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Impostor Syndrome

Facing Fears of Inadequacy and Self-Doubt

(Also known as impostorism, impostor phenomenon, and fraud syndrome.)

Think of your greatest achievements. Do you feel proud of what you've accomplished? Or do you feel like a fraud?

Does each raise, promotion or accolade bring joy? Or is it accompanied by the dread that, one day, your cover will be blown, and everyone will find out that you just got lucky?

If you experience feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, you may be surprised to learn that you are in great company. Impostor Syndrome is typically associated with high achievers. So, if you feel like a fraud, the chances are that you're more capable than you think. Real frauds don't worry about this!

In this article, we'll examine Impostor Syndrome: what it is, how it can limit your possibilities, and the strategies you can use to overcome it.

What Is Impostor Syndrome?

Impostor Syndrome is the overwhelming feeling that you don't deserve your success. It convinces you that you're not as intelligent, creative or talented as you may seem. It is the suspicion that your achievements are down to luck, good timing or just being in the "right place at the right time." And it is accompanied by the fear that, one day, you'll be exposed as a fraud.

Impostor Syndrome can be linked to other feelings of self-doubt, such as **fear of success**, **fear of failure**, or **self-sabotage**. But it's not simply another symptom of low self-confidence, or excessive humility. It involves a constant fear of exposure, isolation and rejection.

Impostor Syndrome often strikes at moments of success: starting a new job, receiving an award or promotion, or taking on extra responsibility such as teaching others, starting your own business, or becoming a first-time parent.

These feelings can inspire you to work harder, so as not to be "unmasked," leading to further success and recognition – and feeling like an even bigger fraud. But often, they lead to "downshifting." This is when you revise your goals and become **less** ambitious, which in turn, prevents you from fulfilling your true potential.

Note:

According to the **Dunning-Kruger Effect**, people of high ability often have a low awareness of that ability. However, that doesn't mean that they all have Impostor

Syndrome, which uniquely involves a dread of "discovery."

Impostor Syndrome and Gender

Impostor syndrome has long been thought to affect more women than men, particularly in male-dominated environments. In their groundbreaking article **The Impostor Phenomenon**, Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes focused on the prevalence of Impostor Syndrome among high-achieving women.

However, **more recent research** has suggested that in certain circumstances, men with Impostor Syndrome may suffer more anxiety than women, and may perform worse. In the same study, women showed greater resilience, and dealt more positively with being held accountable.

Do I Suffer From Impostor Syndrome?

Ironically, Impostor Syndrome can be difficult to recognize in yourself. Many people accept that others have the syndrome, but are convinced that, in their case, they genuinely are impostors.

However, if you recognize any of the symptoms we describe below, you may well be experiencing Impostor Syndrome.

Feeling Inadequacy and Self-Doubt

Impostor Syndrome expresses itself in an extreme lack of confidence. When you experience success you may find yourself thinking "I'm not worthy," or "I don't deserve this."

Most people suffer from a lack of self-confidence at some point in their lives, but with Impostor Syndrome the feeling is constant and severe.

Exhibiting Perfectionist Tendencies

Many people who experience Impostor Syndrome are **perfectionists**. They set themselves unreasonably high goals, and then feel shame or disappointment when they fail. Perfectionists are never satisfied with their achievements, preferring to focus on their mistakes and failures.

Even the highest of achievers can fall victim to this way of thinking. For example, the 2019 World Heptathlon Champion, Katarina Johnson-Thompson, has **spoken of her experiences** of chronic self-doubt, even when performing at an elite level.

Fearing Judgment and Discovery

Impostor Syndrome is characterized by a constant fear of "discovery." Sufferers are haunted by the fear that not only are they not good enough, but also that their co-

workers and managers are sure to find out – if they haven't done so already.

This fear can lead people with Impostor Syndrome to illogical extremes. They often push themselves to the limit in order to prevent "exposure," yet somehow refuse to accept that their efforts have been good enough. This creates a vicious cycle of effort, dissatisfaction, and fear, which further damages their **self-esteem** .

Refusing to Own Your Success

People with Impostor Syndrome downplay their achievements. Often, they will use **negative self-talk** to convince themselves that they don't own their success. This self-talk often provides seemingly rational support for irrational ideas.

One symptom is to pass off something they've done as "easy," even if they've spent a lot of time and effort on it. For example, on completing an assignment successfully they may think, "Well, anyone could do this just as well or better."

And when a manager suggests that it was, in fact, difficult, they may find ways to dismiss these comments. For example, they might think, "Well, I was just lucky and had a lot of help." You might also believe that if you were to start over, you wouldn't have the luck, talent, or skills to replicate your current success.

Note:

Just because you doubt your abilities doesn't mean that you are suffering from Impostor Syndrome. Sometimes, you really will be out of your depth! In these instances, it's important to be honest and seek help from your manager rather than continuing to plug away with no prospect of success.

Does My Team Suffer From Impostor Syndrome?

Impostor Syndrome doesn't just hurt the people who experience it. It also hurts the teams and businesses that they belong to. So, if you are in a leadership role, it pays to keep an eye out for team members who are struggling with feelings of inadequacy.

They may turn down promotions or avoid challenging new roles or high-exposure projects. They'll likely be uncomfortable with compliments or praise, attributing good work or success to luck or knowing the right people.

Another sign is comparing themselves unfavorably with others, using self-deprecating statements such as "I'm not sure I know what I'm talking about, but..." or "It might just be me, but..." They may even openly express fears of failure or incompetence.

Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

Recognizing that you have Impostor Syndrome is often the hardest part. Many people believe that the alternative is to become boastful and self-important, but this needn't be

the case.

The following sections give you some tips to help you beat Impostor Syndrome.

1. Acknowledge Your Feelings

The first step in overcoming Impostor Syndrome is to acknowledge what you're feeling, and why.

Start by keeping a journal. Whenever you experience feelings of self-doubt or inadequacy, write them down, and explain why you're feeling this way. Be as specific as possible about each situation. The chances are that when you write it out, you'll see that you shouldn't worry about the situation.

For example, you might write, "I gave a presentation to the board, and although they said I did very well, I could see that they weren't impressed by what I was saying." If you **reflect** on what you've written, and on how the board members actually reacted, you'll likely see that their response was sincere, and that your fears were groundless.

Next, use **Cognitive Restructuring** to counter negative thoughts with positive statements, and to come up with **affirmations** that neutralize those thoughts. Consider the successes you've had that have led to this moment.

Clance and Imes recommend that you imagine yourself telling all the people you think you have fooled about how you tricked them. How would they respond? Most likely they would tell you that they didn't give you a good grade, promotion or award because you charmed them. They might even be annoyed that you doubt their professional judgment.

Remember that while feelings are important, they are just feelings. So, feeling unqualified doesn't mean you are unqualified. Be aware of the automatic thoughts and feelings you have, and work on countering those with reality-based statements, such as, "I am qualified for this task because...."

2. Talk to Others

Reach out and talk to people you trust. You might be surprised by how many of your friends and colleagues can relate to how you feel. Listen to the people you respect in your life and let them show you how your fears are unfounded.

In her book, **The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women**, Valerie Young writes about the astonishment she felt when she discovered that her peers and mentors also had feelings of self-doubt: "To me, they were intelligent, articulate, and supremely competent individuals. To learn that even they felt like they were fooling others rocked my world."

3. Develop a Quick Response Plan

Dealing with Impostor Syndrome takes long-term effort, but sometimes you need tactics to deal with it at particularly stressful moments. When the negative self-talk takes over, try to confront it by **distancing yourself** from the emotional power of the voice.

You can do this by thinking of yourself in the third person. Instead of allowing yourself to think, "Why did I do that?" try thinking, "Why did they do that?" This will help you to gain a more objective, external perspective on your thoughts and feelings.

You can also counter the tendency to think "I'm not good enough" by deciding to take more risks. This seems counterintuitive, but by taking calculated risks and succeeding, you can build a case against your inner critic. Avoid being reckless, though, as this can be self-sabotaging.

4. Understand Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Build up your **confidence** by becoming more aware of your strengths and weaknesses. Conduct a **Personal SWOT Analysis** to discover what you're best at, and to think about how you can minimize your weaknesses.

Once you have a deeper understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, you won't have to spend so much time worrying that you're not qualified for certain tasks, projects or roles. Develop a supportive network of people who can help you to appreciate the reality of your situation and counter your negative self-talk.

5. Overcome Perfectionism

Learn how to set yourself **realistic**, challenging and achievable goals with our article on **goal-setting mistakes**, and accept honest failures as a part of life. Instead of seeing your mistakes as something to be ashamed of, treat them as learning experiences that will help you to perform even better next time.

Tip:

As a manager, try to foster a psychologically safe environment in which your team members can fail without blame or recrimination.

6. Own Your Successes

Often, people with Impostor Syndrome find it hard to accept compliments. When things go well, they attribute their success to external factors such as help from others, or good fortune. But when things go wrong, they blame themselves.

Try to develop a well-rounded, **internal locus of control**. If you believe that your life is shaped by your own actions, choices and decisions, you can take responsibility for your achievements, as well as your shortcomings, and make the most of them.

When you meet a goal or finish an important project, acknowledge that it was your skill and talent that made it happen. And **celebrate** it, too. It's important to enjoy your success, so get into the habit of **visualizing success in advance**, so that you're ready to welcome it when it happens.

Keep a record of positive feedback. Practice listening to praise, taking in the compliment, and drawing nourishment from it. Write down why your negative thoughts are false or meaningless and explain why you are qualified or worthy enough for this job. And, if you're a manager, be sure to give praise where it's due, and share positive narratives about successful team members.

Key Points

Impostor Syndrome is a self-fulfilling pattern of thought, in which you consider yourself to be a fraud. You doubt your own intelligence and talents and think that anyone who believes otherwise is either "being nice" or has somehow been fooled into believing this.

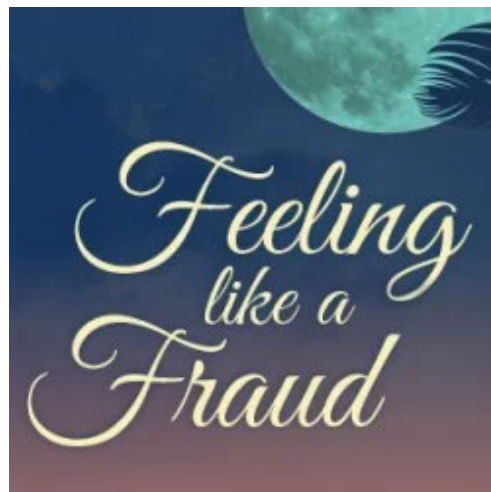
To overcome Impostor Syndrome, you need to break the pattern of setting unattainable standards and thinking that external, temporary factors such as luck, or the help of other people, are responsible for your success. You also need to stop blaming your own personal shortcomings for mistakes or failures.

Talk to others about how you feel. Overcome your perfectionist tendencies by setting realistic goals for yourself, and accept that mistakes and failures are a part of life.

Finally, take ownership of your successes. Learn how to take a compliment, and draw strength from it.

Infographic

Click on the image below to see our top tips on defeating impostor syndrome, represented in an infographic:



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This article help me to identify the imposter syndrome give me a hope to overcome it.

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