



21 Proven Ways To Overcome Impostor Syndrome



by Kyle Eschenroeder

I decided not to post this... but here we are. I told myself it wasn't good enough. In actuality I was just scared. A reader saved it when she emailed about her own Impostor Syndrome. I sent her this post and she responded with this:

[Redacted] replied

Sep 29, 8:40

Omg wow!

That was brilliant!!!!

I think that post literally shook all the excuses out of me.

Kyle you are amazing!

I hope you screenshot of this e-mail :)

Extremely extremely helpful for me, wow I love it. Every time I feel imposter syndrome creeping in, I'm gonna refer back to this post. Thank you so much!!!

[Redacted] Where can I find that post, you made such a difference in my life. I've been struggling with this for so long. I've been in.

Thanks a million for this!

Well, here it goes...

[Update: Since posting this, there have been a ton of people commenting about their experiences with Impostor Syndrome, their stories might be even more helpful than the article itself. Definitely check them out.]

Here's What We're Covering:

- [What Is Impostor Syndrome?](#)
- [21 Ways To Overcome Impostor Syndrome](#)
- [Impostor Syndrome: The Challenge](#)
- [Wrapping This Up...](#)

What Is Impostor Syndrome?

I'm a fraud and everyone is about to find out. I feel that every time I am about to share something. I feel that right now writing this: *I don't even have impostor syndrome.* That's how bad my impostor syndrome is. I even think I'm faking that. If it's part of my life, it's fake. What is impostor syndrome? It's feeling like an impostor when you're not. Like you're a fraud and the whole world is going to find you out.

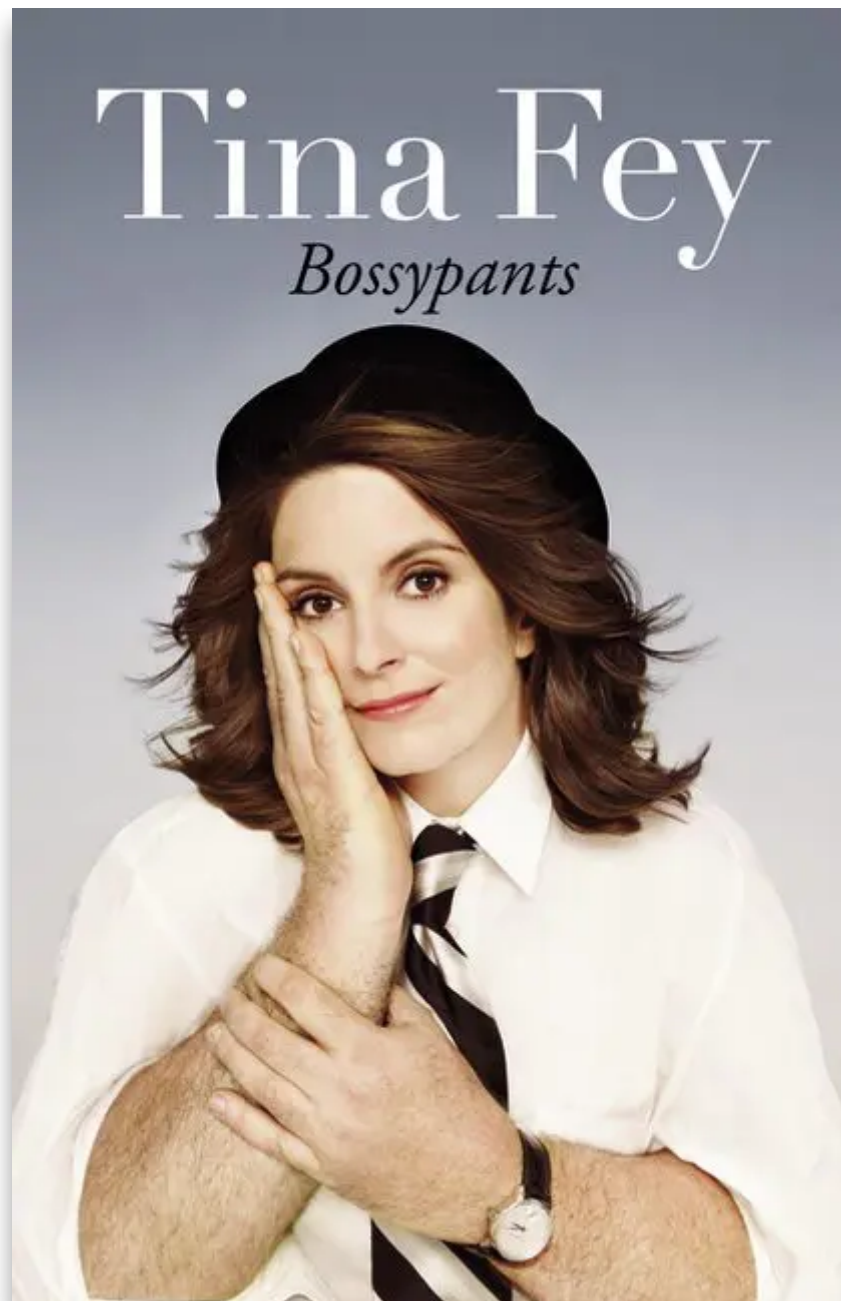
This makes total sense for undercover agents and people selling snake oil. It doesn't make so much sense for people who are trying to make the world a little better or to sell something they believe in.

The first step to feeling better about anything is to realize that famous people suffer the same thing. So here are some famous people with Impostor Syndrome:



– Tina Fey

“The beauty of the impostor syndrome is you vacillate between extreme egomania and a complete feeling of: ‘I’m a fraud! Oh God, they’re on to me! I’m a fraud!’ So you just try to ride the egomania when it comes and enjoy it, and then slide through the idea of fraud.”



– Michelle Pfeifer

“I still think people will find out that I’m really not very talented. I’m really not very good. It’s all been a big sham.”





– Kate Winslett

“Sometimes I wake up in the morning before going off to a shoot, and I think, I can’t do this. I’m a fraud.”



– Maya Angelou

“I have written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’ “

Emma Watson, Sheryl Sandberg, and Sonia Sotomayor have also admitted to feeling like they’ll be found out for the frauds they are.



But wait, these are all women... Apparently this is mostly a problem for women. I don’t buy that though. I think that guys just won’t talk about it. Or at least that’s the story I’m going with. (I don’t want to be

girly.) In searching for famous people with impostor syndrome I *did* find a couple males. Tom Hanks and Neil Gaiman (artists of course, but they'll do):



– Neil Gaiman

“The first problem of any kind of even limited success is the unshakable conviction that you are getting away with something, and that any moment now they will discover you. It’s Impostor Syndrome, something my wife Amanda christened the Fraud Police.”

Seth Godin wrote in *The Icarus Deception* that after a dozen best sellers he *still* feels like a fraud all the time. (I have a sneaking suspicion that Tim Ferriss suffers from it too, just saying.) This problem is only getting worse as more of us rely on our online presences. We’re in this weird culture where you’ve got to sell yourself aggressively while remaining “authentic”. You think you need to be perfect but you also need to feel free to fail. You need to be yourself and more! It’s all set up to make you feel like a fraud. At the end of this post I’m going to issue a challenge. If you don’t feel like reading anything else, skip down and do the thing with me! Here are the ways I keep going when I feel like a fraud:



21 Ways To Overcome Impostor Syndrome

1. Come off it. Usually I feel like a fraud when I think I'm more important than I am. When you feel like a fraud it's in relation to some perfection that never actually existed. Letting go of some of your excess self-importance will go a long way in helping you feel less like a fake.

2. Accept that you have had some role in your successes. We feel like frauds because we are "unable to internalize our successes". We were given an opportunity that others weren't. And so nothing we achieve after that opportunity was actually deserved.

John D. Rockefeller's oldest son suffered that *bad*. His entire life's work was giving away money that his dad made. Can you imagine the intense impostor syndrome he must have felt? Holy moly.

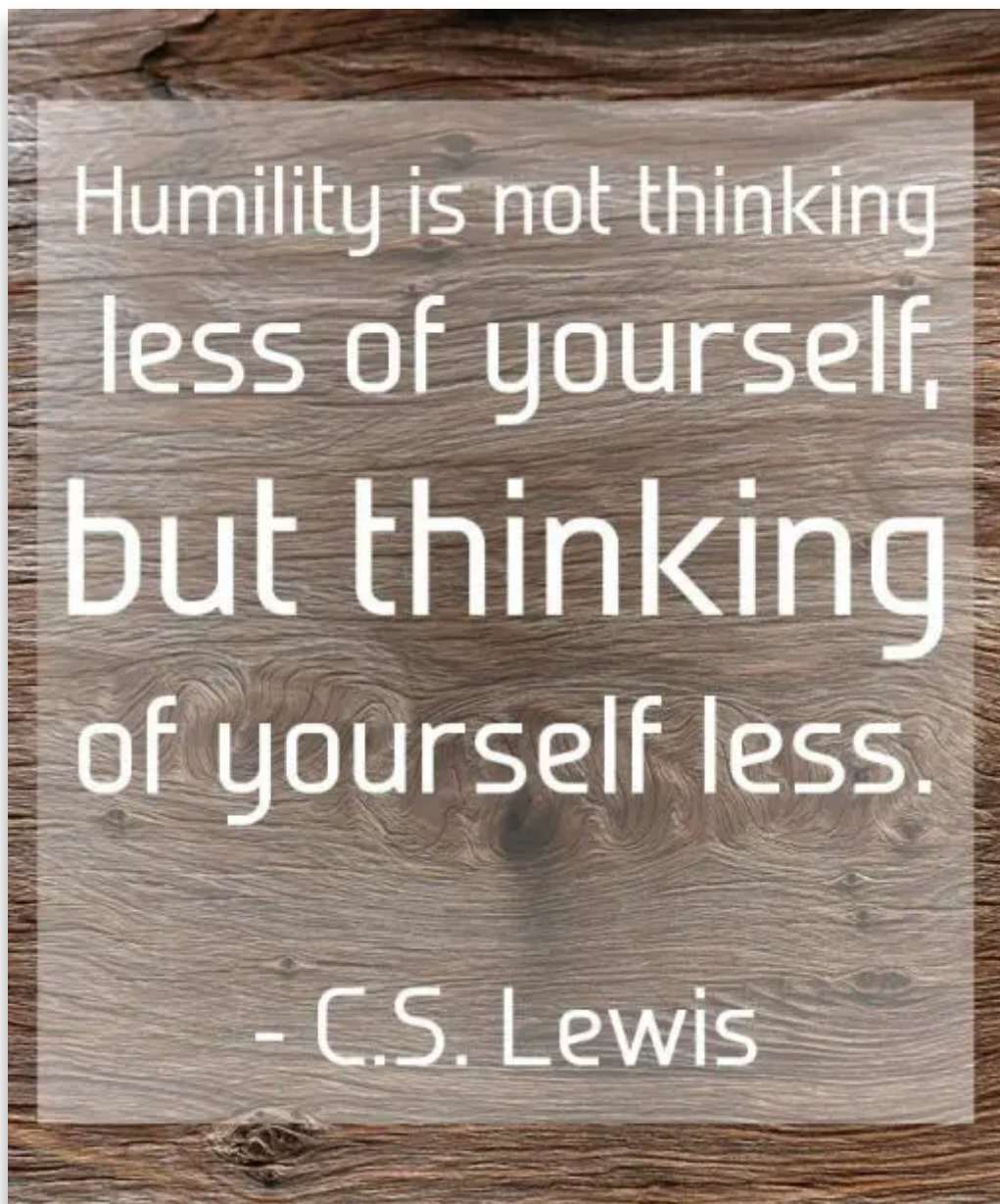
There are plenty of people born with a silver spoon that still manage to f*#\$ up. They were given every opportunity and never could take advantage of them. Opportunities come to those who expose themselves to them.

It's not all "fair", not at all. But you *did* do something to get where you are. You said *yes* when you could have said *no* (or, maybe more challenging, you said *no* when you could have said *yes*.)

3. Focus on providing value. I feel like a fraud when I'm concerned about myself. What will they think of *me*? If I fail they'll shun *me*. I don't know as much as that other guy, I have no right to say anything on the topic. Blah blah blah. The fastest way to get over feeling like a fraud is to genuinely try to help someone else.

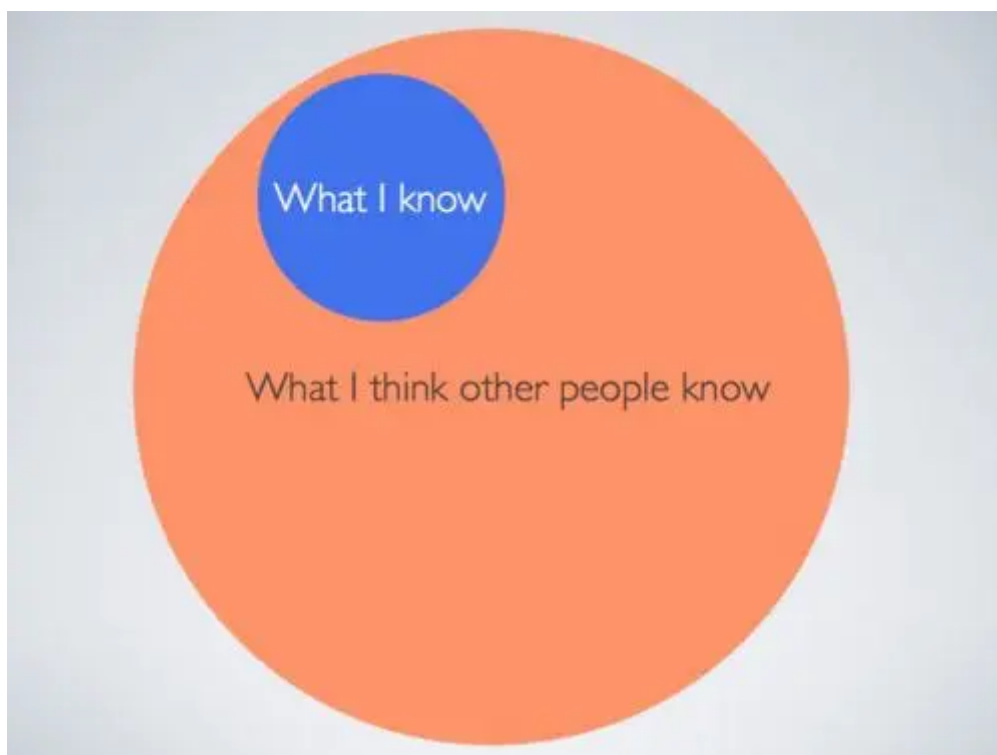
This is hard because what if they hate you for it? What if they make fun of you for trying to help? What if your sincerity is smashed under the laughter of others? Then OUCH! That hurts bad. Not nearly as bad as it hurts to feel like a shell of yourself though. I remember the [first time](#) I wrote vulnerably. I had gone through severe depression and had benefitted from reading about others being depressed. I felt obligated to share my story. I did. It's a couple years later now and I still get emails telling me how helpful

the letter was to them. Not one person made fun of me for that. At least to my face.



4. Keep a file of people saying nice things about you. I just started this earlier this year and it's been amazing. Every time someone writes that I helped them online I take a screenshot and put it in my folder. When I feel like a fraud I can go look through the stories of people I have helped. There is a mom who's 18 year old boy was shaken out of being stuck because of something I had written. There are a whole series of entrepreneurs who started businesses

because of articles I've written. There are successful entrepreneurs that were reinvigorated by something I wrote. There are a whole slew of people at rock bottom who have found life worth living again because of something I wrote. Those things keep me putting stuff out there. Because, honestly, it's easy to forget that writing can do any good. Collect your wins, testimonials, whatever and then visit them when you're feeling like a fraud.



5. Stop comparing yourself to *that* person. There's no good reason for you to be [reading what I'm writing](#). There are world class biographies of Warren Buffett, John D. Rockefeller, and Einstein. James Altucher has had more successes than me. Peter Thiel just wrote a book. Tim Ferriss, Paul Graham, Kevin Kelly... these guys blog! But still, I'm writing this because I think I have something to offer. Actually,

when I look at my praise file I have *proof* that I have something to offer.

When I compare myself to these others it's easy to fall into the trap of "my life sucks compared to that life". You might as well not even do anything! Your life isn't the best life! Emerson said, "Envy is ignorance..." and he was right on. You aren't here to live the life of another person. You're here to do whatever life you can. Turn Facebook off, get off Instagram, stop reading biographies of "successful" people and learn to respect your own experience. [Limit your stress](#), you're not a fraud, you're just you.

6. Expose yourself totally. Part of the twisted arrogance that causes impostor syndrome is the (usually unconscious) belief that you have extreme powers that the world couldn't handle. Or maybe it's just that you think you are a freak. You certainly have the ability to offer the world something that nobody else can... but really it's not *that* wild! You are not nearly as much of a freak as you think you are. Again, come off it, you're just not that special.

Do this: write for 30 minutes the most insane things about yourself. You will never show anybody this. Write your most ridiculous beliefs, your most terrible thoughts, your biggest fraud! Just write gibberish if you think that is crazy. Push into the deepest taboos you hold. Seeing these on paper doesn't get rid of

them but externalizing things puts them in a more sane perspective.

I have a gay friend. Everyone knew he was gay. He spent years not telling anyone. He spent a huge chunk of his life without expressing himself. If the world knew he was gay everything would be over. “So, I’m gay,” he told me. Big surprise. “Okay,” I told him. The next month I saw him he was living a totally different life. There was some kind of rusty wheel in him that was now spinning freely. His eyes shone with life. He was energetic and positive. All just from letting down his guard for a minute.



7. Treat the thing as a business/experiment. Today there is a whole slew of artist-entrepreneurs. We call part of what we do “content creation”. There has never been a time in history where so many people have a “voice”. No wonder we’re all suffering from impostor syndrome.

Start treating even your art as a business. Not to the point that you start making crap because it’s what people like, but to the point that you are honestly

serving the market. In a business, if a product doesn't sell, you stop making it.

If nobody shares this post or leaves comments then I'll assume that nobody wants to hear me talk about impostor syndrome—so I'll stop. I won't wallow in my failure and think the world hates me.

I'm running a test. Looking at it this way makes it easier to create the thing freely.

8. Say “It's Impostor Syndrome” and it immediately becomes a little less terrible.

9. Remember: being wrong doesn't make you a fake.

The best basketball players miss most of the shots they take. The best traders [lose money](#) on most trades. Presidents are wrong about stuff all the time. The best football teams inevitably lose.

Losing is just part of the game. Don't glorify failure, but don't let it make you feel like you're not a real contender either.

10. “Nobody Belongs Here More Than You” <<That's the title of a book I haven't read, but I agree with it. Why do we feel we don't deserve to be in the game? Because we haven't won it yet? We haven't even tried! Break people down into what they are: expiring meat sacks.

We are all going to die, we just take different routes to get there. One of the most attractive qualities in a person is acceptance.

Acceptance of themselves and acceptance of you.

Not in the surrendering kind of way, in the “seeing clearly” kind of way. If you can admit that nobody belongs here more than you (while maintaining the belief that you don’t belong here any more than anyone else) you will find yourself making connections with people in powerful ways.



11. Realize that when you hold back you’re robbing the world. If you walk around feeling that you should be someone else or that you don’t deserve to be here then all your crappy vibes rub off on other people. Your stunted expression means that you can’t be there for people who need you.

Everyone has doubts, the best gift you can give the world is to move forward regardless of the doubts—because it gives us the permission to move forward as well.

12. You're going to die. Do you want to be on your deathbed regretting that you spent your entire life stopping yourself because you felt like a fraud? Maybe you can't shake the *feeling* that you're a fraud. You *can* force yourself to move forward despite the feeling.

13. Stream-of-conscious writing. I suggested something similar in #1. This is aimless though. Do this: write for 30+ minutes nonstop. You can't put your pen down. If there is no thought in your head then write "I can't think of anything" until you do. This will constantly put you in touch with what's going on inside yourself.

It will show you how silly the impostor syndrome is. It's awesome.

14. Say what you *can*. We are often put in the position of "expert". When this happens people look at you like you should know *everything* about a topic. We can't know everything about anything though. If I'm in a situation where there is potential to *actually* be a fraud—ie bullshit about things I don't know—I just say what I can instead. People respect this much more. Admit that you don't yet have the answer but you'll find it.

Admit that you haven't found the perfect solution but you've come close enough.



15. Realize that nobody knows what they're doing.

Most startups fail. Even the ones that you hear about raising millions of dollars fail all the time. Nobody knows exactly what's going on. There are a ton of people who will tell you they know the answers. These people are liars.

The world we live in is the result of a lot of brave people tinkering, failing, and succeeding once in a while. Nobody knows what's next: some are willing to play ball in the face of uncertainty and some aren't. You're not an impostor for trying something that might not work. You're a hero.

16. Take action. Impostor Syndrome lives in abstraction. It's not about [stopping being lazy](#), it's about [massive amounts of action](#). It is impossible for it to survive when you're taking action. Taking action *proves* that you're not a fraud. It tests your mettle in the real world.

Impostor Syndrome cannot do damage to the person who consistently takes action. (You still might feel it every once in a while but you won't let it stop you.)

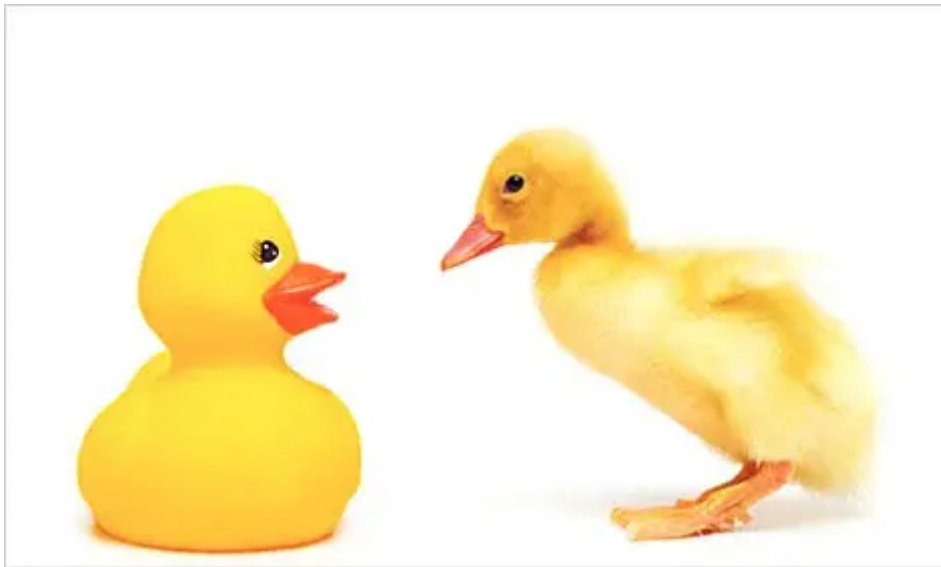
17. Realize that you are never you. You're constantly changing. You're constantly becoming a new person. Your opinions change with new information (I hope). You spend 6 months eating donuts and then you spend 6 months at the gym. Last year you were obsessed with Call of Duty, now you don't understand video games. Maybe you were in a terrible mood this morning. Maybe you're a bit brighter now.



– Michel de Montaigne

“There is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and others.”

You are growing into something different. You are getting better. How? By trying to do something better than you actually can. That's not a lie, that's valor.



18. Authenticity is a hoax. What is being authentic?

I'm not going to write to my grandma using the same words as I use to write to my sister. I'm not even going to emphasize the same interests I have.

If I'm selling security systems, I'm not going to pitch a Mormon the way I pitch a rock star. It just wouldn't make sense. There is no person you can be other than you. Ever. The impostor syndrome will have you believe that you are being inauthentic. That you are a liar. If that's true then where is your true self!?

The impostor syndrome doesn't give an answer because it doesn't have one. Tell it to eff off.

19. See credentials for what they are. They don't mean much. "Expert" means someone decided to call them that. "PhD" doesn't mean someone knows more than you, it means they spent [more time in college](#) than you. (And actually do know way more than you about some uselessly specific topic.)

“As seen in The Wall Street Journal” means they knew how to use HARO. Don’t measure yourself by credentials. It takes the focus away from actually doing good things. And it won’t shut up the impostor syndrome for long either.

20. Find one person you can say, “I feel like a fraud”

to. Being able to say that out loud to another person can be a huge help. Especially when they laugh at you for it.

21. Faking things actually does work. Sometimes faking it doesn’t make you a fraud. If you smile your body will be more generous with happy chemicals and actually make you happier. Neuroplasticity means that you can shape your brain by pretending.

When you were a baby you tried to walk and fell down every time. Were you a walking impostor? Who are *you* to walk!? You can’t even do it! It’s absurd!

Silicon Valley has been built by people trying to do things that *probably* weren’t going to work. We need them to keep trying. We need you to keep trying. We need you. Whether you feel like an impostor or not.

Impostor Syndrome: The Challenge

You have the opportunity right this very instant to overcome your impostor syndrome. This is what we're going to do. A Blog Confessional of sorts.

Write in the comments one thing you've avoided because you feel like a fraud. (If this is too much, you can email me... commenting will be more powerful

though.) You can even stay anonymous if you want. Maybe you haven't started that blog because you feel that you couldn't do it as well as the people already blogging about a topic. Maybe [you haven't started your business](#) because you don't think you're an "entrepreneur". Maybe you haven't talked to that pretty girl/guy. I don't know. There are all sorts of thing. I'll give you mine in a second.

****BONUS ROUND**** *Do something about it!* If you don't know what to do, I'll give you a suggestion. The comment itself will be a huge step for sure. It'll be even more huge to take the thing head on.

Wrapping It Up...

If you're looking for a guide to take action I put together this awesome course on taking action!

[Check out The Action Course – Learning the Art of Doing](#)



AUTHOR

Kyle Eschenroeder

Thanks for taking the time to read this! Let me know what you think - the good, the bad, the ugly - in the comments below.

I'm an entrepreneur (more in the **StartupBros About Page**) in St. Petersburg, FL



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