

Imposter Syndrome

Sources and Solutions

Module 3 workbook

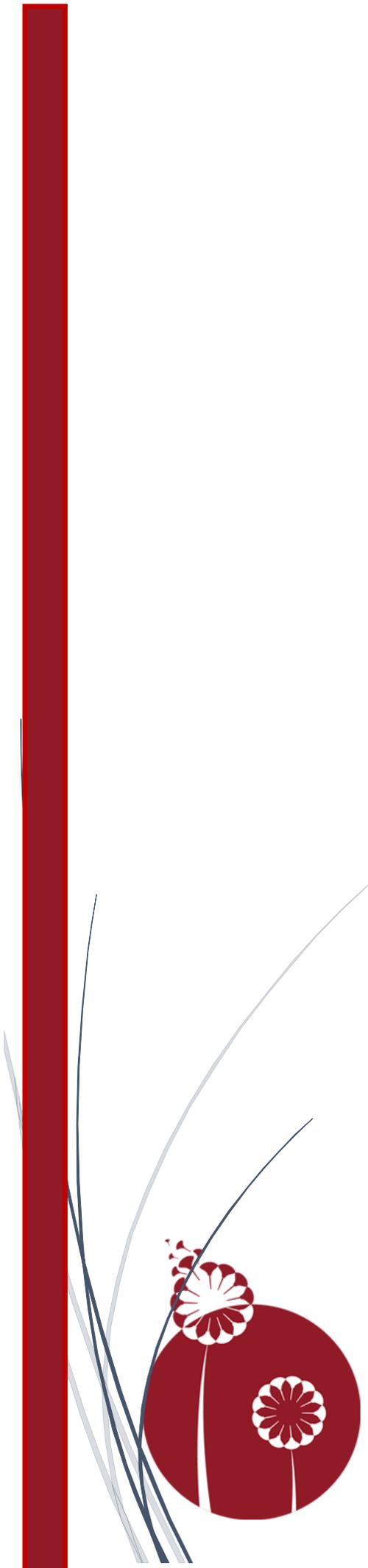
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Do you feel as good as they think you are?

This secret fear that we're not really good enough is surprisingly widespread.

In the face of tangible evidence of their success, many women, some men, people who are genuine high-achievers, are often wracked by self-doubt and the fear of being found out.

You might recognise this Imposter Syndrome when you realise you're thinking or feeling:

- that you don't put yourself forward because you fear you'll fail
- you don't contribute in meetings because you don't want to look a fool
- you've done pretty well so far but it feels you were really lucky
- other people doing similar jobs seem to be more "grown up" than you feel
- your "good enough" for yourself is "achieving perfection without breaking sweat"!

If not addressed Imposter Syndrome feelings can cause individuals to experience significant stress, anxiety and fear. It can drive them to burn-out or inhibit them from achieving their full potential, prevent them from making valuable contributions to projects or meetings and deprive an organisation or a business from seeing the very best that their people can give.

But the secret is now out. The Imposter Syndrome can be sorted!!

During this programme "Imposters" will explore:

- What Imposter Syndrome is...
- The consequences of Imposter Syndrome and why it matters
- How our thinking makes it worse
- Tools for long term change



Today I give myself permission to....

What permission do you need right now?

- Be brave, be honest
- Take a stretch if I'm feeling tired
- Share my opinions out loud
- Enjoy being fully present here and not multitasking!

Take a minute to write down what you need to allow yourself to experience the full benefits of participation in this programme.



Module 3:

How our thinking makes it worse

Imposters - Success, Failure and Competence

The people who are most likely to feel Imposters are generally held in high regard by their colleagues and to have achieved much in their chosen field.

Yet people with Imposter feelings consistently

- Undervalue their achievements
- Attribute their success to others
- Believe others overestimate their abilities

Imagine for a moment that I believe you are an Imposter...

If you are a real Imposter, how come you've achieved so much?

The most common “excuses” for their success include some combination of luck and hard work.

Effectively Imposters attribute their success largely to factors beyond their direct control. By definition these will be difficult or impossible to repeat on demand.

People who feel like Imposters often feel they have, intentionally or otherwise, managed to get other people to like them so they respond by being nice or kind to them.

Do you recognise when you are fearful, over-crediting, undervaluing?

Often we have habitual ways of thinking, talking, taking the spotlight away.

If someone offers us a compliment, we deflect it.

Typical responses include “That’s OK, it was nothing”, “Oh yes but I didn’t do it on my own....” and yes, that feeling that “Yes, they said that, but they were only being nice to me!”.

Take a few moments to share in the Facebook group:

What are your excuses/explanations for actually being successful?

Do you find yourself – fearful – over-crediting – undervaluing? How and when?



How do you think about your own success?

“Many people spend their lives climbing the ladder of success only to realise, when they get to the top, the ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall.” Stephen Covey

There are many ways that people with Imposter Syndrome feelings can think about success that makes things more difficult for them. We can be affected in different ways.

Sometimes, unconsciously, our effective definition of success includes an element of “effortless perfection” and if it isn’t effortless, then we must be faking it.

Does hard work feel like “cheating”, if you were good, it wouldn’t need hard work?

Can you enjoy and celebrate your successes?

Does it feel like showing pride or being “big headed”?

(Even now notice whether you have a tendency to minimise your achievements – it wasn’t so special – it could have been so much better – It was nothing really...).

There are also times when we realise that we are striving to meet the expectations of people in our past, our parents or peers and in reality, what we once thought we wanted isn’t what we want now. Our ideas about what we want or what success means will change and evolve as we grow.

What does success mean for you?

Remind yourself of what you have achieved - personally and professionally.

Take a few moments to reflect on some of the great things you have done in life.

This might include academic qualifications or personal achievements such as learning a language, playing a musical instrument. And it’s not only about academic achievement.

Don't forget the practical "common sense" skills, the things you’ve learned through years of doing the job, being good with your hands, being intuitive or caring, those “it's obvious” things that other people just don't seem to get and you seem to do with little or no effort.

Often being able to do much of this while also caring for family/children/parents/whatever... is a significant act of organisation, application or determination that we easily undervalue.

How do you think your best friend would describe your achievements?

Be brave. Share your insights on the meaning of success in the Facebook group.
You are not alone. We would love to hear from you!



How do you react to failure?

Generally, imposters internalise failure -

- if I fail
- if it goes wrong
- if it's not good enough... it must be my fault, I should have done more

How do you describe failure?

- The state of not meeting a desirable or intended objective
- A lack of success
- Things didn't turn out the way I wanted!

If "failure" really was "things didn't turn out as I wanted" would that be so bad?

Many people with Imposter Syndrome feelings "intellectually" understand failure and yet in practice, feel deeply shamed by failing.

Is failure a sign of weakness, your fault, something to be ashamed of?

Could it be a learning experience, a chance to grow, simply normal?

Did failure sometimes turn out to be better?

Sometimes we need to change the way we really think about failure. Reflect on past experiences. Have there been times when not getting what you wanted or expected opened the door to even better things, new opportunities or deeper growth...

What "failures" turned out well for you?!

Reflect on your thoughts about failure

What if failure was feedback on your learning strategy?

an essential learning experience?

a chance to improve growth?

simply normal?

What attitudes around failure would be more helpful to you in the future?

I'd really love to know when "failure" turned out well, to be a major turning point, a lesson, a springboard, so much better than you'd feared at the time.

Do share in the Facebook group. We would love to hear from you!



Imposters and keeping safe

Many people who experience Imposter Syndrome feelings:

- Are perfectionists

- Have very high standards for their own work or performance

- Have very active self-critical voices...

Because we fear being found out, being a fraud, we may be driven by a powerful team of players whose job it is to keep us safe including:

- Perfectionist – get it right (they might not notice you don't belong)

- Pusher – work harder and longer (to get it right or to get approval)

- Pleaser – keep people happy, don't upset them (if they like you they might be nice to you)

We often feel that if people really knew us they might not like or respect us, we fear wouldn't belong and might be "thrown out" – sometimes even fearing for our job or position. We would do almost anything to avoid being found out.

Sometimes we use strategies to stay "below the radar", keeping small, hidden, out of the limelight. We often don't want to even think about these strategies as that would be admitting our weakness – so we avoid our feelings.

We can do this by keeping so busy that we don't really have time to strategically plan our careers.

We might be habitual procrastinators so we never quite have time to do our work justice – and self-sabotage becomes part of our plan.

We might overwork, binge watch TV or use social media more than we should to justify why we are so tired...

What behaviours or drivers do you use to avoid being found out?

The performance of all these parts is monitored by an Inner Critic to make sure we maintain those high standards – except the voice of the Inner Critic may not even be yours!

What is your "go to protection" – being perfect, pushing/working hard, pleasing, procrastinating, hiding/staying small, numbing in some way?

How does your Inner Critic act as "enforcer"?

Do share your insights in the Facebook group, I promise, you are not alone!



When did you learn to play small?

We were all babies once. Most babies are welcomed into this world. If we are blessed with good enough parents and our needs for food, shelter and security are met we will thrive.

Although we rarely have memories of it, our first months are often filled with times when we were the source of wonder and awe: “Look she smiled!”, “Aw, he held my finger!”, or even “Did you sneeze then?!”. Our smallest achievements are celebrated. This went on for some time, and we enjoyed a brief period of being at the centre of someone’s universe.

At some point though, things began to change, sooner for some than for others. There came a point where we learned that we were not good enough... for some of us the lessons were harsh and hard but few of us escaped our childhood without internalising the message that we were not good enough to some degree or other.

The late Sir Ken Robinson has some very relevant thoughts on the role of education in shaping how we think of ourselves expressed in two very amusing and thought provoking TED talks.

What messages did you learn as a child?

The thing is, as children, we didn’t know better.
As adults we can, if we choose, look at things differently.

We can understand that being different doesn’t mean being wrong. We can see that “room for improvement” is a description that could apply to many human endeavours without meaning that the human behind them was anything less than good enough. We’re all doing the best we can with the resources that we have – when we know better or have different resources we can do better...

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

How do you feel as you read these words of Marianne Williamson?

How do you feel about shining or being seen?

What would your wiser adult self like to say to your younger, vulnerable child?



Imposters and their Inner-Critic

Many people who experience Imposter feelings have a highly active self-critic... they judge themselves and their work particularly harshly because “they should’ve known better”.

Our self-critical voice is perfectly natural, it’s a part of being human. Just because it feels as if it’s in our head, doesn’t mean it’s automatically right, accurate or fair. Some people pay more attention to their critic than others!

In personal contexts, the most common, self-critical messages are around self image and perception, how I look – too fat, too thin, too plain, too short, too loud, I talk too quickly or too quietly, I’m not quick enough, clever enough... the ways we criticise ourselves are many but often cluster around this theme.

In professional contexts, the two most common, self-critical messages are:

- You have nothing to contribute
- You are a fraud

The fact that these are important to us serves to highlight them as our values....

- We want to make a contribution
- We want to feel and be authentic

What are your most common self-critical thoughts?

Now turn that around. What do these messages tell you about what is important to you?

If the voice in your head thinks you’re stupid you possibly value knowing or intelligence. So how does learning show up in your life?

If the voice in your head thinks you should’ve done better then maybe doing things well, setting an example or being a role model might be important to you – how do they show up in your life?

If you fear being found out as a failure then success is important to you, or security, or belonging – what lies at the root?



You are not your Inner Critic

Sometimes we inherit our Inner Critics from our parents, a school teacher, even a classmate or a critical colleague.

Fighting your Inner Critic often makes it worse.

To minimise its impact on you, can you:

- Externalise that voice: is it your mother, a teacher, a colleague, a cat?
- Thank it for pointing out - the opportunity to improve
- Reassure your Critic that you've seen it and got it covered
- Remind your critic that it doesn't need to be perfect, this is good enough
- Recognise: I have limited resources and the choice I've made is...

It's OK to thank your Inner Critic and have a different opinion!

At a neurological level, a number of different brain regions become active when we are not focussed on any particular task. In these "in between moments" the parts of our brain that become active are strongly associated with self-referential behaviour – thinking about ourselves.

This Default Mode Network includes the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) and inferior parietal cortex (IPC). These connect areas of the brain which are aware of ourselves, in relation to other people, at times in the past or the future, with regions designed to identify errors or solve problems... **Could this be a neurological description of an Inner Critic?**

It has been suggested that the function of this network is to allow us to review, evaluate and improve our social interactions. The fact that it is activated every time we are not specifically doing something else suggests it has a very important role in our evolution.

As babies/children, fitting in with others, particularly adult care-givers is absolutely essential to our survival. **So perhaps the function of this network is to keep us safe and alive!**

Writing on values reduces Default Mode Network activation

Research shows that even 10 or 15 minutes invested in self-reflective writing on something that is of importance to you reduces Default Mode Network activation and the intensity of self-critical thoughts for days, weeks or even months.

Write about one of these:

- What personal quality or strength (of yours) do you value?
- What activity, role or relationship brings you meaning?
- What mission, community or purpose do you serve?



Writing on values... (1)



Writing on values... (2)



Writing on values.... (3)

What did you learn from your reflective writing? Was it a surprise?
Do share in the Facebook group. We would love to hear from you!



Going Forward....

Explore your Imposter's attitudes to success, failure and competence

Choose to own your successes – it's not simply luck and you do have a choice...

See failure as a normal, even essential part of the learning process

Finally see the many different ways we try to protect our inner selves from being seen and rejected, the armour we use to protect our inner selves

Can you see your Inner Critic as a part of you, not the truth of you.

Your Inner Critic wants to help - can you see that: - you have a choice:

- to listen or not
- they are not always right
- they are not "you"

