

When Success Knocks Do You Self-Sabotage?

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You've worked incredibly hard. You've stayed late at night, toiled weekends and sacrificed personal time to reach your career goals. You have achieved a high degree of excellence in your job. Now the payoff is just around the corner. You are being promoted. Initially you are thrilled, affirmed and excited. As the promotion gets closer, however, you begin to feel anxious. The anxiety builds. It's not about having to develop a new skill set or being challenged, you've successfully handled that before. It just doesn't feel right. What is happening here? You have run head long into success anxiety.

Some of you are probably thinking, "Give *me* the opportunity and *I* won't have any problem with it." Maybe not but many women are sidelined by this unconscious fear, especially as the stakes increase. What is the real problem? You have as a deeply imbedded picture of what life is supposed to be like for you. The level of success that is appropriate in your life. That picture has been developing for a lifetime. Many people have contributed toward the final picture: your parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, former bosses. Each of those individuals had a level of success they deemed appropriate for you. What have you done? You have incorporated each of those success expectations into your self-concept. Once you push past the limits of that view, you feel out of sync. You have a choice. Either consciously stretch that success limit, feeling the anxiety, or get back in step with the current view.

Unconsciously, many of you choose the second route. You reduce the anxiety by self-sabotaging. You procrastinate on important deadlines. You pick fights with colleagues. You fall short in satisfying a client. You get sick. You forget to return important calls. Put succinctly, you screw up. The next thing you know the "powers that be" have decided that perhaps you need a little longer in your present position before moving up to V.P. of Sales. Though disappointed, your anxiety subsides. You feel back in sync once again. Reality and that picture are once again aligned. But all your hard work, your expertise and your goals have been compromised. So what is the answer?

Try the 6 D's. This is a system for overcoming success anxiety that I've used with many women. It works!

1. Desensitize:

- Take baby steps; gradually expose yourself to incremental success.
- Allow yourself to feel the discomfort, recognize the anxiety for what it is, a sign of stretching and growth. Discomfort does not have to be a signal to stop.
- If your success seems to be getting ahead of your competence, slow down somewhat. When people don't believe they have "paid their dues" the feeling is often a sense of being an imposter.

2. Don't self-sabotage:
 - Awareness is essential, know the forms self-sabotage take.
 - Recognize your own personal red flags. What do you do to self-sabotage? Do you start coming in late? Do you suddenly have to take lots of breaks? Do you blow a presentation because of lack of preparation? Know yourself.
 - Journal, journal, journal. Behavior is more difficult to deny when it's staring at you in black and white.
3. Document your progress:
 - Develop your own accomplishment log. There is the evidence that you have the skills, competence and expertise to warrant your success. This history will also affirm you have paid your dues.
 - Take all this data and write a personal description yourself. As you add new experiences, mastery and growth rewrite this self-description every six months. You will amaze yourself at the rate you are changing. This confirms your right to success.
4. Dump your garbage:
 - Speak like a successful person. Dump ineffective language. Start your sentences with the subject not the word "I". Eliminate weak phrases such as: "This may not but important but ...". Resist the temptation to soften the blow of declarative sentences with add ons such as: "The sales figures for the quarter fall short of the goal, don't you think?"
 - Walk, stand and sit like a successful person. Don't slunk through life, stride like the successful person you are.
 - Give Goodwill a great day. Give away the trappings of the former you. Package yourself to fit the successful rung you have reached.
5. Determine your value:
 - Find out what others in your industry command.
 - Realize your value in the marketplace.
 - Begin to incorporate those new numbers into your self-concept as an affirmation of your skills, talents and expertise.
6. Declare your preeminence
 - Believe you are the best at what you do.
 - Believe that your product, service or company is the best. You'll never feel comfortable with heights of success until your belief is an integral part of who you are.
 - Articulate this belief to the world. Learn to present in a dynamic manner, overcoming fears of public speaking. Speak with confidence and composure at business meetings or with clients.

Surviving success means overcoming your fears about success. Don't assume that your new role in life will automatically be a comfortable one. Have the courage to expand your success threshold. Allow your picture to continue to develop. Practice the 6 D's to let your picture catch up with your reality. Remember no congruence no ultimate happiness with your success. And who wants all the work with no reward?

Fittes is the founder of Strategies for Women's Growth, a company that specializes in training and keynote speeches geared towards helping women overcome obstacles to their career success. She can be reached at (513) 561-4288, kfittes@aol.com or www.wowunlimited.com