- Self-confidence / Public speaking



*Expert advice*



*Chantal Dempsey is an award-winning mindset and confidence coach, NLP expert and master hypnotherapist, known for her transformative impact in the field of confidence, communication and personal development. chantaldempsey.com*



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# Find your VOICE

## Try these simple steps to become a more confident communicator, says Kellie Gillespie-Wright

Do you ever feel like you have the right words in your mind, but they get lost in translation when you start speaking? Maybe you've walked out of a meeting wishing you'd been more assertive, or you've felt anxious about presenting your ideas in the first place. You're not alone — communicating with confidence is a skill many of us desire but struggle to master. The good news is that confidence isn't something we're born with; it's something we can build, step by step.

To uncover what it takes to communicate confidently, we spoke with life coach Chantal Dempsey about the nature of confidence, why so many of us wrestle with self-doubt, and how we can create lasting change in the way we think about ourselves and communicate with others.

### Understanding confidence: the foundation of everything

Before we dive into techniques, it's important to understand what confidence truly means. According to Dempsey, confidence is about inner trust: 'Confidence is the belief that whatever happens, you will be OK and you will have the resilience to deal with it,' she says. It's not about being fearless or never having doubts. It's about trusting that you can handle whatever life throws at you, even if it's outside your comfort zone.

This trust in yourself is 'the building block of everything in life', says Dempsey. She explains: 'Your level of confidence and self-esteem will dictate how you experience and interpret your own reality.' When you feel confident, you're less likely to experience chronic anxiety or fear. As Dempsey puts it: 'Anxiety is worrying about what has happened or what might happen, but if you feel confident that you will be able to handle anything with resilience, that worry doesn't come up in your mind.'

It's also helpful to distinguish confidence from self-esteem. 'Whilst confidence is the belief in yourself and your ability to handle situations, self-esteem is your inner sense of worth, it is how good you feel about yourself as a person,' she says. These two qualities often go hand-in-hand, but you can have high self-esteem in some areas and lower confidence in others, like public speaking or tackling new challenges at work.

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## Why we struggle with low confidence

So, why is it that so many people find themselves lacking in confidence? Dempsey believes the answer often lies in our early experiences. 'The immense majority of struggles with low confidence and self-esteem stem from childhood,' she explains. 'As you start having thoughts and feelings of not being good enough as a child (often because you are told you are not good enough), these create and reinforce neural pathways of low confidence, which progressively strengthen over time, making it a "habit of thinking" and perceiving yourself negatively.'

According to Dempsey, the brain tends to hold onto these patterns as they become familiar, even if they aren't helpful. 'Your mind starts to "run a programme" of low self-esteem, which will impact every thought, feeling, and decision that you make,' she says. For many people, it only takes a single negative comment from a caregiver or teacher to start running this 'low self-esteem programme'. Neuroscientific studies have shown that negative early-life experiences can affect the brain's structure, such as enlarging the amygdala, which is linked to anxiety and fear.

However, Dempsey has good news: these patterns don't have to be permanent. 'It can be changed completely. It can be rewired,' she assures. Thanks to neuroplasticity — the brain's ability to rewire itself — we can create new pathways that lead to confidence, self-assurance, and resilience. 'No matter how low your self-esteem is now, you can still rewire your brain to become the most confident person,' says Dempsey.



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## Confident communication starts with inner work

When it comes to truly confident communication, Dempsey emphasises that it must come from an authentic place. 'Confident communication is sourced from the inside,' she says. Often, people can look confident on the outside — delivering a polished speech or leading a meeting — while battling nerves or self-doubt internally. 'Sustainable confident communication stems from confidence itself. It is the ability to communicate without worrying about what others think, without fear of making a mistake,' she explains.

This sense of calm comes from understanding that, whatever happens, you're prepared to face it. Dempsey notes that when your mind and body are in sync, it shows in your communication: 'The mind and body are in this together; when you are stressed and anxious, your nervous system runs the "fight or flight" response, which makes your heart beat faster, your breathing shallower, and shows signs of nervousness which can be picked up by others, even subconsciously.' But when you're genuinely confident, these physical responses calm down naturally. You breathe more deeply, speak more slowly, and make genuine eye contact — all signs of confidence that others pick up on, consciously or not.

## Simple steps to build self-confidence

Dempsey encourages taking small, meaningful actions to build confidence over time. One of her favourite tips is to celebrate small wins each day: 'One of the most effective steps to start building confidence is to notice and write down three things every day that you do well, three wins, accomplishments, anything big or small that you can celebrate about yourself.'

It could be anything from completing a task at work to helping a friend or family member. Research in positive psychology supports this practice, showing that it helps shift our attention from self-criticism to self-appreciation.

'As you notice at least three wins every single day, you very quickly start to build a habit of noticing what is good about you,' says Dempsey.

Preparation is another major key to confidence, especially in high-stakes situations. 'Preparation plays a key role in how confident you are going to be when the meeting/speaking/conversation is not something that you are extremely familiar with,' she explains. By preparing thoroughly you cover your bases, easing the anxiety that comes from not knowing what to expect. Dempsey says: 'Anxiety and lack of confidence often stem from the fear of the unknown.'

When you're well prepared, you're less likely to stumble, which helps you maintain your composure.

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## Reframing negative self-talk and quieting your inner critic

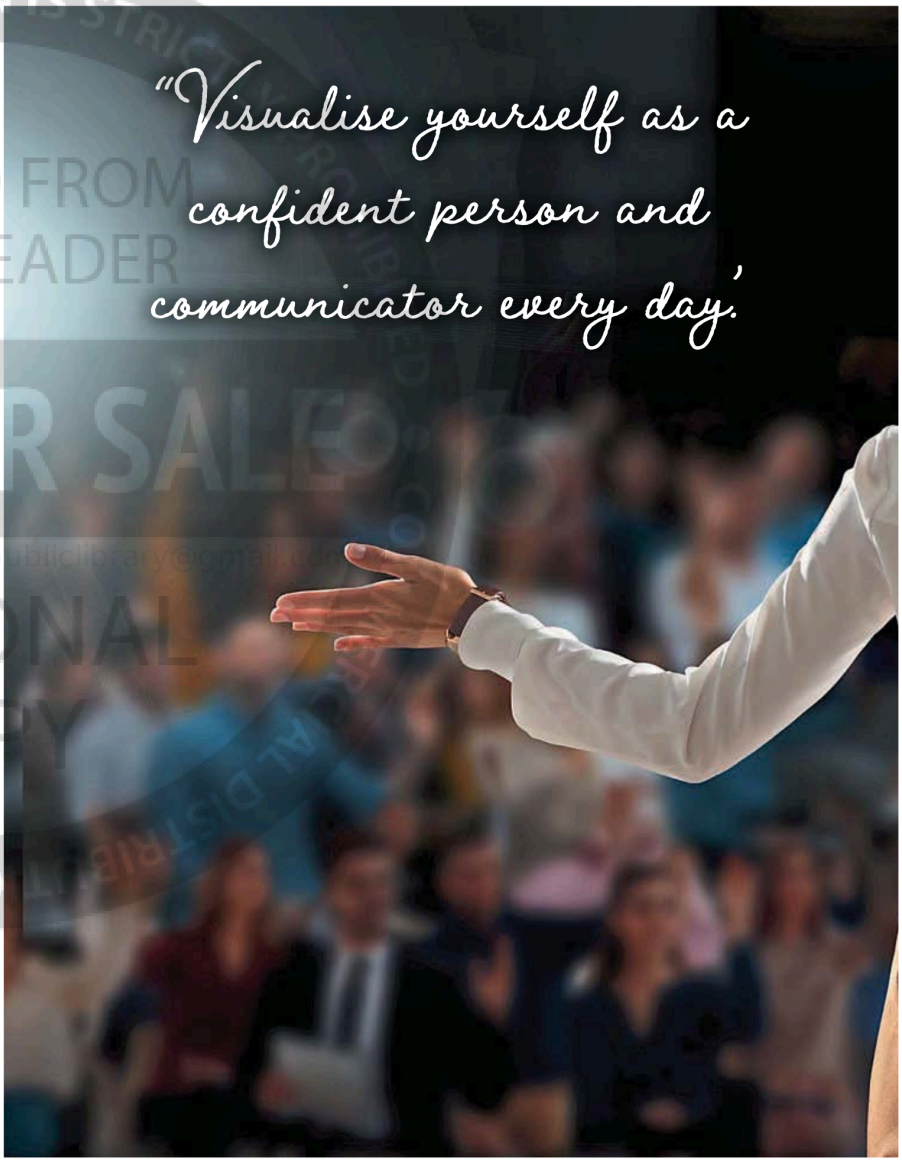
One of the biggest obstacles to confident communication is negative self-talk. Dempsey suggests a four-step process for overcoming it: Notice, acknowledge, let go, and reframe. This process is designed to bring subconscious self-criticism to the surface so it can be replaced with more empowering thoughts. 'The key to overcoming negative self-talk is to notice it,' she says.

Once you notice a negative thought, acknowledge it without judgment. Visualise it in a way that resonates with you — a cloud drifting by, a cartoon character leaving the screen —and let it go. 'Then, reframe the thought, replace it with a different, more helpful thought. "I cannot do this" can be replaced with "I can do this,"' Dempsey advises. Reframing negative self-talk is a powerful tool, and research supports its effectiveness. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a technique that involves challenging and reframing negative thoughts, has been shown to reduce social anxiety and improve overall confidence.

## Understanding body language and non-verbal communication

Did you know that more than 90% of communication happens through non-verbal cues? Dempsey shares the '7-38-55 rule': 7% of communication is words, 38% is tone, and 55% is body language. She explains: 'Whilst your conscious awareness hears the words, your subconscious mind processes the body language and other cues to understand and make sense of what is being communicated.' This is why you might instantly feel comfortable (or uncomfortable) around someone without knowing why — your subconscious has already picked up on their body language.

To project confidence, Dempsey suggests simple techniques like maintaining eye contact, using open and relaxed postures, and even trying out a 'power pose' (standing tall with your hands on your hips) before important interactions. She recommends modelling the body language of people you view as confident: 'Observe how they stand, their tone of voice, mannerisms etc, and replicate those elements.'




## Building long-term confidence

Improving confidence isn't something you do once; it's a long-term practice. Dempsey suggests setting small goals, such as speaking up in a meeting or reading a book on communication skills, each week. 'Do one thing every day that pushes you out of your comfort zone, at least a little,' she advises. Over time, these incremental actions build a solid foundation of self-assurance. She also recommends a daily visualisation practice, which is especially powerful first thing in the morning or right before bed (these moments are called 'power states', known to be powerful times to rewire the brain). 'Visualise yourself as a confident person and communicator every day,' she says. Visualisation strengthens positive neural connections, so your mind builds the habit of seeing yourself as a capable and confident person.

## Balancing assertiveness with kindness

Many people worry about coming across as harsh or unkind when trying



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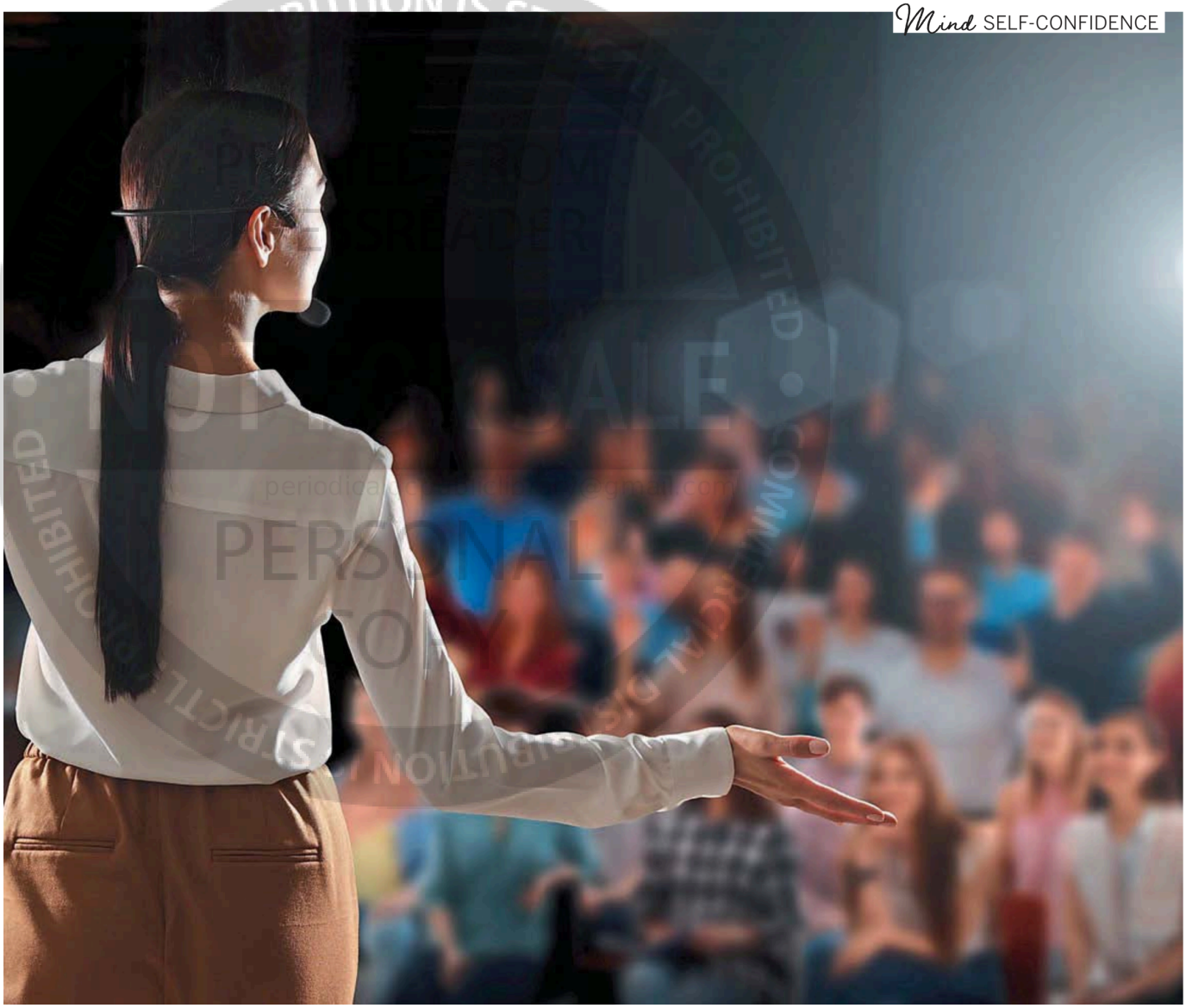

to be assertive. Dempsey reassures us that kindness and assertiveness aren't mutually exclusive. 'If you are working on your confidence and asking yourself the question, the likelihood is that you will be your kind and approachable self, no matter how assertive and firm you become, I promise you!'

If it's still something you want to work on, to balance assertiveness with approachability, she recommends using 'I' statements instead of 'you' statements. For example, instead of saying 'You never meet deadlines,' try "I feel concerned when deadlines aren't met.' This way, you're expressing your needs without sounding accusatory.

## Take action: build your confidence, step by step

Confident communication is within reach for all of us. By understanding where confidence comes from, recognising our patterns, and adopting simple, actionable habits, we can gradually become more assured in how we express ourselves. Remember, confidence isn't about perfection — it's about trusting yourself and letting that trust guide your actions and words.

### NEXT STEPS

**Listen** *The Mel Robbins Podcast — Communicate with Confidence: The Blueprint for Mastering Every Conversation*

**Watch** *How to Sound Assertive: Tips for Confident Communication* by Jefferson Fisher (YouTube)

**Read** *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie

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