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EVER FEEL LIKE A FRAUD?

By **Carolyn Tate**

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Ever feel like you have no clue what you're doing and it's just a matter of time before you are exposed for the fraud you are?

That's Imposter Syndrome. Studies show most of us will suffer from Imposter Syndrome in our lives, and a third of us suffer from it chronically, with significant impact on our lives.

A who's who of Hollywood has admitted to feelings of inadequacy or concerns of being 'found out', including Meryl Streep, Tina Fey, Paul Newman, Nicole Kidman and Matt Damon.

Perhaps we can attribute this to being an angst-ridden artiste, but what hope is there for us regular types when the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, Dr Margaret Chan, feels like a fraud?



Dr Chan, widely lauded for saving countless lives through her handling of the bird flu pandemic of 2003 and the swine flu pandemic of 2009, attributes her successes not to her hard work or superior intelligence, but to luck. In her book *The Sexual Paradox: Troubled Boys, Gifted Girls and the Real Difference Between the Sexes*, Susan Pinker observed, "[Dr Chan] travels the world to give lectures. She talks to the media and helps draft policy. Yet the diminutive, sharply dressed doctor has wondered aloud why people treat her with deference. "There are an awful lot of people out there who think I'm an expert. How do these people believe all this about me? I'm so much aware of all the things I don't know."

Imposter Syndrome was first identified in the seventies by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes. Clance and Imes claimed that while men put their success down to their own awesomeness (yes, really), women tended to credit luck.

It has since been found to be more prevalent among high achievers, so if you can relate, perhaps you can take that as its own vote of confidence.

Each year, the incoming class of the illustrious Stanford Business School, California is asked, “How many of you in here feel that you are the one mistake that the admissions committee made?” Each year, about two thirds of the class put up their hand – and presumably breathe a sigh of relief when they glance around the room.

Imposter Syndrome led Suzanne Mercier to throw in her job as the first female board member of George Patterson Advertising. “The day they called me in to tell me I was being promoted to director, I thought I was going to be fired. I simply had no comprehension of the way I was perceived or the value I was bringing to the table. I sat on that board for two years and was constantly worried I wasn’t doing a great job and that I wasn’t perfect. Rather than waiting for them to fire me I decided to leave.



“I didn’t know what I was supposed to be doing so I tried to keep a low profile and copy what others were doing. I didn’t realise how many women in the organisation were looking to me as a role model. If I’d had more confidence, I would have handled it differently. I would have had more to say and would have taken a more active role.”

Instead, Suzanne recognised this self-doubt was a common factor that was limiting people’s success in the workplace. She started **Imposterhood**, a business that offers training and coaching to teach her clients how to overcome feelings of inadequacy to achieve their potential in the corporate environment.

Although **Sharon Fried-Buchalter** found that men and women both report experiencing Imposter Syndrome in equal numbers, Suzanne says women find it more debilitating.



“Women pull back, while men tend to bluff more,” explains Suzanne. “Women can be amazingly talented but they just play small. They don’t get what they’re bringing to the table and they don’t understand the rules of the game. If a man has four out of ten skills required for a job, he won’t hesitate in putting his hand up, but if a woman has nine out of ten skills, she will say, ‘Well, I just need this one more skill and then I’ll be ready.’”

So what can we do to shake of these feelings of inadequacy if we’re one of **that 70 per cent**? Suzanne says it’s important to give yourself permission to make mistakes.

“Say to yourself, ‘It’s okay for me not to know everything; not to be perfect; to take the next step and see where that goes.’ Hold it a little lightly and work towards your goals. You can’t control people’s responses – only what you’re doing.

“The main point that trips people up is how they interpret what is going on around them, and they have an emotional response to it. We get caught up in our own interpretations. Ask yourself: is that the only interpretation? Or is there an interpretation that is more useful to me?”

Have feelings of inadequacy or of being a fraud stopped you from achieving your goals?



**Carolyn Tate is a freelance writer and editor from Brisbane with a particular interest in health and wellbeing. She is a mum, a runner, a reader, a web addict and passionate advocate of the interrobang. Her articles have appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald, The Big Issue, The Brisbane Times, The Hoopla (hooray!) and more than a decade’s worth of worthy, but sometimes dry, government and corporate publications. Find out more about Carolyn at www.carolyntate.net.*

