

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Confidence Gap Defined

Thinking that feelings precede action.

### 10 Rules

For winning the game of confidence.

### Defusion + Workability

Two very important words.

### Presto! Instant Success

The result of living your values.

### FEAR → DARE

How to make the switch.

### Two Choices

Yours?

# The Confidence Gap

A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt

BY RUSS HARRIS · TRUMPETER © 2011 · 240 PAGES

“Whether you call it ‘lack of confidence,’ ‘fear of failure,’ ‘performance anxiety,’ or ‘self-doubt,’ the chances are it’s cost you dearly in your life. Take a moment to consider: What have you given up? What have you missed out on? What opportunities have you lost because of it?”

Over the years, I’ve worked with literally thousands of people who have put their hopes, dreams, and ambitions on hold because they ‘don’t have enough confidence.’ And the sad thing is, this lack of confidence is not due to any fault of their own. It is certainly not because of stupidity, or laziness, or negative thinking, or a deprived childhood, or a chemical imbalance in the brain. It is simply because they do not know the rules of the confidence game. ...

On your journey, you’ll discover a revolutionary new approach to maximizing human potential: a model of change that is firmly based on cutting-edge research in human psychology. And you’ll learn to develop a mind-set known as psychological flexibility—a powerful mental state that enables you to respond effectively to fear, anxiety, and self-doubt. You’ll also learn to develop genuine, lasting self-confidence. And you’ll learn to enhance your performance in any area of your life—from sports, business, and creative arts to socializing, parenting, and sex!”

~ Russ Harris from *The Confidence Gap*

Russ Harris is one of the world’s leading authorities on one of the most cutting-edge forms of therapy known as Acceptance and Commitment Training, or ACT for short (pronounced like the word *act* not A.C.T.).

ACT is essentially a powerful blend of mindfulness training and cognitive behavioral therapy. I’ll be covering Russ’s first book ([The Happiness Trap](#)) soon where he provides a general intro to it.

This book is, as you probably guessed by now, all about helping us optimize our confidence. Russ basically tells us that we’ve been following the wrong rule book if we want to dial in our confidence. He presents 10 rules on how to win the game of confidence we’ll explore in the Note.

The book is *packed* with Big Ideas (get a copy [here](#)) and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites so let’s jump straight in! (And, if you like this you’ll probably like [Confidence 101!](#))

## WHAT IS THE CONFIDENCE GAP?

“Many people are completely lost in something I call ‘the confidence gap.’ It’s that place we get stuck when fear gets in the way of our dreams and ambitions. You know you’re stuck in the confidence gap if you believe something like this:

I can’t achieve my goals, perform at my peak, do the things I want to do, or behave like the person I want to be until I feel more confident.

*“If only you had more confidence, how would your life be different?”*

~ Russ Harris

*"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing."*

~ Helen Keller

Does this ring true for you? Many self-help approaches inadvertently encourage you to think this way, but you will soon discover that the more tightly you hold on to this belief, the more it will hold you back from creating the life you want."

The Confidence Gap.

It's the story we often tell ourselves that we'll go for our biggest dreams when we *feel* confident. That's not only a gap but a trap.

The theme of the book is captured in the first rule of the game of confidence: "*The **actions** of confidence come first, the **feelings** of confidence come later.*"

We take *action* \*THEN\* we *feel* confident. Not the other way around. If we only do things when we "*feel*" confident, we're not going to do a whole lot with our lives.

Why? Because the only way to grow is to leave our comfort zone. And, the moment you leave your comfort zone you feel, by DEFINITION, discomfort. And, of course, the bigger the dream, the more discomfort. That discomfort doesn't *feel* good. If we let those feelings dictate whether or not we act, we're in trouble. Hence, our golden rule.

—> "*The **actions** of confidence come first, the **feelings** of confidence come later.*"

## THE 10 RULES FOR WINNING THE GAME OF CONFIDENCE

"Below I've listed the ten 'right' rules of the confidence game. However, before you read through them, I think a warning is in order: rules become dangerous when we follow them rigidly. So please—hold all these rules very lightly! Be flexible with them: bend them, modify them, or drop them as required. They are not the Ten Commandments!"

Russ tells us that we've been conditioned to believe the WRONG rules regarding confidence. And, he outlines 10 correct rules that he sprinkles throughout the book. We'll take a quick look at all 10 and then drill into a few in more detail.

### "TEN RULES FOR WINNING THE GAME OF CONFIDENCE

1. **"The actions of confidence come first; the feelings of confidence come later."** This is Rule #1. It's THE GOLDEN RULE of confidence. We ACT \*then\* we feel confident. Most people get this completely (!) backwards—thinking they need to *feel* confident in order to act. Remember: "*The actions of confidence come first, the feelings of confidence come later.*"
2. **"Genuine confidence is not the absence of fear; it is a transformed relationship with fear."** As David Reynolds tells us in [Constructive Living](#), anyone who says they are never afraid is both stupid and lying. (Hah.) We ALL experience fear at times. The issue isn't getting rid of it. It's transforming our relationship to it. (And using it as fuel as per Rule #8.)
3. **"Negative thoughts are normal. Don't fight them; defuse them."** Defusion is such a GREAT idea. More on that in a moment. Know that our brains evolved over millions of years to survive; this required a bias to see the negative. Therefore, we CAN NOT get rid of negative thoughts. Period. We can unhook or defuse ourselves from them. But we can't get rid of 'em.
4. **"Self-acceptance trumps self-esteem."** Self-esteem is a highly overrated quality. Much better to accept ourselves and then self-motivate ourselves to live in integrity with our values. (Side note: Russ talks about how "affirmations" can actually be damaging for people with low self-esteem. Much better to practice [Self-Affirmation Theory](#) by affirming VALUES.)
5. **"True success is living by your values."** Want success right.this.second? Awesome. Live by your values. More on this in a moment as well.
6. **"Hold your values lightly, but pursue them vigorously."** We're NEVER going to live our values perfectly. Period. There are no perfect people. We will not be the first. (Thx, [Maslow](#).)

*"One important thing I have learned over the years is the difference between taking one's work seriously and taking one's self seriously. The first is imperative, and the second is disastrous."*

~ Margaret Fontey

*"Success is not final; failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts."*

~ Unknown

7. "Don't obsess about the outcomes; get passionate about the process." Another theme we talk about all the time. Quit obsessing about whether or not you're going to get the outcome you want. That's a great way to diminish your confidence. Get FIRED UP about what you're going to DO in pursuit of your big dreams. That's a great way to build your confidence.
8. "Don't fight your fear: allow it, befriend it, and channel it." Russ has what he calls the "ABCs" of fear-whispering. He likens it to taming a wild stallion. First, allow your fear in. Then be nice to it. Then channel it. Just as a wild stallion has amazing energy we can harness, fear can be FUEL for our peak performance if we learn how to use it.
9. "Failure hurts—but if we're willing to learn, it's a wonderful teacher." No one likes to fail. And, if we're willing to look for the lessons in our failures, we can learn a TON.
10. "The key to peak performance is total engagement in the task." Want to perform at your peak? Then ENGAGE with life. Put all of your energy into what you're doing. As we discuss in [Peak Performance 101](#), you can't do that if your mind is fused with worrying thoughts. Defuse. Then go all in.

The 10 rules to help us win the game of confidence. Your favorite?

P.S. What's The #1 Rule of confidence? [Make It Stick](#) by thinking of it without looking back. :)

P.P.S. A huge part of ACT is flexibility. As I describe [in this +1](#), we want structure but not rigidity. We want spontaneity not chaos. That's flexibility. It's a VERY good thing. The hallmark of a healthy human.

## TWO VERY IMPORTANT WORDS: DEFUSION + WORKABILITY

*"If a thought has hooked you and pulled you away from living the life you want, then notice it, name it, and neutralize it."*

~ Russ Harris

"At this point, I'd like to introduce one of the most important words in this book: *workability*. Please etch this word deep into your brain, as it underpins everything we do from this point on. The term *workability* arises from this simple question: 'Is what you are doing working to help you create a richer, fuller, more meaningful life?' If the answer is yes, then what you are doing is workable. If the answer is no, then what you are doing is unworkable.

The concept of workability can help us unhook from our thoughts. If your aim is to empower yourself so you can take effective action and be who you really want to be, but your mind is generating all sorts of reasons why that just can't happen, then you can ask yourself this question: 'If I allow this thought to guide my actions, will it help me create the life I want?' If the answer is no, then you can recognize that the thought is unhelpful and that acting on it would be unworkable. It only takes a few seconds to do this: to pause, check in, notice what your mind is saying, and ask yourself the foregoing question. Recognizing a thought or belief is unhelpful often helps to reduce its influence over us; it makes us less likely to act on it. However, note that with this approach, we're not getting into debates about whether the thought is true or false; the question we're interested in is simply this: 'If I let this thought dictate my actions, will it help me lead the life I want?'"

Workability.

It's a key word we want to understand.

But before we get to workability, we want to understand an even more important word: DEFUSION.

Defusion is huge. Before we can even ask the question of whether or not a given thought is helpful for us, we need to NOTICE we're thinking a negative thought in the first place.

This is where mindfulness comes in. We need to SEE our thoughts. We can't do that if we're "fused" with our thoughts. If there's no separation between our thought and our "self" then it's impossible to be effective.

*"The greater the emphasis on perfection, the further it recedes."*

~ Haridas Chaudhuri

*"Because you're not investing any effort in fighting them, disputing them, or suppressing them, you can now put your energy into taking effective action. And because you're not entangled in your thoughts, you can engage fully in whatever you're doing."*

~ Russ Harris

For example, if you can't see that you have a running dialogue telling yourself wonderful things like, "I can't do that," or "I'm not smart enough," or "I don't have what it takes," or "Insert-your-charming story here," then good luck rocking it.

We must DEFUSE from those thoughts. See them and let them go.

Russ has some great ways to help us do that. Let's practice some now. (btw: He tells us that nothing great was every achieved without practice more than I do. If we want to get good at ANYTHING we must practice it. A lot.)

So, first, think of a not-so-empowering phrase that may dance through your mind often.

Got it?

- Now, say to yourself: "I am having the thought that ... *insert phrase*." <— DEFUSION.
- Or: "I notice I am having the thought that ... *insert phrase*." <— DEFUSION.
- Or, say your thought in the most ridiculous voice you can imagine. <— DEFUSION.
- Or, sing your thought to the tune of your favorite song. <— DEFUSION.
- My personal favorite: When the thought arises, say to yourself, "Hey! Thanks, mind. That was awesome. Really appreciate your contributions. #highfives!" (Hah!) <— DEFUSION.

We want to unhook or DE-FUSE ourselves from those disempowering thoughts.

Once we do that we can ask ourselves: "*If I allow this thought to guide my actions, will it help me create the life I want and be the type of person I want to be?*" If not, then we can recognize the thought is unhelpful and choosing to act on it would be unworkable.

Note: We DID NOT try to \*get rid of\* our negative thoughts. As Russ says countless times in the book, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. Millions of years of evolution have wired us to think negatively. Even the greatest Zen masters have negative thoughts. They just aren't hooked by them.

## PRESTO! INSTANT SUCCESS!

"If we live our lives by this definition of success, we are doomed to stress and misery (punctuated by brief moments of joy when we achieve a goal). So I invite you to consider a radically different definition. *True success is living by your values.*

This definition makes our lives ever so much easier. Why? Because in any moment, we can act on our values—yes, even if we've neglected them for years. *Presto, instant success! ...*

When living by our values becomes the definition of success, it means we can be successful right now. All we need to do is act on our values. From this perspective, the mother who gives up her career to act on her values around nurturing and supporting her children is far more successful than the CEO who earns millions but completely neglects his values around being there for his kids. Albert Einstein put it this way: "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value." And Helen Keller put it like this: "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." So next time your mind is beating you up for not being successful enough, try saying, "Thanks, mind!" And then ask yourself, "What tiny thing can I do right now that's consistent with my values?" then do it: instant success!"

A key aspect of ACT is to get clarity on our *values* and then let them drive the show.

Then we can redefine success from the standard, make a ton of money, get famous and all that jazz to living in accordance with our values.

Result? *Presto!* Instant success.

*"Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."*

~ Confucius

*"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off your bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."*

~ Mark Twain

Of course, that begs the question: What are your values?

Russ helps us identify our values by listing 59 of them as inspiration—encouraging us to identify with at least 10 of them, then narrow down that list to the 6 most important values.

Here's a sample: Acceptance, Assertiveness, Authenticity, Caring, Compassion, Connection, Contribution, Courage, Creativity, Enthusiasm, Fitness, Fun, Generosity, Gratitude, Humility, Humor, Justice, Kindness, Love, Mindfulness, Patience, Persistence, Responsibility, Safety, Self-Care, Self-Development, Sensuality, Spirituality, Trust, Insert-your-own-list-here.

Think about it for a moment.

What six values do you think best capture what you stand for these days?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Write those down. Put them on a piece of paper or index card you can put in your wallet and/or on your desk so you can see them often and remind yourself that success is just a moment away. Remember Rule #6: True success is living by your values.

P.S. This definition of success is precisely what we talked about in our Notes on [Wooden](#), [Primary Greatness](#), [Legacy](#) and so many more. Let's live our values. *PRESTO!* Instant success.

## FEAR —> DARE

*"So a useful question to ask ourselves whenever a goal seems to exceed our resources is: 'What's the smallest, simplest, easiest little step I could take in the next twenty-four hours that would take me a tiny bit closer to achieving it?'"*

~ Russ Harris

**"What holds us back? What stops us from acting on our values? The answer is FEAR. No, not fear, but FEAR, an acronym that stands for:**

- F—Fusion**
- E—Excessive goals**
- A—Avoidance of discomfort**
- R—Remoteness from values"**

What's holding us back? FEAR.

We are Fused to our negative thoughts. We have Excessive goals. We Avoid discomfort and we are Remote from our values. Not a winning combo.

The antidote to FEAR? We must DARE.

**D—Defusion.** We need to Defuse from our thoughts. Remember: "Hey, mind! Thanks for awesome thoughts. Super helpful!" :)

**A— Acceptance of discomfort.** This is so important—we need to get REALLY comfortable with being uncomfortable. It's the \*only\* way to grow. (Literally.)

**R—Realistic goals.** Want to freak yourself out? Set crazy unrealistic goals. We want to dream, but then we want to focus on the PROCESS and the next, doable goal. What's yours?

**E—Embracing values.** Values are our fuel. Our pathway to instant success and our fuel for sustained persistence and [Grit](#). What are your values? Embrace them!!!

Turn your FEAR into DARE!

*"You gain strength, courage,  
and confidence by every  
experience in which you really  
stop to look fear in the face.  
The danger lies in refusing to  
face the fear, in not daring to  
come to grips with it."*

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

## TWO CHOICES ON HOW TO LIVE YOUR LIFE. WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?

"Suppose I could give you a choice about how to live your life. There are two options:

**Option 1:** for the rest of your life, you only take action to do the things that are really important to you if you are in the mood, psyched up, and feeling good. In other words, you spend the rest of your days on this planet at the mercy of your emotions. If you're in the mood or you feel good, then you do the things that make your life work. But if your mood drops or you don't feel good, then you give up doing the things that truly matter, and put your life on hold until such time as you feel good, positive, inspired again.

**Option 2:** for the rest of your life you take action to do the things that are really important to you, whether you are in the mood or not. Whether you feel good or bad, energetic or fearful, inspired or uninspired, you continue to take action; you keep doing what truly matters to you. Instead of going through life at the mercy of your emotions, you can behave like the person you want to be and do the things you want to do, even if you're tired or anxious, or you don't feel like it.

Which do you choose?"

That's from the last section in which Russ tells us that the "comfort zone" should be called "the stuck zone" or "the stagnant zone" or "the zombie zone" or "the half-lived life zone."

Fact is, if we want to live our lives as a daring adventure, we need to *embrace* discomfort. We need to get *very* comfortable with being uncomfortable. That's how we develop true confidence—the trust that we have what it takes to respond to whatever life throws at us and the wisdom and ability to do what needs to get done whether we feel like it or not.

So... Two choices. Which do YOU choose? :)

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Heroic Philosopher CEO*

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## About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](http://heroic.us).