

THE POWER OF REAL CONFIDENCE

LEARN HOW TO LEAD TO
YOUR FULL POTENTIAL

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PART I

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Do you ever wonder what it is about some people that makes them so confident? We know confidence when we see it, don't we? Or we think we do. Confident people seem completely comfortable in their own skin, to know who they are, and to believe in themselves and their ability to be successful. They take action and don't seem to let anything hold them back.

No single definition exists for what confidence is, yet it is so important in our lives – and, more specifically, so important in our leadership.

Like confidence, no one-size-fits-all definition exists for leadership. And for that I am grateful! Imagine if we were all trying to lead with the same style, characteristics and traits. We would all be pretty boring and uninspiring (the opposite of what being a leader is). We do, however, have a fairly commonly accepted set of competencies and capabilities that are important for leadership – things like influence, accountability, strategic thinking, integrity, vision, decision-making and relationship management. Yet, doing any one of these things takes confidence.

Whichever way you look at it, confidence is a critical foundation for leadership. In fact, you could say it is the ultimate leadership skill.

The ability to lead with confidence, therefore, is not a 'nice to have'; it is a 'must have'. Confidence separates average leaders from great leaders and, without it, you will never maximise your own leadership potential.

In this part of the book, I help you understand why confidence plays such an important role in your leadership potential.

CHAPTER 1

MAXIMISE YOUR LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

As far as the American public was concerned, the 1970 Apollo 13 mission was just another routine space flight. That was until we heard the words, ‘Houston, we have a problem’ (well, in the movie anyway).

I love the true story the movie was based on, which revolves around NASA Flight Director Gene Kranz (portrayed by Ed Harris). Here was a leader who wouldn’t submit to defeat – even when it was staring him in the face – and who wouldn’t let his team accept defeat either.

Kranz expertly marshalled his resources with his instruction to ‘work the problem’, enabling everyone to play their role in resolving the crisis. For every seemingly impossible situation, his response was simple – find a way to make it work.

Of course, the movie highlighted just how infectious his confidence was! ‘We’ve never lost an American in space and we sure as hell ain’t gonna lose one on my watch,’ he tells his assembled flight team. ‘Failure is not an option!’

Would this have been so inspiring (and effective) if Kranz wasn’t able to lead with confidence? If he wasn’t able to inspire his team to believe that they could make the impossible happen?

Saving the Apollo 13 mission took a massive team effort – from the grounded pilot brought into the simulator to find a successful re-entry approach, to the NASA staff given a box of everything in the shuttle and instructed to use it to make a ‘square peg fit a round hole’.

In today’s ever-changing business landscape, we desperately need leaders like Gene Kranz – leaders who can ... well ... lead, and who lead with confidence. Because exercising leadership like this is so much more than having the competence to get the job done. You must have the confidence to make an impact beyond your wildest dreams.

Competence versus confidence

Francisco Dao is a speaker on organisational performance and strategy, and he sees self-confidence as the fundamental basis from which leadership grows. As he puts it in his ‘Without confidence, there is no leadership’ *Inc.* article, ‘Trying to teach leadership without first building confidence is like building a house on a foundation of sand. It may have a nice coat of paint, but it is ultimately shaky at best.’

A strong foundation of confidence is needed because leadership is seldom easy. Decisions must be made under time pressure and with many shades of grey. You have to inspire your team through a world of complexity and uncertainty, unite them, and give them drive and great purpose. Without confidence, how long do you think you will last? This is especially the case in today's disruptive climate.

Over the course of my career, I have worked with some outstanding leaders. (And some leaders who were not so outstanding, I have to say!) Despite vast differences in styles and personalities, the ones I would say were great leaders were able to strike an important balance between competence and confidence.

Confidence separates average leaders from great leaders. If you're competent in your job, you can tick all the boxes and get the job done. You have the ability required for your role, the right level of skills, the right level of knowledge and the right capacity. However, being competent in your job is no longer enough if you are striving to be a great leader. You must be able to cultivate a culture of confidence in your team and everyone around you so they too believe they can do whatever it is you want them to do. That means you must first have confidence in yourself and your leadership ability. You need to lead with confidence, and so have the ability to inspire confidence in everyone else around you, so they too can achieve great feats.

Cultivating confidence

Cultivating confidence with others starts from the minute we walk into a room, the minute we open our mouths and speak. Often those judgments are made in less than a minute and within seconds. (In fact, a series of experiments by Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov revealed forming a first impression of a stranger takes a mere tenth of a second.)

If, based on how they show up, we believe a leader to be confident, we will assume that they are competent. If we get any sense of a lack of confidence, however, we will assume a lack of competence. This may not be fair, but that's what judgment is all about!

These judgments also have to do with people's assumptions about what a leader should look like. If you show up and seem anxious and insecure, or seem to have some self-doubt, you won't be perceived as a leader because people will think you are a liability, regardless of your actual level of competence and skill to do the job.

So, in order to cultivate confidence in other people, you must first believe and have confidence in your own ability to weather the storms, to perform well under pressure, to learn from mistakes and bounce back, to create and innovate, and to keep raising the bar and driving higher levels of performance. Setting direction, executing strategy and creating an engaging environment for employees to bring their best all takes confidence. You must have confidence and belief in your own ability before you can instill these in others.

I'm not talking about arrogance here – and there's a big difference between that and confidence. I love how psychologist and body language expert Amy Cuddy describes this difference, explaining confidence is a tool and arrogance is a weapon. Arrogance, or overconfidence, has caused the downfall of many a leader and I'm sure you can think of some pretty public figures, and perhaps some not so public, where this has occurred. Overconfident leaders lack the capacity to question themselves, have little humility or vulnerability and often engage in too much risk taking – all things you want to avoid.

When I talk about real *confidence*, I'm talking about an authentic confidence that is built from the inside out – not bravado and not overconfidence. I'm talking about having the ability to be confident and to build confidence in others but to be humble and vulnerable at the same time.

Taking your leadership potential to the max

Over 100 years ago, William James, a psychologist teaching at Harvard University, wrote that the reason so many people never fulfil their potential is not because of a lack of intelligence, opportunity or resources, but because of a lack of belief, or faith, in themselves. I think this is so true.

Nothing is better than feeling confident, and having the courage to face challenges, place yourself in the path of opportunities and take risks head on. Often confidence gives you the ability to first put your hand up for that more senior leadership role and then be successful at nailing the selection

process. Without it, you may have all the competence and skills required to do the job but just never feel ready to go for it. Having confidence like this enables you to realise your potential.

Without confidence, you can give up too easily, refuse to believe an opportunity is possible and, therefore, make limiting decisions about how you lead, what you lead and whether even to lead.

Confidence helps us maximise our leadership potential.

Just think of someone who you say is confident. Chances are they're poised, hopeful and positive. They know their strengths and weaknesses. It is this that makes all the difference to the performance of your organisation.

In research work, professor of business at Harvard Business School, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, compared companies and sporting teams that had long winning streaks and long losing streaks. In the *Harvard Business Review* article 'Cultivate a culture of confidence', where she discussed some of her findings, she argued 'self-confidence, combined with confidence in one another and in the organization, motivates winners to make the extra push that can provide the margin of victory.' She explained that the lesson for leaders is to build the cornerstones of confidence and maintain a culture of confidence. Doing so will ensure that, when you are faced with the inevitable downturns in performance, you are much better placed to lead through them.

Learn to SCALE

To capture the link between confidence and your leadership potential, I developed the SCALE Leadership Confidence Model, shown in figure 1.1. This shows how you can move from building competence and capability in yourself, to inspiring confidence in others, and highlights how that relates to how you are maximising your own leadership potential. The following sections take you through each of the stages in more detail.



E	Enhancing and inspiring confidence in others	80–100%
L	Leading with confidence	60–80%
A	Accelerating performance and impact	40–60%
C	Building competence and capability	20–40%
S	Starting out	0–20%

Figure 1.1: The SCALE Leadership Confidence Model

Starting out

The first level of the model shows the first 0 to 20 per cent range of your leadership potential. Being at this level usually means you don't have a huge amount of confidence. You might be here because you've just been appointed to your first

leadership role, or you've been promoted into a more senior leadership role or even a role of greater influence. You may have taken on additional tasks because your boss or someone else encouraged you, saying you'd 'be good at it', even though you might not agree. And some people around you might be questioning if you have 'what it takes' to do the job.

When you are starting out, you are at the very beginning of working towards your leadership potential. We are all starting out at new things all the time in life, but the more you take on new roles and responsibilities, and try new ways of being and operating, the quicker you will move up the model towards gaining greater confidence.

Building competence and capability

As you move into the 20 to 40 per cent range of your leadership potential, you begin to build your competence and capability, and the impact you have is often based on your ability to complete the technical elements of the work. Whether your work is leading a team, speaking on stage or negotiating large contracts, you generally build the competency-based skills first.

Building these skills is important, and you need to have the competencies that are required for the work. Leadership competencies are observable and measurable skills and behaviours that contribute to your overall leadership and career success. Yet they alone are not enough. You must also have confidence and belief in your own ability to be able to make a bigger impact.

Thankfully, as you build these competencies, your confidence will start to grow. As you perform well in the 'doing' elements of your role, you get good feedback and start to build your belief about yourself. You then start to see your success in the role is possible.

Accelerating performance and impact

As you build both your competence and confidence, you begin to accelerate your performance and impact, moving into 40 to 60 per cent of your leadership potential.

In this stage, you're taking more risks, moving outside your comfort zone and putting your hand up to get involved beyond your scope. You're feeling much more comfortable and confident in what you are doing and how you are leading. The confidence you are building allows your competence to shine, provides you with influence and power in the right forums and means you can stop questioning your ability.

This has a flow-on effect to the impact you make to those around you, and starts to accelerate your performance.

Leading with confidence

When you start leading with confidence, you have a core belief in your ability to be successful. Once you reach this stage, you are at 60 to 80 per cent of your leadership potential.

You understand that confidence is a critical leadership skill and important to maintain. You have a strong understanding of what it takes to show up as the best version of you and how this really supports you. Your confidence also has a

‘realness’ to it, and you have an influential voice and a strong leadership presence. You also role-model this confidence to those around you and are respected for it.

You know how to celebrate your achievements in a humble manner, and accept your strengths and weaknesses in a balanced way. You listen to what others have to say and surround yourself with colleagues who will challenge and support you.

Enhancing and inspiring confidence in others

Reaching the golden 80 to 100 per cent of your leadership potential comes when you extend your confidence to those around you, and start to inspire confidence in them. Without this extension to others, real leadership has not been achieved!

Leading with confidence is the essential ingredient in enhancing and inspiring confidence in others. Confidence breeds confidence, after all.

When you are at this point in the SCALE Leadership Confidence Model, you’re maximising your own leadership potential along with the leadership potential in your teams. That means you are actively building a culture of confidence and maximising the performance of your whole business and entire organisation. Isn’t this a great place to be?

It’s only when you start leading with confidence and inspiring confidence in others that you are truly exercising great leadership.

Where are you now?

Consider where you are right now on the SCALE Leadership Confidence Model – and, more importantly, where do you want to be?



Stop and reflect

As you head into the remainder of this book, start to think about where you might be sitting on your own leadership journey. Are you just starting to build your competence and not yet feeling confident about your ability to succeed?

Or are you sitting midway on the SCALE and feel like you've hit a bit of a brick wall? Are you now looking to step up and accelerate your leadership potential?

Remember – while the principles of confidence in leadership may seem relatively simple, the building and sustaining of confidence requires real work. So even when you make it to the top of the model, you need to be able to continuously work at sustaining your confidence. You will at times find you are back to square one and back to working on the basics, especially if you leave your job, start something new or step up to exercise leadership differently (see chapter 5 for more on this).

As journalists Katty Kay and Claire Shipman wrote in *The Confidence Code*, 'Confidence is hard to define but easy to recognize. With it, you can take on the world; without it, you live stuck at the starting block of your potential.'

Chase your fear

The following comes from my interview with Kate Hughes, former Chief Risk Officer at Telstra.

When I first took on the Chief Risk Officer role, I'd never been a CRO before, and I was managing risks I was completely unfamiliar with. I didn't have a lot of market and credit risk experience and was acutely aware of how important it was to be good at this. I think you know when you don't have that confidence, and people can smell the doubt and insecurity on you.

Every night I would come home and lie on the couch and fear that I was not doing this right; that I was going to miss something really important and that I wasn't capable of doing this job. It was that total fraud moment, that imposter syndrome that we have so often. [See chapter 5 for more on the imposter syndrome.]

My husband said to me, 'Kate, there's a bit of a pattern here with you, do you know what it is?' And I said, 'I keep taking jobs that I'm not capable of doing?' He said, 'No, you keep taking jobs that you're really frightened of. So, do you think maybe that's because you want to conquer them? You're chasing it down. You're looking for it. Isn't that the very reason you get out of bed every day? Isn't that why you do it? Because you're taking on the unknown and you want to win at it. You want to build that confidence. You want to build that expertise.'

He was right. I desperately wanted to be confident in it. I knew I needed to reach for those moments that would probably strike fear in my heart because I didn't know how to do everything. Those things were motivating me the most. It was a deliberate confidence building exercise.

I remember when I first got to Telstra, I thought, *What do I know here? I know big corporations. I know risk management really well. I know compliance. I know retail businesses.* And I was ticking off all the things I was confident at and then stopping and thinking about what I didn't know.

I thought, *I don't really know how the network works. I didn't really know how all of the technical stuff works, which is the key to the decisions we have to make.* I remember sitting down and asking the Head of Networks at the time to take me through everything from the day telephones first existed to today. It took him five hours to go through it but I remember walking out thinking, *Good! One more. Got that one. Know it. Confident.*

So recognise what you don't know and then actively chase it down.



Check your confidence

1. How would you rate your current level of competence as a leader?
2. How confident are you feeling about how you are exercising leadership right now?
3. Where do you currently see yourself on the SCALE Leadership Confidence Model?
4. Where would you like to be?

Now you have a better understanding of why it's important to increase your confidence, not just your competence, in order to truly maximise your leadership potential, it's time to get started on the nitty-gritty and look at how you do that. This is the focus of part II, where we explore the Real Confidence Model.