

BEATING THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

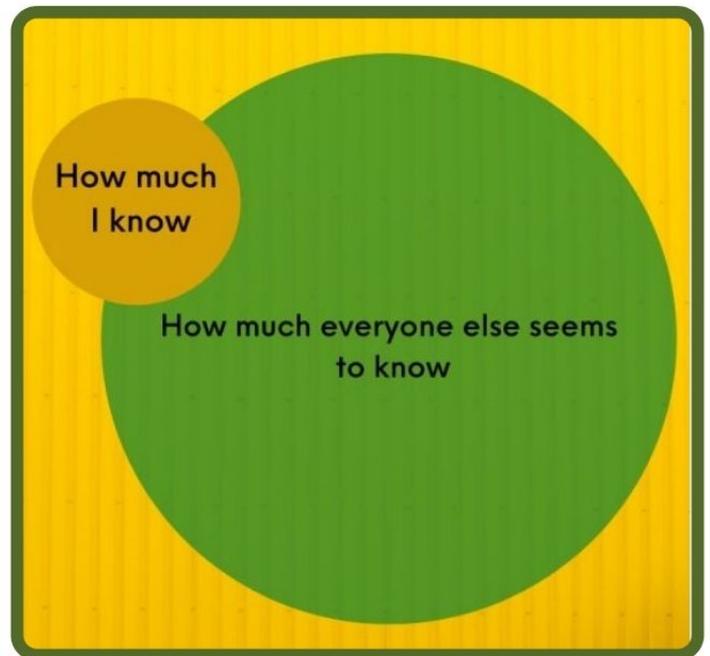
WHAT IS IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON?

“Internal experience of intellectual phoniness”, felt by individuals who are highly successful but unable to internalize their success.

3 common characteristics:

- The belief that he/she has fooled other people.
- Fear of being exposed as an impostor.
- Inability to attribute own achievement to internal qualities such as ability, intelligence, or skills.

First described by Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes.



Exercises to overcome Impostor Phenomenon

1) TALK ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL TO OTHERS, AND LISTEN TO THEIR STORIES

Often imposter phenomenon is compounded by the feeling of isolation. It amplifies the sense of feeling like a fraud, especially when one thinks that they are the only one who feels like they don't belong. Thus, reaching out to the community and sharing stories helps in reducing the power of that inner critical voice. Perhaps, reach out to a trusted friend and share what you are going through or maybe host a sharing circle where people come in and share the moment when they felt like a fraud.

2) RE-EVALUATE HOW YOU EXPLAIN YOUR SUCCESS

If you are experiencing the Impostor Phenomenon (IP), it's quite likely that you are attributing your success to luck, hard work, the kindness of others and a whole host of other external factors. Learning to more accurately account for your success can help you challenge your IP. So, find a sheet of paper and draw three columns.

1. In the first, write down a success you had recently.
2. In the second, write down the statements you would normally use to explain the success.
3. In the third, reflect on what YOU did in order to achieve this

Some questions to reflect on as you do this:

- What exactly did you do to contribute to the success?
- What did you do to be in the right place at the right time?
- If people helped you, what did you do to build a relationship with them? What made them help you?
- If you got success because people like you, what about you do they like?
- What really are the standards? Are they really easy to achieve?
- How would you explain the success of someone else who is in the same situation as you?

(P.S. compare and contrast, of how many commonalities are there between your second column and the third. Observe how many external factors featured in the second column and how many internal factors featured in both second and the third. Was it difficult to write the third column?)

Example

My success	How I explain it?	What did I do?
<i>I moved out of home and am now living independently, something I've wanted to do for a long time</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Because of the pandemic, rents were low.</i> • <i>My friends and colleagues really helped me</i> • <i>It's not a big deal – anyone could have done it</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I have created fairly stable sources of income</i> • <i>I created my own bank account and saved carefully</i> • <i>I did the right amount of research to find a place that was good value.</i> • <i>I faced the difficult conversation with my parents</i> • <i>I invest in therapy</i> • <i>I have built stable and loving relationships</i>

3) REFLECT ON HOW YOU DEFINE COMPETENCE

Beating the impostor phenomenon means adjusting our self-limiting thinking as to what it takes to be competent.

There are 5 common unhelpful definitions of competence. In all these cases, the definition is an impossible one – but since we hold it to be true, we end up believing that we are not competent and hence do not deserve our success.

- **The Perfectionist:** If I were really good, I would deliver an unblemished performance 100 percent of the time.
- **The Superperson:** If I were really competent, I would be able to do it all.
- **The Natural Genius:** If I were really smart, I would be able to understand everything the first time I hear it / do it without effort.
- **The rugged individualist:** If I were really competent, I could do everything myself.
- **The Expert:** If I were really competent, I would know everything there is to know



Exercise: Every week pick one limiting definition of competence you resonate with and write down one specific action you can take to challenge that definition. Pay attention to how you feel and what the consequences are.

For example, if your limiting definition of competence is being the Perfectionist, then pick one task which is not critical at work or home and allow yourself to complete it at an 80% level. Observe what happens and record it.

4) STEP INTO THE LIGHT!

- Take 3 minutes to prepare a self-appraisal monologue.
- This monologue can consist of the facts you have written about yourself in Exercise 2. Pick an accountability partner (could be a trusted friend, a colleague, family member, etc..)
- Say this monologue aloud to your accountability partner confidently. Instruct your partner that if you use any discounting words like 'just/but I had help/not a big deal' etc, they should say 'Pineapple' and you will have to restart.

5) I'VE FOOLED THEM...OR HAVE I?

- Get a trusted friend to do this activity with you. They play you and you play the person you think you have 'fooled' into thinking you are competent.
- Make a script on how you exactly think you fooled this person and ask your friend to repeat these lines to you.
- Respond organically (don't think too much!) as the person who has been fooled. Keep the conversation going for a while.



7) THE SUCCESS WAGON

We often underestimate our success and overestimate that of others. Make two columns. Think of success you didn't think you deserved. Write about the reasons why you ended up getting it. Think of a similar success someone you know has achieved, put down the reasons why you think they achieved it. Now compare and contrast the two lists, how much of it is internal on their list and external on yours?

P.S. If you know this person well enough, you can even discuss this table with them and understand their narrative about it too.

6) MAKE A COMPLIMENT BOARD

List out some of your favorite compliments, put a line down on why you deserve this compliment. Put it up where you can see it every day.

8) CHANGING YOUR INTERNAL LABELS

Think of all the labels and beliefs you have picked up as a child (either as a result of authority figures saying these to you directly or talking about you in this way to others).

For example, these could be labels like "the not so smart one", "the sweet one", "the hard-working one". They could also be statements like "You are bad at handling finances" etc.

Pick one label or belief each week and write down objective examples of where you have not confirmed to this label.

Link to research papers on imposter phenomenon

<https://mpowir.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Download-IP-in-High-Achieving-Women.pdf>

https://www.sciencetheearth.com/uploads/2/4/6/5/24658156/2011_sakulku_the_impostor_phenomenon.pdf

<http://paulineroseclance.com/>

Books

The Imposter Phenomenon – Pauline Rose Clance

The Secret Thought of Successful Women – Valerie Young

Link for the test on imposter phenomenon by Pauline Rose Clance

https://paulineroseclance.com/impostor_phenomenon.html