

The Confidence Factor

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"We gain strength, and courage, and confidence by each experience in which we really stop to look fear in the face... we must do that which we think we cannot."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

When I think back to the moments that have shaped me to be who I am today, I don't credit the times of relaxation and peace as the biggest influencers of my character, but rather at the times when I was put to the test in terms of my skill and my ability. I just recently got to push myself to my limits in a month-long immersion program to become a certified yoga teacher - where everyone was twenty years my junior. Becoming a certified yoga teacher was always something I was going to do "someday," and that "someday" was pushed off in favor of whatever was most important in the moment. I knew it would be hard work, especially for me, after having been a desk jockey for so many years.

I was reminded that it is these exact experiences that have instilled in me a level in confidence to go for my goals with abandon. But, being human, I am infallible, and so is my confidence. I have learned some tricks over the years to help me keep my confidence up so that I can continue achieving my wildest dreams, regardless of my human tendency to falter in confidence from time to time.

Strike a Pose. This is why doing some very basic yoga poses can be good for your flexibility - and not just the flexibility of your body. Specific poses can help you adopt more flexible mindsets, as well. We can't always feel confident or at our best. It's human nature to be unsure at times and question our own competence, especially as project managers who are constantly evaluating our own performance. But rather than *think* your way into a more confident state of mind, try striking a pose.

"Poses are powerful," says Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist and professor at Harvard Business School. Cuddy has done expansive research that has indicated a very strong link between the physical stance you take and your level of confidence. Her findings indicate that when one assumes an expansive pose (legs planted apart and hands on hip) you not only look like Superman - you start to feel like Superman, too. Just two minutes in this stance can increase your testosterone (the dominance hormone) and lower the cortisol (the stress hormone) levels in your bloodstream.

Look down at how you are sitting right now. Are you cramped into a small space, or do you have your legs and arms out expanded, your back straight, and chin up? Try the latter pose and hold it for two minutes for a confidence boost.

Fake it 'Til You Make It. Think about what you would do if you were more confident - then do it. When you pretend you are more powerful and act in powerful

way, your body can actually trick your mind into feeling more powerful. This doesn't mean that you should aim for power that is not authentic. This means that when you adopt a powerful attitude, you will become more powerful authentically.

This is also true for new projects and roles that you may feel you aren't qualified for. Before counting yourself out, ask yourself: can I really do this? Am I holding myself back because of a lack of skill, or a lack of confidence? If lack of confidence is the answer, then jump in. The more you do the things that are a little bit out of your comfort zone, the more confident you will become.

The Imposter Syndrome. Do you ever feel like you are a fraud? That maybe you're not as smart, intelligent, talented, or just downright awesome as others think you are? If you answer "yes," you're not alone. This is a physiological phenomenon known as the "imposter syndrome" and is characterized as the inability to internalize accomplishments.

If you often find yourself saying, "I just got lucky," or, "thanks, but I didn't really do that great," then you may be afflicted with the imposter syndrome. This syndrome is responsible for the negative self-talk that can wreak havoc on our confidence. Don't let the fear of being "found out" hold you back from trying new and risky projects that may uncover your weaknesses – then you truly would be a victim of the imposter syndrome! Take back your power by owning your accomplishments, focusing more what you *have* done (rather than on what you *haven't* done), and boldly searching out new and challenging opportunities.

Start Small. When it comes to building your confidence as a project manager, it is best to set some small goals first that you can complete to create a habit of finishing what you start. Just like what I learned in my month-long yoga program: no, I could not do all the poses the way those folks much younger and far more talented in yoga than I. However, I could do a variation of the pose that was right for me. I learned to set small goals for myself; some days, it was just showing up on my yoga mat with a can-do attitude. Try setting a small goal every day that you can achieve, and expand from there to a goal you can accomplish in a week, one you can accomplish in a month, one you can accomplish in a quarter, and one you can accomplish in a year. Then, achieving your goal becomes your habit.

For example, inspired by what I have learned in my life through my yoga program, I am working on keeping it simple - from the yoga I practice, to every other part of my life. So, I've created a goal this spring to clean out the clutter in my life that I no longer need. I started small by cleaning out my desk and organizing the contents, which took me two hours. The next week, my goal was to re-organize my entire office by the end of the week. I am now into my month-long project of cleaning out my garage and building shelves to organize the contents. What goal can you complete today, this week, this month?

Perception is the foundation of reality. When you believe you are a person who is confident and who finishes their goals, you improve your confidence and are more likely to successfully complete your goals - which in turn improves your confidence. It all starts with you.

About the Author:



Michelle LaBrosse, PMP, is an entrepreneurial powerhouse with a penchant for making success easy, fun, and fast. She is the founder of [Cheetah Learning](#), the [author](#) of the [Cheetah Success Series](#), and a prolific [blogger](#) whose mission is to bring Project Management to the masses.

Cheetah Learning is a virtual company with 100 employees, contractors, and licensees worldwide. To date, more than 50,000 people have become “Cheetahs” using Cheetah Learning’s innovative Project Management and accelerated learning techniques.

Recently honored by the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Cheetah Learning was named Professional Development Provider of the Year at the 2008 PMI® Global Congress. A dynamic keynote speaker and industry thought leader, Michelle is recognized by PMI as one of the 25 Most Influential Women in Project Management in the world.

Michelle’s articles have appeared in more than 100 publications and websites around the world. Her monthly column, the [Know How Network](#), is carried by over 400 publications.

She is a graduate of the Harvard Business School’s Owner/President Management (OPM) program and holds engineering degrees from Syracuse University and the University of Dayton.

