

BODACIOUS

Phoney. Fraudster. Swindler. Yes I'm talking to you. Because it's only a matter of time before someone discovers that you're not all you're cracked up to be. The moment when they realise you don't have the first idea about what you're doing is literally just around the corner. You're only where you are through sheer luck - or - sssh - I won't tell anyone - because of some massive blunder somewhere. Imposter Syndrome is a poisonous and virulent form of self-doubt that afflicts even the most successful and self-assured amongst us.

It affects men and women

A couple of clinical psychologists in the US coined the term in the 70's as a result of their research into immensely clever women who secretly feared they were not as talented as people thought. It can afflict men and women and can hit at any time, but most likely strikes when we take on new responsibilities: say a new job, promotion, starting a business, becoming a parent.

Driving you on

The fear of being found out can actually drive people to work harder, compete more and become even more conscientious, meaning more success, more promotions and – yes you've got it - triggering increasing feelings of fraudulence.

And when it's not pushing us to work like maniacs, it firmly holds us back. We won't ask questions in case colleagues spot our ineptness. We don't ask for help because people will be amazed at how useless we really are. We obsess about others' brilliance and simply sideline our own successes. We are fixated on our shortcomings.

Oh yes, it's a big bad beast!

Cathy*, has spent years battling with it: "I never speak in meetings in case people realise how rubbish I am at my job," she told me. And one of Cathy's colleagues is seriously affecting her wellbeing. Cathy explained: "Golden Girl: She's always being cheered on for winning work and gets invited to all the high level meetings. It's so childish but I hate her. She makes me feel like a useless, gibbering idiot." Cathy needs to get on top of these feelings before she completely loses herself, so she's working through a five-point plan:

1. Learning to appreciate her own successes: For at least a month she's writing down *everything* she's proud of on a daily basis. As she breaks the habit of focusing on her weaknesses she will become more used to acknowledging - and embracing - her achievements.
2. Learning from her mistakes then letting them go: Cathy is listing things that she feels she hasn't done well and writing down how she could have done them better. Then she's crossing them off her list and moving on.
3. Being kinder to herself: Cathy was putting immense pressure on herself to achieve unrealistic goals at work - mainly driven by a misplaced desire to compete with her

colleague. She is drawing up a more targeted action plan that plays to her strengths. By breaking it down into more specific and detailed tasks she will progress through it more easily and feel more achieved.

4. Stopping comparing herself unfavourably to others: As she learns to feel good about her own successes, it will help with those noxious feelings of inadequacy she has when she observes her colleague succeeding.

5. Inviting Golden Girl out for a coffee! She'll most likely discover that Golden Girl is not an ogre with three heads, but actually someone she can learn from.

And sometimes we just need to walk it. Visualise success and behave like the person we want to be. However hapless we feel on the inside most of the time people haven't the faintest idea because they're too busy worrying about you spotting their own incompetence!

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