

What's Causing Your Imposter Syndrome?

6 Triggers Crushing Your Confidence

By Michele Molitor, CPCC, PCC, RTT, CHt



Have you ever had your confidence knocked right out of you?

It can be crushing to your sense of self-worth and self-esteem for sure. And it can lead to a vicious case of Imposter Syndrome if you're not careful.

Imposter syndrome is a somewhat mysterious mind trap that creeps in when your confidence has been chipped away at or even completely decimated by the words or actions of others.

Especially at work. Leaving you second guessing yourself in a variety of ways.

Have you ever felt like an imposter at your job?

Perhaps afraid that your boss or colleagues might find out that you don't have all the answers or aren't as talented as they think?

What are the negative thought loops that keep swirling in your mind, depleting your energy?

Do they sound something like:

- "Do I deserve to be here? They must have made a mistake in hiring me."
- "If they find out I don't know the answer, they're going to fire me."
- "I'm not as good as they think I am! Have I done enough? Should I have worked more?"

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How often do thoughts like these play in your mind, like a recording on an endless loop? And worse, what's the impact on your mental and physical health when these loops start to play over and over and over again?

It can be exhausting for sure.

Imposter syndrome affects both your mental and physical health.

When these negative thoughts start swirling in your mind, it creates a cascade of other physiological issues, as well.

Increased stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline start flowing through your body — getting you prepared to fight or run from the perceived threat.

This can further stir up a myriad of other feelings like dread, self-doubt, or being inadequate, which can lead to anxiety, restlessness, poor sleep, stress, sweaty palms, and worse.

This negative self-talk can also lead to more severe conditions like migraines, IBS, adrenal fatigue, panic attacks, and even heart attacks in some severe cases.

What is imposter syndrome?

According to Wikipedia, imposter syndrome is "a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their skills, talents, or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a 'fraud'."

Despite external evidence of their competence, those experiencing this phenomenon remain convinced that they are frauds, and do not deserve all they have achieved.

Individuals experiencing impostor syndrome incorrectly attribute their success to luck as a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more intelligent than they perceive themselves to be.

Many people — and especially high achievers — experience imposter syndrome.

First and foremost, it's important that you know this: *You are not alone.*

Psychology Today tells us that around 25 to 30 percent of high achievers may suffer from imposter syndrome.

And around 70 percent of adults — both male and female — may experience impostor syndrome at least once in their lifetime, research suggests.

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Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes were the clinical psychologists who first identified and named the phenomenon back in 1978 in their research with high-achieving professional women.

Research shows, however, that men and women can equally suffer from imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome arises from feeling inadequate.

While a healthy dose of modesty is always a good thing, imposter syndrome takes it much deeper.

It arises from the sense of being inadequate in a particular environment, that you don't belong, despite the data that would otherwise prove your levels of competence.

Despite overcoming obstacles and challenges large and small in your life, the feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, fear of failure, and fear of not being enough can loom large in your minds.

Which can then trigger yet more feelings of shame, guilt, and depression. All of which has a negative impact on how you show up to do your job, your levels of creativity, and productivity.

Pay attention to your body's signals.

High achievers are often suffering in silence, as well. Their shame and guilt have them hiding out and not sharing their feelings with others.

Over time, this quiet killer can take an immense toll on someone as the fear, worry, and self-doubt build up inside and easily fester into both physical and emotional challenges.

This my friend, is your body's way of trying to get your attention.

It's telling you that you need to talk with someone like a trusted confidant or counselor to get an outside, objective perspective, so you can process your emotions, recognize your own achievements, and gain the clarity you need to take back your power from your fears.

As someone who has battled with this issue and overcame many aspects of it in my career, asking for help and guidance is a powerful step to reclaiming your confidence.

What triggers imposter syndrome?

Imposter syndrome breeds what therapists call "cognitive distortions" or thinking errors. These distorted beliefs we hold about ourselves come from a variety of factors that are amplified over time.

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The longer these distortions persist, the more ingrained they become in our psyche and self-perception.

Here are 6 key underlying factors that can easily trigger imposter syndrome.

1. Your Family of Origin

As a child, your parents, guardians, or other family members may have been overly critical of you or put too much emphasis on being a high achiever, creating a feeling of “not enough” that shows up in how you perceive yourself and your abilities. It’s the “water you swim in”, a.k.a. your family environment that shapes the foundational beliefs of who you see yourself to be, or not be.

2. Social Pressures

Being part of a group or social circle, which offers conditional acceptance and approval based on your achievements, can start at an early age. Especially with social media these days it can easily leave someone feeling on the outside looking in.

3. Sense of Belonging

One of the major fears of imposter syndrome is being found out and then cast out or discarded.

Any situation in your lifetime, which has made you feel different or excluded from the group — whether that's language, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, religion, or physical or learning differences — can fuel fears, doubts, and trigger imposter syndrome.

And this sense of not belonging, once captured in your subconscious mind, can stay with you for years, driving your behaviors until you recognize the beliefs and behaviors, and consciously change them.

4. Your Life Experience

Your self-belief and temperament are molded and shaped by all of your life experiences. Making some people more prone to adopting the external pressures of work and stress, which then gets embedded at a subconscious level. Driving your behaviors and decisions about how to move through the world just to stay safe and survive.

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5. Societal Norms and Stereotypes

Male-dominated industries, such as technology, for example, tend to have more gender bias and stereotypes that comes in both explicit and subtle forms. This bias can easily make highly skilled women succumb to stereotype-driven expectations.

Some combination of these factors can cause you to not believe in your accomplishments and abilities. To discount or downplay your achievements and all you've gone through to get to where you are today. And yes, these biases apply to both men and women in many ways.

6. Career Challenges or Changes.

If you're up to big things, then Imposter Syndrome can easily get triggered as you step beyond the edge of your comfort zone into uncharted territory. This happens A LOT especially for entrepreneurs who are often building the plane as they're flying it.

It's also important to recognize the powerful impact of feeling "not enough" or "inadequate" can create a downward spiral of emotions such as low self-esteem and self-worth, lack of confidence, shame, or even depression. Any of which can negatively effect how you're showing up and performing in your work.

Each of these triggers can stifle your personal and professional growth.

Preventing you from speaking up for yourself, asking to be paid what you're worth, holding you back from seeking new opportunities to elevate your career or seeking out personal or professional beneficial relationships.

The good news is, once you start to recognize the effects that imposter syndrome is having on your health, well-being, and career success, you're then able to consciously choose how you'd like to move forward with more grace, grit, and self-compassion.

Isn't it time to step out of the shadows and into the recognition you deserve?

Now that you know what Imposter Syndrome is, let's look at some ways to help you tame it.

**“Your fear of being inadequate pales compared with
your fear of being extraordinary.”**

~ Valerie Young

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You're Not A Fraud: How to Tame Imposter Syndrome With 12 Tools

If you have come to recognize that, just perhaps, you've been suffering from a bad case of imposter syndrome...

Well, you've got company!

Now that you see the problem, what can you do to conquer your self-doubt and fear?

First, you need to recognize that imposter syndrome is an *internal* saboteur.

Second, realize that you are stronger than your fears.

You're not helpless against this loudmouth internal voice of fear!

FYI, This is just your Amygdala – that part of your brain that is the fight, flight or freeze safety mechanism. It's there to protect you, and yet your amygdala (I like to call her Amy G. Dala) is often the culprit that is holding you back from achieving your dreams and goals!

Ignoring Amy won't help either. So, instead, tame it by acknowledging its presence ("Hello, Amy! Thank you for sharing...") while also noticing the impact it's having on your body, mind, and spirit.

Here are 12 tools to help you tame imposter syndrome and reclaim your power and peace of mind.

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1. "SBNRR" your way through it. ("Stop, Breathe, Notice, Reflect, Respond")

This can help you slow down and consider the situation — and your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions — more mindfully

Stop: Allow yourself to stop in your tracks and take a moment to pause.

Breathe: Take in a deep breath, letting your thoughts drift away like a cloud passing through the sky.

Notice: Observe your feelings, where are you feeling them in your body? Notice your surroundings, your peers, and the situation.

Reassess: Make a mental note of your reaction and, if possible, what specifically triggered the feelings of imposter syndrome.

Respond: By taking the above steps, you're more likely to be able to respond more effectively (versus a fear-based, panicked reaction) to the situation from a more calm, level-headed perspective.


2. Notice the voice within.

That pesky voice of self-doubt can become debilitating if left unchecked for too long. What does it have to say?

Give it a persona so you can bring it out of the shadows and hear what its complaints, assumptions, and assertions might be.

3. Write it down.

Take time to journal and get those negative thoughts out of your head. Then, you can more objectively evaluate the fear disguised as "evidence" your brain is providing and stop ruminating about it.

 **Try this:** In your journal or notebook, create two columns. Column one is labeled: "Evidence that I am inadequate." Column two is labeled: "Evidence that I am competent."

Any time you start to spiral into negative thinking, you can use this to see what's actually true and what empowers you into action.

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4. Step back and pause.

If you find yourself at an impasse or feeling overwhelmed, it's best to step back and pause from the issue at hand. When our fear response gets triggered, your amygdala can hijack your thinking and leave you in a state of mental fog. By stepping back and refocusing your attention, your brain and nervous system have time to reboot and find new, different, or better solutions to the problem.

5. Focus on your values.

Redirect your thoughts from external signs of success and refocus your thoughts on your core values. These values are at the heart of what drives your thoughts and behaviors.

If your values are out of alignment with the work you're doing, that misalignment can fuel the internal saboteur voice of imposter syndrome.

Seek out ways to align your values more effectively with your daily work and routines to calm that inner voice.

6. Review, revise, and recommit.

When you do suffer a disappointing review or performance mistake, take the time to acknowledge what went wrong and think about how you could do better next time, so you can move forward with more clarity and confidence.

Remember, there is no such thing as failure, only learning. It's a way to discern what not to do next time.

7. Find a role model.

Research shows that when you're exposed to powerful role models, particularly for women, you're more likely to see yourself achieving a higher leadership role or position.



Try this: Find a mentor or coach with whom you can have regular meetings, at least once a month to discuss career guidance.

This will also help you to see your gifts and talents through the eyes of someone you respect, which is a healthy way to boost your confidence.

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8. Say "Yes" to opportunities.

When new opportunities present themselves, practice saying "Yes" more often. Trust in your abilities. Know that you're creative, resourceful, and will achieve success.

Despite what those pesky internal saboteurs are trying to convince you of otherwise. The more you say "Yes," the more comfortable you'll become at doing it and the higher you will soar.

 **Try this:** Every time you say yes to a new opportunity and you achieve the goal, large or small, write it down in a special notebook of "Wins." Then, when you catch yourself succumbing to imposter syndrome, review your wins to boost your confidence, reminding yourself of your talents and expertise that helped you score the win!

This "evidence" can also help support your reasons for asking for that overdue raise, as well!

9. Failure is a perspective.

Fear of failure can become overwhelming, looming large in your mind.

Instead of focusing on it in the abstract and the endless possibilities of "What if...," write down the likely outcomes if some part of your effort fails and find a different perspective to see things through that is less daunting and more empowering.

10. Exercise self-compassion.

You're human. And humans make mistakes. Beating yourself up for feeling like a fraud is the fastest way to drain your energy.

Learn from your mistakes and practice love, kindness, and compassion with yourself.

11. Phone a friend.

When you can talk with a friend, coach, or counselor about what's swirling about in your head, they can provide an objective perspective to help you get to the truth of the situation and stop the swirl in its tracks.

Assisting you to pull apart the "what's so" of the issue versus the false assumptions that your over-activated amygdala might be making about a particular situation.

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12. Practice mindfulness.

This can be as simple as stopping to take several deep breaths as you focus on the in and out of your breath. Breathing in, to the count of four, pausing at the top and then exhaling to the count of four, pausing at the bottom.

The more you learn how to tame your mind to find the quiet space in between your thoughts, the better equipped your nervous system will become for the emotional spikes that Imposter Syndrome can cause.

Wouldn't you agree that it's time to stop letting fear rule your life?

When you eliminate the negative beliefs that have been holding you back for far too long, you'll be amazed at how quickly your confidence will soar!

Start enhancing your peace of mind today with these 12 simple tools.



The Many Faces of Imposter Syndrome

Have you've ever felt like an imposter in your job? Worried that someone was going to call you out for not having all the answers? Or tell you you're not as talented/smart/capable as everyone else thinks you are?

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Well, you're not alone. Imposter syndrome is a pretty common occurrence for both men and women.

But did you know that there are different faces and facets to Imposter Syndrome? Each one is its own archetype for feeling like a fraud.

A lot has been written on imposter syndrome and through my research and studies, I've come to recognize that "Imposter Syndrome" is actually the nice way to say that someone is riddled with Self-Doubt.

Self-doubt is the true culprit here that is getting in the way of your success, holding you back and keeping you from achieving all you're meant to and so much more!

My research has led me to these 5 different self-doubt archetypes, which are the underbelly of imposter syndrome.

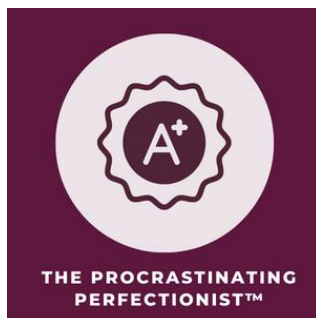
Which Self-Doubt Archetype is running you?

Let's take a closer look at these different Self-doubt archetypes so you can recognize how this unwanted "friend" is showing up in your life. Recognizing your fears is the first step to reclaiming your power back from your them.

You can also [take our 3-minute quiz](#) to identify which Self-Doubt Archetype is slowing you down on your path to greater success.

*"When you look fear in the face,
it quickly disappears into the nothingness that it is."*

~ Michele Molitor



The Procrastinating Perfectionist

As you may have guessed, the Procrastinating Perfectionist is always striving for more, greater heights of achievements and kudos just to feel "good enough." You have exacting standards for the way things 'should' be done.

Every. Single. Time.

No if's, ands or but's.

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This can be exhausting. Not only for you but for your team as well!

The Procrastinating Perfectionist might look or sound like:

- Everything must be done to perfection and yet that still never feels “enough”
- You keep raising the bar on yourself (and others) so you're never satisfied with what's achieved
- “If I were really competent, I would deliver perfect work 100% of the time.”

Their biggest fear? Fear of losing control.

Here are some powerful mental reframes though to get you back on track:

- “Perfectionism inhibits success.”
- “Sometimes good is good enough.”
- “Non-perfection is to be welcomed.”



The Shapeshifter

You're most likely a Shapeshifter if you find yourself spinning multiple plates just to please others. You're proud of the fact that you can be a chameleon to fit into any situation as this helps you maintain a feeling of safety.

But all that busyness is just a way to help you avoid feeling the fears and anxiety that are really motivating your actions and behaviors. The problem is that burying these feelings only guarantees that they will come back another day to get your attention until you address them head on. (BTW, this doesn't have to be difficult. Actually, it's much easier than you might think!).

The Shapeshifter might look or sound like:

- You're proud of all the extra hours you're working, like it's a badge of honor which validates your contributions
- You don't mind working long hours as a way to avoid feeling other more uncomfortable feelings or being distracted by negative thoughts
- “If I were really competent, I would be able to do it ALL.”

Their biggest fear? Facing your fears and past traumas.

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Here are some powerful mental reframes though to get you back on track:

- “Really, it’s ok to say No.”
- “Slow down and let go of unnecessary tasks so you can focus on the people/activities that really matter.”
- “Set a healthy example for your children and your employees.”



The Reluctant Resistor

This self-doubt archetype is always working hard to prove themselves because you never feel like you’ve gotten ‘there’ yet, to the mysterious land of full potential (even though you’re super talented). You always feel like you’re falling short, comparing yourself to others, leaving you afraid to be seen or judged for your work.

And when the Reluctant Resistor gets called out to improve their work, it is uncharted waters. Leaving you feeling like a failure or worse, berating yourself with a bunch of shoulda/coulda/woulda’s around your work.

The Reluctant Resistor might look or sound like:

- You disregard your success because you think “Everyone can do that.”
- When pushed to take your work to the next level of quality, you get uncomfortable or overwhelmed or threatened
- “If I were really competent, I would learn quickly and easily the first time without any guidance or mistakes.”

Their biggest fear? Fear (or shame) of failing.

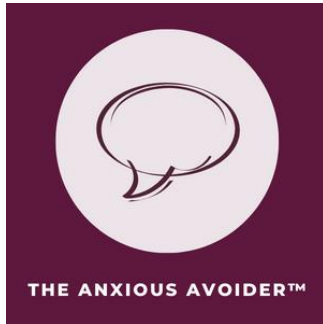
Here are some powerful mental reframes though to get you back on track:

- “Effort beats ability.”
- “Real success takes a bit of time.”
- “Challenges are opportunities to learn and grow.”

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The Anxious AVOIDER

This self-doubt archetype avoids getting help or assistance with their work, no matter what. You're not interested in the opinions or help from others because assistance might just expose your weaknesses that you're desperately trying to conceal from the world.

And your ego just can't have that, so you get overwhelmed trying to do it all by yourself.

The Anxious AVOIDER might look or sound like:

- Asking for help is as painful as going to the dentist or doing your taxes, so you avoid it for as long as possible
- Having to depend on others to get something done only leads to disappointment or failure, which only reinforces the idea "I should just do it all myself."
- "If I were really competent, I could do everything by myself."

Their biggest fear? Fear of being found out as a fraud.

Here are some powerful mental reframes though to get you back on track:

- "Competent people know how to ask for help."
- "It's ok to build on the work of other experienced people."
- "Smart people seek out others who know more than they do."



The Fearful FOLLOWER

This archetype loves to hoard knowledge, research, books, and credentials to fill your brain with more information so you can always have the right answer at the ready when asked. Constant learning and education is a way of seeking outside validation for what you already know but are afraid to claim as your expertise.

You go way above and beyond because of one perceived failure in the past that causes you to now hide out in the shadows feeling 'not enough' in some way shape or form. You're convinced that you need to have all the answers before you can declare yourself as an expert.

The truth is, no one has ALL of the answers (except maybe Google...).

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The Fearful Follower might look or sound like:

- You feel you need to get the next credential to prove you know what you're doing before applying for a new position.
- You don't want to share information with the rest of the team until you're sure you have it all "right" first.
- "If I were really competent, I would know everything there is to know about _____."

Their biggest fear? Trusting themselves, their expertise or their intuition

Here are some powerful mental reframes though to get you back on track:

- "The path to expert takes many roads."
- "You can never "know it all."
- "You don't need to have all the answers but you can be clever enough to find someone who has the answer you're seeking."

Regardless of which self-doubt archetype is driving your behaviors and actions, no matter which face of Imposter Syndrome you might be wearing, the good news is, you can always take that mask off.

You can rewire your thinking with new thoughts to get better outcomes.

Remember: You are perfectly imperfect just as you are, and just as you aren't.

The more you can learn to love and appreciate yourself, with all your quirks and foibles that fuel your unique contributions to the world, the more you will find peace within yourself.

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When you're ready to reclaim your voice, your power and your peace of mind, then schedule your complimentary and confidential [Discovery Call with Michele here](#).

She'll listen carefully to what you're challenged with and let you know how she can help you make a quantum leap forward in your life in as little as 90 days. What are you waiting for?

Wouldn't you agree that life is too short to live from a place of fear?

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Ready to release your imposter syndrome once and for all?

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[Join the How To Become UnShakeable membership with your 30-day trial.](#)

The HTBU membership is a welcoming community that will share with you a powerful and invaluable program to help you uncover the root causes of your Imposter Syndrome – Self-Doubt!

In the UnShakeable program, you'll learn how to Rewire your mind, heart and spirit with new empowering beliefs and habits for success.

Enabling you to reclaim your dignity, reminding you of your value and worth so you can stand tall in your confidence, and ask for what you deserve – both personally and professionally.

I look forward to talking with you!



**Michele Molitor, CPCC, PCC, RTT, CHt
Your Mind Detective**

Michele Molitor is a trailblazer in personal transformation.

For over two decades, she has been utilizing her expertise as a coach, hypnotherapist, speaker, and author, to intentionally address the pervasive mental health crisis we face today.

As the founder and CEO of Nectar Consulting, Inc., and co-author of the best-selling book *“Breakthrough Healing,”* her mission is to empower busy professionals to conquer anxiety, self-doubt, and toxic stress, paving the way for fulfilling lives and careers.

Dubbed “The Mind Detective” by her clients, Michele’s unique Rapid Rewiring™ approach masterfully infuses coaching with a variety of other science-based techniques including emotional intelligence, neuroscience, positive psychology, somatic therapy, Rapid Transformational Therapy and HeartHealing™.

She has provided executive coaching, training, and leadership development globally to individuals and teams in a variety of industries verticals. Helping organizations revitalize their teams, enhance emotional intelligence, create strong cultures of positive communication while infusing them with clarity, purpose, and greater productivity.

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As a nationally recognized speaker, certified executive coach, certified Rapid Transformational Therapy (RTT) and HeartHealing® practitioner, certified hypnotherapist, consultant, trainer, and writer, Michele's vision is to help create thriving work cultures where dignity and emotional well-being are cultivated through acceptance, belonging, and connection.

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Helping others to **#DoWellByDoingGood.**

#RapidRewire #SomedayStartsNow #UnlockThePowerOfYou