Your Personal Coach
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I've had several major professional disappointments recently that have sent me spinning. I've got one more shot at a big contract, but I've totally lost my confidence, and I'm afraid that I'll lose this one too. Do you have any advice about how to get my confidence back?
                    -- Gary

Dear Gary,

Sometimes confidence can be fragile – easily trampled underfoot by life's challenges -- but you're wise to want to reclaim it. It's almost impossible to put your best foot forward, dream big dreams, and achieve success without a healthy dose of self-confidence.

In it's practical expression, confidence may mean different things to different people, but to me, confidence is an enduring faith or trust in oneself. It's a feeling of certainty – the assurance that you have what it takes to realize your potential and reach your goals. This doesn't mean to expect that the road will always be without potholes and detours. It means that you already have within you everything that you need to succeed. Confidence grows with each success, and while a long series of disappointments may threaten to erode it, you can – and must -- keep trying.

It's most important to remember that true self-confidence is there in the face of challenges and disappointments, as well as during the successful times. I mean, think about how easy it is to be confident when everything is just peachy. It requires more courage, more self-awareness to maintain our self-assurance when things hit the fan. In fact, it's a measure of character and grit to pick ourselves up after defeat and try again. This alone can give us the confidence to know that we are resilient and willing to get back into the game.

Take a look at the reasons for your recent professional disappointments. This doesn't mean to blame yourself. It means to honestly analyze these events and see what you can learn from them. Are there any themes? For example, have you lost contracts because your price was higher than your competitors? Have you applied for contracts for which you are well-qualified, or do you need to boost your credentials or experience to win these jobs? Just be honest and gentle with yourself, and bold enough to make any adjustments in your strategic approach that are necessary.

Don't forget to take a look at all the other accomplishments you've had before, or during this same period of business reversals. I know that when I find my confidence shaken, I have an unfortunate tendency to focus on all the ways I've been a "loser," and ignore the achievements in my life. I have to work on this when things are tough. Maybe you will have to be equally vigilant in watching out for this negative "self talk" You know the voice I'm talking about. It's the one that makes sure you know that you are a complete and utter "looooser."

Think about all the people you know (as well as famous people) who "failed" many times before success was theirs. One of my favorite stories is the one about the man who failed as a businessman, storekeeper, and farmer, who then went into politics where he lost more than seven elections – actually every office or nomination he ran for – until he was finally elected President in 1860. This is the story of one of America's greatest Presidents -- Abraham Lincoln.

"Fake it 'til you make it." Even if you don't feel confident inside, act "as if" you are. Don't withdraw from these challenges. Dedicate yourself to your success. Work hard. Do your best and go forward with strong intentions to win this new contract. Our feelings often change to reflect our behavior. Often when you *act* like a confident person, you suddenly realize that you are beginning to actually *feel* this way.

Remember that if failure was good enough for Honest Abe, it's good enough for the rest of us.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) www.fullpotentialliving.com