

5 signs of imposter syndrome (and what to do about it)

Do you have a niggling feeling in the back of your mind that you're not good enough for a job?

Or that it's only a matter of time before everyone realises that you aren't really qualified for your job, and you'll be escorted out of the building?

That's the phenomenon known as 'imposter syndrome'. You might be surprised to learn that you're not the only worker who feels that way, and it's something felt by people at all levels of experience.

But there are ways of overcoming the doubts and negative thinking that come with imposter syndrome.

5 signs of imposter syndrome

Other candidates and colleagues may seem as though they have everything under control and know exactly what they're doing.

But remember, another person's external success doesn't show the whole picture, and they may have self-doubts too.

According to organisational psychologist Dr Amanda Ferguson, these are 5 common signs of imposter syndrome:

1. **Isolation:** You might feel isolated and be difficult for others to connect with, and you might put up walls because you're scared of being 'found out'.
2. **Self-doubt:** You may wonder how you got to the position you have, and don't acknowledge your achievements or take any credit. You might even self-sabotage, too, Ferguson says, in the form of "self-handicapping behaviours, supplication, ingratiation and a negative indirect relationship with self-

promotion”.

3. **Underperformance:** You may underperform and avoid risk-taking. For example, when you fear failure, you might prematurely take yourself out of situations, including career opportunities.
4. **Lack of progress:** You may struggle with negotiating for a better salary, or might stay at a job longer than you want to.
5. **Lack of self-care:** You may feel relief instead of pride after an accomplishment, which can mean you keep pushing onwards without taking care of yourself.

Who has imposter syndrome? (It's not just you)

Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon experienced by many, Ferguson says.

“Remembering that can help normalise it,” she adds.

Around half of Australians – 55% of women and 47% of men – have felt imposter syndrome at some point, SEEK research reveals.

And for one in three job seekers, imposter syndrome prevented them from putting themselves forward for promotion or new job opportunities. The main trigger for many people is feeling like they're not as experienced as they should be.

“It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy on your performance,” says Ferguson.

You may take fewer risks in your career, Ferguson adds, and imposter syndrome can lead to lower motivation and a higher risk of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout.

6 tips for managing imposter syndrome at work

1. **Normalise it:** “Talk to friends or colleagues at work about building resilience to feelings and thoughts of being an imposter”, Ferguson says.
2. **Note your strengths:** Comparison really is the thief of joy, and everyone's career path and skills are different. Focus on your own achievements rather than what others have done. Identify and write down your own skills and [strengths](#) to build your confidence and help challenge imposter syndrome thinking. If you find it tricky to list your own good points, ask people you trust about your positive qualities.

3. **Look at the facts:** Challenge the cognitive distortions of imposter syndrome by looking at the evidence around why you deserve a job, promotion or praise, Ferguson says. “Celebrate success, share failures, avoid perfectionism, and cultivate healthy attitudes.”
4. **Write down your wins:** Regularly keep a record of your successes – no matter how small – as a way of building your confidence and reducing imposter-style thoughts.
5. **Seek role clarity:** “Ambiguity around the requirements or expectations of your role can add to feelings of imposter syndrome, so ask for clarity to help challenge those feelings”, Ferguson says.
6. **Ask for feedback:** “If we have less experience, we’re more likely to experience higher levels of imposter syndrome”, Ferguson says, so getting feedback is another way of challenging self-doubt.

“When an individual transitions into a leadership role and when the role expectations are especially challenging, with increased responsibilities and visibility to others, seek feedback from your management and team.”

Imposter syndrome can feel like it’s in the way of getting that job or promotion you really want. Remember that failures are normal for everyone at all levels of experience and in every industry. Check the facts and ask for clarification and feedback to help challenge feelings of being a fraud, overcome self-doubt and give you new confidence in your career.

Source: Independent research conducted by Nature of behalf of SEEK, interviewing 4800 Australians annually. Published April 2024.

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