The Edge: Stepping out of comfort zone into a new adventure

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I recently made a big career decision. I am stepping out of my comfort zone; I am leaving my first place of employment out of college — the place I have worked, celebrated, and developed for the past six years. However, it is not the decision to take this opportunity that I want to address, rather my reaction to it.

Over the past year there has been much discussion in regards to the confidence gap in women. The overarching theme is that women are more likely to wait until they feel ready for a promotion to seek one, whereas men are more likely to take on the task without questioning their own ability. Gender socialization and social structure play a significant role in how women feel at work and the ways in which they participate in the workforce.

The confidence gap has become very real to me. After learning I was offered my current position, my internal reaction was not one of elation, but of self-doubt. I quickly started to assess my skills and abilities and panic started to settle in. I began to question if I could do the job. I
dismissed the countless hours I spent on professional development and extra projects to enhance my skills. The girl who typically left an interview feeling like a million bucks dissipated into someone that was unfamiliar to me.

After I confidently made a case for increased pay and benefits, I started to focus on all of the insecurities that were in my head. I went home feeling anxious and confused. I should be celebrating my 'lean in' moment! I negotiated! Instead, I was paralyzed with feelings of not being worthy of the challenge ahead. As I started to tell people of my transition, I would scrutinize their response to see if they felt I was up to the task.

Was my reaction simply due to my personality? Was it a reflection of social cues I have gotten along the way? Was it the internalization of messages women receive from various social institutions that tell them they do not belong here? It is likely a combination of all of these, but for me personally, the feeling was strange, and worrisome.

Along the way I received great words of advice that reminded me of who I was, what I do, and why this opportunity was not an anomaly, but something I have been preparing for for years. A former boss of mine told me that managers hire based on a person's values, judgment, and hard to measure intangible qualities that make one candidate stick out from another. Today, I can say that if you are like me and have these moments of self-doubt in relation to your career, just keep in mind the words of Dr. Julie Freed…

"You're ready for that promotion. You're not an imposter. You were asked because others think you can too!"

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