Why Every Entrepreneur Needs to Know About the ‘Alter Ego Effect’

This past Sunday was National Superhero Day, so it is only fitting for entrepreneurs to unlock their own superpowers.

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Starting, growing and operating a business is a challenge. Every day you’re confronted with a new set of obstacles you haven’t been trained for and you’re asked to tackle problems you may not have the skills for yet. For many high achievers, self-doubt, stress and uncertainty rob them of the confidence to strive for greater goals. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

There’s an innate skill you already have that can help you navigate your world as an entrepreneur with more grit and grace. It’s something ultra-successful people have been doing for millennia; it’s the ability to shift your identity to align with the qualities of someone or something else that can achieve your outcome more easily. It’s called your alter ego.

Beyonce uses Sasha Fierce, Kobe used the Black Mamba and even Martin Luther King Jr. used the Distinguished Self, a persona he created when he wore a pair of non-prescription glasses to write his empowering speeches. Tapping into an alter ego has been a tool successful people have been using for years to help move past the resistance that naturally wants to stop us. And it is something I have used for more than a decade.

Indeed, for the past 16 years, I've helped thousands of athletes, leaders and public figures develop their own powerful alter egos to help them navigate their pursuits with more mental toughness (and now have written a whole book on it, *The Alter Ego Effect*). The greatest reward has been seeing people reveal their most "real self" that was buried under years of self-doubt, lack of confidence or fear.

With this past Sunday being National Superhero Day, I thought it would be the perfect time to share a few key steps to help activate your own alter ego in business and leave anxiety, doubt and fear on the sidelines.

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1. Create an alter ego to a specific role or area of your life.

Because we're talking about business, we've already got this step covered. However, the reason this is important is because you have many selves you bring to the multiple roles in your life – whether it's entrepreneur, salesperson, parent, partner, friend or any role important to you. This is an important paradigm to understand because when you start to see yourself as having many sides to how you show up in life, it sets up the unlocking power of this naturally occurring concept.

And just like it's a mistake to try and define yourself as one single "self," because it ends up trapping your capabilities, creating an alter ego for your entire life is also a trap and is far too difficult to navigate. However, the moment you build one to help unleash traits and abilities customized to help you win in a specific role or field of play, you've just greased the slide to success.

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2. Find the alter ego that works for you.

Ask yourself, who (or what) already embodies the characteristics you admire? Who would you love to activate in your role as a leader in your business? Or if you get anxious during specific circumstances – like presenting on stage or closing a deal – what alter ego would best work for you?

Your alter ego can be anyone (or anything) that can help you reveal a level of grit, skill and creativity you didn’t realize was there. For example, a client of mine running a major investment firm in New York taps into the characteristics and traits of someone that deeply inspires him to be a better leader: his grandmother.

She raised four boys on her own in Manhattan after surviving the Holocaust (all of whom went onto having successful careers). My client battled with being a difficult boss that bullied people and had a leadership turnover rate which caused major cultural issues. But when he found his new inspiration for how he would show up as a leader, his entire demeanor changed. He was patient, fair and firm – just like his grandmother.

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3. Find something to help activate and embody your newfound alter ego.

This taps into a psychological phenomenon called “enclothed cognition,” a natural occurrence in the human mind that attributes meaning to the clothing you wear and other people wear. For example, when you see someone in a doctor’s coat, you automatically attribute certain traits and qualities to that person. However, if you put on the coat, you’ll actually

change your behavior because you've just "enclothed" yourself in the cognitive traits of what you think that doctors coat means.

Most people who do this trick automatically become more detailed, methodical and careful with their actions – just as Martin Luther King did when he wore non-prescription glasses as a way to activate his Distinguished Self and move past the insecurities that were slowing him down.

Now, you can't walk around in a Batman costume at work; however, you can find something else to help represent and embody your alter ego. One client of mine has a bracelet she uses to activate her inner Wonder Woman when she needs to perform at a high-level. Another client is inspired by the character Ziva David on NCIS and purchased a leather jacket she wears on sales calls to activate those fearless qualities of Ziva.

Your totem can be anything; however, when you have it on, you must honor the spirit of who or what you're being inspired by. Entrepreneurs are always bumping up against the edge of their comfort zones. You're always making decisions or putting yourself in situations of risk, which can cause many to quit. However, you've already been gifted with a powerful method to tap into your creative imagination and show up with more confidence, calm and certainty.

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