The Small Wins That Change How I See Myself

CONFIDENCE & SELF-EFFICACY

Building confidence through evidence of personal progress

If you tend to discount progress, hold yourself to demanding standards or believe small steps don't count, it is easy to overlook what you have actually done. Rather than repeating positive statements, this form helps you build a more balanced picture of your capabilities from your own experience.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What evidence am I overlooking that I am capable of moving forward?

THE CAIRN

One stone is easy to overlook.

Walkers stack small stones into cairns to mark the way. Over a week, small wins can do the same: each one modest, together a marker you can see and return to.



evidence, stacked one day at a time

01 Why small wins matter

what the research suggests

Experience is persuasive

Bandura described self-efficacy as our belief in our ability to handle particular situations. Of its sources, direct experience of managing something, especially with effort, is thought to be the most influential (Bandura, 1977).

Why affirmations can fall flat

In one set of experiments, people with low self-esteem who repeated "I'm a lovable person" felt worse, not better (Wood et al., 2009). Statements that clash with what we believe can highlight the gap.

Specific, not global

Confidence tends to be specific: you may feel capable at work but not socially. Small, concrete wins can build belief in a particular area without needing to change how you see your whole self.

02 Where belief in our capabilities comes from

Bandura's four sources

THE STRONGEST SOURCE

Mastery experiences

Doing something, and seeing that you managed it. This form focuses here.

Seeing others

Watching someone like you manage something similar.

Encouragement

Others expressing confidence in you; helpful, but less lasting alone.

How you feel

How we read our body and mood, such as nerves, can shape our sense of capability.

SMALL WINS STILL COUNT

- getting up on a hard day
- asking a question
- saying no
- making the phone call
- trying again
- leaving on time
- sending it before it felt perfect

THE AIM

The goal is not to manufacture confidence or to talk yourself into feeling good. It is to help your confidence become better informed by what you actually do, including the small things.

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03 The small wins review

one recent experience, looked at closely

Choose one recent situation that felt difficult, even if it seems minor now. Work through the questions in order.

1 What have I handled recently that was difficult?

It does not need to be an impressive achievement.

2 What did I actually do?

Focus on observable actions rather than personality labels: "I made the call", not "I'm brave".

3 What helped me manage the situation?

Consider what made it possible.

○ preparation ○ persistence ○ support ○ flexibility ○ asking for help ○ adapting the plan ○ something else

4 What does this experience suggest I may be capable of doing again?

Keep it specific to this kind of situation.

How confident am I that I could manage something similar again? *0 = not at all · 10 = completely*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Avoid turning one experience into a sweeping conclusion, in either direction.

5 What is one small challenge I could approach next?

Choose something realistic enough to attempt, a small step beyond this one.

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04 The evidence of capability log

one example a day, for seven days

Each day, record one thing you attempted, managed, learned or handled differently. Small counts. Rate how difficult it felt from 0 to 10.

DAY	WHAT I DID	WHAT IT TOOK	DIFFICULTY
Mon	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Tue	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Wed	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Thu	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Fri	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Sat	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		
Sun	○ attempted ○ managed ○ learned ○ handled differently		

05 Looking for patterns

at the end of the week

Looking across the week, I notice that I may be...

- ☐ more persistent than I assumed
- ☐ able to recover after setbacks
- ☐ able to tolerate uncertainty
- ☐ more flexible than I thought
- ☐ willing to ask for support
- ☐ something else

Before this week, I believed I...

→

The evidence suggests I...
balanced and specific

What I'm still unsure about

My next small challenge
realistic enough to attempt this week

SOURCES

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215.

Wood, J. V., Perunovic, W. Q. E., & Lee, J. W. (2009). Positive self-statements: Power for some, peril for others. *Psychological Science, 20*(7), 860-866.

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