



## Article 11: Confidence in context

---

Confidence is often spoken about as if it is an absolute state. It is as if, in the way we speak about it, we think that once 'acquired', we have it always.

Now, reflect on the different contexts in which we may find ourselves – at home; in the workplace; amongst friends; doing things we have never done before; going to somewhere we have never been; receiving feedback from others who tell us that we are not as skilled/ experienced/ intelligent etc as we believed ourselves to be, or more than we believe ourselves to be; stepping on the dance floor when we think we can or cannot dance; being asked to sing solo in front of others, when usually we only sing in the car or the bath. Put us out of context, in unfamiliar places or situations, how do we feel then?

I dare to suggest that many of us can suddenly find ourselves quaking at the knees, feeling far from the confident, self-assured person we might portray in our most comfortable contexts.

1998 I set off on an overland drive to Zimbabwe with 7 other people in two landrovers, to raise awareness and funds to halt the killing of the Black Rhino which was (and still is) facing extinction. Our trip took us from Sheffield, England through France, Spain, Gibraltar, across the Mediterranean into Algeria and on through the Sahara desert, North and West Africa into Central and East Africa and beyond. We were four women and four men, travelling in an almost literal melting pot of emotions evoked and provoked by the unknown territories we moved through, the people we encountered, the situations we faced and also by the dynamics that played out between us.

On a daily basis over 6 months I was faced with a wildly and rapidly waxing and waning sense of confidence. We were an alien group of people moving through a vivid, vibrant, varied environment. Most of us hardly knew each other at the start but we were united by our mission. I went with my partner who was very shy and who hardly spoke. She was probably the least outwardly confident of us all, including me. And then the tables turned as we entered French speaking Africa. Suddenly, this quiet unassuming character who had been born in Zaire, a French-speaking African country, came alive. She had something that none of us had – fluency in the language of the people around us. She became our core negotiator as we attempted to cross borders that were far from friendly to British people at that time. I can remember how disempowered I felt and although I had remnants of French from my school days, I felt totally at sea. I simply did not feel articulate enough nor confident enough in that context to speak out.

And yet, when we as a group were on our own, everything shifted. Amidst very difficult group dynamics, I appeared to be the more confident player, challenging the behaviours of one of the 2 group leaders; defending others when they were unfairly, verbally attacked by him. Suddenly I found myself in the position of having those attacks consistently and persistently re-directed to me. I began to lose confidence fast. I can remember how utterly devastated and lost I came to feel in those early weeks. At first, I resented my peers when I realised that they were not turning to defend me when the attacks came my way. Then as I reflected more deeply through my journal writing, I began to see that my fellow travelers weren't able to do what I would have wanted them to do and so I started questioning my own previous actions. I challenged myself about what my intentions were when I 'jumped to another's defence'. Were my actions conditional: 'I'll look after you ONLY if you look after me too'; or were my actions guided because I believed it was the right thing to do whatever the consequences on me? Slowly, I began to access a deeper part of myself. I began to engage more consciously with my values and with my deeper intentions for myself, others and the world. My unfolding dialogue with myself in my journal helped me access something I had never before been in touch with: that when I perceived injustices, I would speak up even when my personal fear was great; and that whatever the consequences of my actions, I could take care of myself when I needed to.

I look back to this time, as one of my most defining periods. In many ways it was the most intensely difficult experience of my life – literally being in the middle of completely unknown territory; frequently being unable to communicate with others, and going through such emotional distress and turmoil as I experienced isolation, prejudice and personal verbal attacks. And yet I also cherish this time and hold it as the fundamental turning point in my relationship with myself. I learned that I was worthy of respect and care; I found a deep sense of faith in my capacity to do what needs to be done and to trust that my deepest intentions come from a fundamentally good place within me. Now, when I find myself feeling fearful and lacking in a surface confidence, I remind myself of what I discovered in the vastness of Africa; the continent of my birth and then later, my re-birth as a young adult finding myself, my values, my way; and my reason for being in the world. Confidence might be contextual; having faith in oneself is the firm ground on which we stand – always.

© Louie Gardiner Date 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011

● [www.potent6.co.uk](http://www.potent6.co.uk) ● [louie.gardiner@potent6.co.uk](mailto:louie.gardiner@potent6.co.uk) ● +44 7730 596 771

[info@potent6.co.uk](mailto:info@potent6.co.uk) [www.potent6.co.uk](http://www.potent6.co.uk)

✿ people empowered ✿ passion ignited ✿ power synthesised ✿ partners united ✿ performance enhanced ✿ purpose accomplished