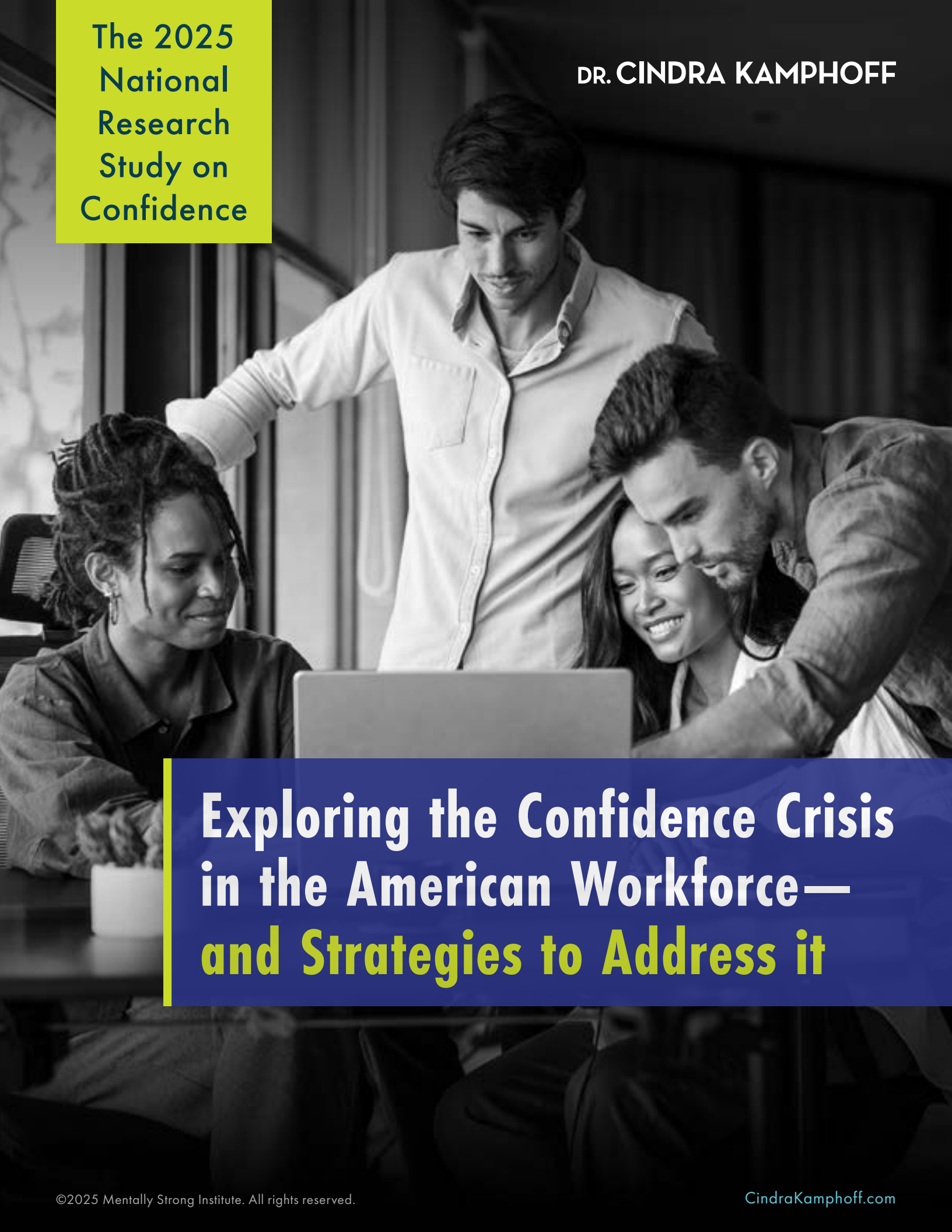




The 2025
National
Research
Study on
Confidence

DR. CINDRA KAMPHOFF

Exploring the Confidence Crisis in the American Workforce— and Strategies to Address it

Welcome!

Thank you for investing the time to read an incredibly important study affecting virtually every aspect of business and life: **The 2025 National Research Study on Confidence**. This groundbreaking study is packed with key findings, unexpected insights, and never-before-seen stats that leaders, employers, and team members need to know to drive greater performance and results. In fact, the national study revealed that a staggering 66% of working Americans said we're facing a crisis of confidence. Let that sink in: Two-thirds of American workers think confidence in America is in serious trouble.

If that weren't significant enough, nearly half (48%) of Gen Z working Americans (ages 18 to 29) frequently or always struggle with feeling like they aren't enough, and 47% regularly compare themselves to others. For younger Millennials (ages 30 to 36), the story isn't much better. The generation raised on smartphones and social media is wrestling with self-worth, comparison culture, and a relentless inner critic—as the report will show.

So, how does this affect you?

Gen Z and Millennials are the emerging generations of employees, leaders, and innovators, and it's important to realize this confidence crisis isn't just a personal struggle. We're talking about an organizational and societal issue of global proportions that can impact everything from work and relationships to daily behaviors. As our research demonstrates, when confidence plummets, so too does productivity, revenue, innovation, and overall well-being. The future of your organization (and your bottom line) hinges on reversing this trend.

The good news—and yes, there's plenty to be found within the pages of this national study—is that confidence isn't determined at birth. It's not a mysterious quality you're either born with or without. Confidence can be systematically and intentionally grown, nurtured, and strengthened. Our research identified concrete, practical strategies for individuals to grow their own confidence and actionable ways leaders can support and build confidence in their teams. For example, we discovered the power of setting achievable goals, fostering supportive work environments, and even simple, proven acts like dressing in a way that boosts confidence.

You might be wondering, "Is confidence really that obvious?" The truth is, 73% of working Americans form opinions about your confidence level within the first two minutes of meeting you, and it often starts with how you present yourself. Confidence matters more than competence alone. However, our research revealed something fascinating: Combining confidence and competence together create a powerful feedback loop. Building your competence boosts your confidence, and higher confidence leads to greater competence.

This white paper pulls back the curtain on America's confidence crisis, separates myth from fact, and equips leaders and individuals with the insights and practical tools to grow real, lasting confidence in yourself and others.



of working Americans form opinions about your confidence level within the first two minutes of meeting you

I hope you find the resources within this study to be beneficial and thought provoking. If you're ready to dive even deeper into this important topic, I invite you to visit our resource-filled website: MentallyStrongInstitute.com or request a discovery call to learn about our mental tools, strategies, and services at MentallyStrongInstitute.com/Discovery.

Sincerely,

Dr. Cindra Kamphoff, Ph.D., CMPC, PCC, CSP



Contents

- 2 | Welcome
- 4 | Summary
- 5 | **Insight 1: The Confidence Crisis in Gen Z Needs Immediate Attention**
- 6 | **Insight 2: Confidence Can Be a Costly Invisible Barrier**
- 8 | **Insight 3: The Hidden Costs of Low Confidence**
- 10 | **Insight 4: Where Confidence Really Comes From (and How to Build It)**
- 12 | **Insight 5: Ways that Leaders Make (or Break) Confidence**
- 14 | **Insight 6: Confidence Is Essential to Your Organization's Bottom Line**
- 16 | Research Study Conclusions and Actions to Take Now
- 17 | About The Study's Authors
- 18 | National Research Study Methodology
- 19 | Copyright and Allowed Usage





Summary

Confidence is not something you can set and forget. Instead, confidence shifts and slides based on the person and the scenario they're facing. And, according to our national research, a resounding number of people believe higher confidence can lead to a higher paycheck.

The national study revealed **70% of working Americans believe they'd earn more money if they improved their confidence**. Even more striking, **75% believe confidence propels you further in life than sheer smarts**. Confidence is a catalyst that drives success in both careers and life. But here's the catch: Confidence levels aren't uniform, even within the same individual.

For example, have you ever nailed a big presentation, but stumbled when giving critical feedback to an individual? The study revealed people felt the lowest confidence levels during negative interactions, such as arguments or delivering critical feedback. Turns out, our confidence dips dramatically not just when we're under stress, but specifically when handling negativity or conflict.



Action Question:

How aware are you of your own confidence fluctuations, and what strategies are you using to stabilize and strengthen your confidence across different situations?

INSIGHT 1:

The Confidence Crisis in Gen Z Needs Immediate Attention

Gen Z is at the epicenter of America's confidence crisis. Our national research uncovered startling trends about the youngest generation entering today's workforce. **Nearly half (48%) of Gen Z workers said they frequently or constantly feel they're not enough, while 47% struggle regularly with comparing themselves to others and dealing with a harsh inner critic.**

What's driving this alarming crisis? Gen Z has faced a multitude of challenges at a critical time in their coming-of-age experience. They've faced global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and, significantly, the relentless rise of social media and smartphone usage. An overwhelming **73% of working Americans pinpoint social media as a major factor behind the confidence struggles of young people.** We call this the "**Confidence Collapse™**"—three numbers that explain why belief in oneself is breaking down in real time at work and in life, especially for young professionals.



73% of working Americans pinpoint social media as a major factor behind the confidence struggles of young people

Speaking of smartphones, let's put this into perspective. According to a recent Harmony Healthcare IT study of over 1,000 Americans, the average person spends a little more than five hours daily on their phone. It's even more intense for Gen Z, clocking in at about *six-and-a-half hours every day*¹. Imagine spending that long staring into a device that bombards you with curated images of people living their best personal and professional lives. Is it any wonder that comparison and insecurity are rampant?

Why Employers (and Parents) Need to Act Now

Gen Z are tomorrow's leaders. Their current struggles with self-worth and comparison could have long-term implications, not just on their individual success, but on the health and innovation of your entire organization. Leaders, this is your opportunity to proactively address these confidence issues with targeted onboarding, intentional mentoring, and systematic confidence-building strategies and tools.

Parents, you have a stake here, too. If your child is Gen Z, their future is likely shaped by how well they learn to build and protect their confidence. You can't shield them entirely from comparison culture or social media, but you can help them navigate it effectively. The good news? Our study proves confidence can absolutely be grown with intentional practice, tools, and strategy.

And if you're reading this as a member of Gen Z yourself, consider this a rallying cry for your generation. Embrace tools and practices that cultivate genuine self-assurance. Remember, confidence is a muscle you can strengthen over time.



Action Question:

How intentionally are you building the confidence of the Gen Zers in your life, whether as a leader, mentor, parent, or peer?

¹ <https://www.harmonyhit.com/phone-screen-time-statistics/>



INSIGHT 2:

Confidence Can Be a Costly Invisible Barrier

Confidence is a powerful driver of success, but most working Americans find their confidence regularly challenged by internal barriers. According to our national study, **nearly 70% of working Americans dwell on past mistakes and wrestle with a harsh inner critic.** Imagine trying to run a race with heavy weights strapped around your ankles. That's exactly what negative self-talk, overthinking, and contemplation feel like, holding us back from being fully present, engaged, and performing at our best.

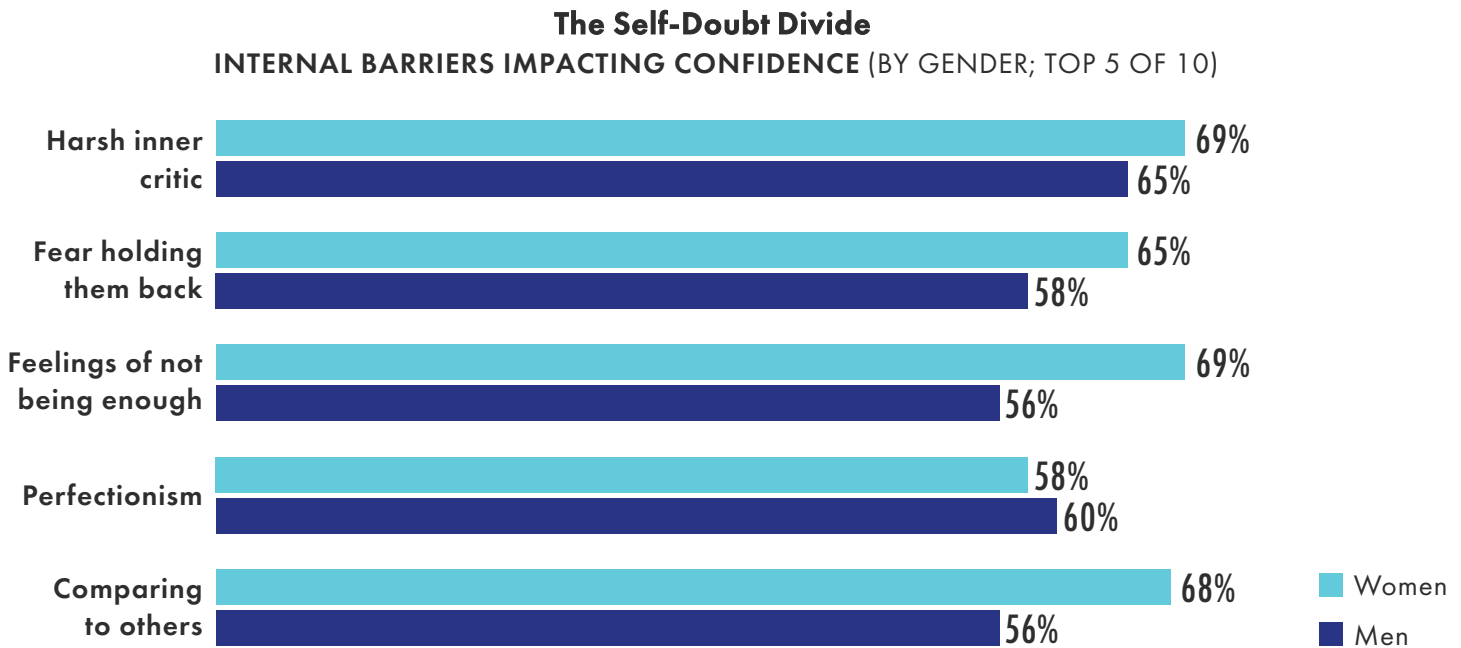
Equally alarming is the **widespread feeling of “not being enough,” experienced by 62% of respondents.** Closely tied to this troubling statistic is the pervasive culture of comparison, with **63% of American workers frequently measuring themselves against others.** It's important to note: Our self-worth, which is our internal sense of being good enough and worthy of love and belonging, is *foundational*. It shapes our daily decisions, creativity, emotional health, and ultimately, our legacy. When confidence and self-worth erode, it stifles innovation, growth, and forward momentum in our careers and lives.



of working Americans dwell on past mistakes and wrestle with a harsh inner critic

Women Face Unique Confidence Challenges

Digging deeper, the study uncovered significant gender differences. Women reported experiencing a harsh inner critic, perfectionism, fear, and the nagging feeling of inadequacy occasionally, frequently, or all the time more often than men. Here's how stark those differences are:



The study reveals that women face confidence challenges which are both individual in nature and connected to bigger cultural and societal gender barriers. Recognizing and understanding these barriers is *crucial* because recognizing what's holding women back is the first step toward breaking through these barriers. With awareness and courage, women can use intentional tools and strategies, embrace a willingness to challenge their limiting beliefs, reclaim their inner strength, and move boldly toward their full potential. Changing cultural and societal barriers takes one person at a time building women up and seeing their full potential.



Action Question:

What specific steps are you or your organization taking to address these internal barriers to confidence, particularly negative self-talk, comparison culture, and imposter syndrome?



INSIGHT 3:

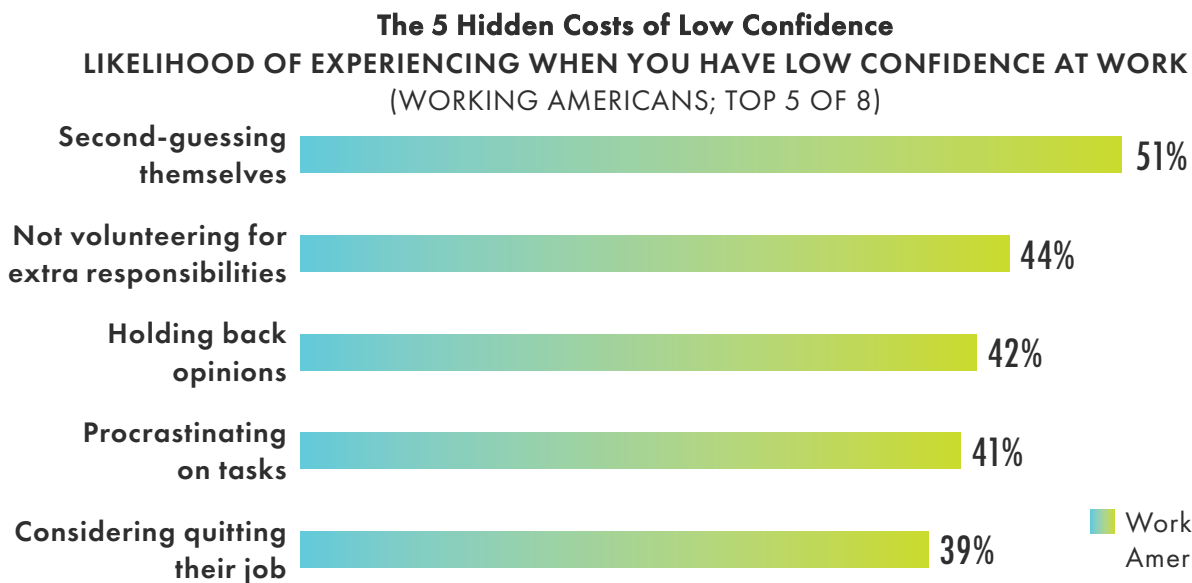
The Hidden Costs of Low Confidence

When confidence dips, consequences ripple through workplaces and quietly erode productivity, innovation, and retention. According to our research, **33% of working Americans have quit a job because it was actively hurting their confidence**. Imagine the talent and potential walking out the door, not because they lacked skill or ambition, but simply because their workplace drained their self-belief.

But the consequences don't stop there. Here are the top five behaviors working Americans report experiencing when their confidence takes a hit:



of working Americans have quit a job because it was actively hurting their confidence



Each of these consequences is a direct detriment to an organization's bottom line. If employees hold back ideas, innovation suffers. When they procrastinate, productivity stalls. If they hesitate to take on extra responsibilities or shy away from challenges, their growth and potential are limited, directly impacting their personal career trajectory and the organization's overall performance.

And let's not overlook retention. Employees considering leaving due to low confidence create huge hidden costs, because turnover, recruiting, onboarding, and training replacements all cost resources, time, and money. Keeping your best talent starts with boosting their confidence and creating environments where they can thrive, and not merely survive.

Why Organizations Should Care about the Gender Gap

Women face especially pronounced confidence challenges. Our study found **women are significantly more likely than men to constantly second-guess themselves (56% women vs. 44% men)**, and they're also **far less likely to share their point of view (47% women vs. 38% men)**. This gap doesn't just hurt women personally, it deprives organizations of valuable perspectives, insights, and ideas.



Women (56%) are significantly more likely than men (44%) to constantly second-guess themselves

These findings are critical for leaders. By understanding that women may be more hesitant to share their point of view, managers can be intentional about creating safe spaces, inviting input proactively, and supporting confidence growth among female team members. Recognizing and addressing this issue isn't just good leadership; it's smart business.

The bottom line? Confidence matters, and the stakes are higher than we realize. Thankfully, confidence can be intentionally built and strengthened, and doing so should serve as both a personal development goal and business imperative.



Action Question:

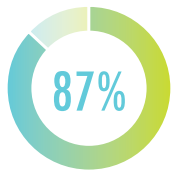
Are you aware of the hidden ways low confidence is costing your organization, and what intentional strategies do you have in place to proactively build and protect the confidence of your people?

INSIGHT 4:

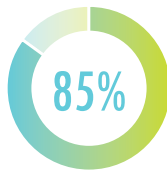
Where Confidence Really Comes From (and How to Build It)

It's important to remember that confidence isn't a fixed trait you're born with—it's a skill you can build over time. This is exciting because it means your potential to become more confident is essentially limitless. **The national study identified eight clear, evidence-based, actionable ways people can intentionally strengthen their self-confidence, giving individuals and leaders concrete steps for meaningful change.**

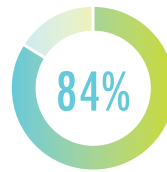
Below are the most effective confidence-building practices working Americans rated as very important or somewhat important which we call **The Eight Drivers of Confidence™**:



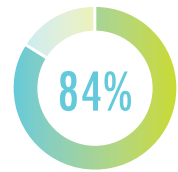
Setting clear goals with a plan to achieve those goals



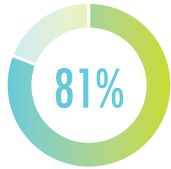
Ensure you're always prepared



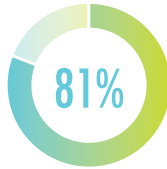
Releasing judgment and letting go of past mistakes



Knowing who you want to be and acting accordingly



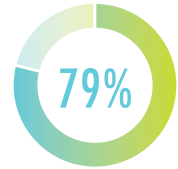
Celebrating your accomplishments



Being your own internal coach and cheerleader



Regulating my emotional response to setbacks



Getting support from mentors, coaches, or other positive influences

The top three methods—goal setting, preparation, and letting go of mistakes—are strongly backed by research in performance psychology. Here's an interesting twist: Even though 55% said releasing judgment is critical, earlier findings in Insight 2 showed nearly 70% of people regularly dwell on past mistakes and battle a harsh inner critic. Clearly, the struggle to let go is real...but it's also solvable.

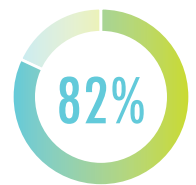
Practical tools at the Mentally Strong Institute directly address these top confidence builders. Take our "Learn, Burn, Return™" strategy, for example. It helps you acknowledge a mistake (Learn), release it intentionally (Burn), and then confidently get back on track (Return). Similarly, our "Truth Meter™" approach helps individuals separate critical self-talk from reality, reducing judgment and anxiety, and boosting confidence. You can learn more about our Mentally Strong tools by requesting a discovery call at MentallyStrongInstitute.com/Discovery.



Confidence-Shaping Behaviors Start Early and Can Be Visible from the Outside as Adults

Parents, take note: An overwhelming **82% of working Americans believe parents significantly shape their children's confidence**. This statistic is a call to action for parents and mentors alike. Building confidence early creates lasting advantages throughout life and careers. Also noteworthy is that confidence isn't just felt, it's visible: **62% of working Americans say they can gauge a person's confidence simply by how they dress**. Dressing confidently influences both self-perception and how others perceive you.

Confidence is within your control, and it's something you must intentionally cultivate. The rewards ripple across every aspect of life and work.



of working Americans believe parents significantly shape their children's confidence



Action Question:

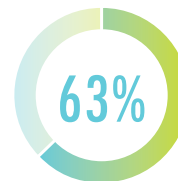
Which of these eight confidence-building strategies on the previous page are you intentionally practicing now, and which ones could you adopt or strengthen to accelerate your personal or team success?



INSIGHT 5:

Ways that Leaders Make (or Break) Confidence

Think back to the best boss you've ever had. Chances are, they built your confidence, recognized your achievements, and went above and beyond simply managing you or your work. These things matter to people. In fact, according to our national study, an eye-popping **63% of working Americans would actually take a lower-paying job just to work for a leader who actively builds their confidence.** Confidence-building leadership is a career-defining priority for most people, and many would even take a pay cut to get it!



of working Americans would actually take a lower-paying job just to work for a leader who actively builds their confidence

The 8 Confidence Accelerators™: What Leaders Should Do to Build Confidence

When we asked employees about the most effective ways leaders can boost their confidence at work, they highlighted these top strategies:

1. Set achievable goals
2. Recognize achievements
3. Foster a supportive work environment
4. Offer opportunities for learning and development
5. Remove toxic employees
6. Delegate tasks and responsibilities to empower employees
7. Embrace failures
8. Model authenticity and not always having all the answers

Although these aren't groundbreaking concepts, they aren't consistently practiced, either. Leaders who embrace these simple but powerful actions create teams that are more engaged, productive, and innovative.

The 8 Confidence Killers™: What Leaders Should Avoid

On the flip side, some leadership behaviors can quietly undermine team confidence. As cited by the workers we surveyed, these damaging actions include:

1. Micromanaging employees
2. Providing a lack of direction or support
3. Failing to recognize achievements
4. Showing no empathy or understanding
5. Being unresponsive to concerns
6. Being inconsistent with their expectations
7. Blame others rather than take responsibility
8. Creating a culture of fear where you cannot take risks or share concerns

Leaders may not intentionally set out to crush confidence, but actions like these chip away at employees' self-belief, motivation, and self-worth over time. And as shown above, employees so value confidence that a majority would take a lower-paying job if it actively built their confidence!

Here's the reality: Confidence is foundational to individual *and business results*. It impacts your organization's productivity, revenue, efficiency, and ability to achieve goals. If you're a leader, your mission should be to consciously and consistently grow the confidence of your people. Request a discovery call at MentallyStrongInstitute.com/Discovery to learn more about how to build the confidence of your team members.



Action Question:

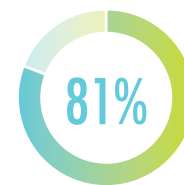
Are your leadership behaviors building or eroding your employees' confidence, and what's one practical step you can take right now to intentionally become a confidence builder for your team?



INSIGHT 6:

Confidence Is Essential to Your Organization's Bottom Line

Leaders, here's a bold truth: Employee confidence directly impacts your organization's performance. Yet, many leaders still assume confidence is just a personal issue and something each employee needs to figure out on their own. Confidence is also an organizational issue. According to our study, **81% of working Americans are attracted to teams and organizations that prioritize and value confidence.**



of working Americans are attracted to teams and organizations that prioritize and value confidence

The High Cost of Low Confidence

When employees regularly struggle with low confidence, the organization pays the price. The study uncovered some striking risks to companies when employees regularly experience low confidence. The top six risks in order from highest to low:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Reduced productivity | 3. Toxic work culture | 5. No innovation or creativity |
| 2. Higher stress and anxiety | 4. Higher turnover rates | 6. Decline in revenue |

The consequences are costly issues that affect everything from output to retention. For example, our research discovered one-third of working Americans (33%) have called in sick because they were feeling low confidence and one-third of all working Americans (33%) quit a job because their confidence was taking a hit. The numbers don't lie: Organizations simply cannot afford to ignore low confidence.

The Payoff of High Confidence: The Confidence ROI

Now, for the good news. Organizations that actively invest in boosting their employees' confidence reap substantial benefits. Our research identified significant advantages of fostering a high-confidence workforce, including in order of benefit:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Increased productivity | 5. Higher retention rates | 7. Stronger leadership potential |
| 2. Reduced stress levels | 6. Greater innovation and creativity | 8. Improved culture |
| 3. Better decision-making | | |
| 4. Improved customer service | | |

Each of these points represents a clear, competitive advantage, yet achieving them goes beyond superficial positivity or touchy-feely slogans. Rather, growing employee confidence means supporting your people in tangible ways, like setting clear and achievable goals, recognizing and celebrating their achievements, creating supportive and positive working environments, and providing ample opportunities for growth.

The Leadership Imperative

Organizations and leaders who intentionally nurture their team's confidence build stronger, more resilient organizations positioned for sustained success. Ignore confidence, and you risk losing your best people, undermining your productivity, and damaging your reputation. But embrace it, and you unlock the true potential of your workforce.



Action Question:

How actively are you prioritizing building confidence in your organization today, and what's one practical action you can implement this week to begin harnessing the benefits of a high-confidence team?

Research Study Conclusions and Actions to Take Now

The **2025 National Research Study on Confidence** makes one thing crystal clear: America is facing a confidence crisis that is especially pronounced among Gen Z and younger Millennials. An alarming **66% of working Americans agree there's a genuine crisis unfolding**.

And when nearly half of our youngest workers frequently feel they aren't enough and constantly compare themselves to others, it's more than just personal struggle. It's an urgent call to action for leaders and organizations everywhere.

Confidence isn't merely about feeling good—it directly impacts organizational performance, productivity, and revenue. Our study found that nearly 70% of working Americans dwell on past mistakes and experience a relentless inner critic, impacting their ability to show up as their best selves. And when 62% of working Americans often feel that they are not enough, this becomes a self-esteem issue that has a profound impact on an organization.

Leaders and organizations that intentionally prioritize employee confidence reap tangible benefits, including higher productivity, increased innovation, better decision-making, improved customer service, and stronger retention. The data paints a clear picture that confidence is an economic driver leaders must actively cultivate.

The strategies revealed in this study are ideal for leaders to use to support their teams and apply across their organizations. These include setting clear and achievable goals, consistently recognizing employee accomplishments, creating genuinely supportive workplace environments, and providing meaningful opportunities for learning and growth.

Addressing confidence has to be thought of as more than superficial positivity. It's about creating an environment where people feel equipped, empowered, and genuinely supported. By acknowledging and proactively addressing this confidence crisis, you're building more resilient, innovative, and profitable organizations. Confidence is fragile, but it's also buildable. It starts with awareness and understanding. Now is the time to make confidence a business growth strategy!



66%
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To take the next steps to amplify confidence across your organization:

-  **Have a question or want to share feedback?** Reach out to our team at Info@MentallyStrongInstitute.com.
-  **Learn more about the work we're doing** and find additional resources at MentallyStrongInstitute.com.
-  **Request a discovery call** with our team at MentallyStrongInstitute.com/Discovery.

Let's stop this crisis in its tracks and start building a more confident, capable, and thriving workforce.

About The Study's Authors



The Mentally Strong Institute helps leaders and athletes increase their influence, grow confidence, and achieve their goals quicker. They offer keynote speaking, workshops, one-on-one coaching with executives, leaders, entrepreneurs, and athletes, as well as a Mentally Strong Coach certification and a Mentally Strong Academy. Their team includes 15+ certified executive and mental performance coaches and speakers. With tangible research-based tools and strategies, they help people play bigger in their careers, in sports, and in life.



Cindra Kamphoff, Ph.D., CMPC, PCC, CSP, is the founder of the Mentally Strong Institute, and an award-winning keynote speaker with a Ph.D. in Sport and Performance Psychology. Her clients range from Verizon Wireless, Target, and Bobcat to Northwestern Mutual. Cindra has worked as a mental performance coach with top teams such as the Minnesota Vikings, the United States Olympic Track and Field team, and college athletic programs around the nation. She works one-on-one with executives, leaders, and professional athletes, and is the founder of the nonprofit, Mentally Strong Kids. She is the author of a bestseller, *Beyond Grit: Ten Powerful Practices to Gain the High Performance Edge*, and the host of the *High Performance Mindset* podcast, ranked in the top .5% of all podcasts. *The Confidence Mindset* (Simon & Schuster), Cindra's next book, will be released in Fall of 2026.



Crystal Hoogeveen, M.A., CPC, PCC, is the Director of Coaching and Training at the Mentally Strong Institute and brings 30+ years of experience. Her expertise is in helping organizations intentionally build high-performing teams and a dynamic culture where people feel aligned, motivated, and valued. She leads a team of 15+ coaches at the Mentally Strong Institute and coordinates the Mentally Strong Coach Certification. Crystal is a Mentally Strong Coach as well as a Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation. She coaches leaders at Fortune 500 companies, financial advisors, entrepreneurs, and school leaders across the country. Through her leadership of the nonprofit Mentally Strong Kids, Crystal helps educators and parents build mental strength in their children—a mission she's incredibly passionate about.



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About The Center for Generational Kinetics

Research | Insights



The Center for Generational Kinetics, LLC (CGK) is the premier thought leadership research firm focused on must-know trends, hidden drivers of change, and actionable insights for visionary leaders. CGK has led more than 150 custom research studies for clients around the world.

CGK's team has worked with over 700 organizations, from healthcare companies to financial services, retailers, technology, and private equity firms and has shared their expertise as keynote speakers and bestselling authors around the world.

Learn more about CGK's pioneering thought leadership research at GenHQ.com.

National Research Study Methodology

The research study included a total of 750 U.S. participants ages 18 to 65 who are currently employed. The study was weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, gender, region, and ethnicity. The margin of error is ± 3.58 percentage points. The research study was conducted online from March 10, 2025 to March 21, 2025.





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