

Karen J. Hewitt

4D Confidence

How to Operate with Assurance in
a Virtual World

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WITH ASSURANCE IN
A VIRTUAL WORLD

4D Confidence: How to Operate with Assurance in a Virtual World

1st edition

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ISBN 978-87-403-3995-6

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1 CONFIDENCE IS KEY TO YOUR SUCCESS

During the Covid pandemic, remote working became the status quo for many. With the safety and productivity gains of virtual working proven, it became clear it was here to stay, even with the worst of the pandemic over. Without face-to-face meetings, however, it is difficult to make deep human connections. Remote working puts barriers – physical and technological – in the way of effective communication. It also makes it hard to separate work from home life.

Psychology Professor Albert Mehrabian conducted two experiments in the 1960s with Wienerⁱ and Ferrisⁱⁱ respectively and concluded that the extent to which others like us is 7% about our words, 38% about our tone of voice and 55% about our body language. This information is significant in our attempts to influence in a virtual environment.

Recent research by presentation specialist Buffalo 7ⁱⁱⁱ suggests that operating virtually has also brought a new form of anxiety. From an inability to read body language, technical glitches and an inadequate virtual background to not having time to prepare your appearance, the fear of virtual platforms is real. Combined with other fears – of having to reinvent ourselves after redundancy or prove ourselves in the same job as our company struggles to cope with dramatic market shifts – is it any wonder our confidence is under threat?

Today, we need our confidence more than ever, at a time when it has never been so difficult to find.

1.1 CONFIDENCE AND ACTION

In the face of adversity, it helps to be positive. According to Martin Seligman^{iv}, however, a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, it means more than simply ‘looking on the bright side’. When we focus on what we do well, and what might go right rather than wrong, our confidence gets a boost. When our confidence is high, we also take action – creating our own opportunities for growth and career development. Whilst psychology in general suggests we are products of our environment, positive psychology suggests that it is we who shape those environments, if we have the confidence to do so.

Moving on to the ‘strengths approach’^v, our confidence grows when we understand and focus on what we do well. Our brains are creating new connections all the time but make them more easily where connections already exist. If we have a strength and work on it, our brains respond accordingly. That’s why the brains of London cab drivers are more developed in spatial memory because they know London’s streets by heart.^{vi}

When we do what we are good at, we feel good, and want to take action. When we don’t feel good, however, our brains can go into ‘fight or flight’ mode. Highly effective at defending us from physical threats, the brain shuts down all unnecessary brain functions, leaving us unable to correct or improve our performance. As Laura Delizonna puts it in an article about psychological safety in 2017^{vii}:

The brain processes a provocation by a boss, competitive co-worker, or dismissive subordinate as a life-or-death threat. The amygdala, the alarm bell in the brain, ignites the fight-or-flight response, hijacking higher brain centers. This ‘act first, think later’ brain structure shuts down perspective and analytical reasoning. Quite literally, just when we need it most, we lose our minds.

Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi^{viii} shows us a more favourable brain state for high performance in his aptly named book *Flow*. In flow, we feel confident, happy and perform better. What if we could find our ‘flow’ in the virtual world, with our confidence simply a given?

1.2 CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION

Feeling confident leads us naturally to the pursuit of excellence in activities that make us feel good, and this is where motivation plays a role. Bestselling author Daniel Pink^{ix} suggests that motivation in the modern workplace is down to three key things: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Purpose means having a connection to a mission bigger than ourselves. Autonomy means having a say in how we play a part in it. Mastery means being supported to achieve excellence in what we do.

With these three ingredients in place, we are motivated to do more great work, and feel confident about it. Mastery in particular is important, because the more we do something, the more trust we have in our ability to do it and do it well. Autonomy adds to that confidence because we feel trusted by our managers to operate independently.

Having to work remotely may have given us more autonomy, but what has it done for our sense of purpose, especially when the status quo has shifted so dramatically? And whilst some of us may have found more opportunities to achieve mastery, others of us may feel cast adrift, with skills that no longer seem relevant.

1.3 CONFIDENCE AND OVERCOMING SETBACKS

When setbacks appear, how we view them, and how we manage them, can have an enormous impact on our confidence. Psychologist Carol Dweck^x says having a ‘growth mind-set’ rather than a ‘fixed mind-set’ is essential to success in life and includes how we manage setbacks. She says “Even in the growth mind-set, failure can be a painful experience. But it doesn’t define you. It’s a problem to be faced, dealt with and learned from.”

When we navigate setbacks successfully, we can look back and think that whilst we may have struggled, we did prevail in the end. Reflecting on the challenges we have successfully overcome gives us the confidence that we can successfully navigate future setbacks without fearing their arrival. When approached with the right mind-set, setbacks such as those we may be facing right now are opportunities to build confidence. What if virtual working were an opportunity rather than a threat?

Key to navigating setbacks with confidence is the ability to ‘reframe’ the whole idea of a ‘setback’. Instead of viewing virtual work as a ‘setback’, then, we might want to call it a ‘breakthrough’ instead. Whilst we know a breakthrough doesn’t come easily, it does suggest progress, advancement and innovation.

Say the words setback and breakthrough out loud to yourself now! Which one makes you feel more confident?

1.4 CONFIDENCE AND EMBRACING CHANGE

We know that today’s companies are facing change, but the bigger issue is the speed of it. The acronym VUCA – first used in 1987 and based on the leadership theories of Bennis and Nanus^{xi} – describes the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity of general conditions and situations. And that was before Covid-19. Post pandemic not only does the pace of change continue unabated, but our entire social system has shifted. We face new decisions about where and how to work, all of which have implications for our confidence.

When change is dramatic, a solid foundation of confidence can be advantageous. Change is like a huge wave coming in to shore while we sit on a flimsy surfboard. If we wait too long to take the wave, our fight or flight response will kick in, our confidence will start to dip, and the outcome won’t be in our favour. When we take the wave early, however, we are able to reap the exhilarating rewards of a perfectly timed ride into the shore.

The same goes for change in the workplace but moving early requires confidence. It usually means our thoughts are clearer, and we are able to visualise future scenarios more easily. And the more our confidence grows, the more it grows, because confidence breeds confidence.

According to psychologist Albert Bandura, people with elevated levels of self-efficacy, “approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them. This outlook leads to personal accomplishment, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression”^{xii}. Without confidence, we become anxious, focusing inwards rather than outwards, and on the past rather than on the future. With confidence, we seize the opportunities whilst others hesitate.

1.5 CONFIDENCE AND FEEDBACK

Have you ever received a nice piece of positive feedback about your work and felt your confidence instantly grow? Or received a piece of negative feedback and suddenly felt it sink like a stone?

We must allow ourselves perspective when we assess feedback, weighing the negative against the positive. And remember that as ingenious as our human brains are, they can still let us down as they automate tasks that we know well to free up space for new ones. We can't rely on them to always be right. It makes no sense, therefore, to allow our confidence to dip based on a single piece of negative feedback, but can we ‘hand on heart’ say we don't?

Think about the last time you were under pressure to perform well in a business setting. Maybe you had to deliver something new, and in a virtual context, putting you right out of your comfort zone. I am sure you did a lot of things, in fact the majority of it, right, but I bet that it was the odd small hiccup that you beat yourself up for once it was over. Daniel Kahneman^{xiii} explains the human propensity to focus on the negative by quoting psychologist Paul Rozin's words that, “a single cockroach will completely wreck the appeal of a bowl of cherries, but a cherry will do nothing at all for a bowl of cockroaches”. With confidence, we just don't allow a single cockroach to wreck our bowl of cherries!

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Confidence is an essential life and career skill that has never been more tested than during the Covid-19 pandemic. New virtual ways of working have been just one more thing for us to worry about. We have never been more in need of confidence, just when it is harder to find. Confidence is important because it means we feel motivated, take action, get better at what we do, take setbacks in our stride, embrace change proactively and respond well to feedback. The most confident people adopt positive psychology and have a growth mindset. The new virtual context provides a timely opportunity to understand the key drivers of confidence and work on them.

2 HOW CONFIDENCE WORKS

In chapter 1, we discussed why confidence is so important, because of what it enables us to do and be, and how it has been impacted in the virtual world. Now we consider why our confidence might get knocked, and how it happens, especially in a virtual context. To do so we need to discuss and dispel some of the common myths around confidence and find ourselves some new truths that serve us better as we seek fulfilment and progression in our careers.

2.1 CONFIDENCE HIGHS AND LOWS

Have you ever seen someone do something you thought was really 'out there', like chair a big virtual meeting, and said to yourself, 'but I could never do that, I'm just not confident enough'? Or had someone try to persuade you to do something they had done, like design their own virtual background, and said you couldn't do it with the excuse 'but you're so much more confident than me'!

Yes, we've all been there. Whether you are just starting out in your career, or a seasoned professional, confidence highs and lows are normal, and once we realise this, we can not only manage them, but harness them to our benefit.

Confidence often varies by context. If we ask someone how confident they feel, they will often say that it depends where they are and what they are doing. People usually feel more confident doing work they know well, and when they are surrounded by people that support them. When someone is new to an activity or job role, or feels underqualified in it, such as running a workshop on Zoom, then this can knock their confidence. And if someone is new to an activity and at the same time not being supported, any confidence knocks can be long-lasting. Conversely, becoming competent at a job and being supported in it can cause our confidence to skyrocket!

Confidence ebbs and flows are also influenced by significant life changes that shape our identity.

Let's imagine your job had you travelling across the globe delivering training, and then a pandemic started, forcing you to stay at home and take your training online. Suddenly, your identity as an international jetsetter is in question. Without it, your confidence may start to falter. No matter who you are and what you achieve in your life, setbacks will happen, and changes will happen. You will find yourself doing things you know, and things you don't know, and among people who make you feel good and people who don't. With an awareness of this, confidence ebbs and flows are much easier to manage.

2.2 CONFIDENCE AS A TRAIT OR SKILL

The extent to which our personality traits are traits we are born with or acquired through learning from our environment has long been the subject of research and debate in psychology. The nature versus nurture debate can also be applied to confidence, when we question how much confidence we are born with and how much we acquire as we grow up into adulthood.

I like to think of all of us with a cup of confidence, and when we are born, it is full to the brim. It is only when we start to experience life, and experience setbacks, that confidence may spill out of the cup. Keeping this confidence cup full to the brim, no matter what that life throws at us, is easier with the growth mindset discussed earlier. With a growth mindset, setbacks are still setbacks, but are less likely to challenge our identity.

There is no doubt that some people are born more confident than others, but I am equally certain that confidence is a personality trait that can be developed and a skill that can be learned. Confident people may then be born, but they can also be made, so fasten your seatbelts and get ready for the ride!

If the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic and having to work virtually has knocked your confidence, let's work on building it up again. The next section tells us where to start.

2.3 WHERE TO START WITH CONFIDENCE

Psychotherapist Nathaniel Branden is reported to have said that the first step towards change is awareness, and the second is acceptance. The first step of the ADKAR^{xiv} change model is awareness, and with a little awareness about what confidence is, how it works and how we can improve it, the world is our oyster! So what is it we need to be aware of?

The first thing we need to be aware of is the myths we sought to bust earlier – that confident people are just born that way, and that it isn't OK to feel lacking in confidence. In a business environment, it is easy to find people that seem so much more confident than ourselves, but it doesn't mean they feel confident inside – they may just hide it well. And just because someone is successful, don't assume that they never struggle with confidence.

In a way, having to move from a physical to a virtual working environment has been a great leveller, with all of us, no matter our job role or position in the organisation, having to embrace a new way of working. And a position of authority in the company doesn't make you immune to confidence dips either. The more pressure you are under, and the more you find yourself out of your confidence zone, the more your confidence will get challenged!

The second thing we need to know is that confidence is a bigger topic than we think, but there are strategies available to boost it – too many for the scope of this book, but we can make an excellent start. So let's set about getting more aware about this topic of confidence! What don't we know? What do we need to know? And what don't we know that we don't know?

2.4 THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN CONFIDENCE

Confidence is like a muscle you work out at the gym, and there is no doubt that the more you perform a certain activity, the more you feel confident in doing it. As an example, the first time I ran a leadership session via Zoom, I didn't feel at all confident, but with every subsequent session I ran, my confidence increased exponentially. Here it is useful to consider Noel Burch's 'Four Stages of Learning Any New Skill,' which he developed in the 1970s whilst working for Gordon Training International:

- Unconsciously incompetent (when we don't know what we don't know)
- Consciously incompetent (when we are acutely aware of how much we don't know)
- Consciously competent (when we can perform the activity well but have to think about it)
- Unconsciously competent (when you can perform the activity - confidently! - without even thinking about it)

In Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, 2008^{xv}, he said that 10,000 hours are the magic hours of greatness i.e. it takes 10,000 hours in anything to be an expert in it. We don't need to spend 10,000 hours in the virtual world to feel confident in it, but the more we do it, the more confident we will feel. Experience in any activity brings confidence.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

It doesn't matter if we don't feel confident about operating virtually, or if doing so knocks our confidence sometimes, because confidence dips are part of the human condition. Confidence ebbs and flows are normal and impacted by the extent to which we feel competent in the work we do, and our environment is supportive. And it doesn't matter how much confidence we are born with, because all of us can boost our own confidence - by focusing on it, learning more about it, and doing more of the activity we don't feel confident in. We can also use a growth mindset to insulate ourselves against life's inevitable setbacks and make sure they don't negatively impact our confidence levels in the long-term.

3 VIRTUAL WORKING AND CONFIDENCE

If you've chosen to pick up this book, it's probably because your confidence has been knocked, and operating in the virtual world has something to do with it. With a better understanding now of how confidence works, and the factors that influence it, we can now look at the role confidence plays in remote and virtual working in particular. What is it about working virtually that is knocking our confidence, and what can we do about it?

3.1 CONFIDENCE AND THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Let's start with what has changed at work and why it matters. When the Covid pandemic struck around the world in early 2020, many companies were forced to ask large swathes of their workforces to work from home, unless they were in key operational roles and needed to be at an office or worksite. Fast forward to the time of writing, when some parts of the world have seen the worst of the pandemic pass, and companies are deciding what blend of office and virtual working is optimal. They say that an elastic band, once stretched, never goes back to its original length, and the same goes for our new post-pandemic world. Even if we recognise the importance of having face-to-face activity in our working week, virtual working is here to stay. It's vital, then, that we feel confident in this new context. It's time to look at the most popular virtual communication channels, and what they mean for our confidence.

3.2 CONFIDENCE AND THE TELEPHONE

Ever since Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone more than a century ago, it has become a firm part of our working lives, whether we work from home, in an office or on a work site. It became part of our social DNA with the advent of the mobile phone at the end of the last century but was quickly replaced by text and instant messaging. That said, whole industries continue to rely on the telephone as a primary communication method, using call centres to find new customers and support existing ones.

'Telesales' is an art in itself, and having done a stint in this profession, I know that it can both boost and knock your confidence. Remembering our Albert Mehrabian research mentioned earlier, we note instantly that without the ability to see someone's body language over the phone, or for them to see ours, we instantly lose our largest communication channel for influencing - the 55% which is down to body language. What remains - the 7% words and the 38% tone of voice - become instantly more critical.

When we speak on the phone, then, whether we are perceived to be confident or not (and whether we influence the outcome or not) will depend on how effectively we use these two elements. The more confident we come across, the more belief the person on the other end of the phone will have in us. Trust will begin to grow, and our initial show of confidence will bring more of it. Confidence breeds confidence - both in ourselves and others. So how do we act confidently with our words and our tone of voice alone? Telesales people are trained to smile whilst making a call, even if the person at the other end can't see them, because it makes you sound happier. And here are some more strategies you might try:

Listen to voices that you think sound confident and ask yourself why they do. What you'll conclude is that confident voices speak calmly, and their intonation is such that their voices go down at the end. This is known as a command tone. When you issue a command, your voice goes down at the end of a sentence, and when you ask a question, it goes up at the end. Make sure that when you make a statement, your voice isn't going up at the end. Otherwise, you will sound unsure, and this lack of confidence will seep through to the person at the end of the phone.



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Confidence is strongly correlated with certainty. Confident people sound certain about what they say - some people call it 'gravitas', which means dignity, seriousness, or solemnity of manner. It doesn't mean you necessarily have to sound serious, but you do need to sound certain, and the words you use can influence this.

To sound certain, your words need to avoid any suggestion of doubt. This can be difficult, especially if you are the kind of person who likes to think about things carefully before taking action. Knowing how words can impact confidence, however, is an important first step. Remember also what we said in the introduction about confidence and action. Confident people take action, and we all know this, so your words need to reflect this.

Let's take a simple example. You are on the phone to your boss, and she asks you how you are getting on with your objectives for that year and you respond, "I think I am on the right track". What does your boss think when she hear this? That you're not so confident about your progress, even if this is far from the truth. If you change your response to "I'm not there yet but I know I'm on the right track, because I've completed x, y and z," then this gives your boss a much bigger feeling of confidence, and you will feel this back. The word 'know' suggests certainty and this phrase grows in emphasis because of the word 'but' placed strategically before it. And then you also use the word 'completed' - a simple verb which suggests action.

Finally, if you want to avoid sounding underconfident, avoid the word 'try' or 'should.' As Yoda famously said in the Star Wars movie *The Empire Strikes Back*; "Do. Or do not. There is no try. " To try suggests the possibility of failure, and this isn't something you want to suggest. And if your boss asks you what you have on your agenda this week, and you reply, "Well I **should** get started on the X project," what's the impression you are giving her? Using the word 'should' brings a negative energy to the conversation. It suggests a task you are unlikely to do and if you do manage to, are only doing it because you have to. Saying "I am **going** to get started on project X" suggests you will do it, because you are motivated to do so.

3.3 CONFIDENCE AND VIRTUAL MEETING PLATFORMS

Virtual meeting platforms have exploded onto the agenda of today's workplaces. Whilst a considerable proportion of us may have managed to keep their use to a minimum before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, doing so is no longer possible. Faced with lengthy periods of time working from home, we were all forced to embrace virtual meeting platforms, with Zoom and Microsoft Teams among the most popular. With much of our day filled up with virtual meetings and conversations, and devoid of physical face to face connections, it was inevitable that this new channel would pose challenges to our confidence. Let's break it down.

At first sight, we wouldn't expect our confidence to change on virtual meeting platforms, because we are not losing the ability to see people. In reality, however, people are reluctant to use this option, for several reasons. Fear of not looking good enough to appear on video, or having a home background that isn't professional enough, are two of them, as we discussed earlier. And when we are on camera it is easier to forget that people can see us.

Whatever our fears, being prepared to put ourselves on video in these situations does wonders for our ability to influence others. It enables us to communicate with confidence. It may even encourage others to have the confidence to do the same. As we discussed earlier in the book, having that visual channel opens up the opportunity to influence through our body language, and for us to understand others through theirs. When we are both (or all) on video, the communication is so much more effective.

To operate confidently, then, in the virtual world, make the most of that video option by doing the following:

1. Get yourself a decent background, take that extra ten minutes to make yourself look presentable, and show up as you would for a face-to-face meeting.
2. If the person you are speaking to doesn't have their video on, don't challenge them on this, as they may not feel mentally in the right place to do so, and that is their prerogative. If you can gently encourage them, however, and they feel able to do so, being able to see them will make you feel more connected to them, and more confident.
3. Position your laptop or computer so that you appear face on and centred on camera. Stack books underneath it if necessary. You don't want people to be looking down onto the top of your head up your nose or even into your ear. If they are, you are doing yourself a disservice from a confidence perspective.
4. Stay engaged in the conversation at all times and avoid distractions. Even if the person or people on your video conference can't see your distractions, they can see your eyes wander. A confident person is engaged in the conversation and listening to those involved. When we listen, not only are we able to know when the right time is to speak, but we also make the person speaking feel valued. When we listen, we know who said what and when, and this is invaluable when we need to reference these things from our conversation, to demonstrate our commitment to the people involved.
5. When you are on video, remember that you are more visible than in a face-to-face setting, because of the 'gallery' view. In a real-life meeting setting, which is often around a table, not all eyes are on you all the time. This means a little bit of control of your facial expressions is required, because they will give away what you are thinking. And keep your body language upright and open and your eyes on your communication partners.

Finally, remember what we said about how confident people approach setbacks, and this is something that is bound to happen in the virtual world. No matter our prowess with technology, something will inevitably fail or go awry at some point. How we manage it, however, speaks volumes about our confidence. Make sure you:

1. Take time to prepare for your virtual meetings, considering what might go wrong, and what plans you have in place in case they do - things like laptop battery running out, Wi-Fi failing, screensharing not working and so on. All these things need a plan B.
2. Stay calm if something does happen to you. Ask for a five-minute time out to fix the issue, and make sure you learn the lessons for next time. And cut yourself some slack - if you don't make a big deal out of an issue, neither will anyone else. Being OK with things not going OK just oozes confidence!

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Virtual working is here to stay - in some form at least. Telephone work loses us our visual channel, so we need to use our words and tone of voice to maximum effect. We need to use words of action and avoid those that suggest inaction or uncertainty. When making statements, we need to do so in command tonality, to make ourselves sound more confident. Virtual meeting platforms, on the face of it, give us that important visual channel, but they have their challenges, and we need to use them effectively. We need to use our video option whenever we can and feel able to, allowing us to show up as engaged and listening. It also enables us to control our facial gestures and use upright, open body language . Preparing for the unexpected, and managing it without fuss when it happens, will buy us additional confidence points.

4 A 4D MODEL FOR CONFIDENCE

So far, we have looked at ways to show up as more confident in the virtual world, and how to use our own personal communication channels more effectively, particularly based on the lessons from Albert Mehrabian's research.

Now let's look at how we can take a more long-term view of our confidence in the virtual world, by using a four-dimensional model to inform our daily confidence-building efforts. This model comes *Employee Confidence - the New Rules of Engagement*, 2018^{xvi}, and divides confidence into four distinct types. It is based on the author's combined learnings from the following three areas:

1. A personal journey to confidence over three decades
2. Interviews with successful people in business, sports and government
3. A model of successful communication from the founders of Neurolinguistic Programming^{xvii}

<p>INTERNAL CONFIDENCE – how I feel inside</p>	<p>EXTERNAL CONFIDENCE – how others feel about me</p>
<p>DEEP CONFIDENCE – how I feel about my work</p>	<p>STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE – how I feel under pressure</p>

Diagram 1: A 4D model for confidence

4.1 DIMENSION ONE - INTERNAL CONFIDENCE

Internal Confidence is the first dimension of the 4D confidence model, although it doesn't necessarily need to be the one you work on first. It is about how confident you feel in yourself, regardless of how others see you. The extent to which you feel confident within yourself will depend to a degree on the environment you grew up in and the opportunities you had to grow your confidence. It can also be a source of anxiety on an ongoing basis as confidence wounds from the past are re-opened by future events such as having to operate in a purely virtual world.

People often say that their confidence is context dependent – so you might feel comfortable in a face-to-face meeting but not in a virtual one, or vice versa. When we are working in an environment that is alien to us, the feeling of being ‘out of our depth’ can kick in, with the result that we avoid this scenario completely. The fear might come not from the environment, but from the activity itself. Let’s use public speaking as an example. Fear of public speaking might lead us to avoid the virtual world like the plague.

And what if the lack of confidence stems from a feeling about how we look? This might be something we can get over in a physical environment, knowing that not all eyes are on us all the time, but in the virtual world, it might become severe enough for us to not want to even put our camera on.

Or we have ‘imposter syndrome, first described by Drs Pauline R. Clance and Suzanne A. Imes in 1978^{xviii} as “an individual experience of self-perceived intellectual phoniness” following a research project with high-achieving women, but later shown to be prevalent among all genders and indeed the population at large. It is common to experience imposter syndrome, when we feel we don’t deserve the success we achieve, and this can affect our ability to capitalise on our achievements.

Internal Confidence can also be about recognising those parts of us that we struggle to accept, and therefore keep hidden from the world, for whatever reason. These are the parts that also sap our energy and stop us showing up as our full and confident selves. What if we were all born supremely confident, but allowed things, and people, to chip away at it, until we didn’t feel able to keep all of ourselves in full view? Psychologist Carl Jung called this our ‘shadow.’ In her excellent book ‘The Dark Side of the Light Chasers,’ 2001^{xix}, Debbie Ford gives us the tools to embrace our shadow and let go of the negative energy associated with it.

Here’s a tip for Internal Confidence in the virtual world: Notice which words trigger a lack of confidence for you, and then start to ask yourself why. Also notice the traits you see in others in the virtual world that you perceive to be negative and ask yourself why they trigger negative emotions. The chances are these words, and these traits, are more about you than anyone else, and with this knowledge, it becomes easier to release negative emotions and let more positive ones in.

4.2 DIMENSION TWO - EXTERNAL CONFIDENCE

External Confidence is the second dimension of the 4D confidence model, and is often the part that people, including myself, work on first, and I will explain what led me to do so in a minute. External Confidence is about the confidence others see in you, regardless of how you feel inside. It’s about how confidently you show up, and the feeling of confidence that others get from you. When others see you as confident, it is because you have projected it,

whether you believe yourself to be confident or not. If you can show up as confident even when you don't feel it, you can vastly improve your influence on others, and bide your time until your internal confidence catches up with you. In essence, you can 'fake it till you make it', and this is precisely what I did in my twenties and early thirties.

As a fresh graduate looking for exciting job roles, I found myself at an assessment centre in an activity where you have to solve a problem as a group to see how you perform. I didn't get the job, and the feedback I received straight afterwards was that I needed to 'have more of a personality'. 'What a cheek!' was my first reaction, and 'I need to become an extrovert' was my second.

The above experience led me to spend the next decade seeking out every opportunity I could to show up as more confident, and every bit of knowledge that would enable me to do so. I found myself excelling at External Confidence, whilst at the same time feeling unsure inside. I modelled myself on confident people and examined carefully what I now know to be Albert Mehrabian's three channels for influencing others through communication - words, tone of voice and body language.

If your job requires you then to show up more confidently than you actually feel, especially across virtual platforms, don't worry, because it is possible to 'wear' new behaviours like you would new shoes, right up until the time that the newness wears off and they start to feel comfortable.

4.3 DIMENSION THREE - DEEP CONFIDENCE

Deep Confidence is the third dimension of the 4D confidence model, and it often comes later in life, when people discover their true purpose. We don't have to wait for it to arrive, however, because as soon as we know about it (like right now), we can start to work on it, and discover how much more influential it makes us, particularly in the virtual world.

Having Deep Confidence means simply knowing that what we do is what we were meant to do, and who we are is who we were meant to be. We pursue what we love to excellence, and that makes us feel good. It also attracts others to us and makes us successful. Remember Malcolm Gladwell's statistic of 10,000 magical hours to become an expert in anything?

When we find Deep Confidence, the work we do aligns with our values and beliefs - what is of deal breaking importance to us - and the rules of life that support those values. In the workplace, the Japanese concept of 'Ikigai', meaning 'finding your purpose in life' is a way of looking at Deep Confidence. Our Ikigai is the confluence of four different forces - what we love doing, what we are good at, what we can get paid for and what the world needs.

When I need to boost my Deep Confidence or feel I have lost my purpose somehow, I check what I am doing career-wise against my Ikigai!

Why don't you do the same! How does your career purpose shape up?

Are YOU doing what you love, what you are good at, what you can be paid for and what the world needs? If you are, you are bound to be experiencing Deep Confidence. If not, what do you need to change?

4.4 DIMENSION FOUR - STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE

Strategic Confidence is the fourth dimension of the 4D confidence model, and usually comes when the other three elements have been mastered. It is about how we manage our confidence levels faced with pressure and uncertainty, which is particularly relevant to the virtual world and the change we are currently experiencing.

With Strategic Confidence, we feel confident, exude confidence and know our true purpose. We also maintain all this under pressure. Strategic Confidence is the final string to our bow, ensuring we maintain confidence, and influence, when the going gets tough - even when we are out of our comfort zone. Couldn't we do with a bit of this in the new virtual world?

Strategic Confidence, from the outside, looks natural and spontaneous.

Think of someone you know who always acts calmly under pressure, and always knows exactly the right thing to do - you are thinking of someone who has Strategic Confidence.

In a virtual environment, Strategic Confidence is knowing how to manage the unknowns and barriers to communication that this environment brings. And what's the secret to doing this naturally and spontaneously? It's thinking about what all the unknowns might be in advance and preparing mentally for every scenario. Of course, we cannot predict every single unknown, but we can predict the majority of them, and a little preparation in advance is the key to Strategic Confidence.

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

There is a 4D model you can use to build your confidence in a long-term and holistic manner. The four dimensions are Internal, External, Deep and Strategic Confidence and don't necessarily have to be considered in a particular order. With Internal Confidence, we feel more confident inside. With External Confidence, we appear more confident to others. With Deep Confidence, we feel confident about the work we do, and have a sense of purpose. With Strategic Confidence, we act confidently under pressure, even when things don't go quite as planned. All four types of confidence are useful in the virtual world.

5 USING STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

If there were ever a context when Strategic Confidence might be useful, it's the virtual one. For many of us, having that physical distance, not being able to read the virtual room and the fear of the technology failing just when we need it most, is enough to get our hearts racing. Because of this, the topic of Strategic Confidence deserves its own chapter. Strategic Confidence, as its name suggests, is all about the strategies, and I truly believe that there are no confident people without them. With Strategic Confidence, we use effective strategies to connect with people quicker, read the room better and keep our confidence wobbles at bay. There are limitless confidence strategies, and here we discuss three of them:

5.1 PREPARATION SETS YOU UP FOR SUCCESS

Preparation in the virtual world is a strategy that can pay dividends, as we discussed in section 3.3 earlier. Let's say you have a virtual meeting coming up where you have to give a short presentation. You have already thought about preparing your slides in advance and doing a test rehearsal with a friend, to check you can manage the technology with aplomb. You might even have considered what you'll do if something goes wrong with the technology and you're not able to share slides on screen – do you have a copy of your slides next to you?

If you want to take your Strategic Confidence to a whole new level, think about who is attending the meeting, what kind of people they are, what job roles they do, and what they will be looking for from your presentation. Will they want big picture or detail? Will they want words, pictures, numbers or all three? What kind of questions will they ask you? How much time will they have? Who is the key decision maker? If you can successfully put yourself in the shoes of your audience in advance of your virtual meeting, and prepare yourself for their requirements, this will make you feel confident from the get-go.

5.2 KNOWING DIFFERENCES PUTS YOU 'IN THE KNOW'

When we enter into any kind of communication, it is important to remember that not everyone thinks and communicates the same. In fact, everyone is unique in their approach, and there is never a one size fits all. The more we learn about different thinking and communication styles, the more likely we are to spot them in others and adapt our own to them, making the conversation much more effective. Knowing we have that flexibility of

communication is a key factor in Strategic Confidence. It means we enter into a conversation armed with strategies that fill us with confidence and prepare us to respond to even the most difficult of situations.

Communication preferences is a topic far too broad for us to do it justice in this book, but let's start with preferences around how we receive and transmit information, and the assumption that differences in communication styles can themselves be the source of conflict. Renowned family therapist Virginia Satir^{xx} discovered this in her work resolving differences between couples. She effectively acted as an interpreter between different communication styles, which was enough to allow the differences to disappear 'magically'.

For Virginia Satir, there were three 'languages' in which couples might prefer to communicate – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. A visual communicator needs to 'see' what you are talking about; an auditory communicator wants you to 'talk' them through it and a kinaesthetic communicator wants you to 'walk' them through it. The latter, of course, is challenging in a virtual environment, so we need to think creatively to find ways for kinaesthetic communicators to get a 'feel for' or 'experience' what we are trying to communicate. Satir was one of three people modelled by Neurolinguistic Programming founders Bandler and Grinder to understand excellence in communication.

There are psychometric tools that enable us to better understand differences in thinking, communicating and behaving. They provide a unique insight into the styles and language people use when communicating with others. At the heart of all of them is the willingness to be open to other people's differences, without judgement - knowing that if we first 'meet people where they are', in doing so, we can build empathy before attempting to 'sell' our own ideas.

The Insights Discovery[™] model, based on the psychology of Carl Jung^{xxi}, offers a simple but powerful model for explaining how people approach tasks differently, which alone can be the source of conflict in meetings. Imagine a virtual meeting then with people coming at it from four different angles; some want the meeting done in the right way, some want it done quickly, some want it done democratically and others want it done collaboratively. How will we accommodate everyone's needs when it's our turn to talk?

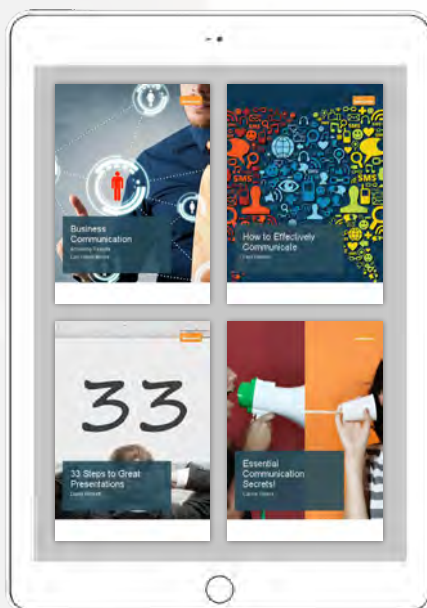
5.3 REMEMBER, IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

One thing that can undermine our confidence when we go into a situation of uncertainty is to focus too much on ourselves. Conversely, when we focus on the other people in the situation, and put our energy on the outside, this helps us feel more confident. Psychologically, the pressure is no longer on us, because our role is now to make the other people in the situation feel at ease. When we nurture other people's confidence, then, it ends up improving our own.

One practical way to do this is to preface our meeting slot with two simple questions - “What am I here for?” and “What is in it for you?” and encouraging questions from the audience as we present. This approach encourages us to think about the needs of the audience rather than our own. It also demonstrates we are there for them rather than ourselves. The result is we feel more valued and more confident.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Strategic Confidence is of vital importance in overcoming the uncertainties and barriers presented by the virtual world. Strategic Confidence strategies are used by the most confident people, and this chapter outlines three of them. The first is to prepare carefully – by envisaging potential scenarios, predicting and preventing issues and researching your audience and what they might need. The second is to open our minds to different thinking and communication styles and get ready to adapt to them to connect with others more easily and communicate more effectively. The third is to put our energy on the outside, focusing on others’ needs as a way of getting to know them and putting ourselves at ease in the process.



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6 USING THE 4D MODEL TO IMPROVE YOUR CONFIDENCE

In the last chapter, we looked at the 4D model for confidence. As you read it, you were no doubt contemplating your own confidence levels, and whether they were high enough in all four dimensions. The good news is that you are about to find out. In this chapter, we will guide you through a self-assessment for the 4D confidence model. This process will help you discover which strengths you can build on and which weaknesses you need to work on. We will set all of this in the context of the opportunities and threats emerging from the virtual workplace. Armed with this knowledge, you will be able to plan to make your confidence levels work for you, rather than against you, and in a way that helps progress your career.

6.1 ASSESS YOUR CONFIDENCE LEVELS

First take a look at the model in Diagram 1 above. Make a mental note of the boxes (or confidence dimensions) where you feel most confident, and those where you feel least confident. Just work with gut feel at this stage, so you can see what early insights become apparent.

Once you have done this, print out this page of the book and complete the questionnaire in Diagram 2 below, as honestly as possible and without overthinking it too much. Rate yourself against each of the twelve statements on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely. If your answer to any of these questions would depend on the context, answer it in the context of remote and virtual working.

Finally, add up your numbers for each section to get your section totals, and all your section totals to get your grand total.

Question	Answer
How easy do you find it to list your strengths?	
How easy do you find it to see the best in others?	
How sure are you that you are good at what you do?	
Section total	
When you speak, to what extent do others listen?	
When you speak, how comfortable do you feel?	
When you are in a group, how strong is your body language?	
Section total	
To what extent do you bring your true self to work?	
To what extent is your work what you feel you were meant to do?	
How passionate are you about your work?	
Section total	
When you have a big moment coming up, how successful are you at managing it?	
When something unexpected happens at work, how calmly do you respond?	
When you are in a stressful situation at work, how calm do you feel?	
Total	
Grand total	

Diagram 2 – Questions to pinpoint your confidence strengths and weaknesses

Once you have finished the questionnaire, you will have a total for each of the four confidence dimensions - your section totals. The first is for Internal Confidence, the second for External the third for Deep and the fourth for Strategic Confidence. Don't worry about the absolute numbers, just put your section totals in order so that you can see which confidence dimension is highest for you and which is lowest.

6.2 PINPOINT YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Having completed the exercise above, it should be clear to you where your strengths and weaknesses lie with respect to the 4D confidence model. If you have two numbers fairly close together, you might want to consider more than one strength, or more than one weakness. Again, the numbers aren't important in themselves. They will help you to prioritise which confidence dimensions to work on.

You have now identified which of the four confidence dimensions you feel stronger in, and which one(s) you need to work on. The next step is to consider the opportunities and threats offered by our virtual working environment, so you can start the process of building confidence in all four dimensions.

6.3 UNDERSTAND WHAT THE VIRTUAL WORLD OFFERS

It's time now to write yourself a list of opportunities offered, and threats posed by, the virtual world to your confidence. In Diagram 3, I have created my own list to help you get started, but your list should be your own and may be completely different to mine.

Opportunities	Threats
Offers exciting new ways of working Some will want to put their video on Travel time between meetings is eliminated Create your own background Connect with people all over the world Many formats and channels to try e.g. virtual meeting platforms, podcasts, instant messaging, virtual rooms etc.	Difficult to read body language Video option not always available Technology can be unreliable Harder to connect with people from a distance Hard to separate work from home life People will judge you from your home background Fear of distractions and interruptions

Diagram 3 – Opportunities and threats to our confidence in the virtual world

If you are not sure what is an opportunity and what is a threat, use the following questions to help you:

Opportunity – what are the benefits offered by virtual work compared to the physical environment e.g. ability to connect with people farther away? What is it about the virtual world that might enable you to be happier and more successful at work? How could it make you more visible?

Threat – what is it about virtual work that might throw your confidence off track - if you aren't prepared for it, and even when you are? What is it about the virtual world that you fear most or feel least confident about?

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we use the 4D confidence model to help us with our own confidence. With a set of questions designed to assess our confidence levels in all four dimensions, it gives us a way to widen our view of our confidence. It gives us a way to assess our confidence today, across four different dimensions. The model works in any context, but today we are answering these questions in our most current context – that of the virtual world. With these questions complete, we can see where our confidence levels are strongest, and where they are weakest, so we know where we need to focus our efforts. The next step is to brainstorm a list of opportunities and threats offered by the virtual world, so we start to see the impact of our confidence strengths and weaknesses in the context we find ourselves. These two steps provide the foundation for a plan to grow our confidence in the virtual world.

7 PLANNING TO GROW YOUR CONFIDENCE

In the previous chapter we outlined our confidence strengths and weaknesses. We also identified the opportunities for our confidence in the virtual world, and the threats posed to it. Now it is time to compare our strengths and weaknesses against the opportunities and threats, so we can build our own action plan to grow our confidence in the virtual world.

7.1 CONDUCT A CONFIDENCE SWOT¹ ANALYSIS

To conduct a SWOT analysis, take the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats you identified earlier, and draw yourself a two-by-two matrix like the one in Diagram 4 below. Draw only the boxes and the headings for each box. Now fill out your own detail in the boxes, under strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, based on the work already completed in the previous chapter. You should already have your list of opportunities and threats, and just need to think a little about your strengths and weaknesses, based on your answers to the confidence questions in Diagram 1 above.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
*Insert your confidence strengths here, based on your questions to the questionnaire in Diagram 1 above	*Insert your confidence weaknesses here, based on your questions to the questionnaire in Diagram 1 above
THREATS	OPPORTUNITIES
Difficult to read body language Video option not always available Technology can be unreliable Harder to connect with people from a distance Hard to separate work from home life People will judge you from your home background Fear of distractions and interruptions	Offers exciting new ways of working Video makes communication easier Travel time between meetings is eliminated Create your own background Connect with people all over the world Many different formats and channels to try e.g. video conferencing platforms, podcasts, instant messaging, virtual rooms etc.

Diagram 4 – A confidence in the virtual world SWOT analysis

7.2 COACH YOURSELF TO FIND CONFIDENCE OPPORTUNITIES

Having completed the SWOT analysis matrix, it is now time for you to become your own 'confidence in a virtual world' coach, by asking yourself, and answering, these simple questions:

1. What opportunities play to your strengths?
2. What threats might expose your weaknesses?
3. How can you leverage your strengths to make more of the opportunities that play to them?
4. How can you minimise the threats that might expose your weaknesses?

The actions for your confidence plan will fall out of these four questions and you can print out this page with Diagram 5 below to work on it. Choose one or more strengths to tie in with one or more opportunities, and one or more weaknesses to tie in with one or more threats. Set yourself an action (or actions) to start building your confidence in the dimensions where you need it most.

Strength	Opportunity	Action 1	Action 2
Weakness	Threat	Action 1	Action 2

Diagram 5 – My plan for confidence in the virtual world

7.3 MAKE CONFIDENCE IMPROVEMENT A HABIT

In the previous section, we set ourselves actions to increase our confidence in the virtual world, based on the opportunities that could leverage our strengths and the threats to our weaknesses that needed mitigating. What we have, then, is a bit more knowledge on how we might improve our confidence in the virtual world, and some plans for what we will do to make it happen.

Unfortunately, many of us never get past the planning stage. Let's not be hard on ourselves here, because it is human nature to find there is a gap between our intentions and our actions. This is the 'knowing-doing gap' – a term coined by Pfeffer and Sutton^{xxii} in an organisational context to describe the gap between what companies say and what they do. In an individual context, the problem is often in our language, when we talk about our goals in the language of what we 'should' do rather than what we 'want' or 'deserve' to do. This makes us feel burdened and obligated before we even start and creates a sure-fire recipe for failure.

Quite often we do take a first step towards our goal, but then lose motivation later on. This is when knowing a bit about how to build habits is useful, because habits are hard to break once formed, and always working for or against us. We want to make sure our confidence habits are working for us, and, if they are not, we need to find new ones and quickly make them stick.

David Halpern in his book *Inside the Nudge Unit*^{xxiii} suggested a simple four step approach to nudge people to take the actions they know they need to. The approach is summed up in the mnemonic EAST – standing for Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely. It means that if we want to do something so regularly it becomes a habit, we need to make it easy to do, attractive (to us and to our attention), socially acceptable and timely – available at precisely the time when the old behaviour would have been triggered.

Let me give you a personal example. A few months ago I decided that I needed to drink more water, to keep myself properly hydrated throughout the day. Often, I was so caught up in my work that I simply forgot to drink. I decided to give myself a nudge, using David Halpern's EAST method, and this is how it worked:

I bought myself a water bottle that I could fill up and keep on my desk – that way it would be really EASY for me to drink more water. So far so good. And when I bought this water bottle, I made sure it wasn't just any old water bottle. No, this was a water bottle with the lid in my favourite colour, so it was ATTRACTIVE to me. It was also a very tall bottle that grabbed my attention, another essential element of the ATTRACTIVE factor. It was the kind that everyone was carrying around with them – yes, it had SOCIAL kudos. Finally, it also had a series of markers on the outside of the bottle indicating the time of the day and quantity I needed to have drunk by then. This made it TIMELY, because the visual marks on the water bottle prompted me to drink more.

All well and good, you're thinking, but how does this help my confidence? What have habits, nudging and funky water bottles got to do with the actions I have chosen? So here's what I want you to do now. Look at those actions you wrote down in diagram 5 above and decide which one is most important. Which is the action that is going to make the biggest difference, in the shortest space of time, to your confidence in the virtual world? Which one is the deal breaker? Which one is the no brainer? Have you decided? Great, because we are going to help this action out by giving it a little... nudge, EAST style!

Let's imagine you identified a weakness in the area of Strategic Confidence, whereby your confidence disappears when something unexpected happens, and the virtual world threatens to expose this e.g. through a technology failure. The action you noted to mitigate this was to set up a Virtual Meeting Skills group where the invitees all share their learnings on the various features and functions of different virtual platforms. You have decided to do it, but not yet taken the action. How can you 'nudge' it to make sure it happens?

Only you know what will make your action Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely, because it is your action, but let's discuss some ideas together. First of all, you could make it EASY by scheduling in the session and inviting people, so there is no backing out. And when it comes to the day of the session itself, your calendar will send you the reminder! Now what would make it more ATTRACTIVE to you? Could you plan in a reward for yourself every evening after having run one of your sessions? And how about attaching a sound to the event reminder, so it will grab your attention and increase the ATTRACTIVE factor even more.

Now to make your plan SOCIAL – something you really want to be a part of, and others do too. You might want to put the meeting on a Friday afternoon, or as the last session of the day, and pitch it as a coffee, drink, chat, have fun and learn session? You could even give the session a catchy and memorable name, like Virtual Vibes. How about an event descriptor like 'The must-attend session for aspiring virtual movers and shakers'?

Finally, you need to make it TIMELY, so that it happens when you most need that new habit, and when others are most likely to join you. You could schedule it just before a regular virtual meeting where you have the opportunity to put a new virtual skill - learned at the skills session - into practice. If you have a regular team meeting on a Monday, for example, then the Friday skills session might work well. Whatever day or time you choose for the habit you want to nudge, make sure it triggers the new habit you deserve!

7.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we brought more detail to the confidence dimensions where we felt stronger or weaker, based on the 4D confidence model question set. We matched them to the opportunities and threats posed by the new virtual working environment, and then set about conducting a confidence SWOT analysis. By asking ourselves a few simple questions, we were able to coach ourselves to confidence. We asked ourselves questions like: Which opportunities allow us to capitalise on our strengths; which threats might expose our weaknesses; and what can we do about it? Then we picked the ONE action we thought would make the biggest difference to our working lives, so we could really focus. Finally, we used a behavioural technique called 'nudge', with the method EAST – Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely - to make our new confidence habit stick.

8 CONCLUSION

In choosing to read this book, you already knew the importance of confidence to your career. You also knew that the virtual world, with all its opportunities and challenges, has the potential to make or break it. Now that you have reached the end of the book, you'll be more aware of why confidence is so important. Without confidence, you'll be reluctant to take action to advance your career and will be lacking in motivation to do it anyway. With confidence, you'll manage setbacks much more easily and calmly, and will embrace change rather than fearing it. You'll respond to feedback in a way that will drive you to learn and grow rather than become defensive and go underground and hide.

8.1 TIME TO TAKE STOCK

I hope now that you feel less alone in your confidence woes, knowing that everyone feels this way at some point in their life, because confidence ebbs and flows are not a weakness to be hidden away, but simply part of the human condition. Confidence is something that successful people and leaders work on because they know how important it is. They also know that it is a skill that can be grown and developed. The more they know about confidence, the better they get at it. Confidence and action create a virtuous circle – the more confident you are, the more you take action, and the more you take action, the more confident you get.

Remote working has changed the goal posts for people and their confidence. It has meant us having to get up to speed extremely quickly with new virtual meeting platforms and in new home offices. Where physical proximity is no longer the preferred option, on safety and productivity grounds, we rely on other channels such as the phone and virtual meeting platforms. All of this throws up challenges for effective communication and influencing others, and our confidence in our ability to do both.

With the 4D model for confidence, we have found a new light to shine on all of this, enabling a broader perspective on what confidence is. We have also developed innovative ideas for finding confidence we didn't know existed. Using Strategic Confidence in particular, the fourth and final dimension of the 4D model, we have learned how preparation, knowledge of thinking and communication preferences, and a focus on others rather than ourselves, can increase our confidence tenfold in the virtual world.

Finally, we have put all of this knowledge into practice by conducting a SWOT analysis of our confidence position against the virtual world, with new insights gleaned and actions we can take as a result. And as the icing on the cake, we chose the action we felt would make the biggest improvement to our confidence in the virtual world . We even used a behavioural ‘nudge’ to make it stick. We’ve proved that there is more to confidence than meets the eye, and that we can thrive in the virtual world as well as, if not better than, anyone else.

8.2 TIME TO GET CONFIDENCE ON THE AGENDA

But why stop here? Don’t you think your colleagues deserve a little bit more confidence in their life? Why not encourage others to pick up this book too? You could even set up a little confidence mastermind programme within your company, enabling everyone to raise their game in this area. As John F. Kennedy was fond of saying, ‘a rising tide lifts all boats!’ Only when your work culture supports and nurtures the activities needed for all employees to grow their confidence will a culture of confidence grow.

Think of it this way – if your confidence were a rare and beautiful flower, what kind of garden would you plant it in?

To help yourself, then, and help all your fellow employees, why not suggest to your manager that confidence is put on the team, and organisational, agenda!

ENDNOTES

- 1 SWOT analysis = 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats' analysis.

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