

The ABCs of Work: Belief

Career Development



Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is **Belief**.

Early in your career, your self-confidence will not be warranted. Self-confidence propels your career because it inspires you to push yourself and try things you otherwise would not.

Last time we talked about Ambition in the sense that you *desire to get better*. An important corollary is you must also have a firmly-grounded *belief that you can*. Self-confidence is incredibly helpful to your prospects of success. It is helpful not because your perception is necessarily accurate. Early in your career, your self-confidence will not be warranted. Self-confidence propels your career because it inspires you to push yourself and try things you otherwise would not.



Self-confidence is one of the most important traits to possess in order to be successful. FGC / *Shutterstock.com*

The power of belief

From one perspective, saying you must believe you can improve and succeed is trivial. We wouldn't do anything if we didn't think we could do it, right? Upon reflection, I don't believe this is true.

If you think about it, people undertake things all the time without being committed to the belief they will succeed. How many people apply to top schools where their admission odds are dismal? Or submit a resume for a job that is, ahem, "aspirational" given their qualifications? It takes a certain amount of wishful thinking to make a budget request for new capital spending, but that never stopped anyone from doing it. Every new product proposal or freshly launched marketing campaign comes with questionable success rates.

What are all these people thinking? We can't tell just from their behavior. I've observed people make decisions for many years and then explored their thought processes. From this, I suggest there are

fundamentally two approaches: In the first camp, people who think “whatever, it’s my job,” and in the second, people who think “I can do this, I will do this, I will be successful.”

Your visual reference for the first group is Marvin, the robot from *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, who suffers terrible depression, ironically, from being asked to do only trivial tasks beneath his abilities.

And the standard-bearer for the second group is Han Solo preparing to fly into an asteroid field and responding to a worried C3P0 in *The Empire Strikes Back*, “Never tell me the odds!”

When you genuinely believe you will succeed in a task, you actually increase your odds of success in that task. The phenomenon comes about in various ways:

- You are undaunted by small setbacks, because you know that success requires persistence and overcoming obstacles.
- Your confidence inspires others, who are more likely to contribute wholeheartedly to projects that they think will be successful than those doomed to failure.
- You put in more effort than on tasks you’re not fully committed to, because failure is not an option.
- You spend more time thinking about the task, because the thought of succeeding is pleasant, which has the side effect that you anticipate problems and come up with creative solutions.



Individuals start to believe more in their own capabilities by showing perseverance and persistence. Overearth / *Shutterstock.com*

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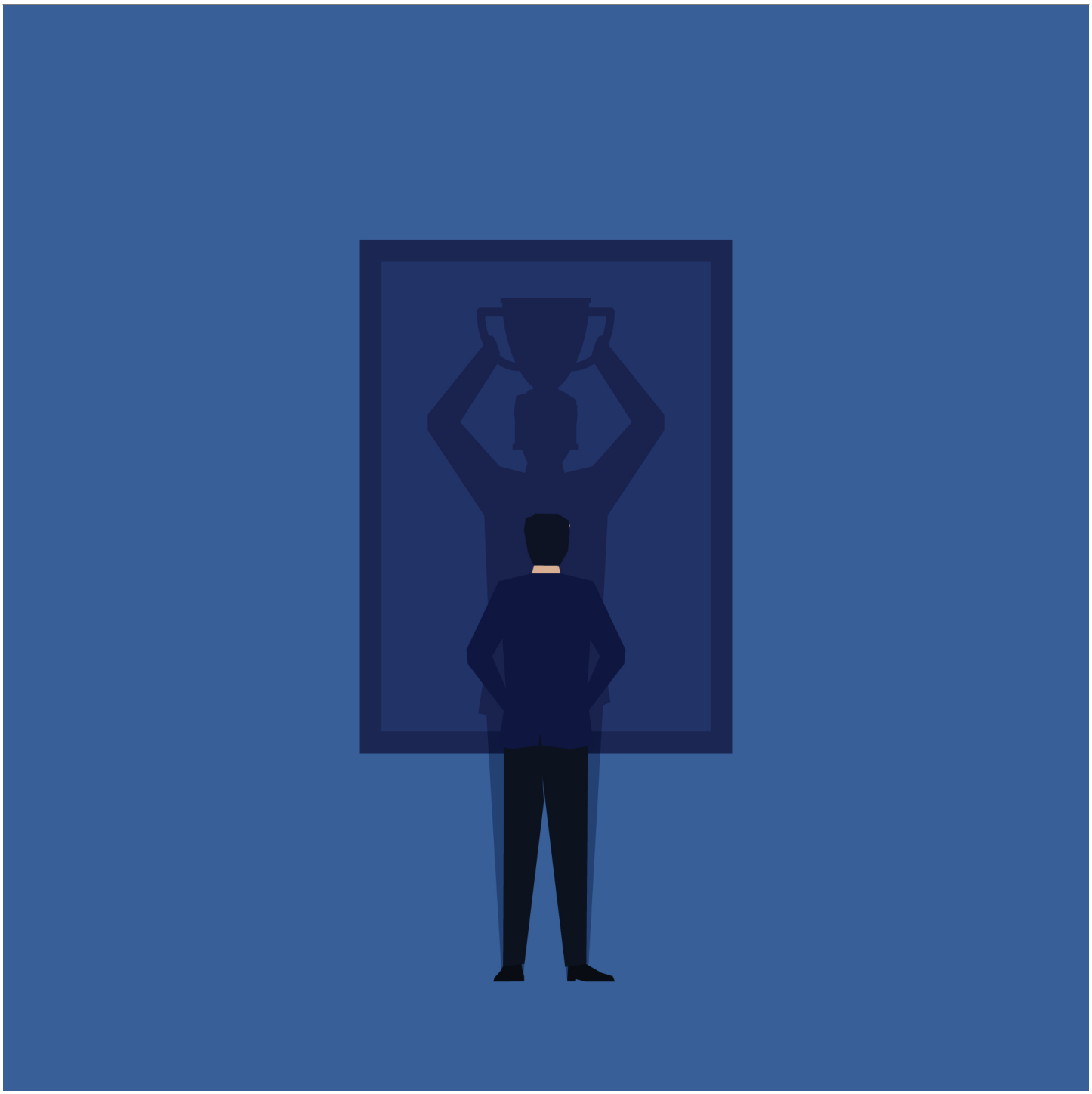
All this adds up to belief and self-confidence helping luck find you more often.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Does a delusional belief become counter-productive?

We all know people who are confident well-beyond any reasonable justification. They sometimes get in dangerously over their heads and cause disasters.

Self-belief and over-confidence, however, help you more than they hurt you. The world continually sends adjusting signals that keep people from overreaching. As such, you are much more likely to underestimate your abilities than overestimate them. And even when you are genuinely delusional in your beliefs, you still are improving your odds. Best of all, *sometimes you will succeed*. Nothing begets belief in yourself like seeing that belief justified. The more you do it, the more reinforcement you'll get.



Over-confidence leads to high levels of motivation and optimism. Jack_Aloya / *Shutterstock.com*

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Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as belief. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mention tips to serve as food for thought:

Belonging — You will perform better when you identify with your company, your colleagues, and your work. Does embracing bonds in this way make you a sap, or make it easier for your boss to take

advantage of you? Maybe. But put aside the cynicism and embrace belonging, and you'll be amazed at what it does for your prospects. You stand out precisely because so many others are worried about being considered old-fashioned sentimentalists.

> Your colleagues will forgive your being wrong occasionally much more than they'll tolerate cowardice.

Bravery — Success is borne on the back of hard calls correctly made. By definition, hard calls are fraught with risk. You will be wrong sometimes. People appreciate when you take a principled stand for the right reasons, even if your decision proves wrong in hindsight. Your colleagues will forgive your being wrong occasionally much more than they'll tolerate cowardice.

Be well.

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.