

WHY IMPOSTER SYNDROME IS A LIE

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Hello, my friends. How are you? It is great to be back. I just took a whole month off this podcast and I stressed about it the entire time. I created a lot of drama, a ton of drama for myself. This is what we're going to be talking about today.

But first, I want to talk about why I did this. Because I haven't really missed an episode here or there, just very few in the last year. But the idea of not putting a podcast out for a whole month was not something I had originally planned to do. It was a tough decision for me because we're all in COVID land. And we're all working our butts off. I just thought I needed to take some time off and enjoy this summer and really refresh my brain and refresh my thinking.

I know that I have this commitment to the podcast, but I also have a commitment to myself. I had to make a choice at that time and I chose myself. So I took some time off. Then I also decided to put a new program together for my one-to-one clients coaching clients. So throughout this process of putting this program together, I had drama. I had all this drama as I was putting it together. Is it going to be good enough? Am I doing it well enough, and all the things and put this whole free workshop together so that people could get an overview of it, and all this kind of stuff?

I was having all this drama and I was thinking to myself, *Can I?* I was having impostor syndrome, which I'll come to but I was having drama. How can I teach people to not have drama if I'm having drama? But what I realize, of course, is that we're always going to be having drama. And I will explain that throughout this podcast. But what I realized, of course, is that the more drama I have, and deal with it, like deal with my own drama, the more equipped I am to help people deal with theirs.

It's the same thing as I have this 20-year career in the corporate world working for McDonald's and working with really big companies. Of course, that qualifies me to a certain extent to talk about careers. And that combined with coaching and coaching myself and coaching others, obviously helps. So all the experiences help. But it was funny because I was having this impostor syndrome. As I was putting this program together, I thought to myself, I need to talk about this, I need to talk about impostor syndrome. I need to talk about it first and foremost, to let people know that the whole idea of impostor syndrome is a lie. It's a lie.

I don't want to discredit what people go through with impostor syndrome. It is a thing. People are suffering, people are creating some drama. They don't know they are but they're creating this drama for themselves. So I'm not trying to negate anyone's suffering. But what I want to tell you is impostor syndrome is a lie that your brain is telling you. It is serving up some thoughts to you and then you believe it. But those thoughts are lies.

I want to explain what I mean by that. Of course, I'm not just going to leave you with that crazy statement. But the reason we suffer from impostor syndrome, and I hate the name 'syndrome'. But the reason we suffer is that we're buying into the lie that our brain is serving us. You're buying into that *you're not good enough*. You're buying into that *you can't do something*. You're buying into that *you have no idea why you're here*, or why anybody put faith in you. So once you believe the lie, of course, it becomes a real thing for you.

Let me start as I dive into this, just defining for a second what impostor syndrome is. If you've had it, you kind of know what it is. But if you haven't, let's just level set here and say that imposter syndrome is basically when you don't think that you're as good as everyone else thinks you are. You don't buy into it. People are going to give you responsibilities. They're believing in you, they've asked you to do things. And you're like, *Holy Hannah. Why are they asking me? I can't do this. I'm not good enough for this.*

That's what we tell ourselves. *Someone's going to eventually figure out that I'm not good enough for my job, that I'm not worthy, that they made a mistake giving me all of this responsibility.* When those thoughts come up in our brain, of course, we think something is wrong with us. We think, *Oh, well. Someone who's confident wouldn't be thinking these things. Someone who is on the ball, or is actually good enough for this job wouldn't be thinking these things.* And so we start to judge ourselves.

So we first have these thoughts, and then we judge our thoughts, and we start to spiral out. So we're in this spiral of imposter syndrome. It happens to all of us. Like I said, it was happening to me, as I was putting together this program.

I remember I was the Head of Marketing for McDonald's restaurants in the UK. It's a big job. I'm standing in the room, and presenting to all the franchisees in the UK and their spouses, and probably some other business managers, etc. were there. It was the annual convention. I'm standing in front of the room and I'm presenting to all these people, little old me. If you know my story at all, you know that I'm from a small town in Canada. I did not finish my university degree. I started in the mailroom at an advertising agency.

So I've been asked to obviously get up and present at this convention. In fact, I was one of the only people at my level. Usually, it was all the officers and only the officers of the company at McDonald's were vice presidents. Everyone else is a director or head or something like that. So only the officers were presenting, but I was asked to present. The whole time I'm thinking, *What?* I'm not thinking about, Oh, I started in Canada in a small town. I'm here in the UK, and I've been asked to present and here I am. And I'm doing all these amazing things.

I'm not focusing on that, I'm focusing on me. I am the girl who didn't finish her degree. I'm the girl who was starting a mailroom. I still see myself that way sometimes. I'll tell you what. The fact that I didn't finish my degree, came up so much in my career, as, I don't have my degrees so no one's going to hire me for that job. Or I don't have my degree so I can't leave this company because no one else is going to hire me without a degree. It always comes up.

It doesn't matter that I have 20 years of experience and great credentials and working for this big company or whatever. I don't have my degree. I always think about it like I was some sort of an imposter who fell into this job. It's like I didn't earn it because of not finishing my degree. It's insane.

We all have this impostor syndrome where we think that we're not good enough. But what if I told you that there's actually nothing wrong with you? What if I told you that when you feel impostor syndrome, it's actually totally normal? It's normal to feel it. If you don't feel it sometimes, then maybe that might be a problem. I want to say it's abnormal. But I might question it. I might wonder why. But what if I told you that impostor syndrome was actually just a sign that your brain is working the way it's supposed to work? And that is usually a sign that you're pushing yourself to grow in some way. That you're about to embark on something hard. That's all.

What if I told you it was that? The reason I say this to you and I've explained this a few times before, so I'm going to go through it quite quickly. Plus, I'm not like a neuroscientist or anything. I know the basics about the brain. There are different parts of our brain. There's a primitive part of our brain and then we have the more evolved part of our human brain. So we have the primitive brain, and we have the human brain.

The role of the primitive brain or some people call it the *lizard* brain, is survival. The whole point of it is to keep you alive. And that was important back in the day, when we lived in caves, and we were running from dinosaurs, or other cave people who were trying to take our food and all our things. So it alerts us to danger. Our primitive brain is all about survival and staying alive. So the primitive brain has this motivational triad. If you imagine a triangle, each point of the triangle has a purpose.

The three things, basically, that the primitive brain is focused on doing are avoiding pain, seeking pleasure, and conserving energy. Those are the three points of the triangle: avoiding pain, seeking pleasure, and conserving energy. That's the motivation of the primitive brain. That was important back in the day because avoiding pain is important. Because if you have pain, it usually means that you could die. Seeking pleasure was important because it made us feel good and usually helped to maintain the species. Like having sex and all those things or eating food. We were looking for ways to survive that way. It's also a way to avoid pain.

And then conserving energy, which was about making sure we had enough energy to run and get the food and have sex and do the things that we needed to do to survive. Those were all important back in the day. But life isn't like that anymore. We still have this motivational triad working in our heads. But today, it's not trying to keep us alive most of the time. Most of the time, it's just protecting us from negative emotions. It doesn't want to feel negative emotions.

I was listening to Brené Brown's podcast the other day, which is awesome. She was talking about shame because that's her thing. She was saying that they've done a lot of tests on the brain and that the parts of the brain that fire when you feel shame, are similar to when you pour a hot cup of coffee on your hand. It does trigger the brain that we don't want to feel these negative emotions. So our primitive brain is just protecting us from negative emotions. And the way it does that is it serves up really the most brilliant excuses that keep us from doing hard things.

Let's say you have something to do that you're not sure you're going to be good at and you're a little nervous about it. Because you feel nervous, your brain is, and that negative emotion creates some vibrations in your body that the brain is reading as pain, basically. Because you're feeling nervous, the brain is serving up these great

excuses to help protect you from feeling nervous, to help you feel pleasure, and to help you conserve energy. It doesn't want to do hard things because that's going to suck up. It's going to make the brain work too hard to do hard things, and that's using up energy. It also might be painful because you might feel a negative emotion, or you might fail, or something like that.

Instead, it tries to give you an out with an excuse. It's basically telling you a lie. So some examples are good excuses. Often when we say, *I don't have time for that project right now*. This may be because our brain is telling us we don't have time, we think it's a good excuse. Or, *my family really needs me right now*, and it comes with all of these reasons why you can't do something that maybe you think is hard. Or, *someone else in the company is going to be better than me at doing that. So it's better for the company if I let someone else do it*. Or, *that person needs it more than I do for their career*.

We come up with all these altruistic reasons why we don't do things when really, our brain serves them up to us and we think, *I feel good about my reason*. But really, it's our brain giving us an excuse, and deep down, we know that it's an excuse for us to get out of doing something. Like it's too cold to go for a run today, that kind of stuff. Our brain serves up all these reasons that we can feel justified or righteous in accepting. But all of these excuses are just lies that our brain is telling us to help us avoid pain, seek pleasure, or conserve energy.

Sometimes, it tells us that we're not good enough to do something, or we're not qualified enough to do something, or we don't deserve something, or we can't do something because it's avoiding some kind of negative emotion, or trying to conserve energy because it's going to be too hard, and my brain is going to have to work too hard to do this. When you feel this doubt and anxiety, and what is called *impostor syndrome*, the first thing you can do is just ask yourself, *Why is my brain serving up this feeling? What are the thoughts I'm having that are creating this self-doubt in me?* Just ask yourself that question.

Why is my brain serving up this self-doubt when all the evidence around me is the contrary? Of course, I deserve to be the Head of Marketing in the UK. I've worked hard, I've got these awards, and I've achieved these things. I can do this presentation, people are laughing at my jokes, and all of the things. Of course, I deserve to be here. I got hired to be here. I deserve to be here. There's all this evidence that you have that demonstrates why you should be doing what you're doing yet your brain is serving up the self-doubt.

First question, why? Usually, it's because it's trying to protect you from something. Avoiding pain, conserving energy, and seeking pleasure. So I want to give you this thought, something to think about. When you feel imposter syndrome, it's actually your brain doing its job to protect you. It's your primitive brain doing its job to protect you. It means when you feel the imposter syndrome, it actually means your brain is working perfectly. The reason we don't want to feel self-doubt is just because it doesn't feel good. Because it doesn't feel good, your brain is serving up all this stuff.

The coaching school I went to, the Life Coach School, is run by a woman named Brooke Castillo. She also has an amazing podcast, by the way. She runs a coaching business, no word of a lie that is like, I think the last I heard, it was like \$35 million dollars of revenue a year. That woman is my hero, I'm going to have that business one day. That's my goal to get close to that. She's got this 30-plus million-dollar coaching business that she's created in 10 years, by the way, and she was saying that she still gets up and feels doubt every day.

She gets up and feels anxious. She gets up and feels doubt like, *People are going to find out I don't know what I'm talking about. Someone is going to say that I'm wrong. I'm going to face something I never thought of before.* It happens to all of us. It doesn't matter if you're the head of marketing, or you're the head of a \$35 million business. We're all going to feel doubt because our brains just serve it up to us. It doesn't really matter how successful you are. Your brain is trying to find a way to not try something hard or do something tough.

Quite often, it's when you are feeling impostor syndrome, and you ask yourself, *Why am I feeling this?* Usually, it's because you're going to be doing something that you haven't done before. Or maybe you had something happen today that didn't go the way you thought you did. And you feel bad about it, and you're learning something hard from it. That's it. Usually, when you have self doubt, it's a sign that you're growing. It's a sign that you're about to do something that's going to take more energy from your brain, which is all about growth.

If you never felt uncomfortable, if you never felt out, then you're probably not pushing yourself as hard as you could be. Not only is impostor syndrome really about the fact that your brain is doing what it's supposed to be doing, it's doing its job perfectly, but it's also a sign that you are growing. What if you took it as a good sign instead of a bad sign? There's my brain doing its thing. That means that I'm doing something hard. This means I'm doing something that's going to help me grow. It doesn't have to stop you.

You can just notice it. You can become the observer of it. You can become the researcher and just go, there's my brain doing its thing. There's my brain doing its impostor syndrome thing. You're going to activate your human brain. I know we only have one brain but I'm just saying, your primitive brain is actually faster. It actually moves faster than the human part of your more evolved brain. The reason for that is because it protects you from danger so it needs to move fast.

Usually, the primitive brain is faster than your human brain, serving up these thoughts really, really fast. So once you notice them, just like kicking your human brain, your prefrontal cortex, and just notice it. You don't have to act out of doubt. You don't have to act out from discomfort. You can just say, *There's my brain doing its thing, telling me lies. It's telling me lies that I'm not qualified enough to try to protect myself from something. I wonder what it is.*

What if every time we felt impostor syndrome, we said, *There's my brain doing its job. I wonder why I feel doubt right now.* Just ask yourself those questions. There's always a reason. There's always a reason you start to doubt yourself. And it's usually not because you're not good enough to do your job. It's because of something else. It's because you're trying hard. It's because you had a bad day. It's because you're tired. It could be a lot of different things. But it's usually not because you're not good enough to do your job. So don't believe it. It's a lie.

It's a lie that your brain is serving to you because you have a tendency to believe it, and it tends to work. Just stop believing it. Get your human brain activated, get that prefrontal cortex working, and just watch. Watch and learn why your brain is feeling that. What are you thinking that's creating that drama in your brain? Because that's really what it is. It's drama. It could be things like, *Today didn't go as well as I wanted. Or, I've never done this before. Or, This meeting is a really big deal, I can't screw it up. Or, People trust me more than I trust myself.*

Or, a lot of the time people feel it when they're about to achieve something really amazing because it is almost like self-sabotage. *I can't achieve this amazing thing. Who am I?* It's just drama. It's just drama that your brain is creating. And what ends up happening is you go back and forth between your primitive brain and your human

brain and create this drama. I call it optional. All this drama is optional. It is optional drama. You don't have to believe all this stuff that your brain is doing to you.

You can just go, *Yeah, got it. Thank you. I understand why you're serving me this information. I understand why you're telling me I'm not good enough. Don't worry about it, I got you. I get why you believe that. But I'm good. I got this.* You can just have that conversation with yourself. In fact, the more you become the researcher, the more you become the observer of what's happening in your brain, and the more the feelings start to dissipate.

So bottom line, you get to decide what imposter syndrome means for you. You get to understand that imposter syndrome is a lie that your brain is telling you to protect you from something. And you don't have to believe the lie. You can say, *Thank you for protecting me.* But you don't have to believe the lie. It's just an indicator for you. It can just be an indicator for you of what's going on. You can say to yourself, *What's going on? Why are you serving this up to me? What am I thinking that's creating this doubt?*

The most important thing that I want you to take away from this is that you can absolutely feel doubt and still show up at your best. I'm not saying resist the doubt. Don't resist the doubt, let it be there. But just understand why it's there. You can let it be there. It doesn't have to stop you from showing up at your best. Because the more you resist the doubt, the more it actually grows. You can just say to yourself, *There it is. There's the doubt. I feel it. It's like a little pit in my stomach. I know why you're there. No worries. I'm carrying on.* Keep calm and carry on, as they say in the UK.

That's my bottom line to you today, my friends. Imposter syndrome is optional drama. It is a lie your brain is telling you and you do not have to believe it, my friends.

That's all I have for you this week. My friends. I hope you have a fantastic week and I'll talk to you next week. Bye for now.

