
CHAPTER

1

The Foundation of Self-Confidence

There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

—William Shakespeare

Your thoughts and feelings about yourself, and what you can or cannot do, are the sum total result of a lifetime of experience and conditioning, and usually have little relationship to what is truly possible for you.

In personal development, there is a principle, or a law of becoming, that simply says that each person is in a continual process of *becoming*, or evolving and growing, in the direction of his or her dominant thoughts.

Your body is also in a state of becoming. At a normal rate of cell death and replenishment, you have a brand-new body every seven years. Whereas your physical evolution in becoming is effected by the food that you put into your body, your mental evolution and becoming is largely determined by the thoughts that you put into your mind.

You Become What You Think About

The law of concentration says that “anything you dwell upon grows in your reality.” Anything that you think about long enough and hard enough eventually becomes a part of your mental processes, exerting its influence and power on your attitude and your behavior.

If you constantly think thoughts of boldness and courage and self-assertion, you become progressively bolder and more courageous and more self-assertive. The more you dwell on the person you would like to be, with the qualities you would like to have, the more you implant those deep into your subconscious mind where they become part of your ongoing evolution. What you habitually think about eventually becomes a part of your character and your personality.

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In this sense, you are a *self-made* man or woman. You are where you are and what you are because of the thoughts that you have allowed to preoccupy your mind. Whatever you have dwelled on over the past months and years, you have become, and you are, right now, today, the result of all those thoughts.

Not only have you made yourself into the person you are today, but you are continuing with the job of construction with every thought you think. Because this is an unavoidable fact of life, the smartest thing that you can do is to persistently think the thoughts that are consistent with the kind of person you would like to be.

Personal Growth Is Not Easy

However, for most people this is too big a leap. Most people continue to think about and talk about exactly what they *don't* want to happen, and then they are constantly amazed that exactly what they were hoping to avoid happens to them again and again.

One of the most profound discoveries in all of human history is that “thought is creative.” *Thoughts held in mind, produce after their kind.* Like begets like. Your thoughts become your realities. You do become what you think about most of the time. You cannot harbor one kind of thought and experience a different kind of existence. This law of cause and effect works perfectly, everywhere and always, for everyone.

The development of unshakable self-confidence, therefore, begins with you taking full, complete, systematic and purposeful control of the contents of your conscious mind, disciplining yourself to think consistently about only the things that you desire and to resolutely keep your mind off the things that you fear.

All of life is from the inside out. It is from the inner to the outer. The law of correspondence, perhaps one of the most important of all the mental laws, says that “your outer world will be a reflection of your inner world.” What you see on the outside is largely a reflection of what is going on inside you. This is not only true for you; it is true for everyone around you.

Your Inner Life Predicts Your Outer Life

Many times we see people who seem to be very nice and pleasant on the outside, but who seem to have continuous problems in their personal and business lives. We wonder, “How could these unhappy things happen to such nice people?”

The unavoidable fact is that, with few exceptions, most of what a person experiences in his or her outer life corresponds exactly to something that is going on in their inner life, something that you seldom know, and it cannot be otherwise.

True happiness and success comes from living your life in harmony with the laws that govern your being. Even though these laws are invisible, they are like the law of gravity, which is also invisible but is to be violated only at your own peril. Happy people are those who obey and follow the laws of nature and live their lives consistent with those laws.

Start with Your Inner Life

If you want to enjoy self-confidence on the *outside*, you must practice complete integrity on the *inside*. The foundation of self-confidence is for you to live your life consistent with your innermost values and principles, while thinking and acting in harmony with your highest aspirations.

Men and women with the most rock-solid self-confidence are those who are absolutely clear about what it is they believe to be right and good and worthwhile, and who live their lives consistent with these values. Everything they do or say is an expression of their innermost convictions. Your whole world can fall down around you, but as long as you know that you are doing the right thing, you will have a deep inner sense of calm that will manifest itself in an attitude of confidence and self-assurance in any situation.

You will have many ups and downs in life, but what is most important is that you remain “true to yourself.” Then, as Shakespeare said, “thou can’t not then be false to any man.”

Determine Your Values

The starting point of developing high levels of self-confidence and in becoming a superior human being is for you to think through and to decide on your values. Superior men and women are those who have taken the time to decide clearly what it is they believe in, and in what order, and they have then organized their lives so that everything they do reflects those values.

Recently, I addressed about 150 members of the national sales force of a very successful company. This company had started from an idea and had grown very rapidly in an extremely competitive market, and the company was very profitable.

All the people at the meeting were remarkably positive and upbeat and had a special quality of goodness about them. When I commented on this, the president of the company showed me the value statement that the executives of the company had worked out before they had begun operations.

There were two pages of values and principles that were given to everyone in the company when they began. These two pages had been subsequently reduced onto plasticized cards that each person could carry in their wallet or purse.

The president told me an interesting story. He said that whenever two or more people in the company were wrestling with a decision of any kind, even over the telephone, they would pull out their plasticized cards describing the corporate values. They would then review the values together, one by one, and compare the various options available to them with each value. Whatever decision they finally made would always stand the values test, without question.

Values in Business

In a recent study covering 25 years of business history, the researchers found that the companies that had very clear *written* values to which everyone in the company ascribed had earned an average of 700 percent greater profit over the 25 years than other companies

in the same industries that did not have a written codes of values. “As within, so without.”

Whenever I conduct a strategic planning exercise for a corporation, the executives of the corporation always select integrity as their highest value and most important organizing principle for the entire corporation.

In my experience, almost every corporation will select the value of integrity as one of their foremost organizing principles. The word *integrity*, according to the dictionary, means “perfect, undivided, complete, unified, a single whole, without blemish or fault.” It’s a fine value to choose.

This is a good choice, but, in reality, integrity is more than a value. It is the one quality of mind that assures or *guarantees all the other values* that you select.

The economic and personal results of individuals and corporations with clear values always tend to be far superior to those of companies and individuals whose values are vague or unclear.

Clarify Your Personal Values

Your starting point toward higher self-confidence and personal greatness is to, first of all, clarify your values for yourself. It is for you to decide for yourself the values that you believe in. What do you stand for and, even more, what will you not stand for? What values do you espouse that you are willing to sacrifice for? What values would you pay for or sweat for—or maybe even die for?

Do you value your family? Your God? Your health? Your work or career? Do you value principles such as freedom, liberty, compassion for the less fortunate, or “reverence for life?” Do you believe in honesty and truth and sincerity and hard work and success? Whatever your values are, think them through and write them down.

Who Do You Most Admire?

A useful exercise is for you to think of the men and women, living and dead, whom you most admire. What qualities or attributes of

these people do you consider the most important? If you could be like any one of these people, which of their qualities would you most want to emulate?

When you look around you at the people you admire, what qualities of these people do you consider the most important? What qualities do you look for in your friends and associates when you are trying to decide whether to become deeply involved with them? What do you think are the fundamental qualities or values that underlie business and personal relationships? What are *your* values?

Values Are Nonnegotiable

When you select a value, if it's to be one of your values at all, it becomes inviolable. Either it is a fixed value and you live every part of your life consistent with it, or it is not one of your values. You cannot have a value when it is convenient and put it aside when it's not convenient. You cannot have a little bit of integrity: It must be all or nothing.

The act of selecting your values is also the act of clearly stating to yourself, and sometimes to others, exactly how you will live your life from this moment forward. Once you have selected a value, and you have declared it to be one of your unifying principles, you are, in effect, saying that this is something on which you will never compromise. And your level of adherence to the values you have personally selected is the real measure of your character, your true quality as a human being.

Unshakable self-confidence comes from unshakable commitment to your values. When, deep down inside yourself you know that you will never violate your highest principles, you experience a deep sense of personal power that enables you to deal openly and honestly and with complete self-confidence in almost every human situation.

Values Clarification

If you're having any difficulty in clarifying your values, a very helpful exercise is to take some time to write out your own obituary or

eulogy. Imagine that everyone you know and care about is gathered at your funeral to pay their last respects. The minister reads your eulogy to this assembly of people, and in it he describes the person you became over the course of your lifetime. He describes not only what you accomplished and what you contributed to the lives of others, but he reads out the virtues, values, and qualities that you were known for by the people around you.

This obituary can become your vision of the kind of person you wish to be and the kind of values that you wish to live by. No one is perfect, and we all have a long way to go in living our lives consistent with our highest values, but the very exercise of writing out your obituary will exert a powerful influence on everything you do thereafter. Both consciously and unconsciously, you will be drawn toward living and acting more and more like the person you described in that final testament.

Organize Your Values

Once you've decided on your values, your work is not over. Now you have to organize your values by priority. You have to decide which value is more important and which value is less important. If you wrote out each of your values on small squares of paper and then you had to throw away all the squares but one, which one would you keep? This then becomes your foremost value, the one that takes precedence over all others.

Which would be your second most important value? Your third? Your fourth? And so on. Your order of priority is extremely important in determining the kind of person you are and the kind of life you live.

Many people organize their values with number one being God, number two being their family, number three being their health, number four being their career, and perhaps number five being success. A person with this order of values is saying that, when push comes to shove, I will always favor the higher-order value over the lower-order value.

Order of Values Forces You to Choose

If your family comes before your health or your work, you would always sacrifice your health or your work for the well-being of your family. If your order of values was changed and your work or financial success came before your health, you would be saying that you would sacrifice your health if that were necessary to get ahead in your career.

I have known businessmen who put career success ahead of their families in their order of priority. When they had to choose one or the other, they regularly chose their work over spending time with their spouse and children. As a result, both the marriages and the careers have run into serious trouble.

Selecting your values and then putting them in order of importance actually creates a mental and emotional structure that enables you to make better choices and decisions in every area of your life.

Integrity Revisited

The principle of integrity, or adherence to your values, seems to be a law of the universe. Whenever you violate or compromise your integrity for anything, there seems to be a great power or force of retribution that will not allow you to get away with it.

Integrity seems to be an absolute requirement for successful human living. A failing in integrity, or compromising your values, not only seems to bring about a punishment that fits the crime, whether it is in business, politics, or personal life, but it seems to create a high level of stress, unhappiness, and inner turmoil in the life of the individual.

This need for absolute integrity seems to require that you “live in truth” with all people and under all circumstances. Living in truth means that you never live a lie. It means that you never compromise your integrity for the sake of a job, or money, or a relationship. It means that you always do and say what you know to be right and true, no matter what the short-term cost or benefit.

Living in truth means that you do not pretend or practice self-delusion. You face life, your relationships, and your circumstances, exactly as they are, not as you wish they would be. Living in truth means that you never stay in a situation that makes you unhappy or which you feel for any reason is wrong for you.

Set Peace of Mind as Your Highest Principle

Living in truth means that you set peace of mind as your highest goal and as your core organizing principle. You select all your other goals to be consistent with it. You never compromise your peace of mind for anyone or anything else.

You do and say only those things that feel perfectly right for you. You accept your own thoughts and feelings completely, whatever they are, and you systematically change each part of your life that is not giving you peace of mind. Only in this way can you enjoy the high levels of self-confidence that are experienced by the superior individual. Only by insisting that everything you do allows you to live in peace with yourself can you feel really terrific about yourself and get along wonderfully in all your relationships.

Your Values Are Only Expressed in Your Actions

Living consistent with your values is the key to happiness, harmony, well-being, and high levels of self-confidence. This brings us to the final point in this chapter, perhaps the most important point of all. It is that your true values are only expressed in your *actions*, in what you do.

You can tell what you truly believe by observing what you do in any situation in which you have to make a choice. Especially when you are under stress, and pulled in two directions at once, with opposing demands or responsibilities, this is when your true values are revealed.

The action that you take in any given situation will tell you which of your values is uppermost or whether you have any values

at all. It is not what you say, hope, wish, or intend, but only what you do that counts. Your choices of the actions you take tell you unerringly who you really are.

In fact, you can tell what your values have been in the past by looking back and observing what you did under stress when you had an important choice to make. Did you listen to the “better angels of your nature,” or did you compromise for a short-term advantage?

A person who says that his or her family comes first and then has to choose between working late or going to a child’s school play or sports activity, and who chooses the child’s needs over the boss’s requirements, is a person who is living consistent with his or her highest values.

Everyone has had the experience of walking away from a job or a relationship even though considerable sacrifice was involved because it was the right—though painful—thing to do, and you probably remember how great you felt as a result!

Whenever you act consistent with a higher value, you always feel terrific about yourself, and your self-confidence soars. However, whenever you compromise your values for any reason, you feel uncomfortable, inferior, guilty, and your self-confidence plummets.

The Law of Reversibility

The fact that your true values are only expressed in your actions brings us to a little-known mental principle called the law of reversibility. This law says that just as thoughts and feelings lead to actions consistent with them, the principle is reversible, and actions consistent with particular values or beliefs actually lead to the thoughts and feelings that would have triggered the actions.

What this means is that, even if you start off lacking a particular quality, if you deliberately act as if you already have the quality, you will eventually create within yourself the mental quality that corresponds to the action.

Dr. William James of Harvard put it this way, “Action seems to follow feelings, but really action and feelings go together; and by

regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”

The Act-As-If Principle

You can develop within yourself a superb set of values by acting as though you *already* had those values. You can develop integrity and courage and compassion and confidence by behaving as though you already had these qualities. The more you “act the part,” especially when you demonstrate these qualities under stress or when you feel like doing or saying something else, the more rapidly these qualities become a permanent part of your mental makeup. The more you practice good values, the more rapidly you become a truly superior person.

The keys to developing the unshakable self-confidence that will make everything else possible for you are *self-control*, *self-mastery*, and *self-discipline*. Self-confidence can come directly, by behaving in a self-confident manner, but more often it comes *indirectly*, by doing and saying the things and practicing the behaviors that lead to self-confidence. The most important self-development behavior is living consistently with your highest values at every opportunity.

The Principle of Resistance

In weight lifting, repetitive lifting of heavy weights develops muscles. The heavier the weight and the greater the resistance, the more blood rushes into the capillaries and the bigger the muscles become.

In mental development, there is a principle of “resistance” as well. In developing “mental muscles,” especially the mental muscle or quality of self-confidence, you can use this principle to accelerate your own development. Whenever you exert self-mastery and discipline yourself to do or say the right thing, especially under stress, you create resistance to your natural tendencies. This resistance generates *friction*. This is the same kind of friction, or heat, that, when applied to a crucible containing chemicals, will cause the chemicals to crystallize and take on a new form.

Whenever you create mental friction by resisting your natural tendencies, instead doing what you know is right and true and consistent with your highest values, especially in a difficult situation, the “mental heat” causes your values to crystallize at a higher level and eventually become a permanent part of your character.

Developing Inner Strength

Each human quality is subject to this same formulation. Once you have persisted through great adversity, you are always capable of persisting through lesser difficulties. Once you have acted courageously in a major confrontation, you are always able to act courageously in the face of lesser confrontations. When you behave honestly when there are large amounts at stake, you are always able, later on, to behave honestly when you are dealing with lesser amounts.

The foundation of self-confidence, the basis of boldness and self-assertion, is a deep inner trust, based on living a life of perfect integrity, and disciplining yourself to live consistent with your highest values in every situation. Each time you do this, you will feel positive and happy and wonderful about yourself. Your behaviors will further crystallize in your personality and become a more permanent part of the exceptional human being that you are in the process of becoming.

Action Exercises

1. List your three most important values governing your personal life.
2. List the three most important values that you practice in your work and business life.
3. List the three people, living or dead, who you would most like to spend an afternoon with.
4. Why would you want to spend an afternoon with these people? What would you ask them or talk about?

5. Why would these three people want to spend an afternoon with you? What are your most admirable qualities?
6. List three times where you have lived consistent with your highest values when you could have compromised.
7. What are you going to do differently from now on to assure that your values and actions are in harmony?

