

Yes, You Can

How to recognize your value

Given the choice between hiring two equally bright candidates—a shiny, happy person or a negative sad sack—who would you choose? It's a no-brainer; individuals exuding self-confidence—faith and trust in their abilities—are those we want to be around and hire.

By Anita LeBlanc

Lynne Sarikas, director of the MBA Career Center at Northeastern University's College of Business Administration says, "When a candidate doesn't show an ounce of confidence, I may feel terribly sorry, but I can't hire them. We tell students, 'You are selling yourself in interviews. You can't do this effectively if you don't believe in yourself.'"

Marilyn J. Sorensen, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and author of *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem*, says a lack of self-confidence can be a symptom of low self-esteem, a condition where a person mistakenly believes that they are inadequate, unlovable, unworthy or incompetent. This way of thinking only increases a job seeker's fear of making a mistake or failing—and plunges their level of self-confidence.

Eliminate the negative, accentuate the positive

Sarikas and Sorensen believe self-confidence is an inside game, one where you must take action to change your thoughts. The first step for the confidence-challenged, says Sorensen, is to diligently edit negative thoughts and only allow authentic self-statements based on fact, truth or history in order to eliminate inaccurate, self-defeating thoughts and behaviors.

In other words, when you think, "I'm an unemployable loser," remember that you have been employed and the contribution you made: "I had a job and I was a reliable, hard-working employee. I'll have a job again."

Both recommend taking stock and writing down your positive traits (Are you honest, funny, cooperative, sincere?), your successes and examples of situations in which you overcame adversity. If you feel your job loss was because of your own negligence, acknowledge it and move on. Rehashing and self-recrimination are cold, comfortless companions.

Can't recall what's so great about you? Ask a friend, former coworker or manager to jog your memory or supply appreciation or recommendation letters. Reference your list and collection of credentials and endorsements often to maintain your self-appreciation. It may sound silly, but no more so than living in your head thinking about how unemployable and unlikeable you are—and far more productive.

Take a break from you

Obsessive thinking about you and your situation won't restore confidence. Sometimes you need to unplug the thinking-about-me machine and make a contribution to others to release yourself from fear and doubt. Being conscious of others' needs and doing something to make a positive difference can help you rediscover your usefulness and well being.

That's why experts recommend volunteering or seeking no-cost ways to be of use while between jobs. Serve breakfast at a soup kitchen



once or twice a week or rake leaves for an elderly neighbor. Doing small acts of kindness have a way of getting negative thoughts out of our heads and putting self-affirming ones in their place.

Prepare and practice

How to boost your confidence pre-interview? Sarikas says preparation and practice are key. She suggests thoroughly researching the company and your interviewers. Consider questions you're likely to be asked and your responses. Prepare your own questions and list examples of your work or experiences relevant to the position. Sarikas also suggests anticipating questions such as, "Tell me about a time you had conflict and how

you resolved it?" or, as the iconic interviewer Barbara Walters once queried, "What kind of tree would you be?"

Ask friends to practice interviewing with you and give you feedback about your performance. Before interview time, ask a friend or mentor for a personal pep rally and then pump yourself up with accurate, positive self-talk. Sorensen adds the importance of taking time to review your list of factual and truthful statements and historical record of successes.

Be here now

Focus is the watchword for confident interviewing. Sarikas says it's important when interviewing to believe that this is the best place for

you to be at this point in time. Don't think about how long you've been unemployed, how you need a job or your competition.

Take the heat off by being attentive to and interested in those interviewing you. Be yourself and don't apologize for what you are not. After all, it's generally not who you are that holds you back, it's worrying about who you think you're not. Be the best you can be and the rest will take care of itself. **CF**

What's Your Confidence Quotient?

Genuine self-confidence takes courage

Take this quiz to see if you know how to hold on to your self-confidence after a job loss.

1 The best strategy to get your confidence back after a job loss is to:

- a. Acknowledge the loss and give equal time to assessing how you did or didn't contribute to the situation.
- b. Tell everyone about your bad break and rotten former employer. They are certain to agree with you and you'll feel so much better.

2 To accurately assess your positive traits:

- a. Find a list of positive affirmations, look in the mirror and say them out loud to yourself each day.
- b. Write down the things you know that are undeniably good about you. Ask a friend or coworker to jog your memory if you need help.

3 The best thing to do just before going into a job interview is to:

- a. Remember all your authentic positive traits and experiences.
- b. Think about all the mistakes you've made so you won't make them again.

4 You've scored an interview! What should you do to get ready?

- a. Nothing. They've seen your resume and they want you. Job, here you come!
- b. Get your Google on and learn all you can about the company and interviewer.

5 It's been a while since you've lost your job, you've had several dead-end interviews and are feeling desperate. The best thing to do is:

- a. Take some time to help a friend or volunteer a few hours a week.
- b. Continue to make your job hunt your first priority. The harder you work at it, the more likely it is you'll find a job.

Answer Key

Give yourself one point for each correct answer.

1-a. Job loss, currently impacting millions across the nation due to the economic downturn, is consistently listed as a top stressor. Personal factors—excessive tardiness or absenteeism or being unfocused at work—can be other reasons behind losing a job.

Sorensen suggests not taking your job loss personally if you didn't do anything wrong. However, if you did play a part, you must be willing to take an honest look at yourself. She suggests writing about why you think you lost your job and what you did rather than ruminating about it in your head. Having the facts written down will help you move on.

2-b. Generic affirmations, such as "I'm a good person," feel and sound absurd for a reason: They are non-specific and lack authenticity. Sorensen says true confidence comes from acknowledgment of one's specific, genuine positive attributes. Unsure of yours? She recommends asking others for help

when compiling a positive inventory. They are often able to remind us of our good qualities when stress inhibits our memory.

3-a. No one can take away your undeniable positive attributes and experiences. Dwelling on past mistakes or situations that you feel didn't work to your advantage are bona fide confidence killers.

4-b. People are undeniably more interested in learning about you when you take an interest in them. As Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People* said, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

You show your respect and interest when you take the time to learn about your hoped-for employer and interviewer. The bonus is you go to your interview prepared for an intelligent discussion, a key confidence booster, according to Sarikas.

5-a. While it's important to continue researching and applying for

jobs, obsessive job hunting and non-stop networking can exhaust you and wreak havoc on your confidence. Certainly spend time each day on your search, but take a break and help others if you find yourself feeling inadequate and frustrated.

It can be the best thing you can do to help yourself. Why? Because being of service gives your life meaning. It's a reminder that while you may currently feel impotent career-wise, you still have purpose and power in your ability to be useful to others—a sure-fire nutrient that will make your confidence bloom and grow.

Scoring

4–5 points: Well done! You've got what it takes to shine.

2–3 points: Not bad, but understanding and employing some confidence raising tactics may help you enhance yours.

0–1 point: Time for a confidence makeover. Consider asking a friend or mentor to help you in your quest for improved self-confidence. **CF**