

# The Confident Mind

Tags: [#confidence](#)

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## Dialogue

Misconception: Once you become confident, you'll stay that way forever.

Confidence is fragile.

Reference interview where he talks about working with high achievers.

Confidence has relatively little to do with what actually happens to you, and pretty much everything to do with how you think about what happens to you.

That distinction.

Protecting our confidence is really critical.

## Safeguard: The Constructive Attitude Lockdown

1. Temporary (it's me - internal)

Just that one time.

2. Limited (permanent)

- It doesn't affect everything else.

3. Non-representative (pervasive)

- West Point lacrosse coach

## Safeguard: How to Win the Battle With Your Own Negative Thinking

It often seems that if I had a dollar for every time a client asked me: "Doc, how do I stop all my negative thoughts?" I could happily retire on my own Caribbean island. No single question has been put to me more

often, and no single question gets asked with more passion and more urgency.

1. Acknowledge it
2. Silence it
3. Replace it (getting in the last word)

Misconception: if you're truly confident you won't have any negative self-talk."

Misconception: you're going to have to do this over and over again -- it's like whac-a-mole

## Safeguard: The Shooter's Mentality

Basketball example

## What have you changed your mind on?

## Reserve

Fall in love with your butterflies.

ESPN (Effort, Success, Progress, Next):

- Look for an episode of quality effort.
- Look for something you got right.
- Look for progress towards your goals.
- Look for what's next.

## Quotes

*Highlight [157]:* Think of each and every mistake, error, and setback as temporary. Yes, it happened, and it may even have been costly, but it's important to treat it like it only happened that one time. Thinking this way about your mistakes and imperfections prevents you from sinking into the "here I go again" trap of worry and self-doubt. If you allow yourself to think that a mistake or imperfection, once it occurs, is going to lead to more of the same, then you've opened up your mental bank account to a sneaky criminal. Instead, tie that criminal down by telling yourself "It was just that one time, and now I have a clean slate going forward."

*Highlight [159]:* Think of each and every mistake, error, and setback as limited. Yes, it happened and, yes, it may have produced some uncomfortable feelings, but it's important to treat it like it only happened "in that one place." Thinking this way about your mistakes and imperfections prevents you from sinking into the trap of thinking "this whole day is going down the drain" or "now my whole game is in trouble." The golfer

who hits one of his first drives into the trees instead of onto the fairway had better keep that poor shot in its proper place instead of generalizing from that drive that now his irons, wedges, and putts, all those other parts of his game, are now in trouble. Thinking, It was just that one drive and the rest of my game is fine is a much more helpful and perfectly reasonable alternative. The soldier in basic training who struggles with getting her gas mask on right and then has some bad moments during her five minutes in the tear gas chamber had better keep that failure in its proper place by thinking, Okay, I messed that up, but I'm keeping up with the pace during the morning runs, I'm doing well on the firing range, and I can fix those straps on the mask so it'll go on faster next time. If you allow yourself to think that a mistake or imperfection, once it occurs in one specific situation, is going to affect other situations, then you've opened up your mental bank account to another insidious criminal. Arrest that particular criminal by telling yourself, It happened in just that one place, and everything else is okay. When you treat your mistakes and imperfections as limited in scope, you acknowledge them and then cordon them off, leaving them locked down in the single place where they occurred.

*Highlight [160]:* Think of your various setbacks and imperfect moments as nonrepresentative of yourself. Once again, acknowledge that those moments happened, and acknowledge whatever damage or consequences resulted, but then choose to see those moments as inaccurate reflections of who you are and what you are capable of. Where treating your mistakes as temporary protects you from the "here I go again" trap, and treating your mistakes as limited protects you from the "my whole day is going down the drain" trap, treating your mistakes as nonrepresentative protects you from the "maybe I'm not good enough" trap, that swamp of unrestrained self-criticism that is always waiting to engulf us.

*Highlight [161]:* I witnessed a great example of this constructive response to a series of mistakes some years ago during an early season practice of the West Point men's lacrosse team. Head Coach Joe Alberici had become understandably unhappy with the team's execution of a full field passing drill that afternoon; too many balls were being dropped way too often. So he blew his coach's whistle and stopped the drill. Then, instead of berating the players for the poor quality of their execution, he stepped to the middle of the practice field and shouted "We're better than this! I'm not sure what's going on, but I'm sure this isn't us." That statement, "This isn't us!" rationalized the team's failure to execute by externalizing it—pushing it away from the team's collective confidence by proclaiming that the dropped passes were not representative of the team's ability. Coach A then took his message a step further by walking over to one of the dropped balls, scooping it up in his hand, and announcing to the team "It's gotta be this ball!" whereupon he took the lacrosse stick from the nearest player, placed the offending ball in the stick, and launched the ball high into the stadium's cheap seats. "Now let's get it right!" he shouted, returning the stick to the player. The drill resumed and the team resumed its characteristic passing efficiency.

*Highlight [165]:* While you may never experience the specific types of hardship and challenge faced by new cadets at Beast Barracks or during a plebe year at West Point,

you may be tempted to explain to yourself the inevitable bad events that occur in your life by saying “It’s me” (internal), “it’s going to last forever” (permanent), and “it’s going to undermine everything I do” (pervasive). Doing so puts you at a greater risk of not making it through your next trial because it destroys your confidence. But no matter what your tendency is right now, you are not doomed to a lifetime of pessimism. You can change the way you look at bad events and protect your mental bank account by treating those inevitable bad events as temporary (“it’s just this one time”), limited (“it’s just in this one place”), and nonrepresentative (“that’s not the truth about me”).

*Highlight [165]:* It often seems that if I had a dollar for every time a client asked me: “Doc, how do I stop all my negative thoughts?” I could happily retire on my own Caribbean island. No single question has been put to me more often, and no single question gets asked with more passion and more urgency.

*Highlight [167]:* Step One: Acknowledge It As much as we’d all prefer not to deal with the way our own mind seems to attack itself (“I’m often my own worst enemy, Doc!”), the first step in defeating these internal enemies is to notice them the moment they arrive. Common sense tells us that you can’t win a fight that you don’t know you’re in, so if you hope to defeat any internal enemy of doubt and fear, you must first acknowledge that enemy’s presence. While some of my clients and trainees know exactly where and when their internal negativity tends to kick in (e.g., “the minute I walk in the locker room,” “as soon as I miss two in a row on any shooting drill,” “as soon as so-and-so enters my office”), others find the enemy more diffuse and elusive. Whatever the case is for you, the first rule is keep your internal radar up and alert so you detect the arrival of any negative thought quickly. Once you notice that voice chiming in, acknowledge its presence and bring it out of the background. For most of us, the voice of negativity prefers to hide in the shadows and pester us from a distance, but you can bring it out into the open by saying Okay, I hear you. Just doing that puts you in charge of the encounter; you’re not just a victim listening to that voice as it talks, but now you are on the attack talking back to it.

*Highlight [169]:* My late friend Ken Ravizza taught his students to imagine a toilet being flushed, and he would even bring a tiny palm-size toilet toy, complete with lever and flushing noise, into the dugout of Major League Baseball teams so that any player could readily “flush” the memory of a bad at bat or an error in the field from his mind. Use whatever picture, symbol, or action works for you to communicate the end, the departure, or the destruction of that negative thought. That trigger, whatever it is, establishes a clean break from the unproductive, disabling thought and clears the way for more effective thinking. Continuing with our triathlete example, this silencing step is dirt simple. You emphatically scream STOP! to yourself to take total command of your mind and the moment.

*Highlight [170]:* The worrisome thought of the struggling math student, I’ll never understand this stuff, can be stopped and replaced immediately with I’ve learned new formulas before and I can do it again. The voice of doubt experienced by the soccer

player who has misplayed her last two touches on the ball (What's wrong with me today?) can be replaced with I'm okay. Just get after the next one. With practice, each and every attack on your confidence that your mind unfortunately produces (yes, we are indeed our own worst enemies at times), can be acknowledged, silenced, and replaced. Even the ones that involve your own physical safety and survival.

*Highlight [176]:* The first is the widespread misconception that "if you're truly confident you won't have any negative self-talk." We've been led to believe that confident and successful people, the champions like LeBron James or Michael Phelps, are magically endowed with a bulletproof mind that is simply immune to negative thinking, that they have permanently silenced their voices of fear and insecurity. By contrast, all the rest of us who are striving for success in our own respective fields readily admit that we have plenty of negative self-talk and because we have it, we conclude that we can't be as confident as those champions always seem to be. This is nonsense. Those "champions," in fact, have plenty of their own negative self-talk, and it often sounds off at the worst possible moments.

*Highlight [177]:* A second factor to understand about Getting in the Last Word is the unfortunate fact that you will have to do it over and over again, and continue doing it over and over again, until you retire from your profession, sport, or field of study. Just like the old arcade game Whac-A-Mole, those voices out to rob your confidence bank account are going to pop up again and again no matter how many times you smack them down. In this way, winning your First Victory of confidence is different from winning a decisive battle that ends the war once and for all (like the surrenders of Germany and Japan to end World War II). Unlike those external enemies in conventional warfare, the internal enemies of doubt, fear, and insecurity can never be ultimately defeated; they are just aspects of the human condition that no one ultimately escapes from. The lie that has been pushed to us through films, TV, and other media is that once some fairy godmother or wise mentor shares with us a secret to success, all our fears and insecurities vanish, letting us live happily ever after. This is a lie. Don't buy into it.

*Highlight [179]:* A final factor that can affect Getting in the Last Word is just how sneaky that enemy of your confidence can be. It seems to know exactly which single sport skill, professional competency, or personal relationship skill you are most insecure about, and it attacks you right there, where it's bound to hurt the most. When you see a coworker or teammate (or worse yet, a competitor) who seems to effortlessly execute that one skill or task that always seems to elude you, that enemy of your confidence will pick right up on it and attack you. The competitive swimmer who has been working hard on his flip turns can watch a rival power through a practice turn and be attacked by I wish I could do it that well. The graduate student who has never excelled in math is likely to be attacked by The stats midterm is gonna be killer. Just like the previous two factors, this one is just a part of being human. We are all intensely aware and rather sensitive about the personal shortcomings that influence our performance. But we can choose to recognize these shortcomings, get to work improving them, and while we are working on them, refuse to listen to the voice that suggests they are going to prevent us from succeeding.

*Highlight [184]:* Hearing this story the graduate students immediately asked Anderson what made him think he could make that last shot, given how poorly he had been doing up to that point in the game. Anderson replied that he had been a 50 percent shooter from the floor throughout his career, so in his mind after missing a couple of shots, he figured that his odds of making the next shots were better than 50 percent. That comment raised the eyebrows of the students, all of whom were studying statistics and research methodology. Anderson's thinking went against everything they were learning about the logic behind the science of probability. But Anderson continued. "After missing four or five in a row, I figured my odds were way better than 50 percent, and by the end of the game, after missing I don't know how many, I figured it just had to go in." Paradoxically, Anderson became more confident with each missed shot.