

Combating *Impostor Syndrome* in Your Team



**Your Go-To Guide
as part of Lead
with SPIRIT**

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which the flower grows, not the flower.”

Alexander Den Heijer



We love this quote, because the same can be said about individuals within a team or organisation. We must think about learning, development and empowerment within an individual as more than just their sole responsibility.

We all have a responsibility in creating a working environment that is SPIRITed, inclusive and supports colleagues to thrive. This is something we all need to remember in combatting the negative implications of Impostor Syndrome.

What does this quote mean to you?



What is Impostor Syndrome?



Where did it come from?

Impostor Syndrome is a psychological phenomenon, that affects up to 70% of us. The term was first coined by Psychologists, Dr Pauline Clance and Dr Suzanne Imes.

In the 70's, Dr Clance worked as a therapist at Georgia State University in the US. She noticed that in many of her undergraduate patients who were women, seemed to share a similar concern.

Although these patients has been formally recognised for their professional excellence by colleagues, and clearly displayed academic achievement through degrees and standardised testing scores, they still felt feelings of insecurity.

A lot of them didn't believe that they deserved their spots at the university, some even believed that there had to have been some sort of mistake when they received their acceptance email into university. They believed there had to be some sort of technical error or coincidence.

Key Points:

- *What is Impostor Syndrome?*
- The term was originally coined by Dr Pauline Clance and Dr Suzanne Imes
- Strong emotions that your progress and achievements are undeserved
- Unease that you will be exposed as a fraud of impostor
- It's a psychological pattern, experience or phenomenon, not a mental illness
- According to research, up to 70% of us will experience Impostor Syndrome at one point in our lives (that's basically the majority of us!)

Have you experienced Impostor Syndrome?



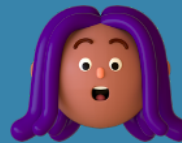
What does it look like?

Everyone is different, and some colleagues are better at hiding their feelings of self-doubt than others.

However, there are some general signs of Impostor Syndrome that you can look out for within yourself and your team:

- **Attributing your success and hard work to external factors, coincidences or luck**
- **Afraid of being "outed" as a fraud**
- **Difficulty accepting compliments or positive feedback**
- **Difficulty accurately measuring work performance**
- **Over preparing or procrastination**

Examples of how Impostor Syndrome might look like in your team:



Linda

Has a hard time starting projects, especially when they are for the senior leadership team



Mike

Takes a long time preparing for simple tasks and struggles to ask for help when he needs it



Adil

Has great ideas but doesn't share them out of fear. Says no to training/apprenticeship opportunities to progress

How does Impostor Syndrome affect teams?



There is growing evidence to suggest that Impostor Syndrome is not solely a personal problem.

Instead of framing the insecurities of individuals belonging to marginalised groups, or workplace cultures that may not be as a "personal problem", we must consider the important role of ***the environment in order to offer more structural and effective solutions.***

Experts suggest that these 3 factors play a huge role in developing Impostor Syndrome:

- **Society and culture at large**
- **Organisations and other institutions**
- **Everyday interactions and interpersonal relationships**

The truth is that leaders and teams belong in all three categories. So, as leaders you have huge influence in shaping a culture that empowers teams.

How does Impostor Syndrome impact a team?

Lack of innovation and creativity

- Unvoiced opinions
- Fear of failure
- Worried about being "found out"

Poor sense of belonging

- Isolated team members
- Negatively impacts interpersonal relationships
- Not feeling like part of the team

Impact on mental wellbeing

- Increases the chance of mental health issues
- Can lead to increased stress, anxiety and low moods

How Impostor Syndrome Affects Teams



Ideas not being shared



Poor engagement



Fear of failure



Lack of belonging



Unvoiced Opinions



De-motivating environment

Although there is more awareness about Impostor Syndrome, teams and organisations still have a lot to do to address it within the workplace.

Not only does it hinder the progress of the individual themselves, the entire team can face the challenges above as a result.

Have you observed any of these behaviours within your team before?

Strategies to combat *Impostor Syndrome* in Your Team



There are three key strategies to combat Impostor Syndrome within your team. You'll find that these align with the SPIRIT values.

Lead with Inclusion

In the workplace, we can often be subject to cognitive biases. Cognitive biases are subconscious errors in our thinking, which leads us to misinterpret information about the world around us.

We need to become more aware of biases when it comes to our decision making through reflection and further education. Becoming self-aware of these is a vital step to leading with inclusion, which creates a culture of fairness and belonging.

Embrace Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a super power that we don't use enough. By opening up to your team members about your own experiences with Impostor Syndrome, mistakes or general anecdotes, you'll create an environment of openness and conversation.

Many people who suffer from Impostor Syndrome have worked in high pressure environments where mistakes were not seen as learning opportunities but to be fearful of. Practise opening up to your team, and see the difference it will make in them opening up to you.

Give Meaningful Feedback

Sufferers of Impostor Syndrome find it incredibly difficult to accurately measure their own performance. They also might not receive feedback that applauds their efforts but rather their "luck".

Remember to always recognise your team members when they've done a great job, and be specific as to **what** they did which made it a success.

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of connection and the path to the feeling of worthiness. If it doesn’t feel vulnerable, the sharing is probably not constructive.”

Brené Brown
Author and Professor



Another great quote that emphasises the importance of vulnerability and going beyond the small talk. Normalising vulnerability within the workplace increases openness and can make individuals feel less alone.

People who suffer from Impostor Syndrome often feel like they're the only ones who do in a team, when the fact is, its incredibly common.

Shared experiences and stories can help build trust and psychological safety which can decrease the negative impacts of Impostor Syndrome.

What does this quote mean to you?

Common Cognitive Biases to be Aware of:

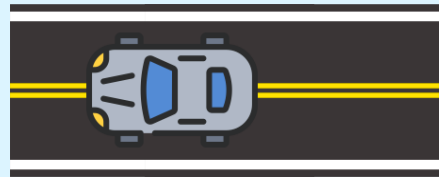
Proximity Bias

When we favour people who are physically closer to us, or we see more often



Blind-Spot Bias

When we see ourselves as less susceptible or even immune to unconscious biases than others



Halo Effect

When the positive impressions we hold of people in one area positively influences our feelings of them in another area



Fundamental Attribution Error

When we assume a person's actions depend on what kind of person they are, rather than the situations which could have led to their behaviour



Which of these biases do you think you personally need to be aware of the most?

Your Leadership Challenge



Background:

We've learnt that being vulnerable is an effective way to reduce the negative impact of Impostor Syndrome in your team. Practising vulnerability will encourage your team to be more open and feel more connected to you as a team member.

The Challenge:

That's why your leadership challenge is to **practise being vulnerable by sharing a truth about yourself**

Share something with your team or a team member **that you would normally hold back or have never shared before**. You can do this any way you'd like, in a 1:1, team meeting, message or email. This can either come up in conversation, or you can mention that you're learning to be more vulnerable and open as a leader.

After sharing your truth, reflect on how this made you feel and how you plan to embrace vulnerability within your team.

This is all about getting out of your comfort zone by putting yourself out there.

Here's some ideas to spark inspiration:

- Your experience with Impostor Syndrome
- Your mental health / something you've been struggling with
- A mistake you've made in the workplace that you've learnt from
- A "weakness" that you're actively working on



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