

You Are What You Believe: Five Ways to Reach Success Through the Magic of Self-Belief

By Roxanne Rivera

We live in a culture where beauty is held in much higher regard than brains. We live in a world where perfection is viewed as the only acceptable standard. We work in a society where our male counterparts often get paid more than us even though they are doing the same job. All that said, it's no surprise that we women can be very hard on ourselves when we make mistakes or hit dead ends in our careers (or, for that matter, fail to look like a supermodel while we're succeeding). It's okay to be hard on yourself every now and then as it can spur you on toward success, but do it too often and you will begin to deplete your pool of self-belief.

For women in male-dominated industries—actually, in any business—self-belief is a major key to success. It provides you with the confidence you need to keep going. No one wants to work with a person who isn't confident in what she is doing. If you show a lack of confidence in front of colleagues or potential clients, it can scare them out of wanting to do business with you. With that said, here are a few ways that you can ensure a lack of self-belief will never be a problem for you.

Create a board of belief. I had a peg board in my office for 22 years that I called my “board of belief.” Every time I came upon an inspirational quote or poem or a wonderful story, it would go up on my “board of belief.” I read my quotes when I was feeling down, when I needed to gain faith in myself, or when I was looking for guidance with a certain problem. When you work in a male-dominated industry, it is hard to maintain a steady belief in yourself and your abilities. My “board of belief” was there for me during those times when I needed a little help believing in myself.

Develop a positive self-image. If you don't believe in yourself, you are going to have a hard time getting others to believe in you. One way I've been able to build self-belief is by developing a positive self-image. I do this through a special exercise. I ask five people who know me— either acquaintances, colleagues, or friends—to give three adjectives that come to mind when I walk into a room. It always helps immeasurably to hear the kind things they have to say. I post their comments next to my mirror and every time I look at them I gain a more positive outlook about who I am. Try it . . . you'll be glad you did!

Set goals. People who believe in themselves are simply ordinary people who know that they can do whatever they set out to do. A key to achieving self-belief is setting goals and then reaching them. I have daily goals, weekly goals, monthly goals, and yearly goals, and I feel a sense of accomplishment whenever I reach one of them, no matter how small or miniscule it may seem.

Don't let fear get in the way. When I owned my construction company, every day that I went into the office I used to feel a little tinge of fear. Working in a field dominated by men is a heroic feat. It is very scary to be the only woman in a room full of men. I am not going to tell you that I got over being afraid. But what I am going to tell you is that I tried to not let the fear get in the way of me doing my job to the best of my ability. If you let fear overcome you, you can never believe in yourself and consequently success will be out of your reach.

Never give up. On my “board of belief,” I had a picture of a pelican with a frog in his mouth. The only things visible were the frog’s legs and his arms. Although he was in the process of being swallowed whole, he had his arms around the pelican’s neck and he was squeezing for all he was worth. The caption underneath the image read, “Never, ever, ever, ever give up!” I cannot tell you how many times I would look at that picture when I was having a bad day, or not believing that I was going to be able to go over that next hurdle. It may sound silly but just looking at those scrawny little arms trying to choke the pelican help me more than I can say.

You don't have to have the brain of Albert Einstein or a perfect score on the SATs in order to excel and be successful in male-dominated industries. But you do need to be prepared to work harder and smarter than your male colleagues, and you need to believe in your abilities and yourself. Women can often be their own worst enemies, but in male-dominated industries you need to be your own best friend because chances are there will be many times when you are your only advocate. Ultimately, you have to approach your job as positively as you can, and you must have your heart in it. Your positivity and determination will keep you moving down the path to success.