Expert or Imposter: Do You Have the Symptoms?

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Google says...

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Expert Syndrome (Dunning-Kruger Effect)

A hypothetical cognitive bias stating that people with low ability at a task overestimate their ability, the bias results from an internal illusion in people of low ability and from an external misperception in people of high ability.

- Wikipedia

Signs of Expert Syndrome

Suzanne Lucas (2017) says:

➢ They have an answer for everything.
➢ Research = Googling
➢ They don’t ever need to check. (“I think it’s X, but let me double check.”)
➢ They (almost) always claim total consensus.

Imposter Syndrome (or Imposter Phenomenon)

A psychological pattern in which someone questions their skills, talents, or qualifications and becomes afraid of being exposed as a “fraud.” If not addressed, imposter syndrome can have long-term negative effects on your mental health and well-being.

- Emily Stanislaus
Imposter Syndrome (Phenomenon)

Which is right? Identity Crisis?

Stanislaus points out that even imposter has “two equally correct spellings: imposter and impostor.”

It appears the movies don’t know the right spelling either.

How we mitigate our imposter?

➢ Learn as much as we can before we write documentation.
➢ Do an audience analysis or interview SMEs.
➢ Extinguish the imposter by having a starting point or set of questions to ask our audience or SMEs.

Do TCs feel like imposters?

One might say, yes! Why?

➢ We are often writing documentation as we’re learning the product/service.
➢ Do we know everything?
➢ Of course not!

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### Expert or Imposter: Do You Have the Symptoms?

1. Believe their success is from luck or an outside factor, rather than their ability or hard work.
2. Are overly sensitive to criticism about their writing (helpful comments feel like an attack on their abilities, and drew them to consider quitting).
3. Are afraid they’ll be found out to be a fake or phony.
4. Feel their achievement or success as a writer (no matter how small) doesn’t provide enough affirmation.
5. Continue to feel like a phony or fake.

### Imposters...

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### Taming Your Internal Imposter #1: 6 Practical Actions (from PowerSpeaking)

1. **Manage self-doubt:** Take time to identify your core values, and create your own definition of success.
2. **Recognize the impostor:** Ask, “Am I making decisions based on what I think I want versus what I really value?”
3. **Embrace success and failure:** Use “I” language when you speak.
4. **Be objective:** Know what makes you feel proud, and speak to those strengths around others.
5. **Be your boss:** Know what makes you feel proud, and set expectations for how you want others to see you.
6. **Be an assertive speaker:** Use body language; use an even emotional tone; be an active listener; avoid submissive language.

### Taming Your Internal Imposter #2: 7 Advice Tips (from Write The Docs)

1. **Don’t take the developer’s word for it when you don’t understand something:** Keep asking questions, keep reading. Acquire the knowledge you need.
2. **Be honest about what you do and do not know:** Be upfront when you don’t understand something or got something wrong.
3. **Relentlessly ask questions:** Ask yourself what makes you feel pride, and speak to those strengths around others.
4. **Your role isn’t to know everything:** Communicate and share your knowledge with the people who need it.
5. **Be honest about what you do and do not know:** Be upfront when you don’t understand something or got something wrong.
6. **Relentlessly ask questions:** Ask yourself what makes you feel pride, and speak to those strengths around others.
In conclusion...

Remember

Be Yourself! You can do this.

No one can take away the knowledge you DO have.
Let them become the imposter and YOU the expert.


Who am I?

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Dr. Jackie Damrau is an STC Fellow, the Book Review Editor of the Technical Communication journal, and Co-Chair, 2021-2022 Education Committee.

Jackie works for Cathedral Plumbing LLC (assigned to the MiView IS product team) to write user stories and documents for a commercial home builder application related to the plumbing industry. During her lengthy career, Jackie has encountered imposter syndrome and will share with you findings from her personal research.

In her spare time, Jackie enjoys raising her two grandchildren and reading murder mysteries, among other eclectic subjects. Find more about Jackie on LinkedIn (linkedin.com/in/jackiedamrau).
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Please complete your Conference and Session Evaluations!