

BUILDING SELF CONFIDENCE

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[HTTP://PHD.STANFORD.EDU/COMICS](http://phd.stanford.edu/comics)

"Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham www.phdcomics.com

“Somehow I can’t believe that there are any heights that can’t be scaled by a man who knows the secrets of making dreams come true. This special secret, it seems to me, can be summarized in the four C’s. They are curiosity, **confidence**, courage, and constancy, and the greatest of all is **confidence**. When you believe in a thing, believe in it all the way, implicitly and unquestionable.

Walt Disney

How self confident are you ?

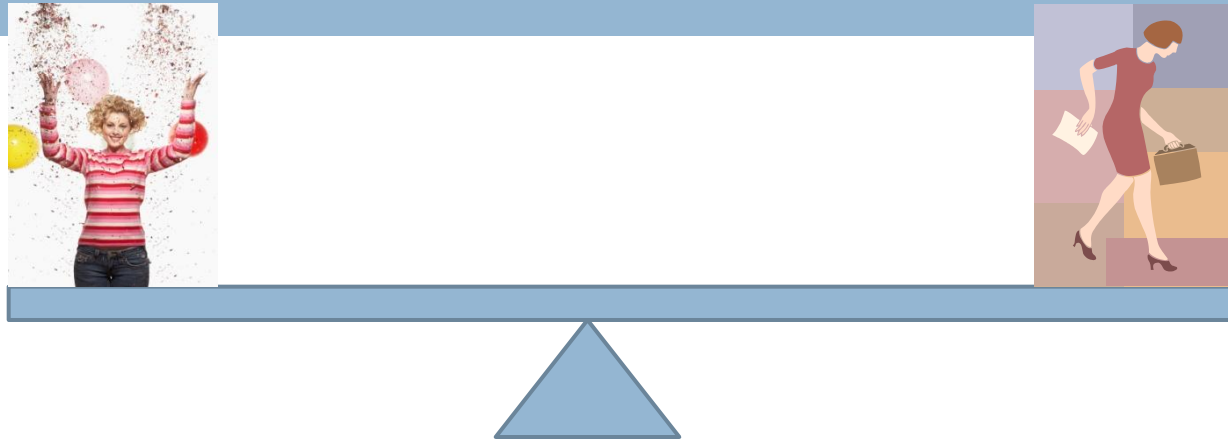
Self Confident

- Do what you believe to be right, even if criticized for it
- Willing to take risks
- Admit your mistakes and learn from them
- Wait for others to congratulate you
- Accept compliments graciously. “Thanks, I really worked hard on that paper.”

Low Self Confidence

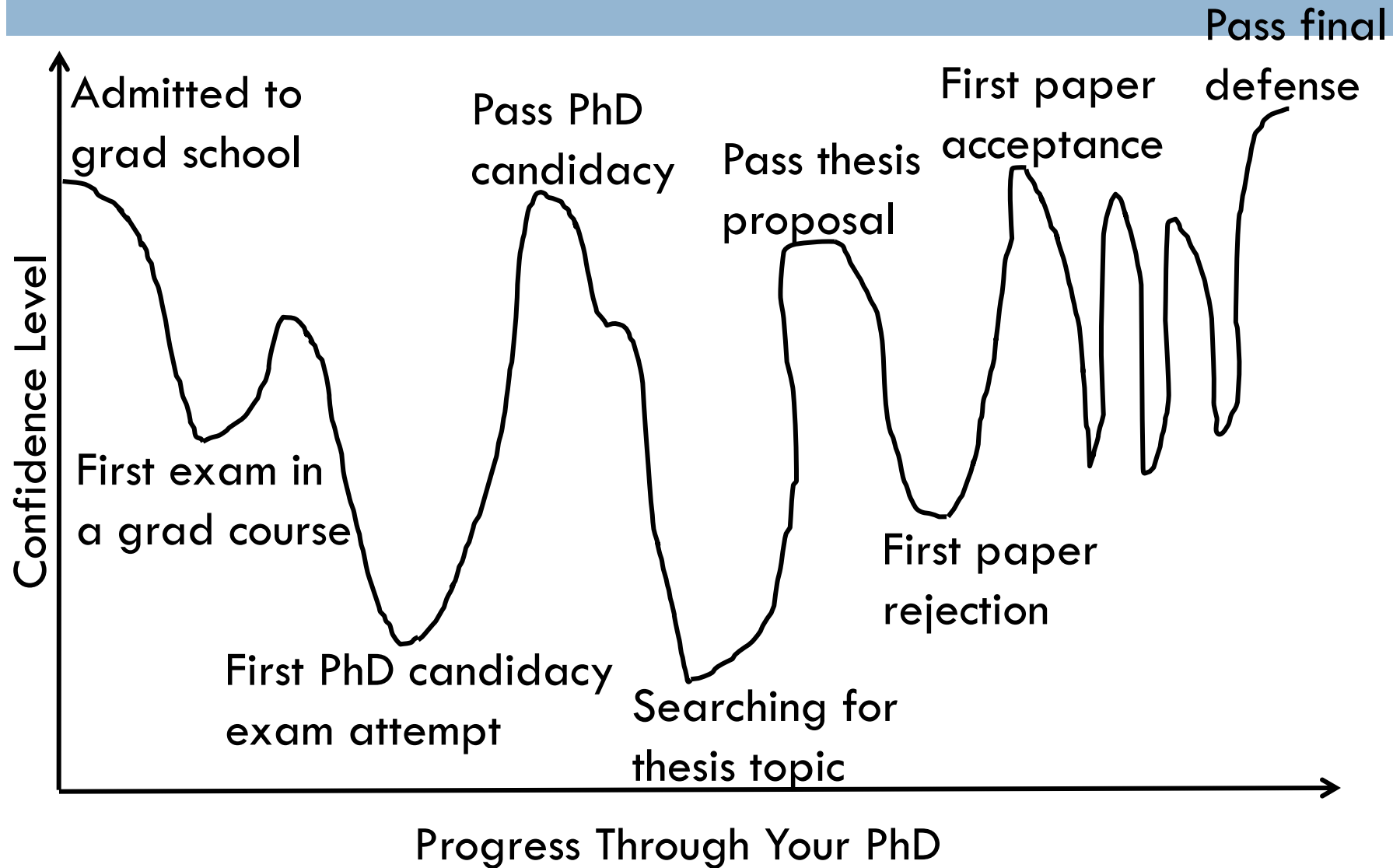
- Govern your behavior based on what others think
- Stay in your comfort zone
- Work hard to cover up your mistakes
- Extol your virtues as often & to as many as possible
- Dismiss compliments offhandedly. “Oh that paper was nothing really, anyone could have done it.”


Balancing self confidence



- If you are under-confident, you'll avoid taking risks and stretching yourself – you might not even try at all.
- If you are over-confident, you may take on too much risk, stretch yourself beyond your capabilities and fail badly.

Grad student confidence “plot”





“Every CS PhD student I have seen, including myself, had at least one period during which they are convinced that their dissertation topic is utterly worthless.”

Gerald Estrin, Professor Emeritus, Computer
Science, UCLA



The good news is that self confidence can be
learned and built on.

12 TIPS FOR BUILDING SELF CONFIDENCE



#1: Admit the problem

- Take stock of where you are, think about where you want to go, and recommit yourself to getting there
- Remember that no one is perfect. Even the *most* confident people have insecurities. Accept that life is full of bumps down the road and have faith that things will be better tomorrow.

#2: Find support

- Find someone **safe** you can talk frankly to
 - ▣ Make sure these are people you trust and who won't judge you in the future based on your current state of low self confidence
 - ▣ Surround yourself with nurturing friends. Watch out for those people who lower the confidence of those around them to compensate for their own confidence issues
- Be sure to be there to support others when they need it

#3: Recognize your successes

- Make a list of your recent successes, then read the list back to yourself
 - ▣ Think about your strengths and what you've achieved so far. Give yourself permission to take pride in your achievements to date.
 - ▣ Be realistic, but don't leave it blank
- Try to avoid just fixating on your failures

#4: Establish some reachable goals

- Make a list – that contains the intermediate steps – that will get you moving towards your PhD goals
 - ▣ If its to get that rejected paper accepted, let the review “age” for a while before reading it again. Ask yourself what was good about the paper and what needs improved. Develop a plan for revisions and resubmission.
- Identify the first *small* step needed to accomplish each goal and *make* that first step

#5: Take a break

- Take some time off from work/study to refresh and reflect
 - ▣ Have a nice dinner/lunch with friends and/or loved ones
 - ▣ Go shopping – buy that pair of shoes you’ve been wanting, that tennis racket, ...
 - ▣ Get some exercise, go for a run, hike, swim, ...
 - ▣ Pamper yourself, get your nails done, have a massage, ...

#6: Beware of the “triple low”

1. Your experimental results don't support that hypothesis you were so hyped about; your paper was just rejected; ...
2. You just saw that man you have such a crush on with another woman; you and your partner had a slamming-door fight this morning; ...
3. It's the first day of your period and that pimple just erupted ... again; those 5 pounds are back; ...

#7: Work to appear confident

- Speak slowly
 - ▣ A person who thinks they aren't worth listening to will speak quickly so as to not keep others waiting
- Stand tall
 - ▣ Don't slouch, walk around with your head held low
- Accept greetings and complements gracefully
 - ▣ When asked how you are doing, say with enthusiasm "Just great." Don't roll your eyes, groan, and say "I'm just swamped".

#8: Be prepared

- Go the extra mile to be ultra-prepared
 - ▣ Study your butt off for that exam
 - ▣ Spend more time in the lab running those additional experiments
 - ▣ Write down what you are going to discuss at the next group research meeting
 - ▣ Write, rewrite, rewrite that paper
 - ▣ Practice that talk again and again – in front of friends and not-so-friends
- But avoid perfectionism or you will never finish

#9: Stick to your principles

- Know your principles and live them
 - ▣ Live the Golden Rule
 - ▣ Live your passion
- Think about whether you actually live them, or if you just believe in them but don't act on them
- If you don't have something you believe in, you don't have anything. If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.

#10: Take a risk a day

- Challenge yourself everyday
 - ▣ Don't be afraid to push yourself a bit, a little bit of pressure is good for you
- Make it a habit

#11: Do what you enjoy doing

- Look for activities that you enjoy doing and spend time doing them regularly
 - ▣ Self confidence comes from how you feel about yourself. When you enjoy what you are doing, you will be happier and have more self confidence.

#12: Believe in yourself

- No one will believe in you until you believe in yourself

“Know yourself and you will win all battles.” Sun Tzu

- Think about what is important to you and where you want to go ... and then go for it !
 - And, smile often 😊

The imposter syndrome

- Regardless of success achieved or proof of competence, you remained convinced that you do not deserve it
 - ▣ Proof is dismissed as luck, timing, or as a result of deceiving others into thinking you were more intelligent and competent than you believe yourself to be
 - ▣ It is particularly common among successful women and typically associated with academics. It is also widely found among graduate students.

"My mother drew a distinction between *achievement* and *success*. She said that achievement is the knowledge that you have worked hard and done the best that is in you. Success is being praised by others ...

Always *aim* for achievement and forget about success."

Helen Hayes, Actress

From <http://women.cs.cmu.edu/What/Outreach/>

Credits

- CRA-Women (especially Esin Saka, Maria Klawe) at previous grad cohort workshops

<http://cra.org/Activities/craw/>

- Various web sites

- wikiHow: How to Build Self Confidence

<http://www.wikihow.com/Build-Self-Confidence>

- MindTools: Building Self-Confidence

<http://www.mindtools.com/selfconf.html>

- 25 Killer Actions to Boost Your Self-Confidence

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/12/25-killer-actions-to-boost-your-self-confidence/>