

*Dear Michelle,*

*I'm in my head a lot. I don't have to prove myself to my boss or team because they trust me to lead, but I wish I felt more secure at work. What bothers me is that I'm always trying to prove myself to myself, if that makes any sense.*

Congratulations on your self-awareness, which is no small feat. It's challenging to become aware of self-sabotaging thoughts and you've achieved that. It's cause for celebration.

In our coaching sessions, you've shared that you never want to take advantage of your positional power, which is considerable now with a recent promotion. It's refreshing to hear a leader say this. Many people misuse decision-making authority for personal gain or to fulfill egotistical needs with behavior that doesn't benefit anyone but themselves. It damages their reputation and team. Your leadership style is the exact opposite of that. The downside to a humble, amiable, high concern for others approach is that it often comes along with second-guessing your own value.

This sounds like "imposter syndrome". "Impostor phenomenon" was coined in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in their paper "The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention." It's a fear of failure and more common than you might think.

We've worked with hundreds of clients who carry around an uncomfortable feeling they're not worthy of their position despite hard work and earned credibility. We know that it affects individuals across genders, ages, and professions, with higher reported rates among women and ethnic minorities. Perfectionism, early family dynamics, workplace culture, and social comparison are significant contributors. Imposter syndrome implications are serious, as it is often associated with anxiety, depression, burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and compromised performance.

When we feel fraudulent despite factual evidence of our competence, we attribute our success to luck or external factors. This means we're not chalking up our wins to our ability as we worry about being exposed as unqualified. I'm happy to report there are ways to get past this detrimental mindset, including aligning with mentors who care and who see your potential. You can seek support from trusted confidantes by introducing brave, candid discussions about the negative self-talk you can overcome. As you debate your inner critic with facts related to the value you uniquely add to the workplace, you update your self-perception. Your self-esteem will grow.

Here are a few additional tips to put to use starting today:

Add the word "yet" when you describe a trait or achievement you haven't landed, as in, "I'm not knowledgeable about this topic - yet!" Try to incorporate "I used to" in your self-talk and spoken messages when you refer to prior weaker points you're already addressing: "I used to stop myself from speaking in meetings".

Finally, ask yourself what you'd say to a dear friend who has your skills but is struggling with feeling "not good enough". How would you build them and help them see their worth? With self-awareness and a little kindness, you can do the same for yourself.

**Are you dealing with a communication challenge?**

If you've got a question, write to [Michelle@GladieuxConsulting.com](mailto:Michelle@GladieuxConsulting.com) for consideration.

Questions remain confidential and anonymous when published.

# COACH'S CORNER

