

Thought Leaders I

Confidence is an Inside Job by Nick Craig



"I could have gone to the academy to become an officer, but officers can't be rescue swimmers — you've got to be enlisted. I'm doing it because I want to be involved directly in saving people's lives. I wouldn't trade this for anything."
— Coast Guard Seaman Kathryn Turner, onboard the USCGC *Eagle*.

The Coast Guard recently played host to Authentic Leadership Institute (ALI) President Nick Craig, who spent a week on the Coast Guard's USCGC *Eagle*. A 300-foot tall ship, the *Eagle* has 56 crew members and 141 trainees, most between the ages of 20 and 22. They spend considerable time at sea, and their work is grueling. "No matter what shift they are assigned to, they're on call 24-7," Craig says. "If the winds shift and the sails need to be changed in the middle of the night, the entire crew gets up. Space is tight, there is little privacy, and personal lives are put on hold. Why would anyone choose this? I spent a week seeking the answer to that question."

What Craig discovered has implications far beyond sailing a Tall Ship. "The executives I'm working with right now at ALI and in my programs at Wharton are facing a crisis of confidence. They're challenged with an economy that's the worst it's been in decades. Uncertainty is the new status quo. And their self-assurance is taking a hit. But the crew of the *Eagle* faces life-threatening situations almost daily. They must operate in an environment over which they have no control. And yet these are some of the most confident people I've ever met."

One crew member, Kathryn Turner, a 21-year-old woman, told Craig her goal was to become a rescue swimmer. Only two out of every class of 12 succeed in attaining the position that has them jumping out of helicopters into stormy seas to perform rescues. "I'm not doing this for the money," she told him. "I could have gone to the academy to become an officer, but officers can't be rescue swimmers — you've got to be enlisted. I'm doing it because I want to be involved directly in saving people's lives. I wouldn't trade this for anything."

In the parlance of authentic leadership, Kathryn's reason is an *Intrinsic Motivator*. She is on a career path because of a deeply held motivation: there is nothing more significant to her than saving lives. Achieving that personal goal is more important than status and salary, which are *Extrinsic Motivators*.

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—Nick Craig, President, Authentic Leadership Institute; Faculty member, *High Potential Leaders: Accelerating Your Impact* and *Advanced Management Program*

Tapping Into Real Needs

Executives used to be able to rely solely on extrinsic motivators to get the job done. One recent *Advanced Management Program* participant reminisced, "In the 'old days,' I'd sit down with my management team and tell them we had to make some tough cuts. There were rough days ahead, but I'd say, 'Don't worry. I'll take care of you.' And I did. I could give them a bonus, or some stock options. Today, I have to tell them we've got hard work to do, but there are no rewards."

"If your confidence is built on satisfying extrinsic motivations," explains Craig, "you're at the mercy of external events. It's all about how you're perceived and how you're rewarded. Your feelings of self worth rely on your salary, your bonus, power, and position. When the economy goes bad, when your control over your environment fades, you lose faith in yourself." Now more than ever it is critical that executives determine those personal motivators and strengths that set them apart. "Why are you doing what you do? If it's only for money or power, you're hitting a low right now. What changes do you need to make in your current environment to be able to satisfy your intrinsic motivations?" Craig asks.

"We're told we need to be generalists — an executive must possess a wide-ranging collection of skills that he or she puts into play every day. This approach isn't realistic, and it doesn't build confidence." Craig continues, "When we know our true strengths and work to develop and exercise them, when we increase the time we spend doing what we're good at, we're tapping into our intrinsic motivators."

Changing the Equation

To renew confidence in this climate, executives must first identify their strengths and intrinsic motivators. In the *High Potential Leaders* program, Craig leads participants in a series of exercises to help them reach that critical step. "Most executives operate under that 'generalist' label. They spend about 20 percent of their time doing what they're really good at.

The other 80 percent is given over to everything else. Imagine the transformation that occurs when you change the equation. Spend 40 percent on what you enjoy doing. You'll still have 60 percent to answer email, run meetings — whatever your 'necessary evils' may be. Spending more time doing what you do best will not only increase confidence, but will make you more successful and in turn bring greater success to your organization."

Ultimately, the message is that confidence can't be bought, and it shouldn't be built on extrinsic factors over which there is little or no control. If the focus is on position and financial gain, with the belief that, in turn, the intrinsics will be satisfied, the equation is backwards. "There's nothing wrong with wanting the trappings of success," notes Craig. "But real confidence, and true success, comes from the feeling that you are doing things for the right reasons. That's when you hit the 'sweet spot,' equilibrium between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators where both are satisfied."

Knowledge and Action: the Power Combination

Craig is joined in *High Potential Leaders* by best-selling author Ram Charan. In his latest book, *Leadership in the Era of Economic Uncertainty* Dr. Charan provides the "new rules for getting things done in difficult times." He gives program participants clear advice on the most important actions they need to execute. Tal Ben-Shahar, whose course on positive psychology at Harvard was the most popular at the school, offers another angle. He reinterprets the meaning of success through a focus not on the currency of money, but on the "ultimate currency" — happiness. Using scientific studies and scholarly research, he examines fulfillment from an innovative and challenging perspective.

Craig asserts, "You can take this time of uncertainty to renew your confidence. But it's not about seeking more extrinsic satisfaction. Begin to understand, on a much deeper level, what your gifts are. What are you good at? Where do you find meaning? By gaining this knowledge and changing the way you spend your time to exercise and develop your strengths, the confidence will return. But this time, it won't be at the mercy of the environment. You'll own it from the inside out."