



# Making Room for Yourself at the Table:

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## Finding Your Voice and Confidence

Presented at the 2025 NOWRA Mega-Conference, October 19-22, 2025

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# Introductions

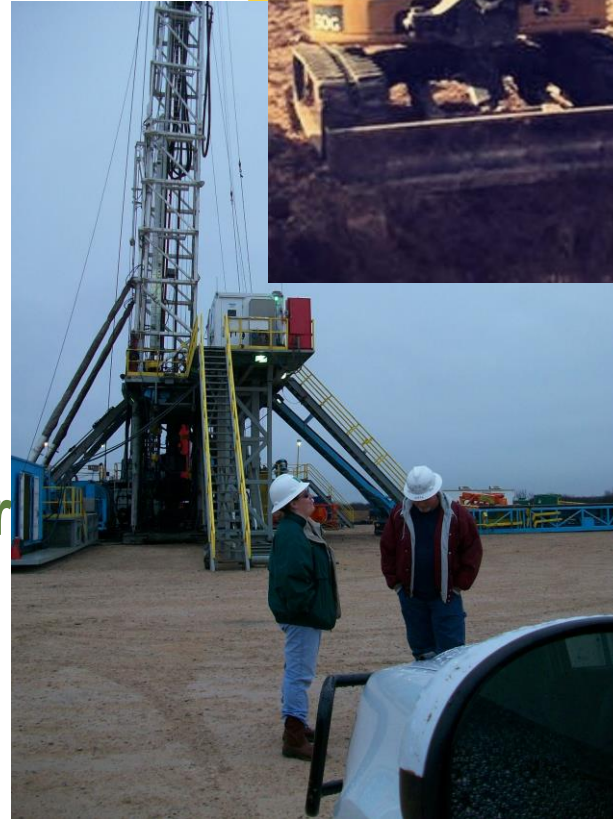
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**Dawn Rohrs**  
President, Cyclone Septics  
*That Septic Girl*  
VP of NAWT

Drilling Engineer/Manager for 20 yrs

Wastewater Business Owner for 10 yrs

*The only woman in the room for 35 years.*



# Agenda

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Today, we'll cover:

- Why your voice matters
- Building confidence from the ground up
- Identify what's holding you back
- Practical tools to speak up and lead
- Taking your seat at the table, unapologetically



# “Confidence comes not from always being right but from not fearing to be wrong.” – Peter McIntyre

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- You don't need permission
- It's already inside you
- You don't need to be an extrovert!!

*bold*

*overconfident*

*bossy*  
*assured*

*arrogant*  
*certain*

*cocky*

*fearless*

*intimidating*

# Speak up... or maybe not

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- Fear of being judged
- Being the “only one”
- Imposter syndrome
- Not wanting to rock the boat

**What's a situation where you wish you would have spoken up?**



# The Challenge in the Trades

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- Fast-paced, hands-on work
- Strong personalities & traditions
- Often male dominated or experience-heavy
- Feeling overlooked if you're new, different or not the loudest

**What gets in your way when  
it's time to speak up?**

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# Let's Talk About It

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- People underestimating you
- Being the only woman
- Credit given to someone else

# The Table's Not Full Until You're There!



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Speaking up brings value – to you, your team, and the job!

- More creative problem-solving
- Better decision-making
- Broader knowledge base
- Stronger adaptability
- Higher engagement and buy-in
- Competitive advantage

**Your unique  
perspective is your  
strength!**



“Don’t be defined by other people’s expectations. Define your own strengths.”

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— Susie Chan



# Confidence 101:

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**Always be  
willing to fail**

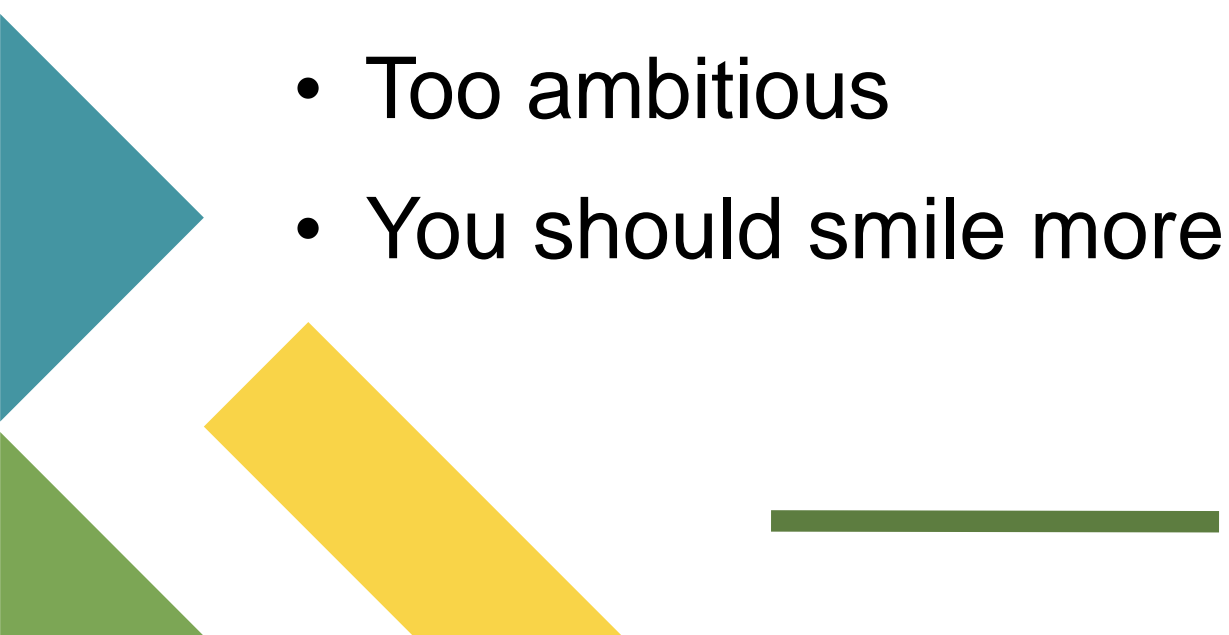
# Confidence Is Not..

- Being loud
- Being an extrovert

# Confidence Is..

- Knowing your stuff (skills + experience)
  - Owning your wins (big or small)
  - Faking it 'til you make it
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# The Reality of Being Too Much

- Too intimidating
  - Too aggressive
  - Too emotional
  - Too ambitious
  - You should smile more
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# “Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes.” – Maggie Kuhn

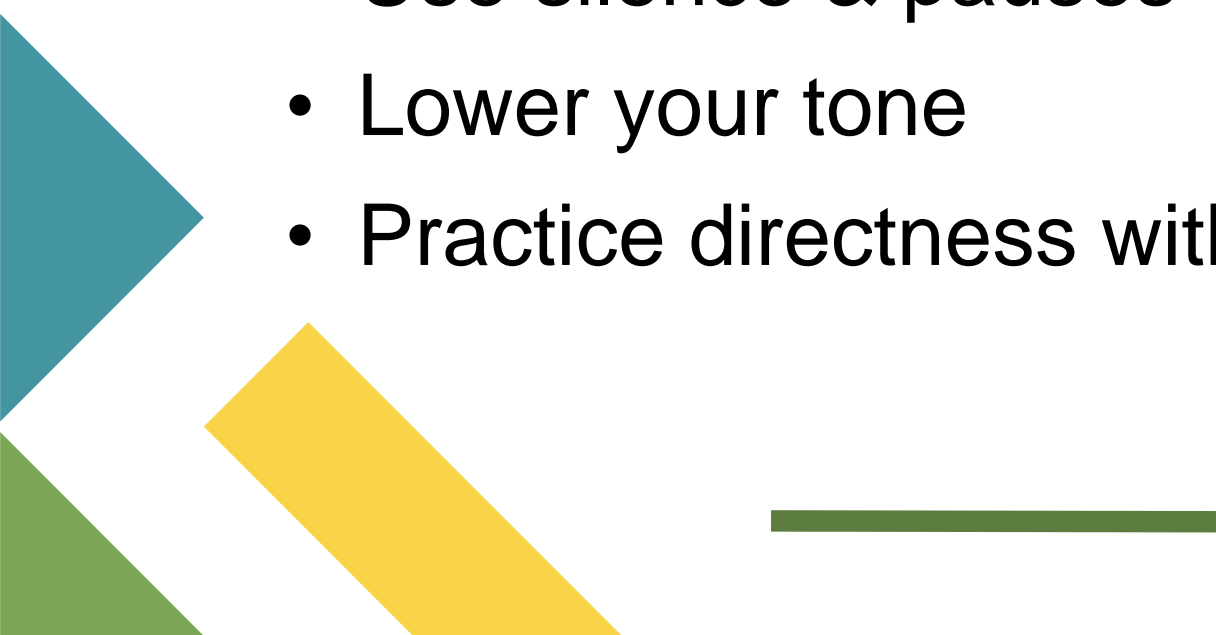
- I’ve *never* lacked confidence
- I *have* felt
  - Nervous
  - Self-conscious
  - Frustrated

# Be the Expert

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- Know your subject better than anyone in the room
- Know your audience – and what they care about
- Bring solutions, not just ideas or problems

# Say It Like You Mean It

- ~~• Sorry, but...~~
  - ~~• I just...~~
  - ~~• I think~~
  - Use silence & pauses
  - Lower your tone
  - Practice directness with kindness
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# Set Boundaries



- “That’s not acceptable”
  - “Let’s keep this professional
  - “I’d like to finish what I was saying”
  - “Let me finish my thought”
  - “I addressed that earlier, let’s circle back”
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# Assertiveness Without Apology

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Speak up & speak clearly: Short, direct sentences

Stand tall: Body language matters

Say no when needed: Be respectful but firm

Use tone and body language to your advantage

**Being confidence isn't the  
problem – people's  
discomfort with it is!**

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# Navigating the Table

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- Pick your moments: Quality over quantity
- Ask questions: Show you're engaged
- Amplify others: Build allies, not enemies
- Practice small: comments in meetings, social media posts
- **Don't dominate, contribute!**

# Confidence Also Means

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- Knowing when to walk away
  - Leave the table
  - Fire the customer
  - Stand up to regulators

# Advocate for Yourself

- Stop shrinking to fit in
- Don't wait to be invited
- Highlight your value
- Ask for what you need
- Stay calm
- Bring the damn chair, build the damn table!
  - Social Media
  - Advocacy



# Find *YOUR* Confidence!

What are you *really* good at?

What's a moment you were proud of?

# Own the Spotlight

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- You're not alone – it just feels that way.
- Focus on your strengths, not your differences
- Anticipate scrutiny and plan for it
- Lead with data, not doubt
- Breathe and slow down
- Turn nerves into energy
- Practice until it feels natural

# Strength in Numbers

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- Support each other
- Echo each other's good ideas
  - “Did you hear what she said”
- Speak up if someone is talked over
  - “I think we should discuss her idea”
- Celebrate each other's wins

**You don't have to find your voice;  
you need to stop giving other people  
the volume control!**

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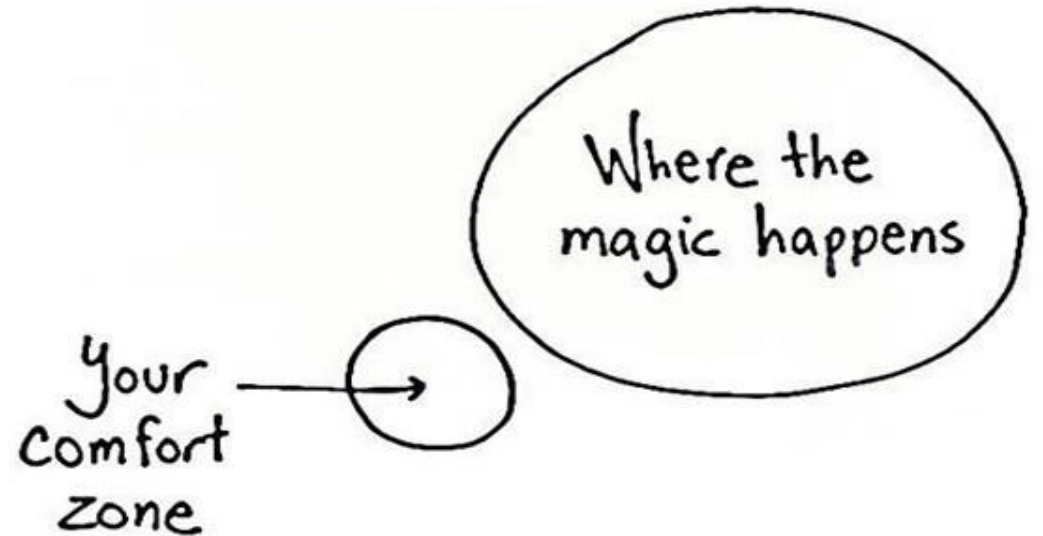
# Own the Table

- Stop asking, start taking
- Own your results
- Hold the floor when interrupted
- Back up your voice with facts
- Never shrink to fit in!



# No Doubt, No Apologies

- The seat is already yours
- You know your stuff so, act like it
- Discomfort means you're leveling up
- Bring receipts
- Stand your ground



# Key Takeaways

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- **Stop asking – start owning**
- **Facts over feelings**
- **Take the seat and keep it**
- **Build a table others fight to join**
- **Brave beats fearless!**



- **You don't need to be fearless, just brave for 10 sec**
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What's one thing you could do this week that would take 10 seconds of courage?



# Thank you

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Dawn Rohrs

