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Sheri Fella: Climbing onto the pitching mound of confidence

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SHERI FELLA
IN THE WORKPLACE

As I watched my 10-year-old niece face each batter from her pitching mound, I wondered how she had such confidence at such a young age. To have the focus of the crowd on her standing alone on that mound and the pressure of doing well for her team, and there she was not only performing, but she was enjoying herself.

As an introvert and recovering “pleaser,” I marveled at her. After the game, I asked her if she was ever scared and she replied with a matter-of-fact tone, “No. I was just doing my best.” She didn’t need me to say I was proud of her because she was proud of herself. All I replied was,

“Congratulations! What a great feeling!”

A feeling of knowing that, whatever is about to happen, all will be OK and all I can do is my best—that is confidence. My niece has already figured out that confidence does not come from knowing you can do something. Confidence comes from believing you can—trusting yourself enough to try and to know you’ll figure it out. This pivot from “knowing” to “believing” seems fundamental as we build trust for ourselves and help others do the same.

I don’t remember if, at age 10, I trusted myself; if I had to guess, I’d say no. I do remember those times in my adult life when I didn’t trust myself—and rebuilding confidence was some of the hardest work I have ever done. I suspect many of us feel this way, particularly if we are in leadership positions or parental roles where our time on “the mound” hasn’t gone so well—even if we tried our best.

Building and rebuilding confidence is for sure an inside job, but a job that is best done in combination with self-reflection and partnership with your community of trustees. For me, having an open mind-set, willingness to learn and unlearn, and trust in others is key to keeping my confidence and getting it back when I lose it.

Here are a few things I do to build my “believing” muscle:

Get curious. My first boss told me that lack of confidence is just fear with no place to go. Want to build confidence? Let the fear out. How? There is some merit in, “Fake it until you make it,” but I believe a more

powerful resilience-building approach is to get playful with your fear. Get to know it. Be curious about it: When does it show up? Where are you when it visits? Whom are you with? What are you doing?

Get moving. Exercise. Volunteer. Walk and think. Go to places that give you a safe environment to experiment:

Not sure you are ready to lead? Volunteer to be a crew leader for Habitat for Humanity.

Not sure you are ready to speak to a crowd? Ask your local high school if it needs speakers for classrooms.

Not sure you are ready to manage a profit-and-loss statement? Volunteer for a fundraising project for Girls Inc. or Women's Fund.

Don't just "be positive or think positive"—act positively.

Get connected with your community of trustees. A big lesson for me in my 20s was that I had to trust others when I couldn't trust myself. I trusted their confidence in me enough to keep moving forward. Being with others who don't share your fear is an important first step. A learning community that has empathetic truth tellers, fiercely loyal momma and poppa bears, and objectively thoughtful observers can radically impact your view of yourself in ways that shift your belief system.

Build a habit. Trust for me is built in often tiny and consistent actions. The same behavior that builds trust with others helps me build trust in myself. My grandma used to say, "You can't talk your way out of a situation you behaved your way into." I find that to be true 100 percent of the time, especially in matters to do with myself. I can't talk my way into confidence; I have to behave my way there.

Those tiny steps, no matter what direction, help me get back into learning mode. As I take any step, I learn something and I begin to trust learning rather than the outcome—believing vs. knowing. I might not *know* any more than before, but I *believe* I can learn my way through it, figure it out, and it is then that I start to hear my voice again and trust it.

Curiosity helps fear find its way out. And if fear is going to visit, at least let your community sit on the couch with her. It is important to investigate, "What is the worst thing that can happen?" So is, "What is the best thing that could happen?"

When fear convinces you that you don't have what it takes, let your community convince you that you have enough and take the mound. •

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