

Imposter Syndrome - Channeling the noise for growth

An [article in Harvard Business Review](#) titled “Mentoring Someone with Imposter Syndrome” resonated with me. The article covers the topic well and offers the following main points for guidance in mentoring:

- Empirically challenge negative self-talk
- Affirm, affirm, and affirm some more
- Deliberately counteract stereotype threat
- Share your own imposter stories
- Do not allow your mentee to give you all the credit

Reflecting on my career, I remember too well the feelings of being an imposter when I started in the industry! I came out of the US Marines, and bounced around a few jobs before landing at a steel mill as an automation electrician and team lead. While there, I felt out of my depth a number of times as I learned on the job, but at that time, I did not have the advantage of the internet and the world at my fingertips that I do now. I started my own business while in that role, teaching myself development focused on the emerging world of websites and web applications. Again, switching my frame of reference, I had to present myself with confidence, and at the same time, learning a whole new lexicon and way of thinking. From there, I joined a consulting firm in the marketing department, again learning a new vocabulary and thinking pattern before jumping again into a global consulting practice and eventually leading the internet practice. I learned to keep my mouth shut unless I had something valuable to say, and to work my tail off in the evenings to answer all the questions I accumulated during the day! I ran 17+ servers in my home and taught myself multiple programming languages while others just assumed I knew the space and had worked it for years as they had.

I lived with the regular feeling of potentially being “discovered” to be inadequate. I channeled those feelings into work and self improvement, leading to constant growth. Over the years since then, I have continued to change my path many times and coming to the point where it felt unnatural to not be outside my comfort zone to some degree.

As I grew more comfortable with the feeling of “being inadequate”, and learned to embrace the feeling of being outside my comfort zone, I transitioned to a place where I started to seek out those experiences for high growth opportunities. I am now in a mentoring role for a number of people in my industry and outside it as well. I find that the points outlined in this article are solid advice and I encourage a read through if you are feeling like an imposter, or if you are seeking to mentor someone.

The negative talk and feelings of doubt are one of the first things I try to tackle in a mentor relationship. I build on that with sharing much of the story in this article, with specifics about my journey. I try to make it clear that we all have times of doubt, and if we never do, we are likely not stretching ourselves nearly enough.

Mentoring is tremendously rewarding, and any mentor will be even more effective directly addressing the self

doubt paradigm.