**How to Break the Cycle of Doubt at Work**

In this presentation we are going to be taking a look at one of the most contemporary of feelings: Self-doubt in the workplace. Doubting yourself has existed long before the modern conception of what it meant to work—after all, Lord Byron waxed poetical about self-doubt, and he never worked a day in his life.

But doubting yourself in the workplace is a much different experience than doubting yourself in, say, a sports game, a family gathering, or a martial arts class.

In those cases, you will almost always get finite responses to your doubts. Can you throw the touchdown pass? Do you have food stuck in your teeth? Can you win this fight? In all of those cases, it is possible for a positive outcome to emerge from even the most crippling of anxieties.

But modern workplaces are unique from those scenarios. Where sports, or social interactions, or physical altercations might come down to a decisive moment, the workplace is a battlefield of attrition. Nothing happens fast at a workplace. In fact, it can be hard to tell if anything is happening at all.

Post-modern philosophy calls this feeling “Ennui”; that is, the feeling that we are not the main character of the story. If you go off to work for Google or Amazon, you will almost certainly feel this way. How can you be certain of yourself when you are clearly a replaceable cog in a machine?

That degree of self-doubt can be crippling. People were not meant to function as such small parts of such large machines, so it is no wonder that we begin to scrutinize ourselves negatively. Once we recognize that this is a problem though, what do we do about it? How do we break the cycle?

If you are struggling with doubting yourself in the workplace, whether you are doubting your ability to do your job or doubting your ability to have a life outside of your job, the starting point is the same no matter what. You first have to establish your value outside of the workplace.

To a degree, this might sound unintuitive. It sounds kind of like I’m asking you to cure your cancer by going for a morning jog every day. What is the connecting tissue? How does one relate to the other?

Well, remember that I emphasized that this is a first step. No matter what your second step to feeling more confident is, perceiving yourself as valuable outside of what you *do* has to be the first.

In the times of ancient Greece, Aristotle defined virtue as the product of one’s habits. Essentially, your goodness comes from what you do. This is such a natural way of looking at the world, and it can certainly be applied to ethics and morality. But you cannot judge yourself by the same metrics.

If you only judge yourself as worthy for what you accomplish, especially in a soul-sucking modern workplace, then you will always doubt yourself. The modern world simply does not allow you to take full possession of your work, and as a result, defining yourself by your work is laying a trap for your own self-esteem.

If your work is not necessary, then there is little difference between your value and the value of someone who is a lazy bum. And if you cannot tell the difference in value between those things, then you will suffer.

Breaking the cycle of doubt starts by treating yourself as valuable by default. There need not be a reason. There need not be an explanation. You are valuable. You deserve to exist. no matter what your work says.