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Overcoming Self Doubt: When the 5-second rule doesn't work

Have you ever wondered why it is so hard to overcome self-doubt?

Are you a compassionate person but find that you are harder on yourself than you are on others?

Have you tried Mel Robbins supposedly life-changing strategy of counting backward 5-4-3-2-1 and still can't take the action you know you want to take to achieve a goal you have?

Why is that?

In coaching, we are not encouraged to ask the client "Why" type questions as it puts people on the defensive. However, I have found in my 14 years of coaching intelligent professionals and entrepreneurs that their strong analytical brain needs to understand "the why" behind something before it will let go of its resistance and allow new solutions in.

You and your brain have been trained to doubt yourself

You have heard much written about the prehistoric brain being designed for fight or flight. So we are born with an ingrained habit of self-preservation and safety. Now combine this with the fact that many people, especially those that are compassionate, have a strong need of acceptance and therefore their number one fear is rejection. So it becomes clearer that your self-preservation mechanism is keeping you from one of your greatest fears which is rejection. If you don't attempt something then you cannot be judged and rejected for it.

Also, brain research has shown that your past thoughts have laid down neurological pathways in the brain. And these well-worn pathways are where your future thoughts tend to go first. That is why most processes on changing habits require you to consistently do something different for at least 30 days to lay down new pathways in the brain.

Most people should also know that laying down these self-doubt tracks are not your fault.

All of you were trained to do this by someone you were trying to be accepted by a parent, a teacher, a potential mate, a current mate, society in general. Be a good person and meet my needs or I won't accept or love you. Hence you will be rejected.

And for those of you that studied for a profession which is based on being prepared to see all the risks that are present for your client...it's even worse. Accountants are trained in auditing to see the risk inherent in every aspect of the business that may affect the financial statement reader. Lawyers are trained to be prepared for every argument that his opponent in court may throw at him. You have been trained to be skeptical and think of the worst thing that can happen. No wonder you think the worst when you think of your own capabilities.

.../2

-2-

Combine that with being on-guard all the time striving to be perfect in an in-perfect world. And when low and behold you aren't perfect on subjects and accomplishments that were never intended to be perfect....you feel deflated and doubt yourself next time in a related area or an unrelated area.

And for those of you that are compassionate or value compassion, it's even worse. Since you tend to be extremely outward focused on what other people think and want. You usually assume that the other person's happiness is dependent on your behavior. And again it's not your fault as you too have been trained to think this. Parental, teacher and peer approval was highly correlated to you making someone else's wishes come true. Play nice, take care of your sister, help mom or dad, pay attention in class, get good grades, be a good little boy or girl.

More Confusing: Self-Doubt isn't always present or consistent

Also, self-doubt can be confusing as it is not always constant. I personally have struggled with wavering self-doubt my whole life. Where I go from feeling "I can do anything" to "who am I kidding; this is too much for me". And most of the time the slip from confident highs to emotional lows usually happens just when I am about to succeed at something. I originally thought something was wrong with me. But after talking to many clients, colleagues and friends I realized that many people have a similar issue.

In fact, there is a huge focus in the coaching and self-development industry around "mindset" as it is such a prevalent problem. Once I saw this issue as a challenge I was here to overcome, I stopped letting it stop me. I started to be much more aware of when it was happening and created strategies to overcome this hurdle to stay focused on my goals. I am still testing and refining the strategies. And I still struggle and get caught up in the emotional lows but now never for more than a day or two. So if you are like me and my clients, and your analytical brain is too strong to be tricked by some of the pop-culture tips such as the 5-second rule then read on.

10 Strategies to Overcome Self-Doubt

I highly suggest that you use the 10 strategies below in order while you are building your self-confidence muscle. And building a confidence muscle is like going to the gym. You build the muscle by repeating the steps over and over. If you can get yourself to take action, you will start to feel a feeling of competence which is a big part of feeling confident. So think of these strategies creating a circle or better yet a spiral which you travel to take you higher towards your feeling of confidence and success.

1) Determine if you actually have doubt, or do you lack information or a skill set to complete the task.

I have dealt with many professional that thought they should know everything and needed to accept that they needed to get help with what they were struggling with. Examples include:

-a CPA client was not completing complex files as he didn't have complex tax knowledge the file required

-a lawyer-client was not closing sales as he didn't have enough information on how his behavior during a sales meeting was affecting the potential client.

...3/

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-an entrepreneur client that needs clients but she is struggling without a concrete marketing strategy as she has no experience in this area as she was an employee prior to this.

2) Accept that you are having self-doubt and reframe it. So if you have the skills or the information to complete the task but still can't move forward then a fear of some kind is stopping you. Most often the fear is judgment or rejection by others. First, acknowledge and accept that you are having self-doubt. This may sound simple but it is a key first step. Call a spade a spade. And accept the fact you are stuck because of some irrational fear.

In speaking with Michael Hyatt a productivity guru and leadership expert recently I asked this question in one of his coaching groups. "What are your tips on overcoming self-doubt when it raises its head? Sometimes it feels like an irrational fear?" His reply was that's because it is. He went on to talk about how he has spoken to thousands of people but an upcoming speech to a large audience has him doubting himself. His mind was whispering "Do you really have something to say?" "Do you really think you are going to stand up on stage and these people are really going to listen to you?" He said that he sees his fear as not just normal, but as helpful. It drives him to prepare. He used to get anxiety before speaking and now reframes it as "Anxiety is how my body prepares for peak performance" He said that his coach Dan Sullivan said "When you're not confident, courage will do" This is courage to act despite their fears.

So that is where I start with clients, getting them to accept where they are, ask what they are resisting, love what is and then act despite their fears.

3) Get some rest, and I mean some real rest. If you are tired or physically ill then this is not the time to leap the hurdle of self-doubt around an issue you have been struggling with. You won't be thinking clearly and tend to allow more negative emotion stop you when you are tired. And if you are struggling with being tired all the time and accept that this is normal (except if you're a new parent), it's not. And you need a real plan to take care of yourself. So stop and create a plan to get more rest and if you're someone obsessed with productivity, see it as "an action" towards a more productive tomorrow or next week.

4) Get some perspective.

I ask my clients to create a success file (it can be paper or digital). Inside it, I ask them to place items of past successes. This can include documents of past courses completed, designations obtained, testimonials from past clients, thank you letters or card from family and friends, positive job reviews, reminders of creative projects you completed (a big of your beautiful home or gardens you designed). Anything that reminds you of places you have already had accomplishment. When they hit that self-judgment wall, which is a fast-moving train of negative self-talk, I ask them to stop that train by reviewing their file. I ask them to remember and acknowledge all they have already accomplished. And

...4/

I mean really feel the accomplishment. Focus on the papers or screen and really appreciate the focus, skill, and determination that you know you had to expend to accomplish that...and remind yourself that you can do it again.

5) Meditate for 15 minutes

If you still don't feel ready to embark on that task then slow down to start. I know that sound counter-intuitive but much research has shown that calming the mind can lead to increase creativity, clarity, productivity and can be a key to changing behaviors. Time Magazine has a whole issue about Mindfulness: The new science of health and happiness

<https://shop.time.com/storefront/books/mindfulness-the-new-science-of-health-and-happiness/prodTDSHOPMINDFULBZ.html>

So find yourself a mindfulness meditation at your app store, download it on your phone and have a set of earphone so you can use it where ever you need to slow down your mind which I not always your best friend.

6) Set a timer for 30 minutes

I truly believe and my clients have validated my belief that you can do anything for 30 minutes. People tend to look at the enormity of a task or goal and are overwhelmed by the size or fear of it. So I ask my clients to start by setting a timer for 30 minutes and then commit to focusing on that task for only 30 minutes at a time. If this is a project that is longer than 30 minutes I recommend that the first thing they do a mind dump and create a plan for the next 3 steps that need to be taken. You don't have to have all the steps of a project laid out to start. As you work on the project completing those 3, the other will come to light, just have a place to write them down and keep them as they come to you. I like using Todoist for this. www.todoist.com

After those 30 minutes, I ask them to feel successful/satisfied with their accomplishment. If you feel like you want to keep going, set the timer for another 30 minutes and keep at it.

Or you can then chose to have a small reward such as get up and make a cup of tea/coffee, have a bite of chocolate or get up to walk around and stretch. Do not give yourself the reward of jumping on social media. This is a rabbit hole of time wasting that few can resist. Plus comparing your current self-doubting self to those out there doing it can really set you back and off your focus.

Most of the time just taking action on the thing you doubt yourself on is enough to create some positive momentum on a task or project.

7) Use your calendar to use your high energy times wisely

Normally most people have a higher energy level in the morning before interruptions, crisis and numerous demand have taken up their energy. I ask my clients to protect this time by booking time in their calendars with themselves to work on their most difficult tasks. And usually the tasks you doubt yourself on fits in that category. .../5

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8) Drop perfection and go for done

Jon Acuff in his book "Finish: The Gift of Done" says that based on studies conducted by a university researcher with hundreds of participants in his online course to help people work on their goals, I learned something surprising: The most effective exercises were not those that pushed people to work harder. The ones that got people to the finish line did just the opposite— they took the pressure off.

Why? Because the sneakiest obstacle to meeting your goals is not laziness, but perfectionism. We're our own worst critics, and if it looks like we're not going to do something right, we prefer not to do it at all. That's why we're most likely to quit on day two, "the day after perfect"—when our results almost always underperform our aspirations.

So if you are a trained professional, know that you are a trained perfectionist. And in your profession or business, there are areas in which you must maintain this standard such as accurate financial statements. But what all your training didn't do is teach you when this level of perfection was only not needed but can be detrimental to your success.

One of the keys to dropping perfection is to stop caring what other people think. This is a hard one especially for compassionate people as their core being seems outwardly focused. My clients have proved to me time and again, that when they focus on what they want to make them happy, that those around them are happier.

So ask yourself the following questions when you find yourself getting stuck or overwhelmed.

- 1) Is it better to have this done then have it perfect?
- 2) Is this something I will regret not doing more than doing?
- 3) If I didn't care what other people thought, what would be possible?

9) Test your beliefs

I was working with a client that had significant doubt around the quality of her work as many people suffer from perfectionism in the workplace. She would double, triple check her accounting files before she sent them to the partner for review. The lack of confidence in her work was causing her to stay late in the office affecting her work/life balance. And the extra time was causing her to look unproductive if she didn't bill it to the file or created unbillable hours for the firm if her time on the file was over-budget. I asked her to think about what the partner wanted. She said he/she would want a quality file that was within budget. I asked her to test the quality of her file. I had her select two files to hand in over the next week where she would not go back and recheck her work before handing it in.

Once those files were reviewed I asked her what the results were. In both cases, there was only one query on the file and neither were items that her double checking would have found. So we tested her belief that double checking was improving the file and we proved that it wasn't. She has now been able to move forward with this new belief, be more productive at work and keep within future job budgets much more easily. ...6/

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So if you have beliefs that are not working for you, go out and test them. There is nothing like experiential evidence to help you change a belief.

10) Get some support

If you have tried the above several times and are still struggling with the self-doubt around a task then it may be time to get some support. It is best to deal with someone that has experience in the area you are struggling with, is positive and has proven skills to help you. Maybe it's a positive friend who can hold you accountable. But I have found that friends usually let friends off the hook. Instead, I would look to a coach or mentor that has a track record in helping others with their self-doubt issues.

Sometimes even the strongest person needs support to move forward on something they don't feel confident on. And for those of you that suffer from more overwhelming self-doubt, know that many of my clients started out feeling that way too until they worked with me and practiced these strategies (and others created just for their situation) that helped them overcome the doubt they had in themselves. If self-doubt is stopping you from reaching your business or personal goals then email me at anita@professionalcoachingcompany.com for a complimentary clarity session.

Want to know more about the complimentary clarity session and book your appointment on-line then go to: <http://professionalcoachingcompany.com/clarity-session/>