

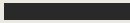
WRITTEN BY

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STEP OUT OF  
COMFORT INTO  
CONFIDENCE

The Professional Woman's Guide to Boosting Confidence



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## Introduction

During the past few decades, we've fortunately observed notable progress of professional women in the workplace. We not only see this in the corporate arena where more women are rising to executive positions, but it's also visible in areas such as politics, sports, and entertainment. If you are a woman that struggles with confidence, especially at work, it may be inhibiting your growth and advancement. What you may not know is that many successful, prominent women also struggle with continuous self-doubt. The imposter syndrome – carrying the belief that you don't deserve to be where you are professionally - also haunts some of these same women.

To illustrate how commonly self-doubts permeates, even within the most talented and successful women, here are some quotes from women you may know and admire.



“

“Every time I was called on in class, I was sure that I was about to embarrass myself. Every time I took a test, I was sure that it had gone bad. And every time I didn't embarrass myself—or even excelled—I believed that I had fooled everyone yet again. One day soon, the jig would be up ...”

“...there are still days I wake up feeling like a fraud, not sure I should be where I am.”

**FACEBOOK COO, SHERYL SANDBERG**



“

"I have written 11 books, but each time I think 'Uh-oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.'"

POET, MAYA ANGELOU

“

“The beauty of the imposter syndrome is you vacillate between extreme egomania and a complete feeling of: ‘I’m a fraud! Oh God, they’re on to me! I’m a fraud!’ . . . Just try to ride the egomania when it comes and enjoy it, and then slide through the idea of fraud.”

COMEDIAN, TINA FEY

“

“You think, “Why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don’t know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?””

A C T R E S S , M E R Y L S T R E E P





*Put on your big girl shoes and get to steppin'*

As you see, anyone can be an outwardly confident, extremely talented, high achiever, and still experience self-doubt. Men are not immune from feelings of self-doubt, but I'm focusing on the women. I present these quotes to you partly to validate your experience and partly to show that the confidence scale has a wide range, from those not represented in these quotes with visible, low levels of confidence, to strong, accomplished women still experiencing self-doubt.

Imposter syndrome isn't all bad. It indicates that the person has stretched herself. She felt the fear and did it anyway. When you force yourself out of your comfort zone, over time, it naturally leads you to greater confidence. So, if you are already experiencing feeling like an imposter, congratulations! You are already on the path to increased confidence!

If you are one of the many women going to work each day with self-doubt, or you know someone who is, this book will offer some ideas for building self-confidence so you can achieve greater success professionally and personally.

## Self-Confidence Defined

Merriam Webster's Learners Dictionary defines self-confidence as:

“Confidence in one’s self and in one’s powers and abilities.” When you have high self-confidence, you trust yourself addressing challenges, solving problems, and interacting with others. We tend to use the terms self-confidence and self-esteem interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Yes, one can have both low self-esteem and low self-confidence. But one can also have one without the other.

Note that confidence is situational. Others may perceive you as totally confident while you secretly know that you have *zero* confidence in a particular area of your life. You may lack confidence in public speaking, your appearance, social interactions, or in your abilities at work or in a new role. You may have considered yourself extremely confident, and at some point, you suddenly noticed a decline in confidence as you encountered a new experience, such as a recent job promotion, a toxic work environment, or a lengthy amount of time in a challenging relationship.

## The Importance of Building Self-Confidence

Confidence is essential to career development. If you doubt your abilities, it reflects in your presence, causing others to doubt your abilities, even though you may be the most skilled and capable person in the room. Also, if you doubt yourself to the point of fear that prevents you from pursuing new endeavors, from more education to new projects, you can ultimately stagnate your professional growth and your career. Not every woman aspires to rise to the executive level. Know who you are, where you fit in, what you want, and be comfortable with that. Certainly, climb that corporate ladder if that is what you desire. But the main point is to continuously develop so that you can take advantage of the best-fit opportunities that present themselves. Each time you hesitate to take advantage of an opportunity, the more stagnant you'll become. Two years becomes five, five becomes ten, and you'll look back, asking, "Why am I still stuck?" A lack of confidence can prevent us from pursuing dreams and reaching our full potential.



## Career Development

Self-confidence plays a vital role in career development and is especially critical to women in leadership or seeking to advance toward leadership.

## Leadership

If you are the woman desiring to pursue leadership or move higher on the leadership path, high self-confidence is essential. In a KPMG women's leadership study, 56% of the women surveyed cited confidence building as part of the training and development skills needed to advance more women into leadership roles. High self-confidence is a characteristic vital to leadership success.

## Closing the Gaps Between Men and Women

Building self-confidence is necessary to decrease the inequities between corporate men and women. Despite our progress, women are still less likely to be promoted than men. Women are underrepresented at every level of the organization.

## Building Self-Confidence

I've researched the topic of confidence, the importance of confidence in the workplace, and the experiences that build confidence. The information that I've gathered from my readings along with the surveys and interviews I've conducted indicate that self-confidence increases from the following:

- Training
- Cumulative Life Experiences
- The Right Support - Including Strong Leaders, Mentors and Coaches
- Volunteering
- Spirituality

The themes through these experiences of building greater confidence relate to leveraging your strengths, moving out of your comfort zone, continuous learning, and taking advantage of the right support when you find it. To illustrate the impact of these life experiences, the some of the following sections include quotes from professional women that I have interviewed. Names have been changed for anonymity.

# Traditional Training and Education

One of the most basic approaches to increasing confidence, particularly professionally, is through intentional learning. Just as you may not feel confident going into a meeting if you know you did not prepare, you won't feel completely confident in your professional role until you acquire the knowledge and skills to excel. In the workplace, a lot of attention and credit is given to those who speak up. Visibility when you are working to advance in corporate is important. However, having the real knowledge behind what you are saying makes you more credible. Anyone can talk just to talk. Continuously increasing your knowledge and skills will continuously build your confidence.

You can start with the basics of identifying what your company expects you to know to perform optimally. Then ask, what else would I like to know? What do you want to be the go-to person for? What genuinely interests you should be your focus. You will naturally excel in the areas that you are passionate about, and people will notice.

Remember to include soft skills. Where do you need to improve?

Communication? Leadership? Strategic thinking? If you are not sure, ask for feedback from colleagues that you trust.

# Cumulative Life Experiences

*"The most difficult thing is the decision is to act, the rest is merely tenacity."*

*Ameila Earhart*

Self-confidence develops over time through professional and life experiences. Research shows that doing and succeeding builds skills, coping strategies, and knowledge that leads to increased confidence. Doing and failing also contributes to building confidence if you can learn to embrace and learn from the mistakes and move forward.

Some of what makes us stronger and builds confidence are unforeseen and often unfortunate challenging experiences. How we manage those difficult times and how we mentally frame those past experiences can still build confidence when you keep a positive perspective.

The following examples reveal how we can embrace challenging or unfortunate life experiences, giving ourselves credit for the lessons learned and the resilience that we can leverage going forward.

***Tina, a training and development manager describes what pushed her out of her comfort zone.***

*"When I was 15, I developed rheumatoid arthritis and couldn't play sports anymore. It actually helped my confidence, because I was able to find other interests that I wasn't the best at, like photography. But I enjoyed it and the fact that I enjoy it makes it worthwhile. It's about seeing the world from a different point of view and the more perspectives you have, the more confidence you have. If you can enter activities with a joy just to be there, you have already won. If you are in there and you are all stressed out, your mind isn't there. It really opens up your mind to other perspectives. Just being there gives you that exposure. Just having the experience -- that increases confidence."*

***Briana, an investment professional, speaks of her experience in a male dominated profession at one of the leading global investment banking companies.***

*"Whenever I'm in any other job, investment is the highest point you can reach, [and this investment firm higher], so I get lot of respect [from having worked there]. These little guys will try to talk down to you – like 'You are a lady; how come you are not home making babies?' These are people with truly more experience than me. I can ride that for the rest of my life."*

# The Right Support - Strong Leaders

*"Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another." - John Maxwell*

Confidence also accelerates when working under a strong leader. If you are fortunate enough to be in this position, take advantage of the situation while it lasts. The strong leader will automatically find opportunities to stretch you, that are a good fit for your natural strengths. It takes a leader who is already secure and confident in, to trust others to leave their comfort zone and do more. If you work for someone that believes you can do something, and you think you can't, believe her. There's a reason she is trusting you with that task.

*Kim – Human Resources Professional*

*"One of my old bosses, one of the best bosses I had – was big on professional development. She wants you to grow as an individual, even if it takes you outside of her department. She was very bold in developing my confidence at work. She was very helpful in letting me know not to be afraid to take risks and take chances because you learn from those experiences. -Just being put in unfamiliar situations at work. I'm not where I want to be, but I'm a lot further than I was. And now people seek me because I've done a good job."*

*Karen – Former Human Resources Vice President, turned Business Owner/Consultant*

*Regarding a strong leader, "...He gave me the space to figure it out. He was not breathing down my neck. He just gave me the room I needed to learn, make decisions. He did not micromanage. The vocabulary he used with me was always positive, encouraging. And he backed that up financially. He would give me the budget and resources I needed. I had one person reporting to me; I eventually had eight. He gave me the people resources I need as well as the budget. He gave me the time and space."*





# The Right Support - Mentors and Coaches

*"I think that you want to always gravitate toward people who are great at what they do and go for authenticity."*

*Viola Davis*

## **Mentors**

Mentorship is known to be critical to career advancement. If your company offers a mentor program, take advantage of it. Otherwise, if you are seeking a formal mentor, you must do the work that highlights your potential and helps you get noticed. Having a mentor doesn't require a structured corporate program. The mentor can be a male or female leader. However, women's workplace experiences differs from men, and the woman leader may be better suited to help you navigate those differences.

Having a role model is equally important. If you notice someone becoming an advocate of you, take advantage of that as well. An experienced, respected professional that takes an interest in you can offer a wealth of insight and wisdom that could potentially lead you in a positive direction and help you avoid damaging career mistakes.

## **Coaches**

Coaching is another option to help support you in your efforts to build confidence, especially if in your current situation, you don't have a strong leader, mentor, or role model. Coaches provide a safe, confidential space to share, heighten your self-awareness, explore options, and design a plan to get you to your desired goal, in this case, increased confidence. The coach does not serve the same role as a therapist or counselor, nor is she there to prescribe specifically what to do in all situations. But your coach will help you see your limiting thoughts and behaviors, and work with you to find your own path to success, based on what works best for you. The coach will support and challenge you, while being your accountability partner through the process.

# Volunteering

Volunteering outside of work is an excellent way to build professional confidence without the pressure of being monitored and evaluated at work and with fewer risks. When you volunteer, you will likely choose a function or a cause that syncs with your passion. Sometimes you are asked to volunteer. But when we proactively choose the volunteer work, we can choose activities we know we do well.

Organizations like your church, local food bank, your chamber of commerce, and professional associations are always looking for volunteers to perform functions such as marketing, writing communications, and organizing events. There are plenty of opportunities for you to leverage and strengthen your professional skills.

Again, working within your passion and strengths facilitates success. The people around you will see your skills and strengths in action and see the value you deliver while seeing the authentic you. When working in a volunteer capacity, you are often recognized for skills and talents you forgot that you had or that you take for granted. Getting clear on your strengths and how you add value adds another layer to your confidence.

# Faith and Spirituality

*"A confident woman feels safe. She believes she is loved, valuable, cared for, and safe in God's will for her."*

*Joyce Meyer*

Research shows that there are correlations between spiritual development and increased self-esteem. The examples below are from women I interviewed who credited spirituality for their continued growth in self-confidence.

*Kim, Human Resources Professional*

*"I was having a quarter-life crisis at turning 25. I was living at home, working part-time. It was a dead-end job. And I broke up with my boyfriend. Okay. I'm supposed to have my life together by now. I was going to church, learning to be patient with where I am. He wants me to be content with where I am. When I came to terms with where I was, that's when things changed for me. I got a job making twice as much, and a new boyfriend. I built faith and trust in where God was going to place me and earning patience. It taught me patience and to trust God and that He will do what he said He would do for me.*

*Alexia, Business Owner*

*"Meditation helps me stay grounded through the day and helps me to focus. Understanding as a leader, there will always be fires to fight. Prayer and meditation. Going to the gym. Taking a 10-minute nap. Knowing that I am not working for man, I am working for God. This is so much bigger than me. It allows me to stay out of being a people pleaser. Giving me the confidence to say no. I don't get offended. Staying grounded through regular attendance at church. Spiritual development."*



## Your Action Plan

It's easy to read some self-improvement material, get inspired, put it on the shelf, and return to the state where you were before you read it. What will you do with your new knowledge and inspiration, and how will you sustain that energy? Here are some questions to ask yourself before you even get started.

- What is it that you want to change?
- How do you envision the best version of you?
- If you can answer these questions, the next question is, what has been stopping you?
- What would be the benefit of taking action to build your confidence to the next level?
- What will life look like five years from now if you do nothing?

What is the cost of doing nothing? If in answering these questions, you decided that it is critical that you start to build your confidence and change your career trajectory, or even change your life, it's time to get a plan. Confidence might be an issue in one or more spaces of your life. Maybe you realized that there is something critical you need to do to grow and reach your dream goals. You still need a plan.



What's the first small step you can take? Is it a work project? Asking your boss for a stretch assignment? Is it a volunteer effort you have been considering for a long time? You may have even been delaying starting a writing project, hobby, or an exercise program. Finding something you will enjoy doing, even love doing, is the key to making this feel good and not like a dreadful challenge you are forcing yourself to do.

STEP

01

## Goal

Decide and document your confidence project and the completion time, if applicable. It can be a stretch project at work, volunteer work, or delving into your spirituality on a new level. Reflect on why this is important to you and document your why.

## Action

Decide on the first step you can take to get started and set a timeframe to get it done.

STEP

02

STEP

03

## Resources

Determine and make a list of the resources you need. This may be training courses, funding for training, or a professional coach.

## Next Steps

Plan the next steps. What do you need to do first? If you decided to proactively take on a special project at work, determine the end goal then work backwards to create a project plan. If it's training, when and where can you get the training. Where will you quickly apply the training when it's done?

STEP

04

STEP

05

## Accountability

Decide who can be your accountability partner. Consider trusted friends, colleagues, or a professional coach if you are ready to push yourself and commit to change.



It's time to take a leap of faith. There will never be a perfect time take your career to the next level. You will never feel completely ready, with the right situation, all of the right skills, or resources. Do what you can now. No matter what you decide to do next on the journey to increased confidence, remember the keys to building confidence are moving out of your comfort zone, leverage your strengths, and continue learning.

*"Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is just show up."*

*BRENE BROWN*



A B O U T T H E

# Author

After a marketing career of over 20 years in large enterprises, I made a drastic career change to professional coaching. Now I help professional women feeling stuck and dissatisfied in their careers see and make the changes needed to create the professional life they desire, build the confidence they have been seeking, and create success as they define it. I do this through a process of creating awareness, identifying what needs to change, and supporting them in designing an action plan to move forward. My approach is strengths-based and holistic, ensuring that during the awareness phase, elements of my client's mind, body, and spirit are addressed and even leveraged in the transformation process.



# About the Author

My desire to help develop others and lead them to a more fulfilling professional and personal life is also driven by my own career experiences. As a marketing professional, I enjoyed the opportunity to create, collaborate, and develop strategies. However, for years I secretly felt like a square peg in a round hole. As an introvert and an INFP within the Myers Briggs personality type, my corporate career was not the best environment to leverage my greatest strengths. I noticed my perspectives were different from others, and it became clear that I was more concerned about people than things. I instinctively knew that there was another way for me to add value using my natural strengths. Today, I am confident in knowing that my empathy, insight, and intuition are the traits that support me in guiding others to sustaining transformations.

What prepared me for where I am today? It starts with growing up in Chicago, and the character developed from being exposed to the cold, the culture, and the people. I began college studies at Howard University, but later returned to Chicago and earned a Bachelor's in Business Administration at Loyola University of Chicago. From there, I began a marketing career spanning 20+ years. I moved to Dallas, Texas in the mid-'90s, where I continued in roles leading marketing strategies for communications technology enterprises. Before I even left for Texas, I intended to study psychology, but I put that on the backburner as my career kept moving.

Being the late bloomer that I am, I married at 38 and had my first and only child, a daughter at 39. Managing a demanding job while raising a strong-willed toddler in mid-life kept me on autopilot for a while. When I came out of my fog, I returned to thinking about what I wanted to do in my career. Fast forward, and I completed the Professional and Executive Coach program at the University of Texas, becoming an ICF certified coach followed by earning a Master's in Organizational Behavior and Executive Coaching. In 2013 I founded Epiphany Coaching, LLC. Since then I've been coaching women and men on career transitions, leadership, building confidence, and entrepreneurship. My mission is to guide my clients to being empowered in their careers, health, and relationships.

# THANK YOU

Thank you for downloading this ebook.

For more support on building your confidence, see the [Step Into Confidence program at Epiphany Coaching](#).

If you have questions please contact me at [lryarbough@epiphanycoaching.com](mailto:lryarbough@epiphanycoaching.com), or schedule an appointment at: <https://calendly.com/lisayarbough/45-minute-consultation>

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