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## **Embrace Your Self-Doubt to Succeed** **By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC**

Having worked with and studied high achievers for over 20 years, I know that the road to achievement is paved with self-doubt. When someone tells me they are their own worst critic, I know they are capable of great things. They simply need to value, rather than ignore, their inner critic.

Even one of the most famous artists in the world, Leonardo Da Vinci — known for painting the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper* — experienced self-doubt and esteem issues. A *New Yorker* article revealed that Da Vinci was known for abandoning projects he considered to be “not good enough.” He was extremely hard on himself. Apparently, a line from one of his diaries reads: “Tell me if I ever did a thing.” Did his self-doubt provoke him toward continued growth and creativity?

Self-doubt has many faces, such as feeling like you do not belong, paralyzing fear of failure or believing your work does not measure up to expectations (yours and others).

It is important to know you are not alone. I suspect there is not an individual in your professional world who has not experienced an inner voice claiming they are not good enough, smart, creative, clever or talented enough.

Handled correctly, self-doubt can lead to high-quality thinking and, ultimately, **stronger results**.

Experiencing the past two months with extraordinarily little social contact has caused even the most confident among us to doubt certain aspects of their lives. A client recently shared with me how damaging it was to her self-esteem to go six days without any face-to-face contact with another human, alone with only the thoughts her mind made up; in her words, ‘ridiculous stories’ about mistakes she’d made over the years.

Our professional worlds provide valuable feedback from colleagues, clients and customers daily. When this feedback is lacking, we make up stories, typically self-critical.

Have you succumbed to increased self-doubt recently? Is your inner critic annoyingly in charge? Below are five tools to turn this inner critic into an ally, rather than a saboteur.

**What is true?** This is a simple-yet-powerful question to ask yourself. For example, think of a time when you were triggered into self-doubt by looping negative thoughts or unkind words by someone. Immediately your familiar inner critic messaged you: “I can’t do this. I do not deserve this. I’m not good enough.” You have heard this criticism for so many years that you quickly believe it and push through the task at hand ineffectively. Instead, stop and simply ask yourself, “What is true for me in this moment?”

Chances are high you will come up with evidence that you have, in fact, succeeded in similar situations — excelled in fact. Had you stopped at merely believing your inner critic and pushing through less competently, you would have proven your inner critic correct.

**Key accomplishment list.** One client calls this his ‘attaboy’ list that he refers to often when given a few open minutes throughout his day. You have accomplished many milestones throughout your life and career, many that others cannot accomplish. This is one time in your life not to be humble. As you list each accomplishment, ponder your unique traits, passions or talents that enabled you to excel with each achievement.

**Acknowledgment list.** Your inner critic will dislike this tool and may convince you it is a waste of time. I have found over the years that extraordinarily successful individuals do not see what others see, appreciate and admire about them. High achievers are driven to be the best that they can be. Therefore, they focus on how to continually improve. Their inner critic is most helpful with this — weaving every success with what they could have done better. Referring to past cards, letters, emails or texts of acknowledgment when self-doubt creeps in is vital to building and maintaining a healthy self-esteem.

**Act.** Great leaders allow self-doubt to spur them into action. If something is not right, they do something about it. Walt Disney famously turned every failure to extraordinary success through constant action when things did not go his way. Disney’s first animation company went bankrupt, he was fired for lack of imagination and was rejected 302 times before receiving financing for Disney World. Whatever may be holding you back, act now, get creative, do something you have not done before and move forward.

**Be decisive.** Being decisive and continually strengthening trust in your instincts is a powerful tool against self-doubt. **Malcolm Gladwell**, author of *Blink*, states that our delayed instinct is often to second-guess ourselves and our ability. “The first task of *Blink* is to convince you of a simple fact: decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately,” says Gladwell. Acting before self-doubt sets in empowers you to build your instinct muscle before you have the chance to talk yourself out of anything. Trusting yourself to make wise decisions shatters self-doubt.

And finally, be extremely discerning with the people in whom you surround yourself. The more successful you become, the more likely you are to unintentionally become a target for those less confident. Choose friends, clients and colleagues cautiously. Surround yourself with individuals who are equally positive, creative, confident, encouraging and as forward moving as you.

Self-doubt is common among all humans. Do not let it defeat you. I challenge you to select one of these tools to put into practice beginning today. Life is too short to not step fully into your power, fully embrace yourself and the opportunities open to the confident you.

*Executive and Leadership Coach Ann Golden Eglé, MCC, has steered successful individuals to greater levels of success since 1998. Ann is president of Golden Visions & Associates, LLC, can be reached at 541-385-*

8887, [ann@gvasuccess.com](mailto:ann@gvasuccess.com) or [GVAsuccess.com](http://GVAsuccess.com). Subscribe to Ann's internationally acclaimed 'Success Thoughts' e-zine on her website.