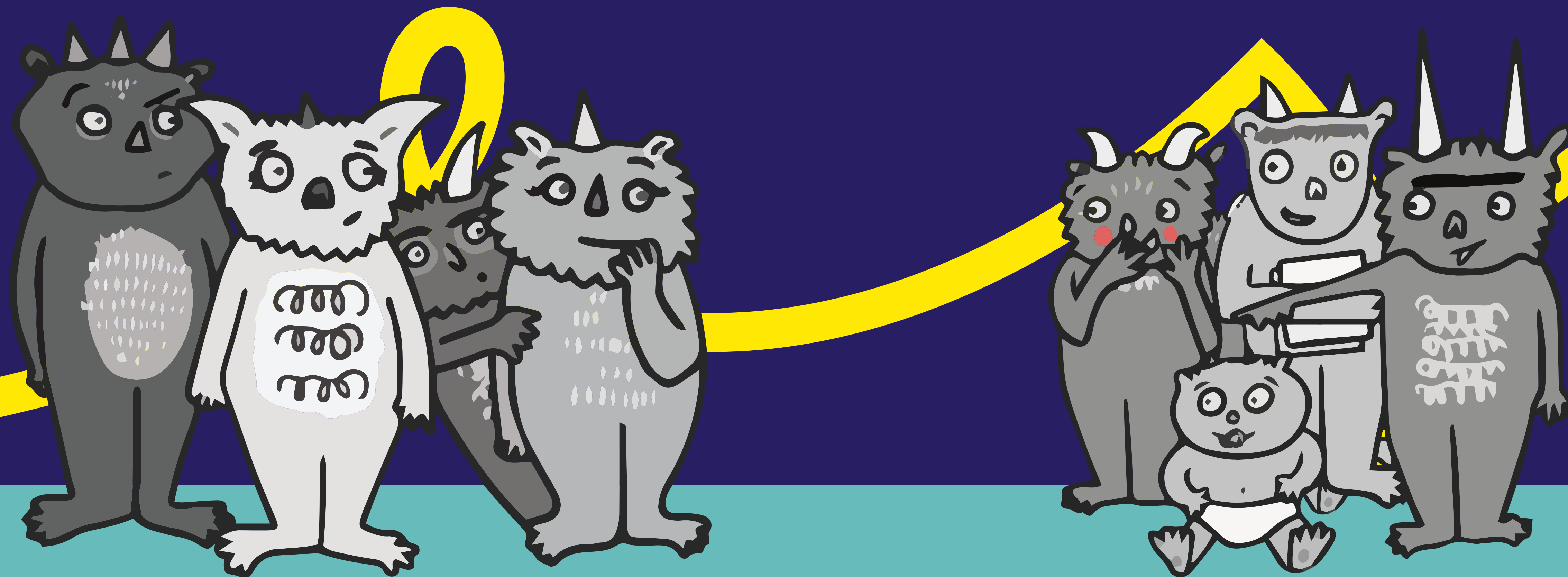




HOW TO OVERCOME Your Confidence Gremlins



Sarah Ellis & Helen Tupper

What is a Confidence Gremlin?

Confidence Gremlins are beliefs that hold us back from doing our best work.

Confidence Gremlins live in our head. They are assumptions we all make about our ability and why we can't do something. Confidence gremlins mean you get stuck in a negative cycle. You believe your gremlin is true so you look for evidence to reinforce your belief, rather than taking action to test if your thoughts reflect reality.

Everyone has Confidence Gremlins.

Even the most outwardly confident and successful people have them.

Your gremlins are unique to you but there are some common confidence themes and we've chosen ten for this book. Most of us know we have confidence gremlins, the hard part is doing anything about them.

The purpose of this book is to give you lots of ideas about how you can overcome your gremlins by taking small actions. Overcoming your confidence gremlins is tough. It takes time, commitment and energy. But it's worth it. If you can keep your confidence gremlin caged you will be able to take advantage of more opportunities, build your resilience and take control of your career.



The Top 10 Gremlins

1

Being put on the spot

2

Numbers

3

People won't like me

4

Senior People

5

Presenting

6

I don't know enough

7

I'll get found out

8

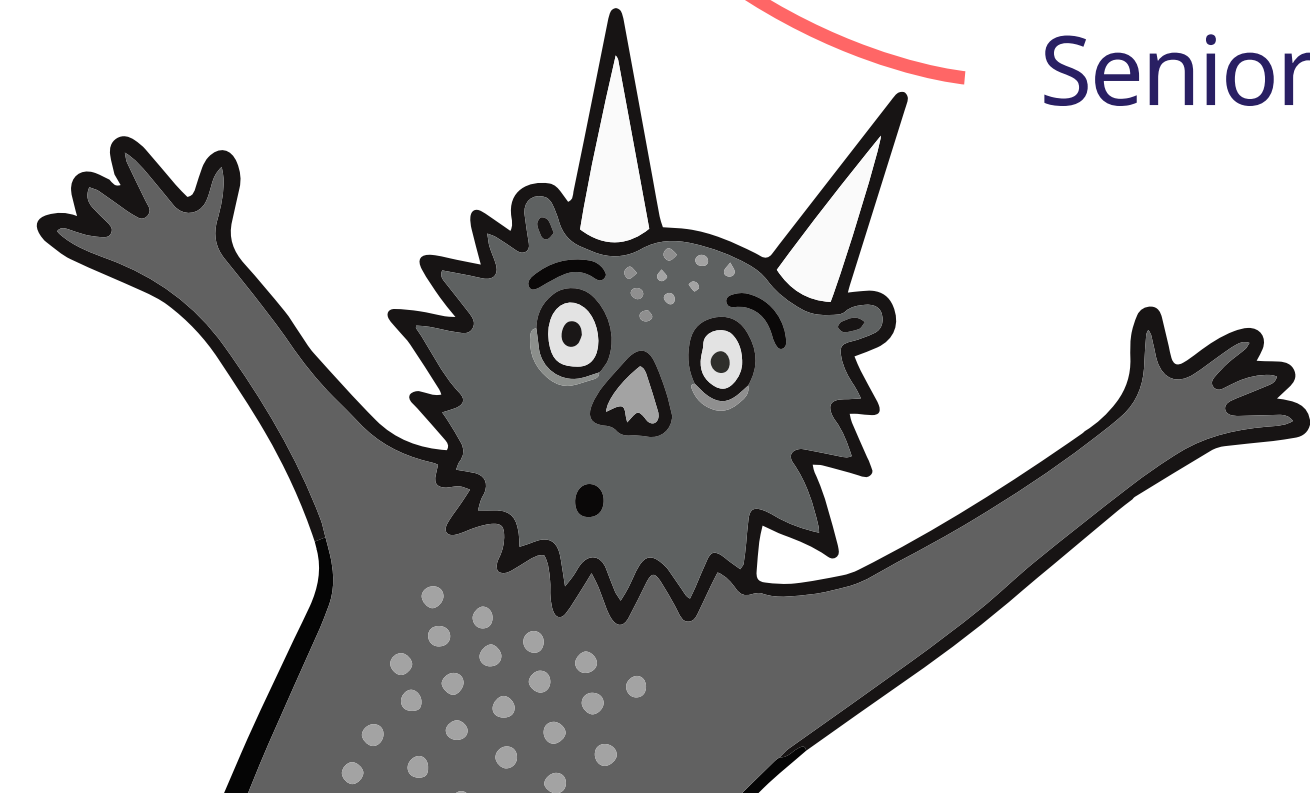
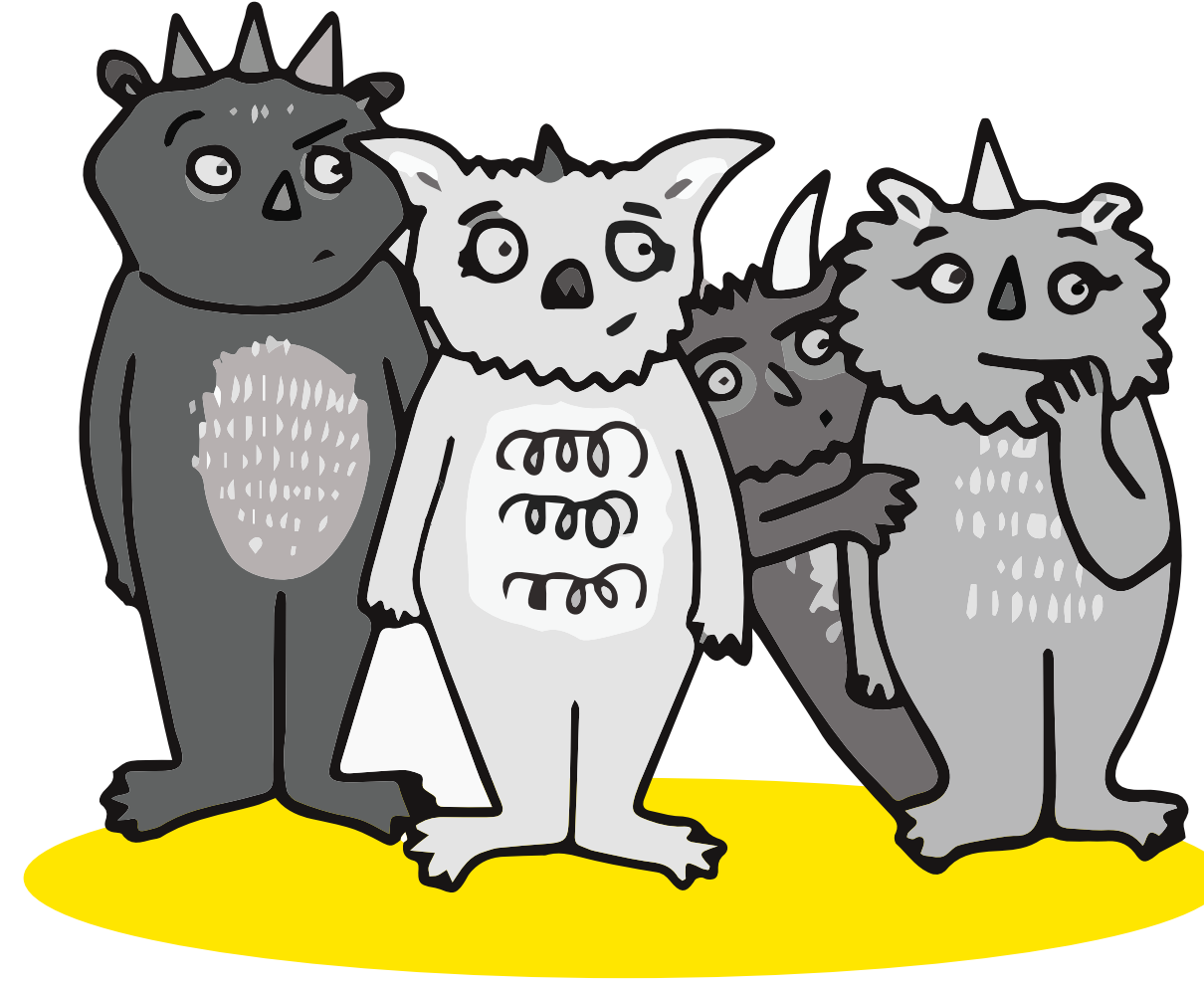
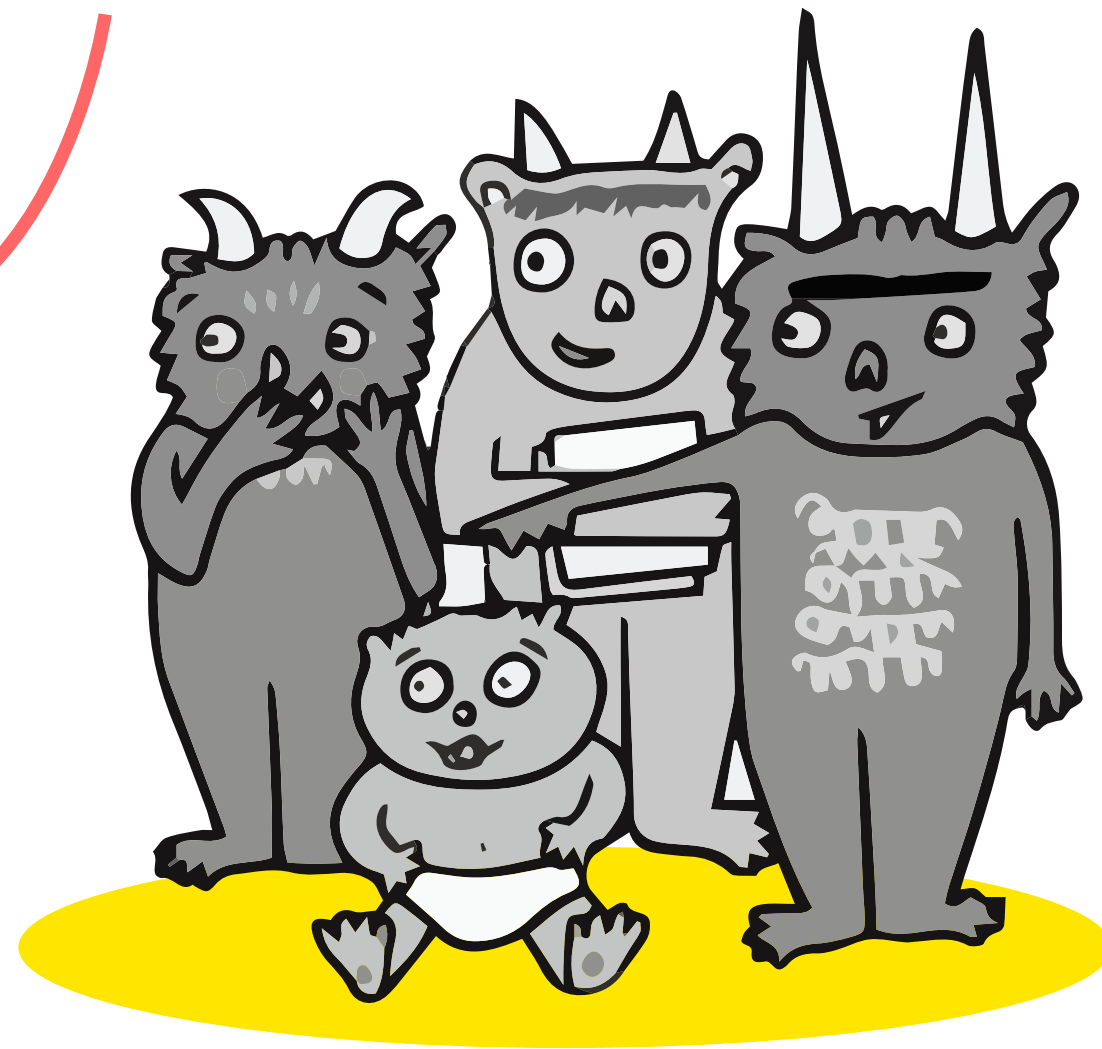
Blushing

9

Failing

10

Too Young



1. Being Put On The Spot

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Spend too much time preparing
- ▶ Freeze when asked questions, even if you know the answer
- ▶ Avoid sharing your opinion unless you know you are right

3 simple actions you can take

1. Prepare less, respond better

You can never anticipate every question or know all the answers. It's always tempting to make up an answer on the spot because you're under pressure but it's better not to. Instead, try saying *I don't know the answer to that right now, let me go away and think about that/find out more and I'll come back to you later today/this week.*



This creates the time for you to respond with a more considered answer and helps you stay in control of the situation. You don't expect other people to have all the answers so don't place that unrealistic expectation on yourself either.

2. Volunteer for something you know nothing about

Volunteer to attend a meeting for someone when they can't make it, especially if you don't know anything about the topic. This is a useful way to practice feel comfortable not knowing the answers in a less pressured environment

3. Pause for thought

When you're under pressure you forget to listen properly. So if you are taken by surprise you can do 3 things to give you some quick thinking time.

First, pause for thought before responding—it's ok to have a beat of silence. Second, repeat the question or statement to double check you've understood properly. This will often encourage the person to explain further what they mean, which might help your thinking. Finally, write down the exact words being said.

This will encourage you to listen and stop you getting distracted by trying to create an answer in your head.



2. I'm Not Good At Numbers

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Don't ask questions in case you look stupid
- ▶ Focus on working out the numbers and stop listening to the rest of the conversation
- ▶ Don't apply for jobs you'd like to do because the job description uses words like 'commercial acumen'

3 simple actions you can take

1. Ask better questions

Some people can calculate numbers in their head, which can feel very daunting. This is a useful skill but not something you need to worry about learning. Focus on what the numbers are telling you and what decisions you might make.

You can use this to prompt discussions, and ask questions of, people who have more financial expertise. For example: *our numbers suggest we're not performing as expected, from what you've seen over the past few months do you think this trend will continue?*

2. Make friends with finance (or someone who is good at numbers)

We often get a coach or mentor to help us improve our gravitas or leadership skills so do the same to help fill your finance knowledge gaps. But be specific. Don't say *I'm not great with numbers can you help me*. Instead, identify what you need to improve and in what order. For example *I'd like to improve my budgeting skills, do you think you could spend 15 mins with me before the next budget review to give me a hand?*

The best way to learn a new skill is to put it into practice regularly, so choose something that is relevant to your current job.

3. Apply the 80/20 rule

The Finance team probably aren't spending time worrying about whether they're great at what you do. You should be spending roughly 80% of your time focused on developing the things you're great at and 20% of your time getting good enough at other things so they don't hold you back. Don't get distracted by the things you're not as good at.

3. People Won't Like Me

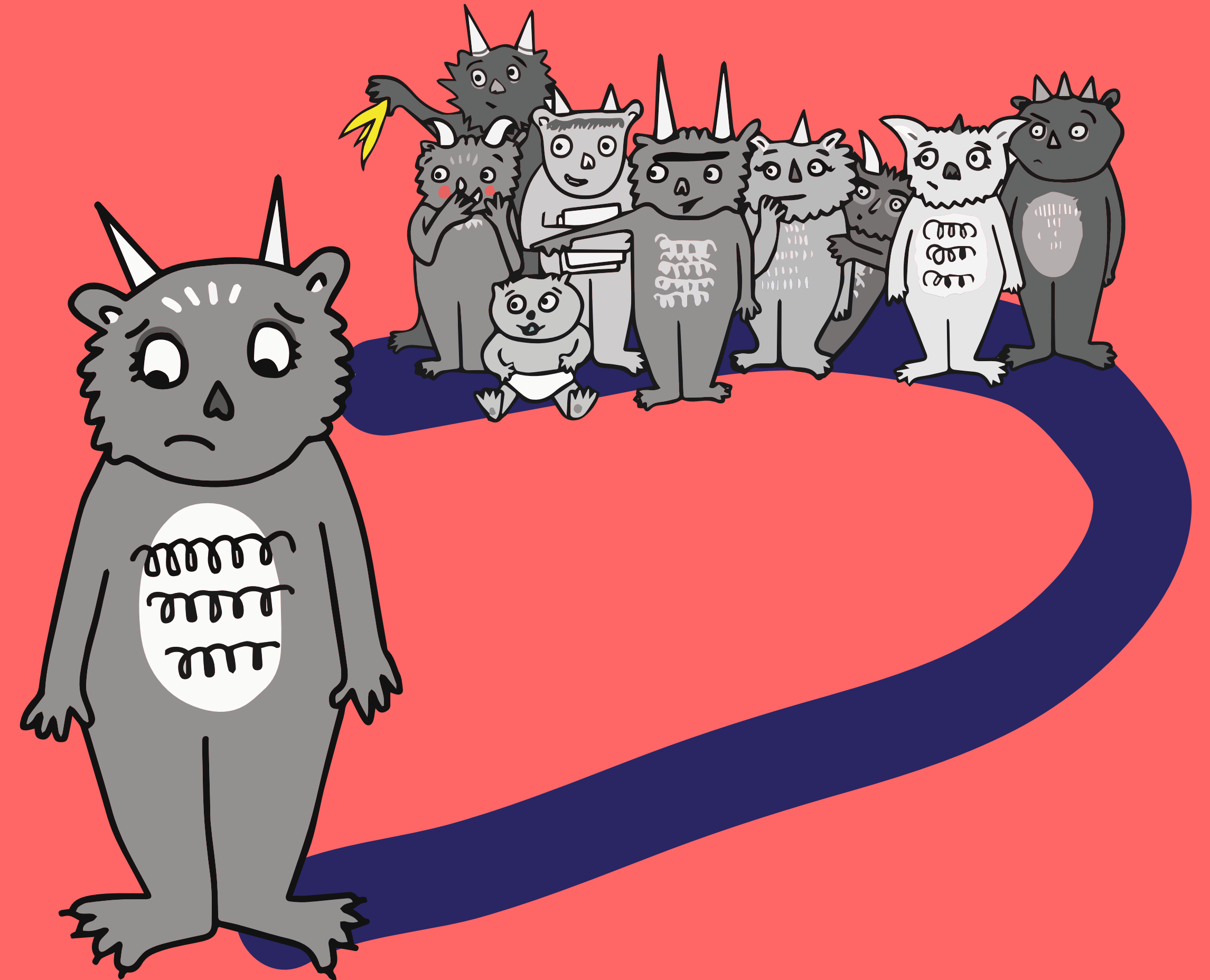
This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Are afraid to say what you really believe
- ▶ Spend lots of time worrying what people are thinking and saying about you
- ▶ Say yes to everything even when you resent doing the work

3 simple actions you can take

1. Discover shared objectives

What would you rather be at work; liked or respected? Of course you're expected to say respected but this is a fake trade off. You can disagree with someone and still achieve both things as long as you ultimately trust each other.



One way you can help make this happen is to agree at the start of a potentially tricky conversation or project why you're doing it and how you'll know if you've been successful. This is great common ground to build trust from.

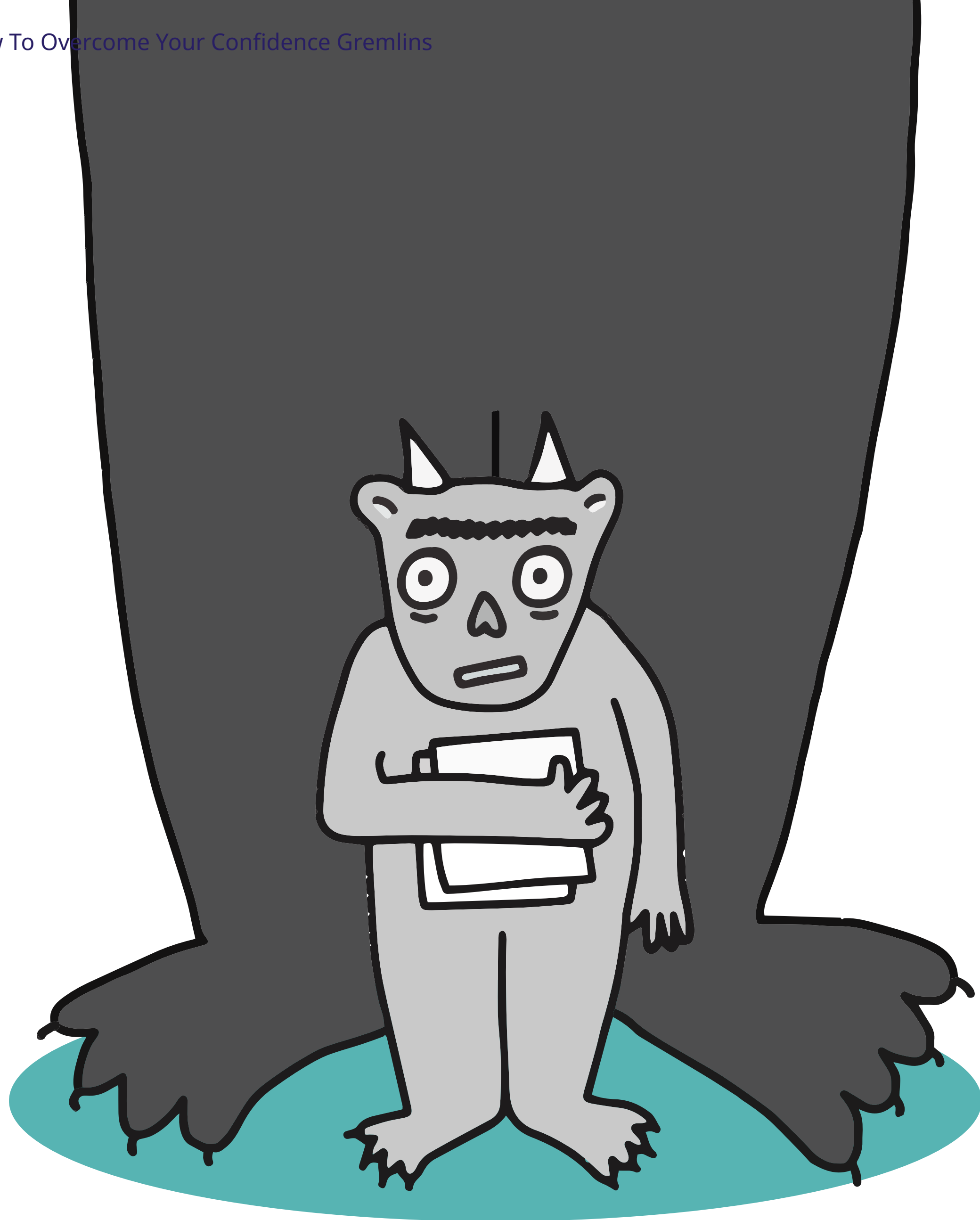
2. Prioritise so you can say no

People pleasers find it difficult to say no, in an effort to be nice to everyone. Saying no can feel tough or unwelcome so learn to prioritise your work into what is urgent and important. The next time you get asked to take on a new piece of work you can then share what you're already doing and discuss what needs to be done in what order. For example: that sounds like an exciting project. I've got 3 other projects on at the moment. It would be useful to get your perspective on whether I should re-prioritise to include this

new piece of work. Another way to say 'maybe' is to test how 'real' the deadline is: *I'm really keen to lead this piece of work but because of my other projects I couldn't start for another 2 weeks, does that sound realistic?*

3. Invest time in your 'work best friend'

A work best friend is someone who knows you really well and can offer you perspective and advice. We all worry about relationships at work and what people think of us, as we want to belong. Taking the time to chat to a work best friend is particularly important if this is your confidence gremlin as they'll help you step back and realise that your manager probably doesn't think you're useless because you couldn't take on that extra piece of work.



4. Senior People

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Forget everything you know and turn into a nervous wreck when senior people are around
- ▶ Let more senior people talk and don't speak up even when you know the answer
- ▶ Don't challenge or question senior people because you think they know more than you

3 simple actions you can take

1. Ask why, about 5 times

Try to work out why you're intimidated by seniority. Is it because they're good at something different to you? Is it because they never smile at you? Keep asking 'why'—about 5 times usually helps—until you get to the 'real' reason a particular person has an impact on your confidence. It can often end up

being one of the other confidence gremlins we've included, such as wanting to be liked or being concerned about being found out.

2. Sit next to a senior person & other small steps

Share your fear with someone supportive: a manager, colleague or friend who understands your context. Most people can empathise with this confidence gremlin and even more helpfully they may have some hints and tips on what to do. When you're with senior people set yourself small actions to start feeling more confident. It could be to ask a question in the first 15 mins of the meeting or as simple as sitting next to the person so it feels less like you're being interviewed or interrogated by them.

3. Try a new approach

Think about how you could build a relationship with someone senior in a different way. Could you ask them for advice on something they're great at? Could you volunteer for a project you know they're sponsoring? Identify different ways to spend time with senior people, as the more time you spend with someone the more comfortable and confident you will feel. It's also worth remembering that senior people all have confidence gremlins too. You might think someone senior isn't interested in what you're saying because they don't ask any questions, but in fact they might be worrying that they don't know enough to ask a good question (another classic confidence gremlin).

5. A Fear of Presenting

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Miss opportunities to share your opinions with others
- ▶ Have to present as part of your job, and spent lots of time worrying about it
- ▶ Avoid presenting and then get feedback you need to 'raise your profile'

3 simple actions you can take

1. Imagine you're listening not presenting

When you're listening to a presentation, what are you thinking? Most people want presenters to succeed and are willing them to do well. If it's a particularly intimidating audience you can even let them know that, which often gets people on your side, it's great, though a little intimidating,



to see so many people are interested in learning more about how our projects are run. Even the most experienced presenters and senior leaders use this technique.

2. Watch yourself

You get better at presenting by practising, so find as many small opportunities as possible to have a go. Don't apologise for seeking out 'easy' opportunities to practise, for example asking for 5 minutes at your team meeting to share an update on your project. If you're working with someone, ask if they'd like to present the work with you, as this is less daunting. When you're starting to feel comfortable, ask someone to film you presenting. If that's too much, a less scary option is to ask someone to observe you and give you feedback.

This is the only way you'll find out that your presenting is good, but everyone is distracted because you keep playing with your hair, don't finish your sentences or talk to your slides rather than your audience (just a few useful examples!).

3. Three is the magic number

Write down 3 things you want people to remember about your presentation as this is usually the maximum amount of messages anyone can recall. Consider starting and finishing your presentation with these points to give you the best chance of making them stick. To see if you succeeded, ask someone what stood out to them about your presentation, about a week later.



6. I Don't Know Enough

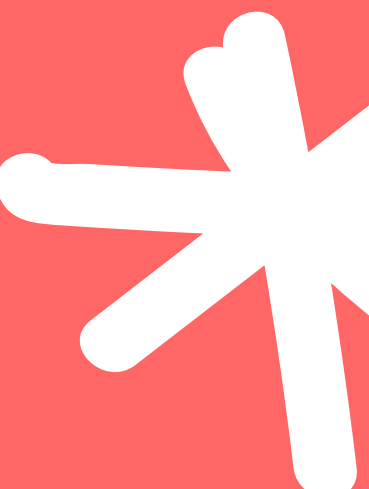
This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Are in a state of 'FOBFO' — fear of being found out
- ▶ Don't ask questions because you think everyone else knows the answer
- ▶ Play it safe with your career choices

3 simple actions you can take

1. Build relevant knowledge

Knowing everything often doesn't help as much as you might think, as people don't have the time, capacity or need to absorb lots of information. What's more useful is to consider the knowledge you need for a specific moment in time. Being relevant beats all-knowing every time.



2. Be curious

Think about your network who do you know, or could you be introduced to, who could help you to learn more about the areas where you have gaps in knowledge at the moment? Most people are flattered to be asked to share their expertise and opinions and your work will be better as a result. Share with as many people as possible what you want to learn about, and be specific. I'm interested in how large organisations create apps that last more than a year. This way you're helping other people to help you.

3. Apply for jobs you don't know how to do every part of

This confidence gremlin can stop us applying for jobs we'd love to do but feel we don't know enough to be successful in.

It's worth reflecting that two years ago you probably would have struggled to imagine being able to do all the things you can do today. In a job interview you don't need to hide the areas you don't have experience in.

If anything the opposite is true, as if you are self aware you will know what your development areas are and already be pro-actively working on addressing them. For example, *I don't have any direct line management experience at the moment, but I have been mentoring 3 graduates for the past year.* And don't apologise for not ticking every box, as no one else will either.

7. I'll Get Found Out

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Spend lots of time and energy worrying about it
- ▶ Compare yourself to other people, who often seem more talented than you
- ▶ Dismiss your successes as luck, timing or other things outside your control

3 simple actions you can take

1. Write down one success everyday

The fear of being found out is so common it was given a name—*imposter syndrome*—in the 80s. Up to 70% of people experience it at some point, so you're definitely not alone.



People often worry much more about what they don't know and ignore their many successes. At the end of every day for a month write down one success you've had that day. Successes can be small or big. A couple of examples might be: made it to the gym for the first time in a month, got to every meeting on time, made time to give someone feedback, got home in time to put my kids to bed, wrote the presentation I've been putting off. This exercise helps you to start recording and recognising all the good stuff you do every day.

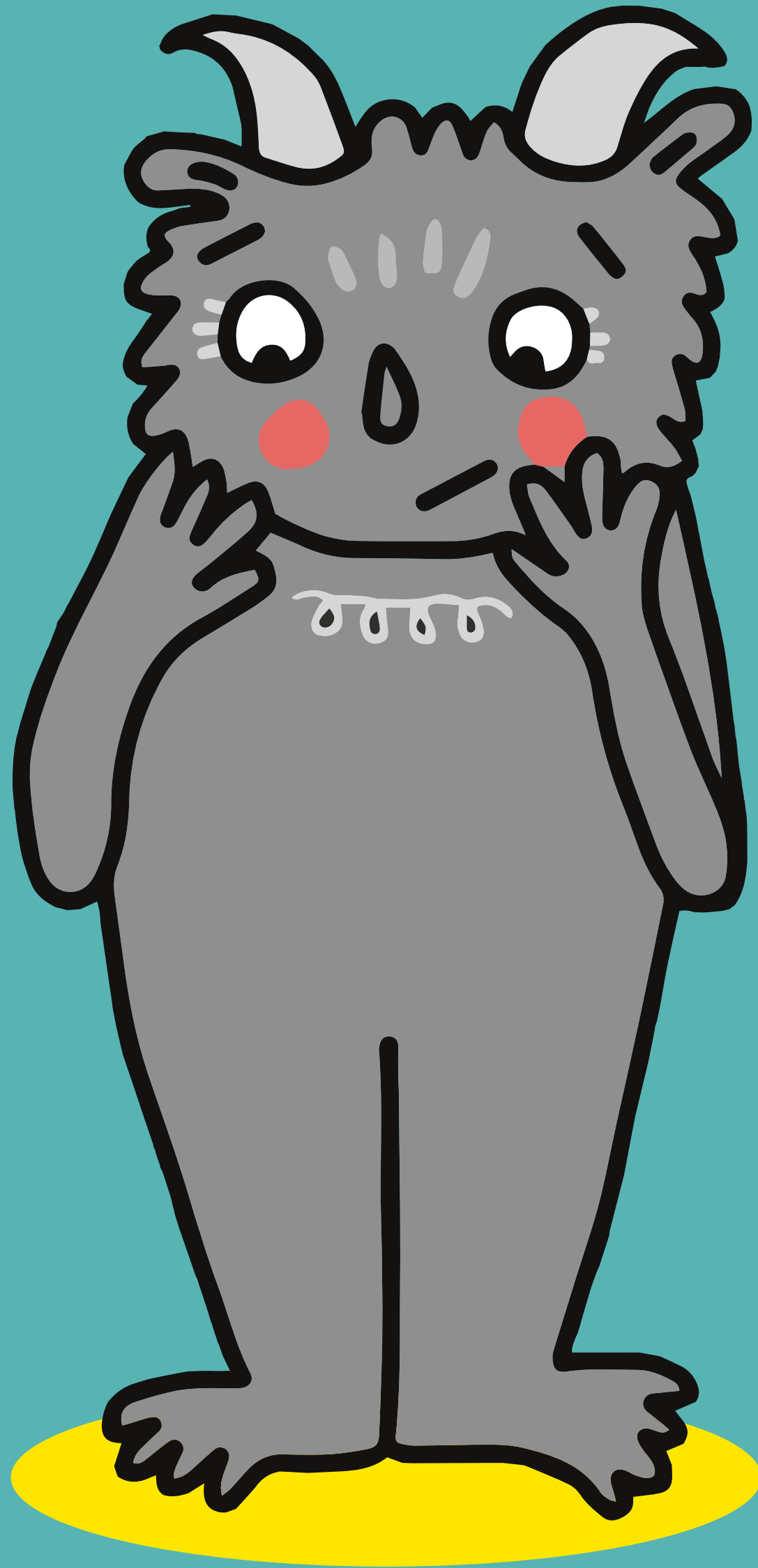
2. Share your strengths

Be 100% clear about the value you contribute at work. Write down your strengths in a way that feels right to you, practise saying them out loud and then start sharing them.

You should worry less about people finding out what you don't know and more about whether people know what you're great at. Ask yourself the question, *if I wasn't in the room would my manager know what my strengths are?*

3. Make friends with your fear

By accepting, and in some way making friends with your fear, it will help you consider more thoughtfully what action you want to take. There's no point comparing yourself to other people as you only have control over your choices and you're the only person who knows whether you're happy.



8. Blushing

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Feel self conscious and lose your train of thought
- ▶ Worry that blushing reduces your gravitas and credibility
- ▶ Feel helpless to do anything about it

3 simple actions you can take

1. Take a deep breath

See if you can spot certain triggers that result in you blushing. Is it a certain person, size of group or situation? When you see a trigger you can prevent blushing, and if you do blush recover quicker, by taking a few deep breaths.

Breathing deeply before a big moment sounds obvious but in moments of stress our breath typically becomes shallow. Breathing deeply helps our whole body to relax, and no one will notice you're doing it.

2. Give yourself a break

Remember that when you blush, you are much more aware of it than anyone else. Most people won't notice and the people that do won't give it much thought, or will just think it's because you care about your topic. If you feel it's helpful, you can make a joke about blushing—*oh look you've made me blush now!*—which can take the tension out of a situation.

3. Try cheating

If you're worried about blushing there are some

tricks you can consider. Blushing is a rush of blood to a part of the body, usually your face or neck. Drinking super cold water can help immediately cool you down. You can also buy green powders to put on that help mask redness. Most of the time these small things will help you feel prepared which then means you're less likely to blush in the first place which is a bonus.

9. Failing

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Don't take risks
- ▶ Won't share a different point of view in case you stand out or get it wrong
- ▶ Obsess over small mistakes and forget about your successes

3 simple actions you can take

1. Take mini risks

Becoming more confident with the idea and reality of failing doesn't mean you need to take massive risks. Instead experiment with lots of mini risks.

To help work out if it's a mini risk ask: *what happens if this fails?* If your risk doesn't pay off can you change direction and is the loss of money and/or time livable with?



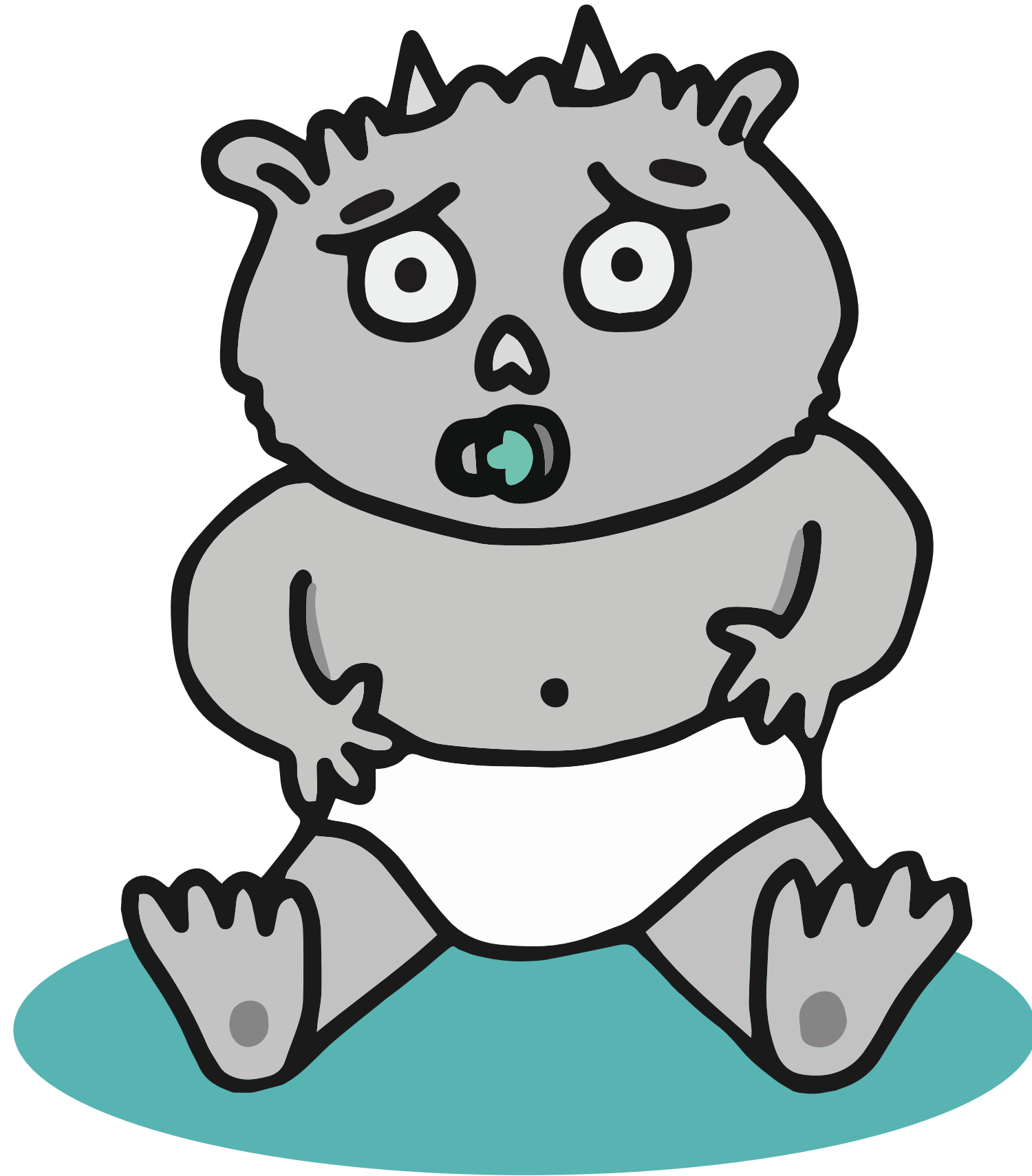
You might not love the answer but if you can live with it then you know it's a mini risk. Don't forget to also ask the question, *so what if this works?* as the answer to that question should make you feel excited about the opportunity.

2. Become a super learner

If you're not making mistakes, you're in your comfort zone and missing out on opportunities to add value to your business as well as your own development. Think about what mistakes you're making each week and make a note of them to change your mind-set about failing being 'bad'. Try thinking about your failure as if it had happened to someone else. What advice would you give them? This will help you develop into a super learner, who takes advantage of every opportunity to learn.

3. Give yourself 24 hours and then move on

It's frustrating and disappointing when something doesn't go to plan. Give yourself 24 hours to dwell on it, perhaps feel a bit sorry for yourself. And then move on. Set a specific deadline after which you'll force yourself to stop being stuck in the moment and starting focusing on what you learnt and what happens next. For example if a meeting at the end of the day goes badly you might think I'll give myself until 4pm tomorrow afternoon, then I'll grab a coffee and write down 3 things I learnt and 1 action I'm going to take in the next week.



10. I'm Too Young

This holds you back because you:

- ▶ Don't apply for a job you could do because you don't have enough years of experience
- ▶ Think a more experienced person is always right
- ▶ Work extra hard to prove you can do a job despite your age

3 simple actions you can take

1. Use your youth

Fresh eyes, with a different perspective, bring valuable knowledge and skills into a business. Use things like your understanding of technology to your advantage.

For example you could offer to mentor someone more senior, or in a different team, to share your expertise. Or you could offer to get involved in the recruitment of young talent into your organisation.

2. Listen more than you speak

Being a good listener and asking great questions will increase your knowledge as well as the respect you earn from other people. Avoid speaking for the sake of it to prove yourself and focus on learning from others. The best listeners are fully present and listen from the other person's perspective, rather than their own. Ask yourself when was the last time you listened to someone in a 1:1 conversation for more than 2 minutes without interrupting was with?

3. Go for jobs that you don't get

Occasionally and thoughtfully applying for jobs that feel out of your reach can be helpful. If you don't get the job you can ask for specific feedback that will help you learn and focus your development efforts. Of course, you might also get the job! This can highlight your aspirations to others and help you to overcome age as a barrier that's holding you back. It may also help you progress quicker than you would have done otherwise. Only do this very occasionally and if you really want the job in the first place. Applying for too many jobs in a haphazard way will make your approach appear unconsidered or too focused on only getting a promotion.

Putting it into practice



Sarah's Confidence Gremlin: Fear of Conflict



This holds me back because I:

- ▶ Withdraw from conversations that feel challenging
- ▶ Don't share my point of view when I disagree (and I have another unhelpful confidence gremlin which means I sometimes blush when I feel challenged)
- ▶ Will miss out on creating the best work possible

What actions do I take?

1. Ask for feedback on a scale of 1—10

The best thing I did to start addressing my fear of conflict was asking someone after a meeting where I felt there was lots of conflict on a scale of 1—10 how much conflict do you think there was in the meeting?

In my mind the meeting had been an 8 or 9 on the conflict scale but their answer was 4. They explained that though not everyone had agreed in the meeting they thought it was a useful debate. This helped me to understand that my assumptions about the level of conflict were not consistent with how everyone else was experiencing a situation. I realized I was blaming others rather than taking control of how I was going to cage my own gremlin

2. Change how you think about conflict

I'm a positive and enthusiastic person but I've realised this doesn't mean I have to agree with everything everyone says. I have always connected disagreeing with things not going well, people not getting on, projects potentially going off track.

I now view disagreement as an interesting opportunity to learn about different perspectives and get better at my job. I don't always find the experience easy but I do actively engage in conversations rather than avoid them.

3. Ask good questions

Asking questions can be a really useful way of understanding different points of view. It demonstrates that you are prioritising listening to and understanding other people rather than relentlessly fighting your corner.

For example questions like *could you give me an example of how that might work?* or *why do you think we should or shouldn't do this?* and *what do you think the objective of this is?* can all be useful.

Helen's Confidence Gremlin: Fear of Missing Out



This holds me back because I:

- ▶ Say yes to everything, spread myself too thinly and feel conflicted and tired
- ▶ Appear unfocused to other people, affecting their perception of my credibility
- ▶ Miss opportunities because I move from one thing to another too quickly

What actions do I take?

1. Practice saying no

I was actually prompted to do this by my manager, who saw how my FOMO behaviour was holding me back before I did. He gave me the challenge of saying 'no' to more things and then telling him about them. This increased my awareness of the amount of things I was saying 'yes' to

and increased my comfort level that saying 'no' didn't mean I was going to miss out on something in the future. Over time, I found a way of saying 'no' that felt authentic to me, often finding other opportunities as an alternative to my involvement.

2. Understand my priorities, so my 'yes' feels even better

By taking time to understand what's important to me and my career possibilities, I was able to increase my focus on saying 'yes' to the things that would make me happy and help me to progress. This meant that each time I said 'yes' to these things, I was making a step towards my happy career. Ultimately this feeling was more powerful than the initial negative feeling I had saying 'no'.

3. Share my priorities, so other people understand my decisions

Sharing my priorities with family, friends and colleagues gave them a better understanding of the choices I was making and helped them to support me. This led to less challenge from them about what I was doing and why, which reduced the conflict I felt about decisions I was making.

This also meant they could offer an objective point of view if I was torn about whether or not to do something. By understanding what was important to me, they could ask me challenging questions to help me come to the right decisions.



Reaping the Rewards of Testing your Gremlins

Taking actions to test your Confidence Gremlins is hard.

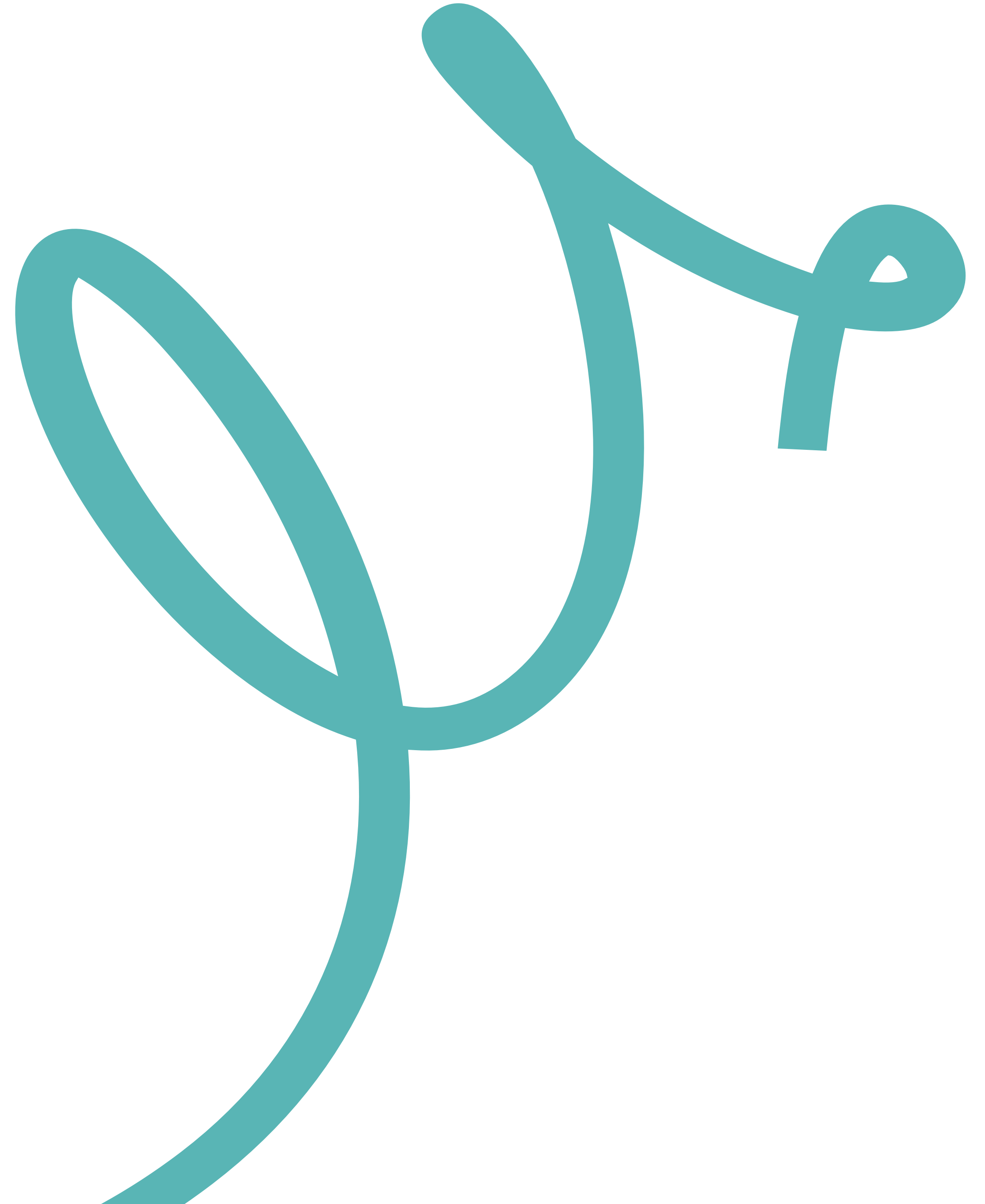
The first time you plan to take an action it's pretty likely that you won't do it. And that's fine. If you don't take the action you were hoping to, there are a couple of questions you can ask yourself. Is the action right but the situation wrong? Could I start taking this action in an easier environment to get some practice before applying the action to the context where it's most relevant. Is the action wrong? Have you started with an action that's too big?

Your plan should be a number of small actions which over time will add up to overcoming your confidence gremlins. There are no one hit wonders (unfortunately!). Is the action right, the situation right but you just didn't do it? This is the most common answer. Changing behaviour is hard however now that you've gone through the process of identifying your confidence gremlin and making a plan of actions you are committed to, you will increase your chances of giving it a go.

It can be useful to share the action you're going to take with someone else, as knowing they will probably ask you how it went will encourage you to take the leap. And then every time you take an action come up with a way to give yourself a pat on the back.

A small reward to recognise the fact you're one step further forward in overcoming that gremlin. The reward can be anything ... a coffee, going for a walk, some new stationery, finishing half an hour early that day, whatever works for you.

Keep the reward the same for every action you take. This will also help you track and recognise the progress you're making. After 12 months what would have previously felt like a massive action will just feel like the next small step.



My Confidence Gremlin Is ...

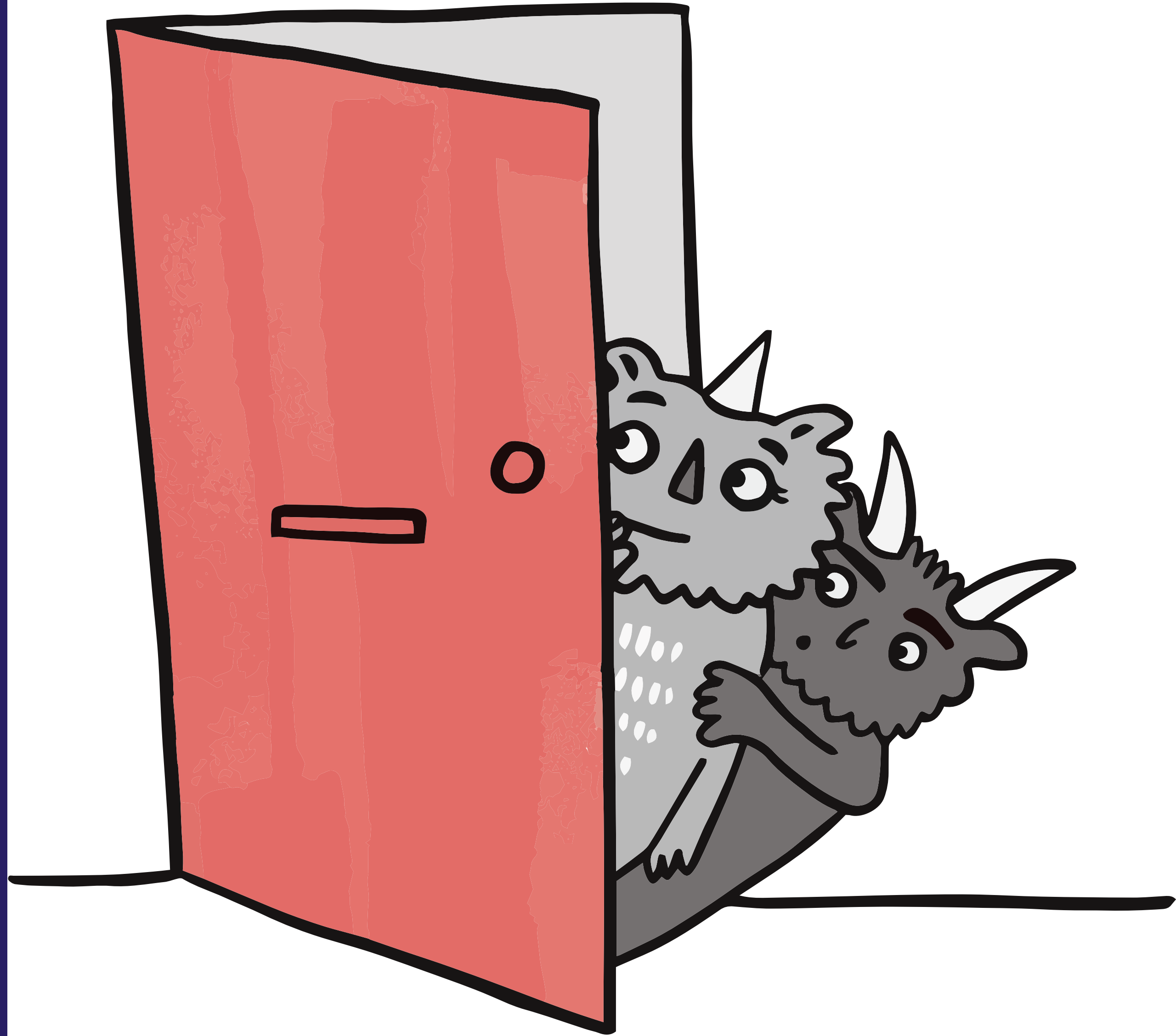


This holds me back because I...

3 small actions that will help me test my confidence gremlin?

How will I reward myself?

What Now?



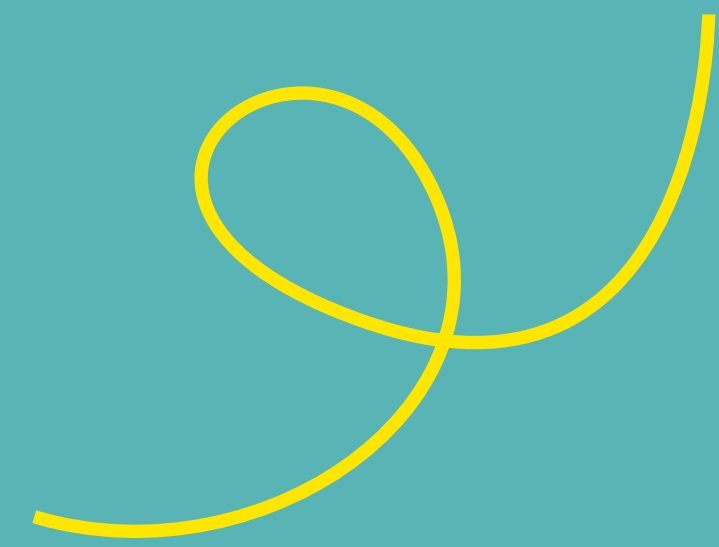
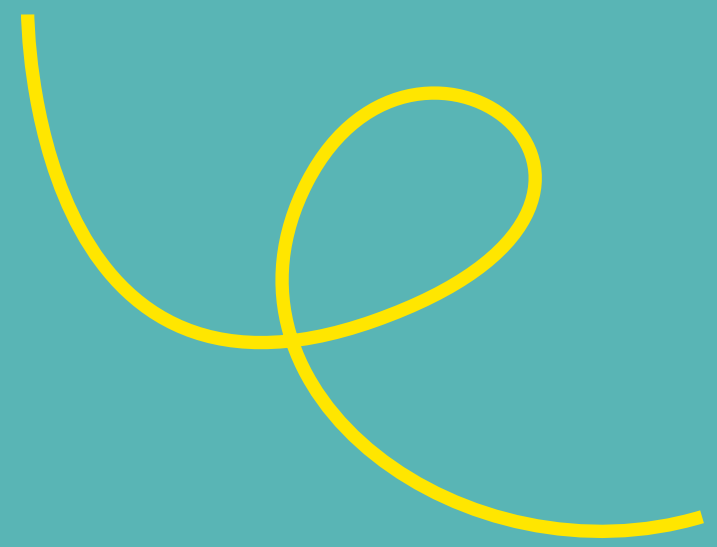
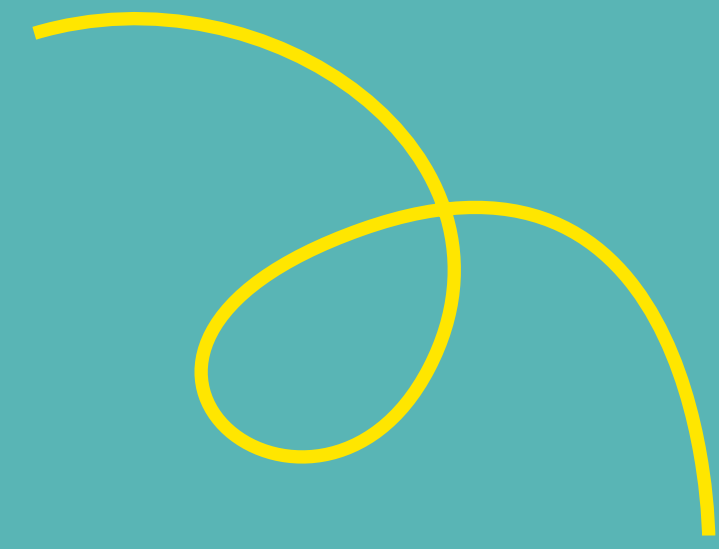
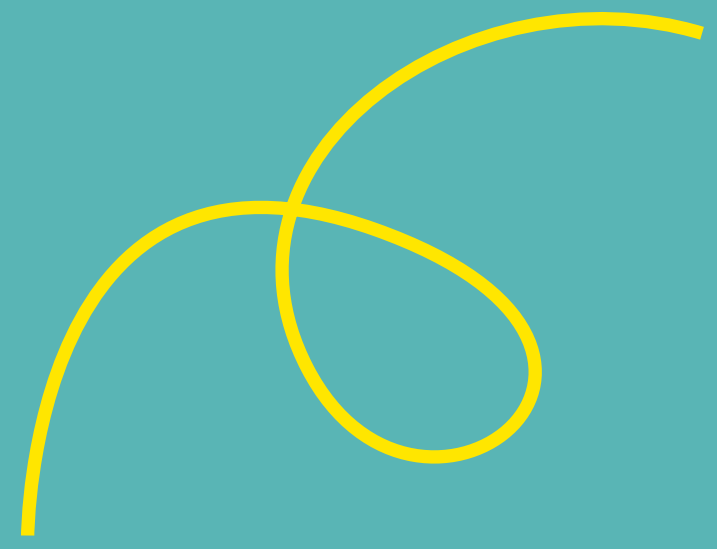
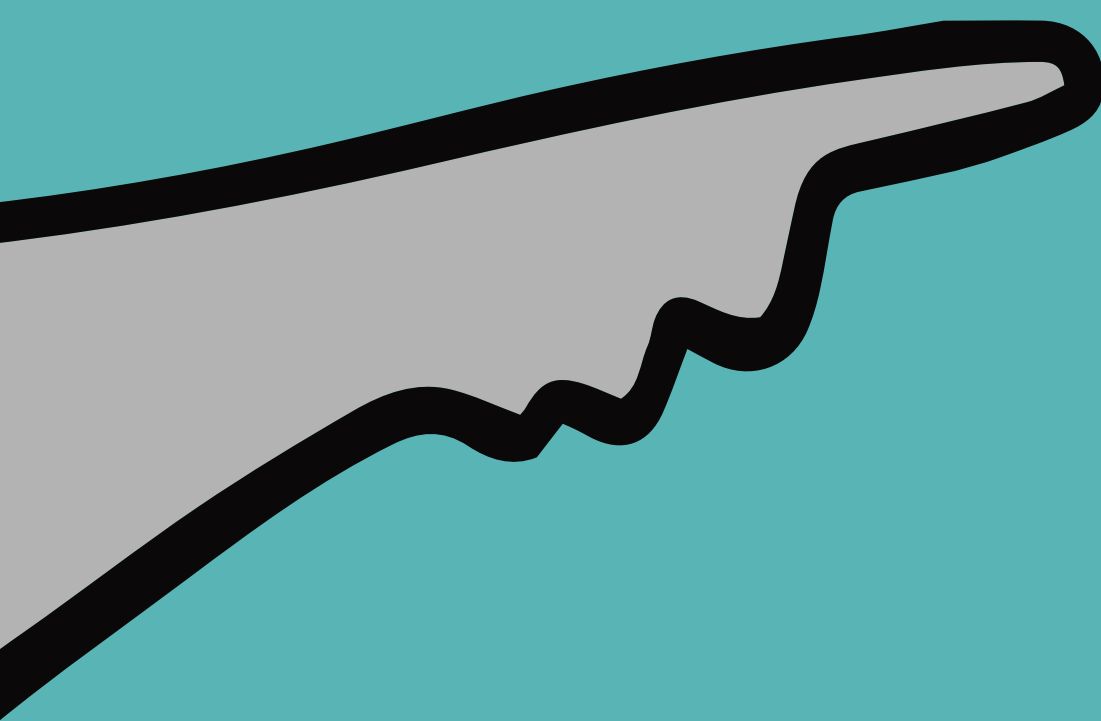
Useful to Remember

Spot
Your Gremlins

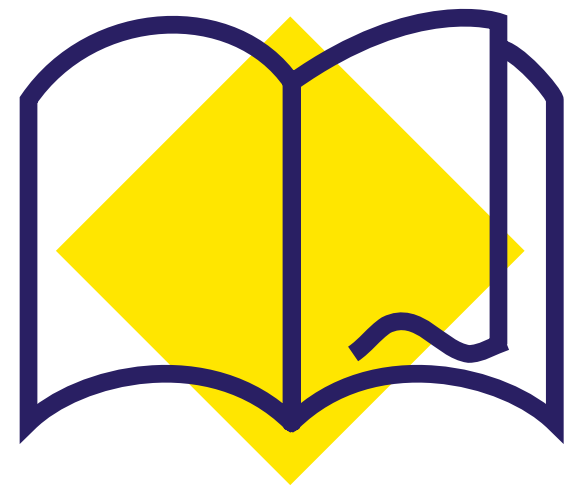
Test
Your Gremlins

Reward
Your Progress

Cage
Your Gremlins



Learn More

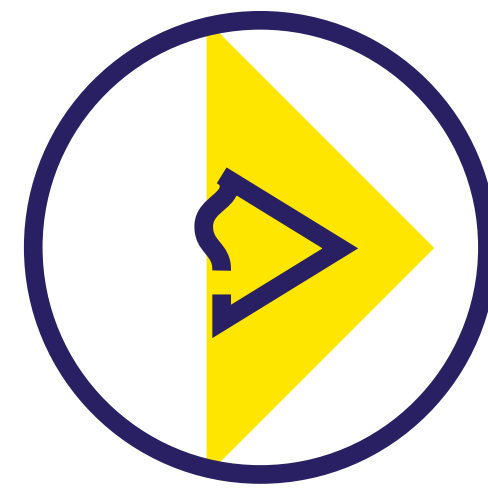


Books

The Start Up of You
Reid Hoffman

The Chimp Paradox
Steve Peters

Career Advice for Ambitious Women
Mrs Moneypenny



Videos

Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are
Amy Cuddy

Vulnerability
Brene Brown

Quiet
Susan Cain



Podcasts

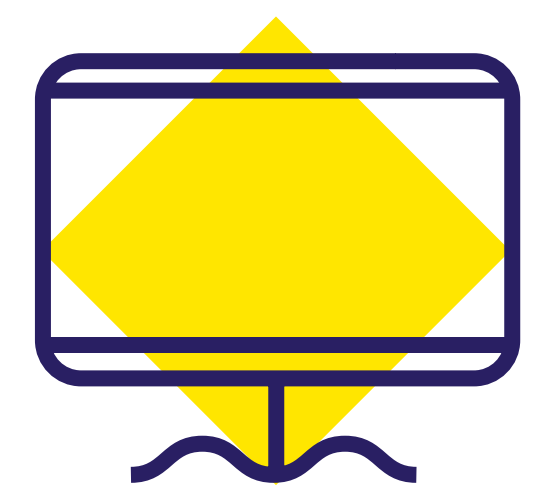
HBR Ideacast
The Accidental Creative

TED Radio Hour
Squiggly Careers



Courses

Amazing If
School of Life
The Complete Confidence Masterclass
Skillshare (online course)



Blogs/Websites

The Muse
Seth Godin

99u

About Amazing If

At Amazing If our ambition is to make careers better for everyone. We do this by helping organisations, and their people, to develop the mindset and skillset needed to have a successful career.



Squiggly Careers



The Squiggly Career



@Amazing If



sarah@amazingif.com



*Squiggly Careers*TM

Anyone that tells you that they don't experience self-doubt is a liar or a sociopath. The tools that Sarah and Helen have developed can help anyone and everyone to understand how they can get on the front-foot in developing their self-confidence and self-belief.

— Mark Evans, Marketing Director: Direct Line

What a fantastic read! Sarah & Helen have created a book jam packed with practical and simple solutions that can be applied to all manner of situations to overcome those pesky confidence gremlins. It doesn't matter where you are in your career journey, you'll find something in this book that will help you overcome those hurdles and enjoy an even happier career.

— Clare Beaumont-Adam, Co-owner: Independents United

Recognising, owning and taming your Gremlin is essential in developing your confidence — This book does exactly that in a fun, easy, yet extremely powerful way.

— Jo Simpson, Executive Leadership Coach,
Speaker and Author of The Restless Executive

