

## Confidence tricks

Peter English explores how to improve your confidence levels at work.

I'm a bit old-fashioned in that I believe we have to earn the right to be confident by actually working hard to become good at the things we want to feel confident about. However, every now and again I come across a nifty little trick or shortcut that can help us to feel and appear more confident when the pressure is on.

### The power pose

This means standing or sitting in an expansive manner, for example by standing tall, feet apart, chest out and with your hands on your hips. One research study found that candidates who adopted the power pose before undertaking a job interview were more likely to be offered the post than those who hadn't.

Importantly, the successful candidates only used the power pose *before* entering the interview room – the interviewers didn't see them in this posture. This indicates that the pose changed the candidate's internal state – it made them feel more confident, and this is what made them more impressive in the interview. So the next time you need a quick confidence boost, why not take yourself off to somewhere you can't be observed and spend a few moments in the power pose.

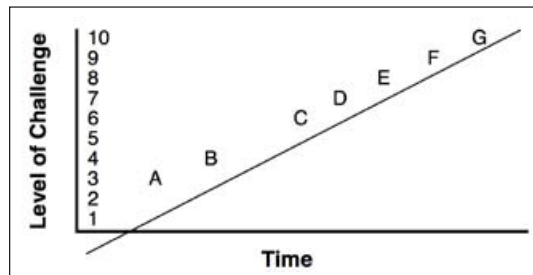
### Graded exposure

Sometimes becoming more confident takes longer – changing our body language isn't always enough. Graded exposure is an approach that is used in clinical situations such as helping people overcome chronic pain or phobias. It is also an excellent way of building confidence. The beauty of graded exposure is that it enables you to gradually move out of your comfort zone but without ever having to take an enormous or terrifying step.

Take the example of Nadine – a competent manager whose career development is hindered by her shyness. Nadine is particularly uncomfortable in large groups of people that she doesn't know well. During her annual performance review, Nadine's manager expressed the view that she needed to raise her profile and get better at networking, partly for her own career development and partly as a way of keeping up to date with developments within her profession.

If Nadine were to use a graded exposure approach to becoming more confident at networking, she would identify the most challenging aspect of networking that she wanted to feel confident about. This is represented by the letter **G** on the graph (above). She would then work backwards, identifying gradually less

challenging networking-related tasks until she had identified an easy first step (**A** on the graph).



So for Nadine, **G** might mean going to a conference on her own where she knows no one, approaching ten strangers, introducing herself, telling them a little about her organisation, finding out about their current projects, then exchanging business cards. An interim step – **C** on the graph – might be for Nadine to go to a conference but only to stay for a couple of hours and to approach three people. Step **A** might involve going to a conference accompanied by a colleague, and saying hello to the people sitting either side of her during the conference presentations.

There are two secrets to using graded exposure successfully:

- **Take small steps often.** Each step should be more challenging than the last, but not *too* challenging.
- **Expect setbacks, and don't be put off by them.** One of the keys to increasing our confidence is, paradoxically, not to place too much emphasis on our feelings. A key principle of becoming more confident is that **we must not let our feelings dictate our actions**. For example, if you are in a meeting and feel shy or nervous about speaking up, it's easy to let your feelings hold you back and consequently you sit there silently and don't make any kind of impact.

So, if you want to increase your confidence in 2014 try the power pose for a quick boost, and graded exposure to overcome those bigger challenges.

Further reading  
Cuddy, Amy J.C., Caroline A. Wilmuth, and Dana R. Carney. The Benefit of Power Posing Before a High-Stakes Social Evaluation. Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 13-027, September 2012.

David S. Butler G. Lorimer Moseley. Explain Pain. Noigroup Publications, 2003



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