

# Concept

*an idea  
distilled  
to its  
essential  
elements*

Confident people tend to do the right things in the right way at the right time, free of the fear and frustration that corrupt many of our decisions. Confidence would seem to be a valuable trait—admired, reinforced, and sought by most organizations.

It is not.

Liking and respecting ourselves is influenced by those with whom we interact frequently and repetitively—spouse, boss, colleagues, friends. Why the dearth of confidence? Do others not like our confidence, even when it's beneficial to the organization?

When we like and respect ourselves, the behavior of others towards us becomes less important. Others don't want their behavior to be less important to us, so they may feel threatened, fearful, and frustrated when they see our increased confidence. That can lead them to subconsciously engage in behaviors that undermine our confidence. Those conflicting interpersonal forces are present throughout our lives.

When we feel we have to be on guard, that leads to excessive behavior. For example, someone called a "sissy" in childhood may act overly tough. When someone's behavior strays from what's appropriate, the result is problematic personal interactions. Being criticized

for careless mistakes early in one's career can make one a micro-manager. People who don't like and respect themselves may lean heavily on their manager for direction. The manager may fear being insignificant, so he or she enjoys their dependence. If they gain confidence, the need for direction diminishes and that's threatening. Thus, the manager becomes more critical of employees' work and of them personally, trying to diminish their newfound confidence. Is it conscious?

No.

A basic responsibility of HR professionals is to ensure that the confidence of employees is a major organizational goal for which all managers are held accountable. The result will be a calmer, more cooperative atmosphere in which internal politics and destructive internal competitiveness are at a minimum. Managerial reinforcement of the success and confidence of employees results in a higher level of competence that will be reflected in the bottom line.

**David W. Thompson** is a management psychologist based in Chicago, and the author of *The Manager: Understanding and Influencing People (MTR Corp., 2004)*; [noiethompson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:noiethompson@sbcglobal.net).

## Out With Fear

**In with confidence, for bottom-line results.**



By David W. Thompson