

Who's your biggest critic?

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Often when mentoring, in a one-to-one, it will be clear that the mentee's worst critic is the one they see very regularly – daily, in fact. Often when they are tired and stressed. Often when they are at a low point. It's the one they see in the mirror.

It's very common. In my latest book, [*The Glass Wall: Success Strategies for Women at Work – and Businesses that Mean Business*](#), we quote a returner from maternity leave who says: “Day to day, I'm just as ambitious, but I'm so grateful now when I get given a break or a step up. I have so much guilt. Why do I feel like that? I shouldn't. It's my due.”

In the Q&A sessions that followed our talks about the book, all too often questions were raised that made it clear the questioner was doubting their own worth. “I'm so lucky,” they might say, before going on to talk about a situation that they clearly deserve. “I don't want to speak up about this, in case I am not the expert” is another common trait among

capable, intelligent and awesome performers.

Where does this come from? In my experience, it is certainly not always from their managers, who are often nurturing their talent.

It might be from their peers. There are some work cultures that operate on a zero-sum-game basis as far as success and recognition is concerned. In cultures without a growth outlook, rewards are limited and therefore success for one person means that no-one else is recognised. The team is therefore motivated to do each other down, whatever the declared culture of the organisation might be. It's no surprise, then, that people don't feel encouraged to take risks or speak up about something that they haven't 100% nailed down. In this situation, your worst critic might be the chap on the other side of the desk.

Most of the time, though, the worst critic lives inside people's head. It might be the criticism that you heard at school or college. It might be the voice of so-called friends. It might be a parent or guardian, sibling or perfect cousin. You can't always shut those voices up. No matter how much you want to. You can, however, recognise that they are internal voices and cultivate a strategy to counteract it.

If you can have an internal critic, you can also have an internal cheerleader. One technique is to give yourself advice that you would give your best friend in that situation. If you're worrying about not being good enough at something, what would you say to your best friend in that same state? You'd probably tell them that it would be alright, they'll sail through it, that you believe in them. If you can do it for your best friend, you can do it for yourself.

You can also build a network of actual cheerleaders. As I said in [Campaign's feature on my colleague Claudine Collins](#), we've built a network of internal cheerleaders at MediaCom. We've got each others' backs. When, as is so often the case, negative internal voices dominate, or we have a tough moment, we've got into the habit of turning to each other to check in and get support, to be each other's cheerleaders and sponsors. Knowing that we have this network makes us better and stronger. And better able to deliver outstanding work for our clients.

This article first appeared in Campaign and can be read [here](#).

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