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### Why Confidence Is King...or Queen

*Adopt some strategies from the confident players' playbook.*

*By Libby Gill*

You can shout *unfair* all you like, but people who are extroverted, confident or even over-confident have an advantage when it comes to connecting with others.

Researchers at the UC Berkeley, led by Dr. Cameron Anderson, found that people who demonstrate confidence tend to be more successful than their peers, even when those peers have greater talents and abilities.

“Overconfidence helps people attain social status,” says Anderson. “Those who believed they are better than others, even when they aren’t, are given a higher place in the social ladder, and the motivation to attain higher social status triggers overconfidence.”

What’s behind this strange cycle of over-confidence leading to success leading to confidence? In experiments conducted with students, professors and staff at UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business, individuals who talked and participated more actively in group tasks were considered more competent, even when they handled the assignments less well than others. Mirroring what I call *leadership by loudness* where strong egos often rule, participants who answered more frequently and loudly—even if wrong—were held in highest regard. Others in the group rarely thought of them as overconfident, but considered them “terrific” or even “beloved.”

Since those people who are given positions of status have more power, options, and access to resources, people who assume they are entitled to these benefits often display a sense of confidence, reinforcing their assumed worthiness of these entitlements. Often the desire for social status or prominence leads to and reinforces over-confidence. Yes, in the workplace, these people are often admired, listened to, and have more clout in swaying a discussion or decision.

This research sheds light on why overconfident people—who are rarely seen as arrogant or selfish—are so often rewarded and promoted over more talented peers. Many of their subjects truly believe that these overconfident individuals are more talented, socially adept and skilled at their jobs than the testing reflects. In fact, in one study, 94%

of college professors concluded that their work was *above average* (perhaps they should peek at RateMyProfessors.com for a reality check).

As Anderson states, “Although we may seek to choose (managers and leaders) wisely, we are often forced to rely on proxies for ability, such as individuals’ confidence. In so doing we create incentives for those who seek status to display more confidence than their ability merits.”

While we might surmise that this research would encourage people with hiring power to look beyond confidence to talent, the research also indicates that *professionals need to develop their confidence, or at least, the appearance of being confident.*

As an executive coach, I routinely hear people dodge the issue, mumbling excuses about not wishing to appear arrogant. But, many talented people would benefit greatly by taking a page from their overconfident peers’ playbooks.

*Women face some special issues related to confidence*, since women tend to minimize their value and men tend to exaggerate their accomplishment, sensing that overconfidence results in workplace rewards.

*The lesson: many companies may be hiring, promoting and rewarding the most confident but least qualified candidates for key positions.* And women suffer the most, since they are less inclined to exaggerate.

## **So, What Can You Do?**

Now, what’s a woman leader, an introvert or anyone who doesn’t brag about their accomplishments to do? While I don’t advocate that you start tooting your own horn *ad nauseam*, you need to see that lack of confidence (perceived or real) can be a career killer. Assuming that you are talented and competent, you can begin to demonstrate more confidence and leadership (and be promoted) by employing these strategies:

*Participate at meetings.* If necessary, prepare some data or comments ahead of time so you’ll have something relevant to say. Force yourself to speak more than you normally do, even if you consider it “too much” (this is doubly true for introverts).

*Check the news.* When you know the latest about world news, company updates, the stock market, or sports scores, you’ll be able to make small talk. Women, if you know sports, jump into the dialogue. Most people will assume you don’t know a hockey puck from a soccer ball, and it’s up to you to prove them wrong.

*Head for the person standing solo.* At a networking event, after you get a cocktail, or soda if you tend to rely on alcohol as a social lubricant, head for someone who is standing alone. Chances are, they’re as lost as you are. Ask how long they’ve been involved in the organization, how they spend their time (as opposed to the utterly obnoxious “what do you

do?”) or where they’re from. Get the conversational ball rolling—just remember to do your part, that is, talk.

***Sit in the front.*** I taught at Cal State Northridge for a year, helping them develop a pilot course. While I used to joke that students who sat in the front got automatic A’s, it’s no joke. Most people, not just students, enter a conference, training session or meeting and head straight for the back of the room. Resist the urge to hide in the back; instead, be a presence at whatever event you’re attending. Ask questions, chat with your peers, and introduce yourself to the presenter. If you act like a person who deserves some attention, you’ll get it.

***Dress well.*** Being carefully groomed can immediately boost your confidence. If you don’t know what that means in your world, it’s well worth the investment in a personal shopper or stylist. In general, dress a notch above your customers, clients and colleagues, without looking like you’re headed to a funeral or job interview.

***Join Toastmasters.*** A great non-profit organization that’s been around since 1924, there are more than 13,500 clubs in 116 countries—all dedicated to helping you speak more confidently. Check out [Toastmasters.org](http://Toastmasters.org).

***Focus on contribution.*** Get your attention off yourself by adding value to other people’s projects and priorities. Whether it’s a brainstorming meeting, company gathering or community event, doing a solid for someone else is always classy.

*Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications and PR for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting. Author of award-winning **You Unstuck: Mastering the New Rules of Risk-taking in Work and Life**. Her latest book is **The Hope-Driven Leader: Harness the Power of Positivity at Work**. You can learn more about Libby's work at [www.LibbyGill.com](http://www.LibbyGill.com).*

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