

Insurmountable?

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Have you ever come up against a challenge that felt overwhelming?

Life is a whole series of these situations. It's as if you are walking comfortably across a field, and suddenly you're at the bottom of a cliff that looms in front of you. The vertical bluff continues in both directions as far as you can see! You stand there looking straight up at the rock face in front of you, and the challenge of scrambling up to the next plateau seems insurmountable!

Part of you is stymied and says, "I can't do this!" Part of you realizes you have no choice. So you gut it out, do what you have to do, and somehow you find a way to scale the heights.

Our first experiences with this phenomenon usually occur as we become adolescents. Can you recall the fear of possibly being rejected when you asked for that first date? How about that scary feeling as you prepared to take your driver's license examination, knowing you'll have to parallel park with a highway patrol officer in the car? Another big one: that first formal interview!

Perhaps you experienced feelings of doubt when you were preparing to give a speech or buy your first house. Maybe you had to deal with major bad news, such as an unexpected illness or injury, or a divorce in your family--maybe your own!

Some people realize early in life that new challenges come routinely. Knowing that trials are part of the process, they take each new ordeal in stride. Though each situation carries fear of the unknown, some folks just seem to breeze right through them.

Others struggle with each new event. They fix their focus on the challenge, envisioning the worst-case scenario. Often, they remain frozen, unwilling to make any effort to progress.

I want to do a study comparing "confidence" with "competence." I've dealt with many people over the past few years who seem to be quite capable but who lack confidence. Yet some are so self-assured--even cocky--well beyond what they deserve based on their observed abilities.

Somehow, the individuals with confidence have faith, perhaps in their skills, perhaps in God's protection, perhaps in their willingness to persevere. They certainly have more faith than fear.

Are you aware that faith and fear share the same definition? "Believing that what we don't see will happen" describes both words! This is the phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Won't you agree that it's healthier to face a difficult challenge assuming your ability to overcome?

I invite you to take an inventory of the times you've successfully met challenges in your life. Start listing your past accomplishments. Take the time you need. Work for awhile, then set the list aside, coming back to it later. Strive to identify at least thirty achievements.

If you have difficulty with this task, seek the help of someone who knows you well. Achievements seem less significant after we've accomplished them. Therefore, we tend to forget or minimize them--but your friends or relatives will remember!

Now go through the list and identify those that seemed insurmountable. Recall them staring you in the face, when you had no assurance that you would be able to overcome the challenge.

As you look back on these, which ones now seem like they were fairly simple? Does what looked like a rock-solid barrier on the front side now seem like a small staircase in retrospect? That's often how our life challenges seem when we look back on them.

I encourage you to keep your list of achievements where you can review them. Add to them occasionally, especially when you overcome significant trials. They'll build your confidence to attack the next seemingly insurmountable challenge that's sure to come!