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Confidence Counts in Advancing Your Career

When it comes to your career, confidence may be an overlooked success factor. Though it may not be a stated qualification for getting hired or receiving a promotion, employers value workers and prospective hires who project a confident demeanor. An individual's self-assurance is often a key consideration when managers are deciding whom to promote to positions of greater responsibility and visibility within their organizations.

It's a good idea to reflect on the role of confidence in advancing your career as a legal administrator or, possibly, how lack of it may be holding you back from reaching the next rung on the professional ladder. Just as intelligence is often measured by IQ, consider how you would score if someone sought to gauge your confidence or "CQ" as a professional.

Although confidence is an intangible quality that cannot be truly quantified, certain traits and actions can be extremely telling in conveying self-assurance. Consider these questions to develop a sense of your personal CQ:

Where do you sit in meetings? One only has to recall memories from high school to grasp the symbolism behind seating arrangements. Assuming individuals were allowed to choose their seats, the best students inevitably selected the front seats. Conversely, the less engaged students typically chose seats at the back of the room, far from the teacher's watchful eye.

Business research supports the idea that where you choose to sit in meetings can influence how you're perceived and, ultimately, your career success. Choosing a visible seat tends to be a sign of confidence, genuine interest and a willingness to engage. Some studies even suggest that certain positions signal your degree of support for the boss or meeting leader. For instance, in a traditional conference room setting where participants are all seated around the same table, supportive individuals tend to sit to the right of the leader, while those who sit to the left may be more questioning types. The seat directly across from the meeting leader is often viewed as the "opponent's chair," and individuals sitting in this position often act accordingly.

Another position to be wary of is one that is "on the sidelines," or not at the table. Individuals in these seats may be perceived as lacking in confidence or, worse, being aloof or apathetic. This rule of thumb also applies to large group meetings, where a senior partner or manager leads the discussion in front of participants; in these settings, avoid sitting in less prominent seats, such as at the back of the room.

With these general guidelines in mind and assuming you're not late to a meeting and forced to accept whatever seat is available, give careful thought to where you sit in meetings and what signal you're sending with your choice of seats.

What is your business demeanor? Be conscious of what your everyday behavior in the office, at meetings and other business functions says about your confidence level. For instance, do you rarely speak up unless specifically asked for your thoughts on a subject, or do you volunteer comments or suggestions when appropriate?

Your interpersonal aptitude and body language are other telling indicators of your degree of self-assurance. Actions such as introducing yourself to others, rather than waiting to be introduced; offering a firm handshake, making eye contact and initiating conversations can all be perceived as signs of confidence.

How do you act in the presence of higher-ups? To assume positions of increasing importance and responsibility, you should feel at ease with colleagues at all levels. If you want to be a member of your firm's management team, for instance, you need to be as confident in your interactions with the managing partner as you are with the office receptionist. Although you always want to be respectful to everyone in the office, be conscious of not being overly deferential to higher-ups. If your goal is to advance to the top levels of your profession, aim to come across as a colleague, not a subordinate.

Do you dress for a higher level of success? You've probably heard the adage that you should dress for the job you want, not the one you currently hold. This saying remains relevant, regardless of your career stage. In fact, it becomes even more important to "dress the part" as you seek to advance your career. Those in management positions are role models for others in the office and often present a public face for their firm at professional gatherings. By always being well-groomed and dressing in a polished, professional manner, you can not only project greater confidence but also do your part to inspire it in others.

Although confidence is critical to career success, all professionals experience occasional self-doubts and may question at times whether they have what it takes to meet the challenges they face. But the ability to come across as confident may be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, helping to propel your career forward. Rene Descartes, the famous mathematician, is known for his statement, "I think; therefore I am." When it comes to advancing your career, consider a similar motto, "I convey confidence; therefore I am."