

Imposter Syndrome: Can it Help in Overcoming Career Roadblocks? A Personal Reflection

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Most people experience high and low phases in their career. In this article, the writer uses her personal experience and the concept of “imposter syndrome” to suggest that this can be a hidden roadblock for some, especially if there have been periods when they were experiencing difficulties in their lives.

My Past

During my primary school years, I was a high achiever, constantly coming home with high academic grades and also a sports captain. Then, in year 7, my life took a change for the worse. Before I completed year 10, I had dropped out of school and disappeared from my family for two years. Then, one day, I had an epiphany: I was going to become a strong independent woman. Even though my personal challenges did not end there, I knew that the future life I wanted for myself and my family could only be achieved by further study and career advancement.

Current Work Position and Achievements to Date

Fast forward to today. I am fortunate enough to work as a Compliance Officer, Planning and Development, in Local Government. With a list of qualifications, including a Master of Business Administration obtained through the Australian Institute of Business, I feel confident that I have the professional, emotional, academic, and intellectual capabilities to become a next-generation leader at my organisation.

Various Challenges to Overcome

In my opinion, the main challenge that I had to overcome to get my current role is that I am now too qualified. However, whilst I have applied for leadership roles within my organisation, I have not been successful for those roles that I am suitably qualified for. The overwhelming feedback received from hiring managers is that the successful applicants have over 20 years of experience.

The Problem

I have been fortunate enough to be identified as a future leader at my organisation. However, as I reflect on my capabilities, I wonder why I am in a position where those capabilities are not used to their full potential or whether my capabilities are relevant to the organisation. As I research articles on Imposter Syndrome, I wonder if this could be my issue. As I did not complete high school or go to university after high school, I sometimes feel like my academic achievements and skills are either ignored or still not good enough. More importantly, I feel like the peers at my organisation have ulterior motives, such as the glass ceiling syndrome, age, misogyny, 'old mates club', or even nepotism, which could be several reasons why I have not been promoted.

There is no denying in recent times, that developing leaders have been a major focus of many organisations. Studies conducted by Deloitte (2016) indicate that employees in my generation (millennials) change organisations approximately every three years [Millennial Survey 2016 | Deloitte | Social impact, Innovation](#). More importantly, Zappe (2016) argues that the Deloitte (2016) survey current results find that 71 percent of the millennials surveyed are more likely to leave their organisations in the next two years as they are unhappy with how their leadership skills are being developed [They're Not Job Hoppers, But Your Millennials Are Getting Ready to Leave - ERE](#).

As millennial employees make up the majority of the workforce [Millennials are largest generation in the U.S. labor force | Pew Research Center](#), and retention of millennials is a challenge to many organisations. HERZBERG theory explains that in order to keep employee job satisfaction alive, in particular, those millennials working in the office environment, leaders should provide them with a sense of achievement, praise and recognise them for their work, provide interesting and varied jobs, provide responsibility, opportunities for promotion and opportunities to learn new skills.

The challenge in my organisation is, in my opinion, that whilst much leadership development is occurring, there are limited leadership vacancies within the structural hierarchy for the next generation of leaders to be promoted, which in turn could have a negative effect on an organisation due to the talent they have invested in, leaving for external career advancement.

In my case, I am a millennial and feel dissatisfied that I have not been successful in career advancement and find myself looking for external leadership opportunities.

The Concept of Imposter Syndrome

The first paper to use the term imposter phenomenon was published by Dr. Pauling Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes in 1978 [The Research | The Imposter Syndrome](#), which followed by an influx of researchers adding to their research including Attard (2021) who states that people who suffer from the syndrome reveal the following behaviours: 1) perfectionists, 2) superheroes, 3) experts, 4) geniuses, and 5) soloists [Imposter Syndrome Defined: 5 Fascinating Research Findings \(positivepsychology.com\)](#). Even though these five behavioural traits are like the behavioural traits of great leaders, Psychology Today (2021) argues that people with imposter syndrome feel like frauds, even though the abundant evidence of their success [Imposter Syndrome | Psychology Today Australia](#).

On review of these behavioural traits, I do like things to be perfect at home and the workplace (perfectionism). I have helped many colleagues with support, guidance and have been there for them through difficult times (superheroes). I have provided many peers with expert advice, which has been beneficial in decision making (experts), and have received comments from peers regarding my investigative and problem-solving skills (geniuses). Finally, I am more than happy to work alone. According to Meadows (2021), Imposter Syndrome can affect anyone, and up to 70% of adults may experience the syndrome at least once in their life [Overcoming Imposter Syndrome - Ask Me Anything Panel | University of Delaware \(udel.edu\)](#).

Conclusion

On one hand, I have learned that even though I may have internal factors that may be affecting my opportunity for career advancement, I am not alone with this feeling that others may perceive me, and even I may see myself, as a fraud. However, research shows that there are strategies to overcome the syndrome which is why I am advocating to others by writing this article.



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