

# *Recognizing and Overcoming the Imposter Syndrome*

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# Objectives

► **At the end of this session, you should be able to:**

1. Interpret your scores from the Clance Imposter Syndrome assessment
2. Be able to define the Imposter Syndrome and its characteristics
3. Recognize how the Imposter Syndrome can impede career progress
4. Learn about actions to take if you experience Imposter Syndrome
5. Learn how to help other people who have Imposter Syndrome feelings

70% of people are expected to experience at least one episode of Imposter Syndrome in their professional lifetime

# Imposter Syndrome Defined

- ▶ 'Imposters' feel that they are less competent than others perceive them to be. These feelings override successes or external proof of their competence. (This is situational)
- ▶ Individuals who are high achievers yet have persistent feelings of inadequacy despite evident success.
- ▶ They tend to attribute their successes to external factors out of their control rather than to their own skills, talents, or expertise.
- ▶ Important: IS is NOT a lack of self-confidence or self-esteem (which is defined as a sense of one's own worth, or deserving of respect). It is NOT a mental illness/disorder diagnosis

## ► The Clance Imposter Phenomenon Questionnaire

20-item questionnaire comprised of **3 subscales** that rate:

1. Your feelings about your professional or intellectual competence and how you think others perceive it
2. Your tendencies around how you respond to successful professional outcomes and praise about your abilities, accomplishments
3. Your tendencies regarding to what you attribute the reasons for your success

From *The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like A Fake* (pp. 20-22), by P.R. Clance, 1985, Toronto: Bantam Books.  
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# Scoring Impostor Syndrome Assessment

Determine where you fall on the IS continuum:

- Few Impostor characteristics (score of 40 or less);
- Moderate IS experiences (between 41 and 60);
- Frequent Impostor feelings (between 61 and 80)
- Often and intense IS experiences (80 or higher).

**Note:** The higher the score, the more frequently and/or seriously Impostor Syndrome feelings interfere in a person's life.

Symptoms can worsen/reappear at life/career transitions and when your role or the way the role is executed undergoes change.

# Who is most susceptible to IS feelings?

- Often found in persons that are in professions different from family of origin
- First generation college students
- First to complete graduate or professional school
- Those who are underrepresented in that profession or position
- Lack of role models or support of achievements ...had to figure things out on their own
- Once thought to be much more common among women, but has since been shown to occur just as often in men
- Those who experienced privilege growing up may feel that things they have achieved are not due to their own merits



# Attributes of Imposter Syndrome

1. Inability to internalize accomplishments
2. Despite external evidence, the person remains convinced that they did not earn the success they have achieved
3. A persistent tendency to attribute successes to external factors (luck, timing, quota filling).
4. Feeling that others are deceived about, or have an inflated perception of, their abilities
5. Fear that they don't really belong in that particular environment and are going to be "found out"



# Consequences to self...

- Anxiety, depression, and psychological distress
- Can lead to physical illness
- Perfectionism and fear of failing, disappointing others. That can add to stress.
- Fear of success – paradoxical - cyclic

## Consequences to career...

- Setting a lower performance expectancy
- Avoiding new challenges for fear of failure
  - **IMPORTANT:** By trying to avoid failure you also avoid success
- Hinder abilities to *advocate* and *negotiate* for things that you deserve or need to be successful in your role
- Inability to fully enjoy accomplishments and celebrate successes

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## Breakout 1:

Discuss a time when you think imposter syndrome feelings prevented you from saying “yes” to an opportunity or from asking for what you needed to be successful in a job or task



## How can these feelings be overcome?

The person needs to learn to accept that they had an important role in their successes.

At some point you may have been given an opportunity that others weren't. The reason may not be 100% clear. You may therefore conclude that things achieved after that opportunity were not actually deserved.

Try to be objective...

## Take action . . .

- ▶ Understand why you are having these feelings
- ▶ Talk to others about it (could be with a counselor, coach, or peer)
- ▶ Make a list of successes and accomplishments (get help with this if needed)
- ▶ Get honest feedback from someone you really trust

It may not be realistic to eliminate IS feelings, but everyone can work on strategies to *reduce* or *manage* it



# Moving past feelings of Imposter Syndrome

- Who do you look up to in your organization?
- Is there a position or role to which you aspire?
- Is there a position or role in the organization that could benefit from your talents or expertise?
- Is there a new skill that you would like to learn?

Don't let Imposter Syndrome feelings prevent you from trying!

Important: There is no failure in applying or nominating oneself for an opportunity or trying something new...there is opportunity for growth and learning in new experiences.

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## Breakout 2:

Discuss a role you would like to learn more about or a skill you would like to learn/get better at.

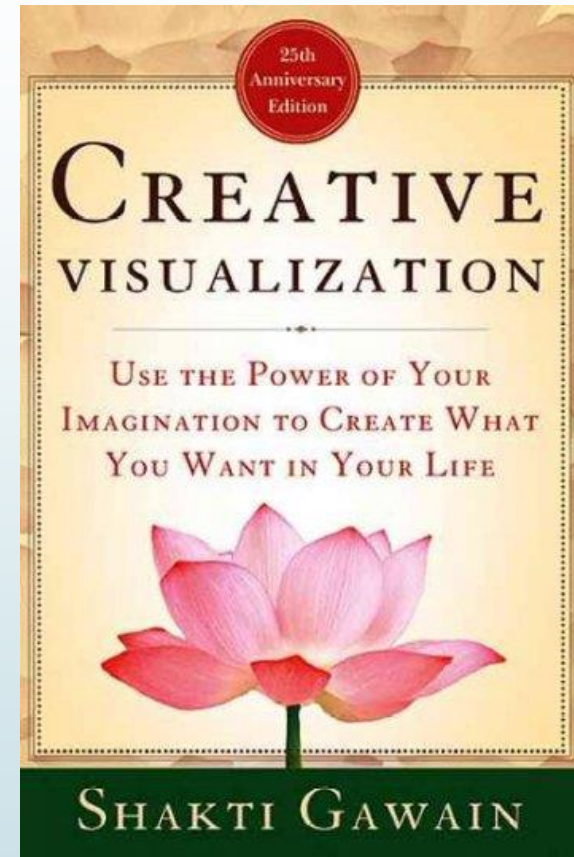
# Imposter Syndrome Prevention (?)

- ▶ Be realistic about your strengths and weaknesses (seek feedback from trusted friends, advisors, mentors).
- ▶ Learn about resources or opportunities to fill in gaps in skill set or training, especially if technology or SOPs change.
- ▶ New roles can include opportunities to expand “hard” or “soft” skills.
- ▶ Ask leaders/supervisors to tell their stories. Ask about their education, training, and career experiences. Ask about career obstacles, things they struggled with, and how they overcame them.

# Be empowered: Cognitive Behavior Techniques

- ▶ Choose to see/view things the way you want them to be...creative visualization
- ▶ Take action to make this a reality
- ▶ Practice makes perfect!
- ▶ Practice...just saying "thank you" when receiving a compliment ...helps to internalize praise

Symptoms can reappear at career transitions and when the role or the way the role is executed undergoes change.





# Parting Advice

*“I am the one thing in life I can control”*

*Aaron Burr, “Hamilton”*

- ◆ Ultimately, it matters more what one does with a given opportunity rather than how or why they were given that opportunity
- ◆ Make the most of opportunities that come
- ◆ You are the one responsible for your path in life