

Achievement, persistence, and success in technology fields are determined by other factors in addition to ability and interest. Separated by thirty years, my daughter and I both stood at the computer lab door and peered in. My daughter went in because she was invited in, made welcome, and affirmed. I went in twenty years later. The difference was a sense of belonging. My experience of self-doubt in the boy-dominated Apple II lab was a key one for me. I didn't pursue computer science as an undergraduate, not because anyone told me it wasn't for me; rather, because no one told me it was for me. Ceasing the negative attitude – “girls can't do math and science” – is a necessary first step to getting more women into IT. The next necessary step is to voice the positive – girls and women succeed, achieve, and enjoy math, science, and technology. The self-perpetuating self-efficacy cycle can become a positive one through role models, affirmation, and belonging. Girls and women today should all receive the lessons I learned early on: that Legos and Matchbox cars are for girls, that interest drives play, hobbies, and careers, and that they belong in the computer lab.

TELL IMPOSTER SYNDROME TO TAKE A SEAT

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#ChangeAgent #AddWomen #ImposterSyndrome
#PublicSpeaking

I am not a fan of public speaking. I clench my jaw, my face gets red, and every so often I even get hives. Yet ever since I've entered the library tech world, I've presented at about three conferences each year. Why would I do this to myself? Sure, there are

always a few people who come up to me afterward and tell me how they never knew about XYZ and now want to do more with it, or how they can apply what they learned at work tomorrow. It is always great to get that feedback when you share with peers. But let's be selfish for a minute and ask, what do I get out of it?

I do not consider myself an expert in anything. I am always learning. Our industry is always changing, and the lines that draw borders around what is considered "our industry" blur and flex constantly. So when a coworker asked me to present with him at a conference in another state, my first thought was, "Why me? I'm no expert in this." This is when I point out the statistic that women generally feel like they are not experts in their trade, even when they are highly capable.²² Also, that men have the self-confidence to apply for the job they don't have all the requirements for, or apply to the conference when they still aren't sure what the heck they are going to talk about.²³ We need to give ourselves that same confidence as a white man in tech. That being said, when I said "sure" to doing the presentation, it wasn't because I overcame my lack of confidence and all of a sudden felt like an expert. I thought there was no chance our presentation proposal would get accepted, so I obviously had nothing to worry about. I would not be found out as a fraud, as I so obviously am, or for not being an expert in All The Things, because there was no chance our proposal would make it in.

Our presentation proposal got accepted. Cue hyperventilating and self-doubt.

In putting together the presentation, I had to articulate how to do processes I do often with little thought. How does

22 Pauline R. Clance and Suzanne A. Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 15, no. 3 (1978): 242.

23 Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, "The Confidence Gap," *The Atlantic*, May 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/the-confidence-gap/359815/>

one break down and explain a daily task, like turning a brainstorming session into a project spec sheet? The analyzation needed to turn those mechanisms into a presentation made me consider my process, reshape the procedures of that task, and actually made me create a better workflow. Additionally, I realized that I was actually more of an expert in the topic than I realized. Creating a presentation with a coworker gave me a better working relationship with him, which led to more interesting projects at work, since he knew I could aid him with specific problems. That presentation sparked the idea for another presentation, because I asked myself, “what if I take this one bit and transform it?” This leads to a chain reaction of curiosity in areas that you want to explore and share with your peers. This is why I stand in front of strangers talking about things I don’t consider myself an expert in. This is why you should take a chance and do so too.

It is so easy to say “I’m not an expert in that” and decide never to share your experiences or lessons in an open forum. None of us are experts. So, if you know just a little bit about something, share it. There is likely someone who has been curious about it or gets turned on to this new-to-them thing, all because you put yourself out there. Share your knowledge and see where your curiosity leads you. Push past the fear and take “the big step” that is right for you. Start small, with a lightning talk or a workshop for your fellow staff members, but put yourself out there. Take a chance, and you’ll be surprised at what will blossom from that one step.