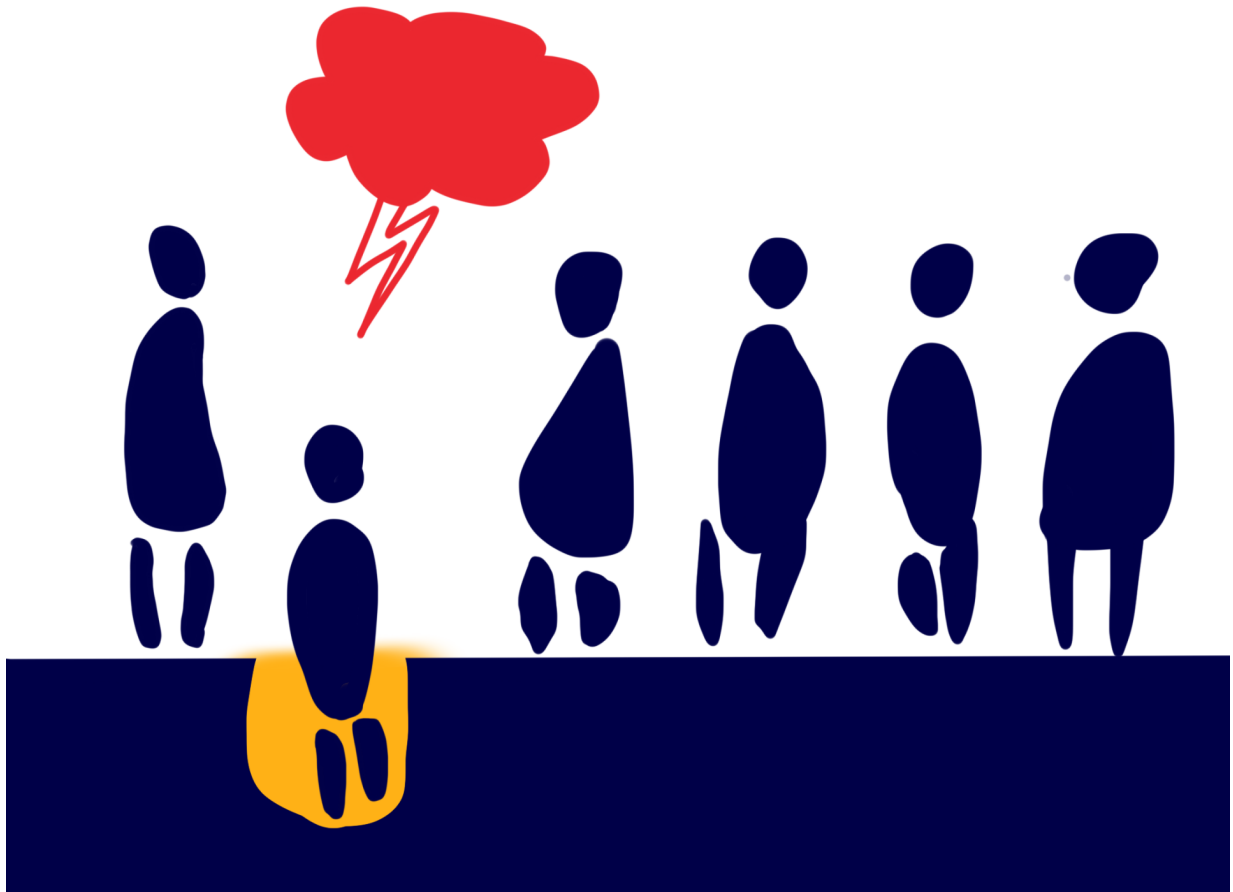# Conquering Self Doubt After a Career Change

Julia Büchting • August 30, 2023

"I will never be good enough. Even if I work for years and years, I will never be as good as the others." This went through my head two months into my new job and I felt defeated. Was changing careers from art to data viz really a good idea? I had no background in STEM or business. I barely knew anything about data or business intelligence. I had studied Michelangelo and intaglio printing and social science. I felt like I was light-years behind my colleagues, and I felt second class to those who had studied something "useful."

A few days later a colleague came up to me. She had started working at Woodmark Consulting two years earlier than me and I had heard other colleagues talk about her and praise how she handled a project. She started as a Tableau developer like me but now it seemed like there was nothing she couldn't do: ETL, Python, cloud computing.
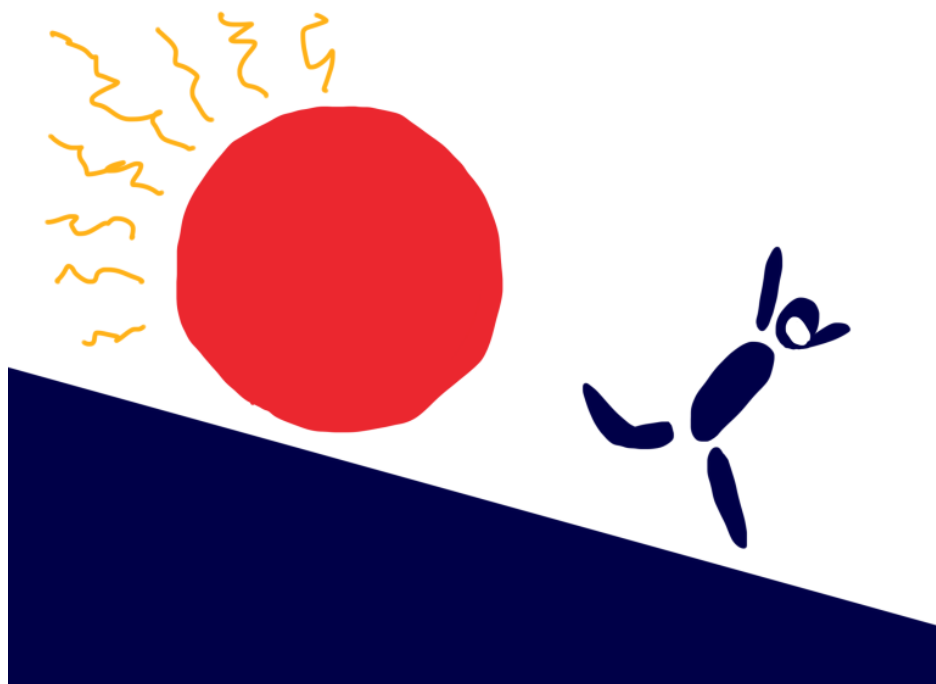
"I think it's awesome that you are an artist," she said. "I studied linguistics before I started here. Don't ever let yourself feel deficient because you don't come from a STEM or business background. Make the

This happened four years ago. I want to pass on these encouraging words: They changed how I perceived my own background, how I thought of myself, and how I pursued my career. What I have to say can apply to anyone — but people from unusual backgrounds need encouragement the most. Philosophers, social workers, ballet dancers: I have talked to so many of you, through networking and through the mentoring platform CoffeeCodeBreak.de.

Sometimes it is harder for us. When we apply for jobs, it is more likely that our CVs get rejected up front because our education says "Master of Arts" instead of "Master of Science." It is harder for us, because clients or businesses want to avoid any risk and our background seems like a risk to them.

Self-sabotage shouldn't be a reason why it is harder for us. If there is one thing we can change, it is how we perceive ourselves and, in turn, how we present ourselves to the world. This is for all people who had destructive thoughts about their qualifications. Let me pick you up like I was picked up — and then, one day, you can try to pick somebody else up.

Looking back at my situation, I now know that you should never let your background be a disadvantage. Don't think of yourself as deficient. And if other people do so, question them. Three years down the road your background will be irrelevant. What counts is your progress, your experience, and your achievements. But years ago, I didn't have that wisdom — and I almost gave up.
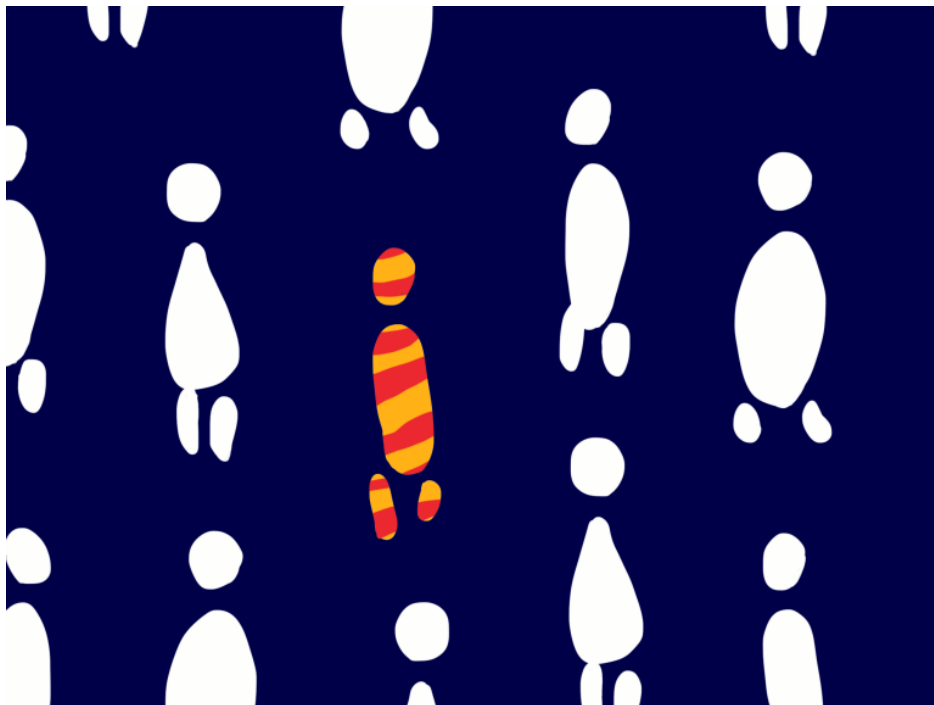

Grappling with imposter syndrome

I started my new career as one of a few Tableau developers in my company. I remember coming home one day in tears. I was overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge I lacked and worried that I would never catch up. Coming from the art world and now working in tech felt like a big culture shock — it was difficult to connect with people at first. I sat down and put a note in my calendar that said: "If you

In the meantime, I tried to take not-knowing things more lightly. I looked for mentors and I talked more to colleagues. When that note popped up in my calendar I barely noticed it. I was busy learning for the Tableau exam. My colleagues particularly were a big factor in making me feel better. I had found my groove and I had not thought about quitting for several days. It helped that I genuinely loved the essence of my new job, building dashboards and creating data products.

I was able to stick through the toughest part of the new job because of two things: a passion for visual analytics and effort. It was extremely demanding in the beginning. I had to google everything, and I didn't understand the explanations, and I had to google the words that explained it, and I didn't understand those definitions, either. I spent every second of my working hours learning things I didn't understand, and it took at least six months for knowledge to fall into place. I asked everybody in my friend group things like: "What's an app?" Or "What's the difference between Java and Python?" My boss and I had extra meetings where he would just explain basic concepts to me like how servers work. The more I learned the more I saw the world with different eyes: So much of our daily life and politics and society is intertwined with technology. Tech is helping us to communicate, make processes more efficient and helping us structure information. The more I learned, the more joyful it became. The more joyful it became, the easier it got. The easier it got, the more I forgot how much effort and time and work it took to survive the first six months.

A great workplace can make all the difference

I am so grateful to Woodmark Consulting AG for giving me the chance when they hired me. I showed them my passion, I told them that I will learn anything I need and I demonstrated my problem solving skills in the first interviews. In my first job interview with Woodmark there were two people. One person was rather doubtful. The other was completely ready to believe in me and my passion. It was enough to get me hired. Finding an employer who sees you, believes in you and provides you with

rson. (It can be super tough;
d at for wanting to change
careers, she was doubted, she was declined over and over again. But she persisted — and succeeded.)

The right work environment can allow you to shine. I started out as a consultant in the BI sector. It is maybe not the coolest of jobs in data viz, working with data about how many customers are consuming electricity or buying a certain car. I always thought that the coolest people for sure are the freelancers and NGO staff who communicate important information to the public, like blood donation information or COVID cases. But I have found that being in consulting has provided me with many advantages. I am employed, earn steady wages, and I have many positions I can develop into as I get more and more senior. Consultancies are used to training people and investing in their skills. They can be more open to hiring career changers, which was the case with me. This work experience shows up favorably on my CV and makes me eligible for other visual analytics jobs.

But most important of all: The field was a good fit for me. I could use a lot of my soft skills such as communicating with difficult clients. New challenges make me rise to the occasion. I had a lot of ideas for improving existing dashboards and my boss gave me the freedom to pursue that.

I hit my stride. You can, too!

I became a senior consultant after two years of work and a Tableau Ambassador after three. My background is part of my personal brand. I am up front with it, nobody can get the impression that I am ashamed of it. Sometimes I even get extra credit for it — people assume that I am extra good and motivated because I changed careers.

I hope that if you want to change careers into data viz — or any other career — that you feel encouraged and empowered after reading my story. Remember: Never apologize for not knowing something. It's

Your background is your strength. Never allow yourself to think you have a deficit. Make the most of what you bring, even if you think little of it. Value your skills and your experiences — that is the prerequisite of other people valuing you. Don't wait for other people to appreciate you — be the first person to do it.

Finally, don't go it alone. Getting mentoring helped me a lot. (You can apply for the DVS mentoring Program, or check out CoffeeCodeBreak.de). I am a mentor there, too: Find me and schedule a session with me! I write and post about career change as well as data viz on my website as well, find it on www.buechting.art.

The illustrations were drawn on iPad by the author, Julia, herself. She is happiest when her passions come together in one place: making art and thinking about data viz.

Julia Büchting

Website

Julia went from building sculptures to building dashboards: She started her career as an artist and is currently working as a senior consultant at Woodmark Consulting AG in Germany. She is an active spokeswomen for Women in IT and career changers. Although she never cared for tech up to her career change she now feels like a fish in the water — there seems no end to the things she is interested in like project management and requirements engineering.

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