Taking Risks on The Real You: Three Ways to Erupt Yourself and Your Career

A quick guide on breaking through barriers, and buzzwords, to embrace career disruption, project professional presence and build emotional intelligence and authenticity in the workplace.

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Do you subscribe to the mantra below?

*Be yourself.*
*Those who matter don’t mind;*
*and those who mind, don’t matter.*

There are several versions of this quote, but the core idea is the same: the important people in your life will know your value.

What about in business? Do the same rules apply?

Not bound by blood or friendship, those who matter, might mind: your board, your boss, your clients and your teams.

Or will they? Some of us never get the chance to find out.

If fears of failure, or looking foolish, are holding you back from:

- Getting comfortable in your own skin
- Revealing the depths of your expertise and abilities
- Projecting professional presence and confidence in work situations
- Accepting your strengths and weaknesses for what they are
- Raising your voice in a noisy, complex work environment

Then please read on. The power of your presence is inside you, and it is time to confront the risks holding you back, and experience the rewards when you *erupt yourself beyond your potential.*

*Note:* If you’re the kind of co-worker that sends emails in ALL CAPS, or leaves their dirty dishes in the sink for days (*among other office faux pas*), this post might not be for you. Might want to start with an office etiquette article.
Breaking Through Barriers (and Buzzwords)

If there’s one constant I’ve found in business is the propensity toward the “bright and shiny.” Always hungry for answers to simplify our lives, or enhance our situation, we are drawn to new ideas, advice, and movements, driven by thought leaders with interesting stories to tell.

The current environment is no different. More recent and popular enterprises in personal disruption, professional presence, and authenticity and emotional intelligence, are different in nature, but share similar threads: removing barriers (both internal and external) and overcoming risks to achieve fulfillment in your personal life and career.

1. Embrace Career Disruption

Admittedly, before one can erupt their power inside, they must disrupt the whole world around them. That is what Whitney Johnson, acclaimed author and president/cofounder of Rose Park Advisors’ Disruptive Innovation Fund, shares in her recent book, “Disrupt Yourself: Putting the Power of Disruptive Innovation to Work.”

In her LinkedIn Big Ideas 2016 article on this topic, she explains “when you disrupt, you move along something called an S-curve — the necessary pivots in our own career path,” through stages of competence, confidence and mastery. Each phase involves the risks of taking on new challenges and sustaining success over time.

In the Quartz article “To get ahead in your career, disrupt yourself first,” Ming Hsu, assistant professor at Berkeley’s Haas School of Business and Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute is quoted: “People are often poor judges of the amount of risk, and can be swayed by surface elements, such as ambiguity.”

Opportunities that seem high-risk on the surface, such as leading the implementation of a new corporate process, or taking on a role or task outside of your knowledge and experience, can yield the highest rewards and with low competition from outside forces. In these scenarios, your main adversary is yourself, including past experiences and implied anxieties.

Even if you fail at the specific project, these types of initiatives force you to learn skills, absorb knowledge, and challenge yourself and others, in ways you haven’t done before. This experience will stick with you in the long-term, no matter your initial outcome.
2. Project Professional Presence

This is known by several aliases: the “X” factor; executive presence; personal branding. I prefer the French phrase “je ne sais quoi,” or “a quality that cannot be described or named easily,” since that is exactly how I feel when I’m in the presence, of someone with presence.

In a recent post on professional presence How Will Others See You in 2016 and Beyond?, Oswald Companies senior vice president and Women’s Leadership co-chair Catherine Kosin shares “building professional presence is an all-inclusive reflection of yourself and requires effort and time to develop.”

In other words, presence is a very external thing, bound to a wholly internal drive. It’s not something you’re necessarily born with, but something that you must nurture each day. It’s the value you give of yourself through your personal interactions, and example you set for others, despite the risks of revealing the real you.

I define presence as the direct result of the work you put in when no one is looking, when someone is actually looking.

Still apprehensive? Here’s a bonus: you can make biology work on your side. View the highly acclaimed Amy Cuddy TED Talk Your body language shapes who you are and join the millions who’ve made peace with “faking it” until you’re making it.
According to the Wikipedia definition, **Emotional intelligence (EI) or emotional quotient (EQ)** is the capacity of individuals to recognize their own, and other people’s emotions to discriminate between different feelings and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior. The idea was made mainstream by Daniel Goleman in the mid-1990s with his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence*.

The awareness component of EI/EQ is key. It’s not about being overly emotional in work settings, but it is about being appropriately emotional when the situation calls for it. It’s in your thoughts AND your actions.

For example, we might be conditioned to check our emotions at the lobby elevator and run our teams like well-oiled machines. There are major risks in showcasing our feelings: major blow-ups, showing signs of “weakness,” etc.

However, EQ is about the right balance of interpersonal connection to the humans we work with, and using intelligence to prevent lines from being crossed. This balance is delicate, but through awareness and practice, your perspective can change.

In my experiences, an output of strong emotional intelligence is **authentic collaboration and leadership**. It’s the stepping stone to gain deeper trust for and from others; the precursors to getting your thoughts heard, and movements, well, moving.
There are risks in revealing the real you: to yourself, your peers and your superiors. It’s going to take new visionary mindset to see beyond the present circumstances in front of you.

You may find out there is much more work to be done before you ready to take the big leap. Or you might pull a Steve Harvey (no, not the famous flub), and simply jump.

**If you mind, it will matter.** Wake up every day ready to take on new challenges, and act and communicate purposefully toward achieving your goals.

Align yourself with the people, networks and organizations that embrace the values that you hold dear, and be the role model for others still finding their way. Fight the fears of changing your situation when it’s called for: a comfort zone isn’t all that comforting in today’s volatile, fast-paced business environment.

As we say often at our organization - which is built on identifying, reducing, managing and transferring the risks of businesses and individuals - one of the biggest risks out there is standing still, and doing nothing.

Long, long, story short. If you don’t disrupt yourself (or as I’ve described, erupt the real you inside) someone else out there is, and will be right on your heels. There’s room for all of us to advance, and frankly, a successful future depends on it.

If I can leave you with one closing thought, it’s this: engage.

Attend a professional event. Join a committee. Take a co-worker that you don’t know out to lunch. Make the choice to take an active role in the world and people around you.

When you do, you’ll find that things like career disruption, professional presence and emotional intelligence, well, they’re just part of the gig.

Still need inspiration? Check out this collection of quotes from women leaders.
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