instantly better when I smile, and it helps me to be kinder to others as well. A little tiny thing that can have a chain reaction. Not a bad investment of your time and energy.

18. Volunteer. Related to the "be kind and generous" item above, but more specific. It's the holiday season right now ... can you find the time to volunteer for a good cause, to spread some holiday cheer, to make the lives of others better? It'll be some of the best time you've ever spent, and an amazing side benefit is that you'll feel better about yourself, instantly.

19. Be grateful. I'm a firm believer in gratitude, as anyone who's been reading this blog for very long knows well. But I put it here because while being grateful for what you have in life, for what others have given you, is a very humbling activity ... it can also be a very positive and rewarding activity that will improve your self-image. Read more.

20. Exercise. Gosh, I seem to put this one on almost every list. But if I left it off this list I would be doing you a disservice. Exercise has been one of my most empowering activities in the last couple years, and it has made me feel so much better about myself.

All you have to do is take a walk a few times a week, and you'll see benefits. Start the habit.

21. Empower yourself with knowledge. Empowering yourself, in general, is one of the best strategies for building self-confidence. You can do that in many ways, but one of the surest ways to empower yourself is through knowledge. This is along the same vein as building competence and getting prepared ... by becoming more knowledgeable, you'll be more confident ... and you become more knowledgeable by doing research and studying. The Internet is a great tool, of course, but so are the people around you, people who have done what you want, books, magazines, and educational institutions.

22. Do something you've been procrastinating on. What's on your to-do list that's been sitting there? Do it first thing in the morning, and get it out of the way. You'll feel great about yourself.

23. Get active. Doing something is almost always better than not doing anything. Of course, doing something could lead to mistakes ... but mistakes are a part of life. It's how we learn. Without mistakes, we'd never get better. So don't worry about those. Just do something. Get off your butt and get active — physically, or active by taking steps to accomplish something.

24. Work on small things. Trying to take on a huge project or task can be overwhelming and daunting and intimidating for anyone, even the best of us. Instead, learn to break off small chunks and work in bursts. Small little achievements make you feel good, and they add up to big achievements. Learn to work like this all the time, and soon you'll be a self-confident maniac.

25. Clear your desk. This might seem like a small, simple thing (then again, for some of you it might not be so small). But it has always worked wonders for me. If my desk starts to get messy, and the world around me is in chaos, clearing off my desk is my way of getting a little piece of my life under control. It is the calm in the center of the storm around me. Here's how.

Somehow I can't believe that there are any heights that can't be scaled by a man who knows the secrets of making dreams come true. This special secret, it seems to me, can be summarized in four C's. They are curiosity, confidence, courage, and constancy, and the greatest of all is confidence. When you believe in a thing, believe in it all the way, implicitly and unquestionable.

– Walt Disney

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