

## **EAO Newsletter- July Issue**

### **Imposter Syndrome**

Imposter syndrome impacts many employees at UW-Madison, but not all supervisors understand what it looks like. This month, the EAO shares some information on this common phenomenon, as well as some strategies to cope.

#### **What is imposter syndrome?**

Simply put, imposter syndrome is the feeling that you are not deserving of your accomplishments. Imposter syndrome is not a medical condition, and it is not an official diagnosis. You may have heard imposter syndrome referred to by another name, like “imposter phenomenon” or “impostorism”.

People with imposter syndrome struggle to internalize their successes. They feel that any positive outcomes are driven by luck, not their own hard work, skills, or talent, and they view negative outcomes as proof that they don't belong. Employees who experience imposter syndrome struggle to accurately assess their own contributions and work performance, and fear that they will be "revealed" as an undeserving imposter.

Imposter syndrome can impact employees at all levels of an organization, and approximately 70% of employees have experienced some feelings of imposter syndrome in the past. This shows up in the workplace in a variety of ways, including:

- Overworking to make up for perceived shortcomings
- Perfectionism and a sense that no work is "good enough"
- Difficulty making decisions and procrastinating due to a feeling of inadequacy
- Constantly second-guessing decisions
- Trying to "fly under the radar" and avoiding all risks
- Discounting or undervaluing success
- Avoiding advancement or career opportunities, even if they are completely qualified
- Avoiding asking for help, even if it's needed

Imposter syndrome decreases job satisfaction and increases feelings of anxiety and depression in employees. It also makes it harder to retain qualified employees, as employees experiencing imposter syndrome often burn out more quickly.

#### **Who experiences imposter syndrome?**

While imposter syndrome can impact everyone, it disproportionately impacts marginalized people. Black people working within predominately white institutions, women in STEM fields and leadership roles, and international students at American universities have all been shown to experience imposter syndrome more intensely and at higher rates. This disparity is the result of several factors:

- A lack of representation and role models who look like you in the workplace
- Inequitable expectations surrounding performance and the sense that you need to work twice as hard to succeed
- Racist or sexist societal stereotypes surrounding competence
- Prejudicial attitudes expressed by colleagues or supervisors
- Professional norms that center cisgender, heterosexual, white men
- The additional burdens on time and labor required to operate within systems not built with you in mind

It is important to note that the term "imposter syndrome" originally developed with no consideration for the impact of systemic bias, discrimination, and inclusion. This puts the onus on individuals, rather than addressing the underlying elements of workplace culture that cause employees to feel like they don't belong. Good supervisors will take a "both, and" approach; they will provide individual support to those struggling with imposter syndrome **and** commit to examining the broader context in which that imposter syndrome is experienced. They will genuinely listen to their employee's experiences and strive to create a welcoming, inclusive, and psychologically safe workplace.

### **What can you do as an individual?**

Supervisors are just as likely as other workers to experience imposter syndrome, if not more so. Here are some individual strategies to help you cope with these feelings:

- Rely on facts over stories. Imposter syndrome can cause you to disregard the truth in favor of narratives about how you've just "gotten lucky" or don't really deserve your success. Keep track of your successes on paper or in a digital document, so you can look back on tangible proof of your accomplishments when you're not feeling confident in your abilities.
- Recognize when your thoughts tend to enter an "imposter pattern". When do these feelings usually come up? When you start to notice your imposter feelings coming up, work to acknowledge them, validate yourself, and then move on. Recognize that it is impossible to feel confident 100% of the time, but that you are also more than your moments of doubt.
- Practice positive self-talk. This may feel silly at first, but reinforcing positive affirmations about your skills, talents, and worth can help you to challenge imposter thought patterns.
- Seek additional support in managing these feelings with a counselor from the Employee Assistance Office or LifeMatters. We are always here to provide confidential assistance and can be used on work time.

## What can you do as a manager?

As a leader in your organization, you can take several steps to support employees experiencing imposter syndrome:

- Openly share your own experiences with imposter syndrome and be clear about what caused these feelings. Many with imposter syndrome feel like they're alone, but supervisors who model imperfection can help them frame their experiences in a broader context.
- Provide clear, fact-based, and frequent positive feedback to your employees. Aim to do this both privately (i.e. "I know you have the skills to succeed on this project") and in front of the team (i.e. "I really appreciate your perspective- thank you for speaking up"). Make sure that your team receives credit for their hard work when it's due!
- Focus on growth over perfection. No employee will ever produce perfect work 100% of the time, and that's not the end of the world. Work with your team to proactively identify resources that they need to succeed, and normalize speaking up when you need help.
- Genuinely listen to experiences of bias and support organizational and systemic change when necessary. Work to avoid deflecting, defending, or downplaying the effects of bias. Commit not only to listening to these experiences, but being accountable to change. If you're approached with a report of bias in the workplace, make sure that you take meaningful steps to improve the situation.
- When you need additional support, consult with the Employee Assistance Office, LifeMatters, or the Office of Equity, Inclusion and Employee Well-Being in the Office of Human Resources ([eiew@explore.wisc.edu](mailto:eiew@explore.wisc.edu)).

## LifeMatters Monthly Promotions and Resources

Our affiliate partner, LifeMatters, offers promotions, newsletters, webinars and more! Go to [mylifematters.com](http://mylifematters.com) and sign in with Bucky2. Webinars are located under "Quick Links."

This month's promotional content includes:

Flyers:

- Making the Most of Downtime
- Emergency Planning
- Self-Care During Times of Social Change
- Successful Coaching (for managers)

Posters:

- Slow Down

- Stormy Weather
- Choose Wisely

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**Coping with Disappointment**

Support Session – August 23, 2022  
12-12:30 p.m. CST

Description:

When was your last disappointment? Whether it was yesterday, last week or a month ago, it's a sure thing – disappointments will happen! How you handle each letdown is a defining moment and becomes part of who you are. There are things you can do to help relieve past disappointments and prepare for future ones. If you want to know more about how to make peace with the past, be less discouraged and happier, this session is for you.

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify your past disappointments and those that might be coming.
2. Gain insight into how your past experiences influence your expectations and coping style for letdowns in life.
3. Understand steps and strategies for effectively coping with disappointments.
4. Differentiate disappointment from depression and PTSD.
5. Know when and how to leverage your LifeMatters EAP benefit to help yourself and others.

Topic: Coping with Disappointment

Date: Tuesday, August 23, 2022

Time: 12:00 pm, Central Daylight Time (Chicago, GMT-05:00)

Session number: 2664 307 6615

Session password: w2WrJNMW3G4

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To join the training session  
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1. Go to  
<https://prohealthcare.webex.com/prohealthcare/k2/j.php?MTID=tb7f36df0691a193fae9542d07afb337d>
2. Enter your name and email address.
3. Enter the session password: w2WrJNMW3G4
4. Click "Join Now".
5. Follow the instructions that appear on your screen.

To view in other time zones or languages, please click the link

<https://prohealthcare.webex.com/prohealthcare/k2/j.php?MTID=tab9ad8fbcf359feb86f64befed0246b>

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To join the session by phone only  
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To receive a call back, provide your phone number when you join the training session, or call

the number below and enter the access code.

United States Toll Free:8662055379

United States Toll:+1 3148881153

Global call-in numbers:

<https://prohealthcare.webex.com/prohealthcare/globalcallin.php?MTID=tdd6f61ceebc460b7ddfc15d4b168725c>

Show toll-free dialing restrictions:

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Access code: 2664 307 6615