



## Conquering Imposter Syndrome

**Just because you're swimming in a bigger pond doesn't mean you don't belong there**

BY ANDREA THOMPSON AND JESSICA GOMEZ

**H**ave you ever received a compliment from a colleague but found it difficult to accept? You might have been dismissive or had difficulty acknowledging that you did a good job. You might have been beset with thoughts such as “I feel like a fraud,” “I really don't belong in this role,” and “Someone will find out soon enough that I really don't know what I'm doing.” These feelings might indicate more than just a lack of self-confidence. You might have “imposter syndrome.”

Imposter syndrome manifests differently than a confidence deficit. Author Pauline Rose Clance defines it as self-perceived intellectual phoniness in her 1986 book *The Impostor Phenomenon: When Success Makes You Feel Like a Fake*, and it might encourage those thoughts.

Imposter syndrome runs deeper than a lack of self-confidence. It represents a wide gap between who you perceive yourself as being and who you think you need to be in order to be a successful leader, according to 2019 research from Clare Josa, author of *Ditching Imposter Syndrome*. If you lack self-confidence and are riddled with doubt about the inability to carry out a task, the focus is on what you can or cannot do—a surface-level concern. But when you experience an imposter moment, it isn't whether or not you feel capable of executing a task, it is your perception of who you think you are versus the person you present yourself as.

### Building Self-Awareness

In order to close that perception gap, people suffering from imposter syndrome can benefit from support that builds self-awareness and strategies to address the syndrome. If you think you might be suffering from it, Jessamy Hibberd's *The Imposter*

*Cure: How to Stop Feeling Like a Fraud and Escape the Mind-Trap of Imposter Syndrome* recommends developing a network of social support. Begin by locating like-minded women in leadership who believe that they are their sisters' keepers.

Next, increase your self-awareness in terms of understanding the extent to which you contribute to colleagues' imposter feelings. Recognize and eliminate competitiveness, jealousy, spitefulness, and the me-first mindset. This will help manage your actions with colleagues.

Third, be aware that imposter syndrome is not a female-only concern. There are differences in how it impacts men and women. Research shows that although men handle imposter syndrome differently than women, the phenomenon impacts males and females equally. Interestingly, the research also shows that the likelihood that imposter syndrome will affect job performance for men in senior-level positions is greatly reduced, while performance for females in senior positions is impacted at a much higher rate.

Finally, develop an awareness of how gender-related biases and societal expectations fuel imposter moments. Societal expectations for women historically revolve around family; even in this day and age, going beyond those expectations can feel like pushing the envelope.

### Overcoming Imposter Moments

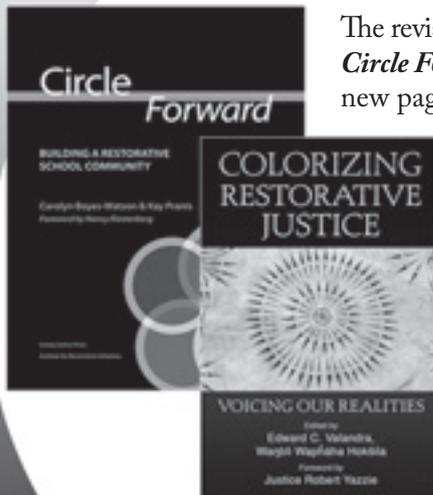
Women in leadership who excel outside traditional gender roles are likely to experience imposter moments and will need strategies to overcome them. Attack them from the root: Those feelings probably first emerged as voices of self-doubt. How can you fend off debilitating feelings and words?

1. **Take back control.** Start by acknowledging the inner voice, and determine if it is coming from a place of judgment. Could it be that you have been judged for who you are and bullied into changing into something others want you to be? Engage in a dialogue with that inner voice, and make it a two-way conversation. Confront that voice, and tell *it* who you are.
2. **Speak of your value as often as you can.** This is one way to manage what you say to yourself about yourself. Start with “I deserve to be here.” Follow up with “I am good at what I do, and I’m willing to build upon my successes” and “I am open to compliments and constructive feedback as I continue my growth.”
3. **Grow in your space.** As you advance from one level to another, your space might grow from pond to ocean. Jump in and learn to swim. You belong there, and it is OK to practice your skills and advance them in the new space.
4. **Don’t compare yourself with others.** Now that you are in a new space, compare yourself only to yourself, and only in terms that outline how well you are doing today compared to how well you did yesterday. As you swim in a bigger pond, let no voice—external or internal—tell you that you aren’t ready for this level of success. Bask in it. You earned it!
5. **Appreciate and acknowledge your journey.** Thank others for supporting that journey and accepting and acknowledging your input. Pat yourself on the back.

You did a lot of work to reach a position of leadership. Accept that fact and know that you belong there. ●

*Andrea Thompson and Jessica Gomez are fellows at NAESP’s Center for Women in Leadership.*

## Books to help us address race & racism in schools



The revised edition of our best-seller *Circle Forward* is out! It features 70 new pages dealing with issues of racism, including new Circles on that topic.

And for deeper insight into racism and settler colonialism as it plays out in actual restorative settings, we have *Colorizing Restorative Justice: Voicing Our Realities*.

Pricing and more information on our web site!

### Living Justice Press

livingjusticepress.org • 651.695.1008

St. Paul, MN 55105 • ljpress@aol.com

QUANTITY  
DISCOUNTS  
AVAILABLE  
CALL US!

WE ACCEPT  
PURCHASE  
ORDERS

ULINE

JANITORIAL  
ESSENTIALS

ORDER BY 6 PM FOR  
SAME DAY SHIPPING

COMPLETE CATALOG 1-800-295-5510 uline.com