

Hi friend, I'm excited to bring you the latest in our series of shorter form podcasts. These podcasts focus on a theme that comes up in my conversations with guests or in my lectures and workshops.... Today we're talking "IMPOSTER SYNDROME."

If you are anything like me and quite a few of the women who have joined me on she said/she said podcast, you've probably experienced something the experts like to call "imposter syndrome." The term was first coined in a 1978 article by psychologists Dr. Pauline R. Clance and Dr. Suzanne A. Imes. The duo defined impostor syndrome as "an individual experience of self-perceived intellectual phoniness (or fraud)."

It's That feeling you get when you've reached a major accomplishment only to feel like that success may not be deserved or that you've gotten there because of luck or something other than your effort or skill. If this sounds familiar, you are in very good company.

This was a surprising finding by one of my recent podcast guests Dr. Praise Matemavi who is the first Zimbabwean abdominal transplant surgeon. She currently practices and teaches at the University of Mississippi Medical Center joined me in Episode 114. Dr. Matemavi interviewed some 74

accomplished women surgeons for her book “Passion and Purpose: Black Female Surgeons.”

In Dr. Matemavi’s case, many of the women surgeons she included in her book achieved firsts in their respective surgical fields, and overcame significant odds and barriers to doing so. If anyone deserved to feel “successful” it was these women.

But it turns out...they are not particularly unusual. Some of the most accomplished women in the world admit to feeling this way, despite so much evidence to the contrary.

Doctors Clance and Imes also found it occurs much more frequently in women including (and perhaps most surprisingly) those who have achieved significant success and external validation for that success. For some reason, the external validation is often misaligned with an internal gauge of value and success.

For me, imposter syndrome is more alive and well when I'm really stretching to achieve a goal. This is especially true during those times when I'm already uncomfortable and unsure. That discomfort tends to increase self talk that can cause me to second guess or question myself more than usual. The talk reel in my head might go something like this, “You don’t have a degree in psychology. Those few courses you took in college probably are not enough to make you an expert.... Are you

really qualified to be writing this article?” or talking about this topic. Just hearing those words makes me cringe!

But, before we can address the tendency, it's important that we first understand how and why this negative, counterproductive habit occurs. At its most simplistic, it's actually your brain's way of protecting you from danger. For many of us, we're hardwired to second guess, and to pause before taking a leap that could put us in danger. When you think about it, it's actually a gift. But, it's a gift that must be recognized for what it is: a defense mechanism that can be overridden, and that should not be the final say on whether a risk is worth taking.

Becoming more aware of this tendency takes self awareness. But overriding it requires both self-awareness and self-discipline.

Regardless of the reasons why we may do this to ourselves, the fact is that many of us have these feelings. So what really separates those who have such feelings, but still manage to plow through and achieve remarkable feats anyway from those who don't?

One thing that made a big difference to the women Dr. Matemavi spoke with was to make sure the personal talk track was more positive than negative. So, rather than focusing on qualifications we don't have, focus on those qualifications and experiences we do have that give us a point of view and

perspective. In my case, while I don't have a degree in psychology, I've studied topics related to how women think and lead extensively and have observed and talked with literally 1000's of women in all different fields over the course of my three decade long career. See how I did that?

Mindset is very important, but I also have 5 tips for helping you keep imposter syndrome in check, and for creating a process to help yourself get past it.

1. **Counter negative thoughts in writing:** take note and learn to recognize when you hear that voice and negative self talk in the form of a defense mechanism, and write down what it's saying to you. As you write each negative thought, counter it with a positive affirmation or two. For example, you might say to yourself in applying for a new job: "I'm not really qualified for this job, but I do have 10 years of experience in this complementary field that will give me perspective that the employer doesn't have but could benefit from." Or, maybe you've had a big setback at work that's left you flatfooted. You might say, "I really blew that proposal, I'll probably get fired, but..... I learned a great deal from the experience and now have a new idea for how to take what I learned and use it to x."
2. **Keep a list of accomplishments:** Keep a running list of accomplishments and things that make you and your background unique and valuable. Include things you've done, nice feedback you've received, recognition for your

work, goals and benchmarks reached, etc... Keep these in a box or a file on your computer or phone. When you run into a negative self-talk roadblock, pull out the list and remind yourself of all that you've already accomplished.

3. **Build a tribe:** Build a tribe of advisers that includes those who really understand your goals and can offer informed feedback and a pep talk that is more valuable because your tribe understands the challenge you face more fully. Beware of those who may be conflicted, or who will be impacted by your success or failure. A vested interest can sometimes color -- for better or worse -- even the best of intentions! Just be aware.

4. **Stay focused on your bigger goal or dream:** Knowing *why* you are doing that thing you are struggling with can be the most clarifying and motivating aspect of overcoming negative self talk and imposter syndrome. The negative thoughts become secondary to the importance of your goal. In Dr. Matemavi's case, as well as for so many of the women she profiled in her book, her dream helped propel her forward and continues to motivate her even when she feels self doubt.

5. **FINALLY And this is the most important thing. Discomfort is normal.** When you are pushing yourself and growing, it *should* feel uncomfortable. It's your natural defense mechanism kicking in to urge you to think carefully. Pause to appreciate the tendency, stay focused on your goal, and embrace the discomfort. Then

Congratulate yourself -- It's a sign you are making progress!

You already have what you need, but these tips can make a difference when you find yourself struggling.

I'll bet you already have some tips of your own and I would love to hear them. Send me a message via Instagram @lauracoxkaplan or email me at Laura@lauracoxkaplan.net

For more insight and perspective on topics like this, check out She Said/She Said Podcast and my entire line up of conversations with incredible women who are creating opportunities for themselves and others. Their insight and perspective is second to none. Our conversations are smart, thoughtful and cover topics that are incredibly common, but that often present big challenges especially for women. What you hear on the podcast could change your lifeor at least give you a new way of looking at things. I'm grateful you joined us today and hope you'll tune in again next week. Take care!