

A top-down view of a wooden workbench cluttered with various vintage hand tools. On the left, there are several hammers with wooden handles and metal heads. In the center, there are several piles of light-colored wood shavings, some curled into tight spirals. To the right, there are several chisels with wooden handles and metal blades, and a pair of dark metal pliers. The tools are arranged in a somewhat organized but busy manner, suggesting a workshop or a collection of old tools.

THE DISEASE OF SELF-DOUBT AND THREE TOOLS TO TACKLE IT Nir Bashan

There's a disease that kills far more people than any illness.

It's a disease that lives in all of us, lying dormant and waiting for the right moment to strike. It's a monster that spreads crushing self-doubt. It is the monster that attacks me while I'm writing these words. Is what I've written good enough? Is my editor going to hate it? Should I delete that last sentence? It's a natural disease that confronts everyone, but there are several solutions to control this monster we call self-doubt.

Self-doubt is really a disease of inaction. It's a paralyzing form of introspection in which we guess and then second-guess our actions to the point of dreadful inaction. It catches us and prevents us from taking the leap into creativity. It is a disease that leads to a lack of belief in our God-given creative abilities and therefore extinguishes creativity.

Self-doubt affects each and every profession from medicine to manufacturing, from finance to technology. The analytical mindset pushes us to answer in absolute terms only. It pushes us to activate only one part of the mind in the search for an answer. It shuns any creative input that can arise from thinking in a different and unique way. As such, it continues to rob countless people, professionals, and businesses of their potential for the betterment of everyone everywhere.

Dr. Kenneth Alexander is the chief of infectious diseases at a prominent children's hospital in the United States. He has established himself as a leading authority on all kinds of pediatric infectious diseases. He studies things such as human papillomavirus and influenza. He gives talks around the world on his unique approach to infectious diseases. To say that he has a lot to lose when it comes to thinking creatively is an understatement. But one day Dr. Alexander stumbled on a creative idea so radical, so out there, that it just might change the approach to cancer treatment forever. However, self-doubt in his case created a deep worry that any new idea would put his hard-earned reputation at risk.

Dr. Alexander was studying the Zika virus, which is carried by a female mosquito. Zika is really dangerous for humans, especially babies. It causes things such as low birth weight, disfiguration, brain development issues, and possibly even death before a baby is born.

But Dr. Alexander eliminated all self-doubt and instead looked at the Zika virus as not just as a plague for developing infants but what he saw was a new cancer treatment that might possibly eliminate cancer.

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Despite his training and study of infectious diseases, Dr. Alexander took a leap of faith alongside his colleagues Dr. Tamarah Westmoreland and Dr. Griffith Parks. This was not a small leap in thinking; it was a massive and risky leap. But he knew that self-doubt had to be conquered, and thinking creatively has the potential to empower ideas that cannot be seen with the analytical mind alone. Against all odds and with the dedication of his team, he started to use the Zika virus to kill cancer cells in cultures in his lab. And kill cancer it did. More recently, he showed that the Zika virus can kill cancerous tumors in animal models. Once sufficient evidence is compiled, he and his team will begin initial trials to treat cancer in children. What an incredible story of creative thinking conquering self-doubt to change the world.

At any point Dr. Alexander could have given in to conventional thinking and self-doubt. Whereas most of us would have given up because we don't want to risk our reputation or succumb to doubt, he worked creatively to create a breakthrough of epic proportions.

Why is this so important to understand? Because where comfort is pervasive, self-doubt thrives.

Modernity has brought on a host of comfortable conveniences that are life-changing. In the past several hundred years the human quest for survival has moved away from being a day-to-day struggle and into the relatively comfortable existence we know today. Where there is comfort, there is an abundance of time to question our actions. And when we question our actions over and over, inaction then drives us away from creativity and into doubt.

Today around the globe there is no longer a need just to survive. In that abundance of time spent away from dealing with sustenance each and every waking moment, there is plenty of time for self-reflection, self-analysis, and self-introspection, all of which could lead to crippling self-doubt and inaction in terms of creativity.

Our ancestors didn't have much time for self-doubt. Every waking moment was a fight for survival. But today comfort is prevalent in almost every corner of the globe. With all this time on our hands, away from the immediate needs of survival, we are prone to overthink, overprocess, and overanalyze. Self-doubt lies waiting for us to have enough time to think about what we are doing and question it. Over and over, like a vicious cycle of self-attack, we are drawn in with no end in sight. Small doubts begin to become bigger. Cracks become valleys. Self-loathing becomes the norm. Pretty soon the fear paralyzes us, and so we do nothing risky, nothing new, nothing creative.

Self-doubt tends to live in the analytical. Forever seeing the world as black and white, the analytical mind hesitates to offer a creative gray. All it sees is absolute. With that comes the crushing pressure to get it right, to not make mistakes, to hit the bull's-eye time and time again, to execute flawlessly. Because that view encompasses so little of our creative potential, it is beyond question that we carry around with us the crushing weight of self-doubt by trying to get it right all the time. Without the creative part of our human condition, we are destined to fail.

For example, you can see it play out in schools at all levels every day across the country. Teachers lecture and then ask students questions in hopes that they will receive the right answers, and this system for learning hasn't changed in a hundred years.

You see, most teachers are looking for the *right* answer. Not a guess, not a conversation, not the activation of the creative mind, but another example of privileging the analytical part of the brain. This training makes us afraid of being wrong. Our testing methods are the same. We have countless assessment tests that can verify if learning is taking place, but what exactly are we verifying? These assessments are really about how students perform on taking the tests and little else.

Our schooling has conditioned us to think that if we don't know the exact answer to a question, we shouldn't participate. We shouldn't guess, we shouldn't make a sound. It does this at the worst possible time in development: during childhood, when the creative mind is supposed to run free and take shape.

Because of all this, we've created a gap between where we could be as a society and where we currently are. Of course, I'm not naïve enough to think that this is the only reason we haven't achieved more as a whole. There are certainly plenty of other issues that block our way to progress. But the overwhelming power of the disease of self-doubt is such a strong force that everyone is affected by its crippling power at one time or another, probably from a very early age.

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THE THREE TOOLS TO TACKLE SELF-DOUBT

In light of the fact that we all can see how self-doubt is an ever-powerful force, I have three specific tools that you can use right now to tackle this common issue. Let's dive into each one.

1. THE FAUCET TAP

The faucet tap is a visualization method that not only can help you understand how ideas interact but also help you reduce the stress of having to "get it right" as we've been trained to do for so long. Here's what I'd like you to do. Imagine an open water tap that begins to flow. Each bit of water that comes out is made of millions of molecules that rush together to form water. The water does not care which molecule comes first or which molecule comes later. It doesn't stop to think about what it is; it just is.

When faced with crippling self-doubt, I often think about how water can represent a flow of ideas that is uninhibited regardless of what idea comes before it or what idea comes after it. In that moment the idea just exists.

Just as the water molecules interact without thinking about *how* to interact, your ideas can flow without there being any pressure for them to make sense immediately. When you take that pressure away, it makes it easier for you to play, to explore, to forgive, to create, and to make mistakes. Why? Because allowing your innate creativity, which has been a part of you since birth, to flow the way it did when you were a child will help loosen the grip of self-doubt.

2. THE LIGHT OF POSITIVITY

When you choose to see the positive instead of the negative, the way you look at the world will change completely. Positivity will allow us to carry an idea to its full and rightful destiny, providing the fertile ground in which creativity can grow. It turns out that this fertile ground of positivity also will help banish self-doubt.

I know that you may be thinking that that's a bit nuts. I mean, who would look at self-doubt—those deeply embedded weaknesses we are all afraid of exposing—with positivity? There is nothing positive about these things! But this is important, and it works. I challenge you to stop looking at self-doubt negatively and instead shift your attitude to one that's positive. Instead of attacking yourself and stopping the flow of ideas because something is “stupid” or “will never work” or “will be viewed by my peers as fringe and too out there,” allow yourself to develop options to let your ideas run free. Say to yourself that “this is just one idea of many” and remind yourself that with these newfound options you will see a subtle yet significant shift in your attitude. By allowing yourself to have options, you will slowly begin to shape your self-doubt into something more manageable.

This positivity will allow you to gather a collection of potential ideas that you don't have to act on if you don't want to. What freedom from self-doubt that brings! You can even cultivate ideas and keep them for later if you want to test-drive them at some point. Perhaps most important, positivity will allow you to burn away your self-doubt in a safe environment away from any judgment from yourself or others. What ends up happening is that you get to burn away the anxiety that comes with self-doubt in a way that gets it out of your system, and when you get it out of your system, creativity is able to take hold.

When you're not reliant on just a single precious idea, you give yourself a break and allow more creative opportunities to present themselves.

3. THE SHOTGUN

The third technique I have for dealing with the crushing weight of self-doubt is the shotgun method. This is a tool that helps you find your target and takes the edge off any attempt at perfection as a result. This technique is all about developing a bunch of ideas and seeing what sticks while banishing self-doubt.

I love Post-it Notes, and it's time to get some out. Take a bunch of Post-its or any blank pieces of paper that you can tear up into smaller pieces. Once you have your supplies ready, write down each self-doubt on its own piece of paper. You can write down "I lack resources" or "I should be better or faster or more agile" or "I wish I wouldn't rush a deal or contract or job search" and on and on. Write these self-doubts down and get them out of your system.

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You don't have to worry about getting this exercise right. There is no right. The doubts that you write down are yours and yours alone. Write down any doubts you may be having about anything. It may be that the first few are things that you are afraid of. It may be that the doubts you write down involve your lack of skills or lack of acquisition of a particular skill. It can be anything. This is the beginning of the self-doubt purge.

If you stick to it, soon something amazing will happen.

When you write down the elements that are giving you this doubt, pretty soon you will run out of things to write. The doubts will begin to run out, and what you will see is simply amazing: you will begin to come up with not doubts but ideas.

It may take a while or it may be quick, but that doesn't matter because soon these doubts will exit your system and ideas will replace them. Once you are done, walk away from these notes for at least a day.

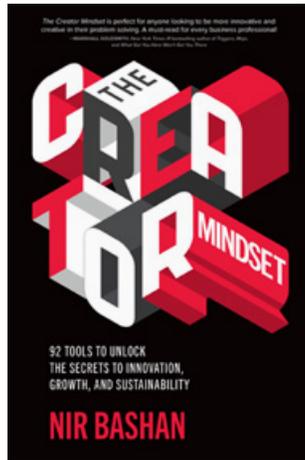
After those 24 hours have passed and when the time feels right, go ahead and reread what you're written. Look at your doubts and the ideas they have created. Much as a shotgun blast affects a general target, not a focused one, this method will allow you to lessen the strain of getting it right the first time and allow you to sift through a bunch of ideas that you probably would have blocked because of self-doubt. By giving yourself permission, patience, and the opportunity to explore, you will have allowed creativity to give you the power of the idea.

We all know that the burden of self-doubt can be crushing, but we also need to learn that defeating it is possible. Although almost everyone out there is thinking with the analytical side only, the future of business will be inherited by those who are able to fuse their minds into thinking holistically. This idea economy will eventually replace the antiquated industrial economy to become the new marketplace of the twenty-first century. That exciting new frontier is open to anyone who chooses to approach it creatively. Overcoming self-doubt won't just improve your business or career; it will make you and the community around you better. **Follow the three steps to crush self-doubt daily and allow creativity to take hold in its place.** 📌

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