

FREE FIRST CHAPTER

ESCAPE THE TRAP OF BEING STUCK

Are You A Self-Saboteur?

Stop Self-Sabotage, Don't Believe Everything You Think, And Unlock Your Full Potential — Chapter One. About a 17-minute read.

“Do you know anyone who would be right for the manager position?”

This was the question posed to me by a client with whom I had been working closely for almost a year. They were in the market for a new content manager, a role I knew I was uniquely qualified for with my experience. However, I still hesitated to speak up and put my name in the hat for a better position (and a sizable raise).

What was it that held me back from saying that I wanted a chance to be considered for the position?

It felt like I had no right to ask for what I wanted because I thought I lacked some essential quality that would make me a good manager over a team of people, all doing the same job I was doing then. Despite my experience, I felt that I didn't have the leadership abilities, organizational skills, and even the graduate degree that would grant me status as a “successful” content manager.

It turns out that there was nothing wrong with my skills or my performance. I received glowing five-star reviews from other clients and was told that I was their “unicorn writer” that they would hire again and again. I might not have held a graduate degree, but I was certainly making an impact.

No, the issue was much more insidious. It was my self-doubt and self-sabotaging behaviors that led me away from consideration for the position. I meekly told my supervisor that I would keep an ear out for anyone who met the criteria, all the while kicking myself for not being able to speak up.

Maybe you have experienced something similar in your professional or personal life. Overthinking and anxiety are common behaviors that hold us back from achieving our goals.

You might think that not reaching your goals makes you a failure, or you might think that productivity is the key indicator of your self-worth. Both are dangerous mindsets that base your mental health on performance and outcomes rather than effort. They can make you feel unworthy and riddled with doubt that holds you back from trying new things that you might enjoy.

Are you living up to your full potential, or is a clear pattern of self-doubt and self-sabotage holding you back?

In this book, you will learn how self-sabotage starts to kick in alongside practical examples of these scenarios. We'll dive deep into your childhood and formative years to explain how self-doubt creeps in as children. If you struggle with paralysis, we will start to heal that with self-compassion and positive affirmations.

Perhaps just as important, we will walk through a journey of your emotional health to set you up for liberation and true freedom of the mind.

But wait, you might be saying. How do I know that self-sabotage is really the reason why I'm not achieving the success I want to see?

We all tend to self-sabotage and become stuck in a cycle of self-doubt to some degree. The good news is that you don't have to stay stuck here forever. Even if your issues with self-doubt are minor, the exercises in this book will start you on a path to healing that will last you for the rest of your lifetime.

There are countless ways to overcome self-doubt, self-sabotage, and even imposter syndrome. This book gives you just one series of exercises and mindset shifts you can make to overcome them. Get a brand-new journal and your favorite pen because there will be many practical exercises found here to maximize your experience.

While I didn't get that managerial position, I now have the skills and tools I need to put self-doubt to bed for good. I wasn't able to correct my course in time to put my name in the ring for consideration, but you'd better believe I didn't miss my next opportunity. I started applying for jobs in a managerial role doing what I loved. I enjoyed professional success and got the raise I missed out on when I was held back by self-doubt. Suddenly, I had clients pouring into my business and more work than I could handle.

Because of the exercises here, I knew what I was capable of and that only my thoughts were holding me back from true success and emotional freedom. My degree of professional success was just one indicator of how I was doing.

As I embraced my full potential professionally, it spilled over to my relationships. My relationship with my husband and children deepened as I stopped projecting my doubts onto them and was able to be more mindful in every single interaction that came my way. As a foster parent to teens and older kids, I had the opportunity to influence and transform the way they saw themselves. Together, we battled their silent sabotage and helped them embrace what they were truly capable of achieving.

In other words, self-doubt was my own worst enemy. I had to overcome it to achieve lasting personal and professional success.

And now, I want to share what I learned with you. It took me countless hours of therapy, reading, and self-searching to reveal the patterns in my behavior that trapped me again and again. Now that I have found emotional freedom through these techniques, there is no going back to playing small and letting other people have all the success.

By the time you finish this book, you will know there is no real cause for your doubt. Every doubt you have is from your own mind, which means the solution originates with you too.

How would it feel to know that you are competent and capable of achieving the tasks set before you? How would it feel to know that you can engineer your success simply by embracing your talents and silencing that inner critic who tells you that you aren't qualified enough or just plain good enough to forge ahead?

These pages will explore a world in which those questions are the norm. Get ready to silence the inner critic in your mind. This book ensures that you will gain the tools necessary to combat the feelings of self-doubt that have plagued you, giving you the confidence necessary to pursue professional and relational success.

If you're ready to start achieving more and stop holding yourself back from what you know you might be capable of. It's time to crack open the next chapter and get to work!

— *Ashley Simpson*

The 7 Perilous Traps That Could Be Blocking Your Personal Growth

At the start of my career, I was riddled with doubt about my skills and talents. High school and college should have given me confidence in my abilities. I earned good grades, excelled at internships, and earned a steady income on the side via my writing and editing services.

But when it came time to launch a business and put those skills to good use, I struggled.

I made excuses for why I couldn't be successful and why I had no right to charge for my services. Instead of moving ahead with my business, I toyed with the idea of graduate school in an endless attempt to delay the inevitable: I needed to decide what came next for me.

Self-sabotage marked the start of my career.

I gave in to quiet self-sabotage: perfectionism, avoidance, fear of failure, negative self-talk, and overspending. It took years to realize that I was the only thing holding me back from a successful career.

I can only speculate how much money and time I lost to the pointless cycle of self-sabotage. I'm sure it is tens of thousands of dollars (and hours) that I'll never be able to replace, though I learned a few things about what not to do.

How does self-sabotage play out in the real world? This insidious ghost will keep you playing small, limiting your potential for success. The problem is that it doesn't always look the way you think it should.

This chapter will help you pinpoint the areas where you are compromising your future success.

What Is Self-Sabotage?

Before talking about how self-sabotage hinders progress in achieving our goals, we need a working definition. In short, self-sabotage is the conscious or unconscious behaviors and thought patterns undermining goals, well-being, and ultimately, success.

Self-sabotage can be simple: delaying the start of a new project, doubting yourself, or adhering to unrealistic expectations. Whether you intentionally or subconsciously interfere with your goals, self-sabotage presents as a major hindrance to achieving success.

The problem is that self-sabotage isn't an easy thing to spot. Instead, it creeps into your life in a variety of ways. There are no one-size-fits-all definitions, which makes it all the more important to acknowledge what is ultimately holding you back.

There are seven main types of self-saboteurs, each with its own attributes and downfalls.

Let's take a closer look at ways you might be holding yourself back.

The Procrastinator

We can all relate to procrastination, which is why we will tackle it first. The undesirable items on our to-do list stack up, making us feel more compelled to delay the start of a project.

Think about those major items you want to cross off your to-do list and evaluate whether you have put them off. This could apply to something as simple as submitting applications for a new and more desirable work position or taking a class to further your education.

Recent studies show that 20 percent of adults experience chronic procrastination*. Undergraduate students tend to procrastinate even more, at 70 to 95 percent. We can all relate to delaying the start of a project at work or a paper for your English class.

Picture the college senior who knows she has a capstone project due at the end of the semester. She reasons that she has four months to complete the project and delays the research and presentation. Her procrastination leads her to pull all-nighters on the cusp of her nearing deadline, compromising her well-being and the quality of her work. The result is a subpar representation of her skill and knowledge.

She might have finished the project, but it was at great cost to her personal life and might not have represented her academic achievement in the best possible light.

What is the result of procrastination in your career or your personal life?

It might be more serious than you think. People engaged in this form of self-sabotage have the qualifications and even the potential to achieve more. Because they delay taking even the simplest action to move the needle forward, they may miss out on career advancements and get passed over for that lucrative promotion.

The Atychiphobic

Atychiphobia, or the fear of failure, plagues people. In some situations, fear of failure may cause you to delay a project. This demonstrates how intricately linked the forms of self-sabotage can become.

Fear of failure is more than just an abstract concept. It is the reason you never take a chance. An artist fails to showcase her work due to a fear of criticism or rejection. A businessman fails to put forward his ideas for a major project because he doesn't want his supervisor to point out their flaws.

Fear of failure may protect you from criticism, at least in the moment. But it has serious long-term implications. Careers stagnate without community and company recognition.

Being agile in advancing your career is crucial to having a long and successful career. However, according to Ya-Ting Chuang and colleagues, the fear of failure can signal the start of a downward spiral when it comes to career adaptability*. This group found that motivation is a “double-edged sword”: It improves adaptability while also increasing your fear of failure. On the other hand, self-efficacy improves adaptability and reduces your fear of failure.

Since the development of self-efficacy should take precedence over motivation, it will serve you better to engage in positive self-talk and cultivate a growth mindset. Coined by Carol Dweck in 1988, growth mindset refers to the idea that people can refine talents and abilities through hard work.

The more you can contribute to positive talk internally and have a growth mindset, the more you can limit your fear.

Try introducing curiosity into professional and academic pursuits*. Look at the bigger picture to keep yourself from getting lost in your fear of failure.

The Imposter

Imposter syndrome is rampant in today's world. The Imposter is aware that they achieve external markers of success but feels like a fraud for these achievements. They consistently fear that they will be “found out” and have serious doubts about their own abilities. It may not be a recognized disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) used by psychologists, but it's valid all the same.

You might be surprised at just how many people relate to the idea of imposter syndrome.

Harvard Business Review clocks the figure at roughly 70 percent of all people*.

I can relate to imposter syndrome, and maybe you can too. When handed new assignments at work or taking on a role with increased responsibilities, I act as though my past achievements are meaningless in inching me toward a new role that could skyrocket my success. The result is that I work harder than necessary, all in a vain attempt to prove that I am worthy of the responsibility.

What is the real risk for an imposter who downplays their achievements?

Colleagues and supervisors will take you at your word. If you tell them you had no role in the success of a major project, they may believe you. As a result, these key authority figures might overlook your achievements and contributions, even though you poured your heart and soul into them.

By not taking credit where it's due, you may be looked over for a promotion, delaying your career advancement. More than that, it can damage self-esteem if you never receive a commendation for your hard work.

Imposter syndrome is often buried deep beneath the surface. Even in a therapeutic setting, several sessions may pass before a skilled clinician can recognize your self-sabotage as imposter syndrome*.

For most people, this concept is intensely personal and closely guarded for fear that others might find them out. It leads to increased anxiety, especially around achieving the goals you want in your career.

The Self-Bully

Think about the inner monologue that loops in your mind. Do you say positive things about yourself, or is it mostly an endless litany of criticism? The Self-Bully seems unable to acknowledge their positive contributions to the workplace, their relationships, and even the world.

This type of person engages in negative self-talk at every step of their journey. Due to their inherent flaws (which they are likely to obsess over), they often feel unworthy of loving or

healthy relationships.

Take Sam, for example. Sam experienced some of these same feelings when dealing with the possibility of entering the dating scene. Fresh on the heels of a bad breakup, he told himself that he was at fault in the failed relationship, that it was due to his personality and his personal failures.

When a coworker offered to set him up with a close friend, Sam was obsessed over what a new partner might think of him if given the chance to get to know him. He felt like he did not deserve the relationship and canceled the date altogether.

The long-term implications of this type of negative self-talk might include unhappiness in your relationships. You may avoid potential matches with a romantic partner because you feel you aren't worthy of a healthy relationship.

Even apart from romantic entanglements, you undermine existing relationships or friendships.

On the flip side, there may be a positive aspect to being self-critical. Highly motivated people, with a strong attention to detail, are often the most at risk of self-bullying behavior*. Compared to an inflated sense of self-esteem, this state might be preferable. Too much self-confidence leads to poorer performance due to a sense of inaccurate confidence, researchers indicate.

This could impact performance at work, school, or anywhere else that may demand attention. Instead, it should be the goal to have a realistic view of your abilities and to accept some innate skill and talent.

It could mean the difference between having healthy relationships and achieving your goals and self-sabotage.

The Financial Saboteur

Do you spend more money than you bring in? Sabotage in your personal finances is just as important as self-sabotage in your relationships and professional advancement. If you are a Financial Saboteur, you spend more than you make.

To some extent, we can all relate to this at some point. You establish a clear financial goal: paying down student loan debt or saving for the down payment on a house. But then, something pops up. The new iPhone is released or you see a spectacular deal on a new laptop. Instead of keeping the goal top of mind, you cave to the invisible pressure.

The Financial Saboteur consistently overspends, regardless of goals. This category of self-sabotage can have lingering effects on your mental health and well-being as debt begins to accumulate.

Debt is an important cause of a steady decline in both mental and physical health^{*}.

One study of young adults proved that an increase in debt results in:

- Higher perceived stress
- Increased rates of depression
- Decreased feelings of well-being and health
- Higher diastolic blood pressure

Not only does financial sabotage impact your health, but it also causes you to miss out on some of the goals you set for yourself. Increased spending leaves you unable to save and invest, leaving you less likely to achieve long-term financial stability.

Lack of self-control is often an indicator of self-sabotaging financial behaviors. Weak financial literacy combined with poor self-control often results in problematic behaviors, namely overspending and making poor investment choices^{*}.

The Perfectionist

We all know someone who strives to cross every T and dot every I. Perfectionism seems to be a great attribute at first glance. After all, who willingly wants to commit their flaws to

paper? Your manager likely expects a flawless result on that upcoming project. They won't be happy if you turn in a presentation riddled with spelling errors.

To some extent, a healthy dose of perfectionism results in a higher standard for completed work. But sometimes, you may find that striving for perfection limits your capacity to produce meaningful work.

The Perfectionist sets the bar high, which can be good. The problem is that they may subsequently abandon a project if their standards aren't immediately attainable.

Individuals who score high on measures of perfectionism are more likely to set unrealistically high standards which contributes to increased stress, fear of failure, and even impaired performance*.

What are the downsides to abandoning projects that aren't immediately going to net a positive outcome?

Oftentimes, it means that you are going to miss out on a lot of valuable learning experiences. Setting a project aside just because you aren't positive that you will achieve the level of success you are after leads to missed opportunities.

You never know your potential for success until you try.

An unrealistic pursuit of perfection will cause you to miss out on many fun experiences (and failures) along the way.

The Avoidant

The Avoidant is closely related to perfectionism and procrastination. If you fall into this category, you may hesitate to act out of a more intense fear of failure. Your boss may recommend you for a class or a promotion, but you hesitate to acquire the skills necessary for professional development.

On the other hand, maybe you see an opportunity at work but are worried that you won't have what it takes. Instead of taking the class to shore up your skills, you sit on the sidelines, watching as others go ahead of you. The fear of failure is intense, leaving you immobilized.

In my own business, I saw an opportunity early on for me to expand my company into new territories. Instead of moving full steam ahead on projects that excited me and had potential for tremendous financial growth, I delayed acquiring the skills necessary to succeed. Others in my field saw the same opportunities I did and moved ahead with their training.

My reluctance for professional growth cost me dearly—both in lost clients and a decrease in my annual revenue.

Maybe you can relate. The Avoidant often feels reluctant to reach for professional growth, which leads to a professional plateau. Your career stagnates and you miss out on the opportunity to truly develop your career.

Subtle Self-Sabotage And Growth

Emily found that she was constantly evaluating her work performance, trying to uphold a standard of perfectionism. When she fell short of her ideal, she would talk negatively to herself and criticize her efforts. To relieve some of her unpleasant feelings, she would often engage in a little retail therapy which kept her from reaching her financial goal of paying down debt.

By this point, it's clear that self-sabotage can be an insidious and influential factor in determining personal and professional growth. Many people engage in not just one brand of self-sabotage but experience a myriad of the real-life scenarios listed above.

Emily is a perfect example of how the self-sabotage effect can weave together. The problem is that self-sabotage, and particularly perfectionism, can lead to a host of mental health concerns. Namely, it results in sharp increases in stress, depression, and even hopelessness*.

The more time you spend ruminating on mistakes and the potential for failure, the more distress you will experience.

Engaging in self-sabotage negates positive reinforcement mechanisms that could cement new (and improved) habits that further your career and personal growth. This is tied to operant conditioning, a psychological term brought to light in the early 1950s.

Operant conditioning indicates that people will continue to do things that feel rewarding while avoiding events that punish them. Self-sabotage leads to avoidance of certain actions and feedback loops. Instead of a reward for a job well done, you bide your time until you are punished for not completing a job to perfectionistic standards.

When it comes to negative reinforcement in the operant conditioning theory, negative self-talk can also act as a sort of punishment.

Emily is a prime example of operant conditioning at work. Because she never completed projects due to her perfectionism, she was never rewarded in a more professional setting. This lack of reward led Emily to continue avoiding the hard work she needed to advance her career, leaving her stuck at lower levels of achievement. It even put her job in jeopardy because upper management felt that she was an underachiever despite her idealistic aims.

Avoiding discomfort like Emily means you will miss out on any potential positive reinforcement associated with overcoming obstacles and achieving personal milestones. Instead, you will be stuck in a cycle of negative behavior without the hope of experiencing the rewards of making a new and more positive change.

As you grow and abandon these methods of self-sabotage, you will increase in self-efficacy. This term, coined by social psychologist Albert Bandura, refers to your ability to control motivation and behavior. Self-sabotage is linked to your self-efficacy. If you are afraid to try, your motivation will be low and you will find that self-esteem plummets.

The result is that you feel less and less capable of achieving your goals. Motivation shrinks and your behavior tends to lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: You think you are incapable of

success and never try, reinforcing the pattern.

Unfortunately, this also tends to lead to risk avoidance. In the literature, behavior is motivated by the promise of a positive or desirable outcome, whereas avoidance occurs in the opposite capacity*. Constantly feeling like you are in danger of failure can lead to this type of avoidance and increase your risk of self-sabotage.

In other words, you will hesitate to take risks that could motivate you to achieve more positive outcomes. There is a potential for great reward if you can move past the looming threat of self-sabotage. Increase your confidence, embrace positive changes, and implement a positive feedback loop to enhance self-efficacy and temper risk avoidance. The result could be increased potential in every aspect of your life.

Action Steps

Take a moment to think about your mindset in relation to success, hard work, and outcomes. Evaluate the things that hold you back from achieving the personal or the professional success you hope to see in your life.

Here are a few questions you might want to journal about to see what patterns come up:

1. How long do you delay starting a project and does it cause you to miss out on new opportunities?
2. How has a fear of failure held you back from trying new things or taking risks?
3. Do you frequently downplay achievements or feel that you have no right to success?
4. What sort of self-talk do you engage in?
5. Are you spending more than you should?
6. How realistic are your standards or how could they be adjusted to give you breathing room?
7. Are there any skills you are putting off learning due to fear of failure?

In my own career, I found I was holding myself to a set of unrealistic expectations. Despite positive feedback, I still felt like my skills weren't adequate to charge for the new services

that would have helped me achieve greater professional success. This hindered me from achieving more financial success, leading me to also be a Financial Saboteur and a Perfectionist and Imposter.

The truth is that my self-sabotage was rooted in how I was raised and the expectations of success that my parents and close loved ones set out for me. In the next chapter, we will dive into how childhood expectations and societal norms play a key role in shaping your likelihood of achieving success in the future.

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