

10 Rules for Brilliant Women

by Tara Sophia Mohr

I coach brilliant women, lots of them. Dedicated, talented, brilliant women.

Most of the time, they don't know their brilliance. They are certain they "aren't ready" to take on that next bigger role. They are more attuned to the ways they aren't qualified than to the ways that they are. They are waiting for someone to validate, promote or discover them. Sound familiar?

It's time to step up, brilliant women. Here are ten principles for owning your brilliance and bringing it to the world.

1. Make a pact.

No one else is going to build the life you want for you. No one else will even be able to completely understand it. The most amazing souls will show up to cheer you on along the way, but this is your game. Make a pact to be in it with yourself for the long haul, as your own supportive friend at every step along the way.

2. Imagine it.

What does a knock-the-ball-out-of-the-park life look like for you? What is the career that seems so incredible you think it's almost criminal to have it? What is the dream you don't allow yourself to even consider because it seems too unrealistic, frivolous, or insane? Start envisioning it. That's the beginning of having it.

3. Gasp.

Start doing things that make you gasp and get the adrenaline flowing. Ask yourself, "What's the gasp-level action here?" Your fears and a tough inner critic will chatter in your head. That's normal, and just fine. When you hear that repetitive, irrational, mean inner critic, name it for what it is, and remember,

it's just a fearful liar, trying to protect you from any real or seeming risks. Go for the gasps and learn how false your inner critic's narrative really is, and how conquerable your fears.

4. Get a thick skin.

If you take risks, sometimes you'll get a standing ovation, and sometimes, people will throw tomatoes. Can you think of any leader or innovator whom you admire who doesn't have enthusiastic fans and harsh critics? Get used to wins and losses, praise and pans, getting a call back and being ignored. Work on letting go of needing to be liked and needing to be universally known as "a nice person."

5. Be an arrogant idiot.

Of course I know you won't, because you never could. But please, just be a little more of an arrogant idiot. You know those guys around the office who share their opinions without thinking, who rally everyone around their big, (often unformed) ideas? Be more like them. Even if just a bit. You can afford to move a few inches in that direction.

6. Question the voice that says “I’m not ready yet.”

I know, I know. Because you are so brilliant and have such high standards, you see every way that you could be more qualified. You notice every part of your idea that is not perfected yet. While you are waiting to be ready, gathering more experience, sitting on your ideas, our friends referenced in rule five are being anointed industry visionaries, getting raises, and seeing their ideas come to life in the world. They are no more ready than you, and perhaps less. Jump in the sandbox now, and start playing full out. Find out just how ready you are.

7. Don’t wait for your Oscar.

Don’t wait to be praised, anointed, or validated. Don’t wait for someone to give you permission to lead. Don’t wait for someone to invite you to share your voice. No one is going to discover you. (Well, actually, they will, but paradoxically, only after you’ve started boldly and consistently stepping into leadership, sharing your voice, and doing things that scare the hell out of you.)

8. Filter advice.

Most brilliant women are humble and open to guidance. We want to gather feedback and advice. Fine, but recognize that some people won’t understand what you are up to (often because you are saying something new and ahead of your time). Some people will find you to be not their cup of tea. Some will feel threatened. Some people will want to do with your idea only what is interesting or helpful to them. So interpret feedback carefully. Test advice and evaluate the results, rather than following it wholesale.

9. Recover and restore.

If you start doing the things that make you gasp, doing what you don’t quite feel ready to do, and being more of an arrogant idiot, you are going to be stretching out of our comfort zone—a lot. Regularly do things that feel safe, cozy, and restorative. Vent to friends when you need to. Acknowledge the steps you’ve taken. Watch your tank to see how much risk-taking juice you have available to you. When it’s running low, stop, recover and restore.

10. Let other women know they are brilliant.

Let them know what kind of brilliance you see, and why it’s so special. Call them into greater leadership and action. Let them know that they are ready. Watch out for that subtle, probably unconscious thought, “because I had to struggle and suffer on my way up... they should have to too.” Watch out for thinking this will “take” too much time – when the truth is it always has huge, often unexpected returns.

Clear a path by walking it, boldly.



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Tara Mohr is an expert on women’s leadership and well-being. She is the author of *Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak Up, Create and Lead*, published by Penguin, and named a Best Book of the Year by Apple’s iBooks. Tara is also the creator of the acclaimed Playing Big leadership programs for women. Her writing on women’s personal and professional development has been featured on The Today Show and in publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *Harvard Business Review* to goop. She lives in San Francisco and loves dance, art, and long walks with her family.

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