

## The Passion Trap

### Module 4: The Truth About Confidence

Module four, the truth about confidence.

By now, you've explored a new perspective of passion. You've questioned authority, and are examining the “who says?” of it all. You understand that you are not limited by some mysterious DNA you either do or don't have, and you're aware that you can build your skills and talent with time, focus, attention and effort.

Okay, then what else might keep you stuck? That thing we always think we need more of before we begin— confidence. We think if we had more confidence we could do anything and everything. We would take that job, we would leave that job, we would be able to date, we'd be able to commit to a person. Anything at all. We think we need the confidence to do it. Here's one problem, the confidence doesn't come first.

The truth about confidence is that it has a funny way of coming up short, right when we need it most. That's because you literally never start with confidence. No one does. Confidence means you have ease in doing a thing. How would you have that easy if you haven't done it before? You also don't aim directly at confidence. It's a side effect.

Confidence is like cash. It's like, uh, I don't think I have enough on me. I don't have any on me. This is what we think. So if you don't have cash on you and you haven't gotten paid cuz you haven't done the work, what do you have? Courage. Courage is like credit. It's what we use and we don't have any cash to back it up yet. You have to use courage because that is how you get to take the initiating action that will ultimately lead to practice, and then confidence. I know you know this, but it bears repeating. I also think it's important to remember that courage is not the opposite of fear. So you don't wait until you're courageous either. Can't wait for any of these things.

A courageous act is taken in the face of fear despite uncertainty. The reason you need courage is because the stakes are high, which is what makes it nerve-wracking to begin with. If there are no stakes, you don't need courage. This is why we admire courage so much. If it were that easy, anyone would do it all the time. I am sure that there are a few things you could list right now that you would love to be more confident in. Sure, okay all of it. I'd like to be more confident in all of it, but it doesn't help to think in generalities like that.

So you know, let's get real specific. Maybe you've got great ideas but you have a hard time communicating them. Or you love to talk to big groups of people, but you're not

really organized in figuring out what you wanna say first and, and you don't have confidence around doing that. Maybe you're great at a party but you're scared one-on-one. A little intimidated by that. Maybe you're not great at dating, but you're great at being vulnerable in a really long-term relationship. Everyone lacks confidence when they try something new. This is normal.

Last module, we talked about skill and how you can not only learn to do things but learn to love them too because it feels good to practice something that you're good at. That's why passion can take root in things after you become good at them, not before. And that's the big goal, I believe. It's not to identify or chase down this unicorn of passion or talent, but to amass a set of skills that it feels good to use, and that give us options and other people value from the actions we take.

Let me give you an example. I have never had a passion for music, okay? I don't believe I had any special talent for music. I didn't learn to play flute because I was like, I really want to understand music and be a performer. No, none of these reasons. I joined the school band because my mother said, you have to do something. Pick an instrument you're gonna play.

I started with the saxophone. I was in second grade. My neck was like this. I don't know what I was thinking, picking the saxophone, but I thought, yeah, that sounds good, I'll do that. And I did it for a little while, but it was so heavy. It was heavy on my neck. It was hard for me to literally carry to school. So I was like, this is an occupational hazard. Like I can't, I don't wanna do it. So I thought I would quit. My mother said "try a different instrument." So I did. I switched to the flute and whoa, that is, that is a lot. Uh, more travel friendly.

I found it easier to play. I really liked it, but I didn't do it because I loved it. I did it because I joined school band, and we met in Wednesday mornings at 8:00 AM, and I played enough that when I was invited to join this regional honors band, I joined that. And then I was invited to audition for state band and I did that. I did not follow my passion into music or through my elementary school music career. Honestly, I didn't care all that much. And that was one of the most confident I was. Because there were no stakes around it for me. I wasn't saying this is what I'm gonna do for a living. I didn't think, like, am I really good at this? I had no, it was literally an activity.

But I learned something. I learned that I could learn an instrument and learn to enjoy playing music with other people and the feeling of being in a state band? I had never experienced something that huge and it was thrilling to be part of it. I got very confident in music. Not because everything was tied up in it, but because nothing was. In fact,

after I graduated, eighth grade went out to high school. I never looked back and I didn't miss it and I didn't care.

But here's my point. I'm not saying you should do things you don't care about because you'll be more confident. That's not my point. My point is, it's our nerve that gets in the way of becoming more confident at things cuz we think we couldn't possibly do it. Confidence and ease go hand in hand. And it's a great lesson to learn how confidence feels in a situation where the stakes aren't so high, where your whole identity is not on the line. That's where we get into trouble. And in fact, the things you're confident doing, the things that feel like no big deal, I promise you there's someone who's like, I could never do that.

Now of course there are lots of things that can kill our confidence, or at least injure it, even if we put everything we had into it, even more so. One of those things is criticism. Critical words are like flaming hot arrows that can set our burgeoning confidence ablaze. And people are gonna criticize, whether you ask them for their feedback or not. Other times, we don't care what they say. Other times, it really hurts and it makes us doubt ourselves. But we also have this critic in our heads. I don't need to introduce you to it because you're already well aware. It is that voice that tells you you're stupid, you're not good enough, you'll never be good enough. You're gonna embarrass yourself. Why couldn't you be more like this person? You should be doing that.

Oh, the critic. The critic eats our confidence for breakfast. That critic is, well, it's a lot of things, but it is the conditioned mind. It is what you were taught to believe based on all the influences you've had from your family, your parents, other adults, school teachers, I mean like you name it. Someone who had an opinion about what you do or should do, fed into this voice that goes nonstop in your brain.

I am trained in an approach to writing, creating and feedback called the Gateless Method, which was created by Suzanne Kingsbury, not by me. And she says this, the critic is the voice of fear. The pragmatist, it's another voice in your head, is the voice of the kind benefactor who wants to pay your bills and make sure you have plenty to eat and a place to sleep. The creative force does best when the pragmatist is able to take care of the details and move forward with a clear plan. The problem is the critic. And not only is that critic caustic, we've actually been told that the criticism is good for us, that you'll be better as a result of criticism. And in fact, you're not.

The critic is a sign of fear. It's the conditioned mind and it's what we think is an authority when it's not. How do you know what's the critic and what's real? What's intuition? People say this all the time. How do I know if it's the critic? Oh, you'll know. You know,

because of how it makes you feel. When you get an intuitive hit, it's clear, it's visceral. You just know you feel aligned around an idea or a decision. With the critic, it's chaos.

Here's how you know the critic is speaking. The critic is contradictory. It loops back on itself. It literally contradicts stuff it says. It'll say you'll never be able to go do this, and when you do, you're gonna embarrass yourself. Okay, but which is it, critic? It speaks in the abstract. You always, you never, sometimes you do this, it doesn't have specifics, it doesn't do a great job of making a case for itself.

The critic is all about the shoulds. It's judgmental. It points out where you're wrong, where you're weak and flawed. You might think, well the critic's right. It's not that you don't have weaknesses and flaws, we all do. But the critic is the voice that points that out. It also isn't trying to help you. All it's trying to do is make that fear bigger so that it blocks any forward movement. The critic does not speak in plans. It doesn't have remedies or solutions for you. It doesn't have anything interesting or new to say. It's been saying the same thing for years, decades.

It can actually make you feel a little sick. It just is kind of floating, generalized, you know, self-loathing. This ugh feeling. That's a bad feeling. It's a sign of the critic. It's also often the voice from the past. A voice that is old, not from an older person's, that's not what I mean. I mean it's not a new idea, it's something that has been going on and on and yammering for years. And I'll add this, the critic is also the loudest when it's on the verge of a breakthrough. That's what Suzanne Kingsbury taught me, and I have never forgotten it because it's true! Right before you're about to do something exciting, something, maybe you're taking a risk, maybe you're going to expand in a new way. The critic is going to try to hit the brakes and stop you.

And so right when you're about to do that thing is when it'll be the loudest. Matched only by right after you do something exciting, right after you've taken a risk, right after you've done something that surprises you and excites you. The critic will say that was stupid. Why'd you do that? That's dumb. You're gonna regret that. Because it has to keep pulling you back. So when I feel the critic, when I feel that getting louder, the din of the critic getting louder and louder, that's actually good news. I've learned to take it as good news, cuz it means something is about to happen. You can't win an argument with the critic. You can't convince it to come over to your side or to believe you. That is just what it is. You also can't get rid of it. This is a function of the mind.

I was watching a Netflix documentary, Jonah Hill's, with his therapist. I don't know if you saw that ever, it's called Stutz. And he says that in some ways we need that critic, which he calls Part X. We need it to have something to overcome. That is another way of

looking at it, that it's not that you could do everything if you didn't have a critic. It's because of that critic that may create the friction for you to move past it. But, you just can't change its mind. It doesn't have a mind to change. It's the ghost of an old idea and it doesn't serve you. The pragmatist is the part of you that says, okay, you're feeling a little concerned about your ability to do this. Why don't we look up some resources? Why don't we reach out to so-and-so? What can we do to help you do this and feel balanced and feel safe, and also make sure you have enough income and you have this and that and the other? The critic will guilt you. The pragmatist doesn't. The pragmatist is about plans, about moving you forward.

So when we start to listen for that, then we can separate the different voices literally, so that we can understand that our confidence won't grow the minute we abolish the critic. It will come when we start to give ourselves more and more evidence so that even though the critic keeps yammering on with the same arguments, we keep proving it wrong. Can't argue with results.

You see the conundrum, right? On one hand, we have this urge to go do a thing. We have all this energy, all this passion. We wanna go somewhere with it. And on the other we have, we crave the confidence to do that thing. And we're cowed by this critic who says, we can't. And you wonder why we get stuck. But it doesn't mean you have to stay stuck.

Let's just assume that you take a courageous act, your critic is yammering and you go, no, I'm gonna do it anyway. And you take an act and it goes well. You ask for the promotion, you get it, you get a pay raise, you get a new office. I don't know. However you see success. I mean, that's a very traditional way of looking at it. But however you measure the success of going after a thing that required risk and you did it, then what?

And don't talk to me about fearless. Oh, she's fearless or he's just fearless. That's how he can do all these things. I don't believe in fearless <laugh> and I certainly don't really respect it. Healthy fear is critical. To be without fear, literally without fear is to be unrelatable and unempathetic. If you claim to be fearless, why would I trust you? Why would I think you could help me at all with my fears? Why would I think you would understand me if you have no fears of your own? If everyone were fearless, we literally wouldn't be here as a species. Just period. Amen.

Every day you don't do something, you are actively preventing yourself from becoming more confident. Think about that. Every day you don't do the thing you want to do or try it or even begin to try it. You are saying, I don't wanna be confident in that. I'm gonna prevent myself from being confident in that. Even if all goes well, there's a chance

you're gonna then have, what? A case of imposter syndrome, which of course is this belief that the world made a mistake in believing and rewarding us. They are gonna find out they made this mistake and that we're a total phony.

So even when you go after the thing and you achieve it, the critic doesn't just go, okay, I quit. Then it kind of morphs into this imposter syndrome, which says, no, no, no, that was a mistake clearly. And everyone's gonna find out soon enough. This is the torture of imposter syndrome. It doesn't matter if the people you love and trust say, no, you're amazing. You deserve it. It's great. It doesn't matter. Even if you win awards or you get recognition, it doesn't matter if you have all the money in the world. You still have this little thought that says you're not supposed to be here. Or you'll think that the people who love you are just really trying to be nice or that they've been fooled too.

The most interesting thing about imposter syndrome is who tends to suffer it? And guess who doesn't suffer from it? People who don't have big ambitions and don't try to do big scary things and don't take risks or try anything new. There's an easy way to avoid imposter syndrome. Don't achieve anything and no one will think you don't deserve to achieve it.

You know who suffers from it the most are the most successful people. You can't find a successful person who doesn't say, oh God, I mean I can't believe, I don't even just watch the Academy Awards. Everyone up there just can't believe, ugh, they can't believe they won it. It's almost like we never really believe it. But my point is, it's not you have to get rid of imposter syndrome so you can be successful. The most successful people have it. Including one Seth Goden, who I'm sure you are familiar with. If not, you got a lot of reading to do ahead because he is just the master of crystallizing these ideas.

And in his most recent book, "The Practice: Shipping Creative Work," he says, and I quote, I feel like an imposter often. That's because my best work involves doing things I've never done before. So if you want to try and do new things and explore new parts of you and your life and your abilities, yeah, you're gonna have imposter syndrome! But you just go, okay, and? That's just that fear I have. On with my life.

I'll add something else that Seth Goden says. Imposter syndrome is real. It's a sign that you're healthy and that you're doing important work. It means that you're trusting the process and doing it with generosity. What this means is that it doesn't matter how smart, how successful, how wealthy or however else you measure success or happiness in your life, how many accolades, awards, testimonials you receive. Nothing will extinguish that flame of a thought that you shouldn't be there, that you're not the real

thing. And so we just acknowledge that this is part of what it means to be a striving human. And we just move on from there.

Oh my God, I used to say this all the time. I loved writing since I was little, real little like seven, like writing in notebooks. Like I, I loved it, but I always said, especially as I got older, that I wasn't a "real writer." I like to write, but I'm not like a real writer. Why? Why? Why do we say these things to ourselves? It used to drive my mother crazy.

Real writers went on to be hard-nosed journalists who won the Pulitzer Prize, or they just read these books that I hadn't read. And so, you know, I was disqualified as a writer. My own confidence has always suffered. I just never believed, as you probably feel the same way about some things. I was like, well, I'm not really, eh, you know, we're so quick to disclaim and discount our own abilities, our own achievements. I won a grant my senior year of college, that was awarded to the person most likely to succeed in a career in writing. And I was like, oh yeah, no, that's... I won it. And I was like, yeah, that was a mistake. My thought was "Cool. I won it. Boy, are they gonna be disappointed."

When I graduated college, I wouldn't even apply to "real jobs" cuz I didn't think I was a real contender. I was like, well, I have no experience so no one will ever hire me. What did I think? No one hires young people ever? I temped for a long time, simply because it was a job I knew that anyone could do and so no one would question whether I could do it. That makes no sense.

What will it take to build confidence? Well, there is no shortcut. There's just how much effort you wanna put into it. There's no hack that you missed. Some people will say, a lot of people say, oh, you wanna get more confident? You have to get outside of your comfort zone. You should aim for that. You know, try to do something every day that scares you. I get that these are popular ideas. They are sort of an eye roll for me. I understand the premise, but aiming for discomfort is like aiming for confidence. That isn't in and of itself the goal. In fact, I devoted an entire chapter in my book "Unfollow Your Passion" to why you can stay in your comfort zone. And my point is, that we spend most of our time uncomfortable. You're born into discomfort. We all experience varying levels of discomfort, but it's part of the human condition. And my point is, why would I aim for it? People say, well, you know, it's easy to get too comfortable and then not go after something and not do something. Oh really? How comfortable are you right now? Even if something becomes really easy to do when you do it over and over again, you're gonna start to probably get uncomfortable. You especially cuz you're here, because you're like, should I be doing something else? I wish I were doing something else. There can be tremendous discomfort even in being too comfortable. So my take on it is I don't aim to be uncomfortable. I know I will have to, as all humans do, endure varying

degrees of discomfort. But my goal is not to do something because it makes me uncomfortable. That's a pursuit of the privileged. My goal is to become more comfortable doing more things. And the only way to get there is to continue to do the thing so that it becomes comfortable.

I can tell you when I first got my Peloton, that was not comfortable, but I didn't do it because I love being uncomfortable. No, I don't. If it had all bad effects, if I just hurt my, you know, ruined my knees and, and gained weight and like, just felt really horrible, I'd say, this is a terrible machine. Take it outta my house. Being uncomfortable wouldn't be enough reason to keep a peloton, I'll tell you that. But becoming more comfortable by doing it over and over. I had of course experienced lots of positive effects as a result of doing that or doing any physical movement.

I like to be comfortable. It doesn't mean I don't take risks. I take risks all the time. But I do it from a place of sturdiness. I do it from a place of, I make sure I take care of myself. I'm not gonna go into a stressful and risky situation if I hadn't eaten or slept. I take good care to make sure I am physically comfortable and grounded so that I can take on the risks and challenges. I don't, I can't think of a better way to do it.

Marcus Buckingham has done a ton of research as I've, it's worth checking out. He says that we don't do our best work when we are uncomfortable, anxious, and stressed. I mean, are you at your best when you're hangry? I don't think so.

When I think about comfort, I think it has some relationship to confidence. Cuz when we see someone doing something confidently, we say, oh, they look so comfortable up there. They look so at ease. They look so themselves. In order to feel like ourselves doing something that we admire, we have to do it ourselves over and over so that it is really us doing that. That's why I don't buy into this fake until you make it garbage. Because, uh, if you've ever tried to fake something that's kind of uncomfortable, don't you think? It feels misaligned. You wanna talk about being a phony? Imposter syndrome? I don't wanna fake confidence.

So someone who's really confident but isn't confident about this particular thing says, "Hey, I don't really know how to do this thing, so I would love some help. Are you willing to help me with it?" There's a confident person, because they can face the uncertainty and take action to get what they need. That's the goal. See, I am making a careful distinction here between confident and comfortable because if I'm not confident yet, the least I can do is make sure I have a comfortable, solid base from which to practice in order to become more confident. And yes I was talking about some physical ways to feel more comfortable in your body by taking care of your body, in your surroundings,



but also in your relationships, in your own spiritual or whatever other kind of practice you have something that grounds you and makes you feel connected to something larger. Those things also help you feel more grounded and secure. What we need in order to build confidence, isn't more confidence, it's patience. Real confidence is so valuable because of what it takes to earn it. If something were that easy to have, it wouldn't be very valuable. Anyone could do it.

Just like you appreciate something that you pay more for, and treat it differently than the thing it didn't pay much for. Confidence has value when you treat it that way. Courage applied often with the goal of expanding your comfort zone is what yields confidence. You just have to be willing to give it and yourself a chance.

This is not a light lift, this is a heavy lift and it's, it's like weightlifting. You lift heavy things regularly. We've talked about and you've written about your relationship to passion, right? You've written about your skills and talents. Confidence isn't a skill in and of itself, right? Confidence is a feeling, and to really experience that. You don't look at it as something you hope you have someday. You already have it. You just have it in different areas. In order to connect with that confidence in you and your capacity for it, we need to be physically present, is what we need, to be physically in the body. And you can't be there unless you pay attention to the fact that you are there.

So you can close your eyes if it's safe to do so, rest your hands in your lap. Feel the ground under your feet. Feel the chair or the cushion under your hips. Get a sense of your spine just rising flexibly out of your pelvis, right? Your relaxed posture. I want you to drop your shoulders, relax them, unhook your jaw, relax your tongue, relax your eyelids. Now starting back at your feet, I want you to think of the word ease. Ease is not having to contract or to fight or to struggle. And I want you to tap into a sense of ease in your feet, in your calves and the large muscle groups of your legs and upper thighs. There's an ease that you embody right now.

I want you to pay attention to a sense of ease and openness in your hips and in your spine. A sense of like <sigh> rising expansion and openness, as in nothing's constricting or confining you. Turn your attention inside of you, all of those organs and muscles and other things, bones, just easily breathing and following their own rhythm. The ease with which air is entering and leaving your lungs. The ease with which all of the systems of the body are just ticking along without you having to do anything.

I want you to have a sense of ease through your hands. Your hands do so much work. All those tiny bones and muscles and just relax. Think of ease through your neck and your shoulders can even roll your shoulders for a minute and feel them relaxing down.

And that ease, that kind of warmth just rises right up through your neck and your jaw and your ears, and then through the top of your head so that you feel grounded but also weightless and open.

Now you're gonna write to a prompt, which will trigger a thought, an image, an idea. And don't worry about what to write, write down or what to come up with. It's more like I want you to sit there as if you're bird watching. Like what flutters, what wings do you see moving? Let your subconscious serve up to you something that maybe you didn't expect. You have to be open and very still to do that. And you're going to just simply jot down as if you're taking dictation, whatever images, thoughts, words arise.

You're not trying to make something happen. There's a sense of ease to the whole effort. Your prompt is this: A time you felt confident and easy doing a thing. When the task at hand was a no-brainer. When you realized you could do a thing, that you were capable. What was that moment like? You've probably had lots of them, but when I say that, what moment rises to the top? A time when you felt, oh, I can do this. I know how to do this. Where were you? First of all, how old were you? What's happening? Just jot it down as you remember it. And also the feeling, what did it feel like to find that kind of easeful effort just move through you.

Maybe it had nothing to do with work. Maybe it had everything to do with work. A time you found ease and confidence in an action or moment. Set the timer for 10 minutes And start writing.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

So what was that like? What came up? Was it a total surprise or did you see it coming a mile away? What did you capture that maybe you didn't even notice the first time? Well, you lived it <laugh>, you know. Go back and reread what you wrote, not to fix it. You're not editing here. You're looking through and saying, what surprised me? What feels new? What feels familiar and what makes me feel most alive? I love these kinds of exercises because you're often surprised at what comes up. I know I am.

Even if the incident you wrote about or the moment you wrote about was about like, I don't know, fishing and you're not fishing right now. What about that ease? How can you bring the experience of that ease into your life now? Now maybe you wrote about something from your childhood and maybe you wrote about something that you do now, but is there something in your life that comes so easy to you, just like that?

How can you channel that feeling? Kind of tag onto that feeling in order to try the thing that you want to try? Can you give yourself that chance to practice ease and patience in doing a thing, knowing that you're not gonna be expert right away and that no one cares if you're expert right away? Where can you apply that sense of ease that you already know you possess into something, into an area where you really need it the most? Because in the area where you feel less easy, and the area you feel very confident, it's the same person. It's all you. It doesn't mean you'll be equally confident doing everything. But what part of that can you bring into the things that don't feel as easy? And start writing.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

As I said, the goal is not to feel confident every second of the day, but if we can make it a practice to invite ease and expansion and a little self-forgiveness as we're learning, you will make tracks toward feeling more confident, much sooner than you would expect. And yes, it takes courage, and courage is a heavy lift.

Once you do it, it can become easier to do. What we want is something to keep us going. How do we keep it going? Also known as motivation. As I'm sure you can guess, I have a bit of a counter take on motivation. And in the next module, our final module for this course, we'll talk about the truth about motivation. We'll see you there.

<End of Module 4>