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Guide to Navigating Imposter Syndrome



According to the International Journal of Behavioral Science, 70% of us think we're not as good as others believe we are - it's called Imposter Syndrome.

It's exacerbated by our fear of failure, trying to please everyone around us, striving for perfection and worried we're falling short! It's particularly prevalent in high achievers and is often the underlying reason we're driven to over achieve - to ensure we're not found out and to prove ourselves capable.

Imposter syndrome is a concept describing high-achieving individuals who are marked by an inability to internalise their accomplishments and a persistent fear of being exposed as a "fraud." It's that voice of self-doubt that, despite our successes, keeps us feeling like we might fail, we might not be good enough, and we might get found out.

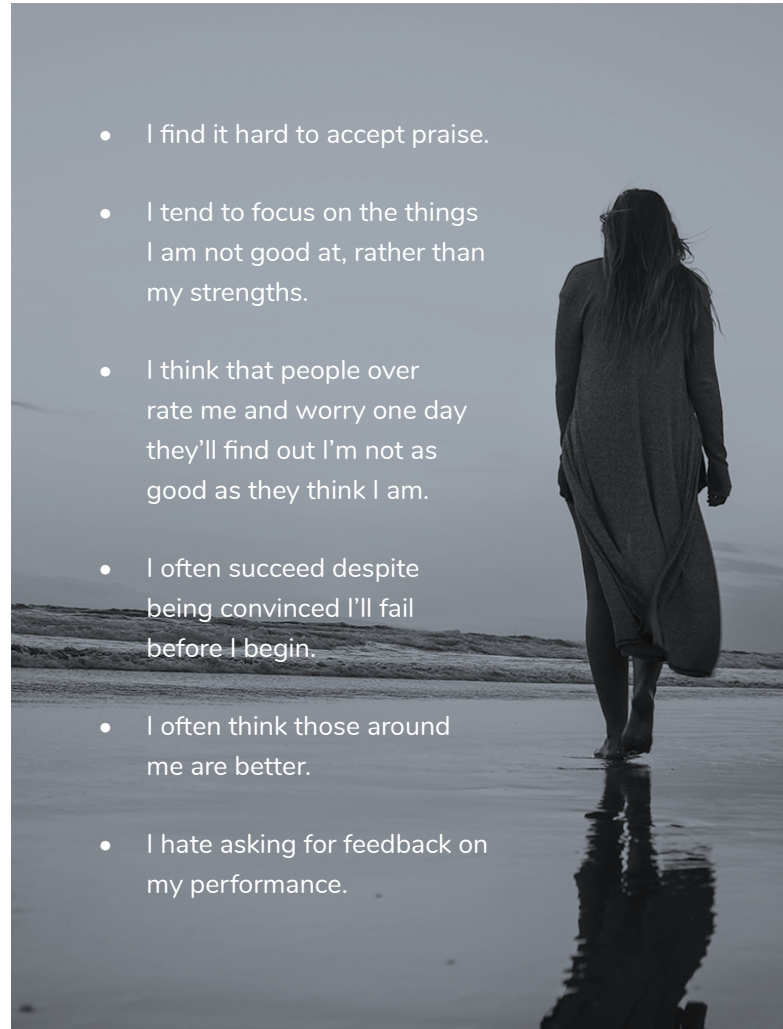
Those with imposter syndrome have a tendency to attribute their success to external factors - like luck, or the work of the team. It takes courage to take on challenges and pursue dreams that leave you open to the risk of failure, falling short, losing face, and being "found out."

It's not something that we overcome, rather we navigate it as it appears in our life. It may always be there but have varying degrees of impact on us given how loud we turn the volume up. It can be different at various times of our life or in different

areas of our life. For some it surfaces at work, for others it's in relationships. It can be dormant for years and rear its head when we start a new job, get a promotion or return to the workforce after having children.

Check below and see if this sounds familiar?

- I find it hard to accept praise.
- I tend to focus on the things I am not good at, rather than my strengths.
- I think that people over rate me and worry one day they'll find out I'm not as good as they think I am.
- I often succeed despite being convinced I'll fail before I begin.
- I often think those around me are better.
- I hate asking for feedback on my performance.





It can feel like we're the only ones experiencing this as it's not much talked about, particularly in the workplace, we therefore assume it's a character flaw in us and a weakness we must overcome – further evidencing these feelings of Imposterism.

However, we're not alone, many people experience Imposter syndrome, especially high achievers and even those we look up to and aspire to be.

It can come from many places, particularly our culture and upbringing. Consider 'Tall Poppy' in NZ and the impact this has on us claiming our successes or talking about the things we're good at.

We'll all have examples of teachers, parents, peers, leaders who have nurtured our intellect or fed our insecurities and this can play into Imposter Syndrome. As can our quest for approval. We also don't value our strengths as we believe if we're good at it so is everyone else so it's nothing special.

Imposterism can lead to us playing it safe to avoid failure and having to work twice as hard to prove ourselves wrong and not get 'found out'. Perfectionism can often be driven from a place of Imposterism and it can impact our brand and credibility if we're constantly downplaying our achievements and not owning our successes.

We may also struggle to delegate or ask for help assuming that to be successful we must do it all by ourselves, or that we need to have all the answers, more training, further experience to be capable – all often in a bid to offset our Imposter Syndrome.

Sadly, it's not something we can easily overcome - but we can learn to navigate it and succeed anyway.

1 Own your successes.

You didn't get lucky, it wasn't by chance. We tend to be modest when it comes to our achievements, and have been brought up not to boast about our strengths. We feel uncomfortable accepting praise and our negativity bias in our brain means we're wired not to think of the positives so much.

The most important thing to remember is that if we're getting praise or positive feedback, it's because we've earned it and deserve it. Own it and let it help counter some of those moments of self-doubt. If all you can say is 'thank you' it's a lot better than anything that'll downplay or wave away the acknowledgement.

2 Give it your all and know it's enough.

Sometimes our imposter syndrome is due to our fear of failure and our perfectionism manifesting to give us this fear of not being good enough. We fail to meet our own unrealistic ideals of perfection - either in the way we look, our abilities in life, or our achievements at work. Perfectionism often sets us up to fail and feeds these feelings of self-doubt.

Overcoming imposter syndrome requires self-acceptance: you don't have to attain perfection to be worthy of success. It's not about lowering the bar, it's about resetting it to a realistic level. You don't have to be Einstein to be a valuable asset. Nor do you have to attain perfection to share something with the world.

3

Don't let your doubt and fear stop you.

We need to continue to take risks and challenges even though we might not think we're ready. Too often, we stand back and let the opportunities pass us by because we doubt our abilities. The best way to see if you're ready is to dive in and take on the challenge!

There will always be a feeling of fear and the risk of failure - we grow and develop by facing these fears and getting outside of our comfort zone. One of the ways we can navigate these feelings is by proving we're capable, this capability brings with it confidence and lessens the power of self-doubt, increasing our confidence by proving we have the competence.

**4**

Remember: your thoughts are not common knowledge.

I know how it feels to be gripped by imposter syndrome - we spend all our energy trying to prove our worth to everyone else to make it go away. The funny thing is, only we believe that we're not capable. For example, we wouldn't have been offered the job if people didn't think we were capable. Often the only person we need to prove anything to is ourselves.

**5**

Acknowledge it and know it's not just you.

We need to be mindful that the voice in our head is often swayed. We are wired to see the glass as half empty, to focus on the negative. This comes from evolutionary times when it was helpful for us to scan the horizon for the worst that could happen in order to survive.

What this can translate to in our modern world is a constant focus on what we're not good at, things that went wrong, and why we're not enough.

This negativity bias can leave us feeling like we'll never be good enough. So to counter the bias, we need to focus on what we have, not what we haven't, to direct our energy toward the things we're good at rather than what might go wrong and where we might fail.

Know that it's not something we experience alone. Some of the most successful people I know who seem to have mastered life admit that underneath, they feel the opposite some days. Even famous people earning millions and excelling at what they do admit to having moments of self-doubt.

6

Stop comparing yourself to others.

It's the fastest way to feel inferior and feed our self-doubt. Unfortunately there will always be someone more beautiful, clever, talented, or stronger than you. However, the reverse of this is also true. So instead of comparing yourself to others, look to see if you're fulfilling your own potential and celebrate the things you have.

Practical tools to try

- **Affirmations or mantras.** What would your best friend say to you when you're having these thoughts? Be your own best friend and say that to yourself. A phrase you repeat in your head until it becomes true. I always use "I'm calm, confident and capable" before I go out on stage and it helps me step into my speaking persona.
- **Reframing and labelling.** Often the things we experience are tainted by how they appear in our mind. For example fear can just as easily be excitement – physiologically they are the same in the body. The next time you take on a challenge and you're telling yourself, I'm unqualified and I've no idea what I'm doing, reframe that to – I may be inexperienced but I'm going to learn a lot and am fully capable of growing into this.
- **Success wall / diary / folder.** This is my favourite and started because I had a bad memory and wanted to prepare better for my annual performance reviews. By writing down the successes throughout the year I got a lift each time I reflected on them, provided evidence to offset my Imposterism and a place I could go to each time I doubted myself. These days it's an icon on my desktop but chose what works for you.
- **Permission to make mistakes.** We are all so keen to avoid failure, we see it as a negative and proof our Imposterism is right. However as humans we all fail at some point, we make mistakes and this is ok. Often it's how we learn and grow, it can be the stepping stone to success and therefore a positive. Those we aspire to be have made mistakes too and often that's why they've got to where they are. Seeing failure as a learning opportunity and natural on the pathway to success is key to helping us get out of our comfort zone.

Pick a few to try and stick with the one that works for you, we're all different so treat the above list as a menu and chose your favourites.

We are all capable of more than we know, and we can do amazing things if we're not busy doubting our abilities. Next time that negative voice in your head starts to speak, turn down the volume.

What matters most is not whether we fear failing, looking foolish, or not being enough; it's whether we give those fears the power to keep us from taking the actions needed to achieve our goals.





Where to go next

Visit the Imposter syndrome resources page at www.jessstuart.co.nz/imposter-syndrome for videos, blogs, animations and more.

- Available for [workshops](#) in your business or [speaking](#) at your event
- Download the [online course](#)
- Visit the [YouTube channel](#) full of free videos
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“

Jess's exercises of helping people recognise their accomplishments was very helpful and motivational.

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“

This has helped me override my natural tendency to criticise or focus on the negative and 'retrain' my brain.

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“

My confidence has grown so much in just who I am and what I have to offer.

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