

SELF-DOUBT

Self-doubt resides in all of us, but it can really raise its ugly head quite unexpectedly when we are in the throes of caregiving.

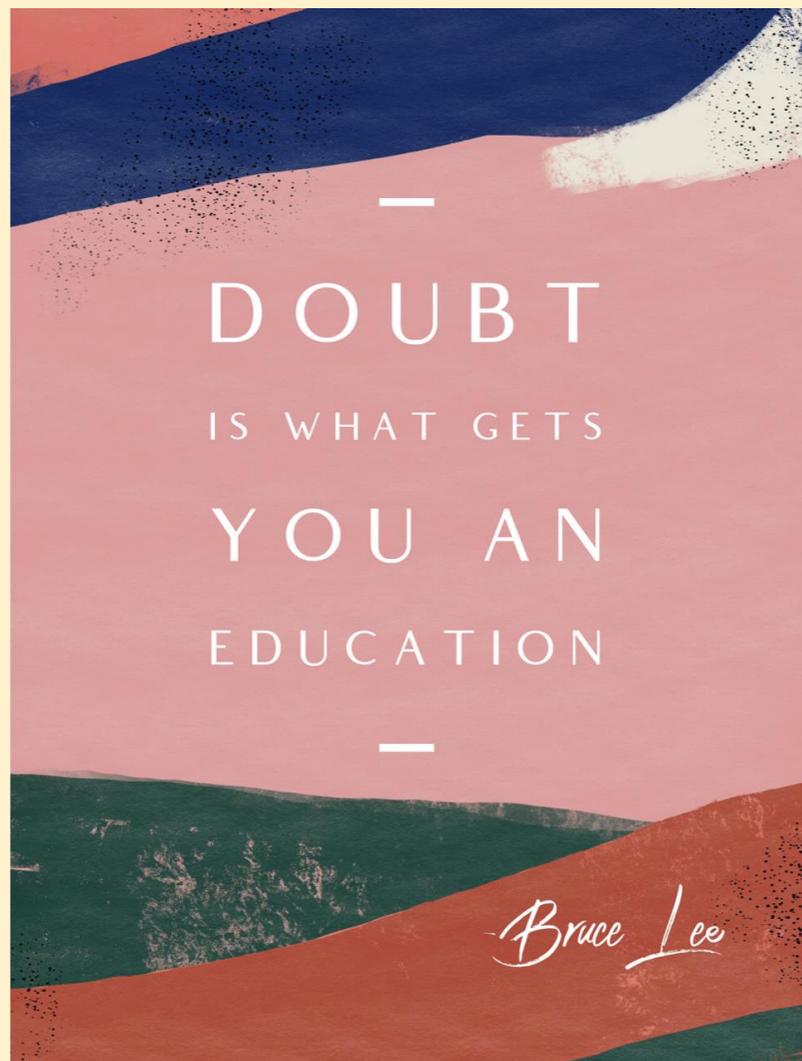
Self-doubt can be one of *the* most difficult beasts to tame. It begins with every vulnerable experience we have ever had that resulted in our being hurt, embarrassed or feeling offended or inadequate.

The beliefs we formed from these experiences, right or wrong, not only became exaggerated over time, but were woven into our life's fabric and thus became part of who we are.

The depth, degree and/or definition of self-doubt is different for everyone. What triggers self-doubt in one person, may not be a trigger for another.

Our physical and emotional responses of self-doubt are also very individualized. For me, my responses are that my face flushes, my heart swells (not in a good way), my throat closes, and my toes curl.

When I first became my Mother's caregiver, my self-doubt had siblings named Guilt, Embarrassment, and Failure. One of the reasons my embers of self-doubt were



stoked was my inability to hold down a job. Dementia proved to be too brutal of a moving target to keep up with and I lost my job. Twice actually.

Adding another log to the self-doubt fire were those family members who viewed my state of mind as being "lazy" and my job loss being due to "not prioritizing my day properly." Their highhanded judgment had the subtlety of a Mack truck. I didn't know better so I couldn't do better, and self-doubt was the first item to pop into my head. Back then, I was without the tools and understanding to handle their condemnations, much less match it with a witty, and equally insulting comeback. I allowed their arrogance to take me further down the rabbit hole.

One obvious symptom of self-doubt is caring too much about what other people think. Our subsequent reactions and behaviors are driven by our need for approval. Self-doubt has a way of making us crazy and making us *do* crazy things.

Two ways I found to limit self-doubt, at least for me, was to fully know myself *and* to fully know the situation at hand.

Knowing myself means having the *awareness* of my physical reactions that start to bubble up, i.e., toes curl, face flushes, etc. Also, I know if I can talk to a trusted friend about my self-doubt, that helps me too. Talking about our self-doubt(s) is vitally important for two reasons. 1) The people we trust, the people we are closest to, would *never* treat us with disrespect or arrogance. Ever. They are on our side. They listen. They give caring, applicable suggestions, or let us know if we are misinterpreting the situation or the people involved. 2) Speaking out loud shines a spotlight on self-doubt that obliterates its dark shadow. (Pets are terrific listeners and the results can be as constructive and helpful as any trusted human friend).

The second way I have found to limit my self-doubt is to fully know the situation. When we gain experience at something while arming ourselves with information about it, we tend to take things not so personally. We are less reactive, and more cool-headed. We find we can better handle a family member (or anyone) aggressively parting our hair with their opinion and advice.

One question I ask myself to keep my self-doubt in check is: "*Is what they are saying, or assuming, about me and the situation true?*" The answer is generally, "No."

Other questions you might ask to keep self-doubt in caregiving or in any scenario in life, are: "*Do these individuals spend enough time with [Mom] to know what is really going on [with her]?*" "*Are they patient and compassionate [towards her]?*" "*Have they taken the time to educate themselves [on dementia]?*"

If the answer to one or all of these is "No," or "Hell no," then trust the care and effort you are providing. Trust the knowledge, experience and information you have gathered. I did. And these traits became my superpowers. My self-doubt began to dissolve, and I could confidently dismiss the opinions and judgments of the less informed.

Just for today, practice being aware of when and how your self-doubt bubbles up. What does it look like for *you*? What just happened to make you feel "less than" or weak? Who can you talk to about it?

Just for today, practice physically distancing yourself from those people who are not on your side. If you are unable to do that, practice *emotionally* distancing yourself from them. You don't have to take in, or accept as truth, the blathering of the less informed and unparticipating.

Just for today, be as knowledgeable and educated as you can be. Experience counts. Information really IS power. Ignorance is NOT bliss.

Just for today, get some rest. Self-doubt thrives when we are sleep deprived, as does every negative, reactive, fear-based emotion we have. **No one** can think clearly, or respond well, when they are fatigued and worn-out.

If we are able to better understand self-doubt, clearly able to see how fictitious and transparent it is, then we will arrive at the end of our day with no regret. These “days” will build upon one another into a week, a month, then a year.

Self-confidence, rather than self-doubt, will pilot our plane. So, tip your hat, or give a salute, to self-doubt. It is here to teach us something about ourselves and it *can be* overcome.

**Note from Vic: I am not an expert on self-doubt. I do a lot of reading on the topics I write about, and I do the best I can to live what I write about; however, my word of caution and empathy go out to the individuals who are clinically depressed, or seeking medical attention for any level of depression. Depression is riddled with self-doubt, so please continue your professional care and know these ideas may not be helpful or appropriate for everyone.