

5 ways to overcome self-doubt at work

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

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Meeting agenda

approx 80 mins

Member updates

15 mins

Watch video

6 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Discuss strategies
- Activity 2: Plan to “think big, act small”

15 mins

25 mins

One Action

3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 10 mins on member updates
- Spend 10 mins on activity 1
- Spend 20 mins of activity 2

Getting started

Member updates

2 mins or less per member

15-20 mins depending on group size

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. Generally, personal updates should be brief and focus on significant changes and important decisions in your life. (It's OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

6 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

- Are there any situations at work where you often experience self-doubt? How have you addressed them? Go around the room and share your experiences (1 minute per person).



“If I was in a meeting with an executive, I had a very difficult time saying anything. I was as quiet as a mouse and would break into a sweat if I had to say literally anything. I overcame my fear by promising myself that I would say something in every meeting. Then I would prepare. I’d ask for the agenda ahead of time and do some research on the topics.”

Sue-Ann Hong, president and CEO, nonprofit, Georgia, USA (she/her)

Activity 1: Discuss strategies

15 mins

Below are Lean In's tips for overcoming self-doubt at work. Read the key takeaways below and discuss as a group:

- Have you ever successfully used the strategies below to build your confidence? If you'd like, share your experiences with the group.
- Has anyone here used any other strategies to overcome self-doubt at work?

Key takeaways from video

1. **Keep in mind that doubting yourself is *not* your fault**, and it's not a reflection of your abilities. Women are often told to act more confidently, and we are blamed for our "lack of confidence" when we don't rise to leadership. But it's not surprising we come to question our own abilities at work, since we are judged harshly at work more often than men are.
2. **Review evidence of your strengths** to build your self-esteem back up.
3. **Prepare** as much as you can in advance for meetings, public speaking, or difficult conversations.
4. **Focus on the best-case outcome** of any situation.
5. **Start small and act anyway.** Refuse to let insecurity hold you back and choose to act anyway. Taking a small step can lead to bigger things.

Activity 2: Plan to “think big, act small”

25 mins

1. Write it down:

- Think of a big, long-term ambition that scares you—for example, speaking to a large audience, writing a book, or starting a business. This could be related to your current career, but it doesn’t have to be.
- Write out a few small initial steps that you could accomplish in the short term to reach this big goal.
- Spend a few moments thinking about the best-case outcomes of taking these steps.

2. **Discuss as a group:** Go around the room and have everyone share the big goal, the small steps you outlined, and the best-case outcomes (up to 1 minute per person). Applaud each person for their ambition!



“I wanted to speak in front of an audience, and had to overcome the belief that my English wasn’t good enough. I had a phobia about revealing who I was through my broken English. But I realized that if I wanted to pursue big dreams, I had to just do it, even when I was afraid. So I always say, ‘Do it with fear.’ I started small, speaking to a small group of women, then a middle-sized audience. When I finally got the chance to speak to big audiences, I was confident enough to feel that my identities were an advantage—as a Latina, as an immigrant, as a working mom. Before I knew it, I was speaking to big audiences with 200 people, sometimes more.”

Laura Espriu, director of HR, digital media company, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her/ella)

One Action

3 mins

- Commit to taking the small steps from activity 2—or another small action that supports a larger goal—and sharing what happens the next time you meet with your Circle.

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Notes

Notes