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Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

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helloworld;)

Hello all, and thanks for coming to my talk today. Heads up that I'm a little shaky due to underestimating the strength of the coffee here so I'll probably talk way too fast and finish early so there should be plenty of time for questions at the end. I also used to memorize all my technical talks, but because this talk isn't technical, I like to rely on my notes pretty heavily.

helloworld;)

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helloworld;)

A little bit about me: I'm a self-taught dev with about 17 years of experience with all sorts of tech stacks and I've recently vacated a position as the Director of Development at a dev shop in Portland called Metal Toad. I left to start a recruiting and consulting company called HelloWorld to support all of the incredible new tech businesses popping up in Portland, so <shameless plug> feel free to contact me if you're interested in moving to Portland.</shameless plug>

In this talk, I'll be focusing on taking action to overcome bouts of imposter syndrome. This won't necessarily cure you; I still struggle with it at times. But hopefully you'll leave with some tools to overcome it when you encounter it.

I had some interesting thoughts as I prepared to submit this talk for the first time. "Am I really qualified to speak on this? There will be peers in the audience, and what if they know my journey and that I'm not a classically trained CS major, or psychologist? What if they think I'm an imposter developer and therefore my take on imposter syndrome is also lousy?" This was not just stage fright. I'm a clown by nature so being onstage isn't that rough for me. But Imposter Syndrome can pop up for anyone at anytime.

I won't deny that having a certain amount of confidence is needed to reach a title of Director and/or gives talks at conferences, but I'll challenge anyone who thinks that I haven't or don't still suffer from Imposter Syndrome. To illustrate this point, I'll be taking some breaks from the main presentation to tell some stories about my own and others' episodes.



I was pretty excited to learn that I had been accepted to talk at Devsigner 2014 in Portland. I worked hard on my presentation and was over the moon when the day came to do it, but when I stepped up to the podium, it then took me 5 minutes and some audience participation to get the two screens working right. I knew in my heart and soul right then and there, that everyone in that room now knew what a fraud I was. “How can this guy be presenting when he can’t even work the projector?” In reality, I was able to present on a topic that didn’t have many experts and I was presenting something that I had created myself. Why on earth was I doubting myself? And every knows that most devs can’t work projectors or printers anyway.



The acceptance email I got for this conference went something like this: “We accepted your talk, even though you misspelled Imposter in your title”. Holy cow was I embarrassed. Here I am submitting a talk in which I have misspelled the most crucial word in the entire thing. My first thought was “Here’s another story for my talk”.

As it turns out, you can spell it with an E or an O and the jury’s still out on which is preferred. So now I like to flip freely between the two now for fun and confusion.

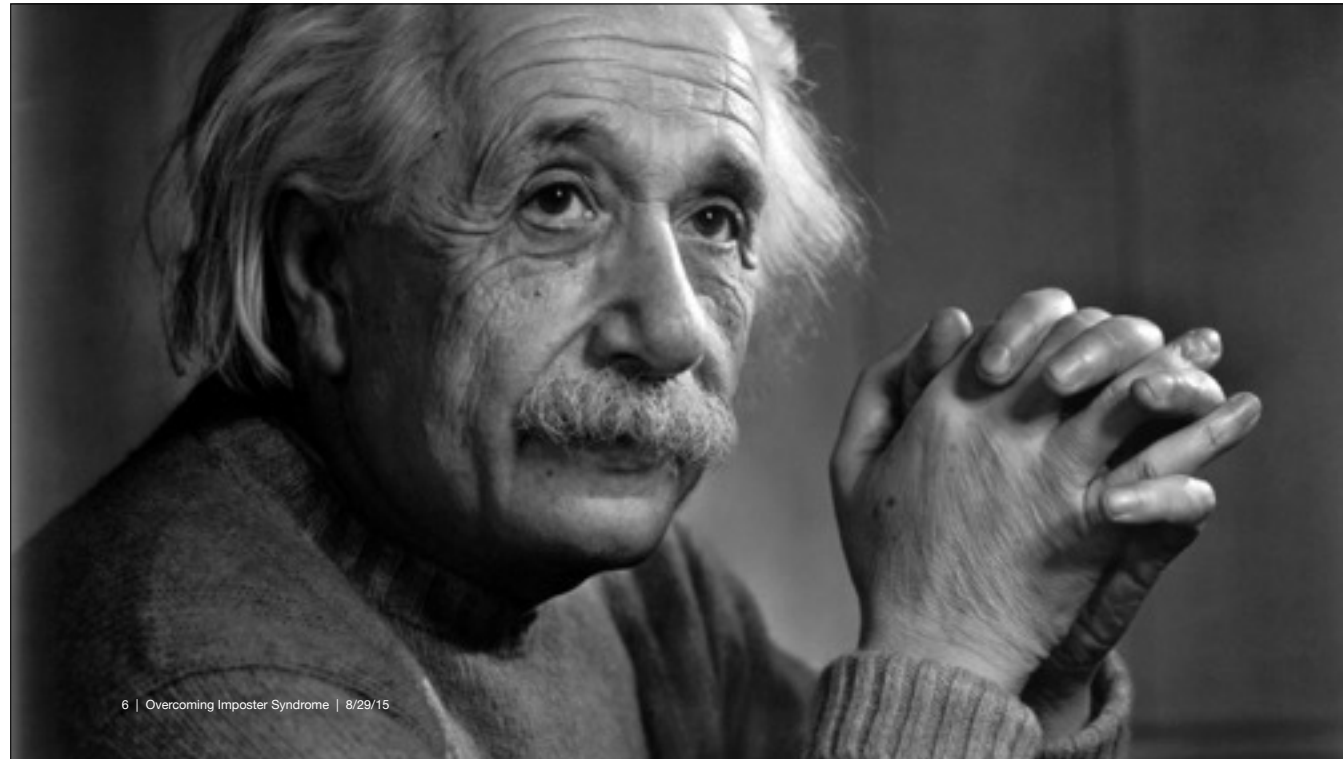
What is Imposter Syndrome?

“Impostor syndrome can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist even in the face of information that indicates that the opposite is true. It is experienced internally as chronic self-doubt, and feelings of intellectual fraudulence.”

- *Cal Tech Counseling Center*

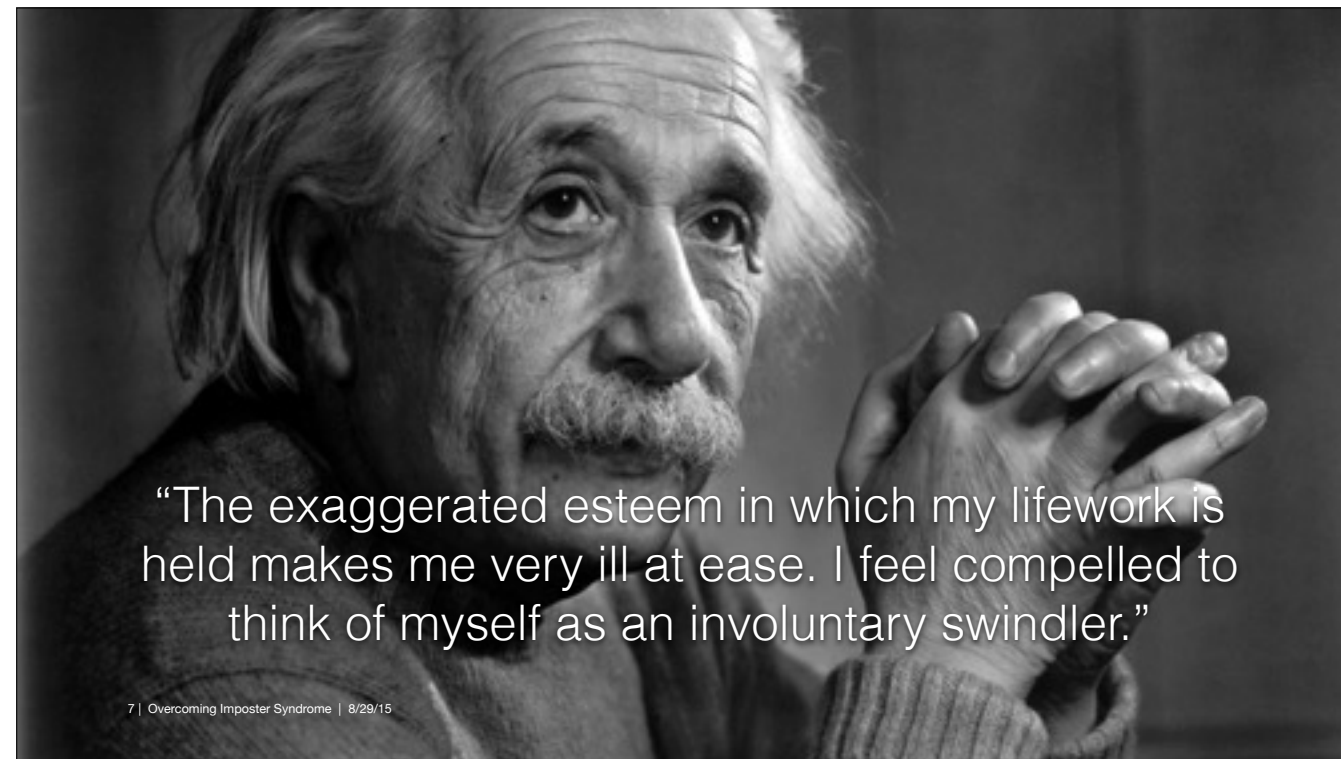
The Cal Tech Counseling Center has this definition on their site and it can be summed up as feeling inadequate even though you have performed in that area before. Let's take a second to read it.

Raise your hand if you can relate to this at all



Who does it happen to?

There seems to be an obligatory part of any writings on Imposter syndrome where I tell you who suffers from it. I found that this is a common theme amongst writers on this topic. There are many many examples of high functioning people who have claimed imposter syndrome, but I'm only going to quote this one for now:



Let's read that and let it sink in for a minute. An involuntary swindler. Albert Freaking Einstein.

Research suggests that 2 out of 5 successful people feel like they are a fraud. I'd bet dimes to dollars that this is much higher in development.

Imposter Syndrome in Women



This phenomenon was first identified in women entering the work place last century. Most speculate that doubt of women's qualifications was internalized by the women themselves, and while outwardly confident, the women entering the workplace suffered internally. I can definitely notice women I've worked with having these feelings more than men, at least in my immediate experience. This talk will focus on Imposter syndrome from my perspective as a male developer. These tools have helped both me and the male and women developers I've worked with and I hope that they can help you too, but I don't claim to be able to accurately speak to the full breadth of a women's perspective on this.



Before we go too far into this pep talk, it's also important to note that Imposter Syndrome is a sign of intelligence, not ignorance. It serves a valuable purpose in asking the base question "Should I be doing this?" People who lack imposter syndrome will continually run headlong into walls, not understanding why someone put the wall there. There is a scene from the movie *The Other Guys* (Great movie with Will Farrell and Marky Mark, I highly recommend it), in which the hero cops of the city are chasing bad guys across a roof. The bad guys then clip on to a zip line and zip down 6 stories to the ground. The hero cops, lacking any semblance of Imposter Syndrome, look at each other, one says "You thinking what I'm thinking?" and the other says "Yep. Aim for the bushes"



They then jump and the camera follows them all the way down to the concrete. Needless to say, they didn't make it. Even though I'm going to be talking about how to overcome it, it's definitely important to be aware of when you're about to jump off a building.

It's situational



Here's an unattributed quote I found: "Though traditionally perceived as an ingrained personality trait, impostor syndrome has more recently been studied as a reaction to certain situations." One of those situations, is development. It's less about you having a flesh wound and more about you being a software developer in the first place.

This repository Search

mitcellh / vagrant

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Vagrant is a tool for building and distributing development environments. <http://www.vagrantup.com>

7,516 commits 15 branches 105 releases 543 contributors

branch: master vagrant / +

Update CHANGELOG

sethvargo authored 15 days ago latest commit 28a42122b8

bin	Do not load the gem and all dependencies due to version.	8 months ago
contrib	contrib/bash: Auto-complete VMs for up command	3 months ago
keys	Fix doc link [GH-3978]	a year ago
lib	Style fixes	23 days ago
plugins	Use the extended password parameter, more compatible	18 days ago
scripts	vagrant push to deploy Vagrant	7 months ago
tasks	update rake tasks for acceptance testing	2 years ago
templates	Merge pull request #5584 from stoned/fix-locale-en	24 days ago
test	Updating the test to see the changes to the mount pass parameter	17 days ago

Code

Issues 482

Pull requests 58

Wiki

Pkgs

Graphs

SSH clone URL

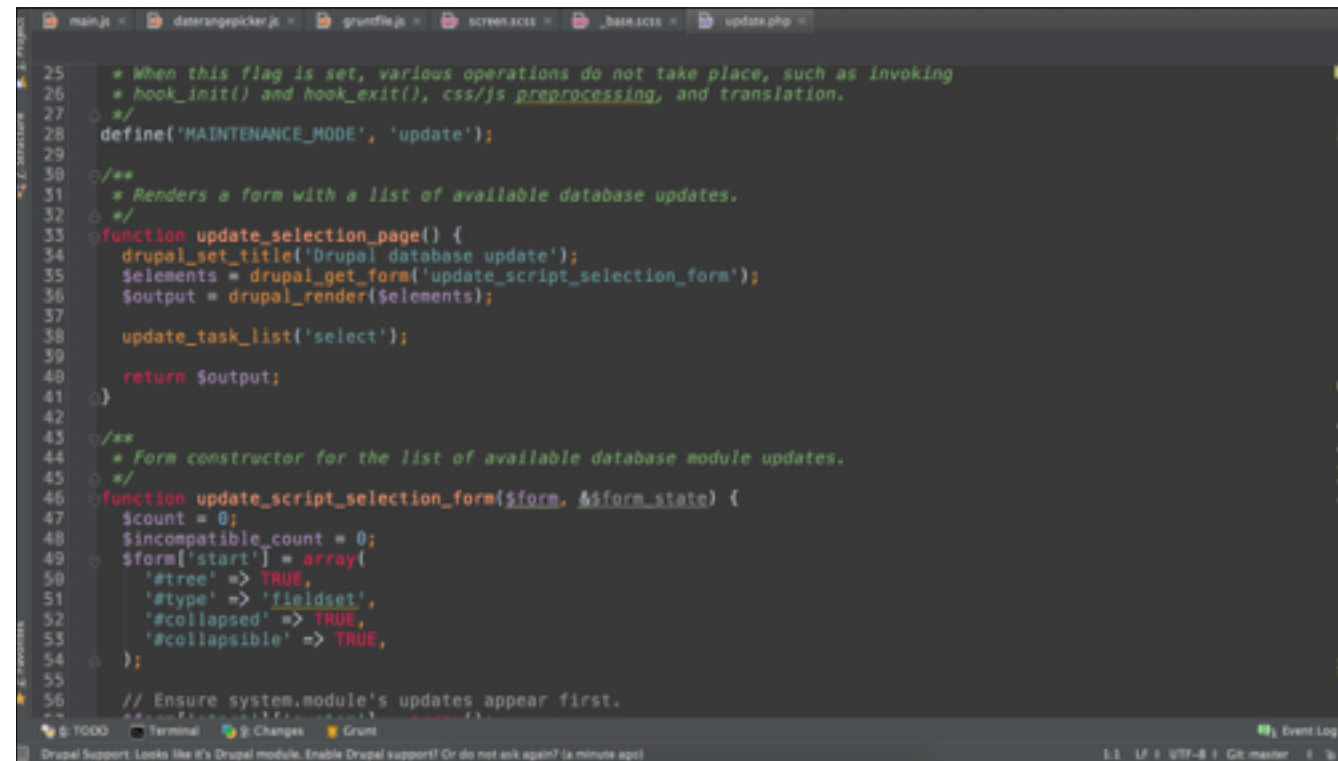
git@github.com:mit

You can clone with HTTPS, SSH, or Subversion.

Clone in Desktop

Download ZIP

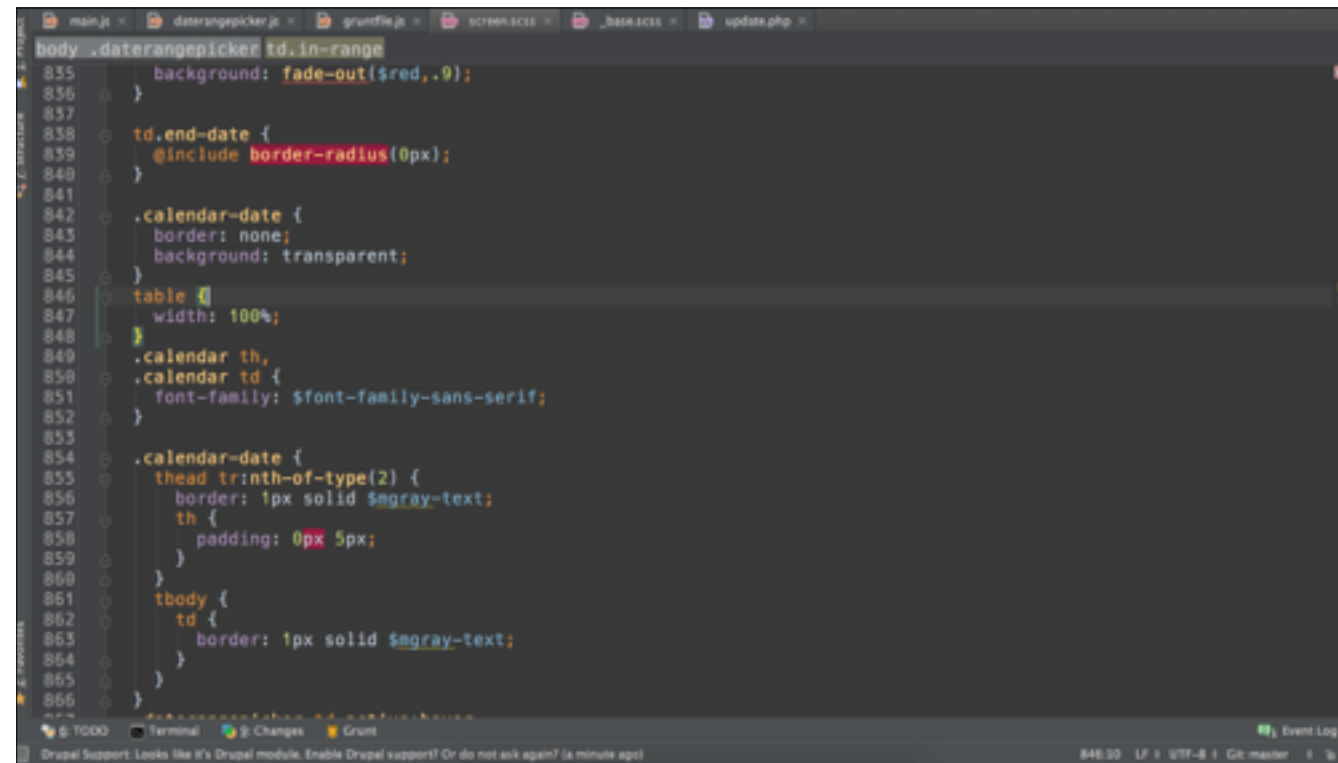
In fact, the Open Source world in particular, where your work is peer-reviewed by other talented developers, is a notorious breeding ground for Imposter Syndrome



```
25  * When this flag is set, various operations do not take place, such as invoking
26  * hook_init() and hook_exit(), css/js preprocessing, and translation.
27  */
28  define('MAINTENANCE_MODE', 'update');
29
30  /**
31   * Renders a form with a list of available database updates.
32   */
33  function update_selection_page() {
34    drupal_set_title('Drupal database update');
35    $elements = drupal_get_form('update_script_selection_form');
36    $output = drupal_render($elements);
37
38    update_task_list('select');
39
40    return $output;
41  }
42
43  /**
44   * Form constructor for the list of available database module updates.
45   */
46  function update_script_selection_form($form, &$form_state) {
47    $count = 0;
48    $incompatible_count = 0;
49    $form['start'] = array(
50      '#tree' => TRUE,
51      '#type' => 'fieldset',
52      '#collapsed' => TRUE,
53      '#collapsible' => TRUE,
54    );
55
56    // Ensure system.module's updates appear first.
```

Drupal Support: Looks like it's Drupal module. Enable Drupal support? Or do not ask again? (a minute ago)

To everyone in this room, you did not take the easy route,

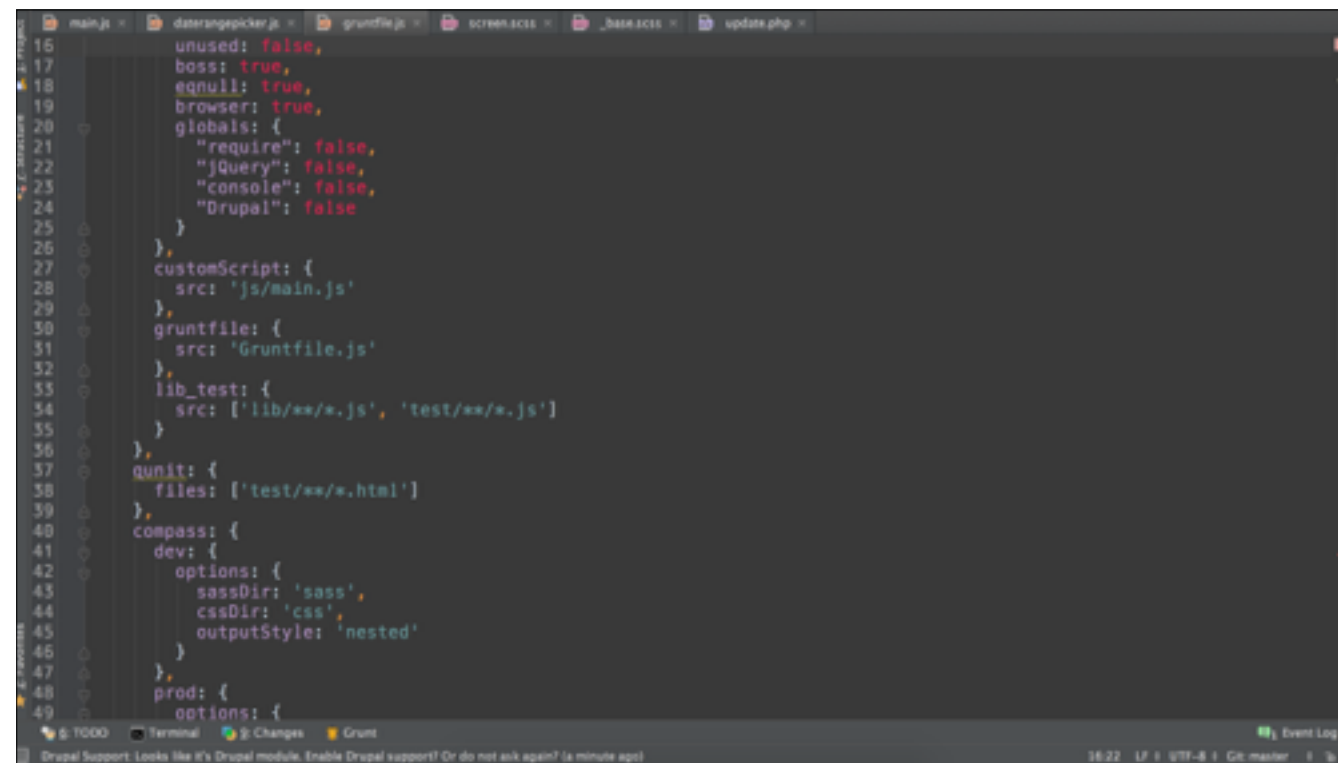


The image shows a code editor with a dark theme. The top of the editor has a tab bar with several files: `main.js`, `daterangepicker.js`, `gruntfile.js`, `screen.scss`, `_base.scss`, and `update.php`. The main editor area displays CSS code for a date range picker. The code is as follows:

```
body .daterangepicker td.in-range
835   background: fade-out($red,.9);
836 }
837
838 td.end-date {
839   @include border-radius(0px);
840 }
841
842 .calendar-date {
843   border: none;
844   background: transparent;
845 }
846
847 table {
848   width: 100%;
849 }
850 .calendar th,
851 .calendar td {
852   font-family: $font-family-sans-serif;
853 }
854
855 .calendar-date {
856   thead tr:nth-of-type(2) {
857     border: 1px solid $mgray-text;
858     th {
859       padding: 0px 5px;
860     }
861   }
862   tbody {
863     td {
864       border: 1px solid $mgray-text;
865     }
866   }
867 }
```

At the bottom of the editor, there is a status bar with the following information: `Drupal Support: Looks like it's Drupal module. Enable Drupal support? Or do not ask again? (a minute ago)`, `846:50`, `LF`, `UTF-8`, `Git: master`, and `Event Log`.

where your mastery of a trade that hasn't changed in decades is easily measured and observed.



The image shows a code editor with a dark theme. The top of the editor has several tabs open: 'main.js', 'data-range-picker.js', 'gruntfile.js', 'screen.scss', '_base.scss', and 'update.php'. The 'gruntfile.js' tab is active, displaying a JavaScript configuration for Grunt. The code is as follows:

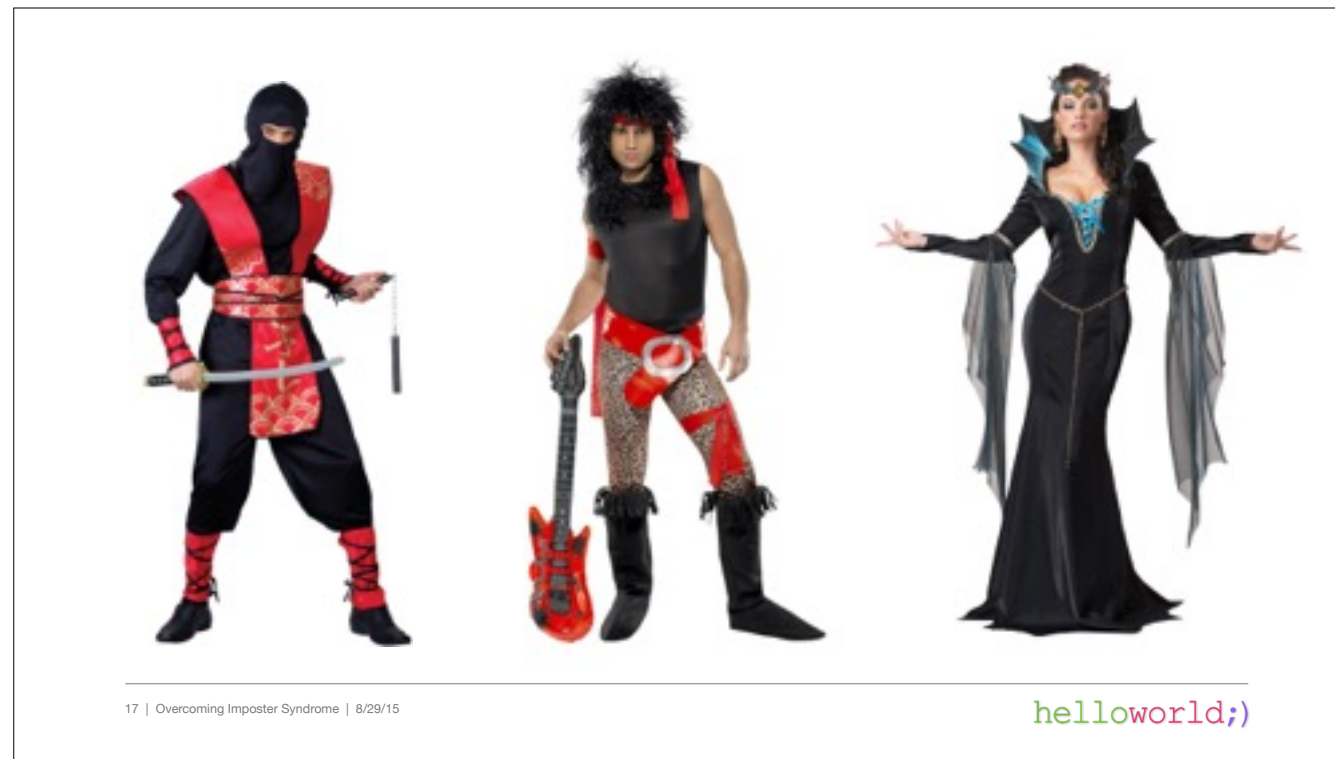
```
16      unused: false,
17      boss: true,
18      eqnull: true,
19      browser: true,
20      globals: {
21        "require": false,
22        "jQuery": false,
23        "console": false,
24        "Drupal": false
25      }
26    },
27    customScript: {
28      src: 'js/main.js'
29    },
30    gruntfile: {
31      src: 'Gruntfile.js'
32    },
33    lib_test: {
34      src: ['lib/**/*.js', 'test/**/*.js']
35    }
36  },
37  qunit: {
38    files: ['test/**/*.html']
39  },
40  compass: {
41    dev: {
42      options: {
43        sassDir: 'sass',
44        cssDir: 'css',
45        outputStyle: 'nested'
46      }
47    },
48    prod: {
49      options: {
```

At the bottom of the editor, there is a status bar with icons for 'TODO', 'Terminal', 'Changes', and 'Grunt'. On the right side of the status bar, there is an 'Event Log' icon. A notification banner at the very bottom reads: 'Drupal Support: Looks like it's Drupal module. Enable Drupal support? Or do not ask again? (a minute ago)'. The bottom right corner of the editor shows the time '16:22', file path 'LF', branch 'git-master', and other icons.

You chose a career in which we are asked to do things that we've never done before, over and over.

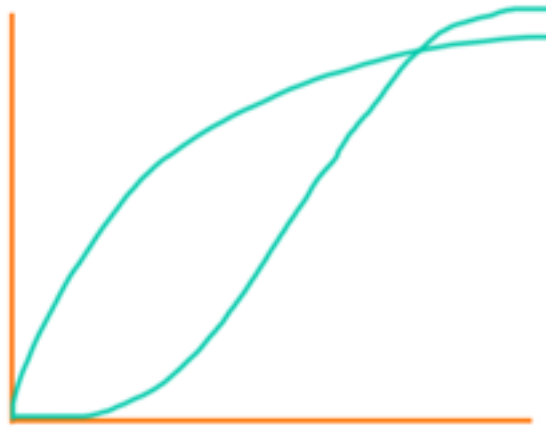

```
main.js | daterangepicker.js | gruntfile.js | screen.scss | _base.scss | update.php
14   endfilter = new Date($datepickerEnd.attr('value'));
15   existTest = true;
16 }
17 startf = parseInt(startfilter.getMonth() + 1) + "/" + startfilter.getDate() + "/" + startfilter.getFullYear();
18 endf = parseInt(endfilter.getMonth() + 1) + "/" + endfilter.getDate() + "/" + endfilter.getFullYear();
19 if (existTest) {
20   $datepickerFinal.attr('value', startf + " - " + endf);
21 }
22 $datepickerFinal.daterangepicker({
23   opens: 'left',
24   drops: 'down',
25   startDate: startfilter,
26   endDate: endfilter,
27   dateLimit: '1 month',
28   minDate: moment()
29 })
30 .on('apply.daterangepicker', function(ev, picker) {
31   $datepickerStart.val(picker.startDate.format('dddd, MMMM D, YYYY'));
32   $datepickerEnd.val(picker.endDate.format('dddd, MMMM D, YYYY'));
33   $('#edit-start-value-datepicker-popup-0').val(picker.startDate.format('dddd, MMMM D, YYYY'));
34   $('#edit-end-value-datepicker-popup-0').val(picker.endDate.format('dddd, MMMM D, YYYY'));
35 })
36 .on('show.daterangepicker', function() {
37   $('#edit-submit-showings').attr('disabled', 'disabled');
38 })
39 .on('hide.daterangepicker', function() {
40   $('#edit-submit-showings').removeAttr('disabled');
41 });
42 if (typeof $datepickerEnd.val() !== "undefined" && $datepickerEnd.val() === "undefined") {
43   var newstartdate = new Date($datepickerStart.val());
44   var newstartmonth = newstartdate.getMonth() + 1;
45   var newstartday = newstartdate.getDate();
46   var newstartyear = newstartdate.getFullYear();
47   var newenddate = new Date($datepickerEnd.val());
```

Naturally this can lead to feelings of inadequacy



It doesn't help that the industry puts some pretty unrealistic titles and requirements out there, like ninjas, rockstars, and sorceresses. Anyone heard anything like this? "Looking for a PERL Warlock, with 10+ years in Ruby, Linux kernel contributions, and experience doing isometric transformations in canvas. COBOL experience a plus." In the early years, even the crappiest of us (Me) were considered wizards because we could do what others couldn't, plain and simple. But now, people think of it as much more of a commodity position, but still expect us to have the proficiency and skill of a ninja. Somewhere along the lines, people stopped admiring rockstars and started expecting them. I am a yellow belt in three different martial arts, I've played in multiple cover bands, and still dabble in some slight of hand coin magic. This does not make me a ninja, a rockstar, or a sorcerer. Trying to live up to these standards is tough to say the least.

Learning curves



Not everyone learns at the same speed. I like to think that my learning curve is like this: I can learn the basics of something very quickly, but it's rare that I gain complete mastery over it. I've worked with others who seem like they aren't understanding anything until some magical aha moment where their knowledge and confidence skyrocket and eventually achieve mastery. It's important that we identify these curves within ourselves and others and accommodate them. Story time!



A good friend and old worker of mine, who happens to be also speaking at a conference in LA right now, almost didn't make it when he started at Metal Toad. Although we recognized his talent and knew that he'd have some ramp up time with Drupal, the framework we were using, he struggled. He was the slow build, skyrocket type. On his side, he was completely terrified and almost gave notice on multiple occasions because he was sure he was swindling us. Then one day in week 5, he hit his stride and started killing it. He surpassed my backend Drupal knowledge that month and is now way better than I am.



We don't do cookie cutter work. We are in the business of solving problems. It's actually rare that the problems we solve are duplicates of previous problems. In fact, even when the problems are duplicates, technology may have changed in the meantime requiring a new solution anyway. I don't know about you, but I can't point to two sites or applications in my experience that were done the exact same way. Things just simply move too quickly.

How it appears

- New projects
- Missed estimates
- Imperfection
- New Responsibilities
- New Skills

These are some ways and situations that could trigger Imposter Syndrome. Recognizing what your triggers are will help you to combat them.



Every project is a delicate unique little snowflake that requires it's own personal touches and flourishes. This can be fun, but it can also be nerve racking. If we could simply pump out the same snowflakes over and over, someone would build a website machine (maybe like SquareSpace?) and be done with it. I had a thought at one point that grid.io, the site that will dynamically create a site and layouts for you based on your content would put me out of a job (Don't worry, I've had this thought many, many times in my career. In 1998, I thought Dreamweaver was going to let my son make sites like legos.) But the reality is that as soon as someone can identify a grid.io site, people and companies will want to be different. The pitch will literally be "It won't look like a grid.io site." So we're constantly creating new things and that can wear on a person. It may cause you to have thoughts like "Why am I struggling? I've done a million sites." or "Why am I not faster or better at this by now?" The truth is we are delicate unique snowflake constructors and no snowflake is the same.

Exactimating!

		GUEST					GAME					# GAMES PLAYED				
		Chari	Destiny	Jonice	Matt	Rex	Checkers	Clue	Monopoly	Scrabble	Chess	1	2	3	4	5
# PLAYED	HOST	Chari														
		Destiny														
		Jonice														
		Matt														
		Rex														
# PLAYED	1															
	2															
	3															
	4															
	5															
GAMES	Checkers															
	Clue															
	Monopoly															
	Scrabble															
	Chess															

Estimating is hard. There is a reason it's not called exactimating. And in the software space, estimates can swing wildly. I've worked with developers on how to get better at estimating, but there is no silver bullet. It's all feel and experience and breaking things down into smaller and smaller chunks. While I happen to fancy myself pretty good at logic problems, I can't tell you how long it's going to take me to solve one, as I'm not aware of all the variables until I start. There can be a small dragon in a tiny estimate that completely blows the estimate out of the water. Nothing like spending 40 hours on a 4 hour estimate, but it happens. And when it does, in comes the Imposter Syndrome.

Imperfect Hacks



So, you've completed that task! Awesome! Did you do it right? Did you follow standards? Did you follow the right standards? Can it be updated without breaking? Is it in source control properly? Can it be deployed worry-free? There are multiple problems with this issue. For one, what is the bar and who is the authority? It's likely up to whoever your supervisor is, but is that it? Do your clients have code quality opinions? What about other developers on the project? As developers, we are held to incredibly high standards that are constantly changing. Obviously, this can also lead to Imposter Syndrome.

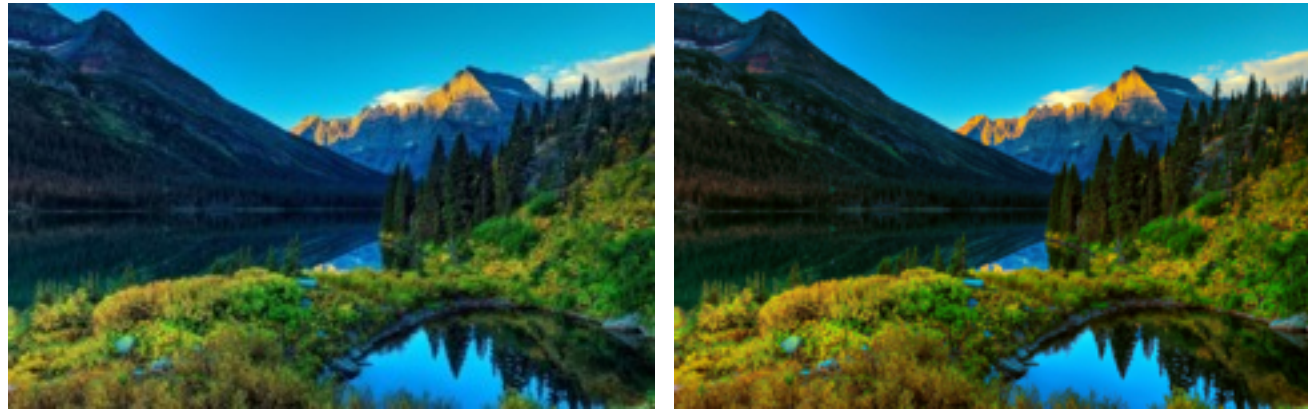
This quote by Hawking is especially timely as he just recently redefined his theory of black holes and said that matter can escape, albeit to another dimension. If he can be wrong, maybe you're too hard on yourself.



My first legitimate digital job was working as a production designer for a tiny agency that did a lot of color correction for a screen saver company. 95% of my job was to photoshop these photos so that

- a) any color casts were removed while maintaining the 'feel' of the picture
- b) they were sharpened in a way that you couldn't tell they had been sharpened and
- c) that they had true white and black points set.

My boss was a professional photographer before he was a graphic designer and was notoriously picky.



I have color corrected one of these slides. We're going to vote. Raise your hand if you think it's the image on the left. Ok, now raise your hand if you think it's the image on the right. Maybe you'll guess right, but my point is that it was completely subjective work that left me feeling like an imposter every single day. Unlike programming, where it works well or it doesn't, this was completely up to the whims of my boss. Sometimes I would get a little overzealous and over sharpen or whatever, but 90% of what he would correct was completely subjective. I don't live in this world anymore and neither do you. Your work may be subjective to a point, but in the end, if it works and has a decent design, UX and architecture, it will be successful.

New Responsibilities



This one is near and dear to me as I've recently transitioned from development to management over the last few years. I left a position where I had amassed a great deal of knowledge and respect and traded it for a brand new career in which I had very little experience. All of a sudden, I was brand new again. I kept calling myself a Junior Director, hoping people would give me some slack. I struggled mightily in my new role, even though I was providing the leadership and mentorship that was required of me. It wasn't until I looked back and realized that it was me and my set of skills that had gotten me promoted, and I just needed to be me, and not try to live up to whatever imaginary Dan Linn, Director of Development that I had in my head.



Now I'm going to go over some ways in which to deal with Imposter syndrome. A number of these came from a wonderful article written by Kyle Eschenroeder entitled 21 Proven Ways to Overcome Imposter Syndrome. I've omitted some, expanded on others, and added my own. I'm not sure how he actually "proved" these, but it's worth a read.

Say it out loud



The number one best way that I've found to overcome imposter syndrome is to simply say "This is imposter syndrome". Heck, if you can get yourself to say, out loud, "I *think* this might be imposter syndrome", chances are that you'll feel better immediately. So, another group activity: Let's all say "I think I have imposter syndrome" together. On 3. Not 1, 2, say it, but 1, 2, 3, *then say it!*. (This is me project managing): Ready 1, 2, 3 "I think I have imposter syndrome"

Talk to someone



Talk to someone you trust. Hopefully this person is someone who will not just tell you what you want to hear, but tell you the truth. That truth will likely be that you're being too hard on yourself. The truth will set you free.

Rubber ducking



If no one is around, and just saying it doesn't help, just start talking to yourself. I know this sounds silly, but... There is a technique to use when you're stuck as a developer called Rubber Ducking. The basic idea is that sometimes you just need to talk it out. Developers will sometimes keep a rubber ducky, or other such totem to simply talk at.



I used to have a client who would call me up and was very long winded. He'd go on for 5 minutes about the problem he was having and 9 times out of 10, he'd end up saying something like "Oh! Well I guess all I have to do is this!" and we'd be done. I started not answering his calls and sending him straight to voicemail where he would solve his own problems. I don't think I ever talked to him again.

Accept your flaws



We are not perfect, and despite job descriptions to the contrary, we don't and can't know everything. Maybe at one point you could, but no longer. I've accepted that my lack of a formal CS degree hinders my ability to work on low-level architecture. Although I've written a Java app before, I barely knew what I was doing and would be in trouble if I had to actually manage more than one thread. But that's fine. I simply look for help in those areas or plainly state that I might not be the best for the job, but I'll give it a whirl anyway if needed. And yes, I've had grey hair since my 20s. Big deal.

Keep working on your flaws



I have a condition that my friends have coined that is very similar to Bitchy Resting Face, if you've ever heard of that. I probably shouldn't say the official condition name out loud in a public setting, so for now we'll call it "Butthead Listening Face". When someone is describing a problem to me, I make a face similar to this gentleman. In my head I'm thinking "Wow, that is a really hard problem. I wonder how I can help" but it comes off more like "Why is this person even talking to me. When will they stop?" Now that it's been identified, I try to combat it, but it's a known thing that I'm constantly working on.

Remember your skills



Sure, I suck at memory management and machine code is as foreign to me as it is to my dog, but I've also been a leader in some other areas. I was doing cool stuff with scriptaculo.us way before jQuery was around. I'm an old school front end dev who remembers tables and layers. I have skills in many intangible areas that make me a very valuable developer. So when I'm faced with a problem that has me temporarily stumped, I try not to beat myself up too much.



I'm a full stack dev, but I lean towards the front-end. A few years back I thought it would be a great idea to get a Virtual Private Server and start hosting some sites. I can configure apache, I knew how to set up virtual hosts. How hard could it be? Fast forward through 6 months of printing money, and then my server stops sending email. I'd been blacklisted from the email servers. I had been hacked. I was thrown into a panic. I went through and checked processes, killing anything I couldn't verify. I learned everything I could about IP tables and firewalls. Finally, I offered to pay a friend of mine with some experience to come over and take a look at it with me. Luckily, he only charged a six-pack. While I was sitting there beating myself up for thinking I could do something like this, he was admiring the sophistication of the attack in which they hacked a mail server into SSH so everything looked like a legit SSH login. I had been sitting there thinking that I had no business hosting sites (That might still be debatable), but in reality, I had just been out hustled by someone who makes hacking into servers their job. I can't beat myself up for that and once I came to that conclusion, I was able to move on.

Don't compare yourself to others



We are all different. The same skills that make me a good developer may not be the same set of skills that make you one. If I was constantly comparing my skills to someone with a CS degree, I'd go crazy. Not only did they sit through 4 years of in-depth computer science training that I didn't receive, but they actually have a piece of paper that says they can do it. Which is a nice segue to my next point.

Credentials != Skill



This is for the self taught people in the room. I don't mean to offend anyone with this, and obviously I'm biased not having one myself, but having a degree does not automatically make someone a better developer. Knowledge of CS is important, but it's not the knowledge that we most often leverage. It's our creativity and ingenuity that make us good developers. Again, this isn't cookie cutter work. Degree or not, you chose this career because it is interesting and you likely had some innate skill at figuring things out. Don't think that just because you're self-taught that you aren't good.

Listen to others



And your employer chose you too. Did you lie on your resume or in your interview? Unless you did, your employer hired you for a reason. Likely more than one. I can tell you that it's fairly frustrating as a manager when I have more faith in an employee than they do in themselves. Don't discount peoples opinions of you. Sure they are tinted through their lenses, but there is truth to it and you have to recognize that.



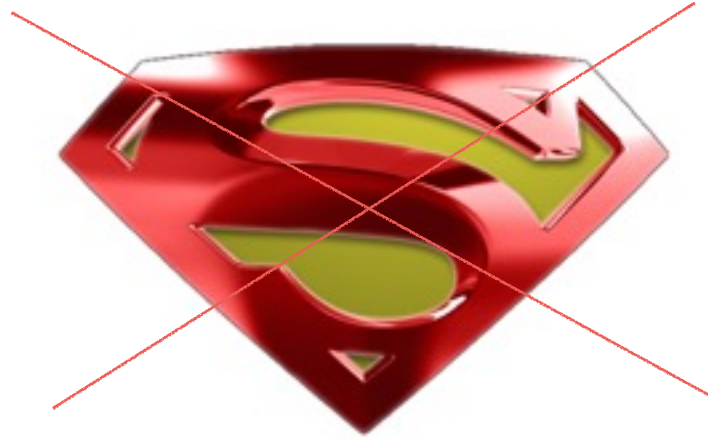
A friend I used to work with at Metal Toad had no digital PM experience but was told to apply by a friend who worked there. We saw some great things in him and hired him, but when he got the job, he had a huge case of the imposties. He tried to focus on his experience of running a venue to try and validate himself, rather than just being open and honest about being new to it. When he realized that he had the validation of his team and that he had been hired based on potential, he was able to refocus on learning the new job and is now very successful.

Super heroes



We are superheroes. We swoop in and save the day. But we do that with creativity, not laser eye beams.

Not super powered



If your coworkers or manager (or likely just yourself) feel like you should be capable of more, maybe it's time to talk it out and reset expectations. If you're the one expecting too much of yourself, then maybe you need to have a little sit down with yourself and try some of these techniques.



Here's a trailer that resonates with me:

In this trailer you see everyday people faced with extraordinary circumstances where it's easy to just give up. But instead, they become Batman and overcome obstacles. Here's why Batman resonates with people: He has no super powers. He is just a human. Granted, a super rich, insanely focused, martial arts expert and weapons inventor, but still. His greatest asset is his mind. We all have the capability to dig within us and find our inner Batman. Over the years, I've actually learned how to embrace stressful situations and sublimate the stress into a frenetic energy that fuels me. It took a while to do, but it's basically the realization of the old adage: When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Be the Batman.

Losing is part of the game



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helloworld;)

Apologies to any LeBron fans. I'm a die hard Portland Trail Blazer fan, so this image tickles me.

Babe Ruth struck out plenty of times. LeBron is regarded as probably the best player in the universe, but he just lost the championship. Missing shots and even losing are a part of any game, and in reality, part of life. We would be nervous wrecks if we were expected to do the exact right thing at the right time, every time. Stop beating yourself up over every little mistake.



I was recently helping the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry with a site rebuild. Not having the necessary budget for the project, they asked for me to architect the site and guide their dev in the development of the site. As I had recently vacated the Front End Architect role for the Director of Development at Metal Toad, this sounded right up my alley. I led them through 14 weeks of agile development. Then, two weeks before the expected go live date, an issue with their calendar, the main feature of the new site, came up as a show stopper. Turns out using Drupal views to query a date range on multi value field collections is tricky. Who knew? I tried a new method - then the pager stopped working correctly. Tried another one - different problems. This problem was so weird, that I actually hired a friend of mine to take a look. In the meantime, I had to go to my client and explain that while everything had gone swimmingly up until then, we finally hit a roadblock with major implications and that their timeline was no longer valid. Talk about imposter syndrome. I had been hired to do something and was now enlisting others to do that very thing. Luckily, I've had 15 years worth of imposter syndrome experience and using many of the tools here subconsciously, the feelings are now fleeting for me. FWIW, the calendar is fixed now and we'll be going live soon.

Take risks



Don't have regrets. When you're on your deathbed, will you say to yourself "Boy, I sure am glad I gave up on X. I'm not sure I could have handled the success"? Probably not. So dive in. Take risks. Be adventurous and courageous. But remember to wear sunscreen.

This is my friend Slavko, who just got certified to jump on his own. This might not be the best example though as there is no way you'd get me to jump out of a perfectly good plane.

Take action



What's the best way to dive in? Just do it. Take action. I wish I could get back the time I spent standing at the top of the half pipe, one foot on the board, too afraid to put my other one on and take the plunge. I finally did it and you know what it took? Nothing. It took me taking action and dropping in. Stop overthinking and do something. The very act of doing something is contrary to feeling like an imposter.

Fake it until you make it!



Fake it until you make it. I wish I didn't identify with this as much as I do, but it's truth. I've been completely over my head hundreds of times. If I go back to my dropping in analogy, if I would have simply tried it, I likely would have succeeded on my first try. I had never done it, but I had the basic idea of what I needed to do, I simply needed to do it. Or at least try.

Write about it



The most widely recognized way to truly overcome a bout with imposter syndrome is to write. Write what you're feeling. If you can't do that, write jibberish. Let the negative thoughts flow out of the pen to the paper. Just this simple exercise can have a profound effect on your mental state. But even more importantly than writing when you're feeling down, is recording your successes. When you start to get down on yourself, go back to your journal of successes. After a while, I think you'll be amazed at what you've accomplished.



I started seeing a new doctor a few years ago. The first appointment was very revealing as she sat me down and had me tell her about every injury and sickness that I'd ever had. As I was recounting my stories, it started to become clear that I've had a lot of head injuries. Like double digits. Although I suffer from weird head and neck pains, it had never occurred to me that I had had so many. All it took for that realization was to go back through my past and remember.

Test Driven Personal Development

Developers = Good at logic, not great at emotions.

Now I'd like to introduce something that may resonate with this crowd more than talking to a rubber duck, or writing in a journal. This is the concept of Test Driven Personal Development.

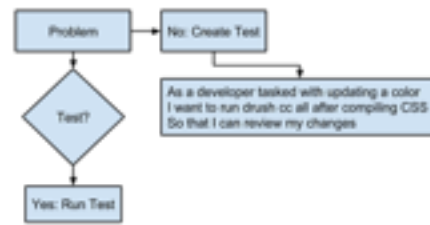
A lot of us developers are great at logic, but maybe not so much with feelings and emotions. In an effort to break down the problem into something we can understand better, I came up with the idea of Test Driven Personal Development.

As we go through this, you may notice that it's pretty much a gimmick, but our mind is playing tricks on us, so it's all fair to do the same back.

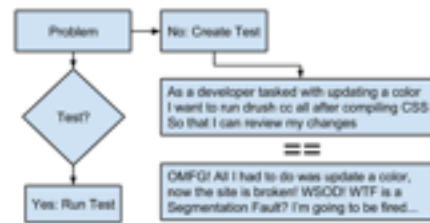
Test Driven Personal Development

- Identify the problem
- If the test exists already, run it
- If it doesn't exist yet, write it, then run it

The basic steps are just what you'd expect. Identify the problem. Run a test if you already have it, otherwise write it and run it.

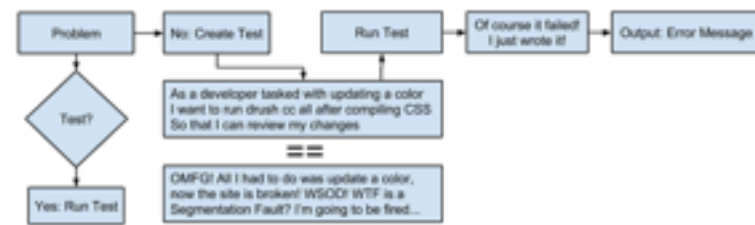


We'll take a look at the flow chart. It start with a problem that I've written a test for. The test reads: As a developer tasked with updating a color, I want to clear the caches so that I can review my changes

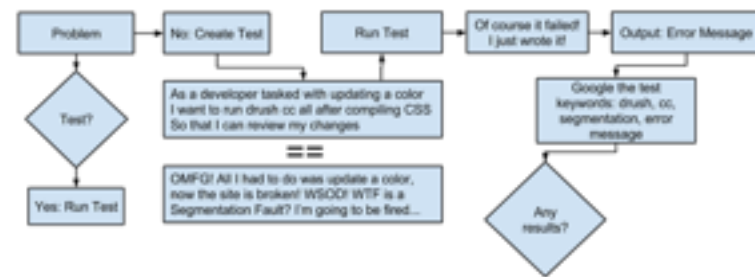


What this really means through the imposter lens is

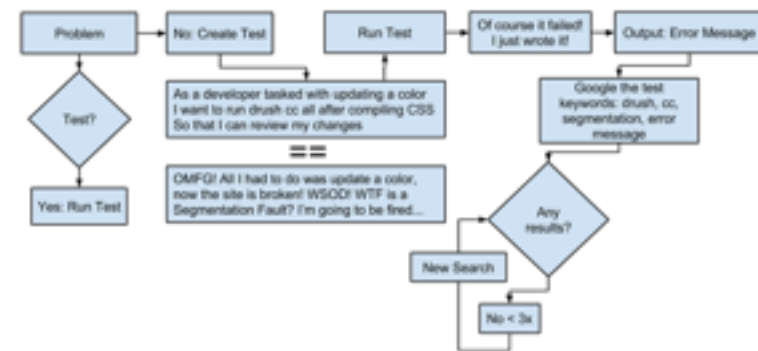
OMG! All I had to do was update a color, now the site is broken! WSOD! WTH is a Segmentation Fault? I'm going to be fired...



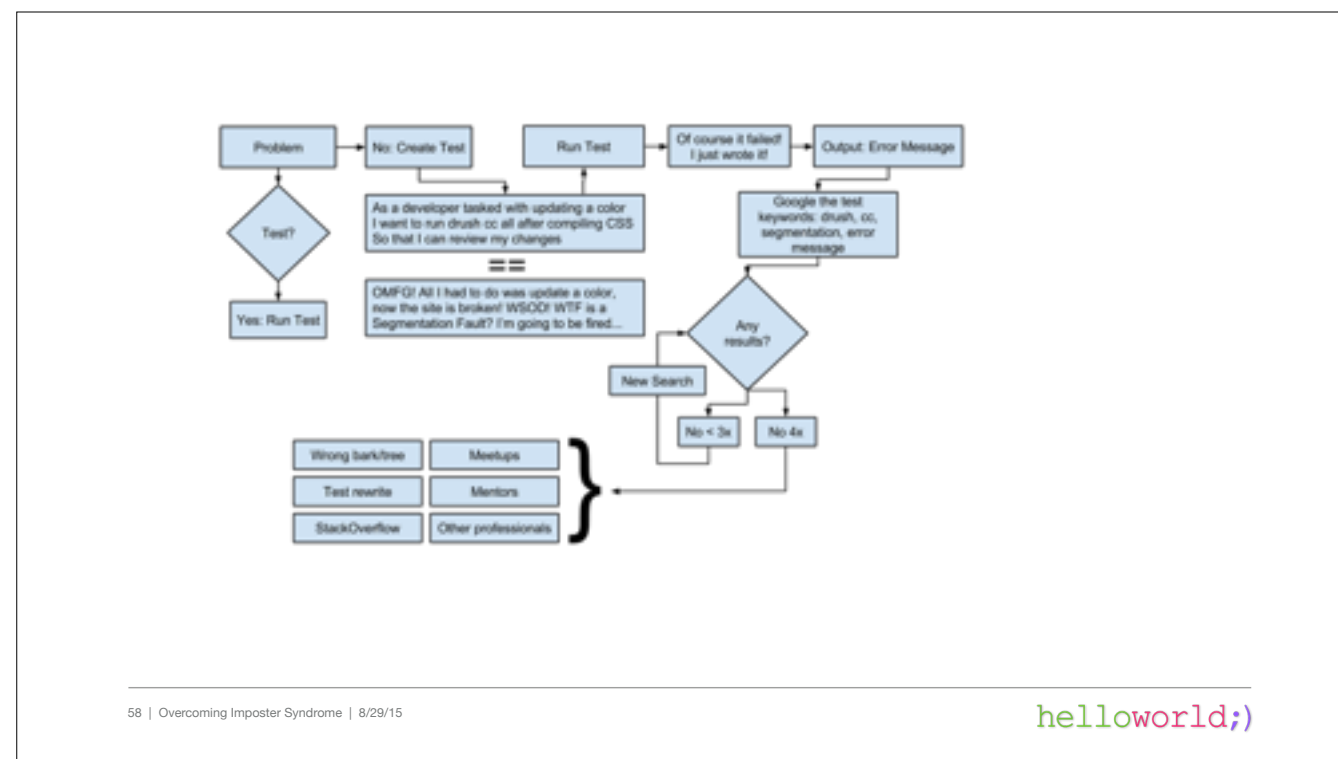
So we run the test and of course it fails, but maybe we get an error message.



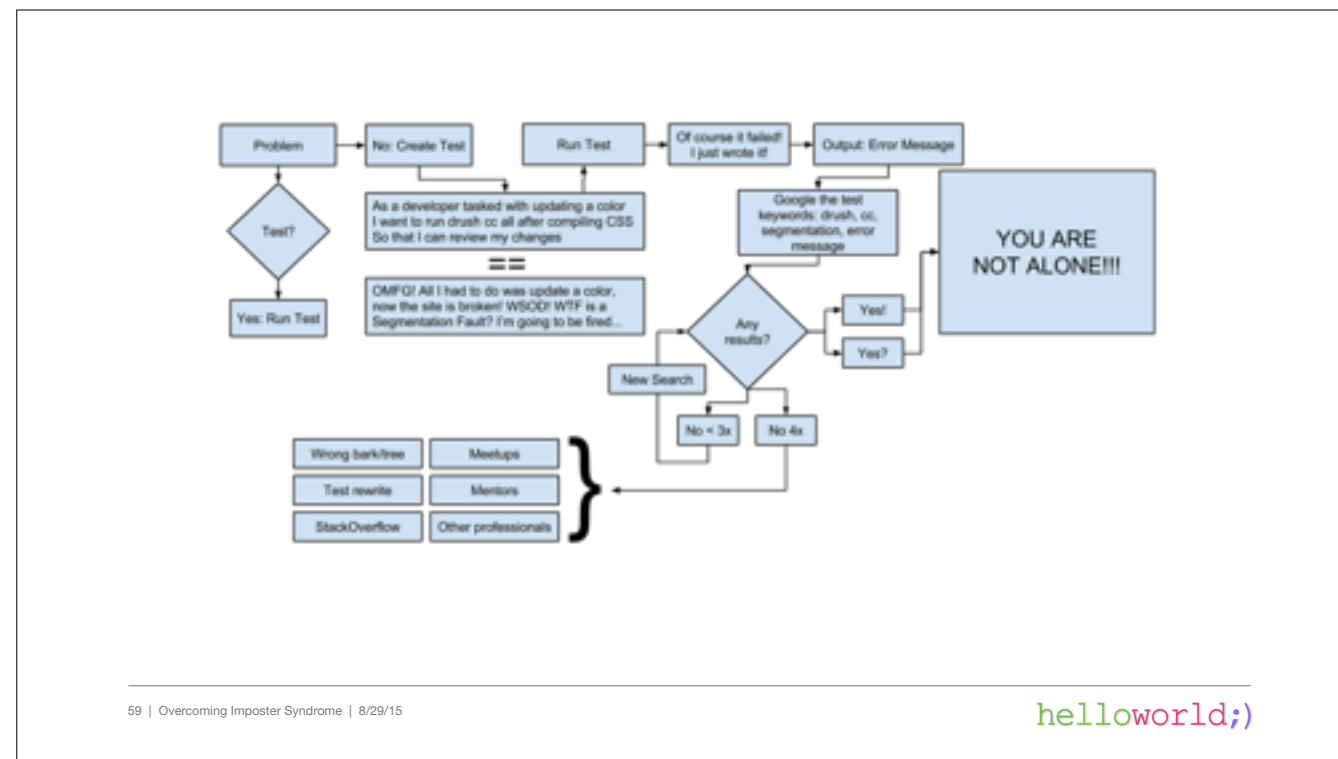
So we Google using the test keywords and any error message text.



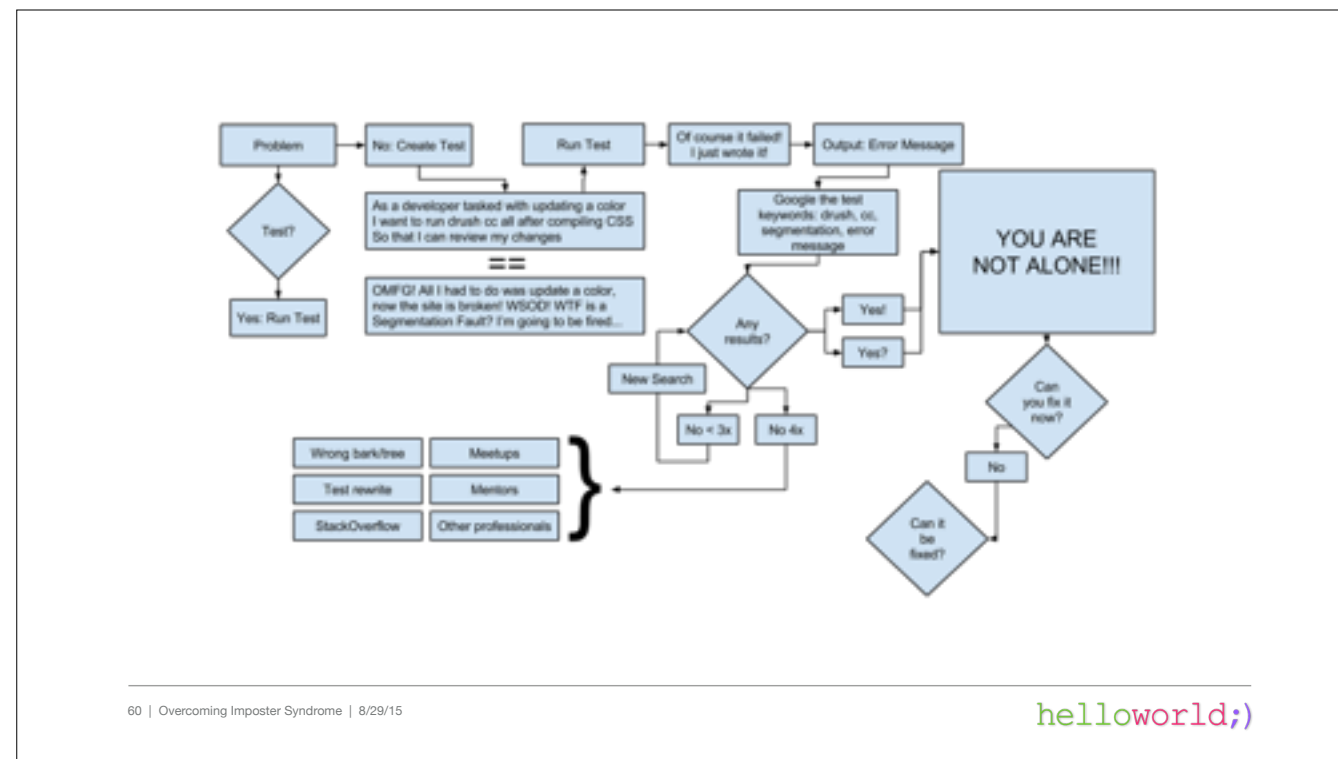
If you don't get any results, use some google foo and try searching again. Keep doing this until you've gotten no results for at least 3 times.



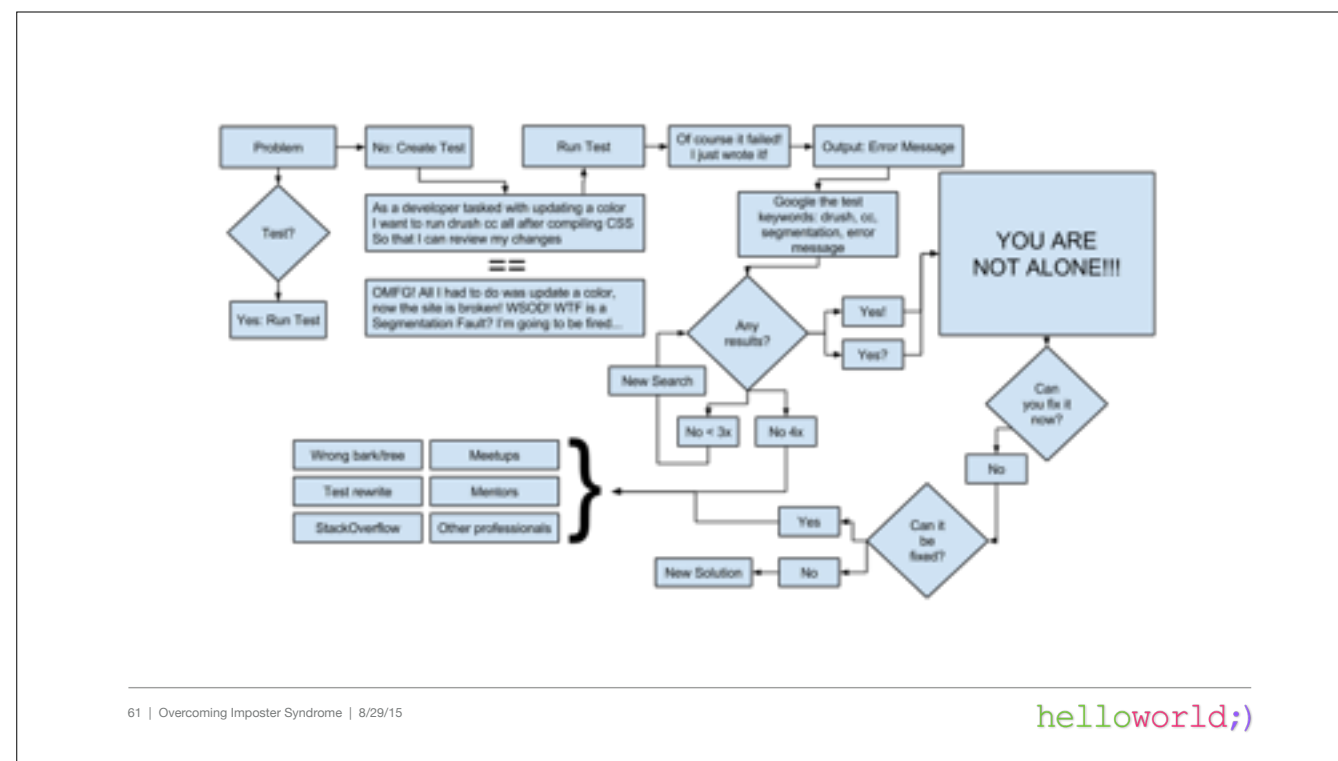
So let's say you just don't find anything in 4 different tailored searches. Then it's time to look for new ideas. Some things to try if you ever find yourself in this spot, which will likely be rare: Maybe you're barking up the wrong tree. Maybe re-evalutate what has been done or what needs to be done. Maybe your test just needs a rewrite. Ask your question on StackOverflow. Go to a meet up or find a mentor or maybe even pay another professional to help out



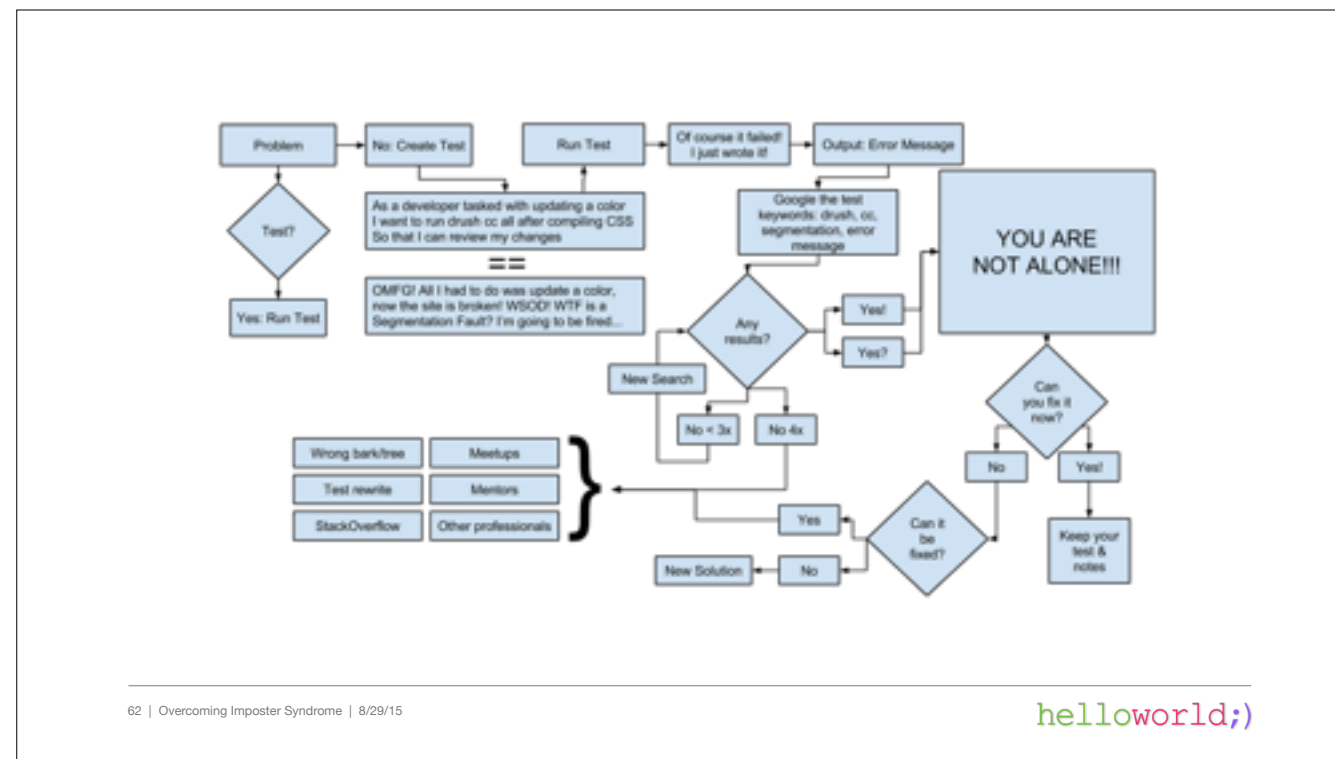
The much more likely scenario is that you do get results. Maybe you don't find a silver bullet like Yes!, but maybe it's more like a yes question mark? Either way, rejoice. For you are not alone!



So you got results. Does that mean that you can fix it? No? Then can it even be fixed?



If not, you'll likely need to find a new solution. Or maybe it's just out of your wheelhouse and it's time to go back to our other resources.



But maybe, just maybe, you're now able to fix it. Fix it, and make sure to keep your test and notes for next time.

This process takes the emotions out of it, while allowing us to simply take action. One step to the next, keeping moving. After a few iterations of this, you should start to internalize it and have an internal framework for dealing with difficult imposter syndrome situations.

At the end of the day, there is nothing novel about this flow chart. It's just a way to force you to take action and record your successes. You could put

As a homeowner

I need to mow my lawn

So that my neighbor stops complaining.

And this process would help you get that done and eventually, you wouldn't need the flow chart anymore and you'll mow your lawn with confidence.

Recap

- It happens to everyone
- Figure out your triggers
- Record your successes
- Keep moving

Just a few recap points I'd like to make. You don't suck, this is just a part of your profession and we all get it. Identify when this happens to you and how to see it coming. Keep a journal of successes to remind yourself of your accomplishments. And finally, the show must go on; keep on truckin'.

Thanks!

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

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Thank you very much for coming to my presentation today. Any questions?