

Ruth H. Axelrod

Abstract

Self-confidence has two aspects: general self-confidence, which is a stable personality trait that develops in early childhood, and specific self-confidence, which is a changing mental and emotional state associated with the specific task or situation at-hand. We develop both types of self-confidence through automatic, mostly unconscious, internal dialogues whereby we make judgments about ourselves based on our experiences and others' feedback. While both types of self-confidence profoundly affect our thoughts, emotions, and behavior, our levels of general self-confidence are important primarily in new and unusual circumstances while our specific self-confidence is pertinent to our everyday performance. High levels of both types are essential for effective leadership and enable the leader to influence his collaborators, or followers, to build task-specific self-confidences that can strengthen their job performance. This chapter includes instructions for a conscious mental process called self-leadership, which effective leaders routinely employ and through which we each can learn to positively influence our internal dialogues so that we, too, can build on our innate abilities and develop specific self-confidences to do what we choose.

Keywords

Self-confidence • Personality trait • General self-confidence • Specific self-confidence • Internal dialogs • Emotions • Goal-setting • Influence • Authenticity • Psychological empowerment • Self-leadership

R.H. Axelrod (✉)

Granite State College, 169 Portsmouth St #190, Concord, NH 03301, USA

e-mail: raxelrod@gwmail.gwu.edu

Introduction

The ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, who wrote about leadership in his troubled times, observed that confidence is a person's greatest friend. Modern leadership researchers generally agree as most of those who have focused on the leader's personality traits include self-confidence in their lists of what makes leaders effective.¹ In fact, a review study found, in 2002, that in the ten existing reviews of research on leadership traits, self-confidence was the only trait that appeared in a majority (eight) of the lists.² Even scholars who focus on leader behaviors or leader–follower relationships generally include self-confidence in their discussions.³

This chapter discusses the nature of self-confidence, how it affects both leaders and their collaborators, or followers, and how a person can strengthen and maintain it.

The Nature of Self-Confidence

As with many psychological constructs, scholarly as well as popular definitions of self-confidence vary considerably, with most people describing it as how we feel about ourselves and our capabilities. For the purposes of this chapter, it is defined as *an individual's level of certainty about his or her ability to successfully do tasks and manage situations*. Self-confidence is formed through complex internal processes of judgment and self-persuasion⁴ whereby we attach meaning to our personal experiences—particularly our successes and failures in past performances—and comprehend others' reactions to us.⁵ Thus, it involves sense-making⁶ whereby we learn to understand ourselves and create expectations of our future performances. Some psychologists conceptualize our resulting beliefs as a continuum with high self-confidence at one end and uncertainty at the other.⁷

We experience self-confidence in two different forms—as a stable personality trait of *general self-confidence*—e.g., “I know that I will do well in any job for which I am qualified”—and as a variable state of *task-specific self-confidence*—e.g., “I can help with the research but I am not good at creating PowerPoint presentations.”

¹ See, for example, Bass and Stogdill (1990), (Goleman, Boyatzis, and Annie (2001), Goleman (1998), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), Northouse (2016), Stogdill (1948), and Yukl (2001).

² Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002).

³ Alvolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991), Heifetz and Laurie (1997), Kouzes and Posner (1993), and Zaleznik (1977).

⁴ Bandura (1990).

⁵ Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015).

⁶ Weick (1995).

⁷ Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015), Stajkovic (2006), and Tubbs and Schulz (2006).

General Self-Confidence: A Personality Trait

Our levels of *general self-confidence* have to do with our beliefs and judgments about our ability to do well irrespective of the task or context. They develop early in our lives, within the contexts of our families and other social environments such as day-care and kindergarten,⁸ as an aggregate of our judgments and feelings about our capabilities and, therefore, ourselves.⁹ These early childhood self-assessments become part of our personalities and, so, are highly resistant to change.¹⁰ In consequence, the level of general self-confidence that we each acquire in childhood remains fairly stable over our lifetime. For example, if Ryan is repeatedly told that he is stupid when he fails in various tasks, he will tend to develop a low level of general self-confidence while Maryam, who is told that she has the ability to do anything that she wants, tends to develop a high level, as long as her performance matches her expectations.

Specific Self-Confidence: A State of Mind

Our level of *specific self-confidence* reflects our beliefs and feelings about our ability to do specific tasks that we are facing at particular points in time. Like general self-confidence, specific self-confidence is built primarily on our judgments about our performances. However, unlike general self-confidence it is a state of mind that alters, largely by strengthening or declining, after almost every new experience.¹¹ Both Ryan and Maryam will gradually gain confidence as they learn to do specific tasks and succeed in performing them but when they fail their task-specific confidence may wane.

The Interaction of General and Specific Self-Confidence

People with high levels of general self-confidence find it easier to enter into new environments and take on new tasks than do people with low general self-confidence.¹² So, on the first day of their new jobs, Ryan may feel more anxious and uncertain than does Maryam who, with high general self-confidence, is better equipped to develop the new specific self-confidences that are required. However, at the end of their successful probation periods, both are likely beginning to develop beliefs in their competence relative to the tasks they have been performing, and that affects their expectations and behavior far more than do their general levels of self-confidence. Specific self-confidence supports our ability to deal with recurrent and familiar problems though general self-confidence affects our ability to cope with the unknown.¹³

Thus, with regard to self-confidence, at least, it is fair to say that eight decades of formal leadership research has demonstrated that *leaders are both born and made*.

⁸ See, for example, Conger (2004).

⁹ Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015), and Stajkovic (2006).

¹⁰ Matthews, Deary, and Whiteman (2003), and Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015).

¹¹ Demo (1992).

¹² Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015).

¹³ Oney and Oksuzoglu-Guven (2015).

Case 17.1: Speaking Truth to Power

Rachael was the new administrative manager of a special research unit in a teaching hospital. One morning, the ward clerk ran into her office, saying, “Dr. Smith is yelling at Carol in front of a patient!” Though anxious about facing this formidable senior physician, Rachael hurried to the patient’s room, sized up the situation, grabbed nurse Carol’s arm and drew her toward the door, saying, “I am sorry, Dr. Smith, but I need Carol in my office immediately.” Astounded, he followed.

Once both were in her office with the door closed, Dr. Smith turned on Rachael, saying angrily, “How dare you interfere with patient care!” “I am sorry for interrupting,” Rachael replied, “But, in the future, if you feel you need to shout at Carol, I will be happy to vacate my office so that you can do so in private. Your patient is dependent on his nurse and you may have just damaged his confidence in her, which is not to your patient’s benefit, Doctor.” He glared, turned on his heel and stalked out.

Rachael sat down, before her knees could cave in, and took a deep breath. Carol gave her a quick hug and left. Rachael immediately called her boss, Dr. Rand, to explain what had happened before he heard Dr. Smith’s version. She later learned that Dr. Smith had complained about her but Dr. Rand had supported her actions. Then he had complained about both of them to the Dean of the medical school. However, several weeks later, hospital scuttlebutt maintained that Dr. Smith had all but stopped shouting at nurses throughout the hospital.

1. *What factors made Rachael willing to challenge Dr. Smith’s authority and how were they each relevant to her decision and actions?*
2. *How would you have handled this situation, and why?*

The Self-Confident Leader

Self-confidence plays a role in every aspect of a leader’s thoughts, feelings, behavior, relationships, and job performance,¹⁴ through an internal psychological mechanism called self-leadership.

¹⁴Kolb (1999), and Neck and Manz (1992).

Self-Leadership: A Meta-Skill

As we go about our daily lives, we continually receive incoming sensory data that we must process in our minds before we can make sense of it. This automatic and largely unconscious activity draws on all our internal resources—including our values, beliefs, assumptions and expectations (VABEs), memories, attitudes and motivations—to assess the input and determine what it means for us.¹⁵ Our conclusions are also shaped by our personality traits such as self-confidence.

The practice of *self-leadership* enables us to influence those conclusions by consciously inserting selected information into the deliberative process; that is, by attempting to persuade ourselves of something that we want to believe. For example, after we fail at a task, we may habitually berate ourselves but if we practice self-leadership, we might consciously tell ourselves that we failed only because it was a learning experience and assure ourselves that we will succeed next time. Articulating this causal attribution and positive expectation helps guide our thoughts in a constructive direction and manage our emotions,¹⁶ so it helps build task-specific self-confidence. This, in turn, can enhance our performance¹⁷ because people who believe they can perform well tend to do better than those who expect to fail.¹⁸ It can also help us avoid overconfidence, which develops through internal dialogues that focus solely on our successes, thus fostering unrealistic beliefs and expectations.¹⁹

In short, self-leadership may be the leader's single most important psychological skill, an effective tool that can help build task-specific self-confidence and, so, shape our internal life story to foster success.²⁰ For this reason, it is now being widely recommended in practitioner-oriented books, scientific journal articles, and leadership training programs.²¹

Effects of Self-Confidence on Leader Behaviors

Self-confidence is not only affected by, and affects, self-leadership but also plays a role in other psychological and behavioral phenomena. Both general and specific self-confidence influence self-beliefs and expectations, so, are not distinguished in most of the research that is relevant to leadership.

Psychological empowerment: Self-confidence plays a role in psychological empowerment by influencing our willingness to take control of our work and function

¹⁵Kleitman and Stankov (2006), Knippenberg, Knippenberg, De Cremer, and Hogg (2004), and Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005).

¹⁶Schlaerth, Ensari, and Christian (2013).

¹⁷Neck, Neck, Manz, and Godwin (1999), Neck and Manz (1992), and Prussia, Anderson, and Manz (1998).

¹⁸Gist and Mitchell (1992).

¹⁹Parker and Stone (2014), and Van Zant and Moore (2013).

²⁰Shamir and Eilam (2005), and Weintraub (2015).

²¹Neck and Houghton (2006).

independently in our decision-making and other behavior.²² For example, research shows that to manage performance problems, self-confident managerial leaders tend to work directly with their subordinates, using informal persuasion and supervisory power, while those with less confidence may fall back on formal administrative processes or refer the problem “up the ladder.”²³

Goal-setting: Self-confidence is a prerequisite for challenging the status quo, which is what the best leaders often do.²⁴ Leaders with strong self-confidence tend to have positive expectations and, so, are willing to take risks that others might avoid.²⁵ By enabling them to comfortably face accountability, self-confidence allows them to make difficult decisions and follow up with decisive action.²⁶ This willingness to take risks, coupled with their belief in their own competence, also prompts self-confident people to set high, hard goals,²⁷ which serve as a very effective self-management technique that maximizes performance.²⁸

Motivation and persistence: Self-confidence also enhances self-motivation and engenders persistence in the pursuit of goals. Even though he is not naturally motivated by a particular activity, a self-confident leader will tend to demand of himself that he do it, and do it well, which both generates a goal and builds commitment to a high level of performance.²⁹ Our levels of self-confidence also affect our willingness to persist in tasks when we fear failure. For example, in situations where our known levels of achievement are insufficient to achieve particular goals, people with strong self-confidence will increase their efforts and persistence while those with low confidence may quickly give up.³⁰ When the discrepancy between goals and achievements is so large, however, that it undermines our specific self-confidence, people with high general self-confidence will adjust their goals while low-confidence people tend to become discouraged and abandon their goals altogether.³¹ (Also see Chap. 12, Motivation, and Chap. 19, Perseverance.)

Management of emotions: Self-leadership plays a role in helping us manage our emotions,³² particularly for self-confident people, so that we can distance ourselves from our feelings and view them in perspective. It softens the blow when we fail, which is important because failure affects us viscerally since confidence judgments shape our emotions as well as our rational thoughts.³³

²² Paglis and Green (2002), and Spreitzer, De Janasz, and Quinn (1999).

²³ Goodstadt and Kipnis (1970); Kipnis and Lane (1962).

²⁴ See, for example, Zaleznik (1977).

²⁵ Chemers, Watson, and May (2000).

²⁶ Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991).

²⁷ Locke, Shaw, Saari, and Latham (1981).

²⁸ Latham and Locke (1991).

²⁹ Manz (1986).

³⁰ Bandura (1986).

³¹ Bandura and Cervone (1983).

³² Schlaerth et al. (2013).

³³ James (1890).

Through emotion management, self-confidence has a positive impact on a leader's ability to manage conflict.³⁴ By helping a leader remain emotionally stable, containing his anxiety and anger during difficult confrontations, it allows him to focus all his attention on positive, functional and constructive language and approaches that will yield beneficial outcomes.³⁵ In short, self-confidence plays a role in emotional control, enabling a leader to act with honesty and integrity in reliable and adaptable ways.³⁶ Self-control also enhances others' perceptions of his abilities, while lack of self-control tends to damage trust and commitment. (Also see Chap. 7 Emotional Intelligence.)

Presence and voice: Presence and voice are twin facets of how we present ourselves to the world. The "right" presentation for the culture and circumstance confers social status on a leader and, so, helps him win allies and rally support.³⁷ Though self-confidence is an internal attribute, a leader must ensure that it is evident in his voice, words, and physical mien, for example, in his use of persuasive arguments, rather than coercion, to influence others.³⁸

A display of self-confidence works in combination with other characteristics, such as assertiveness and decisiveness, to generate so-called executive presence,³⁹ which comprises a set of cues that most people naively associate with leaderly strength and competence.⁴⁰ The characteristics associated with executive presence, in the West, tend to be inherently masculine, so it should come as no surprise that the term is rarely applied to women.⁴¹ Modern workplaces, though, are demanding new patterns of leadership behavior, so both men and women are forging new styles of presence and voice that prove to be effect with particular constituencies like internationally-mobile professionals and workers of the Millennial generation.

Authenticity and achievement: Leaders who have a strong sense of self-confidence tend to be comfortable disclosing their personal values and beliefs.⁴² This enables them to act authentically rather than hiding behind masks, as people with low self-confidence often do. When their driving values are prosocial, though, such as treating everyone with respect and wanting to make the world a better place, the work of any leader can become intrinsically spiritual and transforming.⁴³ This both helps them reach their full potential and raises the aspirations of those around them to achieve things beyond themselves. (Also see Chap. 8, Spirituality.)

³⁴Schlaerth et al. (2013).

³⁵Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991).

³⁶Goleman et al. (2001).

³⁷Bielak and Moscovitch (2013), and Van Zant and Moore (2013).

³⁸Mowday (1979).

³⁹Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991).

⁴⁰Van Zant and Moore (2013).

⁴¹Dagley and Gaskin (2014).

⁴²Sparrowe (2005).

⁴³Neck and Milliman (1994).

Case 17.2: Leading in Fits and Starts

Whenever Michael, the President of a large, urban teaching hospital, announced that he was going away for a few days to attend a managerial leadership workshop, his managers exchanged knowing glances and mouthed the words, “Not again!” across the room. On his return, they knew, he would insist that they stop what they were doing and focus on implementing the new management model or practices that were recommended in the workshop. And so it happened—the old vision was replaced, priorities shifted, and leaders throughout the hospital started on new courses once again.

Over time, the managerial leaders who wanted to accomplish lasting changes that would improve the hospital experience for the patients and their families, and the employees, lost their motivation and left. Those who remained were largely people who were comfortable living with the *status quo* of intermittent and episodic change.

Questions:

1. *How and why do you think the workshops affect Michael’s management decisions?*
2. *What should his loyal managers do in this situation?*

The Self-Confident Leader and His Collaborators

Self-confidence plays an important role in a leader’s ability to influence his collaborators’ thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors,⁴⁴ in large part, by bolstering his credibility, since perceived credibility is a cornerstone not only of leadership⁴⁵ but also of interpersonal trust.⁴⁶ Thus, while it is important that a leader be self-confident, it is imperative that collaborators perceive him that way.⁴⁷

Confidence-Building

The GLOBE studies of culturally relevant leadership attributes found that “confidence-builder” is positively endorsed as a leadership characteristic in *all* of the numerous countries around the world where its researchers conducted their culturally localized studies.⁴⁸ Other research in the USA has demonstrated

⁴⁴Caetano, Vala, and Leyens (2001), Conger (1991), and Stake (1983).

⁴⁵Kouzes and Posner (1993).

⁴⁶Axelrod (2004).

⁴⁷Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), Kolb (1999), Popper, Amit, Gal, Mishkal-Sinai, and Lisak (2004), and Sümer, Sümer, Demirutku, and Çifci (2001).

⁴⁸Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, and Dorfman (1999).

that a leader's self-confidence can enhance the confidence of his collaborators⁴⁹ and, consequently, their performance.⁵⁰ Some leadership scholars even contend that fostering other people's self-confidence is one of the hallmarks of great leadership,⁵¹ and, so, is one of the most important tools for individual and organizational transformation.⁵²

Empowerment and Motivation

Employee empowerment is vital in all modern organizations, especially those that rely on creative knowledge work such as architecture, economic development, or technological innovation.⁵³ Strong, self-confident leaders empower collaborators by articulating expectations of high performance and expressing confidence in their ability to achieve it.⁵⁴ Empowered employees take initiative, engaging in volitional behaviors that give them a sense of freedom and autonomy.⁵⁵

Goals and Performance

Collaborative goal-setting by a leader and subordinate produces different effects depending on the subordinate's levels of both general and task-specific self-confidence. Those with strong self-confidence will tend to choose higher goals and accept more difficult challenges, commit more strongly, spend more effort and persist indefinitely in the face of difficulties.⁵⁶ Thus, they generally achieve more than do those with low levels of confidence, who are more conservative in their aspirations, unless the latter receive significant amounts of the leader's attention and ongoing support.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Bandura (1986).

⁵⁰ Greenacre, Tung, and Chapman (2014), and House, Javidan, Hanges, and Dorfman (2002).

⁵¹ Kerfoot (2010).

⁵² Conger and Kanungo (1988), De Cremer and Knippenberg (2004), De Cremer and Wubben (2010), and Paglis and Green (2002).

⁵³ Carmeli, Meitar, and Weisberg (2006), and Conger and Kanungo (1988).

⁵⁴ Bandura (1986), and Conger and Kanungo (1988).

⁵⁵ Ryan and Deci (2000).

⁵⁶ Locke, Frederick, Lee, and Bobko (1984), and National Research Council (1994).

⁵⁷ Bandura (1986), and Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears (1944).

How to Develop and Maintain Self-Confidence

As discussed above, though we cannot improve our levels of general self-confidence, we can dramatically increase our task-specific self-confidences through learning, practicing, and interpreting our performances in positive ways.⁵⁸ Research has shown that engaging in self-leadership by using the following strategies and techniques, can help us achieve masteries that we might not have believed to be possible.⁵⁹

1. Interpreting Our Performance Experiences

Information about our past performances, as we interpret it, has the strongest and most lasting effect on our self-confidence, for better or worse.⁶⁰ Our internal assessments generally take into consideration the difficulty of the task, how much external aid we received, and how much effort we expended to achieve those performances.⁶¹ So, it is only insofar as we credit ourselves, rather than external agencies, with our successes that our memories of the experiences contribute, over time, to a robust sense of self-confidence.

2. Monitoring Our Emotional and Physical States

Noticing the emotions triggered by thinking about or engaging in a task can help us discern whether our self-confidence about it is low or high. For physical activities, ranging from keyboarding to dancing at the company gala, we tend to interpret our physical symptoms—such as high energy, fatigue, or pain—as indicators of our competence.⁶² When we face these and other types of tasks, we may feel fear and self-doubt, which promote anxiety. Detecting these emotions and managing them by constructing positive internal dialogues can help improve our self-confidence for the tasks.

3. Heeding Our Cheerleaders

Other people play a crucial role in helping us build self-confidence (or not) by setting expectations, evaluating our performances and helping us understand the reasons for our successes and failures, as well as supporting us emotionally by celebrating wins and supporting us through losses.⁶³ To be effective, their input and feedback must be believable and must explicitly credit our underlying ability to do the task. This feedback is most influential when it comes from people whom we perceive to have expertise and prestige, as well as credibility and trustworthiness,⁶⁴ and it plays an important part in our self-leadership dialogues.

Formal coaching is effective not only in sports but also in other areas of endeavor. So-called executive coaching can increase a leader's sense of efficacy⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Weintraub (2015).

⁵⁹ National Research Council (1994).

⁶⁰ National Research Council (1994).

⁶¹ Bandura (1986).

⁶² Bandura (1990).

⁶³ Alvolio et al. (1991).

⁶⁴ National Research Council (1994).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Popper and Lipshitz (1992).

so that he feels better equipped to deal with the difficult aspects of his job⁶⁶; for this reason, many companies fund it for their senior managerial-leaders. Typically, coaching involves personal goal-setting as well as feedback, since both are required to achieve optimal performance, though any kind of evaluative feedback is more helpful than none at all.⁶⁷

4. **Comparing Ourselves to Others**

The less experience we have had in doing something, the more we rely on social comparison, or modeling, to establish expectations of our own performance.⁶⁸ We can best approximate our capabilities by observing models who are similar to us in personal characteristics and general experience.⁶⁹ Seeing them achieve their goals through effort and persistence can be a powerful source of aspiration and motivation. “If she can do it, so can I” is a common inference that can help build our self-confidence sufficiently to launch us into a task.⁷⁰ When our self-confidence is on the wane, we also can benefit from examples of others’ courage, using it to strengthen and guide us.⁷¹

5. **Reducing Our Performance Anxiety**

Anxiety, or stress, negatively influences our self-beliefs about our ability to cope, so managing anxiety is an important way to increase self-confidence in anxiety-prone situations such as confronting an under-performing subordinate or giving a speech in public. We can mitigate the anxiety by rehearsing the event in our imagination, as many experienced leaders regularly do. Over time, this internal dialogue can help us develop a generalized confidence that we can cope with many kinds of stressors. But if high anxiety is an omnipresent challenge, we would do well to consider formal training in cognitive-behavioral coping skills.⁷²

6. **Practicing Positive Self-Leadership**

The techniques described above are helpful only if we can use the information gained from them to positively influence ourselves.⁷³ This requires that we convince ourselves that we either have or can acquire the skills needed to do the target task. If we believe that it requires an inherent aptitude—such as boldness where we are shy, high intelligence where we are average, or a large accumulation of knowledge that we do not possess—we will never persuade ourselves that it is doable.

As noted above, one way to build our task-specific confidence is to rehearse the activity in our minds, generating *mental imagery* of a successful performance.⁷⁴ For example, we might rehearse a counseling session in our minds, imagining things that the under-performing subordinate might say and inventing appropriate

⁶⁶Gyllesten and Palmer (2014).

⁶⁷Bandura (1986).

⁶⁸Burton (2012), and National Research Council (1994).

⁶⁹Festinger (1954).

⁷⁰David (2010).

⁷¹Child (2013), and Peng, Schaubroeck, and Xie (2015).

⁷²Smith (1989).

⁷³Johnson and Staple (2011), and Neck and Manz (1992).

⁷⁴National Research Council (1994).

responses, then concluding the session inspirationally. Then, when we get to the actual session, we have already done it once and learned by the experience.

Another technique is to engage in constructive *self-talk*.⁷⁵ Both before and after doing a task,⁷⁶ a well-constructed series of affirmations and ego boosts can undercut our inner critic, reduce our anxiety (even for those with perennial, trait-based anxiety⁷⁷), and help us learn to trust our ability to achieve success. Self-talk is most effective when we address ourselves by our given names in our internal thoughts and directives. Avoiding the pronouns, “I” and “me,” helps distance us emotionally so that we can focus on the task,⁷⁸ working through our thoughts and feelings to rationally compare the task requirements with our known aptitudes and skills.⁷⁹ And afterwards, whether we succeeded or failed, positive self-talk helps us construct a confidence-building narrative to augment our accumulated experience.

Some of these techniques outlined above will probably be familiar as we all sometimes practice them consciously. Others may feel odd, at first, but if we persist in practicing them, they can help us develop task-specific self-confidences and, so, become more effective in all domains of our lives.

How I Can Talk Myself Through a Challenging Task⁸⁰: A Lesson from Ryan

- *Ryan sits back and takes a few deep breaths, which will relax him. He tells himself that he does not need to be anxious because this is an easy task and he has already done something similar.*
- *First, he goes through the steps of the task in his mind. He has assembled the things that he needs. Wow, he tells himself, this will be easier than he had thought!*
- *Now, Ryan is ready to do the actual task. The first step is just like he imagined. He tells himself that it really came out well. The next step is more complicated but Ryan tells himself that he can do it. Oops! That does not look right but now he knows what it should look like so it will be easy to fix.*
- *It's all done and Ryan tells himself that it looks great! He came through with flying colors! He acknowledges that he messed up one piece of it but that now he knows how to do it correctly, he won't make that mistake again. He has been successful and now is ready to see what the boss thinks about his work.*

⁷⁵ National Research Council (1994).

⁷⁶ Weintraub (2015).

⁷⁷ Kross et al. (2014).

⁷⁸ Weintraub (2015).

⁷⁹ Kross et al. (2014).

⁸⁰ Adapted from Weintraub (2015).

Discussion Questions

1. What are the two types of self-confidence described in this chapter and what role does each play in our lives?
2. Consider a very recent experience where you failed to meet your own standards of excellence. Did the failure impact your specific self-confidence? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
3. Think about a leader whom you have observed close-up, such as your boss, another manager, officer, politician, or religious leader. Do you think that he or she has a strong sense of general self-confidence or not? Drawing on the material in this chapter, as well as your own experience, explain what led you to that conclusion.
4. You have been randomly assigned as the leader of a group of peers who have volunteered to arrange an event for your club or class or school. What would you do to ensure that each of you contributes as effectively as possible to the task?
5. Select one thing that you are not confident about doing but that you need to do either now or in the near future. Jot down some ways that you can mentally prepare yourself for it, drawing on the techniques described in the last section of this chapter.

Chapter Summary

- Self-confidence is formed through complex internal processes of judgment and self-persuasion whereby we attach meaning to our personal experiences—particularly our successes and failures in past performances—and comprehend others' reactions to us.
- Our levels of general self-confidence have to do with our beliefs and judgments about our abilities to do well irrespective of the task or context.
- Our levels of specific self-confidence reflect our beliefs and feelings about our abilities to do specific tasks that we are facing at a particular point in time.
- People with high levels of general self-confidence usually find it easier to enter into new environments and take on new tasks than do people with low general self-confidence.
- Self-confidence plays a role in every aspect of a person's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behavior, relationships and job performance, through an internal psychological mechanism called self-leadership.
- Self-confidence also plays an important role in a leader's ability to influence his collaborators' thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors, in large part, by bolstering his credibility.
- We can dramatically increase our task-specific self-confidences through learning, practicing, and interpreting our performances in positive ways, using the techniques described in this chapter.

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