

6. SELF-CONFIDENCE

*Throughout my life, from childhood through my career in the major leagues,
I've always believed I was going to get a hit. Every time up.
It has never made any difference to me who is pitching.
I want that pitcher to feel the confidence I have at the plate.
I want every pitcher to know that I'm the best there is,
and that when I step into the batter's box, he's got his hands full.
-Rod Carew-*

Self-confidence is an extremely important ingredient in the achievement of your goals and success. It reflects the way you feel about yourself, and particularly your belief that you can accomplish what you set out to do. Whether or not you are generally a confident person in life depends on your background, personality, support system, the successes you experienced in the past, as well as many other things.

Successful athletes believe in themselves,
the meaningfulness of their goals,
and their capacity to reach them.

How confident are you about living the life you want and fulfilling your goals?

If you are generally confident, pat yourself on the back because you must be doing something well. Have you, however, noticed times when you didn't feel as confident? Perhaps after you had a really bad performance or flunked an assignment? When the task you were about to perform was totally new? When you were afraid to get injured or disappoint your coach or parents? It is normal to not be 100% confident all the time because we all go through ups and downs (remember, obstacles, distractions?) and this may affect our level of confidence. In those situations though, you can remind yourself that you have the choice to do something about it. You can become increasingly aware of those instances when you don't feel confident about yourself or your performance and do everything that is within your control to enhance this.

Let's start by looking at situations or areas in your life in which you are generally confident. Try to relive a recent moment in your sport or other area in which you were extremely confident. Where did your confidence come from? What did you do? Were you thinking of anything in particular? How were you feeling? Did anything in your environment influence you? Some athletes have told me that they noticed a difference between *thinking* they were confident (or trying to mentally convince themselves that they were) and *feeling* confident. According to them, feeling confident was what allowed them to perform at their best. Have you ever been able to make the distinction? Is thinking that you are confident sufficient enough for you to experience optimal performance and well-being? Or do you need to feel it as well? Also, can you feel confident without having any thoughts? How does this affect your performance? Paying attention should help you to answer these types of questions.

If you have made the observation that feeling confident is important in your process of performance, then you have some data with which to work. Had you identified that you wanted to feel confident in Exercise 1.10? If not, perhaps other descriptions of how you want to feel actually encompass this? Would it be useful to make this more explicit? Take some time to reflect on how it really feels inside of you when you are confident. Do you sense anything in your gut, your chest, your legs (e.g., if you're a cyclist), your face (i.e., if you have a certain look when you are confident)? Take a look at yourself in the mirror, on a photograph, or on a video when you are confident. What do you observe? Once this feeling of confidence is clarified, you will likely be in a better position to connect with it in different situations.

Here's another thing to consider. If you are able to apply your process of resonance on a daily basis, you are likely engaged in the present and feel the way you want to feel as best as possible. In this case, is self-confidence even an issue? If you have done everything you need to do to prepare yourself for an upcoming task (including planning appropriate responses to potential obstacles) and you feel good about yourself, confidence will likely take care of itself. There is no other way to put it, feeling confident typically comes with being prepared and being in the moment.

Now let's look at those situations where confidence may be lacking. The following exercise will help you to explore situations in your sport and daily life. Try to determine the cause of your lack of confidence and target possible solutions. Your level of confidence is something you **can** control and evaluate as you learn and progress over time.

EXERCISE 6.1 – MY STRATEGIES TO REGAIN CONFIDENCE	
Identify situations in training, competitions, and your daily life in which your level of confidence decreases. Then, describe what you can do to regain your confidence. Think of the resources that are available to you (i.e., people or things that have been sources of confidence in the past).	
<i>What lowers my self-confidence in training</i>	<i>What I can do to regain it</i>
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EXERCISE 6.1 – MY STRATEGIES TO REGAIN CONFIDENCE <i>(cont)</i>	
<i>What lowers my self-confidence in <u>competition</u></i>	<i>What I can do to regain it</i>
☹	☺
☹	☺
☹	☺
☹	☺
<i>What lowers my self-confidence in <u>my daily life</u></i>	<i>What I can do to regain it</i>
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☹	☺

As previously mentioned, self-confidence is not always stable. It may be affected by a difficult or challenging training phase. It can also be influenced by the results of a competition, as well as by the lack of feedback and support from teammates or colleagues, the coaching staff, or your family and friends. What's important is that you recognize that there will be some days when you will experience some self-doubt, when you will believe you are unable to take risks, when nothing will seem to go right. On those trying days, don't beat yourself up, take charge and do whatever you are capable of doing on that day.

Following are two exercises you can practice. Observe if they help to increase your self-confidence. Try to create your own exercises by using your imagination or building on strategies that have worked for you in the past.

TABLE 6.1 – MAINTAINING CONFIDENCE**1. FIVE FINGERS**

Whenever you have this little voice inside your head telling you, “You can’t do it,” “You’re not worthy,” “Don’t take the chance,” “You should quit,” OR when you don’t feel the confidence you would like, you can do the following to connect with desired feelings and increase your self-confidence.

- a. Touch your thumb to your index finger. As you do this, think of a time when your body felt healthy fatigue, and relive the way you felt right after it (i.e., after you finished an intense, high-quality training session or after you successfully completed a physical training test).
- b. Touch your thumb to your middle finger. As you do this, think of a time when you had a loving experience, and relive every feeling you had at the time (i.e., when you hugged someone you hadn’t seen in a long time, when you had an affectionate conversation with someone you love, when you had an intimate physical experience).
- c. Touch your thumb to your ring finger. As you do this, recall the nicest compliment you have ever received. See the person giving you the compliment, then see yourself accepting it. Repeat it to yourself now and believe it in your mind and in your heart.
- d. Touch your thumb to your little finger. As you do this, revisit the most beautiful place you have ever been to and let it evoke in you the feelings you had when you were there.

2. BREATHING CONFIDENCE

This exercise can be done anywhere to quickly give you a boost of confidence when you need it.

- a. Stand tall with your head high, your chin up, and your shoulders back but relaxed.
- b. Take a deep breath from your abdomen (*see Section 8: Relaxation*) and as you do this, breathe in confidence and breathe out any tension, negative thought, or negative emotion. When you breathe in, repeat to yourself positive statements such as, “I am confident,” “I can do this,” or “I am good.”
- c. Repeat this 2-3 times or as many times as possible to feel the way you want to feel (presumably to feel good and ready to perform).
- d. Smile. Free yourself to perform.

Can looking confident help you to feel confident?

It can be extremely powerful to look and act confident on the outside even though you might not feel very confident inside. Displaying this confidence can have a positive carry-over effect

on your internal self-confidence. It can be enough to convince yourself and your competitors that you are ready to perform.

**Let the passionate person
within you come out and play**

Have you ever noticed how some athletes have fire in their eyes when they perform? How does that make you feel? Does it intimidate you? What effect can you have on your competitors if you look highly

confident? Search within yourself to find your true colours and allow these colours to shine each time you perform. The following exercise may help you to get started.

EXERCISE 6.2 - MY HIGHLIGHT JOURNAL

Start a journal to highlight positive things about yourself, your performance, and your environment, as well as your daily successes. Take a few minutes each day to write down what you did well during the day, what made you feel good, what lifted your spirits – anything that made you laugh, smile, or connect with how you want to feel. It could be something simple like seeing a child hug her dog, eating your favorite meal, watching the sun set, or something bigger like buying a new car, painting your house, or going on a trip.

This highlight journal can be powerful because it will be filled with positive and uplifting events, thoughts, and feelings, as well as fond memories on which you will be able to look back. If you get into the habit of regularly writing in your journal, you may notice that you will feel better about yourself and most likely about your performances as well. Chances are you will feel more confident and fulfilled in all areas of your life. I speak from experience when I say that this exercise will help you grow as a person and have a more positive outlook on life.

You can start here... What are your highlights so far today?

TABLE 6.2 - SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS

1. Revisit how you want to feel on a regular basis to ensure that you are living the way you truly want to live. Being in control of designing and engaging in your own life should help you feel connected and confident.
2. Revisit your goals and determine whether they are realistically challenging or not. If they are too ambitious, they might be generating feelings of self-doubt. Modify them or set new goals to regularly experience improvements and successful performances, which should lead to feelings of confidence (*See Section 2: Goals*).
3. Assess your level of commitment. Are you putting in sufficient time and effort and preparing well enough to succeed at your level? If not, your performance and self-confidence might be affected (*See Section 3: Commitment*).
4. Remind yourself of your strengths and qualities, and what you have accomplished so far. Rely on the strengths you also have in other areas of your life (*See Section 1: Self-Awareness*).
5. Engage in positive self-talk. When you have a negative, distracting, unwanted thought or emotion, shift it to a positive one (*See Section 7: Positive Perspectives*).
6. Seek support and encouragement from people who believe in you and make you feel good.
7. Celebrate your successes by doing things that make you feel good in and outside your sport.
8. Act confident if it can lead you to feel confident.
9. Make it a habit to end each day and each performance on a positive note. Write down your highlights in your diary or journal.