

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

*What It Is and
How To Overcome It*



Altitude
Business Solutions

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“I have written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’ ”

– MAYA ANGELOU

*"I wonder how long it will take
before someone figures out that
I'm not very good at this."*

*"I really don't deserve my success.
I'm the perfect example of the word lucky."*

*"I shouldn't have been given this job.
I don't know what I'm doing."*

Have you ever caught yourself thinking this way? These types of thoughts are common in those that experience Impostor Syndrome.

This insidious affliction consists of pervasive and consistent thoughts of inadequacy, even when you've proven yourself to be entirely capable. It's like you can't convince yourself of how great you are, even when you really are!

While everyone suffers from self-doubt on occasion, someone with Impostor Syndrome feels this way all of the time. It doesn't matter how much you accomplish. You might win an

Oscar for best leading actor, but you're still convinced you can't act.

There are many people who feel this way and it's not limited to any particular demographic. Men, women, children, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and custodians can all suffer from Impostor Syndrome.

Do you feel like a phony?

Do you find it hard to believe that people trust you?

Do you regularly feel self-doubt, regardless of how much success you achieve?

If so, you're in the right place.

By learning to manage your Impostor Syndrome, you can begin to see your full value and reach your ultimate potential. Your confidence will soar when you gain the necessary skills to deal with your self-doubt effectively.

When Impostor Syndrome is allowed to exist unchecked it can severely limit your overall satisfaction in life. It can also hamper your relationships and career.

Consider these topics to learn more about yourself and your options for dealing with Impostor Syndrome:

1. Chapter 1: Understanding Impostor Syndrome. Do you have Impostor Syndrome? What are the signs and effects? How long has Impostor Syndrome been an issue? What are the causes? You'll find out all you need to know.
2. Chapter 2: The Basic Types of Impostor Syndrome. There are five basic types of Impostor Syndrome. Understanding your types will help you to understand the solution.
3. Chapter 3: A Three-Pronged Attack to Impostor Syndrome. This is a big chapter and demonstrates just how challenging Impostor Syndrome can be to defeat. You'll learn about the role of your childhood, beliefs, and basic personality.
4. Chapter 4: A 21-Day Action Plan. You'll have a daily plan for three full weeks. Using the ideas presented here, you'll build momentum that can carry you toward a new future.

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"As a therapist, I've worked with many high-achieving people who don't feel worthy of their success. Whether it was a recent college graduate who had landed a high-paying job or a mature adult who had just received another promotion, all of these people suffer from impostor syndrome."

- AMY MORIN

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CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

The term “Impostor Syndrome” has been around for nearly 50 years. Back then, it was considered to be a feeling that the sufferer lacked the necessary competence to perform their job adequately, even when the person had shown repeatedly that they did indeed have the skills.

There are three primary qualities that those with Impostor Syndrome share:

1. The feeling of being a phony. If you have Impostor Syndrome, you believe that you don't know what you actually do know. You think you're just faking it, and that others are crazy for assuming that you know what you're doing.
2. Fear of being discovered as a fraud. Everyone with Impostor Syndrome worries of that dreadful day coming - the day everyone finally figures out they're a fraud.
 - It's believed that the underlying issue is one of standards. Those with Impostor syndrome set

standards that are far too rigorous. Setting more reasonable standards can help tremendously.

- The anxiety that arises from worrying about being uncovered as a fraud can be considerable.
3. An inability to accept success as genuine. It's common to assign success to external factors, such as luck, right place - right time, or having the right connections.
- Having Impostor Syndrome makes it challenging to accept the idea that one's skills and expertise are the reasons for success.
 - It's also common to overestimate the abilities of others. If something is easy to accomplish for someone with Impostor Syndrome, their assumption is that it's easy for everyone, even when it is not. They fail to recognize that their knowledge and skills make it easy.

How many of these qualities do you possess?

Impostor syndrome has been around since the beginning of civilized man, but was only given a

name 50 years ago. This is nothing new, and you're not alone. Many of the most successful people have struggled with feeling like a phony.

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"Sometimes I feel like an impostor, and I have to remind myself, 'You are able to do this.' I look at the books on the shelf that have my name on them to remind myself I have done it before and, likely, I can do it again."

- LAURA AMY SCHLITZ

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The Origins of Impostor Syndrome

There are a variety of opinions on the causes of Impostor Syndrome. There is general agreement that both nature and nurture factors are responsible. If you like to blame your parents, you might find part of the explanation to your liking!

Those that feel like an impostor tend to score high on the traits of neuroticism. They are more emotionally reactive than most people. They also score low in conscientiousness. They are less disciplined and less organized than the average person.

Those with Impostor Syndrome often have parents that set unreasonably high standards and focus more on failure than success. These are the kind of parents that want to know why you got a “B” in math but ignore the five “A’s” on the rest of your report card!

Your basic personality and upbringing can combine to create a general feeling of inadequacy.

*“It feels like my hard work
has paid off, but at the same
time, I still have the
impostor, you know,
syndrome. I still feel like I'm
going to wake up, and
everybody's going to see me
for the hack I am.”*

- VIOLA DAVIS

TYPES OF IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Those with Impostor Syndrome manifest their predicament in different ways. While there are no hard and fast rules, it's generally accepted that there are five basic types of impostors. See which one most applies to you.

What type of impostor are you?

1. The expert. This type of “impostor” believes they’re lacking in the knowledge necessary to be successful. They spend a lot of time looking for new things to learn.
 - They always seem to need to learn just one more thing, and then they’ll have the confidence they need to apply themselves. Unfortunately, that day never comes. There’s always something else they believe they need to learn.
 - Gaining more knowledge or skills can be a form of procrastination.
2. The soloist. If you’re a soloist, you avoid asking for help. You feel that you must do

everything on your own. There are two reasons for this:

- You believe that you'll be exposed as a fraud if you ask for help, so you try to do it alone.
 - You believe that a true expert never needs help, but this couldn't be further from the truth. While you think that receiving help means you've achieved nothing, in reality, experts get help all the time.
3. The genius. If you're this type of impostor, you believe that anything that requires hard work is something you don't do well. After all, an expert should be able to handle anything quickly and easily.
 - The expert feels inadequate and a touch of shame if he can't complete a task easily.
 4. The perfectionist. The perfectionist is never happy. She sets impossibly high standards and confirms her lack of expertise by failing to attain them. If she actually does attain her high standards, she believes that she should have done

more. It's a no-win situation.

5. The superhero. The superhero believes that he's incompetent when he compares himself to his colleagues. He attempts to prove his worth by outdoing everyone. He's the guy that works weekends when it isn't necessary. He comes in early and stays late. He skips breaks.

Impostor syndrome can manifest itself in more than one way. While the root of the issue is always the same, how this is interpreted by each "impostor" can vary.

Which type of impostor are you?

“I no longer get into stupid thought wormholes about identity and stuff.

At one time, I did have some impostor syndrome about acting, but then I remembered I've been doing this since I was little, actually.”

- TAVI GEVINSON

PRONGED ATTACK TO IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Impostor Syndrome won't go quietly into the night. A single approach is likely to come up short. It's important to deal with the beliefs you developed in childhood, your basic nature, and the current manifestations of those two items. Dealing with all three will provide the best chance for success.

The Issue of Nature

Neuroticism is one of the primary components of Impostor Syndrome. Those that are neurotic have an innate tendency to worry, have negative expectations of the future, focus on personal shortcomings and weaknesses, and struggle to enjoy life in general.

Addressing your neurotic tendencies can be very helpful with Impostor Syndrome and overall happiness.

Try these strategies:

1. Be mindful. There are two components to mindfulness:

- Keeping your mind in the present moment is the first part of mindfulness. Focus your thoughts on whatever you're doing in the moment or on some aspect of your immediate environment. Mopping the floor and thinking about your bills isn't being mindful.
 - The second aspect of mindfulness is noticing your emotions and thoughts without judging them. This takes away the emotional charge. When you're feeling anxious, try to relax and notice how you experience the anxiety in your body. How does it feel?
 - Imagine you're a scientist studying your anxiousness. How would you describe it? Just notice it and continue paying attention to it until it disappears.
2. Contemplate death. You might question the idea of thinking about death, but it's actually quite liberating. Imagine you knew you would die tomorrow. Would you still worry about the same things you worry about now? You might normally

worry about:

- Your finances
- What others think about you
- Your level of attractiveness
- Your health
- Not being invited to a party
- The weather this weekend
- Would you still worry about these things if you knew tomorrow was your last day on Earth? Of course not. In fact, you'd probably go outside and enjoy the rain, rather than hide inside your home. 99% of your worries would be instantly removed.
- There's really very little difference from knowing you're going to die tomorrow and knowing that you're going to die someday. It's all going to end at some point, so why worry?

3. Engage in positive self-talk. You can't experience neuroticism if you're not saying negative, doom-and-gloom things to yourself. Investigate how you speak to yourself and develop a habit of saying positive, encouraging things to yourself. This may take a lot of work, but the results are worth the effort.
4. Focus on solutions. Those that worry a lot focus on their challenges and negative outcomes. Avoid thinking that way. When you're faced with something that concerns you, look for a solution and implement it.
 - If there's no solution to be found, what's the value of worrying about it?
5. Let go of trying to be perfect. If you feel the need to be perfect, the world is a challenging and scary place. When you need to be perfect, there's only one way that things can go correctly and an infinite number of ways that things can go wrong.
 - The best baseball players in the world make \$30 million per year and fail to hit the ball even 40% of the time. You don't need to be

perfect either.

6. Get professional help. If these strategies aren't sufficient to soothe your anxiety, consider talking to a professional. You wouldn't try to replace your transmission or operate on your appendix yourself, so there's no reason you have to tackle this issue on your own either. Get help from a professional.

One of the five major personality traits is neuroticism. We all fall somewhere on the neuroticism scale, but those with Impostor Syndrome tend to reside at the higher end of the scale. While it's tough to alter your basic nature, there are plenty of enhancements you can make to your outlook on life and how you handle stress, worry, and anxiety.

"I was really into films when I was younger, but I feel like a bit of a phony sometimes - I started acting because I didn't know what else to do. I filled in all these university application forms and honestly didn't want to do any of the courses."

- AIDAN TURNER

The Issue of Nurture

Let's face it. No one's parents studied parenting for four years in college. There are no parents that are experts until it's too late. It's only after your kids have grown that you have enough experience to parent correctly. A few lucky parents get it right, but it's 95% luck. Most parents leave something to be desired in their performance.

This includes your parents.

How to undo the damage of your childhood and feel like less of an impostor:

1. Examine the harmful beliefs that you developed in childhood. What did you learn from your parents that is harming you today? List your harmful beliefs. A few common examples include:
 - I have to be perfect. Anything less than perfection is failing.
 - Mistakes and failure are bad.
 - I'm not enough.
 - I'm not worthy.

- I'm powerless.
 - I'm not capable.
 - I'm not important.
2. Question the belief. The belief wasn't implanted in you. You assigned a meaning to your parents' words and reactions to your behavior. Maybe you drew an incorrect conclusion. Ask yourself these questions:
- What happened that led me to believe this? Try to pinpoint one or more events from your childhood.
 - Is this the only reasonable interpretation?
 - Were my parents trying to be helpful, but took a wrong approach?
 - What is the best, most helpful interpretation from the experience that led to this belief?
3. Complete this process for all of your negative beliefs that contribute to your Impostor Syndrome. Try to tackle a belief or two each day. It could take a lot of time

to get through them all, so get started today!

Let's take a look at an example. Suppose a negative belief you hold is:

"Perfection is the only acceptable result."

Looking through your memories, you remember two times where you received this message loud and clear.

- There was a time you played a little league baseball game and had a nearly perfect game. You played error-free baseball in the field. You hit two home runs and struck out once. After the game, your dad ignored all your amazing plays and asked you, "Why did you strike out in the last inning?"
- Another time, you decided to help your mother by cleaning the living room. You did an amazing job, especially considering that you were only 9 years old. However, when your mom inspected your work, she pointed out that you failed to dust the TV. She never commented on the high quality of the rest of your work.

What are some other interpretations of these incidents?

Let's come up with a few:

- My parents were jerks that didn't know anything about how to raise a child.
- My parents wanted me to learn from my mistakes, so they focused on those. My parents didn't want me to become complacent or cocky.
- My parents were just having a bad day.

You would continue coming up with alternatives until you had exhausted all the possibilities that seem reasonable to you.

Next, pick out the most helpful interpretation that seems believable to you. Now, relive those experiences, but imagine your parent's response supporting your new belief. You can even change the words your parents say in your mind.

Keep in mind that it's not just parents that influenced your beliefs. It could be a sibling, other relative, neighbor, or teacher. Look for all the sources of the beliefs you have that make you feel like an impostor today.

"I'm someone who's experienced impostor syndrome - as I think a lot of people have with their careers, especially when they pursue what they're passionate about, because they want to be good at it."

– ANTONI POROWSKI

Your past, beliefs, and basic personality have led you to where you are right now. Dealing with these things allows for the possibility of making changes now. Impostor Syndrome won't go away easily.

Once the past and your natural tendencies have been addressed, it's time to address the present with these strategies:

1. Acknowledge the challenge of Impostor Syndrome in your life. This isn't an easy challenge to overcome, so it's important to recognize that it's causing issues in your life.
 - List all the ways Impostor Syndrome is making you miserable.
 - List all the ways this issue is holding you back and limiting your life.
 - List all the ways your life would be enhanced if you could work through it.
 - How much happiness is it costing you?

- How much money is it costing you by limiting your employment opportunities?
2. Draw attention to your successes.
Recognize your role in your success. You weren't successful just because you were lucky or knew the right people. Recognize your contribution to all the great things you've done.
 - You might need to enlist the help of friends and family for this. Ask them to list your positive traits.
 3. Learn to like criticism. Most criticism can be helpful if you have the proper perspective. Each time someone offers a suggestion, you might be getting a great piece of advice.
 - Not all criticism is given with positive intentions, but that's just life. Some people are just negative like that.
 4. Redefine failure. Failure is only a temporary condition. It's stepping stone to achieving your goal. Some things require a few tries. Sometimes you'll take the wrong approach and need to make a

few changes.

- Imagine you made chocolate chip cookies and discovered that you didn't add enough chocolate chips. Would you break down and wallow over what a wretched chef you are? No, you'd just alter your recipe and add a few more chips next time. Failure is that simple.
5. Learn to let go of the need for external validation. This is a tough one, but a fully actualized adult can work for nothing other than their own validation. You're not a child anymore. You shouldn't need someone to be in awe of every little impressive thing you do.
 6. Learn to override your feelings. Uncomfortable feelings stop us from all sorts of things, like sticking with a diet, going to the gym, asking someone for a date, or applying for a job.
 - The discomfort caused by Impostor Syndrome isn't a literal set of shackles that immobilize you. You can override those uncomfortable feelings and go on

to do what you intended to do. It just takes a little determination.

Dealing with your past and your tendencies is a huge step in the right direction. However, there is the present set of challenges to clear up, too.

When you've approached the world a certain way for an extended period of time, you develop habits. Habits won't vanish just by resolving childhood issues. Resolving those issues makes change possible.

“The beauty of the impostor syndrome is you vacillate between extreme egomania and a complete feeling of: ‘I’m a fraud! Oh God, they’re on to me! I’m a fraud!’ So you just try to ride the egomania when it comes and enjoy it, and then slide through the idea of fraud.”

– TINA FEY

ACTION PLAN

In some cases, 21 days can be enough time to create a new habit. Whether you manage to develop any new habits or not over the next three weeks, you'll certainly create a lot of momentum and make some significant changes.

Thought and behavioral patterns won't change easily, but you created your current set of thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. You can create a new set that serves you better going forward.

Day 1

The first step to ridding yourself of a challenge is to admit that you have a challenge. And the more motivated you are to rid yourself of it, the more likely you are to experience success.

- List all the ways Impostor Syndrome negatively impacts your life.
- List all the ways your life will be enhanced when you successfully overcome it.
- Write out a goal statement that you're going to stick with this 21-day process until it's complete.

Day 2

Address the issue of your inner critic. Take notes for a full day during the workweek and for a full day on the weekend.

- Make a list of the things your inner critic says to you and note when you're likely to say these things to yourself.
- Develop an alternative that you can say to yourself instead and use it. For example: "If I fail at this, everyone will know I'm a fraud" could be rewritten as, "I'm going to focus on doing my best since that's all I can do. I am free of worrying about the opinions of others."

Day 3

Set at least three goals that are made more challenging by Impostor Syndrome. These will likely be career or financial goals, but any type of goal will do.

- This will provide additional motivation for overcoming the challenge of Impostor

Syndrome.

- It's important to have goals in general. Everyone needs goals.

Day 4

List your greatest strengths. Think back to your earliest memories and work forward to today. What are some things that you do well? List things that you naturally do well, and things that you've learned to do well.

- If you have an exceptional level of knowledge in a specific area, list that as well.
- Talk to friends and family and get their input, too.

Day 5

Visualize yourself free of any signs of Impostor Syndrome. Imagine yourself going through a normal day, free of any thoughts or behaviors related to Impostor Syndrome symptoms.

- Notice how good it feels.

- Imagine how great it would be to feel that way every day.

Day 6

Go through your memories from earlier where you identified incidents from your childhood that contributed to your Impostor Syndrome. This time, however, imagine that you're an adult bystander witnessing the event. See the other person talking to the younger version of yourself.

- What would a reasonable adult conclude from that interaction?
- If you could address the younger version of yourself in private, what would you say to them?

Day 7

Think about how you want to be remembered. What do you want to leave behind as your legacy?

- What do you want to accomplish?
- How do you want your children to remember their childhood?
- What do you want to experience?
- What are your long-term goals?

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“There are an awful lot of people out there who think I’m an expert. How do these people believe all this about me? I’m so much aware of all the things I don’t know.”

- DR. CHAN, CHIEF OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Day 8

Develop affirmations for the things you identified in Day 7. Set up a schedule to repeat them to yourself. You might want to record them and then play them on a loop.

Day 9

List your greatest successes and how you contributed to those successes. Be fair with yourself. Ask a friend for help if necessary.

Before you go to bed, plan out tomorrow in detail. You’re going to need this tomorrow.

Day 10

Spend a day being as mindful as you possibly can. Take the plan you made last night and stick to it. As much as possible, avoid thinking about anything beyond what you're doing in the moment. Whether you're taking a shower, driving, or writing a report, keep your mind on your task.

- Your mind will wander constantly. Without any emotion, just bring your attention back to the task at hand.
- You'll be amazed by how much your mind wanders off task. You'll also be amazed at how relaxing it is to live this way, once you gain some skill at focusing your attention.

Day 11

Today is a day of gratitude. Start a gratitude journal and write in it each day. Noticing, and being thankful for, the positive people and things in your life can help to minimize Impostor Syndrome.

- Spend five minutes asking yourself what you're thankful for and write down the answers you receive.

Day 12

How well do you handle compliments? Let's find out!

Today, notice how you respond to compliments. What do you think? What do you say? What do your reactions suggest?

- To give yourself the best opportunity to receive compliments, make an effort to look your best. Dress up a little. Spend some extra time on your grooming today.

Day 13

Unleash yourself at work today.

Pick one thing you've been holding back on at work because of Impostor Syndrome. Allow yourself one day to be free of concern and just do things the way you know they should be done. Notice how you feel at the end of the day. Notice everyone else's reaction.

- You'll likely find that you feel great and everyone else is the same as usual.

Everyone is too busy to be overly concerned with you.

Day 14

See if your diet is affecting your thoughts and mood.

There seems to be more evidence every day that diet can greatly impact a person's mood, thoughts, and general outlook on life. Let's do an experiment for three days.

- Cut out all processed foods. This includes everything that didn't grow in the ground or in the ocean, come from a tree, or have eyes. So, meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, and nuts are fair game. Leave everything else alone for three days.
- Limit your beverage intake to water. You can have coffee or tea if you have a caffeine issue. It will be hard to determine the impact of your dietary changes if you're also battling caffeine withdrawal.
- Before you get started, rate yourself on a 1-10 scale on the following attributes: Anxiety, Focus, Sleep Quality, Energy,

General Happiness. After the three days are up, rate yourself again.

- What did you learn?

“Impostor syndrome, or feeling like a fraud at work, at home, or anywhere else in your life, will probably affect you at some point.”

- CAROLINE GHOSN

Day 15

Find someone to mentor. This can be in any capacity. You could help a high school student with algebra, teach someone to play the guitar, or mentor someone at work. Show yourself that you have valuable information to share that not everyone else in the world knows.

Day 16

Reach out and find a mentor for yourself today. Those with Impostor Syndrome are filled with self-doubt. Get the reassurance that a mentor provides. You might not trust yourself to make a good choice, but you can feel more confident if a mentor agrees with you.

- Your mentor must be someone that you respect. It must also be someone that has the necessary expertise to help you.
- Be clear that you want to make recommendations on courses of action and receive feedback for your choices. Allowing your mentor to call all of the shots won't help you with your issues.

Day 17

Embarrass yourself on purpose today!

Show yourself that embarrassing yourself isn't the end of the world. You could accomplish this in a variety of ways:

- Wear mismatched shoes to work.
- Spill a drink on your desk.
- Drop a stack of papers while walking down the hall.
- Burp out loud.

- If your work environment is truly too unforgiving, head to the local mall and make a fool out of yourself there. Wear something outrageous. Walk around and sing to yourself.
- You'll be surprised by how little others care.

Day 18

Focus on providing value today. Make today about everyone else. Rather than worrying about yourself, put your attention on serving others.

- Serve your boss today in the best way possible.
- Serve your partner and children as best you can.
- Help your neighbors, coworkers, and strangers in any way you can.
- At the end of the day, contemplate what you learned.

Day 19

Write your eulogy. You're going to do this twice.

- First, write a eulogy that someone close to you might actually write.
- Second, write a eulogy that you hope someone will be able to accurately write about you.
- How do you move your life from the first eulogy to the second? What changes do you want to make in your life?
- This also reinforces the idea that your lifetime is limited. There's no time to worry about silly things.

Day 20

Review your weaknesses. As someone with Impostor Syndrome, you might initially believe that you have a ton of weaknesses. Let's just see if that's true.

- Make a list of your weaknesses.
- Now, go back through your list and think about the evidence you have that it is actually a weakness that you possess. If you can't prove it, mark it off.

- Now, find a trusted friend and ask them if they agree with the list.
- With the items that remain, ask yourself if they negatively impact your life. If not, why worry? If they do, come up with a plan to address them or work around them.

You're not as weak as you thought!

Day 21

Keep a journal.

At the end of each day, make a note of all the things you accomplished that day. Write about the times you felt like an impostor. Also, write about the times you felt good.

- What triggered the positive feelings you experienced?
- What triggered the impostor feelings?

MOVING FORWARD

Celebrate completing this action plan by doing something nice for yourself. Few people manage to stick with anything for three days, and you lasted three weeks!

Keep up the momentum you've created by choosing tasks for yourself to complete for another week.

Impostor Syndrome can negatively affect every area of your life - if you let it. Make a commitment to yourself today to follow through on these strategies, so you can let go of these untrue beliefs that limit you and cause you grief. You'll be glad you did!