

You're Better than You Think You Are

Workbook for the Imposter Syndrome Online Course

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Not intended for distribution outside the course

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Get to Know Your Instructor

I Am Elisa Heikura

I am a communications trainer for technology professionals, a Developer of People. For my whole career I have suffered from imposter syndrome; that is, I've believed I've fooled the whole world. I've been absolutely certain that someday someone will notice that my whole career has been one big mistake and I'll be fired.

That day is yet to come.

I have a Master's degree in Humanities. I've worked in communications and digital marketing and eventually ended up an entrepreneur. Through happy accidents my career took me to the technology sector and from marketing towards training communications and interacting skills. Only in recent years



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I've begun to see and admit the part my own work has played during my career, in addition to the happy accidents.

At some point I began to wonder why everyone else seemed to be so capable and I felt like an imposter. I ran into the imposter phenomenon and began to learn more about it. It turned out that there was a name for my feelings. It turned out that I'm not alone with these thoughts. When I began to talk courageously about it with others, it turned out that almost everyone I know shared this experience.

I decided that I can't continue like this and began to actively work on my own imposter syndrome. I've read all sorts of things, tried different tools and treated my deep-rooted ways of acting with gentle firmness. Some-

times it works great and I might go a long while without a single imposter thought.

Until they turn up out of nowhere to my great joy at precisely the time they really wouldn't need to. Luckily, I've also learned ways to better deal with these situations.

I finally came to the conclusion that this phenomenon needs to be treated more widely than just inside my head. It's an incredible waste of human potential that so many of us hold back, hide, belittle and underuse our capabilities. This online course is one way to get to work on this.

So thank you for being here.

Enjoy the course!



Introduction and Course Contents

Welcome to the Imposter Syndrome online course! It's super awesome that you're here right now. A lot of people are troubled by imposter thoughts at some point during their lives. The more people understand their imposter thoughts, are able to treat them and dare to do something about them, the smaller their effects will be. Thank you for being so brave and decisive!

This Course Has Three Goals

1. Teach you that you are not alone with these thoughts and that you are not broken.
2. Help you understand what this phenomenon is about, what imposter thoughts are and how they show up in your life.
3. Give you tools and techniques to treat imposter thoughts and alleviate their effects.

In addition to these learning goals it's my aim to get you to finish this course, since so many online courses end up half-finished. I'd prefer for you to go through every section briefly and then come back later to review those sections that were most useful to you.

The Course Consists of Eight Chapters

1. Am I an Imposter?

What imposter syndrome is, how it manifests and what kind of impact it has

2. The Imposter Phenomenon in the Tech Industry

What characteristics of the tech industry sustain your imposter syndrome or make it worse

3. Female Imposters

Why women so easily think that they are frauds

4. The Competence Rule Book (for Mere Mortals)

What is the slightly twisted ideal view of competence that you unfairly compare yourself to

5. Why Do I Have Imposter Thoughts?

Not everyone has imposter syndrome, so why do you – and why do I – have it?

6. Yes, But...

What if I am the only real fraud?

7. The Treatment for Imposter Thoughts

Tools and techniques for both acute and long-term treatment

8. Can I Help Others?

How can we also help the people around us?

Every section has a video and an associated assignment. To pass the course you only need to watch the videos and do the assignments. This workbook, on the other hand, extends the contents of each section, adds the sources and further reading and provides additional assignments that help you to put what you've learned into practice even better.

We happen to be very good at learning things on the theoretical level, reading books and wading through online courses. Putting things into practice is the part that often gets left undone. It's not just once or twice that I've read a book or devoured just the theory part of an online course and left the exercises undone...

It's when you're putting things into practice that the effects of the course really start to show. Of course, knowledge is helpful and understanding things is useful. But if your goal is to change something in your everyday life, take care to put at least one thing you've learned into practice as well.

Before we tackle the first chapter of the course contents, it's a good idea to think about your own motivation to get into this topic. What made you begin this online course? What do you hope to learn? What do you hope will change? Go submit your answer to the assignment!

Additional Assignment

Pick five random people close to you. They can be relatives, family members, friends or colleagues. Or open a discussion in the office Slack or Teams or another communications channel. Pluck up the courage to ask:

- Do you ever feel that the world thinks you're more capable than you think you are?
- Do you ever feel like you've tricked everyone into believing that you know more than you really do?
- Do you ever feel that for some reason you aren't qualified for the position you're in?

Beginning the conversation gives others the courage to admit and recognize their own imposter thoughts. It also illustrates how common a phenomenon – especially in the technology industry – we're talking about.



1. Am I an Imposter?

Let's begin from the simple fact that you are not an imposter.

You just have a very real feeling that you're somehow fooling others or that you're not what the world thinks you are. In reality, you, like everyone suffering from imposter syndrome, aren't fooling anyone. Quite the opposite: many who think they are frauds are remarkably honest about their own feelings of incompetence.

In This Chapter You'll Learn

1. What imposter syndrome actually is
2. How imposter syndrome appears in your life
3. How imposter syndrome is a spectrum, not an either/or phenomenon

What Imposter Syndrome Really Is

Imposter syndrome was noted and the term was created by **Pauline Rose Clance** and **Suzanne Ament Imes** in 1978. Clance and Imes studied 150 high-achieving women and wondered at how many of them felt unqualified and incompetent – despite all evidence. They began to call this curious phenomenon imposter syndrome.

Rather soon after their findings Clance and Imes noted that their discovery wasn't actually a proper syndrome. That is, it isn't a diagnosable physical or mental disorder, i.e. an illness. They began to use the term Imposter Phenomenon (IP) instead of syndrome.

However, the term imposter syndrome took root in common parlance and today we still commonly talk about imposter syndrome and not imposter phenomenon.

Finnish author **Tiina Ekman** defines imposter phenomenon like this:

“Imposter syndrome or imposter phenomenon is an unofficial [...] but established term for a specific distressing way of thinking: I can't really do anything even though others seem to think I can. Someday everything will be revealed, I'll be caught and oh how shameful it will be!”

Ekman also writes, “Imposter syndrome is not a mental disorder, illness or diagnosis but a collection of ways of thinking and acting that the person suffering from feeling like a fraud uses to try to control their anxiety.”

Ekman mentions that she prefers the term “imposter thinking” and that's perhaps the most useful way to describe what imposter syndrome is about.

Imposter syndrome is not a mental illness but it's a deep-rooted way of thinking that disturbs everyday life and even causes anxiety.

Imposter Syndrome appears in Many Ways

Imposter syndrome is a collection of anxiety-inducing thoughts and constant doubts

about your own competence. This thinking affects our behavior and causes many different ways of acting and coping mechanisms. Consequences or manifestations of imposter thinking include:

Workaholism and Burnout

For people suffering from imposter thoughts it's common to need to be special or the best in what they're doing. People who feel like a fraud think that only by being the best they are good enough. You only earn your place and show you're enough if you're special and flawless. This constant reaching for perfection and overachieving easily leads to burnout.

Extreme Humility

It's hard for an imposter to accept and internalize positive feedback. Accepting praise is very difficult. An extremely humble person doesn't believe the praise or positive feedback but instead thinks that they've “somehow managed to fool those people as well”.

Distorted View of Others' Intelligence and Capabilities

Someone with imposter thoughts tends to overestimate others' capabilities and underestimate their own. A person who thinks they're a fraud also has a distorted view on intelligence. This distortion means that the fraud can never see themselves as intelligent or capable.

People Pleasing and Adjusting

Because someone with imposter thoughts is above all afraid of being caught and revealed as an imposter, they often try to be pleasant and inconspicuous. If the self-identified fraud becomes the center of attention, the risk of exposure increases. People with imposter thoughts also try to cover up their feeling of incompetence by being funny, nice and pleasant employees. For example, they don't oppose decisions they think are bad, because they don't want and dare to disagree.

Fear of Failure and of Assessment

People who think themselves frauds are deadly afraid of failure, because that at the latest would show that the fraud doesn't actually know anything. Assessments are also scary, because every piece of criticism and negative feedback is evidence of the fraud's incompetence, lack of qualifications and great deception. Fear of shame and humiliation may even cause panic attacks and strong anxiety.

The Cycle of Imposter Thoughts

Ekman presents The Cycle of Imposter Thoughts created by Clance and Toole: "When faced with a challenge, the fraud experiences fear or self-doubt; can they succeed this time? They may have varying symptoms of stress. They either work at the task far too much or come up with other

things to do and excuses to avoid starting the task and then take on a huge workload at the last minute. When successful, they get positive feedback. That activates the thought that they can only succeed with extraordinary effort or due to sheer luck."



Sakulku & Alexander, 2011, based on Pauline Rose Clance's model.

Adapted from Tiina Ekman, Huijarisyndrooma, 2017

Two Alternative Coping Mechanisms

When the self-identified fraud faces a challenge, one of these coping strategies activates.

1) Overachiever: Either the person with imposter thoughts takes on an extreme amount of effort, goes through a whole lot of trouble and works ridiculously much. Much more than what the task really requires or what would be reasonable and justifiable considering the importance of the task. By working the task to death, the self-identified fraud tries to avoid failure, criticism or negative feedback.

2) Underachiever: Alternatively, the self-identified imposter procrastinates, doesn't begin the task and leaves everything to the last possible moment. When the pressure to finish increases, the imposter starts a gigantic last-minute effort and fixes up something because they have to. Doing things at the last minute gives the imposter some protection: "It's no wonder if I get poor feedback since I did it all in a rush, at the last minute, quickly."

In both cases the person suffering from imposter thoughts finishes the task and often even gets good feedback for their work. However, the positive feedback creates doubts about their own abilities and about the accuracy of the feedback. If the person has done a lot of work, they think that they can only succeed when they put in an in-

credible amount of effort. On the other hand, if the person has left everything to the last minute, they think they've only succeeded due to luck and so don't think they really deserve praise. Thus, positive feedback doesn't improve their sense of competence, but faced with the next challenge "the fraud" again doubts their own abilities and gets stressed. This creates the Imposter Cycle.

I've found another, third group – over-and-under-achiever – that I personally belong to. In my professional life, I've always gathered up many, absolutely far too many, tasks so that I have no option but to do everything the night before it needs to be done. This way, I've had an "acceptable" excuse to do everything only when the deadline creeps closer, because I haven't had time to do it before.

The large workload has guaranteed that I've believed myself a hard-working and thorough employee – or entrepreneur. In reality the impossible workload has allowed me to underperform and to hide my own feelings of incompetence behind being busy. This way of acting has been surprisingly hard to quit partially because professionally we idolize being busy and a "hero" who gives work their all. However, this is in no way a sustainable or useful way of acting.

The Spectrum of Imposter Thoughts

Ekman emphasizes that imposter thoughts are not something binary that a person either has or doesn't have. Instead, you might sometimes have imposter thoughts depending on your situation and the timing, and their severity varies as well. Often imposter thoughts increase when faced with a new challenge or life change and when things stabilize, so do they.

The amount and severity of imposter thoughts is a spectrum. On one end there's normal doubt, healthy self-distancing. Can I do this, do I know enough? It's perfectly natural to sometimes think about your own abilities and assess how big a challenge something is.

On the other end there's obsessive, compulsive thinking. At this extreme imposter thoughts take over a person and don't give them any peace. They prevent you from working towards your own goals and taking on new challenges. At worst, anxious thoughts cause depression and even panic attacks.

Overall, it's essential to know that feeling like a fraud is a phenomenon related to perfectionism, self-criticism, demanding a lot from yourself and feeling obligated to perform. They all arise from uncertainty about your-

self and your person, at their core is the fear of "Am I enough as I am?" All of these phenomena can be associated with burnout, anxiety symptoms, panic attacks and/or mild depression.

That's why it's extremely important to examine where on the spectrum you fall at any given moment. If you feel that you're on that end of the spectrum where imposter thinking has a large negative impact on your life, have a talk with your manager or seek help straight from occupational health care or mental healthcare services. It's always better to go and ask if you might need help with working on these thoughts. There's no downside. Instead it might be detrimental to struggle alone with these challenges for a long time.

Most people with imposter thoughts sail somewhere between healthy self-reflection and obsessive thinking. At this point you can also treat your imposter thoughts yourself. Talking about your own thoughts with another person – a colleague or someone close to you – is already helpful. In addition to that, this course contains a lot of tasks that can help you move yourself closer to the side of healthy self-reflection.

It's still a good idea to remain sensitive to your own feelings and be aware of when harmless self-doubt turns into obsessive thinking that limits your life.

A Test Can Help You Grasp the Situation

So that you don't have to try to guess yourself how strong your own experiences and thoughts are, next we'll do the Clance IP Scale test. This test isn't the only test to measure imposter syndrome and it is not perfect – but based on current knowledge it's the most functional and useful.

The test isn't supposed to give you an objective place on the spectrum but to give some idea of where approximately your own

thoughts fall, how severe your own imposter thinking is.

You'll find the questions at the end of this article by **Queena Hoang**:

<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=tvc>

You can also use the clickable version that has the exact same questions:

<http://impostortest.nickol.as/>

Don't forget to go report your results and submit your answer to this part's assignment!

Extra Assignment

Pay attention to the different ways you act:

- Do you feel that you always have to be the best or perfect?
- Do you have trouble accepting praise or believing that you deserve the positive feedback?
- Do you try to be as nice and inconspicuous as possible?
- Do you agree with people even when you really disagree?
- Do performance appraisals, code reviews, pair programming, retrospectives or presenting your own work cause you insurmountable anxiety?
- Do you do an excessive amount of work on projects or do you leave everything until the night before the deadline?

Recognizing your issues is the crucial first step and it's vital to also accept that this is the way you currently operate. Write down what you've noticed or tell someone that you can talk to without being judged or belittled.



2. The Imposter Phenomenon in the Tech Industry

Studies have shown that about 70 % of people suffer from imposter thoughts at least at some point in their lives. As such, it's a very common phenomenon. The IT sector is also especially prone to imposter thinking.

In This Chapter You'll Learn:

1. Why imposter syndrome is so common in the tech industry
2. Why working in IT may sustain or increase imposter thoughts

A Small Survey about the Imposter Phenomenon in the tech industry

Almost every developer that I've ever talked to has admitted to sometimes or always

suffering from imposter thoughts. Because the same tale repeats itself from one expert to the next regardless of position, career length and level of experience, I decided to do a small survey. In it the participants were asked to do the Clance IP Scale test you're already familiar with and to report its results as well as how long they'd worked in the tech industry. I received 242 responses and you can find the graphics on the next page.

Of course, this small a sample doesn't make it scientific yet, but the results are nevertheless interesting, if somewhat bleak. Practically four out of five respondents have imposter thoughts and one in ten suffer from particularly severe imposter thinking. In a way, that's no wonder because there are several factors that aggravate imposter thoughts for those in the tech industry.

Clance IP Score result



3 % 20
9 % 21-40
32 % 41-60
44 % 61-80
12 % over 80

I've worked as a developer for



26% 0-3 years
33% 4-10 years
34% 10-20 years
7% Long enough

88 % of people working in the tech industry suffer from imposter thoughts at least a bit and 12 % suffer severely.
The length of your career doesn't affect the result; both beginners and industry veterans have imposter thoughts.

Features of the IT Sector that Feed Imposter Thoughts

1. The industry is rapidly changing
2. The work is creative problem-solving
3. There is unhealthy discourse and comparison

1. The Industry is Rapidly Changing

Imposter thoughts have a strong presence in industries where knowledge is constantly shifting and which develop enormously at a rapid pace. In rapidly developing industries there's a great need to stay up to date. On the other hand, no one person can ever know everything, which partly causes uncertainty and overly critical assessments of your own abilities. When yesterday's valid programming language, framework or project model

is hopelessly old-fashioned today, your own abilities might feel about as stable as a house of cards.

When the recently graduated or self-taught young developer enters the workforce, they quickly run into the experience of not knowing enough. The jungle of industry jargon alone creates the feeling that your abilities are insufficient. You begin to question if a new employee should know right out of the gate what terms such as MFA, SLA, ATDD or ACL mean?

Self-taught developer **Rob Conery** was one of the people who noticed this as he constantly found himself in situations where he didn't understand what the others were talking about. He felt like a fraud all the time. Frustrated with the situation, he decided to

find definitions for various terms and eventually wrote **The Imposter's Handbook**.

Confusion about the vocabulary, anxiety about the ever-shifting nature of the industry and constantly growing demands on your own abilities are prone to feed imposter thoughts. Especially if it looks like everyone else can handle it and you're the only one who's barely getting by.

2. The work is creative problem-solving

Even though computers speak in ones and zeroes, few things in IT are a binary either/or, either right or wrong, yes or no. Many things are opinions, dependent on context or a thousand other things and you can achieve your goal through several different routes. We're talking about a far more creative field than you'd initially think.

Although the problems might feel logical and their solutions mathematical, the work still requires an ability to think creatively. You have to consider the world, the user, the boundaries provided by technology and the environment, the client's wishes and the sensibility of implementation. And there are no absolutely correct answers.

You're constantly developing either something completely new or the next version of the old thing. The term 'to develop' already means 'to cause to evolve something in some direction'. Both 'something' and 'some direction' are often rather vague and unclear.

Creative work always entails uncertainty, chaos, the agony of creation and confusion.

If you aren't used to for this side of the job – or even if you are – the feeling of uncertainty feeds imposter thinking. Is it any wonder if you sometimes feel like you're defrauding others when you need to come up with certain solutions to uncertain problems?

3. There is unhealthy discourse and comparison

In the tech industry there's a persistent myth about a super ninja unicorn coder who codes a complicated solution alone in one night fueled by energy drinks and with zero google searches. This mythic image of the super coder is one endless source of imposter thinking in the industry.

Whether there's a handful of ninja unicorn coders or not a single one, anyone would get burnout from trying to reach an impossible ideal. Even comparing yourself to a colleague with 20 years of industry experience is not only useless but at worst extremely harmful. You might also forget that even the people with 20 years of experience are still learning, making mistakes and googling.

One thing that's keeping this problem alive are the job ads looking for rock stars, superheroes and unicorns with lists of demands as long as lightyears. The impossibly long lists of demands in job ads alone are enough to make anyone doubt if their own abilities and skills are enough.

After one of my imposter syndrome training sessions a man from the audience raised his hand and wanted to tell a story. He had worked in one IT company for five years and enjoyed his work. One day he noticed that the company was looking for a new junior developer and decided to check out the advertisement. It confused him – he wouldn't have dared to apply for the position! He felt that his own abilities wouldn't be enough for this junior position even though he had worked at the company for many years already.

He decided to go to tell his employer about what he'd noticed. He said that the job ad was so demanding that no junior could be expected to have all the skills listed. He also mentioned that some of the listed technologies weren't even actually in use at the company.

Instead of getting thanks for the feedback or the job ad being edited in a more sensible direction, the man in question almost got fired.

So Is It Any Wonder...

When you think about all the characteristics of the tech industry that contribute to imposter thinking, it's no wonder that so many feel incompetent, insufficient and unqualified. Realizing this is essential, but it also has associated risks. We have a tendency to

blame the environment and the circumstances and to think, "I can't really do anything about this imposter syndrome, the industry being what it is." There might be a lot to improve about the industry and the culture changes slowly. It still doesn't have to mean that you cannot do anything about it. Quite the contrary, you can do a lot!

It's useful to know what the elements of your own work that sustain or exacerbate your imposter thinking are so that you can reduce them. It's important to recognize different reasons so that you can control and treat their effects. In addition to this I of course wish that every one of us would dare to speak up if they notice unrealistic lists of demands or hear rock stars being idolized. It's to everyone's benefit that the deep-rooted habits of the programming industry get slowly dismantled and improved.

And There's More

It's also essential to know that you or someone close to you might have a combination of factors in their life that stirs up imposter thinking, and the tech industry might only be one half of it. Specifically, in IT imposter thinking is especially common for:

- **Minority groups such as women, LGBTQ people and ethnic minorities**

Someone from a minority doesn't feel like they fit in. This experience of being separate often gets mixed up with imposter thoughts. The thought "I don't

fit in” often leads to the erroneous conclusion “I can’t do this, I’m not capable, I can’t make it.”

- **Freelancers and the self-employed**

Freelancers and people who’re self-employed lack the support and feedback of a work community. When you work alone, you’re alone with your own thoughts, fears and concerns. You might go a long while without encouraging positive feedback. Self-employed people also have the most demanding and merciless boss in the world who’s constantly questioning their abilities.

- **Those forced into a culture of flawlessness**

Imposter thoughts are especially strong in work places where the company culture or the boss doesn’t allow

mistakes, showing weakness, uncertainty or incompleteness.

- **The self-taught**

Even though being self-taught isn’t such a rarity in IT, the lack of a formal education can be a source of fear that you don’t know enough. How can you be sure of your own abilities if they haven’t been verified by an official source?

Today’s assignment will make you think about the elements of your job that sustain or cause your imposter thoughts at the moment. Focus on examining them neutrally and avoid pointing fingers. Accept the things you cannot change and try to change what you can. Instead spend most of your energy on strengthening your own sense of self and your wellbeing despite the special characteristics of the industry.

Extra Assignments

1. Think about the circumstances that particularly make you feel like you don’t know enough. Consider for example:

- Does unnecessarily complicated language flourish around you at work?
- Do those close to you lift up exceptional superheroes and idolize people who work excessively?
- Is it especially hard to begin a project?
- Do you know what’s the Definition of Done for your current work/project in progress?

- Is your job description clear?
- Do you talk about learning, failure, mistakes and practicing with your colleagues?

Talk about what you notice with your colleagues, team leader or manager.

2. If you work for a company, go through your own employer’s job ads and think about how demanding they are. Are the demands realistic in relation to the work your company does? Could or should the job ad be made more reasonable?



3. Female Imposters

Initially imposter syndrome was thought to be a women's problem. Clance and Imes found the phenomenon by studying successful women and for a while it was thought that especially successful women were prone to imposter thoughts. Since then it's been noted that it is in no way a problem only for women and that men have imposter thoughts just the same.

However, for women in IT there's a specific factor that exacerbates imposter thoughts, and that is belonging to a minority.

Women are also often prone to imposter thoughts due to upbringing and cultural reasons. Not because of their gender but because of gendered upbringing. Because we'd like more women in IT, it's good to understand why it might be hard for a woman to enter the IT sector or work in it due to im-

poster thinking.

In This Chapter You'll Learn

1. Which elements in both women's upbringing and society stir up imposter thoughts specifically in women.
2. The tendency of women and overall people with imposter thoughts to wait until they're completely ready to [x].
3. Rights that are hard to internalize but important for everyone regardless of gender.

ATTENTION! Even if you don't identify as a woman, it's still useful to go through this chapter. You probably have a woman in your life, mother, sister, spouse, daughter, friend or colleague. It's good to understand the reality they are living in and what kind of expectations and roles they might face.

On the other hand, the rights we'll go through towards the end of this chapter are rights for everyone and internalizing them is often hard also for male imposters.

Women Are Kind, Decent and One of the Guys at Work

1. Women Have Been Raised to Be Kind, Obedient and Cheery

Times change and the future generations are already being brought up differently. Girls are encouraged to reach for their dreams, to have opinions and to take risks. Prior generations, however, were largely brought up another way. Women have been made to believe that they are kind, diligent, caring and sensitive. Some women are, but by no means all.

Current working life on the other hand sends messages that experts should bravely take their role as experts, reach for their dreams, direct their careers and be successful. There might be a conflict between upbringing and the expectations of work life that might make a woman feel that she's the wrong type or in the wrong place.

2. Girls Don't Play Guitar and They Can't Do Math

The roles assigned by families and teachers stick. Even today you hear far too many stories about how a well-meaning teacher or parent has told a girl that girls can't do math

or that only boys are interested in technology or that IT careers are for men.

These roles and boxes have many different consequences. Some women completely forego applying to positions that interest them because they think that they couldn't have the necessary skills. Or alternatively a woman might feel that she needs to know everything at least 150 % so that she can really prove that she can. If a woman is successful in a career that she isn't "supposed" to succeed in, that might create a contradiction that feeds imposter thinking: "Somehow I'm fooling everyone into believing that I can even though I really can't."

3. Women Are a Minority in IT

For now, women are a minority in IT and a minority is more likely to see themselves as an imposter. It's especially hard for a woman to apply to leadership positions in IT, because she isn't only a minority in IT, she's especially a minority in IT leadership.

Minorities often feel like they don't fit in. The thought "I don't belong here, I don't fit in" often gets erroneously mixed up with "I'm not good enough to be here, I won't make it."

Minorities also often feel the pressure to represent their whole group. A woman might think, "If I don't do well in this position, no woman will ever again be hired for a similar one." This pressure is completely unreasonable for an individual, because it is no one's responsibility to represent the whole group

that they happen to belong to. An individual is just an individual.

4. Society Is Still Rather Masculine

Although we've come a long way towards gender equality, there's still ways to go. The focus on men in society is still visible especially in media, culture and speech patterns. Newspapers write about sports and women's sports and many magazines still make a point to tell which famous man the woman the article focuses on is married to.

These examples might be trivial, but they occur daily. Confronted with these small messages, women absorb and internalize the idea that women are secondary. This messaging implies that womanhood is something that defines a person, her career and abilities. The lack of female role models also increases the feeling that the woman is in the wrong place and she shouldn't succeed in the career path she's chosen.

5. Success Is Also Often Masculine

Success gets measured in status, power, money and fame. Success is success only if it entails these ways of measuring. For women, like for some men, success may mean very different things. Success might mean for example the chance to spend more time with your family or flexibility in how the work gets done. For some, success means the opportunity to make society better or to have a positive effect on others' lives.

However, these are not seen as measures of success the same way power, money and fame are. Your own goals might then feel wrong or unimportant. A person might end up trying to attain the type of success that doesn't actually feel important to them.

This trend is luckily already passing as for example social responsibility and a person's well-being gain importance. This plays a part in reducing the feeling of being a fraud as everyone gets to define a measure of success that fits their own values.

6. Is a Woman Allowed to Be Feminine at Work?

One challenge for women in a male-dominated industry relates to the question of femininity. It's a whole different conversation what even is womanly or feminine. But many things generally seen as feminine like softness, sensitivity, empathy and caring are only now beginning to be appreciated at work.

On the other hand, a woman might feel the pressure to be part of the manly group and thus the need to be "one of the guys" and act like her male colleagues. This might mean hiding your own physical and mental characteristics and emphasizing traits that don't feel like your own just to avoid being left outside the group. However, this leads to a conflict between the internal self and the outward self, which strengthens imposter thinking.

I'm a Developer When...

People with imposter thoughts in general – but typically especially women – commonly think that they need to be perfect and at least 100 % ready before they can [x]

- [x] apply for their dream job
- [x] apply to be a speaker at an event
- [x] call themselves a developer / an architect / a scrum master...
- [x] lead a team
- [x] express their opinion
- [x] disagree.

This phenomenon is particularly troublesome because there will just about never be a day when you feel completely ready and perfect for a job. There will always be some healthy self-doubt about your own abilities!

This leads to many qualified, capable, even brilliant employees not applying for jobs, beginning a suitable project, sharing their knowledge, giving their opinions and teaching others – because they don't feel one-hundred percent ready. A huge amount of knowledge gets underused.

What Does Identity Matter?

Many women feel hesitant to assume for example the identity of being a developer before they know everything or before they've worked for long enough. And it very much does matter which identities a person assumes. Identity affects habit formation and

motivation among other things.

There's a huge difference between thinking "I'll be a programmer when I've passed this course, done this internship and got a job" and "I'm a programmer and I'll be an even better one once I've passed this course, done this internship and get to show my abilities at my first job."

You already are what you're becoming. You don't need to be perfect or 150 % ready or wait for a specific day when you'll be a developer. If you've written even one line of code, you're a developer. On the other hand, it takes time and practice to be a tried and tested professional.

Adam Montandon brought up a thought-provoking example in one of his talks: when Hagrid came to prepare a totally clueless Harry Potter for his first year at Hogwarts, Hagrid realized that Harry didn't even know he was a wizard. Hagrid's appalled exclamation "You're a wizard, Harry!" is legendary.

With that one sentence, Harry became a wizard. He didn't only become a wizard once he graduated from Hogwarts. Harry became a wizard the moment he realized he was and wanted to be a wizard. Montandon pointed out in his speech that we don't experience the transformation our last day of school – but our first!

List of Everyone's Rights

Valerie Young's book **The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women** has a list of rights that everyone has. The original compiler of the list was a student at the University of Massachusetts, who shared the list without even leaving their name. Young has edited the list to fit today's needs. Read through the list and focus on every line.

You Have the Right

1. You have the right to say no without feeling guilty.
2. You have the right to feel and express healthy competitiveness and achievement drive.
3. You have the right to make mistakes or to be wrong.
4. You have the right to express pride at your accomplishments.
5. You have the right to occasionally have an off day or not perform up to par.
6. You have the right to fail and to learn from the experience.
7. You have the right to be treated fairly without discrimination due to your gender, race, age, class, sexual orientation, religion, culture, or disability.
8. You have the right to achieve at a level you are comfortable with.
9. You have the right to say, "I don't understand."
10. You have the right to have things explained to you.
11. You have the right to be treated as a competent adult.
12. You have the right to work in nontraditional realms without penalty.
13. You have the right not to be the spokesperson for your entire gender, race, cultural group, et cetera.
14. You have the right to work and raise children at the same time.
15. You have the right to achieve above—or below—family expectations.
16. You have the right to not know all of the answers.
17. You have the right to be treated with dignity and not be patronized.
18. You have the right to have your input considered as valuable as the next person's.
19. You have the right to ask for additional compensation for additional work.
20. You have the right to be in the midst of a learning curve.

Extra Assignment

If you're a man, start a discussion on this topic with a woman you're close to. Ask her if she recognizes some of the aforementioned things about upbringing and society. Ask how they have affected her career or how they're affecting her work right now.



4. The Competence Rule Book (for Mere Mortals)

What does it really mean to be competent? This chapter is dedicated to the five distorted views of competence Valerie Young presents in her book. A distorted view of competence just so happens to be one central factor sustaining imposter thoughts. Someone who suffers from imposter thoughts has a distorted view of what competence means and so what kind of person is really capable.

When we compare ourselves to this kind of impossible ideal, we are pulling a heavy load. We'll never be enough for ourselves and we think that we'll never be enough for the world either.

In This Chapter You'll Learn

1. What kind of views of competence are:
 - The Perfectionist
 - The Natural Genius
 - The Expert
 - The Rugged Individualist
 - The Superhuman
2. How you can develop your own view of competence to be more sustainable and productive.

The Perfectionist

"If I were truly competent, I wouldn't make mistakes. To really be capable at my job, I need to always implement everything perfectly. My code must be flawless, every test must always pass without a problem and there must never be a single bug. No one has anything to mention during a code review. I never fail anything."

If this is your yardstick for competence, your ideal is the Perfectionist. So long as we demand perfection of ourselves to be competent, we'll never be enough for ourselves and will sustain feelings of imposter syndrome.

According to **Brené Brown**, perfectionism is a protective shell so that no one will see our vulnerability. It keeps people at a distance and tires its wearer, because the constant pursuit of perfectionism is very taxing.

In her book, Young presents new perspectives that a person pursuing perfection should begin to internalize.

Perfectionism Prevents You from Succeeding

The Perfectionist spends ridiculous amounts of time trying to be perfect – also on the things that don't need to be perfect. When you go over things a thousand extra times, your pace slows down, you miss opportunities and your deadlines fly by.

Sometimes Good Really Is Good Enough; Not Everything Deserves 100 % of Your Effort

There are things where it's justifiable to go over things again and again. There are things that deserve your best effort. But there are also things that don't. If everything is important, eventually nothing is important. That's why it's essential to choose your battles, focus on them and get the other stuff done with less effort.

Your Perfectionism Affects Others, Too

The Perfectionist sends the message that only perfect is good enough – regardless whether they expect perfection only from themselves or the people around them as well. The Perfectionist's behavior implies that making mistakes is unforgivable and makes you a worse person. Sooner or later it makes also colleagues and family members demand too much of themselves and be merciless in the face of incompleteness and humanity.

Learn More

Watch Brené Brown's TED talk **The Power of Vulnerability**: https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability

Read Brené Brown's book **The Gifts of Imperfection**:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/159285849X>

The Natural Genius

“If I were truly competent, all this should be easy. I should know all this without constant practice. I should learn things at first try, remember everything and know the answers to even demanding problems easily. I should remember all functions by heart and not have to google this simple thing.”

If Natural Genius is your yardstick for success, you don't allow yourself failure or practicing. This harmful view of competence is born in a culture that idolizes super geniuses. It's conveniently left unsaid that every expert who makes it seem easy has started by practicing, falling over and being disappointed numerous times.

Here are some new perspectives that someone idolizing natural genius should begin to internalize:

Effort Trumps Ability

Very few people are natural geniuses at anything. Everyone else has had to practice, learn, fall over and stumble. Even those who've lucked out with the genetic lottery and have been gifted with a slightly better memory, mathematical problem-solving skills, social skills or for example spatial awareness, won't in the end win over someone who practices and puts in more effort. Natural ability only gives a bit of a leg-up; it doesn't settle who wins the race.

Adopt a Growth Mindset

Although I stressed in the previous chapter how important it is to dare to adopt the identity you want, here we have to talk about the flipside of it. There are also harmful, fixed identities or roles. If we think we are bad or good at something, we develop a fixed mindset. This belief about ourselves stops us from trying out things, growing and learning. Instead it's good to remember that your self is flexible. You can learn and grow in whichever direction.

Challenges Make Growth Possible

Learn to see challenges as a chance to grow and to learn. We often learn even more from the projects that fail than the ones that go well. Every time when we find ourselves in a state of confusion, we're close to learning something new.

Real Success Takes Time and Effort

However effortless success looks like, every success story has taken long hours of hard work.

Learn More

Watch the video **The RSA: 'Fixed mindset & growth mindset'**

<https://youtu.be/YI9TVbAal5s>

The Expert

“If I were really competent, I would have three degrees and a PhD in this subject. I must know the newest programming languages and stay constantly up to date on industry developments. I cannot say I know how to do this before I can do this thing from beginning to end perfectly by heart and I have ten years’ worth of work experience.”

If your measure for success is a ridiculous amount of studies, you’ll never be satisfied. There will always be one more online course, book or study credit that you should find time to do so that you’d be truly competent. There’s nothing wrong with learning. This ideal becomes harmful when you regularly belittle your own abilities because there are a hundred articles online that you haven’t read.

Here are a few perspectives that someone looking to be the Expert should internalize:

There Are Many Roads to Expertise

The tech industry especially has many self-taught people and people who’ve learned at work. When the whole industry changes year after year, no formal qualification will keep up with the progress. It’s important to think about how you can supplement or develop your own skills. But there’s also cause to think critically about whether a degree is the thing to develop your own professional skills. You can gain knowledge in many ways.

There’s No Endpoint to Knowledge

Absurd amounts of new books, articles, YouTube videos, podcasts and infographics get produced all the time. It’s simply impossible to read everything about one topic – even if it’s very narrow – and stay up to date on all the new knowledge. The important thing is to stay curious and continue learning new things. The things you’ve learned aren’t meaningless just because there’s more to learn.

Truly Competent People Know What They Don’t Know

Recognizing your limits is one form of competence. You don’t have to know everything. You only have to be smart enough to know the person who does.

It’s thus less important to know everything about everything and more important to know how to find someone else who knows more than you do about a specific method, perspective or technology when you need it. It’s part of the professional skillset of a competent person to say, “I don’t know the answer yet, but I’ll find out and get back to you.”

You Can Be Confident Even When You Don’t Know Everything

You’re a professional even if you don’t know everything. Don’t belittle what you can do and what you know just because you cannot do and know everything. This doesn’t mean that you should give a false or exaggerated

impression of your own abilities. But it absolutely means that you mustn't question your own abilities without reason or point a finger at your own shortcomings.

Learn More

#TIL, i.e. Today I Learned, is a very useful concept. Although for example on Twitter #TIL is mostly full of fun trivia, sometimes it shows that people learn confusingly basic things even when they're older.

Found some sort of #TIL channel in your professional community where you encourage others to also share what they've learned. It not only teaches everyone new things but also reminds you that you'll never run out of knowledge and can always learn new things. You'll also learn what your colleagues are studying and what they are particularly knowledgeable about, so you'll know who to ask.

The Rugged Individualist

"If I were truly competent, I wouldn't need to ask anyone for help with anything. If someone has to help me even a little, I no longer deserve credit for this work. It's no longer worth anything. A competent person doesn't need help – and definitely not advice. A competent person has to make it on their own!"

This yardstick for competence makes people dig in their heels and to do many things the

hard way. The Rugged Individualist forgets that one form of competence is to know how to compile an efficient team and how to ask for help. They forget that the goal is far more important than that you've achieved it alone with blood, sweat and tears.

Here are some new thoughts that are useful for the Rugged Individualist to internalize:

To Do Your Job Well, You Need to First Recognize the Resources You Need – Including Help

Modern working life gets more complicated, the projects grow larger and the responsibility of the executor increases. Agile software development is built on smooth co-operation and the jobs that can be done totally alone get fewer and fewer. That's why one of the most important qualities of a competent software developer is to recognize when and where they need help from a colleague. It's likewise important to know what you can help others with!

Smart People Get Close to Those Who Know More than They Do

If you've been blessed with a team that has smart and talented people, it's pure madness to leave that knowledge unused. On the other hand, the Chinese philosopher **Confucius**, who was alive around 500 BC, already allegedly said, "If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room."

Your Work Doesn't Need to Be Ground-breaking to Be Good

Many creative workers think that if they weren't the first ones to think of an idea, it isn't worth anything. However, most work nowadays is variations on the old and creative reconnecting. More important than being the first is to be the one who makes the idea work in practice.

Competent People Know that It's Totally Okay to Build on Other Competent People's Work (Stack Overflow FTW!)

It's simply a waste of time to try to solve again a problem that someone has already solved. At the very least it's useful to see how something has been solved before and to improve on the result yourself.

Learn More

The Rugged Individualist can test their own thinking through one simple question: "Why is it important that I do this work/project alone?" You'll certainly recognize when the answer is justified, such as, "This is my thesis project that assesses my abilities and to ask for help at this point would be cheating", and when it isn't.

The Superhuman

"To be truly competent, I should handle everything perfectly and alone. I have to produce perfect code ahead of schedule and under budget and develop internal projects and processes. In addition to that, I have to be a faultless spouse and friend, work out four times a week and spend the weekends building a summer cottage in the Turku archipelago. When the kids' school organizes a fundraiser, I'll bake something amazing."

The Superhuman is a cross between the Perfectionist and the Rugged Individualist. Instead of being a solitary perfectionist only at work, they bring the same expectations to every area of their life. In the Superhuman's worldview, a truly competent person can do everything all the time perfectly. The end result is a constant feeling of not being enough and probably sooner or later also total burnout.

It's useful for the Superhuman to read through the sections for the Perfectionist and the Rugged Individualist. In addition to them, there are a few perspectives that are their very own.

It's Okay to Say No: Delegating Frees up Time and Gives the Others a Chance to Participate

When the superhuman has to be perfect in everything and do everything themselves,

they end up doing a whole lot of things that they don't really want to do and don't really know how to do. Instead there are a lot of people who would happily – even passionately – bake for the kids' fundraiser or build the summer cottage. It's perfectly acceptable to not agree to do every single task in the world and to delegate the ones that it's not absolutely necessary to do yourself. This gives others the chance to participate and to do the things they enjoy and are good at.

When You Slow down and Reduce Your Workload, You Focus on What's Really Important

Like the Perfectionist, it's also important for the Superhuman to remember that there are only 24 hours in the day for everyone. No one can do everything perfectly all the time. There's no getting around the fact that it means that some part of your life will get less attention. For some, it's sleep and taking

care of your health, for others it's family and friends, and yet for others it's your own free time and recovery, and for some it's work. Slowing down and reducing the things you do is essential to leave time for the important things.


Pretending to Be Superhuman Sends a Harmful Message to Others – Especially Kids

The Superhuman tries to be the perfect solo performer also at home with their family. It sends a subconscious message to everyone close to the Superhuman that they're worse and insufficient if they for example buy cleaning services, don't bake themselves or ask for help or leave something undone. The Superhuman probably doesn't mean for this to happen. But for some reason they don't allow themselves the things they'd allow for others. And by doing so, they wordlessly don't allow them for anyone else either.

Learn More

Oskari Saari writes a lot about how success requires a precise balance of things in his book **The Core – Better Life, Better Performance**. It's especially important to know who you are and to focus your energies on advancing the projects most important to you. The subject of Saari's book, F1 coach and doctor **Aki Hintsa**, used to recommend that his clients answer the following three questions:

1. Do you know who you are?
2. Do you know what you want?
3. Are you in control of your own life?



5. Why Do I Have Imposter Syndrome?

70 % of people suffer from imposter thoughts at some point in their lives. However, that also means that 30 % of people don't have them and there are also people in the tech industry who are not bothered by this phenomenon. If this isn't a problem for everyone, then why specifically you – and I – have imposter syndrome?

The short answer is that the roots of imposter thoughts are probably in your childhood. That's why in this chapter we'll go through which factors in your childhood and teenage years have had an impact on the development of your imposter thoughts.

What Kind of Environment Did You Grow up In?

There still isn't much research about imposter syndrome and its causes. Based on current knowledge we cannot yet unequivocally and unambiguously say what causes imposter thoughts. However, it has been noted that most people who suffer from imposter thoughts have similar childhood experiences.

Research articles say that adults who think themselves frauds have usually grown up in families where

- the child and the child's feelings weren't met with understanding
- there was poor support for individuals
- communication and behavior were strongly controlled with different rules
- there were strong conflicts or threat of conflict

Tiina Ekman writes that everyone she has interviewed about imposter syndrome has had a childhood family where **one parent evoked strong feelings such as fear, distrust or uncertainty**. The most central factor that caused insecurity was one parent being mentally unstable, suffering from substance abuse issues or demanding a lot.

Imposter thoughts might also be rooted in some kind of childhood family taboo or tragedy that wasn't talked about, and the silence inevitably distorts communication and affects how the child sees themselves. "The child begins to tell themselves stories that could explain the communication, but at the same time they also define themselves in a distorted way," Ekman writes.

Most often imposter thoughts are rooted in a childhood where the child has been in somehow unstable circumstances, has experienced fear, distrust or uncertainty – and has been left alone and invisible with their feelings.

Even though imposter thoughts begin to take root as a result of childhood experiences, they might not necessarily start to bloom until for example university studies or the beginning of your career. It might very well be that doubts created in childhood don't cause imposter thoughts until adulthood.

The Adult Says, the Teacher Says

Contradictions between the role assigned by your family and your own experiences and feelings may give birth to imposter thoughts as well. We already talked about this a bit in the chapter about female imposters. However, nearly all children regardless of gender get different roles and definitions from their families and vicinity. We for example tend to praise a child by saying that they are intelligent, artistic, mathematically gifted or sporty.

We also compare children to their siblings or cousins or the parents when they were the child's age. If for example the child's older siblings are very good at mathematics and the youngest does a bit worse, the youngest child's math skills might get belittled. Even if the youngest performs better than average, they might still think they're bad at math just because they don't do as well as their sisters or brothers.

Ekman introduces two types of situations that especially give rise to imposter thinking.

The First Case

The child is praised a lot and is said to be capable and gifted. They might be told, “Of course you’ll do well because you’re so talented and gifted” or “You don’t even have to practice at all” or “You always learn everything so fast.” The child learns to think that all that is true and that’s what the child is like.

When the child goes to school and for the first time meets a situation where they can’t do something right away, they should practice or everything doesn’t go perfectly, the child gets confused. It might be that the teacher gives feedback along the lines of, “This isn’t your strongest suit, you need to practice.”

The child comes home confused and tells their parents about what happened. If the parent isn’t listening carefully to the child right then and doesn’t understand what has happened, they might belittle what the teacher said or what the child experienced: “Oh, the teacher just doesn’t know how good you are at stuff” or “Don’t mind that one mistake, you’re doing really well otherwise.”

This answer only confuses the child further. They feel that they’re tricking either the teacher or their parents. Both authority figures are correct in the child’s eyes, so the child may end up thinking that they’re the one somehow causing the contradiction.

The Second Case

The second version has the same mechanics, but the feedback goes in the other direction. At home the child’s abilities have been somehow belittled. The child has been told, “You can’t really do this” or “You aren’t particularly good at this.” Maybe there has been unfair comparisons to other children or siblings and the child’s abilities have been belittled because of that. Someone might say for example, “It doesn’t matter that you aren’t so good at this, since anyway you’re so nice/friendly/cute/funny – you’ll always make do.”

A child who’s adopted this view of themselves goes to school and ends up doing well. They know more than what they believe they will. The teacher tells the child that they’re smart or gifted or capable and the child gets confused. This can’t be right; the child can’t really do this.

Again, the child comes home confused and tells the parent about their experiences and the adult has the demanding task of being alert and facing the child’s confusion, taking it seriously. If the adult cannot speak to the child about the contradiction, in the child’s mind there will remain seeds of doubt; maybe they’re just tricking everyone at school. The child may also think that they can’t really do anything, they have just been nice, friendly, cute or funny and that’s why they’ve got such a good grade or good feedback.

Other adults, relatives and friends in our lives may also have given us these kinds of roles and definitions. However, parents and teachers have a particularly large impact because as children we assume them to be correct and to know who we are.

Forgiveness Is the First Step

If you recognize these events in your own childhood, the very first step is to try to forgive your parents and teachers for doing this. Every adult tries to bring up their children with the best possible knowledge and skill. Despite of this, every adult is certain to mess up, because no one is a perfect human. Adults are also fallible, imperfect and weak.

We don't forgive what has happened for the other person's sake, but for our own. Forgiveness doesn't mean that you'd have to accept what was done or that you'd have to allow yourself to be treated poorly in the future, either. Forgiveness just means that you no longer carry anger, bitterness and reproach inside of you. It helps to forgive if you can accept that your parents did their best. If our parents had known better or been able to do better, they certainly would have done better.

I want to emphasize this because, just like with the characteristics of the tech industry and with society, it's also easy to get stuck with blame and explanations when it comes to your parents' actions. It would be easy to pass all responsibility on to your environ-

ment or your past: "That's just how I am, because my parents were like that." But that doesn't help or make things easier. Sooner or later it's good to try to move forward.

It's useful to know what's behind your own imposter thoughts. That makes giving up these thoughts and ways of acting easier. "In my childhood there were things that resulted in me having these thoughts. However, I can let go of them, I don't need to act like this any longer. They're not true, and they no longer serve me!"

Ehhh, What if None of This Sounds Familiar?

As I said, there's still relatively little research on imposter syndrome and its causes. It may be that nothing I just mentioned sounds familiar. If that's the case, spare a moment to be grateful that you've had very good parents and teachers. There are also a few other things that may explain your imposter thoughts.

Both Ekman and Young mention that university is an environment that might trigger imposter thoughts.

- You might be the first one to go to university in your family and it might make you doubt whether you belong and if you're somehow a fraud.
- You might have always been the best in your class, but the further you study, the

fiercer the competition gets for the best grades. If you no longer perform as well as you used to, that might trigger imposter syndrome.

- At university, the student runs into a language barrier and a jungle of jargon right at the beginning. A freshman might believe that they should already know everything. The university might not adjust the teachings to the beginner's level, which may trigger imposter syndrome.

Imposter thoughts are a bit more common for introverts than for extroverts. It's theorized that this is because introverts talk less about their business to others. The introvert might think themselves incapable but doesn't tell anyone about it. This way the contradiction between the own, hidden experience of incompetence and the outward impression deepens.

It might be that as you're thinking about your childhood, you'll find other factors that may have caused you to pursue perfection, demand a lot of yourself, feel like you're not enough and criticize yourself harshly. That's why the assignment for this chapter is to think about which elements in your life may have caused imposter thoughts, have an impact on these thoughts getting stronger and what sustains them still. As you reflect, be merciful towards both yourself and the people close to you.

Learn More

If you want to dive into academia, read this article: **The Impostor Phenomenon: Recent Research Findings Regarding Dynamics, Personality and Family patterns and Their Implications for Treatment**

<https://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/-Langford.pdf>



6. Yes, But...

“That’s all very nice, but I’m the only real imposter.”

Before we move on to tools and techniques to treat imposter thoughts, we must tackle one of the most bizarre manifestations of imposter syndrome. It’s a very interesting pitfall, the most mystical distorted thought in the entirety of imposter thinking. If we don’t go through it thoroughly, it might be that you’ll end up thinking that the tools cannot work for you. For others, maybe, but not for you.

In This Chapter You’ll Learn

1. Why every imposter thinks they’re the only real imposter
2. How people who suffer from imposter syndrome minimize their own achievements
3. And finally we’ll compile a list of evidence

The Others, Yes, But I...

When we talk about imposter syndrome, we most often talk about how competent – even successful – people don't believe in their own competence. Not even if they have loads of evidence. Not even if they've achieved this and that. People who have no cause to believe they are frauds still think that they are.

When you realize that perfectly competent, even successful people suffer from imposter syndrome, the first feeling is that of relief. When you hear that the person you admire also thinks they're a fraud, you feel comforted. "If they also suffer from imposter thoughts, then there's nothing to worry about. This is a bit of a silly problem to have."

This feeling of relief lasts a moment and then the horrible realization hits. "Oh, dang it, everyone else suffers from imposter syndrome and only thinks they're frauds. They have no basis to think that. But I... I am THE ONLY REAL fraud!"

This is the most curious characteristic of imposter thinking. That is, every single person who thinks they're a fraud thinks the same way. **Everyone thinks they're the only real fraud.**

Ekman talks about how imposter thoughts are distorted. They aren't based on reality; they have no connection to what's true. Yet they feel true and make people doubt them-

selves profoundly. Intellectually it's easy to understand what the phenomenon is about and how illogical imposter thoughts are in other people's lives. But for ourselves, the phenomenon is based on feelings; it's not rational. That's why it's so paralyzing and difficult – because it goes deeper than logical thinking.

It's thus important to remember that imposter thoughts feel real and that feeling is very powerful. But it's distorted thinking that has no basis in reality. Not even for you, even if you might not yet believe me.

Imposter Thinking Makes You Minimize the Evidence

How is it possible that everyone who feels like a fraud thinks that they're the only real fraud? It's because every self-identified fraud is a true master of explaining away and minimizing their own achievements. The fraud is extremely talented at forgetting, doubting and belittling their own actions, which leads to them being absolutely convinced that they can do nothing and have deserved nothing.

As we noted in the first chapter, frauds are terrible at accepting and internalizing positive feedback. The fraud also thinks that all of their achievements are due to something independent of their own actions. According to the fraud:

I got this job / I did well in this exam / this project was only successful **because, and for no other reason than:**

- I did gigantic, ridiculous amounts of work, more than anyone else would have needed to do
- I had an incredible stroke of luck; I was at the right place at the right time
- I have such good networks and I happened to know the right person
- I'm so charming and funny and people like me.

The truth is that all of those factors have an impact. Luck, networks and personality are all factors in your personal success. But none of them alone is enough. You also have to know things and to do the work. As to doing gigantic amounts of work, instead of seeing it as incompetence, you should see it as a sign of competence. Someone doesn't succeed "just because they did a lot of work", but "because they did a lot of work".

Could You Really Fool Others?

The one area where people with imposter thoughts don't belittle their own abilities is tricking others. We believe we've tricked the whole world! It's a bizarre moment when you

In one of my imposter syndrome workshops a woman said, "Yes, but what if I know for a fact that I got my job only because a reliable person recommended me?" This is a perfect example of the blind spot that the person with imposter thoughts has about themselves. The statement is true, yes; she got the job because of the recommendation. The implication just happens to be baseless.

First off, someone agreeing to recommend you for a job is not a no-brainer. Putting your own reputation on the line for someone else means that you believe in the other person enough. On the other hand, the recruiter doesn't make the decision simply based on the recommendation if the applicant appears untrustworthy or incompetent. And you won't keep your job for very long if you don't do well enough in it.

It's good to be grateful to your referee and to recognize the help that others have given you along your career. However, it's in no way justified to forget and to belittle your own part in it. Additionally, it's almost ludicrous to think that both of these people (the referee and the recruiter) would be totally inept at truly assessing a person's capabilities.

start to wonder for the first time if you really would have been capable of tricking everyone. Could I really trick my employer? The hundred people in the audience? My colleague? The interviewer? The recruiter? The invigilator? The professor? Would not even one of them be capable and smart enough to see through me if I truly knew nothing?

When you think about it for a moment, your own abilities at fooling others become questionable. Maybe I really can do something? Can I trust that these talented people might be right after all and since they have trusted me, I can also trust myself?

If anyone we cared about claimed that they can't really do anything and others simply don't notice, we'd think them nuts. Yet in the grip of imposter syndrome we're totally ready to believe this about ourselves! Can this realization make imposter thoughts so ridiculous that they lose their grip on you a bit?

The assignment for this chapter is to compile a list of evidence so that you can slowly examine your own abilities and achievements neutrally. When you've first done the main assignment for this part – and I truly hope that you spend at least 15 minutes on it – you can come here to supplement the exercise with an extra assignment.

Extra Assignment

As the main assignment for this chapter you created a list of evidence in which you listed everything that you've done, known and achieved up to now. For you to do this extra assignment, the list should be on one large sheet of paper, on its left side with one achievement per line. Divide the paper into three columns, the first of which has your achievements.

Go through your list of achievements and note down in the next column how good luck, the right timing, far-reaching networks, i.e. the people you know, and your personality have affected your success positively. What role have these played in your achievement?

After this, add your own actions and effort in the third column. How did you make use of good luck, networks, fortunate timing and your personality? What did you personally do for your achievement? Don't belittle the work you did but give yourself thanks for being persistent, careful, hardworking and having initiative. For truly opening your mouth, seizing the chance, doing what was asked or more, putting in the effort and finishing the task.

Go over your list and let reality slowly sink in. You're a lot more capable than you've given yourself credit for up to now.



7. The Treatment for Imposter Thoughts

This chapter is dedicated to different treatment methods, tools and exercises that can help you to slowly reduce the power imposter thoughts have over you. In regards to this, I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that imposter syndrome might not ever go away completely. The good news is that you can pretty much minimize its effects.

This chapter is intended to give you tools both for reducing acute symptoms and for long-term treatment of imposter thoughts.

Imposter Syndrome Is Like Low Hemoglobin

I like to compare imposter syndrome to low hemoglobin, i.e. a low concentration of iron

in the blood. It's a trait you can never rid yourself of completely. You can't simply take medicine for a while and fix the situation permanently. Treating low hemoglobin requires recognizing the symptoms, constantly eating an iron-rich diet and occasionally taking iron supplements when the symptoms get particularly bad. You have to accept it, live with it and treat its effects consistently.

Tiina Ekman says, "A recovering fraud is a bit like a recovering alcoholic. Imposter thinking is persistent, and many recovering frauds work on themselves for the rest of their lives. You can get rid of imposter thinking, but it might rear its head again during life crises where you need to react automatically and rapidly."

This is her view on her own thoughts:

"I'm a recovering imposter, I live with it. I don't let it control my life, I don't let it stop me from doing things, it mustn't control me."

For a recovering fraud to live a fulfilling life, it's essential to:

1. Know what imposter syndrome is, to recognize imposter thoughts and accept their existence.
2. Become aware of the symptoms of imposter thinking and its effects when it tries to make your life harder.
3. Treat acute symptoms and improve your well-being by using the right tools.
4. Maintain resistance to imposter thoughts by taking care of yourself, your mental state and the environment you're in.

Because we've lived with imposter thoughts for years, we've learned to function despite of them. Not all coping mechanisms and ways of acting are the best ones possible. It's possible to slowly switch ineffective ways of acting for better ones that improve your quality of life in the long term.

More important than trying to get rid of imposter thoughts completely is to learn to work on them when they arise.

Let's Start with the Acute Situations

What to do if you're going to a performance review, a job interview, you're considering submitting an application to be the speaker at an event or you have an upcoming code review or a retrospective, and you start getting anxious? Your chest feels heavy and your faith in your own abilities just vanishes. Doubt and self-criticism take over your mind.

It's Essential to Recognize the Situation and to Name It out Loud

Speak to yourself in a calm voice: "These are imposter thoughts and I feel anxious. I don't have to do what the thoughts tell me to, they aren't true. I can do more than I think I can right now."

Putting the issue into words out loud (if possible) in a positive, calm and gentle manner brings you back into the moment. If it's possible to speak about the situation to someone, do that.

Focus on the Desired Outcome as Calmly as Possible

With imposter thoughts you often think, "I'm not enough for this" or "Who am I to say anything" or "I don't really know how to do this" and "What if I get caught?" They're all focused on what you should be like and if you're good enough.

In these moments it's a good technique to turn your attention away from the question "Am I good enough" and towards "What do I want to achieve?" It's freeing to focus on the goal and on what's important right now. You can also examine the matter with the help of these questions:

- How do I want to help this client?
- What's important about this project?
- How do I want to serve this audience?
- What kind of employee do I want to become?
- Why do I want this exact job, why do I want to do this work in particular?
- How do I want this situation to go? And how can I get there?

Focusing on the end result takes attention away from who and what you should be.

Calm Yourself by Breathing

Communications trainer **Richard Newman** teaches a **5-5-5-2 breathing technique** that activates the parasympathetic nervous system and calms down the sympathetic nervous system. The basic idea is to first breathe in while counting to five. After that hold your breath as you count to five. Then breath out as you count to five and hold your breath as you count to two. Repeat these steps for a while.

A few rounds are usually enough to calm you down notably. Personally, I use the 5-5-5-2 technique also when I can't fall asleep. When your thoughts are racing, a few rounds of

5-5-5-2 breathing gets them to settle down. Calm breathing tells the brain that there's nothing to worry about and that you'll manage.

The Pausing Exercise

If you have the possibility to spend a few minutes on calming yourself, pausing might help you. Tiina Ekman's exercise begins by settling yourself in a chair in a sitting position or lying down on your back, closing your eyes and letting your breathing calm down. Ekman writes:

Let your breathing go calmly at its own pace, focus on listening to your breathing. Continue listening for a while.

Say to yourself: I am here, I am breathing. I don't need to be anything, I don't need to pursue anything. I am here, I am breathing. That's enough.

Continue focusing on your breathing consciously. When you notice your thoughts wandering to other things, note the thought and tell yourself that you'll circle back to it later and return your focus gently back to your breathing.

With the pausing exercise you can let yourself feel and hear what comes up in your environment and your own body. You don't have to explain, analyze or interpret anything, it just is. For a few minutes it's enough that you just are there and breathe.

Pose Testosterone into Your Body

Amy Cuddy has studied body language and its effects on our self-esteem and ability to perform. She noted that so-called **power posing** where a person stands or sits in a powerful position increases the production of testosterone and reduces the production of cortisol. Testosterone prepares you for performing and adds to your feelings of strength. Cortisol in turn is one of the body's stress hormones.

That's why before important moments when your self-esteem is being tested and you're anxious, it's important to pay attention to the position your body is in. Raise your chin, open up your chest, pull your shoulders back. Don't cross your arms or your legs, open up your whole being. The larger you make yourself, the greater an effect the pose has. Some take this to the extreme by going to a toilet stall for a moment to stand with their legs apart and arms wide. More moderate power poses have positive effects, too. That's why I also stand behind the stage in a more open pose before stepping in front of the audience.

Long-term Treatment Instructions

It's important to find ways that you can use to keep imposter thoughts at bay for longer

and to have them come back in milder forms. Low hemoglobin is treated with an iron-rich diet and the occasional bout of iron supplements. By contrast, positive self-talk, self-knowledge and gentle correcting of harmful ways of acting help with imposter thoughts.

Positive Self-talk and Zero Name-calling Policy

Our own internal critic is needlessly critical and downright cruel. When you begin to beat yourself mentally over the smallest mistakes or when you tell yourself in so many different words why you aren't good enough, it would be very good to cut this internal talk off. You don't need to listen to anyone say that stuff about you – not even yourself!

Adopt Brené Brown's **zero name-calling policy**. Brown suggests that every family, workplace and hobby group adopt a rule that you aren't allowed to call anyone names. This also applies to the person themselves. If someone begins to berate themselves by saying, "Eh, I'm so lazy/stupid/idiotic/bad", the others have the right to say, "Don't call yourself names." Before long you also begin to catch yourself and the name calling slowly ends.

I also recommend that you listen to Brené Brown's lecture series **The Power of Vulnerability**: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1604078588>

Accepting Praise

Teach yourself first to just accept positive feedback. When someone praises you, say thank you. Don't belittle yourself, explain or try to minimize what you've heard. A simple thank you is enough. If you dare, look the speaker in the eye and smile.

The next step is to learn to trust in the good judgement of the person giving you feedback. When you get positive feedback, add it to your list of evidence. It's one more piece of evidence that you've done a good job.

When you trust in the good judgment of the person who gave you feedback, you can also expand your response by saying:

- Thank you, I'm very happy with this too.
- Thank you, this project was important to me.
- Thank you, it feels nice to hear you say that.
- Thank you, I value your feedback.

Ending the Spiral of Over- or Underachieving

In the first chapter we went through two alternative ways of coping with the anxiety of imposter thoughts. When faced with a challenge one gets anxious and puts in a massive amount of effort, goes through their work over and over again until the last moment and doesn't let it go until it's perfect. The other gets anxious when faced with a challenge and procrastinates on beginning

the work, stretching the situation out until the last evening when there's no other option left but to do a mad last-minute dash to the finish line.

Think about how you operate. Which group do you belong to: Are you a neurotic reviewer? Or a last-evening sprinter? Or perhaps a last-minute performer who collects far too many work tasks?

Bring up your ways of acting in conversation with a colleague, the team leader or your manager. If you're your own boss, find yourself a mentor or a professional peer. If you're a student, find yourself a study group or a tutor. If you're a job seeker, talk to a friend or a family member. Talk with a safe person about how you can improve your ways of acting.

Overachiever (i.e. Neurotic Reviewer)

For you to work on this way of acting, you need help defining what's a good performance. Try to find out what kind of end result is enough. Go through your work tasks or projects and find out what's a high priority project and what isn't. Set yourself minimum requirements that it's enough to reach – but also the maximum limit after which you need to stop going over the thing (whether that's measured in hours, lines, or defined by a deadline or some other way).

Tell your colleagues or other peer group that you have the tendency to go over things too many times. Tell at least someone close to you: "I have imposter thoughts and thus a

tendency towards perfectionism. I'm just learning to accept that everything doesn't need to be perfect and I need support with that." It also helps to make your reviewing more sensible if you set yourself clear goals: "What's my goal today/for this week?"

Underachiever (i.e. Last-minute Sprinter)

If you leave everything to the last possible moment, you need to divide projects into smaller chunks and have intermediate deadlines. For you, it's crucial to tell a peer group (colleagues, study group, family) what you plan on doing and when. This public accountability urges you to begin early. Beginning the impossible task gets easier when the work has been divided into suitable pieces first.

Again, it helps to admit things out loud. Get help from a manager, team leader, tutor, mentor or supervising teacher to begin cutting up your work and finding small moments of success. In the background of beginning the task there often looms a paralyzing fear of failure. Saying it out loud also reduces the fear considerably.

Over-and-underachiever (i.e. Potential Burnout Case)

If you've amassed yourself an endless pile of work so that you don't have time to do anything well: cut it down. Cut it down. Cut it down. It's important for you to learn to define realistically what's enough. Get help from, for example, your employer or supervisor. It's

more important to do a little bit well than a lot of things badly. Learn to accept that a smaller workload is also enough. It's easier said than done and I'm still working on it myself. Yet it's good to begin somewhere.

Whatever your achiever type, it's important not to beat yourself up about it, blame or be cruel to yourself. You aren't broken even if you do these things. You simply have a harmful way of acting due to imposter thoughts that you now want to get rid of. The change is slow and you'll probably need help from the people close to you. Dare to bring it up.

Learn to Recognize Your Feelings and Thoughts

Tiina Ekman has an exercise for changing feelings and thoughts. It goes like this:

1. Write down an experience that brings up difficult emotions for you.
2. List all the thoughts that arise from the situation. Go through them one by one and think if they're reasonable. Think about what belief they represent in your thoughts. Try to see the thoughts as simply thoughts, not larger-than-life truths.

For example: I've been mistreated < > I currently think that I was mistreated then.

3. Write down all the feelings that arose from that situation or arise now that

you're thinking about it. Try to connect the feelings to your thoughts.

For example: I'm very angry because I think that I shouldn't get mistreated and no one else should either!

4. Write down all the reactions you notice in your body that are connected to these feelings and thoughts.

For example: When I'm really angry, my throat feels tight and it feels like there's a stone in my stomach.

5. Recognize the needs that you have in regards to the situation and think about how you can satisfy them.

For example: Someone should listen to my side of the story so that the situation would be just. I'll ask N.N. to listen to me.

Morning Pages Help See Your Thoughts

Often our thoughts are left to run in circles. One way to develop your thinking and to avoid the cyclical traps is to write so-called morning pages. The idea of morning pages is that immediately after you wake up in the morning, you write a few sheets, about three, of anything that you can think of. You can burn these pages right after, rip them up or otherwise get rid of them.

The important thing is to not screen your thoughts. Because you're not planning on

coming back to this text ever again, it can be any type of stream of consciousness. Morning pages help to transfer troublesome thoughts from your mind onto the paper and their power over you grows smaller. Morning pages also have a few nice potential side effects: first off, you might remember your dreams better, and your creativity might increase.

What Do I Want?

One of the hardest and most important questions is to ask yourself what you want:

- What do I want right now?
- What do I want today?
- What do I want this week?
- What do I want in life in general?
- What do I want to achieve?
- What do I want to do?
- What do I want to know?

Sometimes we focus far too much on what we should do or what we should be and we lose connection with what's important to us and what we want to work towards. By focusing on the question "what do I want in regards to this thing and how can I achieve it?" we give our subconscious a chance to come up with creative and exciting solutions.

Take a moment with a pen and paper and ask yourself seriously: what do you want?

Read also **The Responsibility Process** by **Christopher Avery**:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01LYB6QV1/>

Make up Your Own Study Plan

If you feel like you don't know enough, you can also actively take control of the situation. It might actually be that you're really missing some skills or knowledge. That doesn't mean that you don't know anything or that you've tricked everyone up to now. It just means that to become an even better professional, you'll actively develop your own abilities.

Create a list of different skills, technologies, methods and areas of knowledge that you think you should master in your own work. Verify the accuracy of your list with an older colleague or your manager. Or ask a person whose abilities you admire what they have studied and can do.

After that, do a self-evaluation of the knowledge and skills you've gathered: what do you already do well and what should you learn

more about. Ask for second opinions from colleagues, your team leader or your boss. It might be that you think you need to improve in an area that your colleagues already think you know well enough. Remember that not all areas deserve 100 % of your effort. You can also specialize in a different area than the one your colleague has mastered.

Talk with your employer about how and when you plan to, can and would like to add to your abilities. Evaluate together what's the best way to learn the skill or area of knowledge you want to master. It might be a course, a degree, a training session, a book, self-studying, pair programming, a teaching session with a colleague, work rotation or something completely different! Don't forget to talk about how you'll know you've learned the thing. You're never finished with learning and new things to learn. It's crucial to know what's enough for now.



8. Can I Help Others?

In true TL;DR spirit the answer is: **Yes, you can help others and that also helps you!**

Now you know – or at least can guess – how many people around you also suffer from imposter thoughts. When you truly think about it for a moment, it begins to feel downright ridiculous that we don't talk more about this. Luckily there are three relatively simple ways for you to become one of those people who're changing the situation for the better.

In This Chapter You'll Learn

1. How you can be an example to others and help them
2. How to meet someone else suffering from imposter thoughts
3. How to pay attention to your professional community and environment

1. Be a Good Example

The fact that you've finished this course is already a remarkable feat. It has increased your understanding and you have vocabulary and knowledge to discuss the subject. You've learned to recognize imposter thoughts in yourself and sooner or later you'll begin to recognize them in others as well.

I also hope that you have the courage to talk about your own imposter thoughts to others. It reduces the stigma around the topic – and it might be the first time that someone hears about the whole thing! Maybe your colleague, just like me in my time, has wondered by themselves for years how everyone else is able to do things and handle it and they're just panicked and not good enough for anything.

By talking about your experiences, you can be the person that gives an alternative explanation to your colleague's experiences. When the phenomenon, feelings and experiences get a name, they get easier to deal with.

If it feels hard to talk about imposter syndrome, there are other ways to set a good example. It would be of particular importance that people would dare to request help, ask for advice and say it when they can't do something. It would slowly shift the hero coder myth in a more realistic direction.

I know that asking for help and showing that

One thing that breeds uncertainty and feelings of incompetence in the tech industry is the constant jargon, that is, the shifting and obscure vocabulary. When I asked people in my Slack community which terms they had to google in the middle of a meeting or after it, I got heaps of replies along the lines of “a whole bunch of stuff”. **Tytti Karanka's** reply was courageous:

“A lot of things, constantly and all the time. I always prefer to ask the person, (if I cannot do it right away, then afterwards) so that there are others listening as well. The more we bring this up, the better it is for everyone – at times I also relapse into jargon and it's great if someone brings me back to the listeners' wavelength.”

Be like Tytti!

you can't do something is a terribly difficult task, especially for someone with imposter thoughts within the tech industry. After all, it'll reveal that I'm not perfect, that I don't know everything!

I also know that a question might get mocked on professional forums and channels if someone thinks it isn't perfect or challenging enough. That might raise the threshold to ask very high and people will spend a lot of time formulating their question so that they'd get an answer, not condemnation. That's why I encourage you to

practice asking a little bit at a time and first in safe environments.

But if it still happens that you pluck up the courage to ask a question or request help and get attacked with mockery, remember this: A person only judges others in matters that they themselves are fearful and uncertain about. According to Brené Brown, the function of judgment is to receive a momentary feeling of superiority in an area where a person doesn't feel confident.

Pay attention to people who are very good and confident at their jobs. They barely ever mock, brag to or belittle those who aren't yet as far along. So, if someone comes to judge you for daring to ask, always remember that the person is themselves hesitant about the matter. By ragging on you they can try to feel superior for a moment and get relief for their own agony. You can leave that person be. It is not the critic who counts!

2. Meet the Other Person as a Person and Take Them Seriously

Another and perhaps the most important thing about reducing imposter thoughts is to learn to see a person and to take their experiences seriously. As mentioned, one factor mitigating imposter syndrome is to talk about it, to put it into words. The problem, however, is that sometimes our confession doesn't get recognized.

Person A tells person B they fear that they can't do something, they suffer from imposter syndrome or they feel that they aren't enough. Person B feels uncomfortable with person A's pain and tries to console them, make them feel better and turn the situation into a positive. Often person B ends up trying to convince person A with "But you actually can do it" or "Don't be so hard on yourself, you're doing fine" or "But you did this other thing well enough."

Person B means well. They just minimize and belittle person A's experience without intending to. Instead of A now thinking, 'Wow look at that, I actually know how to do this', most often the logical conclusion (according to someone with imposter thoughts) is, 'Oh dang, another person I've defrauded!' In the end, A is left feeling even worse.

This is very human and typical because we'd like to fix the problems of someone who's suffering. It feels like a good idea to try to convince the other person and to make them see that their thoughts are baseless. Unfortunately, it just doesn't work.

Tiina Ekman advises that it's good practice to just stop to listen to another person talking about the matter. It's most important just to be there and to listen even if you really want to fix the problem straight away. However, you can help the other person process their experience with these questions:

- What makes you think that?
- Where does that thought come from?

- Why do you feel like you don't know enough?
- What could I do to help you?

If you want to show compassion or reduce the other person's pain, you can also say:

- That must be really hard, to constantly feel like you don't know enough?
- Do you know what... I sometimes feel exactly like that, too!

You need to be careful with the latter sentence, though, so as to not hijack the story and begin talking about your own experiences. You can say that you sometimes feel the same, but afterwards it's important to listen to how the other person reacts and what thoughts it brings up for them.

Colleagues and managers have an important role in accepting a colleague suffering from imposter thoughts. The most important thing is to believe when a colleague talks about their experiences even if they sound ludicrous to an outsider. When the question creeps into your mind about "how could THAT PERSON possibly have imposter syndrome", the answer is: the same way you do. There's no logic to it, it just happens.

So, if someone dares to tell you about their thoughts and feelings, listen to them. Don't try to fix, give advice to or heal the other person – it's enough that you're present, you take them seriously and you listen to them with understanding.

3. Talk about It at Work

There are many small things that can help create a safe company culture. The type that reduces imposter thoughts and doesn't fuel them. Here's some of them:

- Zero name-calling policy
- Retrospectives and emotional retrospectives
- Conversations that allow for mistakes
- Learning together, talking about learning
- Making job ads more reasonable

Zero name-calling policy

We talked about the zero name-calling policy already in the previous chapter, but let's review. The point of Brené Brown's zero name-calling policy is to weed out name-calling in communities – whether it's aimed at yourself or others. It's important to note here that in professional culture you shouldn't call anyone names, not the stupid colleague, the frustrating client, the slimy salesperson, the greedy boss or the crooked competitor.

Although 'us versus them' is a powerful tool to raise team spirit and to create social cohesion, it will eventually turn against itself. Negative commentary feeds a negative atmosphere. Name-calling also causes the name-callers to wonder what people say about them behind their backs. You always need to maintain respect even though you disagree with another person's actions and behavior.

Retrospectives and Emotional Retrospectives

It would be good for workplaces to have communications practices that gently and through learning dismantle mistakes and failures. Retrospectives, especially emotional retrospectives, are good events for this. Reflecting a past time period together with the team helps you to learn from your mistakes without pointing fingers at anyone or seeking to place blame. It also clears the air and energizes you for the new time period.

Allow for Mistakes

Sharing failures, errors and missteps in an accepting company dismantles the hero coder myth. Everyone makes mistakes and if they aren't allowed, people might try to hide them. However, to get to a good end result it would be more productive to admit the mistakes and to fix them. That's why it's important to encourage people to share their own mistakes, what they learned from them and how they fixed them.

Learning Together

In today's world you'll never run out of learning. In chapter four where we talked about the views of competence, I encouraged you to create your professional community a #TIL channel or some other forum where you can share what you've learned with others. Learning something new together strengthens not only learning and team

spirit but also the feeling that you can always learn something new and no one is ever finished.

Job Ads

Could your workplace be one of those places that seek applicants with a realistic job ad? Could you be the brave person that goes to tell the recruitment team / HR department / marketing / your manager how the company's job ads could be made more reasonable? Let's all do what we can to end the hunt for super ninja unicorns and start looking for people to hire.

Tell Others You've Taken This Course

It's particularly useful for both you and your colleagues if you dare to tell them you're taking this course and what you've learned. Nothing is as effective a learning tool as teaching others the things you learned. When you tell even one colleague one thing that you found interesting, you'll remember it better. By teaching someone else even a little bit you organize your own understanding of the topic, you review, you maybe check a fact or two and your knowledge deepens.

What if you could help even one of your colleagues with their imposter experiences, make them understand themselves better and reduce their anxiety? It truly is worth it!

So share and teach. <3



Conclusion

At the beginning of this course, one of the goals I set was to make you finish the course, and here we are! I also set three learning goals.

1. I wanted to teach you that you're not alone with your thoughts, but that there's many of us. You aren't broken or faulty, you're human.
2. I also wanted to teach you what this phenomenon is. It was my goal to give you so much knowledge about different facets of imposter thoughts that you'd learn to recognize them in yourself.
3. My third goal was to give you tasks, tools and techniques to deal with your imposter thoughts. I tried to give many

of them so that you'd find the ones that suit you best.

Here's a three-minute review of these learning goals:

You Are not Alone, and You Are not Broken

- The imposter phenomenon was found by psychologists Clance & Imes in 1978.
- About 70 % of people suffer from it at some point in their lives.
- It's not a syndrome but a deep-rooted way of thinking; Tiina Ekman talks about imposter thoughts.

- The tech industry is a rapidly changing and creative industry, which sustains imposter thoughts. They also arise from the unrealistic demands in job ads and super ninja coder myths.
- If you're a woman in IT or part of some other minority, you're particularly prone to feeling like a fraud.
- The roots of imposter thoughts are in your childhood experiences, and the roles given to you by family and teachers may have impacted the birth of imposter thoughts.
- After childhood you have tried to control more or less anxiety-inducing imposter thoughts with various (not perhaps the best possible) ways of acting.

Effects and Manifestations of Imposter Thoughts

- Imposter thinking may cause workaholism, extreme humility, strong fear of assessment and of failure and even anxiety, depression and panic.
- Those who feel like imposters tend to either overdo their work or procrastinate.
- Someone who feels like a fraud is very critical and demanding of themselves.
- Someone with imposter thoughts has a distorted view of competence and feels

that they should be a Perfectionist, a Natural Genius, an Expert, a Rugged Individualist or a Superhuman.

- Every imposter thinks that they're the only real imposter and they are a master of explaining their own success with reasons unrelated to themselves.

Tools and Techniques to Alleviate Imposter Thoughts

- List of rights you should internalize
- Claiming your own identity
- List of evidence about your own competence
- 5-5-5-2 breathing and power posing
- Recognizing the situation calmly and putting it into words, talking about it
- Focusing on the goal and the end result
- Positive self-talk and controlling self-criticism
- Pausing, writing
- Building your own study plan
- Ending the cycle of over- or underachieving
- Helping others

Now What?

Like always when you're finishing up with something, you get confronted with the question of andwhatnowthen? How to move forward from this? The first and most important thing is to continue doing the exercises regularly. Because imposter thoughts are persistent, you have to be more persistent. Keep focusing on positive self-talk, practice asking for help, learn to be enough for yourself, accept praise and thanks.

Return to the parts of the course that particularly spoke to you. The Finnish trainer and CEO Jari Sarasvuo has a habit of saying, "Not always a new thing, but a review of something." It's good advice since we tend to forget quite a lot of what we've learned. That's why reviewing strengthens learning. We often learn different things the second time around than we did the first time.

If you completed some chapters carelessly, return to give them more attention. I repeat

my recommendation to teach what you've learned to others as well.

The next chapter of this workbook will help to quench your thirst for knowledge; it compiles all the sources for this course and also further reading. You'll find a bit more to look at about every topic there. I particularly recommend that you read Valerie Young's book *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women* (regardless of your gender).

Please do also join our Slack community. It's a place to ask questions in a safe environment, get peer support from other recovering imposters and to learn more. You'll find the link at developerhood.com/join-slack/

Thank you for giving this course your time and energy. It's been a pleasure to teach you this stuff. You can always send feedback, questions or comments to elisa@developerhood.com

Thank you and I'll see you again!



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Articles

Pauline Rose Clance: Validation of the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale

<https://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/ValidationofClanceIPScale.pdf>

Pauline Rose Clance: The Impostor Phenomenon: Recent Research Findings Regarding Dynamics, Personality and Family Patterns and Their Implications for Treatment

<https://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/-Langford.pdf>

Queena Hoang: The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming Internalized Barriers and Recognizing Achievements

<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=tv>

Sandeep Ravindran: Feeling Like a Fraud: The Impostor Phenomenon in Science Writing

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/2016/11/15/feeling-like-a-fraud-the-impostor-phenomenon-in-science-writing/>

Other

Neil Gaiman's anecdote

<http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2017/05/the-neil-story-with-additional-footnote.html>

Adam Montandon

<https://www.adammontandon.com/>

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