

Confidence Blockers



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Welcome to the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. This is episode 12, "Confidence Blockers."

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! If you're new here, welcome, and if you've been here before, welcome back!

In last week's episode, I talked about things you can do to improve your confidence, and I mentioned that confidence is especially challenging for perfectionist women to develop. In this episode I'm going to talk a little more about why that is, and I'm going to share six confidence blockers you should watch out for, and I'll give you some tips to deal with each of them.

If you haven't already listened to last week's episode, episode 11, I'd suggest you pause this one and listen to that one first. A lot of what I'm talking about

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today builds on what I shared in that episode, so it would be helpful for you to have that background knowledge.

Okay. Let's dive right into the confidence blockers. As I said, I'm going to share six different things that block confidence, but as I go through them, you'll probably notice some overlap. These six things are interconnected, interrelated, and similar in some respects, so on one level it might seem a little forced to separate them out. I played around with the idea of talking about them as parts of one big thing – um, the first blocker I'm going to talk about, actually – but I feel like there are enough differences that it makes sense to go ahead and separate them out.

So, the first and biggest confidence blocker, by far, is perfectionism. And as I said, the other five blockers all relate to perfectionism in some fashion, but I want to start just talking about the overarching umbrella idea of perfectionism. Perfectionism doesn't just block confidence – it destroys it. Perfectionism is a confidence killer. So if you're a woman and a perfectionist, you have two big strikes against your confidence. If you recall from last week's episode, women have physiological, neurological, and cultural factors working against their confidence that men don't have. So if you add perfectionism to that mix, that greatly decreases your odds of feeling confidence or of improving your confidence.

Now you may be wondering why that is, why perfectionism is so detrimental to confidence. Isn't striving for perfection a good thing? Don't we want to always be improving and growing? Yes, wanting to improve and grow and progress toward perfection is a good thing. But there is a HUGE difference between that and perfectionism. Perfectionism doesn't allow for anything

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short of perfection. It doesn't allow for failure and missteps and growth. As Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy say in the book *Big Feelings*, "It's one thing to strive for 100 percent, get a 94 percent, and feel good about what you've learned. It's another, poisonous thing to beat yourself up for a 99 percent."

Perfectionism says you shouldn't be a beginner or ever struggle to master anything. If you do struggle to master something, that means there's something either wrong with you or you're just not capable. Perfectionism doesn't ever allow for "good enough." It ties your personal worth to the quality of what you produce or do, so if you don't produce something perfect or don't execute something perfectly, you're automatically not good enough or your work isn't good enough. According to Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy, "Perfectionism doesn't make you feel perfect; it makes you feel inadequate."

In the book, *The Confidence Code*, authors Katty Kay and Claire Shipman say, "[O]f all the warped things that women do to themselves to undermine their confidence, we found the pursuit of perfection to be *the most crippling*. If perfection is your standard, of course you will never be fully confident, because the bar is always impossibly high, and you will inevitably and routinely feel inadequate."

Ouch! That's a bitter pill to swallow if you're a perfectionist, but it's so true!

In *The Confidence Code* it continues, "[P]erfectionism keeps us from action. We don't answer questions until we are totally sure of the answer, we don't submit a report until we've line edited it ad nauseam, and we don't sign up for that triathlon unless we know we are faster and fitter than is required. We

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watch our male colleagues lean in, while we hold back until we believe we're perfectly ready and perfectly qualified.”

As I said in last week's episode, one of the key steps to improving your confidence is to take action on things related to your values. You don't have to do big things, but you need to *do things*. You need to try stuff, take small steps toward a goal. You can't just think and plan your way to confidence – although those things are part of it – you have to incorporate action.

If you're waiting to take action until conditions are perfect, you'll never take action. You'll stay stuck in a loop of tweaking and planning and researching and organizing, which yes, those things are actions, but they're not the kind of action that will ultimately move you forward. In *The Confidence Code*, the authors said, “Nothing builds confidence like taking action, *especially when the action involves risk and failure.*” Risk and failure are both critical partners to building confidence.

Let's say you want to increase your confidence in delivering presentations. At some point, you're going to need to do the thing that involves risk and failure, which is standing up in front of others and delivering the presentation. Endlessly tweaking the presentation design and content trying to get it “just right” doesn't really entail much risk or failure. It just keeps you stuck in a protective bubble.

Now, if you're not sure what it is that you need to do in your particular situation that involves risk and failure, just pay attention to what your body has to say. If you're thinking about possible actions or steps to take, what

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causes you to feel fear? What are you afraid to do *because you might fail*? That can be a really good indication for you.

Now keep in mind, I'm not suggesting you start with this step. There are some other things you should do to get your head in the right space *before* taking action, and to hear what those are, you should go listen to last week's episode.

OK. I have a few tips I want to share to specifically help you overcome perfectionism in this case. The first one is to ditch the idea that perfectionism is helping you. Perfectionism pretends to be noble and helpful, but it is not, so stop believing that lie. Second, remember that "good enough" really can be "good enough." When I was going through coach certification, we were taught to aim for B minus work. B minus work can actually change the world, but work you don't share can't help anyone. Third, set deadlines for your work. Don't allow yourself to stay in an endless loop of tweaking and planning and researching and organizing. When you begin working on a task, set a timer and allow yourself to work only until the timer goes off. Once the timer goes off or the deadline passes, share your work as it is. Fourth, think in terms of succeeding and learning instead of succeeding and failing. When you share your work or take some other kind of action, you'll either be successful or you'll learn from your attempt. There are no failures, only lessons. And fifth, keep a victory log where you can record wins each day. In the book *The Success Principles*, author Jack Canfield says, "When most people are about to embark on some frightening task, they have a tendency to focus on all the times they tried before and didn't succeed, which undermines their self-confidence and feeds their fear that they will fail again."

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Keeping and referring to your victory log keeps you focused on your successes instead.”

The second confidence blocker is rumination or overthinking, and this relates A LOT to the first blocker, perfectionism. According to the book *The Confidence Code*, “Women spend far too much time undermining themselves with tortured cycles of useless self-recrimination. It is the opposite of taking action, that cornerstone of confidence... We do a lot more ruminating than men, and we have to get out of our heads if we want to build confidence.”

Ironically, it seems female brains are designed for rumination. The distribution of brain cell matter and the amount of brain activity differs between men and women, which, according to one Harvard study, suggests vastly different methods of processing information between the two genders. Another study conducted by physician and psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Amen suggests that, “women have 30 percent more neurons firing at any given time than men.” Thirty percent more neurons firing at any given time than men – yes, we really are overthinking! The trouble is that most of this overthinking is negative. According to *The Confidence Code*, it’s “nightmare scenarios masquerading as problem solving, [spinning] on an endless loop. We render ourselves unable to be in the moment or to trust our instincts because we are captive to those distracting, destructive thoughts...”

So what can you do to combat rumination? First, set a timer for 10 minutes and allow yourself to ruminate until it goes off. Things we resist tend to persist, so allowing your brain to worry and spin for a short time can help your brain relax about the negative thoughts. Get the ruminating thoughts out of

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your head and on paper so you can start to recognize them for what they are: just sentences in your brain.

Second, practice saying “I notice I’m thinking...” in front of each ruminating thought. For example, let’s say a couple of the ruminating thoughts you wrote down were, “I’m going to stutter during the presentation” and “I need to make sure the content flows perfectly.” Practice saying, “*I notice I’m thinking* I’m going to stutter during the presentation” and “*I notice I’m thinking* I need to make sure the content flows perfectly.” This will help create some distance between you and the ruminating thoughts. It will help make the thoughts feel less true and less urgent.

Third, intentionally redirect your brain to focus on solutions instead of problems. Instead of worrying about stuttering during the presentation, focus on what you’ll do to remain calm during the presentation. Decide ahead of time what you’ll do to take care of yourself in that moment so you can keep going through the presentation. It could be something like reminding yourself, “If I stutter, it won’t be the end of the world. I’ve stuttered before and made it through just fine.”

Now, for thoughts like, “I need to make sure the content flows perfectly,” I’m not saying you shouldn’t be concerned about stuff like that. I’m not saying you shouldn’t want your content to flow. As a presenter or a trainer, your end goal is that people understand and benefit from your training, and how your content is organized does affect that. But, if you’re *ruminating* about that kind of thing, if it’s something your brain keeps looping on, there’s a diminishing rate of return for that.

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But I get it. When I was a coach and a trainer for a school district, I constantly struggled with this. I'd be developing a training, building the presentation to go with it, creating the activities and assignments for the participants, and my mind was constantly looping on thoughts like, "I need to make sure this is perfect. This could be better. Maybe I need to move this slide around or maybe there's a better graphic or video clip I could include. Maybe I need more information or research. Oh, that headline looks a little off. I think I need to adjust the font size of those bullet points. Wait, do I have too much content? Am I missing something critical? This is probably confusing. Are people going to like this? I think this could flow better. The participants might think this is boring. I need to add in some jokes or stories. Wait, do I know any jokes or stories that would fit here? Maybe I should scrap everything and start over."

It sounds kind of crazy now, but because all of that was going on in my brain, I was constantly checking and tweaking my work, right up until the moment I had to deliver the training or presentation. When I'd go home at night, my brain would still be spinning about what needed to be different to make it better, so I'd open up the presentation or training outline or online course and keep going over it. Was there some benefit to doing that? Yes. My attention to detail and design yielded some phenomenal work. But as I said before, there's a diminishing rate of return to that.

Sometimes when I talk about this kind of thing, people think I'm saying they shouldn't care about the quality of their work. They shouldn't have thoughts about improving their work. They should just go with whatever first draft they come up with and not worry about refining it. But that approach assumes "not caring at all" and "making it perfect" are the only two options, and I'm

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here to tell you those *aren't* the only two options. There are millions of options between “not caring at all” and “making it perfect.” Our brains, though, in their desire to be efficient, automatically default to this black-and-white, all-or-nothing type thinking. In those moments, we need to intentionally redirect them to something that serves us better. Redirect to something that still honors our desire to do quality work but that doesn't tie the quality of our work to our worth and our capacity.

As I said, I used to really struggle with this kind of thing, and I still do, although to a lesser degree. Every week when I'm working on this podcast, those same kinds of thoughts show up. “Is what I'm writing going to make sense? Will people like it? Maybe I should move some stuff around. Maybe I need to include more stories. Have I included enough practical tips to make it really useful to people? Maybe I'm going overboard and it'll be overwhelming. Is my grammar good? Is what I'm saying too slangy and not professional sounding?”

Now, I do want to put out content that is helpful to you, my listeners. If you're using your time to listen to what I have to say, I want it to serve you, and I want you to enjoy it. I want it to be easy to digest and I want it to sound professional. I mean, the title of my podcast is the *Perfectionist Professional Woman*, after all. So my motivation behind all those ruminating thoughts is good, and I don't want to change that. But, I know that if I get too caught up in those ruminating thoughts, I won't publish any episodes. I'll keep tweaking and second-guessing and researching and revising ad nauseam. I know that if I try to make the episode perfect, it'll never be good enough. I know that if I'm too worried about what other people think, I'll drive myself crazy trying to

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control their reactions – which I can't actually do, and I'll devalue my own opinion of me and my work.

So each week, I set a deadline for myself to have the content published. Each week I remind myself that the episode will never be perfect and it doesn't need to be in order to be valuable to others. I give myself permission to review and revise it up to a certain point, and then after that, I don't allow myself to second-guess anything. I remind myself that if I leave anything critical out or if I mess up on a research citation or if I change my mind about something down the road, I can always correct it later. The world will not end if I mispronounce something or cite something wrong or even if I completely flub an episode. Ruminating about all the things that *could* go wrong might feel useful and preventative, but for the most part it isn't. It just creates a bunch of anxiety and stress that isn't helpful for me. I also remind myself that not everyone is going to like what I have to say, and that's OK. My worth isn't determined by what others think of me and my podcast.

So it's work I'm still doing. Each week I catch myself doing things that aren't what I planned, like taking longer than I planned to write and revise the episode. I want to get to a point where I don't do that, where I can allocate let's say three or four hours to write the podcast and stick to that, but honestly, I'm not there yet, and I'm choosing not to make that a problem. There are still things I'm figuring out about creating a podcast episode every week, and I'm giving myself permission to be a little lax about some of my processes right now. I am sticking to the publishing deadline I set each week, though, and once an episode is recorded, I'm not allowing my brain to ruminate about the episode. That's a big improvement for me because in the

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past I would have shared my content and kept going back to look for mistakes. I no longer do that, and I have to say it's very freeing!

A third confidence blocker is a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is a belief that your basic qualities like intelligence, personality, talents, and capacity are fixed at birth and can't be increased or changed. By contrast a growth mindset is a belief that your basic qualities *can* be increased through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Someone with a fixed mindset believes things like, "I'm not good at this and never will be," whereas someone with a growth mindset believes, "I'm not good at this yet, but with practice I can get better." Someone with a fixed mindset believes that if something doesn't come easily, it's not within the scope of their capability and it's not worth pursuing. Someone with a growth mindset sees things that don't come easily as challenges that can be overcome with time and effort.

According to Katty Kay and Claire Shipman in *The Confidence Code*, "Confidence requires a growth mind-set because believing that skills can be learned leads to doing new things. It encourages risk, and it supports resilience when we fail."

If you have a fixed mindset about something, one simple yet powerful way to shift yourself into a growth mindset is to change how you're talking to yourself about the thing. If you're thinking, "I'm not good at this," add the word "yet" to the end. "I'm not good at this...yet." Another thing you can do is to activate your curiosity by incorporating the phrase "I wonder." "I wonder what I would need to do to get better at this," or "I wonder what other people have done to get better at this," or "I wonder how long I'll need to practice

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before I see improvement,” or “I’ve seen how others have improved in this; I wonder what my growth journey will look like.”

A fourth confidence blocker is pretending to be confident. When I first read that in *The Confidence Code*, I was a little surprised, because I’d grown up hearing that if you’re not feeling confident about something, you should “fake it till you make it.” But according to Ohio State University psychologist Jenny Crocker, faking it makes us feel less confident, because knowingly masquerading as something we’re not makes us anxious. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman also say that, “Confidence isn’t about pretending, or putting on an act; it springs from genuine accomplishment and work.”

So the tips here relate to taking action on things related to your values. Do the thing, put in the work, even if you’re scared. Acknowledge that you’re scared – it won’t help to deny you’re scared, pretend you’re not scared, or tell yourself that you shouldn’t be scared. Acknowledge that you’re scared, tell yourself it’s understandable that you are, and then do it scared. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman add, “Don’t pretend to be anything or anyone—simply take action. Do one small brave thing, and then the next one will be easier, and soon confidence will flow.”

A fifth confidence blocker is people-pleasing or focusing on external validation. This is basing your worth on the approval of others. In the book *Big Feelings*, Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy describe it like this: “Without validation from those around you, you feel worthless and ruminate about what you might have done wrong. Your self-confidence (and sense of satisfaction) is, as clinical psychologist Michael Brustein puts it, ‘a gas tank

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with a hole in it.' You're so tired, but the only way you can imagine digging yourself out of your exhaustion is to do more."

In *The Confidence Code*, Katty Kay and Claire Shipman say "When our confidence is based on external measures, the biggest risk is that we won't act. We are more likely to avoid risk if we think we might feel a dip in approval." We'll avoid sharing ideas or sticking our necks out in any way if we think we might be criticized, which, they say, is not surprising, but it's also really limiting.

In the "Dealing with Difficult Coworkers" episode a couple of weeks back, I talked about how when we need our coworkers to think or act a certain way for us to feel good, we're essentially giving them control over our mental state and emotional wellbeing. If we need them to stop interrupting us in meetings before we can feel calm, for example, we may never feel calm, right? Because they may never stop interrupting us. We can't control what they do. Similarly, if we need others to like us or approve of what we're doing before we can feel confident, we're giving them all the power over our confidence. If we have to wait for others to like us and our work before we can feel confident, we may never feel confident, or we may have to wait a really long time. Which is also really limiting.

In *The Confidence Code*, the authors say, "people who base their self-worth and self-confidence on what others think of them don't just pay a mental price; they pay a physical price, too... Those who [depend] on others for approval—of their appearance, grades, choices, you name it—[report] more stress and [have] higher levels of drug abuse and eating disorders."

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So what can you do about this confidence blocker? First, differentiate between what you can and can't control. Remind yourself you can't control what others think of you and your work, and when you try to control what you can't control, you just end up frustrated. Second, remind yourself that your worth is not determined by some committee vote. It isn't determined by the opinions of others. Not everyone is going to like and approve of you, and that's ok. You're not for everyone. No one is. Third, practice giving yourself the validation you want from others. Have your own back. If you want others to tell you you're good enough, practice saying that to yourself. Look for all the ways you *are* good enough, and remember that making mistakes doesn't mean you're less valuable as a human – it simply means you're human.

The sixth and final confidence blocker is not trying hard enough. It's not going all in to really see what you're capable of because you're worried if you do, you might find you're not good enough. I have done this so many times in my life in everything from work to family to school to church to friends to hobbies. Years ago I attended a scrapbooking class and learned some really cool ways to design pages, but I did very little with what I learned because I didn't want to create pages only to have them be ugly. Over the years there have been jobs and grants I didn't apply for, diet and exercise plans I did only half-heartedly, friendships I didn't pursue, competitions I didn't enter, lessons I waited until the last minute to prepare...all because I didn't want to try and find out I wasn't good enough.

Looking back now, I can see what a disservice I did to myself in holding back like that. I understand now that it wouldn't have been the end of the world if I had tried and failed at each one of those things. I missed out on a lot of great opportunities by not trying. That being said, I have a lot of love and

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compassion for who I was back then. I was scared and insecure and full of self-doubt. Had I attempted those things and failed back then, I would have bullied myself for days, weeks, or maybe longer, because that's all I knew to do in the face of failure. I held back to protect myself. I did the best I could at the time with what I knew.

OK. That's what I've got for you this week. Before I wrap up, let's do a quick recap of the six confidence blockers to watch out for.

1. Perfectionism - the mother of all confidence blockers
2. Rumination or overthinking
3. Fixed mindset
4. Pretending to be confident
5. People-pleasing or focusing on external validation
6. Not trying hard enough

If you recognize any of these confidence blockers in your life, I encourage you to give yourself some grace. Practice self-compassion. Cut yourself some slack. You've been doing the best you can with what you know. There's a quote often attributed to Maya Angelou that says, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better." So now you know better, you can do something different...if you want. The choice is always up to you.

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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 in Front of Others" cheat sheet. If you're a woman who works in the training and development space and you'd like to feel more confident speaking up in meetings or delivering presentations and trainings at work, this cheat sheet will help you do that.

Have a beautiful week – ciao for now!