Learning to flourish

If a receptionist is too quiet or too abrasive, it's likely that a lack of confidence is the problem, says Glenys Bridges, who suggests that this issue can easily be resolved with some correct training.

Have you ever noticed that it's how you project yourself, rather than your skills and abilities, that influence how employers and patients perceive you? All too often people who work quietly, diligently and with attention to detail are overlooked in favour of colleagues with an 'X-factor'. But over time, some of these people are shown up for what they are - all style and no substance.

If you recognise this scenario from your own working life, you'll be interested to single out the X-factor so you can build it into your working style. If this is the case, look no further. What you are looking for is the confidence factor. Confidence is something certain people ooze; it is seductive and reassuring for onlookers. Other people's confidence can lift you when you're feeling worried or uncertain and since many of us are familiar with these emotions, we look to outwardly confident people to sustain us.

Why some people are naturally more confident than others has been thoroughly researched by psychologists, many of whom agree there is an 80-20 ratio in force, with nurture being by far the most influential. Most agree that the environment in which we grow up will shape our feeling of self worth, as too will workplace culture.

Conquering self-doubt

We are all affected, to some extent, by how we are treated by the people surrounding us. When others like and respect us, we are most likely to flourish, but we can't rely on others to determine our self-esteem. Truly sustainable confidence starts when you conquer your self-doubts and focus on your strengths.

Before you can be really confident at work, you need to feel sure your workplace skills are sufficient to enable you to effectively manage any circumstances or tasks you encounter. This requires practice managers to set your job description, and then provide the training and guidance needed so you are aware what is expected of you.

When employers approach companies to find ways of meeting reception staff development needs, they are most likely to say their receptionist is either too quiet and doesn't interact well with patients, or is too confrontational and needs to be more sympathetic to patients' anxieties.

In most cases, the underlying problem is the same - a lack of true confidence. This illustrates how individuals react differently to the same emotion with some opting for the flight response when they are feeling out of their depth. Building confidence means cultivating internal talk which says, ‘Whatever happens, using my training and expertise, I can work out the most appropriate response. I am in full control of my work, so don’t need to fear what others may say or do’. When we feel confident, we look and feel confident. This starts a chain reaction that feeds off our self worth and our ability to support and sustain those around us when they are at a low ebb, nervous or in some cases terrified.

If this level of competence is achieved through hands-on training, it's fair to say you're training at the school of hard knocks, where you learn not to make mistakes, rather than through understanding what is required and using your skills and imagination to make that happen.


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