



LEADING AND THRIVING WITH YOUR SUPERPOWERS

Lisa Sun

We often have a hard time receiving compliments because we are in a deficit mindset, seeing only our weaknesses or not believing what's being said about us, or we feel the need to be humble.

I want you to break this habit. This is the moment to pay yourself a compliment and take pride in its truth.

How do we do that? Think about a time when you were at your peak: a moment when you felt you had it all together, you were “in the zone,” everything seemed to flow and go right, and you felt your performance was exceptional.

Put yourself in the center of this memory and recall as many details as possible. Ask yourself, what things about your character led to that positive result? What specific skills did you employ to create this peak moment? How did your superpowers drive that positive outcome?

Let me take you back to March 2020.

I run a women's workwear business, and workplaces were closed, with employees sent home. Fears abounded—fear of getting sick, anxiety about the state of the world, the stress of sheltering in place.

Gravitas sales were not zero; they were negative. We have a 30-day return policy, so customers who had recently purchased a dress for an upcoming event, conference, meeting, or date night returned their items when they realized they had nowhere to go. Our factories in China had been closed since January; activities in our New York City factory and office ground to a halt.

When upsets happen, our brain defaults to the “amygdala hijack.”

The amygdala is the most primitive part of our brain—every animal on the planet has an amygdala—and it controls our flight, fight, or freeze impulses, our physiological reactions to perceived danger. In prehistoric times, this would be a reaction to a perceived threat like being chased by a predator.

This primordial part of the brain is the first to arrive at the party, whether it’s a looming deadline, being criticized for something you did, getting stuck in traffic, or, on a more serious note, being in the throes of a divorce or a victim of emotional abuse. It takes at least 10 seconds for the neocortex, the reasoning part of the brain, to arrive and engage in thoughtful problem-solving (this is why parents tell their children to count to 10 when they’re angry). Asking questions in the face of a perceived threat often provides enough time to trigger the appropriate neural response that engages the neocortex.

In the face of our business collapsing, I literally told our team to hit the pause button, to count to 10, and then I asked them a series of questions: “What are our superpowers? What do we have that no one else has right now? Who needs us most in this moment?”

When you take stock of your distinctive capabilities and assets, you can deploy them to say, “Here’s how I can help” (versus the “Do you need help?” question you get in a store, to which the default answer is: “No, I’m just browsing”).

Here were the answers my team gave me:

- “We have two thousand yards of Japanese premium quilters’ cotton sitting in the New York City warehouse sent to us by one of our partner companies, Tokki, and *The New York Times* just said quilters’ cotton is good for cloth face masks.”
- “Our sewing team is willing to work. Some of them even have machines at home.”
- “A local hospital needs hospital gowns, and our factory in China is about to reopen. They have capacity because most apparel orders were cancelled for this season.”
- “A food distribution warehouse in Newark just called to see if we could get them 5,000 cloth face masks for their workers.”
- “One of our best customers just called and asked if we would be willing to make 50 face masks for her co-workers, who are essential and still going into the office.”

So we got to work on April 3, 2020. For 72 days without a break, we manufactured and distributed hospital gowns and cloth face masks to essential workers and our community.

And we did it with a team brimming with superpowers. When the pandemic hit, we took stock of what we were able to do as a company, but what really got us through this time was how our individual superpowers laddered up to what we could do together.

(Ready to find your superpower? You can take my quiz, designed to give you a quick and accurate readout on what makes you tick, at [MyConfidenceLanguage.com](https://www.myconfidencelanguage.com))

First of all, I am the best at Creating, Leading, and Performing. I can make something from nothing. I see possibility. I'm resourceful. I can rally us in a new direction. I can share on social media what we're doing and get people to help us. You need hospital gowns and face masks? We can do that.

When you take stock of your distinctive capabilities and assets, you can deploy them to say, “Here’s how I can help.”

Second, our head designer, Aruk, is the best at Achieving and Believing. There were many times when I felt like giving up, but he is the master of resilience and optimism. He never gave up on us. He saw the positive in the situation and reinforced that we were doing the right thing (“We are so lucky to be able to work and help others right now!”).

Third, our production manager, Kelly, is the best at Knowing and Self-Sustaining. She came in and organized the spreadsheets for production, managed the processes effectively (a challenge when our warehouse was working at partial capacity), and, every day, never doubted that we would make it through.

The quality everyone on our team shares to some degree? Giving. Not surprising that we pivoted our company not with profits in minds, but purpose in our hearts.

Entrepreneurs use the word “pivot” a lot. I looked it up in the dictionary, and to my surprise, the word has very little to do with the change in direction you’re taking.

Rather, it’s the central pin on which you turn. And the stronger that central point is, the more capable you are of turning. Strengths give us the fuel to be speedboats and not aircraft carriers, especially in the face of setbacks.

This is how acting on your confidence language can create space for you to do incredible things. If we had not been deeply aware of what we were capable of, and the best at, we would have been out of business. And deploying your superpowers is a muscle that gets stronger over time.

I know that we are better off today than we were before the pandemic, more capable of taking on the next challenge ahead. And the combination of our team’s superpowers balanced out the downsides of each of our individual confidence languages.

Case in point: Kelly’s ability to organize processes effectively offsets my inability to complete tedious tasks; my resourcefulness and communication skills provide clear direction for my team in the face of uncertainty.

With our confidence languages, we can more proactively seek out and create opportunities. We can raise our hands rather than waiting to respond. We can align our lives around our superpowers, the qualities that bring out the best in us and give us great joy.

Your superpowers enable you to lean into situations with confidence and power, but they can also help you better evaluate if and why you may feel stuck or unfulfilled.

Have you ever been to a dinner party where someone asks you, “If you weren’t doing what you were doing, what would you want to be doing?”

My answer? I’m doing it. There’s no Plan B, no greener pasture. For the first time in my life, I can tell you that my superpowers line up perfectly with the life that I’ve created for myself: everything that my company is and stands for stems from all of my strengths.

We can align our lives around our superpowers, the qualities that bring out the best in us and give us great joy.

Writing my book—that is my Creating and Performing superpowers in action. I deploy Giving in being the “dress whisperer” for our customers. My confidence language connects directly to everything that I do.

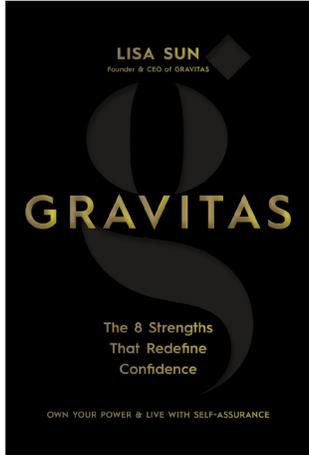
I would not have been able to say the same when I was a management consultant. I owe a lot to McKinsey & Company; I would not be who I am today without that 11-year experience. But the superpowers typically associated with being a great consultant (Achieving and Knowing)—while I am competent at them, they are not what drive me.

You too can line up your life, and choose how you move forward in it, and get what you want out of it. Ask yourself that proverbial dinner party question: What would you want to do, if you could?

And then keep going: How does that align with your strengths? When you look at your superpowers, **do they spur ideas for opportunities you might not have previously seen?** 📖



Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Sun is the founder and CEO of GRAVITAS, a company on a mission to catalyze confidence. GRAVITAS offers innovative size-inclusive apparel, styling solutions, and content designed to make over women from the inside out.

Prior to founding GRAVITAS, Sun spent 11 years at McKinsey & Company, where she advised leading luxury fashion and beauty brands and retailers in the U.S., Asia, Europe, and Latin America on strategic and operational issues. Her first collection was featured in *O*, *The Oprah magazine*, *People*, and the *Today* show in the same month. Sun and GRAVITAS have been featured on *CNN* and in *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, *New York* magazine, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *InStyle*, and more.

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