

Confidence—Influencing with Assurance

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This article is the last in a series of four associated with the merger of awareness, competency, and confidence in the behaviors of leaders as they interact with those they influence. I'm intrigued with this confluence of seemingly independent characteristics. I've thought about these concepts a lot, and I welcome the insights of others who understand (or who are seeking to understand) the keys to leadership effectiveness. (The three previous articles are on my website; click on "Dennis' blog.")

Our confidence has a lot to do with the stories we tell ourselves about our past, our inherent capabilities, and our effectiveness. It seems that we all have insecurities; anyone who claims not to have occasional anxiety is likely self-deceived. We are all inadequate alone; that's why I stress collaboration so heavily in my work with leaders.

I've found an intriguing video that has shaped my thinking on this topic, and I commend it to you. Go to www.ted.com. "TED" started in 1984 as a way to share insightful ideas from the worlds of technology, entertainment, and design. Thought leaders are invited to share concepts at annual conferences.

In the "search" box, enter "Daniel Kahneman." Kahneman is considered today's most influential living psychologist. He is also known for receiving the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002 for applying his knowledge of how humans make decisions relative to money matters. Standard economics presumes people are rational in making decisions about money. Kahneman showed that we are heavily influenced by emotion. With this insight, Kahneman invented the field of "behavioral economics."

Click on the twenty-minute video entitled "The Riddle of Experience vs. Memory." Kahneman's comments focus on "happiness," but the comments seem to apply equally well to confidence.

Kahneman distinguishes between our "experiencing mind" and our "remembering mind." Our experiencing mind lives in the "psychological present," which Kahneman says constitutes about a three-second interval surrounding the fleeting "now." We have about 20,000 of these "present" moments a day. We generate memories about some of these events, but most pass unceremoniously.

Our remembering self operates in the past and in the future. Our remembering mind automatically makes up stories about our history, current events, and our anticipated future experiences. We routinely "make meaning" of situations as they occur in our lives. Because we are biased, these stories usually do not reflect "the truth." Instead, they reflect the unique perspective of our beliefs, self-image, hopes, fears, etc.

Based on our good and bad memories and anticipations, the remembering self is usually a major contributor to the decisions we make. Even when we think about the future, we imagine potential memories, so we typically choose actions that are likely to deliver what we expect.

Thus, the remembering self drags the experiencing self through life. Your experiencing self spends its small, incremental moments making decisions based on anticipated memories and past recollections of successes and failures, all delivered courtesy of your very opinionated remembering self.

Your confidence in the moment is heavily influenced by the stories your remembering self has made up regarding your past and future choices and their actual or imagined outcomes. If you view your past mistakes as learning events from which you've grown, your current level of confidence will be higher than if you view those past mistakes as evidence of your inadequacy.

Further, if you expect your future achievements to be successes based on the actions you take now, your confidence level will be far greater than if you anticipate dismal failure.

Typically, all of this "story-making" occurs at the subconscious level. You don't make meaning of every event in your life based on willful analysis. On the contrary, you tend to dismiss a lot of what happens as fairly inconsequential.

However, now that you are aware of the power of your remembering mind, you can better understand why you do what you do. Further, you can choose to think and act differently. For example, realizing that you have “made up” the meaning of past experiences, you can now recognize the impact those stories have had on your self-image. Changing those past fabrications may be hard, but you can at least become aware of their sometimes detrimental effects.

More importantly, as you experience new situations, you can intentionally envision a favorable outcome and consciously take the action that will most probably deliver that result. That is, you can begin to enhance your confidence by being more conscious of the stories you make up about the situations you face and how you effectively handle them.

Recognize that you have a lifetime of habit that will automatically take over if you are not intentional and consistent about the meaning you give to events. With increased awareness and discipline, however, your new insight will allow you to incrementally modify your decision-making process and your behaviors, enhancing your confidence with each new victory.

Dennis Hooper helps leaders define their objectives and build their skills. For more information, check his website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com. Or contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com.