

Want To Be More Confident? Stop Doing These 7 Things

By Kerri Palmer, Senior Vice President, Risk Management. Capital One. March 30, 2016

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.”

It’s no secret that fear is a big roadblock to confidence. Fear of taking risks. Fear of failure. Fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. There are a myriad of ways in which our fear holds us back. If only our fear of inaction were greater than our fear of the outcome, we’d be more confident. Right? Not necessarily. Especially for women.

Numerous studies, from findings published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* to the recently released “Breaking Through: Harnessing the Impact of Women Entrepreneurs,” have cited the disparity between men and women when it comes to confidence. The gender confidence gap is real, and fear is just one factor.

As the mother of two daughters – and a *Fortune* 500 executive – supporting other women and helping them to build confidence is an important part of my personal and professional lives.

Through Capital One’s Women’s Network, we recently convened a group of women business leaders at our headquarters in McLean, Va., to talk about how they have developed a greater inner confidence. After hearing about their personal journeys and their own struggles with confidence, one thing was clear – as women, we have a tremendous capacity to learn from and help each other to recognize, navigate and overcome self-doubt and replace it with self-confidence.

In the weeks since, I’ve reflected on takeaways from that day and other confidence lessons I’ve learned throughout my personal life, my career and work with coaches and mentors.

While there is no one-size-fits-all formula for building confidence, eliminating certain behaviors can have a profound positive effect. Here are seven confidence saboteurs that have tripped me up personally or that I have seen others fall prey to:

1. Striving for perfection – For several years, I’ve worked with executive coach **Carol Lempert**, who champions the concept of ‘satisficing’ – knowing when good is good enough. Abandoning the pursuit of unattainable perfection in favor of satisfaction will actually make us happier with our decisions in the long run.

2. Constant comfort – Comfort and growth don’t exist together. One executive coach at the event suggested that you think of your personal growth like a rubber band – you want to be flexible and keep stretching yourself out of your comfort zone – just like a rubber band can stretch and grow – but keep an eye on how much growth you’re trying to achieve at any one time. Don’t go so far that you put too much strain on the band at one time.

3. Leading without purpose – Unanimously, the women panelists cited personal passion as the top motivator for finding inner courage – remembering why you care about the work you’re doing and why it matters can sometimes be just the motivation you need to speak up or act.

4. Negativity – Women spend a lot of time uplifting others in our lives – try that same approach on yourself. Shift from negative to positive self-talk. Quit ruminating on your failures from the day – no one else is dwelling on them. You shouldn’t be either.

5. Underestimating – More so than men, women experience an internal disconnect between our perceived abilities and actual abilities. Trust in your credentials and expertise and work to align your own perceptions with your true capabilities.

6. Minimizing and Apologizing – Any sentence that starts with, “I just wanted to…” or “I’m sorry, but…” undermines our contributions. Mastering ‘power speak’ is an important part of building confidence. Rather than hedging or prefacing with a disclaimer, state your meaning and purpose clearly using phrases like, “My point is…” or “I recommend that…”

7. Doubling Down on Defeat – If we strike out once and never go back to the plate, we’re actually being defeated twice. Get comfortable with trying something that doesn’t work, learning and moving on. In today’s ever-changing, digitally driven economy, a fail-fast approach is a must for success.

At Capital One, we’re working with organizations like Grameen America, Women Who Code, and Accion to help more women entrepreneurs double down on success – to build confidence and, through our \$150 million Future Edge initiative, get the skills, tools and resources they need to succeed in the 21st century economy. We recognize that when women succeed, they create stronger communities and boost our local and national economies – which ultimately benefits us all.

Some of the best advice I’ve heard reminds me that everyone is a pioneer in her own life. We pave our paths through our actions *and* our inaction. Today, starting now, let’s commit to taking action.