Dealing With Imposter Syndrome

sam.macdonald@pentestpartners.com

@pentestpartners
https://ptp.sh/blog

Sam Macdonald

Security Consultant at Pen Test Partners

Two years of experience in cyber security

Web apps, infrastructure and OSINT

Freaking out right now!!!

Imposter Syndrome / Phenomenon

The psychological pattern in which one downplays their achievements and believes that they are secretly a fraud undeserving of their achievements.

It is not a medical condition

There are no definitive tests or diagnosis

Symptoms can include:

Burnout from overworking

Fear of success or failure

Lack of self confidence

Sensitivity to small mistakes or criticism

Setting impossibly high standards

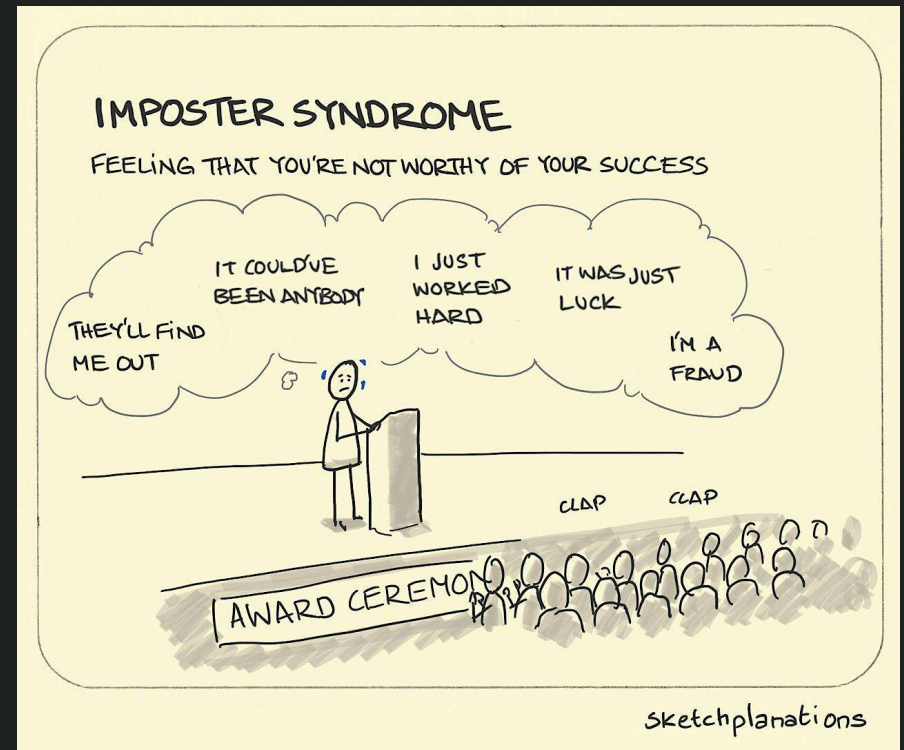**Crediting external factors for your success**

Who does it affect?

7 / 10 people report feelings of impostorism

All genders are equally found to be affected

Some evidence suggests the perception of imposter syndrome reduces with age

Prevalent in professions where expertise or intelligence are highly valued.

https://sketchplanations.com/imposter-syndrome

Imposter Syndrome in Cyber Security

High expectations and standards - the pressure to perform at a high level and the fear of falling short can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Constantly evolving technology - the technology landscape continually evolves, and staying up-to-date can be challenging. The need to learn and adapt quickly can be overwhelming, and feeling like falling behind can lead to imposter syndrome.

Fear of failure - when constantly striving for perfection, any mistake can feel like a failure, even more so with the consequences potentially being so severe. This leads to negative self-talk and feelings of inadequacy.

Isolation – since COVID a majority of work is performed remotely. This has meant that we receive less impromptu praise for the work we do, we perceive that we're on the verge of being discovered as a fraud and that we're about to be fired as people talk behind our backs.

Personal Experience

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Client Engagement

Self-doubt – I am not good enough for this role.

Fear of being seen as a failure – I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm unable to find any issues.

Extensive procrastination – If I delay testing, then I'm unable to reaffirm my lack of skills.

Overworking – putting more hours into the project means I can overcome my shortfall in abilities.

Constant comparison to other people – My colleague would have found a critical issue. What did the previous company find? They must be more qualified than me.

HOW IT FEELS WHEN YOU HAVE IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Report Writing

Exposed as a fraud – my colleagues will notice I'm unable to perform my duties.

Extensive procrastination – if I delay writing the report then I have more time before I'm found out.

Overreaction to criticism – a colleague has found out I'm a fraud.

Downplay accomplishments – I was just lucky / anyone would have found it.

Coping Strategies

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Talk to Others

Find a mentor – Opening up and sharing your feelings is a significant step in the right direction. Look for a mentor who can listen and provide support. They don't have to offer solutions; it can simply be someone with more experience in your field who understands the challenges.

Get a cheerleader(s) – To counteract negatives thoughts about oneself we need a source of positivity. Seek a cheerleader(s) to remind yourself of how capable you are, the skills you possess and how you've overcome challenges before. They could be family, friends, not just a fellow colleague.

Just talk – A problem shared is problem solved. Perhaps appointing a mentor or cheerleader causes too much anxiety, another individual you feel like you have to check-in with or fake it to. A quick conversation with someone may just do the trick to get the thoughts out of your head. Sometimes we do not need advice or guidance, just hearing ourselves out loud is enough to re-evaluate how our perception is inaccurate.

Stop the Scroll

Comparison loop – it is a natural reaction to compare ourselves to others, especially in our respective fields. With the invention of the infinite scroll we're unable to get escape content to compare ourselves to.

Confirmation bias – the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's belief of being an imposter.

In small doses – control the amount of time you spend on social media. Studies show that exceeding 30 minutes of usage shifts the balance from beneficial to detrimental.
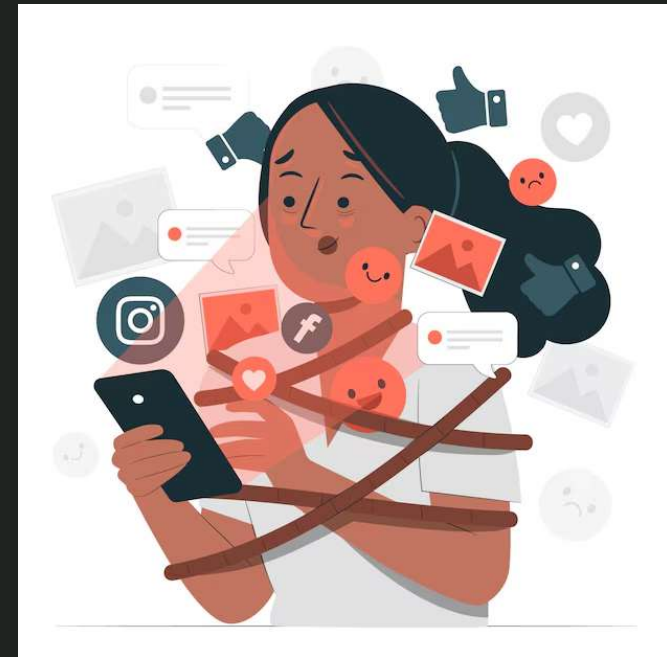
The Bullsh*t List

Goal / target – Write down the goal you wish to achieve.

Obstacles – List the obstacles you feel are preventing you from achieving your goal.

Call BS on the obstacles – Under each "obstacle" list reasons why they are irrelevant.

Cookie Jar Method

David Goggins - *Can't Hurt Me*

Collect your cookies - Acknowledge moments of personal success, no matter how minor. Whether it's finishing a difficult task, conquering a fear, or offering a kind gesture to someone, each achievement counts.

Fill Your Jar - Keep track of these victories, either mentally or by writing them down. These "cookies" represent your resilience, strength, and ability to handle challenges.

Reach Into the Jar - When facing doubt or difficult times, revisit your collection of "cookies." Reflecting on these past successes will remind you of your capabilities and give you the confidence to tackle new challenges.
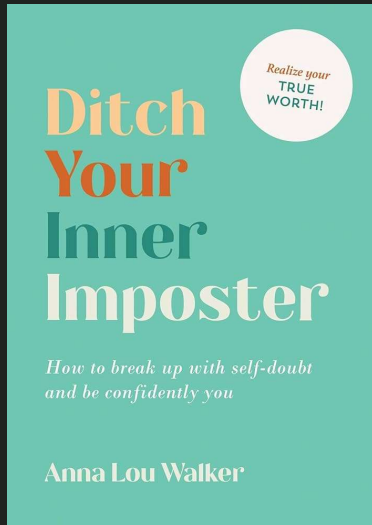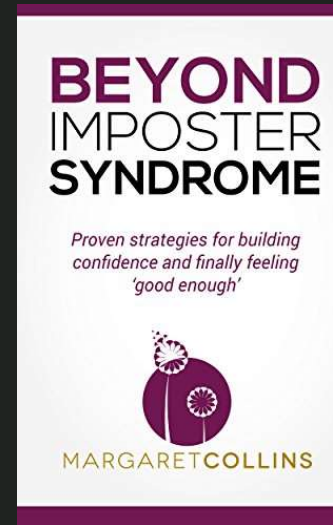
My Version of Cookie Jar

Resources

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Books

Ditch Your Inner Imposter: How to Belong and Be Confidently You

Anna Lou Walker

Beyond Imposter Syndrome: Proven strategies for building confidence and finally feeling 'good enough'

Margaret Collins

Podcasts

The Imposter Syndrome Network Podcast

Chris & Zöe

Ditching Imposter Syndrome

Clare Josa

Q&A

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sam.macdonald@pentestpartners.com

@pentestpartners
https://ptp.sh/blog

info@pentestpartners.com
+44 (0)20 3095 0500
@PenTestPartners
PenTestPartnersLLP