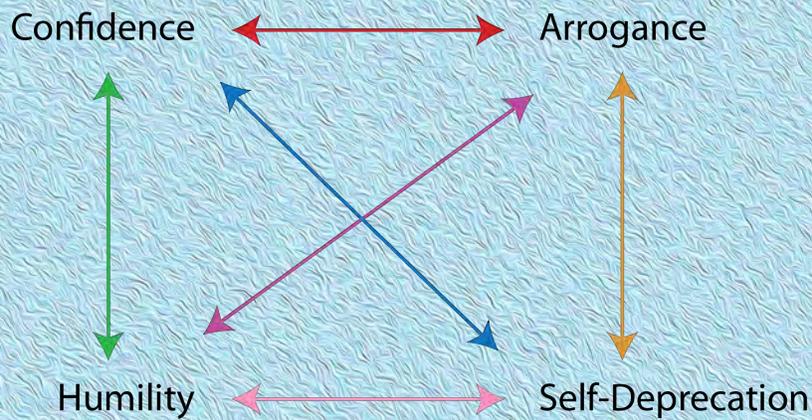


# THE CONFIDENCE CONNECTION

Staying Off the Slippery Slope  
from Confidence to Arrogance



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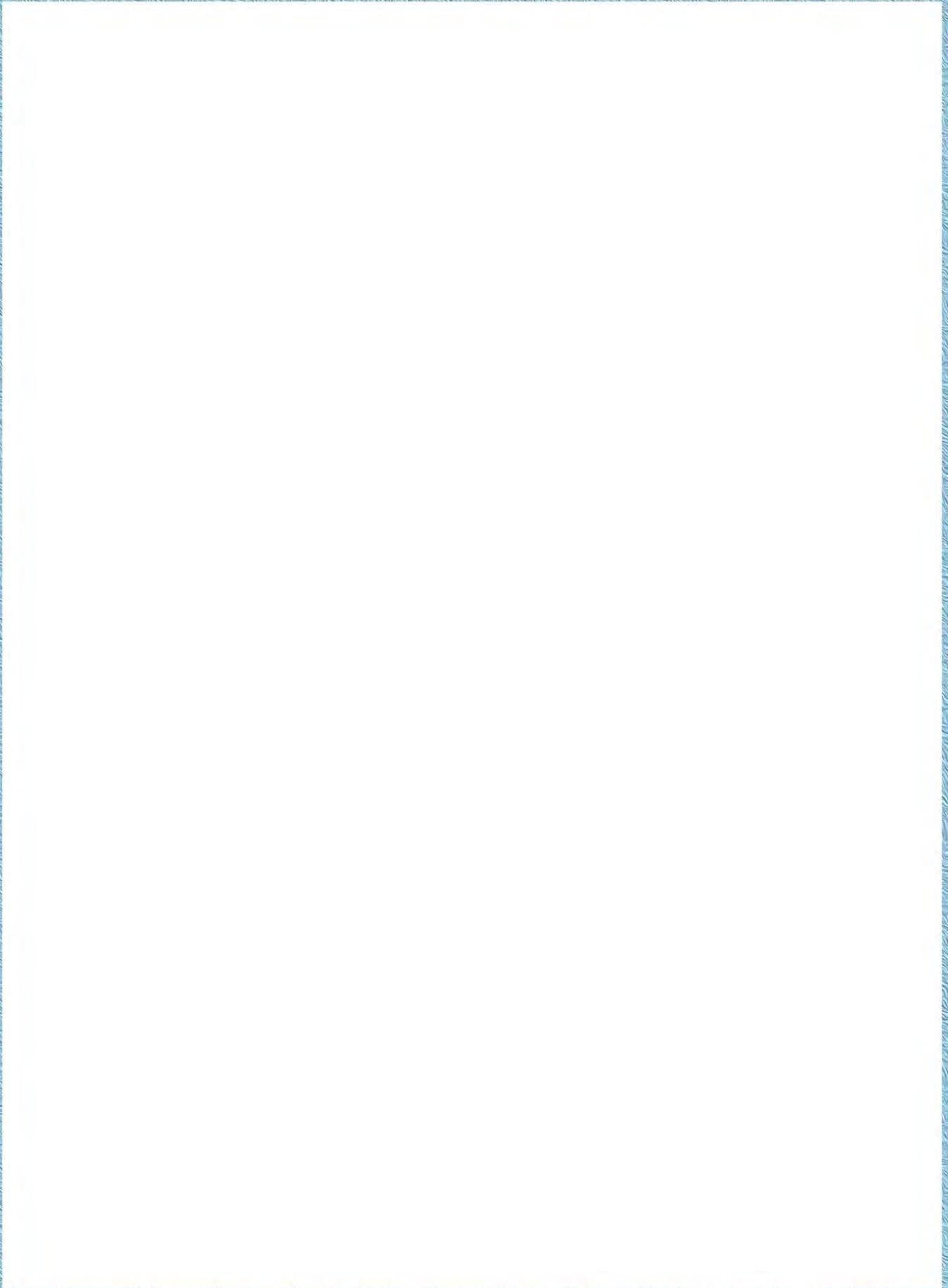
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*“Be humble for you are made of earth.  
Be noble for you are made of stars.”*

*- Serbian proverb*



## Introduction

For a number of years, I've been contemplating the interrelations between Confidence and Arrogance, Humility and Self-deprecation. It seemed like a slippery slope – that Confidence could easily slide into Arrogance, that belittling yourself could disguise itself as Humility. I wanted to figure out how to stay in the positive energies, and not slide into the negative ones.

In this booklet, I've compiled some ideas around these four states of being. They're not based on scientific research, and not meant to be a comprehensive coverage of this topic – just my own thoughts and observations. I invite you to consider them and see how they resonate for you personally.

## Overview

As a human being, I find that among the issues that I am constantly dealing with is that of self-confidence, along with its "sisters," self-worth and self-esteem. When I was younger, I struggled with being painfully shy. I've certainly come a long way since then, by continually challenging myself to get out of my comfort zone and face my discomfort. By now, I consider myself reasonably confident.

Building confidence is an act of will. Like any other game, the harder the level of challenge, the more there is to gain, in confidence as well as other rewards. But there are pitfalls along the way. As human beings, we are often plagued with fear and self-doubt. We may find ourselves putting on an act of bravado to convince people that we are a lot more self-assured than we really feel, or diminishing ourselves for fear of being shot down by someone who feels threatened by us and wants to take us down a peg, so we do it to ourselves first.

This is a lifetime pursuit. No matter how strong and confident you are, life can throw you curveballs that shake your confidence, and you have to pull yourself back up again. The good thing is, each time you rebuild your confidence, you're building upon strengths and strategies that you've developed, so that you have the tools to work through each new challenge with greater self-assurance, and it's not as scary as it used to be.

One way that I have found to monitor myself in this respect is through a grid that I have labeled the Confidence Connection:

Confident: I feel good about myself.	Arrogant: I'm better than everyone else.
Humble: I am as worthy as others.	Self-Deprecating: Everyone is more accomplished than little old me.

Basically, the Confidence Connection illustrates a fluidity of movement between the elements of Confidence, Humility, Arrogance and Self-Deprecation. They are interconnected. Confidence and Humility tend to co-exist; Arrogance and Self-Deprecation often occur together. The opposite pairs, just by their very nature, generally do not: When you're feeling truly Confident, you tend not to slide into Self-Deprecation; when you're in the throes of Arrogance, Humility feels threatening, and there is a defensiveness or self-protection that keeps Arrogance in place.

Let's look at these four aspects in greater depth.

## **Confidence**

Confidence is a sense of self-assurance that comes from knowing who you are and being okay with that. You feel like you can handle whatever life throws your way, even if it throws you off kilter for awhile. It doesn't mean that you necessarily like everything about yourself, but you generally appreciate and accept who you are and can tolerate and use constructive criticism without getting defensive. You own your strengths and come to peace with what you perceive as your flaws, improving what you can change and accepting what you can't.

Because you are basically comfortable with who you are, you can also allow others to be themselves without feeling threatened. While your confidence is reinforced by outside approval, you do not require external validation to shore up your self-worth. You acknowledge your value and your impact on the world. You live your life true to your ideals, to the best of your ability, and therefore have a sense that your integrity is whole and intact. You generally feel good about yourself.

You're open to other people's ideas and willing to concede when someone else's ideas are just as valid or better than yours. You're willing to try new approaches on for size and choose what works best, whether it's your idea or someone else's. You play fair and go for the best outcome for everyone – cooperation more than competition.

Confidence is usually accompanied by Humility. Someone who is confident owns their positive qualities and accomplishments. They can share those without bragging or puffing themselves up or making others feel less than them. They can also acknowledge and appreciate other people's strengths and accomplishments without turning it into a competition.

## **Humility**

Humility is the partner of Confidence. While you have a strong sense of your own value, you also know that you are a small part of a greater whole, not any more (or less) worthy than anyone else, whatever their status in life.

You have a healthy sense of your place in the universe. From a spiritual perspective, you may hold your strengths and talents as gifts that come from a higher power and are yours

to make the best of. While you see that some people have been given greater gifts than others, you understand that all beings are special and unique in their own way and have the same intrinsic worth – that we are all equal in the eyes of God. You enjoy your gifts and use them to the fullest, and also enjoy and appreciate other people's talents and accomplishments.

You have compassion for those in less fortunate circumstances than you, and you know that wealth or position, or the lack of it, does not make someone better, or worse, than you. When you're living from a place of Confidence and Humility, you experience self-respect and self-worth, and you respect others, whatever their situation in life.

There's a difference between humility and modesty. A person who is humble accepts their flaws and owns their strengths and accomplishments. It is an inner state. Someone who is modest may downplay their positive qualities. It is a show they put on for the outer world, really a mild form of self-deprecation. The confident/humble person is able to receive acknowledgment without resorting to arrogance or self-deprecation. In other words, they graciously accept compliments without diminishing or deflecting them.

## Arrogance

Arrogance is, in a way, the opposite of Confidence. It is based on pseudo-self-esteem – a seesaw effect in which someone else must be down in order for you to be up, to feel good about yourself. For you to be a winner, somebody else must be a loser. It is a *show* of confidence, rather than the real thing. You act with bravado or cockiness, to convince the world (and yourself, really) that you're okay, to elicit the outside validation that you need by convincing people to tell you that you are as great as you want to believe you are.

The person who is arrogant always has to be right. If challenged or criticized, they become defensive. They need to feel "better than" someone else in order to maintain this false confidence. When working on a team, they will devalue other people's contributions.

It's hard to feel empathy from this place, because it makes you weak, and you need to maintain an illusion that you're stronger and better than others in order to feel safe, to feel good about yourself. Showing compassion moves you into Humility, which undermines Arrogance and makes you feel vulnerable. But this illusion that you're better and stronger is a house of cards that will collapse as soon as you feel threatened, because it's based on a false premise.

Underlying the façade is a fear that, in reality, you're not okay – that you're scared or weak and can't really handle challenges or threats to your ego. An additional component may be a disconnection from a higher power or a support system – feeling that you can only count on yourself – which makes you feel too small and weak to cope with a frightening world. You may lack a feeling of integrity, or wholeness, because of acting in a manner that is inconsistent with your values. You become a person you don't like, which pushes you further into Arrogance to scaffold your shaky self-esteem.

When you're in a place of Arrogance, it's hard to accept compliments. You can't let the compliment in, because it means that the person offering the compliment is confident enough to offer it. They see themselves as your equal, which squashes your intent to put them on a lower rung than you. And if someone gives you negative feedback or communicates that your behavior hurt them, you feel attacked and attack them back or turn it around to blame them. (This is typical behavior for a narcissist: Narcissists tend to be arrogant.)

The Arrogant person may have a sense of entitlement, that they deserve the best of everything – that they should be everyone's favorite person, have the most valuable possessions, get the best projects and the most praise. There is an underlying sense of not belonging or feeling left out if they're not the constant focus of everyone's attention and held in the highest esteem by all.

The put-downs of an Arrogant person may come in the form of jokes. If the target of the joke becomes angry or defensive, it's easy to say that it's because they're too sensitive or can't take a joke. It's a form of gaslighting, where they try to make the target doubt their own feelings. This may show up in narcissistic relationships with an "energy vampire," who knocks down their partner in private and undermines their sense of self-worth, but is sweet and attentive when others are around to witness it. (The energy vampire sometimes doesn't show up until the marriage deal is sealed and the person feels safe to show who they really are.)

Arrogance can also show up as a Rebel, who behaves in a manner that justifies the rejection they feel will come to them anyway. This person will deliberately provoke others to reject them by pushing their buttons or behaving in a way that's hurtful or unacceptable. Then, when that person finally gets angry enough and walks away from the relationship, the Arrogant person can turn the blame on the other person, rather than taking responsibility for how they damaged the relationship.

## Self-Deprecation

Self-deprecation is the flip side of Arrogance – humiliation rather than humility. In Self-deprecation, you feel unworthy or lacking, but there is no attempt at bravado to hide that belief. You may submerge your personality, desires, needs and ideals in order to earn the love and approval that you feel you don't really deserve by playing weak and needy. You put yourself down in the hope that you won't threaten those from whom you want approval, while showering the other person with shallow, fawning compliments. In a way, it's a manipulation to get people to say nice things to you or to get their attention and bolster your ego.

There is a lack of personal integrity here, because you give up your own values (and sometimes your goals and dreams) to take on those of the person(s) you're trying to win over. You may be a people-pleaser. You may appear cowering or submissive, like the

“humble” Uriah Heep (a character in Dickens’ *David Copperfield*), who was not humble at all, as we define it here, but used it to exploit people.

The self-deprecating person will deflect compliments, even when they’re deserved. This is false modesty – not humility. By putting themselves down first, they avoid others criticizing them and get people to lavish further praise on them to convince them that they deserve it.

If someone communicates a need to be treated a certain way, the self-deprecating person will fall apart or apologize profusely, making the communicator feel guilty (and, often, still won’t change their behavior). Being in a relationship with someone like this can be crazy-making, because asking for what you need will only trigger a display of self-pity – which is a manipulation to deter you from asking for what you need if the self-deprecating person really doesn’t want to give it to you.



As mentioned earlier, these positions are not solid. It is most likely that you will see yourself floating in and out of these aspects, depending on how much you’ve strengthened your confidence and if a new situation challenges you in new ways. The goal, of course, is to guide yourself back to Confidence/Humility when you see yourself in Arrogance or Self-Deprecation.

Keep in mind that both Confidence (self-esteem) and Arrogance (pseudo-self-esteem) can be built from real-world evidence. The difference is the attitude with which the evidence is approached. A Confident person will acknowledge themselves for their success (a function of a healthy ego). An Arrogant person will use it as proof that they’re better than others (a manifestation of a negative or unhealthy ego).

## Contrasting Qualities and Behaviors Associated with Each Aspect

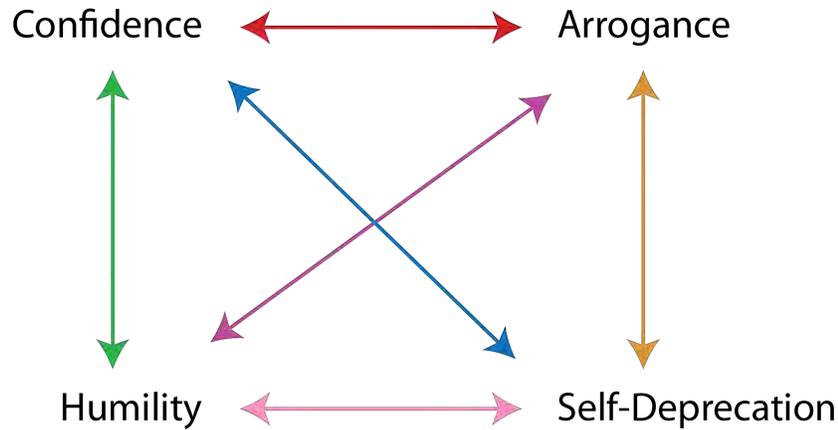
The combination of Confidence/Humility or Arrogance/Self-Deprecation will manifest other qualities or behaviors. Following are some examples (in no particular order) that may be associated with each combination, although in actuality, there will be some blurring or crossover.

Confidence/Humility	Arrogance/Self-Deprecation
Self-respect	Underlying lack of self-respect, perhaps feeling self-disgust or shame
Integrity, live by your principles as much as possible	Dishonest or hurtful, either defensively or with deliberate intent
Certainty with flexibility	Defensiveness with rigidity
Strength/courage	Fear (can show up as timidity, aggressiveness or rebelliousness)
See all people and things as having inherent worth	See yourself as better than others
Courage of your convictions	Unsure, looking for outside approval, waffle on issues or go with the side that will most benefit you
Feel good about yourself	Feel superior to others, but underneath, don't really like yourself or feel you're lacking in some way
Handle challenges with self-assurance and courage	Experience struggle and doubt when challenged, terrified to fail and be judged
Accept responsibility	Blame others
Willing to take risks	Want guarantees
Make informed choices	Afraid to choose, or impulsive
Can see another's point of view	Must be right at all costs
Playful in a kind way	Humorless or serious, or make hurtful jokes at another's expense
Stand up for yourself in an assertive way	Stand up for yourself in an aggressive way, or let people walk all over you and stuff the anger

<b>Confidence/Humility</b>	<b>Arrogance/Self-Deprecation</b>
Express emotions appropriately	Express emotions inappropriately or not at all
Non-competitive, cooperative, playfully competitive	Competitive, must win, a sore loser
Can hear and evaluate criticism, even when it hurts	Can't take criticism without getting defensive or angry
Self-assured	Self-centered, self-absorbed
Enjoy outside validation, but have an intrinsic sense of self-worth	Need constant validation from outside yourself
Generous with yourself and others	Entitled, want and expect the best for yourself
Have empathy for others and help if you can	See everything through the filter of your own needs, feel others should just "suck it up," bully those you perceive as weak or treat them with contempt
Kind, compassionate, empathetic	Judgmental, unkind, even cruel
Accept your imperfections and improve what you can	See yourself as perfect; if others criticize you, they're wrong, it's their problem
Able to accept compliments graciously	Either puff yourself up or deflect/deny compliments
Have a sense of power within yourself	Need to have power over others to feel powerful yourself

## Compare and Contrast

These four aspects have similarities and differences when compared to each other.



Let's look at each pair:

### Confidence – Arrogance

**ALIKE:** Both have an outward appearance of self-assurance. There is a sense of strength or force, and the person feels powerful.

**DIFFERENT:** Confidence is based on true self-assurance; Arrogance is based on a lack of it. Confidence comes with self-esteem, while Arrogance provides a kind of pseudo-self-esteem, not the real thing. Confidence stands on its own (non-competitive); Arrogance rests on being better than someone else (competitive).

### Confidence – Humility

**ALIKE:** Both are based on acknowledging your own value, generally accompanied by a sense of inner peace. They complement each other. They exist interdependently; one follows the other. Both avoid "better/worse than."

**DIFFERENT:** Confidence acknowledges your value as an individual; Humility acknowledges your value as a human being, equal to all. They are opposite sides of the same coin. Confidence without Humility can become Arrogance.

## Confidence – Self-Deprecation

ALIKE: Not!

DIFFERENT: These two can't really co-exist. Self-deprecation undermines Confidence; Confidence dissolves Self-deprecation. If you are confident, you will see and acknowledge your flaws and mistakes, but not beat yourself up or diminish yourself for them. When you're truly confident, you don't need to elicit praise from others by putting yourself down.

## Arrogance – Self-Deprecation

ALIKE: These co-exist, although one or the other may be displayed more dominantly. Both are based on fear or feeling that one does not deserve. They're accompanied by low self-esteem. Arrogance includes an underlying element of Self-deprecation, a fear that you have to convince people of your worth, because you don't believe it yourself.

DIFFERENT: Arrogance is outwardly aggressive; Self-deprecation is inwardly aggressive, taking it out on oneself. One puts on a show of "better than," the other "less than." One seeks approval by building oneself up, the other by sinking into self-pity, whether actual or feigned.

"It's funny how thinking 'I'm better than' can slip into 'I'm worthless' in mere seconds." – Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*

## Arrogance – Humility

ALIKE: They're not.

DIFFERENT: These two also don't co-exist. When you're feeling arrogant, humility is threatening. When you connect with your Humility, you most likely won't slide into Arrogance.

## Humility – Self-Deprecation

ALIKE: Both acknowledge something greater than (or superior to) themselves.

DIFFERENT: Humility acknowledges that you are as valuable as anyone else. Self-deprecation diminishes who you are, often in the service of getting validation from others to shore up your insecurity about your value.

## How to Apply This

The information discussed in this booklet is meant as more than an intellectual exercise. It has practical value as well. I developed the grid by observing my own behavior, both external and internal. By noticing that I was in Arrogance or Self-deprecation, I became better able to make myself aware of my own fear or lack of confidence and move into Confidence (or at least Humility) by beginning to affirm even my small successes, as well as other people's, and to be gentle with myself when I fell short.

Information is interesting, but I like to make things useful. Here are some ideas of how to apply this work.

- The first step is becoming aware of what you're feeling and how you're acting. When you're not aware, you act unconsciously. Once you become conscious of your thoughts and feelings, you can make conscious choices about your behavior.
- When you catch yourself in Arrogance/Self-Deprecation, stop. Just stop. Breathe. Go off by yourself if you can. See how you can shift into Confidence/Humility internally and choose how you want to act as a result of that shift.
- Look at the situation with "compassionate awareness." Judging or beating yourself up is a waste of energy and not productive. Look at how you might be feeling scared or threatened. Again, see what internal shift you need to make, perhaps using affirmations to bolster your confidence or getting support from a trusted friend.
- Use the chart on page 6 and notice any behavior patterns you're experiencing. Look at the underlying intention of your behavior. Be honest with yourself. How are you trying to diminish someone else to make yourself seem better, or to solicit praise by putting yourself down?
- Look at: What's a more constructive way of feeling better about yourself? For example, if you feel someone is more accomplished than you, what can you do to improve your skills? What do you need to work through to finally write that book, improve your relationships, pursue your passion? What support do you need? How can you acknowledge someone else's success without feeling diminished yourself?
- If you've hurt someone, find the courage to apologize, to take responsibility for your actions. This will move you into Humility – a positive step toward Confidence.

As you practice this, you'll get better at staying in Confidence/Humility. It won't be perfect. You'll have bad days. There will be things that trigger your insecurities. Become aware of what those triggers are. I know that when I'm exhausted, my "demons" have a field day with my confidence. I know enough now not to take it seriously and, instead, to nurture myself and give myself the care and rest I need. If I need to make any decisions, I put them off until I feel grounded again.

Here's an example of how I've applied this:

Today, I behaved in a way that I regretted. It was not intentional, but I felt like I hurt some people's feelings. Here are the ways I could have approached this:

*Self-Deprecation:* I'm such an idiot. I should have done better. They must think I'm incompetent. I blew my reputation. They'll never forgive me.

*Arrogance:* It wasn't my fault. It was a bad situation, and I couldn't help but mess up. I was under pressure. It was a no-win situation. If they hadn't put me in an uncomfortable position, I would have done better. It wasn't my fault.

*Humility:* Yes, I messed up. I handled the situation badly and people were upset. It wasn't intentional. I'm human, I'm not perfect. I forgive myself.

*Confidence:* I can do better next time. I will apologize and use this as a learning experience. Next time something like this happens, I'll be more aware and handle it better.

In this situation, I felt like I wasn't performing up to my standard, and I was disappointed in myself. I felt overwhelmed in the moment and didn't handle the situation very skillfully. I was trying to please everyone, which wasn't possible. People in the group seemed hurt and disappointed, and I felt like I let them down. I doubted my competence.

Since I like to walk my talk, you might guess which road I took. I treated myself with compassion and accepted that perfection is an impossible standard. I did apologize the next day and got positive feedback that people weren't as upset as I thought they were. Phew!

Here's another example. This happened many years ago and I only remembered it because I had written it in a draft of this booklet.

I witnessed an interesting demonstration of true self-confidence on my part yesterday. In my ballet class, a student returning from Japan brought for the class a box of rice crackers of different types. Each cracker was wrapped in a translucent paper with a different color design, and we were trying to discern which flavor was which.

As I was standing over the box with another woman in the class, she turned to me, looked intently into my eyes, and suggested that I try a cracker and if it was okay, then she would try it. There was a definite malevolence or manipulation beneath her request. My initial emotional reaction was to say something nasty to her. Instead, I stopped and thought about how I could handle this without escalating into a conflict.

Since I knew that tasting the crackers would not cause me any harm, and knowing that her manipulation could not hurt me either unless I allowed it to, I decided to make light of it and joked about being her "royal taster." I tried one cracker and then passed it on to her to finish.

For me, the incident was over, although for the rest of the class, I noticed a look of tentativeness or even guilt in the other woman's eyes. Why she attempted this mean manipulation is something that she needs to deal with for herself, but because I was able to move myself into Self-confidence/Humility at the time of the encounter, I was able to prevent it from escalating into hurtfulness or even a fight by taking offense. Self-confidence allowed me to see clearly that this was her issue and not take it as my own.



One other note...

Sometimes I have a success and feel very good about myself. Then I notice that I'm feeling "better than" – an indication of Arrogance. So, I add a teaspoon of Humility – maybe by acknowledging others who contributed to my success – and that moves me back into Confidence.

## About Building Confidence and Self-Esteem

There are a lot of theories around building self-esteem. In exploring my own experience, I've found that there are two things that have helped build my self-esteem and, along with that, my self-confidence.

### Living True to Your Values and Principles

We all have values and principles, but living them is another matter. When living true to your values means sacrificing something, losing income or security, or hurting someone, it's harder. I'm not saying you always have to make that sacrifice, take that loss or hurt someone, but sometimes you have to, to maintain your own integrity.

I've had to give up income when doing the job went against the grain for me or jeopardized my health or well-being.

I've had to walk away from long-time relationships when that person became hurtful and it was violating my standard of being treated with kindness and respect.

I've had to hurt or disappoint someone when doing what they wanted me to do was harmful to my well-being.

It was hard to make these choices, and there was a sense of sadness or loss, but once I'd processed those feelings, I felt so much better about myself. My integrity and principles were intact. And very often, even though it may hurt the other person, it's beneficial to them and their own growth in the long run.

Sacrificing your values and principles may be easier in the short-term – it's easier to go along and not rock the boat – but it takes a toll on your self-esteem.

## Facing Your Fears

The other way I've found to build my confidence and self-esteem is to face my fears. When I was graduating sixth grade, we got autograph books. In the front, there was a space for your motto. I remember discussing this with my best friend, Janet. We decided on: "Learn to conquer your fear." I was barely 12 years old, but that turned out to be my motto for life.

Fears are difficult and scary. But when you learn to walk into the fear, rather than avoiding it, you learn to trust yourself to be there for yourself. And the more you do it, the less scary it becomes.

When I was in my mid-30s, I volunteered to produce a show featuring residents from the building I live in. I had no idea what I was doing and felt I was in way over my head. I remember one day sobbing in the kitchen because I was so scared of some of the tasks I needed to do and the criticism I might get if I didn't do it well. But I got through it and the show was pretty successful.

Several years later, a friend and I started a publishing company. Once the initial excitement wore off, I was again terrified. But over time, I learned that I could handle it, and the outcome was never as bad as I feared it would be. (They say that 99% of the things you worry about never happen, and I believe that's true.) Now, when something comes up that scares me, I trust myself to be able to work through it.

Try these approaches on for size and see if they fit for you!

## In Closing ...

I hope you've found my musings helpful. As I mentioned in the introduction, they're my thoughts, not scientifically researched. They work for me. See if they work for you!

## About Sharon

Sharon Good, BCC, ACC, CLC, is a Certified Life Coach and the president of Good Life Coaching.

Sharon has been building her confidence through many years and several careers. As a shy teenager who longed to be an actor, she faced her fears every day and at every audition. She eventually had a successful career in musical and children's theatre.

Sharon's next challenge was co-founding Excalibur Publishing with Maria Ciaccia. After an exciting beginning, the reality of the responsibility set in and she lived in fear with each new challenge. By facing the challenges, Sharon and Maria built their confidence as authors and publishers and ultimately were proud of the books that they brought to the public.

Sharon then moved into a career as a Life Coach and teacher. Once again starting from scratch, she evolved into a masterful Coach and trainer of Life Coaches. She has published several books through her new company, Good Life Press.

Sharon is waiting to see what her next adventure will be ...

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