



# HOW TO: Overcome Fear & Put Your ESD Out There

## How to Get Out of Your Own Way and Get Your ESD Work into the World

Pick up a book about marketing or click play on a YouTube tutorial for business success, and you will likely come across the instruction to figure out your mission—your *why*—before you do anything else. As Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) professionals, we tend to be passionate and mission-driven people, so most of us already know *exactly why* we are doing this work (preventing violence, creating a safer world, empowering women, etc., etc.). The suggestion that we start with “why” might fall flat.

We believe deeply in our work’s potential to change the world, one voice and one community at a time. Even so, despite abundant passion for, dedication to, and faith in that mission, many ESD professionals may still balk when it comes time to “sell” or “promote” themselves or their work.

The Association of ESD Professionals is as passionate about your work as you are, and we want every ESD professional’s practice to be a huge success. This month’s How-To is designed to guide you through resistance and fear so you can boldly bring your ESD offerings into the world, be of service, and live your mission.

Whether you are reaching out to schools, offering classes directly to your community, or seeking to develop relationships with funders or collaborators, the art of self-promotion is a critical skill. But first, you have to move through the fear and discomfort that can surround it. In the following pages, we will walk you through effective steps to overcome resistance and self-doubt, as well as a few practical tips to start putting yourself out there.

Let’s get started!

### Overcoming Resistance to “Self-Promotion”

It is extremely common to feel some amount of resistance to concepts like marketing and promotion. In fact, in mission-driven fields such as ESD, those who feel comfortable with this process seem to be the odd ones out.

Resistance to marketing, outreach, or other forms of self-promotion tends to take one of five forms:

1. “I’m not a brand. I don’t want to promote myself.”

2. "I'm not a business. Why should I have to do marketing?"
3. "The right people will find me. Going out looking for them feels icky."
4. "I know I need to do it, I just keep not doing it."
5. "I'll just teach when participants seek me out."

Unfortunately, if you build it, they won't necessarily come. In today's Information Age of endless data and services at the touch of a finger, offering a wonderful service or a ton of experience isn't enough. The people you want to reach with ESD are oversaturated with information, so it is hard to break through. Plus, it's not easy to determine where to look for clients.

So let's reframe the whole idea of "marketing," shifting from "selling people things they don't need" to "letting your audience or client know that you *exist*." In other words, if you believe that your ESD work is vitally important, and you trust that many students, funders or collaborators out there would agree, then marketing is about *making sure they know about you*. At its core, it is that simple.

Similarly, self-promotion is not synonymous with self-aggrandizement. Your knowledge and experience teaching ESD is worth *a lot*. So is your time and energy. Making sure people know about your classes, availability to teach or collaborate, or other ESD offerings is ultimately about honoring the value of your work, and expecting others to do the same.

**Pro-Tip:** Don't think of it as marketing. Think of it as making it easy for the people who are looking for your classes, courses, or services *to find you*.

## Moving Through Fear to Be of Service

"There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure."  
— Paulo Coelho

Often, resistance is a symptom of more deeply-rooted fears. Some of the most common fears when it comes to putting any kind of work out there are:

1. What if no one shows up (to my class, workshop, webinar, etc.)?
2. What if no one wants what I am offering/wants *me*?
3. What if I fail?

Putting ourselves out there is unavoidably vulnerable. Whether you have been teaching ESD for two months or twenty years, promoting a workshop, applying for a grant, or reaching out to a school board has a way of sparking doubt and insecurity.

These fears, left unchecked, can be paralyzing. We hope that these tips will help you mitigate them:

### **1. Believe in your bones that your work has value.**

Scroll down to the next section on self-doubt for a quick and effective exercise for transforming limiting beliefs. No one will ever believe in you as much as you can believe in yourself. So you need to be your own best cheerleader in the face of inevitable failures, rejections, and roadblocks.

What's more, if you don't think your ESD offerings are valuable, how can you expect anyone else to?

**Pro-Tip:** If you truly believe in the value of your work, your audience or participants will pick up what you're putting down—sooner or later.

### **2. Accept that you can't please everyone.**

*For more on identifying your ideal client or audience, check out our guide, "[How To Identify Your Target Audience](#)."*

You can't be everyone's cup of tea, and you shouldn't try. Focus on the students, clients, and collaborators who are right for your unique ESD style, and don't worry about the rest. While of course everyone *could* benefit from learning ESD, not everyone will want to, or not right now, or not with you. And that's okay!

Stay focused on what works for you—not what doesn't. Let the (non-constructive) criticism and naysaying roll right off you, and don't worry about the people who are not interested in your ESD offerings.

### **3. Trust that your audience is out there.**

There is an audience for EVERYTHING. Just look at the top movies on Netflix, viral videos on TikTok, or the shelves at your local bookstore if you need a reminder: Absolutely anything you can create, teach, or sell—there is an audience for it. And ESD? That base of potential participants is huge.

Trust that your students are out there. They want to learn what you have to teach. They have been looking for you. Trust that you will find the people for your ESD offerings.

### **4. Remember: If you help one person, it was worth it.**

Yes, it is important to dream big. Many ESD professionals will want to reach as many people as possible, because they know that self-defense training can change lives—and because they want to make a profession of it. Yet, if we think of success as only a numbers game, we are ignoring the personal, individual impact that gives our work so much depth. Sometimes you may only have a handful of students who sign up for your

course. But if you teach those few people empowerment self-defense, that is still a huge success!

You may not reach everyone you are targeting every time, but for the people you do reach, it could mean everything. Remember that.

Pro-Tip: Focus on the individual lives you touch, not the faceless masses.

### **5. Failure is a part of life. You don't have to identify with it.**

Sometimes, it won't work out. Failure is part of any endeavor, and it is vitally important to **not** take it personally. Your value as a person is immutable and intrinsic. It does not depend on the success of your ESD practice, your new workshop, or anything else you achieve or do not achieve in the world.

Since for many ESD professionals this is a passion, a profession, and an identity all in one, it may be challenging to separate self-worth from the success of your ESD initiative. For your own sake and the sake of future success, however, you have to try.

## **4 Steps to Transform Self-Doubt**

Struggling with self-doubt as you put yourself and your ESD practice out into the world? That's okay! Most of us do.

Ultimately, it is critical to believe in the value of your work; however, sometimes action has to come first, and belief will follow. Words and actions can shape our worldview, so start acting and talking like you believe in yourself 100%. With enough practice, it will become your deepest truth. Try this simple (and quick!) journaling exercise to start transforming your own limiting beliefs into steady self-confidence. Your ESD practice will thank you!

1. Make a list in your journal or on your computer or phone of at least 10 doubts, fears, or limiting beliefs about yourself or your work. (e.g., "I don't have enough experience teaching ESD." "I'm not the right person to teach this." "No one will want to come to *my* classes." "Who would want to fund me?")
2. Now, in a new column or on a fresh page, rewrite those doubts as positive statements, transforming them into encouragement or motivation. (e.g., "I have trained/studied extensively in ESD, and I am ready to share my knowledge." "If not me, who? I am exactly the right person to teach this." "Someone out there is waiting for my ESD offering." "My work is extremely important, and it deserves to be funded.")
3. Choose a few positive statements, the ones that make your heart race, or give you goosebumps, or feel like a "yes" in your belly. Copy them onto Post-It notes to leave

on your desk, fridge, mirror, or anywhere else you will see them frequently. If it feels good, repeat them aloud whenever you need a boost.

4. Come back to this practice anytime that you find yourself getting in your own way.

## **5 Tips for Getting Started**

### **1. Make a marketing plan.**

Starting with a marketing plan is not only good strategy, it is a great way to calm the overwhelm of self-promotion. A marketing plan will define your target audience (the individuals you hope will become clients), create a plan for outreach to institutions and collaborators, devise a content strategy for social media pages, website, newsletters, and blogs, and potentially include additional ideas such as affiliate programs. Visit our Resources Page for some motivation, and stay tuned for more How-To Guides this year to bolster your business and marketing acumen.

### **2. Give social media a go.**

It doesn't have to be perfect, and you don't have to be an expert. Social media is an excellent, low-stakes way to start getting comfortable with putting yourself out there. We recommend thinking about the social media your audience is most likely to use and start with those platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, etc.).

Don't worry about having it all figured out before you begin. The great news is you can delete or archive posts and try again as you trial and error your way to an effective digital marketing strategy.

### **3. Reflect on your WHY.**

It is easy to get bogged down in the practical details of running your ESD practice and turning your passion into your career. As discussed, every ESD professional is likely well aware of their "why," their driving motivation for doing this work. Even so, when we are wrapped up in daily tasks, we can "forget the forest for the trees." In other words, we lose sight of the bigger picture. Taking a moment at the start of each day or work session to reconnect in your mind and heart with your underlying mission can help you feel motivated through the less glamorous parts of your work.

Pro-Tip: Make it visual with a vision board or even just a simple note posted at your computer.

### **4. Seek supportive partners.**

Yes, it is important to be your own best cheerleader... and having friends, colleagues, or business partners who believe in you can make it a heck of a lot easier to stay focused, confident, and driven. Seek out alliances for your ESD practice, collaborations with people and organizations who are mission-aligned and care as much as you do. Build yourself a work environment and inner circle that fulfills you and gives you energy to

keep tackling the challenges of running an ESD practice while teaching others how to interrupt and prevent violence.

### **5. Make it a practice.**

Just like the boundary-setting techniques we teach in ESD classes, putting yourself out there isn't complicated, but it does take practice to overcome the initial discomfort. Start with small steps: Make a first post on social media introducing your ESD work. Reach out to the "low-hanging fruit" on your list of potential clients or investors—the people most likely to say yes. Make one call to one potential client. Talk to a new acquaintance at a dinner party about your ESD business.

Take it step by step, checking off items on your marketing to-do list every day, and keep practicing until it stops feeling uncomfortable and starts to feel natural. Everything gets easier with practice. You'll see.

## **Ready to go?**

We believe in you! We know you have what it takes to put yourself and your ESD work out into the world. And we will be right here cheering you on.

Stay tuned for more how-to guides on marketing, business development, class planning, and so much more!

## **Legal Disclaimer**

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