

URL: <https://ecorner-stag.tcg.stanford.edu/quick-dips/draw-confidence-from-your-accomplishments/>

When you doubt your abilities or expertise, remembering all the hard work you've done to date can be a source of confidence, says entrepreneur Sandy Jen. She describes how plagued with doubt she was while launching her first startup, and how she built up a reservoir of courage by taking stock of her accomplishments along the way, which helped her get through especially stressful times.



Transcript

- And I think a lot of us tend to overthink these things.. I'm sure all of you have had a giant decision and you list the pros and cons and you make a spreadsheet of what's good and what's bad and then you kind of calculate all the odds of what's the best decision that you can make and I kind of think of it as the choose it your own adventure book.. You know when you were a kid and you stick your fingers between every single storyline that's possible and then you find the one that you've already read that wasn't good and you picked the best one? I was an optimizer and as kid that was what I wanted to do and so that kind of person, generally, tends not to trust her gut cause there's no data in gut.. It's just kind of a raw feeling and so I decided to shut all that out, right, and trust the gut and then really prove to myself that I could be an entrepreneur and I could be a really good entrepreneur and so through getting to know my co-founders, it wasn't like we formed a team.. Like the idea just shot into our brains and then we got funding and, boom, we're like we're a start up.. No, no, no, nothing works like that.. Took two years of sort of failing and exploring ideas and coding out prototypes and then getting disillusioned to then almost quitting and then succeeding a little bit.. Killing ideas and then a lot of learning to sort of get things up and running and all the while I was still really uncomfortable and I was really scared.. Just because you say I'm gonna be an entrepreneur doesn't mean all those insecurities go away and so even after I quit my job and I was like I'm committed to this and I was like, okay, I'm gonna use my savings and eat junk food for the next two years.. It was still really terrifying..

I kept thinking, okay, what if someone asks me a question I don't know the answer to or what if I'm not smart enough to do this? What if I'm not good enough? What if this, what if that.. And that, sometimes, that chatter just got really loud and so one interesting story I wanna tell is it got really, really loud when we finally got lined up to pitch to Sequoia Capital.. I'm sure a lot of you have heard of Sequoia.. It's a pretty good V.C.. I suppose.. They funded Google and Yahoo and all those folks and so we each had our part in the presentation and my part was to explain the technology so I'm like, alright, I got this.. So I studied for hours like it was an exam.. I was like okay what are the coding positions that we made? What are the bugs that we fixed? What are the design decisions I made? Why did I architect this way? What are the giant coding obstacles that we had to overcome? And I was like, alright, I got this, I got this, and I was really, really nervous and we practiced and we practiced.. Because you're basically in a room full of billionaires.. Like generally older white men and I'm 5'2, like I said..

I look like I'm 18 cause I'm really young at the time.. I have one good outfit which I recycled for all of my pitches and you're sitting there thinking, okay, I'm gonna ask these people for a lot of money and then I was like there's no way they're going to ask me a question about memory management.. Why am I stressing about memory management? And that moment of sort of realization was sort of amazing to me because I kept thinking I'm a fake, I'm an imposter, I'm not good enough, but I built the product.. I did the work.. So no one knew that product better than I did.. So I wasn't an imposter, I couldn't be.. I couldn't be standing here if I was an imposter and so that sort of quieted the chatter a lot and there are those sort of key times in my career and I think what happened to you guys where you have all this self doubt and you have all this hesitation and then something crystallizes where you're like why am I thinking that way? And those moments are extremely powerful and so I tend to sort of stock those up so when I do feel insecure or I do feel doubtful, I kinda can remember back to when I was able to overcome that..