



Have you ever been at work and someone asked you to do something, and you think, 'who me? Why are you asking me to do this? I don't know what I'm doing!'

When I started a new position I was about a week in and my boss had asked me to go before city council and advocate for why our organization needed more money.

After he asked me, that was my reaction- 'who me?! I've never done anything like this before. I don't know what I'm doing. Why don't you ask somebody else? I'm not qualified for this.'

Luckily, though it felt unlucky at the time, my boss didn't take that as a reason or an excuse. I went ahead and spoke before the city council and I'm here to tell the tale. I lived through it and to let you know that feelings of 'I don't know what I'm doing', 'I don't feel fully qualified for this' are incredibly normal and to be expected.

We often refer to them as imposter syndrome and we often refer to them in the negative.

Today we're going to talk today about how you can make imposter syndrome work to your benefit as a leader.

Imposter syndrome is really just something in our brains and our mindset. It is psychological and it causes us to doubt our accomplishments and our competency and give us feelings of being a fraud.

The opposite of imposter syndrome is something called the Dunning-Kruger effect where people are legitimately not qualified or competent, but they feel like they are. Imposter syndrome is 'I have the capability and competence. I just don't feel it'.

Kruger is 'I don't have the capability and confidence but I feel like I do.'

So there's really not any good benefits to the Dunning Kruger effect, but there are a lot of benefits to imposter Syndrome.

This is a great quote from Mike Dooley that I want to share with you. I'm going to read it out loud. If you want to close your eyes and take the words in please feel free.

*The one thing all famous authors, world-class athletes, business tycoons, singers, actors, and celebrated achievers in any field have in common is that they all began their journeys when they were none of these things. Yet still they began their journeys.*

Part of the challenge with Imposter syndrome is it catches us by surprise. We expect to be really good at things before we've ever done them and when we're not, then we start to doubt ourselves. Instead of letting Imposter syndrome affect us in our work we can use it to our benefit to become stronger leaders. The first place is in our growth.

If we always felt completely competent and confident in everything we were doing it



means we're not growing. Anytime we grow we're going to have feelings of discomfort and not knowing what we're doing because we don't know what we're doing. We're just starting something out.

Imposter syndrome reminds us that we're stretching ourselves. We're getting outside of the box. We're moving out of our comfort zone- all those cliches we like to use all the time. It doesn't make them any less true. That feeling of growth is really important even though it's uncomfortable.

The second way that Imposter syndrome makes us stronger leaders is through empathy. When we go through that experience ourselves, we can understand our staff when we're asking them to do things that they don't feel they're capable of or they don't yet have the confidence to believe in their own potential.

It helps us not dismiss those experiences and those feelings and to help normalize what that feels like when you're trying something new.

In anything we do as a leader, modeling is the best way that we can support our teams by doing as we say and do and allowing our staff to learn by example. It's one of the most powerful ways to impact our staff.

When staff see us stretching and trying new things and taking risks and stepping outside of that comfort zone, it gives them permission and inspiration to do the same. When we are honest and vulnerable about the challenges we experience along the way it gives our staff permission and encouragement to do the same.

And finally humility. In all things, leadership is a balance and it is also a balance between humility and confidence. It's important to be confident as a leader. It's important not to be too confident. Having humility means you know that you are not perfect. You know that there is always growth ahead and that humility will help push you to make that growth.

If you are overly confident if you have that Dunning- Kruger effect going on, you don't think you need to learn a thing and that of course is going to prevent your growth.

Not all sides of imposter syndrome are positive admittedly. When we let it prevent us from stepping into our own power and our own ability, then it can be damaging.

If Imposter syndrome is so strong that we can't push through it, then that can really hurt us as leaders.

So how can you embrace the positive sides of it but also work through the negative sides?

The first thing to do is be prepared and don't be so surprised when you try something new and you're not very good at it.



When we try something new and we stumble and fall and make mistakes- that should be an expected part of the process.

As we work with our teams as they're trying new things, help them coach them through the process as they make mistakes and fumble and fall and normalize the process of discomfort. Don't let discomfort prevent you from growing into your potential.

The second way to help overcome the negative sides of imposter syndrome is to shift your mindset.

Instead of saying, 'I'm terrible at this. I'm no good. I'm such a fraud', you can tell yourself, 'this is new and it's hard and I can get better. This is uncomfortable now, but if I do the work it will become easier later on. I've gone through this before and I've come out the other side. I can get through this too.'

Mindset work is so powerful when it comes to Imposter syndrome and everything we do.

This is another way that your experiences can benefit your team by helping them shift their mindsets.

Finally get better.

I know that's not an answer you may want to hear, but imposter syndrome can also put up a mirror to where we need to grow.

When we have those moments of not feeling comfortable, it's quite possible in a lot of situations we're not yet competent at that thing.

Imposter syndrome reminds us that we're not yet good at this thing and let's push ourselves to get better at this thing.

My training when I was in college was to be a teacher. I still teach to this day. I absolutely love it. Before I got in front of a classroom, you could not tell me any different. When it got closer and closer to my time to actually teach, I almost left the program altogether. In my brain, I was absolutely convinced I couldn't do it.

Eventually, thankfully with lots of support I did it and am still doing it now. Before I knew I could do it, I was able to get over the mindset and realize I could do it, I had to have the humility to say, 'yes. I got up in front of the class. I'm very proud of that. But boy do I have a long way to go.'

I've come a long way. I still have a long way to go, but I continue to invest to get better.

With your team as well, continue to invest in helping them get better.

So, the most important question for you to ask yourself is, how can you use Imposter syndrome to make yourself a better leader?