

FROM SELF- DOUBT TO SELF-BELIEF

Overcoming imposter syndrome to
unlock professional potential

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Introduction

While the correct terminology is largely up for debate – whether its imposter syndrome, imposter phenomenon, fraudulence complex, or simply ‘feeling like a phony’ – what isn’t up for debate is its prevalence within our society today. In fact, 8 in 10 people(1) who read this report are **likely to experience imposter syndrome at some point in their lives.**

Chronic feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy can affect anybody, at any time. Maya Angelou, Tom Hanks, Sheryl Sandberg – all highly successful people at the summit of their respective fields – have admitted to experiencing imposter syndrome throughout their careers. So what hope do the rest of us have?

How can I stop feeling like this?

How can I feel less rubbish about my performance?

Believing in myself
Am I good enough?
Feeling like a failure

Building confidence and self-worth

Dealing with self-defeating thoughts

Everyone says I’m doing great, but I don’t believe it

Fear of being judged

Help me know what to do

Does everyone feel the same?

Whether it’s an unexpected promotion, working with new people on a stretch assignment, or starting work in a new business, **there’s no hard and fast rule about what will drive feelings of self-doubt in somebody.** All we know is that once these feelings take hold, they can be difficult to displace – especially if people and organisations don’t work together on managing them.

We wanted to understand how these feelings manifest themselves in working life - which factors are impacting our self-belief, and what can we do to change them?

Read on for new insights from our latest survey of 2,000 working professionals.



Lorraine Mills
Principal Consultant



Lisa Stone
Head of Coaching

Methodology

The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 2002 respondents (split across all genders, aged 18+) in full-time employment, junior manager level and above. The data was collected between 31/01/25 - 4/2/25. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

*Taken from the responses given when asked ‘what would you want a coach to help you with?’

(1) [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#), 2019



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Pressure Points

How is the workplace amplifying feelings of imposter syndrome?

Gender based community siloes

While historical data has led many people to **assume that women are affected by imposter syndrome more than men**, our latest research revealed that this isn't necessarily the case.

Yes, women were found to be more prone to feeling like a fraud at work than their male colleagues (42% of women vs 35% of men), and were significantly more likely to say feelings of self-doubt prevent them from putting themselves forward for promotions and development opportunities (24% vs 16%); but **the overwhelming consensus is that imposter syndrome is equally prevalent in all employees, regardless of gender.**

- **55%** say they've experienced imposter syndrome at work: **57%** of women vs. **53%** of men
- **56%** feel their achievements are due to luck rather than skill
- **34%** believe they aren't deserving of their professional success

There are no gender disparities within these statistics – imposter syndrome simply is everywhere. And yet, **21% of male respondents believe men are typically more affected by imposter syndrome** – a sentiment that only 8% of women agree with; while **38% of female respondents say women are more susceptible** – something just 11% of men think is true.

This misconception could mean that men only ever look to their male colleagues for guidance or advice, and vice versa for women. **The support network available to both communities then becomes much smaller**, with lines of communication between them remaining closed – making for a workforce that is reluctant to collaborate or ask for help.



But why are men and women experiencing imposter syndrome within these community siloes? Do people find it easier to trust and speak to someone of the same gender? **And how as a business do you begin to break down these walls and connect the two communities?**

Stigma and misconceptions

Our data revealed that professional interventions, such as **coaching and mentorship programmes, are recognised as powerful tools for combatting imposter syndrome**, with 1 in 3 respondents agreeing that these interventions would help reduce their feelings of self-doubt. And yet, despite 54% of people admitting that this support is available to them at work, **less than 1 in 5 are actually utilising these initiatives.**

Instead, people are turning to their colleagues for advice (28%), practicing mindfulness alone (21%), or simply doing nothing at all (27%). These preferences suggest **employees are looking to go under the radar, both in their experience of imposter syndrome, and in their pursuit for help**, as opposed to seeking more formal support through their employer – but why? Well, when we asked what would prevent people from taking up formal coaching support, 1 in 3 respondents said the **stigma and fear of being judged is holding them back.**

32%

of people say stigma and fear **prevents them from getting help** with imposter syndrome



To this day, **there remains a common misconception that coaching is exclusively reserved for underperformers.** The last thing an individual experiencing imposter syndrome wants to do is expose themselves as being one of these underperformers, and so to avoid raising a red flag against their name, they refuse to engage with career support.

Feelings of self-doubt are then left to fester and **can lead to chronic indecisiveness and reduced productivity.**



“Everyone should have access to a coach, without feeling judged.”

Lorraine Mills, Principal Consultant, Right Management

So how do we begin to remove the misconceptions and stigma surrounding coaching? **And what can businesses do to ensure such support is discreetly accessible to people experiencing imposter syndrome?**

Workplace culture

A key responsibility for any business leader is to define and create a psychologically safe workplace, where people feel they belong and that they have a trustworthy support network available to them. Unfortunately, organisations appear to be falling short in this mission, as **1 in 5 people said specific colleagues (23%) and a culture of blame (21%) are two of the main amplifiers of imposter syndrome within their workplace.**



We know that employees contending with imposter syndrome are increasingly looking to their colleagues for support, **but what happens when the very people they're turning to for help begin pointing the finger and blaming them when things go wrong?** It's no surprise then, that less than 16% of respondents would consider more collaborative interventions – such as team and peer coaching – to help them manage feelings of self-doubt.

In its very nature, imposter syndrome is an internalised experience, but that doesn't mean it has to be an isolating one. Unfortunately, **negative interactions with colleagues and a problematic culture of blame can remove any sense of psychological safety** and make people feel as if they have nowhere left to turn. **Employees are then increasingly likely to leave the organisation due to feeling unsupported.**

But why are people so quick to assign blame when something goes wrong? How do we change people's perception of failure from always being a negative? **And is it possible to re-instil a sense psychological safety once it has been lost or damaged?**



Mindset

The importance of mindset in navigating imposter syndrome cannot be understated. It is the lens through which we view and understand the world around us, helping to formulate core beliefs, attitudes and assumptions.

But when faced with chronic self-doubt, employees discredit their achievements and strengths. They lose confidence, and become reluctant to try new things, voice their opinions and ideas, or challenge the status quo – withdrawing into the comfort of what they know.

Left unaddressed, self-doubt can manifest itself deeper and **lead to employees questioning themselves even when completing tasks that they're familiar with.** Our research found that 1 in 5 people experiencing imposter syndrome have seen their performance decline due to spending too much time overpreparing (24%) and delaying or avoiding tasks (20%). As a result, **39% are spending the equivalent of a full working day, working additional hours to make up for their misconceived inadequacy.**



“Be brave, take a risk. Coaching can really change your life.”

Lisa Stone, Head of Coaching, Right Management

Not only is this leading to higher levels of stress in 34% of employees, but **over half (54%) are saying they have no time to engage with professional interventions that could help them.**

People then become fixed in their mindset that they can never strive for anything beyond their current situation – failing to put themselves forward for promotions or development opportunities – **thus limiting both their individual and the organisation's potential for success.**

How then, can businesses ensure employees' potential doesn't go to waste? What can they do to help people shift from having a fixed mindset, to one of growth? **And what aren't they doing, that's led to so many people habitually overworking?**



39%

of people are **working an extra day a week** due to self-doubt



Key Takeaways

Helping your people manage feelings of imposter syndrome and achieve their potential

Four key takeaways

While it's impossible to completely eliminate something like imposter syndrome from the world of work, there are steps that organisational leaders can take to mitigate against the impact it has on their people.

1. Encourage the use of collaborative coaching:

In advocating for its usage, business leaders can:

- Facilitate more regular interactions between a diverse group of employees, thus creating a more collaborative workforce
- Ensure employees feel psychologically safe to discuss their vulnerabilities with colleagues
- Provide people with the space and opportunity to connect and build support networks at work

2. Role-model the use of coaching at work:

By openly sharing their own experiences, leaders can:

- Dispel the misconception that career interventions are exclusively for underperformers
- Normalise both the experience of imposter syndrome and coaching as the solution
- Alleviate the stigma surrounding both, ensuring employees feel comfortable engaging with the support they need to move forward and achieve their potential



3. Emphasise the importance of feedback:

Embedding a feedback culture will help to:

- Verify individuals' competence and strengths by providing evidence of their contribution
- Substantiate the talent and value each employee brings to their team and the wider business
- Protect against individual and organisational stagnation by enabling employees to disprove feelings of self-doubt that would previously have stymied their productivity

4. Encourage a growth mindset in your people:

Through supporting employees in taking risks, leaders will:

- Provide people with the courage to experiment with new ideas, without fear of reprimand should something fail
- Help employees build confidence and develop new skills in response to change and new challenges
- Build a more mobile and agile workforce, as employees feel empowered to work with different people, engage in stretch initiatives and pursue ongoing development



"Your coaching has been first class, and I have taken such value from our time together. You've supported me to transition effectively into a new role and organisation, while navigating the various complexities that came with this. You helped me to focus on my priorities and embed myself with confidence. A huge thank you for everything."

- Coachee Feedback

Looking to unleash the full potential of your people?

Discover the Powering self-belief programme

Overcoming imposter syndrome to increase self-confidence & unleash potential

It's not easy to be your best when you're constantly having feelings of self-doubt. Imposter syndrome, or phenomenon, can impact people at all levels, causing feelings of inadequacy or uncertainty which can be huge blockers to both personal and organisational success. And it can be really challenging to manage someone experiencing these feelings.

The **Powering self-belief programme** is designed for anyone struggling with self-doubt. We use a combination of assessment, via the Hogan Forecast Series, and 1:1 coaching to increase self-confidence, helping your people to understand their personal barriers, find their voice and work towards their full potential.



Programme components

Duration	For individuals	For groups of 10
3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hogan Forecast Series assessment Pre and post self questionnaires Unlimited 1:1 coaching Independent e-learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hogan Forecast Series assessment Pre and post self questionnaires 3 x group coaching sessions 2 x peer coaching for 5 people Optional individual coaching Independent e-learning

Outcomes

- Improved individual and collective performance
- Increased individual and collective well-being
- Talent retention
- Building talent from within

Interested in learning more?

We'd love to chat.

**Empower individuals. Improve performance.
Elevate engagement. Increase retention.**

Right Management partners with organisations to translate business needs into impactful talent programmes, offering over 40 years' experience in outplacement, assessment, coaching, mobility and change. We work with you to design human-centred programmes that help you develop, retain and optimise a workforce for the future.

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