

Ways to tame your Imposter Syndrome

What is Imposter Syndrome?

The term 'Imposter Syndrome' was first coined as a term in 1978 by two psychologists, Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes who studied high-achieving young women at Georgia State University.

It can impact anyone, regardless of job or social status, all genders, and all cultures. However high-achieving individuals are known to experience it more often.

Common characteristics of Imposter Syndrome

Anxiety, overwhelm, pressure, and perfectionism. Sometimes dependency on performance and achievement for self-validation and discounting successes saying things like "I've been lucky", rather than recognising intrinsic qualities such as their skills or experience.

3 ideas for coaching tools and areas to explore with clients and yourself

1 Explore the language - 'Imposter Syndrome' may be a problematic term. Interestingly, Clance and Imes first described this as 'Imposter Phenomenon', which sits more comfortably for me as 'syndrome' has medical undertones, suggesting it is a problem belonging to an individual and infers that it can be 'cured'. For more on this, see the HBR article below.

2 Create a persona for Imposter Syndrome Trying to quash or ignore the voice of the imposter won't work. It will sit in the subconscious and sabotage us or impact our confidence. When we create a persona, we can start to communicate with the voice of the imposter, which is far more powerful than being a victim of a harsh, critical voice. The voice of the imposter is the voice of our fear-based brains, trying to keep us safe. The imposter can be soothed by feeling acknowledged.

3 Use a strengths-based approach from positive psychology

What are the unique strengths and skills that you have?

Where have you made progress in recent weeks?

When we focus on Imposter Syndrome we are focusing on ourselves: our doubts, insecurities and fears. When we shift our focus from ourselves to others and how we can serve, the story changes.

Coach yourself questions:

What triggers Imposter Syndrome for you?

What unique strengths, skills, and contributions do you bring to that situation?

Reflect on what “imposter thinking” has prevented you from doing. With the benefit of hindsight, how could a different way of thinking support your growth?

What one action step will you make as a result of this learning?

Useful Resources:

The “Learn” blog that accompanies this learning sheet:

[6 Ways to tame your Imposter Syndrome](#)

Books:

Amy Cuddy: Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges

Dr Jessamy Hibberd: The Imposter Cure: How to stop feeling like a fraud and escape the mind-trap of imposter syndrome

Tara Mohr: Playing Big: For Women Who Want to Speak Up, Stand Out and Lead