

Swagger

Unleash Everything You Are and Become Everything You Want

by **Leslie Ehm**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

We want to have what we think traditional swagger is—an air of powerful, cocksure confidence, no matter the situation. We want to be heard, respected, recognized, and rewarded for being our true selves at work, but we’re too shit-scared of the possible repercussions. So, we squash our realness down, telling ourselves that we’ll get what we want in the end if we’re hardworking drones who don’t stand out too much.

The more you are able to be yourself in your work, the more successful you will be at work. That’s what swagger really is. Swagger is the ability to manifest the real you and hold on to it in the face of all the psychological crap that’s going to come for it—regardless of the situation or environment. Leslie Ehm, speaker, consultant, and author of *Swagger*, assures us that swagger is not about perfection. It’s about being a flawed badass. It’s self-acceptance, not self-assuredness. And once you find your swagger, you’ll never, ever want to go back to who you were, because having swagger is the secret to that game-changing, next-level success.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Swagger is more than confidence.
- What will block your swagger.
- How truth, intention, and self-belief drive your swagger.
- To speak, walk, and feel your swagger.

Introduction

Confidence is not about having all of the answers—it's about honestly believing in yourself, which is very different from simply pretending to. Confidence is not a “thing” to achieve; it's a by-product of self-belief that stems from real competence. If you believe that you are truly worthy of owning your awesomeness at the stage you're currently at, then you do. Nothing or no one can tell you differently. In that light, it makes sense to flip the adage from “fake it 'til you make it” to “feel it 'til you find it.”

Swagger Blockers

Everyone is capable of swagger. Being an introvert or inexperienced is no excuse. Conversely, just because you're a crowd-pleaser doesn't mean you already have it. Tapping into and releasing true swagger has to be a conscious act. You won't always notice when, where, why, or how it's getting stuck unless you understand the psychological blockers holding it back. Imagine that the real, authentic you—the one seen every day by those who already love and accept you—sits at your very core. This is the you who feels free to speak and act without self-consciousness, fear of judgment, and nagging self-doubt. It's the you that the world deserves to see.

Persona

The first swagger blocker separating the real you from the world is Persona. So many of us develop a conscious demarcation between who we really are and what we reveal to the world, particularly in the context of our professional lives. We do this because we've been conditioned to believe that there's a way we're supposed to show up if we want to succeed. But the truth is, having a work persona hides our uniqueness and shrouds our value. When we align our persona as closely as possible with our true self, we can step into our power big-time.

Ambition

In the business world, the concept of ambition is extremely loaded, which is exactly why it qualifies as a swagger blocker. The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of ambition is “a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work.” It's not about a title or power. It's wanting to be a badass to the best of your ability and for the right reasons. For ambition to be legit, it should never come at the cost of your authenticity.

Insecurity

Insecurity is the dreaded “what if”—the anxious state where all unknowns percolate. It's self-doubt in action. Remember that those voices in your head do not suddenly manifest—they've been simmering and solidifying for years, seeded by your parents, siblings, teachers, boyfriends and girlfriends, colleagues, and bosses your entire life. When someone tells us we're not good enough, it sticks. Those tapes get recorded and then play themselves when we're at our most vulnerable. Insecurity is rarely about the challenge we're about to take on—it's the history of self-doubt that is the killer. Retrain your brain to accept what is true instead of what is imagined.

Fear

Fear is real. It doesn't matter what the danger is. Telling someone, or yourself, to “just get over it” doesn't work. So let's get practical. The trick is going to be in building up some positive conditioning to counter the brain's certainty that all is about to go to hell in a hand basket. Having a clear and decisive plan to face your fears is like slowly chipping away at the boulder that sits on your chest. You'll feel lighter and more positive in no time.

Pain

We are all formed by pain. Ling was the only daughter in a family of four brothers. In Chinese culture (at the time), women were perceived as second-class, almost disposable entities. As such, she was completely overlooked. Her wants, opinions, and aspirations were ignored. She was told to “stay quiet” for her entire childhood. So she did, becoming progressively invisible—even to herself. Even when she broke free from her family and made her way to Canada, that silence stayed with her. It was rooted in profoundly painful memory and conditioning. Now, when she was free to speak up for herself, it was too late. She had literally lost her voice.

Slowly but surely, she was able to turn her volume up, and with it came the funny, quirky personality she'd been hiding for so long. Ling didn't just find her voice. She found her importance. Without learning what was triggering her pain, she may have stayed hidden forever. But now, understanding that hearing “speak up” wasn't a criticism of her worth, she was able to lean in and be heard in her own unique, quiet way.

Swagger Drivers

Truth is what you want and need to express, intention is why you want to express it, and self-belief is knowing that

you are the best person to express it now, and that you have the right to, in this situation. The biggest challenge you'll face is learning how to keep your truth, intention, and self-belief intact as they navigate through the swagger blockers.

Truth

Truth is the number one driver of our swagger because it has the power to carry our authenticity out into the fresh air. Speaking your truth isn't license to run around spewing your opinions or judgments on others, either. It's more an antidote to feeling unheard, misunderstood, or suppressed in some way. If swagger is the authentic manifestation of who you really are, then speaking your truth must be in your toolkit if you want to be successful.

Speaking truth to power has always been a human challenge. The ancient Greeks referred to it as "parrhesia," meaning "to speak candidly or to ask forgiveness for so speaking." Parrhesiastes means "one who speaks truth to power." In the 1950s, the Quakers used the phrase as part of their manifesto to find alternatives to violent actions. Since then, it's become a political rallying cry for everyone from Martin Luther King Jr. to Anita Hill and the #MeToo movement. Why? Because speaking truth when you feel like you're in a position of lesser power and believe there could be serious consequences can be utterly terrifying, regardless of whether the stakes are personal or global. So, if you're someone who struggles with truth, it doesn't make you "weak"; it makes you perfectly human.

Do a quick analysis of the situation that you believe requires or deserves your truth. Now swap chairs and imagine it from the perspective of the person or people you're hoping will hear it. How might they feel? How would you feel in their position? A little empathy can help you check yourself. While something may be your truth, it may not actually need to be shared for any other reason than to make yourself feel better. If that's the case, go for drinks with a friend and vent that shit.

Intention

Intention is everything. It is the "why" of your swagger and can mean the key difference between cocky and confident. Sharing your intention can do wonders to prepare your listener for what's coming, especially if the conversation is going to be touchy or delicate. For example, "I know you're having a really hard time these days and it's affecting you badly. My intention here is to help in any way I can be-

cause I know you're getting some harsh judgment about it." That's a juicy, well-intentioned conversation starter. It's the compass for your swagger, and you should always know exactly in which direction it's pointed.

Self-Belief

The ability to believe in one's self is tough, and it's the driver most likely to falter when facing down swagger blockers. What also makes self-belief challenging is that it must come from the self rather than being a reflection of other people's belief in you. Self-belief is the unerring faith that you are the right person to express this thing in this moment, for these people and this situation.

Remember how Wile E. Coyote would chase after the Road Runner with absolute commitment and gusto? He'd charge up the winding mountain path, trying to catch a bird that could take corners at breakneck speed. Inevitably, the poor sap would careen over the edge and find himself suspended in midair. He'd hang there for a moment. And he would fall only when he looked down. That's the secret to self-belief: Never. Look. Down. Instead, believe if you speak your truth and act with intention, that path through midair will magically reveal itself beneath your feet.

Walking, Talking, and Feeling Your Swagger

We are all born with physical quirks, nuances, and differentiators. That's what makes the breadth of humanity so freakin' gorgeous. Yet most of us develop a serious hate-on for the very things that make us memorable and unique. (Thanks, adolescence. You fully suck.)

Living in Your Swagger Skin

I worked with a female senior executive at Google who is incredibly tall. She is literally head and shoulders above all the dudes in the room. She has a gorgeously deep voice and a strong Eastern European accent. She is strong and smart and kind. Guess what she wanted my help with? How to appear smaller when she was in front of audiences. This glorious specimen wanted to take up less space because she believed her height made her intimidating. I spent the bulk of our time together persuading her to reframe how she believed others perceived her. Watching her step back into her body and discover its potency was a very powerful experience for both of us. Through this, she was so much more confident in expressing her truth, intention, and self-belief.

Speaking of Swagger

How we express ourselves reveals who we are and how we think and feel about the world around us. There's no such thing as "sounding smart." To qualify as smart, you are either in a place of knowledge or in a place of seeking it. The latter is about curiosity and openness. Sounding smart is about either or both insecurity and arrogance. These are the opposites of swagger.

When we put tons of unnecessary mental energy into planning and second-guessing every word we say, it's unlikely that we're going to find our flow. But when we just let it rip, focus more on our truth and intention, what comes out of our mouths will find acceptance.

Feeling Your Swagger

Everyone from interns to CEOs are cautious about having the "feels." All the wishing and hoping ain't gonna make emotions conveniently disappear. Every time we get criticized, rejected, or even celebrated, our brain's natural response will be emotional. The more you accept your emotional realities and complexities, the more secure in your swagger you'll become. You'll be less hyperreactive to external triggers—your sense of self will strengthen and you'll be far less subject to what would have been injury before.

Living Your Best Swagger Life

Small, medium, or mega, each swagger moment we have matters and counts. If we've consciously established our truth, intention, and self-belief in advance of any situation and are able to act on it—even in the tiniest way—that's an amazing win! Those moments will add up and before you

know it, you'll have more consistent, conditioned reactions to whatever life throws at you. Because swagger is not just about what you do, it's also about how you feel about what you do. Your swagger is for you. The by-product is awesome for the world. But you're doing it for the betterment and happiness of only you first. So shed those pounds of insecurity, put down the bottle filled with fear, and dance that change like nobody is watching.



Former TV host and advertising Creative Director turned training guru, **Leslie Ehm** has spent decades travelling the globe with her award-winning company Combustion, working with executives and teams from top organizations like Google, Disney, Pepsico, TD Bank, Uber, and more. She's turned technologists into creative forces, bankers into storytellers, and has brought a serious dose of badassery to boardrooms everywhere. Leslie is now a Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Amazon #1 bestselling author, speaker, and Swagger Coach.

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