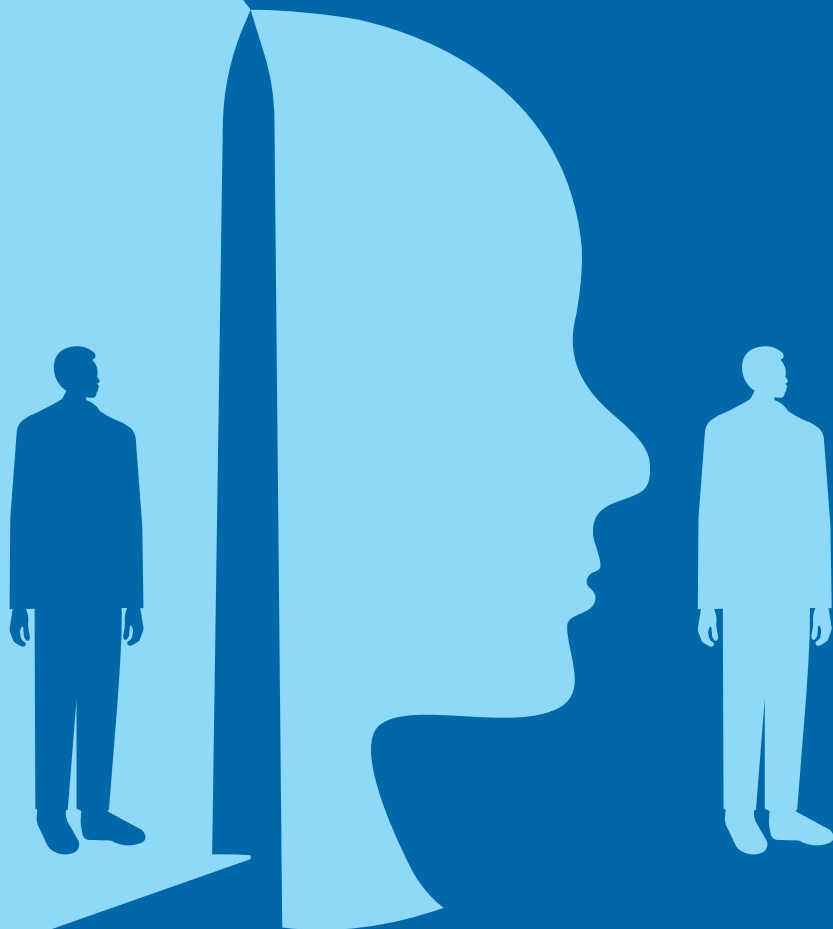


LEARNING TO EMBRACE YOUR IMPOSTER



It's unsurprising that many senior leaders succumb to imposter syndrome, particularly when under increasing pressure. Community Members share with **Dylan Totton** how they have led with conviction despite moments of self-doubt



Senior leaders are under pressure to lead with confidence and conviction at all times. However, in quiet moments, many of us question our own competency. To move forward, executives should focus on their achievements, seek support from a trusted source and acknowledge that imposter syndrome even comes with some benefits.

Community Members share their thoughts on leadership capability and their first-hand experience of how best to lead with your imposter in tow. This is what they had to say:



Matthew Blagg

Matthew Blagg, CEO of Criticaleye, says many leaders encounter feelings of inadequacy and advises taking time to reflect on your achievements.

There's a perception that 'true' leaders have a natural belief in themselves, but many of them experience a huge amount of insecurity. Imposter syndrome has always been an issue, but with higher expectations being placed on CEOs by society, the media and other stakeholders, the pressure has increased.

Our [research](#) tells us that many leaders are experiencing isolation in their roles, and this can feed into feeling like an imposter. Talking about it can help, however, no two leaders are the same; while some people may be comfortable talking about it more widely, with complete openness, others may prefer to discuss it with a mentor in a more closed way.

“To get the best out of our people, we think we should talk about [imposter syndrome] and provide support before they even feel the need to ask for it”

Those that struggle with their self-belief but aren't able to articulate their concerns, either openly or in private, will be the real victims.

It's important for leaders to take a step back and look at their achievements regularly. People with imposter syndrome often find it hard to recognise their successes. Visualise what you have achieved and write it down – give yourself time to reflect because, when you are busy, it can be difficult to see any progression.



Louise Britnell

Louise Britnell, CFO of The Co-operative Bank, suggests that leaders should provide proactive support for people throughout their organisations.

I've experienced imposter syndrome when I'm doing well. People praise you and then you think: *they're going to find out that I'm not that good*. I've also experienced it when I'm not doing so well, when I've thought: *someone else in this position would be doing better*. I've had a lot of support from my current organisation, which isn't the case everywhere.

Many people in my direct team are new in their positions, or are stepping into wider roles, and I can see similar challenges playing out for them. I like to ensure that the support I have valued is available to my team; I reassure them that we all feel like this.

We have networks in the bank, and I spoke about imposter syndrome to one of them. I went through my experience with a small group of people who could ask questions. So, we actively support people on this topic, outside of the line manager-colleague relationship.

We recognise that this is a real thing and it can be debilitating. So, to get the best out of our people, we think we should talk about it and provide support before they even feel the need to ask for it. >



Olivia Sharp

Olivia Sharp, Partner within Executive Search, Human Resources, at Eton Bridge Partners, believes a misplaced lack of self-belief can hold back leaders in their search for future roles.

In my previous role as an HR Director and in the job that I do now, I see imposter syndrome a lot. People land in front of me for all sorts of reasons – because they're choosing to leave a role, they've been made redundant, they've been fired, they've had a terrible run in with their boss or a key stakeholder – and those things can all chip away at your confidence.

If you're going to perform well in an interview process, you have to believe you can do the job you're going for. I'm always trying to coach my candidates to understand that they wouldn't have an interview if I didn't think they could do the job, and the client wouldn't be interviewing them if they didn't think they might be able to do it.

I spend a lot of my time trying to help people frame their job search in a more positive way. It is about trying to shift the mindsets of people, so that they think: *this isn't about me and my capability; it is about me as a person and whether or not the employer and I can work well together.*

In Criticaleye's latest CEO Research 2022, 67 percent of CEOs said they feel isolated in their roles

Click [here](#) to read more

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Rita Clifton

Rita Clifton, Deputy Chair of John Lewis Partnership, a Criticaleye Board Mentor and author of 'Love Your Imposter: Be Your Best Self, Flaws and All', comments on how to manage imposter syndrome and create a more empathetic culture within your organisation.

What I have come to realise is that imposter feelings, such as insecurity and concern about whether you're good enough, can actually be a useful prompt to stretch yourself more and progress in your working life.

We've all got these drives, whether it's from childhood, school, families or university, and it's a matter of trying to manage the energy of that drive. That is why I've stopped talking about struggling with or overcoming your imposter, but rather about developing a different mindset of loving your imposter.

However, I think you need to make sure that you are managing the situation, not faking it. I disapprove of the advice to 'fake it till you make it', because it encourages people to think about themselves as a third-party construct, which is unhelpful and doesn't lead to the natural humanity that I think we need to see in business.

It has become so much more acceptable to talk about these feelings now, which is good because then we can all recognise that these are things that make us human and, frankly, we need more overtly human beings in charge of organisations. ■

It is ever more important for senior leaders to come together, benchmark ideas and challenge their imposter as they continue to navigate uncertainty and ensure the success and resilience of their organisations.

Click [here](#) for more information on Criticaleye's upcoming events.

Featuring Commentary From:



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