

Imposter Syndrome Can Stop Your Business Growing

Time for Some Clarity

We've all heard of Imposter Syndrome, where people are unable to internalise their accomplishments. What that means is that they believe they are frauds, despite overt evidence of their competence. Apart from being emotionally debilitating it means they don't believe they deserve success.

We're All Imposters Really

It tends to be more prevalent amongst the high achieving and partly that is consequential, because you are more exposed and noticeable than someone who has done less, or isn't striving as much. Einstein, one of the twentieth century's low achievers once said; *"the exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler."*

I'm sure we have all felt ourselves to be imposters at times. Imposter Syndrome doesn't have to be with you all the time. We have all been in situations where we have wondered; 'should I really be here, do I really have the experience / credibility to be listened to?'

It is well documented that high achieving women often suffer from Imposter Syndrome. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and a billionaire in her own right, has highlighted this as a personal demon; *"Every time I was called on in class, I was sure I was about to embarrass myself. Every time I took a test, I was sure that it had gone badly. And every time I didn't embarrass myself – or even excelled – I believed I had fooled everyone yet again. One day the jig would be up."*

Those With Imposter Syndrome Sound Like The Perfect Employees

Imposter Syndrome has a heavy price emotionally. While often sufferers are highly driven over achievers, it can wear you down over time. You spend your

time over compensating. For businesses it means your stars don't shoot for them, but just below, to make sure they keep on achieving.

Businesses Get The Syndrome Too

Often we see a collective Imposter Syndrome develop and become the norm within a business. It tends to emanate from the top team, but the trickle down is invidious. Almost invariably it is borne out of defensiveness and a desire for self-preservation regarding what can be achieved. Of course it usually has the opposite effect, making the business more exposed.

This exposure at its core is a lack of belief in the business. What it stands for, what it delivers, who it delivers to and the level of esteem customers hold it in. Dynamically, however it is more than this. It is a lack of belief in what the business can be. In other words, beyond what it is now. It's a business that isn't prepared to see the stars so it can shoot for them.

Syndrome and a Time of Life

Imposter Syndrome seems to manifest itself most commonly in businesses during that crucial and difficult transition from small / medium to enterprise scale. It's when businesses feel very exposed, where everything has to re-evaluated and only some succeed in making the jump. For these businesses they have to find the right way to believe they can externalise their accomplishments.

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