Finding happiness: how to be more confident

By Anna Brech

Contrary to common belief, confidence isn't some golden nectar on tap for a lucky few.

Instead, it's more like a tendon: something that can be layered and toned over years of practice.

Sure, there might be injuries along the way. But with each knock, that muscle becomes more resilient. And crucially, it can only grow with continued use.

Here's how to be more confident in different life situations, and why solo travel is the best workout of all for self-esteem:

How to be more confident at work

How to be confident while speaking is a big issue in the workplace, with 75% of us suffering from [speech anxiety.](#)

First up: you need to practice. If you have a big presentation on the horizon, it can be worth signing up to a course like [Toastmasters](#) to develop your skills and build a support network. It's amazing how much better you can feel, just by realising how common your fear is.

Secondly: it can be helpful to play out your public speaking gig, like a cinema in your head, to pinpoint what precisely is worrying you. "When exactly do you feel fear?" says psychotherapist Karin Peeters, founder of [Vitalis Coaching.](#) "Under which circumstances? With what sort of people? What do you imagine will happen? And after that? Peel off the onion, until you get to the core."

This tool of "playing the script to the end" can balance out your worst fears. You won't faint or vomit or die doing a presentation. At worst, you will feel nervous, but remember; you're far more aware of this than anyone else.

In fact, in today's frenetic world, it can hard to hold an audience's attention. While you're busy feeling self-conscious about your shaking voice, everyone else is thinking about that cat meme they just saw on Instagram. The *real* struggle is not controlling your nerves, but keeping their focus.

How to be more confident in social situations

Social anxiety affects [around 12%](#) of the population, with many more people feeling uneasy or shy in certain social situations (like a blind date, for example).

This uncertainty stems from fear of judgement and rejection. Given how we have evolved as social beings, with our survival depending on the group, it's a predictable concern. And it's almost always irrational.

Most people with social anxiety "naturally don't think they have what it takes when it comes to social interactions," says Stefan Hofmann, professor of psychology at Boston University. "But actually, the vast majority of people with social anxiety have good social skills. And equally, people with bad social skills have no social anxiety at all."

The key, he says, is to [confront your fear](#). Scared of saying something silly? Say something silly: you'll soon realise that "there won't be any arrests, or crowds ridiculing you".

By getting comfortable with your worst social anxieties, you'll quickly grasp that they are exaggerated. In most scenarios, those cringe-worthy moments you imagine (silences, saying the wrong thing, not being funny) are a lot less loaded than you think.

How to be more confident with body language

In her smash hit [TED talk](#), social psychologist Amy Cuddy argues that just two minutes of power posing can "significantly change your life".

Our minds change our bodies, she says, but it's also true that our bodies change our minds. We are powerfully affected by our own "non-verbal expressions of power and dominance".

When you strike a "power pose" – stretching out and opening up, *Wonder Woman* -style – research shows that it positively impacts your thoughts, feelings and even your hormones.

And since these things are all linked to behaviour, just practising a Usain Bolt "lightening bolt" pose before a big meeting or interview will help you feel and act more confidently.

Cuddy herself suffered from imposer syndrome when she was younger, and she's clear that this body language technique is not a matter of being fake or forced.

Instead, she says, it's a way to develop your presence. It shows people who you really are, minus the residue of your own self-doubt. Practise it enough, and you will internalise it until it becomes part of you.

How to feel more confident within

It's easy to have your confidence dented by what other people think of you. But even this perception is clouded by *what you think of yourself*. The cues you get from others are filtered through your own self-perception.

Because of this, it's crucial to challenge your critical inner voice; the one in your head that constantly snipes at you, destroying your confidence. "This voice is seldom rooted in reality,"
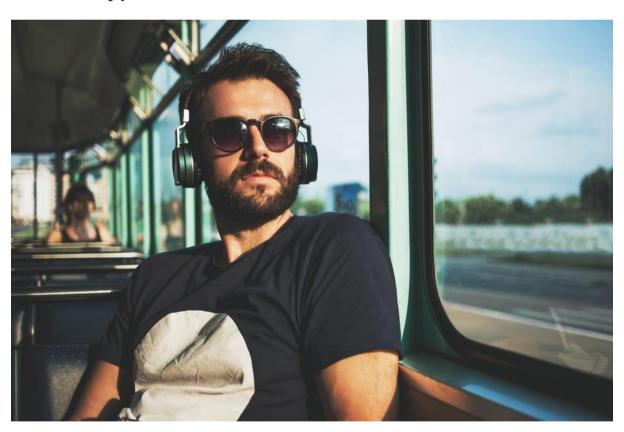
says Harriet Griffey, author of *I Want To Be Confident*. "Challenge it. What actual evidence do you have for what it's telling you?"

Part of this process lies in developing self-compassion. Our culture sends the message that being hard on yourself is the way to be, argues psychology professor Kristin Neff; but when it comes to developing confidence, it's much better to treat yourself as your own best friend.

Some therapists go a step further, and suggest looking after yourself as you would a toddler. Set boundaries on your time, give leeway to your moods, be encouraging and loving, and always pick yourself up after a fall.

To this you can add positive affirmations, which are a great way to boost self-confidence and build self esteem. And since writing things down powerfully reinforces beliefs, you could start to journal all your positive achievements, and the great things other people have said about you.

How to develop your confidence with solo travel

Solo travel is a sounding board on which to develop your confidence skills. When you head out to the world alone, you escape the expectations of those who know you. And you're also more open to meeting new people, especially if you're travelling with strangers.

Here's **psychotherapist Karin Peeters** again: "Being with a new group of people gives the opportunity to practise new ways of being," she says. "Behave as if the opposite of your belief is true. Test new behaviours. Be how you would be if you'd be confident and carefree.

"I don't mean being fake. I mean being more yourself than you'd ever dare being with those who know you."

When you fly solo, you get to stretch the boundaries of your self-confidence in a whole new context. There's no baggage weighing you down.

And each time you do this, you become more confident. It's a self-fulfilling curve.

Other aspects of solo travel, from learning new life skills via adventure, to developing greater resilience, help with the process, too.

Before you know it, you'll be cruising down that self-confidence highway. Like a 80s power ballad, NOTHING'S gonna stop you now.