3 Ways Women Can Close the Confidence Gap

To erase the gender pay gap, we first need to address the gender confidence gap. Here's how women can create space for themselves and others to advance.

January 4, 2019 5 min read

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One of the most confounding disparities in corporate America isn't the gender pay gap but the gender *confidence* gap. Certainly the pay gap matters, but it won't be resolved until women own their credentials and abilities.

A recent study from Northern Illinois University found that women often fail to self-promote themselves because they fear negative backlash. The researchers asked two groups of female students to write essays about their skills and achievements. Some wrote anonymously, while others were asked to put their names on the essay. Those in the anonymous group gave themselves higher praise than those who knew they would be identified.

These results provide important insights into why strategies, such as teaching women power postures, haven't moved the needle on women's tendency not to self-promote. The problem: As long as women fear a backlash, they will not advocate for themselves no matter how confident they are.

That instinct is compounded by the fact that women often second-guess whether they're fully qualified for new opportunities. Most simply put their heads down and keep working hard, assuming that if they do that long enough,

they’ll receive recognition.

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Anonymity is more difficult to maintain in the working world than it is in a university setting. But fears of backlash manifest not just in a failure to self-promote but in other ways as well. Every time a woman chooses not to speak up during a conference call or decides against introducing her ideas during a meeting, she hinders her own progress and that of other women.

Yet we women can change the tide. By taking steps to own our power, we can combat negative backlash and create space for other confident, powerful women to advance. Here are three ways how:

1. Own your strengths.

Research shows that self-awareness correlates with success. The better you know yourself, the more likely you are to achieve your goals. Pay attention to the projects and responsibilities that inspire passion, creativity and motivation. Note, too, the things you struggle with or those that drain your energy. As you gain an honest picture of your abilities, you’ll be able to partner with people whose skills complement your own so you can drive results within your organization.

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In the past, YouEarnedIt CEO Autumn Manning has listed self-awareness as her biggest challenge as a business leader, according to an article on Business.com. Manning understands that her company and workforce have ever-shifting needs, which means she has to work to align her strengths with those needs on any given day. Being self-aware, Manning said, allows her to steer the business into the future with

confidence.

2. Get comfortable with disappointment.

Too often, women try to brush over professional setbacks and disappointments. They suppress the frustration, anger, and doubt that come from those instances. But those are the moments that teach you the most. When you fail or you don't receive the recognition you believe you deserve, sit with that experience. Learn from it and reflect on how you can do better. Be prepared to work even harder the second time around.

Then be willing to go to bat for yourself. Mary Barra, General Motors' first female CEO, advises firmly but respectfully standing behind your decisions, according to a *Refinery29* profile. When you've failed, learned and then succeeded because of what you've learned, you've earned those achievements. Allow yourself to savor the strength you've built throughout the journey.

3. Envision your future.

One of the best motivators for self-promotion is envisioning where you want your career to be five or 10 years from now. Chances are, you won't get there by cowering in the corner and hoping someone will take notice. You'll need to take concrete steps to build your skills, and you'll need to assert those skills to move up the ranks. Such has been the path of every powerful woman, including PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi, who has steadily improved the company's global position since taking the top seat in 2007. Confidence and self-promotion are essential to fulfilling your career goals.

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Women need to step out from behind the cloak of anonymity to make real change in the corporate world. You may experience backlash on occasion, but let your results and success speak for themselves. The more women who express confidence and advocate for themselves, the more negative backlash will diminish. Show up prepared to work, find allies and embrace every chance for growth that comes your way. If you allow yourself to claim the opportunities that are yours, you'll find that being publicly confident will naturally follow.

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