

"*The Confidence Myth* is the handbook for any woman looking to succeed in her career."

– Barbara Corcoran, Real Estate Mogul and star of ABC's *Shark Tank*

# The Confidence Myth

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Why women undervalue  
their skills and how to



Helene Lerner, author of *In Her Power*



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## More Praise for *The Confidence Myth*

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—**Barbara Corcoran, real estate mogul and star of ABC's *Shark Tank***

*"Helene Lerner tackles head-on the myths and truths about confidence—a hot topic linked to women's success. Her straightforward, authentic approach incorporates practical tips and exercises to help build your confidence muscle. This book is a treasure trove of advice to help advance your career."*

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*"The Confidence Myth offers practical insights, tips, and tools that can help you move through your fears and spark your confidence. It's an indispensable read for women who want to become empowered and successful while staying true to their values."*

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*"Every woman needs to read this book. It confirms you are not alone in your fears and worries while offering solid strategies to get beyond them. I started dog-earing pages I wanted to return to until I realized it would be easier just to dog-ear the ones I didn't."*

—**Janet Kelly, Senior Vice President Legal, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary, Conoco Phillips**

“We all struggle with knowing how to express our own value and move through our fears. This book walks women through these common struggles and helps them emerge as stronger, more confident role models. Helene Lerner’s combination of both honesty and insight makes this a valuable tool for women of all ages.”

—Mika Brzezinski, cohost of MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*

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Why women undervalue their skills  
and how to get over it

**Helene Lerner**



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.  
*a BK Business book*

# The Confidence Myth

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First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-62656-202-8

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-203-5

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-204-2

2015-1

Cover design by Crowfoot/Leslie Waltzer

Book design and production by Beverly Butterfield

Copyediting by PeopleSpeak

Indexing by Rachel Rice

I dedicate this book to the people  
who have shared their insights  
with me through the years and  
the talented women who will  
be moved to step up

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# Contents

Introduction	1
1 Transform Fear by Stepping Up	9
2 Lead with Presence	25
3 Win with Honest Feedback	42
4 Create Power Parameters	55
5 Stand Out and Attract Sponsors	70
6 Trust Your Inner Compass	82
Conclusion	93
Appendix A:	
Thirty Days of Confidence Sparks	101
Appendix B:	
The Women and Confidence Survey:	
Methodology and Results	106
Notes	116
Acknowledgments	119
Index	121
About the Author	131

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# Introduction

What would change if you felt more confident? Would you have a better job with more responsibilities, making more money? Would your personal life look different? Would your conversations be more honest? Think about this for a minute.

If you said yes to any of these questions, let's look at some of the reasons why you aren't where you'd like to be. You probably want to address both external and internal factors. Externally, women face cultural prejudices that impede our advancement—we are confronted by gender inequities every day. We get frustrated because sometimes our goals have to take a backseat to navigating through this resistance.

But despite these obstacles, some women have been able to move up to the C-suite. So how did they do it? Do they, internally, have more confidence than the average woman? These questions intrigued me.

As an expert on women's issues, I am often asked how to develop confidence. This question kept coming up, so I thought it was time to write about the important topic of women and confidence. I interviewed a number of successful women leaders to find out their thoughts, and after talking to them and reflecting on my own experiences in

the workplace, I realized that Confidence with a capital C is a myth. No one has the confidence issue all sewn up, but there's this pervasive misconception that some of us do.

Confidence is often understood to mean

- Being comfortable with oneself (true)
- Courageously taking action while not knowing the result (true)
- Practicing fearlessness (false)

Fear is actually an inherent part of stepping out in a new way. Too many of us wait until we feel comfortable that *all* of our skills line up before we make a move, and as a result, we miss out on the big breaks needed to advance our careers.

The goal of this book is to demonstrate that most women in positions of leadership who have achieved high levels of success felt shaky at times, but they took action anyway. If they hadn't, they would have missed valuable opportunities to make a difference.

## **My story**

Truth be told, my level of fearlessness varies on any given day, even now. Looking back on my career, I often had to act as if I believed in myself when I was doubtful. My list of achievements—television host, author, diversity consultant, and founder of a popular career women's website—certainly did not come easily to me.

When I started my own business in the mid-'90s, "stressed out" was my natural state of being. My friends thought I was crazy for going out on my own during a recession. Money was of great concern as my husband (at the time) and I had a toddler to support. Despite those circumstances, I knew it was time to leap into action, time to take a smart and calculated risk.

I had a burning desire to empower women and girls by creating a multimedia company focused on the issues of working women. I was very motivated, but I did not know the first thing about producing for television or putting together a website. I had to learn everything from scratch: how to get a distributor, create a sales pitch for potential sponsors, manage a production budget, handle releases and get them executed—the list went on. I definitely did not feel like I had everything under control as I stepped out each day and bumped up against more obstacles.

At first I found it difficult to reach out for support (as a child I was taught to appear self-sufficient), but in time I learned to humble myself and accept help from others. I realized that if I wanted to make big changes, I could not do it on my own. Not everyone was supportive, but more than enough people offered me their time and expertise along the way. One colleague, Suzanne Altfeld, was incredibly generous. She became a mentor to me, offering priceless feedback, celebrating my successes, and motivating me to continue when I made mistakes.

What I know for sure—as a result of my experience and the experiences of other successful women—is that you can have lofty goals and achieve them without feeling like you are in complete command of what you're tackling.

## **The importance of taking action anyway**

Shari Levine, an executive vice president at Bravo Media, told me over lunch that she often interviewed for jobs she would need to grow into. She has used her confidence and straight-talking ability to land several of these positions.

In fact, most senior women leaders have had to take big risks to get bigger jobs. They may have felt shaky and unsure about their qualifications, but they took action anyway. In doing so, they moved closer to their goals. Their commitment to making a difference was greater than any gender prejudice or self-doubt they might have felt.

Reaching a higher level is often an uphill battle, but shying away from the challenge deprives others of our valuable insights. We can no longer wait on the sidelines. My call to action is not just for the leaders at the top but for *all* of us: if you are not making a difference and you know you can, step up. Shari advised jokingly, “Just wear a skirt long enough to cover the fact that your knees are shaking.”

I’m sure that men could benefit from some of the material presented in this book. However, I chose to focus on how the traditional concept of confidence relates to women because false perceptions—myths about what confidence is—harm women more than men.

In *The Confidence Code*, journalists Katty Kay and Claire Shipman sift through the research and explore the differences between male and female workers—from the way we process information to the physiology of our brains, to the overt and subtle ways our culture determines who will ascend to high-level positions. They observed that women are seen as underconfident, underestimating their own knowledge and skills. Men, on the other hand, tend to be overconfident,<sup>1</sup> more likely to have an inflated sense of who they are and what they can achieve.

Why shouldn’t women step into positions of more responsibility? Why not go for the bigger job, even if you don’t have all of the skills required? Why not reject the position you are overqualified for and counter with, “I want the job two levels higher”? Don’t listen to the negative voice that

whispers, “You don’t have what it takes.” This attitude stems from prejudice, not truth.

The myth of the highly confident individual without fear must give way to a more realistic assessment of what confidence involves. A confident woman has the whole package: talent, insight, excitement, courage, *and* fear. Confidence is not the absence of discomfort; rather, it is taking action while having conflicting thoughts and sensations. We need to align our definition of confidence with Nelson Mandela’s understanding of courage: “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.” Real confidence is acknowledging fear and moving forward anyway.

## **Book overview**

My sincere hope for this book is to help women like you redefine confidence (with an acknowledgment that fear and courage are components just as much as talent and insight are) and to persuade you to reach for your next big goal.

I believe that each one of us is called to make an important contribution. This book is a practical tool kit to help you navigate through internal resistance in the service of making your own important contribution. The many qualities we bring to the table, including creativity, connectivity, and a unique perspective, are needed around the globe. Let me support you as you think, dream, and act boldly.

My team at WomenWorking.com conducted an online survey of 535 people, mostly women, covering confidence issues both at work and in our personal lives.<sup>2</sup> Insights and important results from this survey appear throughout the book, along with confidence myths that need to be busted, wisdom from high-level professional women, and Confidence Sparks (exercises, tips, and reflections) to help

you move forward in spite of the uneasiness you may feel. A What Would You Do? exercise at the end of each chapter presents challenging scenarios and effective ways of dealing with them. A convenient Power Tools summary helps solidify the main takeaways from each chapter.

The results of the Women and Confidence Survey were clear and consistent, and they confirmed my initial thoughts on this important topic: a perceived lack of confidence holds most of us back, but it doesn't have to. You will never feel 100 percent self-assured as you step out in a bigger way. Moving forward with fear is a skill you develop over time and with practice. And I can tell you from experience that *now* is the best time to test the waters.

Below are short summaries of what you will find in each chapter.

## **Chapter 1: Transform Fear by Stepping Up**

*Myth: I can't tackle it now; I'm not ready.*

*Truth: I can do it. What I don't know I will learn or delegate.*

Chapter 1 sets the stage for looking fear in the face as you step out in a new way. Inspiring stories from the women I've interviewed will prepare you for identifying and committing to *stretch goals*.

## **Chapter 2: Lead with Presence**

*Myth: It's not possible to learn how to be a dynamic leader.*

*Truth: Leadership presence can be cultivated and is available to me.*

Leading with presence involves presenting yourself authentically, exhibiting poise during stressful times, reading the room, artfully listening, dressing the part, and, especially for women, using power language to assert yourself. Chapter 2 presents skill-building tips in these areas and more.

### **Chapter 3: Win with Honest Feedback**

*Myth: When I feel criticized, I react defensively and I can't be objective.*

*Truth: I have the ability to discriminate, take what fits, and leave the rest.*

In order to advance, you must understand how others see you. In our quest for excellence, our perfectionism can get in the way of our ability to accept feedback and grow from it. Chapter 3 provides examples and strategies for processing feedback constructively and determining what's valuable. Useful ways of giving feedback are also offered.

### **Chapter 4: Create Power Parameters**

*Myth: If I don't do it, no one else will.*

*Truth: If I say no, others will pick up the slack, and that will be just fine.*

As women, demands on our time come from so many fronts that we can lose sight of our own needs. Our well-being and future success depend on our ability to set limits with people and prioritize what we need from day to day. In chapter 4, you will be given strategies for determining your "power parameters" and having the often difficult conversations necessary to create them.

### **Chapter 5: Stand Out and Attract Sponsors**

*Myth: The competition for sponsors is fierce—standing out and getting one is too difficult.*

*Truth: I can attract and build important power alliances.*

Awareness has increased in the last several years about the importance of attracting sponsors, people who advocate for you when positions open up. Men have cultivated these powerful relationships for decades, and women can learn a lot from them. You can create these crucial alliances, and chapter 5 will give you the tools to do so.

## **Chapter 6: Trust Your Inner Compass**

*Myth: When I am under pressure, I can't tap into my intuitive insight.*

*Truth: I always have access to my intuition and the ability to use it.*

Tough choices are made every day in business, and often we have no precedent to guide our decision making, especially as women travel into uncharted workplace territory. Developing an inner compass can help you navigate the bumps along the way and bust the myths discussed in the previous chapters. Chapter 6 provides tools to help you connect with your inner wisdom and make intuition your professional edge.

### **Appendix A: Thirty Days of Confidence Sparks**

Appendix A includes thirty additional Confidence Sparks. Each will boost your ability to take action and move forward in a positive way toward your next achievement. I encourage you to make reading and reflecting on them a daily practice.

### **Appendix B: The Women and Confidence Survey**

Appendix B includes a discussion and presentation of The Women and Confidence Survey and the methodology used. It also presents the survey questions and results.



# Transform Fear by Stepping Up

## **MYTH**

I can't tackle it now; I'm not ready.

## **TRUTH**

I can do it. What I don't know I will learn  
or delegate.

Our fears can prevent us from achieving great heights of success. They can distort reality and are often grounded in false beliefs, including erroneous messages due to gender prejudice. But when we step up and take action, we move through our fears.

Taking action in itself can bring up fear because we are moving outside our comfort zone. That's okay because being challenged means we are growing. Confidence is the ability to step into uncharted territory and take the next right action, to get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Giusy Buonfantino, president of North America Baby & Child Care at Kimberly-Clark, faced several challenges when she came to the United States from her native Italy. It was all new territory for her, but she never let fear hold her back.

“I worked with a few men who didn’t seem to understand my accent,” she confided. “What helped was for me to use hand signals to get my points across. I’d put my hand up at a meeting to express my opinion.”<sup>1</sup>

Giusy didn’t settle for the status quo, which solidified her position as an innovative thinker and a strong leader. Her advice to women is to keep offering suggestions: “I encourage women to share their unique ideas and not hold back. Voice your point of view. Don’t be silent. Get your hand up in meetings,” she advises.

David Bidmead, global leader of multinational client service at Marsh, added, “When you leave your ego at the door and stop trying to be the smartest person in the room, your opinions and ideas will be more appropriately valued and appreciated” (and that’s applicable to both genders). He told me that to be heard, women should offer insights regularly rather than only expressing the occasional opinion.

I followed that same valuable piece of advice early on in my career at the *New York Times*. I was asked to cover for a senior leader at a top-level meeting, which came as a surprise to me. Those directly above me were out in the field, so I was asked to stand in for them. This was my first significant interaction with top management and a big deal. I hadn’t had time to prepare.

The meeting was on the executive floor. As I got off the elevator, I was nervous. But as David suggested, I parked my ego outside the door and walked in the room. I thought to myself, *Just be of service. Offer your help when needed.*

I listened carefully to what was being said. The men in the room were discussing a problem and I had an idea, so I spoke up. Admittedly, my voice was a little shaky, but they listened attentively. As a result of that experience, top management began viewing me as having leadership potential.



## Confidence spark

**When the voice of fear is saying “hold back,” see it for what it is. Your fear may be grounded in a false belief about what will happen if you put yourself forward. With reflection, you might find that your fear has been stripped of its power and that stepping up doesn’t seem as intimidating as before.**

## How we limit ourselves

As women, we encounter gender prejudices all the time. Sometimes we may even accept the biases we encounter as true, unaware that we’re doing so. For example, many of us have been brought up to play nice. We feel compelled not to rock the boat or appear confrontational, so we refrain from saying or doing what is necessary to get ahead.

But what if instead of trying to be nice, we respond authentically? What would that look like? For one, people would know where we really stand on the issues that are important to us. In addition, we would have more time to focus on making a difference and advancing our careers instead of trying to please other people.

The continually evolving workplace can be stressful and we need vigilance to monitor our thoughts and confront negative self-talk, what I call *mad mind-chatter*, that holds us back. I use this label because to think that we are not capable of achieving greater things is insane. In the Women and Confidence Survey we asked people what they would do to become more confident. Over half (58 percent) responded that they would “counter negative mind-talk with more affirming thoughts.” We need to question the old ways of acting that limit us, and we need to adopt new behaviors.

Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg says that we hold ourselves back by giving in to self-doubt and “lower[ing] our own expectations of what we can achieve.” She urges us to stop “pulling back when we should be leaning in.”<sup>2</sup>

Maybe you don’t feel like you are ready to “lean in.” You still have a lot to learn, and for now, it’s better to stay on the sidelines. But no man or woman at any stage of his or her career is ever 100 percent prepared. That is the confidence myth. Now is the time to step up and question that negative belief that counsels you to hold back.

Jill Campbell, now COO of Cox Communications, was almost held back by mad mind-chatter that told her she was not ready to run a Fortune 500 company. When her first chance at the COO role came around, her self-doubt led her boss to think she didn’t want the job. Jill’s “moment of truth” came when her boss told her he was giving someone else the position.

“When Pat Esser [my boss] suggested that I didn’t want the COO position and appointed someone else instead, he could have thrown cold water all over me. I had no idea that I had been projecting self-doubt,” Jill shared.

“It worked out fine because the new COO was a huge supporter of mine,” she went on. “He helped me get a coach, and I started to handle the issues that stopped me from advancing. I was raised to be ‘nice’ and not to brag, to play down my abilities. When the COO position opened up again, I knew I could do it. I went to Pat and told him that I wanted to be next.”

Not surprisingly, the second time around Jill got the job. She did it by replacing her self-doubt with a more positive and honest appraisal of her abilities. When she believed in herself, she persuaded top management to do so as well.



## **Confidence spark**

**Take inventory of your strengths—actually make a list of them. Call to mind your current supervisor and previous managers—what else would they say about your strengths? Take this all in.**

When you receive bad news, self-doubt can be the first place you go. In these stressful moments, spot your reactions and use your emotional intelligence to hold on to your sense of power. A few years back, I shared the stage with a senior leader whose company was undergoing a global reorganization. She modeled how to shake off limiting beliefs for over two hundred women attending when she talked about a job she was up for but didn't get.

"I got the news on Thursday that a coworker was promoted instead of me," she revealed. "Of course I was upset, so much so that I took the afternoon off. For a few days, I was on the 'pity pot.' I let myself get angry, sad, and fearful. But then I stepped back from my personal disappointment. I realized he was a better fit for that job than I was. It made sense to move him up," she told us.

By showing her own struggle and explaining how she worked through it, this savvy leader gave the audience valuable insight into how to deal with upsets. She was able to assess the situation objectively and take action accordingly—she decided she needed to take her career in another direction and left the company a few months later.

I too have dealt with career upsets that have been difficult to handle, but by reaching out to my network, I was able to work through them. For example, when a strong supporter of mine unexpectedly did not come on board to fund one of

my television shows, I was shocked. She delivered the news compassionately, saying we could revisit sponsorship next year, but I still felt so disappointed—I was barely able to get off the phone without my voice cracking.

I immediately called a friend who listened and supported me to move forward. I made many new business contacts that next year, but I also kept in touch with the sponsor. Sure enough, the following year she was on board again.



### **Confidence spark**

**You may not always be able to remove yourself from the situation when you hear bad news. To deal with a disappointment on the spot, take a quick inventory of how you are feeling. Say your boss nixed your proposal without any explanation, and you know it's a winner. He also indicated that he didn't want to talk about it further. Ask yourself: What am I feeling? *Anger. Fear.* Where am I feeling tension in my body? *My jaw is clenched. I have stomach cramps.* What action can I take that is in my best interest? *Do nothing right now.* When you have some distance from the incident, a next step might be to pitch your idea again down the road to your boss or to another manager. Brainstorm with a trusted colleague on how you might go about doing that. After you process the upset, move on.**

Do you hold a negative belief that creates self-doubt and keeps you from thinking bigger? Perhaps a parent, teacher,

close relative, or boss judged you harshly, and instead of questioning the comment, you believed it. In the Women and Confidence Survey, 54 percent of the respondents who reported that they did not feel confident in the workplace said that “having a leader who micromanages and disrespects me” had inhibited their confidence. Neerja Bhatia, executive coach and founder of Rhythm of Success, advises us to stop identifying with the stressful judgments from our past. If we don’t, what has happened will block us from getting what we want.

We must be vigilant and recognize our own mad mind-chatter, turning it around when it rears its ugly head. Regardless of what has happened before, know that you can start to change what’s happening now.

## **How thinking small gets in the way of big breaks**

Mad mind-chatter can make us believe that we may not be qualified for a job when we are quite capable of tackling it—this mindset keeps us playing small. Why not aspire to something greater?

I was surprised by the stories of several senior leaders who admitted they didn’t want to put themselves in the running for that next powerful position early on in their careers. All too many women seem to feel like they need to have a great number of skills in place to make a move, while men need far fewer skills to say yes. You’ve probably heard of the internal review at Hewlett-Packard a few years back that showed women within the company applied for open jobs only if they met 100 percent of the criteria listed; men, on the other hand, felt they needed to meet 60 percent of the requirements.<sup>3</sup>

Some women didn't take on higher positions until they received encouragement. Cathy Kinney, former president and co-chief operating officer of the New York Stock Exchange, said it was her boss's belief in her abilities that persuaded her to take a leap. After being in the job for a few months, she questioned why she ever doubted her ability to do it. With smarts and passion, she ran the trading floor of over eight hundred people.

Another woman leader at a major consumer goods company shared this story: "When I had been at the company for two years, a position several levels higher became available, and I was asked to recommend people for the job. It didn't occur to me to put myself in the running. That night, the thought crossed my mind, *Why not me?* I submitted my name the next morning and got the job."

Kathy Waller, chief financial officer of Coca-Cola, advises us to take action despite our fears. She says, "Believe that you will do whatever it takes to be successful, even if you have to take a class or reach out to someone with more experience who can help you get up to speed."

If you aren't feeling sure about stepping up (remember, our take on confidence includes feeling shaky but moving forward anyway), use your nervousness to your advantage. "Nervous energy can help pull the greatness out of you—it makes you overachieve," says Jackie Hernández, COO of Telemundo. And as Debbie Storey, chief diversity officer of AT&T, put it, "My knees have been shaking my whole career."

When considering bigger jobs, let your prospective boss be the judge of whether or not you're right for a position—you owe it to yourself to take a smart risk. "People don't walk into a job with all the tools they need," Jackie reminds us.

Let's bust the myth that "I don't have the skills needed to take that job" and realize the truth: "What I don't know I can learn or delegate." Mobilize the support you need to take

a bigger leap—pick one or two people you can call on for expertise and feedback, but also be your own mentor and ask yourself “Why not me?”



### **Confidence spark**

**When interviewing for an ambitious assignment, make a list of the skills you have, the skills you need to learn, and the tasks that can be delegated. Now address your fear of not being able to handle the situation, and see the truth as it is. You have several skills, and you can learn or delegate the rest. Breaking down the job into its various parts may also help. What daily tasks can you do right now? Which ones will you assign to someone else?**

## **Speak up even when wobbly**

Undoubtedly you are contributing and making a difference. But are you contributing as much as you can?

Sometimes the most frustrating thing about a job is having the talent and ideas to contribute but feeling like you can't give voice to them. In the Women and Confidence Survey, almost half of all respondents who reported that they didn't feel confident in the workplace attributed their lack of confidence to “feeling disconnected to my job because the work does not leverage my skills.”

If you know the answer to a problem and you don't speak up, not only does the group suffer, but you do too. How do you know your solution won't be adopted? We may have a strong and reasonable fear of backlash, but sometimes we can hold ourselves back because of vague misgivings that do more harm than good.

Anne Mulcahy, the former CEO and chairman of Xerox, shared on one of my television shows her personal experience with not speaking up. When she was the chief administrative officer, the CEO at the time, Paul Allaire, was disappointed in her for not voicing her opinions at meetings. He was grooming her to take over the company, and she wasn't talking. Anne did some soul searching and her choices were clear: speak up or step down. She had been with Xerox for many years and knew what the company needed, so she began speaking up. The rest is history: Anne went on to lead Xerox powerfully as CEO.<sup>4</sup>

Years ago, I was at a conference and the presenter wasn't addressing how gender prejudice filters down to all levels of an organization and the difficulty of changing that dynamic. That was the real issue at hand, but I seriously thought of not saying anything because I wasn't sure of the reaction I would get. Yet I knew it had to be addressed. Like Debbie Storey my knees were shaking, but I spoke up anyway. Changing the conversation in the room was more important than playing it safe.



### **Confidence spark**

**Set aside some time to write about a work issue that has been bothering you but hasn't been addressed. Get clarity as to what's really going on. Who is involved? Why are you upset? Do you have a concern about speaking up? Does this remind you of a similar situation from your past? Share your observations with a supportive friend and get some feedback. Agree to benchmark with your friend (or someone else) as you take steps toward resolving the problem.**

## How taking risks leads to big rewards

Too many of us play it safe to feel in control. Somewhere along the way, we started to equate risk with danger instead of opportunity.

In the survey data, respondents' comments indicate a high level of correlation between confidence and the willingness to take risks. Some sample responses were, "[Low confidence] often keeps me from taking risks that less able folks take," and "As I've grown older I have a greater belief in myself, and that has allowed me to be more adventurous in my life."

I have practiced risk taking throughout my career because I believe what I can contribute is important. That isn't to say that I don't feel nervous. I have come to accept that trying something new involves discomfort—and taking risks gets easier with practice. I also have reached out for support. My risk-taking ventures haven't always succeeded, but enough of them did. And even when my efforts did not work out, I learned something valuable from trying.

Ruthie Davis, entrepreneur and shoe designer to the stars, is a consummate risk taker, which has certainly contributed to her success. At UGG Australia, she repositioned the iconic sheepskin boot as "fashion" and started a craze across the United States. After holding several corporate jobs, she launched her own shoe line in 2006. Ruthie attributes her success to "thinking outside of the box, writing my own rules, and being brave."<sup>5</sup>

Rosalind Hudnell, vice president of human resources, global director of communications and external relations at Intel, has taken risks since she was a young woman. She attributes this ability to the support she received from her mother and grandmother. Roz told me, "No matter what

risk I took, I knew that if I really fell on my face, the worst possible thing that could happen was I'd go back home—which was a pretty cool place.” Roz has tried to pass on her risk-taking confidence to her children by letting them know that she has their backs. Her positive attitude enables her to take risks in her career because, as she describes, if “I don't know anything about this [new project or position], I'm going to have to learn really quickly, and in any way I can.”<sup>6</sup>

Why not go ahead and take a leap? Even if your efforts don't work out as planned, the lessons learned will make you wiser. Think like Sandra Dewey, executive vice president and head of business affairs for Turner Entertainment Networks and Cartoon Network Originals. She tells herself, “I'm going to make the best choice I can and if that turns out not to be perfect, I'll keep my eye on it, analyze it, and modify it as I go.”



### **Confidence spark**

**If you're feeling shaky about taking an action that could prove risky, use this exercise to determine if the action is what I call a *best bet*, a smart risk worth taking. First, analyze the pros and cons. Say you're offered a job working for a start-up company. How many pluses and minuses can you list? Which do you have more of? Second, consider the timing and your other priorities. Are you just starting out or have you been in the workforce for a long time? Are you single or married; do you have children? All of these factors go into determining whether taking the risk is worth it. Third and most importantly, listen to your inner voice. What is it advising? If everything**

**points to go, then it's time to make a move.  
Or maybe you find that the timing is not right.  
Don't discard your plans—just put them aside  
for now. Reevaluate the opportunity, or  
another one just like it, at a later time.**

## **Letting go of perfection**

We need to change the paradigm of what an effective businesswoman is and allow for expertise *and* imperfections to be part of the equation. The women I interviewed admitted to both. When we give up perfectionism, we are better able to step up, speak up, think big, and take risks. Yes, we have had to be twice as good as our male counterparts as a result of our late arrival into the workplace. But no one can keep pace with a standard that can never be achieved.

The pretense of perfection can kill your enthusiasm as well as your ability to move forward. Don't indulge it. Mistakes are part of the growing process. Some of the greatest innovations have come as a result of things going awry. A senior leader once told me that it's okay to make mistakes as long as you don't make the same mistake twice.

## **Stepping up to a stretch goal**

Now is the time to identify a bold goal, one that you feel passionate about. Maybe it's a promotion or taking your career in a new direction. Think big!

Breaking your stretch goal into a series of smaller, doable actions may help. What steps will you need to take to get to your goal? If your goal is a promotion, how can you get more visibility with power players? Which project can you put your hand up for that will showcase your skills and commitment?

What else can you do to show that you are ready to advance?  
How can you attract a sponsor?

Also, consider the people who can support you as you work toward your goal. Who will give you honest feedback, offer expertise, or just be available to listen as challenges arise? Continue reaching out to these people when needed.

Remember, one action at a time will get you there. Once your goal has been achieved, acknowledge the courage it took and how you have grown throughout the process. Don't stop—find another stretch goal to tackle. Confidence is about stepping up over and over again, looking fear in the face and moving ahead anyway.

## What would you do?

Scenario	Hold yourself back	Step up
You are asked to suggest the name of a candidate for a job two levels above you.	You do your research and offer up two names. Yours is <i>not</i> one of them.	You offer one name— <i>yours!</i>
You are in a meeting with your supervisors and they are talking about a challenge you know how to solve.	You offer no comment. They will probably figure out what you know will work.	You speak up and suggest a solution.
You are visiting a client and he confides in you, explaining that a consultant from another firm dropped the ball.	You listen but do not probe into what he needs because it is not your place.	You ask the client what he needs and offer to get back to him with a plan of action.



## **Power tools**

- **Speak up** when your insights can make a difference. If others make disparaging remarks, the results you bring to the table will ultimately override their negative comments. If the negativity continues, you may need to look for other opportunities.
- **Do a spot-check inventory** throughout the day. Be aware of how you are feeling and thinking. If you are experiencing mad mind-chatter based on unfounded biases, question these thoughts.
- **Find a stretch goal** you are passionate about and consider what you need to do to achieve it. Get a few supporters in place and start taking action, one step at a time.

Thank You For Reading

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