

Edited by Pete from No CS Degree

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

How 30 developers without CS degrees handle it
and how you can too!

Table of Contents

Introduction	p4
Lucie Vrsovska	p5
Chris Fernandi	p6
Jessica Chan	p7
Richard Blechinger	p8
Belle Cooper	p9
Steph Smith	p10
Bilal Budhani	p11
Laura Roudge	p12
Lee Warwick	p13
Debora Piu	p14
Austin Grandt	p15
Dr. Meghna Srivastava	p16
Anthony O'Neill	p17
Peter Thaleikis	p18
Kara Luton	p19
Tapha Ngum	p20
Christina Gorton	p21
Guilherme Rizzo	p22
Dennis Ivy	p23
Sean Walsh	p24

Paulina Zheng	p25
Arvid Kahl	p26
Joe Stetch	p27
Peter Elbaum	p28
Danny Thompson	p29
Phoebe Voong-Fadel	p30
Newvick Lee	p31
Randall Kanna	p32
Ellen Macpherson	p33, 34
Alec McEachran	p35
Sean Miller	p36
Tapha Ngum	p37
Nader Dabit	p38
Conclusion	p39

Introduction

Thanks so much for buying this book!

I'd like to thank each and every one of the developers featured in this book for contributing their thoughts on how they became developers and how they deal with imposter syndrome!

I think imposter syndrome is a problem for a lot of developers, particularly those of us who are self-taught or have learned at a bootcamp. I have been asking my No CS Degree interviewees about how they deal with the fear of being "exposed" or feeling like they aren't good enough for a long time now.

I figured it would be a good idea to collect all these viewpoints and put them all in one place! I've also included some new unpublished quotes from developers that aren't on the website so that's a little treat for you.

Hopefully this book can help you if you are having a bad day or you need some encouragement at the start of your career as a developer. Really I think anyone that says they don't ever get imposter syndrome is lying!

There are people I've interviewed that have built six or seven figure businesses and still feel like they are imposters! Others deal with it even though they work at top companies that most developers would kill to work at. I hope this book helps you in some way and that you listen to the positive voice in your head and keep growing!

Best wishes, Pete

Lucie Vrsovska

Frontend Developer, Newton Technologies.



Of course, imposter syndrome is my middle name! Initially, I thought that perhaps after becoming a “real” developer it would hit me less frequently but oh – how wrong I was... Actually, it’s bloody hard for me not to feel like the odd one out at work. For context, I am the only female developer in the company, I don’t hold a CS degree, and I only started coding at 28. All my seven male colleagues either already have a degree in Computer Science or are currently working towards one, and as far as I know, most of them started with programming between the age of 8 and 15.

There are days when I feel like a total outcast, like I ended up in tech by accident and I don’t belong here. At times like these, I try to stop these toxic thoughts and reflect over how far I have come. I heard about React.js for the very first time roughly a year ago and now I work with this technology on a daily basis. I may be the most junior dev at work and yet I started contributing and pushing commits to our company’s repo from my day 3 on the job (it would have been even faster if it didn’t take ages to install all the prerequisites needed to build the app).

My advice is this: Don’t compare yourself to others. Focus on your own coding journey and achievements. Don’t let your imposter syndrome stand between you and your success. Rebrand yourself. You’re not a misfit – you are a pioneer of the new era of programmers! The world of tech is constantly changing, and it’s just a matter of time before there are more people like you and me (more self-taught developers and bootcamp grads, more women and more folks from diverse backgrounds). Just hang in there!

Chris Fernandi

Javascript instructor, Vanilla JS Academy



I just kind of pressed on anyways, because I so very very badly wanted to make web development my career. Feeling like I didn't know enough is what drove me to keep learning.

Because my particular style of development focuses on simplicity over "chasing the new hotness," I sometimes get asked questions about stuff that I don't know the answer to, and every now and then I send myself into an imposter panic.

It's good to remind yourself that the people you look up to may be experts in one area, but total beginners in another. No one knows everything.

You can totally do this!

Jessica Chan

Coder Coder / Youtuber



I was terrified the first year that I was in my agency job. I mean, I had coworkers who had gotten bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science, and I was here with my art degree. I definitely felt a lot of impostor syndrome at the beginning, even though all my coworkers were really supportive and always willing to help me out with questions.

The only thing that can help with impostor syndrome is time. While the first year was pretty difficult, I did start feeling less incompetent in my second year on the job. As I learned more and more, and things started to stick, I started feeling a bit more confident in my own skills. By year five, I actually felt reasonably confident, that even if I didn't know how to do something, I knew enough that I could Google to find the answer to it. That was a big realization. And the fact is, no one knows everything. There's always something more to learn, no matter how many years you've been in the industry.

Richard Blechinger

Freelance software engineer



Imposter syndrome is kind of like a little haunting parrot that always sits on your shoulder and screeches in your ear. You can quell it with little treats (e.g. when you land a job, or when you complete a cool project) but after a while it just starts rearing its head again, asking for more validation.

This holds especially true for me in freelancing. In the back of my head I know that I'm capable of dealing with the things that I have to work on, but when I sit in a call with clients there's this nagging feeling in my head of "What if?"

"What if I get stuck at some problem and it seems super trivial to them?"

"What if my performance doesn't live up to standards"

"Should I know more about this topic?!"

I've never been proven right by this imaginary parrot on my shoulder, however it also has no intentions of moving on. And so we cruise through life together.

Belle Cooper

iOS Developer/Co-founder, Hello Code



I get it most when I'm around other iOS developers, because that's the main work I do, but I don't have deep expertise in it, so it's really easy for me to feel out of my depth. It's gotten a little better over time, as my skills have improved and I've gained more experience. I also find spending more time in that world so I know what people are talking about, even if I don't have direct experience with it myself, can really help me not feel out of place so much.

And I try to remember that I mostly get this feeling when I'm talking about code, rather than writing code. When I'm writing code, I care about my users, and the product I'm making, and not about what other developers think or what qualifications I do or don't have.

Steph Smith

Senior Analyst, The Hustle



As with most people, I have definitely experienced imposter syndrome. However, I've experienced it less over time, not necessarily because I became more skilled, but because I stopped seeing the world as black and white or that they can do this and I cannot. Instead, I see the world and everyone in it along a curve, where if someone is better than you at X (true for almost anything), it's typically just a result of them having spent more time than you on it. This concept has evolved from personal experience in learning skills that I once felt completely unqualified to do, from coding to long-form writing.

I also love one of Steve Job's famous quotes:

"Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you and you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use.

Once you learn that, you'll never be the same again."

Bilal Budhani

Founder, Neev Labs



Imposter syndrome is very real and can make you feel miserable about yourself. The sooner we learn to deal with it the better off we will be. As I progressed in my career it became easier to manage. Although in my junior days it was very hard to overcome. I used to question my presence in this domain every single day. I always had a feeling what I'm doing is not up to the mark because I never received a formal education of learning this process. On top of that in one of my early jobs, I found myself working amongst the engineers from a top university in my country which made this feeling even worse. I found what worked for me was shipping my work regularly and going to local tech meetups.

Firstly, keeping your work only to yourself can have a traumatic effect on your mental health - you never shipped it so you never know how good it was. Shipping regularly helps in building confidence in yourself & lets your peers provide you with healthy feedback to improve on. Receiving early feedback on where you might need to improve can be quintessential. Secondly, nothing beats meeting like-minded people in your local tech meetup from different walks of life & hearing them speak about their struggles. A sense of belongingness goes a long way in making you feel secure & accepted. I personally run two tech meetup groups in my city to make sure there is a platform for folks like us.

Laura Roudge

Software Engineer, Deezer



Oh yes, that pesky imposter syndrome! I think I felt it the strongest when I was about to start my internship at Deezer, and I still feel it at least once a week! One trick I have learned from Abby Kearns, Executive Director for Cloud Foundry Foundation, is to give your impostor syndrome a name, and treat it like a different person. It allows you to detach yourself from it and not let it guide your actions.

Other than that, know your worth, stay humble and be okay with failure because there is going to be a lot of it, and don't assume you need to know everything. Bring what you have to the table because it's always contributing to something, whatever you might think! Also, I have been told by many seniors that seniority is also a state of mind. It doesn't matter if you're a noob in your job, as long as you're senior in your head and act professionally and responsibly.

Lee Warwick

Frontend Developer, Real Truck



I feel impostor syndrome every time I find myself learning a difficult subject. Recently I've been trying to wrap my head around machine learning and feeling very stupid while learning it. Before that though, serverless and AWS were giving me the same feeling, and before that, node and passportJS.

I've learned that everyone struggles to learn this stuff, and that we're all on our own journey. The best thing we can do is to stop looking at the people ahead of us and instead look back at how far we've come.

Debora Piu

Software Engineer, Deloitte



I don't think I have any special way of dealing with it. I've talked about it with coaches and colleagues, however it's just something that I needed to accept at some point. I remind myself of what I accomplished and work through the bad days. If I can get anyone to help me get through any task that is making me feel that way, I ask, take my time and I feel better when I get it done.

At Makers they used to ask us "are you a better developer than you were yesterday?" I think that stopping for a moment and realising how further I had got to in the past year, month or week, gives me some confidence that I'll get through whatever I'm facing today as well.

This is a huge industry and it changes very fast, therefore there will always be so much that one doesn't know. What's important is the attitude in working through it.

Austin Grandt

Software Engineer at a Midwest University



I deal with it by just knowing that everyone starts from somewhere and even the smartest people have deep knowledge in areas you don't and you have deep knowledge in areas that they don't. We all have our own specialties and just keep chasing your interests versus trying to know every minute detail about a language. The knowledge will build on itself over time.

Dr. Meghna Srivastava

Software Developer, Auto1 Group



In the tech industry, imposter syndrome is the friend who visits you the most. I almost feel it every other day. When I was learning how to code, things felt super hard. Imposter syndrome used to show up depending on how much I was struggling.

When I got a job as a developer, some days were really hard. It took me some time to realize that as a junior developer I was allowed to make mistakes and take time to learn. The more I learned, the more productive I became for the company and ultimately, the less often imposter syndrome appeared. I finally started feeling more confident in my abilities. However, whenever I come across a new problem or an unfamiliar technology, my brain still screams at me “You’re a fraud!” I’ve slowly started to observe that imposter syndrome isn’t something just inexperienced people feel. Even the senior engineers and managers feel it. It’s not just me. It’s not just you. It doesn’t matter what level we’re at and maybe if you don’t feel a bit of imposter syndrome, are you really challenging and learning in your role? When I feel imposter syndrome now I remind myself that it’s a normal feeling, or it will get better with time and ask for support when needed.

Anthony O'Neill

Remote Software Engineer



Software development is a very broad field with a fascinating history so you're never going to know it all. But even with that rationalisation there will be times where you're worried that you're about to be "found out".

I think some developers trigger imposter syndrome in others with bikeshedding about other's code or tooling etc, so encountering that early in your coding journey can be quite off putting. My advice is to be nice, stay calm, and if it helps with your imposter syndrome then dedicate some time into learning about areas that you feel less sure about. I particularly enjoyed learning about the history of computers so as to build a mental narrative of why we're here with these tools, but it may make you an insufferable person to people who aren't interested in this. Additionally, if you're feeling "stupid" or out of your depth, reflect on how far you've come in the last week, month, or year - this can help you to pinpoint areas where you've grown your skillset.

Peter Thaleikis

Freelance developer



Learning as you go is great, but comes with downsides. A big one is the slippery slope to imposter syndrome. I often get the feeling that I'm just completely 'winging it', know (almost) nothing, and just figuring everything out as I go. If you aren't careful, this can lead to a feeling that you and your work aren't worthy. I think especially self-taught developers go down this path often and don't think they are 'real' developers.

Whenever I notice this feeling creeping up I take a break, maybe watch a live stream of a rocket launch as distraction, and most of all spend some time thinking about my humble beginnings. The times with Notepad on Windows 3.11, the spinning gifs and all the interesting projects I've worked on since then. Looking up from there to where I am now helps to put things into perspective.

Depending on your personality, another successful approach is checking statistics. A look at the growing traffic of my side-projects and the growing business of my development company gives a sense of achievement too.

Kara Luton

Software Engineer, CrowdStrike



As someone who changed from *such* a different career than the one I'm in now, I get imposter syndrome constantly. I've only been coding for a few years when some of my coworkers have been coding for their entire life. Whenever I'm feeling imposter syndrome creep in, I like to take a step back and look at how far I've come. A few years ago I didn't know what a div was and now I'm writing JavaScript on a daily basis.

Tapha Ngum

Freelance web developer



To me, most of the benefits that I've managed to gain from overcoming imposter syndrome have come from teaching. I feel like the process of teaching has given me a better perspective and understanding of my own level of knowledge in comparison to others. It has given me more empathy, which I believe is key to mitigating some of the negative side-effects of imposter syndrome.

Christina Gorton

Instructor, Egghead



I feel like I never know enough and can always learn more. I try to look at this as a good thing now though. If I already knew everything I would get bored pretty quickly. An exciting thing about programming is that there IS so much to learn. Flipping it so it is something I can continue to work on instead of something I have to do has helped relieve some of the stress of keeping up with tech.

Guilherme Rizzo

Founder, CSS Scan



I always look back to times that I was and felt successful, and I try to remember how I felt, what I did, why I was successful. I do that once a month. If you start doing that you'll feel better with yourself too.

Dennis Ivy

Software Engineer + Youtuber



I don't know anyone that hasn't experienced imposter syndrome. That's due to the nature of the industry being so vast that we can't possibly grasp it all. At whatever level we all know more than someone else. I just realized that we are all at different stages and learned to accept it and just keep improving myself. I was petrified of people calling me out on the way I explain things, and it did happen.

I still get nervous when someone tells me they are watching my videos. I don't want to let them down or be exposed for something I don't know. The key is to not let it stop you. No critic is worth stopping you from accomplishing what you are capable of. In most cases your biggest critics will be the ones that were too afraid to do it themselves and bring others down just to cover their own insecurities.

More people will root for you than you think 😊

Sean Walsh

Software Engineer



Of course. I think everyone does whether or not they admit it. There is so much to learn and you can never learn it all. I think it's very important to accept that learning every single day is an essential part of being a developer, and there will always be others who know more about you in any given topic. Take it easy 🙌

Paulina Zheng

Data Scientist, Envisagenics



I've studied with and work with extremely smart and driven people and it's easy to feel out of my depth. I usually take a step back, take a mental break, and remind myself of how far I've gone. It's an incentive to always keep learning and improving my skills as a data scientist. And I try to remember that there are always going to be people who are better but that just means that there is more to aspire to.

Arvid Kahl

Co-founder, Feedback Panda



I have imposter syndrome right now! Even after having built a successful business and selling it, I still feel like I shouldn't be giving advice. I have found that the best way to deal with this kind of feeling is to look at the impact of your work. If your code helps even one single person somewhere have a slightly better day, it's all worth it.

If your business makes tens of thousands of dollars a month when before you had a meager salary, it's essential to step away from the monetary numbers and look at the people. Your customers pay you money because they looked at your product, looked at the price, and said to themselves: "this is worth more than the price." Easy as that. No one expects more from you than giving people something valuable and charging just a bit less than what it's worth.

Joe Stetch

Director of Software Engineering, Ascend Analytics



Every once in a while there's a voice in the back of my head that will say "they're going to find out that you have big gaps in your knowledge!" It's an unpleasant feeling. The best way I've found to push through when I have doubts is to just learn more and improve my skills. Also, the more things you try, the more successes you'll eventually have.

Being able to look back and say to yourself, "I've done all these things" is a great way to keep yourself moving forward. Keep trying things and failing, and eventually you'll succeed. The only sure-fire way to not accomplish anything is to stop trying.

Peter Elbaum

Remote Software Engineer, Praxent



I think it's near-universal, but I had it really badly for the first couple years of my career. I fell into a vicious cycle of not trusting my own ability to figure things out and relying too heavily on more senior colleagues to help me with things I didn't understand. The problem with this approach is that I wasn't developing self-reliance and problem-solving skills, so the impostor syndrome never got better.

It wasn't until I started at my current job that impostor syndrome became less of a daily reality. The reason for this was that I was the only front-end developer on my first project, so it was up to me to make all of the architecture decisions and also write all of the code. It was pretty scary to have so much responsibility after having just joined, and I definitely struggled at times, but by the end of the project I had the confidence to know that I could push through and figure things out for myself. I still struggle with feeling like a fraud, but it's significantly better than it used to be!

Danny Thompson

Software Engineer, Frontdoor



Imposter syndrome hits the best of us. I am always doubting if I am doing the right thing or on the right path. But you have to trust the process! You have to trust that you are working so hard and becoming greater and greater! We are our own worst critics. If we were our own judges we would never get jobs!

But understand how great you really are! You are beyond phenomenal and are on a life-long journey! You will never know it all and you will always forget things you have studied countless times! That is life! Don't sweat the small stuff. Just focus on being the best version of yourself and you will reach where you need to reach.

Phoebe Voong-Fadel

Front End Developer, Blue Fox Technology



I was recently asked to be a panellist for an online Lockdown conference organised by Hashnode and freeCodeCamp. I was asked to talk about my experience as a freelancer. I was the least experienced on the panel! However, I realised that everyone's perspective and experience differs. My advice would hopefully resonate with someone in the audience. It was also reassuring when the other panellists agreed with the answers I was giving. It was a great experience and pushed me out of my comfort zone.

Newvick Lee

Software Developer, Wealthbar



Computer science is so broad and technology is developing at such a fast pace, it's very difficult to stay on top of more than 1 field. I do try to focus on the fundamentals, things that will likely still be useful in 10 years.

I'm no expert, so what I try to do is talk to different senior developers and find out what skills/knowledge they think is most useful for the next 5-10 years. Although they might differ in answers, you do get a sense of what is probably not fundamental (specific frameworks and tools). I find that if I follow my interests and curiosity, I'll usually learn very effectively.

What I learn is usually related to my side project at the time. Having a side project makes sure that I'm always improving on something. And the best way to ensure I understand something is to use it in practice.

Randall Kanna

Senior Software Engineer, Base



Thankfully, my imposter syndrome has started to lessen over the last five years. It used to be crippling. Sometimes I wanted to take a sick day so I could avoid feeling like an idiot all day at work.

I don't think anyone ever gets rid of imposter syndrome. I've talked to some senior engineers who sold companies and even had CS degrees and they said the imposter syndrome never goes away. I remind myself of this anytime I feel like I'm not good enough to be an engineer. I deal with imposter syndrome by reminding myself that nobody knows everything. You might know nothing about infrastructure but you might be super good at React. Nobody can know it all. It's impossible!

Ellen Macpherson

Consultant Developer, ThoughtWorks



I suffer from impostor syndrome quite a lot. I think it's common when you're relatively new to something. However, as a career changer, I've gone from being great at the thing I was doing to really sucking at programming and eventually to being decent at programming, but surrounded by people who are fantastic and have been doing it their whole professional careers. That puts me in a uniquely vulnerable position to impostor syndrome.

Firstly, I'm the worst judge of my own professional worth. I know that I'm my own worst critic, so I try to seek out feedback from other people as often as I can.

Often the feedback is quite nice, and not at all the bollocking I'm expecting! If there is criticism, I can use it as a helpful objective benchmark to improve, rather than beating myself over the head with a flaw I perceive in myself.

Secondly, I've found Dr Valerie Young's work on Impostor Syndrome really interesting. She defines *five* types of impostor syndrome. Seeing the many different ways it manifests was so helpful in recognising my negative thought patterns so I could stop them. I'd highly recommend looking up her work.

Lastly, I've found that working on a project from start to finish was a great way for me to realise I'm not as much of a fraud as my brain tells me I am. It can be tough at work to see progress if you're working individual tickets and you're under pressure. You can't see the forest for the trees. Coming home and building a WordPress website or a small game really helped me to appreciate my skills a little more, even if I only worked on it for an hour a week.

Alec McEachran

Software Engineer, KPV Labs



I had a significant case of imposter syndrome when I joined Google. Until then I had always felt among my peers, but suddenly I felt like I was surrounded by people smarter than me. It took a while to find my feet and my voice.

I worked with lots of better engineers than me, but few of them could communicate about a problem the way I could, or help new developers get up to speed. I had to find my strengths; the aspects of my personality and the particular aspects of my background that made me valuable and different, and use those to become valuable to the team and the company.

It helped that both my first manager then my second manager had both left school at 16! Luke was an extremely talented coder who had been a US Marine mechanic, where he had learned to code. Paul was a fellow Brit who had gone into business, proved himself smart and successful and had quickly risen. They proved that honest hard work could drive success, and they helped to reassure me that I deserved to be where I was

Sean Miller

Software Engineer



For me, having a small win like Snapcrap was helpful in that it showed me you don't need to be the best engineer to build something useful. I also think it's really important to have faith in the process and believe that it will pay off in the future. The first couple months I spent coding I literally had no idea what I was doing and wanted to give up, but I had some weird evidenceless belief that eventually I would receive value from the experience.

Tapha Ngum

Freelance developer and founder of From To School



To me, most of the benefits that I've managed to gain from overcoming imposter syndrome have come from teaching. I feel like the process of teaching has given me a better perspective and understanding of my own level of knowledge in comparison to others. It has given me more empathy, which I believe is key to mitigating some of the negative side-effects of imposter syndrome.

Nader Dabit

Software Engineer, Amazon Web Services



I still deal with it (but it **does** get better as you become a better developer). I overcome it by remembering how far I have come and reminding myself that whatever I don't know is just a google search away. Over the course of my career I've worked with tons of smart and senior people who I have known things they did not know, and am always surprised that these really smart senior people are also learning on a daily basis like us.

Conclusion

I really hope you enjoyed the book!

Thanks again for all the amazing developers who have contributed to No CS Degree!

I've interviewed over 80 developers now without CS degrees so the content is here just a very small snippet of what is there. To read all the stories, check out my website:

www.nocsdegree.com

I recently made www.bootcampindex.com where you can research which bootcamp to go to if you decide to go that path. You can check out prices, what languages are taught and what scholarships are available.

I also have a jobs board for developers that don't have a CS degree education - if you are looking for work just now you can head on over to <https://nocsok.com> and hopefully find your next job!

Whatever stage in your career, I hope this book has been and continues to be helpful for you. If you like it, please tell a friend! If you would like to get in touch my email is pete@nocsdegree.com

All the best on your journey.

Pete