“Are you sure?” I asked that question around fifty times after I found out that I had been accepted into SOURCE’s Associate Consultant class. Don’t get me wrong—I was extremely excited to work for SOURCE. I chose Claremont McKenna College largely because of SOURCE and I could not believe that I would actually be a part of the organization. My previous nonprofit work had always made me feel fulfilled and connected, unparalleled feelings that led me to apply to colleges with strong civic engagement and nonprofit collaboration programs. It was a dream come true.

I felt like I was going to wake up any second. Or, at the very least, the SOURCE Managers and Leads would realize that they made a mistake. I had no idea why I was hired. I had no previous consulting experience and no true understanding of what consulting entailed. While I had worked with different nonprofits before, I felt like there was no reason why a nonprofit should take my advice. I already have enough trouble listening to my own advice! Why would nonprofit leaders trust a college freshman to know what’s best for their organization? I attended every meeting in constant fear that my Lead consultant would finally realize what I had always felt: that he had hired the wrong person.

My insecurity severely impacted my job performance. I dreaded speaking up during meetings and hated giving feedback to my teammates. After every meeting, I would go over everything I did incorrectly and fixate on those mistakes.

Although I had difficulty believing in myself, my team never stopped supporting me. My Lead offered to meet individually and helped me practice my deliverables. He made sure that I could anticipate potential questions and answer them confidently. The rest of the team helped me solidify my ideas which brought me to feel less alone in my projects. Their trust in my capability slowly encouraged me to believe in myself as well.

My internal experience with SOURCE also enabled me to build confidence. Although I did not feel fully qualified to tell nonprofits how to proceed, I felt more than comfortable sharing my opinion with fellow SOURCE consultants. SOURCE’s new ad-hoc committee structure allowed me to get really involved with our internal affairs and understand the multiple initiatives. By participating in these Task Forces, I felt like I had something to contribute to the organization. I even ended up leading our Symposium Task Force and coordinated all the details for our annual event.

Over time, I realized that I was concerned with the wrong issue. I kept worrying that I was not qualified enough, that I was not the person SOURCE thought I was, that I was a fluke. I spent so much energy obsessing over my own insecurities and inadequacies that I lost sight of the real reason I joined SOURCE in the first place: the nonprofits. I kept asking “Why me?” when I should have been asking “Now me, how can I help?” I had to learn to trust the hiring process or, at the very least, accept the fact that I was hired. Even if it was a mistake like I feared, I am a SOURCE consultant now. I am part of an organization where I have the unique opportunity to advise, influence and improve a real nonprofit.

Through changing my focus, I spent less time fixating on my shortcomings and more time brainstorming proposals for my nonprofit. My mindset change encouraged me to be bolder and take a more active role in my team. By diverting energy away from my employment justification and towards my nonprofit work, I ironically felt more secure and validated about my position.

My first year at SOURCE has been nothing like what I imagined. I am so thankful for the opportunity, the nonprofit partnership, the workshops, the mentors and even the doubts. My insecurities were what reminded me of SOURCE’s purpose: to leave a positive impact on the community.