Power Stance: Powerful You
A Simple Scientific Tip (that works!) for Improving Your Confidence

Think about your standard posture right before you go into a meeting. Are you hunched over looking at your phone? Are you flipping through notes on your notepad or tablet? If so, you may be poorly situating yourself by unknowingly increasing your stress level and decreasing your confidence.

Those postures and others that involve curling into yourself or making yourself smaller, are considered “low-power poses”. In contrast, “high-power poses” are about making yourself bigger: standing like Wonder Woman or Superman or a runner crossing the finish line victorious with arms raised above head.

In a recent Ted Talk, Amy Cuddy talks about the way these “poses” can alter your hormones and thus change the outcome of a situation, especially in evaluative or social-threat situations, like an important meeting, performance review, or interactions with co-workers when you’re under a deadline.

The Science: Dominance versus Stress

Testosterone and cortisol correlate with dominance and stress respectively. High powered leaders usually have high testosterone and low cortisol, so they are dominant but not very stress-reactive. Certain people are more prone to holding these stances, or naturally have higher levels of testosterone and lower levels of cortisol, and thus rise to power more easily.

Cuddy found, however, that people who are not innately gifted to be high-powered, can actually ‘fake it until they make it’ and, better yet, ‘fake it until they believe it.’ Through lab experiments in which individuals were asked to hold a pose for two minutes without knowing why, Cuddy found that people who held high-power
poses for two minutes experienced a 19% increase in testosterone and 25% decrease in cortisol from their base.

In contrast, those who held low-power poses for two minutes experienced a 10% decrease in testosterone and a 17% increase in cortisol. The high-power posers were willing to take risks when offered, while the low-power posers were not.

The Real Life Experiment: Performing in an Evaluative Situation

Cuddy wanted to find out if these chemical changes could actually make a difference in an evaluative situation so she experimented with these poses before sending individuals in for an intense, five minute recorded interview.

When judges watched the interviews, and ranked who they'd want to hire and why, the individuals who held the ‘power pose’ were significantly better received than those who held low-power poses. In fact, those were the ones the judges wanted to hire.

It had to do with their presence during the interview, not the quality of their answers. Those who held the power poses were confident, authentic, comfortable, enthusiastic, captivating, and passionate. Cuddy explains, “they were bringing their true selves” to the interview.

The Application: Being Powerful Before & During your Meeting

Whether you’re frequently hosting meetings, or you find yourself stressed in certain one-to-one interactions, it never hurts to have a little extra confidence with the added bonus of reducing your stress levels.

To be clear, you don’t want to hold a power pose while meeting with someone. You risk coming across as too dominant, intimidating or aggressive. The idea is to provide the chemical reaction for yourself before you go into the high stress situation.

Silly or simple, we recommend you give it a try: be a Wonder Woman or a Superman for two minutes prior to going into your next intense work experience. It’s potentially the most effective and easiest prep you can do. Find two minutes in your office or in the restroom prior to your meeting to strike a power pose and you can change the chemicals in your brain so that you perform to the best of your ability. Sure, it may sound a little ‘hocus-pocus,’ but what have you got to lose?
