

Now, before we get started, I want all of you to do something for me. Close your eyes. Imagine that you are standing on a stage, blinding lights, hiding the faces of your audience. Thousands of people poised and ready to judge your every move. Do you feel confident? Are you having regrets about getting up this morning? Now you can open your eyes. I have always been told that I am confident. When I was just seven years old, I hated the math computer program my school used to teach times tables. So, laboriously, I went to the principal and I explained its many flaws. Now, later that year, he removed that program from the curriculum forever. When I look back on that situation, I ask myself, what happened there? Some people assume that confidence isn't a innate quality. There requires no thought. And frankly, so did I. For example, when I first applied for TEDx, I was confident about my admittedly bold topic. And when I first wrote up my speech, I thought, well, I have it in the bag. But when I submitted that first draft to my fellow speakers, as if it were my final speech, I was displaying the dark side of confidence. The side that I let me believe that my top was superb, perfect even, without revisions. Wow! Boy was I wrong. Every single person in that room urged me to rethink almost everything about my top. I didn't feel too confident then. In fact, I couldn't even imagine getting on this stage, feeling that way. I was broken, classic reign slide. I knew these people meant well, but I couldn't barely hold back the weight of the tears fighting to run down my face. I felt like I had nothing left, but a strong sense of regret. Why have I done this to myself? I wish I had quit earlier. What a pain. I shouldn't have even applied to talk this year. But when I got up the next morning, I have thought, confidence is not an innate quality. It requires thinking. In fact, come to think of it, I've been thinking about confidence a lot. Prethinking does not signify a lack of confidence. Sometimes, even before the simplest of conversations, I sit contemplating and rehearsing responses, questions, comments that could apply to the situation I'm going into. I spend hours premeditating each dialogue and engineering each interaction, hoping that at some point I end up in a real conversation. Then I thought about the thinking. What am I doing with all of this contemplation? I am taking myself out of the stressful situation. I am pre-living each moment and using my imagination in an environment of my own creation. A safe place. This is the way to prepare for whatever real life or deals may be on the way. To quote, 2019, MacArthur Genius author Linda Berry, We don't create a fantasy world to escape reality. We create it to be able to stay. However, this escape method often comes with a mountain of overthinking. Did I really just say that? Should I have mentioned, I call this a brain virus and left alone a virus can cause other problems too. For example, as soon as I start consciously thinking about breathing, all of a sudden it becomes the single most complicated thing I've ever done, leading to a near-death moment of self-sphyxiation. Now, let's take a step back. Examine the process. Confidence is a thread that weaves its way through everything that we do. From the simple act of walking out the front door to speaking your mind in front of an audience, it supports us. Let's follow that thread. In my story, we saw it first in the sloppy beginnings of my first draft. Then it appeared again in my recovery, sewing its way into the edits of my third draft, all the while hemming the edges of my thinking and embroidering the fringes of my imagination. Well, the point is, we can see it. But what about your story? Do you think you can see it? It was there when you got up this morning. It was there when you walked out the door. It was there every step of the way, carrying you forward through time. Confidence gives you the option to choose what you project to the world. Without confidence, people can be forced to change parts of themselves. With it, you could express yourself as the person you want to be. Now, I mentioned my third draft. By this time, it was last Sunday, and it still wasn't done yet. Panic had set in. I thought I had lost the thread, but I had it. I needed to move on from thinking and start doing. Confidence is not an innate quality. Thinking can only do so much. Work needs to be done. So that's what I did. I started writing, rewriting, hating it, rewriting again. But despite all of that, I stand here before you giving the part of the speech I had struggled to write. When I felt I had lost my confidence, my mind became hostile. I had thrown away even the confidence needed to create that safe place. But then I started thinking, imagining not only moments ahead, but the past, which I've already survived. Now, for the people who out there who, like me, sometimes stumble on words and sometimes struggle to get up in the morning, confidence cannot simply be solved with a superhero pose. Or a smile in the mirror. It takes work, time, and effort to build up that courage. But it is always possible. Now, I want you to close your eyes and do it for real this time. Imagine you are back on that stage. Same blinding lights, same people watching. But this time, think. Imagine each moment of flawless success. Now, as you give your long anticipated speech, talk, dance, body language, interpretive dance, whatever you want to do, breathe. You've done it. Do you feel confident? You got up this morning. You walked out the door. Now you can open your eyes. See the thread no matter how faint. Because, after all, if I can do this, well, I'll let you do the thinking. You