

Confidence Game

By
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You're just about to start your athletic event and you're very nervous. Your hands are sweating and your knees are shaking.

From behind the stands you hear a voice calling from a dark corner. From the shadows you hear, "Hey you, yeah you, come over here." You approach slowly, nervously, trying to make out a face. The stranger seems to sense your fears. As you finally see him,, he wryly smiles and asks, "You wanna buy some confidence?"

Confidence is extremely valuable to an athlete but, unfortunately, it can't be bought. So put your money away and let's explore some blue chip approaches for building your confidence.

There's no guarantee that they'll work though, that's up to you. But trust us, if you didn't already have a certain amount of confidence, you would not have stayed in athletics.

Confidence is heard in that little voice inside your head that says, "I can do it. I can accomplish my goal in this situation." This self-assurance is derived from reinforcements, either instantaneous or long term. The more positive reinforcements you acquire, the stronger your confidence becomes in that given situation. And, like a high-yield bank account, the larger your Store of confidence, the greater the amount of interest or continued self-assurance that will accrue.

Instantaneous reinforcement occurs most frequently in sports; the gymnast sees her score after her routine; the swimmer hears her time as she touches the wall; the basketball player hears the audience's cheers after she scores two points. However, over time, instantaneous reinforcement can also serve as a long term reinforcer.

The instant results for the gymnast, the swimmer and the basketball player are the

rewards for all of their long hours spent training and preparing for that moment. Thus, their internal confidence stems from their perceived external reality: the score, the time and the cheers. Once a foundation of positive feedback is established, more confidence can be built by achieving harder or higher goals. This self-assurance is then translated into external actions which exude the internal state-of-affairs.

However, because no one is 100t full of, nor void of, confidence, it is a "gray" area in our existence and is often specific to each situation. Practiced activities yield a higher self-assurance due to previous positive feedback. This feedback then allows the athlete to continue setting and reaching higher goals.

Although, if an activity is a new one which has never been practiced, the confidence level will obviously be lower as there is no foundation. Yet, at the same time, it can be built quicker as expectations for success are low and easily achievable. An ice skater may feel safe and at home on the ice, but, if she were to attempt to dive off a diving board, her "safety zone" of confidence would be much lower. Yet, once she did go off the diving board for the first time, she would feel a little more sure of herself and thus, have a base on which to build up her confidence while diving.

Now that we have a rudimentary understanding of confidence, the following are some methods that will help you strengthen your own confidence in whatever areas you feel you need to improve:

STAY AWAY FROM DRAINS - Protect yourself from people or situations that you know will only serve to drain or sabotage your confidence. This is especially important before a competition and will also

help you maintain the correct attentional focus.

AVOID DOWNERS - Watch what you say. Statements of, "I'll try," or "I think I can do it," only serve to feed your self-doubt and defeat your self-assurance.

CREATE THE CORRECT "MIND SET" - Get yourself in that particular mood which will relax you enough to participate in the activity that will then elicit the reward for achieving your goals.

PERFORM A REALITY CHECK - Make sure to, dwell on previous successful experiences. Replay those positively reinforcing tapes in your head, over and over. If you did it once, you can do it again!

KEEP A JOURNAL - Each day write down those things that pertain to your personal progression in your sport. This will later serve as a road map of your success from Point A to Point Z.

OVER-LEARN A SKILL - If you can over learn a particular skill or trick that you tend to worry about, then you will be able to throw your mind and body on "auto-pilot" and thus not be so overwhelmed by self-doubting thoughts.

CREATE A PROTECTIVE WALL - Visualize a protective wall around yourself, keeping all of your confidence within it. Then, fill the area within the wall with self statements like, "I am confident in my abilities. I believe in me. I know I can do it." Leave all negative remarks by others outside the wall. Do not allow them to

break the barrier, but rather, just bounce off of it and you.

PREPARE AS THE CHAMPIONS DO - If there is a particular person whose mental or physical preparation style seems to yield good results, incorporate his/her style into your own preparation. This is especially important if you are unsure of how to prepare for an event which will, if correctly executed, boost your confidence.

LISTEN TO THE VETERANS - Take to heart what those successful athletes in your sport or other sports advise. There are currently many videos published by successful athletes that can be rented or purchased and studied in your own home. Once you learn to employ one, several or all of these confidence building methods, you will be much further along on the road to a successful performance. And, if your confidence ever gets knocked down, you'll know exactly how to rebuild it.

So there you are again, about to start into your event. Once more, from the shadows you hear that familiar con maxi's voice calling out to you. But, this time, you confidently ignore his scam. You now know how to generate your own high level of confidence from within.

Reality is what you perceive as real, even if others tell you that it is not.

--Michele Mitchell