

# The confidence boost

For women and people of color, Efficacy programs offer ways to handle big challenges, new paths to the top

When Sir Edmund Hillary was asked about his feats, including his pioneering ascent of Mount Everest and other towering peaks, he once said, “It is not the mountains that we conquer, but ourselves.” In most organizations, do talented leaders believe that they can reach deep into themselves so they can find the strength and confidence to achieve great things for themselves, their colleagues, and companies? Alumni report that as a result of their participation in Korn Ferry’s *Efficacy* programs, they can better cope with unexpected events, think of solutions when confronting major obstacles, and handle a wide variety of challenges.

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one’s capabilities to successfully handle tasks and situations, plays a key role in personal and organizational success. In interviews and surveys with 237 *Efficacy* alumni,<sup>1</sup> the Korn Ferry Institute found that increases in this capacity positively influenced alumni’s career trajectories. By the time of the surveys and interviews, 39% of respondents who participated in *Efficacy* before 2014 had been promoted, and 47% of all interview respondents said the programs had helped them transition into a higher or more desirable position.

An alumna explained that the programs, “increased my confidence in my abilities at work. I took on higher visibility leadership type roles and mentoring. I strongly believe this then moved me to get promoted a year and a half later.”

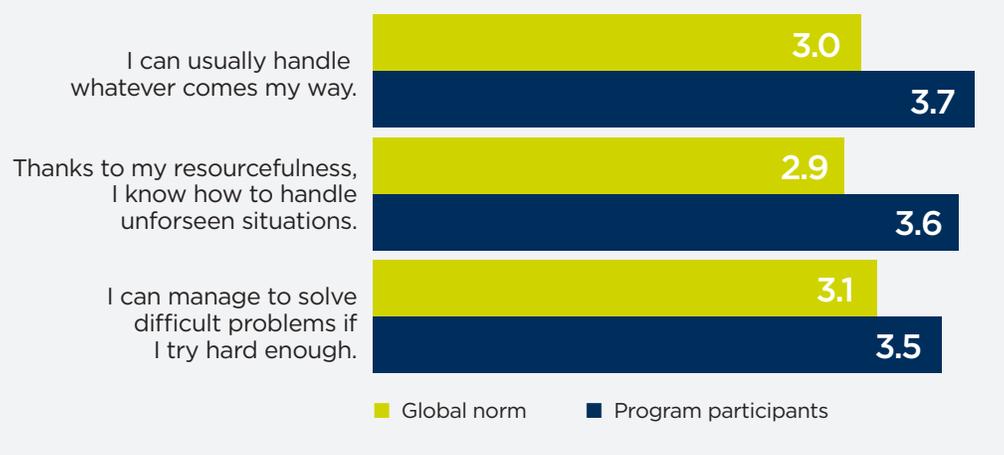
Compared to a global norm sample of 17,553 individuals, program alumni scored significantly higher on measures of self-efficacy (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> In fact, 99% of *Efficacy* alumni agreed that they can solve difficult problems, know how to handle unforeseen situations, and can deal with whatever comes their way.

Research by the Korn Ferry Institute (KFI) found that 39% of survey respondents who completed the firm’s Efficacy programs before 2014 reported they had been promoted; 47% said the programs had helped them transition into a higher or more desirable position by the time of the KFI follow-up surveys and interviews.

<sup>1</sup> Between February and April 2016, 42 alumni were interviewed and 195 alumni were surveyed. The surveys were anonymous, and were not linked to interview responses. It is assumed that some alumni participated in both the interview and the survey.

<sup>2</sup> Alumni also score significantly higher than the US-based norm sample (n = 677).

Figure 1

**Alumni with higher scores.**

Korn Ferry's *Efficacy* programs, multiday workshops with some follow-up efforts, depending on the client, seek to help individuals take control of their careers and “lead life by design, not by default.” Alumni said the programs helped them to respond in productive ways to change and to improve challenging situations. They said, for example, that they often recalled the helpful program guidance that, even if they controlled just 10% of a challenging situation, they still had some element of control.

The personal benefits of increased self-efficacy—tackling difficult challenges, increased and sustained effort, greater optimism, and higher levels of accomplishment (Parjares 2002)—are tied to organizational impact and success: This capacity was a robust predictor of work performance and organizational outcomes in a study of 30,000 employees (Stajkovic and Luthans 2002). This is especially true in challenging work situations, such as those faced by people of color. As an alumnus observed, “through participation in *Efficacy*, I have been able to leverage my skill set within a work environment where I am the only faculty member of color.”

These programs, born out of a need for organizations to ensure that they empower their full talent pool, have evolved from a race/ethnicity and gender client focus to embrace wide inclusivity, though affinity groups remain a segment especially well served. An alumna from an *Efficacy for Women* program explained, “I no longer feel ashamed or like a failure for feeling overwhelmed and/or confused by unfair circumstances at work. [The program] affirmed that it is normal to be upset by inequities I experience because of my race and gender. Knowing that others [who] have felt as I do have found ways to overcome [their feelings] has been encouraging.”

## References

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## Contributors

### **E. Susanne Blazek**

Senior Manager of Outcomes Research, The Korn Ferry Institute

### **Melissa D. Pahl**

Specialist, The Korn Ferry Institute

### **J. Evelyn Orr**

Senior Director, The Korn Ferry Institute

### **Carolyn Dienhart**

Researcher/Project Coordinator, Korn Ferry

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