Imposter Syndrome

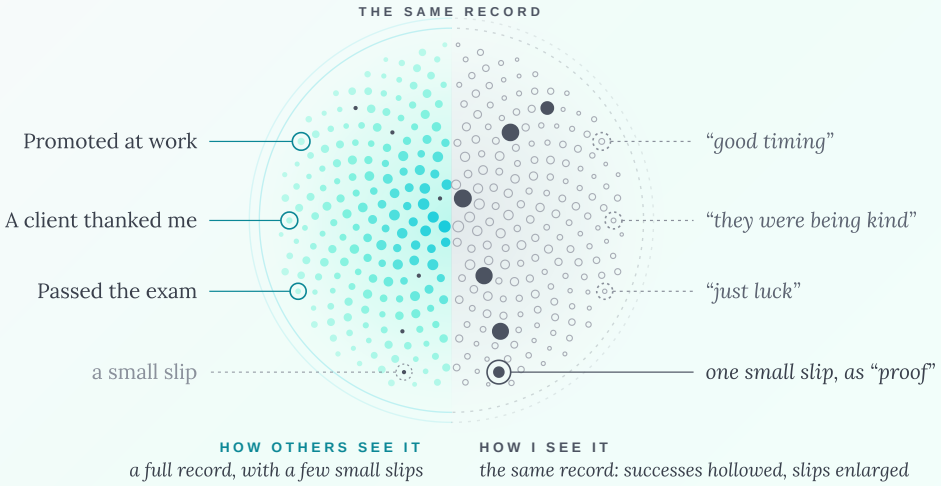
SELF-PERCEPTION · ACHIEVEMENT

Feeling like a fraud despite evidence of your competence

The persistent sense that your success is undeserved, and that one day you will be "found out". Researchers call it the **impostor phenomenon**: the problem is rarely a lack of evidence, but what happens to the evidence once it arrives (Clance & Imes, 1978).

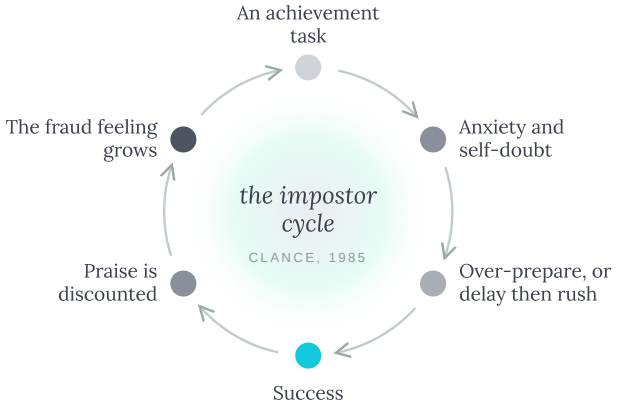
01 The discount filter

the same record, read two ways



02 Why success doesn't settle it

a self-confirming loop



Faced with a new challenge, people caught in the cycle tend to cope in one of two ways. Both routes usually lead to success, and both offer a ready explanation that leaves ability out of it.

ROUTE ONE · OVER-PREPARE
"It only worked because I worked twice as hard."

ROUTE TWO · DELAY, THEN RUSH
"I got away with it this time."

So each success can **deepen** the feeling instead of easing it, and the next task starts the loop again (Clance, 1985).

03 How it can show up

common signs

Explaining success away
luck, timing, other people, an easy year

Fear of being found out
one mistake will reveal the "real" me

Brushing off praise
"they're just being nice"

Overworking to stay safe
very high standards, little rest

04 Worth knowing

what it is, and is not

An experience, not a diagnosis
It is not a recognised mental health condition, though it often sits alongside anxiety, low mood and burnout (Bravata et al., 2020).

Common and widespread
Reported rates vary widely across studies, depending on the population and how impostor feelings are measured. These figures should not be interpreted as a general-population prevalence estimate (Bravata et al., 2020).

Shaped by context
It can be stronger where people are underrepresented, stereotyped or treated unequally. The setting matters, not only the person (Feenstra et al., 2020).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

First described in high-achieving women (Clance & Imes, 1978), it has since been found in men and women alike. It is kept going by how success is explained, not by a shortage of it. Research on what helps is still limited (Bravata et al., 2020).

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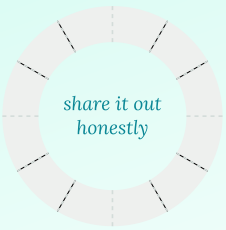
05 Who gets the credit?

pick one recent success

HOW THE IMPOSTER VOICE SHARES IT OUT



A FAIRER SHARE-OUT · YOUR TURN



Divide the credit for one success between these four. A fair split rarely gives **any** slice 0%.

- My skill and judgement ____ %
- My effort ____ %
- Other people's help ____ %
- Timing or luck ____ %

06 My evidence ledger

catching the filter in action

WHAT HAPPENED *just the facts*	HOW I EXPLAINED IT AWAY *the discount filter*	A FAIRER ACCOUNT *keeps the grain of truth, adds the rest*
EXAMPLE My manager asked me to lead the new project.	*"There was no one else. They'll soon see I'm out of my depth."*	I will be stretched, and some of this is new to me. Managers usually choose leads on track record, and mine includes two projects delivered well. Feeling unsure is a normal part of stepping up, not proof I can't do it.

07 Reframes that hold up

both can be true

AN AFFIRMATION THAT TENDS NOT TO STICK	A BALANCED REFRAME THAT HOLDS UP TO SCRUTINY
"I'm brilliant at my job."	I still have things to learn, **and** I have met the standard for this role again and again. Both are true at once.
"Luck had nothing to do with it."	Timing helped. I was also prepared enough to make good use of it, and that part was mine.
"I'll never feel like a fraud again."	The feeling may return when I take on something new. It tends to show up when I am stretching, and it is not a measure of my ability.

08 Small experiments

test the prediction, not the feeling

1
Take the compliment

Next time someone praises your work, say "thank you" and stop there, without a disclaimer.

I PREDICT

WHAT HAPPENED

2
Good enough, on time

Hand in one piece of work at a solid standard, without the extra hours of polishing. Notice the outcome.

I PREDICT

WHAT HAPPENED

3
Say it out loud

Tell someone you trust that you sometimes feel like a fraud. Notice how often others recognise it.

I PREDICT

WHAT HAPPENED

IMPORTANT NOTE

This resource is for general education and self-reflection. If self-doubt is linked to ongoing anxiety, low mood or burnout, or if your environment treats you unfairly, talking with a professional, mentor or trusted colleague may help.

SOURCES

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