



# Video Transcript

## Renee Kosiarek on Building your confidence as a writer

*"We will never get the joy that we want,  
if we don't tame our inner critic."*

Renee Kosiarek

WRITE, *Woman*, WRITE



# Building your confidence as a writer

## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

with Renee Kosiarek

**WWW:** I have with me Renee Kosiarek who is the founder and executive director of the new centre called New Women Leaders ([www.NewWomenLeaders.org](http://www.NewWomenLeaders.org)). Welcome Renee.

**RK:** Thank you it's great to be here.

**WWW:** Renee is also a new author who has written a book that she has had published with an academic publisher called, *Harnessing the Power of Creativity to Produce Change*.

Today what I would love to have Renee talk to us about is that place of confidence that we sometimes struggle with as new writers and women. So, welcome, Renee!

**RK:** Thank you it is a pleasure to be here. I'm excited about having a community where women can get advice and ideas from other writers and



experts, women and men, who have struggled with writing and putting their work out there.

I've been in that situation myself. I wrote my first book over the last year and it was a wonderful, but challenging process for me. I think having support from other people is really key.

**WWW:** What was one of the wonderful things and what was one of the most challenging things with that writing?

**RK:** Like so many people, I had always wanted to write a book. So, the really wonderful part was – I did it and made it through! One of the reasons I actually did it was that I had a publisher and I had a deadline. For all those people that are self-publishing or don't yet have a publisher – that's hard and the real challenge is, it's sort of like running a marathon. You think it's going to be great, but the day-to-day can be really tricky and really lonely.

Particularly for me, I like to get feedback and I did have some people giving me feedback, but my internal feedback was often very negative: "this isn't good," and then "this is not right" or "this really stinks."

I think that writers do that themselves all the time. And I would say that my own inner critic was really the most difficult part of writing for me. It was taming that voice and trying to listen to the voice of encouragement, the voice of strength, instead.

**WWW:** Which you also have inside of you...

**RK:** Yes. Yes!

**WWW:** Did having a publisher give that other voice, that encouraging voice, a little bit more power do you think? Because someone had already said, "Yes, we believe in you!" or not?

**RK:** That's a great question. I never thought of it that way, but probably because somebody had said, "Yes, this is workable; this is something we want," I had no choice! And I did have that little external voice telling me, "this is workable; this is good."

And I think that's why it's important to have other people read your work, because in so many pieces of writing there is at least a nugget of something really useful to at least some people. And, if we are not willing to share it, we're never going to get positive affirmation.

And certainly it's important to get feedback to help us improve as well, but goodness gracious, we need to start telling ourselves, "this is good! We're moving forward!" and I really needed to hear that externally as well. And hearing hearing that from the publisher? Yeah, that was helpful.

**WWW:** It's interesting. I was speaking to the health coach recently and she was talking about sharing her drafts with friends and family and how *unhelpful* that was for her because *they* had a perception, basically, which was, "You're a writer? But I don't understand. You're not a writer, you are a

health coach. You're something else." So, while it is great to get that feedback externally, it's so important to get it from the right people.

You have a long background in women's empowerment. Tell us how you came to create this non-profit organization, which sounds fascinating.

**RK:** I have been teaching at the college level for about ten years and I taught in a Master's leadership program. I teach leadership theories and strength-based leadership and creativity, as well.

And I would see women, young women in particular, who are just heading into the workforce, who are bright, incredibly hard-working and very intelligent. Sometimes they would offer ideas, but often they would hesitate. They would always do what was expected of them but very often I would see them doing just what was expected rather than going above and beyond.

So, I saw this gap and I continue to see this gap where we have bright, hard-working, amazing women who are really shrinking; they don't rise to their potential. And they feel that shrinkage as well, so they don't feel as strong. And when we don't *feel* strong, we are really not as alive, so it's not just about *leading* with power and strength it's about *living* with power and strength and living the life we are meant to live.

I started this non-profit to help these emerging young women walk strong in their power and be brave and be creative. We teach a variety of things and talk about a variety of things and learn from a host of experts, but the goal is

to help these emerging young women to become stronger, more powerful and creative overall.

**WWW:** When I was conceiving *Write, Woman, Write*, it was an interesting thing to me because I had been a volunteer firefighter for five years (I just retired in February of this year) and I have two sons and a husband. So, it felt a little bit weird to do something that was focused on women. But when I looked around and I looked at my women's writers group – The Romance Writers of America, Greater Vancouver Chapter – and then looked at the guys that were volunteering at the fire department (there were 4 women and 25 guys) I saw a difference in how we are in the world, and the huge need to have women's voices heard.

**RK:** I think you are on to something, because women do not promote themselves the way that men do. When we look at collective groups of women, when we look at thousands of women versus thousands of men, they're leadership is often very much the same. but the one thing that shows up often is that women are not promoting themselves, so that's a big distinction.

If I'm not able to share my work, my writing, and not able to speak up and say, "Hey! I'm really good at this!" and "Yeah! I deserve this publishing contract!" There is a difference.

WWW: One of the greatest things about belonging to the group is we have something called "Attagirl." It is encouragement to share. I am the Vice President and at the beginning of the meeting we ask people to share their accomplishments over the last month and we give people a chocolate and they get cheered and we are learning that it is okay to say, "I got a publisher!" or "I got an agent!" or "I finally finished the manuscript you've heard me talk about for the last year-and-a-half!"

But we also learn that it is okay to stand up and say, "I sent out three contest applications" and be applauded for risk-taking.

And then the other one is "I was *rejected* by four agents last month."

We say, "Yes! You had the courage to submit to agents. Well done! Attagirl!"

RK: I love it. Teresa Amabile is a social psychologist and professor psychology at Harvard and her idea is that in order to be more creative we need we need to keep track of our progress. She's done a study on it and it really is true that when we focus on how every day, in fact, we are progressing, we are more creative overall and that is key for writers.

So, "Attagirl!" is a great idea and it's proven in research to work, that focusing on our progress helps us to be more creative and moves us forward.

**WWW:** In the workshops that you do with your organization at the Center for New Young Women Leaders, what are some of the topics that you cover to help women achieve confidence?

**RK:** We have six major pillars. The first one is about power and wise use of power.

We also talk about strength-based leadership; becoming strong and leading from our strengths.

We talk about purpose-driven leadership, so you can go about the day-to-day, but it's really important to have a bigger vision for what our work does; how we contribute. Even if we are working at a restaurant or even if we are working on someone else's book, we making their dream come true or we are helping the employees around us have a better day. So there are ways to frame our work to make it more purpose-driven. So that is one of the components.

We talk about collaboration and there is a sense of vulnerability there; we need to reach out and ask people help us. We need to share things with other people. We also need to risk rejection. But we also need to learn to give and take feedback in a way that is meaningful and in a way that is sometimes difficult. So we work through that in our work.

We talk about creativity and creating bravely. In order to be a leader you have to be a creative problem-solver today. We need to take more risks and step outside of the box and think differently.

Our final pillar is ethical right action and this is one that I believe is sometimes missing in leadership programs. If we are not thinking about our values and how our behaviour impacts others, then to me we are not leading well, so that is an important contribution.

**WWW:** I can see the link between everything you have just spoken to and being a creative person, being a writer or an artist. It's an interesting thing – until speaking to you, I hadn't put together the skills required to be a creative and to be a leader. And it's a dumb thing I hadn't put together because as I look up on my bookshelf I see so many books. I look at those authors and I see so many thought-leaders and change-makers and the risks that some author have to take. I am in awe of their ability to say, "This is a controversial or maybe not a well-loved way to present this idea, but this is what I believe and I think we need to talk about it."

That bravery is so required. I also look at my library being a huge fan of non-fiction and I don't see one non-fiction book that is written by a woman. I love brain science so I have a lot brains science on my shelf – all written by men.

**RK:** Certainly science can be dominated by men but that is changing a little bit.

**WWW:** So in terms of advice for a woman who is 49-years-old and six month, which is where I was last year. I had written two novels at that time. One I had development edited and I had entered a contest and actually won a international contest and I was still sitting there saying, "But all the agents rejected me, so it must not be good enough."

It took my fiftieth birthday for me to give myself a boot in the pants and self-publish. I am so glad I did. That act of putting what I had created into the world changed me. Do you have a tip or two that you can share with other women who are still in that fear place?

**RK:** I do and I get it. If I were to offer two tips, the first one would be would be serving the inner critic a little bit more and the second one is boundaries the relates to feedback and you beautifully touched on that one earlier.

I'll start with the boundaries and feedback since I don't want to forget that one. I did mention that I get feedback from people and you wisely pointed out that have to be careful who you get feedback from. I have a small circle that I share my work with and I would get frustrated sometimes when my husband would nitpick at everything. That was difficult. I also had someone

helping me more professionally and her feedback was very thoughtful, very wise and constructive.

But my husband's, maybe because he is my husband, didn't feel so wise and constructive...although maybe it was. I had to set boundaries and say to him, "This is what I need from you. I need you to support me. I need you to tell what is good about it first. I do want to hear your feedback but I need it to be couched in terms of something good because I am sitting here berating myself every day for how bad it is or it not being good enough or wondering and revising and revising, so I need you to start with what is good. Even if it's not great, chose something, please!"

And so I set my boundary. And I think for me, and my relationship with my husband, that that was really important to do. I encourage women to do that because it is precious what we put out there. That is our heart. And there is nothing wrong with setting a boundary in terms of what we are willing to take back when we put it out there.

So I would say, set some boundaries, especially with someone you really love; who means something to you in a way beyond this professional sharing.

Secondly, this idea of the inner critic. Tara Mohr talks about this really well. She's written a book called, *Playing Big*. We all have, within us, this critic who is there to keep us safe. Essentially, going way back we are animals and we want to be safe and we want to be protected.

And when we put our work out there we risk rejection, we risk discomfort, we risk failure. We risk it all. We know the rewards are life, joy, fulfilment, meeting the purpose that we are meant to meet. But as an animal essentially, we want to protect ,we want to stay safe.

That inner critic is there and in a way it's there to help us if you think about that way. So, rather than shoving it away, I think it's a good idea to say, "Listen, Self, that is being hard on you and saying these things, it's going to be okay. I'm going to submit with this anyway and I might risk failure and I know you are trying to keep me safe, but I think this is pretty good and I maybe if I make this change to it I think it is going to be darn good enough to send."

The way we talk to ourselves and talk to our inner critic is key. And it's really important not to push it away – at least for me, that hasn't worked – but to really recognize that it's trying to help you. Then to pat it on the back and say, "I know you are trying to keep me safe and I am going to be okay." And then move on.

**WWW:** That is moving; it's lovely. You made me think or I don't know if it came from someone I know, or if it is a scientifically proven thing... in the last few months somebody was talking about how we talk to ourselves in a voice and we criticize ourselves in a voice that we would never use with someone we love.

It is time to say, "You know, this is about self-love as much as anything." Yes, I know there is that self-protection. I hear what you're saying. And, on top of that, we have to acknowledge that we would never speak to our children with those inner voices.

**RK:** Yes, I agree completely. And speaking for myself, I am my harshest critic. A lot of people would say the same thing. Often that relates to protecting ourselves, but we don't really need to protect ourselves that way. Most of us, by now, have been through these failures and we have survived. We can survive it again. We are never going to get to the joy, we are never going to get to the creation we want if we don't risk, if we don't tame that inner critic. We need to stop listening to it and stop obeying it.

**WWW:** I am sitting here thinking, "I wish I was a young woman in Chicago right now. Is your program national or is it just in Chicago?"

**RK:** Yes, it is national and we do virtual workshops. Our events are in Chicago at this point but we are doing virtual workshops as well.

**WWW:** I am so pleased you are out there doing this work and that you were willing to share some of what you have learned and pass that on to the Write, Woman, Write community. I am thrilled to meet you.

**RK:** I am thrilled that you are doing this work. I think that for women to have support as they're writing and making a contribution and doing what they love... it's a beautiful thing that you are doing. Thank you for doing that.

**WWW:** Thank you for working together on different parts of the same project. The voices of women we are not hearing are the voices we most need to hear. Whether they are writing fiction or creative non-fiction like yours, that is what is going to change the world. And I am of the belief that we need some serious game changing right now.

I am honoured to meet you. Thank you so much, Renee, for sharing with us.

**RK:** Thank you as well.

**WWW:** I look forward to staying in touch and I am absolutely going to pick up your book *Harnessing the Power to Produce Change* and am looking forward to taking a look at it and maybe with your permission I will include a tip or two in the resources of *Write, Woman, Write*.

**RK:** That would be nice. Thank you.