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## That's Confidence!

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Recently I attended my first barn dance. I have grown up doing Scottish country dancing and Ceilidh (a form of social dancing, pronounced "kay-lee"), and it's second nature to me, but American country/line dancing is a whole new ball game. I expected to be bad at it. The instructor was great, but despite my efforts I didn't do very well. I got into a negative spiral of failure, and found myself frustrated and embarrassed. I decided right then that I'm not a fan.

When people fail, they have less energy, they feel tired and depleted. As I tried to learn to dance unsuccessfully, I felt all of these things, so I gave up and did my own thing. The problem is that moods are contagious – both negative and positive. I failed and lost, and in doing so, I dragged a few others down with me.

Why is it that when we think we'll fail, we often do? Conversely, why is it that when we succeed, we are more likely to believe that our efforts will pay off in the future? This is confidence. This is self efficacy. This is something we as leaders want to breed in our people.

"Confidence is the bridge connecting expectations and performance, investment and results."<sup>[1]</sup> It helps people to take control and believe that they can be successful. When we succeed, we try harder (which of course increases our chances of success). The irony is that often it takes success to believe that one can be successful. There's a cycle to all of this. When people are successful, they often find themselves "on a roll;" they continue to win. "Success breeds success," they say (whoever *they* are.) The opposite is also true, and we can end up on a losing streak.

Consider Kanter's Law: "Everything can look like a failure in the middle."<sup>[2]</sup> Winning is about not giving up even when things look bad. In reality, deadlines can be missed, people get tired, obstacles trip people up, and unexpected situations arise. Confidence can help to maintain success by calming the situation and trusting that it will all work out. A team can become stronger and even more successful if they can recognize the barriers and overcome them – as long as they don't panic.

Everyone from athletes to entertainers to entrepreneurs has heard about "positive mental attitude" and "positive self talk." These silent yet powerful internal pep talks are useful in improving performance and increasing confidence. As leaders and managers we can use this concept to try to create a positive attitude within our teams and increase the likelihood of success. That means that we have to create an environment that allows our people to succeed. The "Pygmalion Effect" is the concept that when we assume that people are high achievers and treat them that way, we expect more of them and they perform better. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Remember that what you focus on determines your reality.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's premise is that there are three keys to creating confidence:

- *Facing facts and reinforcing responsibility* – creating a culture of openness where mistakes can be identified and fixed at an early stage;
- *Cultivating collaboration* – cultivating mutual support, respect and confidence in each other; and
- *Inspiring initiative and innovation* – empowering individuals to be successful by shifting the emotional climate of negativity to one of success.

In my example of learning how to dance, this means I should be able to admit I can't do it, have others offer to help me learn and practice (and nobody laughing at me), and work within a culture where I and others believe I can be successful. How does that play out in your team?

If you think you can be successful, you can. That's confidence.

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[1] Rosabeth Moss Kanter. 2004. *Confidence*. Crown Business, New York., p.3.

[2] Ibid. p.67.

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