Confidence is a quality that most people admire in others and wish to cultivate more of in themselves. It can be a powerful trait for influencing action and inspiring even more confidence. But, for all its potential for influence, it can also get us into trouble. For example, how we approach our confidence shapes the perception others have of us as well as how we see ourselves. Attempting to appear confident without building a foundation of true self-trust can sometimes result in the tendency to focus on our past achievements and rank rather than what we can contribute now and in the future. This stunts our ability to build real confidence. In addition, confidence in the absence of other key traits to temper it can come across as arrogant and heedless, which can reduce one's influence over time.

The second of Berkeley Haas' Four Defining Leadership Principles: Confidence Without Attitude—provides a simple model of effective leadership for the modern age. It demands that we balance two halves of a powerful equation—self-assuredness plus humility—to effectively lead with consideration and positive influence. When we genuinely embrace Confidence Without Attitude, we are less likely to get caught up in needing to be right (the 'attitude' part of this principle) in order to feel or appear worthy of that confidence. Rather, with a willingness to be imperfect and vulnerable, an openness to new evidence, and a desire for greater understanding (of ourselves and our world)—our confidence can grow from a deeper, virtually unshakable place.

In a broader sense, Confidence Without Attitude asks us to view our abilities as a more expansive network of skills and knowledge, extending outward to include asking for help when we need it and recognizing when someone else may be better suited to making a call. A group or organization that adopts Confidence Without Attitude is often one built on a culture of diverse perspectives, empathy, and trust.
CULTIVATING THE MINDSET

There is a difference between appearing confident and actually having confidence. It often comes down to possessing a combination of three key attributes evident in those who exhibit Confidence Without Attitude.

• SELF-AWARE
• SELF-ASSURED
• HUMBLE

SELF-AWARE

Essentially, self-awareness involves acknowledging and thoroughly understanding one’s own strengths, weaknesses, abilities, limitations, and even biases. Only through self-awareness are we able to address elements of our personalities, habits, skills, and knowledge that may require modification or improvement, providing us with the capacity to strengthen our weakest proverbial links while at the same time allowing us to recognize, appreciate, and leverage our strongest qualities, resulting in the further maximization of our potential.

Those who lack self-awareness are prone to falling victim to their own biases and previously established (and often incorrect) assumptions. Their inability to identify potential blind-spots results in diminished confidence and trust in oneself. Consider the stress they must experience, constantly questioning the basis for every important decision or choice they make.

SELF-ASSURED

Self-assurance is a deep trust in our ability to operate and even thrive in a given context. It requires a sense of self-empowerment that comes from healthy self-esteem and adequate skills/competence. Leaders who exhibit healthy self-assurance exude a sense of calm and confidence that can help their teams stay focused during stressful situations and makes them better equipped to tackle challenges head-on.

When we don’t feel empowered by our abilities or fail to believe in our own value, we may hesitate when we should take action or make poor decisions based on fear. Likewise, when we’re overly confident or arrogant, we can overestimate our expertise and we’re likely to miss important details or needlessly alienate others.

Developing self-awareness to strengthen weaknesses and leverage strengths leads to healthy self-confidence and, ultimately, a profound trust in one’s capabilities/abilities. Access our ‘Increasing Self-Awareness Tip sheet’ for helpful awareness exercises and tips.

Self-assurance can be cultivated by acquiring new skills, honing existing ones, and staying open to changes that might call for new thinking. Our ‘Self-Assurance & Empowerment Worksheet’ may help uncover your keys to increased empowerment.
HUMBLE

Humility is an essential ingredient in effective leadership and a core characteristic of those who embrace the true spirit of Confidence Without Attitude. Far from reflecting a sense of weakness, genuine humbleness stems from unshakable security in one’s competence and unique power. It takes humility to recognize the value of others, particularly when you may have more formal academic/professional training or experience than someone who contributes differently.

Without humility, confidence can be perceived as self-centered and narcissistic—the ‘attitude’ in Confidence Without Attitude. This attitude often stems from tying our self-worth to being perfect or knowing everything, feeling threatened by someone else’s perspective, and attempting to protect our point of view at all costs—all of which limits our ability to learn and to lead effectively.

LIVING THE PRINCIPLE

Having Confidence Without Attitude takes a certain trust in your ability to make good decisions. The following approach to decision making can help flesh out invisible concerns and alleviate many of the uncertainties that arise when trying to decide on a course of action. If addressing an organizational issue, be sure to involve stakeholders and skilled contributors throughout the process.

Know what you want
The first step in being able to make good decisions is to recognize your goals and desired outcomes. What are you hoping to accomplish? Why is deciding on an answer or finding a solution important?

Define the problem
Craft a short statement that describes (in simple terms) the basic situation or problem—as you currently understand it. This can help you clarify what it is you are dealing with. What is the nature of the issue itself? Where is the root of the issue? Question your assumptions and make sure that you are addressing the cause and not just the symptoms.

List everything you need to know
Poor decision-making often stems from relying on incomplete or faulty information. Learn what you might be missing by taking time to identify your potential blind spots, keeping an open mind, and asking as many questions as you can up front.

Gather the information
Do your research to find answers to your questions and gather other data to help you better understand the situation and spark helpful insights. Be aware of the tendency for confirmation bias and remain open to all information during this stage.

“Every institution has an inventory of phrases and expressions...we loved it and it was in our recruiters’ guide, but it wasn’t until 2010 that we anchored it as one of the four things to double down on. Confidence without attitude worked for us. There was truth, value and difference in it.”

— Rich Lyons, former Dean of Berkeley Haas, on identifying Confidence Without Attitude as one of Haas’ four defining principles.
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Ask for help
Spend time reviewing the data through multiple lenses. Recognize the value that others’ perspectives and knowledge can add and don’t be afraid to reach out to key people along the way for input and guidance.

Brainstorm ideas
Refrain from settling on the first idea or answer that comes to mind. Unless your situation demands making a choice between two clear options, take some time to ideate and explore multiple ideas or avenues. It helps to withhold judgment and be divergent in your approach. Make a list of everything that comes to mind.

Reduce your options
Once you have an exhaustive list, it’s time to converge. Decide what criteria your ideal solution must meet. Is it important for your solution to be cost-effective, quick to implement, involve x, y, or z? Run your options through your set of criteria to determine which are still workable. Also be sure to understand the holistic impacts of your decision.

Analyze remaining options
Take some time to consider the remaining options and whittle it down to the top two or three. Then employ various decision making tools that make sense for your situation. Some of these might include creating a pros/cons list, performing a SWOT analysis, testing simple prototypes, checking in with your gut, and reconnecting to your goals.

Make a selection
When the time comes to decide, don’t procrastinate out of fear of making a mistake. Accept the responsibility you have and be firm in your choice. Because you have addressed the cause and not the symptoms, weighed different viewpoints, and explored multiple options, you can feel confident that you have done what you can to make a great decision.

Reflect and evaluate
After you have implemented your decision and have understood its impact, be sure to take an honest look at whether it has addressed the issue as intended. If not, you may want to revisit certain steps and make a new decision.

THE BIG PICTURE
Confidence Without Attitude is an admirable collection of traits that is powerful in what it brings to the individual who embodies it as well as what it inspires in others. It is a model of the type of leader we need now and in the future, with the ability to trust themselves to confidently weigh all evidence and take appropriate and meaningful action while inviting and recognizing the contribution of others. Now, more than ever, we need to bridge divides and use our collective skills and competencies to solve our most pressing problems. This requires the self-awareness to know who we are and what we value, the self-assuredness to call upon existing skills and acquire new ones, and the humility to recognize that our voice and contributions are not the only ones of value.