



REPLAY: When Self-Doubt Creeps Up

As we look ahead to 2023, we leave you with one of our favorite episodes to set you up for success in the new year. Takara is an Emmy-nominated producer and director making her way in a new industry. She's doubting her abilities and questioning the decisions that got her here. Stevon helps us tackle self-doubt by updating our definitions of success.

Stevon Lewis: Hi everybody. Stevon here. The New Year is coming! For me, and perhaps for many of you, this is a time to reflect on the past, take stock of where you're at, and look ahead at what's next. You might be getting ready to take a big step in your life or career, make a bold decision, change things up a bit. Or a lot. So I wanted to share one of my favorite episodes with some strategies to help you stick with your intentions and resolutions, even when the self doubt or impostor syndrome kicks in. As always, thank you so much for listening; we'll be back next year!

What's up everybody? Welcome to How to Talk to High Achievers About Anything, I'm Stevon Lewis, a licensed psychotherapist in private practice. On this show, we share stories of people who are striving for something big, especially black and brown folks. People who are facing roadblocks like we all do from others and from within ourselves. I offer feedback and strategies so that together we'll figure out how to achieve on our own terms.

Today, we welcome Takara. Takara decided to make a bold career change and finally made her move. But when the pandemic hit feelings of self-doubt resurfaced and made her question, whether she can make it.

Let's get into it.

Takara: I am Takara Joseph and I am an Emmy-nominated producer and director living in Los Angeles. Currently I am producing full-time on a freelance basis. I'm also kind of on the fence of I'm currently considering pursuing corporate employment trying to weigh the perks or the pros and cons of working in the corporate production environment versus kind of having a little bit more freedom in the freelance capacity.

I, for many years knew I wanted to be in film and my parents being Caribbean were like pick the safe choice. So in undergrad, I got my degree in public relations and communications and I minored in film. One day in Atlanta I just thought why am I still here? Why am I playing it safe? Like I really need to move on. And so that was my catalyst to moving to LA. I'm essentially starting over.

I have an MBA, I've worked this ladder, I'm director at a company, and now I'm going to say, "Hey, I'm going to go produce things on set and have no experience in that." So I'm basically going back to zero. My last day there was the first week of March of 2020, and then the following week the country shut down or the world shut down for the pandemic. I think the longer the duration of the lockdown kept going and the severity of it, there were for sure doubts of like, Girl, are you crazy? Why did you leave this as much as you didn't enjoy it? As much as you knew this wasn't the place where you needed to continue to be? It was a steady check. It was stability during that time.

Takara: Those thoughts definitely went in and out of my mind and some challenges, as you can imagine are financial that there's no money coming in and you didn't properly save. That's a problem. The other challenge is I am not the poster child for being in production. I am from Atlanta. I did not go to film school. Did not even have the resources to go to film school. I did not set foot on my first set until I was 30 something. I learned everything I learned through reading and through being on independent sets, who do I think I am? Who do I think I am to think that I could also being a woman also being black, get in this industry and be in this industry and be able to support myself in this industry?

So there were definitely doubts all along the way, even moving to California like how do I think someone in California is going to hire me? Why would they pick me? I had to find people who were similar. The people that I produced *Giants* with had no film school experience. We didn't know what things were, we had to Google stuff on set that we should know or what people in film school probably learned on day one. And there were times where I'm just like, "I should know this, why don't I know this?"

Or having a conversation with someone and like trying to remember what they said, because I knew I had no idea what they were talking about and I wanted to look it up later so that I could at least sound intelligent for the next conversation I had. So it was a lot of those moments, but I think honestly finding the people who were trying to grind and be where I was, but didn't come from the background is really what encouraged me and helped me to continue to be on that path.

The pandemic and all of the things that came along with the pandemic definitely induced doubt, definitely induced more anxiety than I already had. I'm a planner, so if I can control from A to Z, that's what I want to do, which is totally the wrong profession for production, because you can't control a damn thing. And although I did have opportunities to remote produce, I was able to produce a short film. There was still doubt of like, should I just go back to work in corporate? And I can do marketing.

Takara: I've definitely had those thoughts of revising the dream. So maybe the dream isn't full time. Maybe I gave it my best shot and the dream is going to be that production is the passion project on the side, which a lot of people do. There's this meme where it's this guy and he's digging in this underground kind of tunnel and he stops. And when you kind of zoom out, you see that the treasure is right there and he had stopped. I have that moment a lot where I'm like, forget this. I'm about to just give up. And I sometimes think of that meme and I'm like, it's not time to give up yet or it's not time to make that decision yet.

Lewis: Thank you for sharing what you're going through, Takara. Takara's story is really, really indicative of what I hear from a lot of high achieving folks. She's found success in one area of her life. She's also wanting to seek out doing something different and she's found success there. And she questions the success she's achieved in this new space because she didn't take the traditional route. She didn't go to film school and she's done some good work in film. And so I don't know that having gone to film school was a prerequisite necessary for her to be able to be successful in this space. But because she doesn't have it, she's questioning whether or not she belongs in this area.

So when I'm working with someone I'm always looking to try to find out like, how did you develop this belief or this narrative you adopted about how success looks. We all have a definition of success that we operate off of. I have one, Takara has one obviously, her parents have another. Takara has adopted what her parents' definition of success is. And that is you go to school, you get an education and then you find a job, you work hard in it and that's how you'll do well in life. That's one definition.

Part of the work I do with individuals or especially with high achievers, is getting them to understand their definition of success and then recreating or updating it to be more reflective, and inclusive of who they are and how they present in the world. Oftentimes what I'll do is I'll ask them about their current definition. And in there, you'll probably hear some sort of demand that lends itself to suggest that perfection is necessary for them to be successful. And so I ask the question, what is it that you know about you that others don't know?

Because the way it is oftentimes is that they're being given opportunities, being elevated, have other people compliment their work and really have confidence in them to be able to accomplish new, bigger, better things and the individual is living with intense fear about their own ability to live up to those expectations. And so for me in my head, logically, I can't understand why other people would have such a strong belief in your capability to do something and you as an individual, wouldn't have an equal level or more to have the same confidence in yourself to be able to accomplish that same thing.

The interesting thing is that when I ask that question about what people know about themselves, that others don't, I get one of two things. There's like a long pause and they aren't able to think of anything or what they do is they tell me about the imperfections they have. And that gives me an opportunity to help them see that what you're saying is that if you have imperfections, this is part of the narrative you're telling yourself, if I am imperfect, then I really don't have the capability to be successful at a high level.

And I am chipping away at that belief and getting them to recognize, one, you've already been successful. Two, other people that aren't you don't care about your imperfections. It's not swayed them to lose belief or confidence in your ability to go out and do a thing.

Lewis: Maybe your understanding of the role perfection plays in success is a little bit off. There's an interesting kind of, I guess, phenomena that happens when people are shifting or changing direction in their career or in their space of where they're operating. Takara has received or achieved some success in business and corporate America and done really well there, has an MBA. And now she's pivoting and she's learning a lot of the stuff on the fly as she's having experiences, I guess kind of using that information to train and teach herself to continue to improve in this area.

What people do is that they tell themselves, I'm starting over and so now I'm behind. And for me that doesn't really make a ton of sense. It's not a complete start over. The way I think about it is if I'm driving and I'm trying to get to work. And my normal route to work is now blocked off because there's some construction happening. I have to make a detour, right? I've got to change directions from the original path that I had set out on. What I don't have to do is go all the way back to my house and start over.

: And so I think it's important for people who are pivoting, you aren't starting completely over. You aren't going all the way back home. What you're doing is you're taking a bit of a detour and that's okay. That's still forward progress. And I

think Takara in her situation, she's saying, well, I've got all this MBA stuff and I know how to operate in corporate America and I can be successful there. And I feel confident and safe because I've done it. And in film not so much. And I'm saying, well, the same stuff that made you successful there, why wouldn't those same tools and abilities and knowledge... Why wouldn't that also be helpful in this new space for you to be successful there?

She's resilient. She is adaptable and she's intelligent. And I think that she doesn't recognize the value that those have in overall success. So if you're listening to this podcast, one thing I would love for you to take away is that self-doubt is not a bad thing. I think that there's some appropriateness to us questioning our abilities when we are starting something new.

What I try to teach the people I work with about these concepts like self-doubt or confidence is that it's on more of a spectrum. It's not, I have it, or I don't. It's how much of it do I have? And do I have an appropriate amount considering where I am in the process? And if I'm a novice and I'm very new to a space, how confident should I be about my ability to be able to perform and do really well? Should I be at 100 or should I maybe be at like 80? Because we don't have 100 and again, high achievers that perfectionism, then it feels like they don't know anything.

Lewis: There's some benefit to having a little bit of doubt, because we are aware that we don't know everything. I think when we're over confident, we become a bit myopic in our kind of approach to life. And we don't really pay attention to those things that could be stumbling blocks to us in the future. And so there's a level of healthy self-doubt to have and also we should have some confidence along with the self-doubt to say that I've not known things before and I've had to learn them and I've been able to do okay. If that weren't true, then we'd probably all still be crawling around on our hands and knees never having learned to walk. And so, since some of us are walking around, if we have that capability then it suggest that we have the ability to learn and improve and grow.

And that's a wrap. Thank you so much for listening to How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything. We have really big plans for our show and we want you to be a part of it. We want to hear about your successes and challenges, your sacrifices, the ways you've celebrated, and what's ahead as you grow. Send our producer Virginia an email and we'll get your story on the show.

She's at Virginia@lwcstudios.com. *How to Talk to [High Achievers] about Anything* is an original production of LWC Studios. Our show is produced by Virginia Lora. Editing and production support from Jordan Cali. This episode was mixed by Trent

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