

## Chapter 1

# Something worth thinking about

## DESCARTES UPDATED

In 1644, the French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes, came up with the immortal words, '*I think, therefore I am*' - sometimes written, '*I think, therefore I exist*'. He rationalised that being consciously aware of the fact that he was thinking was proof that he existed.



Thinking might prove you exist but don't you want to do more than exist? Don't you want, and have a right to, a fulfilling life? To do that, you need to take Descartes' statement a step further and be more aware of *what* you think about and *how* you think about it because, as you will discover in this book, the *what* and the *how* of your thinking affect the kind of existence you have.

*What you think about and how you think about it determine the way you experience life and, consequently, they affect the quality of your life.*

## THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE

Consider just a few of the things that add 'quality' to life and make it more fulfilling - satisfying relationships, a generally positive outlook, a positive response to the inevitable problems you encounter, hobbies you make time for, work that adds to your sense of worth, a worthwhile pursuit you invest time in, a willingness to help others and contributing to society, etc.

The quality of your life depends on what you do - your behaviour. Behaviour (other than automatic responses such as pulling your hand away from something hot) is, to one extent or another, preceded by thought. Deciding what to have for breakfast, juggling priorities so that you can watch that important television

programme or planning how to broach a tricky topic with a work colleague are behaviours that involve thinking.

How you *think* determines how you *behave* and, as you will see shortly, the quality of your thinking affects much more than your breakfast, television viewing or whose turn it is to make the coffee.

*The quality of your thinking affects a lot!*

It affects the kind of person you are, your perception, your attitudes, values and beliefs, the subjective world you inhabit, your relationships to things and to people, your experiences, whether you are sad, pessimistic, frustrated, anxious, restless, pitied and avoided as bad company or whether you are happy, optimistic, fulfilled, relaxed, peaceful, admired and sought after as good company.

It also affects your perception of yourself, your outlook and your relative level of confidence.

*All this is a consequence of what you think about and how you think about it.*

So when was the last time you thought about your thinking? This is more than just becoming consciously aware that you are thinking about something; it means considering your thoughts, cleaning them up, dumping those old habitual thoughts that are past their 'use by date', identifying the ones with negative knock-on effects, consciously changing them and deliberately rehearsing and practising those that prove productive.

## **POWERFUL POSSIBILITIES**

Understanding what you think about and how you think about it are vital steps in the direction you take in the journey of life. On one hand, you avoid serious problems.

*Lack of confidence goes hand in hand with a tendency towards low self-esteem, stress, procrastination and pessimism.*

This combination, according to research, results in more visits to the doctor, a weaker immune system, lower survival rates from serious illness and earlier

mortality than the statistics would suggest.

*On the other hand, you can be happier, more sociable, have more friends, achieve more, relax more, be more respected and feel better about yourself.*

These are powerful possibilities.

## WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU

What those possibilities might mean to you depends on your starting point.

- Your 'default setting' might be pessimistic or melancholy and you want to feel happier.
- You know you have the potential to achieve more but 'something inside you' seems to be holding you back.
- You might have sufficient confidence to handle many situations, especially those with which you are already familiar, but you want to reach out and apply the same level of confidence to more challenging situations.
- You might feel that your level of confidence is displayed in a way that makes some people feel uncomfortable and, consequently, you want to achieve a better balance.
- You might just want to understand the subject better so that you can help a friend or loved one whose confidence needs strengthening. Whatever *Quietly Confident* means to you, the results can range from helpful and self-affirming to fundamental and life-changing.

## HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU?

*One of the problems with low confidence is that it can feel normal.* Have you ever assessed your own level of confidence? Checking it can confirm whether your level of confidence is ok or whether it needs to be dusted off, cleaned up and revitalised. The following questionnaire will not tell you if you are confident or not (that has to be your decision); neither will it give you a score quantifying your level of confidence (that is too open to misinterpretation).

*You will know, as you answer these questions and reflect on your answers, if your confidence is at the general level you want.*

1. How frequently do you dwell on, and get upset by, negative stories or the news?
2. How frequently do you do what you feel 'compelled' to do, or what you 'must' do or 'should' do rather than what you really want to do?
3. To what extent are you concerned about what people might think about you?
4. How easily are you persuaded to do what you would prefer not to do? How susceptible are you to peer pressure?
5. To what extent do you consistently put the needs of others before your own needs?
6. How often does anxiety affect your decisions, choices and actions?
7. To what extent do you give up easily? How easily discouraged are you?
8. To what extent do you avoid, or feel uncomfortable about, social events where you won't know many people?
9. To what extent do you feel self-conscious or disagree when people praise you?
10. To what extent does criticism make you feel bad?
11. Compared to other people, how sensitive are you?
12. To what extent do you avoid difficult conversations with people?
13. How often do you doubt your ability or believe it is less than that of other people?
14. To what extent do you consistently blame yourself when things go wrong?
15. To what extent do you gravitate towards negative thinking rather than positive thinking?
16. How often do you become aware that you are thinking negatively or replaying something negative in your imagination?
17. Do you have an inner voice? To what extent is it positive and empowering or negative and controlling? Do you ever wish you could shut it up?
18. To what extent do you feel that negative 'programs' are running in your

brain?

**19.** In one sentence, how would other people describe you to a third party?  
How do you feel about that description?

**20.** To what extent do you feel you lack confidence?

**21.** How many times, in response to these questions, did your brain respond with a qualifying 'Yes, *but...*' instead of a straight answer?

I suggest you let your answers sink in for a while. Reflect on which questions registered with you most, which answers you found most uncomfortable and which you would most like to change. That reflection will help you benefit more from the valuable ideas in this book.

## QUICK START GUIDE

Keen to get started? If you want to, you can begin straight away with any of these seven suggestions:

**1 Walk, speak and generally do things with a little more pace and purpose.** Behave *as if* you were (even more) confident, positive and optimistic. Breathe a bit more slowly and deeply with more emphasis on the inhale than the exhale. In the same way that an object cannot be in two places at the same time, you cannot be 'not confident' and 'confident' at the same time. When you walk, move and breathe confidently, you affect how you feel *and* how other people feel about you.

**2 Think of a situation in which your confidence feels low and see in how many ways you can reframe it.** Reframe the situation from at least three different perspectives. Ask yourself which reframe is most conducive to feeling confident and behaving confidently. Aim to do this at least twice a day.

**3 Focus on at least one easy situation an hour in which you will think and/or behave confidently.** Consciously thinking confident thoughts and behaving confidently continuously throughout your waking hours won't work because your conscious brain only has space for one thought at a time – and you'll probably need that space to get some work done or cross the road safely. So practise feeling and behaving confidently in brief, specific situations. This might mean making eye contact and smiling at someone as you hold a door open

for them or as someone serves you in a shop. If that is already very easy for you, try accepting a compliment by saying ‘*Thank you*’ instead of belittling yourself and/or the compliment. If that is already very easy, try something more challenging such as returning a faulty product to a shop. When you start with easy situations, you get the hang of it quickly and feel more inclined to repeat the process by behaving confidently in situations containing slightly more challenge. This frequent application, gradually ‘stretching’ your confident thinking and behaviour, is easier and more learning-efficient than infrequent application to very big challenges. The cumulative effect builds up surprisingly quickly.

**4 Intercept negative self-talk and replace it with positive self-talk – even if you have to *pretend* you’re confident.** Just like everyone else, you have a voice in your subconscious that talks to you and, every now and then, you become consciously aware of it. When the voice is critical or negative, it depresses your mood, making confident behaviour more difficult. So, as soon as you become consciously aware of negative self-talk, intervene and make two changes. First, change the tone. Make it a friendlier, kinder and more positive voice. Second, make what it says more constructive, forward-looking and empowering. When you change its tone and content, you lift your mood and confident behaviour follows more naturally.

**5 Allow small frustrating problems to bypass you.** It’s easy to get into a habit of noticing and reacting to small problems. As this habit develops, the firing threshold of the associated brain neurons lowers. You then begin *over-reacting*, even to small problems, your mood thermostat resets at a lower level and confidence becomes more elusive. Instead, stay calm. When, for example, a road hog comes out in front of you, your train is late or the computer takes a long time to boot up, just *let it go*. Please note that this is not the same as gritting your teeth and suppressing your emotions. You simply allow the problem to bypass you; *there is no emotion*. By allowing the problems to bypass your emotions, you effectively train yourself to stay calm in more challenging situations. When you are calm, it is easier to maintain control of your thoughts and behaviours. Confidence is easier.

**6 Get some ‘confidence coaches’.** Tell some friends or colleagues what you are doing and ask them to describe what they notice about you, how you come across and what effect your behaviour has on other people in specific situations. This has several benefits: learning is more motivational when the process is shared; your ‘coaches’ will notice things that you don’t; different ‘coaches’ will

notice different things in different situations, providing overall comprehensive feedback; by choosing specific situations, the feedback will be specific, which is much more useful than generalised feedback.

**7 Aim to make at least one person a day feel good for having come into contact with you.** That contact could be a friendly ‘Good morning’ as you pass them in a corridor, smiling as you hold open a door for them, a genuine ‘Thank you’ to a shop assistant, listening unconditionally to a friend, giving a colleague specific praise and so on. This shifts the focus of your thoughts and behaviours from yourself to other people, which provides two major benefits: first, it makes it easier for you to ‘get on’ with feeling confident and behaving confidently (it’s amazing what we can do when we stop thinking about it and just do it); second, seeing how good you make people feel makes you feel good too.



## A message from the author

Thank you for reading this example chapter from *Quietly Confident*.

To help you learn about confidence as quickly as possible, the example chapter is preceded by a detailed explanation of the terms used. It is then followed by chapters that:

- explain why confidence does not come naturally to us,
- show you how to make your thinking and your behaviour work together,
- show you how to help other people be more confident,
- how to make quiet confidence a way of life.

If a book is to make a real difference, it has to do more than inspire you; it has to give you practical solutions you can implement easily. *Quietly Confident* is full of proven, practical and mutually reinforcing ideas that will enable you to think, feel and behave more confidently in situations that matter to you.

This is what some readers have had to say about it:

***One of the best...here's why***

*Words to describe this book...clear, concise, scientific, practical, enjoyable, hype-free, realistic, relevant, grounded. What more can I say? I sincerely hope this book attracts the size of audience it deserves and you find it as helpful as I did. Terry Gillen is a masterful communicator. Read this book and you'll see why.*

*Paul McGee*

***An outstanding contribution from an exceptional thinker***

*Anyone would benefit from the wisdom and ideas in this book. It stopped me in my tracks several times and really made me think.*

*David Rees*

***Easily the best book on self-confidence***

*If you're looking to address your confidence levels, you won't find as much crucial and succinctly explained information packed into any other book.*

*Lin Flanagan*

***This book is a gem.***

*This is a brilliant book on so many levels - appearance, content, size, anecdotes etc. The turn of phrase is spot on and I would imagine it appealing to all age groups. I have recommended this book and will continue to recommend it. It is on my coffee table for immediate reference.*

*Dr C.*



***Quietly Confident - How to think, feel and communicate calmly and confidently in situations that matter to you*** is now available on Amazon and Kindle.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Quietly-Confident-Communicate-Confidently-Situations/dp/0993397808/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1458901533&sr=1-1&keywords=quietly+Confident](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Quietly-Confident-Communicate-Confidently-Situations/dp/0993397808/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1458901533&sr=1-1&keywords=quietly+Confident)