



6 Keys to Manage Self-doubt (and Take Action Despite it)

There is abundant research to show that courage, risk-taking, and stepping out of our comfort zone does not require the absence of fear. (Side note: the absence of fear is not a good thing! It has been shown to lead to excessive risk-taking, addictive behaviors and business losses).

What is needed is the ability to manage our fears and self-doubt so we can bring greater perspective to the situation and take intentional action towards our goals.



#1 Embrace the emotion

Research by Kelly McGonigal in her book *The Upside of Stress* shows that stress leads to avoidant behaviors, (and harmful health effects) IF we view stress as bad for us. When you change your perspective on how you're feeling – afraid – you can harness the stress neurotransmitters to your advantage. Engage in positive self-talk, like “I’m afraid and that is normal”, or “It shows that I really care about this goal” and you’ll instantly feel more competent to take it on.

What will you say?

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#2 Focus on the Gain

Taking risks becomes difficult when we focus only on what we can potentially lose. And given that we're wired towards the negativity bias, that's all we focus on! Intentionally shifting your focus on what you can gain by taking the risk, or stepping out of your comfort zone, can act as a pull force towards taking action. How will you grow and change as a person? How may you impact others in a positive way? Who would benefit from your actions, and why is that important to you?

What will you gain?

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#3 Lean into the Loss

It's also important to fully explore what you stand to lose. Because without this knowledge, you likely have a catastrophe blasting on your mental Jumbo – a catastrophe that is extremely unlikely to happen. Think logically through to what can 1. likely happen, 2. potentially happen and 3. the worst case scenario (which, you'll also realize, is highly unlikely). And while you're at it, also think of how you'll deal with each of these scenarios, if they were to happen. How will you cope? Who will you reach out to? What actions need to be taken now that lessen the chances of the worst happening/ make you better equipped to handle it?

How will you cope?

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#4 Look at the Larger Perspective

Fear and self-doubt engages parts of the brain that are focused on the short term. Expand your vision by asking yourself: “When you look back at your life many years from now, will you regret not having taken this step, or having made these changes?” you may even want to imagine the older, wiser version of you sharing the most important lesson they’ve learned and giving you some perspective on your current life and its challenges and opportunities.

Why is this important?

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#5 Use Your Body

Your body is one of the oldest sources of information that you have. When you slouch, retreat, lower your gaze or fidget with your hands out of worry, you send your brain the message that something terrible is going to happen. And this works in feedback loops. To break out of the cycle, try standing tall, lifting your chin, and maybe even striking a power pose that says “I can do this!” Amy Cuddy’s research on ‘power poses’ shows that it works!

Strike that pose!



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#6 Take Action

And finally, do not delay action. Because the more you step out of your comfort zone, the more confident you feel about doing so in the future. If the action you need to take feels too big just yet and is way beyond your comfort zone, break it down into smaller steps that stretch you but do not scare you away. And as you take action, reflect on it regularly so you build your mental library of courage and increase your grit along the way.

What will you do?