

(By Jeff Janosik, Independent Member, Pennsylvania)

Confidence is an enormous factor that determines the level of success for a basketball official. This is also true for anyone pursuing an ambitious endeavor in life, such as climbing a mountain, a team's depth chart, or the corporate ladder. But building confidence in one's self requires an indeterminable amount of time, especially for those who officiate the intense, fast-moving, and complex game of basketball. Confidence evolves from doing, learning, and adjusting behavior. Repeating the cycle reinforces knowledge and compounds self-confidence. Various approaches to building self-confidence can be taken, but whatever the course, nurturing the Confidence Factor is an absolute must in order to maximize individual potential, and ultimately, to achieve goals.

### The Distinction

There is a certain aura that surrounds a confident basketball official that sets him or her apart within an officiating crew. At higher levels of play, however, officials are more apt to be at the same levels of proficiency and confidence, so the distinction is often less clear if not insignificant. For the most part, the distinction is evident when witnessing how a confident basketball official: moves with a purpose, speaks intelligently and clearly, senses and manages potential trouble spots, acknowledges coaches, maintains composure and focus, leads inconspicuously, and demonstrates fluid mechanics. Less confident officials are deficient in these areas—and usually stick out like a sore thumb. It is easier to justify the reasoning for calls made by a confident official, but not always so for a less confident official. A self-confident basketball official will consistently make the necessary calls, where a less confident official will too often pass on a foul call when a call is warranted (or the reverse). A confident official will effectively manage a situation at the scorer's table, whereas a less confident official may be at a loss or bungle the situation altogether (and/or at the expense of time). Indeed, the self-confident basketball official is steadfast and resolute from tip-off to the final buzzer, while the less confident official seems tentative or nervous, as expressed in his or her body language, mechanics, or foul selectivity.

How then, does a basketball official build self-confidence? It is entirely possible to develop, over time, a self-assured demeanor that can withstand the tests of time—season after season. As always, though, persistence and dedication are required to have this come to fruition. There are four keys to building self-confidence: 1) Experience, 2) Study, 3) Mentoring, and 4) Successful People.

***"It is courage based on confidence, not daring, and it is confidence based on experience."*** — DR. JONAS SALK

### Experience

For basketball officials, building self-confidence is procedural in nature; the "You have to crawl before you walk, walk before you run" analogy. There is no substitute for experience. So, working a higher number of games in the early stages of an officiating career is beneficial to "learning the ropes" and "getting the feel" for officiating. During these early years, the learning curve is steep both for garnering rules knowledge and developing self-confidence. After a few years, however, the quantity of games becomes secondary to the quality of games where the lessons learned are tested more relentlessly. Quality, of course, equates to those types of games that have heightened importance. No intention here to downplay the significance of *any game at any level*, but it is understood that higher levels of play have greater implications. With each higher level of play, the greater the need for more proficient—and confident—basketball officials. There is no magical number of assignments to work, summer camps to attend, or pairs of referee shoes to wear out in order to reach a high enough level of self-confidence. Only by seeing and handling a multitude of plays and situations from sequential levels of play can a basketball official acquire those priceless assets: experience and confidence.

***"One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation."*** — ARTHUR ASHE

### Study

Every basketball officiating assignment is a final exam, of sorts. Any game at any level can produce almost any situation. Therefore, a basketball official must be prepared to apply and enforce the proper rule accordingly. Such preparedness can only evolve by intense and dedicated study of the rulebook and mechanics manual. There is some logic to the notion, "If you understand Rule 4, 'Definitions,'

you'll know enough to get by." However, if one is serious about self-confident officiating, there is no way to avoid learning and understanding every published rule, article, section, note, and exception. This should be further extended to include mechanics, court coverage, philosophies, and the Code of Ethics. An emphasis on *understanding*, rather than just memorizing each of these areas is vital to becoming an effective official. A basketball official need not be able to recite the rules verbatim, but neither should one ever put himself or herself in a position of not knowing the rules thoroughly enough to make a clear, justifiable call. Having a "game day" approach of wishing that certain plays do not occur, or relying on officiating partners, or hoping sticky situations go undetected due to a lack of rules knowledge is unprofessional and highly irresponsible. A basketball official should make it a personal goal to have a thorough understanding of the rules, thus becoming a thoroughly confident official.

***"The things a man has to have are hope and confidence in himself against odds, and sometimes he needs somebody: his pal or his mother or his wife or God, to give him that confidence."*** —

CLARK GABLE

### Mentoring

The time-tested concept of mentoring has as much relevance to basketball officiating as it does with any other challenging activity or profession. When combined with gaining experience and knowledge, constructive mentoring can only further enhance individual development. There is just too much knowledge to obtain and too many situations to master for any official to "go it alone." There are many credible sources of mentors including veteran officials, supervisors, observers, peers, and select family members and friends who can provide both positive feedback and constructive criticism that a basketball official should welcome and for which be most thankful. Also, a degree of humility is essential to developing a sound mentoring relationship. Humility is not incompatible with self-confidence; it is needed to continue learning and growing, and thus enhances self-confidence. Furthermore, having a *willingness to listen* and learn allows an official to focus on those areas needing primary attention. Following the "Sponge" analogy, i.e., "absorb everything, but retain only what is most useful," is a good rule of thumb (especially at summer camps). An official can greatly benefit from a mentor's sound advice on a rule or mechanics interpretation, guidance on a philosophy, judgment on a call made, or any number of related issues. Mentoring is vitally important not only to building self-confidence but also to achieving goals. Therefore, basketball officials should be eager to establish and maintain such relationships to take full advantage of their productive effects.

***"When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things."*** — JOE NAMATH

### Successful People

Lastly, another proven approach to promoting self-confidence is to study the traits and styles of successful people. By doing so, these shining examples can act as a powerful motivational tool; the "If she or he could do it, why can't I?" approach. History provides a bevy of success stories of renowned figures, both real and fictional whose personal success can be attributed to their superior self-confidence. For instance, in addition to their great talents, self-confidence was a significant contributor to the celebrated glory of revered figures such as George Washington, Charles Lindbergh, Jackie Robinson, and John Glenn. Studying the characteristics of these or other heroes—and the challenges they had to overcome—provides for insightful perspectives that will positively affect and inspire self-confidence. In respect to helping build self-confidence, a basketball official would be wise to identify a successful role model that, no matter how tough the challenge, always projected an exceptional level of confidence.

***"Besides pride, loyalty, discipline, heart, and mind, confidence is the key to all the locks."*** — JOE PATERNO

Only a relative few have the makeup to assume challenging roles—such as becoming a basketball official. Not everybody is able—or willing—to develop the necessary self-confidence that is essential to success. Success is, after all, subjective. It would be heartening to believe that every basketball official at every level is a success story, and carries a level of confidence—on and off the court—that is not easily found in people from other walks of life. This is true, of course, for those who have nurtured, cultivated, massaged, tweaked, or made whatever adjustments necessary to develop that all-too-important—Confidence Factor!