

Learning in the Treetops

Confidence in one's ability to perform on the job is important for success, and it is developed by education and practical experience, among other avenues.

But can a person become *too* confident?

Christine Hogan writes about that question in *Practical Facilitation*. She gave this example:

Lumbering is a dangerous occupation, and one instructor became famous for training novices to bring down the tallest pines with the fewest injuries.

One day, a group of instructors arrived to learn his methods. He was willing to demonstrate, and had everyone follow him to where the tall trees were being cut. The instructor sent some novices high into the pines to trim branches before felling the trees.

As soon as they were all high in the treetops, however, he surprised the observers by going to sleep while the "class" worked above him. It was only when the rookies had worked their way down to about 20 feet above ground that he awoke. He began to watch them very carefully and warn them to watch their footing, test their weight before venturing onto a branch, and so on.

One of the observers asked him why he had waited so long to stress safety.



The instructor replied, "When the novices are high up, their fear makes them learn to watch every step. But when they've learned a little, accomplished a little, and descended to what they think is a safe height, they tend to get careless – and that's when they need extra warnings about caution."

He taught the observers what experienced leaders also know: Remember to anticipate the dangers of expertise and overconfidence as much as ignorance and fear.

– Beecher Hunter