

How 'Imposter Syndrome' is limiting your potential

By Carolyn Tate / Jun 14, 2013 7:57AM



Are you as clever and talented as your colleagues think you are? If your answer is no, you could be suffering from Imposter Syndrome. Studies show up to 70% of us suffer from feelings of being a fraud and fear that we'll be 'found out' at work. Have a look around your office. See those high achieving women you aspire to emulate? They're the most likely sufferers.

While men are just as likely to suffer from Imposter Syndrome, they are more likely to fake it till they make it. Many women stall their careers until they are confident they can tick all the boxes required to move on to the next step, while others manage to reach lofty heights but then work twice as hard to prove they deserve to be there, while constantly looking over their shoulders.

Suzanne Mercier left her role on the board of George Patterson Advertising because of her concern that she wasn't executing her duties perfectly. "I was never sure of exactly what I was supposed to be doing, and as a result, felt I wasn't making enough of a contribution," she said. Instead of waiting to be fired, she quit.

Mercier is now a behavioural change consultant, and her business Imposterhood is helping individuals and organisations break free of the constraints of Imposter Syndrome. She says there are two major questions to consider when dealing with Imposter Syndrome in the workplace:

1. **What happens to us when we experience Imposter Syndrome?** When you feel like a fraud, the biggest fear is that you will be discovered. As a result, we disconnect from ourselves – denying our own intelligence and talents – and others, so they won't see through our professional 'façade'. This can lead us to make decisions about our careers and our lives based on our erroneous judgements of

ourselves, and we live inside an ever-shrinking comfort zone, never challenging ourselves to grow and conquer our fears.

2. **What happens to our organisations when their employees feel like frauds?** Employers require their employees to feel engaged in order to go that extra mile, stick their necks out and provide extra value. This is where innovation is found and profits are made. Employees that don't believe they are truly valuable are rarely the ones providing this extra value. They are the ones keeping their heads down and hoping nobody will notice them. Imposter Syndrome is bad for business.

So how can we break free and stop Imposter Syndrome from limiting our potential at work, and help our employers succeed? Mercier offers this advice:

- **Let go of perfection** – it's okay to not be perfect. Just take the next step and see where it goes.
- **Take credit for your achievements.** Enjoy the victories and give yourself a pat on the back when you've earned it.
- **Become like Teflon.** Let those criticisms and rejections slide off without questioning your basic value.
- **Ask questions and request help when you need it.** You won't look stupid; you will look engaged.
- **Be aware of how you interpret what is going on around you.** Ask yourself: is that the only interpretation? Or is there a more useful interpretation to consider?
- **It's okay to feel like a fraud sometimes,** but it's not okay to let that stop you from achieving what you want to in your career. Aim high.

Comments:

[Tania Jolley-Taft](#)

I'm so glad that this has been written As my husband is always telling me that I sell myself too short! But it's very hard to judge your talents when your working in a very small business with very few employees and your supposed to be the top cop! I sympathise with Yvette as I too feel 'lazy' when I'm not 'working' normal hours yet I often find myself staying up till 1 or 2am finishing off my 'to do list' for the day.

We are definitely our own worst critic, which is why I am trying to embrace and enter awards and join networking groups etc.... to be able to validate my own performance, learn and hopefully feel fulfilled within my self and therefore ultimately perform better in my role to successfully lead our business.

There are many who will knock you down and put up barriers to success, we shouldn't be doing this to ourselves..... but it is easier to say than to believe sometimes.

[Yvette](#)

I find this is a massive consideration for women who run their own business - it's not just a corporate phenomenon. The crushing self-doubt that overtakes me when I pluck up the courage to send through (or even construct) an invoice is a daily battle. Another, similarly related fear of mine is that if I do take a day off or am not constrained by deadlines (it is my business after all), I'm fearful I'm going to be labeled 'lazy'... after all, don't all dedicated business owners stay up until all hours of the night/morning getting things done?

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