

## Managing Self-Doubt: Making Friends with Your Saboteur

By Lainie Neiman

Do you find yourself struggling with nagging doubts on occasion, almost as if you had a little critic sitting on your shoulder? Who is this devilish creature who whispers (or yammers) in your ear and threatens to derail you and sabotage your success? Meet your *saboteur*.

Some say that our "inner critic" has value- and shouldn't be confused with our saboteur, who simply aims to undermine our confidence and throw obstacles in our way. It seems perverse to give "air time" to this diabolical character, but clearly our saboteur plays a role in our psyche worth exploring. There is a Chinese expression, translated means, "What we resist, we're stuck with". So the more we fight this voice in our head, the more we're stuck with it. What might be the origins of this voice that is taking up valuable real estate in our mind?

Surely, if you have ever suffered from low self-esteem in your life (who hasn't?), you are all too familiar with your self-doubt and second guessing yourself. Learning to take risks personally or professionally takes courage and guts. When we challenge our doubts and step into unfamiliar territory - this behavior can ratchet up our anxieties that trigger the saboteur voice in our head. (Kind of like a worried Jewish mother)

Perhaps a different strategy would be more functional in confronting this potentially threatening voice. In Gestalt psychology, the basic tenet focuses on integrating our polarities: owning all parts of ourselves; the good, the bad, and the ugly. Some of us develop a kind of bravado to combat feelings of insecurity, or self doubt. There are many cultural and gender influences that help create this dynamic as well. So, if you experience cognitive dissonance at the mere thought that you feel unsure or lacking in confidence, and you don't want to allow the possibility that you might feel wobbly or indecisive, your Saboteur swings into full action. It's as though, all these little independent, otherwise manageable thoughts are mobilized as a big army directed by this dictatorial little creature.

So perhaps, a divide and conquer tact will work better for you. Practice allowing those little thoughts some air time before they Unionize against you. Maybe the Tai Chi approach- going *with* the Saboteur, befriending him/her- having a cup of tea together and hearing him out. Wouldn't it be better if this character was tamed into a little Shmu rather than the Monster in the closet?

