



MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

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Everyone wants to feel confident, look confident, inspire confidence in others. When you look in the mirror, are you seeing a confident person looking back? For many lawyers who read this, particularly those at the beginning of their career, the person who looks back may have relatively little confidence.

For many, this is a secret kept deeply buried. A shameful secret. Because we believe that we must be confident in order to succeed, or must succeed in order to be confident. The good news is that confidence may come naturally to some, but it is something which can be developed over time for the rest of us.

How does one go from a position of low or no confidence to one which exudes confidence? Let's first acknowledge that this isn't an overnight process. It is a journey which requires dedication and attention to complete. Throughout the journey, with little effort, confidence will grow in many areas. For example, a trial attorney usually develops confidence in his or her professional skills after completing a number of trials. Or, a young rainmaker eventually becomes a confident polished and accomplished public speaker after doing a number of less-than-stellar presentations.

"If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right." — Henry Ford

Clearly, self confidence must be built for some. There's nothing wrong with you if you're someone who needs to do so. Time and experience certainly help. But if you want to put your progress on the fast track — change the face which looks back at you and others in the mirror — there are a number of steps you can take proactively. And that's where the dedication and attention come into play.

If you do an internet search for "build self confidence" you will uncover a lot of resources. Most are for commercial consumption. Some of those products and services might be useful for you. Perhaps listening to some motivational tapes, or hiring a coach, might be just the boost you need. Or maybe one of the following steps, which are the assembled wisdom from dozens of articles found, will get you to your desired journey's destination.

Perfection is not required. In past articles and at seminar presentations, I have frequently referred to the high need for perfection, and the high fear of failure, common to attorneys. These personality traits often lead to procrastination, insecurity and self-doubt, and decision paralysis. You have to accept the reality that no one is really perfect. No one can avoid making an occasional mistake or failing at something, unless they avoid ever making a decision or choice, or taking action. The simple fact is that sometimes there is no perfect answer or solution.

We all have insecurities. Even the most confident people have insecurities. The difference is that a confident person acknowledges that there will be bumps in the road, and just keeps on keeping on, as the song goes. They don't let those insecurities or past failures prevent them from doing what needs to be done.

“Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” — Henry Ford

Be positive, be happy, or fake it! Remember those pep squad people in school who were always so disgustingly positive, cheerful, and bubbling with energy? Aim for that in a genuine way. But remember that even if it's not genuine, speaking and acting positively, and wearing a smile, will usually evoke this response in others. Acting confident might actually make you feel that way. At the least, appearing that way to others will get you more positive feedback and cooperation.

Purposely look for a positive way to approach things, even if you don't necessarily feel so positive. Speak about your current situation, future, and progress in terms of your successes, rather than your failures. Learn from your mistakes and failures. Remember them as lessons, and they will remain a more positive aspect of your past as a result.

Avoid indulging in self-pity or wallowing in the sympathy of others over life's failures and disappointments. Instead, take an inspirational mid-western attitude by picking yourself up, dusting yourself off, and getting back in action again; a little wiser and more resilient for the experience.

Challenge yourself to grow. Don't be afraid to push yourself beyond your current abilities, or outside of your comfort zone. Now, I'm not suggesting that you commit malpractice. But just because you don't know how to do something, doesn't mean that you will necessarily commit malpractice if you take it on. If you are committed to devote the time, resources and attention to acquiring the necessary



knowledge or working with someone who does, then don't walk away for lack of courage. Rising to the challenge, or stepping outside your comfort zone, will help you achieve new skills and hone existing ones. That will increase your confidence level.

I was greeted warmly by an attorney following a recent seminar presentation. He reminded me that he had contacted me for assistance several times when he was about to start his own practice. I asked how he was doing, and he confidently and happily let me know that he was experiencing success beyond his expectations. I asked what he thought were the most significant factors which contributed to his success. He responded without hesitation that the materials I provided to him, the knowledge I shared during our conversations, and the security of knowing I was available when new issues arose, all gave him the *confidence* he needed to rise to the challenges.

Help others. If you want to feel really good about yourself, do something for someone else. Be kind and helpful to the people around you. Be charitable. Be generous of your time. Help someone in need. Be a kind ear and offer a strong shoulder. Your own problems and shortcomings will diminish by comparison. There's probably nothing more powerful in our arsenal of tools to build our self confidence than our own capacity to help others.

Be grateful for what you have. Or, as my grandmother used to say, "*It's better than a stick in the eye!*" Such old-world wisdom is simple, but powerful. Yes, we all have regrets. And often we think that whatever we have, whatever we've achieved, has fallen short of the mark. With that attitude, there can never be enough money, luck, love, recognition, or success. In short, there can never be satisfaction, inner peace, or confidence.

Try to put things into perspective. Remember that for every person "above" whom you admire or envy, there are usually two "below" who admire or envy you. So acknowledge that what you have is actually pretty good, or good enough, or just that it could be worse, and give yourself a pat on the back rather than a boot you know where.

Recognize and applaud your successes. Everyone has talents and strengths. Locate, acknowledge and embrace yours. Allow yourself to take pride in what you accomplish, no matter how small the accomplishment.



Remember that we all have that “I’m not worthy” voice inside our heads — speaking negatively at varying volume on a regular basis — creating a state of mind fraught with insecurity which strips us of our confidence. Don’t be a victim of that negative voice. Work on recognizing and increasing your talents, strengths and successes, and you will find not only more passion in your life, but also develop feelings of accomplishment which will help you build your confidence.

Learning to graciously accept compliments is yet another way to acknowledge and embrace your successes, and momentarily silence your negative voice. In reality, our tendency to deflect compliments with a display of undue modesty is often the hard work of our negative voice cloaked in disguise. Recognize the negative inner voice regardless of the manner in which it disguises its appearance, and you will gradually take away its power to make you feel bad about yourself.

Pay attention to your body and health. Try to exercise and eat healthy. Get sufficient amount of sleep. Get regular checkups. Remember that exercise will raise your endorphins, and make you feel happier and healthier. Being in a state of good health will also make you feel happier. It will provide you with greater stamina to face life’s daily challenges. When the image which looks back at you and others from the mirror is fit and healthy, it will boost your confidence, and inspire confidence in others.

Some people mistake volume for happiness or confidence. Being loud doesn’t equate to being confident. In fact, many people over-compensate for their insecurities by boisterously blustering and bluffing. Truly confident people are most often silently or quietly exuding confidence.

Last week I had a hot line call from a newly minted attorney. He felt betrayed; that his entire journey through law school and the passing of the bar was a gross misrepresentation. Despite good grades and a summer internship at a decent firm, he has received no job offers. When he mentioned to one of his law school professors, and one of the partners at the firm at which he clerked, that he was going to attempt to open his own practice, both gave him extremely negative feedback. Both advised that he didn’t know enough, and was not yet skilled enough to practice law without committing malpractice.

They effectively destroyed his self-confidence. Maybe they didn’t mean to and were only trying to be helpful in offering their opinions. But the result spoke for itself. When he contacted me he was paralyzed with insecurity and fear. He



wanted my guidance in determining what other careers might be suitable based on his education.

No, I didn't send him off to McDonalds with instructions to say, "Do you want a Will with that burger?" Although certainly that was about what he felt qualified to do. Instead I talked about the many ways and available resources he could utilize to get the support he needed as he began practicing law. I provided him with a wealth of practical information on how to set up his practice and attract clients.

Hopefully, by providing him with a kind ear, a strong shoulder, and leading him to lots of support, he will regain his confidence. And that's going to be the essential ingredient in developing a model for success. I can only hope that a few years from now, when he looks in the mirror, he and others will see a confident and happy young man looking back.

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