Outsourcing Confidence

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Keri Martinez

Perfectionist Professional Woman Podcast with Keri Martinez

Outsourcing Confidence

Welcome to the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. This is Episode 15, "Outsourcing Confidence."

I'm Keri Martinez. I'm a wife and mother of three children and three bonus children. I'm also a certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For a good portion of my life, I equated perfection with happiness and success. I thought that striving to *be* perfect and *do* things perfectly was the key to feeling happy and to being successful. I've since come to realize that perfection *isn't* necessary to achieve either one of those--quite the opposite, in fact--and that has made such a difference in how I think, feel, and experience life. So if you're a professional woman and you'd like to know how to release perfectionism so you can trade self-doubt for self-confidence, stop beating yourself up, and start enjoying your life more, then come with me. Let's do this together.

Hello everybody. Welcome to the podcast. Welcome to episode 15.

In this episode, I'm going to talk about something I believe all perfectionist women do to some degree or another, myself included, and that is outsource their confidence and self-worth. I'm going to be focusing mainly on confidence throughout the episode, but I'm mentioning self-worth too because our confidence and self-worth are very intertwined. Our confidence is greatly affected by our feelings of self-worth or lack thereof.

I've been thinking about this topic for a while now, and I decided to do a podcast on it because I see many people, many women doing this without even realizing it, which is completely fascinating to me! Why do we do this?

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Maybe all humans do it, I don't know, but I do know a lot of people, especially perfectionist women, do this. So what is driving that? What biological or evolutionary purpose does it serve for us? I have a theory, a guess about why we do this and I'll share that a little later, but first I want to clarify what I mean when I say women are "outsourcing their confidence."

What does it mean to outsource something? I went to the Google to get a definition and found an article from *Investopedia* that says outsourcing is "the business practice of hiring a party outside a company to perform services or create goods that were traditionally performed in-house by the company's own employees and staff." It's usually done as a cost-saving measure, but it can also allow the company to focus its time and energy on things it is best suited for and hand off other areas or processes to people with greater skill and expertise.

When I worked for the school district, we handled most of our professional development in house, but sometimes we'd outsource PD if we needed someone with more expertise or if we weren't able to handle a particular training due to other commitments. My department also outsourced catering for all of our professional development events because we didn't have the capacity, prep space, time, or even desire to manage that. So I want to acknowledge that outsourcing can be very useful and helpful. It's not necessarily a bad thing.

Outsourcing is a form of delegating - that's another way to think about it. It's giving the responsibility for something to someone outside the organization. And when I talk about outsourcing confidence, I mean handing over the

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responsibility for your confidence to someone or something outside of you. It's giving someone or something else the job of making you feel confident.

So what does that look like? In what ways might you be outsourcing your confidence, or to what kinds of things might you be giving the job of making you feel confident?

Well, you might be outsourcing to things like job titles, degrees, certifications, and awards – things you'd see on a resume. In other words, you might feel confident because you have those things, or not feel confident because you don't. Either way, you're shifting the responsibility for your confidence to those things.

You might be outsourcing to affirmations and accolades from others. These could be compliments people say directly to you or they could be written comments in performance evaluations, feedback forms, and social media. You could also be outsourcing to the number of likes and follows you have on social media.

You might be outsourcing to things like the number of speaking engagements you're asked to do, the projects or teams you're asked to lead, the number of items you cross off on your daily to-do list, the size of your professional network, or who's in your professional network.

You might be outsourcing to milestones and accomplishments like the number of competitions won, miles logged, books read, countries visited, weight lost, or articles published. You might be outsourcing to the number on the scale or the number on your clothing labels.

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In terms of self-worth specifically, you might be outsourcing to your marital status, the number of children or friends you have, how your children behave and what they've accomplished. You might be outsourcing to the number of birthday messages and social event invitations you receive or to material possessions like cars, clothes, and the size and cleanliness of your home.

I could go on, but I think you get the idea.

The way to tell if you're outsourcing is to finish this sentence: I feel confident because (and then fill in the blank) or I don't feel confident because (and then fill in the blank). If you feel confident because you have a certain position, have x number years of experience, manage other people, have published this many articles or podcast episodes, produced x number of videos, or if you don't feel confident because you lack those things, you are outsourcing. If you feel confident or don't feel confident because of things outside you, even things like your clothing size or the number on a scale, you're outsourcing.

Now, I'm not pointing this out to say it's a problem. I'm not pointing this out so you can start beating yourself up or shaming yourself about it. I'm not saying it's a bad thing in and of itself. So if you heard all those examples and you're thinking, "Oh my goodness – I'm outsourcing everywhere!" it's okay. As I said in the beginning of the episode, we all do this. Outsourcing seems to be a normal human thing from what I've observed. I just want you to be aware of it, because as I've said in previous episodes and will continue to say many, many more times in the future, awareness is the first step to lasting change. You can't change something you're not aware of, so we have to start with building awareness if we want to do something different, if we want to create a different result.

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I also said before that outsourcing in business can be really useful and helpful, and I think it serves a useful purpose in terms of our confidence and self-worth, too. My theory is that our brains do this to conserve energy. At their most basic level, our brains are "don't get killed" devices. Their primary function is to keep us alive, and they do that by trying to conserve energy, warning us about danger, and encouraging us to seek things like food that will keep us alive. Outsourcing confidence is a shortcut. It enhances our brain's efficiency. It's easier and less costly in terms of mental calories than sourcing it in house. If I can outsource my confidence to things outside me, I don't have to do the work of managing my brain which is what's involved in sourcing those things internally.

And it's not a problem that we do this, until it is. So let's talk about why and how outsourcing confidence can be problematic.

In business, there are potential risks with outsourcing, and some of those align with outsourcing confidence, so let's start there. When you outsource something in business, you give up most or all of the control over that thing, and sometimes the vendor doesn't deliver what you want or in the way you want it. If you outsource bookkeeping, for example, you give up some or all control over how your financial accounting is managed, and your vendor may not manage your books the way you want or may not give you financial reports in a timely fashion, let's say.

If you outsource your confidence to things like praise from other people, performance evaluations, the number of projects you're asked to lead, or the position you hold, you give up so much control over your confidence. If you outsource your self-worth to the number of social invites you receive, the

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number of likes and follows you get on social media, or to people remembering your birthday, people may not give you what you want.

They may not give you the compliments or praise you seek. They may not give you high marks on your performance evaluations. They might not ask you to lead the "right" number of projects or attend the "right" number of social events. Then in those situations, what tends to happen is you end up trying to control them and get them to change...which is exhausting. In the book *Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior,* author Mark Goulston says, "There is nothing more futile than trying to change another person." Sometimes it works, but more often than not it doesn't or the cost is so high it's not worth it.

If you outsource to things like your marital status, material possessions, degrees, certifications, job titles, miles logged, and articles published, you do have more control over those things, but they're still subject to external factors. They're still not as lasting as sourcing confidence from within. Marriages can end, material possessions can be lost or damaged, degrees and certifications can become outdated or irrelevant, jobs can be lost, and the number of miles logged and articles published can become insufficient.

If you tie your confidence and self-worth to any kind of external source, you risk losing them if those external things change or underperform. Relying on external sources to create an internal feeling of confidence is unreliable at best and debilitating at worst. That's the main problem with outsourcing confidence and self-worth.

When I worked for the school district, I was responsible for preparing School Accountability Report Cards (or SARCs for short) for each school. These were

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mandated by the State of California and had to be published by February 1 each year. We had more than 70 schools, and it was a tremendous amount of work to gather the needed data each year, prepare the SARCs, and publish them online. Each SARC was probably 12 to 15 pages, and although I could automate some of the preparation, doing this for more than 70 schools took a solid two to three months each year.

When I was first given the task, I knew next to nothing about SARCs. I didn't know anything about what was required, how to gather the data, who to gather it from, what the template needed to include, how I would publish it, and on and on. I was given copies of SARCs from previous years and directed to a California Department of Education website to get more information on how to prepare them. It was challenging, but I figured it out and got the report cards done and posted by the deadline.

I continued to do the SARCs for more than 10 years, and every year, my stress level rose as the time to prepare them approached, and my dislike of the SARCs increased…greatly. My last couple of years doing them, the district outsourced part of the preparation process to an outside company, and that speeded things up some, but it was still a lot of work to get them done.

Funny thing was, though, when my boss reallocated job duties within our department and gave the SARCs to someone else, I was crushed. I was relieved at first, but then I was crushed. Even though I dreaded preparing them every year, I took a lot of pride in doing them well. It was a huge job for just one person, and I had done it successfully for more than 10 years on my own. Knowing I was responsible for and could successfully execute such a big job made me feel very confident. It made me feel good about myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but I had outsourced a big chunk of my confidence and

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my self-worth to the job of doing the SARCs. I was tying both to the job (which was external) and not to my ability to do them and my capacity to problem solve and persevere and other things like that (which were internal), and when the job was given to someone else, my confidence and self-worth went with it.

Years later when I found coaching, I started to understand why that had affected me that way. After I learned to source my confidence and self-worth from within, I realized how much I'd been outsourcing and that I'd been doing it for most of my life.

I now understand and want you to understand as well that if you want to develop more sustainable, more robust confidence, you need to in-source more than you outsource. That's it. That's the key. You don't need to stop outsourcing, you don't need to go cold turkey. I like to think of this in terms of a scale where you've got outsourcing on one side and in-sourcing on the other. If the outsourcing side is heavier, you just need to add more to the in-sourcing side to start to balance it out. And as you continue to do that, your in-sourcing side will eventually be heavier than the outsourcing one.

So, how do you in-source confidence? *In*-sourcing has everything to do with managing your brain, your *in*ternal world. You manage your brain by paying attention to the thoughts it's offering you about YOU and then questioning, challenging, and pushing back on thoughts that aren't serving you. It's recognizing that thoughts create feelings, and that the feeling of confidence comes from your thoughts about you. It's recognizing that thoughts are optional, and when you find one that's not serving you, you can opt for something different.

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If you haven't listened to episode 13 about my favorite problem-solving and coaching tool, The Model, you should definitely do that because I go into a lot more detail there about this idea of thoughts creating feelings.

Let's go back to my SARC story for a minute. The first year I did the SARCs, remember I said I knew next to nothing about them and I was given SARCs from previous years and directed to a website to learn what to do. I did not feel confident about doing the SARCs when they were first handed off to me. I felt quite the opposite, but it wasn't because I lacked experience and had never done them before. The amount of experience I had was a neutral circumstance, and circumstances can't create feelings. Thoughts create feelings. My initial lack of confidence didn't come from me having never done the SARCs before. It came from what I thought about me never having done them before. It came from me thinking, "I don't know what I'm doing, and I don't know if I can do this." It came from me thinking, "I might mess this up big time." If I had thought, "I've never done this, but I'll figure it out" or "I'm going to work on this until I do figure it out," I would have felt something completely different. Same circumstance of never having done the SARCs, but a different thought would have created a different feeling.

Similarly, after I completed the SARCs that first year and every year after, I felt very confident, but that wasn't because I now had experience. It was because I was thinking, "I did it!" and "I know what I'm doing and I can do it again." If I had finished the SARCs and thought, "I don't know if I'll be able to handle that again next year," I would have felt self-doubt instead of confidence.

Now, if you're thinking, "Wait a minute. Are you saying experience has no bearing on me feeling confident? That I can feel confident even when I don't have any experience just by changing my thoughts? That doesn't seem

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possible." Just hear me out for a minute. Does experience impact your confidence? Yes and no. Experience does have some bearing on you feeling confident, but probably not in the way you're thinking. Experience makes it easier for us to think the thoughts that create confidence. It makes it easier for us to think, "I can do this" or "I've got this" because we're using evidence from our past to back up those thoughts. But our thoughts are always optional, so we could choose to believe, "I can do this" or "I"ve got this," even without experience. I could have thought that when I was first given the SARCs. I didn't, though, because at that point I didn't realize my thoughts were optional. I didn't realize I could think, "I can do this" or "I've got this" when I had no evidence of that.

And this is important to realize, because if we need experience to feel confident, we will severely limit our ability to feel confident. That means we'll only feel confident when we're doing something we've done before or something similar to what we've done before. If we can't generate enough confidence to try new things, we'll stagnate. We'll never grow.

In episode 11 "Improving Your Confidence," I said one of the most important things you can do to increase your confidence is to take action. I quoted from the book *The Confidence Code* by Claire Shipman and Katty Kay where they said, "Nothing builds confidence like taking action, especially when the action involves risk and failure...When in doubt, act." Now, taking action in and of itself won't make you feel confident, because actions don't create feelings – thoughts do remember. But taking action will make it easier for you to think the thoughts that create confidence. That's why doing things even before you're ready, doing things even when you're scared, can be so powerful and

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helpful. Take action *so you can* believe, so it's easier for you to think thoughts that make you feel confident.

Also consider that when you were younger, you didn't need prior experience to generate confidence, thank goodness, because when you were little, you hadn't done anything before. You just kept getting up and trying again every time you fell down as you were learning to walk. You kept making sounds and trying different word combinations as you were learning to talk. You kept holding a pencil and making marks on a page until you learned to write. Everything you've learned to do, you started doing without prior experience. It may be harder now to think thoughts that will create confidence for you, but a big part of that is probably just due to lack of practice.

Confidence, and all mind management really, is a perishable skill. We lose it if we don't continue to do things to keep it up. It's something we need to practice consistently if we want to maintain and increase. And that's fantastic news because if you haven't been practicing thoughts that create confidence and regularly weeding out thoughts that inhibit it, you can start now. Doesn't matter how old you are, doesn't matter how long you've struggled with self-doubt and insecurity, you can start today and feel a difference today.

So let's go back to talking about how you in-source confidence. Once you have awareness of why you're feeling confident or not – which, remember, all comes from what you're thinking – you can start playing with thoughts that aren't serving you. Push back on thoughts that don't help you have your own back. Challenge thoughts that don't validate your ability to figure things out and make it though. Question thoughts that don't acknowledge your capacity to course correct and handle mistakes. Direct your brain toward thoughts that build your trust and belief in yourself and away from thoughts

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that base your confidence on external things. Practice thinking things like, "I can figure this out" or "everything is figureoutable." "No matter what happens, I'll make it through." "I've made it through hard things before and I can do it again." "No matter what, I'll have my own back."

Remember, confidence is an inside job, and in-sourcing it is about developing a solid foundation within ourselves so we can become less reliant on external validation.

I hope this has shifted your perspective on developing confidence, and I hope you found it super helpful. If you did, I have one small request. Please subscribe to the podcast and give it a five star review. If you'd like to do one more thing, share it with another woman you think might benefit from it.

All right my friend, that's it for this episode. I will see you next week.

Thanks for listening to this episode of the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. To see show notes and a transcript, head over to kerimartinez.com/ podcast. That's k-e-r-i-m-a-r-t-i-n-e-z dot com forward slash podcast. And while you're there, click the link to download my free "Feel More Confident" cheat sheet. If you're a career mom and a perfectionist and you'd like to feel more confident in your career and your personal life so you can stop letting fear hold you back, this cheat sheet will help.

Have a beautiful week – ciao for now!

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