

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/convince-yourself-first/>

The first person you have to convince about anything is yourself, advises business leader, author and rocket scientist Sylvia Acevedo. She describes how, in 4th grade, she set an intention to go to Stanford, and persevered even though some people tried to discourage her. That perseverance and drive, she explains, proved to be a powerful force in spurring her career forward, especially as she battled bias and discrimination.



Transcript

- I really do believe the first person 00:00:06,193 that you have to convince about anything is yourself.. And that is that confidence, for example, we talked about that rocket, in that when I finally, after failing so many times, then having that rocket go up, I just knew inside of myself I could do this.. I could do science, I could do math, even though the world around me was telling me I couldn't.. But I had convinced myself that I could.. So for whatever your dream is, you're the one, you have to say, "I can do this," and know that within yourself.. And then figure out what is it gonna take to get you there.. You see my Stanford diploma.. When I was in fourth grade, my teacher, in a very far-sighted fashion, showed our class in Las Cruces, New Mexico, which, back then, was a small desert town, she showed us pictures of great universities.. And when I saw the iconic red-tiled roof and sandstone buildings and then the beautiful green, green hills, remember I grew up in the desert, I said, "I wanna go there." And she looked at me and she said, "You know, Sylvia, it's one of the best colleges in the world, universities in the world," but she said, "And you're smart, you can go there." And so at fourth grade, I just said, "I am going there." And that's like an amazing, amazing goal for myself, but I set about what is it going to take so that I can get there.. And I methodically went and did all those things, and one of the first things I realized is I had to get really good grades (laughs)..

- But you know what's so interesting 00:01:44,407 is that you had someone who said to you, "Hey guess what, Sylvia, you can do that.. That's a realistic dream." There are other people who get different messages where people say, "That's unrealistic.. You know what, forget it, you'll never get in there.. That's not a place for you." - Well, you know what, I had plenty of that 00:02:03,400 in my career, and even in high school.. My high school counselor, when I signed up to go to college counseling, she looked at me and she said, "What are you doing there?" And I said, "I'm here to get college counseling." And she said, "Girls like you don't go to college." And statistically, she was right, but as an educator, she was really wrong to say that.. You know what, that was like the three nos.. I stood up, went into her office.. And she followed me in and she said, "Well, what are you gonna study?" And I said, "I'm gonna be an engineer." And she laughed, and she said, "Girls aren't engineers." And I went on and, as you know, became a rocket scientist and engineer and all that.. But also in my career, many times, I did global and international travel, and it was really hard to convince them to let me do that.. And in fact, twice in my career, I had to pay for my trips to the countries before I even had that assignment in that company, because they didn't believe I could go there..

So on my own dime, I went to these two different countries, I met business leaders, I got letters of recommendation, I came back, and put those on my boss's desk, and they were like, or hiring boss's desk, and then what could they do but to hire me.. Another time, I could not break into another company's international business, no matter what I did.. I had amazing sales track record on the domestic side.. And so what I did is I created a presentation showing that if they had the same kind of penetration in multi-national accounts in the Apple Pacific region as I had back then, I would be able to, their sales would be up by several hundred million dollars.. And I remember the sales vice president, I had my little presentation, got him for just a few minutes in one of those side team rooms.. He looked at the presentation and he said, "Oh, wow, this is great." And he went to grab the presentation, I put my hand on it.. And he said, "Don't I get this?" And I said, "Yes, you do, but it comes with me."..