

# Imposter syndrome: How to stop feeling like a fraud and embrace authenticity

People who doubt their abilities to the point they sometimes feel they don't deserve to have the role they have landed suffer from "imposter syndrome." A recent Harvard business review survey canvassed Fortune 500 CEOs and found that 95% of them had suffered at times from imposter syndrome, or feeling they would be 'found out' that they weren't up to the job.

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This plague disproportionately affects high-achieving people, many who focus more on what they *don't* know than reminding themselves of the reasons they were hired. This troubling syndrome affects women more than men. So how can we show ourselves authentically if many of us are also doubting ourselves? Are you thinking, 'Can I let other people know the real me?' Yes, you can, and you must if you have the ambition to be an inspiring leader.

Goffee and Jones found that the best leaders were those that authentically showed their strengths *and* discussed their weaker areas with others ranked higher in leadership than those that didn't show their authentic selves. We want leaders that show they are like us fallible but willing to learn. So how can you do this and maintain professional boundaries?

First, realise that self-doubt is an inherently natural quality that only narcissists and sociopaths don't experience. Most of us have elements of confidence and areas of doubt simultaneously and we can use that self-awareness wisely to hone our skills as leaders. Here's my four-point, fool-proof guide to staying at the top of your leadership game, while also defining and maintaining your authenticity.

## Remember the facts

Notice when you read about imposter syndrome and self-doubt, it means that people may *feel* or *think* they don't *deserve* the job, they may *believe they don't deserve* the job but that is not a fact. They didn't just walk in and take over; they were selected by people specifically charged to hire the best qualified candidates for those positions. These people are *not* where they are by mistake or because of some accident, yet many continue to doubt themselves. Fight against being one of them by remembering the facts.

## Manage the expectations

Women—even the very talented, highly-experienced women I have the privilege of working with—seem to have a significant lack of success expectation and increased insecurity in dealing with the success they do achieve. Men are more likely to expect success, as if bred for it. (Which brings a whole different set of mental health challenges for men not suffered by women when they don't succeed, but that is for another article). I wonder if, somehow, men naturally understand this through societal upbringing, but women somehow find this more difficult through the norms and roles that society teaches them. I talk more about this in my book, 'Why Brave Women Win.'

## Mirror role models

If you don't feel confident, imagine a role model, someone you admire. Roleplay in your head how they would handle a challenging situation, while showing authentic leadership. How would they hold themselves, look, and speak? How would their demeanour come across? Mirror them. I'm often asked if it's possible to teach confidence. Yes, if you mirror it enough, it becomes a habit. While this habit develops, you're being your authentic self, imaging the outcome you seek and showing inspiring leadership others will want to follow, and refusing imposter syndrome symptoms.

# Build your toolbox: My not-to-do-list

Overwork, unrealistic expectations, and other stresses can cause people to feed into imposter syndrome. How do we deal with those stresses? My favourite tool is my NOT-To-Do-List. Say no to tasks that aren't vital to do today. Use your practiced messaging in a way that leaves you feeling comfortable. For the time-consuming asks from others, I listen carefully, but sometimes out comes my practised mantra, "I'd like to help you with that, but I can't fit it in just now."

I visit my NOT -to do-list regularly I'm astonished how many items on the To-Do list can shift on to the NOT-To-Do list today, this week or forever, lightening my load considerably. Prioritise brutally and you're getting more authentic instantly, while doing only what you need and want to do. People are so pressured by their To-Do lists that they often don't properly consider priorities. Having skewed priorities is an efficient way to become professionally insecure or burnt out and lower the quality of your output on the work and home fronts.

Finally, having sifted through and shortened the To-Do list, relentlessly attack it, and feel confident in having achieved those vital tasks. When you hone down what they are, go for the big win.

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