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HOW TO MANAGE IMPOSTER SYNDROME 2.0

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hey there, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today we're talking about imposter syndrome. This episode is for those of you who want to get rid of imposter syndrome. I have talked about this before on this podcast in some of the old episodes, but I have some new thoughts on how to manage imposter syndrome that works well, with both myself and my clients. And I want to share those with you.

Having imposter syndrome isn't really a problem. It's not the biggest challenge that you're facing. The actual biggest challenge with imposter syndrome is that we make it mean something is wrong with us. The biggest challenge is not actually having it, it's making it mean that something is wrong with us. We tell ourselves that if we were truly good enough; if we had it all together; if we were the leaders that we want to be, then we wouldn't have imposter syndrome. So something might be wrong with us. And that, my friends, is just a load of bullshit that you might be telling yourself.

I want you to really hear this. Imposter syndrome is just a natural occurrence for all successful people. It's a natural occurrence for all successful people. And it's not something that needs to be eradicated. You don't need to get rid of it. You just need to learn to manage it. That's what we're covering. Today, we're going to talk about what imposter syndrome is, and what it looks like in action because sometimes, it can manifest in many different forms. I want to talk about how it shows up in your day-to-day life now so that you can recognize when it's happening. Then I want to offer you three strategies on how to effectively manage it.

Let's start with what it is. Imposter syndrome, it's simple. It's the feeling that you're a fraud and that you don't deserve what you've achieved. And not only don't you deserve it, but you actually didn't do enough to get it. Like somehow it's a fluke that you're here. And eventually, of course, you're going to be found out. They're going to find out that it's all been a fluke and a mistake and then all that good stuff is going to be taken away from you, probably in the most embarrassing, humiliating way possible when they find out.

Of course, we all think that. It all happens. It crosses all of our minds. I want you to know that. Because it's simply a form. Imposter syndrome is simply a form of self-doubt and insecurity but it manifests itself in so many different ways. And I also want to say it's kind of an identity shift. It's a form of self-doubt and insecurity brought on by the fact that you don't actually accept yourself in this new role. You don't accept that you created this in

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your life, you never thought maybe you'd be this far, or whatever. You just haven't accepted yourself yet. You don't see yourself a certain way. Therefore, you're creating this insecurity. And it manifests itself in so many different ways–self-sabotage, not trying, perfectionism, and people-pleasing.

I want to go through some examples, and I could go on and on. Let's start with ***self-sabotage***. Self-sabotage is like you just slow down taking action because what you do might actually work. It's almost like your brain is kind of scared that you might see success. Because the more success you see, the higher chance there is that when you fail, it's going to hurt a lot more. This is a story your brain tells you, this isn't a fact. I'm not saying this is a fact, I'm saying this is kind of the illogical way your brain thinks. Because it thinks that if you're successful, it's even more dangerous.

It's more dangerous to be successful because if I fail, it's going to hurt more. That's sort of the background narrative. What it does is it makes you slow down taking action when you think your action is going to result in success. That's why we procrastinate. Let's say you get the opportunity to present in front of your executive leadership team, and it's something that you really know well, and you know exactly how you want to say it and what you want to do. But then you wait until the last *frickin* minute to put the deck together, or you don't practice your presentation, or you don't socialize your presentation with some of the audience, or whatever ahead of time, which would guarantee your success, which would help you be more successful. But you don't do any of that. That's called self-sabotage.

Let's say someone calls to offer you a job or says, "*I've got a job that you might be interested in.*" You don't call the person back right away, or after an interview, you don't follow up with a note. Or maybe you don't send the invoice for your services, and all of those things. They seem like such small silly things, but we don't do them because the sense of being successful or achieving something feels a little uncomfortable. And so we try to avoid that discomfort. That's self-sabotage when you slow down taking action because there's a chance it actually might propel you forward if you take the action.

You might really be successful if you take the action and stay committed to taking the action. That's a form of imposter syndrome because you don't believe in your ability to manage your success. You don't see yourself as that person who can be the person who gets that success. You just haven't accepted that about yourself.

Another version of this is what I call ***failing ahead of time***. You're just not going to try because (you might be successful.) And that's kind of scary. *Let's just fail ahead of time. I'm not going to apply for the job. I'm not going to ask to be on the task force. I'm not going to make myself available to be in that meeting. I'm not going to say no when I don't think that it's going to work when I have a better idea. I'm not going to speak up in the meeting because then, what if people think my idea is not great? Or what if I go to the meeting, and it doesn't go well? Or what if I say no and people get mad at me? Or what if I apply for the job and I don't get it?*

We don't think we can handle the rejection or the pain that comes along with sometimes not getting the result we're looking for. But I promise you, you can handle it. It's just a feeling in your body. And when you don't try, you just fail ahead of time. That is a form of imposter syndrome when you don't think that you can handle what's going to happen if you try and you are successful, or you don't think you can handle it if you try and you're not successful. Absolutely, you can handle it. You've handled failure so many times in your life. That's how you got to where you are. You can handle it again.

Another one. I'll just go through this last one is ***people-pleasing***. This is when you're overly grateful and thankful. You know that you got the job or you got the opportunity and then you bend over backwards doing anything for

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anyone and saying yes to everything. You take on too much work. You don't position yourself as an authority. You kind of actually position yourself as subservient in some ways. Because if you think you do that, then you're going to be valued somehow as being subservient and as being someone that they can count on to do whatever they need them to do.

But that's not valuable at the leadership level. You need to be someone who actually isn't people-pleasing but has a point of view, who is an authority, who says no, and who operates strategically versus bending over backwards. But people-pleasing makes you feel like *"Oh, if I just make everybody happy and like me, then I'm not going to fail. Because I don't believe in myself enough to just show up as the full-fledged leader that the position I have actually allows me to be because I actually don't believe in myself as that form of a leader. I haven't bought into myself as being someone seasoned and capable enough to be the kind of leader that the job I acquired demands of me."*

I'm giving you some of these triggers or some of these red flags of imposter syndrome so that you can recognize them. But I'm not giving them to you as things to feel bad about. They're just like manifestations of imposter syndrome. I'm sharing them with you so that you can go, *"Oh, I am self-sabotaging. I'm letting myself react to imposter syndrome right now."* And when you have that awareness that you're reacting or acting out from imposter syndrome, then you have the insight to be able to pull yourself back out to get yourself back on the right track.

There's nothing wrong with *"Oh, I see. I'm self-sabotaging myself. I know where that's coming from. Let me pull back on that. I see that I'm afraid of trying. I keep saying no or I keep not applying. That's probably because I don't believe in myself being able to do the job. That's just imposter syndrome. It's fine. I can pull myself out of that."* Or people-pleasing, or sometimes a form of perfectionism is imposter syndrome, or comparing and despairing as I call it. Meaning like, when you see someone at work getting the results that you want or getting the accolades that you want, or getting the job that you want, and you kind of go, *"Oh, I'll never get that. That'll never be me. I'm not that good."* That's comparing and despairing.

Or just like genuine negative self-talk and beating yourself up could be a form of imposter syndrome, because you don't believe that you're good enough to do the job so you're always cutting yourself down. These are all signs that you might just be acting out from imposter syndrome. And that's okay. There's nothing wrong with it. When you notice that you're acting out, now you have the insight, now you have the information to be able to do something about it. It's only when we make it mean something's wrong with us that we make it worse.

It's like, *"Oh, I'm procrastinating calling that person back because I'm self-sabotaging."* And then we notice that and make ourselves wrong for that. Like we double down and go, *"Not only am I self-sabotaging myself, but now let me beat myself up for self-sabotaging myself."* That's not useful at all.

When you stop making imposter syndrome mean something is wrong with you, then you can truly unleash your value. You can truly become this highly sought-after leader who can work anywhere because you don't need to get rid of it, you just have to make it stop making it mean that something is wrong with you. And when you just like, *"Oh, there it is. let me pull back. Let me figure it out. Let me normalize this."* Then that gives you the space to actually do the work and become highly sought-after.

I know that even me saying that can feel scary. *"If I do this, people are going to think I'm great. And I'm going to become highly sought-after."* Then you might self-sabotage yourself. But don't worry, this is a practice. Learning to overcome some of these behavioural and mindset challenges is always a practice.

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Now that you know how to recognize some of the symptoms of imposter syndrome, I want to offer you three strategies to manage it, manage the imposter syndrome that you have now, and then also when it shows up in the future because it probably will. And guess what, it doesn't mean anything. You can definitely still kick butt.

The very first strategy is to ***step into the new identity***. Step into the new identity, which means, essentially, to accept yourself as what you've achieved. Because the problem is that you just don't see yourself as that thing, as the VP, or the director, or the chief of whatever it is that you do, even though you've worked your butt off to get where you are. And it was your goal all along. And you spent more time in your head hoping that you would get there right and planning to get there and doing all the work to get there.

Now that you're here, you don't necessarily accept yourself as this person. You just can't believe it. Because even though you spent all that time working to get here, you actually didn't spend any time accepting and practicing accepting yourself as this person. You didn't accept that you could be here, that you are worthy of being here, even though you kind of did believe that. Now that you're here, you don't believe it because you didn't really fully embody it.

I have a client who is a director of HR. She knows she's really good at her job. If I asked her to tell me why she's great at her job, or if I threatened that she wasn't good at her job (even easier), she would definitely tell me all the reasons she is amazing. Also, she has a story about her life which is she had a family that struggled and had to work really hard. Success for her was always potentially limited. She had dreams of being a CRHO or people officer. She believed it would happen and she also believed that it could never happen.

I had the same thing. I grew up in a really poor family. I had to work twice as hard in my brain. I had this unbeknownst to me, limit in my brain of the kind of success I could achieve. I think there are a lot of people out there like that, especially when you come from a poor family or a family that has just less privilege, let's call it. My family was the only Muslim family in an all-white Catholic community. And so I always thought of myself as *other* even though my parents weren't very religious, and I'm not religious at all.

I always thought of myself as other because we were different. And because I was other, I felt like I needed to prove myself harder, and that there was going to be a limit and a ceiling to what I could achieve. So when I achieved great things in my career, I questioned whether it was possible. Is this real? Do I really deserve this? How did I get here?

My HR director client feels the same way. But I also have a director of business development who feels the same way. I have a PhD who feels the same way. It's not specific to the title and the background. It's just that you have reasons for not believing that you are the kind of person who could have achieved the amazing success that you've achieved. So the work you need to do is just to lean into believing it. Step into this new identity. The key here is really to practice in your mind being this person ahead of time. You need to practice thinking of yourself as the thing that you're trying to achieve.

So if you're an HR manager out there and you want to be a VP of HR, I want you to start thinking about yourself as that person. I want you to start thinking about yourself as to *what kind of leader will I be when I'm that person?* How will I make decisions and start practicing being that person now? How will I carry myself? How will I treat my people? What kind of work will I be doing? And start trying to make decisions from that place now. Start trying to treat your people like you would then. Start trying to step into that identity ahead of time.

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When you do this and when you're already in the belief that you are this person before you officially become this person, then you're going to have to deal with a lot less imposter syndrome because you already believe and are operating as the person that you've been working towards becoming all this time. That doesn't mean you won't get imposter syndrome sometimes. Imposter syndrome will always come to people who are pushing themselves outside of their comfort zone to achieve more, to do more. But it does mean you're going to be more ready for the job. And being ready for the job is more than just knowing how to do the job. It's being mentally accepting that you are the person for the job. So that's the very first strategy. It's to step into the identity of this new person ahead of time.

The second thing is what I'm calling the ***question the fear***. Question the fear. What imposter syndrome is telling you is that you don't believe you get to have this success that you created, or you don't believe you're good enough for this success that you created. That's what imposter syndrome is trying to tell you. You're basically feeling unsafe to lean into this version of you for some reason.

When I say question the fear, what I'm offering for you to do is just to ask yourself, why? Why don't you believe you get to have this? Why don't you believe you're good enough for this job? Why do you feel like a fake or a phony? Why do you feel it's unsafe to just let yourself lean into the fact that you're a badass who got this job? What's so scary about accepting that you're a badass? What's so terrible and awful? What is going to happen to you? I think it's worth you just stopping for a second and reflecting and asking yourself that question. What are you really afraid of happening? Why don't you feel safe in your job?

What normally comes up after a lot of digging, and I'm going to give you the cleaned-up version. There are lots of different variations of this version but the foundational thing is people are just afraid of failing. The higher up I get, the more I might fail. And you know what? You are going to fail. You're going to fail a lot because that's what successful people do. You're going to make missteps but you get to manage it along the way. The key is not to worry about failing because you will fail.

The key is to believe in yourself that even if you do fail, along the way, these little failures, you will be able to handle them. You will be able to get yourself back on track. You will be able to manage the noise, fix the failure, or learn from it and not do it again, or whatever it is, because you have failed all the way up to this point. And you will continue to fail if you want to continue to grow.

So when your brain tells you that you're going to fail, it's normal. It's afraid of change because change equals danger. So it's telling you you're going to fail and you won't be able to handle it. But let's be honest, you're not going to do one massive shit the bed failure that's going to take away your whole career. No. If you're going to fail, in a big way, it's going to be a series of little failures that get you there. And you can manage those little failures. You've been doing it so well up until now.

So when your brain says that you're going to fail, I want to offer you that you can just tell your brain, *"Yeah, and we can handle failure. We know how to handle failure. We can get ourselves back on track."* You are probably someone who can figure anything out. You're probably a problem solver. And so you can figure out how to problem-solve your failures. You can apply it to yourself as well. That's one way. You can just chat with yourself and say, *"I know you're worried about failing, brain. But don't worry, we can handle it. I got you."*

The other thing that comes up a lot is people thinking that if they don't tell themselves that they're not good enough; if they don't tell themselves that they really have to put pressure on themselves to prove to themselves constantly that they deserve this job; if they sort of lean back and just accept that they're good enough, then they

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might get complacent. They might lose that edge. That's what they're thinking, that they won't be able to keep doing great work, and they'll become apathetic or lethargic. And that, again, is not true.

The more you believe in yourself, the more you are willing to take risks because you believe you can handle it. The more you are willing to speak up, willing to try new things, and willing to take on challenges because you believe in yourself. Because you think that you deserve this job, that you're smart enough and you're good enough, and you're going to spend so much less time in drama in your own head wasting time, ruminating on this negative shit. You're going to be able to reinvest all of that emotional drama time into actually doing a great job.

Don't be afraid of complacency. Don't be afraid that if you lean into your greatness and just believe in yourself, you're going to become complacent, arrogant, or any of that. None of that's going to happen. You're actually just going to get better at your job. And arrogance is a sign of insecurity, not a sign of confidence and self-belief. Arrogance is when you think you're better than other people. And it only happens when you don't believe in yourself and when you need to use other people to prop yourself up. And that doesn't happen with people who just believe that they're great at their job. They don't need to waste any time on that kind of stuff.

So this whole con that your brain is giving you that you'll become complacent and you'll lose your edge, that's not true. You're going to get more edge when you believe in yourself. So question that fear and find out what it really is that you're afraid of that's making you feel unsafe. And then question the validity of that thing. Because I promise you, it's probably not valid.

When you bring those thoughts out into the light of day, you'll start to see how illogical they are. And that alone is going to help you reframe things. But even though you've stepped into your new identity, and you're questioning the fear, your brain is still going to serve you thoughts that make you feel doubt. You self-doubt yourself. Because when you're someone who stretches yourself constantly to grow, you are constantly putting your brain in danger mode. Your brain is going to freak out and try to stop you from doing all these amazing things by feeding you some BS thoughts about who you are and what you can achieve.

This brings me to my last strategy, which I've talked about already. But just in context, strategy number three is ***don't make imposter syndrome a problem***. It's normal. Don't make imposter syndrome a problem. Don't make self-doubt a problem. It's normal. Whenever you stretch yourself beyond what you know right now, your brain will think it's in danger. Your brain considers change dangerous. That's how we're all wired. So it's normal.

If you think about imposter syndrome like, *"Oh my God, I'm not good enough for this…"* When you notice those thoughts, just go, *"Oh, yeah. There's my brain working properly."* It's normal. You have a perfectly operating human brain. When you're about to get up in front of a roomful of people, and you're like, *"Oh my God, can I do this?"* Of course. It's normal for you to question yourself in those moments because change equals danger. But that's when you just get aware of that and remind yourself, *"Yeah, I can handle this… Yeah, I do know what I'm doing… Yeah, I am a badass…"* You can hold both thoughts.

You can have the thought of, *"I don't know if I can do this. And I totally know I can do this."* you can hold space for both of those thoughts. You don't have to get rid of the self-doubting thoughts in order for you to be confident. You don't have to get rid of the imposter syndrome in order for you to believe that you're a badass at your job. You can hold space for those things. You can say, *"I'm a badass at my job. And I totally deserve to be here. And sometimes I question that."* And that's okay. That makes you normal. That doesn't make you less qualified for

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your job. If you're someone who loves to grow, then self-doubt is going to come along for the ride it just comes with. Don't make it a problem.

So the three tools I talked about today are one, step into that new identity. Practice ahead of time becoming the person that you're trying to become. Number two, when the fear comes up, just question it. Why am I feeling that I'm not qualified? What am I afraid of? Why am I telling myself this? Just get to the root of it, and then question that root? Do I need to be afraid of failure? Is that really a thing I need to be afraid of? Am I really going to be someone who becomes complacent? Do I really believe that I can't do this job? Have I not really set up safety nets for myself to make sure I'm okay? Is this something really to be afraid of? Those are all questions that you can ask yourself.

And three, no matter what don't make it a problem. Nothing has gone wrong when you have thoughts of self-doubt and/or imposter syndrome. It just means that you're someone who's pushing yourself out of your comfort zone and your brain is reacting to it. That's all. It's a normal human thing. You don't need to get rid of self-doubt to think of yourself as confident. You don't need to get rid of imposter syndrome to believe that you are qualified for your job.

Okay, my friends. That's what I have for you this week. Talk to you next time. Bye for now.

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