

# Fighting that fraud-day feeling – lifting the lid on Imposter Syndrome

Business coach **Tara Halliday** has written a new book that discusses the issue of Imposter Syndrome, a condition that affects many successful people and leaves them feeling that they aren't good enough for the work position they have been given.

Impostor Syndrome is secretly feeling like a fraud, when you're not, even though others see you as successful.

It affects 70% of high-achievers at some point in their lives, and is experienced as fear of being 'found out', anxiety, isolation and stress that can lead to exhaustion, stress-related illness, burnout and even people quitting their careers.

Sufferers are capable, confident, successful people, so impostor syndrome is not low confidence or poor self-esteem. It's the sudden fear that they are not good enough for the position they've been given, and that someone is going to find them out.

## Success breeds anxiety

I have a PhD in engineering – as a direct result of my own impostor syndrome! And nearly 20 years as a qualified holistic therapist and a certified coach helping people through difficulties of all kinds.

I've done extensive research into impostor syndrome with scientific publication research, experience of my coaching teachers, interviews with many people who volunteered to talk to me about their Impostor Syndrome and of course working with my own clients.

Classic Impostor Syndrome behaviours are perfectionism, discounting praise (they will say that they just 'got lucky'), over-preparing more than is needed, comparing themselves to others, secrecy about how they're feeling, and for some, procrastination. Essentially, the feeling is that they are not good enough. More success increases anxiety as people then believe they won't be able to produce those kind of results again.

Meryl Streep, who has received more acting awards than any other actor in history, expresses her Impostor Syndrome as "You think, 'Why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don't know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?'"

## The loss of a talented individual

Impostor Syndrome strikes high-achievers, but not always all the time. Many times that feeling of not being good enough is linked to one particular activity, possibly one they've been unconsciously

avoiding. But as their role expands due to promotions at work, then they find that 'impostor activity' now needs to be tackled.

A change of role or job can trigger Impostor Syndrome, as can a negative workplace environment that includes criticism, attacking and intolerance for error.

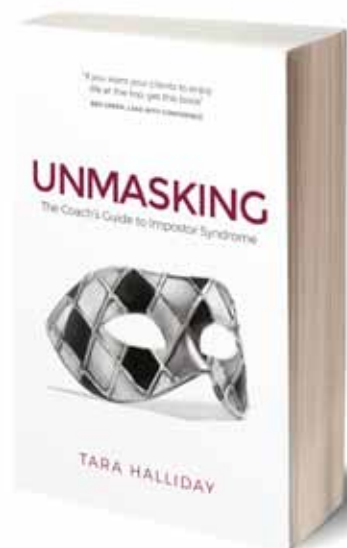
The problem for businesses is that the sufferers keep it a secret and so no-one is aware of the stress they are under. This makes them feel even more isolated and anxious, and the problem escalates. Often people will push through until they collapse with stress, or they may express their stress with more volatile outbursts.

The company will see disruption when the sufferer needs to take time off work to recover, sometimes months, other team members will need to carry their workload, projects may be disrupted or delayed and client relationships may be damaged. This is especially true at more senior levels.

In the extreme, the sufferer will suddenly quit their job and the loss of a genuinely talented individual is added to the cost and disruption of hiring a replacement.

## A false belief

The first step for Impostor Syndrome sufferers is to realise that it's not 'just them', which is how it feels. It affects seven out of ten successful people, so they're not alone. It's also not a weakness or



Business coach Tara Halliday.

Picture: TARA HALLIDAY

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flaw; the basis is a mistaken belief that their worth as a person depends on their success. This is a false belief, but it is learned from early childhood by most people in our society, and it shows up as Impostor Syndrome in highly successful people.

Next the sufferer would need to get some kind of support, whether that's a coach, mentor, counsellor, therapist or a priest – someone they can talk to confidentially.

It is not a psychological disorder, just a pattern of behaviour based on a false belief. Once they have that support, then they can work at changing the beliefs that underlie it, addressing their stress response directly and changing the behaviour patterns that make it worse.

'Unmasking: The Coach's Guide to Impostor Syndrome' is written for coaches, business leaders and mentors to help their clients or

team members overcome Impostor Syndrome – the secret feeling of being a fraud and the fear of being found out.

Unmasking allows you to spot Impostor Syndrome behaviours, understand its cause and restructure old beliefs that keep your client stuck. Specific coaching practices free your client from cycles of Impostor Syndrome and give them lasting tools for success.

■ **Unmasking: The Coach's Guide to Impostor Syndrome** by Tara Halliday is published by East Anglian publisher Rethink Press. Visit [rethinkpress.com](http://rethinkpress.com) for more information.

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