

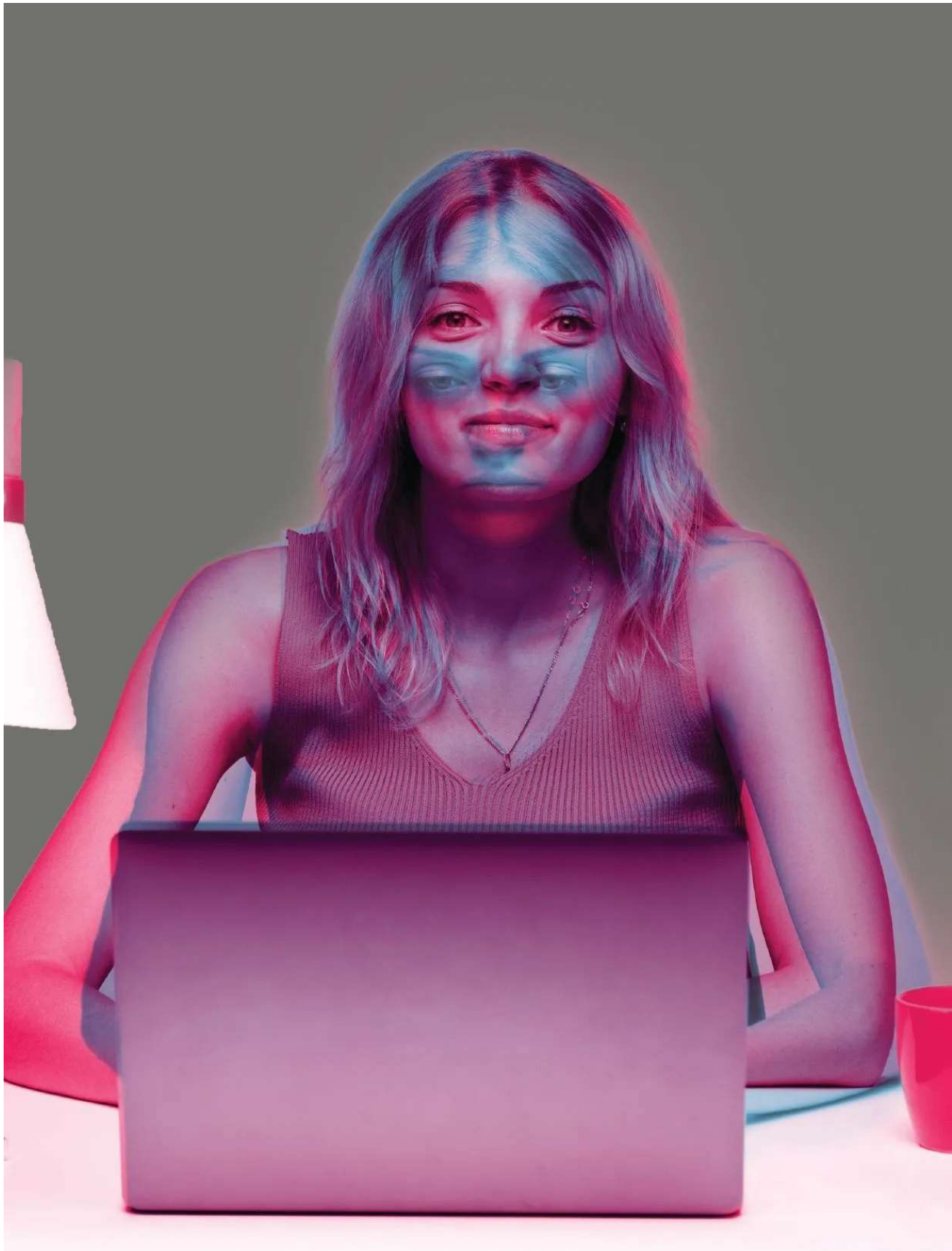
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Features

You're More Than You Think: The Importance of Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

Alesia Louise



Despite the excitement of landing a new job, leading the next big presentation, or earning a promotion, stepping through a new threshold often brings concealed self-doubt, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. Faced with the reality of starting a new project, you may fear failing your team, certain anyone else would be a better choice, knowing everyone will see you have no idea what you're doing and you have no business being here. You are not alone.

In the late 1970s Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes first identified what we now know as impostor syndrome, describing it as a feeling of “phoniness in people who believe that they are not intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement.” Not only are these feelings of fraud widespread, affecting some 70% of the workforce, but counterintuitively, they are more prevalent in more experienced and higher-level professionals. Success, achievement, higher education, and accolades do not relieve these self-critical feelings. There is hope, though; let’s take a closer look at impostor syndrome and how you can tame these self-sabotaging notions.

Impostor Syndrome in the Modern Workplace

All types of people from all walks of life can experience impostor syndrome from time to time. It goes beyond a lack of confidence at work; feelings of phoniness or fraud can undermine goals and aspirations, impair relationships, and lead to burnout. For administrative and support professionals, the broad range of skills required, and the often-solitary nature of the job can contribute to insecurities, even for the most confident. People in these positions are essential to successful operations—connecting departments, information, and resources and setting the tone for positive interactions between colleagues, executives, clients, and vendors. Your self-confidence and well-being are pivotal to your success and the success of your team.

6 Ways Impostor Syndrome Sneaks Up On You

No. 1: Feelings of phoniness. Intrusive thoughts of being a fraud or fooling everyone interfere with your performance and cause you to isolate yourself from others. You worry that anyone else could do this far better than you ever could, and you feel like you need to hide who you are to avoid being found out.

No. 2: Procrastination. Self-doubt and fear of failure can be paralyzing, keeping you from moving forward. Some people remain stagnant for years believing they need to graduate first, master their grammar first, read one more book, or take one more class—anything to avoid stepping forward.

No. 3: Comparison. Everyone else has it all together, knows everything, does everything, and deserves more respect and grace than you. These perceived shortcomings might even seem confirmed when comparing yourself to more senior colleagues, and your insecurities prevent you from asking for guidance and help.

No. 4: Invisibility. You credit luck for your successes, deflect compliments, downplay your ideas, minimize your accomplishments, and hide in the background. It may seem safe, but it’s holding you back. Rejecting new opportunities in favor of safe successes keeps you from reaching your potential and achieving your goals.

No. 5: Perfectionism. Sensitivity to small mistakes, an intense fear of failure, and anxiety over how things will be done can all lead to setting unattainable standards. The pressure you put on yourself to handle everything on your own and get every detail perfect compels you to overwork and refuse help.

No. 6: Burnout. Overworking to meet your self-imposed high standards, making sure nothing is ever missed or mistaken, stressing over every detail, taking on too much work, and dodging help make a short road to burnout. Feeling your worth is tied to your job performance, you give too much.

Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

If you’re experiencing impostor syndrome, know you are not alone, this is temporary, and you can do something about it. Feelings of self-doubt and insecurity are a sign you’re doing something hard, you’re stretching and growing, and you care about doing a good job.

Take Charge of Your Success

Although impostor syndrome will affect most people at some point, it doesn’t need to derail your plans. Many people overcome impostor syndrome on their own as they work and grow, but for some people,

talking to a therapist can be the difference between a lifetime of success and missed opportunities. Often, impostor syndrome is rooted in experiences from the past, some more deeply entrenched and traumatic than others. If you think talking to a therapist might help, check your company's employee assistance program, talk to your doctor, or pursue an online therapy service.



8 TIPS TO OVERCOME IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

1. Acknowledge your feelings. Your feelings of insecurity and self-doubt are normal; they're a sign you're on the right path. Next time you're feeling anxious or insecure, check in with yourself. Take note of what you're struggling with and how you're feeling. Understanding impostor syndrome is part of the process of learning and growth; and you can start to work through it.

2. Review reality. Fear overshadows truth, making it difficult to see the situation clearly. Identify the facts and evidence you have—your skills, experience, training, or certifications are valid; acknowledge approvals, metrics, feedback, and results. If you identify specific, concrete areas for improvement, plan to improve.

3. Check your stories. Your mind is a powerful place, and it can bend reality to fit your thoughts. If you're repeating to yourself that you're not smart enough, creative enough, experienced enough, and you don't belong here, you'll find reasons to believe it. When you notice these defeating thoughts, pause. Tell yourself a new story. You are smart enough and you can do this. You do belong here and you're learning to feel like it. Over time, your mindset will shift, and you'll start looking for reasons to believe this new, positive story as well.

4. Reframe comparison. The next time your colleague does some amazing work and your insecurities flare up, save it! It's OK to admire their work; use it as a guide to help you improve your next project.

5. Talk about it. When you hide your feelings and deny your fears, they grow into unmanageable burdens, and in the process, you isolate yourself from the connection you need. Find a mentor, choose accountability partners, or talk to your manager or any trusted confidant. Most people will be eager to support you and you'll gain a fresh perspective.

6. Take action. You don't get to have confidence before you do the work. Confidence comes from doing, so jump in. Time breeds anxiety and fear, making it harder to take that first step. Break down overwhelming goals into smaller steps, but don't get stuck in planning, training, and overthinking—just start.

7. Celebrate your successes. It's far too easy to overlook your successes in favor of uncertainty and fear. Talk about your wins and keep a file of notes, positive feedback, and kind words of appreciation from others. Revisit this file when you feel insecurity creeping in.

8. Try a weekly recap. Write down five things you're proud of this week. They don't need to be earth-shaking; little things are great. Then ask yourself: What's one thing your inner voice is criticizing? What is the actual truth about this? Use this weekly recap to help reset the stories you tell yourself.

About the author

Alesia Louise has served countless leaders during her 20+ years in business support roles. Now, as a freelance writer and small business support specialist, she shares her insight about personal success, engagement, relationships, and what makes work—work. She supports leadership at every level, true collaboration, uncommon sense, plain language, and the humanity of humans at work. You can reach her at alesia@alesialouise.com or www.alesialouise.com

Boost Confidence and Bypass Imposter Syndrome on Your Team*

BY ALESIA LOUISE

Imposter syndrome is an epidemic in the workforce. Described as a feeling of “phoniness in people who believe that they are not intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement,” in a study by Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in the late 1970s, imposter syndrome affects 70% of people at some point in their careers.

These feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, and phoniness aren’t just a challenge for the individuals who face imposter syndrome, but for a successful business as well. Individuals struggling with confidence fall prey to procrastination, comparison, invisibility, perfectionism, and burnout, which become missed deadlines and metrics, strained teamwork and communication, low morale and engagement, and ultimately, poor performance and turnover.

While there are several ways an individual can help themselves, we can make significant strides by supporting each other as well, minimizing the impact of imposter syndrome, and ensuring our teams and workplaces thrive.

1. **Be upfront and clear** – Uncertainty multiplies doubt. It’s natural to assume another person has the same information we do, but that is rarely the case. Be upfront and clear about plans, goals, and expectations. Spell out communication ladders, resources, peers, meeting norms, and tools.
2. **Create connections** – Colleagues need opportunities to connect, discuss projects, share information, and talk to each other about struggles and fears. Both casual connections and more formal connections like mentorships and accountability partners can help. By fostering connections and making time for them, we all feel more like we belong.
3. **Choose relevant heroes** – One key way we see ourselves in the world is by how we relate to those around us. For minorities, there are precious few successful role models to see themselves in. Highlight diverse examples of success and confidence in your workplace.
4. **Share specific, timely feedback** – Generic feedback like “good job,” is often dismissed. Give specific feedback like “this was a complex project, you’ve captured every detail,” or “I can see you’ve put a lot of work into this. I’m a little lost in section two, can you rework this section to simplify things?” And don’t wait, silence can grow into unintended stress and anxiety.
5. **Speak up** – Speak up for each other publicly; reframe negative or biased statements when you hear them. For example, when someone describes another as a stickler, speak up and explain that she produces high-quality work and is key to the success of her department. Negative talk like this creates insiders and outsiders - interrupt it and advocate for one another.
6. **Listen and believe each other** – It can be daunting to share our experiences and fears, and it’s much harder when we feel our words will be misunderstood or brushed aside. When someone trusts us enough to share, listen and believe them. Ask questions, talk openly about obstacles, and find out what they need. Be open about your struggles and experiences and encourage others to do the same.

Thoughtful interactions designed to support one another can have a significant impact on the success of our teams, our projects, and our businesses. Together we are always stronger than alone.