Exposing Impostor Syndrome
Answering the 5 Ws About Impostor Syndrome

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Impostor Syndrome

- What
- Who
- Why
- Where
- When
- How
What is Impostor Syndrome?

- Feelings of fraudulence, that you’ll get found out, that you are fooling everyone, that some Fraud Detection Force will find you one day and take back your job/family/house
- The belief that despite your work, knowledge, skills, and talents, you will be exposed as a fraud undeserving of fulfilling your role IT duties
- I just lucked into it
- If I make a mistake people will figure out that I don’t know what I’m doing and/or I’m unqualified
INNER CRITIC

IMPOSTOR SYNDROME
What isn't Impostor Syndrome?

- Actually not having necessary competencies – don't forget you do need to keep advancing skills in technology :)
- The discomfort of not knowing something, learning a new job, learning a new skill
- Toxic work environment
“I still have a little [bit of] impostor syndrome, it never goes away, that you’re actually listening to me....It doesn’t go away,” she continued, “that feeling that you shouldn’t take me that seriously. What do I know? I share that with you because we all have doubts in our abilities, about our power and what that power is. If I’m giving people hope then that is a responsibility, so I have to make sure that I am accountable.”

-Michelle Obama, Lawyer & First Lady of USA
If it all falls down falls down falls down falls down
If they solve my life they find me out
Never thought to keep all I have found
I have had my fun if it all falls down

-Jimmy Buffett, Musician & Beach Bum
“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 that I had fooled everyone yet again. One day soon, the jig would be up.”

-Sheryl Sandberg, Technology Leader

in Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead
Who gets it?

Lots of perfectly wonderful people like Michelle Obama, Jimmy Buffett, & Sheryl Sandberg

IT in particular due to our toxic culture that requires performative contempt to belong

Affects women slightly more mostly due to social conditioning
Why does it happen externally?

- Impostor Syndrome
- Wanting to Belong
- Toxic Culture
- Toxic Behaviors
- Shame
Why does it happen internally?

Depression/Anxiety

Family expectations

Childhood labels like “the smart one” or “the responsible one” or “genius”
Where do we feel it most?

- Perfectionist
- Expert
- Natural Genius
- Soloist
- Superhuman
When?

- Most people at some point in their career
How do we deal with it?
Activity 1: Let's write some user stories!

- As a perfectionist, I can never make a mistake so that I can keep my job.
- As an expert, I can never not know the answer so that people won't find out I have no idea what I'm doing most of the time.
- As a 'gifted child' I can never let anyone see me struggle with anything so that no one thinks I'm not smart.
- As an independent worker, I can never ask for help so that I don't look weak.
- As a working mom, I can never say no so that I never disappoint anyone or miss an opportunity.
Activity 2: What does this ideal person look like?

- What do they look like?
- How do they dress?
- How do they conduct themselves?
- How do they enter the room?
- How are they viewed by others?
Is this reasonable?
Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Which parts are doable?
Activity 3: Adjust your user stories

- As a human, I can make a mistake so that I and others can learn from it
- As a human, I can admit I don't know the answer so that we can find the answer together
- As a human, I can struggle with a problem so that no one feels pressure to look smart all the time
- As a human, I can ask for help so that I can learn from and teach others
- As a human, I can learn say no so that I focus on what matters
Humans:

- Embrace mistakes
- Keep providing value (don’t need to be an expert)
- Stop comparing yourself
- Holding back robs everyone
- Say what you can - someone needs to hear it
- Find your strengths
- Faking it can work
Success! Now what?

- Accept some credit in your successes
- Accept praise
- Keep a file of proof of value (acknowledgements, thank yous, good reviews, etc)
- Find cheerleaders - peers who can support you and correct your incorrect beliefs
- This is an iterative process – always building on MVP.
- Realize NOBODY knows what they are doing, we are all finding our way through.
WE ARE ALL WINGING IT!

“I’m a fraud! Oh God, they’re on to me! I’m a fraud!’ So you just try to ride the egomania when it comes and enjoy it, and then slide through the idea of fraud.” - Tina Fey
THANK YOU!
Resources and further reading

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women: Why Capable Women Suffer from Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It* by Dr Valerie Young
- https://www.themarysue.com/michelle-obama-imposter-syndrome-secret/
- Sheryl Sandberg in *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*