



4 Steps to Overcoming Impostor Syndrome in the Workplace.



You don't need to be a perfectionist to experience self-doubt in the office or working from home. In fact, it's something the majority of us experience sooner or later. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to tackle those niggling doubts.

What is impostor syndrome?

[First identified in 1978](#) in a group of high-achieving women, "impostor syndrome" has become the go-to term to refer to doubting your own abilities and generally feeling like a fraud.

Difficulties internalising successes, and even shying away from opportunities in the first place, can have major implications for you and your colleagues' careers. It risks a negative feedback loop in which you are perpetually doing yourself down, limiting your ability to fulfil your potential or collaborate with others.

This problem is widespread: our recent [LinkedIn poll](#) found that 70% of respondents had experienced impostor syndrome – a statistic echoed by the [International Journal of Behavioral Science](#). A recent review found that the prevalence of the phenomenon can range between 9% and 82% of study respondents. Variation depends on how research is conducted and its sample; impostor syndrome is especially common in women and individuals from marginalised groups.

The truth is that impostor syndrome can affect anyone. Even [in a healthy workplace](#), anxiety is a normal part of taking on new challenges and sharing your work with others. What counts, however, is the way you respond to these anxieties.



It's normal to feel like you're not good enough sometimes. We measure ourselves against the way we perceive others, without realising that they are likely struggling with the same doubts.

The 4 steps to overcoming impostor syndrome

1. Practice self-respect

Tackling impostor syndrome starts with a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T. In the trials and tribulations of the working day, it can be all too easy to let small victories slip by unnoticed. But if you dwell on the challenges you face, rather than your successes, you're more likely to feel like a fraud. As hard as it might be, you have to take a step back and recognise your value.

Self-respect is the antidote for self-doubt. Dr Pauline Rose Clance, one of the researchers who first identified impostor syndrome in the '70s, suggests that [the best response](#) to the condition is to “develop and implement rewards for success – learn to celebrate”.

Determining which system works for you comes down to experimentation. This could involve listing things that you're proud of at the start or end of your day or making a conscious effort to treat yourself to a celebratory dinner or gift when you succeed. However you choose to reward yourself, just remember – you deserve it.

2. Change the way you approach criticism

Whatever you do, there will always be critics. If you suffer from impostor syndrome, it's likely that you are your own biggest nay-sayer. But there will

be people around you who offer feedback on areas where your work can be improved too.

In an article for [Time](#), author Tara Mohr suggests that getting “comfortable with ongoing criticism and pushback” is something of a “personal rite of passage”. For Mohr, this about adjusting work so that it is better received by others rather than an acknowledgement that “we need fixing”.

The best way to stop yourself falling into a cycle of perceived failure is to acknowledge that it's just that – perceived failure. Instead of internalising negative responses to your work, try to determine what concrete actions you can take to make improvements to it in light of criticism. And, above all, remember that criticism of your work doesn't reflect on you personally.

3. Accept that you don't know everything

The truth is that we're all impostors. On some level, we are all performing tasks that sit outside our comfort zone or that we aren't fully qualified for. But that's how we grow. [Serial entrepreneur Auren Hoffman](#) suggests that “All employees (not just entry level employees) should strive to have at least 70 percent of their time doing things that are really difficult.”

If you find something extremely difficult, the chances are that you don't have much experience doing it. But that doesn't make you a fraud – quite the opposite. Practicing the 70 percent rule makes you a pioneer.

This comes back to self-belief. As American social psychologist Deborah H. Gruenfeld notes, quoted in the [Harvard Business Review](#), “A certain degree of confidence – specifically, confidence in your ability to learn – is required to be willing to admit that you need guidance or support.”

4. Share your experiences with others

The age-old adage that “a problem shared is a problem halved” is more than a dusty platitude. In fact, a study from the [University of Hawaii](#) found that interacting with someone in a similar emotional state to you during a stressful situation could serve as a buffer against negative emotions.

Once you understand that we're all in the same boat, you can start to share your experiences of impostor syndrome with others. [Workplace friendships](#) can be an especially valuable support network here. The result should be an overall reduction in stress caused by self-doubt and an increase in wellbeing.

When asked whether they had experienced impostor syndrome, 12% of our [LinkedIn poll](#) respondents answered “I have, but I've overcome it”. By nurturing a culture of acceptance, both internally and within your workplace, you too may be able to overcome impostor syndrome.



Sharing your experiences with others is hard, but it can help put them in perspective and dispel any worries you might have.

The good news is that a flexible working environment can be part of the solution. Research from the [Harvard Business Review](#) found that [coworking spaces make employees feel valued](#) and help them find common ground with peers. The opportunity to collaborate and foster a feeling of belonging has the potential to turn self-doubt into self-confidence.

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