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By Eser Yilmaz, M.S., Ph.D. Reviewed by Tchiki Davis, M.A., Ph.D. What is self-efficacy? Discover the theory behind self-efficacy, understand how it differs from self-esteem and self-confidence, and find out how you can boost it. *This page may include affiliate links; that means we earn from qualifying purchases of products. How do you feel when you face a challenging situation? Do you feel confident and believe you have whatever it takes to succeed, or you doubt your skills or aptitude to be able to tackle the task ahead of you? The answer you give reflects your self-efficacy about the situation. But what exactly is self-efficacy? In this article, we will define self-efficacy, discuss the research on this concept, and use examples of self-efficacy from everyday life. You'll also find helpful tips for boosting your self-efficacy for future challenges. Before we get started, we thought you might be interested in taking our well-being quiz to get your free personalized report. Or, if you're a well-being entrepreneur or coach, download our Wellness Business Growth eBook to get expert tips, tools, and resources to grow your business fast. Are You a Therapist, Coach, or Wellness Entrepreneur? ✓ Save hundreds of hours of time ✓ Earn more $ faster ✓ Boost your credibility ✓ Deliver high-impact content Have you ever wondered why some people welcome a specific challenge with enthusiasm, whereas others shy away from precisely the same? That's because some individuals have high self-efficacy toward that challenge and others don't. Self-efficacy is a psychological concept that refers to your thoughts and perceptions about your ability to perform the actions needed to reach a specific goal. In simpler terms, self-efficacy is your belief that you can succeed in a particular situation. One thing to keep in mind is self-efficacy is not about having the skill to complete a task, but whether you believe you can achieve that task. Because self-efficacy is tightly linked to your belief in your ability to accomplish something specific, it can affect how you manage it. Suppose you feel confident that you can handle a new challenge. In that case, you might be highly motivated to take action, put more effort toward accomplishing it, and display higher resilience when you face adversity. In fact, one of the basic notions of this concept is that you are more likely to participate in activities and delve into tasks for which you possess high self-efficacy and less likely to take action for those you possess low self-efficacy (Lunenburg, 2011). For instance, you and your friend might have similar body types and athletic skills, but if you have a higher self-efficacy for running a marathon than your friend, you might have more motivation to train for it and less likely to give up before crossing the finish line. Moreover, self-efficacy is a situation-specific construct. In other words, you may have a high self-efficacy toward certain situations but a low self-efficacy toward others. Let's illustrate this notion by imagining two scenarios. In the first one, someone gives you car keys and asks you to drop her off at the hospital. In the second scenario, the same person gives you helicopter keys and asks you to fly her to the hospital. Unless you are a pilot, you might have high self-efficacy with operating a car engine than a helicopter engine; therefore, you might have a higher self-efficacy for driving to the hospital than flying there. But how does self-efficacy develop? Below, you will discover the origins of self-efficacy theory and the factors that contribute to it. Upon noticing that a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a task affects how they handle it, Albert Bandura proposed a new construct to explain this observation in an article titled "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change" (Bandura, 1977). In addition to defining this construct, Bandura also outlined the four major sources of influence on self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states. Let's take a closer look at each of these sources of influence. Mastery Experiences When it comes to developing self-efficacy, Bandura has determined that mastery experiences, which are an individual's past performance outcomes, are the most effective sources of influence (Bandura, 1994). For instance, if you have performed well at a given task in the past, you might feel competent about performing a similar task again. Yet, mastery experiences can be double-edged swords; your positive experiences can boost your self-efficacy. However, like with the mastery experiences, watching someone else fail or experience losses might lower your self-efficacy. Verbal Persuasion The third source of influence that shapes self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. In this case, what other people say about your performance or ability to perform shapes how you feel about your capabilities to handle the challenge. Moreover, the more credible the source of verbal persuasion, the greater their influence over self-efficacy (Won, Lee & Bong, 2017). Imagine a swim team coach encouraging her athletes by telling them that their skills have improved significantly this season, and she believes they will do very well in the upcoming championship competition. Because this coach uses verbal persuasion in a positive light, her swimmers might feel motivated to train harder, put forth more effort, and have greater confidence in their abilities to perform well. Additionally, this coach's encouraging words likely affect a swimmer's self-efficacy more than similar words they might hear from one of their non-swimmer friends. Again, the reverse case is also true; discouraging words might chip away self-efficacy. For instance, if the same swim coach were to tell her swimmers that the expected them to swim much better or that their performance was subpar for their league in the last swim meet, her swimmers might doubt their abilities and feel less confident that they will do well in future competitions. Emotional and Physiological States The last source of influence in Bandura's self-efficacy model involves internal sensations of the individual in two aspects: emotional and physiological. When it comes to emotional influences, your mood and outlook may affect how you approach a challenge. Simply put, having a positive attitude might enhance your self-efficacy, but a negative attitude might diminish it (Bandura, 1994). Physiological influences include your bodily reactions, such as fatigue, aches, pain, pleasure, and levels of stress hormones. According to Bandura, people who perceive their physical reactions as energizing factors have higher self-efficacy, whereas people who regard them as setbacks have lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). For instance, I used to dread giving speeches in front of others. Before walking to the stage, my heart rate would go up, and my palms would become sweaty. However, once I started viewing these physical indicators of excitement to share my knowledge with people who want to learn from me, giving public speeches became effortless and even enjoyable. In other words, changing how I view my stress reactions increased my self-efficacy and focused on it as a stand-alone construct. However, after realizing that a clear understanding of self-efficacy required an encompassing social framework, Bandura later incorporated his self-efficacy construct into the social cognitive theory (Pajares, 1997). Self-regulation is a complex process and depends on the interactions of multiple components to influence behavior (Maddux and Volkman, 2010), which are self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-reaction, in addition to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1991). The first of these self-regulatory processes, self-observation, entails assessing your progress towards a goal. For example, if your goal is to write a novel, every page you write might give you a sense of progress and self-motivate you to continue writing. On the other hand, self-assessment allows you to view your performance in the light of your goal and compare your execution with the desired outcomes. A good performance is more likely to give you satisfaction than a subpar performance. Therefore, self-evaluation might push you towards increasing your effort, ultimately providing better results and higher satisfaction. Finally, self-reaction is when you modify your behavior based on your performance. Let's assume your initial goal towards writing your novel was writing one page every morning. If day after day you finish your page quickly and long to write more, you would be likely to re-evaluate your daily goal and increase it to two pages or more. In contrast, if you struggle with writing an entire page in the morning, you might change your goal to writing later in the day or aim to write only one paragraph. Since Bandura's pivotal article, self-efficacy has become one of the most closely-studied constructs in psychology. Almost every type of human behavior has been explored through the lens of self-efficacy. Here are some research highlights: Self-Efficacy and Education The influence of self-efficacy has been studied extensively for teaching and learning behaviors. For example, when researchers compared students in good academic standing to those on academic probation, they found that successful students had higher self-efficacy (Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra, 2007). Researchers also found that teachers suffer less from job-related stress and burnout when they have high self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Moreover, higher teacher self-efficacy had a positive impact on student motivation as well (Mojavezi and Tamiz, 2012).Self-Efficacy and ParentingMaternal self-efficacy strongly influenced parental behavior when all other factors were controlled for (Teti and Gelfand, 1991). Moreover, the implementation of supportive breastfeeding policies at workplaces increased working mothers' self-efficacy (Wallenborn et al., 2019).Self-Efficacy in the WorkplaceA meta-analysis revealed a strong correlation between self-efficacy and employee's job satisfaction and performance predictors (Judge and Bono, 2001). Yet, self-efficacy is also a significant influence on entrepreneurship and helps would-be entrepreneurs to consider new opportunities and cross the barriers needed to establish their businesses (Boyd and Vozikis, 1994).Self-Efficacy and Weight ManagementIn a study, participants who completed self-efficacy-promoting activities not only had higher motivations to lose weight and implement healthier habits than control subjects, but they also shed more pounds (Roach, 2003). Similarly, successful weight management of participants in another study was correlated to their self-efficacy (Kitsantas, 1999). Our lives are full of self-efficacy examples, and you might already be thinking of some from your own life. In addition to our careers, education, and family lives, self-efficacy may also influence our friendships, sports performances, hobbies, health, and general life choices. Here are a few that you might have witnessed or even experienced yourself. Career: A prospective employee reads the description of a new position for a role she hasn't performed before. She decides that she has the skills and the aptitude to thrive in that position and sends her application. Education: A student is taking a course in an unfamiliar subject. She believes in her learning abilities to master the new topic and do well on tests.Parenting: A man finds out that his partner is pregnant. He believes he will be a good parent and looks forward to raising a child with his partner.Sports and Fitness: A man starts going to the gym every day because he believes he can get in shape with regular exercise. Health: After getting injured in an accident, a woman struggles to walk without help. Yet, she feels she will be able to walk on her own by completing physical therapy and following her doctor's recommendations.Friendship: After moving to a different neighborhood with his family, a child feels confident that he can make friends in his new school.Hobbies: A woman receives a crochet hook for her birthday. Even though she has never crocheted before, she knows how to knit and feels confident that she can apply her knitting skills to learn how to crochet. As you might have noticed, all of these examples illustrate high self-efficacy. But how does low self-efficacy affect our decision making and behaviors? As discussed earlier, when someone has high self-efficacy about a situation, they believe that they can succeed. This belief influences their decisions and behaviors. They tend to remain motivated to obtain successful outcomes and are less likely to give up than individuals with low self-efficacy. Imagine two friends who want to quit smoking. The first individual has high self-efficacy and believes she can stop smoking. She disposes of her remaining cigarette packs, fights her cravings, and gradually replaces smoking with healthier habits. In contrast, the other individual has low self-efficacy and has doubt about her ability to stop smoking. She fights the first few urges to light up a cigarette but eventually gives in when an acquaintance offers her one. Let's see how the outcomes differ when we use the point of view of a person with low self-efficacy for the examples from above.Career: A prospective employee reads the description of a new position for a role she hasn't performed before. He decides that he would fail in that position and doesn't submit an application. Education: A student is taking a course in an unfamiliar subject. He is unsure whether he will get a passing grade.Parenting: A woman is pregnant. She doubts that she has the necessary skills to become a good parent and thinks that her child will not be as healthy and intelligent as other children. Sports and Fitness: A woman goes to the gym for a few days. She doesn't feel confident that regular exercise will help her get in shape, and stops working out. Health: After getting injured in an accident, a man struggles to walk without help. He thinks he will never walk independently and stops going to his physical therapy sessions. Friendship: After moving to a different neighborhood with her family, a child feels reluctant to go to her new school and doubts that her new classmates will want to be friends with her. Hobbies: A man receives a crochet hook for his birthday. He knows how to knit, but he puts away the crochet hook because he has never crocheted before and doesn't think he can learn how to use this new tool.These low-efficacy examples might have reminded you of individuals with low self-esteem or self-confidence. Although self-efficacy is somewhat related to these other self-concepts, it differs from them in crucial ways. Self-esteem is an individual's opinion about their general worth, whereas self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in a specific situation. Although a person with high self-esteem might also have high self-efficacy in many cases, these two constructs don't always go hand in hand. This is because self-efficacy is a situation-specific construct. Therefore, you might have an overall high opinion of yourself but believe that you lack the skills to tackle a particular task. Or you might have low self-esteem but feel confident about tackling a problem with ease. Self-Confidence is a nondescriptive certainty of a belief, whether positive or negative. Yet, high self-efficacy is the positive self-confidence that you will succeed in a specific situation. What does that mean? Self-confidence is a general notion of your abilities. It doesn't account for the difficulty of a particular task, time constraints, or any other factors that might influence your self-efficacy. For instance, you might have high self-confidence in your math skills but have low self-efficacy for teaching math at your local community college. Self-efficacy is a crucial influence on our decisions and actions. If you'd like to learn more about why self-efficacy matters, you may enjoy the video below. Not everyone has a high self-efficacy in every situation. However, this doesn't mean you can't boost your self-efficacy or help others increase theirs. Here are a few tips that you might find helpful.Practice, Practice, Practice This tip is related to the mastery experiences in Bandura's self-efficacy model. Simply, the more you have practice doing something, the more likely you will become better at it, and the more confident you will feel doing the same task in a different situation. Try New ThingsAgain, this suggestion is related to the mastery experiences. People tend to feel more comfortable with familiar situations. Therefore, the more novelty you accept into your life, the less likely you will be intimidated by new tasks. Trying new things might increase the range of skills at your disposal, but you may also be more likely to face situations that share similarities with your past experiences.Find Role ModelsHere, we use Bandura's second source, vicarious experiences, which states that observing other people's successes can boost our self-efficacy. Witnessing someone who you consider as a similar goal might motivate you to follow their steps and imagine yourself as successful. And the more similar that person's background is to yours, the more you can relate to their experiences.Mentor OthersIf you have accomplishments that you are proud of, why not share the joy with others by helping them do the same? If you choose to become a mentor, you may be able to boost your mentee's self-efficacy by being their role model. Moreover, you can further increase their self-efficacy by providing them with encouraging feedback and regularly reviewing their progress with them in an encouraging way. Build a Support System Hearing positive feedback about your performance can significantly boost your self-efficacy, especially if the praise comes from experts, teachers, coaches, and peers who have done well in similar endeavors. You may try surrounding yourself with supportive people whose opinions you value.Be Positive It is essential to recognize signs of stress and thoughts of self-doubt so that you can address them. You might want to focus on your past victories and positive experiences to keep your self-doubt at bay. Keeping a list of accomplishments that you are proud of might come in handy when you need a quick boost to your mood. If stress and anxiety prevent you from making progress, you may try to implement some more articles to read that can help you develop self-efficacy. Want to keep learning more? Check out these books: Life is full of challenges. When an obstacle appears in your path, you may feel unsure about your ability to handle it. Increasing your self-efficacy can help you deal with a challenge more effectively: you may feel motivated to succeed and put more effort toward your goal without giving up in defeat. In other words, building your self-efficacy can give you the motivation and persistence to reach the finish line. Many factors contribute to self-efficacy, and you can use them to your advantage and boost confidence in your skills so that you can handle whatever life throws in your way. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191.Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. 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Dimensions of teacher self-efficacy and relations with strain factors, perceived collective teacher efficacy, and teacher burnout. Journal of Educational Psychology, 99, 611-625.Teti, D. M., & Gelfand, D. M. (1991). Behavioral competence among mothers of infants in the first year: The mediational model of maternal self-efficacy. Child Development, 62 (5), 918-929.Wallenborn, J. T., Perera, R. A., Wheeler, D. C., Lu, J., & Masho, S. W. (2019). Workplace support and breastfeeding: The mediating effect of breastfeeding intention and self-efficacy. Birth, 46(1), 121-128.Won, S., Lee, S. Y., & Bong, M. (2017). Social persuasions by teachers as a source of student self-efficacy: The moderating role of perceived teacher credibility. Psychology in the Schools, 54(5), 532-547. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform a specific task. Low self-efficacy means you don't tend to have much belief in yourself. People with high self-efficacy approach unfamiliar situations with a firm belief that if they exert enough effort, they will be successful. Failure is viewed as just a temporary set-back that can, and will, be overcome. These people approach problems with a "can-do" attitude. Examples of self-efficacy include being determined to do your own car repairs or attending night school to advance your career, knowing that you can do it despite the odds. Definition of Self-Efficacy Examples of Self-Efficacy According to Bandura, there are several ways you can develop self-efficacy. Mastery Experiences: Firstly, having mastery experiences, in which a person becomes highly skilled at a task over time, will increase a person's sense of self-efficacy. Secondly, seeing people that are similar to ourselves be successful through their sustained efforts will also increase a person's beliefs regarding their self-efficacy. This is referred to as vicarious experience, or social modeling. Verbal Persuasion: Verbal persuasion from important people in our lives, such as teachers and parents, will also help us develop a strong belief in our abilities. Physiological Reactions: Our psychological reactions also play a role. If we interpret a challenge negatively then our emotional reaction will involve anxiety and stress. This is not conducive to success. However, viewing that same event with enthusiasm can increase our motivation and help us feel energized. See Also: Self-Concept Examples Having the confidence to know you can put your money down to buy a house, then work on it, and flip it for more money, requires a strong sense of self-efficacy. There seem to be dozens of shows popping up about home renovation. Basically, a person, or a couple, will buy a house that is in dire need of repair, a complete disaster of a house. Then, they will renovate it inside and out, and try to sell it for a nice profit. There is a lot of work involved...and a lot of money. A bank loan is needed to purchase the house, and the couple's reserves, and interest on the monthly mortgage. If the economy takes a downturn and the housing market stalls, the buyer can be left sitting on a bottomless pit of financial pain. It takes a lot of guts to take on that kind of risk. Going into a flip-or-flop project with the belief that all obstacles will be overcome and eventual success will be attained requires a strong sense of self-efficacy. People who have the confidence to seek further education in the middle of their career have a strong belief in themselves, even if it requires hard work and struggle. When economies change over time it can leave some people out in the cold. Professions that were pervasive and lucrative a few decades ago may not even exist today. In fact, if the predictions of some futurists come true, a lot of jobs will disappear as robotics continues to evolve. When a person loses their job to automation, there are two ways to handle it. Some may feel overwhelmed with hopelessness and despair. They simply cannot escape the sense that the future is bleak. However, for others, this will be a source of motivation. They will seek out training in another profession, or maybe even go back to school and earn a different degree. A person's level of self-efficacy will have a huge influence on their psychological reaction and subsequent action plan. Being good at sports requires a lot of practice. For those that are most determined, this can mean practice, after practice. Spending extra time running drills and working on their game is often what separates the good from the great. Of course, unless a person really believes that the extra effort will pay off, they may not even try. Some may just accept the fact that there is not much they can do to change their natural level of talent. Others, however, will know that if they keep working hard, put in the extra time, and not lose focus, great things will come. This is an example of how self-efficacy works in the world of athletics. The growth mindset is the belief that our abilities can improve if we try. Having this mindset is an example of self-efficacy that will help us persevere through challenges. Unfortunately, a person with a low sense of self-efficacy will struggle to develop a growth mindset. They already doubt their abilities. However, a strong sense of self-efficacy can help us develop a growth mindset. As psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues have stated, "the brain is like a muscle that grows stronger and smarter when it undergoes rigorous learning experiences" (Yeager et al., 2019, p. 364). Self-Efficacy and a growth mindset strengthen each other over time. Long before Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, there was The Little Engine that Could. A great story by Watty Piper in 1930 about a small engine that was tasked with pulling a long train up a very steep hill. As the engine struggled to reach the top of the mountain, it just kept telling itself "I think I can. I think I can." Eventually, it reached the top and found success in what seemed impossible. It was the engine's belief in itself that enabled it to keep trying and never give up. The story embodies the idea that believing in oneself, and having a high degree of self-efficacy, anything can be accomplished. Most of us will seek a mechanic to fix our cars. But some people with high self-efficacy will see the challenge and believe they can tackle it on their own. Very few people really know what goes on under the hood of a modern car. These days, cars are incredibly complex, with computer chips and tons of electronics. However, there are still a few repairs that a person could do on their own. Believing that you can tackle minor car repairs is another example of self-efficacy. Of course, we are not talking about a complete engine overhaul, but certainly changing a tire or an air filter can still be done. The point is that if you believe you can do it, the very least you will try. Minor repairs are actually fairly easy. However, if a person lacks self-efficacy, they might not even try. Asking for a promotion is a bold move. To do so, a person must have a high degree of self-efficacy. Or, maybe a discussed sense of importance. If the request is granted, then great. The leap of faith paid off. If the boss responds with a slight chuckle however, then matters can turn for the worse. For a person low in self-efficacy, a rejection can be devastating. They may lose motivation and actually spiral into a self-defeating tailspin of doubt. But according to Bandura, a person high in self-efficacy will respond to the rejection in a completely opposite manner. Their motivation will be sparked and they will make proactive moves to address any deficiencies in their resume. They will take the necessary steps to be in a much better position the next time around. Some home repairs are best left to the professionals. Electrical wiring is a good example. Plumbing is another. However, there are some leaks that some of us might be able to tackle. Sometimes a leaky faucet is just a matter of tightening up a joint in the pipes or replacing a worn-out washer. This situation could be a good way to assess a person's level of self-efficacy. Those that methodically analyze the problem and try different solutions until one works, are probably high in self-efficacy. Those that just shut-off the water and call the nearest plumber, are probably a few points lower on the scale. There are few decisions in life riskier than moving to a foreign country. Still, many try every year. A person may not speak the language, have no relatives living there, and no job prospects whatsoever. When faced with a daunting venture, only someone with a firm belief in their abilities is going to try. It is a bold step to take. No one low in self-efficacy is going to even consider this move. The path will be filled with multiple obstacles and set-backs. Each one of those can mean the end of the road, even jailtime. Immigrating to a foreign country is an example of a level of self-efficacy that is off the charts on any paper-and-pencil inventory. Entrepreneurs are people with some of the highest self-efficacy. They back themselves to succeed in the free market! Becoming an entrepreneur may be one of the riskiest career moves a person can attempt. It often means leaving a good job with a stable future. There are countless obstacles. Securing funding can involve taking out massive bank loans that one may never be able to repay. The competition is fierce and the chances of success are near zero. Aside from all of those challenges, if your idea involves software or a cool gadget, advances in technology could make your invention obsolete in a matter of months. Wouldn't that be great? Only those with a sky-high sense of self-efficacy will even think about becoming an entrepreneur. Nothing says self-efficacy like trying something vastly different from your usual MO. We hear the phrase "get out of your comfort zone" a lot. How many of us actually do that? Attempting something different is a big risk because the likelihood of failure can be quite high. However, if a person has a high degree of self-efficacy, they will approach situations outside of their comfort zone with a sense of determination. They will expect success, if not immediately, then most definitely in the long-term. This is exactly what Bandura was referring to when he proposed his theory of self-efficacy. Some people just have a strong belief that eventually they will succeed, even after failure. People with high self-efficacy are willing to give things a go even when the odds are stacked up against them. For example, I've been watching the TV show Survivor lately. In this show, there will just be one winner. Nevertheless, 40 people head into the challenge with the belief that they can win, and they give it a go. Not only do they throw their hat in the ring, they also do it in front of the television for all to watch! These people have high self-efficacy. Similarly, as seen above, people like entrepreneurs and immigrants have the self-efficacy to dive into an enormous challenge, knowing that it's a tough task and there is a fair likelihood of struggle and even failure. Flow is a state of complete absorption in an activity. A flow state is often described as "being in the zone" or "in the moment." It is a peak state of performance where we feel our best and do our best work. To get into a flow state, sometimes you really need self-efficacy. Furthermore, when you're in this state, you feel really good about yourself. You feel like you can do it because you're doing so well at the task. When teaching people how to do a task, we often look to our students and try to get them into that state of flow. When they're in that state, we have they've developed confidence in the task and are doing it with ease and enjoyment. Quitting smoking is notoriously difficult. In fact, it's one of the hardest things a person can do. Not only is nicotine one of the most addictive substances on the planet, but smoking also becomes a huge part of a person's daily routine. It can take multiple attempts to finally quit smoking for good. And even then, there's always a risk of relapse. However, people with high self-efficacy believe that they can quit smoking and stay smoke-free for good. They approach the challenge with determination and are more likely to succeed than those with low self-efficacy. In many aspects of life, we don't know what the outcome will be. But people with high self-efficacy will dive into something without that knowledge. For example, you might start a new job not knowing if it will work out or not. You might start a new relationship not knowing what kind of person they will grow up to be. People with high self-efficacy are okay with not knowing the end result. They trust in their ability to figure things out as they go along and adapt as needed. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy might avoid starting something new because they need to know what the outcome will be before they take action. Self-efficacy refers to what people think about their capabilities and likelihood of success. They often need to engage in self-assessment to reach this point. It affects how we approach new challenges, or if we approach them at all. For people that have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they feel strongly in their chances of success and will usually not be discouraged by failure. For them, it is just a matter of time and effort before one's goals are met. For someone with a less robust sense of self-efficacy, the same set of themselves. Their beliefs about their ability to overcome obstacles is usually shaken and failure can mean the end. References Bandura, A. (1977). Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral change. Psychological Review 84(2), 191-215. doi: Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co. Haimovitz, K. & Dweck, C. (2017). The origins of children's growth and fixed mindsets: New research and a new proposal. Child Development. 88(1). Moritz, S. E., Feltz, D. L., Fahrbach, K. R., & Mack, D. E. (2000). The relation of self-efficacy measures to sport performance: A meta-analytic review. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 71, 280-294. Piper, W. (1930/1989). The little engine that could. New York: Platt & Munk. Yeager, D. S., Hanselman, P., Walton, G. M., Murray, J. S., Crosnoe, R., Muller, C., ... & Dweck, C. S. (2019). A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement. Nature, 573(7774), 364-369. Teachers would be well served by paying as much attention to students' perceptions of competence as to actual competence, for it is the perceptions that may more accurately predict students' motivation and future academic choices.' (Frank Pajares)[i] Beliefs are the strongest indicators of behaviours which make over their lifetimes and early experiences powerfully influence them. Because building self-efficacy starts early in life, it is paramount for children to become competent and confident learners from a young age. This is possible through teachers' delivery and modelling of early and continuous positive learning experiences. Self-efficacious students exert extra effort, persevere with difficult tasks longer and show resilience by bouncing back from difficult learning situations. Students with high self-efficacy regard problems as challenges, set goals and are committed to them, attribute failure to lack of effort or as yet unlearned skills or content, and increase their efforts in order to overcome failure. Self-efficacy, like many other aspects of socio-emotional learning, is both an enabler of success at school and an outcome of schooling. Studies have shown that interventions to build students' self-efficacy beliefs can improve outcomes on particular tasks as well as influencing later life outcomes. There are a number of strategies that teachers can employ to ensure that students have the necessary experiences to build and develop their self-efficacy. Promote task accomplishment and success Mastery experience, or a student's experience of succeeding in tasks, is the most important source of self-efficacy beliefs. Once students experience an improvement in performance or an achievement, feelings of efficacy are enhanced, enabling them to tackle further improve their performance, so it is important to provide activities that students can accomplish with a reasonable amount of effort. To ensure an optimal level of challenge, teacher support can include scaffolding, allowing plenty of time to complete a task, and deconstructing larger tasks into smaller steps. Build concepts gradually and ensure success at each step. Explain the concept or strategy thoroughly before asking students to use it, which creates a perception of moderate challenge but also balances the difficulty of tasks. 2. Provide daily opportunities to learn and apply what has been learned Value what you are teaching and express confidence that your students can learn it. Feeling that important learning has been achieved when further enhances students' efficacy beliefs, so teachers should convey to students that what they are learning is important. Foster a co-operative social environment, rather than a competitive atmosphere. Allow students to work together, and encourage them to build on one another's responses and help each other. Use instructional practices based on class discussion and small group work. Another way to provide mastery experiences is through regular practice and problem-solving activities. To foster competence and confidence, make the problems appropriately challenging, but non-threatening. After a while, students will become comfortable and more confident, and feel able to move to more challenging problems. The impact of challenge on students' sense of self-efficacy depends on students' perceived autonomy and choice, their workload and skills, and the support they receive from their teacher and peers. Use questions that foster thinking and that ask students to justify their thinking. Help students learn how to explain why they are doing something and then ask them to explain to the class or have pairs question each other: 'I see you did __ . How did you come up with that?' 3. Encourage peer modelling Peers are the second most important influence on self-efficacy beliefs. Peer modelling can be more effective than teacher modelling, especially as some students may doubt that they can ever attain the teacher's level of competence. However, choose your models carefully. The best peer models are those who make errors at first and express doubt about their self-efficacy ('I'm not sure I can do this'). The teacher supports these peer models by giving prompts, and the model then successfully completes the task. He or she can be questioned about how they overcame failure and developed mastery. This kind of model, called a 'coping' model, is more effective than a 'mastery' model who performs the task correctly and verbalises high self-efficacy and ability ('I'm good at this' or 'That was easy'). Most students tend to see themselves as being more like the coping model than the mastery model. Try to identify suitable coping models from within your class, but be wary of influential students who others themselves as mastery models. If your model does not make mistakes or experience difficulties, ensure that you ask questions about how they overcame challenges in order to elicit coping strategies. Alternatively, you might pick a model yourself, or make empathetic statements such as 'At this point, you might be getting confused', or 'You might believe you've gone wrong'. 4. Foster goal setting and provide meaningful feedback Although involving students in setting their own goals can lead to greater satisfaction for the student, giving a student a goal you as a teacher wish them to achieve can have a larger impact on self-efficacy because it indicates your belief in the student's capabilities. Encourage students to compare present performance against a goal and also against previous performance. Convey tasks and activities as goals to be accomplished, then frame completion as success. Help students to identify any obstacles they foresee in accomplishing the goal, and help them brainstorm potential strategies they can use to overcome these. Give specific instruction in goal setting by starting with a general goal and discussing how to revise it so it is specific and realistic, as well as how to break it into a subset of smaller goals. For example, 'I want to have great study habits' might be transformed into 'I will master a reading comprehension strategy', 'I will practise each part at a time', and 'I will monitor my performance after each comprehension test'. Have students write goals, then in pairs try to revise and improve them. Feedback frequent, detailed and positive. Offer feedback emphasising goal progress and highlighting personal capacities in order to increase students' self-efficacy. Feedback should refer to what students are learning rather than simply evaluating their answers as correct or incorrect. When students give an incorrect response, examine their thinking processes to understand where they misunderstood. Use this opportunity to re-teach or clarify, so as to further support the student's efficacy. Focus on effort and strategies in attributing the reason for success: for example, 'the effort you showed by restudying the words you missed paid off – look at the improvement you've made'. Teach students to expect to make mistakes, and treat mistakes as opportunities to learn and gain useful feedback from others. This can retrain students' interpretations of setbacks and build resiliency. 5. Use self-assessment Have students write comments or questions in the last few minutes of class. Address these points verbally or in writing. This encourages students to think about what they do and do not understand, and helps them see how they are learning. Tell students every day how they are progressing and what they have learned the day before. Some students need to be convinced that they can learn and are learning. 6. Affirm students' identities as learners Students may be better able to accept difficulties if they have affirmed other aspects of self which strengthen their sense of self-efficacy. Have students identify other skills they have, and express confidence in these. Enable students to draw on their resources to cope with challenges, and view threatening events – such as negative feedback or making errors – as less powerful and less significant for their self-concept. The following can help teachers determine students' perceptions of their teacher's ability to teach them and their confidence in their own ability to learn. As self-efficacy tends to be task or domain specific, it may be useful to use this survey in different subject areas. 1 – disagree   2 – mostly disagree   3 – mostly agree   4 – agree   Student Trust Survey   1 2 3 4 1 Teachers are always ready to help.   2 Teachers are easy to talk to at this school.   3 Students learn a lot from teachers in this school.   4 Students at this school can depend on teachers for help.   5 Teachers at this school do a terrific job.   6 Teachers at this school really listen to students.   7 Teachers always do what they are supposed to do.   8 Students are well cared for at this school.   9 Teachers at this school are always honest with me.   Adapted from 'Students as Allies in Improving their Schools' References & Further Reading Pajares, F. (2002). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic contexts: An outline. Retrieved from uushe2/Pajares/efftalk.html Rosen, J.A., Glennie, E.J., Dalton, B.W., Lennon, J.M., & Bozick, R.N. (2010). Noncognitive skills in the classroom: New perspectives on educational research. RTI Press publication No. BK-0004-1009. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International. Retrieved [date] from . [i] Pajares (2002), p. 29 This website uses cookies to improve your experience while you navigate through the website. Out of these cookies, the cookies that are categorized as necessary are stored on your browser as they are essential for the working of basic functionalities of the website. We also use third-party cookies that help us analyze and understand how you use this website. These cookies will be stored in your browser only with your consent. You also have the option to opt-out of these cookies. But opting out of some of these cookies may have an effect on your browsing experience. Self-efficacy is a psychological construct that refers to one's belief in their ability to successfully complete a task or reach a goal (Bandura, 1977). It is a person's confidence in their capacity to influence their environment to achieve desired outcomes. Self-efficacy has been linked to higher motivation, effort, and persistence in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1986). It is important to note that self-efficacy is not the same as self-esteem, which refers to a person's subjective evaluation of their overall worth or value (Rosenberg, 1979). Self-efficacy has been studied in a wide variety of contexts, including academic performance, physical health, the workplace, social interactions, and mental health (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996). In terms of academic achievement, research has shown that self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of academic performance, even after controlling for other variables such as intelligence, prior achievement, and parental involvement (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1986). For example, a study of college students found that those with higher self-efficacy had higher GPAs, whereas those with lower self-efficacy had lower GPAs (Zimmerman, 1986). In terms of physical health, research has shown that self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of health behaviors, such as exercise (Wallston & Wallston, 1978). For example, a study of college students found that those with higher self-efficacy were more likely to exercise regularly, whereas those with lower self-efficacy were less likely to do so (Wallston & Wallston, 1978). In the workplace, self-efficacy has been linked to job satisfaction and performance (Bandura, 1997). For example, a study of workers in a manufacturing plant found that those with higher self-efficacy had higher job satisfaction and performance ratings than those with lower self-efficacy, whereas those with lower self-efficacy had lower ratings (Bandura, 1997). Finally, in terms of mental health, research has shown that self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of depression and anxiety (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). For example, a study of college students found that those with higher self-efficacy were less likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety, whereas those with lower self-efficacy were more likely to do so (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). In summary, self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of performance, health behaviors, job satisfaction, and mental health. It is important to note that self-efficacy is distinct from self-esteem and is not the same as ability or intelligence. Future research should explore the mechanisms by which self-efficacy influences behaviour and the ways in which it can be increased in order to improve performance and health outcomes. References Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191-215. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. New York, NY: Freeman. Gecas, V., & Schwalbe, C. (1986). Self-efficacy and psychological well-being. Social Psychology Quarterly, 49(1), 67-75. Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. Review of Educational Research, 66(4), 543-578. Rosenberg, M. (1979). Conceiving the self. New York, NY: Basic Books. Wallston, K. A., & Wallston, B. S. (1978). Development and validation of the health locus of control (HLC) scales. Health Education Monographs, 6(2), 160-170. Zimmerman, B. J. (1986). Becoming a self-regulated learner: Which are the key subprocesses? Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11(4), 307-313. Self-efficacy, a concept introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance outcomes. It's the confidence in one's ability to influence events and control over one's environment. Psychologist Albert Bandura has defined self-efficacy as people's belief in their ability to control their functioning and events that affect their lives. One's sense of self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. People's beliefs in their efficacy are developed by four primary sources of influence, including (i) mastery experiences, (ii) vicarious experiences, (iii) social persuasion, and (iv) emotional states. High self-efficacy has numerous benefits to daily life, such as resilience to adversity and stress, healthy lifestyle habits, improved employee performance, and educational achievement. It differs from self-esteem, which is more about overall self-worth. Self-efficacy focuses on capability in specific pursuits, while self-esteem is broader. Self-efficacy is a psychological construct that refers to one's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. How does Self Efficacy influence behaviour? Perceived self-efficacy significantly influences performance in several ways. It affects whether people will even attempt to cope with a situation, as they tend to avoid perceived threats that exceed their coping skills and engage confidently in situations they feel capable of handling. Self-efficacy also impacts thought patterns and emotional reactions. Those with low self-efficacy may dwell on deficiencies and magnify potential difficulties, leading to stress and impaired performance. Conversely, individuals with high self-efficacy focus their attention and effort on the task demands, seeing obstacles as challenges that spur greater effort. Furthermore, self-efficacy plays a role in self-regulation, determining how much effort is expended, how long people persevere in the face of difficulties, and their resilience to setbacks. People with strong self-efficacy tend to: Embrace difficult tasks as opportunities to learn. Recover quickly from setbacks. Attribute failure to insufficient effort or poor strategy (things they can change). Have lower stress and are less likely to develop depression. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy tend to: Avoid challenging tasks or give up easily. Focus on weaknesses and negative outcomes. Believe failures are due to lack of ability (a fixed trait). Experience higher stress and are more vulnerable to depression. SourcesImprovingExamplesMeasurementRelated Ideas How Does Self-Efficacy Develop? Source: The Pennsylvania State University Albert Bandura (1977) states individuals develop their self-efficacy beliefs by interpreting information from four main sources of influence. Performance Outcomes (Mastery Experiences): Successful mastery of tasks is the most powerful source of self-efficacy information. Experiencing success strengthens beliefs in one's capabilities, while repeated failures tend to undermine them. Vicarious Experiences: Observing others (models) perform tasks successfully can raise observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to succeed. Verbal Persuasion: Being told by others that one possesses the capabilities to succeed can enhance self-efficacy. However, the persuasiveness of this source depends on the credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness of the persuader. Physiological and Emotional Arousal: Physiological states, such as anxiety or stress, can influence perceived self-efficacy. High arousal in threatening situations is often interpreted as an indicator of vulnerability, which can lower perceived self-efficacy. Conversely, managing and reducing stress can enhance efficacy. The strongest factor shaping your belief in your abilities (self-efficacy) is mastery experience. A mastery experience happens when you successfully take on a new challenge or accomplish something difficult, giving you direct proof of your capability. Why are these experiences so powerful? Because nothing convinces you of your own skills quite like achieving the difficult people, including you. Success – especially when you've overcome something that previously felt challenging or intimidating – boosts your confidence and strengthens your belief in what you're capable of doing. Of course, not every experience ends in immediate success. Early setbacks or failures can sometimes damage your self-efficacy, especially if you haven't yet built a solid foundation of confidence. However, failure isn't always negative. When you push through initial setbacks and eventually succeed, those victories are especially rewarding, showing you clearly that perseverance pays off. In fact, successfully navigating setbacks can lead to even stronger self-belief than never facing difficulty at all. People who persist through challenges develop a resilient type of self-efficacy – one that's powerful enough to withstand future setbacks and difficulties. Practice is crucial because it's the clearest path to mastery. But why does practicing work so effectively? When you practice regularly, you're not only improving skills – you're continually proving to yourself, often without even realizing it, that you have what it takes to succeed. Each successful practice reinforces your self-belief, creating a positive cycle of growing confidence. In short, mastery experiences – personal achievements gained through effort and perseverance – offer the most reliable and powerful evidence of your true capabilities. They're more convincing than simply watching others succeed (vicarious experiences) or receiving encouragement from others (verbal persuasion), because they show you firsthand exactly what you can achieve. The second important source of self-efficacy is the vicarious experiences provided by social models. Simply put, this involves learning by watching others successfully complete tasks, especially tasks you find challenging yourself. Bandura (1977) posits that "Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed." Role models can be anyone you look up to, including: Older siblings or friends Teachers and coaches Parents, grandparents, or relatives Supervisors or colleagues at work When these role models display confidence and success, especially at a task you find difficult, you naturally begin to adopt some of their self-belief. How Do Vicarious Experiences Work? Watching someone else perform a difficult or feared task successfully gives you a mental blueprint. You see firsthand that challenges can be overcome through perseverance, effort, and effective strategies. This builds your expectation that by putting in similar effort, you can also achieve positive results. However, it's important to note that while observing others is helpful, it's typically not as powerful as achieving success yourself (mastery experiences). Personal accomplishment gives you stronger and more lasting confidence because you've directly proven your capability. How can vicarious experiences influence how strongly you benefit from watching others: Effort and Persistence Shown by the Model: Role models who visibly struggle but eventually succeed through perseverance send a powerful message. Their journeys teach you that setbacks and anxiety are normal, temporary, and manageable through persistence. Similarity to the Model: You're more likely to believe in your capabilities when your role models share your special skills or abilities you don't have. But if you view their success as achievable through effort and persistence, your self-efficacy can still grow significantly. When Are Vicarious Experiences Most Effective? Several factors affect how strongly you're influenced by watching others: realistic success helps you stay motivated when you face your own difficulties. Similarity to the Model: You're more likely to believe in your capabilities when your role models feel relatable—people who share similar backgrounds, skills, or characteristics. Seeing someone very much like yourself succeed boosts your belief in your potential. In contrast, seeing someone very different succeed might not affect your confidence as much. Clear and Diverse Examples: The most helpful role models clearly demonstrate the results of their efforts. When you see someone achieving clear, positive outcomes, your belief that you can achieve similar results grows. Observing multiple people rather than just one) successfully handle challenging tasks is even more beneficial—it reinforces the idea that success is achievable by different people, including you. Practical Skills and Strategies: Watching others successfully manage difficult tasks doesn't just build confidence—it can also teach you practical skills you can apply in your own ability to succeed. Self-efficacy is influence by encouragement and discouragement pertaining to an individual's performance or ability to perform. Imagine a coach telling an athlete, "You've trained hard; you've got this!" or a teacher reassuring a student, "You're capable of great things – keep going!" Such positive encouragement can significantly boost your confidence and motivate you to put forth extra effort, especially when tackling challenging tasks. When someone you trust expresses confidence in your abilities, it helps you believe in yourself too. Encouragement gives you that extra push from a trusted figure can be enough to persist longer and try harder, even when you face setbacks or challenges. Over time, this increased effort often leads to actual success, which further reinforces your belief in your capabilities. How to Make Encouragement Effective Not all encouragement is equally effective. There's what matters most: Realistic and Genuine: Encouragement should be believable and specific. Empty praise, such as telling someone they're great at something when they haven't genuinely succeeded, tends to backfire, making the recipient doubt the encouragement. Genuine recognition of real progress and strengths is far more powerful. Credibility of the Encourager: Feedback from someone you see as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and sincere has the greatest impact. For example, feedback from a respected coach, teacher, or mentor is much more credible than casual compliments from someone less credible. Timing and Specificity: Feedback works best when it clearly highlights what you've done well and how you can realistically improve further. For example, a teacher might say, "You did really well on this project, and I believe you can do even better by using this strategy next time." Combined with Practical Support: Verbal encouragement works best when accompanied by tangible support, such as guidance or resources to help you succeed. Simply being told you can succeed without having the tools or strategies to actually achieve your goals can set you up for disappointment. Limits of Verbal Encouragement While verbal encouragement can significantly boost your confidence, it's generally less powerful than personal experiences of success (mastery experiences). Direct experiences of achievement provide proof of your capabilities. Without actual success, verbal encouragement alone can quickly lose its impact when you face setbacks or obstacles. However, even though verbal encouragement isn't as strong as firsthand experience of mastery, it still plays an important role, especially when you're uncertain or new to a task. Positive feedback can motivate you to take the first step, try a little harder, and keep going despite difficulties. Encouragement and positive feedback are most powerful when combined with opportunities to experience success firsthand. By hearing supportive feedback, then actually achieving your goals through practice and persistence, you build a stronger, more resilient belief in your abilities. Over time, this balanced approach – encouragement combined with genuine opportunities for success –creates lasting confidence and motivation. The emotional, physical, and psychological well-being of a person can influence how they feel about their capabilities in a particular situation. For example, when you're feeling confident and relaxed, you might find it easier to believe in a healthy level of well-being. Is it impossible to build self-efficacy while suffering from some of these struggles? Of course not, but boosting your self-efficacy is much easier when one feels healthy and well (Bandura, 1982). It's All About How You Interpret Your Feelings Psychologist Albert Bandura noted something important: it's not necessarily how strong you feel certain emotions (like nervousness or excitement) that matters most – it's how you interpret these feelings. For example, imagine you're about to give an important presentation and feel your heart racing, palms sweating, and butterflies in your stomach. If you doubt your abilities, you might interpret these physical sensations as proof that you're unprepared or incapable, increasing anxiety and lowering your self-confidence. But if you have higher self-efficacy, you might interpret the same sensations differently - as a natural excitement or energy boost that helps you perform at your best. The physical reaction is similar, but your mindset transforms how you experience and use that energy. Bandura wasn't the only psychologist to delve into researching self-efficacy. One example of another influential self-efficacy researcher is James Maddux (1995). James Maddux (2013) has suggested a fifth main source of self-efficacy through "imagined experiences," the art of visualizing yourself behaving effectively or successfully in a given situation. "Imaginal experiences (or visualization) are basically someone attempting to portray their goals as achievable. It's like the old saying that goes, "it's so close you can almost taste it" – visualization is about putting yourself (in your head) in a pole position to keep believing in a bright future. With this method, in order to enhance one's own self-efficacy or that of a child, the focus needs to be on painting a picture – making success seem like the most likely outcome (Maddux and Meier, 1995). By painting oneself or others in a favorable position, Maddux (1995) hypothesized that the levels of self-efficacy in said individuals would rise given that they will become more susceptible – after portraying themselves at the finish line – to believe in themselves. Improving Self-Efficacy People's beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on those abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is huge variability in how you perform. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failure; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong (Bandura, 1977b). 1. Goal Setting Understanding why challenging goals is essential for keeping us motivated and enhancing our performance. Goals not only guide our actions but also provide benchmarks for measuring progress and celebrating achievement. Long-term goals—such as getting a degree or starting a new career—are inspiring but can also feel overwhelming. When the end point seems distant, it's often easy to stay motivated or even recognize progress along the way. This is why breaking down larger goals into smaller, achievable subgoals (also called proximal goals) is so powerful. Proximal goals act as stepping stones, offering immediate incentives, clear direction, and a sense of achievement that keeps us engaged. Each time we reach a subgoal, we experience a sense of accomplishment. These frequent successes build our confidence, increasing our self-efficacy – the belief in our own ability to succeed. Research shows that repeated small victories significantly strengthen our self-belief, empowering us to persist even when we encounter setbacks (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Importantly, short-term goals help us see our progress more clearly. Without them, it's hard to accurately judge our performance, and motivation can fade quickly. By regularly achieving these smaller milestones, we clearly track improvements, making us feel more competent and capable. Additionally, achieving proximal goals creates feelings of satisfaction and even enjoyment in the task itself. Rather than feeling discouraged by how far we are from a distant target, we find intrinsic motivation and fulfillment in regular, smaller wins. This cycle of setting, achieving, and celebrating short-term goals makes the entire process rewarding, sustaining both our motivation and our belief in our ability to achieve even

bigger goals down the road. 2. Emphasize Peer Modeling Learning from examples set by those around you happens at any age (think of how a teacher is a role model for a student, but in a similar manner an employer is a model for an employee). This concept of peer modeling, while it can be applied to any age, is, of course, especially true for children on the early side of the spectrum and is most effective when a child's direct peers (brothers, sisters, parents, teachers, friends) set the example (Bandura, 1988). To put peer modeling into simple terms – it is when a child or an adult shows good social behaviors and is interested in passing on those same values to a new person. Take, for example, a work setting – one employee takes center stage for the week and shows both business savvy and good social behaviors. This employee will be a peer model to the rest of the employees of the company – they will want to act and behave in that manner, especially if this good behavior helped them achieve more success or drew more praise from the boss. 3. Seek Feedback The problem with understanding feedback is that some people tend to believe that getting no feedback is the same as being told that one is doing their job well (hence the common phrase: "no feedback is great feedback"). When done with both the right intentions in mind and also in the right manner, feedback can be one of the most important sources of building levels of self-efficacy. Employees and students alike tend to want to know how they are doing. In order for the feedback to work positively, feedback must be delivered both concisely and frequently. Without frequent feedback, one can be confused as to whether they should remain doing what they are doing, and without concise feedback, the individual will not understand what in particular they should fix about themselves. Self-efficacy and subsequent task performance improve after receiving higher, more detailed levels of performance feedback (Beattie, Woodman, Fakehy, Dempsey, 2015). 4. Encourage Participation Participation tends to be essential in any work environment – it encourages the person to be active and engaged, great qualities in someone that are usually influential in a person's levels of self-efficacy. Participation is especially important at an early age – those students who engage with the class are not only being more active in their learning, they are probably absorbing more information in regards to the material. Active class participation is also correlated to having high critical and higher-level thinking skills. Participation is also an essential quality of a peer model – this is a person who has previously engaged in active learning and can teach others in a similar manner. The level of thinking associated with an activity that requires participation goes beyond simple comprehension of text – it engages both the instigator and the audience. More importantly, participation helps fellow students learn from each other – and people tend to build their levels of self-efficacy depending on how those around them behave. 5. Allow People to Make Their Own Choices When talking about the importance of letting people make their own choices, the term self-accountability usually tends to come to mind. Whether the outcome is positive or negative – making one's own decisions allows for one to feel responsible (due to your cunning or due to your negligence, the person themselves is the one held accountable for if the outcome turned out in your favor or against you). Another important reason to emphasize self-accountability – making one's own choices and decisions allow one to make their own mistakes and – most importantly – gives one the opportunity to learn from them. Advice is not the same as a command – an individual can advise one on something, but it is a person's own responsibility to do whatever they feel like with said information. This is why a peer – although very helpful – is not enough; the person needs to understand that at the end of the day – if they want to model anyone – the only person capable of taking action is themselves. 6. How to Use Emotions and Physical States to Boost Self-Efficacy So how can you shift your mindset and improve your self-efficacy, even when you're feeling anxious or stressed? Here are a few helpful strategies: Reframe Your Anxiety as Excitement: Recognize that feeling anxious can be a sign that something matters deeply to you. Reminding yourself that these emotions are normal—and even helpful—can transform anxiety into motivation. Manage Your Stress and Mood: Learning stress-management techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness, or relaxation exercises can calm your physical responses, making it easier to maintain confidence under pressure. Focus on Situational Factors, Not Personal Flaws: Instead of viewing physical reactions (like increased heart rate or tension) as evidence of personal inadequacy, try attributing them to external factors like the high-stakes nature of the situation. This perspective reduces negative self-judgments and maintains your self-confidence. Stay Physically Healthy: Improving your physical well-being – through regular exercise, proper sleep, and balanced nutrition – helps reduce stress and anxiety, giving you a solid foundation for stronger self-efficacy. Examples of Self-Efficacy High self-efficacy has been linked with numerous benefits to daily life, such as resilience to adversity and stress, healthy lifestyle habits, improved employees performance, and educational achievement. 1. Healthy Habits Health psychologists emphasize that people are more likely to consistently engage in healthy behaviors when they believe they have the ability to succeed (Bandura, 1988). For example, imagine someone who wants to become physically fit. If this person has high self-efficacy, they'll feel confident enough to set realistic fitness goals, consistently attend workouts, and persist even when motivation wanes or obstacles arise. Each successful workout not only reinforces their confidence but also improves their overall physical health and mental well-being. Similarly, self-efficacy can help individuals successfully adopt other healthy lifestyle choices, like sticking to a nutritious diet, losing weight, or quitting smoking. Believing in one's capability transforms challenging lifestyle changes into achievable steps, making lasting positive habits more likely. 2. Academic Success Research by van Dinther and colleagues (2011) highlights a strong connection between self-efficacy and educational outcomes. Students who believe in their academic capabilities tend to use more effective learning strategies, set meaningful goals, and ultimately achieve higher academic outcomes. For instance, a college student with high academic self-efficacy might approach studying strategically by organizing their coursework, actively participating in class, and confidently tackling difficult assignments or exams. This proactive attitude, driven by their belief in their ability, results in better grades and a more fulfilling educational experience. In short, students with strong self-efficacy don't just dream about academic success—they actively create it through disciplined and focused behaviors. 3. Treating Phobias Bandura (1982) demonstrated how self-efficacy could effectively reduce fears and phobias through direct experience. In a classic experiment, he divided participants afraid of snakes into two groups. One group directly interacted with snakes (touching or holding them), while the other group merely observed someone else interacting with snakes. The results showed that participants who directly faced their fear by handling snakes had significantly higher self-efficacy – they felt more capable and were less fearful in subsequent encounters compared to those who had only observed. This clearly illustrates that directly engaging with a feared situation boosts confidence more effectively than mere observation, highlighting self-efficacy's crucial role in overcoming fears. Can Self-Efficacy generalize across different situations? Usually, self-efficacy – your belief in your ability to succeed – is specific to certain tasks or situations. But confidence built in one area can actually help you feel more capable in other, seemingly unrelated areas too. This happens most often when tasks share underlying skills. For example, if you're great at organizing and problem-solving at work, you might also feel more confident tackling these same skills at home, like planning events or managing household tasks. Another reason this generalization happens is because our minds naturally look for patterns. Even when tasks seem very different on the surface, recognizing similar demands or challenges can help transfer your confidence from one context to another. Lastly, our core beliefs about ourselves – what psychologists call self-schemas – also play a role. If you see yourself as someone who consistently handles challenges well, that self-image makes it easier to maintain strong self-efficacy across various situations. In other words, building confidence in one area can ripple outwards, helping you feel capable and empowered in many areas of life. How is Self-Efficacy Measured? Self-efficacy refers to your belief in your ability to succeed at specific tasks or situations -and psychologists measure this by asking people how confident they feel in their skills. Because self-efficacy is specific, it's important that measurements clearly match the task or area being evaluated. For example, some assessments focus on very specific actions, like how confident you feel about solving a particular math problem. Others are broader and look at your confidence in an entire domain —such as how capable you feel in academic settings or maintaining healthy habits. When measuring self-efficacy, researchers typically consider three main aspects: Level: How confident you feel handling tasks from easy to challenging. Strength: How strongly you believe in your capability. Generality: How widely your confidence applies across different situations or tasks. In practice, psychologists often use surveys or questionnaires. Participants rate their belief in their abilities, usually on a scale from 0 (not at all confident) to 100 (completely confident). This provides a clear, practical picture of someone's self-efficacy across various activities within a specific area of their life. General Self-Efficacy Scale The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) was developed by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralf Schwarzer – the scale is composed of only 8 items, rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself" "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them" "In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me" "I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind" "I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges" "I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks" "Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well" "Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well." The scores are then calculated by taking the average of all eight responses (these will respectively range from 1 to 5). The way the test is supposed to work is so that the higher one's score is, the greater the level of self-efficacy in said individual. Self-Efficacy and Related Ideas Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to successfully perform a specific task or behaviour. It is a key concept within social cognitive theory and is distinct from broader concepts like self-esteem or self-confidence. While self-concept is a more general evaluation of self that includes feelings of self-worth and can be domain-specific but not task-specific, self-efficacy is a context-specific judgment of one's capability to achieve a specific outcome. For example, someone might have a generally positive self-concept regarding their academic abilities, but their self-efficacy for passing a particular difficult exam might be low. Self-efficacy judgments are typically measured at a microanalytic level, focusing on specific tasks and situations, and are considered a strong predictor of behaviour. Self-esteem is your overall sense of self-worth—how much you value yourself as a person. It's a broad feeling that doesn't usually change dramatically from one task to another. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is your belief about your ability to succeed at a specific task or goal. Unlike self-esteem, self-efficacy can vary greatly depending on the situation you're in. Let's look at a quick example: Imagine someone who's not very good at horseback riding. They'd probably have low self-efficacy for riding – they doubt their ability to perform well. However, if horseback riding isn't important to how they see themselves, their overall self-esteem probably wouldn't be impacted. On the flip side, a person might actually be very skilled at riding horses but still struggle with low self-esteem. This could happen if they've set such high personal standards or depend heavily on riding for their sense of worth, constantly feeling they aren't good enough despite their high skill level. Here's how these concepts differ clearly: Self-efficacy is about believing in your ability to perform a specific action or succeed in a particular situation. For instance, you might have high self-efficacy speaking publicly about your favorite hobby in front of friends but low self-efficacy speaking about an unfamiliar topic to a critical audience. Self-esteem is more general. It reflects your overall feelings about yourself—how positively or negatively you view yourself across all aspects of life. Another important difference involves feelings of worth: Self-efficacy isn't necessarily about how good or bad you feel about yourself—it's simply your belief that you can achieve something. You can be confident in your math skills without necessarily feeling proud or deriving personal worth from that skill. Self-esteem, however, always includes this evaluative component—how positively you see yourself and how worthy you feel as a person. Finally, these beliefs develop differently: Self-efficacy is mostly shaped through direct experiences of success (mastery), observing others (vicarious learning), receiving encouragement (verbal persuasion), and managing emotional responses (stress or anxiety). Mastery experiences, like succeeding at tasks, are especially powerful. Self-esteem tends to develop through broader comparisons—either comparing yourself with others (social comparison) or comparing your performance across different areas of your own life. Understanding these differences can help you recognize how each contributes uniquely to your overall confidence, motivation, and sense of well-being. When psychologist Albert Bandura introduced the idea of self-efficacy in the 1970s, he was careful to separate it from the broader, everyday concept of confidence. While the two terms might seem similar, they describe distinctly different things. Confidence refers generally to your strength of belief – how certain you feel about something – but it's often vague. You can be confident in your ability to succeed just as easily as you can be confident you'll fail. Confidence alone doesn't specify exactly what you're capable of or how well you think you can perform. Self-efficacy, however, is more precise. It describes your belief in your ability to successfully perform a specific task or handle a particular situation. For instance, you might have high self-efficacy about presenting a work project because you trust your skills and preparation. In other words, self-efficacy isn't just general assurance – it's confidence directly connected to performing certain actions. Think of it this way: Confidence: "I generally feel good about how I handle things." Self-efficacy: "I know I can deliver a great presentation because I've prepared thoroughly." Another important distinction is how each affects our behavior: High self-efficacy encourages you to view tough tasks as exciting challenges, boosting your motivation and commitment. Successfully meeting these challenges can, in turn, lead to increased confidence overall. General confidence, while helpful, doesn't necessarily tell you whether you feel capable of completing a specific action effectively. In short, while confidence gives you a general feeling of assurance, self-efficacy provides the targeted belief in your capability, driving your motivation, persistence, and ultimate success in specific areas of your life. At first glance, motivation and self-efficacy might seem very similar—but they're actually two distinct ideas that shape our behavior differently. Motivation refers to your desire or drive to reach a certain goal. It's the inner energy that pushes you to take action. Think of it as the reason why you decide to get out of bed in the morning and start your day. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is your belief in your ability to successfully achieve a specific goal or complete a particular task. This is the confidence that you have the skills and resources needed to get out of bed, face the day, and handle whatever comes your way. While people who feel highly capable (high self-efficacy) often have strong motivation—and vice versa—they aren't the same thing. You might really want to achieve something (high motivation), but if you doubt your ability (low self-efficacy), you may hesitate to start or quickly give up when things get tough. On the flip side, believing strongly in your ability can significantly boost your motivation. Each time you successfully complete tasks, your confidence increases, which in turn strengthens your motivation to keep going and take on even bigger challenges. How Does Self-Efficacy Fit with Other Theories of Motivation? Psychologists place self-efficacy alongside other motivational concepts to help explain how people behave and succeed: Intrinsic Interest: Feeling skilled and competent (high self-efficacy) can significantly boost your intrinsic motivation the pleasure you get from an activity itself. When you meet smaller goals along the way, you gain satisfaction and a greater interest in continuing, fueling a positive cycle of motivation and performance. Attribution Theory: This explains how our beliefs about why we succeeded or failed affect our motivation and future actions. People with high self-efficacy tend to attribute setbacks to factors they can change, such as effort or strategy, motivating them to keep trying. People with low self-efficacy often blame failures on a lack of ability, reducing motivation and increasing discouragement. Expectancy-Value Theory: This theory suggests we're motivated by two factors: how likely we think success is (expectancy) and how valuable the goal is to us. Including self-efficacy makes this even more precise because we don't just consider outcomes—we also evaluate whether we have the ability to achieve them. Many valuable goals go unpursued simply because we doubt our capability. Learning Activity Develop a measure of self-efficacy for any health-related behavior that avoids the confounding of self-efficacy with related constructs such as confidence or motivation. Health-related behaviors include: Smoking cessation Alcohol use Eating Pain control Exercise Design an intervention program that will enhance self-efficacy for a health-related behavior and a research design to measure changes in self-efficacy. References Bandura, A (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. Psychological Review. 84 (2): 191-215. Bandura, Albert (1977), Social Learning Theory Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-hall. Bandura, A. (1997b). Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. New York: Freeman. Bandura, Albert (1982). 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