# **Why am I in this room?**

### On ambition and imposter syndrome

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Hi there,

By the time you are reading this, I will have already made it through the work stressor of the week. That is the fun part about publishing on Friday: you can smell the weekend air on the breeze and all of the stressors from the week slide gently away.

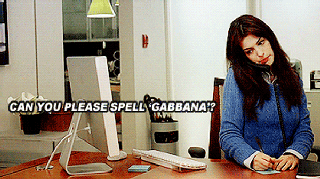
However, as I am writing this, it is Tuesday and I am prepping to get on a flight to New York for a meeting with about 30 financial industry big wigs. My job: manage logistics for this meeting in a building that I have never entered, liaising with people that I do not know, and holding myself to a standard of excellence. Yea, I am a bit nervous. But I think that it goes beyond the practical nerves. That’s what I want to spend some time on today.

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To be honest, while a lot of elements of this particular meeting are new to me, I have managed to pull off events like this in the past. I vaguely know what to expect, what could go wrong, and how I can fix it. I know that for each of these sort of events in the past, I have done quite alright in managing it — that is why I have the job that I have.

What is weighing on me ahead of this meeting has to do with how I define success. It also presses into my negotiation with my own ambition.

I think that a lot of us grew up imagining successful careers in a very narrow way. To be successful was to be a doctor, a leader, to make a lot of money, or all of the above. While my definition of success has changed a little bit from that architype, I certainly grew up with it. That means that when I walk into a room filled with people my age who are making three times my salary, living in one of the largest cities in the world, and saying that they work for companies whose names a lay person would recognize, I am standing in front of the archetypical definition of success, and I am an outsider.



The Devil Wears Prada

That is the hardest part of this particular meeting. Last time I was around this group of people, I left feeling like I absolutely needed an MBA and perhaps should consider going into private equity. The other day, I googled “buy-side versus sell-side” so that I could better understand the language that these people are speaking. I haven’t let go of that idea of success, and right now, I am not sure that I will.

This is where the ambition element comes in. As I was willing myself to get out of bed this morning, I stumbled across [this Substack article](https://open.substack.com/pub/amiemcnee/p/is-my-ambition-just-a-trauma-response?r=3833jd&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web) about how the writer was navigating the fine line between ambition and desire. In reading her writing I came to re-investigate my own sense of ambition and success.

First of all, this is her opening paragraph:

“I read an article the other day where the writer declared that the more they healed as a person the less ambitious they became. Immediately, a familiar internal narrative started playing: *holy shit AM I UNHEALED!? Am I going to wake up one day and realise that all that drive, all that hunger to create and make impact, I had that because I was broken?* This is not what the writer was implying, but I am constantly suspicious of my ambition, of my hunger to create, make and connect.” - Amie McNee

Let’s start here. This bit may be a direct snapshot of my own internal dialogue. The Femme Futures Cooperative is explicitly meant to be a haven for the ambitious, yet every time I remember that, I am met with this heavy uncomfortable feeling. Am I asking people that I want to see flourish to lean into their brokenness? Am I succumbing to capitalism where we will simply never be enough, so we may as well soothe our misery with wealth and material success?

Ok, so that is the “anxiety-brain” take. The other side, much as Amie discusses, is my desire to build something incredible — and my ability to appreciate what I have. Read her article, I am begging you. The gist is that the creative impulse is yes, ambitious, but also fueled by desire and hope. Amie’s focus is on clearly defined creatives, but I think that we can expand this past people who pursue careers in writing, music, and art. To build a company — or to participate in the building a company — is a creative act. Any time you see a glimmer of a chance to improve a system, to increase reach, or to modify your professional goals is a creative impulse.

Coming back to the big room with the impressive people, I want to press into this new understanding of ambition. What about the big room with impressive people feels representative of something that I want?

1. I want the outward validation of success. This feels yucky and wrong, but it is still true. I want the respect that comes with the fancy titles. Even more, I want to experience the trappings of a life like that — just to know if I would like it.
2. I want quick success. Truthfully, my reaction to this is akin to anger or resentment. How *dare* these people who are my age have access to this level of success that feels years out of reach for me?

I can say that I want those things, but I don’t want the lifestyle associated with these particular job titles. Trust my when I say that I was not built for clocking out after midnight. Additionally, I need to live in (or in close proximity to) real nature — sorry, Big Cities. The life that I live now, while certainly not aligned with this particular definition of success is defined by my values. My role now is allowing me to mold a future that excites me and is aligned with my values.



a photo from my camera roll from a recent snow day in my town

Additionally, success may be a bar that we keep raising. I was talking to my coworker yesterday and she was explaining that there are people in every single industry who think that they are not qualified for the job that they have. I would go out on a limb to say that nearly everyone is stretching for a success that is a bar that keeps raising. You could be a doctor and feel that to be successful would be to be a surgeon, or a doctor who works at a leading hospital. You could be one of the people in the room with me this week who is a Senior Associate at a major bank and feel that true success would be running the bank.

It may be the case that the only people who feel that they have achieved success are those who have redefined success to match their values. But in so doing, do you lose your ambition? Amie’s argument is that you can keep your ambition, given that it is taken with a healthy dose of gratitude. When you reach a goal post, celebrate it. Then move it.

All that is well and good, but it does not negate the fact that I am about to stare down a definition of success this week that I do not see myself reflected in. I have no idea what that experience will do to me. I know that I will struggle not to compare myself — I already am — and that it will be something requiring some introspection on my end to reach an equilibrium with.

Perhaps by this time next week, I will have sage words of wisdom about how your job isn’t how you define success, but rather it is a matter of making the world a little bit better, even if it is just by making one person smile. (Right now, that feels like utter nonsense, but okay.) Alternatively, I could be walking you through my plans on how I will prepare for the GRE in order to attend a top MBA granting institution and then make billions of dollars while doing something good for the world. (Truthfully, there are some major flaws in this idea.)

In the meantime, wish me luck! Or I guess… celebrate my success?

Best,

Zoe

P.S. Keep your eye out for a note about how to make the most of the Femme Futures Cooperative being on Substack!