GDC

Been There, Done That:
Industry Women Share Experiences and Advice

Kim McAuliffe, Founder and Designer, gamesto.love
My N. Tran, Chief Product Officer, Truly Social
Amy Kalson, Creative Director, EA PopCap
Trevoli Ponds-White, Technical PM, Amazon
Katie Chironis, Game Designer, Oculus
Ellen Marett, Chief People and Cultural Officer, WG Cells
Elizabeth Sampat, Game Designer, EA PopCap

UBM

- Hello and welcome! Please make sure devices are on silent.
- I'm Kim McAuliffe, we're all really excited to be here today, thanks for coming!
- We created this session to share advice from veteran developers with those new to the industry.
- we hope you find it inspiring, encouraging, and useful.

Feelings vs. Reality
by Kim McAuliffe (@EnameledKoi)

- My inspiration for this talk was: "What do you wish you could go back and tell your younger self?"
- This is it: "Feelings vs. Reality"
- or…

When Not to let your Emotions Run the Show

- Feelings are great. I'm a big fan of following your gut
- But sometimes you don't want them calling the shots, because their intensity is clouding your objectivity.
- I'm going to talk about three situations where that might happen, and why having a mentor can help in all of them.

About Me

@EnameledKoi

- First, a bit of background on me:
- Started out making handheld games
- Made some console games
- Went to Microsoft and made more console games

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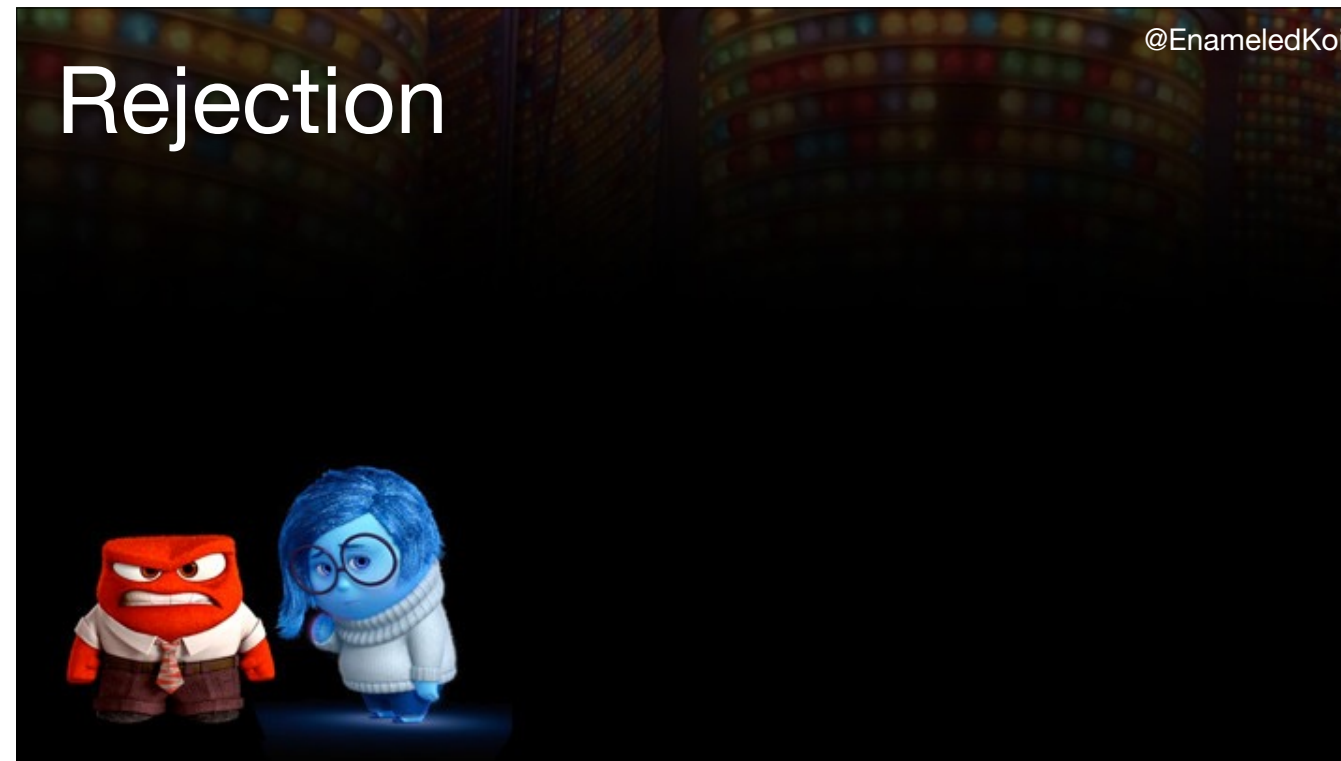- Worked on a FB game
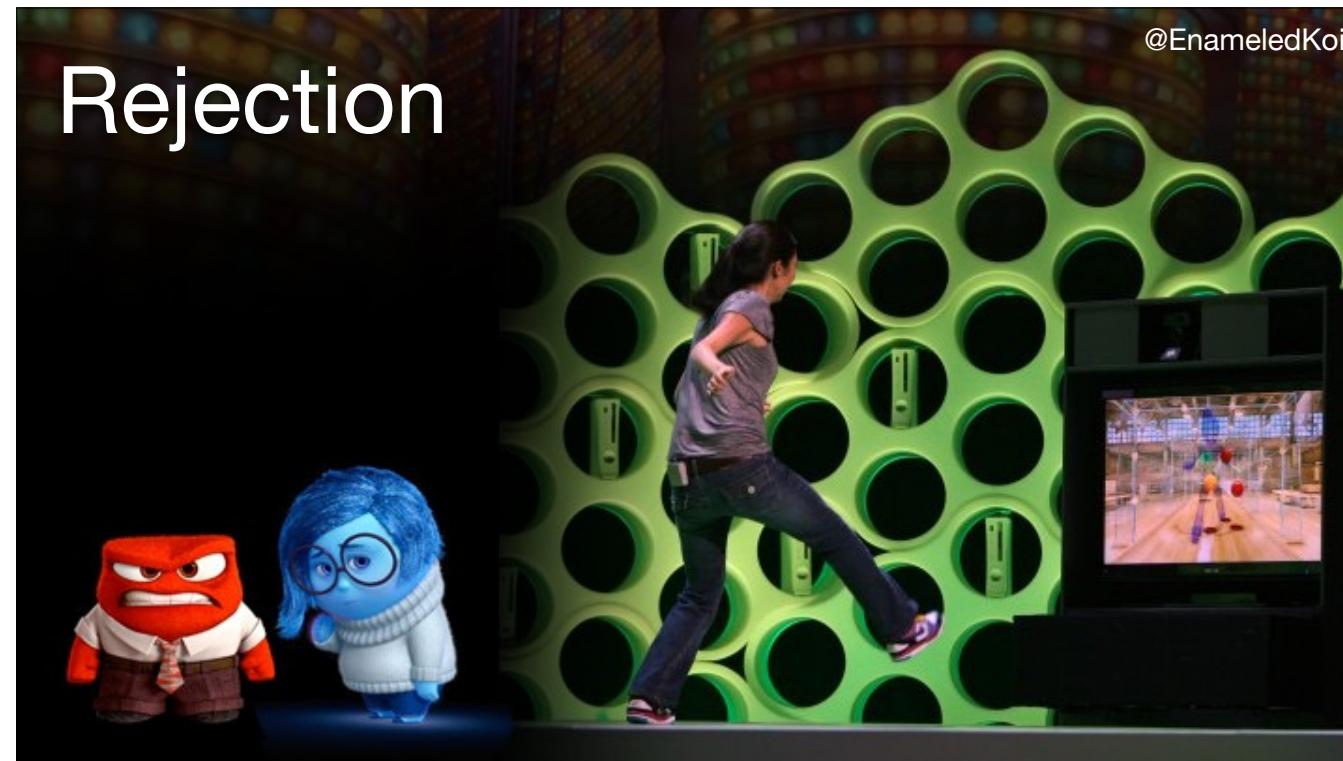- Now I'm working on my own stuff for a while.

The Mirror

@EnameledKoi

gamesto.love

http://mirrorga.me

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Rejection

@EnameledKoi

- Back to the Feelings! The first situation where feelings might skew your perception is Rejection. Rejection can leave you angry, sad, and feeling really down about yourself and your abilities.
- I've been rejected many times, but the most memorable instance was with MS. I wasn't looking for a job when they approached me, but by the end of the first chat I was determined to work there. (click)This was when Kinect was still Project Natal, and the potential was really exciting.
- They brought me in for a formal interview loop, which seemed to go well. But they didn't move forward after that interview, or the two others I did after that. The cycle of hope, nervousness, exhausting interviews, excitement, rejection, and depression was very hard on me and my self-esteem.
- I got feedback like this (click) and wondered why, if they liked me so much, we weren't moving forward.
- I lost my objectivity.

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Rejection

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I'm never gonna be good enough for you, am I?

- (pause) I felt like I'd never be good enough. Sometimes I felt like they were jerking me around on purpose, even though that doesn't make any sense.
- I almost said no when they asked me to interview a third time, but the recruiter told me, "They wouldn't keep bringing you back if they didn't like you. We're just looking for the right fit." Something clicked when I heard that, and I was finally able to stop taking the rejection personally.
- So I did the 3rd loop. That didn't work out either, but one of the people I interviewed with had a different job opening, and hired me for that. I went to work on games for kids and families, and of the four jobs, this was by far the best fit for what I wanted to do, and the skills I'd grown. (click) It led to adventures like running a teleprompter on a rock slope with a grizzly bear, a game design experience unlikely to ever be repeated.
- (click) Both of the games I shipped there taught me a lot. In the end, all of that rejection was never personal, and the right fit did come along.
- In the face of rejection, don't get too down on yourself, don't take it personally, and keep putting yourself out there.

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The phone screen reads: "OK - now that we've seen wild bears dig for moths on the talus slope - it's your turn."

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- Another situation where your feelings might hold you back is facing a new opportunity. You might be excited, but worried that you won't be ready, that you'll fail. You might even be disgusted with yourself for not being the kind of confident person who takes on every challenge without fear.
- I want to tell you, I've never met any of those people. Almost everyone wonders if they'll be up to the task when jumping into something new. Some are just better at hiding it. This fear doesn't go away when you get more senior; you just learn to ignore it.
- I decided at one point to say yes to most of the opportunities that came my way, especially if they could advance my skills or teach me something new. One of the most impactful was being asked to speak in a group talk at GDC for the first time.
- I'd never done any public speaking. I hated oral reports and being in front of the class in school. But I knew this wasn't an opportunity that was likely to happen again, and I trusted that the organizer would help me prepare. I was super nervous but didn't say no.

~~Opportunity~~ Fear of Failure

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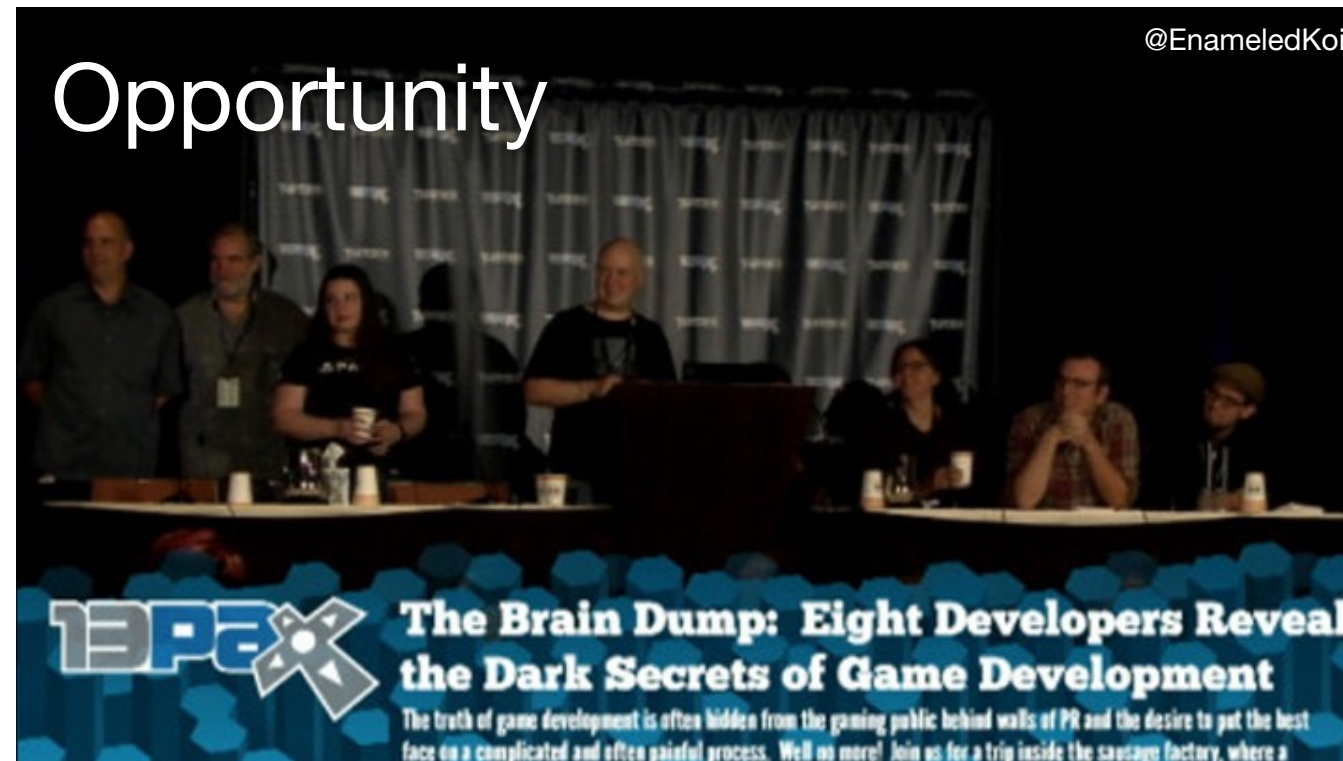
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- This was the first #1ReasonToBe. That day is in my top 10 best experiences ever. Maybe 5.
- To my surprise, I liked speaking to an audience. (click)
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- And then last year I was part of his "Rules of the Game" session, where I gave probably the first ever talk about cow tipping at GDC.
- All of these were scary, and the preparation was a lot of work. But they were worth it, and each time I got a bit better.

Opportunity

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13PAX The Brain Dump: Eight Developers Reveal the Dark Secrets of Game Development

The truth of game development is often hidden from the gaming public behind walls of PR and the desire to put the best face on a complicated and often painful process. Well no more! Join us for a trip inside the sausage factory, where a

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"There are no mistakes, only opportunities"

-Tina Fey

- It's not like I've never screwed up. But mistakes sometimes teach us lessons that can't be learned any other way.
- I've never wished I hadn't taken those chances.
- Don't let fear of failure keep you from finding new success.

Impostor Syndrome

@EnameledKoi

- (pause) A third situation where your feelings might not be in line with reality is during a bout of impostor syndrome.
- This term has been mentioned a lot lately, but specifically what I'm talking about is: (click)
- Feeling like a fraud and worrying someone is going to find out, and
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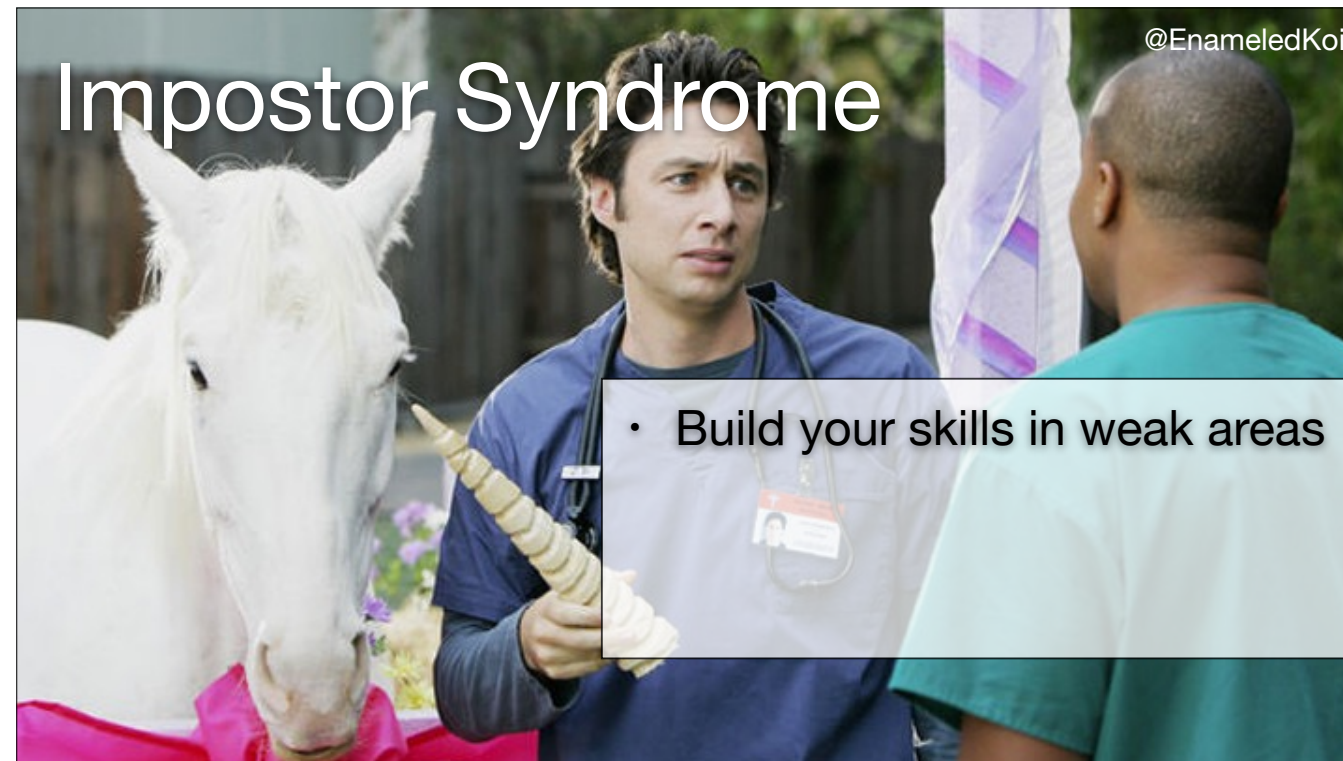
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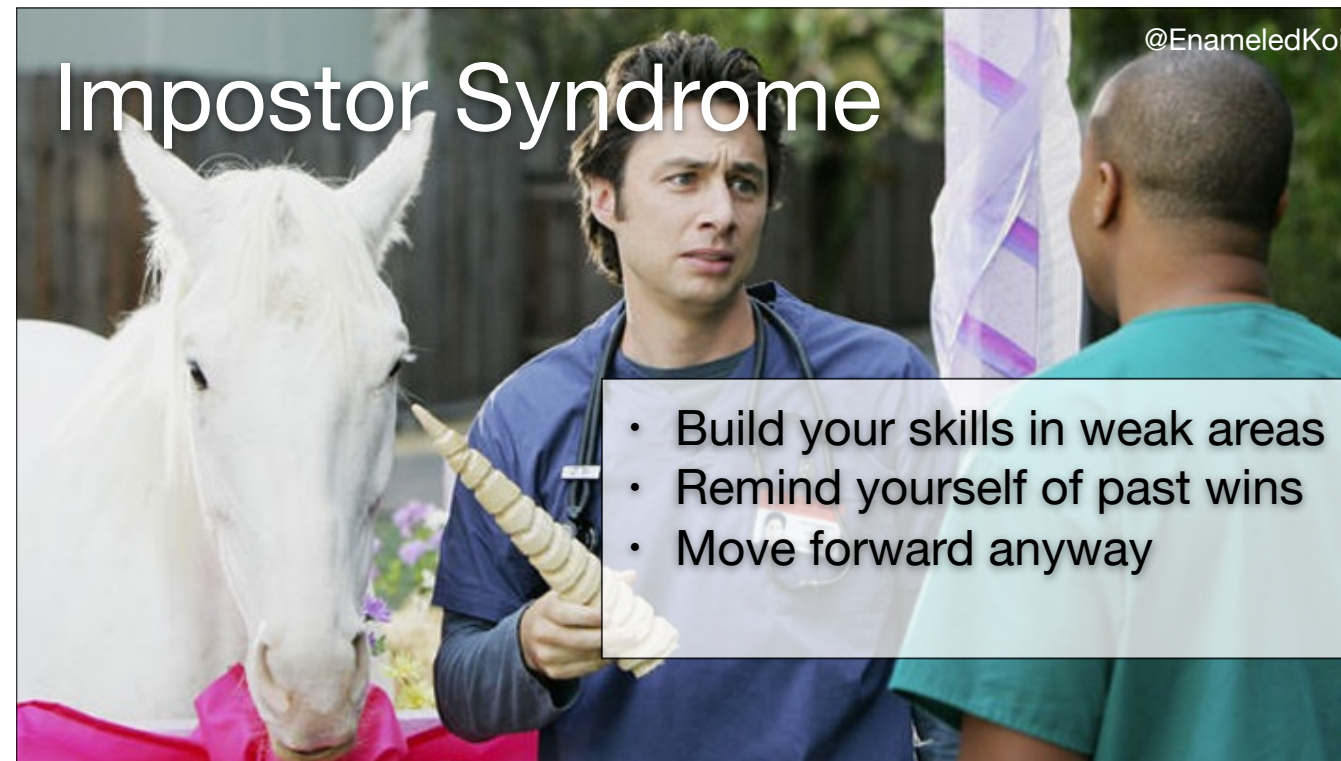
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- So what can you do to fight these feelings? (click)
- If your feelings are rooted in not having a certain skill or knowledge base, take action and learn. (click)
- Remind yourself of your past wins and accomplishments, and let yourself take credit for them! (click)
- Move forward. Just getting started on something can alleviate feelings of inadequacy as you focus your mind on your work. (click)
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Mentors

@EnameledKoi

- Finding mentors is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your career.
- When facing rejection, they can help you figure out what skills you might need to polish to get the jobs you want—and help you plan your career trajectory in general. They can also send new job possibilities your way.
- When evaluating a new opportunity, a mentor can help you figure out if it will get you closer to where you want to be. If you take the plunge, they can help you build a plan for success.
- And finally, mentors can remind you of your skills and accomplishments when you're not feeling like you belong. It's harder to dismiss the opinion of someone who knows you and your career so well.

Mentors

- Surprisingly hard to find examples of women mentoring women in popular culture. The only female mentoring relationships I could think of were kinda negative, like in The Devil Wears Prada.
- This was the best google and I could do: (click)
- If you're a woman, finding a female mentor is a huge bonus. It's not that men can't be great mentors—I have had those, too. But women can have specific hurdles at work to navigate that men aren't aware of.
- There's no one way to find a mentor. Most of mine have been very informal; I approached them for lunch or advice, and we built a relationship over time. These relationships evolve. As my career progressed, I sought new people to learn from, and previous mentors became good friends.
- There are women up here today who have either mentored me or been mentored by me, which is pretty great. But now, advice and support is traded pretty equally back and forth.

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"I pretty much just do whatever Oprah tells me to."

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Summary

In Summary:
• Be persistent in going after what you want in spite of rejection. Try not to take it personally and don't get down on yourself.
• Don't let the fear that you might fail stop you from seizing opportunities. Ask yourself "what's the worst that can really happen?" and remember that even failures are learning experiences.
• In the face of self-doubt, remind yourself how far you've come, and realize that many successful people struggle with the same feelings. They've just learned over time to recognize when it's happening and move forward anyway.
• Find a mentor to help you sort through all of the above. A more experienced perspective can help you work through your feelings, discern when they're off base, and support you in making the best decisions to reach your goals.

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Make time to celebrate your accomplishments

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"You can do this."

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Thank you!

Thank you!

MY N. TRAN

CHIEF PRODUCT OFFICER

TRULYSOCIAL

KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU WANT.
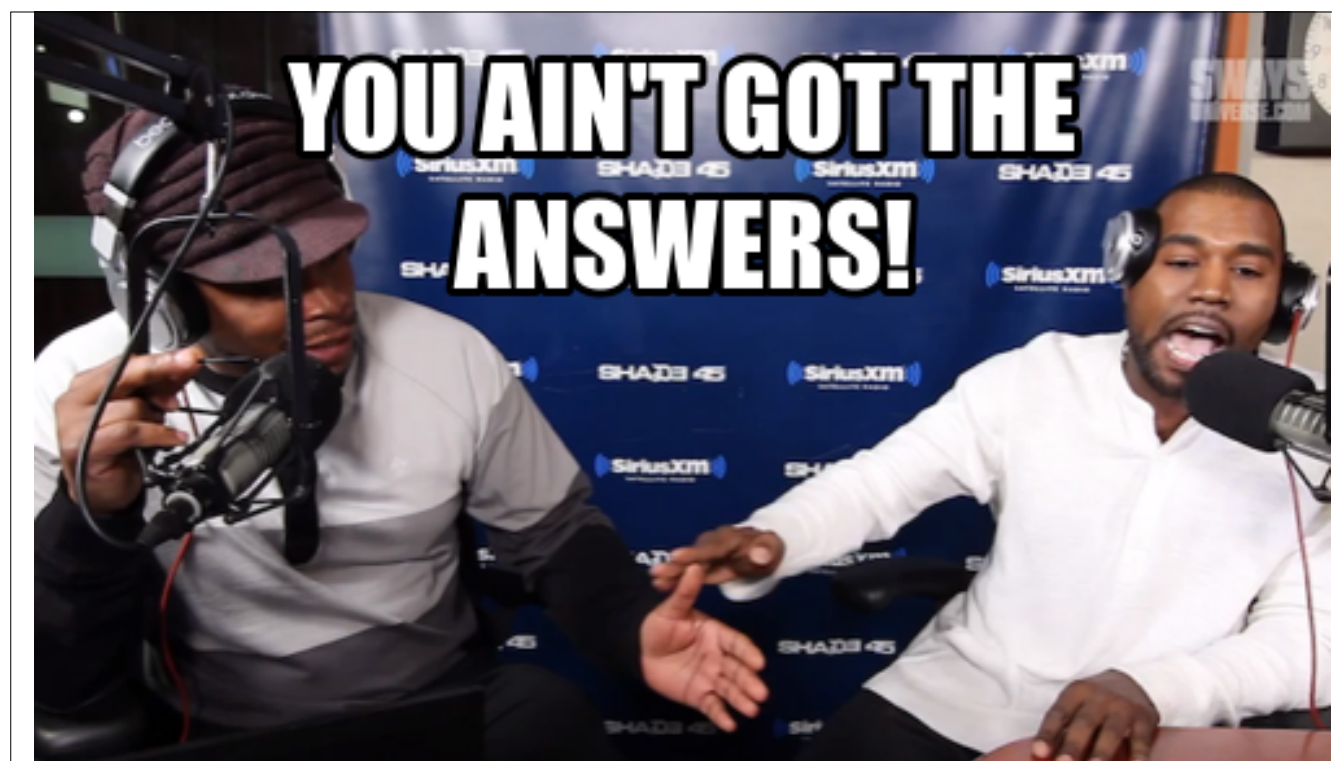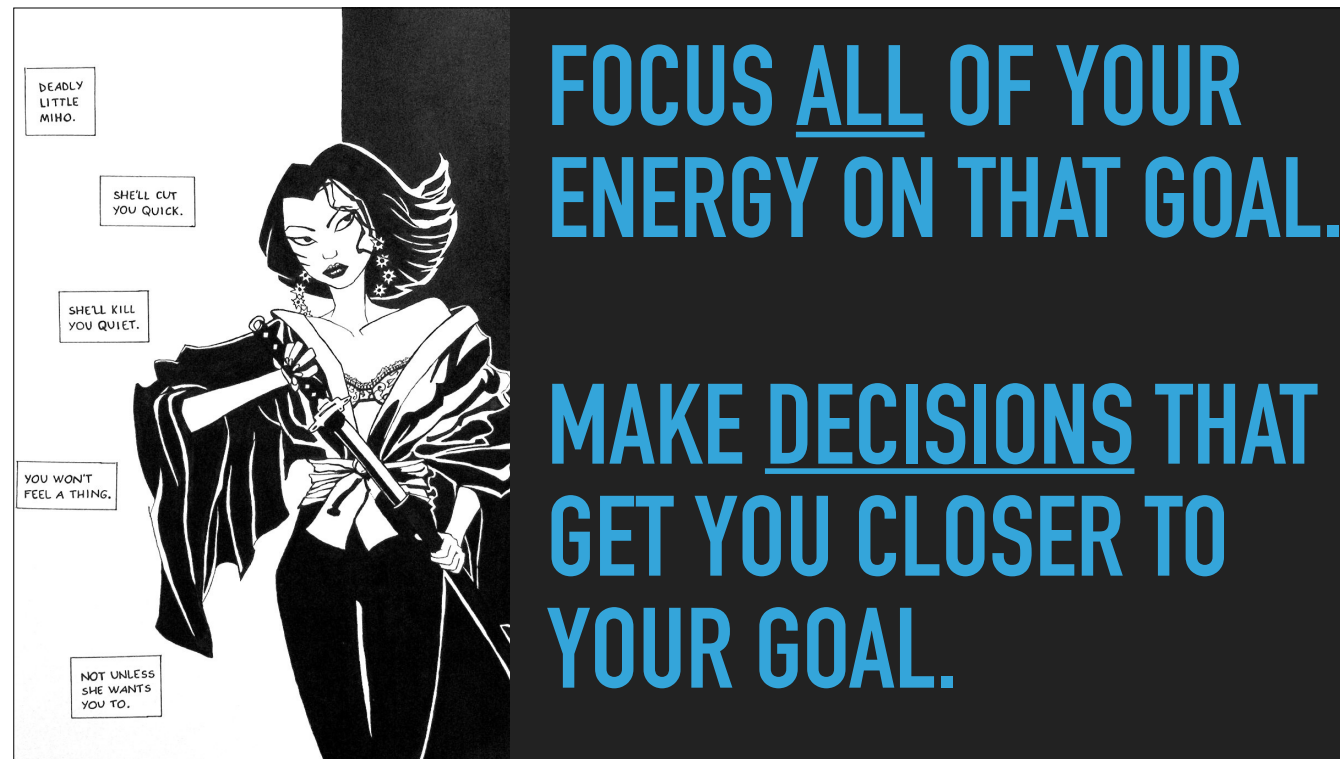
FOCUS <u>ALL</u> OF YOUR ENERGY ON THAT GOAL.

MAKE <u>DECISIONS</u> THAT GET YOU CLOSER TO YOUR GOAL.

RESULTS MATTER.
NOTHING ELSE.

DID I ASK FOR YOUR OPINION?
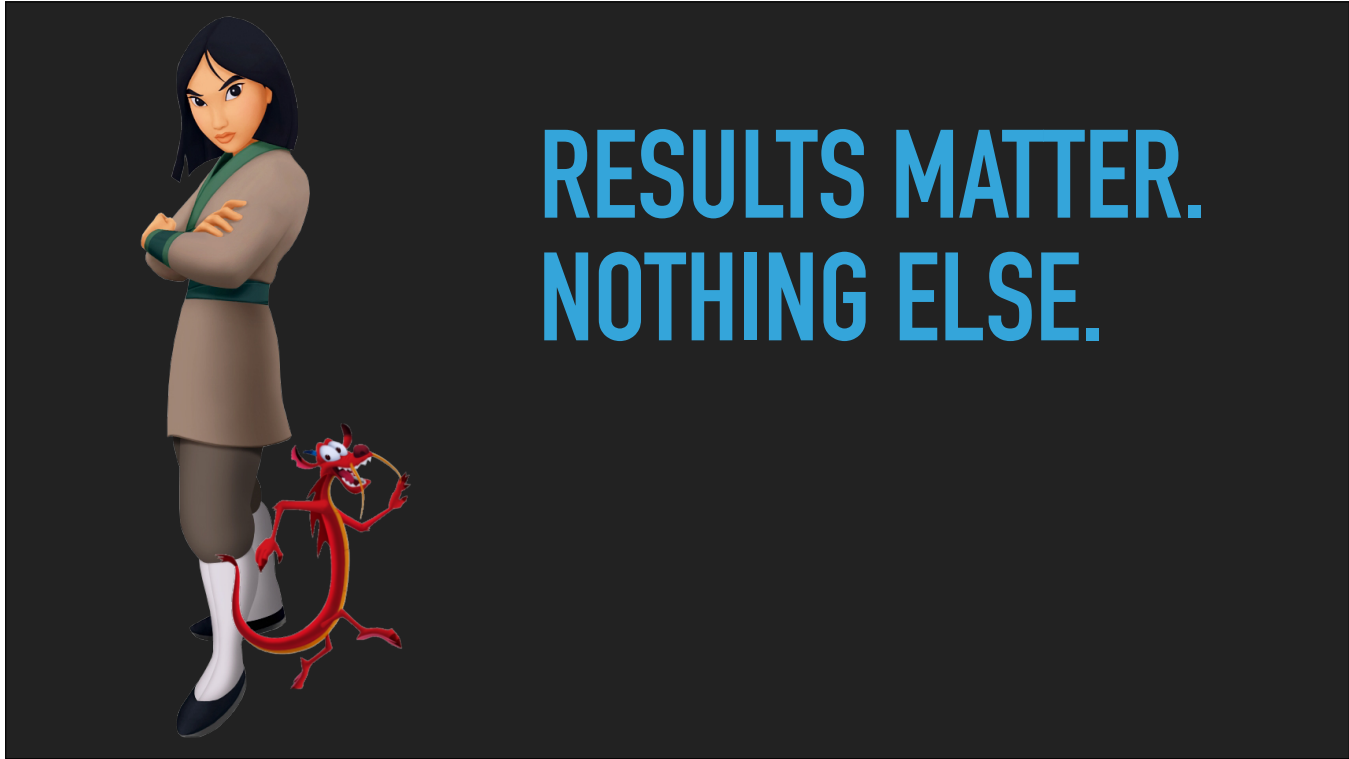
DO NOT DO THAT TO YOURSELF.

GET THE FACTS.
KNOW YOUR WORTH.

@MYNRTRAN

CREATING
SELF-CONFIDENCE

Amy Kalson
Twitter: @AmyKalson

Hi. I'm Amy. I'm a Creative Director at PopCap in Seattle.

When Kim was first putting this talk together, I asked her what topic she'd like to hear me talk about. Without missing a beat, she said "self-confidence", which really surprised me, as I have never thought of myself as a particularly self-confident person. But I thought it was a really interesting topic, so I decided to do some research. And what I found changed me, both in the way that I interact with the world, and the way I view myself.

So the first thing I did when I set off on this quest to explore self-confidence was that I asked people how I could be more self-confident, and they all said some variation of this. Which isn't surprising, as it is super ingrained into our society:

-"Know Thyself." was written in the forecourt of the Oracle at Delphi

-It was used extensively by Plato and Socrates.

-Hamlet: Lord Polonius to Laertes: "This above all: to thine own self be true."
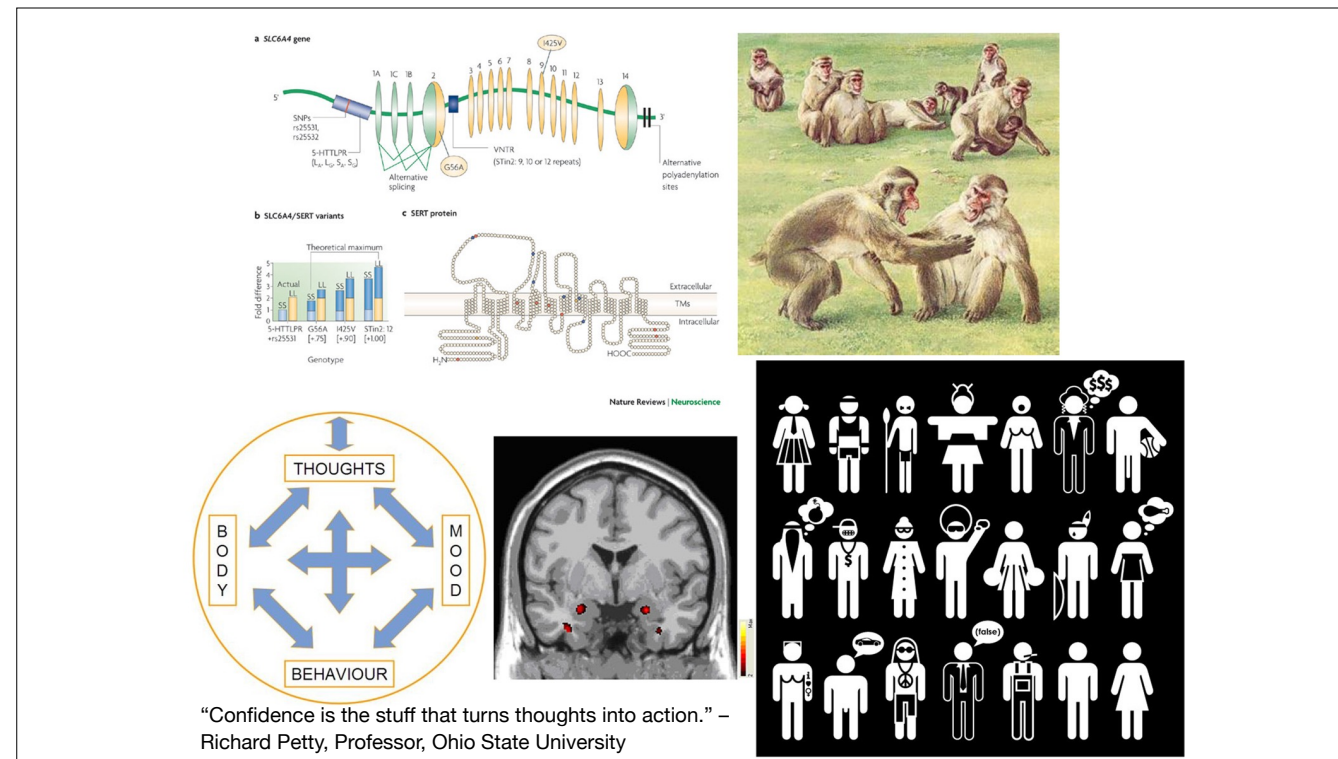
The only problem is…

—Well-Intentioned but Unhelpful People
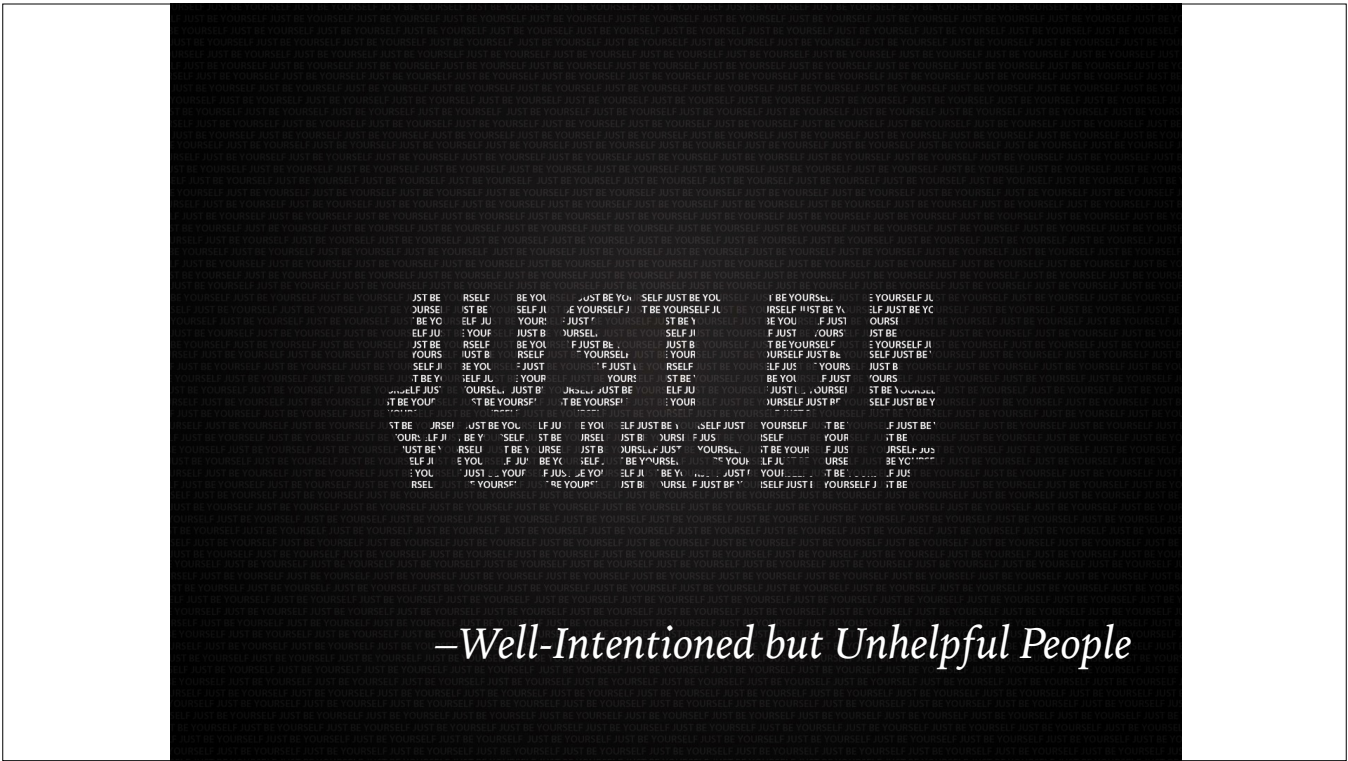
…It just isn't very helpful.

There is no "how" here. There is no strategic action. It is like saying, "here's how not to be poor: just have lots of money." Which is factually correct, but again, not very helpful.

And it isn't easy to do. Benjamin Franklin wrote, "There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self."

So there had to be a better way.

"Confidence is the stuff that turns thoughts into action." – Richard Petty, Professor, Ohio State University

Luckily, it turns out there is a lot of research going on in this area:

-Scientists have discovered that SLC6A4 serotonin transporter gene. Could be 40% nature vs nurture.

-Studies with monkeys (yes, there is such a thing as monkey self-confidence).

-Cognitive behavioral therapy

-MRIs on the amygdala in the brain, on brain plasticity and how memory affects behaviors

-Psychology studies about how stereotypes influence performance, how men and women are perceived in leadership positions, how your own bias can influence how you perform.

One thing that all the research points to it is this: self-confidence is all about taking action. It is about doing, not just about the way you feel when you do something.

-Ok, so if self-confidence is about taking action, what are those actions?

7 THINGS YOU CAN DO IMMEDIATELY

Because confidence is about TAKING ACTION

It turns out there are seven key actions that anyone can do to become more self-confident. Here's my promise: by the end of this talk, I will prove that they work.

So enough buildup, what are these things?

1: STRAIGHTEN UP (LITERALLY)

Back straight, chin up, feet flat, uncross your arms.

Not figuratively. Literally. Yes, "sit up straight" is actually backed up by science. When women are told to adopt classically male poses - taking up more space, spreading our legs and arms, our testosterone levels rise and our cortisol levels drop. We instantly feel more self-confident and powerful. I've been practicing this while walking around the GDC this week, which is a little dorky. But it made me feel great.

There is a great TED talk on this by Amy Cuddy who is a Social Psychologist about how this can affect your chances for success.

By the way, it is incredibly difficult to find pictures of real non-superhero women posing this way. It is so engrained into us that we should make ourselves as small as possible - that we should fit in.

2: EXIT YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Take the weirdest class you can find.

It turns out that Nike is right, and "Just do it," is really good advice because nothing builds confidence faster than taking action! One of the best ways to do this is to take the strangest class you can find. Get your local community college or art center catalog and sign up for the thing you can imagine yourself doing the least.

2: EXIT YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Take the weirdest class you can find.
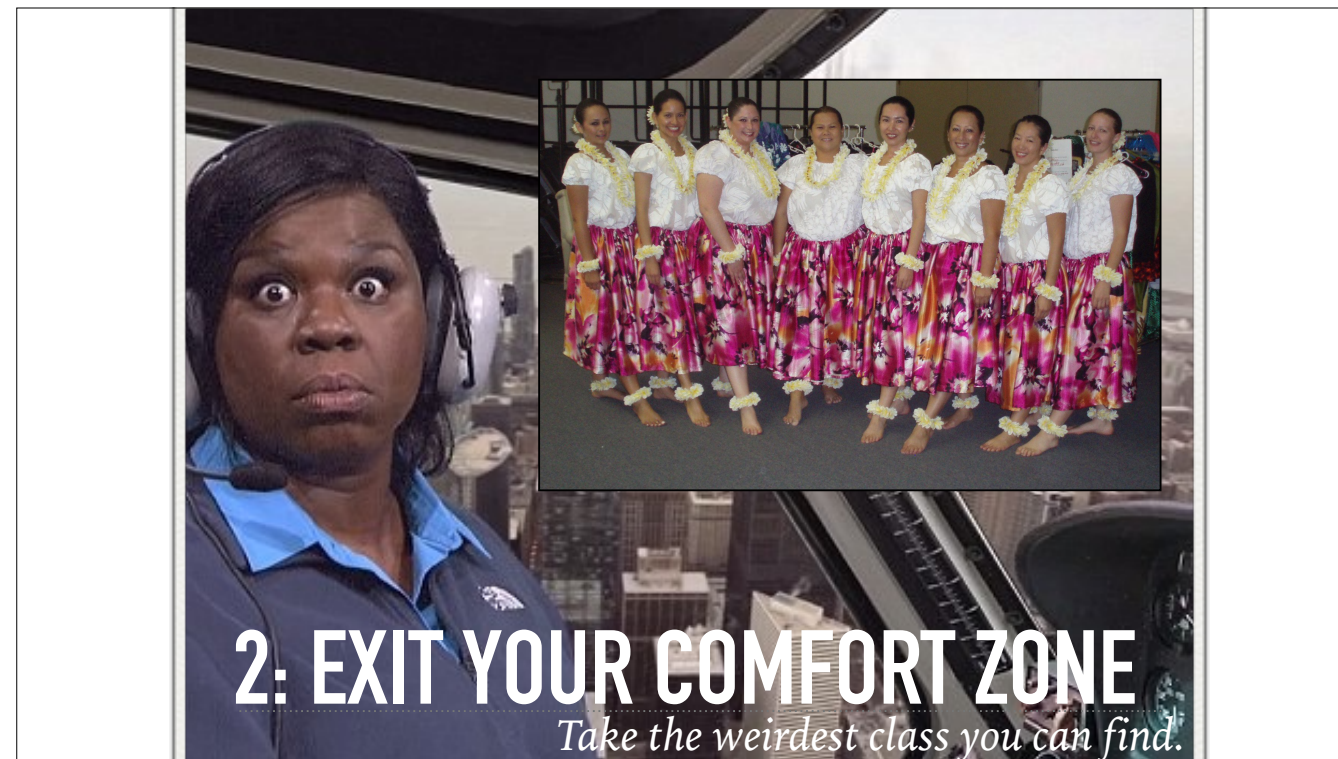
This is how I inadvertently became a semi-professional hula dancer in Los Angeles for five years.

It works because you have no expectations of having to be good at it. You can just simply explore something new without pressure to perform. And taking small risks like this prepares you for taking more meaningful ones later on. It's practice. And while you're taking that strange class…

3: GO AHEAD AND FAIL
Make something awful.

Fail. Fail fast. Fail a lot. Fail on purpose. The more you fail, the more you'll get over the fear of failing. It is not so bad to fail because failing teaches you to embrace the whole experience: losses, struggles, and all. It puts you into a growth mind set and it frees you up to learn.

By the way, failure is also the key to iterative game development, but that is another talk.
And while you're failing…

4: STOP THINKING SO DAMN MUCH

Keep a journal for a week of all the negative thoughts that pop into your head. Then BURN IT.

Kill the negative automatic thoughts in your head. Murder those tiny voices that stop you from taking action. You need to become conscious of the relationship between *thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and actions*.

I'll be honest. This is a really hard one for me. I think way too much about pretty much everything. I struggle with this. The thing that I have found that works for me is to leverage my own empathy. Instead of imagining all of the negative reasons someone acted a certain way, I force myself to think of a kinder, more compassionate point of view. Maybe that Starbucks barista that snapped at me didn't hate me. Maybe he had just burned his hand on a hot cup of coffee. Even if I have to do some mental gymnastics to come up with a kind view, I feel much better when I do it.

And the funny thing is that the more I do this, the less likely I am to automatically go to a negative mental place when something bad happens. And that has improved all of the relationships in my life - professional and personal.

5: SPEAK UP

At dinner tonight, make a toast. If you are dining alone, do it anyway.

Speak up! Use your own style. Stop asking and start telling. Stop using conditional text or seeking approval. Just say it like you mean it and worry about the consequences later (or not at all).

6: FOCUS ON YOUR WORK INSTEAD OF ON YOURSELF

Get a stranger's perspective about what you are making.

And if you're still struggling to find your voice, focus on your work, project, or on your team. Let the genuine passion you feel for what you're making show. We are conditioned to see emotion as a sign of weakness, but it is actually a sign of strength. Passion is contagious. People will pick up on your genuine excitement and mirror it back to you.

Secret-Tip: This works incredibly well on job interviews, too. Stop worrying about what the interviewer is thinking and instead focus on how interesting the actual job is. And if it isn't interesting, you don't want to work there anyway.

7: BREAK A RULE. ANY RULE

Stop worrying about being acceptable.

I saved my favorite one for last: Go out and break a rule. Now, I'm not saying rob a bank or take candy from a baby. But find a small way to let go of behaving acceptably. And while you're doing it, don't care if people like you or not.

I'm going to level with you: the system is rigged. Workplace biases are not your fault. It is quite possible that you don't have the same advantages as your coworkers because there are larger forces at work. So get creative. Refuse to accept a rotten hand. If you need to bend the rules to fit you, do it.

IN SUMMARY, TO BE MORE SELF-CONFIDENT

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD

AND TAKE ACTION

So after researching what self-confidence is, and how to create more of it, and doing these 7 things regularly, I had a break through moment: Self-confidence is really just about having the courage to do something even if it scares you to death. Like being able to get up at the GDC and give a talk in front of a room full of friends and strangers. This talk, itself, is proof that these things work.

So be bold. Take action. Make amazing games. And don't let anyone - even yourself - stop you!
Thank you!

Living With Impostor Syndrome

Trevoli Ponds-White

Amazon

About Me

Software Engineer on 17 games, 10 as the Lead Engineer. Went on to lead a shared tech and tools team supporting a 13 team mobile studio.

Currently Technical Program Manager in Amazon Web Services working on Amazon Lumberyard.

Living with Imposter Syndrome

- You're not alone
- Ask questions early
- Leads and managers aren't experts, don't fall into the trap of thinking you need to be
- Hone your strengths

Grabbing The Mic

by Katie Chironis (@katiechironis)

- I got my first internship when I was 19
- I'd been assigned to work at my dream company, but when I was there, I found it isolating and confusing
- No one seemed to want to help me learn what I needed to do and there was jargon everywhere
- I spent every morning in my car in the parking lot crying, trying to muster up the energy to clock in at 8 AM
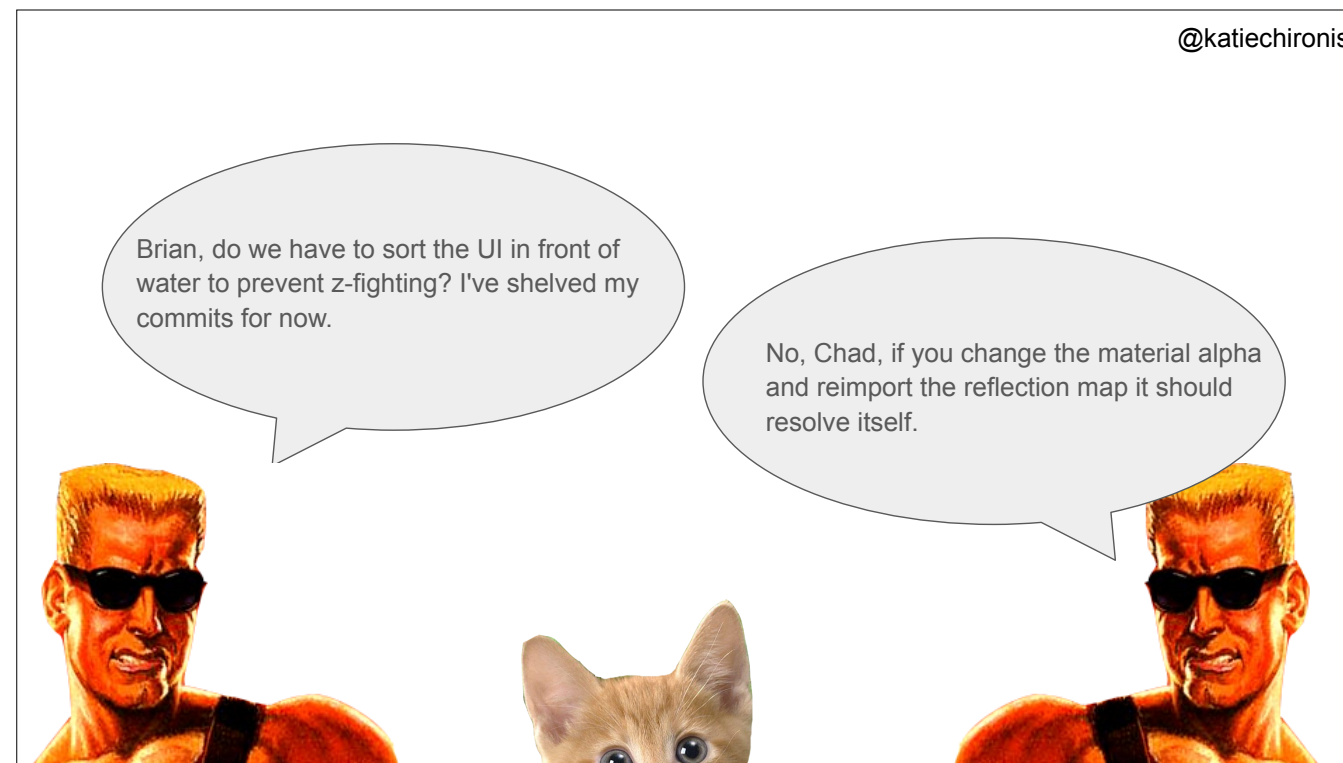
- What if I speak up, but I sound dumb?
- What if I'm wrong?
- What if people get mad at me?
- What if they just fire me outright?

it's cool
they didn't invite me to lunch
i'll eat at my desk

When I was an intern, I worked with almost all men, and I didn't know how to make friends.
My male co-intern seemed to be immediately accepted, but I wasn't invited to eat lunch or go out.
I ate lunch at my desk nearly every day, quietly working.

LESSON 1: VISIBILITY CREATES SOCIAL CAPITAL
SOCIAL CAPITAL CREATES POWER

Visibility forces everyone to know your name and what you do.
Visibility means you have a stake in the ground and an opinion on the table.
Visibility means you are doing what you got into this industry to do: create.
You are going to say dumb things and wrong things. There are going to be strange pauses and awkward silences when you start speaking up.
But then, it'll get better. The more you speak up, the more people expect you to speak.
Social connections are all you have in this industry
They alone are the key to your power
That's one of the ways men keep women out of the industry: they starve them of their social capital, which starves them of their power.
Eat lunch with the team. Go out with the team. Do not sit in the corner and wait for the men to come to you. They won't.

"Hey! I'd really like to grab lunch and ask you about the team's processes and tools."

"Do you guys mind if I join you?"

"You seem really knowledgeable. Do you mind if I come to you with questions?"

Here's the snowball effect: because I hadn't built up capital with anyone on my team, when I needed things to be done, they were done slowly and not to my specifications.
This in turn led to more difficulties in my own work...
Which in turn caused my own work to suffer...
Which in turn caused me to be penalized and told I wasn't working hard or fast enough.

@katiechironis

LESSON 2:
SPEND SOCIAL CAPITAL WISELY

"Those new materials you checked in look so much better."

"You made the right call on that change."

"I really value your opinion - what do you think of this?"

People want to feel valuable.
Creatives, especially, take huge pride in their work. Point out when people are doing well. Do it often.
Be enthusiastic about the work others do. You're all a team pushing for the same goal.
And, when people feel like you generally like them and their work... they'll react much better when you ask them to help you with your work in return.

@katiechironis

"You seem cool and like you really want to be here, not like [Famous game developer in 2009] who slept her way to the top."

Um...

That summer, a senior developer offered to take me out to coffee. He said this to me.
And I didn't say anything in response to his sexism.
It has been the most shameful event in my career to date.

LESSON 3:

ACTIVELY HELP OTHERS

- Mentor
- Review resumes
- Pass along resumes to contacts
- Amplify on social media

Once you have a little capital to spend,
your job is to spend it lifting others up.
That means encouraging your bosses to hire people from diverse backgrounds.
We are all climbing up a big wall to the sky. Don't stand on others' shoulders to get there.
You are the generation that will change the face of this industry forever. Never give up.

WG CELLS

VALUES

every company has them

VALUES

but what exactly are they?

VALUES

Trust

Transparency

People

VALUES

Trust

Transparency ——— GUIDING PRINCIPLES

People

VALUES

Top Down

Power

Conformity

VALUES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Top Down
- Power
- Conformity

Alignment of values creates good relationships **in** and **out** of the office.

DEFINE *your own values*

DEFINE *your own values*

⬡ What are your values/guiding principles?

DEFINE *your own values*

- What are your values/guiding principles?

- Think about the jobs you loved the most. What were the values they fulfilled?

DEFINE *your own values*

- What are your values/guiding principles?

- Think about the jobs you loved the most. What were the values they fulfilled?

- What were the jobs you didn't like? What values were missing?

Before the interview

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

Before the interview

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- **Company website**

Before the interview

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- Company website
- Glassdoor

Before the interview

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- Company website
- Glassdoor
- Friends

Before the interview

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- Company website
- Glassdoor
- Friends
- Friends of friends

Ask questions
In the Interview

Ask questions *In the Interview*

- What are the company values, how do they manifest themselves?

Ask questions
In the Interview

- What are the company values, how do they manifest themselves?

- How would you describe the culture of the organization?

Ask questions   In the Interview

- What are the company values, how do they manifest themselves?

- How would you describe the culture of the organization?

- What does the organization do to foster and support this culture?

Ask questions
In the Interview

- What are the company values, how do they manifest themselves?

- How would you describe the culture of the organization?

- What does the organization do to foster and support this culture?

- What sort of things are rewarded by the organization?

RECAP

RECAP

⬡ **EVERY COMPANY HAS VALUES**

RECAP

- ⬡ **EVERY COMPANY HAS VALUES**
- ⬡ **DEFINE YOUR OWN VALUES**

RECAP

- EVERY COMPANY HAS VALUES

- DEFINE YOUR OWN VALUES

- RESEARCH THE COMPANY

RECAP

- EVERY COMPANY HAS VALUES

- DEFINE YOUR OWN VALUES

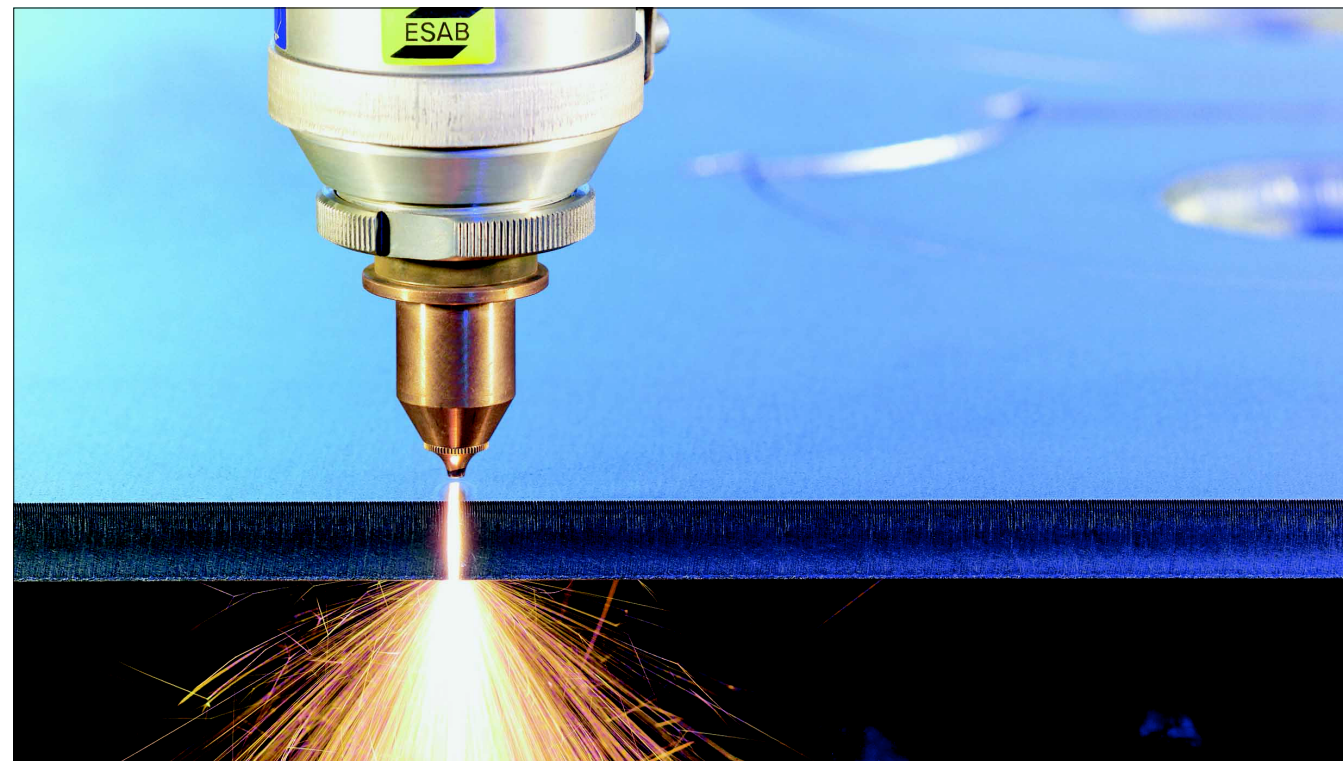- RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- ASK QUESTIONS IN THE INTERVIEW

RECAP

- EVERY COMPANY HAS VALUES

- DEFINE YOUR OWN VALUES

- RESEARCH THE COMPANY

- ASK QUESTIONS IN THE INTERVIEW

- IS IT A MATCH? SWEET!

Apply Like A Man.

Elizabeth Sampat

@twoscooters

60%

Likeliness to Negotiate

Men 4x more likely

Men   Women

Perception of Negotiation
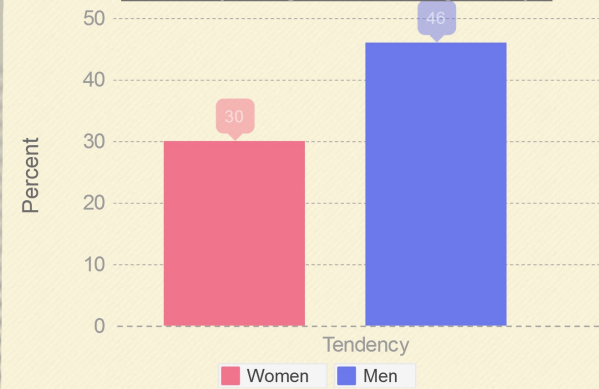
Men: Winning a ballgame

Women: Going to the Dentist

Designed by

Always Negotiate Starting Salary

50

40

30

20

10

0

Percent

30

46

Tendency

Women   Men

Based on a study done by Linda Babcock & Sara Laschever

*All US Statstics

An Example:

"**Designed** and **led development of** new gameplay systems and improvements to all existing gameplay systems"

"**Wrote and communicated** design **specs and docs** to the rest of the design team, engineers, and other pertinent members of the team."

"**Designed** and **led development of** new gameplay systems and improvements to all existing gameplay systems"

"I achieved **this positive result** through **these concrete skills** and actions."

"Alongside a team, I worked closely to re-design and implement a new content cadence, which helped bring this game into the top free apps on the Apple store."

"I brought this game into the top free apps list on the Apple store through a total re-design of the content cadence, which involved close collaboration with multiple disciplines."

WWYIOCWMD?

(What Would Your Inner Overly-Confident White Man Do?)
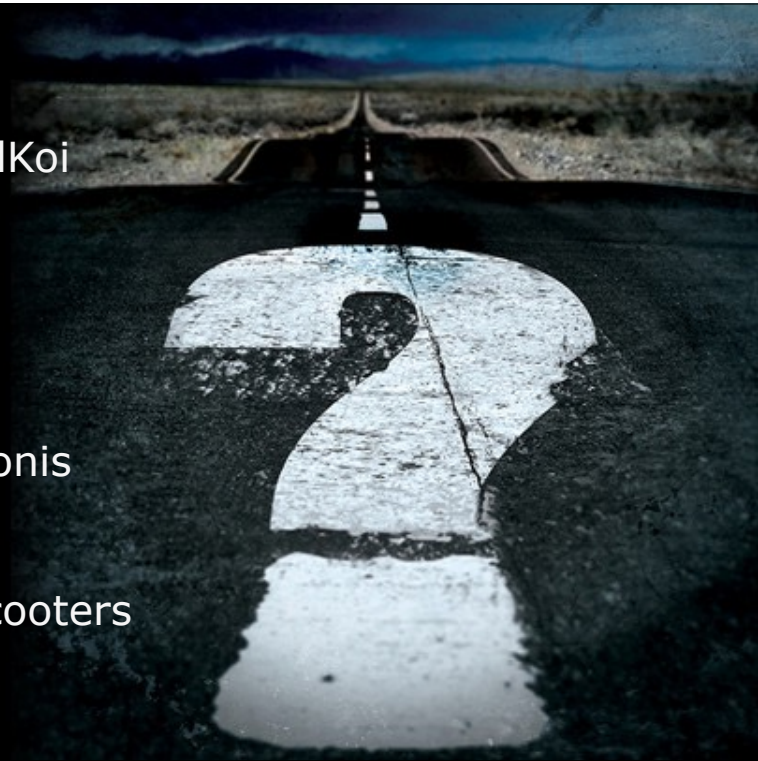
Actual White Male

Meet Trevor.

"Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it, you will land among stars." – Les Brown

Thank you.

Kim McAuliffe @EnameledKoi

My N. Tran @mynrtran

Amy Kalson @AmyKalson

Trevoli Ponds-White

Katie Chironis @katiechironis

Ellen Marett

Elizabeth Sampat @twoscooters

Questions?

Move to the wrap-up room if needed.