



61 vs 45

15,000+

75%

21 Days

Why You Rate Yourself Lower Than You Should

A verified-data guide and 21-day journal
from Style Vault

www.riascalony.org

You will not find empty affirmations in these pages.

We did not create this guide to convince you that you are extraordinary. We created it because research shows that many capable women consistently describe their own achievements more modestly than the evidence supports.

The words we use about ourselves shape the opportunities we pursue, the salaries we negotiate, the credit we accept, and sometimes the lives we believe we are allowed to build.

This guide began with a simple question:

What if the problem isn't that women don't have enough confidence? What if many have simply become accustomed to judging themselves more harshly than they judge everyone else?

The studies you'll read about do not suggest that women lack ability. In many cases, they show the opposite. The gap appears not in performance, but in self-assessment.

That idea changed how we thought about confidence.

Instead of asking you to believe something new about yourself, these pages invite you to look more carefully at what is already true. To separate facts from assumptions. To report the score before telling yourself the story.

The journal that follows is intentionally simple. A few minutes each day. Small exercises. Honest reflection. No pressure to become someone different. Just practice seeing yourself with the same fairness you so easily extend to other people.

If, by the end of these 21 days, you find yourself describing your work a little more accurately, receiving a compliment without dismissing it, or acknowledging an achievement without adding "it was nothing," then this guide has done exactly what we hoped it would.

We're glad you're here.

BEFORE YOU READ A WORD

The Numbers, At a Glance

Every figure below is attributed and sourced on the last page. Nothing here is rounded up for effect.

61 / 45

Self-rating score, men vs.
women, same accuracy on the same
test

15,000+

Adults and school-aged children the
pattern was retested on

75%

Female executives who have felt
imposter syndrome in their career

56%

Worry about not living up to
expectations

85%

Believe the gap affects women more
than men

81%

Believe women pressure themselves
harder not to fail

One question changed. "How well do you think you did?" became "What was your score?" The gap between men and women shrank almost immediately.

You Already Know the Feeling

You finish something good. Someone asks how it went. You say, “I think it went okay.”

That sentence is not modest. It is a documented, measurable pattern, tracked across aptitude tests, executive surveys, and classrooms of children as young as eleven.

This guide lays out the verified research behind it, and hands you the 21-day practice Style Vault built in response: one page a day, a place to write, and a small box to check when it's done.

The gap was never about missing information. It was about how people interpreted the information they already had.

Where the Data Comes From

The 20-Question Test

Researchers gave 900 working adults a twenty-question aptitude test, the kind used in military screening. Every answer was right or wrong. There was no room for opinion. Afterward, each person rated their own performance from 1 to 100.

Both groups scored the same. The gap existed only in the telling. The study was conducted by **Christine Exley** (Harvard Business School) and **Judd Kessler** (Wharton), published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2022. The same gap appeared when they repeated the test on thousands of adults, and again on sixth graders.

More Information Didn't Close It

Researchers told some participants exactly how many questions they'd gotten right, and exactly how they ranked against the room. The gap barely moved.

One Change That Did

They stopped asking people to judge their performance, and simply asked them to report their score. That one shift, from rating to reporting, closed most of the gap.

It Doesn't Disappear With Success

KPMG surveyed 750 female executives one or two steps below the C-suite, across more than 150 organizations, many nominated by their own CEOs. These were not women starting out. They were leaders already trusted with budgets, teams, and strategy, and a large majority still carried doubt about whether they had earned their place.

A Note on the Research

Most of this research comes from North America and Europe. Africa does not yet have research of the same depth on this exact question, and this guide will not pretend otherwise. Broader workplace research, including Deloitte's work in South Africa, points in a similar direction: heavier workloads, more caregiving responsibility, and declining career optimism among women. Those pressures don't create self-doubt alone, but they reinforce it.

The Problem Was Never a Lack of Confidence

This is not a call to simply be more confident. That advice has never solved the problem, because confidence is not manufactured by repeating encouraging words. It grows only when you consistently let yourself count the evidence that is already there.

The women in the Exley and Kessler study were not missing facts. They had the facts. What changed their answer was not new information. It was the shift from judging their performance to reporting it.

The Friend Test

If a friend you genuinely admire showed you this exact result, with her name on it instead of yours, what would you tell her?

Most women answer that question in seconds. They call it excellent. They call it well earned. It is only when their own name sits beside the same evidence that the story gets complicated. That difference is not a character flaw. It is a well-documented pattern.

The Practical Reframe

The next time you finish something that matters, resist the urge to explain what it means before you have written down what happened.

1

Write down only what happened.

Not your interpretation. Not your doubts. The result, the number, the outcome, exactly as a neutral observer would write it.

2

Ask the friend question.

If this exact result had someone else's name on it, someone you admire, what would you tell her?

3

Say that sentence about yourself, out loud.

Not the hedged version. The one you would give a friend.

The 21-Day Confidence Journal

Confidence is not a mood. It is a practice, the same way strength or a new language is a practice. What follows is not a checklist to skim. It is a page a day: one small action, a fact to anchor it, and space to write.

No hollow affirmations, no scripts to recite. Just the habit of recognizing your own evidence and putting honest words around it.

How to Use This Journal

Each day has its own page: the practice, an anchor line, a checkbox you can tick right inside Word, and ruled space to write. A bar at the bottom of every page tracks how far through the 21 days you are.



WEEK ONE • Days 1–7

See the Evidence



WEEK TWO • Days 8–14

Find the Words



WEEK THREE • Days 15–21

Say It Out Loud



01

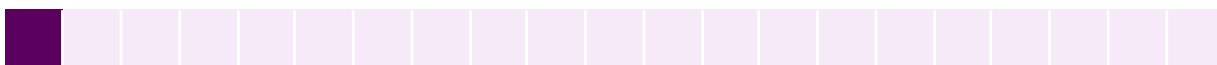
Report the score. Not the story.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

List three things you did well this week. Facts only, no qualifiers.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





02

The facts didn't change. The framing did.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Take a recent piece of feedback and remove every “just” and “only.” Read it again.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





03

Someone else can already see it clearly.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Ask someone who knows your work to describe it in one sentence. Compare it to how you described it.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





04

Undersold is not the same as untrue.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Take a result you underplayed. Rewrite it as a neutral observer would report it.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





05

"Okay" is not a result. It's a habit.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Every time today you say "it went okay," replace it with what actually happened.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





06

Invisible skill is still skill.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

List three skills you use so often you have stopped noticing them.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.





07

A pattern named is a pattern you can change.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Reread everything you wrote this week. Notice the pattern, not the modesty.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



08

Hedging is not humility.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Write one sentence about your value with no hedging: no "I think," no "maybe," no "sort of."

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



09

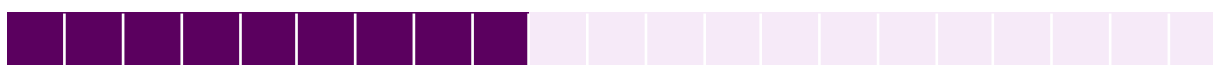
Say it the way you'd say it for her.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Run the friend test on your biggest win this year. Write it exactly as you would for her.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



10

Your bio is a list of facts, not a request for approval.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Rewrite your professional bio using only facts and outcomes.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



11

Say it plainly. Let it land.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Say one accomplishment out loud, exactly as written, with no minimizing tone.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



12

Keep the point. Drop the apology.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Notice one place you apologize before you speak. Remove the apology. Keep the point.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



13

Fear is not a pricing strategy.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Write down what you would ask for, charge, or negotiate, if fear were not a factor.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



14

The truest sentence is usually the shortest one.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Reread Days 1 to 13. Circle the sentence that feels most true.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



15

Unhedged is not the same as unkind.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Say one fact about your work out loud, in a real conversation, completely unhedged.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



16

Specific requests get specific answers.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Ask for something specific: a rate, a raise, an extension, or credit you are owed.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



17

Shrinking is a habit, not a fact about you.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Introduce yourself in one sentence that states what you do without shrinking it.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



18

Fairness works both directions.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Give someone else the same fair, factual credit you are learning to give yourself.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



19

No, said clearly, is still care.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Say no to one thing that would have you overextending to prove your worth.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



20

Twenty days of evidence is not a coincidence.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Report the score, not the story: write one result from this week exactly as it happened.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



21

You already have the data. Now you have the sentence.

TODAY'S PRACTICE

Write the sentence you now believe about your own value. Keep it somewhere you will see it.

☐ *I did this today.*

Write it down, the way the evidence would.



YOU FINISHED THE 21 DAYS. NOW WHAT?

Keep going, inside Style Vault.

*Free daily practice, progress you can see, and a community of women
running the same days alongside you.*

SIGN UP AT [STYLEVAULT.APP](https://stylevault.app)

RIA'S COLONY · FOR THE LIFE YOU ARE BECOMING.

SOURCES

Where This Data Comes From

In keeping with how we build everything at Ria's Colony, every figure in this resource is attributed and verifiable. Nothing here is invented, rounded up for effect, or borrowed without a source.

Christine L. Exley & Judd B. Kessler

"The Gender Gap in Self-Promotion," The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2022. Harvard Business School and the University of Pennsylvania (Wharton).

KPMG

"Advancing the Future of Women in Business" (the KPMG Women's Leadership Summit Report, "Mind the Gap"), survey of 750 female executives across more than 150 organizations.

Deloitte South Africa

Referenced directionally as broader regional context. Research specific to female self-assessment across Africa remains limited, and we say so plainly rather than filling the gap with assumption.

*This resource accompanies the Colony's blog post, **"Why You Rate Yourself Lower Than You Should."***