

What Impostor Syndrome Actually Is

And why the standard advice hasn't worked



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THE REAL PROBLEM

Everyone has heard of impostor syndrome.

Most of what is written about it **misses the point**.

The standard advice is usually some version of this:

- remind yourself of your accomplishments
- reframe the negative thoughts
- recognise that everyone feels this way sometimes.

For people whose impostor experience is situational and mild, that advice can help.

For people whose impostor feelings are persistent, identity-level, and largely unresponsive to evidence of their own competence, it **does not touch the problem**.

Here's why.

IT IS NOT A THINKING PROBLEM

Impostor syndrome is **not primarily a thinking problem.**

It is an identity problem.

It develops in people who learned early that their worth was conditional on performance, compliance, or suppressing parts of themselves that were not useful to the people around them.

They became very skilled at reading what was required and delivering it.

What did not develop was a **stable internal sense of worth** that existed independently of external evaluation.

When that person achieves something real, the achievement does not land the way it should. It gets measured against what was required rather than integrated as evidence of genuine capability.

WHY EVIDENCE DOESN'T FIX IT

The gap between external success and internal experience is not irrational.

It is the predictable result of a particular developmental history.

Competence accumulates. The internal system **does not automatically update** to reflect it.

Professionals who learned early that visibility was dangerous, that mistakes carried disproportionate consequences, or that belonging was conditional on performance continue to operate from that architecture long after external conditions have changed.

Knowing you have earned your place does not, on its own, update the system underneath.

This is why **listing your accomplishments does not fix it.** And why reassurance, however well-intentioned, rarely creates lasting change.

WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGES IT

What shifts things is slower, more deliberate work.

Not reframing. Not positive self-talk. Not another list of evidence that you are capable.

The work involves understanding where the pattern came from, what is currently maintaining it, and changing it at the level where it actually operates - which is **identity, not cognition**.

This means developing a stable internal sense of worth that does not depend on performance, external validation, or the absence of self-doubt.

It means being able to move through high-stakes moments without the internal system treating them as threats.

That is what changes. And **when it does, it holds**.

WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGES IT

This guide was written for the people for whom the standard advice has never quite worked.

Not because they did not try hard enough.

But because the advice was addressing the wrong thing.

If this is familiar, that is usually enough.

I offer a brief consultation to look at what is going on and whether this work makes sense for you.

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