Confidence Gap: Is It a Me Thing or a We Thing?

By Dr. Kelly J. Baker

When Katty Kay and Claire Shipman’s The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance—What Women Should Know (Harper Business, 2014) landed on my desk, I was intrigued. Would this advice manual provide failsafe methods for being confident?

I admit that I picked up this book in a moment when I felt unsure about my career choices to become a freelance writer. I put aside my normal skepticism of advice manuals because I want to have more confidence than I do self-doubt.

A confidence gap exists between men and women, and The Confidence Code is an attempt to close it by providing women with insights into how to build and foster confidence. However, the authors focus too heavily on what individual women can do to improve their self-worth. This is not a long-term solution for the inequality women face in the workplace.

Watch for the gap

Sometimes, I’m a confident writer. Other times, I’m plagued by self-doubt. I feel confident about my public speaking abilities, except when I don’t. I’m wracked with nerves as I step up to the podium to deliver a paper, a lecture or a public talk. I would describe myself as anxious rather than confident.

What I discovered is that I’m not alone in negative thoughts about my abilities. According to the authors, lack of confidence holds women back in our careers, home lives and the wider world. Kay and Shipman describe many capable and talented women who hesitate over decisions, worry about how they might sound and fear trying new risky ventures.

To explain the confidence gap between men and women, Kay and Shipman turn to neuroscience, psychology, genetic testing and even parenting styles. They also interview successful women in business, politics and professional sports to uncover how these women became and remain confident.

The authors are convinced that improved confidence might be the cure-all for working women. If only we shored up our confidence, then we might have more success at work and home.

Not as easy as it sounds

Unfortunately, while confidence might offer more possibilities to women, it does not mitigate hostile or benevolent forms of sexism, change gender inequalities in pay, or guarantee that women are not harassed in the workplace. Confidence might make us feel better about ourselves, but it is no balm for structural inequity.

The authors also emphasize gender essentialism, though they cloak it in the language of science. To the book’s detriment, they assume that gender roles are innate. They ignore the cultural construction of femininity that clashes with confidence.

If women are trained to be meek, humble or self-deprecating, it is no surprise that we lack confidence. Sure, our brains might be different from men’s brains, but the cultures we inhabit place a premium on what womanhood is and isn’t. By ignoring how culture could kill the confidence of women, the authors do their readers a grave disservice.

Additionally, confidence might actually prove detrimental to women and their careers. For instance, a recent study of performance evaluations documented that both men and women rated women in leadership roles more harshly than their male peers. Confidence is a component of leadership, but it might prove to be a double-edged sword for women workers.

In chapter after chapter, what I realized is that Kay and Shipman seem remarkably unaware of their own privilege as white women from upper-middle-class backgrounds. They tend to overlook how class and race might impact one’s approach and deployment of confidence.

While they might get to be confident in their workplaces with no repercussions, this is not true for all women. Their advice, then, is limited in its applicability.

The takeaways

The Confidence Code was not a total waste of time, as I grudgingly applied some of their advice to build my own confidence. Here’s the advice that most helped me work on my new confidence habit:

• Make our thoughts our allies. Counter negative thoughts about our abilities with three examples of things we do well. We can’t stop self-doubt, but we can push against it.

• Don’t personalize failure. This one is so hard. Realize that failures, small and big, are not necessarily about you as a person. If you get a rejection for a scholarly article, focus on what you learned and try again.

• Stop the self-deprecating tone right now. Humility is supposedly a virtue, but we should also take credit for our successes and learn to take compliments.

• Strive for good enough, not perfect. Perfectionism keeps us from getting work done, and it stalls us. Moving on to new projects is a better use of our time.

After following these four steps for a week, I did feel more confident. I’m countering my self-doubt, but I’m not sure their helpful advice outweighs the glaring oversights of The Confidence Code.

Overall, I found the book frustrating, especially the authors’ gender essentialism and their lack of engagement with the structural issues that hold women back. I also tend to disagree that lack of confidence is what really holds women back at work. As I mentioned in my August 2014 review of What Works for Women at Work, women face persistent bias, explicit and implicit. We have to walk a tightrope between playing to and resisting cultural expectations to get ahead at work.

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There is also such a thing as loyalty to 'type' or its opposite. It can only rarely happen that someone who hates westerns buys a ticket for one after reading a review, or a love story addict avoids a romantic film because of what the papers say. So if a film review isn't really a consumer guide, what is it? I certainly don't feel I have a responsibility to be 'right' about a movie. Now what is GENERATION GAP - A generation gap is the difference of opinions between one generation and other regarding beliefs, politics or values. In today's usage "generation gap" often refer. Continue Reading. The most important thing I want to describe in my post is described in these two paragraph so read it carefully because my motive is to apply those things in life and get this gap comes to an end but for this some negativity must occur. When there is no negativity then there cannot be a path to get rid of it. I can explain these effects with the help of a short story. Like happiness, confidence is one of those things you can’t™t really get directly. You can’t™t just try to be confident any more than you can try to be happy. In fact, sometimes this direct approach to seeking confidence can backfire: You’re so worried about being more confident, that you make yourself anxious and insecure — the opposite of confident! What if we need a completely different approach to building confidence? This gives me a relatively unique insight into the world of confidence and how it works: I get to see very specific patterns and habits that cause people to lose confidence and feel insecure. If you can identify these habits in your own life and work to eliminate them, I think you™ll find that confidence has a way of showing up on its own. 1. Asking for reassurance. confidence. a feeling of being certain of your ability to do things well. contain. If one thing contains another, it has it inside it. criticize. to say that something or someone is bad. varied. containing or changing between several different things or types. coincidence. an occasion when two or more similar things happen at the same time, especially in a way that is unlikely and surprising. conduct. to organize and perform a particular activity. One of the important problems of all times is a generation gap. Adult's mentality is different from teenager's. We are the children of two epochs with different views on various subjects. Because of this parents and children sometimes argue with each other. Some people believe that teenagers today are generally rude, lazy and ill-behaved. Other people, however, think that teenagers are not so bad. Most of the quarrels between parents and children happen because of children's marks at school and generation gap. We try to learn better, but if we have a bad mark our parents can shout at us. In most cases "new generation" doesn't understand their parents and becomes depressed because of this. To protest against it, teens can shock people around them.