

Building Professional Confidence: Why and How

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What's Holding You Back?

So you graduated from law school and passed the bar exam. You have the opportunity to grow into a powerful, self-reliant leader with excellent instincts, judgment, and ability to help individuals and change the world for the better. What's holding you back from recognizing and becoming the best version of yourself?

Fear of...

- Losing a job
- Malpractice
- Looking foolish
- Being rejected by others
- Losing a case or client

If you are a lawyer who lacks confidence, it's because you aren't aware of your superpowers.

Confidence Myths

- It's a myth that confident people do not feel anxiety or fear
- It's a myth that fear and anxiety are signs of weakness
- It's a myth that confident people feel confident before they act
- It's a myth that how confident one feels on the inside accurately reflects one's competence

Competence is in Your Control!

Here's how to grow and ensure your competence:

- Be diligent
- Be mentally, emotionally, and physically able to do the job
- Already have sufficient learning and skill when you take on a matter. If you don't have those things:
 - Team up with a lawyer who does have sufficient learning and skill and/or
 - Refer out to a lawyer who does have sufficient learning and skill and/or
 - Get yourself up to speed with sufficient learning and skill before doing the work
 - **AND...** get malpractice insurance—it's your safety net

Malpractice Insurance is Worth it for Peace of Mind

Standard: \$100,000/\$300,000 in limits. Cost varies according to areas of law, years barred, and size of firm. In practice less than three years? Check out **Lawyers Mutual's Strong Start Program** for solo attorneys in practice 3 years or less—***it's surprisingly affordable!***



You Have Lawyer Superpowers

→ You are brilliant—you've gone through school and passed the California bar exam. You've overcome hurdle after hurdle to get to this point. From that journey, you've developed knowledge, skills and talents that you don't even know you have. Don't underestimate these powers!

- **Superpower #1.** You have an ability to get to the root of a problem, untangle it, come up with options, and create a roadmap for dealing with it. You don't need to have all the answers.
- **Superpower #2.** Your law license is the great equalizer! You don't have to wait to be hired. You can be your own boss.
- **Superpower #3.** Access and influence. You have powerful peers. You also have endless opportunities to demonstrate leadership and influence.
- **Superpower #4.** Yourself! You have rich experiences and talents that helped you get where you are today—capitalize on them!

(This is not an exhaustive list.)



How to Uncover and Develop Your Lawyer Superpowers (and your confidence)

Tools to help you develop your superpowers and confidence.

Take Control of Your Presence. Make sure others see the best version of you online, in writing, and in person.

Harness the power of first impressions:

- In writing
- In person
- In court
- On the phone
- Online
- With clients
- With opposing counsel
- With colleagues/peers

Review and update your resume and complete free or low-cost profile sites.

- Degrees, awards, distinctions, volunteer work, leadership positions
- Update often with speaking engagements, publications, volunteering, etc.
- LinkedIn, SuperLawyers, AVVO, etc.
- Don't forget to highlight and capitalize on the rich life experiences you had before law school!

Be smart about headshots and websites:

- It's worth paying to get ones you're happy with
- You are judged by them, for better and for worse
- You can have different ones for different purposes

Social media: a word of caution

Carefully curate your personal and professional social media profiles—you're a professional now. People want to come to you for life and other advice, so be careful what you post!

Law School Changed You: Get to Know Yourself Again

Discover your natural talents and practice them.

- The more you develop your talents, the more likely you are to become the BEST (vs. spending time and energy trying to overcoming weaknesses)
- Your “strengths” may be so natural that you aren’t even aware of them or know you can improve them
- Gallup CliftonStrengths Finder tests 34 areas of strength

Get crystal clear about your “Why”

- Be able to explain the values you bring to your clients and to your community in a nutshell or elevator pitch
- A must for marketing/business planning
- Sets you apart from the crowd
- See: **Find Your Why** by Simon Sinek

Reassess and work on your personal and professional boundaries, i.e.: When to say “yes” and when to say “no”

- This is a MUST for preventing burnout
- Helps with clients, opposing counsel, personal relationships and time management
- Some good reads:
 - **Unf*ck Your Boundaries** by Faith Harper, PhD, etc.
 - **Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life** by Henry Cloud
 - **Dare to Lead** by Brené Brown (and her TED Talks!)

Create Your Own Community

Fill your community with people who want to help you succeed because you share their values (and vice versa). Invest time and energy in:

- Nurturing relationships that don’t depend on a single success or failure
- Being a reliable participant in that community—expect to give more than you get
- Including people of all practice levels—from law students to retirees
- Giving and receiving honest feedback
- Providing and developing a safety net of relationships

Places to Seek Community

- Local bar associations/committees
- Bar associations based on identity, affinity groups
- Associations based on legal practice areas
- Alumni associations
- Non-law groups, committees, associations
- Volunteer projects

Benefits of Peer Support

Don’t underestimate peer support. Peer support lets you:

- Bounce ideas off each other
- Give/get referrals
- Co-counsel
- Share resources (e.g. office, support staff, etc.)
- Get perspective
- Get back-up in a crisis

Work on Building Your Legal Competence

- Be realistic: Decide the scope of what you can handle with the help of your mentors and community. Everything takes longer than you think it will. Consider:
 - Limited scope opportunities
 - Taking on “smaller” cases
 - Co-counseling
 - Volunteering
 - Contract work (e.g., court appearances; ghostwriting)
- Take advantage of practice guides, available for FREE at law libraries
 - CEB OnLAW
 - Rutter Guides
 - Matthew Bender
- Seek out templates
 - Paid sources (e.g., CEB, Westlaw, Lexis, etc.)
 - Many affinity bar associations maintain document banks
- Get MCLEs
 - In-person helps with networking
 - Online for more obscure areas
 - Many free options, e.g., check out <https://pbtraining.org/>



- Join Listservs
 - Affinity groups
 - Bar associations
 - Practice-related areas
- Take on Pro Bono Projects
 - Legal research and writing
 - Trials
 - Transactional
 - Public speaking
 - Litigation
 - Legal clinics
 - Client intake

Pro bono projects are available in various areas of law, including immigration, landlord-tenant, government benefits, intellectual property, elder law, employment law, business and nonprofit formation, children's rights, probate, wills and trusts, etc.



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A Final Word about Self-Acceptance and Facing Our Fears

Don't compare yourself with others.

The actions of confidence come first, the feelings come later.

- It's like learning to swim: hold your breath and paddle like crazy! You'll get better with practice.
- Take action with the faith that your legal education, smarts, determination and resourcefulness will get you through.
- Be patient with yourself and focus on the process instead of obsessing on outcomes.

"Genuine confidence is not the absence of fear; it is a transformed relationship with fear."

- Our "fight-or-flight response" is natural when we leave our comfort zone. Get used to know it and use all that energy for good!

- Next time you're nervous, try pausing to observe what is going on in your body with curiosity (e.g., heart racing, palms sweating, etc.).
- Try breathing in for 6 counts, holding it for 6 counts, breathing out for 6 counts, etc.

"Strive for self-acceptance over self-esteem."

- Self-acceptance: Being patient with yourself when moving beyond your comfort zone and not judging so harshly. You will make mistakes along the way. All successful people do!
- Three elements: mindfulness, reflection, feedback/honesty.

Quotes from ***The Confidence Gap*** by Russ Harris.

Be HEALTHY

Healthy Confidence = Grows Competence

You're OK with saying: "I'm not sure; let me research and get back to you."

You have faith in your education and abilities. You can figure out what you need to do!

You seek out candid feedback.

False Confidence = Risk of Malpractice

You don't admit how much you don't know, to yourself or your client.

You're always thinking you can wing it in lieu of thorough preparation.

You need to be right; you avoid criticism.

Remember

- Law is not an easy profession, but it's the business we've chosen.
- It can be extremely fulfilling.
- Work hard on staying healthy—mentally and physically.
- Make time for people you love and things you enjoy doing.
- You are not a machine—don't aspire to be one.
- Your pre-law school life experience is valuable: skills can be channeled into your own unique way of practicing law.
- Nurture yourself outside of law practice; balance is critical to true, long-term success.