



Episode 22: From Impostor Syndrome to Confidence

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today's podcast is about one of my favorite topics to coach and speak about. It's about confidence. Raise your hand if you wish you had more confidence. And just so you know, my hand is raised, too!

It's time to talk about impostor syndrome and confidence. I'll share my thoughts about what confidence is and how you can build yours. Then I will share an easy-to-remember, actionable formula to lessen your impostor syndrome and boost your confidence.

First, let's define the terms we're talking about and let's start with Impostor Syndrome. Although many people use that term casually offhand, it actually has a specific definition. Impostor syndrome is officially defined as meeting three criteria: 1. Believing that you have fooled people. 2. Having a fear that you'll be exposed as an impostor; and 3. Being unable to attribute your achievement to your internal qualities, skills, intelligence, and strengths.

Impostor syndrome is the problem we're dealing with because it directly undermines confidence. It can talk us out of going for a promotion, negotiating for more money, or sharing a creative idea.

Because words focus our thinking, I want to stop talking about impostor syndrome and instead start talking about how to build your confidence. Because I want you to be able to walk into that high-stakes meeting, that performance review or job interview, saying to yourself, I've got this.

I define confidence as believing in yourself. It's about getting clear on who you are and what your value is. It's more than knowing you can do a task. The bigger definition of confidence is knowing that you matter in the world.

When we're clear about who we are and what our value is, it's easier to do the work in the world we are meant to do and be the person we're meant to be.

Now, unfortunately, lots of things can undermine our confidence, and these things fall into one of two categories: internal factors and external factors.

The things that undermine our confidence can come from within us, or they can come from the people and environment around us. First, let's talk about those internal thoughts that can undermine our confidence. How many of you are your own harshest critic? Yup, me, too.

Our inner critic – that voice of judgement that causes us and others pain – is a quick confidence buzzkill. We might be feeling prepared or excited about taking a big step, and then our inner critic says something like, “Are you sure you're ready?” or “What if they don't like what you're asking for?” and our confidence level immediately drops.

In addition to internal factors that undermine our confidence, external factors can also keep us feeling and playing small. Too often, we give our power over to others' comments and opinions. Here's an example: One of my clients had a huge hit in confidence after her manager told her that other people thought she was hard to work with. Now, let's think about this a second. This was secondhand, vague information that came from only one source. My client could have probed more as to how the project she was working on was impacted. She could have advocated for herself. But instead, her confidence sank and she let those comments feed her inner critic. Her mindset immediately went to, "I must not be as good a leader as I thought."

Here's the thing, though. She is a good leader; in fact, she is awesome. She's purposeful, hard-working, and collaborative. And yet, one person's comments made her feel like she was less than and not good enough? Does that sound familiar?

If it's time for you to build your confidence, get ready to take some notes. Here are 3 truths that I know about confidence:

1. Confidence is a practice. And just like any practice, the more you do it, the better you'll get at it.
2. It's not that you either have confidence or don't. You do have it. Your confidence is in you, waiting. I imagine confidence like an underwater river that you can tap into whenever you need to.
- And 3. To build your confidence, you can use both your body and your mind.

This brings me to my formula for building confidence. Here's the formula: A plus B equals C. Simple: $A + B = C$.

Let's define these variables and break it down. A stands for attitude, which is your mindset and thoughts. B stands for body position, which is your posture and how you breathe and hold your body. C stands for Confidence. To build confidence, you need to align your thoughts with your body.

Let's talk about how to put this into action and let's start with A, attitude, the thoughts that you have about yourself and your abilities. As I often say, our thoughts create our reality. And we get to choose where we focus our thoughts. We can focus our thoughts on our weaknesses or on our strengths. We can focus on our fears, or on our courage and commitment.

When you put attention to A, your mindset, you are intentionally focusing your thoughts on your strengths, your abilities, your purpose, and your past accomplishments. You are rechanneling any inner critic thoughts of: I can't do this, or I'm not good at this, to: here's what I can do and here's what I do know.

Here's how to refocus your thoughts. Choose 3 open-ended coaching questions to ask and answer. For example, you might ask yourself, What gives me purpose? Or, What have I figured out in the past? Or, What's one thing that I'm good at?

After you've focused your mindset and attitude, it's time to maximize variable B, body. Here's a truth: moving our body can shift how we think and feel. Our body is one of the most powerful tools we have to help our mindset be more empowered and positive. Let's try it now. I invite you to bring attention to your body, and to sit up straighter. Pull your shoulders back and open up your torso. How does that feel? Now let yourself exhale fully and take a few deep breaths. What do you notice now?

B is about finding the body position or stance that makes you feel most confident. What is it for you? Is it having your hands on your hips? Your arms outstretched? Being in a yoga pose?

We can use our body to feel more present, more grounded, less anxious, and more confident.

Now, let's put the formula together to see how it helps you feel more confident. Here's how to put $A+B=C$ into action. Start by standing in a powerful body position, and then state out loud a few positive thoughts you have. If I were doing this, I might say something like, "I do care deeply about helping people feel empowered." Or "I'm brave for trying something new."

And here's what I notice. When I stand tall with my shoulders back and I say these statements, I feel more confident. I definitely feel more confident than when my body is hunched over my computer and my thoughts are full of fears.

I want to clarify something, though, about the positive thought statements that you create for yourself in A. These thought statements only work if they feel true to you. If the statements you say out loud don't ring true, your body and your brain will resist them. So don't use those. Instead, find something you can say that does feel true. Maybe you can say that you're courageous, or that you're putting a lot of effort toward a goal. For me, when my inner critic is really loud, I like to state confidently that I know how to be brave. That's a statement that usually moves me from a negative to a positive mindset.

Now that I've shared my thoughts about how to lessen your impostor syndrome and build your confidence, let's bring this to you. In the next few weeks, I invite you to practice talking about your strengths and your purpose. Do this out loud and often. You can even encourage your colleagues and team to share their strengths and purpose, too.

I also invite you to notice how you're holding your body, especially when you're experiencing worry or self-doubt. My guess is that you'll be constricted, your shoulders will be hunched over, or you'll be holding your breath. If that's the case, open up your shoulders, stand tall, stretch your arms out wide, and let yourself fully exhale. And see what you notice.

Thank you so much for listening and for being part of my community. Thank you also for your commitment to building your confidence. I know that the world needs your purpose, your ideas, and your leadership. Being confident is your divine right, so that you can be who you're meant to be and do the work you're meant to do. As always, if I can be helpful, please email me at deb@debelbaum.com. I'm here to help you feel empowered, confident, and happier.

Until next time!