

How to deal with imposter syndrome

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 90 minutes

Summary: This lesson is about the psychological phenomenon of imposter syndrome and how it can affect people in their work. In this lesson, students:

1. study an article that advises them on how to conquer feelings of self-doubt;
2. talk about, and reflect on, their own abilities, strengths and what makes them good at their job;
3. hone their listening skills as well as practise how to ask tactful questions and give helpful advice.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Group size: Any

Note: This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 8/2019.

Warmer

Students complete tasks a and b in pairs and tasks c and d alone. Working with a partner will make the tasks a and b more communicative, but make sure you check students' answers before they move onto tasks c and d. Then students sit together in small groups for task e.

Key:

- *first minister* (in Scotland this is the leader of the ruling political party)
- *author* (someone who writes books, articles, etc)
- *co-founder* (someone who starts a new company with one or more other people)
- *CEO – chief executive officer* (the most senior manager in a company)
- *entrepreneur* (someone who uses money to start businesses and make business deals)

Key words

Students match the key words with the definitions before carefully reading through the article and noticing how the words are used in context. The words in the task are in the order that they appear in the article (though some words appear more than once).

Key:

1. *self-doubt*
2. *fraud*
3. *imposter*
4. *syndrome*
5. *vulnerable*
6. *anticipation*
7. *strategize*
8. *slump*
9. *accomplished*
10. *dismissed*

Understanding the article

In pairs, students read the statements and decide whether they are true or false according to the article. Together they decide how to rewrite the false statements to make them true.

Key:

1. *F – People who suffer from imposter syndrome are not sure how they got their job or whether they are good enough for it.*
2. *T*
3. *T*
4. *F – Identify what you yourself are worried about, and plan how to deal with that.*
5. *T*
6. *F – Be happy about all the big and small things you have done well.*
7. *F – Stay away from people who say negative things about you and your abilities.*
8. *T*

A useful expression

- a. Students find and underline the expression in the article and choose its correct meaning.

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Key:

a. 2

b. (possible answers)

1. *The company crashed and burned after less than a year.*
2. *The singer on the talent show got angry with herself after she crashed and burned in the first round.*
3. *If he's not careful, he's going to crash and burn and then who's going to help him?*

Writing

Give students about ten minutes for this task in which they work by themselves and write their answers to the questions from the article into the box. These will form the basis for the next task, so it is important that they write enough here to use in a discussion.

Discussion – listening and giving advice

Students work together to read the questions from task 5 again and share their answers. This task tests students' abilities to self-reflect, listen, ask tactful questions, give helpful suggestions, as well as useful advice and encouraging words in English.

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1 Warmer

- a. Scan the article to find five job descriptions or titles. Make a note of them.
- b. In pairs, discuss what you think people do in these jobs.
- c. Working on your own, decide which of the jobs you think you could do well.
- d. Which one would you like to try to do, even though you might not be very good at it?
- e. In small groups, explain your answers to c and d, giving reasons.

2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article, and then read the article noting how they are used in context.

accomplished	anticipation	dismissed	fraud	imposter
self-doubt	slump	strategize	syndrome	vulnerable

- 1. the feeling of not having confidence in yourself or your abilities _____
- 2. someone who pretends to be someone else in order to trick or con people

- 3. someone who is somewhere that they shouldn't be, pretending to be someone else or doing something that someone else should really be doing _____
- 4. a set of feelings or actions that are typical in a particular situation _____
- 5. weak or easily hurt physically or mentally _____
- 6. a feeling of excitement about something enjoyable that is going to happen soon

- 7. develop a way of dealing with something _____
- 8. a period when you don't feel good or successful _____
- 9. succeeded in doing something (even if it took a long time) _____
- 10. said that someone was not good enough or worthy of respect _____

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How to deal with imposter syndrome By Deborah Capras

Are you often plagued with strong feelings of self-doubt? DEBORAH CAPRAS has tips on how to deal with this psychological phenomenon.

1 Do you have an inner voice telling you everyone will soon find out you're a total fraud? Does it get louder the more successful you are? Congratulations! You have imposter syndrome. In an interview on Sunny Govan Radio, Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, recently admitted to such self-doubt. "Every time I stand up in parliament [...], I feel vulnerable," she explained. "I could just crash and burn." If you know the feeling, here are some useful tips on how to live with and fight this syndrome.

See it in a positive light

2 First, focus on why imposter syndrome could be a good thing. According to Sturgeon, it can help you become better at what you do. "It reminds you that you have to work hard," she says. "It makes you ask: Could I do better?"

Analyze the reasons

3 But if your negative inner voice insists too loudly that you're not good enough, analyze the reasons why, says Louisa Jewell, the author of *Wire Your Brain for Confidence: The Science of Conquering Self-Doubt*. She suggests trying to change negative feelings, such as fear, into something more positive, such as anticipation. Remember that it's also perfectly normal to be nervous at times, Jewell told *Fast Company*. "Identify what you're worried about, and then strategize for that," she says.

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Celebrate your past

4 When self-doubt appears, it's all too easy to forget your past wins. There's a danger you will automatically focus on failing. "For me, the simplest way to break out of that slump is to look back at what I've accomplished," Colbey Pfund, the co-founder of LFNT Distribution, told *Inc.com*. Celebrate big and small wins. "You'll quickly see that you are anything but an imposter," he says.

Admire yourself

5 Any time you question your abilities, remind yourself of your talents, skills and knowledge. What do you have that makes you the ideal person for your role? "Every CEO, leader and entrepreneur I've ever met has questioned themselves at some point," says Frances Dewing, CEO and co-founder of Rubica Inc. She told *Inc.com* that people need to stop thinking "Why me?" and think "Why not me?" instead.

Listen to the right voices

6 "Avoid people who say you're not good enough", advises the former first lady of the US. As part of her Let Girls Learn initiative, Michelle Obama talks about the need to pay attention to positive messages from our true supporters and to focus on our own positive thoughts. "I decided not to listen to the voices of those who doubted or dismissed me. Instead, I decided to listen to my own voice."

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3 Understanding the article

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. People who suffer from imposter syndrome think that they are too good for their job.
2. Imposter syndrome can be a good thing if you use it to remind you to do your job well.
3. If you have negative feelings about your work abilities, try to turn them around and give them a positive spin.
4. Identify what other people say you cannot do well, and plan how to deal with that.
5. Remember the things you have done well in the past.
6. Be happy about the things you have not done well.
7. Try to spend time with people who say negative things about you and your abilities.
8. Focus on your positive thoughts and not those that make you doubt yourself.

4 A useful expression

a. Find and underline the expression *crash and burn* in the article. What does it mean? Choose the correct meaning below.

1. have a car accident
2. fail completely
3. make other people angry

b. Now use the expression to complete the sentences with ideas of your own.

1. The company ...
2. The singer on the talent show ...
3. If he's not careful, he ...

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5 Writing

Answer the questions from the article about yourself.

What have I accomplished recently?
What makes me the ideal person for my role?
What could I do better in my job?

6 Discussion – listening and giving advice

Work in pairs or small groups. Take turns to read the questions in task 5 again and share your answers. The students who are not talking should listen carefully to what the speaker is saying.

Once the speaker has finished, the listeners should ask the speaker questions about their answers. The speaker should give reasons for their answers and further details wherever possible.

Ensure that you listen well and ask tactful questions. Give your fellow students helpful suggestions, useful advice and encouraging words wherever possible.

