

You have to take action if you want to improve your confidence and self-belief. Just talking about it is not enough. Using positive self-talk and affirmation could be a good support, but if no actual steps taken, the result is short-lived.

People who lack confidence may attribute it to the build-up of past negative experiences in life and find their inner voice constantly criticising, punishing and belittling every task or accomplishment they attempt. Whereas people with healthy confidence have an inner voice that conveys positive and reassuring messages, even when things go wrong. These people choose to learn from their mistakes and use them to grow. Someone with low confidence may use the failures to beat themselves up with. To move forward, the client with low self-esteem or confidence needs to believe that he or she can change it. As coaches, we do a wonderful job supporting our clients' belief that they can change. We, and they, may be aware that change doesn't always happen quickly or easily, but armed with the tools and strategies that coaching provides, the desire to change through taking consistent and regular action, a client can start to transform their beliefs about themselves.

So how can we help our clients suffering with confidence issues? Here are three steps, which can create a great effect:

Step 1: Challenge the Inner Voice

The first step is to start to challenge all those negative messages of the inner voice. For example, after being turned down for a date a person may feel rejected, embarrassed or humiliated. They tell themselves they are unattractive and that nobody will ever like or care about them, and that they will always be alone. To counteract those negative inner messages, a person could choose to reframe saying for example: "Never mind. It's his or her loss that s/he doesn't want to go out with me. I know I'm an attractive and good person. I will find someone else". Help clients to catch themselves being negative and then practise reframing the problem.

When working with clients on their limiting beliefs, one exercise to use is to get them to write down any negative inner thoughts around a goal or topic, and then write down their reframed thoughts to counteract. For some individuals, this simple step, can work wonders at re-programming the mind to think more positively, for others it is a great first step even though they will require other interventions to support their change.

Step 2: Practice Self-Like

Depending on how your client responds to this, as a homework exercise, get them to write down 50 things they like about themselves between now and the next session – they may need some support with this from friends and family. If 50 really is too overwhelming for them, start them off listing 25. It can be absolutely anything, from shape of their fingernails to the colour of their eyes. Whatever figure you start with, when they have done it, encourage them to add at least one new thing they like about themselves EVERY day. Do this for a month and see how it helps them to build up good feelings about themselves.

Some coaches encourage their clients to keep a Personal Success Journal which highlights all the successes, achievements and positive things they have ever done in their lives – however small. Included in this, could be reminders of accomplishments such as certificates and positive letters they have received in the past. The great thing about this exercise is if they start to doubt themselves, they can go look at all their good points.

Step 3: Enlist the Support of Others

For some it can be very difficult to improve self-esteem or confidence without help from others, but this can be the most difficult step. People with low confidence or poor self-image often won't ask for help because they don't think they deserve it. Here are some simple things to try out:

Ask really trusted friends to tell you what you do well and get them to write it down.

Ask them to tell you 5 things they like about you, again get them to write it down.

Find a friend (or a coach) who will listen to you – without trying to fix things for you.

Ask friends and family for more hugs (it's reported we need 15 a day for good health!)

Remind those who love you to keep telling you that they do (tell them too!)

Look to pay other people genuine compliments – and if they pay them back..... just say Thank You!

Finally, I would encourage a client with low confidence to spend 5 minutes every day, sitting quietly, visualising and talking through how a life of peace, happiness and great confidence would feel to them. This is very powerful. Then.... commit to 3 actions to start to make it happen.

Remember, to improve your confidence, you have to be willing to try something new or different, even small things count, notice the progress and then start feeling good about yourself!