

The Top 5 Science-Based Secrets of Confident Leaders



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The Science-Backed TRUTH About Confidence

We all want to feel confident. Self-assured. Poised. Competent. Authentic. We want to rest in the feeling that we can tackle whatever challenge comes our way. That we can achieve whatever we set our minds to. Confidence is the fuel that gives you the courage to go after your dreams. It's the attractor that magnetizes people to you. And it's also maddeningly elusive.

For most people, confidence is a mystery. We ask, "Why does *that* person feel so self-assured while I'm riddled with self-doubt?" "How can I stop pretending to be confident and start actually *feeling* confident?"

The latest science shows this is a surprisingly solvable problem. It doesn't mean it's easy--it definitely takes effort. And courage. But

building genuine confidence is 100% doable.



Before we continue, let me quickly tell you about my journey. I'm James Garrett, the founder of Brain by Design, and I've spent the last 23 years studying the brain. I've explored, unpacked, and relentlessly experimented in my own life with the question of where confidence comes from. I've also spent years in psychology labs at Columbia, Tufts, and Yale and have wrestled with what it really means to *apply* the most cutting-edge science through research, brain-hacking, self-experimentation, and the Deep Change Project. This isn't a theoretical question for me--it's a fundamental one that I've examined from every angle, leaving no stone unturned. I've also coached hundreds of clients, trained thousands of executive coaches, and gained hard-won knowledge of what this looks like in practice. **This report will give you five evidence-based strategies you've never heard of to build rock-solid confidence.**

No BS--this is the real deal.

Self-Help Snake Oil

So where does confidence come from? Well, let's first look at where it DOESN'T come from. The old adage, "fake it till you make it" implies that if you can just pretend to be good at something long enough, confidence will eventually grow. But Dr. Jennifer Crocker has shown that in fact, trying to act more confident than you feel increases stress and leads to feelings of inadequacy. Fear of being found out increases anxiety, and *lowers* confidence, creating a downward spiral of self-doubt.



Confidence also DOESN'T come from *thinking*. The idea that confidence is about "getting your head right" is also false. Using tools like affirmations to build confidence just doesn't work. Drs. Richard Petty and Daryl Bem have shown that confidence is a byproduct of action, not thought. Your self-concept comes more from what you do than the story you tell yourself.

Similarly, Dr. Crocker's research shows that attempting to build confidence by seeking the praise and approval of others is not only ineffective, but destructive to wellbeing. Furthermore, the idea that attaining certain markers of achievement or status ("Once I make partner, I'll finally feel confident as a lawyer") couldn't be more wrong. Outward markers of success often coexist with crushing self-doubt.

Finally, the pursuit of perfection is the mortal enemy of confidence. Often, we hold back until we are perfectly prepared, thinking that our perfect readiness will give us confidence. But this impossible standard keeps us from taking the actions that Drs. Petty and Bem point to as the catalyst for confidence. Perfectionism breeds paralysis, which confirms our worst fears that we just can't do it.

So building confidence isn't about faking it. Or reciting affirmations. It isn't about having a better boss who offers you better praise, or having all the right letters behind your name. And it's definitely not about being perfectly prepared to tackle every new task. When it comes right down to it,

CONFIDENCE is about MASTERING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM.

I know, it's about the un-sexiest sentence you'll ever read. But it's also one of the most **hopeful**.

Because when we approach confidence-building at the level of the nervous system, we're not creating the ephemeral kind that comes from all the usual self-help strategies. We're building the **permanent, rock-solid, unshakeable confidence** we see in the people we most admire.

The past two decades have seen an absolute **explosion of scientific discovery about the human brain**. And the central finding is that the brain has essentially unlimited capacity to rewire itself. It's called **neuroplasticity**. And it means that changing our mental habits creates physical changes in the nervous system. When we intentionally alter our thoughts and behaviors, new neural pathways are formed and old ones are pruned. So **we can literally re-wire our brain** for skills and attributes we may have come to believe were out of reach. Including confidence. Yes, you heard that right...

Confidence can literally become hardwired within us!

In this report, we'll reveal the top 5 tools you can use to **REWIRE YOUR BRAIN FOR CONFIDENCE**

1. Constructive Comparison
2. Distress Tolerance
3. Self-Efficacy
4. The Big Flip
5. Rejection-Proofing

And the best part?
All of these strategies are
about changing **mental
habits and micro-behaviors**.
None of them adds yet
another thing to your
to-do list.

Confidence Tool #1: Constructive Comparison

Comparison is one of the brain's superpowers. It's an in-built tool we use to make sense of the world and our place in it. To learn new skills. To achieve equity. To assess risk. To define our very sense of self. But...

It's also one of the most reliable destroyers of confidence. Especially when we are comparing ourselves with others or with an impossibly high standard of perfection.

But I'm guessing this isn't news to you. Most of us recognize the fact that "comparison is the thief of joy."

But because our brains are so good at comparison (evolutionary science actually shows that it's a survival mechanism) attempting to simply, "stop comparing so much!" requires an incredible amount of willpower and discipline. And is likely doomed to failure.

One of the tricks of the trade when it comes to harnessing neuroplasticity is learning to take a behavior your brain is going to do anyway (like comparison) and redirect it down a more helpful, less harmful pathway.

So rather than using all your energy trying to STOP comparison altogether, it's far more effective to START engaging in **CONSTRUCTIVE COMPARISON**.

Progress, Not Perfection

The first critical switch is to reframe your goals. Rather than setting a goal to become *something* or *someone* (a CEO, a perfect Mom, a marathon runner), set a goal to become better than you were last week. This is comparing *you* against *you*--over time. Comparison that focuses on progress, not perfection, is like rocket fuel for your confidence.

Always Measure Backward

Progress-oriented goals are crucial. But how we TRACK progress turns out to be the key to triggering an upward spiral of confidence.



Dr. Heidi Grant Halvorson's research has shown that changing our focus from GAPS (what we have left to do) to GAINS (what we have done so far) sustains motivation, unleashes positive emotions, and builds confidence.

Dr. Benjamin Hardy calls this a switch from "measuring forward" to "measuring backward." Measuring progress against a baseline, rather than a finish line, redirects your comparison machinery. The question is no longer: "How far do we have left to go?" but "How much have we accomplished so far?"

Measuring backward makes you more likely to keep moving toward a goal, making success more attainable, and confidence more sure.

Use All-Through Lists Not To-Do Lists

Keeping a running list of unfinished tasks in front of you all day is like a giant neon sign pointing to the GAPS. No matter how many things you check off, you will constantly feel the weight of what you still have left to do. Rather than feeling like a rock star, you are likely to feel like your best is never enough.

Instead, keep your To-Do List out of sight, and an All-Through List front and center. Seeing what you've done already provides a steady signal of progress to your brain. Dr. Teresa Amabile has shown that progress is confidence fuel. Period. The trick is to focus your attention on the GAINS. It's a small switch that has big consequences for confidence.



Confidence Tool #2: Distress Tolerance

Stress. Pressure. Overwhelm. Everyone feels it. But have you ever thought to yourself, “If I really knew what I was doing, I wouldn’t feel so burned out all the time,” or “other people make it look so easy...what’s wrong with me?”

It’s true: One of the markers of confident people is their ability to manage stress. To roll with what comes. To stay calm in the storm. Psychologists call this “distress tolerance” and, thanks to the power of neuroplasticity, it’s a totally learnable skill.

Your nervous system has two main parts: a stress system (sympathetic) and a calming system (parasympathetic). And most of us are unintentionally strengthening our body’s stress system every day. **The more we *feel* stressed today, the easier and more likely it is for our body to *activate* a stress response tomorrow.** Because we’ve formed a wide and deep neural pathway to activating the sympathetic nervous system when we experience life’s inevitable frustrations. So even small triggers start to activate a stress response (which we often label “overreacting”).

It might feel like you don’t have control over this response. But new science has shown that you can actually *strengthen* your calming system, so that it’s more likely than your stress system to activate in the face of difficulties. In other words, **you can rewire your brain to stay present and engaged in difficult situations, recover quickly after an upset, and take decisive action when you feel on-edge.** This is the essence of “distress tolerance.” And it’s a huge confidence builder. Because no matter the situation or the provocation you face, the superpower of distress tolerance will skillfully manage the emotions that come up, allowing you to get straight back to your A-Game.

So how do you do it?

Building distress tolerance is about taking everyday stressful situations and turning them into opportunities to rewire your response.

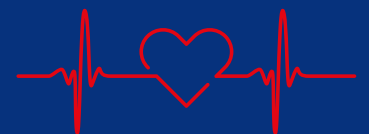
Feeling Follows Frame

Emotions can seem like they have a life of their own. But we have a lot more control over them than we think. Dr. Kevin Ochsner has proven that the way we explain other people’s behavior determines the emotions we feel as a result. “What jerk cuts people off like that?” makes us feel anger and stress. But “I hope they get where they need to go--they’re clearly under a lot of pressure” induces empathy and calm. And since we are usually guessing anyway about why people do what they do, we might as well choose an explanation that strengthens our calming system and builds distress tolerance.

Distanced Self Talk

Most of us have an incessant chatter box in our heads. But the key isn’t to try to silence the voice in your head (nearly impossible), it’s to re-train it to speak to you differently. Dr. Ethan Kross has shown that speaking to ourselves in the third person calms negative emotions. Instead of saying “I’m so overwhelmed!” Try saying, “OK, [Your Name]. I can see you’re feeling overwhelmed right now. How can [Your Name] break this down into smaller pieces that will feel manageable?” Yes, actually *say your own name*. It will feel a bit strange at first, and then delightfully soothing. What calms our nervous system is a bit of distance--we can soothe ourselves the same way we would soothe a friend. And build distress tolerance along the way.

Did you know?
You can measure
how your calming system
strengthens over time by tracking something
called heart rate variability. Cool!



Confidence Tool #3: Self-Efficacy

The third tool to build unshakeable confidence is something scientists call self-efficacy, which is a belief in your ability to influence an outcome. For example, if you set out to learn a new language, how strong is your belief that you'll be successful? That belief is the #1 determiner of how willing you'll be to persist when things get hard. Like whether you'll put yourself in the uncomfortable situations required to learn a new language, and if you'll have the motivation to practice until you're fluent. If you don't have self-efficacy, you won't take the actions necessary to succeed. If you do have self-efficacy, you will take those actions. Which means you're much more likely learn the language and thereby gain confidence that you can do it again.

Dr. Albert Bandura discovered that self-efficacy is built upon a history of small wins. If we try to gain confidence with positive self-talk, it tends not to work because the brain has an exquisitely sensitive BS detection system. If I tell myself that I'm going to nail this presentation, what my brain is really asking subconsciously is, "Have I nailed presentations in the past?" If the answer is no, my insecurity will manifest in what scientists call "leaky emotions"--involuntary behaviors like lack of eye contact, folded arms, and hesitation in our voice.



So building confidence that passes the BS detector requires **taking actions that will produce evidence of competence**. Taking on small challenges that grow in difficulty over time, and produce a history of small wins.

Each time you do something difficult, you're building the proof your brain needs to actually feel confident. Without that proof, there is no feeling. Challenge fuels self-efficacy. And self-efficacy is the "can-do" confidence you crave.



Because what produces self-efficacy is your history of wins or successes in a particular area of your life, self-efficacy is usually context-specific. So you can have high self-efficacy in your technical expertise at work and low self-efficacy in your relationships. Or high self-efficacy in your ability to learn a new musical instrument but low self-efficacy in your ability to learn a new sport.

But there is one giant exception to this--and that's developing self-efficacy in your ability to form new habits. Because whether it's giving great presentations or communicating better with your partner, most goals are just skills we learn over time by habitual engagement with the process of learning.

So if you start thinking about habit formation itself as a skill--and you engage in small challenges to build competence in that skill--you're developing self-efficacy in the skill that gives birth to all other skills.

If you can get good at forming habits, you can become confident in not just one domain, but in your ability to take on anything.



Habit formation is a "meta skill set" and is the most powerful way to create "generalized self-efficacy"--confidence that goes beyond a single domain. There's even evidence to suggest that you can re-wire your brain to make this a default setting. Something Dr. Judy Willis calls a "success mindset"--where you see challenges as a game, setbacks as puzzles to be solved, and failures as learning opportunities. In other words, when you have lots of evidence that you can tackle challenges by habitizing them, everything is a challenge to be embraced, not a threat to be feared. Now that's confidence!

Confidence Tool #4: The Big Flip

Now that we've talked about constructive comparison, distress tolerance, and generalized self-efficacy, there's one more emotional elephant in the room we need to deal with.

Your brain has a natural propensity to avoid discomfort, especially the experience of fear.

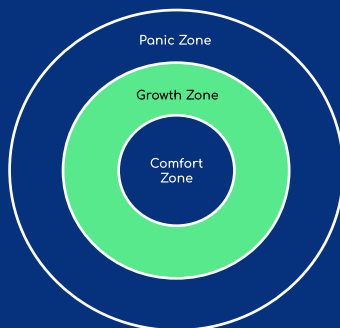
But when it comes to being a leader, fear is just part of the job. And this realization can change everything. Let me explain.

I've been coaching the CEO of a large company for years. Working with the tools I've outlined above, her confidence has gone way up.

But in a recent session, she expressed her surprise that certain aspects of her job never really get easier. As she put it, "I now understand that to excel at leadership, I just have to get better and better at being uncomfortable. Because there's no growth without discomfort."

This realization--*that discomfort is the stuff of good leadership*--has become her new paradigm. In other words, for most people, the goal is to stay in their comfort zones. But leaders do the opposite. They continuously **seek out discomfort**, because they know that's where the growth is--for themselves, their teams, and their organizations.

Stepping out of your comfort zone means stepping into the unknown. And that's the very essence of leadership.



So when we get nervous before speaking, feel awkward when trying to offer feedback, worry we've made the wrong decision, or feel like an imposter, those feelings are NOT evidence that we don't have what it takes.

On the contrary, those very feelings are PROOF that we're doing EXACTLY what it takes to be a leader.

"If I really had what it takes, I wouldn't feel this way."

There's magic in the meaning

In fact, there's new evidence from Dr. Ayelet Fishbach and Dr. Kaitlin Woolley that *reinterpreting discomfort as evidence of growth* creates more motivation to keep doing difficult things. To keep doing what leaders do. It's called "cognitive reappraisal."

The meaning we give the feeling of fear is 100% up to us. We can either say to ourselves:

"If I were a leader, I wouldn't feel so afraid.
I must be an imposter."

OR

"Leaders step into the fear--again and again.
Doing the scary thing is what
makes me a leader."

Turn Fear into Leadership Fuel

If we choose to interpret our feelings of fear, nervousness, or worry as evidence that we're doing the things good leaders do, this will fuel our desire to do even more of those things. And as we do more of those things we will, in fact, become better and better leaders.

It's another upward confidence spiral that begins with "The Big Flip."

Turn imposter feelings on their head by reframing them: choose to see fear and discomfort not as a weakness, but as evidence that you are leadership material. And then do it again. And again. And again. A new neural pathway will form to support this mental habit. Which means you can sit back and watch your confidence grow.



Confidence Tool #5: Rejection-Proofing

I started this report talking about the shared human desire for confidence, and how unattainable it can seem. And perhaps the deepest, strongest, and most elusive form of confidence we all long for is **authenticity**.

To be comfortable in our own skin. To be true to ourselves. To quit second-guessing our instincts. To stop fretting about how we come across. To live our values.

Authenticity is the Crown Jewel of Confidence.



And when it comes right down to it, in order to live authentically, we have to overcome the fear of what other people think of us. Which means we have to become Rejection-Proof.

Scientists have known for decades that overcoming fear is possible--they call it "extinction." Which means that even the most deep-seated fears--like the fear of rejection, or the fear of judgement--can actually lose their grip over time.

Overcoming our fears starts with a secret weapon psychologists call "habituation." To reduce the fear of rejection--and correspondingly increase our courage to live authentically--we have to place ourselves into regular and consistent contact with rejection itself.

The problem is that when we get rejected we feel intense discomfort. And as you learned on the previous page, the brain has a natural propensity to avoid discomfort. So if the very idea of this freaks you out, you're not alone.

The trick is to expose yourself to just one tiny corner of the thing you're afraid of--and increase that exposure a little bit at a time.

If I'm afraid of looking stupid, my habituation practice might look like asking for clarification in a meeting. Or when someone asks a question I'm not sure about, simply saying, "I don't know."

The more we expose ourselves to the thing we fear the most, the more comfortable we'll feel doing it again. Thus, "habituation" eventually leads to "extinction," and the fear of rejection will eventually be replaced by the confidence to live authentically.

Each time you speak your mind, say no, make an unpopular decision, or align with your values even when others disagree, it almost certainly will feel awkward. Uncomfortable. Scary. But, as you learned above, you don't have to see those feelings as indications you've done something *wrong*. You can choose to reinterpret these feelings as evidence that you're doing something *right*--**you're strengthening your authenticity muscle.**



When we dream of living authentically, we usually picture a Thelma-and-Louise-style throw-it-all-to-the-wind statement. True, a gutsy move might be what you ultimately need to claim your authenticity. But, contrary to what Hollywood would have you believe, the courage and confidence you need to make bold moves doesn't just naturally form as a byproduct of pent-up frustrations.

It's a confidence muscle we build over time by choosing to put ourselves in small but meaningfully uncomfortable situations. And when fear rears its ugly head, consider it a clue that you are exactly where you want to be--you're becoming "Rejection-Proof."

The question is, what are you willing to feel in order to have the life that you want?

Claim Your Free 30-Min Consultation and We'll Help You Start Building Unshakeable Confidence

Now that you know a bit more about how to harness the power of constructive comparison, build distress tolerance, increase self-efficacy, make the big flip, and start rejection-proofing, you may have in mind a particular confidence challenge that tends to get in your way.

It might be worrying what others think of you, overreacting in stressful situations, getting out of your comfort zone, perfectionism, comparing yourself to others, trusting yourself, or something totally unique to you.

In my own coaching practice, one confidence challenge I've worked through with many clients is imposter syndrome: the fear of not having what it takes to lead...and being found out.

Whatever your biggest challenge may be, you're definitely not alone.

Click on the link below and we'll spend 30 minutes of one-on-one time working with you to identify one specific confidence challenge, design a plan to help you overcome it, and create meaningful momentum that is moving you toward becoming a more confident leader.

This is what we do at Brain by Design. We equip individuals with 100% evidence-based brain tools that are absurdly effective.

This 30-minute consultation is a free, no-obligation session with a member of the Brain by Design Team. There's no need to move forward with our program after the call if you feel like it's not for you. It's simply a free workshopping session designed to provide personalized value that you can use to start building the confidence you want.

Click below to book a free session today--we're only doing this for a limited time!

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