



Imposter Syndrome in Tech

HIMSS Event

11.5.24 ARW





Sound Familiar?

"This system works but I just got lucky - a real IT professional would understand why."

"Everyone else seems to know these terms naturally. I'm the only one still Googling basics."

"They made me department lead but I'm just good at talking - not a real expert."

"During meetings I'm terrified someone will ask a technical question that exposes me."

"My solutions look good on the surface but someone will eventually see I don't know what I'm doing."

Aaron in One Slide

People and relationships are the path to success.



Aaron Warner formed ProCircular to prepare and protect organizations from the ever-changing cyber threats that face us every day. Backed by Warner's 22 years as a biotech CIO and CTO, and a top-shelf team of cybersecurity experts, **ProCircular helps organizations understand and manage their cyber risk.**

Mr. Warner's cybersecurity expertise, an MBA from the University of Iowa, and **numerous cybersecurity certifications** underline the organization's commitment to aligning cybersecurity, compliance and their clients' company strategy. He collaborates frequently with **FBI, Homeland Security, and other federal organizations.** He was awarded the National SBA Businessman of the Year (Iowa, 23) from President Biden and the SBA, and given inducted into Junior Achievement as the Entrepreneur of the Year.

Aaron is an avid reef, wreck, and cave diver, a musician of low caliber, and most importantly a family man with two great kids and the most patient wife on the planet.



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Well that sounds AWFUL



im·pos·tor

/im'pāstər/

noun

noun: **imposter**

a person who pretends to be someone else in order to deceive others, especially for fraudulent gain.
"the charity has warned anyone approached by the impostor to contact the police immediately"

Similar:

impersonator

masquerader

pretender

deceiver

hoaxer

fake



syn·drome

/'sin.drōm/

noun

a group of symptoms which consistently occur together, or a condition characterized by a set of associated symptoms.

"a rare syndrome in which the production of white blood cells is damaged"

- a characteristic combination of opinions, emotions, or behavior.
"the "Not In My Backyard" syndrome"

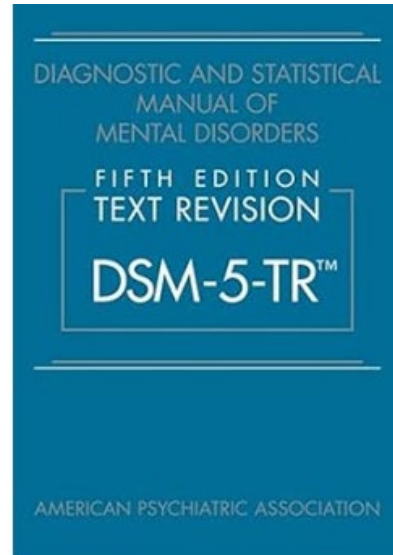


Not A Mental Disorder

The experiences associated with it:

1. Are often context-specific (typically occurring in academic or professional settings)
2. Don't necessarily impair daily functioning
3. May be temporary or situational
4. Can be considered a normal response to achievement and success, especially in competitive environments

it's considered more of a situational experience or psychological pattern rather than a clinical disorder.







Definition: Imposter Syndrome

- Feel like they've fooled others into thinking they're more capable than they really are
- Attribute their success to luck rather than skill or hard work
- Fear being "exposed" as a fraud
- Dismiss positive feedback
- Overwork to prevent anyone from discovering their perceived inadequacy

The term was first coined by psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978, based on their observations of high-achieving women.



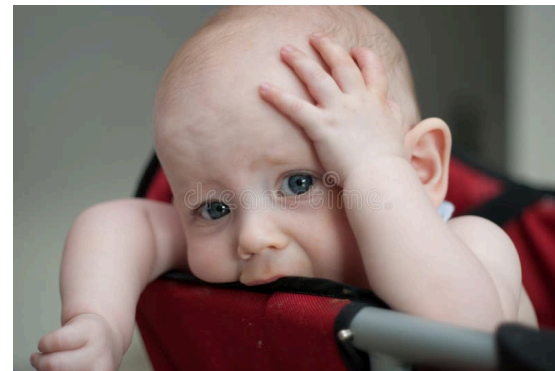
Why? It Starts Early.

Early Conditioning

- Receiving praise primarily for achievements rather than effort
- Learning that worth is tied to performance
- Experiencing inconsistent validation or support

Identity Formation

- Internalizing the belief that success defines value
- Developing a self-image heavily dependent on external validation
- Struggling to integrate both achievements and perceived failures





Who Does It Affect Most Often?

- High achievers (the people in this room)
- People from underrepresented groups in their field
- First-generation professionals
- People starting new roles or responsibilities



It's Particularly Rough in Tech

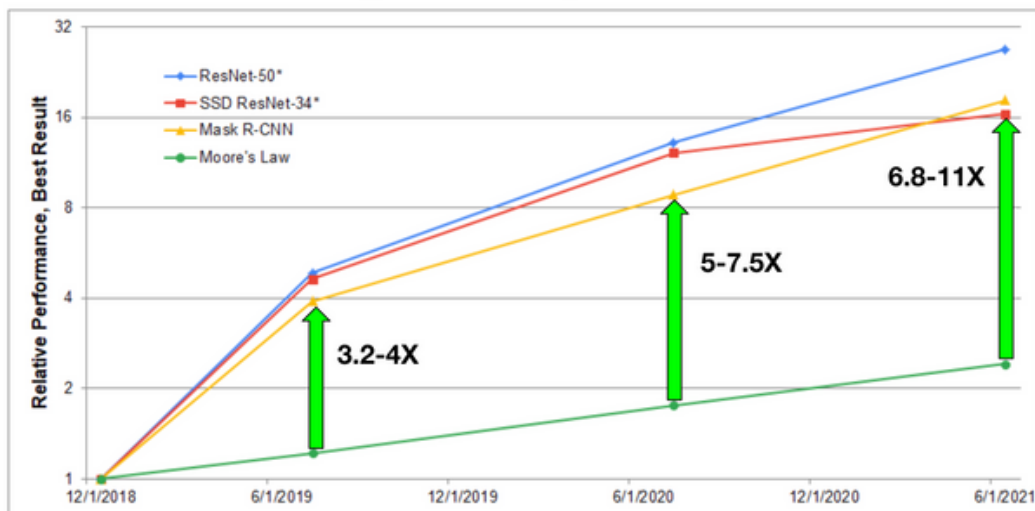
- Constant evolution of tech
- Women & minorities in tech
- Gap between reward vs. job requirements





Always Something New

MLPerf™ Training Outstrips Moore's Law





Stacked Biases for Women & Minorities

- Systemic racism, classism, xenophobia, and other biases
- Easy to classify women as “suffering” from imposter syndrome (see ‘female hysteria ala 1900’s)

<https://hbr.org/2021/02/stop-telling-women-they-have-imposter-syndrome>



Job <> Goals

- Testing in Code Development
- Flexible Workflow Design
- Elegant Network Architecture
- (ahem) Documentation

**Is this what you're actually praised for
doing in reviews?**

<https://stackoverflow.blog/2023/09/11/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-imposter-syndrome/>



Dunning Kreuger Effect

“The Charles Barkley Swing”





So Now What?





Guessing Game



“You'll feel a bit insecure and that's not a bad thing. That feeling is not unique to you, it's almost universal. Everyone who's in a challenging role feels that way.”

Sundar Pichai

imposter syndrome isn't necessarily related to actual competence or achievement.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=m2EtCOOMAEw>



Guessing Game



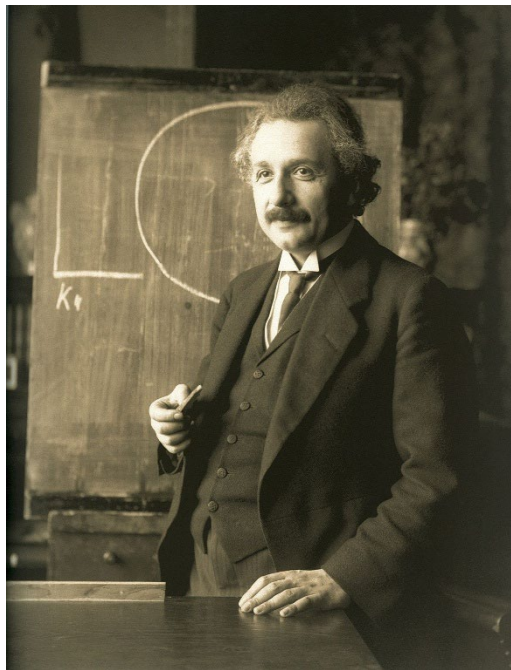
"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, 'uh oh, they're going to find out now'"

Maya Angelou

imposter syndrome isn't necessarily related to actual competence or achievement.



Guessing Game



“The exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an involuntary swindler”

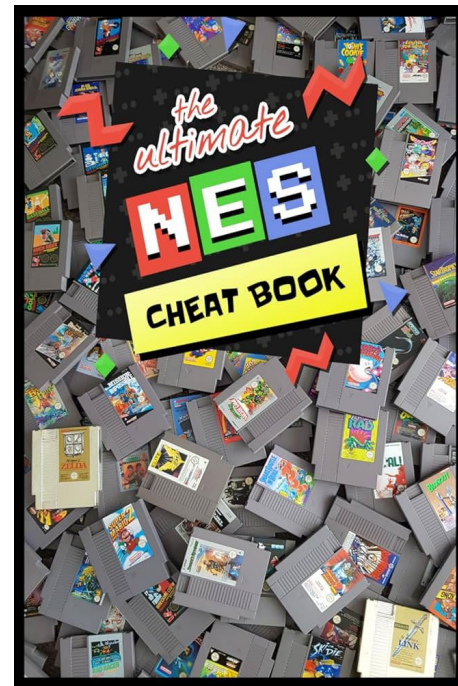
Albert Einstein

imposter syndrome isn't necessarily related to actual competence or achievement.



Cheat Codes

- You're in excellent company
- Change your environment
- Remember facts over feelings





Ask Yourself

“I got lucky”

“I’m not qualified”

“I must be alone in this feeling”

“I was prepared and took advantage of the opportunity”

“This is new, and I’m at least capable of learning it”

“If I were truly incompetent, I probably wouldn’t know to even ask”



BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD
Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY
Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

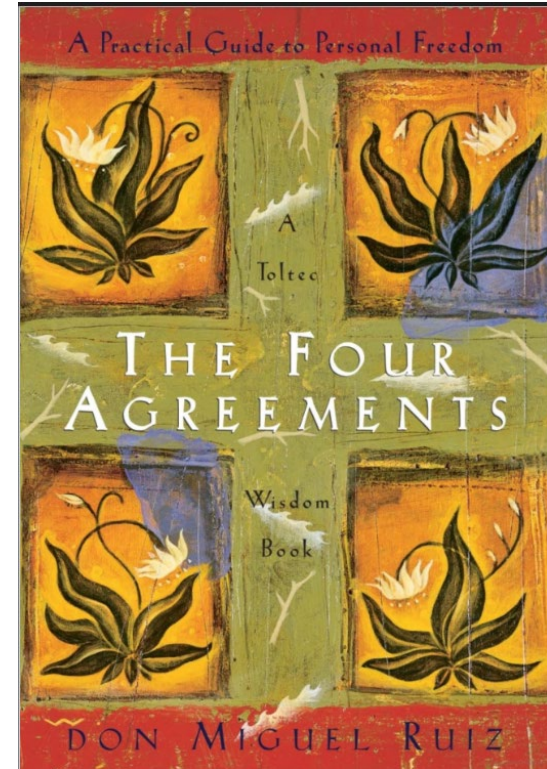
THE FOUR AGREEMENTS

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS
Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST
Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgement, self-abuse, and regret.

BY DON MIGUEL RUIZ

THEFOURAGREEMENTS.COM





Share With Someone





Sound Familiar?

"This code works but I just got lucky - a real developer would understand why."

"Everyone else seems to know these terms naturally. I'm the only one still Googling basics."

"They made me team lead but I'm just good at talking - not a real expert."

"During meetings I'm terrified someone will ask a technical question that exposes me."

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Aaron R. Warner

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CCISO, CISSP and Security Strategist



Thank You For
Your Time!

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