



## 6 Ways for Women Business Owners to Stop Worrying

Stop worrying so much ... it's bad for business. Follow these 6 steps to turn your inner worrier into a business warrior.

*I'd like to be just a little bit more open to making mistakes and not worrying about it so much.*—Joan Jett, rock star

Are you a worrier? If you're a woman business owner, the answer is likely "yes," according to a recent report and white paper from CDR Assessment Group. The study, which focused on executives and why women have trouble breaking the glass ceiling, found that 65 percent of women leaders tend to be "worriers" under stress. In contrast, stressed out male leaders are more likely to fall into categories such as "egotists," "rule breakers" and "upstagers."

While none of these behaviors are necessarily worthy of emulation, worrying is particularly problematic because it negatively affects the perception of women as effective leaders. In contrast, being egotistical and breaking the rules ... well, aren't these pretty much the traits you think of when you think of a typical entrepreneur?

A little bit of worry isn't necessarily a bad thing. Worriers tend to study and analyze when they're under stress, which can enable you to see all sides of a situation and avoid taking unnecessary risks. The problem arises when you can't stop worrying or analyzing. Suddenly you're trapped in analysis paralysis, unable to act because you're trying to decide which option to choose.

While worriers are overanalyzing in a (misguided) effort to protect themselves from anything going wrong, they often miss out on business opportunities that more confident entrepreneurs snap up. Their employees, clients and partners are less likely to trust them as leaders. (Would troops have followed General Patton into battle if they'd seen him wringing his hands and asking "what-if" about the outcome?) Not to mention, worriers suffer sleepless nights, stomach pains and a host of other physical ills.

But not to worry, says report author and CDR Assessment Group president Nancy E. Parsons, who notes that even an ingrained personality trait like worrying can be minimized or neutralized if you learn to manage it productively. What can you do to harness worrying for good instead of letting it hurt your reputation and your business?

**1. Recognize your instincts.** Parsons says the report is "good news" for women leaders because it makes them cognizant of the behavior, and simply being aware of your tendency to worry will help you manage it better. Ask yourself, "Is this a real risk, or is it just my worrying kicking in?"

**2. Capitalize on worrying.** Don't try to overcompensate for worrying by becoming Ms. Happy-Go-Lucky. Instead, identify what's making you worry and take steps to deal with that using research skills. For instance, if you're worried about extending credit to a new client because you've been burned in the past, do a thorough credit check, talk to your attorney about creating a better contract to protect you from problems you've encountered before, and institute a payment policy (such as partial payment in advance) to alleviate some worry.

**3. Set time limits.** Once you've done what's necessary to mitigate the risks you're worried about, stop. In the example above, you could spend hours drilling down 26 Google search result pages into every mention of the client's name and scanning them for suspicious activity. Don't. Just stop.

**4. Partner up.** A business partner, strategic partner or key employee who is more risk-tolerant is a good foil to your natural worrying. If you don't have such a person on board, start looking for one. For instance, I'm a natural optimist while one of my partners is a worrier. We make a nice balance as she digs into what can go wrong while I convince her of all the ways it's likely to go right.

**5. Start small.** Build your confidence by taking small risks with minimal chance of loss. And if something does go wrong with your small risk, accept the loss as the cost of doing business, but also learn from it. What went wrong? What can you do to prevent the same problem next time? Getting your team's input will help you get different perspectives and keep you from obsessing solo.

**6. Get help.** One problem worriers have as business owners is they often have no one to unload their worries on. If you don't want to look weak to your team and don't want to burden your friends and family, an outside advisor such as a mentor can be a good sounding board for you to vent your fears and get advice. SCORE, the Small Business Development Centers (disclosure: Both are clients of my company) and the Women's Business Centers are great places to find experienced, impartial counselors who can listen to and advise you.

So stop worrying. By taking the steps above, you can turn your inner worrier into a business warrior.

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