

Wednesday WeBelong Monthly:

Imposter Syndrome



What is Imposter Syndrome?



Impostor syndrome is the result of structural inequality, not individual inadequacy.

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People with imposter syndrome often can't internalize their success and feel like frauds.

This can lead to one doubting their abilities, even in the presence of strong evidence of their achievement.

The History of Imposter Syndrome

In 1978, psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes developed the concept of the "imposter phenomenon," focusing their research on white, middle-class, high-achieving women who doubted their own intelligence and feared being exposed as frauds.

Imposter syndrome is often considered a diagnosis given to women, which can be problematic. It was developed without considering the effects of systemic racism, classism, xenophobia, or other biases. It pathologizes a universal feeling of discomfort, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace, especially for women.

The Four Behaviors of Imposter Syndrome

Perfectionism: You set high-quality standards and time limits so short for yourself that you write off having any chance of success. If you do succeed, you put it down to dumb luck that you pull it off in time.

Overwhelm: You work hard to hide your struggle to cope and keep up while tasks are falling off your to-do list daily.

Procrastination: You let the unimportant minutiae eat up your time instead of focusing on producing results.

People-Pleasing: You say yes when you should say no to a situation that really shouldn't belong to you.

What Causes Imposter Syndrome?

Systemic Oppression: When they cannot see people from similar backgrounds succeeding in their fields, it heightens feelings of not belonging.

Cultural Pressures: Being part of a social circle or group where approval or worth seems to be explicitly connected to achievement.

Family Environment: Growing up, parents or other family members might have put outsized emphasis on achievement or been overly critical.

Sense of Belonging: Part of imposter syndrome is the fear of being found out and cast out.

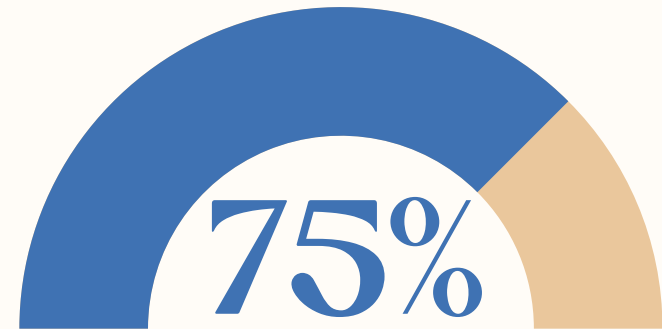
How Imposter Syndrome Shows Up At Work

- Using negative self-talk, which can become a self-perpetuating cycle influencing one's feelings and behavior.
- Failing to act due to an inner critic preventing one from speaking up or taking on challenging assignments.
- Difficulty accepting praise and attributing success to external factors instead of acknowledging one's abilities.
- Comparing oneself to others, often viewing others as more capable, hindering the ability to build strong relationships.
- Isolating oneself and increasing feelings of loneliness due to not wanting others to discover feelings of inadequacy.

The Human Impact

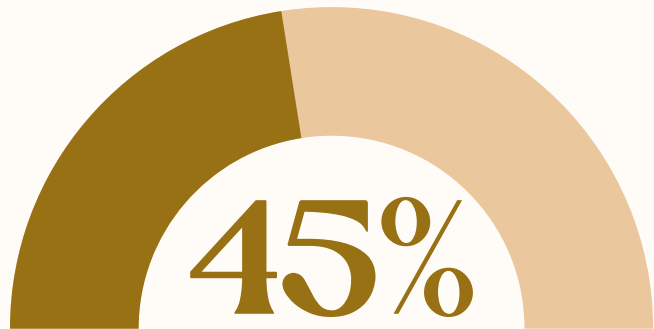


According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), imposter syndrome can lead to **impaired job performance, decreased job satisfaction, and burnout, affecting as many as 82% of individuals.**



A 2020 poll of 750 **high-performing executive women** just below C-level in various industries found that **75% had experienced imposter syndrome** at some point in their careers.

The Human Impact



In corporate settings, **45% of women of color** have been the only person of their gender in the room, a number that increases in STEM fields.



A 2019 LinkedIn report found **while men and women viewed nearly the same number of jobs** and expressed similar interest, women were 16% less likely to apply, and overall, **they applied to 20% fewer jobs than men.**

How To Overcome Imposter Syndrome at Work

Turn to Your Community: You are not alone! 70% of the population has experienced imposter syndrome at some point. One way to feel less alone is to talk to a friend or mentor.

Recognize Your Achievements: No matter how much you believe your success is due to luck or good timing, you wouldn't have come this far if your performance wasn't up to par.

Don't Make Perfection the Goal: Just because you don't know everything doesn't mean you know nothing. Focus on the top priorities of your job, play to your strengths, and work to develop skills that need improvement.

The Solution to Imposter Syndrome is Community

The dialogue about overcoming imposter syndrome tends to be very individualistic, often focusing on the individual's self-perception and self-doubt.

Instead of focusing solely on fixing individuals, it is crucial to **create an environment that fosters diverse leadership styles and values diversity in racial, ethnic, and gender identities.**

