

FAST COMPANY

8 female executives on the habits they gave up

It's worth evaluating what's working for you—and leaving everything else behind.

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There are many theories about how long it takes to form a habit. Some say 21 days. Others argue it's more like 60, or more. Whatever the case, some aspects of our routine are beneficial to our personal and professional growth, while others just slow us down. For leaders who are tasked with not only meeting their own goals but also guiding others, paying attention to negative patterns is essential. That's why these women, across industries, stopped apologizing. Or adding a "maybe" to every sentence. Or opted to do things their way—even if it wasn't the "right" way.

We asked eight impressive female executives to describe the habits they're glad they gave up:

"I GAVE UP SAYING 'I THINK'"

Right after college, chief content officer at Hearst Magazines, Kate Lewis, landed a coveted gig at Condé Nast. She spent many years moving from editorial to HR before leaving to join Say Media. It was there that she was introduced to the president of Hearst Magazines, and eventually took on her current role, becoming the second person to ever hold the position. She now directs content strategy for more than 25 publications, reaching 150 million people in the U.S. Her leadership has more than tripled monthly unique visitors.

She says it was a shift in wording that fueled her career growth. Specifically she stopped using the phrase "I think," after realizing she often started emails that way. "I relish conversation, back-and-forth—even dissent—because those things force me to consider my position more carefully," says Lewis. "But I don't need to undercut my own point of view to solicit them. [This change] has forced me to evaluate my statements more thoroughly. Without adding a qualifier before them, I must reckon with how much I truly believe them."

"I GAVE UP FEELING BAD ABOUT 'ME TIME'"

Heather Marianna, founder of Beauty Kitchen, makes all-natural skincare and cosmetic products. To date, she's appeared on more than 80 TV segments discussing clean beauty. Marianna stays busy, consistently working 16-hour days, six days a week.

Like many entrepreneurs, she loves what she does, but says she came to realize scheduling time for herself wasn't lazy. It was necessary. "I used to feel really selfish when I would take an hour to do yoga or go get a facial. I would always feel a sense of guilt and think to myself about all the millions of other productive things I could be doing," she says. "On the verge of pure exhaustion, I began meditating several months ago and reminding myself that I need to take time for myself." Now, she feels more centered and focused. "I'm happier, more proactive, and I'm actually getting more done."

"I GAVE UP ACCEPTING THE FIRST OFFER"

Designed for women, by women, Samantha Dong's company, ALLY Shoes, creates accessible luxury footwear. The company has a 15% repurchase rate within three months, with top customers buying five or

more pairs. When Dong looked back at the experiences that led her to create ALLY, she says she realized how little she previously negotiated anything. Even when she knew she deserved more, she wasn't brazen enough to demand it.

When she left her second job for business school, she spoke with a coworker who said he negotiated a promotion and a raise every six months. "He typically wouldn't get everything he asked for, but always ended up better than his prior position," she says. "That was a wake-up call for me and made me realize: You don't get what you don't ask for. I decided to break my habit of not negotiating, because I was only short-changing myself."

Her ability to negotiate terms with vendors and during fundraising rounds at ALLY has been a saving grace, she says. "I realized negotiation is never about winning or outsmarting the other side, but instead finding common ground and creative solutions that benefit both parties. My business wouldn't be where it is today without it."

"I'VE GIVEN UP MICROMANAGING"

When Vanessa Jakobson, the CEO of Blo Blow Dry Bar, joined the company, she left an 11-year stint in the nonprofit sector. Though she loved the work, she was ready to dig in to a promising startup. Alongside her husband, she's doubled their business, and created a franchising system that's allowed the company to expand.

The process has been a life-changing one for Jakobson, who says she's learned how to step aside and allow her team members to do their thing. "I've had to curb my enthusiasm to make way for the talented people around me to bring their skills to the table," she says. "I've learned to get out of their way and trust they are more than capable of achieving success. This has allowed me to stay focused on the things that really need my attention."

"I'VE GIVEN UP THINKING THERE'S A RIGHT WAY TO DO THINGS"

Since starting her line of healthy and conscious snacks that utilize entrepreneurial farmers in Uganda, Renee Dunn has had a few learning curves. In just three years, her company, Amazi Foods, has rebranded. It's also launched on Amazon Prime, and they're in talks with a nationwide retailer. She says that she has heard all of the advice there is to hear—and is now opting to do things her own way.

"I've had the opportunity to connect with so many real, authentic people in the food space," she says. "There isn't one path, even if they're playing the same game. Beyond that, there's not just one game to play."

Even though "industry experts" may mean well, they may not know her company—or her personal values. "I was being swayed in so many ways, losing time and progress as a result," she says. "[This lesson] has given me the confidence to build the business that I want to build and make decisions that I feel in my gut. . . . Even if it all goes terribly wrong and all the cautionary experts were right, I'd rather fail doing what I believe in."

"I GAVE UP FACEBOOK"

Sarah Luna, president of Pure Barre, leads the corporate team and the fitness company's 500 franchises across the country. Her leadership has led to major growth for the company, with 560 studios set to open by the end of 2019 and 680 by 2021. Membership sales have also increased 75% year-over-year, and revenue has increased by 35%. Even with all of these impressive figures, Luna says she developed a bad habit of paying attention to social media trolls, especially on Facebook.

"Oftentimes, my evenings or weekends would be ruined and I found that people's comments had an intense power over me that was detrimental and unhealthy," she says. "I became unproductive at work and noticed that I would stop my entire day or project to triage and deal with the social media 'war' that was occurring."

So, a year ago she disabled comments and logged off. The goal was to be more strategic with her time and level of engagement on social media. In return, she's noticed a dramatic shift in her ability to focus on leading a team and driving a business. "Not worrying about who will be displeased by the decisions made has allowed me to make better decisions, heavily rooted in fact and analysis, not in emotional turmoil," she says. "My energy lasts longer throughout the day and I am able to stay much more positive and upbeat."

"I GAVE UP SAYING 'I'M SORRY'"

Raise your hand if you've apologized at work (or in a texting convo) in the last 48 hours. If you're like many women, your five fingers will be dangling in the air. Apologizing is a habit that many female professionals develop—and one that cofounder and CEO of TRUWOMEN Erica Groussman says she's kicked.

Her company offers vegan, gluten-free, non-GMO, and sugar-free protein bars and powders in the form of desserts like doughnuts or cookie-dough bites. As she was getting her brand up and running, she realized how often she would say "I'm sorry" when asking for something she needed, like an update on a client.

A friend pointed out this habit and she figured out she was trying to subdue her strong and confident work persona. But what she was actually doing was misrepresenting her performance as a leader. She wasn't sorry; she was doing her job. "Becoming cognizant of how often I say 'I'm sorry' has forced me to truly consider my use of words and how people on my team are interpreting my communication," she says. "Instead of joining a conference call two minutes late and immediately apologizing, I've now reframed by verbiage to 'thank you for waiting.' These small adjustments have allowed me more opportunity to express gratitude, while also giving other women within the company permission to do the same."

"I GAVE UP LIVING IN MY COMFORT ZONE"

Melanie Huscroft, cofounder and chief visionary officer of Yunique, started the company alongside her brother. Their social media-based business sells a variety of products, with 4,000,000 sales of their signature product, Moodstruck Epic mascaras, in less than two years.

Huscroft says she's had to get comfortable taking greater risks. "It takes real courage to work through the fear that holds us back, but courage isn't the lack of fear, it's the gaining of perspective," she says. "I learned that you have to do things that no one else is doing, things that frighten you and that make you question how much longer you can hold on."