



It's Our Uniqueness That Makes us Stronger

Living as differently abled or with otherness can exacerbate Imposter Syndrome. To build solutions and help everyone establish a sense of belonging, businesses first need to cultivate an understanding of the lived experience of their employees.

Imposter Syndrome can undercut the performance of the most talented performers in any role. If that employee is also managing a perceived disability, social difference, or "otherness", Imposter Syndrome becomes even more debilitating. For businesses to help their employees continue to be top contributors, it's important for companies to cultivate an understanding of the daily experiences of their workers who may be facing an attack of Imposter Syndrome.

In the paragraphs ahead, the inside perspective of a top sales performer with a chronic health condition will be revealed to illustrate the impact of Imposter Syndrome on those who also face true disadvantages. Next, possible solutions and support frameworks will be examined. Finally, businesses will get advice on how to build their own frameworks and support employees of all backgrounds when Imposter Syndrome strikes.

A Day In The Life...

Imagine how a person with a chronic health condition or disability feels on a daily basis. While they may have every desire to wake up, feel well, and do work, but their physical challenges keep them from performing at the level they were able to just the day, or the week prior.

Take the case of an incredibly successful salesperson, with a closing rate of approximately eight out of ten calls. She takes pride in her work and in helping her clients grow their revenues exponentially. She also battles Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis.

As a result, it isn't her ability to help her prospect and clients increase their sales numbers that plagues her with doubt. Instead the daily concern is over whether or not she will be able to see out of her right eye the next day, or whether her legs will leave her crippled in bed, wrapped in heating pads and downing magnesium as her muscles begin to release. There is typically no warning when these exacerbations hit, but each time they do, the deep feeling of inadequacy can quickly set in.

What Can A Business Do To Provide Support?

As a business, the question becomes, "How do we ensure that both the self-doubting executive and the sales professional who consistently closes millions of dollars worth of business when they are physically able to move have the personal support they need? Not only to overcome their individual fears of inadequacy, but also so that everyone on the team can succeed in their specific positions?"

Asking this question – and developing a meaningful answer – often sends line managers and HR advisors scrambling for guidance. One place to look for guidance is an established skills assessment tool, such as Gallup's StrengthsFinder, introduced in their 2001 management book *Now, Discover*



Your Strengths. The tool helps shift conversations in workplace settings from what can't be done – or can't consistently be done – to a focus on the strengths and abilities of the candidate or employee.

This kind of tool is particularly useful when opening conversations with employees who are managing physical or mental health challenges or disabilities. For many employees, the StrengthsFinder has been an empowering framework, as it helps those with disabilities or feeling isolated to recognize the unique talent stack that they bring to their employers. On the other hand, it also helps employers match employees to work that uniquely suits their skills and passions. Further, the StrengthsFinder can help establish a baseline or foundational skill set that can be relied on independently of a rough physical health day or bad mental health episode. This allows employees to feel more secure in asking for what they need, as simple setbacks can be framed appropriately within the context of the employees' full capabilities. This can eliminate employee fear that day-to-day challenges could be used as grounds for dismissal and provide managers tools for effective performance management and coaching.

Ongoing Support In The Face Of Imposter Syndrome

With a “reality checked” performance and skills baseline to lean on, businesses and employees alike can stand strong in the face of Imposter Syndrome. When doubts and fears begin to threaten performance, both sides can return to what they know is true about the potential and skills that underlie the employment relationship.

Research from the Harvard Business Review, Forbes, and a myriad of personal blogs reveals that everyone from CEOs to mommies battle Imposter Syndrome. While frustrating and at times, debilitating, the core lie of Imposter Syndrome – “you're not good enough” can be countered with repeated reinforcements of the individual's strengths and ongoing support of areas of weakness.

As DotDash's The Balance notes:

“From a manager's perspective, identifying strengths and weaknesses is the secret to unlocking the potential of every employee and every team. This information enables leaders to make smarter decisions about assignments, deliver more effective performance reviews, and ensure that every employee can grow and succeed.”

Placing the focus on the strengths of each team member, and working together from those individual strengths, creates the most powerful companies. It creates an environment wherein each person realizes their value to the whole entity, and how each individual can offer complementary skills and strengths to those managing otherness, poor health, or differing ability. In this way, Imposter Syndrome can be crowded out, ceasing to have a place of impact or room to flourish. Instead, the group can thrive, allowing uniqueness and differences to become the core strength of the team, and keeping the focus always on what's possible for all.