



# **Diagnose and Defeat Imposter Syndrome Once and For All**

**Michael W**

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>WHO SUFFERS FROM IMPOSTER SYNDROME?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>HOW IMPOSTER SYNDROME HOLDS YOU BACK</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>ARE YOU AN IMPOSTER OR JUST MODEST?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SELF-TEST FOR IMPOSTER SYNDROME</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>DEALING WITH IMPOSTER SYNDROME</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>LEARN TO KEEP IMPOSTER SYNDROME AWAY FOR GOOD</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>FOLLOW-UP</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>	<b>31</b>

# Introduction

What in your life makes you feel that you are legitimate?

We are taught as children to seek out the approval of those that are around us. We learn from this when we are doing things the right way. When we are praised or complimented, we beam with pride so we naturally try to keep our eyes on other people as a method of figuring out if we are on the right track.

Our confidence is undermined when we seek outside validation. When, at some point, we don't get the feedback that we want to receive or even that we feel we deserve, we can start to think that we are no good at the things we actually excel in because no one gave us the feedback we needed.

Welcome to the blooming of Imposter Syndrome.

The problem of not validating ourselves became a habit. We think we don't have any accomplishments because we don't take the time to recognize them. It is even possible to become convinced that we really don't know what we are doing.

You are now getting deeper into the world of Imposter Syndrome.

You will find out more about the Imposter Syndrome and the difference between it and a feeling of being naturally cautious or having some doubt in yourself, in this book. You will also be able to self-diagnose if you have Imposter Syndrome. If you do, don't worry as Imposter Syndrome is pretty normal and you can easily defeat it.

# What is Imposter Syndrome?

You start to have that little bit of uneasiness that maybe you don't know what you are doing then you start to feel anxious. Welcome to the start of Imposter Syndrome. It is worrying that you are in over your head and you are certain that you don't know what you are doing and everyone around you knows that as a fact or they are about to find out. You feel that everything about you is going to collapse. All of your past accomplishments are about to fall, like a house of cards.

Since Imposter Syndrome is tied to your emotions it makes it an unpleasant experience. What is even worse is that Imposter Syndrome negates all of your achievements, honours and accomplishments. It is as though they never happened.

Imposter Syndrome is perhaps one of the most annoying conditions that you will experience. There are pretty good odds that you will experience it at some point in your life. Imposter Syndrome was first identified in 1978 and has been tracked and studied throughout the years. It is currently thought that at least 70% of people will experience Imposter Syndrome at some point. Social media's impact on our lives will probably make this number climb even higher.

Imposter Syndrome is:

- Being crippled by self-doubt
- Needing to be absolutely better or do more than everyone around you
- Not being able to accept a compliment
- Not being able to see your achievements
- Self-sabotage
- Trying to be perfect
- Thinking that someone else could do your job better
- Not deserving what you have
- Fear of being exposed as a “fake”

You are not displaying a healthy caution or even the normal uncertainty when you are trying something new with Imposter Syndrome. You are also not downplaying

your achievement or displaying modesty or humility when you have Imposter Syndrome.

We will explain these traits later when talking about different types of “Imposters.”

Why does Imposter Syndrome show up?

## **The Past**

If you have been pushed by someone to accomplish even more, you may have wondered if what you had done wasn't good enough. This type of constant pressure from parents or teachers caused you to internalize a feeling of not being able to measure up. This feeling is further reinforced if you have been criticized by someone., especially if you feel that this criticism was unfair. The more this had happened to you when you were young, the more likely that you would experience Imposter Syndrome when you became an adult.

## **Peers**

It is often the case of where we stand in a group relies on our past accomplishments. You need to have more rewards, achievements or recognition than the person next to you to have social credibility. You push harder to get ahead because of this but you also build feelings of inferiority as you believe the people around you are all high achievers outperforming you at every turn.

## **Friends**

Not every friendship you have is going to be healthy. It is somewhat common to find a friend who is only around to see the disaster. When you fail, they feel better about themselves. These people are usually immature or lack self-esteem. Unfortunately, the damage they do to your self-esteem can be severe. They need you to fail so that they can feel good about themselves, so they will point out every flaw in you and talk about every time you didn't measure up to the task.



## **Groupthink**

Being different or unique is terrifying. This is a way of thinking that has lots of emotion attached that seems to be hardwired into our DNA. When we were hunter/gathers being part of the crowd was a method of staying safe. It was basically a death sentence if you were removed from the pack for doing something different. Even today, when we have outgrown this need of being in a group for safety, we still fear being alienated from the group. This is why being different is so terrifying and peer pressure can be so powerful. If this fear is in you and so strong that you actually loath not fitting in, you can get to a point where Imposter Syndrome becomes a way of life and you sabotage yourself before you even get started.

## **Birth Order**

It seems that firstborn children have a higher chance of experiencing and suffering from Imposter Syndrome. There is no real conclusive evidence why, it is thought that there is a lot of parental pressure on their firstborn child and not as much on following children. This may be that they want their firstborn to set an example, or that they just change their behaviour as they become more comfortable with being parents. This pressure does make a difference on how the children grow up and think about themselves.

## **Parenting style**

Your childhood was more likely a protected life than those of previous generations if you had grown up in the last 20 to 30 years. As adults, children who grew up in a careful, protected environment are going to be less sure of themselves. They didn't have to see what they were made of and push themselves. They also didn't have to make difficult decisions and cope with the outcomes. You are more likely to feel like an imposter when you are not sure of yourself. This is not the case with someone who has a lot of confidence built into them through their life experiences.

## **Genealogy**

Parents with more than one child can tell that certain traits seem to be born into the child. They can identify the brave child and the timid child very quickly. Some people who worry more about fitting in seem to internalize negativity. If this sounds like you, then you may have more trouble with Imposter Syndrome. You can escape this of course. You are not an imposter all of your life. You just need to learn and work harder with some of the coping strategies that will be discussed elsewhere in this book.

# Who Suffers from Imposter Syndrome?

Imposter Syndrome is quite common. The following quotes from famous people may surprise you.

“Sometimes I wake up in the morning before going off to a shoot, and I think, I can’t do this. I’m a fraud... I’m there thinking, 'Oh my God, I’m rubbish, and everyone is going to see it. They’ve cast the wrong person.’” – Kate Winslet

“No matter what we’ve done, there comes the point where you think, 'How did I get here? When are they going to discover that I am, in fact, a fraud and take everything away from me?’” – Tom Hanks

“You think, 'Why would anyone want to see me again in a movie? And I don’t know how to act anyway, so why am I doing this?’” – Meryl Streep

“I have written 11 books, but each time I think, 'uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’” – Maya Angelou

“I have spent my years since Princeton, while at law school and in my various professional jobs, not feeling completely a part of the worlds I inhabit. I am always looking over my shoulder wondering if I measure up.” – Sonia Sotomayor

These people are famous for what they have accomplished yet at some point in time they felt like an imposter.

At some point in time everyone has experienced Imposter Syndrome. Remember the statistic from the rigorous study earlier that said 70% of people had at some point experienced Imposter Syndrome? A more informal study says that this number is more like 87% or could even be higher.

No matter how you categorize people, rich or poor, by gender or sexuality, by education level, background or their location, anyone can feel like an imposter at some point in their lives.

All of this can feel pretty daunting when you start to consider it, but there is one more factor to consider. How people are held back by Imposter Syndrome.

# How Imposter Syndrome Holds You Back

- Your brain is flooded with negative thoughts
- You procrastinate more
- You take a long time to get things done
- You are uncertain
- You are unsure of the outcome so you don't try new things
- You miss or don't see opportunities
- You can't judge what you are really capable of
- Your goals are impossible to achieve
- You overwork so your family life suffers
- You feel that you are not worthy of your partner so your relationship suffers
- You burnout faster than others
- You suffer adverse health effects
- You don't network or build new relationships
- You tend to overachieve
- You are more anxious than others
- You fail more even when you try to achieve things
- You suffer from depression and suicidal thoughts.

# **Are You an Imposter or Just Modest?**

It is a tricky question to answer. In this chapter you will find out about the different kinds of imposters and then there will be some questions that should help to clarify things a bit more.

## **The Different Types of Imposters**

In her book “The Secret Thoughts of Professional Women”, Dr. Valerie Young studied Imposter Syndrome and conclude there were five different types of imposters. Each one showed different traits of Imposter Syndrome. While the book title refers to Imposter Syndrome in women, this is because Imposter Syndrome was initially discovered when studying workplace issues that women have. Remember that anyone can experience Imposter Syndrome. The take away is the classifications of Imposter Syndrome.

Here are the five classifications from the research and book:

- The Perfectionist
- The Superman / Superwoman
- The Natural Genius
- The Soloist
- The Expert

You are probably a blend of two or more of these types. This makes it frustrating and also interesting to figure out what type of imposter you may be. Read through the descriptions and note those things that sound familiar to you.

### **The Perfectionist**

The perfectionist sets the bar for anything they do really high. While some say this is a good thing since they assume that perfectionists are good at doing things, this is not as true as you may think. While they want to do things well, it takes a long

time to get anything done because things are never quite good enough or will need to be worked on again, and again, and again...

They become procrastinators and micromanagers when you put them in charge of projects since they need to be in control of the outcome. In light of Imposter Syndrome, this can take a nasty turn.

Since they are never going to get anything right to satisfy their requirements, they tend to beat themselves up for not achieving their goals the way they want to achieve them. They view themselves as a failure even though they have surpassed what was expected and they will continue to see themselves this way even if they exceed the level of excellence they have already achieved.

### **Superman/Superwomen**

This is the personality type to turn to when you need something done. These people will take on any task no matter how busy they are. They are overachievers who put in more time at the office than anyone else. If they do eventually go home, they are probably still working on the weekend. Superman or Superwomen don't believe in days off and they don't just do this in one area of their lives. They view their work-life, home life and even parenting as quantity over quality no matter the costs.

Why do they do this?

They are the person who needs to have their work constantly validated by others because they believe that they are worthless. Even though they disbelieve the praise they receive they are always looking to receive more. These people can never enjoy the outcome of the enormous amount of work they do every day since Imposter Syndrome tells them there is still more that needs to be done

### **Natural Genius**

The word genius brings up images of Ken Jennings or Elon Musk, high achievers who are very smart. The natural genius is a bit different though. These people are

very good in some areas of their lives but are nothing special in other areas. They are typically good in one very specific area.

There are natural geniuses in math that understand numbers and usually did reasonably well in school until they had to show their work to others.

A natural genius may instinctively understand things but they are usually not good at explaining how they came to that answer. When they come up against things that they don't know and have to work at understanding it they become frustrated. They just don't understand how to learn, at least the first time they try. Imposter Syndrome then starts and they become frustrated because they are supposed to know everything but now, they feel they have failed. They might fight against learning itself and then get themselves caught up in self-doubt which can cause them to continue on a downward spiral.

Why does this happen? They are used to knowledge coming easily to them. They feel that their genius has betrayed them and they now realize that they are not infallible. This single failure, in their mind, negates everything they have previously accomplished.

## **Soloist**

If the last thing you ever wanted was to have others find out that you don't know what you are doing, then you understand the soloist. This is the person who does everything on their own because they think they are an imposter. They are the lone wolf in business or life.

Though not always the case, soloist sometimes seem antisocial. They push people away because they fear being found out. They may really want help or at least they want the support of others.

This could eventually change if they have been going solo for a long time. Even the hardcore soloist may start to resent that they can not easily get help on things when others have no problem having people help them when in the soloists' mind, they have to do everything by themselves.



## **The Expert**

The mantra of the Expert may well be “I need one more thing.” No matter how familiar they are with what they are doing and the processes involved, they still feel they do not have the skills or knowledge necessary to get things done. They want to do a little more research, double and triple check themselves constantly or start to look for more training.

Not everyone who likes to do more research is an Expert. These imposters have the feeling that they are not qualified or capable of doing the task at hand. When we try something new, we all feel this way. However, if burying yourself in certifications, college courses and constant study and you still feel unprepared you are probably an Expert. This is true if the need to learn more is actually stopping you from starting the project.

This is not a comprehensive list of all types of imposters but it is a good starting point in your understanding of them. You may be slipping into Imposter Syndrome when you start to second-guess yourself, feel unqualified or start to panic when someone praised you or promoted you.

There is one crucial thing all of the types of imposters you have read about have in common: they never feel that they belong where they now are or deserve the praise they receive.

# Self-Test for Imposter Syndrome

So, are you an imposter? Here are some questions that you should carefully consider.

## The Perfectionist

- Is time never enough to complete the same tasks as others do?
- Will things ever be good enough?
- You never declare a project finished because you continue to tweak it?
- Is accepting compliments difficult for you?
- When receiving recognition for something, do you feel that they actually picked the wrong person?
- When you turn in okay work, do you feel that you have gotten away with something?
- Are things ever done?
- Do people call you a perfectionist?

## Superman/Superwoman

- Do people know you as the person to get things done?
- When you are busy, do you still take on new tasks?
- You do more than those around you but you still feel that you could do more?
- Are you always the last one to go home?
- Your family wonders where you are?
- Even though you are financially okay, do you still work extra hours throughout the week and weekend?
- Are you proud of all the work you get done?
- Do you still feel that you could do even more work?
- Do people call you an overachiever?
- Are you doing many projects at the same time?
- Do you start things but have trouble finishing them?

## **Natural genius**

- Are there some things that come easily to you?
- When you don't understand things immediately do you become frustrated?
- You are knowledgeable in some areas but you still struggle learning new things?
- Can you explain your area of expertise easily?
- If you don't immediately understand something, do you feel like a failure?
- Does having someone explain something to you make you feel less than smart?
- If you don't understand something, do you think others see you as less intelligent?

## **Soloist**

- Do you feel that you are pretending to be something that you are not?
- Do you choose projects that allow you to work alone?
- Are you a micromanager?
- Have you been accused on not being a team player?
- Do you avoid relationships with people so they do not find the real you?
- If you are working in a team, do you take on pieces of the project where you can work alone?

## **Expert**

- Do you show people how much you know by getting more certifications and degrees?
- In spite of the degrees etc., do you still believe that you don't know enough?
- Do you do so much research that you find it difficult to start the project?
- Even though you know the facts you constantly recheck them because you don't trust yourself?
- You won't apply for a job unless you have every qualification listed?
- If you are hired into a position that you are not trained to do, do you panic?
- Have you been surprised by a promotion that you feel you didn't deserve?

- If you are promoted or commended for something, do you feel lucky?
- Do you downplay your achievements believing that anyone could accomplish them?
- Instead of recognizing your own achievements you insist that they were completed because of other people?

### **General questions to ask yourself**

- Are you where you are today because you feel that it was due to connections or other people helping you?
- Do you believe that others are giving you praise only because they are being polite?
- When you receive praise, do you tell people that you were faking it?
- Did you accomplish what you did because you feel you were faking it?
- Even though you are sure of what you are saying to others do you still minimize your contribution as you are not sure of yourself?
- Do other people have it easier than you in your own mind?
- Do you need other people to validate you?
- Are you scared by success?

Everyone will, at some point in their life, experience some of these symptoms. You need to look for a pattern or frequency of when you say yes to these questions.

If you did say yes to many of these questions, don't panic. You are not a failure or a bad person if you suffer from Imposter Syndrome. You are just at this point in your life right now and there are some things you can do to get you back on track.

# **Dealing with Imposter Syndrome**

You will now find several methods that can help you to deal with Imposter Syndrome. You will be able to reclaim your life and enjoy your successes. At the end of this chapter, you will find ways to keep Imposter Syndrome out of your life so that you can stop feeling like a failure.

## **Dealing with Imposter Syndrome**

To deal with Imposter Syndrome you first need to be aware of your thoughts then take action to rewire those thoughts. Some of these tips will use distraction techniques and other times you will be using a different internal script when you are dealing with that voice in your head. These tips will help to keep Imposter Syndrome from ruling your life but they are not permanent fixes.

## **Everyone is an Imposter**

Remember the earlier statistic that said that everyone feels like an imposter sometimes. This is normal so don't beat yourself up over Imposter Syndrome.

## **When bothered by an imposter, name it**

When you are dealing with an imposter, it is sometimes helpful to distance yourself from the thoughts of being an imposter. Say that it is only the soloist trying to get me to be alone. Or give it a name you can laugh at. It will no longer hold any power over you if you can laugh at it.

## **Assess your abilities honestly**

It is a lie that you are not good at anything but when you start to think that you are an imposter you start to believe this. Everyone is good at something so start keeping a list of your talents and add to it when you discover more. When you are feeling like an imposter, re-read your list to see how good you really are.

## **When you accomplish something, admit to it**

Seeing any success is difficult for an imposter. Start to recognize your accomplishment when you finish something to break the cycle. Tell people about it as sharing the news is good for you.

## **Celebrate when you are successful**

Call attention to the projects you finish or do well. Use small rewards for yourself or set up a brag-board in your home where you can see it so you can actually see how many things you have done right.

## **Act quickly**

When you tell yourself that you are not ready, Imposter Syndrome is great at getting you to procrastinate. Tell yourself that this is the day you will start that project that you have been doing the preparation for. Don't talk yourself out of it, act quickly.

## **Don't wait for external validation**

People with Imposter Syndrome tend to look for other people to give them the reassurance that they are doing the right things. However, they don't always get that reassurance. Stop looking for external validation and start to validate yourself.

## **Don't fear criticism**

Maybe you are not the best at everything you try but stop listening to the list of faults being given to you by your imposter. Look for someone you trust to give you constructive criticism. They are usually more honest and kinder than you would be to yourself. They will also let you understand where you really do need to improve and also where you are good now.

## **Look to make small improvements**

When you want to act on some constructive criticism, don't listen to the imposter's mindset of all-or-nothing. Start slowly making small improvements to those areas of concern. You will not burn out and will feel better about yourself.

## **Ask for help when you need it**

When you are struggling, Imposter Syndrome tries to hide this state. You sink faster when this happens. Don't suffer in silence and try to hide your uncertainty, ask for help.

## **Accept assistance when offered**

After you ask for help, accept the assistance that is offered. This is a good habit even when you haven't asked for help. The saying "many hands make light work" is true.

## **Know what you need and when you need it**

There is no reason to do additional research or get additional certifications and education if they have nothing to do with your current project or task. These things are just the signs of an out-of-control Imposter Syndrome. Focus on what you need to learn now in the present, at this moment and what you will need for the next part of the project or task. The future is a long way off.

## **Ask questions**

Because they are afraid that others will notice their apparent lack of understanding, imposters rarely ask for clarification. It would be better to get all of the information you need when you need it instead of worrying about what others may think.

## **Find people to support you**

If you want to feel better quickly about feeling like an imposter, tell a trusted friend or mentor how you feel. Studies have shown that when you tell a friend you do better than someone suffering through Imposter Syndrome on their own. Make sure that the person you find is someone who you can be honest with.

## **Become a mentor**

This may sound odd, but if you don't feel strong in an area where others think you are an expert, consider teaching what you know to others. You will be surprised at how much you really do know and you will also gain confidence in your own skills.

## **Enjoy the imperfection**

Does it really matter if you are not perfect? It does to an imposter, but not really to the rest of the world. In some cultures, a flawed item is considered more beautiful than a perfect one.

## **Don't hide the flaws**

If you are flawed, let others see them instead of trying to hide them. Share your rough draft or send out a less than perfect proposal. Letting others see the work in progress is okay.

## **Get rid of comparisons**

When you are constantly comparing yourself to those people around you, you will never feel good about yourself. A simple life truth is that there will always be someone better than you in something. Don't dwell on this just accept it and move on with your life.



## **Refocus your energies**

In order to survive, Imposter Syndrome needs to be fed. When you are wrong, instead of being caught up in this thinking, shift your attention to something else. Help someone else right now instead.

## **Accept compliments**

What do you do when you are complimented? Don't avoid taking credit or negate the accomplishment. Just say "Thank you" and then note the compliment. This allows you to read it again later. Keep the compliments you receive; they are worth it.

## **Do something**

You can become stalled when you are facing Imposter Syndrome. You either procrastinate because you don't think you can actually do the task, or you never start because you are sure that you will ultimately fail. Find an activity that you can do when this happens. Doing anything is better than doing nothing at all. You may not immediately start on what you are procrastinating on, but you will find it is easier to get to work on it later if you have actually been doing something else.

## **Fake it**

The imposter may say you are faking it but so what? Is that a bad thing? We all sometimes need to fake a little confidence or keep going making believe that we know what we are doing. There is no reason to feel bad about doing this if it is working.

## **Know you can't do it all**

If you get caught up in the perfection type or start overachieving where you are making everyone and yourself crazy, you may need a humility check. You have to remind yourself that no one can do it all, so why are you trying to do it all?

## **Expect to make mistakes**

Don't internalize your mistakes and allow your inner imposter to use them against you. Nothing is ever going to be 100% perfect, mistakes happen. This is a normal part of any process.

## **Recognize your mortality**

Do you really want to spend your days on Earth feeling like an imposter? Focus on the big picture and see how you want to live your life and how you want to be remembered when you are no longer here.

## **Own your successes**

Take pride in your accomplishments, you earned it. Don't explain away the things you are successful with, take a breath and feel the joy of knowing that you did really well.

## **Value yourself**

Why are you listening to people telling you that you are not an incredible person when you know you are? List your best qualities, you may need someone else to help you if you are having difficulties making the list. Read this list whenever you need to boost yourself up.

## **Talk to someone if you need help**

If you are still having difficulty getting through Imposter Syndrome, you may need to get some help to get started. Seeking professional help when you need it is okay. Finding a counsellor or a psychologist may be the boost you need to get you going in the right direction.

# **Learn to Keep Imposter Syndrome Away for Good**

You will now learn some methods to use to attack the roots of Imposter Syndrome. You will explore why you feel this way and find methods to shift your thinking.

## **You need to recognize what is going on**

We sometimes don't recognize our internal state until we are too deep into the negative emotions. To keep Imposter Syndrome away, as part of your plan, you need to be able to spot the signs that it has started to take control. When you start to feel the old thought patterns, ask yourself if Imposter Syndrome may be starting.

## **Perform a reality check on yourself**

If you do detect Imposter Syndrome, ask yourself what you are reacting to at this time. Are you feeling uncertain about something? Is there a reason for this feeling now?

## **Accept the feeling of insecurity**

You need to validate the basis for these thoughts you are having. Is there any basis for them? If you are in a new place and feeling lost, that is okay, it is normal. People will feel lost in a new place so you are not an imposter for having these feelings.

## **Remove the nonsensical thoughts**

Remind yourself that your emotions are valid and you might be feeling uncertain, but if there is no basis for the thought, there is no reason that you should feel this way. How can this thinking be considered false? If you don't feel that you know enough to do the project or task but you have done it before, remind yourself how well you have performed this task before.

## **Change your thought process**

You are usually being set up for Imposter Syndrome when you start to fall back into these negative thought patterns again that are inflating your emotions. Stop this internal dialogue now and focus on a really positive thought you can replace the negative thought with.

## **Move past your mistakes**

If you have had a failure and these thoughts are starting, have a script ready on what you can tell yourself and remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and see what you can learn from the experience instead of becoming negative and blaming yourself.

## **Are your own internal rules holding you back?**

Are you fighting Imposter Syndrome because of an internal rule that was created by someone else a long time ago? Some of these may be “Always finish what you have started”, or “Everything must be perfect before handing it in”. Are these rules that you want to live by? Could you create and apply better rules to your life instead? Something like “It is okay to walk away from a project you no longer enjoy”, or “It is sometimes okay if things are ‘good enough’ instead of perfect”.

## **See a new outcome**

Turn off the disaster movie that you are playing in your head. Think about what triggered the feeling of being an imposter and now think of the outcome you want to have instead. Imaging what success looks like and what you need to do to achieve it.

## **Reward the right behaviour**

Praise yourself when you step back from the feeling of being an imposter. You never want to beat yourself up for having these feelings or reacting too slow under

any circumstances. Instead, you want to celebrate catching yourself doing that and doing a great job in defeating these feelings before they got too far. You are doing an amazing job.

# Conclusion

Hopefully by now you are feeling a little more confident. Don't give up hope if you are not. Just keep working on the steps given in the last chapter and you will reach that state. Be patient with yourself and be consistent, the new thought processes will become a habit in time and then become a way of life.

When you know you are worthy of success, it is a wonderful feeling. When you reach this point you and the world will know you are legitimate.

You are not an imposter and you will never need to feel like one again. There is a new you starting today with a new way of looking at the world. You can now start to see yourself as you truly are.

## Follow-up

If you are interested in reading more articles on being successful and making changes to your life, you should visit the [You Are Success Life Coach](#) blog

If you want to improve your confidence and motivation, then you can visit [Confidence and Life Coaching](#). If listening to podcasts is more of your style, then [Confidence and Motivation Development](#) podcasts may be for you.

# About the author

Michael W is passionate about helping others to be the best that they can by helping them develop the confidence and motivation and life skills that will make their lives better.

Michael is a certified Life Coach and instructor who believes in education and constant learning and improvement to make people's lives enjoyable and worth living to the fullest.

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