

# A Prescription for Self-Confidence

By Wendyl K. Leslie

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Wendyl K. Leslie  
webmaster@servetolead.net

Serve To Lead Leadership Concepts <http://www.servetolead.net>

It is believed that the most common failing of human beings is a lack of self-confidence. We have a tendency to remember our failures and forget our successes. To become healthier and get rid of self-doubt, we have to turn this around.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz, in his book "Psycho-Cybernetics, wrote that "Confidence is built upon an experience of success. When we first begin any undertaking, we are likely to have little confidence, because we have not learned from experience that we can succeed. This is true of learning to ride a bicycle, speak in public or perform surgery. It is literally true that success breeds success. Even a small success can be used as a stepping-stone to a greater one . . .

"[We need] to form the habit of remembering past successes, and forgetting failures. This is the way both an electronic computer and the human brain are supposed to operate. Practice improves skill and success in basketball, golf, horseshoe pitching or salesmanship, not because 'repetition' has any value in itself. If it did, we would 'learn' our errors instead of our 'hits.' A person learning to pitch horseshoes., for example, will miss the stake many more times than he will hit it. If mere repetition were the answer to improved skill, his practice should make him more expert at missing, since that's what he has practiced most. However, although he misses may outnumber hits 10 to 1, through practice, his misses gradually diminish and his hits come more and more frequently. This is because the computer in his brain remembers and reinforces his successful attempts and forgets the misses.

"This is the way that both an electronic computer and our own success mechanisms learn to succeed.

"Yet, what do most of us do? We destroy our self-confidence by remembering past failures and forgetting all about past successes. We not only remember failures; we impress them on our minds with emotion. We condemn ourselves. We flay ourselves with shame and remorse (both of which are highly egotistical, self-centered emotions). And self-confidence disappears."

Dr. Maltz went on to write: "[So the prescription is to] use errors and mistakes as a way to learning--then dismiss them from your mind. Deliberately remember and picture to yourself past successes. Everyone has succeeded sometime at something. Especially when beginning a new task, call up the feelings you experienced in some past success, however small it might have been.

"Dr. Winfred Overholser, superintendent of St. Elizabeth's Hospital has said that recalling brave moments is a very sound way to restore belief in yourself, that too many people are prone to let one or two failures blot out all good memories. If we will systematically relive our brave moments in memory, he says, we will be surprised to see we had more courage than we thought. Dr Overholser recommends the practice of vividly remembering our past successes and brave moments as an invaluable aid whenever self-confidence is shaken."

So there you are: the prescription for getting rid of feelings of self-doubt, the lack of self-confidence. Forget your mistakes, just as you should forget the bad shots you made on the golf course, and remember your successes. This is the normal, the healthy way to live positively and effectively.

A person who lacks confidence in himself is a person who has never really tested his powers. A test, to be valid, must include a whole lot more than one or two tries.

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Recently nominated for the 53rd edition of The Marquis' Who's Who in America, Wendyl is also the author of Serve to Lead: Mastering the Leadership Style of Jesus. Wendyl invites you to visit his website and subscribe to his weekly journal at: <http://www.servetolead.net>

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