

# For women, a guide to giving fear the boot

“I want \_\_\_\_\_.”

Dana Theus of InPower Coaching wants you to fill in that blank right now, but only from your “stretch zone”—that place just a few steps beyond your comfort level. What do you want at work that’s both exciting and a little scary? Flex time, training in a new field, a raise with more digits than your boss might expect?

One of the key differences between the genders, Dana explained in her recent webinar, *Woman’s*



*Guide to Communicating With Confidence*, is that women tend not to have grown up being pushed into that risk-taking stretch zone the way men are. As a result, women overall take more considered risks, waiting for certainty before thinking, “The time has come. I’m going for it.” But walking a tightrope and chancing a steep downside are what often bring the big rewards in the office. Over the course of a career, too much risk aversion slowly widens the success gap between those who embrace risk and those who shrink from it.

There’s a method for getting up on that tightrope on a consistent basis, and step one is rethinking what confidence really is.

“It’s not invulnerability,” Dana told her audience, “and I don’t think this belief is serving us.” Instead, building confidence means slowly venturing just beyond your comfort zone again and again, falling but then getting right back up, until you become at ease with risk.

Taking crazy chances is not the goal—if you’re only 60% certain of an outcome, you’ve ventured into the “aspiration zone,” the high country Dana doesn’t recommend you wade into lightly. Stay in the stretch zone and you’re always constructively getting closer to complete confidence. If you feel actual fear and panic, step back a little.

The way will be much easier if you can stamp out your negative thoughts about your abilities; start today by removing the “pre-apology” from your speech. This is the curse of leading off your statements with verbal cues stripping you of your credibility; it’s the old “I’m no expert, but ...” trap. Sure, you want to exhibit respect for others and paint an accurate picture of yourself, but these expressions of humility lower others’ expectations of you. In one study, Dr. June Baxter found that in the boardroom, women fell prey to pre-apologies four times



more often than men. Look, it's true, you *may* be speaking out of turn, and you may *not* have enough experience in an area, but the pre-apology cuts you off from even the chance to find out if they're ready for what you're selling. Declare what you *are* instead of what you're not.

Questions from webinar attendees during the Q & A session revealed other tips for expressing yourself more boldly:

***“What if what I want on the job is something no one has ever gotten before?”***

Dana shared the story of a reporter friend who pursued flex time. She wasn't some star or award-winner, and she thought she'd never get it.

First, she suppressed the negative belief about why she supposedly wasn't deserving of this particular perk—what Dana calls the “Ick belief.” Then she approached her boss from a position of power because she had a backup plan that would get her a benefit even in case of disaster (in her case, a different job; she had her résumé polished and ready for action). Without that power, those above you will almost always sense your weakened position. If you know you're going to come out of things a winner either way, you'll relax and communicate far more effectively.

***“I usually read about confidence as something you project physically ... how can I go about doing this?”***

Have you heard about how certain postures actually release more testosterone into the body—like putting your hands on your hips? Dana has, but this is an area where she says you need to be a little skeptical. Sure, wear the clothes that make you look sharp, and embrace those good hair days. On the other hand, recognize the limitations of the outward trappings of confidence, because your pride and inner voice are far more powerful. You can make people believe you'll change the world while wearing purple sweatpants if you believe it yourself.

“Authenticity is its own kind of power,” Dana said. Coming across as real and comfortable in your own skin projects strength, even if people see your vulnerabilities. Again, though, there's no reason to announce those vulnerabilities verbally. Communicating effectively sometimes means saying nothing at all, and simply giving others no reason to actively doubt you mean business.