

Superpower Confidence Without Certainty

BY ANNE E. COLLIER

“NEVER LET A GOOD crisis go to waste” is often ascribed to Winston Churchill. The sentiment being that even in the face of adversity, life affords opportunities to do things that you could not otherwise accomplish.

Thus far, 2020 has been a difficult year. It certainly has tested and continues to test our confidence. The levels of unpredictability, instability and ambiguity have uniquely stressed us. They seem more like a paradigm shift than the normal vagaries of life. As the “new normal” evolves, some of us feel out of our depth. We question whether the ground we’re standing on is solid. We question our personal myths about what we *should* be doing and how life *should* be. Add the fact that in the United

States we are not accustomed to experiencing scarcity and fear of failure at such a large scale. It has shaken our confidence.

Confidence is knowing that you are resilient, that you have the ability to overcome difficulties, to push back when pushed, to intentionally adapt when necessary. It’s “anti-fragility.” It’s growing a callous instead of bleeding in the face of adversity. We do it all the time. This is confidence. We now need to make it a superpower.

The dilemma is how to do so in the face of profound feelings of vulnerability, which we resist as taboo. That’s why Brené Brown’s TED Talk on the “Power of Vulnerability” received close to 50 million views. We all know we’re vulnerable. It’s our dirty little

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It's what we make vulnerability mean about us that makes the secret dirty. The fact that we add meaning, and we are meaning-making machines, means that if we don't think about our thinking, we are at the effect of our thinking, acting impulsively and generating the very thing we fear. Thus, equating vulnerability with weakness and fear with helplessness means we are just that. It's this Conflation Trap that cripples us. Much of life occurs this way.

As you travel the path of life, you can shape your experience of the journey. It can be scary or replete with opportunity. You get to choose. The mechanics of choosing optimism require a higher-order thinking known as metacognition. This means you must possess a keen awareness and understanding of your own thought processes so you can deliberately shift your thinking from victimhood to empowered. Confidence is all in your head, so let's get your head straight.

That means to avoid the Conflation Trap, you must be rigorous in your thinking: recognize that vulnerability is not weakness; it is awareness that an outcome is uncertain. Fear is not helplessness; it is a reaction to the unknown. Thus, vulnerability and fear are signals, which must be properly decoded; they are not indicia of a future in which life doesn't "work out." As we learn to transform our fears into awareness, we get comfortable with our vulnerability because we recognize what it is and isn't, and that we can be both vulnerable *and* empowered regardless of whether the ground is solid.

It also means that if your first instinct is to assign blame, avoid blame or be defensive in the face of any "evidence" of a personal deficiency, you have fallen into the Conflation Trap. If you progress and dig into the problem by adopting a mindset for personal growth, you escape the trap. It's simple: If you are not oriented to persevere, you won't; your mindset determines your success. You get to choose.

12 TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING SUPERPOWER CONFIDENCE

Superpower Confidence requires extraordinary self-awareness and the fortitude to get your head straight. Here's how:

- 1. Think about your thinking.** Superpower Confidence provides the capacity to explore your perspective and examine the meanings you attribute to feelings and facts.
- 2. Adopt objectivity.** Superpower Confidence has you able to be rigorously honest with yourself about what is so. You don't fool yourself. You find you are objective about your own thinking.
- 3. Be in the awareness of your emotion, not the emotion.** You waste time *being* upset, angry or harboring any other negative emotion. Superpower Confidence, instead, has you *be in the awareness* of that emotion; understand it is there, own it, but it's not driving your decisions and behavior.
- 4. Recognize you have choice.** Superpower Confidence means you can choose your thinking, attitude and behavior in any

situation. Challenging circumstances and stress are not an excuse to behave poorly or ineffectually.

5. Identify your Conflation Trap. Recognize the unpleasant emotion and what you are making it mean. Next, recognize what caused the unpleasant emotion. This process allows you to distinguish the fear from the reality that brought about the fear.

6. Recognize your patterns. When experiencing an unpleasant emotion, ask yourself: What events typically bring on this unpleasant emotion? What do I make it mean? What do I notice first when I am headed down this unproductive path? Which situations (including people) are triggers? Recognize and remember so that you develop the insight necessary to distinguish your fear before it becomes your reality.

7. Adopt a growth mindset. Don't choose to view suboptimal results as indicia of your innate abilities. When you notice yourself thinking, "I can't do this," replace it with, "I haven't done this yet" and figure it out. Focus on what you can learn. Be curious and have both grit and a sense of humor.

8. Shift from a blame to a problem-solving mindset. When confronted with a suboptimal situation, focus on how to fix it, not who's to blame. Blame distracts from solving the problem, which is most important.

9. Use blame and defensiveness as a signal. Heighten your self-awareness by recognizing that blame is a choice to be in a fixed mindset. Likewise, if you are defensive, you are dodging blame. Focus on learning and fixing the problem instead. This amplifies your Superpower Confidence.

10. Avoid infectious fear. Those without Superpower Confidence are in a fixed mindset, blame others, live in the Conflation Trap and create their own worst reality, thereby justifying that they were right to be so pessimistic. Don't let others' fears trigger yours.

11. Do what's next. Requiring certainty to take action is a subtle Conflation Trap; it is the equation of fear with failure. Distinguish and move forward. Look for what's next and embrace the challenge.

12. Focus on what you can control. Distinguish what you care about from what you can influence. What you care about is often broader than what you can influence. Focus on what you can influence; don't lament what you cannot control.

Remember what Henry Ford said: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't—you're right." He knew that Superpower Confidence is yours if you choose it, which also means you determine your own success or failure. **LP**



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